

Mythological Face of Ancient Medea in Georgian and Russian Symbolist Poetry

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Abstract:

The myth of Medea has been a central concept in 20th-century sociology and cultural theory, serving as a potent symbol and narrative tool across various artistic movements, particularly modernism. This paper explores the role of mythology in modernist literature, focusing on the reinterpretation of the Medea myth by French, Russian, and Georgian symbolists. French symbolists, such as Arthur Rimbaud, modernized mythological heroes to fit contemporary cultural contexts. Conversely, Russian symbolists like Valery Bryusov and Andrei Bel emphasized the superhuman qualities of mythological figures, influenced by Nietzschean philosophy. Georgian symbolists, including Titian Tabidze and Sandro Shanshiashvili, offered unique interpretations of Medea, reflecting the socio-political context of Georgia and contrasting the perspectives of East and West. This study highlights the diverse ways in which modernist writers used ancient myths to address contemporary themes and the varying degrees of psychological and cultural rehabilitation of the Medea figure.

Keywords: Modernism, Symbolism, Medea, French literature, Russian literature

Introduction

Myth is one of the central concepts of sociology and cultural theory of the 20th century, which was used as an eternally living starting point; Often for the designation of completely different concepts. In the beginning of the XX century, in the era of modernism, the role of myths and in general. The activation of mythology is associated with the opinion established in creative circles about the existence of eternally destructive demonic forces under the "thin layer" of culture, which, together with human nature, is connected with the general human, psychological, metaphysical beginnings. The desire to escape from socio-historical and time-spatial frameworks made mythology (due to its characteristic symbolism) a very convenient, universally acceptable "language" for conveying the personal and public behaviors of eternal models (Miresashvili, 2005, p.176).

As it is known, the business card of modernism is symbolism, and France is considered its birthplace. The interest of representatives of the school of French symbolism in ancient mythology is confirmed

by their own works (quoting from ancient literature, using artistic forms and versification norms, "borrowing" the titles of individual poems and poetic collections, etc.); However, it should also be noted that their relationship with the mythological world is usually aimed at modernizing the myth, immortalizing the mythological heroes, adapting them to the modern cultural context. For example, the above-mentioned trend follows the work of Arthur Rimbaud, in which we find the ancient mythological

Faces (Eros, Selena, Endymion, Venus, Ariadne, Zeus, Leda, etc.), with the help of which the author discusses the issues of superman, God, love relationship. However, antiquity soon acquires a grotesque character in Rimbaud's poems; Ancient Greek gods fall from their pedestals, and beautiful myths (eg, the birth of Aphrodite from sea foam) are transformed into an apotheosis of ugliness (Venus Anadiomene, 1870). According to the ancient literature researcher Ketevan Gardapkhadze, this attack is directed against modern images of Parnassus and not against the ancient world. According to him, the mythological face of ancient Medea, which is interesting for our work, did not find a proper reflection in the works of French symbolists (Gardapkhadze, 2018, p.151). It is difficult to argue why the French symbolists abandoned the myth of the Argonauts and Medea; However, in contrast to them, the interest of Georgian and Russian symbolists towards Medea is clearly fixed and connected to the general trend of modernism - a wide range of quotations, reminiscences, stories and the use of artistic forms. At the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, the use of ancient heritage in the works of Russian symbolists (that is, the so-called poets of the Silver Age) was given a wide and deep character. Innocent Annensky, Valery Bryusov and Andrey Bel used antiquity from different perspectives (starting with ancient motifs and ending with a review of ancient philosophy). As is known, Innocent Anensky - an excellent connoisseur and translator of classical languages and literature - played an important role in the formation and development of Russian modernism. The very first collection of his poems (published under the pseudonym Nobody) introduced Russian readers to the Homeric world (reminiscent of Odysseus and the cave of Polyphemus). This was followed by translations of Euripides (1890-1906), including "Medea" (1903). The mentioned translation was part of a rather ambitious project, which envisaged the complete translation of Euripides' literary legacy, with which Annensky was, in fact, engaged in the years 1890-1906. It is noteworthy that Anensky never turned to Medea as a source of inspiration for his own works. Nevertheless, he left us some critical comments on the meaning of this character in the article "The Tragic Medea" which he appended to his above translation. The main concept of the article was formulated in several postulates:

- Medea's tragedy lies in the Colchian woman's realization of the meaninglessness of her own life and fate;
- It was difficult and fatal for Medea not only the fact that her husband betrayed her, but also the realization that she dedicated herself, her life to an unworthy person who insulted and humiliated her (Annensky, 1906, p. 19; e-mail address).

In the preface to the translation of "Medea" I. Anensky also noted that "Medea" alone is not enough to understand the phenomenon of Euripides; It is necessary to translate all the works of Euripides into Russian in order to get a more or less complete idea of the worldview of the Greek tragedian

(Анненский, *ibid.*). Based on the above, the main difference between Anensky and other Russian writers, who began to discuss the theme of suffering and the aesthetics of tragedy in the cultural prism of antiquity, manifests itself in the definition of the subject that undergoes a tragic transformation. Where others (e.g., Vyacheslav Ivanov) saw the audience as "renewed in the fundamental principle of existence and resurrected in universal suffering" [ИВАНОВ, 1904:64; email address], Innocent Anensky saw "helpless. A person who was sacrificed by the gods for inevitable death" [Анненский, 1906:212-213; email address].

The spiritual achievements of Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, which is to some extent connected with Friedrich Nietzsche's discovery of the Dionysian element in ancient Greek tragedy, contributed to the reevaluation of the classical heritage in Russia. From this point of view, Anensky's opinions were innovative, because they were dictated by the desire to resist the spread of Nietzsche's theory of the origin of tragedy in Russian reality. Annenski perceived the essence of ancient Greek tragedy differently from symbolist circles; The metaphysical approach to tragedy was unacceptable to him, which in fact represented a purely realistic genre for the artistic perception of the ancient Greeks. The aesthetics of tragedy, which the Russian Symbolists borrowed from Nietzsche, caused negative results, because, according to Anensky, it deprived tragedy of its main essence - psychological tension and cathartic resolution. Friedrich Nietzsche, with his superhuman phenomenon, turned out to be a great source of inspiration for representatives of Russian symbolism; And no hero was subject to superhuman idealization as much as Medea of Colch. Contrary to Anensky's views, the reincarnation of the Medea myth in Russian literature was motivated by the desire to find a symbol that corresponded to the Nietzschean totality of eternal connections.

Friedrich Nietzsche presented Dionysus and Apollo in a different light in the book "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music"; They perfectly embody the two antagonistic beginnings of life, two independent vital forces which have existed since mythic times, though they did not arise simultaneously. According to Nietzsche, the question - what is the connection between music and tragedy, between Greek and tragic music? - There is only one answer: it is in the artistic world that the ancient Greek finds himself. To demonstrate the principles of independence. It is this aspiration that can be read in Valery Bryusov's poem "Medea" (1904), in which the episode of Medea's killing of children and her escape from Corinth is presented. Bryusov similarly examines Medea's children as her brother Apsirte (i.e. dismembered and threw body parts into the sea). This scene (dismembering the murdered children and then throwing their body parts from the flying chariot) is a gross violation of the ancient Greek and Latin versions of the Medea tragedies. According to Bryusov, Medea committed such a crime because of her desire to gain freedom, which she had lost in the conditions of family cohabitation with her husband: " - "Here she is, here she is, the wind of freedom!/I greet you! Whistle in my ears! [...] Can I, turning the coffins at night by the power of witchcraft,/sleep in family coziness,/like a slave's simple wife?" Here we note that the present quote, which aims to emphasize the hero's specialness, difference, contradicts the following terrible naturalistic scene, in which Medea cites the elimination of shame as the reason for her behavior: I, crushing the bodies into pieces/ And throwing them to the ground,/ Shake off all the shame of the last passion/ from my shoulders

Tearing it to pieces/and throwing it on the ground/all the shame of the last passion/I wash off my shoulders" (Брюсов, *ibid.*).

Thus, V. Bryusov needed to identify a strong figure who is above the crowd/superhuman; which can change the world. However, as many scholars have noted, Medea sacrificed the children to death only to destroy everything that had a genetic connection to Jason. It is likely that I. Annensky's article "The Power of Darkness" - ВЛАСТЬ ТЬМЫ (1905) was, among other things, provoked by Valery Bryusov's Nietzschean interpretation of Medea, as evidenced by the quote below: "In 1886 two remarkable books were published. In one of them (which has been republished this year) there is talk about the origin of tragedy from the soul of music, where the romanticist Nietzsche took the children's fairy tale to the highest spheres of spiritual life" (АННЕНСКИЙ, 1979, p. 65). According to Annensky, the symbolic approach to myth presents antiquity on one plane, without perspective. Excerpts from Bryusov's poem quoted above seem to confirm the correctness of this statement.

The myth of the Argonauts can also be found in Andrei Bel's poem "The Golden Fleece", in which the author, in accordance with the demands of the worldview of the generation at the turn of the century, added a new interpretation to the myth. Unlike Bryusov, Bell is less interested in the history of the heroes of the Argonaut campaign and Medea, their superhuman qualities, etc. The central figure for him is the ship "Argo", with which the Argonauts set off to Kolkheti to bring the golden fleece; That is, for the author, the collective action of people aimed at achieving a goal, which should change the world, is the most important. Thus, in both cases, Russian symbolists - Valery Bryusov and Andrei Bely - by focusing on ancient characters, focused not on the actions of gods and heroes, but subordinated the myth and mythological story to the ideas important to them (Nietzsche's superhuman phenomenon, the idea of the poet-demiurge, the idea of collective action of people), created own coordinate system and thus provided to the reader. As for the Georgian modernist discourse, it offers an interesting understanding of the myth of the Argonauts and the artistic face of Medea. We note that from a chronological point of view, the beginning of modernism in Georgia is considered to be the 10s of the last century, when under the influence of European and Russian culture, not only in literature, but also in Georgian art as a whole (music, theater, applied art...), various modernist currents were established (Symbolism, Expressionism, Impressionism, Futurism...). It should be noted that in Western reality, modernism has existed for almost a century; In Georgia, it is considered an "aborted project", because in February 1921, after the occupation of Georgia by the 11th Russian Army, the representatives of the Bolshevik ideology, who were at the reins of the government, completed Georgian modernism in just two decades. However, despite the tight chronological framework, the modernist outlook played a very important role in defining and shaping the most important paradigms of Georgian writing in the 20th century.

Despite the fact that the Georgian symbolist school was influenced by the French and Russian schools, Georgian poets had a different vision in terms of interpreting myths; Thus, the ancient face-symbol of Medea is found in their poetry with different meanings. It should be noted that in the Georgian literary tradition there were two different views regarding the Argonauts' campaign and the artistic-contextual meaning of Medea. The first comes from Ioane Batonishvili's "Kalmasobi" (1848), in which the author presented the tragic finale of Medea and Jason's love according to Euripides' "Medea" (that is, in order to take revenge on Jason, Medea kills her children and runs away from

Corinth in a chariot tied to a dragon). According to Professor Ketevan Nadareishvili, the above-mentioned episode (that Medea kills her own children) lays the foundation for one trend of interpretation of Medea's face in Georgian culture (Nadareishvili, 2021, p.80). As for the second trend, it is developed by Teimuraz Batonishvili in "History of Iveria" (1840). Unlike Ioane Batonishvili, the author does not present Medea as the murderer of her children or her brother. Teimuraz Batonishvili tried to rehabilitate Medea's person, emphasizing her valued status in society. Later, Akaki Tsereteli also shared the above-mentioned tendency to interpret Medea's face in the poem "Medea", in which he presented the daughter of the Kolkhi king as a victim of a foreign world (dichotomy mine/other, civilized world/barbarian) (Nadareishvili, 2021, p.81). Georgian modernists followed the same line and tried to justify Medea, to find a psychological explanation for her behavior.

In Titian Tabidze's poem "Medea", the daughter of the king of Kolkheti is presented as an unhappy person who will never find peace again because of the crime committed; The poet sympathizes with him: "In a foreign country, my soul is tired,/ I am reminded of my estate./ I'm sorry! The garden o

f Alers has shrunk, / the dead body will not accept me" (Tabidze, 1966, p. 278).

Titian Tabidze connects Medea and the tragedy of his homeland - Georgia (the poem was written before Georgia gained independence, before 1918); that both of them lost their freedom under the sky of Colchis: Medea of Colchis laments the freedom that disappeared under the sky of Colchis: "Stir to the daughter of King Aeti, / Once the innocent maiden of Colchis" (Tabidze, 1966, p. 279).

Similar feelings are expressed in Kolau Nadiradze's poem "The Song of Orpheus", where the poet presents Medea as a grieving mother: "They took away the fabulous gold, / the strength of Singe's arms and bows / and left behind Medea's grave, / the weeping of her slain children" (Nadiradze, 1971, p. 190). The author emphasizes the strength and wealth of the Kingdom of Colchis; At the same time, the expedition of the Argonauts to find the Golden Fleece is referred to by the epithet "great", because according to the author's view, it was this expedition that connected our country with the European world. Accordingly, for Kolau Nadiradze, the Argonauts' march is both a pain (poet, why did Medea cry when she stood guard at the garden?) and a step towards progress: "...the owner of the land is complete, /he will hear the sounds of the immortal song that filled the heart of Orpheus" (Nadiradze, 1971, p. 191). The myth of the Argonauts and the ancient icon of Medea appear in the work of another symbolist poet - Sandro Shanshiashvili. The poem "Medea" (the author refers to Medea in this form) has been studied from different angles in the Georgian literary space; We think that one of the important issues is to present what caused Sandro Shanshiashvili's interest in the mythological form of Medea; What innovation did the poet add to it and which of the previously interpreted versions did he rely on? Sandro Shanshiashvili wrote the poem "Media" in Switzerland in 1911, and in it he told the story of the tragic end of Jason and Medea's love: Jason's betrayal of Media in the kingdom of Corinth and his decision to marry Creusa, which was followed by Media's revenge. Thus, the story line of the poem follows Euripides' "Medea", although the writer presented certain scenes with a different interpretation.

First of all, the face of the nanny attracts attention in the poem, through which the author expresses his conceptual vision. Although the nanny sympathizes with Medea, she reminds her in the first

episode of the cause of her misfortunes; reminds that Medea did not take care of the Golden Fleece, which was a guarantee of its owner's strength (that is, Medea and the Colchis in general); that Medea should not follow passion, should not be enslaved by a stranger; Therefore, he should not have taken the treasure of Kolkheti to a stranger. Thus, Sandro Shanshiashvili connects Medea and the fate of Kolkheti at the very beginning of the poem. The subsequent development of events confirms the validity of the nanny's words; From a person who came from Kolkhita, it becomes known to the media about the murder of Otia's father (the verse is presented in this form) and the deplorable state of the country. The person who arrived also considers the loss of the Golden Fleece to be the cause of the tragedy unfolding in Colchis (obviously, Medea's guilt is emphasized by this once again). Thus, the author's conceptual vision regarding Medea's crime is fixed at the very beginning of the poem, and with the development of events, Medea herself realizes this. Like Euripides' "Medeas", S. Media and Jason meet twice in Shanshiashvili's poem. At the first meeting, the medium reminds Jason of his merits (as with Euripides), however, at the end of the meeting, he softens his tone and threatens to return to him. As for the second meeting, it will take place after the passionate meeting of Jason and Creusa, of which the media will be an involuntary witness; He is extremely angry, on the one hand, by what he has seen and heard with his own eyes (Creusa humiliated him in his conversation with Jason) and, on the other hand, by the misfortunes that have befallen his homeland. Medea demands (not asks) Jason to return to her. In this dialogue, Shanshiashvili uses Jason's famous words when he brings Medea from the wild country to Hellas: "I brought you through the wild country/Barbarian and monster/And the untrained one runs away/You met the right judge" (Shanshiashvili, 1986, p.327). In response, Shanshiashvili's media refers to Elada in an extremely negative context and expresses regret for not being able to recognize the fickle and deceitful being in Jason. At this very moment, at the time of extreme regret, Medea commits an unexpected act: she takes the wool removed from the golden fleece to the raging storm, which symbolizes the decline of Jason's heroism - bringing the golden fleece to Hellas - (Nadareishvili, 2017, p.158). It is interesting that researchers Irina Modebadze and Tamar Tsitsishvili interpret the mentioned episode differently; According to them, with such a verdict given by the media, Sandro Shanshiashvili symbolically confronts the centrist idea; that the golden ram should belong not only to the "civilized Hellenic" world, but to the whole of humanity [Modebadze..., 2011, p.109]. Sandro Shanshiashvili's interpretation of the subsequent events in the poem is quite far from the Euripidean storyline; The Georgian author tried to justify Medea's behavior, to find a psychological motivation for the mother's murder of her children. In the poem, according to Creon's order, only the media are expelled from Corinth, and the children are left with Jason. Desperate media threaten Creon to let him take at least one child, but he is told that the children themselves refused to live in exile with their mother, to share their mother's fate. It is at this point that Medea devises the famous act of revenge: sending a fatal gift to Creusa through the hands of her children, thereby, in effect, sacrificing her own children as well.

Refusal to share the fate of the mother is innovative for the Georgian literary space, but not for the European one; We find a similar understanding in the trilogy "The Golden Fleece" by the 19th century Austrian poet Franz Grillparzer, in which the author tried to morally rehabilitate Medea. For Medea of Grillparcer, the betrayal of her children is no less painful than Jason's betrayal - their refusal to share their mother's fate. Presumably, Sandro Shanshiashvili deliberately introduced the above-mentioned episode in order to find some psychological explanation for the behavior of the media; It

was shown that the rejection of the mother by the children caused the media to take a tragic step. In Sandro Shanshiashvili's poem, the media's behavior is further motivated by the fact that it cannot forgive anyone for being ridiculed; that he who had humiliated him (ie, Jason) must be punished; Jason, on the other hand, sees extreme bitterness "by killing his own chicks" (we find this in Euripides as well); What is new is that after the rejection received from his children, the media believes that his children will be like Jason in the future, and they, like their father, will make life miserable for others. The poem ends with the disappearance of the media on Rush. He is chased in vain by the dashing Jason, who is petrified on the spot for a long time after shouting at the media. Jason's final words are filled with doubt: "Am I guilty," he asks. Finally, his life will be sacrificed by Reno Dashna, the daughter of the king of Troy - Priam. Jason is not only a treacherous, pragmatic, cold-blooded person for the media; Like Media, she promised her love and loyalty to Reno, but she also betrayed him.

Thus, Sandro Shanshiashvili contrasts the West (Hellenes/Greeks) and the East (Colchis, Trojans) for the purpose of moral rehabilitation of the media; In this dichotomy, the West carries a strongly expressed negative connotation, while the East has a positive connotation. The opposition of me/other and the preferential presentation of one's self in the background of others can be seen in the tendency to present everyone as a barbarian, except for Hellenes; For example, like Jason, who approves of bringing Medea to the Hellene country, Creuse also thinks of Colchis as a wild country, who scolds Jason if

Sandro Shanshiashvili dedicated the poem "Jason and Reno" to the history of Jason and Reno, in which he described the delay of the Argonauts on their way to Kolkheta in Troy and the story of the separation of Jason and Reno there. We learn from the media that Reno committed suicide.

Why did he marry his wife in the wild country? The nanny's words are also very interesting; This is the area "where a stranger is called Sudara" and where "a rose is seen as a rose" (Shanshiashvili, 1986:310). Obviously, despite all of the above, the poet does not absolve Medea of her guilt, although the fact that the children turn their backs on their mother seeks some explanation for her tragic appearance. As for the xenophobic tendencies and the portrayal of characters in an imagological perspective, we note that this tendency found further development in modern literary interpretations of Medea, which is the subject of a separate study.

Thus, Sandro Shanshiashvili, like Titian Tabidze and Kolau Nadiradze, tried to rehabilitate Medea; He went even further and considered this conflict from the perspective of the West-East problem; However, despite this, it is easy to see that S. Shanshiashvili considers the legend about the Argonauts in a positive light, because this cycle of legends represents the main stage connecting Georgia with European culture.

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