

The Dramatic Conception of Euripides' Work

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Abstract: *Greek tragedy has seen many series of poets and attempts at plays, but the quality of the inventor of tragedy is attributed to Thespis. Although Thespis is the most important representative of his generation, his works have not been preserved, not even fragments. Euripides is the third representative of classical Greek tragedy. Although almost contemporary with Aeschylus and Sophocles, if we make a comparison between their works, we discover different styles, which seem to be from different generations. Euripides is closest to contemporary sensibility. Euripides treats in his dramatic art both the very conception of action and its scenic treatment. The heroes of his work struggle with themselves, or rather, with beginnings of their human nature.*

Key-words: *Euripide; tragedy; Greece; dramaturgy; Ancientry*

1. The new genre: Tragedy

„We are on the brink of great tragedy; its idea came about; the process has begun; the childhood of the genre now appears as a fulfilled fact. Lyrical poetry will now remain even further, with its well-defined status; from it, however, a new genre emerged, with its own personality, with its indisputable autonomy: tragedy.”²

Greek tragedy saw many series of poets and attempts at plays, but the quality of inventor of tragedy is attributed to Thespis, who is thought to have been in full literary maturity by the middle of the sixth century BC. He had the initiative to introduce the prologue and the recited pieces in the choir songs, the separation of the roles assigned to the actor from those of the choir and the first use of the masks. Although Thespis is the most important representative of his generation, his works have not been preserved, not even fragments. The same thing happened to his successors: Choirilos, Pratinos and Frinichos. But thanks to them, the tragedy managed to overcome the embryo phase to become a stable genre, crystallizing and becoming a public institution.

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2. The main differences between the three great tragedians

Euripides treats in his dramatic art both the very conception of action and its scenic treatment. The heroes of his work struggle with themselves, or rather, with beginnings of their human nature. If Aeschylus and Sophocles presented us the drama of human destinies unjustly struck relentlessly and were preoccupied with giving the human soul greatness and height, Euripides looks at reality directly in its human reality, in its manifestations and forms capable of rising from mere horrors at soul- shaking fillings.

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² Zamfirescu Ion. 1973. *Panorama of universal dramaturgy*. Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică Română, p. 22.

In his dramas, the characters he paints highlight the power and beauty of tears, he does not bring them on stage to evoke great, historical memories, but tears, sufferings, deep disturbances. The feeling of human misery, whether it comes from pain, weakness, ignorance, suffering, malice, wandering, is expressed in traits full of pathos, power and drama. He paints passions as intimate enemies, which man carries within himself, and brings to the stage revenge, love, hatred, jealousy.

An important difference between the 3 ancient authors is that Aeschylus painted the human soul only in its serious side, with its strong features, Sophocles brings to light strong feelings, with long resonance, able to paint heroes or rare creatures, like Euripides to wear the sketch created by the two with traits from human psychology, traits related to the affection we as humans give to life.

Euripides transposes, sees, understands and interprets in his scenes feelings of human nature, instinctive feelings that spring from life and from which our existence is composed for the most part. It depicts characters with the thoughts, feelings, impulses and reactions of ordinary people in the face of the various circumstances that life has in store for them and that we could certainly fulfill each of us, through our ordinary soul powers. He has a strong sense of observation. The hazard at Euripides appears more fully, in various situations, some of which are close to tricks or maneuvers or surprises used in modern dramas.

The prologues and the ending in Euripides' work fulfill a special function: the prologue initiates the viewer in the following episodes, the events in the actual center of the drama, give essential indications on the action, directs the viewer's attention to its center and prepares the outcome from the first movements of the show. Euripides takes each subject separately and tries to extract as much emotional content from its specific situations, so that the plot is pressed with incidents capable of arousing both emotion and curiosity to the viewers, the characters encountered are in situations of physical and moral decryption, prey to hallucination and madness, overwhelmed by misery, and on the other hand they are presented to us in all the splendor and beauty of their youth. His dramatic conception is closely related with the style used by Euripides. It gives life to the dialogue, and the speech becomes more natural, approaching the ordinary speech, like in prose. He excels in passionate arguments, and varies sometimes with a harsh and tumultuous register, sometimes with a warm and insinuating one, sometimes ironic or violent, sometimes pathetic or generous. This helps us to see that Euripides links the deeds that his predecessors attributed to divine predestination, through loose starts and passions, enemies that man carries within himself, are alive and we recognize in them, with defects as well as with our virtues. We can say, if we are allowed, that Euripides creates drama, while Aeschylus and Sophocles create tragedy. For the two, the tragedy results from the opposition man-god, an opposition that creates heroes, and Euripides' drama arises from the opposition between two human individuals equally possessed by superhuman passions, this conflict needing to be highlighted more with facts than of the attitudes. Euripides innovation brings about a change in the tragic background that no longer results from the relationship between man and destiny, but that which brings man and his problems to the center.

"In Euripides, if we talk about the gods, man is at the center of concern, he is the essential factor in tragedy, as it is in life, the interest of the whole action focusing on him and only on him."³

Female characters play an important role in creating both types of main typologies - good women, with a spirit of sacrifice, and bad ones, with many weaknesses. It gives more importance to women than men and creates different types of women.

³ Gheorghiu Octavian. 1963. *The history of universal theater*, vol 1. Bucharest: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 74.

We can also point out that Euripides is the explorer of the troubled world of human passions and feelings and giving importance to the subjective element passes on the characters, presenting the human soul in a modern sense by resembling its heroes with the people of everyday life. It presents us with heroes possessed by a strong passion who are aroused in making extreme decisions, revealing states of mind unknown before.

In order to make the action more complex and interesting, Euripides introduces into the tragedy several characters, who lead and provoke tragic acts, each protagonist acting according to his own judgment. The violation by the tragic hero of the fundamental relationship between man and the gods or the disregard of the moral-social laws determines the breaking of the universal harmony, a mistake with tragic effects, which inevitably arouses the punishment of the hero.

From Homer to Euripides, stopping at Aeschylus and Sophocles, the evolution of the tragic paradigm is enormous. Each tragedian is distinguished by the idea of the nature of sin and how he conceives the role of guardian of the moral law attributed to divinity. Under this report, as we have shown, we can see important differences in terms of the components of the paradigm of tragedy in ancient Greek literature, especially in the work of the three great tragedians studied.

The greatest merit brought by Euripides was that he created realistic characters, taken from everyday life, with special features, drawn with a lot of realism.

Euripides emphasizes the "realism of the characters' feelings", Medea being the best example, given the complexity of its female characters, and I add this aspect taking into account the themes that the play explores starting with: passion and anger continuing with revenge, I add pride and greatness and putting an end to intelligence and manipulation.

In Euripides' work, the dramatic action has a more complex structure than that of his predecessors, and the psychological analysis of the characters is profound, due to the innovation he brings in the dramatic technique, namely, the inner dilemma between the oscillating consciousness of the characters. and vice versa, which increases the tension of the dramatic conflict.

Aristotle's assertion in his work *Poetics* that: „in any well – constructed drama, the change of situations must lead from happiness to unhappiness, and not because of any innate baseness, but because of a great mistake, committed by a hero, who does not differ from others by virtue or justice, nor does he end up in misfortune through wickedness or wretchedness...”⁴

Euripides' work was not appreciated at its true value, the main reason being that the style he approached did not have the religiosity that the styles of his predecessors had. The characteristics of Euripides' theater are: realism, rhetoric and philosophy. The former appeals to the familiar aspects of life, the latter to the inclination towards verbal virtuosity, and the latter being understood not as an expression of a conception of the world, but as a predilection manifested in debates of ideas.

Peculiarities that distinguish the work of Euripides from that of the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles:

- Increased attention paid to psychological description.
- Introduction of *deus ex machine*.
- Gradual reduction in the space reserved for the choir, to more than 400 verses.

Medea - is, perhaps, the most famous work of Euripides. It is a tragedy of revenge, in which the main character is Jason's wife, Medea. Falling in love with Creusa, the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth, Jason leaves Medea. This one, in an excess of despair and with a burning

⁴ Aristotle. 1965. *Poetics*. Bucharest: Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, p. 7.

desire for revenge, seeks means to punish the unfaithful Jason; he poisons Creusa and Creon with a golden diadem and a poisoned scepter. Then, thirsty for revenge and wanting to punish him severely, tearing Jason's heart apart, she kills the two children she had with him. When Jason learns of his wife's crimes, he orders her to be imprisoned in the palace so that he can take revenge; but he discovers that it is too late, as Medea leaves the castle, in a chariot drawn by winged dragons, dragging after her the lifeless bodies of the children. The play ends with Jason's pleas, which asks Medea to bury the children's bodies, but these prayers are in vain, Medea remains relentless, confronts him and takes revenge to the end.

Medea introduces into Euripides' theater an exception, through the trembling subject of tragedy, of revenge out of jealousy, given by a morbid passion. "Medea is one of the characteristic dramas of Euripides, in that it shows us a fundamental side of the poet: his art of painting the passion of love, with the storms that can arouse in the human soul. The heroes or heroines of Aeschylus and Sophocles - Clytemnestra, Agamemnon - proclaim their passion, even glorify it, but do not describe it, do not give us the analysis of the states and senses that compose it. Euripides' heroes, on the contrary, live it, manifest it in its elements and articulations, paint it on a whole range of manifestations. The tragic substance, for them, is precisely the wide unfolding of their passions."⁵ The subject of Medea was taken over by many tragic writers of different eras, such as Corneille (1635), de Longepierre (1694), Ernest Legouve (1854), Catullus Mendes (1898).

3. Conclusion

I conclude by saying that Euripides sought to improve the subjects and humanize the protagonists of his tragedies by placing the action in a setting familiar to the Athenians, diversifying the acting and reducing the appearance of the choir being concerned with costumes and directing. Aristotle exclaims about him as "the most tragic of poets" occupying a predominant place on the theater stage.

Euripides work was not a resounding success during his lifetime. He wrote ninety-two plays of which eighteen tragedies and a satirical drama have been preserved, as well as numerous fragments from the other works, his major works are: Hecuba, Orestes, Medea, Hyppolitus, Alcestis, Andromache, Iphigenia at Aulis, Iphigenia in Tauris, The Trojan women, The Bacchae, Heracleidae, Heracles, Ion, Helen, The Phoenician women and the satirical drama Cyclops. The subjects of his plays bring to the fore great and violent passions, they have their source, especially in the fabulous history of Athens, and also preserve themes from the epic cycles of the ancient epics. Unlike Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides prefers not to deal with great epic events, but rather secondary, collateral facts, bringing with it a "variety of less common aspects that for the moment give us the impression that the classic line of tragedy was serious. troubled. We find: adventures, murders, incest, passionate outbursts, catastrophes, which are chained together, unexpected situations, crimes and misery, facts that can amaze us; in other words, we are in a new world, a world unknown in the Greek tradition until then."⁶

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⁵ Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza. 1997. *History of Europe*, vol.1. Iași: European Institute, p. 93.

⁶ Zamfirescu Ion. 1958. *The history of universal theater*, vol. 1. Bucharest: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, p.88.

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