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The Tragic Plot of the Tragedy Medea And the Characteristic Features Providing It

This paper establishes the role of the *Medea* tragedy in the development of the tragedy as a genre. The essay contains the characteristic features and the history of the evolution of the tragedy, originating from the times of Ancient Greece. For better understanding of the actions performed, provided by the heroes of the tragedy, the set of myths was observed. The study of these myths was done to reveal the events that led to the consequence presented in Medea. Euripides's Medea features the row of elements, characterizing it as a revenge-play according to the story-pattern. On the basis of such affiliation, the characteristics of the structure and the plot are represented adding the characterizations of the main heroes – Jason and Medea. Considering the fact that the tragedy always reflects some context, whether social, political or moral, the paper elucidates the

ideas and problems of the society, considered in the tragedy and represents the topicality of the issues relevant these days.

While taking into consideration any type and genre of the literary works, developed in Ancient Greece, the source of their origination is in the worship of the mythological god – Dionysus. Processions of people followed the actors, impersonating god and his companions, and presented songs and dance stories from the life of the god. The specific kind of songs was hymn, performed by a chorus, and it was called dithyramb. The dithyramb was the point for the drama and then the tragedy emergence.

Covering the notion presented by the Norwood, the tragedy is a genre which “was at first mere improvisation” (Norwood). The development of this genre was not rapid but its degrees were gradually becoming higher and higher. A lot of literators contributed to the progress of this genre. It should be emphasized that the literary work was closely connected if not inseparable with the performances because all the plays were written to be introduced to the public with a help of actors on the prototype of the stage. Considering such interaction, a lot of changes took place in order to make plays in any genre highly acceptable by the public. These changes comprise the constant growth of the actors’ number, diminishing the chorus’ role, the emersion of the scenery. The increase of the number of the acts and paying more attention to the importance of the dialogues also took place in the process of the tragedy evolution.

Medea was a rather widespread title for the literary works of the fifth and the fourth centuries BC. The Greek authors used it for the number

of comedies and tragedies. Some time later, the Roman writers also called their works the same way, treating the same topic. For example, Seneca's variant of *Medea* survived till our days, but Euripides work is treated as "classic".

Not much information about Euripides has survived till contemporary days but usually he is said to be born at Salamis, in 480 BC. He is believed to have had the well-to-do family and rather profound education. The public activities were of no interest to him, on the contrary to communication with the great philosophers and writers like Anaxagoras and Socrates. Euripides' first works were established when he was nearly thirty. Indicating his contribution to the development of the technique used in the tragedies, the first point is the status of his tragedies. The style of the tragedies was a cause to call them not tragedies but tragicomedies. The other characteristic features were the loose syntax, the repeated words and expressions with the polysyllabic vagueness. The innovation provided by the Euripides was the use of the prologue. The Euripidean prologue was created to make the moment of the beginning of the action clear for the spectators. Euripides had written about a hundred dramas during his life. One of the most famous and important works created by him is the already mentioned *Medea*.

The tragedy *Medea* is based on the myth about one of the most famous heroes in the Greek mythology, Jason, though the tragedy itself covers only the last period of hero's life, outlining betrayal of his wife Medea and the consequences of this action. While considering the myth that served as the basis for the tragedy, it relates to the branch in the Greek mythology, called Argonautika.

To better understand the basic reasons for the tragic chain of events represented in the work by Euripides *Medea*, it is necessary to distinguish the principal events of the myth. At the very beginning of the story, the relationship between two brothers-princes of the land Iolcus is shown. Aeson is one of the two princes - the rightful heir of the kingdom, but his half-brother Pelias, the son of god Poseidon, betrays Aeson and imprisons him. As a result of the Aeson wife's prudence, their little son Jason stays alive and is brought up by the Centaur Cheiron.

When Jason becomes twenty years old, he returns to the motherland with the desire of becoming the true king of Iolcus. Pelias decides not to kill the fellow at once and gives him a task, after completion of which Jason is not supposed to return. Therefore, Jason is under the support of gods and with the crew of heroes aboard casts off.

During the sail to the Colchis, where the Golden Fleece, needed by Pelias, is situated, the crew deals with a number of barriers. The first place where the ship with the heroes, called Argo, anchors, is the island Lemnos inhabited by women only. Men have spent several years on the island with these women, but then the Argonauts realized that it is already time to leave and continue their sailing.

On the land of the Doliones, the members of the crew say goodbye to Hercules after the accident with the king of the land – King Cyzicus, who dies in the result of the accident. The other King the Argonauts deal with is King Amycus, whose tradition is to fight with every stranger he meets. After the difficult fight, the representative of the Argonauts, skilled boxer Polydeuces wins, but the tribe of Bebryces

cannot tolerate the death of their king and attack the Argonauts. The latter prove their strength and they continue their sail. During the following voyage, the heroes undergo the clash with the Styphalian Birds, the sacred birds of Ares and the dangerous approach through the Symplegades.

After landing on the island, Colchis Aphrodite assists Jason to get Medea's loyalty. Medea is the daughter of the King Aeetes, and being in love with Jason, helps him with all the tasks her father gives him. The woman contributes greatly to Jason's success, and he promises to take her with him and marry her. Medea is a witch and provides the victory to her beloved but at the same time she understands her father's unwillingness and unpreparedness to give the Golden Fleece to the stranger.

Medea risks and makes treachery of the Fleece with the Argonauts and departs with them. On their way back to Iolcus, the ship is chased by the Medea's father and brother. Medea kills her brother with cruelty, and the King stops his chasing. During the return to Iolcus, the heroes again face the number of adventures but finally come back home.

Pelias expresses himself as an unfair man and is punished by Medea, who plays a horrible trick with Pelias's daughters. As a result, the residents do not want to consider the sorceress Medea as their queen. This is the very point for the beginning of the tragedy by Euripides.

Jason and Medea go to live in Corinth. In Corinth Jason falls in love with the young princess Glauce and leaves his wife and children. Medea and her children have to leave the land before the wedding of Jason and

the princess, but the insulted woman decides to revenge. The sorceress cannot bear the thought that Jason neglected her after everything she had done for him. The worst is that Jason uses the arguments of Medea's cruelty in the performance of the actions, leading to his success in the past. He accuses his wife of her participation in the stealing of the Fleece, the eagerness to leave her parents' house so easy, the murder of her own brother and the cruelty of her act with the King Pelias. Medea is not ready to be dishonored in such a way, as her husband is going to dishonor her by the marriage with the other woman and kills his bride and their common children to punish him.

The tragedy has a revenge-plot which is determined so because of containing such features as "elements of grievance, overcoming of obstacles, deception, murder, and celebration of success" (Mastronarde). The structure of the plot is built on the chain of steps, made by Medea, overcoming the number of obstacles to get the desired revenge. Medea has many decisions and changes them quickly, but the structure of the tragedy is not destroyed with this fact. On the contrary, the sum of her intentions and following actions fulfill her original plan.

According to the Mastronarde, the tragedy *Medea* "in general invites a fruitful confrontation between systems of value, especially between the heroic values and the more polis-centred and more egalitarian values of contemporary society".

Thus, the system of moral values depicted in the tragedy really has not changed in the contemporary world too, that is why people are supposed to use and appreciate their presence in other people appropriately.