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“Gut sei gewesen, was die Entfaltung alles  
Lebendigen gefördert habe.”<sup>1</sup>

Feminist Mythmaking and Christa Wolf's  
*Medea. Stimmen*

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Recent feminist scholarship has identified the social construct *Mythos Frau*, the myth of womanhood, as an invention of the female sex in literature and history. It has been revealed that female characters depicted in myths and other literary forms are often one-sided women who represent ideals of angel, mother, or whore. Medea, Helena, Medusa: their names ring in our ears. We have heard stories about them or their family members. Similar to the analysis of the role of Eve, Judith, and Mary in feminist theology, feminist myth criticism has allowed us to reinterpret female characters in myths, to rewrite their stories, and to retell their impact on humanity.<sup>2</sup> Myth and religion are different, yet related ways of making sense of our history and especially of our so-called civilization. Mythological and religious stories are narrative forms that attempt to shed light on our cultural values, philosophical and political principles, as well as on our origin, represented by our fore-fathers and fore-mothers.

In her recent work *Medea. Stimmen* (1996), why does Christa Wolf turn to a patriarchal tradition; why does she rewrite a Greek myth?<sup>3</sup> Many critics have attacked Wolf and interpreted the *Medea* novel as a self-defensive work.<sup>4</sup> The same issues have often been raised about her previous novel *Kassandra* (1983) and Wolf has been criticized for not offering a new and different approach from her first reinterpretation of mythology. These attitudes—as appropriate as they may be—prevent investigations of other levels of the text. Wolf's rewriting of the *Medea* myth is a continuation of this process in feminist criticism, which is still at the beginning of examining different aspects of gender, different works, and different myths of our culture. With the help of this feminist practice, Wolf shows the reader inequalities in

our world and illustrates how differently men and women construct their reality. Thus, Wolf uses the myth to ponder about history and the writing of history as well as the writing of stories and their inscription into our cultural memory. Reading Wolf's novel from a feminist perspective, the question arises as to whose interests old myths serve and what they tell us about the world and our place in them. In *Medea Stimmen*, Wolf creates a selfhood for women and expresses women's experience by transforming an androcentric cultural tradition. By redefining Medea, she revises one part of a male-dominated system of storytelling. Before I examine these points with examples from Wolf's novel, I would like to outline the recent history of feminist myth criticism as part of feminist literary criticism.

As feminist scholars have shown, religious stories and folktales or myths of the Western tradition are very important for our understanding of gendered characteristics because of their influence on our thinking and on our comprehension of the world. Hélène Cixous's approach regarding mythology in the Western European tradition has opened up our eyes for a critique of old values. In 1975, Cixous dealt with the Medea figure in *The Newly Born Woman* and illustrated her feminist critique of myths:

*Woman's weapons:* Weeping, crying, poisons, veils, nets. Who cries there? . . . Who? Medea, Ariadne, Dido, How did you moan . . . All history is thus troubled with her incessant moanings, which insist, die down, come up again, always unheard. (107)

Cixous reflects on mythological female characters who are either passive, helpless victims (they cry) or they are aggressive perpetrators (they poison somebody) but their cries and voices are never heard. The female characters of male authors are often trapped in their patriarchal environment without being given a voice or a way out of their situation. Cixous deals extensively with the meaning of myths as part of our literary tradition:

Where to stand? Who to be? Who, in the long continuing episodes of their misfortune - woman's abundance always repaid by abandonment? Beginning Medea's story all over again,

less and less violently, repeating more and more tenderly, sadly, the gift, the fervor, the passion, the alienation, the stunning discovery of the worst (which isn't death): the total love that has been used by the loved one for his base ambitions. 'The one who was everything for me, I know only too well, my husband has become the worst of men.' (Euripides, *Medea* 75)

Cixous uses the patriarchal tradition of myth because their reinterpretation offers a way of showing how old traditions are laden with inherited misogynist values. Among others, Dorothy Dinnerstein explains in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1976) how women and men learn gender specific attitudes and internalize them by being exposed to old stories. Since myths seem to stem from true stories, readers and listeners of myths internalize the ideas about gender differences as universally applicable and true.<sup>5</sup>

In 1978, the radical feminist Mary Daly examined the mystification of myths in the Western world and came to the conclusion that "[p]atriarchy perpetuates its deception through myth" (44). In patriarchal myth scholarship, myths are viewed as explanations of the world, they are supposed to help understand the world. Like any other form of literature they can be used as a tool of learning because they include a didactic approach: "To participate in reality is to repeat mythical models, to *reactualize* them continuously" (Daly 45, emphasis in original). According to Daly, patriarchy uses traditional myths to reinforce its dominant position. Supporting this idea, Northrop Frye points out the importance of our cultural heritage in terms of myths. Frye states that Greek and biblical mythologies are predominantly male-centered and that they lead to almost all subsequent forms of literature.<sup>6</sup>

In her study *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics* (1986), Maggie Humm concludes that feminist scholars have long been concerned with the influence on gender-role perceptions transmitted through myths.<sup>7</sup> She not only eloquently explains the importance of myths for gender stereotypes but also emphasizes the need for new myths:

Myth Critics are important to any feminist analysis of the culture of sexuality since sexual politics is the base for their

analysis. Male myths . . . are really prohibitions against women's free choice of sexuality . . . Above all, gender stereotypes can only be eliminated when we recognise the many different styles of thought, feeling and behaviour represented in the language of myths. In the long run, myth criticism may be most important not so much to feminist criticism but to the future of women's writing. The creation of *new* myth in lesbian and science fiction novels . . . is an uncharted territory of the psychological and physical potential of women. (102-3, emphasis in original)

Humm's argument is twofold: myth criticism is an important area for feminist analysis as well as a tool for new myths written from a female or feminist perspective.

Another feminist scholar who draws attention to the questionable assumption that myths offer universal truth is Cynthia Davis. In 1990, Davis examined archetypes and myths and warned that traditionally myth scholars have not taken into account "that most of the tales they study are created and transmitted by males . . . and they never question the equation of male with universal" (114). Therefore, feminist critics have to examine mythology as partly shaped by a patriarchal tradition. According to Davis, it is important to keep the following in mind when analyzing the works of women writers and their relation to images of women:

The woman is always the Other in the male myth, unpossessed but needed, capable of dual effects, allowing and threatening the man's sense of identity. The woman novelist enters a literature and culture rooted in this myth, in which gender relations are the parable for human relations to the outer world, in which *human* means "male" . . . But in a very real sense, the received versions of myth are the structures the writer has to work with; to step completely out of one's culture is impossible. The woman writer can add the 'human dimension' by identifying with the mythic female in a way that men cannot; thus the resurrection of myths that center on women . . . (117)<sup>8</sup>

Davis calls for adaptations of myths from a female perspective. When an author retells a myth focusing on the situation of women, an illuminating dimension is added to the reading of the myth. Yet, Davis also clearly states the impossibility of completely changing a myth because of our roots in the culture in which we grow up.

In her article "Creating a Women's Mythology: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*" (1990), Susan Friedman describes why it is so important for the female literary tradition to establish a women's mythology:

Because this revisionist mythmaking offers a rich source of personal and cultural transformations from a woman's perspective, it makes an important contribution to the female poetic tradition. Simultaneously, it helps to reshape *the* poetic tradition to which all groups, with their different historically determined experiences and perspectives, contribute. (376, emphasis in original)

Friedman sees an important opportunity for the reshaping of the patriarchal canon in revising old myths. She has explored revisions of the traditional Helen myth in H.D.'s poetry. According to Friedman, H.D. can only construct a new identity for Helen after the character comes to terms with the identity created by the dominant tradition.

In order to understand Wolf's choice to reinterpret a Greek myth, I would like to point to a recent study by Sigrid Weigel, *Bilder des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (1994), in which she deals with new approaches in reading East and West German literature from a post-*Wende* perspective.<sup>9</sup> Weigel asserts that a development has taken place in contemporary German literature that moves from themes of individual autobiographical stories to stories that deal with a more collective cultural memory. Weigel further contends that authors try to reconstruct their cultural identity nowadays by elucidating their cultural roots in legends, folk-tales, and myths. The reader is drawn into an interpretation of literature through complex structures of memory, one of which is the "Verfahren der Aktualisierung von Mythen für gegenwärtige Erfahrungen" (Weigel 10). Weigel describes the overall tendencies in contemporary German literature as follows:

Im Bewußtsein einer immer schon be- und geschriebenen, einer

stets bereits gedeuteten Welt gewinnen in der Literatur dabei Verfahren der *Intertextualität* an Bedeutung: Referenzen auf tradierte Bilder, Texte und Dokumente, Fortschreibungen, Umschriften und Relektüren alter Mythen und Geschichten, in denen Ähnlichkeiten aufscheinen und Unterschiede zur Jetztzeit markiert werden. (11, emphasis in original)

The cultural memory with which authors deal is found in old stories, images, and creation myths. They offer an explanation of the structure of our present societies and ideas.

In the patriarchal Medea myth, Medea threatens the patriarchal Greek world and its values, one of them being the ideal of the submissive female. Her power is represented as destructive because she does not support but attacks the patriarchal system. Carolyn Durham describes Euripides's version as follows: "Medea dismembers and scatters in the first place. Not only defined as killer of men, Medea also incarnates the destruction of the private, domestic, traditionally female world of the family" (55).<sup>10</sup> Durham does a close feminist reading of Euripides's play, but unlike her and other feminist scholars who interpret the drama as androcentric, Peter Rudnytsky claims in his interpretation that Euripides's *Medea* is a "feminist work:" "Indeed, despite being written by a male author, the *Medea* [Euripides's] surely qualifies as a feminist work in its anatomy of the injustices suffered by women in marriage" (37). I argue that it is not Euripides or other authors after him but Wolf who is the first to offer her readers a feminist version of Medea.<sup>11</sup> Manfred Fuhrmann observes in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

Die griechischen Mythen dürfen umerzählt werden: Davon leben sie, davon haben sie ihre leuchtenden Spuren die Jahrtausende hindurch hinterlassen. Christa Wolfs neue *Medea* befolgt dieses Prinzip, sie befolgt es so entschieden, daß sie sich *gründlich* von ihren etwa zweihundert Vorgängerinnen unterscheidet.

Among these two hundred authors, Wolf is the first to rewrite the myth in order to shed new light on a story originally written from a male perspective. She refuses to believe that Medea has murdered her

children.<sup>12</sup>

Wolf tries to add a human dimension to her character by identifying with Medea. Her Medea is not an entirely new myth. She uses different versions of this old myth and allows the reader to look at them from a different perspective. Neither the author nor the readers can step out of the culture that surrounds them. This realization requires us to analyze the myths with which we have grown up, discover their misogynist values and, possibly, change them into egalitarian stories by including other perspectives or inventing new myths. The same is necessary when we look at nursery rhymes, fairy tales, etc. In retelling "Little Red Riding Hood" from a feminist perspective, we conceptualize a different version which enables us to question whether there is only one "true" and right story. Hardly any story and in particular not old, handed down stories announce that they are written or told from a certain perspective and that there are other "true" accounts from other perspectives of the same story. The retelling of a story allows us to see how tied up our literary and intellectual tradition is with the dominant perspective.

To problematize Wolf's critique of the most predominant Medea myth, we need to take a closer look at the differences between Wolf's *Medea. Stimmen* and the main source from which her interpretation evolved. Euripides's play *Medea* is no doubt the most prominent source for Wolf, although she is aware of early derivations of the story.<sup>13</sup> In Euripides's and Wolf's works, Medea is the protagonist of the story.<sup>14</sup> The motivations for her actions, however, are quite contrary and the evaluation of Medea's actions by these two authors is very different.

In the patriarchal tradition of myths, Medea is known as the woman who fell in love with Jason and helped him steal the Golden Fleece. Fearing her father's punishment for her disobedience, she fled with Jason and the other Argonauts to Corinth. When her father set out his fleet in pursuit of them, Medea allegedly killed her brother, cut his body into pieces and strew them into the ocean so that her father would slow down. Medea is also said to have poisoned the King of Corinth. She is known for jealously murdering the king's daughter Glauke when her husband Jason decided to marry Glauke. Finally, Medea is supposed to have murdered her two children to take revenge on Jason.

The most striking changes which Wolf incorporates in her story are the following: Medea leaves Colchis because it is a degenerate state ruled by her corrupt father, Aietes. Her brother Absyrtos does not die at her hands but he is killed with their father's permission because Aietes is afraid that his son would take over his power.<sup>15</sup> Medea does not poison the princess of Corinth, Glauke, and her father, Kreon. Medea does not commit infanticide but her children are killed by the mob. The infanticide motive, central to all other adaptations of the myth, is no longer the crucial issue because Medea has a lover and is not jealous of Glauke.<sup>16</sup>

Euripides's Medea is a less independent character than Wolf's. Even though he turned her into an intelligent woman and powerful sorceress, she is trapped in the patriarchal system of her time which allows her only to be mother and faithful wife. In Wolf's novel, Medea is not only intelligent and has healing powers but she also has many friends, a profession, and she does not see her life-fulfillment in supporting her husband's aspirations. Wolf's Medea is not a self-sacrificing woman. Even though she tries to help others through psychotherapeutic insight and homeopathic medicine, she is very much aware that she does not follow the rules for women in Greek society.<sup>17</sup> She does not abandon her powerful position and does not lie about basic beliefs in order to save her husband, her children, or herself.

Euripides wrote from a perspective which turned Medea into a barbarian outsider, a non-Greek, who threatens Greek values and society. In *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, Michael Grant indicates that some of the legends about the Argonauts and the *Odyssey* were created in a phase of colonization and exploration of the Mediterranean region during the seventh and sixth century B.C. Euripides wrote his plays during the classical phase in the fifth century B.C. and tried to fuse some of these old legends (Grant 280).

Wolf analyzes Medea's position as a member of an ethnic minority of her time. By using an old story, she traces similarities to our time and addresses unresolved social problems in present-day Germany as well as in Western history. As a foreigner and a woman who looks critically at the intrigues of the ruling class Medea is turned into the scapegoat of the greedy government in Corinth which tries to keep its powerful position through fraud and deceit. Compared with the light-skinned Greeks, Medea is dark-skinned. In her article in the *Neue*

*Zürcher Zeitung*, Astrid Köhler refers to her as the "erste Asylantin der Literaturgeschichte."<sup>18</sup> The novel tries to speak out against oppression of minorities and violence against foreigners. *Medea. Stimmen* contains a critique of colonialism. However, Monika Shafi challenges the way Wolf treats Medea as a foreigner and a "barbarian." "*Medea* entfaltet ... nicht eine kolonialkritische Perspektive, sondern rekurriert letztlich auf ein klassisches Humanitätsideal, das individuelle Entscheidungsprozesse in den Vordergrund rückt" (383). Indeed, the novel fails to discuss problems between insiders and outsiders and reduces the conflict between the majority of the Greeks and the ethnic minority of the people from Colchis to a personal story. Although these points of criticism are compelling, it is also a legitimate investigation on Wolf's part to confront us with a different version. As Shafi persuasively explains, the blind spots in the novel are fields of analysis for feminist scholarship that work in conjunction with issues of race, sexual orientation, age, religion, to name but a few distinctive differences among people. Shafi also convincingly argues that the character Medea enters exile as an outsider in a privileged position and is preoccupied with her moral superiority:

Medea ist nämlich nicht damit beschäftigt, sich in dem aus verlorener Heimat und ungewisser Zukunft konstituierten 'Zwischen-Raum' neu zu orten, sondern ihre moralische Andersartigkeit und Überlegenheit unter Beweis zu stellen. (383)

Medea's moral power compared to everyone around her is emphasized by the different voices—since there is no single narrator—throughout the text.<sup>19</sup> Shafi's assertion of Medea's superiority stands in contrast to Herbert Lehnert's conclusions. According to him, the representation of Medea "verhindert, daß die mythisch-feministische Vorbildlichkeit der Figur ins Legendäre und Unglaubliche gerät" (300). While Shafi asserts that Medea's role is too superior to be considered real, Lehnert argues that Medea is depicted as an ideal but does not lose her credibility as a human being. Wolf's Medea has been referred to as too good to be true.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Wolf maintains in an interview that Medea is not meant to represent an ideal: "Wenn ich an die Frauen denke, die ich kenne, wäre sie [Medea] bestimmt nicht für jede ein Ideal. Und,

ich wiederhole, ich bin weit davon entfernt, Ideale schaffen zu wollen" (Wolf, "Interview" 55). Wolf tries to show her readers a different version and glorifies Medea but refuses to admit that the character Medea turns into an image representing the conscience of the people and is thus of superior moral standing. Gail Finney contends that

[T]he reader emerges from this novel with a revised portrait of Medea as a superior individual: superior as a woman, as a healer, as a priestess who unburdens others by encouraging them to speak—to bring other hidden thoughts to a verbal level, in the manner of a therapist—and as the conscience of the public. (124)

Medea is obviously not the average person and has advantages (social standing, education, etc.) over other characters in the book (and over her readers) that prevent them from making similar decisions of comparable moral integrity.

Nevertheless, the judgment of Medea as a moral speaker and Wolf's mouthpiece raises other questions. The critique that Medea is too noble a human being might be persuasive on the one hand. Yet, on the other hand, does this criticism occur partly because Wolf's character is a woman? In literary history, many male characters have been representatives of a new man, a better human being. Is Wolf criticized because she developed a morally superior female character as a positive example of humanity? In *Kassandra* and *Medea. Stimmen*, the agent is not a male but female character. The question arises whether the author is criticized for placing a woman in the position of a moral leader. As Georgina Paul claims in her study on the dialectic in *Medea. Stimmen*, "[S]ie [Wolf] kehrt den Spieß gleichsam um, indem sie die Männer der mangelnden Selbsterkenntnis bezichtigt, während die Frauen es sind, die die Handlungen der Männer mühelos durchschauen . . ." (235). However, not all women are good and all men are bad. Inge Stephan acknowledges that Wolf sympathizes with the female rather than male characters but she also asserts that the depiction of characters like Agamede and other women who work against Medea helps to avoid "eine schematische Verteilung von Gut und Böse zwischen Frauen und Männern" (247). In an interview, Wolf admits that her interest lies much more in the development and motivation of the female charac-

ters.<sup>21</sup> "Daß hier eine Frauenfigur von einem über die Jahrhunderte hinweg überlieferten Makel befreit wird," writes Thomas Anz for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "dient aber nicht der platten Gegenüberstellung von guten, verkannten Frauen und schlechten, überschätzten Männern." An essential task of feminist literary scholarship is to examine these kinds of new myths and to question their representation of characters, values, and the world depicted in them. Wolf employs didactic goals when she changes the meaning of the older myths that show Medea as a sorceress and murderer.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas Euripides focuses only on themes such as love, adultery, and jealousy, Wolf deals, in addition, with topics such as politics, psychology, education, the power-play between people, intrigues, truth, fear, and violence. The most important aspect in the book is her utopian ideal of a better life, one in which all things alive can be stimulated, promoted, and encouraged and do not need to be suppressed. Medea's strength in Wolf's novel is her ability to see through things, to identify patterns of fear and how fear turns into hatred and violence. At one point she learns that not only Colchis which she fled hoping to find to a place where people were less corrupt but also Corinth is built on lies. "Die hier . . . sind Meister im Lügen, auch im Sich-selbst-Belügen" (Wolf, *Medea* 111). For Wolf, it is important to tackle themes of justice and equality of humankind. Medea's former student Agamede used to be an admirer of hers. During the course of the novel, however, Agamede's feelings change into envy and finally into hatred. She says: "Medea in ihrer Verblendung setzt ja auf die Stärken der Menschen, ich setze auf ihre Schwächen" (83). Medea truly believes in the positive sides of humans, although she is aware that people can be easily corrupted through fear and lack of self-respect.

What Wolf has challenged in *Kassandra* and keeps challenging in *Medea. Stimmen* are the fixed images of women. These unchanging images reoccur throughout literary history in stories written up to the present. To contest these images, Wolf destroys the static and paralyzed character Medea. The effect is eye-opening. At the same time, however, Wolf steps into the trap of unintentionally reinforcing the message of the original story. As Nicola Kaminski puts it in her analysis of the interconnectedness of Wolf's *Sommerstück*, *Was bleibt*, and *Medea. Stimmen*:

Als abgeschlossener Einzeltext vermag auch sie [Medea]

bloß die Aporie des Festschreibens, der Ersetzung eines Mythos durch einen anderen zur Darstellung zu bringen, wenn auch - im fortwährenden Nachdenken über Mythengese - hoch selbstreflexiv. (131)

I would argue, however, that Wolf's self-reflexive analysis of the old myth enables the reader of *Medea. Stimmen* to reread the old myth while simultaneously reading the revised one which opens up new horizons of conceptualizing our world. In her study on myth and gender in 20<sup>th</sup> century German writings, Inge Stephan also declares that Wolf's approach to the old myth is "analytisch-hermeneutisch" and opens new dimensions in a dissecting fashion (244). By rewriting *Medea*, Wolf counterbalances the masculine experience with the formation of a women's myth and transforms mythological traditions by evaluating the *Medea* conflict from a female perspective. The author makes *Medea* realize and fight against all expectations of the dominant myth before *Medea*'s authentic self can develop and gain independence of the old myth.

Some critics have insisted that Wolf prompts the reader of her book with an attitude of resignation, a judgment they primarily base on the last few passages of the book.<sup>23</sup> In the end, after she is expelled from Corinth and her two sons are killed, *Medea* has to run away and she joins a group of women in the mountains. She doubts that people will understand the power structures and dangers for humankind in patriarchal societies. Even if they identified them, they would not know how to fight them. It has also often been overlooked, though, that Wolf offers a variety of descriptions which represent a utopian world. When *Medea* remembers her childhood in Colchis, she dreams of a better society that can be read as a utopian image for the future:

Wir in Kolchis waren beseelt von unseren uralten Legenden, in denen unser Land von gerechten Königinnen und Königen regiert wurde, bewohnt von Menschen, die in Eintracht miteinander lebten und unter denen der Besitz so gleichmäßig verteilt war, daß keiner den anderen beneidete oder ihm nach seinem Gut oder gar nach dem Leben trachtete. (Wolf, *Medea* 99)<sup>24</sup>

Centuries ago, before *Medea* was born, the government in Colchis

distributed property evenly among their subjects. The projection of Marxist ideas regarding property distribution becomes evident. The lifestyle in Colchis was initially different and focused on the comfort of all people. *Medea* talks about those times and values with Akamas, one of the astrologers and politicians in Corinth who, in the end, accelerates her downfall. "Gut sei gewesen, was die Entfaltung alles Lebendigen gefördert habe. Also Fruchtbarkeit, sagte ich [Akamas]. Auch, sagte *Medea*, und sie fing an, von gewissen Kräften zu reden . . ." (Wolf, *Medea* 123). The deconstruction of old myths will continue to play an essential role in feminist criticism, and it is a viable tool for literary endeavors that aim at exposing internalized concepts of truth.

In summary, I have shown how feminist myth criticism has been shaped over the past twenty five years and now offers a theoretical basis and a set of tools to analyze our understanding of the world reflected in myths and to dissect gender ideologies transmitted through myths. Writing women's myths is a way of reconstructing women's role in history as well as a way of establishing a different place for women in oral and literary history. By relating Wolf's reinterpretation in her novel to feminist myth criticism, I have examined why there is a need for more rewritten versions of old stories and myths and a need for feminist mythmaking. I have also illustrated how the *Medea* figure in Wolf's novel *Medea. Stimmen* differs from the one in Euripides's play *Medea*. Wolf's *Medea* is not responsible for the crimes which she has been blamed for. Wolf has artistically rewritten how *Medea* was made into a scapegoat for a much bigger crime committed by the greedy governments of Colchis and Corinth. The author deconstructs the traditional image of *Medea* and thus simultaneously constructs a new image of a strong woman. Wolf reinterprets mythology and in doing so she shows biased viewpoints and inequalities in perception between people. She points out inadequacies of gender ideologies but does not succeed in investigating culturally inscribed racial stereotyping. If more new versions of *Medea* are going to be written, maybe at one point in time we will be able to tell a revised *Medea* myth that incorporates all different kinds of perspectives from still unheard voices.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Wolf, *Medea* 123.

<sup>2</sup>For a further discussion of female characters in myths and religion, see Davis, Humm, and Pratt.

<sup>3</sup>The English translation is entitled *Medea: A Modern Retelling* and, therefore, defines Wolf's book immediately as an adaptation of a myth.

<sup>4</sup>As examples, see Anz, Fuhrmann, Köhler, and Hage.

<sup>5</sup>Bulfinch asserts that there is "a substratum of truth" in old myths (132).

<sup>6</sup>Compare Humm 90.

<sup>7</sup>Compare Humm's argument in the chapter on "Myth Criticism" 89-103.

<sup>8</sup>The resurrection of the Aphrodite, Artemis, Cassandra, Demeter, Helen, Medusa myths and others is an indication of the new value that feminists see in a re-evaluation of myths. Compare Pratt's analysis of Aphrodite, Artemis and Medusa in twentieth-century fiction and poetry. See also Stephan's take on myths in 20th century German literature.

<sup>9</sup>Weigel's study was published in 1994 before *Medea. Stimmen*. However, Weigel's analysis of Wolf's *Kassandra* can be applied to *Medea. Stimmen* as well.

<sup>10</sup>Böschstein concludes in her analysis that not only female power but also "Angst vor andersartiger Genialität der Frau" is at stake in Euripides's *Medea* (24).

<sup>11</sup>Among the other authors who rewrote the Medea myth are Ovid and Seneca, and in the German-speaking literary tradition Grillparzer, Hans Henny Jahnn and Heiner Müller. For lesser known authors of recent rewritings of the Medea myth in German, see Novak as well as Calabrese 84-93.

<sup>12</sup>Compare Wolf, "Von Kassandra zu Medea" 15.

<sup>13</sup>Wolf obviously deals with Euripides's interpretation because she mentions the author in two epigraphs. As Kenkel points out, there have always been variations of the myth in which not Medea but her enemies killed her children (18).

<sup>14</sup>Whereas Durham argues that Euripides's Medea plays a central role but is not a tragic heroine because the male tradition of tragedy does not allow women to be tragic (54-59), Rudnytsky contends that Euripides's Medea is in fact tragic (36). In this article, I can only point out a few differences between Euripides's play and Wolf's novel.

<sup>15</sup>According to Bulfinch, Medea killed her brother (137). Grant, however, contends that Jason slew Absyrtos (258).

<sup>16</sup>In the traditional version, the name of the princess of Corinth is Creusa (Bulfinch 136). Compare Rogowski who states that Heiner Müller's

version sees Medea's infanticide as a result of patriarchal power structures and a system of oppression (176).

<sup>17</sup>Walker summarizes: "[S]he was named from the Sanskrit concept of *medha*, "female wisdom." She was a fount of the feminine art of healing, and her name was related to "medicine" (628). In a lecture, Wolf explains that Medea's name means "die guten Rat Wissende" (Wolf, "Von Kassandra zu Medea" 16).

<sup>18</sup>Some racial implications of the play are discussed by Böschstein 9 and Rogowski 171.

<sup>19</sup>Paul also considers Wolf's Medea as a "Wunschbild, ein moralisches Ideal" (238).

<sup>20</sup>Compare Anz who claims that Wolf's Medea is not a tragic character because she is "zu edel, hilfreich, gut und einsichtsvoll."

<sup>21</sup>For Wolf's emotional and psychological involvement with Medea, see Wolf, "Interview" 52.

<sup>22</sup>For a discussion of Wolf's didacticism in *Medea. Stimmen*, see Stephan 248-9.

<sup>23</sup>For a critique of Wolf's resignation, see Anz.

<sup>24</sup>This is one of the most frequently quoted passages of the book and reflects one of Wolf's utopian visions. Wolf's idealization of old hierarchical structures such as the old monarchy in Corinth are, however, questionable utopian worlds. The fairy-tale romanticism in this picture wipes out the negative aspects of governments with hierarchical structures.

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