
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Plato's State and the Literary Canon: A Comparison

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ABSTRACT

Plato's issue is with "orality," as embodied by "the poet," who is incapable of "telling the truth," but our current concern is with "canonized literature," in which the minority is purposefully disregarded or neglected. As a result, both the poet and canonized literature evade and/or ignore the truth. Plato looks for and sees solutions in "literacy" at his time, where the truth might be traced. We can now look for a place for the marginalized portion of literature –written by powerless, colonized, disregarded, and oppressed people who are able to express themselves and transmit their part of the truth to future generations. The main objective of this article is to analyze and present both issues and try to suggest a solution. And the method will depend on objective analysis and comparison between these two problems to understand them and accordingly contextualize them in the light of time. After all, our current time problematic canon might be solved by representing the minorities and giving them a space in the known canon.

KEYWORDS

Literacy, orality, literature, canon, literary, Plato

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1. Introduction

What separates our era from Plato's is a cultural shift. Plato's dissatisfaction with his time's poets stems from a cultural shift. He wants his society to move away from orality and toward literacy. The cultural studies movement is currently attempting a new cultural revolution with Western canonical literature. The current cultural studies ask for reformulating what has been canonized due to political variables such as race, gender, class, and so on. In this article, Plato's motivations are discussed and summarized. Meanwhile, numerous studies and inquiries have examined whether new cultural forces are ready to abandon canonical literature. Also, this paper will present two problematic issues that have taken place in two different eras; Plato's time and our modern era, two important obstacles that are connected with learning and educating the youth. In this paper, the two eras will be compared and objectively analyzed in light of what has taken place and how it should be handled.

2. Discussion

As the phrase suggests, is there a way to employ the poet's characteristics to promote ideals and disclose the truth? In the argument that follows, I will attempt to answer this topic as well as other connected concerns. Plato considers most of the poet's liars in Book II of *The Republic*. Because they are ineffective information carriers, they pay no attention to telling the truth. As a result, he asks for the establishment of "a censorship of the fiction authors" (Plato II, 62), i.e. poets. People memorize poetry to maintain and convey their cultures' values and customs with the least amount of interpretation and analysis. As a result, the oral state of mind opposes logic, experience, and analysis. Instead of remembering, Plato wants the guards of his Ideal State to reconsider, examine, and assess; "they should become the 'subject' who stands apart from the 'object'" (Havelock 47). This is, after all, the problem with modern education: pupils are conditioned to be 'passive'.

In our day, "literature departments were being taken over by 'urban guerillas,' who are not really interested in literature at all and view it merely as a tool of oppression," as Gerald Graff (1992) points out (19). By "deliberately failing to introduce them [the youth]

to the history and literature in which those values are embodied," these guerillas want to wipe established values and mores of Western civilization from people's minds (Graff 20). In short, they are more concerned with power and hegemony than with literary beauty, truth, and aesthetic characteristics. This is where the issue arises. By the way, this issue is not exclusive to the Western canon; the causes of the problem in western civilization may be found in every society.

Plato criticizes poetry at his time and gives reasons for his criticism. Plato first conveys his dissatisfaction with the content of poetry that entices the minds. Yet, Plato acknowledges "Homer is the greatest of poets and the first of tragedy writers" (X, 301). He criticizes poetry because it portrays God as flawed, presents ancient heroes as corrupt and cowardly, and portrays the afterlife as a bleak, unappealing place. This poetry encourages corruption (images of God and forefathers are shattered in the eyes of the youth) while also expressing emotions and sensations. The guardians will not be inspired to fight and die for the Republic by such poetry. Furthermore, poetry arouses emotions and hinders reason, which, according to Plato, is the only path to truth. Plato does indeed impose his idealism here, ignoring and erasing the 'other.'

Plato does not, however, exclude all poets from his Republic. Those who are serious in their poetry are admitted to Plato's Ideal State; in his words, he admits "hymns to the gods and praises of famous men" (Plato X, 301) into his state. Plato attempts to use poets in this way in order to achieve what he believes in through those 'serious' poets. Plato, in fact, is concerned about the poets' influence on the youth. As a result, Plato's concerns are instructive: "Our story shall be the education of our heroes" (Plato II, 61). His educational story is the long story of all nations, cultures, and powers throughout history; education is the emphasis of those who have power and authority, regardless of that power and authority. In today's schools, the cultural studies movement is attempting to modify, if not change, the Western canon.

Second, Plato associates the poets with the issue of "mimesis" (imitation). The poet creates a superficial imitation of a carpenter's bed (Plato's example), which is actually an imitation of the ideal bed. As a result, the poet is twice as far from the ideal form, namely, the truth. As a result, Plato sees him as a deceptive and poor information carrier. In Plato's Ideal State, such a poet is not intended to be allowed. Here, Plato ignores creativity, which is the most important aspect of the influence on the youth.

Plato attacks poetry, which is important to Greek education, for the reasons stated above, whereas cultural studies, such as feminism, criticize the current Western canon for reasons that are similar in nature. Unfortunately, when they assault the 'conventional' canon, they apply the same restrictions as the canon's guardians, excluding the 'other.' The term "canon" is used to distinguish "important" works and authors from "minor" works and authors. Authors like Milton, Shakespeare, and Chaucer, for example, have a place in the canon of English literature. Classical Greek, Latin, and English literature are very prevalent in college curricula in the West and elsewhere because of the strong influence these civilizations have had and continue to have on other cultures today; cultural studies have recently attacked this canon for ideological and political reasons such as racism, class, gender, and so on. However, the most popular claim is that the Western canon was created and approved by a group of white male critics and educators who purposefully excluded and neglected the "other." As a result, this canon reflects these guardians' interests. Other minorities, such as blacks, Native Americans, women, and others, are left out.

This accusation causes the emergence of defendants and opponents of the traditional Western canon. The cultural studies accusation does, in fact, open up certain possibilities:

- 1-Expanding humanities curricula to incorporate a diverse range of works;
- 2-Establishing additional oppositional canons, such as the black canon, feminist canon, and so on.
- 3-Denying the concept of canon and refusing to distinguish between works, whatever they are (see Childers (1995) pp. 37-38 for these alternatives).

In any case, Plato has chosen to reject the 'orality' of his day. However, in today's cultural studies movement, it's worth noting that traditional canonical books are the subjects of increasing research. In reality, those canonical texts have shaped Western Culture (Childers 38). Furthermore, the quantity and quality of literature and art generated by all people are used to assess their greatness.

In a nutshell, the following is a comparison between the status of poetry in Plato's time and the standing of the Western canon in our time:

To begin with, both Plato's and cultural studies' critiques are retorts. Plato reacts to oral culture and calls for a shift from 'orality' —for its negative aspects — to literacy (writing as far as Plato is concerned). The current cultural studies movement is asking for a look at the current Western canon and a place in it for its members; they want their views to be heard.

Second, they are both political in some way. Plato's challenge to 'orality' has a political component for the title. *The Republic* is a

term that refers to a state and the way it is organized. Furthermore, Plato speaks as an authoritarian who is willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of his Ideal State, including creativity and artistic freedom. The conventional canon's current difficulties are mostly political in nature, stemming from women and other minorities demanding their rights and their voices to be heard. Furthermore, there are analogies between Plato's censorship of poetry and the restriction of literature by some modern authorities, particularly when some guardians fall under the influence of minorities. As a result, various restrictions on literature may be imposed.

Third, what Paulo Freire (1996) calls "banking education" in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a shared theme between Plato's attack on poetry and the current cultural movement's attack on the Western canon. Though Plato criticizes Homer's banking educational system, he instructs his Republic's guardians on what they should learn. As a result, while attempting to abolish the old system, Plato engages in a different type of "banking education" for his Ideal State. Different banking educational systems established by the ruling class are accessible today all across the world. Cultural studies attempt to persuade these guardians to reformulate the canon, at least in some nations. Whenever their influence works, the official authorities in question put it into practice in the form of "banking education," as Freire calls it. Hence, we expose our youth to what we want them to get exposed to.

Fourth, both Plato's and the cultural studies movement's arguments are contradictory in some way. Plato contradicts his theory when he demands on a unique 'guardian' education to be banked into leaders, even while he asks for analytical, abstract inquiry, i.e. problem-solving of the old Homeric banking system. On the other hand, the cultural studies movement contradicts itself in that it calls for eliminating the Western canon from the minds of young and creating a distance between the individual and his or her culture while also attempting to provide the individual with his or her identity. There is no identity without tradition, which is shaped and formed by those powerful and important structures.

3. Conclusion

Plato's reasoning, in general, ties us to the beginning of Western Metaphysics. Plato's argument is a reaction to the prevalent 'orality' in his period. It is necessary for us to read him to grasp how cultural shifts occur and identify the influence of cultures on one another. On the other hand, young generations must be exposed to the history and literature that shaped Western society and represented its values. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the political dimensions of race, gender, country, and so on, one should focus on the truth, beauty, and aesthetic characteristics that may be found in studying the classic canon. As a result, the solution to "today's cultural conflict" (Graff 12) is to consider all issues. Cultural studies courses should be in conversation with "conventional ones" (Graff 13). We must become pragmatic, strive to understand one another and connect the youth to their heritage at the same time.

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