Mistress, Mother, Muse

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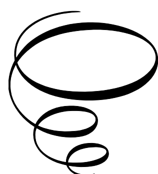
An Exploration of the Female in Modern and Contemporary Mediterranean Literature

By

Maria Palaska

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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INTRODUCTION

This book is an attempt to explore female liminality twentieth-century Mediterranean literary productions through the lens of mythology and more particularly through the comparative discussion of different versions of classical myths. The primary texts have been chosen on the basis of their representations of liminality in relation to the female qualities of motherhood, sexuality and creativity.

For the purposes of my discussion, liminality as a concept is understood as the indefinable and the elusive. The state of liminality as a threshold and transitional stage implies openness and potential, and consequently a liberation from all definitions and demarcations; not simply a state of standby and in-between but a constant reformation and reorientation, a dynamic of redefinition and remoulding. This transcendence, or even defiance, of definitions subsequently suggests an elusiveness and a chimerical quality.

Female liminality is not only represented but also signified in sexuality, motherhood and in literary inspiration and creativity.

The three heroines in the primary texts illustrate representations of the symbolic significance of women in relation to the liminal. Federico García Lorca's heroine in *Yerma* represents an elusive, liminal motherhood, as she is unable to bear her own children and fantasizes about motherhood. In M. Karagatsis's novel, *The Great Chimera*, Marina illustrates the struggle for an elusive sexual fulfilment and finally Idwar al-Kharrat's Alexandrian women in *City of Saffron* and its sequel *Girls of Alexandria*, embody creativity typified in literary inspiration and articulation.

As the book looks at three twentieth-century Mediterranean literary works and explores the notion of female liminality as (re)presented in these works, it attempts to establish the study of modern and contemporary literary productions of the Mediterranean as a dynamic reality and not as a fossil of the past or an exoticized category.

The choice of texts from the Mediterranean is based on the apprehension of a regional as well as a cultural framework. Consequently, the book falls within the scope of mediterranean studies but it is primarily a comparative literary study. The apprehension of the Mediterranean as a literary concept is ambiguous and quite speculative as the term mediterranean studies mostly refers to historical, archaeological and anthropological research of the pre-

historic, ancient, medieval and occasionally early modern eras while its legitimacy as a discipline or research area is often doubted.[1]

The term mediterranean studies, inspired by the pioneering and heavily influential work of Fernand Braudel[2], whose research in the first half of the twentieth century covered the disciplines of anthropology, history, geology, human geography, ecology and archaeology, has come to denote the study of the Mediterranean lands and their populations from antiquity up to the middle ages or early modernity and is often identified with classical greek and roman studies wherein the only concerns with literary works are to be found. The notion of the Mediterranean as a distinctive region, not confined to but inclusive of the mare nostrum, is a romantic construct of nineteenth-century geographers and travel writers based on the contrived dichotomy of the rational and hence civilized and powerful North and the temperamental and hence primitive and disadvantaged South.[3] This dichotomy has been enhanced by the coinage of the term *Mediterraneanism* (coined by Michael Herzfeld under the influence of Edward Said) which acquired a pejorative connotation as it has been loaded with colonial and imperial connotations and often viewed as another Orientalism asserting the political, economical and cultural superiority of the North over the "otherness" of the South.

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[1] Scholars of mediterranean studies in disciplines such as history, anthropology, archaeology and human geography constantly investigate, negotiate and debate the nature, subject matter and disciplinary status of the study of the Mediterranean. Indicative and noteworthy examples of this type of post-Braudelian scholarship are Peregrine Horden's and Nicholas Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford & Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000), W.V. Harris's (ed.) *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), David Abulafia's *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Ian Chambers's *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008) and Matvejevic Predrag's *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[2] It is in fact in his work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip* II first published in 1949 where the idea of unity and distinctiveness of the Mediterranean and its significance as an area of scholarly research was brought up. His book *Memory and the Mediterranean* is based on the same idea of distinctiveness and unity of the Mediterranean.

[3]As Horden points out while referring to *The Corrupting Sea:* "The idea of the Mediterranean as a *region*, of the circum-Mediterranean *lands* as a distinctive collectivity, is a creation of nineteenth-century thought: it did not arise earlier. It is, most obviously, a creation of nineteenth-century geographers who represent, whether explicitly or indirectly, the Mediterranean ambitions and designs of northern European powers." (Horden 2005, 26-27)

(Harris 2005b, 1-42 and Horden 2005, 26-27)[4] Romanticism has treated the Mediterranean as a literary topos, based precisely on this artificial dichotomy between the North and the South.

The threefold "sin" of Mediterraneanism (exoticizing, homogenizing and restricted comparativism) has not deterred the rising interest in mediterranean studies yet this interest is still confined to the study of the past. The academic study of the modern and contemporary Mediterranean is restricted to social, political, commercial and lately artistic (mostly pertaining to music) relationships within Mediterranean countries.

While archaeologists, historians and ethnographers can theorize about the geographical, ecological, and commercial links (or the *connectivity* as Horden and Purcell refer to them)[5] in antiquity and up to the middle ages, which qualify for the study of the Mediterranean as a field in itself, there is no conceptual framework for the literary scholar or academic who might want to study the twentieth-century and/or contemporary literary productions of the Mediterranean. In other words, the study of the Mediterranean has been dominated by the social sciences as well as antiquity and the middle ages.

Contemporary Mediterranean literature, though, is dynamic[6] as it constantly challenges cultural and national demarcations and offers a superb and uniquely rich canvas for comparative literary analysis.

The study of contemporary literary productions of the Mediterranean that I propose is therefore the exploration of this ever-changing canvas.

It is within this framework that the book examines how liminal female qualities such as motherhood, and sexuality are treated thematically by three

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[4] Horden and Purcell write:

> The sin of 'Mediterraneanism', [as presented by Said and Herzfeld] can be summarized under three headings. First, it involves *exoticizing*: the label 'Mediterranean' serves the interests of anthropologists studying southern Europe because they feel vulnerable to the charge of operating too close to home for discomfort…The second element in Mediterraneanism is thus *homogenizing*: the discipline has to be validated by exaggerating the uniformity of its chosen area, usually by recourse to vaguely defined cultural traits…The assumption of homogeneity, thirdly, determines the *restricted comparativism* that is typical of Mediterraneanists. A priori, comparison across the sea, between Christendom and Islam, is essential - whether relevant to the matter or not. (Horden and Purcell 2000, 486-487)

[5] See Horden and Purcell 2000, 123-172 for their definition and discussion of connectivity as well as Purcell 2003, 9-11

[6] Or an "open itinerary" to borrow an expression originally used for comparative literature as a discipline. See Guillen 1993, 4.

twentieth-century male authors of the Mediterranean basin.[7] Ultimately, the book seeks to illustrate the transcendental perspective through which these liminal aspects are discussed.

The book draws upon myth as a theoretical perspective and more particularly upon its inherent transformative quality, which is termed *potency* and which is schematically represented in an algorithmic model. The work of Hans Blumenberg and Ernst Cassirer is of fundamental significance in any consideration of the grounding of mythic potency; the concepts of *fundamental* vis-à-vis m as well as the *law of metamorphosis* and *consanguinity* in myth accommodate the grounding of potency and its significance for literary discussion. Myth as a tool for literary analysis is therefore suggested as an alternative theory.

The methodology employed is comparative, understood as "the systematic study of supranational assemblages" (Guillen 1993, 3) and as the exploration of the tensions between the particular and the general, the singular and the plural (ibid., 5-23). The primary as well as secondary texts are discussed independent of their national and cultural milieu, although this is considered when necessary.

Comparative discussion in this book is in no way confined to the "restricted comparativism" that Horden and Purcell attribute to Mediterraneanists. It is primarily a comparison of texts and not of national, ideological or cultural modes.

Ultimately, this book suggests an alternative way of looking at literary analysis, myth and women in literature.

[7] Idwar al-Kharrat might as well be considered a twenty-first and hence contemporary author as he is still alive and active as an author.

CHAPTER ONE

MYTH AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

1. The dynamics of myth

Myth often constitutes the main axis of a literary text or the occasion for its birth and development. It is usually apprehended as narrative (drawing upon the Aristotelian definition of μύθος as plot) and is consequently classified as a literary genre.[8] Mythic symbols, figures and patterns often appear in literary works, playing a major or minor (though not necessarily insignificant) role, and the influence of a particular myth on a writer as well as the conscious rewriting of a myth or the creation of a new myth, mythopoeia, have been a common phenomenon throughout literary history.

The question of whether myth is literature, and the factors that determine this identification, is an interesting yet complicated matter which is worth addressing but almost impossible to resolve in a definite manner and does not fall within the scope of this Chapter.[9]

This Chapter, and indeed the book in its entirety, present an argument for the use of myth as an independent tool for literary analysis. More particularly, they illustrate the employment of mythic notions, symbols, patterns and images within the context and practice of literary analysis, with the objective of achieving an enlightened and enlightening interpretation of the literary text(s) in question.[10] The employment of mythic elements as

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[8] Since the Eleatic School of Presocratic philosophy, myth was seen as a preparatory stage for logos (λόγος), as an allegory which was a "cloak for a speculative, scientific, or ethical truth." (Cassirer 1964, 2) It was actually Schelling who first argued for a tautegorical interpretation of myths and attempted to liberate myth from the tyranny of the allegorical, figurative approach. (ibid.,1-26 and Meletinsky 1998, 3-4)

[9] Robert Segal is not only sceptical regarding the very concept of myth studies as an academic and scholarly field but he also contends that because of the absence of a single, agreed, definition of myth, the study of myth is a mere extension of other disciplines. (Segal 2004, 2)

[10] For the purposes of this book I dispense with the already established approaches to myth such as structuralism, semantics, anthropology, psychoanalysis and history which have imposed their own agendas on mythic analysis.

tools for literary analysis differs significantly from their mere detection in literary works as well as from the study of the influence of a myth on a literary text, or the discussion of modern myths in the works of poets, novelists and dramatists. While all the aforementioned have proved to be unquestionably beneficial to literary discussion, they are founded upon the premise of a direct influence between literary text and myth and, in essence, of an ostensible kinship between the two (which might consist of a conscious retelling or adaptation of a myth, the presence of mythic symbols, allusions, characters, etc.), or of what Northrop Frye calls "displacement" (Ziolkowski 1996, 252) and Mircea Eliade "degeneration" of myth into literature (ibid., 256).

The most significant factor problematizing the already complex and intricate relationship between myth and literature is the lack of scholarly and academic consensus on a single, comprehensive definition of myth. As Stambovsky notes, "'myth' itself is now so broadly and disparately defined that the very intelligibility of 'myth as *a collective term*' is a topic of debate." (Stambovsky 1996, 24) The definitions of myth vary significantly, and usually they reflect a particular approach to the study of mythology.[11] The lack of a single, accepted definition of myth subsequently puts the existence of the study of myth as an academic and scholarly field into question. The primary definition of myth, chronologically as well as conceptually, is its antithesis to reason as encountered in the proverbial controversy between λόγος (logos*)* and μύθος (mythos), between what came to be regarded as Cartesian rationality and primal, underdeveloped thinking, in other words, between what has been perceived as uncontaminated reason and tainted myth. This controversy, initiated by the Presocratics, has resulted in a negative predisposition towards the study of myth. An indicative consequence of this negative predisposition is the use of the word myth in today's common parlance as something untrue, illogical, fallacious and fictitious. This view continued to exercise a great influence in the study

[11] Approaches to myth expand across different disciplines and they involve eminent scholars and intellectuals. Sir James Frazer is, perhaps, the most influential figure (though often severely criticized), due to the breadth of his research and his pioneering work. Along with Jane Harrison they form the Cambridge school of the ritualistic approach to myth. Bronislaw Malinowski pioneered the socio-anthropological view on myth which takes into account socio-economic parameters. Lévi-Strauss represents the structuralist approach while the Jungian Kerenyi is a follower of the psychoanalytic/archetypal approach, although the strictly archetypal perspective is attributed to Northrop FryeAll these approaches gravitate towards a definition of myth which reflects their own basic premise; the Cambridge school, for instance, understands myth as a narrative emerging out of the necessity to complement rituals.

of myth, even when other disciplines such as psychoanalysis, structuralism and semantics were introduced into mythic analysis. Eminent theorists of myth and literary critics, such as Sir James Frazer, Jane Harrison, Northrop Frye, Bronislaw Malinowski, Mircea Eliad, and Claude Lévi -Strauss, failed or refused to accept the autonomy of myth and, more particularly, its independence from narrative and literary discourse.[12] Myth, therefore, is usually perceived and referred to as a branch of literary or philosophical studies or as a by-product of literary production.

Given the problematics of a definition of myth and its relationship to literature, it is indeed a challenge to approach myth from a strictly philosophic point of view (where myth is subject to philosophic enquiry) attempting thus to explore its nature and essence while liberating it from any manner and form of dependence and advocating its autonomy.[13]

Myth's autonomy emanates from its inherent dynamic quality manifested in the state of process which Ernst Cassirer names "Becoming" and believes is inextricably related to primordiality or what he calls *ἀρχή*.[14] Cassirer understands the relationship between myth and ἀρχή in conjunction with Schelling's philosophical perspective on myth as tautegorical and argues that myth as a stage of human consciousness involves a process which he calls "theogonic". This is a key word that integrates two basic mythic concepts related to ἀρχή: divinity (θεός*)* and origin (γένεσις*)*.[15] In other

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[12] Also see Douglas 1996, 68-78

[13] However, even the term philosophy of myth turns out to be problematic as it relegates to the perennial opposition between philosophy as systematic methodology representing reason and myth as a pre-rational, anarchic terrain representing primitive thought. It is actually Schelling who articulates very vehemently the disparity of the term philosophy of myth as a challenge and an occasion for a more serious and systematic exploration of the relationship between philosophy and myth. (Schelling 1995, 50-57)

[14] Cassirer actually bypasses the μύθος-λόγος binary by acknowledging the concept of ἀρχή as a liminal stage between myth and philosophy. "It (ἀρχή) designates the zone between myth and philosophy–but a boundary which as such partakes of both the spheres it divides, representing the point of difference between the mythical concept of the beginning and the philosophical concept of the 'principle'." (Cassirer 1964, 1-2)

[15] It is very important here to explain the exact meaning of the word γένεσις. Γένεσις is the noun of the verb γίγνομαι which means to become, to happen but also to be, to be born. Its synonyms are ποιοῦμαι (to be created) and γεννόμαι (to be born). The verb γίγνομαι has the same root as the verb γεννῶ which means to beget (for father) and to bear (for mother, to beget for mother is τίκτω). Consequently, γένεσις incorporates the concepts of birth as well as origin and creation. However, in order to understand the creative seminal nature of myth it is important to highlight the fact that γένεσις as birth refers to creation and not to labour.

words, this "theogonic" process is the process of creation of the beginnings (Cassirer 1964, 6). As Cassirer articulates it, "The mythological process is the process of the truth re-creating and so realizing itself." (ibid., 7) affirming thus the tautegorical quality of myth and its independence.

Cassirer bases this process on his view of myth as "an independent configuration of man's consciousness" (ibid., 3) which is not to be understood in terms of an outside, but as something self-referential confirming Kant's Copernican revolution (Scarborough 1994, 20-21). In other words, myth is defined in terms of its intrinsic qualities and not as antithetical, complementary or analogous to any other form or discipline. In fact, for Cassirer, myth is a world in itself, "uniquely a complete human world, with its own type of perception, action, and 'explanations' of reality." (Schultz 2000, 117) Cassirer draws upon Schelling's view on myth as tautegorical and as a process within human consciousness, arguing that "all attempts to intellectualise myth – to explain it as an allegorical expression of a theoretical or moral truth – have failed." (Cassirer 1945, 81) The failure of the allegorical apprehension of myth signifies the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the dependence of myth on an outside and inevitably calls for a serious consideration of the autonomy and intrinsic worth of myth. The keywords in understanding and delineating such an apprehension of myth are: autonomous, self-referential, dynamic, inherently transformative.

The state of "Becoming" which characterizes and determines myth, is what I would like to call *mythic potency* and it entails progress and evolution. For the purposes of this Chapter and book, mythic potency is best represented with the assistance of the mathematical concept of an algorithm as a way of providing a new perception of myth based on concrete processes, and free from enigmatic and often problematic theoretical discourses.

The mathematical definition of algorithm is that of "a set of instructions that can be mechanically executed in a finite amount of time in order to solve some problems" (Gersting 1998, 13). An algorithm can be functional but it can also be descriptive: in other words, it is a process based on a sequence of steps in order to test a hypothesis or describe relationships.

The process of the evolution of a particular myth is traced in a series of essential and sine qua non elements of the myth which signify the algorithmic pattern. The following section of this Chapter illustrates how myth incorporates sequence and progression towards several different orientations, and it does so intrinsically and is therefore *potent.*

For Cassirer this potency is permeated by a form of mythic transformation which connotes change and mobility (Cassirer 1945, 81). More particularly, he argues that despite myth being "refractory to a merely logical analysis" (ibid., 72), there is one feature or law which governs the mythical world,

and that is the "law of metamorphosis"(ibid., 81) which suggests the absence of demarcations and categories by virtue of a perennial flux in which "everything may be turned into everything." (ibid.) According to Cassirer, the mythical world is characterized by continuity, motion, and what he calls "consanguinity" (ibid., 82). This consanguinity is the underlying thread that links all the different metamorphoses of a myth. It is in fact a kinship based on vital, creative elements in the same way that relatives share the same genetic material although they are different in all other respects. Cassirer acknowledges and defends vehemently the dynamic nature of myth: "It is now generally admitted that it is a very inadequate conception of myth and magic to look upon them as typically aetiological or explanatory. We cannot reduce myth to certain fixed static elements; we must strive to grasp it in its inner life, in its mobility and versatility, in its dynamic principle." (ibid., 76) This consanguinity is a property that qualifies myth to be dynamic and versatile and eventually to be subject to metamorphosis.

The idea behind the concept of algorithms is a sequential process which not only implies progression but also entails a dynamic state. As such, the algorithmic model qualifies for an effective schematic representation of mythic Becoming and potency. The algorithmic model, which involves a process based on a pattern, echoes the notion of "patterned action" of myth, which allows myth to function as "a useful tool for literary and cultural analysis":

> …myth as a useful tool for literary and cultural analysis is understood as a complex image used in a symbolic manner which by means of a simple narrative explains man's relation to his fellows, his society, his environment, his destiny. Without at least the vestiges of narrative we have only a symbol. A symbol may condition response, but only a myth patterns action. And it is the potential of patterned action that makes myth a fundamental concept in the study of a society through the medium of its literary remains. (Boewe 1961, 196)

Boewe argues that the study of myth from a specific culture or society enables us to understand the literary products of this society and eventually understand the society itself,[16] but a departure from this strictly anthropological and sociological approach allows for the assertion of the autonomy of myth and its emancipation from other disciplines. A focus on the "potential of

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[16] Boewe's view on myth, therefore, is essentially anthropological and sociological despite his own claims that it is a view on myth as a means of literary analysis.

patterned action" (ibid.) of myth reveals the full mythic potential for transformation, which can be of great use to literary analysis.[17]

Hans Blumenberg in his book *Work on Myth* makes a distinction between *fundamental* and *original* myth, the original myth being a first, completed version and fundamental myth containing the essential parts that remain throughout the various alterations: "The fundamental myth is not what was pre-given, but rather what remains visible in the end, what was able to satisfy the receptions and expectations" (Blumenberg 1990, 174-175). In other words, the fundamental myth is the distilled form that can survive various alterations and transformations. Interestingly, there is a further correspondence between myth and algorithms as the notion of the fundamental myth approximates the Greatest Common Divisor of the Euclidean algorithm. The Euclidean algorithm is a sequence of divisions, and specifically "A procedure in which each operation depends on the results of the preceding operation" in order to find the Greatest Common Divisor (Merritt 1962, 7). Based on this idea of divisions, mathematicians came up with the so-called "Divide-And-Conquer" algorithm, in which a problem is broken down to smaller subproblems (Gersting 1998, 149). In a similar manner, the transformation of a myth can be broken down to smaller steps consisting of alterations in particular mythic elements. Metamorphosis is, in fact, a transformation that the original myth undergoes, and what Blumenberg calls the fundamental myth is the sediment of a series of such transformations.

The capacity of myth to expand, multiply and evolve is intrinsic and forms an essential element of mythic consciousness. *Potency* corresponds to the inherent potentiality, the energy that can initiate a sequential, evolutionary process. *Potency* is the dynamics of myth. Yet, this dynamic quality is also the liminality of myth as a process of "Becoming."

Cassirer clearly acknowledges this potential and his understanding is close to the idea of potency.

> For nowhere in myth do we find a passive contemplation of things; here all contemplation starts from an attitude, an act of the feeling and will. Insofar as myth condenses into lasting configuration, insofar as it sets before us the stable outlines of an objective world of forms, the significance of this world becomes intelligible to us only if behind it we can feel the dynamic of the life feeling from which it originally grew. Only where this feeling is aroused

[17] John Vickery (1996, 297) acknowledges the significance of myth in literary criticism and argues that: "An awareness of myth enables the critic to isolate latent elements, which, like those of dreams, possess the force that vitalizes the manifest pattern." However, he does not discuss this significance but dwells on the description and analysis of the relationship between myth and literature.

> from within, only where it manifests itself in love and hate, fear and hope, joy and grief, is that mythical fantasy engendered which creates a world of specific representations. But from this it seems to follow that any characterization of the mythical forms of thought applies only to something mediated and derived – that it must remain inadequate unless it succeeds in going back from the mere mythical form of *thought* to the mythical form of *intuition* and its characteristic form of *life*. (Cassirer 1964, 69-70)

Evidently, Cassirer perceives this force behind myths that is related to life itself and he also acknowledges a disposition of the recipients of myth towards the recognition of this life. He calls this disposition *will* and he denounces a passive and sterile apprehension of myth.[18]

The words *life* and *will* echo Henri Bergson's élan vital and his biological philosophy. Bergson acknowledges a force in nature, which dictates progress and forward movement (Bergson 1935, 100-105). Like Cassirer, Bergson resorts to nature in order to illustrate successfully the genuiness and legitimacy of his thesis. His term élan vital is close to my notion of potency.

Myth, however, does not fully depend on philosophy and philosophical discourse in the same manner that it does not fully depend on literature. Neither does its opposition to philosophy as a manner of systematic methodology (the opposition between λόγος and μύθος) suggest an impossibility for philosophical truth in myth. The mythic world and consciousness are and should be seen as yet another domain, another discourse which cannot be a priori stigmatized as fallacious and illegitimate only by virtue of being different and of having been confronted as an "Other".[19]

H. and H.A. Frankfort (1948, 7) also subscribe to the idea of the dynamic nature of myth and acknowledge an even more forceful agent in myth which they call "compelling authority." According to them

> It is essential that true myth be distinguished from legend, saga, fable, and fairy tale. All these may retain elements of the myth. And it may also happen that a baroque or frivolous imagination elaborates myths until they become

[18] Cassirer's approach to myth has been criticized and dismissed by G.S Kirk as arbitrary and as referring to religion and not myth. However, Kirk himself does not provide a sound theoretical refutation of Cassirer's argument or an alternative view. See Kirk 1973, 261-268.

[19] Dimitra Mitta (1997, 256-257) suggests two alternative ways of looking at myth: either as a continuation of the project of the Enlightment (i.e. to reveal the meaning behind what seems to be fallacious – fallacious here does not imply untrue) or as a completion of what Habermas has called the "uncompleted project" of modernism.

> mere stories. But true myth presents its images and its imaginary actors, not with the playfulness of fantasy, but with a compelling authority. It perpetuates the revelation of a 'Thou'. (ibid.)

Myth therefore possesses a power to reveal truth, a truth which is not a mere object, an "It", but a "Thou" and as such it is unique. (ibid., 3-6) Moreover, this "compelling authority" is an active quality which enables myth to create and re-create itself yet the term is quite strong as it implies control and imposition whereas potency suggests freedom and ingenuity.

> Myth, then, is to be taken seriously, because it reveals a significant, if unverifiable, truth-we might say a metaphysical truth. But myth has not the universality and the lucidity of theoretical statement. It is concrete, though it claims to be inassailable in its validity. It claims recognition by the faithful; it does not pretend to justification before the critical. (ibid.)

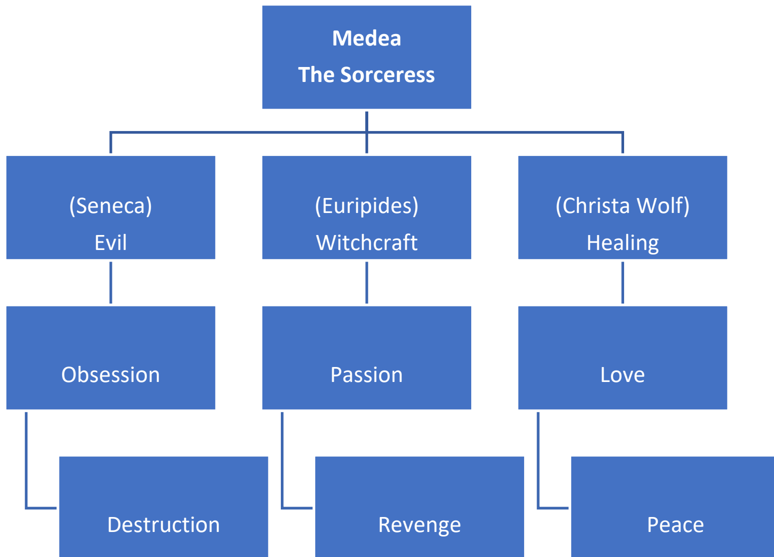
In short, myth is an independent and dynamic configuration of human consciousness with an intrinsic transformative impulse. The use of the concept of potency and its algorithmic representation is an attempt to find a more concrete way of presenting and at the same time exploring the versatility of myth.

It is precisely this "Becoming", this inherent potential for evolution and transformation which renders myth autonomous, dynamic and versatile and qualify it as an alternative tool for literary analysis. One of the main aims of this book is to argue for the use of latent mythic qualities in explicating texts that have no manifest connection with the myth in question.

The following pages are an illustration of mythic metamorphosis and of the dynamics of myth.

2. Mythic potency and its significance in comparative literary discussion

This section looks at the myth of Medea as an example of the exploration and illustration of the dynamics of myth. The versions of the myth that are discussed in relation to mythic transformation are Euripides's play *Medea,* Seneca's play *Medea* and Christa Wolf's novel *Medea*. The choice of these texts is based on the distinctive manner in which they develop the myth in question. The following flow chart serves as a schematic representation of the transformation of the myth of Medea in the three aforementioned versions through an algorithmic sequential process.



Sorcery is the vital element without which the myth of Medea cannot exist. The concept of sorcery itself encompasses a wide range of practices, predispositions and qualities (the distinction between white and black magic is an obvious example) and is therefore open to various orientations. Once the element of sorcery is given a specific orientation then new elements can be added to the particular version of the myth. The conclusion of the myth varies according to the preceding alterations. There is in fact an input-output relationship which is reminiscent of the mathematical input-output relationship found in algorithms.

While the Euripidean version renders a Medea who is tormented by her passion for Jason and employs her witchcraft to take revenge on him for abandoning her, Seneca's Medea is a far more wicked and disturbed female who is obsessed with Jason and uses her wickedness in order to cause utter catastrophe not only in Jason's life but in her own as well. Finally, Christa Wolf's version assumes a completely different stance and presents Medea as a healer who loves Jason deeply and who eventually becomes victimized and sycophantically outcasted by the society she lives in.

Euripides's *Medea* is not, in fact, the first record of the story of Medea but is based on earlier tales and narratives; however, it is considered a seminal text in the study of the myth of Medea as it is the first organized, officially recorded account of the story of Medea and can thus be considered the original myth concerning Medea. The acknowledgement of the

Euripidean text as an original myth allows the detection of elements that are in a seminal state (such as the notion of sorcery) and of elements that have been developed by Euripides but are still open to reworkings (such as the passion for Jason). The potential for reworking, which realizes itself in the versions of Seneca and Wolf, is what I have earlier termed mythic potency. An example of an element which exists in the Euripidean tragedy in a latent state is Medea's intelligence and high perception which underlies the notion of sorcery and which in Euripides connotes witchcraft, in Seneca manifestation of evil and in Wolf benevolent healing properties.

In Euripides's version, sorcery is associated with witchcraft. Medea is portrayed as an Asian sorceress who possesses the art of witchcraft and is involved in the world of the occult. Medea is a vehicle for the darkness and gloominess of the Orient which is juxtaposed to the radiance of the Hellenic world. She represents the Dionysian world of the supernatural, totally oblivious to Apollonian rationality. As she remarks "It is best to go by the straight road, the one in which I am most skilled, and make away with them by poison, so be it then." (Euripides 1958, 38) She is a skilful witch and an ally of Hecate, the lunar goddess of darkness and the supernatural. The "straight road" for her is the obscure and unintelligible world of the occult.

However, it is not Medea's sorcery per se that plays a primary role in the play as it is not a key concept that can justify her actions. On the contrary, sorcery is a background element necessary for the narratological as well dramaturgical development of the play. Sorcery is related to revenge, and is used by Medea as the most efficient way for her to take revenge on Jason. Medea resorts to her witchcraft after careful reasoning and after considering other options that do not eventually seem suitable for her. Sorcery is a means for Medea to take revenge on Jason, a vehicle for her bitterness and anger. As D.L. Page points out in the Introduction to the Oxford University Press edition of *Medea*, "At once dry-eyed and calculating she reasons in measured sentences the way of her revenge" (1988, xviii). Medea does not murder her children because she is a sorceress but because she wants to punish Jason. From that point of view Medea is not the ruthless mother who murders her children but a very clever woman who carefully plans her revenge and uses her skills in order to achieve the best results for her plan. Ruth Morse (1996, 31) commenting on Diana Rigg's 1994 performance of Euripides's *Medea,* mentions the rationality that the actress manages to convey with respect to Medea's deed of revenge. "There was a fatalism about her act which was perceived as a choice already made, and nothing mad or emotionally extravagant about the doing of it." Indeed, Euripides's emphasis is not so much on witchcraft and occultist practices but rather on the woman Medea, her wounded pride, her mind, and

her "choice already made". It is also worth mentioning that Medea is in fact a pharmakis, namely a practitioner of white magic involving charms, incantations, drugs and that pharmakis was not an unsual practice in fifth-century Athens. According to Bernard Knox (1979, 308-309) it is the use of poison that has led to the dark, negative image of Medea and the Euripidean Medea has no supernatural powers whatsoever while her only weapons are her cunning and the poison.

Medea's intelligence is brought up explicitly by Euripides in her dialogue with Kreon. Kreon is aware of her acute perception and he is scared of her. "You are a clever woman, versed in evil arts" (Euripides 1958, 35) he admits, and later on he explains his fears: "A sharp-tempered woman, or for that matter a man, is easier to deal with than the clever type who holds her tongue. No. You must go."(ibid., 35-36) Undoubtedly, it is her acute mind and not her temperament that scares him; it is not an explosion of wrath that Kreon fears but the quiet perception and the unmanifested calculations of Medea which he perceives as a threat. At this point we can detect a seed of Christa Wolf's rendition of Medea as a quiet and perceptive healer and an exceptionally charismatic personality.

Contrary to the prevalent critical approach according to which Euripides's Medea is a frenzied lunatic, a careful study of the text as an original myth indicates that it is not Medea's dionysian, maenadic, mystic consciousness but her intelligence which points to sorcery as the most suitable and effective form of revenge. This is extremely significant as it reveals aspects of Medea that contribute to the study of her character while providing material for further progression of the myth. Some of these aspects are Medea's intelligence, her strong personality and her sanity. The Euripidean text explicitly illustrates Medea's intelligence in her dialogue with Kreon and in some of Medea's speeches. An indicative example is her response to Kreon where she admits that she is clever and that she is also considered clever by Corinthian people.

> Οὐ νῦν με πρῶτον, ἀλλά πολλάκις Κρέον,
> ἒβλαψε δόξα μεγάλα τ' εἴργασται κακά.
> χρὴ δ' οὒποθ' ὃστις ἀρτίφρων πεφυκ'ἀνὴρ
> παῖδας περισσῶς ἐκδιδάσκεσθαι σοφούς·
> χωρὶς γὰρ ἂλλης ἧς ἒχουσιν ἀργίας
> φθόνον πρὸς ἀστῶν ἀλφάνουσι δυσμενῆ.
> σκαιοῖσι μὲν γὰρ καινὰ προσφέρων σοφὰ
> δόξεις ἀχρεῖος κοὐ σοφὸς πεφυκέναι
> τῶν δ' αὖ δοκούντων εἰδέναι τι ποικίλον
> κρείσσων νομισθεὶς ἐν πόλει λυπρὸς φανῇ.
> ἐγώ δὲ καὐτὴ τῆσδε κοινωνῶ τύχης.
> σοφὴ γὰρ οὖσα, τοῖς μέν εἰμ' ἐπίφθονος,

[τοῖς δ' ἡσυχαία, τοῖς δὲ θατέρου τρόπου,]
τοῖς δ' αὖ προσάντης· εἰμὶ δ' οὐκ ἄγαν σοφή.

(Euripides 1988, 15-16)

> This is not the first time, Kreon. Often previously through being considered clever I have suffered much. A person of sense ought never to have his children brought up to be more clever than the average. For, apart from cleverness bringing them no profit, it will make them objects of envy and ill-will. If you put new ideas before the eyes of fools they'll think you foolish and worthless into the bargain; and if you are thought superior to those who have some reputation for learning, you will become hated. I have some knowledge myself of how this happens; For being clever, I find that some will envy me, others object to me. Yet all my cleverness is not so much. (Euripides 1958, 35)

Euripides clearly attributes to his heroine a great degree of intelligence and the original text suggests that the heroine does not simply possess a cerebral and cognitive intelligence of the kind that can be measured by an IQ or other similar tests. The word chosen by Euripides is σοφὶα (wisdom), which has particular connotations. According to Knox (1979, 313)

> "Clever" is not an adequate translation of *sophe* – but then, there isn't one. It is a word used in the fifth century to describe not only the skill of the artisan and the poet, not only the wisdom won by experience and reflection, but also the new intellectual enlightened outlook of the great sophistic teachers and the generation they had taught. This is why Creon fears her.

In her response to Kreon, the adjective σοφὴ/σοφὸς is repeated five times. Her speech to the king illustrates her self-awareness and articulates her own acknowledgement of the centrality of her wisdom in the issue of her exile. As Morse (1996, 29) observes, "Throughout the play Medea's intelligence (her σοφὶα) is emphasized as a dangerous attribute; it is dangerous because intelligence is power, and she is an intelligent woman. Creon is afraid that she might think of something. This could not sound more rational." This quality of σοφὶα is exploited by Christa Wolf in her novel *Medea* where this general notion of intelligence is transformed into the particular charisma of intuition and healing. Wolf's novel dwells upon the "envy" and "ill-will" that people feel for Medea, and in fact these two elements constitute vital parts of the novel and determine the evolution of the plot.

There is therefore a very interesting paradox which I believe corresponds to the crux of the debate concerning the character of Medea. The allegedly wicked sorceress is at the same time a very intelligent and perceptive person,

exhibiting excellent reasoning and argumentation. She also demonstrates an impressive self-awareness and consciousness of her distinctive skills and talents. It is this paradox, this bizarre and inexplicable amalgamation of reason and the supernatural, that has made Medea such a challenging and controversial figure in literature and art. As Marianne McDonald (1997, 303) points out "Medea is a complex being. Following the model of the soul that Plato gives us in *Phaedrus*, with the *λογιστικόν* element (reason) as a charioteer driving the horses *ἐπιθυμητικόν* (desire) and *θυμοειδές* (passion, 264a; cf. Rep. 4.440e for these labels), some see Medea with runaway horses, others as clearly in command. The ostensible contradiction in the Euripidean version, which again asserts the richness and multiplexity of the Medea myth and justifies the text as the original myth, lies in the personality of Medea who is supposedly a Dionysian agent while at the same time possessing Apollonian rationality.

Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (1997, 253-296) does not consent to the idea of contradiction in the Euripidean Medea but she does acknowledge that Medea possesses incongruous qualities, such as those of a "normal", "good" and "bad" woman. According to her there is a process of alternation, of zooming and distancing from these qualities. The metaphor of zooming and distancing illustrates a vacillation on the part of Euripides concerning the "badness" and "goodness" and the more general "normality" of his heroine. This vacillation is justified later on in this chapter, when Christa Wolf's account of Medea's story is examined. There is a correspondence between the Platonic qualities that McDonald has attached to Medea and the three qualities that Sourvinou-Inwood considers; λογιστικόν corresponds to the goodness, ἐπιθυμητικόν corresponds to the "badness" and θυμοειδές corresponds to the "normality" of the heroine. A woman (or a man for that matter) who acts according to the dictations of reason is classified as "good" because reason, very often referred to as prudence, has been acknowledged as the socially condoned way of behaviour. On the contrary, a person who lives according to the dictations of ἐπιθυμητικόν, is a "bad" person because desire had been stigmatized – primarily by religion and by society – as a harmful and unacceptable emotional experience. Whether "bad" or "good" a person is labelled as "abnormal" if they are overwhelmed by passion, θυμοειδές, and Medea's "abnormality" is intextricably related to her passionate character.

Who is Euripides's Medea after all? Is she the enraged witch or the intelligent woman? Is she a "good" or a "bad" woman? Is she a "normal" woman? Is she the charioteer in command of the horses or is she simply driven by them, having lost all control over her vehicle? Euripides attempted to fuse carefully the existing mythologems, tales and rumours concerning

Medea and enrich them with his own creativity and incisive perception. The result is a heroine who encompasses the Platonic qualities of reason, desire and passion, and this has made the play a concrete and comprehensive work, constituting thus the original myth about Medea. Euripides does not provide a clear representation of either the one or the other profile of his heroine and it is this ambiguity which makes Medea one of the most fascinating figures in world literature, while allowing various reworkings of the myth. As Marianne McDonald (1997, 303) points out about the Euripidean Medea: "She is not simple, and neither are her interpretations. She overflows constricting categories."

Looking at the Euripidean text as the first stage of a sequential process enables the reader to perceive the potential inherent in the character of Medea and so to understand the dynamic nature of the myth, and to reach new understandings of it. In fact, the complexity of the Euripidean Medea stems from the comprehensive nature of the play, and it is actually this complexity and ambiguity of Medea that has enabled and fostered the creation of so many variations of the myth. Euripides's play as an original myth, incorporates elements, such as Medea's intelligence and sorcery and her relationship to Jason, that are open to exploitation and development. Sorcery as witchcraft is simply one way to portray Medea's peculiar nature and her exceptional personality; it is the input which undergoes certain alterations and reaches a conclusion.

In Seneca, however, sorcery is not exhausted in the execution of magical practices: it is the manifestation of evil. More particularly, in Seneca's tragedy Medea's sorcery is not simply a craft, or an exercise of occultism. It is a malicious practice, a result of an evil nature. Seneca portrays Medea is a woman with a great susceptibility to mental upheavals, and it is this susceptibility that enables her to exercise sorcery. Medea is susceptible to malevolent supernatural forces and to chthonic experiences. Her soliloquy, which opens the play, is an evocation to these forces: "Be present, be present, ye goddesses who avenge crime, your hair foul with writhing snakes, grasping the smoking torch with your bloody hands, be present now, such as once ye stood in dread array beside my marriage couch." (Seneca 1960, 229) While, later on, preparing her evil deed Medea asks for help from the realm of darkness. "I supplicate the throng of the silent, and you, funereal gods, murky Chaos and shadowy Dis' dark dwelling-place, the abysses of dismal Death, girt by the banks of Tartarus." (ibid., 291) Unlike the Euripidean heroine, she is not simply seeking revenge but she delves in the deepest and darkest layers of the supernatural world in order to channel the evil that resides inside her. In fact, she sees her crime as a sacrifice to the altar of those chthonic forces, and wishes to pray prior to committing

the crime. There is an integration with the world of evil and a subsequent association with the powers and deities representing this world. Unlike Euripides's tragedy, the emphasis here is not on Medea's mind or personality but on her subconscious.

At this point, a slight but significant metamorphosis in the myth of Medea can be detected; this is manifested and exemplified in the idea of sorcery. The mere exercise of magic for the sake of revenge, which we saw in Euripides, becomes a satanic, contaminated consciousness seeking destruction and death. We are beginning to see therefore how the vigour of this particular myth is realizing itself: from a dynamic impulse it is transubstantiated into a concrete reality. What in Euripides is a straightforward revenge – "for this is best to wound my husband" (Euripides 1958, 52) – in Seneca is a consequence of evil: "Does he think that all my powers of evil are so exhausted?" (Seneca 1960, 237) Bernard Knox points out that

> It is in fact, in the Roman poets of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. (Horace, Virgil and Lucan) that something resembling our conception of a witch first appears to give literary shape to the medieval witch of Christian times who serves the devil instead of Hecate but claims the same powers to raise the dead, curse, blight, transform and prophesy. (Knox 1979, 307)

Knox further observes that the Euripidean text does not in any way present a frantic, disturbed or evil Medea: "The term 'witch' with its medieval overtones of black magic, ugliness, and malevolence, has no place in a description of Euripides's Medea." (ibid.)

Medea's original intelligence is transformed into malice by Seneca. His Medea bears no resemblance to the intelligent, rational Euripidean heroine who premeditates and considers revenge as the best form of justice. Seneca's Medea is malicious by nature and is mentally disturbed. She doesn't simply wish to take revenge but to cause destruction and death. In her introductory soliloquy she refers to the "force of madness" that her deeds involve. Kreon fears her cunning: "She is plotting mischief; I know her guile, I know her power. Whom will she spare? Whom will she let live in peace?" (Seneca 1960, 243-245) In Euripides, Kreon acknowledges Medea's clever mind and in fact it is her sharpness that scares him; he does admit that a clever person, either man or woman constitutes a threat to his authority. In Seneca though, Kreon fears Medea's distorted intelligence, her evil mind and her cunning. It is not so much intelligence, as such, that disturbs him, but the consequences of a perverted intelligence is what terrifies him.

Unlike Euripides, Seneca focuses on the Dionysian and chthonic aspect of Medea and allows no space for ambiguities. His Medea is not simply a paradigmatic practitioner of the occult but an agent of evil. She can be said to be a precursor of today's satanists. There is no rationality in her, no Apollonian temperance and sensibility, no σοφὶα*,* only mental disturbance.

In Seneca's version there is a significant change in the myth. Medea's exceptional character and personality which in Euripides was associated with witchcraft is developed by Seneca into a mental and existential agitation. The skill of witchcraft is replaced by the innate quality of malice. Evil, which in Euripides is just a potential, realizes itself in Seneca's play. It could be argued that Seneca is challenging (perhaps intentionally) Euripides's play and, in particular, the very nature of the main character.

In Christa Wolf's novel, *Medea,* Medea's sorcery is neither witchcraft nor evil practice but a therapeutic skill. Medea is a healer, a Heilerin: she helps people recover from physical as well as emotional injuries. She is a peaceful person, gifted with understanding, patience and serenity and the ability to heal people's minds and bodies. She is only considered a sorceress by the people of Corinth who are unable to understand her personality and her mentality: "...she soothed me with her words, no, it was more than soothing, it was, one of her sorcerer's tricks, that's clear to me now." (Wolf 1999, 111) Wolf's Medea is a benevolent person who tries to inspire self-respect and self-confidence in the people around her. She practises a remedial kind of sorcery aiming at restoring the mind, body and spirit of the people who seek her help. Her motives are purely altruistic. Unlike the versions of Euripides and Seneca, where Medea's sorcery focuses on Jason, Wolf's Medea uses her skills and gifts to help anybody who is in pain or trouble. Her attempt to help the daughter of the king overcome her fears and her epilepsy is an obvious example of her benevolent nature. The emphasis here is on the spirit.

Medea's intelligence is depicted by Wolf as acute intuition and perception, which enables her to be a healer. It is this perception, this inner vision that signifies her otherness and her outcast status within Corinthian society. Men are scared of her free and lively spirit, and women are jealous of her charming and outstanding personality. While Euripides has Medea simply admitting that she is hated and envied because of her *σοφὶα*, Christa Wolf shows in detail which thoughts, emotions and reactions Medea's personality elicits to other people around her. First and foremost, Jason experiences feelings of frustration towards Medea. His first, immediate reactions upon meeting her in her father's palace in Colchis, are shock and enchantment:

> The way she stood there, stooped over, in that red and white tiered skirt and close-fitting black top they all wear, and caught the water from the spout in her cupped hands and drank. The way she straightened up and noticed us, shook her hands dry, and approached us frankly, taking quick, strong steps, slender, but with a well-developed figure, and showing off all the virtues of her appearance to such advantage that Telamon, with his usual lack of self-control, whistled through his teeth and whispered to me: Now there's something nice for you.
>
> A pulling in all my limbs such as I'd never known, a feeling of absolute enchantment – she's put a spell on me went through my mind, and in fact, so she had. (ibid., 32)

Jason is enthralled not only by Medea's physical attributes but mainly by her natural grace and magnificent aura. In fact, the very first thing that impresses him is the way she moves and performs trivial daily activities, such as drinking water from the fountain, shaking her hands dry, walking and talking. By his own admission it is her dark features that initially attract him but primarily it is her exceptional personality as manifested in her mannerisms and behaviour that captivates him.

Her incisive perception is demonstrated in her attempt to help Jason in Colchis, and her strong will makes him fall in love with her. "My consciousness abandoned me" he admits (ibid., 46). Monika Shafi points out that Medea's willingness to help Jason is not a sign of weakness but a demonstration of her strong personality.

> Ihre Medea ist eine kluge, einfühlsame, stolze und unabhängige Frau, die Kolchis nicht aus blinder Liebe zu Jason verließt, sondern um dem verknöcherten, autoritären und unmenschlichen Regime ihres Vaters Aietes zu entfliehen. (Shafi 1997, 377)
>
> Her Medea is a clever, compassionate, proud and independent woman, who left Kolchis not because of blind love to Jason but to escape the rigid authoritarian and inhuman regime of her father Aietes. (My translation)

Much as he admires her and is attracted to her because of her outstanding, charismatic personality, Jason is also frustrated as he cannot fully comprehend his wife's character. When, for example, Medea refuses to bind her hair like Corinthian women do, Jason perceives that as an act of arrogance and rebellion. He is unable to understand her exuberance which contrasts with the mild and submissive temperament of Corinthian women. "That woman will do me in" (Wolf 1999, 29) he concludes, unable to understand his wife and deal with her.

While to Jason, Medea elicits feelings of attraction and frustration, to other people she evokes the “envy” and “ill-will” mentioned in the Euripidean text. Agameda, Medea’s former pupil, is envious of her teacher’s unique charisma and tries to distance herself from the influence of Medea’s personality.

> There it was again. The intoxication that overcomes me when I’m in Medea’s presence overcame me – but for the last time. Now I know I’m safe. Safe from her damned tricks and her famous emanations. (ibid., 54)

Agameda, detests Medea for her “damned tricks” and her “famous emanations” which are nothing but acute perception. One of her so-called tricks, perceived by Corinthians as an exercise of witchcraft, was to help them deal with famine by encouraging them to eat horseflesh and by teaching them to grow edible, wild plants. Instead of gratitude she faces ostracism and is labelled a witch even by Kreon’s astronomer, Akamas.

At this point the notions of the consanguinity, metamorphosis and potency of myth and their significance in literature, become more explicit. When Euripides is mentioning the “envy” and “ill-will” that people feel towards Medea, he establishes the link which perpetuates the myth of Medea and operates as one essential element of kinship between the Euripidean play and the novel by Wolf. It is this consanguinity that in turn establishes the metamorphosis of the myth and affirms its vigour.

The fact that Wolf’s version is a novel can partly account for the thorough presentation of thoughts and emotions and it can be argued that Wolf deliberately did not write a drama, where the unfolding of the inner world of the characters would be exhausted in lengthy soliloquies. There is, of course, a strong element of drama since the novel is subtitled *Stimmen* (*Voices*) and consists of ten monologues. However, the novel is not based on action or description but is a graphic disclosure of the innermost thoughts and feelings of the heroine as well as of the other characters. As Turner observes, “Wolf’s narrative technique allows the priestess to meditate without the accompaniment of the Chorus, to think rather than merely to rail or declaim” (Turner 1999, 205). Medea’s monologues are an uninhibited exposition of her thoughts and emotions, in contrast to the regimented, defensive speeches in the tragedies by Euripides and Seneca.

Furthermore, the end of the novel in which the Corinthians stone Medea’s children to death, is a clear affirmation of their hatred of Medea. Wolf therefore develops the idea of Medea’s exceptional nature and the effects it has on her life. Medea’s intuition also helps her discover the reality of Corinth, namely that the civilized city hides great atrocities and macabre secrets. Medea, as Christa Wolf portrays her, is a charismatic woman with

the talent to delve into the human psyche and try to bring peace.

A very significant element that Wolf introduces in her version is the fact that Medea's children are stoned to death by the Corinthian people. According to Georgina Paul, Wolf based her version on Robert Graves's account of the story of Medea in which he mentions the scholiast Hyginus, and argues that Medea's children were murdered and Euripides was bribed in order to present Medea as the killer of her own children (Paul 1997, 227-240).

Medea, Stimmen challenges, thus, the original myth by introducing information that has been ignored shedding light on certain ambiguities of the Euripidean text. Euripides does have Medea kill her children and he does refer to her sorcery skills; however the woman he portrays possesses a great degree of rationality and an outstanding personality and mind which is evident in her dialogues with Kreon and Jason. As previously mentioned there is a great degree of vacillation on the part of Euripides regarding the good or evil nature of Medea. Readers have been conditioned to read the Euripidean text as a representation of female madness and emotional disturbance. This has happened because Seneca's version has contributed greatly to the impression that Euripides's Medea is just a lunatic, vindictive female. This reading has not only reduced Medea to a caricature of the enraged, betrayed wife but it has also deprived the Euripidean text of its comprehensive nature. Furthermore, as Angeliki Kottaridou mentions in her essay, "Medea – the price for knowledge", "With the rising influence of rationalism, the image of Medea, whose essence contradicts the prevalent beliefs, acquires more and more darker aspects." (Kottaridou 1995, 25). With Christa Wolf we have not only a new transformation of the myth but also an enlightening and enlightened depiction of Medea, which eventually restores her status in the literary canon and reveals new aspects of the Euripidean play. As Barbara Turner points out:

> The portrait of the lovelost, thus hysterical Medea - a traditional if inexact reading of the Euripidean version - reverts to that of a cunning, perceptive observer, who uncovers Creon's guilt and must therefore be taken out of the way. Indeed, Wolf gives perhaps not a version of the story but a presentation of its structural underpinnings, the causal chains which lead to the currency of Medea's infamy. (Turner 1999, 205)

It can be argued of course that Euripides's play does not qualify for being the original myth on Medea as it does not consider the view that her children were stoned to death by Corinthians. However, his play illustrates the vacillation between a good and a bad Medea and in that sense it is a comprehensive story. Moreover, the story of Medea is neither a saga nor a legend in which historical information would be of extreme importance. The

story of Medea is a myth, and myth is neither pure reality, nor pure fiction but a perennial oscillation between the two. Myth may encompass segments of reality (history, society, politics, facts) but it also embraces the realm of the supernatural, the metaphysical and the transcendental. Euripides's play is the original myth on Medea as it demonstrates exactly this oscillation.

Undoubtedly, more light can be shed onto texts if those are seen as a part of a sequential, dynamic process and compared with one another within this process. The algorithmic evolutionary process of the myth allows interesting comparisons to be made and provides new readings of the texts. Christa Wolf herself admits in one of her interviews:

> Many people believe that the less you know the "freer" you are to invent, but that isn't the case. I find the multitude of sources in this prehistoric field especially stimulating, even exciting, instructive, delightful, but it's indicative of the multitude of a story's possible variants.
> (www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0498/wolf/notebook.html)

Wolf acknowledges the variegated nature of myth and its importance for literature. In fact, she argues that myth encourages creation because of its multiplicity. What she is actually articulating is the notion of input and output, and more specifically, that the quality of the output depends on the quality and multiplicity of the input.

The different accounts of Medea's sorcery reveal how the myth of Medea possesses the potential for evolution and how this potential materializes itself in the case of sorcery. The three different texts illustrate the ramifications of the original myth and its dynamic nature. At this point, Cassirer's concept of metamorphosis assumes a more intelligible form and justifies its introduction and application in the study of myth.[20] The next step is to look at the sequences that result from the three different inputs in the flow chart. First let's look at the feelings that Medea has for Jason which make her attach herself to him and devote her life to him.

In Euripides Medea's love for Jason is a strong, compelling feeling which enables her to commit incredible atrocities. Her heart is "a heart on fire" (Euripides 1958, 39), heart which is totally devoted to Jason and goes to extremes for his sake. Medea herself admits that her love for him surpasses all her other qualities including her intelligence: "And then, showing more willingness to help than wisdom, I killed him, Pelias, with a

[20] Cassirer, in fact, contrives the term "law of metamorphosis" which he argues characterizes the mythic world. For Cassirer, the natural and the mythic world share a lot of fundamental principles and are inextricably linked. One of these fundamental principles is the principle of motion and change or what he calls the "unbroken continuous". See Cassirer 1945, 72-107.