

Irine Darchia (Tbilisi)

## FOR COMPOSITIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PLATO'S PHAEDO

The individuality and the high artistic value of a literary work are determined by various important factors. The architectonic of a literary work, i.e. its structure, should be examined for the first. It's impossible to study thoroughly the art of any author without clearing up the structural peculiarities and certain composition principles of each work separately. For this purpose the newest direction of studies – structural analysis – is to be adopted.

Let us recall, that “The structural analysis methods have become quite fundamental in the classical philology. If we take Greek literature of the archaic and classical periods, one can notice that structural analysis touched all essential authors and works to a certain extent. The studies made of Greek epic poetry and of Homer first of all are especially fruitful and interesting. Of course, not all structuralistic studies have traced the classical philology perceptibly. But in our mind, we aren't false if we say that some of these studies give us new ways, new tendencies for a more objective and fundamental understanding of literary processes in Antiquity, for a clearer interpretation of the most important works”.<sup>1</sup>

Plato's heritage, namely the problem of his dialogues' compositional organization, isn't properly studied yet, but such a many-sided author's works, presumably, will give us exceptional and interesting material.

It should be mentioned, that Plato's dialogues' structure is usually studied not so much for clearing up their composition peculiarity and Plato's writing principles as for chronological purposes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Гордезиани Р. В., Проблемы гомеровского эпоса, Тбилиси, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars think, that earlier, the so-called Socratic dialogues are characterized by more simple structure, but then Plato complicates the structure gradually. On this prob-

There has been an attempt to study the structure of *Republic*, though independent from the chronological purposes, but it still doesn't aim to study this dialogue's composition. Namely, H. Kuhn in the II-X books of *Republic*, analyzing the relationship between Greek Tragedy and Plato, clears up the principle of the symmetrical distribution of information and uses it to make the aim and enthusiasm of the work clearer.<sup>3</sup>

Plato's dialogues are formally divided into two groups, according as the work has a direct dialogue shape or it represents the dialogue narrated by a certain personage. The two terms are used to designate them: indirect, reported, narrated, "dihegmatic" dialogue (it contains the dialogue reported by an imaginative author) and direct, dramatic dialogue (it reports the dialogue directly, without an imaginative author).

Such a classification of Plato's dialogues' structure is acceptable of course, but its aim is more to group the works formally than to understand the compositions fundamentally.

In my present work, I'll try to clear up the compositional peculiarity of *Phaedo* by analyzing its structure.

Discoursing on the composition of *Phaedo*, to my mind, we have to take into consideration one essential factor – the genre peculiarity of this work – the fact that *Phaedo* is a philosophical dialogue, that is, the dialogue, the conversation, the discourse (reasoning) is determinative, while the action is in the background at first sight.

Analyzing the composition of the work, the scholars single out so-called mental blocs, that is, they divide the passages proceeding from the reported philosophical content. This principle isn't always kept thoroughly and so, we receive the composition variants of *Phaedo* in which the so-called dialogue and descriptive parts, that is, discourse (reasoning) and action elements are mixed.

The scholars pay more attention to the discourse than to the action, but we should take into consideration both factors, because if we take notice of the philosophical reasoning only, we will not be able to understand what literary principles and writing devices determine the compositional integrity of the work. In my opinion, we should direct our attention to the less striking factor – to the development of the action first in order to understand the architectonic of the work better.

Analyzing this issue, we must choose the action development stages as the structural elements, that is, we have to pay more attention to what is happening than to what the personages are talking about. First we have to

lem see: Thesleff H., *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Helsinki – Helsingfors, 1982, 58 – 56.

<sup>3</sup> Thesleff H., *op. cit.*, 36 – 37.

deliberate the action development structure (the work's skeleton) – narrative frame, and then the philosophical part itself, the so-called discourse (reasoning) composition, i.e. by what principle and sequence are distributed the philosophical-mythological and ethical problems in the work.

The plot of *Phaedo*, according to the action development and to the characters, participating in it, can be divided into separate fragments.

1) The work begins with the conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates. Its course is determined by Echecrates' questions concerning Socrates' death and his last days spent in prison. (Echecrates wants to learn everything in detail: whether Phaedo was present at Socrates' death or not; why Socrates was not punished just as the sentence dictated; what he said when dying, how he behaved, from the friends who were with him...). This passage has the character of an exposition and we can conditionally call it: *Exposition. The First Conversation of Phaedo and Echecrates* (57a-59c7).

2) Phaedo begins to relate. First he describes, so to say, everyday details concerning Socrates in prison (How he and his friends used to visit Socrates; how that fatal day came and what the situation was in prison). Let's call this descriptive part of the work: *Socrates in Prison before the Philosophical Dialogue* (59c8-60b3).

3) Socrates begins the conversation and the descriptive part of the account moves gradually to the philosophical dialogue. Simmias and Cebes take part in the conversation mainly (There is the shade of the image of Crito delivering to Socrates the servant's message about having poison (63d5-e1; 63e3-5). Simmias and Cebes either agree or disagree with Socrates; they express their own position by short remarks, by several words or they discourse more widely and present their objections). Let's name this passage: *The Beginning of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue* (60b3-88c1).

It should be noted that C. Rowe picks out separately the lines 84c1-85e2 in this fragment and names them "Interlude"<sup>4</sup>. Here Simmias and Cebes confess to Socrates that his argumentation is not persuasive enough for them and the philosopher encourages them to express their contradictions. The passage, held by C. Rowe as an interlude, is placed by me separately in *Phaedo*'s so-called dialogue part, as I consider it to be a certain stage and inseparable part of the philosophical reasoning.

4) Phaedo comments on the existing situation, the doubts of Simmias and Cebes; tells us the thoughts and feelings of the personages followed

<sup>4</sup> Rowe C. J. (ed.), *Plato, Phaedo*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

by the reciprocal reaction of Echecrates. The narration of Socrates' and his friends' dialogue is temporarily interrupted by the next conversation of Phaedo and Echecrates, that is a certain transitional step to further stage of the philosophical reasoning. Let's call this passage: *Interlude. The Second Conversation of Phaedo and Echecrates (The Comments on the First Part of the Philosophical Dialogue) (88c1-89a8)*.

5) Phaedo continues to narrate. First he relates us his conversation with Socrates by means of which the philosopher paves the way for further argumentation and later the discourse is again renewed (See the passage reported above: *The Beginning of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue*). Let's call this passage: *The Continuation of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue (89a9-102a1)*.

C. Rowe considers the lines 88c1-91c5 of this fragment to be an Interlude as well. The part 88c1-89a8 of this extract, that is, the second conversation of Phaedo and Echecrates I discuss separately as a unit with an independent meaning. I link the other lines 89a9-91c5, that is, the conversation between Socrates and Phaedo with the so-called dialogue part, as I consider them to be the preparative stage of Socrates' discussion in answer to Simmias and Cebes. I think them to be necessary attributes of the dialogue part.

6) Socrates exposes the contradictions of Simmias and Cebes, which is followed by Echecrates' reaction in return. The narration is interrupted again by the conversation with Phaedo, which marks a certain crisis in the argumentation. Let's call this passage: *Interlude. The Third Conversation of Phaedo and Echecrates (The Comments on the Second Part of the Philosophical Dialogue) (102a2-10)*.

7) Then Phaedo returns to Socrates' and his friends' dialogue, which comes to the philosopher's monologue gradually. Socrates tells us the ethical-cosmological myth. I don't distinguish this passage as a separate unit, because Socrates uses the mythos to support his argument and therefore, I discuss it in connection with the so-called dialogue part. Let's name this fragment: *The End of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue (102a10-116a)*.

8) Little by little the work comes to the end. Phaedo returns to the descriptive details of the narration. He describes in detail the last hours spent by Socrates in prison, the philosopher's and his friends' actions and in the end – Socrates' death. Let's call this passage: *Socrates' Last Hours Spent in Prison after the Philosophical Dialogue (116a2-118a14)*.

9) At the end Phaedo applies to Echecrates again. The work which began with the conversation of these characters ends with their appear-

ance again. Let's call this fragment: *Phaedo's Last Words to Echecrates* (118a15-17).

One can see that according to the development of the action in *Phaedo* nine parts can be distinguished and a certain regularity is obvious. Only a few characters figure in the work: *Phaedo*, whose narration is the basis of the whole creation; *Echecrates*, who sometimes appears as a participator in the dialogue with *Phaedo* and sometimes as a passive listener; *Socrates* himself, who actually holds the philosophical dialogue and proves the soul's immortality both from the philosophical and from the mythological point of view; *Simmias* and *Cebes*, who take part in the philosophical dialogue directly; *Crito*, the guard, and *Xanthippe*, *Socrates'* wife, who appears only episodically in *Phaedo's* so-called descriptive parts.

The development of the action is actually determined by the interchange of these characters. They are changing and the scene is changing accordingly – the conversation comes to the action, the action to the discussion and vice versa. Sometimes we listen to the dialogue taking place in Athens or in Phlius. Sometimes we watch the actions of the philosopher and his friends. The structure, consisting of nine parts, is made by the interchanging of these three “scenes”.

Actually, the play is performed before our eyes, where the “scene” of three types succeed each other. But by what sequence and principles do they interchange? If we consider each scene as an element of the work's structure and if we construct the scheme using them, we'll be able to clear up the principle by which structural elements are distributed. Let's mark each type of “picture” (scene) with the letters A, B, C accordingly.

A) *Phaedo* and *Echecrates* participate (Exposition A1, two Interludes A2, A3, Conclusion A4).

B) The description of *Socrates'* actions in prison before and after the philosophical dialogue (B1, B2) (the so-called descriptive part).

C) The philosophical dialogue between *Socrates* and his friends (its Beginning C1, Continuation C2, End C3) (the so-called dialogue part).

The unity of the A, B and C elements makes a structure with nine parts:

A) Exposition. The First Conversation of *Phaedo* and *Echecrates*

B) *Socrates* in Prison before the Philosophical Dialogue

C) The Beginning of *Socrates'* and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue

A) Interlude. The Second Conversation of *Phaedo* and *Echecrates* (The Comments on the First Part of the Philosophical Dialogue)

C) The Continuation of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue

A) Interlude. The Third Conversation of Phaedo and Echecrates (The Comments on the Second Part of the Philosophical Dialogue)

C) The End of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue

B) Conclusion. Socrates Last Hours Spent in Prison after the Philosophical Dialogue

A) Phaedo's Last Words to Echecrates.

As we see, the monolithic structure is made by the following repetition: element A four times, element B twice, element C three times. Element A as the exposition, two interludes and the conclusion makes a certain prop in the structure. Element A unites the whole dialogue, but at the same time breaks up the so-called dialogue part itself (which I've marked as C), which is represented by a triad accordingly.

By element B, inserted at the beginning and end of the structure, the spirit of symmetry is created, which is increased by elements CA rhythmically interchanging in the structure.

The so-called dialogue part with two interludes (that is, interchanging of the CA elements' whole complex – CACAC) makes a certain center, around which the A and B elements are symmetrically placed and the structure is counterbalanced by them. A certain mixture of the parallel division and circle symmetry is presented in the dialogue part itself (by the interchanging of philosophical discussion and interludes).

What is the length correlation between the structure-making elements? The beginning of Socrates' and his friends' philosophical dialogue (C1) exceeds its continuation (C2) and the end (C3), which are nearly the same length, twice over.

The exposition also outnumbered the interludes having the same quantity (A2,A3) and the conclusion (A4), which presents the shorter element. To the description of Socrates' actions and everyday details is given twice as much space after the philosophical dialogue than before it. The length of the dialogue part itself is about nine times greater than the total size of the other elements, which underlines the genre peculiarity of the work once more – the main role of the discussion, dialogue.

As the analysis shows, Plato provides the original, complicated and interesting structure, with its props, uniting and counterbalancing elements. The circle symmetry and parallel division principles are provided at the same time. Their original mixture is given here. The center of the structure is the whole complex of the elements distributed by the circle symmetry and parallel division principles (CACAC). One of the elements (A)

appears as a prop of the whole structure. At the same time around this circle (CACAC) the A and B elements are distributed according to the circle symmetry.

There is a close content, semantic and emotional connection between the passages of *Phaedo* (that is, between the structure-making elements). The structure of *Phaedo* can be imagined as a pattern and its constituting threads are closely connected to each other by the peculiar rule characteristic of this pattern only. Neither a phrase, nor an episode can be taken or shifted without destroying the composition pattern. Each passage arises from the foregoing one and inevitably needs the next one as well. Each episode continues the previous one and paves the way for the next passage. At the same time there is a logical connection within each fragment.

Let's discuss how the logical connection between the structure-making elements – exposition, conclusion, interludes, so-called dialogue and descriptive parts – is made.

The exposition, that is, the first conversation of *Phaedo* and Echechrates (A), paves the way for the events reported in the work and for the philosophical discussion. The author's aim is clarified in the exposition: It is to report Socrates' last day in prison – what the philosopher did (B) and what he said (C).

*Phaedo* begins to narrate. First he describes the atmosphere in prison. He relates the emotional state of the philosopher and his friends. To understand the reason for these contradictory sentiments, it's necessary to discuss the essence of the philosopher and his philosophy, which is logically connected to the soul's immortality and the proper philosophical problems. Accordingly, the descriptive part of the work (B1) gradually comes to the philosophical reasoning (C). The compositional peculiarity existing in this fragment itself, i.e. in the so-called dialogue part, that is, the distribution principle of the philosophical-mythological information and the function of the interludes (A2, A3) will be touched on below, in the discourse (reasoning) composition analysis.

After the soul's immortality has been showed up both from the philosophical and from the mythological-mystic point of view, the reader is psychologically and spiritually ready to learn about the death of Socrates. He will be able to appraise the philosopher's calmness before the punishment at its true worth, to see the philosopher's afterlife in its proper perspective.

The dialogue part of the narration (C) comes to the description of everyday details prison (B2), as it were. This fragment responds to the episode with the same content (B1) at the beginning of the work. *Phaedo* tells

us of Socrates' last hours, the philosopher's and his friends' spiritual state, their words and Socrates preparation for death (B2) in detail.

Finishing his narration, Phaedo applies to Echecrates again. The work begun by the conversation of these two personages (A1) ends by their imaginative conversation (A4) as well. The work is united and integrated.

I have made a structural analysis of the development of the action in *Phaedo*. But as I marked above, I'm going to lay the stress upon so-called dialogue part, the regularity of philosophical reasoning.

The discourse on the essence of the philosopher and the philosophy is directly connected to the problem of the soul and body interrelation. Its arguments are also connected to each other having a causal-resulting relationship. The philosophical conceptions of knowledge acquiring and the soul's internal circularity, the philosophical categories of the interchange of opposites and the equality of subjects, the theory of ideas, the mythological notions of Heaven, Earth and Nether World follow and distinct from one another and proceed from each other.

I'll shortly discuss how the mythological-mythic information is represented in *Phaedo*.

First we must note the principle of the distribution of the proofs of the soul's immortality, as there are many points of view on this issue in modern scholarship. The critics locate these proofs within the different limits<sup>5</sup>.

The first argument becomes localized in nearly the same part of the dialogue (70c4-72e2 C. Rowe, 69e6-72e1 D. Gallop, F. Schleiermacher, 70c-72e A. Losev).

The second argument gives rise to a certain problem. F. D. E. Schleiermacher calls it *additional argument* (72e-78a) and he marks out not four, but three pieces of evidence consequently and so he contradicts the majority of scholars. Other scholars place this argument nearly in the same limits (72e3-78b3 D. Gallop, 73a-78a A. Losev, 72e3-77a5 C. Rowe).

The third argument causes different points of view as well. F. Schleiermacher considers it to be the second argument (78b-82b), but A. Losev, unlike other scholars, places the doubts of Simmias and Cebes and their objections, that is, the soul harmony theory, in the limits of this argument (78b-96a). In my opinion, the other scholars' position is more acceptable. It's more justified to discuss this passage separately from the

<sup>5</sup> The localization of the arguments, made by other scholars see in the following editions: Gallop D. (ed.), *Plato, Phaedo*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975; Лосев А. Ф. (ред.), *Платон, Сочинения*, т. II, Москва, 1970; Rowe C. J., *op. cit.*; *Platon, Werke*, Band II. 3, in der Übersetzung von F. D. E. Schleiermacher, Berlin, 1987.



third argument, as it represents not so much the evidence-making element, as the preparatory stage and transitional step of the following argument (78b4- 84b8 D. Gallop, C. Rowe).

The localization of the fourth evidence is crucial as well. Within the fourth argument A. Losev places the fragment 96a-102a, where the soul harmony theory is exposed – opposing to the naturephilosophy and introducing the theory of ideas – that according to the correct indication of C. Rowe is its preliminary, not the fourth evidence part<sup>6</sup>. Proceeding from it, I consider the opinion of C. Rowe and other scholars to be more justified and logical and than that of A. Losev (102a10-107b10 D. Gallop, C. Rowe, F. Schleiermacher).

A decisive importance is attached to the arguments' distribution principle in the philosophical problems of *Phaedo*. In this case I held it to be necessary to express my standpoint on this issue in order to place the arguments with validity, while discussing *Phaedo*'s so-called dialogue part (C), that is, the discourse composition.

In *Phaedo* the philosophical-mythological and ethical problems are represented as follows:

C1) *The Beginning of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue* (60b3-88c).

Two views of death

Soul and body from the point of view of Truth cognition (64b-70b)

Philosopher's living principle (67b-69e)

The first argument (70c4-72e2)

The second argument (72e3-77a5)

The conclusions on the fate of souls, importance of philosophizing (82c-84b)

A theory: the soul as a harmony (85e-86e)

C2) *The Continuation of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue* (89a9-102a1)

The unmasking of the theory: the soul as a harmony (89a-95a)

The thoughts of the naturephilosophers (95a-97b)

The teaching of Anaxagoras (97b-99d)

The theory of ideas (99d-102a)

C3) *The End of Socrates' and His Friends' Philosophical Dialogue* (102a10-116a)

The fourth argument (102a10-107b10)

The ethical conclusions on the living principles (107a-107d)

<sup>6</sup> Rowe C.J. (ed.), op. cit., 227.

The myth of the afterlife fate of souls (107d-108c)

The Earth description (108c-109b)

The True Earth description (110b-111c)

Hades, the system of the subterranean streams (111c-113c)

The afterlife fate of souls (113d-114c)

As mentioned above, the sequence of subjects in the dialogue fragments themselves is determined by the logic of philosophical reasoning, on the basis of which the issues are compositionally distributed in the narrative frame. Or rather, this frame itself is conformable to the discourse necessity.

As I indicated, the philosophical reasoning, by inserted two interludes, makes a certain triad (C1A2C2A3C3). Let's discuss this triad character and the function of the interludes.

Actually, the philosophical dialogue is twice interrupted. First when the theory of the soul as a harmony (A2) is introduced and later when Socrates expounds it and his rivals acknowledge their defeat (A3).

By inserting the conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates (with two interludes) twice in the work (A2, A3), Plato concentrates the readers' attention upon the present stage of the discussion development. For the first time the "Interlude" is introduced when Socrates is at a deadlock and for the second time when he exposes triumphally his opponents' arguments.

The two interludes make the accent on the central dialogue part (C2), located among them. Here Socrates expounds the theory of soul harmony, provides the thoughts of naturephilosophers and introduces the theory of ideas. By inserting the conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates (i.e. two interludes), is marked out the fragment where the old theory has been defeated and the new one has been founded. Accordingly, it shows the victory of the Socratic-Platonic philosophy.

What sense do the reasoning stages, i.e. C1C2C3 elements, bear?

In the beginning of the dialogue part (C1) the way is paved for the philosophical argumentation. Then come the first three arguments for the soul's immortality and their logical conclusions that are followed by the theory: the soul as a harmony.

At the next stage of the discourse (C2) the theory of the harmony of the soul is expounded, the naturephilosophy is criticized and the theory of ideas is introduced. This fragment is not only the center of the structure, but the culmination of the philosophical reasoning as well.

The fourth argument enters at the last stage of the discourse (C3). After reproducing all the evidence for the soul's immortality, the discussion

approaches its logical end. Then enters the concluding myth, that is the supporting material for the philosophical argumentation. By its content and aim the myth arises from the dialogue's ethical-philosophical problems and responds to them.

As we see, the thematic of the beginning of the dialogue (C1) is more various. The whole spectrum of the philosophical statements is shown up and the philosophical reasoning of proving enthusiasm is represented here. The continuation of the dialogue (C2) is more critical. The new ideas arise by the condemnation of old ones and the discourse approaches its culmination as well. At the end of the dialogue (C3) the philosophical discussion comes to an end and the concluding myth introduces the mythological-mystic ground.

Analyzing the structure of *Phaedo*, I tried to show what writing devices determine the architectonic peculiarity of the work, that is, how this dialogue's compositional integrity is made technically.

What can be said about the compositional organization of *Phaedo* as a result? The structural analysis of this work – the delimitation of its descriptive and reasoning (discourse) parts, the consideration of the compositions of the action and reasoning (discourse) separately – showed me that *Phaedo* can be seen as a triptych, as interchange of three pictures. It represents an original, complicated and interesting structure. There is a close logical connection between its composing elements, i.e. among exposition, conclusion, interludes and so-called reasoning, more precisely, the descriptive parts of *Phaedo*. On the basis of these elements the monolithic structure is constructed. The philosophical-ethical problems are distributed proceeding from the logic of the philosophical discourse and from the necessity of the arguments for the soul's immortality.

As my present work has shown, *Phaedo* refers to the so-called dramatic dialogue type and it's constructed not only according to the regularity characteristic of a philosophical treatise, but it represents a refined work of art by its compositional organization.

A certain narrative frame is presented in *Phaedo*, to which the philosophical reasoning seems to be submitted. Actually, this narrative frame is constructed to integrate and unite the philosophical discussion, to accentuate the proper passages and to mobilize the reader's attention.

The structure analysis of *Phaedo* once more showed that in this work Plato presents himself not only as a great philosopher, but as an excellent writer, as a master of the work's compositional organization as well. It's interesting how the compositional organization of Plato's other works shows his writing skills.

What can be said about the compositional peculiarity of other dialogues? Unfortunately, we aren't able to answer this question completely and to make a generalized conclusion, because this problem hasn't been studied properly yet. As for the future perspective, in my opinion, if we study the composition of Plato's other works by using the structural analysis methods, that will give us the possibility for a more thorough understanding and new interpretation of this philosopher's literary heritage.