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## Tragedy according to Plato's critical opinion

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**Abstract.** The ancient Greek world gave world literary philosophy great names such as Plato, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles and others who revolutionized the art of writing and told it the idea of critical thinking, on the forms, styles and skills of making art generally. In ancient antiquity these attitudes were primary, and it was almost impossible for the writings to break away from the tradition, which at its core was dominated by tragedy, as one of the formats that would later dominate the entire globe as a source of inspiration. Man seems to need to experience loss, suffering and tragedy, perhaps to appreciate the love and spirit that it (life) gives. Therefore, in this paper, the types of dramatic works are taken for analysis, in particular the tragic and the tragedy according to the critical opinion of Plato, and the development of this field in old Greece, with the most famous authors Aeschylus and Sophocles and with Shakespeare in Europe. A special space in this study is occupied by Plato's criticism of Homer, to whom he even asked special questions, because, as is known, Plato in his theory on the state was looking for a literature, an art that would have educational effects on young people ...as well as the theoretical problems that characterize tragedy, the hero and heroism and other feats, and the writing style within the literary narrative.

**Keywords.** Plato, literature, drama, tragedy. analysis, interpretation

### 1. Introduction

#### What is tragedy?

The term tragedy has its source in the Greek word “tragodia”, meaning principally "goat's song", and was related to the celebrations for Dionysus, (born in old Greece and its primary meaning related to folk performances at holidays in honour of the God Dionysus, for whom Greeks sacrificed a goat (in Greek “tragos”)), and which was considered a god of fields and vineyards, and in honour of which, beside an altar, a goat was sacrificed under the sound of music and choir song.

Indeed, for this very reason, all of the choir's singers, were duly dressed in goat skins. In the art of literature, tragedy is a dramatic literary work of high value, "a kind of drama in which a prominent character (the tragic hero), in the war he wages for a great idea, eventually clashes with the interests and the worldview of his circle of people, and by his actions causes himself the so-called tragic guilt, thus in his struggle with the circle of people and the conditions in which he lives, in the tragic conflict, he dies, nonetheless his idea for which he fought to his own death, "triumphs"

Tragedy is a literary creation of a particular kind (one of the oldest types of drama in which the hero's character develops and then heads into an impasse, in an unequal, fierce confrontation that leads him towards disaster), be it for the subjects, or for the fable, or for the characters, but particularly for the actions of the hero and for his tragic ending, even to the language, or rather, for the particular rhetoric - consequently for all these traits, tragedy constitutes an literary creation, which throughout history has played an important role in cultivating literary values, amongst others.

This, ultimately, is one of the three main types of dramatic literature, alongside comedy and drama (Rrahmani, Zejnullah : Teoria e letërsisë.- Prishtinë, 1996, f. 183-194) but is closely related to many other literary and philosophical notions, such as: mimesis, the subject, fable, high ideas, inevitable conflict, catharsis, the death of the hero, the triumph of the central idea, etc.

Ancient tragedy caused shockwaves to the viewer (theatre viewers), whereby human character's strengths appeared, simultaneously and fittingly linked with hero's weaknesses, in an unequal struggle against supernatural forces, which [forces] appeared to be fatal and which guided man's fate. This unequal struggle as well as the tragic end of the hero, to the old Greeks caused a sense of horror, but at the same time aroused their human feelings and belief in the strength of human personality.

Indeed many tragedies of the Greek ancient literature are fairly popular. The most significant of these are the tragedies of Aeschylus ("Prometheus bound" etc.), the tragedies of Sophocles ("Antigone", "Oedipus Rex" etc.) and others. In European literature, Shakespeare is doubtlessly the greatest tragedy writer, and whose tragedies that include ("Hamlet", "King Lear", "Romeo and Juliet" etc.) are extremely popular and duly translated into almost all languages of the world.

Many definitions have been churned out on the meaning of tragedy, starting from antiquity to the present day. Indeed very bright thinkers of antiquity, such as Plato and Aristotle, were the first to discuss and speak regarding tragedy. The latter, who spoke in a very important work of art about tragedy – namely the literary work "Poetics", in addition to his remarks about this type of literary creation, was also taken up as one critic of Plato's concept of the tragedy of poetry in general and its function in educating younger generations. Indeed it is very well known the saying that in philosophy has become proverbial: "*Amicus Plato, sed magis arnica veritas*", which properly translated means "Plato is a friend of mine, but I love the truth more."

## **2. Method**

During the drafting of this paper, several methods were used, initially the method of studying the text, the form and construction of the structure, the content, the analysis and the message given by the ancient Greek literary culture. The cultural methodology means its historical development vis-a-vis other Balkan cultures first, and world later, these are sufficient arguments that are often emphasized in all ancient literary creations, especially in the Hellenic ones. Ancient literature, especially the Hellenic one, seemed to find it necessary to include the element of tragedy within the literary texts, because through such forms with tragic content, the heroes of the time were brought out, and these heroes were necessary not only for art and the written word, but also for the myth and antiquity of events, whether real or imaginary. As such, they bear the imprint of time, which in all literary forms preserves centuries-old emotional sensibility, than in today's genuine literary creations.

### **2.1 Critique of tragedy and Plato**

Plato is one of the most renowned philosophers and writers of Greek antiquity. He has written many works, some of which are the cornerstones of artistic creativity of the time and of the theoretical thought for many philosophical, literary and political issues. He was, unquestionably, the most famous author (indeed he has been in this position for all times) of philosophical, literary, scientific, and political dialogues. In many areas of his study, issues of art and literary creation occupy an important place.

“According to Plato, before falling into the world of things, the soul of man lived in an ideal world, the world of ideas, whereby he recognized the true essence of things. The things felt by man in the material world’s dimension are just imitations, “shadows” and idols of the real world. Thus, man does not divulge, however he recalls the truths he once recognised in the world of ideas. All encompass within themselves the knowledge and truth, and all they have to do is merely recall them”( <https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platoni>)

Moreover, if one examines his interest in the arts and especially his highly artistic creations, such as, above all "Phèdre" and "Symposium" dialogues, which are really two excellent and perfect models of artistic creation, and his attitudes and views about art "as bare imitation" and that "the epic, tragedy and mimetic poetry should be completely expelled from his ideal state, allegedly because of bad moral consequences", come out as paradoxical and very astonishing, and instead of them he preferred hymns devoted to gods and poems devoted to courageous people" (Platoni, Shteti, Libri X, 598/c, Rilindja.- Prishtinë, 1980, p. 408.)

Plato expresses the view that "any art that mimics, is far from the truth, and this, it seems, is all that it (= art. NK) can express, since it includes only a small part from everything, indeed only its exterior".( Platoni, Shteti, Libri X, 598/c, Rilindja.- Prishtinë, 1980, p. 408.) Later on in these dialogues, the master’s work (e.g., sculpting a bed), the work of the painter and the author of a literary work, is considered by Plato merely as imitation of appearance, not even an imitation of reality or truth, which to him meant imitation of aspects that he noted, and seemed important and therefore he decided to "imitate" in one of the forms mentioned here. In his opinion, if someone exults from such a work, this is not the real result of the work, but the result of the fact that such a man "may have encountered a magician who deceived him and, he could not distinguish wisdom from ignorance and imitation, and this (= thus the author), seemed to him to be all-knowing, true."( Platoni, Shteti, Ibid. p. 598/d.)

By always keeping in mind these attitudes regarding these three stages, according to their importance, i.e.: purpose (use), sculpting, production and imitation (which would somehow be named by him differently i.e.: the king-oligarch-tyrant, specifically: "the philosopher" - "the craftsman"- "imitator" /, Plato would then conclude: “The skill of imitation (indeed what we may call art) is therefore void, is related to hollowness and gives birth to what is worthless.”( Ibid, 16, f. 531.)

Again, according to his view of art as imitation and his opinion that "everyone who works on something, that according to the true nature of that thing is in the third place, we shall define as imitator." In this group of "imitators", Plato would also include the author of tragedy, for he is an emulator, and all the other imitators will be placed in the third place compared against the king and the truth"( Platoni , Ibid, p. 416)

### **2.2. Plato on Homer's tragedies**

Plato demonstrates his stance on tragedy as a literary creation, in a common context, when it comes to the knowledge and values that a true poet must have. It is assumed that he does not consider poets as all knowledgeable people (as some people thought of the poets) and

especially not people who; "know all things related to virtue and vice, even divine things"( Ibid. p. 407.)

Plato proclaims that people who have such an opinion about poets, including Homer, are misled. He supports his affirmation with the fact that the poets are indeed imitators (some of them certainly very versatile) and their works, as such, are "threefold away from "being" and can be easily done without the knowledge of the truth", always keeping in mind the fact that "they are illusions and not those that are, in fact, the subject of poetry".

Speaking later of the subjects of some of Homer's works, as well as other poets, without naming them, in an effort to deny the role they play in their works, he emphasized that if, for example, a literary work is about a physician character, would the poet-writer be a doctor and who would be healed by him - if he really had knowledge about the doctor's workmanship. Here too, it is clear that Plato looked at art in terms of the benefit that ordinary man has from it. If we rely on this position of his, we would be even more convinced on the reason he did not put the art of imitation in his "ideal state [government]".

Plato would address Homer a few questions about the many battles he describes in his literary works, the impact of those wars on the governance of countries and their role in "educating people", as he would put it. Let's give a full picture of it; "O dear Homer, if, by virtue of your virtue as a creator of images, you are not in the third place, and if you are not an imitator, as we have mentioned early on, you are placed in the second place and you have learned which are the aspirations that make the best or worse out people in public and private life, then tell us which country, due to your merits, has obtained the best ruling... Which state can say that you have been a good lawgiver and have properly served them? ... Who praises you? Will there be anyone who will cite you"? (Ibid. p. 409. )

His conclusion is that Homer, through his works, did not succeed in producing a good number of followers, who would greatly support him, advance life according to his example, and ultimately leave offspring, such as "the Pythagoreans" (the followers of the teachings of the great philosopher - Pythagoras). In addition it may be emphasized (to back up this position on Homer's limited role) that neither his friend, Chroepil, while alive, had not followed Homer and his teachings. Through this thoughts, Plato tried to uphold his position that Homer was just a simulator of things, and that he did not even know the virtues, vices and other elements he put into his literary work.

Because, Plato would continue, (Socrates in his dialogues): "If Homer and Hesiod had been able to teach virtue to people, then their contemporaries would certainly not have let the rhapsodists wander around so far in the world, they would hold them tougher than gold, and force them to stay with them, and if they did not want to do so, they would follow them wherever they would go, until they received the enough education. Or wouldn't' they"?( Ibid. p. 410.)

### **2.3 Conclusions**

However, Plato does not deny the fact that even Homer and other poets in their works used precious words, striking expressions, and colours, so as to make them more attractive to the reader and to exert some influence over them. Because that particular way of speaking, that magical force that comes from the written word (but surely it came out even more forcefully, as the word was announced and manifested on stage), "pronounced meticulously, rhythmically and harmoniously" caused particular feelings to people. Nevertheless, according to Plato, if you remove these "beautiful dresses", colours and musicality, then they will look like "new, but not beautiful faces that are shown to the eye at a time their flowering has gone by".

And at the end of the discussion, we would give an opinion on Plato, concerning tragedy, the poem and the poetry in general, but through Homer's work in particular:

"Here are the things for which we have come to agree: the things that imitate our mimetic, I do not know anything that would be worth mentioning, imitation is a game, not a serious work, in the full sense of this word, imitators are those who deal with tragic poetry, even when they do it in the jambe or the epos".( Ibid. p. 411.)

Plato wrote predominantly in the style of **dialogues**. The characters in his writings debate a particular subject and examine it from multiple perspectives. Scholars typically organize Plato's works into three different eras: early, middle, and late.( [Who is Plato? - Philosophies, Ideas & Contributions - Video & Lesson Transcript | Study.com](#))

Plato began his career as a writer of tragedies, but hearing Socrates talk, he wholly abandoned that path, and even burned a tragedy he had hoped to enter in a dramatic competition (D.L. 3.5). Whether or not any of these stories is true, there can be no question of Plato's mastery of dialogue, characterization, and dramatic context. He may, indeed, have written some epigrams; of the surviving epigrams attributed to him in antiquity, some may be genuine.( [Plato | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy \(utm.edu\)](#))

#### **Data for the author**

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