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Medea of Three Different Eras - Woman's Artistic Image as a Reflection of Epochal Tensions (Corneille, Legouve, Anouilh)

The consideration of prominent artistic images being especially sensitive in reflecting the problematic issues, tensions, and challenges of their day is widely recognized. Medea is one of the leading female figures among these outstanding images. The story of the Colchian maiden proved to be one of the best matrixes for the comprehension of socio-political problematics of various eras and the discourse regarding the multiple ideological and philosophical topics.

Analysis of how French dramatists of different epochs—Corneille, Legouve and Anouilh—interpreted Medea's image to articulate the dominant issues of their respective eras will be the central piece of the paper.

Pierre Corneille, French playwright of the neoclassical period, regarded Medea's story appropriate for reflecting on topical issues such as allegations of Satanism and witchcraft pertinent in 17th century France. Ernest Legouve, another French dramatist and theorist of women's rights, responded in his own way by reworking the Medea myth to the women's emancipation movement taking place in France during the 1850s. Jean Anouilh, on the other hand, a prominent French existentialist writer of the 20th century, has used Medea's story to make his audience meditate upon significant philosophical issues –meaning of preserving one's identity, different approaches towards life, compromise vs. radicalism, etc.

The paper will discuss the novelties introduced by these dramatists in their reworking of the original Medea story—be it changing of the fabula, the personages, the artistic tools, etc.—while focusing to research the authors' commitment to the development of the respective interpretative trends of Medea.

The conclusion of the paper will add useful insights to (1) the study of interrelations between literature and contemporaneity; (2) comprehension of artistic images as denominators of epochal tensions; and (3) research on Medea's abovementioned receptions in the context of the various interpretative trends of this “multidimensional” figure.