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**MEDUSA, CASSANDRA, MEDEA  
RE-INSCRIBING MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY  
GERMAN AND RUSSIAN WOMEN'S WRITING**

by

**ANJA GROTHE**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York**

**2000**

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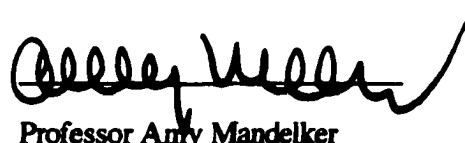
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**This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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**Abstract****MEDUSA, CASSANDRA, MEDEA  
RE-INSCRIBING MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY  
GERMAN AND RUSSIAN WOMEN'S WRITING****by****Anja Grothe****Adviser: Professor Amy Mandelker**

**In this study, I am analyzing works by contemporary German and Russian women authors who draw on mythological figures indicative of certain faculties of agency, and interpret them in the context of current critical debates on mythology. Emphasizing feminist aesthetics and classical studies, I pose two central questions: how can myth be conceptualized in terms of contemporary literature? And, is the use of mythological figures a retreat into known, safe, literary ground or are women authors creating new dimensions in a post-modern literary environment?**

**The myths of Medusa, Medea, and Cassandra are examined in a modern context as representing aspects of female agency, or rather, female agency denied, constituted in the faculties of the gaze (Medusa), speaking/prophecy (Cassandra), and action, especially giving or destroying life (Medea) in works by Elena Chizhova, Olesia Nikolaeva, Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Liudmila Razumovskaia, Ol'ga Sedakova, Liudmila Ulitskaia, and Alina**

**Vitukhnovskaia, Ingeborg Bachmann, Gerda Hagenau, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, Katja Lange-Müller, Elisabeth Langgässer, Gertrud Leutenegger and Christa Wolf.**

**My analysis traces an imagined genealogy of women's literature and theory that envisions a line of development, and thus a connection between the myths: Medusa as representing the stage of definition, 'looking at' what criticism has looked at, and critically looking back. Cassandra—the female voice denied—as the investigation and formulation of a women authored tradition in writing, and Medea as an experiment in women's capacities, and, beyond her transgressions, a search for a productive model to re-define identity. Through this genealogy, I explore how the mythological figures are presented in the divergent, although historically connected, contemporary contexts of Russian and German literature. The notion of mythic narrative as frame serves as a major analytic tool and metaphor.**

## **Acknowledgments**

Writing a thesis on three female mythic figures with a century-long literary history was a task as complex, manifold, and engaging as the mythic narratives themselves and continues to engage my thoughts as new texts are written on Medusa, Cassandra and Medea. I owe my thanks and gratitude to all those who have accompanied my journey through literary mythic territory with guidance and advice, and thus partook in my 'work on myth.' First, I like to thank my dissertation committee, for guiding my thoughts along winding paths and through abundant material: Amy Mandelker, for advising, inspiration and encouragement; Vincent Crapanzano, for creative discussions of ideas at all times and constructive solutions, and Elizabeth Beaujour, for critical advice.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Reading Contemporary Re-Inscriptions Through Their Mythic Frames**

A female figure looks out from the shore across the water. Worriedly she looks into the future, but if she turns around for a moment, what she sees might also be unsettling. The image of a woman gazing at the crossing between then and now, she is at the present moment, Medusa, Cassandra, Medea. An uncomfortable female counterpart. Do we take the risk to look at her? Can we tolerate her prophecies? Can we evaluate the consequences of her radical actions? The shore might be the edge of the known world, the shores of Troy, of Korinth, or of St. Petersburg. Point of departure, moment of metamorphosis – as the border of emergence, birth, re-birth, and death. Placing a female figure at this point evokes the moment of myth-making and poses the question where we, from our position and point in time, situate ourselves in relation to her.

A visitor to St. Petersburg might encounter a similar scene on its shore, certainly, he will come across Medusa around the city. The city of the neoclassical Baroque embodies the Russian enlightenment fascination with classical antiquity. In that first encounter with mythological female figures, the image of Medusa was struck by the Italian artist Rastrelli at the command of a Germanophilic Russian autocrat. So until today her iconic bronze image guides the visitor across the Moika. Poets and accompanies the grand view from the Admiralty—"Serdito lepiatsia kapriznye Meduzy [...] i otkryvaiutsia vsemirnye moria!" [Furious snuggle the capricious Medusae [...] And

the sea opens up to all the corners of the world!, Mandel'shtam, "Admiralteistvo," 1913].<sup>1</sup>

The cultural refiguration of a mythic figure in a distant, foreign context is a striking phenomenon present in contemporary, postmodern works by women authors in Russia and Germany. Peter the Great was trying to invest Petersburg with the grandeur of classical antiquity, the age of origin of the myths of Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea. What continues to trigger the interest of contemporary writers to reinscribe them, and why do they create literary encounters with these female figures in particular, while others such as Venus, Psyche or Antigone had fascinated earlier ages? Medusa, Cassandra and Medea are not related by mythic genealogy, and in artistic renditions their paths rarely cross. How is their mythological tradition cast in contemporary Russian and German works of the past fifty years, and how do they partake in a yet to be formulated women-authored tradition of myth-inscription?

I propose that special agency is largely responsible for the above sketched development, and creates a connection between Medusa, Cassandra and Medea. This agency is exceptional, and often ambiguously connoted, frequently denied. A major characteristic feature, this agency is constituted in Medusa's faculty of the gaze, Cassandra's speaking prophecy, and Medea's life-giving or death-inflicting actions. Within the contemporary texts, Medusa is the most theorized, Cassandra the most rhetorically explored, and Medea the most re-written in fiction. This might suggest a parallel between mytho-text and genre, presuming that vision is the region of philosophy. Cassandra's oral prophecy might be read along the lines of narrating history, and becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Note on transliteration: For transliteration from the Russian Cyrillic alphabet I have used the Library of Congress system, with the exception of few common names which may be given in

of interest as women authors employ her in narratives of subjectivation. Medea is the most axiologically problematic, as per her tradition in tragedy, and the arousal of catharsis, pity and fear. Therefore, my analysis traces an imagined genealogy of women's literature and theory that envisions a line of development, and thus a connection between the myths: Medusa as representing the stage of definition, "looking at" what criticism has looked at, and critically looking back. Cassandra—the female voice denied—as the investigation and formulation of a women authored tradition in writing, and Medea as an experiment in women's capacities, and, beyond her transgressions, a search for a productive model to re-define identity. Through this genealogy, I explore how the mythological figures are presented in the divergent, although historically connected, contemporary contexts of Russian and German literature. In particular, I examine literature by women authors writing out of a tradition of myth re-inscription hitherto dominated by male-authored dramas featuring masculine perceptions of feminine tragedy. The notion of mythic narrative as frame, which I explain further along in this chapter, serves as a major analytic tool and metaphor. I am most interested in the correlation and interaction between myth and modern literature and explore a reading strategy that borrows the analogy of a carefully framed picture. In this model, ancient myth is viewed as frame, critical and gender context as a "passe-partout," a means of framing that is visible between work of art and outside frame, with an existence of its own but inherently connected to both sides, a meta-construct. Finally, the contemporary re-inscription is envisioned as content, when considered by itself, but also partaking in the "passe-partout."

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their anglicized form (e.g. Moscow instead of Moskva). Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Russian or German are my own.

The individual approaches of contemporary women authors to ancient myths show a great variety and cannot be easily grouped. The three major analytic parts of the study, devoted to Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea, include analyses of works by Liubov' Alferova, Elena Chizhova, Olesia Nikolaeva, Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Liudmila Razumovskaja, Ol'ga Sedakova, Liudmila Ulitskaja and Alina Vitukhnovskaja, Ol'ga Zhigalova, Ingeborg Bachmann, Gerad Hagenau, Dea Loher, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, Katja Lange-Müller, Gertrud Leutenegger, Gerlind Reinshagen, and Christa Wolf.<sup>2</sup> Several of these authors are little known, and I briefly introduce author and work.<sup>3</sup>

Notably, an increasing number of literary works by women authors evoke myths. German scholar Inge Stephan calls it "myth boom," a resurgence of myth in modern and postmodern literature.<sup>4</sup> My earlier evocation of St. Petersburg serves as an example to emphasize cross-cultural and cross-temporal dynamics between Germany and Russia:

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<sup>2</sup> My selection of German texts by women authors published after 1945 includes authors who needed to be correctly labeled as 'authors writing in German' such as Ingeborg Bachmann of Austria, and Gertrud Leutenegger of Switzerland. Issues of difference in literary developments and assessment of gender in the former eastern and western parts of Germany might be raised in passing. The broader cultural context makes it possible to subsume these works under the heading "German" for the comparisons foregrounded in this study. For a brief historical overview on the reception and work with gender in East and West Germany see Stephan, Weigel, and Wilhelms in the foreword and introductory chapters of their collection "Wen kümmert's wer spricht" Zur Literatur und Kulturgeschichte von Frauen aus Ost und West (Köln: Böhlau, 1991) ixff.

<sup>3</sup> The most concise collections of biographical and bibliographical information on German-language and Russian-language women authors currently available are: Eigler, Friederike and Susanne Kord. The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997) and Ledkovsky, Marina, Mary Zirin, and Charlotte Rosenthal, eds. Dictionary of Russian Women Writers (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Inge Stephan, Musen und Medusen (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997) 10. Comp. also Gottwald stating a "Mythenrenaissance" [myth-renaissance] Mythos und Mythisches in der Gegenwartsliteratur (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1996,) 16 and, with regard to Russian women authors, a "mini-boom." Note studies on Russian women listed by Goscilo and Holmgren in their introduction to Russia-Women-Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) ix.

Peter the Great not only fostered a re-presentation of classical heritage, but employed a range of German artists and workers to execute this task. These temporal and cultural dynamics are of particular relevance for the reading of ancient mythic figures in a comparative contemporary Russian and German context, and at any time when a myth, covered by layers of inscriptions and interpretations is reinscribed. In the context of this study, the image of the woman by the shore epitomizes this condition. She contains and crystallizes features of the three mythic women looking out, turning back to then look out again. Contrary to Lot's wife or Orpheus, the looking back or moment of confrontation does not cause paralysis. Through the continuous motion of reinscription, the potential to look forward is afforded.

A study of myth in modern literature necessarily raises the question of how 'myth' is understood. The abundance of interpretations offered illustrates the problem: a 'myth as such' does not exist, it only comes into being through narration, which would confirm my proposition that what we might see as being inside the frame actually is emergent only in the process of framing. Once narrated, it is impossible to strip the myth of its narrated body to regain the "essential" myth. Through time and in different cultural contexts, myths have accumulated layers of narratives and interpretations. Our notion is shaped by these palimpsests, we cannot possibly "travel to the source upstream."<sup>5</sup> Myth always involves action, the performance of a mythic figure. Through analysis, we can identify the actors or agents, whose name usually stands for the myth, and their actions or

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<sup>5</sup>

A question that George Steiner rhetorically poses in his study on renditions of Antigone "Gibt es irgendeine Möglichkeit, stromaufwärts zur Quelle zu gelangen?" George Steiner, *Antigones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 368.

features that we find recurring in different narrative versions.<sup>6</sup> We know Medusa through the poetry of Pindar and Ovid, for example, who have inscribed the story of Medusa's petrifying head. Ovid narrates Medea's story as one of love, revenge and murder. Euripides casts her similarly in his drama that became a reference text for most later inscriptions of this figure, while everyone familiar with the mythic tradition can imagine Medusa without necessarily referencing Pindar, Ovid or Euripides.

The ancient myths of Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea are productive in European culture, and interestingly, there is a fertile, mutual influence between the German and Russian tradition. Mythopoetics was a frequent theme in the German Romantic tradition, notably in the lectures of Schlegel and Schelling, who developed the idea of a "new mythology." From the 19<sup>th</sup> century reception of German idealist philosophy in Russia, mythopoetics continued to reference German theory through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the psychoanalytic employment of myth through Freud and the archetypal reading of it through Jung, structural and poststructural studies, especially by Roland Barthes, Levi-Strauss and others link the function of myth to societal structures, rituals, emotional and artistic concepts. Such a list only briefly calls the most prevalent directions to mind. This study concerns itself mainly with the artistic concepts of myth that individual authors express through their texts. I investigate how authors re-inscribe a mythic narrative, and how they draw intertextual connections to previous literary myth rendition.

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<sup>6</sup> On the semiotic quality of name as referent, as "integral'noe tseloe," especially in relation to myth, see Iurii Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii "Mif – Imia – Kul'tura" (*Trudy po znakovym sistemam* VI. 1973) 282-303, 284f.

How then can a complex selection of works, united mostly by the common theme of a certain female mythological figure, be approached? I base my analyses on two parameters. First, I perceive myth as a certain type of narrative —which comes close to acquiring the determinative force of a genre. Secondly, I was inspired by the visual iconic quality of the Medusa-figure. I presuppose a relation between myth, context, and text. The image I envision is that of a picture in a passe-partout in a frame. The picture represents the individual story that is told. The passe-partout is a texture that contains cultural context and critical notions. Both are framed, limited by the frame itself, representative of the mythic generic narrative. As Hans Blumenberg has noted

Der Mythos ist kein Kontext, sondern ein Rahmen, innerhalb dessen interpoliert werden kann; darauf beruht seine Integrationsfähigkeit, seine Funktion als 'Muster' und Grundriß, die er noch als bloß durchscheinender Vertrautheitsrest besitzt. (51)<sup>7</sup>

Myth is not a context, but a frame within which one can interpolate. This is the basis of its integrative capacity, its function as "pattern" and outline, which is immanent even if all that is left is a transparent layer of familiarity.

The frame raises the awareness of what is framed. Thus, these theoretical "bordering" devices allow me a way to fix an object as mobile and difficult to represent as a mythic reinscription.

For a preliminary working definition I understand myth to be a generic narrative that deals with fundamental human emotions and faculties, and offers variable translatability that accounts for its poetic productivity beyond linguistic, cultural, or

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Terror und Spiel*, Manfred Fuhrmann, ed. (Munich: Fink, 1971).

historical limits.<sup>8</sup> A myth's variability extends beyond the thematic plane to a presence in various literary genres. Besides a range of permanent, that is, continuously reappearing features that I will identify for each of the three myths, it affords a variability of the more marginal features.<sup>9</sup> Thus, my objective is to demonstrate how mythology continues to present a framework for major exemplifications of human agency.

My methodology combines critical approaches, aspects of which provide suitable tools for the analysis of contemporary myth-reinscriptions. Juri Lotman, Jacques Derrida, and Hans Blumenberg critically engage the notion of frame and *passe-partout*.<sup>10</sup> Though they approach the subject from the different theoretical angles of semiotics,

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<sup>8</sup> The theoretical discussion about myth, especially in Germany, continues to recur on the issue of mythos and logos, or mythos versus logos. Blumenberg from his hermeneutical position for example argues that one excludes the other, that logos always implies not only representation but presentation. I would maintain, though, following Manfred Frank, that both are related, and that myth's narrative quality stems from logos's rhetorical substance. Manfred Frank: "Thus, logos is born as myth's very own logos. From birth, he is mytho-logy, containing in one the death of myth and its innate quality of myth. [...] But it is his destiny to exist as a myth, if he should forget this connection." [Der Logos kommt mithin als des Mythos eigener Logos zur Welt. Er ist von Geburt Mytho-logie, in einem der Tod und die Verinnerung des Mythos. Mächtig ist er als überwindendes Eingedenken seiner Abkunft. Doch ist ihm bestimmt, selbst in Gestalt des Mythos zu existieren, sobald er diesen Zusammenhang vergißt.] Manfred Frank Mythos und Moderne. Ed. Karl Heinz Bohrer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983) 17.

<sup>9</sup> It is an understanding that assumes the existence of "Grundmythos" [original myth], that, in Blumenberg's definition, has permanent iconic features, and offers a story "with a core of high persistence and equally developed variability of its marginal features. ["Mythen sind Geschichten von hochgradiger Beständigkeit ihres narrativen Kerns und ebenso ausgeprägter marginaler Variationsfähigkeit."] Blumenberg 40.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Blumenberg, Arbeit am Mythos (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

Juri M. Lotman, Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta (Moscow: Isskustvo, 1970). (Structure of the Artistic Text. Trans. Ronald Vroon. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, no. 7, 1977. Jacques Derrida, The Truth in Painting, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

deconstruction, and hermeneutics, they offer models for the perception of reinscriptions of myth that take place within the frame of ancient myth.

Myth, then, directs the reader's vision to a story. Through its generic quality, it differs from other types of intertextuality which, as one might argue, could be quoted as models also. In a moment, I will outline the three main types of myth-reinscription that I find in contemporary text. Each of these types relates to myth, and thus treats its "frame" differently. The reinscribed 'image' does not necessarily fit. It might be cut off by the frame, find itself in a frame that is there but almost invisible or it might be too copious and overlap or transgress the frame, definitely, though, emphasize myths' transgressive qualities.<sup>11</sup> In all possible cases, there is always a frame which affects the discursive possibilities, because, as Derrida argues, the frame is the necessary object or border-drawing device that analysis requires: Only when framed, does something become describable.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the frame itself provides us with a way to "handle" what is framed, and influences the perception.<sup>13</sup> Valerii Briusov, for example, writes the fictitious account of a woman whose's perception of the world changes with the kind of mirror she looks into, depending on the decorum of the frame, she gazes ("From a Psychiatrist's archive").

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<sup>11</sup> I have in mind framing devices known in German as "frameless image-holders" ["rahmenlose Glasbildhalter"] made of a glass or plastic cover, a back, and clips to hold the parts and the image together, which is then framed, but no frame is visible.

<sup>12</sup> See Derrida, section I.

<sup>13</sup> Comp. Mary Ann Caws. Reading Frames in Modern Fiction. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 11ff. Caws, who also refers to Lotman and Derrida, give an overview of other "philosophical frames," studies that explore framing as an artistic device, including Georg Simmel, Edward Bullough and Louis Marin. Ibid.

Lotman reminds us of the quality of storytelling and representation innate in each work of art, and inevitably bordered by a frame: A work of art is always limited, defined by a frame. Therein, it is a finite model of the infinite world, yet it is always a representation, and thus a translation. From the image of frame, Lotman develops parts of his definition of sujet and fabula. He notes that part of the sujet is "mythological" by being representative of the aspect that is the reference point for a 'translation of reality'. The context in which Lotman exemplifies his understanding of myth and frame is directed at the assessment of formal and structural elements of a texts. It might thus be not completely congruent with but nevertheless inspiring for the use to which I put the notion of frame in this study. If we think of contemporary authors as using myth as frame, it becomes evident that the frame is not always as tightly closed as Lotman envisions: There are texts which enter in a dialogue with the frame and strive to permeate it, to transgress it. This oscillating process has been explored by Gleb Uspenskii, who on several occasions collaborated with Lotman. Uspenskii notes that the frame marks the transitional moment of representation, and alternates between description structured from within and description structured from without, and their transitions.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis of the transitional moment signals two important aspects: the "frame" itself as a construct which likewise needs to be constructed through the metalevel of reading. It is part of the creative process and does not exist independently, just as what I envision to be inside the frame comes into being in dialogue with the frame as a construct of the interpretation. Uspenskii alludes to this aspect, when he notes that the frame itself "belongs necessarily

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<sup>14</sup> See Gleb Uspenskii, "The Frame of an Artistic Text," A Poetics of Composition, 137.

to the space of the external observer" (Uspenskii, 143). The frame is thus a meta-construct that is necessary for us to tackle what is framed and defined through it, yet would not exist without anything to be framed, or, referring again to Uspenskii, "the frame is the borderline between the internal world of the representation and the world external to the representation." Christa Wolf's comment, that "we always carry ourselves with us," further illustrates the complexity and reciprocity of the framing process. Hence, the quality of frame, *passee-partout* or reinscription inside the frame is neither concrete, nor absolute, but they function as guiding images to explore the mechanisms of a myth, that as such is not really representable, and a reinscription that requires the acknowledgment of the myth to be read in its full potentiality.

I find noteworthy that both Lotman and later Derrida from a different angle point out the necessity of frame as a prerequisite of representation. My model presupposes that the mythic frame is always closely related to the mythic re-inscribed narrative that is within the frame. If this is a close relationship, where does the *passee-partout* come into play? Myth-narratives continue to be productive in different cultural and historical contexts. They are read, discussed in and employed by various critical debates. These aspects, that are neither inherent part of the generic myth narrative nor of the reinscription, together form the texture of what I envision as *passee-partout*: they are neither part of the myth, nor are they completely "inside nor outside, neither above nor below" the work, and "give[s] rise to the work" (Derrida, 9).

Interestingly, a comparable notion is put forth by Christa Wolf, one of the few authors who explicitly theorizes her work on myth. Christa Wolf elaborates a spatial notion. She also imagines myth as border and limitation, but with the capacity of

abundant free space within. In a lecture, in which she traces her own creative process "From Cassandra zu Medea," Wolf defines three coordinates: one's self, that one always takes wherever one goes (writes), a mythological figure who moves within a frame that needs to be respected as such, and the potentially grand free space within the borders set by the frame, so that the modern reader can "from the depths of time be gazed at and moved by ancient figures."<sup>15</sup> Earlier, in her lectures that describe her Cassandra project, Wolf, describes her initial encounter with Cassandra, while reading the Oresteia, using the metaphor of looking through the "web" of the old text—By our look through the "web" of myth, we also constitute what we see through it:

Wie ein grobes Netz hängen des Aischylos Zeilen mir vor Augen, durch dessen weite Maschen ich eine Gestalt sich regen sehe, in einer Art, die schwer zu benennen ist.

Aischylos' lines hang before my eyes like a roughly spun web; through its wide holes I can see a figure move about in a way that is difficult to describe.<sup>16</sup>

The next question that arises is how the authors "see" and then write the mythical figure who is moving about in the web or frame of the story. As a working hypothesis, I distinguish a scheme of three main types of myth re-inscription in contemporary texts: Evocation, Retelling and Critical Probing. Evocations presuppose that the myth, that is, the generic mythic narrative and outcome of the story are known. The evocative text

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<sup>15</sup> "Eine Gestalt ist da, die sich in einem Rahmen bewegt, an den man sich zu halten hat, in dem aber, wenn man sich nur tief genug darauf einläßt, ungeahnte Freiräume sich eröffnen: zu entdecken, heraufzuholen, zu deuten, zu erfinden. Den heutigen Blick auf die uralte Geschichte zu richten. Sich aus der Tiefe der Zeit von uralten Figuren anblicken, anrühren zu lassen." Christa Wolf, "Von Cassandra zu Medea" in Christa Wolfs Medea. Voraussetzungen zu einem Text, Ed. Gerhard Wolf (Berlin: Janus Press, 1998) 11.

<sup>16</sup> Christa Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1983) 13.

merely alludes to the myth. This reference can be as brief as a mythic title, e.g. "The Argonauts' Journey" or the name of a mythic figure. Myth evocations, more than the other two reinscriptive types, are dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense—they require the dialogue between myth and text which in turn presupposed an author, and, consequentially, also a reader who is familiar with the mythic pre-text. It is this dialogic "work on myth" (Blumenberg) a reader undertakes in an active reading process to fully develop the interpretive potential of the layers of myth and modern work.<sup>17</sup> If a reader were to read the text without knowing the originary myth, he would necessarily reach a different interpretation, without the mythic resonant.

Retellings are re-inscriptions of the generic mythological narrative by relating a version of the mythic story. Retellings retain the ancient context and personage, at least to a large extent. They offer an individual emphasis on the casting of the myth, usually without critically engaging other renditions of the same myth or actively engaging a contemporary context. This transference, the interpretation of the retold myth in the light of the author's context, is the reader's task. Comparable to the idea of *parergon* that Derrida formulates in his discussion of Kantian aesthetics, the retelling adds a new detail, interpretive angle, or emphasizes a certain aspect in the perpetual recreation of the mythic narrative without altering the generic mythological narrative as such.

Thirdly, critical probing "takes the myth on" (Lange-Müller), engages with it. Not unlike the evocative type of myth-reinscription, a critically probing text sometimes assigns it new meaning through an interpretation that widely differs from the usual

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<sup>17</sup> Comp. Renate Lachmann's analysis of intertextuality with reference to myth in Gedächtnis und Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996) 69.

perception of the mythic narrative. In some texts the protagonists might bear some resemblance, yet act completely different from the reader's expectation of the mythological figure—such as Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Medea*, for example, who has extraordinary insights and healing skills, but no children and thus does not commit infanticide. This third type contains inherent metacriticism of the mythic narrative embedded in a literary form. The distinctions between the three forms are not necessarily clear-cut, especially the second and third form. Wolf's *Cassandra*, for example, retells *Cassandra's* mythological story, and contains immanent criticism of early, normative literary myth inscriptions. Thus I categorize her as a probing of the myth. Critical probings are often based on the implicit discourse with one particular earlier version of the myth, or with a mythopoetic issue. Christa Wolf is an example for this case as well, since she examines the *Cassandra* of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in essays prior to the writing of her *Cassandra*-novel and then in the novel itself, Katja Lange-Müller explicitly addresses Hans-Henny Jahn's *Medea*. In general, however, as there is no 'original' myth, the major features of the figures that I discuss early in each chapter, and the contemporary texts themselves will serve as my comparative reference.

The relation between ancient literary myth renditions, modernist rewritings, and our own reading from a western late 20<sup>th</sup> century point of view remains an important issue that is difficult to assess. For lack of accessible material on the authors' process of working with the myths, results tend to remain speculative. For all Russian and most German authors we can only attempt to gather evidence from the texts to address the question if modern authors self-consciously engage with the mythic tradition. In reinscriptions of *Medea* even more than for *Cassandra* or *Medusa*, the source of the myth

retains importance as it significantly influences the presentation of Medea as an evil aggressor or as a victim. It is tempting to argue that a modern author, especially a woman, would write Medea without evil intentions and without infanticide as an exemplary strong woman character. The diverse texts I am discussing convincingly exemplify, however, that no clear-cut conclusion of this kind can be drawn. Their stance ranges from admiration to abhorrence, and the author's position towards Medea refuses to be neatly matched with the feminist or critical agenda the author might argue throughout her work, or with her cultural background. Yet the notion of myth as frame can serve as a common denominator. The authors operate on a high level of reader expectation and require their audience to be familiar with the myth. More than in an originally conceived story—that is one which does not explicitly and deliberately play upon an already existing text—the myth-reinscriptions invite a reading on different planes. Depending on the reader's familiarity with the ancient narratives and intervening renditions, the contrasts between frame and content can be sharper, raise more associations and more frictions with other texts. The range is broad. Petrushevskaja applies an evocative inscription in a story without a 'Medea' yet with murder as the story's central theme. The story could be understood without knowledge of the myth, but the title "Medea" would remain cryptic, because of Medea's narrative absence in the story. On the other end of the range are works that likewise do not renarrate the generic mythic story, but do more than evoking the myth as interpretive background. Ingeborg Bachmann for example does not write about a Trojan princess and prophet in her novel Malina, yet her narrator has an array of features that invite comparison with her. Ulitskaia's novel can be read as an

inscription reversely mirroring the ancient Medea-myth, with Medea cast as positive cultural model.

The three main analytic parts of this study are devoted to Medusa, Cassandra and Medea, and examine six to eight examples of contemporary reinscriptions. The comparisons evolve from three types of reinscriptions, divided into retellings, evocations, and probing of the myth, with a slight alteration in the Medusa-chapter.

First, I consider whether Medusa is treated as threat or as creative power, as poison or *pharmakon*. In this part, I compare the novella Meduse by Swiss writer Gertrud Leutenegger—focusing on the discrepancies between civilization and nature, between reason and emotion—to a science-fiction story by Liubov' Al'ferova, that looks at similar issues from the opposite angle. I read poetry by Ol'ga Sedakova and Olesia Nikolava, that does not explicitly focus on, but alludes to themes associated with the Medusa. Finally, I introduce the epic poem "Pavlov's Dog" [Sobaka Pavlova] by the young Moscovite poet Alina Vitukhnovskaia. She casts an unforgiving, "rocklike Medusa." Her imagined poetic landscape questions the possibility of communication in a postmodern environment and confronts the reader with the substantial question of linguistic possibilities in an age in which everything human has already been told, an essential notion in the discussion of Medusa.

My thesis is that Medusa is not an agent, yet she possesses agency in that she makes things happen. She attracts the attention of feminist criticism because her iconic representation lends itself to an interpretation as typically feminine "universal empty space," since she weds the faculties of being container, mirror and threat. Consequently, a review of Medusa's re-inscription by 20th century feminist criticism shows that it widely

defies the image of a paralyzed/paralyzing Medusa. From Hélène Cixous's 1976 essay "Laugh of the Medusa," as manifesto of women's creativity, to Sigrid Weigel's examination of the Medusan laugh and gaze, which she makes productive by proposing a "cross-eyed-gaze" that might serve women artists to free themselves, and including more recent studies, women critics turn to the productive features of this ambivalent mythic figure. This "cross-eyed," strabismic gaze leaves one eye fixed, returning the male gaze that cast the woman, the other free to find its own object and direction.

The Medusa-myth is productive in diverse European cultures and in creative and critical discourse with similar emphases. In the early stage of feminist criticism, her gaze provided an iconic frame through which fixed feminine literature was first read and then re-evaluated through the frame of her mouth open with her laughter. While there is no explicit interaction, there is an inherent connection between the critical and the literary texts on the Medusa. I propose that the criticism has its limitation in that, mainly because of its feminist agenda, it remains rather occupied in mounting Medusa on its aegis to fend off the evil male eye that has allegedly denied women's gaze and voice in history, while only beginning to suggest viable options for this creative voice. Poets and writers, on the other hand, expose themselves to the Medusa and thus open up creative space. Therefore, if Medusa were dismantled from the shields and put back into the creative flow, she would be released from her paralyzed iconicity, and one could probe the limitations of knowledge by engaging into a dialogue with her.

The second part of the study moves from the gaze to the voice and examines Cassandra. Her fate of tragic unheard prophecy frames issues of rhetoric and memory as the indispensable ingredients of literary production. The woman's voice that is being

silenced and the exploration of how it makes itself heard is the topic of this chapter. The original myth casts the Trojan princess and priestess Cassandra as a disobedient trickster who renounces Apollo and is thus punished by others' disbelief in her prophecy. In early dramatic versions such as Aischylos Oresteia, Cassandra seems to only have a supporting role. Mostly silent toward the other protagonists, she voices, in my opinion, some of the strongest statements of the play in front of the chorus. There she is an advocate of memory and urges the Greeks not to forget the events they witness. Contemporary women authors engage with Cassandra and her striving for subjectivation through rhetorical prowess, by probing her rhetorical capacities and creating rhetorical strategies to make her heard.

The body of available texts on Medea written since 1945 by Russian and German women authors is larger than the corpus on Medusa, examined in the preceding chapter, but it does not account for as many renditions as Medea. Similarly rich is the variety of texts, including poems, a short story, novels, and Christa Wolf's unique and genre-transcending project of novel and lectures on the making of Kassandra (1983), which inspired the general discussion of Cassandra in terms of a female rhetoric.

In a larger critical context, Cassandra can be read as a paradigm of the silenced woman author, and thus in mythopoetic terms one can ask if authors who employ the Cassandra myth treat it as a substitute for the gaps and shortcomings of women in the literary tradition. The works I analyze use diverse rhetorical strategies, that focus either on personal, political or creative aspects. Texts include Marie-Luise Kaschnitz's story "Der Tag X," Ol'ga Zhigalova's émigré-novel Shalaia Kassandra [Crazy Cassandra],

Ingeborg Bachmann's Malina, Christa Wolf's Kassandra, and poems by Elena Chizhova and Gerda Hagenau.

The final analytic part of this study is devoted to Medea, and asks if the "Dangerous Sorceress" has been "tamed" by the contemporary women who reinscribe her. And by looking at Medea it will explore motivations for and reactions to Medea's peculiar agency, including sorcery and infanticide, and her figuration as the ultimate other. The story of Medea frames, most often dramatically, facets of transgression.

While in the previous chapters the faculty of agency denied was also the same agency re-formed by the works, i. e. the gaze and the word, the figure of Medea presents a different phenomenon, as her agency itself, that is, her dramatic actions, are being changed and rewritten. She might be the mythological figure most violently and radiantly oscillating between terror and terrific abilities. Yet while Medusa remains iconic and Cassandra mostly, like Echo, reduced to her (unheard) voice, Medea also has the most features of a full-fledged literary character. In his cultural-sociological study, Johannes R. Gascard has named her, in the tradition of C. G. Jung and Erich Neumann, an "ever-present figure in changing cultural contexts"— "Medea [als] allzeitige Kultur-Wandlungsgestalt."<sup>18</sup> This perception suggests one possible approach to interpret contemporary re-inscriptions of any mythological figure, most especially relevant for Medea: We can read her as a mirror of moral and social conditions cast in an artistic work, with her authors, in the tradition of *histoire de mentalité*, participating in the crafting of a collective identity. We thus also need to ask if we are dealing with a particularly female identity. This continuum has been productive in the literary, dramatic,

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<sup>18</sup> Gascard, Johannes R. Medea-Morphosen. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993).

and artistic sphere. Altogether, Medea's history—or the historical Medeas in their different periods, reflect upon their cultural context.<sup>19</sup>

The analysis of Medea focuses on three issues recurrently raised in her reinscriptions: There is, first of all, a productive tension between Medea's tradition and its transformations in the contemporary texts. Secondly, her casting as a literary figure as it varies between a typological mythological narrative and psychological character study, culminating in the formulation of the so-called 'Medea-syndrome.' Finally, the oscillation between Medea as stranger/estranged woman and constitutive role model. These tensions are present in most of Medea's rhetoric and actions. The typical representations of Medea as sorceress, 'other,' foreigner, etc. and the tensions just described will guide the analysis of more than a dozen texts by Russian and German women authors.

My analysis probes the transformative aspect and the translatability of the Medea-myth in writings by Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Liudmila Razumovskaja, and Liudmila Ulitskaja, Dagmar Nick, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, Katja Lange-Müller, Gerlind Reinshagen, Christa Wolf and Dea Loher with brief references to further works from the post World War II German and Russian context. As this list clearly shows, among reinscriptions of Medusa, Medea, and Cassandra, Medea attracts the widest interest of contemporary authors, and presents the widest formal scope as it includes works of poetry, short story, novel, letter, and play.

In all her literary appearances, Medea transgresses the codes of appropriate behavior, according to ancient or modern moral standards. This agency establishes her as

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<sup>19</sup> For artistic representations of Medea and the mutual influence of literature/drama on the arts see Ekaterini Kepetzis *Medea in der Bildenden Kunst vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997) 15.

a counterfigure to a major female type in ancient literature, the weak victimized female, destroyed by overburdening powers, most often, passion as in the case of Dido. Yet, Medea is not a typical 'strong' woman. With Dido, Phaedra and other tragic women, she shares the fate of burning passion. Her actions exile her not only spatially, but also with regard to her emotional situation. It is impossible to think of her as whole and content. Powerful contradictions are at play in all literary renditions of her character. By the constitution of her character, though she has ancient origins, she appears to illustrate a typically postmodern condition of the self.<sup>20</sup>

Wolf, for example, draws her Medea as a powerful, skillful woman banned and outlawed by her husband because her knowledge becomes too dangerous, the murder of her children only a rumor spread by Jason. Ulitskaia on the other hand, evokes few thematic links with the original myth and creates a childless Medea who becomes a signifier for a positive model of cultural origin, as she is a native of Crimea, the cradle of culture according to Ulitskaia, and a self-declared substitute mother to all children in her family. With Ulitskaia's Medea I end my study to take a look back. When revisiting this point of departure, I will focus once more on the issue of water and fluidity versus stasis and wall which continue to play a role in the reinscription. Within such an an

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<sup>20</sup> Beyond Medea's great productivity in contemporary literature she also appears to invite explicit or implicit associations with Medusa, Cassandra, or Antigone, which I will discuss in greater detail further on in this chapter. They can take the form of numerous allusions and similes, interspersed throughout the text as in Elisabeth Langgässer's *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* or appear as allusions, as for instance when Nick's Medea resumes that she was "popular as prophet with the Corinthians," because those could not hear enough of horrors to come. A Medea-alluding protagonist is contrasted with Cassandra in Gerlind Reinshagen's play *Green Door*. In the major perception of Medea as the ultimate "other" possibly originates the connection between her and Medusa, who also represents the—most frightening, most inconceivable—aspects of the "other." In Razumovskaia's Medea-play, for example, Medea is twice compared to the Gorgon, and this association underlines her otherness.

**environment, where is the mythic characters' reference point? And are the literary visions developed part of a utopian or antiutopian .**

**Before I set out on exploring the myth, I attempt to cut a "passe-partout" for the analyzed authors and their texts, by sketching out the theoretical and traditional contexts wherein they are situated.**

## 1.2. Shaping the Passe-Partout

Mit den weit geöffneten Augen der Sibylle blickt der Mythos über den Abgrund her. Sprich, schöner entrückter Genius; ich höre dir zu. Wer sind wir, wohin gehen wir? Ist diese Erde unwiderruflich? Warum hallt sie nicht mehr wider von unserem Glück und unserem Zorn?

With the wide open eyes of the Sybil, myth gazes across the abyss. Speak, beautiful entranced genius; I am listening to you. Who are we, where are we going? Is this earth irreversible? Why does it no longer resonate our happiness and our wrath?

Kaschnitz, "Mythos" Werke, vol. 7, 415

### 1.2.1. Comparative German and Russian Mythopoeitics

In Germany, the strong influence of the classics and the study of the classical period is inherent in the tradition and reached a peak with the discussion of mythology as a foundational part of human history and a "new mythology" in the lectures and writings of Hegel, Schelling, and Schlegel.<sup>21</sup> A century later, the mythopoetic debate in Germany reached a new peak, with Hans Blumenberg's Arbeit am Mythos [Work on Myth], and the discussions of the group "Poetik und Hermeneutik" [Poetics and Hermeneutics] who published their debate in the volume Terror und Spiel [Terror and Play]. The title emphasizes Hans Blumenberg's central thesis of myth as "Spielphase der Kultur" [culture's play time], the flight from possible terrors imposed by nature into tales about terror, manifested first in mythical narratives.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Schlegel's examines myth to be an "original" (or "Ur-) poesis of mankind" ["Der Mythos ist, wie die Sprache, ein allgemeines, ein notwendiges Produkt des menschlichen Dichtungsvermögens, gleichsam eine Urpoesie des Menschengeschlechts."] Vorlesungen über philosophische Kunstlehre, (Jena 1798) 49.

<sup>22</sup> Comp. Hans Blumenberg, Arbeit am Mythos (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979). Manfred Fuhrmann, ed. Terror und Spiel. Probleme der Mythenrezeption (Poetik und Hermeneutik, vol. 4.

Blumenberg, as well as Manfred Fuhrmann and Manfred Frank, argue in their mythopoetic work for the ordering power that myth can have and contend that myth is productive in terms of enlightened intellectual progress. The aim of the "work on myth" is to work through it to reach subjective freedom. This model requires using myth as mnemonic tool, to execute "mnemonic work" [Erinnerungsarbeit]. In dialogue, but also in critical argument with this debate, a number of significant studies have been published since the 1980s which examine the relation between classical and contemporary literature, or follow the reception and re-inscription of a mythological figure through literary history.<sup>23</sup> While Prometheus is a staple character of Blumenberg's work and Odysseus is likewise frequently mentioned, female figures such as Medusa, Cassandra or Medea are significantly absent from this debate. They do play a role, however, in the work of women critics that I discuss further below with regard to women's writing.

The writings of Schelling, Schlegel, and later Ernst Cassirer, have been read and critically discussed in Russia. With the initiative of F. I. Buslaev (1818–1897), a "mifologicheskaja shkola" was forged in Russia.<sup>24</sup> Drawing on Buslaev, but also on Potebnia and Veselovskii, A. L. Toporkov examines the theory of myth in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian philosophy (Teoriia mifa v russkoi filologicheskoi nauke XIX veka, Moscow 1997). Cassirer's philosophy, based on the perception of the world in "symbolic forms," in entities of myth, language, science, and art, greatly influenced Russian mythopoetic

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Munich: Fink, 1971). Manfred Frank, Der kommende Gott: Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> Karl Heinz Bohrer, ed. Mythos und Moderne, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983). Hans Poser, Philosophie und Mythos: Ein Kolloquium, (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1979).

studies in the Twentieth Century. Aleksei Fedorovich Losev (1893-1988), Elezar Meletinskii and Vladimir Toporov, for example, reference German philosophy, as well as the French structuralist school. Meletinskii develops a structural model, wherein folklore and ritual evolve from myth. In more general terms, he defines myth as a "combination of stories about gods and heros, and a system of phantastic ideas about the world."

(Meletinskii, Mifologicheskii slovar', 1990, 634). While narrative genres in his definition develop out of the folkloric genre, poetry and play are products of rituals and customs.

According to Losev in his Dialektika mifa [Dialectics of Myth], myth is a form of its own [lichnostnaia forma] with every living being imbued with mythic features or at least capacities.<sup>25</sup> A comparable, holistic notion is advocated by Piatigorskii: "When I think about mythology, I know that myth is me, my thought, rhetoric and behavior" [Kogda ia dumaiu o mifologii, ia znaiu, chto mif – eto ia, moia mysl', rech' i povedenie." Mifologicheskie razmyshleniia, (Moscow: Jazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1996) 94], and Telegin expresses it even more radically through his integrative model of "myth-restoration" [miforevstaratsiia]—resonant of the symbolist desire for "world culture"—in which myth as such affects the realms of the social, of reality in general, and of the social

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<sup>24</sup> Comp. Petra Hesse, Mythologie in moderner Lyrik: Osip E. Mandel'stam vor dem Hintergrund des "Silbernen Zeitalters." (Bern: Lang, 1989) 31ff.

<sup>25</sup> Losev's works from the thirties through fifties have been frequently re-published in the 1990s with the supervision of his wife Takho-Godi. Dialektika mifa was first published in 1930 after Losev had already been arrested for criticizing the materialist view of socialist theory. In addition to Schlegel and Schelling, Losev names Plato, Hegel, and Husserl as influences for eight works published between 1927 and 1930. Dialektika mifa in Filosofija, mifologia, kul'tura. (Moscow: Politizdatel'stvo, 1991).

relations therein, and has an explanatory function.<sup>26</sup> Toporov for example reexamines and further develops some Saussurean theses. Younger theorists are possibly aware of Hans Blumenberg's influential works. While the majority of the Russian studies focuses on philosophical aspects and folkloristic aspects, wherein they draw connections between ancient Greek and other national mythologies, more recent studies such as Meletinskii's Poetika mifa and Toporov's Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz (Moscow: Progress, 1995) draw examples from Russian classical literature such as works of Pushkin or Dostoevskii.

The term 'kulturologiia,' which is not synonymous with but comparing to what develops as Cultural Studies in the Western discourse, has been explored with reference to a founding tradition that stems from German and Russian mythopoetics.<sup>27</sup> Among the few studies done by women critics Natalia Medvedeva who in her dissertation reviews myth re-inscriptions by male Russian and Georgian authors, and characterizes myth as hope and as characteristic mainly for irrational poetry.<sup>28</sup> Ol'ga Freidenberg, similar to the formalist notion of myth, summarizes the function of myth as "a specific construction principle of the figurative perception" [osoboi konstruktivnoi sisteme obraznym predstavlenii, Mif i literatura drevnosti].

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<sup>26</sup> S. M. Telegin, Filosofija mifa: Vvedenie v metod miforestavracii (Moscow: Obshchina, 1994) 5f.

<sup>27</sup> See Zulaiko Mirazizovna Usmanova, Mif kak fenomen kul'tury (Dissertation. University of Tadjikistan, Duzhanbe, 1993). Usmanova referees cultural studies – "kul'torologia." She stresses the strong ties between Russian and German mythopoetics as developed by the German Romantics and their later influenced Russian theory.

<sup>28</sup> Natalia Gennadevna Medvedeva. Mif kak forma khudozhestvennoi uslovnosti. (Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kand. fil. nauk. MGU im. Lomonosova. Filolog. fak. Moscow: 1984).

The previous examples illustrate that at least during the past two centuries a fertile dialogue between Russia and Germany has established itself with regard to myth, notwithstanding differences in the mythopoetic tradition and the reception of ancient myth in both cultural contexts. The tradition of classical mythic narratives, has, however, been present in Russia through various times, including the Stalin years.<sup>29</sup> While Russian literature especially since symbolism has produced myth-reinscriptions, "No monograph-length study has appeared to date which would undertake a more or less systematic study of impact of the Classics on Russian literature and culture" notes Peter Barta.<sup>30</sup>

### 1.2.2. Feminisms – Are Women Authors Women Writers?

This study reads myth reinscriptions by "women authors" or "women writers," a more critically charged term. Its notion would merit more detailed discussion, as it has become lately questioned in theoretical discourse. Any terminology related to gender is inherently problematic as it operates on the basis of a dichotomical distinction that almost inevitably implies a derogatory a-priori-judgment. Medusa is a strong figure in the French theory of "écriture féminine" that widely influenced German "weibliches

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<sup>29</sup> An example is the Moscow Institute for Literature and Philosophy (IFLI), founded 1934. Its creation marked the return of Classic education to the Soviet university curriculum. The course taught at IFLI stood out for their emphasis on Greek and Roman antiquity as well as aesthetics (Frances Nethercott, "Une école pour l'élite," in: Moscou 1918–1941. De "l'homme nouveau" au bonheur totalitaire, Ed. Catherine (Paris: Goussier, 1993), 213–224. For an example of the presentation of classical antiquity in Russian education comp. G. S. Knabe, Antichnoe nasledie v kulture Rossii (Moscow: Rossiiskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut kul'turnogo i prirodnogo nasledia, Moscow, 1996). Knabe speculates the symbolists' interest in classical myths was triggered by the education in Greek and Latin language and culture many of the Symbolist poets received.

<sup>30</sup> In his introduction to the collection Russian Literature and the Classics, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996) 161-191.

Schreiben"—"female" or "feminine" "writing," yet a satisfying definition of the specific characteristics of this type of writing have not been formulated. Existing terminology presupposes an inherently limiting difference between male and female.

I set out to investigate myth re-inscriptions by authors who are women, and I pose the question whether there is a specific reception of myth and mythmaking by women authors. My investigation concerns the authors of the reinscriptions, but also the theoretical context that might illuminate my question. The authors included in this study tackle issues of women's creativity, yet without following a clearly feminist agenda.

Though there clearly is a presence of textual myth-reinscriptions, Russian theory that examines women's writing on myth remains scarce.<sup>31</sup> In conversations, outspokenly feminist authors even skeptically called the productivity of ancient myth for contemporary woman authors into question.<sup>32</sup> While the history of women's writing as a specific research topic is fairly young, a highly critical stance toward women's writing and feminist theory prevails on the part of both male and female critics and writers, originating in the history of the Russian women's liberation movement, which developed

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<sup>31</sup> A marginal comment on research in Russian libraries: Available research categories did not comply with the topic of this study, which shows that the official discourse, at least in the system of the library, has not picked up on certain research areas. In 1997/98 no systematic categories such as "women's writing" or "mythopoeitics" were available, except for a ten-page typed shortlist that the librarian gave out on special request, related subject areas that I inquired are "antichnye motivy," "zhenskie obrazi" (mostly referring to female images in texts by male authors) and the general categories "mif" and "literaturovedenie."

<sup>32</sup> Masha Arbatova and Nadezhda Azhgikina have argued that ancient myth is a 'male trope and model', and thus not compatible with women's writing, when I asked them about the relation between myth and women's writing during an informal interview in Moscow, February 1997. The notion that myth, including female mythological figures, stems from a predominantly male conception, has been formulated for example by Luce Irigaray in her discussion of Sophocles' *Antigone*. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1974) and Carol Jacobs, "Dusting Antigone (*Modern Language Notes* 3:5 (1996): 888-917, 890f.

differently from western feminism. This skepticism toward models of the latter results in a separation into two opposing groups in Russia. Advocates of feminism adopt it as a source of increased possibilities, both practical and theoretical. Their approach is, however, often sociological and political, and offers little criticism pertaining to questions of literary aesthetics. The sociological and political focus is similar to the beginnings of contemporary feminism in Germany. Among those skeptical of or indifferent to feminism are some of the writers included in my analysis—Liudmila Ulitskaia and Liudmila Petrushevskaja explicitly refuse any labeling of or association with "women's writing." In one of the first essays on works by women in the journal Preobrazhenie (no. 1, 1993), the Armenian-born writer and critic Nina Gabrielian advocates the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' rather than between male and female literature. What appears as a rather commonplace rough distinction is noteworthy.<sup>33</sup> It still dominates a large part of the debate in Russia, and illustrates the difficulty of dealing productively with gender categories in an environment wherein the term "women's

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<sup>33</sup> N. Milman advocates a similar position. N. Mil'man, Chego khochet zhenshchina... [What Women Want...] referring to an anthology of women's writings, a point of view she shares with Elena Trofimova, the editor of Preobrazhenie, whose theses resemble Gabrielian's. An outside contribution to this argument is a statement Ricarda Huch made in 1931 in an introductory essay to the works of Romantic poet Annette von Droste-Hülsoff, wherein she writes that "The muses belong to the celestial beings who do not distinguish between men and women," as the only guideline "for an artist is art" and curiously ends by claiming that "each poet is androgynous," containing both male and female features. [Die Musen gehören zu den himmlischen Gestalten, die Mann und Weib nicht kennen' der einzige Maßstab für einen Künstler ist die Kunst, nicht Nationalität oder Geschlecht oder Konfession oder Stand. Geschlecht kann schon deswegen nicht sein, weil jeder Dichter androgyn ist, es gibt keinen, der nicht Männliches und Weibliches in sich vereinigte.] Ricarda Huch, "Annette von Droste-Hülsoff," Introduction to Gesammelte Schriften. (Freiburg: Atlantis, 1964) 231.

writing" has only entered in the early 1990s.<sup>34</sup> Before, contemporary Russian writers, especially if they wrote innovatively and outside of the norms of the socialist realist doctrine, were commonly subsumed under the terms of "novaia volna" [new wave] or "drugaia proza" [other prose] together with their male colleagues.<sup>35</sup> Natasha Perova, critic and editor of a journal for contemporary Russian literature in translation, still stated in 1994 in the Literaturnaia gazeta that "even two years ago I did not try to categorize literature in terms of gender and did not even think about this subject" [Eshche dva goda nazad ia tozhe ne pytalas' delit' literaturu po polovomu priznaku i voobshche ne zadumyvalas' na etu temu] (Natasha Perova: "Est' li v Rossii zhenskaia literatura?" (Literaturnaia gazeta, 02.03.1994, 4). The dialogue with western feminism has since developed, yet mostly focuses on sociological issues.<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1990s, the more liberal publishing policies of the perestroika and affluent subsidies fostered the publication of a number of anthologies of women's writing, with introductory essays on the subject and titles as ambitious, and in this rare

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<sup>34</sup> Comp. Beate Jonscher: "Zu Tendenzen der Frauenliteratur in den 60er und 70er Jahren" in Frauenbilder und Weiblichkeitsentwürfe in der russischen Frauenprosa Ed. Christina Parnell (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997) 159–171, esp. 160f.

<sup>35</sup> Pisarevskaia traces the changes in terminology for the "other Russian prose," [drugaia proza] by Petrushevskaiia, L. Zorin, A. Galin and others. Com. Pisarevskaia, Proza 80-90x godov. (Diss. kand. nauk). Moscow: Moskovskii gos. universitet, 1992, 26. Following was the term novaia volna in the early 1980s. Natalia Ivanova wrote a survey article, wherein she distinguishes between the three main categories of the historical, the national, and the ironical avantgarde. In Druzhba narodov 7 (1989): 239–253 (among the few women named are Valeria Narbikova and Tatiana Tolstaia). See also Oleg Dark, "Zhenskie antinomii," Druzhba narodov 4 (1991): 257–269.

<sup>36</sup> In the late 1990s, the Moscow publisher "Progress" published translations of feminist classics such as Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique. The "Gender Tsentr" of Moscow and St. Petersburg are in dialogue with Western colleagues, and quite up to date on the current discourse, though most of their material concerns sociological and political rather than literary or philosophical topics.

case myth-related, as Novye Amazonki [New Amazons], edited by Svetlana Vasilenko (Moscow, 1991). Presently, in light of the economic crisis and more commercial approaches to literature, ambitious literary productions either turn to publication in journals, small private presses or, most recently, to the internet, that might lead to interesting new forms of intertextuality yet to be developed and studied.

It exceeds the scope of this study to discuss whether the debate about specific aesthetics of women's writing, and its situation in a (myth-referential) tradition is not relevant to contemporary authors, or, if their writings presuppose aesthetic categories that they do not discuss outside their work. Here, it shall suffice to note that contrary to some of the German authors included in my study, none of the Russian writers explicitly works on the constitution of a feminist aesthetic, or, with the exception of Ol'ga Sedakova, on theoretical issues in general. The authors rather voice their aesthetic models through diverse assessments of reality in their texts. While Razumovskaia and Petrushevskaja, from an emotional and from a hyper-realist point of view, assess the state of reality without offering an alternative ethical model, Sedakova and Shvarts take a metarealist stance, and Ulitskaia and Nikolaeva turn back in search of eroded, generic human values, that can be traditionally Russian, religious or merely humanist.<sup>37</sup>

The writings of Russian women authors have generated increasing interest in the West since the mid-1990s, as for example studies and critical anthologies by Helene

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<sup>37</sup> See remark by Carol Ueland "While Nikolaeva's fundamentalist views on gender ("In the Christian view, the boundaries within which equality between men and women is realizable are located beyond earthly natural laws.") will certainly not appeal to Western feminists, her views are not atypical of those of many contemporary Russian women. Her Search for values based in traditional Russian culture represents an emerging trend in post-Soviet literature." Ueland in Clyman and Greene, eds., Women Writers in Russian Literature (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994) 243.

Goscilo, Beth Holmgren, Stephanie Sandler, Sibelan Forrester and others illustrate.<sup>38</sup>

Due to its young history as a research field in Russia itself, I expect that more studies on aesthetic and stylistic aspects, including reinscription of myth, will appear in the near future.<sup>39</sup>

A brief look at how Russian Medea-reinscriptions can be read in connection with major themes in Russian women's writing during the past two decades, and what issues especially Medea raises for German women authors also shall serve as a transition to the assessment of women's writing in Germany. As a general tendency, Russian women authors have been digressing from the formerly prescribed socialist realist doctrine of stereotypical positive hero(ine), to address instead emotional and dark sides of themes such as love and jealousy, family relations, sexual desires and describe women who are often challenged by double or even quadruple binds of family, job, personal desires and societal expectations. Medea, a figure otherwise only marginally productive in Russian literature, as the following remarks on mythic tradition illustrate, has been re-inscribed by at least three Russian authors—Petrushevskaja, Razumovskaja, and Ulitskaja. In their otherwise diverse texts, they present Medea as exemplary female other, in critical confrontation with these four spheres. Though their emphasis is on the personal situation

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<sup>38</sup> For a comprehensive and recent overview of this tendency and publication examples see Pamela Chester's and Sibelan Forrester's introduction to the volume Engendering Slavic Literatures, 1996, esp. xff.

<sup>39</sup> I agree with Catriona Kelly, that literary history, specifically in Russia, is not void of women's criticism, while it does lack prominence and deserves to be excavated and read. "Views that the 'feminine' was incompatible with appropriate language" (Kelly in Wigzell, 71) confirm the widespread notion that literature by women is irrational. Kelly further argues that critical examination (that is, through criticism) is necessary to disentangle prejudices against the label "women writers," that are very present, especially in Russia.

of the Medea-character, at least Petrushevskaja's and Ulitskaia's Medeas are clearly situated in the context of contemporary Russian society.

Likewise, German authors who reinscribe Medea are influenced by the context of their society. If they come from the former German Democratic Republic, they were affected by the doctrine of socialist realism, though less strictly so than their Russian colleagues. German authors lived in a state first divided and then reunified in 1990. Therefore, they might view Medea's otherness, especially if perceived in political terms, with a specific angle in relation to their own experience with differences.<sup>40</sup> Christa Wolf notes for example that her interest in the figure was triggered in connection with a perception of colonialization, that she viewed Medea as the "barbarian from the east."<sup>41</sup>

Before turning with Medea to the relation between individual and society, Christa Wolf, during the early 1980s, worked on the myth of Cassandra, exemplary of the individual's, or more specific, woman's voice. Together with Ingeborg Bachmann Wolf prominently shaped the discourse on women's writing in Germany.<sup>42</sup> "Weibliches

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<sup>40</sup> The strong and specific reception of ancient myth in GDR literature has been widely noted, for a comprehensive list of primary texts see Glau's thesis on Cassandra in Aischylos and Wolf (16f), Riedel's thesis and Rohrwasser's articles for critical details. Emmerich has suggested that while the GDR authors made the myth productive, in the face of 'terror', the west was subscribing to 'fashionable mythic dreams' that exploited existing versions without engaging. 223.

<sup>41</sup> "Es war zunächst das Thema 'Kolonialisierung', Abwehr gegen Fremdes, das mir in der Medea-Figur zu stecken schien: Sie war für mich die 'Barbarin aus dem Osten.'" Wolf in Gerhard Wolf 1997, 22.

<sup>42</sup> It has to be noted, though, that neither Wolf nor less Bachmann explicitly labeled their work as feminist. Ingeborg Bachmann was even attacked by early feminists who found her work complying with "male" standards. Only recently criticism has recognized the value of her works for developing an aesthetics of women's writing. (For an outline of the development comp. Andrea Stoll, Ingeborg Bachmanns "Malina", Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992).

Sigrid Weigel has named this phenomenon "Ungleichzeitigkeit in der Literatur" [non-simultaneity in literature]. By that she means that before the discussion of feminist issues

Schreiben," has entered the debate in Germany in the 1970s as a result of the critical reception of the French "écriture féminine" with a strong critical reading of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva by German feminist literary critics.

One of the earliest works that was searching for the possibility of a female aesthetics is Silvia Bovenschen's essay, titling with the question if a "female aesthetics" exists ["Gibt es eine weibliche Ästhetik?"] She reviews the historical development of literary production, and lists poetological reasons for assumed female poetic incompetence. She cites Schiller, to whose ballad "Kassandra" (1805) I will later refer, as a negative example for juxtaposing female nature to the male attributes of reason, freedom and morality. Women, Bovenschen resumes, have been perceived as imagines rather than imaginative creators, and are 'petrified' in their functions of icons and object of desire. Hassauer's resignative resume of 1980 that "a female aesthetics, as used as a term in the discussion, can mean all kinds of things, from the image of genuinely female forms of creativity to an aggressive feminist aesthetics" has not even 20 years later been convincingly reversed.<sup>43</sup> I review these early positions of German feminist criticism, as the issues they raise and their attempts to define the creative writing process is in my opinion productive for an analysis of myth re-inscriptions that tackle poetological and

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entered theory, women writers had written texts that were addressing the political- genre- and content-related issues feminism was to pick up. As examples she lists among others Marie-Luise Kaschnitz and Ingeborg Bachmann (Weigel Schielender Blick, 251).

<sup>43</sup> Frederike Hassauer, Notizbuch 2: VerRückte Rede - gibt es eine weibliche Ästhetik? Berlin: Medusa, 1980, 11. "Weibliche Ästhetik kann..., so wie der Begriff in der Diskussion verwendet wird, von der Vorstellung genium weiblicher Formen von Kreativität bis hin zu einer feministischen Kampfästhetik alles mögliche meinen."

creative issues. The feminist critical debate has moved on. Gender performativity aspects and interdisciplinary issues have been foregrounded in the more recent discussion.<sup>44</sup>

In line with Bovenschen's generic question and significant as she is among the first to raise mythopoetic questions in relation to women's tradition in writing, are the early studies of Sigrid Weigel. In the 1980s she developed her theory in a critical reading of Benjamin and is informed by French feminists, and her own contemporaries such as Bovenschen. Weigel's frequent references to the lack of women's tradition is complaint and demand at the same time. She formulates a project that archeologically detects and (re)discovers women as participants (and excluded subjects) from literature. Weigel turns to history to establish a tradition, employing a Benjaminian notion of "Erinnerungsarbeit" [mnemonic work]. Weigel emphasizes the reciprocal process of shaping our view of history as shaped by legends and myth, and, vice versa, our present view of mythology as shaped by literary and historical tradition. Her approach has features of archeological work. In an essay collection that Weigel and Inge Stephan, with Weigel the most noteworthy German critic on women's writing and myth, edited in the late 1980s, the editors note that in "*mythical* heroines, the life of real women is hidden" and that even in "*texts by women*, their desires and experiences are not directly expressed," because they are "masked" by conventions and "silenced memories."<sup>45</sup> Do the contemporary authors I

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<sup>44</sup> A concise and fairly recent overview of the debate is presented by Beutin in her volume "Als eine Frau lesen lernte trat die Frauenfrage in die Welt, 2<sup>nd</sup>". Hamburg, 1995, esp. essay "Androgynie, Feminismus und weibliche Ästhetik", o. 13ff. The debate was considerably shaped by the critical and editorial work of Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel, with collections on women artists such as Weiblichkeit und Avantgarde, 1987. See also the collection Bildersturm im Eifenbeinturm, ed. Karin Fischer (Tübingen: Attempo, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel, Verborgene Frau, 1988. "—Auch in mythischen Heldinnen ist das wirkliche Leben der Frauen, von denen sie berichten, verborgen.—Und selbst in den Texten von Frauen kommen ihre Wünsche und Erfahrungen nicht unmittelbar zum Ausdruck. Sie sind

read in this study still "mask" their intentions and desires? Or have they successfully overcome "men-murdering female figures such as Medea, Pandora, Judith, Salomé, Penthesilea or Lulu, death angels, witches, mermaids, female vampires, amazons, femmes fatales"? Frequently present in occidental mythology and literature, they can be figuratively interpreted as "fear of the 'return of the repressed'" and read as a "reflex of the aggressive potential of a culture which is based on exclusion and suppression." (Lindhoff, 18f).

In her attempt to trace a history of women writers, Weigel observes that in 19th century Germany for instance, men were trying to restrict women to more "domestic" and "intimate" genres (with possibly less public effect), such as memoir, diary, and correspondence. Her argument contends that men are envious of women's superior role in procreation and thus were striving to secure a part of creativity in which they would dominate, hence: women might be able to give birth to children by law of nature, but artistic creativity was a male production—a dichotomy that I later discuss as paradox when looking at the allegory of Medusa's death as a prerequisite for Perseus' birth.<sup>46</sup>

If we assume that literary tradition was conditioned by the 'male' fear that women could take over the artistic in addition to the biological realm of creation as well, how did they inscribe this fear? The literary figures Lindhoff quotes all have in common that they were traditionally to various degrees inscribed as "in and out of their minds." (Padell)

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verborgen hinter Maskierungen, unter der Prägung durch geltende Frauenbilder und Schreibmuster und in den "verschwiegenen Erinnerungen" (quote from Ingeborg Bachmann), 6.

<sup>46</sup> While until the 20<sup>th</sup> century most myths rendered in plays or poems, in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century women authors work in all genres present, whereby shorter dominate and the epic dominates the dramatic. A study that would afford the time to examine the genre differences of the myth re-inscriptions could follow up on this problem and pose the question of "genre anxiety" (S. Freedman).

Even in antiquity, women figures were often rendered as instable, with a more modern term, 'hysteric' or plain mad, to the effect that they could not be held responsible for their actions, but that vice versa their "unreasoned" actions had no serious effect. Madness is an issue for both Cassandra and Medea, who are considered of mad when acting on their special agencies. Once Cassandra or Medea execute their powers of prophecy or sorcery, they become displaced from their usual realm of activity. I am emphasizing the notion of 'site', or 'locus', because feminism has presented women's speech as dis-placed or dis-located: historically (displaced), in the sense that literary tradition refused women their proper place as creative subject rather than object, programmatically and progressively (displacing) in showing how contemporary women writers create their own place and move away from already defined sites. Here, again, German allows to make the connection between madness and displacement: the adjective for German is "verrückt", "rücken" is a verb that means to move from one place to another, ("ver" is an emphatic prefix).<sup>47</sup>

Classicists such as Helene Foley, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, Froma Zeitlin and Nicole Loraux have begun to investigate gender aspects in classical texts. They concern themselves with the issue of place and distance from a historical point of view, and call attention to the position of women in antiquity, historic and mythic. Thus from a different perspective, against the backdrop of the classical context, their studies highlight the temporal and spatial distance that lies between the contemporary texts I am reading and their predecessors, and thus measure the scope of the passe-partout, or how far the edges of the "web" Christa Wolf invoked lie apart. The classicist studies moreover exemplify

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<sup>47</sup> See also the collection VerRückte Rede, edited by Hassauer (Berlin: Medusa, 1980).

the negative connotations many female mythical characters were endowed with, including the main staples of the Gorgon Medusa as turning people to stone, the prophet Cassandra prophesying horror, and the sorceress Medea murdering those close to her. On the other hand, prominent male mythological figures such as Prometheus, who for example figures as Hans Blumenberg's exemplary character, are applauded as figures of progress and development. A review of mythic reinscription shows the tendency that male authors employ both male and female mythological figures in their works, while women authors tend to focus on female mythological figures, and thus caters to the assumption that a reinscription of myth often aims to re-vision historical or gender paradigms. For example Odysseus, the other usually positively employed representative of positive progress who has been present in the mythopoetic debate since Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, [Dialectics of Enlightenment]. The myth of Odysseus is the first major example of subjectivation, and thus can be read in pair or against Cassandra, specifically in her modern appearance in Wolf's novel.<sup>48</sup> Several articles have discussed the significance and relation between the two myths, and Cassandra has entered the discussion as possible third element, that achieved its importance of status for the modern literary tradition through Wolf's novel.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The debate affirms Cassandra's symbolic significance. In addition to contextual parallels one might draw between the figures' processes of subjectivation, the political and cultural tradition also played a role, as Adorno and Horkheimer were doubting and questioning the potential of enlightenment-philosophy in a post-war scenario, while Wolf's novel originated amidst the danger of renewed terror through nuclear armament. She thus revitalizes myth in a constructive way and counters historical pessimism with "aesthetic re-foundation" to work "enlightened against enlightenment." M. Engelhardt and M. Rohrwasser, "Kassandra – Odysseus – Prometheus. Modelle der Mythenrezeption in der DDR-Literatur," *L'80*, 1985, 48.

<sup>49</sup> See Herrfried Münkler, *Odysseus und Kassandra* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1990), M. Engelhardt and M. Rohrwasser make further reference on the subject, and note that author Franz Fühmann—who corresponded with Christa Wolf between the 1960s and 1980s—was

I argue that female mythological figures such as Medusa, Medea and Cassandra offer women authors a greater potential. Their specific agencies distinguish them from male figures such as Odysseus or Prometheus, who are primarily defined by their actions as such.

### 1.2.3. The Myth-Boom

The popular presence of Medusa, Cassandra and Medea manifests itself in non-literary naming processes, wherein the myth is an evocative referent. Cassandra and Medea have established phenomenological patterns that turned them into name-sakes for the "Kassandra syndrome," (Engelhardt and Rohrwasser, 51) which describes the announcement of danger, and, more specifically, war, the "Cassandra cries" as a trope for unheard warnings of lurking, most often political, danger, and the "Medea-Syndrome" coined by psychoanalysis for women who kill their children. In his book on gender-relations Matthias Mattusek, journalist for the German weekly "Der Spiegel," defines the "Medea-effect" as a model, whereby the raging woman is partly excused for her outrageous deeds on grounds of her gender. Mattusek strikes harsh criticism against Christa Wolf's Medea. Like Stephan, though from a different view point, he questions the

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instrumental in the mid-70s in establishing myth as a 'realist' element in literature that needed to be acknowledged and worked on. It needs to be noted that his understanding of 'realist' is not congruent with the official notion of socialist realism. See also Wolfgang Emmerich. "Zu-Endedenken. Griechische Mythologie und neuere DDR-Literatur," (Akten des Internationalen Germanistenkongresses, 1985).

relevance and acceptability of a Medea who has lost—or proven false rumor—the attributes of rage and murder.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to these negatively connoted phenomena, the German women's movement since the 1970s has rendered Medusa and Cassandra productive in light of the "myth-boom" by naming publishers and publications after Medusa and Cassandra (Comp. Stephan Musen, 12f). The Berlin publisher "Medusa" focused on alternative and critical feminist texts, and the "Medea-Frauenverlag" [Medea-women's (literature) publisher] caters to the same audience. 1977 briefly featured an edition of "Kassandra. Feministische Zeitschrift für die visuellen Künste" [Kassandra. Feminist journal of visual arts], and in Zurich a "Kassandra-Verlag" was founded.<sup>51</sup>

In literature and the performative arts, the myth-boom certainly is not confined to Russian and German women authors. The following is a list of examples illustrates the prolific and continuous production of works. Peter von Becker, Die kopflose Medusa [Headless Medusa]. German poetry, 1989. Stefan Schütz, Medusa. German Prose, 1990. Gorgo Medusa takes the reader on a trip through German history. Tony Harrison, The Gaze of the Gorgon, 1992, British poetry. Peter Shaffer, The Gift of the Gorgon, British novel, 1993. Clare Braux, Medusa and Her Sisters, French novel, 1994. Barbara Adams, Dutch Story, Medusa, 1996. Among anglophone women authors employing the Medusa

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<sup>50</sup> Matthias Mattusek, Die vaterlose Gesellschaft: Überfällige Anmerkungen zum Geschlechterkampf [Society without fathers: overdue remarks on the fight between the sexes, 1998].

<sup>51</sup> See also Inge Stephan on this, who interprets this developments as additional indicators to a "myth boom." Stephan Musen, 13 and 22.

are May Sarton, Louise Bogan ("The Sleeping Fury" / "The blue Estuaries"). Anne Sexton ("Letting Down of the Hair"), and Iris Murdoch, A Severed Head. Friedhelm Döhl, Rolf Liebermann, Mikis Theodorakis wrote operas on the Medea-theme, and in spring 2000 Jani Golob's Medea opened at the Liubliana opera house in Slovenian language.

Per Lysander and Suzanne Osten imagined Medeas Kinder [Medea's children] at the Grips-Theater Berlin, a children's theater, in the 1980s, George Tabori had Jason kill the child, played by a thoroughly disabled actor, in his controversial play "M" (1984), Ulla Stöckl's movie Der Schlaf der Vernunft [The Sleep of Reason] envisions Medea as a contemporary.

Other women authors who inscribe Medea are Diane Wakoski, Medea the Sorceress, 1991. Claire Bush adapted Euripides' tragedy in 1986. Katherine Braverman wrote the novel Lithium for Medea in 1979, Medeae were written by Miranda Seymour in 1982 and Elena Soriano, Barcelona, in 1985. The list cannot aim to be complete yet it seems as if Cassandra had decided to remain silent or make herself heard through other characters.

Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea form an imagined trajectory in correspondence with the development of women's writing, yet they are not the only female mythological figures who are productive in contemporary literature. Kristeva's essay Black Sun and fictional works by a number of German, Russian and American authors employ the myth of Persephone, foregrounding a mother-daughter theme and aspects of the Bildungsroman. In the light of love stories contrasted in the dichotomic space of being

and non-being, the young Russian poet and rock lyricist Marina Kulakova has inscribed Persephone in the brief dramatic Persefona. Dramaticheskaja istorija ljubvi v dvukh neudachnykh deistviiakh [Persephone. Dramatic Story in Two Unsuccessful Acts], wherein she juxtaposes Persephone and Pluto with Orpheus and Eurydice.<sup>52</sup> Several German authors, especially in the immediate post-war period, under the auspices of the so-called "Bewältigungsliteratur" [literature of coping (with the past)] worked on coming to terms with the heritage of totalitarianism, conflicts of power and the relation between individual and society.<sup>53</sup> Grete Weil and Elisabeth Langgässer for example reinscribe Antigone.<sup>54</sup> In her study on Antigone, Johanna Bossinade connects the Medusa's piercing gaze to the story of Antigone. She draws an interesting parallel, suggesting that the double-faced nature of Antigone alludes, probably unintentionally, to the Medusa.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> In Marina Kulakova, Reka po imeni Master (Nizhni Novgorod: Dekom, 1995) 41–76.

<sup>53</sup> On "Bewältigungsliteratur," especially including gender aspects, both GDR and DDR see Johanna Bossinade, Das Beispiel Antigone [For Example, Antigone] 1990, 112ff. Upsurge of texts on Antigone, e.g. by Ingeborg Drewitz, in Langgässer's story "Die getreue Antigone" [Faithful Antigone], or Weil's novel Meine Schwester Antigone [My Sister Antigone].

<sup>54</sup> Julia Kristeva, Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). See also article on Persephone in Kowalewski-Wallace, ed. Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory (New York and London: Garland, 1997) 303, though it only mentions Kristeva and a number of American examples.

<sup>55</sup> "Die vorliegende Studie steht unter dem Vorzeichen der Antigone-Figur, deren Name ein Synonym für elementare Menschlichkeit ist. Freilich unterliegt diese Menschlichkeit einer merkwürdigen Teilung. Wird Antigones Selbstopfer für den toten Bruder betont, tritt die Heldin ans Licht von Humanität, Widerstand, Liebe. Erhält ihre Todeszugewandtheit den Akzent, erscheint sie als Bacchantin der Unterwelt, als finstere Braut des Hades. In Antigones Doppelgesicht wagen die wenigsten zu schauen. (emph. mine. Bossinade, XIII).

The list could likewise be continued, but I will end here with one last example, Inge Merkel's novel Odysseus und Penelope [Odysseus and Penelope]. Merkel narrates the Odyssey from Penelope's point of view. It is an unsentimental, realistic psychological study of an aging woman who has to deal with a house full of potential masters and few potential lovers, her unfulfilled desires, her aging body and a mixed baggage of love, longing, estrangement and jealousy when her long missing husband returns.

#### 1.2.4. Looking Back: Recent Literary Traditions

In fact he [Boreas] finds himself overwhelmed by a host of Gorgons and Pegasus and other such monsters, whose numbers create no less a problem than their grotesqueness, and a skeptic who proposes to force each one of them into a plausible shape with the aid of a sort of rough ingenuity will need a great deal of leisure.

Plato, Phaedrus

The tradition of Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea in European art and literature is vast. It begins in antiquity and still continues. Nevertheless, there are differences in the level of popularity, and in the direction that the perception of these myths takes. To add a layer to the mythopoetic "passe-partout" I have attempted to sketch out in the previous section, I will embed the mythic figures briefly in their cultural traditions, and point out possibly relevant intertextual connections. If the brief remarks have an emphasis on the Russian tradition, it is mainly because available comparative thematic studies on myth do not reference Russian examples.

In their correspondence of themes, Romantic and Symbolist literature would merit a more substantial comparison with postmodern literary developments.<sup>56</sup> Russian

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<sup>56</sup> In one example, Sybille Cramer draws a thought-provoking parallel between romantic theory, especially Schlegel, and Christa Wolf's poetics toward a subjectivation. Her point of comparison is the change in the order of a reference system: Schlegel renounced the previous genre system,

Symbolism and Akmeism appears to foster the conflation between the mythological figure and the modern author—for example the literary-philosophical group "The Argonauts," consisting of Belyi, Ellis, S. M. Solov'ev and others, and Mandel'shtam's coining of "Cassandra" as a name for Anna Akhmatova.

#### 1.2.4.1. The Medusan Tradition. From Beast to Beauty and Back

After antiquity, when Medusa's prominent feature was the mask-like apotropaic quality of her head, she continued to inspire artistic work, reaching a peak in Romanticism. Shelley, Goethe and others were fascinated by the horrible-beautiful dichotomy of her being that Mario Praz among others has analyzed (Romantic Agony, 1974). Medusa has taken a long way in becoming a figure whom modern feminist critics employ to define models of female agency, and authors use to probe the poetic potential. Her iconic quality is a stable feature, and likewise is her fragmentation, which results in reference to her head, her gaze, and her hair.

Some early versions such as Pindar allude to Medusa as originally being a beautiful figure.<sup>57</sup> The name's etymology similarly suggests positive qualities: Besides

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when the societal order was about to break apart, while Wolf resists against an aging patriarchy. "Was sich in Christa Wolfs Erzählung als Privatissimum abspielt, vollzieht sich in der Romantik im Rahmen der ästhetischen Theorie. Das auf sich selbst zurückgeworfene Subjekt sucht nach einer Objektivierung im Entwurf einer "Neuen Mythologie", deren Priester der Dichter ist [...] So wie Schlegel das Alte Gattungssystem in den historischen Augenblick absetzt, als die Gesellschaftsordnung zerfällt, auf die es sich bezieht, so entwickelt Christa Wolf ihre Vorstellungen einer weiblichen Ästhetik aus dem Widerstand gegen ein marodes Patriarchat." Comp. Sybille Cramer "Eine unendliche Geschichte des Widerstands. Zu Christa Wolfs Erzählungen "Kein Ort. Nirgends" und "Kassandra". Christa Wolf Materialienbuch, ed. Klaus Sauer (Darmstadt / Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987) 121-142, 134.

<sup>57</sup> Pindar, XI Pythian Ode: "[...][Perseus] having carried off the beautiful Medusa's head..." 2/26. The ode focuses on Athene's invention of fluteplay, inspired, according to Pindar, by the "sorrowful lamentations" of Medusa's sisters.

the onomatopoeic interpretation of the word "Gorgon" as resembling the gurgling sound both Medusa's severed head and her lamenting deceived sisters utter, "Gorgides" and "Gorgades" are names for deities of the sea (Kerényi Geburt der Helena, 44). The name "Medusa" means "queen" but also she who thinks, how posses spirit.<sup>58</sup>

The Romantic and the decadent notion of Medusa conflate the erotic and the terrible. Preceding was a rich artistic tradition of Medusa that imagined her as a beheaded woman—by Leonardo, Caravaggio, Rubens, Cellini and others—yet rarely inscribed her. As an early myth and a female mythic figure on the edge of the world as envisioned in mythic landscape, Medusa has been read in connection with "colonializing efforts" of male mythic heroes such as Perseus (comp. Stephan Musen, 61). Understanding this term not only in its political sense, I would contend that the Romantic and Symbolist tradition tend to cast women as men's "negative other," as the mysterious, the stranger.<sup>59</sup>

As the mysterious woman, Medusa became the "icon of an epoch".<sup>60</sup> As that, her beauty was in the eye of the (male) beholder who gazed in fascination at the inactive,

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<sup>58</sup> Note also the connection between Medusa's and Medea's name, both sharing the core "Med". Kerényi argues, to assert the positive qualities of Medusa, that it was a quite common girl's name which parents would have probably not given to a daughter if the common connotation was negative. (Kerényi, *Mythologie*, 44). For the reference to Medusa's name meaning "the one who thinks" see Klaus Heinrich in Schlesinger, 348 "Ihr Name, wie gesagt, ist ein schönes Wort: Médusa, das kann "die Herrscherin" heißen, ganz direkt' aber es ist zunächst einmal die, die denkt, die Geist hat, die "Sinnende". Es ist also diejenige, die qua Geist herrscht und nicht qua Gewalt—wahrlich kein unbedeutendes Wort in der griechischen Sprache." Heinrich, whose lecture focuses on different Medusa-representations in art, mainly Beckmann's Medusa-triptych as representative of horrors of world War II (painted in Amsterdam, 1940/41, also focuses on the gender-tension innate to the Medusa).

<sup>59</sup> For example in the poetry of Baudelaire and Blok. Comp. Taeger, 73.

<sup>60</sup> A similar development can be traced in art, especially painting. Departing from the antique depictions there is a tendency towards a certain melancholy in the perspective of the painter/spectator. Stephan notes a dramatic increase of Medusa-depictions around

beautiful, and potentially dangerous image for whom one gladly risks the terrifying arrest for a fleeting moment of passion. Among the Russian symbolist works that contain prominent allusions to a thus beautiful-petrifying Medusa Blok's poem "Neznakomka" [The Stranger, 1906] is a prominent example. The male protagonist, drinking in a bar, beholds night after night "ochi sinie bezdonnye" [bottomless blue eyes] which "tsvetut na dal'nem beregu" [blossom on the distant shore, 12 / 3-4].<sup>61</sup>

Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal, married to the symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov, in her story "Golova Meduzy," published only after her death, parodyingly draws on Blok, as she names her male protagonist "Neznakomov."<sup>62</sup> Zinov'eva-Annibal tackles what the symbolist myth of the feminine meant for "women who wanted to write, to be creators rather than exemplars of men's myths."<sup>63</sup> In her story, Neznakomov in a bar meets the sculptor Feres, who is obsessed with stone, which befits his profession, but also implies the idea of petrification—"Kamen' liubliu" [I love stone, 197], especially when he exclaims that he "wants a stone woman" [Khochu kamennuiu zhenshchinu, 203], and, putting his hand on that of Neznakomov, makes him feel as if the blood would draw from

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1900—"Medusa becomes the icon of an entire generation." ("Medusa wird zur Ikone einer ganzen Epoche." Stephan, Musen 65).

<sup>61</sup> Noteworthy is the repetition of the image of the distant shore, that is a staple in the majority of Medusa- reinscriptions and prominently figures for the other myths as well. – "bereg ocharovannyi" and "ocharovannuiu dal'." 10 / 2+4.

<sup>62</sup> L. D. Zinov'eva-Annibal, "Golova meduzy" in Tragicheskii zverinets (Novozibirsk: Volodei, 1997). The story's atmosphere compares with the atmosphere in symbolist cycles. In an article on Zinov'eva Annibal, Beth Holmgren describes her in Greek attire, amidst a bohemian atmosphere, as a salon hostess. See Beth Holmgren in "Stepping Out / Going Under," Russia – Women – Culture, Holmgren and Goscilo, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 228ff.

his veins. Feres' gaze into a woman's eyes—the Medusan head, complete with hair, is invoked, too, but mainly reduced to the eyes—is not, like in Blok's poem, the gateway into the mystified, spherical distance, but locks the beholder into a perpetual exchange of gazes: "And I look. And these eyes are my eyes. And my eyes, these. eyes." [I ia glazhu. I te glaza – moi glaza. A moi glaza – te glaza, 202].

At the same time, less romantically charged iconic representations of Medusa are evoked in Russian symbolist poetry, for example in Osip Mandel'shtam's poem "Admiral'teistvo" (1913). The theme of vision, mirror, and petrification that figure prominently in my reading of Medusa, appear frequently in the poetry of that period. The notion of the dangerous gaze and petrification at a turning point figure in Anna Akhmatova's "Lotova zhena" (1924) which evokes the story of Lot's wife from the book of Genesis. In the poem, a woman is petrified after a last glance back at her past and what she treasured, now all gone up in flames. Differing from the biblical text that implies the overriding of a prohibition, I read the moment of petrification in Akhmatova's poem also as a moment of horrified acknowledgment of the terror implied in what the woman sees. For the contemporary poetry, in addition to the reference Sedakova makes to Akhmatova's poetry, I would also relate this image to Cassandra in Elena Chizhova's poem, wherein the prophet is horrified by the site of Troy burning. It is also noteworthy in my context, that Akhmatova casts Lot's wife as a memorial, as an icon that triggers mnemonic work, and in this respect evokes Aischylos' Cassandra's plea to the chorus to be remembered as "poor thing lightly killed" (Aischylos, *Agamemnon*, v. 1316f.).

Kto zhenshchinu etu oplakivat' budet?

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<sup>63</sup> Jane Costlow. Introduction. *L. Zinovieva-Annibal. The Tragic Menagerie. Stories*. Trans. Jane Costlow (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999) xvi.

Ne men'shei li mnitsia ona iz utrat?  
Lish' serdtse moe nikogda ne zabudet  
Otdavshuiu zhizn' za edinstvennyi vzgliad.

Who will weep for this woman?  
Isn't her death the least significant?  
But my heart will never forget the one  
Who gave her life for a single glance.<sup>64</sup>

For the German context, Medusa is present as a referent, but rarely productive beyond. Goethe employed Medusa as an example of the deceptive woman, imbued with danger, when he has Mephistopheles quotes Medusa as a warning example for Faust in "Walpurgisnacht." There, Faust sees an apparition, beautiful and transparent, that resembles Gretchen. Mephistopheles warns him that it is but a beautiful deception, which might petrify him. The likening of "idol" and "magic image" [Es ist ein Zauberbild, ist leblos, ein Idol], refers to Medusa, which, Mephistopheles assumes, is commonplace knowledge—"you have certainly heard of the Medusa"—because, one might add, visual representations and literary inscriptions have manifested her image.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Anna Akhmatova, "Lotova Zhena," *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986)147. Trans. by Judith Hemschemeyer, *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova* (Boston: Zephyr Press, 1994) 273f.

<sup>65</sup> "Laß das nur stehen! Dabei wird's niemand wohl. / Es ist ein Zauberbild, ist leblos, ein Idol. / Ihm zu begegnen, ist nicht gut' Vom starren Blick erstarrt des Menschen Blut, / Und er wird fast in Stein verkehrt, / Von der Meduse hast du ja gehört" (Goethe, *Faust I*, Walpurgisnacht, 4189ff, *Werke* vol. 3, 131.) This corresponds to the vision of Medusa as "Ur-Threat" already in the *Ilias*: Gorgo in *Ilias* is horror of war, but kind of generic horror (Homer, *Ilias* 8/348 and 11/36).

#### 1.2.4.2. Cassandra, the Poet's Epitome

In the following part, I explore how the figure of Cassandra has been differently treated and shaped in the German and Russian poetic tradition.

The earliest Cassandra-text discussed in this chapter, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz's story, dates from the early 1960s. It is noteworthy because it reflects the cautious treatment of myth in the immediate German postwar tradition, unparalleled in Russia, and still suffering from the effect of the national socialists.<sup>66</sup> They had coopted mythic themes, and especially Germanic mythology, for ideological purposes. Cassandra's former medieval, Christian, and Romantic tradition appeared no longer applicable in the second half of the Twentieth Century—except for allusions in Hagenau's ongoing exploration of the character, charged with a strong Christian moral.<sup>67</sup> Mention of Cassandra in postwar literature was more often associated with exiled writers' comparisons between their own unheard warnings and Cassandra's prophecies (comp. Epple, 232).

In the German postwar literary tradition, a lecture series was established at the Frankfurt University, the Frankfurter Lectures on Poetics, given by a different writer each season. Bachmann, Kaschnitz, and Wolf each delivered a series. The connection between

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<sup>66</sup> A similar and even earlier example is Erika Mitterer's novella "Die Seherin" [The Prophet, 1953]. For a brief discussion of this novella see Epple.

<sup>67</sup> Hagenau. Kassandra. Wie ist die Welt so stille. Novella. [Cassandra. How the World is Still and Quiet]. Undated and unpublished. The subtitle quotes a popular lullaby, "Der Mond ist aufgegangen," written by Matthias Claudius in 1779. The setting is a professor's study, like a *Kunstkammer* filled with art objects, paintings, sculptures, pagan and Christian, and books. In an eschatological vision, Cassandra steps out of an attic vase and John the Evangelist from a Dürer painting. Their conversation does not match: while Cassandra sees fires and steel birds that she cannot decipher, signs of the past war or a new one, and expresses fear, John rejoices: he interprets the vision as the advent of the final judgment. 4f.

Bachmann's lectures—she was the first author to deliver them in 1959/1960—and her later novel, Malina, is not as immediate as in the case of Wolf's Cassandra-project, although both authors address similar aesthetic issues. The following discussion will show that Bachmann's major questions in the lectures, concerning rhetoric, subject, naming, and (linguistic) utopia appear in poetic shape in Malina, and are also major themes Wolf and Kaschnitz concern themselves with. Unfortunately, Kaschnitz's lectures have not been published and thus cannot be included in the paired comparison of lectures and novels/story. I find the combination of these three authors' works, who all addressed themes pertaining to Cassandra on a critical and poetic plane, particularly noteworthy and unique. They illustrate my methodic approach, that I have discussed in the thesis's introduction, to treat any critical or poetic text in relation to the questions posed in this thesis; that is to note aesthetic propositions in an essay or lecture, or metacritical elements in a novel, story, or poem (comp. to page 13). These metacritical connections appear to be productive only in the German context. As alluded to in the opening paragraph, Cassandra has a different history in the Russian literary tradition. It is distinct from German revisions of the myth, and there is no comparable phenomenon as described above where women authors theorize about the creative process and write fictional works that experiment with theoretical issues on a different plane. Noteworthy is Marina Tsvetaeva's allusive metaphor wherein she compares the critic to a prophetic figure. Tsvetaeva evokes characters such as Aphrodite, Phaedra and Ariadne in her poetry and dramatic works.<sup>68</sup> In an essay on criticism, Tsvetaeva goes even further in describing the

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<sup>68</sup> On the note of a specific female aesthetics, Wolf's lectures, however, do not supply information that is discernible as a particular "female" approach to writing, yet her essays have not been attacked because she is a woman. A different case is Tsvetaeva's literary criticism that has been

critic's powers of interpretation, as the ideal critic becomes "The Sibyl above the cradle."<sup>69</sup> As a Sibyl leaning over a cradle, the critic is no longer the traditional stereotype of a rational, masculine interpreter, but a prophet who is female, inspired by the god of poetry, Apollo, and (perhaps most strikingly) known for speaking in riddles to be deciphered.

While seldom present as a character in women's texts, the Russian tradition often identifies and endows the poet with prophetic qualities. From Polonskii to Pushkin, Cassandra has repeatedly been a poetic subject.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the most famous example is Anna Akhmatova. For the leading woman poet of the Russian tradition in the Twentieth

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degraded as "hysterical" partly because of an assumed lack of objectivity as she was a woman author. Her criticism extensively employs metaphors of the body, and of childbirth significant in Cixous's definition of "écriture féminine". See Sibelan Forrester, "Tsvetaeva as Critic," in *Russian Writers on Russian Writers*. Oxford, Providence: Berg, 81–98, 97. For a general assesment of women writers as critics, for the stigmatization of women's criticism as 'emotional' and male criticism as 'analytical,' and also for the degradation of Tsvetaeva's criticism as 'hysterical', see Catriona Kelly's article on the women writer as critic in the same volume: "Missing Links: Russian Women Writers as Critics of Russian Women Writers," in Wiggzell, 67–79. See esp. 72f.

One can speculate that Tsvetaeva had considered Cassandra as a character. In her article on an ancient theme in Tsvetaeva's work, O. M. Savel'eva notes that Tsvetaeva had planed a trilogy on ancient heroines. While she completed Phaedra and Ariadne in the late 1920s, the third piece, presumably on Helene, was never written. In that tragedy, supposedly, Cassandra might have played a role. See O. M. Savel'eva. "O reministsentsii odnogo antichnogo siuzheta u M. Tsvetaevoi," Antichnost' v kontekste sovremennosti, ed. Takho-Godi.

<sup>69</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, Izbrannia proza v dvukh tomakh. New York, 1979, vol. 1, pp.225, 227, 231.

<sup>70</sup> Jakov Petrovich Polonskii (1820–1898) has a poem on Cassandra. In her dissertation on myth in Russian literature at turn of the century, G. P. Kozubovskaia analyzes Polonskii's employment of Kassandra as a heroic woman, suffering from the conflict between love and duty, a view that could be compared to Schiller's and Hagenau's inscription of Cassandra. Galina Petrovna Kozubovskaia. Problema mifologizma v russkoi poezii kontsa XIX- nachala XX veka. Dissertation, Samara-Barnaul, 1995, 33 and footnote 34, 137. Kozubovskaia further touches on Akhmatova and proposes to study mythology and theatricality, especially the use of masks, as two major currents in her poetry.

Century, Mandel'shtam appropriated the title 'Cassandra.'<sup>71</sup> In exploring the connections between ancient mythology and modern literature, Akhmatova's poetry is noteworthy for its representation of the acmeist notion of complete intertextuality: each text can be read as itself and as another, since it partakes in the "global poetic text."<sup>72</sup> The idea of a double-being [dvoinichestvo] finds its expression in mirror-images in Akhmatova's poetry of figures who mirror ancient stories in their poetic shapes. Mythopoetic aspects in Akhmatova's poetry strive especially in her muse poems, wherein the muse either carries the memory, or is frenzied, maddened (in a transgressive, inspiring way).<sup>73</sup> The three heroines Cassandra, Dido and Phaedra bear a special significance, thematically united through tragic unrequited love. Their reinscription can be read as an illustration of the idea of 'dvoinichestvo.' It envisions the trajectory of mythological figures from their casting in ancient texts through a literary tradition that has shaped their reading. Therefore, 'dvoinichestvo' acknowledges that Homer has been read via Schiller, Vergil through Dante and Euripides through Racine, and adds the poet's own vision.<sup>74</sup> The

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<sup>71</sup> "Ja ne iskal v tsvetushchie mgnoven'ia / Tvoikh, Kassandra, gub, tvoikh, Kassandra, glaz..." Osip Mandel'shtam, "Kassandre," 1917. See also T.V. Tsivian. "Antichnye geroini – zerkala Akhmatovoi," *Russian Literature* 7/8 (1974): 103–119, 106.

<sup>72</sup> "mirovoy poeticheskoy tekst" Ibid., 102.

<sup>73</sup> "Verdichtet sind die Aspekte akmeistischer Lyrik in den Musen-Gedichten Anna Achmatovas, in denen ein archaisches Sediment des Musenmythos profiliert wird (die vorapollinische Rolle der Musen) und die Elemente koinzidieren, von denen die Rede war: Erinnerung–Vergessen, Stimme–Schrift, Doppelgänger, Gespräch. Die Muse erscheint in dieser Auslegung des Mythos als archaisches Prinzip des Dichtens, das zwei Instanzen hervortreten läßt: das Gedächtnis (die Muse als Gedächtnisträgerin, Erinnerung als Dichten) und den 'Wahnsinn' (als Inspiration und Entzückung)." Renate Lachmann. *Gedächtnis und Literatur*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990) 389.

<sup>74</sup> "Sushestvenno i to, chto vse tri nazvannye antichnye geroini prinadlezhat fragmentu MPT, kotoryy byl izbran i ukazan akmeizmom, vo-pervykh, i chto oni vziaty ne iz antichnykh

doubling effect that Akhmatova describes is mainly temporal. Transposed to the discourse on women's writing, it contributes a dimension to Weigel's theory, which stems from a critical reading of Irigaray. Weigel contends that women always occupy a 'double place' inside and outside tradition. This assumption thus invites reading the woman writer/poet and her work as oscillating between subject and object, individual presentation and being represented. If Akhmatova, the woman poet, is associated with the tragic prophetess Cassandra, and also inscribes her in her poetry, what does that mean? One might fall into the trap of stigmatizing works by women authors, conflating the writer's persona and the characters in her work. Acmeist philosophy in mind, in the particular case of the prophet Cassandra and the female author I would argue for reading 'dvoinichestvo' as a trope emphasizing the poet's task to see further, both into past and future, and to search for a poetic truth.<sup>75</sup> Speaking a poetic truth is something that Ingeborg Bachmann especially admired. She dedicated a poem to Akhmatova that deals with the poetic claim not only to write, but to 'underwrite,' to 'sign' the poetic statement:

To make one single sentence last,  
bearable in the razzle-dazzle of words

Nobody writes this sentence,  
Who won't underwrite.<sup>76</sup>

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pervoistochnikov, a iz "zermal", vo-vtorykh: Gomer cherez Shillera, Vergilii cherez Dante, Evripid cherez Rasina." Tsivian, 106.

<sup>75</sup> See Weigel's statement of "doppelten Ort innerhalb *und* außerhalb des Symbolischen" / "double place of women inside *and* outside of the symbolic," the basis of her theory of the "cross-eyed gaze." In Stephan / Weigel 1983, 9.

<sup>76</sup> From the poem "Wahrlich. Für Anna Achmatova." 1957-61. "Einen einzigen Satz haltbar zu machen, / auszuhalten in dem Bimbam von Worten. // Es schreibt diesen Satz keiner, / der nicht unterschreibt." Bachmann, Werke 1, 166.

The question of truth and truthfulness in prophetic speech is intimately connected with temporal dimensions. The temporal trajectory between past, present, and future, is evoked in most texts relating to Cassandra. Marcel Detienne's interpretation of the prophet as someone who has to recognize the origin of something and, by remembering it, restore it—he states as one example the divine ancestry of kings—is illuminating, especially the initial impulse is to associate the prophet with futurity. In acmeist philosophy, however, the past is comprehended as a process, a becoming that is projected into the future (comp. Lachmann, 358). Thus, if Romanticism in Germany or the Silver Age in Russia espouses a "nostalgia for culture" [toska po mirovoi kul'ture, Mandel'shtam], can the same be asserted for texts of the late Twentieth Century? Or, considering especially the role of the woman author, is the (re)construction of a tradition of one's own and subsequent laying grounds for a poetic future the more prominent concern?<sup>77</sup>

Incidentally, but most likely not coincidentally, voice, memory and writing are central issues of acmeist aesthetics and in modernist reinscriptions of Cassandra.<sup>78</sup> The sphere of the voice is supposed to function as the spherical resonant space wherein the speaking voice can make the entire semantic realm resound, embracing past, present, and future. The longing, if not for culture, but for a special place in one's environment, or for knowledge, truth, or, in the romanticized versions, for the typically female role of lover/wife/mother has the strongest impact on Cassandra's myth, superseding Medusa or

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<sup>77</sup> Marcel Detienne, Les maîtres de vérité dans la grèce archaïque, 1967.

<sup>78</sup> I have to note, though, that I do not focus on the implicit tension and conflict between voice and text, as Lachmann notes for Acmeist poetry, but rather on how the voice establishes its grounds within the text.

even Medea.<sup>79</sup> Cassandra in all literary versions alienates and isolates herself through her superior knowledge of future events. In the Agamemnon of Aeschylus's Oresteia, an isolated Cassandra is first conceived as dramatic ally, as a character whose most significant feature is the prophecy of the death of the king Agamemnon and her own; her only plea is to be remembered. Aeschylus's play assumes the same prominent and formative position for the later perception of the Cassandra myth as Euripides with relation to Medea. The Aeschylean tragedy is the first poetic inscription of the ambivalent gift of prophecy for Cassandra by the god Apollo.<sup>80</sup> Cassandra as suffering woman who is denied marriage, with the god through priesthood or with mortal men, is foreshadowed in Euripides' Trojan Women.<sup>81</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Friedrich von Schiller's ballad "Kassandra" (1805) has a strong intertextual significance for the reception of the prophet in modern literature, both in Russia and in Germany.<sup>82</sup> It is not possible here to trace Schiller's extensive influence

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<sup>79</sup> Comp. also Solveig Müller's Foucauldian analysis, Müller, 29.

<sup>80</sup> Comp. Davreux, 35f. Gantz, by assessing Cassandra's relation to Apollo in Aeschylus's tragedy, points out the strange and rare presentation of a woman who can refuse a god. Without searching for possible explanations, he thereby presents Cassandra as an exceptional female character. Gantz, 92. His argument is weakend, I would argue, because nothing but the refusal attests to an act of strength—Powerless in her punishment, Cassandra has to witness the doom, including her own, of everything that is dear to her.

<sup>81</sup> Other ancient authors who inscribe Cassandra, though often briefly, are: Lykophron, Hygion, Apollodor, Bakchylides, Vergil, Homer, Pindar, Ovid and Seneca.

<sup>82</sup> A number of translations of Schiller's works can be presumed available to the authors. There is an early biography / edition of poetry: Schiller, ego zhizn' I izbrannyya stikhotvoreniia, (St. Peterburg: Izd. A. S. Suvorina, 1887). Translations by Russian writers such as Zhukovskii and later Pasternak have been published. Zhukovskij's translations appeared in the well-known Sobranie sochinenii Shillera v perevodakh russkikh pisatelei, (Moscow, 1859), edited by N. V. Gerbel'. Also: Schiller. Izbrannaia proza, ed. N. Slaviatinskii, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo detskoi literatury, 1955). It seems to me that Schiller is responsible for another

in Russia starting from the Golden to Silver Age poetry; here it will have to suffice to comment on intertextual echoes in Hagenau's and Chizhova's poetry and Wolf's rejection of Schiller. Yet neoclassical interest in ancient mythic stories did not come to Russia via Germany alone. A reinscriptive example of the Trojan War from around the same time as Schiller's poem is Ozerov's tragedy Poliksena (1809), inspired directly by Euripides' Hecuba and Seneca's Trojan Women and formed by the construction principles of French classical tragedy.<sup>83</sup>

Comparative studies on Cassandra as a literary figure, most of them dissertations, by Pascal-Anne Brault, Thomas Epple, Solvejg Müller, Stephanie Jentgens, and Dagmar Neblung, end with a discussion Wolf's Cassandra and her lectures on the novel project as their most recent examples. Neblung's study focuses on ancient reinscriptions, and explains Cassandra's ongoing literary popularity with her indentifiability: anyone whose warnings are not heard can identify with the mythic prophet.<sup>84</sup> Jentgens emphasizes

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interesting phenomenon that I can only point at here. His tragedy Maria Stuart that has been translated into Russian already in the Nineteenth Century and then in 1958 by Boris Pasternak. At least three Russian women authors have written versions of Mary Stuart. Elena Chizhova and Liudmila Razumovskaia have written plays, Galina Nerpina a poem.

<sup>83</sup> See Adolf Stender-Petersen. Geschichte der russischen Literatur, vol. 2. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1986. 74.

<sup>84</sup> Sources: Pascal-Anne Brault, Prophetess Doomed. Cassandra and the Representation of Truth (New York: 1990). Thomas Epple, Der Aufstieg der Untergangsseherin Cassandra: Zum Wandel ihrer Interpretation vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1993). Solvejg Müller, Kein Brautfest zwischen Menschen und Göttern: Cassandra-Mythologie im Lichte von Sexualität und Wahrheit (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994). Stephanie Jentgens, Cassandra. Spielarten einer literarischen Figur (Hildesheim and New York: Olms-Weidmann), 1995. Dagmar Neblung, Die Gestalt der Cassandra in der antiken Literatur (Stuttgart, Leipzig: Teubner, 1997).

Solvejg Müller's study Kein Brautfest zwischen Menschen und Göttern is based on a Foucauldian reading of the relation between sexuality and power in the design of Cassandra throughout literary history. She focuses mainly on German/European works from the middle ages up to Christa Wolf's Cassandra, with a brief mention of later works such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's

Cassandra's multifaceted reception through literary history, which ranges from voice of the conservative status quo to revolutionary protest.<sup>85</sup> Müller focuses her tracing of Cassandra, based on a Foucauldian reading, on the relation between sex and power and notes an increasing 'domestication' of Cassandra towards the Twentieth Century from a potentially 'red' woman or femme fatale into a 'white' innocent, unfulfilled woman, in a portrayal that less and less focuses on power and prophecy. Two older monographs by Klaus Ledergerber and Juliette Davreux focus on pre-Nineteenth Century versions of the myth.<sup>86</sup> The later studies, all written in the past decade, have contributed to completing Cassandra's literary history by listing and analyzing versions of her myth in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. Though Thomas Epple includes an excursion on Wolf's novel in light of the debate on "weibliches Schreiben," theoretical aspects of a

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novel The Firebrand, 1987. Jentgens compares Wolf and Bradley, pointing out that both authors offer a positive utopian possibility in the end (though I would contest that about Wolf), including the relation to a man. In Bradley's novel, 'trivial-feminist' according to Jentgens, Cassandra is the co-founder of a new city. Jentgens, 55. Jentgens makes the distinction between femme fatale, or 'red woman', a literary motif from the Nineteenth Century. The definition derives partially from Mario Praz's Romantic Agony. Jentgens contends to have coined for her analysis of gender significance in Cassandra the opposing category of femme sacrifiée, or 'white' woman. She uses Iphigenia and Polyxena as supportive examples, without mentioning Girard whose theory might be likewise applied in this context. Ibid., 132f.

<sup>85</sup> "Einmal ist sie Vertreterin vorgegebener moralischer Forderungen, dann wieder sprengt sie die Normen tradiertter Tugendvorstellungen. Sie wird ebenso als Revolutionärin gesellschaftlicher Zustände wie als Vertreterin konterrevolutionärer Vorstellungen interpretiert." Ibid. 23.

<sup>86</sup> Klaus Ledergerber, Kassandra. Das Bild der Prophetin in der antiken und insbesondere in der älteren abendländischen Dichtung (Freiburg: Buochs, 1941) and Juliette Davreux, La Légende de la prophétesse Cassandra d'après les textes et les monuments (Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1942). Davreux traces literary appearances of Cassandra through classical texts from the epics to the works of the rhetorics, with an appendix on her cultic function, and then analyses her presentation in art. Ledergerber has an extensive section on Cassandra in medieval texts, wherein he clarifies the transgression from pagan to Christian contexts, that would situate Cassandra in the realm of Christian prophesy. He adds a brief excursion into traces of Cassandra in Renaissance literature.

female rhetoric that are invited by the modern renditions are mostly absent from the monographs, but discussed in a number of critical articles and studies on Christa Wolf.<sup>87</sup>

A further noteworthy actualization of Cassandra in the German context, even if marginally significant for my approach to the myth, is the commonplace "Cassandra-cries" or "shouts," as idiom for unheard warnings. They appeared especially in politically critical situations such as the post-war era, or during the 1980s, shouting warnings into the Cold War and the disarmament debate. Different from the literary castings Kaschnitz and Wolf give in this context, in this mostly political debate Cassandra is evoked as the prophet of war. Sometimes she is paired with Odysseus as female counterpart to his cunning trickery. Herfried Münkler even claims that Cassandra and Odysseus are the two decisive forces of the Trojan War. Rhetorical power, Münkler argues, is stronger than the armour—"the pen is mightier than the sword"—for and with which Achilles and Hector fight. Odysseus is the cunning trickster to whom the Greeks listen, Cassandra gives her

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<sup>87</sup> See e.g. Christa Bürger, "Empathische Vernunft. Über die Erzählung Cassandra von Christa Wolf." In Zerstörung. Rettung des Mythos durch Licht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, 111–127). Various essays in Marilyn Sibley Fries, ed. Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) (esp. Gilpin. Porter, Ryan). Barbara Lersch. "Kassandra' und die Utopie des weiblichen Subjekts. Zu Christa Wolfs Poetik." In Diskussion Deutsch. 20/105 (1989): 59–78. Sigrid Weigel, "Vom Sehen zur Seherin. Christa Wolfs Umdeutung des Mythos und die Spur der Bachmann-Rezeption in ihrer Literatur." In Text + Kritik 46, 3rd edition (1985), 67–92. Sabine Wilke, Ausgraben und Erinnern: Zur Funktion von Geschichte. Subjekt und geschlechtlicher Identität in den Texten Christa Wolfs (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993). To trace Cassandra's history, it would be fruitful to examine mythological dictionaries from different times and analyze the categories applied to the character. As Solveig Müller notes, for example, Hederichs Gründliches mythologisches Lexicon, popular in the Eighteenth Century, in its 1770 edition lists eight categories: name, parents, coincidences, death, persona [Gestalt], cult, historical traces [wahre Historie] und misc. Comp. Müller, 99. Another example is the hesitant stance that a GDR-dictionary takes on myth in literature. According to Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch, Berlin, 1978, the "metaphoric meanings of mythic figures and conflicts" are hardly significant in present culture, 514, quoted after Engelhardt and Rohrwasser, 46. This official definition stands in stark contrast to the high productivity of myth in GDR literature especially in the 1970s and 1980s, for a comprehensive list of examples see Glau.

warnings in vain, and the Trojans lose the war.<sup>88</sup> Münkler concedes, though, that the iconic use of "Cassandra-cries" is based on a de-tragicized, hysterical Cassandra who evolved in literature through the figure's casting in the medieval and romantic tradition. For the present context it will be of greater interest to investigate whether the tragic aspect of the character is reinserted by the contemporary texts I am analyzing in this study. The question of the contents of Cassandra's prophecy arises in connection with the evaluation of tragic potential—were Cassandra's prophecies not understood because of what she said or because the conundrum of her expression made the statement unclear?

None of the above mentioned studies considers Russian texts. Jentgens alone, who has a comprehensive appendix of literary Cassandra-versions, notes a text by the Czech writer Lessja Ukrajinka. For my goal to trace a Russian Cassandra tradition, Jentgens's conclusion provides a notable hint to the supposedly different literary tradition of her myth in Slavic countries. Jentgens quotes a source that associates Cassandra with sagas, ancient and biblical mythology; for example she suggests a connection to the figure of Mary Magdalene.<sup>89</sup> The reference, representative of the attempt to Christianize pagan antiquity, might be more productive for medieval texts and their comparison, though Ledergerber for example has presented medieval literary versions that read

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<sup>88</sup> See e.g. Münkler, esp. 78f. Münkler's presentation of the figures might have been significantly influenced by Wolf, whom he mentions. Ibid., 81 and 88.

<sup>89</sup> Jentgens refers to a study on the history of Troy in Rumania by Klaus-Henning Schroeder, Die Geschichte vom trojanischen Krieg in der älteren rumänischen Literatur (München, 1976). Schroeder mentions the south Slavic legend of "Alexander the Elder," i.e. Paris. Therein Cassandra is called "Magduna," a variation of Maria Magdalena and thus joins allusions to ancient myth, southern European sagas and biblical stories. Jentgens, 220.

Cassandra in connection with prophesying the advent of the messiah. Except for Gerda Hagenau, who in an unpublished text envisions an encounter between John the evangelist and Cassandra, though, biblical myth is not emphasized in the herein discussed contemporary texts [comp. Kassandra. *Wie ist die Welt so stille*].

#### 1.2.4.3. Medea's Chariot on the Move

In Western Europe, including Germany, Medea has a strong presence since her origin in ancient times. One of the strongest German examples is Hans Henny Jahn's *Medea* from 1826, in which Medea is a black-skinned sorceress, strongly signified as "other." I will only make a brief comment on her. Though her chariot is on the move in numerous reinscriptions, the German tradition has been concisely documented, while the Russian context offers little material.

There are few original Medeas in Russia. One of the reasons might be the strong positive image of mothers that causes a resistance to depict a child murderess. Symbolist poets produced two translations of Euripides's *Medea*. The translations by Innokenti Annenskii and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii which suggest the conclusion that the classic play was authoritative for the reception of Medea at the turn of the century.<sup>90</sup> A relatively unknown author, Viktor Petrovich Burenin (1841-1926) published a *Medea*-drama in 1884. In his cycle „*Pravda vechnaia kumirov*” [The Eternal Truth of Idols, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vol., Moscow: Skorpion, 1906. I, 387f.] from 1904, Valerii Briusov has a poem on Medea. Therein, Briusov focuses on Medea's "strast'," her passion, as a strong

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<sup>90</sup> In *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. XXII (Moscow, 1914, Repr. Olms, Hildesheim und New York, 1973).

human potential. He depicts her at an end point, when, after her revenge against Jason, she takes flight in her dragon-winged sun chariot.

There are few figures in Russian literature that resemble Medea. As one possible example, Nikolai Leskov's novella Lady Macbeth Mzenskogo kraia [Lady Macbeth of Mzensk] from 1886 can be noted. Known better in Shostakovich's opera rendition of 1934, the novella has, in addition to the obvious intertextuality with Shakespeare, similarities with a Medea as well. The protagonist Katerina Lvov'na, married to a wealthy older merchant, falls in love with her servant Sergei. For her forbidden love, Katerina murders her father in law, poisons her husband and then his nephew, and denoted heir, as Katerina and her husband are without children of their own. As they are found out for the last murder, Katerina and Sergei are sent to prison camp, where Sergei falls in love with another woman. Katerina drowns her and then herself. The dramatic development shows similar kinds of murders than those the mythical Medea commits: She murders out of passion, and she cuts off the male line of power and possession by killing her husband's heir. When betrayed, she kills out of jealousy.

In conclusion, the Russian tradition of classical mythology in its literary and theoretical reinscriptions literature needs and deserves further investigation. Russian literary reference works and encyclopedias for example all list Medusa, or at least the Gorgons, Cassandra and Medea. They refer to their tradition in Western culture, most often giving a list of examples. In no case, however, have I encountered the mention of a original Russian work – though obviously these have been included into the Russian tradition by Russian poets.

## **2. Medusa – The Horrible Head Trip? The Ambiguous Mythological Figure**

In which language should I speak now?  
I spoke about all that is human.  
I am like a dead fish on the sand  
grey discoloured scales.

Like the gluttonous fledgling which does not collapse on a carrion  
Medusa, the Gorgon, also knows no mercy.  
I lie on the sand, like someone lying  
on the ground, who does not drown, no way.

Alina Vitukhnovskaia, "Sobaka Pavlova"

At one particular point in my life, I saw a Medusa rising up in the sea [...] Unwillingly I looked at the delicate, but piercing appearance for a while. Something immediately concerning myself was beaming at me, something already decayed or not yet shaped, water floating surrounding my feet, the sea from which we all emerged.

Gertrud Leutenegger, Meduse

The Medusa is one of the most ambiguous of mythological figures. The quotations from Alina Vitukhnovskaia and Gertrud Leutenegger illuminate her diverse potential. In modern feminist theory, Medusa becomes a kind of modern apotropaic shield against the gaze of the male tradition, in an attempt to stake a claim for women authors to develop their work and theory. Medusa's ambiguity between stasis and creative potential generated special interest in her character. Her myth appears to begin in the transitory moment of her death: When Perseus decapitates her, it is an act of violence that fragments the Medusa into her most familiar guise: a terrifying head with a petrifying gaze: Paralyzed, paralyzing, and silent. She also contains life. In the moment of her death, two creatures, supposedly conceived by Poseidon, spring forth from Medusa's head: Chrysaor, the future bearer of great heroes and the winged horse Pegasus, whose path through the realm of the Muses reveals the source of poetry. Her beheading, curiously, reveals the double nature of Medusa: as terrifying monster, and as creative force.

Chrysaor's and Pegasus' birth and the beheading are related to the creation of fluteplay by Athena who was intrigued by the sound of Medusa's hissing (hair-)snakes or, as other versions have it, the lament of her Gorgon sisters. At the same time, it relates the productive origin of two art-forms, fluteplay and poetry. Kalliope, the flute-playing choral leader of the Muses, sometimes wears a Gorgon's mask.<sup>1</sup>

Both the venomous snakes, that commonly substitute for Medusa's hair, and her blood symbolize a chthonic life / death ambiguity: "Two drops of Gorgon's blood [...] The one with death is fraught, the other cures disease" (Creusa in Euripides's *Ion*, 1007). Her gaze can petrify, but is also apotropaic and protects against the evil eye, thus Medusa's head became a common motif on Athena's aegis and heroic shields. She herself, however, remains paralyzed and silent. In all her literary inscriptions, by Pindar, Homer, or Ovid, the action always evolves around but never originates in her.

Medusa's death through beheading marks her as a tragic figure.<sup>2</sup> I am inclined to read the death/creation stories that evolve around her allegorically, as a foil against which I

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<sup>1</sup> See Renate Schlesier, "Flötenspiel der Gorgo," *Notizbuch. "Musik"* (5/6): 1982, 39, and Florentine François-Vase, ca. 570/65 b.c., Florence, Museo Archeologico. "Caliop" is also the name of a steam-organ, a musical instrument made of harsh sounding steam whistles. In Pindar's 12<sup>th</sup> Pythian Ode, which mentions the "beautifully cheeked Medusa," the Greek word for it is "kalliparéous." See also Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Features of the Mask in Ancient Greece," *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988) 189–206. Also, Weigel emphasizes that this artistic foundation myth ("Gründungsmythos der Kunst"), requires a male agent who uses the female figure. She refers to the reciprocal example in Adorno and Horkheimer discussing Odysseus and the Sirens: "Diese Mythe von der Totenklage der Medusa als Voraussetzung einer Transformation der Totenklage in Musik beschreibt eine Geschlechter-dramaturgie, in der die Aufspaltung, die an den weiblichen Figuren vollzogen wird, durch einen männlichen Akteur und dessen Heldentat in Gang gesetzt wird." Sigrid Weigel, *Das Geschlecht der Künste* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996) XI.

<sup>2</sup> Beheading has been analyzed as a tragic prerequisite, especially for women, when they, in ancient tragedy, acquire glory only at the cutting off point between life and death. The neck

can test the contemporary writers' rendition of the Medusa.<sup>3</sup> While the source of poetry is said to have emerged where Pegasus trod, it's existence provides the form and format in which the story of Medusa is being told.<sup>4</sup> Therein, the (mortal) mythological figure achieves immortality in art through her death.<sup>5</sup> The question is, how to interpret this end and its consequences: On one hand, it secures Medusa's survival as a fixed image, framed by a narrative. On the other hand, only Medusa's demise is what facilitates the emergence of the artistic form her story is told in: There would be no poetry without Medusa's child, which is born only at her death. This suggests a reading of Medusa as female figure who cannot be an active creator, but is used as a vessel that is to be 'discarded' after serving as a prerequisite for the act of creation. Consequently, this notion opposes viewing Medusa as an agent, and conforms with a perception of female as passive, male as active. Or, related to the gaze, which in artistic and literary history alike is predominantly the male gaze that looks at the female objects and thus directs the mode of perception. But on the contrary it is the Medusan gaze that possesses the petrifying quality or, in the Freudian notion, poses the threat of castration through a kind of "upward displacement," the actions of decapitation and castration are read as congruent. [Ferenczi, 360]. Thus, while my analytic focus is on the aspects that link Medusa to

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is the woman's most vulnerable body-part. Comp. Loraux, Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 50ff.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. Kerenyi's invocation of the beheaded Orpheus still singing as an example of the "resonance power" of both poetry and music. Karl Kerenyi, Töchter der Sonne (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997) 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid. Metamorphoses, Book V, 254ff.

creation, I will engage with the tension that arises between her possible creative force and Medusa's petrifying gaze—her predominant feature in classical sources. Curiously, most mythic narratives focus on Medusa's power to petrify, yet depict her in and after the moment when she is decapitated and thus fragmented into a head without a body. Such a notion will be of interest especially in relation to feminist criticism that in recent studies has often focused on women's bodies and their fragmentation, their lack of wholeness. It is, thus, not only the paralysis that is effected by Medusa but also the paralysis of her fragmented being, her head. This stasis is foregrounded in images of the Medusa in art from classical depictions onward through Romanticism during which the interest in this particular mythological figure reached a peak, and continues in the 20th century.<sup>6</sup>

The artistic and literary representation and perception of the Medusa has undergone numerous changes throughout history and oscillates between an ugly/grotesque and the sad, melancholic beauty of a romanticized Medusa.

Then, who or what is the Medusa? A threat or a creative power, a poison or a remedy? The Medusa is fragmented, and so is her story. While other myths have a more or less consistent "story-body," no ancient source tells her whole story. There is not a tragedy as for Cassandra or Medea, which makes her a central character. This might have

<sup>5</sup> "Das Ende der Geschichte aber, die Mordtat, die der Held an dem weiblichen Ungeheuer vollzieht, ist der Preis für dessen Transformation in Kunst, für dessen Weiterleben in ihr." Schlesier, Notizbuch 284.

<sup>6</sup> For paintings showing Medusa as "preferred example of surrendered femininity" (Stephan, Musen 64), see e.g. the Medusa by Caravaggio, Leonardo, and Rubens, the sculpture by Bellini. For a romanticized version emphasizing elusive beauty, see Edward Burne-Jones' Perseus-series. For further discussion of artistic renditions of the Medusa, see Stephan's chapter "Faszinosum Gorgo" in Stephan, Musen 60ff. In the Russian Eremitage, at least three famous artistic interpretations of themes from the

to do with her extreme representation as the "other," which prevents any kind of concise story. But this also makes her a more iconic rather than narrative figure, a container, an open space, in which literary or critical texts can unfold their own versions of the Medusa.

The dichotomy between beauty and ugliness that runs through the reception of Medusa is curious in relation to gender and works by women. Especially in the Romantic tradition Medusa's excessive beauty is petrifying men, while leaving women unaffected. The question arises if this process affects a feminine author who confronts the Medusa, and, through her inscription, the story itself.<sup>7</sup> A look at the object of examination, Medusa's head, can be helpful in tackling these questions: Snakes still curl from it, and the wound drips with Medusa's blood. I would argue that the snakes and drops of blood serve as outer symbolical representations of her ambiguous quality that I perceive as an extension of her being. Her face itself is equally ambiguous. It is mostly described as ugly and monstrous, yet retains the features of a human face, and simultaneously expresses horrifying and seductive features. Medusa's mouth is open in an exaggerated which blurs

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myth of Medusa are on display: Ruben's Perseus and Andromeda, Karl Vanloo's Perseus and Andromeda, and the head of the Medusa by an artist of the Bernini-school.

<sup>7</sup> Comp. John Freccero: "In mythology, the Medusa was said to be powerless against women for it was her feminine beauty that constituted the mortal threat to her admirers. From the ancient Physiologus through the mythographers to Boccaccio, the Medusa represented a sensual fascination a pulchritudo so excessive that it turned men to stone." "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit," Yearbook of Italian Studies (1972) : 1-18, 7f.

into an ugly grin: <sup>8</sup> "Gorgo is young-old, beautiful-ugly, masculine-feminine, human-bestial; and she is also mortal-immortal."<sup>9</sup>

Medusa's agency appears to be effected by and afflicted through her gaze, which, consequently, will be the locus of my investigation. I will examine the hitherto neglected reciprocity of what Medusa is looking at, and who is looking at her. This reciprocal exchange presupposes mobility, while the inflicted petrified paralysis, which, according to ancient myth follows any crossing of gazes with the Medusa, prohibits further exchange.<sup>10</sup> The only prevention of paralysis, according to the ancient myth, is to avert the meeting of the gazes, and to employ a mirror as mediator. Julia Walker has recently and exemplarily examined this phenomenon in a study on the Medusa and Narcissus, the mythological characters in whose stories the mirror plays a most prominent role.<sup>11</sup> From the dichotomy of Medusa who petrifies by the power of her gaze but, when beheld in a mirror, is powerless, Walker develops a discussion of the relation between gender and power that she finds materialized in the myth of Medusa.

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<sup>8</sup> Schlesier remarks that it is less the animalization or "dehumanization" that is represented in the Gorgoneion, but the "monstruous in the human." Schlesier, Konstruktion 19. See also Vernant.

<sup>9</sup> Vernant, Features 194.

<sup>10</sup> Comp. Freccero. It is thus the time factor which comes into play here, the longing for another glance, of beauty averted. Hence, Freccero argues, Medusa becomes an erotic/seductive agent of memory, Ibid. See also Weigel, Der schielende Blick.

<sup>11</sup> For a reading of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Spenser's Elizabeth and Milton's Eve, and the effects of mirror and gaze, Walker examines the myths of Medusa and Narcissus. She makes a distinction between knowledge and recognition, that which is seen through the mirror or directly looked at—"The thing in the mirror, the reversed image is it stronger or weaker?"

My own focus, though, is the oscillation between the meeting of the gazes as possibly productive poetic locus, and on the reciprocity of being gazed at as a mirroring of one's own self. The intricate relation between the looking at and what is looked at emphasizes Medusa's main characteristic, her effect – because it is not her activity, petrification is caused by looking at her. But do not many texts suggest that the reflection of the active gaze, the gaze of the person who looks at the Medusa, is what initiates the petrification? Following this question in depth would lead away from the analysis of the poetic texts I am about to discuss and extend the scope of the present study. I would like to point to two noteworthy comments on the originating locus of petrification and the reciprocity of gazes, by Russian critics. The perception of creation as petrification is advocated by Russian essays that discuss chaos and creation in this respect. V. L. Rabinovich contends, for example, that a person facing mortality is simultaneously creating a language of one's own and partaking in a universal creation. Once accomplished, this creation out of chaos is frozen, as if it were petrified. Only a reader can 'revive' it, thus attaining a status in between creator and reader:<sup>12</sup> Mikhail Evzlin, who studies Medusa as a chthonic force in "Kosmogoniia i ritual" [Cosmology and Ritual, Moscow 1993], stresses the onlooker's gaze as initiating force of the Medusan power. He refers to

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Certainly it is DIFFERENT." Julia M. Walker, Medusa's Mirrors. Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and the Metamorphosis of the Female Self (University of Delaware Press, 1998) 46.

<sup>12</sup> "No proizvedenie okamenevaet v tekste (vmeste so svoim istoricheskim avtorom), umiraet. [...] Vtoruiu zhizn' (mnogo zhizeni) emu daet chitatel' (mnogo chitatelei), vnov' vozvrashchaia tekst v pretvorcheskoe ego sostoianie, I tem samym stanovitsia kak by soavtorom istoricheskogo avtora." V. L. Rabinovich. "Zerkalo I smert'," Figury Tanatosa, A. V. Demichev and M. S. Uvarov, eds. (St. Petersburg: Izd. St. Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 1998) 7.

Ovid, who uses the verb "conspicere" [to look at one another] to argue that the "empty and dead gaze of the Medusa" is activated when "a living being looks into her eyes."<sup>13</sup>

I maintain that Medusa is not an agent, yet she possesses agency in that she makes things happen. She attracts the attention of feminist criticism because her iconic representation lends itself to an interpretation as typically feminine "universal empty space," since she weds the faculties of being container, mirror and threat. Beyond the translatability and transmutability inherent to any myth, Medusa's static iconicity fits Hans Blumenberg's previously cited notion of mythology as pattern and outline. More prominently than the myths of Cassandra or Medea, the mirror of her gaze offers a frame in the sense I have outlined in the introduction, and provides a reciprocity. Medusa offers the least resistance to free interpolation within that 'outline' and projection from it, because she has, among her fellow mythological characters, the least story material attached to her, in contrast to Medea, for example, whose entire family story is part of most of her inscriptions.<sup>14</sup> Her voice is absent, because, as Sigrid Weigel notes in her first essay on the figure, the Medusa myth is exemplary for the situation of the writing

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<sup>13</sup> "Prichasti conspecta (con-spicio) predpolagaet dvunapravlennost' smotreniia, t. e. pustoi i mertvyi vzgliad Meduzy aktiviziruetsia v tot moment, kogda zhivoe sushchestvo zagliadyvaet ee glaza." Mikhail Evzlin, *Kosmogoniia i ritual* (Moscow: Radiks, 1993).

Evzlin follows a mythopoetics of myth as ritual and reads the Perseus-Medusa story as an initiation rite. He makes noteworthy observations on the fragmentation of the Medusa, such as viewing the transference of the Medusan head onto Athene's aegis as provision of a new "body," and the relation between body and space in a cosmological model.

<sup>14</sup> Taeger on images of women: "Die Frau als Subjekt gewinnt nur einen scheinbaren Eigenwert, sie fungiert vielmehr als Symbol. [...] Sie ist die universale Leerstelle. In einer Doppelung von Wunsch und Befürchtung signalisiert sie Teile des Männlichen, die aus dem Selbstverständnis des Mannes ausgegrenzt werden mußten. Diese Anteile tragen das Zeichen des "Natürlichen." [...] Im gleichen Maße, wie dieses "Natürliche" als Bedrohung empfunden

woman: to gain a position from where to speak that which remained unspoken, she has to occupy the locus that is spoken from. Thus, she renders herself as already inscribed—and turns herself into paralysis.<sup>15</sup>

While Cassandra and Medea in ancient and modern inscriptions alike are independently acting characters, artistic renderings of Medusa objectify her, and conceive of her as of a mediator of a certain effect rather than as an agent in her own right. Moreover, in contrast to other mythological figures, post-classical Medusa figures have resisted psychologization, possibly because of her silent stasis. Consequently, it is the image, Medusa's iconic depiction on various kinds of mundane objects and predominantly on shields, which is Medusa's most prevalent representation.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary women writers and critics both attempt to "reanimate" her, however, and inscribe her as an example of female agency. My hypothesis is that several contemporary authors make attempts to remove Medusa from the shields and put her back into the creative flow.<sup>17</sup>

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wird, nimmt das Bild der Frau medusenhafte Züge an." Annemarie Taeger, Die Kunst Medusa zu töten (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1987) 11.

<sup>15</sup> "Das 'Lächeln der Medusa' ist eine schöne Wunschphantasie, ein Bild, das die Dialektik von Schrecken und Sprache, wie sie der Mythos der Medusa beschreibt, leichter erträglich macht. [...] Wenn hier von der Stimme der Medusa gesprochen wird, dann durchaus im Sinne dieser, vom Mythos erzählen nahezu unmöglichen Konstellation. Sie wiederholt sich in den Schriften und in der Sprache von Frauen. Wenn diese versuchen, das, was aus den herrschenden Redeweisen und Überlieferungen ausgeschlossen ist, zu beschreiben, dann müssen sie den Ort, von dem aus gesprochen wird, einnehmen; und dort sind sie immer schon die *Beschriebenen*. Weigel, Stimme

<sup>16</sup> Which reinforces the connection with Athene and with warfare; the image of Medusa's head on a soldier's shield is meant to terrify and drive away the enemy.

<sup>17</sup> A similar claim for imagining Medusa as productive rather than as destructive was recently pronounced by Jane Costlow as a question: "can we imagine journeys in which the hero does not slay Medusa, but allows her to remove her mask and lead him forward?" Jane T. Costlow, closing her article "Dido, Turgenev and the journey toward Bedlam," Russian Literature

As a prerequisite for an analysis, the question must be posed if and how the Gorgon figures as a mythological 'character.' In spite of her acute effect on any possible beholder, she does not act or develop, but appears to be a mute and passive figure. Though her gaze has the power to petrify, the Pindarian or Ovidian versions of the myth do not narrate any acts of petrification before Perseus decapitates her and thus leaves her fragmented. They only ensue in stories after Perseus has run off with his booty in a sack. In these narratives, Medusa is already reduced to her head, becoming an icon of horror and petrification.<sup>18</sup> I am particularly interested in these dynamics of fragmentation and the ambiguity of active and passive powers represented by Medusa. I find this ambiguity firstly in the fact that her danger only attains validity in the immediate presence of an other and secondly that the range in which her danger operates—in the underworld, as the aegis on Athena's armor—is mostly a result of what others make her. On the shield, Medusa's head is also forever fixed and framed. Thus, Medusa's petrifying power is realized only after slaying when her head is carried off by Perseus and for the first time 'performs' its power, initiated, though, by the agency of others who have to look at her first before they can meet her gaze. As the narrative potential of Medusa is little, but her symbolic potential very high, I include poetic readings that focus on gazes and mirror images as Medusan attributes, and situate her in a poetic discourse, wherein these images function as meta-poetic evocations. In light of Medusa's characteristics, there are no classical retellings among the contemporary texts this chapter examines. The analyses of

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XXIX (1991): 395–408. In her argument "Medusa immobilizes men because they have objectified her," 408.

Leutenegger's and Alferova's stories are rather examples of evocations of the myth that perform mnemonic work through narrative and investigate people in relation to nature. Finally, the reading of Sedakova's, Nikolaeva's, and Vitukhnovskaia's poems focuses on the probing of mirror-gazes and Medusan-gazes as poetic icons between "terror" and "poetic play" (Blumenberg). Blumenberg, whose mythopoetics I referred to in the introduction, has interpreted myth as the aversion of terror by narrating it. One small example of a retelling of the Medusa myth by Marie-Luise Kaschnitz in her collection of Griechische Mythen [Greek Myths, Hamburg: Claassen, 1943/1972] illustrates this perception: Marie-Luise Kaschnitz retells the myth of Perseus and the Medusa, casting her as half woman, half she-horse, an appearance that makes her likewise mentioned coupling with Poseidon, who tends to appear as a horse, better imaginable. Noteworthy is Kaschnitz's rendition of the reciprocity between Medusa's and Perseus' gaze. Medusa is set metonymic for terror. Perseus uses a mirror to not confront her directly. [So tritt Perseus dem Schrecken nicht als rohe Kraft gegenüber [...] 67]. The mirror associates "Perseus' cleverness," the "invisibility cloak" the "art of disguise," and the "winged shoes" the ability to "turn away from earth into lighter realms." Equipped with these superior attributes, he is though not only the slayer of Medusa, but also her "midwife," as his sword delivers the Medusa of Pegasus, "fated to discover the Muses' grove."<sup>19</sup> Reason

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<sup>18</sup> See Perseus' fight in the palace of Cepheus, petrifying both allies and enemies, Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book V. Medusa's head guarding the underworld in Homer's Odyssey, and in Dante's Inferno, Canto IX.

<sup>19</sup> "Der Spiegel, in dem er das Bild der Gorgo auffängt, deutet auf die Klugheit, die sich der Gefahr nicht mehr unmittelbar aussetzt, die Tarnkappe auf die Kunst der Verstellung, die Flügelschuhe auf die Fähigkeit, sich der Erdschwere in in andere, lichtere Bereiche zu entziehen. Auch bedeutet die Bluttat des Perseus nicht Vernichtung allein. Der Schwertstreich des Helden entbindet die Medusa von dem Flügelpferd Pegasus, einem Wesen höherer Art

conquers terror, logos myth, appears to be Kaschnitz's conclusion. Yet in the end, Perseus is turned to stone himself, when he doubts the powers of the Medusan head and turns it onto himself to look (72).<sup>20</sup> Kaschnitz clearly emphasizes by using the metonymy of Medusa – terror three times in her short narrative, and at the end of life, Perseus is conquered by terror

The iconic figure of Medusa has been vividly embraced by feminist criticism, and therein widely defies the image of a paralyzed/paralyzing Medusa. Hélène Cixous's 1976 essay "Laugh of the Medusa" is a manifesto of women's creativity, refuting the Freudian notion of Medusa as representative of the threat of castration.<sup>21</sup> The treatise fueled critical examinations of the subject. Cixous is provocative, but also, I would argue, reductive: She claims that the truth about (strong women) lies in Medusa's gaze – "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she is laughing." But the laugh, as Sigrid Weigel will contend in response, is but a romantic dream—the Medusa remains silent, and that silence is deeply troubling. Subsequently, German critics such as Renate Schlesier, Sigrid Weigel and Inge Stephan have investigated Medusa's missing voice and connected it to the creation of fluteplay.

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dessen Bestimmung es ist, den Quell im Hain der Musen zu erschließen." Kaschnitz, *Greek Myths* 68.

<sup>20</sup> Kepheus, king of Ethiopia, is blind and therefore bears the sight of horror friendly and with calm: "Freundlich gelassen habe der Greis den Anblick des Schreckens ertragen," 72. This could be interestingly connected to the blind seer Tiresias, and the question if the disability to see the present makes "facing" the past or future more bearable.

<sup>21</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse." *L'Arc* 61 (1975): 39-54. Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, summer (1976): 875-893.

This is one possible reason why critics such as Renate Schlesier, Sigrid Weigel and Inge Stephan have investigated the connection between the relation between Medusa's missing voice and Athena's invention of fluteplay.<sup>22</sup> Fluteplay, according to ancient belief, was formed by the breath (pneuma), as were words. However, this music did not allow the logos to be transmitted, but rather produced a state of heightened ecstasy. In his chapter on music and musical education in Politeia, Aristotle, for example, claims the flute to be an instrument inappropriate for the education of noble youth. It is unapt to develop reason and is an orgiastic requisite. Who plays the flute cannot speak, thus fluteplay obstructs rhetorical education. (Aristotle, Politeia, VIII 1341). Along similar lines, in chapter six of The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche discusses the relation between fluteplay and poetry. In his juxtaposition of the Apollonian and Dionysian qualities of the arts, he qualifies the luring music of the flute as Dionysian-excessive. He contends that the crafting of images is the achievement of poetry, and poetry thus the further developed, more refined art. When connected to my analysis' starting point, the Medusan dichotomy is further confirmed by Nietzsche's argument.

Yet the Medusa-myth intrigues through its transitory quality, as the simultaneity of Pegasus's birth and Medusa's death marks the transition from origin to art. Schlesier

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<sup>22</sup> Schlesier: "[...] der Gorgo Medusa, wird mythologisch instrumentiert, daß es zusammengesetzte Wesen gibt, verschlungen und gotterfüllt zugleich, und daß es eines gewaltsamen Eingriffs, eines Schnitts zwischen Kopf und Rumpf bedarf, um die für diese Ungeheuer spezifischen zwei Naturen auseinandertreten zu lassen... Und nicht nur weitere Ungeheuer und Ahnen von Ungeheuern entstehen dabei, sondern es hat zugleich die Geburtsstunde eines Musikinstruments geschlagen, dessen zweideutige Wirkungskraft der Gorgo ähnelt, der Flöte, und einer musikalischen Form, die in ihrem Namen die Häupter der Gorgonen und der sie umzüngelnden Schlangen trägt, des kephalan pollan nómos, der vielköpfigen (Flöten-)Weise." (Flötenspiel, 12).

highlights that the Gorgons' lament was not yet art, and that it required Athena's mimetic recreation to make it that.<sup>23</sup>

In respect of creative agency, Athena thus plays a formative role in connection to the Medusa. The effect Sigrid Weigel and Gertrud Weber in response to H elene Cixous's essay ascribe to Athena's interference is most interesting in approaching possible gender differences in agency, in particular in the creative process.<sup>24</sup> Hence, Athena's act can be interpreted as creating a (female) Medusan "ear-text" as opposed to a (male) Persean "eye-text". The term "ear-text" is based on the assumption that women's texts are more lyrical, sound oriented, and thus, according to the feminist critics' argument, more open, less fixed. Male texts, thus the argument, strive to create a representative image, thus to "fix" or "petrify" their imagination in words.<sup>25</sup> Another aspect of this dichotomy is related to the immanent threat Medusa poses. The voice is more futile than the image fixed in a painting or a text. The lure of the voice is immediate and threatens the integrity of subject. As such, it is connoted female in mythology, both in its fulfilled capacity as well as in the equally silent void—Medusa is silent, yet in representations her mouth is usually open as if uttering a silent cry. Related mythic examples that explore the power of voice or the absence thereof, are the myths of Echo and the Siren-episode in Homer's

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<sup>23</sup> See Schlesier, Notizbuch 13f.

<sup>24</sup> H elene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", Signs (1976). Sigrid Weigel, "Der schielende Blick" (1984) and Die Stimme der Medusa (1987). Sabine Georg, Modell und Zitat: Mythos und Mythisches in der deutschsprachigen Literatur der 80er Jahre (1996).

<sup>25</sup> A connection between music and rhetoric/ creative power is also apparent in Christa Wolf's Medea Stimmen (1996). Jason describes Medea as singing while taming the snake/dragon guarding the golden fleece (57). Later on, the Corinthian palace-astronomer

Odyssey. Their song is as beautifully attractive as it is death-connoted. Odysseus has to chain himself to the mast of his ship and fill his ears with wax to resist the songs. In Dialektik der Aufklärung [Dialectic of Enlightenment], Adorno and Horkheimer have interpreted this scene as Odysseus' attempt to retain his individual wholeness against the threat to be torn apart by the sirens' voices.<sup>26</sup> Sigrid Weigel's discussion of the siren-episode as the foundation myth of art, which develops from the discussion by Adorno and Horkheimer, suggests a gendered reading of the myth, and contrasts it with the Medusa myth. The division of labor among men—the rowers safe from song thanks to closed ears, Odysseus bound and thus able to enjoy their song—enables artistic delectation without danger, "the division of labor among men instead of a beheaded monster and a flute-playing goddess."<sup>27</sup>

Both in Der Schielende Blick [The Cross-eyed Gaze] and Die Stimme der Medusa [The Voice of the Medusa] and later essays touching on the subject, Weigel further explores the Medusan myth. She suggests to locate women's place (in literary) history through their texts and thus establish a conscious recognition of women's works that abandons the notion of silent object to acknowledge them as writing subject with a voice.

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remembers having been with Medea, listening to the spherical music of the stars which she was the first to hear, 124.

<sup>26</sup> "Es ist unmöglich, die Sirenen zu hören und ihnen nicht zu verfallen: es läßt sich ihnen nicht trotzen. [...] Er neigt sich dem Liede der Lust und vereitelt sie wie den Tod. Der gefesselt Hörende will zu den Sirenen wie irgendein anderer. [...]" Theodor von Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) 65f.

<sup>27</sup> Weigel, Musen XI. Of interest is also her juxtaposition of Orpheus and Medusa. Orpheus' lyra, the artistically crafted instrument, is stronger than the natural sounds of the sirens, and allows the Argonauts to pass the sirens unscathed. It would be of interest to further investigate the relation between the older, beheaded, mythic Medusa and the mystical, beheaded singer.

She draws a comparison between the figure of Medusa and Walter Benjamin's theorizing about the "angel of history," who has the face to the past and its back is to the future.<sup>28</sup>

In his contemplations on defining history, Benjamin evokes Paul Klee's painting Angelus Novus (Benjamin, Walter. Gesammelte Schriften vol. 12, Abhandlungen. "Der Begriff der Geschichte, IX," 697). It shows an angel who is moving backwards: His face is a terrified grimace as he faces the terrors of the past; eyes and ears wide open and wings spread, a strong wind blows him backwards into the future. The angel's arrested expression shows that he is unable to utter what he is seeing. His peculiar expression and paralysis is what links the angel to the figure of the Medusa, and emphasizes historicity, fear, but also creativity, around which the debate about Medusa evolves.<sup>29</sup>

The debate is grounded in the question whether pain and suffering is representable or not, starting with the Laocöon debate between Schiller and Lessing in the 18th century, and retains its validity for (post)modern writers such as Vitukhnovskaia, Sedakova and

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<sup>28</sup> Weigel refers to Bachmann's novel Malina and to several of her stories. Weigel, Schielender Blick 273f. The image appears widely quoted in literary theory with historical references, in her introduction to an essay collection on post-soviet culture, the editor Elisabeth Cheauré quotes Benjamin on this subject. Cheauré, Jenseits, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Weigel is among the first to point out the "gender-dynamics" at the heart of the Medusa myth. She relates them not only to the very (male-inflicted) act of beheading, but extends their relevance to be connected to desire for power and related acts of colonializing the other. For the readings of the texts I will be employing, and in the context of a 'female aesthetics' to be defined, I find more important the process which relates the Medusa to creativity. See Stephan, Musen 5f and also Kerényi, who point out the possible historical analogy between the Perseus-Medusa story and the colonialization activities that ended the dominance of matriarchal structures in Greece. Kerényi, Göttin 44. For a world view that requires both the outlook into the present and into the past, comp. Cassirer, vol. III, 182.

Leutenegger.<sup>30</sup> Contrary to the paralytic paradigm of the Laocoon debate—the problem how to represent pain that is non-representable—these authors render dynamic and productive myth narratives, following rather Wilhelm Schlegel's paradigm of myths narratives as expression of imaginative freedom.<sup>31</sup> In her ambiguity, however, Medusa not only represents pain, but is also an object of desire. Especially romanticism, as I have discussed above, envisions the beautiful Medusa. An object of desire, this is the Medusa who was pursued by Poseidon and conquered on a flowered meadow. If we take this as a point of departure for a reading of the myth, Medusa can be interpreted as an icon of memory. Medusa stimulates an erotic desire that longs for yet another glance at her (Comp Freccero, 17). On the other hand, the Medusan head, conventionally represented with an open mouth that suggests a silent cry, exemplifies the desire to utter her pain, to have a voice to express it. Therein lies a creative potential. The mythical narratives illustrates her creative potential through her cry, unbearable and irrepresentable, expressing dying and birthing pain followed by the birth of poetry and invention of flute-play.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See also Weigel's recourse on this debate. Weigel, *Stimme* 22. In another essay, she distinguishes between what the angel sees and what the public sees: Where the angel sees one great catastrophe, we see a series of single processes, 273.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik I* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989) 152.

<sup>32</sup> Comp. Weigel on this debate, who also notes the non-representability of the cry by suggesting that in spite of closure and silence opening could contain healing. In this context, she quotes from Peter Weiss's *Ästhetik des Widerstandes* that phantasy is alive as long as someone who resists is alive – "Die Phantasie lebt, so lange der Mensch lebt, der sich zur Wehr setzt." Weiß, 339 cited by Weigel, *Medusa* 22f.

More even than Cixous, who was the first to react against Freud's misogynist Medusa-interpretation, Weigel picks up on Medusa's dichotomy and coins the theory of the "cross-eyed gaze". Therein the woman artist or a female character has to cope with the male impression which has cast her, while on the other hand freeing one eye for better perception of her own point of view. It is an odd image depicting a task that requires considerable energy and emphasizes that the female gaze —be it destructive or not—does not come about easily.<sup>33</sup> In feminist discourse the gaze or the smile of the Medusa is figuratively appropriated to female creativity. But the notion is complicated as apart from several petrifications mentioned by Ovid no deeds, no works, no relationships to other characters are attributed to her—the Medusa herself remains a silent figure. She remains continuously so in the contemporary works that are subject of my analysis, in which Medusa likewise is an icon, or maybe a catalyst rather than an agent.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> It would be interesting to compare in particular ancient examples of male and female 'cross-eyed' gazes. Froma Zeitlin notes a similar phenomenon in her illuminating essay on *Gender and Ancient tragedy*, when she analysis mimetic instances and describes male crossdressing: "Woman may be thought to speak double, and sometimes she does. But she also sees double; the culture has taught her that too, and it is perhaps not an accident that only when Pentheus dresses as a woman does he see double for the first time—two suns, two Thebes. This is a symptom of madness, to be sure, attributed by the ancient commentators to inebriation, but madness is the emblem of the feminine, and seeing double is also the emblem of a double consciousness that a man acquires by dressing like a woman and entering into the theatrical illusion." Zeitlin, *Playing* 80.

<sup>34</sup> The claim, however, that the restitution of beauty to the Medusa is a merit of feminist considerations fails to acknowledge the romantic Medusa. Pindar speaks about the "beautifully-cheeked" Medusa (12<sup>th</sup> Pythian Ode). Apparently, there are even sources which attribute Medusa's petrifying powers to her beauty rather than to her horrfying gaze. See McGann, 3f. Other ancient sources to mention Medusa or her story include: Hesiod, *Theogony* 276-86, Euripides, *Ion* 1478, Homer, *Ilias* 5, 736-42. Medusa's oscillation between the beautiful and the horrible illustrates a complicated entanglement of male/female agency: Is the initial cause Medusa's rape by Poseidon, or Athena's rage, spurred by a jealousy towards the beautiful Medusa, as one version of the myth contends? Considering the latter, one should recall that Athena has an array of male features and can be said to be the most 'manly' among the female deities. She shares with Medusa the 'headiness' – as Athene is said to having

## 2.1. Contemporary Medusae

The difference in literary and theoretical reception of Medusa in the Russian and in Western context needs to be recognized: Medusa has been made productive in western criticism, while her presence in literary works is quite infrequent.<sup>35</sup> While she is rarely a subject of literary criticism in Russia, contemporary women authors, and especially poets, use her or themes and images related to the myth of the Medusa to tackle poetic questions. In the following paragraphs I explore how Medusa is rendered productive instead of paralytic.

### 2.2.1. Medusa as Mnemonic Device. Gertrud Leutenegger and Liubov' Alferova

Medusa can be read as the mnemonic "Ur"-scene

Sigrid Weigel, Stimme der Medusa

In the latest novella of the Swiss German author Gertrud Leutenegger, Meduse (1988), a sea-Medusa plays a central and enigmatic role, raising several issues about the Medusa myth that have been discussed above.<sup>36</sup> Many of Leutenegger's texts feature

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emerged from Zeus' head. There are, however, feminist readings that aim to 'correct' this story of origin, namely Heide Göttner-Abendroth, who defends a matriarchal reading of history and contends that Athena is pre-classic and a parthenogenetically conceived personification of wisdom, Göttner-Abendroth, 52f.

<sup>35</sup> On account of Cixous' work, a recently published encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory (Kowaleski-Wallace, 1997) allots Medusa an entry as the only mythological figure, while the equally recent Russian dictionary Zhenshchina v mifakh i legendakh [Woman in myths and legends, 1996] lists Medusa only briefly as one of the Gorgons.

<sup>36</sup> Very little research has been done on this young Swiss writer. Notable are Ryka Felka's short monograph, a paragraph on her in Ann Marie Rasmussen's book article "Women and Literature in German-Speaking Switzerland: Tendencies in the 1980s," Mona Knapp and Gerd Labrousse, eds. Frauen-Fragen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989) 176–181, and Beatrice Sandberg, "Mythos, Maske, Symbol. Zur Poetik der

mythological topics, though not necessarily drawn from classical mythology. Leutenegger was born in 1948. Her prose is distinctive through the voice of her female first person narrator who is recognizable throughout her work. Ninive, her acclaimed second novel from 1977, introduces the male character of Fabrizio and the climax of a love story whose end is then told over a decade later in Meduse.

In the beginning of the novel, Leutenegger's female narrator has an encounter with a Medusa. This introductory scene can be read as an epigraph that introduces the environment and mode of the novel. The image is more peaceful than threatening, but retains some of the romantic fascination with a potentially horrifying beauty. It symbolizes the narrator's quest for knowledge, the desire to decipher the past and to know about the future.<sup>37</sup>

Zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt meines Lebens sah ich aus dem Meer eine Meduse auftauchen, groß wie ein Kinderkopf, rosa marmoriert, mit Fangfäden, die tief ins Wasser hinabgingen. Unvermittelt aber zerflossen diese wie Haare in den grauen Wellenmassen, die Meduse schaukelte auf mich zu, wobei sie ihre Ränder bald aufblähte, bald zusammenzog. Wider Willen betrachtete ich länger die zarte, doch durchdringende Erscheinung. Etwas unbedingt mich Angehendes strahlte mir daraus entgegen, schon untergegangen oder noch gestaltlos, Flut umspülte meine Füße, das Meer, aus dem wir alle kommen. (7)

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dichterischen Objektivierung im Werk Gertrud Leuteneggers," Text & Kontext 11 (1983) 354-369.

<sup>37</sup> In her study on the Medusa in Dante and Ariosto, Miranda Johnson Haddad has remarked that the desire to know the Medusa is essential to her threatening power: "Surely part of the terror of the Medusa lies in her awful unknowableness; to know something is to achieve a certain mastery over it. Because of the danger attendant to looking upon Medusa, however, it seems virtually impossible to know what she is." Haddad, "Ovid's Medusa in Dante and Ariosto," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 19:2 (1989) : 211-225, 213.

At one particular point in my life, I saw a Medusa rising up in the sea, big as a child's head, like pink marble, with tentacles that reached deep into the water. But suddenly they flooded, spread out like hair on the gray mass of waves, the Medusa came drifting towards me, now expanding her edges, now contracting them. Unwillingly, I looked at the delicate, but piercing appearance for a while. Something immediately concerning myself was beaming at me, something already decayed or not yet shaped, water floating surrounding my feet, the sea from which we all emerged.<sup>38</sup>

The image of the sea is strongly prevalent, and both of its capacities, the creative origin as well as the destructive drowning force, are simultaneously present. In her opening words, the narrator marks the occasion as significant and foreshadows a deeper meaning that arouses suspense triggered by the allusion that the reader witnesses a moment of peculiar importance for the narrator.

This opening scene presents a frontal encounter between the Medusa and the narrator. Vernant's remark on frontality in relation to the Medusa offers ideas on the ambiguous attraction of looking frontally at a strong power. According to Vernant, in an "en face" confrontation between human and divine power, the axis of gaze remains the same, the human gaze is transfixed at and mirrored in the divine gaze.<sup>39</sup> As the narrator establishes this first scene as the core of her memory for what she will now narrate, it establishes the connection, in literary form, between Medusa and memory, Medusa as the

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<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that this and all other paragraphs end without a period, thus providing a sense of openness, elipsis, and possible closure to come.

<sup>39</sup> "Im en face der Frontalität bestimmt sich der Mensch in symmetrischer Position gegenüber dem Gott; er bleibt immer in seiner Achse; diese Wechselbeziehung enthält gleichzeitig die Dualität—Mensch und Gott bieten sich gegenseitig die Stirn—und die Untrennbarkeit, gar Identifikation die Faszination bedeutet, daß der Mensch seinen Blick von der gegenüberstehenden Macht nicht ablösen, sein Gesicht nicht abwenden kann, daß sein Auge sich in dem Auge dieser Macht verliert, die ihn so betrachtet, wie er sie betrachtet, bis daß er selber in jene Welt geworfen wird, der diese Macht gebietet." Vernant in Schlesier, Faszination 418.

Ur-scene of memory. But the narrator is not only confronting the Medusa, she is also confronting the past: "at a particular moment in my life [...] I saw". Here, the Benjaminian portrayal of the "angel of history" comes into play. Like the storm of progress, originating in paradise, blows the angel into the future, Leutenegger's Medusa is blown out to the sea by a strong wind at the end of the novel. Clearly, Leutenegger's novel is to a large extent about memory and a clash between past, future, and a place that is resistant towards progress, as well as personal memories. The recurring image of the Medusan encounters provides a frame for this memory, yet in this function is curiously open, as the outlook into the sea continues to hold the image of something more to come.

Through the color opposition of the Medusa's pink and the waves' gray the juxtaposition of life and death forces is underscored: the newborn, with whose head the Medusa is compared, is pink, ashes of something burned and gone are gray. The Medusa both invites and rejects and this through the movement of her edges; she is able to adjust her shape. The narrator's gaze is obviously transfixed on the object, which is explained through the recognition of the appearance's specific meaning. Sustaining the gazes requires special force. The sea is the medium in which the Medusa swims and unfolds her peculiar shape, and also the mediator between her and the narrator. She, with at least her feet in the water as well, keeps a safe distance still standing on relatively firm ground but already sharing the feeling of the same element that is associated with birth or pre-birth, with the origin of the world. The ensuing story evolves around the rise, evolution, and immanent death of love between the narrator and her childhood-friend Fabrizio.

Leutenegger's Meduse is less driven by the unfolding of events or the development of a story than by a narrative, interwoven with memories and stream of consciousness,

that creates an atmosphere and a mood. Two pairs, the unnamed female narrator and her friend and lover from childhood, Fabrizio, and his aunt Giuditta and uncle who live in an odd synergetic arrangement bordering on an incestuous subtle erotic, interact and seem to sometimes mirror each other. She thus creates a "double-vision" of the narrated world.<sup>40</sup>

The narrator and Fabrizio are spending the summer in Rovina, a deteriorating mountain village, where Giuditta and the uncle seem to be among the few permanent inhabitants who stay past the summer. One afternoon, the narrator and Fabrizio are planning a walk to a forest above the village. This might suffice to summarize the fabula whereas the *sjuzhet* stretches to take the reader back into a past remembered and a near future that is constantly foreshadowed as immediate, threatening, and change-bearing, but never quite reached. The narrative seems to flow back and forth like the waves of the sea, which is depicted as a sphere and realm in sharp contrast to the petrified world of the mountains. Is the sea that which still bears potential and the mountain that which came after Medusa's look?

Rovina, which in Italian means "disaster," "crash," works towards a realization of its meaning. Houses are being deserted, the only connection to the world below is an elevator that is operated on demand. Fabrizio's uncle delights in ordering bits and pieces of machinery he is quite obsessed with assembling while never actually finishing a project. It appears as though his constant promises to get something done sustain him to do anything, charged by a certain fear that the completion of a project might turn into a quite real end. While he seems more concerned with the threat the future bears, his sister

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<sup>40</sup> "Doppelgesicht," "Doppelbetrachtung." See Eve Vahtrik. "Zum Stellenwert der mythischen Symbolik in Gertrud Leuteneggers Romanen "Vorabend" und "Ninive," *Uchenye zapiski*

Giuditta is presented as more connected to the past. She has sacrificed hopes for a child and a family of her own for living with her brother, but the implied loss of never realized hopes is represented in her singing a popular mountain song of unconsummated love and failure and her substituting the nourishment of others for her mothering activities. Feeding the others, she makes Polenta for dinner, but also uses it as a remedy for an asthmatic cough, but oddly also as a substitution for having a child as "...this came as close to what she might have felt holding a baby to her breast." Although no incestuous activity occurs in the text, its sexual undercurrents are very strong. Only at the point of petrification and "Endzeitstimmung" does Giuditta come close to being pregnant: When her brother is paralyzed and brought down into the village, she immediately enters menopause and develops a tumor in her uterus the size of a "child's head" (with which the Medusa had been compared earlier). While not turned to stone, the dead and death-bringing matter growing inside her slows her down and stifles her options for action. Giuditta, whose name has etymological link to "Judith" thus internalizes reminiscences to another mytho-literary figure related to decapitation and thus resonant of Medusa.<sup>41</sup>

Reading the narrator and Fabrizio as a pair mirroring the older couple, it appears that their own love is destined for failure. But while Fabrizio's uncle is mostly described in dark colors, thus alluding to a symbol of death, Fabrizio in one of the flashback memories, in spite of his Mediterranean dark eyes and dark skin, shows some traits of an

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Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta 626 (1982), 119–138.

<sup>41</sup> Though not coincidental with this romantic notion, it is worthwhile rewording that Stephan makes a connection between the female figures connected with decapitation – Medusa, Judith and Salome, to note that after a drastic increase of the depiction of all three, Medusa attains the status of an epochal icon: "Medusa wird zur Ikone einer ganzen Epoche." Stephan, Musen 65.

ephemeral angelic appearance. One of the key scenes towards the end of the text remembers Fabrizio's childhood as 'angelic period': For a religious procession, Fabrizio dresses up as an angel, and stubbornly refuses taking the costume off. After failed attempts that document Fabrizio's insistence—"If Giuditta dared to grab him, he wiggled himself out of her grip with great skill or screamed with an enormous persistence, which he had probably gained during his nights without sleep" (84). Giuditta gives in to his fancy and lets him tend to the chicken in his costume. The costume completes the image of a bucolic, Petrarchian shepherd. But the idyll is soon to be destroyed by the uncle, who wants to end the masquerade by disguising himself with a red wig, screaming at Fabrizio with a changed voiced and rendering him motionless. The scene bears an uncanny resemblance not only to a confrontation between angel and devil, but also of a gender-reversed Medusa-travesty on part of the uncle, as the view of his red hair petrifies Fabrizio:

Eines Nachmittags erschien er [der Onkel] mit der roten Frauenperücke, die er an der letzten Fasnacht getragen hatte, hinter dem Holunderbusch, dröhnte mit verstellter Stimme: genug mit diesem Firlefanz, bestia! brach darauf in die Hühnerwiese ein und schnappte nach Fabrizio's gerade äußerst zierlich geringeltem Schweineschwänzchen. Fabrizio vergaß vor Schreck, mit den Kartonflügeln zu wackeln, fixierte statt dessen die roten Frauenhaare des Onkels, wurde leichenblaß und völlig starr. Der Onkel fürchtete nun vielleicht doch, Fabrizio könnte wie nach seinen Alpträumen gleich in Ohnmacht fallen, jedenfalls brummte er nur noch einige Fluchworte in die Gegend und verzog sich. An jenem Abend ließ Fabrizio sich widerstandslos von Giuditta entkleiden und zu Bett bringen, wie ein toter Falter baumelten die Kartonflügel am Türhaken. 84f.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Beautiful hair often has symbolic sexual association or can function as an attribute of power. There was a customs for Greek men to wear their hair long. Spartans cut brides' hair or even to shaved their head as an intiation rite to take away their 'male' fierceness and to avoid bringing anything resembling the Gorgo into the house. Comp. Helena Goscilo, Debexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1996).

One afternoon he [the uncle] appeared behind the holly bush, dressed in a red woman's wig which he had worn for the last carnival, screamed in false voice: enough with this nonsense, bestia! broke into the chicken den and tried to grab Fabrizio's just then cutely curled pigtail. Horrified, Fabrizio forgot to flap his cardboard wings, and instead fixated his uncle's red woman's hair, turned dead pale and completely immobile. Now the uncle was afraid that Fabrizio might faint like after one of his nightmares, anyway, he just murmured some more curses and went his way. That night, Fabrizio let himself be undressed and put to bed by Giuditta without making a fuss, like a dead butterfly his cardboard wings were dangling from a hook at the door.

The passage is set in strong contrast to the next paragraph which is another encounter between the Meduse and the narrator, a switch back to the narrative presence and a mirroring of the previous Meduse-encounter travesty of the memory—the Medusa is "exhausted from my attack." (85) She returns to the bottom of the sea, just to come up again suddenly, her tentacles beaming with a seductive light. The remedy is not to turn away, but to follow the light she exudes, illuminating the bottom of the sea which also depicts a mirror image of the alp in the mountains or: another memory image in the narrator's mind.

Leutenegger's novella is abundant with color symbolism. Her narration of nature, often through colors and perceptions of moods and temperatures frequently substitute character descriptions. In a stylistic deviation from regular grammar, Leutenegger ends her paragraphs without full stops. This might hint at a more open continuation, a greater freedom in continuation, or a change of vision.<sup>43</sup>

Poignant images of single things allow to suggest that the author draws on a Leibnizschian monadic model, rendering an entire world contained in one single entity. In

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<sup>43</sup> This last possibility is favored by Eve Vahtrik in her study on the novel. Vahtrik, 121.

one of the narrator's first memory-flashbacks, Boccia-balls, round as a globe, are compared to Fabrizio's eyes, and at a later point, to collecting berries in the woods. The redcurrants shine, they mirror the sky and the narrator's whole world. The mirror turns blind once the berry is put away in a container— placed, thus darkened; or: put into a specific place, it loses its color. The image plays with the notions of life and death and the lure of power an illusion of control can entail:

*Ich aber versank beim Pflücken der Johannisbeeren in eine Zeitlosigkeit, die mich in dieser Beschäftigung unermüdlich, fast wie in einem Delirium, fortfahren ließ. In den nur manchmal leicht getrübbten, oder von Gespinnst überzogenen, sonst meist glänzend roten Beeren spiegelte sich der Himmel wider, zogen die Wolken, neigten sich die Eschen. Jede Beere wurde eine kleine Weltkugel, die mein eigenes Bild, die Voralp, das ganze Dasein leuchtend umschloß, und erst auf dem Grund der Büchse dunkelte....Oft widerstand ich einer süßen Zerstörungslust nicht, schloß die Augen, wühlte mit der Hand zwischen den Johannisbeeren, drückte, zerquetschte, bis der Saft tropfte, Blut, das sich Sommer für Sommer erneuerte. (87)*

Picking redcurrants, I fell into a state oblivious of time, which made me continue my doing as in a delirium. In the mirror of the just occasionally web-clouded but mostly shining, red berries the sky was visible, clouds were moving, ash-trees bowing. Each berry turned into a small globe, shimmeringly containing my own image, the alpine foothill, all existence, and only darkening on the bottom of the can...Often I could not resist the desire to destroy, closed my eyes, and dug deep into the redcurrants, squeezing, crushing them until I was drawing the juice, blood, which renews itself summer after summer.

If one wanted to follow the beaten path of interpreting women's writing as that which is closer to nature, Leutenegger might fit that category well. I would argue, however, that nature in her work does not assume the role of the better, desirable aspect, the "mother nature", but is a veritable force of its own, beyond human control, that can be reckoned with but that can be as creative as it can be destructive. The dichotomy, the romantic fearful desire, is inherent in the Meduse's iconic function in

the novella. In the course of the narrative, the narrator has a few more encounters with the Medusa, each taking the contact and thus the interaction a step further, while the question, planted in the reader's head from the very beginning —what is the crucial moment in the narrator's life in which she first encounters the Medusa?—remains literally unanswered, but contained in the story of Rovina. For Leutenegger, it appears that the confrontation with the Medusa is foremostly a confrontation with one's own self.<sup>44</sup> In the end, the Meduse disappears into the sea, having fulfilled her function as catalyst of memory and self-reflection.

A mythic tale of love, death, and estrangement that bears some similarities with Leutenegger's novella is Liudmila Petrushevskaja's story "Poseidon," like "Medea" part of the cycle "Rekviemy," Po Doroge Boga Erosa (Moscow: Olimp, 1993). The text evolves from a regular vacation-story into an eerie ghost tale. The narrator describes the visit to a friend who spent her summer in an apartment house by the sea. The house breathes an atmosphere of immanent decay and, the characters appear shadow-like, doors open into rooms with unmade beds, while their inhabitants remain invisible. A young handsome boy feeds the whole community with the fish he catches. When the narrator returns to the city, she learns that the friends whom she believed to have paid a visit had drowned a year earlier. Like Leutenegger, Petrushevskaja sketches a contrast between a world of creation, growth, productivity, and the stagnate world of death and immobility. She uses the dividing line between reality and a spiritual space to trigger memory.

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<sup>44</sup> Comp. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness. "The prolonged meaning of the myth of Medusa is the petrification of Being for itself in Being-in-itself by the other's look," 555.

The realm in between is also the topic of Liubov" Alferova's story Khrustal'naia Medusa, [The Crystal Medusa].<sup>45</sup> Liubov" Andreevna Alferova is a little known author. She is a native of Riga, studied journalism in St. Petersburg and worked as a journalist in the Far East and Latvia. Her works of fiction favor the fantastic genre.<sup>46</sup> Her Medusa-story lends the title to a collection of 19 fantastic stories, three of them by women authors. Alferova explicates her use of the fantastic in the collection's introduction. The fantastic, according to the author, is used to confront a story's "hero with unusual events," and allows to "shed light on what is hidden in every-day-life."<sup>47</sup> This emphasis on what is hidden, unusual, glossed over, corresponds to the fear of the Medusa as the fear of what is too strange, but also could be too familiar.

"Khrustal'naia Meduza" introduces the young bio-scientist Aleksandr Nikolaevich Elizarov, who is working on his dissertation. Aleksandr, "Shurik," is a very studious and thorough personality, in contrast to his colleague Matvei Prostukhin, who claims to work on his dissertation for years without showing results. Elizarov has high goals to explore the means for human happiness through mathematical theories. He resists viewing life as fated and unchangable, that, in his eyes is just "the dance of a [jelly] medusa on the

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<sup>45</sup> Liubov" A. Alferova, "Khrustal'naia meduza," Khrustal'naia meduza. Prikliucheniia fantastika puteshestviia, Ed. V. Semenova (Riga: Liesma, 1985) 270–295.

<sup>46</sup> Alferova has a book of stories, Goluboi gobelen (Riga: Diesma, 1980), and a fantastic story, "Noch' v inm izmerenii" in the first collection of fantastic stories from Riga, Piatinobyi pbruch (Riga: Diesma, 1982).

<sup>47</sup> "K fantastike literator obrashchaetsia dlia togo chtoby postavit' svoego geroia v neobychnym obstoiatel'stva, pokazat' polnee ego ili proizkhodiashchie iavleniia ili – to i drugoe vmeste. No eto ne znachit, chot fantastiko tselikom sosredotochyvaetsiia na situatsiakh, otorvannykh ot togo, chto proizkhodit s nami: ona staraetsia (i pozvoliaet nam!)

waves, and, besides, the waves lead the step" [Eto pliaska studenistoi meduzy v volnakh, prichem khod diktuiut volny! 271]. Having evoked this image, Elizarov himself begins to feel like a helpless jellyfish.

When Elizarov decides to take a break, Matvei suggests to him to visit his ex-professor Krakarskii, who lives by the sea, undertakes experiments in genetic engineering and deals with cabbage to get by. Elizarov turns the offer down and remarks that, if he went to the sea, he would rather visit the dacha where he spent childhood summers, and meet the host Angelina and her daughter Al'mira. But instead he finds the house empty, until of a sudden Krakarskii appears. Elizarov is confused but accepts a dinner invitation, where the two scientists are being served by a human-size mouse wearing an apron. Understandably surprised, Elizarov follows Krakarskii to his laboratory, where he constructs "biorobots," crossings between biorobots and humans. The laboratory appears to Elizarov like an open space, and is filled with solidified huge drops of quicksilver, in which he can make out small living beings, or at least parts thereof. Krakarskii invites him to join some of his experiments the next day. Asked about Almira and Angelina, he reports that the girl had drowned and the mother died of grief.

At night in the moonlight, Elizarov goes down to the sea. As he stands "at the edge of the world," [zdes', na kraiu zemli] with his feet in the water, he sees between his feet a "shining medusa with beautiful star-like outlines." [on uvidel vozle nog svetiashchuiusia meduzu prekrasnykh ochertanii]. He takes the jellyfish in his hands, but as he sets on examining it, he notes that there is nothing, his hands are empty. Instead he notices behind him a barefoot woman with long hair, shimmering in the moonlight. When

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vysvetit' to, chto v povsednevnosti byvaet skryto, zaterto, obezlicheno privychnost'iu nami,

she asks him who he is, he feels as if he did not exist before, had no name, no consciousness of his past or anything at all. The stranger [neznakomka] happily resumes that he is human, because they, she replies to the skeptically negating Elizarov, "were given the gift to love each other and the world they live in [...] In love is the source, deliverance and eternity of mankind." [Tol'ko liudiam dan dar liubit' drug druga i mir, v kotorom oni zhivut [...] B ljubvi – istina, spasenie i vechnost' chelovestva. 288] The austere Elizarov is fascinated, but sure that she is a real woman, and he desires her. When awakes on the shore, he finds a "crystal medusa," which, this time, he manages to take. Through it, the sea looks different and playful, and he sees a black raven fly by. Back in the laboratory, he takes the medusa to look at the quicksilver-like droplets, and beholds what he almost expected, an array of people of all ages, and on the wall a collection of the "biorobots" they are supposed to become. He starts to attack the droplets with the pointed edges of the medusa. They turn into nothing, but when he sets out to attack the last, the man in a pyjama inside it calls at him to quiet down or he would call the hostess. All of a sudden, the scene is a regular dacha-living room. Krakarskii enters and explains that "personal power is as well just an idea" and points out that inside the Almira is caught in the medusa the Elizarov has in his hands. He exclaims her name in astonishment, and only a moment later, Angelina, glad to see Elizarov, and Almira enter. Matvei is also present. He explains to Elizarov that all he believed to have seen was just an experiment a friend of his had developed years earlier to demonstrate the effect of Elizarov's studies on his emotions. During this, on the windowsill sits a speaking raven by the name of Krakarskii.

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nashim bytom." Alferova 5.

In Alferova's fantastic parable, the Medusa stimulates metamorphoses, and, for Elizarov, 'fixes' or 'petrifies' images that might be caused by his attempt to make the world happier by rationalizing it. Thus the story's moral contends that the power of love still holds stronger than scientific efforts. In the revelation scene, the Medusa, coincidentally "containing" the woman he desires, becomes Elizarov's apotropaic device against the chimerae that his own experiments might have caused.

In comparison to Leutenegger's novella, nature is not as much part and illustration of the human condition, as its very origin that reason might try to explain, but cannot dominate. While Alferova casts a romantic-fantastic tale with fairy tale attributions that concentrates on a specific condition rather than on a condition embedded in a personal historicity, Leutenegger's character emphasizes the interplay between past, present, and a foreshadowed future.

### **2.2.2. Exploring the Gaze in the Mirror. Ol'ga Sedakova and Olesia Nikolaeva**

Medusan figures resonant of the "angel of history" are present in poems by Olesia Nikolaeva in her cycle "Angel Vremeni" [The Angel of Time].<sup>48</sup> The poem's symbolic imagery expands the temporal dimension into past and future and inscribes a certain paralytic anxiety to face what could tentatively be called 'truth' or 'superior knowledge.' Ol'ga Sedakova takes a similar stance in several of her poems that employ mirrors and mirroring devices. Their poetic mirrors on the wall or in the beholder's hand is always more than just a reflection of the looking self. Rather than serving simple beauty-

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<sup>48</sup> Olesia Nikolaeva. Amor Fati. Stikhotvorenia 1989–1996 (St. Petersburg: Inapress, 1997).

quizzes—"who is the prettiest of them all?"—they probe what lies beyond the surface, deeper in the soul, or around and behind the spectator. The mirror reflects and also frames both the beholder's and the reflective gaze. Their reciprocity bears erotic tension, but also a tension of fear of what could possibly be revealed, and maybe paralyzed

This section focuses on Ol'ga Sedakova's cycle "Tri zerkala" [Three Mirrors] of the collection Dikii shipovnik. Legendy i fantazii [The Wild Dog Rose, 1978] and Olesia Nikolaeva's "Angel Vremeny" from the cycle by the same name (between 1989 and 1996), briefly referencing Sedakova's "Zhenshchina i sluzhanka" [Woman and Maid] and "Zerkalo" [Mirror] as well as Nikolaeva's "Pered zerkalom" [In Front of the Mirror].<sup>49</sup>

Both Moscow poets have been producing poetry since early youth, though only since the perestroika have several volumes of poetry appeared in print, and during the last few years scattered translations and studies by Stephanie Sandler, Helena Goscilo and Mikhail Epshtein directed critical attention to them.

Ol'ga Sedakova, born in 1949, is a poet, critic, translator of poetry, including Dante and Rilke, and a classics scholar. She currently teaches at the University of Moscow Philology Department. Sedakova began to write as a child. Later, her work appeared predominantly in samizdat editions, and in the journals Novyi mir and Druzhba narodov. After her first collection of verse, Vrata, okna, arki [Gates, Windows, Arches], was published in Paris in 1987, a concise collection of her poetry was published in Moscow in 1996 (Stikhi). Sedakova's poetry abounds with allusions to classical texts and themes. It often touches on

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<sup>49</sup> Ol'ga Aleksandrovna Sedakova, Stikhi (Moscow: Gnozis / Carte Blanche, 1994). Translation in The Wild Dog Rose, Trans. Richard McKane (London: Approach, 1995).

metaphysical and spiritual motifs she draws from contemporary, medieval or ancient poetry and philosophy alike. In her essay "Shkatulka s zerkalom" [Little Box with Mirror] Sedakova discusses mirror imagery in the works of Anna Akhmatova.<sup>50</sup>

The younger Nikolaeva, born in 1955, "one of the most published poets of the younger generation," also frequently touches on spiritual themes. As a member of the Writers' Union, she had more favorable conditions to have her poetry published than Sedakova (Goscilo in Ledkovsky, 465). Learned in Greek and a church activist with the bible as her Ur-Text, her works have a pronounced religious focus. The philosophical stance reflected in her poetry draws on the tradition constituted by philosophers such as Florenskii, Rozanov, Berdiaev and others. Not a member of a specific group of poets, among the currents in contemporary Russian poetry, Nikolaeva's verses and Sedakova's intricate, meditative language most likely situates them as metarealists. I am referring here in particular to Mikhail Epshtein's definition of metarealism as a deliberate complication of language on the part of the poet, and as a perception that is not antirealist, but "impedes the understanding of reality itself."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Shkatulka s zerkalom. Ob odnom glubinnom motive A. A. Akhmatovoi," Uchenye zapiski TGU, 641 (1984) : 93-108. I thank Stephanie Sandler for suggestions on this theme and for pointing me to this essay.

<sup>51</sup> "Metarealizm – eto ne otrizanie realizma, a rasshirenie ego na oblast' veshchei nevidimyykh, uslozhenie samogo poniatia real'nosti, kotorai obnaruzhivaet svoiu mnogomernost', ne svoditsia v ploskost' fizicheskogo i psikhologicheskogo pravdopodobniia, no vkluchaet i vyschuii, metafizicheskuii real'nost', iavlennuii Pushkinskomu proroku. [...] Metarealizm – eto realizm mnogikh real'nostei, sviazannykh nepreryvnost'iu vnutrennykh perekhodov i vzaimoprevrashchenii. Est' real'nost, otkrytaia bluzhdaniiu elektrona, i real'nost', pro kotoruiu skazano - "i gornyi angelov polet", i vse oni vkhodiat v sushchetvo

Sedakova's deliberate multi-level complexity illustrates an "impediment" as Epshtein outlines. Her verse resists linear interpretation. She has high expectations of her readers, as she weaves her poetry with a rich thread of intertextual references. The poems toy with notions of vision and brief reflections of what I read as allusions to the Medusa. They mirror a metarealist realm that encloses not only the poems' reality, but also previous texts with the universe they contain, expressive of a poetic duplicity. The critic T.V. Tsivi'an analyses the phenomenon of "mirror-duplicity" in Anna Akhmatova's work, and concludes that her poems always mean 'themselves and another.'<sup>52</sup> Sedakova, whose complex themes resemble Akhmatova's poetry notes on the subject:

As soon as things get truly serious or important, it turns out that we lack acceptable formulae or comprehensible expressions [...] It's no accident that the important things elude our grasp and cluster around nebulous and unconcretizable words that serve to register flickering reality (here for someone, absent for another; a name now full of meaning, now empty). They, that is, the important things do this, I believe, out of love of freedom (their own freedom), which perhaps more than anything else differentiates them from things of a different order—not so important or serious things—and out of love for our freedom, without which we are useless to them [...] Capturing these free actors—or, rather, having been

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realnosti." Mikhail Epshtein, Paradoksy novizny (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988) 160f. And: [...] "an art of metaphysical revelations, striving for realities of the highest order, which demand spiritual ascents and the mystical intuition of the artist." Epshtein, Alexander A. Genis and Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover, eds. Russian Postmodernism (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 1998) 113.

<sup>52</sup> Tsivi'an explicates the idea of the double-being ("dvoinichestvo") that finds its expression in the mirror-images of Akhmatova: "Sovershenno osoboe mesto v nei sleduet otdat' tem geroiniiam, kotorykh v kakom-to smysle mozhno schest' osnovopolozhennymi v etom spiske zerkal-dvoinikov: Cassandra, Didona, Fedra." T. V. Tsiv'ian, "Antichnye geroini – zerkala Akhmatovoi" Russian Literature 7/8 (1974): 103-119, 106. I do not intend to suggest, though, to read Sedakova, and certainly not Nikolaeva as followers of Akhmatova. Especially the latter pronouncedly strives toward forging her poetry independent of the canon formed by Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva. Comp. also Carol Ueland, "Women's Poetry in the Soviet Union," Women Writers in Russian Literature, Toby W. Clyman and Diana Greene, eds. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994) 243.

captured by them—art shares with them their doubts in the world, their unconfirmability, their flickering and selective existence, all comprehending and taking all on faith.<sup>53</sup>

Sedakova's metaphorical comment on semantic copia resonates metaphorically with a Bakhtinian notion of unfinalizability. Copic abundance and ever-changing presence of the things in the world defy fixating poetic casting. It lets us wonder about the relation between poetic language, its objects and the mirror. Does a presumption of unfinalizable copia imply that the surface of Sedakova's mirrors is blurred, so that we have difficulties making out the details? Or does, on the contrary, the sharpness of the mirror allow us to see things more clearly? Let us also keep in mind that the mirror's range reveals things normally out of sight, like those that lie behind or on the side of the viewer. As Elena Shvarts, a poet whose poetics bears similarities with Sedakova's and Nikolaeva's, reminds us: "all depends on the quality of the mirror's surface."<sup>54</sup> I will explore the surface quality of Sedakova's and Nikolaeva's mirrors.

This simultaneous presence of subject and beholder in a poem such as Sedakova's "Zhenshchina u zerkala" calls attention to the reciprocity of the gaze and to what the gaze reveals, as well as to the third perspective added by the reader. He might observe the reciprocity of the exchange in the poem, or adapt one

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<sup>53</sup> Ol'ga Sedakova, "Statement," Third Wave. New Russian Poetry, Kent Johnson and Stephen M. Ashby, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 129ff.

<sup>54</sup> "Ja stalo gorazdo spokoinee v obshchenii s liud'mi, kogda poniala, chto mozžno smotret' v nikh, kak v zerkalo, I dat' im smotret' v sebia tak zhe. No vse zavisit ot kachestva zerkal'noj poverkhnosti. V silu etogo zhe liudi mne ne stol'ko interesny sami po sebe (khotia byvaet –

of the viewpoints involved—that of the lyrical "I" or that of the mirror.

Presumably, the act of seeing results in a revelation. There is a distinction, however, between what one directly looks at and the reversed image as seen in a mirror.

This reciprocity of the gaze is not Sedakova's or Nikolaeva's primary concern. They nevertheless raise gender issues in their poetry. In Sedakova's poem "Gospozha i sluzhanka," for example, doubt is voiced that anything is to be seen in the mirror, calling into question the looking woman herself: "Zhenshchina v zerkalo smotrit: chto ona vidit—ne vidno; / vriad li tam chto-nibud' est'" [A Woman looks into a mirror: what she sees there can't be seen; / It is unlikely that anything's there]. In Nikolaeva's "Angel Vremeni," the woman narrator has to cope with an all new environment she is confronted with, "new skin," "new sound," a "changed environment, measurement, and image." There are no points of orientation for her, and not even the angel can help. Whereas the woman "Pered zerkalom," in front of the mirror, parodies the stigmatized image of a woman putting on make-up with a contrast that describes her face as containing universal history. Different as their poems might be, they both explore the reciprocity and different effects that the looks inside the mirror and the reflection from it have on the female lyrical subject and the reader. In a brief comment with an unusually visual focus, Mikhail Bakhtin explains how one cannot ever reach an objective image of oneself. The gaze into the mirror, he contends, provides a (reversed)

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chto interesny), no skorei – naskol'ko ia sama interesna sebe v ikh prisustvii." Elena Shvarts, "Zerkalo," *Opredelenie v druguiu pogodu* (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 1997) 57.

image, and we cannot unite the outside and the inside view of ourselves.<sup>55</sup> Only another gaze from the outside can approach a complementation of the vision.<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, Sedakova's language constantly probes and questions the content of the universe, and its makeup, the mirozdanie, while meeting the challenge with a sense of "wonder and pleasure."<sup>57</sup> Playful transference and a lyrical "I" who never assumes a fixed position and continues to appear in numerous masks and positions are staples of Sedakova's poetry, as she writes her metarealist perception of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Sedakova's "Tri Zerkala" will serve as primary example to explore how the poet treats the gaze into the mirror is part of the collection Dikii shipovnik. It occupies a predominant place in the poet's poetic conception of the world.

<sup>55</sup> "Ne ia smotriu iznutri svoimi glazami na mir, a ia smotriu na sebja glazami mira, chuzhimi glazami; ia oderzhim drugim. Zdes' net naivnoi zaochnyi obraz. Naivnost' sliania sebja i drugogo v zerkal'nom obraze. Izbytok drugogo. U menia net tochki zreniia na sebja izvne, u menia net podkhoda k svoemu sobstvennomu vnutrennemu obrazu. Iz moikh glaz gliadiat chuzhie glaza." Mikhail Bakhtin, Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh. vol. (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1996) 71.

<sup>56</sup> Comp. the paraphrase Morson and Emerson provide: "Throughout his career, Bakhtin explored the proper ration of unfinalizability to finalization. [...] After all, Bakhtin argued, without a finalizing other, "I" cannot achieve an image of myself, just as I cannot be aware of how my mind works when I am unselfconscious and cannot know how I really appear to the world by looking in a mirror. An integral self, a tentative self-definition, requires an other to know oneself, to know one's image in the world one needs another's finalizing outsideness." Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson, Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) 71.

<sup>57</sup> Comp. Stephanie Sandler, "Women's Poetry Since the Sixties," A History of Russian Women's Writing, Adele Barker and Jehanne Gheith, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2000) 6.

<sup>58</sup> For the constitution of Sedakova's lyrical self, comp. Stephanie Sandler, "Thinking Self in the Poetry of Ol'ga Sedakova," Gender and Russian Literature. New Perspectives, Rosalind Marsh, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 302-325, 312f.

Appearing about halfway through the collection, "Tri zerkala" is one of three triptych poems. In the musical rhythmicity of the collection, the triptychs offer a pause. "Zhenshchina u zerkala" [Woman by the Mirror] "Staryi dom" [Old House] and "Prorok" [Prophet], the "Tri zerkala"-poems are not the only, but perhaps the most prominent examples in Dikii shipovnik that explore themes of vision. Beyond that, they all tackle the motif of fate and the task of confronting it. The poetic oscillation between fear and hope and stark poetic contrasts between darkness and light as setting for poignant imagery emphasize the collection's metarealist dimension. The first poem, "Zhenshchina u zerkala," concentrates on the present. "Staryi dom" opens a door to the past, and poses the question if "we [will] too, in the extinguished light, write to the end the story of death and flesh?" [Neuzhto i my pri potushennom svete / dopishem istoriiu smerti i ploti? 5/1-2] to answer this question, in my understanding affirmatively, in "Prorok" by observing that life happens and thus "inscribes" itself upon all of us. As a consequence, the lyrical narrator appeals to the prophet to announce his prophecy about life, even if it is terrifying. The first lines are especially significant in this context. "Let them know how Your image wrings its hands / Let them know how the terrible heart triumphs / Swallowing life like a grave insult / What happened, happened to me. And worse: - to everyone about everyone and on everyone's lips," to continue with a hopeful turn, "endlessly it perfects me [...]" Thus, the end of the triptych's third poem eases the uncanny ending of the poem about the woman at the mirror, of which I will quote the first and last stanza:

Ne snizu, a kak iz-za nekoj dveri,  
 Polurastvorennoi v sviatiashchiisia zal,  
 Iz vernykh, kak detskoe imia, materii,  
 Kak iavnaia prava iz mnogikh poverii  
 Iavliaetsia shenshchina vozle zerkal.

[...]

I vstala ona, I rukami zakryla  
 litso svoe: to chto v litse ee bylo,  
 chto bylo v rukhakh ee, vsia eta t'ma  
 proshla, kak sud'ba nad svobodnym sozdan'em,  
 I eto moglo pokazat'sia rydan'em,  
 no bylo viden'em, svodiashchim s uma.

A woman appears by the mirrors  
 not from below, but from behind some door,  
 half opened into the consecrated hall,  
 from true materials, as true as a child's name,  
 like the real truth form many beliefs.

[...]

She got up, and covered her face  
 with her hands: that which was in her face,  
 which was in her hands, all that darkness passed,  
   like fate over a free creation,  
 and this could appear to be sobbing,  
 but was a vision that drove one mad.

"Zhenshchina u zerkala" has an even structure. Written in a classical metre, amphibrachic tetrameter, its six stanzas have five lines each except for the last ending on a sixth line. With the exception of the forth stanza, which thus attains increased meaningfulness, all stanzas begin with *j / and* and consist of one sentence. Thus the poem attains an epic, chant-like quality, similar to an incantation. Akhmatova similarly uses the epic parallel sewing together of lines in her "Biblical verses," especially in "Rakhel," where almost half of the lines start

with the conjunctive "i." <sup>59</sup> The first stanza of Sedakova's poem develops toward a first climax that is reached upon the woman's entrance. The special quality of the description conveys an architectural structure. The negating beginning immediately introduces ambiguity: The woman enters "not from below," – "ne sznizu" but from "true matter" and through a door that is half-opened into a "consecrated hall." Through this climactic beginning her entrance attains more force and grandeur, especially since she is associated with "true matter," "true like a child's name," which connects her to knowledge and beginning. The reader finds himself in suspenseful expectation, because the contents of the consecrated hall are obstructed by the half-opened door and by the woman entering through it. Since she comes from there, however, the reader can assume that she knows what lies beyond. Her reflection in the mirror might reveal a reflection of that place in her eyes. The forceful movement set off in the images following the second stanza however never discloses whether she actually looks into the mirror. Repercussions of mythological figures and Dante's Divina Comedia among other texts run throughout Sedakova's cycle Dikii shipovnik which is constitutive of her poetic "mirozdanie." In "Zhenshchina u zerkala," the woman's association with "the world beyond" evokes not only a journey to the underworld as in the Inferno. Associations of the woman's image with figures such as Persephone or Eurydice come to mind. They, like the woman, oscillate between the realm of the 'real',

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<sup>59</sup> I have referred to the second of these poems, "Lotova zhena," which describes the life-changing power one glance might have, in the passage on the Medusa-tradition in the introductory section. Akhmatova, 147f.

present, and the 'other,' the world of the dead, they are drawn to one and kept by the other.

The poem's second stanza switches its tense from present to past, and the reader's focus from direct witness to distanced listener to whom something is reported or who has to reconstruct the image in his mind. A narrative shift happens inside the poem as well. The lyrical I who speaks first in the last line of the third stanza could belong to the poetic narrator or to the woman. The strongest image, from which the rich thread of images throughout the poem emerges, is the image of weaving or sewing. In the second stanza, the woman "screws up her eyes / as though she was threading a needle / with the thread of destiny and a body." The strange image raises the question whose body is referred to and if it might be that of the woman. It is not even certain if she actually looks into the mirror and thus opens the view to what is behind her and/or what is inside herself. One might read the image of the needle-hole as constitutive, which means that she looks outside into the world. Matter, materia is the key term that can serve as the leading thread for approaching an interpretation. Materia is the container of multifold forms and truths, and it is also the cloth, the tapestry that represents life through images such as that of nature, birds and trees (stanzas 3/4). They serve as metaphoric reference points.

I have not yet compared the woman-figure to one of the Parcae, because the poem's climax in the fifth stanza and the last stanza defy that notion: "everything" cannot be presented like "a piece of material," a beautiful cloth of life, "shame," "deathly boredom," and "a life hanging from hands" prevent that. The condition for change is

temporal as well modal (kogda by, 5/1). Original matter, "woven by the light," is unfinalizable; spread out, it would "soar like a crowd of birds," —or disappear, as the verb "vzletat" that Sedakova uses also has the second meaning of "to dissolve," "to disintegrate." In light of the question of a women's poetic, Hélène Cixous has argued that because women have no place in history, they 'fly' through it, playing on the double meaning of the verb "voler" in French as "to steal" and also "to fly."<sup>60</sup> She contends that women had to "live in flight" and "steal away" to find their own passageways. Though Sedakova's primary concern is not with a specifically female aesthetics in writing, this image adds an interesting take to her stanza.

The poem provides a glimpse of hope in the second to last stanza, where the lyrical "I" appeals to the forms to be "merciful," "go with wonders," and "disappear, like a mirror before the eyes." Thus the text reminds us that if we look attentively, we do not see the mediating mirror, just what is in it. Yet when we look at the final image of the woman, we might conclude that an integrated, all encompassing perception of the fabric of matter and being is unbearable. As the woman sits with her hands covering her face and sobbing, she has become an image of madness. For the reader she has become the mirror, the container of the visions cast before her, causing her desperation, and us horror that we can hardly bear to see. How did this vision come to pass? In the beginning, the view of both the narrator and the woman was restricted. The woman's entrance had a theatrical air,

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<sup>60</sup> "Voler, c'est le geste de la femme, voler dans la langue, la faire voler. Du vol, nous avons toutes appris l'art aux maintes techniques, depuis des siècles que nous n'avons accès à l'avoir qu'en volant: que nous avons vécu dans un vol, de voler, trouvant au désir des passages étroites, dérobés, traversants." Cixous, *Body* 49.

as she enters the poem like a stage. In the end, the perspective has changed, and everything is concentrated on her face and hands. The darkness gives way to the all-encompassing vision, and the mirror seems to have disappeared. This disappearance does not allow for a positive revelation through greater proximity, however. Rather, its absence and its framing quality affects the discursive possibilities, because, as would argue quoting Derrida again on the subject, "only when framed, something becomes describable" (Derrida, section I/18). The amorphous globality that befalls woman and reader in Sedakova's poem, is too much to bear.

A notion of arresting, overwhelming fate is contained in Nikolaeva's long poem "Angel vremeni." Concerned with change of all parameters in life, the octagon with two verses in each section, the poem contains, like a number of other poems by Nikolaeva, implicit mirror-references. In Nikolaeva's work, the mirroring exchange of glances plays a more significant role than the mirror as object itself. While in Sedakova's poem the temporal dimension is secondary and the focus metaphysically on coping with knowledge arising from vision(s), Nikolaeva's perspective is strongly temporal, and thus, historicizing. Her notion of change precedes the angel's appearance—when she speaks about "change of sight," and "change of heart" in the second stanza of the second part of the octagon. Her notion of matter and sight is contained in the figure of the angel. As he stands vigil and marches from left to right, he is the guardian, but also the announcer of a new time. Yet when he, like an "indifferent Chronos" ... "[the angel] does not know us by our face," a rupture is signaled, a change in vision

between old and new, under which "everything looks as if newly lit." [...] kak vse vygliadit, kak pri novom osveshchenie" V/1/1-2]. Despite his sight and the guardian function the angel can describe, but not recitfy ("[...] No i on ne v silakh popravit' ni tochku, ni zapiatuiu," (VII/2/4). Nikolaeva's angel reminds of Walter Benjamin's contemplation of history in the figure of the "angel of history."<sup>61</sup> A resonance of this figure is present both in Sedakova's "Zhenshchina u zerkala" and Nikolaeva's "Angel Vremeni." Sedakova's image of the woman covering her face bears witness to an outside, frightening event, and the face of Nikolaeva's angel accounts for change and the dawn of something hitherto invisible.

It resonates the title of the cycle, "Amor Fati," a philosophical concept of perceiving the world that Nikolaeva borrows from Nietzsche. In his Fröhliche Wissenschaft and other texts Nietzsche advocates to love life, specifically a life as it is fated by God.<sup>62</sup>

Sedakova challenges her readers, requiring them to know her multifold references to classical and modern literature. For example Rilke, whom Sedakova translated, and whose poetry has rich examples of mirror-metaphors, and shares some of Sedakova's central metaphors such as birds and needle-holes. In

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<sup>61</sup> Comp. Weigel, Stimme 273f. Weigel illuminates her examination of Medusa, a mythological figure she employs as allegory of missing women's literary history by introducing an important comparison, with a remarkable presence in literary texts, between Medusa and the angel of history. The image appears widely quoted in literary theory with historical references, in her introduction to an essay collection on post-soviet culture, the editor Elisabeth Cheauré quotes Benjamin on this subject. Cheauré, ed. Jenseits des Kommunismus (Berlin: Berlin Verlag A. Spitz, 1996) 7.

<sup>62</sup> On Nietzsche's influence in Russia, comp. Aleksandr Etkind, Sodom i Psikheja (Moscow: IC Grarant, 1996).

"Zhenshchina u zerkala," the comparison to the act of threading introduces the realm of fate—life and the body that are "threaded" through the frame of the needle-hole. In his poem "Himmelfahrt Maria" (1913), Rilke employs the image of the needle-hole as a framing metaphor for his own gaze at the beloved.<sup>63</sup> In a later poem, an image of matter, or, as Rilke writes, the "mirror-image of what is secret" is crafted as being thrown up in the air "like a bird soaring" finds a resonance in Sedakova's simile of matter "soar[ing] like a crowd of birds."<sup>64</sup> Sedakova's image of the birds might also play on the image of Dante's metaphor of birds. In the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, the lovers Paolo and Francesca and their fellow sinners are compared to a flock of birds. Dante's beloved Beatrice is associated with the light of redemption. In several cantos of the *Paradiso*, her eyes become the mirror for what Dante perceives around him.

Regarding the question of gender, Sedakova's image of women is, in my opinion, iconic rather than emphatically gendered. Nikolaeva's poems, on the other hand, illustrate her conception of "gender as inherent and preordained."<sup>65</sup> The image of a woman in front

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<sup>63</sup> [...] "Wie in ein Nadelöhr / will mein langer Blick in dir sich fassen, / eh du diesem Sichtlichen entfliehst, -" Rainer Maria Rilke, *Himmelfahrt Maria* (1913), *Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 2, Gedichte, 2. Teil* (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1957) 47.

<sup>64</sup> "Während Entwürfe ihm keimen, / wirft er, wie Vogelschwung, / Spiegelbild des Geheimen / durch den Glanz ihrer Spiegelung." Poem IX of the cycle "Im Kirchhof von Ragaz," 1924. Rilke, 174.

<sup>65</sup> Comp. Goscilo in Ledkovsky, 465. Carol Ueland remarks on the topic of gender that "While Nikolaeva's fundamentalist views [...] will certainly not appeal to Western feminists, her views are not atypical of those of many contemporary Russian women. Her search for values based in traditional Russian culture represents an emerging trend in post-Soviet literature." Ueland, 243. For an interesting take on the reciprocity and mirroring of women authors writing women characters looking into mirrors in general comp. chapter 3 of Anne Herrmann's *The Dialogic and Difference: 'An/Other Woman' in Virginia Woolf and Christa*

of a mirror is commonly associated with a contemplation of beauty, a romantic, and potentially trivializing image, focused on pretty vanity of the woman's gaze absorbed in a quest for beauty. Such a notion, however, fits neither Sedakova's nor Nikolaeva's women in front of mirrors. Their poems use the familiar image, but transcend romantic, fairy-tale connotations and examine the environment surrounding the woman-mirror scene as essential part of the picture. Especially in Sedakova's poems, it is often layered with frightening notions of darkness (in "Zhenshchina u zerkala") loss, and melancholy ("Zerkalo," "Gospozha i sluzhanka"). In "Pered zerkalom" Nikolaeva describes a woman in front of the mirror "working on her beauty," but it is less an individual, physical beauty. Transcending the individual image, the woman is enveloped in eternity, as she paints "ancient symbols, signs, and the story of humankind."<sup>66</sup> While the mirror-exchanges in Nikolaeva's Angel Vremeni are in the majority direct and frontal, Sedakova's lyrical subjects tend to approach the mirror on a non-direct trajectory. Thus it seems that the gaze is never straight, but always slanted. In "Tri zerkala," the woman "appears by the mirrors" [zhenshchina [iavliaetsia] vozle zerkala]. In "Gospozha i sluzhanka," one of the women looks in the mirror, yet the narrator witnessing the scene does not appear to have the same direct perspective: "The woman looks into the mirror: What she sees is not visible" [Zhenshchina v zerkalo smotrit: chto ona vidit – ne vidno] and the

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Wolf, "The Lady in the Looking Glass," (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Though Herrmann works on novels, her perspective can be transferred to poetry as well: "The female character serves as fictional subject within a novelistic discourse; at the same time she represents the inscription of a female subjectivity within a female-authored text." 62.

<sup>66</sup> "drevnye simvoly, znaki, istoriiu roda," "Zerkalo" 2/2. Comp. Sandler: "Nikolaeva's "Pered zerkalom" ("In front of the mirror") comments that women's self-contemplated beauty has been trivialized by poets and philosophers as ephemeral, but she ends in celebration, as the woman poses before eternity itself, which is blind to her beauty." Sandler, History 11.

next line in reaction provides a puzzling conclusion: "unlikely that anything is there" [vriad li tam chto-nibud' est']. In "Zerkalo," the mirror hangs nearby. Sedakova uses the diminutive common in folk-tales, "the mirror hangs nearby" [zermal'tse v'etsia riadom] as if the mirror were only a prop evoking a fairy-tale atmosphere of guessing the future in the prevailing tone of this poem which Sedakova includes in her cycle "Old Songs" [Starye pesni]. Here, her lyrical self warns the addressed "my dear" [milyi moi] that it is "better not to see" what he would reveal by looking into the mirror, with a notion of life surrounded by death "as by the sea."

Thus, as Sedakova's perspectives are shifting and refuse to fix on a direct look, her mirrors differ. If the notion of going through the mirror and behind it is probed in "Zhenshchina u zerkala," a notion reminiscent of fairy-tale mirror-questioning prevails in "Zerkalo." Finally, "Gospozha i sluzhanka"—the most enigmatic of the three poems—deserves a more detailed comparison not only to Nikolaeva's "Pered zerkalom" but also to Rilke's "Woman in front of a mirror" (Paris, 1907).<sup>67</sup> All three, with varying emphases, explore the oscillation between futile and eternal beauty. If Nikolaeva focuses on the woman painting her face and painting eternity, Sedakova breaks hierarchial and conflicting notions into two figures, both apparently searching for something in the mirror that "certainly is therein" but deserves "tender painting" (Chto-to trebuet laskovoi mazi), while

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<sup>67</sup> Catriona Kelly discusses "Gozpozha i sluzhanka" in her article on Sedakova and makes two observations relevant for this discussion: "What at first appeared to be simply an antiquarian excursion has become a reflection on human communication; the poem moves from a historical to an empathetic view, and then back to a generalization informed by empathy." And: "Through these devices [metrical and intonational shifts] Sedakova can give cerebral material an unexpected flavour of the spoken voice, and so make her poems read as dramatic

Rilke paints the figure of an old, tired lady, a melancholic image with a grandeur that is sharply refused in Sedakova's clear vision of the loss that comes with time and aging.

Sedakova and Nikolaeva use various images of mirrors as apertures into the world beyond. These mirrors are tempting and daring, they refuse us clear images of ourselves, but might, if we look carefully and closely, provide us with a view not so much of our individual selves but of the designs of the fabric of life.

Sedakova, a poet who is one of the "youngest archaists" expands her poetic sphere through her mythological allusions.<sup>68</sup> Her poetry is distinguished by an intricate set of layers, containing one another, like a mirror within a mirror or a web of references. While the layers do not necessarily present boundaries against one other, their frames cause a certain friction, and an easily shifting narrative perspective.<sup>69</sup>

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soliloquies." Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820–1992* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 429.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Wachtell characterizes the poets Kutik, Sedakova, Kibirov, and Parshchikov as "the youngest archaists". He detects a tendency to more "flamboyant citations" in postmodernism than before. The expansion of interpretive horizons might have roots in symbolism. In *Rereading Russian Poetry* Stephanie Sandler, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 270–286.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of Sedakova's poetry with a focus on the self, see Stephanie Sandler's article on the "Thinking Self" in *Gender and Russian Lit.* 302–, her being a "meditative poet" and her proximity to the form of the elegy (303). Sandler points out that Sedakova stands in the tradition of Akhmatova's writing.

### 2.2.3. Laughing Back Speechless? Alina Vitukhnovskaia

Alina Vitukhnovskaia's apocalyptic poetic environment evokes Medusa's ancient residence at the edge of the world. Here, language is an object of desire, yet also a prison-like confinement. Despite its potentially paralyzing powers, the poet must work with it. The author "faces" the Medusa by writing her, turning her into a fixed image/object, which, thus 'arrested' can cause no more harm.

I am reading an untitled long epic poem from 1991 that appeared in the collection Sobaka Pavlova, [Pavlov's Dog, published in Moscow in 1996; Vitukhnovskaia collaborated on it with the poet Konstantin Kedrov]. The title of the poetic collection evokes a range of connotations of its own that do not immediately resonate in the poem. Suffice it to say here that Vitukhnovskaia in her poetry works against the reflex of Pavlov's dog: By fragmenting language and with this act of displacement and estrangement creating a heightened awareness of the quality of words in all their dimensions—as image, sound, and meaning—she works against an automatic apperception.

The poem from "Sobaka Pavlova" does not have a narrative structure that could be easily summarized. It is dominated by the ruminations of a lyrical I who appears to be on a quest for language and illustrates the poet's dark world view, although occasional instances of humor, however cynical, let a glimpse of hope shine through—against all odds, the poet continues her work. Even in her early youth Vitukhnovskaia believed she was thrown into the wrong world at birth, into a provisional existence.<sup>70</sup> Thus, in a postmodern re-take of gnosticism or existential despair, she perceives her entire

environment, and the language that expresses it, as an inescapable prison. In her work, she makes attempts to express her personal, inner world through neologisms and sign-personifications, but what she has at hand is language as the only instrument to work with, and she has to cope with that. She, like some other authors of the avant-garde, views mankind to be nothing but a bundle of pathologies. She claims that her work is "anti-art", and would prefer to exist as pure spirit, in an ethereal form.<sup>71</sup>

When Vitukhnovskaia engages the Medusa, she is playing with the notion of the beautiful versus the ugly Medusa. In her poetry, Medusa becomes an incarnation of the threat that is posed to language. Vitukhnovskaia, seeking to resolve the problem of poetic language, re-inscribes the mythological figure who is commonly portrayed as a silent emblematic image into a referential counterpart of the narrator. Vitukhnovskaia uses classical mythology as a foil with which she is working, and evokes a range of images, a poetic screen onto which she projects her quest for a post-modern poetics. Her application is embedded in a dark, at times apocalyptic, worldview.

Vitukhnovskaia, born in 1973, had her first trial for alleged drug possession and dealing in 1994. Though the proofs were shallow, Vitukhnovskaia spent over a year in the Butyrka prison, under conditions that were rated torturous by UN-observers. Vitukhnovskaia's behavior after her release was, according to reports, impeccable. Nevertheless, she was arrested again in October 1997, her health impaired and with her showing suicidal tendencies. In Germany, where her collection of "Children's' Death

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Vitukhnovskaia by Kerstin Holm, "Alle Kunst ist Betrug," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 11/14 (1995), 41.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Songs" [Detskie pesni mertvykh] had been published in translation, she received a German writer-in-residence grant which she could not use. The authorities, not willing to rest the case, have questioned her sanity and committed her into a psychiatric hospital in January of 1998. Alina Vitukhnovskaia, who has been writing since childhood and has won recognition by senior poets quite early, drew support from accomplished writers such as Andrei Bitov, Konstantin Kedrov, and Alexander Tkatchenko. Since her first imprisonment, Vitukhnovskaia has produced three new volumes of poetry, prose and some journalistic articles. At first, she was inclined to view her prison sentence as part of an artistic experience. But the harshness of the actual circumstances of life in prison led her to destroy many of the works she produced during this time.<sup>72</sup>

Many of the poems that have survived Vitukhnovskaia's time in prison and that she did not destroy, are dark and pessimistic. They mirror a vision of life as a merely preliminary, prison-like existence she can at best try to share with others through her poetry. Vitukhnovskaia's 'work is allusive, eclectic, anagrammatic, using rhythm rather than rhyme, much wordplay and associative strings that at times appear to be arbitrary, but upon further investigation reveal semantic connections. In comparison to many of her

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<sup>72</sup> Vitukhnovskaia had in articles openly acknowledged experimenting with drugs and recording these experiences in her poetry. But all poems can be read as an experiment of the mind, regardless of possible outside material influences on the poet's perception, as many of the romantic poets might assure us. The Russian authorities have used Vitukhnovskaia not only to make a case against drug dealing, but have thus also portrayed her as a 'useless member of society,' because she does not hold a job that contributes to the common welfare. The same accusation was made against Joseph Brodsky, among others, and Vitukhnovskaia's situation bears an uncanny resemblance to the show trials of the 1930s. Other women poets who have been tried and imprisoned in recent years are Natalia Gorbanevskaja and Irina Ratushinskaja, but their sentences were handed down in the pre-perestroika era and were connected to the authors' openly political engagements. The fact that observers such as the journalist and PEN-member Iunna Morits have been banned from attending Vitukhnovskaia's trial raises the question whether the issue is only drug charges—might the poet also present

later works, "Sobaka Pavlova" from 1991 is rather expressive and consecutively pursues the question of poetic language. Because of this and the poem's manifesto-like character I have chosen it for an exemplary analysis.<sup>73</sup> In the later prose-poem Posledniaia starukha-protsestshchitsa russkoi literatury [possibly: The last percentagist-bag of Russian literature, Moscow: 1996] throughout several passages the world appears petrified, the Medusa remains silent [meduza molchit, 97].

In Vitukhnovskaia's earlier poem, though, Medusa exudes a lure that entices the narrator to look at her. The petrifying power that threatens the very potential of creative language is present in the subtext. Vitukhnovskaia's poetic fragmentation ensues increasingly starting in the 13th stanza—the lyrical subject claims to be "fish, fisher, dish in a bar and check, waiter" [Sam ia miaso dlia ryby, sam ia ryba, rybak, bliudo v bare i schet, oficiant..., " 13/1+2], and seems to mirror what is essential to the figure of Medusa. Particularly striking in Vitukhnovskaia's poem is the narrator's actually engaging with the Medusa. A 'dialogue' with Medusa is, however, a daring undertaking, if not contradicting the very nature of this figure.<sup>74</sup>

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an intellectual threat to the Russian authorities? Their position in Vitukhnovskaia's case resembles a censorship that could render any experimental art a crime.

<sup>73</sup> Other works by Vitukhnovskaia such as Anomalizm and Posledniaia protsestshchitsia russkoi literatury could be called prose, or epic poetry but do not conform with genre norms. In their copic abundance of associations and free flowing narration Vitukhnovskaia's works remind of the "grafomania" that characterizes for example the early prose experiments of Pasternak. Vitukhnovskaia's main character, F, is an anti-hero in a narrative that is dark, resigned, and alludes a dysfunctional mother-child relationship.

<sup>74</sup> Shelley's poem on the Medusa suggests, that a confrontation with the Medusa bears the potential to release creative force rather than petrification on part of the beholder: the Medusan image is imprinted on the canvas of his soul and has a harmonizing effect there. Though it would exceed the range of my analysis here to undertake a comparison, this further undermines the observation that the dichotomy of Medusa's power was an issue already in Romantic literature. Shelley, "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine

In the first of the poem's 57 stanzas, the narrator having asked "In what language should/can I speak now?"—note the ambiguity of the Russian phrasing "na kakom mne teper' govorit' iazyke," states that it has already spoken about all that is human, appropriating itself to an ancient character, reminiscent of an oracle or a sibyl. Then she likens herself to a dead fish. But what follows in the third stanza is almost a reciprocally reversed version of how the myth usually goes:

Ia Gorgone smotriu v rokovoie litso.  
 Gde liuboi prevrashchaetsia v kamen'  
 tam Meduza menia obrashchaet v iatso  
 I trepeshchet volos cherviakami.

I look the Gorgon in her stone-face  
 where anybody would be turned into stone  
 there Medusa turns me into an egg  
 and her hair trembles with snaky worms. (4/1–3)

Nonsense or enigma? might be the puzzled reader's first reaction. But a closer look at Vitukhnovskaia's metaphorical system opens itself to interpretation: The Medusa's face is rocklike in a context where everything appears dead, immobile, and petrified. It also alludes to the quality of Medusa as a mask (Vernant, *Top* 198). The transformation of a dead fish into an egg reverses the natural order and, though an egg is likewise an immobile object, points back—or forward, depending on the perspective of the reading—to the source and the beginning of life. The bird that appears in this poetic environment in the first stanza reminds the reader of the figure of the Phoenix, who dies and is born again, and of the creation of Eros, thus opening the theme of the circle of life

and death as it is presented in the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy.<sup>75</sup> The egg can be interpreted in the light of a pre-hellenic, pelagian creation myth: according to which the great goddess came out of chaos, separated heaven and earth and, through her dancing, created Boreas, the northwind, which materialized as a snake and impregnated her. As a dove, the great goddess lay an egg out of which fell sun and moon, the planets and the earth with all its plant- and wildlife (Ranke-Graves 22/23). Implicit therein is a continuous striving for Eros, for poetry, yet the continually present option and threat of death creates suspense. The ancient Medusa also represents a borderline state, between chaos and creation, chaos and eros, as one of the most ancient beings.<sup>76</sup>

Vitukhnovskaia does not espouse a feminist agenda in her poetry. Her quest for language is driven by the problems posed by the poet's inner creative world and her environment rather than by a notion of gender. However, I find Hélène Cixous', Sigrid Weigel's and Inge Stephan's approaches particularly relevant in this context, as they have theorized the Medusa as mythological symbol in a contemporary context and drawn new attention to this figure. Another thesis on the use of myth in modern literature and relative to Vitukhnovskaia's work envisions myth as a search to establish new definitions of gender or nation as developed by Inge Stephan or Hans Blumenberg.<sup>77</sup> Thus, myth gains a political and historical dimension that becomes especially relevant in times of

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<sup>75</sup> An analysis of myths of birth, rebirth and destruction, as employed by Vitukhnovskaia, invites comparison with the poetry of Elena Shvarts.

<sup>76</sup> Comp. Blumenberg. "Sie [that is, Medusa] gehört zu den Gorgonen, deren Herkunft wie die der meisten Schreckensgestalten auf die Urgeschichte verweist, auf das Übergangsfeld zwischen dem Gestaltlosen und dem Gestalteten, zwischen Chaos und Eros." Blumenberg 131.

political change. Vitukhnovskaia tackles the question of irrepresentability: How can the poet express what moves her, but what is invisible or undescribable.<sup>78</sup> Vitukhnovskaia's juxtaposition regarding the contextualization of commonplace phrases and words 'arrest' the reader's gaze, because he cannot glide over words as he normally might in a sentence that simply runs smooth with conventions.

The poem progressively approaches the question of poetic speech. In the beginning, there is an abstract engagement with this theme, as Vitukhnovskaia employs all possible verbs relative to speech, from speaking (both in the complete and incomplete view: speaking (1), being silent (6), speaking, praying, (7), asking (8), getting no answer (9), whining (crying)/ echo (10), whispering and evoking an echo, and words that "fall out of memory" (11) etc. In the 12th stanza, the poem's very first line, the question—"In what language should I speak now?"—is repeated, only here it becomes a devastating confrontation in which the narrator "light-heartedly lose[s] the gift of speech" [i ia ostaius' nalegke—ne zhaleia, teriaiu dar rechi, 12/2-3]. The gift of speech becomes questionable—if not a curse. While in the previous stanzas the issue of language referred exclusively to the narrator ("should I speak," "beg," "ask"), from this stanza on reference

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<sup>77</sup> See Stephan, 5 and Blumenberg, esp. the chapter on "Myth and Dogmas," 215ff.

<sup>78</sup> A recent dissertation develops the idea of a "Medusan poetics," defined as "a vehicle whereby to analyze poetic boundaries in texts characterized by issues of the (un)describable, (un)representable and (in)visible." Adrienne Stefania Defendi. *Spectacles of Medusa*. Yale University, 1997 (Diss. Abs. vol 58, no. 5, 1997).

is extended to include the act of communication, an issue that for Vitukhnovskaia, according to her own statements, is an utterly complicated problem.<sup>79</sup>

In the poem's first stanzas Vitukhnovskaia introduces the set of images that she will use and vary throughout the poem. She frequently employs oppositions, such as contrasting the land and the sea. Her ocean appears to be a site of death rather than a life-giving element. But the shore is not any better. The flotsam and jetsam washing up on it is dead or deadly debris, and thus the shore as a safe ground to stand on appears to break away. Through the course of the poem, the narrator identifies with various objects; here it is a dead fish: "I, like a dead fish, lie on the sand" [Ia kak mertvaia ryba lezhu na peske-1/3] read with the following hopeless enumeration of "dead brother, dead son, dead dad" [mertvyi brat, mertvi syn, mertvyi papa, 3/10] evokes the holy trinity which in the present context becomes a metaphor of lost faith. With regard to the cosmic egg into which the narrator is turned (4/3), one could speculate about a connection to a Christian sacrifice or resurrection theme. Moreover, this enumeration opens the poem's temporal sphere, as it evokes the past, present, and future generation(s).

The fish, removed from its original element, is gray and discolored. In classical and Christian symbolical systems numerous associations with fish are possible, though the poetic neighborhood of the above mentioned trinity suggests a reading of it as a symbol of lost faith and also of a distinctly mute animal, a notion that Vitukhnovskaia plays with later in the poem. Another possible association is Nemesis, the goddess of rage, who fleeing Zeus, fled into the sea and turned into a fish (Kerényi, 86). The image of the fish

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Vitukhnovskaia by Kerstin Holm, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11.14. (1995), 41.

is a continuous leitmotiv in Vitukhnovskaia's poetry, and in different places can evoke versatile associations. As a symbolic icon of her poetry, it connects the implication of death to the fluidity of water a "fish is not only a living being and element of the evolution, but also a symbol of many things" ["...ryba est' ne tol'ko zhivoe sushchestvo I element evolutsii, no i simvol mnogovo, chto neosporimo, Posledniaia..., 18] but also a symbol of death.

In Vitukhnovskaia's apocalyptic environment which resembles the mythological realm at the edge of the world where the ancient Medusa is located, language is an object of desire, yet also a prison-like confinement. Despite its paralyzing powers, the poet must work with it, which in turn is the way to deal with the Medusa: writing her, she becomes a fixed image/object, thus 'arrested', she can cause no more harm.

The poem's 12th stanza represents a strong caesura: not only does it partially repeat the first, it varies it onomatopoeically—read aloud, it foregrounds Vitukhnovskaia's lyrical qualities in creating an "ear-text," especially when read in comparison to the first stanza:

Na kakom mne teper' govorit' iazyke?  
 Ia pro vse rasskazal chelovech'im.  
 Ia kak mertvaia ryba lezhu na peske  
 sedinoi cheshui obescvechen. (stanza 1)

Na kakom mne teper' govorit' iazyke?  
 Ryb molchan'e – sut' chelovech'e  
 mnogoslov'e. I ia ostaius' nalegke—  
 ne zhaleia, teriaiu dar rechi. (stanza 12)

In which language should I speak now?  
 I spoke about all that is human.  
 I am like a dead fish on the sand  
 grey discoloured scales.

In which language should I speak now?  
 The fishes' silence is the human's  
 torrent of words. And I remain, lightly packed—  
 light-heartedly lose the gift of speech.

It could easily be a resigned ending—contrasting the muteness of the fish and the wordiness of mankind, neither seems a desirable alternative. But what ensues is a change of focus that explores the problem on a stylistic level through an increased use of wordplay, an accumulation of alliterations and anagrams, search for meaning. For example: "Kto est' kto? Eto kot. On proshel OTK" (14/1) or "v etom mutnom i mokrom kak more i rom" (15/1) and on the semantic level by exploring the problem in connection with specific literary periods and/or other artforms: the futurist creates a word-morgue, "Futurist formiruet slovesnyi morg," 17/1, and there is a plea to "stop the sculptor, castrating the artists' association" [Ostanovite skul'ptora, kastriruiushchego kust iskusstv! 18/1]. It is also here, in this second part of the poem, that for the first time reference is made to the crafting of literature by means of mentioning novels, if only pulp fiction: "deshevye romany" (15/2), and an author, if only as presenting and thus declaring himself a repetition or duplicate: "Postskriptum avtora: "or povt-ora" (16/4).

At this point, the poem turns the reader's attention to a newly introduced second figure that, in allusion to the form of the poem and the discussion in a classical context, might be called an "epic hero." It describes (even though this might not be the absolutely appropriate verb for Vitukhnovskaia's linguistic experiments) his way through the 'forests' of language, reminiscent of Baudelaire's metaphor of poetry as a "forest of symbols."

By introducing another character, Vitukhnovskaia introduces an other and allows for more opposition and contrasts, and also brings up the option—or is it another possible 'punishment'?—of juxtaposing one's own to a foreign language. Although, as the author demonstrates, this does not make a difference in the quest to solve the problem, which, it seems, exists only in the artist's pathology of the mind. Over the course of the investigation of its linguistic and existential options, the lyrical subject appears to have suffered a fragmentation, which takes us back to the figure of Medusa. The pathology of fragmentation, however, cannot be diagnosed by regular medicine: "I see, there is no pathology whatsoever, " states the doctor [Ja smotriu, nikakoi patologii net, 52/1].

Hans Blumenberg's argument that there is not, contrary to what is often claimed, a succession from mythos to logos, but that mythos is essentially involved in the development of logos appears applicable to Vitukhnovskaia's poetry. Another of Blumenberg's theses describes the two generic forms of myth as (1) terror (or a depiction thereof) and (2) as poetry.<sup>80</sup> At first myth came about as an attempt to comprehend the inexplicable terror men were faced with (by nature or the gods), while it subsequently evolved into poetry. Daring to draw a connection between the historical and the linguistic dimensions of myth, Vitukhnovskaia evokes history not in its concrete, factual aspects, but as a realm in men's/poets' existence.

Through an abundant succession of alliterations and anagrams Vitukhnovskaia's lyrical "I" arrives at the conclusion that one can only attempt to trust oneself—in language—and that death poses no danger. The poem ends with the image of a "cynical

fledgling" that flies over the sea, "and everything is clear to him." It remains for us to decide if we want to read this as cautiously optimistic departure into the future or as a flight.

Vitukhnovskaia highlights the poet's ailment that men's existence in history has burdened language with so much meaning that it is a difficult poetic task to peel away the layers and reach for its essence to create language anew. Taking on the Medusa might not be a cure, but it can be instrumental. In the end of the poem, the lyrical subject escapes the danger of paralysis and reaches an "amoral moral" in conclusion: It is normal to cry, to shout. ("No moral' amoral'no. Normal'no orat'," 55/1). And the poet, daring to face the Gorgon, engages in a shouting match with the Medusa.

### 2.3. Conclusion: Productive Gazes, Silenced Cries?

Mein Gelächter hat lang die Wasser bewegt, ein gurgelndes Gelächter, das ihr manchmal nachgeahmt habt mit Schrecken in der Nacht. Denn gewußt habt ihr immer, daß es zum Lachen ist und zum Erschrecken und daß ihr euch genug seid und nie einverstanden wart.

My laughter has for long moved the waters, a gurgling giggling that you sometimes, horrified imitated at night. Because you have known all along that it makes you laugh and makes you terrified and you were satisfied by yourself and never agreed.

Ingeborg Bachmann, "Undine geht," Werke 2, 256.

In the beginning of this chapter, I have discussed the role of Athena for the myth of Medusa. I would like to return to her for a moment for a brief outlook at the interplay between destruction and creation Athena's intervention affords. She is firstly destructive

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<sup>80</sup> See the development of Blumenberg's argument in Fuhrmann, 11ff.

in that she guides and supports Perseus, thus, is instrumental in Medusa's death.<sup>81</sup> It has been argued, though, that Athena and Medusa are two sides of the same coin.<sup>82</sup> As contrasting parts of one more complex figure this notion establishes a dichotomy that renders Medusa's agency possible beyond her death which, as argued earlier, is the necessary precondition for (1) the origin of poetry and (2) the establishment of Medusa as icon, productive in several but especially the Romantic artistic tradition. Secondly, Athena is an agent who is present past Medusa's death and has an active part in the emergence of the art of fluteplay, which has been read by Cixous and other feminist critics as the more fluid, flexible form of art, as an "ear-text."

The water-references that figure in her poetry as well as in Leutenegger's novella and Alferova's story, reference Cixous's notion of the never-ending cycle of desire: The encounter is never finished, nor is it ever completely satisfactory.

Athena stops the fluteplay when she sees her own face, distorted from blowing into the flute, in the water. Is fluteplay deceptive? Or was it rather the gaze in the water,

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<sup>81</sup> Some interpretations take this to be an act of revenge for the violation of her temple, in which the rape of Medusa by Poseidon might have taken place, as some versions in variation of the meadow as the site of the deed, assert. Why, however, she is to be punished when she is the victim of the rape, is questionable. In his *Library*, Apollodorus mentions a beauty contest between Athena and Gorgon, which could give affirmation to the revenge-motif ("It is affirmed by some that Medusa was beheaded because of Athena, for they say the Gorgon had been willing to be compared with Athena in beauty." Apollodorus, *Library*, Book II, 46.)

<sup>82</sup> See *Medusa Denetrified* and *Stephan Musen*. Tobin Siebers notes on the subject: "The evolution of the Gorgoneion suggests that the seemingly antithetical figures of Medusa and Athena are only two different expressions made by the same face. Medusa and Athena seem to occupy two poles, but double one another in crossing. [...] Once we detach our view from the mythological perspective of the community, the difference between the divinity and the monster vanishes." Tobin Siebers, *The Mirror of Medusa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 24.

the moment of recognition. What was Athene attempting to get away from?<sup>83</sup> The sound is sweet, the way of making it looks ugly. Does her gaze into the water evoke Narcissistic implications? In Leutenegger's "Meduse", there is a scene that can be taken as an example to assess this question. Lured by the light of the Meduse, the narrator looks beyond (or down) and sees Rovina and the alp mirrored in the water. This might be a mirror image of her own life, or the allusion that Rovina might only be an illusion, an image in the water, like the famous Atlantis, and is it a haunted place or a place wished back.

The question of origins remains unsolved. Does the productive gaze lie in the object or in the onlooker? According to the vision of Vitukhnovskaia, and implicit in the intertextual scope of references in Sedakova's and Nikolaeva's poems, only the mutual exchange can render the process productive. Visiting the Medusa in the waves, as Leutenegger and Alferova do, allows for a coming and going of the mythic referent. The sea has a strong presence, and figures as metamorphic site both in Leutenegger and Vitukhnovskaia, but also in the images of Sedakova's poetry.<sup>84</sup> Whereas Vitukhnovskaia sees it as the other realm, and there appear to be clear boundaries, the connection between the sea as another realm and self-reflexivity attains an almost psychoanalytical dimension in Leutenegger's prose.

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<sup>83</sup> She might be more prone to this than other figures because of her fragmentation. Inge Stephan also reads her as only part of the female nature. In Stephan's reading (based on Heinrich), however not Athena, but Andromeda is Perseus' beautiful "booty" and goal: Medusa becomes emblematic of the Andromeda-snake story: by the severing of her head, cut into pieces, she becomes the beautiful virgin desired for marriage and the threatening part, represented by the snake, is being killed. Stephan, *Musen* 62f.

<sup>84</sup> On water images in Sedakova's poetry in general comp. Stephanie Sandler's remarks on the gaze into the water in the poem "Mal'chik, starik i sobaka." "Water in her poems can lie stilly as reflective surface and enigmatic depth; water also often rolls past a motionless

Medusa shares her fate of decapitation with the singer Orpheus, an iconic figure of poetry. While Medusa's most characteristic feature, however, is her powerful gaze, and her mouth is opened in a silent cry, Orpheus' mouth is the active location of his being singer, oracle, and prophet. It would be the topic of another study to analyze the semiotic connection between Medusa and Orpheus.<sup>85</sup> Orpheus's head is said to have sung even past his death. Does the Medusa speak, or laugh? None of the analyzed texts contends that she does. But it is the writers and poets who cast her and dare to look at her who, daring the look, speak ever the louder.

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viewer, which is is an important thing to note in a body of poetry where objects often are motionless, where there is little physical attention." Sandler, Gender 305f.

<sup>85</sup> The question should be posed if women authors have a stronger affinity to Medusa, if and how differently they cast Medusa and Orpheus as symbols of their poesis. Poetic examples might include Elena Shvarts and Ingeborg Bachmann, whose work I discuss elsewhere, as well as the young Russian prosaist Ol'ga Tatarinova, and Kulakova, who is a dramatist and songwriter. Kulakova also wrote an "Anti-Laokoon" that is potentially interesting for her aesthetic conception. For this study, I was not able to consult the original text, printed in the journal Urbj, Nizhnii-Novgorod, 1991/1. An example of the metonymic evocation of myth is Ol'ga Tatarinova's story "Sonety k Orfeiu" [Sonets to Orpheus], that appeared in the third volume of Preobrazhenie in 1995. The title evokes Rilke's Orpheus cycle. In Tatarinova's story, the male protagonist is a poet engaged in a challenging translation of the cycle into Russian. The female narrator, in her unconditional love for her poet, provides nourishment both real and ideal, so that he can be free to create, until one day she realizes, disillusioned, that he is but a fraud, and leaves him. The author casts the woman as the disregarded muse, and creates a cycle of citations: The modern poet Rilke evokes the ancient poet Orpheus as a poetic model. The young poet-translator of Tatarinova's story unsuccessfully aspires through the modern poet to ancient models and to a poetic essence. He gets lost, and loses both the ability to create and the woman who loved him.

Thus I conclude this chapter with a poem by Elisabeth Langgässer. "Arachne," written in 1947, metaphorically connects the weaver of stories and the Medusa. This unusual connection emphasizes Medusa's creative potential:

Von den Schultern hebt nach oben,  
 spinnenbeinig sich ihr Haar.  
 Soll sie schreien, soll sie loben?  
 Gorgos Haupt hat sie gewoben,  
 schrecklich, süß und wunderbar.<sup>86</sup>

Ascending from the shoulders  
 like spiderlegs her hair.  
 Should she scream, should she praise?  
 Gorgon's head she has woven,  
 horrible, sweet and wonderful.

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<sup>86</sup> Elisabeth Langgässer, "Arachne," *Gedichte* (Hamburg: Claasen, 1959) 159f. Langgässer also invokes facing the Medusa and seeing lies and destruction therein in her poem "Frühling 1946" [Spring 1946].



"Kassandra" by Gerda Hagenau

Die Nacht ist fürchterlich!  
 Sie ist erfüllt von tobendem Geschrei.  
 Ich höre Jauchzen, Lachen – nein, es ist  
 doch Todesröcheln nur und Angstgeschrei.  
 Hörst du es nicht? Skamandros brüllt; vom Blut  
 bäumt sich sein Leib, ist übersättigt, will  
 Nicht mehr noch neues Blut. Und doch! Und doch!  
 Ich sehe nichts als Blut! Und Brand! Und Brand!

Die Nacht ist schwül. Zu eng wird mir der Raum.  
 Gedanken kreisen, Feuerrädern gleich,  
 in meinem Hirn. Gebilde, dunkelrot  
 und grell, umflattern mich gleich Vögeln.  
 Giganten sind es, die in meiner Brust  
 voll Wildheit aufgesprungen sind. O Nacht,  
 Gebälerin der großen Taten, du  
 erfüllst mit Raserei mir meinen Sinn.<sup>2</sup>

[.....]

The night is terrible!  
 Filled with raging cries.  
 I hear cries, laughter – no, it is  
 But sighs of death and cries of fear.  
 Don't you hear it? Skamandros screams: bloodswollen  
 Its body rising, it's fed up, wants  
 Not again, more new blood . But yet! But yet!  
 I don't see anything but blood! And fire! And fire!

The night is muggy. Confined in a room too narrow  
 My thoughts circle round and round like fireballs  
 In my head. Images, dark red  
 And glaring, flap around me like birds.  
 Giants jumped from my breast  
 Fiercely savage. Oh, night,  
 Giving birth to all great deeds, you  
 Fill my senses with rage!

[.....]

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<sup>2</sup> Gerda Hagenau, "Kassandra," Der Himmel brennt Gedichte. (Wien: Edition Atelier, 1989).  
 The poem was first published in 1989, but might have been written earlier.

I preface this chapter with excerpts of two contemporary poetic re-visions of the ancient prophet Cassandra. Gerda Hagenau's poem was published in 1989, and Elena Chizhova's "Cassandra" was written between 1986–88. I have chosen these examples because they emphasize, through different poetic means, Cassandra's prophetic voice which is the main focus of this chapter. I investigate the voice as narrative theme that Russian and German women authors employ in Cassandra reinscriptions, representing the voice as tool of subjectivation, yet also as chain that binds the protagonists to the normative rules of language and society.

I highlight central aspects of Cassandra's voice, as they are manifested in the poems. A reading of Marie-Luise Kaschnitz's story "Der Tag X" [Doomsday] and Ol'ga Zhigalova's novel Shalaia Kassandra [Crazy Cassandra] investigates partial evocations of the myth that create a comparison with the works' protagonist-narrators. Together with Chizhova's poem, Zhigalova's novel is the only Russian example I discuss in this chapter. In modern Russian literature, women's texts that focus *on* Cassandra as the main subject are rare, while there is a tradition of reading the poet, especially the female poet, as a prophetic Cassandra-figure, able to predict the future.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Viktor Krivulin views the heroine of Alexandra Marinina, author of widely popular detective-novels in Russia, as a Cassandra-figure: she lives isolated and solves her cases with intuition rather than systematic research. She is, up to the point when she can prove her case, often not taken seriously, she has bad back. Despite these curious coincidences, though, there are few instances in Marinina's thriller-series that would lead to productive conclusions on female rhetoric in the character of Cassandra. Krivulin suggested that the connection between poet and prophet, and the reinscription of themes from classical ancient mythology is still valid and present in current poetry by St. Petersburg poets. Conversation with V. Krivulin, St. Petersburg, 3.7.98.

The discussion of Christa Wolf's Cassandra against Bachmann's novel Malina, drawing in addition on other prose and critical works by these authors, establishes the discussion of female voice/rhetoric as creative process of subjectivation.

Gerda Hagenau's and Elena Chizhova's poems envision Cassandra in her ancient, mythic environment, focusing on her subjective position therein. Later in the chapter, in the analyses of the poems and the other Cassandra reinscriptions, I discuss Cassandra's voice as a process of subjectivation and how it is formed in the texts of modern authors. 'Subjectivation' or 'subject-becoming' are terms I have chosen as my own working terms to denote the process of evolving from speaking in another's voice—for Cassandra that of the prophet, signalling the language of men—to a language that is her own, expressing her individual / female state of mind. Underlying subjectivation is the notion that assumes the possibility of an 'atomic' undeletable individual essence.<sup>4</sup> My assumption is that 'subjectivation' can be achieved by a probing of the voice within and against its environment. In this case, we look at a creative process, that I trace in the texts reinscribing Cassandra. Here, my understanding of 'subjectivation' is based on a notion of dialectic individuation according to Hegel's philosophy rather than Schelling's early Romantic idea of pure identity. I further suggest to "put on its feet" the idea of dialectic individuation by way of Weigel's suggestion to break through the existing (male) literary

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<sup>4</sup> Based on a platonic notion, Wilke notes this 'atomic' essence as one of the major construction principles for Wolf's Cassandra-novel; while identifying the other as the metaphor of historical turning point. See Sabine Wilke, Poetische Strukturen der Moderne: Zeitgenössische Literatur zwischen alter und neuer Mythologie (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992) 94f.

tradition via a "cross-eyed gaze" that I have discussed in the chapter on Medusa.<sup>5</sup>

Translated into the realm of the voice, the "cross-eyed-gaze" is comparable to a voice starting as a dissonant conundrum to finally achieve a pure sound. I am aware that this choice of terminology and understanding of 'subjectivation' at first sight sets up gender boundaries that are problematic and not easily detectable or applicable in every case in which a female character is rhetorically active in a text. I do not assume or aim to construct a 'whole' or 'complete' female subject. Such an approach would ignore the developments in recent, especially feminist, criticism.<sup>6</sup> It would also operate with a static, and thus possibly stigmatizing, perception of the female subject and its rhetoric. "Subjectivation" which even as a term emphasizes the implied process, can be a productive tool to follow and analyze female rhetoric, a central issue in the discussion about "women's writing" since the 1970s. In my analysis, I am exploring only a section of the numerous realms that are affected by an issue such as subjectivation.

Dichotomies between the private and the public, between personal and political rhetoric, are major themes in critical discourse. However, I will relate to them only in passing or when they invite a consideration as gendered. In relation to mythology, I explore the interaction between the retelling of the myth and the presentation of Cassandra's voice, thereby analyzing how authors use the Cassandra myth,

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<sup>5</sup> Comp. section 2.1. in chapter 2 on the Medusa. See Weigel, Schielende Blick 83–137.

<sup>6</sup> Recent studies, for example by Judith Butler and others, emphasize performative gender aspects over narrative structures. Earlier studies from the French feminist school and German criticism that developed in mutual discourse serve as a critical basis for my project with its focus on the rhetoric at work in the mythological reinscriptions.

transforming Cassandra's fate of disbelieved prophetic rhetoric into discourses on women's voice with communicative capacities.

The six texts I have chosen for this chapter are significant for the reinscription of Cassandra in contemporary literature. It is noteworthy that poetic and narrative genres prevail among them, which signals a slight shift from the dramatic tradition in which Cassandra was mainly inscribed before. Nevertheless, Cassandra has a continuous stage presence in productions of the classical tragedies.<sup>7</sup> A modern exception is Gerlind Reinshagen's play, which, in a unique melange of mythical characters has turned Cassandra into a suspicious, curious neighbor of the Medea-like-protagonist. This 'Cassandra-Änne' not only predicts destructive developments but executes them in the play Die grüne Tür. Medea bleibt [The Green Door. Medea Stays, 1999].

Especially in comparison to greater variations in the inscriptions of Medusa and Medea, Cassandra's features are fairly permanent. Cassandra, daughter of the Trojan king Paris, is a virgin priestess at the temple of Apollo. The god tempts her. Cassandra tricks him, refuses him, and receives the gift of prophecy combined with the curse that no one believes her. Taken captive and made mistress during the Trojan War by the Greek king Agamemnon, both are murdered by Agamemnon's wife Clytaemnestra.

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<sup>7</sup> Cassandra's dramatic presence was recently established in a staged version of Wolf's novel as dramatic monologue, performed by Erika Eller, directed by Hans Otto Zimmermann, at the Schwartzsche Villa, a Berlin off-theater, August 1999.

### 3.2.1. Poetic outcries – Romantic Suffering and Rhetorical Sting. Chizhova's and Hagenau's Cassandras

Elena Semenova Chizhova was born in 1957 and has been associated with the circle of contemporary St. Petersburg poets such as Elena Shvarts and Viktor Krivulin.<sup>8</sup> "Cassandra" is the opening poem of her unpublished cycle Elena. zriachikh i slepykh [Helena. Games of the Seeing and the Blind, 1987], written by Chizhova in 1986-88.<sup>9</sup> The poem was first published in the Anthology of Russian Women's Writing 1777–1992 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).<sup>10</sup> The "Helena"-cycle is to my knowledge the only example wherein Chizhova explicitly explores mythological characters, with an interesting selection from those pertaining to the Trojan War.

Like Nikolaeva and Sedakova, Chizhova is a woman author who experiments with religious and spiritual material, in a fruitful exploration of subjectivity in the ambivalent space between 'realism' and 'anti-realism' (see Kelly, *ibid.*) Chizhova sees herself within the tradition of Western literature. The principal themes of Chizhova's poetry are eternity and time, love and death, betrayal and loyalty; metaphysical categories of the eternal. The histories of St. Petersburg, ancient Greece, England and Scotland in the Middle Ages are all equally important to the poet, who sees her country

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<sup>8</sup> Though it should be noted that these poets do not form a specific poetic group or school; they are united by Petersburg as their place of residence and by the concern for similar poetic themes.

<sup>9</sup> In her History of Russian Women's Writing Kelly quotes the date as 1984, 381.

<sup>10</sup> Edited by Catriona Kelly, 334 in English translation and 478 in Russian.

in the context of European history. Her Tragediia Marii Stiuart korolevy shotlandskoi [Tragedy of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland] from 1992 is considered her main work.

A comparison between the very different poems by Hagenau and Chizhova shows that both use imagery of violence, such as fire and belligerent birds. Fire, and also frenzy are explicit or alluded to in both poems.

In Hagenau's poem Cassandra's voice mourns loss, both communal and personal:

I hear cries, laughter – no, it is  
But sighs of death and cries of fear. (3/4)

Ah, rejected by Hades even, I return  
Poorest of the poor, to life. (21/22)

She speaks of her own life, that is embedded in a society at war, and she indicates her role as receptive—"I hear." In Chizhova's poem, Cassandra's voice is so strongly emphasized that it becomes itself an independent subject. Though the situation is similar—Cassandra is scanning the burning city of Troy—her subjectivity is subdued. Notions of fear, fire, and frenzy prevail in both poems though they are very differently cast. Chizhova uses the metaphoric backdrop thus created to inscribe her Cassandra as a prophetess who is concerned about the use of her prophecy. Her doubts are voiced as a question that shows her concern beyond her personal fate:

[...]For whom, for what reason  
must someone prophesy shame and doom? (5/6)

Especially Hagenau's Cassandra, who mourns the marriage she will never experience, these poems have been filtered through the Romantic tradition, with a possible influence of Schiller's ballad Kassandra in this context.

Chizhova subtly projects fear, a strong motif in Hagenau's poem, onto the objects—"Priam's city" (7), "carrion" (13), and the "strange tangels of enemies, friends"

(14). While the perspective of Chizhova's Cassandra goes from her inside to the outside events and appears actively and aggressively involved in the events that lead to the burning city the poem describes, Hagenau's prophet perceives her environment as happening to her, being inflicted on her, while she watches and reacts. Hagenau's poem, though, foregrounds the lyrical "I" more strongly.<sup>11</sup> Through the sparse use of the personal pronoun in Chizhova's poem, it gains more weight when applied, e.g. as in the poem's center, almost its middle, in line 16: "I am the black plague that eats Priam's city, / not a woman—a sting."

In Russian, the pronoun is even more pronounced, as it is divided from the continuing sentence by a hyphen: "Ja—chernaia nemoch' [...]." Treating the part of the sentence within the hyphen as an ellipsis, the reader is left with "Ja—zhalo," which provokes the equation between Cassandra and a "sting," as translated in the printed version. The Russian "zhalo" also means the tongue of a snake, thus creating an ambivalence that connects to the "treason" Cassandra is accused of and resonates in the sound of the alliteration "*zhenshchina—zhalo* that resembles a snake's hissing noise.

Chizhova's poem is very dynamic. The subject goes through three metamorphoses. The lyrical "I" is first "a singing reed at Apollo's lips I beat." From voice there seems a return to being a woman, with the immediate correction of 'not a woman', but 'black plague' and 'sting.' The visual resemblance of 'reed' and 'sting' is noteworthy and establishes a connection, associating the sharp quality of the reed. The return to the voice, emphasized through repetition of the noun, though, seems strangely

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<sup>11</sup> While in Hagenau's poem the narrator uses the first person "I" thrice and the personal pronoun eight times, as opposed to twice and once in Chizhova's case—though one has to

dis-embodied and has no pronominal connection to the lyrical subject. It is ambiguous whether 'this voice' even belongs to the lyrical subject or to the Erinnyes's choir.

There is no immediate textual proof that Chizhova had also Medusa, Athena, and the creation of flute play in mind when she composed the Cassandra-poem. What strikes me in the course of my discussion is the metaphorical relation the poem creates between the poetic voice and the 'singing reed' of the ... stanza as if it were a flute, which is strongly reminiscent of Athena playing the flute, a theme I discuss in the chapter on the Medusa. But where in Chizhova's poem is the connection between the voice and the body? This voice appears to have an independent existence outside the body. It materializes in a vision wherein the voice flies over the burning city of Troy to "echo" in strong metaphors the images she receives, as if it were independent from Cassandra's body. In contrast to Hagenau, Chizhova raises the question of reason, intention, in asking "for whom, for what reason must one prophesy shame and doom?" (line 6). The voice clearly is the subject, simultaneously active and an observer. It is singled out and solitary, not part, but outside and above the city and the people, among whom the distinction between friend and enemy is blurred: "this voice [...] *dives* for carrion [...] / *high above* the strange tangles of enemies, friends." (14/15)

Kelly characterizes Chizhova's portrait of the prophetess as follows: "[...] Cassandra speaks of her prophetic gift in metaphors representing a femininity at once stifling and threatening" (Kelly 1994, 381). Without referring to her own fate as Hagenau's Cassandra does, Chizhova's prophet emphasizes the contrast between gods and men. She alludes to the mythical background of the gods' involvement in the Trojan

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account for the difference in length – Hagenau's poem has 28 lines, Chizhova's 16.

War; her narrator's vivid metaphorical portrayal emphasizes the competitive, but almost playful way in which the gods appear to handle human fate (lines 15/16). By juxtaposing contrasts—woman/sting, hope/funeral pyre, enemies/friends, gods/men, the narrator reveals the upheaval and instability that has overcome Troy.

Some of the images in the poem resonate with Schiller's ballad, though the general tone differs greatly, and Chizhova's Cassandra questions, but does not reject prophecy. Schiller plays continuously with the contrast of blindness and sight, and refers to Troy as the "city of the blind" (7<sup>th</sup> stanza, line 3), while Chizhova writes "the blind make our prices." "Torches flame" in Schiller's ballad, which begins by evoking the doomed marriage of Achilles and Polyxena: "but not in Hymens hand / I see it [the flame] flowing towards the clouds / but not like to smoke of sacrifice" (5<sup>th</sup> stanza, lines 1-4) appears ironically varied by Chizhova as "hope burns on the funeral pyre." Blindness and insight as significant poetic tropes are evoked, played with, and destroyed in the poetic fire that is enflamed. Fire, a proto-trope with regards to prophecy, is ironized by depicting it as the force that destroys hope by burning it.

Chizhova's cycle Elena. Igr'y zriachikh i slepykh, to which "Cassandra" is a kind of preface, has two parts each containing three poems entitled "Menelaus," "Paris," and "Elena," in the first part addressing mainly Paris, in the second mainly Elena.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Paris's first poem evokes a connection to the Erinnyes of Cassandra's poem:

"Za Parisom – ne Erinii / gnev! / B'et krylom nazoilivyi uspek." (p. 3 of manuscript)

While Elena, mourning her fate, in the second cycle likens herself to a sybil:

"Ne zhenshchinoi plachu, chtob nas minovalo / –sud'be ne zakroesh' glaza. / Ne zhenshchinoi tkala sebe pokryvalo– /Sivilloi. No rvetsia sleza." P. 9 of manuscript.

constellation focuses on the three protagonists involved in the tragic love-triangle that caused the Trojan War. The disturbing Cassandra-poem is but a preface setting up the dangerously charged atmosphere within which the other encounters take place.

Cassandra evokes a scenery that associates the sea through her metaphors billows that break on a bank, tides of men—and its rough instability, The other poems also refer to ships and sea, evoking notions of change, departure, and the humanly uncontrollable force of the sea.

Subjectivation in Chizhova's poem is reduced to a voice that, devoid of individual fate, is watching and commenting on the fate of her people. The metaphors are striking and the similes the only reference to the femaleness of the narrative voice. The image of her beating at Apollo's lips as a singing reed (lines 2/3) is erotically charged while also evoking violence. No personal desires, though, are voiced, as in Hagenau's *Cassandra*.

A particular, original *Cassandra* tradition has been forged by Gerda Hagenau. Her interest in the prophet that continues throughout an extensive time period begins in 1948 with an unpublished tragedy. She wrote a story on the prophet that remained unpublished, and the *Cassandra*-poem I discuss below. It takes most of its text from the earlier tragedy, and thus can be read as the poetic essence of Hagenau's *Cassandra* revision.

Many of Gerda Hagenau's poems are lyrical, sensual snapshots and observe a concrete event, a moment in time. In this respect, her *Cassandra* poem stands alone and is not typical for the author. Gerda Hagenau's geographic-biographical background,

make her a borderline case to be included in this study like Zhigalova. Born in Poland in 1918, she has studied, lived, and published in the German language context—she currently lives in Vienna. Very active in editing and publishing Polish literature, Hagenau has written mainly non-fiction, some prose, and some poetry. In her early unpublished tragedy, Hagenau inscribes a moralistic warning against the violence of all wars, for which Thomas Epple coined the term "Kassandra-Bewußtsein" – "Cassandra-consciousness" (Epple, 234), which I read to be similar to the above mentioned employment of "Cassandra cries," mostly in a political context. In Hagenau's expressionist drama, Cassandra's warnings remain unheard as well. Her fervent, expressive call for reason is countered by mischievous laughter. Hagenau's five-act tragedy follows neoclassical models from the Nineteenth Century and makes strong moralistic statements. I describe the tragedy in some detail, because Hagenau has lifted quotes from her tragedy and newly combined them to form the later poem "Cassandra" as a poetic montage. At the heart of her drama and the later poem is the contrast between war and peace. Hagenau pairs several couples of characters on both the Greek and the Trojan side as mouthpieces for one party respectively. Her Cassandra gradually refrains from frantic, crazed attempts to warn her fellow Trojans and becomes a resigned, disillusioned woman whose greatest wish is to no longer see more than others and to be taken away from her miserable life. Before Priamos and Hecuba she behaves very much as a daughter who would like nothing more than to behave correctly.<sup>13</sup> Two

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<sup>13</sup> Epple is the only, and reliable source for information here. His footnote on the drama, in Epple, 234: "Hagenau, Gerda. Kassandra. Tragedy in Five Acts, unpublished manuscript, p. 63. 1948 parts of the play were presented at a public reading. Its structure, language, and narrated event comply with the classicist plays of the late Nineteenth Century. Hagenaus

alterations of the mythic story in Hagenau's tragedy are noteworthy for her conception of the female prophet. Here, Cassandra reproaches her father for having forced her into priesthood. She is cast almost like a female mirror image of Paris. While he is the object of the three goddesses' contest wherein they bargain with him over his choice of wealth, power, or love, Hagenau's Cassandra claims to have been asked by Apollo to choose between him, the image of a god and a wordly king, Agamemnon.

Before the publication of the poem which would distill and re-tailor the tragedy, in 1976 Hagenau published a popular scientific study on 'prophets and seducers,' in which she gives an easily comprehensible summary of the history of prophecy and some quotes from Aeschylus's Agamemnon.<sup>14</sup> She compares Cassandra to Calchas, who, unlike Cassandra, is listened to. Hagenau's description of the prophets contains a subtle gender-related judgment. Calchas is presented as the more serious "cult prophet," whereas Cassandra is running wild and unkempt like the sibyls or bacchae—emphasizing the notion of Cassandra as a mad woman.<sup>15</sup> In part Hagenau's

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new addition, significant for the Zeitgeist of the time the play was written is Cassandra's pacifist stance.

<sup>14</sup> Gerda Hagenau, Verkünder und Verführer. Prophetie und Weissagung in der Geschichte (Düsseldorf, Wien: Econ, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Comp. Feder on female madness. See also Ledergerber on the connection between the Sybil and Cassandra.

One of Hagenau's examples that I find curious only because it can be linked to the Slavic tradition, is Hagenau's mention of the "most successful clairvoyant of the Eastern block: Wanga Dimitrowna." (26) who lives in "the land of Cassandra, the classical country of prophecy, near the border between Greece and Bulgaria." Hagenau (1979), 24ff. The German title, Verkünder und Verführer is almost homonymous, a strong alliteration. Cassandra vs. Calchas: "Aber eines tut sie noch vor ihrem Tod: sie reißt sich die Seherkränze vom Hals und zerbricht ihren Tyrkosstab, beides Attribute des Sehertums. Sie sagt sich los von dem Gott, der so großes Unglück über sie gebracht hat. / Anders der Seher Calchas bei Homer. Auch er praktizierte seine Kunst, die ihm von Apollo gewährt wurde, und er sah "vergangene, gegenwärtige und zukünftige Dinge", und auch er hatte "seine Gabe von Gott" bekommen.

poem reads as a poetic illustration of the frenzied prophet she has painted in her study, especially in the second stanza. Yet in the poem Cassandra appears desperate, but already tamed, void of illusions, she takes account of her city's destruction, and mourns her fate of unfulfilled marriage. Her longing for love, marriage, a prophecy-free life subscribes partly to the romantic version of Cassandra.

While there is no immediate or recognizable citation of Schiller's ballad, I contend that there is a significant resemblance in tone, setting, and focus with Hagenau's poem. Like Schiller, Hagenau contrasts the settings of festivity and war in her first stanza. Like his Cassandra, she mourns the marriage she will never experience. Schiller's Cassandra begs Apollo to:

Nimm, o nimm die traur'ge Klarheit,  
Mir vom Aug den blut'gen Schein!  
Schrecklich ist es, deiner Wahrheit  
Sterbliches Gefäß zu sein.

Take, oh take the cruel clairvoyance  
take from my eye the bloody glow  
It is terrible to be your truth's  
mortal vessel (8<sup>th</sup> stanza, 4–8)

while Hagenau's Cassandra has bloody visions:

Die Nacht ist schwül. Zu eng wird mir der Raum.  
Gedanken kreisen, Feuerrädern gleich,  
in meinem Hirn. Gebilde, dunkelrot  
und grell, umflattern mich gleich Vögeln.

The night is muggy. Confined in a room too narrow  
My thoughts circle round and round like fireballs  
In my head. Images, dark red  
And glaring, flap around me like birds. (2<sup>nd</sup> stanza, lines 9–12).

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Aber ihm glaubte man. Er war hochgeachtet. Ein Kultprophet; während Kassandra ungezügelt, gleich den wild und frei umherschweigenden Sibyllen "ungeschminkt, mit rasendem Mund"

It is noteworthy that Hagenau lifts these last verses almost directly from her earlier tragedy. There, however, Agamemnon pronounces them in the first act which takes place exclusively among the Greeks. Cassandra's second speech during her first appearance in the tragedy's second act, in dialogue with Glauke, appears in the poem at the beginning of the following stanza, continuing the image of night as birthplace of rage and fear.

In the tragedy, Cassandra leaves Glauke and returns with a report from the situation outside the temple; her report turns into the poem's opening stanza. The final stanza can be found in the tragedy as well (fourth act, scene 16). Comparing the two works and their very different genres, I find curious what Hagenau has chosen to include in the poem, especially since she takes one stanza that had been originally ascribed to Agamemnon. Reading the poem by itself, though, there is no noticeable switch in voice. The images of night, fire, and fear complement each other. Cassandra appears bound in a cage of frenzy from where she views the events of Troy. Like Chizhova, who metonymically evokes the myth, Hagenau assumes that her reader can complete the mythic story in his/her mind. She uses explicit references to the myth extremely sparingly—beyond the title, only the mention of the Scamander hints at the setting.

While Chizhova strongly emphasizes Cassandra's voice, Hagenau's prophet emphasizes what she sees. What she hears are voices crying out around her, but most metaphors pertaining to her own persona are related to vision: the blood she sees in the second stanza, the vision of the fireballs and birds in the third stanza, her vision of herself as bride in the final stanza. The poem ends with the image of the "fearfully

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ihre schrecklichen Gesichte hinausschrie." 24f.

widened eye." Subjectivation gains significance especially towards the end, when Cassandra alludes to her own fate and her unfulfilled desires. While she is able to name them, her rhetoric does not attempt to effect a change of her situation, for example by speaking against what fears her. The poem ends with a still-life-image of fear. This ending resonates a finiteness and hopelessness which evokes pity in the reader.

Beyond the collection of poetry that contains "Cassandra," in her elegies, Lobet die Welt. Elegien zu unserer Zeit [Praise the World. Elegies for our Time, published in 1993], Hagenau continues to allude to religious, and classical mythology.<sup>16</sup> The elegies touch on prophecy, and are fairly religious and start on a melancholic note on the "Unbehausten," the 'homeless,' to be read as a spiritual rather than physical homelessness. They end on a hopeful, religious note, implying that a home can be found by believing. The first elegy describes the Trojan War, and even if Cassandra is not explicitly mentioned, the reader senses the connection.<sup>17</sup> While shaping her Cassandra for half a century, Gerda Hagenau has continuously created the trope of a suffering woman full of longing, who is denied her livelihood and whose concern is less to find her independent voice than to reintegrate herself into a romanticized happiness created by the bonds of marital and familial love.

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<sup>16</sup> Gerda Hagenau, Lobet die Welt. Elegien zu unserer Zeit (Wien: Edition Atelier, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> In the first elegy she mentions the fall of Troy and Carthage.

An image from the second elegy is also reminiscent of Medusa and the horror of facing history. The first stanza reads: "Mächtig ist vieles, doch riesig erst in der Nacht./Unvermutet springt es dich an und dringt ein / In die geheimsten Kammern des eigenen Ichs, / Die du so sorglich verschlossen hältst vor dir selbst. / Jedwedes Siegel bricht, und die Riegel schnappen zurück: / Tor- und türlos steht dein Inneres offen, / Daß du gelähmt vor Entsetzen verstummst, / Ehe du noch zum Schrei geöffnet den Mund."

### **3.2.2. Warning Voices From Beyond. Cassandras by Marie-Luise Kaschnitz and Ol'ga Zhigalova.**

Marie-Luise Kaschnitz's story "Der Tag X" [Doomsday, 1966] belongs to the second reinscriptive category I have outlined in the introduction, as a story that cites and then evokes but does not fully renarrate the myth. (Ferngespräche. Erzählungen, Frankfurt: Insel, 1990). Marie-Luise Kaschnitz (1901–1974) after World War II changed her previous focus to renarrate and annotate mythic stories.<sup>18</sup> In 1972 Kaschnitz had written that she "withdrew from the lure of mythology" to "turn to the people of our time." Since the 60s she published short stories on contemporary people whose lives are often marked by loss and suffering, yet narrated subtly, and lucidly, without voicing complaint. From her straightforward pre-war retellings of Greek myths she had shifted to applying some of their characteristic features to her own contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> "Der Tag X" vividly shows the repercussions of the recent war and evokes its looming danger, thus offering an interesting comparison to Wolf's novel. Written during a period of nuclear armament, it reflects rising fear that a third world war might. In this context the works have a significantly diverging 'noise level' of their female protagonists' capability of making themselves heard.

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<sup>18</sup> See e.g. her comments in an edition of Grillparzer's Medea.

<sup>19</sup> "Erst nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg habe ich mich aus dem Bann der Mythologie und dem der südlichen Landschaft gelöst und mich der Gegenwart und den Menschen unserer Tage zugewandt." Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, "Nachwort zur Neuauflage der Griechischen Mythen." Griechische Mythen. (Hamburg: Claasen, 1972) 176.

Life appears quaint. The narrator is a housewife and a mother, her husband goes to work, and the sons to school, people in the streets are running errands. Towards the story's final scene when the family gathers around the radio, the "Volksempfänger", instead of news there is only a grungy sound from the airwaves, reminiscent of the time when the radio was the medium to transport news about the current situation. But these connections are only drawn by the female protagonist and narrator. Her husband and two sons perceive the day as normal, they are rather disturbed and annoyed by her strange prophecy. She then gathers her courage to tell her husband, who ignores her, that it is the final day. In front of the children she keeps quiet, though she is disturbed that on this particular day, when she tries to get them to stay home, they insist on going to school—they want to see a movie in class and participate in an exciting schoolyard meeting to secretly smoke. The narrator is left alone with her anxieties and her prophetic visions that have disturbed her for a while. She directly addresses the reader in the opening passage:

"Sie wissen schon, was für einen Tag ich damit meine. Das X steht da für ein U, U gleich Untergang, Weltuntergang nicht gerade, aber doch etwas Ähnliches[...] (184)

"You know what day I mean with that, the "X" stands for a "D," "D" as in "doom, maybe not doomsday, but something similar."

The narrator bases her ambiguous wordplay on the German idiom for fooling somebody, "jemanden ein X für ein U vormachen"—in German "doom" is called "Untergang". On the other hand, the phrase "x-beliebig" means "just any" and thus leaves space for the notion that this is just any day. Only once does the narrator explicitly make a Cassandra-reference directed to her husband, when she complains that

nobody believed the ancient prophet, either. Her husband strongly dislikes her speech ["Du hast recht", sagte ich, 'ich kenne mich so auch nicht, aber gerade deswegen mußte etwas daran sein und der Cassandra hat auch niemand geglaubt.'" 187]. During the day, time seems to accelerate and the narrator's suppressed panic rises as everything around her remains quiet and normal.

The story suggests intertextual connections. Some literary texts appear significant for the narrator. While the older son wants help with an essay on Wilhelm Tell and asks if the act of murder in the play is revenge, the narrator looks for books that might be appropriate reading to indulge in as possible last reading in case the world would really end. She picks out and then rejects Goethe's trilogy of passions, Jean Paul and Hesperus. Later that evening, she evokes the family's memories, in an attempt to resume her life with her husband, to imprint upon him the memory of what constitutes their lives:

Jedes der eingeklebten Bildchen ruft eine Menge von Erinnerungen hervor, Landschaften, Gespräche, Streit und Zärtlichkeiten, Tage und Nächte, das ganze Leben kann da noch einmal aufsteigen, und das will ich auch, ich kann meinem Mann keine Liebeserklärung machen, aber ich kann ihm das zeigen, ein Leben voll Liebe an unserem letzten Tag.

Every little pasted photograph evokes many memories, landscapes, talks, quarrels and moments of tenderness, days and nights, the whole life can be evoked again, that is what I want, I can't tell my husband that I love him, but I can show him this, a life full of love on our final day. (193)

The photographic images evoke memories and have a quality of permanence in which the narrator finds a certain comfort. While the photographs cannot prevent the end of the world, they might survive those depicted on them. This notion is reminiscent

of the later statement Wolf's Cassandra makes that image will survive word.<sup>20</sup> When a distracting sound emanates from the radio, the story's mood switches and the narrator suddenly develops a rather feverish, seemingly unmotivated activity. She counters her husband's rising nervousness with a pragmatic statement, "only life can save life."<sup>21</sup> In the end, the world still exists, though the narrator is unwilling to accept her fate of being ignored in her warnings. Nevertheless, she surrenders, resigned to fooling herself and keeping quiet about her unsettling visions that do not affect the other family members. She complains that contrary to Cassandra, she has to fool also her own husband and children.<sup>22</sup> The ending is strange and bitter. Just before, the narrator had emphasized the importance of conserving life in memory. What the narrator takes as a consolation—that, once the narrator's visions are fulfilled, nobody will be left to think about the her or any family (196)—is only an illusion.

In Kaschnitz's story, Cassandra remains a citation, a mere allusion to the myth that the author employs to underpin and strengthen the unsettling atmosphere of the story. Without the evocation of the myth, the story would lack suspense. Furthermore, the narrator turns the reader into her quiet accomplice. Thus, the reader supports her credibility because s/he knows that in the end she must be right. Written post-war and

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<sup>20</sup> In Cassandra, and has also a parallel in the timelessness of images". Compare footnote 83.

<sup>21</sup> "Mein Mann wirft mir einen Blick zu, einen Blick voll von Schrecken, aber ich will nicht darauf eingehen, [...] ich bin anderer Ansicht geworden, der Ansicht nämlich, daß nur das Leben das Leben noch retten kann." 195.

<sup>22</sup> "Ja, so wird es sein und bei der Cassandra war es gewiß nur deswegen anders, weil sie keinen Mann und keine Kinder hatte, die sie betrügen mußte, wie ich meinen Mann und meine Kinder jetzt betrüge, obwohl es doch folgerichtig wäre, zu sagen, da habt ihr es, ihr müßt jetzt sterben,

pre-feminism, "Der Tag X" features a female protagonist who acknowledges her great, perhaps prophetic, sensitivity and takes toll of her life within her family. Her subjectivity remains repressed, though, and she decides to remain integrated in her familiar context.

Far more upbeat in favoring love over skeptical Cassandra-cries is Ol'ga Zhigalova's émigré-novel Shalaia Kassandra [Crazy Cassandra]. Published in 1971 in Washington, it is the only full-length Russian novel with a Cassandra-theme. Its literary quality differs from Wolf's Cassandra or Bachmann's Malina. In comparison with these works' focus on subjectivation and female rhetoric that work against obstacles in their environment, Shalaia Kassandra contains a process of subject-becoming, wherein the protagonist Nina has to reconcile the split into a 'double nature' inside herself. She quotes and evokes the myth rather one-dimensionally, but Nina's voice is never seriously questioned, nor is she ever in serious danger as subject. In this novel Cassandra is Nina's imagined alter ego, the vivid expression of Nina's inner divide, at the same time "reason and explanation" for her unstable character which is prone to instantaneous mood-swings (25). This 'crazy Cassandra' can be read as a counterexample to the madness continuously endangering the voices in Bachmann's and Wolf's novels: shalyi denotes a lighter notion of craziness with ironic undertones. Shalyi

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warum habt ihr mir nicht geglaubt. Ich sage das aber nicht und am Ende des langen Tages ist es dann schließlich so weit, ich betrüge mich selbst." 196.

is an unusual, colloquial adjective meaning "chance related, chaotic character".<sup>23</sup> Nina calls herself "Shalaia Cassandra" in "moments of critical self-evaluation" (26).

Ol'ga Zhigalova is little known as author. She appears to have published only one novella in Russian after Zhalaiia Cassandra, Dusha Veshchei, [The Soul of Things, New York: Tovarishchestvo Zarubezhnykh Pisatelei, 1982). Her brief autobiography, written in English for her grandchildren who do not command Russian, lays out a typical Russian life in an unstable century. Zhigalova spent her childhood with her well-to-do, bourgeois family who had a country estate, Zhigalovo, near Smolensk. In the 1920s, she emigrated to Berlin, where she married and had some contact with the Russian intellectual circles. Though she does not write much about it, her portrait, painted by Leonid Pasternak, suggests this observation.<sup>24</sup> Under the threat of Nazism, Zhigalova emigrated to the States with her husband, a banker, and her only son. She revisited Russia only 40 years later in the 1960s.

Zhigalova's first novel is a low-brow romance with predictable turns and much repetition about two uneven lovers who long to be meant for another, but are not. Nina, Russian-born widow of the famous Austrian conductor Brockhaus, takes a boat from their home in New York to Europe. She meets the younger, humble scientist Martin. They like each other and spend time together in Paris. Without foregoing the formal address for each other they enter a love affair. There are conventions to deal with and

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<sup>23</sup> Meaning the same as 'shal'noi', the Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo iazyka defines the meaning of 'shal'yi' as 'sluchainyi, bezporiadochnyi kharakter' – an 'unruly personality'.

none of them ready to overcome them: the age difference, Martin's desire for a proper family complete with a husband who earns the living and a wife to look after him, the house and the kids, without reaching for luxury or the stars, which he doubts he will be able to provide. Martin's matter-of-fact stance and Nina's romantic desires, nourished by the provisions of a care-free financial situation providing for numerous travels to and from Europe, tickets to the opera and fancy dinners endure about three years of ravishing meetings. Martin meets Nina's stepdaughter Jenny, born and raised by her mother in France, finds her to his liking, and finally marries her. Nina appears to be out of the game, suffers a bit but endures, secretly convinced that she and not the young European woman, only ten years her junior, has Martin's real love. In the meantime, Nina finds comfort in charity work and the company of Lindsay, an old friend of her husband. They eventually marry, the equilibrium appears close to perfect, they even help Martin achieve his peace after Jenny leaves him for her first love, a maritime engineer turned hospital manager in the south of France, who fulfills her childhood dream of a family and a prominent husband. The novel has a bittersweet happy end, thoroughly moralistic, after a predictably and in the end slightly rushed denouement.

Where is the space for myth, the influence of Cassandra, the Trojan princess and prophet in this story void of tragedy? Nina's alter ego and inner voice Cassandra intuitively looks ahead and predicts maybe not the future, but the future development, preferably of matters of the heart. She is in most instances a warning voice Nina does not listen to. Assessing a particular situation that Nina is in, and commenting on it, Cassandra functions partly as the narrator, partly as her voice, like an inner monologue,

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<sup>24</sup> Portray from 1932, reproduction in Zhigalova, 162.

a projection of Nina's consciousness. Cassandra is Nina's "dvoinik", her double, Doppelgänger, with whom she is in constant quarrel: On the one hand "life-embracing, courageously looking into the future, willing to believe in everything, to agree with everything, to receive joy from everything. [...]" against "this other, continuously looking for the truth, cruelly negative [...] that makes her hardly convincible, indecisive, full of doubts and fear." (25)<sup>25</sup>

Zhigalova's novel is an example of a reductive myth-evocation. By using the name of Cassandra, the novel metonymically evokes the myth, and presupposes that the reader will recognize it and associate the myth as a foil against which s/he can read the story. Zhigalova has stripped the mythic character of almost all her qualities but her clairvoyance and skepticism.<sup>26</sup> The addition of the adjective "shalyi" weakens the association with the ancient tragic character, as it is not compatible with the expectation of high tragedy. At the same time it creates a tension. Seemingly one name, it contains both sides of the character. Yet, Akhmatova's concept of 'dvoinichestvo' has but faint traces in Zhigalova's crafting of Nina/Cassandra.

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<sup>25</sup> "Ona rana pochustvovalo v sebe dve razlichnye, postoianno vstupaiushie v spor, natyry: zhizneradostnuiu, smelo gliadiashchuiu v budushchee, gotovuiu vsemu verit', so vsem soglasht'sia, vsemu radovatsia. Eto vrozhdennoe svetloe nachalo vstrechalo protivorechiia, bylo kak by postoianno odergivaemo za rukav tem drugim, ishushchim pravdu, besposhadno pronitsatel'nym, vsego opasaiushchimsia, delavshum ee neuverennoi, nereshitel'noi, polnoi somnenii i strakhov. Ona prislushivalas' k etomu vnutrennemu skepticheskomu golosu, ne vseгда veria, ne vsiudu sleduia. No vsiu zhizn' ei ne udavalos' raz edinit'sia, razoitis' so svoim dvoinikom – Kassandroi," 25.

<sup>26</sup> The interpretation that Nina calls her "Cassandra" because she, feeling special herself, wants to associate herself with a tragic princess and priestess, who is cast out of her country

Romantic longing for love is set up as the major motivation through the novel's epigraph, a quote "from a conversation":

—O chem vy pishite?  
 —O liubvi bez budushchego.  
 —Liubov' zhivet I bez budushchego. (7)

—What do you write about?  
 —About love without a future  
 —Love lives even without a future.

The novel explores different ideas and models of love, including friendship, erotic desire, family, and charity. Nina's subjectivation lies in her gradual insight that the Romantic image in her head is not the 'prophecy' the future has in store for her. Nor can she achieve happiness by continuing to be deliberately blind to the realities that she senses and that the seeing Cassandra continues to tell her.

Nina truly cherishes memory, which, far more personalized and romanticized than in Bachmann's and Wolf's novel, is always a central theme, especially since it is always personal. Nina's encounter with Martin evokes not only memories of her first love, but is an attempt to reconstruct or remodel her own history by continuing a lost love and pushing back her ambivalent memories of the marriage with Brockhaus. Her personal concept of love and striving for completeness and perfection in it is embedded in a frame of intertextual references: with an allusion to the "two souls inside her" when she describes her first recognition of her alter ego Cassandra, and the wish to the fleeting

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(rather than with for example a sybil) appears plausible, but has to remain speculation as there is no textual proof.

minute. There, she quotes Goethe's Faust: "Oh tarry yet, thou art so fair".<sup>27</sup> The list of allusions continues. The narrator mentions the essential power of love in connection with Paul's Corinthian letter. Nina and Martin attend a performance of Candide. On another evening, Nina shows off a special dress, that "has provoked comparisons with Anna Karenina" (202). She glosses over the implicit reference to the tragic end of Anna Karenina's love story.<sup>28</sup> A suggestion of Anna as a morally ambivalent character is played on tongue-in-cheek. Only Cassandra, who cannot be fooled, detects the pretense in Martin's slightly mocking reply when he remarks that the dress will attract admirers.<sup>29</sup>

The novel has some features of the Bildungsroman, although I would hesitate to define it as such because the romantic love-story is far more emphasized. Still, part of Nina's learning includes a temporal adjustment toward living in the present. Her final contentedness stems to a great extent from this acknowledgment. In their selective evocation, her memories of the past feature a happier period. Her "cloudless and happy childhood and youth did not present many occasions for the whisperings and influence

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<sup>27</sup> Part II, Act V, 11582/3.

<sup>28</sup> Further, Nina has a good friend who is an intimate connoisseur of Dante and Shakespeare, two further examples of authors known for their intricate poetics of love.

<sup>29</sup> In her brief autobiography, Zhigalova, otherwise noting little about literature, describes her family's reading habits. She notes that there was no library in Zhigalovo, and that her mother's reading consisted of Tolstoy's novels, especially Anna Karenina, which she reread. The father is depicted as reading the newspaper, her brothers discussing Bakunin and Locke. The family's stratification in terms of reading habits is conventional. Zhigalova quotes her mother on Tolstoy's novel. This comment could serve as a motto for the moral stance that prevails in Shalala Cassandra: "A woman should love her husband and stay for good or ill and not run away from him." 154.

of Cassandra"—Nina resists and can live happily whole for a while.<sup>30</sup> Later she notes though that "Life is always in the future: somewhere there." (146) Despite Cassandra's interspersed comments on what the "somewhere there" might contain, her resistance continues until she learns by experience.

During a visit home to Gmund, Nina remembers her first love Numa. The year she got married, Numa died in the mountains and was found with an Edelweiß in his hands. These traces of trivialized romantic tragedy provide Nina with an image that allows her to situate her own memories into a pseudo-mythical context.

Judging by the expectations that Nina formulates in the novel, her subjectivation comes to a successful end—not her initial, romanticized, but a more realistic, thus more livable end. As an émigré novel *Shalaja Cassandra* thematizes the search for a place to call home physically and emotionally, through the inner dialogue between Nina's two voices and souls, that towards the end merge increasingly into one voice, since the more reasonable Cassandra gains the upper hand.

### 3.2.3. Speaking Against Time. Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann

Poetic Cassandras are largely devoid of personalized features. They appear to focus on phenomena that concern, in Chizhova's case, the prophet as outcast and suffering for, but not inside a group, for Hagenau the woman suffering from exceptional

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<sup>30</sup> Zhigalova writes a mirror scene of interest: By chance, during playtime, young Nina finds herself in front of a mirror. Curiously she examines her face and all its details to conclude that before her was what people call "beautiful" – and it was her. The lay psychologized scene

knowledge that isolates and denies her integration. Through a different angle, exploring the Cassandra's rhetoric as constitutive or destructive tool, Wolf's and Bachmann's prose works engage the myth. In this section, I discuss Christa Wolf's (born 1929) Cassandra-novel (1983) and Ingeborg Bachmann's (1926–1973) last published work Malina (1971) in comparison and relation to each other as two novelistic experiments in search of the female voice.<sup>31</sup> There are several thematic links: Both authors explore the female voice in various temporal dimensions and experiment with a subjectivation process against issues of memory and death, as I have noted in the chapter's introduction. Several of Wolf's essays on or mentioning Bachmann illustrate her relation to Bachmann's work and to how it deals with the female (poetic) voice.<sup>32</sup>

More than a decade lies between Bachmann's last published novel Malina as part of her Todesarten (Deathtypes)-project, which feminist critics have just lately

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ends in Nina's acknowledgment though, that she later learned that her beauty was not the most important feature in life. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Though originally presented as a lecture series the last lecture was a reading of the novel itself. Lectures and novel have been published separately in Germany: Christa Wolf, Kassandra. Eine Erzählung. And Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra. Frankfurter Poetikvorlesung. Both at (Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1983). The English translation, which appeared only a year thereafter, keeps the texts together, but reverses the order: Cassandra. A Novel and Four Essays. Transl. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984). All quotations from this edition, referencing first the page number from the English and then the original German edition. Though the German title marks the genre as "Erzählung," which would be translated into "story" or "novella," I have chosen to retain the term "novel" when referring to the text, because it has all the properties of that genre, and follows the English translation.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Wolf's fourth lecture and her essay "Die zumutbare Wahrheit. Prosa der Ingeborg Bachmann" (1966) Lesen und Schreiben. Neue Sammlung (Darmstadt/Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1972) 121–134.

'discovered', and Wolf's Cassandra.<sup>33</sup> Wolf's Cassandra, like Hagenau's and Chizhova's poems, evokes the mythical Cassandra in the ancient context of the Trojan War. In the context of the novel that envisions the events in Troy, Wolf plays on and probes notions of voice, musicality/sound and image. Thus, she rhetorically explores several issues that texts on the Medusa represent from a theoretical or iconical point of view. Cassandra has been read in light of creative/critical dialogue on women's writing and as a political roman-à-clef written against the threat of nuclear armament, a notion the author supports by interspersing her lectures Voraussetzungen für eine Erzählung [Conditions of a Narrative] with current news about political events.

The rhetoric of the entire project—Wolf's lectures, delivered in 1982, and the novel, attains an additional, performative quality that is noteworthy. Both have initially been read to an audience. This initial presentation of the literary work is unusual. It emphasizes the possibly oracular didactic aspects of the novel, and implicates the critical theory of the lecture. More importantly, though, through the performed reading, the narrative reveals its strong rhythmical features. Long passages are written in iambic, trochaic and dactylic meter. Such rhythmicality is more likely in poetry or drama than in an epic work. The overtly classical style has stimulated a debate among the feminist

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<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Arnold, Heinz Ludwig and Weigel, Sigrid, eds. Text + Kritik. Sonderband Ingeborg Bachmann (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1984). U. Brandes. "Christa Wolf und Ingeborg Bachmann: Über die Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit," Zwischen gestern und morgen. Schriftstellerinnen der DDR aus amerikanischer Sicht (Berlin: Lang, 1992) 199–219.

Gürtler, Christa. Schreiben Frauen anders? Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Heinz, 1983.

Gudrun Kohn-Wächter. "...ich liebte ihr Herunterbrennen" Das Zerschreiben der Opferfaszination in Gespräch im Gebirg von Paul Celan und Malina von Ingeborg

critics about whether Wolf is citing, copying, or parodying high—male—standards and how this might interfere with her intent to create a unique female voice.<sup>34</sup> Wolf probes the dimension of epic narration, deliberately blurring and expanding genre boundaries between 'literature' and 'criticism'.<sup>35</sup> Criticism has been voiced that the novel's high classical style imitates Wolf's classical predecessors such as Schiller, although she criticizes him as 'boring'. Contrasting the classical style are sometimes fragmentary sentences and unorthodox punctuation that obliterates question marks after questions but places them after statements.<sup>36</sup> I read this partial structural and stylistic imitation of a classical, "masculinist" epic tradition and a more performative genre as a critical engagement on Wolf's part. She connects Cassandra's oral function in the myth or respectively the critical notion that women are subject indicative of oral culture with the permanence of the written novel which is similarly a 'voiced' written form.

Themes of voice, creation, and the image of Cassandra, the mythic prophet, already run through Wolf's earlier works: Charlotte Jordan, the protagonist in Kindheitsmuster is referred to as 'Cassandra' (154, 158), in an idiomatic rendition

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Bachmann, " Schrift der Flammen: Opfermythen und Weiblichkeitsentwürfe im 20. Jh. (Berlin: Orlanda, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in her other myth-based novel "Medea. Voices" Wolf tells one story through the voices of different narrators, and thus experiments with a dimension that is more common to dramatic form. While Maisch e.g. comments positively that the style elevates the narrative, Cramer contends that the "artistic spontaneous language of emotion, seeking its salvation in the jambic metre" is interfering with her project of weibliches Schreiben." Cramer in Sauer 1979, 138.

<sup>35</sup> On genre in Kassandra, see comments by Beeler, 228f, who analyzes genre and the "ambiguity implicit in the construction of a text" (234) as a tool in the genre discourse.

expressing her ability to foresee a negative future.<sup>37</sup> Wolf explores utopian models of creative spaces, especially for women, in several works. An example is her novel Kein Ort. Nirgends ["No Place. Nowhere" or, literally translated, "Utopia," 1979] wherein she envisions an encounter between Heinrich von Kleist and the Romantic poet Karoline von Günderode. There, alternative creative models exist in the minds of and are sensed by the poets, but never realized.<sup>38</sup> Wolf worked on the Romantic tradition in essays on Kleist's Penthesilea and Bettina von Armin, and I read her Cassandra as a fictional exploration continuing this line.<sup>39</sup> Kein Ort. Nirgends foregrounds gender difference in relation to the poetic creation process and its acceptance by the

<sup>36</sup> See Maisch: "Die passagenweise auftretende gleichmäßige Sprachrhythmik verleiht der Cassandra-Erzählung Pathos und genau die "Formenstrenge", die Christa Wolf an Schillers Cassandra-Gedicht monierte." Maisch, 10.

<sup>37</sup> See eighth chapter of Kindheitsmuster: "Immer bloß schwarzsehen. Cassandra, hinterm Ladentisch, Cassandra, Brot schichtend, Cassandra, Kartoffeln abwiegend," 154. On the strong connections between Wolf and Bachmann's poetics and the proximity between Cassandra and Bachmann's Todesarten-Projekt, of which Malina is a part, see Lennox, esp. 200 and 209. Lennox mixes levels of discourse, though, by conflating the literary with the actual author's persona: "Für Cassandra, "eine Seherin", ist, wie für Bachmann, "das Sehen" grundlegend, und ihre eigenen Einsichten werden mit dem Fortschreiten der Erzählung tiefer, doch ihr Schicksal, wie das von Bachmann, besteht darin, nicht verstanden zu werden," 213. Aesthetic relations between Wolf and Bachmann have repeatedly been noted, see e.g. Weigel, Text 84f, also connection between Kindheitsmuster und Malina with motto of 8<sup>th</sup> chapter taken from Malina: "Mit meiner verbrannten Hand schreibe ich über die Natur des Feuers," 89.

Wolf's literary study on Günderode, Kein Ort. Nirgends (1979), also shows allusions to the prophet: "Sie begriff, wie manche Leute zur Sehergabe kommen: Ein starker Schmerz oder eine starke Konzentration erleuchtet die Landschaft ihres Innern," 135. See also Weigel, Vom Sehen 67.

<sup>38</sup> Christa Wolf, Kein Ort. Nirgends (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> "Der blinde Fleck der Erzählung besteht in Wolfs Konzeption der Frau als Utopieträgerin. Diese Trägerschaft nämlich konstituiert sich über Verzicht, welcher von Wolf, und das ist das Entscheidende, nicht weiter problematisiert wird. Dieser Moment des Verzichts, kombiniert

environment—Günderode, for example, has to publish under a male pseudonym. When her friend Clemens Brentano reveals her identity and reads her poetry in front of a society gathering, she is mocked and deeply ashamed. Reflections on gendered aspects of language and the freedom to use it are frequent in Bachmann's work also, pronouncing individual rather than historical or theoretical aspects. Her story "Undine geht" ["Undine Leaves," 1961] also alludes to a female mythic figure. The female narrator's expressive monologue denotes and denounces how men create and rule their own lives and that of women, while only reaching half of the people, half of the truth. Undine departs also, because she heard "you [the men] talk to me in a language in which you should not talk to me."<sup>40</sup> In "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha" ["One Step Towards Gomorrha," 1961] the protagonist Charlotte fights with the intruder Mara, not only physically, but also with her words, because her female language is "without muscle, useless" (198). Charlotte longs for the language of men because "one used to be able to count on [this language] in moments like these."<sup>41</sup> Gradually, though, she undertakes a half-conscious, half-desperate attempt to free herself, perhaps to gain the "right of her

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mit dem Rekurs auf einen männlichen Autonomiebegriff, wird sich in Kassandra wiederholen." Legg, 160. Christa Wolf, "Kleists Penthesilea," Text + Kritik 46, 3rd edition (1985): 1–11.

<sup>40</sup> "Ich gehe ja schon. Denn ich habe euch noch einmal wiedergesehen, in einer Sprache reden gehört, die ihr mit mir nicht reden sollt." Ingeborg Bachmann, "Undine geht," in cycle Das dreißigste Jahr, Werke, vol. 2, 260.

<sup>41</sup> "Charlotte dachte: mir ist dauernd unklar, wovon sie spricht. Die Sprache der Männer war doch so gewesen in solchen Stunden, daß man sich daran hatte halten können. Ich kann Mara nicht zuhören, ihren Worten ohne Muskel, diesen nichtsnutzigen kleinen Worten." Ingeborg Bachmann, "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha" in cycle Das dreißigste Jahr, Werke, vol. 2, 198.

own unhappiness" which Franz, representative of the masculine force, forbids her.<sup>42</sup>

Like Cassandra in Aeschylus's drama or in Wolf's later novel, Charlotte longs to transmit something to posterity.<sup>43</sup> She longs to reach herself through and beyond language, to be "home within herself" no longer "in this city, this country, with a man, in a language, but by herself" (205). This struggle to 'be herself' and 'be by herself' that Bachmann's character expresses, is a leitmotif of her oeuvre, a continuous exploration, that Wolf summarizes in her essay "Die zumutbare Wahrheit. Prosa der Ingeborg Bachmann" [Reasonable Truth. Ingeborg Bachmann's Prose, 1966], warning that the reader should not expect conventional stories with action or regular characters, but:

Eine Stimme wird man hören: kühn und klagend. Eine Stimme, wahrheitsgemäß, das heißt: nach eigener Erfahrung sich äußernd, über Gewisses und Ungewisses. Und wahrheitsgemäß schweigend, wenn die Stimme versagt.

A voice will be heard: courageous and complaining. A voice, truthfully, that means: expressing something according to its own experience, be it sure or insecure. And truthfully silent, if the voice fails.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "[...] wußte sie, daß er nicht geschaffen war, ihr Recht auf ein eigenes Unglück, eine andere Einsamkeit einzuräumen." *Ibid.* 201. The relationship between Charlotte and Franz strongly resembles the relationship between Malina and the narrator in *Malina*. There, also, the narrator's dependance on Malina regarding the linguistic plane and elsewhere is crucial.

<sup>43</sup> In Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Cassandra asks the chorus to remember her and the unrightful deeds committed: "Bear witness what I am / Hereafter [...]" vs. 1325ff.

I acknowledge that transmittance of memory is a commonplace of literary production and not novel to Bachmann's or Wolf's characters. Yet, they employ it more pronounced in a female literary tradition.

<sup>44</sup> Wolf. "Die zumutbare Wahrheit. Prosa der Ingeborg Bachmann" written in 1966, published in *Lesen und Schreiben*. Luchterhand, 1972. In the same essay, Wolf also points out how Bachmann's narrative is always an exploration of borderline cases (*Grenzfälle*), and how the author is strongly affected by reaching for the truth through her writing. *Ibid.*, 127f. Wolf notes: She [Bachmann] does not defend border regions, but places of the heart

The relation between subject and rhetorical object, that is, between the speaker and what she says, is fragile in most all of Bachmann's work. In her first Frankfurt lecture on poetics, "Fragen und Scheinfragen" ("Questions and Rhetorical Questions") she notes that "the relation of trust between the first person narrator and language and thing is fundamentally shaken" in a reality in which space and time as realities have dissolved and which awaits a new definition.<sup>45</sup>

On the literary plane, probing the limits of language can also mean expanding the limits of a genre. In two respects Wolf's 'Cassandra-project' from the early 1980s marks an interesting moment in the discussion of female aesthetics emerging around the same time. It is a double exploration of poetic language in both the theoretical context of rhetoric, and aestheticized context of the boundaries of genre, the novel. Wolf's insistence on reading both parts of the project together suggests a new—and more open—form of writing. Should this form of writing be regarded more 'female' though, simply because it caters to the demands of Cixous or Irigaray that women's literature be more open and non-finite? Wolf's lectures on the becoming of her novel exceed an artist's explication of his/her creative methods and material, comparable to what Thomas Mann achieves with his *Entstehung des Dr. Faustus* [The Making of Doctor Faustus]. I would argue that the use of such a mediating genre as Wolf's lecture creates an interpretive space and continues the "beginning of a different aesthetic, whose pieces we

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["Herzländer"]. Men's right of self-realization." Ibid., 130. All these themes are explored in Wolf's *Kassandra*.

should collect" [Ansatz zu einer anderen Ästhetik deren Splitter wir sammeln sollten] that Wolf detects in the work of Karoline von Günderode.

Already in her essay on Kleist's Penthesilea Wolf contends that classical Greek literature can be read as a complete repression of female culture and female needs, and her Cassandra illustrates examples of this notion with examples from classical texts.<sup>45</sup> Wolf discusses her notion of the relation between myth and mythic narrative tradition in her correspondence with her colleague Franz Fühmann. Slightly ironic, Wolf replies to Fühmann, who in his previous letter had colloquially evoked the encounter between Artemis and Hippolytus as a metaphor for the writer, who labors without getting the desired reward from 'his' goddess. He imagines what Artemis would say to Hippolytus, who had served her exclusively all his life: "Yikes, you are dying, that is not for me," pondering that the same death was to happen to the poet who had dedicated his life to a muse or goddess. Wolf answers that Artemis, the huntress, in the male interpretations like that of Euripides, is simply a "terrible virgin." "Originally," which for Wolf

<sup>45</sup> "Die Realitäten von Raum und Zeit sind aufgelöst, die Wirklichkeit harrt ständig einer neuen Definition, weil die Wissenschaft sie gänzlich verformt hat. Das Vertrauensverhältnis zwischen Ich und Sprache und Ding ist schwer erschüttert." Bachmann. Werke, vol. 4, 188.

<sup>46</sup> Wolf in Weigel 1985, 4. In searching for the sources of Wolf's interest in myth as a foil against which to explore issues of language and gender, several passages in her recently published correspondence with her friend and colleague Franz Fühmann are of interest. Fühmann also reinscribed works of ancient mythology and lectured on mythopoetics. Cassandra is not specifically discussed in their correspondance, and only mentioned in passing. I will quote Wolf's reprise to Fühmann on Artemis at greater length, because it emphasizes her understanding of gender, and also distinguishes between that classical and a pre-classical perception of mythic gods, and, more precisely, goddesses, that resonates in Wolf's inscription of Cybele and the women's community in Cassandra. The distinction between classical and pre-classical, and the searching of the latter sources especially for a different casting of female characters negatively connoted in classical texts, such as Cassandra and also Medea, are a recurrent theme in Wolf's essayistic works. Comp. the

connotes the era of goddesses, she was "just another aspect of Aphrodite," and would never engage in a quarrel with her, let alone a fight about a man.<sup>47</sup> The picture Wolf paints in this letter is one of superior female knowledge of male desires. She juxtaposes in a slight mocking tone the "era of the goddesses" and that of classical authors such as Euripides. Her casting psychologizes myth in a fashion that follows the line of "myth plus psychology" coined by Thomas Mann in a letter to Karl Kerényi who assumed a currency of the myth beyond temporal limitations, for a modern civilization.<sup>48</sup>

Before I turn to the reading of Wolf's Cassandra-project, I would like to examine Bachmann's Malina as an attempt, failed at first sight, of subjectivation defining an original rhetoric, and establish it as a reference point to Wolf's later utopian vision of subjectivation. The mythological dimension of Bachmann's novel related to Cassandra is present, though more indirectly allusive than in the other works discussed in this chapter. A hidden connection of interest is concealed in the etymology of the name Malina. This Slavic term for 'rasberry' can be traced to a geographical origin as 'originating in the mountains of Ida', the place where the mythic goddess Cybele resides.

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Cassandra lectures, her essay "From Cassandra to Medea" and her commentary in the stage bill to Reinshagen's Medea-tragedy.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from 13.6.82. Christa Wolf and Franz Fühmann, Monsieur – Wir finden uns wieder. Briefe 1968–1984. Ed. Angela Drescher (Berlin: Aufbau, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> One of Thomas Mann's letters to Kerényi from 1941, speaks out for a combination of myth and psychology. Comp. Kerényi, Karl and Thomas Mann. Mythology and Humanism. The Correspondence of Thomas Mann and Karl Kerényi. Trans. Alexander Gelley. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

The figure of Cybele has been brought to the reader's attention by Wolf's Cassandra.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond this association, some scenes in Malina suggest connections to other figures such as Antigone, a female version of John the Baptist, and Nessus, all associated with sacrifice.<sup>50</sup>

Each of the novel's three chapters focuses on one of the female first person narrator's relationships with a man: "Happy with Ivan" (her lover), "The Third Man", re-visiting a problematic father-relationship through dream-sequences, and "About Last Things," focusing on the ultimately deadly relation to Malina. All parts exemplify that in a conventional narrative environment there is no original space for the individual

<sup>49</sup> Notes the slavic etymology whereby Malina means raspberry and goes further into depth. :Die "Himbeere *Rubus idaeus*" weist als Gattungsnamen "die Röte, die Rose" auf und als Artnamen die Herkunft vom Gebirge Ida, dem Reich der Bergmutter Kybele. Auch der Türkenbund ist durch die Signalfarbe der Liebe gekennzeichnet. [...] Die Kybele-Verehrung auf dem Ida-Gebirge, durch Christa Wolfs Buch Kassandra wieder ins allgemeine Bewußtsein gerückt, war sehr ausgebreitet, bis nach Inner-Asien und "Süd-Rußland" hinein, und als Fruchtbarkeitsgedanke von fast monotheistischer Synthetik, wie es im titel "Mater Deum Magna" überliefert ist." 225f. Maria Behre "Das Ich, weiblich. Malina im Chor der Stimmen zur Erfindung des Weiblichen im Menschen. In 210–232. In Scholl, ed. 1992.

<sup>50</sup> The image wherein the narrator in the dream sequence of the second part falls into "a little grave [...] until the next fall everything has to heal and I have to remain in the grave until then" is one instant reminiscent of Antigone. Comp. also Bossinade, who notes the motif of being burried alive in several places of Bachmann's novel: "Obwohl kein Antigone-Text im direkten Sinn, enthüllt sein Motiv des 'Lebendig Begraben seins' überraschende Bezüge zu ihrem Beispiel." Bossinade 1990, XIV.

In his treatise Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche draws the development of the Apollonian and the Dionysian principle in Greek culture. He finds them united in attic tragedy and dramatic dithyramb represented by a figure who is "both Cassandra and Antigone." Friedrich Nietzsche, Die Geburt der Tragödie. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1953) 36. In the last part, the narrator envisions a scene in the prominent restaurant Sacher where she is being decapitated. The bloody head falls on a plate and is presented to the guests. Malina, 302. Right before her death, the narrator has but one dress she has never worn left in her closet. When she puts on, she is immediately uncomfortable and seems to melt and dissolve in the garment that she calls "made of hellish thread" and "Nessus-dress," after the death-giving bloodsoaked dress the centaur Nessus presents to Hercules's wife Deianira (321). Comp. Ovid's Metamorphoses IX 102ff.

female.<sup>51</sup> The narrator is signified as female only through details in the narrative, such as her wearing dresses and thoughts of motherhood, but she never has a name. In the course of the narrative, the narrator slowly dissolves, and, in the end, disappears into a crack in the wall.

Bachmann prefaces the narrative by a list of characters, place and time, much as in a play, or in an official bureaucratic protocol as for example in a murder case. Associating the latter it would frame the main narrative together with the final sentence, "it was murder" as a murder-mystery. Though the time is given precisely as "today", this leads the first person narrator into an extensive discourse on time. "Today" thereby gains a presence far beyond the abstract-temporal, becoming a physical obstacle that the narrator encounters "with highest fear, raging speed" (12). The distorted notion of time extends to the characters, the narrator tells of a presupposition that Malina was her doom and destiny, and that she knew that "Malina's place was already taken by Malina, before he entered my life." (17) Her spatial frame and boundary is an equally subjective sphere that she calls "Ungargassenland," after the street she lives in—the name contains the country her lover's home country and thus subtly plays on the narrator's notion of her own emotional 'home'. The narrator notes that all that matters in this universe are two houses in this country, the distance between which she can measure blind with her

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<sup>51</sup> Comp. Weigel's comments on Malina in Weigel/Stephan 1984, 121f. Weigel remarks in a central observation, that the incompatibility of male and female individuality in Malina is not expression of an eternal disjunction, but expression of a particular, contemporary individual experience. Ibid., 123.

steps.<sup>52</sup> In her own rhetoric, the narrator is frequently transgressing the boundaries of reality, time and place. Her world and movements are motivated by Ivan: "I live in the animated world of a half-savage" (76). He depends on him to remove thoughts of death from her: "he shall take this illness away from me, redeem me" (78). In this first part, she embraces the shelter she finds in her lover's actions, but remarks such as [he ]"never asks, is never suspicious" and "places his hand over my mouth when I say something silly" (33) hint at a certain disinterest—in her other life, but, ultimately, in who she is or what she has to say. Though the narrator's occupation is never disclosed, she is most likely a writer. Torn between wanting to write something substantial and longing for non-existence—"I could hide behind the legend of a woman who never existed" (61). She transposes herself into this legendary imagined figure and her desire for substance onto the objects needed for writing. She wants "a writing desk, scrolls, a feather and old-fashioned ink" (61)—objects meant to substitute, with their aura of history and permanence, for what she longs to accomplish but does not have the confidence to achieve for and by herself. Memory is something the narrator longs to acquire, to be able to have and convey, and several times notes if or by what she is obstructed from it, while wanting to create to be inscribed in it herself. Desire and the inability to fulfill it run thematically through the novel. The numerous scenes of communication that the narrator reports appear as a variation of this theme. With its prerequisite of creating a

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<sup>52</sup> "Aber Washington und Moskau und Berlin sind bloß vorlaute Orte, die versuchen, sich wichtig zu machen. [... Die Grenzen waren bald festgelegt, es ist ja nur ein winziges Land, das zu gründen war, ohne Gebietsansprüche und ohne rechte Verfassung, ein trunkenes Land, in dem bloß zwei Häuser stehen, die man auch im Dunkeln finden kann, bei Sonnen- und Mondfinsternis, und ich weiß auswendig, wieviel Schritte ich machen muß, von mir schräg zu Ivans Haus, ich könnte auch mit verbundenen Augen gehen," Bachmann, *Malina* 28f.

physical distance between the speakers, the telephone makes the communication non-direct, and emphasizes the presence of the voice over that of the body. For the narrator the voice connotes a sphere of both anxiety and desire. Wanting the other (who is not there at that particular moment), having at the same time more and less control over the communication, she can end the conversation at any time, but there is also the risk of being listened to by a third party – as narrator remarks several times throughout the novel. The telephone is an instrument of partial fulfillment of desire, allowing at least the vocal contact with the beloved, and the narrator's relation to the object is almost religious when she "falls on my knees in front of the telephone like a Muslim on his carpet" (43). Once in a phone booth she feels trapped; it becomes a site of madness, the walls confine and suffocate her: "Zelle" in German is synonymous for a phone booth and a closed cell in a mental hospital or cell in a prison<sup>53</sup>. The notion of confinement—in mythical terms, possibly associates Antigone's punitive confinement after she expressed her own truth—is thus evoked repeatedly through space and rhetoric alike. The image of confinement of a voice that sounds into the void, unheard, narrates a monologic situation. The subject appears excluded from a dialogicity that would allow situation and orientation in a context. The narrator's replies on the phone appear as echoes. The text usually lists only the answers the woman gives—though one senses the statements she replies to—and calls into question the independent subjectivity of her voice. Noteworthy is the relation between these early phone conversations and the end, when through a phone conversation the woman's death is manifested. The narrator

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<sup>53</sup> "Es darf mir hier nicht passieren, ich werde ja wahnsinnig, es darf mit nicht in einer Zelle passieren," Bachmann, *Malina* 176, similar sentence repeated 178.

feels and foreshadows an ever-present immanent death threat that she discusses in relation to Ivan and Malina.<sup>54</sup> Death and dying as the finite point, the end of memory and the possibility of writing, are a leitmotif throughout the entire novel. Even in living, the narrator's dependence on the men is never overcome. From her statement "I live in Ivan. I do not survive Ivan" (45) she goes to "I lived in Ivan and I die in Malina" (335).

The tragic irony in the discrepancy between the narrator's failing attempts to integrate herself in a 'normal' life, and the world of her own subjectivity that in vain searches for a place is demonstrated in the scene wherein she attempts to cook dinner for Ivan. She notes the absence of cookbooks in her apartment, and wonders, "how absurd that there aren't any cookbooks, what did I read up until now, what good is it to me, if I can't use it for Ivan." (81) She promptly resumes the authors she has read, among them Kant, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, Kafka, Rimbaud, Blake, Proust etc. to sum up "...I did history and philosophy, medicine and psychology, I worked in the madhouse Steinberg, noting the schizophrenic and the manic-depressive patients' case histories, made notes in the auditorium..." (81). Later, answering a journalist's questionnaire, she equates writing with madness: "delusion, paralyzed in expressions, which comes out of people." In another ambiguous expression, books become drugs—whether as addiction or as cure: "no, I don't take drugs, I take books." (94) The verb is einnehmen, literally "to take in" which is used in expressions about taking medicine, and commonly does not refer to the act of reading. She ascribes a certain physicality of words on several occasions, and

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<sup>54</sup> In one relevant scene, Ivan, repairing her telephone, plays her concern down by remarking "You? You of all people, no way—you, my tender crazy one?" (294). While speaking, Ivan loosens a screw on the telephone, inserting another madness-allusion, since "having a screw loose" is an idiom for being crazy in German and English.

notes, for example, that Malina's name, for which she envies him because Malina the person and his name appear so intimately connected, is a delightful commodity, a "Genußmittel" for her. When she turns to her own creation, it is again with reference to Ivan, whom she promises that she will write "this book that does not exist, for you, if you really want it. But you have to really want it, want it from me, and I will never ask you to read it." (82) Ivan hopes that the book will have a happy ending; some time later, Malina finds a note that reads "Ways of Dying" (Todesarten, like the title of Bachmann's project for several novels), and that is the only information on the narrator's creative projects the reader will have throughout the novel.

In the novel's second part, the narrator tells several dream sequences related to her father. In one of them, her library is threatened; the scene is reminiscent of the Nazi book-burning. The narrator treats the "great (male) authors" in her library as if there were real people, after they are thrown from the shelves, she lies beneath them and caresses them, remembers how she used to pay homage and say goodnight to them every evening (190 ff). But the books never answer. It appears that part of the narrator's gradual dissolution is caused by the increasingly one-sided communication, that gradually isolates her, finally completely.

In the dialogues with Ivan and Malina, the narrator's intense desire to tell Ivan all that is important to her, is often met with resistance, which forces her into a discouraged silence: "... Ivan never asks me, is never suspicious, because he even puts his hand on my mouth if I said something silly." She concludes that he will never want to know. Then, she decides to "tell him [anyway], in another language, with *skin and*

*hair*." This expression is a German idiom for "everything, all encompassing", but also refers to [the woman's] body. This rather odd phrasing shifts the site of rhetoric from speech, the sphere the narrator is struggling with, to the body—the more 'appropriate' female site of communication.

The order that the narrator allows the men to impose upon her and struggles to comply with becomes undone in the course of the novel. The narrator's inner fears and paranoia increasingly surface in her speech: her rhetoric is not able to reconcile, recapture the order, she slips out of it, in this sense almost reversing Cixous/Clement's portrayal of the hysteric as someone who "...introduces disorder into the well-regulated unfolding of everyday life...".<sup>55</sup> When at the end the narrator disappears into the wall, only silence remains. It is the end of rhetoric, but also the end of the narrator's existence. She existed as long as she spoke and was spoken to. When she disappears, Malina denies her existence over the phone to Ivan. "It was murder," the narrator concludes. "Murder," however, not only of the female subject. Female rhetoric is the murder victim, with reference to the poet's problem with language and dealing with issues outside language.<sup>56</sup> Bachmann discusses this problem in one of her lectures on poetics and concludes that it often results in "falls into silence"—or the disappearance into a

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<sup>55</sup> "The hysteric unties familiar bonds, introduces disorder into the well-regulated unfolding of everyday life, gives rise to magic and ostensible reason. These roles are *conservative* because every sorceress ends up being destroyed, and nothing is registered of her but mythical traces. Every hysteric ends up inuring others to her symptoms, and the family closes around her again, whether she is curable or incurable." Cixous and Clement, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Wolf judges the case as suicide: "Es war auch Selbstmord," Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, 149, referring to, as Johanna Bossinade contends, the "self-destructive desire of women within the institutions of literature and aesthetics." Bossinade, 261.

crack in the wall.<sup>57</sup> Though consequential, I find it difficult to follow Sigrid Weigel's notion that the end of *Malina* bears a strong utopian potential in the narrator's refusal to live the life *Malina* dictates. While the utopia is not realized, the desire is present throughout the novel.<sup>58</sup> If one reads the novel's ending not as its final point, it might fulfill Cixous's claim that female language be a 'never-ending circle of desire'.<sup>59</sup> Bachmann herself caters to this notion in her lecture "Das schreibende Ich" ["The Writing Self"] wherein she explores the self, or I, first person, in a text to cautiously claim that any fictional self, in a novel or poem, lives through the logic: I speak therefore I am." (Bachmann. *Werke*. Vol. 4, 225) She later concludes that there is no final call—wherever the self speaks, it lives, no matter the circumstance, and the self will always triumph as substitute of the human voice.<sup>60</sup> And though the narrator and her voice have disappeared into the wall, somehow the ending suggests that it could resurface, though as a different subject, in another novel—as Bachmann notes in her lecture on literature

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<sup>57</sup> "Stürze ins Schweigen," Bachmann, *Werke*, vol. 4, 188. See also a later passage: "Wir meinen, wir kennen sie doch alle, die Sprache, wir gehen doch mit ihr um; nur der Schriftsteller nicht, er kann nicht mit ihr umgehen...Für das, was er will, mit der Sprache will, hat sie sich noch nicht bewährt; er muß im Rahmen der ihm gezogenen Grenzen ihre Zeichen fixieren und sie unter einem Ritual wieder lebendig machen, ihr eine Gangart geben, die sie nirgendwo sonst erhält außer im sprachlichen Kunstwerk." *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>58</sup> "Das Verschwinden des 'Ich' ist nicht nur als Tötung, sondern auch als eine Trennung von *Malina* zu verstehen, als Weigerung, ein *Malina*-Leben zu führen. Eine konkrete Utopie über eine Lebensmöglichkeit, die das Ivan-Glück mit dem Überlebenswillen *Malinas* verbindet, ist im Roman nicht ausphantasiert, als Wunschgehalt des Textes aber immer präsent. Der ausgetragene Widerstreit beschreibt eine gelebte Distanz zur Utopie." Weigel *Schielende Blick*, 125.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

as utopia, literature is an eclectic collection of past and present, our hopes and desires that we project into it. Utopian remains the language the writers are striving for:

But an imitation of this language that we can sense, yet never completely make our own. We own poetic fragments of her, realized in one line or scene, and therein, with a sigh of relief, find ourselves spoken. We have to continue to write.<sup>61</sup>

The relation between Malina and the narrator remains purposely ambivalent.

Her various statements that he 'made' her, that they are 'the diverging world' because they 'are one' (126) suggest that beyond the reality of the novel Malina and the narrator are aspects of the same subject. We might read them as a 'male' and a 'female' principle, the first stronger and surviving the other. Bachmann supported this double notion of a fragmented character in an interview.<sup>62</sup> The recurrence of a figure named Malina in several posthumously published fragments by Bachmann wherein she experiments with female Malina figures further underpins this reading.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> "Denn es gibt keine letzte Verlautbarung. Es ist das Wunder des Ich, daß es, wo immer es spricht, lebt; es kann nicht sterben [...] dieses Ich ohne Gewähr. [...] Und es wird seinen Triumph haben, heute wie eh und je—als Platzhalter der menschlichen Stimme." Ibid., 237.

<sup>61</sup> "Aber eine Nachahmung eben dieser von uns erahnten Sprache, die wir nicht ganz in unseren Besitz bringen können. Wir besitzen sie als Fragment in der Dichtung, konkretisiert in einer Zeile oder einer Szene, und begreifen uns aufatmend darin als zur Sprache gekommen. Es gilt weiterzuschreiben." Ibid., 270f.

<sup>62</sup> Interview in *Die Zeit*, 9.4.1971, 4. The notion of Malina and the narrator as two faces of one character, as "Doppelgänger," is an aspect Bachmann mentions repeatedly in several interviews. See Andrea Stoll, *Ingeborg Bachmanns "Malina"* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992). In one of her essays, Stoll notes that Malina is a "story of resistance" [die Geschichte einer Verweigerung], a novel in which every possible narrative perspective is employed so ambivalently that it thus questions its own construction principle. Stoll, "Der Bruch des epischen Atems", 250–264, esp. 250f.

<sup>63</sup> Both in "Requiem für Fanny Goldmann" and in the sketches on the character of Malina. Both in Bachmann. Works. Vol. 3. In *Requiem*, Malina is a young actress, "stuttering,

Death and murder, paired with notions of language, are recurrent topics in Bachmann's prose. In the story "Undine geht" (1961) that examines male-female relationships in terms of language, the narrator notes that "Nobody has ever spoken like this about himself. Almost true. Almost murderously true."<sup>64</sup>

If one reads Malina with Cassandra in mind, some of the key sentences in Bachmann's novel offer striking parallels, especially through the intimately linked notion of memory as driving force for storytelling and the knowledge that the end of the story will be the end of the storyteller. In a seemingly uneventful scene, when one evening Malina and the narrator walk through their apartment, she says: "I have to tell the story. I will tell it. There is nothing that obstructs my memory any more." [Ich muß erzählen. Ich werde erzählen. Es gibt nichts mehr, was mich in meiner Erinnerung stört, 23]. She will later claim, more intensely towards the end, that Malina obstructs her in her memory (e.g. 332). Once she has disappeared into the wall, the question remains who narrates the end, a question that must also be posed when looking at the beginning and end of Wolf's novel.

Traces of the mythological Cassandra whose prophecies evoked and thus inscribed memory are present but different in Bachmann's and Wolf's novel. In Bachmann's case they are more dependent on individual experience, while Wolf keeps

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unattractive, crooked, uncombed, unwashed" (488) but unfolds as a forceful presence on stage in her roles. In the sketches, there is the famous writer Malina and his sister, Maria Malina.

<sup>64</sup> "Nie hat jemand so von sich selber gesprochen. Beinahe Wahr. Beinahe mörderisch wahr." Bachmann, Werke, vol. 2, 262. In another of her stories, "Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha" Charlotte, the narrator's encounter with the young girl Mara turns into an uncanny half-desired, half-resisted affinity of the two women. Charlotte appears as a female Blaubart who remembers her seven dead men and the key to the room that Mara will never be allowed to

the relation to society at large in mind.<sup>65</sup> The theme of history is inherently connected to memory: without memory, there would not be any history, and what is not remembered, is lost. Conscience can also be formed by it, as the memory of certain decisive events shapes our perception of what is right or wrong. Literature began, likewise through memory and the oral performance of the ancient epics. Wolf follows this origin of a tradition, when she has her Cassandra long for a servant-girl to hear her story and tell it further to her daughter—"So that alongside the river of heroic songs this tiny rivulet, too, may reach those faraway, perhaps happier people who will live in times to come" (80/93).<sup>66</sup> The narrator of *Malina* evokes an entire literary-philosophical history through the authors and titles mentioned in the novel. She never specifies her own relation beyond the intimate comfort she achieves from some of them in the second part. Beyond that, words that could form memories and novels of her own, remain subject and object of her desire—she lives with them and through them, but can never quite make them her own home, and in the end is extinguished by them through Malina's verbal denial of her existence.

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open. Leitmotif of Mara is her 'wide skirt in death-red,' *ibid.*, 188, the image of the crumpled skirt on the floor ends the story.

<sup>65</sup> For More examples of the relation between memory and female protagonists in Wolf's works, see Maisch, 17f.

<sup>66</sup> I would argue though, against Weigel who refers to this passage, because in my reading Aeschylus has his Cassandra motivate and be the source of memory that becomes part of history. Weigel writes: "Während der Tod einer Figur im Mythos als unabwendbares tragisches Schicksal erscheint, erhält der Tod Kassandras in Christa Wolfs Erzählung durch diese geschichtsstiftende Erinnerungsarbeit Bedeutung. Die Umdeutung des Mythos begründet so einen geschichtsverweigernden und geschichtsstiftenden Sinn zugleich, der Austritt aus der männlichen Geschichte wird durch den Entwurf einer weiblichen entgolten." Weigel, *Spielende Blick*, 71. Issues of historicity, gender and poetics are also discussed by Lersch, 65.

Like Cassandra, who is taken from her original environment, the narrator in Bachmann's *Malina* is gradually stripped of the objects that constitute her familiar environment: her books, her clothes, the phone. Notions of madness resurface recurrently as the narrator has increasing difficulties to establish her place in the world. Among the numerous examples is the above cited episode of the confining phone booth. When the narrator awakes from the dream sequence in the second part of the novel, she is so shaken that she repeats her fear of going crazy to Malina (196). She notes that according to a prophecy known to her she has to fall three times before she can rise again. The knowledge of this prophecy reminds of Cassandra's superior knowledge. The number three frequently appears in fairy tales, often as part of the quest-structure wherein the protagonist has to pass a number of tests. In the given context, there is allusion to a "testing" of the narrator; she is actively involved and afflicted. Prophetic aspects play a role in the novel only insofar as she relates them to her own fate and, from the beginning, through the leitmotif of death, foreshadows her own end. Time in this constellation is a confining capacity, perceivable as the narrator's writing/telling the story against time. Towards the end, she experiments with a cluster of sentences that explore the conditionality of time, mostly its absence, and though she ends with the optimistic "I will have more time later!" (253) it registers as a cynical foreshadowing that this greater space of 'later' might lie beyond her own existence in time.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Musical techniques as a construction principle of *Malina* have been reviewed and would afford a more detailed investigation than this study allows. They account though for the frequency of theme and variations, and musical characteristics in one of the last dialogues between Malina and the narrator, Bachmann, *Malina* 292f.

**The Lions' Gate of Mycenae opens and frames Wolf's Cassandra:**

**Das Letzte wird ein Bild sein, kein Wort. Vor den Bildern sterben die Wörter.**

**The last thing will be a picture, not a word. Words die before pictures. (21/26).**

The novel's opening image of the stone lions, iconic remnants of the myth, signify an assessment of the novel's temporal dimension in relation to its mythic past and its present and future readers. Temporal dimensions are inherent ordering principles of the novel, even though Cassandra's recollections are not chronologically structured. Her monologue is framed by a brief narrator's passage, just as the gates through which she will enter her future that will immediately turn her into a figure of the past by killing her, are framed by two lions. The gates, still watching over the Mycenaean palace ruins in the presence of the narrator, the author, and the reader, also serve as frame to enter the mythical dimension, as Wolf describes it in a later essay.<sup>68</sup> The lion gate has a multiple poetic function. Beyond framing the narrative, the gate opens the narrator's (who immediately disappears into the narrative), author's and reader's view onto and into the imagined ancient scenario. The gate as frame provides a physical connection between the ancient past. It evokes, beyond the archeological remnants, the setting of the Aeschylean tragedy, thus implying a textual reference: Cassandra in the Agamemnon greets the "Gates of Hell" that take her in for her death ["I will go in / And meet my

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<sup>68</sup> Wolf, "Von Cassandra zu Medea," in Wolf, Medea. Voraussetzungen 12. Note that this narrative 'architecture' has been previously applied in German literature by Walter Jens, who in his 1959 text "Mykenische Vision" [Mycenaean vision] evokes voices from the Oresteia framed by the lion gates as image in beginning and end. Jens also evoked Cassandra in his version of Euripides Trojan Women. Comp. Engelhardt and Rohrwasser, 51.

death. Ye Gates of Hell, I greet ye!" vs. 1236f]. Wolf inscribes what is not written in the Oresteia. Where Cassandra predicts her own death and evokes the tragic lot of the Atreides in the ancient drama, Wolf's Cassandra remembers the Trojan tragedy of which she herself is part, from her own point of view.<sup>69</sup> While thus the novel's immediate beginning with the evocation of death startles the reader as seeming to put a halt to a narrative that has not even begun, the impression is countered by the novel's epigraph and in the scene following the opening at the lion gate. There, Cassandra fiercely struggles to save her children, whom she loves. Thus, the essential dichotomy of Eros and Thanatos—previously discussed in the reading of Vitukhnovskaia's poem featuring the Medusa—is evoked in the novel's very beginning. Eros appears in a verse from Sappho as epigraph: "Once again limb-loosing love shakes me, / bitter-sweet, untamable, dusky animal." When Cassandra is introduced as narrator after the first paragraph, she first evokes Thanatos. The story is external to Cassandra. In keeping pace with it, the story conveys her to death:

Mit der Erzählung geh' ich in den Tod. (5)

Keeping step with the story, I make my way to death. (3)

Her will to not let go and surrender to Thanatos, using Eros as her driving force becomes apparent in Cassandra's description of how she saves her children from the raging elements, how she clings to life, her own, and theirs. Her Eros is to see what happens, even if it is doom: she gains, if not hope, pleasure from everything she sees.

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<sup>69</sup> Euripides casts his Cassandra as raging, evoking and willing to revenge the loss of her people. On this matter see Davreux, 44f.

Shortly thereafter she explains the intention behind the drive to prophecize. She wanted the gift of prophecy to "speak in her own voice: the ultimate." Here, as in many other instances, Wolf's Cassandra speaks in an ambivalent tongue. The ambiguities often generate not only in the contents of the speech, but also in punctuation. Some sentences are designed as questions, but without a question mark. The 'ultimate' / 'final' / 'most outrageous' could be diminishing – so little is what she wants – but could also imply that this claim is the most daring. Her situation could be "a reason to laugh," and this laughter, between terror and liberation, is an image reminiscent of the Medusan ambiguity that I have discussed in the first chapter.

Throughout the novel, Wolf employs numerous connotations of Cassandra's voice: laughter, prophecy, sound of voice. In contrast to the dramatic tone of the two poems by Hagenau and Chizhova, screaming is not among them, while moments of frenzy and madness are rather expressed through the reactions of the entire body, or perceived as such because of what Cassandra says rather than how she says it. The temporal dimension draws attention to the importance of memory. In Cassandra's situation speaking equals living, and living gives her the opportunity to speak. She has to do the work of remembering and reminding events herself. Unlike in Aeschylus's drama, where Cassandra petitions the chorus to remember her and her words, Wolf's Cassandra is alone. Only towards the last third of the novel, when she ponders the options she has in addressing Clytaemnestra—petitioning for mercy or asking for a quick death—she hints at the option to live, and live on through memory. However, Cassandra sets up a dichotomy that appears to confirm with the stereotype of viewing

written male culture as 'high' culture and in contrast to female (and less educated) oral culture:

Clytaemnestra, lock me up forever in your darkest dungeon. Give me barely enough to live on. But I implore you: Send me a scribe, or better yet a young slave woman with a keen memory and a powerful voice. Ordain that she may repeat to her daughter what she hears from me. That the daughter in turn may pass it on to her daughter, and so on. So that alongside the river of heroic songs this tiny rivulet, too, may reach those faraway, perhaps happier people who will live in times to come (81/95).

The passage is noteworthy because of its immediate reference to Cassandra's main dialogue with the chorus in Aeschylus's Agamemnon. It is also striking that Wolf's Cassandra directs her wish for a woman as memory-keeper to the woman who will become Cassandra's murderer. What does it mean that the woman protagonist is killed by a woman? Does it have a significance beyond following the structure of the ancient myth? In the novel, the question is not explored further, other than in the irony of Cassandra's notations of similarities between herself and the queen.

Cassandra's own memory is selectively organized by fear and emotions.<sup>70</sup>

Temporal dimensions function as ordering principles. Thus, Cassandra's world is clear-cut into past, present, and future. While the question remains if there is any future to speak of, as her own will end with the end of the speech, one is reminded, again, of Benjamin's 'angel of history', and in this light Cassandra has been interpreted as a "female utopia turned to the past" [rückwärtsgewandte Form weiblicher Utopie, comp. Lersch, 72]. Panthoos, the Greek priest, suspects that Cassandra's wish for prophecy is

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<sup>70</sup> "Ich hatte Angst, Aineias. Das war es, was du niemals glauben wolltest. Die Art von Angst hast du ja nicht gekannt. Ich hab ein Angst-Gedächtnis. Ein Gefühls-Gedächtnis," Wolf, Kassandra, 122.

nurtured by her wish to be remembered. In her narrative, memory constitutes the present, as her language has increasingly only the past to operate with:

Nothing left to describe the world but the language of the past. The language of the present has shriveled to the words that describe this dismal fortress. The language of the future has only one sentence left for me: Today I will be killed. (14/17)

Time, throughout most of the novel measured by events of the war that drive the destruction further and further, attains an unmarked, original quality for the first time when Cassandra spends time in a half dream, half delirium at the women's community. She perceives the episode as a timeless, boundless gift, which makes it even more a utopian vision than the creative, earthly complicity of the women. Time as frame or border device loses its meaning and gains an abstract value, allows for the only possible vision of the future:

It amazed me to see that different though we all were, the women by the Scamander felt without exception that we were testing something, and that it was not a question of how much time we had. [...] We were grateful that we were the ones granted the highest privilege there is: to slip a narrow strip of future into the grim present, which occupies all of time. (134/154)

Uncannily, as this second quote from close to the end of the novel mirrors the previous one from its beginning, it reveals the futility and temporality of any hope, including the utopian vision of the peaceful women's community. Cassandra's question, why she wanted the gift of prophecy by all means, will accompany her through the novel as a leitmotif. Her first answer – that she wants to speak her own language – appears to be the most valid, and the most tragic, as it seals her fate, and turns out to be an impossible task. Wolf subtly changes the ancient mythic version of the encounter between Cassandra and Apollo by transposing it to a dream sequence. Thus, the meeting attains an aura of ambiguity, and allows Cassandra to make the equally

ambivalent remark, that she "gotten her dream of prophecy." Though the German **erträumt** usually means the fulfillment of a strong wish, it also contains the verb "träumen" [to dream] which sets it off against a real event.

Once endowed with the prophetic vision, Cassandra appears safe as long as she complies with the order of the temple, performing the rituals as priestess and being at the Greek priest's Panthoos's service with her skills and with her body. Her reality is outside her: "I was playing priest." In this state of mind, which is governed by her environment, Cassandra cannot use her gift and gradually loses herself:

Getragen von der Achtung der Troer lebte ich scheinhaft wie nie [...]  
Ich sah nichts, Mit der Sehergabe überfordert, war ich blind.

Upheld by the respect of the Trojans, I lived in semblance more than ever.  
[...]  
I saw nothing. Overtaxed by the gift of sight, I was blind. (27/33)

When that changes, Cassandra starts resisting to "comply with their wishful thinking." (44) She excludes herself from society. Wolf outlines the process of alienation and deconstructs common notions of friend/kin versus enemy—a complicated entanglement that also shines through in Chizhova's poem, when her Cassandra points to "the strange tangles of enemies, friends." As all of Cassandra's narrative is recollection, it is not always consecutive and consequential—not always do the events occur in the narrated order or follow a logical connection. Often, though, she connects central observations that are not temporally linked, but gain a specific and uncanny causality. She concludes, for example, that it is wrong to say that the dead are sleeping, and remembers the wide open eyes of the corpses of her dead brothers and of Penthesilea. In the next paragraph, she looks into Clytaemnestra's eyes to test if she can

perhaps call on her mercy for her children, immediately concluding that "this woman does what she has to." (41/49). She does not even need to mention that there is no hope for the children, though she recognizes that circumstance and Clytaemnestra's hunger for power are stronger than any feeling that "In different times nothing would have prevented us from calling each other sister. [...] and the same smile appeared in the corners of Clytaemnestra's mouth as in mine. Not cruel. Painful." (42/50).<sup>71</sup> What can be read as a string of memories, one told after the other, leads in this case to a circle that emphasizes once more the inherent connection of Eros and Thanatos. Cassandra notes the signal power of images that come to her as memories in a particular moment (52). After the eyes of her dead brothers, and the worry for her own children, she remembers her brother Aisakos, who kills himself after his wife dies in childbirth. At that point Cassandra decides that she never wants to have a child—a wish not granted, children and parents doomed to early death as well—and falls into a state of mourning so furious that "this was the first time I heard: "she is out of her mind" (51). While depicting the way from compliance to contradicting expectations through her prophecy, she first talks about the "other voice," the voice of prophecy. Its appearance is connected to love and madness: It happens in Aineias's presence, and not by coincidence, and it turns Cassandra into a state of madness:

I had known from the beginning that Marpessa was telling the truth. [...] The voice that said this was a stranger's voice, and of course today I know—I have known for a long time—That it was no accident that this strange voice which had stuck in my throat many times already in the past

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<sup>71</sup> Later in novel, she makes another connection between herself and Clytaemnestra. For Cassandra, who reminds him of his sacrificed daughter Iphigenia, Agamemnon had bought a necklace. Cassandra sees its counterpart on Clytaemnestra's neck when meeting her at the palace gates. The women recognize each other by this jewelry, *ibid.*, 120.

should speak out of me for the first time in Aeneas's presence." I set it free deliberately so that it would not tear me apart. (39/45)

Calchas, the male prophet, tailors his prophecies according to the rulers' demand. His authority first remains unquestioned, and contrasts more strongly with Cassandra's truth that raises disbelief. This contrast emphasizes the gender-aspect of male authority versus female frenzy, and is a phenomenon Hagenau mentions in her essay on prophets. One can pose two questions in this context: Why was Cassandra the prophet blamed for a prophecy with destructive consequences (while Laocoon, for example, has no less terrible things to say)? Why does the connection between female prophecy and madness, that both Hagenau and Wolf evoke, seem innate? In the classical tradition, Cassandra's image as a frantic priestess, ready to give up her position and become not only the voice but the hand of Trojan wrath by committing herself to marriage with a Greek, stems from Euripides's tragedy of the Trojan Women.<sup>72</sup> Wolf's Cassandra breaks out in convulsions, cries, and foams at the mouth. Her legs "which were as much out of control as all my other limbs, jerked and danced with a disreputable, unseemly delight that I myself did not feel in the least" (39/47). This first seemingly mad 'episode' governs her perception of time for a while. The break marks her first step on the way to seeing. While Cassandra considers herself blind while she is acting in accordance with her role as priestess, she calls her illness after the episode a state of 'half-blindness' (40/48). The gift she so much wished for turns into the opposite. The prophetic voice, a strange object inside her body, increasingly cuts her

off from her family and the Trojans, and also from herself. Her mind and voice in contrast to that 'other voice' and her body appear as different objects that Cassandra tries to manage and rule, but not always successfully. The first climax and prophetic experience after her initiation and the internal knowledge of the truth about Calchas comes during Menelaus's visit to Troy. Cassandra can physically feel the certain doom to come: "Like everyone's, my body gave me signs; but unlike others, I was not able to ignore them" (58/68). She tries to destroy the body that houses the deadly voice: "I did not want to feed this body. I wanted this criminal body, where the voice of death had its seat, to starve, to wither away." (60/70) She thus attempts to approach her inner sense "Wahn-Sinn" (60/70), the German composite noun translating as "mad-sense" (as opposed to "Wahnsinn"—"madness"), only to find that she did not exist (61/71). She has yet to come to terms with her body as the container of memories and future events alike, which reacts the way it does as a result of the dangerous and often suppressed 'overload' of past, present, and future it has to cope with.<sup>72</sup> Like only few other (male) mythic heroes—Aeneas among them—Wolf lets her Cassandra travel, in her state of half conscious madness, to the underworld and back. In the epics, the trip to the underworld is a prophetic device. However, Cassandra needs Arisbe's advice to "open

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<sup>72</sup> Cassandra's frenzy in ancient literature has been analyzed for example by Lilian Feder, Madness in Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). The emphasis is on how Cassandra's credibility is weakened by her presumed madness.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Horn, using Lacanian psychoanalysis, has fruitfully explored the relation between body, voice and memory in Cassandra in his essay "Die Grenze, hinter der die Sprache aufhört. Die antimythologische Begründung weiblichen Schreibens in Christa Wolfs Erzählung Kassandra," Acta Germanica 22 (1994): 85–100. He notes that often the archives of memory that the body stores turn to archived of forgetting, because we switch to an absentminded gaze, having learned that "seeing is dangerous," 88.

her inner eye. To look at herself," and to be able to return (62/72). After this internal travel brings her back into Trojan reality, the war starts. Cassandra, alienated, clearly sees the absurdity of creating enemies to justify warfare.<sup>74</sup> Aeschylus's Cassandra, on the other hand, asks that she be remembered as representative of the unnecessary fate of doom, Wolf's Cassandra wishes that someone could remember, write down and carry on the 'rules', if any existed, about the pre-war, the war before the war starts to prevent further armed arguments. (66/78) Wolf demonstrates the absurd nature of the Trojan War by writing Helena out of it: In her version, Helena had never actually entered the city, and Cassandra is the only one to know it.

Previously, I had noted that the relation between voice and image, name and naming are essential to Wolf's Cassandra. Helena and Cassandra represent the opposite poles of the spectrum. As Panthoos wrathfully states in the beginning, Cassandra's name will be remembered because of her negative prophecies, but it will be emptied of any trace of Cassandra as a person or of her real voice. Helena's only 'reality' is her name, which, devoid of a person to be assigned that name, is sufficient alone to maintain a war, so that after the third year of war, no one even demands to see Helena anymore (67/79).<sup>75</sup> On another level, this storyline demonstrates that possible thriving power is

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<sup>74</sup> This is one of the major arguments a political reading with the disarmament debate in mind finds in the novel that supports Wolf's stance to defy increase of nuclear arms and support a pacifist position.

<sup>75</sup> The third meaningful name in this novel is that of Achilles, "Achilles the brute / the animal" / "Achill das Vieh" as Cassandra calls him. His name contrasts with the other as the incarnation of (male) war, cruelty, and brutal lust, everything that is destructive. And there is Polyxena, the sister who is for Cassandra "what I could not have been," Wolf, Kassandra, 110. Sacrificed to Achill, she was for Cassandra "the last name that stood between me and Aineias. Perhaps our only misunderstanding," *ibid.*

absurd: Cassandra gains no power through the prophecies that are not her own reality, Paris destroys what he could reign over when he invents the beautiful woman who according to prophecy would give him power. While Helena remains a beautiful illusion with atrocious consequences, Cassandra strives for beauty and truth through love. Wolf constructs the contrasting pairs of Helena–Paris, and Cassandra–Aeneas.<sup>76</sup> Cassandra's narrative asserts that names can only achieve true reality through love. In her meetings with Aeneas that nourish love and sensuality, communication is mostly gestures and calling of their names: "We said little more to each other than our names; I had never heard a more beautiful love poem" (103/88).<sup>77</sup>

The fourth level on the way to her own voice after Cassandra's initiation to prophecy, the Calchas episode and the delirium following her vision of the war, is her observation during the war. She realizes that the clear vision of events and the acknowledgment of their truth is more relevant, or even implies clairvoyance of a prophetic vision:

That day saw the start of something that became a habit: I stood and saw.  
[...]Those who could see saw it the first day: We would lose this war.

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<sup>76</sup> An etymological connection between Helena and Cassandra has been noted by Ledergerber with reference to other classicist studies; comp. Ledergerber, 8f. He concludes that Cassandra had become the Trojan counterpart to the Greek Helena. While I note this as a significant detail with regards to character relations, I am aware that an affirmation of Wolf's presentation by means of factual historical information is an ambivalent, critical issue, as the later discussion of West's criticism against Wolf's writing methods will show. There might be historical sources for a relation between Helena and Cassandra, but the love relation between Cassandra and Aeneas, on the other hand, is Wolf's invention. Also, it cannot be proved that Wolf was aware of this etymological connection, nor does she expand on it in the narrative.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the notion of love in Wolf's work and the assumed exclusion of the productive force of love in patriarchic Western value systems, developed by Wolf based on Bachmann's poem "Erklär mir, Liebe" see Hilzinger, 87f.

This time I did not shriek. Did not go crazy. Went on standing there. (72f / 84f)<sup>78</sup>

Even this level, though, is connected to madness, this time not as a state befalling Cassandra, but as a punishment assigned her by her father, who chooses to declare his daughter mad over the other two options to get rid of her: giving her away in unwanted marriage or arresting her. Her madness corresponds with the Trojan strategy of perceiving as real what had been made public instead of the simple announcement of what really occurred:

I still believed that a little will to truth, a little courage, could erase the whole misunderstanding. To call what was true, true and what was untrue, false: That was asking so little (I thought) and would have served out cause better than any lie or half-truth. (85/99)

Cassandra ponders after Priam throws her out for the second time. The fifth state: While the war goes on, Cassandra has regained the ability to dream—even though what she dreams is disquieting. She flees into perfecting her skills as priestess, into teaching the young priestesses "to speak as a chorus, which is indeed not easy" (101/114)—an ironic statement given that precisely with that occupation Cassandra decides to speak as part of the 'chorus' of the Trojans. She is trapped, like a prisoner, without acknowledging it (102/115).

Cassandra, observing, is faced with a state of destruction that leaves close to nothing of her family. Hector and Troilus slain, Hecabe an old, white-haired woman,

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<sup>78</sup> In the *Iliad*, an image of the observing Cassandra's is conveyed, with an emphasis on her beauty through a simile with Aphrodite: She is the first to see her brother Hector die: "Nor was any other / aware of them at the first, no man, no fair-girdled woman, / only Kassandra, a girl like Aphrodite the golden, / who had gone up to the height of the Pergamos. She saw / her dear father standing in the chariot [...]" *Iliad*, book XXIV, v. 697-701.

Andromache whining, curved up in a corner, Polyxena decisive and sharp like a sword. (112/131). She, Cassandra, who had "dreamed of prophecy" stops dreaming altogether, "a bad sign" (113/130). It is a different, numbing kind of blindness. Her words are reduced to "no" that, as Panthoos reminds her that words have "physical consequences" [körperliche Folgen, 132] condenses, shrinks her being even further. And leads her into the imprisonment in a wicker basket. When Cassandra refuses to remain silent and support a plan to use Polyxena to lure Achilles, her father uses the second of the three possibilities to get rid of her: he imprisons her. The effect amplifies her first refusal and reclusion into a state of madness, this time she fights it, though. When she is freed and in reclusion among the women at the Scamander, she reminds herself "Not to lose her mind now" (148) and succeeds. When she emerges from her prison "the underworld" (148), more real even than that of her feverish dreams in the beginning of war, she has found her voice. During this episode, she learns what pain is (149), forced through her refusing 'no'. After her survival, Priamos makes use of his third option, he marries her off to Euryplos, a new potential ally, who dies in battle immediately after marrying Cassandra and having fathered the twins with her.<sup>79</sup>

Cassandra's entire monologue shows a gradual development that is marked less by deeds or any kind of progress toward a certain goal or finite event, than by an

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<sup>79</sup> This relationship is as freely invented by Wolf as the love-relation between Cassandra and Aineas. In her criticism of Wolf's non-compliance with ancient texts, West remarks that particularly these inventions contradict mythological and societal logic: Aineas, as Vergil emotionally depicts, loses a beloved wife in the war, and why would Agamemnon claim Cassandra as booty, had she lost the attraction of being the enemy king's only virgin daughter. On this topic, though, Gantz, even if he notes the circumstance alike as strange, notes the same phenomenon in several ancient sources. Gantz, 675. On Cassandra's arranged

increasing process of purification and disillusionment, that leaves her clairvoyant and knowing, but emptied of emotion or hope. Her journey through her memory is a definition of herself as speaking subject, during which she has not only to disentangle different voices, but to allow all truth to be voiced, including that about her own intentions, even if that offers arguments to be held against her. Cassandra, knowing how destructive the weapon of the word can be, gradually admits towards herself:

In the future I had to know more than they [her family, the palace community] did in order to punish them. Become a priestess in order to gain power? Ye gods. You had to drive me to this extremity to wring this simple sentence from me. What a hard time sentences have had till the end, when they tackle me. How much faster and more easily the sentences get through when they are aimed at others. (51/61)

It is also a journey from the thirst for seeing and speaking to (inherent, painful) knowledge and truth. When, towards the end, Cassandra resumes the nature of her prophetic abilities, she connects the issues of power, name, and voice.

In a reverse development, the quality of voice in Troy and Cassandra's voice change: The more authentic Cassandra's voice gets, the more euphemisms are used to officially describe the increasingly critical situation in the palace, the more language is manipulated and abused as instrument of power.<sup>80</sup>

Other women play influential roles in Cassandra's story. Her mother, who takes her seriously, helps spreading the news about her dream and comes up with the other part of the story. (45) When talking is no longer wanted in the 'palace of silence,' (57) it

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marriage or possibly even yet another marriage promise after the death of her first husband in battle, see *ibid.*, 650ff.

<sup>80</sup> Comp. Maisch, 75f.

is first the mother and the nurse who keep silent, and then, only much later, Cassandra (57). Arisbe, the mother-in-law of her beloved dead brother Aisakos carries the knowledge about Paris' fate and curse. Her portrayal in her hut on the bottom of mount Ida, a big woman stirring the stinking pot on the fire, with a voice like a trumpet, inadvertently reminds one of the stereotypical witch who has power and potions. With Arisbe, Cassandra finds a home that allows her to heal, and prevents her from dying and going crazy. There, she finally finds her own voice. The presentation of this environment has provoked some criticism as well as unconditional support, depending on how the critics judged the earth-bound, natural, original femaleness of the mother-earth type. But Arisbe's hut under mount Ida and the women's community on the banks of the Scamander are reminiscent of maternal myths not only ancient, but classical like the witches and the world of the mothers in Goethe's Faust that itself refers to a pre-ancient, original realm. Wolf herself paints the realm of the 'mothers' as a source of creative tradition that lies before, or at least beyond like an "Ur-mother," original goddess.<sup>81</sup> Anchises in the end calls Arisbe "Great Mother" (155). This denomination suggests that one should read her close if not representative of Cybele, the fertile original goddess on whom Wolf's Cassandra calls—in contrast to Apollo, whom she calls at in Aeschylus's Oresteia. Besides Arisbe, who together with Anchises assumes the role of counselor for Cassandra, Marpessa, who had first known the truth about Calchas, belongs to the original females. There are also the women sacrificed voluntarily

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<sup>81</sup> It is characteristic for Wolf's essays to refer to pre-classical sources, and a pre-classical time of goddesses that she turns to as references for her own reinscriptions. Remarks in this respect can be found in her lectures and her essay "From Cassandra to Medea," in Wolf,

or involuntarily to the war, such as Iphigenia, Cassandra's sister Polyxena, given to Achilles as booty, Briseis, and on the other side Clytaemnestra. The Greek queen is to a certain extent a mirror-image of Cassandra, since both characters are connected through the same war and a thirst for power from opposite positions, especially in Wolf's novel: The queen loses her daughter Iphigenia for the war and sacrifices her husband to her lust for power, which she gains through murderous action, while Cassandra gives birth to twins by Euryalos, the husband she was forced to marry, as cause of the war. Once she realizes that she has to let Aeneas go so that he can survive and lay the foundation for a future, she sacrifices her love.

Though the contrast between men and women is clearly sketched by Cassandra's narrative, she does not make her own femaleness a central issue for the most part. When she then notes towards the end that she never wanted to be a man, this potentially essential statement seems almost weak and out of context.<sup>82</sup>

Cassandra never closely associates herself with the group of women in the palace or with the Scamander community (so she feels very close to the latter). Contrasting the two, Cassandra juxtaposes the 'palace of silence' that she labels 'tragic' to the 'burlesque' women's meetings where the community not only discussed matters of the city, but "cooked, ate, drank, laughed together, sang, played, learned" – innocent, creative, child-like occupations, far from Cassandra's thirst for power and desire for

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Medea Voraussetzungen, and in her stagebill for Reinshagen's Die grüne Tür. Medea bleibt, 1999.

<sup>82</sup> When Hector is brutally dragged to death, Cassandra's farewell are only through silent glances: "Nie mehr Hektor, Lieber, habe ich ein Mann sein wollen. Oft jenen Mächten, die für das Geschlecht des Menschen einstehn, gedankt, daß ich Frau sein darf" Wolf, Kassandra, 128f.

prophecy, that she finds comfort in for a limited time while she is aware of the fleetingness of this utopia.

At the beginning of her lecture series on Cassandra, Wolf sets up a dichotomy between structured norms and woven experience; she rhetorically negates her task to give lectures on poetics, by stating a definition of it that emphasizes a structured, normative tradition, and countering that she has none. Her simile for her own extrapolation of the subject is the image of weaving, a handicraft that positions her in a context with the Parcae and Penelope. She emphasizes the process, not the result. Her lectures have this in common with the novel, which, as I attempted to trace above, follows the process of Cassandra's becoming in a non-linear fashion.

The contrast between entrapment—through war, tradition, or gender—alienation and the freedom of knowing oneself is Wolf's leitmotif. She outlines this point when she describes her encounter with Cassandra that initiates the project: Reading the Oresteia, she believes in every word of Cassandra, though the prophet is entrapped, alienated, as "object of foreign goals" [Objekt fremder Zwecke<sup>10</sup>]. However, Wolf finds that "she alone in this play knew herself" [Mir schien, daß sie als einzige in diesem Stück sich selber kannte, 10]. Thus, tracing the contrast between this objectification, more prone to, but not exclusively applicable to women, Cassandra's imagined becoming an individual voice/subject lies at the heart of Wolf's Cassandra-Project. She asks who Cassandra was before anyone wrote on her and inscribed her. She herself emphasizes a contextualization she aims for: To return the myth within the (imagined) social and

historical coordinates.<sup>83</sup> Wolf is curious about the character of Cassandra, she wants to know who she is, what language she might have spoken, and how Aeschylus came to create a woman who in his tragedy ends her monologue in view of the "gates of Hades" in a manner that could not have been executed by any woman of Aeschylus's time because it would have been inappropriate.

Two of her four lectures contrast the impressions of a trip to Greece with Cassandra's ancient world as she imagines it, connecting the two worlds, ancient and modern, as if they could be read on the same level. Despite temporal distance, the structures of power, communication, and conflicts between locals and foreigners have not significantly changed. In the other two lectures Wolf explores her reading material. In addition to her primary examples of Cassandra's crafting by Aeschylus and Schiller's Cassandra, it contains a rich list from mythopoetics and women's studies. As my priority in this analysis is not an exhaustive intertextual reading, I will not explore all the texts she mentions, but only briefly investigate those that are significant for Wolf's notion of a female voice and mythopoetics.

Before Wolf writes a voice for Cassandra, she listens to one of the few available, that of Aeschylus's Cassandra in his Agamemnon. Later on in the third lecture, Wolf lists the titles of an entire pile of summer reading during the work on her novel, a list that is a representative selection of studies on women and female creativity, starting with Bachofen and ending with Bovenschen and Irigaray. Nevertheless, I do not find that she draws a dividing line between men and women; in the search for the

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<sup>83</sup> "Mein Anliegen bei der Cassandra-Figur: Rückführung aus dem Mythos in die (gedachten) sozialen und historischen Koordinaten." Third Lecture, note dated from April 1981. Wolf,

autonomous and creative subject, she simply notes that traditionally women had to overcome more obstacles than men.

If Wolf's phrasing is rather cautious in the lectures, she formulates a more radical statement around the same time in an essay on Kleist's Penthesilea.<sup>84</sup> Wolf's central thesis in this essay tracing how the male author Kleist can use the mythological woman Penthesilea as mouthpiece, is—from a present point of view rather confirmatory than revolutionary—that Greek culture is misogynist and repressive of women's creativity:

The lower position of women was commonplace, they deprived women of their rights, banned to live inside the house, rendered harmless, causing no more danger. [...] The great literature of the Greeks can be read as literature of displacement—of female culture, of female claims in the broadest sense.<sup>85</sup>

Wolf's reading list and her two intentional statements, the question of pre-literary origin of the individual Cassandra, and the task to embed her in context, bear an inherent contradiction, and spur a controversy over mythologization and demythologization that exceeds Wolf's particular case and affects several of the modern authors I am discussing.<sup>86</sup>

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Voraussetzungen 111.

<sup>84</sup> Wolf's occupation with the topic is another example for her creative/critical mythopoetics, tackling the issue from different sides: Penthesilea is a female figure of rage, an equal adversary to Achilles, in Kassandra. Wolf analyses a male author's treatment of the figure in her essay, and had previously contrasted the author Kleist's fictitious encounter with Karoline von Günderode in Kein Ort. Nirgends.

<sup>85</sup> "Ihnen war ja die Minderwertigkeit der Frau selbstverständlich, sie hatten ihre Frauen entrechtet, ins Haus verbannt, unschädlich und ungefährlich gemacht. [...] Die großartige Literatur der Griechen kann man auch als eine Literatur unaufhörlicher Verdrängung weiblicher Lebensansprüche im weitesten Sinne lesen." Wolf, "Kleist's Penthesilea" 4.

<sup>86</sup> The definition of demythologization is complicated and appears to be tailored differently by various critics. Glau's definition appears plausible: An alternative aesthetics of perception and presentation strip myth of its conventional interpretation that is based on common readings of it. The specific case of Wolf's Cassandra, Glau notes though, implies a double

Stephanie West for example wrote a harshly critical article on Wolf's novel. West deconstructs Cassandra. By comparing the modern novel with its classical predecessors she claims to find ample evidence that, by using doubtful sources and freely mixing them, Wolf writes Cassandra out of the myth:

Demythologized, secularized, sexually experienced, neither troubled nor comforted by religious belief, this late-twentieth-century Cassandra has been designed as a representative woman, clever, independent-minded and, like Christa T. and Karoline von Günderode, possessed of unrealized talents; but she has moved as far from her classical forerunners as she could without becoming completely unrecognizable.

(184f) West is disappointed, as

Christa Wolf's description of her encounter with the Aeschylean Cassandra raises high hopes that her re-creation will enhance our subsequent appreciation of the older texts and that a careful choice of detail and emphasis will produce the hermeneutic transmutation which a creative writer may achieve in handling legendary material. (182)

I would agree that Wolf's intent to contextualize Cassandra raises expectations that are not followed through. Though the war with its political intrigues and Cassandra's alleged role are mentioned, the process of Cassandra's subjectivation takes over as the novel progresses. However, West might have overlooked that Wolf adds the restriction gedachten ("thought of" or "invented") to her search for socio-historical context in parentheses, and that she asks about Cassandra before anyone had written her. With that statement, as I read it, Wolf takes care to avoid the necessity of placing herself in the literary tradition West presupposes as authoritative.

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demythologization, through the narrator on the one hand and the subject/Cassandra, on the

The controversy represents the complicated bind for any contemporary writer who takes on an ancient myth: Connections and comparisons with previous, especially normative versions of the myth are unavoidable. The question is to what extent the modern writer fashions herself in that tradition, or deliberately sets her text against it, and how the concept of tradition in itself is conceived by the author. The even more interesting question here concerns notions of tradition as authority. Following West's argument, classical literary tradition makes for authority. West treats classical texts as sources and compares their contents to Wolf's storyline, in all cases proving the modern author 'wrong.' In her more recent essay "From Cassandra to Medea" (1998) Wolf asserts the complexity and variety of ancient sources. She defines her own position as aiming to discover and to follow as many of these versions as possible, "not in a scientific manner, but as a literary author, with imagination and fantasy, nourished by knowing, as comprehensively as possible, these characters' circumstances."<sup>87</sup>

Here, one is caught again in the dilemma of evaluating a myth-narrative against the assumption that there is no original version of a myth. If we treat all texts, including Homeric epics as versions of a generic myth, than there is little case to be made for not treating two texts written at a distance of two thousand years on the same level—at

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other, thus canceling each other out. Glau, 97.

<sup>87</sup> Wolf characterizes Cassandra and Medea as female characters originating in an oral tradition, later inscribed in the classical epics and texts: "Mich faszinierte der Versuch, all diesen Überlieferungen auf den Grund zu kommen, soweit dies überhaupt möglich ist – nicht in der Art der Wissenschaft, sondern als Literatin, mit Imagination und Phantasie, die allerdings gespeist wurden durch die weitestmögliche Kenntnis der Lebensumstände dieser Figuren." Wolf, *Medea Voraussetzungen* 12.

least for purposes of aesthetic and literary quality.<sup>88</sup> Even Aristotle in his Poetics—a treatise that raises its own questions and contradictions, but no doubt one that West would accept as quotable source—claims that actions and characters must be believable, but concedes that they might be invented.<sup>89</sup> To perceive a Homeric epic or an Aeschylean tragedy as the only valuable canonic column supporting the building of later literature also means to strip it from the intercultural and intertextual references of its own context, and thus to deny it much of its complexity.

One main difference for a modern reader examining Wolf's novel together with her lectures, though, is the presentation of Wolf's authorial vision. Through her notation she lets the reader participate in the creative process. She opens her tool cabinet and library to the reader's eye, and also formulates aesthetic and philosophical tasks she sets out to tackle in a work of fiction. The Cassandra-project, seen in its entirety as lectures plus novel, evolves in a "three phase thought movement" in which the author travels back in history to research the character, then transports the character into a presence

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<sup>88</sup> One could drive the argument one level further by questioning to what extent an oral epic, written down at a later state by an author such as Homer whose persona has been questioned, can serve as historical source.

<sup>89</sup> While conceding that poets, especially in comedy, are "makers of plots," he states Agathon's Antheus as example that [...] even in some tragedies most names are invented and only one or two well known [...] So one need not try to stick at any cost to the traditional stories, which are the subject of tragedies; indeed the attempt would be absurd, since even what is well known is well known only to a few, but gives general pleasure for all that." Aristotle, Poetics, I, 1451 b).

and finally manifests it in the narrative.<sup>90</sup> I am referring to Wolf's multiple tasks: She chose to reinsert Cassandra into her social context, to investigate Cassandra's persona before her manifestation as literary character. Furthermore, she had received a task set by the invitation to read the Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics.

Wolf conducts an experiment that is fruitful, if not always successful, and certainly not destructive to myth: She explores the rhetoric and storyline potentials of Cassandra the prophet. Her search for "truth,"—in voice and in writing—is a goal very prominent in many of Wolf's works. She is inspired—and sometimes uninspired—by critical and fictional texts, while her own writing oscillates between travelogue, story, and criticism. Certainly, her engagement with the ancient texts is a kind of dialogue. How that affects the reader could be tested in an—unfortunately only theoretical—experiment, wherein one reader would listen to or read the lectures and the novel (the first, original setup), the other read the novel without the lectures, and both would respond if they had 'heard' other texts, especially Aeschylus's *Cassandra of the Agamemnon* in the background.<sup>91</sup>

I agree with West that "classical legend has proved amazingly permeable to contemporary concerns" and that a reader familiar with the myth faster discerns "variations from the familiar form of the story" (185). I disagree, however, that Wolf's novel falls under the category:

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<sup>90</sup> Cramer 135. She also makes an interesting comment relevant for the dialogicity between author and character from a structural point of view, characterizing the gates of Mycenae as the architectural meeting point between the author and her prophet, both in the lectures and in the novel. Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> In her lectures, Wolf recites Cassandra's passages from the tragedy almost in their entirety.

Carelessness or gross deviancy imposes a severe strain on the conventional framework of theme and variation. Demythologization cannot fail to bring trivialization; nationalization drains legend of the very elements which give it its imaginative appeal. (185)

But how does Wolf deal with tradition, as she raises the issue herself in both the novel and her lectures? The female utopia she constructs with the Scamander-community and the remarks about matriarchy in her lectures suggest that she assumes a female tradition before and layered over what became normative male heritage. However, her exegesis is not completely satisfactory. In light of the Romantic tradition, that began to foreground the subject and to experiment with genre norms, Wolf's genre-blurring is not completely new, neither is it originally female (Comp. Cramer, 135).

As the analysis has demonstrated, the temporal structure in the discussed novels by Bachmann and Wolf is constitutive. Even though Wolf retrospectively tells her story, she focuses on the presence of the narrated event. In Malina, the presence is even more immediately in focus. Since the future is what Cassandra in Wolf and the narrator in Malina see but do not want, respectively should not be seeing, might serve as an explanation. What Wolf defines as 'window,' is comparable to the 'presence' in Bachmann, when she defines it as a 'non-place.' In addition to the interpretive potential given by Bachmann's influence on Wolf and the latter's comments on Bachmann's work, both Cassandra and Malina narrate a process of subjectivation or subject-becoming, limited and framed by the knowledge of imminent death. The subject is a woman who concentrates on defining her space while she speaks/writes against time, and both first person narrators reflect on their preoccupation and symbolic perception of time. Finiteness is given by emphasizing the death- rather than the life-perspectives, as both

authors' works can be read as 'Death-type projects', in allusion to Bachmann's unfinished Todesarten-Projekt.<sup>92</sup>

Memory in Bachmann is not narrated, but reported and documented, leading to dissolution and breaking up of genre-structures, the present tense of narrative.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.3. Conclusion: Did Cassandra Get Her Voice Back?

Has Cassandra, in the renditions of contemporary women authors, advanced from prophetic, unheard mouthpiece of the gods and of human fate, to an individual, female, and independent voice? There is no satisfactory, simple answer. The majority of the six texts that I examined in this chapter end with a significant split between voice and person: In Chizhova's poem, which focuses so vividly on Cassandra's voice and its effect, the voice seems disembodied and therefore the relation between a female subject and the prominent voice is a void. Cassandra's voice dies when it is no longer needed or resignedly gives up. In Zhigalova's novel, when Nina attains emotional peace and does not have to make any more important decisions that demand Cassandra's consultation,

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<sup>92</sup> Sybille Cramer suggests a reading of several of Wolf's novels as 'Todesarten', understanding many of her female protagonists as figures of resistance and of 'in-between' two historical areas: "Lebensläufe, die als Todesarten beschrieben werden, als Aufenthalte in einem schmalen Schichtsspalt, dessen "eiserne Platten" sie näherrückend zerquetschen." Cramer, 123.

<sup>93</sup> "In Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman erscheint Erinnerung radikalisiert. Erinnerung ist beständig gegenwärtig, sie ist bewußt gemachte, natürlich ist sie auch literarische Erinnerung, aber als literarische ist sie nicht erzählt, sondern protokolliert, dokumentiert, Erinnerung im "Malina"-Roman ermöglicht keinen Roman mehr, sie zwingt zur Gattungsvermischung, zur Auflösung erzählerischer Zusammenhänge, zur Destruktion epischer oder sprachlicher Linearität und damit zur radikalen, auch sprachlichen Entgrenzung." Irmela von der Lühe,

Nina's prophetic alter ego 'wins' by being right, but no longer speaks. The narrator of Kaschnitz's story, only briefly comparing herself to Cassandra, resigns herself to remaining silent and not raising that doom-foreseeing voice any longer so as not to enrage or endanger her family. In Hagenau's various castings of the mythic character, Cassandra dies, caught in her unwanted voice and denied the love she longs for. The longing of Hagenau's Cassandra is not for truth or power, or even for an individual self.

Wolf's Cassandra and Bachmann's narrator both strive for such an individualization and subjectivation. While Wolf's Cassandra explicitly wants to be powerful, different from the members of the community, and knows about the equation of voice and power, the narrator in Malina struggles to fit herself, in vain, into the frames of others. Her voice, especially during the phone conversations with Ivan, expresses an individual stance, but especially replies and even echoes themes and topics Ivan brings up. Does this mean that the narrator is caught in the role of echo, unable to give voice to her own position? Bachmann's narrator is not echoing, but is also rarely setting her own ground. Malina is extraordinarily complex because the narrative voice I have been focusing on is not independent, but, as Bachmann herself notes several times, one, a female, "color" of a complex voice of which Malina is the other, male, "color," a type of "Doppelgänger," as Bachmann characterizes him repeatedly.

The female protagonists of the texts attempt to various degrees to leave their confinements, that are defined by their various circumstances, but in all cases, are also set by the myth. They aim to create their own image through their voices so as to become independent of their environment's image of them. After brief visits into views

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"Erinnerung und Identität in Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman Malina" in Text + Kritik.

of their own, Kaschnitz's and Zhigalova's protagonists decide to cover themselves and return to the safer frame of existing visions. Bachmann's narrator seems to fail in that she cannot assert her voice strong enough to survive and dissolves so that only the other remains in Malina. I do not contend, though, that Bachmann's experiment fails in a narratological sense. Her novel is perhaps the most experimental and advanced among the examples, in that she does not subscribe to a dichotomy of male versus female. Her female narrator and Malina could become a functioning entity, if they would complement each other. But the balance does not work out that way, wherefore the result appears as a failure, while bearing the broadest potential for subjectivation among the texts discussed.

Christa Wolf's Cassandra alone manages to create an image of herself that is her own and that will remain with the echo of her voice after she and her voice are gone.<sup>94</sup> Her Cassandra takes the myth on, 'archeologically' uncovers it and then attempts a partially 'utopian' solution that fails in that Cassandra only reaches her own voice and truth right before her death. I would argue, though, that Wolf's Cassandra, from the beginning when she strives for the position as priestess, does not 'echo' the male voices of her fellow Trojans. Like them, her voice implies war, but since she does not see things from the 'right' side, this superficial conformity with the male voices causes her

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Sonderband Ingeborg Bachmann, p. 135.

<sup>94</sup> Comp. Wilke, 136. "Was die Spiegelungsthematik anbetrifft, geht es ja in 'Kassandra' explizit um die Ersetzung eines Bildes von sich selbst - des Bildes, das unter der Bedingung des Blicks der anderen entstand - durch ein neues Bild, das von dieser Bedingung frei ist. Auch hier suggeriert der Text eine erfolgreiche Bewegung, denn Kassandra sagt ja von sich selbst, daß es ihr gelungen sei, dieses andere Bild von sich selbst zumindest zu entwerfen."

trouble with the power of the palace.<sup>95</sup> The pragmatic intentions of the Trojan rulers and the priestess Cassandra differ. While the men use their words to gain or keep power, Cassandra's prophecies are not purpose-less, but untainted by personal interests. She cares about the fate of Troy. However, as she cannot influence the content of the prophecy. Her words bear the risk of being painful and possibly incurring loss. Cassandra's visions range somewhere between birthing pains and madness, they attain a physicality closely connected to her female body, which is absent in any speech of the male characters of the novel, including even Cassandra's lover Aeneas.

In the discussion about Wolf's treatment of myth in *Cassandra*, there is no consensus. Critics' assessments of Wolf's *Cassandra* range from demythologization / deconstruction of myth, incorrect myth-reception bordering on demythologization

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<sup>95</sup> Gerhard Neumann has opened interesting perspectives on Wolf's works in relation to myth in his essay on the archeology of the female voice. He bases his argument on the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, focused on the story of Narcissus and Echo. Echo, the woman who can only speak through with the voice/words of the men, that she repeats, both figures doomed to die when uncovering the truth. Neumann compares Wolf's 1972 novella *Selbstversuch*, that he reads as a modern resinscription of the Tiresias-myth, to *Cassandra*. I disagree with his notion that Wolf works against the myth because that it is based on the notion of sexuality, wherein male power degrades the female voice to an echo. In my opinion, the issue is more complex. In the ancient versions, for example Aischylos, Cassandra speaks in the —male—voice of war, yet *not* echoing, because her words have different implications (echoing would be more what the complicit Calchas does (comp. the discussion Hagenau invites on this subject, see section 3.2.1.). Neumann notes rightly, and much in synch with the French feminist school, the immanent connection between body and voice that becomes apparent in *Cassandra*, Neumann, 247. He concludes that the innovative pairing of an archaeology of the every-day and utopia in Wolf's novel lies in the reaching beyond the male dominated layer of the myth or a poetics deeper into a modified anthropology wherein the common features are emphasized (257). Gerhard Neumann, "Christa Wolf: *Cassandra*. Die Archäologie der weiblichen Stimme," *Erinnerte Zukunft*, ed. Wolfram Mauser (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1985) 233 ff.

(Girnius, West) to remythologization, innovative or conservative.<sup>96</sup> Adding yet another, and slightly different perspective, I would argue that Wolf remythologizes Cassandra's story by the poetic creation of the female prophet. As a reference one could draw on Schlegel's lectures on mythology, held between 1801 and 1804, wherein he explores the possibilities to inscribe mythology post-enlightenment: to recreate, through poesis, the mythic state as a "deliberate and vivid dreaming." I am reading this with his earlier definition in mind wherein he describes myth as original human poesis.<sup>97</sup>

One of the main problems all Cassandras face is the lack of consequence that their enunciations have. Silvia Bovenschen and Inge Stephan have referred to the lack of a female tradition, and consequentially a lack of effect of female rhetoric. Bovenschen observes that "Cassandra did not prophesy anything wrong. She was not listened to. She was not noticed" – and therefore, of no or little effect.<sup>98</sup>

While Cassandra's features are fairly stable in comparison to the renditions of Medusa and Medea, she is nevertheless presented partly positive and partly negative,

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<sup>96</sup> Legg for example criticizes that Wolf's novel has a teleological structure that reiterates models in Western tradition Wolf is critical of in her lectures. Legg, 164.

<sup>97</sup> Schlegel's lecture "Über Mythologie" [On Mythology] Berlin 1801–1804: "Der Zeitpunkt, wo der mythische Glaube aufhört und eine prosaische Ansicht der Dinge an seine Stelle tritt, würde demnach dem Erwachen zu vergleichen seyn, welches die Herrschaft der Fantasie durch Sorgen und Geschäfte, wobei der Verstand die Oberhand hat, aufhebt. Die Poesie ist eine künstliche Herstellung jenes mythischen Zustandes, *ein freywilliges und waches Träumen.*" Quoted from August Wilhelm Schlegel. *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik I* (1798–1803) (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989) 440.

<sup>98</sup> "Kassandra prognostizierte ja nicht das Falsche. Sie wurde nicht gehört. Man nahm sie nicht wahr." Bovenschen, 60. Bossinade, who discusses Antigone as "one of the main actresses of ancient mourning-laments" contends that only since the fifth Century an interest in the death of women arose, at a time when "female demons and goddesses had been already tamed" – while previously men had been the subject of mourning rituals, women only the mourners. Bossinade, 86.

oscillating between a luring and a repulsive figure, between "femme fatale" and "femme sacrifiée."<sup>99</sup> Contemporary reinscriptions by women authors reduce Cassandra's tragic potential. With the disbelieved voice of truth in focus, the character is gradually undramatized for a stronger narratological emphasis. Cassandra, it appears, needs to be moved as far as possible from her mythic frame to unfold her rhetorical potential. I would argue that there appears to be a trend where the narration of the story and the rhetoric potential raised of how it is told gains importance. Cassandra re-inscriptions can be read as examples of a process rather than an accomplished model of 'female rhetoric,' thus subjectivation is an ongoing process. In all texts frequent reference to dreams or a dreamlike state reflect a desire for the future and conceive preliminary utopian models, which further underline the processual quality. A process from dream to desire to hope unfolds<sup>100</sup>, mirrored in contrast to the disbelief her immediate audience affords the Cassandra-character. This "anticipating consciousness" (Walter Jens) is widely detectable in contemporary reinscriptions of Cassandra.

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<sup>99</sup> Jentgens uses the labels "femme fatale" and "femme sacrifiée" and notes that the analysis of gender criteria pertaining to the figure of Cassandra is not original in Twentieth Century studies, but existed in its structure already in antiquity. Jentgens, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Ernst Bloch. Das Prinzip Hoffnung. Werke, vol. 2/5 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959).

#### 4. Medea – (Post-)Modern Medeas or the Sorceress Tamed?

##### 4.1.1. Addressing Medea: Katja Lange-Müller's Fictitious Letter to Medea

"Doch hoffe ich, Medea hört mich nicht." [But my hope is, Medea does not hear me]<sup>1</sup> ten years ago, in 1990, the German prose writer Katja Lange-Müller titled her fictitious letter to Medea, with an apologetic paradox. The ambiguous exclamation, continued by the claim to speak "in a frequency inaudible for the human ear and maybe, yours as well," (160) only at first glance appears to lessen the force of the author's verbal attack. On the contrary, she thus invites an even closer listening and underlines Medea's assumed power. Lange-Müller poses a range of questions that continue to arise in connection with the multifold and transgressive figure of Medea. The fictitious letter prefaces this chapter on contemporary re-inscriptions of Medea, as I derive from it my catalogue of questions for a possible approach to this third female character from ancient mythology who is very present in some of the most recent texts of this study.

The letter constructs a situation in which both the narrator and Medea are prisoners. The narrator eventually ends her term but then comes back for visits to question Medea. Lange-Müller draws an immediate connection between Medea's

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<sup>1</sup> Katja Lange-Müller "Doch hoffe ich, Medea hört mich nicht." Es geht mir verflucht durch Kopf und Herz. Vergessene Briefe an unvergessene Frauen, Eds. Gabriele Kreis and Jutta Siegmund-Schultze (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1990) 160–167. Lange-Müller's original text poses a few problems of translation: In addition to several neologisms, neo-compound nouns and wordplay, her sentence can join several subclauses like a stream of consciousness. I have tried to retain as much of this as possible, especially because it makes for the rhythmical and associative quality of the letter.

I have translated Lange-Müller's text with permission of the publisher Hoffmann & Campe, Hamburg.

unbridled passion for Jason and the murders. She depicts Medea's sorcery as a spell immediately related to her actions.

Medea, I imagine, we were sitting next to each other, prison wall to prison wall, me—short-term, for something or other, robbery or so, you, as we know, for first degree murder, several life-sentences, unless acquitted. I come to see you after years back there, whenever they give me permission to visit, to put down, exact change, 22 marks for cigs, identical coins, next to the thermos with hot water and instant coffee, and in a frequency, non-audible for the human ear and, maybe, not for yours as well, I tell you what I thought about you, what I imagined, sensing your outline, and about you, at night, lying along the wall next to you and nothing was between us but a naked cement wall:

*And then you let passion uproot you from mothersoil<sup>2</sup> and fatherland, "with all little roots," like a radish: fresh, tender, pungent, black on the outside and white on the inside, or maybe the other way around? Was that act-ually a matter of passion? And if so, was it passion itself, the idea of it, or "only" your own passion, or was it what the male-born poets, usually quickly finished with it! call "love"?*<sup>3</sup>

Was it this wild passion. that you put over well-built Jason's physical beauty like a coffee-cozy, so that any possible feeling Jason might have for you would be extinguished in its seed / semen; while the act's intention was to slow down the chosen one's cooling down?! Or was he not chosen after all, and no love/passion hit you like a thunderbolt out of the blue, just an occasion that came and was welcomed as an occasion? You, you who lured her brother into a deadly trap, you, knowledgeable of each and every bad trick, threw yourself—"Cupid's arrow never misses/it knows its destined way!"—at Jason full force, just as he was about to hit the waves, leaving behind golden fleece and black Medea, (his promise was but a product of mistaken pronunciation), and you helped yourself to an escape while

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<sup>2</sup> Meaning 'topsoil,' 'native soil.' I have used a literal translation to convey the original metaphor.

helping him to the fleece. *Did you need a reason for acts that are probably also fun (arousal?):* tricking and dismembering brother, fucking up sister, cheating on father, betraying the people, leaving home... blinding messengers, setting princess on fire, burning king, stabbing sons, suffocating husband, slowly and painfully, in dirt and sand, and found him in Jason and "did it all for love." And when you, feeling down out of precipitated unworthiness, would have liked nothing better than to go against yourself, also because of the adversary-lover's weak passion, when you, according to Schwab's works "would have liked best to end your suffering with poison," you would not have had to, not until other available mortals had died, as substitutes for the substitute, Jason, this bad fake of an original, that you could not even imagine, let alone wish: a being that loved you, with his love, without speaking back and, if necessary, without loving back, released you from the spell of magic/having to kill. May the gods prevent that! *No one and no man, no woman, nobody was and is to be found whohesheit would be omnipotent enough to even like Medea-monster. Even compassion associates complicit guilt.* Had Alfred Jarry written a Medea-play, would mother Ubu be an innocent little angel in comparison to you?

*So many moral-rhetorical questions about you, temptress of male poetics. Or do you or anyone know a woman who would have taken you on, at least dramatically!*

And now here is some therapeutic-to-self-experience information: You, afraid of being loved, had knowledge/power over nature, human sciences, metaphysics and whatever else, were fixated on loss — Jason's refusal to be with you turned your melan-cholry into creativity, reactivated the healer/witch in you—the more Jason drew away from you, the more you were Jason-drawn. What and whoever, let alone what man could stand this for long? Why then were you so rigorously monogamous? With the power at your disposal you could have had any number and any – others, men and women, children and animals, plants and stones....could have lured them into your bed. But you wanted only from Jason,

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<sup>3</sup> Emphasis mine. Throughout the letter, I will highlight those sentences that I will further employ

what he wanted from any human-being – younger or older, no matter if man, woman or child— as long as it wasn't you. Not the bodily decay, thanks to your decision not affecting him, but the more visible on your own body, estranged Jason, but the antipolygamous persistence of your yoking him to what you considered inevitable marital duty. And whom did you want to make believe that this "gift" to Jason, eternal youth, was a token of love, while you, ever aging, pursued your mortality? No one would believe you to be so dumb, except maybe, and even this is no more than pure and reckless speculation, a more or less earthly judge in his manly vanity and, maybe, you yourself? You can't be serious to insist you were surprised or appalled and hurt if neither the senses nor his cock, doomed to be perpetually nineteen, lusted after the fifty-year-old woman who claimed at least thrice daily what she thought to be her right and—as topping, so to speak—threw dark threats at Jason's exclamations of unwillingness and inability. And don't even try, with Hanns Henny Jahn's help, to call defeated Jason a racist; it wasn't your skin's color, but its wrinkles and your annoying persistence. How often did I sing you, casually, as if to myself, the old Eastgerman pop song: "You can't force love/ no, oh, no/ because more than anything/ it has to be true..." Sometimes I would like to think that you just did not dare to simply be and be mean without any motif.

And another try to exchange my appalled resistance to you, Medea of the poets, Euripides, Hans Henny Jahn and Heiner Müller, ...at least a bit for epic justice: Death lurks in the (living, warm) house of love and waits for its time to come, when it is being called to appear. *Is death only the center, or, like in a piece of fruit, the seed of love?* "The being," wrote Hegel, "decays through its appearing." Like the animal, who cannot know (?) man has to love whom he has to love—yesterday's fated snow, formerly coming from above. His needs, exact, psychological-and physiological increasing to longing desire is highly sexually charged and forces him to want someone so much for an extended period of time, that he can fall ill, even fatally ill, if he cannot have him (a 'crazy' term in this context), keep him for a while or get him back. Someone who loves, desires, is

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as the basis for the questions I ask the following Medea-texts.

possessed by desire, knows quite well and is not really afraid of knowing, in fact it doesn't matter to him, if the desired person is man or woman, young or old, beautiful or ugly, smart or dumb, on drugs or clean, healthy as a spring chicken, therefore without love and death or mortally ill; and in most cases both are everything and everything applies to both; and would I be the one to claim that the desired person had to be human? Someone who is in love with a dog's ass thinks that to be the moon.

Death, whom we can imagine as a moth, who is supposed to, turned chrysalis—love—leave it very soon.

My attempts, not unscholarly as if coming from an overeager teacher, to peel you out of your matriarchally influenced African-Egyptian heritage, your multiple strangeness in patriarchal Greece and your juxtaposition against a "real" maybe really living Medea, thus yourself, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in East/West-Germany, I do not have to resist. Your making me feel creepy is an impression old and rather new, and the time in between, between the then and now, before and after—'intermediate' as we like to call it, which is supposed to be in the middle, enclosed by experiences, is a—or just mine?—(knowledge-) gap.

... and now I imagine myself as audience and at the theater they are playing Hans Henny Jahn's "Medea." But the audience does not have to imagine anything—were you like this or like that or otherwise—because it just watches a play which director, author, you, the theater ... the actors—perform for the audience (?) The text, Hans Henny Jahn's language, written down between three glasses: one full of a boy's urine, one full of horsepiss, and the third filled with cheap booze, drools from the actors who knows how, maybe as if in a dance, but definitely physical. All the psycho-logical, philosophile thought-ways, approaches, proposals...collected by all kinds of people and the audience, to you and for you, become obviously and –audibly— dispensable. The actors are nude, they make language with all their limbs and their mouths as well—of course, with hand and feet, skin and bone. There is not the enemy, as he often exists on stage, and most often in personal life, in front of whom they would have to cover their nudity, to whom they could address pain, loneliness, shocking delirium facing the

inescapable... The small group of dispersed actors, spread out on stage like an island, is circumfloated by hostility, the antagonism of life itself, not that of the audience. When the actors touch each other, physical but rarely erotic and never sexual, then just because they need it, to sustain their resistance, long discovered to be useless, against deadly doom, a feeling of being lost for each other, to endure their being alone in the group, not even acceptable as loneliness, until the end of the play; because like flies on a slow poisonous flypaper thosetheyallupthere will soon be dead.

...and now I also wish them a horse onto the stage, a real, living horse; it would be the absurd and at the same time realistically-precise-creaturely metaphor for the entire existentially impossible situation. What is a horse doing on stage? It would never just go there and would go crazy if the performance would not soon be over. The actors unravel themselves from their roles, until they are plain and nude, animal like the horse. They defend their plain existence against the terrible tragedy, or do they defend tragedy with their plain existence? They play the play until its end, a finis that could not be more finite. Fate has been fulfilled, filled with dead and death. The mythological space is full of corpses of the next moment who choke on earth, suffocated by the "dust of (hi)story"; it falls from the ceiling in thick clouds, down, probably heavily, on the actors, lying readily in a pile of sand/dirt. Soon, that sand/dirt will reach the audience in front to their throats, those further in the back to their ankles; those in the upper circles and boxes will watch on a bit longer. For hours, all exits and emergency exits are sand-/dirt-blocked.

*The end is as radical as can be: No one will have seen it, nothing remains and nobody, not even you, Medea, you less than anyone, especially because you remain, alone, but only in the play, only in this game, only as a fantasy of the real murderer, who would not be re-actionary, like no victim before, like, since A-linear, almost all literature and in the legal archives no female guilty agent, but a "real" agent, remains of her (of you?), of me; utopia."*

**Medea the sorceress. Medea the sophist. Medea the passionate lover. Medea the child murderess. Medea the healer. Medea the barbarous woman, the foreign other. Medea might be the mythological figure who most violently and radiantly oscillates between 'terror' and 'terrific' abilities. The preceding catalogue of characteristics, collected from centuries of literary reinscriptions, includes and extends Lange-Müller's casting of Medea. According to Euripides and Ovid, who created the most influential ancient versions of the myth, Medea abandons and betrays home and country to help Jason obtain the golden fleece and shares his life as an exile in Corinth until he decides to marry its princess, whereupon Medea kills her children, the princess, and the Corinthian king to flee in a chariot provided by her grandfather Helios. This staccato-storyline illustrates the variety of features that contribute to her agency. In all her variability, Medea's agency is always transgressive. By breaking conventions, she gradually becomes the ultimate 'other.' She is a woman who speaks her own mind in a man's world. As a child murderess she outlaws herself from moral standards, regardless if the context is pagan, Christian, or Orthodox. Her foreign origin makes her a barbarian in the eyes of the Corinthians, who regard her special abilities to heal or to kill as sorcery. Her story does not immediately evoke "utopia," Lange-Müller's last, and thus strongly resonant, word in her fictitious letter. As it repeatedly resonates, though, in a number of contemporary Medeae, my thesis is that there are contemporary texts envisioning a Medea who is foremostly "other" in terms of being "exceptional."**

**In contrast to the Gorgonn Medusa who is difficult to inscribe because she is not really acting in a narratable story, Medea's multifacetous mythic character offers an entire array of stories and refuses any one-dimensional description. Then who is Medea?**

Lange-Müller calls her a "temptress of male poetics." And asks : "Or do you or anyone know a woman who would have taken you on, at least dramatically!" At the end of the 1990s several women authors have indeed dramatized Medea, including, in Russia and Germany, Liudmila Razumovskaia, Gerlind Reinshagen and Dea Loher, whose Manhattan Medea appeared only in 1999.

Lange-Müller's statement on Medea's presumed absence in women's literature is noteworthy for its choice of words. The verbal phrase "sich deiner angenommen hätte" [taken you on] implies in the original German an act of care taking or mercy. Lange-Müller's addition "wenigstens dramatisch" [at least dramatically] lends a provocative edge to the following mixture of compassionate questioning and challenging criticism. The classical Medea remains aloof, Euripides allows her to leave the scene skybound in Helios' carriage, and in most other versions she gets at least a chance to depart, while Lange-Müller fixes her. Framed and bound into prison walls, Medea cannot escape the author's monologue wherein she investigates her actions thematically and dramatically. Curiously, she re-inscribes Medea by recognizing and discussing her previous literary existence. The author's questions engage the literary character into a dialogue that has to remain one-sided and in turn challenges the reader to search for possible answers. By abandoning an auctorial position that presents one vision of a character, Lange-Müller's innovative form of "taking" Medea "on" changes the creative dynamic. A strong ambiguity towards the character permeates Lange-Müller's entire seven-page letter. It begins as a tour-de-force of word-play and associations fueled by stereotypical notions of

Medea and, towards the end, shifts in the last third towards specific observations on Hans Henny Jahnn's Medea-drama and its effect on actors and audience.<sup>4</sup>

Lange-Müller asks numerous questions and supplies few answers, only subtle hints. This structure, however, makes her addressing Medea the more suitable for trying her questions on several reinscriptions. The author begins with the leitmotif of the letter – furious passion, love of the destructive type if we keep the ancient notion of "furor" in mind. Lange-Müller calls on the question of agency—"[...] was it passion itself, the idea of it, or "only" your own passion" – or "what the poets call love?" Investigating Medea's passion as motor of her actions, I will also ask how this motivation, and coming from what source, is perceived. Where and how strong is the reciprocity between Medea and Jason? Was he, maybe, "not chosen after all, [...] just an occasion that came and was welcomed as an occasion?" The question of agency alludes the ancient notion that love does not originate in the individual's heart, but is rather imposed onto someone by the goddess Aphrodite. In Euripides' Medea, for example, Jason in his first dialogue with Medea credits their initial love to Aphrodite's manipulation alone, and thus declares himself free of responsibility for subsequent acts or changes.

In this highly metaphorical paragraph on her passion, Lange-Müller also addresses the issue of Medea's foreignness through an allegory of Medea's uprooting, critically questioning cause and motivation: "[...] and then you let passion uproot you from mothersoil and fatherland, "with all little roots," like a radish: fresh, tender, pungent, black on the outside and white on the inside, or maybe the other way around?

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<sup>4</sup> These performative issues have a different focus than my discussion of myth perception. Questions of performance certainly relate to the discussed Medea-dramas by Reinshagen, Razumovskaia and Loher, and I will refer to them during the analysis.

Was that act-ually a matter of passion?" Lange-Müller introduces the issue of parentage, which is connected to Medea's being nationally and emotionally rooted. Again, the choice of words suggests a dichotomy: the maternal qualities are connected to nature, "soil," while the paternal "fatherland" hints at the political entity of the state. The central question of agency is continued in "Was it act-ually a matter of passion?" The translation loses some of the original "Tat-Sache Leidenschaft." Usually, the German composite noun "Tatsache" is not hyphenated, it means 'fact', but can be used as an attribute to mean "really," "actually." Its two components, however, are "Tat" [act] and "Sache" [matter, thing].

The image of an uprooted Medea leads to the question of foreignness. One might assume this to be a burning issue for Russian and German authors in the recent past, considering the historical and societal changes, such as the opening of borders, and the reassessment of national identity. For Lange-Müller, and, for the majority of contemporary authors with the possible exception of Christa Wolf, however, "foreignness" often reads as "otherness" in more general terms, as one of Lange-Müller's remarks illustrates: "[...] it wasn't your skin's color, but its wrinkles and your annoying persistence."

Lange-Müller continues to probe if passion was the plausible reason for Medea's often terrible and deadly deeds, or if they might have been "probably also fun," a quite provocative assumption. This passage, however, highlights what is lacking in Lange-Müller's and most of the other reinscriptions: Medea's ancient faculty of sorcery is rarely mentioned, and assumes only a quite reduced meaning in modern reinscriptions. Rather than sorcerous deeds that emanate from Medea, Lange Müller, searching for her

"occasion for love," evokes the dichotomy of Eros and Thanatos, reminiscent of the Medusan dichotomy of agency versus paralysis: "Is death only the center, or, like in a piece of fruit, the seed of love?" The "chrysalis love," she notes, will soon turn into the "moth" death. Through this allegory Lange-Müller tackles Medea's suffocating passion for Jason, her deadly acts motivated by it, and her assumed death-wish, leitmotivic themes in contemporary reinscriptions.

Then, is Medea a terrible or a tragic figure? Raising the question of compassion, Lange-Müller comments that "nobody was and is to be found whosheit would be omnipotent enough to even like Medea-monster"? I will look for affirmations or contradictions of this rhetorical provocation only in passing, as I contend that Lange-Müller's final point, the rhetorical affirmation of Medea as 'real' agent and the last, singled out term, "utopia," have a greater impact upon the assessment of modern Medeae. Without reading "utopia" as a pragmatic intention of all modern myth-renditions, I rather look for the space and poetic possibilities afforded to Medea, who, in her ultimate 'otherness' constantly confronts, and more often transgresses, the 'no-place' she is forced into.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This echoes in Wolf's fictitious account of the relation between the poets Gunderode and Kleist in her novel Kein Ort. Nirgends, translatable as "no place" or "utopia."

#### 4.2. Medea's Contradictions. Deadly Passion and Female Foreign Otherness

I explore what the contemporary Medeae have in common, and wherein lie their differences. By using the questions I derive from Lange-Müller as a template, I investigate reinscriptions, which have rich interpretive potential, especially when they seem at first glance as far removed from the ancient predecessors as Euripides' Medea, such as Ulitskaia's protagonist, who is a childless, older woman and an icon of altruistic compassion, or Wolf's Medea, who is a strong, "transgressive" female figure, and "devilishly human"?<sup>6</sup>

Because of the broad range of Medea texts which I cannot analyze in detail, the following section provides an overview, divided into evocations, retellings, and probings. I begin with the texts that I read more closely in the following section.

**Evocations:** Liudmila Petrushevskaja's short story "Medea" (1989), only seven pages long, and part of the cycle "Rekviemy" (1993) is the most striking and the most illustrative example for merely citing and metonymically using the myth of Medea.<sup>7</sup> Petrushevskaja, born in Moscow in 1938, is one of the best known Russian prose authors and dramatists. Her work, published officially only since the perestroika although she has been writing since the early 1970s, has been characterized as "bytovaia literatura," that is,

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood calls her "transgressive" in her introduction to the English language edition of *Medea*. Wolf, *Medea* 18. Manfred Fuhrmann in his review of Wolf's novel characterizes her as "[...] makellose, fast möchte man sagen 'verteufelt humane' Heldin." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 53/9D, 3/2/1996.

<sup>7</sup> It first appeared in *April'* (1989):2, later in the collection *Po doroge boga Erosa*. Moscow: Olimp, 1993 and in *Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. 2. (Moscow: AST, 1995. 41–48. English translation by Brian Thomas Oles in *An Anthology of Russian Women's Writing 1777–1992*. Ed. Catriona Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 340–346.

descriptive of daily life and marginal events, and also "chernukha," [from "chernyi," black] because of its dark, pessimistic undertones. Petrushevskaja's narratives are typically short, in very condensed language often employing colloquial language or "skaz," a typically Russian form of spoken, dialogic language, of which her "Medea" is a striking example. The story's title is the only determinative association with the ancient myth. In a tale told in a taxi somewhere on the outskirts of modern-day Moscow, Medea is the central but absent protagonist of the dialogue between a cab driver and the female narrator. Here, the Medea figure—her real name is never mentioned—is the cab driver's wife who has murdered their daughter and is in a prison's psychiatric ward, while her husband blames himself for her breakdown and the destruction of his family.

One of the most recent works that evoke Medea is a play by Gerlind Reinshagen. Reinshagen, born in 1926, lives in Berlin. She started off as author of children's books. After publishing prose and poetry, since the late 1960s she works mostly on plays, a genre in which she can best execute her formal experiments. In her plays, she aims at a dramatic language that reflects current issues and ideas in contexts that change with increasing speed. Though her themes are contemporary, she uses elements from ancient drama, such as the chorus, providing a tool for commentary and reflection between the dialogues. Thus, Reinshagen's latest book-publication collects "Choric Plays," among them Die grüne Tür. Medea bleibt [The Green Door. Medea Stays, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999] which premiered at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden in February of 1999. Most of Reinshagen's protagonists, including Janna from Die grüne Tür are at a point of departure in their lives and exist in a kind of "twilight zone," representative of the

unspecified space between reality and the character's imagination of what she has dreamed of for herself.

Set in an apartment building in an unspecified town in present-day Germany, the protagonist Janna-"Medea" is married with two children. When her husband loses his job while she finds a good position, the marital and gender-relation is thrown off-balance and crisis becomes unavoidable. Janna becomes involved with Bernhardt, a struggling writer who lives on the top floor of the house, while her husband refuses to face the situation of the crumbling marriage and his own drifting towards violent alcoholism and paralyzed inactivity. Änne, a neighbor and incidentally called "Cassandra-Änne," contributes pessimistic comments and prophesizes rising tragedy. While Janna only toys with and later has a dream about killing her children, Änne actually executes the murder at the end of the play.

The earliest example among the temporary range of myth re-inscriptions analysed in this study is Elisabeth Langgässer's novel Märkische Argonautenfahrt [Argonauts' Journey through the Marches, 1945, publ. Hamburg: Claasen, 1959].<sup>8</sup> I will only summarize it here. Langgässer is best known as a poet, who uses Christian motifs and nature imagery as her main referent. She wrote her only full-length novel during the last years and immediately after World War II. A novella, inserted close to the end and only loosely linked to the novel's plot narrates the story of "Medea's children." The main narrative plot, by its title evoking the ancient quest theme and the story of Jason and the Argonauts, sends four diverse couples on a journey from destroyed and recently occupied

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<sup>8</sup> The novel has been translated into English in the 1960s as The Quest, a title that omits the implicit reference to Jason and the Argonauts. Trans. Jane Bannard Greene (New York: Knopf, 1953).

Berlin to a nearby monastery. It is summer, and the group wanders through a landscape that appears little scathed and in stark contrast to the destroyed city. A reminiscence of the journey, a snapshot is signed "The argonauts and their ladies on their quest for the Golden Fleece," fixing for eternity an image of the architect Ewald Hauteville, his sister Lotte, the actor Albrecht Beifuß, an elderly Jewish couple, Friedrich, a young soldier who has just returned from the war, and Irene von Dörner, a girl. They allegorically represent the groups most affected by the war; their Golden Fleece is peace and spiritual salvation. None of them finds what they had imagined, and has to master tests and detours. While none of the main characters can be convincingly compared to or is modeled after Medea or Jason, the novel's narrative is full of mythological allusions without favoring a particular myth. She blends ancient mythological and biblical quotations, most of them thematically connected to themes of transition, searching, and change, evoking, for example, images of the underworld or the Last Judgment, and characters such as Persephone, Eurydice, and the Gorgon. A Medusan reference, in its symbolic quality associating the "angel of history" motif is connected to the young abbess Demetria, whose name itself already has a mythical referent. For some of the argonauts, who find temporary shelter in her monastery, she becomes an icon of fate.

In its modernist style, the novel operates with sequences of stream of consciousness and various narrative perspectives and montage. The most peculiar example is the inserted fragment, framed by the main narrative. It could be an independent novella and is distinguished in the novel, otherwise lacking chapter headings, by its title, "Medea's Children." It briefly discusses the issue of children killed or abandoned by their mothers in the context of war, and then proceeds to tell the story of

a couple of siblings trying to survive in the ruins of Berlin, who in the end connect to the characters from the Argonauts' Journey.

**Retelling:** Liudmila Razumovskaia's two-act play Medea (1981) has been published in the collection Sad bez zemli [Garden Without Soil, Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1989, 205–246]. Razumovskaia, born 1946 in Riga, lives in St. Petersburg. In her plays, she frequently works on mythic, historic, and fairy tale characters, most of whom are exceptional women who suffer from passion. Besides Medea, she has dramatized The Little Mermaid and Mary Stuart. Though she has gained a reputation in the West, especially in Germany, her plays were rarely performed in Russia before the perestroika. Together with Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Viktor Slavkin, Aleksandr Vampilov and other dramatists from the younger generation, Razumovskaia is usually read as a writer of the "novaia volna," [new wave] in Russian drama.

On first glance, the setting and structure of Razumovskaia's Medea, which she did not label as a tragedy, appear to follow the Euripidean tragedy, while presenting a deranged rather than an enraged Medea. Unlike in Euripides' version, Razumovskaia's Medea does not herself conceive the idea of killing her children, but receives the suggestion from the nurse. If Euripides' Medea seems unemotional, Razumovskaia's protagonist expressively suffers from the prospect of losing her husband; her monologues and the dialogues with him are intense and illustrate her psychological turmoil.

In Marie Luise Kaschnitz's early retelling of the Medea-myth, the story "Die Nacht der Argo" [The night of the Argo, 1943, publ. in Griechische Mythen, Hamburg:

Claasen, 1972] and the later radio play "Jasons letzte Nacht" [Jason's Last Night, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 6 Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1989] from the 1960s, the quest of the Argonauts and, subsequently, Medea, is reinscribed allegorically. The radio play operates through flashbacks. Like Wolf, though less directly, Kaschnitz provides critical, interpretive remarks on mythology. A review of Kaschnitz's work on the Medea-myth in retrospect is, as I have noted in the introduction, of particular interest. In the 1940s, Kaschnitz engaged with myth by retelling mythological narratives. A special interest in the constellation Jason-Medea becomes apparent in her commentary to an annotated edition of Grillparzer's Medea-drama that she edited. In her commentary as well as in the new afterword to the Greek Myths, Kaschnitz notes that according to legend, Jason dies alone and forgotten by accident, battered by falling fragments of his beloved Argo.<sup>9</sup> Further along in the essay, she highlights that, for Grillparzer, the conflict and relations between men and women are at the center of attention.<sup>10</sup>

Jason's ship, the Argo, is an allegory imbued with female features of beautiful lover, protective mother and safe refuge Jason can return to no matter how hard life has struck him. The ship assumes these functions beyond what Medea or Creusa could be for Jason. But the Argo also represents the powers of nature, and in the end collapses and

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<sup>9</sup> Kaschnitz, Franz Grillparzers Medea, published in 1966, the same year as her own short stories, 76. A bit further along, Kaschnitz draws a comparison between Jason and Anna Karenina. The connection to a Russian character is probably coincidental, but curious enough to quote: "Jason, der Flüchtling, begehrt Macht vor allem, aber auch eine Heimat nach so vielen Jahren des Herumziehens und Zu-Gast-Seins, dazu gibt es eine Parallele in Tolstois Anna Karenina, als Wronsky in Venedig das Wanderleben mit der Geliebten nicht länger ertragen kann. Wronsky will Anna nicht verletzen, auch Grillparzers Jason versucht es zunächst im Guten. Aber Medea weiß doch schon, daß es vorbei ist mit den guten Tagen, in denen er auf ihre Liebe angewiesen war. "Ich dir zur Qual, du mir, das ist die Erinnerung an den Fluch des Vaters, den sie mit dem Vlies, dem Zauberstab, hatte begraben wollen, aber nun klingt er ihr wieder im Ohr." Ibid. 97.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 79.

buries the burned-out hero under its remains.<sup>11</sup> As the brief summaries show, Kaschnitz does not concentrate on the figure of Medea, but her writing of Jason and the introduction of the Argo as a quasi-character into the plot allows for interpretive conclusions about Medea. While "The Night of the Argo" showcases an outside perspective on the characters and is dominated by the distant narrator's third person voice, the radio play opens up a more intricate, detailed perspective through its dialogues.

Similarly, Anna Segher's story "Das Argonautenschiff" [The Argonauts' Ship, 1949, reprinted in Post ins Gelobte Land. Erzählungen, Berlin: Aufbau, 1990], which I will not discuss at length, focuses on the relation between Jason and the Argo. Here, Medea appears to only provide a backdrop for what happens around Jason. While in Kaschnitz's play Jason would refuse remembering Medea if only he could, Segher's Jason really tries to forget her, who sacrificed so many things for him that he did not really want.

**Probings:** The radically different re-inscriptions of Medea and also the most interesting, have been written by Christa Wolf, Dea Loher, and Liudmila Ulitskaia.

Over ten years after her Cassandra-project, Christa Wolf examines Medea as a victim of defamatory rumors in her latest novel Medea. Stimmen [Medea Voices, Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1996] and evokes a philosophical context through quotes from ancient and philosophical sources, including Euripides and Seneca, but also René

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<sup>11</sup> Comp. Stephan's reading in Stephan, Medea 8.

Girard.<sup>12</sup> These quotes preface her chapters and raise questions not only of victimization but of sacrifice. While Medea is the novel's central character, diverse partisan perspectives on her provide the six main characters. Medea, her former confidante and pupil Agamedea, also a Colchian, and Jason, are juxtaposed to three Corinthians, king Creon's two astronomers and the princess Glauce. I refrain from reading Wolf's novel as a political German roman-à-clef, as criticism has done, but focus on how Medea, cast as exceptionally capable and altruistic by Wolf, is being "othered" by the novel's other voices.

Dea Loher, born 1964, one of the most accomplished and interesting young German dramatists, provides the latest counter-proof to Lange-Müller's thesis that no one, especially not a woman, would take on Medea. Loher's Manhattan Medea (1999) transposes the mythological story into present day New York. Though the structure of several dialogues strongly resembles the Euripidean drama, the play has little in common with its classical predecessors. The play's temporal and spatial transposition of the mythic plot to a western metropolis of the present foregrounds racial issues and foreign otherness more than most other recent renditions of the myth. Loher re-evokes dramatic discourse, and deals with her Medea critically and less sympathetic than Wolf and Ulitskaia. Manhattan Medea was commissioned for the Austrian theater festival "Steirischer Herbst." As a coproduction with the Schwerin State Theater it opened in Graz and then in

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<sup>12</sup> Engl. transl. by John Cullen, New York: Doubleday, 1998. I will not quote from this edition, though, as I emphasize certain aspects not foregrounded by this translation. The English subtitle for instance is not "Voices," but "A Modern Retelling."

Schwerin in October of 1999.<sup>13</sup> When the author was asked to work on a play for the festival, she was in New York. In an interview, she describes that her only reference was an English translation of Euripides' Medea.

Liudmila Ulitskaia had, according to her own account, a mythic image of Medea as a skillfull, maybe not 'sophisticated' but certainly 'sophist' woman from the East in mind, when she cast her Medea Mendez, protagonist of her first and critically acclaimed full-length novel Medea i ee deti [Medea and her Children, 1996].<sup>14</sup> Ulitskaia, born 1943 in Bashkiria, grew up in Moscow and is a geneticist by training. In the 1980s, she began to work with theater groups and wrote numerous screenplays. Her stories and especially the novella Sonechka established her as a prose writer in Russia but also in Western Europe, where she has since won several awards and writing fellowships. Ulitskaia's trademark, minute psychological character studies, usually with a grain of humor, uncover sometimes ambivalent emotions of her protagonists, who are predominantly, but not exclusively, women. Her Medea Mendez could almost be called an anti-Medea. Childless, she becomes surrogate mother for many of her relatives, and especially for the sensitive poet Masha. An archaic matriarch without children of her own, rooted in the Caucasus region far from modern Moscow, Medea Mendez is drawn as a humane, compassionate role-model. Allusions to myth are enforced through the novel's setting in present-day Georgia, the modern equivalent of Colchis.

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<sup>13</sup> The text has been published by Verlag der Autoren, Frankfurt, 1999. On October 28, Uwe Matheis reviewed the play. Titling his review "Kein Stern über Manhattan" [No Star above Manhattan], Matheis draws parallels between the play and Joseph and Mary. He completely glosses over the mythical relation, stating in wrong order that "Josef and May turn into Jason (played by Jakob E. G. Kraze) and Medea (Johanna Katrin Gast)." He makes no connection, however, to Euripidean or later dramatic versions of Medea. Süddeutsche Zeitung, 10/28/99.

Katja Lange-Müller's Medea-letter has already served as my opening example and structuring device. Lange-Müller born 1951 in the former GDR, writes mostly prose. As a consequence of conflicts with the authorities she moved to West Berlin in 1984. Lange-Müller, who received the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Award in 1986, in her work usually focuses on contemporary subjects. Ancient mythic themes are quite an exception in her work. The clear, strong, and confrontational issues which she raises with Medea are not so myth-specific that they could not be transferred onto another character. It is unusual, though, to reinscribe a myth in the unmediated, one-sided communication of a letter. Lange-Müller's "taking on" of Medea is embedded in a volume of letters to fictional women characters. Beyond that, only Helga Novak, like Lange-Müller born in the GDR, in 1935, wrote a poem that is a likewise an imaginary letter to Medea.<sup>15</sup> The poem "Brief an Medea" [Letter to Medea] from 1977 begins "Medea, du Schöne, dreh dich nicht um" [Medea, beautiful, don't turn around], evoking a nursery rhyme, but also, working on myth, Orpheus and Euridyce in the underworld [Helga N. Novak "Brief an Medea," Von einer, die auszog... Ein Lese- und Arbeitsbuch zur Literartur von Frauen. Ed. Lucia Richter, Frankfurt am Main: Scriptor, 1989, 46].

Following is a brief selection of Medeas to whom I will not refer in detail. Uta Haas' popular novel Freispruch für Medea [Medea Acquitted, 1991] reveals its program

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<sup>14</sup> Paraphrasing a conversation with Liudmila Ulitskaia in Moscow, March 1997.

<sup>15</sup> It could be interesting to investigate the letter as literary genre with reference to myth and in the construction of a female literary tradition, especially since the letter has been widely discussed as a typical medium of women's literature. Among others, Weigel examines how women since the 18<sup>th</sup> century have been using this more "private" genre to experiment with writing, and as an outlet for literary production. Comp. Weigel, Stimme 72.

in the title: Medea is presented as a pleasant, sensitive woman with special powers that go unnoticed or are abused by her environment. By beginning with Medea's girlhood, the author, by her own account, aims to develop an "intimate, understanding view" of an exceptional woman, who she claims is wrongly accused of child murder as a result of Euripides' misogynist phantasy (11, see also Tuana, 2680).

Though the title might raise the expectation that Haas would critically engage the myth, the novel in fact tells Medea's story quite simply. The book was published in a series "Die Frau in der Literatur" [Women in Literature] and contains a map and glossary, which makes it appear didactic. Haas' plea for Medea's innocence bases its argument on the intricate description of her childhood, the positive relation to her flower garden and the difficulties she experiences around people. Such an unhappy childhood, Haas appears to conclude, can only result in passionate tragedy. Medea's Peter-Pan fantasy "never to grow up" remains an unfulfilled desire.

Dagmar Nick's Medea. Ein Monolog [Medea. A Monologue, 1988] features Medea as narrator, though she tells her own story, then evokes impressions of a mythological world in transition, framed by the characters of the rebellious, life-demanding Prometheus and Chiron, the centaur, Jason's old teacher, knowledgeable about music and medicine, and desperate to be able to die. This Medea stresses her feelings of ambiguity and estrangement towards humans. While animals and nature give her shelter and guidance, people always 'other' and outcast her. In Nick's version, her supposed sorcerous deeds of rejuvenation and murder are rumors created by people as results of their own deep anxieties. Nick's original contribution is the invention of a

strangely romantic relationship, or rather unfulfilled desire for a relation between Medea and the centaur Chiron, Jason's former teacher.

Nick ironically plays with the fascination of tales told, be it stories, rumors, or prophecies. Her Medea remarks that the Corinthians liked her as a prophet "because they all wanted to know the horror the future had in store, they could not get enough of what would befall them: suffering, stillborn children, sickness and epidemics and fires." (12)

"I know that I have to go away. Into a different environment. To other people. I have a while left to live" [Ich weiß, daß ich fortgehen soll. In eine andere Landschaft. Zu anderen Menschen. Ich habe noch eine Weile zu leben.]. Similar to Wolf's novel, Nick uses Medea's voice to achieve a greater intensity and immediacy of the character. But here, her voice stands alone in the monologue. Any other voice—something Wolf allows, thus achieving a wider and more colorful range in her narrative—is for Nick's Medea a cause of estrangement, an adversary. Consequently, it seems, she is by rumor, spread by others, accused of having murdered her children.

But mostly, Nick's originality lies in the introduction of Chiron and Prometheus into her story. If the first is the prototypical teacher of heroes, Jason included, the latter demonstrates the upheaval of humans against the gods, a turning point in mythology. Prometheus, like Medea, is a transgressive mythological figure, only in literature and philosophical criticism he usually wins acclaim for it. In an interview that is published together with the monologue, Nick stresses that she did not intend to create an aesthetic counter-model to the ancient Medea-myth, but that she wanted to write especially about the Centaurs, whom she thinks important, but neglected figures of mythology.

Mortality and immortality are underlying themes of Nick's monologue. Medea seems to oscillate and we can never quite grasp if she, having left her story now to begin a quest after the sense of immortality, has returned to the divine state of eternal being—like the myth itself that exists as long as the story is being told—or is a human character with a finite life-span.

Thus, Medea is questioning the sense of immortality and hopes to hear an answer from Chiron, who himself suffers from it and only wants to die, and whose immortality seems as useless as that "eternal life, bound to the rock of immortality," that Prometheus is leading. Telling a story, the essence and truth of every story being told is called into question, and Medea claims to have stopped believing in stories. Waiting for the Centaurs and wondering if they are as fierce as people say they are, she comments: "I don't believe in stories. Way too many stories have been told. In the end, people believe in anything."

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#### 4.2.1. Evocation: Liudmila Petrushevskaja and Gerlind Reinshagen

Unhindered by her extremely reductive style, Petrushevskaja's story affects—as, due to its distanced mode, it might not 'infect'—strongly and displays the difficulties and hopelessness of human relations in general. They, like Greek tragedy, in her works serve as a metonymy of the human condition, as Helena Goscilo has rightly noted. But in contrast to the grandeur of the ancient, Petrushevskaja's family is ironically debased.<sup>16</sup> Her use of ancient mythology is not a comprehensive reworking of mythic stories. She uses them as 'templates' to enhance the allusive capacity of the conflict she is about to describe. Her evocations, mostly in the titles of her stories—"Medea," "Poseidon," "Po doroge boga Erosa"—simultaneously direct the reading and broaden the interpretive scope. She demonstrates that interpersonal conflicts might be different in their specificity, while their intrinsic mechanisms are deeply rooted in our cultural heritage.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Such a reading, however, fails to account adequately for Petrushevskaja's extensive reliance on antiquity as cultural referent. [...] "Far from merely serving as a vehicle for social commentary, family in Petrushevskaja, as in Greek tragedy, metonymizes the human condition. The exalted tone of tragic doom in Euripides and Sophocles that Aristotle deemed requisite for catharsis, however, undergoes radical debasement in Petrushevskaja's modern world in extremes. What Greek tragedy casts as elevated cosmic drama, she decrowns as shabby everyday prosaics. Substituting low-key horror for noble grandeur, she capitalizes on associations with classic antecedents to convey the full magnitude of experiences that her style, by contrast, ironizes and degrades." Goscilo, *Mother* 103f.

The term "infection" is borrowed from Tolstoy's "What is Art"; the lack of it discussed by Vladiv-Glover in Epshtein, *Russian Postmodernism* 254f.

<sup>17</sup> In her various prose cycles, Petrushevskaja repeatedly works with quotations and allusions both to antique and to other classical literature. They are not concentrated but appear sporadically. While "Rekviem" has no further classical reference, it has a story entitled "Dama s sobakami", while a story evoking Poseidon and one on "the new Faust" are to be found in "V sadakh drugikh vozmozhnostei" and a variation on Oedipus in "Taina doma". Petrushevskaja's references to classical literary and mythological sources are briefly discussed in a review of *Po doroge boga Erosa*: A. Mikhailov, "Ars Amatoria, ili nauka ljubvi po L. Petrushevskoi." *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 37 (1993): 4.

Petrushevskaja's reductive treatment of character and story creates a tension between the evocation of mythological dimensions, that marks a high cultural sphere, and the language and events of everyday-life.

The story's title raises the expectation that a story about Medea will follow, which is only true in that a character reminiscent of Medea is at the absent center of the narrative. The story, six and a half pages long, begins with the word that itself is Medea's epitome: "strashno" [horrible].<sup>18</sup> The nameless female narrator notes that the ensuing tale, based on a cab ride, is horrible, strange to tell. After this brief introduction, the reader is drawn into the unmediated dialogue between the cab driver and his client. While the conversation is very suggestive, death appears as a continuously present subtext, and the reader gains an uneasy feeling that catastrophe lies ahead. Her play with conventions and expectations makes Petrushevskaja's work special. In the course of the conversation, one partner attempts to outdo the other in telling stories of horrific accidents, while the driver keeps insisting that he has the most horrible story of all to tell. "Strashno" becomes the leitmotif. Details associated with his story accumulate like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Thus, Petrushevskaja provokes high suspense within an extremely small narrative space. Because she does not renarrate, but only refers to and explicitly evokes the myth, Petrushevskaja highlights the contrast between classical tragedy and real life documentation. In one of the narrator's stories she mentions a severe psychological problem—the cab driver freezes. In another a child dies. Still, the woman continues to engage in small talk and petty stories while the driver keeps insisting that his tale is more horrible. The tight, allusive narrative engages the reader more than s/he might like. With

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<sup>18</sup> "Strashno" also alludes to "stranno" – foreign, strange; the sound of which is very similar.

the denouement comes no cathartic relief, rather, the uneasiness lingers on. What in particular constituted the relationship between the cabdriver-father and his daughter? Apparently, the mother has killed her in an act of jealousy and despair; wherefore now the husband/father feels guilty. Is the daughter a merging of the ancient 'templates' of Medea's children—though they are usually described as boys—with the object of Jason's new love and Medea's jealousy, the Corinthian princess? The end of Petrushevskaja's story is characterized by great openness, the narrative is confessional, and the relationships are severed and undone to a point at which reconciliation seems impossible.

While Petrushevskaja is extremely evocative in the dialogues, there is little character description, with the exception of one passage that sketches the cab driver as a Jason-like character, not very sympathetic, nor, though, dangerous: The cab driver is described as "fourtyish, of the weak type, in a plaid shirt with worn-out cuffs. A weak worker..." [Taksist byl let soroka, takogo slabogo tipa, v kovboike s potrepannymi obshlagami. Slaby rabochii ..., 42] He has longing, unrevealing and not very large eyes. [Glaza kak by s povolokoi, prikrytie i nebol'shie, 42] This, the narrator lets us know, will be important later in the story [Portret zdes' vazhen dlia dal'neishego, 42]. The description suggests an association with Jason; he is as ambivalent as the entire narrative, and has an equally appealing and appalling effect. The story plays on a theme and its variations. The leitmotivic adjectives are "strashno" [horrible] and "vinovat" [guilty]. The first term is used eight times, and there are 16 variations of "guilty." Though, according to myth, one would first think of Medea as guilty, here, Jason takes guilt upon himself, not for the act itself, but for having caused it. Linguistically, the tragic effect is heightened by the word repetition and by inverted sentence variations such as in the following example.

– Ja uzhe vyplakal vse, glaza sukhie. Sukhie glaza.  
On smotrel na menja svoimi sukhimi poluzakrytymymi ot slabosti glazami.

– Ja vinovat.

Ja ne mogla nichego sprashivat', chto sprashivaiut obychno liudi iz liubopytstva, kak i chto. Ia dvinulas' v boi. (44)

"I am already cried out, my eyes are dry. Dry." He looked at me with his dry eyes, half-closed from fatigue.

"I am to blame."

I couldn't ask any of the usual questions, the ones people ask out of curiosity, how it happened, why, and so on. I went on the offensive. (341)

The climax that the reader anticipates almost from the beginning, follows on the second to last page. The revelation of the murder includes the driver's noting that his wife has been placed in a psychiatric ward—though she appears guilty of the murder, the first judgement assumes that she could not have committed it had she been in her right mind.

As a reciprocal effect now the cab driver appears to be slightly driven out of his mind.

On opiat' stranno posmotrel na menia.

– Oni tak sideli obe I shili mirno za piat' dnei do smerti.

Ia vinovat, ia ne sledal togo, chto nado bylo sdleta'. Tak kak-to dumal, ladno. Vy znaete...

Pauza.

– Vz znaete, – zkazal on, – eto moia zhena ubila doch'. Ona sidit v tiur'me, v Butyrkakh. Tam est' otdelenie dlia sumashedshikh.

Pauza. (47)

He gave me another strange look.

"They were both sitting there peacefully sewing five days before her death. I am guilty (to blame), I didn't do what I should have done.

Somehow I thought that things would be alright. You know...."

Silence.

"You know," he said, "it was my wife who killed my daughter. She's in prison, in Butyrki. There's a section there for crazies."

Silence. (345)

The only brief image of the mother and daughter is a peaceful domestic scene of a typical woman's deed, and does not associate anything with aggressive murder, but might illustrate the cab driver's blindness.

U nee byla depressiia, I bol'she ona nikuda ustroit'sia ne mogla.

– A tut eshche vy.

– Ia vinovat. Ia odin raz vyzval platnogo vracha-psikhiatra, ona govorit: nu chto, vyzyvaite psikhoperevozku, kladite v bol'nitsu... No ia kak-to... Znaete... Ne sdelał etogo.

– Zhalko bylo?

– Da net. Tak kak-to... My s dochkoi... Ne dumali ni o chem... Ia mnogo sebe pozvolial, vot chto. Ia vinovat.

Sidit odna v bezumii v tiur'me, ozhidaia kazni. (48)

"She was depressed and she couldn't find a job anywhere."

"There you are again."

"I am *guilty* (to blame). I did pay for this psychiatrist woman to come over, she said: I should send for an ambulance and have her put in in hospital. But somehow... I just... did not do it."

"Did you feel sorry for her?"

"Oh no, just somehow... *Me and my daughter, we didn't think anything of it... You know, I crossed a line. I am guilty.*"<sup>19</sup>

So, she is sits alone in her madness in prison, waiting for her execution." (346)

The final sentences, though referring to the judgment awaiting the woman, suggest that the husband needed to be judged as well, and that his guilt might have its origin in his relationship with the daughter, that is never disclosed. For Petrushevskaiia the ancient myth of Medea provides a frame, an intercultural and intertextual reference. Thus, the ancient, allegorical 'template' of the myth engages in a curious dialogue with the contemporary text. It provides features for Medea, who is a nevertheless absent character in Petrushevskaiia's story. Medea, thus both emptied and doubled in her

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<sup>19</sup> There seem to be different versions of the text, interestingly including or omitting the sentence that allows the association of possible incest. In italics I have set my own translation of the text

contextualized role in the narrative, in turn frames the psychological study of distorted communication and relations among the story's narrating characters. Petrushevskaja's *Medea* is an example of estrangement. Her use of myth figures as text-code, highlights the transformation of *Medea* into a postmodern text. In its minimalist narrative form, Petrushevskaja's story contains features of tragedy.

Tragedy and its stylistic potential also interest Gerlind Reinshagen. Though formally none of the three contemporary *Medea*-dramas by Razumovskaia, Reinshagen, and Loher follow ancient dramatic structure, Reinshagen, who digresses from the ancient storyline and transposes the play into the present, retains or rather revives the chorus from classical tragedy.<sup>20</sup>

Gerlind Reinshagen introduces a frame in her title. The "Green Door" marks a division between 'here' and 'there,' inside and outside. The play delineates from scene to scene how this space develops. Like Petrushevskaja, Reinshagen evokes *Medea* only in the title, but creates a character imbued with Medean characteristics. Reinshagen envisions gender relations in which the women clearly are the agents. Janna, her *Medea*-like protagonist, is a successful business woman, but has difficulties committing herself emotionally. Her zest to move up, through professional success and also by achieving a personally happy relationship, is illustrated by the play's demonstrative architecture. "The Green Door" is on the top floor of an apartment building, behind it lives Janna's lover, the

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from Petrushevskaja's *Sobranie Sochinenii*, while Brian Thomas Oles, the translator, based his translation on the original journal publication from *April*, 1989.

<sup>20</sup> The edition of plays is subtitled "Chorische Stücke" [Choric Plays]. Interestingly, Reinshagen omits the subtitle "Medea stays" with its direct reference in the printed version, while it is

writer Berthold. Somewhere on the lower levels are the apartments of Janna and her husband, and the neighbors Paula and Anne. Down on the street is the pub "Southern Star" where the protagonists and other people gather who constitute Reinshagen's modern version of a chorus.

Reinshagen's play has two levels, in the play's architecture and with respect to her mythic-realistic theme. She continuously plays on the mythic. By citing evocative parts of the mythic story she establishes the connection to the myth of Medea, and also Cassandra. She focuses on the relations between the characters and Janna, who is part of or at least the topic of the conversation in most scenes. Janna constantly climbs—literally, up and down the stairs of the house, metaphorically, as she aspires to her happiness. Passion is one of her driving forces, but without success it is not enough for her: when her husband loses success and fails to cope with the situation productively, she leaves him. It is noteworthy that her new lover is also a storyteller. The relationships in the drama are constructed like a web in which Janna will stumble. Her husband Wolf appears to have a relationship with a neighbor, and Esther, a young woman and doctor's daughter, begins a relationship with Janna's lover Berthold. The storyline is evocative of the myth, though elements are shifted, it is not "Medea's" husband who leaves her for a younger lover, but a younger lover endangers her own romantic relationship. The children, absent characters like in ancient tragedy, are part of Janna's model of a complete and fulfilled life, but they potentially obstruct her moving on. The following monologue that she speaks late one night, gains in tragic potential if read against the mythic Medea story:

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retained in the theater version and the stage bill the theater publishes. Reinshagen discusses her approach to the classical chorus in an essay in this volume.

Groß seid ihr. Bald zu groß für Geschichten. Erzähl ich euch's trotzdem. Schlaft. Schlaft weiter! Alles schläft. Wacht ihr nachts auf und weckt den Vater, fragt ihr den Vater nach eurer Mutter, der sagt: Die ist auf den Mond geflogen. Aber das ist nicht wahr. Es ist wahr und nicht wahr. Der Mond ist hier. Kalt ist's auf dem Mond und wird kälter und kälter. [...] Da werden wir einheizen müssen. (54)

Big, you are. Almost too big for storytelling. But I will tell you anyway. Sleep tight! Sleep tighter! Everyone is asleep. If you wake up at night and wake your father, you ask father where your mother is, he says: She has flown to the moon. But that is not true. It is true and it is not true. The moon is here. It's cold on the moon and it gets colder and colder [...] We will have to turn up the heat.

Janna's strange lullaby, following a night when she had told her children the tale of a beautiful princess looking for love, evokes Medea who drives away in her chariot. The tension between the safe, comforting sleep that is watched over by a caring mother and the eternal sleep of death creates uncanny suspense. Implicit color symbolism contrasts the darkness to the moonlight, the coldness of the moon and the heat of the fire. The fire as a remedy against the assumed cold is exaggerated and turns into a potentially death bringing device, as Janna heats a coal oven and shuts all of its doors and all windows. The act that might have caused a poisoning of the children, and her lover who is in the same apartment, fails. In the last moment, Janna opens the window. The last image the audience beholds of her is her figure in the window of the doctor's apartment. She stands, erect and looks as if she were about to jump (57), framed by the window. After a brief choric scene that discusses the event, the play concludes in the scene wherein Cassandra-Änne completes the act. Her monologue is a paradox on death and misery, in her metaphorical allusion of planting flowers and weeding weeds she sets up the contrast between fertility and void, between darkness and light.

[...] Ich habe geträumt. Zum Glück.

Ich sehe die Straße draußen, nicht von schwarzem Wasser überflutet, kein Feuer nirgendwo, kein Rauch [...] Kein Mann am hellichten Tag an der Stille erstickt, und keine Frau am toten Mann. Kein Kind im Waldgrab aufgefunden. Kein Toter geht herum mit Münzen auf den Augen, auch keiner mit dem Rücken zur Frau,

leise daß er sie nicht mehr ansehen muß, Und keine, die sich aus dem Fenster stürzt, verzweifelt. Oder einfach davonfliegt, wie ich's sah.

*Die Wand zu Jannas Wohnung öffnet sich, Anne schleicht sich ins Schlafzimmer.*

Jede bleibt, wo sie war, im Angenehmen. Wo sie ihr Gärtchen hat, bleibt sie, wo sie ihr Grab hat, pflanzt sie Immergrün drauf und fette Henne, schön Grün und Rot, schön Rot auf Blut, sticht Unkraut, daß Luft kommt, sticht's aus, daß Licht kommt.

*Sie ersticht die Kinder in den Betten.*

Daß nichts ans Licht kommt! Ich sehe klar!

Sie zeigt dem Publikum das Messer und ihre blutigen Hände. (62)

It was a dream. Fortunately.

I see the street outside, it is not flooded with black water, there is no fire anywhere, no smoke. No man suffocated in broad daylight from silence, no woman because of the dead man. No child has been found in a grave in the woods. No dead man walks about with coins on his eyes, and none with his back to the woman,

silently so that he does not have to look at her anymore. And no one jumped out the window in despair. Or just flies away, like I have seen it.

*The wall leading into Janna's apartment opens, Anne tiptoes into the bedroom.*

Each one remains, where she was. Where it is quaint. Where she has her garden, she stays, where she has her grave, she plants evergreen and red flowers, beautiful green and red, beautiful red on blood, she cuts out weeds, so that air gets in, cuts it out so that there will be light.

She stabs the children in their beds to death.

So that nothing comes to the light! I see clearly!

*She shows the knife and her bloody hands to the audience.*

#### **4.2.2. Retelling: Marie-Luise Kaschnitz and Liudmila Razumovskaia**

In the myth, Medea's involvement with Jason and the golden fleece marks the transition to womanhood and loss of innocence on several levels. Not only does she facilitate the hero's success in his quest, she becomes independently active against her family to the point of murderous bloodshed along her way to Greece.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, she becomes Jason's wife. Euripides's account reads as if love's power is indeed not for little girls and so consuming it can turn to violence. Ancient literature very rarely has children-protagonists, with some exceptions such as the childhood of Hercules. But even the youth of Telemachus or Antigone focus less on the process of growing-up stories, but on the transition to adulthood. For Medea, there is no depiction of adulthood, no transition from girl to woman in the ancient texts.<sup>22</sup> Only two decisive markers, periods of transition, find the way into the classical versions: The entrance into womanhood, marriage with Jason for a high price, and the transition from mature, fertile woman to middle-aged departure from that state, when Medea has to face the reality of being no longer either powerful or young enough to bind Jason to stay with her. Does not this open

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<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the various versions, it seems almost certain, that Medea caused bloodshed on the way back to Jason's native Greece; be it the killing and cutting into pieces of her brother Absyrtos or the ritual through which she makes Pelias' daughters kill their father in the attempt to rejuvenate him, a kind of secondary murder.

<sup>22</sup> In a caviat, Kaschnitz, in her retelling of the myth of Jason and the Argo, writes one of the rare moments of Jason as a boy. Before he is sent away to obtain the golden fleece, Jason is a "wild boy, who rode through town on the back of his ass, observing the city people with wide-open eyes."

space in Medea's classical biography provide an inviting blank page for a modern re-inscription, particularly if it were concerned with the creation of a female self?<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to Lange-Müller's Medea whom she pictures as "uprooted" from "mothersoil and fatherland, "like a root," Kaschnitz's young Medea appears to be very connected to her Colchian soil. The 'girl Medea' is already a little sorceress, who frightens, but attracts Jason. In the dialogues of Kaschnitz's radio play "Jasons letzte Nacht," Medea exercises her powers of rejuvenation, which does not seem to fit her appearance as a child. A bird that Jason notices in her hand turns to a little white skeleton once he takes it, but flies away alive as Medea breathes on it. In a playful motion, Medea asks Jason to lie down on the ground. She wants to bury him, "earth on your legs, earth on your arms, earth on your breast, earth on your eyes, earth on your mouth. If nothing is left of you to see, I will clap my hands, then you are going to jump out, as if completely new." Jason finds all that irritating: "I don't like it" — "What do you not like?" — "Your games." But cannot take his eyes off her: "You are different from the children at home," whereupon Medea replies: "I am not a child any more. I can tame wild animals and make dried flowers blossom. I know what it means when the moon has a double aura, and I only have to look someone in the eyes to know what is wrong with him" — Medea, here enumerates all her classically typical deeds: close to nature, she has superhuman powers, knowledge of astrology and medicine.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> As much as I find that a legitimate option and one that several authors appear to exploit, it contradicts C. Durham's assumption that Medea represents exactly the opposite, that is a complete undoing of what is conceived of as a "female self." Durham, 55.

<sup>24</sup> "MEDEA (M). Leg dich hin. Ich werde dich eingraben. Erde auf deine Beine, Erde auf deine Arme, Erde auf deine Brust. Erde über deine Augen, Erde über deinen Mund. Wenn gar nichts mehr von dir zu sehen ist, klatsche ich in die Hände, dann springst du heraus, ganz neu... JASON

Both examples could be taken to make a case for the 'feminine myth' of women's special proximity to nature. A more convincing reading though would perceive of them in spatial, territorial terms drawn from the classical mythic narrative. In Lange-Müller's example, Medea exists in a different sphere that is grounded and defined until Jason's arrival. Jason's interference into Medea's original "territory" is necessary in the first place to exile and other her: the conditional reciprocity creates the circumstance. This view assigns women 'natural' powers that might be seen as a threat. Such an interpretive approach, however, contains a certain risk, in that it also caters to a common branch of 'male' criticism that equates nature with primitivism and emotionality with a lack of rationality. Inge Stephan has discussed this angle of the "myth of womanhood." Cast as a Medea, she writes, women find themselves not only always as already described, but risk being absorbed into the so-called "female myth / myth of womanhood"—which, she reminds us, is not an invention of twentieth century psychoanalysis, but has indeed ancient roots.<sup>25</sup> Kaschnitz operates allegorically, and employs the bird, a highly symbolical animal that in different contexts functions as messenger, a portend, or a symbol of love in the first determining encounter. Her description of a pseudo-burial oscillates between children's game and highly brutal torture, but also points to the soil of the land that is Medea's origin.

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(J) Ich mag das nicht.—M: Was magst du nicht?—J. Deine Spiele—M. Aber mich magst du?—J. Ich sehe dich gerne an. Du bist anders als die Kinder bei uns zu Hause— M. Ich bin kein Kind mehr. Ich weiß sehr viel. Ich kann wilde Tiere zahm machen und vertrocknete Blumen zum Blühen bringen. Ich weiß, was es bedeutet, wenn der Mond einen doppelten Hof hat, und ich brauche nur in die Augen eines Menschen zu sehen, um zu erkennen, was ihm fehlt." Kaschnitz, Nacht 74.

<sup>25</sup> "Als Medea finden sich Frauen nicht nur immer schon als Beschriebene vor ....sondern sie geraten in Gefahr, von jenem "Mythos der Weiblichkeit" (Schlesier) aufgesogen zu werden, der nicht erst ein Produkt der Psychoanalyse in unserem Jahrhundert ist. In der Formulierung

While Kaschnitz' Medea cannot take her soil, and her past, with her, she retains her powers over parts of nature; before she loses Jason from her life, she employs them again. Jason wants to start a new life without a past, and Medea understands—"Your past, that is me?" (87). She reacts, though her suggestion meets Jason's resistance: "Do you want to see the beautiful colorful bird and smell the scent of the flowers from the woods of my country?" (88) Jason leaves, and Medea goes to offer Kreusa an adorned wedding cloak. Kreusa: "It is beautiful and strange. Flowers and birds, right? The birds fly under the flowers, and the flowers grow between the stars." (89) But soon, before Kreusa's eyes, the beautiful needlework turns into confusing lines and patterns.<sup>26</sup> Medea explains that these are signs "For people's loneliness and restlessness. For the insecurity of their possessions and for the unreliability of their love in the world." (90)

Childplay turns into passionate murder. Kaschnitz and Uta Haas are the only authors who imagine Medea as a girl, and trace a development in her, a technique more apt to modern storytelling than to ancient mythic narrative, that usually focuses on one or a string of decisive episode's in a character's life.

Like Dagmar Nick, who depicts an aging Medea setting out to explore mortality and immortality, Liudmila Razuomvoskaia in her play explores the situation of Medea after she is but an aging woman about to be left by her husband. In Razumovskaia's drama, her suffering and helplessness, which only gradually turns into rage, seems at least as self-destructive as it is destructive of others. It traces Medea's change from

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"Mythos Frau" ist dieses Verschmelzen bzw. Ineinanderfallen von "Frau" und "Mythos" radikal zum Ausdruck gebracht. (Stephan, *Musen* 5).

<sup>26</sup> Note the curious correspondence to the imagery in Sedakova's "Zhenshchina u zerkala."

helplessness to being enraged by burning jealousy.<sup>27</sup> The play's opening scene establishes a poignant image with strong repercussions of other ancient plays. Medea stands, "petrified by grief," atop a cliff, "like waves against a shore, tears run down her face, without her noticing it," and looks out for Jason who has been gone for seven weeks without notifying her of his whereabouts or plans [okamenevshaia ot gorja Medea. Vremia ot vremeni na ee zastyvshie litso, [...] kak volny na bereg, nabegaiut slezy. Ona ikh ne zamechaet. Stage direction for the opening scene, 206]. Medea refuses to acknowledge what all around her, including the nurse who makes several attempts in helping Medea to a realistic assessment of the situation, appear to know. Jason has long left her for good. The opening scene, though, reminds one of the Oresteia. There, in opening scene of Agamemnon a messenger watches out, awaiting Menelaus back from Troy and calling out his arrival. Penelope, the epitome of a truthful wife, tells how often she has looked out for Odysseus to return. In Razumovskaia's play, it is not only the evocation of the sea/land border as metaphor of separation, but the symbolic depiction of paralysis in Medea through emotional pain that likens her to the rock the cliffs are made of and evokes Medusa.

Though Razumovskaia's Medea is an agent and about to kill the children and herself, the initial idea and thus the perception of guilt are distributed differently from ancient examples of the myth. The author introduces an older couple, reminiscent of the nurse and the tutor in Euripides' play. Together, their role is instrumental, as the old woman suggests a staged infanticide to scare Jason, while the old man helps ignite the city of Corinth. While I read Razumovskaia's Medea and Jason as modern characters

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<sup>27</sup> Justus Fetscher in an unpublished talk on Medea in drama, presented at Deutsches Haus at

whose dialog displays less classical tragic convention but psychological exploration, the old couple dramatically functions, borrowed from the neo-classical tradition, as confidant/e. By their commentary, they execute functions of the ancient chorus, but mostly they are the play's catalysts. Especially in the beginning, when Medea appears almost paralyzed in a state of grief, much of the initiative for horrible actions is transposed onto the supporting characters and partly absolves her from the responsibility for the act. Clearly, Razumovskaia depicts Medea as a woman stricken by grief for a lost passion. Though madness as a possible effect of the loss, and then cause for her murderous actions, is not openly discussed in the play, there are several allusions to it. Medea, madly in love with Jason, calls him her "dove" in a "snow white" garment—note the contrast to the dress that later will set Creusa on fire—, and she runs to meet him like a "madwoman." Shortly thereafter she laments that she is about to "lose her mind because of all that waiting." The nurse subtly refers to Medea's mind in her advice to Medea not to "occupy her mind" [ne nashego s toboi uma] with what Jason does or why he does it.

Razumovskaia's play occupies a special place among the reinscriptions, dramatic or epic. She directs her Medea to be catalyzed in her actions by others. Razumovskaia twists the character to fit not the typical active, raging Medea. She rather resembles the other female type in classical tragedy, that of the weak victim. Razumovskaia did not and maybe did not want to eliminate the ultimate transgression, the infanticide. For the most part, throughout the play, until just before the end and the infanticide, Medea appears as passive, only reacting to what happens around her. Consequently, in the end, she finishes her role as victim by committing suicide. —Which, again, is a feature that only Razumovskaia's play has, and none of the other Medeas dies.

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Columbia University, October 1996.

The extensive dialogues between Medea and the other characters such as the old nurse, Aegeus, and Jason are case studies in spousal desperation. The reader has to remind him/herself that Medea is indeed a princess, because the nurse suggests that Medea play a trick on Jason, using quite colloquial and drastic language. She tells Medea how her husband once betrayed her, and how she blackmailed him to get him back:

Starukha. Vzjala rebenka za ruku, vzobralas' na skalu i poklialas' samuiu Afroditu, chto esli on eshche uiti posmeet, khot' raz odin, ia sbroshu v more mal'chika, synishku. (108)

Old woman. I grabbed the children, ran up the cliffs and swore her highness Aphrodite herself that if he dared just one more time to run away, I would pick up my son and throw him in the water [...]

while Medea at this point still refuses to listen to the nurse, because, she says

Medea. Iason mne mat', otets, rodnye brat'ia, vozliublennyi, zhenikh, otets moikh detei, moia otchizna, dom, zashchita, krepost', moe dykhan'e, ruki i glaza, suprug moi nenagliadnyi, moia otrada, moi kumir, moi bog! Tot, kto Iasona oskorbit, – mne vrag smertel'nyi. Ego ia zashchishchu otvazhnee, chem l'vitsa svoikh detenyshei v opasnuui minutu. (21)

Medea. To me, Jason is mother, father, my own brothers, lover, bridegroom, father of my children, my home, house, shelter, castle, my breath, hands and eyes, my husband of whom I cannot take my eyes, my pleasure, my shelter, my god! Who dares to speak up against Jason is my eternal enemy. I defend him more fearless than a lioness would defend her cubs.

only to have the nurse remind her that all of this is now irrelevant, because she no longer is a woman, but only a mother.

Medea continues to be ignorant of the warning and eye-opening reports of the nurse and others. Only when she speaks with Aegeus does she seem to finally acknowledge the facts. Addressing Jason's adultery, she takes a stance between solemn calmness and naïvite. Medea is immensely curious and her questions resemble those of a

teenage girl rather than those of a woman of Medea's standing. She wants to know from Aegeus how Creusa chooses and carries her clothes, her jewelry, her posture, her speech, to end her line of questions with the request to "tell me everything about her! So that I can joke about how she has bewitched Jason" [Chtoby ia mogla oshchutit', chem ona okoldovala Iasona" 218]. Is Medea's casually integrated comment wicked or as innocent as Razumovskaia makes it sound upon first hearing? Her Medea turns the order around: Usually it is she who is accused of bewitching people with her special powers. In this case, however, it is her rival Creusa who allegedly "bewitches" Jason to keep him away from wife and children.

As in the Euripidean drama, Razumovskaia has Aegeus suggest that Medea come with him and thus escape her fate in Corinth, but Medea refuses. In the modern drama, however, allusions continue to foreshadow and suggest the crime that Medea will commit. In her metaphors, Medea compares the tenderness of her hands to the blood that they will be soon covered with. Jason's reaction to Medea is significant because it illustrates with striking clarity how language and approach to a situation differs between the sexes. Jason says to Medea:

Jason. Medeia, mne skoro tritsat' let! O! Ty etogo ne ponimaesh! Ty zhenshchina. I ty, vz vse sovershenno inache ustroeny. Esli u vas est' muzh, da eshche liubimyi muzh, vam bol'she nichego ne nado v zhizni. Ved' tak? A muzhshine, Medeia...Muzhchina ne mozhet zhit' odnoi tol'ko liubov'iu. Emu, prezhdе vsego, neobkhodimo delo. [...] Da, Medeia, grecheskii geroi – eto ne professiia. [...] Ia mushchina. (231f)

Jason. Medea, I am almost thirty! Oh, you don't understand! You are a woman. And you, you all are different. If you have a husband, moreover a beloved husband and children, you don't need anything else in life. Isn't that true? But a man's life, Medea...A man cannot live by love alone. He needs, more than anything else, a task at hand. Yeah, Medea, Greek hero – that is not a profession. [...] I am a man.

Jason draws a line between the sexes and exemplifies the distance between emotion and deed. He draws on the stereotypical gender-dichotomy that the woman's realm is emotion, while it is a man's task to supply the daily necessities of survival, which, by definition, is the more essential part and thus, to continue Jason's unfinished line of argument, rectifies his behavior toward Medea. Though possibly not intended by Razumovskaia, Jason's line about the non-professionalism of a "Greek Hero" as parody. By emphasizing the deed ("delo") Jason distances himself, though, from Medea, who initiates and then fulfills much by her words alone. Before Medea finally kills the children and herself, she addresses Jason, mourning their sad faith. Before she loads guilt upon herself, by "going beyond herself" as mother, she clearly names Jason guilty. Besides the discussion about pre-empted guilt for the child murder and her own death, it is noteworthy that Razumovskaia's Medea emphasizes the word upon the deed that she is about to do. While Jason had previously explained how men are dependent on their deeds, she focuses on the work. Within the play, her words are the powerful catalysts that her deeds only follow. Medea's moral stance appears to be closer to Christian than to Pagan morality, and no author exemplifies more clearly than Razumovskaia how through the linear structure of a play tragedy can evolve through the words of the characters.

Nu vot, Iason. S toboi my ostalis' s glazu na glaza. Vot ia. Vot ty. Vot nashi deti. Davai-ka schety, nakonets, svedem. I iz liubvi k tebe ubitsei stala, a ty menia otvergnul. Spravedlivo l' eto, skazhi?...Spasen'ia net. Vse koncheno. Zamknulsia neschastnoi zhizni krug. No pered smert'iu khochu ia, *chtob za mnoi ostalos' slovo*. Chtob naposledok zaglianul i ty v takuiu zh bezdnu strashnuiu, kak ia. (*Pauza*.) No neuzheli podnimsia u materi ruka? U materi? Na sobstvennykh detei! Kakoe nadrugatel'stvo nad mirom. Prirodoi. Materinstvom. Zhizn'iu. [...] Beris' za nozh, vse muzhestvo sobrav! Nesctastneishaia mat', chudovishche iz chudishch, idi svoi dolg poslednii vpolniai! (244f)

That's how it is, Jason. You and I remain, eye to eye. There I am. There is you. There are our children. Let's settle accounts. I became a murderess for love of you, and you refused me. Tell me, is this fair?... There is no salvation. Everything is over. The unhappy life-circle has closed. But before I die, *I want that after me a word remained*. So that, finally, you'd also gaze into the abyss just as I did (*pause*). But is it possible that a mother raises her hand? A mother? Against the own children! What a violation of the world. Of nature. Of motherhood. Life. [...] Take the knife, after you have gathered all courage! Most unhappy of mothers, monster of all monsters, go and fulfill your last deed!

When Medea describes her relationship with the Athenian king Aegeus as a prime example of a woman using a man who thinks he can use a woman as part of a commodity-bargain, she humiliates herself then only to plunge into a state of rage. The sudden killing of her children and her subsequent suicide leave only Jason, who had intended to make peace with Medea, to look in horror and desperation at the corpses of his family members.

With increasing range and estrangement, several similes of Medea and the Gorgon signal her state of being outside the community, and also her own mind. Medea is likened to the Gorgon shortly before the murder of her children. At this point in the play she has reached a degree of "otherness" that ultimately outcasts her and denies her the perception as woman and/or mother. The simile "Gorgon" is used twice; the address has the quality of a curseword or angry reply. Once Medea advises her gossipy servant, who has bad things to say about Medea's beloved and absent Jason "Ah, wicked Gorgon! Stop your newsmongering already." [A zlobnaia Gorgonna! Podavis' svoimi spletniami!, 211] Towards the end of the play, the messengers from Corinth who brought gifts and who are held up by the fire that Medea had caused, are suspicious of her and, just before the climax at which she kills her children, decide to search her house. They liken her to the Gorgon as well ..."But we will be careful. She has strange powers. Not a woman is

she – but a Gorgon." [No budem ostorozhnyi. Zlye sily podvlastnyy ei. Ne zhenshchina ona—Gorgona, 245]. Medea herself, afraid to go mad if Jason left her, evokes images of the Gorgon, Harpies, and other mythical figures of fear and rage. She repeatedly employs images of stones that associate petrification. In the opening scene, standing atop the cliff, Medea suffers from her loneliness so much that she addresses even the "immobile stone" [ia v kamen' nepodvizhni obrashchus']. Shocked by the nurse's suggestions, Medea wonders if the gods had "provided her with a stone instead of a heart."

Razumovskaia treats myth as an example of text within text. Though employing not only content, but also form close to the model, I find that in the case of this play the text's distanced estrangement becomes more apparent than in most other examples. The process of showing tradition in transition is clearly marked.

### 4.2.3. Probing: Wolf, Loher and Ulitskaia

In her latest novel Medea–Stimmen [Medea Voices], Christa Wolf evokes a strong and active Medea. As for her Cassandra project, Wolf has kept traces of some of the stages leading to the novel. She states in a letter from 1992 that her first associations with Medea were the motif of colonialization and the resistance against anything foreign.<sup>28</sup> Wolf's subtitle Voices foreshadows rhetoric's prominent role in the novel. The prefatory opening pages suggest that the calling of a name, the naming and speaking of events, suffice to transpose the reader into the time of the event—a condition that assumes and allows for permeability:

Wir sprechen einen Namen aus und treten, da die Wände durchlässig sind, in ihre Zeit ein, erwünschte Begegnung, ohne zu zögern erwidert sie aus der Zeittiefe heraus unseren Blick. (1)

We speak a name and enter her time because the walls are permeable, meeting a wished-for encounter she, without hesitation, returns our gaze from the depths of time.

Wolf sets up a suggestive connection between the ancient myth and the author's and reader's time. She foregrounds Medea's inner strangeness as it reveals itself through her rhetorics and action and is set against the Corinthians othering her because of these features. Creon wants her out of the city, because Medea has discovered the horrible truth about his reign, which is based on a crime.<sup>29</sup> In a crisis, the queen, who according to old custom has the power of the crown and only lends it to the king, votes with the people to

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<sup>28</sup> Wolf in a letter to Göttner Abendroth, Oct. 13, 1992, published in Wolf, Medea Voraussetzungen 22. "Es war zunächst das Thema 'Kolonialisierung', Abwehr gegen Fremdes, das mit in der Medea-Figur zu stecken schien: Sie war für mich die 'Barbarin aus dem Osten'."

<sup>29</sup> "Die Stadt ist auf eine Untat gegründet." Medea in her first speech, Wolf, Medea. 24.

marry the older princess Iphinoe to one of the Colchis' loyal neighbors. Creon, fearful for his power, has the girl sacrificed.<sup>30</sup>

This causes at least three cases of madness with different accents: the queen screams so loud at the death of her child that she loses her voice completely, locks herself into her quarters and is treated as mad.<sup>31</sup> The nurse who accompanied the child, not able to stand what she witnessed and the official rumors that blame the girl's disappearance on an abduction, goes mad and finally kills herself.<sup>32</sup> The younger daughter, Glauke, is carefully kept away from society, unsuitable for marriage, pale and unattractive, she suffers from epilepsy. Enters Medea, who had discovered the older dead princess', Iphinoe's tomb in the catacombs under the city, who brings the mute queen to assert her suspicion, and who cures Glauke and, in a psychotherapeutic attempt to make Glauke remember her past, brings back long suppressed memories. Glauke, first attracted by and trusting Medea, falls for the rhetoric powers of her father and his followers and turns to rejecting Medea, pronouncing her mad. At Medea's trial, she suffers from a last major epileptic seizure and later throws herself into a well in the courtyard.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Her name, Iphinoe, resonates that of Iphigenie, another princess-daughter, tragically sacrificed for the state/her father's power (see Aeschylus, Oresteia Euripides, Iphigenia Among the Tauris, Iphigenia in Aulis).

<sup>31</sup> "Merope, ihre Mutter, mußte in dem Teil des Palastes, den sie seitdem bewohnt, von vier Männern gehalten werden, man sagt, durch ihr irres Schreien habe sie ihre Stimme verloren, seitdem sei sie stumm." Wolf, Medea 130.

<sup>32</sup> "Die Amme ist natürlich geisteskrank geworden, mit wirrem Haar und irren Augen lief sie tagelang durch die Straßen von Korinth [...] eines Tages fand man ihren zerschmetterten Körper unterhalb der Klippen. Sie habe den Verlust ihres Brustkinds nicht verwinden können, wurde vom Palast ausgestreut, die Wahrheit also, nur daß sie, wie so viele Wahrheiten, auf falschen Voraussetzungen beruhte." Ibid., 131.

<sup>33</sup> Before Medea's trial, Glauke, in a moment of recognition, blames the entire incident on herself. She goes to Helios' temple to plea with him to punish her, she prays in mad gestures, tearing her

The novel establishes two uncommon parallels between the two princesses Glauke and Medea (besides their relations to Jason): both have lost their sibling to a treacherous crime, Medea, trying to reawaken Glauke's memory—hoping for a witness, an ally?—regains her own painful memories of the lost brother. She connects Absyrtos and Iphinoe by depicting them as victims, as related: "She is more your sister than I ever could have been."<sup>34</sup>

Medea, strong enough to face memories and to use her rhetoric to remain 'sane', survives, though in the end she is left emptied of all hope and desire. Glauke, dependent on the rhetorics of others, literally falls victim to them. She is physically and mentally so strongly affected that her suicide appears a form of murder.<sup>35</sup>

In this novel, Jason is no more than a power-hungry weakling who senses that she will become "his doom"<sup>36</sup>. He also acknowledges her as "killer woman" ("Mordsweib,")—ambiguous in German as 'MadWomen', because it refers to the act of

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clothes and scratching her face, 139 (reminiscent of Dionysian ritual or mourning rites). But she also blames it on Medea, whom she does not call by her name, but only addresses her as "this woman." Ibid., 140f.

<sup>34</sup> "All die Jahre über, Bruder, habe ich nicht von dir träumen können. Jetzt sind, mit den Erinnerungen, auch meine Träume erwacht. [...] Iphinoe. Sie ist mehr deine Schwester, als ich es je sein konnte", 106 and "Wir hatten Colchis retten wollen. Und ihr, dieses Mädchen Iphinoe und du, Absyrtos, ihr seid die Opfer. Sie ist mehr deine Schwester, als ich es je sein kann." Ibid., 113.

<sup>35</sup> The well she throws herself into is the site of departure for her painful memory, a place connected with the sacrifice of Iphinoe. Glauke's having her final epileptic breakdown there and later throwing herself into it is a strange closure to the story. Also, Medea had encouraged her to "climb down the rope of memory"—in the end, Glauke abandons the rope and sacrifices herself to her memory. Glauke's reaction and consequence recalls another loyal confidante driven to death by her master, I am thinking of Oenone in Racine's *Phaedra*.

<sup>36</sup> "Das Weib wird mir zum Verhängnis. Als ob ich es nicht gehnt hätte." Wolf, *Medea* 43.

killing, but also colloquially connotes a woman who is particularly stunning.<sup>37</sup> Having adopted the 'civilized' stance of the Corinthians, he describes Medea and, in extension, the other Colchian women as well, as 'wild', which in the course of the narrative becomes increasingly synonymous with 'other' and 'mad'. He locates her power in her extraordinary rhetorical skills that work like a drug: this is how she tamed the dragon guarding the golden fleece and gained power over the Corinthians: by speaking to them until they fall asleep (he uses the verb to describe both situations).

Wolf's rendering of madness in Medea with a strong focus on society and power versus the (female) subject, resonate with Foucault's early definition of madness. According to Habermas's paraphrase of Madness and Civilization, Foucault has a "philosophical interest" in madness as in a phenomenon complementary to reason: reason, now monologic, keeps madness at arm's length, so that it will then be able, without risk, to take power over it as an object cleansed from reasonable subjectivism."<sup>38</sup> Wolf operates subversively, so that her Medea throws the monstrous, the madness back at the society which is imposing it on her. It is a shift, a displacement.<sup>39</sup> Medea fails to accomplish the task of "acculturation," of getting used to a foreign culture (comp. Böschstein, 9). The Corinthian action against Medea is driven by the desire for power,

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<sup>37</sup> When, at the trial, Jason finds out she was Oistros' lover, he says: "Sie ist ein Mordsweib, und mit meiner Abneigung gegen sie stieg meine Bewunderung." Ibid., 217.

<sup>38</sup> "Was dieses Buch [i.e. Madness and Civilization] über die kulturgeschichtlich angelegte Studie eines Wissenschaftshistorikers hinausgeht, ist ein philosophisches Interesse am Wahnsinn als einem Komplementärphänomen zur Vernunft: den Wahnsinn hält sich eine monologisch gewordene Vernunft vom Leibe, um sich seiner gefahrlos als eines von vernünftiger Subjektivität gereinigten Gegenstandes bemächtigen zu können." Habermas, 280.

<sup>39</sup> See Stephan Medea. The central problem is the "...Gewaltpotential des Mythos, der in Medea ins Monströse gesteigert zu sein scheint. Wolf rückt die Gewalt entschlossen von ihrer Medea weg und verlagert sie in die Gesellschaft [...]" 1.

but equally by a fear beyond reason, a fear of things outside the controllable order that, in order to be amended, needs a sacrifice, and a scapegoat.<sup>40</sup> The part of the novel where she focuses is on this theme is prefaced with a quote from René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*: "People want to convince themselves that their misfortunes come from one single responsible person who can easily be got rid of" (in Wolf, 123). Medea fills that need toward the end when she acts mad and enraged like a fury. She brings her children whom she is not allowed to take into exile, to Hekate's temple to plea for protection.<sup>41</sup> Only years later she finds out that the children were stoned to death the same day, and that the Corinthians still talk about it as if she had murdered them.

Medea, here, is constantly "othered," displaced, and in different incidences presented as mad.<sup>42</sup> Even though the term "mad" or madness does not appear in the novel, the Colchian women who followed Medea to Corinth are often called "wild, savage" (as opposed to the "tame" Corinthians). The definition of 'wild' herein comes very close to 'being other', to think on their own, to know more. This perception of savage/other ties in with Wolf's interest in pre-classical, preferably matriarchal concepts. In assessing the fratricide committed by Medea, Wolf wonders if the origin of this mythic feature could not be the allegorical depiction of seasons and their perpetual coming and going, personified by her brother. In this interpretation, the murder resembles rites of

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<sup>40</sup> Leukon the astronomer contends that Medea is the center of danger and denying it, 168. He fears for her because he knows that what drives the people is stronger than reason. Wolf *Medea*, 182.

<sup>41</sup> Leukon: "Maßlos ist sie am Ende gewesen, so, wie die Korinther sie brauchten, eine Furie." *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>42</sup> See my caveat on female creativity and madness in the introduction.

death and renewal, similar to the Bacchae's dismembering of Dionysos.<sup>43</sup> Medea who blames herself for leaving Colchis, and thus uproots herself, becomes a "half feared, half shunned Barbarian" in Corinth ["halb gefürchtete, halb verachtete Barbarin" 113].

Wolf provides further philosophical background for assessing Medea in chapter-epigraphs that quote from Euripides' and Seneca's *Medeae*, Ingeborg Bachmann and René Girard. Through this frame she foregrounds the notion of Medea as victim: in her novel, Medea is not the murderess of her children, that is an accusation and rumor spread by Creon and his followers, who fear Medea's knowledge and skills as a risk for the Corinthian community.

In the course of Wolf's novel, two child-murders whose victims are not Medea's children receive major attention. Contrary to the ancient myth, Medea narrates how her brother Absyrtos was killed by their father, the Colchian king, in a treacherous plot to remain in power. The almost archetypal image of her as a raging madwoman standing on the Argo's deck, tossing the parts of her brother into the sea, has imprinted itself on the Argonauts' memory and serves the Corinthians to spread the rumor that she is responsible for her brother's death.<sup>44</sup> With emphasis placed on Medea's strength, Wolf attempts to refute the terrifying evil attributed to her. On the other hand, this version is neither a modern, nor a feminist invention. Though the reception of Medea via Euripides and Ovid

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<sup>43</sup> "Da beginnt ja wohl das Bedürfnis, ein Bild der 'schrecklichen Mutter, 'schrecklichen Schwester' herzustellen. – Also war Apsyrtos nicht vielleicht der Jahreszeitenkönig der Medea (in einer früheren Schicht des Mythos), ihr Bruder, und war nicht seine 'Zerstückelung' – genau wie die des Dionysos durch die Bacchen – eben ein Teil des Wiedergeburtssituals, auf das ja der ganze Jahreszyklus hinauslief?" Wolf, Medea. Voraussetzungen 24.

<sup>44</sup> "Auch meinen Argonauten ist dieses Bild in die Glieder gefahren: eine Frau, die unter wilden Schreien die Knochen eines Toten, die sie bei sich trug, gegen den Wind ins Meer wirft." Wolf, Medea 105.

is the most common, in some pre-Euripidean versions like those of Apollodorus, Hesiod, Ennius, Attius or Neophron, Medea is not a murderess.<sup>45</sup>

Neither passion nor evil intention drives Wolf's Medea. On the contrary, she is presented as an altruistic wise woman, trying to rectify the injustice committed in the Corinthian state. As one of few Medea texts, Wolf plays on Medea's special powers, but marks them as gifts and skills she has that are merely not acknowledged by the Corinthians. Medea's personal story and her personal interests, though resonant in some of the "voices" are set back against the foregrounded relationship of Medea in a foreign society that others her. The agency is thus partly transposed – Medea's agency is obstructed, and thus she cannot become "same" even if she wanted to, but is being othered by the environment. She does not commit any sorcerous acts, but the "poisonous" words that she speaks about the foundation of the Corinthian state on injustice, are statements that, like Cassandra's prophecies, no one wants to hear. With her strong personality that attempts in vain to effect positive change in her environment, Wolf reinscribes Medea as failed, but productive, and quite sympathetic figure. A very different, static, and critically assessed by her author is the Medea Dea Loher inscribes in her play Manhattan Medea.

Dea Loher's Medea others herself and refuses a metamorphosis conducive to her exile environment. Her play is exceptionally dense with a sequence of strong leitmotivic

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<sup>45</sup> See Stephan, Medea 1 and also Christa Wolf in a playbill on Hans Henry Jahn's Medea, in which her observation about the character sounds like an early commentary on her 1996 Medea-novel. Christa Wolf, "Die andere Medea" in Programmheft des Maxim Gorki Theaters Berlin zu H. H. Jahnns "Medea", which premiered on March 25, 1994, 17f, cif after Stephan, Medea 20.

metaphors, transformations, and structural elements that recall fairy tales. Medea appears as the fixing point amidst the transformations that surround her. It is one of Loher's main points of criticism that Medea does not change and insists on her love to Jason, and on her disappointment with the lack of progress for the better in her life circumstances. Except Medea, the other six active characters are or have been men. Jason changes in the new circumstances as immigrant and reaches for a new life with another woman. Sweatshop-Boss, his father-in-law to be, a scrupulous entrepreneur who disguises himself as a friendly merchant by taking on the name "Sawyer." Deaf Daisy is a transvestite who assists Medea's murderous plans and provides her with a poisonous dress to kill her rival. A seven-year-old child, a mute role, is Medea and Jason's offspring and Medea's victim. Velazquez is a doorman who imitates the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish painter Velazquez. Through his imitation, however, he attains a new originality as he draws "a copy but not a copy" of his role model's work:

Velazquez. Ich bin ein Meister der Kopie. Und doch – indem ich sie signiere, mache ich ein Original aus ihr. Eine Kopie, die keine ist. Ein falscher Velazquez, der ein echter ist. – Aber an dem Tag, an dem es darauf ankommt, werde ich der einzige Velazquez sein. Der einzige.  
(11)

Velazquez. I am a copy-master. And yet – by signing the copy, I make it an original. A copy that is not a copy. A fake Velazquez who is not fake. – But when the day comes, I will be the only Velazquez. The only one.

On a symbolic level, Velazquez plays a major role in the plot. He is a subtle catalyst. In the opening dialogue with him, Medea identifies herself as "a thief, dealer. Maybe just a whore, harmless" [Eine Diebin, Dealerin. Vielleicht nur Hure, harmlos, 9]. Velazquez is present again in the final scene, watching as Medea, forced by Jason to

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Authors with a feminist agenda, for example Tuana, stress that the murderous Medea is an

leave her son behind with him and his new bride Claire, the daughter of the rich Sweatshop-Boss, comes to see the child one last time. Velazquez hands her a copy of Diego Velazquez' painting of the infant Philip Prosper as a token and assures her that no one will hurt the child as long as he is doorman of the house. The well-known Velazquez painting depicts a son of Philip V of Spain who died at age four or five.<sup>46</sup> The original painting's reality does not correspond to Velazquez' assurance, and Medea takes the plastic bag the painting was wrapped in to suffocate her son.

Her monologue, directed at her dead brother, connects brother and child, both blood relations to Medea. All her relations to men have failed, and now Medea longs to be alone. Medea says, hugging her child:

Medea. Mein Bruder. Du hattest recht. Es reicht nicht für vier. / Es reicht nicht einmal für drei. / Ich gebe dich zurück. / Und dann wird Frieden sein. / Und ich werde endlich / allein sein mit mir. / Nur für mich.  
/ Für mich. / Für mich. / *Schweigen*. / Ich liebe dich. (61)

Medea. My brother. You were right. / There is not enough for four. / There is not even enough for three. / I return you. And then there will be peace. / And finally, I will be / alone with myself. / Only by myself. / By myself. / *Silence*. / I love you.

After the child's death a torch appears in the doorway and burns Velazquez' painting, which turns into Picasso's Las Meninas. The final metamorphosis reflects on Medea's story – she, who had lived surrounded by men, has at last cast all men out of her life. Even in the painting, after its fiery "metamorphosis," there is a girl and not a boy. Introducing a Velazquez figure who transforms Velazquez' paintings into "new" copies, and that then turns one Velazquez painting—The Infant Philip Prosper—into

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invention of Euripides. 268.

<sup>46</sup> Diego Velazquez. The Infant Philipp Prosper, 1659, Prado, Madrid.

another—Las Meninas— and furthermore a later rendition of the subject, Loher introduces a discourse on representation and perception of tradition. She transcends genres as she includes these famous paintings into her dramatic work, and tackles the philosophic discourse about visual perception and perspective. In his opening essay in Les mots et les choses, Foucault discusses point of view and perspective using the example of Velazquez' Las Meninas.<sup>47</sup> He especially reflects on the bundling of perspectives of the painter, the addressees, King Philip IV and his wife, visible as mirrored reflections in the background, and the spectator, that, together, exemplify the essence of pure representation effected by the work. Picasso, who painted 44 studies of Velazquez' work, has split one painting into different perspectives, like Medea herself, who is also presented as split and not belonging herself. Even in her self-representation, Medea has "fallen out of her frame." She has lost a clear referent for her own life.

Medea's early dialogue with Jason demonstrates how differently the couple perceives its situation and its past. In this scene, they speak more to themselves than to one another, and the reader is reminded of acts of miscommunication as Bachman envisioned them in Malina, Wolf in Cassandra or Reinshagen in her Medea drama. As in most Medea texts, Loher's Manhattan-Medea has a turning point at which Medea's strong love turns into hate, revenge and murder. At first, she assumes that Jason's life with another woman is temporary, a scam to force money out of his bride and rich father-in-law to then return to Medea. But she errs, and when she realizes her mistake, she plans to destroy Jason's new life. Throughout their dialogue the main topics are love, lies, murder and suffering. They employ a mostly brief, simple, syntax that works with a considerable

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<sup>47</sup> Foucault, Michel. Les mots et les choses (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), introductory

amount of repetition. In her first dialogue, Jason argues that "I never wanted to stay with you. Ever. Fire and water do not belong together" [Ich wollte nie bei dir bleiben. Nie. Feuer und Wasser gehören nicht zusammen, 23]. Medea, who at this point still wants him to return, reminds him first of their love and of the memories of a life and suffering together: She fell in love with him because he shared his grief with her. She accuses him that she became guilty first by sharing the knowledge of his mother's death. Then followed the murder of her brother: Jason, who narrates that the only reminder of his mother is his American name that ridiculed him in their village, Medea, and her brother board a ship to the new and supposedly better world. Medea is pregnant. Food is scarce, and when the brother refuses to share his food with Medea, she kills him. Jason claims to sometimes see Medea's dead brother's eyes in the eyes of their child: "The Dying, who takes over the unfinished body at the moment of death, as his new home, and as revenge." ["Der Sterbende, der sich im Augenblick des Todes den unvollendeten Körper nimmt, zum neuen Wohnsitz und zur Rache," 34]. Medea, as cited above, has a similar vision when she murders the son, only in her rendition it appears as an act of closure that is not a revenge.

Loher works on several levels of representation, perception and self-perception of her characters. Not one, but several frames of reference are at play simultaneously. Metamorphosis is one of the leading themes of her drama. Medea transforms from a foreign observer and outsider to an actor in the original sense of the word. Loher employs a fairy-tale like symbolism of colors and elements. The colors red, white, and black, fire and water, accompany characterizations and scenes. Jason is associated with water. Before he reaches Medea's village, he crosses the sea to change his fate. Not, like his

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chapter.

ancient predecessor Jason, on a quest that promises fame and wealth, but to escape war and poverty. During the initial flight with his mother, he drowns her upon her request. Medea's brother, as the Sweatshop-Boss, father of Jason's bride Claire, will remark later, also finds a "grave in the water" (49). He also notes that their common child: is "a smart child. Claims it does not have a name and had been borne from the water one day." [Ein kluges Kind. Sagt, es habe keinen Namen, und es sei eines Nachts aus dem Wasser geboren, 48]. Medea's element, on the other hand, is fire. First, she burns with love for Jason, she sends her rival Claire a red dress she will burn in, the fire burns the safeguarding-image of the little boy, and the flames make Las Meninas appear. The complementary image is a dream Jason has, in which he sees himself in a wedding scene with two brides, Medea and Claire, one dressed in black and the other in white.

When Medea's reminders of the past do not provoke a reaction in Jason, Medea begins to mutilate herself. First, she cuts her hand, then her cheek with the knife she had killed her brother with. The red blood that flows from the wounds does not bring about a change in Jason, either. Medea brusquely renounces Jason's subtle suggestion of a menage-a-trois.<sup>48</sup> Next, Medea will send the red dress for Claire as a wedding gift, by which the young bride will die. Then, she remarks about her rival that "her skin is white," the color of innocence. Claire's color soon changes, thanks to Medea. She "replaces" it with red leather dress. The choice of color not only associates Medea's attribute of

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<sup>48</sup> When Medea argues that she has shared a long and difficult period with Jason and that Claire might get bored by him soon, Jason notes that he would be happy if he could live with two women (29).

passionate love, but also foreshadows Claire's terrible death and allegorizes Medea's jealousy.<sup>49</sup>

After the conversation with Jason, Medea enigmatically evokes the allegory of a falcon, which, a lily in his beak, flies across snow-white plains—the image of a haunting bird with the flower representative of innocence, but also death. The next character to appear is the transvestite Deaf Daisy, who sings a folk song of exile and love that she will complete only in the end, after Medea has murdered her son. She sympathizes with Medea and her situation and agrees to help her. Medea asks her to get her a poisoned red dress, made of leather that has lingered too long in its red dye. Deaf Daisy's self introduction is a good example of Loher's poetic skill in playing with allusions and chains of associations that are slightly off: Medea understands the transvestite's name wrongly as "Death Daisy"—which would suggest a connection to her later role in the play. Daisy corrects her: "No, no, the dove, Daisy, the dove," which is not correct either, but plays on Daisy self-perception that stands in ironic contrast to her actual appearance.

Both Velazquez and Deaf Daisy are mirroring characters to Medea. While Velazquez is a visual catalyst, Deaf Daisy is a vocal catalyst. She continues her introduction:

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<sup>49</sup> Note in reference to the burning garment that Medea (and Hercules' jealous wife, Megaira) present to kill a rival out of jealousy, that there is an etymological connection between the German word for jealousy [Eifersucht] and fire. "Eifer" has an Indogermanic root that means "to burn," and "Sucht" is also an old word for "sickness": "Eifer ist vom althochdeutschen eibar, eiveri abgeleitet und geht auf die indogermanische Wurzel ai, "brennen" zurück. Sucht (suht) ist das alte Wort für Krankheit. Im Wortsinn ist die Eifersucht also die "brennende Krankheit." Rinne, 70.

**Deaf Daisy.** Ja, ich bin Deaf Daisy. Ich bin das Gehäuse der Klanglosigkeit, die keine ist. Nur Abwesenheit von hörbaren Tönen. Ich kenne nicht meine eigene Stimme. Aber ich fühle sie pulsen. Wie alle Geräusche lautlos in mir schwingen und vibrieren. Ich trage die Stille des Weltraums in mir, die hellhörige, die dem Tod vorausgeht. Lauschen Sie nur – (43)

**Deaf Daisy.** Yes. I am Deaf Daisy. I am only the vessel of a soundlessness which is not without sound. Only absence of audible sounds. I do not know my own voice. But I can hear it pulse through my body. It vibrates through me, noiselessly, like all sounds. I carry the silence of the universe, that light keen-on-hearing moment that precedes death. Just listen –

Deaf Daisy's song and actions are but a reflection of Medea's pain and her longing: Deaf Daisy's song accounts for unfulfilled love and the pain of exile. Medea, who longs to listen for a word of love from Jason, sends her rival a death-prepared dress with the help of deaf Daisy.<sup>50</sup>

The Sweatshop Boss challenges Medea. An audience familiar with the myth might read his question, what her name means, as an implicit allusion to or reminder of her past. She however, claims that the name means only herself, thus renouncing the ancient tradition. When Sweat-Shop Boss, however, calls her a sorceress, as also Jason had done, she almost stops reacting.

**Sweatshop-Boss.** Diese Stadt lebt von der Verwandlung. Medea. Medea. Wie lange bist du hier. Was hast du gemacht aus dir. Hast du dich verändert. (48f)

**Sweatshop-Boss.** This city lives through metamorphosis. Medea. Medea. How long have you been here. Where have you gotten yourself. Have you changed.

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<sup>50</sup> Through metamorphoses that partly result from the fragmentation of an act, Lober demonstrates how vision, sound/voice and action are inherently connected, and can be transported onto a mythical plane as well. Lober's figure of Deaf Daisy reflects upon Medea's hidden potential and can be compared to Lange-Müller's Medea approach wherein the author suggests to speak "inaudible"– though in both cases the message comes across loud and clear.

The questions are not marked as such and appear entirely rhetorical. When Sweatshop-Boss repeats Medea's name, it is not so much mere repetition as an insistent evocation which resonates ineffectively, as it does not bring Medea to recall her (mythic) past. Dea Loher takes the theme of change to her characters and demonstrates how their life circumstances shape them and they make their lives, or, in Medea's case, fail to do so. Loher probably strikes the harshest implicit criticism against Medea's immobility or her unwillingness to change.

Liudmila Ulitskaia's Medea is not a figure of change, either. Yet for her, Medea's rootedness in her familiar environment and its tradition has positive connotations. Though Medea Mendez, the protagonist of Medea i ee deti goes experiences a major transition in her life, she remains a stable, powerful character. The novel begins when Medea is already an older woman and has been a widow for many years, her youth is evoked in narrative flashbacks to present her character in its full life circle. The retrospective narrative is also used to establish her special status and abilities: When she is sixteen, the transitional age between young girl and woman, she finds herself in a witch's circle of mushrooms, and she finds an aquamarine ring, resembling the color of the sea, that from then on she wears and that is repeatedly evoked to allude to her healing capacities or her ability to 'read' people. The crisis of her husband's betrayal that dominates Medea's old age late reveals the secret between Medea and her husband that emerges not only long after the fact, and only in the last third of the novel, but also after Medea's husband's death. Possibly it is no coincident that Medea also finds a ring that Alexandra had lost on the seashore during her affair with Medea's husband. Only through

a letter, though Medea finds out that her late husband had had an affair and even a child with her younger sister Alexandra, while she had remained childless. And Medea had nurtured that particular child of Alexandra, as if it were her own.<sup>51</sup> Medea, who had loved her husband very much, is left to her own devices—it is too late to confront him—but she draws great strength from this situation, teaching others a lesson in compassion and understanding.

Throughout the novel, Ulitskaia's Medea is associated with tradition: She received her name from an aunt who died at her husband's funeral, grieving for him. Her name is thus rooted in a tradition. This tradition emphasizes the poles of love and suffering.

Besides Medea, the other prominent character of the novel is her grand-niece Masha, the daughter of Alexandra's son with Medea's husband. Masha's parents die in a car accident when she is only eight, and the young orphan, traumatized, grows up with her grandmothers. She might be read as the author's alter ego; she is extremely literary and sensitive. A counterpoint or variation of Medea, Masha's is versed and very fond of poetry, she loves Pasternak and Akhmatova. Her passion finds an outlet in poetic production when she begins an excessive "roman," an affair with the exclusively physically oriented former artist and doctor Butunov is so overwhelming that it breaks her and drives her to death. Meanwhile, her aunt Medea turns her alert perceptions of people and situations into practical action; her love for her husband appears rational, but no less sincere than Masha's tumultuous surge of feeling. Ulitskaia contrasts these different passions without comparatively judging them. It is my thesis that Medea and Masha are two sides of the same coin. In Masha surfaces poetic talent and in innate

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<sup>51</sup> A curious allusion to the promises Jason makes Medea about Creusa's assertions to take care of

tragedy. Her creativity is brought out by a turmoil of emotions. Strong feelings and an especially alert perception of the world surrounding her are qualities of Medea, that she however, keeps to herself.

Ulitskaia's allusions to myth are very subtle and border on the parodic, for example in the first descriptive passage of the novel. It states that Medea together with her sister Alexandra was the last pure Greek in the family. She also is the last to speak real Greek, a very distant language which retained "an astonishing literariness and original sense of the word: Even today, laundromat is called "katarizma" and transportation is called metaphorsis" [I ponyne na etom iazyke prachechnaia zovetsia katarizma, perevozka – metaforisis, 9].

Though Ulitskaia's Medea is certainly not a mirror of Russian mentality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, her birth date is significant and suggests her life as a kind of parallel documentation to the century. The narrative, which continuously asserts a special relation between Medea and the sea – it is a place of gathering, contemplation, memory, findings, and loss. Attributes of the sea are invoked metaphorically as frame in a key scene in which Medea, described as not prone to any vanity, examines her face in a mirror, framed by seashells:

**S godami ono eshche bol'she udlinilos'—veroiatno, za schet opavshikh, s'edennykh dvumia glubokimi morshchinami shchek. [...] Medeia s nekotorym udivleniem razgliadyvala svoe litso – ne skol'ziashchim bokovym vzgliadom, a vnimatel'no i strogo – i poniala vnesapno, chto ono ei nraivits'ia. V otrochestve ona mnoga stradala ot svoei vneshnosti: ryzhie volosz, chrezmernyi rost i chrezmernyi rot, ona stenialas' bol'shikh ruk i muzhskogo razmera obuvi, kotoryi nosila... "Krasivaia starukha iz menia obrazovalas'", – usmekhnulas' Medeia i pokachala golovoi. (40)**

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**Medea's and Jason's son.**

It had grown longer, maybe because of the collapsing cheeks, marked by two deep lines [...] Medea looked at her face with some amazement – not just with a quick glance, but austere and alert – and realized all of a sudden that she liked it. In her youth, she had often suffered because of her appearance: red hair, tall body, an oversized mouth, and she was also ashamed of her big hands and the size of her shoes befitting a man. "I turned into a pretty old lady" Medea laughed and shook her head.

A few pages later, Masha arrives. The scene introducing her reveals the author's focus on similar details in the description of her characters:

Ozhidala svoei ocheredi i Masha, strizhennaia pod mal'chika, podrostkovogo slozheniia, kak bud'to ne vzroslaia zhenshchina, a toshchii nedorostok na vikhliavykh nozhkakh. No litsom krasiva – krasotoi ne proiavlennoi, kak perevodnaia kartina.(45)

Masha was also waiting patiently, with a boy's haircut, the shape of an adolescent, as if she were not a grown-up woman but a thin young girl on insecure legs. Yet her face was beautiful.

The strong connection between Medea and her grand-niece, read against the ancient myth, might be interpreted as a reversal of the child murder in the ancient tragedy, and Medea's stance toward her sister and her offsprings as acts of forgiving and redemption in a context of Christian values. Here, utopian potential is realized in an environment of compassion, that includes stronger and transgressive, possibly destructive passions. Not Medea is destroyed by passion, that she rather distances herself from, but Masha realizes a passion that she cannot master. Its strength triggers her poetic creativity, but also destroys her. From this depiction arises the question if passion and creativity depend on or rather obstruct each other, and if the price Medea has to pay for her compassion without passion is a lack of creativity—reproductive or poetic—of her own. Working with some features of the ancient myth—Medea as stranger, yet in Ulitskaia's rendition as a stranger from an ancient and ultimately more 'humane' thus civilized

culture—, Medea Mendez' rootedness in her "mother-soil"—Ulitskaia transforms Medea into a modern-day "Estia," a concept but also a goddess protecting the "navel" of the house. Thus, Ulitskaia's Medea-novel is more than a "family chronicle."<sup>52</sup>

Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to point out one more aspect of Ulitskaia's Medea. It is of interest because it draws a connection back to my analysis of Medusa and the connected figure of the "angel of history." Medea feels strong connections to the past. The novel tells how sometimes she stands on the shore but also likes to look back at the mountains, which represent to her stability and shelter. In one of these moments, as a young woman, Medea has a vision seeing an apparition of her dead parents and the last child at whose birth her mother had died. They all thank Medea for taking care of her other siblings.

Sometimes after her parents' death and again right before her suicide, Masha has visions of them, and is sad that they seem far away, strange and disconnected. In a mirror-scene of her first suicide attempt, Masha beholds something strange, frightening her, behind the door. She takes her courage to face it, walks out onto the balcony into the snowfall, and jumps. The following quote immediately precedes the vision of her parents:

On stoia v dvernom proeme, vsegdashnii angel, v temno-krasnom, mrachnom, litso ego bylo neiasnym, no glaza gusto sineli, kak iz prozei teatral'noi maski.[...] On protainul k nei ruki, poliozhil ei na ushi I dazhe prizhal nemnogo.  
"Seichas nauchit iasnoviden'iu", dogadalas' ona. [...] (265)

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<sup>52</sup> Tati'iana Morozova, "Rezh da esh'. Kriticheskie zametki o semeinoi khronike Liudmily Ulitskoi 'Medeia i ee deti'." in *Literaturnaia gazeta* 19.4.1996, 4.

**He stood in the doorway, the ever-angel, in dark-red, murky, his face hazy, but his eyes were piercing blue, like through a theater-mask [...] He reached out his hands to her, put them on her ears and even lightly pressed them a little.**

**"Now he is going to teach me clearvoyance," she guessed [...]**

### **4.3. Conclusion: Mirroring Myth or Postmodern Deconstruction? Investigating Medea's Utopian Potential**

Most of the analyzed Medeas are depicted with a significant psychological depth, a feature atypical in ancient mythological texts, but common in modern re-inscriptions of mythological stories. In summarizing the motivation and situation of the modern characters, I start with the infanticide that in the theoretical debate continues to be the most burning issue. The 20<sup>th</sup> century texts focus on aspects of the psyche for choreographing the murderous act instigated by jealousy.<sup>53</sup> The infanticide is present in all but Ulitskaia's novel where Medea Mendez semi-consciously takes on the role of step- and foster mother for several children of her extended family.<sup>54</sup> But as rage and infanticide appear to be the quintessential features associated with Medea, is she even conceivable without them? Do not castings like that of Liudmila Ulitskaia or Christa Wolf, who depicts Medeas as a sane, powerful woman with good intentions who has fallen victim to violent rumors, dismantle the myth of Medea?<sup>55</sup> While I would not object that there appears to be a tendency of demythologization, I do not agree that infanticide is the only important characteristic of Medea. Undeniably, this murder is the realization of the ultimate transgression.

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<sup>53</sup> As Justus Fetscher identifies Medea as a founding member of the "First Wives' Club"—a woman who is not willing to just watch her estranged husband marry another. Unpublished lecture, Deutsches Haus at Columbia University, October 1996.

<sup>54</sup> Ulitskaia's approach corresponds to a tendency I have found in earlier German Medea-reinscriptions from the 1990s', such as Haas' or Nick's, possibly more informed by the women's movement, wherein the heroine is absolved and her special powers are not viewed as destructive but rather as positive forces. Wolf mentions in her notes that she would have liked to present Medea as innocent, but as her novel shows, she acknowledges the figure's ambiguities (comp. Wolf, *Medea. Voraussetzungen*).

Psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic criticism have only recently taken an interest in Medea, and focus on this aspect. The "Medea syndrome," thought-provokingly discussed in literary studies by Renate Böschstein, originally relates to the 'Oedipus-' and 'Electra-complexes.' It describes a pathological behavior of women who kill their children in an act of revenge for disappointed or unrequited love.<sup>56</sup> I would suggest that another case or form of "Medea syndrome" is contained in women's supposed "need" to comply with expectations to fulfill their 'female duty' towards their husbands and parents, and traps them between their own mind and goals and that of others.<sup>57</sup> The children who are the victims in the ancient and most modern versions can be perceived as a physical representation of this entrapment. A modern feminist interpretation might argue that they obstruct women's self-fulfilment. However, none of the above analyzed Medea-reinscriptions, with the possible exception of Gerlind Reinshagen, seems to support this version. Rather, interpretations such as Nicole Loraux's argument that ancient women took revenge on their husbands through murdering their children appear more viable. In the ancient context, Loraux further contends that mothers kill their sons to cut the paternal line destined to proceed on the throne. For them, infanticide is the only chance to enact real power. Thus, Euripides' Medea would be making use of a power tool. By being

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<sup>55</sup> Olga Rinne speculates if the murder might be the effect of a male fear-fantasy—"männliche Angstphantasie" which, deployed of the textual context, loses its foundation. Rinne, 12.

<sup>56</sup> See Renate Böschstein's and Inge Stephan's approaches to the question.

<sup>57</sup> Böschstein develops her interpretation of the "Medea-Syndrome" from the image of a generation of women who have been educated with ambivalent values of independance and adaptation in a marriage by their war/postwar mothers: "Die Töchter dieser Mütter gingen mit einem ambivalenten weiblichen Leitbild in ihr eigenes Leben hinein, prädestiniert dazu, ein "Medea-Syndrom" zu entwickeln: das Hin-und Gergerissensein zwischen dem Wunsch nach Unabhängigkeit und Handlungsfreiheit und der Sehnsucht nach Sicherheit und Geborgenheit in der alten weiblichen Rolle." Böschstein, Medea 125.

close to the pursuit of a male heroic cult, she is, at least in ancient times, too progressive for her environment. According to ancient gender norms, a woman who "speaks on her own behalf" already commits a transgressive act (Zeitlin 80). Zeitlin resumes that Medea's exit "upward and out of sight" is consequential.<sup>58</sup> But how can this be applied to the modern authors whose heroines have other power-tools available and in whose texts the perspective and sometimes even the agency differs? Only about half of them have her commit infanticide and be the only agent, while the other half alludes to or suggests another agent, or at least provocateur of Medea's actions: Petrushevskaja leaves ambivalent to which extent the cab driver's actions immediately provoked his wife's reaction. Further, Petrushevskaja's story defies Loraux's theory that mothers kill only sons, never daughters. Reinshagen makes the uncommon choice of introducing a Cassandra-figure as murderer. Razumovskaja suggests that the old woman's advice initially planted the idea of infanticide in Medea. In Dea Loher's play, Medea kills her son, but the act is counterposed to Jason's equally transgressive matricide.<sup>59</sup> Christa Wolf refers to rumors about infanticide. The Corinthians use them to turn against the stranger Medea to disguise their own guilt of committing the murder. In all texts that include the infanticide, though, it alienates and "others" Medea from society. Since there are ancient Medea versions in which she does not kill her children, the absence of

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<sup>58</sup> "A woman who insists on the binding nature of the compact she made on her own with a man, who defends her right to honor and self-esteem in terms suspiciously resembling those of the male heroic code, and finally who would reverse the cultural flow in founding a new genre of poetry that celebrates now the exploits of women rather than those of men is meant not for human but superhuman status. Accordingly, it is only logical that she disappears once the drama is over—upward and out of sight." Zeitlin, 68.

<sup>59</sup> Loher's Medea is of special interest as within this text, guilt is not on Medea alone, but also on Jason. The matricide, committed because the mother foresees that she is too weak for the flight

infanticide is not an innovative "void" of 20th century women authors. Alas, in search of a motivation why some of them chose to omit the murder or attribute it to a third responsible party might be an alienation that the authors consciously or not—do not tolerate, not unlike the female chorus in Euripides play. Foley's poignant remark on the change from solidarity to repulsion on part of the chorus as a consequence of Medea's eloquence in her monologue in the first act stresses this aspect. In her reading, Euripides appears strikingly progressive in creating a "reversal of poetry's silencing of women through the centuries" (Weigel). What are the paradigms by which the reader could measure the causes of the murder? Ancient Greek tragedy certainly addressed murder differently than modern texts. Euripides' *Medea* has rhetorical prowess, but without results in (political) change. With the exception of Wolf's *Medea* the authors are motivated by personal rather than by political interests—thus the infanticide must be judged differently. Probed against the mythic reinscriptions, arguments that foreground aspects of gender-performativity, and thus view Medea as speaking like a woman but acting like a man, are of minor resonance. Euripides' tragedy however has uniquely drawn attention to gender issues.<sup>60</sup> Of no little importance however, in assessing Medea's transgressions and the infanticide in particular are the ethical standards of the ancient authors that differ from the Judeo-Christian context of modern German and Russian

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and asks her son, has in Jason's retelling strong repercussions of Aeneas carrying his aging father out of the burning city of Troy.

<sup>60</sup> Nicole Loraux and Nancy Rabinowitz's remarks discuss this issue. Comp. Rabinowitz who argues for the fictitious quality of Medea as far removed from women's reality. "[...] Medea was enacted by a man pretending to be a woman who pretends to be feminine but who is motivated by the masculine ideal of honor. As I have argued in earlier chapters, the honor code for men did not apply to women, who in general merely passed honor to their children through their chastity. The character Medea may be of the female sex but is of the male gender." Rabinowitz, 153. Especially Medea's monologue in the first act of the play has been widely discussed in this respect.

authors. Therein, even the presentation of an infanticidal mother as literary protagonist might be deemed transgressive. Böschstein and Schlesier argue, though, that Medea is not imaginable without the murder of her sons. Other critics note how the absence of infanticide leads to a massive shift in the presentation and perception of Medea, turning her from agent to victim or into an entirely different figure.<sup>61</sup> Can then Medea be Medea without the infanticide? Or could Medea's violence be rectified as a "means to a beneficial end" (Pucci, 165)?

I would argue that she still retains enough characteristic features, yet that modern authors focus on the aspect of her "otherness," using the ancient frame in their altered context to feature a figure who is fragmented, in different places though than Medusa. Are then these fragmented postmodern Medeas representative of the "return of the repressed feminine side of Western culture."<sup>62</sup> Probably not. Lange-Müller raises the question of compassion. Several authors, for example Kaschnitz, Nick, Haas, and certainly Razumovskaia and Wolf draw their protagonist sympathetically, but almost none without ambivalence. In the contemporary reinscriptions, she is maybe not a tragic character in the classical sense, but she suffers from passion, from otherness and from a partial paralysis due to her status as an outsider.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See e.g. Paul, who emphasizes that thus Medea is placed on the side of reason, Paul 227f. Noteworthy is also that Stephan quotes reviews of Wolf's novel and points out how the shift of responsibility banalizes the myth and shifts the focus from the powerful Medea to Medea the 'little mother.'

<sup>62</sup> A thesis suggested by Simone Novak in her Dissertation "The Return of Medea: Bridging Dichotomies in Contemporary German Culture." UC Davis, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> An ancient system that integrates foreign elements, as Vernant references in his discussion of the Gorgon, but which might be read in light of Medea as well, is not applicable to the contemporary reinscriptions. Vernant makes the point that the Greeks, though their social system was very much based on its members' active participation in social life, always found a way to

In contemporary reinscriptions, a slight shifting of focus is detectable from the relation between Medea and the male members of her family, Jason and the sons, to the addition of a female component absent from the ancient reinscriptions. In Petrushevskaja's story there is a daughter, Ulitskaia's Medea does not have children, but the child of the relationship between her husband and her sister is also a girl, and in Loher's play, the son's portrayal is turned into the image of Las Meninas, two girls. No more than a signal, but noteworthy nevertheless, modern Medeae foreground conflicts that lie less in the family structure than in the identification process of the female subject, and tackle jealousy against the other and / or the younger females as a possible driving force.

Among the reinscriptions Dea Loher most critically emphasizes aspects of paralysis and shows a Medea who is not able to define her own ground, but also too fixed in her status to change. Yet even for her Medea, like for all others passion, as Lange-Müller had suggested, initially uproots them. The differences in reinscription are in the period following the uprooting. The retellings by Kaschnitz and Razumovskaia most strongly focus on the passion and the Medea-Jason relationship, while Kaschnitz takes a distanced position in that she describes Medea mainly from Jason's point of view. The other evocations and problings incorporate Medea's relation to her environment to various degrees. In the majority of texts political implications stand back behind personal aspects. Only in Loher's play and Wolf's novel is Medea's foreignness an issue. None of the

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integrate the "foreign elements" of their society" Nun schien mir am Beispiel der Griechen, daß eben dort, wo die menschliche Natur wie bei ihnen durch die Teilnahme an einem politischen Leben definiert ist – was das exklusive Privileg der Hellenen und das Zeichen ihrer Überlegenheit ist – , dort, wo in der Folge Barbaren, Fremde, Sklaven, Frauen und Jugendliche an die Ränder der Menschheit gedrängt werden, die institutionellen Praktiken und die Glaubensvorstellungen

contemporary women authors have gone as far as Hans Henny Jahn, who inscribed a black Medea. Aspects of race seem minor if not unimportant to the contemporary authors' vision of Medea, with the possible exception of Dea Loher, though racial conflicts undoubtedly exist in Russia as well as in Germany.<sup>64</sup> Her foreignness is displayed as a personal concern, emerging from Medea's personality, and Reinshagen's play is probably the strongest example of this aspect.

In contemporary texts, the transgressive acts are reduced to the infanticide, while all other murderous or sorcerous deeds are either left out or sparingly alluded to, with the exception of the fratricide which Loher's and Wolf's texts discuss. Thus Medea's faculties as temptress and sorceress, main causes of her being othered in ancient tragedy, are for the most part neglected by contemporary authors, and Lange-Müller's question whether Medea gains pleasure from her transgressions loses relevance. If the modern reinscriptions make any allusion to special powers or sorcery, they concentrate on Medea's medical capacities: Ulitskaia's Medea is a nurse; Kaschnitz' Medea, with Jason and her children threatened by poverty, treats the Corinthians to secure her family's survival, and Wolf's Medea, in an altruistic act, attempts to heal her rival, Glauke. Nick's Medea alone, in the narrative retrospectively recalling the Jolkian and Corinthian reactions to her use of snakes and medicine, refers to the issue of witchcraft. She concludes that the others' suspicion against her powers is only a transference of their fear of any change in their own lives.

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stets einen Weg finden, jene auf irgendeine Weise wieder zu integrieren, die sie scheinbar radikal ausgeschlossen haben." (Vernant, *Mythos* 60).

Paired with her agency, Medea's voice, and thus her rhetoric, gains importance in the analyzed texts. Euripides and Seneca already foreground Medea's rhetorical prowess. The contemporary authors and especially Razumovskaia, whose dialogue-structure resembles ancient tragic models, draw on this. Yet the modern reinscriptions expand, modify, and alter Medea's rhetoric. Lange-Müller and Wolf add new dimensions to the structure of the dialogue.<sup>65</sup> In Kaschnitz's stories, gazes and voices are of high importance. As the Argo becomes Jason's partner in dialogue, she also becomes his counterpoint, and, read as a female figure, completes the triangle Argo—Medea—Creusa that turns against Jason. Dea Loher plays on different voices especially through the figure of Deaf Daisy who voices some of Medea's intentions. Petrushevskaja's Medea is perhaps the most 'horrible,' as the author plays on the adjective 'strashno' in the story, because she never herself speaks and thus offers no explanation of her actions.

As I pointed out, the accusation of madness is sometimes used to play down Medea's agency, especially in the Medea-reinscriptions which focus on the dynamics between Medea and her environment. In the ancient context, Medea's mad range was more closely associated with her barbarian otherness. Losev points to this as he characterizes Medea in the ancient tragic setting as "chaotic figure."<sup>66</sup> Noteworthy among the modern examples are Razumovskaia's dialogues in which the verbal acknowledgment

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<sup>64</sup> Loher's theme of East European immigrants invites comparison to Berthold Brecht's "Medea aus Lodz."

<sup>65</sup> Curiously, Wolf's text is a novel, while the structure of the different "voices" has a theatrical dynamics, and the novel has also already been adapted for radio plays and stagings in small theaters in Leipzig and Marburg.

<sup>66</sup> Comp. Losev envisions a model of increasing order out of chaos. In reference to Medea, he quotes Seneca's tragedy wherein Medea exclaims "o chaos, chaos." Losev argues that the heroine

of madness precedes and thus seems to trigger the enraged action, and Wolf's novel wherein the madness accusation is a pretext to veil injustice.

Wolf's Medea offers, and has already been read as a kind of continuation of her Cassandra project.<sup>67</sup> Medea is more active than Cassandra, while she retains the quality of alternative counterpoint to the men in power. Wolf's voices though also resonate with a didactic edge. Her chapter headings have a methodological quality. She uses cutting edge theory, and thus within her text illustrates the current discussion about the figure of Medea. She prefaces her novel with a quote from Elisabeth Lenk, who describes the phenomenon of achronism. Through the image of a Russian matryoshka doll with nested figures, she illustrates interconnections and suggests that the "walls of time periods" transmit information and thus establish a communication independent of time, an image that Wolf takes up in her opening paragraph (Wolf, Medea, 5 and 9).<sup>68</sup>

Wolf's work on the mythological figures Cassandra and Medea throughout a decade marked by significant cultural and political changes in Germany, invites critical

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of a Dante or Shakespeare would have surpassed this original chaos and not call on it. Losev, Filosofija 435.

<sup>67</sup> Georgina Paul, "Schwierigkeiten mit der Dialektik: Zu Christa Wolfs Medea. Stimmen," German Life and Letters, 50:2 (1997): 227-40. Paul examines the value systems and societal order that Wolf foregrounds in both novels, especially by contrasting remains of matriarchy with the newly empowered patriarchy. Therein, both Cassandra and Medea are conceived as literary figures representatives of an 'alternative value system,' that is suppressed by the system and culture of the victors; they become thus representative of the 'other' and exemplify the process of cultural suppression "So werden beide, Medea und Cassandra, als Figuren wahrgenommen, die auf ein von der dominierenden hellenischen Kultur, der Kultur der Sieger, verdrängtes, doch wie immer beim Verdrängten in symbolisch-entstellter Form seine Spuren hinterlassendes, alternatives Wertesystem hinweisen; und Sinn der Wolfschen Arbeit an den Konstellationen der überlieferten klassischen Tradition ist es, anhand dieser Frauenfiguren eine Ahnung jenes verdrängten Anderen wieder aufleben zu lassen und dadurch die Prozesse der kulturellen Verdrängung sichtbar zu machen." Paul, 230.

commentary, especially since Wolf's recent essays suggest this connection.<sup>69</sup> While her Cassandra prefers isolation and leaves the society which does not understand her, Medea tirelessly attempts to enlighten the Corinthians about the dark side of their history and to aid them, including even her rival, Glauke. Her reward, though, is irreversible exile and the loss of her children. In the end, the lonely desert which is Medea's refuge in her desperate state has little in common with the caves, fruitful in more than one regard, near the river Scamander where for Cassandra the utopian female counter-society emerges.

Have modern Medeas lost their powers? Have they been 'written down' to mere literary characters who act within the framework of ethical norms cast by their societies and no longer kill anyone, let alone their children? It is noteworthy that Medea's ancient abilities to bewitch, to render forever young, to transform, are of little or no concern to the contemporary authors. Medea thus gains greater potential as an identificatory figure, yet also increasingly probes how she, with her implicit potential of transgressive otherness, confronts the challenges reality with which reality presents her. No sun-chariot sent by her forefathers stands ready to rescue her up into the sky once human criticism and punishment is upon her. The ancient as well as the modern Medea's othering is a process of displacement. The new place is also, at least in the beginning, a no-place, and thus utopian. Lange-Müller establishes a connection between Medea and the narrator: "you, me, utopia". By ending thus, her no-place appears a new white canvas to be

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<sup>68</sup> Another comparative aspects is Wolf's use of narrative perspective in her opening passages. In both Cassandra and Medea Voices, she employs a narrator in the beginning, thus focusing the reader on the narrator/reader perception, before she turns to the characters' narrative.

explored. The frame has been set, but there are still infinite possibilities inside it to explore. Nick offers an interesting variation as her Medea, in search for Chiron, is on a quest, thus not in any particular place. Petrushevskaja's Medea-character, is caught in the "no-place" of a prison's psychiatric ward. Kaschnitz envisions a connection between Medea and the Argo, the ship, likens the woman to the vessel. Medea is thus disembodied and epitomized as the culmination of Eros and Thanatos, united in one figure: Who/what had attracted Jason and helped him to move on also caused him misery and consequentially ends it by ending his life. For Razumovskaia, however, Eros and Thanatos are necessarily contrary forces. Once a split is effected and Medea loses her fulfilling, loving relationship, her physical and emotional displacement affects her so drastically that she re-acts in return: all of her acts destroy, including destruction of the self. Wolf, who focuses on Medea, the capable individual, against a society exemplifies that, since the no-place is occupied, Medea is again displaced even from there. Loher's Medea has to face the unfriendly environment of a strange place as well. She first meets it with the vision to create a utopian space for herself and Jason, shutting out the surrounding reality. When the vision fails, and Medea realizes that all the men in her life have a destructive, fragmentary effect —symbolized, two levels removed, in the metamorphosis of the painting of one male child into many young females—she is too paralyzed to change, to metamorphose out of the situation other than through destruction.

Looking back in time, Ulitskaia finds in the figure of Medea a symbolic character suitable to represent cultural grounding and roots. Among all other reinscriptions, hers is the most removed from ancient models, but also the least displaced. It is no u-topia as

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. "Begegnungen Third Street," first published in Neue deutsche Literatur (1995):2 and "Von

**Medea has found her place. Her otherness becomes a utopian enclave, wherein those close to her can escape estrangement. It is not Medea who travels, rather others travel to her to discover their own fears and desires. Medea is presented as an epiphany of cultural origin, embedded in a context of humanist compassion.**

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**Kassandra zu Medea," speech, publ. in Wolf, Medea. Voraussetzungen and Wolf, Hierzulande.**

## 5. Conclusion: Narrative Moves – From the Edges Into the Focus

[Myth's immanent logic:] "playground of the imagination"

Blumenberg, Work on Myth<sup>1</sup>

My study of three mythical figures, Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea, diverse, yet somehow connected in their phenomenology, has generated a structural model in tripartite sections placing the contemporary texts within a contextual / critical passe-partout and mythic frame. Mythic reinscriptions are read as evocation, retelling, and probing of the myth. Finally, the agencies of gaze, speech and action illustrate a poetic presentation of Medusa's objectification, Cassandra's subjectivation and Medea's postmodern displacement.

This model draws a strong framing outline while the diverse range of texts necessarily affords transitions and connections. Cultural and poetical differences notwithstanding, these tendencies are detectable throughout the entire range of German and Russian texts included in this study. The characters' agency derives from their individual faculties. This emphasis is foregrounded in different formal approaches to myth through retelling, evocation, or probing. Especially the two latter forms have a rich interpretive potential.

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<sup>1</sup> This space or "playground" distances, creates the border between terror and myth. "Nur wenn man den Mythos als Distanz zu dem versteht, was er schon hinter sich gelassen hat, was Schrecken, schlechthinige Abhängigkeit, Strenge des Rituals und der sozialen Vorschrift oder wie immer genannt werden mag, kann man den Spielraum der Imagination als das Prinzip seiner immanenten Logik begreifen, aus der die Grundformen der Umständlichkeit und Umwegigkeit, der Wiederholung und Integration, der Antithese und Parallele hervorgehen." Blumenberg, 49f.

The reinscriptive texts by women authors about ancient mythic characters analysed in this study are productive by continuously engaging with the myths they employ, probing the mythic frame and challenging its permeability. Thus most authors, their stylistic and contextual differences notwithstanding, tackle issues of poesis and stress the communicative faculties by which they voice and subsequently inscribe a tradition. The gender aspect that a reader is prone to question in a woman-authored text occupies a secondary role. Authors who refer to gender issues often address differences in communicative strategies rather than obvious gender differences. In Razumovskaia's dramatic dialogue between Jason and Medea for example, Jason insists that a man needs a task, while Medea stresses her wish to have "a word" remain after her. I read the myths of Medusa, Cassandra and Medea as reinscribed by women authors not as contrary to male myths, but as literary visions which explore communicative aspects from previously neglected angles. The majority of these reinscriptions represent the mythic figures' transgressive potential constructively rather than negatively.

There is no common denominator among the large and varied selection of texts I have analyzed, nor is there a commonality in how women authors who are active in a fairly narrow time frame in two different, yet related cultures, reinscribe myth. In the majority of examples, however, the notion of myth is inherently connected to questions of poesis and therefore to the expressive capacity of the writing subject. Against the backdrop of rich mythopoetic grounds, most authors do not concern themselves explicitly with theories that have ventured to tackle what is so difficult to describe: what a myth is. Instead, in their works, the mirror, the voice, the deed are always in the foreground. They might not have set out for a utopian vision of a myth-explanative narrative. Yet as long as

myth continues to be productive, there is always the possibility of a utopian vision's emergence. The authors, continuing to confront the modern reader, move Medusa, Cassandra, and Medea, from their "othered" position at the edges or barbarian regions of the mythic world into the sight of their readers and, through their engagement, continue a dialogue on the mythic narrative.

It is not possible to draw empirically definitive conclusions from the observed prevalence of a specific type of myth reinscription, divided by myth or by cultural context, from the body of texts read in this study. I find it significant, though, that the controversial figure of Medea generates the greatest productive interest. Secondly, none of the three types of myth-reinscription I distinguish, evocation, retelling, or probing, is clearly favored. The number of German mythic re-inscriptions by women authors appears to be larger, though this statement must be treated with caution as it might be related to the different dynamics of publishing in Russia and Germany and might not reflect the actual literary production. Clearly, there is an active tendency of myth reinscription in recent Russian literature. It remains to be seen if the "youngest archaists," Sedakova among them, will continue to expand interpretive horizons through the use of classical references (Wachtel in Sandler, Rereading 270). Thirdly, there is no generic difference that marks the texts I have read as specifically "German" or "Russian." There are few references to specific, non-ancient settings. And lastly, none of the authors analyzed in this study makes myth her exclusive subject.

At this point of conclusion, I would like to revisit the female figure that I invoked at the beginning of this study – she stands on a shore and gazes into the future, but might also look back. Different from Akhmatova's "Lotova zhena," and also the "angel of history," though possibly more closely related to him, I envision her as a figure who in order to resist the danger of petrification must turn back in order to gather strength to move on. In the reinscriptions of Medusa, the protagonists such as Leutenegger's narrator, Vitukhnovskaia's lyrical subject or the protagonist of Alferova's story gaze at the Medusa. Contrary to the outcome of the ancient myth, the result is not a stasis. Rather, it is a confrontation with the narrator's own self or past. The encounter has an effect on her future, but instead of producing a standstill it allows her to move on.

What does the sea with its body of water in the image symbolize? Associations range from primordial waters, chaos and endless motion to an image of Botticelli's foam-born Venus. For the texts discussed in this study, creative rather than romantic associations prevail—corresponding to Hélène Cixous who likens the process of writing by women to the image of the sea: We are the sea which we fashion.<sup>2</sup> In all three myths, the seashore marks a point of departure and displacement: It is Medusa's environment, wherein Perseus encounters her. Cassandra is brought on a ship from Troy to Mycenae. Medea embarks the Argo with Jason to sail away from all that was familiar into a future without royal standing. Medusa cannot move from her point of departure at the edge of the world near the ocean, only be moved by others. Cassandra is brought places without

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<sup>2</sup> "Écrits! Et ton texte se chechant se connaît plus chair et sang [...] Mais voilà, nos mers sont ce que nous les faisons, poissonneuses ou pas, opaques ou transparentes, rouges ou noires [...]" Cixous, *Body* 51.

deliberately influencing where she goes. Medea's passion incites her to move and take action by following Jason onto the Argo.

Complementary rather than contrary to this water-connected movement, walls set metaphorical border marks in many of the narratives. These walls are always penetrable and signal capacities of looking both ways, backwards and into the future: Bachmann's narrator in Malina disappears through a crack in the wall. Reinshagen's Cassandra-Änne moves through the wall into the bedroom of Janna-Medea's children, and while Wolf's Cassandra crosses the gates of Mycenae only one time, her image remains and her voice resonates beyond this seemingly final point of departure. In Medea. Voices, Wolf emphasizes the permeability of the "walls of time" through which ancient images gaze back at us and we can even hear their voices.

Against petrification, standstill, and immobility, the diverse texts set a fluid water imagery which is subtly present in most of them, yet deserves to be highlighted by interpretation. Water is not only the image of the continuous flow, it can also wash away, "melt" stone. Gertrud Leutenegger for example symbolizes the flow omitting the period at the end of her paragraphs, and thus provides Medusa, with the function of a mnemonic icon, free space to float in.

I contend that contemporary myth reinscriptions have sea and seashore, gates or walls, imagery of generic topoi, in common with their ancient predecessors. Beyond their differences in style and content, they share strikingly similar color-symbolism with a predominance of black and white, red and green. These colors of mourning and innocence, fire, blood, passionate love and growth correspond to a perception of mythic narratives as concerned with the elemental implications of human agency.

The water's flux in images of the sea expands into space but at the same time emphasizes temporal dimensions. Contemporary reinscriptions of Medusa, Cassandra and Medea share a connected notion of both past and future, and the incompatibilities or rather complications that this connection implies. This evocative quality might mark a reason why myth can be especially powerful in times of change when it expresses a need for an orientation in the present that critically reflects the past and attempts to get a glimpse of the future in order to construct a desirable present to live in. The voice, or rather its absence, connects Medusa and Cassandra as a kind of "sound of poetry." Similar to Echo, who can only use 'old' already spoken words, Cassandra is not free in what she says. Her prophecy consists of old words as well, but in her prophecy they acquire new, and potentially threatening meaning. Moreover, in evoking the prophet Cassandra, a writer is always caught in the paradox of reinscribing a prophecy of the future that from her point of view is already long in the past, and already beyond proving its mostly disastrous truth. The poetic images of Sedakova, Nikolaeva and Vitukhnovskaia equally resonate the poetic voice as only audible when overcoming a certain resistance. In their poetry, but also in narrative explorations of subjectivation, such as Bachmann's Malina, double voice and locus of voice are explored: the voice comes from somewhere else and thus obstructs the process of subjectification, yet marks the beginning of alterity and the becoming of something other. Cassandra and Medusa are signified by both the power inherent in their voice and the absence of it. Medea's transgressive acts and her rhetorical prowess are not tamed, but the contemporary reinscriptions show a tendency to represent them as written studies—"writing tales of terror"—rather than as actual experiences.

Especially in connection to voices, the capacity of metamorphosis through mutually affective dialogue must not be underestimated, hence Medusa has the potential of an "interactive myth" between looking-at and being looked at.<sup>3</sup> Medusa could not unfold her capacity without the gaze of Perseus or, subsequently, others. Medea would not have a motivation for her action without Jason—be it the use of her witchcraft or the murders she commits out of revenge. Cassandra alone lacks a comparable object of reflection and counteraction. This is curious, as her myth is the one most concerned with communication.

The mythological casting of Medea as a foreigner from the edge of world, which is synonymous with the notion of savage and barbarian in relation to the Greeks, is key to an understanding of her inherent tensions since antiquity. Her 'otherness' is inseparable from her special powers and her agency. There, she makes use of Thanatos at a point when Eros does no longer provide a creative force. In postmodern reinscriptions, authors emphasize the fragmented Medea and foreground transition, tradition, and their effect on the psychological dimension that might best be analyzed through the outcasting of Medea, the 'other.'

In the chapter on Cassandra I have raised the issue of utopia, the no-place. I have also noted that especially contemporary Russian literature shows antiutopian tendencies. From different angles and through different texts notions of utopia and antiutopia resonate throughout this study. They range from the youngest author, Alina Vitukhnovskaia, who concentrates her anti-utopian and yet curiously innovative poetic

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<sup>3</sup> Comp. de Lauretis: "Medusa and the Sphinx, like to the other ancient monsters, are survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions—places and topoi—through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning," 109.

perspective in a Medusa-metaphor, to a cultural-positivist, and thus potentially utopian outlook into the future in one of the latest works discussed, Ulitskaia's novel, Medea i ee deti.

In the mythic tradition, the elements occupy a special place in search of a place. Water and fire, as I have shown, are significant elements for Medusa, Cassandra and Medea still in contemporary reinscriptions.<sup>4</sup> Endowed with similar symbolic realms are Odysseus (water) and Prometheus (fire). These male mythic figures are, as I have noted in the introduction, frequently employed in mythopoetic discourse portrayed as "framing- and de-framing characters" and presented as representative of the formation of individuality and of progress. Yet the fire symbolic of Cassandra's prophecy and the fire which Medea sets are dangerous or destructive. Their journeys across water do not lead them homeward but away from home, into a continuous process of displacement where subjectivation cannot or never is afforded, and where progress is in the background against a productive probing of past and future.

If, then, the myth reinscription of Medusa, Cassandra and Medea is productive in the second half of the twentieth century, can the frequent appearance of these myths or mythological figures be linked to the authors' historical, political or culture circumstance? Could each period have a myth that best reflect its most burning issues? The myths are

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<sup>4</sup> "Diese repräsentieren zugleich eine eigene Symbolwelt. Als Grenz- und Entgrenzungsfiguren verbindet ihre Gestalt sie mit einem tradierten Geflecht von Motiven, Bildern und Symbolen." Engelhardt and Rohrwasser, 51. Prometheus, who dared the gods, can be seen as Cassandra's predecessor in tricking the gods, untying the marriage-bond between god and men, a fate that Cassandra will share.

too versatile to allow an answer. There is no clear timeline of Medusa's, Cassandra's and Medea's presence or absence, or when they incite authors to re-inscribe them. All three, though, beginning from their ancient castings, foreshadow or signal change. An interpretation of Medusa as figure of protest and probing, as an ambiguous "paradigm of the power of representation" (Walker 47), Cassandra as unheard warning, and Medea as the potential to act, highlights part of their capacities, but such readings, standing alone, do not do them justice. Reinscriptions of all three myths afford a certain split between agency and figure that generates tragic outcomes for the character, while this fragmentation might be deemed productive in a poetic sense.

This conclusion cannot come to a close because its main content is the notion of a fragmentation. Contemporary myth reinscriptions anchor their narratives in ancient figures. They have worked on myths and employed mythic figures in search for a female voice. At the turn of the new century, the accents have changed, but the myths' ample potential continues and does not come to a close. Silent cries have turned into voices in search for resonance and subjectification. Most recently, with the latest Medea texts, reinscriptions show a tendency to experiment with the resonance space of the myth and to explore the mythic figure's acting space in her social and cultural environment.

Who confronts the inscribed Medusa has to also face and react to her, who reads Cassandra already also 'listens' to her, and Medea, who is not whole and content, cannot escape on her chariot but has to face the reader's engaging with her transgressive deeds.

The mythic narratives do not answer all the questions the authors or I posed. They continue to raise them. Yet therein lies the continuously productive quality of a mythic narrative. The female figure continues to look, and we look back.

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