



The Metamorphosis of the Ancient *Medea* Myth into *Norma* de Soumet*

Mehrnoosh KEYFAROKHI**

THE literature is the scene of the life of the characters created by the author or of the reappearance of the myths that have inspired writers since the ancient era. As myths are the authentic representatives of humans' characteristics, they are often served as unique treasures for authors. Thus, Alexander Soumet takes the myth of Medea in his play entitled *Norma* or *infanticide*. In fact, despite the similarity of Medea and Norma, they are different. This difference is illuminated by a detailed study of the nineteenth-century literature, and the attitude represented by the characters of Soumet towards the ancient times and the terrifying atmosphere that reigns over the life of the characters. It is clear that the modifications undergone by the myth are imposed by the author, but the answer to how and why of these changes will be discovered only through a sociological study conducted on *Norma* de Soumet. Indeed, in the first place, this play depicts the precarious situation of the woman and her suffocated freedom and then presents the royal majesty as the undeniable representative of God on earth. This study leads us to highlight the close connection of politics and religion in the nineteenth-century France.

Since ancient times, Medea has been the first woman free from all attachment, aggressive, independent and vengeful. She sacrifices not only the blood of her two boys as the vengeance claimed for her soul, but also

*Received: 2018/11/13

Accepted: 2019/05/14

** Assistant professor, University of Shiraz, Iran, E-mail: m.keyfarokhi@gmail.com.ir

manifests herself as the first feminist personality that denies the authority of her father and the gods. Indeed, she kills not only her two sons, but before them, her brother and many other mythical characters who are mostly male.

This strong woman, lover and criminal, has turned into a weak, religious and deplorable character named Norma in the tragedy of Soumet. Lover and betrayal in her love, as observed in Medea, Norma takes revenge for the love she has given to Pollion, but her decision does not profit from the same circumstances as those of Medea. In fact, before the betrayal of her lover, she had killed no one and did not even intend. We can say that she is forced to take revenge in this way, voluntarily but also compulsorily. Thus, at the end of the play we see her depressed and afflicted with a kind of madness and fear; in fact, she was surrounded by her angry people who had prepared the pyre to burn her alive with her two children. But why did this angry people want to kill this woman who was considered as their spiritual leader?

In fact, this tragedy is a description of the life of the women of the nineteenth century, who were considered as constitutive elements of man's property and who had no right to choose the style of their life. In addition to the woman's inferior position vis-à-vis the man, religion and her relationship with politics mark the novelty that Soumet brought to his play. We tried to analyze this aspect of the Norma tragedy based on the social truths of the 19th century. Crossing the scale of power, we come from the notion of the father to that of the king and then of God. Although it is a pagan piece, this hierarchy of power is well presented in Norma. The ancient Medea took revenge for the will of the gods and the betrayal of her husband, but Norma, she suffers from not being free, from being imprisoned at the altar of the gods, and then from the will of her father who plays the role of king. We conducted our analysis sociologically, but it is inextricably linked to religion and its place among the people. Indeed, Soumet and his works were quickly hidden behind the light of the romantic and especially Victor Hugo; otherwise it could have better than any other present us the atmosphere of France in the early nineteenth century. Thus, despite the undeniable similarities between the ancient myth and the main character as well as the plot of the play, the profound differences make these two works distinguish. Medea was a victim of no one but Norma is, however, a victim of society, superstitious thoughts and fanaticism of his time. In his other works, such as *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Elisabeth de France*, Soumet addresses the same problem; it is the parents, especially the fathers who have killed their children. And the sociological approach assures us that this attitude is, indeed, the anxiety of keeping the monarchical system and the person of the king safe as the

representative of God on earth. Interesting sociological discoveries attest to the importance of this relationship between political power and religion. Indeed, the manifestation of Marian statues crying to all regions of France testifies to the solidity of this relationship that worked to protect the absolute monarchy. So, the whole atmosphere of Norma's play that places the action in a distant time and tries to bring it closer to ancient Medea is only an apparent effort because the deep analysis of this piece presents the hidden intention of the author to present the structure of the society of his time.

Keywords— Medea, religion, politics, Soumet, sociology

REFERENCES

- [1] DEPAULIS Alain, *the Medea Complex*, De Boeck, Brussels, 2008.
- [2] CHOLVY Gérard, Religion and culture in the nineteenth century in Western Europe, in 13th Session of Academy of Sciences and Letters of Montpellier; December 2010.
- [3] GUERMES Sophie and Marchal Bertrand, The Religions of the Nineteenth Century, Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Society of Romantic and Pentecostal Studies, November 26-28, 2009, September 2011, [http: //etudes-romantiques.ish-lyon.cnrs. fr./religions.html](http://etudes-romantiques.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr./religions.html)
- [4] MARX Jacques, *The Sin of France Supernatural and Politics in the 19th Century*, Espace de liberté, coll. Secularism, Brussels, 2005.