

## Reflections on the Neoclassical Dispositions of a Banned Playwright

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### Abstract

The literary work of Albanian playwright Etëhem Haxhiademi had been banned for over four decades due to vindictive political principles. He was one of the most notable creators of Albanian tragedy, revealing Albanian literature in the modern era. In 1924, he wrote the tragedy "Ulysses" in Berlin, in 1926 he wrote the tragedy "Achilles" in Vienna, and in 1928 he wrote the tragedy "Alexander" in Lushnje, Albania. All three tragedies were published in Tirana, Albania, in 1931. Later, he wrote and published the tragedies "Pyrrhus" (1934), "Scanderbeg" "Skënderbeu" (1935), "Diomedes" (1936), and "Abeles" (1938). He was also known as the creator of the poetic volume "Lyra", (1939). His dramatic work was set up according to models of classical tragedy, using ancient or medieval subjects, even dating back to pre-biblical history. His literary work becomes functional to revelations that can be compared to phenomena, ideas and problems staging the reality of the time in which he wrote his works. By striving to clarify the notions of classicism in this writing, we have directly contributed to the estimation of the literary work of E. Haxhiademi which, in our opinion, presents excessive concomitances in the ideas, aesthetic ideals and design practices of neoclassical experiments. in Europe.

**Keywords:** Forbidden Playwright, Tragedy, Classical Canon, Neoclassical Dispositions.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Before presenting our view related to the neoclassical inclinations of our playwright, we reflected on it to provide some insights related to the effects of neoclassical dramatic models in his tragedies.

Etëhem Haxhiademi created seven tragedies, mainly in the first half of the 20th century (1920s and 1930s), with their subjects taken from Albanian antiquity and the Middle Ages ("Pyrrhus", "Alexander", "Scanderbeg"), from ancient mythology ("Achilles", "Diomedes", "Ulysses"), as well as from biblical subjects ("Abel"), thus conforming to the basic tendency of classical playwrights.

Haxhiademi's persistent effort to return to classical tragedy, even though the prosperity of this literary genre had already disappeared during the period in which he was writing, can be explained by his efforts to give new impetus to dramaturgy—one of the least developed genres in Albanian literature. Due to its conventionality in Albanian literature, this genre could only advance along paths already trampled by others. It could not evolve differently, but by applying models that had been considered by European literature as examples of its perfection.

Certainly, the return of the Albanian genre of classical drama to the models of classical tragedy was not strange, but in general terms, it created a kind of anachronism in the background of the general inclinations of evolution in the literary processes of those years. A delayed classical contribution indicated that Albanian literature was inclined to try all paths of evolution, paths that would further develop and enrich it.

## II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### a. The Place E. Haxhiademi Occupies in Albanian Dramaturgy

Just as in classical dramaturgy, E. Haxhiademi's subjects try to balance;

- 1) The main interests of great figures, kings and queens, military commanders, princes and princesses, and popular leaders, whose actions were driven by the powerful passion of omnipotence. This passion becomes the cause of their tragic failure. Characters like Zanfina, Hamza, and, for a time, even Moses in Scanderbeg, Atal, in Alexander, act under the unapproachable power of this passion; their actions affect the fate of states and kingdoms alongside, involving other passions with it, such as love and revenge (Philip's love for Cleopatra in the tragedy Alexander, Achilles' love for Polixenia - the daughter of King Priam, in Achilles, the King Priam's strong desire to take revenge on Achilles, Olympias' love for Philip and his hatred for Cleopatra, his second wife, etc.). All these revelations contribute to the completion of the main action - the protection of royal power and its legacy.
- 2) In accordance with classical principles, these subjects intended to confront the perpetual passions of the people, with their greed for power and their love and revenge leading them to their ultimate destruction. In cases where their actions were deemed just, that is, led by reason, they embodied virtue, while on the contrary, they permeated vice. The internal struggles between them were very fierce because vice used all intrigues and wickedness and would not stop even in the face of crime. In these terms, Olympiad (Alexander), blinded by his hatred for Philip, killed his rival Cleopatra, who was pregnant, while King Priam took advantage of the feelings of his daughter, Polyxeny, to finish off her lover Achilles.

With some of his tragedies, Haxhiademi wanted to achieve:

- 1) The well-known classical principle is that humans are neither completely perfect nor completely bad when exhausted. After a mistake or weakness, they suffer serious consequences beyond their control, even though most of them do not deserve it. In the tragedy of the same name, Achilles falls victim to both King Priam's legitimate hatred and his predilection for Polyxenia, King Priam's daughter. The same thing happens with Philip (in Alexander), who, lost in his mind because of his love for Cleopatra, falls prey to Gaelon's intrigues and is killed by Paussant. The same thing happened to Odysseus, the hero of the tragedy bearing his name, killed by his son, Telagonus, the son born of his love with Circe.
- 2) The strength of their power and the temptation of it. Powerful passions flourished both in the temperament and conduct of those who could afford to bear them, realize them, or suffer from them, in the lives of mythical heroes as well as in the lives of the upper classes

of society. It was natural that the characters of classical tragedies were drawn from these classes of society. The characters of Haxhiademi's tragedies are either heroes of Greek mythology (Achilles, Diogenes, Odysseus, etc.) or kings and queens, rulers, or their relatives (Pyrrhus, Scanderbeg, Hamza, etc.), representing great interests in the destiny of their states.

- 3) In their literary work, all the classicists were moralists. They openly accepted this inclination and considered creations educated by greatness as bearers of true values. E. Haxhiademi also adhered to this point of view, while not hesitating to note, addressing the readers, that in one of his own literary works, "Abel," he had written on a moral thesis. In general, in all his creativity, Haxhiademi had tried to realize the well-known principle of the classics: to teach and educate through favorite models derived from the hymnization of virtue in the fight against vice.
- 4) The plots of Haxhiademi's literary works, in keeping with the classical spirit, try to be extraordinary, too radiant, far from the worries of everyday life, which for the classics were not considered to deign to be reflected in art.
- 5) By imitating classical tragedy in all its aspects, Haxhiademi attempts to reflect, in his work, not only the feeling of greed for royal power but also other feelings, such as love, parental compassion and nobility, always under the subjection of reason - the only force protecting virtue and right and leading to them.

The classicism of Haxhiademi's tragedies was noticed long ago; "Just like in the other tragedies of this author," remarked A. Xhuvani, "this tragedy, 'The Scanderbeg,' has a classical inspiration; it is divided into five acts, there are few characters, and the weaving of the subject as a whole maintains the classical rules of dramatic art. Mr. Etehem Haxhiademi, the classical admirer, likes to create tragedies rather than dramas."

#### **b. Can Ethem Haxhiademi Be Considered a Neoclassical Writer?**

In order to get the answer to this question, we thought about presenting some opinions on neoclassicism, taken from Caroline Dauphin, *Neoclassical poetry in France and England, né Comparatisme en Sorbonne 4-2013: (De) construire le canon*.

Neoclassicism should not be seen as an artistic trend deeply rooted in the history of literature; rather, it is a tendency to think with a certain stretch, a complex network of influences, a bridge connecting Illuminist ideas with Romantic ideals; a certain paradoxical balance between tradition and modernity; a tendency toward a new relationship between neoclassical poetry and the solid canons/rules of classicism. In fact, neoclassicism is not simply post-classicism, which would be a slavish and humble imitation of the Ancients; rather, it is an original and impressive treatment of ancient subjects and previous models. Behind the refusal to simply continue in the footsteps of classical tradition, one must see the unclaimed desire to reestablish classical canons and rules.

But is it possible that a contradiction exists between the proclaimed fidelity to an artistic and literary past and the affirmation of its recreation, the prior search for the new and untested style? The neoclassical concept itself is elusive, perceived as suspended between the past and the present, as the preceding model and the one that follows it, what is questioned and what is distorted.

At the very least, the creation of this "classical" canon would be well-accepted as a way of filling a gap in the national literary culture by choosing from an elite culture. On the other hand, these intentions reveal political tendencies. In the figurative and plastic arts, neoclassicism actually served the arts of the Revolution and the Empire; Jacques-Louis David's presentation of Napoleon as a new Caesar has always been considered a fine illustrative example. Neoclassical poetry also served this purpose; it reconstructed the canon and made possible a new social, cultural, and ideological model.

Neoclassicism in literature (despite its greater development in the figurative and plastic arts and architecture), spread to various European countries, particularly France and England. Both currents, in France and England, had common sources in terms of the influence of the Grand Siècle, the ideas of the Illuminists, and ancient models. Both demand the perfection of humans through their actions described by poetry, formal rules of symmetry, and harmony of dimensions; the etymology of canon derives from the Greek word *kanôn*, which originally indicates a measuring tool. On the other hand, the great political and commercial rivalries between France and England could not prevent writers on both sides from having a permanent adoration for classical models. The Pope adores Boileau's genius and seems to realize his dream of Boileau's "poetic art" by writing "Essay on Criticism": on the other hand, Delille translated Milton into French.

The fundamental distinction between English and French neoclassicism is undoubtedly their time of influence; in France, poetic neoclassicism developed in a short but intensive period, from 1780 to 1820, dominated by Jacques Delille, André Chénier and/or Jacques Clinchamps de Malfilâtre. In England, the movement renovated the French classics, drawing inspiration mainly from Boileau. Milton, Dryden and later Pope are prominent and reestablish the classical rules of poetry by renovating, mainly, the art of satire.

Neoclassicism would be a modern term for writers evoking the values of their elders. Their legacy would, in fact, disguise a questionable reconstruction of the canon, somewhere between continuity and recreation, in order to shape a national literature, also serving various political ambitions.

Neoclassical poetry offers an original reinterpretation of classical models, whether they are ancient authors or writers of the Grand Siècle. In this context, the translation of great poems from Antiquity is of particular interest. "Through translation, beyond linguistic transcription, the original that the translator(s) consider(s) offers(s) a new perspective and presents the texts from a new point of view. Translation is above all a reinterpretation and an updating; it is the product of a confidential dialogue permeating words and centuries in order to rediscover the source text in depth."

Even though they worship the elders/ancients, they are always closer to modern creators; they want to emulate their models by creating a completely original work. Dryden openly expresses this goal when he begins to translate Virgil, *Anaïda* and the *Bucolics*.

New translations allow us to discover Antiquity from a new perspective, alongside archaeological discoveries from the time of Pompey's ruins. Dryden in England is classical in his references and neoclassical in his ambitions, informed by a style as sensitive as it is elegant.

The influence of the Illuminists on the Neoclassicists made them develop a different attitude towards the Ancients and the classics themselves; they were therefore admirers of the Ancients, they appeared as humans of their time, eager for knowledge and with great scientific curiosity.

For the classics, ancient references were rethought, creating new relationships between contemporary characters and ancient heroes. Poetry, too, took on a political bent. The classical canon was clearly used as a powerful ideological vector, intended to dramatize revolutionary episodes. By connecting the present to the past, Camille Desmoulins and André Chénier sought to convey a timeless and universal character to the revolution, to become the Horatii and Ovids of the era in which they lived.

Neoclassicism, therefore, is not simply a collection of rewritings and translations of Virgil and the Illuminists; it is first and foremost an art in response to a historical need and in particular political and cultural circumstances. In the same way, it is a supportive art for future generations, a resource for the pre-Romantics, although some modernists, such as Baudelaire, consider it merely a literary nuance comparable to a cloud of locusts.

Neoclassicism is not post-classicism either, since it faithfully follows all its ancient predecessors. However, it is neoclassicism that reclaimed classical canons and adapted them to a new aesthetic and political ideal. Far from being the twilight of classicism, it is the new dawn of an early morning.

### III. CONCLUSION

By clearly explaining what neoclassicism is, we can squarely consider Haxhiademi's work, in which there are more concomitances of aesthetic and practical ideas and ideals that designed neoclassical experiments in Europe. These concomitances are clearly distinguished in Haxhiademi's literary practices;

1. At the beginning of his literary works, Haxhiademi translated Virgil's *Bucolics* in such a way as to give clear testimony to the inclinations of an art that could be reread and rewritten.
2. He also engaged in poetry, alongside dramaturgy and translations.
3. In his experiments in poetic creativity we find concomitances with the ideas and intentions of the neoclassicists.
4. A different perspective from the experiences of the classics was noticed in his dramaturgy, in terms of perception and treatment of characters and heroes as well as in the conception and transmission of ideas.

This does not mean that he was a representative of neoclassicism since in the Albanian context as well as for a certain level of social, political, cultural and ideological development, moreover, for the contemporary level of the evolution of dramaturgy, it was impossible to follow and create neoclassical models of literary and artistic works, (such a big leap could never even be made by a young playwright, however cultured and talented he may be, because, until now, there were no previous models of classicism transmitted to the literary experience of Albanian literature); it was more comfortable and more appropriate and

functional in these conditions for other different ideas or intentions to be conceived, even similar to the neoclassical nature, not necessarily aiming at the recreation of canons and new rules but aiming at integration with the classical canons; and this is what Haxhiademi did, thus making evident the recognition and inclination of this very testimony for neoclassicism.

Considering the nature of Haxhiademi's work from this point of view, the reason why in the 20th century an author like him considered literature as a model of 3-4 centuries ago and not later models such as neoclassicism, is naturally explained, especially by a writer who grew up and cultivated in the civilized European environments.

It was precisely this declamation of the syncretism of classical and neoclassical elements that became the cause of the beginning of debates, approvals and disapprovals in the 1930s and 1940s - a debate that, in a way, continues to this day.

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