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Cassandra and Medea. Mythopoeia and Translation
Processes in Christa Wolf's Work

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Introduction

With her rewritings of *Kassandra* (1983) and *Medea.Stimmen* (1996), Christa Wolf has created two genre-defining novels of contemporary German literature, which have influenced the establishment of new paradigms for the practice known as ‘revisionist myth rewriting’. Not only have these novels brought to the fore the voices and tales of two traditionally neglected or misunderstood characters of classical mythology; they have also allowed for new literary discourses to arise in Germany, as well as on the international scene. Cassandra, the homonymous protagonist of Wolf’s 1983 novel, is the seer who most famously appears as a secondary character in Homer’s *Iliad* (8th century BC) and in Aeschylus’ tragedy *Agamemnon* (5th century BC), and who is irrevocably presented as harbinger of doom, as if she herself was the cause of the misfortune she was able to foretell. Medea is the degenerate mother who embodies the villainous role in the heroic tales of Jason and the Argonauts, also famously retold in Euripides’ *Medea* tragedy (431 BC). These ancient characters become central to Wolf’s mythological rewriting, acquiring new meaning and more nuance than what was attributed to them across time and in numerous other adaptations. Wolf’s mythopoietic action will be addressed considering the theoretical framework on myth and on myth adaptation specifically, which comprises the travelling concepts theory and a perspective on the translation of myth.

The first chapter of the dissertation addresses the theoretical background which has informed Wolf’s mythological rewritings. Among the many scholars who, throughout the centuries, have tried to understand the endless fascination with myth, Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss have developed some of the most compelling readings, especially in relation to Christa Wolf’s own interpretation of myth and myth-rewriting. Therefore, the first chapter will take into account the most interesting aspects of Barthes’ and Strauss’ respective theories, in dialogue with Wolf’s theoretical framing of her works.

In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes introduces different perspectives on the study of myth. Barthes considers the ‘eternal’ quality of myth to be dependent on myth itself

functioning as a semiological system. Such a system constantly reproduces itself into new combinations of the same elements, which allow for it to be used for different purposes as well. On the one hand, myth is understood as a language of modernity, the contradictory mixing of ancient archetypes and modern thinking, which according to Barthes is shown in the way *pop culture* has been permeated by the myth-system of signification. On the other hand, Barthes also explains how the creation of new mythologies, which often overwrite the old ones, are imbued with ideological pretexts and can consequently become dangerous. The appropriation of myth through the introduction of historical and ideological elements is also considered by Wolf in her *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra* (1983), in which she reflects on the projected vs. the authentic images of the *Korai* and of Greece. Barthes and Wolf thus provide comparable perspectives on the myth-discourse, which will prove fundamental for the establishment of the theoretical background of the dissertation.

The first chapter also presents Claude Lévi-Strauss' theory on myth, which the scholar has expanded on in his works *The Structural Study of Myth* (1955) and in *Myth and Meaning* (1978). Similarly to Barthes, Lévi-Strauss also considers myth as a third order of language, a system made of constituent units which however, differently from language proper, does not present issues of 'betrayal' when it comes to its translation, or transplantation, into a new context. In this sense, myth is to be understood as an ensemble of variations which coexist and whose survival is guaranteed by its various iterations.

The theoretical framework also takes into account how myth has been framed in the realm of literary adaptations and how it has helped shape the concept of European literature. In this section of the dissertation, it is shown how Christa Wolf consciously takes her distance from this tradition and thinks of her novels as being out of the boundaries of Western 'canon'. Christa Wolf's break with tradition is well documented in her *Voraussetzungen*, where she explains how she wishes to bring to light the experience of female characters, such as Cassandra and Medea, who have long been silenced by that tradition. In her adaptation, she wants to bring humanity to them, which they have long been negated by a partial reading of their tales.

Stemming from these considerations, the second chapter introduces the discourse on myth adaptations and on the functionality of Mieke Bal's travelling concepts theory for

understanding the way myths, and specifically Wolf's rewritings of Cassandra and Medea, have been relocated in Germany first, and subsequently translated for the foreign audiences. In this second chapter, ideas of translation and adaptation are investigated, pondering specifically on myth-rewriting as a practice of cultural translation. An important element to the understanding of myth is, in fact, its bond with translation. In the realm of studies on cultural translation, Homi K. Bhabha highlights the importance of the hybridity of concepts, such as myth and translation, which migrate from one culture to another. The act of myth-rewriting is an act of cultural translation, where certain elements migrate from the original to the target context, taking a new shape. Characteristics belonging to translation are what Doris Bachmann-Medick identifies as "appropriation, transformation and conflict", all of which also belong to myth. Through this theoretical approach, it is also shown how both myth and translation are intrinsically connected to ideas of movement and of travel, more so when they are brought together in the rewriting of mythology. In her work *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2000), Mieke Bal engages with several key concepts in the humanities, showing how they have been adapted in different contexts, thus shedding light on the topic of the migration of concepts and how it can be paradigmatically valuable for understanding the migration of concepts within the scope of myth-rewriting, particularly in relation to Wolf's original and translated novels.

The subchapter titled *Micro-myths and Macro-myths of the GDR* provides an overview and analysis of the historical background, in which *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* were conceived. The main argumentation of this subchapter rests, on the one hand, on the importance which the construction of new myths had in the context of the GDR; on the other hand, it reflects on the so-called 'revival' of mythological narratives within the literary borders of East Germany, and the significance of specific myths being rewritten in those years. It further expands on the link between myth and ideology, applying Károly Kerényi's theory of the 'technicised myth' to the myth-building of the GDR, and contrasting it with Wolf's closer adherence to its opposite, the so-called 'genuine myth'. It is shown how Christa Wolf recognizes the ideological discrepancies of such misuse of myth, providing a critical perspective of it in her writing, along with other writers in East Germany.

The third chapter of the dissertation delves into the literary analysis of the novels, from

the perspective of their thematization of the border concept. The first subchapter, titled *Borders in Cassandra*, examines some excerpts from Wolf's novel, through which it is possible to highlight the focus on the concept of borders and the different ways in which it is expressed within the work. Beginning with some reflections on the concept of 'border' as an integral part of the imagery of the GDR, we will see the literary rendition of this aspect. Both in the language used by the author and in the characterization of the characters and the way they interact with each other, the 'border' is continuously traced. The focal point of this representation is, of course, the figure of Cassandra. This character is, in fact, the border-figure *par excellence*. However, this border is not made for crossing, but rather for permanence in the intermediate space. It is the body that suffers the consequences: the torn bodies of Cassandra, but also of her brothers and sisters, of the men and women sent to slaughter in the relentless war machine, are the most dramatic image of the marginality that is produced by the construction of protective, yet isolating walls. The same investigation is carried out in the following subchapter, titled *Borders in Medea*. From the analysis of this second novel, the concept of border emerges once again, this time combined with terms related to what is foreign and monstrous. Medea, in fact, even more than Cassandra, lives in a state of marginality linked not only to her gender and abilities, but also to her origins in an archaic, remote world. The process of 'othering', suffered by many of the characters in the novel and partly also self-inflicted, characterises the entire development of the narrative. For better or for worse, Medea reappropriates this marginality, existing as a borderline figure who, after attempting to cross the threshold, ultimately realizes that she belongs to neither side of the 'wall'.

The analysis of the translation processes contained in the last subchapter of the thesis, titled *Christa Wolf's Cassandra and Medea Travelling Through Translation: a Comparative Approach*, offers some reflections on the translation strategies employed by the Italian translator of the two novels examined in this dissertation, namely Anita Raja, in comparison with the different translation strategies implemented by the translators of the North American editions of *Cassandra* and *Medea*, namely Jan van Heurck and John Cullen. Taking into account the differences between the contexts in which the translations of Wolf's work were produced, we will examine the multiple elements that contribute to the creation in the target context not only of a specific image of the author, but also of the mythical figures, which take on new meanings acquired

during the migration phase. In this chapter, therefore, we will observe not only the differences in the construction of the editorial product (i.e., the presence or absence of paratextual elements that contribute to the rendering and impact of the translated text), but also the linguistic and content differences that result from the process of reworking the two novels in the target language. The studies by Caroline Summers and Luise von Flotow provide important theoretical support for the analysis of the translations of Christa Wolf's two mythological novels, especially when the 'phenomenon' of the translator's invisibility occurs. Whereas, for the Italian context, Anita Raja's reflections on her personal approach to Christa Wolf's poetics will prove fundamental.

Based on the theoretical framework relating to both myth and translation, and on the historical and cultural context of reference, as well as that of reception and translation of the two novels, we will be able to draw conclusions about the impact and effectiveness of the migration of Cassandra and Medea from antiquity, to Christa Wolf's Germany and to the international context, leading us to assess the influence that Wolf's understanding of mythopoeia has exerted on new practices of myth rewriting that are still employed today.

1. Myth, Language and Ideology: A Theoretical Premise

Across decades of studies and research, the large number of scholars who have reflected on mythology have tried to explain the reasons behind the captivating quality of myth and how it induces endless fascination. In his very influential work *Antigones*,¹ Georg Steiner writes about the “eternal” quality possessed by characters such as Prometheus, Oedipus and of course Antigone herself, in consideration of the widespread impact of these characters and stories from Ancient to contemporary times, which is a testament to the truth of this appraisal. In various ways and forms, myth has constantly returned throughout the course of human history, it has shaped cultures, values, beliefs. The literature on this topic is quite vast and it encompasses a variety of fields and disciplines, in which the construction of myth and/or mythology has played a significant role. One of these fields where myth has never failed to reappear, even while maintaining somewhat of an irregular pace in its (re)emergence, is literature. Our interest is, in fact, directed mainly at the literary developments that mythological characters have undergone at specific places in time and in specific contexts. Cassandra, Medea, Prometheus, Antigone: all these characters have travelled through centuries of history and have continuously reshaped themselves in order to fit into new interpretations of their stories, mostly in European literature, but not exclusively so. Among these characters, the female figures in particular have undergone the most changes, with respect to their ‘canonical’ versions, for reasons which will be addressed in the following chapters. It can be anticipated that this characteristic can be attributed to the feminist readings of these characters progressively becoming more important and highlighting aspects of these myths that were previously either taken for granted or

¹ G. Steiner, *Antigones*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984.

being overshadowed by other elements.

German literature has not been immune to the appeal of these 'eternal characters' and indeed possesses its own tradition of myth-rewriting. As anticipated in the introduction to this dissertation, the focus of our investigation will be directed at Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* and *Medea* novels; however, it is paramount that we paint a bigger picture of what enables the rewriting of myth in the first place. We will not try to answer the question of what myth is, as it is almost impossible to find a definitive solution to this dilemma. Instead, in the following chapters we shall present a theoretical framework that reflects the process of myth-rewriting which Christa Wolf has put in place.

One of the immediate problems that comes up when talking about myth in relation to Germany is, of course, how tainted this subject has been for so long, given its misuse in its recent national history: the association of myth with Nazi ideology has led to a necessary distancing from it for several years after the end of World War II. Christa Wolf herself has addressed this taintedness on various occasions, but many others have grappled with this problem during the years. Among the many books that have been published on myth, and which address this matter, *Mythos und Moderne*,² which was published in 1983, is a testament to the fact that a new discourse on myth was being built around the time Wolf published the first of the two female- character- centred reimaginings of the ancient tales. This is not to say that before then there had not been any other notable rewriting of classical mythology, which had emerged in German literature: on the contrary, GDR literature alone had very understandably shown a great deal of interest for these characters and stories. This book in particular, however, does not provide a new theory in itself; its purpose is limited to anthologizing several great writers and thinkers in German literature, who had developed their theories on myth. In fact, this collection of essays includes Friedrich Schlegel's famous *Rede über die Mythologie*, mentions Max Weber's rationalising approach, Walter Benjamin's reflection on the relationship between myth and modernity, and still, it can only partially cover that long standing tradition. At the time of her writing, Christa Wolf was perfectly aware of this tradition, and deliberately deviated from it. As for theories on myth, her library is full of resources that were either published for the first time or re-

² K. H. Bohrer (Ed.) *Mythos und Moderne*, Berlin, Suhrkamp 1983.

edited in the context of the ‘myth revival’ of the GDR, but also beyond it. Among these, the most notable are the 1981 German edition of Roland Barthes’ *Mythologie des Alltags (Mythologies)*, the 1977 edition of Károly Kerényi’s *Die Mythologie der Griechen*, but also other books and collections such as the GDR’s *Kulturgeschichte der Antike* (1977). Certainly, her reading of Barthes and Kerényi will inform a consistent part of this research as well, while highlighting the peculiarities of Wolf’s understanding of mythopoeia.

It would seem that, when it comes to myth, the co-existence of scepticism and fascination is a necessary requirement, a condition that must always be met if we wish to elaborate a comprehensive analysis of it. The contraposition of these two aspects is undoubtedly paradigmatic in Christa Wolf’s own approach to this subject. In *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung*,³ Christa Wolf demonstrates that she is extremely knowledgeable about the reception of the character of Cassandra in the literature of her country, divided as it was at the time of her writing. This knowledge extends to an awareness of characters such as Cassandra being treated in a manner that was consequential to the male writers’ point of view. This served in successfully perpetuating those stereotypes which are attached to these characters even today. The underlying theme which can be inferred from Wolf’s thinly veiled accusations, is that of politics and ideology shaping thought and reception around mythological characters and narrations.

In support of this claim and to better understand the process in Christa Wolf’s writing of *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen*, the following sections of this chapter will be dedicated to establishing the theoretical framework on myth. Although we are mainly considering myth from a literary point of view and, as anticipated, we will not try to answer the question of what myth is, it is fundamental to unveil the perspectives that have been developed outside of narrative texts, seeing as they have both affected and informed them. Across the many definitions of myth that have circulated until present day, the most convincing for the purposes of this study are those that refer to myth as a language of modernity and as a specific expression of ideology. Sometimes, these two aspects converge, showing how interwoven they are in the creation and the ‘maintenance’ of myth. In fact, even though myth is incredibly self-sustaining, there is

³ C. Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung. Kassandra*, Berlin, Suhrkamp 2008.

no doubt that it requires a certain level of maintenance to be effective. Such is the work that happens through language, ideology and, ultimately, through literature, which are how these characters and stories survive, generating discontinuous yet, apparently, endless interest from the public.⁴

In the following sections, we shall discuss the theoretical framework dealing with myth as a language and as ideology in more detail. First, a definition of modern/modernity in relation to myth is required. What do we mean by “modern”? Can myth be considered as such, and in what way? Studies such as Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern*⁵ and Beate Dignas and Lucy Audley-Miller’s *Wandering Myths*⁶ provide interesting perspectives on the misconceptions both myth and modernity are usually associated with, which largely resonate with Christa Wolf’s criticism of the pretend separation between antiquity and modernity, dissipated at the time by the threat of a nuclear war.

The first theory that will be presented is Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, which was first published in 1957. Barthes’ in-depth investigation of myth as a language of modernity proves to be extremely eye-opening in depicting myth as a system of signification, whose importance is not unlike what it used to be in ancient times. His study is also conducted from a semiological point of view, and in fact it presents in detail the semiological structures of myth, in a way that explains its ability to constantly reinvent

⁴ In recent years, successful rewritings of the Iliad and the Odyssey have appeared in the Anglophone sphere, achieving significant success. Interestingly, many of these retellings consider the point of view of prominent female characters (i.g. Circe, Penelope, Clythemnestra), which have traditionally been at the margins of these stories, seemingly following a new tradition, one that Christa Wolf has certainly helped in establishing. These writers have been grouped under the term “revisionist mythmaking”. Various news outlets have caught up to what seems to be a literary trend in its own right, which is neither restricted to Greek myth, nor to ‘myth’, but rather on feminist retellings of mythological or mythicized figures of ‘classical’ literature as well. We shall not focus on these matters, given that they would merit more room for reflection. As stated above, this research will only consider ‘proper’ myth rewriting outside of literary trends. However, I believe that there can be some interesting data to be retrieved from these observations on the readership. For further reference, I hereby propose an article which was published on The Guardian in 2023, which tries to interpret the success of this literary trend: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/mar/24/two-sides-to-a-story-why-feminist-retellings-are-filling-our-bookshelves>, and a different article published in 2022 on the Frankfurter Rundschau: <https://www.fr.de/kultur/literatur/mythen-aus-weiblicher-sicht-erzaehlt-zr-91954566.html>. Based on these and other accounts, comprised of academic research, it would seem that the Anglophone sphere has taken over, at least when it comes to feminist retellings. In German-speaking literature *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* remain the feminist rewritings of Greek myth *par excellence*, although other forms of rewritings have appeared across the years.

⁵ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1993.

⁶ L. Audley-Miller, B. Dignas (Eds.), *Wandering Myths. Transcultural Uses of Myth in the Ancient World*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter 2018.

itself, without losing any of its impact in the process. Barthes explores the myths of *pop culture*, trying to understand the role they play in contemporary society. In his theoretical approach, myth is defined as a peculiar system of signification, with rules similar to those of language, and yet also entirely independent from it. Reflections on myth as language are also part of Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Structural Study of Myth*, where the author identifies myth as a kind of language which operates at a different level as opposed to language 'proper'. He also elaborates a system which would allow myth and its language to be decoded, through the identification of its components. Both Barthes' and Lévi-Strauss' theories develop reflections on the link between myth and ideology and take into careful consideration the political implications of this relationship. This anticipates Károly Kerényi's work on myth and ideology, which will be further explored in the second chapter of the dissertation.

The theoretical framework on myth presented in the first chapter will also include some fundamental observations on the matter of myth and literature, in order to establish what kind of literature is produced through it and how it helps in constructing a 'canon', with respect to Wolf's ideas on these subjects.

Following Christa Wolf's own interest for these dynamics, which are reflected not only in the two novels, but which are also part of the hypotext and intertext in her works, we shall immediately delve into this framework.

1.1 Myth as a Language of Modernity

On a surface level, myth and modernity seem to be oppositional rather than conjunctive. Although it is difficult to grasp what myth is, if we were to consider its temporality, we would normally associate it with the past. Myth has its roots in ancient societies, and it is connected to ancient beliefs and ritualistic practices.⁷ Therefore, a discussion on myth might seem detached from modernity, since the very concept of modernity prides itself for its rationality. Bruno Latour would affirm that, in truth "we have never been modern"⁸:

When we find ourselves invaded by frozen embryos, expert systems, digital

⁷ Cf. Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*

⁸ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, *ibid.*, p. 44.

machines, sensor-equipped robots, hybrid corn, data banks, psychotropic drugs, whales outfitted with radar sounding devices, gene synthesizers, audience analyzers, and so on, when our daily newspaper displays all these monsters page after page [...] something has to be done.⁹

Is it the “failure” of modernity which causes myth to still be relevant in modern society? Even without anticipating the ideological and political motivations behind the rewriting of both Cassandra and Medea, it is easy to find some level of resonance in what Latour says here with Wolf’s take on modernity. The modern “monsters on display on the newspapers”, to slightly paraphrase Latour’s expression, at the time in which Wolf was writing Cassandra, were dependent on the blind trust in science, which was leading to a potential second atomic attack. When one starts believing that mathematics can be autonomously applied to anything, as Wolf writes in the *Voraussetzungen*, the world starts producing “aberrant thoughts”.¹⁰ This modern world, that praises itself for its advancements and progress, in opposition to the brutality of the ancient world, is in fact “grotesque” and “irrational”.¹¹ The rest is an illusion: Wolf faces the brutality of her society through mythology, showing how human kind has essentially remained the same.¹² However pessimistic this perspective might appear, Wolf’s mythopoietic intent is not entirely, or not at all built on negativity. Although neither *Cassandra*, nor *Medea* shy away from depicting the ugliest sides of our current reality, it is not to be taken as an admission of defeat to the monstrous status quo: rewriting myth, other than acknowledging the hardships of reality, also expresses the importance of creating an alternative to our self-destructive tendencies.¹³

⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰ Cf. Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, ibid.

¹¹ Cf. Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, ibid.

¹² D. Edelstein, B. R. Lerner (eds.), *Myth and Modernity*, New Haven, Yale University Press 2007, pp. 1-4: “The suggestion that myth can be the creation of *modernity*, and not only of darkest antiquity, is hardly considered possible, and yet [...] myths should be understood as expressions of modern political culture, not as the timeless and universal forms found in most anthropological, religious and psychoanalytic approaches to myth. [...] The impact of cultural change on myths was not only an unconscious, passive process; modernity was also marked by a highly self-conscious affinity for myths”.

¹³ I. Cacopardi, *Wu Ming: La mitopoiesi, un’arma contro la crisi?*, in N. di Nunzio, S. Jurišič, F. Ragni (eds.), *“La parola mi tradiva”. Letteratura e crisi*, Perugia, Università degli Studi di Perugia 2017, p. 360: “Can writing truly take on a political, ethical, civil role? Can it contribute to the production of a pertinent analysis and to the overcoming of the catastrophe of the present, or is it merely a rhetorical exercise?” (Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian and from German into English are my own).

Therefore, myth does not directly stand in opposition to modernity, rather it offers a different perspective on it. This would also explain why scholars such as Roland Barthes or Lévi-Strauss define it as a language of modernity and/or as a modern language. The hypothesis which we can establish based on the theoretical framework and the novels themselves, is that myth is modern, in so far as it creates both a “message” and a “system of communication”,¹⁴ and it gives a glimpse into the inner workings of modern societies, as well as of ancient societies. Given its transcendent nature, it is only to be expected that we should be able to find the roots of its modernity if we were to turn our attention to those ancient societies in which myth used to be the main narration. These ancient societies, which are certainly a point of reference for Wolf herself, would normally be those of Ancient Greece. As we know from her own reports of her travels, Christa Wolf has searched for Cassandra in the remnants of these ancient sites. However, as is stated more explicitly in the *Voraussetzungen*, Christa Wolf has carefully considered the roots of Cassandra outside of what scholars would call “the paradigm of Greek myth”, and therefore in a transcultural perspective.¹⁵ This is certainly not exclusive to Wolf and is constitutive of other rewritings of these tales. Therefore, it is an important point to make if we also wish to discuss the translation and adaptation process that myth undergoes in modern times. Beate Dignas and Lucy Audley-Miller emphasise the importance of analysing myth from a transcultural perspective as well. We can consider the existence of a common “archive” of myths, given the “multicultural nature of the ancient Mediterranean and its interconnections with the Near East [...]”¹⁶ Thinking of myth itself as an archive of content that changes, while maintaining the same form, is certainly fascinating, but it would perhaps diminish the dynamicity of the works we wish to analyse, and therefore it is not sufficient to construct our theoretical approach. The notion of archive is also closely connected to that of archetype, which has had an influence on Wolf’s understanding of myth, but it

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 363-364.

¹⁵ Cf. Dignas, Audley-Miller, *Wandering Myths*, p. 7: “the paradigm of Greek myth” refers to the study of the patterns and characteristics of Greek myth as a basis for the analysis of ancient myths and mythologies. It has now become apparent how this approach is quite limiting and that decentering the perspective from this paradigm can offer a more comprehensive view of what myth truly represented in ancient societies: “It is not difficult to see that ancient societies were linked by their creation and understanding of mythological narratives, from the Ancient Near East to Rome and beyond. It is much harder to discern and describe any patterns in this shared understanding, or to examine how myths came to ‘move’ and to become locally resonant in disparate places in different ways”. What we do know is that these myths have travelled and that their transformative movement, although difficult to trace with extreme precision, is among the characteristic that have determined its survival.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

will not be our main interpretative stance, for the same reasons. In other words, Cassandra and Medea are not archetypes, they are not fixed objects in the (mental) archive of humankind, to put it in Jungian terms; nonetheless, there are some archetypal markings attached to them, which have been overcome, especially in feminist (revisionist) rewritings.

Thus, as fascinating as thinking of Cassandra and Medea as characters stored inside of an archive might be, we should tread carefully with the implications that this idea suggests. It is not a mystery that around the time Wolf started writing the first of the two novels, there had been a 'revival' of the interest towards myth (which is also testified by the previously mentioned *Mythos und Moderne*) and the theories produced by thinkers such as Carl Gustav Jung and Károly Kerényi, which Wolf also indicates in her bibliographical resources for the writing of *Cassandra*. Christa Wolf certainly plays with the idea of myth being able to create and shape collective memory; to a certain degree, this idea could be considered as a premise to the novels. We do possess confirmation of the fact that Wolf had 'digested' these ideas at different points of the writing process. Interestingly, her first encounter with Cassandra is described as a primordial calling, as if she and the character's consciousness were part of the substratum of a shared collective unconscious: "Cassandra. I saw her immediately. She, a prisoner, took me prisoner. She, the object of obscure intentions, possessed me. [...] Her magic took effect immediately. I believed every word of hers, there was an unconditional trust. Three thousand years, completely melted away [...]."¹⁷

There is no direct mention of a collective unconscious in this encounter, but it is described as magical, therefore as something which at the very least transcends rational comprehension. The unconscious link between Christa Wolf and the mythological Cassandra is a metaphor that establishes why she can identify with a character that she should not have anything in common with, such is the distance, both in time and in experience, that exists between them. She expresses similar thoughts in regard to Medea

¹⁷ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*, p. 15: "Kassandra. Ich sah sie gleich. Sie, die Gefangene, nahm mich gefangen, sie, selbst Objekt fremder Zwecke, besetzte mich. [...] Der Zauber wirkte sofort. Ihr glaubte ich jedes Wort, das gab es noch, bedingungsloses Vertrauen. Dreitausend Jahre – weggeschmolzen. So bewährte sich die Sehergabe, die ihr der Gott verlieh, nur schwand sein Richtspruch, daß ihr niemand glauben werde. Glaubwürdig war sie mir in einem anderen Sinn: Mir schien, daß sie als einzige in diesem Stück sich selber kannte".

when she talks about her image emerging while she is sedated and coming in and out of consciousness during a medical procedure:

[...] A figure gradually emerged, I knew her name was MEDEA, even before I recognised her. She steps forward, I relive the miracle of her appearance, *undeserving*. Medea, who has not murdered her children, the innocent, I thought happy and triumphant, I did not know her yet, but I hoped I could make use of her as a witness, a rebuttal witness.¹⁸

What these two passages have in common, the first of which appears in the *Voraussetzungen* and the second in *Mit anderem Blick* (2005), and therefore to be considered as part of the context for the novels, is the way in which the mythological figures appear in the author's life, before they appear as characters in her works. They are figments of the past, but also concrete and material parts of the present. Would this make either Cassandra or Medea archetypal? Before reaching such a conclusion, a definition of 'archetype' is required. According to Jung, who is possibly the most appropriate reference for this matter and who has in fact had a major influence on myth-rewriting at the time in which Wolf was working on *Kassandra*, archetypes are images that appear to be identical in every form, and which remain unchanged. Following this line of thought, it could be said that Cassandra and Medea, as characters originally belonging to Ancient Greek tradition and mythology, have become archetypal in their own way. Both Cassandra and Medea share the archetype of the 'witch' and the 'harbinger of death', similarly to what Kerényi discusses in *Töchter der Sonne*.¹⁹ They are monstrous, aliens and alienated in society. This 'fixed' image of them is crystallized in language as well. On the one hand, the *Kassandra-Ruf* refers to any ill-intentioned, or perceived to be such, women who, by not conforming to societal standards, become harbingers of doom. This character is subsequently detached from her context and this archetypal image of her is what is repeated everywhere. As it is usual for myth, this image is then rearranged to suit a specific language, culture and historical context, but

¹⁸ Cf. C. Wolf, *Mit anderem Blick*, Berlin, Suhrkamp 2007, p. 47: "[...] eine Figur allmählich hervortrat, die einen Namen hatte, ehe ich sie kannte, MEDEA, sie kommt, ich erlebe noch einmal das Wunder einer Erscheinung, *unverdient das alles*, Medea, die ihre Kinder nicht ermordet hat, die Unschuldige, dachte ich freudig und triumphierend, da kannte ich sie noch nicht oder hoffte vielmehr insgeheim, sie benutzen zu können, als Zeugin, Entlassungszeugin [...]".

¹⁹ Cf. K. Kerényi, *Töchter der Sonne*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta 1944.

its archetypal core remains. Similar observations could be made about Medea having become the archetypal reference of the degenerate mother, the mother who kills her own offspring. An image so rooted in many different cultures that her name is used to refer to real crimes of this nature, to this day. Jung believed that the recurrent nature of these images in the human psyche was to be attributed to the fact that these archetypes are part of the unconscious and help in structuring it. They are to be considered “motifs”, which are intrinsically connected to myth as much as they are to anything else the human unconscious is capable of producing, be it dreams, fantasies, visions, manic ideas or religion. In this way, archetypes can be described as overarching and omnicomprehensive categories of the unconscious. Therefore, as much as consciousness is individual, according to Jung, the unconsciousness is a lot less individualised and much more collective. A further, more exhaustive definition of primordial images and archetypes is given by Jung in *Die Archetypen und das kollektive Unbewußte*,²⁰ where he explains that the primordial image can also be considered as an engram, in other words a primary image, which is the sum of many different processes of elaboration and re-elaboration, which have allowed the persistence of this image in the human mind. Persistence, in this case, also means that it is an image which keeps recurring in our psyche. It can also be deemed a “mythological motif”, which allows for certain experiences to always be expressed in the same way, in wildly different contexts. Moreover, the primordial images supply the human psyche with a system of interpretation of the external world, not unlike vision. To Jung, myth is both manifestation and proof of the existence of a collective unconscious.

Christa Wolf evidently does not express a belief in the collective unconscious, per se, rather she describes suggestions of Cassandra and Medea as if originating from her unconscious, while also referring to the unconscious of the collective experience of women, in a sense.²¹In the end, however, the Cassandra and Medea who emerge from Wolf’s unconscious end up shedding the archetypal image and become something

²⁰ Cf. C. G. Jung, *Die Archetypen und das kollektive Unbewußte*, Düsseldorf, Patmos-Walter-Verlag, 1976.

²¹ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*, p. 61: “Aber die Frauen. [...] merkwürdig ist es schon, dass sie alle sich scheuten, Schlüsse aus der Tatsache zu ziehen, dass Frauen in der Malerei der minoischen Künstler einen derart beherrschenden Platz einnahmen. [...] Es *gab es* doch einmal, das Land, in dem die Frauen frei und den Männern gleichgestellt waren. [...] in dem sie bei allen öffentlichen Vorführungen auf den bevorzugten Plätzen sitzen, in festlich-freier Aufmachung; in dem sie bei den rituellen Übungen mitwirken, sogar die Masse der Priesterinnen stellen.”

entirely different.

This happens through their travelling and the specific way in which stories are instated in a new context. From the perspective of their ‘wandering’, we can distinguish different sets of myths: “One type is a myth that is originally set in one place but comes to be retold in a new setting and possibly with a new set of characters”.²² However, “a myth that is told in places other than its place of origin is surely also a wandering myth even if its names and locations remain unchanged”.²³ Another form is then constituted by an “[...] old narrative mainline from which branch lines were constantly led off as different cities sought connection with the age of heroes. The myths have not wandered, but new places have been brought within their network”.²⁴ Christa Wolf’s rewriting would fit into the second category, since her Cassandra and Medea keep their names and their location, although they become a palimpsest for the GDR, and would therefore fit into the first category as well. According to Daniela Padularosa, Wolf’s rewriting of these stories retains a labyrinthical form²⁵, which again in Jungian terms would be a key image, part of “the process of individuation”, through which the spheres of consciousness and the unconscious supposedly find a synthesis. In other words, a synthesis between the past and the future.

In the endless sea of theorization on myth and mythology, plenty of definitions have been given. However, it is not possible to give a univocal explanation of what myth is, nor is this the purpose of our study. The theoretical framework which has been selected for this research is therefore not based on conclusiveness on the matter of defining myth, but rather in relation to those representations of it that resonate with Christa Wolf’s literary endeavour. For this reason, we will refer to works which are instrumental to understanding the environment surrounding the development of *Cassandra* and *Medea*.

²² Dignas, Miller, *Wandering Myths*, *ibid.*, p. 397.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ D. Padularosa, *Danza, Cassandra...Percorsi nel mito in Christa Wolf*, *ibid.*, p. 10: “[...] this is also structured as a web of paths, movements, interaction and iterations, aporias and anachronisms, whose essence is condensed in the image of the labyrinth”.

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes thinks of myth as an object, which different societies, at different points in time, use to describe and understand reality under specific conditions. More precisely, according to Barthes, everything can become a myth, as “[...] the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things.”²⁶ Barthes demonstrates this theory through an analysis of the myths of *pop culture*, ranging from Einstein’s brain to Greta Garbo, to the Romans in film, and so on. There is no mention of classic mythology, but the discourse that Barthes develops in this book is still very much relevant for the rewritings at the centre of our research, and does not at all contradict our initial premise on the “eternal” quality of myth, but rather aims to reinforce it, while simultaneously shifting the interest from classical myth to myth as a system of signification. The idea that anything can become a myth is of course fraught with danger, especially if we consider how, through the lenses of myth, what is in fact historical could be regarded as natural. Debates on myth and history have also been part of the discourse in these two oppositional areas of study. The changes this brings are related to what is effectively done through myth, how society in its entirety is affected through it. Barthes further elaborates on this concept, when he describes myth as having

[...] an imperative, buttonholing character: stemming from an historical concept, directly springing from contingency [...] it is *I* whom it has come to seek. It is turned towards me, I am subjected to its intentional force, it summons me to receive its expansive ambiguity. If, for instance, I take a walk in Spain, in the Basque country, I may well notice in the houses an architectural unity, a common style, which leads me to acknowledge the Basque house as a definite ethnic product. However, I do not feel personally concerned, nor, so to speak, attacked by the unitary style: I see only too well that it was here before me, without me. It is a complex product which has its determinations at the level of a very wide history: it does not call out to me, it does not provoke me into naming it, except if I think of inserting it into a vast picture of rural habitat. But if I am in the Paris region and I catch

²⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 107.

a glimpse, at the end of the rue Gambetta or the rue Jean-Jaures, of a natty white chalet with red tiles, dark brown half-timbering, an asymmetrical roof and a wattle-and daub front, I feel as if I were personally receiving an imperious injunction to name this object a Basque chalet: or even better to see it as the very essence of *basquity*.²⁷

In this passage, Barthes uses the Basque houses as an example of historical object, which has acquired a mythological character, becoming the concept of *basquity* itself and acquiring a definite social value. This metamorphosis occurs when the historical object, or at least those features which are reminiscent of a particular historical object, are displaced in a different cultural context. Displacement is not surprising, especially if we consider myth with the background of the travelling concepts theory, which we will do in the second chapter. But even without this perspective in mind, it is at the core of these narratives. Barthes' focus is on how myth stems from history, only to later survive in opposition to it, as "[...] the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated*".²⁸ This also underlines the paradoxical quality of myth, something that also emerges in Christa Wolf's own approach to this subject. In fact, in her *Voraussetzungen*,¹⁷ she addresses the matter of the contrast between myth and history, between the existence of the mythological Cassandra as opposed to Cassandra as a 'real' human being, who might have existed at a certain point in time, and also between Greece as an almost esoteric, magical place as opposed to an historical place. Based on this, we could argue that Barthes' passage on the concept of *basquity* and what it entails could directly symmetrically reflect what is written in the following passage of Christa Wolf's *Voraussetzungen*:

Den Weg hügelan ins Vorgebirge einschlagen, wo die beiden weißen verlockenden Dörfer lagen, die man von der Straße aus sieht. Wir sollten womöglich bezeugen können, daß im April nicht nur ganz Griechenland, auch ganz Kreta grün ist und von Frühlingblümen übersät; das sei ganz und gar untypisch; typisch für Griechenland und Kreta seien vielmehr verbranntes, zu Heu verdorrtes Gras und glühendes kahles Gestein. Wir haben Kreta grün gesehen. Für uns ist Kreta das Land der tausend Blumen

²⁷ Barthes, *Mythologies*, *ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[...].²⁹

In these lines, Christa Wolf evokes the difference between what Greece and Crete are imagined to be, and the ‘real’, lived experience of such places. The imagined, mythologized Greece is a dry, dusty land, buried under the sands of time. The real landscape is green, ripe with life. Most importantly, it’s in the present, whereas its mythical variant is in the past. And yet, the image that survives is the latter:

Trost- und meist ahnungslose ameisenhafte Zudringlichkeit der Touristen, die, wie ich selbst, auf Marmorblöcken ausruhen [...]. Und dann tritt man, traten wir, vor die Koren vom Erechtheion, die im Museum auf der Akropolis vor der totalen Zerstörung sichergestellt sind. [...] Über die Gesichter der steinernen Mädchen sind Tränen geströmt, die sie zerfressen haben. Etwas, stärker als Kummer, hat sich in diese schönen Wangen eingegraben: saurer Regen, vergiftete Luft. Mögen diese Gesichter ehemals blick- und ausdruckslos gewesen sein – unser Jahrhundert hat ihnen seinen Ausdruck aufgenötigt, den der Trauer, der, als bekäme ich von innen her einen Stoß, in mir ein Echo findet.³⁰

What we can infer from these lines, is an emotion akin to regret, which surfaces regarding the “Korai”, the sculptures depicting young girls, whose artistic representations have been eroded by time, just as much as the intrusiveness and disregard of the tourists who look on, unable to grasp their historical implications and value, also serve to erode the memory they contain. The memory that Christa Wolf defines as the one “our century has imposed on them”. We see Cassandra and Medea

²⁹ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*, pp. 66-67: “The road leading up the hill to the foothills, where the two white, alluring villages that you can see from the road lie. We should attest to the fact that in April not only Greece, but also Crete are completely covered in spring flowers and immersed in green; this is completely atypical; what is typical of Greece and Crete is burnt grass that has withered into hay and glowing, bare rock. We have seen a green Crete. For us, Crete is the land where a thousand flowers grow.”

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 31-32: “The comforting and mostly unsuspecting ant-like intrusiveness of the tourists who, like me, rest on marble blocks [...]. And then one steps, we stepped, in front of the Korai of the Erechtheion, which have been put inside the museum to be protected from total destruction. Tears have streamed down the faces of the stone girls, corroding them. Something stronger than sorrow has burrowed into those beautiful cheeks: acid rain, poisoned air. These faces may once have been expressionless - our century has imposed its own expression on them, that of grief, which, as if I were receiving a blow from within, echoes inside me.”

reflected in the statues of the Korai, or at least what is left of them after they have been subjected to this process of erosion and to the substitution of memory. Wolf alludes to the idea of myths wandering, as Cassandra, Medea or the Korai, in this case, have retained the same ‘form’, while the ‘content’ has changed. In other words, the signifier has remained the same, while the signified has changed. Similarly to the way all historical implications of ‘basque’ are disregarded in *basquity*, the ‘historical’ Cassandra and Medea end up being diluted in the concepts of ‘cassandra-ness’ or ‘medea-ness’. Just like it happens to the concept of *basquity* in Barthes’ exemplification, the imaginary which is usually associated with them in mythological terms has changed, as a consequence of them becoming recipients of certain ideologies. It is the consequence of Cassandra and Medea becoming modern, although according to Wolf they had always been so. Their modernity, the modernity of myth in general, is stored in its ancient roots, which as we have seen, go beyond the “paradigm of Greek myth”, and are to be found in the memory that has not been stored, that has not made it to the archive, until it did. Wolf’s process of myth-rewriting is therefore based on the rejection of what we referred to as ‘cassandra-ness’ and ‘medea-ness’, with the purpose of dismantling the dominating ideologies and the socio-political structures the characters had been imbued with. In other words, this is what other scholars would call a process of demythologization, which entails the uneasy discovery of these characters being denied self-expression.³¹ Christa Wolf’s *Voraussetzungen* and Barthes’ *Mythologies* converge in this demythologizing process.

According to Padularosa, the author’s trip to Greece has made it possible to re-establish a form of contact with “reality” and with “the Ancient”, so that she could “rediscover the ‘dynamic force’ hidden behind those images of the past, trying to ‘affirm’ the existence of movement behind the mythical past[...].” Padularosa defines this a “multiple and labyrinthical” process, in which the images of the past “[...] are slowly liberated from the strict normative and interpretative canons, to be rebuilt starting with the recovery of their vital energy, which often corresponds to an experience of suffering, pain and death”. She concludes that, in Wolf’s perspective, not only the ancient language(s) such as Greek, but also “[...] the architecture, the fortifications and

³¹ C. Wolf, *Aus einer Diskussion an der Ohio State University (1983)*, in *Die Dimension des Autors. Essays und Aufsätze. Reden und Gespräche (1959-1985)*, Frankfurt a.M., Luchterhand, vol. 2, 1990, p. 903.

monuments are a product of the pain, the loss and the fear of death, while still transmitting the fatigue and the sheer bodily work that has been employed to create them”.³²

The sense of loss which Padularosa mentions in this passage is at the heart of Christa Wolf's understanding of myth and literature, an aspect which we will go back to in a following section of this chapter. What is particularly interesting in Padularosa's analysis is the comparison that she makes between Wolf's rewriting of these characters as a process of “dismantling” the rigidities of canonical expectations and the writer's account of her trip to Greece as an operation of rediscovery of a truth buried underneath centuries of ideological impositions.

In fact, aside from the discourse on the historical rootedness of myth, another aspect that resonates in both Barthes' and Wolf's approach to the subject is the belief that myth and ideology are inevitably linked. However, the conclusion that myth and ideology are somewhat related is not immediately reached. For all intents and purposes, the study of myth and the study of ideology have been completely separated for a long time, at least until the 1960s, when new research connecting these two fields started to emerge, showing obvious links between the construction of myth and the construction of ideology, where in the past only the glaring differences between the two had been debated. Myth and ideology had been separated first and foremost on the basis of the differences in their respective schools of thought. On the one hand, where many divisions inside the study of mythology existed, depending on difference in approach (i.e. philosophical, philological, psychoanalytic, anthropological, etc.), the same ‘issue’ did not exist in the school of ideology. Most importantly, however, the separation

³² D. Padularosa, *Danza Cassandra...*, ibid., p. 81. “Il viaggio in Grecia dell'autrice risponde infatti proprio alla necessità di ristabilire un contatto “reale” con l'Antico, di riscoprire la “forza dinamica” delle immagini del passato cercando di “affermare” il movimento, vale a dire ciò che si cela dietro la staticità di un passato mitico, che lo rende oggi inefficace e privo di valore. L'operazione di Christa Wolf è molteplice e labirintica, perché accosta alla riflessione sulle origini del mito e della narrazione, una riflessione per così dire metaletteraria sull'interpretazione del mito in chiave sociale e politica. Il lavoro di scavo archeologico nelle profondità della memoria culturale è per lei, dunque, sempre associato al tentativo di “spoliazione” delle immagini, che vengono lentamente liberate dai freddi canoni interpretativi e normativi, per essere ricostruite a partire dal recupero della loro energia vitale, la quale spesso coincide paradossalmente con un sentimento di sofferenza, di dolore e morte. [...] La lingua, il Greco antico, la “lingua parlata e ascoltata” – e dunque i racconti tramandati –, ma anche le opere architettoniche, le fortificazioni e i monumenti, sono frutto del dolore, della perdita e della paura della morte, ma trasmettono anche la fatica, il male fisico, il sudore delle braccia e la forza delle mani che hanno dato loro vita”.

between the two areas of study was motivated by the wrong assumption that myth “deal[s] with the characteristic beliefs of antique or primitive men”, whereas ideology “deal[s] with the characteristic beliefs of modern men”.³³

The assumption that myth is necessarily related to the past, whereas ideology is necessarily related to the present (and the future) has since been overcome, as well as the meaning of ‘modern’ has been problematized. However, both myth and ideology present a problem for modernity, in that they challenge ideas of truth and reality, given the fact that they are associated with the “negative connotations” of “deceit” and “self-deceit”³⁴. In any case, their function was normally considered to be different: on the one hand, “myth images function as integrating values around which individuals or societies become organized and exist as coherent entities”. Conversely, “the function of ideologies, [...] is [...] to segregate and consolidate competing groups around rival ideas”.³⁵ This initial assessment, where myth and ideology are completely different things, aside from sharing a negative connotation, is too strict. Myth and ideology are, in fact, more complementary than what they were made out to be in their respective fields of study. Ben Halpern writes that “myth is, in a sense, more elementary than ideology, and ideology, in a way, implies some of the processes proper to myth”.³⁶ We could argue, instead, that myth supports specific ideologies in specific contexts. Throughout history, we have also seen how political ideologies are constructed around

³³ Cf. B. Halpern, “Myth” and “Ideology” in *Modern Usage*, in *History and Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Hoboken, Wiley 1961.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131: “[...] “science”, and “law” may quite easily be conceived as no more than historic monuments. On the other hand, words like “opinion” and “theory” imply the second (dynamic) meaning of “historical”, but not necessarily the first. An “opinion” or “theory” may quite easily be trivial and evanescent, and never be handed down to succeeding generations. In “myth” and “ideology”, popular usage has terms which necessarily imply both the above meanings of “historical”. “Myths” and “ideologies” are major and not trivial concretions of the symbols accumulated in culture over generations; that is, by definition, they weigh enough in the balance of history to be remembered and to exert their effects from one generation to the next. Also, “ideology” necessarily implies “other ideologies” with which it is in dynamic relations; and the same is true, in its own way, of “myth”, especially as it is currently used. In fine, with these two terms, popular usage discriminates meanings essentially and integrally related to the domain of the “historical” in both its senses. If we had not considered “myth” and “ideology” against this particular back-ground, but had asked immediately what connotations are most obviously connected, in popular usage, with these two terms, we should have had to begin with another feature common to both: these words carry primarily a negative connotation approximating “deceit” or “self-deceit”, or, at any rate, they signify an “interested” or “subjective” approach to “reality”, an attitude going off at a tangent to “truth”. In contrast, a word like “science” usually implies an “objective, disinterested” approach to “reality”, entirely harmonious with “truth”. However, on closer examination it appears that even popular (at least, “middlebrow”) usage is aware of “subjective” aspects in “science”, and of possible “objective” references in the concepts “myth” and “ideology”. The differences would then reduce themselves to the degree of emphasis on the “subjective” or “objective” side of connotation.”

³⁵ *Ibidem.*

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

a mythologization of their values. It would seem that myth and ideology are inextricably bound. Such is the perspective we find in Barthes' and in Kerényi's theorizations, but also as the basis for the writing of *Cassandra* and *Medea*.

As a semiologist, Barthes is convinced that myth and ideology are closely affiliated because myth functions as a secondary semiological system. That is to say that myth, not unlike language and at the same time diverging from it, is constructed as a tridimensional scheme, whose components are the signifier, the signified and the sign. The system that is myth, as it has been envisioned by Barthes, functions in complex ways, considering that

[...] myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a *second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech [...] are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language. Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writing, myth wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain. And it is precisely this final term which will become the first term of the greater system which it builds and of which it is only a part.³⁷

If it is true that, according to Barthes, anything can become myth, it is also true that myth can also become a special kind of language. However, only under certain conditions, as he explains in a following section of the book:

Of course, it is not *any* type: language needs special conditions to become myth. [...]. But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of

³⁷ Barthes, *Mythologies*, *ibid.*, p. 113.

signification, a form. Later, we shall have to assign to this form historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society into it: we must nevertheless first describe it as a form.³⁸

In *The Structural Study of Myth*, Claude Lévi-Strauss also invites consideration on what type of language myth is and agrees on the fact that “[...] myth is language [...] and also something different from it”.³⁹ As Barthes recognizes that myth is a second-order semiological system, Lévi-Strauss affirms that in order to show how myth functions as (a) language, while simultaneously preserving its specificity, one can rely on linguistics,

For language itself can be analyzed into things which are at the same time similar and different. This is precisely what is expressed in Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*, one being the structural side of language, the other the statistical aspect of it, *langue* belonging to a revertible time, whereas *parole* is non-revertible. If those two levels already exist in language, then a third one can conceivably be isolated.⁴⁰

The third level of language, therefore, is myth. Conversely, it could be affirmed that myth operates on this mysterious third level of language. In any case, both Barthes and Lévi-Strauss seem to agree that myth belongs both inside and outside of the traditional boundaries of language. Is this the language that emerges from the unconscious? Lévi-Strauss certainly opposes this interpretation, clearly stating that “Jung’s idea that a given mythological pattern – the so-called archetype – possesses a certain signification [...] is comparable to the long-supported error that a sound may possess a certain affinity with a meaning”.⁴¹

Cassandra and Medea are thus wandering words in the language of myth, whose perception has changed in their wandering. Again, according to Lévi-Strauss, myth is a

³⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁹ C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Structural Study of Myth*, *ibid.*, p. 430.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 429.

language “functioning on an especially high level, where meaning practically succeeds at ‘taking off’ from the linguistic ground on which it keeps on rolling”.⁴² In support of this claim, he states that the translation of myth, as opposed to the translation of language, does not present the problem of “betrayal”: “[...] the mythical value of myth remains preserved, even through the worst translation. Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader throughout the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells.”⁴³

We can take issue with what Lévi-Strauss says about translation in this passage of his essay: since then, translation studies have progressed to overcome the idea of translation betraying the original. Essentially, what Lévi-Strauss writes here is that myth somehow functions at an even higher level than ‘normal’ language, because the core of it is not lost through translation. Although we would not be inclined to agree on this for what concerns the practice of translation itself, the fact that myth is a language universally and transculturally spoken is undeniable. It is also evident that it functions differently.

If the categories of *langue* and *parole* do not apply to myth as they (might) do to ‘regular’ language, how do we identify the peculiarities of myth? Lévi-Strauss proposes a system, in which myth is made of “constituent units”, such as “phonemes, morphemes and semantemes”. However, “these differ from the latter in the same way as they themselves differ from morphemes, and these from phonemes; they belong to [the] higher order [of] *gross constituent units*”.⁴⁴

In proposing this system, Lévi-Strauss largely anticipates some of what comes to be known as “wandering myths”, or as “travelling concepts” later on. Its anticipation is contained in a brilliant analogy he makes in the same essay. He explains that an understanding of how myth and its gross constituent units function could be reached if we compare it with a group of archeologists coming from the future and trying to decipher a specific category of books (myth), which did not follow the same patterns as the others:

⁴² Ibid., p. 431.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 430.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 431.

[...] after trying, without success, to decipher staves one after the other [...], they would probably notice that the same patterns of notes recurred at intervals, either in full or in part, or that some patterns were strongly reminiscent of earlier ones. Hence the hypothesis: what if patterns showing affinity, instead of being considered in succession, were to be treated as one complex pattern and read globally? By getting at what we call *harmony*, they would then find out that an orchestra score, in order to become meaningful, has to be read diachronically along one axis [...] and also synchronically along the other axis, all the notes which are written vertically making up one gross constituent unit [...].⁴⁵

Lévi-Strauss applies this analogy to an analysis of the myth of Oedipus. He indicates and differentiates among four patterns, some of which seemingly do not have anything in common and lead to different interpretations of said myth, if taken separately (overrating of blood relations; underrating of blood relations; monsters being slain; difficulties to walk and to behave straight as the meaning of characters' names). Thanks to this system, which represents the structural analysis of myth, Lévi-Strauss can pinpoint the overarching concept behind the myth of Oedipus, with all its many variations. In the end, this overarching concept or theme seems to be the belief in cosmology. According to him, this method, aside from being applicable to any other mythological narration, would also solve the problem of having to identify the “*true* version, or the *earlier* one”: “On the contrary, we define [...] myth as consisting of all its versions”.⁴⁶ Consequently, “if a myth is made up of all its variants, structural analysis should take all of them into account”.⁴⁷

This might be significant for the abovementioned “structural analysis of myth”. However, it is unlikely, and therefore not to be expected, that authors rewriting myth would be able or be willing to take into account all of these variants, as they themselves are in the process of producing a ‘new’ one. Additionally, as we have seen, it is quite difficult to step away from the idea of an original. One or two of these variants are usually considered the ‘canon’ version, in literary terms, whereas the rest either is not taken into account, or lies dormant at the bottom of this system. Although Christa Wolf might not have had this scheme in front of her while she was writing *Kassandra* or

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 432.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 435.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

Medea.Stimmen, we can see how her approach to the subject matter stems from a similar hypothesis as the one expressed in *The Structural Study of Myth*. And it certainly seeks to show that the variant(s) should not be considered as lesser than what is perceived to be the ‘original’, ergo the canonical, most popular(ised) version of a certain mythological tale and/or character. The meaning of the language called ‘myth’ is anything but univocal or fixed, as the preferred words of this language (i.g. the characters of myth) contain multiple identities and, at different points in time, advocate for different ideas.

This brings us directly to another important theoretical point, which is the expression of ideology through (the language of) myth. The political and literary implications of this will be analysed in the second chapter. In this section we will focus instead on the theoretical background which will inform said analysis. Although we must go through different terminological references for what constitutes myth as language, it is important to show that these theories all converge on the same hypothesis, which supports the analysis of Christa Wolf’s theoretical approach. It can already be anticipated that from the second chapter onwards, we shall settle on the expression “travelling concepts”. However, it is fundamental to show how this conclusion can be reached, before we move on to the analysis of the travelling concepts in *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen*.

In the previous sections, we have explored the notion of myth as language. One implication that can be derived directly from this presumption and the others we have made previously, is that myth is always linked to ideology. The key to understanding how myth as a language can be linked to ideology is contained precisely into the inversely proportional relationship between form and concept:

A signified can have several signifiers: this is indeed the case in linguistics and psycho analysis. It is also the case in the mythical concepts: it has at its disposal an unlimited mass of signifiers: I can find a thousand Latin sentences to actualize for me the agreement of the predicate, I can find a thousand images which signify to me French imperialism. This means that *quantitatively*, the concept is much poorer than the signifier, it often does nothing but re-present itself. Poverty and richness are in reverse proportion

in the form and the concept: to the qualitative poverty of the form, which is the repository of rarefied meaning, there corresponds the richness of the concept which is open to the whole of History.²⁴

Within this parameter, myth and its function of meaning is to be understood as an instrument which enables the manipulation of reality, confirming the association of both myth and ideology with ideas of “deceit”, as seen previously. Identifying reality with myth is a perilous road to take, as perilous as identifying reality with ideology is, as it has been demonstrated plenty of times in the course of history. In *Mito. Mitologie e mitopoiesi nel contemporaneo*,⁴⁸ the consequences which such a depiction of reality can produce are stated quite clearly:

From the point of view of theory and culture, fascism, social realism and fundamentalism, and even post-modern democracies – although it’s with different degrees of intensity and in relation to contents of a different nature – all work in a similar way when it comes to defining idealized and crystallized modes of identity through authority.⁴⁹

When there is an overlapping between myth and reality, the former shows all its potential for the transformation or the annihilation of the status quo. The ideology which belongs to each of the political systems Jesi refers to in this passage of his book are constructed based on a mythological system. What Barthes highlights as the capability of myth to turn into *pop culture*, Jesi leads back to the political and ideological implications derived from myth’s potential. According to him, “whatever their content may be, myths circulate, they manifest themselves as truths belonging to a superior order, they shape mental universes and generate consequences”.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ G. Leghissa, E. Manera, *Mito. Mitologie e mitopoiesi nel contemporaneo*, Torino, Philosophy Kitchen, 2016.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 22: “Il fascismo, il socialismo reale e i fondamentalismi religiosi, e persino le democrazie post-moderne – pur con diversi gradi di intensità e su contenuti di segno molto diverso – dal punto di vista della teoria e della cultura operano in modo analogo nel definire attraverso l’autorità modelli ideali e cristallizzati di identità”.

⁵⁰ Cf. E. Manera, *L’officina mitologica di Furio Jesi. Sulle prefazioni non pubblicate a ‘Materiali mitologici’*, *Mythos*, 13/ 2019.

Confronting this statement with Roland Barthes' theory, it is evident that they are expressing a similar overview on the matter, especially considering that Barthes is also interested in the political implications of myth in modern times. As a matter of fact, he defines myth a "depoliticised speech", once again linking the political weight of myth-construction with a specific use of language, in bourgeois society, where myth becomes depoliticised:

One must naturally understand *political* in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their [...] power of making the world; one must above all give an active value to the prefix *de-*: here it represents an operational movement, it permanently embodies a defaulting. [...] it is the contingent, historical, in one word: *fabricated* [...]. Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them. [...] it makes them innocent and gives them an eternal justification [...] it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth.⁵¹

Therefore, the more depoliticised myth becomes, the more dangerous it is when used for political purposes, in support of ideology. Barthes distinguishes between "strong" and "weak" myths, when it comes to them being subjected to this process and concludes that it is with "strong" myths that their depoliticisation has immediate effect, whereas it might take more time with "weak" myths, but it can succeed nonetheless.⁵² This character is not fixed: weak myths can become strong, the more persistent they are, as they work in conjunction with ideology.

How is the depoliticised myth harnessed in politics? Roland Barthes makes an important distinction between "Myth on the Left" and "Myth on the Right". He writes that "Statistically, myth is on the right"; that is to say: in its depoliticised state, the right can make use of myth to the fullest.⁵³ "Myth on the Right" is the myth of the

⁵¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 143.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 150: "Statistically, myth is on the right. There, it is essential; well-fed, sleek, expansive, garrulous, it invents itself ceaselessly. It takes hold of everything, all aspects of the law, morality, of aesthetics, of diplomacy, of household equipment, of Literature, of entertainment. [...] The oppressed is nothing, he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple, with all the possible degrees of dignity at its disposal: he has an exclusive right

bourgeoisie and has specific characteristics as opposed to “myth on the left”. Among these, what he calls “the privation of History”, “identification”, and “the statement of fact”.⁵⁴ The first is another concrete example of myth turning into nature, and consequently “depriving the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates. [...] All that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from”.⁵⁵ Where the privation of history contributes to the institution of a singular point of view and of an immovable truth, “identification” further exacerbates this univocal perception of reality by the rejection of the “Other”: “If he [the petit-bourgeois] comes to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. [...] This is because the Other is scandal which threatens his essence.”⁵⁶ The “statement of fact” once again highlights the political implications of this marginalization, which occurs through the political and ideological harnessing of myth:

Bourgeois ideology invests in this figure interests which are bound to its very essence: universalism, the refusal of any explanation, an unalterable hierarchy of the world. [...] Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date [...]. For the Nature, in which they are locked up under the pretext of being eternalized, is nothing but a Usage. And it is this Usage [...] that they must take in hand and transform.⁵⁷

Myth on the left has different connotations according to Barthes, but it is not less pervasive. The main point of difference is the principles on which it rests. In essence, the distinguishing factor is that “Revolution” is at the center of “leftist” politics, and “revolutionary language” in itself “cannot be mythical, because it is the language of

to meta-language. The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural theatrical: it is Myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter at eternalizing”.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 152-155

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

⁵⁶ Ibidem: “There are, in any petit-bourgeois consciousness, small simulacra of the hooligan, the parricide, the homosexual, etc., which periodically the judiciary extracts from its brain, puts in the dock, admonishes and condemns [...]. Sometimes [...] the Other is revealed as irreducible [...]. There is here a figure for emergencies: exoticism.”

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

man as producer”.⁵⁸ This means that “wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the meaning of things [...] myth is impossible”. Along this line of reasoning, it can be inferred that myth on the Left is not only possible, but it is more likely to appear when the Left fails its main purpose: revolution. In doing so, “it accepts to wear a mask [...] and to distort itself into ‘Nature’”.⁵⁹ According to Barthes, the existence of myths such as the Stalin myth can be explained in such terms. However, as opposed to what happens on the Right, “Left-wing myth is inessential”, because leftist myths are always expressed from the point of view of the oppressed, rather than the oppressor. Apparently, there is no othering process, because in this case identification is, or at least should be, with the Other.

If we read *Cassandra* and *Medea* as allegories for the crumbling of the GDR State, we can see how the failure of its revolution has trapped its State in its own myth, preventing any real change from happening. Christa Wolf’s myth rewriting echoes this failed revolution in utopian terms, as do other writers belonging to the GDR’s literary sphere.

And yet we are still far away from reaching a definite theory on what myth is. Instead, new questions arise, which take our discussion in different directions. For instance, has the circulation of myth only, or at least, mostly been possible thanks to its religious and metaphysical qualities? Or are there other arguments that could be made to explain the unshakable relevance of it? In what way does mythopoeia come into play?

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

1.2 Myth and Literature

As we have seen in the previous section of this chapter, one of the defining characteristics of myth is its ability to transcend boundaries of every kind. It can be argued that this has been possible through the translation of myth and its adaptation to different languages, cultures and socio-political contexts. As a matter of fact, the circulation of myth largely rests on its various literary adaptations. Among the many research fields in which myth has been investigated, literature has guaranteed its survival, outside of time and space constrictions. Greek myth in particular, but not exclusively, has always attracted interest and it has helped shape the idea of what European literature is. According to what William Rieger writes in *Myth and Literature*, any theory on myth which is produced inside the field of literature is “a theory of fictions”, first and foremost, taking into consideration whether or not “we think of myth as a compelling or somehow superior fiction” to other types of fiction.⁶⁰ With respect to this distinction, consequentiality is what supposedly makes a difference between the two. On the one hand, a myth is consequential, in that it produces a tangible effect in society (i.g. the myth(s) of the DDR); on the other hand, a fiction is inconsequential, because it is imaginative.⁶¹ Fiction is therefore “explanatory, but not the basis for action”.⁶² And yet, it becomes apparent that there is a contradiction in this statement, considering that by all intents and purposes, myth also possesses an explanatory nature, even though the way it “explain[s]” and what it explains have changed.”⁶³ Contradicting the idea which certain scholars have put in the distinction of myth from other types of story-telling, stating myth produces tangible effects where stories do not, is the increased awareness of the fact that what myth provides is ultimately a “story” which “proves nothing. Yet, it has a certain force”.⁶⁴ The effect of this force can be gauged in the way that, through the stories told by myth “[...] we can be seen to feel that the human sequence of things is somehow illuminated or made

⁶⁰ Cf. W. Rieger, *Myth and Literature*, London-Boston, Routledge & Kegan 1975, p.86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 91

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 92: “The arguments over the ‘explanatory’ character of myth have in traditional anthropological studies centered on the way in which the myth has provided some accounts of the framework of life: birth, marriage, customs, laws, the animal kingdom, the cycle of seasons, death. This of course means myth in the traditional and ‘prescientific’ sense. And if we are in some sense in a new age of myth it has been clear that it cannot explain in such literal terms.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

intelligible”, which in other words means that “the story has somehow worked”.⁶⁵

In its literary adaptations, particularly in modern and contemporary times, myth is made to walk away from ideas of unity and unequivocal understanding of what it represents and is instead valued because of its “obliquity” and “tentativeness”. As a matter of fact, “[...] the thing that the myth provides is a recognizable thing, which is more exactly related to the question hand in hand than a more abstract and logically responsible answer would be”.⁶⁶ Literary adaptations show how myth should not be thought of as a thing of the past, but rather as a subject which is still relevant to making sense of the world and how we choose to inhabit it.⁶⁷

Throughout time, myth has managed to absorb societal and cultural transformations, so much so that the way literature was willing to deal with it at different points in time not only reflected a specific attitude towards myth itself, but also a specific understanding of what literature was supposed to be.⁶⁸ *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* are certainly an expression of their time and context and reflect or reject an idea of European literature as well. In *Il mito della letteratura europea*, Sinopoli writes about the possibility of recognising certain features that are to be considered specific to European literature, although we have seen that the subject matter is in certain cases not entirely or not at all European. According to Sinopoli, the idea of European literature is itself divided into the categories of “mito” (myth) and “nozione” (notion). The mythical nature of European literature depends on the idea that such a literature, with a “unitarian

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁶ Ibid: “The choice between no answers at all and answers of an oblique and tentative kind keeps the ambiguities of evaluation before us. But at least in all of its tentativeness [...] what myth provides is a recognizable thing, which is more exactly related to the question hand in hand than a more abstract and logically responsible answer would be”.

⁶⁷ M. Bell, P. Poellner, *Myth and the Making of Modernity*, Amsterdam, Rodopi 1998, p. 2: “Although myth may initially appear to be the archaic counterterm to modernity, it is also the paradigm on which modernity has repeatedly reconstructed, or come to understand its own life forms. [...] mythopoeia in itself is not a voluntary, and therefore conscious project, like the ‘new mythology’ of the German romantics, so much as the emblematic recognition of an inescapable condition of human being in the world”.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 1: “The turn to myth in a number of early twentieth-century writers is a topic that manages to be at once banal and misleading. For many readers, this aspect of modernism has faded into a mere historical curiosity. [...] Furthermore, the broader intellectual and political history of the first half of the century has led to an increasing hostility to myth as such, as if it were intrinsically fascistic. And where the millennial mood of postmodernity is still prepared to deal in myth it is usually in a playful and demystifying spirit”.

character” could exist. It stands to reason that this literature is the product of “the search for a unitarian identity among the different people of Europe [...] which through the creation of a common translation refers to the awareness of a primordial, but also historical, mourning: the loss of the Empire identity”.⁶⁹

The concept of Europe itself then also stems from myth, although it’s debatable how much of this myth comes from a uniquely “western” perspective and what this implies when we try to establish the existence of European literature, or the mythological connotations surrounding it. As such, Greek mythology is one of the bases of this so-called European literature. Even so,

The exemplarity, the third character of myth in European literature, is it becoming a universal literary paradigm, a mirror and a projection in which, using romantic terms, the aesthetic reunification of humanity could be achieved. The united image of the European literary civilization is a self-image, because it is based on the idea of a common literary tradition which is based on the classical heritage, the Christian-Roman tradition, the Renaissance and Modernity. This common tradition, recorded in its texts, strives to occupy the empty space left by the absence of a common language and of mixed and uncertain historical origins. This perspective is then projected onto the rest of the world.⁷⁰

Christa Wolf acknowledges this tradition very early on in the *Voraussetzungen*,

⁶⁹ F. Sinopoli, *Il mito della letteratura europea*, Roma, Meltemi 1999, p. 10 : “Esse sono profondamente implicate tra loro, poiché è dalla messa in luce del carattere “mitico” della letteratura europea [...] che discende la nozione attuale di letteratura europea. [...] Il carattere sacro ci sembra possa essere dato dalla presenza dell’elemento costitutivo centrale dell’idea di letteratura europea, la sua unitarietà. La ricerca dell’identità unitaria della cultura dei diversi popoli europei attraverso la creazione di una traduzione comune rimanda alla consapevolezza di un lutto originario, ma storico: la perdita appunto dell’unità “imperiale” identitaria. Dietro l’idea di letteratura europea c’è dunque l’idea di Europa. [...] La presenza [...] di una pluralità di interpretazioni relative al concetto/figura di Europa nell’antichità e ai miti greci che lo/la riguardano derivanti a loro volta da quelli cretesi, rafforza questo carattere anonimo proprio del mito. Per quanto concerne più specificamente il mito o meglio i miti di Europa, essi si incrociano, come è tipico dei miti, con temi arcaici non perfettamente sovrapponibili al mito stesso”.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 12: “L’esemplarità, il terzo carattere del mito della letteratura europea, è il divenire della letteratura europea un paradigma letterario universale, ottenuto facendo della propria “auto-immagine” quella della “letteratura universale”, uno specchio e una proiezione cioè nei quali potesse prefigurarsi, detto in termini della poetica romantica, l’unificazione estetica dell’umanità. L’immagine unitaria della civiltà letteraria europea è un’auto-immagine, poiché basata sull’idea di una tradizione letteraria comune i cui fondamenti sono l’eredità classica, la tradizione cristiano-latina, il Rinascimento e la Modernità. Questa tradizione comune, testimoniata dai suoi testi, ambisce ad occupare il vuoto di una lingua comune inesistente e di origine storica meticciosa ed incerta. E poi si proietta sul mondo intero”.

however far from her own perspective it may be. She can't recognize herself as part of this literature, because this literature has excluded women from the canon for a very long time. Should we think of *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* as part of a new kind of literature? Do they contribute to the rise of a new canon? In a way they do, in so far as they produce new insights into these old mythological tales. This new model for myth rewriting is possible because and in spite of the stability of myth, where stability is not synonymous with unchangeability. If myth can change and adapt, then so can the view we have of its characters, especially marginalised ones. As soon as new perspectives were given a voice in literature, characters who previously had no depth and relied on their archetypal features gained new life. Or better yet, it is thanks to these new readings of myth that these stories still have a place in our society. In the words of Christa Wolf, we cannot expect that western (nor any) literature should continue to be representative of "the white man's reflection on himself".⁷¹

In the *Voraussetzungen*, Wolf also brings forth some reflections on the connections between myth and the concept of a European literature:

'Europa' als einen Namen, der sich vom griechischen und thrakischen Festland ausdehnte, je nach dem Bewußtein der Griechen der nördlichen Landmasse. Europa, die Tochter des phönikischen Königs, die der Gott Zeus in Stiergestalt von Phönikien nach Kreta entführte, wo sie ihm unter anderen Kindern den späteren König Minos gebar. Ein Gewaltakt an einer Frau begründet im griechischen Mythos die Geschichte Europas. Mein Schmerz um diesen Erdteil ist teilweise auch ein Phantomschmerz: nicht nur der Schmerz um ein verlorenes Glied, auch der um noch gar nicht ausgebildete, nicht entwickelte Glieder, um nicht wahrgenommene, nicht gelebte Gefühle, um uneingelöste Sehnsucht. Dies alles aufgehoben in der Literatur – seit wann?⁷²

A careful analysis of these lines would suggest that the paradigms of myth are stored

⁷¹ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*, p. 84: "[...] Die Literatur des Abendlandes, lese ich, sei eine Reflexion des weißen Mannes auf sich selbst. Soll nun die Reflexion der weißen Frau auf sich selbst dazukommen? Und weiter nichts?"

⁷² Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*, p. 59.

in the very foundations of Europe. The existence of the “phantom pain”, which originates from this act of violence against Europe, the woman from myth, is therefore integral to the understanding of European literature and its development. To Christa Wolf, it represents the essential starting point for dealing with all of the “phantom” repressed memories, feelings and thoughts, which must now reemerge from the collective unconscious, where they have been stored for the longest time. This passage of the book depicts the sense of loss we made reference to in a previous section of this chapter, and it ties very well both with Barthes’ explanation of myth as the naturalization of history.

Christa Wolf certainly seems to agree with Jung regarding the idea that myth serves the purpose of interpreting and imposing a specific vision of the world. As we have already anticipated, oftentimes this idea has meant perpetuating a specific take on characters, particularly female characters, such as Cassandra and Medea, who have been made to represent values assigned to them by a male perspective.

For this very same reason, Christa Wolf does not subscribe to the norms of a “Poetik”, in Aristotelian and Horatian terms, which would traditionally be required of any writer.⁷³ It is hard to ignore that the tradition she is supposed to, in a way, adhere to or cater to, is built on faulty premises. It is a tradition that does not account for women to be represented or included in any meaningful way.⁷⁴ When the marginalized subject regains authority over itself, there remains the problem of how this regained subjectivity should be handled. Wolf clearly states what her perspective is in a following passage of the *Voraussetzungen*, where she writes:

Ahnt man, ahnen wir, wie schwer, ja, wie gefährlich es sein kann, wenn wieder Leben in die “Sache” kommt; wenn das Idol sich wieder zu fühlen beginnt; wenn “es” die Sprache wieder findet? Als Frau “ich” sagen muß? Ein

⁷³ Cf. Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ F. Ghedini, *Maledette. Le donne nel mito*, Venezia, Marsilio Editore 2023, p. 15: “Looking back with disenchanted eyes at the sometimes dramatic events involving them also provides keys to understanding aspects of the society that lived with those myths and legends: for example, insights emerge into women’s daily lives, confined to an inevitable subordination [...]. But what matters most is that the [...] protagonists, subtle deceivers, evil sorceresses, victims of uncontrollable erotic urges, cold-blooded murderers, illustrate with lucid objectivity the negative and contemptuous assessment that the ancients gave of women: dangerous to society, capable of contravening every moral law, manipulative and treacherous. [They] are therefore archetypes and witnesses of a persistent misogyny that runs through the entire classical period.”

generationenbreites Gelände, in dem die schreibende Frau beinah oder wirklich noch verlorengelht: an den Mann, an die Männer Institutionen, Verbände, Kirchen, Parteien, Staat. [...] Ich behaupte, daß jede Frau, die sich in diesem Jahrhundert und in unserem Kulturkreis in die vom männlichen Selbstverständnis geprägten Institutionen gewagt hat – “die Literatur”, “die Ästhetik” sind solche Institutionen -, den Selbstvernichtungswunsch kennenlernen mußte. [...] meinst Du, die Bachmann wußte nicht, wie Goethe, Stendhal, Tolstoi, Fontane, Proust und Joyce Romane schreiben? Oder sie hätte nicht voraussehen können, auf welche Art entgeistert ein Gebilde wie das, was sie als “Roman” unter die Leute brachte [...]. “Madame Bovary bin ich”, das hat Flaubert gesagt, und wir bewundern dieses Wort seit mehr als hundert Jahren [...] Aber Flaubert war ja eben nicht Madame Bovary [...].”⁷⁵

In these lines, Wolf explains why she cannot adhere to any sort of literary tradition, precisely because of the foundations this tradition is built upon, despite it providing the grounds for her own literary endeavours. She expresses the difficulty of identifying with a world narrated in half, by half of the population. Certainly, Flaubert could say “I am Madame Bovary”, just as Goethe, Schiller, Nossack and other German writers could have said “I am Cassandra”, or “I am Medea”, or any other female character, but the point that Wolf wishes to make here is that they could never actually be that female character, as there is no lived experience they could actually share with the character. What they could have done, instead, is impose their experience as male onto the female experience. Although Christa Wolf does not strive to wedge further gaps between two opposing world views and seems to look for a synthesis, this outcome is not possible for either Cassandra or Medea, because there are always other interests at play. The myth of unity, which the GDR itself needed to upkeep, is revealed to be untenable. And if political institutions rely on the explanatory power of myth, in the sense that they try to shape belief and ‘culture’ in a way that unifies rather than shows nuance, literature,

⁷⁵ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen*, ibid., p. 150: “Can you imagine how difficult, how dangerous it can be, when life gets put back into the “thing”; when the idol starts feeling again; when “it” regains speech? How difficult and dangerous to be able to say “I” as a woman? Female writers have been almost or completely lost across entire generations: to men, their institutions, associations, churches, parties, states. [...] I think that every woman who, in this century and in this cultural environment, has dared to step into these institutions – such as “literature” or “aesthetics” – which are imbued with male identity, must have encountered a wish for self-annihilation. [...] Do you think Bachmann did not know what kind of novels Goethe, Stendhal, Tolstoi, Fontane, Proust or Joyce wrote? Or that she could not have predicted how shocking her idea of “novel” would be for the public? [...] Flaubert wrote “I am Madame Bovary”, and we have admired these words for over a century. But he could not be Madame Bovary [...].”

especially modern, post-modern, contemporary literature seeks to represent and come to terms with the fragmentation and ambiguity of our world. For these reasons, some myths are more adaptable than others, even in literature. In other words, “[...] the life of myth in its modern sense depends on the death of traditional myths and feeds off them at another level”.⁷⁶

In the following chapter, we shall delve further into the political implications of myth (re)writing in the context of the GDR, trying to understand how the dichotomy of “genuine” vs. “technicised myth” applies to Wolf’s mythopoietic process and demythologizing adaptation of Cassandra’s and Medea’s respective tales.

⁷⁶W. Richter, *Myth and Literature*, *ibid.*, p. 120.

2. Adapting and Translating Myth

As we have already begun to see in the first chapter, myth and translation share many features, with translation functioning as a vehicle for myth to be intercepted by different cultures, at different times. Like myth, translation is also a wide field, with many different interpretations of what it means to translate, and to translate myth specifically. One of these interpretations has its roots in Mieke Bal's travelling concepts theory, which transversally enters the realm of translation studies, and further advances the premises posed by the *cultural turn*⁷⁷. First, a differentiation between translation and adaptation, which Katja Krebs calls "two sides of an ideological coin"⁷⁸, is required, in order to see whether the two can be used interchangeably in the context of myth-rewriting. According to Krebs,

Both translation studies and adaptation studies are interdisciplinary by their very nature; both discuss the phenomena of constructing cultures through acts of rewriting; and both are concerned with the collaborative nature of such acts and the subsequent and necessary critique of notions of authorship. It seems a curious state of affairs, then, that two distinct academic fields and discourses have developed that investigate such closely related acts of rewriting as adaptation and translation without engaging with each other's perspectives and methodologies.⁷⁹

In his study titled *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation*, Lawrence Raw reflects on the uneasiness with the notion of adaptation in translation studies, where it was either "discussed, supported or severely criticized".⁸⁰ He also points out that adaptation has often been accepted as inevitable and is described as a "domesticating task" by Lawrence Venuti, among other scholars. Adaptation, however, can also be an un-domesticating task, when it requires the reversal of traditional schemes: such is the act

⁷⁷ Cf. S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Clevedon, Cromwell Press, 1998.

⁷⁸ L. Raw (ed.), *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation*, London, Continuum International Publishing Group 2012, p. 42.

⁷⁹ K. Krebs, "Translation and Adaptation – Two Sides of an Ideological Coin", *ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁰ Raw, *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation*, *ibid.*, p. 21.

of mythopoeia, especially considering Wolf's approach to the 'creation' of myth. Cassandra and Medea, in fact, are freed from the bindings of their 'origins', their potential unleashed.

In the context of the intersections of different fields of study, postcolonial studies have certainly advanced the discourse on cultural practices towards an understanding of translation and adaptation as complementary processes within it. In *The Third Space*,⁸¹ Homi Bhabha discusses culture in terms of "hybridisation" and "cultural translation". The scholar elaborates an important distinction between "cultural difference" and "cultural diversity", defining the latter as a "kind of liberal relativist perspective" which is "inadequate in itself and doesn't generally recognise the universalist and normative stance from which it constructs its cultural and political judgements." In contrast, "the notion of cultural difference" is more aptly described as a "position of liminality", a "productive space" in which culture can be constructed as difference, "in the spirit of alterity or otherness".⁸² For this reason, the notion of "cultural translation" seems the most appropriate to deal with this 'liminality', 'alterity' and 'otherness'. Specifically,

[...] the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior.⁸³

The existence of this hybrid third space, in which the rigidity of concepts such as culture is challenged and brought into question, is only made possible by the migration of these concepts. In this study, Bhabha's focus on the novel as a literary genre, reveals that meaning can be "ambivalent, doubling and dissembling",⁸⁴ because meaning migrates, as does culture, its texts and its concepts.

⁸¹ H. K. Bhabha, *The Third Space*, in Rutherford Jonathan, "Identity. Community, Culture, Difference", London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁸³ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*: "To think of migration as metaphor suggests that the very language of the novel, its form and rhetoric, must be open to meaning that are ambivalent, doubling and dissembling. [...] The importance of thinking migration as a *literary metaphor* [...]"

It is evident that the capacity of myth to traverse time and space reinforces specific themes and aspects of it, which are inherently linguistically, historically, culturally and socio-politically oriented. The process of myth-rewriting necessitates a deliberate choice by the author/translator, who decides what concepts should travel from the ‘original’ context to a different one. This process entails a conscious decision concerning the translation of cultural aspects belonging to the source culture/text into the target culture/text. Therefore, the reception of myth always implies a translation, on multiple levels.

In this study, the investigation will be conducted from the perspective of “translation proper”, which will be concerned with producing an analysis of the translation of Wolf’s novels into Italian and into English. This would amount to an examination of the language that the translators have used, based on their diverging theoretical approaches. It must be acknowledged that understanding the cultural background of the two translation contexts is fundamental for the interpretation of translation choices that were made, whether overt or subtle. Subsequently, the focus will shift towards the analysis of translation on a more “abstract” level, that is, the level at which the author (or as will be shown, the “author-function”) and the text are able to travel from the source context and of being transplanted into a new one. This travelling, in particular, allows myth as narration to survive, as well as it motivates our research approach towards the novels *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* from the perspective of the concepts which are developed within the texts and how they might have been transported into the target context.

In her essay *Translation – A Concept and Model for the Study of Culture*,⁸⁵ Doris Bachmann-Medick focuses on the second dimension of translation-adaptation practice, adopting Mieke Bal’s travelling concepts theory to discuss how translation is affected by such a paradigm, and how fruitful it could be when it comes to identifying new strategies for understanding translation and translated texts. According to her,

⁸⁵ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Translation – A Concept and Model for the Study of Culture*, in Neumann Birgit, Nünning Ansgar (eds.), *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*, Berlin/Boston, de Gruyter, 2012.

It is no longer possible to ignore how crucial processes of cultural translation and their analysis have become, whether for cultural contact or interreligious relations and conflicts, for integration strategies in multicultural societies or for the exploration of productive interfaces between the humanities and the natural sciences. The globalisation of world society, in particular, demands increased attention to mediation processes and problems of transfer [...]. Here translation becomes, on the one hand, a condition for global relations of exchange ('global translatability') and, on the other, a medium especially liable to reveal cultural differences, power imbalances and the scope for action. [...] Translation is opened up to a transnational cultural practice that in no way remains restricted to binary relationships between national languages, national literatures or national cultures.⁸⁶

Myth could be considered as one of the "situations of global cultural encounter" Bachmann-Medick refers to, which would make analysing (the process of rewriting) myth as one would the processes involved in translation theory and practice. In particular, it would seem that myth shares with translation similar issues and features, among which those of the same "appropriation, transformation and conflict"⁸⁷ emerge dominant. These characteristic are become essential in understanding how both translation processes and myth-rewriting processes function: specifically, how they function together.

Appropriation is a fundamental and controversial aspect of translation processes, as much as it is fundamental for understanding the standpoint of feminist myth rewriting, and it manifests in two different forms: on the one hand, it involves the traditional narratives that have been perpetuated through myth as indebtedly appropriating and manipulating of pre-existing narratives and cultures (f.i. the gradual transformation of goddesses into gods); on the other hand, it refers to (re)appropriation as the basis and motivation of feminist myth rewriting, in its intention to subvert traditional expectations regarding the nature and function of myth.⁸⁸ As for the characteristic of

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁸ Appropriation is normally considered as the negative side to translation and adaptation, happening when the translator takes too many liberties with the original text. Cf. Hugo Vandal-Sirois, Georges L. Bastin, *Adaptation and Appropriation: Is there a Limit?*, in Lawrence Raw (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 23: "Adaptation

transformation, it is the quality belonging to both myth and translation which facilitates for the convincing adaptation of mythological narratives across different contexts. Finally, the idea of conflict develops as a consequence of the processes of adaptation and rewriting : the emergence of new perspectives generates discussion and controversy, with translation occupying a central position within this framework .

Therefore, when myth travels from one culture to another, it is accompanied by these issues. In *The Science of Mythology: Essays on the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, Kerényi expresses that it is only natural to think of translation as part of the process of myth-creation. He explains that the “particular kind of material which determines the art of mythology” is a kind of material which is characterized by “*movement*”.⁸⁹ This is “something solid and yet mobile, substantial yet not static, capable of transformation”.⁹⁰ His understanding of the bond between mythopoeia and translation is directly linked to the ideas expressed by Bal and Medick in regards to the travelling of concepts and the role of translation. As such, it is further established that - translation and adaptation are integral parts of the infallible process of myth-migration.

In their book *Translating Myth*, Ben Pestell and Pietra Palazzolo⁹¹ also describe the travelling of myth(s) through translation as being inherently characterized by “dangers and sensitivities”, be they “cultural, political, literary” or “emotional”, which takes us back to the dimension of conflict evoked by Bachmann-Medick in her previously mentioned article. The existence of such “dangers and sensitivities” inspires the confrontation with the question of what myth the endurance of myth across time and space represents, and of what it contributes to modern and contemporary narratives. As was discussed in the first chapter of the dissertation, Christa Wolf does not wish to cater or adhere to the tradition of classical myth, which nonetheless influences its many re-

seems to be part of the process of linguistic transfer of a document, created in one source culture and then aimed at another culture. In spite of the adjustments and modifications, often imposed by the language of the source text or deemed necessary by the translator, an adaptation still shares a very strong link to the source text. On this view, it is the notion of appropriation that could be accused of being an ‘unfaithful’ representation of the source text”. In this case, however, (re)appropriation takes on a positive meaning, because it highlights the agency of the writer-translator in constructing a narrative they were once excluded from. It also questions ideas of authorship in relation to the fixed status of mythological narratives.

⁸⁹ B. Pestell, P. Palazzolo, *Translating Myth*, New York, Taylor&Francis, 2016, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

adaptations .⁹² This poses the problem of how to adapt such tales, how to achieve a cultural translation of myth, which re-imagines the so called canonical narratives, which transforms and reappropriates.⁹³ These processes imply, first and foremost, a shift in authority, as described by Rachel B. Du Plessis:

[...] a committed identification with Otherness – a participant observer’s investigation of the claims of those parts of culture and personality that are taboo, despised, marginalized. [...] The contention of truth finally unburied helps give power to the retold tale and authority to the teller, both necessary for confronting the cultural weight of Western civilization.⁹⁴

This definition suggests that “otherness” is already part of the approach that women (re)writing myths employ when they encounter narratives, such as the mythological narratives, which did not always contemplate their existence, if not as secondary or tertiary subjects. In fact, according to Du Plessis, this material is “indifferent or, more often, traditionally hostile to historical considerations of gender, claiming as it does universal, humanistic, natural or even archetypal status”.⁹⁵ The practice of going against or effectively straying away from this tradition is what Du Plessis names “revisionary myth writing”, in that it is “critical of existing culture and values”.⁹⁶ This requires understanding myth, and the narrative and characters contained within it, as travelling concepts, which are transformative in nature and therefore allow for a reconsideration of the traditional, more widely accepted narratives. As such, the scope of the travelling concept theory must be established, before it is shown how its paradigm functions as a basis for understanding the mythopoeia and translation processes involved in Wolf’s novels.

⁹² Cf. the section of the first chapter where Christa Wolf’s perspective on tradition is referenced, particularly her affirmations on the impossibility of “adapting” myth from a tradition which excludes womens’ voices.

⁹³ Cf. Homi Bhabha’s approach on this topic.

⁹⁴ R. B. Du Plessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending, Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1985, p. 108.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*

The *travelling concepts theory* was first introduced by Mieke Bal in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*. Since its publication in 2002, it has enjoyed considerable success and resonance in the humanities and, in its expansion, it has produced a ripple effect on various areas of study.⁹⁷ In her book, Bal strives to show new and different ways in which various disciplines in the humanities can be linked to one another. Concepts, which travel from one discipline to another, create this web in the humanities. According to Bal, in fact, “the concept of *concept* itself is [...] a territory to be travelled”.⁹⁸ In order to be able to define the dimension and reach of its travelling, Bal intends to clearly state what a concept is. The author explains that, first and foremost, concepts are not synonymous with words: in fact, “(mis)using” concepts as words makes them “lose their working force”, because this means that they would be “subject to fashion”, which in turn would make them “quickly become meaningless”. However, when used properly, “concepts can become a third partner in the otherwise totally unverifiable and symbiotic interaction between critic and object”.⁹⁹

In Bal’s conceptualisation, the “vertical and binary opposition” between subject and object is rendered obsolete and substituted by “interactivity”. According to the author, therein lies the potential of concepts for the humanities. However, Bal also explains how concepts are not at all fixed entities. In fact,

They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during and after each ‘trip’. [...] Between different scholars, each user of a concept constantly wavers between unreflected assumptions and threatening misunderstandings in

⁹⁷ Important studies which have been conducted on the premise of Bal’s travelling concepts theory are, among others, Doris Bachmann-Medick’s *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, Berlin, de Gruyter and *The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2014, adding to the abovementioned studies by Bachmann-Medick, Neumann and Nünning.

⁹⁸ M. Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23: “Concepts (mis)used in this way lose their working force; they are subject to fashion and quickly become meaningless. But when deployed as I think they should be – and the remainder of this book articulates, demonstrates, and justifies how that might be – concepts can become a third partner in the otherwise totally unverifiable and symbiotic interaction between critic and object”.

communication with others. [...] Between historical periods, the meaning and use of concepts change dramatically.¹⁰⁰

In presenting her theory, Bal also references Stengers' notion of the "propagation" of "nomadic concepts". According to this theory, "it is only through a constant reassessment of the power of a concept to organize phenomena in a new and relevant way that its continued productivity can be evaluated. [...] for, in the reorganisation it facilitates, a concept generates the production of meaning".¹⁰¹ The reorganisation and new production of meaning will be made evident as soon as we delve into the concepts evoked in Christa Wolf, novel, both on the levels of translation and at the level of the novels.

In this regard, Bal's conceptual framework will provide useful instruments for engaging with the concepts within the novels. A deeper look into Bal's analysis of concepts and their travelling in the humanities shows that the scholars studies these concepts as they are "elaborated in the context where they most frequently occur".¹⁰² In her study, Bal problematizes the idea that "culture" itself can be thought of as a concept: according to her we should not be too quick in turning it into one, "because its uplifting derivatives, such as 'multiculturalism', were appropriated [...] to mean indifference, tolerance, and condescension".¹⁰³ In this problematization, Bal's theory is linked to Bhabha's understanding of hybridity and his conception of a third space, which should counter the "indifference, tolerance and condescension" the Dutch scholar denounces in this passage of her essay. Instead of hybridity, however, Bal focuses on the transculturality of concepts and how this aspect can concretely enrich the humanities. In order to see how Bal's analysis can be used as a framework and as a paradigm for understanding the travelling of Cassandra and Medea across different contexts, we shall evidence some important aspects and passages of this essay.

An example of this would be the second chapter of *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, in which Mieke Bal takes out the image of the language of translation being "a royal robe with ample folds", quoting Walter Benjamin, and uses it "to learn how to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 287.

conceptualize the image as travelling between visual and literary studies”.¹⁰⁴ Through the link shared by image and metaphor, as its literary counterpart, Bal “maps” the travelling of images between philosophy and art history, starting with the image of translation presented by Benjamin in his famous essay, in different historical periods. This process of investigating two baroque works of art, namely Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647) and Bourgeois’ *Femme-Maison* (1983), by “ec-centrally positioning aesthetic”¹⁰⁵ is called “an *ecstatic form of translation*”.¹⁰⁶ The key question Bal poses here, and which is relevant for developing the framework of the travelling concepts theory, is not exclusively about “Bernini’s relevance to the (art)-historical concept of *baroque*”,¹⁰⁷ but rather about his work and what it can tell “about what ‘baroque’ is, means and entails”.¹⁰⁸ Bal’s argument revolves around the fact that the two works of art she investigates, given their “preposterous historical relationship”,¹⁰⁹ can “enrich” Benjamin’s own concept of translation, by stating that the image is translation, and that the image is metaphor.¹¹⁰ In doing so, Bal reflects on the gradual dismantling of hierarchical structures, which finds itself at the basis of the migration of concepts and is paramount in the development of the paradigm essential to our investigation of Wolf’s novels. The third also provides some interesting problems and questions and it is dedicated to the *Mise-en-scène*, or the concept of theatricality. In this section of her study, Bal asks what the point of a concept such as this can be for cultural analysis,¹¹¹ “by making more specific, more material, more practical sense of objects in their social life”.¹¹² Bal also remarks on the fact that “the resulting insights mediate between cultural practice, the specific object of cultural analysis, and a cultural theory that enables students to make tentative generalizations”, in that they “allow the generalizations to be made [...] without impoverishing the cultural reality on which they are based”.¹¹³ Concluding that “image, in its revised conception as an event in the present, is, by definition *mise-en-scène*”, in the fourth chapter Bal discusses the issue

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 99.

¹¹³ Ibidem.

of “how cultural objects are viewed”,¹¹⁴ or the concept of “framing” and its specificity in comparison with “context”. Bal maintains that instead of pitting one against the other, as many have done, it would be more productive to think of “each concept individually”.¹¹⁵ In this way, framing becomes an interpretative process, a concept which “brings theoretical reflection into the practice, and compels people involved in practices to account for what they do, and realise why they do it that way”.¹¹⁶ Translation as a concept does something similar to framing, as it can also be said to “delimit[...] what is relevant and what can be left aside”.¹¹⁷ In the fifth chapter on “performance and performativity”, Bal considers these two as separate concepts and the impact generated on culture by their interaction, where memory serves to bridge the gap between the two. The following chapter then focuses on the concept “or ideology” of “tradition”, using Fox’s photographs of the *Zwarte Piet* to see how “image comes to embody cultural analysis itself” and “understanding yet another ‘travel’ of concepts, the one between the subject of analysis [...] and the analytic work itself”.¹¹⁸ Chapter seven takes on the concept of “intention”, which according to Bal is problematic both for methodological and for political reasons, as the danger of individualism looms over it. Finally, the last chapter titled “critical intimacy” deals with the outcome of the travel, the “movement” of concepts and disciplines, reflecting what this means for culture and for “breaking away from the already known”.¹¹⁹

This work has been very influential for many scholars who have sought to expand this approach to research in the humanities. One such study, which has already been mentioned, is *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*,¹²⁰ where the study of culture itself is problematized, as it is supposed to encompass “the whole spectrum of the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

¹¹⁶ M. Bal, C. Baldacci, S. Franco, P. Conte (eds.), *Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice. A Conversation on Framing and Reframing.*, Venezia, Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2023, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 14: “While framing calls for the recognition of the subjective agency in the act, the agent of framing is framed in turn. In this way, the attempt to account for one’s own acts of framing is doubled. First, one makes explicit what one brings to bear on the object of analysis: why, on what grounds, and to what effect. Then one attempts to account for one’s own position as a subject of framing, including for the rules to which one submits. This is a double self-reflection. It thus might help solve the problems of unreconstructed contextualism as well as of a moralistic and naive self-reflexivity.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 288.

¹²⁰ Neumann, Nünning, *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*.

traditional disciplines in the humanities,”¹²¹ while overcoming the differences between disciplinary and national specificities when it comes to approaches and stable practices. Therefore concepts, as they are envisioned and employed by Bal, become extremely useful “intellectual tools”¹²² which can help in crossing these transdisciplinary and transnational boundaries, since they can “determine how members of the academic community conceive of themes, approach objects and define the relevant questions to be addressed”.¹²³ While it may appear that it might seem that operating with concepts entails the achievement of a fixed result, this is an oversimplification, far from the true purpose of using concepts. In truth, “concepts [...] are dynamic and changeable, as they travel back and forth between diverse academic contexts”.¹²⁴

One such concept, which has been anticipated with translation. Translation operates on various levels when it comes to the travelling of concepts. Both Bhabha and Chakrabarty put it at the centre of their theoretical considerations on culture. This is due to the fact that translation enables the existence of culture and cultural studies in the way they are conceived at present. Translation, however, is not merely an “enabler”, a vehicle for the travelling of concepts. As Doris Bachmann-Medick points out, it is also a travelling concept itself.¹²⁵ According to her, however, it is important to define exactly what kind of concept translation is, so that it does not risk becoming diluted.¹²⁶ As previously demonstrated, Bachmann-Medick’s work underlines the importance of acknowledging “tensions” as an integral part of translation. Especially in the context of what is to be understood under the features of “appropriation, transformation and conflict”.¹²⁷ Additionally, the scholar emphasises the necessity of the “reinterpretation of situations of global encounter”.¹²⁸ Consequently, advocating for translation to be defined as a concept implies the managing of these “frictions” and contradictions.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²² Ibid., p. 3.

¹²³ Ibidem.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Bachmann-Medick, *Translation – A Concept and Model for the Study of Culture*, p. 25.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

As a field of study, but also as a practice, translation is usually subjected to another point of (con)tension, in the form of what is usually called “translation proper”.¹²⁹ Considering translation only from this perspective seems to clash with the broader horizon opened up by defining translation as a travelling concept. However, it is precisely from translation as “a language-oriented procedure” that this broadening of horizons starts, as this “can offer valuable insights for the investigation of in-between positions and ethical implications as opposed to mere transcodings [...]”.¹³⁰ It is only in this manner than translation can truly become dynamic, and that it can realise its “transgressive and transformative” nature. In order to do so, it must deconstruct the ideas of “origin” and “tradition” that are still somewhat tied to it.¹³¹

On the basis of this theoretical framework it is therefore possible to argue that Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* and their translation into Italian and into English can be analysed based on the concepts that have migrated from their original context. In particular, the mythological characters of Cassandra and Medea themselves can be thought of as travelling concepts, which in their travelling have adapted and transformed and exist as paradigmatic examples of Bal’s theoretical approach. Most importantly, these two characters and their tales are imbued with the border-concept, which they embody in their ability to travel while dwelling in the in-between-space between cultures, literature and languages. This embodiment is reflected in the narrative and linguistic structures of Wolf’s two novels. Therefore, Bal’s and Medick’s theories serve as a framework to present the concepts that are central to the novels, which will be examined in more detail in the third chapter of the dissertation. Bal’s approach to concepts and their constant shifts in the spaces between disciplines, cultures, languages will serve as a framework for presenting the concepts which emerge from or constitute the premises of Wolf’s mythological retellings.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 30.

2.1 Macro-Myths and Micro-Myths in the GDR

There is a consensus among scholars that the social, political, economic and cultural apparatus of the GDR was based almost entirely on the construction of and on the more or less widespread confidence in its myth, which set out to construct a socialist, utopian reality. In fact, according to those who have closely inspected the functioning of GDR society and its politics, whether from within or from without, during its existence or after its dissolution, the myth of the GDR was also its leading force. This continued until it eventually led to its demise. Despite the valuable knowledge provided by historiography in regards to the German socialist state, in *Building the East German Myth*, Alan L. Nothnagle states that “the mythic approach” is able to offer even more insight, allowing for an understanding of the “motivation” and “passion” which seemingly drove the people living in the GDR to wanting to fulfill

of the ideals set by the Party. In the context pertaining to the myth of the GDR it would however be erroneous to assume that there was a univocal, single-minded narrative right from the beginning, to which every citizen adhered utterly and completely. This becomes further accentuated if one consider that each individual had their own personal motivations to adhere to the rules. Although this idea of a people sharing a common will is integral to the mythology and propaganda of any authoritarian state, homogeneity in GDR society remained mostly utopistic. As a matter of fact, the belief in the society that the Communist party wished to build was led by various motives. Among these were the “day-to-day experience or at least observation of the injustices of capitalism and ‘imperialism’”, or “through involvement in the Communist youth organization, with its action, excitement and sense of mission.” In other cases, the motivations resided in the fight against fascism and/or the admiration and respect for the Soviet Union. Next to a ‘true’ passion for the Marxist-Leninist model, there was also a certain amount of opportunism, which made itself known in the acquisition of more rewarding jobs for those who achieved the goals that the Party had set out for them.¹³²

A deeper look into the workings of this society clearly shows the rationale behind the GDR, or rather its leading Party, the SED, needing to create a mythology of the new socialist State. The main narrative would change during the years, however the main motivation remained largely unaltered and is to be attributed to the utopian system of this state. As a matter of fact,

[...] Once communist states, as utopian regimes, invoke their mythology they can never let it go. No utopian regime ever measures up to its millenarian goals, regardless of the quality of its propaganda, and hence it is always threatened by a worrisome lack of present.

This so-called “lack of present” points to the need to create a narrative that would ensure the socialist’s perpetual movement towards the future: the fruits of change, of revolution, would always have to be collected further down the line. In the meantime,

¹³² Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

people could focus on self-improvement and doing everything in their power to create that future. With such a precarious mindset, there was no room for noticing any dissonances or incongruities. At least not for a while, and not all at once. This is perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of myth-building in the GDR: with so many references to the past, this mythology expends too much time attempting to predict the future and neglects the present.¹³³ What was the nature of myth-building in the GDR and what was distinctive about it?

Myth-building is about setting priorities and gaining control over the terms of public discourse. It means the calculated use of history. It is the deliberate and systematic transmission of a specific historical consciousness to a broad audience for the express purpose of securing political and institutional legitimacy. But although GDR myth-builders regularly used cynical methods in order to manipulate the public, they were not necessarily hypocrites themselves. Most were profoundly – and tragically – sincere in their intentions. For myth-building also meant the ‘cultivation of tradition’, the fulfilment of a historic mandate.¹³⁴

This excerpt shows how, for a considerable period of time, the government of the GDR tried to lead its people to believe in the merging of myth and reality, and therefore with history, as evidenced by Barthes’ problematization of the interconnection between the two. In other words, this is a reference to Károly Kerényi’s definition of a “technicising” and of a “genuine” myth, despite the progressive blurring of the line separating the two.¹³⁵ In the GDR, this would only become more apparent as time went on, particularly as the younger generations started noticing the deficiencies in the system which their parents had contributed in creating and which some of them continued to support.

As many other people belonging to her generation and older, Christa Wolf was not unaccustomed to the inner workings of an authoritarian state. She was part of that

¹³³ Interestingly, the most representative mythological characters of the GDR, Cassandra and Icarus, deal with this motive of present vs. future.

¹³⁴ Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹³⁵ K. Kerényi, *Scritti italiani (1955-1971)*, G. Moretti (ed.), Napoli, Guida, 1993.

generation which had experienced Nazi rule first-hand, but who at the time was not old enough to critically assess and process what was happening, besides internalising the need to blindly conform to the law. Subsequently, after the construction of the GDR, she, like many others, had wholeheartedly embraced the utopian proclamations of the Communist State, which itself was perceived as a counter model to Nazifascism. However, she escaped this mindset relatively quickly and became an essential voice of dissent for her generation. Most importantly, she approached the GDR system critically, and came to see it for what it was. This realisation was gradual and not at all painless: to reach this conclusion, she had to renounce the promise of a utopistic future and focus her attention on denouncing the less pleasant aspects of their present condition under the rule of the SED, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*.

In Wolf's literary production, the myths of the GDR are unequivocally recognized as 'technicised'. Hers is not a unique case: other writers in the GDR had already been engaging with the matter of myth before Wolf started working on *Cassandra*. However, what is peculiar about her writing is the creation of a new, "genuine" myth, on the one hand, and the subsequent demythologization of the old on the other. It stands to reason that, if we wish to gain a better understanding of Wolf's rewriting of *Cassandra* and *Medea*, her opposition to the ideological categories of the GDR proposed through its macro- and micro-myths cannot be overlooked.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how myth is shaped by ideology, and how ideology shapes myth in turn. The political ideology of the GDR exploits this connection between the two. Lévi- Strauss asserts that politics are nothing more than the mythical language of modernity, to the point that they end up replacing it.¹³⁶ This language is spoken through different means, some of which entail the creation of a new (mythological) vocabulary. The close relation between myth, ideology and language, each one informing, or even replacing the other, is an issue that Christa Wolf has had to face directly in her career, especially with her unshakable reputation as a representative of specific political values, for better or for worse. As Therese Hörnigk writes:

For both biographical and personal reasons, Christa Wolf became part of a

¹³⁶ C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Structuralist Study of Myth*, in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, n. 270, pp. 428-444.

tradition that defined literature as a “specific modality of social action”. [...] Various ideologies were linked to that programme, which involved many intellectuals, such as Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher, Arnold Zweig and Stephan Hermlin, who claimed to be antifascists and who identified themselves with the government’s objectives, even though they could not identify themselves with those in power, who had the support of the Soviet Union, and who had landed in East Germany after being exiled. For the emigrants, the GDR was supposed to be a reward for the lost years. For the younger generation, of which Christa Wolf was part, and which was precociously introduced to Marxist ideals, it represented the chance of building a radically different world.¹³⁷

Christa Wolf’s ability to “support a moral capable of uniting both the public sphere and the personal- individual relationship with the external world”,¹³⁸ together with the “candor with which she took responsibility for expressing certain ideas, a responsibility especially felt towards those who could not freely express their thoughts” was what eventually earned her the “status of defender of rights”,¹³⁹ and at a later time, the accusation of being a *Staatsdichterin*.

Furio Jesi and Károly Kerényi, in particular, have reflected on the social, political and cultural importance of distinguishing between the “genuine” and the “technicised” myth. It is this so called “technicised” myth that is recognized as the cause of the perversion and distortion of the genuine myth, and which consequently has also been the cause of all the horror and destruction that characterised the 20th century. The “technicised” myth, in fact, emerges in the space between the conscious and the

¹³⁷ T. Hörnigk, *Senza “partecipazione” non c’è memoria, né si dà letteratura. L’intento poetico di Christa Wolf*, in G. Schiavoni, *Prospettive su Christa Wolf. Dalle sponde del mito*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1998, p. 82: “Per ragioni sia biografiche che personali, Christa Wolf si vedeva inserita in una tradizione che definiva la letteratura come una ‘modalità specifica dell’agire sociale’. [...] A quel programma di si collegava un’osmosi di ideologie che coinvolgeva molti intellettuali, fra cui Anna Seghers, Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher, Arnold Zweig e Stephan Hermlin, i quali si professavano antifascisti e condividevano gli obiettivi di governare pur non identificandosi con gli uomini di potere sostenuti dall’Unione Sovietica e approdati anch’essi nella Germania orientale dopo l’esilio. Per gli emigranti tornati in patria la Ddr doveva essere la ricompensa per gli anni perduti. Per i più giovani venuti precocemente a contatto con il marxismo, come Christa Wolf, essa significava l’occasione per costruire un mondo radicalmente diverso”.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 83: “[...] sostenitrice di una morale capace di unire sia le valenze pubbliche che il rapporto personale- individuale con il mondo esterno”.

¹³⁹ Ibid., *Senza “partecipazione” non c’è memoria*, p. 84: “E fu la naturalezza con cui si assunse la responsabilità di esprimere certe idee, responsabilità avvertita come un dovere pubblico nei confronti di coloro ai quali era impedito di parlare, a conferire a Christa Wolf lo *status* di una rivendicatrice di diritti [...]”.

unconscious dimension and preys upon its enduring imbalance:

The mystery of our “conception” of the human psyche, which is located beyond the realm of conscience, becomes a symbol of how realities and images, from which mankind can be overcome, are eternally preserved. This act of subjugation is not limited by conscious will, and therefore resides outside the confines of a morality of responsibility. It is responsible the behaviour of those who gladly welcomes the images coming from the unconscious, without suffering or struggle [...] On the contrary [...] if the images coming from the unconscious induce the idolising of death, those who are overcome by them should be unanimously condemned by humanity.¹⁴⁰

In this section of the book *Germania segreta*, Jesi revisits the theory proposed by Kerényi and identifies the technicized myth as the source of the tragic historical and political developments that took place in the 1900s. Once again, it is the deformation of the relationship with the past which, according to Jesi, directly results in an instinct and idolising of death, and which ends with the sacrifice of the collective character of the genuine myth to the altar of political interest. In other words:

Welcoming the manifestation of genuine myth in our lives should mean behaving irrationally. However, as long as myth is genuine, and has not been technicized by a perception of fatality, nor has it been deformed by those who project their illnesses and guilt on it, this behaviour can be defined with the words used by Thomas Mann in relation to psychoanalysis: “the form of modern irrationalism which is unequivocally opposed to any reactionary abuse”.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ F. Jesi, *Germania segreta. Miti nella cultura tedesca del '900*, Milano, nottetempo, 2018, p. 9: “Il mistero che il nostro “modello” della psiche umana colloca di là dalla coscienza simboleggia una perenne riserva di realtà e di immagini dalle quali l'uomo può essere sopraffatto. Tale sopraffazione non è suscettibile di limitazioni da parte della volontà cosciente, e dunque di per se stessa si colloca al di fuori di una morale della responsabilità. Responsabile è il comportamento di chi, dinanzi all'affiorare delle immagini dell'inconscio, le accoglie lietamente, senza sofferenza e incertezze [...]. Ma [...] se ciò che affiora dall'inconscio con il suo predominio conduce a idolatrare la morte, è giusto che la comunità degli uomini condanni chi ne subisce involontariamente il possesso.

¹⁴¹ The mention of Thomas Mann refers to the author's interest in myth, mostly but not exclusively in the dichotomy between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Although his are not proper rewritings, the referencing of classical mythology and its themes in many of his works has certainly influenced other writers of his time, as well as the enduring fascination with myth in German-speaking literature of the 20th century. Herbert Lehnert has further explored *Thomas Mann's Early Interest in Myth and Erwin Rohde's Psyche* in an article of the same name.

How does this analysis apply to the mythological construction of GDR society? First, we must distinguish between the different myths which co-existed in the GDR and comprehend their hierarchy. For this reason, we shall focus on differentiating between the “macro-myth(s)” and the “micro-myths” of Eastern Germany.

For a definition of the macro-myth of the GDR, scholars have proposed distinct interpretations of what this consisted of. According to some scholars, the macro-myth of the GDR is not to be identified in one single instance, theory or object; rather, it consists more generally of the fundamental assumption of the State’s moral superiority. Consequently, this assumption would constitute the very basis of the political organization of the GDR. The notion of moral superiority is thus reflected in what other scholars, including Helfried Münkler, have referred to as the “Gründungsmythos” of the GDR: its supposed antifascism. However, the myth-building of the GDR was a far more complex phenomenon and could not be simply reduced to its opposition to fascism. It is under these premises that a series of micro-myths, populating the imaginary of the GDR, have been engendered, and continued to prosper at least until the fatidic year of the State’s dissolution in 1989. Among these micro-myths, the myth of *Parteilichkeit* was arguably the most prominent, given that this single word linked all the other areas of influence over which the SED sought control:

The SED demanded a foundation of absolute *Parteilichkeit* both inside and outside its ranks in order to maintain its power. However, since not all East Germans and not even all Party members were as orthodox as the Party wished, it had to devote much of its energy to establishing this orthodoxy in the first place. [...] *Parteilichkeit* was thus both the starting point and the goal of GDR historiography, language, propaganda, and myth-building in general.¹⁴²

While the SED was trying to rescind any connection to Nazi Germany, it was also employing much of its rhetoric, if not even the same methods, in order to reach the point where their ideals finally aligned with reality:

¹⁴² Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, *ibid.*, p. 19.

Continuity between the past and the present? This fact might seem disconcerting, especially considering that after 1945 the denazification process had been much more radical in West Germany and the condemnation of national socialism was one of the pillars of the cultural politics in the GDR. The marxist system to which its founders adhered led to a historiographic interpretation, which considered capitalism the root for nazi degeneration, therefore categorizing the national socialist phenomenon as alien to the GDR [...]. This conviction validated the feeling of moral superiority with regards to the 'other' Germany, as the continuity between the past and the present, also denounced by many Western authors, was made evident by the persistence of the capitalist system [...].

The process of denazification had motivated the reformation of both economic, social and cultural structures since the year 1945.¹⁵ The efforts dedicated to such an ambitious task culminated in the building of the Berlin Wall, which was presented as the ultimate defence against Nazi ideology which, according to the party in the East, still resisted in the West.

Among the many micro-, technicized myths of the GDR, the myth of *Kultur* emerges one of, if not, the most relevant, especially considering how much the SED invested in the diffusion of its ideals through literature and the arts. Nothnagle states that, in fact, the myth of *Kultur* was more than a satellite turning around the macro-myth of antifascism; rather, the myth of *Kultur* itself was the founding myth of the GDR, instead of the previously proposed myth of its antifascism.¹⁴³ The reasons why such a myth would need to be created might be easy to discern, but we should still specify how this came to pass. It is not that Germany was in need of a new cultural paradigm. Certainly, the Nazi had successfully cannibalized those aspects of German *Kultur* that did not align with their propaganda. Nevertheless, they could not negate the existence of Goethe or Schiller, and of the other pillars of this *Kultur*. Indeed, after the end of World War II, Germany was committed to revert to its 'origins'. Therefore, German high culture had never ceased to exist. Nonetheless, that in itself was not sufficient to

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 39

the SED: the renovation of culture was necessary to build the GDR mythology upon it. One of the many contradictions which characterized the GDR State was its aspiration towards “the sovietization of all aspects of life, all the while singing the praises of Heine and Handel”.¹⁴⁴ The myth of *Kultur* was especially fruitful, because it was already established in Germany, so it was relatively easy for the SED to exploit it for their own objectives.¹⁴⁵ The construction of this particular myth did not include all social classes indiscriminately, as was the case with others, but it was still hierarchically oriented. In accordance with the parameters envisioned by the Party, the myth of *Kultur* was to be primarily directed at “the educated classes and the intellectuals”¹⁴⁶. As a matter of fact,

Through the invocation of *Kultur* and the clothing of political statements in cultural metaphors and symbols, intellectuals were to learn to identify themselves with the SED and its policies. The myth’s youthful version had the purpose of winning over the children of these groups and preparing working class youth for their new social status as privileged functionaries of the SED. The preferred symbols of the *Kultur* myth were the concert of the “polyphonic community” and the drama of national liberation. Compared with later, headier myths, the myth of *Kultur* was poor in ceremony and symbolism. This was because the proclamation of and participation in *Kultur* were already symbol and ceremony in themselves.¹⁴⁷

The primary role of literature in the dissemination, consolidation and subsequent questioning and demolishing of these myths is exemplified by the creation of the *Schriftstellerverband* in 1952.¹⁴⁸ This action was indicative of the government’s involvement in the regulation and censorship of the literature that was being published. As an institution, it also remarkably pushed writers to self-censorship, as

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 41: “*Kultur* is organic. It is firmly rooted in the German soul and in German soil, as opposed to the superficial *Zivilisation* of the Western world.”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. Ibid., p. 54: This was preceded by the counter-propaganda which was circulated by the SED against the Federal Republic, opposing the true, German *Kultur* to the western(ized) *Kulturbarbarei*. The respective allies, the Anglo-Americans on the one hand and the Soviets on the other, while both had committed atrocities in the effort to win the war, they were painted in the light that was most useful to the interest of the different mythologies of the two German states. Therefore, in the East, the *Amis* [...] were painted as “fundamentally destructive”, “the very embodiment of *Unkultur*”, where the Soviet Union became the “defender and restorer of *Kultur*”.

well as to the monitoring of their colleagues, should they to adhere to the established guidelines. Evidently, the SED regarded literature and art as having equal importance to political action for what concerned the rise of a socialist society in Eastern Germany. This justified the need for censorship, control and absolute adherence to reality (where realism as a literary genre was involved) with regard to the treatment of writers, their texts and the preference for specific literary genres and themes. This decision-making was once again inspired by the model of the Soviet Union. As Cheryl Dueck writes in the book *Rifts in Time and in the Self*:

The concept of socialist realism was initially conceived within the Soviet context under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, who prescribed for the socialist writer the role of 'engineer of the human soul'. At the All Union Conference of Soviet Writers in 1934, Stalin's minister of culture, Andrei Zhdanov, was the first to advocate the exploitation of the method of socialist realism for political purposes, and established the following definition:

Socialist realism...demands of the artist a truthful, historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Faithfulness to truth and historical concreteness of artistic portrayal must involve the tasks of ideological reorganization and education of the workers in the spirit of socialism.¹⁴⁹

This ideology was employed in all its parts and helped in the constitution of the GDR myth, consequently propelling the literary wave in which writers were expected to uphold these standards. The strict control exerted by the SED should have resulted in an extremely homogenous literary production, yet this was far from the truth. What is instead true is the fact that in the early years of the GDR, literary production had to be focused on the *Aufbauliteratur*, on *Betriebsromane*, and other novels depicting people working in different industries, given that

The function mechanically assigned to literature is that of mirroring reality, so that it reflects the complex functioning of social mechanisms, in order to employ and favour further developments; for this reason, the adoption of social realism as an alternative to formalism is mandatory. [...]

¹⁴⁹ C. Dueck, *Rifts in Time and in the Self: The Female Subjects in Two Generations of East German Women Writers*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi 2004, p. 19.

The realist method's objective [...] was to eliminate literary tendencies which differed a lot from one another, such as naturalism, modernism and existentialism [...]"¹⁵⁰

Ultimately, the intent expressed by the SED was that of "uniting the ethos of work to the aesthetic dimension":

Reaching the domain of freedom, where it would have been possible to freely consume art, would have also meant overcoming the in-between phase, with the end of the proletarian dictatorship and the definitive destruction of the bourgeoisie. Uniting theory and praxis [...] would have been possible through the propelling, project-driven force of literature, imbued with marxist humanism, which does not stop at the 'finished product', nor lets itself be caged into the bureaucracy and norms of the party. However, the marxist utopia was essentially censored in the GDR.¹⁵¹

In other words, the controlling instances employed within the *Schriftstellerverband* and within other cultural institutions were justified as a form of necessary evil, to be tolerated until the time was ripe for them to be dismissed. Conversely, the ideal of a literature created by writers who focus on the daily activities of workers, describing the work process and the relationships between the workers is what was being pursued in the name of realism:

[...] Characteristics of a socialist realist work of fiction have been delineated, in an albeit simplified form, by George Buehler as follows: The work must be an objective reflection of reality, show partiality to socialism, possess a national orientation, portray 'typical' characters and situations, and focus on a positive hero [...]. The concept of socialist realism did, in

¹⁵⁰M. Sisto (ed.), *L'invenzione del futuro*, Milano, Libri Scheiwiller 2009: "La funzione meccanicamente assegnata alla letteratura è quella di rispecchiare una realtà da far conoscere, nei suoi meccanismi complessivi, alle componenti sociali per esercitare tramite vicende esemplari un'ulteriore azione di stimolo e di sviluppo; questo impone l'adozione del realismo socialista come alternativa al formalismo. [...] Il metodo realista [...] mirava a colpire sotto l'etichetta di formalismo tendenze e orientamenti letterari fra loro assai diversi, dal naturalismo al modernismo e all'esistenzialismo [...]"

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 42: "il raggiungimento del regno della libertà, nel quale poter godere pienamente delle espressioni artistiche, avrebbe significato il superamento della fase intermedia della dittatura del proletariato e l'abbattimento definitivo delle residuali strutture dello stato borghese. L'unità di teoria e prassi [...] avrebbe dovuto fondarsi sulla forza propulsiva e progettuale di una letteratura animata da un umanesimo marxista che non si ferma al 'prodotto finito' né si lascia imbrigliare dalla precettistica burocratica del partito. Ma nella DDR l'utopia marxiana viene sostanzialmente censurata".

fact, change and develop over time, and was influenced in the GDR not only by the Soviets, but also by two other conceptual directions: that of Lukàcs, and that of the more modernist socialists, represented by Bertolt Brecht and Anna Seghers".¹⁵²

The inherent contradictions in representing society through these means, and in bending art to the politics of the Party, are immediately evident, and have prompted the writers themselves to discuss this process as a complex phenomenon.¹⁵³ It is interesting to note that, as realist, objective representations of reality were the means through which the government imposed its worldview on society,¹⁵⁴ dissenting visions were expressed through the rewritings of myth.

In some cases, these rewritings of myth have focused on representing the dangers of pursuing the unknown, at the expense of collective societal development.¹⁵⁵ In other cases, what the writers of the GDR have sought to express through myth is the utopistic desire for a new beginning, thus simultaneously complying to and straying away from the literary standards set by institutions such as the *Schriftstellerverband*. However, according to Fabrizio Cambi, it has been "the hermeneutic dramaturgy of myth" which can be conceived as "one of the most fertile contributions in GDR culture",¹⁵⁶ and where the seeds of dissent seem to have flourished. The positive hero of socialist realism was substituted by more morally flexible and generally more dynamic characters, such as the characters of Ancient Greek mythology. Among those that were chosen to represent a different kind of 'hero' in GDR literature, possibly expressing

¹⁵² Dueck, *Rifts in Time and in the Self*, *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁴ Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, *ibid.*, p. 51: "Among the writers who offered their services in this way were Friedrich Wolf, Johannes R. Becher, Gustav von Wangenheim, Bodo Uhse, Hedda Zinner, Bertolt Brecht [...] Anna Seghers, and many others. In early 1949 the SED put its cultural policy into the service of its first two year plan, and the Party's Department of Propaganda, *Kultur*, and Education issued detailed guidelines to SBZ writers urging them to place the plan and German workers at the center of their creative work. They were to go into the factories, talk to the workers, and read their works there".

¹⁵⁵ Sisto, *L' invenzione del futuro*, *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76: "La dramaturgia ermeneutica del mito è stata uno dei contributi più fecondi nella cultura della DDR, che in questo campo ha prodotto opere eccentriche alle sue coordinate ufficiali, riassorbendone e neutralizzandone tuttavia la portata innovativa e propositiva. Se la presunta astoricità del mito, la sua tradizione fantasiosa e antirealistica proiettabile in una dimensione universalizzante non si inseriscono linearmente nei canoni del realismo, ma possono essere accolti nel bacino dell' eredità culturale, funzionale alla politica culturale della DDR, più problematica risulta la messa a fuoco della loro declinazione nel presente fatta di trasversalità e di trasposizioni comparative. L' evoluzione della ricezione e della rielaborazione del mito nella letteratura della DDR può essere ricostruita anche sulla base di alcune figure mitologiche paradigmatiche nella tradizione che dalla tragedia classica giunge alla modernità. Una di queste è Ulisse."

diverging ideals, the character of Ulysses was one of the most noteworthy examples, as he conveyed “the theme of the survivor and his problematic re-integration in society”.¹⁵⁷ Rewriting myth seemingly was a very efficient way of “upsetting the socialist mythology”. This approach was employed not only Wolf, but also by other writers before her, such as Heiner Müller with his reinterpretation of Medea’s myth.¹⁵⁸ Müller, for instance, explicitly stated that employing settings such as the war of Troy in his writings was a decision aimed at asking those questions which would not and could not have been asked otherwise. At this point in time, it became clear that this was one of the means through which censorship could be circumvented. Myth-rewriting offered the chance to condemn the “stagnation” of Stalinist ideology at a time in which it was absolutely forbidden to do so.¹⁵⁹ This perspective is also evoked in Stefan Schütz’s *Odysseus Heimkehr* (1977) where the anachronistic structures of the GDR are mirrored in a decaying Ithaca.

Having established that myth has provided the means for criticising the GDR well before Wolf’s rewriting of Cassandra and Medea, it remains to be discussed where her novels fit in this context, and if the dichotomy of “genuine” versus “technicised” myth can be applied to her works.

Prior to the writing of Cassandra, Wolf had entertained the idea of going in a different direction with her rewriting of myth. There are several instances in which she expressed her stance on these matters. One of these instances is her correspondence between the years 1968-1984 with another prominent writer of the GDR, Franz Fühmann, who was also invested in the rewriting of Greek mythology and who even wrote an insightful essay exploring his own theories in regard to myth, in relation to its impact in GDR society. In his perspective:

Myth enacts contradiction, whereas fables eliminate it. Therefore, we need to accept that in this respect myth mirrors life. [...] We want to think of a kind of literature which presents a world without internal contradictions, a world where good and evil, right and wrong, noxious and beneficial are clearly distributed in opposite pairs; however this does not mean that we will need to use characters such as cobolds or witches, tom thumbs or

¹⁵⁷ H. J. Haecker, *Der Tod des Odysseus*, Hamburg, Strom, 1947.

¹⁵⁸ Sisto, *L’invenzione del futuro*, *ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

cannibals, nor kings, princes or poor coalmen, only familiar characters: [...] Then it would only be fair to ask, what is closer to life: is it myth, with its fantastical creatures which represent contradiction, or is it the world without contradiction of workers, belonging to different social classes? Without hesitation, I would answer: myth.¹⁶⁰

This quotation, through which the author essentially criticises the ideological impositions on literature, is emblematic of the writers who recognise the subversive potential of myth. Christa Wolf, in particular, takes further steps towards the liberation of myth, and especially of its female characters, from the constraints of ideology and politics, but most of all from the constraints of myth itself.¹⁶¹ In addressing this subject, Wolf and Fühmann show their adjacent, albeit ultimately differing perspectives in a letter exchange, which predates the publication of *Kassandra*. At this time, Wolf is conducting her research, not only on the character, but also on the historical and anthropological background relating to the story. As a writer who had personally and successfully delved into the topics of myth himself, Fühmann shows his enthusiasm and interest for Wolf's upcoming novel, and is an ideal interlocutor. To her he writes:

¹⁶⁰ F. Fühmann, *L'elemento mitico nella letteratura*, in *Franz Fühmann interprete di ETA Hoffmann*, Pasian di Prato, Campanotto, 2013, p. 146: "Il mito mette in scena la contraddizione, mentre la fiaba la elimina. In questo aspetto, dunque, che dobbiamo riconoscere come essenziale, il mito coincide con la vita. [...] Vogliamo pensare a una letteratura che presenti un mondo privo di contraddizioni interne, un mondo in cui bene e male, giusto e sbagliato, nocivo e utile fossero nitidamente distribuiti in coppie oppostive, ma non ricorremo per questo a figure di coboldi e streghe, pollicini e mangiatori d'uomini, e nemmeno a re, principi e poveri carbonai, ma soltanto a figure che ci sono familiari: [...] e sarebbe allora lecito chiedersi cosa risulti più vicino alla vita: il mito, che con le sue creature fantastiche rispecchia le contraddizioni, o il mondo senza contraddizioni delle professioni dei ceti reali? Io direi, senza esitazioni, il mito".

¹⁶¹ This is a process that had already started with the writings that preceded her myth-rewritings. As Anna K. Kuhn points out in her article titled *The Gendered Reception of Christa Wolf* in Sonja E. Klocke, Jennifer R. Hosek (eds.) *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, Berlin, De Gruyter 2018, pp. 68-69: "When Wolf received the GDR's Heinrich Mann Prize for *Der geteilte Himmel* in 1963, it cemented her position as an East German writer, while broadening the parameters of what was acceptable in GDR literature. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* [also] marks a radical break with socialist realism, heralding the breakthrough to Christa Wolf's aesthetics of 'subjective authenticity' – the interjection of a subjective authorial voice into her narrative – that would become the hallmark of her writing. [...] By centering her narrative on a nonconformist figure – who, measure by the standards of society, is a failure – Wolf flies in the face of socialist realism's demand for exemplary heroic characters. In the figure of Christa T., Wolf presents readers with a committed socialist who, like Wolf herself, is unable to reconcile her humanistic vision of socialism as the coming-into-being of the fully rounded individual within the socialist collective – with the technocratic, instrumentalist society that characterized the GDR of the 1950 and 1960s". However, "To read Wolf as a dissident is to misunderstand her complex relationship to socialism and the GDR state. Wolf embraced socialism following the collapse of the Third Reich, viewing it as the only viable alternative to capitalism, which she, following the communist ideology, linked to fascism. While she became increasingly disenchanted with and critical of the actual existing socialism of the GDR, she viewed her criticism of the state as inducement to reform".

Christa, since you are delving into mythology, you will surely meet prince Hippolytus, who had consecrated his life to Artemis, the terrifying virgin, the huntress, and who had consequently renounced his service to Aphrodite, who then rages, and how she rages!, old Euripides has described it; alas, in the end when Hippolytus is about to die, he calls for the goddess Artemis, [...] to show herself.¹⁶²

Fühmann, then, follows this thought by saying that Artemis was so heartless as to express disgust towards this human, who had renounced Aphrodite to serve her. As for Wolf she is, in fact, well acquainted with the traditional depictions of characters such as Artemis, the “schreckliche Jungfrau”, the “Jägerin”, and of her supposed cruelty towards the devoted prince Hippolytus. And to Fühmann she replies:

Artemis, the huntress, is only a ‘terrifying virgin’ in the interpretation of men, for example in Euripides. At the time of the goddesses, she was only another incarnation of Aphrodite, and the two of them hardly antagonised each other, and certainly not for a man, not even Hyppolitus. And if the goddess is not forced, but rightfully invoked and prayed to, be it in the hour of death or the hour of writing, she answers the prayers, quick on her feet and with favourable disposition, and what she says is [...] Well, old man, do you still not know better? [...].¹⁶³

Even prior to the publication of *Cassandra*, it is evident how Wolf was already rethinking the patriarchal structures of myth. She points out the wilful ‘misunderstandings’ of Euripides in regards to the characters of Artemis and Aphrodite, as she later does with *Medea*, and the age old practice of pitting women, Goddesses in this case, against one another, with the intention of singling out two

¹⁶² C. Wolf, F. Fühmann, *Monsieur wir finden uns wieder. Briefe 1968-1984*, Berlin, Aufbau, 1995, p. 127: “Christa, wenn Du in die Mythologie sinkst, dann begegnest du sicher dem Prinzen Hyppolitos, der hat sein Leben der Artemis geweiht, dieser schrecklichen Jungfrau, der Jägerin, und hat darüber Aphrodite zu dienen versäumt, und die rächt sich nun, und wie sie sich rächt, das schildert olle Euripides, jedenfalls liegt am Schluß Hyppolitos im Sterben, und nun hat er nur einen Wunsch: Die, der er sein Leben geweiht, seine Göttin, Artemis, die leichtfüßige Schweiferin, möge ihm in der Sterbestunde sich zeigen [...]”.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 130: “Die Artemis, die Jägerin, ist doch nur in der männlichen Ausdeutung, zum Beispiel der des Euripides, eine “schreckliche Jungfrau”, ursprünglich, d.h. zur Zeit der Göttinnen, war sie nur ein anderer Aspekt der Aphrodite, und die beiden lagen nicht miteinander in unstillbarem Streit, schon gar nicht um einen Mann, und sei es Hyppolitos. Und wenn die Göttin nicht herbeigezwungen, sondern auf die rechte Weise herbeigeseht und -gewünscht wird, und sei es in der Sterbe- oder Schreibstunde, dann kommt sie ganz selbstverständlich, leichtfüßig und wohlgesonnen, und was sie sagt, ist [...] Na,Alter, immer noch nicht klüger geworden? Und dann lächelt sie auf ihre unnachahmliche Weise, und was sie denkt ist: Männer![...]”.

different female archetypes, which cannot exist in symbiosis.¹⁶⁴ Instead, Christa Wolf points out how “originally” the two were considered to be essentially two sides of the same coin. In the *Premises*, Christa Wolf considers how this representation is also present in Goethe’s *Faust*:

Goethe was perfectly aware of the threefold nature of the ancient mother goddesses (the original trinity, from which all the others were derived), in which the number ‘three’ was even, since there was only one goddess for each of the three planes of the world, who manifested herself in three different forms: the young huntress, the bright and graceful (Artemis), the goddess of women, the bearer of fertility, the ruler of earth and sea, the erotic deity (Demeter, Aphrodite, Era [...]); and finally, the venerable old woman who lives in the underworld, the goddess of death who also engenders rebirth [...].¹⁶⁵

This threefold perspective had already been lost a long time before it could have appeared in German literature. This loss has resulted in the perpetual sacrifice of the female goddesses at the altar of the male god.

Therefore, even though the premises of the reflections on myth are similar, the focus has changed, and it is now even more multilayered. As opposed to Ulysses, who even at his most “subversive”, still conforms to the standards set by tradition, both Cassandra and Medea present a new model for understanding and deconstructing society through myth. The political implications of this are not lost on Wolf, on the contrary:

¹⁶⁴ C. Wolf, P. Kamman, *Warum Medea? – Gespräch*, in Marianne Hochgeschurz (ed.), *Christa Wolfs Medea. Voraussetzungen zu einem Text. Mythos und Bild*, Berlin, Gerhard Wolf Janus Press 1998, pp. 50-51: “[...] In den Überlieferungen heißt es meist, Medea haßt Glauke aus Eifersucht und schenkt ihr dieses giftgetränkte Kleid, das ihr auf der Haut brennt, als sie es anzieht, und das sie tötet. Auch das habe ich umgedeutet. In annähernd matriarchalen Beziehungen zwischen Frauen gibt es keine Eifersucht wegen eines Mannes. Medea gibt Glauke das Kleid großzügig, geradezu schwesterlich, ohne böse Absicht. Gerade das erträgt Glauke nicht. Die Werte, die Korinth ihr aufgedrückt hat, treiben sie in den Tod.”

¹⁶⁵ Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung*, *ibid.*, p. 181: “Goethe wußte von der Dreigestaltigkeit der alten Muttergöttinnen (der ersten Dreifaltigkeit überhaupt, von der alle späteren abgeleitet sind), in der “drei” “gleich” war, indem die eine Göttin, entsprechen der Dreistöckigkeit der Welt, in drei Erscheinungen auftrat: als helles, jugendliches, jagendes Mädchen der Lüfte (Artemis), als die Frauengöttin in der Mitte, Fruchtbarkeit spendend, über Land und Meer herrschend, eine erotische Gottheit (Demeter, Aphrodite, Hera [...]); und schließlich als Greisin, die in der Unterwelt wohnt, die Todesgöttin, die zugleich Wiedergeburt bewirkt [...].”

[...] there was often the claim that for GDR authors myth constituted a possibility to evade censorship. Many authors of the GDR have dealt with myth [...] I am quite convinced that this is only partially the truth. People assumed that through these obscure ancient characters we could express what we otherwise could not. [...] However, the main issue was a different one. [...] Since these were patriarchal societies, very similar to ours hierarchically, we can see ourselves in those human beings, and the fascinating thing is that we can change these models [...].¹⁶⁶

Interestingly, the perspective on female characters and qualities generally attributed to them becomes a key concept in Jesi's theory surrounding myth, especially when it comes to the dichotomy of "genuine myth" and "technicized myth". According to Jesi, this has been especially evident in the 20th century, for what concerns the developments in German culture and literature. The dualism of Artemis-Aphrodite (which Fühmann too considers as two separate characters, whereas Wolf reconstitutes them to two different interpretations of the same character, split into two opposing forces for the sake of the dominant narrative) is to be found first and foremost in the dualism of Kore- Persephone. In this dichotomy Kore, suffers at the hands of the "technicizer", whose gaze "deforms the woman's image".¹⁶⁷ Jesi shows how the clash between these two characters, or these two sides of the same character, represents the crisis of culture starting at the beginning of the 20th century in Germany. The difficulty with reconciling both aspects of a (female) character is where the seed of disruption first emerges in several works of literature, which mirror this contrast between genuine and technicized myth in society. According to Jesi, the female images born out of 20th century culture are monstrous, as they "represent a negation of life and humanity".¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Schiavoni, *Prospettive su Christa Wolf*, *ibid.*, pp. 72-73: "Sì, si è spesso affermato che per gli autori della DDR il mito costituiva una possibilità per eludere la censura. Molti autori della DDR si sono occupati del mito [...] Io sono convinta che solo in minima parte ciò fosse un espediente per sfuggire alla censura. Si è pensato che attraverso questi ignoti personaggi antichi riuscissimo a esprimere ciò che altrimenti non avremmo potuto. [...] Ma la cosa principale è sostanzialmente un'altra. [...] Dal momento che si trattava di società patriarcali e gerarchiche simili alle nostre, in quegli esseri umani è possibile individuare tratti di noi stessi, e la cosa affascinante è quella di variare quei modelli [...]"

¹⁶⁷ Jesi, *Germania segreta*, *ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁶⁸ Jesi, *Germania segreta*, *ibid.*, p. 127: "Il demonismo e la deformazione orrida del mito sono sempre negazioni della vita e dell'umanità. Tali negazioni dominano la maggior parte della cultura tedesca degli inizi del nostro secolo: le immagini femminili che nascono dall'humus di quella cultura sono fiori mostruosi e demoniaci come le fanciulle-fiore del Parsifal o le donne-serpente di cui resta l'immagine nelle arti figurative [...]"

This “negation of life and humanity” is what Wolf herself describes as a “pathological condition of modern society”, using the term necrophilia:

It is possible to set such a thing as ‘the living word’ against the contemporary necrophilia, which manifests itself in steel, glass and concrete [...]? This word would have to be subversive, carefree, ‘im-pressive’, in the literal sense of the word, and it may not ask whether it achieves its ‘aim’ – indeed, it must not even have an ‘aim’.¹⁶⁹

To Christa Wolf, this disruption is, as we have seen, already present in ancient Greece, where the seeds of contemporary society are to be found. Her rewriting of myth aims to reconcile the female characters who have been split into two, thereby destroying the patriarchal model of GDR society, with all its political and cultural specificities, and even redefining the dichotomy of “genuine” vs. “technicised” myth, as the “genuine” is to be located even farther away from what is normally accepted as the ‘canon’. Who was Cassandra, before she became a character in a story? And what has become of Medea, after Euripides was done with her? These are the questions that start the process of rewriting for Christa Wolf. It is through a new representation of subjectivity, specifically female subjectivity, that the author highlights the crisis of the social and cultural models of the GDR. The 1980s seem to have been a turning point in this respect:

The social, cultural, and political conditions of the 1980s in the GDR have been generally characterized as bleak and, in retrospect, signs of rapid deterioration and decline were prevalent. Before the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* policy, which he introduced as soon as he became General Secretary of the Central Committee in the Soviet Union, there was little hope for reform in Eastern bloc countries, and global politics couched mounting East-West aggression in the rhetoric of the detente.¹⁷⁰

“The emancipation of the sexes”, which was one of the most important micro-myths of the GDR state, revealed itself to be nothing more than a fluke. As GDR sociologist Irene Dölling points out that:

¹⁶⁹ Dueck, *Rifts in Time and in the Self*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[...] the social politics were carried out by 'Father State', and that rhetoric revolved around the 'solution to the woman question' rather than the 'emancipation of the sexes'. Through the emphasis of the public sphere at the expense of the private sphere, images of model women were formed which hindered true emancipation.

Policy and concrete models were...patriarchally structured, since women's role in them was always just functional, in relation to something else, something higher: they were co-creators of socialism, workers, child-bearers. Autonomous claims as women – independent of functional demands -, subjectivity, self-realization and the right to choose between possible lifestyles were not part of this picture. 'Our Mommies' should 'work like a man', and otherwise remain 'proper women'. [...].¹⁷¹

If Ulysses, even at his most subversive, could still be considered adherent to the characteristic of the prototypical hero, the same cannot be said for Cassandra and Medea. They are part of a process whose objective is to demolish these prototypical, stereotypical narrative structures, and via this process they also reveal the incongruities of the micro-myths of the GDR. Among these is the myth of the socialist hero, the traditional protagonist of literary works in the socialist state, which also leads to the destruction of the micro-myth of antifascism, culminating in the (temporary) abolishment of the patriarchal myths at the basis of society. Reconciling the female characters, who have been split into two, means revealing the contradictions of the reality they inhabit, and the multiple subjectivities they contain. A revolution is brought about in system of the Euripidean tragedy, which according to Rita Calabrese "determines the transition to a patriarchal order", followed "the establishment of the new olympic deities, who substitute the Great Goddess in her unity", and the subsequent "interruption of the female genealogy, violently overpowered by the patriarchal order [...], which separated thought from body, being from appearance, creating this new dichotomy which became the philosophical system of all systems, and the 'destiny' of the West".¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Dueck, *Rifts in Time and in the Self*, p. 27.

¹⁷² R. Calabrese, *Dal silenzio alla parola. Il lungo viaggio di Medea nella cultura (soprattutto tedesca)*, in G. Schiavoni (ed.) *Prospettive su Christa Wolf. Dalle sponde del mito*, p. 105: "La tragedia sancisce il passaggio all'ordine patriarcale, l'instaurarsi della pluralità delle divinità olimpiche subentrate alla totalità della Grande Dea, quella 'interruzione della genealogia femminile violentemente sopraffatta dall'ordine patriarcale, ossia proprio quell'ordine [...] che ha separato il pensiero dal corpo, l'essere

Wolf's Cassandra and Medea reshape this "destiny", they go back to the very roots of the problem. The language of the patriarchy, the language of the GDR and of Western Germany alike, is the language which produces the dichotomies of subjectivity vs. objectivity, of individuality vs. collectivity, it reduces the world to one single, dominant perspective. It is Apollo's silencing curse which reigns over the world at large. A curse which shouldn't have survived to this day, and yet somehow it did.

In an interview with Petra Kamman, Wolf explains that to her Cassandra and Medea do not belong to the "Antike", rather to the "Vorgeschichte", to "Mythologie".¹⁷³ This is what makes them characters of the present, as well as of the past. Through them it is possible to recognize the affinities between ancient and modern societies, possibly finding the key to understanding the present.¹⁷⁴ In this context, Medea is described by Wolf as "eine Gestalt aus der Zeitengrenze",¹⁷⁵ a character who transcends the limits of time, not only because the patriarchal system is still in place, but also because the reception of this myth is shaped by it.

This is also the reason why Wolf's insistence on the "historical" Cassandra and Medea serves the purpose of highlighting the inconsequentiality of talking about the "original" Cassandra and Medea, but does not extend any kind of authority in itself. The questions on originality must be asked only with the purpose of being deconstructed. What we are interested in is what Wolf herself is interested in, which is uncovering the different layers making up these characters. The process of mythopoeia itself is made out of these layers. Wolf asks herself:

dall'apparire, facendo di questa dicotomia il sistema filosofico di tutti i sistemi e il 'destino' dell'Occidente".

¹⁷³ Hochgeschurz, *Christa Wolfs Medea. Voraussetzungen zu einem Text*, *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*: "Kassandra und Medea sind ja eigentlich keine Figuren aus der Antike, sondern aus der Vorgeschichte, aus der Mythologie. Manchmal kann man an solchen scheinbar weitzurückliegenden Figuren die zeitgenössischen Probleme besonders deutlich herausfiltern, gerade weil es ein prähistorisches Feld ist, auf das ich mich begeben – allerdings schon mit patriarchalisch und hierarchisch strukturierten Gesellschaftsgruppen. Da wird erkennbar, daß das Grundverhalten der Menschen in ähnlichen Situationen schon dem unseren ähnlich oder gleich war. Insofern kann ich diese frühen Gesellschaften als Modell verwenden – wie es ja übrigens sehr oft in der deutschen Literatur geschah. Und genau das reizt mich."

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.50: „Sie [Medea] ist eine Gestalt auf einer Zeitengrenze. Ich habe mir erlaubt, auf sie [...] zusammenzuziehen - [...] der Übergang von matriarchalisch dominierten Strukturen zum voll ausgebildeten Patriarchat. Ich habe Kolchis als einen Stadtstaat genommen, in dem noch matriarchale Verhältnisse erinnert werden, während Korinth schon durchpatriarchalisiert ist."

[...] What is truly hidden behind the story of Medea, daughter to the King of Kolchis, and of Jason of the Argonauts? How many different layers of reception have come together to shape it? And above all: what systems of values, which are fundamentally different, clash in this story, and in what way is Medea's story proof of the fact that the values of those in power are never able to understand the ways of living, the objectives and the ideals, the religious beliefs of those who are subjected to them, let alone recognizing them as values. As we can see, these are all extremely relevant questions for us today.¹⁷⁶

Both myth and translation have to deal with the "myth of origin". As a matter of fact, the question of origin and the question of authorship are very closely related, even when it comes to narrations which have been repurposed and rethought many times already. The fact that myth is able to travel from one context to a different one, to reinvent itself, to constantly adapt and change form to suit a new perspective, does not imply that it is safe from scrutiny when it comes to the perception of what is considered to be canon. We had already anticipated this matter in the first chapter of the dissertation, when we talked about the peculiarities of myth and the theoretical approaches surrounding its dissemination. We now bring this essential matter of both myth and translation in the framework of the travelling concepts theory, but also in the realm of other related theories of translation, which can help us gain an understanding of how Cassandra and Medea have actually been translated, first by Wolf, and later re-translated by different authors translating Wolf. Why does authorship matter so much when it comes to both myth and translation? How does it affect the reception of both? How has it influenced Christa Wolf's rewriting of these characters? These are all questions which we will try to answer in the upcoming part of this research.

¹⁷⁶ Hochgeschurz, *Christa Wolf Medea: Voraussetzungen zu einem Text*, *ibid.*, p. 23: "[...] Was steckt denn nun wirklich in der Geschichte der Medea, Königstochter aus Kolchis, und dem Argonauten Jason? Welche verschieden alten Schichten von Überlieferung sind in ihr zusammengekommen? Und vor allem: Welche grundlegend verschiedenen Wertesysteme stoßen aufeinander, und inwiefern legt die Medea-Geschichte Zeugnis davon ab, dass die Vertreter der 'höheren' will heißen: siegreichen Werte niemals bereit und in der Lage sind, die Lebensweise, die Ziele und Ideale, die Glaubensvorstellungen der unterlegenen Gruppe, sozialen Schicht, der besiegten Bevölkerung zu begreifen, ja: auch nur zu sehen, geschweige sie als Werte anzuerkennen? Sie sehen, alles höchst aktuelle Fragen".

3. Cassandra and Medea: from Prototypes to Translated Women

Recovering Cassandra and Medea's characters and stories is inherently an act that, similar to 'translation proper', "subverts, rewrites and questions hegemonic definitions of authorship, as well as [it] [...] disrupt[s] and dismantl[es] intersecting regimes of power".¹⁷⁷ This paradigm, which has proven to be particularly relevant in feminist translation studies, also becomes productive on two other levels: on a first level, Wolf's 'translation' of these characters into the German language and culture, as well as under the scrutiny of the GDR and the Western sphere of the world, and, second, a paradigm that can also be applied to the translations of these texts into different cultures.

Wolf does something to myth that is akin to what feminist translation does, namely "recovering female characters lost in patriarchy".¹⁷⁸ Her re-authoring of the stories of Cassandra and Medea is not only a translation of the classical myth for the German audience, resulting in the transfer of them into German culture, but also a reshaping of the power dynamics in myth-making and storytelling, where both have been imbued with patriarchal modes of structuring reality. One of the purposes of translation in its broadest sense entails rethinking authorial hegemony over myth. In fact, the problem when seeking to understand myth within modern parameters is the ever-present

¹⁷⁷ L. von Flotow, *Translation and Gender. Translating in the Era of Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

obstacle of the rewriting of myth. Moreover, an aspect of this specific storytelling with a problematic nature evident to Wolf is that “modern society does not live with the religious background of mythology anymore”, whereas in ancient times “life was defined by myth. Therefore, each rewriting of a mythological tale meant rethinking existence”.¹⁷⁹ Therein lies the distinctive quality of Wolf’s work, as opposed to other rewritings. In the process of myth-making, Christa Wolf “acts as freely as an ancient Greek author would have done”. Indeed, she acts as freely as Euripides, who added Medea’s murder of her children to the original myth, except Wolf asserts the right to go in the opposite direction: not that of (only) inventing but of mostly unearthing what has long been forgotten. This process of myth (re)writing, of translating and transplanting a myth into a new context, is very close to Homi K. Bhabha’s questioning of the correspondence between “original” and “anterior” with “superior”. Cassandra and Medea, the translated women, are therefore no less “original” than their ancient counterparts. On the contrary, Wolf goes to great lengths to show that what we consider to be the original is only the product of several layers of interpretation. As such, each iteration of the myths is only one of several possibilities (read: translations) available synchronically and diachronically.¹⁸⁰ If this was not the case, we would be unable to talk about the migration of concepts, characters, narrations and texts in the way that we do. This is the necessary premise for understanding how Wolf operates as an author and as a creator of myth.

While we have discussed the eternalising quality of myth, including through its relationship with translation, carving places for Cassandra and Medea in modern times is not an easy task. As we previously discussed Cassandra and Medea being “translated women”, it is fundamental that we understand what that entails, before truly delving into analysing the concepts that have travelled from their ‘original’ context to a different

¹⁷⁹ M. Camps-Gaset, *Von Cassandra zu Medea: Christa Wolf*, in Jordi Jané, Marisa Siguan (Eds.), *Was bleibt? Christa Wolf y los temas literarios de la reunificación alemana*, p. 62: “Der große Unterschied liegt für uns darin, dass die moderne Gesellschaft nicht mehr mit dem religiösen Hintergrund der alten Mythologie lebt. Für unsere Gegenwart ist der griechische Mythos ein fremder Stoff. Er gehört zum Besitz einer kultivierten intellektuellen Minderheit, die den Unterschied mit den alten Quellen nachzuforschen versteht. Für die Antike war der Mythos dagegen lebensbedeutend. Aus diesem Grund war jede Bearbeitung einer mythischen Erzählung ein Nachdenken über die Existenz selbst. Unserer Meinung nach agiert Wolf insofern genau so frei, wie eine altgriechische Autorin es getan hätte.”

¹⁸⁰ In the first chapter of this dissertation, we have seen how Lévi-Strauss’ theory deals with the coexistence between different iterations of the same myth function in a systematic structure.

one. We previously described both Cassandra and Medea as characters “recovered from patriarchy”¹⁸¹, a definition derived from Rushdie’s explanation of what it means to be “translated men” in his famous *Imaginary Homelands*.¹⁸²

When it comes to Cassandra, the character Wolf carves in her modern reinterpretation does not exist prior to being ‘translated’ on the author’s own terms. The fixed image she is carved from mostly belongs to Aeschylus’ version of the myth. In his *Agamemnon*, Cassandra is a secondary character, who is made to represent a specific kind of madness. According to Seth L. Schein:

Cassandra is [...] a ‘prophet’ possessed by Apollo, with a kind of ‘second sight’ that enables her literally to ‘see’ both past and future as well as present events as if they were all happening in the present. [...] What is different about Cassandra is that she is not interpreting bird-signs but actually seeing and emotionally responding to exceptionally gruesome and vividly-described events, including her own murder. In thus witnessing her own death, she transcends a boundary of experience which was, for the Greeks, one of the defining limits of human condition. [...] all the pain and horror of this transcendence [is] what we might call Cassandra’s ceasing to be human.¹⁸³

The references to Cassandra being able to experience multiple time dimensions simultaneously and to her transcending the limits of the human condition are aspects that we also find in Wolf’s Cassandra; however, the impression that we have of her is different. Wolf does not want her audience to perceive Cassandra as any less human due to her abilities. The overlapping of timelines is not so much to be perceived as a ‘superpower’ as it is to be interpreted as the foresight of those who are not blinded by propaganda and can see things for what they are. Christa Wolf’s Cassandra does not present herself as being above everyone else, or different in a

¹⁸¹ L. von Flotow, *Translation and Gender. Translating in the Era of Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 1.

¹⁸² S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981 – 1991*, London, Granta Books, 1991. p. 17: “[...] (The word ‘translation’ comes, etymologically, from I the Latin for ‘bearing across’. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.)”.

¹⁸³ S. L. Schein, “The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus’ ‘Agamemnon’”, in *Greece & Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 29 (1982), p. 2.

way that would leave her detached from her fellow humans.

The ‘othering’ process she undergoes, in a way that identifies the ‘other’ as the enemy, comes from the outside. It also comes from the recognition that she can, in fact, cross borders. Yet that is not allowed, as there are limits to be set and walls to be built, and she is punished for being able to see beyond these. In *Kassandra*, the key point is not that she is able to foresee doom and destruction, but rather that she is able to see the reality of things and to connect events logically. Hence, rationality might appear as madness, and madness as rationality, when censorship is used to subvert the perceptions of events. Furthermore, her ability to move between different timelines is simply a way of representing how the human memory works.

At the time of publication, both *Kassandra* and the *Voraussetzungen* caused much controversy. Wolf ended up as the centre of attention, not only for her novel, but also for political reasons. It would not be the last time she was accused of perpetuating the spreading of a specific ideology via her writing, either within the borders of the GDR or outside. At this point in the history of East Germany, however, the fact that the government intended to silence its dissident and/or non-conforming citizens, especially the artists and writers, was a secret hidden in plain sight, something everyone to witness.⁵ According to certain critics at the time, Christa Wolf only had herself to blame for her “appallingly dreadful translation” of *Cassandra*.⁶

It is not difficult to imagine that such a harsh judgment was often justified by the critics when comparing Wolf’s ideologically charged, feminist (read: hateful) rewritings to the original myths. At the same time, the existence of a long tradition of myth rewriting in Germany and, more specifically, the existence of more acceptable interpretations of both *Cassandra* and *Medea* in German literature made it so that Wolf’s bold new perspectives stood out for their ‘divergence’ from the canon. The tale and character of *Cassandra* have been adapted multiple times in German literature, which shows an interest in this figure in particular, mostly due to the potential for social and political criticism that is linked to it. In fact, one aspect of Christa Wolf’s adaptation of the character of *Cassandra*, which shares a common ground with previous adaptations of this classical myth in German literature, is the political value that is attached to the name ‘*Cassandra*’. Through this character, political narratives

could be established and criticised. This quality was first recognised by Friedrich Schiller, who sought to express criticism of the customs and the politics of his own time through the character of Cassandra. From that point onwards, the figure of Cassandra appeared quite regularly in German literature, serving as a reminder of impending doom or of the need for change.¹⁸⁴ The adaptations of the 18th and the 19th centuries were also especially influential in creating a model for this character, an effective, stable mould that remained as the basis for repurposing and reimagining her character in the following century. The various reinterpretations of Cassandra that were produced during this period of time were influenced by one another and mixed together different conceptualisations of the character, entangling the elements from ancient times and a more contemporary framing, making difficult to distinguish between the ‘original’ myth and the elements that were only introduced in the modern narratives.¹⁸⁵

After Schiller, other writers took interest in the myth of Cassandra and proposed their own versions of her tale. Heinrich Joseph von Collin was among these writers, reimagining the classical character in his drama *Polyxena* (1802). In this adaptation, which is notably influenced by Schiller, Collin brings to the fore another, often overlooked or sidelined, female character of classic mythology: the character of Polyxena, Cassandra’s sister.¹⁸⁶ While Cassandra is a secondary character in this rewriting, Collin still focuses on her, and his conception of the character provides some

¹⁸⁴ T. Epple, *Der Aufstieg der Untergangsseherin Cassandra: zum Wandel ihrer Interpretation vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann 1993 p. 78: „Über diese indirekte historische Bedingtheit von Kassandras allmählichem Eintreten in das neuzeitliche Bewußtsein hinaus zeigt sich die Geschichtlichkeit ihrer jeweiligen Interpretation am Anfang ihres engeren Wiedergangs deutlich: Die ästhetische und politische Revolution im letzten Drittel des 18. Jahrhunderts führt zu einem ersten Wiedererkennen von Zeitproblemen in der Figur und eröffnet ihr ein Aktionsfeld mit ganz unterschiedlicher philosophischer Dichte. Der Beginn von Kassandras literarischer Karriere in Deutschland erscheint daher, ohne dem Klang eines großen literarischen Namens zu verfallen, vielversprechend: Stolberg und Schiller loten nach dem langen Zeitraum ihrer Randständigkeit beinahe schlagartig die Möglichkeiten des interpretatorischen Umgangs mit ihr aus: der eine die Anwendung ihres mythologischen Potential zur Bewertung der politischen Entwicklung, der andere ihre Eignung zur Versinnbildlichung einer komplexen philosophischen Problematik“.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 84: „[...] bei der Cassandra-Figur [entsteht] auch [...] ein disparates Gemisch verschiedener Interpretationsweisen. Der tief im 18. Jahrhundert verwurzelte Collin kombiniert Partien ihrer zeitgenössischen Neudeutung mit einer eher für 17. Oder 18. Jahrhundert charakteristischen Darstellung: einer Gestaltung ohne tieferes Verständnis für ihren mythologischen Kern und ihre pessimistische Grundtönung. [...] Er [Collins] macht offenkundig, wie schnell sich die Prägung der Cassandra-Figur durch Schiller ausbreitet.“

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 80: “Fast am Ende von Polyxenas Rezeptionsgeschichte verknüpft Collin die gerade durch Schiller ins Bewußtsein der Zeit gerückte Cassandra mit ihrer Schwester in einem ‚Polyxena‘ – Drama.”

contrastive elements when compared with Schiller's adaptation, showing the evolution of the understanding of her character. Schiller's Cassandra is a compassionate seer, making her more human than 'godly'; Collin's Cassandra is more mythological figure than human being, and much emphasis is placed on the fact that she has to keep herself under control.¹⁸⁷ Among the other Schillerian reinterpretations of Cassandra, August von Platen's *Kassandra* is notable, especially concerning the suffering caused by her premonitions.¹⁸⁸ His Cassandra is, in fact, a character marked by complete hopelessness and by the despair brought on by being the only one with access to a kind of forbidden knowledge. Ultimately, what emerges from a diachronic reading of these rewritings is that it is not the character herself, but rather the symbolical and metaphorical readings of her character that interested the authors. Wolf consciously distances herself from this tradition, which is much more reliant and focused on the philosophical and political matters (Schiller), or on the more melodramatic aspects of the tale (Collin, Platen). According to Thomas Epple,

Schiller greift Kassandra auf, um seiner Skepsis Ausdruck zu verleihen, daß die Vorstellungen von einer Erfüllung der Menschenseins in der Wirklichkeit nicht zu realisieren sind; Collin dagegen instrumentalisiert die Figur zur Verkündung seiner Variante einer christlich-humanen Weltanschauung, ohne den Widerspruch zu der von ihm geschilderten Wirklichkeit überhaupt zu bemerken. Platen zeigt in der Nachfolge Schillers, jedoch ohne den Anspruch der Allgemeingültigkeit, wie ihn Schiller seinem Gedicht unterlegt, ebenfalls ein Scheitern des menschlichen Bestrebens nach Liebe und Glück in der Realität.¹⁸⁹

At the time when Wolf was writing, Schiller's *Cassandra* was certainly the most recognisable version of the character in German literature, and it is the counter model that Christa Wolf references in *Voraussetzungen*. What is most prominent in the Schillerian understanding of myth rewriting, is that Cassandra does not have to be

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 84: "Hält die Kassandra Schillers an sich, um das Glück der anderen Menschen nicht durch ihr Wissen zu zerstören, so wird der Figur Collins ganz anderes zum Problem: Sie muß sich beherrschen, nicht zu viel Trost und Zuversicht zu spenden [...]."

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 86: "Die Charakteristik Cassandra übernimmt Platen von Schiller; auch seine Kassandra ist eine Figur der völligen Hoffnungslosigkeit. Die Qual des Wissens wird auch bei ihm stark betont, die Diskussion um das Gegenbild, die anthropologische Notwendigkeit des Scheins, aber nicht weitergeführt."

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

represented as a living person; on the contrary, she is a vessel for “the expression of his underlying philosophical reflections”.¹⁹⁰ Precisely because she is a character from myth and, therefore, possesses a certain symbolical value, she is permitted less freedom and individuality than other Schillerian heroines (e.g. Maria Stuart). Thus, we might begin to understand how Wolf initiated a new tradition of myth rewriting, that deviates not only from the Schillerian (and Goethean) model, but also from more modern adaptations that preceded hers.

Well after Schiller’s and the other, lesser known adaptations authored by Collin and Platen, in fact, the figure of Cassandra kept re-emerging as a cultural reference in German literature. The work of Hans Erich Nossack (1910-1977) titled *Kassandra* (1948) is an example of the rekindled interest in this character. As it often happens with myth adaptations of myths, Nossack’s Cassandra is built more as an archetype than as a character, although she also manifests as an alter ego of the author, where the hierarchy between the *ego* (the author-narrator) and the *alter* (the Cassandra-like figure) is clearly defined. It could even be said that Cassandra is, after all, more of a mirror than an alter ego, albeit certainly less disquieting than a *doppelgänger*. Therefore, she does not speak of or for herself, instead being used mostly as a literary device, with the purpose of representing the crisis of masculinity in post-war Germany.¹⁹¹ As a consequence, even if the title of Nossack’s 1948 novel is *Kassandra*, her character is never given a chance to voice her prophecies; instead, she serves as a vessel for the author to voice his own.¹⁹² The way this choice would later come to be perceived as

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 65: “[Schiller] gibt Kassandra nur soweit individuelle Konturen, wie es zum parabolischen Ausdruck seiner zugrundeliegenden philosophischen Überlegungen nötig ist“.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Susan Jeffords’ article titled *The “Remasculinization” of Germany in the 1950s: Discussion*, in *Signs*, Vol. 24, n. 1, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1998, pp. 2-4, which further delves into the topic: “The crisis of masculinity is, as Fehrenbach astutely argues, not simply the absence of German fathers through the war’s decimation of the German male population, but the presence of American men, both as models of masculinity (i.e. ‘the conquering soldier’) and as actual fathers of ‘German’ children, who thus not simply displaced but supplanted German males and structures of masculinity. [...] rather than situate a reconstructed Germanness in what myth logically seem to be less ‘tainted’ subjectivities - non-combatant women, mothers, young children, and so forth - it was imperative that particularly those subjectivities most at risk in the transition from an ordered to a ‘disordered’ world would be the focal points for cultural anxieties”.

¹⁹² Inge Stephan, *“I have only you, Cassandra”: Antifeminism and the Reconstruction of Patriarchy in the Early Post War Work of Hans Erich Nossack*, in Jerome Roy (ed.): *Conceptions of Post War German Masculinity*, Albany, State University of New York Press 2001, p. 173: “In his 1948 narrative “Kassandra”, Nossack used the Trojan War as a point of reference in order to stage both German history and his own. Nossack posed the question, “Of what relevance is Cassandra to us?” appropriating a doomsday vision for his own purposes at a time when the seer had become a controversial figure [...]. [...] demonstrating that Cassandra, as seer, protester and admonisher had become a symbolic character,

problematic from the perspective of a woman writer is evidenced by the previously referenced passage from Wolf's *Voraussetzungen*, wherein she questions the pretend self-identification of male authors with the marginal experiences of their female characters. Additionally, Inge Stephan notes that the main interest in this character results from "the question[ing] of the relationship between the sexes and the role of sexuality",¹⁹³ so much so that "Cassandra's political potential is sacrificed by reducing the connection between sexuality and truth to the question of why Cassandra resisted the affections of the god Phoebus".¹⁹⁴ The dimension of the *alter ego* is especially evident in the conversation between the male narrator and Cassandra in *Ich habe nur dich, Kassandra* (1950), where

the author and Cassandra merge into one [...]. Both are loners, forsaken admonishers, voices crying in the wilderness [...]. It is here that the identification between the author and Cassandra occurs, and identification that Wolfgang Koeppen [...] although with a very different purpose than Nossack, raised to the level of a credo for a whole generation of authors refusing to conform to the "tenor of the times": "The author is no party member and he does not celebrate with the victors. He is a man, alone, frequently in the same situation as Cassandra among the Trojans."¹⁹⁵

In her preface for her novel, Wolf explains why, from her point of view, this identification can only occur partially, or might not occur at all. Is it truly possible to identify with Cassandra if one does not completely wish to understand her plight, but rather projects *his* own onto her? While the answer to this question is rather complex, what emerges quite clearly from these rewritings is that there are certainly aspects of Cassandra's marginalisation that are not and cannot be evoked within their boundaries.

Some similarities in the tradition of myth-rewriting can also be found in the plentiful rewritings of Medea's myth.¹⁹⁶ Perhaps even more than Cassandra, the character of

functionalized either as a figure of resistance or as a cipher of legitimation by authors of all political stripes".

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Rita Calabrese's essay titled *Von der Stimmlosigkeit zum Wort*, in Marianne Hochgeschurz (ed.), *ibid.*, which gives an interesting perspective on various Medea rewritings in German literature, particularly the Medea-motiv in Lessing's and in Klinger's works, pp. 80 - 81: "Im Trauerspiel *Miß*

Medea belongs to a long and tortuous tradition, before eventually being adapted by Euripides in his tragedy.¹⁹⁷ In his version, Euripides presents Medea and Jason as exiles in Corinth, very much like they are shown to be in Wolf's rewriting. However, at the beginning of Euripides' tragedy, Jason has already abandoned Medea to take a new wife and conversely Medea has been declared an enemy of Corinth. At the centre of Euripides' retelling is Medea's meticulous planning of her revenge, and uses her magic to orchestrate the death of Jason's new bride. Most atrocious of all is the perpetration of the child murder she is archetypically known for. Among the others, this retelling has certainly been the most influential, even in German literature. In fact, a long time before Wolf's influential rewriting of Medea, the most prominent German-speaking Medeas were created by Franz Grillparzer (1791- 1872) and Heiner Müller (1929-1995). Another interesting adaptation of the myth can be found in the work of Elisabeth Langgässer (1889-1950), which was produced between the works of the other two and briefly breaks the cycle of male-authored myth rewritings, albeit without necessarily questioning the traditional dimension of the characters. Along with Nossack, Langgässer is also part of the literary movement that focused on the "German

Sara Sampson (1755) und im folgenden *Emilia Galotti* (1772) verwendet Lessing den mythologischen Stoff, um seine ästhetischen, ethischen und sozialen Auffassungen zu entwickeln, indem er Traditionelles vermischt und verändert, fast bis zur Unkenntlichkeit. Züge der Medea, die keine Hauptfigur, sondern ein 'Fluchtpunkt' der dramatische Tat ist, finden eine komplexe Darstellung in der Gestalt der Orsina, die eine originelle positive Dimension in antityrannischer Funktion übernimmt. [...] Der Aufklärer Lessing verwendet die dämonisierte Gestalt der Medea, um die Möglichkeit einer gewalttätigen Umwälzung der Gesellschaft darzustellen. [...] Die Medea von Klinger ist eine ungewöhnlich starke Frauengestalt des Sturm-und-Drangs-Theaters, das fast ausschließlich von außergewöhnlichen Männern - Kraftkerlen -, Ausdruck der absoluten Natürlichkeit, bevölkert ist. Sie ist ein Machtweib, das durch den Verrat von Jason und ihren Kindern - die ihr Rivalin Kreusa vorziehen - zu seiner ursprünglichen und blutigen Barbarei zurückgeführt wird. Die Integration der übermenschlichen Frau in die eintönige Normalität scheint so unmöglich zu sein, wie die Versöhnung zwischen Natur und Kultur, Vernunft und Leidenschaft."

¹⁹⁷ M.G. Ciani, *Euripide, Seneca, Grillparzer, Alvaro. Medea. Variazioni sul Mito*, Venezia, Marsilio 1999, pp. 10-11: "The Argonauts' feat is recounted by Homer, who does not mention Medea, however. Hesiod was the first to mention the 'bright-eyed' maiden whom Jason took as his wife in his Theogony. Other episodes are recounted in post-Homeric poetry and archaic lyric poetry: the killing of Pelias and Creon, the rejuvenation of Aeson and Jason himself, Medea's union with Achilles in the Elysian Fields...In the realm of tragedy, the story of Medea also inspired Aeschylus and Sophocles, who drew on mythical material from episodes concerning the various stages of the story [...]. But of these works - Aeschylus' *The Nurse of Dionysus*, Sophocles' *The Women of Colchis*, *The Herb Gatherers*, and *The Scythians* - only a few fragments remain, as do fragments of the first two tragedies that Euripides dedicated to the daughter of Aetes: the *Peliades*, with which he made his debut in 455 and which depicted the killing of Pelias, and the *Aegean* (c. 440), which recounted the events of Medea in Athens, and therefore, probably, the attempted poisoning of Theseus, the discovery of the crime, and the subsequent expulsion of the woman from the city. The great surviving works that convey the full grandeur of the character of Medea in Greek literature are: the poem *The Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius (3rd century BC) - which recounts the expedition to Colchis, the conquest of the Golden Fleece, and the meeting and love between Medea and Jason - and Euripides' third tragedy, *Medea*, performed in 431 and based on the events in Corinth."

catastrophe”. As such, it is evident that any myth-adaptation (or any adaptation, for that matter) is heavily influenced not only by ideological principles but also aesthetic principles which belong to a certain historical context and/or literary movement. Therefore, as we briefly take into account each of these adaptations of Medea in order to be able to witness the impact that Wolf’s rewriting had in her own time period, we shall also consider the merits that the previous works had in their individual contexts.

In his reappraisal of the Medea-motive, Franz Grillparzer develops the ‘missing’ parts of the original tragedy, focusing on the background context of both Jason’s and Medea’s actions. As often happens in adaptations of this myth, the motivations for Medea’s actions, rather than the results of them, change. Chiles Clifton Ferrell points out that one of the major changes of the “German Medea” has to do with the weight that was given to banishment in different rewritings. In Euripides’ tragedy, where Greek customs are reflected, banishment is, in all truth, a punishment worse than death. Hence, the fact that Medea was condemned to being banished was sufficient motivation for her to wreak vengeance. The Medea who appears in Grillparzer’s adaptation, however, cannot express anger on the same grounds as her original counterpart: in order to function and to be reasonable for the German audience of the time, the trigger had to be different, even if the outcome remained the same.¹⁹⁸ This Medea, in fact, carries out her revenge just as brutally as the protagonist of Euripides’ tragedy, although Grillparzer saves space for her character to be treated with compassion and to express self-reflection, neither of which are abundant in the Greek version of the myth.¹⁹⁹ In fact, in Grillparzer’s re-imagining of the story, Medea’s humanity prevails over her god-like stature,²⁰⁰ and it is supposed to inspire not only contempt, but also understanding, even *Mitleid*, in the

¹⁹⁸ C. C. Ferrell, *The “Medea” of Euripides and the “Medea” of Grillparzer*, in *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 9, n. 3, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press 1901, p. 353: “It is difficult for us, with our modern ideas, to appreciate what banishment meant to the ancient Greeks. The chorus in Euripides’ play says that death is to be preferred to it, with its attendant evils. Medea would have been an outcast and a wanderer on the face of the earth; no Greek city would have received her, and she could not have returned to Colchis. It is easy to understand how the banishment of her children with her is accounted the severest form of punishment by Euripides, while perhaps the bitterest part of the penalty the German Medea has to pay is the fact that she *may not* take her children with her.”

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 355: “[...] Medea’s own better self [...] takes the place of the chorus and exerts a restraining influence upon her angry passions”.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 356: “The Colchian princess of Euripides is worthy of the heroic age to which she belongs. Her passions are stronger than those of ordinary mortals. [...] She is so hard and unfeeling, and so laden with guilt, that we have little sympathy with her, as greatly as she is wronged.”

public.²⁰¹ Grillparzer's Medea is, for all intents and purposes, a Romantic heroine: she is capable of showing repentance and compassion, but ultimately the actions of others cause her to fall over the precipice of her own passionate stance. For this reason, she turns into a degenerate mother, *the* degenerate mother, as a result of what her enemies make of her, and of what a patriarchal view on motherhood makes her out to be. Her children reject her: they choose Creusa, Jason's new bride, over her. The mixture of sorrow, loss and rage this causes prompts Medea to commit the unspeakable act she is best known for, namely the murder of her children:

Medea:

Wie könnt ihr schlafen? schlafen?

Glaubt ihr weil eure Mutter wacht bei euch?

In schlimmern Feindes Hand wart ihr noch nie!

Wie könnt ihr schlafen hier in meiner Nähe?

Geht da hinein, da drinnen mögt ihr ruhn!

(Die Kinder gehen in den Säulengang.)

So, sie sind fort! Nun ist mir wieder wohl!—Und weil sie fort;

was ist wohl besser drum?

Muß ich drum minder fliehn, noch heute fliehn?

Sie hier zurück bei meinen Feinden lassend?

Ist minder drum ihr Vater ein Verräter?

Hält minder Hochzeit drum die neue Braut? Morgen wenn die Sonne aufgeht,

Steh ich schon allein,

Die Welt eine leere Wüste,

Ohne Kinder, ohne Gemahl

Auf blutig geritzten Füßen

Wandernd ins Elend.—Wohin?

Sie aber freuen sich hier und lachen mein!

Meine Kinder am Halse der Fremden

Mir entfremdet, auf ewig fern.

Duldest du das?

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 357: "The German Medea does not belong to the giant world; she is human in stature and human in heart. She has a violent temper, like her Greek prototype. She knows how to prepare potions that bring health or death, but she has not killed her father or her brother, and is no murderess."

Ist's nicht schon zu spät?
 Zu spät zum Verzeihn?
 Hat sie nicht schon, Kreusa, das Kleid,
 Und den Becher, den flammenden Becher?
 —Horch!—Noch nicht!—Aber bald wird's erschallen
 Von Jammergeschrei in der Königsburg.
 Sie kommen, sie töten mich!
 Schonen auch der Kleinen nicht.
 Horch! jetzt rief's!—Helle zuckt empor!
 Es ist geschehn!
 Kein Rücktritt mehr!
 Ganz sei es vollbracht! Fort!²⁰²

This passage from Grillparzer's tragedy shows a conflicted anti-heroine who agonises over the possibility of harming her children in order to exact revenge on Jason. Eventually, it becomes clear to her that her children have been turned against her ("Meine Kinder am Halse der Fremden/ Mir entfremdet, auf ewig fern") and that it is too late to change her plan: murder is the only acceptable punishment for Jason's betrayal of her.

Langgässer's 1950 novel featuring Medea is titled *Die Märkische Argonautenfahrt* and is a retelling that is more distant from the Greek tragedy. According to Inge Stephan, it plays a lot more into the need to "revitalize old gender images and familiar configurations in order to construct a new national identity",²⁰³ which is understandable given the context in which it was written. The 1950 novel in which the character of Medea appears is titled *Die Märkische Argonautenfahrt*. In the novel, the myth of Medea and of the Golden Fleece becomes an allegory for the events of the World War II, and symbolically represents the circumstances that eventually led Germany into its darkest hour. As a result, Langgässer opts for a drastically different staging of the tale, which takes place in 1940s Germany rather than in Ancient Greece. In their quest to reach what is known as the "Kingdom of Order", where the Golden Fleece resides, the

²⁰² F. Grillparzer, *Das goldene Vliess: dramatisches Gedicht in drei Abteilungen (Der Gastfreund, die Argonauten, Medea)*, Stuttgart, Reclam 1994, pp. 189-190.

²⁰³ I. Stephan, *The Bad Mothers: Medea-Myths and National Discourse in Texts from Elisabeth Langgässer and Christa Wolf*, in Kosta Barbara (ed.), *Writing Against Boundaries. Nationality, Ethnicity and Gender in the German-speaking Context*, Amsterdam, Rodopi 2003, p. 131.

Argonauts meet all sorts of different characters. Among these are the ‘Madonnas’, who stand in direct opposition to the ‘wicked mothers’, who represent the deadly instincts, which have ultimately brought humans to commit atrocities against their own kind. The wicked ‘leader’ of this group is none other than Medea. In this retelling, she is very far from her ancient Greek counterpart, but also quite different from her German predecessors. Langgässer wants her Medea to embody the archetype of the all-devouring mother, who threatens the survival of humanity due to her cruelty and greed.²⁰⁴ In this reinterpretation, Medea returns to being somewhat superhuman:

She practically is everywhere: she has taken hold of the “souls” and the “language of people”. She has found access to their “dreams” and “gestures” and even constitutes a part of their nourishment. She is the “nothing” that infiltrates where chaos reigns in place of order. [...] Only the “Imitation Maria” can provide the new “order”, which is supposed to replace the old, collapsed one. The “new” kingdom fantasized in the novel is the Kingdom of the Spirit that is, a “manly” kingdom, in which Maria has officially been given the role of guardian patroness, the role of God’s handmaiden, to which women in general have been reduced.²⁰⁵

Before writing *Verkommenes Ufer Medeamaterial Landschaft mit Argonauten*, which was first staged in 1983, Heiner Müller had already dealt with the matter of myth in other works, including *Philoktet* and *Prometheus*. Medea herself, or rather her *mythologem*, as Katharina Keim highlights,²⁰⁶ had already made sporadic appearances in his other works, such as in *Zement*, before being fully fledged in *Medeamaterial*. In this play, a Medea-like figure emerges from the contours of a character named Dascha, who “in the face of what she had lived through and experienced during the turmoils of the [Russian] Revolution” decides to “reject the social role of the monogamous wife and caring mother”.²⁰⁷ This is reason she becomes a Medea-like figure in the eyes of the other characters, thus rejecting her humanity and condemning her to existing as an

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Stephan, *The Bad Mothers*, *ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁰⁶ K. Keim, *Theatralität in der späten Dramen Heiner Müllers*, Berlin, De Gruyter 1998, p. 101.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem: “In der ‚Medeakommentar‘ betitelte Szene aus dem 1972 entstandenen Stück ‚ZEMENT‘, das die Situation der Revolutionäre im russischen Bürgerkrieg im Jahre 1921 schildert, weist die Protagonistin Dascha angesichts der von ihr in den Revolutionswirren durchlebten Erfahrungen ihre gesellschaftliche Rolle als monogame Ehefrau und treusorgende Mutter zurück.”

archetype of one of mythology's most controversial figures. The Medea and Jason who appear in *Medeamaterial* and in the other two adjacent works are less connected to a specific historical context (in contrast to Grillparzer's and Langgässer's versions); rather, they are more mythologem than character. In his rewriting, Müller uses the characters of myth to expose the grotesque condition of human existence, with a specific focus on the social constructs attached to the performance of gender roles. As for what concerns the murder of the children, this gruesome act

now breaks the continuity of the ritualized sequence of events of sexuality, birth and death. [...] The infanticide here has no revolutionary dimension, but by the falling of the body parts from the floor of the lacing, it becomes clear that the killing does not represent a way out of the ritualized course of history. Rather, it reveals the cycle of experiencing violence and exercising violence that is characteristic of civilization and to which the Medea myth already bears witness.²⁰⁸

As we have already begun to see, and as we will analyse in more detail in the following subsections, the apparent "typification" of the characters does not take away from the social critique that Müller sought to express through them. In fact, the process of *Entmythologisierung* that scholars and critics recognise in Wolf's adaptations of Cassandra and Medea, is also part of Müller's approach. Although their respective retellings ultimately develop in very different directions, both Wolf's and Müller's Medeas are less mythological, more contemporary characters than their predecessors, given that they are confronted with and written in the face of the precariousness of the GDR's own mythological system.

However, one element that is present in the other adaptations but is completely omitted from Wolf's rewriting, aside from the varying levels of prominence that the character of Medea is assigned in the Argonauts' tale, entails their Medeas all diluting their

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 103: "[...] sprengt nun die Kontinuität des ritualisierten Geschehensablauf von Sexualität, Geburt und Tod. [...] Der Kindermord hat hier keine revolutionäre Dimension, sondern durch das Herabfallen der Leichenteile aus dem Schnürboden wird deutlich, daß das Töten keinen Ausweg aus dem ritualisierten Geschichtsablauf darstellt. Vielmehr enthüllt es den Kreislauf von Gewalterfahrung und Gewaltausübung, der für die Zivilisation kennzeichnend ist und von der schon der Medea-Mythos Zeugnis ablegt".

identity with that of their husband.²⁰⁹ The tragedy of Medea is that Jason's actions are projected onto her and eventually corrupt her too. We will see that this is not the case for Wolf's Medea, which adds another layer to the *Entmythologisierung* tendency that was taking place in the GDR.

3.1.1 Borders in *Kassandra*

In *Über Grenzen: Limitation und Transgression in Literatur und Ästhetik* (1999), Claudia Benthien and Irmela Marei Krüger-Fürhoff present some defining ideas with respect to the concept of borders, which are particularly relevant to the novels we wish to analyse.²¹⁰ They refer specifically to “bodily, psychological and social

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 108: „[...] Medea ihre Identität verloren zu haben scheint, sie definiert sich vollständig über ihre Beziehung zu Jason.“

²¹⁰ C. Benthien, I. M. Krüger-Fürhoff (Eds.), *Über Grenzen: Limitation und Transgression in Literatur und Ästhetik*, Stuttgart/Weimar, Metzler, 1999. p. 8: “It's interesting to see that the concept of borders does not pertain exclusively to the space metaphor [...], but it is also related to ideas of the body: like the body, borders can be violated; “contact” happens at the border, exchange is made possible. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the bodily, psychological and social phenomena inscribed in the border are

phenomena” related to these borders, and avoid pitting the ideas of “limitation” and the “dissolving of boundaries” against one another, revealing how there can be a mutual exchange between the two. Even more importantly, they widen the horizon of interpretation, as the borders come to include the self (*Ichgrenzen*), gender roles and the threshold between epoch-defining transformations. In fact, the existence of various forms of limitations, is what allows transgression to exist in the first place.

The imaginary of the GDR built between 1961 and 1989, and even beyond that period, was built around such borders. Writers, artists, and intellectuals have all had to confront the ‘issue’ and ‘potential’ of at least one specific border, namely the Berlin Wall. But while its existence would certainly end up limiting and straight up impeding movement from one side to the other, contrary to the ideals of freedom and democracy that the GDR was founded on, it could not impose any creative limitation in and of itself. Several years after the reunification of Germany, we know that the literature ‘of’ the GDR has always kept “the ability to cross over”. In fact, the true limitations were imposed by censorship. In this regards, Wolfgang Emmerich explains how the *Literaturgesellschaft* model of the GDR, as theorised by Minister of Culture Johannes R. Becher, essentially backfired:

Considering that the literary system of the GDR existed as a subsystem of the social whole, it never had the capacity to operate autonomously (autopoietically) and self-critically (self-referentially), establishing its own separated existence. It remained subjugated under the political order, and was permanently overmanaged by the state and the party’s restrictive guidelines.²¹¹

As we have begun to see, *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen* represent a divide in Christa Wolf’s literary production. Chronologically, these two characters and their stories belong to the opposite sides of the Berlin Wall. However, as Wolf shows in her writing, beyond the adaptation of the two mythological figures, there may be as

especially multifaceted. It is also important that we do not concentrate on “limitation” or the “dissolving of boundaries”, but rather on the interchangeability of the two.”

²¹¹ M. Sabrow (Ed.), *Der geteilte Himmel. Literatur und ihre Grenzen in der DDR*, Leipzig, Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2004. “Das System Literatur war in der DDR als Subsystem des gesellschaftlichen Ganzen nie so beschaffen, dass es sich selbsttätig (autopoietisch) und selbstbezüglich-kritisch (selbstreferentiell) auszudifferenzieren und einen stabilen Eigenzustand herzustellen vermochte. Es blieb unter dem Primat des Politischen, es war in Permanenz übersteuert (overmanaged) durch restriktive Vorgaben von Staat und Partei”.

many differences as there are similarities when it comes to these two novels and characters. The idea of a physical and metaphorical border dividing Christa Wolf's oeuvre, and Cassandra and Medea being at the centre of this separation, resides in her wish, which was shared by many of her contemporaries, to engage with the problem, or the opportunity, posed by the border. This originates from the fact that the existence of one border, the "Mauer", also guarantees that of the GDR, as it protects the State as it protects it from the dangers lurking outside. This conviction lasts up until the point it becomes clear that the seeds of destruction (from the perspective of the SED), which imply the need for change and renovation, for better *and* for worse, come from both sides of the Berlin Wall.

In both novels, Wolf explores the limits imposed on various entities, material and immaterial (memory, body and language, just to recall the most important ones), head on. But before she can put everything into words, she needs to experience many different perspectives, which then in turn end up informing the different layers of subjectivity and different voices present in her work. In *The Protocol of Barriers to Thinking? Wolf's Moskauer Tagebücher. Wer wir sind und wer wir waren*, Birgit Dahlke discusses a pivotal experience in Christa Wolf's personal and authorial development, referring to her having experienced socialism from outside the GDR during her travels to the territories belonging to the ex-USSR, from 1957 to 1989.²¹² The German author, who travelled to Greece to 'encounter' Cassandra 'in the flesh',²¹³ as opposed to the mysterious primordial-adjacent encounter she describes in the *Voraussetzungen*, was already familiar with this kind of "hermeneutic movement", as Dahlke terms it:

Shuttling to and fro between the Soviet and her own East, Wolf constantly undertakes an internal differentiation. This leads to her perception of the GDR as more 'Western' – from the perspective of her personal national identity – than has previously been recognized. [...] This farewell to her early idealization of the Soviet people and their way of living exclusively for the public good is painful. Wolf the observer repeatedly tries to explain what she saw as disturbing behaviour and circumstances, ascribing them to

²¹² B. Dahlke, "The Protocol of Barriers to Thinking? Wolf's Moskauer Tagebücher. Wer wir sind und wer wir waren", in Sonja E. Klocke, Jennifer Hosek, *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2018, p. 201.

²¹³ We mentioned the importance of this travel in the first chapter of the dissertation.

the material and moral cost of the gruelling war of defence against and liberation from the German attacker.²¹⁴

This shows Wolf facing the double identity of socialism outside of socialism, and realising that, in a way, the GDR does not ‘belong’ anywhere, not in Germany and not outside of it. So how can its citizens belong anywhere else other than within its walls? And, at the same time, how can they not wish to find their way out?

As for the novels *Kassandra* and *Medea.Stimmen*, John Pizer notes out how many critics have failed to consider the major difference in context that stands between them. According to him, even though both novels depict the symptoms of state separation, *Kassandra* still holds onto the hope of a sort of “pan-Germanism”, whereas in *Medea.Stimmen* that hope is no more.²¹⁵ While this is a necessary premise for any analysis of both novels, especially if we want to understand how these characters (re)created by Wolf have travelled outside of their respective contexts, the objective of this chapter will be to focus on all the different ways in which Wolf depicts the divide, after having established that it exists in both the characters and the texts.

The travelling metaphor, which also describes the reality of what happens during translation and the rewriting of myth, leads to a necessary confrontation with the concept of border(s) in *Kassandra*. Given that they are characters belonging to mythological narrations, we have argued that both Cassandra and Medea are meant to travel, as it is in their very nature to do so. This idea might bring forth images of a smooth transition to a new plane of existence for these characters, but we know that it is not so simple. By contrast, the action that the characters undertake can be seen as

²¹⁴ B. Dahlke, “The Protocol of Barriers to Thinking?...”, *ibid.*, p. 202.

²¹⁵ J. Pizer, “From Pan-German Cosmopolitanism to Nostalgic National Insularity: A Comparative Study of Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra* and *Medea*”, in Sonja E. Klocke, Jennifer R. Hosek, *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2018, pp. 148-149: “The rivals in the Trojan War are treated as unified through such martial bellicosity. Wolf wrote *Medea* in the wake of unification, which she regarded as a troubled process that fused two highly disparate nation-states. An unbridgeable divide seems to separate the two geographic entities in the novel, Colchis and Corinth. [...] The Cold War novel *Kassandra* entails an advocacy of pan-German solidarity. In *Medea*, on the other hand, Wolf no longer evokes this inner German cosmopolitanism [...]. This culture allegorizes that of the GDR and underscores the unbridgeable social divide between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany, the historical antecedent of which in the novel is Corinth. [...] In other words, in *Medea*, Wolf portrays a conflict between two groups completely alien to each other racially, religiously and geographically. In *Kassandra*, on the other hand, she constellates the rivalry of the Trojans and the Greeks as a fraternal dispute despite the tragic mutual hatred between these two peoples”.

much as travelling as dwelling on the border. When it comes to Wolf's rewriting of the characters, it has to do with her own experience of dwelling, as opposed to truly belonging somewhere. But there is more to be discerned concerning the matter of borders in *Kassandra* and *Medea. Stimmen*.

The concept of a border allows us to visualise how the discourse that arises around the characters is polarised. Cassandra and Medea are usually regarded as heralds of doom and conflict. They are divisive, and they produce splitting. This happens for several reasons, which we will highlight via the analysis of the novel. These aspects are also highlighted in relation to other female characters who embody this divisiveness, as they are unable to control how they are perceived. Helen of Troy is one such character. She is made to shoulder the responsibility for the conflict, even if its real causes are different. Yet the pretence that the war must be fought for a woman—or, worse, that she is the primary cause of the conflict—must be maintained at all costs. Cassandra directly confronts Paris about this, and he eventually admits to Helen being used as a means to keep the war going and, with it, a perpetual state of conflict and separation:

Paris selbst war, widerwillig, schien es, auf den Marktplatz gekommen und hatte den Namen der schönen Helena dem Volke hingeworfen. Die Leute merkten nicht, daß er nicht bei der Sache war. Ich merkte es. Warum sprichst du so kalt von deiner warmen Frau? hab ich ihn gefragt. Meine warme Frau? war seine höhnische Antwort. Komm zu dir, Schwester. Mensch: Es gibt sie nicht.²¹⁶

Helen, Cassandra and Medea all become 'scapegoats', some more literally than the others, as a society that feeds itself through the waging of war refuses to accept the truth about the damage caused and who instigated it. Wolf makes reference to this in the fourth lecture included in *Voraussetzungen* when she writes about Helen becoming an 'Idol', the 'shade' of a living, breathing person:

Women are deprived of their living memory. A different image is imposed onto her, through the vile process of fossilization, the reification of an animated body. She now belongs with the rest of the properties—like the children of the

²¹⁶ C. Wolf, *Kassandra*, Darmstadt/Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1983, p. 75: 'Paris himself had come to the market square, apparently not of his own volition, throwing Helen's name around. The people who heard him didn't notice that he wasn't truly in it. I did. Why are you speaking so coldly of your warm woman? I asked. My warm woman? He scoffed. Pull yourself together, sister: she doesn't exist'.

household, the slaves, the plots of land, the cattle [...]. Can we even imagine how truly dangerous it must have been to inflate life back into the ‘thing’; when the ‘thing’ starts feeling again; when ‘it’ finds words again?²¹⁷

Cassandra and Medea, therefore, are made to embody the societal constructions of borders, where anything that is unclear, ambivalent or ‘foreign’ must be kept at a distance. Wolf exalts this complexity and advocates for the agency of the characters, who are meant for movement but forced to be at a standstill instead. It might seem contradictory, but this is the nature of myth: their dwelling is a different form of movement, after all. Cassandra and Medea are aware that society wants to push them far away, where their divisive nature cannot harm others, although society is unaware of the harm caused to itself in the process and in a more permanent way to the harm experienced by Cassandra or Medea. They are both condemned to death as a result of their confinement, but the effect this has on the world they used to inhabit is a lot more enduring. Consequently, while neither character can belong anywhere, and they both seem to be stuck in limbo, they also gain some freedom, existing in the in-between.

As is to be expected, many other writers in the GDR were very receptive towards the thematisation of borders in their literary works, and mythological characters seemed to be especially fitting when it came to representing the crossing (or not crossing) of these borders. As we saw in the chapter dedicated to myth in the GDR and the GDR myth itself, among all the mythological figures who could be rewritten, Ulysses seemed to serve as the main point of reference. Many other writers focused on a different mythological figure—namely, Icarus, who allowed for discourse on the different perceptions of borders in the realm of a ‘collective’ mindscape as much as a physical realm made of concrete. Along with the socialist rewriting of myth, in the sense that it was approved by the socialist government of the GDR,²¹⁸ came other rewritings that

²¹⁷ C. Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra*, Darmstadt/Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1983, p. 202: ‘Das lebendige Gedächtnis wird der Frau entwunden, ein Bild, das andre von ihr sich machen, wird ihr untergeschoben: der entsetzliche Vorgang der Versteinerung, Verdinglichung am lebendigen Leib. Zu den Sachen gehört sie nun, zu den Res Mancipi – wie Hauskinder, Sklaven, Grundstücke, Großvieh [...]. Ahnt man, ahnen wir, wie schwer, ja, wie gefährlich es sein kann, wenn wieder Leben in die ‘Sache’ kommt; wenn das Idol sich wieder zu fühlen beginnt; wenn ‘es’ die Sprache wiederfindet?’.

²¹⁸ A. Detke, ‘*Fliegen ist schwer*’. *Ikarus in lyrischen Texten nach 1945*, in W. Barner et al. (eds.), *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, Göttingen, Wallstein, p. 347: ‘In exile debates, the concept of myth and the work on myth were initially exposed to doubts due to previous instrumentalisation by the fascists. Among the Marxists, on the other hand, the tendency to represent the “better” literature in a socialist adaptation of myths prevailed, so that a special dignity was lent to myth in the GDR. The

provided a challenge, not only to the traditional way such stories were told but also to the government-mandated rewriting of myth. This should not distract us from the main focus of this chapter; rather, it is meant to provide more context with regard to the shifting paradigms of border representation in the GDR, specifically through mythological re-narrations. It is important at this stage to mention Anke Detken's study—titled *Fliegen ist schwer* (2007)—on the evolution of the Icarus myth in the GDR. This focus comes as no surprise, given that the 'destiny of Icarus [was] being compared to the conditions of people living in the GDR'.²¹⁹ However, Detken also points out that there are more layers to be uncovered when it comes to understanding the fascination with the mythological character of Icarus in particular, which extend beyond the motive of 'escaping' and the 'Wall'.²²⁰ In fact, many rewritings portray a very atypical Icarus, who often does not even take the leap, remaining a creature trapped (or free, depending on one's perspective) in the in-between, dwelling, never flying. This renders him not unlike Cassandra and Medea, who also inhabit this dimension, feeling simultaneously alienated yet tied to their communities.²²¹

Wolf convincingly thematised the concept of border(s) on multiple occasions, other than in her mythological novels, from the very beginning of her literary career. One such case is her 1963 novel *Der geteilte Himmel*, which can be directly connected to her later work, especially with regard to *Kassandra* and *Medea. Stimmen*. Justyna Zachara discusses the 'motive of separation' ('Motiv der Trennung') as conducive to the interpretation of this novel; however, the matter arguably goes beyond a single work of literature, as future works would tend to demonstrate.

In *Kassandra*, we immediately encounter several representations of borders, limits and

authority of myth was therefore reinforced, thanks to its connection to both antiquity and classicism'. This is explored in the chapter of the present dissertation dealing with myth in the context of the GDR.

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 340–341: 'These findings can be explained by rethinking the dominating political ideologies of the time, which caused the people living in the GDR to inevitably compare their situation to the destiny of Icarus'. She adds that, 'Living "confined and in fear of death" must have been the reason why this character had such an appeal over writers. It's quite obvious, since this myth is about someone who dares to fly'.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ S.E. Klocke, *Inscription and Rebellion. Illness and the Symptomatic Body in East German Literature*, New York, Camden House, 2015. p. 72: 'The two books [*Kassandra* and *Medea. Stimmen*] are linked by the protagonists' feeling of alienation: they feel connected to their communities, despite the lack of empathy they receive'.

separations, with some of them being more literal and others more figurative. It could be argued that Cassandra vividly incorporates the border experiences that other characters, such as Rita from *Der geteilte Himmel* or Karoline from *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, had already experienced by the time both *Kassandra* and *Medea. Stimmen* were conceived. The pervasiveness of this concept in Wolf's literary production leads to the discovery of all its different facets in *Kassandra* and in *Medea. Stimmen*. Interestingly, as Zachara also points out, Rita never speaks the word 'wall' aloud, only making implicit references to it, to the concrete object, the physical manifestation of a *Trennung*. By contrast, as soon as we encounter her at the beginning or, rather, the end of her life and story, Cassandra immediately mentions the walls surrounding Troy.

These walls, which enact an obvious form of separation and even more obviously represent the Berlin Wall separating the GDR from the FRG at the time when Wolf wrote and published the novel, fail to achieve their purpose of protecting the people inside (and also outside, for that matter) from the inescapable death Cassandra has foreseen. We see her in the moments of the ultimate dwelling, before she travels from the world of the living to that of the dead. The cyclopic walls lead the way to the utmost darkness, severing the bonds that tie her to life. Against all odds, it is on this border, on this precipice of life, that Cassandra can finally reveal what she has kept secret for so long. It is the place where she is truly allowed to exist without fear or prejudice, even if only in her last moments. From this point onwards, the narration circles back to the very beginning, as Cassandra recollects the memories of what led her to this tragic outcome. As a prisoner, she has a different perspective on the walls surrounding the city, which both 'protect' and 'limit' it, in the end revealing themselves to be not so indestructible and unbreachable as they once appeared.²²² As the situation becomes more dire, the character of Eumelus is made to implement a series of limitations, which mirror the state of the GDR at the time when *Kassandra* was published. Eumelus represents the corrupt powers sabotaging the hopes of the GDR's citizens. In one passage, Cassandra directly confronts Eumelus about his intentions. This is probably one of the places in the novel where Wolf and her character—and, therefore, the history

²²²Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 38: 'Und mit der Stadt die Mauer – jene schützend, auch beengend – [...] ohne Segensspruch des mächtigen Orakels festgemacht, mitnichten uneinnehmbar, im Gegenteil: verletzlich sei?' ('And the city together with its walls – protecting, but also confining – [...] could it be that without the blessing of the powerful Oracle, these were not impenetrable, on the contrary: vulnerable?').

of Troy and that of the GDR—most clearly and intentionally overlap. The solutions that Eumelus proposes are rooted in restricting the already precarious freedoms citizens are permitted:

Die Zitadelle nach Einbruch der Dunkelheit gesperrt. Strenge Kontrollen alles dessen, was einer bei sich führte, wann immer Eumelos dies für geboten hielt. Sonderbefugnisse für die Kontrollorgane. Eumelos, sagte ich, das ist unmöglich. [...] Das möchte ich gerne noch mal von dir hören, sagte er. – In diesem Augenblick sprang die Angst mich an. Eumelos, rief ich, flehend, dessen schäm ich mich noch immer: Aber glaub mir doch! Ich will doch das gleiche wie ihr. Er zog die Lippen hart zusammen. Den konnte ich nicht gewinnen. Er sagte förmlich: Ausgezeichnet. So wirst du unsere Maßnahmen unterstützen. Er ließ mich stehen wie ein dummes Ding. Er näherte sich dem Gipfel seiner Machtvollkommenheit.²²³

The motif of the border also appears in the way women and men are expected to interact with one another based on social norms attached to gender and status in society. There is always a wall between them, which prevents them from truly understanding one another. This is exemplified by the complicated relationship between Cassandra and Panthous. In a different passage of the novel, Wolf paints a picture of Panthous through Cassandra's own recollections of him. He is perceived as uncaring and unfeeling by her. Apparently, however, this is not due to him being purposefully cruel but rather because there seems to be some sort of obstacle that prevents any kind of meaningful connection from developing. This distance is not entirely dependent on issues of language, which we shall address later on. Here, there is something else at play, as the following passage eloquently demonstrates:

Panthoos der Grieche tat, als kenne er die Wunde in meinem Herzen nicht. als mache es ihm nichts aus, in dies Herz eine mir selbst fast nicht bewußte, sehr feine, sehr geheime Feindschaft gegen ihn, den Ersten Priester, einzupflanzen. Mein Griechisch hab ich ja bei ihm gelernt. Und die Kunst, einen Mann zu empfangen, auch. [...] Daß ich unberührt war, schien ihn nicht zu überraschen,

²²³ Ibid., p. 111: 'The citadel had to be closed at sunset. People were to be subjected to strict controls, whenever Eumelus saw fit. These were the special measures of the government. Eumelus, I said, this is not possible. [...] I would like to hear you say it again, he answered. In this moment I was overcome with fear. So I begged him, which I still feel ashamed for: please believe me! I want the same things that you want. He grimaced. I could not persuade him. Wonderful. So you will approve our measures. I was left dumbfounded. He was on the verge of gaining absolute power'.

auch nicht, in welchem Maß ich körperlichen Schmerz zu fürchten schien. [...] Ich aber wußte nicht, wie ich Haß und Dankbarkeit gegen ein und denselben Menschen mit mir herumtragen sollte.²²⁴

Pain is what creates the border between women and men. It depends on who, between the two, has the power to wield it and who is at the receiving end of the pain.²²⁵ This violence is often threatened and even more often effectively carried out. Achilles, ‘the beast’, is the emblem of the darkest urges—he is war itself, taking the rage he is traditionally associated with to the extremes. In another passage, Cassandra witnesses the killing of one of her brothers, Troilus, by the Greek warrior:

Dann kam Achill das Vieh. Des Mörders Eintritt in den Tempel, der, als er im Eingang stand, verdunkelt wurde. Was wollte dieser Mensch. Was suchte er bewaffnet hier im Tempel. Gräßlichster Augenblick: Ich wußt es schon. Dann lachte er. Jedes Haar auf meinem Kopf stand mir zu Berge, und in die Augen meines Bruders trat der reine Schrecken. Ich warf mich über ihn und wurde weggeschoben wie ein Ding aus Nichts. Wie näherte sich dieser Feind dem Bruder. Als Mörder? Als Verführer? Ja gab es das denn: Mörderlust und Liebeslust in einem Mann? [...] Das tänzelnde Herannahen des Verfolgers, den ich jetzt von hinten sah, ein geiles Vieh. [...] Ich an des Mörders Arm gehängt, an dem die Adernstränge vortraten wie Schnüre. Des Bruders Augen aus den Höhlen quellend. Und in Achills Gesicht die Lust. Die nackte gräßliche männliche Lust. [...] Nun hob der Feind, das Monstrum, im Anblick der Apollon-Statue sein Schwert und trennte meines Bruders Kopf vom Rumpf.²²⁶

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 30: ‘Panthous the Greek pretended as if he wasn’t aware of the wound in my heart; he behaved as if he didn’t care whether or not I developed some kind of subtle, secret enmity towards him, the Head Priest. The Greek I know, I learnt from him; and the art of laying with a man, too. [...] He did not seem surprised that I was untouched, nor that I feared pain. [...] I wouldn’t have been able to explain how I could harbour feelings of hatred and gratefulness towards the same person’.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 12: ‘Der Siegerkönig hätte mich erschlagen – und das war es, was ich wollte –, hätte er nicht auch vor mir noch Angst gehabt. Immer hat dieser Mensch mich für eine Zauberin gehalten’ (‘The king of the victors could have killed me – and I would have wanted him to – if he didn’t fear me so much. He had always thought of me as a witch’).

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 81–82: ‘Then came Achilles the beast. Darkness followed the murderer, as he crossed the threshold of the temple. What did he want. What did he look for, armed inside of a temple. A dreadful moment: I knew it already. And then he laughed. Every hair on my head stood upright, as my brother’s eye filled with sheer terror. I tried to shield him with my body, but was cast aside as if I were weightless. And how the enemy advanced on my brother. A murderer? Or a predator? Could there be murderous and lustful intent in the same person? [...] Dancing before his prey, I now saw him from behind. A lecherous beast. [...] I was hanging from the murderer’s arm, where the veins strained against the skin like rope. My brother’s eyes bulging out of their orbs. Unadulterated lust on Achilles’ face. Naked, hideous, male lust. [...] And now the enemy, the monster, raised his sword in front of Apollo’s statue and severed my brother’s head from his neck’.

Achilles finds sick satisfaction in what he does here, which we can analyse from different perspectives, still within the realm of border representation. First, Achilles stands in stark contrast to Aeneas in a different scene, which we will comment on later in this chapter. On the one hand, we have Cassandra, who is trying to bring Troilus into the safety of the temple walls. On the other hand, we have Achilles, who, in pursuit of his prey, dares to trespass in the confines of this enclosed, sacred space. Cassandra is powerless to stop the violence about to take place. She can only observe, much as she does with her visions of the future, the stalking of Troilus by the predator Achilles. In the moment when the trespassing of the limit happens, doom is ensured: Troilus is killed, while Achilles sports an expression of ‘naked, terrifying lust’, which Cassandra describes as specifically ‘male’. It is arguable that the way Troilus is killed is also significant, if we wish to read the passage in the context of ‘border-crossing’. His head being severed from his body as a consequence of Achilles’ (who we have established embodies war) violence is metaphorically connected to the fear of a ruthless, painfully final severing of bonds between the people living on the two sides of the Berlin Wall, people caught in a larger conflict fought among hegemonic nations. A similar scene featuring Achilles takes place at the temple in a later passage of the novel. Here, the themes that were already present during the feral killing of Troilus become even clearer, especially regarding aspects of boundaries being trampled on:

Warum nur trat in jener Stunde der Zwiespalt, in dem sie lebte, als inständiger Ausdruck von Gebrechlichkeit auf ihr Gesicht. Warum mußte Achill das Vieh den Ausdruck sehn. Der Atem stockte mir, als er eintrat. Seitdem er hier den Bruder Troilos getötet hatte, war er Apollon ferngeblieben, obwohl, leider, sag ich, ausgehandelt war, daß dieser Tempel ein neutraler Ort sein sollte, auch den Griechen zur Verehrung ihres Gottes offen. So kam er denn, Achill das Vieh, und sah die Schwester Polyxena, und ich, vom Altar her, von wo man alles sieht, sah, daß er sie sah. Wie sie unserm Bruder Troilos ähnelte. Wie Achill sie mit seinen entsetzlichen Blicken, die ich kannte, verschlang.²²⁷

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 117: ‘Why did her conflicted nature reveals itself right at that moment, as a fervent expression of frailty? Why did Achilles the beast have to see that expression? My breath caught when he entered. Ever since he had killed my brother Troilus here, he had stayed away from Apollo, although unfortunately the temple had come to be considered neutral ground, so that the Greeks too could worship their god. And so there he was, Achilles the beast, he saw my sister Polyxena, and from the altar I could see that he saw her. How she resembled our brother Troilus. How Achilles devoured her with his dreadful looks, by now known to me’.

Once again, Achilles is described as a devouring beast, one determined to desecrate the now 'neutral' ground of the temple dedicated to Apollo. This scene shows how war takes away or radically changes people affected by it. A 'neutral' ground does not exist, not in Troy and not outside of it. It is a myth that Cassandra has to unlearn at her own expense and at the expense of those she cares most about. As for her sister Polissena, she pays the price of deluding herself into thinking there was freedom to be gained in conflict.

If possible, war magnifies the gap rooted in pain, which moves two worlds even farther apart, effectively contrasting the 'male dystopia' with the 'female utopia'. Indeed, war creates an unbridgeable gap between people, not only based on nationality but also on social class and gender. In fact, men and the enemy are described as one and the same, because whether they are Trojan or Greek, they are responsible for the war. Only one male character—namely, Aeneas—seems to be immune to this categorisation, at least in the eyes of Cassandra:

Mittags, als Aineias kam, fiel mir auf, daß ich ihn seit langem schon in jeder Menge sah. [...] Wir gingen in eine weit entfernte Ecke des Tempelbezirks und überschritten dabei, ohne es zu merken, die Grenze, hinter der die Sprache aufhört. Es ist ja nicht Hochmut, nicht nur Scheu, die auch, natürlich, wenn ich den Frauen, als wir allmählich auch über unsre Gefühle sprachen, nie ein Wort über Aineias sagte. [...] Ich weiß, daß ich so die Schranke zwischen uns nie ganz einriß.²²⁸

Among all the men described as barbarians due to them subjecting themselves and being subjected to the logics of war, Aeneas appears different from his peers, although his difference does not bring him any closer to Cassandra, no matter how much she initially deludes herself. Wolf shows this very early on, in passages of the novel such as this one. Here, they find themselves in a secluded place, somewhere inside the fences surrounding the temple. Aeneas is the only one who can cross this physical border meaningfully and find Cassandra in the in-between place, suggesting a way to communicate and perhaps develop some sort of understanding, form an alliance.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 20–21: 'When Aeneas came at midday, I realised that I could easily spot him in any crowd by now. [...] We walked to a faraway corner of the fence surrounding the temple, and without noticing, we crossed the border to the place where no words are uttered. It wasn't because of pride or bashfulness that I never mentioned Aeneas to the other women, as we gradually opened up to each other. [...] I realise that this reinforced the barrier between us'.

Nevertheless, he is also the only one able to move freely between the two worlds, whereas Cassandra remains stuck. Wherever he goes, she cannot follow, which she clearly states multiple times throughout the novel. Notably, Cassandra explicitly mentions another barrier, one existing between her and the other priestesses of the temple. In addition to reinforcing the idea that Cassandra truly dwells on a threshold, this also shows that she does not have the power to change her condition and certainly does not relish in it.

The very power that Cassandra wields—the knowledge of the future—has been gained precisely at this cost: his status as a deity does not prevent Apollo from reinforcing the exact same dynamic when Cassandra denies him after he bestows her with the gift-curse of prophecy.²²⁹ Sonja E. Klocke describes this in terms of the ‘symptomatic body’, as being central to East German literary texts and recurring particularly in Wolf’s work, before and after the reunification.²³⁰ Adopting this perspective, Klocke analyses the novels *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968), *Leibhaftig* (2002) and *Stadt der Engel, oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (2010), but if we were to apply it to *Kassandra* and *Medea*, we would realise that ‘symptomatic bodies’ is certainly one of the overarching themes they depict, perhaps even more directly than other works. According to Klocke, the motivation behind these narrations concerns the reality of the GDR, with the literary and metaphorical manifestation of the border being inscribed on the body.²³¹ War rages over Cassandra’s body, much as it does outside the walls. It is a different conflict, one that is fought over her limbs, mind and soul, onto which the suffering of her people,

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 19: ‘Wenn sich ein Gott zu ihr legen wollte: War das nicht ehrenvoll für eine Sterbliche! Das war es. Und daß der Gott, zu dessen Dienst ich mich bestimmt, mich ganz besitzen wollte – war es nicht natürlich? Doch’ (‘And what if a God wanted to lie with her: wouldn’t that have been an honour for a mortal! Surely it was. Even more so that it was the God she had sworn to serve – wasn’t that only natural? It was’).

²³⁰ Klocke, *Inscription and Rebellion*, ibid., p. 2: ‘[...] *Nachdenken über Christa T.* [...] which highlights the female body marked by psychosomatic ailments and fatal disease in order to expose the obstacles Wolf discerned in advancing the socialist state. The protagonist’s physical reaction to political events of the 1950s and 1960s is illness and death. [...] *Leibhaftig* [...] focuses more centrally and dramatically on the ill female body than any other of Wolf’s novels. Reading it in conjunction with *Stadt der Engel, oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* [...] reveals the extent to which bodies serve as symbolic spaces where political conflicts and the individual’s struggles play themselves out in Wolf’s oeuvre, both pre- and post-unification’.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 4: ‘German studies scholarship has pointed to the proliferation of fictional discourses about illness and health – predominantly, but not exclusively, in East German literature – in the aftermath of the so-called *Wende* of 1989/90, and explained the phenomenon as a means to express threat to the social body after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This observation, while accurate, overlooks the fact that depictions of illness and bodies in medical institutions were already abundant in GDR literature before the fall of the Wall’.

and the suffering caused by the prohibited knowledge she possesses, is projected, as Wolf describes in the following passage:

Wie jedem Menschen gab mir der Körper Zeichen; anders als andre war ich nicht imstande, die Zeichen zu übergehn. [...] Endgültige Fremdheit, schien es, gegenüber mir und jedermann. Bis endlich die entsetzliche Qual, als Stimme, sich aus mir, durch mich hindurch und mich zerreißen ihren Weg gebahnt hatte und sich losgemacht. [...] Und in mir wurde gekämpft, das merkte ich wohl. Zwei Gegner auf Leben und Tod hatten sich die erstorbene Landschaft meiner Seele zum Kampfplatz gewählt. Nur der Wahnsinn schützte mich vor dem unerträglichen Schmerz, den die beiden mir sonst zugefügt hätten.²³²

Here, Cassandra describes her rapidly deteriorating mental state, resulting from the traumatic events that have taken over her life and life inside the fortified city of Troy. The madness that she talks about, as if it were a defensive mechanism against both physical and mental torture, is not to be taken literally. The conflicted nature of Cassandra's existence on the border manifests with progressively more virulence as it creates a feeling of abstraction and rescindment from her own body.²³³ This detachment from the body, which also results in a different form of pain perception on the part of Cassandra, stems from her body being moulded to fit a series of stereotypes, which do not allow her to break free from the marginal space she is forced to occupy, from a gendered perspective or from that of an outsider.²³⁴ In the end, the double-dimensionality and value of the border, which were theorised by Benthien and Krüger-Fürhoff are reprised in full force. The only place where Cassandra feels at ease is inside

²³² Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, pp. 66–67: 'My body started giving me some signals, as it does with everyone; but contrary to the others, I was not able to ignore them. [...] There was a battle taking place inside of me. Two opponents fighting for their lives or to the death in the desolate place that my soul had become. Only madness could protect me from the unbearable pain the two were inflicting me'.

²³³ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, pp. 26-27: "Hat es nicht jetzt schon, dies probate Mittel, mein altes, schon vergeßnes Übel wieder wahrgemacht: daß 26 ich, gespalten in mir selbst, mir selber zuseh, mich sitzen seh auf diesem verfluchten Griechenwagen, unter meinem Tuch, von Angst geschüttelt. Werd ich, um mich nicht vor Angst zu winden, um nicht zu brüllen wie ein Tier – wer, wenn nicht ich, sollt das Gebrüll der Opfertiere kennen! – werd ich denn bis zuletzt, bis jenes Beil. – Werd ich denn noch, wenn schon mein Kopf, mein Hals – werd ich um des Bewußtseins willen bis zuletzt mich selber spalten, eh das Beil mich spaltet, werd ich – Warum will ich mir diesen Rückfall in die Kreatur bloß nicht gestatten. Was hält mich denn. Wer sieht mich noch. Bin ich, die Ungläubige, denn immer noch im Mittelpunkt der Blicke eines Gottes, wie als Kind, als Mädchen, Priesterin? Gibt sich das nie." .

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33; 103: "Wär ichs doch! dacht ich verzweifelt, als sie dich – nicht mich! nicht mich! – zum Orakelsprecher machten. Ach sei froh, Schwester. Augur sein – was für ein undankbares Geschäft. Na, er werde sich pünktlichst an die Anweisungen des Kalchas halten./ Durchsichtig, schwächlich, immer unansehnlicher wurde mein Wir, an dem ich festhielt, unfühlbarer daher für mich selbst mein Ich."

the dwelling space of the temple: outside of it, only chaos and panic await.²³⁵ This is the transformation that Cassandra undergoes in Wolf's adaptation—she travels to modern-day Germany, not as an echo of her previous literary incarnations but as a character who can speak to the fragilities and hopes of Wolf's contemporaries.

3.1.2 Borders in *Medea*

The shadows and lingering effects of war, bringing conflict and instigating separation among a people, are elements of a motif that is reprised from *Kassandra* and brought into the narrative structure of *Medea. Stimmen*. The abundance of contradictions in the process of German reunification are highlighted in the character of Medea, who is not only stigmatised because of her 'barbaric' origins but also because she speaks a language no one wants to hear. Like Cassandra, Medea speaks with her own voice, but she gradually becomes more isolated and more estranged from the rest of society as the story progresses. In comparison to Wolf's previous mythological novel, in *Medea. Stimmen* the borders between characters, territories and ideologies are thematised even more explicitly. It is not a mystery why Wolf has framed herself, Cassandra and Medea as 'foreigners', both in the GDR and in the FRG. Naturally, her existence as an outsider became much more dramatic in relation to her life and career as a writer after the *Literaturstreit*. In several interviews, and in an essay titled *Die Andere Medea*, Wolf explicitly problematises the issue of 'foreignness' as part of the *Ausgrenzung* process, affirming that there is a 'pattern' to be recognised in the way people are excluded from cultural, political and social spaces during times of crisis. As she explains in a conversation with Petra Kamman:

Ich war selbst überrascht, dass sich mir noch einmal ein mythologischer Stoff aufdrängte, aber so verwunderlich ist es doch nicht. Ich begann 1990/91, mich mit der Medea-Figur auseinanderzusetzen. Es zeigte sich mir in jenen Jahren, dass unsere Kultur, wenn sie in Krisen gerät, immer wieder in die gleichen Verhaltensmuster zurückfällt: Menschen ausgrenzen, sie zu Sündenböcken zu machen, Feindbilder zu züchten, bis hin zu wahrhafter Realitätsverkenning. [...] In der DDR hatte ich ja gesehen, wohin ein Staat gerät, der immer größere Gruppen ausgrenzte, der seine Integrationsfähigkeit immer mehr verlor. Jetzt

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 107: "In meinen Eingeweiden saß ein Tier, das fraß an mir und trieb mich um, später fand ich seinen Namen: Panik. Und nur im Tempelbezirk fand ich Ruhe."

erleben wir in der größer gewordenen Bundesrepublik Deutschland, wie immer grössere Gruppen von Menschen überflüssig werden, aus sozialen, aus ethnischen und anderen Gründen. [...] Diese Ausgrenzung des Fremden zieht sich durch die ganze Geschichte unserer Kultur. Immer schon vorhanden ist die Ausgrenzung des angstmachenden weiblichen Elements. Das zieht sich vom Beginn des Patriarchats durch die Geschichte.²³⁶

Through the *Medea* rewriting, the chorality of Cassandra's conscience is split into several different yet converging voices. All of these subjects speak for themselves, thereby surrounding the main body of the narrative, which is centred on the development of Medea's character. We shall now consider what the borders in *Medea* comprise.

Many scholars note a separation between *Sieger* and *Opfer*, which Medea overtly mentions in the novel. However, the novel itself works around this clearcut divide and instead focuses on thresholds often shrouded in darkness—it dwells on the border(s) in a way that is perhaps even more daring than what occurs in the retelling of Cassandra's story. The character of Medea is the most affected by this dwelling, albeit not exclusively so. Indeed, all the 'voices' fall prey to their idiosyncrasies and become difficult to place on only one side of the metaphorical and literal fence: Medea is neither hero(ine) nor foe; Jason takes many steps towards change but remains several steps behind as well. The ambiguity of these characters was actually part of Wolf's first conceptualisation of the novel:

Doch werde ich mich auf die gängige Überlieferung einlassen und die Nahtstelle der Wertesysteme in sie hineinlegen müssen, sie zum Objekt der patriarchalen Machtinteressen verschiedener Familien - auch des eigenen Vaters - machen, zeigen müssen, aus welchen Gründen und in welcher Weise sie, die Heilerin, die hoch angesehene Tochter es ankam, nach und nach und am Ende rasend schnell demontiert wird und wie dieser Prozess besondere Schärfe gewinnt durch die Teilnahme Jasons, für den es, wenn er sich nicht über den Rand hinausdrängen lassen will, in dieser Gesellschaft keinen Platz gibt als den des Herrschenden, sodass natürlich auch er demontiert wird, er muss seine Werte verleugnen, er tut es, er ist am Ende ein gebrochener Mann, Medea ist eine vernichtete, nicht eine

²³⁶ Hochgeschurz, *Christa Wolfs Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 50.

The characters' inner selves are torn apart, considering that the differences between them seem irreconcilable.²³⁸ Each of them tries and fails to strike a balance within the power systems that have been established in the cities of Corinth and Colchis.²³⁹ In a similar fashion to the narrative progression of *Cassandra*, one side seeks the truth while the other is on a quest for power, thus condemning everyone to needless suffering. However, this divide is presented in a less black-and-white way than it was in *Cassandra*: the character of Medea, who embodies the motif of the *Sündenbock*, is also a perpetrator, albeit in a different way than her traditional reputation would imply.

As a matter of fact, Medea becomes even more of a border figure than the rest of the characters, given that she is deprived of her identity and ends up being 'das Monster [...], die Unnatur in Person, die schreckliche Frau'.²⁴⁰ The aspect of marginalisation

²³⁷Ibid., p. 47.

²³⁸ Klocke, *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, *ibid.*, p. 149: 'For the native Corinthians, Colchis is at the edge of the world a land of dark-skinned barbarians. In Medea's somewhat overdetermined figuration, the Colchians also signify the dark-skinned residents of the new Berlin Republic. In other words, in Medea, Wolf portrays a conflict between two groups completely alien to each other racially, religiously and geographically'.

²³⁹ While it seems easy to draw parallels between Colchis/East Germany and Corinth/West Germany, Christa Wolf has clarified that this binary opposition, and binary oppositions in general, is not at her concern. So, even if we interpret criticism of the GDR and FRG, and towards the Reunification process of Germany as well, we must also keep in mind that Wolf sought to reach beyond these differences. According to her, as it is explained in Hochgeschurz's *Christa Wolfs Medea*, p. 58: "Andererseits ist es natürlich so: wenn jemand in einer bestimmten Zeit ein Thema aufgreift, wenn ein Motiv ihn oder sie so bedrängt, daß er oder sie es schreiben muß, wie mich eben dieses Problem, daß eine Frau zum Sündenbock gemacht wird, was ja eine Kernlinie des Buches ist, dann kann man schon davon ausgehen, daß der Autor, die Autorin eben dieses Problem in dieser Zeit selbst sehr stark empfunden hat. Aber eben nicht in dieser oberflächlichen Weise, sondern in einer Weise, die doch sehr viel mehr zu tun hat mit den allgemeinen Umgangsformen und Verhaltensweisen in unserer Kultur, die übrigens in Ost und West nicht so verschieden waren, wie es heute dargestellt wird. So verschieden sind die Verhaltensweisen und Grundlagen der Zivilisation, der Kultur nicht in Ost und West. Das hat mich viel mehr beschäftigt und betrifft mich auch heute noch viel tiefer. Und vielleicht ist es auch so - ich will das niemandem unterstellen -, aber es könnte auch sein, daß diese viel härtere Fragestellung vielleicht manche auch nicht wahrnehmen wollen und sich zunächst einmal erfreuen und verlustieren an dem Vordergründigen".

²⁴⁰ Hochgeschurz, *Christa Wolfs Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 42. Additionally, 'Medea [...] wird wohl daran zugrunde gehen müssen, dass sie auf keiner Seite mehr ganz stehen konnte. Dass sie zwischen die Fronten geriet. Dass sie auch oft selber nicht mehr sicher war. Was sie am häufigsten denkt, manchmal sagt: Ich weiss nicht' (p. 38). Cfr. with R. Saunders, *The Concept of the Foreign*, Lanham, Lexington Books 2003, pp. 3-4, wherein the author writes that: "No entity is inherently foreign; s/he who is a foreigner in one place is at home in another; as the familiar is altered or a boundary redrawn, so too is the character of the foreign. [...] to be foreign is not belonging to a group, not speaking a given language, not having the same customs; it is to be unfamiliar, uncanny, unnatural, unauthorized, incomprehensible, inappropriate, improper. [it is] a principle of negative relativity [...]". Therefore, p. 5, "If the relative nature of foreignness means that it is defined negatively and thereby embedded in a hierarchy, it also means that the presence of the foreign simultaneously thematizes and interrogates the familiar, drags crepuscular familiarities into daylight and exposes them to inspection".

serves as vital essence for the development of the novel because its foundations are built on issues evoked by the *Literaturstreit* but also because the novel is a reassessment of previous assumptions concerning the fate of Germany.²⁴¹ Some of the observations made in *Medea. Stimmen* also appear in *Kassandra*, as well as in other works that do not necessarily deal with mythology in any shape or form.²⁴² In *Medea. Stimmen*, however, Wolf has the advantage of knowing the ‘future’ unfolding of events. She knows that most of her predictions became reality. In short, she has the advantage of being able to look at the same events from the other side of the Berlin Wall, both literally and metaphorically.

Medea as a character is also the perfect soil in which Wolf can grow her new narrative. In fact, even momentarily disregarding Wolf’s re-narration, there is scarcely another character in classical mythology who could embody marginalisation and foreignness quite as effectively as Medea. The degenerate, barbaric and wild Medea, a mother who kills her own children: this series of attributes is what she is best known for, but as we know, Wolf spares her at least one of these descriptors. The Medea in Wolf’s rewriting is still regarded as a threat within her social confines because she is foreign (and, therefore, barbaric and wild), but she contradicts the negativity associated with her condition (woman, foreign, witch, monster) by not committing the murder she is archetypically infamous for. For her choice to commit to the ‘original’ Medea, Wolf was heavily criticised but praised in equal measure.²⁴³ Rewriting Medea as a complex

²⁴¹ Cf. B. Dahlke, *Christa Wolf (1929-2011): Antifaschistin-Humanistin-Sozialistin*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann 2019, p. 66: ‘Wolfs Umerzählung des Medea-Mythos funktioniert eben gerade nicht nach dem Modell ihrer dreizehn Jahre früher erschienenen *Kassandra*-Erzählung. Hier prallen Göttliches und Menschliches, Heiliges und Profanes, alte und neue Hierarchien aufeinander’.

²⁴² *Medea. Stimmen* could also be understood as offering an alternative resolution to *Der geteilte Himmel*, where Rita/Medea *does* decide to leave with Manfred/Jason. In so doing, they (Rita and Medea) are able to uncover the ‘what ifs?’ of that first, heavily criticised novel and to once and for all remark on the impossibility of that utopian conception, even for Medea, who has left the old world and old customs behind, only to discover that the whole world functions in the same way as Colchis.

²⁴³ Cf. Kosta, *Writing Against Boundaries*, *ibid.*, p. 135: ‘In *Der Spiegel*, Volker Hage writes that ‘This Medea does not hurt anyone. She has never hurt anyone. Neither the younger brother nor any of her children: No murder. Nowhere’. This allusion to Wolf’s novel, *Kein Ort. Nirgends (No Place On Earth; 1979)* is not only overdone but also false, as there is more than enough murder in the novel. Indeed, in Colchis, Aetes commands his son to kill Apsyrtus so that he can remain in power and, in Corinth, Creon lets his daughter Iphinoe be killed for the same reason. Medea is also involved in the deadly power game of the ‘father-kings’: as a sister, she feels guilty regarding the death of her brother in Colchis and, as a ‘guest friend’, in Corinth, she discovers that Creon’s power rests on crime. Both of these ‘victims of the foundation process’ result in further ‘kinds of death’ in Corinth. Iphinoe’s nurse loses her mind and jumps off a cliff; the mother, Merope, falls into an irretrievable depression and locks herself inside the palace; Iphinoe’s sister Glaucé also becomes mentally ill and commits suicide by jumping into a well. Medea is declared an undesirable foreigner, driven from the streets and banned from the city as a ‘scapegoat’.

victim, rather than as a (more or less complex) perpetrator, allows for a ‘shifting in responsibility’, which does not correspond to a lack of agency on Medea’s side. Rather, it is a different kind of agency, one the character was not permitted before, if not for nefarious intent. In any case, it is still not enough to truly diminish the power of those in charge: Medea’s marginality and foreignness are still the cause of her doom and her children’s demise, even if these outcomes are not directly orchestrated by her. If Medea perfectly embodies marginality and serves as a border figure, it shows mainly in the fact that she haunts the narrative and remains a cautionary tale: ‘Foreignness [...] is precisely what is repressed in identity, in the proper, [...] what is misrecognized as other’.²⁴⁴ Medea becomes the repressed unconscious, the trauma that the Corinthians and Colchians are desperately trying to remove. As a ‘foreigner’ and a representation of men’s (and women’s) worst nightmares, Medea is not only denied social and political recognition (like Cassandra) but also humanity, much like how Wolf was alternatively used as a symbol and a scapegoat.²⁴⁵ At the same time, Medea and the Colchians are more than a metaphor for marginality: they are described as *Flüchtlinge*, effectively reflecting and criticising the status of former East Germans as emigrants to former West Germany and accounts of them being treated as lesser than, ‘[...] as abject, second-class citizens’.²⁴⁶

Marginality is expressed in various forms throughout the novel and embodied differently by different characters. Especially enigmatic here is the figure of Jason, who is shown to continuously and consistently represent his wife Medea as an outsider, seeking to distance himself from her, from the ‘border’, from the brink of the precipice. Although once fascinated by her ‘wildness’ and her authentic disinterest in structures and customs she considers unreasonable, Jason understands that he needs to repress his

Arethusa, Medea’s girlfriend, dies from the plague. Creon remains a broken man and Jason, robbed of his former and new wives and the coveted king’s honour, fades towards approaching death in the shadow of the defeated Argo after his and Medea’s sons, Medus and Pheres, are stoned to death by the Corinthians. Thus, at the end of the novel, corpses surround Medea.”

²⁴⁴ Saunders, *The Concept of the Foreign*, *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Dahlke, *Christa Wolf: Antifaschistin-Humanistin-Sozialistin*, *ibid.*, p. 65: ‘Der Sündenbock-Ideologie werden alternative Strategien zur Seite gestellt. Medea ist hier weniger Opfer als vielmehr die Außenseiterin mit dem klaren Blick auf gesellschaftliche Strukturen einschließlich verdrängter Gründungs-Gewalt ereignisse. Zwar erhält Medea das erste und letzte Wort und die anderen fünf Figuren/ Stimmen erscheinen stets in Relation zu ihr. Wer von ihnen allen die Deutungsmacht innehaben wird, ist jedoch nicht sicher. [...] Der Titel lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Polyphonie der Stimmen und nicht auf das simple Modell der Barbarin aus dem Osten’.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Klocke, *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, p. 156.

own fascination for the perturbing Medea. ‘Das Weib wird mir zum Verhängnis’²⁴⁷: these are the first words Jason utters in the novel, through which the fear of marginalisation, of becoming as ‘wild’ as Medea is, clearly manifests. After Acamante announces his cruel and ill-intended prophecy, and after Medea has been framed as a murderer, Jason twice repeats: ‘Wohin war ich da geraten, wohinein hatte sie mich nun schon wieder verstrickt. Überzeugt, überzeugt. Wovon kann unsereins schon überzeugt sein bei diesen Weibern’.²⁴⁸ He effectively absolves himself of responsibility, takes the easy road and decides to conform to the already widespread belief that Medea is the wielder of malevolent influence and power:

Wie sie, sich aufrichtend, uns bemerkte, die Hände ausschüttelte und unbefangen auf uns zukam, mit raschen, kräftigen Schritten, schlank, aber von ausgeprägter Figur, und so alle Vorzüge ihrer Erscheinung zur Geltung brachte, daß Telamon, unbeherrscht wie er ist, durch die Zähne pfiß und mir zu flüsterte: Das war doch was für dich. Es war ihm nicht entgangen, daß ich für die Reize braunhäutiger dunkel haariger Mädchen empfänglich bin. Aber dies hier, der arme Telamon war nicht imstande, es zu begreifen, war doch etwas anderes. Ein nie gekanntes Ziehen in allen meinen Gliedern, ein durch und durch zauberhaftes Gefühl, sie hat mich verzaubert, ist es mir durch die Sinne gegangen, und in der Tat, das hatte sie. Und das will sie weitertreiben, da hat Akamas recht. Daß ich mich hüten muß, immer wieder auf ihre Kunststücke hereinzufallen, denn natürlich wird sie mir über den Tod ihres armen Bruders eine ihrer Geschichten erzählen, die so überaus glaubhaft sind, solange sie einen mit ihrem Blick festhält, aber jetzt muß ich mich wappnen, daß ich nicht wieder auf sie hereinfalle.²⁴⁹

In this early depiction of his character in the novel, Jason is shown to rethink his relationship with Medea as soon as her unwillingness to bend to the rules (i.e. to accept

²⁴⁷ . Wolf, *Medea. Stimmen*, *ibid.*, p. 39: “That woman will be my ruin”.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40: “Where did I end up, where had she led me to. Convinced, convinced. What can the likes of us be convinced of with these women”.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43: “As she stood up, noticed us, shook hands and approached us unabashedly, with quick, powerful steps, slim but with a pronounced figure, she showed off all the advantages of her appearance so that Telamon, with all his lack of restraint, whistled through his teeth and whispered to me: That was something just for you. It had not escaped him that I am susceptible to the charms of dark-skinned, dark-haired girls. But poor Telamon couldn’t understand that this was something else. A never-before-felt tugging in all my limbs, a thoroughly enchanting feeling, she has bewitched me, it crossed my mind, and she had. And she wants to take it further, Akamas is right about that. I must be careful not to fall for her tricks again and again, because if she were to tell me one of her stories about the death of her poor brother, which are completely believable as long as she holds your attention with her gaze, but now I must be strong so that I do not succumb again.”

her status as less than human) becomes a threat to his reputation. Since Medea does not conform to the ideals of the new society they both inhabit, we witness first-hand the creation of the Medea myth as we know it and we discover that Jason contributes to its spread while Medea simultaneously rewrites her own tale. Therefore, the demythologising and rewriting process unfold meta-narratively before our eyes. At the same time, each word uttered with the objective of sullyng Medea's reputation becomes a brick in the wall being built to confine the character. One such moment of meta-narrative clarity is found in the following passage:

Es ist dahin gekommen, daß ich selbst nicht mehr genau weiß, was ich da in dem Hain, an der Eiche mit jener Schlange erlebt habe, aber das will ja sowieso keiner mehr hören. Sie sitzen abends an den Lagerfeuern und singen von Jason dem Drachentöter, manchmal komme ich vorbei, es schert sie nicht, ich glaube, sie wissen nicht einmal, daß ich es bin, den sie besingen. Einmal hörte Medea mit mir den Liedern zu. Am Ende sagte sie: Sie haben aus jedem von uns den gemacht, den sie brauchen. Aus dir den Heroen, und aus mir die böse Frau. So haben sie uns auseinanderge trieben.²⁵⁰

In this scene, there is thinly veiled parallelism with the temple scene involving Cassandra and Aeneas. Whereas Aeneas is willing and able to reach out to Cassandra in her dimension of dwelling, even if only for a brief moment, Jason chooses to turn away from the border and is unwilling to cross it any more than he already has, leaving Medea alone to face the merciless judgement of the Corinthians. Medea's words, however, reveal Wolf's demythologising intent, as the character shows awareness of how she will be remembered by future generations, and she speaks directly to readers as much as she does to Jason. The monumentality of the betrayal that occurs between the two characters remains at the heart of the Medea myth, although her reaction in Wolf's rewriting is unexpected and sets a virtuous precedent for interpreting the actions of women characters in myth to this day.

Medea has an initial premonition of the fate that awaits her when she is face to face with the conditions of Corinthian women, who are expected to behave as 'domesticated

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 53: "It has reached the point where I can no longer tell what I really experienced in the grove, by the oak tree with the snake, and no one wants to hear about it anyway. In the evenings, they sit around the campfires and sing about Jason the dragon slayer, sometimes I come by, but they don't care, I believe they don't even know it's me they're singing about. Once Medea listened to their singing with me. When it was over, she said: they made of us what they needed. You, the hero, me, the evil woman. This is how they separated us".

animals', obeying the commands of their owners. Medea is aware that she stands out, and her proud stance, which Jason describes as regrettable in his soliloquy, to Medea herself, is a way of retaining her identity. She remains on the outskirts of society, but inspires attention and, somehow, admiration too: 'the Corinthian women [...] stare at me as if I were a strange apparition'.²⁵¹

In stark contrast to Medea and among the Corinthian women, Queen Merope stands out. By looking at her, Medea understands that she (and, by extension, the rest of the women of Corinth) has also been made to inhabit an enclosed space:

Warum bin ich der Frau nachgegangen, der Königin, die ich, solange ich in dieser Stadt Korinth bin, kaum je zu Gesicht bekommen habe. Eingesponnen in ein dichtes Netz schauerlicher Gerüchte, zuverlässig verborgen hinter ihrer Unnahbarkeit, verbringt sie ihre Tage und Nächte im entlegensten, ältesten Teil des Palastes, in dickwandigen Kammern, die lichtarmen Höhlen gleichen sollen, eher eine Gefangene als eine Herrscherin, bedient und bewacht von zwei seltsam ertümlischen Weibern, die ihr aber auf ihre Weise treu ergeben sein sollen, ich glaube, sie kennt meinen Namen nicht, und ich hatte keinen Gedanken verschwendet an die unglückliche Königin eines Landes, das mir fremd geblieben ist und immer fremd bleiben wird.²⁵²

Medea acknowledges the struggles of her fellow women, but unlike Cassandra she is already detached from others and does not have anyone she can truly rely on. The sympathetic relations Cassandra managed to create with a small community of women, that utopian micro-society, cannot be recreated in the context of this novel. Medea accepts her isolation, which will ultimately lead to her downfall:

Lyssa, die ich manchmal neben mich auf mein Lager ziehe, um vertraut mit ihr zu sprechen, und die ich manchmal wegwünsche bis an den Rand der Welt. Aber der Rand der Welt ist Kolchis. Unser Kolchis an den Südhängen des wilden Kaukasus, dessen schroffe Berglinie in jede von uns eingeschrieben ist, wir

²⁵¹ Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 17: "Why did I follow the woman, the queen, whom since I arrived in the city of Corinth I have hardly seen? Enveloped in a dense net of frightful rumors, reliably hidden behind her aloofness, she spends her days and nights in the most isolated and oldest corner of the palace, in chambers with walls so thick that they resemble those of a dimly lit cave, more a prisoner than a ruler, served and guarded by two strangely primitive women, who should somehow be loyal to her, I believe she does not know my name, nor had I given any thoughts to the unhappy queen of a country that has been and still is foreign to me".

wissen es voneinander, reden niemals darüber, Reden steigert das Heimweh ins nicht zu Ertragende.²⁵³

The fact that Medea is surrounded by a system that fails her (and fails women in general), both in her native Colchis and in the unfamiliar Corinth, is further highlighted by the voice of Agameda. She is one of those who suffer under the system, but unlike Medea, she seeks to escape her marginal condition and deludes herself into believing she can control those who keep the system standing. Agameda, who depicts herself as having once been loyal to Medea, desiring only her love and recognition but being rejected on both fronts, schemes to have Medea accused of murdering her brother.

Wie auch immer, Medea nahm mich in ihre Schülerinnenschar auf, wie sie es meiner Mutter versprochen hatte, sie lehrte mich, was sie wußte, aber sie hielt mich zu meiner Enttäuschung von sich fern, sie entzog dem Kind die Zuneigung, nach der es brannte, und erst viel später, als ich in die erste Reihe ihrer Schülerinnen aufgerückt war, sagte sie mir einmal beiläufig, ich hätte doch sicher verstanden, daß sie mich strenger habe behandeln müssen als alle anderen, damit man ihr nicht nachsagen könne, sie ziehe die Tochter ihrer Freundin den anderen vor. Da fing ich an, sie zu hassen.²⁵⁴

Agameda tries to use the imbalances in the system to her advantage, as well as to Medea's detriment, but she ends up damaging them both. Her betrayal pushes Medea further into the corner; however, she does not react in the way her mythological counterpart would have: this creates tumult and condemns Medea to death.

Another aspect that Medea shares with Cassandra is the representation of her embodied subjectivity, as shared with the body of Colchis. In this respect, Medea describes herself as an extension of the body of Colchis, 'of which I could feel every movement'.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 28: "Lyssa, whom I sometimes pull on the bed next to me, so that I can entrust my words to her, and whom I sometimes wish away to the edge of the world. But the edge of the world is Colchis. Our Colchis on the southern slopes of the wild Caucasus, the steepness of whose mountains is etched into each one of us, something we all know but never talk about, talking only exacerbates the homesickness until it's intolerable"

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 83: "Nevertheless, Medea took me into her group of students, as she had made a promise to my mother, she taught me what she knew, but to my disappointment she kept me at a distance, denying the child the affection that she longed for, and it was only much later, when I had rose to the highest rank within her group of students, that I must have surely understood by now that she was only stricter with me so as not to raise suspicion of any favouritism towards her friend's daughter. It was then that I began to hate her".

²⁵⁵ Wolf, *Medea*, ibid., p. 54.

Therefore, the fall of Colchis resembles ‘an illness that makes its way through me’.²⁵⁶ The symptomatic body of Medea, however, carries different implications than Cassandra’s own representation of illness and fragmentation, and it has more to do with Jason’s attempts to repress ‘his’ unconsciousness (i.e. the trauma of reunification). In fact, the representation of illness and the body in *Medea. Stimmen* anticipates the themes that will be explored in Wolf’s later novels, such as *Leibhaftig* and, to a certain extent, *Stadt der Engel*. Klocke considers this particularly in relation to *Leibhaftig*, about whose representation of the body she writes the following:

If the portrayed body is furthermore understood as an allegory for the body politic, the narrative’s political references turn the protagonist’s flesh into a seismograph of her country and its collapse. [...] her body is actually more than a metaphor for the decaying GDR: it acts as a kind of interface on which the conflicts between the individual and the GDR regime are played out in disease and suffering. In this performance, the symptomatic body contributes its hidden historical knowledge to the historical narrative.²⁵⁷

But more than in this later novel, Medea is not only ‘an allegory for the body politic’, as she identifies with the body of the State and is receptive to the rapidly changing dynamics in the political sphere. Yet Wolf’s *Medea* also anticipates the spectral, haunting presence of the GDR’s past long after its collapse.²⁵⁸

Most poignant and enduring of all is the representation of Medea as a ‘horrible mother’, which Wolf discussed at length with various experts on the Medea myth. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich writes that ‘The scapegoat is different from the martyr; she cannot teach resistance or revolt. She represents a terrible temptation: to suffer uniquely, to assume that I, the individual woman, am the “problem”’.²⁵⁹ This aligns with the tradition of Medea being the symbol of mothers shouldering responsibility for the failures of their children and of society as a whole. As Stephan also notes, ‘the figure

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Klocke, *Inscription and Rebellion*, *ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 155: ‘[...] post-GDR novels often do not portray the GDR per se, but feature symptomatic bodies to reveal vestiges of the GDR lingering in contemporary German society. Precisely because the socialist state has long since ceased to exist, the protagonists at the center of these fictional prose texts are taken by surprise when the specters return to haunt them— even outside the territory of the bygone country’.

²⁵⁹ A. Rich, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, London, Virago Press 1977, p. 278.

of the mother, or rather the idea of motherliness as solicitousness and sacrifice unbound by time acquires a special meaning, with the “failure” of mothers in times of crisis and upheaval carrying more weight than the “blame” of fathers for the collapse of national order’.²⁶⁰

In *Medea. Stimmen*, Wolf constructs the narrative around the ‘stereotype of persecution’, which allows her to ground not only the actions of Medea but also those of people around her, providing a literary representation of Renè Girard’s theories in *The Scapegoat*. In this way, Wolf is able to trace the roots of how the hatred of Medea, the marginalised, the othered, was legitimised. According to Girard, “men feel powerless when confronted with the eclipse of culture; they are disconcerted by the immensity of the disaster but never look into the natural causes; the concept that they might affect those causes by learning more about them remains embryonic”.²⁶¹ This can be directly compared to what Medea says about her understanding of why the people of Corinth need to rely on the fear of others and to act out that fear via aggression, which is something she failed to conceive of before because it did not occur in her culture: “Now I know why they do it. It’s because they can only mitigate their fear if they project it into the others”.²⁶² Girard defines this process as ‘the loss of difference’, which is the cause of the “monstrous foundations” upon which both Corinth and Colchis have been built.

Also interesting is the reason why Medea is arrested and imprisoned. Among all the crimes she is said to have committed, she is ultimately accused of having eviscerated Turon during a ceremony. The outrage prompted by this act has not so much to do with the violence itself but with the crime symbolically alluding to the dismantling of the patriarchal order. Due to her barbarian customs, which would entail the castration of men, Medea represents a threat that must be neutralised once and for all.²⁶³ Moreover, the same threat is perceived in Medea’s supposed dismembering of her brother’s body. While the alleged scission of the patriarchal order is attributed to Medea, the scission that is actually happening is the one imposed on every female character by patriarchal–

²⁶⁰ I. Stephan, *The Bad Mothers*, *ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁶¹ R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press 1986, p. 29.

²⁶² Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁶³ In her letter to Wolf, written while the author was collecting information about the Medea myth, Heide Göttner-Abendroth explains that the same symbology can be perceived in the acquisition of the golden fleece.

illuministic society: Medea is separated from her identity as a healer and a mother; Glauce is deprived of the affection she has for her sister and remains an empty shell; Agamedea is torn apart by her unrequited affection for Medea and uses the only means available in a patriarchal system to transform that affection into hatred.

In the end, Medea solidifies her permanence at the 'border' between Colchis and Corinth, between two sides of the same coin, by pronouncing her curse against the violence of those who murdered her children, which can be understood as the hatred that develops in all mothers who, across time, have lost their children to the interests of warmongers. It is a different curse to that which Cassandra pronounces against the god Apollo, precisely because Medea is not blaming a higher power for what happened but, uniquely, finding blame within the human sphere. This hatred pushes the limits of what Medea is allowed to say and do, even more so than her 'original' counterpart. The ruthlessly passionate Medea is expected to murder her children for revenge and forever relegated to the role of scorned lover. Wolf's translated Medea is allowed something much more powerful: freedom of speech. Proof of the unsettling quality of this characterisation can be found in readers and interviewers deciding to directly confront Wolf about her choice to end the novel on a note of hatred. To this, Wolf answers as follows:

Ich habe Schwierigkeiten, der Aussage in Ihrem Buch zu glauben, daß Medea frei sei, da sie am Ende diesen Fluch getan hat. Denn wäre sie wirklich frei, dann wäre sie doch auch frei von Zorn und Haß.

Sie ist frei vom Glauben an die Götter. Das ist die Aussage: Ich bin ganz frei, ihr könnt mich abtasten mit euren Organen. Ihr werdet keine Hoffnung, keinen Glauben an mir finden. Von Zorn und Haß ist sie nicht frei!

Also nicht wirklich frei? Frei genug! Haß und Zorn können zur Freiheit gehören oder dazu führen.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Hochgeschurz, *Christa Wolfs Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 59: "I have trouble believing the statement in your book, which asserts that Medea is free, since at the end she casts a curse. If she were truly free, wouldn't she be also free from rage and hatred? She is free from the faith in the Gods. This is her statement: I am free, you can probe me and you still won't find either hope, nor faith. She is not, indeed, free from rage and hatred! So, does that mean she isn't free? She is free enough! Rage and hatred can also lead to freedom."

3.2 Renegotiating *Cassandra* and *Medea* in Translation

In the first chapter of this dissertation, we explored the notion of myth translation and adaptation and the different strategies and purposes associated with this process. Therefore, we have seen that characters such as Cassandra and Medea innately possess the potential to travel through time and space, independently of Wolf's rewriting of them. Yet it is also the peculiarity of the rewritings that has influenced the most recent retellings of mythological narratives. Wolf's influence is not limited to the travelling of her novels *Kassandra* and *Medea. Stimmen* through translation: many other 'heroines' and many other works of her literary production have stirred the interest of critics and the reading public abroad. In fact, Wolf has found an impressively loyal readership in many countries worldwide, from Germany to Vietnam, China to France, Italy to the United States. Beyond the specific context of each of her novels, there has always been a singular quality to her writing that has caused her work to transcend the confines of its conception. Many scholars and researchers have discussed the appeal of her writing in many different countries, focusing on what translates from the 'original' work into a different language, culture and context.

It has already been partially shown that the demand for Wolf both inside and outside her own country has changed quite drastically over time, depending on the ever-oscillating sympathies regarding her as a public figure, ultimately causing ever-changing impressions to be projected onto her writing. Countries such as Italy and the United States have been especially receptive to Wolf's work at specific times in their history and cultural, social and economic development. The decision-making concerning what works by Wolf should be translated and how such a task should be accomplished was affected by the varying sensibilities of these countries. Several scholars have tried to make sense of the phenomena surrounding Wolf's translation and reception abroad, formulating context-specific hypotheses.

Among the scholars who have shown interest in exploring this dimension of Wolf's writing, Huynh Mai Trinh emphasises how the readership in his own country, Vietnam, might have felt a connection with the themes and concepts of division, of unification and construction of a socialist society, together with migration, all of which are explored

in Wolf's novels.²⁶⁵ Monika Wolting points out how significant the translation of *Kindheitsmuster* was for readers in Poland at a time when much interest was invested in teaching and discussing the expulsion of Germans from the country following the events of 1945.²⁶⁶ This interest in adapting Wolf's work for a specific context has also contributed to it being translated to fit perceived or reimagined purposes. Indeed, 'some themes were furthered and other suppressed', leading to what amounted to a complete dismissal and misreading of Wolf's writings following the damaging invectives of the *Literaturstreit*, which appeared in several newspapers (*Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*) between 1989 and 1992.²⁶⁷ The debate, which mostly involved Wolf but also other writers from the former GDR, started on June 10th 1990 in a newspaper article that accused her (and Stephan Hermlin) not only of having written exclusively in 'defence' of the GDR but also of having waited until the GDR was no more to paint themselves as victims. By contrast, 'some Western intellectuals, such as Günter Grass and Walter Jens challenge the self-righteous meddling of the Western critics into the Vergangenheitsbewältigung of the former GDR'. While, according to Thomas Anz, the *Literaturstreit* was not about Wolf, she and her novel *Was bleibt*, which had been published five days prior to the beginning of the *Literaturstreit*, were at the centre of the dispute between East and West Germany after the reunification. The words used in this clash, many of which were the same as used to process what happened during the Nazi dictatorship, were also part of the language of this *Streit*. This by itself caused outrage among those who came from the ex-GDR, sparking further debates. Most important for our research is what Frank Schirrmacher wrote about Wolf, which also engendered a reaction from the other side, resulting in Wolf becoming more famous abroad via her translated works. In his article 'Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten' *Auch eine Studie über den autoritären Charakter: Christa Wolfs Aufsätze, Reden und ihre jüngste Erzählung 'Was bleibt'*, Schirrmacher describes Wolf as an authoritative voice among the writers and

²⁶⁵ Klocke, Hosek (eds.), *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, *ibid.*, p. 30: 'While highlighting the distinctions between Germany and Vietnam, Huynh's work speculates on how Vietnamese readers may have found Wolf's themes of division and unification, the construction of socialist society, and migration particularly salient'.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 'These contributions treating China and Vietnam also highlight the fact that Christa Wolf's work was received in distinct ways depending on context. Especially in circumstances marked by the events of World War II and the Cold War, different topics were of particular interest in particular national contexts. For instance, in Poland *Kindheitsmuster* was included in school reading lists for its critical engagement with German wartime acts and groundbreaking thematization of the expulsions of Germans from the areas of Hitler's Reich that became Poland after 1945'.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31. On the *Literaturstreit*, see also Thomas Anz (ed.), *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf: der Literaturstreit im vereinigten Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Verlag, 1995.

intellectuals of the GDR, as well as of the FRG, and even outside of Germany. She is presented as someone who, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, had always stood by the policies of the SED, even encouraging others to do the same and remain in the GDR. To support his argument, Schirmmacher points to texts such as *Der geteilte Himmel*, where Rita's choice to remain in the GDR is seen as proof of Wolf's ultimate defence of the state, while failing to recognise the contradictory nature of the character and the criticism that Wolf always expressed towards the censorship and lack of perspective within the confines of Communist Germany. In essence, Schirmmacher accuses Wolf of failing to recognise that she was living in a totalitarian regime. This bold accusation has been interpreted as an attempt to destroy Wolf's reputation, one that proved successful to a certain extent. This is where the translation and reception of Wolf outside of Germany come into play.

In an essay titled *To Be Recognized Again. Memory, Amnesia and Sincerity in Christa Wolf*, Christine Kanz discusses the impact of this debate years after the reunification:

Ultimate proof came from the funeral and subsequent ceremony for Christa Wolf, who had died on 1 December 2011 in Berlin: the non-presence of many prominent intellectuals, politicians, and colleagues from the West—with the exception of Günter Grass—was striking. On this day it became more than obvious: the Wall between East and West Germany had not really fallen, at least not on an attitudinal or emotional level. Peter Schneider's 1982 formulation 'die Mauer im Kopf' ('the Wall in our heads') still rang true. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, most East Germans and West Germans continued to identify themselves as such.²⁶⁸

This literary and cultural dispute among Germans ended up involving intellectuals outside of Germany, rendering the debate relevant to the reception and translation of Wolf's work abroad, which we shall address later in this chapter.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ C. Kanz, *To Be Recognized Again. Memory, Amnesia and Sincerity in Christa Wolf*, in G. Fetz, P. Herminghouse (eds.), *What Remains: Responses to the Legacy of Christa Wolf*, Vol. 24, New York, Berghahn Books, 2022, p. 125.

²⁶⁹ In reference to the reception of the *Literaturstreit* in the United States, Anz discusses an article written by Ian Buruma, published in the *New York Times* on August 24th 1990, with the title *Despite All, German Literati Keep Jousting*, which underlines the 'paradoxical' negative judgment of Wolf's work by those who previously celebrated her.

Wolf's American reception serves as a point of reference for understanding the spirit in which the translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea* were performed. In *Examining Text and Authorship in Translation: What Remains of Christa Wolf?*,²⁷⁰ Caroline Summers analyses the environment in which Wolf's texts were effectively transplanted and reaches the conclusion that what remains of her in translation (at least, in the Anglophone sphere) is not much—that is, the Wolf that American readers have come to know and appreciate is not necessarily the German Wolf, much less the Wolf of the GDR. In fact, the discourse surrounding the publication of her novels and essays in the United States was punctuated by the overinterpretation of her texts, which simultaneously reduced her writing to what was considered most relevant for the public. In an article titled *The American Feminist Reception of GDR Literature*,²⁷¹ Angelika Bammer reflects on the similarities between the feminist movement and feminist theory in the United States and West Germany, contrary to the idea of feminism 'under socialism'. According to Bammer, there are several reasons why Wolf was the most recognised (if not the only) woman writer of the GDR in the United States. The interest in her writing intensified alongside the rise of feminist studies and theory in the 1970s and is attributable to the following:

- (1) The rapid and dynamic development of feminist theory and literary scholarship in the West was generating a keen interest in women writers;
- (2) in the GDR a new proto-feminist body of women's literature was emerging; and
- (3) the development of GDR studies as a new field of scholarly inquiry in the United States was providing the means for exchange and mediation between these two otherwise unrelated feminisms.²⁷²

It would, however, be misleading to state that American feminism had the same effect on GDR literature that the so-called 'proto-feminism' of the GDR had on American feminism. If, on the one hand, feminist perspectives (in the Western sense) 'played an important role in the developing critique of Marxism itself', on the other hand, the 'critical rethinking of Marxist paradigms from a feminist perspective affected the development of a critical consciousness in the GDR', albeit without truly affecting the

²⁷⁰ C. Summers, *Examining Text and Authorship in Translation. What Remains of Christa Wolf?*, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholar Press, 2013.

²⁷¹ A. Bammer, *The American Feminist Reception of GDR Literature*, in *GDR Bulletin*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1990, p. 18.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

Western feminist discourse and instead being diluted by it.²⁷³ In the GDR,

[...] women were also engaging in public debate on what, in traditional Marxist parlance, was still commonly referred to as the Woman Question. Unlike in the West, however, their engagement did not take the form of political activism on behalf of women's liberation nor was it articulated in the form of feminist theory. In the GDR, rather, where oppositional politics tended to be played out in the cultural sphere, feminism took this form also: protest was registered in the form of fictions.²⁷⁴

In a study titled *Wunschbild, Vorbild oder Porträt? Zur Darstellung der Frau im Roman der DDR*,²⁷⁵ Patricia Herminghouse identifies the developments of feminist literature within the broader genres of GDR literature, including the *Aufbauliteratur*, the *Ankunftsliteratur* and the literature of the 'verändertes Bewusstsein'.²⁷⁶ According to Herminghouse, where the *Aufbauliteratur* is concerned, feminist literature should be presented from the perspective of a positive heroine, whose conceptions and ideals largely depend on socialist realism. The so-called *Ankunftsliteratur* reprises the schemes of the *Aufbauliteratur* but slightly changes the subjects: women can also be 'engineers' and 'scientists'.²⁷⁷ Therefore, later developments in the realm of the *Frauenliteratur* or feminist literature are to be understood as a reaction to the

²⁷³ Ibidem.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. Cf. on the history of the DFD: "Mit Bezug auf die Kapitalismuskritik von Karl Marx und die Schlussfolgerungen, die Friedrich Engels aus der Matriarchatsforschung des 19. Jahrhunderts abgeleitet hatte, wurde die sogenannte Frauenfrage als Teil der Klassenfrage interpretiert. Die westdeutsche Linke entwickelte daraus die These vom Haupt- und Nebenwiderspruch. Die DDR-Frauenpolitik sah im Geschlechterthema keine gesellschaftlichen Widersprüche, sondern lediglich Relikte der Vergangenheit, und berief sich dabei auf August Bebels These von 1878: „Die Klassenherrschaft hat für immer ihr Ende erreicht, und mit ihr auch die Herrschaft des Mannes über die Frau.“³ Nach dieser These hätte es in der DDR keine Frauenorganisation geben müssen. In der Sowjetunion gab es auch keine, nur das Komitee der Sowjetfrauen, dessen ausschließliche Aufgabe in der außenpolitischen Vertretung der sowjetischen Frauen bestand. Die Unterordnung der Frauenfrage unter die Klassenfrage, die heute auf der Grundlage neuerer ethnografischer Forschungen als "Sackgasse" bezeichnet wird, prägte die Frauenpolitik der DDR grundlegend und nötigte die DFD-Verantwortlichen zu einer Gratwanderung zwischen schwesterlicher Verbundenheit und Parteitreue".

[<https://www.digitales-deutsches-frauenarchiv.de/akteurinnen/demokratischer-frauenbund-deutschlands-dfd>]. A detailed timeline of the DFD's relations with other socialist and non-socialist nations, from the late 1940s to 1989, and its development outside of the borders of the GDR following reunification, can be found in a volume edited by U. Schröter, R. Ullrich and R. Ferchland, titled *Patriarchat in der DDR. Nachträgliche Entdeckungen in DFD-Dokumenten, DEFA-Dokumentarfilmen und Soziologischen Befragungen*, Berlin, Karl Dietz Verlag, 2009.

²⁷⁵ P. Herminghouse. *Wunschbild, Vorbild oder Porträt? Zur Darstellung der Frau im Roman der DDR*, in Hohendal Peter Uwe, Herminghouse Patricia, *Literatur und Literaturtheorie in der DDR*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp 1976.

²⁷⁶ Vv. Aa., *Cieli divisi. Le scrittrici della Germania orientale*, in "Nuova DWF – donnawomanfemme", ottobre, n. 8, 1981, p. 50.

²⁷⁷ Ibidem.

conformism of the dominant genres of literature in the GDR during the 1950s and 1960s. Erasing or underplaying the importance of this process, which was specific to the GDR, as well as its results, negates the purposes of these literary texts.²⁷⁸

By 1975, American publishers were openly investing in feminist studies and feminist literary works, and it was under this label that Wolf received recognition in the United States. As such, this was also the image projected onto her until the *Literaturstreit* came to pass; subsequently, the political nuances of her novels became more prominent, albeit not sufficiently to overshadow the main narrative attached to her works. As Bammer notes, Wolf became popular among American (feminist) readers despite being a GDR writer and largely because her American publisher, Farrar, Straus & Giroux (which was very well known and, therefore, had major influence), guaranteed that her writing was accessible to a wide audience. ‘The only problem’, suggests Bammer, ‘[...] is that, as she is incorporated into the feminist canon, she tends to be read less as a German (much less a GDR-German) writer, than as a woman – indeed a Great Woman – writer’.²⁷⁹ This reflects the mostly linear reception of Wolf as a writer and, conversely, the less linear translational process that affected her reception in the American context. Summers reflects on how Wolf was framed as an author in the Anglophone sphere, thereby providing the basis for further analysis of the American context of Wolf’s reception when compared with the Italian context.

First, Summers distinguishes between the ‘original’ and ‘translated’ author functions,

²⁷⁸ Ibid. The author of this essay also underlines that the only feminist association allowed in the GDR was the *Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands* (DFD). This association was founded during the *Deutscher Frauenkongress* of 1947 and its scope was ‘in schwesterlicher Verbundenheit über Weltanschauung, Konfession und Beruf hinweg helfen, Militarismus und Faschismus völlig auszumerzen und das Sehnen der Menschen nach dauerhaftem Frieden zu verwirklichen’. The association was banned in 1957 but reinstated in 1964 under the leadership and control of the SED. Additionally, ‘Die DDR-Frauenpolitik sah im Geschlechterthema keine gesellschaftlichen Widersprüche, sondern lediglich Relikte der Vergangenheit, und berief sich dabei auf August Bebels These von 1878: ‘Die Klassenherrschaft hat für immer ihr Ende erreicht, und mit ihr auch die Herrschaft des Mannes über die Frau.’ Nach dieser These hätte es in der DDR keine Frauenorganisation geben müssen. In der Sowjetunion gab es auch keine, nur das Komitee der Sowjetfrauen, dessen ausschließliche Aufgabe in der außenpolitischen Vertretung der sowjetischen Frauen bestand. Die Unterordnung der Frauenfrage unter die Klassenfrage, die heute auf der Grundlage neuerer ethnografischer Forschungen als „Sackgasse“ bezeichnet wird, prägte die Frauenpolitik der DDR grundlegend und nötigte die DFD-Verantwortlichen zu einer Gratwanderung zwischen schwesterlicher Verbundenheit und Parteitreue’ [<https://www.digitales-deutsches-frauenarchiv.de/akteurinnen/demokratischer-frauenbund-deutschlands-dfd>].

²⁷⁹ Bammer, *The American Feminist Reception of GDR Literature*, *ibid.*, p. 19.

which refer, respectively, to the author's self-determined author function within the boundaries of the source context and language and to the reassignment of said author function within the limits of the target context and language. No translated author is immune to this power dynamic, which is engendered every time a work of literature is translated for a new audience. However, the less autonomy over the author function the author has in the target context, the more this function will disappear and be indiscriminately assimilated into the target context.²⁸⁰ In Wolf's case, this distinction is especially relevant because it '[...] reveals how the translated writer, lacking a sustained presence in target-language discourse, is especially reliant on others embedded in that context for the construction of her author-function'.²⁸¹ At the same time, 'the critical discourse of 1990–1993 in German and English also exemplifies the capacity of a translated authorial identity to remain stable while the author's source-culture institutional position may be under threat'.²⁸² A new identity is produced in the contact zone created by the travelling of the texts as much as by the travelling of the concepts and characters present in the novels.²⁸³

A large portion of the American reporting on how people who had previously praised and supported Wolf turned against her due to what were seen as biases and misconceptions certainly had an impact on reshaping the image of the German author. Consequently, Wolf's reputation in the United States is no less politicised than her image in the GDR and in Germany. This situation might have been unfavourable for certain aspects of the translation of her works into English, but it helped repair some of the damage that the *Literaturstreit* had caused to her on a personal and authorial basis.

²⁸⁰ This matter is at the centre of the discussion on the so-called politics of translation. Cf. G.C. Spivak, *The Politics of Translation*, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2021; Cfr. J. Heilbron, G. Sapiro, *Outlines for a Sociology of Translation: Current Issues and Future Prospects*, in M. Wolf, A. Fukari (eds.), *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2007, p. 4: 'To understand the act of translating, one should in a first stage analyse it as embedded within the power relations among national states and their languages. These power relations are of three types – political, economic and cultural – the latter split into two aspects: the power relations between linguistic communities as assessed by the number of primary and secondary speakers, and the symbolic capital accumulated by different countries within the relevant field of cultural production. In these power relations, the means of political, economic and cultural struggles are unequally distributed. Cultural exchanges are therefore unequal exchanges that express relations of domination. In accordance with these analyses, the flows of translations should then be re-situated in a transnational field characterized by the power relations among national states, their languages, and their literatures'.

²⁸¹ C. Summers, *Examining Text and Authorship*, *ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

²⁸² *Ibidem*. Summers is referring to the *Literaturstreit*.

²⁸³ D. Bachmann-Medick, *Übersetzung zwischen den Zeiten – ein travelling concept?*, in *Saeculum*, Vol. 67, n.1, 2017, p. 23.

Therefore, as Summers notes, Wolf's author function rests on power and political relations as much (and, sometimes, even more) as it does on the self-determined authorial image she wished to project:

The developing trajectory of Wolf's Anglophone authorship, and especially her experience in the early 1990s, demonstrates how the profile of an author is defined not only by the writer herself but also by the powerful social agents and institutions that control the publication and reception of literature. These authorities have been instrumental in the emergence and circulation of Wolf's writing both within and beyond the cultural and linguistic boundaries of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and reunified Germany; the resulting multiple understandings of her authorship exist in relation to various different national and linguistic contexts but also compete with one another for authority.²⁸⁴

One scholar who has translated Wolf and reflected on aspects of her translation process is Luise von Flotow, who is German–Canadian, although she also positions herself in the discourse surrounding Wolf and her translated texts in the American context. In *Creatively Re-transposing Christa Wolf: They Divided the Sky*, von Flotow talks about her experience in East Berlin during the 1980s and of becoming familiar with the generation of the *Hineingeborene*,²⁸⁵ while also developing a sense of how they perceived Wolf at the time, comparing it with how the author was viewed in the West and emerging with a fairly positive image of her. Von Flotow explains that, at the time, Wolf was treated with great respect in North America, where German authors did not normally enjoy the same degree of attention or interest. By then, plenty of her work had been translated into English; however, not all of the translations were necessarily *good* translations. According to von Flotow, one of the most problematic translations of Wolf's work was *The Divided Heaven*, the first translation of the novel *Der geteilte Himmel*, which von Flotow herself retranslated in 2013 with the title *They Divided the Sky*, motivated by the misshapen politics of translation that governed the first edition and likely affected the translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea* as well.²⁸⁶ After

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ L. von Flotow, *Creatively Re-Transposing Christa Wolf*, in L. von Flotow (Ed.), *Translating Women*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2011, p. 65.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 66. Von Flotow also quotes the Germanist Charlotte Koerner, who heavily criticises the first translation of the novel in a 1984 article, writing that the message presenting the division of Germany as necessary, which is present throughout the novel, is completely absent from the Anglophone version of

extensively discussing the themes and background context of the original text, von Flotow considers her own translation, particularly what motivated her choice of title:

Perhaps the most important aspect of my translation (apart from the fact that it follows and seeks to reproduce every detail and nuance of the source text) is the title: *They Divided the Sky*. It is drawn from the last pages of the book, where the lovers prepare to separate at the end of Rita's day in West Berlin. Gazing at the sky (which has been a constant element throughout the story) as the long northern twilight sets in, Manfred says, 'Den Himmel wenigstens können sie nicht zerteilen' (At least they can't divide the sky) (187). The reference to the generic 'they' for the forces of evil and tension and oppressive politics struck me as key. 'They' come up throughout the book to refer to all manner of powers that influence and control individuals. [...] My solution points to the unnamed and powerful political forces that caused many deep and tragic post-1961 rifts between the two Germanies and in the lives of several generations of those living there. Perhaps it also evokes Wolf's ongoing interest in how these nameless and irresponsible geo-political forces affect 'die Leute' (the regular folks) she alludes to in her prologue and throughout the book.²⁸⁷

Von Flotow belongs to the tradition of feminist translation theory,²⁸⁸ which explains her regard for Wolf's text and how she contextualises it among the rest of her literary production, ultimately deviating from the premises of other Anglophone translations. These kinds of insights are of extreme importance in terms of the comparative analysis we wish to perform because, while we do not have access to this type of self-reflection when it comes to the English translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea*, mapping the context

the text. Another aspect that is completely overlooked, according to Koerner, is the inner awareness of the novel itself and of characters such as Rita, whose subjectivity is muted in the translated version. The conflict between individual and public identity, which characterises the female characters of many other novels, also remains unaddressed. Finally, Koerner mentions the importance of the Wolf's narrative style, which does not emerge in the American edition. Cf. p. 73: 'The English version of 1965, however, seems to undermine, if not annihilate, Wolf's early musings around women's roles in the GDR, destroying not only the coherence and innovative character of this particular text but that of Wolf's works as a whole. It provides instead a "familiar formula" of a heroine facing a difficult life choice [...]'.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 79–80.

²⁸⁸ Cf. L. von Flotow, *Translation and Gender*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press 1997, p. 49: "The (counter-)tradition to which von Flotow, and arguably also Anita Raja, belongs starts with the 'feminist initiatives of the 1970s', which 'triggered enormous interest in texts by women writers from other cultures'. This leads to retranslations and rewritings of literature written by women and/or other texts imbued with patriarchal rhetorics and "misrepresented in patriarchal translation". As previously discussed, von Flotow is also the author and editor of various books and articles on matters of translation, specifically on translations that challenge the boundaries of the field and, therefore, offer precious insights relevant to the framework of this research.

and power dynamics in which the translations were produced will prove very effective when it comes to direct confrontation with these texts. This implies that, after Jan van Heurck translated *Cassandra* in 1984 and John Cullen translated *Medea* in 1998, the reception of Wolf's work changed alongside the prerogatives of translation theory. However, neither *Cassandra* nor *Medea* has not been retranslated, despite the criticism usually levied at English translations of Wolf's work.²⁸⁹ This could be due to several reasons. On the one hand, American scholars of *Germanistik* and critics refer directly to the original texts and transport them into their worldview (see: the issue with 'feminism'). On the other hand, this 'flattens' the translated texts, which exist and are also criticised but then put to the side. Therefore, the wider public has access to a text that has been framed in a specific way—often negatively—but there is no reaction to the negative reception from the publishing houses. This is ideally because the negative reception of translated texts by scholars and critics does not diminish public interest in the texts, particularly when the author's reputation does not depend on the translation itself but rather on the framing that American scholars and critics have provided her with, independently of the quality of the translations.²⁹⁰

Furthermore, von Flotow breaks from the tradition of male translators interpreting the voice of Wolf. While this is not an issue in itself, it is another distinguishing factor that creates a gap between the American and Italian translations, and it reinforces the dualism of author–translator, casting a different light on our tentative framing of *Cassandra* and *Medea* as 'translated women'.²⁹¹ From this perspective, whereby 'The

²⁸⁹ C. Summers, *Examining Text and Authorship*, *ibid.*, p. 161: "As the previous two chapters have shown, the development of Wolf's Anglophone author-function has been fundamentally guided by the agency of individuals in the translation process, specifically through the shift away from her subjective-authentic aesthetic towards a more individualist, Cartesian narrator and the alignment of the author and her writing with target-culture feminist narratives. Integral to both these shifts has been the distancing of Wolf and her writing from the narratives of socialism that informed the author's East German literary context. While it is clear that Wolf's author-function has emerged through framing by political and non-political narratives in Anglophone culture just as much as in German-speaking discourse, then, responses to the events of 1990–1993 in the context of her authorial narrative demonstrate a crucial difference in Anglophone and German assumptions about her authorial identity".

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17: "A worthwhile addition to this list, as this book suggests, would be a new examination of the relationship between "original" and "translated" author-functions. Wolf's example reveals how the translated writer, lacking a sustained presence in target-language discourse, is especially reliant on others embedded in that context for the construction of her author function; the critical discourse of 1990–1993 in German and English also exemplifies the capacity of a translated authorial identity to remain stable while the author's source-culture institutional position may be under threat. [...] Translation plays a vital role of negotiation between cultural and linguistic spaces in which different narratives dominate".

²⁹¹ The notion of 'translated women' as opposed to 'translated men' originally appears in an ethnographic study conducted by Ruth Behar in 1993, titled *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's*

Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but *made*, we can also think of Cassandra and Medea as the ‘other’ that has been ‘made’ and that must be unmade before it can be remade in Wolf’s narratives. But what is the result of this unmaking or unmasking?

Italy also represents an interesting case when it comes to the impact of Wolf’s translated works on editorial practices. In fact, it is arguable that the Italian translation and reception of *Kassandra* met the expectations of an important portion of the reading public, which had not been given sufficient consideration for a very long time. The partnership that Wolf established with the *e/o* publishing house in Italy is an important starting point for understanding translators’ approach to her work. It all started with ‘the search for a literature written by women, which favoured the perspective of women in the East’.²⁹² Wolf showed interest in publishing with *e/o* because this perspective was what she wanted to be ‘translated’ into Italian and what ended up being reflected in other publishing choices. The fact that women translators were central to these publishing projects was also quite significant.²⁹³ However, it was not always easy. Quite the contrary, intellectuals had to fight against the prejudice of the printed press, which at that time did not place any value on this line of publishing.²⁹⁴ The publication of *Kassandra* in 1983, translated by Anita Raja, seemed to be a major turning point in overcoming these prejudices. Anna Chiarloni suggests that ‘[...] themes such as patriarchy, pacifism and the increased danger of war on European soil due to the installation of short-range nuclear missiles resonated very strongly in Italy’, so much so that ‘[...] the *Literaturstreit* controversy around Wolf’s Stasi involvement and the publication of *Was bleibt* raised muted criticism and sometimes sympathy. Wolf was seen as a principled intellectual who sought to support and improve the GDR’.²⁹⁵ Another point that certainly played an important role in Wolf resonating with foreign

Story, which Kate Sturge defines in an article titled *The Story of Ruth and Esperanza: Concepts of Translation in Ruth Behar’s ‘Translated Woman’* as “an act of translation in several distinct yet overlapping ways”, referring to the ways different voices create a hybrid narrative of the languages and identities of the women at the centre of this particular study. This notion and method of ‘translation’, which appeal to a polyphonic representation of reality, as developed in this ethnographic study, are very much relevant to Wolf’s rethinking of Cassandra’s and Medea’s respective tales. In this sense, they can also be understood as ‘translated women’.

²⁹² G. Tortorelli, *Il lavoro della talpa. Storia delle Edizioni E/O dal 1979 al 2005*, Bologna, Pendragon, 2008, p. 97.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁵ Klocke, Hosek, *Christa Wolf: A Companion*, *ibid.*, p. 32.

audiences was the fact that ‘[...] her work engaged women-centred issues in transnationally relevant ways’, leading to a ‘gendered reception’ of her work in countries such as the United States.²⁹⁶

However, if the American reception and translations frame Wolf as a feminist writer, without seeming to pay much attention to other cultural elements that would not translate as well into the Anglophone context—namely, criticism of the GDR and the specificities of its political system, consequently diminishing the importance of elements such as the border concept, which end up diluted in a more readily applicable and generalised idea of marginalisation—the Italian translation and framing play significantly more into the contextual issues presented in the source texts, without being dismissive of the peculiarities of the narration. *Kassandra* and *Medea*, as well as other texts, are still portrayed in a feminist frame in Italy, albeit one that seems more sensitive to the voices of women writers in the GDR and that wishes to make them heard. In other words, if the American translation (with the few exceptions mentioned previously) chooses the translator’s invisibility as a mark of the target text, the Italian translation chooses the translator’s accountability and visibility, which parallels the visibility of the author and her author functions. The most prominent translators of Wolf into Italian are Maria Teresa Mandalari, who was also a writer and essayist, and Anita Raja, who is also a writer and the translator of *Cassandra* and *Medea* and whose translations and reflections will serve as the basis for our comparative analysis. Raja has reflected on her work as a translator in general, and as a translator of Wolf in particular, on several occasions. One essay in which she describes her translation process is titled *La traduzione come pratica dell’accoglienza (Translation as a Practice of Acceptance)*. Here, Raja positions herself not so much as a ‘professional translator’ in the sense that this practice is not her job but as somebody who has an interest in literature, particularly German literature, and has always been able to choose to translate the texts that truly capture her attention.²⁹⁷ She also reflects on what literary translation means to her:

What does it mean for me to translate literature? It means establishing an intense

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁹⁷ Cf. L. von Flotow, *Translation and Gender. Translating in the ‘Era of Feminism’*, ibid., p. 39: “Flotow (1995) has discussed the role that a translator’s personal biography plays in the selection and translation of texts. [...] When these aspects are made apparent in translation, they undermine claims for ‘invisible’ aspects of translation or “objective” readings and rewritings of any text”.

relationship which unfolds entirely within the written word, a relationship which begins with one written text and produces a second written text; it is therefore not only a relationship between two languages but above all a relationship between two modes of writing, between two utterances that are by nature strongly personal.²⁹⁸

The matter of authorship is immediately brought to light. Raja presents her work as a translator as being deeply intertwined with the work of the original author, maintaining the independence of both. The translator should not disappear, just as the author should remain visible.²⁹⁹ In this sense, both have to *accept* and welcome one another into their writing and, to a certain extent, into their lives. This does not mean that there is not a power struggle; however, rather than perpetuating a strict hierarchy between author and translator, the translator has agency and consciously makes space for the author within the pages of the translated text. The relationship between author and translator “is not one between equals” and “it requires a particular disposition: the translator must retreat so as to accept the language of the other, to allow herself to be invaded by it so as to accommodate it”.³⁰⁰ Hence, the ‘submission’ of the translator to the ‘authority and wonder of the original text’, as Raja defines it, is not to be confused with a lack of agency or autonomy. Rather, the translation practice is an “offer[ing]”, made “with love, with passion, with admiration, and even with devotion”:

If these conditions are fulfilled, then to translate is to position oneself to accept a tightly structured text, to surrender, word after word and sentence after sentence, to the text’s needs, to compel one’s own more modest linguistic capacity to grow and rise to the level of the original.³⁰¹

Translation is a “rewriting” that “jostles the language of the translator” and “remains

²⁹⁸ A. Raja, *Translation as a Practice of Acceptance*, tr. by R. Falkoff, S. Milkova, [<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/criticism/anita-raja-translation-as-a-practice-of-acceptance/>].

²⁹⁹ A. Raja, *La parola inadeguata*, [...]p. 73: ‘Tra la metà degli anni Ottanta e tutti gli anni Novanta io stessa - in qualità di ‘voce italiana’ di Christa Wolf - ho fatto esperienza diretta di queste realtà, sono stata invitata in giro per l’Italia, spesso in piccole, vivaci città di provincia. A titolo di curiosità, ma anche per fissare un impegno diffuso delle donne, riporto qui una lista che ho ritrovato, buttata giù nel 1994. Si tratta delle associazioni - al di fuori dell’ambito accademico - che mi hanno invitata in quel periodo, tutti luoghi di elaborazione e di discussione di donne. [...] I gruppi di lettura di cui parlo erano composti di donne con un’acculturazione molto diversificata, ma tutte guardavano al testo come a un concentrato di esperienza di vita e di elaborazione intellettuale che può aiutare a spiegarsi, a mettersi in discussione, a capirsi e a capire’.

³⁰⁰ A. Raja, *Translation as a Practice of Acceptance*, *ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibidem.*

bound to the original and yet is inventive on its own”.³⁰² For Raja, this practice of acceptance of the foreign text is also very closely related to her profound attachment to the women writers of the GDR, who she began translating in the 1980s, as well as to the creation of a familiarity and friendship with Wolf.³⁰³ In this way, Raja underlines the importance of welcoming, from the translator’s point of view, and being welcomed into the author’s writing and mental space:

Beginning in 1984, with the publication of *Cassandra* in Italy, my familiarity with the author through the translated text transformed into friendship. The relationship between two languages, that is to say between the original text and the translated text, also became a relationship between two people. From the written word we passed to the spoken word, and to the body, the voice, to domestic space and public places: that is to say to a direct knowledge of the many planes of experience she transformed into literature. I had the opportunity and the fortune of entering into the author’s laboratory, of getting to know her milieu, her attachments, her daily surroundings, her normal life, her way of negating the stereotype of brilliance, of downplaying [her] talent, of making ‘great history’ everyday.³⁰⁴

As we have seen, this familiarity with the text, context and author does not diminish the difficulties posed by the translation process itself, aside from how favourable its conditions might be. In fact, Raja also explains the importance of treading the line between visibility and invisibility,³⁰⁵ between remaining under the surface and not diving too deeply so as not to be submerged in the source text and the imposing quality of its words. Again, Raja highlights the importance of agency in the translator’s work,

³⁰² Ibidem.

³⁰³ Ibidem: “I discovered Christa Wolf (1929-2011) in the early 1980s, after I had already translated quite a few women writers from the former German Democratic Republic. I was passionate about this work because in Italy we didn’t know much or anything about the literature written in East Germany and it seemed exciting to me to act as a cultural mediator. Reading Christa Wolf’s texts, however, took me beyond mere cultural curiosity for the women writing in a distant country, under difficult political conditions”.

³⁰⁴ Ibidem.

³⁰⁵ Cf. H. Vassallo, *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies. Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing*, New York, Routledge 2023p. 1991: “To see the translator is to re-train deeply ingrained habits, just as to see women (with all of the intersecting characteristics that this term can imply) is to re-train our assumptions regarding social hierarchy. As such, connecting discussion of the translator’s visibility to critical studies on gender (and gendered visibility) not only offers new and productive perspectives in translator studies but also the potential for a positive shift in industry application and gender equality’. This amounts to ‘writing against “the translator’s invisibility” and against “invisible women” [...] for a “redefinition of feminist translation practice”’.

despite the contradictory and delicate nature of the practice:

A text tethers readers tightly within its web, even if, when we read a book we love, it is difficult to tell where we end and the characters begin, where we submit to the author's will and where we impose our own. To translate is to accept this inequality, to see the text clearly, and to willingly let ourselves be trapped in its web. A text that inspires our admiration, that influences us, gives us the feeling that the writer has articulated something for which we had no words. While reading, we have the impression that the text grants us voice, that if we knew how to write we would write it exactly as it is written, that the writer seems to have written it with us in mind.³⁰⁶

If translation is a practice of acceptance, it is so because it allows the translator to recognise themselves into the words of the original text. The translator gives voice to the author in a foreign context, but at the same time, they are given a voice in turn, as Raja notes. When translating, one finds a means of self-expression, creating a polyphonic text wherein two or more identities co-exist. There is no strict separation, nor should that be the premise or objective of a translator's work. Any text poses a challenge and, as Raja explains, accepting the unequal ground on which that challenge is built and not backing out is a sign that translation is anything but 'an act of surrender' in a traditional sense.³⁰⁷ Recognising the inequality of this dynamic in the process of translating Wolf's work caused Raja to realise how productive it could be: the tension originating from striving to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap only added worth to the translated text. Raja further explains how challenging it was to rethink the grammatical and syntactical structures of the language based on Wolf's experiments with German pronouns, as with other aspects of her writing.³⁰⁸

In truth, Wolf's writing presents a critical approach to various aspects and institutions of society, particularly those that force people to fit into certain categories and do not allow deviation from the norm. This also translates into her highlighting the ambivalences in her use of language. Raja comments that Wolf's over-awareness has

³⁰⁶ Ibidem.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem.

³⁰⁸ Ibidem: "One characteristic feature of her writing, for example, is the play of pronouns: a person is now unitary, now appears split into an "I," a "you," or a "she," depending on her stage in life. Wolf does not conceal the "I" authoring the written text—it emerges ever more explicitly on the page, it signals the moments of authorial identification with the narrated events or with the characters".

also influenced her own careful attention to these features of language, which could not always be translated well into Italian. Therefore, the “critical awareness of her [Wolf’s] linguistic originality, forced me to identify the (much more pronounced) sexism of the Italian language and to follow her path, trying to keep up with her in my linguistic universe”.³⁰⁹

As we have mentioned, Raja has returned multiple times to describing the background and foreground processes of translating Wolf’s work. In *Worte gegen die Übel der Welt*, she continues her analysis of the language used in Wolf’s novels, which together with the aforementioned essay represents an essential testimony on the interpretation and analysis of her translation process. As she anticipated in *Translation as a Practice of Acceptance*, some of the difficulties faced by the translator are related to Wolf’s criticism of the aesthetic and linguistic canons, which results in an experimental style. According to Raja, this produces

[...] the closest possible approximation to what appears to be the natural limit to what can be said, and to the attempt to break through it. [...] Despite its visibly experimental character, this process is carried out so masterfully that it hardly sinks the threshold of legibility. The motivation for this is that experimentation is not the objective by itself, rather it is conditioned by the inner demands of the narrative.³¹⁰

Once again, Raja evokes the multiplicity of pronouns and, therefore, of voices, which are constantly shifting into one another (‘I’ into ‘we’, into ‘you’ and into ‘she’). These are found in various of Wolf’s novels and constitute the basis of her portrayal of the world and the people who inhabit it and her stories. In the afterword to her translation of *Cassandra*, Raja produces a specific framing of Wolf for the Italian public,

³⁰⁹ Ibidem. To this she adds, “I could give numerous examples of this: An attention to ‘dead metaphors’ stashed away in the language. The false neutrality of the impersonal form (man). The attention to pronominal endings and the difficulty of conveying them in Italian. The obsession with every single past participle—in German they do not agree with the subject, while in Italian they do. The attention to the masculine form masquerading as universalizing neuter. Or, take a noun such as *das Elternhaus*, which means ‘the parents’ house’ or ‘the family home’ and which in Italian corresponds to ‘la casa paterna’ or ‘the father’s house,’ introducing an irksome connotation in a text extremely attentive to the critical implications of language”.

³¹⁰ A. Raja, *Worte gegen die Übel der Welt*, pp. 120–121: “[...] Weitestmögliche Annäherung an das, was als natürliche Grenze der Fähigkeit des Sagens erscheint, und der Versuch, diese Grenze zu durchbrechen. [...] Trotz seines ausgesprochenen experimentellen Charakters ist dieses Vorgehen stets meisterhaft vollendet, ohne dass die Schwelle der Lesbarkeit jemals gesenkt würde. Der Grund hierfür liegt natürlich darin, dass das Experimentieren nicht Selbstzweck ist, sondern durch die inneren Ansprüche des Erzählens bedingt wird’.

positioning the author as a feminist, albeit one who has had to grapple with the Western notion of feminism while being “an intellectual in a socialist realist country”.³¹¹ *Voraussetzungen* is framed in a pluralistic way and, together with *Cassandra*, are viewed as the “narration of the collision between the Marxist education, the professional ‘narrative’ perception of the world and of the feminist culture”.³¹² Finally, this reveals “the lucid sentiment of the atomic catastrophe and the inadequacy of the language in expressing the significance of *living in the shadow of destruction*, the ultimate outcome of a patriarchal society”.³¹³ According to Raja, the narration of *Cassandra* aims to reconcile the ancient past with the terrifying developments of the present.³¹⁴ Reflecting on how the language of the translated text conveys these aspects, the Italian translator offers some ‘warnings’ to readers who wish to approach it and understand its complex stratification:

The punctuation used by Wolf (almost complete absence of question marks, frequent and irregular use of colons) is almost always respected, except for those cases in which the meaning in Italian would have been distorted. Some synthetical expressions have also been rendered more fluid, so as to avoid incomprehensibility. An often calculatedly rhythmical prose, which imitates classical metre and cadence, seldom finds an equivalent in Italian. And we have not always been able to recover the dense web of lexical references to the everyday life experience inside the GDR. Finally, although we have pursued this mirage in each line of the text, it is hard to say whether or not we have been able to capture the broken and yet insistent narrative rhythm [...] of a language that is scarred by the traces of the past and by the violence and death of the present, but which also transports the echoes of a different way of being and of the body [...].³¹⁵

³¹¹ A. Raja, *Postfazione*, in C. Wolf, *Cassandra*, Roma, e/o 1983, p. 122.

³¹² *Ibidem*.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

³¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127: “La punteggiatura usata dalla Wolf (assenza quasi totale del punto interrogativo, uso frequentissimo e anomalo dei due punti), quasi sempre rispettata, è stata qualche volta (raramente), lì dove in italiano il senso sarebbe stato stravolto, modificata. Alcune espressioni sintetiche sono state fluidificate per evitare l’incomprensibilità. Una prosa spesso calcolatamente ritmata a imitazione del metro e della cadenza dei testi classici di rado trova l’equivalente in italiano. E non sempre siamo stati in grado di recuperare la fitta rete di rimandi lessicali all’esperienza quotidiana in un paese come la RDT. Infine, ci è difficile dire – sebbene ne abbiamo inseguito il miraggio rigo dietro rigo – quanto ci è stato possibile catturare di un ritmo narrativo rotto e insieme incalzante [...] di una lingua che lascia trascorrere dolorosamente i segni di un’epoca passata e presente di violenza e di morte, ma che trasporta anche gli echi di un modo diverso dell’essere e del corpo [...]”.

In this passage, we can see how much Raja values a certain adherence to the German language and its prosody. According to her, the use that Wolf makes of both conveys the multilayered structure of her narrative. At the same time, the translator is bound to the constrictions of Italian syntax and metric, which cannot be overlooked. Thus, Wolf's language is described as a 'mirage' that ultimately needs to be 'captured' but cannot, and should not, be domesticated.

As for *Medea*, Raja also provides some reflections on the translation of this novel, even though it happens outside of the text itself. Again in the article titled *Worte gegen die Übel der Welt*, she reflects on the linguistic and stylistic aspects of Wolf's second mythological retelling. First, Raja references the 'atypical functioning' of personal pronouns in Wolf's texts and, more generally, the difficulties of breaking through the barriers of 'male' language.³¹⁶ As Raja notes, there are six different 'Ichs' in *Medea. Stimmen*, all of which must be taken into account when translating it.

The American edition of *Medea* is introduced by a foreword written by Margaret Atwood, who is widely recognised as a feminist author and, therefore, sets the tone for the North American public when approaching this text. The paratextual elements contribute to the 'travelling' of the author function, as well as of the characters and the texts themselves, so much so that they form part of the discourse on feminist translation studies. Hence, while we do not have significant references to the translators' work, besides the translated novels themselves, we can infer valuable information from the paratextual elements because they help constitute the translated Cassandra, Medea and Wolf. In the chapter dedicated to the revision of the 'theories and myths' of translation in *Translation and Gender. Translating in the Era of Feminism*, von Flotow discusses the importance of the paratextual elements of translated texts in the North American spheres in particular. According to her, at least since the 1970s, the "Feminist influence on translation and translation studies is most readily visible in the metatexts - the statements, theoretical writings, prefaces and footnotes"³¹⁷ of translated works, which

³¹⁶ Hochgeschurz, *Chirsta Wolfs Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 123: "Schreiben kann nichts anderes bedeuten, als durch immer radikalere Fragestellungen die Polizeisprache der >Festung< in Abrede zu stellen, abzulehnen. Zweifellos handelt es sich um einen ungleichen Kampf, und die weibliche Person erscheint in ihrer Auflehnung und Wiedergeburt immer unsicherer in Bezug auf die Frage, ob es wirklich ein Woanders gibt, das sie am Ende ihres Weges aufnehmen kann".

³¹⁷ L. von Flotow, *Translation and Gender*, *ibid.*, p. 35: "Translators are introducing and commenting on their work, and offering explanations for it. They are exerting further influence by writing scholarly

in the case of the Italian translation would form part of what von Flotow describes as “a concerted move away from the classical ‘invisible’ translator, the idea of the translator being some kind of transparent channel whose involvement does not affect the source or the translated texts”.³¹⁸ The American edition of *Medea*, however, does not present us with any direct statements from the translator himself, although it still somehow adheres to the feminist contextualisation of the text. The translator is invisible. What is instead visible is the way the novel is ‘packaged’ to attract a specific readership, starting with its title. The original title of the novel, *Medea. Stimmen*, makes explicit reference to the polyphonic aspect of Wolf’s *Medea* rewriting. The American edition prefers a more ‘marketable’ and less poetic title, stressing to its audience that this *Medea* is a *Modern Retelling*. This seems to be a deliberate choice made to attract the audience to the novelty of the text while setting the author function to the side. Atwood’s foreword then acts as an authoritative reference of the novel’s purpose, which is not only ‘modern’ and, therefore, ‘palatable’ but also part of the feminist discourse. This is certainly true, albeit in a different way than the reader might be led to assume before reading the novel. The importance of the foreword is also indicated by the reference to it on the cover of the book. Atwood introduces Medea as a character who, along with other female figures of mythological and/or literary tradition, such as “Judith, Salome, Jezebel, Delilah, Lady Macbeth”, over time has accumulated a “lurid reputation”.³¹⁹ This introduction is followed by a relatively brief retelling of the Greek myth, which familiarises readers with it or reminds them of how the story develops. Atwood then draws on the long tradition of later rewritings, in which “each artist has chosen among the variant traditions, and some have made their own changes and addition”, mentioning Corneille, Ovid and Seneca but also William Morris and Charles Kingsley for the Anglophone branch of this tradition. Wolf’s *Medea* is then inscribed in this tradition; however, Atwood also explains that she strongly deviates from it:

Her attack is head-on and original. Others before her have condemned Medea’s

essays and “workshop reports” that draw attention to the work of translators and the historical, literary and biographical research that often accompanies a translated text”.

³¹⁸ Ibid. Cf. p. 39: “Not only have women translators brought their personal histories and political positions to bear on translation, foregrounding the translator’s subjective input into work, they have also consciously filled the roles of scholar and teacher. This role is most evident in the essays and commentaries produced to accompany translations of works long out of print, “forgotten” or dispersed in anthologies. It is also evident in the interpretations and explanations of the sometimes highly experimental feminist material. The translators take on the role of interpreter, educator and specialist in such literary experiments”.

³¹⁹ Wolf, *Medea. A Modern Retelling*, tr. by John Cullen, New York, Doubleday 1998, p. 7.

main crimes—fratricide, infanticide, and the murder of the bride-elect Glauce by toxic frock—or viewed them as partially understandable under the circumstances, but Christa Wolf’s *Medea* flatly denies that she committed any of these crimes at all. [...] In Wolf’s version, Jason is beloved, true, but later: this *Medea* is no helpless slave of sexual passion. At first Jason is largely the means to an end—*Medea*’s escape from blood-smeared Colchis in search of a higher and more humane civilization. Jason’s betrayal of her is also Corinth’s betrayal of her idealistic quest, and her contempt for his behavior is the contempt of the disillusioned nineteenth-century colonial arriving in Paris or London to find that the imperial promises of a nobler life ring hollow.³²⁰

As is evident in this part of the foreword and the following sections, Atwood proposes a post-colonial reading of Wolf’s novel, which is something also suggested by other scholars.³²¹ More specifically, the Canadian author references J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and considers how the power struggles in the novel “stir[...] uneasy resonances” between “the Colchians [and], perhaps, the Turks in Germany, or those of African descent in Europe and North-America, or the Jews; at another, there seems to be in the atmosphere of distrust and betrayal that characterized the collapse of East German hegemony when to back-stab first appeared to be the only defense against having the knife plunged swiftly into your own spine”.³²² In this sense, Atwood helps readers to understand that there is a broader scope to the novel and reasonably establishes these connections, including with other pieces of literature. While Wolf maintains that there is more to the novel than a straightforward metaphor for the division and reunification of East and West Germany, the reference to this vital historical background is made only in passing. The criticism of the colonisation of East Germany by West Germany following the reunification is not brought into the discourse, although it should be part of the post-colonial reading of the novel. Nor is there reference to the significance of this novel, particularly within Wolf’s literary production. Ultimately, Atwood remarks that

Medea is no two-dimensional allegory. Like a tunnel full of mirrors, it both reflects and echoes. The question it asks the reader, through many voices and in many different ways, is: What would you be willing to believe, to accept, to

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³²¹ Cf. Klocke, Hosek, *Christa Wolf. A Companion*, *ibid.*, pp. 156–157.

³²² Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 11.

conceal, to do, to save your own skin, or simply to stay close to power? Who would you be willing to sacrifice? Hard questions, but the posing of them is the troubling yet essential task of this tough, ingenious, brilliant and necessary book.³²³

The Italian edition of *Medea* is also enriched by the presence of paratextual elements, including the afterword written by Chiarloni, who tackles different issues than Atwood does in her foreword and is more in line with a framing of the novel that brings the context and the framing of the author into the light. Chiarloni also introduces Wolf's *Medea* as part of a tradition of myth retelling that includes Germany (Müller, Grillparzer) but also Italy (Pasolini), thereby grounding the text in a larger landscape that is accessible to Italian readers, who might have been unfamiliar with the German tradition of myth rewriting. However, Chiarloni also seeks to ground Wolf's authorial stance and provides more details about the birth of the novel. She mentions the defamation campaign against Wolf in 1990 while underlining that the references to that situation are but a small part of the text and that much more weight should be given to the criticism of violence, which constitutes the *leitmotiv* of the novel.³²⁴ Chiarloni traces the evolution of Wolf's myth rewriting since *Cassandra* and quotes the author's own reflections on the process of myth retelling:

Readers, and even more so female readers, will easily recognise certain thematic similarities with theoretical feminism in this initial thesis. The writer starts from the assumption that destructive impulses cannot stem from matriarchy: 'Over the millennia, the figure of Medea has been turned on its head by a patriarchal need to denigrate what was specifically feminine. But something didn't add up: Medea could not have been a child murderer because a woman from a matriarchal culture would have never killed her own children. Later, with the help of other scholars, I traced sources prior to Euripides that confirmed my base hypothesis. It was an extraordinary moment'.³²⁵

³²³ Ibid., p. 12.

³²⁴ Wolf, *Medea*. *Voci* p. 142.

³²⁵ Ibidem: "Al lettore, e più ancora alla lettrice, sarà facile riconoscere nella tesi iniziale alcune adiacenze tematiche col femminismo teorico. La scrittrice parte infatti dal presupposto che dal matriarcato non possano discendere pulsioni distruttive: 'Nel corso dei millenni la figura di Medea è stata ribaltata nel suo opposto da un bisogno patriarcale di denigrare lo specifico femminile. Ma qualcosa non mi tornava: Medea non poteva essere un'infanticida perché una donna proveniente da una cultura matriarcale non

Both Atwood and Chiarloni make reference to the multiple ‘voices’ in the novel, which actually resonates more clearly in the Italian edition, since the subtitle reads *Voci*, as does the German (*Stimmen*). Furthermore, Chiarloni highlights the fact that this Medea is German and strongly reflects the social developments of that nation, as much as the novel broadly encompasses the criticism regarding the lack of ‘humanity’ in modern and contemporary society.

3.3 Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra* and *Medea* Travelling Through Translation: a Comparative Approach

The following analysis of the Italian and American translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea* follows the approach of Summers’ study on the translations of Wolf’s novels in the North American context. Her work focuses on Wolf’s novel *Christa T.* and its translation for American audiences. Summers’ reflections on this translation are fundamental to reconstructing the context of the American translation of Wolf’s works. At the same time, they provide important insights into the poetics of subjective authenticity and how they have been translated prior to the publication of *Cassandra* and *Medea*. In fact, Summers argues that the translation of *Christa T.* provided the footprint for almost all subsequent translations of Wolf’s works produced for the American context. Its influence is highlighted in the choices made regarding the language, which might not have reflected the poetics of subjective authenticity that Wolf was striving for in her novels. Summers notes how differently “the accessibility, dialogism and universality of [Wolf’s] writing have been constructed in translation”, considering that “textual analysis reveals the reshaping of the author-function through

avrebbe mai ucciso i suoi figli. In seguito rintracciai – con la collaborazione di altre studiose – le fonti antecedenti a Euripide che confermavano il mio assunto di fondo. Fu un momento straordinario”.

intervention from the social languages of the translator and target culture in the heteroglot narrative voice”.³²⁶ Summers also maintains that “the interpretation of shifts in the translated text can be informed by an understanding of the translator’s individual identity and strategies”.³²⁷ However, while information regarding the translator’s strategy is readily available for the Italian context, we do not possess the same amount of data concerning the American translators’ work processes. Thus, our hypotheses are also based on additional information, such as the editorial choices that informed the marketing of Wolf’s novels for the Italian and the American public, some of which we considered in previous chapters. We might also begin to understand why diverging choices were made in terms of the framing of Wolf’s earlier works for the American reading public when compared with her later works, establishing a diachronic perspective that will provide a well-rounded background for our comparative analysis.

In the American context of reception, the translators of *Cassandra* and *Medea* are mostly ‘invisible’, even when it comes to the framing of the novels. This detail indicates that there has been a change in strategy with regard to the marketing of Wolf’s novels for the foreign reading public. Indeed, contrary to the translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea*, the translation of *Christa T.* largely rested its perceived value on the shoulders of its translator, who was an accomplished author. According to Summers, this editorial choice had significant implications because it provided ‘a convincing frame for Wolf’s writing in translation’ and, at the same time, was also important for creating the translator’s “author-function for his translation strategy”.³²⁸ By contrast, the translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea* were still provided with a specific framing, albeit without relying too much on the translators’ fame, recognisability and/or personal accomplishments. A reasonable explanation for this change could be that, at the point when both novels were published in the United States, Wolf and her translated novels could rely on her established authorship in the country. At the same time, her fame was mostly linked to “the paratextual framing of Wolf’s translated texts [...] typically exclud[ing] specific source-culture narratives that had characterised their reception in the GDR and FRG, in favour of emphasis on the more ‘universal narratives’ addressed

³²⁶ Summers, *What Remains of Christa Wolf?*, *ibid.*, p. 64.

³²⁷ *Ibidem.*

³²⁸ *Ibidem.*

by Wolf'.³²⁹ This begs the following questions. Will this have had an impact on the translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea* to the same extent as it did on the previously translated novels? Has the translation strategy compromised the travelling of concepts, specifically the border concept, as it has reduced the linguistic impact of her poetics of subjective authenticity? And if this has been the case, to what extent has it influenced the reception of Wolf's work abroad?

As noted by Raja in her afterword to the Italian translation of the novel, undertaking the translation of *Kassandra* first and foremost represented a linguistic challenge, which might have been attempted with a more 'daring' or a more 'restrained' approach, with some grey areas in-between the two polarities. In *Kassandra*, Wolf takes full advantage of the free indirect speech technique, allowing for the realisation of her *subjektive Authentizität*. Cassandra's soliloquy incorporates the voices and thoughts, the perspectives and retrospectives, of several different characters she encounters, while also freely moving between different timelines or, rather, moving smoothly back and forth between multiple time frames. This confers a unique kind of dynamicity on a novel in which the plot lines are not the most important aspect of its development. It is this exchange between the past, present and future through Cassandra's fragmented recollection and anticipation of events to come that defines the identity of the novel. In her talks with the characters of Panthous and Eumelus, each of whom represents a specific facet of power-wielding and administration in Troy, the use of this technique is especially effective in conveying the 'choral' functioning of Cassandra's mind and body: she, a seer, is able to hold many different 'voices' and temporalities within herself. Throughout the novel, punctuation is used to stress this polyphonic quality of her *stream of consciousness*. The following is one example of this, which we shall compare with the American translation:

Wär auch das vorgegeben. Liefere auch das an Schnüren, die nicht in meinen Händen liegen, wie die Bewegungen des Mädchens, das ich war, Wunsch- und Sehnsuchtsbild, die junge helle Gestalt im lichten Gelände, heiter, freimütig, hoffnungsvoll, sich selbst und anderen vertrauend, verdienend, was man ihr zuerkannte, frei, ach, frei. In Wirklichkeit: gefesselt. Gelenkt, geleitet und zum Ziel gestoßen, das andre setzen. Demütigend (ein Wort aus früheren Tagen): Alle

³²⁹ Ibidem.

wußten es. Auch Panthoos. Panthoos der Grieche war eingeweiht. Ohne mit der Wimper zu zucken überreichte er derjenigen Stab und Stirnbinde, die Hekabe ihm bezeichnete. So glaubte er nicht, daß ich von Apollon geträumt hatte? Aber doch. Dochdoch, kleine Cassandra. Das Dumme war: Er glaubte nicht an Träume.³³⁰

What if that, too, is prescribed? What if that, too, is worked by strings that are out of my hands, like the movements of the girl I was, ideal image, image of longing: the bright young figure in the clear landscape, gay, candid, hopeful, trusting herself and others, deserving what they conferred on her, free; oh, free? In reality: captive. Steered, guided, and driven to the goal others set. How humiliating (a word from the old days). They all knew. Panthous too. Panthous the Greek was in on the secret. He did not twitch an eyelash as he handed over the staff and the fillet to the candidate designated by Hecuba. So he did not believe that I had dreamed of Apollo? But of course he did. ‘Of course, of course, little Cassandra.’ The awkward thing was, he did not believe in dreams.³³¹

This segment of the novel shows how fractured and insistent the rhythm of Wolf’s language can become when it is supposed to mirror the anxiety of Cassandra’s ‘visions’. Her flowing consciousness is interrupted by the staccato of self-doubt, as instilled by the counterarguments of Panthous. In fact, the only visible question mark appears in relation to the question we imagine Cassandra has asked directly of him, although it is posed in the third person: “So glaubte er nicht, dass ich von Apollon geträumt hatte?” or “So he did not believe that I had dreamed of Apollo?”. “Aber doch. Dochdoch, kleine Cassandra”, is what Panthous answers. Wolf mirrors the rhythm of spoken language and uses *dochdoch* as a single word to convey the patronising tone used by Panthous, even before he calls Cassandra ‘little’. The mirroring of spoken language is also visible in the apocopes or contracted forms, which normally do not appear in written language and highlight certain auditory patterns in Wolf’s text. These are particularly difficult to replicate in both the Italian and American translations and can only be conveyed via other means. In this section of the novel, as in others in which the same linguistic structure appears, the American translator opts for direct speech, as signalled by the use of inverted commas, and shifts Panthous’s answer forward: “But of course he did. ‘Of

³³⁰ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 27.

³³¹ Wolf, *Cassandra. A Novel and Four Essays*, tr. by Jan van Heurck, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1984, p. 7.

course, of course, little Cassandra”’. While not completely disrupting Cassandra’s stream of consciousness, this has an impact on the perception of the text, as it unnecessarily homogenises it in certain parts. Perhaps more importantly, the patronising *dochdoch* is lost due to the normalising ‘Of course, of course’. Although Wolf does not completely renounce the use of question marks, she is frugal and particular in how she uses them. The American translation is more generous in an effort to explicate what was conceived as ambiguous while still sticking to Wolf’s alternating between very brief and very long sentences. This tendency towards explicitation³³² is an element that Summers also identifies in the translation of *Christa T.* and, while it does not seem to have affected the translation of *Cassandra* to the same extent, it remains notable, especially in comparison to the different translation strategies of the Italian edition, which are not exclusively attributable to the different grammar and syntax of the language.

Among other passages of *Kassandra*, this section also exemplifies the intentional musicality of Wolf’s phrasing, conveyed not only through the alternation between long and short sentences but also through other rhetorical means, such as alliteration (“gefesselt”, “gelenkt”, “geleitet”, “gestoßen”; “vertraut”, “verdienend”; “Stab”, “Stirnbinde”), repetition (“freimütig”, “frei”) and parallelism (“In Wirklichkeit: gefesselt”; “Demütigend” “[...]: Alle wussten es; Das Dumme war: er glaubte nicht an Träume”). The majority of these are lost in the American translation. For comparison, we shall look at the same passage in the Italian edition:

Potrebbe essere prefissato anche questo. Potrebbe scorrere anche questo su fili che non stanno nelle mie mani, come i movimenti della fanciulla che ero, immagine desiderante e struggente, figura giovane e radiosa dentro ma zona di luce, serena, schietta, ricca di speranze, fiduciosa in se stessa e negli altri, degna di quanto le veniva riconosciuto, libera, ah, libera. In realtà: incatenata. Pilotata,

³³² Cf. A. O’ Keffe, M. J. McCarthy, *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Translation*, London-New York 2022, pp. 242-259. These interventions in the translated text could be considered instances of ‘explicitation’ instead of ‘explicitness’, although the two techniques are very closely bound. In fact, “Explicitness and explicitation are stratified in terms of lexicogrammatical and cohesive levels. As explicitness, density, and directness are three properties of lexicogrammatical constructions’, explicitness is conceptually related to density and directness at the linguistic level of lexicogrammar. At the level of text, explicitness is conceptually related to properties such as ‘lexically impoverished, rationalized, clarified, expanded, ennobled, popularised, standardised’ . Explicitation, on the other hand, is a relationship or process, the resulting products of which are more ‘explicit’ lexicogrammatically and cohesively than their counterparts”.

guidata e spinta verso mete che ponevano altri. Umiliante (una parola dei giorni passati): tutti lo sapevano. Anche Pantoo. Pantoo il greco era stato messo a parte. Senza batter ciglio offrì scettro e benda a colei che Ecuba gli indicò. Dunque lui non credeva che avevosognato Apollo? Ma certo. Certocerto, piccola Cassandra. Il guaio era: non credeva ai sogni.³³³

While most of the alliterations disappear, the use of punctuation and parallelism remains intact, helping to maintain the staccato-esque rhythm of Wolf's sentences. Interestingly, the Italian translation also strives to provide an echo of the spoken language with "Certocerto" ("suresure") translating "dochdoch", mirroring the patronising quality of Panthous's language in the original text. A key aspect of this mixture between stream of consciousness and dialogical communication that the Italian and American translations approach very differently is the rendering of "das Dumme war". While Wolf's wording hints at the stupidity and short-sightedness of people such as Panthous, the American translator opts for awkward, which conveys a tonal shift towards embarrassment, whereas the Italian translator opts for a full semantic shift with "guaio" (trouble, disaster), pointing to the doom of incomprehensibility, which characterises Cassandra's exchanges with the men in positions of power.

The change from free indirect speech to direct speech, which seems to represent an attempt to standardise the language of the original in its translated edition, also occurs in the scene where Cassandra talks to Aeneas within the borders of the temple, a section of the novel that we have previously investigated. In the Italian edition, the thoughts and voices of Cassandra and Aeneas are closely interwoven—that is, closer to how they appear in the German text: "Er kam stracks auf mich zu, verzeih, sagte er, eher konnte ich nicht kommen./Venne dritto verso di me, perdona, disse, non mi è stato possibile venire prima". The American translation again opts for a disambiguation of the free indirect speech: "'Forgive me,' he said, 'I could not come before now'".³³⁴ In other passages, the Italian edition tries to follow the sound pattern of the original, although it cannot be replicated in its entirety: "Ich, wieder einmal stumm in der aufgereggt schnatternden Schar der Schwestern, weh und wund, aufgerissen".³³⁵ The Italian translator proposes this version: "Io, ancora una volta muta nella schiera eccitata e

³³³ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 18.

³³⁴ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 5.

³³⁵ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 52.

schiamazzante delle sorelle, dolente e ferita, lacerata”.³³⁶ The consonance of “schatternden Schar der Schwestern” can be partially retained (“schiera” – “schiamazzante”), but not the alliteration of “weh”–“wund”. The American translator opts for the following translation of the same passage: “Once again I was mute amid the excitedly chattering crowd of my sisters; galled and sore, torn open”.³³⁷ Similarly peculiar is the choice of “crowd” as a translation for “Schar”, which leans towards a more neutral meaning, whereas the Italian translation chooses a term that can also be applied to a military context.

In another extract of the novel, there are other instances of this shift in meaning or tonal change, which are conveyed via a different use of punctuation or through semantic nuance. This time, we shall perform a comparison between the German original and the Italian translation first:

Warum wollte ich die Sehergabe unbedingt? Mit meiner Stimme sprechen: das Äußerste. Mehr, andres hab ich nicht gewollt. Zur Not könnt ich es beweisen, doch wem? Dem fremden Volk, das, frech und scheu zugleich, den Wagen umsteht? Ein Grund zu lachen, gäbe es dennoch: Mein Hang, mich zu rechtfertigen, sollte sich, so kurz vor mir selbst, erledigt haben. Marpessa schweigt. Die Kinder will ich nicht mehr sehn. Sie hält sie unter dem Tuch vor mir versteckt. Der gleiche Himmel über Mykenae wie über Troia, nur leer. Emaillenschimmernd, unzugänglich, blankgefegt. Etwas in mir entspricht der Himmelsleere über dem feindlichen Land. Noch alles, was mir widerfahren ist, hat in mir seine Entsprechung gefunden. Es ist das Geheimnis, das mich umklammert und zusammenhält, mit keinem Menschen habe ich darüber reden können. Hier erst, am äußersten Rand meines Lebens, kann ich es bei mir selber benennen: Da von jedem etwas in mir ist, habe ich zu keinem ganz gehört, und noch ihren Haß auf mich hab ich verstanden. Einmal, »früher«, ja, das ist das Zauberwort, hab ich in Andeutungen und halben Sätzen mit Myrine darüber sprechen wollen – nicht, um mir Erleichterung zu verschaffen, die gab es nicht. Sondern weil ich es ihr schuldig zu sein glaubte. Troias Ende war abzusehen, wir waren verloren. Aineias mit seinen Leuten hatte sich abgesetzt. Myrine verachtete ihn. Und ich versuchte ihr zu sagen, daß ich Aineias – nein, nicht nur verstand: erkannte. Als sei ich er. Als kauerte ich in ihm, speiste mit meinen

³³⁶ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 38.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Gedanken seine verräterischen Entschlüsse. »Verräterisch« sagte Myrine, die zornig mit der Axt auf das kleine Gebüsch im Graben um die Zitadelle einschlug, mir nicht zuhörte, mich vielleicht gar nicht verstand, denn seit ich im Korb gefangen gesessen, sprich ich leise. Die Stimme ist es nicht, wie alle meinten, die hatte nicht gelitten. Es ist der Ton. Der Ton der Verkündigung ist dahin. Glücklicherweise dahin.³³⁸

Perché volli a tutti i costi il dono della veggenza? Parlare con la mia voce: il massimo. Di più, altro, non ho voluto. All'occorrenza potrei dimostrarlo, ma a chi? Al popolo straniero che, con insolenza e soggezione a un tempo, attornia il carro? Ci sarebbe da ridere, se fosse il momento: la mia tendenza a giustificarmi avrebbe dovuto estinguersi un po' prima di me. Marpessa tace. Non voglio più vedere i miei figli. Lei me li tiene nascosti sotto il panno. Su Micene lo stesso cielo di Troia, ma vuoto. Luccicante di smalto, inaccessibile, terso. C'è qualcosa in me che corrisponde al vuoto del cielo sul paese nemico. Finora tutto ciò che mi è accaduto ha trovato la sua corrispondenza dentro di me. Questo è il segreto che mi attanaglia e mi sorregge, e non sono mai riuscita a parlarne con nessuno. Solo qui, sul limite estremo della vita, posso nominarlo: poiché c'è qualcosa di ognuno dentro di me, non sono mai stata completamente di nessuno, e sono arrivata a comprendere persino l'odio che provavano per me. Una volta, «prima», sì, questa è la parola magica, ho voluto parlarne per accenni e mezze frasi con Mirina – ma non per procurarmi un sollievo impossibile. Piuttosto perché ritenevo di essergliene debitrice. La fine di Troia era ormai prevedibile, eravamo perduti. Enea se n'era andato insieme alla sua gente. Mirina lo disprezzava. E io tentavo di dirle che Enea – no, non solo lo capivo: mi ci riconoscevo. Come se fossi lui. Come se stessi rincantucciata dentro di lui, come se con i miei pensieri nutrissi i suoi propositi traditori. «Traditore» diceva Mirina, che con l'ascia menava colpi rabbiosi ai piccoli cespugli del fossato intorno alla cittadella, e non mi ascoltava, forse nemmeno mi capiva, perché da quando sono stata tenuta prigioniera nella cesta, parlo sommessamente. Non per via della voce, come tutti pensavano, essa non ne aveva sofferto. Per via del tono. Il tono profetico è finito. Finito, per fortuna.³³⁹

This passage of the book accentuates the border motive, as it positions Cassandra both outside and inside the confines of her body (“am äußersten Rand meines Lebens”;” als

³³⁸ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

³³⁹ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

kauerte ich in ihm”) and her community (“dem fremden Volk”; “dem feindlichen Land”; “das Geheimnis, das mich umklammert und zusammenhält”). The Italian translation remains very close to the meaning and punctuation of the German text, although choosing a specific nuance for certain words, which contrasts with some of the choices made in terms of the American translation. The verb ‘umklammern’ is translated as ‘attanagliare’ (to grip strongly), linking it to the idea of being painfully constrained, which is seen throughout the entire passage, constituting an oppositive pair with ‘sorreggere’ (to support). The American version leans towards the other meaning of ‘umklammern’ and translates the sentence as follows: “This is the secret that encircles and holds me together”. Conversely, the adverb “glücklicherweise”, which Cassandra uses to express her relief at not having to perform the role of seer and simply be a seer (in a less traditional sense), is expressed in Italian with “per fortuna” (luckily), whereas the American translator proposes the idea of happiness to be linked to it: “The tone of annunciation is happily gone”, which takes away some of the dramatic, ironic quality of “glücklicherweise”. Another interesting aspect is the different understandings of “Warum wollte ich die Sehergabe unbedingt? Mit meiner Stimme sprechen”, which Raja translates directly as “Perché volli a tutti i costi il dono della veggenza? Parlare con la mia voce”, thereby assigning the central value to “parlare con la mia voce” (speaking with my own voice), whereas the American translation places the accent of the question on a different element of the sentence, instead asking “Why did I want the gift of prophecy, come what may?”

Similarly, other shifts in meaning occur in passages of the book where Cassandra discloses the switch between ambivalent states of body and mind, as evidenced in the extract where Troilus is killed by Achilles: “Troilos der Bruder fiel. Achill das Vieh war über ihm. Ich wollte es nicht glauben, glaubte es sofort, wie schon oft war ich mir dabei selbst zuwider”.³⁴⁰ This “ich war mir selbst zuwider” is translated as “I was at odds with myself”³⁴¹ in the American translation but as “provai disgusto di me”³⁴² (I was disgusted with myself) in the Italian translation. Additionally, “Achill das Vieh” becomes “Achilles the brute” throughout the entirety of the American translation while remaining a ‘beast’ in the Italian text (“Achille la bestia”). As we may recall from our

³⁴⁰ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁴¹ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

earlier analysis of this passage of the novel, several borders/boundaries are overstepped and crossed during the murderous action taking place within the sacred grounds of the temple. It is also one of the few instances in the text in which Wolf uses the term “Grenze” (“an der Grenze des Tempelbezirks”), while generally preferring other euphemisms or references to the wall(s). As Summers highlights, the multilayered significance of this term for the GDR context is partially lost in translation: it is in such instances that the paratextual framing of the work acquires even more significance due to allowing the reader to access the less visible layers of the text. This is where the visibility or invisibility of the translator can make, and arguably does make, a difference.³⁴³ In the American translation, “an der Grenze des Tempelbezirks” is translated as “the temple precinct”, while in Italian it is translated as “recinto del tempio”, with both ‘precinct’ and ‘recinto’ (fence and enclosure) mitigating the meaning of ‘Grenze’.

All the while, Cassandra knows what is going to happen to her brother but is helpless to save him, causing the ‘disgust’ expressed in both the German and Italian texts, which is mitigated in the American text. The boundary overstepped by Achilles—that of a human who becomes an animal, a devouring beast—is also mitigated by the use of brute, which, while conveying the violence of the character, fails to underline the ultimate, character-defining crossing of the borders between species.

In other passages of the novel, Wolf makes poetic use of inversion, with her objective being to underline Cassandra’s suffering. This technique also reveals the author’s sensibility in adapting the solemnity of the ‘original’ verses, which she references in *Voraussetzungen*.³⁴⁴ The Italian and American translations adapt the original text differently. In these instances, the American edition tends to be more ‘verbose’ and explicating when compared with the German original, whereas the Italian translation

³⁴³ In reference to the translation of the word *Grenze* in *Christa T.*, Summers declares that, p. 80: “the translation lacks the double-voiced quality of the German because “limit” does not denote as strongly as ‘Grenze’ the idea of a physical boundary and does not evoke the same institutional narratives of a German-German border that cannot normally be crossed without some form of transgression”. This statement can be contrasted with how the word has been translated in the American and Italian editions of *Cassandra* as well.

³⁴⁴ Wolf studied the language and melody of the Greek tragedy translated into German, ‘translating’ some of this musicality in the language of the novel. Cf. *Voraussetzungen zu Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 16: “KASSANDRA: Apoll! Apoll!/Wegführer! Du/Den andern allen/Gibst du Schutz!/Und mich vernichtest du,/Apoll,/Zum zweiten Mal!”

maintains language that is closer to the original but still produces some significant changes in meaning.

At the very beginning of the novel, we are introduced to Cassandra's thought process and, most importantly, to her self-identification with the story she is narrating: "Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod. Hier ende ich, ohnmächtig, und nichts, nichts was ich hätte tun oder lassen, wollen oder denken können, hätte mich an ein andres Ziel geführt".³⁴⁵ In the American translation, this sentence appears as follows: "Keeping step with the story, I make my way into death. Here I end my days, helpless, and nothing, nothing I could have done or not done, willed or thought, could have led me to a different goal".³⁴⁶ The identification between Cassandra and the story is established through the expression "Mit der Erzählung geh ich den Tod" and, soon after this proclamation, it is amplified by Cassandra saying "Hier ende ich". The story ends with Cassandra, because she is both the storyteller and the author of her own story/life. The American translation, however, proposes a separation between story and character. The story is something external to Cassandra, which she has to keep up with. Thus, she "ends her days" separately from the story. The Italian translation retains the nuance of the original: "Con questo racconto vado nella morte./Termino qui [...]"³⁴⁷ (With this tale I go into death. I end here [...]). This is relevant to the mixing of temporal frames, which is part of Wolf's poetics of subjective authenticity. As Summers notes, "The ambivalent temporal position of Wolf's narrative voice in both past and present suggests that, when we remember, we do not stand outside memory but rather narrate it from 'inside ourselves'".³⁴⁸

By contrast, the American translation suggests that "the translated narrative" occurs in "a temporally distant story that can reveal abstract truths to the reader through its individual specificity, rather than contesting shared or institutional narratives".³⁴⁹ Moreover,

³⁴⁵ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁴⁶ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴⁸ Summers, *What Remains of Christa Wolf?*, *ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Such choices suggest a linear progression from a bounded, finite past to a narrating present in which the story is ‘bewältigt’, selectively excluding the past from the present and framing the protagonist’s personal narrative as a closed unit, best narrated and understood from outside. The possibility is excluded that the narrator (or the author) is inhabited by her own story.³⁵⁰

A normalising effect in the American edition of the text is also achieved in Cassandra’s speech to Agamemnon, in which the indirect speech form gives way once again to direct speech while Wolf’s emphatic sentence structuring is brought back in order: “Groß vor mir stand der Klytaimnestra Rache”,³⁵¹ which becomes “The vengeance of Clytemnestra rose huge up before me”³⁵² in the American edition. The Italian reads as follows: “Grande davanti a me stava la vendetta di Clitennestra” (Great before me stood Clytemnestra’s rage), which produces a similar effect.³⁵³

Conversely, Raja takes some liberties concerning other passages of the text, where she tries to reproduce the tone of Cassandra’s words without strictly adhering to the original. One example of this is the passage where Cassandra describes the horrific duplicity of war, which demands joy be derived from pain and strength be derived at the expense of someone else’s helplessness. The following is what Wolf writes in *Kassandra*, followed by the Italian translation:

Wer wird, und wann, die Sprache wiederfinden.

Einer, dem ein Schmerz den Schädel spaltet, wird es sein. Und bis dahin, bis zu ihm hin, nur das Gebrüll und der Befehl und das Gewinsel und das Jawohl der Gehorchenden. Die Ohnmacht der Sieger, die stumm, einander meinen Namen weitersagend, das Gefährt umstreichen. Greise, Frauen, Kinder. Über die Gräßlichkeit des Sieges. Über seine Folgen, die ich schon jetzt in ihren blinden Augen seh. Mit Blindheit geschlagen, ja. Alles, was sie wissen müssen, wird sich vor ihren Augen abspielen, und sie werden nichts sehen. So ist es eben.³⁵⁴

Chi ritroverà la parola, e quando.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁵¹ Wolf, *Kassandra*, ibid., p. 60.

³⁵² Wolf, *Cassandra*, ibid., p. 17.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁵⁴ Wolf, *Kassandra*, ibid., p. 11.

Sarà di quelli a cui il dolore spacca la testa. E fino a quel momento, fino a lui, solo l'urlo e il comando e il lamento e il signorsì degli obbedienti. L'impotenza dei vincitori che, muti, dicendosi l'un l'altro il mio nome, si aggirano intorno al veicolo. Vecchi, donne, bambini. Oh, l'orrore della vittoria. Oh, le sue conseguenze, che vedo già nei loro occhi ciechi. Sì, colpiti da cecità. Tutto ciò che devono conoscere si svolgerà davanti ai loro occhi, ed essi non vedranno nulla. È così.³⁵⁵

To maintain the dramatic tone of this painful prophecy, which materialises before Cassandra's eyes, Raja chooses to reproduce the emphatic repetition of 'Über die Gräßlichkeit/Über seine Folgen', substituting 'Über' with the repeated invocation 'Oh/Oh'. In so doing, however, she also needs to modify the connection between the two sentences. In German, die Ohnmacht is strictly connected to 'Über die Grässlichkeit/Über seine Folgen' (literally, the powerlessness [...] over the atrocities/over the consequences). In Italian, this consequentiality is lost and dramatic effect is given precedence. The American edition also opts for anaphoric repetitions, albeit of the word "helplessness", which translates "Ohnmacht". Hence, the same passage reads: "The helplessness of the victors who silently prowl around the vehicle, passing each other my name. Old men, women, children. Their helplessness at the atrocity of the victory".³⁵⁶

In another passage of the book, where Cassandra once again reflects on the somatisation of fear, as caused by her ability to see and know the truth, Wolf reveals the character's self-reflection by having her ask rhetorical questions in free indirect speech ("Wie wird es sein. Wird die Schwäche übermächtig. Wird der Körper die Herrschaft über mein Denken übernehmen."),³⁵⁷ whereas the American translator chooses to explicitate these questions ("What will it be like? Will I be overcome by weakness? Will my body take control of my thinking?"),³⁵⁸ contrary to the Italian translation ('Come sarà. La debolezza avrà il sopravvento. Il corpo imporrà il dominio sul pensiero').³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁵⁶ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁵⁷ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁵⁸ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The American translation also makes use of another explicitation technique, which occurs in the same passage and many others throughout the book. This technique consists of the use of cursive to underline the elements of the sentence the reader should perceive as ‘accented’. This technique is only to be found in the American edition and is not present in the German original or the Italian translation: “When our ships – how stupid! I mean, *their* ships [...]”,³⁶⁰ “*then* my resolution was formed, melted, tempered, forged, and cast like a spear”,³⁶¹ “I believe that was the first thing I really *saw*”,³⁶² “When I really got to know Troy, *my* centre, I understood what he meant”.³⁶³

Oftentimes, Wolf uses elliptical sentences (“Wohin ich blicke oder denke, kein Gott, kein Urteil, nur ich selbst”),³⁶⁴ which are maintained in the Italian translation (“Dovunque io fissi lo sguardo o concentri il pensiero, non un dio, non un giudizio, me stessa soltanto”)³⁶⁵ and normalised in the American translation (“Wherever I look or cast my thoughts, there is no god, no judgment, only myself”).³⁶⁶ According to Summers, this “shifting away from elliptical style and implicature of oral everyday narration [...] establishes a more controlled and ‘transparent’ voice, distinguishing clearly between the temporal and spatial contexts that define the act of narration and event”.³⁶⁷

In the final scenes of the novel, where images of movement alternate with images of stativity, involving the characters of Cassandra, Aeneas and Eumelus specifically, Wolf conveys this contrast through the use of language. We can see this first in relation to Eumelus:

Eumelos. Vor dem stand ich wieder. Sah das Gesicht, welches man von Mal zu Mal vergißt und das daher von Dauer ist. Ausdruckslos. Ehern. Unbelehrbar. Selbst wenn er mir glaubte – er würde sich den Troern nicht entgegenstellen. Sich vielleicht erschlagen lassen. Der überlebte nämlich. Und die Griechen

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁶⁴ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁶⁵ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁶⁷ Summers, *What Remains of Christa Wolf*, *ibid.*, p. 87.

würden ihn gebrauchen. Wohin wir immer kämen, dieser wär schon da. Und würde über uns hinweggehn.³⁶⁸

Wolf projects an aspect of irremovability onto the character of Eumelus. However, this is fraught with contradiction, as we are told that ‘he will surely survive’ and that he is, somehow, above everyone else and everything that is happening around him, ultimately ‘passing/stepping over us’. His durability is linked to his self-interest. As such, he remains ‘Expressionless. Unshakable. Unreasonable’. The same passage translated into English reads as follows:

Eumelos. I was standing before him once again. I saw the face which you forget from time to time and which for that reason is permanent. Expressionless. Pitiless. Unteachable. Even if he believed me, he would not oppose the Trojans, and maybe get himself killed. He, for one, intended to survive (he said). And the Greeks would be able to use him. Wherever we came, he would be there first. And would pass us off with a shrug.³⁶⁹

The American translator chooses pitiless and unteachable, hence focusing on the emotional nuance of *chern* and less on the idea of Eumelos motionlessness, whereas *unbelehrbar* directly translates to unteachable. Eumelos is, indeed, someone who cannot be taught, but also someone that cannot reason with. Both express the idea of someone who cannot, or rather does not, let himself be affected by change. “He, for one, intended to survive (he said)” is used to translate “Der überlebte nämlich”, once again removing the nuance of the free indirect speech. As a consequence, in the German text we have the impression that this is Cassandra’s own prediction (interpretation) of how the events will unfold, whereas the American text provides agency to the character of Eumelos, therefore splitting Cassandra’s stream of consciousness into two different perspectives. “Und würde über uns hinweggehn” is interpreted as “and would pass us off with a shrug”, which strays away from the semantic field of durability, expressed in this entire passage, and moves towards the idea of ‘carelessness’. The following is the same passage in the Italian translation:

³⁶⁸ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 147.

³⁶⁹ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 46.

Eumelo. Ero di nuovo davanti a lui. Vidi quel viso che ogni volta si dimentica e che proprio per questo è destinato a durare. Senza espressione. Ferreo. Irriducibile. Se anche mi avesse creduto – non si sarebbe messo contro ai troiani. Piuttosto si sarebbe fatto ammazzare. Vale a dire che sarebbe sopravvissuto. E i greci se ne sarebbero serviti. Dovunque fossimo arrivati, lui sarebbe già stato là. E sarebbe passato sopra di noi.³⁷⁰

The Italian translation provides a different nuance to the expressions “ehern” and “unbelehrbar”, respectively translated as “ferreo” (steely) and “irriducibile” (immovable, unshakeable), focusing on the semantic field of stativity in relation to this character. “Der überlebte nämlich” is translated as “Vale a dire che sarebbe sopravvissuto”(Which meant, he would have survived), as the translator interprets this utterance as Cassandra’s own, rather than Eumelos’. Finally, “Und würde über uns hinweggehn” is not interpreted as implying ‘carelessness’ but is translated as “E sarebbe passato sopra di noi” (He would have stepped over us), meaning that he would have survived, emerging victorious over everyone else.

The idea of stepping over people in the quest for power is used to explain not only the motivations for the actions of Eumelos, but also for Paris’ behaviour. Without his complicity, in fact, Eumelos would have not been able to -incite the people’s blind faith in his rule. Consequently, Paris’ cruelty also manifests in a similar action, that of stepping over people and morals, crushing both Greeks and Trojans under his foot:

Und Paris, zermalmt, schief lächelnd, nur noch die Hülle seiner selbst, aber schärfer denn je. Man sagte mir, der gehe über Leichen – nicht Griechenleichen; Troerleichen, ein gefährlicher Mensch. Eine Scharte nach der andern hatte der auszuwetzen, sein Leben lang. Mit dem war nicht zu rechnen. (Ja. Damals begann ich wie unter Zwang die Leute, die ich traf, für einen Notfall, den ich noch nicht kannte, einzuteilen: Mit dem ist zu rechnen, mit dem nicht. Wofür? Das wollte ich nicht wissen. Später stellte sich heraus, ich hatte mich nicht oft geirrt.)³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁷¹ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 109.

In the American edition, “der gehe über Leichen” is translated as: “I was told he would stop at nothing – not where Greeks were concerned but Trojans;[...]”,³⁷² removing the reference to the corpses and therefore choosing to adhere to the idiomatic meaning of the German phrase. The Italian translation, instead, focuses on the gruesome image, translating: “Mi dissero che passava sui cadaveri – non cadaveri di greci; cadaveri di troiani [...]”.³⁷³ This deviation from the idiomatic meaning in the Italian translation allows for the conveying of a powerful image, that of the equalizing factor of death, which will befall the Greeks as much as the Trojans. As it reflects the contradictions of the political system of the GDR, it is also a very powerful statement: Christa Wolf predicts the present/future of the West and East German State, and points the finger towards the real enemies of the people, who leave behind the corpses of the Greeks (the West-Germans) as much as the Trojans (the East-Germans).

Aeneas could also fall victim to stativity, instead he is characterised by his will to move on, and continues to be one of the most dynamic characters until the very end of the novel. The following passage, which comes directly after the previously mentioned one, exemplifies precisely this quality of the character:

Aineias. Lieber. Du hast mich verstanden, lange eh du's zugabst. Es war ja klar: Allen, die überlebten, würden die neuen Herren ihr Gesetz diktieren. Die Erde war nicht groß genug, ihnen zu entgehn. Du, Aineias, hattest keine Wahl: Ein paar hundert Leute mußtest du dem Tod entreißen. Du warst ihr Anführer. Bald, sehr bald wirst du ein Held sein müssen. Ja! hast du gerufen. Und? – An deinen Augen sah ich, du hattest mich begriffen. Einen Helden kann ich nicht lieben. Deine Verwandlung in ein Standbild will ich nicht erleben.³⁷⁴

This passage reads as if Cassandra were prophesying right before our eyes, mirroring the prosody of what would have appeared not in prose, but in verse in the ‘ancient’, original text: rhyming “diktieren/entgehn” (with apocope), “entreißen/müssen”, “lieben/erleben”, using the assonances of “Wahl/bald/Held”. What Cassandra fears is that Aeneas might turn into a “Standbild”, a statue. Neither the Italian, nor the American

³⁷² Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁷³ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁷⁴ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 148.

version retain the ‘auditory’ aspects and proclamatory tone of this passage in the original text. The image of the “Standbild”, is however, translated differently in the two versions. The Italian translates Standbild as monumento: “Non voglio vivere la tua trasformazione in monumento” (I do not wish to see you turn into a monument), whereas the American translation reads: “I do not want to see you being transformed into a statue.” Cassandra is also described through this dichotomy of immovability/movement, ultimately succumbing to her destined end:

Ich bleibe zurück.

Der Schmerz soll uns an uns erinnern. An ihm werden wir uns später, wenn wir uns wiedertreffen, falls es ein Später gibt, erkennen.

Das Licht erlosch. Erlischt. Sie kommen.

Hier ist es. Diese steinernen Löwen haben sie angeblickt. Im Wechsel des Lichts scheinen sie sich zu rühren.³⁷⁵

In this section of the novel, the dichotomy of immobility/movement is constructed through Cassandra's transformation into a being made of stone, as can be observed in the metaphor of the lion statues and their illusory movement caused by the effect of the light, and also in the shift from free indirect speech to third-person narration; this also hints at the return to the initial frame of the story. This dichotomy is particularly accentuated in the Italian translation, as “rühren” is translated with “animarsi” (to come to life). Also interesting is the choice to translate “Später” as “Dopo”, using the capital letter, whereas the American edition does not express this nuance, which alludes to the beyond, simply translating “Später” with “later”, in lowercase. Underlining the different layers of meaning expressed even through the use of capital and lowercase letters, it can also be observed how Anita Raja chooses to use the capital letter to recreate the emphasis placed on certain words in the original text, while the English opts for quotation marks, thus creating a different effect: “«Noi» dico, e di tutti i Noi a cui sono approdata, questo resta quello che maggiormente mi turba. È molto più facile dire «Achille la bestia» che questo Noi”.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 149.

³⁷⁶ Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 100.

German	American	Italian
Sie schleppten dich weg, zum Grabe des wüsten Achill. <i>Achill das Vieh.</i> (29)	They dragged you away, to the grave of depraved Achilles. <i>Achilles the brute.</i> (8)	Ti trascinarono via, alla tomba del feroce Achille. <i>Achille la bestia.</i> (20)
Ich [...] Sie also hinderte, ihr und meiner Kinder Leben den gleichgültigen Elementen zu lassen, <i>und sie statt dessen wahnwitzigen Menschen überantwortete.</i> (6)	I threw myself at her unhesitatingly and unthinkingly to prevent her from abandoning the lives of her children and mine to the indifferent elements, <i>so that I could surrender them to mad people instead.</i> (1)	E così le impedi di abbandonare la sua vita e quella dei miei figli all'indifferenza degli elementi e, invece che a questi, <i>agli uomini dissennati li consegnai.</i> (2)
Durch den Jahreslauf des Gottes und die Forderungen des Palastes wurde mein Leben bestimmt. <i>Man könnte auch sagen: erdrückt.</i> (32)	The course of the god's year and the demands of the palace determined my life. <i>You could also say they weighed it down.</i> (8)	La mia vita era scandita dalla liturgia annuale del dio e dalle esigenze del palazzo. <i>Si potrebbe anche dire: soffocata.</i> (22)
wollte ich die Leute aus dem Kreis her ausreißen, in den sie eingeflochten seien? In dem sie sich wohl fühlten, nach nichts anderem Ausschau hielten? <i>Darauf ich, hochfahrend:</i> Weil sie nichts andres kennen. (34)	Did I want to tear the people out of their familiar round where they felt comfortable <i>and</i> looked for nothing else? <i>To which I arrogantly replied:</i> 'Because they don't know anything else. Because this sort of question is all they are allowed.' (9)	volevo strappare la gente al circolo dentro cui era inserita? Dentro cui stava bene, non cercava nient'altro? <i>Al che io, scattando:</i> perché non conosce niente altro. (24)
Und unsre Palastschreiber, ein Völkchen für sich, das müßtest du wissen, machen nachträglich aus dem halbwegs mißglückten Unternehmen großmäulig das ERSTE SCHIFF. (37)	And our palace scribes, who as you must know are a breed unto themselves, <i>have belatedly rechristened this the FIRST SHIP, bragging about an enterprise that halfway miscarried.</i> (10)	E i nostri scribi di palazzo, una razza a sé, dovresti saperlo, da fanfaroni che sono, retrospettivamente trasformano l'impresa, più o meno fallita, nella PRIMA NAVE. (26)
<i>immer</i> das Zukken meiner Glieder, <i>immer</i> die kalte harte Wand gegen sie, Leben gegen Tod, die Kraft der Mutter gegen meine Ohnmacht. (49)	<i>Forever</i> the twitching of my limbs, <i>forever</i> the cold hard wall against them, life against death, my mother's strength against my weakness. (13)	Sempre la convulsione delle membra, sempre contro di esse la fredda, dura parete, vita contro morte, la forza della madre contro la mia impotenza. (36)
Auch <i>geistig</i> müßten wir gerüstet sein, wenn <i>der Griechen</i> uns <i>angreife</i> . (70)	We must be armed <i>mentally</i> , too, if <i>the Greeks attacked us, they said.</i> (20)	Avremmo dovuto armarci anche <i>spiritualmente</i> , se <i>il greco</i> ci <i>attacava.</i> (52)
Mehr Ausdauer, als ein Mensch aufbringen kann, hätte es gebraucht, immer weiter einen Namen im	It would have taken more perseverance than <i>a man</i> could muster to go on mouthing a name that	Ci sarebbe voluta una costanza sempre maggiore di quella <i>di un essere umano</i> , per continuare ad

Munde zu führen, der immer mehr nach Asche schmeckte, nach Brand und Verwesung. (75)	tasted increasingly of ashes, <i>gangrene</i> , and decay. (22)	avere sulle labbra un nome che sapeva sempre più di cenere, di <i>fuoco</i> e di putrefazione. (56)
Ich glaube, daß wir unsere Natur nicht kennen. Daß ich nicht alles weiß. (126)	I believe that we do not know our nature. That I do not know <i>anything</i> . (38)	Io credo che non conosciamo la nostra natura. Che non so <i>tutto</i> . (98)
<i>Jetzt bin ich gleich soweit.</i> (126)	<i>It will not be long now.</i> (38)	<i>Adesso sono pronta, subito.</i> (98)

Table 1.1: Explicitations

German	American	Italian
Geschickt, fast ohne mir weh zu tun und beinah liebevoll tat er, wozu Aineias, <i>an den ich dachte</i> , nicht willens oder nicht fähig gewesen war. (31)	Skilfully, almost without hurting me and almost tenderly, he did what Aeneas (<i>I thought of him</i>) had been unwilling or unable to do. (7)	Abilmente, quasi senza farmi male e in un certo senso con affetto fece quello che Enea, a cui io pensavo, non aveva avuto l'intenzione o la capacità di fare. (21)
Wär ichs doch! dacht ich verzweifelt, als sie dich – nicht mich! nicht mich! – zum Orakelsprecher machten. Ach sei froh, Schwester. Augur sein – was für ein undankbares Geschäft. Na, <i>er werde</i> sich pünktlichst an die Anweisungen des Kalchas halten. (33)	If only I were! I thought in despair when they made you the oracle – not me! not me! ‘Oh, be glad, Sister. What a thankless job, to be a soothsayer.’ Well (<i>he said</i>), he would observe Calchas’s instructions to the letter. (8)	Se lo fossi! pensai disperata, quando essi fecero te – non me! non me! – portavoce dell’oracolo. Ah sii lieta, sorella. Essere àugure – che incarico ingrato. Sì, lui <i>si sarebbe attenuto</i> con la massima precisione alle direttive di Calcante. (23)
Der überlebte <i>nämlich</i> . (147)	He, <i>for one</i> , intended to survive (<i>he said</i>). (45)	<i>Vale a dire</i> che sarebbe sopravvissuto. (115)
– nicht Griechenleichen; Troerleichen. (109)	not where Greeks <i>were concerned</i> but Trojans. (32)	Non cadaveri di greci; cadaveri di troiani. (85)

The paratextual elements also add to the understanding of other, more ‘hidden’ layers, which would have been clear to the original audience, but less accessible to the foreign audience. This aspect has already affected the translation of the word “Grenze”, but there are also other, more character-based elements, which could have been easily overlooked in both the American and in the Italian translations, if not for the framing of the novels and its paratextual components. Perhaps, one of the most important references that Christa Wolf makes to the GDR context is embodied by the character of Eumelos, described as a ‘capable man’. Both the East and West German audience would have easily recognised the reference to the propaganda that surrounded the government of East Germany and the ideology that went into the creation of a mythology of the GDR. Particularly relevant is the mention of Eumelos, not only in relation to the policing of freedom of action within the borders of Troy, but also in relation to the policing of language. This description resonates with what Nothnagle writes in *Building the East German Myth* about the language of the GDR being one of ‘mutual deception’.³⁷⁷ Priamos and his subjects, in fact, are presented as needing to convince themselves and one another that Eumelos is, in fact, a ‘capable man’. In her afterword to the Italian edition of *Cassandra*, Raja states that “Eumelos is the personification of police-reinforced borders”, therefore hinting at the original context of the novel in a way that makes it clearer to the Italian audiences, who might have not been familiar with its implications, and guiding the reading public towards a specific interpretation.

der Gast, den niemand mehr »Gastfreund« nennen sollte. Was? Wer verbot denn das! Eumelos, hieß es. Eumelos? Wer ist Eumelos. Ach ja. Jener Mann im Rat, dem jetzt die Palast wache unterstand. Seit wann entschied ein Offizier über den Gebrauch von Wörtern. Seitdem die, die sich die »Königspartei« nannten, in dem Spartaner Menelaos nicht den Gast freund, sondern den Kundschafter oder Provokateur sahn. Den künftigen Feind.

³⁷⁷ Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, p. 31: “Since every State secures its borders one way or another (a point the SED made at every opportunity), the term expressed the normality and international recognition the regime longed for. However, a leap over the Berlin Wall or the fortified inner German border was not prosaically called Flucht (escape), but Republikflucht (Republic desertion, by analogy with the military term Fahnenflucht, or desertion). By consequence, a successful practitioner of this crime was not a Flüchtling (refugee), but a Republikflüchtiger (Republic deserter). It was the use of such ideologically colored euphemisms, combined with a bureaucratic terminology, which made both the Wall and its victims possible in a ‘humanistic’ society.”

Seitdem sie ihn mit einem Sicherheitsnetz umgeben hatten. Ein neues Wort. Dafür gab man das alte, Gastfreund, her. Was sind Wörter. Auf einmal sahn sich die an »Gastfreund« festhielten, auch ich, beargwöhnt. Aber die Palastwache war ein kleiner Haufen, der nur an hohen Festtagen in Prachtuniform den König umgab. Dies würde anders werden, und zwar gründlich, versprach Eumelos. Wer? Eumelos. Der wurde schief angesehen, der den Namen immer noch nicht kannte. Eumelos, Sohn eines niedrigen Schreibers und einer Sklavin aus Kreta. Den jedermann – jedermann in der Umgebung des Palastes – auf einmal »fähig« nannte. Ein fähiger Mann am rechten Platz. Doch hatte diesen Platz der Fähige für sich erfunden.³⁷⁸

The reference to a “Sicherheitsnetz” is quite intentionally a reminder of the Wall being referred to as the “Sicherung der Staatsgrenze der DDR zu Westberlin”, and also points toward the new language of the GDR, which serves to uphold its ideology: “Ein neues Wort”. This new language belongs to the loyal members of the “Königspartei”, making an explicit allusion to the SED and its role in maintaining dissent under control, via the creation of neologisms and by censoring the more ‘reactionary’ opinions.

Am Abend war die Stadt voll Lärm. In den Innenhof, auf den mein Fenster ging, drang kein Laut, man hielt alle Zugänge abgesperrt. Der Himmel, in den ich aus dem Fenster starrte, war mir Tag und Nacht von tiefstem Schwarz. Essen wollte ich nicht. Parthena die Amme flößte mir in kleinen Schlucken Eselsmilch ein. Ich wollte diesen Leib nicht füttern. Ich wollte diesen verbrecherischen Körper, in dem die Todesstimme ihren Sitz hatte, aushungern, ausdörren. Wahn-Sinn als Ende der Verstellungsqual. O, ich genoß ihn fürchterlich, umgab mich mit ihm wie mit einem schweren Tuch, ich ließ mich Schicht für Schicht von ihm durchdringen. Er war mir Speise und Trank. Dunkle Milch, bitteres Wasser, saures Brot. Ich war auf mich zurückgefallen. Doch es gab mich nicht.³⁷⁹

In this extract from the novel Cassandra describes a form of “Wahn-Sinn”, a depressive and/or manic-adjacent state, which brings out a form of disassociation from her own bodily necessities. In this condition, she does not perceive the passage of time either,

³⁷⁸ Wolf, *Kassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

the switch from day to night, her mind is poisoned by the “dark milk, bitter water, sour bread” she feeds from. The separation of the two nouns, “Wahn” and “Sinn”, is intentional, as it graphically and semantically shows Cassandra’s (material and spiritual) separation from the self; additionally, it alludes to the internal division faced by the Trojans and the Germans, in the dichotomy generated via the opposition of reality vs. propaganda. Therefore, this usage of the term “Wahn-Sinn” widens its semantic spectrum and projects the idea of “mutual deception” related to the language-based propaganda within the GDR. Indeed, “Wahnsinn” is not exclusively “madness”: etymologically, it also stands for the “emptiness of perception/ of the senses”. Notably, from the same root the word “Wüste”, desert, is also derived. It is, by all intents and purposes, a desertification of the self, which concurs with the “aushungern” and “ausdörren” Cassandra experiences. Neither the Italian translation, nor the American translation can convey the double-meaning of the German word. However, while the American edition opts to translate “Wahn-Sinn” with “lunacy”, without hyphenation, the Italian translation keeps the graphic, if not the semantic, separation, using the term “in-sanìa” (which means “in-sanity”), therefore partially mirroring the idea of the original text. Also significant in this passage is another, perhaps more explicit, dichotomy which is expressed by the alternated use of the nouns “Leib” and “Körper”. Normally, both nouns would refer to the ‘body’; however, each term is often used with a different meaning. If “Leib” usually stands for a vessel imbued with vitality, “Körper” can also refer to an absence of said vitality. The Italian and the English language do not have the same differentiation, which means that this nuance will be lost in translation. However, the Italian translation seemingly compensates for the lack of nuance and opts for translating “Leib” as “organismo” (“Non volevo nutrire quest’organismo”, I did not want to feed this organism/body), and “Körper” as “corpo” (body). Christa Wolf insists on these dualities of language by also inviting her readers to draw the similarities between the linguistic (and cultural) propaganda put in place by the GDR regime and that which takes place in her rewriting of the fall of Troy:

Krieg durfte er nicht heißen. Die Sprachregelung lautete, zutreffend:
Überfall. Auf den wir sonderbarerweise gar nicht vorbereitet waren. Da wir
nicht wußten, was wir wollten, haben wir uns nicht bemüht, der Griechen

Absicht wirklich zu ergründen. Ich sage »wir«, seit vielen Jahren wieder »wir«, im Unglück hab ich meine Eltern wieder angenommen.³⁸⁰

In this passage it becomes evident how the term “Krieg” is subjected to the new, propagandistic “Sprachregelung”, which substitutes it with “Überfall”. The American translation reads: “We were not allowed to call it ‘war’. Linguistic regulations prescribed that, correctly speaking, it be called a ‘surprise attack’”,³⁸¹ while the Italian translation reads: “Non era opportuno che si chiamasse guerra. Il regolamento linguistico suggeriva in modo calzante la voce: aggressione” (Calling it war was not appropriate. The rules of language suggested that the adequate noun would be: aggression).³⁸² Without the necessary references to the context of the “Sprachregelung” and its hinting at the censorship imposed by the GDR, this nuance is inevitably lost.

The American translation of Wolf’s *Medea* novel shows some changes in the strategies employed to translate this work for the North American reading public. The American translator opts for replicating the use of free indirect speech, which Wolf reprises in her second mythological novel, although with new implications than in *Cassandra*. This time, the use of direct speech is completely forsaken in the American edition, in favour of the indirect speech, an aspect which already makes for a much more compelling read than the translation of *Cassandra*. Even though the *Stimmen* of the German title are lost, once again, to the logics of translation and specific editorial choices, this absence is compensated for in the way the interconnections between the different voices and subjectivities in the novel are rendered.

Regarding the language of the American translation, one aspect that stands out is the shift towards a mixture of colloquial and formal expressions. Examples of this linguistic ambiguity are to be found across the entirety of the novel. The translator privileges the use of metaphors and fixed expressions, which would not be uncommon in contemporary use, but which sometimes clash with the context of their utterance. The *modern retelling* in the subtitle is, therefore, mirrored in this use of language. One such instance can be observed in the following passage:

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 78.

³⁸¹ Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁸² Wolf, *Cassandra*, *ibid.*, p. 59.

I felt as though I'd taken one to the head, I could only raise up my hands and protest, But that's completely out of the question. So, they said, you're certain that her accusers are lying? What was I up against, what had she got me mixed up in this time? They wanted certainties? What can the likes of us be certain of when it comes to women? The elders nodded their heads in agreement. Apparently it's not me they've got it in for. But her. And she's my wife. What *can* the likes of us be certain of, when these women are in agreement to let a man grope in the dark. And I mean that literally.³⁸³

The use of “I'd taken one to the head” and “it's not me they've got it in for” stands out in this passage of the novel, in which Jason is coming to terms with the dramatic transformations that his relationship with Medea is undergoing. For the same expression, the Italian translation opts for “ero stordito” (I was bewildered/stunned) and “A quanto pare non è la mia vita ad essere in pericolo” (Apparently it's not my life that is in danger), and maintains the same tone throughout the passage, formal but never archaic:

Ero stordito, riuscii solo ad alzare le mani e ad assicurare che era fuori questione. Dunque ero persuaso che chi l' accusava mentisse? Dov'ero finito, in che cosa mi aveva di nuovo irretito. Persuaso, persuaso. Di cosa non sono capaci di persuaderci, queste donne. Gli anziani scossero le teste in segno di disapprovazione. A quanto sembra non è la mia vita ad essere in pericolo. Ma la sua. E lei è mia moglie. Di cosa non sono capaci di persuaderci, queste donne, quando si mettono d'accordo per lasciarci brancolare nel buio. Ed è una cosa da prendere alla lettera.³⁸⁴

Aside from the tonal differences, the Italian translation also favours the use of less explicitating sentences. For instance, “So they said, you're certain that her accusers are lying?” in Italian has been translated as “Dunque ero persuaso che chi l' accusava mentisse?” (“So was I convinced that those who accuse her are lying?”), without the explicitating “So they said”. The Italian also emphasizes the use of the verb “persuadere” (to persuade/convince), which together with “irretito” (“to be entrapped”),

³⁸³ Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁸⁴ Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

conveys Jason's perception of Medea, of women as enchantresses and seductresses, therein providing moral justification to himself in his decision to abandon Medea to her 'fate'. The German original is in between the two polarities of the American and of the Italian translation:

Ich war wie vor den Kopf geschlagen, konnte nur die Hände heben und beteuern, aber davon könne doch keine Rede sein. Also sei ich überzeugt, daß die, die sie beschuldigten, lügen? Wohin war ich da geraten, wohinein hatte sie mich nun schon wieder verstrickt. Überzeugt, überzeugt. Wovon kann unsereins schon überzeugt sein bei diesen Weibern. Die Ältesten bewegten zustimmend die Köpfe. Anscheinend soll es nicht mir an den Kragen gehen. Aber ihr. Und sie ist meine Frau. Wovon kann unsereins überzeugt sein, wenn diese Frauen sich einig sind, einen im dunkeln tappen zu lassen. Und das ist wörtlich zu nehmen.³⁸⁵

On the one hand, the German also makes use of expressions such as "Ich war wie vor den Kopf geschlagen", on the other hand it is in general less colloquial and less explicitating ("Also sei ich überzeugt, daß die, die sie beschuldigten, lügen? Wohin war ich da geraten, wohinein hatte sie mich nun schon wieder verstrickt. Überzeugt, überzeugt."). Furthermore, similarly to the explicitation strategies adopted by Van Heurck in his translation of *Cassandra*, the translator of *Medea* also retains the use of cursive, guiding the reader through an emphatic interpretation of certain words and expressions. This technique is recurrent throughout the text. One example is to be found in this very same passage: "What *can* the likes of us be certain of, when these women are in agreement to let a man grope in the dark".³⁸⁶

Considering that the novel is imbued with a post-colonial perspective on the GDR³⁸⁷, it is also interesting to note which words are used to translate this kind of marginalisation, alternatively through the eyes of the colonizer (Jason) and the colonized (Medea). Particularly evocative in the American translation is the use of the word "alien", which

³⁸⁵ Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁸⁶ Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁸⁷ Several scholars have addressed the weight of German Reunification using this terminology. Cf. Wolfgang Dümcke, *Kolonialisierung der DDR* (1996); Andrea Geier, „Der Kolonialisierung Diskurs in der Literatur nach 1990“; Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (2005); Jonathan R. Zatlin, *Unifying without Integrating: The East German Collapse and German Unity*, 2010.

addressed carefully, because the image of colonization portrayed in the novel is different from the one which the North American audiences might have in mind. John David Pizer points out that

After all, what distinguished the former GDR citizens from the indigenous people across the globe who were subjected to territorial expropriation, authoritarian rule by foreign nations, and often slavery from the Age of Columbus until well into the twenty-first century, is that East Germans actually voted for reunification in March 1990, not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.³⁹²

Yet, there is no doubt that a system of exploitation was set in place after the western market policies started being implemented in the former GDR and that the terminology of colonization employed by Wolf in the novel has its roots in this kind of oppression.³⁹³ This element of the text is naturally lost in translation or, rather, re-imagined, localised. [Initially, in Germany this aspect was overlooked or banalised.³⁹⁴] Other than the

[ciety](#): “The term “alien” has been a fixture in American immigration policy for centuries. It dates back to the nation’s earliest laws, including the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which granted the president authority to deport non-citizens deemed a national security threat. Over time, the term became embedded in federal law, used to differentiate noncitizens from U.S. nationals across various legal statutes, from visa regulations to deportation proceedings. Throughout the 20th century, the word “alien” remained standard in immigration policy, but its connotations evolved with political and social changes. During World War II, the term was used under the Alien Enemies Act to justify the internment and deportation of individuals from enemy nations, a policy that led to the forced detention of thousands of Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants. More recently, critics argue that the word carries negative and dehumanizing undertones, reinforcing the perception of immigrants as outsiders rather than integral members of society.”

³⁹² J. Pizer, *Ambivalent Literary Farewells to the Lost German Republic*, Berlin, De Gruyter 2021, p. 26.

³⁹³ A. Geier, “Der Kolonialisierungs-Diskurs in der Literatur nach 1990”, in Inge Stephan, Alexandra Tacke (eds.), *Nachbilder der Wende*, Köln-Weimar-Wien, Böhlau 2008: “ Die politischen, wirtschaftlichen, sozialen und mentalitätsgeschichtlichen Veränderungen in Ostdeutschland nach dem Fall der Mauer werden in publizistischen, wie literarischen Texten vielfach als ‚Kolonialisierung‘ bezeichnet. Dabei handelt es sich um ein komplexes interpretierendes Sinnbild, das erst im Zuge der öffentlichen Auseinandersetzungen um die zukünftige Gestalt der deutsch-deutschen Beziehungen eine steile Karriere erlebte — im Unterschied etwa zum ebenfalls prominenten ‚gemeinsamen europäischen Haus‘, das aus der Mitte der achtziger Jahre stammt und im Zuge der Vereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten dynamisiert und verändert wurde.” Wie Letzteres stellt das Sinnbild ‚Kolonialisierung‘ eine Ähnlichkeitsbeziehung her, in der die damit entstehenden symbolischen Verweisungen durch ihre „transzendierende Qualität [...] Bedeutungsüberschüsse“ produzieren, die „je unterschiedlich weite und vieldimensionale Räume für Konnotationen“ eröffnen. Es ist Teil der Kollektivsymbolik der deutschen Einheit, deren Bilder „nicht zum Expertenwissen gehören, sondern kulturell weit verbreitet und allgemein bekannt sind sowie in alltäglichen Reden, Handlungen und Ritualen immer wieder appliziert werden.”

³⁹⁴ Chiarloni, *Medea und ihre Interpreten*, in Marianne Hochgeschurz (ed.), *Christa Wolfs Medea*, ibid., p. 118: “Christa Wolf? Sie hat sich die Frage nach den destruktiven Wurzeln unserer Zivilisation stellen wollen und ist dadurch auf die vor-Europäischen Quellen gestoßen. Daher ist es peinlich, wenn Volker

differing translations of the term “fremd”, there are other places in the text in which the language is heavily influenced by post-colonial imaginary, especially when it comes to the representation of the foreign women. One passage in the original text refers to the women who were tasked with surveilling queen Merope. These women are described as “seltsam urtümlichen Weibern”³⁹⁵, “strangely primitive women”. Coming from Medea, this description is particularly interesting because it shows how the colonized, too, is not immune from thinking through the categories of ‘primitive’ vs. ‘civilized’. However, the faith in this dichotomy, which is constantly rehashed throughout the novel and which both Medea and Jason project onto the worlds of Corinth and Colchis respectively, vacillates. Medea and Jason, in fact, reach the same conclusion, at a different pace in the narrative, which naturally also has to do with how this dichotomy affects the two of them distinctly. In Italian, the ‘primitive women’ preserve this quality of being ‘urtümlich’, and queen Merope is surveilled by “due donne di strano primitivismo”³⁹⁶ (two strangely primitive women), while the American translation opts for a more relativistic term, “rugged” instead of “primitive”.

German	American	Italian
[...] bedient und bewacht von zwei seltsam urtümlichen Weibern [...]. (Medea, p. 17)	[...] served and guarded by two peculiarly <u>rugged</u> females [...]. (Medea, p. 19)	[...] servita e sorvegliata da due <u>donne di strano primitivismo</u> [...]. (Medea, p. 8)
[...] und ich hatte keine Gedanken verschwendet an die unglückliche Königin eines Landes, das mir <u>fremd</u> geblieben ist [...]. (Medea, pp. 17-18)	[...] I had never wasted a thought on the unhappy Queen of a country that had always seemed <u>alien</u> to me [...]. (Medea, p. 19)	[...] nè io avevo sprecato un solo pensiero per la regina infelice di un paese che mi è rimasto <u>straniero</u> [...]. (Medea, p. 8)

Hage gerade diese strenge philologische Arbeit übersieht und dem Leser zuerst das traditionell vertraute Bild serviert - „Medea? Eigentlich eine mörderische Frau.“, als ob es das Wichtigste wäre, dem Kumpel Euripides beizustehen. So wird der Gegenentwurf von Christa Wolf auf eine willkürliche Erfindung, auf einen „banalen Etikettenschwin- del“ reduziert. Was bleibt? Ein augenzwinkernder Titel - Kein Mord. Nirgends - und einige ironische Bezeichnungen - „eine Alice Schwarzer von Korinth“, ein Buch, das man vom Schreibtisch als „puren Kitsch“ wegräumt. Und fast männlich-rührend klingt der Schluß: „Christa Wolfs Heldin mag eine mutige und sympathische Fremde aus dem Osten sein, eine Asylantin, der vom Gatten und von den Gastgebern übel mitgespielt wird - eine Medea ist sie nicht.“ Fazit: wir wollen unsere alte Medea wieder!”

³⁹⁵ Wolf, Medea, *ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁹⁶ Wolf, Medea, *ibid.*, p. 19.

<p>[...] weil es mir nicht mehr wichtig war, gefährliche Bequemlichkeit. (Medea, p. 23)</p>	<p>[...] because it wasn't important to me anymore - <u>a convenient but dangerous omission</u>. (Medea, p. 23)</p>	<p>[...] perchè per me non era più importante, <u>pericolosa pigrizia</u>. (Medea, p. 11)</p>
<p>Aber sie betreten ja nie die ärmlichen Behausungen der Fremden am Rand der Stadt. (Medea, p. 52)</p>	<p>But surely no Corinthian would ever set foot in the foreigners' shabby hovels on the edge of the city, nor (as I do) <u>in Medea's dwelling place</u> [...]. (Medea, p. 40)</p>	<p>Ma non entrano mai nelle misere abitazioni degli stranieri al margine della città, o <u>nella dimora di Medea</u>, come faccio io [...]. (Medea, p. 30)</p>
<p>Sie haben aus jedem von uns den gemacht, den sie brauchen. Aus dir den Heroen, und aus mir die böse Frau. (Medea, p. 53)</p>	<p>They've made what they need out of each of us. Out of you, the Hero, and out of me, the <u>Wicked Witch</u>. (Medea, p. 40)</p>	<p>[...] di noi hanno fatto ciò di cui avevano bisogno. Di te l'eroe, di me la donna <u>malvagia</u>. (Medea, p. 30)</p>
<p>[...] aber ich bin misstraurisch geworden gegen meine inneren Stimmen, man hat mir dargelegt, dass sie von Medea beeinflusst waren und, wer weiss, noch sind, sie hat Macht über Menschen, sie schläfert einen ein. (Medea, p. 53)</p>	<p>[...] but I've started to be suspicious of my inner voices, it's been explained to me that they were subject to Medea's influence and for all I know they may be still, she has power over <u>people</u>, she entrances <u>them</u>. (Medea, p. 41)</p>	<p>[...] ma io sono diventato diffidente verso le voci di dentro, mi hanno spiegato che erano influenzate da Medea e chissà, forse lo sono ancora, lei ha potere sugli <u>uomini</u>, <u>ti</u> ipnotizza. (Medea, p. 31)</p>

Additionally, the American translation, seems to portray an image of colonialism that is very much imbued with horror elements and which descends directly from a tradition of Anglophone post-colonial literature. That is not to say that the horror element is absent from the original text; rather, it is arguably given more emphasis in the American translation. In the very first chapter of the novel, in fact, Medea discovers that her beloved Colchis is built on a castle of lies. The word that she uses in the original text is “Untat”, which literally translates to “atrocious/outrageous deed”. While the Italian translation opts for the more neutral “misfatto” (crime/misdeed), the American translation builds its semantic field of ‘horror’ and translates it as: “the city is founded

on a monstrous deed”. The choice of leaning into the aspect of monstrosity might stray a little bit from the original tone of this passage in the novel, however it can be argued that the translator quite aptly encapsulates the atmosphere of Medea’s gruesome discovery. At the same time, it also leans heavily into the othering dimension, which is often associated with the monstrous/the monster, and which is further highlighted in the following passage from the text:

Do I want to die, the question crossed my mind, I set my teeth and kept on crawling, then I licked some moisture seeping from the walls, tasteless dampness, then I sensed that the composition of the air was changing, and then my hair stood up even before I heard the sound. Then I heard the sound. It lasted longer than a person has breath, a barely audible but penetrating whining. It could just as well have been an animal, but it was no animal. It was the woman. It was Merope. I wanted to go back, all the way back, and I pushed myself forward inch by inch. All at once, the sound stopped; the hammer in my chest drowned out any other noise, it hasn’t stopped, it’s hammering all the way up to my temples. Then, when my eyes had glimpsed the right direction in the darkness, I saw the Queen, sitting in the dim light of her little oil lamp, braced straight and still against the rocky cave wall, her eyes unwaveringly fixed on a point across from her. In this icy cold I was drenched with sweat, I stank of horror, such a thing had never happened to me. Something stirred in me that I had kept locked up and almost forgotten, something came alive in that corpses’ crypt.³⁹⁷

It seems that the American translation draws from the imagery of colonial gothic, which uses metaphors of haunting and of spectral, monstrous figures as narrative tools.³⁹⁸ What seems to be particularly adherent to this semantic field is the translation of “[...] in mir regte sich etwas, das ich unter Verschuß gehalten und fast vergessen hatte, etwas Lebendiges in dieser Totengruft.”³⁹⁹ The most striking feature of the translation is connected to the word “etwas Lebendiges” (something alive). The Italian translator proposes the following rendition of this sentence: “[...] in me si muoveva qualcosa che

³⁹⁷ Wolf, *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁹⁸ R. Duncan, *Decolonial Gothic: Beyond the Postcolonial in Gothic Studies*, in *Gothic Studies*, Vol. 24, n. 3, pp. 304-322: “Haunting is the trope through which [the mistrust in colonial representations] is figured in postcolonial Gothic”.

³⁹⁹ *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 21.

avevo tenuto sotto chiave e quasi dimenticato, qualcosa di vivo dentro quel sepolcro”.⁴⁰⁰ This rendition offers the same image as the original text, whereas the American translation describes “something [which] came alive”, therefore painting a scene that is reminiscent of gothic horror and which could easily evoke a set of familiar images in the minds of the Anglophone readers. These more or less subtle shifts towards localisation are to be seen in other places in the text, f.i. where the dual opposition of Medea and Jason is represented through different imagery to the one which is used in the original text. In the passage of the novel, in which Medea foresees how the tradition will describe her and Jason as “the evil woman”, Medea, and “the hero”, Jason, the American translation uses the fixed, fantastical trope of the “Wicked Witch”, which refers to a different tradition, in opposition to the mythical one. The Italian translation, instead, sticks closer to the more neutral image presented in the German text.

In summary, the American edition of *Medea* shows greater awareness from the translator when it comes to the rendition of the German sentences and expressions; however, the translation of the border aspects and of the sense of marginality is marked by closer attention to the target culture, more so than in *Cassandra*. The Italian edition, instead, is marked by a sense of continuity, due to the presence of the same translator, who maintains the same purposes. Similarly to the translation of *Cassandra*, the Italian *Medea* also tries to capture the essence of the original text and attempts to convey it through rhythmical and semantic choices, without sacrificing the prose, which remains poetic and convincing in Italian as well.

⁴⁰⁰ *Medea*, *ibid.*, p. 10.

Conclusions

Having witnessed Cassandra and Medea's travelling from the ancient times, to Christa Wolf's novels, after being translated for different audiences (German, Italian, American), it is now possible to draw some conclusions based on the elements which have emerged from the different editions of these texts and on the context of myth adaptation. The answer to our most prominent question of whether the characters of Cassandra and Medea have managed to travel and to retain their purpose in each version cannot be given straightforwardly, as we must take multiple perspectives into consideration. It has become increasingly clearer that each context has its own peculiarities, some of which vary independently from both the author's function and the translators' input.

The German context of *Kassandra's* and *Medea.Stimmen's* respective publication was

fraught with imbalances and ambiguities in the interpretation of Wolf's understanding of these characters and their stories. This interpretational divide has generated the conditions for the appearance and thematization of the 'border concept'. Not only were these novels judged as original works for their contribution to contemporary literature: they also had to be measured up against the unyielding tradition of myth. A tradition which would not have allowed characters such as Cassandra and Medea to be anything but fixed models tied to a methodically manufactured 'ancient wisdom'. As a consequence of the evident rupture with tradition, Wolf's Cassandra and Medea have been celebrated, on the one hand, as feminist characters (which they undoubtedly are) and/or as metaphors of a politicized narrative (which they also are, to a certain extent). But most importantly, perhaps, they have also pioneered the rise of a new mythology, which thanks to Christa Wolf has established its roots in various cultures and literatures. This is true for the Italian and the American context of reception as well, each of whom has adapted Wolf's rewritings looking at them from different perspectives.

The American translation was conditioned by the editorial choice of framing Christa Wolf primarily as a feminist writer. This perspective single-handedly overshadowed many other aspects of her work, which would have contributed to a more nuanced reception and, possibly, to the development of different translation strategies. Although changes are to be found in the comparison between the translations of Wolf's mythological novels, it can also be shown how certain features of the translated works have influenced the perception of Wolf as an author in the US. This brings us to the conclusion that the translators' invisibility, paired with the lack of paratextual elements which hint significantly at or explain in detail the context of the translation, as well as the presence of other paratextual elements which almost exclusively convey the perspective of the target culture, have generated a portrayal of Christa Wolf and of her characters that is not necessarily damaging, but which still incites some scepticism in regards to its execution. If we consider the translation of *Cassandra*, we can infer that the absence of the translator's voice, as well as the lack of a foreword or afterword, has weighed on the perception of the novel in the foreign context. Furthermore, although the translation of *Cassandra* manages to convey the ground-breaking shift towards a woman-centred, woman-narrated myth, it lacks some depth in the portrayal of how this shift comes to be. Consequentially, some changes are produced with respect to Wolf's author-function and a partial obstruction in the travelling of the 'border' concept

thematized in the novel also takes place. All of this is evidenced in the dismissal of the free indirect speech, which alters the form and function of Cassandra as a character and remains an issue of considerable importance throughout the text, especially considering that the underlying translator's strategy is never addressed. With it, Wolf's *subjective authenticity* also remains dormant. Other aspects of her writing, which convey the concept of 'border', are not highlighted in the translation. Among these, the incessant use of explicitations, in particular, dilutes the language of the novel into a less rhythmic and poetic prosody. On the level of language, Wolf establishes the ebbs and flows of the characters' consciousness, how they each construct the borders that keep them enclosed in a more or less defined space. Therefore, the absence of those linguistic patterns in the American translation produces a lack of depth in its execution.

Different is the case of the American translation of *Medea*, which can be said to portray a more conclusive and well-rounded image of author and character for the American audience, not without some critical elements to its conception. Once again, the translator's invisibility 'weighs' on the target text, but not as much as it did before. The reasons for this positive development are to be found in the use of paratextual elements (Atwood's foreword), and are also determined by Wolf's author-function not being as reliant on the translators' work as it was before. Through the reversal of previous strategies, it can be maintained that both Christa Wolf and *Medea* have been portrayed in a more 'accurate' light compared to the previous novel.

On the other hand, both the Italian translations of *Cassandra* and *Medea* have benefited from the exact opposite strategy, when it comes to the use of paratextual elements, but also in relation to the (not overbearing, but still evident) presence of the translator, who understands her role as a vehicle of the text, but also accepts that of being a representative of the novels for the Italian public. In fact, one of the most prominent aspects of these translations is the continuity that is established through the choice of the translator (Anita Raja for both novels). The editorial choice to have one specific translator, with whom the readership can identify the foreign author, has proven to be particularly effective in transposing the peculiarities of Wolf's texts into Italian. Naturally, not only the fact that there is only one translator, but also the fact that Raja in particular had a close understanding of Wolf's authorial persona and had her trust. No less important is Anita Raja being a woman who translates the work of a woman

author, in the context of giving back the stolen voices of Cassandra, Medea and Christa Wolf as well. This aspect of the translator's work is carefully articulated by her on several instances, in and outside of the translated work itself, and it also shows in her declared approach to the language of the text and the layers of meaning that are constructed through it.

The travelling of the characters of Cassandra and Medea, the women who we have defined as wandering words in the language of myth, who bring with them elements of the 'border' and push the boundaries of what can be said about and through myth, and especially about and through the women of myth, if not always successful in all of its elements has certainly been impactful, even beyond Wolf's rewritings and the translation of the novels. As such, they have resonated with other writers, who have decided not only to try their hand at myth-retelling, as is common in every epoch, but also to give the women of myth the chance to speak for themselves. The focus switches from the hero to the heroine, and so the *Odyssey* becomes *The Penelopiad*, the tale of Penelope, under Margaret Atwood's terms; Circe becomes more than a secondary, stereotypical character in Madeline Miller's homonymous novel; Clytemnestra becomes more than Agamemnon's murderous wife in Costanza Casati's retelling. Either directly or indirectly indebted to Wolf's writings, these novels testify the influence of the German writer's approach to mythology and continuously expand the discussion and redefine the terms of what myth represents for us in the present, rather than focusing uniquely on what it represented in the past. It is a reappropriation of the narrative which speaks to the most human, most authentic side of stories which have been retold countless times, and which are likely keep being retold for a long time still.

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