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Haunting the (Psychic) Crypt? Unearthing the Family Secret in Christa Wolf's *Medea*

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Abstract

Retelling from the perspective of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's concepts of the crypt and the phantom. According to Abraham and Torok (1987) a psychic crypt is formed as the result of a refusal or inability to mourn a lost loved one; the subject's memories of the deceased loved one are thus incorporated into the psyche, where they are "buried alive ... as a full-fledged person". Moreover, for Abraham and Torok, the encrypted family secret can unwittingly be passed on to later generations in the form of a psychic phantom, where the parent's cryptic behaviour results in a mute psychic zone in the unconscious of the child. Such crypts and phantoms can cause a range of psychological and even physical symptoms in their hosts. From this perspective, this article focuses on the character of the princess Glauce in Wolf's novel, and on Medea's relationship with her. It is argued that Glauce, whose sister Iphinoe was sacrificed when Glauce was a small child, is potentially suffering from both a psychic phantom and a crypt. The phantom results from her parents' covering up of this family secret, while the crypt is a consequence of Glauce's own inability to mourn her sister. As a result, Glauce suffers from a host of psychological and physical problems, including epilepsy, a skin disorder, apparent depression and low self-esteem. Medea, who unearths this dreadful secret at the heart of Corinth, attempts to help Glauce by forcing her to confront her memories of her sister. Ultimately, however, she cannot save the princess, who commits suicide, and perhaps even contributes to her death through her attempts at amateur psychotherapy.

Keywords: Medea, Glauce Psychic crypt, phantom, myth

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Psikik Kriptini Hortlatmak? Christa Wolf'un *Medea* Romanında Aile Sırrını Ortaya Çıkarmak

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Özet

Bu makalede Christa Wolf'un *Medea* isimli romanı, Nicholas Abraham ve Maria Torok'un mahzen (lahit/kript) ve *fantom* söylemleri ekseninde incelenmektedir. Abraham ve Torok'a göre, psişik lahit kayıp bir sevilen için yas tutma konusunda yetersiz kalınması veya yas tutmanın reddedilmesi sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır; öznenin yok olmuş sevilen ile ilgili hatıraları, ruhunun içine "diri diri gömülmektedir". İlaveten, Abraham ve Torok'a göre şifreli olan aile sırrı, psişik bir hayalet veya fantom biçiminde sonraki nesillere farkında olmadan aktarılabilmektedir. Bu tür mahzen ve fantomlar, söz konusun olan bireylerde çeşitli psikolojik ve hatta fiziksel semptomlara neden olabilir. Bu bağlamda, makale Wolf'un romanındaki Prenses Glauce karakterine ve Medea'nın onunla olan ilişkisine odaklanmaktadır. Glauce henüz küçük bir çocukken ablası Iphinoe kurban edildiği için hem psişik bir fantom hem de bir lahit nedeniyle potansiyel olarak acı çekmektedir. Fantom ebeveynlerin bu aile sırrını gizlemesinden kaynaklanırken, lahit Glauce'un ablasının yasını tutamamasının bir sonucudur. Sonuç olarak, Glauce, epilepsi, cilt bozukluğu, belirgin depresyon ve düşük özgüven gibi birçok psikolojik ve fiziksel sorunlar yaşamaktadır. Corinth'in kalbindeki bu korkunç sırrı ortaya çıkaran Medea, Glauce'u ablasıyla ilgili anılarıyla yüzleşmeye zorlayarak ona yardım etmeye çalışır. Ancak Medea intihar eden prensesi kurtaramaz, ve belki de, bilinçsiz psikoterapi girişimleriyle, onun ölümüne katkıda bulunur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Medea, Torok Psişik Lahit, Fantom, Mit

1 Introduction

The myth of Medea, archetype of ‘the Witch, the black Sorceress and the Negative Mother’ (Weingarz 15), has long haunted the Western imagination (Atwood ix). However, Medea’s murder of her own children in her attempt to take revenge on Jason, who abandons her in Corinth to marry Princess Glauce, appears to be an innovation on the part of Euripides; in earlier versions of the myth the children are either not killed, or are accidentally burned by Medea during a misguided attempt to make them immortal, or are murdered by the Corinthians (Griffiths 35-36).

In this context, Christa Wolf’s revisionist writing of the myth can be read as an attempt to absolve Medea from evil (Weingarz 40); her Medea is innocent of both fratricide and infanticide. For Wolf, myth is ‘fundamentally a misrepresentation of reality, a false belief or blind spot’; her main concern, in both *Kassandra* and *Medea*, is thus ‘to undo the layers of myth through which we know the central female character, exposing their ideological function’ (Bridge 34). While Wolf’s *Medea* can, therefore, be understood as a rewriting which challenges the dominant version of the myth, as popularised by Euripides, it also arguably interacts with older versions of the myth, in which the children are killed by the Corinthians rather than by Medea herself.

However, Wolf retells the traditional myth(s) not from a single character’s point of view, but rather from six different perspectives. Within this polyphonic structure, however, a single story is revealed (Bridge 36); that of the Corinthians’ vilification of Medea, as they spin the more familiar tale in which she is an evil witch, guilty of the murders of her brother and her children. Thus, in Wolf’s version, the myth is ‘in the hands of those who have power and is manipulated by them’; Medea herself becomes a ‘witness of the processing of mythopoesis’ (Koskinas 191).

As Tatar argues, in a reading of Wolf’s *Medea* inspired by Derrida’s hauntology, every revisionist writing of a myth is haunted by its earlier version(s) (28-52). Like Derrida’s specter, the ghost of the myth ‘knows of a secret to be revealed, a wrong to be righted, an injustice to be made public or a wrong-doer to be apprehended (Davis 3). It therefore returns demanding ‘justice to a wronged party, an overdue compensation to the specters of past texts through reproduction’ (Tatar 35). Derrida’s specter, then, is not to be silenced; instead our responsibility is to ‘let it speak’ (Derrida 11); as discussed below, it can be contrasted with Abraham and Torok’s phantom, which must, above all, be neutralised and silenced (Davis 31).

For Wolf, Medea’s time, like that of Derrida’s specter, is ‘out of joint’; breaching the divide between past and future, she is ‘the shape with the magical name, in whom the epochs meet – a painful process – and in whom our time meets us’ (Wolf, cited in Weingartz 41). At the same time, though, the myth of Medea as infanticidal and fratricidal, seemingly created by Euripides, and the

suppression of the earlier Medea myths can perhaps be understood, in terms closer to the phantom of Abraham and Torok as a haunting which arises specifically from the past, and which must be laid bare in order to be put, finally to rest.

In Wolf's rewriting of the myth, Medea is depicted as a refugee from Colchis, a backward and barbaric land in the eyes of the Corinthians, where her father had sacrificed her young brother Aspyrtus in an attempt to bolster his rule. Thus, her primary motive for leaving Colchis on the Argo is not her love for Jason; it is, instead, her inability to remain in Colchis under her father's rule and her consequent need to seek asylum in a foreign land, the 'gleaming city state' of Corinth. There, she stands out from the pallid Corinthians not only due to her brown skin and woolly hair, but also due to her supposedly 'wild' behaviour (Wolf 39);

...According to the Corinthians I'm still wild, as far as they're concerned a woman is wild if she has a mind of her own. The Corinthian women seem like thoroughly tamed house pets to me, they stare at me as though I'm some strange apparition (Wolf 9).

Despite her innocence of both fratricide and infanticide, Wolf's Medea, an easy target due to her position as an outsider in Corinth, thus becomes a scapegoat for the Corinthians' crimes and for the disasters that befall them (Atwood xiv).

More specifically, it is Medea's discovery of the unspeakable secret of child sacrifice on which King Creon's rule is based, echoing the sacrifice of Aspyrtus by King Aetes in Colchis, which leads to her banishment by Creon and the subsequent murder of her children by the Corinthians. Thus, Medea can be described as an able detective who aims to penetrate the rotten world of secrets and lies at the heart of Corinth (Raducanu). However, it can also be argued that she acts, ultimately disastrously, as an amateur psychotherapist to the princess Glauce, who, in Abraham and Torok's terms (Abraham and Torok), is haunted by a repressed family secret, that of the murder of her older sister Iphinoe.

As will be discussed further in the following section, according to the theories of Abraham and Torok, such family secrets may result in the creation of what they call a psychic crypt in the first generation, and may be transmitted to later generations in the form of a psychic phantom. As Rahimi points out, Abraham and Torok's phantom stands in sharp contrast to Derrida's specter; while for Derrida 'the specter's secret is ... tied to the processes of creativity and imagination that hold the symbolic system together', Abraham and Torok's phantom is 'a "liar" whose message needs to be unpacked, decrypted, disassembled and ultimately neutralized' (Rahimi 39-45).

Notably, the intergenerational family curse or secret has been an important literary theme dating back at least as far as ancient Greece; Homer, Euripides,

Aeschylus and Sophocles, for instance, were all inspired by the myth of the curse of the House of Atreus. Set in motion by King Tantalus' sacrilegious sacrifice of his son Poleps to the gods, in order to test their omniscience, the resulting curse afflicts the family for generations, provoking bloodshed and murder between parents, children and siblings. The curse eventually culminates in Orestes' slaughter of his mother, Clytemnestra, in revenge for her murder of her husband Agamemnon. She, in turn, had also largely been motivated by vengeance, in this case for Agamemnon's sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigenia at the beginning of the Trojan war.

In this context, in her analysis of a selection of 19th and 20th century short stories, Rashkin emphasises the relevance of Abraham and Torok's work for literary studies, arguing that some works of fiction may be structured around an encrypted family secret which returns to haunt some of the later generations. From this perspective, Abraham and Torok's theories may shed further light on certain fictive characters who;

can be understood to be propelled by the haunting presence of a secret beyond his or her awareness ... One result of this inquiry is a new view of subjectivity in fiction, a view that construes a subject's sense of alienation, ex-centricity or otherness not as an ontological given but as potentially the result of being "possessed" by a phantom (Rashkin 44).

2 The Transgenerational Secret: Abraham and Torok's Concepts of the Phantom and Crypt

Abraham and Torok's view of psychic maturation, according to their theory of *dual unity*, is understood principally as a process of 'individuation' from the mother, (Rashkin 18-20). From this perspective, the mother is everything for the young child, "amion, warmth, nourishment, mainstay, body, cry, desire, rage, joy, fear, yes, no, you, me, object and project" (Abraham and Torok 96); and the child does not as yet possess a conscious or unconscious of its own separate from the psyche of the mother. The process of individuation begins with the child's discovery of language, when the child detaches the mother's words from her person. Although the child gradually emerges as an individual separate from the mother, and with an ego and unconscious of its own, it is by no means rid of the maternal unconscious, which becomes the Core or Kernel of the child's own unconscious. As the child matures, it will add its own repressions, produced by its own lived experiences, to this central core, while its ego will simultaneously expand to accommodate new introjections. As the mother is herself the child of another mother, however, she is already the bearer of the contents of another's unconscious; in this way, we are all the psychic products of our infinitely regressive family histories (Rashkin 16-18).

Thus, psychic trauma may be passed on from generation to generation. For Abraham and Torok, the traumatic is found in 'every experience that is impossible to psychically metabolize, i.e. to know, think, verbalize, symbolize and thereby transform into a bearable aspect of the subject's experiential world' (Yassa 82-91). In their view, such traumas, specifically those resulting from an unconscious refusal or inability to mourn a deceased love object, may result in the formation of a psychic crypt, an isolated wound in the psyche comparable to 'the formation of a cocoon around the chrysalis' (Abraham and Torok 141). The crypt thus acts as a 'sort of artificial Unconscious, lodged at the very heart of the Ego (Abraham and Torok 254-255) where the subject's memories of the dead loved one are 'buried alive ... as a full-fledged person' (Abraham and Torok 130).

The concept of the psychic crypt arguably has its roots partly in Freud's essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, in which he attempts to distinguish between 'normal' mourning and melancholia. For Freud, normal mourning gradually dissipates and comes to an end, whereas melancholia 'circles around itself, exhausting its victim, sometimes to the point of self-annihilation' (Sprengnether 193). For Freud, melancholia may result from ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards the lost object. In this context, the melancholic person, instead of retracting the libido invested with the lost object and redirecting it to another object, directs it inwards: 'the ego wants to incorporate this object into itself' (Freud 258). As a result, part of the subject identifies with the lost person, resulting in an inner split; the melancholic's violent self-reproaches are, in effect, reproaches against the lost object (Freud 251-268). Kristeva, for instance, describes melancholia in similar terms: 'I love that object,' is what that person seems to say about the lost object, 'but even more so I hate it, and in order not to lose it, I imbed it in myself; but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad, I am non-existent, I shall kill myself' (Kristeva 11).

In addition, Abraham and Torok draw on Ferenczi's concept of *introjection*. Although adapted by later psychoanalysts, Torok returns to Ferenczi's original definition, which she summarises as 'the extension of autoerotic interests, the broadening of the ego through the removal of repression, and ... an extension to the external world of the original autoerotic interests' (Abraham and Torok 110-113). While they put forward that introjection is characteristic of 'normal', mourning, Abraham and Torok argue that *incorporation*, a term first introduced by Karl Abraham¹, occurs when loss is denied, which generates a 'melancholic fantasy of absorbing the lost other into the self' (Abraham and Torok 127-130) (Rashkin 169).

¹ Karl Abraham and Nicolas Abraham were not related

As Abraham and Torok argue, in the context of encryptment, the ego unconsciously assumes the role of guardian of the cemetery, from which ‘nothing should filter out to the external world’(Abraham and Torok 254-255). However, sometimes the ‘in the dead of night ... the ghost of the crypt comes back to haunt the cemetery guard, giving him strange and incomprehensible signals, making him perform bizarre acts, or subjecting him to unexpected sensations’(Abraham and Torok 130).

Importantly, Abraham and Torok argue that such traumas may be transgenerational in nature, and thus help to shed light on the powerful effects of the family secret. In the first generation, the secret is ‘entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting its resurrection (4); it is ‘something that must never be revealed, unspeakable because of the pain and shame it would evoke’(Yassa 83). This secret can unwittingly be passed onto the next generation; through cryptic language and behaviour on the part of the secret-bearing parent, the secret is silently transmitted to the unconscious of the child (Rashkin 94). Thus, the children of a cryptophore will themselves be haunted by the parents’ crypt in the form of a psychic phantom.

In the second generation, however, the secret now becomes unmentionable, an unknown, unrecognised knowledge, for the child who inherits this ‘phantom’ from one of their parents; the child intuitively feels the secret’s existence, but is ignorant of its content (Rashkin 27). In turn, this unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host, and may lead to symptoms such as ‘phobias, madness and obsessions’ (Abraham and Torok 17). Abraham has also compared the phantom to Freud’s concept of the death drive, proposed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud himself uses a vocabulary of haunting to describe the death drive repetition phenomena associated with it; notably, he compares it to ‘possession by some “daemonic” power’. In Abraham’s view, the similarities between the phantom and Freud’s death drive are striking;

Little by little, something surprising becomes evident: the work of the phantom corresponds, point by point, to what Freud called the death drive. First, in effect, it has no energy of its own; therefore it cannot be ‘abreacted’ but only named. Second, it pursues its work of unbinding in silence. Let us add that it is supported by concealed words, so many invisible gnomes who work in the unconscious to break all coherent links. Finally, it is the source of endless repetitions, which more often than not cannot be rationalized (Abraham and Torok 175).

While Abraham and Torok do not put forward a coherent theory of *how* the phantom is transmitted to the next generation, they speculate that the child’s normal process of individuation from the parent is disrupted by the presence of a gap or lacuna in the parent’s speech (Rashkin 27).

In this context, then, the phantom may be understood as a pathological form of dual unity with the parent, according to which the child's failed attempt to psychically metabolise this mute area of the parent's unconscious results in the formation of a mute psychic zone, called an *enclave*, in the child. These enclaves are filled with fantasies both of the reasons for the parent's absence and of the reparation of the parent's damaged part (Yassa 83).

Due to the multigenerational nature of the dual unity, the phantom, as has already been noted, may later be transmitted from the second generation to a third generation, and even on to further generations; however, Abraham and Torok note that this 'phantom effect' progressively 'fades from one generation to the next, and that, finally, it disappears' (176). Although Abraham and Torok's early work suggests that psychic phantoms only develop in the children of cryptophores, their later work, notably Abraham's *The Phantom of Hamlet or the Sixth Act*, indicates that the familial phantom may originate in a secret that is silenced but not repressed in the psyche of its first generation bearer (Rashkin 23-24).

As Rand points out, the concept of the transgenerational phantom can have societal as well as individual or familial consequences, and can help account for the periodic return of political ideologies which had been rendered shameful by the military defeat of their proponents. Notably, in a haunting connection to the life of Christa Wolf, who was brought up in Nazi Germany and spent the bulk of her adult life in the GDR, Rand gives the example of the popularity of neo-Nazi movements among young people in late 20th century Germany. For Rand, this is a consequence of the 'falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past', which may be 'institutionalized by a totalitarian state (as in former East Germany) or 'practiced by parents and grandparents', and which provides a 'breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations' (Abraham and Torok 169). Smale, for instance, has already emphasised the relevance of Abraham and Torok's concept of the phantom, which she sees as 'the haunting effects of the recent German past' to Wolf's work in the context of her engagement with the double legacy of National Socialism and Communism (56).

3 Wolf's *Medea*: Exposing the Phantoms and Crypts at the Heart of Corinth

As has been discussed above, Raducanu reads Wolf's *Medea* as a detective, in that she discovers the terrible secret, that of child sacrifice, which haunts the seemingly civilised city state of Corinth. Ironically, when she first arrived as a refugee in Creon's Corinth, Medea had enviously thought that;

These people have no secrets. And that's what they think too, that's what makes them so convincing, with every look, with every one of their measured movements, they're drumming it into you: Here's one place in the world where a person can be happy. It was only later that I realized how much they hold it against you if you express doubts about their happiness (Wolf 7).

However, Medea discovers that, despite appearances, the parallels between the supposedly 'barbaric' Colchis and the apparently 'civilised' Corinth are striking; like Colchis, Corinth's 'power too is founded upon the sacrifice of children (Atwood xiv).

In Colchis, Medea had joined a group of dissenters who, in an attempt to dethrone her father, the corrupt King Aeetes, proposed a return to the old matriarchial tradition, according to which queens had once ruled in Colchis. On this basis Aeetes, who had reigned for fourteen years, the maximum a king was allowed to rule under the old matriarchial system, was to be replaced by Medea's sister Chalciope. Faced with an envoy of the Colchian dissenters, Aeetes apparently agreed to their demands. However, informing the envoys that he would do exactly as his predecessors from the matriarchial era had done, Aeetes announced that he would appoint his son Aspyrtus as a proxy for a day, allowing him to resume his rule once again (Wolf 74).

Although Aeetes pointed out that this would 'more than satisfy the traditions of our people, for surely we wouldn't go so far as to demand adherence to the oldest rituals, which required that either the king or his young proxy be sacrificed' (Wolf 74), he indeed sacrificed Aspyrtus, perhaps egged on by a 'fanatical band of old crones whose purpose in life was to oblige us in Colchis to live exactly as our ancestors had done, down to the smallest detail'. Escaping from Colchis with the Argonauts, Medea scatters the bones of her slaughtered brother into the sea, fuelling later Corinthian rumours that she, rather than her father, killed the boy (Wolf 75-76).

In her first monologue, emerging from a feverish delirium where she imagines she is a sick child in Colchis being nursed by her mother, she returns to the present, and remembers a recent banquet at King Creon's court in Corinth which preceded her discovery of Corinth's unspeakable secret. At the feast, Medea notes, with surprise, the presence of Queen Merope, whom she has barely seen in all her years at Corinth. The Queen, who, as Medea perceives with her second sight, possessed a 'dark aura due to inconsolable grief', was sitting beside King Creon; as Medea points out, 'she seemed to hate him and he seemed to fear her' (Wolf 9-10). Humiliated at being seated with the servants, Medea decides to follow the Queen, when the latter leaves the banquet without a word.

In her pursuit of Queen Merope, Medea enters an underground passageway, a 'counterimage' of the King's 'bright glorious palace ...in the depths of the earth, built into the darkness' (Wolf 11). Eventually, the passageway having broadened into a cave, Medea hears an animal-like whining noise coming from the Queen, whose gaze is fixed at a point across from her. The scene unleashes a sense of uncanny recognition in Medea, presumably reminding her of the events that had provoked her departure from Colchis; 'Something stirred in me that I had kept locked up and almost forgotten, something came alive in that corpses' crypt'(Wolf 11-12).

A silent phantom slithers towards the Queen, 'the shadow of a shadow, that propelled itself to the woman's side, whispered a word to her and took the dimming lamp out of her hand'. Eventually, Medea discovers the source of the phantom, an engraved crypt located at the point of the wall the Queen had stared at, containing the remains of a child, the 'meager childish skull', the 'fine-boned shoulder blades', the 'brittle spinal column' of a young girl(Wolf 12-13). As is revealed later in the narrative, this body is that of Iphinoe, daughter of King Creon and Queen Merope, who, in an echo of Aspyrtus' death in Colchis, was sacrificed in order to preserve her father's hold on power. Thus, the physical crypt and supernatural phantom that Medea discovers in the bowels of Corinth can be read as symbolising the psychological phantoms and crypts caused by the terrible secret of Iphinoe's murder, a family secret which, as the family in question is the royal family, is also a secret which haunts the whole of Corinthian society.

The character who suffers most from this repressed secret is, arguably, the princess Glauce, younger sister of the deceased Iphinoe. Glauce, who narrates the sixth monologue, portrays herself as a disturbed and lonely young girl, a 'pathetic and miserable wretch afflicted by the gods'(Wolf 107) who, inexplicably, feels responsible for the plague that has descended upon her city. Glauce dresses in black, and describes herself as ugly, with 'pallid unclean skin, thin lank hair, awkward limbs', which, she reckons, explains why even her own father flinches from touching her (Wolf 105-106). We later discover that she suffers from periodic attacks both of epilepsy and of an unsightly, irritating skin disorder. She also exhibits a seemingly inexplicable fear of the palace courtyard, particularly of a spot near the well, presumably where her sister had died; eventually she becomes unable to cross the courtyard without having an epileptic fit (Wolf 107).

From Glauce's narrative, we learn that she had become close to Medea, who acted as a therapist to the disturbed young princess, and becomes almost a substitute mother to her, although Glauce later comes to hate Medea, feeling that, just like her mother, she abandoned her (Weingartz 25-27). Medea bolsters Glauce's confidence, teaching her to dress and carry herself more attractively. She also introduces her to her friend's daughter Arinna, who befriends Glauce

and encourages her to periodically escape from the palace to bathe in the sea. Medea thus ‘gradually fashions another Glauce, a bold and unconventional princess, suddenly aware of her femininity, the Corinth mirror and counterpart of her Colchis self’ (Raducanu).

In addition, Medea also encourages Glauce to explore her unconscious, in an attempt to unearth the terrible secret buried there. While Medea’s interest in the secret that Glauce unconsciously harbours can be read in the context of her role as a detective (Raducanu), it can also, and perhaps simultaneously, be understood as amateur psychotherapy, as an attempt to heal Glauce by uncovering the source of her psychological and physical ills. However, while Medea may be a successful sleuth (Raducanu), her attempts at psychotherapy are, arguably, ultimately disastrous.

With Medea’s help, then, Glauce lets herself ‘climb down an inner rope ... to a place inside me that was nothing other than my past life and my memory of it’ (Wolf 110). This leads Glauce to a childhood memory of a fight between her parents, followed by a long-repressed memory of her elder sister;

Iphinoe. I had never heard that name again, never spoken it again, I could swear I’d never even thought it, not since that time. She was gone away, my older sister, the beautiful one, the intelligent one, the one my mother loved more than me’ (Wolf 119).

According to Turon, the young man charged with protecting the adolescent Glauce, Iphinoe had escaped on a ship with her lover, ‘with that son of a mighty but quite distant King’ without taking her leave; Glauce, however, recalls Iphinoe, wearing a white dress and accompanied by ‘a troop of men, armed men’, coming to her bedroom to say goodbye. Iphinoe smiles at Glauce, ‘She smiled at me the way I’d always wished she might smile at me ... I believe she noticed me for the first time’. Glauce then remembers resisting the temptation to follow Iphinoe, then her mother’s shriek ‘like an animal that’s being slaughtered’. At this point, Glauce asks Medea, who is also in tears, if Iphinoe is dead; ‘She nodded. I’d known it the whole time’ (Wolf 119-120).

Arguably, Glauce’s symptoms can be explained in terms of Abraham and Torok’s concept of the phantom. From this perspective, as Glauce informs us, her mother began to withdraw from her at around the time of Iphinoe’s sacrifice. As a result of her mother’s withdrawal, the young Glauce becomes physically and, ultimately, psychologically sick. Although Queen Merope never explains the secret of Iphinoe’s sacrifice to Glauce, the Queen’s verbal avoidance of the subject, along with her physical withdrawal, may have led to a pathological disruption of the dual unity between mother and daughter, and the formation of a phantom in Glauce’s unconscious. As Abraham and Torok note,

the phantom can cause psychosomatic illness (164-165), obsessions and phobias (177-185).

As noted above, when Medea confirms that Iphinoe is indeed dead, Glauce claims to have 'known it the whole time' (Wolf 120). Indeed, as Rashkin notes, in this sense the phantom can be related to Freud's uncanny, in that the person haunted by the phantom is inhabited by an 'unknown knowledge' that is simultaneously strange and familiar (Rashkin 30). Along with her later rejection of Medea, encouraged by her father and by Turon, Glauce attempts to reject the unspeakable knowledge revealed by the phantom;

She built up all kinds of groundless suspicions in my mind, that sounds believable enough. Or would you rather believe, my dear Glauce, that you live in a murderers' den, asks Turon ... That our beautiful Corinth, which these foreigners can never understand, is a kind of slaughterhouse. No, I don't want to believe that. Of course I imagined the whole thing. How could a child, as I then was, be capable of taking in such complicated images and keeping them locked inside herself for years and years (Wolf 121).

For Abraham and Torok, dismantling the phantom is 'a small victory for Love over Death'; this is, however, no easy matter as the phantom is a liar whose 'would-be revelations are false by nature' (188) and its message, 'a capsule of poisonous secrets', therefore needs to be interpreted and decrypted against its wish' (Rahimi 40).

In this context, 'If the subject is a non-place or a haunted site, analysis becomes an uncanny affair' (Castricano). Thus, the subject of the analysis is not the patient herself, but the patient's ancestor with whom the family secret originated and who, ultimately, is responsible for the formation of the phantom. This obviously proves a significant challenge for the analyst, in that; 'Outlandish as this may seem, this often means analysing, via the mediating presence of the patient, someone who is long since deceased' (Rashkin 33).

However, it is also possible that, in addition to being haunted by a transgenerational phantom, Glauce may be harbouring a crypt of her own; while she appears to be unaware of the nature of Iphinoe's death, as a result of Medea's therapy she does, as noted above, retrieve some repressed memories from the time immediately preceding her sister's murder. As Abraham and Torok put forward, a crypt is formed to 'house' the departed loved one in the subject's psyche in secret. Crypts occur when, although they are overcome by grief, the survivor is deluded into believing that no trauma or loss has occurred (104); they are formed in cases where 'the abrupt loss of a narcissistically indispensable object of love has occurred, yet the loss is of a type that prohibits its being communicated. If this were not so, incorporation would have no

reason for being'(129). In addition, for a crypt to form, the dead love object must have functioned as an ego ideal for the subject; there must also have been a shared secret between the subject and the love object.

Glauce, of course, is unable to mourn Iphinoe. Although she perhaps suspects that something terrible has happened to her older sister, her grieving process is aborted from the start as Iphinoe's death, covered up by King Creon, is unacknowledged. Moreover, it can be argued that Iphinoe, 'the beautiful one, the intelligent one' acted as an ego ideal for the young Glauce, who also appears to be jealous of Iphinoe, who, at least in Glauce's view, was their mother's favourite (Wolf 119).

In Abraham and Torok's view, though, the fantasised aggression of the melancholic cryptophore 'is not in fact primary, it merely extends the genuine aggression the object actually suffered *earlier* in the form of death, disgrace, or removal, this being the involuntary cause of the separation'. In this sense the (imagined) idyll between the subject and object 'did not end due to aggression but owing to hostile external forces' (136-137). As Abraham and Torok note, 'This is why melancholics cherish the memory as their most precious possession, even though it must be concealed by a crypt built with the bricks of hate and aggression' (136-137). In this context, then, Glauce's final traumatic memory of Iphinoe is also perhaps her happiest memory. As has been noted above, before her departure, Iphinoe gives Glauce the gift of a smile; at long last she feels noticed by her elder sister, the object of her love (1998: 119-120).

However, through the preservation of the deceased within their psyche, the melancholic subject becomes a 'living corpse' (Abraham and Torok 148) which assumes the features of the ghosts which inhabit them, 'embodying the very loss which (s)he seeks to deny' (Smale 18). Thus, the covert identification with the encrypted object leads to 'apparently unintelligible words and actions' (Abraham and Torok 155). Moreover, the crypt, like the phantom, can also give rise to somatic symptoms which, as Abraham and Torok argue, represent 'the return ...of the dead who are in mourning' (162-164) for the cryptophore him/herself. In this sense, Glauce's phobias and physical ailments can also be explained as her embodiment of her encrypted sister; notably, Glauce's depression, her phobia of the courtyard, and the ensuing fits it produces, can be understood as representations of Iphinoe's fear and sense of loss.

Similarly to the phantom, the crypt requires very specific and careful treatment on the part of the analyst; it is a lengthy and risky process which proceeds in stages (155-156). Careless or mistaken analysis, in this context, can even lead to suicide;

So, when the subject learns from the analyst, in a repetition of the initial trauma, that his secret lover *must* be attacked, he has no choice but to push his fantasy of mourning to its ultimate conclusion ... The cure will

be complete the day when the 'object' makes the supreme sacrifice
(Abraham and Torok 137-138).

Indeed, overcome by the revelation of the terrible family secret which has haunted her since childhood, and by the Corinthians' persecution of Medea, Wolf's Glauce commits suicide following her marriage to Jason. As Leukon narrates, on the day of Medea's expulsion Glauce's body, wearing Medea's white dress, was found in the well, the very well that Glauce had feared since childhood, and which had presumably been the site of her sister's murder (179). Although, in Wolf's version, Medea is innocent of Glauce's murder, she is, perhaps, partly and unwittingly responsible for her death as a consequence of her amateur attempt at psychotherapy.

4 Conclusion

Wolf's *Medea* is structured around a buried family secret, that of the sacrifice of Princess Iphinoe, which returns to haunt not only the members of the family in question but, as the family is the royal family, affects Corinthian society at large. In contrast to the stories analysed by Rashkin, however, the unspeakable secret in *Medea* is not left to be deciphered by the reader, but is revealed by Medea, sleuth and shrink, herself. This secret, along with the Corinthians mythopoesis of Medea's supposed infanticide and fratricide, is revealed to the reader through the monologues of the various narrators.

Medea's quest to uncover Corinth's rotten secret focuses on the princess Glauce, who, apparently haunted by the phantom of Iphinoe's death, and by a psychic crypt formed by her inability to mourn her, suffers from low self-esteem, phobias and physical ailments. Medea's attempt to befriend and, eventually, cure Glauce via a form of primitive psychotherapy possibly contribute to Glauce's suicide by carelessly unleashing the poisoned secret harboured by the phantom and enclosed in the crypt of Glauce's mind. Hence, Medea appears to have ignored the lesson she claims to have learned from her brother's sacrifice;

If your fearful death has taught me anything, brother, it's that we can't
deal with the fragments of the past any way we like, piecing them
together or ripping them apart just to suit our convenience (Wolf 76).

However, there is a glimpse of hope following Glauce's suicide; her death is followed by a loaded silence, as if the phantom which haunted her has finally been released. As Queen Merope holds her daughter's head in her lap, Leukon notes that 'a stillness descended ... I felt as though that silence hid within itself something like grief and justice for all the victims that people in their blindness

leave behind them in this labyrinth' (Wolf 179). The unleashed phantom, the ghost of the family secret which, with Glauce's death, can no longer haunt her descendants, thus begins to resemble Derrida's specter in its call for justice.

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