



III col·loqui internacional del projecte *Mimesi*

LA POÈTICA DE LA IL·LUSTRACIÓ: RAÓ & CÀNON

Universitat de Barcelona 6|7 octubre 2011

UTILITAT

Aut prodesse aut delectare:

límits de la funció educativa a la tragèdia neoclàssica

(limits of educative function in neoclassical tragedy)

Maria PAREDES (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

This lecture focuses on the scope and significance acquired by the concept *utility* in the theoretical discourse on tragedy generated all along the 18th century. Tragedy was, indeed, the dramatic genre chosen to convey, through the aesthetic outfit of the neoclassical canon, the social reforms suggested by enlightened reason.

1. The concept of *utility* in the Aristotelian theoretical discourse on tragedy: definition and associated notions

The fixing of the concept –educative function of the tragic poet, political dimensions of the genre– and the notions associated to utility in the genre's early discourse –*pathos*, *metabolé*, *catharsis*, *propé*, *ofeleia*– reach up to the third chant of Boileau's poetics by means of the Horatian *aut prodesse aut delectare* and Scaliger's innovations.

2. The concept of *utility* in neoclassical tragedy

Luzán limits the concept: utility becomes a key point in his reshaping of the Aristotelian concept as well as of classical tradition and the poetics of the age. He matches it to a generic educative function, an essential poetical utility, a clear moral aim and a suitable political goal. He associates to it the necessary adaptation of the Aristoleian notions –*catharsi* “purifying of passions”; *metabolé* “shifts of fortune”; *pathos* “distress”, *prepon* “decorum” and the formulation of new concepts: dramatic illusion “magic deception”; “good taste”.

3. Interpretative variation on the concept *utility* on neoclassical tragedy poetics

Even though it is not easy to set limits, on the basis of the coordinates established in the previous point, a classification founded on the reflection upon a significant textual corpus –poetics, prefaces, speeches, etc.– related to the object of study is suggested.

a. *Orthodox or classicist* readings:

Follow Luzán or the French poetics and emphasize definite aspects; they follow mainly the reformism of the age (Jaucourt, Montiano, Moratín, Madramany, Marmontel...).

–*Vindictive or apologetical*: in front of the *inutility* of Baroque tragedy, there is a defense of the primacy of the educative character of the new tragedy model over other dramatic genres.

–*Dogmatical or normativist*: it roots the *utility* of the tragedy on the scrupulous respect for the norms and criticises any type of license.

–*Political*: tragic *utility* is subjected to patriotic or monarchic indoctrination.

–*Ethical-civil*: tragic utility is aimed to the ethical formation of individuals as citizens.

b. *Deist* readings:

–*Metaphysical*: attempts to revisit tragedy as a useful tool for reflecting on the human being. Importance of catharsis (Lessing).

–*Philosophical*: tragedy as a useful platform for the diffusion of enlightened reason *per se* –from Voltaire to Lessing.

c. *Alternative or innovative* readings:

the redefinition of the tragic genre (Diderot, Andrés, Almodóvar).

In order to guarantee *utility* it suggests the gradual introduction of topics such as love and sensibility, the widening the scope of spectators and the legitimacy of hybridization of dramatic forms.

d. *Heterodox* reading or the *inutility* of tragedy:

–The transgression of *useless* precepts (from d'Houar to J. J. Rousseau).

–The inutility of tragedy considered as a mean of social and ideological homogenization (J.J.Rousseau).

–Inutility and *perversity* of tragedy, considered as a demagogical tool serving the monarchy and the nobility (Mercier).