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## MEDEA THE FEMINIST AND MEDEA THE OTHER IN MODERN GEORGIAN RECEPTIONS

KETEVAN NADAREISHVILI

*Abstract.* The receptions of Medea depicting her as the Other and as a feminist appear to be the main trends of her interpretation since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The article studies the Georgian receptions of Medea the Other and Medea the feminist in the context of these interpretative trends developed in her Western reworkings; namely, it focuses on three artistic productions: *Medea: A World Apart*, produced in 1997 by Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre and based on Olga Taxidou's two plays; Nino Kharatishvili's 2007 play *Mine and Your Heart (Medeia)*; and Madi Beriashvili's 2013 play *Medea as Medea*. The conclusions suggest useful insights concerning the similarities existing between Medea's Western and Georgian interpretations as well as the novelties her Georgian receptions present.

The versatile image of Euripides' *Medea* has given birth to the numerous productions, adaptations, and receptions of this play on a global scale. Different epochs and various authors have interpreted this multifaceted figure in their own way — Medea the witch, Medea the infanticide, Medea the abandoned wife, Medea the proto-feminist, and Medea the outsider — with each one appearing to be the main interpretive trend of Medea, “arguably the most theatrical of all Greek tragic characters.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Macintosh 2000, 1.

Feminist receptions of Medea have been spearheading the reworkings of this complex image from the 1960s onwards. Together with this trend, the interpretations of Medea as ethnically Other can be considered as the mainstream direction as well. At the same time, from the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mixing of various interpretative directions of Medea in a single artistic piece starts to enjoy popularity. Medea the feminist and Medea the Other became the dominant trends in the modern amalgam of Medea's reworking. The reason for their dominance lies in the topicality of the issues they reflect. Responding as always to the concerns of the day, these modern mainstream trends — Medea the feminist and Medea the outsider — are being refashioned nowadays in accordance with a contemporary problematic of otherness and of women's wrongs.

The modern Georgian reworkings of Medea are of significant interest when studying the abovementioned interpretative directions of the Colchian woman. Though to fully understand the contribution of Medea's Georgian receptions to her mainstream interpretative trends, a certain introduction of the main characteristics of these discourses seems to be appropriate. It will facilitate our better understanding of the themes that turned out to be the most topical for the Georgian interpretations as well as of the novelties Medea's Georgian reworkings have offered. From Medea's numerous Western receptions interpreting Medea the feminist and Medea the Other, only the most important ones will be discussed.<sup>2</sup>

#### MEDEA THE FEMINIST IN THE WESTERN INTERPRETATIONS

The feminist reworkings of the Medea myth, and the most recent ones in particular, share one characteristic feature — they try to rehabilitate Medea, some of them striving not only to exonerate her morally but also to free her altogether from the crimes she had never performed even though they were ascribed to her. In this discourse, Jackie Cross-

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<sup>2</sup> For a generalized picture of Medea's interpretative directions, see especially Macintosh 2000 and Lauriola 2015. For Medea's feminist rereadings, see Van Zyl Smit 2002. For Black Medeas – Medea the Other, see Van Zyl Smit 2014. Other important studies in this respect will be considered below.

land's play *Collateral Damage: The Tragedy of Medea* (1991) and Christa Wolf's novel *Medea. Voices* (1996) are the most distinguished ones.

The Canadian playwright Jackie Crossland, by presenting Medea's whole story, was able to show how abused her life already was from her maidenhood in Colchis. Isolated from people since her mother's death, this Medea, being maltreated by her father and the brother, does not show any attempt of a protest, and runs away only after Jason had requested her to.<sup>3</sup> When leaving Colchis, Jason kills her brother. It is this very moment the rumor net accusing her of the crimes she had never done starts to be woven. The father seems to be first casting the stone at the daughter, blaming her for the murder of his son and accusing her of bewitching Jason. Amid personal revenge over the daughter, the ruler's reaction is caused by his belief that Medea's, a woman's independent action – namely, her secret escape with Jason is a transgression threatening the patriarchal hegemony.<sup>4</sup>

Perceiving Jason as an excellent warrior, therefore as a helper in militaristic affairs, Crayon (Creon) decides to marry his daughter off to him, thus continuing Medea's injuries and exiling her. But the princess (without name here) appears to be a self-willed personality who considers the marriage as a means to consolidate Crayon's position. Despite her protest, the king forces her to marry. Jason rapes her in the name of marriage. But this independent-spirited woman finds force in herself to contradict the established behaviour norms and sets fire to the marriage bed before running off to the women's tower. This is the kind of a shelter where outraged women find an escape, serving as a manifestation of women's solidarity.<sup>5</sup> But the male-dominated world perceives the tower as a potential threat and is quick to burn it. At the end we see Medea as a lonely woman mourning her children believing them to be dead (though the children

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<sup>3</sup> "As the Maid tells, 'Medea was a woman more or less like any other who depend[ed] on a man and got no thanks for it.'" (Crossland 1992, 74, quoted in Choi 2013, 47-48).

<sup>4</sup> Choi 2013, 48.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., women from the tower gave a rest to pregnant Medea when she first arrived at Corinth and was wandering in the streets not speaking their language.

managed to escape together with the Maid). The net of the rumor continues to weave around her, claiming this time that Medea is guilty in the murder of the princess and her own children.

Thus, the woman playwright presents a totally innocent Medea here, still blamed, but her crimes are non-existent since the princess and the children are alive. Crossland's Medea is an ordinary woman lacking the strength of a character and will for action. Contrary to her prototype, she appears to be a weak, unsophisticated person reluctantly accepting injuries. She even justifies Jason, her betrayer, on the basis that the latter was only following Crayon's demands. Nonetheless, what seems most striking in Crossland's personage is that this Medea accepting the conditions the patriarchal order offers considers them to be normal.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Crossland throws in surprises when she makes the princess, Medea's rival, the only woman capable of independent action, free will, and to top it all, of fighting back at males, as demonstrated by the burning of the marriage bed.

Crossland's message seems to be that "Medea's story could be any woman's story"<sup>7</sup> in the sense that every woman is a victim of the male-dominated world. Given that the term "collateral damage" was used to denote the thousands of deaths civilian victims faced from wars around them, it can also be used to equally denote the victimization of women's and children's lives as they were also "buffeted by the circumstances over which they have no control," believes the writer herself.<sup>8</sup>

Medea again is totally guiltless in the novel of the well-known writer from East Germany, Christa Wolf. The 1996 novel *Medea. Voices* appears to be the narrations of six voices — six personages (including Medea) speaking about Medea. The novel presents Medea's story both in Colchis and Corinth. These countries, corrupt and totalitarian, are predominantly displayed as patriarchal hegemonies striving to keep the established norms. The main threat for them appears to be a potential matriarchy —

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<sup>6</sup> The fact that Jason doesn't pay much attention to the conversations with her seems quite natural for Medea as she believes that women can't expect much.

<sup>7</sup> Van Zyl Smit 2002, 113.

<sup>8</sup> Crossland 1992, 9.

the rule of women that seems to be more compassionate in the novel.<sup>9</sup> And to prolong this patriarchal order, Creon's rule, his successor Iphinoe was sacrificed at Corinth. Colchis was ruled by men and women alternately through seven-year cycles, according to its constitution. But when the time comes for Aeetes to be replaced by a woman, Medea's sister, the king manages to discredit the confronting party of women by a chain of intrigues. Leaving Colchis to escape from her father's brutal and corrupt power (she was involved in an attempt to end Aeetes' rule), the Colchian woman arrives at Corinth to find out that the Greek country, renowned for its prosperity, is as corrupt and rotten as the regime she had run away from. Here the tragedy of Medea begins when she accidentally discovers the secret of the court — Creon's daughter Iphinoe, the successor of Creon, had been sacrificed intentionally to preserve the existing patriarchal hegemony.<sup>10</sup> Though Medea shows no sign that she will speak about the news she discovered, the stranger "who knows" becomes unendurable for the royal family. The first step against her appears to be discrediting her reputation — the whole propaganda machine is set into motion trumping up various charges against her. The stranger is blamed for the murder of both her brother in Colchis and of Glauce in Corinth.<sup>11</sup> Afterwards Medea is judged and sentenced to exile, forbidden to take her children with her. Leaving the city, Medea entrusts them to the priestess in Hera's sanctuary hoping they will be protected there. But the dark PR against her hasn't ceased. This time the witchcraft that was ascribed to her in the past is cited as the cause of every misfortune — earthquake, solar eclipse, etc. The indignation towards her children is so all-embracing that the mob takes the boys from the sanctuary and stones them to death.<sup>12</sup> This is followed by the fabrication of the next lie — the rumor that it was the mother herself who killed the children.

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<sup>9</sup> See Lü 2004.

<sup>10</sup> The elimination is kept as a secret while the royal family spreads the "official" false story that Iphinoe eloped to marry abroad.

<sup>11</sup> Medea is innocent in both charges. She has no motive for Glauce's killing. She doesn't love Jason. Furthermore, she is in love with another man, the sculptor Oistros. Glauce drowns herself in a well.

<sup>12</sup> See Danelia 2003.

Despite the fact that Medea, in both versions, is a totally innocent victim of the male-dominated world order based on misogynist ideology, her persona appears to be quite different in the two women's writings. Medea of the German writer is an intelligent woman gifted with a healer's knowledge who helps everyone around her. Additionally, she is also a distinguished woman among the Corinthian womenfolk. Fortitude, pride, and disobedience are the most prominent features of her personality. Compliance of the Corinthian wives is utterly unacceptable for this Colchian woman who urges them to express their feelings, wishes, and intentions.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside interpreting the feminist Medea, the author reworks the trend of Medea the Other, though to a lesser degree. Accused of witchcraft, Medea is a "scapegoat" for every misfortune at Corinth as it happens usually to strangers throughout history. The Colchians who willingly came to Corinth in a search of a better country are treated as low-class strangers in Greece claiming its own superiority. "Corinth is obsessed with the desire for gold [...] And what shocked us [Colchians] most: the worth of a citizen in Corinth is measured by the amount of gold he possesses [...]"<sup>14</sup>

Wolf's Medea is then another guiltless Medea, a fearless woman who does not reconcile herself to the consideration that the female sex must be subordinate to the male. But unlike her prototype, her disapproval of the existed ethical norms does not turn into an active struggle against these very norms. What makes this personage a Medea-like figure is that those surrounding her are unable to force her to do the things they wish.

Tony Harrison's work *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* (1985) seems to be an interesting feminist interpretation of Medea's story with the main message claiming the existence of a century-old and total war between man and woman. Medea here is again innocent in killing her offspring. It is the archetypal misogynist Hercules who murders Medea's children.<sup>15</sup> Despite

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<sup>13</sup> Metreveli 2007, 219.

<sup>14</sup> Wolf 1999, 35, quoted in Lü 2004, 12. The researcher emphasizes the contrasts and the similarities between Corinth and Colchis discourse in relation to that of East and West Germany's integration process.

<sup>15</sup> "[Hercules] was a man who slew monsters, thus contributing to civilization, but, as Harrison claims, these monsters were all forms of a woman, maiden, crone, and goddess, and in slaying them he resembled the final monster: "All the monsters that

the fact that Medea has not committed the murder, she is still executed in the electric chair. She and the whole of womanhood are victims of extreme male misogyny.<sup>16</sup> “Medea, as trope or representation as guaranteed through her fictionality, is eternal,” colorfully remarks Marianne McDonald, “now a warning, now a reassuring song ... and now, also, again, on the stage is an indictment of the world off stage.”<sup>17</sup>

The second direction of Medea’s feminist interpretations presenting her as a murderous mother still tends to rehabilitate her morally. The adaptation by the Irish writer Brendan Kennelly *Euripides’ Medea: A New Version* (1991) appears to be a significant example of this discourse. Together with the feminist reworking of Medea’s myth, the adaptation puts forward the political issues of the day, thus responding to the contemporary tendency of Medea’s revision — uniting different interpretative trends in one piece. Jason and Medea’s opposition is seen as England versus Ireland, where Jason is seen as Cromwell and Medea as Ireland, the colonized victim fighting back.<sup>18</sup> The author’s main motive was to write the story of Medea as a reflection of the opposite sex’s attitude towards women and the resulting animosity of women reacting to this perspective. Medea’s famous “Women of Corinth” speech acquires here the significance of women’s manifesto. Abundant with obscenities, it appears as a weapon in Medea’s hands.<sup>19</sup> The writer changes the focus of the women’s famous choral song of Euripides’ tragedy (*Med.* 410-430). While ancient women sang about an absence of women’s voices in literature, the ode is dedicated to female abuse by their male counterparts in the modern writer’s voice. Able to alter her position and change

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I ever slew / were only the great EARTH MOTHER, you!” (Harrison 1985, 434, quoted in McDonald 1992, 119-120).

<sup>16</sup> “In every quiet suburban wife / dissatisfied with married life / is MEDEA, raging!” are the words of the chorus of women. See Harrison 1985, 371.

<sup>17</sup> McDonald 1992, 124-125.

<sup>18</sup> McDonald 2003, 190.

<sup>19</sup> “Men, the horny despots of our bodies, / sucking, fucking, licking, chewing, farting into our skin, / sitting on our faces, fingering our arses, / exploring our cunts, widening our thighs, / drawing the milk that gave the bastards life.” (Kennelly 1991, 89, quoted in McDonald 1997, 307).



her plight, Kennelly's Medea "transcends being a scorned woman to reach wondrous glory."<sup>20</sup> The adaptation ends with a noteworthy question: "And yet I wonder, and will always wonder - / Is Medea's crime Medea's glory?"<sup>21</sup> Concern with political issues makes the Irish Medea angrier in a political way, notes M. McDonald. Using her familiar metaphoric language, McDonald sums up her discussion of the Irishman's adaptation with the following words, "Medea now is a lightning rod for political questions, and a suitable heiress to the dragon chariot."<sup>22</sup>

Certain feminist interpretations of Medea depict her as a heroine who has again obtained the whole range of passions characteristic of her prototype. Revenge is her motive for the terrible action.

The Scottish dramaturge Liz Lochhead's *Medea* (2000) is considered an example of such comprehension. According to Fiona Macintosh, the play presents "Medea the *femme fatale* who returned to the stage with gusto and immediacy."<sup>23</sup> The play is close to the original story despite some changes. The main novelty appears to be the presentation of the women's chorus as encompassing women "of all times, all ages, classes and professions."<sup>24</sup> Medea's motive for the murder of her children is to save her sons from becoming "cruel men like their father" and her daughter from experiencing the reality of "womanhood / and this world's mercy."<sup>25</sup> The playwright's aim was not Medea's exoneration but to present the gender relationship as Medea envisioned it. Being as it is, the male-female interaction appears to her as a dead-end she does not want to accept. Van Zyl Smit is right when arguing that though Medea takes responsibility for the

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<sup>20</sup> O'Brien 2012, 164.

<sup>21</sup> Kennelly 1991, 75.

<sup>22</sup> McDonald 1997, 312.

<sup>23</sup> Macintosh 2000, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Lochhead 2000, 7. The chorus, being representative of womanhood, comprehends her grief. They hate men like Creon and Jason and urge Medea to act against them: "We know men, we know who's in the right. / Punish him for us Medea" (Lochhead, 2000, 10). But their support, as in the original plot, falters after hearing Medea's decision of killing her children and they start attacking her for being an unnatural mother. For the chorus' presentation by Lochhead, see Craig 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Lochhead 2000, 28; Craig 2015, 47.

deeds performed, she isn't perceived as a monster by the chorus. What has happened to her may happen to any woman.<sup>26</sup>

#### MEDEA AS THE OTHER OF THE WESTERN RECEPTIONS

As stated, Medea's reception as the Other appears to be another mainstream trend in the contemporary reworking of her image. Critics agree that the tradition of presenting Medea as an ethnic Other starts with Franz Grillparzer's tragedy *The Golden Fleece* (1820). In the trilogy, the Austrian dramatist proposes the otherness theme resonating with contemporary Jewish oppression, Jew being "the essential Other for German speaking lands."<sup>27</sup>

While depicting Medea, Grillparzer strove to present her as a victim of Otherness and being a woman. The dramatist displayed the whole panorama of her story from the beginning, aiming to show the important role outside actors have played in her destiny. The Colchian maiden is exonerated here from some crimes prescribed to her (e.g., she does not kill her brother; confronts Jason as much as she can not to steal the Golden Fleece). Grillparzer's heroine appears to be a sincere, straightforward personality who never acts in secret.<sup>28</sup> The ability of manipulation is developed much less in his Medea. She is presented with more human characteristics. Jason's wife tries her best to assimilate herself into the Greek culture.<sup>29</sup> Displaying Medea's difficulties of accustoming to the new socio-cultural milieu, the author works the theme of the West-East opposition and of Medea as the Other in this context. Grillparzer pays special attention to how the arrogant Greek mentality receives the Other. The acceptance of a foreigner (Medea) in Greece is exemplified by Jason looking haughtily at the Other and emphasizing on every occasion Greece's superiority over Colchis, a savage and a dark land. The main culprit for

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<sup>26</sup> Van Zyl Smit 2002, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Corti 1998, 128.

<sup>28</sup> Unlike her prototype, she does not run from her country superstitiously, on the contrary, after informing the father about her feelings, she demonstratively makes her way towards Jason.

<sup>29</sup> To take leave from her past, the Colchian woman buries her clothes and witch's outfit in the ground before entering Corinth.

Medea's failed "Hellenization" appears to be this very arrogant approach towards an alien, such a characteristic feature for the representatives of Greece.

The betrayed and exiled woman asks for one last favor to take the children into exile but receives the bitterest shock of her otherness — the boys refuse to follow the mother, having already been alienated from her.<sup>30</sup> This moment seems to be the acme of Medea's total isolation. The infanticide follows; however, the Colchian woman sees this act as the only way to avoid a terrible future for the children, as she tells the nurse. Medea's words make Macintosh suppose that the murder is not presented here as an act of a furious revenge but rather as a mother's desire to prevent her children from a worse fate in the future.<sup>31</sup>

To sum up, Grillparzer's novel approaches, taken together, have promoted to create a perception of Medea that presents her as an extremely victimized woman, thereby, making her terrible revenge look more understandable.

Though Grillparzer's work was a significant reception of this famous heroine, the interpretative trend of Medea's otherness initiated by him did not gain popularity up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when "Medea's ethnicity became a dominant concern in dramatic treatment of the myth."<sup>32</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century Medea's interpretations in this discourse tend to explore global concerns of the time — be it an interracial strife, anxieties between colonies and metropolises, or complex relations of "civilized" states and the so-called Third World. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reworkings of Medea the Other, Hans Henny Jahn's *Medea* (1926), *Asie* (1931) by Henri Lenormand, and *The Wingless Victory* (1936) by Maxwell Anderson are considered as some of the most influential. Though Jahn's play (premiered in Berlin in 1926) had shocked his contemporaries and had not enjoyed the success at the time of its first performance, it was revived sever-

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<sup>30</sup> The children's refusal to follow their mother is Grillparzer's innovative contribution to Medea's story. Creusa, Creon's daughter and Jason's bride, plays a big role in the boys' adaption into Greek society.

<sup>31</sup> Macintosh 2000, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Macintosh 2000, 21.

al times. Subsequent popularity seems to be caused by exploring the theme of otherness — interracial anxieties this time around.<sup>33</sup> For the first time in the history of her presentations, Medea presented as a black woman was played by the black actress Agnes Straub.<sup>34</sup> Medea and her “half-negro” children are abused and isolated because of their race. Her elder son (the children are grown-up youths here) longs to marry Creon’s daughter, but Creon — being the embodiment of racial prejudices who considers dark-skinned people lower than animals — rejects the possibility of their marriage, while welcoming Jason, the personification of a real Greek male and a hero to him. Medea and her sons are ordered to leave the city or to be killed. Medea’s desire to save her sons from racial injustice is seen as her motive for the filicide.<sup>35</sup>

The French writer Henri Lenormand explored Medea’s “multidimensional otherness”<sup>36</sup> in the play *Asie* (Paris, 1931) through an experience of an exploitation of the colonized through Indo-Chinese princess Katha, the Medea figure of the play. Jason is represented here by a French colonial de Mazzena.<sup>37</sup> As in other interpretations of Medea the outsid-

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<sup>33</sup> Jahn’s play was revived in 1964; 1978; 1981. Alongside the main theme, the interest towards the play was due to other topical contemporary issues as well such as sadism, pedophilia, and homoeroticism. See Macintosh 2005, 65.

<sup>34</sup> For the analysis of the play, see Corti 1998, 180-186.

<sup>35</sup> Lauriola 2015, 394. Medea’s image appears to be a complex one in this play full of symbolic contexts as well. Medea, a black and an aged woman, is presented in the play as an embodiment of a sensual-daemonic primaeval female force/formation. Through killing the sons, Medea transforms their corpses into eternal images. For other motives of the filicide, see Frenzel 1970, 231.

<sup>36</sup> Foley 2012, 193.

<sup>37</sup> Translated into a different place, time, and circumstances, the play follows the Medea story: the princess betrays her father — the ruler of Sibang in Indo-China — saves Jason from death and is found guilty of her brother’s murder. A significant deviation should be noted here — Katha’s betrayal of her nation is far more serious as she helps her husband to subjugate her people and to rule over them. Their marriage bond starts to break as soon as the Jason figure returns to France where the princess is comprehended as an alien. The following corresponds to the Medea story as well: Jason marries the daughter of the prefect of Marseille and Katha is ordered to return to Sibang. The husband here offers help for safe return

er, alienation between the spouses is also due to their belonging to various cultures, though these cultures being not only different, but also being valued asymmetrically. One considers itself “civilized,” thus being superior, and perceives the other as “barbarian,” “savage,” thus — inferior. Such a comprehension gives the superior one the right to exploit the other. The exploitation of the colonized is presented as far more sophisticated in the French dramaturge’s version of *Medea*. As Macintosh notes, the author depicts three stages of this exploitation by Western ways: seduction, schooling, and finally betrayal.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately this serves to deprive the colonized people of their identity under the cover-up of helping them to achieve progress as well as liberation. And indeed, the princess fears the technological world so greatly that she believes it will facilitate the ending of the free life of her nation.<sup>39</sup> Another weapon of the “civilized world” to take away the identity of “the inferior” is conversion of the colonized to their religion — baptizing of the boys being the way to “Europeanize” them in the play. Seeing how far her children have adapted to the father’s world, the princess resolves to preserve them from the enemy world of “civilization.” *Katha*’s motive for the children’s murder appears to be her conception that by killing them she will grant them peace and liberation.<sup>40</sup> However, *Medea*’s revenge does not appear here as merely a personal and a family matter, it should be considered as revenge for her abused people. And

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as well, though de Mazzena wants another favor for himself striving to reforge a pact with her to exploit Sibang even more, economically speaking this time. But the princess refuses. After acknowledging the importance of sons to a father, infanticide appears as the best form of revenge here as well. Poisoned with mango jelly, the boys die in their sleep. The difference here lies in the final accord. Unlike her triumphant predecessor, this *Medea* figure ends her life by jumping from the window to death.

<sup>38</sup> For the excellent and detailed investigation of this play in its historical context, see Macintosh 2005.

<sup>39</sup> That is the reason she constantly contradicts her husband in his striving to accustom the boys to the western world of technology seeing in this the way of alienation of the children from her — the mother’s world.

<sup>40</sup> See Lauriola 2015, 394.

then, she destroys “the European” side of herself at an enormous personal cost, the murder of her children.<sup>41</sup> Depicted far more sympathetically, Katha-Medea represents Asia, and her abuse is consequently considered as injustice of the civilized world towards the people of this land. Thus, this very civilized world order is accountable for the injustice this Medea suffers.<sup>42</sup>

The racial anxiety appears again to be the main theme of Anderson’s 1936 play, this time the Medea-Jason’s story being developed in Salem, a town in New England at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The American writer mostly confines a racial prejudice to the cultural-religious movement of Puritanism. The intolerance of Salem’s puritan community towards Oparre, a Medea figure in the form of a Malay princess, hinders her path of becoming a member of the community as a wife of one of their compatriots, Nathaniel in every way possible. She is an alien to them as she is pagan.

Though at their arrival in Salem, the spouses are presented as a loving couple, under permanent pressure and blackmail by his compatriots, Nathaniel agrees finally to repatriate his wife. The plot of the play, unlike the original one, does not contain the story of Nathaniel’s new marriage. Thereby, the husband starts to feel guilty about failing to confront the community around responsible for Oparre’s injury. This Medea also poisons her children (the children are daughters in this adaptation) to death and commits suicide, though Nathaniel has repented in the last instance. In Anderson’s play, similarly to Katha in *Asie*, Oparre’s motive for the infanticide is her remorse at having deserted the ways of her people, thus becoming a traitor. The penalty for deserting, according to her gods, is death, so she sacrifices herself and the children to fulfil the prescription of her gods.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, Anderson’s Oparre lacking the will and the strength of the original, in addition to the wrath for vengeance appears to be an exceptional heroine in a discourse of Medea the Other. Betine Van Zyl Smit, thus, is right arguing that Oparre-Medea incarnates the ideals of un-

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<sup>41</sup> Macintosh 2005, 73-74. For the study of the play, see Belli 1967.

<sup>42</sup> Van Zyl Smit 2014, 160.

<sup>43</sup> Belli 1967, 239.

conditional love and unselfishness confessing that she still loves Nathaniel and wants to set him free before her death.<sup>44</sup>

Among Medea's late 20<sup>th</sup> century receptions, Heiner Müller's play *Medeamaterial* (1982) deserves attention as an example of a modern amalgam presenting the above mainstream trends of her interpretation.<sup>45</sup> Consisting of dialogues between Medea and the nurse, Medea and Jason, and the monologue by Medea, the play centers on a betrayed and outraged Colchian woman being in a condition "beyond crying or laughter," as characterized by her nurse. Unable to recognize herself in a mirror, her remark "that is not Medea" says a lot about her tragedy — losing of identity. Acknowledging that she has lost her identity for the love of Jason, turned now into a betrayer, the children become reminders of this humiliating relationship for her. An abused victim demands recompense, and this can only be the death of the children. Now Medea asks the children for her blood back, she will kill and drain the blood.<sup>46</sup> In Macintosh's opinion, Müller aligns Medea to the Earth that exacts its terrifying revenge after years of abuse.<sup>47</sup>

The survey, though a limited one, seems to provide the possibility of examining the main characteristic features in addition to the tendencies of these reception trends of Medea.

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<sup>44</sup> Van Zyl Smit 2014, 162.

<sup>45</sup> *Medeamaterial* is the second part of the trilogy with the first part being *Despoiled Shore* and the last *Landscape with Argonauts*. As a postmodern theatre play, these three are a mixture of the fragmented narratives set in modern times and contain allusions to the Argonauts' myth. For example, Medea appears only at the end of the first play and is presented as a murderer of her brother and a betrayer of her country. Additionally, Jason's head is crushed by a piece of wood from the ship *Argo* in the third play, concluding the Argonauts' story. *Medeamaterial* was staged at Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre by the renowned Greek director Michael Marmarinos in 2001, but only a few performances were held as it was soon taken out of the repertoire. For the discussion of the production, see Darchia 2018.

<sup>46</sup> McDonald 1992, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Macintosh 2000, 26.

The attempt to rehabilitate Medea's image as the main aspect of the feminist reworking, as discussed earlier, consists of her total exculpation for some authors (Crossland, Wolf, Harrison), while others strive to rehabilitate her but only morally. Nevertheless, in the feminist discourse, one can still find the adaptations and translations of Medea's story that do not focus on her exoneration. By presenting her true to the prototype, they succeed in canonizing this figure as an icon of women's victimization (Lochhead).

Universalizing of Medea's fate becomes the hallmark of her feminist receptions. No matter whether Medea is a murderer or not, her story has one, clear message — the female gender is the victim of a patriarchal order that, along with the misogynist ideology, is an excellent apparatus for this male-dominated world (this very ideology is to be blamed for the eternal "war" between male and female, Harrison believes) to keep the status quo. And indeed, Medea's feminist revisions are at their best when emphasizing the schemes used by this ideology to discredit women. Wolf's case comes off as the most sophisticated in presenting how a dark PR operates. On a similar note, in the feminist discourse Crossland accentuates the role of rumors in discrediting women. It is much easier to get even with a discredited woman, make her an outcast or even put her to death as exemplified by the electrocution of Medea in Harrison's play. Thus, no matter the depiction of Medea, the message of her feminist reworkings all seem to be nearly identical — Medea's story can belong to any woman (as told by Crossland), or what happened to Medea could happen to any woman (Lochhead). Among the considered plays, Medea achieves the highest profile of generalization when aligned with the earth, as in Müller's play.

It is surely the different portrayals of Medea's personality that first and foremost contribute to the creation of her various feminist receptions. These differing portrayals entail numerous personalities both emotionally and intellectually — an active agent willing to contradict an oppressor or a passive one lacking the will and the force to avenge. However, Medea's "reconstruction" is achieved through her act of revenge above all — it is this terrible act that makes Medea a specific figure. Taking this statement into account, Crossland's Medea appears to be somewhat of an anti-



Medea with her passive, tolerant, and subordinated personality who shares only one thing in common with her prototype — the unacted deeds. Then there is Wolf's version, another guiltless Medea who fails to strike as the real one given that she does not defend herself or show any signs of will to counterattack whatsoever despite being an intelligent, proud woman fighting against resignation from womenfolk. Yet, the wide-ranging gallery of Medeas presented by the feminist interpreters chiefly consists of strong-willed, angry women who, albeit being victims, will inevitably get back at their oppressors.

Contrary to the feminist discourse, the interpretations of Medea the outsider do not attempt to exonerate her from the infanticide, even in Grillparzer's case where she is exculpated only from the murder of her brother. In spite of that, we can still speak about the clear-cut tendency of Medea being presented in a sympathetic light appealing for certain empathy.

Medea's alterity appears to be multidimensional. Her "otherness" encompasses a wide spectrum of identities — a barbarian, of a black race, a colonized body, a dark-skinned pagan — and is a quintessence of the exploited. Additionally, the symbolization of Medea as an Asian continent reiterates the abovementioned tendency of her universalization. Betrayal by the husband (rejection and exiling by the community in Anderson's piece) becomes a kind of a trigger for her acknowledging a loss of self. After this bitter admission, Medea begins struggle to recover her lost identity brought to light through the infanticide and, in some cases (Lenormand, Anderson), followed by suicide. The wide spectra of Medeas can be found in this discourse in addition to the exceptional Medea figure of Anderson's Oparre, distinguished by her unconditional love and unselfishness.

Another characteristic feature of receptions showcasing Medea the outsider is the strengthening of Medea's total isolation by the children's alienation from her (Grillparzer, Lenormand, Müller). As declared by Medea, the motive for their murder is her desire to protect them from the enemy society threatening them with further harm of all kinds, loss of their identities being among them.

As mentioned, Medea's receptions from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century often present a fusion of these mainstream interpretative trends with Medeas of Wolf, Kennelly, and Müller being such examples. Medea is a double victim in these works, an abused female and an oppressed outsider at the same time. Here, Medea's struggle is presented as her protest to achieve higher goals, be it a revelation of her inadmissibility of the existing gender politics (Lochhead) or her concern for political ends (Kennelly). Kennelly's adaptation ends with a noteworthy question, "And yet I wonder, and will always wonder / Is Medea's crime Medea's glory?" which invites Medea's future interpreters for further speculation of this multifaceted heroine's deed.

#### MEDEA THE FEMINIST AND MEDEA THE OTHER IN MODERN GEORGIAN RECEPTIONS

These mainstream interpretative trends of Medea, as mentioned above, have found an inspiring response in the modern Georgian receptions of the Colchian woman. From the numerous pieces on this subject, we will focus on three artistic productions: *Medea: A World Apart* (1997), produced by Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre and based on the plays by Olga Taxidou; Nino Kharatishvili's play *Mine and Your Heart (Medeia)* (2007) and Madi Beriashvili's *Medea as Medea* (2013).<sup>48</sup>

The 1997 performance *Medea: A World Apart* by Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre, a significant theatrical play elaborating the issues of wrongs of abused women and oppressed strangers appears to be a successful collaborative product of two nations — Greeks and Georgians. The performance was based on the plays of the renowned Greek writer Olga Taxidou<sup>49</sup> and was acted in Tbilisi, Georgia by the

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<sup>48</sup> While choosing the plays we considered significant: a) for the feminist rereading of Medea's story to study the women authors' viewpoint on the subject (the plays discussed below are all by the women); b) for the reworking of Medea's otherness to investigate the approach of the emigrant writer to the problem of alterity (Kharatishvili). Moreover, an artistic collaboration of Greeks and Georgians presented by the Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre looks like a stimulating experiment for conceiving the theme of Medea's otherness from both perspectives.

<sup>49</sup> Olga Taxidou is a professor of drama and performance studies at Edinburgh University, whose one of the main fields of interests is the relation between clas-

Georgian actors' troupe.<sup>50</sup> The director, Nana Kvaschadze, has fused Taxidou's plays in such a way that the Trojan women — Hecuba, Helen, Cassandra, and Andromache — are all presented here as the chorus of Medea.<sup>51</sup> The chorus of women on stage watches Medea on a distant television screen while mourning their fate.<sup>52</sup> Medea remains the central figure of Taxidou's adaptation as the title of the spectacle suggests. Her monologue is encased with the Trojan women's narratives. While each one has her own story, they sing the same tale as a collective identity — either of their previous happy life in Troy or that of their miserable present reality of unemployment and the despair of refugee life.<sup>53</sup> The male personages of the story are absent altogether in the performance.

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sical Greek and modernist theatre. Her famous monograph *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* (2004) is dedicated to this topic. She is the author of several adaptations of the ancient Greek tragedies, some of which have been staged both in Edinburgh and internationally. Her *Medea*, directed by the famous Lee Breuer at Mabou Mines theatre in New York City is particularly remarkable.

<sup>50</sup> The performance appeared to be a mixture of two plays by Olga Taxidou: the adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, and *A World Apart*, the contemporary sequel to Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. These plays were part of the trilogy — *Medea. A World Apart. All about Phaedra* (Taxidou 2000, 221). The first two plays were later published as a literary play titled *Medea: A World Apart*. See Taxidou 2005.

<sup>51</sup> These personages appear to be a mix of mythical heroines and modern women, in tune with the postmodern techniques of the play (discussed below). Unlike Euripides' *Medea*, where the chorus consists of women of Corinth, the chorus of the performance is a group of alien and refugee women who happen to share a lot with Medea and are thus comprehended as a whole.

<sup>52</sup> Rapti 2005, 85.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, Helen sings about the technologies of reproduction, thus hinting at her birth from an egg (Taxidou 2000, 224). She, unlike others, has optimistic delusions. Helen is proud of Medea, who is lucky, from her perspective, to become a TV star. Andromache's narration-lamentation is concentrated almost totally on the terrible circumstances in which her son was killed. There are sequences with Cassandra suffering from False Memory Syndrome (Taxidou 2000, 224). Hecuba as an elder one consoles everyone around — Cassandra, Andromache, and Helen. She is a realist. At the end of the play, Hecuba informs other

Given that Taxidou's plays appear to be postmodern experimental theatrical productions, in order to understand fully the writer's novel approach towards reworking of Medea's (and here also the Trojan women's) theme in the above interpretive trends, a very brief characterization of the formal aspects of the production is needed.<sup>54</sup> Taxidou's plays reproduce the plots of Euripides' tragedies through narration, not through action, narrations have postmodern style characteristics of non-linear time sequences; non-climatic plot development; and no language coherence. It appears to be a kind of a pastiche consisting of episodes and having a fragmented form. The timeframe seems to be eclectic as well as the author tends to historicize Euripides' plays by transposing Medea's myth and the Trojan War (considered by Taxidou as the first imperial war) to modern-day Greece. Thus, Medea appears to be the mythic heroine and a modern woman — being a sacred lady, a priestess, a witch, and a queen in Colchis — who becomes a formal queen in modern-day Greece, but at the same time an ordinary housewife.

Another formal element and a modern device, the series of "sequences"<sup>55</sup> have an ideological dimension in the discourse of Medea the feminist. In the situation when male figures are totally absent, thus, the male voice being silenced, they serve to inform the audience about Medea's encounters with the male characters, namely Creon, Aegeus, and Jason.<sup>56</sup>

The modern political tone of the performance, as noted by Olga Kekis, is assumed not in the least part through its gestural actions.<sup>57</sup> The performance opens with the appearance of four women being saved from a sea storm. They stand on the basements of the broken caryatid columns, the upper part of the columns, heads of caryatids, being stuck to the ceiling.

characters about their future misfortune of not being able to stay in the shelter anymore and having to go on the move again (Kekis 2013, 90-91).

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed analysis of the production's theatrical techniques, see Rapti 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Sequences are signposts depicted as upper-case-letter captions which guide the audience during Medea's fragmented monologue. See Rapti 2005, 85.

<sup>56</sup> Kekis 2013, 82. The encounter with Aegeus takes place at the opening of a new refugee center. Taxidou 2000, 224. Thus, it is another example of intertwining the mythological and the present situation.

<sup>57</sup> Kekis 2013, 95.

The women standing on the column pieces reach up trying to connect the top of the columns to the bottom. This gesture appears to be a visual illustration of the performance's main theme. Here, the women, in their attempt to make the broken columns whole, are symbolically expressing the purpose of their lives, namely, "to put back together the shattered pieces of their existence and reassemble their fragmented identity."<sup>58</sup> Yes, the identities of these women are as fragmented as everything around them — the world they live in is also fragmented, and apart, as the title of the performance suggests.

There is one more gestural action in the production that seems to be the most important one, due to its resounding with Georgia's political reality of the 1990s and presenting the main message of the production as well. This is the waving of the white scarves performed periodically throughout the spectacle by the women characters. The women personages through this action embodied a white scarf movement, an age-old Georgian tradition.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, they reminded the audience of the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia,<sup>60</sup> when a group of women headed by Ketidolidze,<sup>61</sup> went straight to the front line.<sup>62</sup> By conducting the above tradition, trying to stop the war "between the brothers" these desperate Georgian women expressed their utmost striving to end "the madness this war has created."<sup>63</sup>

Overall, such a formal experiment resulted in a creation of a totally different type of performer, called by David Barnett a "postdramatic text bear-

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<sup>58</sup> Kekis 2013, 93.

<sup>59</sup> According to this tradition, women laid white scarves in between the fighting parties to stop a war.

<sup>60</sup> The war fought between the Georgian government forces and the Abkhaz separatists together with the support of Russian military forces in 1992-1993.

<sup>61</sup> A well-known Georgian director who also played Medea in the performance.

<sup>62</sup> The women's "Peace Train" went from Tbilisi to Abkhazia in the summer of 1993. It was organized by the women's antiwar movement "White Scarf."

<sup>63</sup> Taxidou 2000, 230.

er."<sup>64</sup> The whole experiment in the end induces a different reaction from the audience. The spectators are invited not to respond emotionally to the narrative, but to reflect intellectually on the story of Medea and other women and through their tragedy comprehend the real life of the modern-day refugee women that, according to the author, is the most vulnerable part of clashes between an empire and the so-called Third World.

The women's issues are articulated most sharply through Medea's imaginary appeals and her song. For example, when appealing to Jason, Medea warns him to remember that she is not just a field to sow and plough and then abandon.<sup>65</sup>

Medea's appeal to women evokes the pathos of Euripides' Medea's well-known "Women of Corinth" speech. Of all the creatures on the earth, women are the most unfortunate, uttered Medea in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and when, after twenty-five centuries, Taxidou's Medea repeats them, they seem to bear the same meaning. One can say that by estimating women's wretched lives, this Medea appears to be more radical and harsher. Especially horrifying is her depiction of childbirth which she considers to be the deadliest for women. In Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre's performance, Medea bawls that the real battlefield lies in women's bodies that get torn into two every time women give birth.<sup>66</sup>

Taxidou's interpretation of Euripides' another famous ode sung by the women chorus (*Med.* 410-430) displays the modern approach towards the eternal issue — a voice of a female author presented in literature. According to Euripides, it is "Phoebus, lord of melody, who did not grant women the power to sing. Be it otherwise, women could also chant hymns for women's praise and tell of men's destiny as well."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> "By standing out as a performer and blurring her roles and her identity she becomes more of a postdramatic 'text bearer' than a dramatic 'character.'" (Barnett 2008, 18, quoted in Kekis 2013, 82).

<sup>65</sup> Soil and plough are well-known dichotomies, woman/soil – man/plough is famous opposition in the patriarchal mentality.

<sup>66</sup> Compare with Euripides' Medea, who bitterly remarks: "I would rather stand three times with a shield in a battle than give birth once" (*Med.* 250-251).

<sup>67</sup> Knox considers this choral song as the great ode celebrating the new day for the female sex. In this extraordinary passage, all songs are dismissed as they were

Taxidou's Medea singing this ode announces that the time has come for a female voice to be heard and for male voices to be silenced. The first woman poet, as Medea tells, will sing about her and her bitter love.

Another song of Medea dedicated to love comprehends the subject as an omnipotent terrible force bringing disaster for women.<sup>68</sup> Taken together with the previous bitter remark on love, the context makes it apparent that Medea hates not the individual man but blames the entire male gender responsible for their subjection.

Medea's attitude towards her children should be considered in the context of the feminist issues as well. Jason's wife is alienated even from her boys as she conceives them to be Jason's sons: "They are not my children... They belong to the city that bred them."<sup>69</sup> Consequently, they are soldiers of the empire and the product of its culture. According to Kekis, by killing them Medea returns the children to the society which created them and disassociates herself from their killing.<sup>70</sup> The child murder is centralized neither in the play nor in the spectacle, the children are killed but their deaths are presented on a television. The Colchian woman's story is continued further in Athens with Medea being in a women's talk show host role, considering the plights of oppressed and unhappy women like her.

A tragedy of alterity is supposed to be the main theme of the Georgian performance. The juxtaposition of the Empire and the so-called

written by men... "Legends now shall change direction; woman's life have glory," sings the chorus. As Knox comments, the future tense is unnecessary here, as Euripides' play itself marks this change of direction. See Knox 1977, 223-224.

<sup>68</sup> It is a force that splits woman into two — chops, breaks, spits out, it digs trenches for bodies. This deep, never-ending, all-forgiving, always-wanting love is like mourning. It should be noted that alongside generalizing love as a disaster for womanhood, Medea sings here about the shameful deeds she has done for its sake. In Euripides' tragedy, the love ode is sung by the women's chorus. Bitterness of this force is emphasized here as well, the ideal being a moderate love. The chorus blames both — an excessive passion (personified by Medea) as well as an adulterous love (incarnated by Jason). See Conacher 1967, 191. Thereby, according to Euripides, love can bring disaster for both — males and females.

<sup>69</sup> Taxidou 2005, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Kekis 2013, 98.

Third World is performed here from the viewpoint of the “other side” and through the eyes of the third-world representatives, remarks the playwright herself. Being Greek, the play was fueled by her interest in the plights of the Greeks from the Black Sea area who by the time of the war in Abkhazia in the early 1990s, had already been returned to Greece, though they became refugees in their homeland afterwards.<sup>71</sup> This was the fate of those Greeks, being generalized by the writer, just like the plight of others — the refugees and war victims.

Medea tells in detail how the civilized society (here Greece) usually accepts foreigners. The modern attitude towards the Other has two main characteristics as presented by Taxidou, a seeming liberalism and arrogance. The egalitarian attitude of the Empire towards service staff, as perceived by Medea, is entirely false as well as their apparent generosity towards the so-called Third World with their development programs and charity missions. False is a desire of the Empire representatives to study the languages or life modes of these peoples. Their arrogance towards the Other is revealed in almost every action, be it commenting with an ironical smile how difficult it is for the Other to adjust to the Empire’s cultural norms or their reproaching with their developed world operated by remote control systems and full of supermarkets, credit cards and Walkmans. Medea considers her husband as a quintessence of arrogance as he reproaches her, his savior, with bringing her to the free and developed country. The Colchian woman believes that murder of her children is the only possible way of turning this world upside down. Hence the all-encompassing desire to change the established world order appears to be the main inspiration of her deed.

In conclusion, we can say that the interpretation of Medea as the feminist is closely intertwined with her reception as the Other in this play. Medea-woman appears to be Subaltern Other,<sup>72</sup> who pays her oppressor back. One of the main characteristic features of this complex image seems to be a search for the lost identity (together with other Trojan

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<sup>71</sup> Taxidou 2000, 219.

<sup>72</sup> “Subaltern other” is a term of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, quoted in Kekis 2013, 82.



refugees in the performance). Through the use of the feminist and the political discourse, she transfers the search for identity into the quest for a political voice and invites the audience to reflect on the plight of women refugees.<sup>73</sup>

The play *Medea as Medea* (2013) by the Georgian playwright Madi Beriashvili is constructed in a postmodern feminist configuration.<sup>74</sup> We see here a deconstruction of the original story resulting in a narrative with non-linear plot development and missing cause-and-effect relations. Another characteristic element of this postmodern discourse seems to be a mundane and a private atmosphere of the play. All mythic elements of this well-known story are absent except one, the virtual Golden Fleece, the reason for everything happening there which serves as a metaphoric meaning for the play. The work is distinguished by its shocking strong language depicting brutality and abundant abject acts. But the most important for Beriashvili's aesthetic vision, her stylistic mode, are the strong, violent images of the dramatic characters. It can be said that the whole theater of *Medea as Medea* is created by Medea's image alone, the figure notorious for her powerful and multifaceted personality from antiquity onwards. In this sense, the appraisal of a

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<sup>73</sup> Kekis 2013, 99. The final accord of Taxidou's *Medea* seems ambiguous to me. The fact that an audience does not see Medea's agony on the stage after her deed seems to be caused by the formal side of the play inviting the public to reflect intellectually on the main theme. Medea's words after the murder, "I am no longer my own," define her present condition as a "non-entity, a transparent and an empty one" (Taxidou 2005, 154). These words, in my opinion, indicate not only her total alienation from the Empire but also the loss of her identity or entity, thus echoing her prototype, Euripides' Medea.

<sup>74</sup> Madi Beriashvili, a female Georgian playwright born in 1988, has presented the solo performance *Kevin* based on her play at the theatrical festival ARDIfest – 2010. In 2011, she participated in *Women's Voice*, a Swedish-Georgian playwriting project (a collaboration between Dramalabbet (Stockholm) and Royal District Theatre (Tbilisi) as a Georgian woman dramatist. In 2012, Beriashvili put on *Idiliaphobia* according to her play of the same name in the Ilia State University Theater (Tbilisi). In 2013, her plays, including the discussed *Medea as Medea*, were published in Georgian: see Beriashvili 2013.

theater by Sara Kane, saying “for me the language of a theater is image”<sup>75</sup> seems to be true to Beriashvili’s theatrical world as well. And indeed, these are the violent emotions of the writer’s female characters, the emotions having such disposition and intensity that they make Beriashvili’ drama monologues to resemble Kane’s plays.

The Georgian playwright’s deconstructed version *Medea as Medea* appears to be Medea’s soliloquy retelling the famous myth through the heroine’s lens, with different perspectives being absent altogether. Without naming the geographical location of the story, the narration starts from the events in Medea’s natal family, from her very childhood. The starting point appears to be a perverse lust of the father-ruler towards his daughter, Medea. So that nobody would wed her, he states to her knight bridegrooms that the only way they could marry her is to obtain the Golden Fleece. But this Fleece does not exist in reality; it is invented by the ruler. All his power relies on this very lie as he succeeds to make everyone believe in the existence of the Golden Fleece. Thus, knights from all over the world strive to obtain the Golden Fleece, being ready to perish for its sake.<sup>76</sup>

Though the father never manages to sleep with her, this perverse lust causes a serious disorder in Medea’s sexual behavior. Having sex with anyone just to repay the father-ruler for his grievances gradually ceases to satisfy Medea. So, when Jason shows up, willing to punish the father and pitying the knight at once, Medea decides to run away with him. She promises Jason that only in this case will she lead him to the place the Golden Fleece is kept as Jason does not admit categorically the non-existence of the fleece. Escaping with Jason from the country, Medea saves him at the same time, since his striving for the Golden Fleece would have resulted in the same outcome as his predecessors’ attempts.

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<sup>75</sup> Saunders 2002, 50, quoted in Obis 2008.

<sup>76</sup> The Golden Fleece has been a widespread metaphor as a sign of power and wealth in the receptions of this myth. In Grillparzer’s trilogy *The Golden Fleece*, the fleece is a symbol of vanity of earthly glory. The writer believes that the earthly fame Jason strives to obtain is nothing else than a dream. In this sense, Beriashvili’s comprehension of the fleece somewhat responds to Grillparzer’s metaphor. See Nadareishvili 2013.

After years and years of wandering on the sea in search of the Golden Fleece, the two finally settle somewhere where Medea gives birth to the boys whom Jason brings up only for one desire, the fleece. The realization that the males around her are only interested in obtaining the fleece step by step accumulates a rage in Medea. Medea acknowledges that "For Jason [she] was not a woman, but a personified dream of the Golden Fleece."<sup>77</sup> Her traumatized sexuality comes again to the fore. In Jason's absence, she brings just anybody home to have sexual intercourse with them. This damaged sexuality causes her abnormal behavior in the family life. As Medea tells, she called her sons to rape animals and watch her lechery with the strangers brought by her at home. The play's climax seems to be the same as in the original story, Jason's betrayal and Medea's revenge.<sup>78</sup> True to her prototype, the Georgian dramatist's Medea also cannot bear that Jason betrayed her, his savior — he had no moral right to do so, believes the heroine.<sup>79</sup> What differentiates Beriashvili's heroine from other Medeas is the astonishing brutality of her vengeance. Here we do not have anything like the inner struggle in Medea's soul — Medea-mother versus Medea the avenging wife, an important aspect of Euripides' heroine. The terrible act of the child murder is no more the central part of her revenge as well.<sup>80</sup> The most

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<sup>77</sup> Beriashvili 2013, 83.

<sup>78</sup> In the mundane environment of Beriashvili's play Medea's rival appears to be not a princess, but the very sexual young prostitute. Jason is not planning to leave Medea to marry the young girl, however, he ceases to sleep with Medea altogether after dates with the bawd.

<sup>79</sup> "I saved him from the death, from the death for the non-existent Golden Fleece" (Beriashvili 2013, 87). (All translations of Beriashvili's texts in this paper belong to its author). Beriashvili's Medea is aware that the men comprehend her as a means to an end, however, she being Medea, does not bear to be betrayed by these men.

<sup>80</sup> The heroine coolly and in detail informs the audience how she has murdered her children: "That morning I took Jason's breed to seek the promised Golden Fleece. On the way I kept telling them the stories..." (Beriashvili 2013, 87). Suddenly a description of the subsequent events breaks off and the story she has recorded to her boys follows (the story she tells is a fairy tale having a deep significance for the play's message and will be discussed below). Not finishing

shocking thing in the whole episode is her punishment of Jason. After killing the sons, the woman calmly removes the skin of their corpses, makes wine and the meals from the dead bodies, and invites Jason for a supper ending in a passionate sex. Wrapped in the boys' skins being previously rinsed in gold and poison, Medea's body is sparkling gold. The very moment Jason thinks that at last he has obtained the much-desired fleece and is going to inform the children, Medea tells him that he had had the blood and flesh of his sons for the supper. The agonized death of Jason follows. Medea then cuts off his genitals rinsed in gold and poison as well and sends them as a present to her rival found dead the next morning. The play ends with Medea looking at her dead husband. In her narrative, she tells how she cried both out of happiness and of misfortune. In her own words, she is happy (her prototype is both satisfied and triumphant) as she had avenged the betrayer, but also sad because she could not hinder Jason from eating his offspring.<sup>81</sup> Her final statement is especially noteworthy, "I've made the dreams of the father and the children come true — I gave them the real Golden Fleece."<sup>82</sup>

One might ask what the message of this deconstructed version of the myth is supposed to be with its shocking and unforgettable horror. "A constant search for what the limits of our humanity are," the characterization given to Sarah Kane's early plays by Éléonore Obis comes first to mind.<sup>83</sup> Although Beriashvili's play challenges the boundaries of our morality, it also invites us to examine how far can we go in denuding our psyche to see what might surface from the subliminal abyss.

The aforementioned take can be considered as a general message of the writer, though for this message to be fully articulated, she needed an immensely vivid and violent artistic image of a woman agent. And indeed, the woman playwright turned to Medea — the archetype of a

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storytelling, Medea notifies how she has cut off the children's heads with Jason's knife with the same calm tone (Beriashvili 2013, 88).

<sup>81</sup> One begs to wonder about acknowledging parental emotions to the offspring from Medea's perspective.

<sup>82</sup> Beriashvili 2013, 91.

<sup>83</sup> Obis 2008.

dominant and violent woman. It naturally aroused my interest as to why Beriashvili chose Medea's mythic figure and what had inspired her to write the play on heroine given that there are not any other mythic or historical persons in her mono-plays whatsoever. This question I have put directly to her. According to the author, it was Medea's character, the questions being arisen around her image, and her mysterious nature that stipulated her to write Medea's story. For her, Medea has been a personage destroying frontiers and norms of every kind, both by physical action and from an ethical standpoint. She was able to perform extreme acts for the sake of love as well as vengeance and despite everything, she managed to remain Medea.<sup>84</sup>

Turning to Beriashvili's interpretation of Medea's character, we can see that we are dealing with another postmodern "text bearer," who, like Taxidou's heroine, not only narrates but also evaluates and comments on the events, the personages around her, and her own self alike.<sup>85</sup> This very introspective character is also extremely ruthless when appraising her own motives for the actions she has performed and towards herself generally. It is very noteworthy that the agent performing terrible deeds, Medea is also the victim of all males around from the very childhood. One can object to the claim that mythic Medea has also been a victim. And indeed she has, though not from the very beginning, if we consider this point in the context of her whole mythic biography originating from the Colchian episode of her maidenhood. In Beriashvili's play, Medea begins her existence as a victim, and what is most shocking, a victim of not just someone, but of her father's perversive lust.<sup>86</sup>

The self-reflective Medea admits her abnormal sexual behavior and conceives it as a result of her victimization. "I am licentious," confesses Medea later on in the play, adding, "It is my father's merit."<sup>87</sup> The fact

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<sup>84</sup> Madi Beriashvili, email message to author, December 8, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> For the interpretation of Medea's image in Beriashvili's play, see also Bobokhizze 2018.

<sup>86</sup> In Medea's own words, her childhood was totally sacrificed to her father's egoism and his invented fleece. He wished that Medea should never like any man whatsoever, being just an odious and pitiful creature for her.

<sup>87</sup> Beriashvili, 2013, 83.

that Medea's mentality is damaged forever is made evident from her married life in a country far away from her motherland and the father despot. It is interesting that Jason, as Medea herself admits, is not some "other" male for her, but an embodied father in his youth. Of course, we can go speculating further and look for the famous Electra Complex. Though Medea is negatively disposed to whatever this feeling can be called. "My hate towards the father was so strong that it did not give me a release years and years after," says Medea.<sup>88</sup> This perversive lust, though never actually realized as stated above, completely destroyed any normal projection of the masculine self in Medea's consciousness and lead to her abnormal behaviour in family life.

However, it is not as if Jason is innocent in her tragedy — he really does his part to further Medea's disrupted feminine self. Being also obsessed with a passion, though towards the Golden Fleece in his case, he is indifferent towards Medea's femininity. The Golden Fleece is a means for him to gain money and power, his only interests.

As a mother, Beriashvili's Medea seems to be zero. The children are only Jason's offspring to her, and such a perception of her motherhood is not novel for Medea's feminist interpretations. Though here Medea reaches the highest point as an anti-mother. "They have never been my offspring; they were the dirty future of the Golden Fleece... They were donkeys bottled from Jason's fluid," informs Medea.<sup>89</sup> These "slaves of gold and silver"<sup>90</sup> kept asking her to tell them the story of the Golden Fleece every night before going to bed, thus infuriating Medea to such an extent that she was ready to kill them. The mother envisions that the boys will follow suit in the future and become just like all other males in her family, creatures longing for gold and power alone.

However, there is the passage that seems the most important one for the understanding of the play's main message. It is reproduced in a form of the fairy tale the mother tells her sons just before murdering them. One should note that during her soliloquy, Medea never men-

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<sup>88</sup> Beriashvili, 2013, 83.

<sup>89</sup> Beriashvili, 2013, 85.

<sup>90</sup> Beriashvili, 2013, 85.

tions her feelings toward Jason, and this seems to be in tune with the play's atmosphere. Still, one wonders — is Beriashvili's heroine absolutely deprived of this feeling? Presumably, the answer can be found in the fairy tale. And indeed, the tale recorded by Medea seems to be much like her own story. Here too is a princess (a very beautiful one without a name), here too figures a king (a wise and handsome one) who fell in love with his daughter and invented the Golden Fleece as a condition of her marriage. And here again, are the wonderful knights willing the princess and the Golden Fleece as well. The difference between the play's plot and the fairy tale lies in one word — *love*. The princess falls in love with one distinguished young knight, saves him, and asks for love and loyalty in return. The given promise is broken as the knight falls in love with the daughter of another king. Here the fairy tale breaks off and only dots follow. The dots themselves give way to various interpretations, though it seems that the writer thought of the same continuation of the princess' story that Medea's myth has. Still, a single word *love* changes the whole atmosphere of the fairy tale. Yes, the mythic heroine's story ends in a terrible tragedy, but even there, the starting point for Medea's and Jason's relationship was her great love towards him, which, unfortunately, due to Jason's betrayal, turned into hate. Madi Beriashvili then, by presenting this parallel story of the princess in love, tries to carry the following message — yes, her heroine could have been like this princess if the world around her, more concretely the males of her life, had left the slightest possibility for love or sentiments of any kind. But they did just the opposite. All this resulted in the creation of the different heroine — Beriashvili deprived her Medea of this very important trait, the ability to love deeply, one of the most crucial aspects of this mythic figure.

Who or what she believed was responsible for turning Medea into the person we see at the end was another question put to Madi Beriashvili. "As I see it, the surroundings and outside events, as well as her disposition towards both the outer world and her own have played a big role in Medea's coming-to-be. The outside events embittered and moved

forward her rough “ego,” which happened to be stronger than her nature as a woman and a mother,” she answered.<sup>91</sup>

But this cruel world, a world without love, ruins also those who have created it. In the last, nearly psychedelic scene with a deep symbolic meaning, the author presents how the materialized Golden Fleece brought death to Jason with poignant sarcasm. It was the skin of the dead children Medea was wrapped in that he kissed and lacked during the sex with her, poisoning him to death. At the same time, the Golden Fleece in a form of the skin removed from his dead offspring appears to be the physical manifestation of ending Jason’s hereditary line. One only wonders if Jason, the representative of these very masculine values, has understood this bitter truth — the vanity of the values he was so obsessively longing — in the last instance just before his agonized death while vomiting the pieces of the eaten children. In order to turn this cruel world upside down, these established passions, false ambitions and avarice for money, one needs the oppressed to fight back at the oppressor.

Unlike the abovementioned works, Nino Kharatishvili’s play, *Mine and Your Heart (Medeia)*,<sup>92</sup> which premiered in 2007 in Kampnagel Theatre, Hamburg, is written according to the established drama principles. Thus, the plot of the play is acted on the stage and not reproduced by narration. Along with the main theme of Medea’s myth — the heroine’s vengeance, as in the majority of Medea’s productions of the modern era, we also have the sub-plot presenting the complicated relations between various pairs — that of Jason and Creon; Creon and Glauce; Medea and Glauce; Medea and Nia.<sup>93</sup> The play consists of many episodes and the plot is quite full of action.

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<sup>91</sup> Madi Beriashvili, email message to author, December 8, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Nino Kharatishvili is a well-known German-based Georgian novelist, playwright, and theatre director. The author of several bestsellers, she has been honored with prestigious literary prizes, among them Anna Seghers Prize, Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, and the Givi Margvelashvili Award. The above play, put on at the Kampnagel Theater, was directed by the author herself and was later staged in the Theater Regensburg (director Oliver Haffner). *Mein und dein Herz (Medeia)* originally written in German, was recently published in Georgian (Kharatishvili 2020).

<sup>93</sup> The mentioned pairs meet more than once, so the plot presents a development of relations between these pairs. Nia, a new personage for Medea’s story, is men-



The play's novelty lies in substituting the main theme of Medea's myth — the vengeance of the abandoned wife through killing her children. The central theme in Kharatishvili's interpretation becomes how the seemingly indivisible world of Medea and Jason, their great love, is being crushed. The world for Medea, as she tells it, consists only of herself, Jason, and the children. Being deprived of her children and then of Jason, the heroine is left totally alone, having nothing to live for. Therefore, the infanticide is perceived by the writer as the accompanying result of crushing Medea's and Jason's indissoluble world, as a physical manifestation of their world's obsolescence accomplished by the suicides, both of Medea and Jason.

The architect of the destruction of their union appears to be the king, Creon, who decides to demolish Jason's family in order to marry the famous hero, the obtainer of the Golden Fleece, to his only daughter, Glauce. Neither Glauce nor Jason desires this marriage, still Glauce yields to her father's will and afterwards Jason seems also ready to receive the king's offer. All of this paves the way for Medea's revenge, the main object naturally being Creon. Medea warns the king that bereaving Jason from her will cost him too much and fulfils her promise. To achieve an end, the Colchian woman manipulates Creon's daughter who asks her to teach a love secret (she wants to become a desired woman for Jason). Medea induces Glauce to burn Creon's much-desired Golden Fleece right in front of her father, causing the death of the old and ill king. As for Glauce, a nonentity for Medea, the Colchian woman leaves her alive, though by her manipulation achieves her goals of Creon's death and her rape by Jason.

The play opens by presenting Medea and Jason sailing on a ship just arriving at Corinth. This pre-Corinthian episode of the couple's life aims to display a great affection Medea and Jason have towards each other before coming to Corinth.<sup>94</sup> The love story starts by depicting these tender feelings between the spouses calling each other "my ant" and declaring

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tioned as Medea's maid in the play's list of the characters, though there is a complex relationship between this pair.

<sup>94</sup> This pre-Corinth scene is novel for the Corinthian narrative of the Medea myth.

the love proposed to be eternal.<sup>95</sup> Despite the full harmony among the couple, Medea is still anxious, fearing for their united world not to be crushed in the alien land. And indeed, soon after we see that her foreboding proves to be correct. Though questions naturally arise: why is it possible? What is the reason? Did it happen because the ruler of the country, Creon, wanted it so? As the development of the action makes clear, things are not as simple as that.

The author profoundly develops two dichotomies — the first one being the opposition of two worldviews on life; the second, the century-old confrontation between the Greek and the barbarian that existed in this myth from Euripides onwards. This confrontation implies the problem of comprehending the Other — of comprehending Medea in Greece as well as an adjustment of Medea as the Other to the alien cultural space.

As stated, Medea's world is a closed world consisting of only her, Jason, and their children, with the latter not allowing anyone to enter this space. "Everything begins with us and ends with us" is Medea's motto.<sup>96</sup> This world starts to crush immediately as soon as one of its members leaves it. "If you leave me, the world won't exist anymore for us," Medea warns her husband.<sup>97</sup> This self-sufficing world is based on ideals and does not admit compromises. She repeats to Jason, "I have only asked you not to bow the head to anybody," and then, "what can be obtained without a struggle?"<sup>98</sup> Naturally, such a self-sufficient person does not need to worship foreign gods or take into consideration the foreign habits and norms, but when the context is changed and one has to live in the Other's country, the problem of self-sufficiency arises.

Jason's approach towards life is different. Now back in Corinth, he seems to be tired of too many wars and blood. Yes, there was a time

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<sup>95</sup> "Ant" appears to be a signifier of some creature being very close (to somebody) or being inside (someone). Medea tells Jason that "she is in his blood and crawls on his skin like an ant" (Kharatishvili 2020, 12).

<sup>96</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 12. "The only world that exists for us is the world that we, ourselves, create" (Kharatishvili 2020, 37) are again Medea's words. (All translations of Kharatishvili's texts in this paper belong to its author).

<sup>97</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 36.

when he had dreams of his own. "I dreamed together with you every day, in every country," he tells his wife.<sup>99</sup> However, he adds that he also aspires to be at home sometime in the future. "Heim" is a crucial concept for Jason. Greece, the Other for Medea, is "Heim" – home for him. Now it is time to wake up, the Greek hero believes, time to learn how to live from the start.<sup>100</sup> The children have to learn how to live and not how to dream, Jason reminds his wife over and over again.<sup>101</sup> He asks Medea to adjust to the Greek lifestyle – in the changed world, Medea also has to change her mores.

These different approaches of the couple towards life were put in the matrix of Medea's myth from the very beginning. Various authors developed this theme, some with more and others with less emphasis. It seems that Jason's and Medea's different attitudes towards life were elaborated most profoundly by Jean Anouilh in his play *Medea*. Anouilh's Jason, like Jason of Kharatishvili, strives to obtain quietness and calm. If Kharatishvili's Jason admits that he is tired of dreaming, the French dramatist's character is much more explicit. Medea's worldview is totally intolerable to him. Furthermore, he believes that Medea is incompatible with the concept of happiness. On the other hand, Anouilh's Medea also has her different world perception of not submitting to any compromises whatsoever. Life means only one thing to her, struggle. In Medea's case, there are more similarities with Kharatishvili's heroine, as the latter too considers a struggle as an absolute necessity. The French Medea also perceives Jason and Medea being one whole, one identity and believes that there is no way for anyone to divide this whole. Despite this apparent similarity between Anouilh's and Kharatishvili's characters, the crucial difference between the plays lies in the fact that the personages of the French drama speak retrospectively about their feelings that once existed in the past. It is Medea's striving to recover her lost identity and not their

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<sup>99</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 64.

<sup>100</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 37.

<sup>101</sup> During their last dialogue, when Jason speaks about the children's future, he declares his love for Medea once again and promises that one day he will return for her – the day by which the boys will have already grown up.

love, that is the central issue in the French play, while the destruction of their united world and the tragedy it caused seems to be the keystone in Kharatishvili's drama.

The dissolving of Jason-Medea's harmonious family life is due to the tragedy of alterity as well. The interpretation of Medea as the Other by Nino Kharatishvili is complex as it is closely twisted with the discourse of presenting the different worldviews of the couple. The difference between the Greek world and "their" world starts with an apprehension of the different colors these two worlds have — a pomegranate is red but of another shade in Greece; Colchian land is black, dark, while Greece is the golden land.<sup>102</sup> Then we come to remarks on the difference between the Greek and "their" habits; the difference between time measuring methods of these worlds; and the demonstrations of open intolerance towards the Other, who is distinct from the usual, considered as normal, right. Creon urges Jason, his compatriot, to leave Medea not because he wishes so, but primarily because Medea is not an appropriate wife for him given that she is not obedient and contradicts Jason, something that is far from a normal wifely conduct. "Women of her country are not like ours," he tells Jason, "they are undisciplined and uncontrollable."<sup>103</sup> Medea, on the other hand, does not obey the rules of the country she lives in, does not go to their shrines or worship their gods, and does not even concede the slightest bit to her husband. "I cannot change myself," she declares.<sup>104</sup>

According to the author, the crushing of their world and consequently their love is largely caused by the tragedy of alterity. The beginning of the last scene points to this with the phrase "open wounds" being linked with the word "Other": "Open wounds ... Other's life. Other's land. Other's song. Other's words. Other's desires."<sup>105</sup> Convincing repetition of the word "Other" sends us back to the problem of alterity. Further concretizing is not peculiar for Nino Kharatishvili.

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<sup>102</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 36.

<sup>104</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 38.

<sup>105</sup> Kharatishvili 2020, 79.

## CONCLUSIONS

Though this analysis pertains only to certain artistic pieces, those discussed still give an impression of how the interpretative trends of Medea the feminist and Medea the Other have been reflected by the Georgian cultural milieu. Summarizing the study, it can be concluded that these receptions — similar to her receptions worldwide — presented Medea not as an individual woman being wronged, but as an embodiment of the harmed womanhood and the oppressed Other. Similarities between Georgian and Western discourses can be expanded in this respect. For example, one can speculate on the nearly identical considerations of the modern Western ways of exploiting the Other (as displayed in *Medea: A World Apart* and *Asie*) and the Georgian performance's recall of Medea's (and other Trojan women's) struggle for recovering her (their) lost identity(ies). Nonetheless, a specific resemblance needs to be noted that the Georgian productions' favour of the alienation theme, the one between a mother and children, is akin to Medea's Western reworking.

The main novelty of the Georgian receptions appears to be the accentuation of the love discourse. Beriashvili strives to display the impossibility of this very sentiment in a world with completely different values. Kharatishvili highlights the tests that love has to persevere through in an alien world. According to Taxidou, love is an omnipotent force and women are its victims.

Although the different messages of the Georgian interpreters contribute to Medea's various portrayals, one constant mark remains — Medea being a strong, radical, rash, and independent-acting woman in every play. Inviting us to intellectually reflect on the plights of the oppressed female refugees in a world torn apart, Taxidou's Medea is somewhat of a detached personage and is contrary to Beriashvili's heroine who constantly shocks the audience by displaying the dangers of male abuse on a woman's mentality. As for Kharatishvili, she explores the discourse of a world lacking tolerance, therefore being mighty to ruin even the great love by presenting the tragic love story of Medea and Jason.

Medea "reconstructed" in the Georgian milieu, true to her prototype, has the strength to fight her oppressor back and despite her terrible deed, she is not the only one to be blamed. The male-dominant world,

along with the ethos of xenophobia for the Other, have to answer for the wronging of the Medeas and must share responsibility as it is this type of society that makes Medeas who they are.

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