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PLATO'S LEGACY: A REVISION

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Lena Petrović

Department of English, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš

Abstract. *The purpose of the text is to suggest the need to reconsider and reevaluate Plato's legacy, particularly his contribution to literary theory and practice. Contrary to the unqualified admiration for the 'founder' of European philosophy, or less than convincing arguments concerning his legacy in the Romantic and Symbolist poetics, in what follows I will claim, with Bela Hamvash, that Plato's ambition was not to found anything, but to rescue, and not mankind but the state, and that in doing so he corrupted the more original spiritual traditions, which, in fact, underlie what is best in Romanticism, Symbolism, and also in earlier poetic movements wrongly referred to as Platonic, or Neo-Platonic. Far from inspiring significant poetic achievement, Plato's views of poetry and their metaphysical premises deserve close study for the sole reason that they represent an exemplary model for much of the subsequent reactionary use of philosophy and literary theory*.

Key words: *Plato, Socrates, Dionysus, Orphism, Pythagoras, Golden Age, corruption of being, theory, ethics, politics, metaphysics, science, poetry, music, tragedy*

Of many philosophers of ancient Greece, some of them very wonderful thinkers, the influence of Plato and Aristotle in subsequent philosophy and in literary theory has proved, for better or worse, the most enduring. I say for better or worse on purpose, for although philosophy is not my province, nor have I read more extensively from what the 'two giants' have left us than was required for the preparation of a postgraduate survey course in literary theory I have taught one term, I do not believe that their influence has been for the best. On the contrary, I find that J. C. Ransom's description of the Platonic impulse as 'predatory', and a modern Platonist as 'a habitual killer', is a very exact summary of Plato's legacy[1]. Ransom's anti-Platonism, very convincingly argued, is not

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[1] See J. C. Ransom, 'Poetry: A Note on Ontology' (1934), in L. Petrovic (ed), *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX Century Literary Theory*, Nis: Prosveta, 2004, 100. The origin of the Platonic impulse Ransom detected in an anxiety before the inexhaustible diversity of life and a desire to arrest and master it through a simplifying formula, or the Platonic idea. Its murdering aspect refers both to the way a certain kind of exclu-

widely shared. On the other hand, the acceptance of the Platonic tradition in western thought as wholly beneficial seldom rests on arguments other than piety owed to the long established opinion[2]. As Bertrand Russell observed in his *History of the Western Philosophy*, it has been always correct to admire Plato, but never to understand him properly. Thus, for example, I detect a less than adequate understanding of Plato's influence in the brief introduction to a selection from classical literary theory in *From Plato to Alexander Pope: Backgrounds of Modern Criticism.* The editors single out those of Plato's ideas that are most relevant to subsequent literary theory and practice, pointing to their affinity with the Romantic and Symbolist poetics and with the 20th century archetypal criticism. Thus Plato's understanding of inspiration as divine madness is the supporting background of the Romantic and Symbolist theory of imagination; his metaphysics, particularly his notion of transcendental ideas and the related theory of knowledge as anamnesis, underlie the Romantic transcendental idealism (Wordsworth's newly born, coming to this world 'trailing the clouds of glory') as well as the archetypal criticism of Maud Bodkin and C. G. Jung (collective unconscious as a pool of memory containing forgotten but still potent patterns of racial experiences that can be reanimated by archetypes of rituals and art). There is a qualification to the effect that Plato's influence is mostly indirect, and often a matter of the borrowed terminology rather than substantial agreement as to the meaning and interpretation of the terms, but this difference is not elaborated in any greater detail[3].

My intention is to demonstrate that differences are much more important than similarities, that they are crucial. For one thing, Plato uses the doctrines mentioned above as arguments against poetry: they are combined together to support his ultimate condemnation of poets as a threat to truth, virtue, and order, and to justify their banishment from his ideal republic. The Romantics and Symbolists, like the archetypal critics after them, and the Florentine neo-Platonists before them, are great defenders of poetry, which for them was a medium of finer awareness, of more discriminate understanding of truth, justice and moral purpose of life. In fact, I believe that what is usually called Plato's legacy, in Romanticism, Symbolism, and archetypal criticism, together with what is best in Renaissance neo-Platonism, does not originate in Plato at all. It belongs to earlier mythic and philosophical traditions which Plato reinterpreted and, in doing so, distorted. To understand Plato properly is to see that he is not a founder but a falsifier, a corruptor of a more

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sively rational, abstracting observation impoverishes the world observed (stripping the 'world's body' it of its flesh and reducing it to a skeleton) and destroys the observer's sensibilities.

[2] The high esteem in which Plato is still held is certainly part of the traditional reverence for the Classical Greece and its philosophy, as the cradle of western civilization and a source of its proud intellectual and artistic traditions. There have been dissenting voices, though, from Nietzsche's daring reversals of the Classical studies' established orthodoxies, to more recent challenges of the nature of Greek legacy, particularly Plato's. Not all of them are equally valuable to those seeking political, or ethical options other than those deriving from Plato's philosophy. Thus, spectacular as it is, Derrida's deconstruction, (in his text 'Plato's Pharmacy', and elsewhere), of the system of multiple exclusions on which Plato's and subsequent western metaphysics depends for its privileging of logos (speech, being, reason, idea, law), involves also a sweeping, non-selective dismantling of all conceivable foundation of truth, meaning, identity, and thus ends in a vertiginous epistemological and moral relativism. Less dazzling, but more promising, because they suggest alternatives, are critical re-examinations of the Greek, i.e. , Platonic, traditions launched from certain pro-feminist positions (not necessarily by card-carrying feminists, or exclusively by women authors). Such is, for example, the anthropological work of E. Fromm, R. Graves and Ted Hughes, and the critical analyses of Platonism offered by the feminist author L. Irigarey, or the ecofeminist Val Plumwood.

[3] See Walter and Vivian Sutton (eds), *From Plato to Alexander Pope: Backgrounds of Modern Criticism,* New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966, pp. 1-3.

original, and more complete conception of being. As Bela Hamvash writes, Plato does not want to originate anything, he only wants to rescue, and not mankind, but the state[4].

Hence it would be best to start from *The Republic*: Plato's concern in this dialogue is to define justice, and since the just is better described in what is big than in what is small, he proposes to define a just or ideal state. Now justice is a very old notion among the Greeks, and to demonstrate its distortion in Plato's *Republic*, it is necessary to evoke its original meaning. It was probably conceived in much earlier, pre-Hellenic times, when archaic agricultural communities modeled themselves on what they perceived as laws of nature. These people of various origin are nevertheless commonly called Pelasgians, the name which in fact includes the mixture of the indigenous population and the assimilated early Hellenes[5]. Those inhabiting Crete are believed to have come to the mainland of Greece around 1600 BC, bringing with them the feeling about the universe and about the human world that marked the Minoan Bronze culture, and that was deeply religious and ethical. It may well have been a local instance of that primordial holistic conception of being of which Bela Hamvash speaks as the common core of all authentic spiritual traditions in the world: an awareness that there is only one unified system of rules, or one order, which, however strict, never harms life, because it is not a matter of compulsion, but of freedom[6]. This self-regulating system is perceived as underlying all natural processes, which unfold through the creative tension of opposing principles, where neither extreme is allowed to prevail, because it would be the end of life. It is embodied in social relationships such as by all evidence were cultivated in the Minoan Crete, and which, though modified, survived in the early Mycenaean period in Greece: this culture was democratic in the true sense, egalitarian, peaceful and cheerful: there is no evidence of hereditary kingship, social hierarchy, private property, discrimination of women; nor, as their unwalled cities and the absence of aggressive scenes or weapons on the pottery testify, was there any real fear of or desire for war or conquest.[7] Those laws were felt to be also embedded in man's soul and manifested themselves as a spontaneous, intuitive knowledge of what was right and what was wrong, what fostered and enriched life, and what corrupted and denied it. This unified, archaic 'theory' (theory in its original Orphic sense,

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[4] Bela Hamvaš, 'Orfej', *Patam*, Beograd: Centar za Geopoetiku, 1994, p. 244.

[5] See Robert Grevs, *Grčki mitovi,* Beograd: 'Famile't', 2002, pp. 6 and 26.

[6] Ibid., 246.

[7] See Bertrand Rusell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1946, 1975, 27-28.
According to Harry Levin, this earliest egalitarian and nonagressive *modus vivendi*, characterized by the absence of words *mine* and *thine*, survived in mythical memory as the Golden Age, and is associated in the Hellenic mythology with the pre-Olympian times and the reign of Chronos and the Titans. It was Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, that almanach of the early Hellas, who first linked the age with the golden metaphor, and its end with the overthrow of the Titans by Zeus. The coup in Heaven corresponded to the destruction of the golden and silver generations of men on earth and the creation of the third, brazen race, stronger and more warlike, which ended up by destroying itself. The fourth, worst of all, is the iron race, and it is still going strong - that is where Hesiod's own and subsequent generations come in. He ends his pessimistic narration by profesying that evil will prevail, and that Aidos and Nemesis, personifications of shame and indignation, will forsake the earth. In a later poem, inspiraed by Hesiod, by the stoic poet Aratus, Hesiod's abstract deities are replaced by the maiden goddess of justice, Dike, who is said to have dwelt among men during the golden and even the silver generations, but was so appalled by the bloodshed of the third that she fled to heaven. (See Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 14-15.)
Levin's conjecture that mythology's Golden Age may well have been humanity's Neolithic age is plausibly argued in Adelle Getty, *Goddess: Mother of Living Nature,* London: Thames and Hudson, 1990. In fact, she also refers to the early Bronze Age cultures, such as Minoan Crete and pre-Hellenic Greece, as possessing the nonagressive characteristics attributed to the denizens of the mythic Golden Age.

as Bertrand Russell reminds us, meant a way of seeing – 'a passionate, sympathetic contemplation' of life inseparable from the actual material practices[8]) passed into the later Greek thought and was preserved in its religion, that is to say, in the archaic cults dedicated to Dionysus, that had existed at least since 1300 BC in Thrace, and arrived in Greece in 600 BC to become a challenge and an alternative to the lifestyle sanctioned by the Olympian deities[9]. But it also affected the early philosophical, proto-scientific, rational Greek thought, which, although an antithesis to the mystical and ecstatic Dionysian tradition, shares with it this sense of the continuity and reciprocity at the heart of all being. I want to begin with the scientists.

Common to the pre-Socratics was the belief that the world or the cosmos, including man, is one - either consisting of one single substance - *prima materia*, or ultimately reducible to it. Whether this primal substance is identified as water, as in the sixth century philosopher Thales of Miletus, or whether, as in the later, much less naïve, teaching of Democritus and other atomists, the world and men were reducible to atoms, these unitary explanations of the *physis* are the foundation of social egalitarianism, suggesting or stating explicitly, that human beings, consisting as they did of the same substance, were all equal. This unity was not static, but dynamic, (for atoms, or whatever constitutes the prima material, move unceasingly), and this dynamism was a crucial feature of the pervasively ethical nature of all being, which was called, at an earlier stage, by Anaximander, cosmic justice.

For Anaximander, the primal substance was ultimately unknowable, but its chief attribute, infinity (*apeiron*) meant that it was both indestructible and ubiquitous, inhering in what is big as well as what is small. It transforms itself into various other substances with which we are familiar - fire, water, air and earth, which further transform themselves into each other - and persists through those eternal transformations, ageless, infinite, eternal. Its eternity is guaranteed by a certain self-regulating natural mechanism, some necessity or law, that preserves the right proportion between water, fire, air and earth, so that whenever one of them encroaches upon the other, which is an instance of injustice, the balance is quickly redressed, injustice repaired, order and proportion restored (where there has been fire, there are ashes, which are earth, and so on.). A more sophisticated and more widely known version of this conception of the world is to be found in Heraclitus' (c. 500 BC) famous theory of perpetual flux, of endless cycles of ceasing and becoming, which unfold through the conflict of opposites, themselves nothing but the transformations of a single primary substance – fire. It should be noted though that the ethical conclusions he draws from this conception are not unequivocal. His ethics seems to be

[8] Russell, op cit. , 52

[9] His origin in Thrace has been contested recently by archeologists, who have discovered evidence that the worship of Dionysus in Greece goes back to the days of Mycenaean civilization (c. 1200 B. C.) This means, as some commentators argue, that his foreignness was not cultural, but a matter of psychological difficulty in accepting him: 'that is, the conflict was not between a foreign culture and a Greek one, but between the established values of Greek society and the values which the worship of Dionysus represented'. (See E. M. Thury and M. K. Devinney, *Introduction to Mythology: Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths,* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 476.)
The comment is only partially valid: even if Dionysian worship did exist in Greece since the days of the Mycenaean civilization , this civilization, a fusion of the native and Ionian Greek cultures, surviving in the more primitive rural areas after the arrival of second and third waves of Greek invasions, *was* foreign to the social and religious order these new settlers established, mainly in the cities. Whatever the case, the fact remains that Dionysian celebrations caused discomfort and were in other ways subversive of the civilized city life of Classical Greece.

dominated, like Anaximander's, by a sense of cosmic justice, which prevents the strife of opposites from ever issuing in the complete victory of either. Yet when he uses the word *war* to describe the natural and just cause of both cosmic becoming *and* of the unequal social condition ('War is the father of all, and the king of all; and some he has made gods, and some men, some bond, and some free.'), we may wonder whether he is saying, albeit carelessly, that 'without contraries there is no progression', or whether he is not the first instance in Greek philosophy, as some of the Sophists unmistakably are, of the deliberate warping of this originally deeply moral theory of the world into an excuse for an unjust and immoral political practice characterizing the century when he lived. For the former, Blakean and Nietzschean, vision of war as necessary and perpetual resistance to, and rebellion against everything that stifles freedom and growth, is the very opposite of war as conquest, subjugation and enslavement. War in this latter sense would be the violation of that immanent equilibrium of which Anaximander and other early natural philosophers spoke as cosmic justice. This, in fact, was probably the original meaning of *hubris* (that is, before Aristotle seized the term and, associating it with *hamartia*, entangled it in hopelessly confusing qualifications and hair-splitting discriminations[10]): an arrogant willful act of transgression against natural law, punished, when it turned against a blood relation, by the Erinyes, the personifications of guilty conscience, and handmaids of justice embodied in the goddess Dike before she become interchangeable with *dike*, a new concept whose meaning was reversed to serve the new legal system of the polis[11].

For, of course, the rise of Greek culture, the very foundation and political and economic success of the city-states, were due to precisely such a hubristic act of violent transgression: to war, conquest, and enslavement. Thus Sparta was founded in the third, Doric wave of the colonization of the Greek peninsula. Instead of the native tribal organization, the invaders established hereditary kingship, and, later on, an aristocratic government. They reduced the population they found there, hitherto free and unaccustomed to exploitation, to serfs, the so-called helots. The land which had been held in common was allotted to the Spartans, and helots worked it for them, because the aristocratic conquer-

[10] By the time of the great tragedies of the fifth century, it had acquired another meaning, that of the transgression against social boundaries or the law of the polis. To distinguish the sense in which the word is used in each particular instance (which Aristotle fails to do) is essential to the proper understanding of Greek tragedy. Of the (often deliberately) careless use of this word, and the corruption of language in general, on the part not only of Aristotle's but in the subsequent ideological practices in the western world, Edward Bond says the following: 'The words used in morals, ethics, theology, aesthetics, are corrupt. To give one example, Aristotle's *hubris* is said to be pride which causes the tragic protagonist's downfall. This is taken as a cliché so irrefutable it would be believed even by the dead. In fact, *hubris* is insubordination against authority, either divine *or* state. It asserts the Promethean imperative to be human – and that is why Aristotle, the owner of slaves, needs to destroy it.' See Edward Bond, 'Freedom and drama', *Plays: 8,* London: Methuen, 2006, p. 219.

[11] See Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1990, p. 40. Writing of the violently contrasting religious and moral orders of the Chthonic deities and the new Olympians in the period of the Hellenic invasions and the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal culture in ancient Greece, Vernant points to the confusing phenomenon of the opposing values sometimes existing at the heart of a single divine figure. Thus Zeus was often portrayed in classical tragedy as possessing this duality, i. e. , appearing as the celestial Olympian God of the Hellenic conquerors, yet sometimes in his original guise of the 'Zeus from below', to whom the Euripides's Danaids (in *The Suppliant Women*) appeal for protection against the forced marriage to the usurping foreigners. The same was true of Dike. Thus, in Sophocles *Antigone,* the *dike* of the dead is opposed to the celestial *dike*: Antigone, who wants to return the body of her dead brother to the earth, against the order of the patriarchal father and tyrant Creon, recognizes only the former and comes into violent conflict with the throne of the latter. The clash of the protagonists can also be seen as a dramatization of the two opposing kinds of *hubris* referred to in the note above.

ors considered the tilling of the soil degrading, and were by law forbidden to do it. Because the helots were prone to rebellion, the Spartans established secret police to deal with the problem, and, in addition, declared a preventive war once a year against the helots, in which any of them that seemed insubordinate could be killed with impunity. War, in fact, was the sole occupation of the Spartan male adults, and their education, both for males and females, served to develop civic and soldierly virtues: insensitivity to pain, submission to discipline, and repression of any emotion unprofitable to the state. Women were encouraged to show contempt for cowards and were praised if it was their own son. Conversely, they were forbidden to display grief if their newborn child was condemned to death as a weakling, and were castigated if on those occasions they succumbed to emotion. Natural affection and love were suppressed, twisted or instrumentalised in other ways too. Marriage, for example, was not a matter of spontaneous decision, but was compulsory. A means of supplying the state with more obedient citizens, it was subject to strict rules as to who, at what age, and whom, was allowed to marry; the children born outside the prescribed limits were put to death. The cult of pederasty had little or nothing to do with love and affection either: the older lover was responsible for the education of his young protégé in manly toughness and military courage.

The aristocratic Sparta was a prototype of all later fascist states, but the democratic Athens, contrary to the long-established view, was not radically different. Its material prosperity, intellectual and artistic achievement, even its famous serenity of spirit, were confined to a minority, and were made possible in the first place by the institution of private property, imperialist conquest and slavery. Its democracy gave most power to aristocrats, and excluded two thirds of the population - women, who were isolated from public life, and slaves obtained in wars with neighbouring barbarous population. Yet this complete reversal of the archaic moral values which accompanied the temporary success of the Greek polis was still called justice. It was then, in fact, that a long-standing confusion, (exemplified by the ambiguities of *dike*) set in whereby the law, invented to protect the privilege of the rulers, was identified with justice. In short, politics and morality split, and the Athenian citizens were educated not to see the difference.

It was occasionally made visible though, in various ways. One among the challenges to the ideology of the City came from Socrates. The doctrine underwriting official education was that the highest moral good was loyalty to the state, the highest duty a contribution to its welfare; Socrates, an unofficial teacher, told those willing to listen that the greatest good was the welfare of one's own soul, and the worst evil the harm man did to it by his own wrong actions. The moral integrity Socrates undertook to restore had its source in the ethical law inherent in the soul, but, as he was well aware, the spontaneous knowledge of this inborn law had been repressed or forgotten. Socrates did not pretend to know what exactly it was - or rather he pretended not to know – but, in any case, in claiming his own ignorance and exposing that of his listeners', he forced them to make the first step towards liberation from indoctrination. Thus, although he never openly rebelled against the Athenian democratic government, or defied its laws[12] (taking part, for example, in its war campaigns without any protest), indirectly, by subjecting any socially or religiously sanctioned norm, any established opinion or piety, to the ordeal of his spe-

[12] Under the anti-democratic Tyrants, after the war with Sparta, he risked his death by refusing to take part in the arrest of an innocent man. See Anthony Gottlieb, *Socrates: Philosophy's Martyr*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 53.

cially developed educational method – an argumentative, dialectical debate - he undermined the habit of obedience and reawakened individual consciences. The absolute necessity to constantly re-examine all ready made definitions and criteria in the light of one's own conscience (*daimonion*) as a prerequisite of good life, was the argument Socrates, faithful to the end to his own principles, offered in his defense when he was accused and brought to trial for disbelief in traditional gods and the corruption of the Athenian youth. In fact, his uncompromising defense speech merely sealed his death sentence, which is why Socrates is said to have virtually argued himself to death[13].

It was the democrats who, on coming back to power shortly after the war with Sparta, sentenced Socrates to death, which may be one good reason why Plato, Socrates' disciple and admirer, hated Athenian democracy. The others were not so good. Plato himself was an aristocrat. Socrates was a poor man, completely unconcerned about material possessions and comfort, and thoroughly egalitarian in his educational approach, happy to question and argue with anybody, because everybody, and not merely the chosen few, had the right to examine and thus make their lives worthwhile. Plato, on the contrary, was used to wealth and luxury, and was highly elitist in his political and educational theory[14]. He also blamed democracy for the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war, rather than the imperialist principle underlying the politics of both parties. Hence, in his *Republic,* he could think of no better model for a just state than the aristocratic Sparta, philosophically idealized. He took over practically all, from the eugenics (including the exposure of children not born within the prescribed period for parents to have children), the cult of pederasty as a higher form of love, to the strict class hierarchy.

The chief difference is that Plato's ruling class is not the aristocracy of wealth but the aristocracy of wisdom. They are the famous philosopher-kings, or guardians, who pass through a long period of training and education before they can devote themselves wholly to the business of governing the state. It seems that a certain democratic and even feminist element enters here, because Plato concedes that the guardians may be recruited initially from the whole population, regardless of sex and class, and if they do well in the course of education, may qualify for the rulers. Besides, among the Guardians everything was to be held in common. However, the abolition of private property, a revolutionary idea in itself, was dangerously misunderstood by Plato, who extended it to cover all personal attachment: it was not merely greed for material possession, but also marital love and maternal care that were treated as selfish impulses. The guardians were therefore to

[13] Ibid., p. 12

[14] The differences between Plato and Socrates can be reliably established by comparing Plato's dialogues with other sources about Socrates, chiefly those provided by Aristotle. On the basis of evidence thus obtained, Anthony Gottlieb has proved that the early dialogues transcribe accurately Socrates' conversations, while in his later work, Plato uses the name of Socrates as a convenient device for expounding views of his own. The instances of Plato's departure from his teacher's views are not confined to those stated above. Among them are also Plato's attitude to knowledge and, related to it, his metaphysics. While Socrates' approach to knowledge was practical, and his search for definitions of virtue a means to an end, i.e., a precondition to virtuous life, Plato saw this search as an end in itself. Philosophy for Plato soon became a theoretical project, concerned with the otherworldly realm of unchanging forms (to be contemplated only by the few initiates) rather than a matter of practical moral obligation that Socrates felt it to be, to the here and the now. Unlike Socrates, who was never obsessed with an afterlife, and did not, as a matter of fact, believe in the immortality of the soul, Plato always had one eye on the beyond, which made his intellectual motives less pure, and which, as in official Christianity already anticipated by his dichotomies, was certainly linked to his increasing dogmatism. (See Gottlieb, pp. 20-26) Admirable as his book is, I do not find all the explanations offered by Gottlieb entirely plausible. One is that Plato owes his metaphysics to Pythagoras, a claim I intend to question in what follows.

be also deprived of marriage and family life, and were in general expected, by the end of their training, to have subdued their emotions. This, in fact, disqualifies any argument in favour of Plato's alleged pro-feminist orientation: for what it makes clear is that Plato may not have been a hater of women so much as of femininity – the behaviour, characteristics and areas of life associated with women. A certain female 'elite' were allowable into the guardian class only in so far as they renounced what actually made them women and what led Plato to place the whole sex into a 'lower' order of being, – procreation, love, uncontrollable passion, lack of discipline – and became indistinguishable from men in their unquestionable commitment to the state[15].

But the most serious flaw of Plato's utopian project was the fact that, once established through at least some merit, the social hierarchy was to become hereditary. This obviously was not what the underprivileged castes, particularly the labourers, whose sole task was to feed the soldiers and the guardians, might gladly accept. To make men acquiesce in what is historical, i.e., in what has been created, and can therefore be de-created, it is best to give it the appearance of the given, natural and eternal.[16] So Plato supplies the alibi of nature, inventing a pseudo-scientific fiction, the first in a series of such myths that falsify both nature and science in order to justify repressive institutions (from the monarchy-supporting myth of blue blood to 'scientific proofs' that Jews, blacks, or working class are intellectually deficient). Plato never pretended that the fiction he invented - that God made three kinds of men, one of gold, the other of silver, and the last, third kind of brass - was anything but a sheer lie. But for him (who thought that all books by Democritus should be burnt!), it was a good, legitimate lie - 'a royal fiction', as he called it, which it was the prerogative of the ruling class to elaborate and spread to justify and ensure the stability of a rigorously stratified society. There was another lie, though, which Plato did consider wicked: that of the poet.

That the poetic illusion is a lie proceeds from Plato's metaphysics. He belonged to that later kind of philosophers, like Parmenides, who were profoundly disturbed by the Heraclitean image of the world as perpetual flux, and sought instead the kind of permanence that existed entirely outside the temporal domain of change. Parmenides argued change out of existence, Plato denied it the status of the real. Reality, or true being, he ascribed to unchanging essences, or pure forms inhabiting the transcendental, heavenly order, while the world of eternal becoming he relegated to the lower sphere in his metaphysical scheme. This ontological separation , like the rest of his dualisms, proceeded from the more primary polarization, that between reason and nature. It is as if this founding opposition created a fault-line, running, as through virtually every topic discussed. Hence there are, in Plato, two sorts of everything: of being, of love, of causation, of knowledge, and even of music, in each case the lower side, as Plumwood amply demonstrates, being associated with nature in almost all of its meanings - the body, the senses, passions, the feminine, the slave or barbarian, non-human life, matter, change, chaos – and the higher with reason.[17] Thus transcendental forms constitute true being not only because they are

[15] For an interesting development of this argument, see Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 76-80.

[16] For the way modern bourgeois myth protects the social *status quo* by emptying the world of memory that it once was made, see Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies,* London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1987, pp. 142-145.

[17] See Plumwood, pp. 80-81. There have been suggestions, based on *Timaeus*, that Plato later revised his sharply dualistic position, and replaced it with a pantheistic concept of the world-soul. Plumwood's disqualification of such readings of *Timaeus* (which, in fact, are attempts to reconcile Plato with Wordsworth and with Romantic

changeless, but because they belong to what is intelligible, conceivable by the intellect only. Conversely, they confer to intellectual knowledge, particularly mathematics, the status of the only reliable knowledge. ('No one ignorant of geometry is admitted here' is said to have been the inscription at the entrance of his Academy.) In fact, the purest of all ideas are geometrical figures, solids, and numbers. In the contingent, empirical world, which we experience with our senses, there is no ideally straight line, or perfect circle, but we can deduce them rationally without any reference to that world. By the same token, the sensual perception of the objects in the empirical world, as the imperfect earthly reflections, the fleeting shadows of the ideal forms, cannot render truth, but merely opinion. There follows the notorious conclusion regarding poetry: the poet, who merely reproduces images of these shadows, is an imitator of imitation, twice removed from reality - therefore doubly an illusionist, or a liar.

The reason I dwell on these well known aspects of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology is that they are usually attributed to the influence of Orphism and particularly of Pythagoras, which I believe once again to be a misrepresentation: if his metaphysics is

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nature mysticism, and are responsible for the misinterpretations of Plato's legacy I quoted at the opening of this essay), turns on what, in *Timaeus*, is identified as nature, and in what sense. She contends that *Timaeus* does not depart from Plato's earlier position in any fundamental way: the spiritualized nature Plato glorifies in this late dialogue is the rational cosmos, purged of all the lower attributes he elsewhere ascribes to nature - the sphere of 'the indeterminate, the inconstant, the anomalous, that which can neither be understood nor predicted'. Produced by the imposition of (masculine, paternal) logos on the passive formless (female) chaos, it does represent a marriage, but a patriarchal one, whereby the husband/cosmos's primordial underside –chaos/wife - comes to share in her partner's goodness only in so far as she registers the completeness of his conquest. In environmental or political terms, it also represents a colonization model, celebrating not nature, but the structuring of the world to the needs and the intentions of the mastering mind/race: 'the eradication or rationalisation of superfluous qualities, kinds, tribes, which are seen from the perspective of the master as disorderly, unnecessary, useless, outside of control'. (Plumwood, pp. 83-86)

This logic informs Plato's conception of love too, described most memorably in the *Symposium*: as opposed to (hetero)sexual love, trapped in the lower sphere of the feminine and the bodily, the object of higher love is not the flesh-and-blood person , but the idea embodied in the beloved. Taken over by some of the Renaissance neo-Platonists poets, e.g. Edmund Spenser in England, as a philosophy and practice of heterosexual love, it did a very dubious service to women. Extolling the beloved to the status of divine principle, they actually translated the unique, unpredictable, and hence disturbing living woman into a reassuring changeless abstraction, to which she was expected to conform and thus reflect back to the lover the image of his own desire. Spenser's own Platonism in love is quite in line with the cruel measures he undertook, as a Governor in Ireland, to eradicate what he considered the revolting excesses in the native population's pagan customs and habits of life. But against such a puritanical and colonizing model, rightly called neo-Platonic, the Florentine humanists such as Ficino, or Bruno, along with a number of major Renaissance poets they inspired (including Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne in England) were mystics, striving to recapture in their lives, religion, philosophy and in their love poetry (though not always with equal success), the ideal condition of oneness. Their philosophical project was a reconciliation of heterogeneous ideas, of spiritual traditions or social orders hitherto considered mutually exclusive, such as Christianity and paganism, the lay and the clergy, science and myth, spirit and matter. In pursuit of this ambition, they did refer to Plato, but, more importantly, they also drew on alchemy and magic, and looked back to the Cabala and a certain kind of pantheistic Gnosis, all of which traditions were ultimately Pythagorean, and not Platonic. As to love, if the Renaissance courtly love poets did often regard the beloved as a heavenly, star-like ideal they were satisfied to adore from a distance, it was partly fashion but also partly because the women, caught in courtly games of manly competition, *were* as a rule inaccessible to those with less power, and not because of any intrinsic need to idealise Platonic relationships. Donne's mystical love poems, on the other hand, (dedicated to Anne More , whom he dared risk his career to marry), with their punning fusion of the sexual and the spiritual, the profane and the sacred, are a strong evidence that the most important and enduring Renaissance poetry was Platonic only in name. (On the Renaissance uses of the Occult texts and the latter's mythic and philosophical sources, see Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1964.)

Pythagorean, it is, like the Platonized Socrates, a Pythagoras processed to serve Plato's own ends.

Pythagoras was the last of the Greek thinkers to preserve the unified vision of the world. In fact, he kept together, within a single system, the two Greek traditions - of religious mysticism and proto-science - which, as I hinted already, had a common origin and purpose but, by the time of Pythagoras, had long been using different methods. The Orphic mysticism grew out of the Dionysian tradition, the ecstatic worship of a primitive archaic deity of all life, which, in fact, constituted the second and, in comparison to the rational Socrates' patient dialectical inquiry, much more direct and often violent challenge of the social hierarchies and ethical priorities of the Greek city state.

Dionysus, whether he originated in the primitive Thrace, or is of Greek origin, is one of the most archaic of deities worshipped by the Greeks. Represented in one of the later versions of his myth as the son of the mortal woman Semele and Zeus, the solar God of Thunderbolt (by whom she, six month pregnant, was burnt to death when he appeared to her in his divine fiery aspect), brought up by nymphs later to become Hyades (the stars that brought rain), represented with a goat's horns, Dionysus encompassed all the chief contradictions that make up the dynamic totality of being: he was a mixture of the natural, human and the divine, blending in himself fire and water, the sun and the rain - the elements that combine to ripen the grapes and keep the plant alive. A god of wine and intoxication, he was also synonymous with freedom from all artificially imposed constraints. Once, the story says, he was seized by pirates, brought aboard their ship, but when they fetched rude bonds to fetter him, they were unable to bind him: the ropes would not hold together, but fell apart as soon as they touched his hands and feet. The helmsmen alone understood that this must be a god and should be set free at once or deadly harm would befall them all. The captain mocked him, but then, wonder upon wonder happened. Fragrant wine ran in streams down the deck, a vine with many clusters spread over the sail; and the mast flowered like a garland with fruits. Terrified, the pirates tried to kill him but he turned into a lion, whereupon they all, in a fit of madness, leaped overboard and were instantly changed into dolphins[18].

Beginning with 6th century BC, the cult of Dionysus swept through the civilised Greece and was joined by all who suffered in the grip of its laws, primarily women. In addition to Maenads, his regular companions, he drew to himself, as he passed through various cities, bands of wild women, called Bacchae, who followed him, in the state of ecstatic joy, out of the dusty streets back to the purity of untrodden hills where they danced to the music of his primitive pipe. But he was strongly opposed by the authorities, for which they often were punished by destructive madness that caused them to savage their own children, or were dismembered themselves by the wild Bacchae. Dionysus was himself torn to pieces as a child by Titans and brought back to life by his grandmother, the goddess Rea. The brutal physical dismemberment associated with Dionysian worship, like intoxication or madness, had a psychological meaning: it was the breakup, joyful or painful, of the mental shell, the pseudo-identity confining the souls of the civilised Greeks. To be dismembered meant to be out of one's right mind, forget oneself, discover another in oneself, as Rimbaud was to do centuries later, when by systematic derangement of all the senses, he would recover his lost soul, and find, to the utter shock of the

[18] See Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, New York: The New American Library, 1969, pp. 55-62.

Christian teachers and masters of the racist, imperialist Europe, that it was not that which separated but that which identified him with 'the nigger' and 'the beast'[19].

If the enthusiasm (the term means etymologically to become one with the god, to have the god enter the worshipper[20]) produced by Dionysian worship was sometimes marked with savagery, it was because the resistances, internal inhibitions as much as external prohibitions, were too strong and could only be overcome violently – as in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where Pentheus' attempt to enslave the god ends in his own dismemberment and death at the hands of his mother in a fit of Dionysian madness. But the primary purpose of Dionysian worship was always beneficial: for it should be remembered that in the story of Dionysus, love and compassion figure prominently. On his way through Greece, he met Ariadne, originally the Cretan Moon Goddess, now callously abandoned by Theseus, the new patriarchal monster-slaying hero, whose life she had just saved. Dionysus took pity on her, married her at once, had six children by her, and remained loyal always. When eventually his cult was officially recognised, he did not forget his dead mother, but descended into the lower world to seek her, snatched her away from death and sent her - a mortal, a woman, and a mother - to heaven to dwell with the immortals. In this, as in the rest of his deeds, he sought to restore sacredness to what had been long desecrated in the civilized Greece.

Like Dionysus, Orpheus, originally from Crete, was a musician. In fact, he is believed to have been a priest in Dionysian rituals, before he came to serve the new god of music and poetry, Apollo. Like Dionysus, again, he descended into the underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice, but, unlike his predecessor, he failed, his failure registering, in all probability, the fatal swerve away, in Greek culture, from the Dionysian to the Apollonian principle: from the Muse inspired, ecstatic worship of all life, to civic and manly virtues.[21]. It was with this major transition in human history that philosophy was first purged of feeling and reduced to rational abstract thought, in religion the split opened between the body and the soul, and the contempt and fear of natural life engendered a desire to escape from the wheel of birth and ascend in spirit to some timeless static upper realm. That, as a matter of fact, is what B. Russell says the Orphics, a movement inspired by Orpheus, believed and attempted in their religious practice to achieve. But if he is right, then it must have been a later development, for it is emphatically not true of the Pythagoras that emerges from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's Pythagoras had not been yet affected by binary hierarchies, a foundation of all subsequent modes of repression. On the contrary, he honoured life's continuities, one proof of which is his belief in the transmigration of the soul, which, upon a person's death, moves into other bodies, whether animal or human. That is one reason why he was a vegetarian. But his motives were not merely self-regarding: he also held it a sin to kill an animal and eat it, when nature offered such an abundance of fruit and vegetable. In love with all living things, he is said to have preached to wild beasts.

Most importantly, for the purposes of the revaluation of Plato's legacy, Pythagoras, as evoked by Bela Hamvash, still conceived of theory in its original sense: as a single unified system, ethical, poetic and scientific at once, inspired by a sympathetic imaginative

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[19] See Edmund Wilson, 'Axel and Rimbaud', *Axel's Castle*, Glasgow, Collins: Fontana, 1931, 1979, p. 219.
[20] Russell, p. 36.
[21] As Robert Graves observed, once Apollo prevailed, official poetry ceased to be the invocation of the Muse, and became a hymn in praise of kings and military leaders. See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 442.

contemplation of life. Approaching music scientifically, he nevertheless remained faithful to the Dionysian and original Orphic understanding of music as expressing and rejoicing at the creative reciprocities of the multi-faceted yet single world. As a mathematician, he discovered that number was the foundation, the essence of music, and of all other phenomena: but, in a crucial contrast to Plato, Pythagoras never attempted to abstract number - nor any other essence, for that matter - from things. Number, for him, did not exist as a pure concept, in some heavenly beyond. It was always *embodied*, in music and dance as rhythm, in sculpture as proportion, in geometry as ratio. It was inherent even in ethics, in the sense of the inner proportion within the soul, whose harmony, if undisturbed was perfectly attuned to the singing cosmos. It is this all-encompassing, non-hierarchical paradigm, this unified and unifying knowledge, practically forgotten by the times of Pythagoras, that he insisted the soul of man can and must remember[22].

His theory of knowledge as recollection becomes something very different in Plato. Plato falsified it, as he did most of the ideas he took over from Pythagoras. According to Plato, the soul's previous existence was not earthly but heavenly, and what it remembered was not, as Pythagoras had understood it, the primordial wholeness of being, but abstract ideas. Once again, this prioritizing of the unchanging abstraction is yet another instance of Plato's general dogmatism, inseparable from his authoritarian politics. Hence music, one of those living, rapturous embodiments of number in Pythagoras, and a debased reflection of a transcendental numeric essence, according to Plato, should be, in the latter's opinion, rigorously censored. Only certain kinds are permissible, those that stimulate soldierly courage. Ionian and Lydian harmonies are forbidden, the first because they express sorrow, the other because they are relaxed and relaxing. The manly spasm, that which fights off the surge of emotion, the 'other life', as Howard Barker once called the ideologically non-annexed soul, must be maintained at all costs.

The same censorship is applied to literature. I already mentioned Plato's first argument against poetry: as an imitation of an imitation, it cannot impart true knowledge, and is therefore a lie. But, rather than a sheer illusion, Plato also refers to poetry as a divinely inspired madness, which seems at times to be an acknowledgement of its privileged status. Yet, although it may sound inconsistent, it is, in the last instance, precisely its origin in divine possession that makes poetry the most harmful and wicked of lies. Thus, in *Ion*, Socrates seems to be offering this explanation of the rhapsode's success in interpreting Homer as a compliment. But in the *Republic*, we see that what he calls divine inspiration is, in fact, another word for Dionysian rapture, and from the standpoint of Plato's patriarchal, rationalist ethics and totalitarian politics, Dionysus is the wrong god to be possessed by. For this kind of inspiration is contagious and having turned upside down the psychological hierarchy within the poet, then the rhapsode, it spreads further to his listeners, threatening to undermine the social caste system itself.

This latter argument becomes of particular importance when he turns it against dramatic poetry. To appreciate the full force of his final condemnation, a reminder is necessary of what the great plays he condemned were all about. Performed in the 5th century, they were not mere imitations of the visible - no art is: like mystical religious cults before them, and like their contemporary, Socrates, the tragedians revealed what in the politically and economically most successful period of Athens tended to be obscured. Conducting crucial moral questioning through mythological representations rather than

[22] See Hamvaš, pp. 247-249.

merely logical arguments as Socrates did, yet more complex and refined than the Dionysian rites out of which it had evolved, this drama was another, probably most powerful, critical examination of an age that referred to itself as Golden, but had, in fact, betrayed all the primordial values that constituted the original Golden Age mourned by Hesiod.

This is by no means a universally held view. On the contrary: the question, for example, whether Aeschylus, wrote 'religious propaganda' in the service of the new patriarchal order, as Robert Graves casually observed[23], or whether his purpose was to expose and condemn its injustice, as a far smaller number of critics (from Erich Fromm to some important contemporary authors, such as Edward Bond) maintain - has not been decisively settled. Most Greek drama, including the *Oresteia*, withholds direct, unequivocal answers (in that respect, to be sure, it is unlike propaganda!), but so do Shakespeare's plays, and all great art, for that matter. Like Shakespeare's, Greek drama performed its subversive function by juxtaposing conflicting values. As Jean-Pierre Vernant claims, in line with my own argument so far, 'The Greek tragedy is born when myth starts to be considered from the point of view of the citizen', when 'the legendary past embodied in mythical traditions' clashes with 'the new forms of legal and political thought'. The debate with the past, he goes on to say, unfolds on several levels, one being the external tension between chorus, the collective and anonymous presence, expressing collective anxieties, desires and judgments, often of the citizens, and the individualized protagonist, a hero from an age gone by, always more or less estranged from the condition of the citizen. The conflict is also projected in the language they speak, in the ambiguous use of legal terminology, where a word referring to an old system of values is high-jacked to denote the new one, while retaining its original meaning too, as in the case of *dike*[24]. Corresponding to the objective external clash, both linguistic and interpersonal, there is, as a rule, the inner dilemma of the protagonist, torn between what Vernant understands by *ethos* – a socially conditioned character, and the archaic religious power operation through him - his *daimon*, or inner voice[25]. The moral choice demanded of the protagonist is, in fact, what constitutes the crisis in Greek drama (the word crisis derives from *krisis*, the Greek word for choice or decision[26]), expressed in the question resounding through the great tragedies: 'What shall I do?' Whatever his ultimate decision, however the ensuing debate is resolved, it is not, as Vernant notes, 'only the world of myth that loses its consistency…; the world of the city is called into question and its fundamental values are challenged'[27].

This is true of the Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and of Euripides' *Ion,* in all of which the patriarchal and/or military ethos of the polis prevails in the end. In fact, as a number of critics have argued plausibly, close reading of these plays or, even better, seeing them performed, provided that the translation and the performance follow the original text faithfully, would demonstrate that, while they seem to end in the final apotheosis of the city, these tragedies are more than merely open, equivocal, or undecid-

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[23] Grevs, *Grčki mitovi*, 337.
[24] See note 11.
[25] Vernant, p. 37.
[26] Rush Rehm, *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, London: Duckworth, 2003, p. 87.
[27] Vernant, p. 33. Although Vernant himself, like the overwhelming majority of classicist scholars, believes that Aeschylus, was 'the most optimistic of the tragic writers,…exalting the civic ideal and affirming its victory over all forces of the past,' he feels nevertheless that the *Oresteia* 'is not making a positive declaration with tranquil conviction', but rather posing questions to which 'the tragic consciousness can find no fully satisfactory answers and so they remain open.'

able[28]. By exposing the fact that it has its roots in the oppression of women (the *Oresteia*) and the suppression of individual conscience (*Philoctetes*), or rather both (*Ion*), these plays must have created in their audience a profound sense of discomfort at the very least, puncturing, in the words of Sallie Goetsch 'the comfortable illusion that Athens is the city of the just', and 'subverting the enormous Athenian ego created by public funeral orations and other political practices'[29].

Thus Euripides' *Ion* ends in the Athenian patron goddess's prophecy of the city's glorious imperialist future, to be achieved by the three descendants of the legendary Athenian king Erechteus, each bearing the name of one of the chief invading Hellenic tribes – Ion, Doros Achaios. Invented by the goddess both to establish Athenians as the founding nation, and to crown the process of the protagonist's 'rebirth' from a quiet parentless servant at the Delphic temple to the adopted son and heir to the Athenian king Xuthus, this *ad hoc* myth also functions as the playwright's ironic comment of the way identities are ideologically manipulated in the Greek polis. For Ion's transformation from a foreign slave to the Athenian citizen and future King involves a rejection of the moral vision and independent judgment, which drove him initially to refuse the offer of citizenship in the class-divided state so steeped in xenophobia (reinforced by the myth of autochthony), envy and violence that political participation ruins one's life whether one accepts it or refuses it. In reply to his (step)father's persuasion, he says:

> They say that Athenians are famous as earth's
> Children, all native and no outsiders.
> I'd come in with two afflictions –
> As a bastard, and a son of a foreign-born king…
>
> If I avoided power, I'd be nothing, a nobody,
> But if I joined the political fray
> And tried to be someone, the powerless
> Would hate me. Achievement brings grief.
> On the other hand, capable men who wisely
> And avoid political life
> Would take me for a fool for speaking out
> In a city filled with fear[30].

[28] See Sallie Goetsch, 'Playing Against the Text', *The Drama Review* 38, 3 (T 143), Fall 1994, pp. 88-92. Goetsch argues that the disproportionate number of the distorting readings of the *Oresteia,* particularly of *the Eumenides* , which make of the Erinyes the vile goddesses, and deny us the sympathy with the female characters, is due to the absence of adequate translations of the Greek original, which in turn is a result of the fact that the 'early authorities approached Greek texts with an enormous blind spot and a patriarchal agenda which may have been so familiar a part of their lives as to be invisible to them'. (89) Once misread and mistranslated, the chain reaction set in responsible for the misinterpretation of Aeschylus' trilogy on the contemporary stage, even by eminent feminist directors. It is symptomatic, however, that Goetsch should overlook one of the very first, groundbreaking, challenges to the accepted pro-patriarchal interpretation of the *Oresteia* in Erich Fromm's *The Forgotten Language* (1951). The absence of Fromm's name and of most other Marx inspired humanist thinkers associated with the 'Frankfurt School' from the mainstream contemporary cultural and literary theory and criticism is obviously another ideological blind spot, to which Goetsch's own omission, whether deliberate or not, unfortunately contributes.

[29] Ibid., p. 89

[30] Euripides, *Ion* 594-606, quoted in Rehm, 111-112.

His successful indoctrination into the Athenian ideology is signaled by his assumption of a new personality, that of a blood-thirsty avenger, seeking to throw his mother Creusa off the cliff, in a replica of his ancestors Kekrops' and Erechteus' sacrifice of their daughters to save Athens – the incidents mentioned at several points in the play. Thus the apparent happy ending, including his reconciliation with the mother, is ironically undercut by the play's refusal to forget these incidents, indeed its indirect allusion to all the raped or murdered daughters, their sacrifices built, as it were, into the very foundations of the Greek polis[31].

It is precisely its refusal to ignore the suffering, or indeed the thwarting of any emotion, involved in the military and political success that Plato targets in his final verdict against drama at the end of Book X of the *Republic*! Dramatic poetry, he argues, invoking once again his gendered binary hierarchies, appeals to the inferior part of the soul, that is to say, to feelings and passions. Instead of having our passions dried up, he remonstrates, we have them watered down by dramatic representations of suffering. In our own lives, we are taught to suppress sorrow, endure pain, tolerate unhappiness, restrain pity. Yet, as we watch a play in which people weep and suffer, we are stirred to sympathy: we empathize with the characters on stage, sharing their pain. This may infect even the best of us, Plato warns in the end, and turn the men that we are into women. Or worse still, the injustice that tragedy depicts may stir us to anger, another undesirable emotion in Plato's Commonwealth. The same holds for laughter, which is indecorous, and should be always controlled by reason.[32] Compassion, anger, laughter: Plato is right, all those are subversive, rebellious impulses, so having crowned the poets with laurels, he dispatches them from his ideal republic[33].

Hostile as it is, Plato's response to this drama (as well as Aristotle's, despite the differences between the two) nevertheless deserves its prominent position in the history of literary judgments, for at least two reasons. First, it is very edifying: formulated more than two thousand years ago, it tells us that the proper business of (most) literary theory is to hinder or obscure, rather than elucidate and help release the transformative potential of literature. But its second effect has been, paradoxically, most beneficial both to poetry and our understanding of it. For when Plato dismissed the poets from his republic, he did not let things rest at that: he promised to readmit them should anyone offer convincing

[31] According to R. Graves, the stories of Erechteus's daughters as well as the daughters of Coecrops originate in the time of transition from pre-patriarchal to patriarchal order, and refer specifically to the sacrifices of the priestesses of the Pelasgian Triple Goddess to the new patriarchal gods. See *Grčki mitovi,* p. 138.

[32] Extract from Book X of the *Republic,* reprinted in V. and W. Sutton, pp. 30-32.

[33] For the sake of the contrast separating Plato from Pythagoras and his followers, we might imagine what response these tragedies might have elicited in, say, Empedocles, the last Pythagorean mystic. Very different, to be sure, for their message is comparable to his own – both remind us that justice in its original sense was synonymous with love. Empedocles believed that love and strife combine to produce change, but that in the Golden Age, when men worshipped Aphrodite alone (a Greek version of the Cretan mistress of animals, and of primitive mother goddess) love was all inside, and strife all outside. In time strife entered and began to oust love, preparing the worst moment still to come, when strife would be wholly within and love wholly outside. His theory of history being cyclical, however, he predicted a new reversal, where love once again would become primary. Empedocles was a politician in a Sicilian city around 440 BC, a time when for such views men were either executed or exiled. Socrates, his younger contemporary in Athens, had to drink poison. Empedocles, like Ovid after him, (and for the similar offence of failing to praise the Augustan Rome, and choosing instead to lament the passage of the erstwhile Golden Age of the primeval Saturn) was exiled: he abandoned politics, became a prophet, and, the legend says, committed suicide by throwing himself into a live volcano, without explaining how the renewal he had predicted might come about. But the tragedies, if properly approached, suggest an answer: through empathy with the sufferers and anger at what causes the suffering. (See Russell, p. 71-73)

proof of poetry's usefulness. Whether he did it out of regret, being a lover of poetry and in a sense himself a poet, or whether it was sheer defiant irony, his final remark articulated a challenge that has produced a number of defences of poetry, which, from the Renaissance to our own day, have referred to Plato only in order to refute or reverse his propositions.

The poets and critics listed by V. and W. Sutton as sharing in Plato's legacy are indebted to him only in this negative sense. A few simple facts in support of this conclusion: To begin with, it is terribly misleading to point to transcendentalism as Plato's bequest to Romanticism, Symbolism and archetypal criticism, as V. and W. Sutton do, because for the term *transcendence* - reaching beyond - to mean anything at all, it must be specified what it is that must be transcended, and what it is that must be reached. For the Romantics, Symbolists, and the archetypal critics, too, transcendence was the very opposite of what it was for Plato: it meant going beyond the repressive (patriarchal, racist, capitalist, bourgeois, puritanical, rationalist), culture and culturally prescribed identity, and reaching back for a more organic, more complete mode of being. Blake's revolutionary prophecies and mystical visions, all bent on the overthrowing of the combined forces of social oppression and the Urizenic mind, so that the fallen man could be restored to his original freedom and wholeness; Wordsworth's enamoured pantheistic contemplation of nature; Rimbaud's embrace of 'a nigger', and 'a beast' in his soul - an anticipation of the Jungian 'participation mystique'- these are all repudiations of Plato's unnatural hierarchies, particularly his contempt for and exclusion of whatever he deemed lower forms of life. And finally, if, again contrary to Plato, the Romantic or Symbolist literary theory strove to replace the ideological lie with the truths inherent in the fictions of imagination, it was because the theoreticians in this case were primarily great poets, and also great lovers, poetry and love being, as J. C. Ransom remarked, the best antidote to the Platonic arrogance[34].

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PLATON I PLATONIZAM: REVIZIJA

Lena Petrović

Ovaj rad predstavlja pokušaj da se problematizuje ortodoksno shvatanje o Platonovom značaju za potonju evropsku književnu teoriju i praksu. Nasuprot bezrezervnom strahopoštovanju za 'utemeljivača' evropske filozofije, ili problematičnim argumentima u prilog platonističkih premisa romantičarske i simbolističke poetike, kao i arhetipske kritike, u radu se podržava tvrdnja Bele Hamvaša da Platonova suštinska ambicija nije bila da osniva već da spasava, i ne čovečanstvo već državu, te da je sledeći taj cilj falsifikovao i degradirao prvobitnu duhovnu baštinu, na čijim principima zapravo počivaju romantizam, simbolizam, kao i ono što je najbolje u renesansnim pesničkim i filozofskim pravcima pogrešno nazvanim neo-platonističkim. Daleko od toga da su nadahnule značajna poetska dostignuća ili uvide u prirodu umetnosti, u radu se ističe da Platonove ideje zavređuju pažljivo proučavanje utoliko što predstavljaju prvi primer ideološke upotrebe književne teorije.

Ključne reči: *Platon, Sokrat, Dionis, orfizam, Pitagora, zlatno doba, propadanje bića, teorija, etika, politika, metafizika, nauka, poezija, muzika, tragedija*