

Université de Montréal

Euripides, Christa Wolf and Adorno: A Critical Comparison of Medea Retellings

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Abstract

This literary analysis examines the Medea myth and its retellings by Euripides and Christa Wolf. Since the 1950s, many Western revisionist mythmaking authors have dived back into mythology to find artistic inspiration to fill the gender gap within the Western world's overly masculinized cultural heritage. One of the purposes of these authors is to tell the story from the silenced Other's vantage point of view, a way to deconstruct gender apriority and stereotypes imposed by what Adorno calls formal reason. To explore myths is to recast them into modern days and detect their timeless insistence and relevance. This exercise allows women to voice their side of the story to destabilize the patriarchal rhetoric and archetypes. To shake and deconstruct stereotypes of womanhood made by Western formal reason, it is essential to turn toward Medea's mythical figure as a woman. Indeed, how can the comparison between Christa Wolf's and Euripides' Medea produce an aesthetics that emancipates the princess of Colchis and women from Western males' domination? To answer this interrogation, this literary research takes Adorno's dialectical theory and Wolf's aesthetics as the analytical axis of comparison between Euripides' and Wolf's versions of the Medea myth. As this comparison concludes, Euripides' Medea, the murderous mother devoid of *sophrosyne*, remains an archetype of womanhood in the late 90s' imagination. Also, Euripides and Wolf draw a consistent image of women as nature's minions. However, unlike the Greek tragedian, Christa Wolf insists on the naturalness of the body as an epistemological aesthetics that allows the non-identical to shine forth. *Medea: A Modern Retelling* juxtaposed with Euripides' tragedy creates a dialogue that explores corporeal writing and its usefulness in assessing one's agency into the world of meanings.

Keywords: Medea, Christa Wolf, Adorno, Euripides, feminism, subjectivity

Résumé

Cette analyse littéraire examine le mythe de Médée et ses redites par Euripide et Christa Wolf. Depuis les années 1950, de nombreuses autrices occidentales révisionnistes se sont replongées dans la mythologie pour trouver l'inspiration artistique afin de combler le manque de représentation du genre dans l'héritage culturel de l'Occident. L'un des objectifs de ces écrivaines est de raconter l'histoire du point de vue de l'Autre réduit au silence, une façon de déconstruire l'apriorité du genre et les stéréotypes imposés par ce qu'Adorno appelle la raison formelle. Explorer les mythes, c'est les adapter à notre époque et détecter leur insistance et leur pertinence intemporelle. Cet exercice permet aux femmes d'exprimer leur version de l'histoire afin de déstabiliser la rhétorique et les archétypes patriarcaux. Pour ébranler et déconstruire les stéréotypes de la féminité fabriqués par la raison formelle occidentale, il est essentiel de se tourner vers la figure mythique de Médée en tant que femme. En effet, comment la comparaison entre la Médée de Christa Wolf et celle d'Euripide peut-elle produire une esthétique permettant d'émanciper la princesse de Colchide et les femmes de la domination de la raison masculine occidentale ? Pour répondre à cette question, la théorie dialectique d'Adorno et l'esthétique de Christa Wolf sont prises comme axe analytique entre les versions d'Euripide et de Wolf du mythe de Médée. Comme le montre cette étude comparative, la Médée d'Euripide, la mère meurtrière dépourvue de sophrosyne, reste un archétype vivant de la féminité à la fin des années 90 en Allemagne. De même, Euripide et Wolf brossent un portrait cohérent des femmes en tant que servantes de la nature, mais contrairement à son homologue grecque, Christa Wolf insiste sur le caractère naturel du corps en tant qu'esthétique épistémologique qui permet au non-identique et aux différences de surgir. *Medea : A Modern Retelling* juxtaposé à la tragédie d'Euripide crée un

dialogue qui explore l'écriture corporelle et son utilité pour évaluer l'agentivité de chacun dans le monde des significations.

Mots-clés : Médée, Christa Wolf, Adorno, Euripide, féminisme, subjectivité

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Dedication

À la mémoire de Yolande.

Peu importe l'endroit où tu es, j'espère que tu as trouvé la sérénité. Le combat n'est peut-être pas fini ici-bas, mais c'est sur tes traces que je désire maintenant marcher.

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Introduction

“The lie, once a liberal means of communication, has today become one of the techniques of insolence enabling each individual to spread around him the glacial atmosphere in whose shelter he can drive” (Adorno and Jephcott 33). What is a lie, and how can it manipulate people in their blindness? Do people, in a world of vulnerabilities and instant information sharing, to cope with the lack of human trustiness, rely unconditionally on authoritative statements only to spare themselves the time to formulate an opinion? Hence, a lie that comforts its devotees may create political leverage for those with a “legitimate” status to make authoritative statements as absolute truths.

Is living in blindness to avoid the painful realization that suffering still exists make any sense human-wise? “If they are not the ones who suffer, it is me. What choice do I have but to comply?” As Christa Wolf argues, this individualist thinking cannot achieve meaningful emancipation because it feeds itself into “false alternatives”: it is a mode of thinking that resolutely make its thinkers “fear certain societal death more than uncertain physical death (Wolf and Heurck 267). As if “us” and “them” are separated by an unbridgeable chasm where each position on the two edges can never be reunited under the same cause. This radical socialization can be undertaken only in “total isolation from all other human beings, who appear to be both men only in estranged forms, as enemies or allies, but always as an instrument, things” (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 49). This socialization inevitably implies that its social bodies pursue an extreme alienation from each other.

Myths are good examples of this cultural bed of alienating misconceptions that have reached modern days. One tale of concern for this work on gender emancipation is the myth of Medea. However, before jumping into the core of Medea’s story, it is essential to briefly evoke

the importance of mythology in today's Western world. Throughout this analysis, the term "West" is used to describe the economic, political, and cultural legacy of Europe, which also englobes North America, Australia, and New Zealand. Ancient European myths uphold the West cultural heritage and cannot be extended to native and aboriginal people's culture. Hence, within this literary analysis, the West alludes to the peoples' culture descending directly from Europe, whose majority comes from white European colonizers.

Ancient Greece's mythology, among others, has never ceased to colour the West's cultural legacy. It might be even more perceptible with the production of new artistic media such as film, photography, and video games. From the 20th century onward, one can observe an increase in movie production dedicated to Greek mythology. Today, the mingling of ancient and modern mythology is undeniable, which DC Comics', Marvel's and Disney's superheroes can attest to as evidence. For instance, Wonder Woman (DC Comics) is a mighty Amazon born from the extramarital union of Zeus and Hippolyta, who fights the Axis alongside the Allies during World War II. This American heroine, created to bolster feminist military support and American exceptionalism, demonstrates the entanglement of Greek and American mythology, a cultural crossbreeding that can replicate degrading and uncriticized gender norms for political use. Even if Greek mythology seems temporally remote, its influence has not decreased and remains tied to the dominant perspective (Kallin 45).

Mythology continues to generate gender role models for the Western youth. This cultural imprint remains within individuals throughout their lives and influences directly or indirectly their behaviours. According to Barthes, there are no fixated "mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely...often [myth] does nothing but represent itself"(qtd. in Arnds 416)...[and] is indeed open to 'translation' in the sense of a re-

interpretation” (Arnds 416). Also, as Barth sustains in *Mythologies*, myths are only words chosen by history: “il (le mythe) ne saurait surgir de la ‘nature’ des choses (Barthes 182). Hence, not considering mythology as a generative locus of culture would be to miss an enormous component of Western identity.

Heroes of the past resurging in Hollywood movies and other modern art forms continue to have considerable influence on norms of behaviour (Morales 148). Like Herakles and Jason, these heroes represent models for young men because they appeal to masculine heroism. Myths of ancient Greece, however, are firmly patriarchal. Stories of strong men who fight monsters, natural forces, untrustworthy beings such as witches (Medea and Circe), harpies and foreigners structure and maintain Western societies’ culture based on classical and mythological archetypes of masculinity (Bolumburu Perl 366).

Greek mythology’s patriarchal one-sidedness and its constant actualization throughout time should not establish them as *de facto* unequivocal gender norms. One essential component of Greek myths is the complete silence of the “Other’s” point of view. The Other, in Ancient Greece, is mostly foreigners, children and women: everyone who is not a male citizen of the polis. There is an enormous void in the West’s cultural heritage regarding gender representation and the political “Other.” Yet, it is not to say that Greek men had more culture than the Other. Instead, women’s experiences, among others, were not recorded and transmitted because they did not appeal to the Greek patriarchal, cultural, and societal norms. As Christa Wolf points out, since the Homeric period, men have conquered and maintained their control over women’s stories, whose temporal rearrangement has become a source of mistrust vis-à-vis women to this day (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 13).

This thesis compares two versions of the Medea myth: Euripides' *Medea* (431 BCE) and Christa Wolf's *Medea: A Modern Retelling* (1996). The first section shows how Euripides' Medea, the witch, and murderess mother, continues to haunt Western society's imagining of women as sexually driven beings devoid of self-restraint. It demonstrates that even though many men do not directly base their judgement on the Medea myth, the patriarchal archetype of the "mad" woman persists despite critical feminist interventions. To explain this seemingly irresistible urge to categorize women in such a manner, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is taken as a point of departure. Furthermore, violent masculine role models in late capitalist societies propose compelling reasons for women adhering to capitalist ideals to follow dualist thinking, a remark that Wolf insists upon through the figure of Agamedea.

The second section pursues the literary comparison through Adorno's and Horkheimer's lenses, which provides an additional avenue for criticizing the misogynistic behaviour exposed through the Medea myth. In fact, according to the patriarchal rhetoric, men like Jason and Creon demonize Medea because she represents nature, which the male ego has tried to distance itself from. Far from naturalizing women's oppression, this work attempts to expose men's fear of nature, which stems from the repression of their natural origin. In the end, this repression is violently reflected onto the Other. What appears different from patriarchal reason is inevitably shelved as irrational, and this fear of differences limits Western culture's capacity to build an inclusive and egalitarian society.

The third section aims to find an aesthetic response to formal reason's gender reductionism through Wolf's *Medea*. Indeed, with the help of Adorno's and Wolf's corporeal aesthetics, it is possible to generate an esthetic politics of gender emancipation, which could be further developed into a more expansive approach. This work produces a sensitive response, an

ethics of care, rooted in a historical subjectivity that acknowledges the not-yet-visible or the nonidentical of human experience. Contrary to Euripides's *Medea*, who endorses the Corinthian patriarchal behaviour through violence, the emancipation of Wolf's heroine lies precisely within the exchange of recollected corporeal stories. To come-to-oneself must irrevocably start from a recollection of past bodily suffering because, contrary to reason, the body cannot anesthetize itself to pain. Pain remains imprinted into the body, and those marks of suffering are reminiscences of humankind's vulnerability. However, subjectivity cannot be socially achieved without exposing one's experience. This exposure of one's vulnerability through past suffering experiences creates a space for intersubjectivity. To look beyond categorization and abstraction is essential to arrive at a collective subjectivity that would increase self-criticism and openness toward differences. This analysis states that Wolf's *Medea* does not achieve social emancipation but embodies the writer's aesthetic ideal. Indeed, her *Medea* does become more conscious of herself as a historical and living subject, and her exile testimony encourages human beings to exercise resistance through critical thinking. Her last laments continue to pierce readers' understanding of the figure of *Medea*, and the echo of her voice persists even after the end of the narrative.

This comparative study examines Euripides' tragedy *Medea* and Wolf's novel *Medea: A Modern Retelling* because of their historical juncture, representing an essential point of comparison between ancient and modern times. On the one hand, Euripides' tragedy was first played during Athenian democracy's prime age (431 BCE): a political system ruled exclusively by Athenian male citizens. Comparable to American exceptionalism, Athenian democracy became the symbol of freedom par excellence throughout the Hellenistic world. According to Timothy J. Reiss, democracy brought about an "epistemic crisis" comparable to an

epistemological disenchantment resulting in the Athenian tragic art. Tragedy allowed “new discourses of knowledge” to grasp the “felt impossibility of accessing truth” (Collits 8). Thus, Athenian tragedy represents a historical juncture that allowed the ambiguous and counter-generated truths to be accessed without exhausting the concepts they tried to summon. Yet, Euripides’ patriarchal reification of Medea became Europe’s paradigmatic literary trope of womanhood.

On the other hand, Christa Wolf’s revisionist version of the Medea myth saw the light in a similar historical turmoil in Western history. Published in 1996 by the formerly GDR author Christa Wolf, *Medea: A Modern Retelling* calls upon the social and political atmosphere of post-1989 Germany. As a turning point in history, the German reunification symbolizes the end of the Cold War and the USSR’s dismantling. Like in Athenian democracy, post-1989 Germany offered a critical space within which political and social ideas could be exchanged to form a better Germany. Even if a significant proportion of East Germans, such as Wolf, saw the *Wende* as a historical juncture to rebuild a better socialist state, the reunification and the merge of these two politically opposed ideologies provoked the absorption of GDR’s history into the West’s cultural imagination. Like in Pericles’ Athens, East Germans experienced a disenchantment vis-à-vis the state’s socialist policies in the last decades of the GDR. Not that socialism was undesirable, but that GDR’s socialist paradigm modelled on the USSR’s was becoming increasingly autocratic, and the state’s powerholders saw internal criticism as a direct threat to the party. As Molly Andrews points out, “Stalin’s most rigid construction of dialectical materialism, which ascribes very limited parameters to that which is considered constructive criticism...ultimately spelled its demise” (Andrews 139, 150). Thence, Stalinist dialectics

became the wall against which the GDR's spirit of criticism based on the tension between the multiplicity of viewpoints saw its impetus stopped short.

Christa Wolf becomes Medea in her pursuit of an inclusive and supportive society, for the princess of Colchis represents "eine Gestalt auf einer Zeitengrenze" (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 50), whose status as a scapegoated woman reappears incessantly throughout Western history. Demonized by the West for her short cooperation in the 60s with the Stasi, Wolf, like her Medea, tries to find her place amidst the political and social turmoil following the reunification. She realizes that "progress" and Western "freedom" revert to identical thinking, reflecting Euripides' patriarchal reification of womanhood. Wolf is objectified as a woman and a human being; she becomes what society wants of her for political goals.

Nevertheless, unlike Euripides' Medea, who finds comfort in reproducing male norms of violence, Wolf's Medea tries to find herself in the social and corporeal relatedness of the being. She tries to transcend the universalization of womanhood and reconnect with suffering experiences through the sensitive body (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 5). According to Adorno, this type of suffering is "a moral or psychological type caused by oppression, alienation or wrong living seem...either to generate physical pain very concretely or to be modelled on it, in the mode of sensible" (Ferrarese 9). It is to acknowledge the other side of Medea's story and remember what formal reason has tried to anesthetize into forgetfulness. Wolf tries to accomplish an aesthetics capable of creating a self-conscious subject through the recollection of painful experiences and their collective sharing into dialogic relationships.

This work examines Wolf's work from *post-dualist* eyes. Many Anglophone scholars argue that Wolf's *Medea* is a feminist work of art. However, according to Summers, the Anglophone translation of Wolf's writing marginalizes the historical and political period in

which it is embedded (Summers 228). Indeed, as she critically investigates Bachmann's poetics, Wolf asserts, in the words of the Austrian author, that "writing does not take place outside the historical situation" (Lennox 126). To write from experience is perhaps Wolf's signature, but the abstraction of her works' historical context can only impede their critical interpretation.

Furthermore, compared to Anglophone feminists, Christa Wolf's writing goes beyond mere gynocentric and dualist concerns. Wolf's artistic quest is to concoct an antidote to the oppression of both women and men in patriarchal context. This approach would acknowledge and accept the ambiguous particularities within the self, which is inevitably part of a greater collective. According to Summers, Wolf's advocacy for women matches her commitment to a broader subjective authenticity in literature (228). Differently put, Wolf integrates both men's and women's experience to transform the understanding of the human condition based on a recognition that "um so akuter wird das Problem werden, beiden Geschlechtern die Möglichkeit zur Differenzierung zu geben; anzuerkennen, daß sie unterschiedliche Bedürfnisse haben und daß nicht der Mann das Modell für den Menschen ist, sondern Mann und Frau" (Wolf and Drescher 800). Hence, her writing cannot be reduced to a movement away from socialism to feminism, as Anna Kuhn promptly suggests (Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision* 3). This comparative analysis of Euripides and Christa Wolf has a feminist dimension but does not discard the potential of a more significant human emancipatory politics.

The choice of Critical Theory and Wolf's aesthetics rests precisely in their convergence of opinions vis-à-vis formal reason. Both claim that scientific explanations stem from a patriarchal vision of the world through which men can demystify nature under a universalizing language. According to Wolf's Büchner Prize acceptance speech (1980), she "aligns herself

more clearly with the...*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tracing the destructive tendencies of the present back to the Greek beginnings of Western culture” (Lennox 138):

Disillusioned through and through, we stand dumbfounded in the face of the reified dreams produced by that form of instrumental thought which still calls itself rational, but which has long since lost sight of its emancipatory Enlightenment origins in the notion of education for responsibility. This ‘rationalism’ has entered the industrial age in the form of an unmitigated mania for expediency. (Wolf, *Citadel of Reason* 170)

This “instrumental thinking” is central to Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, and its allusion in Wolf’s work strengthens her quest to identify patterns of violence and repression within the human condition (Kallin 49). Therefore, the influence of Adorno’s contribution on Wolf’s philosophy should not be underestimated.

Another important similarity between Christa Wolf and Adorno is situated on an epistemological level: a return to holism, “führend zu denken und denkend zu fühlen” as Wolf urges to pursue (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 60). The body (mortal coil), long despised by Western thinkers, regains its epistemological essence under Adorno’s and Wolf’s aesthetics; it becomes the concrete surface on which suffering leaves its mark. The interdependent mind-body relationship and its equilibrium are reaffirmed throughout Wolf’s writing, which scholars usually underappreciate. Then, this work tries to shed new light on Wolf’s holistic interests vis-à-vis the human condition in the West.

One concern needs to be addressed before using Adorno’s approach. Because Adorno’s thought is primarily construed in aphorisms, its use throughout the following lines does not dictate its universalization. An uncritical and unreflective determinism characterizes Adorno’s subjective criticism of gender. His philosophical investigation into the wrongness of capitalism

ignores women's reality entirely. Indeed, he reasserts patriarchal stereotypes of womanhood without fundamentally having a critical reflection on his concepts of gender. For example, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer associate women with powerlessness. According to this logic, women's inability to become a subject due to their "biological inferiority" as a "mark which invites violence" legitimates their objectification within patriarchal societies (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 206). In late capitalism, this determinism set by "nature" increases and sustains capitalist absolutism through women's bodies' self-commodifying. For Adorno, "women are more dominated by the commodity character than men"; riveted to consumption, they function as commodity agents in society" (qtd. in Ferrarese 71). This gender determinism is rooted in a patriarchal ideology that sustains the naturalization of women's domination.

Paradoxically, Adorno argues that appealing to nature is an attempt at domination, which feeds into humanity's perpetual violence by eradicating the nonidentical through absolutism (Ferrarese 58). Hence, how can Adorno rely so much on women's naturalization while advocating for the collapse of universality's tyranny on singularities? Contradictions are perceivable between Adorno's seemingly uncritical statements and his thought on negative dialectics. Can his fragmented and aphoristic philosophy explain in part his contradictoriness? Or did an uncritical and patriarchal form of reason continue to pervert Adorno's view on gender? These questions are yet to be discussed, but this analytical work takes these gender statements seriously and tries to keep a fair distance vis-à-vis Adorno's sexist objectivity.

Nevertheless, Adorno's philosophical thought will be the point of departure to assess one possible reason for the origin of Western women's domination through Medea and to build an aesthetic response. Due to the fragmented state of Adorno's thinking, it is possible to extract

strings of thought individually and put them together with Wolf's aesthetics to create a more solid gender approach. By analyzing the Medea Myth from Euripides' and Wolf's perspective, this thesis distances itself from Adorno's uncritical and subjective views on womanhood. In other words, it is to turn his theory against himself and formulate a better response to male rationality, a patriarchal reason that Adorno tried to dismantle but failed to apply to himself.

Chapter 1

1.1 The Dialectic of Enlightenment and Gender's Objectification under Instrumental Rationality

This chapter examines Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and its usefulness in assessing gender relations based on rationality and instrumental capitalism explored through the Medea myth. Indeed, how can this classic of the Frankfurt School shed new light on Medea's story and its various versions? More precisely, how can Critical Theory help Medea in her struggle for emancipation? While the authors lack self-criticism about gender power dynamics, their arguments about the Enlightenment can become a solid ground for building a more adjusted feminist discourse. As this chapter argues, Christa Wolf's novel and Euripides' tragedy highlight the continuous preponderance of violence imposed by formal reason (Enlightenment) on women. This literary comparison shows that human "progress" has failed to emancipate women from patriarchal domination. Indeed, the myth of male dominance keeps repeating itself in the form of economic commodification and social repression. As Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, historical progress through formal rationality is only a veil that camouflages the persistence of mythology: formal reason's failed attempt to free itself from tautological Enlightenment. Therefore, to better understand what Adorno can offer to feminism, it is essential to consider Euripides' and Wolf's literary pieces of evidence that support the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

This chapter has two aims. Firstly, it demonstrates that Euripides' (ancient) and Christa Wolf's works (modern) allude to formal reason's violence articulated through the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Secondly, the chapter aims to retrace Enlightenment's genealogy to expose its

continuous adverse effects on human psychology and social relations, regardless of gender identification.

1.1.1 The *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: The Portrait of 20th Century Western Rationality

Conjointly written by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment (Dialektik der Aufklärung)* is a philosophical work composed of fragmented commentaries on the Enlightenment. The fundamental question that impelled these two founders of the School of Frankfurt to write about rationality's deceitfulness was: "How can the progress of modern science and medicine and industry promise to liberate people from ignorance, disease, and brutal, mind-numbing work, yet help create a world where people willingly swallow fascist ideology, knowingly practice deliberate genocide, and energetically develop lethal weapons of mass destruction" (Zuidervaart, "Theodor W. Adorno.")? What is the conclusion? Rationality, through its instrumentality, has reverted to its negative image: it has become an irrational calamity (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 1). As its sole purpose, self-preservation has led formal reason to a threshold where the distance it has tried to pursue between the self and its fear of irrationality is reduced to nothing. Rationality and irrationality are now more perceptibly interchangeable than ever. Ironically, violence toward the self and others has become the norm for preservation. Categorization and its totalizing effect have thoroughly diluted particularities into the general social order, and everyone must fit the mould to avoid seclusion and brutality.

Adorno and Horkheimer question the historical process of Enlightenment from the 18th century onward with a critical eye. Both would agree: the spirit of Enlightenment is a necessary realization that individuals need to reach to achieve a sense of intellectual freedom. However, the authors deem enlightened rationality irrational because it reverts to mythology, initially the point

of departure of its emancipation. Historically, Western nations see Enlightenment as a triumphant prowess of the intellect whose goal is to dissipate the mythical world through knowledge. Yet, for both Adorno and Horkheimer, this is slander. It is false emancipation from nature because mythology is Enlightenment, and Enlightenment reverts to mythology (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 1). Following the authors' logic, societal freedom and Enlightenment thinking are inseparable. Social freedom cannot succeed if individuals do not strive for cultural Enlightenment, but the enlightened spirit that taints our institutions and social behaviours already contain proofs of regression (Horkheimer and W. Adorno II).

1.1.2 The Birth of Identical Thinking Through Dialectics

Where did humanity lose the spirit of the Enlightenment? The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* suggests the pre-animist time. According to the authors, pre-animist individuals did not wholly distinguish their being from nature. The dialectical process of the mind started to make a differentiation when the "thing" reveals its double meaning. In the pre-animist world, mana composed "everything" and was viewed as a moving spirit. The dialectical process was already underway as soon as humanity started to associate demons and deities with nature.

Horkheimer and Adorno evoke the example of the tree:

The split between animate and inanimate, the assigning of demons and deities to certain specific places, arises from this pre-animism. Even the division of the subject and the object is prefigured in it. If the tree is addressed no longer as simply a tree but as evidence of something else, a location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that it is at the same time itself and something other than itself, identical and not identical.

(XVI)

This dissociation of logos from nature has permitted human beings to create a comprehensible language that dismisses the natural particularities of matter into universalist thinking. This dialectical process gave birth to the self, whose distance from nature has become its fundamental survival mechanism.

In its current application, the dialectic of Enlightenment creates a totalizing language (identical thinking) for the self to understand nature. Facing nature's incommensurability and for the sake of its preservation, the self needs control over its environment. It needs to know what drives its surroundings because it can stipulate, gauge, hypothesize, and make statistical calculations of these natural forces that endlessly try to draw back the self into its previous state of natural dedifferentiation (if such human condition did exist). Indeed,

for the Enlightenment, only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or an event; its ideal is the system which everything and anything follows....The multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter. (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 4)

To dominate nature, the self creates new totalizing languages that can provide the best knowledge to conduct its survival purpose. Knowledge has become the primary source of power: the one who "knows" always knows more than his neighbour to survive the strife with nature. Then, rationality appears inexorably at the convergence of terror and survival. Formal reason rationalizes nature; it is how the unknown becomes known. What seems incommensurable becomes commensurable; it is the path of demythologization.

The rational being believes in the advent of its emancipation when it reflects the most on mythology. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the "happy match" between humans and the dominated nature is patriarchal: "the mind, conquering superstition, is to rule over disenchanting

nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters” (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 2). Now that it believes in its truthfulness in comprehending its surroundings, formal reason trusts its superiority and returns to violence to oblige the non-conformers to comply. Reason’s identical thinking, acquired through cognitive mediation with nature, dismisses differences and counterviews. Enlightened reason hammers down its conceptual understanding into people’s heads hitherto the means necessary. What is outside the conceptual framework of rationality is irrational. Accordingly, irrationality is a relic of nature because enlightened thinking cannot, in its current form, rationally conceptualize or imagine the abstract, the beyond of the thing-in-itself, and the particularities’ limitless. Therefore, Enlightened thinking does violence as soon as it creates a closed conceptual box that repudiates the nonidentity (particularity, difference, non-conceptuality).

In the end, the comprehension of objects through the mind’s mediation can only be illusory. Western rational reason exists only in its state of fear vis-à-vis the unknown. Its interpretation mirrors nature because “what is unknown ultimately is unknowable...the world must elude thought, no matter how exhaustive its concepts” (Schoolman 3). In other words, the mind is the prisoner of its linguistic cage since it believes that it can grasp the unknown, which is already a contradiction to its meaning.

The difference between magical and Western thinking is vital in understanding formal reason’s evolution. Adorno and Horkheimer pin down the breaking point between magical and formal reason (Western thought) in Homer’s *Odyssey*. According to the authors, magical thinking, which follows animism, did not proclaim superior knowledge over nature. Individuals accepted their situation within the organic system without rejecting their natural state. Facing dangers and phantom-like experiences such as sickness, the sorcerer imitated the “bad” spirit by

wearing a mask in its image to chase it away from the body it inhabited. This mimicking mechanism indicates that humans have allowed “themselves to be frightened by natural phenomena” (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 4). Magical thinking did not differentiate itself from tormenting spirits. It did not assert knowledge over invisible forces as Western thought allows itself to believe. X did not necessarily produce Y as the mathematical logic would prescribe it. Something or someone has taken control of the body, and sorcerers used nature to frighten the inflictor while resisting the urge to self-differentiate from their natural essence. In short, animism and magical thinking had an aesthetic receptivity that allowed them to recognize differences within the natural world. They acknowledged “the difference between an object and its identification... its nonidentity, which is the difference belonging to an object that can never be known” (Schoolman 35). While animism recognized that nature transcends intellectual comprehension, magical thinking did so by controlling nature for its interests, for which the Enlightenment represents its modern crystallization.

This essay does not advocate for the eradication of religion, philosophy, and science. Yet, it alludes to formal reason’s bias in claiming objective and unquestionable truths about a world that exceeds its understanding. Totalization in universalist concepts tends to dissolve particularities. Not recognizing this cognitive limitation is how violence toward differences becomes humanity’s regression into irrationality.

1.1.3 Odysseus and the Sirens: The Formation of the Proto-bourgeois Reason

Western civilization has already and undeniably admitted Ancient Greece’s contribution to Europe’s intellectual and social heritage. To better comprehend the turn that Western rationality has been taking since animism to become what we now know as the industrial society,

Adorno and Horkheimer analyze one of the founding works of European literature: *The Odyssey* by Homer. What they find in Odysseus's journey is the formation of the proto-bourgeois intellect (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 35). Indeed, Odysseus's epic *nostros* is a coming-to-self journey. Nature's splendours, such as monsters, natural force, and feminine creatures, constantly challenge Odysseus's reason.

Myths are modes "of apprehension" of the external world. They laud "differences within the human and natural worlds, collectively represented by mythological figures as worlds replete with powers and mysteries beyond the powers of human understanding" (Schoolman 36). Mythology retains *mana* as nature's composition and conserves an aesthetic sensibility to differences. However, Odysseus' conquest of the mythical world ultimately puts an end to this aesthetic thinking by contemplating suffering without legitimately acknowledging it as a proof of violence.

1.1.3.1 Male Association between the Sirens and Women

One episode of interest is Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens. This episode is essential due to its allusion to women as enchantresses. The Sirens are creatures characterized by women's bodily features. Any traveller or seafarer who hears their melody becomes the prey of their charms. However, nowhere in the epic does Homer describe the Sirens. One of the oldest descriptions comes from a Greek red-figured stamnos called *The Siren Vase* (see fig. 1). This artwork depicts the Sirens "as birds with woman's heads, their hair looped up with a dotted stephane, a single tress hanging beside the ear (parotis): their lips are parted as though singing" (*The British Museum*).

More modern paintings such as *Ulysses and the Sirens* by Herbert James Draper (see fig. 2) and *The Sirens and Ulysses* by William Etty (see fig. 3) portray the Sirens as female mermaids or simply naked women.



Fig. 1. The Siren Painter. “The Siren Vase.” *The British Museum*, 48n.d., The British Museum, Attica (Greece), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1843-1103-31. Accessed 19 May 2022.



Fig. 2. Draper, Herbert James. “Ulysses and the Sirens.” *The Victorian Web*, Oct. 1909, Hull Museums Collections, <https://victorianweb.org/painting/draper/paintings/11.html>. Accessed 19 May 2022.



Fig. 3. Etty, William. “The Sirens and Ulysses.” *Manchester Art Gallery*, 1837, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, <https://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/title/?mag-object-20>. Accessed 19 May 2022.

According to Etty, generations of artists have taken up this close association between women and the Sirens. The complete transformation of the Sirens’ depiction from flying creatures to women symbolizes the rationalization of the myth (Robinson 439–40). On earth, these amphibian creatures take back their humanoid appearance as women. They live now on land; the patriarchal society needs to be on guard.

This short comparison helps us understand women’s objectification since antiquity and how art has been a critical medium for the social conception of womanhood. Euripides’s and Christa Wolf’s *Medea* are women who ultimately become what men desire of them. *Medea* and the Sirens are two sides of the same coin of an uncritical gender tradition. On the one hand, *Medea* is Jason’s sensual wife and the bearer of his children. On the other hand, she is the Other, and men cannot treat her as an equal because she embodies sexual temptation and threatens the patriarchal order.

1.1.3.3 The Sirens and the Nonidentical Thinking: An Aesthetic Experience

According to Katie Fleming's analysis of Adorno's and Horkheimer's work, the encounter between Odysseus and the Sirens depicts the allegory of art and the potential of self-criticism (118). When the ship approaches the Sirens' shore, Odysseus hears their calling:

No one has ever his black ship past here

Without listening to the honeyed

sound from our lips.

He journeys on delighted

and knows more than before.

For we know everything

that the Greeks and Trojans

Suffered in wide Troy

by the will of the gods.

We know all that happens on the teeming earth. (Homer, *Odyssey*, Bk. 12, lines 192–199)

The Sirens sing the ancient past and its present. The melody contains the experience's diversity. More precisely, it is criticism through the other's suffering because it represents the lived experience in Troy from a negative imprint: the sufferers' testimonies.

To survive, the enlightened self must resist its mythical origin that has since been transformed into the "material of progress." However, "the Sirens' song threatens to erase those hard-won boundaries between past, present, and future: 'Their allurements is that of losing oneself in the past'" (Fleming 118). Formal reason acquired through times of self-sacrifice and dialectical differentiation from nature cannot surrender because it would be "tantamount to self-

destruction” (Fleming 118). Rational subjects cannot hear suffering because it represents the negation of their subjectivity. The sufferer is afflicted by something out of the mind’s control, and enlightened thinking can’t bear it. Since formal reason needs total comprehension to dominate its surrounding, the sufferer contradicts the established conceptual system of rationalization. Suffering is quintessential criticism because it argues that individuals are hurt by something out of their control. As a repressive tool used by the enlightened dominators, conformity to a system of beliefs is essential to maintain the social division’s stability. Inversely, its nonconformity results in resistance and threatens the rational society’s social foundations. Therefore, as Adorno argues, suffering becomes a primordial form of criticism because it represents the nonidentical, and it is only through the sufferer’s voice that the subject’s matrix of concepts can be shaken (qtd. in Caputi 24). But as Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, through Odysseus’s control of his surroundings and his irrevocable allegiance to his hard-built rational reason (the solid mat as its metaphor?), formal reason neutralizes the Sirens’ song into contemplative art (Caputi 27).

Adorno sustains that the human reconciliation with nature’s affinities should not be positive but negative. Indeed, “affinity is not a remnant which cognition hands us after the identifying schemata of the categorial machinery have been eliminated. Rather, affinity is the definite negation of those schemata” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 270). In other words, if humans consider themselves and their dominating behaviours as natural, the myth will continue to reproduce itself. Only in formal reason’s negative image can our freedom from self-preservation vis-à-vis nature be achieved. Seeing the nonidentity is crucial to free us from false alternative actions in our “blind pursuit of natural ends.” Becoming mindful of nature and its

differences is the key to unleashing the subject in allowing nature to become “conscious of itself” (Cook 57).

1.1.4 Human Beings and their Inescapable Nature

This episode of the *Odyssey* is essential to this essay because it describes the Adornoian basics of bourgeois identical thinking. Indeed, feminist movements, among others, try to break the patriarchal mentality, which took thousands of years to form. In the same vein as Adorno and Horkheimer, Christa Wolf argues that questioning is a desirable form of criticism because otherwise, the mind would fall into a state of mental stasis (Wolf, *Cassandra* 167); it stagnates in the comfort of its totality. No mental efforts are required because the rational mind feels at home. Thus, repudiating any foreign elements that do not comply with the subject’s identical thinking becomes second nature. The breaking down of the formal male reason would signify the demythologizing of men’s cherished closed system of concepts based on masculinity, power, domination, physical prowess, and gender superiority over women. In other words, formal reason needs to hear the Sirens’ song to acknowledge the sufferer’s voice.

1.2 Identical Thinking and its Violence: Control and Suppression of Natural Instincts

As said previously, coherence in society’s current system of beliefs is crucial for its stability. However, to conform to a set of beliefs, control in passive or active social coercion is required (according to the rational mind) for individuals who cannot or would not identify with the popular matrix of concepts. To survive and avoid suffering, the self must ironically do the opposite of what it tries to run away from, which is to say: its negation through self-sacrifice to achieve a new sense of individuation. Enlightenment thinking imposes two kinds of domination

captured by Euripides (unintentionally) and Christa Wolf (purposely). The first type of dominance is between individuals whose commodity is the driver of this power relationship. The second dominance (explained in chapter 2) is between the natural being and formal reason's identical thinking (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 9).

1.2.1 Marxist and Postmodernism Thought: Capitalism and its Alienating Effect on Humans' Naturalness

From the vantage point of Postmodernism and Marxist thought, capitalism has instrumentalized rationality. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer describe the bourgeoisie's formal reason as instrumental rationality. Driven by this logical reason, the individual's self-preservation is transferred to the abstract meaning of the thing. Work, production, and consumption have become the sole purposes for objectiveness. It is at work that reason survives nature's call on the subject. Paradoxically, mechanical work transforms the subject into an object of production. Subjectivity, built from knowledge acquisition, is once more alienated:

In the bourgeois economy the social work of each individual is mediated by the principle of the self; for some this labor is supposed to yield increased capital, for others the strength for extra work. But the more heavily the process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labor, the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul. Enlightened thinking has an answer for this, too: finally, the transcendental subject of knowledge, as the last reminder of subjectivity, is itself seemingly abolished and replaced by the operations of the automatic mechanisms of order, which therefore run all the more smoothly. (Adorno and Schröder 23)

As Odysseus' rowers mechanically row *at the same pace* to pass through the Sirens' land and avoid their enchantment, he, the authority of the vessel, can experience the aesthetic art of the nonidentical. Yet, even the wealthiest bourgeois who has free time cannot appreciate autonomous or unintentional art because bourgeois artworks reflect identical thinking. As soon as art does not challenge the current matrix of concepts by revealing, through its independent form, the contradictions of the social thinking's structure, art is reduced to mere contemplative beauty. In that sense, one can acknowledge that revisionist myth-making authors such as Christa Wolf confront this bourgeois aestheticism because it reveals potential counter-narratives of myths left out by patriarchal and bourgeois art.

1.2.1.1 Economic Exploitation of Gender Roles: Women as Valueless Objects

The power dynamic of exploitation is not traditionally limited to the employer-employee relationship but also to gender power dynamics. In Elisabeth List's own words, Werner Dubiel suggests that:

...the deeply contradictory character of capitalist modernity results from the very fact that its realization depends on the possibility of exploiting or making use of premodern forms of labor and symbolic orientation, such as religion or traditional values of solidarity. But of course, the most important of such "premodern" resources are the modern ideologies and ideas of femininity, of women's housework and caring work in the private sphere.

(333)

The system has rarely acknowledged the housework assigned to women. Indeed, housework does not produce material value and greater economic spending power. According to society's

patriarchal and consumerist doctrines, housework is a “valueless job” but necessary to sustain the private and the public sphere.

On the one hand, Euripides’s *Medea*, in front of the chorus, denounces women’s confinement within to household duties: “They, men, allege that we enjoy a life / secure from danger safe at home, / while they confront the thrusting spears of war. / That’s nonsense: I would rather join / the battle rank of shields three times / than undergo birth-labor once” (*Medea* lines 247-52). The female body’s prowess and suffering during childbirth are ignored and not valued by Corinthian men because it is not politically rewarding. Also, childbirth is not a source of acquisition such as money, equipment, land, and fame. What *Medea* legitimately desires the most is the male acknowledgment of women’s courage when it comes to childbirth.

On the other hand, *Medea*’s comparison of women’s and men’s suffering re-establishes gender division under a hierarchical totality. Following the heroine’s statement, women suffer more in childbirth than men in battle, but both genders face imminent death. Here, each gender’s reality is irreconcilably misunderstood. *Medea*’s statement also reinforces a hierarchical domination based on whose suffering is greater and deserves more merit. Imposing a conception of how one’s suffering is ranked is exactly the endeavour of instrumental rationality. Then, acknowledging the other’s suffering would be essential to reduce formal reason’s dominating habit. In recognizing the other’s suffering, the mind would consider the possibility that equal suffering can lie within the other’s experience.

1.2.1.2 When Capital Dictates Humans’ Worth

Domination between individuals has evolved into a pyramidal power structure. The object of production has become the social and economic unifier among producers and

employers. In other words, the thing has developed into a divine fetichism. Material worship controls and transforms humans' social interactions into mere profit calculations. Late capitalist individuals see themselves as potential commodities that can enchant one's economic and social status through their time and physical participation in the system of production. This economic calculation is a step further than mere domination between individuals. Both the employer and the employee succumb to the ideology supposed to free them from their mythical past. Since the industrial revolution, money and its productivity have become the new myth in which "nothing" seems to exist beyond a life ruled by an economic system; the Enlightenment has reverted, once more, into mythology.

According to Adorno, what is deeply pervasive is the measurement that the instrumental reason has undertaken to rank people's worth accordingly to the individual's social and economic importance. Indeed,

not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind. Individuals shrink to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected of them. Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things. (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 21)

Individuals do not see the subjects behind the veil of commodification. Their work in the materialist system calculates the individuals' societal implication, their reputation equals their pay, and their respectability amounts to their capital. Economic superiority has proved to be reason's new mechanism of serenity because money has "reached such a size, acquired such a

critical mass” that capital now appears to be “an institution, an expression of society as a whole” (Cook 14).

In a world where capital has become king, it provides security, stability, and richness for its devotees, whereas poverty, violence, and seclusion are punishments reserved for the nonbelievers. The poor are the new heretics. For example, in Wolf’s novel, *Medea* compares the social hierarchy of Corinth and the role that gold plays in the social ranking of the city’s population:

Corinth is obsessed with gold...What we found most disconcerting was this: the worth of a Corinthian citizen is measured by the quantity of gold in his possession, and the contributions he must take to the place are calculated accordingly. Entire armies of clerks are employed in making these calculations...[king Creon] proclaimed a law forbidding his subjects to wear gold jewelry unless their contributions to the palace reached a certain level. (*Medea* 24)

Medea comes from Colchis (East) and arrives in Corinth (west). *Medea* finds the evolution of a mentality from which she initially fled. Commonly acknowledged is the parallel of the two Germanies’ unification that Wolf, throughout the novel, draws constantly. Wolf was influenced by Marxist thought and believed in human relations and self-consciousness’s positive effects on society (Resch 49). For *Medea* and the Colchians, gold is not considered economically profitable. Colchians use this metal as decoration that does not add value to the object.

Wolf does not describe Colchis as a society based on personal profit. However, as *Medea* reveals the reasons behind her flight from Colchis, she describes the city’s slow transformation under Aietees’ reign into a society based on self-interest. To avoid his son’s precipitated succession to the throne, Aietees plots Apsyrtos’ murder that would later be pinned on *Medea* by

the Argonauts and the city of Corinth. According to Medea's interpretation, Colchis is "plagued" by this growth in selfishness and self-interest that his father, the king, has spread. She leaves with Jason primarily because Colchis has become a corrupted and lost land (Wolf, *Medea* 77). She finds herself in a society (West) that precisely represents the evolution of this self-interested economic mind. In Corinth, people are not considered by their social relations but by their level of wealth. More capital they possess and higher in the social hierarchy they rank, and better respectability they acquire.

Similarly, in Euripides' play *Medea*, Jason employs a language that radicalizes the objectification of his matrimonial relationship with Glauce: "For if my wife holds me of any value, she'll estimate / my wish above material possessions, I am sure of that" (lines 962-3). Words such as "value," "material," "possessions," and the verb "estimate" underscore Jason's economic language. He tries to convince Medea that she should keep her gold garments to herself because gold is not a rare resource for the palace. Jason uses a capitalist language that is permeated by antithetic elements. He wishes that the Corinthian princess should love him, not for his wealth but for who he is as a human being. Jason reveals the double standard; men can marry for political and economic purposes, but women can only wed for love. As Wolf's *Medea* similarly explains, Jason only believes that she helped him to obtain the Golden Fleece because she "must have been helplessly in thrall to him..." (*Medea* 15). This language shows the pervasive effect of materialism on human relationships. Materialist exchange of social relationships counters the instinctual desire to be loved. Ultimately, the rational mechanism that drives humans' identification for "what they are for themselves ... [and] what they think they are, is secondary" (Adorno and Pickford 248).

1.2.1.3 Capitalism and Violence in Female-female Relations

It is essential to give serious attention to the contemporary economic context that governs gender relations in discussing women's struggles. In analyzing Euripides's and Wolf's *Medea*, it is possible to trace capitalism's continuous and pervasive effects on feminism, including female-female relations. More precisely, neoliberalism encourages a rugged individualism that facilitates woman-woman violence for personal profit goals, and Euripides' *Medea* and Wolf's *Agamemnon* are the figureheads of this ubiquitous economic violence.

To better appreciate Adorno's theory and its usefulness in understanding late capitalist feminism, it is essential to describe the concept of disenchantment. According to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Enlightenment's program is to demystify the world's meanings. It wants to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge" (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 1). Disenchantment is a critical period within which the mind's consciousness is disenchanted; the cognitive approach to the world collapses under its failure to apprehend nature. The Enlightenment eradicates "the last remnant of its own self-awareness" through thoughts, which does enough violence to the self to shatter myths (Horkheimer and W. Adorno 2). As the Tutor in Euripides proclaims, "Ancient ties become displaced by newer ones..." (*Medea* line 76). Thus, this ideological remnant becomes mythology as it cannot perpetuate or improve humankind's control over nature.

Each disenchantment opens new opportunities to exploit or conceptualize the natural world differently. In this regard, Adorno considers Enlightenment as "a series of related intellectual and practical operations which are presented as demythologizing, secularizing or disenchanting some mythical, religious or magical representation of the world" (qtd. in Stone

234). Disenchantment is desirable for Adorno if it does not entail suffering for the other. Indeed, even his theory of negative dialectic requires individuals to radically change their approach to differences, which implicitly demands a personal disenchantment vis-à-vis the ego's subjectivity (Stone 240). Adorno criticizes the pervasive succession of formal reason's disenchantments provoked by its inability to perform mediation between itself and nature. Each new religion, philosophy, and science produces another cognitive cage founded on identical thinking. When differences resurge from their incompatibility with the hegemonic system of thought, masters use violence to impose conformity. Violence is sustained in each new disenchantment to arrive at the same result: the need for another disenchantment.

First and second wave feminists have tried to establish respectful and egalitarian relations between genders. Feminism has been and still is a movement of acceptance vis-à-vis differences. Under Adorno's thought, feminism, through its manifestation into concrete social actions at the end of the 19th century, is a form of disenchantment vis-à-vis the patriarchal order. Feminism has been promoting legal and social demands to rebalance the asymmetrical position of women within the overly male-oriented society. What is meant by feminist "progress" is debatable among social and gender theories and Critical Theory. Nowadays, criticisms of Western feminism revolve around the potentiality of feminists to work within the patriarchal system and achieve significant societal improvements for women. Legally, it is fundamental to acknowledge first- and second-wave feminism's positive contributions to Western women's rights and legal status. However, women's fight against male objectification seems astray regarding economic emancipation in neoliberal societies.

Power Feminism, a branch of the third wave feminism, represents a restoration of old social and economic violence, which the capitalist system sustains by its insistence on rugged individualism. The system recalls men's quest for autonomy vis-à-vis nature: a struggle that has brought about centuries of hostility toward women. Following Oksala's argument, the neoliberal subject pursues only personal interests, making him governable. The neoliberal individual "responds systematically and in a predictable way to strategic modifications artificially introduced into the environment" (Oksala 111). The neoliberal society asks for systematic modifications of the individual's formation to maximize competition. Thus, the free-market pushes subjects to rely only on themselves.

Power Feminism suggests that women must mimic men to achieve economic and social emancipation (qtd. in Caputi 4). In neoliberalism, the models of Power Feminism are tough, independent, and aggressive. They can "overpower another in a flashy tour de force.... They appeal because they're indomitable, lending credence to the assertion that women can now do everything that men can, and that women behaving aggressively is now not only allowed, but glorified" (Caputi 108). Under late capitalism, this conception of emancipation indicates that economic prosperity and capital accumulation necessarily equal freedom. In purely financial terms, this logic is correct. Still, suppose the equation includes social emancipation. In that case, one can see that businesswomen who mimic masculinity and rugged individualism for the sake of profit do violence to their fellow women. Endorsing the male idolatry that has been dominating women for thousands of years, these female bosses reproduce the exact mechanism of domination and exploitation that feminists of the first and second wave have criticized. Capitalism, economic violence, and repression exerted by and among women point once more to money's rule over human relations.

For example, in Euripides's tragedy, Medea's offering of her gold garments to the Corinthian princess and the consequent death caused by these suggest that wealth consumes the subject. The servant, coming back from the palace, carries back to Medea the dreadful news of Glauce's murder:

SERVANT. (...) the wretched girl awakened from her silenced voice

and tight-shut eyes, and moaned a dreadful cry of pain.

Two pincer torments were invading her:

first the golden band around her head spat

an astounding fountain of incendiary fire;

and then the clinging fabric, given by your boys,

began to eat into the poor girl's milky flesh.

Engulfed in flames she rose up from her throne,

and bolted, shaking hair and head this way and that,

attempting to throw off the wreath.

But still the gold clung tightly by its fastenings;

and when she shook her hair,

instead the blazing doubled in intensity.

Then, overcome by agony,

she crumpled to the ground, unrecognizable

to anyone except her parents' view.

The position of her eyes was not distinct,

nor any feature of her pretty face;

and blood was trickling from her crown, mixed sputtering
with fire. (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 1183-99)

This passage must be cited at length because what Glauce suffers from is a foreshadowing metaphor for the subject's complete dissolution within the vast capitalist economy. It is a juxtaposition of Critical Theory and feminist discourse. Indeed, through her desire to avenge Jason's betrayal and regain traditional masculine respectability, Medea enchants her golden garments so that they ignite at the sun's light. The princess of Colchis is aware of the beauty of her gifts; they embody wealth and richness for whoever values gold as expensive. Gold shines under the sun; the gods' blood is gold; therefore, this pure metal becomes valuable and transpires wealth for whoever wears it. Medea uses wealth to both kill her "adversary" (economically and socially) and, at the same time, to turn her victim to absolute totality: the dissolution of Glauce's particularities.

Glauce's dissolution of her subject predicts the homogenization of consumerist societies. Indeed, her skin, eyes, and face are liquified by the fire till no features of her past image can be recognized. The homogeneous and burning mixture dilutes all the particularities of what composed the beautiful Glauce. Her decomposition into a homogeneous substance foreshadows neoliberal feminism and the abolition of differences. The capitalist system has homogenized its subjects to conform to the economy. Women's and men's desires have become reflections of their neighbours': money, success, and power (Oksala 115). Thus, identical thinking, sustained by the capitalist apparatus, abolishes the subject's individuality and ability of self-criticism by its submission to the central ideology. Neoliberal individuals reflect on each other, and the myth is re-established. The totalizing ideology dominates and sculpts the mind to replicate its idols. This

achievement passes through the individuals' homogenization and conformity at the expense of those who cannot or do not want to identify with the central ideology.

In the end, Glaucé accepts Medea's gifts because she comes from the royal family: a group of people who dominate the economy by exploiting its people. Like all palace members, Glaucé is the captive of her ideology (wealth accumulation) and the worshipper of her dominator (capital). By way of conforming to the palace's signature of wealth, she is, consciously or not, unable to resist "once she [looks] close at the finery..." (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 1157-8). Glaucé, portrayed by Euripides, glances at post-feminism:

post-feminism is more a lifestyle than an activist movement, which positions itself as a means towards the achievement of a "higher-status lifestyle, with consumption of high-status commodities. Post-feminism therefore appeals to a comparatively small number of women – those who are in positions of privilege- that dominate mainstream media discourse. (Hains 99)

Glaucé is attracted to Medea's golden apparel because her royal status has generated endless stimuli in her, which ask for material acquisition. She acquires lavish richness to differentiate herself from those who do not hold power, namely the poor citizens of Corinth. Instead of forming a critical subjectivity, material possessions give protection and control to capitalist individuals. Like second nature, Glaucé is attracted to gold instinctively, which inevitably proclaims her own demise: her subject's dissolution.

Similarly, Wolf's Agamedea may be seen as a figurehead of neoliberalism who adopts the Corinthian capitalism' philosophy to achieve vengeance on Medea. Contrary to Euripides'

Glauce, Agamede is not Corinthian but Colchian. She arrives in Corinth with Medea and her fellow Colchians. She used to be Medea's favourite apprentice, but a master-apprentice conflict worsened their relationship when Agamede once asked to receive more attention than the other pupils, and Medea refused by saying: "...You can't have everything" (Wolf, *Medea* 65). Since Medea was like a second mother to Agamede, she interpreted the Colchian princess' refusal as a withdrawal of "the affection the child [Agamede] was yearning for..." (Wolf, *Medea* 65). From this day on, Agamede has built rancour vis-à-vis Medea. In Corinth, rumours about Medea's implication in Apsyrtus' murder pave the way for Agamede to release her resentment against her previous teacher.

This character may sound familiar to someone accustomed to Wolf's post-1989 literature. By giving a voice to Agamede, Christa Wolf criticizes her fellow East Germans who once supported the socialist dream of an egalitarian society. Agamede, as for many other East Germans, participated in the spread of Western "rumours" concerning Wolf's and Medea's implications (Wolf's rumours that she cooperated with the Stasi, and Medea who betrayed the Colchians by killing her brother). Agamede embodies the assimilation of Eastern/Colchian subjects into the capitalist system of the Western/Corinthian society.

The first visible step toward Agamede's subjectivity's homogenization is her contact with material richness, which she can now afford through her healing missions. Indeed, she receives monetary compensation from the Corinthians for her healing services, but the paycheque varies according to their pity. The more they pity her "primitive" Colchian accommodations, the more they pay her. This money acquired partly from pity does not bother Agamede because she can profit from her "primitive" culture by buying the Corinthian upper class' luxurious clothes,

foods, and wine (Wolf, *Medea* 54–5). In getting used to this sort of treatment, Agamedea consciously internalizes the reduction of Colchian culture to savagery and primitiveness, a cultural stage of humanity that is, under the Corinthian rhetoric, “backward” in every sense of the word.

Subsequently, Agamedea clearly understands that the Corinthians see themselves as superior to the Colchians, and she intentionally participates in this subjugation to remain a visible subject within the Corinthian court. As Agamedea notes, the Corinthians “were born with the unshakable conviction that they’re superior to people who are short of stature and brown of skin...” (Wolf, *Medea* 57). Here, Wolf refers to the West’s colonialism and the feeling of inferiority that East Germans sensed vis-à-vis West Germans following the reunification. The East Germans inhabited the other side of the wall, the barren land occupied by “childish people” who needed Enlightenment from Westerners. Even if Agamedea finally claims that Corinthians are “inferior stocks,” she resists to assert her Colchian identity because she does not “want to be nobody” (Wolf, *Medea* 57). However, to survive, Agamedea needs to abandon her Colchian identity and embrace the Corinthian cultural and economic lifestyle.

Also, Agamedea’s body becomes an economic lifter as she converts to Corinthian femininity. She is more aware of her body’s image and how it attracts the male gaze. She merchandises her body to Turon and Akamas in order to be recognized as a valuable player in the conspiracy against Medea (Wolf, *Medea* 66). This power of sexual attraction, however, comes with a price and responsibilities. It brings considerable suffering upon Agamedea because she realizes, among other things, that her nose is too big to satisfy Akamas’ gaze (Wolf, *Medea* 58). To survive and climb the social ladder, her body must conform to Corinthian physical

femininity. In the end, Agameda behaves and thinks in neoliberalist terms: she commodifies her body to remain a recognizable and legitimate subject.

As a final stage, Agameda mostly takes pleasure in spying, conspiring, spending, and manipulating others (Wolf, *Medea* 59). Using the patriarchal judicial system to her advantage, Agameda testifies at Medea's trial and participates in the rumours that stand on hearsay. More precisely, Agameda is an amalgam of Euripides' Medea and Glauce. Like Glauce, her subject is homogenized to reflect Corinthian economic and patriarchal identity, and like Medea, she uses the master's tools to achieve her goals. Like Buchner's Rosetta, Wolf's Agameda lives in a world that cannot restore her visibility; she remains invisible and "becomes definable by that which she is not" (Wolf, *Citadel of Reason* 179).

1.3 Formal Reason's Violence is Genderless

The comparison between Euripides and Christa Wolf suggests that Western individuals have not yet escaped Enlightenment thinking's hold. Reason's current form uses identical thinking to secure its survival against nature. However, its survival mechanism proceeds only at the expense of the other's well-being. As Euripides' and Wolf's Medea show, formal reason is violent to differences, and it does not exempt "woman" as a social construct. Also, under Adorno's thought, the ancient and the modern Medea are victims of the Enlightenment thinking's psychological suppression of human nature, which results in economic objectification. Regarding this latter, Power Feminism and neoliberal feminism are the figureheads of this economic violence imposed on but not exclusively on female-female relations.

Finally, Christa Wolf and Euripides highlight formal reason's ungendered domination over individuals. In other words, women and men can be subjected to the formal reason's

violence throughout their survival quest against nature's total reunification (Kallin 49). However, to approach feminism with Adorno's Critical Theory, it is essential to investigate women's violent classification by the heteropatriarchy. To deconstruct male logic regarding genders and stop the disenchantment loophole, it is necessary to trace back women's primary form of classification: women as nature's reminiscences.

Chapter 2

2.1 Women's Categorization as the Negative Imprint of Men's Anxiety: Nature and Women

The previous chapter assumes that gender identity is not a variable that influences formal reason's domination. Nevertheless, stipulating that formal reason has equally affected men and women would be outrageous for many reasons. Among others, it would disregard women's historical testimonies of their domination and subjugation under men's authority. Patriarchal society, characterized by identical thinking based on male subjectivity, has formed women's economic and social identity through its negative imprint. More precisely, the patriarchal male subject identifies women as nature's representatives. The male conception of womanliness embodies the undifferentiation between subjects and nature. Women become subjects of male dominance insofar as they remain undifferentiated from men's anxiety vis-à-vis nature. As Andrew Hewitt points out, "the problem with any such assertion, of course, would be that the domination of woman takes by means of her identification with nature" (153). On the contrary, men's dominance over femininity is exerted only "by identifying her with nature" (Hewitt 153). Thus, to liberate Medea from patriarchal discourse, it is necessary to capture the essence of this discourse.

According to Adorno, human history is the history of repression of instincts. As nature's subjects and objects, humans' needs spur irrevocably from instincts. The ego (formal reason, consciousness), an agent born from its predator (natural essence), cannot wholly differentiate itself from its constitution. The subject's primal instincts, such as love, anger, and sexual drive, remind the ego of its naturalness because it is itself a product of nature. Consciousness cannot exist without the instinct of self-preservation. In her reading of Adorno, Deborah Cook suggests

that “giving the lie to the supremacy of thought over being [...] Adorno contends that instincts continue to preponderate over thought” (35). Indeed, matter exists only through the mind’s mediation influenced by the social and historical context of the individual. Thus, absolute knowledge is unachievable by reason. The mind can mediate its environment, but nature “nonetheless remains distinct from its mediated forms” (Cook 35). Then, it is possible to affirm that Adorno and Freud share some theoretical affinities regarding human instincts. Even though Adorno remains highly critical of psychoanalysis, both acknowledge the prerequisite to giving more space to the id’s (unconscious) instinctual nature to cultivate a peaceful relationship between the ego and the id. The ego has developed a narcissistic character by creating its closed system of concepts commanded by its dominating needs for survival. Incapable of self-differentiation, the ego is repulsed by what resurfaces as irrational impulses because it has forgotten its natural origin. Since the ego must maintain control to survive, it must repress any impulses deemed irrational. Consequently, this repression inflicts internal violence on the subject. The reconciliation between the ego and the id becomes de facto necessary.

As Power Feminism reminds us, recognizing one's epistemological and linguistic entrapment requires a liberation from the ego and the social apparatus that dictates the subject's constitution. Additionally, it is to be aware of disenchantment and its mythical reproduction in violence. Analyzing women's dehumanization through her naturalization will help deconstruct patriarchal thinking. This chapter does not seek to discover women's truthful identity. In this regard, this attempt would obfuscate Adorno. Identity is not something that must be imposed on someone, which is the task of identical thinking. Instead, this chapter suggests a deconstruction of male identity fashioned by its negative reflection on women.

As previously mentioned, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that the birth of the self (ego) comes from the mind's evolution into a mediating form of thinking that concentrates its efforts to survive against nature's incommensurability. To secure its prevalence, the ego, through its mediative cognition (the dialectic of Enlightenment), has built a coherent language of nature that asserts absolute knowledge over matter (identical thinking). Knowledge dispenses safety and provides power as a form of control because the individual can now understand the unfathomable nature. Hence, the object reveals its (false) totality through the mind's mediation, and human beings believe they have the upper hand over nature. Since the mind has reverted into identical thinking by absorbing all particularities into a compact universal totality, the individual does not need to critically approach the "known" object (Stone 232). Specificities are lost, and concepts remain undifferentiated.

It is undeniable that womanhood from antiquity to the present Western world has retained its oldest form of male domination. Indeed, following Adorno's and Horkheimer's argument, men have been controlling and dominating women because they are, in patriarchal terms, representatives of nature (56). Women are the Other, the inhuman, and the uncivilized. In patriarchal societies, men are the only recognizable subjects to detain civility and rationality. Since the "Other" relentlessly reminds men of their natural origin, patriarchal reason needs to circumscribe its dialectical image; like the Jungian shadow projection, the weakness and self-loathing of binary thinking is cast onto the external Other: the opponent.

2.1.2 Men's Civilization Development through Nature's and Women's Subjugation: Medea the Witch and the Beast

According to Cornelia Klinger, Western rationality is to blame for both women's and nature's exploitation, and men's path to modernity has only exacerbated their servitude (Nagl-

Docekal and Klinger 148). For instance, in Euripides' tragedy, Medea criticizes women's position within ancient Greek society. As a wife, Medea denounces men's objectification of their concubines; they become mere objects of obedience. Since Greek wives are restricted to their household (οἶκος) and serve their husband's will unconditionally, they are portrayed as gentle, domesticated beasts under their master's "yoke." This male portrayal dictates how women ought to think of "an enviable life" (Euripides, Griffith, et al. Medea lines 241-242). The metaphor of the yoke is crucial because it not only refers to women's subjugation under men's control but also points to the exploitation of women's labouring force in building a civilization. Agriculture and sedentarism are core characteristics of Western societies; the former is essential for food sustainability and for satisfying the elementary needs of sedentary populations. Fortunately, agricultural practices have become more accessible and stable with the labour of strong-built animals. However, since women have essential social and biological roles, men have caged them under their "yoke"; they have "animalized" women for strictly instrumental purposes. Men's relationship with their wives has constantly reminded them of the impossibility of becoming autonomous. Driven by the ego's survival and oblivion of its natural origin, the rational man's total self-differentiation from nature (women, children, and foreigners) is more irrationally exacerbated into violence, which was the starting point of the ego's differentiation from nature.

In her review on continental feminist perspectives, Cornelia Klinger notes two interesting male interpretations of "women as nature." According to Carolyn Merchant's argument, Western civilization's rational advancement has always succeeded "at the expense of nature." Indeed, "as the unifying bonds of the older hierarchical cosmos were severed, European culture set itself above and apart from all that was symbolized by nature" (qtd. in Nagl-Docekal and Klinger 148). Also, as Western rationality has evolved into analytical and systematic mediation, women's

creative and “magic-mimetic” powers have come into conflict with the newly developed scientific methods for nature appropriation (qtd. in Nagl-Docekal and Klinger 148).

In complementarity to this view, Silvia Bovenschen asserts that the industrial age has propelled man as the “new human” (Nagl-Docekal and Klinger 149). Bourgeois industrialization has fixed the image of nature’s vengeance in women, and their exploitation has been rationalized. During this time, women did not take part in nature’s subjugation. On the contrary, they have remained objects of domination. For example, Bovenschen suggests the witch who “stands at the point of the historical development where the exploitation of nature takes on its systematic character” (qtd. in Nagl-Docekal and Klinger 149). In other words, ancient beliefs in witchcraft have triggered the rational ego’s fear of natural absorption. Witchcraft cannot be understood through causal and mathematical logic because patriarchal men’s mental activity feels at home in the cold abstraction of the formula’s “objective” truthfulness (Wolf, *Citadel of Reason* 172). Then, the potential of women’s language of nature, exemplified by the witch, is threatened by the rational subject who believes to know more about nature than nature itself. The “new human” has reduced the nonidentity of womanhood to simple heresy. Thus, Western society burned witches at the stake due to patriarchy’s identical thinking, with modern science and Abrahamic religions as the leaders of such reasoning.

Considering this view, the comparison of Euripides’ and Wolf’s *Medea* demonstrates the continuation of women’s subjugation in cartesian society. In Euripides’ play, *Medea* embodies the witch, the enchantress, and the doer of evils. When *Medea* cries out about Creon’s decree and the reasons that have led him to her banishment, the king of Corinth explains:

CREON. I am afraid of you—no point in mincing words —

I am afraid you'll work incurable mischief upon my daughter. And many things
combine toward this fear of mine:

you are by nature clever and well versed in evil practices; and you are feeling
bruised

because you've been deprived of the embraces of your man [...]

Your words are soothing to the ear;

But I still have a horror that inside your head

you're hatching plans for something bad. (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines
282–87, 316)

Fearful of her evil practices, Creon affirms his ego's refusal to look positively at nature that composes equally men and women. Under Creon's claim, Medea is naturally well-versed and clever. It stipulates that nature has an enchanting effect on men because it appeals to them. Also, it signifies that her speech resembles Creon's political rhetoric, which is a domain reserved for men. However, since the feminine physique of Medea provokes a dissonance with her masculine oratory, her attractive language blocks male identical thinking. Creon experiences a primary attack of nature on his male ratio. He must stay grounded and resist the temptation to lose the power of his privileged gender position.

As she finally understands that Creon would not reconsider her banishment, the princess of Colchis ultimately appeals further to the king's sensitive humanness (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 344-347), but her banishment is irrevocable. Even if Creon grants Medea the day to organize her exile, he cannot renege on his words because it would amount to his submission under her evil soothsaying and practices.

Interestingly enough, Harding suggests that Euripides's gender dualism between Medea and the male authority reveals the rapid social transformation of genders (qtd. in Gabriel 348). In fact, Medea challenges the established gender norms. Her actions (murders) and her rhetoric of well-versed words blur the line between manhood and womanhood. Under her "supposed" magical aura interpreted by Creon, she becomes a figure of social trans-gendering because her status as a woman collapses under the males' depoliticized gender identification. Since she cannot receive justice and reparation under womanhood, she transgresses the patriarchal "impenetrable" frontier between genders to be recognized as a legitimate human being. In other words, Medea's spell, which is nothing less than her male rhetoric and behaviour, is a metamorphosis into a man. Her "transformation" disrupts Creon's identical thinking on gender. It leaves an impression that nature cannot conform to the patriarchal normative and behavioural postulate of a "rational" division of gender.

Creon's and Jason's mapping of gender "onto distinct principles" and Medea's "insistence in her connection to the social order" create an environment composed of confronting tensions (qtd. in Gabriel 350). Ironically, Euripides demonstrates that genders are not crystallized even under political suppression and are not by nature circumscribed. Genders always have the potential to be other than what the societal apparatus prescribes. Politically and socially, men's doings and women's doings are not rationally exclusive vis-à-vis the other gender. To echo Butler's theory, Medea performs a gender that is not hers in the traditional patriarchal society of ancient Greece. Gender identification reproduces itself through behavioural iteration. Daily repetitions of actions and behaviours enforce the power of gender identification, in which the crystallization of gender takes place (Baril 66). Hence, Medea defies Creon's mapping of gender through her behaviour and male oratory.

In comparison to Euripides', Wolf's Medea has no magical power. The Argonauts make the primary rumours about her supposed "magical" skills, and Jason knows it. Her only "magic" is about healing (Wolf, *Medea* 48). Wolf's Medea's attractiveness does not result from magical enchantments but from her male-mediated form. Because Medea's beauty appeals to Greek men's sensual desires, they spread the rumour that she uses magic to control male minds. They violently reflect their emotional repression in degrading and manipulating Medea's social image. Certainly, Euripides' and Wolf's Medea do not socially differ; in the eyes of society, she is the "Wicked Witch" (Wolf, *Medea* 40).

Furthermore, even if Jason, in his incomprehensible state of love vis-à-vis Medea, asks her if she is a sorceress, and she answers positively, it does not mean that she claims to be an enchantress per se (Wolf, *Medea* 47). In Medea's language, the word sorceress is not immoral as in the patriarchal sense. In this case, Medea affirms herself as a witch only regarding the situation: Jason feels emotions that he has never felt before, and Medea can sense them. She knows the effects she triggers in him. However, Jason's emotional whirlwind can only be assessed through cognitive association with magic. For Medea, being a sorceress does not hold any bad connotation. It is only throughout her experience with the Corinthian culture that emotions of love and sexual attractiveness become socially and publicly pervasive (Wilke 18). In the end, the words sorceress and witch, positively associated at the beginning of Jason's and Medea's relationship, are transformed into their undifferentiated Greek form of wickedness: a "figment of the Corinthian's imagination" (Arnds 420). Thus, Jason must be on his guard against her "bewildering" attraction if he does not want to be "bamboozled" once more (Wolf, *Medea* 32,38).

2.1.2 Women as Reminiscences of the Primordial Past: Medea and Helios, Nature's Ambiguity

Genth suggests that formal reason's violence has increased since it considers itself supernatural. Indeed, she claims that male rationality has positioned itself as a reason "cleansed of materiality and of the transitoriness of natural process, as abstract and thus as capable of dominating natural processes..."(qtd. in Nagl-Docekal and Klinger 149). Furthermore, modern binary thinking has propelled rationality as the sole source of power, which disclaims any affinity with nature. Thus, everyone who cannot relate to this formal matrix of concepts must endorse its dominated negation. According to Genth, women, children, foreign people, animals, and vegetation have traditionally taken this role (qtd. in Nagl-Docekal and Klinger 152). This notion of the supernatural man is not alien to Wolf who

has traced the relationship between the evolution of the Western paradigm of reality which has led us to the brink of global destruction, and the suppression of the 'female factor' in most cultures throughout history, leading to the increasing estrangement of man from woman, and from Nature. (Schiwy and Rosen 3)

Wolf's Medea incarnates this barbarian (foreign) woman who, on the one hand, represents nature's threat against the supernatural mind and, on the other hand, nature's positive agency in human beings.

In Greek mythology, the supernatural mind that takes control over nature has become the legitimate ruler of society. Indeed, the Greek cosmogonic genealogy, literalized through Hesiod's *Theogony*, explains how rationality and the control over nature have become the norms to survive in an incommensurable world. In the beginning, there was Chaos, the Abyss, Gaia (Earth), the Tartaros, and Eros (love, sex). Then, the Abyss gave birth to Erebus (darkness) and "dark Night." Gaia gave birth to Ouranos (Heaven, sky), the Mountains, "raging Sea," and from

Ouranos, she gave birth to Ocean and the Titans (Hesiod et al. lines 116-135). These early divinities incarnate primordial elements of nature. They are more or less organized material substances. They are entities that threaten the rational mind because of their immanence, timelessness, and opacity. For instance, Eros, personifying love, affects humans and nonhuman beings. He is immaterial but hunts and animates everyone. Eros is universal and particular in each of its apparitions to beings. Since he is formless and immanent, human beings' attempts to control him inevitably fail each time. Indeed, even human beings' emotional suppression proves that men cannot separate themselves from Eros. Love and sexuality are part of what makes humans living beings composed of desires and passions.

Medea's lineage represents these primordial deities. As the myth tells, Medea is the grandchild of Helios (Hyperion). This divinity is sometimes associated with the Titans but primarily known as the sun god or simply the Sun (Britannica). During the Titanomachy (Τιτανομαχία), Zeus and the other Olympian gods fought against the Titans, which resulted in the Olympian order. In Greek mythology, Helios personifies the Sun and rides his shining chariot from east to west. In pre-Hellenic Rhodes (5th century BCE), Helios was considered the chief god. However, only in the following century was his role as the Sun supplanted by the Olympian Apollo. In counterpart, Apollo is the god of music, poetry, light, and the leader of the Muses. Here, light is to be understood as "Enlightenment"; he is the god of reason. Since light mimics the Sun's radiance, Apollo became closely associated with the Sun, if not replacing it (Britannica). Then, Medea's worship of Helios (the Sun) is, in Euripides's tragedy, a threat to formal reason's self-preservation, but also, in Wolf's novel, seen as a positive force of human nature.

Nonetheless, this interpretation of Medea does not suggest that women are the ultimate representatives of nature, such as "Mother Earth." It would be to follow identical thinking, which implicitly excludes men from the natural world. On the contrary, this chapter claims that women as threatening reminiscences of nature by the patriarchal reason is a logic that violently rejects men's naturalness. In its attempt to clean itself from any natural reminiscences, the traditional patriarchal reason transfers the anxiety of its naturalness to women to better dominate nature. Thus, under the conventional formal reason's logic, only the knowledge acquired from the mind's mediation of nature can stand as rational and desirable.

Euripides' Medea and her grandfather Helios embody the male fear of nature's inhalation. Before Medea, Creon orders that she and her children be already far gone from Corinth when "the sun god's coming light ... looks upon ... the borders of this land..." (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 352-4). Otherwise, the sun god's rays would reveal Medea's noncompliance and put her to death. Creon cannot revoke his words; they are irreversible (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 353-4). The king reassures himself that he speaks on behalf of the sun god Apollo. The god's name is never mentioned throughout the play and is always referred to as "the sun god." In an Olympian society such as Corinth, Apollo appears to be the logical divine entity in front of whom Creon swears his allegiance. However, contrary to Creon's religious faithfulness in the Olympian Apollo, Medea's father "descended from the Sun" (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* line 406). Consequently, Medea relies on a deity that encompasses the rationalization of nature. Helios personifies the Sun's massive weight and opacity. This deity is the giver of natural light and warm temperature that can equally cause droughts and fruitful harvests. It is a force of nature that is beyond formal reason's comprehension. Medea's divine lineage represents a threat

to Corinth because she embodies a living reminiscence (Helios' grandchild) of unsupervised nature.

Morton Schoolman, in his comparison between *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, recalls the Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian experience as a replication of the dual relationship between formal reason and nature. On the one hand, the Titanian world belongs to the Dionysian experience because the identity collapses under its unification with nature, which Nietzsche calls the “primordial unity” (45). Imprisoned by Dionysus's experience, the individuals’ “very gestures express enchantment,” “recognizes what identity excludes, what the image omits” (Nietzsche et al. 37; Schoolman 89). According to feminist scholars and writers, the pre-patriarchal subject experienced nature as an all-embracing, vigorous spirit and “felt from inside herself [nature], her heart beating strongly in the heart(s) of all” (Schiwy and Rosen 8).

On the other hand, the Olympian gods represent the individual's Apollonian experience (subjectivity, reason) that creates dreamlike images (concepts, thoughts) of nature to resist unification. Indeed, the Apollonian experience had vanquished the Titanian past, during which the Dionysian experience (individual's merger with nature, the self-forgetfulness of identity) reigned solely (Schoolman 89).

Schoolman's analogous comparison helps understand why Creon fears Medea's Titanian affiliation. Since Euripides endorsed Socratic thinking based exclusively on the Apollonian experience (ego), he could not portray Medea and Helios (nature) in a good light (Nietzsche et al. 82). The princess of Colchis is a living remembrance of the Titans' political order in which identity was indistinguishable from and subordinated by nature. The Apollonian experience born from the self's desire to survive exists only in its self-differentiation from the Dionysian

experience. Thus, Medea's suffering and existence cannot be acknowledged since she incarnates Dionysus' legitimacy. In the end, to preserve his rational identity, the king of Corinth cannot let himself be enchanted by Medea's Dionysian spell.

It is not to say that Medea necessarily embodies the nonidentical in being woman, or the undamaged nature as Dinora Hernández puts it (364). As the previous chapter shows, formal reason's dominating habits affect and submit any gender. According to Rochelle Duford, as a reflection of Sade's Juliette, Euripides' Medea's “successful liberation from patriarchal institutions ... is caught up within the domination imposed by the logic of the Enlightenment” (788). Indeed, in claiming her natural ancestry, Medea not only acknowledges her dependency on nature but also powers herself up through it. As she recognizes her unbreakable link with nature, one could think that Medea's formal reason would reduce its hold on the id to discover new ways of approaching life. However, Euripides' narrative and Medea's younger versions of the myth disavow this scenario. Creon's words are irrevocable, but Medea finally proves to him that his order can be reversible through nature's power. As much as Creon claims that the Olympian gods have neutralized nature under their yoke, Medea, in instrumentalizing nature for individual ends, mirrors her opponent's domination behaviour toward nature. By eliminating Creon and Glauce through the Sun's power, Medea reverses the king's judgment and makes it her own. In other words, Medea “utilizes the master's tools’ and embodies” “intellectual pleasure in regression, *amor intellectualis diaboli*, the joy of defeating civilization with its own weapon” (Duford 788; Horkheimer and W. Adorno 74). Then, Euripides portrays nature and women as uncontrollable entities that take over rational civilization once more.

In addition, while Medea remembers herself of her divine lineage, she makes a rapid connection between womanhood and Helios, which suggests women's inclination to depravity:

MEDEA. You're from a noble father and descended from the Sun.

You have the expertise. What's more, we are born women.

It may be we're unqualified for deeds of virtue:

yet as the architects of every kind of mischief,

we are supremely skilled. (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 406-9)

According to this passage, Medea's expertise to conduct “every kind of mischief” arises from womanhood. She associates womanhood with wickedness and disqualifies women as virtuous agents. The first-degree reading of this passage recalls ancient Greek women’s complete seclusion in the household. Under Greek men's rhetoric, women are “children” devoid of rational reasoning. Thus, in line with this misogynistic depiction, women do not know morals, ethics, and good conduct. Nothing more is left to them than natural urges and impulses that can become useful to their household under their men's yoke.

Inversely, a second-degree reading suggests that Medea uses the male depiction of women to legitimate her behaviour. Since men have portrayed women as irrational creatures and best at putting together evil plans, Medea acts out her gender’s characterization by the patriarchal society. More precisely, from the point of view of a contemporary reader, her rhetoric can be ironic. In front of the audience, Medea exclaims the normative and social constructs imposed on her gender without minimizing her suffering's gravity. To be sure, this theatrical interpretation could not be employed in Ancient Greece because Euripides' *Medea* is not a comedy but a tragedy. Nonetheless, Medea's close association between nature (Helios) and womanhood demonstrates the patriarchal rationalization of the Medea myth.

In *Medea: A Modern Retelling*, one can observe that Medea, the princess of “barbaric” land, brings along her path concepts of positive nature. Even if Glauce thoughtfully renounces

Medea's portrayal of Corinth as a slaughterhouse, her critical and fond engagements with her leave a trace. Glauce cannot abandon Medea; she is divided between two irreconcilable views. On the one hand, a part of herself does not believe that the palace and its ideology are beyond reproach. On the other hand, she remains hopeful that Medea possesses the answer to her suffering: "Helios, help!" (Wolf, *Medea* 121). In an Olympian society, why does Glauce turn to a primordial divinity? This calling suggests a return to natural humanness characterized by closeness and warmth. In other words, Glauce requests Helios' aesthetics of sensibility to heal.

Contrary to Lu, who asserts that Christa Wolf erases Medea's supernatural elements, this essay does not agree with the protagonist's ungodliness (Lu 200). Wolf says nothing about Medea's divine ancestry, which does not discard the supernatural aspect of the protagonist. Glauce and Medea refer to Helios as a close deity to their heart. In the case of Medea, she does not explicitly affirm nor deny her divine lineage from Helios: "Neither Helios, the sun god, nor my beloved moon goddess will notice my absence" (Wolf, *Medea* 144). Hence, the divine status of Medea in Wolf's novel remains ambiguous, which allows the reader to speculate on her lineage.

Colchian culture praises Helios because the Colchian royal family, according to the mythological narrative, traces its lineage back to this Titan. As Medea and her Colchians immigrate to Corinth, their divine ancestry and religious beliefs are reduced to "charming savages" and barbaric remembrances of the Greeks' primordial past (Wolf, *Medea* 42). Helios, who personifies the Sun, is the giver of elementary light that helps to grow plants and food. He is the one who gave light to the gods and human beings. Like other primordial gods and Titans, he is the incarnation of immediate nature. As the mind progressed toward autonomy, the Olympians (rationalization of nature, formal reason) vanquished the Titans (embodiments of nature). Helios,

the Sun, was replaced by the enlightening god Apollo, the sun god. Then, Glauce's and Medea's Helios refer to the elemental power of the Sun; its warm and sensitive touch resembles human love characterized by sensitivity and togetherness. It personifies community growth by its democratically shared source of power. Differently put, it is "anything that promote[s] the development of all living things ... certain forces that unite us humans with everything alive that must flow freely lest life come to a standstill" (Wolf, *Medea* 91). Here, Christa Wolf portrays Medea and Helios in a positive light. It confirms Klinger's thesis that not all women's assimilations to nature are negative (151).

Nevertheless, here, femininity is not exclusively associated with positive nature. Helios, the Sun, is familiar to every individual who sees the light. If the Sun metaphorically sheds light on knowledge, does it unveil the unseeable reality? In other words, if the Sun's light is "democratically" accessible for everyone, does it entail that knowledge is everywhere but not perceivable by everyone? If so, what knowledge does the Sun reveal through its sunlight? Because the Sun's rays dispense warmth to the body and mimic thoughtful human relationships, Glauce's call upon Helios is about objective truths through physical experience. Suffering experiences are intrinsic to the human body, and Medea's testimony is a retelling of her suffering. In front of the jury, her story is nonidentical to Corinthians' identical thinking because suffering reveals trauma. Her body is moved and remembers the reality's affliction, a hardship that challenges the ego's relatedness. Thus, the experience of suffering might become an aesthetic storytelling that can positively change both women and men. As Medea's unequivocal banishment demonstrates, this aesthetics of sensibility personified by Helios represents a challenge to traditional male thinking. To better understand this aesthetic, the third chapter

investigates the potentialities of such aesthetic theory to free the subject from reason's violent form of thinking.

Also, Jason's encounter with Medea's primordial culture, which liberates something “wondrous” in him, is equally essential in understanding Medea's association with nature. To refer once more to Schoolman's analogy between Nietzsche and Adorno, Jason speaks of his Dionysian experience through his Apollonian assessment:

I did everything she [Medea] commanded me to do... I let myself be urged on by her savage drum music, which penetrated my limbs and drove me crazy, I no longer knew myself, I leapt among the bulls and slaughtered them, I was beside myself and wanted to be beside myself... I would have believed anything she said. What happened to me next, I don't know. It was atrocious, I know that for sure. My consciousness abandoned me.

(Wolf, *Medea* 46)

Here, Jason experiences a Nietzschean form of Dionysus' apparition. Unfamiliar music moves him. The drums transport him; he is beside himself and cannot recognize his being. His identity collapses under Dionysus' power; he makes one with nature. He can objectively sense the nonidentity of nature through his bodily impulses. Furthermore, as some extended researches show, Jason goes through a hypnagogic state: “the waking state wherein ‘the absence of directed, analytical (cortical) thinking’ leads to a loosening of ego’s boundaries, wherein boundaries” disappear and the individual experiences a more diffuse, intertwined awareness of unconscious streams so that irrational mental activity can resurface (Schiwy and Rosen 21). This dreamlike experience allows Jason to cultivate a multifaced, fearless attitude towards ambiguities that tolerates the integration of polarities and opposites. This attitude restricts formal reason’s revolt against “die Grenzen des Sagbaren” (Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*).

Nonetheless, Jason's Apollonian experience stops him short from appreciating his Dionysian experience. In the end, everything that he does not consciously remember is inevitably "atrocious." Indeed, he "had been in the jaws of Death, his breath had brushed [him], part of [him] was still in that other world that we so rightly fear" (Wolf, *Medea* 46). What his Apollonian mind recalls is the death of his hard-built ego. His identity has barely made it through the experience of this deathful "other world," which is closely linked by Jason to women's doings (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 16). If something non-Greek happened during his amok, it could not be his fault, but of Medea's enchantment. As Peter Arnds's reading of Wolf posits, this "art of repressing unwanted and distorting their reality according to the dictates of circumstances" is typical of the patriarchal mind (421). Jason's repression incarnates a developed stage of the mind's differentiating process vis-à-vis nature whose deadening is bolstered by the forfeiture of their rhythms (Colchian drums) and ambiguities (Schiwy and Rosen 8).

Medea's ancient culture, kept afloat by women, does provide Jason with some nonidentical experience of human life and Jason acknowledges that he would be long dead without her (Wolf, *Medea* 46). By positioning Medea as the tragic Nietzschean Dionysus, Wolf positively associates nature with women through Jason's testimony. For Nietzsche, the presence of Dionysus on the stage symbolically reconciles the dualism between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. The German philosopher's

Attic tragedy provides for a form of representation that recognizes that the innermost ground of being is unknown and fathomless, the province of appearance only.

Recognizing that nature is essentially different from its image in art and in thought, and not the terror the Apollonian had with certainty previously taken it to be, the Apollonian

is freed of its fear of nature and thinking is freed of the need to impose on nature a form representing it as other than it is. (Schoolman 102)

When Jason wakes up from his madness, Medea stands just beside him. She and her music are the reasons that have led to his ecstatic trance. As Jason remembers his identity (Apollonian) and his Dionysian experience, Medea, with her touch and concocted mixture, gives back his “life” (Wolf, *Medea* 47). In a certain way, Medea nullifies Jason's fear of his Dionysian experience (nature, world of instincts). She represents the tragic vision of Dionysian, who appeases his devotees’ “fear of a terrifying nature” through healing (Schoolman 102). Consequently, Wolf's Medea incarnates the unmediated nature insofar as she can alleviate men's fear of nature and differences. She reveals the other side of the wall built by formal reason's unwillingness to reconnect the mind with the body.

2.2 The Limits of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* for Feminist Politics?

While critical feminists have mixed interpretations of Adorno's thought, Elisabeth List claims that his conception of reason is ultimately a male construction. Indeed, as the ancient patriarchal conception of womanhood posits a state of undifferentiation with nature, women are reasonless according to this logic. Therefore, it implies that a woman does not possess a “male” reason, if not a reason at all. Repression and renunciation of instincts have led to “the logical outcome of the suppression of those aspects of humanity that have been relegated to the female and excluded from the concern of a masculinized idea of reason” (List 336).

Also, because Critical Theory claims to be a theoretical school of society and reason, criticism is required for such androcentric concepts that have survived through Adorno's critical

thinking (List 337); he thinks of “reason” in identical thought. Thus, it becomes of necessity for Critical Theory to expand on the conceptuality of reason regarding gender.

Along the same lines, Andrew Hewitt argues that the dialectic of Enlightenment recognizes domination as a totalizing form of repression, which power represents its impossibility (146). Since selfhood and individuation exist only through the subject's self-alienation, Hewitt's reading of Adorno posits that women “experience domination, not power” (157). Even if women free themselves from patriarchy's negative imprint, Adorno and Horkheimer would postulate that such liberation falls back into another “complex system of power” (Hewitt 157). The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* suggests that the “oppressed” can only set themselves free as the “repressed.” However, “Horkheimer and Adorno had great difficulties in creating from the ‘repressed’ a potential subject position not defined purely in terms of its objectification by the dominant discourse” (Hewitt 169). Hence, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* might lack potential theoretical grounds for feminist politics. Failed by their male rationality, Adorno and Horkheimer cannot de-instrumentalize women. Women’s emancipation from male domination is left untouched. The third chapter of this analysis tries to fill this theoretical gap in regard to gender conceptualization and emancipation.

To sum up, this chapter explores different contingent forms in which the heteropatriarchal order has constrained women. As this section has shown, identical thinking under heteropatriarchy has imprisoned Medea, the woman, in the same cage as the threatening nature. Firstly, patriarchal politics has characterized women's physical attraction through witchcraft and enchantment. According to this logic, nature and women constantly try to draw back the male ego into a past state of undifferentiation with its surroundings. Medea incarnates this enchantress. She is the envoy of unmediated nature that threatens male rationality. Her physical

allure as a woman embodies male anxiety of unsupervised nature. Since patriarchal men's identical thinking cannot deal appropriately with their naturalness expressed through impulses and emotions, they have reflected their fear in women's domination. Ultimately, the calculating ego must control the illogical rationality pinned on women.

Secondly, Medea is a barbaric woman because she embodies the ego's past undifferentiation from nature. On the one hand, Euripides portrays Medea's Titanic divine lineage as a threat to the rational and patriarchal superiority because it embodies a regression into bodily sensitiveness. On the other hand, Christa Wolf perceives Helios and Medea's cultural heritage as a positive source for human sensibility toward differences. Wolf's association between womanhood and the Dionysian experience opens a new way of looking at nature through a possible aesthetic experience based on human sensitivity. Can this aesthetics access Medea's nonidentity and discover the human behind the patriarchal narrative? Are there limitations to this aesthetics? To investigate Medea's aesthetics of sensibility through experience, this work must depart from Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. It must go beyond this classic of the Frankfurt School and engage with additional theorists of aesthetics.

Chapter 3

3.1 Medea and an Aesthetics of Sensibility

This chapter investigates the aesthetics of sensibility of Christa Wolf and its potential to emancipate Medea from formal reason's violence. Also, this section outlines some limitations to Adorno's aesthetics concerning gender emancipation for concrete political and social actions. From this starting point, Christa Wolf's aesthetics of resistance reveals itself as a valuable complementary method to Adorno's *Negative Dialectic*, by which the nonidentical can finally be acknowledged and respected. Intersubjectivity becomes an essential approach through which human beings can reconnect with suffering and their sensitive bodies. To hear, speak, and witness suffering through corporeal art is, according to Christa Wolf, the exit door to a better human existence.

This chapter concludes that even though Wolf's Medea does not achieve societal emancipation, she, contrary to Euripides' Medea, is conscious of human suffering and the constant repetition of patriarchal violence. She comes close to the Hegelian self-conscious "slave," but she does not in any way endorse passivity, which many scholars are prompt to argue. On the contrary, Wolf's Medea is a literary reminiscence of women's struggle under the patriarchal order. The curse that she puts on her oppressors is a force that resonates through time and asks the readers to remember the forgotten. It is only through telling one's experience that an individual becomes a subject of history. Intersubjectivity through art becomes beneficial for the subject to be recognized and to resist identical thinking. Therefore, the social exchange of experiences is the only way Medea can withstand her subordination to patriarchal violence.

3.2 Euripides and Medea: A Historical Dead End?

So far, Euripides' text has helped reveal the continuous, pervasive effects of formal reason's violence on women, which Wolf's novel demonstrates through Medea's modern objectification. However, Euripides's tragedy *Medea* lacks an explicit emancipatory engagement with women's reality. This assertion comes as no surprise. Even though some commentators admit that Euripides' play sheds light on human psychological features, the Greek tragedian is a stranger to his female characters. In his search for a proto-feminist movement in Antiquity, Collits argues that Euripides shows certain feminist features within his narrative. In accepting Reiss' historicist assessment of Greek tragedy as a genre born from the Athenian democracy, Collits attempts to demonstrate Euripides's openness toward women's rights and social representation (9).

According to Collits, Euripides questions why bards only sing about male heroes and never about women of Homeric feats (11):

CHORUS. The poems of long-ago bards shall no more

portray us as fickle, untrustworthy friend –

bias because lord Apollo forbore

to implants his lyrics in feminine minds.

Otherwise we could have answered with songs,

Back to the masculine sex, that long years

Can easily open up tales of men's wrongs,

no less than their narratives all about ours. (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines

421-30)

Here, the Chorus criticizes the Greek oral tradition maintained by bards who sing the male hero's fights against monsters and immoral individuals. The Chorus illuminates the historical hypocrisy of the Greek tradition by ignoring women's role within the male-centred heroic literature. It is undeniable that these lines contradict and distort the patriarchal narrative. In ancient Greece, bards (male singers) were the agents of the politics of representation. They sang the life of archetypal heroes that would become recognizable within the politics of visibility, which Rancière theorizes as *le partage du sensible*:

...un régime spécifique d'identification et de pensée des arts : un mode d'articulation entre des manières de faire, des formes de visibilité de ces manières de faire et des modes de pensabilité de leurs rapports, impliquant une certaine idée de l'effectivité de pensée (10).

By singing the heroic deeds or the daily life of women, the female bard would take on an artistic position that would break with the patriarchal system of visibility. In this regard, Euripides demands a concrete reflection on gender and its representation within the cultural and political tradition (Collits 12).

Although this analysis is valuable to some extent, Euripides cannot remain faithful to his text: he becomes himself the bard of women's life who disregards the subjective experience of Medea. He moulds his female characters accordingly to his patriarchal ideal of womanhood. Ultimately, the women who deserve legitimacy are the ones who fit the patriarchal image of femininity. There is a clear gap between Euripides' social and political life and the experience of Greek women. He is not interested in Medea's "subject" but in her masculine demonization of "inadequate" womanhood. Put differently, Euripides' writing reinstates the "Avant-l'heure" Aristotelian poesis of the femme fatale who cannot politically and aesthetically achieve the status of heroine.

Also, Collits argues that Euripides' Medea is proto-feminist because it was rare for a female protagonist to dominate the stage and the narrative (13). However, this reason is too far-fetched to be considered an artistic openness vis-à-vis women's cause. Euripides' poetic writings do provide some new dimensions to the mythical character of Medea, but these elements are restricted to how women ought to behave in a men-led society. Sensitiveness is lacking in his writings. The gap between the male and female experience seems too far apart to reconcile or write accurately about the opposite gender's living.

From this point on, this chapter will take a turn away from Euripide's Medea to redirect the analysis toward Wolf's poesis and the role of subjective experience in women's emancipation. There is a need to rethink the subjectification of individuals. Indeed, the problem lies within formal reason's urge to identify with a set of concepts that do not allow differences to exist. Adorno's criticism of subjectivity is grounded within the historical postulate of identical male thinking. He criticizes bourgeois subjectivity that repudiates the human experience to make space for formal reason's blossoming. Euripides is the exemplification of reason's inability to reconcile Medea's body and mind. According to the patriarchal logic, these two bodily components are mutually exclusive. Whereas Euripides' Medea cannot be trusted because *sophrosyne* "allegedly" fails women, Christa Wolf and Adorno rethink the relationship between mind and body. It is an epistemological approach that acknowledges the interdependency between these two sensitive constituents and strives for unexhausted truths within a reconciled mind-body relationship.

3.3 Adorno and his Aesthetics' Lack of Political Engagement

This work uses Adorno's theory of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the *Negative Dialectic* to draw Medea's portrayal from a patriarchal point of view, which is sustained by formal reason's desire to control nature and the fathomable. His theory on formal reason uncovers the pervasive manner of human cognition to interpret nature in absolute knowledge. What cannot be absorbed or identified with mainstream rational thought is inevitably irrational and devoid of humanness. As chapter 2 shows, men have subjugated women under their "yoke" because they believe that womanhood is inhuman, which is to say: lacks masculinity and rationality. Women, along with children and foreigners, have been the Other. They are the minions of a threatening nature who try to eradicate the male ego.

Even if Adorno's theory allows the nonvisible to become visible through art, it does not call for concrete political and social actions that would significantly change the status quo of women's suffering, if not humans' adversities in general. As Rancière points out, the problem with Adorno is "his lack of interest in politics as a collective practice of the oppressed" (Allerkamp et al. 131). Indeed, Adorno's emancipation, as for Marx's, tries to abolish the separation between means and ends, active and passive, and the realm of necessity and action. However, Marx "postpones the end of the separation of means and ends to a future that is itself determined by the success of a strategic action, whereas Adorno tends to confine emancipatory potential within the work of art" (Allerkamp et al. 132). Consequently, political and social emancipation remains within the domain of art, whose Adornoian aestheticism, influenced by Benjamin's aesthetic theory, is based on apolitical art. The Adorno's politics of transformation lies precisely in the realm of hope, of potentialities, of possibilities, and of critical thinking "- not at the level of action" (O'Neil 27). In other words, the Adornoian art is not crafted because it

wants to be political. Instead, it becomes political because its artistic representation of experience challenges the identical thinking of society. As long as the Adornoian work of art resists conformity and the ego's satisfaction, it can be considered aesthetic (Heberle 197).

In contrast, Christa Wolf's aesthetics intends to be political. It is art produced by people who are conscious of their place within humanity's history. The art exists as a mirror that reflects the readers' and the artists' experience into each other. This dialogue, grounded in mutual recognition of individuals' uniqueness, is the foundation of an aesthetic approach to life that acknowledges the codependent bond between every human experience. To write about one's understanding of suffering and to read about one's experience are the components of Wolf's political and artistic aesthetics. Like the Adornoian aesthetics, approaching suffering is to accept the nonidentical of the visible matrix of concepts. Wolf's *Medea*, throughout her monologues, tells her version of the story left out by Euripides' tragedy. In her modernization of the myth, Wolf breathes life into the statue-like image of the murderess Medea by reactivating the history of human experience. In other words, Wolf's *Medea* is reborn by feeling again, and by acknowledging that her experience is dependent on and influenced by others' life.

3.4 Christa Wolf and her Anti-poiesis: The Foundation of an Aesthetics of Resistance

Most of Christa Wolf's literary theory can be found in her four essays that follow or precede (depending on the edition) the novel *Cassandra* (1988). Her reflections lay the foundation of her literary poiesis that characterizes her following works, including *Medea: A Modern Retelling*. Wolf's poiesis, whose goal is to emancipate the writer's authority, is based on biographical art that mimics the artist's experience (Beebe and Weber 261, 266). The poiesis creates an open and direct dialogue between the work of art, infused by the writer's experience

and the reader's point of view. As the writer engages with life, the readership receives it and reflects the comprehension of their historical experience in the work of art. Hence, art becomes the negotiator between the sufferer and the witness.

Nonetheless, this meeting does not translate into a unilateral relationship in which the sufferer is the only one who leads the discussion. Instead, the summit that the artwork summons creates a space of exchange between the readers and the suffering writer. For example, Medea exemplifies this poesis which is not a poesis in the traditional sense. In *Corinth*, Wolf's Medea tells her story and informs herself about the other's experience. She engages in open dialogue with Akamas, Glauce, Jason and her Minoan friends. As Adorno might suggest, the sufferer's experience proves that the nonidentical cannot be disregarded. The body suffers from its incapacity to fully live its experience within the world because the formal ego demands conformity to norms that do not acknowledge the subject's expression. Medea is aware of this phenomenon, and she lends an ear to anyone who can open their heart. Her several interactions with other protagonists open an intersubjective relation that allows the experience of the other to be heard and recognized.

Wolf's poesis does not fit the Aristotelian art of poetry. In fact, she engages her writing in unpoetic terms. To achieve this anti-poesis, Christa Wolf's writing style had to enter "the well-known dilemma of deconstruction, which in this case has two levels: how to produce a narrative that does not alienate the reader..., and how to write an anti-poetics without using the language of poetics" (Beebe and Weber 264) Firstly, Wolf's writing strives to make human reality more concrete in its manifold, sensitive appearances in the body. The formerly GDR author does not want to alienate the reader with logical and mathematical writings devoid of human sensitivity. In this respect, she aligns herself with a long German aesthetic tradition to which Schiller, Hegel,

Marx, Brecht, and Adorno belong. Indeed, she criticizes the scientific approach to literature for its lack of humanness:

Aber eben diesen Weg ist doch, vereinfacht gesagt, das abendländische Denken gegangen, den Weg der Sonderung, der Analyse, des Verzichts auf die Mannigfaltigkeit zugunsten der Geschlossenheit von Weltbildern und Systemen; des Verzichts auf Subjektivität zugunsten gesicherter "Objektivität." (qtd. in Beebee and Weber 264)

This subjectivity, now compromised by cartesian objectivity, is historical. Since *The Quest for Christa T.*, Wolf's works are agglomerates of a "vision of human socialism...informed by the early Marx's concept of non-alienated social relations..." (Kuhn, *Aesthetics of Resistance* 156).

In this regard, Christa Wolf owes much to Kant, who asks that "every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life" (qtd. in Kuhn 157). Wolf tries to overcome the subject's alienation by creating a historical subjectivity that develops itself in a respectful environment. In other words, she tries to envision a collective world in which everyone is treated as a human subject. Thus, Wolf's writing aims to reconnect with the other through the de-anesthetization of suffering. It is a writing that is resolutely more oriented toward human experiences and the body's sensitiveness.

Secondly, Wolf's anti-poiesis is resolutely anti-Aristotelian. Her anti-poiesis resists the language of poetics because it is characterized by the patriarchal handwriting that has excluded women's experience (Beebee and Weber 264). Wolf does not have poetics because Aristotle's and Horace's theory of poetry has taken "a systematic form, and whose norms have been accorded 'wide validity'" (Wolf, *Cassandra* 141). Hence, the systematic poetics of Aristotle can no longer allow the nonidentical to exist.

The Aristotelian fable is a regime of representation whose narrative tracks the protagonists throughout their hitches. The main characters have “civilizing” goals and fight against the dangerous forces standing on their path. Following Kuhn’s argument, Wolf believes that the “prescriptive normative” Aristotelian poetics objectify individuals. It is a poetics that encourages “mastery over, not a mutual exchange with, the writer’s material” (163). This classical paradigm of representation and its tragic scene represents the visible and the audible of a hierarchical world of subjects whose artistic adaptation speaks right back to it (Rancière 23). Every Aristotelian narrative strives for the male ego’s satisfaction and creates an imaginative space in which the subject’s heroic selfishness is reflected. Under this view, the Aristotelian poesis desperately lacks a human dimension, in which feelings and social interrelations play a major role in the subject’s formation.

Christa Wolf’s anti-poesis turns toward the sufferers’ vantage point to break the authority of the all-too masculine protagonist who spends his time conquering and mastering nature for his own ends. Her anti-poetics affirms that any poetics can’t prevent the “living experience of countless perceiving subjects from being killed and buried in art objects” (Wolf, *Cassandra* 142). As the murderous mother, Medea, buried into literary sedimentations of the Western male tradition, cannot expose the female experience from a feminine point of view. Wolf wants to drill a hole into the solidified mould in which the patriarchal society has imprisoned Medea. As Arnds posits, the purpose of her *réécriture* is dedicated to “women’s depetrification” (Arnds 417). For Adrienne Rich, the re-vision of myths constitutes an act of survival through which women’s “drive to self-knowledge...is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (Rich 35). Oistros, a Cretan sculptor and Medea’s

lover, alludes directly to this emancipatory thought. This liberation comes from the subject's capacity to become other than what society expects:

...he pointed out blocks of stone and had me figure out what shapes are hidden inside them -for it's not true that just any shape whatsoever is hiding inside any stone, that was new to me- it's the same way with us, Oistros said, you can't make a human being out of every mass of flesh, sometimes it's comforting to know that, don't you think? (Wolf, *Medea* 116)

The stones contain a shape, an imaginative image of a future statue that would incarnate a person, a divinity, or a metaphorical sculpture. However, the sculpture will always be other than what the artist initially imagined. Once born into the world of meanings, the work of art has a life of its own and people can individually live a dialectical relationship with the exposed creation. Even if its original meaning is criticized, manipulated, reinterpreted, or reaffirmed, the work of art remains autonomous vis-à-vis society. Even if her character has been used and reused as the "bad" womanhood archetype under patriarchal rhetoric, Medea remains a fictional subject of history with a mind of her own. She knows what she and other female protagonists have suffered from, and solidarity among contemporary women can slowly reverse "the hideous process of petrification, objectification, performed on living flesh" (Wolf, *Cassandra* 298). It is to break enough stones to create thin air conduct, enough for Medea to breathe again, regain her strength to exist, and finally demolish her constraining sheath.

3.5 Medea and Wolf's Aesthetics of Resistance

Wolf's aesthetics of resistance grounded in her anti-poiesis tries to reconcile the mind with the body through its sensitiveness. As she reminds her readers, the contemporary man "is

now missed.” He is devoid of “naturalness, guilelessness which he got rid of by thinking them away.” His mind has created a perfect steel armour that blocks the body from feeling the air and the gentle touch of human compassion. Abstraction of bodily sensation has made the modern man walk through fire or ice without noticing it (Wolf, *Cassandra* 276). Accordingly, the 20th-century man has repudiated a part of his naturalness by creating a mode of thinking based on cold calculations, statistics, and materialism. The Western man has created a delusional reality in which man, in Goethe’s words, stands “alone before Nature-opposite Nature, not in it...” (Wolf, *Cassandra* 283). However, this epistemology remains incomplete if one does not include the body’s response to external stimuli.

In Wolf’s novel, Medea is not the only protagonist conscious of this bodily abstraction. Even Akamas, who continues to support the royal system of exploitation of its population, acknowledges that contemporaries, like their ancestors, have developed a comfortable and blindfolded lifestyle provided by the Olympian gods. As explained previously, the Olympian gods of reason have replaced the all-too-natural order of the Titans. Zeus’ order has become a political régime that seems to have always existed in its current form. Thus, people are not urged to question the system because it looks “natural.” Indeed, the people of Corinth are amazed how the gods have “set things up in this way and not the otherwise” (Wolf, *Medea* 99). They admire the divine wisdom that rules their society. Yet, for someone like Akamas or Medea, who observes from afar, the repetitive economic and political system set by the Olympians has revealed itself delusional because it alludes, as Wolf posits, to totalizing forms of perceptibility (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 76). People find comfort in their routine, which considerably reduces the time allocated to critical thinking on topics that relate specifically to what it means to be human as *homo reciprocans*, and not as *homo economicus*. Observing such a

phenomenon becomes a compulsion because the mind is at home in a lifestyle composed of repetitive patterns (Wolf, *Medea* 99).

Wolf's aesthetic engagement is a clear break with this type of politics. Her aesthetical commitment demands a return to sensitiveness. She attempts to give social politics a "human face"¹ (Andrews 144), if not a human body (to continue with the metaphor), that acknowledges the extra-rational component of human life by remembering the experience in its entirety.

In one of her monologues, Medea remembers how Corinthians are good at lying and hiding their emotions:

These people here, Apsyrtus, are masters when it comes to lying, including lying to themselves. From the very beginning I was amazed at the lumps and knots in their bodies. If I laid my hand on the back of their necks, their arms, their bellies, I felt nothing, no movement, no flowing. Nothing but hardness...What a fight they'd put up against sympathy. (Wolf, *Medea* 81–82)

Medea's description describes dangerously the petrification of the Corinthian population vis-à-vis their emotions. This portrayal alludes to Wolf's interpretation of the West's culture of insensitivity in day-to-day relations, which critically lacks interest in the Other. According to Medea's testimony, the people of Corinth resemble stones. They are the rigid, cold and mind-my-own-business type. Thus, awareness of the self's and others' suffering is essential to break with the abstraction of the body's sensitiveness that formal and capitalist minds have taken hundreds of years to solidify.

As another example, Creon represents the political authority of Corinth that reduces the individual to a mere ideological representative. Under Akamas' interpretation of Creon's

¹ Phrase coined by Dubcek in 1968.

position, the king is not a human who governs. Rather he incarnates the ruling ideology to which he must obey:

In answer to Medea's simple-minded question, I tried to make it clear to her that Creon, as King, is not Creon or any other man whatsoever, in fact he's not a person at all, but an office, namely the king. (Wolf, *Medea* 90)

Akamas draws an inhuman picture of the king. Here, the term "inhuman" relates to both the brutal atrocities administered by the regime and the reduction of a political actor to a simple office whose duty, among others, is to perpetuate the ideology's maxim. Alluding to the West's governing system and ideology, Christa Wolf portrays the Corinthian/Western politics as devoid of humanness. Creon cannot be Creon. He must give away his subjectivity to become the king. Through his subordination to the royal ideology, Creon, the individual, accepts to withdraw his critical ability to think about and against formal reason's conceptual prison. Nature within human beings is lost, and sensitiveness toward suffering has become a source of weakness. Even if the strings of power are pulled behind Creon's back, he cannot achieve a meaningful coming-to-the-self because the office has kept his subjectivity under lock and key. Politics with a human face has slowly faded away before the Western world's eyes to give place to an ideology that coldly rules and manages people as profit-making agents regardless of the human suffering that such an economic paradigm might engender. It is not a coincidence that Creon doesn't hold an active role in the polymorphous narrative; his voice, like his office, is reduced to silence.

Like her heroine's enterprise, the task of Wolf's aesthetic telling is to reconnect both the body's reality with formal reason in order to create a sense of living that acknowledges their mutual dependency. Hence, it becomes urgent to find a political and artistic aesthetics that can

help reconcile the mind's survival will and the body's sensitiveness. Perhaps the unintentional truth lies precisely in the negotiation of these two realities...

3.5.1 Adorno and Christa Wolf: A Theoretical Symbiosis?

Adorno proposes a similar aesthetic approach to Wolf, which requests a return to “what has been forgotten within ourselves – our own physicality and vulnerability” (Heberle 35). As Drucilla Cornell explains in her interview with Heberle, Adorno's philosophy tries to remind its audience that all human beings suffer physically and psychologically in both “a destructive moment and a contrary moment that promises hope” (35). It is when suffering points to individuals' vulnerabilities that fail to be recognized by formal reason's conceptual framework of recognizability. To live one's physical experience is to live in the present moment, a physical temporality in which the individual holds on to physical suffering, “and with it the goal of longing- sensual ease” (Heberle 35). It is the creation of a world where sensual ease has overthrown formal reason's exclusive padlock on human cognition.

Following Drucilla's Adornoian argument, being mindful of nature and grasping the existence of suffering allows human beings to be soft in everyday politics. It is to care about others as well as others care for us. Therefore, Adorno's political and artistic aesthetics might well be the production of an individual who affirms human vulnerabilities and the natural side that all humans share. After all, Adorno's truth is not only found in suffering but also “in tenderness for the subject's reflection on his or her own otherness” (Heberle 36).

Even if Adorno's thought is relatively epistemologically masculine and offers poor insights into feminist politics, his theory flirts closely with Christa Wolf's literary aesthetics based on somatic experience. Indeed, the fusion of these two theories can reveal a literary and

political style that reconciles the being in its naturalness. In bringing Adorno and Wolf under an unified approach, Medea could genuinely achieve a sense of emancipation vis-à-vis herself as a thinking subject and a being who recognizes the mutual dependency between the self and the community. In other words, the task is to find a house in which the mind and the un-anesthetized body feel both at home. It is to undertake an Bachmann-esque endeavor by holding “fast to the legitimacy of...experience” and finding “a language that could accurately express it” (Lennox 125). Hence, rediscovering this lost home would enhance people’s ability to appease suffering through mindful actions that would eventually develop and maintain livable conditions for oneself and others.

3.5.2 Writing as Resistance

Following Christa Wolf’s aesthetic writing, the community constantly plays a significant role in the self’s formation. Indeed, her aesthetics at play in *Medea: A Modern Retelling* has an extra-personal dimension that acknowledges subjectivity as a never-ending process. Wolf’s writing, composed mainly from the vantage point of “I,” is a coming into consciousness through the remembering of experience, itself tinted by human relations. According to Wolf herself, her aesthetics is a fabric whose “motifs are not followed up, many of its threads are tangled. There are wefts which stand out like foreign bodies, repetitions, material that has not been worked out to its conclusion” (Wolf, *Cassandra* 142). Like real-life individuals, Wolf’s characters are interrelated and interdependent. One character’s life cannot be pictured without considering the other characters’ agency. In other words, Wolf’s “individual subject is always presented in a dialectical relationship with the larger social community” (Kuhn, *Christa Wolf’s Utopian Vision*

3). One cannot just pull out one string of the entire fabric and hope that it remains undamaged (Wolf, *Cassandra* 287); characters are never autonomous in the formation of their “self.”

The novel’s narrating polyphony constitutes in itself a fabric of voices in which the protagonists’ subjectification is irrevocably dependent on their socialization (Arnds 416). To purposely pull out one fabric string and fix it as absolute truth is exactly the task of formal reason’s reductionist endeavour. Wolf posits that the multi-perspective approach to narration allows the disintegration of dualism that opens a possibility for each protagonist to come about “in ihrem Recht”. Also, as the author further argues, humans, as social bodies, sail on the same highly dangerous boat that can only be safely accosted in a spirit of togetherness (Hochgeschurz and Frauen Museum 50).

In addition, this polyphony allows the Medea myth’s deligitimation “because it offers the possibility of speech to the female in the case, giving voice to the muted” (qtd. in Carrière 49). In this whirlwind of ambiguous perspectives, the “voices” construct and negotiate Medea’s identity: she is

un sujet ‘en procès’ : elle ‘devient’ Médée sous l’assemblage de ces ‘voix’ dans le courant implacable des rumeurs criminelles qui circulent sur son compte et pour lesquelles elle sera finalement jugée, condamnée et exilée. (Carrière 129)

Hence, Christa Wolf’s writing tells the story of Medea, whose life is entangled with others’ existence. Wolf’s mythopoesis creates Medea, a mythical woman, subjected by other voices, but also by her own implication in rumours (Carrière 127). As an example, the rumour that sustains the characterization of Medea as a murderess is present in both Euripides’ and Wolf’s work. It is not to decide whether one retelling of the myth is more truthful to the “original” Medea than another. Rather, it is to interrogate how the rumours and patriarchal literary depictions become

an integral part of her character as a woman. In Wolf's novel, Medea is socially categorized by these rumours made by the Argonauts. Her identity as a foreign woman vanishes from behind the cloud of gossip. By pulling out one string from Medea's life fabric, the Corinthian society atomizes her personality to a mere political mirage.

For Euripides, Medea must rebel against the male authority to free herself from the constraining and insufferable situation. She murders her children; the male association between violence and "uncivilized" or "unrestrained" woman is satisfied, and the fabric of Medea is ragged. What once composed Medea (her experiences, encounters, discussions, suffering and happiness) is reduced to the murderess image instituted by the patriarchal society. In other words, the particularities, the strings, that hold together the life fabric of Medea are generalized, and the product of this cognitive shortcut engenders an enduring masculinist postulate on womanhood.

In Wolf's novel, the rumours, introduced by the Argonauts and sustained by Agameda and Leukon, are used by the Corinthian high authorities to fit their xenophobic rhetoric, which society's misogyny only exacerbates the objectifying discourse. Medea's life is bonded to Apsyrtus' death for apparent reasons; he was her brother, and their father perpetrated his murder.

Also, Apsyrtus' death taints Medea's life fabric so that it is used by the Corinthians to "legitimately" expels her and the Colchians from Corinth. The murder of Apsyrtus has deeply affected her, and she cannot think of herself without considering this tragedy. As they witnessed Medea's homage to her brother by throwing overboard his bones into the sea, the Argonauts made a cognitive shortcut based on male objectivity; a woman who brings her brother's bones and then dispense them into the sea is someone that cannot be civilized. Jason and the Argonauts could have questioned or asked about the story behind her actions. Still, they preferred to trust

their Western patriarchal objectivity and crystallize for centuries the image of Medea as a murderous “savage” (Wolf, *Medea* 77).

The Argonauts and the Corinthians find comfort in demonizing Medea because it is how foreigners and women must be acting according to the Western rhetoric. The isolation of one of Medea’s life fabric strings eclipses her identity societally. This demonization brings suffering to the self because she must question herself again and relive the experience that she thought was already digested. Indeed, because *Medea: A Modern Retelling* is a narrative significantly inspired by the author’s life, the description of Medea’s demonization, based on one historical element isolated from the web of experiences, narratively parallels Wolf’s stasis files’ unveiling. As she criticizes in her “*Dresden Lectures*” series, the German tradition of confronting the past

takes the form of a chronicle of scandals or a mere skimming of documents – documents that reduce people’s personal histories to simple patterns of yes or no, black and white, guilty or innocent, and provide no information beyond that. (Wolf and Heurck 297)

As Medea’s strings are pulled out individually to make her look conspicuous, Christa Wolf’s Stasis files, in which her limited collaboration in the 60s is described, were used by the authorities to downplay the GDR cultural heritage within the new unified Germany. As Medea readily criticizes, people cannot “deal with the fragments of the past any way [they] like, piercing them together or ripping them apart just to suit [their] convenience” (Wolf, *Medea* 76). The society of the new Germany, mostly ruled by the previous “West Germans,” needed to find a scapegoat to explain the inflation and the growing antisemitic violence in Germany, and Wolf, like Medea, became the perfect target to alleviate the population’s anger against the state.

In this torment of accusations, the individual is reduced to a single particularity that now symbolizes the people’s hatred: he or she becomes a myth. In the case of Wolf and Medea, the

objective categorization, produced by Corinthian hearsay or a sample of files written by the GDR government, socially and culturally solidifies the image of these women as mythological figures. Whereas Euripides' Medea has become the Western patriarchal archetype of "unrestrained" womanhood, the German conservative press (Auga 3) categorizes Wolf and her Medea as conspicuous contributors to Germany's cultural and political deterioration.

As it was demonstrated previously, *Medea: A Modern Retelling*, compared with Wolf's "Dresden Lectures," has a greater dimension regarding gender. Not only does the existence of Medea turn out to be the perfect "crafted" reason for Corinth's plague, but her gender as a woman legitimates men's aggressiveness towards women because they, as males, cannot acknowledge nature in themselves. In *Conversation with Günter Grass*, Christa Wolf reinstates what she believes is the issue with patriarchy:

...since Patriarchy has continued or even intensified its drive to get rid of, suppress, push aside, ban, and demonized the female part – including the female part in the male, of course – right down to the present day, we need to grant the necessity of adjusting to each other, being considerate of each other. (Wolf and Heurck 264)

According to Wolf, patriarchy, which is supported by formal reason and its binary thinking, sustains society's violence. Nature is suppressed, and patriarchal men resort to aggressive behaviours to express formal reason's inability to escape its natural history. Instead of controlling the Other, Wolf proposes to link back with the world's diversity in its singularities. Whether it is one's confluence of experiences or the life fabric of Wolf's aesthetics, dialogue allows the multiplicity of views and understandings of the world. To see what lies beyond one's closed system of concepts is to let the nonidentical be known and heard.

To accomplish this, however, one obstacle is identified within *Medea: A Modern Retelling*: human remoteness. As said previously, Corinthians are detached from their feelings, and the dialogues between each other are purely pragmatic and devoid of charisma. The hardheartedness between individuals on which the society of Corinth stands accelerates Medea's downfall. Emotions cannot be involved in the public sphere because the individual must remain impassive and coolheaded to make rational decisions. Existing in this type of system is dehumanizing. The rumours about Medea's murder looks objective and rational according to the highly categorized society of Corinth. As a result, Medea becomes society's object of frustration. She is the scapegoat that society was after, which prevents the Corinthians from looking inwardly at themselves. They do not need to criticize the postulate of Medea because they believe that what justice brings is inevitable "just," "right," and objective. One fact is enough to craft a believable lie, and Medea is an example of this social injustice.

Yet, how can individuals reconnect with their sensitiveness, the truth throughout its manifold appearances, and the nonidentical of formal reason's dualist mediation? Does science, in its "beyond-reproach" epistemology, can help us to become human again and to alleviate the suffering perpetuated through the controlling of nature and so of human beings?

3.5.3 Wolf's and Adorno's Criticism of Western Thought: Medea as the Victim of an Objective Science of Humanity

Wolf's criticism at work in this novel reflects Adorno's critique of Western thought, which is "the route of segregation, of the renunciation of the manifoldness of phenomena, in favour of closed systems and pictures of the world; of the renunciation of subjectivity in favour of a sealed 'objectivity'" (Wolf, *Cassandra* 287). Indeed, Medea is the victim of a closed system in which her image is fixated by the norms set by the patriarchal society. As a woman, Medea's

story is socially manipulated to satisfy the Corinthian political needs. Women can only be approached through the lenses of patriarchy, and the remodeling of Medea's story by Corinth's male authority confirms this political insistence on womanhood.

Christa Wolf, like her Medea, has lost faith in a science that can faithfully approach humanness as a scientific object of analysis:

...I've rid myself of the belief that our human destinies are bound up with the movements of the planets and the stars, that souls similar to ours dwell there and affect our lives, perhaps by malevolently tangling the threads they dangle from. (Wolf, *Medea* 144)

The star watching is the new science of Corinth. The king asks his astronomers what the planets and stars have to say about the future. The astronomers' scientific calculations based on a method of objectiveness dictate the king's politics and how his population should behave. In this regard, astronomy becomes a political tool with which objectivity, such as witnessing astral movements, manipulates society to strengthen the scientists' hold on power. Indeed, constructing a historical identity based on scientific truths is "once again sailing in the direction favored by those who have enough clout to determine which way the wind blows" (Wolf and Heurck 298). Human beings must sacrifice their subjectivity, their way of approaching life as a sensitive being, to give place to an epistemological method restrained in scope. Instead of becoming human, to come-to-oneself through sensory experiences and dialogues, the individual is devoid of agency vis-à-vis his capacity to act in each situation. Violence, repression, and authoritarian behaviours are legitimated because "it was written in the stars."

Wolf's "manifoldness of phenomenon" does not discard scientific methods as a fair tool to approach human life. However, science has taken the epistemological monopole and replaced Abrahamic religions in some parts of the Western hemisphere. As far as the Western world's

written history is concerned, each disenchantment has replaced a closed system of thoughts with another objective and beyond-doubt system. Under Adorno's thought, this mode of thinking is the reification of reason; identical thinking attempts to become universal by excluding its dialectical image(s) (Heberle 161). Wolf and Adorno argue for a return to a world where humans' cognitive limitations to seize nature's truthfulness are recognized. To see the world beyond humans' traditional and dualist thinking is to reconnect with the infinite potentialities of being other than the dialectic image proposed by identical thinking.

3.6 Adorno's Epistemological Constellation

To escape formal reason's categorization of concepts into silos, Adorno proposes the constellation: his negative dialectic epistemology. It is a never-ending truth-seeking endeavour. Following Adorno's thought, truth appears as "a constantly evolving constellation," and the material thing is "infinitely given as a task" (qtd. in Cook 85). Furthermore, Stone suggests that "constellations lend a voice to suffering by showing that natural things 'have been damaged, prevented from existing in their spontaneous forms'" (qtd. in Cook 86). Finally, the sufferer's voice and the produced dissonance within a harmonious whole allow the concept's potentiality to become other than what the conditions of its existence have commanded (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 52). To put it simply, a constellation is a potential truth that the mind can never exhaust because survival drives its intellectual inquiry. The non-identical is the object's meaning that cannot be conceptually translated into the dominant form of language (Feola 26). For example, the book's essence, its truth, is the center of the constellation. The constellation's satellites are the particularities of the truth. If the book has a red cover, its unexhausted truth is a red cover book. It becomes a paper-made red cover book if the book is made of paper. By adding

satellites to the book's truth, its conceptualization becomes a never-ending process through which the concept slowly but never fully uncovers itself. Popular adjectives, functions, characterizations, and the non-book must be added to the book's constellation. In the long run, one can observe that the constellation expands. Some of its satellites come to touch with another constellation's satellite, which demonstrates nature's interconnection mechanism between its material components. Also, Adorno's constellation shows that formal reason cannot do without strict and "objective" categorization. Hence, his epistemology engages concepts to reveal what the historical and social conditions have attempted to circumscribe.

With this epistemology in mind, one faces a problem of feasibility: Adorno's constellation evades the human relationship mechanism, which increases the inability of this epistemology to approach non-tangible things such as socially constructed concepts. Adorno's "politics of non-identity" has little to say about the emancipatory force that such undertakings would bring about in democratic life. In fact, he remains silent on his aesthetics' application in day-to-day life (because of his doubts about modern-day society's mass culture?) and "how such closures on meaning are contested by those who find themselves straining against dominant languages of citizenship to identify or denounce situations of injustice" (Feola 43). Therefore, Adorno's epistemology of constellation is valuable to inquire about the material world, but it remains unpractical regarding social concepts. Nonetheless, his thought, unfinished regarding human emancipation, can be completed by adding Wolf's aesthetics of intersubjectivity through writing.

3.6.1 Wolf's Corporeal Writing; The Primary Step Toward a Collective Emancipation Through Intersubjectivity

To fill the epistemological gap left by Adorno, Wolf's intersubjectivity comes as a complementary avenue to approach the concept of humanness. Indeed, Christa Wolf's

intersubjectivity, implemented throughout *Medea: A Modern Retelling*, is like Beauvoir's, which suggests that "literature provided [for Beauvoir] a strange blurring or openness at the edges of subjectivity that allows for communication in an intersubjective space similar to Heideggerian *mitsein*" (Scheu 85). Also, this openness between the reader and the writer provokes a whirlwind of confusing thoughts and ideas. This confusion makes space for a dialogue in which the reader abdicates the "I" in favour of the one who is speaking, yet the reader stays him- or herself (Beauvoir et al. 201).

To bate formal reason's identical thinking, to become aware of what has been missed, and to allow differences to exist, the subject must first be self-conscious. However, to meet the other with all the historical baggage that one carries, the "I" must be capable of knowing the experience that made it. According to Wolf's aesthetics, coming-to-oneself can be done through writing. It is why biographic and corporeal writing has become Wolf's artistic signature since *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968). The text employs the term biographic for biography, a term that must be understood in Wolf's case as a writing that is significantly inspired by the author's historical experience. In addition, the text uses the term corporeal that relates to the body's constitution and its somatic stimulation. Thus, the words corporeal and biographic are adopted to investigate the relationship between the mind's mediation through temporal experiences (biography) and the body's response to felt events, a somatic response that is considerably indissociable from the unconscious.

Biographic and corporeal writing engages with one's life fabric; one experience or episodic suffering crosses another, which leads to another lived experience long forgotten by the consciousness. Rigidified by formal reason's cognitive framework, these interrelated experiences and "the complex texture, the richness and diversity" of living "are flattened out" and buried

under false realities (Schiwy and Rosen 6) or as Wolf says “false alternatives” (Wolf, *Cassandra* 267). Put differently, it is the mind’s way to make abstraction of the body’s messages. In her first dialogue, Medea executes this reflecting exercise. She tries to remember every sensuous detail from the discovering of Iphinoe’s body. Throughout her description, she remains faithful to the body’s response to the trauma:

... I must have dreamed that; but the cold, surely that was no dream, I’m still shivering, nor the sharp-edged stones that tore my skin, why else would my arms be so covered with crusted scratches...felt with reluctant fingers for the deep niche carved into the rock, found what I had feared to find, and uttered a cry that echoed in the maze of caves...I can think of nothing but that meager, childish skull, those fine-boned shoulder blades, that brittle spinal column. (Wolf, *Medea* 11,13)

The body suffers from violence done to another human being because bodies are related. Medea holds on to an experience that the mind, to protect itself, tries to anesthetize, a process that inevitably leads to forgetfulness. Medea’s body reacts instantly; she utters a cry. In this precise moment, she experiences Adorno’s “shudder” (*Erschütterung*). It is an experience lived by the subject, in which “the limits of disenchanting thought” are broken; “she or he registers the claims of the sensuous, even when these claims are not thinkable within a dematerialized reason” (Feola 31). In other words, it is the result of “an unintentional moment of consciousness and its biological past...an echo of objectivity in the subject...ushered in... through the impulses and conscience of the subject” (Ferrarese 11). This aesthetic experience allows the subject to recognize the preciousness of one’s life and to sympathize with the fragile and precarious conditions of humankind that formal reason, operated under patriarchy, has turned a blind eye.

Writing from “I” is a way to hold on to a past undamaged by formal reason. It tries to break through the veil of false realities crafted by the mind to avoid contact with suffering. Following Trinh T. Minh-ha’s artistic engagement with the soma, writing through the body allows this “intercise between the visual and the tactile” whose “(un)location is necessarily the shifting and contextual interval between arrested boundaries” (O’Neil 27). Through honest writing, subjects become critical of their psychological constructions and retrieve a sense of identity grounded in lived experiences. According to Wolf, writing is to have “the courage to risk self-knowledge,” a component that is tied to the author’s moral responsibility (Wolf, *Citadel of Reason* 177).

Individuals reclaim their historical subjectivity as soon as the body can fully express itself without being anesthetized by the mind. Even though the body does not necessarily wear the marks of suffering, it does register pain in the form of memory: the body memory. Like a Buchnerian character, Medea’s body brings her to senses whereas Glauce’s rapid stream of thoughts demonstrates her tormenting somatic suffering (Wolf, *Citadel of Reason* 169). Wolf’s corporeal writing and need to “think feelingly and feel thinkingly” can be coupled with Nelle Morton’s holistic consciousness:

It [the totality of living experiences] may be seen as a unified focus of all faculties of one’s being, each feeding on the other and many of them surfacing simultaneously...Learning to listen with one’s whole body. Learning to hear with the eye and see the ear and speak with the hearing. Knowing the Spirit in movement and not in stasis. (qtd. in Schiwy and Rosen 18)

This holistic writing of Wolf is frequently under-appreciated regarding feminist empowerment. In fact, Wolf questions formal reason’s epistemological authority through which experiences and

concepts can be grasped (Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T* 73). Even her Medea resists this temptation to base her remembering on strictly rational terms: "...I must have dreamed that; but the cold, surely that was no dream, I'm still shivering, nor the sharp-edged stones that tore my skin, why else would my arms be so covered with crusted scratches" (Wolf, *Medea* 11)? Also, to counteract formal reason's dualism, Medea employs body language (the eyes as the site of language) to bring up sensitive images that complement or simply thwart the rational interpretation of one's experience (Wolf, *Medea* 22, 35, 74). Christa Wolf's reliance on body language results from her concern about the language's difficulty in explaining and conceptualizing human suffering and how it can be translated from one person to another.

A writing based on the *soma* and felt experiences is the political aestheticism that Wolf advocates. It is to participate individually, then collectively, in a memory that is not hidden behind false realities. Once individuals become more conscious of past experiences and their place within history as a thinking subject who recognizes the multiplicity of "I" and "you," only then intersubjectivity can become an emancipatory endeavour.

In Wolf's novel, Medea is feared because she is a woman with a mind of her own. She threatens the patriarchal order because her identity is grounded in recollected experiences, which give her enough identity stability to question the status quo. The men of Corinth portray her as a wild woman due to her capacity to face men's dominance through her questions and assertiveness (Wolf, *Medea* 9). She does not mimic the bourgeois intellect whose "power" arises from a blind trust in formal reason. Throughout the novel, Medea peacefully and respectfully informs herself about people's "life fabric" and how their thinking can relate to one another. Her line of critical thoughts is not redirected toward the other as if she was impermeable to "falseness." In fact, she is open to self-criticism, which she proves multiple times. For instance,

she acknowledges that she unconsciously took part in her brother's murder by ignoring the political step-backs of their father's reign (Wolf, *Medea* 75–76). This episode has become part of her life fabric and she cannot forget it if she desires to stay true to her historical subjectivity.

3.6.2 Intersubjectivity and the Creation of a Space of Recognition

Once individuals become conscious of their historical existence through self-questioning, criticism, and experience reconning, subjects must put out their story in the world. This “putting-out” can take several discursive forms: storytelling, writing, public discourse, artwork, or a friendly discussion around a drink. In the case of Wolf, her medium of transmission is writing. She puts her corporeal narratives “out there.” Wolf exposes the “uniqueness” of her experience as a human being to the public eyes. She looks for a dialogue with her readers. Hence, the next step of Christa Wolf's aesthetic politics is to meet the other, to ask genuinely about one's life story, and to be aware of suffering.

In Euripides, this desire to encounter the other's suffering is already present. When Medea laments her misfortune in her house, the Chorus, composed of Corinthian women standing outside, sings:

CHORUS. I heard her call, I heard her cry,

Medea's pain, the Colchian.

[...] I heard her voice

From deep inside her mansion gates.

The sufferings of this household cause

Me pain – my friendship's blended close. (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 131-136)

Medea, inside her household, laments aloud the suffering that she has been enduring since Jason broke their marriage, an oath that he swore before the gods. Interestingly is the Chorus's ability to hear Medea's suffering. Not that they can audibly hear Medea's cries, but that her laments can be heard outside the household. As she laments, Medea cries: "Oh, in pain, in pain /...oh for me, for me..." (Euripides, Griffith, et al. *Medea* lines 96–97). Those two lines in ancient Greek represent lamenting sounds like "ah! oh!" ("ἰώ") (Euripides, Steadman, et al. lines 96-97). Suffering expresses itself in the present moment. It is the lived experience of Medea's body that answers to immediate unsayable pain in words of vagueness. Then, it is not surprising that Medea's laments coming from the household are heard by the Chorus, a group of Corinthian women, and not by men such as the Tutor or Creon. Her cries transgress the limits of perceptibility of the public sphere, and it inevitably disturbs the peaceful unity of the male polis.

In contrary to Kallin, who claims that Euripides' female protagonists' voices are inaudible (Kallin 40), this analysis proposes that Medea's laments, as vague as they might appear to the rational mind, do open new possibilities for interpreting the body-mind relationship. Indeed, used to identify specifically each pain with a precise cause or body part, the rational mind is at a loss in front of Medea's cries (*Fremdwörter*) because they are not rationally translatable. In Lacanian terms, *Fremdwörter* are the perpetual otherness of language that cannot be assimilated and "remains as 'the "unspeakable" dimension of desire, the "symbolic debris" that disrupts the narrative of the ego"' (O'Neill 91). *Fremdwörter* and their impossible intelligibility are for Adorno the "historical evidence...of the failure of that unification" between foreign words and formal reason (Adorno et al. 190). The use of onomatopes in the original version of the tragedy suggests the impossibility of Medea to translate her body's pain in reaction to Jason's betrayal. Incapable of deciphering the pain, the mind, submerged by

emotions, must discharge the unsayable: she utters a cry. Cries and laments, usually discarded by the male rhetorical and bodily language, become new holistic dialects through which the mind expresses the body's sensitiveness. After all, it is not a coincidence if Wolf's Medea criticizes the Corinthian male directive that only women are allowed to lament the deceased as if men could not feel the shock through their bodies as well (Wolf, *Medea* 19).

To get back to intersubjectivity, Christa Wolf transfers the Chorus's symbol of sensibility to the voices composing the novel. Compared to Euripides' tragedy, in which the Chorus sings in unison (one voice), Wolf's voices are incompatible and unfriendly to each other. It is as if the Chorus of Wolf does not sing or speak of a united lived experience that would bond individuals. Medea's monologues create dissonance within the Chorus, and only her expulsion can reharmonize the singing. Whereas Euripides' Chorus represents a group of women who attend to Medea's suffering, Wolf's voices are more unsympathetic to individual and collective pain.

Wolf's Medea is more faithful to Euripides' Chorus. Indeed, Medea becomes closer to Glauce; she helps her fight her tormenting demons so that Glauce could sing her identity, not on Medea's terms but on hers. In a world where the princess of Corinth would have not taken her own life, Glauce would have joined the Chorus with her specific and unique tonality. However, this heteroclitite voice would have perturbed the patriarchal chant already disturbed by Medea's singular tonality.

3.6.2.1 Intersubjectivity's Power to Create a Politics of Resistance

The politics of resistance takes shape when one's story encounters the other's narrative. Particularities of lived experiences are exchanged, views are argued and contested, and community identities are created. To give words to the unsayable experience (the nonidentical of

being human) is the path through which the process of coming-to-oneself comes into development. Because they cannot achieve complete self-consciousness without negotiating their identity with society's social and normative structures, individuals must meet the other in the public sphere (Feola 52). One's story must appear within the limits of legibility to push those boundaries to the extreme. In other words, one's capacity to "rendre compte de soi" in public creates a discontinuity in the dominant, normative discourse. Metaphorically, particularities of the human experience are like disparate dots in a graph. The line in the graph formed by the homogenous dots is the identical dominant thinking, and the heteroclitic dots are the particularities, the differences, and the nonidentical. The addition of disparate dots distorts the linear graph and expands the boundaries of what constrains the meaning of "human life."

Through their public voicing, subjects' narratives are the force via which individuals can exist as "living" beings. Once the experiences are shared and discussed, ordinary lived "realities" usually ignored by formal reason gain visibility. They become bonds between individuals. They are the ground on which new realities can be legible. Hence, this type of subjectivity can only take form and become visible at this precise encounter with the other's story.

Still, the individual's coming-to-oneself cannot exist without negotiating with the social structures. The body-based text or artwork "is no longer an autonomous object but something affected by authorial experience and read through the reader's experience. Literature has a certain power to alter the reader's own lens..." (Beebe and Weber 266). Regarding this discussion, altering one's lens leads to an engagement with what has been invisible and inaudible. It is to change the rational pattern of formal reason to expand and retrieve a collective subjectivity that is not totalizing and impermeable.

On a more feminist note, Kuhn suggests that Wolf's "understanding of women's difference is of a piece with feminist standpoint epistemologies that argue that women's socialization leads to different perceptions of the world" (Kuhn 164). Indeed, Wolf acknowledges that women experience a different reality because they are the objects of men who themselves are nature's objects. Women, according to Wolf, must strive for autonomy through living and writing. They must resist the temptation to integrate the "prevailing delusional systems" (Wolf, *Cassandra* 259).

This emancipatory project is not without pitfalls and challenges. It is difficult to let go of a mentality in which one feels comfortable in abstraction. To change formal reason's endeavour and break the chain of identical thoughts requires continuous cognitive efforts. For instance, displacement and distortion of governing structures predominantly asserted by men might engender further violence. In Wolf's novel, Medea and the Colchian women represent this critical juncture that disrupts the harmonious rhetoric of male supremacy. According to Akamas' point of view:

One can observe in many of [the Corinthian women] a strange desire to spend time with the foreigners, as though they've been seized by some compulsion. Then they begin giving their husbands thoughtful, detached looks. To tell the truth, I enjoy this. I'm no friend of those worthy men. As for their chilly, affected women, I'm no friend of theirs either. I've got something against such adhesive friendships. (Wolf, *Medea* 90)

What Akamas perceives is the patriarchal system of thought's deregulation. *Friendship* is the keyword that explains how intersubjectivity allows, in this specific case, women to share

experiences. It reveals the non-conceptual of gender relations and the “something” that exists beyond the postulate of male domination.

As another potential pitfall to this emancipatory aesthetics, the imposed muteness on women’s voices by the patriarchal authority might increase to maintain the status quo. Medea’s and Wolf’s public demonization is exerted to downplay their authoritarian aura as women “with a mind of their own.” Their Eastern history only adds to the authorities’ machination that their “statements” about these two women are well-founded and accurate. What post-1989 Germany’s and Corinth’s authorities try to achieve is the silence of their voices (their “life narratives”). It is to prevent any contradictions and oppositions to the Western ideology’s durability.

This typical scenario of political schism can be exemplified through the juxtaposition of Wolf’s novel and the myth of Philomela’s rape. As Ovid tells in *Metamorphoses*, Philomela is raped by the king of Thrace, Tereus, whose wife is Procne, the sister of Philomela. Seized by a courage to “shout what you (Tereus) have done”, Philomela confronts the king of Thrace with his crime (Ovidius Naso et al., Bk VI., lines 533-66). Afraid that the news would spread around the kingdom, Tereus, to protect his political link with Athens, cuts Philomela’s tongue and imprisons her in a close space devoid of communication with the outside. Philomela, whose “speechless lips could tell / No tale of what was done,” was determined to inform Procne about her husband’s sexual assault. As a political act, she “wove a clever fabric, working words / In red on a white ground to tell the tale” (Ovidius Naso et al., Bk VI., lines 567-96). As she passes the fabric to a woman so that she entrusts it to Procne, the “wickedness” of Tereus is revealed to the world.

What is essential in this myth is the resilience of Philomela to “transmit” and tell her experience. Even “voiceless” and secluded, Philomela succeeds in revealing the suffering reality

of women's experience under men's politics. As Morales explains, her "tapestry is part of a larger cultural phenomenon in which women turn to weaving and craftwork as a means of resistance" (72). Her story is not audible, but becomes legible and visible through art.

Like Wolf's and Philomeda's, Medea's voice might be attuned and silenced by the authorities, but she persists and work through this alienation and dispossession; she weaves her life fabric in remembering her painful experiences and by sharing them with others. In parallel to Philomeda, even dispossessed of political legitimacy, Wolf resorts to literature to weave her own story, her own version of the events whose appropriation by Western conservatives helped to push the anti-East agenda.

Ultimately, this emancipatory politics cannot take form if it does not come firstly from the individual. To reconnect with one's "living" history is to reflect oneself in the mirror and pay attention to the cracks left by time.

3.7 What Remains?

To come back to the central question of this analysis: does Wolf's Medea achieves a sense of emancipation? This twofold question cannot be answered simply by yes or no. On the one hand, Medea's exile demonstrates that she has not achieved meaningful socialization within the Corinthian society. However, she is more aware of her state of consciousness (as a historical living body) and the place that she has held within the Corinthian society. She takes back a form of agency by deconstructing the dominant vision of the world, which she finds to be delusional.

According to Marie Carrière, Wolf's Medea is a Ricoeurian subject; "une figure mythique à la fois désemparée par son propre mythe, déterminée par lui, mais jusqu'à un certain point, agente de sa fabrication et de sa propre situation damnée. Médée-sujet s'appartient donc

‘en quelque façon’” (Carrière 139). Medea’s agency in her self-damnation, however, lies precisely in the complex fabric-scheme of the human condition. In an environment where social relationships tie individuals’ self-realization, it becomes difficult, in the whirlwind of information and experiences, to distinguish the part in which the self plays a significant role albeit its own socialization. Also, myths are like Russian dolls; each mythological hero cannot be defined without considering the previous and future input of other heroic figures (Bolumburu Perl 369). In other words, investigating mythology requires a multi-perspective approach that consider myths as an interwoven, heterogeneous fabric of narratives that is crystallized through institutional writing (Bolumburu Perl 362). Consequently, Wolf’s investigation into the Medea myth as a dialectic medium for intersubjectivity reveals the exercise’s complexity.

One question persists at the end of the novel: how can Medea live again after such painful experiences? The direction that Wolf’s Medea takes is surprising: she puts a curse upon Akamas, Creon, Agamedea and Presbon:

What is left to me. To curse them. My curse upon you all... May a hideous life be your lot, and a miserable death. May your howling mount up to heaven and leave it unmoved.

I, Medea, put my curse on you. (Wolf, *Medea* 186)

Medea completely lacks understanding. Is it possible to blame her? She was exiled and lost her child who was stoned to death by the Corinthians. Her curse shows that although the subject must be considerate of others to live in a society of mutual respect, the individual is still a sensitive being.

The idea remains: the progress of intersubjectivity and gender emancipation cannot function properly if the individual does not undergo a process of self-reflection. Significant and liberating changes to the status quo must genuinely come from the people. Thus, authoritarian

politics cannot impose fundamental changes on individuals. It does not mean that individuals cannot express their concerns publicly. Certainly, writing is the art form Wolf has chosen to disclose her politics publicly.

Moreover, the final monologue of Medea leaves the reader on a troubling note. Indeed, she claims that the Gods “may probe me with their cruel instruments, they will find in me no trace of hope, no trace of fear. Nothing, nothing...even pain stops. I am free. Desiring nothing...” (185) These lines problematize Wolf’s aesthetics. It is a loss of faith for a better future, a doom that looms over humanity. Has Wolf given up on a more democratic and collective living?

One cannot differentiate Medea’s life from Wolf’s. Suppose one relocates the novel within its historical context. In that case, Christa Wolf might divert the causes of her social and cultural seclusion toward a bigger ideological entity: individualism and identical thinking. Indeed, Medea’s last sentences are explicit: “Where can I go. Is it possible to imagine a world, a time, where I would have a place. There’s no one I could ask. That’s the answer” (Wolf, *Medea* 186). According to these words, Medea feels alone in a world where she cannot be recognized. She questions the possibility of living in a community where individuals consciously and collectively acknowledge the social interdependence of human relations. She interrogates her readers about the likelihood to build a community that can attend to its sufferers, be more conscious of its constituents’ sensibilities and create an aesthetic politics that transcend the binary rhetoric. Undoubtedly, these concluding words act as Wolf’s criticism whose resonance continues to trouble the reader’s understanding of Medea’s parameters of visibility. Like Adorno’s politics of transformation, Medea’s final testimony appeals to the realm of hope and critical thinking from which the possibility of a social and gender emancipation can be envisioned.

Nevertheless, to imagine such a political ideal, the individual must come to subjectivity through a self-reflective process. To reconnect with what makes humans living beings, to remember the bodily sensibility to pain and to approach the other as a unique individual; those are endeavours that scarcely have a place within a consumerist and individualist society, which Corinth, and post-1989 Germany are its exemplifications.

Medea cannot be answered for two reasons. Firstly, there is no one to ask because the community is not interested in the other's life. Imprisoned within an individualistic society, Medea, like Glaucus, cannot yet "collectively" imagine a world where individuals would detain a social place that properly and individually fits their identity.

Secondly, this interrogation reminds the readers that the primary step toward subjectivity must come from the self. In the case of Medea, she must repeat this process. This repetition might be the source of emancipation that one needs to relive to become once more the subject of a new history. To come back briefly on an interview that Christa Wolf gave to Günter Gras in 1993, the GDR writer is asked to define this "coming-to-oneself":

WOLF: In my case, things have always come about through crisis, through what in part were life-and-death crises...I've always gone through crises when I recognized: that's something I absolutely don't want, and when I also recognized what I really do want...when you really had to stand up for something against the pressure. After that² I wrote books and did things I could never have done otherwise...And each time 'after that' I'd moved a bit farther along the road to myself, and I think I was able to show it in my books, too...Of course, I'm in a crisis now too, and I have the impression that it's helping me to gain more freedom. First, I naturally feel relieved- (Wolf and Heurck 263)

² Biermann affair.

If the reader might recall, Medea, before coming to Corinth, experienced the painful loss of her brother. So, she had already gone through a crisis before she fled Colchis. She tries to relive this suffering experience throughout her testimonies to remember her reality through body remembering. It is undeniable that her inward “looking back” tries to relocate her subjectivity within the historical space of experience.

Each time of crisis draws Medea back into the abyss of alienation vis-à-vis herself. The process of coming-to-oneself must be repeated; self-reflection, reconnection with the suffering body, elaboration of a new story of the self and the intersubjectivity that renders the subject’s visibility. Medea’s eviction from Corinth triggers another cycle of self-questioning, a repetition that is painful but necessary. Indeed, living an untroubled life through conformity precisely prevents subjectivity’s expression and the possibility to reveal the “not-yet” existing, perceivable singularities.

Crisis after crisis, Wolf has reflected upon herself and reconnected with what makes her a “living” and sensitive being. She has tried to draw a picture of “conscious” subjectivity constrained and influenced by social interactions in a society where rugged individualism and self-entitlement endanger the foundations of a community. As Schiwy and Rosen posit, “no longer do we participate concretely in social reality, in the reality of each other; no longer are we organically immersed in it... Today, I construct you... I re-present you to myself. In this way I bypass your insideness, flatten you out, turn you into a picture” (Schiwy and Rosen 11). Indeed, if self-enrichment and formal reason’s identical thinking put social relations through the mill to a point where concepts like “collectivism” and “communism” (in the broad sense of the word) become synonyms for “aversion” or “disgust,” what can be considered as a society in the Western world?

After her disenchantment with GDR's socialist politics, her surveillance from the Stasi, the Biermann Affair and her demonization by the new unified Germany, Christa Wolf wrote about her suffering. Certainly, she wrote to become each time more conscious of her place within Germany's political and cultural landscape. To retrieve the self, meet the other through thoughtful and genuine interactions and break formal reason's patriarchal pervasive thinking are goals set by Wolf's writing.

Whereas Adorno defends the impossibility of an authentic subjectivity (as if it was enough "to bring order into consciousness, for order to be brought into society" (qtd. in Ferrarese 4)), Wolf's identity is a fragile and unreliable subject (Carrière 140) who comes about in an endlessness re-enactment following periods of suffering. In other words, like Medea's, Wolf's coming-to-oneself, to become mature, takes form throughout this repetitive process of attending to suffering whose result can only point at a singular truth (among others) of the subject's identity. This political aesthetics creates circumstances in which subjects "intervene, fail, protest anew and become obsessed with new experiences" (Wolf, *Citadel of Reason* 169).

To conclude this chapter, one last question needs to be answered: Is Wolf's Medea, like Christa T., her political medium through which society can finally hear her voice and become visible? As she states: "Inventing her (Christa T.), was action, and was life at long life" (Wolf and Heurck 263).

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of Euripides' tragedy *Medea* and Christa Wolf's *Medea: A Modern Retelling* has explored different ways through which formal reason has survived Western history. Formal reason generalizes features of the human existence to create concepts impermeable to ambiguities and differences. Indeed, with the help of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Euripides' and Wolf's narratives of the Medea myth shows that dualist and universalist thinking characterized by patriarchy has tinted how humans interact and categorize each other from ancient Greece to modern days Germany. As chapter one suggests, the Medea of Euripides portrayed by the masculine ego as the murderous mother continues to pervade the modern imagination of womanhood. In her retelling of the Medea myth, Christa Wolf's Agameda echoes Euripides' Medea as the late capitalist model of woman-woman violence. Like Euripides' Medea, Agameda, in her pursuit of fame and social acceptance by the Corinthians, reproduces the same political and social violence that she tries to escape. According to Adorno's and Horkheimer's argument, humans regress into mythology when they believe that they have grasped the objective truth of nature, of humankind. To survive, Euripides' Medea and Wolf's Agameda internalize the patriarchal behaviour that once constrained them to turn it against their female peers. Thus, by applying the dialectic of Enlightenment explored by Adorno and Horkheimer, this study suggests that Westerners have been unable to investigate other ways of thinking that could alleviate women's suffering and improve the livability of humans' unique subjectivities within a world that exceeds their comprehension. However, to conclude that formal reason or Western rationality has lost any substantial power in subverting domination is perhaps too far-fetched. An exhaustive literary and philosophical research must be added or coupled with this analysis to arrive at such a conclusion. In that regard, revisionist-mythmaking works become

valuable to this enterprise because their artistic revisions trace back the evolution of ideologies that still encourage contemporary dominating practices and discourses on the “Other.”

Also, the first chapter shows that formal reason's imprisoning influence affects all genders when critical thinking is neglected. Similarities connect people, but differences and ambiguities remain nonidentical of what constitutes the meaning of being human. Thus, the reductionism of differences propels violence on every subject that cannot and does not want to comply with the dominant ideology.

To thwart formal reason's dual thinking and find a political aesthetics that will not transform into a replica of dualist segregation between genders, chapter two explores women's subjugation under men's “yoke.” As the section demonstrates, women's and the Other's exclusion of humanness by the Western patriarchal order is characterized by their assimilation with nature. Euripides' and Wolf's Medea are objectified and rejected by Jason and the Corinthian authority because they incarnate magical figures who endanger male rationality. Since the Euripidean Medea comes from a foreign land and is renowned for her magical aptitudes, she is despised and dreaded. Some feminists argue that the dialectic of men's ego vis-à-vis women imagines the feminine magical abilities as threatening because they do not fit the masculine rationality that obeys scientific and objective calculations. Recognized by different feminists as a source of epistemological resistance to the patriarchal order, Medea's magic emphasizes the potentiality of seeing and knowing what exceeds the masculine perspective.

In the case of Wolf's Medea, not only does she exemplify this naturalization of womanhood by the patriarchal order but also leads the readers to an underappreciated aspect of modern humanness: men's self-repudiation of their natural origin through wilful somatic

blindness. Wolf's treatment of the male reason from the point of view of Jason, Akamas and Leukon demonstrates her desire to abolish the reductionism of dual thinking. As the GDR author exposes throughout the dialectical relationships that bind the novel's different voices, the image of Medea as a woman is naturalized and negotiated only insofar as the patriarchal man represses his naturalness through bodily abstraction. The different testimonies composing the novel introduce Wolf's holism: the treatment of the mind and the body under a cooperative relationship wherein somatic stimuli to felt events challenge formal reason's epistemological monopoly. The literary comparison between Euripides' and Christa Wolf's works demonstrates the time-lasting masculine portrayal of women and the Other as reminiscences of humans' previous undifferentiated origin from nature. The male ego circumscribes the role of women and foreigners so that it can control what it believes to be nature's minions. However, far from reinstating a dualist discourse, Wolf, supported by Adorno's and Nietzsche's somatic epistemology, introduces a holistic approach to a new political aesthetics through which Medea and her (male and female) Western counterparts can alleviate the violence that formal reason imposes vis-à-vis differences and the nonidentical. Wolf's new political aesthetics, however, is taken from the male perspective (Jason and Akamas). Contrary to traditional feminist debates based on an irreconcilable gap between genders, Christa Wolf investigates and deconstructs the patriarchal man, an endeavour that she undertakes with the help of the body's ability to sense; a biological feature that cannot be so easily differentiated between genders.

Chapter three delves into Wolf's political aesthetics that rests on biographic and corporeal writing. Christa Wolf's struggle to say "I," to come-to-oneself, resurfaces in Medea's testimony. Her reliving of past experiences allows her to perceive what society (and herself to a certain extent) has tried to push into forgetfulness.

Due to his persistent lack of understanding concerning women's reality, Euripides' Medea cannot possibly influence a feminist politics by which genders can emancipate themselves from formal reason's violence without resorting to it. Nonetheless, Wolf's aesthetics explored in her novel does not discard Euripides' Medea entirely because, as chapter three shows, his tragedy reflects or hints unintentionally at the nonidentical of feminist politics. The Chorus's engagement with feminine solidarity and Medea's lamentations revolve back to Wolf's and Adorno's somatic preoccupations. The artistic and political act of retelling traditional myths through modern lenses is essential because revisioning their narratives encourages the thwarting of their patriarchal bedrock (the Aristotelian fable).

By taking a distance from Euripides' tragedy, Wolf's retelling of the Medea myth re-envisions and reconceptualizes the epistemological foundations of gender debates that, according to the author, are soaked by dualist arguments that dilute and evade the resourceful power of humans' embodiment. This feature is repeatedly criticized through the Corinthians' social coldness. Grounded in an anti-poetics that avoids the Aristotelian reductionism, Wolf's political aesthetics is exemplified by Medea, who constantly challenges her memory by remembering and resorting to past corporeal suffering. It is a way to thwart formal reason's monopoly on the subject's narrative by renegotiating the trustworthiness of events that the ego incessantly reshapes throughout time accordingly to identical thinking (the ego's way to survive). By taking advantage of the body's sensitiveness, Wolf's Medea can renegotiate her identity in a society where categorization and abstractionism are masters.

As Medea's testimony suggests, Wolf's writing is firmly entrenched in biographic and corporeal retelling. To tell one's story without ignoring the body is perhaps how Wolf can

elaborate emancipatory aesthetics by giving a voice to Medea. Wolf's experience during and after the GDR and Medea's journey criss-cross each other. Also, the somatic remembering and the sonorous whirlwind of the different voices composing the novel create a fabric that binds Medea's subjectivity. The heroine's identity cannot be reduced to a single thread (an event, character trait, discourse, etc.). Hence, telling one's corporeal narrative from "I" cannot be veracious if it is not recontextualized within the social fabric that composes society. To speak about suffering in a manner that does not disavow the body's sensitive existence opens a new dialogic space of intersubjectivity between readers and authors. By experiencing the Adornoian "shudder," the body reacts and challenges the mind's comprehension. This tension between the mind and body forces the subject to reconsider the foundation of the "I." Nevertheless, to exist as social bodies, the process of self-reflection must continually, according to Wolf's political aesthetics, be renegotiated vis-à-vis oneself and the society.

Medea, who discovers Iphinoe's body and on whom Apsyrtus's death is pinned, represents the scapegoat of patriarchal rationality that demonizes the "Other" by manipulating the threads as it sees fit to maintain absolute control. Like her heroine, Christa Wolf's demonization by the post-1989 Germany for her limited collaboration with the Stasis in the 60s transpires in Medea's revisionist testimony. However, Wolf's biographic and corporeal writing that permeates her works since the 70s embodies her artistic resistance to formal reason's reductionist thinking. Feeling through thinking and thinking through feeling symbolizes the symbiosis of a cognitive practice that advantages human beings, and it is undoubtedly Wolf's point of departure from feminism. To write about painful experiences is to write about the irreducible meaning of being human, a concern that Wolf engages in a post-dualist fashion that does not pitch women's and men's experiences against each other.

Wolf's sensual writing already envisions her utopian equality of sexes. Actions through art or any other social movement would inevitably bring changes into the system already overly corrupted by patriarchal thinking. Wolf and Medea experience a different reality than men, but their vision of society is based on an equally shared ability among genders: the somatic experience. Furthermore, as chapter one reminds us, relying exclusively on formal reason to emancipate human beings provokes the reproduction of the same violent discourse, and both women and men are vulnerable to this type of violence.

As this study concludes, Wolf's Medea does not achieve meaningful social emancipation. However, Medea's identity is solidified throughout her remembering of corporeal experience infused by suffering. Whereas Adorno criticizes the linear process of subjectification proposed by different theorists, Wolf's reimagining of Medea's testimony – and, by extension the framing of her own subjectivity - produces an unstable subject that is constructed and deconstructed by manipulated narratives. Unlike the rational subject of formal reason, Wolf's subjectivity exists within the constant re-actualization of identity through the tension between the body's response and the mind's negotiation.

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