SKENÈ

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

2:1 2016

Catharsis, Ancient and Modern

Edited by Gherardo Ugolini

Executive Editor	Guido Avezzù.
General Editors	Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliazzi, Alessandro Serpieri.
Editorial Board	Simona Brunetti, Lisanna Calvi, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Gherardo Ugolini.
Managing Editor	Lisanna Calvi.
Assistant Managing Editor	Francesco Lupi.
Copyeditors	Marco Duranti, Flavia Palma, Carlo Vareschi, Tobia Zanon.
Layout Editor	Alex Zanutto.
Advisory Board	Anna Maria Belardinelli, Anton Bierl, Enoch Brater, Jean-Christophe Cavallin, Marco De Marinis, Tobias Döring, Pavel Drábek, Paul Edmondson, Keir Douglas Elam, Ewan Fernie, Patrick Finglass, Enrico Giaccherini, Mark Griffith, Stephen Halliwell, Robert Henke, Pierre Judet de la Combe, Russ McDonald, Guido Paduano, Franco Perrelli, Didier Plassard, Donna Shalev, Susanne Wofford.

Copyright © 2016 SKENÈ
All rights reserved.
ISSN 2421-4353

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means
without permission from the publisher.
SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
http://www.skenejournal.it
info@skenejournal.it

Andrew L. Ford*

Catharsis, Music, and the Mysteries in Aristotle

Abstract

Of the many meanings of catharsis available to Aristotle, two have predominated in scholarly attempts to say what the word means in the *Poetics* when "the catharsis of pity and fear produced by pity and fear" is defined as the aim of tragedy. The past thirty years have seen a concerted effort among scholars of the *Poetics* to overturn Jacob Bernays's appeal to Aristotle's use of catharsis in his *Politics* (1342a10-11) with its medical meaning of 'purgation' as the basis of his theory that tragedy provides a harmless 'outlet' for emotions; against this, Plato's notion of intellectual 'purification' as a kind of catharsis has been invoked to argue that the workings of the tragic art were fundamentally cognitive and resulted in the ethical 'clarification' of the audience. The present essay proposes that Aristotle's theory of tragedy was deeply informed by another meaning of the word in his day: the ecstatic release provided by certain mystery cults. After underlining Aristotle's familiarity with such rituals, it draws on Walter Burkert's *Ancient Mystery Cults* to bring out suggestive commonalities between mystery initiations and theatre. The 'telestic' 'initiations' (τέλη) aimed not at the afterlife but at alleviating fears and anxieties of initiates; both their secret nocturnal ceremonies and public choral processions were dramatic and highly theatrical, with an essential role played by ecstasy-inducing 'sacred tunes'. In order to discern the relevance of telestic catharsis to the Poetics it is necessary not to focus solely on the definition of tragedy in chapter 6 but to appreciate the anthropological approach to the poetic arts in chapter 4. This context supplies, if not a fully worked out model of tragic catharsis, a broad-based explanation of how human beings might respond to imitations of terrible things with pleasure and profit.

Olympias of Macedon, daughter of a king of Epirus and wife of Philip II, acquired among the ancients a reputation for religious fanaticism. According to Plutarch (*Alexander*, ch. 2), she stood out even among the women of northern Greece – whence the Bacchae had descended to wreak chaos on Thebes, and where Maenads had dismembered blameless Orpheus – in their addiction to archaic rituals connected with Orpheus and Dionysus (ἔνοχοι τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς οὖσαι καὶ τοῖς περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργιασμοῖς ἐκ τοῦ πάνυ παλαιοῦ, ibid. 2.7). Olympias's attachment to rites that brought on ecstatic frenzy bordered on barbarism and even included furnishing tame snakes to her fellow celebrants (ἡ δ' Ὀλυμπιὰς μᾶλλον ἑτέρων ζηλώσασα τὰς κατοχάς, καὶ τοὺς ἐνθουσιασμοὺς ἐξάγουσα βαρβαρικώτερον, ὄφεις

* Princeton University – aford@princeton.edu

© SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies 2:1 (2016), 23-41
http://www.skenejournal.it

μεγάλους χειροήθεις ἐφείλκετο τοῖς θιάσοις κτλ., ibid. 2.9).[1] Evidently an adept snake-handler, she would join in the wild dancing at those ceremonies with snakes entwined about her body and would provide her co-celebrants with the same to brandish in their processions. Plutarch notes that the spectacle was terrifying to men and speculates that this may be the reason that Philip stopped sleeping with her.

Stories involving the parentage of great kings are bound to be politicized and then distorted, but I am less interested in the prejudices of Plutarch's sources than in how Olympias's conduct may have struck her son when he was in his early teens. If the young Alexander were already contemplating how to administer the empire he would soon win, he might have turned to his tutor to ask what if anything should be done about such alarming religious practices. After all, Euripides had suggested in his *Bacchae*, a play composed for the Macedonian court, that an autocrat who tried to repress the more barbarous aspects of Dionysiac cult was bound to meet disaster, and not least when its devotees were to be found in the royal palace itself. But Alexander's more sober tutor was likely to have replied along the following lines: "A susceptibility to feelings of religious ecstasy (ἐνθουσιασμός) is something that all people are capable of feeling, just as everyone is disposed to feel pity or fear, though people differ in the degree of their susceptibility; now Olympias is obviously one of those people who are, so to speak, in the grip of such states (κατοκώχιμοί), and for them the mystery rituals with their frenzy-inducing sacred tunes (ἱερὰ μέλη) produce a catharsis that puts them back on their feet again after violently arousing their emotions (ἐξοργιάζουσι), almost as if they had gone to a doctor and been treated for an ailment; and along with the relief comes a certain pleasure. Everyone can feel a kind of *katharsis* (τινα κάθαρσιν) at that kind of music, along with a pleasant feeling of relief, to one degree or another; after all, music has the power even to charm snakes. But the resultant pleasure is harmless, a feeling of relief, and is nothing for a prince to trouble himself over very much. Still, if one desires a more thorough account of these matters, one might consult my works on poetry".

Alexander's tutor, of course, was Aristotle, and the response above is, I submit, a fair pastiche of a famous passage from the seventh chapter of *Politics* book 8 in which the philosopher discusses which kinds of tunes and musical modes (*harmoniai*) are to be permitted in a well organized state (8.7, 1341b32-1342a18):

> ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν διαίρεσιν ἀποδεχόμεθα τῶν μελῶν ὡς διαιροῦσί τινες τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ, τὰ μὲν ἠθικὰ τὰ δὲ πρακτικὰ τὰ δ' ἐνθουσιαστικὰ τιθέντες, καὶ

[1] My translation adapts Perrin's Loeb 1919: 228-9. On Olympias, see Carney 2006: ch. 6, esp. 93-4. All translations from Greek are mine unless otherwise stated.

τῶν ἁρμονιῶν τὴν φύσιν <τὴν> πρὸς ἕκαστα τούτων οἰκείαν, ἄλλην πρὸς ἄλλο μέλος, τιθέασι, φαμὲν δ’ οὐ μιᾶς ἕνεκεν ὠφελείας τῇ μουσικῇ χρῆσθαι δεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ πλειόνων χάριν (καὶ γὰρ παιδείας ἕνεκεν καὶ καθάρσεως – τί δὲ λέγομεν τὴν κάθαρσιν, νῦν μὲν ἁπλῶς, πάλιν δ’ ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς ἐροῦμεν σαφέστερον – τρίτον δὲ πρὸς διαγωγὴν πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν), φανερὸν ὅτι χρηστέον μὲν πάσαις ταῖς ἁρμονίαις, οὐ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον πάσαις χρηστέον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς μὲν τὴν παιδείαν ταῖς ἠθικωτάταις, πρὸς δὲ ἀκρόασιν ἑτέρων χειρουργούντων καὶ ταῖς πρακτικαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐνθουσιαστικαῖς. ὃ γὰρ περὶ ἐνίας συμβαίνει πάθος ψυχὰς ἰσχυρῶς, τοῦτο ἐν πάσαις ὑπάρχει, τῷ δὲ ἧττον διαφέρει καὶ τῷ μᾶλλον, οἷον ἔλεος καὶ φόβος, ἔτι δ’ ἐνθουσιασμός· καὶ γὰρ ὑπὸ ταύτης τῆς κινήσεως κατοκώχιμοί τινές εἰσιν, ἐκ τῶν δ’ἱερῶν μελῶν ὁρῶμεν τούτους, ὅταν χρήσωνται τοῖς ἐξοργιάζουσι τὴν ψυχὴν μέλεσι, καθισταμένους ὥσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως· ταὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖον πάσχειν καὶ τοὺς ἐλεήμονας καὶ τοὺς φοβητικοὺς καὶ τοὺς ὅλως παθητικούς, τοὺς δ’ ἄλλους καθ’ ὅσον ἐπιβάλλει τῶν τοιούτων ἑκάστῳ, καὶ πᾶσι γίγνεσθαί τινα κάθαρσιν καὶ κουφίζεσθαιμεθ’ ἡδονῆς.

[Since we accept the classification of tunes made by some philosophers into the ones expressive of ethical states, the action-oriented, and those arousing religious passion (ἐνθουσιαστικά), with the various *harmoniai* assigned to them according to their natural kinship with each, and since we say that music ought to be employed not for the sake of a single benefit but for several (for it serves the purpose of education and of catharsis – the term catharsis we use for the present without elaboration but will discuss it more fully in the work on poetry – and, thirdly, for occasions of leisure to provide relief and release of stress), it is therefore clear that we should make use of all the *harmoniai*, but not all in the same way; the most ethical ones should be used for education, and the active and passion-arousing kinds for listening to when others are performing. For any experience that occurs violently in some souls is found in all, though with different degrees of intensity—for example pity and fear, and also religious ecstasy (ἐνθουσιασμός); for some persons are especially susceptible (κατοκώχιμοί) to this form of emotion, and under the influence of the sacred tunes (ἱερὰ μέλη) we see these people, when they use tunes that thoroughly arouse the soul’s emotions (ἐξοργιάζουσι), being put back on their feet as if they had received medical treatment and been purged (ὥσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως); the same experience then must come also to the compassionate and the timid and to other emotional people in general in such degree as befalls each individual of these classes, and all must undergo a kind of *katharsis* (τινα κάθαρσιν) and a pleasant feeling of relief. (Trans. by H. Rackham, adapted)]

The passage is famous because its discussion of catharsis is the best gloss we have from Aristotle himself on the meaning of that word in the *Poetics*, where it caps the definition of tragedy in chapter 6 (1449b22-7):

περὶ δὲ τραγῳδίας λέγωμεν ἀναλαβόντες αὐτῆς ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων τὸν

γινόμενον ὅρον τῆς οὐσίας. ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.

[Let us speak about tragedy, taking up from what we have said a definition of its nature: tragedy, then, will be an imitation[2] of an action that is serious and complete, having some magnitude, with seasoned language employed separately in its separate parts, with the performers acting and not narrating, bringing to completion through pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions.]

Although Aristotle promised in the *Politics* a "fuller discussion of catharsis in the work on poetry",[3] this brief mention is, apart from a passing reference to Orestes' ritual 'purification' (1455b15), the only occurrence of the term in the *Poetics.* And yet an understanding of the concept it names seems to be crucial to understanding the *Poetics* since its use here implies that the "catharsis of pity and fear" is something of a final cause for Aristotle, naming the function that tragedy, and by extension poetry, serves in human life. Accordingly, what the catharsis in *Poetics* chapter 6 means has been a source of contention since the Renaissance, with some holding that tragedy 'purges' us of harmful and unwanted emotions and others arguing it 'purifies' and even 'clarifies' our moral sentiments; in this debate much has turned on the question of how to apply the evidence from *Politics* or even whether to apply it at all.

In the passage quoted from *Politics* 8.7, Aristotle is concerned to argue that those kinds of rhythms, modes and melodies that were classified by the musical experts of his day as arousing religious frenzy (ἐνθουσιαστικά, 1341b34) have their uses in civic life, but such music is not appropriate everywhere. For example, he had argued earlier in the book that in school such music, along with the aulos on which it was played, actually interfered with learning; he says that the aulos, a reed instrument the Greeks found passionately arousing, produces "a passionate rather than ethical experience in its auditors and so should be used on those occasions that call for catharsis rather than learning",[4] It would seem, then, that the business of enthusiastic

[2] I use the term 'imitate' and its congeners merely as a convenience to designate the family of words related to μιμεῖσθαι. This is not to deny the obvious fact that in Aristotle's conception the 'mimetic arts' are arts of *representing* people in action, not 'copying' them.

[3] *Pol.* 1341b38-40: τί δὲ λέγομεν τὴν κάθαρσιν . . . ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς ἐροῦμεν σαφέστερον.

[4] Ibid. 1341a17-24: ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ αὐλὸς ἠθικὸν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὀργιαστικόν, ὥστε πρὸς τοὺς τοιούτους αὐτῷ καιροὺς χρηστέον ἐν οἷς ἡ θεωρία κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον δύναται ἢ μάθησιν. Excellent commentary on the passages from the *Politics* is provided by Kraut 1997: 192-3, 202, 208-12.

music was a lot more like rock and roll than like Bach.[5] Hence it is worrying to some that following our passage from 8.7 the preeminent example Aristotle gives of an occasion that calls for "catharsis rather than learning" (κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον . . . ἢ μάθησιν) is the theatre: in the sequel to the passage quoted Aristotle explains that where enthusiastic music on the aulos will provide a kind of relief (πρὸς ἀνάπαυσιν) for the spectators (8.7, 1342a16-22):

> διὸ ταῖς μὲν τοιαύταις ἁρμονίαις καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις μέλεσιν ἐατέον <χρῆσθαι> τοὺς τὴν θεατρικὴν μουσικὴν μεταχειριζομένους ἀγωνιστάς· ὁ θεατὴς διττός, ὁ μὲν ἐλεύθερος καὶ πεπαιδευμένος, ὁ δὲ φορτικὸς ἐκ βαναύσων καὶ θητῶν καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων συγκείμενος, ἀποδοτέον ἀγῶνας καὶ θεωρίας καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις πρὸς ἀνάπαυσιν.
>
> [Therefore *harmoniai* and tunes of this (kathartic, 'enthusiastic') kind must be allowed for those who deal with music as professionals in the theatre; for the audience is double, partly free and educated and partly vulgar, composed of craftsmen and labourers and the like; performances and spectacles should be provided for the latter sort to give them relaxation.]

As Aristotle, with an unappealing jaundiced eye, sees it: working for others and trading with all comers have a distorting effect on soul that warps its evaluation of what is pleasurable; nonetheless, he thinks labourers deserve in their leisure a music that "produces the pleasure that is naturally suited to their natures".[6]

The discussion of ritual catharsis in the context of theatre in *Politics* 8 has engendered a controversy especially since Jacob Bernays (1857) used it to argue for an 'outlet' theory of catharsis, taking advantage of Aristotle's description of the effects of musical catharsis as "like receiving medical treatment and being purged" (1342a10-11: ὥσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως). Bernays' model of purging excessive feelings has been criticized for its un-Aristotelian, negative view of the emotions and for its un-Aristotelian reliance on a homeopathic model of medicine; but to my mind his essay remains nonetheless a powerful rebuttal to more recent attempts to attribute to Aristotle, as many scholars since have been wont to do, a view of tragic catharsis as an essentially cognitive process in which the spectator experiences an ethical 'clarification', to borrow, as this view does, a metaphorical use of *catharsis* in Plato.[7] In short, there is a return to

[5] Schadewaldt (1955: 153) takes the passage quoted from *Pol.* in the previous note as a decisive refutation of the idea that the experience of tragedy refines our moral sentiments; so too Ford 2004: 325-8. For modern attempts to resist this conclusion see Lord 1982: 112, Janko 1987: 182-3.

[6] Arist. *Pol.* 1342a25-6: ποιεῖ δὲ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἑκάστοις τὸ κατὰ φύσιν οἰκεῖον.

[7] E.g. *Soph.* 227c. 230c; *Phaedo* 67c, 69b; cf. Golden 1992 and Nussbaum 1992: 270, 273.

a Lessing-like view that the final cause of poetry for Aristotle is a moral kind of *catharsis* in the sense of 'purification'.[8] This return would seem to be ruled out if we understand the catharsis provided by tragedy in the *Poetics* in terms of the cathartic, enthusiastic music of religious ritual described in the *Politics*, for in a suggestive fragment Aristotle is said to have held that the purpose of undergoing mystic initiation is not to learn anything (μαθεῖν) but to experience something (παθεῖν), to undergo a change of mental state (διατεθῆναι) that enables one to cope with life.[9] Rather than going into the *Politics* again in detail (see Ford 2004), I wish to see what difference it makes if we reflect that of the many meanings that catharsis could bear – simple cleaning, ritual cleansing, medical purgation[10] – ritual catharsis through music was an experience with which the Stargirite was quite familiar. I propose that Bernays was right to reject Lessing's view of tragedy as 'a moral house of correction', but we need not take on the physiological reductiveness of Bernays' model (Destrée 2011: 49-51); after all, medical purgation is only an analogy in *Politics* 8 (ὥσπερ). But putting Aristotle's account of ritual catharsis beside the *Poetics* highlights suggestive commonalities between mystery initiations and theatre, and should at the least make us hesitate before projecting onto Aristotle an enlightened disdain for such barely civilized religious impulses. Finally, I will address the more important objections that have been raised against bringing the ritual perspective of the *Politics* into the *Poetics.*

The mystical ceremonies Plutarch describes were focused on Dionysus and his votary Orpheus, while Aristotle's mention of the 'sacred tunes' of Olympus points rather to the rites of the Great Mother by her attendants, the Corybants.[11] But both Bacchants and Corybants belong to the same subgroup of sacramental mystery rites called 'telestic'; these were 'initiations' (τέλη) in which 'ministrants' (τελοῦντες) invoked divine powers to serve the needs of 'initiands' (τελούμενοι) (Linforth 1946; Dodds 1957: 77-80). We get a fuller picture of such rites as they were conducted in Athens at about the same time from Demosthenes's *On the Crown* of 330 BC.

Aeschines, Demosthenes' opponent, had a mother something like Olympias and *On the Crown* mocks him for helping her with her initiations.

[8] Recent interpretations with bibliography of catharsis as leading to moral improvement: Halliwell 2011: 236-60; 2002: 172-6. Dissenting voices include Lear (1988) and Ferrari (1999).

[9] Arist. fr. 15, Rose: καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης ἀξιοῖ τοὺς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν τι δεῖν ἀλλὰ παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι, δηλονότι γενομένους ἐπιτηδείους. Cf. Burkert 1987: 69, 89.

[10] For recent studies of the ritual and medical meanings of catharsis in Aristotle's day, see Hoessly (2001) and Vöhler and Seidensticker (2007).

[11] *Pol.* 8.7, 1342a8-9: ἐκ τῶν δ᾽ ἱερῶν μελῶν; cf. 1340a8-14 on the aulos tunes of Olympus, which were acknowledged to make listeners ecstatic.

According to Demosthenes, Aeschines read a sacred book while she performed the ritual and helped the celebrants with their preparations, which involved ritual cleansing (καθαίρων), libations, dressing in fawn-skins and carrying sacred paraphernalia. As for the actual ceremonies involved, Walter Burkert has offered a speculative reconstruction:[12] the nocturnal rite was private and began with the initiands seated by a mixing bowl and smeared with mud; out of the dark an initiatory priestess appeared as if a terrifying demon; once cleansed, the initiates rose to their feet and exclaimed "I escaped from evil, I have found the better" (ἔφυγον κακόν, εὗρον ἄμεινον), to which by-standing participants like Aeschines added the ritual high piercing cry (*ololyge*) as though greeting the epiphany of a divine being. The sacred drama was followed on the next day by a public one as the group of celebrants formed a sacred band (*thiasos*) and paraded through the streets carrying their sacred objects; garlanded and brandishing snakes above their heads, they cried out mystical sacred names, *Euoi* and *Saboi*; their dancing and their triumphant rhythmic cries proclaimed that "terror ha[d] become manageable for the initiate" (Burkert 1987: 97).

Both the fearful ceremonies of the night before and the public choral performance on the following day are highly theatrical, with a close "interdependence of performers and onlookers" in both cases (ibid.: 113). And accompanying it all was a special kind of music designed to induce the state of *enthusiasmos* in initiates: the 'sacred tunes' attributed to the mythical composer Olympus of Phrygia were played on the arousing Phrygian aulos to an insistent rhythm provided by drums, tambourines, and cymbals; the combination of music, singing, shouting, and dance brought the initiands into a state in which they felt themselves to be possessed. At the end of it all, the initiates had a feeling of "calm and tranquillity and their minds were at peace" (Linforth 1946: 156). This was a life-changing experience for those being initiated as well as a stirring (and apparently alarming) one to onlookers. It remains to ask, however, how far Aristotle thought the psychological experience in initiatory ritual was comparable to the catharsis of pity and fear in the theatre of Dionysus. We begin with describing the effects attributed to telestic rites.

Scholars of Greek religion place the rituals with which we have been concerned in a special class of rites whose function was not solely to honour gods but to invoke their powers to secure benefits meeting specific needs of the 'initiands' (τελούμενοι) (Linforth 1946: 155; Burkert 1987: 18-19). In contrast to, for example, the Eleusinian mysteries which prepared initiates for the afterlife, the *teletai* associated with Dionysus and the great Mother

[12] Burkert 1987: 96-7, combining *On the Crown* 18.259-60 with *False Embassy* 19.199, 249, 281.

offered practical benefits in this life: health, wealth, and good fortune were promised, and in addition the initiatory ceremony itself provided, as Aristotle intimates, a kind of therapeutic relief from some undefined psychic distress. Indeed Burkert (1987: 97, 113) speaks of these mysteries as inducing a "psychic transformation" and "a veritable change of consciousness" in the participants.[13] As evidence for the psychology underlying Aristotle's musical catharsis Burkert (ibid.: 113) cites a text on music by the late author Aristides Quintilianus:[14]

> διὸ καὶ τὰς βακχικὰς τελετὰς καὶ ὅσαι ταύταις παραπλήσιοι λόγου τινὸς ἔχεσθαί φασιν, ὅπως ἂν ἡ τῶν ἀμαθεστέρων πτοίησις διὰ βίον ἢ τύχην ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν ταύταις μελῳδιῶν τε καὶ ὀρχήσεων ἅμα παιδιαῖς ἐκκαθαίρηται.
>
> [Accordingly they say that there is a certain logic to Bacchic and similar rites whereby the feelings of anxiety (πτοίησις) felt by less educated people, caused by their way of life or some misfortune, are cleared away (ἐκκαθαίρηται) through the melodies and dances of the ritual in a joyful and playful way.]

Aristides supports Aristotle's recommendation in *Politics* to use 'enthusiastic' music in the theatre as a way of giving relief to the lower sorts of spectators; but the case of Olympias shows that craftsmen and non-citizen labourers were not the only clients for initiatory experts (οἱ τελοῦντες). Plato can add to the picture, for, as I.M. Linforth (1946: 154-7) showed, the Corybantic rites were familiar to Plato and his readers. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates praises those forms of madness whose source is not pathological but divine. The forms of "divine madness" include poetic inspiration, divine prophecy and the madness which cures "diseases and the greatest sufferings in certain families, on account of some ancient cause of wrath".[15] When Plato specifies that these sufferings tend to run in certain families that incurred divine wrath in the distant past, we hear I think the explanations purveyed by the itinerant priests, the *argutai* and *manteis*, who sought wealthy patrons in old Athenian families. In contemporary terms we would say that a susceptibility to anxiety and nervous disorders that can be cured by rites of initiation appears to be a genetic disposition running in certain families for whom a form of psychotherapy can alleviate the effects of trauma buried in the past.

[13] Bukert compares (1987: 97) Plato's description in *Republic* 560d-e of how an oligarchic personality can be converted to a democratic one as a kind of mystical process: an emptying of the soul and a purification (κενώσαντες καὶ καθήραντες) attended by a jubilant chorus crowned with wreaths. On the fifth-century background to the tragic emotions in Plato and Aristotle, see Cerri 2007: 78-95.

[14] Aristides Quintilianus, 3.25.14-19; see Barker 1989: 531. On translating πτοίησις in the text as "anxiety", see Burkert 1987: 171, n. 156.

[15] *Phaedr.* 244d: νόσων γε καὶ πόνων τῶν μεγίστων, ἃ δὴ παλαιῶν ἐκ μηνιμάτων ποθὲν ἔν τισι τῶν γενῶν. Cf. *Phaedr.* 265b, *Laws* 815c and Burkert 1987: 19.

Here we can turn at last to the *Poetics* and ask what the tragic "catharsis of pity and fear produced by pity and fear" has in common with "the thoroughgoing arousal of violent emotion and the feeling of relief mixed with joy that comes over all who resort to telestic rites" (*Pol.* 1342a14-15). On this question I believe that progress is to be made not by bearing down once again on the notorious definition of tragedy on chapter 6 and trying to limit catharsis to a single technical sense, but by turning to chapter 4, Aristotle's excursus into the origins of the poetic arts as a whole. After establishing the kinds and forms that the poetic art has assumed in his day through an inductive diaeresis filling chapters 1-3, Aristotle turns in chapter 4 to consider how poetry arose, a subtle speculation that I will take up in three chunks. He begins (1448b4-9):

> Ἐοίκασι δὲ γεννῆσαι μὲν ὅλως τὴν ποιητικὴν αἰτίαι δύο τινὲς καὶ αὗται φυσικαί. Τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας.
>
> [It is probable to suppose that two causes brought about the art of poetry in general, and these were natural ones. For imitating is an inborn activity of human beings from childhood, and they differ from all other animals in being the most imitative of all and they learn their first lessons from mimesis, and everyone enjoys imitations.]

The crucial feature of this discussion is that Aristotle takes an anthropological approach to poetry. The anthropologist looks for 'causes' (*aitiai*) that are rooted in human nature, and Aristotle does not even mention the old traditions that poetry was a gift of the Muses or Apollo. He hits on two primary causes of poetry: our natural instincts to imitate and to take pleasure in imitations. For poetry to have arisen naturally it was necessary not only that *homo sapiens* be natural imitators, but also that that they take pleasure in the imitations of others, for a poet needs an audience. Aristotle is speculating here (ἐοίκασι) on matters of great antiquity, but he has reasons to give in support of his assumptions. As proof that human beings are natural imitators he points to the fact that children first learn by imitating; the fact that this is the way we get our *first* lessons (τὰς μαθήσεις . . . τὰς πρώτας) suggests that imitating is instinctive rather than learned behaviour.

To confirm the second proposition, that everyone enjoys imitations, Aristotle reasons from everyday experience (1448b9-19):

> σημεῖον δὲ τούτου τὸ συμβαῖνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων· ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὁρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἠκριβωμένας χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν. αἴτιον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅτι μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἥδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτοῦ. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας

ὁρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος· ἐπεὶ ἐὰν μὴ τύχῃ προεωρακώς, οὐχ ᾗ μίμημα ποιήσει τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν ἢ τὴν χροιὰν ἢ διὰ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἄλλην αἰτίαν.

[And experience affords a sign of the truth of this [that we enjoy imitations]: for images of things that we look upon with pain give us pleasure to contemplate when they are very precisely rendered, for example, the shapes of disgusting animals and of corpses. And the cause of this is that learning is not only extremely pleasant for philosophers, but for others too, though they share in it only to a little extent. For this reason people are pleased when they look at images, because it is possible for them to learn something as they consider them (θεωροῦντας), and to deduce (συλλογίζεσθαι) what each thing is, for example that this man is that man (οὗτος ἐκεῖνος). Since, if someone happens not to have seen (the thing represented) before, the imitation will not please qua imitation, but on account of its fine workmanship or colouring or some other such cause.]

Aristotle has observed no person who does not like imitations and infers that this is because it is always attended by a form of learning, for “all people have a natural appetite to understand” and “learning is naturally sweet”.[16] But in explaining the pleasure we take in imitations as a kind of learning Aristotle opens a door for those who would say that, despite what is suggested in the *Politics*, the *Poetics* advances a theory of art which holds that the pleasure tragedy gives is one of learning something about the world. If imitations please us because they afford a kind of learning, it might follow that the true aim of the imitative arts is to teach. When one adds that the difference between poetry and history is that poetry represents not particular facts but the kinds of things that happen (ch. 9), the pleasure tragedy gives its audience may be that of learning (even ‘deducing’, on a narrow construction of *sullogizesthai*) patterns of human behaviour from the structured plots of plays. This is a widespread current understanding of the *Poetics*.[17]

But such views misconstrue this passage by making the process too intellectual. Aristotle’s use of θεωροῦντας for ‘considering’ an image is not

[16] *Metaphys.* 980a.21: πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει. Cf. *Rhet.* 1371b4-1: “learning is sweet, as is wondering . . . as it leads to learning” (ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ μανθάνειν τε ἡδὺ καὶ τὸ θαυμάζειν . . . ὥστε μανθάνειν τι συμβαίνει). Plato similarly defined ‘wonder’ as “the peculiar *pathos* of the philosopher”: μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν: *Theaet.* 155d.

[17] E.g. Golden (1992: 5-29) and Keesey (1979), both proposing a very intellectualist account of tragic pleasure (see Nussbaum 1992: 281); more nuanced, though still fundamentally cognitive, versions of how viewing tragedies can lead to ethical development are Halliwell 1986: 198-9; 2002: 177-88, 221; Janko 1987: 187; 2011: 372-7; Belfiore 1992: 345-53; Nussbaum 1992; Depew 2007. For a penetrating critique of these approaches, see Destrée 2011.

to be confused with philosophical 'contemplation', θεωρία, the highest form of human intellection (*Eth. Nic.* 10.8, 9). Nor does *sullogizesthai* point to some rigorous process of reasoning. All that Aristotle seems to have in mind is that when we 'consider' a portrait we 'deduce' in the sense of figure out that it is meant to represent a particular person (or thing) in the world, as 'that painting is a painting of Socrates'. Aristotle's phrase 'this man is that man' (οὗτος ἐκεῖνος) is not to be glossed as the formal conclusion of a conscious process of reasoning, as '*QED*'; it is more like an 'Aha!' prompted by a sudden realization: in the *Rhetoric* the best metaphors provoke a quick recognition that "this thing is that thing" (τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο: *Rhet.* 3.10, 1410b19); in comedy, it is a colloquial exclamation that can be glossed 'Jesus, Maria und Joseph' (Radermacher 1954: 327 on *Frogs* 318). The expression is suggestively used by Plato in connection with the mysteries at the climax of Diotima's long speech to 'initiate' Socrates into the mysteries of love in the *Symposium* (209e-210e; cf. Burkert 1987: 153, n. 13): "this is that" (τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο) says Diotima at the moment when the much-labouring initiate finally realizes the object of the his or her toils, the final vision of love. This demotic, quasi-mystical reaction is closer to what is experienced by those who, in Aristotle's eyes, have but a moderate love of learning. It is a basic operation, but it is one that can go missing, as in Aristotle's following counterexample in which spectators consider a painting or sculpture of an object with which they are unfamiliar: such persons may enjoy the colours of the paintings or the working of the bronze for their own sake, but they will be unable to treat the object on a basic level as an imitation of something they know. Aristotle makes the same point a little later when he says, "if someone smeared the most beautiful pigments on a surface at random, he will not give as much pleasure as one who executes an image in black and white".[18]

It has been objected that to identify the subject of a painting is not learning much, and that we should rather see here an intimation of an idea drawn out of chapter 9, that because poetry is more concerned with universals than history it can be the occasion of a kind of philosophical learning. On this view, we do more than learn this painting is of that original but learn something general about the original (Else 1957: 132; Dupont-Roc and Lallot 1980: 165; Sifakis 1986: 216; Halliwell 2001: 90-3). But in chapter 4 Aristotle is expressly thinking of learning at a general, low level that is available to all, for the point he is proving is that "everyone delights in imitations" (cf. Lear 1988: 307). As Malcolm Heath (2009a: 63-4) has observed, the function of the verb *sullogizesthai* is to mark this kind of pleasure in imitations as one that is available only to human beings. (Were it otherwise, mimetic animals like

[18] 1450a39-50b3: εἰ γάρ τις ἐναλείψειε τοῖς καλλίστοις φαρμάκοις χύδην, οὐκ ἂν ὁμοίως εὐφράνειεν καὶ λευκογραφήσας εἰκόνα.

apes would have developed imitative arts.) Chapter 4, then, does explain our enjoyment (*chairein*) of imitations by taking it as a form of learning, but we are not justified in assuming that learning is the essential or sole pleasure that imitations may afford. Moreover, individuals will vary greatly in the pleasure they take in learning: in *Poetics* 4 and in a passage from *Parts of Animals* (645a7-17) often cited with it, Aristotle makes a distinction between the common, popular pleasure in learning and the rarer pleasures taken by those who are "by nature" philosophers. No doubt Aristotle thought learning a very great pleasure, but it is one restricted to few (see Ford 2015: 15-17). A small amount of love of learning is all that is needed for spectators to assent to a mimetic illusion and say, "That's Agamemnon!" and thereafter to be open to tragedy's proper pleasure of arousing pity and fear through imitating his rise and fall.

The final chunk of Aristotle's speculation into the origins of poetry picks up from where he left off (1448b20-4):

> κατὰ φύσιν δὲ ὄντος ἡμῖν τοῦ μιμεῖσθαι καὶ τῆς ἁρμονίας καὶ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ (τὰ γὰρ μέτρα ὅτι μόρια τῶν ῥυθμῶν ἐστι φανερὸν) ἐξ ἀρχῆς οἱ πεφυκότες πρὸς αὐτὰ μάλιστα κατὰ μικρὸν προάγοντες ἐγέννησαν τὴν ποίησιν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοσχεδιασμάτων.
>
> [Since imitating is something natural to us, as are *harmonia* and rhythm (for it is obvious that metre is rhythm cut in pieces), in the beginning those who were most naturally inclined toward these things gave birth to poetry little by little from improvisations.]

Aristotle adds a further cause to explain how poetry arose, the natural affinity we have, which is highly developed in those who become artists, for rhythm and *harmonia.* This affinity for music on our part is not one of the two natural causes of poetry, but a contingent determining condition of the art: it might have turned out that, like some animals, we were naturally insensitive to rhythm and *harmonia*; other things being equal, we would in that case still have mimetic arts – this the two natural causes are sufficient to guarantee – but our poetry would have no meter or music (nor, of course, would we have the arts of the *aulos* and *kithara*). A tone-deaf people can still tell stories about characters acting and suffering.

Because our musical aptitudes have only contingently shaped the evolution of the poetic art, Aristotle regards them as something appealing but 'extra', like a sauce on a meat. Hence he is wont to speak of adding music and/or metre to logos as a 'seasoning' or a 'sweetening' (1449b28-9: λέγω δὲ ἡδυσμένονμὲν λόγον τὸν ἔχοντα ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἁρμονίαν). Nonetheless, these extras have come to be indispensible in some art forms, as in the definition of tragedy which stipulates that it should make use of 'seasoned' language in its various parts (1449b25-6: ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν

ἐν τοῖς μορίοις). By this Aristotle means that speech seasoned with rhythm will be used in the (mostly) trimeter dialogue, while speech seasoned with rhythm and *harmonia* are used in the μέλη, 'songs', of the play.

Given our physical constitution, it was natural that these appealing forms of speech should enter into the pleasing art of poetry in an appropriate way. When dramatic dialogue evolved out of primordial choral songs, for example, "nature herself found the appropriate metre" (αὐτὴ ἡ φύσις τὸ οἰκεῖον μέτρον εὗρε) because the iambic trimeter is closest to normal speech (1449a22-28). The same natural processes were at work when early epic poets hit on the "heroic" hexameter from trial and error (1459b32: τὸ δὲ μέτρον τὸ ἡρωικὸν ἀπὸ τῆς πείρας ἥρμοκεν), because the stateliest and weightiest of the metres (1459b34: τὸ γὰρ ἡρωικὸν στασιμώτατον καὶ ὀγκωδέστατον τῶν μέτρων ἐστίν) harmonizes with heroic themes. The formal embellishments of speech in poetry are secondary causes, accidents of our natures that required time for poets to learn how best to exploit; but nature was driving the process and such embellishments are to be disregarded at the author's peril: today it would seem "unfitting" (ἀπρεπής) to compose an epic in any other metre (1459b36-39).

A more powerful embellishment than adding rhythm to speech in verse was music, which blended *harmoniai* – including the stirring ones Aristotle speaks of in *Politics* – into the mix. Aristotle declares songs, μέλη, the most important of tragedy's embellishments (1450b15-16: ἡ μελοποιία μέγιστον τῶν ἡδυσμάτων) and accordingly includes song as one of the constitutive parts of tragedy (1450a9). It follows that not only is μελοποιία, the 'composition of songs,' one of the principal ways that the tragic art is distinguished from epic (1449b32-4), it also "in no small part" makes tragedy a superior art form to music-less epic, for music makes the pleasures of tragedy most vivid and palpable.[19]

It is with our instincts for rhythm and *harmoniai* mentioned in chapter 4, I submit, that the passage from *Politics* has most to do. For the same "enthusiastic *harmoniai*" played on the aulos to such powerful effect in the mysteries were also used on the stage. To be sure, it would be reductive to simply equate theatrical and ritual catharsis, and in rejecting Bernays's medical account of tragic catharsis and the idealizing one as 'clarification' I do not propose simply to put ritual catharsis in its place. There is a difference between a telestic ritual and a drama in a theatre, even if the latter was dedicated to the god Dionysus. But the connection between *Politics* 8 and *Poetics* suggests that they are analogous forms of experience, and one may see this hinted at even in the definition of tragedy: in chapter 6, Aristotle

[19] Ibid., 1462b16-17: οὐ μικρὸν μέρος τὴν μουσικήν [καὶ τὰς ὄψεις], δι' ἧς αἱ ἡδοναὶ συνίστανται ἐναργέστατα.

says not simply that tragedy 'brings about' the catharsis of pity and fear, but that it brings this catharsis to completion, it "drives the process to an end" (περαίνουσα: *Poet.* 1449b28; cf. *LSJ* s.v.). This would seem to describe, but in a reduced form, the process of musical catharsis in ritual in which "the sacred tunes thoroughly arouse the soul's passions" (*Pol.* 1342a9-10: τοῖς ἐξοργιάζουσι τὴν ψυχὴν μέλεσι).

One objection to the association of telestic and dramatic catharsis is that it might seem to imply that, as Gerald Else (1957: 440) put it, "we come to the tragic drama (unconsciously, if you will) as patients to be cured, relieved, restored to psychic health. But . . . Aristotle is presupposing 'normal' auditors, normal states of mind and feeling, normal emotional and aesthetic experience". Certainly Aristotle's mixed theatrical audience is not pathological (Heath 2014); but he testifies that even "normal" people respond to such music, and we have seen that telestic ritual drew on all social levels. The difference between Olympias and Aristotle is perhaps compendiously noticed in *Politics* 8.7 where people who are not addicted to orgiastic music are said to experience only a "kind of *catharsis*" from the music (1342a15: τινα κάθαρσιν). Nor is another objection made to Bernays's medical analogy pertinent: Elizabeth Belfiore (1992: 260-78) has been especially insistent that, since the medical thought with which Aristotle was familiar worked on allopathic principles, any notion of a catharsis that 'cured' the passions by arousing the passions was unthinkable. But I think it unwise to press Aristotle for a too precise model of telestic catharsis. If these skeptics were to ask Aristotle how he can believe in a homeopathic effect in religion or in the arts, as an erstwhile member of Olympias's household he could reply in the words Mark Twain is said to have used when he was asked if he believed in infant baptism: "Believe it? Heck, I've seen it!".

I have said that I do not propose telestic catharsis as the model for tragic experience, and would add that perhaps we should not focus so exclusively on that word as a key to Aristotle's views on the function of art. Catharsis is, after all, one of a series of terms to describe the pleasurable experience afforded by tragedy. In chapter 4 he uses the general term 'enjoying' (χαίρειν) to describe the natural human pleasure provoked by imitations (1448b9).[20] Soon after, he describes our feeling when recognizing a painting

[20] It is worth comparing the similar general meaning given to the noun *charis* in Plato's analysis of the correct response to works of musical art. Attempting in *Laws* 667b-d to define how a judge will distinguish fine from foul music, he uses *charis* to name the "enjoyableness" that attends such activities as learning or eating, but distinguishes this as less important than the pleasure (*hedone*) that a serious person (*spoudaios*) will take in correct eating (as in dietetics) or correct learning (leading to truth). So too the image-making arts are "enjoyable" but this is not the same as their being quantitatively and qualitatively correct. In music "enjoyable" feeling is only a common response and

as "pleasure" (ἡδονή, 1448b18) and "delighting" (εὐφράνειν, 1450b2). The same verb for delight is used of a tragedy by Agathon (1451b23; cf. 1451b25), but of course Aristotle's most important concept for literary purposes is the "proper pleasure" that belongs to a given poetic genre, whether it be comedy or tragedy (1445a36: ἡδονὴ . . . οἰκεία). The "proper pleasure" of tragedy is one that it alone is naturally suited to provide (1459a21). This pleasure should be the poet's polestar, disregarding any chance pleasure that may be available (1462b13: τὴν τυχοῦσαν ἡδονὴν), for "one must not seek every pleasure from tragedy but the one that is proper to it" (1453b11: οὐ γὰρ πᾶσαν δεῖ ζητεῖν ἡδονὴν ἀπὸ τραγῳδίας ἀλλὰ τὴν οἰκείαν).

But how does all this stress on pleasure and Aristotle's recognition of the powerful emotional impact of tragedy fit with the fact that in chapter 4 he puts learning at the root of the pleasure of mimesis? Are we to apply some kind of Horatian *dulce/utile* dichotomy and conclude that the tragedian's goal is to teach and that the embellishments are just a way to make the lesson appealing? But to say that we enjoy imitations because deciphering them is a form of learning is far from identifying the "pleasure proper to tragedy" with learning. Heath (2001) argues that the natural pleasure of learning from *mimesis* cannot be the 'characteristic' (*oikeia*) pleasure of tragedy since it is available from other forms of imitation as well; for *all* the mimetic arts give pleasure, including painting and dance, and one would hardly take Aristotle seriously as a critic if he reduced our enjoyment of those forms to ethical inferences. Heath persuasively concludes that Aristotle's laconic text in chapter 4 does not foreclose the conclusion that "learning is not the sole, and perhaps not even the main pleasure that Aristotle expected poetry to provide" (Heath 2001: 19-20).

The telestic catharsis described in the *Politics*, then, is best set against Aristotle's anthropological account of the susceptibilities of human nature in *Poetics* ch. 4. Indeed, this chapter may be what he primarily had in mind in the *Politics* when he referred to "the work on the art of poetry" (τὰ περὶ ποιητικῆς: 1341b40) for a fuller discussion of catharsis. Scholars who have focused only on *Poetics* ch. 6 have speculated that the promised fuller discussion appeared in the lost second book of that treatise, or perhaps in another work on the topic, the *On Poets*. But by taking the full sequence of chapters 4-6 together we can understand how the catharsis of tragedy emerges from Aristotle's account of the full range of human responses to art and music, in which his experience with telestic catharsis seems to have provided a suggestive analogue. The entire discussion does supply, if not a

not sufficient to recognize truly fine music. The latter requires judging the relation of representation to object represented to know if "the truth" has been represented.

detailed account of catharsis, an explanation of how humans might respond to imitations of terrible things with pleasure and profit.

Without proposing a fully worked out model for tragic catharsis, I have argued that with this word Aristotle meant to point to the powerful reaction, not fully assimilable to cognitive reflection, that such plays at their best uniquely aroused. This is not to say that his idea of a good tragedy was a thrill-packed spectacle with one car crash after another. We can see this from the relatively marginal role he assigns to *opsis*, 'spectacle' in arousing the pleasure of tragedy: even though he acknowledges its power to 'stir the soul' (1450b17: ψυχαγωγικόν), he considers it extraneous to the poet's art properly understood. And the work of Stephen Halliwell has especially brought out how that art depended on tightly constructed and plausible plots, with all the elements of the play working together toward a single effect. The tragic art was not a matter of stirring up the audience's passions in any way that came to hand, but the subtle art of contriving to arouse in the audience "the pleasure that comes from pity and fear through mimesis" (1453b12: τὴν ἀπὸ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως . . . ἡδονὴν). A great deal of artistry was required on the poet's part, and no little critical attentiveness on the part of the audience. But the experience as a whole issued in something that was more like undergoing a mystic initiation than coolly appraising or observing a show. Now it might strike some critics that to compare the experience of tragedy, and *mutatis mutandis* of literature generally, to mystical initiation is to neglect what is most artful and sophisticated in what our texts have to offer. It may seem paradoxical that these complex, subtly crafted works of art should have been thought to serve to elicit such a comparatively mindless purpose. I would rather say that the Greek tragic poets show real inventiveness and skill in forging such finely made instruments of catharsis; it is to their credit and to that of their audiences – whose tastes were not only catered to but tutored by the poets – that this visceral, irresistible response could be aroused by such refined works of art.

It should be clear that the implications of this view need not be that Aristotle took an aesthetic view of tragedy as opposed to a moralizing one. Certainly, he held that poetry was for pleasure: whatever *catharsis* may be, it is a species of pleasure, a peculiar one arising from witnessing pitiable and frightening events. But the kind of intense reaction that catharsis seems to betoken is hardly disinterested enough to be called 'aesthetic' in the sense of a pleasure taken in art for the sake of art. It must also be admitted that Aristotle does not analyse this pleasure very deeply (Heath 2001) and his narrow focus on pleasure has been faulted for ignoring the political and social contexts in which the plays were first performed (Hall 1996). Simon Goldhill (2000) includes Aristotle in his deconstruction of any attempt to claim that tragedy has a purely aesthetic value. Goldhill (2000: 39) allows

that "'[p]leasure' may be one explicit aim of tragic theatre (as it is for the arenas of cricket or football or pornography or tourism)", but insists that "it is simply inadequate to use such an aim as the overriding determining criterion for *understanding the cultural politics* of the Great Dionysia (as it would be for cricket or football or pornography or tourism)" (emphasis mine). There is no doubt that, as Hall (1996) and Goldhill (2000) show (see also Goldhill 1987), the production of tragedies at the Athenian civic festivals was an eminently political affair. But Goldhill's declared aim is "understanding the cultural politics" of tragedy, while Aristotle's, as I have argued, is trying to take an anthropological approach to the phenomenon, trying to understand tragedy as a universal human art, a development of uniquely human faculties, abilities, emotions and susceptibilities (cf. Ford 2015; Heath 2009b). Doubtless, Aristotle was no more able than the rest of us to escape the blind spots of his political conditioning (complex as that would have been for the Metic from Stagira), and his conceptions of our nature as political animals was bound to be influenced by (Metic?) ideology. But for this writer of many books on politics, the very act of taking a broad view in *Poetics* was precisely an attempt to see beyond the undeniable ideological functions of the plays (which is implicit throughout the history of poetry in *Poetics* ch. 5 and explicit in *Politics* 8) and to do justice to the full range of their powers, among which something like telestic enthusiasm must figure.

My final remark concerns what I consider the weakest, but by no means the rarest version of the cognitive approach to tragedy as ethically broadening, and this is to imagine that we can learn something about life from tragedy that can help and even protect us. That line of thinking is little better than the spectator who leaves the premiere of *Oedipus Rex* concluding, "Well, if I ever get such a prophecy as Oedipus did, I'll be sure to marry a younger woman and I'll keep my temper around older men".[21] It is not only Aristotle but the whole tragic tradition that knows that the person who strolls out of the theatre of Dionysus thinking such thoughts is the ripest target for a tragic downfall that there is. It is hard to settle on a single thing that tragedy teaches, but one thing that no tragedy gives us is a paradigm from which we can draw lessons to make us (more) safe. The very confidence that philosophers place in the power of reason, the very assurance they place in their 'clarified' moral ideas, are the exact targets of tragedy. If the sight of people no worse than you broken does not make you (virtually/mimetically) afraid for your life, afraid that there is a recognition coming when you will realize you had no idea that you were going in the opposite direction than you had hoped, what you have experienced is not what Aristotle experienced when he described the experience of tragedy.

[21] Cf. Depew 2007: 145.

Works Cited

Barker, Andrew (1989), *Greek Musical Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. 2.

Belfiore, Elizabeth (1992), *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bernays, Jakob [1857] (1979), "Aristotle on the Effects of Tragedy", trans. by Johnathan and Jennifer Barnes, in Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield and Richard Sorabji (eds), *Articles on Aristotle*, London: Macmillan & Co.: 154-65, vol. 4.

Burkert, Walter (1987), *Ancient Mystery Cults*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Carney, Elizabeth (2006), *Olympias: Mother of Alexander the Great,* New York and London: Routledge.

Cerri, Giovanni (2007), *La poetica di Platone: una teoria della comunicazione*, Lecce: Argo.

Depew, David (2007), "From hymn to tragedy: Aristotle's genealogy of poetic kinds", in Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (eds), *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual To Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 126-49.

Destrée, Pierre (2011), "La purgation des interprétations: conditions et enjeux de la catharsis poétique chez Aristote", in Jean-Charles Darmon (ed.), *Littérature et thérapeutique des passions. La catharsis en question*, Paris: Hermann: 41-63.

Dodds, Eric Robertson (1957), *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Dupont-Roc, Roselyne and Jean Lallot (1980), *Aristote: La Poétique*, Paris: Seuil.

Else, Gerald F. (1957), *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ferrari, Giovanni R.F. (1999), "Aristotle's Literary Aesthetics", *Phronesis*, 44: 181–98.

Ford, Andrew (2004), "Catharsis: The Power of Music in Aristotle's Politics", in Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson (eds) (2004), *Music and the Muses: The Culture of "Mousikē" in the Classical Athenian City*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 309-36.

— (2015), "The Purpose of Aristotle's *Poetics*", *Classical Philology*, 110 (1): 1-21.

Golden, Leon (1992), *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Goldhill, Simon (1987), "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology", *The Journal of Hellenic* Studies, 107: 58-76.

— (2000), "Civic Ideology and the Problem of Difference: The Politics of Aeschylean Tragedy, Once again", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 120: 34-56.

Hall, Edith (1996), "Is there a polis in Aristotle's Poetics?", in Michael Stephen Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond,* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 295-309.

Halliwell, Stephen (1986), *Aristotle's Poetics*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

— (2001), "Aristotelian Mimesis and Human Understanding", in Øivind Andersen

and Jon Haarberg (eds), *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetics*, London: Duckworth: 87-107.
— (2002), *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Heath, Malcolm (2001), "Aristotle on the Pleasures of Tragedy", in Øivind Andersen and Jon Haarberg (eds), *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetics*, London: Duckworth: 7-23.
— (2009a), "Cognition in Aristotle's *Poetics*", *Mnemosyne*, 62: 51-75.
— (2009b), "Should There Have Been a Polis in Aristotle's 'Poetics'?", *The Classical Quarterly*, 59 (2): 468-85.
— (2014), "Aristotle and the Value of Tragedy", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 54 (2): 111-23.
Hoessly, Fortunat (2001), *Catharsis. Reinigung als Heilverfahren. Studien zum Ritual der archaischen und klassischen Zeit so wie zum Corpus Hippocraticum*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
Janko, Richard (ed.) (1987), *Aristotle. Poetics I*, Indianapolis: Hackett.
— (2011), *Philodemus, On Poems, Books 3-4, with the Fragments of Aristotle, On Poets*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Keesey, Donald (1979), "On Some Recent Interpretations of Catharsis", *The Classical World,* 72 (4): 193-205.
Kraut, Richard (1997), *Aristotle "Politics" Books VII and VIII*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Lear, Jonathan (1988), "Catharsis", *Phronesis*, 33: 327-44.
Linforth, Ivan M. (1946), "The Corybantic Rites in Plato", *University of California Pubications in Classical Philology*, 13: 121-62.
Lord, Carnes (1982), *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Nussbaum, Martha (1992), "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity", in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 261-90.
Perrin, Bernadotte (trans.) (1919) *Plutarch, Lives Volume VII*, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.
Radermacher, Ludwig (ed.) (1954), *Aristophanes "Frösche",* Vienna: Rohrer.
Schadewaldt, Wolfgang (ed.) (1955), "Furcht und Mitleid", *Hermes*, 83: 129-71.
Sifakis, Gregory Michael (1986), "Learning from Art and Pleasure in Learning: An Interpretation of Aristotle *Poetics* 4 1448b8-19", in John H. Betts, James T. Hooker, and John Richard Green (eds), *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster*, vol. 1, Bristol: Bristol Classical Press: 211-22.
Vöhler, Martin and Bernd Seidensticker (eds) (2007), *Catharsiskonzeptionen vor Aristoteles*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.