

WUT 2020

10th International Conference “Word, Utterance, Text: Cognitive, Pragmatic and Cultural Aspects”

ANTIQUITY MATERIALS AS PHENOMENONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DISCLOSURE OF FEMALE BEING

Yana Zubenko (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) U. Sultangazin Kostanay State Pedagogical University, Tauelsizdik Street 118, Kostanay, Kazakhstan,
janaz75@rambler.ru,

Abstract

The article discusses the interpretation of antique female images, reflected in “Medea. Voices” by German writer Christa Wolf. The discrepancy between moral standards and surrounding reality left an imprint on issues of traditional values and caused serious difficulties in assessing what was happening around. Of particular interest is the author’s position on female images, and, in particular, the image of the main character, through which she debunks the patriarchal lie about strong women and contrasts two completely different cultures: matriarchy and patriarchy, new and old social forms. By identifying the similarities and differences between the narrative structures of the novel and the primary sources, Ch. Wolf’s attitude to historical events in Germany in the 90s of the 20th century is analyzed. Ch. Wolf retains in her novel about the past the features of the language of the depicted era, the speech flavor of the time of creation of the primary sources. The article discusses the need to include intertext in the work being created, which allows a more in-depth understanding of the text, which is not always possible, since the author can enter information from other sources into his work, thereby allowing the text not to be understood due to the explication of multidimensional links with other texts. Through labeling, identification and opposition to texts of other authors the writer creates her own text and establishes her own personality.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Postmodernism, narrative hero, antique female images, prototext, intertext, explication.



1. Introduction

The novel by German author Christa Wolf being written in the late 90s of the XX century serves as a typical example of postmodern literature. Wolf was considered the most prominent writer of the GDR as she symbolized a whole generation of representatives of the German intelligentsia. Her works, including „Medea. Voices”, are well known to Russian readers. At the time, an era of “tired” culture and pessimism reigned in society, as a result of which there appeared a need in literature to overcome the state of despair through the search for new values and a new literary language.

As all myths, the myth of Colchian Medea changed over time, from oral form it transferred into the written narrative. The stories about Medea have numerous versions, but infanticide, evil witchcraft and betrayal have always remained the core of the mythical story. However, the novel by Ch. Wolf makes the reader take a fresh look at the image of Medea: a vengeful and treacherous woman is transformed into a victim in the struggle between the civilized Corinth and the barbarian Colchis. Ch. Wolf treats Jason’s clash with Medea as a worldview conflict and, to some extent, as a political one. The novel has the second title – that of “Voices”. Thus, it becomes clear that this is not on the author’s narration: the storytellers themselves evaluate their actions, the surrounding reality and what is happening, while the reader remains neutral. Their revelations claim the truth, which has remained unsolved even to date.

It should be noted that the literature of the postmodern period is characterized by a multilevel organization of the text, a rethinking of the elements of the culture of the past, uncertainty and fragmentation (Nünlist, 2018). There are a lot of researchers are paying attention to the problem of the text (Bozhenkova & Bozhenkova, 2018; Gulius, 2016; Kalinin, 2019; Kessler, 2018; Nefedova & Kotlyarova, 2018; Ogudov, 2016; Vasseva, 2018). As a representative of her time, Ch. Wolf, while writing a novel, besides the myth of Medea, creatively interprets the tragedy of ancient Greek poet and playwright Euripides and Roman stoic philosopher and poet Seneca, who, in turn, were influenced by “Medea” by Publius Ovid. The tragedy has not survived to our time, but still it is considered one of the best examples of this literary genre in Roman literature. Melanphius, Neofron of Sikion, Diogenes of Sinop, Karkin the younger, Dikeogen, Morsim, Theodorides, Biot, unknown author, Anneus (“Medea the Exile”), Action (“Medea, or Argonauts”), Pompey Macr and Lukan also referred to the image of Medea.

2. Problem Statement

The main objectives of the study are: to conduct a comparative analysis of the text of the novel with prototexts in order to identify the nature of the contents of the novel in relation to the primary sources and the author’s attitude to modern reality; determine the role of women in the political and cultural life of the society; find out the necessity of including an intertext in the text being created.

The plot underlying the work is to be come across repeatedly in world literature. According to P.D. Ivlieva, many authors have interpreted and rethought the image of Medea, in particular, Hans Henny Yann (play “Medea”, 1926), Jean Anuy (“Medea”, 1946), L. Petrushevskaya (story “Medea”, 1993), L. Ulitskaya (Medea and Her Children, 2004), Tom Lanoi (Mother Medea, 2011) and others (Ivlieva, 2017). Each of the writers introduced new shades in the vicissitudes of the fate of individual mythical heroes, changed their behavior, character traits and often adapted the characters to the present within the frames

of the system of the work of corresponding time periods. “Medea. Voices” by Wolf was created as an allusion to the ancient Greek myth of the Golden Fleece, as well as to the tragedy of ancient Greek poet and playwright Euripides and Roman philosopher and writer Seneca (Euripides, 2016; Grillparzer, 2015; Kun, 2019; Seneca, 2007). Mythological plot of the work is convenient because of its polysemantics, which allows the author to transform the plots and images of mythology and rethink their moral and ethical basis at will and in connection with the goals set.

3. Research Questions

The article highlights historical events in Germany in the 90s of the XX century, touches upon the problems of literature of the postmodern period and identifies the means of updating the informative components of the utterance from antiquity sources, contributing to the disclosure of the inner world of women.

4. Purpose of the Study

We propose to trace the influence of the recent past on female images in the novel by Ch. Wolf “Medea. Voices”, in which the writer stands on a par with the hero-narrator, and even more so, they merge, forming a powerful sociocultural source, in which, like in the mirror, all the problems and conflicts of modern society are reflected.

5. Research Methods

In the research the following methods were resorted to: using the continuous sampling method, examples for analysis and illustration of theoretical propositions were selected; the identification of specific linguistic phenomena and their consistent description in terms of their structure and functioning has become possible thanks to a descriptive method; contextual analysis was used to study the functional specificity of words and their meanings; it is an analysis of the fragments of the text in which the given words are used, as well as an analysis of the dependence of a word's meaning on this context; interpretation contributed to the understanding of implications.

6. Findings

The modern novel by Ch. Wolf at the beginning of the narrative contains a list of characters and their brief description, which brings it closer to dramatic works intended for stage performance. To connect all the stories in one work, Ch. Wolf uses her own technique, the author introduces voices into the novel. So, six characters in eleven monologues defend their point of view, their own individual perspectives, describe their interests and share plans for the future with the reader. Any utterance, as any text, cannot exist in isolation and have no connection with other texts. Very often a new text arises as a response or as a reaction to an existing literary work. A so-called dialogue of texts takes place, during which the meaning of the original word or text acquires a slightly different meaning or semantic multiplicity, which is reflected in the new work (Volker, 2013).

The general non-textual commentary for the entire work is represented by the words of Elizabeth Lenk, which set the tone for the entire work and imply that humanity always has an opportunity to rethink the milestones of history walking through “transparent partitions of time”. Of particular interest is the author's introduction to the novel, by means of which Ch. Wolf addresses her issues of concern, namely, the modern perception of the image of Medea.

In the revised version of the myth, Medea is a representative of her time, an ordinary woman and mother, seeking happiness, understanding and care. The one who wanted to change her life, who was not afraid to go against her father and leave her native land. The one who struggled all her life for her good name appeals to the modern reader with the aim of explaining her actions and dispelling the negative ideas that have developed about her. Against the background of the history of Medea's life, a number of issues that reflect the problems of the individuals in society, for example, an attempt to preserve their customs and traditions, are addressed. The novel also describes the difficulties of a person who left the homeland and remains a stranger in a new society, i.e. refugee problems and their adaptation: “*Falls sie nicht, ausgehöhlt durch Heimweh und Demütigung und Enttäuschung und Armut, zu einer dünnen brüchigen Schale geworden sind, ...*” (Wolf, 2010, p. 32).

Corinthians from the very beginning did not accept Medea because of her independence and unwillingness to follow their traditions. So during a famine caused by drought, she forces Jason and the inhabitants of Corinth to eat horse meat, thereby committing sacrilege. The people survived, but they did not forgive her for their weakness. She was very different from Corinthian women; for everybody she was a “stranger” and “refugee”, doing what they were “forbidden from an early age” to do. The daughter of Tsar Eet, who walked with her head high in her homeland and enjoyed great respect among her people, has assessed the situation in the city and her current position in the society as follows: “*Korinth ist besessen von der Gier nach Gold*” (Ibid. p. 36). Corinthian wives remind Medea of tamed, carefully trained domestic animals. Through the image of the main character, the author shows that women from the East (Colchis) are more emancipated than women from the West (Corinth).

The myth about a wonderful life in a foreign country, which usually develops among people who dream of leaving Colchis and who believe that life in a new place is much better than in their homeland, is debunked. The compatriots of Medea who set off on a journey to a distant land are getting used to the customs and traditions of it with great difficulty. Even for Jason, who has seen many countries, it is not easy to adapt to the royal house and its inhabitants. Medea has been missing Colchis all her life: “*... wenn ich den Kopf drehte, so wie jetzt, sah ich die Fensteröffnung, wie hier, wo bin ich, da war doch kein Feigenbaum, da stand doch mein geliebter Nußbaum. Hast du gewußt, daß man sich nach einem Baum sehnen kann, ...*” (Ibid. p. 12).

The distribution of leading roles among people in power remains not less significant. Describing the situation of the common people and the events during the plague, the author raises social issues. The novel also addresses legal issues of the rights of a migrant or, as the Corinthians call her, a “refugee”. In ancient times, according to Athenian laws, marriages with foreigners did not have legal force and could be easily revoked. Thus, Medea, having lost all rights in her homeland, is deprived of any protection and shelter in Corinth.

The paradox of the novel is that it shows the imposition of political myths. Thus, the politicians of the civilized Corinth use the death of Apsyrt in the struggle against Medea, whom they find undesirable, and create the myth of the murder. The struggle for power is waged equally brutally in Colchis and in Corinth. Tsar Creon, despite his poor health, does not want, according to ancient custom, to transfer power to the hands of his wife, Tsarina Merope, from whom he “only borrowed the crown”. Creon later sacrifices his daughter, believing that a woman will not be able to rule in Corinth. To hide the evil intent and traces of the crime, rumors are spread among the people about the young girl’s departure to distant lands and her happy life with a beautiful prince. So there is another legend that is politically motivated.

Not less interesting is the fact of describing the death of the daughter of Tsar Creon and Meropa. According to one of the original sources, Corinthian tsar Creon has convinced Jason to leave Medea and marry his daughter Glauka. In turn, Medea, cursing an ungrateful husband and wanting to punish him, has presented the princess with a cloak of light fabric, the so-called peplos, after soaking it in poison. Glauka, wearing an outfit, burns alive with her father, who tried to save the daughter. In the novel, the princess kills herself, rushing into the well. She commits suicide when she realizes that with the exile of Medea few people will be interested in her life. Glauka was not loved by her parents since childhood, since all their attention and love were given to the older sister of Iphonia: “... *die ältere Schwester, die schöne, die kluge, welche die Mutter mehr liebte als mich*” (Ibid. p. 145), whom later the father did not spare, and the death of who further distanced the youngest daughter from the family.

Referring to the events in Corinth and Colchis, the author introduces a political myth into the novel, describing and explaining what is happening, emphasizing its ideological and symbolic basis: the secret marriage of Ifinoia, who allegedly left the country, having married a prince from another state: “... *ob sie denn wirklich von fremden Seeleuten entführt worden sei, um ehrenvoll mit deren jungem König verheiratet zu werden*“ (Ibid. p. 115); the troubles that struck the city explained by the presence of Medea and strangers in Corinth; killing the children of Medea by Corinthians, who blame their mother for the murder: “*Sie sorgen dafür, daß auch die Späteren mich Kindsmörderin nennen sollen*” (Ibid. p. 217). In order to hide the truth about what is happening, the authorities use a political myth. On the example of the novel, Ch. Wolf shows that well-known facts borrowed from some myth or certain tragedies can be processed and presented to the reader from a completely different perspective. Key episodes demonstrate that myths are created by people, and, depending on the needs of society, their contents change. People turn to myths or compose legends in order to escape from the reality surrounding them; perhaps they want to encode some information about certain events.

Let us turn to the description of the appearance of Colchian princess Medea. Ch. Wolf describes Medea as a slender dark-haired girl with sparks in gray-green eyes and an arrogant movement of her eyebrows, with a proud gait, who knows how to behave in any society. In the course of the novel, the characters describe her as follows: “*wunderliche Frau*”, “*das braunhäutige dunkelhaarige Mädchen*”, “*schlank*”, “*mit der ausgeprägten Figur*”, “*zieht die Augenbrauen hoch*”, “*die schöne Wilde*”. By describing the appearance of the main character in this way, Ch. Wolf shows that this woman is a rather extraordinary personality and the significance of her image is set by the author from the very beginning of the story in the novel. She appears to the modern reader not as a typical representative of her time, but as

a completely new person, ready to go against the existing system of personality. The author was able to catch the echoes of eternity in the individual psychology of a particular person.

The author interprets the image of the main character in her own way and presents it to the reader as: 1) a truth seeker who uncovered politically motivated murder of Princess Ifinoia in Corinth; 2) a proud and confident woman who has some claims; 3) a representative of her time who is beautiful and knows her worth, and who knows how to support a man in extreme cases; 4) an idealistic woman who helps even her enemies in trouble; 5) an intelligent and wise woman who saved the inhabitants of Corinth from starvation; 6) a courageous representative of the fairer sex, who during a religious holiday stopped an aggressive crowd; 7) emotional woman; 8) a woman unlike others; 9) a healer.

In the novel there are several female images, one of them being the image of sorceress Kirk. In accordance with the contents of the novel by Ch. Wolf, Kirk is an elderly woman with fiery red hair, she is Medea's maternal aunt. Kirk helps Idia, Medea's mother, during the birth of her son. Her speech against the tsar leads to an escape from Colchis. On the way to Iolk, Medea and Jason land on the island where the sorceress lives. Kirk performs a ceremony of purification from blood guilt. She does not trust men and, according to the legend, turns them into pigs.

So, the image of Medea in the novel can be reconstructed from the contents of monologues of both positive and negative characters. Based on the material studied, we can conclude that Ch. Wolf does not always adhere to the storyline her previous works.

7. Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the text of the novel and prototexts allows us to identify both coincidences and discrepancies with the primary sources, as a result of which the polemic nature of the contents of the novel in relation to the primary sources and a critical attitude to modern reality are revealed.

In the novel, the author addresses the issues of immigration and integration, the restructuring of state and social systems, raises political issues, and does not disregard the problems of mutual understanding. The main character is in search of a solution to the conflict with the society. Ch. Wolf presents a portrait of a self-willed and unusual woman "between times", a misunderstood personality, whose life is being lived on the borderline of two ideologies. The author debunks the patriarchal lie about strong women who allegedly cause evil to the people around them. Ch. Wolf opposes two completely different cultures: matriarchy and patriarchy, the new and old social forms. Both worlds are built on a similar murder (Aspirt and Ifinoia). She draws a parallel between masculinity and femininity, good and violence, emotionality and rationality.

The inclusion of intertext in the created text gives reason to consider it as one of the most important techniques in the stylistic system of the author and allows us to understand the additional meaning of the text, to which the author may refer both explicitly and implicitly. The pragmatic specificity is that the author is not always sure that the recipient is able to adequately interpret or identify the information received from the text. Understanding of the meaning of the text comes to the reader due to his cultural, historical and life experience.

References

- Bozhenkova, R. K., & Bozhenkova, N. A. (2018). Mekhanizmy rozhdeniya i nakopleniya novyh lingvokul'turnyh smyslov v processe translyatsii teksta [Mechanisms for the birth and accumulation of new linguistic and cultural meanings in the process of text translation]. *Mir russkogo slova*, 1, 53-57. Retrieved from <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/mehanizmy-rozhdeniya-i-nakopleniya-novyh-lingvokulturnyh-smyslov-v-protsesse-translyatsii-teksta>
- Euripides. (2016). *Medea*. Berlin: Verlag der Comtumax GmbH & Co. KG.
- Grillparzer, F. (2015). *Das goldene Vließ*. Project Gutenberg EBook. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/7946/pg7946-images.html>
- Gulius, N. S. (2016). Sovremennye narrativnye strategii kak cherta novogo realizma v literature [Modern narrative strategies as a feature of the new realism in literature]. *Yazyk i kul'tura: sbornik statej XXVII Mezhdunarodnoj nauchnoj konferencii*, 28-33. Retrieved from http://biblioclub.ru/index.php?page=book_red&id=466549&razdel=
- Ivlieva, P. D. (2017). Ot P. Kornelya k L. Ulitskoj: evolyuciya obraza Medei v evropejskoj literature [From P. Cornel to L. Ulitskaya: the evolution of the image of Medea in European literature]. *Filologiya: nauchnye issledovaniya*, 3, 117-124. Retrieved from https://nbpublish.com/library_read_article.php?id=23441
- Kalinin, S. S. (2019). *Lingvokul'turnyj transfer kak forma peredachi informacii (na materiale germanskikh yazykov i kontaktnyh idiom)* [Linguocultural transfer as a form of information transfer (based on Germanic materials and contact idioms)] (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://kemsu.ru/upload/iblock/03a/03aa6286ef0bdcd396f84aa0590ce003.pdf> Kemerovskij gosudarstvennyj universitet, Rossiya
- Kessler, L. A. (2018). Sredstva aktualizacii gendernogo aspekta v nemeckoyazychnyh tekstah vospominanij XIX – nachala XX vekov [The specifics of the implicit expression of the author's gender identity in German-language female texts of memoirs of the XIX – XX centuries]. *Interaktivnaya nauka*, 1 (23), 92-95. <https://doi.org/10.21661/r-468059>
- Kun, N. A. (2019). *Legendy i mify drevnej Grecii*. [Legends and myths of ancient Greece]. Retrieved from <http://www.e-reading.club/book.php?book=31594>
- Nefedova, L. A., & Kotlyarova, T. Ya. (2018). Gipoverbalizaciya kak princip postroeniya sodержatel'noj programmy korotkoj prozy [Hypoverbalisation as a principle of meaning construction in short literary prose]. *Quaestio Rossica*, 535-549. <https://doi.org/10.15826/qr.2018.2.311>
- Nünlist, R. (2018). Kontext und Kontextualisierung als Kategorien antiker Literaturerklärung. Ute Tischer, Alexandra Forst, Ursula Gärtner (Hg.) Text, Kontext, Kontextualisierung. *Moderne Kontextkonzepte und antike Literatur*. Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim Zürich New York, 101-119.
- Ogudov, S. A. (2016). Diskussiya o rasskaze i pokaze v narratologii: problemy i perspektivy [Discussion about the story and show in narratology: problems and prospects]. *Vestnik of Tomsk State University*, 409, 14-19. <https://doi.org/10.17223/15617793/409/2>
- Seneka, L. A. (2007). *Medea*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam.
- Vasseva, D. D. (2018). Povestvovanie ot pervogo lica v sovremennom rasskaze [First-person narration in a modern story]. *Mir russkogo slova*, 1, 80-85. Retrieved from <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/povestvovanie-ot-pervogo-litsa-v-sovremennom-rasskaze>
- Volker, K. (2013). *Textanalyse und Interpretation zu Christa Wolf, Medea, Stimmen*. Hollfeld: Bange. Retrieved from <https://docplayer.org/48878469-Medea-stimmen-koenigs-erlaeuterungen-christa-wolf-textanalyse-und-interpretation-zu-volker-krischel.html>
- Wolf, Ch. (2010). *Medea. Stimmen*. München: Luchterhand.