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## **ON BOUNDLESS *PHYSIS*: MYTHOLOGICAL AND PRE-SOCRATIC TENDENCIES TOWARDS DISEMBODIMENT**

**Abstract.** The present article defends the argument that there were tendencies in both mythological and pre-Socratic thought that paved the way for an explicit philosophy of disembodiment inherited by the Hellenistic mind, which flowered in the shapes of gendered ambivalence. By focusing on personification of boundlessness and the notion of *apeiron*, I discuss the genesis of the problem of disembodiment, and investigate its tendencies in mythical (pre-philosophical) thought and in single-element theories, abetted by arguments from feminist poststructuralist theories and from feminist philosophy, to pre- and post-Socratic/post-Platonic attitudes that spliced embodiment and femininity. The article aims to demonstrate that the problem of disembodiment is characterized by a pre-Platonic ambivalence concerning *physis* emanating in the relations between femininity, elementality, and death. I reveal that the problem of disembodiment is intimately tied to gendered ambivalence in both mythology (female mythic figures) and pre-Socratics (i.e., “elements” and “principles”) that transformed female boundlessness into male heroism. Hence, in the post-mythological world the relation between women *and* death became problematic, which in turn led to a male anxiety over reproduction: an anxiety that was reliant on constellating women, death, boundlessness, and formlessness, and a process that eventually decries a lost preternatural male *physis*.  
*Keywords:* *apeiron*, *physis*, boundlessness, femininity, disembodiment

### **Some Heuristic Terms<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Tendency**

Since in this text I hold that disembodiment features tendencies within the transitions of the types of thought researched – mythological and pre-Socratic – here I make the case of using the term “tendency” not as an analytical, but as descriptive term. What I mean by “tendency” throughout is that the material surveyed reveals a certain *desire* in various textual corpuses to prioritize

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of Chapter 1 from my doctoral dissertation *The Problem of Disembodiment: An Approach from Continental Feminist-Realist Philosophy*. Budapest: Central European University, 2020, pp. 21–44, 54–55.

an idea that can be (or has been) otherwise flexibly used for different ideational projects. The tendencies that I identify are not intentional and conceptual projects hell-bent on structure or causation. I use this word as an operative term – not a concept – because it does not qualify the incumbent problem of disembodiment as the result of causation. The term qualifies the problem rather as the *sum total* of willful, desired ideational trajectories within a given textual corpus and/or evidence. “Tendencies” hence means that the ideas whose trajectory I outline were variable positions that, for reasons I attempt to detect, ended up as an ossified particular project of disembodiment whose correlates (e.g., boundlessness) cannot be seen as a form of necessary causation, but as a contingent and gendered transformative process.

Given that my argument begins with, and is reliant on, the fragmentary nature of the initial evidence available and left to us by philological and doxographical work on the notion of *apeiron*, I qualify my argument about the resulting disembodiment as a tendency towards a disembodied philosophical anthropology. This is so since the very nature, the very form of the fragment allows to diagnose precisely tendencies within the text and the mythic narrative: instances of metaphysical and transcendent volition express precisely tendency *as* subjectivity. In certain cases, e.g., the pre-Socratics, the textual ambivalence of fragmentarity pairs with the content of my argument: that the tendencies within mythological and pre-Socratic thinking abandoned a certain type of gendered ambivalence about the origin of the universe.

### **Gender Ambivalence**

By “gendered ambivalence” I describe the varying relatedness of femininity, elementality, and im/mortality. This includes a discussion of the notion of the *apeiron*, rendered throughout as the boundless. Focusing on *apeiron* will help me reveal two things: that the material engaged with reveals a move away from boundless *physis* (nature), and that a metaphysical version of *physis* was conceptually developed through a more metaphysical notion of femininity *without disrupting* the continuity between femininity and boundlessness, but *by changing the effect of that linking* in the process of abstracting natural forces. Over time, boundless nature was given a hierarchical locus, and hierarchical metaphysics became possible. I will show that the transition from the mythology involving the boundless and female principles and personifications to the philosophies that discuss the boundless as those principles is varied and gender ambivalent. There were two distinct steps; the ambivalence of boundless femininity with respect to power and death was interrupted. The formlessness and boundlessness of natural forces evolved from mutability of elements<sup>2</sup> to

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<sup>2</sup> I discuss “elements” and “principles” as these were the discursive units introduced by representatives associated with both mythology and pre-Socratic philosophy.

the irreducibility of the femininity of elements, from persona<sup>3</sup> to concept, which opened the way to a later metaphysical attitude illuminating disembodiment as something good in itself.

### *Apeiron/The Boundless*

The two terms *apeiron* and *boundless* are synonymous, bearing in mind that the other preferred translation is “limitless,” whose preference conveys a sounder continuity with Plato’s Unwritten Doctrines and their importance for Neoplatonism. I prefer the term “boundless” because it has been used consistently in feminist philosophy throughout the XX century, and because I use references from feminist philosophy to account for the problem posed by boundlessness, namely, the resulting idealization of disembodiment. The term describes the association of femininity and elementality in general and femininity and non-discursivity in particular; the latter association has been positively valued in opposition to what feminist philosophers qualify as male-centric Western metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> There exists a plethora of terms such as boundless, limitless, formless, indefinite, unlimited, and infinite in the intersection of feminist poststructuralist and feminist philosophical bodies of literatures, and those fields often use these terms interchangeably. I prefer “boundless,” and to some extent regard the other renditions of *apeiron* as mutations of the initial dyad *apeiron*-femininity I scrutinize, although I will avoid endorsing those terms’ interchangeability as much as possible. Where the discussion involves the qualification of “formless/ness,” this is to indicate an instant where the association between female and form point to a more or less misogynistic and somatophobic tendency, which comes from the later Aristotelian hylomorphism,<sup>5</sup> and which imputed to form as such a higher metaphysical standing. That, however, is a post-Aristotelian tendency projected anachronistically into the pre-Socratic and even the mythological material. Where I use “boundless/ness,” this is in order to inspect femininity as it is often being recovered by feminist philosophers from ancient and mythological narratives, where boundlessness is not superimposed onto origin narratives as a female qualifier of deprivation and lack (i.e., lacking goodness, itself a Platonic stipulation). While it is clear that the associations between female, matter, boundlessness, maternity, and evil have led to a differential and questionable status of the female in ancient Greek cosmology, in this article I do not begin with the assumption that the resulting evilness of female embodiment was foundational. The main question to be answered here

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<sup>3</sup> The personified “figures” are treated more as metaphorizing examples of the tendency toward disembodiment rather than mere metaphors with a subtext.

<sup>4</sup> LLOYD, G. *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge, [1984] 2004; CLARK, B. Introduction: A Fling with the Philosophers. – In: *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader*. Ed. B. Clark. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, pp. 1–12.

<sup>5</sup> See PANAYOTOV, *The Problem of Disembodiment*, pp. 11–14.

is: How is it that the female figures, elements, and principles moved closer and closer to the boundless, and subsequently to the notion of embodiment? How did they, after mythology and the pre-Socratics, continued to be associated with boundlessness, matter, and corruption

## 1. Theorizing the Boundless

Feminist philosophy of antiquity proposes a return to the formless (or the non-eidetic) in pre- and post-Socratic philosophy in order to explain the predominantly negative valuations of femininity in ancient philosophy.<sup>6</sup> This proposal, however, is founded on an embrace of the positive moral evaluation of the category “embodiment,” as if its opposite is its automatically male corollary. In part, below I will show this is not the case. And in many ways, this feminist “return” narrative is a *reaction* to the silent de-suturing of femininity from the domain of moral goodness, but the latter did not appear as a conceptual unified project at least until Socratic wisdom, if not in earlier four-elements theories. Whether reaction or not, the return seems to oppose what has limits (*peras*), or the initial four elements doctrine (*stoicheia*), to the boundless (*apeiron*). It is best represented by the accounts of Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman, and Sabina Lovibond: in these readings, the feminine is akin to *apeiron*.<sup>7</sup> The feminine is framed as a reasoning according to metaphors and personae, which is proximal to the boundless and matter (and the embodied); reasoning according to concepts is closer to the bounded, idea, and form (and the disembodied). This set of readings and its multiple, endless iterations in feminist theory has interiorized the hylomorphic dichotomy form/matter (*morphe/hyle*), which allows reading the philosophical and literary Hellenistic canons in dichotomously gendered terms.

Much of this dichotomous grid entails a retroactive thinking of femininity as an ethically defensible cosmological quasi-principle, whereby various readings of those canons impute an air of pre/discursive competitiveness. This is one of the reasons why feminist philosophers of antiquity offer arguments defending the idea that the female principles in ancient philosophy are often represented as second-order principles, or as having a less meaningful place in mythological and metaphysical schemas narrating cosmic origins and origin stories. Lovibond suggests that the lower status of the feminine in ancient cosmology is effectuated via the devaluation and downgrading of the boundless (indeed, as the formless),

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<sup>6</sup> As already stated earlier, here the use of formless/boundless/limitless is somewhat synonymous. Here I want to merely indicate that the consequences of a re-theorization of boundlessness need not be reduced to feminism only.

<sup>7</sup> IRIGARAY, L. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985; IRIGARAY, L. *In the Beginning, She Was*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012; KOFMAN, S. *Freud and Fiction*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1991; LOVIBOND, S. “Feminism in Ancient Philosophy: The Feminist Stake in Greek Rationalism.” – In: *Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Eds. M. Fricker and J. Hornsby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 10–28.

projected onto the female body. The more formless, the less powerful a force is, whence femininity's cosmologically contested role. But this seems to be true only if we account for "concepts," and not literary-mythic personae. Nonetheless, the association between formlessness and natural force becomes the motif behind the political contestation of women in Hellenism.<sup>8</sup> The cosmological and political obsolescence or superfluity<sup>9</sup> of the (female) boundless comes from the embracing of the limit (*peras*) as "good" and the limitless as "bad."<sup>10</sup> As Sergius Kodera says, "'being without a limit' also implies a characteristic inclination to be infected by (potentially unwanted) forms."<sup>11</sup> Hence becoming and liquids were easily interchangeable, allowing a leaking into each other; for the feminist philosopher, natural elements are always ethically and sexually charged, because they are called on to retreat a cosmo-epistemic explanation of humanity's coming-to-be and its uncertainty. Metaphysical becoming and physical liquids putrefied each other, and "woman is able to tap the inexhaustible reservoirs of nature's procreative power."<sup>12</sup> This opposition is as old as the Pythagorean table of opposites:

Limit (*peras*) is contrasted with the *apeiron* (the indeterminate or formless – a character attributed, in this way of thinking, to matter), and together the two make up one of ten pairs of opposed terms which Aristotle says were recognized by the Pythagoreans as ontological or cosmological "first principles." The pairs (which in fact include "good" and "bad") each comprise a "good" and a "bad" term, though in some cases the values attaching to them are derived from a highly specific philosophy of mathematics; "limit" falls on the "good" side of the table, prefiguring the role of "forms" or universals as ideal paradigms in middle-period Platonism. For us, though, the important point is the appearance of "male" and "female" in the list.<sup>13</sup>

When feminist philosophers try to answer how to re-interpret the boundless, they implicitly or explicitly address the mythic dimension of reproduction; however, reproduction becomes a metaphysical problem only after

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<sup>8</sup> LORAU, N. *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*. New York: Zone Books, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> *Überflüssigkeit*, Songe-Møller's term, was proposed in response to Konrad Gaiser's work in 1984. See SONGE-MØLLER, V. *Philosophy without Women: The Birth of Sexism in Western Thought*. London and New York: Continuum, 2002, pp. xi, 4, 9–10.

<sup>10</sup> LOVIBOND, *Feminism in Ancient Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> KODERA, S. *Disreputable Bodies: Magic, Medicine, and Gender in Renaissance Natural Philosophy*. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010, pp. 26–27.

<sup>12</sup> CARSON, A. Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire. – In: *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. Eds. D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, and F. I. Zeitlin. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 143, 154.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* The table traditionally features ten opposites, and the tenth – male/female – is sometimes disputed as being part of the original listing, although the ideal number among Pythagoreans was ten. Here Aristotle's influence of understanding the Pythagorean system (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* I.A 986a22–986b2) is formative for a retrospective critique of the original source, whose stability relies on embracing the historical account of the hierarchies as undergirding the critique of those hierarchies.

mythological thought and the post-Pandoran predicament. The problematization of boundlessness extends to the entire history of Platonism, and to Plato's predecessors. Kodera claims that the "Platonic tradition [has] a characteristically ambivalent attitude towards embodiment,"<sup>14</sup> and he gives an example with a late XVI century Renaissance metaphor called "nymphomaniac matter," taken from Renaissance Platonists Leone Ebreo and Alessandro Piccolomini,<sup>15</sup> where the latter goes on to compare matter to nymphomania, building on a passage by Aristotle's *Physics*<sup>16</sup> which posits that "flesh and bone" are subject to change. Kodera states that the association between nymphomania and matter describes "the ontological whoredom of the embodied world,"<sup>17</sup> and that nymphomaniac matter indexes femininity as corrupting matter itself – corrupting because disrupting with change what is otherwise unmoved, stable, and bounded. The feminist philosophical approaches to embodiment and the boundless from ancient philosophy onwards treat and explain femininity as valued more negatively: this is the reactive theory formation of a post-Aristotelian exclusion of women from the domain of an allegedly neutral ideality of "form," and Kodera's late Platonist characterization above is nothing but representative of such feminist reaction which axiomatically aligns femininity, boundlessness, and embodiment. The problematization of boundlessness as it is associated with femininity here is studied before Platonist philosophy: to better grasp the reactivity, I claim that the ambivalence surrounding gender persisted until the pre-Socratics. Boundless nature as also a female one was not a function of embodiment through and through.

The ancient theorizing of creation was also a theorizing of embodiment, and the problem of embodiment put on the agenda of cognition gendered metaphors for an even more grandiose pursuit – cosmogony and cosmology. In cosmology, the female body became the placeholder of male anxieties about reproduction. The late Renaissance worry over matter's nymphomania indexes anxiety over reproductive control, but also over conceptual clarity, and embodiment presents a fundamental stipulation for such clarity. As Carson says when describing the dirtiness of ancient *porneia*:

That which confounds categories or transgresses boundaries is polluting, that which is so confounded or transgressed is polluted and threatens to pollute others. (...) Adulteresses pose a special threat to the public hygiene of the city; their dirt is something they carry with them like a contagion. (...) Dirt is a matter that has crossed a boundary it ought not to have crossed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> KODERA, *Disreputable Bodies*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–47, with the Latin word for prostitute *meretrix*, and thenceforth *materia meretrix*.

<sup>16</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Physics* II 193b31–194a6.

<sup>17</sup> KODERA, *Disreputable Bodies*, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> CARSON, *Putting Her in Her Place*, p. 158.

Much before womanhood would be framed as “nymphomaniac matter,” harlot, and even mother, in mythology, thought about matter belonged to the domain of physics and explaining nature. It is necessary to review the problem of associating boundlessness and femininity in mythology and pre-Socratics because without analyzing the ambivalence (especially with respect to death) these domains entailed about femininity, femininity’s role in post-Socratic thought and metaphysics cannot be studiously fathomed. And investigating these two domains for gendered ambivalence – from physics to metaphysics – describes a process of becoming, which is tied to reproduction and femininity, two gendered and anthropic predicaments that generate an allegedly ungendered, yet androcentric and endless self-observation – that of the interrupted ideality of (male) self-same and homosocial<sup>19</sup> origins.

Detecting gender ambivalence has to begin with the idealized assumption that whenever philosophers provide a distinction between Hellenism and Hebraism, the former is equated with change (and thereby becoming, which implies embodiment) and the latter with obedience (and thereby stable being).<sup>20</sup> The transition from physics to metaphysics concerns changes: changes specifically around this ambivalence, changes that are decisional in the last instance, changes that qualify matter in a gendered way.

The cosmological opposition between form and formless is derived by the modern dyad rationality-masculinity, which Genevieve Lloyd has identified,<sup>21</sup> and Susan Bordo has singled out<sup>22</sup> as soul-body dualism. In Lloyd’s reading of ancient philosophy, femaleness was symbolically associated with unreason and the dark powers of conceiving, making them closer to earth and death.<sup>23</sup> The opposition is not derivative of Plato’s legacy, and is older: from the earliest cosmogonies and cosmologies of the pre-Socratics onwards, the female has been identified with the formless and the boundless. It is the Hellenistic philosophical continuity between *mythos* and *logos* that conceptually tied femininity to earthliness in thinking about *change* in a specifically morally hierarchical and codified way, whereby change is becoming is reproduction. Lloyd’s implication is that the body was figured as an impediment to knowing the truth about the reality of universe; the value-laden-ness of the boundless crossed the threshold of femininity. The identification between women and the boundless expressed a political worry

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<sup>19</sup> On the notion of homosociality, see HARTMANN, H. I. *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union*. – *Capital and Class*, Vol. 3, Iss. 2, 1979, pp. 1–33; and SEDGWICK, E. K. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 1–5.

<sup>20</sup> KOFMAN, *Freud and Fiction*, pp. 12–13; LOVIBOND, “Feminism in Ancient Philosophy,” p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> LLOYD, *The Man of Reason*.

<sup>22</sup> BORDO, S. *The Flight of Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987; BORDO, S. “Feminist Skepticism and the ‘Maleness’ of Philosophy.” – *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 85, No. 11, November 1988, pp. 619–629.

<sup>23</sup> LLOYD, *The Man of Reason*, pp. 2–3; similarly, CARSON, “Putting Her in Her Place.”



about women's political nature and participation in what should have been an autochthonous political geometry of horizontality, silently equated with male-only equality. The analysis in the next two sections surveys how the way was paved for a discrete progression of Platonic soul-body dualism and its resulting tendency toward a more strongly gendered male disembodiment, by looking at examples of female figures that can be seen as threatening male life and virtues – and the ethical isonomy of their civic imaginary.

## 2. Mythology, the Pre-Socratics, and the Boundless

In this section I will review and typify some examples from mythology and mythmaking (Hesiod and Homer) and will discuss female mythic figures that have a strong relation with constant becoming and elemental change, in order to account for a change observed in the attitude towards women and death. My objective is to show how gender and femininity operate in myth with respect to boundlessness and boundless nature. The background stipulation is that it is not the case that women have been expressly identified with the domain of becoming (itself a later pre-Socratic category); the question is to demonstrate that this identification was itself produced. The exposition in the following lines will help to show two things: that boundless *physis* was given a hierarchically lower place, later enabling hierarchical metaphysics, and that there is a gender ambivalence with respect to power and death.

Mythology and pre-Socratics constitute a polarity and cannot be read in isolation. Kofman claims that philosophical (pre-Socratic) thought began with metaphorical language, which was subsequently devalued.<sup>24</sup> Metaphorical language is inferior to later Hellenistic discourse (Plato and Aristotle): it conceals rather than reveals truth, since metaphor is subordinated to concept. It is seen as inferior discourse and useless polysemy. Polysemy is boundless with respect to truth and is epistemically gendered. Catherine Zuckert claims that pre-Socratic philosophy was not able to articulate itself in general truth and principles, because it did not hold that any such truth was tenable.<sup>25</sup> Myth was a precursory form of truth and was central to understanding the use of natural forces and their anthropomorphic translation as gods, deities, or as the later development of the four roots/elements. The indistinct character of gods and natural forces (another way of saying their “cognitive value”) suggests that for the people of pre-Hellenistic times, religion and physics worked together to explain reality.<sup>26</sup>

Hesiod is the first to organize figurations of the divine into an ordered system. This makes him the first representative of the transition from theo-

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<sup>24</sup> KOFMAN, *Freud and Fiction*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> ZUCKERT, C. *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 427.

<sup>26</sup> CAMPBELL, G. Empedocles. – *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2010: <https://iep.utm.edu/empedocles>; BURNET, J. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: A & C Black, 1920, I.1.



gony to cosmogony. Hesiod is considered both mythologist and thinker.<sup>27</sup> He introduced an organized system of choreographed personifications of powers and placed importance on gendered conflict,<sup>28</sup> in two ways. First, he gives a name to women (*gyne*) and only after that does he refer to the original race (*anthropoi*) as men (*andres*).<sup>29</sup> Before the creation of women, men (the humans) represented mankind, but now women represented only themselves, for their creation brought about the very distinction between kinds of *anthropoi*.<sup>30</sup> In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus' original Greek speaks of both mother and child as *xenos* – “friend” but also “guest,”<sup>31</sup> the implication being that there is no natural bond between the two, and that the woman is a mere midwife. In Hesiod's Pandora myth women become the “race of women” as the evil for men<sup>32</sup> and as the “destructive race of women.”<sup>33</sup> Second, he introduced Chaos as relative to women. Hesiod remains invariably connected to the problem of female boundlessness as he relates it with death and formlessness, derivative of Chaos, a male god. In Hesiod, Jean-Pierre Vernant finds Chaos as the preceding element before any separation (*chorismos*).<sup>34</sup> Death and boundlessness are here not bounded by a female figure. The nocturnal forces,<sup>35</sup> the female and the Chaos are etymologically united by *chaino*, derived from *chasko*,<sup>36</sup> meaning “to open up, gape open,” and by extension to swallow. In describing the death of Achilles, later Homer uses the verb *amphichaino*. Here Vernant<sup>37</sup> builds on the work of Françoise Frontisi-Ducroix<sup>38</sup> and links the female monsters<sup>39</sup> with Chaos and the impossible image of the unimaginable – and hence the impossibility of seeing (female) monstrosity, a predicament all the more monstrous as femininity and masking is a gendered phenomenon, as Frontisi-Ducroix demonstrates. The examples below are related to both monstrosity and boundlessness, and, on

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<sup>27</sup> VAMVACAS, C. J. *The Founders of Western Thought: The Pre-Socratics. A Diachronic Parallelism between Pre-Socratic Thought and Philosophy and the Natural Sciences*. New York: Springer, 2009, p. 11; HESIOD, *Theogony* 27–28.

<sup>28</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony* 590; VERNANT, J.-P. *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece. – Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Summer 1986, p. 56 on the parallel between death and women.

<sup>31</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony* 570: *kakon anthropoisin*.

<sup>33</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony* 591: *oloion esti genos kai phyla gynaikon*.

<sup>34</sup> See KIRK, G. S., RAVEN, J. E., and SCHOFIELD, M. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 29; on its etymology, pp. 26–27.

<sup>35</sup> The “first Night”: HESIOD, *Theogony* 120ff.

<sup>36</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> VERNANT, J.-P. In the Mirror of Medusa. – In: *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*. Ed. F. I. Zeitlin. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 141–150.

<sup>38</sup> FRONTISI-DUCROIX, F. *Prosopon: Valeurs grecques du masque et du visage*. Doctoral Dissertation. Paris: L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1988.

<sup>39</sup> The term monster/monstrosity introduced above is an interpolation of the school. It captures a culture of welcoming, and not shunning, death, see VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 54.

Vernant's argument, to Chaos, thus initially representing the female as potent boundlessness that has a central (pre-conceptual) place in origin stories.

### Mythological Boundlessness

Below I present and typify representative examples of the relation between femininity and boundlessness from Greek mythology. I approach them through the Paris school of comparative anthropology of ancient Greece.<sup>40</sup> Basing his work on his teacher Louis Gernet and his studies of ancient Greece's juridical foundations, and influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism,<sup>41</sup> in 1964 Vernant founded the Centre Louis Gernet de recherches comparées sur les sociétés anciennes at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris (since 2010: ANHIMA, Anthropologie et histoire des mondes antiques). Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Nicole Loraux, François de Polignac et al. moved away from literary positivism and Durkheimian sociology prevalent in their day.<sup>42</sup> The latter was concomitant to literary positivism, which demands that the reader/scholar of ancient myths should abide only by the text given (the so-called "*sola scriptura*"). Vernant and Loraux in particular<sup>43</sup> also stimulated research on gender on classical antiquity. Following those writers, Svetlana Slapšak in turn based her work<sup>44</sup> partly on Anica Savić-Rebac's,<sup>45</sup> a contemporary of Gernet, who in the 1920s independently focused on issues related to Eros and gender. Both Gernet and Savić-Rebac moved away from literary positivism towards a more materialist and constructivist approach, and both represent an early and successful approach to hermeneutic reading of source materials. And both problematize the structure of "polarity" as such, particularly the way units such as "concept" and "form" have epistemic value over "pre-conceptual" thinking, thereby enriching debates over "savage thinking" and "pre-logical" mentality.<sup>46</sup> For example, Savić-Rebac claims that one cannot divorce poetry and speculation, personal and impersonal.<sup>47</sup> She further claims

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<sup>40</sup> GERNET, L. *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*. Baltimore, Maryland and London, UK: The John Hopkins University Press, 1981; VERNANT, In the Mirror of Medusa; VERNANT, J.-P. *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*. New York: Zone Books, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> HUMPHREYS, S. C. The Historical Anthropology of Thought: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Intellectual Innovation in Ancient Greece. – *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, No. 55, 2009, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 93.

<sup>43</sup> LORAUX, N. *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division between the Sexes*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994; LORAUX, *The Divided City*.

<sup>44</sup> SLAPŠAK, S. A Cat on the Head: In Search of a New Word to Better Read Ancient Mythology. – *I Quaderni Del Ramo D'oro On-Line*, No. 3, 2010, pp. 122–128; SLAPŠAK, S. *Antička miturgija: Žene*. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> SAVIĆ-REBAC, A. *Predplatonska erotologija*. Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, [1932] 1984.

<sup>46</sup> LLOYD, G.E.R. *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, pp. 5–6, with notes.

<sup>47</sup> For example, she accused Rohde's capital work on the concept of *psyche* (ROHDE, E. *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*. London: Kegan Paul, 1925) in divorcing these two categories.

there is a “universal lyricism”<sup>48</sup> in myths and an untenable disjunction between the personal and the poetic, between the lyricism of the impersonal and the speculative of the personal, and her approach sought to disrupt this boundary.<sup>49</sup> Collapsing hermeneutically this boundary is a precondition to understanding the discussed gender ambivalence as it is conceptually tied to so-called “non-conceptual” thought.

Svetlana Slapšak and Katerina Kolozova represent best the synthesis between Vernant and Savić-Rebac in contemporary classics.<sup>50</sup> Following Savić-Rebac’s universal lyricism and Vernant’s notion of myth-making (the idea that myths are not closed systems of thought), Slapšak offers the term *mythourgy*<sup>51</sup> which focuses on myths as creative action and on “discursive aspects of production of myths, thus avoiding the pitfalls of value-laden classifications.”<sup>52</sup> The language and materiality behind mythology are expressive of the *ambivalence* between personal and impersonal as an open system of thought. This ambivalence gives way to analyzing the material within mythology as expressive of tendencies and transitions towards an ambivalent attitude to boundlessness and gender. My analysis below treats the examples as mythourgical since the focus on discursive aspects retreats the potential to “open a new semantic field for the study of myth,” and because this approach “entails loose temporality, or historicity.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the notion of mythourgy aims at the deplatonization of myth.<sup>54</sup> The examples below are often treated as more radical than they are because from a later perspective the very idea of myth<sup>55</sup> is platonized. Thus, the notion of mythourgy helps in deplatonizing the mythology of female boundlessness I present below.

### **Boundless Immortality: The Gorgons, the Keres, and Circe**

My first group of examples includes the Gorgons, the Keres, and Circe. I chose to present them because all of these exhibit a flexible, loose relation to both death and power, and to the problem of male and female im/mortality, thus posing

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<sup>48</sup> See also SLAPŠAK, S. Uvodna studija: Antička estetika i nauka o književnosti Anice Savić-Rebac među delima slične zamisli. – In: SAVIĆ-REBAC, A. *Predplatoniska erotologija*. Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25. For example, there is a transition between the personal poetry of Euripides and the impersonal speculation of Plato, just as there is a transition from an impersonal Plato to a more personified one.

<sup>50</sup> SLAPŠAK, *Antička miturgija*; КОЛОЗОВА, К. *Хелениите и смртта: Антички концепти за смртта и нивната рефлексija во модерното*. Скопје: Култура, 2000 [KOLOZOVA, K. *Helenite i smrtta: Antichki kontsepti za smrtta i nivnata refleksija vo modernoto*. Skopje: Kultura, 2000]; and КОЛОЗОВА, К. Les troubles et métamorphoses de Mnémosyne. – *Monitor: Journal of the Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis*, Vol. 5, No. 1-2, 2003, pp. 17–33.

<sup>51</sup> SLAPŠAK, *Antička miturgija*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> SLAPŠAK, A Cat on the Head, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> SLAPŠAK, *Antička miturgija*, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> See PLATO, *Republic* III 394b; *mythologountes: Republic* III 415a.

a challenge to masculinity as foundational in myth. The name Gorgons comes from *gorgos*, meaning “grim, dreadful” (the Sanskrit etymology is onomatopoeic, as in the growl of a beast), their hair was made of venomous snakes, and turned those seeing them into stone. The name Keres comes from Ker, meaning goddess of death/doom, but also plague. A “Ker” in singular usually means destruction. They were the daughters of Nyx (night) and were female death-spirits. Their sisters, the Moiras, controlled Thanatos; the Keres were often the pure, solitary form of death itself.<sup>56</sup>

The Keres and the Gorgons represent qualities of monstrosity, deathliness, and femininity; they represented death proper.<sup>57</sup> The Keres have a more explicit relation to a divine heartlessness and mercilessness,<sup>58</sup> figuring as unstoppable furies “assuaging their bloodthirsty hatred.”<sup>59</sup> Their outright and unapologetic relation to bringing death can be explained through their relation to form. A Gorgon is not a person or a face (*prosopon*) but a head (*kephale*).<sup>60</sup> Gorgons have no heads proper before the head being cut off. The impossibilities of female faciality culminate in terror, in both fascination and repulsion,<sup>61</sup> as faciality and head-ness are articulated once mortality enters the scene. Mercilessness, exactly a quality of unapologetic relation to death, is best portrayed by Circe. Unlike the Gorgons and the Keres, Circe was ruthless, and her relationship to death was unilateral and rather spontaneous. She is killing out of affect, and for entertainment,<sup>62</sup> including other women (e.g., turning Scylla into a sea monster because Glaucus rejected her).

The monstrosity and facelessness are enabled by female divine immortality; in short, a mythourgical reading of women as boundless *physis* requires to explicate that in mythological stories female immortality was only possible because femininity was itself the domain of death. This changed dramatically with introducing the arch-example of mythic female mortality, Medusa, whose monstrosity and form were divorced in a way that defined femininity<sup>63</sup> as a figure of the incommunicable, transfigured into the formless, “now a nothing, a nonperson.”<sup>64</sup> Medusa’s potent formlessness was ruptured by her mortality: her head became a weapon of Perseus, the man who beheaded her. Even more importantly, Perseus gave her head to another woman, Athena, which then became an adornment and part of her shield and the imagery of justice.<sup>65</sup> Medusa

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<sup>56</sup> KOLOZOVA, *Les troubles et métamorphoses de Mnémosyne*, p. 27.

<sup>57</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 59.

<sup>58</sup> See HOMER, *The Iliad* XV 18.535ff.

<sup>59</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> FRONTISI-DUCROIX, *Prosopon*, *apud* VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*.

<sup>61</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 61.

<sup>62</sup> See HOMER, *Odyssey* 10.505 on killing her husband the king of Colchis, and 10.135–12.156.

<sup>63</sup> See CARSON, *Putting Her in Her Place*, p. 154.

<sup>64</sup> VERNANT, *In the Mirror of Medusa*, p. 144.

<sup>65</sup> The so-called *gorgoneion* is an amulet with apotropaic function which is said to have been

represents a double mediation of interrupting the relation between femininity and death, which is significant because the relation as such expresses what I term here boundless *physis*. When the mythmaker moves the relation between two women, the question of female control over death (and thus reproduction) becomes all the more pertinent and worrisome.

These mythic females (often, collective deities) were defined by shapelessness, monstrosity, and deathliness (the ability to bring death). Their femininity was not defined by their reproductive qualities. They are all monstrous and nocturnal beast-like, shape-shifting female creatures, whose divinity and power are defined by their uncapturable transformability.<sup>66</sup> Shapelessness, monstrosity, and deathliness define them as examples of boundless and powerful female immortality, with “amorphic” power of femininity, and this power is indeed powerful-because-formless. Yet formlessness here also indexes interrupted forms of reproduction *and* uninterrupted relation to death. These females are anthropomorphized representations of natural forces whose manifestation is a dramatized natural boundlessness. The latter often translates into behavioral traits such as deceptiveness and mercilessness. As a result, those female mythic examples are expressive of deceptiveness with respect to truth, saying deceitful lies (*pseudoi logoi*).<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Hesiod has Hermes implanting in Pandora’s chest “deceitful words and more lies.”<sup>68</sup> The boundless immortality of those mythic females appeared possible on two accounts: bringing death and telling lies. In mythology, the qualities of shapelessness, monstrosity, and deathliness culminated in a female boundlessness *and* immortality.

### **Mortal Boundlessness: Calypso, Pandora, Athena, and Chtonia**

Those qualities did not remain unassailed by mythourgical anxieties, which is why here, in the second group of examples, I include female figures whose relation to death becomes more ambivalent. In those examples monstrosity and immortality are less pronounced, indicating that female boundlessness is the object of some restrictive epistemic changes. The examples express a transition from imagining women and their power as unfettered by death and embodiment to being encumbered by the wants of mortality.

In the *Odyssey*, the Ker’s mercilessness transitions to Calypso’s tamed

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used by Athena and Zeus.

<sup>66</sup> This aspect of the female figures is not tied to “femininity.” The shape-shifting Zeus is also defined by such transformability. My examples are reduced to female figures because they undergo a specific kind of transition to a decreased transformability and relation to death. As with male examples, the heroines of Homeric literature mirror societal roles: LLOYD, *Polarity and Analogy*, p. 195. On a recent recasting of female mythological transformability, see MANCHEV, B. Pandora’s Toys, Or, *Zoon Technicon* and the Technical Ghosts of the Future. – In: *Epidemic Subjects – Radical Ontologies*. Ed. E. von Samsonow. Berlin: diaphanes, 2016, pp. 67–79.

<sup>67</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 56 on Apaté.

<sup>68</sup> HESIOD, *Works and Days* 373, 788.

relation to death. Both Circe and Calypso<sup>69</sup> have had relations with Odysseus. While Circe literally manipulated him for her pleasure, Calypso lulled Odysseus to an oneiric-like lifestyle of pleasurable deception. This difference in relations is important because it highlights how female figures intervene in male narratives of heroism and moral adventure; the power of women to shape the very idea of the “hero” is itself a subject of change. Calypso is thus a significant example of transitioning to a more ambivalent relation to death that redefines the implications of boundlessness. She does not embody Circe’s murderous isolationism and excommunication; she is simply not dehumanizing. Calypso, a nymph, hides.<sup>70</sup> She promises Odysseus immortality and reprieve from age and death, leading him to a “sort of nowhere-land into which Odysseus has disappeared (...) where he lives a life as though in parentheses.”<sup>71</sup> Her offer for immortality proposes an indefinite form of livelihood as opposed to the *telos* of heroic life. But heroic life is only achieved through undying fame (*kleos apthiton*) and beautiful death (*kalos thanatos*),<sup>72</sup> both scenarios imbued with the teleological horizon of cathexed death. The episode’s moral is about a temporary diversion from male immortality caused by the amoral-because-timeless formlessness of femininity. If boundlessness is a type of shapeless timelessness, then it lacks the moral coordinates of a human horizon. Odysseus leaves because he sees the life of boundless eternity as a formless antipode of heroism (“a heroic refusal of immortality”<sup>73</sup>), a life devoid of the horizon of immortalization by death.

The preference for tragic death over endless life is thus male and gendered: it correlates gender and mortality, and is defined by the creation of women in the Pandora myth. She is responsible for the “deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble.”<sup>74</sup> Before her creation, mankind, made of men only, knew no death; after Pandora, women and death became a unity.<sup>75</sup> The Pandora myth reshapes the mythological boundlessness of femininity: now figurations of boundless nature are not about the *birth* of women, nor about female death-harbingers, but namely about their *creation*, and thus artificiality – their artificial and violent malaise of a prelapsarian moral universe. The post-Pandoran world is the world of death, of humanity’s mortality, of post-divine artifice. With the Pandora myth, female boundlessness is reduced to a boundary within the self-sameness of male *anthropoi*.<sup>76</sup> It is as if

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<sup>69</sup> They are often confused since Odysseus ultimately escapes them both, e.g., PLUTARCH, *Beasts Are Rational* 985ff.

<sup>70</sup> Her name comes from *kalyptein* – to hide. VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 62. Note again Kofman’s comment on hiding the truth cited above.

<sup>71</sup> VERNANT, “In the Mirror of Medusa,” p. 107.

<sup>72</sup> On both, see КОЛОЗОВА, *Хеленисте и смртта* [KOLOZOVA, *Helenite i smrtta*], pp. 36–53, 138–47.

<sup>73</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> HESIOD, *Theogony*. 591.

<sup>75</sup> VERNANT, “Feminine Figures of Death in Greece,” p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> Again: the introduction of qualities in figures is not exclusively one-sided. For example, if



a pre-conceptual disruption is borne by a conceptual eruption, but their logical places are exchanged.

The sexual division wrought by the Pandora myth caused a proto-political anxiety over male identity. Vigdis Songe-Møller describes it exactly as an “anxiety” and the problem of male self-sufficiency<sup>77</sup> via the work of Loraux,<sup>78</sup> stemming from the myth of the foundation of Athens as the guardian of the polis. Hephaestus created Pandora and is the father of the first Athenian, Erichthonius,<sup>79</sup> who expelled Amphictyon, became king of Athens, and set up the wooden image of Athena in the acropolis. Stella Sandford notes that “[t]he origin of the first Athenian is both divine and earthly,”<sup>80</sup> indexing the vertical theological mobility of political and civic life. Creation stories are similar, but the purpose of the myth of Erichthonius is different: Erichthonius and the Athenians are autochthonous and self-same, and Pandora is a “concession to a sad reality.”<sup>81</sup> The myth feeds a male fantasy of autochthonous self-reproduction<sup>82</sup> – indeed, a cloaked, “pre-conceptual concept” of oneself, as it were – which instituted the very form and idea of *isonomia*<sup>83</sup> and the *democratic polis*. The dream of a world without women after Pandora is in fact a dream brought by conceptual separation borne by the generation of women-as-separation, of women-as-the-limit and the bound, and *not* their boundlessness. This dream was an exercise in testing the political grounds for the boundlessness and formlessness of *physis*. The myth of Erichthonius was a response to the question how this dream can survive after sexual division, and one part of the answer was the personification

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Eros can be read as the male analogy of Pandora, he too has a “primordially vegetative and (...) lightful nature,” in similarity with Apollo and Mithra. CREPAJAC, L. “Uvodna reč: O Antičkoj estetici i nauci o književnosti Anice Savić-Rebac.” – In: SAVIĆ-REBAC, A. *Predplatonska erotologija*. Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> The notion of self-sufficiency is defined and criticized by feminist philosophers: JAMES, S. *Feminism in Philosophy of Mind: The Question of Personal Identity*. – In: *Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Eds. M. Fricker and J. Hornsby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 41; FRIEDMAN, M. *Feminism in Ethics: Conceptions of Autonomy*. – In: *Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Eds. M. Fricker and J. Hornsby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 218. Even though it was stabilized in Cartesian philosophy (see STOLJAR, N. *Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy*. – In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, May 2, 2013: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-autonomy/>), some scholars trace male self-sufficiency back to creation myths and mythology too, e.g., LORAUX, *The Children of Athena*, and LOVIBOND, “Feminism in Ancient Philosophy.” It is criticized because “man stands for original unity, whereas woman is the *other*,” SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> LORAUX, *The Children of Athena*.

<sup>79</sup> APOLLODORUS, *Library* 3.14.6.

<sup>80</sup> SANDFORD, S. *Plato and Sex*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2010, p. 44.

<sup>81</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> SANDFORD, *Plato and Sex*, p. 44.

<sup>83</sup> KARATANI, K. *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*, trans. Joseph A. Murphy. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 11–17; HUMPHREYS, S. C. *Anthropology and the Greeks*. London and New York: Routledge, 1978, p. 83.



of a female literary compromise, the war-like and masculinized, de-sexualized<sup>84</sup> Athena, who inherited all but a petrified remnant of female vengefulness: the in-crusting head of the now mortal Medusa on her shield.

Codifying autochtony and maleness via the figure of Athena as the problem of male self-sufficiency is one part of the story explaining the doing away with female death-like boundlessness. Yet it was also preceded by the collective figure of Chtonia: deities who were representative of agricultural societies and bore the sign of fertility, and who were also representative of the conflict between “the Eleusines, the lightest place of the Demeter cult, and Athena.”<sup>85</sup> The collective name Chtonia was used for a group of female nymphs at the very periphery of the Greek ancient world – they were the guardians of water, wellsprings, herbs,<sup>86</sup> and, on Slapšak’s account, this made them look dangerous. Unlike the later Athena, they had rich sexual lives. If nymphs and sirens had rich sexual lives, it is because they guarded vegetal procreation and sustained the food chain, not the polis. Chtonia is thus a very ancient prefiguration of the contemporary problem of reproductive vs productive labor. Athena’s body, presiding over autochtony, no longer represented natural boundlessness; her embodiment follows and is followed by the order of statehood. Athena became the generalized image of subsuming agricultural sexuality into an always-already divided statehood and, with that, the symptom of weakening women’s ruthless relation to death, and thus boundlessness.

The two groups of examples represent a vacillating attitude to death in female deities: some were personae, some were collective deities – a literary ambiguity that implies boundlessness cannot be subsumed under personhood as such. Instead of the female figuration of immortality, the *mythos* of the Greeks came to prioritize the male mortal condition as the civic moral condition.<sup>87</sup> The transition from the Golden Age of female, deified, shape-shifting immortality in myth and lyric towards the male heroic death and mortality in tragedy and drama – from universal lyricism to universal heroism – highlighted that the male heroic overcoming of death in death itself, as the antithesis of the female morbid boundlessness, was the true and worthy kind of life-in-death that secures the avenue of immortality. Gendering the relation to death, due to sexual division, dualized mortality. Heroic male death was defined dualistically, in terms of a female polarity representing a boundless relation to mortality (Calypso). The creation of deadly women made love and sexual reproduction a necessary evil. The homo-social generation of the universe was over.

The interruption in the relation of women to death (Medusa, Calypso) was redefined by the story of the creation of women as the story of the sexual division of mankind (Pandora). This led to a changing relation between female deathliness and boundlessness, traceable in the move from

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<sup>84</sup> SLAPŠAK, “A Cat on the Head,” p. 47.

<sup>85</sup> SLAPŠAK, *Antička miturgija*, p. 120.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121.

<sup>87</sup> VERNANT, *Feminine Figures of Death in Greece*, p. 64.

the gods to the humans: from the political geometry of divine immortality to the geometric democracy of anthropic finitude. The trouble of the latter was the division of the sexes, and this trouble was relaxed with emasculated femininity (Athena). Other female figures began to embody both femininity and maternity (Demeter, Hestia). The post-Pandoran female's mythology of the boundless moved away from non-reproduction, monstrosity, and inconsequential death towards maternity, reproduction, and mortal life. This was the response to the hero's paradoxical relationship to immortality. The world of birth was the world of multiplicity, and this alone isolated it from the ideal of unity and self-sameness in the polis' *isonomia*, because now the world of death was the world of heroic unity with the divine cosmos. The very vertical corollary of the transcendental polis resting in the invisible domains of the cosmos could be mediated anew via the interruption of the deathly human being: and this interruption as such became a male, gendered structure, however hidden. (And for a long time, the philosophical scandal was that this male/gendered interruption passed as neutral.) Femininity was relegated to an archaic form of political immobility: the death of Medusa became the life of Athena incrustated in her shield. Female boundless immortality became mortal boundlessness defined by reproduction. The male hero could reproduce in death, slyly stupefying female control over both death and immortality.

I surveyed examples of mythic female boundlessness that present shapelessness, monstrosity, and deathliness in order to reveal how these qualities were gradually eliminated as cosmo-political vehicles of power. With these examples, I made a specific summary of the ancient Greeks' mythology of the female boundless. These figures were material myths/stories responding to the problem of embodiment and reproduction, but the response as such does not appear to be a female anxiety. The mythmaking behind them has happened because embodiment was not a problem in the pre-Pandoran world, as it did not entail mortality and finitude in a sexually undivided world. The female figures discussed expressed the gendering of boundlessness, and this boundlessness of natural forces moved closer to mortality, embodiment, and sexual reproduction in post-mythological thought, which in turn enabled tendencies towards preferring disembodiment. The strange price to be paid by figurations of female boundlessness, however, is the loss of the power of that boundlessness as metaphysically relevant element of life here on earth. It was the female power over death and thus immortality that defined a male, androcentric narrative about giving up immortality, yet paradoxically it is this male concession over controlling death that transformed mortality into boundless heroism – and thus its negative, immortality. That is, the very conceptual scaffold of ancient heroism is predicated upon giving up death and conceding it to various forms of mythic femininity: a boundless immortality now archaic and dysfunctional in the face of the hero, the new breathing paradox of immortality.

### 3. Pre-Socratic Boundlessness

In the following section I review some changes within the female boundless *physis* in the transition from mythological narratives to pre-Socratic philosophy, all the while providing examples of the gradual loss of gender ambivalence in boundlessness. This is done by looking at the transition from female figures to abstract principles as conceptual abstractions of natural elements and forces in single-element theories.<sup>88</sup> This transition included some gendered ambivalence, specifically regarding the moral evaluation of female control over natural forces. What Songe-Møller calls the “tragic ambivalence” of myths<sup>89</sup> is thus differentially gendered in pre-Socratic philosophy.

I organize my sources according to single-element (Heraclitus, Anaximenes, Anaximander, and Parmenides) and multiple-element (Anaxagoras and Empedocles) theories and group the authors according to their interpretation regarding oneness/unity or multiplicity of elemental creation. I argue that in the transition to abstracting femininity – from physics to metaphysics – the linking of women and the boundless did not de-escalate. It is precisely the continuity of the link between the two that, I claim, will serve as a tendency for the formation of an idealization of disembodiment. The linking of women and the boundless did remain the structure of supporting a notion of femininity that is more and more associated with embodiment. An embodied relationship to boundlessness was the initial, mythical link between women and the world of being. But the linking between women and the boundless added an explanatory model to that structure that was morally charged. If the initial embodied relationship to boundlessness was defined by some female power over death and immortality, the gender ambivalence surrounding it offered a new path towards a disembodied relationship to immortality: this time mediated by the mythical and literary figure of the (male) hero. Thus, the move towards abstracting principles went hand in hand with their gendering, but the move was not radical. Regardless, the move implied the idealization of a silently indexed and male disembodiment.

The figure of the mythic hero was far from enough to institute a vertical and transcendent mobility of the Greek mind, and thus control over those earthly and negligible territories of becoming, which is why the general transition I describe in this section is from mythology and theogony/cosmogony towards philosophy/cosmology. The particular transition within this general process is from female boundlessness expressed in anthropomorphic terms to allegedly gender-neutral conceptual abstractions.<sup>90</sup> Concepts and elements are expressions of the earlier metaphors and gods, male or female. The general process of transitioning to philosophical speculation is traditionally explained with the interest

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<sup>88</sup> For multiple-element theories, see PANAYOTOV, *The Problem of Disembodiment*, pp. 44–54.

<sup>89</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 84.

<sup>90</sup> They do remain gendered, and I consciously do away with the question whether mythic patterns and abstractions ought to be deemed pre-conceptual.

in beginnings (*protista*) and the all (*panton*) itself. In its elements, the transition accounts for the early Ionian interest in the transitoriness of the elements to the problem of the eternity of the world and what is stable, i.e., purely physical, in the created world (the Italian schools and Parmenides' Sphere<sup>91</sup>). To follow this transition, two steps should be minded: (1) the gross qualification of pre-Socratic sources as (crude) materialisms is an Aristotelian framing polluting the sources; (2) the Eleatic school largely rejected the Ionians and their rather non-hierarchical universe, often confusing hierarchy with polarity, a problem muddying the research in pre-Socratic philosophy to this very day. The discussion of the boundless in the very terms of the Ionians has, strictly speaking, nothing to do with a distinction between form and matter as it is usually understood via Aristotle's hylomorphism. Hence, the discussion of this transition below aims to describe the end of god-like immortality and the beginning of sexual division in humans as cosmo-politically constitutive. Cosmogonically, the formalization and distribution of male and female qualities/principles is reliant on the separation of both sky and earth and men and women.<sup>92</sup> For the ancients, the real problem was to "find better institutions"<sup>93</sup> that will organize elements and principles in a sustained notion of orderly speculation.

As in mythic thought, in the pre-Socratics there is also ambivalence as to whether those elements are gendered and, if so, how does gendering structure speculating about reality – and reality itself. The most fundamental problem in the pursuit of such scientific speculation are precisely the four elements and the way they are divided or not. Strictly, here the female boundlessness is a subset of that problem. The scholastic understanding is that *apeiron* precedes distinction – of form/matter, male/female – as it describes the cosmos as a body, an abstract cosmos, yet *apeiron* can still be researched through a gendered perspective if we apply the interiorized hylomorphic schema, the usual feminist trope, which I suspend here.

### **Single-element Theories: Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides**

Elemental theories are theories that seeks to substitute mythic personifications expressive of natural phenomena and causes; they are often deemed as "conceptual," and thus hierarchically higher than mythic literary characters

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. KIRK, RAVEN, and SCHOFIELD, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, pp. 73–216 and 216–319.

<sup>92</sup> The literature discussing these processes in terms of grossly ahistorical binary schemas is traditionally the one of comparative religion, and writers such as Mircea Eliade, whose reliance on binarism (up and down, left and right) is questionably suitable. Anthropologists and sociologists such as Gregory Bateson, Mary Douglas, Pierre Bourdieu and André Leroi-Gourhan have contributed greatly with data on "primitive mentality" that entertain more with empirical detail rather than inspired-and-literary ahistorical explanatory generalizations.

<sup>93</sup> DOUGLAS, M. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London and New York: Routledge, [1970] 2004, pp. xii–xiii.

who serve as unified explanations of reality. Single-element theories (also known as material monism) include Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. In those theories, either one natural element out of the four (earth, water, air, fire) is given preference, or another unifying entity is singled out as the unique point of creation of the heavens. For Anaximander it was neither element, but the *apeiron*; for Anaximenes this was air; for Heraclitus it was fire; and for Parmenides, too, none of the elements but the Sphere/Being was central. According to Songe-Møller,<sup>94</sup> we can distinguish between hierarchical and non-hierarchical single-element theories: Heraclitus and Anaximander are examples of a non-hierarchical philosophizing and cosmology that did not make its way into later political philosophy. By this she means that in those theories maleness and femaleness were recognized as different, but more or less equal counterparts in creation narratives.

Other than Thales and his emphasis on water, who I do not discuss here, two later philosophers share a single-element theory: Anaximander and his student Anaximenes. We only have one surviving fragment from Anaximander and his poem *On Nature*, as testified by Simplicius:

Of those who say that [the first principle] is one and moving and indefinite, Anaximander, son of Praxiades, a Milesian who became successor and pupil to Thales, said that the indefinite [*to apeiron*] is both principle [*arche*] and element [*stoicheion*] of the things that are, and he was the first to introduce this name of the principle. He says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other indefinite [*apeiron*] nature, from which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them; and those things, from which there is coming-to-be for the things that are, are also those into which is their passing-away, in accordance with what must be. For they give penalty [*dike*] and recompense to one another for their injustice [*adikia*] in accordance with the ordering of time – speaking of them in rather poetical terms. It is clear that having seen the change of the four elements into each other, he did not think it fit to make some one of these underlying subjects, but something else, apart from these.<sup>95</sup>

This passage has been studied extensively and the clause about the *apeiron* (the translation here by Patricia Curd renders it as “the indefinite,” while I use “the boundless”) and its authorship has not been vigorously contested.<sup>96</sup> Simplicius’ doxography is considered the most reliant one, while Theophrastus<sup>97</sup> is considered unreliable.<sup>98</sup>

The boundless is, in effect, an element of the elements, a meta-element:

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<sup>94</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, pp. 74, 80.

<sup>95</sup> Simplicius, *On Aristotle’s Physics* 24, 13ff. = DK 12A9 and B1. Trans. Patricia Curd.

<sup>96</sup> KAHN, C. H. *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 28–82, with comprehensive doxography; on *apeiron*’s doxography, *ibid.*, pp. 32–33, with discussion on pp. 321–339.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>98</sup> After BURNET, J. *Greek Philosophy*, Part I: *Thales to Plato*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1914, XIV.

this is why Anaximander's is treated here as a single-element theory. With Anaximander we see for the first time the *apeiron* defined, we witness the conceptual ritual of defining the undefined: for an undefined and boundless natural force to be, first it should be defined as such, and this is what he does by speaking of the boundless as a first, undefined principle. This does not mean we cannot think of the boundless as a boundless body, because the boundless is material (not matter) and thus requires emplacement within space. As William Guthrie sums this up,<sup>99</sup> after Anaximander, fire was the most important element. Other than Simplicius' evidence, we also know that an *arche* is "to be the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known."<sup>100</sup> Natural philosophers, who are theorists of the elements, presided by Anaximander in the doxographic tradition, question in a new way the origin of life on earth. Life was the result of actions between hot and dry on the cold and moist.<sup>101</sup> But it is the boundless (body) out of which the heavens are made, and which in turn gives rise to all the elements. There is an ongoing discussion about this sequence, and some authors claim that the boundless only generates the *polarity* hot-cold, not the elements themselves.<sup>102</sup> Generally, both Anaximander and then Anaximenes believed that in some inexplicable way the heavens (*ouranoi*) are formed in this "boundless" (whereby inexplicable simply means transcendental), but they were unable to provide an account of the formation of heavens.<sup>103</sup> That the heavens are in or from the boundless implies that *apeiron* is some kind of paradox: an infinite, yet created/material space. The separation of *polis* and *kosmos* is thus still "not yet discreet,"<sup>104</sup> and the account of the boundless is insufficiently philosophical.

Anaximenes of Miletus, son of Eurystratus, pupil of Anaximander (sometimes disputed) singled out air as the key element of origins. He

declared that the origin of existing things is air. Out of it all things come to be and into it they are resolved again. He says that just as our soul, which is air, holds us together, so breath and air surround the whole cosmos. Air and breath are used synonymously.<sup>105</sup>

He chose the air because for him the boundless body was devoid of any qualities. With his monism he suggests that an entirely unqualified entity cannot account for origins and creation. Air is preferred because to Anaximenes

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<sup>99</sup> GUTHRIE, W. K. C. *In the Beginning: Some Greek Views on the Origins of Life and the Early State of Man*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957, p. 51.

<sup>100</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* V 1013a23; see also ARISTOTLE, *Physics* IV 213a16–18.

<sup>101</sup> GUTHRIE, *In the Beginning*, p. 31.

<sup>102</sup> CURD, "Pre-Socratic Philosophy."

<sup>103</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, pp. 49–77.

<sup>104</sup> VICTORIN-VANGERUD, R. D. *Facing Nature: The Infinite in the Flesh*. Doctoral Dissertation. Perth: Murdoch University, 2004, p. 32.

<sup>105</sup> Aëtius I.3.4, B2; DK A10. See also ARISTOTLE, *Physics* IV 213b22; almost the same theory as Anaximenes' is developed by Diogenes of Apollonia, cf. GUTHRIE, *In the Beginning*, pp. 49–50.

it seemed closer to inter-transformation. In Theophrastus and Plutarch, it is suggested that air provides the way for change to happen through condensation and rarefaction of air (13B1). The view that single-element theories require one material reality that can transform itself but keep its “own” quality throughout is a later development, undergirded by Aristotle and his ontological requirement of substance and substance metaphysics. At the time of Anaximenes, nothing close to the Aristotelian substance was defined: perplexities surrounding unification, however, arose because the question of quality and property was already posed, yet the quiddity remained undefined. The problem of matter’s quality is a problem of the created world, of the world of becoming and change, and Anaximenes deepened this problem without finding a solution of explaining quality.

With Heraclitus, everything revolved around fire – an element later masculinized in ancient medicine and the theory of humors, but in no way is it gendered in this way in Heraclitus. In B30 he simply speaks of the “ever-lasting fire,” and in B90 that it is exchanged for all things in a cosmic cycle. For him fire (*Keraunos*/Thunderbolt) is *logos* and Zeus (B64), an identification supplanted by the doxography, whereby *logos* is eternal and unchanging, and fire is eternally changing, leading to an inter-transformation of elements. But he does not make gendered qualifications of the element’s identification with Zeus. However, later Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle, will make a further distinction between generative and destructive heat,<sup>106</sup> where heat is the generative agent, and moisture the matter on which it acts. As Anaximander, Heraclitus expressed monist tendencies and claimed that “all things are one” (B50). The underlying oneness comes from fire, which is analogical to *logos* as an immanent principle of creation. *Logos* penetrates Nature, because “nature is accustomed to hide itself” (B123).

The emphasis on unity was also kept by Parmenides. His cosmology responded to that of Anaximander, since for Parmenides being is a Sphere (B843). He did not single out an element, as in the case of Anaximander, and treated Being (*to eon*)/the Sphere (*Sphairos*) as the foregrounding principle of principles.<sup>107</sup> In his poem, a young man meets a goddess (Dike) who will give him knowledge of “all things” (28B1); however, eventually she does not give the man (*kouros*, B1 24) the knowledge, but simply ways to uncover it. Strictly said, the “ways” is knowledge itself, but since she does not claim to present it, it is illuminated instrumentally via the “well-rounded Truth” and the “opinion of the mortals.” The Heraclitean suggestion that nature hides – not unlike the mythic Calypso – is implied by the poem’s goddess, who impersonates a thesis that is thus older than Parmenides’. She warns the man that one has to avoid the way according to which “that which is not is,” meaning the way of relying on sense perception (B7). The philosophy of “Being” with which Par-

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>107</sup> PALMER, J. Parmenides. – *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, February 8, 2008: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/parmenides>.



menides is associated thereafter<sup>108</sup> is laid out after B7 (what-is, *esti*, or what must be, as opposed to what-is-not, or what is contingent), and Parmenides presents the thesis that man has to provide an account of how what-is is.<sup>109</sup>

Past this point, the goddess speaks of the deceptive opinions of the mortals, and therefore requires the proofs of truth behind the reality/nature which is *already* hiding; this is Parmenides' famous introduction of *doxa*. On the grounds of a polarity between divine truth and human/mortal opinion, Parmenides is considered the first thinker to introduce the distinction between being and becoming. What-is cannot come-to-be, and it cannot cease to be; change of what-is is impossible. On such grounds, because the universe is predicated on the sphere and sphericity, it is stipulated that change of what-is is impossible: "[s]ince the only solid that is uniform at its extremity is a sphere, what must be must be spherical."<sup>110</sup> Only becoming (the world of opinion and mortals) can undergo change that will qualify it as what is not and as contingent. What-is/being therefore does not have a place. Parmenides' cosmology is theological one, because it qualifies truth as an achievement of the mortal philosopher/*kouros* as advised by the divine goddess. Thus, in Parmenides change is impossible because nothing comes out of nothing – everything is always already created, and the perishing or generation of anything new is impossible, for the world is the One Sphere which contains the All in itself. The principle can be summarized as: What is uncreated is indestructible. What is disembodied is eternal. But does that imply that what is disembodied is immortal or boundless? Is the principle here the same as boundless nature? No, but boundlessness comes closer to an articulation of embodiment and being.

Here, too, it is difficult to discern a specific gendering within the polarity itself. Some introduction of equality between elements is partly true in Parmenides (particularly in the epistemic interface between *doxa* and *episteme*), with the proviso that there is a division in necessity between the boundless and the elements.<sup>111</sup> The Sun-like girls lead the hero to the border of day and night, a border patrolled by Dike as the goddess of boundaries, especially

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<sup>108</sup> KAHN, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*.

<sup>109</sup> See the excellent study on Parmenides by Emese Mogyoródi, who concurs in great detail that, from among all the single-element theories, Parmenides', *contra* Songe-Møller et al., should be considered a proto-feminist. MOGYORÓDI, E. Light, Knowledge, Incorporeality, and the Feminine in Parmenides. – In: *Soul, Body, and Gender in Late Antiquity: Essays on Embodiment and Disembodiment*. Eds. S. Panayotov, A. Jugánaru, A. Theologou, and I. Perczel. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024, pp. 33–56.

<sup>110</sup> PALMER, Parmenides.

<sup>111</sup> In what can only be characterized as a deliberate provocation, however educated one, to decades-long debate on Parmenides' "feminism," Mogyoródi forcefully demonstrates that "... it follows that the feminine, as such, is not dissociated from philosophical knowledge. Quite to the contrary, the fact that Truth/Reality is revealed to the *kouros*, the only male character in the Poem, by a powerful and formidable goddess, through the help of other female divinities, strongly suggests that Truth/Reality is in some fundamental way associated with the feminine." MOGYORÓDI, Light, Knowledge, Incorporeality, and the Feminine in Parmenides, p. 38.

the one between life and death. The daughters of the sun persuade Dike from the gates, “whereupon the road is left behind and instead a ‘gaping chasm’ is disclosed, which evidently alludes to Hesiod’s description of Tartarus and Chaos,”<sup>112</sup> and we are taken beyond the limits of the world of Chaos. Dike is the bearer of knowledge, but she says nothing of herself, and says nothing of the place out of which she speaks, effectively becoming that place of truth. Most importantly, in the interpretation of Songe-Møller Parmenides is not occupied with soul-body distinctions<sup>113</sup> that will consume Plato and Aristotle, which means that Parmenides’ teaching is not irreconcilable with human bodily, and thus sexed, existence. Interestingly, Emese Mogyoródi arrives at a similar conclusion on the opposite argument that Parmenides does not abet the foundations of Western philosophical misogyny.<sup>114</sup> Either way, it is clear the thinker does not seem to posit existence is reliant on sexual division. Yet Parmenides unproblematically describes the securing of the border of Being as presided by women<sup>115</sup> and guarded by the “chasm” of Chaos which, curiously, is male in Hesiodian terms. In Parmenides, Chaos seems to be de-sexualized. The fact that the first feature of being, guarded by the female Dike, is that it is ungenerated (*ageneton*) is in stark contrast with the Hesiodian race of women who bring evil. What exactly does the hiding of truth here becomes more difficult to identify. As ungenerated, Being cannot die: and Being is still watched over by an immortal goddess. Dike is used to demonstrate that change and becoming are excluded, and that what-is/being has primacy. The sexed *mythos* explains the sexless *logos*. The insistence on unity and unchangeability of the boundless/the Sphere does not exclude the existence of the world of matter, embodiment, and multiplicity. Parmenides’ cosmology only (but crucially) qualifies this world as unnecessary – in the sense that it is incorrigibly aligned with the Sphere – yet it does not stipulate that it should not exist. Proto-feminist or not, on account of the argument from disembodiment of the principle, Parmenides’ supreme single-element theory should be considered the pre-Socratic theory that has led to the later development of hierarchical metaphysics. But it was produced with the help of female figures, not pure “philosophical” abstractions, conditions that reject the idea that disembodied reason is the result of purely somatophobic thought.

### Conclusion: A Nature Lost

In this article I reviewed mythological and pre-Socratic examples and theorizations of boundless nature in order to prepare the ground for outlining

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<sup>112</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 35.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>114</sup> MOGYORÓDI, Light, Knowledge, Incorporeality, and the Feminine in Parmenides, pp. 43–44.

<sup>115</sup> SONGE-MØLLER, *Philosophy without Women*, p. 41; Dike: B1.15 and B8.13; Ananke: B8.16 and B8.30; Moira: B8.37.

the genesis of the problem of disembodiment in later Platonic thought, without ever entering this territory. My aim was to demonstrate that, over time, between *mythos* and *logos*, boundless nature was given a hierarchical locus, a hierarchy that launched the very foundations of hierarchical metaphysics. And while there is nothing original in claiming that the latter is gendered, my contribution here was to show that this hierarchy (again, often confused with the structure of polarity itself) was only possible because the gendered aspect of the femininity ascribed to nature's boundlessness became the object of a specifically male anxiety over power, which substituted a female boundlessness for a male mortality: the power to handle vertical structures of transcendence, itself the product of the anthropic and mortal interruption of humanity. All the while my question was how is it that the female figures, elements, and principles moved closer and closer to the boundless? Their continued and historical association with boundlessness, matter, and corruption erupted in a much later obsession over the axiological hierarchy of a post-Pandoran embodiment. Yet disembodiment was not a de-privileged locus of female power in mythology: while it was ambivalent as to whether mortality and reproduction have anthropic importance, boundless nature was definitionally powerful as an archaic proto-form of disembodied existence.

Showing that in mythological and pre-Socratic thought there operated a gendered ambivalence concerning the relations between femininity, elementality, and death, culminating in the notion of *apeiron*, is far from enough to tell the story of losing a narrative world of becoming. I also tried to indicate that this ambivalence was expressive of tendencies towards radicalizing disembodiment. And yet the "gender ambivalence" of boundless nature was radicalized and then lost. It morphed into de-potentialized forms of femininity lending way to the heroic pattern of mastering the turgid world of unrelenting becoming. This was followed by capturing the interface of continuity between mythology and pre-Socratics regarding nature and matter as boundlessness, the result of creation stories. I showed that in the post-divine and post-Pandoran world, the double gift of women *and* death went hand in hand with a male anxiety over reproduction, and with a fantasy of self-sufficiency and immortality defined by the realization of its otherness, death itself. My discussion of mythological boundlessness revealed that there was a transitioning to a model of male heroism which was reliant on correlating women, death, boundlessness, and formlessness. If indeed mythology is a gendered drama, then the heroine of boundless nature was forced to become the hero of mortal and transcendent boundedness. The discussion of pre-Socratic single-element theories helped reveal that from the mythological phase onwards, femininity was closer to, but not identical with, the domain of embodiment, becoming, and mutability. This mutability challenged the very nature of boundedness, of limit, and finally of definition and conceptual clarity. Conceptual clarity – the very form of the "idea" – needed as its other the boundlessness of femininity. In the process,

disembodiment and boundlessness were largely confused. Oddly, some of us feminist scholars are often only happy to embrace this confusion.

Creation stories maintained that women approximate boundlessness via figures of shapeshifting, mutable creatures, making femininity responsible for not controlling boundaries, and endangering those of others. This literary drama produced a homologization between the elemental woman of nature and nature's metaphysical analogy, matter, to then culminate in the concept of *apeiron* in Anaximander and Empedocles. The elementality of boundless femininity and its inter-transformation into a dubious proxy of creationism continued the Erichthonian male anxiety about autochthony. Chthonia became autochthony.

In their desire to institute a boundary between *peras* and *apeiron*, the ancients *have defined* the limits of the limitless and the indefinite against the background of femininity: boundless nature, after all, was defined on account of a very specific thought pattern called the "hero," as if the latter is a more transcendent form of personification, a conceptual figure much more intimate with the skies. This he was not. But the cunning of an androcentric embracing of death against the cunning of mastering death itself ended up in a strange form of de-gendering boundlessness as such. The definition of the indefinite as the very indefinite was defined by gendering elementality and boundlessness. The move from mythological personifications to abstractive concepts such as *apeiron* retained the use of female boundlessness, and then boundless *physis* was developed into a metaphysical version of *physis*, particularly after Aristotle, which deepened the continuity between femininity and boundlessness. With the philosophical introduction of *apeiron* and the four elements theory, this continuity also led to a more metaphysical notion of femininity. The ambivalent relation of women to death was problematized in the Hesiodian post-Pandoran world, because sexual reproduction posed a challenge to conceptual identity and self-sufficiency. Chaos is not sufficiently and only a gaping death, but a gendered space of power dispute. The continuity's metaphysical garb is mythological and very physiological (Chthonia). This duality, founded on ideas of sexual division between sky and earth, is suggestive of the axiological ordering of reality.

And this is how the creative force of boundless nature was given a hierarchical locus, and hierarchical metaphysics became possible. The transition from the mythology involving the boundless and female principles and impersonations to the philosophies that discuss elements and the boundless as those principles is gendered and varied. These were two distinct steps; the ambivalence with respect to power and death was interrupted. In the transition, the formlessness and boundlessness of natural forces evolved from mutability of elements to the irreducibility of the femininity of elements. Gendered ambivalence resulted in a bounded idealization of embodiment. It is precisely this transformation that made possible a metaphysical attitude towards disembodiment as something good in itself. But after the transition,

it was too late for women to participate in this good's ideal: they were asked to agree embodiment is their conceptual trade-in-stock from mythology onwards, and, quite dramatically, as much of contemporary feminist studies reveals, they consented. Whatever power was imputed to disembodied reason from then on would therefore never be the priority of a female "difference": the power of femininity and alterity now stemmed from the foundational loss of the gender ambivalence of the lost boundless *physis*.

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## ЗА БЕЗГРАНИЧНИЯ ФИЗИС: МИТОЛОГИЧНИ И ПРЕДСОКРАТИЧЕСКИ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ КЪМ БЕЗТЕЛЕСНОСТ

**Резюме.** Настоящата статия защитава аргумента, че както в митологичната, така и в предсократическата мисъл са съществували тенденции, проправили пътя за една изрична философия на безтелесността, наследена от елинистичния ум и процъфтяла във формите на полова амбивалентност. Като се фокусирам върху олицетворяването на безграничността и понятието *apeiron*, аз обсъждам произхода на проблема за безтелесността и изследвам неговите тенденции в митичната (предфилософска) мисъл и в едноелементните теории, подтикнат от аргументи от феминистките постструктуралистски теории и от феминистка философия, до пред- и пост-сократически/пост-платонически нагласи, които сливат въплъщението и женствеността. Статията има за цел да демонстрира, че проблемът за безтелесността е характеризиран от предплатоническа амбивалентност по отношение на *physis*, произтичаща от отношенията между женственост, елементност и смърт. Показвам, че проблемът с обезтелесяването е тясно свързан с половата амбивалент-

ност както в митологията (при женски митични фигури), така и при пред-сократиците (т. е. „елементи“ и „принципи“), които преобразуват женската безграничност в мъжки героизъм. В постмитологичния свят връзката между жените и смъртта става проблематична, което от своя страна води до една мъжка тревога около възпроизводството: тревога, осланяла се на съзвездието от жени, смърт, безграничност и безформеност и един процес, който в крайна сметка порицава изгубеното свръхестествено мъжко тяло.

*Ключови думи:* *apeiron, physis*, безграничност, женственост, безтелесност

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