

S K E N È

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 Bigliuzzi, 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

MARTIN VÖHLER*

The Pathological Interpretation of Catharsis

Abstract

When Aristotle characterized the effect of tragedy as catharsis (“purification”) of the tragic emotions (“fear and pity”), he set off a discussion which is still ongoing. This essay deals with the transformations of catharsis and the break with tradition which occurred when Jacob Bernays in a philological treatise (1857) rejected the traditional moral concept of catharsis. In its place Bernays put forward “solicitation”, i.e. the deliberate excitation and discharge of emotions. The process of catharsis was thus medically interpreted and labelled pathological. This study focuses on Bernays’ achievements in redefining the term and the resulting dissolution of its boundaries; no longer limited to the classical fields of poetics and ethics, religion and politics, catharsis is relevant to medicine, psychology, aesthetics and cultural theory.

Jacob Bernays

In his essay *Main Features of Aristotle’s Lost Treatise on the effects of tragedy* (1857),¹ the classical philologist Jacob Bernays takes a stance on the catharsis debate which Aristotle had generated with his *Poetics*. Bernays turns to this discussion from the perspective of classical philology. Born in Hamburg in 1824 as the son of a rabbi, Bernays had studied with Friedrich Ritschl, Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker and Christian Brandis, exhibiting early on unusual talent. His prize-winning work on Lucretius was published in 1847, followed by his doctoral thesis on the influence of Heraclitus on Hippocrates’ *De diae-ta*. Subsequently he was appointed *Privatdozent* in Bonn. As a consequence of his refusal to renounce the Jewish tradition he had been raised in, he never received a full professorship, despite his excellent publications. Two appointments to professorial chairs in Breslau and Heidelberg were rejected by the responsible ministries. Thus, between 1854 and 1866, Bernays taught at the Jewish-Theological Seminar in Breslau where he entered into aca-

* Aristotle University, Thessaloniki - mvoehler@lit.auth.gr

¹ The treatise is quoted according to the facsimile edition by Karlfried Gründer (Bernays 1970). For the English translation I am indebted to Angela Zerbe. All quotations from German-language sources in general are translated by A. Zerbe.

demic exchange with Theodor Mommsen who lectured at the University of Breslau (1854-58).² In 1866, he returned to Bonn where he simultaneously discharged his duties as head librarian as well as those of an associate professor. Among his students were Ingram Bywater and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff.³

Bernays's engagement with Aristotelian catharsis dates back to the year 1852.⁴ His first results were published in *Ergänzung zu Aristoteles' Poetik*, in which he deals with the effects of comedy (Bernays 1853: 561-96). His comprehensive study of catharsis was initially conceived as a lecture for the *Historisch-Philosophische Gesellschaft* in Breslau, founded by Mommsen. It was published in the first volume of *Abhandlungen der Historisch-Philosophischen Gesellschaft* (Breslau 1858). Additionally, a special edition of this work was published beforehand (Breslau 1857).⁵ The treatise sets off a prolonged philosophical discussion; for the period between the first print until 1928 over one hundred and fifty titles relating to the catharsis question are recorded (Cooper-Gudeman 1928). As Karlfried Gründer points out, "with very few exceptions, most of these relate to the Bernays controversy" (Gründer 1970: vii). At first Bernays gets involved in the debate,⁶ but later he allows the "tumult in the scholars' republic" (Gründer 1968: 508-16) to take its course and provides only a slightly improved second edition (1880) of the volume which had long been out of print (Bernays 1968: 1-118).

Bernays gives a new turn to the discussion by postulating that Aristotle had applied a medical interpretation to the process of tragic 'purgation'. In this way Bernays positions himself in opposition to Lessing and Goethe, each of whom presented prominent interpretations of the 'tragedy clause' of Aristotle's *Poetics* (6, 1449b24-28). Lessing had developed his moral interpretation of catharsis in the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1768) (Lessing

² On Mommsen's stay in Breslau, cf. Rebenich 2002: 98-106; Wickert 1967: 265-94; Wickert 1969: 321-42.

³ About Bernays's life: Fraenkel 1932; Bach 1974; on scholarly works: Momigliano 1969: 151-73; Glucker-Laks 1996; Bollack 1998; on the treatise on catharsis: Gründer 1968; Gentili 1994: 35-66; Funke 1996: 50-75; Lawrenz 2007; Wilm 2009: 21-50; Ugolini 2012; Porter 2015: 15-41.

⁴ Cf. his letter to Heyse dated 16 June 1852 (Bernays 2010: 71).

⁵ Thus Bernays wrote to Heyse on 26 February 1857: "On the occasion of a lecture in a professorial circle I have elaborated on my old heresies on tragic catharsis for which, in the meantime, I have found all kinds of new documents. Before the end of the year you will probably read them in print" ("Gelegentlich eines Vortrages in einem Professorenkränzchen habe ich meine alten Ketzereien über die tragische Katharsis ausgearbeitet, zu denen ich inzwischen noch allerlei neue Dokumente gefunden habe. Vor Ablauf des Jahres wirst Du sie wahrscheinlich gedruckt lesen") (Bernays 2010: 149). On the Breslau circle of professors, cf. Bach 1974: 151-3.

⁶ Cf. Bernays' 1859 letter to Spengel on the issue (Bernays 1859: 367-77).

1985: 551-80). Goethe, on the other hand, discussed the catharsis question in his *Nachlese zu Aristoteles' Poetik* (1827) (Goethe 1949: 342-5). Dissociating himself from Lessing, he introduced his own translation of the 'tragedy clause' which was in keeping with the premises of the autonomy of art and refrained from any teleology of the work of art. The profound disparity in the two interpretations afforded Bernays the opportunity to re-open the catharsis discussion from the viewpoint of classical philology. He developed a framework in which he attempted to satisfy the demands of Aristotelian scholarship as well as to incorporate the proposals of Lessing and Goethe. Bernays harnesses insights gained from classical studies, the histories of medicine, religion, culture and literature as well as literary scholarship, philosophy and aesthetics in order to achieve a new interpretation of the tragedy clause. What emerges is a complex contribution to scholarship which obtains an overwhelming resonance not only within classical studies but also across academic boundaries. Bernays' thesis of the 'pathologization of catharsis' turns out to be a provocative intellectual concept which proves fruitful and adaptable in the contemporary discourses. In order to better grasp the following polyphonic discussion, I will undertake an exploratory analysis of the argumentation, of the source references, and of the terminology developed by Bernays.

In Agon with Lessing and Goethe

In his preamble Bernays addresses Lessing's and Goethe's interpretations,⁷ identifies the shortcomings of their irreconcilable positions, and suggests certain prospects for resolving the catharsis issue. In terms of text strategy, this preamble assures the author of his readers' attention: by announcing that Lessing and Goethe are to be refuted, Bernays creates expectations. He claims interpretative competence in the question which is "familiar to every educated person and unclear to any thinking person" ("die jedem Gebildeten geläufig und keinem Denkenden deutlich sind", Bernays 1970: 138). Avoiding the specific terminology of his own discipline, he translates the passages being discussed and explains their contexts. His essay is written in elegant prose as he vies stylistically with his opponents.

He sets out his approach to the catharsis question in the introduction, explaining that his interpretation is based on the last six words of the tragedy clause and asserting that these key words concerning catharsis had not yet been satisfactorily interpreted. While Lessing had redefined the terms 'pity' and 'fear' and managed to remove many "misunderstandings" ("Missver-

⁷ On Lessing's moral theory of catharsis cf. Kommerell 1960; Lawrenz 2007; Martinec 2003; Schings 2012. On Goethe's aesthetic interpretation cf. Boyle 2010: 1072-86.

ständnisse”, *ibid.*: 136), his concept of purgation had proved problematic. By linking this process to Aristotelian ethics, Lessing renders catharsis a “moral function” (“eine moralische Veranstaltung”, *ibid.*) and tragedy a “house of moral correction” (“ein moralisches Correctionshaus”, *ibid.*).

To substantiate his reservations about Lessing’s interpretation, Bernays has recourse to the authority of Goethe who had protested against the moralistic functionalization of catharsis in his *Nachlese zu Aristoteles’ Poetik* (Goethe 1949: 343). That Goethe had based his interpretation on an unacceptable translation does not make his elaborations useless for Bernays. The agon with Lessing and Goethe augurs well for Bernays. Both had presented exemplary interpretations of Aristotelian catharsis (Lessing a moralistic interpretation, Goethe an aesthetic one). However, both interpretations proved to be inadequate. It seemed that the time for a critical revision had come.

Aristotle’s Viewpoint

In the first chapter, Bernays introduces the foundation of his interpretation of catharsis. He quotes from the eighth book of Aristotle’s *Politics*, conveying the central passage concerning catharsis in his own translation which added clarifications and key Greek terms in parentheses:

Wir nehmen die Eintheilung einiger Philosophen an, welche die Lieder scheiden erstlich in solche, die eine stetige sittliche Stimmung (ethische), zweitens in solche, die eine bewegte, zur That angeregte Stimmung (praktische), drittens in solche, die Verzückung bewirken (enthusiastische). Nun soll man aber, nach unserer Ansicht, die Musik nicht bloss zu Einem, sondern zu mehreren nützlichen Zwecken anwenden, erstens als Theil des Jugend-Unterrichts, zweitens zu Katharsis – was Katharsis ist werden wir jetzt nur im Allgemeinen sagen, aber in der Abhandlung über Dichtkunst wieder darauf zurückkommen und bestimmter darüber reden – drittens zur Ergötzung, um sich zu erholen und abzuspannen. So kann man denn alle Harmonien verwenden, aber nicht alle in derselben Weise, sondern als Theil des Jugendunterrichts solche, die eine möglichst stetige, sittliche Stimmung bewirken, dagegen zum Anhören eines musikalischen Vortrags Anderer solche, die eine bewegte, zur That angeregte Stimmung und auch solche, die Verzückung bewirken. Nämlich, der Affect, welcher in einigen Gemüthern heftig auftritt, ist in allen vorhanden, der Unterschied besteht nur in dem Mehr oder Minder, z. B. Mitleid und Furcht (treten in den Mitleidigen und Furchtsamen heftig auf, in geringerem Maasse sind sie aber in allen Menschen vorhanden). Ebenso Verzückung. (In geringerem Maasse sind alle Menschen derselben unterworfen), es giebt aber Leute, die häufigen Anfällen dieser Gemüthsbewegung ausgesetzt sind. Nun sehen wir an den heiligen Liedern, dass wenn dergleichen Verzückte Lieder, die eben das Gemüth berauschen, auf sich wirken las-

sen, sie sich beruhigen, gleichsam als hätten sie ärztliche Cur und Katharsis erfahren (ὥσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως). Dasselbe muss nun folgerecht auch bei den Mitleidigen und Furchtsamen und überhaupt bei Allen stattfinden, die zu einem bestimmten Affecte disponirt sind (ταὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖον πάσχειν καὶ τοὺς ἐλεήμονας καὶ τοὺς φοβητικούς καὶ τοὺς ὄλως παθητικούς), bei allen übrigen Menschen aber in so weit etwas von diesen Affecten auf eines Jeden Theil kommt; für Alle muss es irgend eine Katharsis geben und sie unter Lustgefühl erleichtert werden können (πᾶσι γίνεσθαί τινα κάθαρσιν καὶ κουρίζεσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς). In gleicher Weise nun wie andere Mittel der Katharsis bereiten auch die kathartischen Lieder den Menschen eine unschädliche Freude (χαρὰν ἀβλαβῆ). Man muss also die gesetzliche Bestimmung treffen, dass diejenigen, welche die Musik für das Theater ausüben (das ja unschädliche Freude schaffen soll) mit solchen kathartischen Harmonien und Liedern auftreten. Da nun aber das Publicum doppelartig ist (ὁ θεατῆς διττός), ein freies und gebildetes einestheils, andernteils ein gemeines, aus niedern Handwerkern, Tagelöhnern und dergleichen bestehendes, so muss man auch zur Erholung der Letzteren Aufführungen und Schaugenüsse einrichten. Wie nun die Gemüther dieses Theiles des Publicums aus der naturgemässen Beschaffenheit verschoben sind, so giebt es auch in den Harmonien Absprünge und unter den Liedern eine stürmische und gefärbte Gattung; Jedem gewährt aber das allein Vergnügen, was seiner Natur entspricht; man muss daher den auftretenden Künstlern die Freiheit lassen, vor einem solchen Publicum sich solcherlei Gattung von Musik zu bedienen. (Bernays 1970: 139-40)

[We accept the classification of several philosophers who divide songs into three groups according to the dispositions they induce: firstly a constantly moral (ethical), secondly action-prompting (practical) and thirdly, rapture (enthusiastic) (b35). In our opinion one should not apply music for just one, but rather for several useful purposes: first of all as part of teaching youth, secondly for catharsis – what catharsis is we will now say in general, but return to it in the treatise on poetry (b40) and elaborate in detail – thirdly, for amusement, in order to regenerate and relax (a1). Thus we can use all harmonies, but not in the same way. In teaching youth we use music which produces a consistently moral disposition; on the other hand, when listening to musical performances other modes are to be preferred such as those which animate to action and also those which result in rapture (a5). The affection which appears vigorously in some souls is present in all, the difference being in the intensity. For example, pity and fear (occurring intensely in all compassionate and fearful people, to a lesser extent in other people). The same holds true for rapture (to which all people are subjected to a lesser extent). There are people, however, who frequently become victims of emotional seizures. We may observe in sacred music that when such (a10) persons allow ecstatic songs, which intoxicate the soul, to sink in they become tranquil, as if they had received medical treatment and purgation (ὥσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως). It follows that the same thing must happen with the compas-

sionate and the fearful, in general to all who have a proclivity for a certain emotion (ταὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖον πάσχειν καὶ τοὺς ἐλεήμονας καὶ τοὺς φοβητικούς καὶ τοὺς ὄλως παθητικούς). In all other persons, in as much as they are affected by these emotions, there must be some kind of catharsis (a15) so that they can be relieved by feelings of pleasure (πᾶσι γίνεσθαι τινὰ κάθαρσιν καὶ κουφίζεσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς). In the same way that other means bring about catharsis, the cathartic melodies also provide people with a harmless pleasure (χαρὰν ἀβλαβῆ). Legal provisions must therefore be laid down which allow those who practice music in the theatre (which should bring about harmless pleasure) to perform cathartic melodies and harmonies. Since, however, the audience is of a dual nature (ὁ θεατῆς διττός), one part free and educated, the other part consisting of vulgar artisans and day labourers, one must ensure that the latter group also enjoys recreation with performances and pleasurable spectacles. Just as it is in the nature of the souls in the latter group to be perverted, so there are corrupted harmonies and melodies which are rough and unnatural. Pleasure, however, can only be experienced by each person according to his nature, and therefore performing artists must be given the freedom to practice this lower form of music before such an audience. (*Politics* 1341b32-1342a28)]

At the beginning of the quoted passage, Aristotle distinguishes between three types of songs which, according to their underlying harmonies, can be used for different purposes. The ethical songs enhance the “moral disposition” (“sittliche Stimmung”), the practical songs promote action while the enthusiastic songs lead to excitement or “ecstasy” (“Verzückung”), as Bernays translates ἐνθουσιασμός (*Arist. Pol.* 1342a7). Accordingly, the respective areas of application of the melodies are: teaching, amusement (with recreation and relaxation) and catharsis. Against the background of this division, Aristotle subsequently elaborates on the concept of catharsis. He begins by saying that in the context of *Politics* he will only speak generally about catharsis but will return to it in the “Treatise on Poetry to treat it in greater detail” (πάλιν δ' ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς ἐροῦμεν σαφέστερον, *Arist. Pol.* 1341b39-40). Bernays proceeds in similar fashion. In the first chapter of his work, he provides, with the aid of the *Politics* passage, a review of the concept of catharsis and its areas of application in order to expand on tragic catharsis in the following chapter on *Poetics* (2).

In his interpretation of the *Politics* passage Bernays begins with Aristotle's reflections on the use of music in the theatre (*Arist. Pol.* 1342a16-28). “Cathartic harmonies and melodies” (“mit solchen kathartischen Harmonien und Liedern”, Bernays 1970: 140) should be permitted, especially in the theatre. However, in the general provisions that Aristotle had prefaced his work with, a means has a cathartic effect when it relieves “with a pleasurable sensation” (ἡδονή) and causes a “harmless pleasure” (χαρὰν ἀβλαβῆ, 1342a14-16). Bernays calls this effect, which applies to all cathartic effects,

“the hedonic aspect” (“den hedonischen Gesichtspunkt”, Bernays 1970: 141) of catharsis. Aristotle sees this possibility of relief through the use of cathartic music in the theatre. However, the theatre public has a dual nature, consisting of free, educated members alongside a group of “vulgar artisans and day labourers” (“ein gemeines, aus niedern Handwerkern, Tagelöhnern und dergleichen bestehendes”, *ibid.*: 140). Due to their laborious tasks and “natural character” (“aus der naturgemässen Beschaffenheit”, *ibid.*), these members of the audience are oppressed and their minds “perverted” (αἱ ψυχαὶ παρεστραμμέναι τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἕξεως, Arist. *Pol.* 1342a22-23). Therefore the effects of cathartic music are especially suited to this part of the audience as it contains “corrupted harmonies and rough and unnatural melodies” (“in den Harmonien Absprünge und unter den Liedern eine stürmische und gefärbte Gattung”, *ibid.*: 140) which provide the vulgar audience with particular pleasure (ἡδονή).

Bernays utilizes his comments on music in the theatre to refute the moral concept of catharsis that Lessing had propagated. He builds on the polemics developed in his preamble which he had brought to bear against the theatre concept of the Enlightenment (Bernays 1970: 136). Aristotle, Bernays argues, had not conceived of the Greek theatre as “an institute of moral correction” (“sittliche Besserungsanstalt”, *ibid.*: 140) but rather as a “place of amusement” (“Vergnügungsort”, *ibid.*) for an audience with different levels of education. Bernays decisively rejects Lessing’s concept of moral education with recourse to the pleasure that the music of the theatre should provide. However, Bernays qualifies the hedonic aspect. He maintains that Aristotle, in *Politics*, had attributed a “pathological aspect” (“pathologischer Gesichtspunkt”, *ibid.*: 141) to catharsis.⁸

Bernays defines the “pathological aspect” based on his key elaborations on the cathartic process (Arist. *Pol.* 1342a1-16). According to Aristotle, the unique force of cathartic music lies in its impact on affect (πάθος). Although all humans are receptive to musical stimulation of the soul (ψυχή), their reactions vary. While most listeners react moderately, others are vigorously gripped by emotion (e.g. pity, fear or enthusiasm). When these emotions are vehement and occur frequently as seizures, the listeners can be treated with the application of certain songs, as experience confirms. In this context Aristotle makes reference to the “sacred music” (familiar to his contemporaries). Healing is accomplished in the following manner: “We observe in the sacred songs that when such frenzied persons allow the ecstatic songs which intoxicate the soul to sink in, they become tranquil as if they had experienced

⁸ On the objections to Bernays’ purgation account in the scholarly literature (Golden 1973/74: 473-9 and 1976: 437-52; Lear 1992: 315-40; Heath 2014: 111-23) cf. Seidensticker and Vöhler 2007: vii-xii.

medical treatment and purgation”.⁹ “Sacred music” has the effect of arousing a strong excitation; it “intoxicates” and leads to “ecstasy”. Subsequently, however, as soon as the listeners with strong emotional proclivities have heard or sung the stimulating songs, they experience a calming effect. In this way the therapeutic circle is completed. Cathartic music purges affection by reinforcing it homeopathically.¹⁰

While Bernays distinguishes between “phyrgian”, “orgiastic” and “corybantic” songs used therapeutically (Bernays 1970: 57-9), he does not elaborate on the cultural background of the songs; he is interested in the cathartic release of affection as their common effect. In view of the extreme manner in which songs process emotions, Bernays calls this type of treatment “the catharsis of enthusiasm” (“Katharsis des Enthusiasmus”, *ibid.* 142).

Aristotle’s comparison of “medical treatment to catharsis” to describe the effects of “sacred hymns” (*Pol.* 1342a10-11) is of central importance for his subsequent argumentation. Bernays explores the connection between treatment and catharsis in order to obtain areas of application of catharsis and cathartic measures in the context of Greek life. Two fields lend themselves to this end: cultic and medical catharsis.

Bernays sees little benefit in establishing a connection to cultic ceremony (*lustratio*).¹¹ In the cultic context catharsis does, in fact, occur as a result of priestly actions when guilt is expiated and the individual experiences the discharge of guilt from his soul. However, the cathartic effects of music on affection “which we are seeking to explain is not clarified” by reference to the cathartic removal of guilt through cultic ceremony, “which itself is in need of explanation” (Bernays 1970: 143). By contrast, the medical interpretation of catharsis is instructive and expedient:

Dann ist κάθαρσις nur eine besondere Art der allgemeinen und deshalb auch an erster Stelle genannten ἰατρεία; die Verzückten kommen durch orgiastische Lieder zur Ruhe wie Kranke durch ärztliche Behandlung, und zwar nicht durch jede beliebige, sondern durch eine solche Behandlung, welche kathartische, den Krankheitsstoff ausstossende, Mittel anwendet. Nun ist die räthselhafte pathologische *Gemüthserscheinung* in der That verdeutlicht, denn sie wird versinnlicht durch den Vergleich mit pathologischen *körperlichen* Erscheinungen. (Bernays 1970: 143)

[For κάθαρσις is only one specific kind of the general and thus first-mentioned ἰατρεία. The frenzied are calmed by orgiastic songs like patients in

⁹ καὶ γὰρ ὑπὸ ταύτης τῆς κινήσεως κατοκώχιμοὶ τινές εἰσιν, ἐκ τῶν δ’ ἱερῶν μελῶν ὀρῶμεν τούτους, ὅταν χρήσωνται τοῖς ἐξοργιάζουσι τὴν ψυχὴν μέλεσι, καθισταμένους ὡσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως (*Arist. Pol.* 1342a7-11).

¹⁰ On homeopathy in Aristotle cf. Belfiore 1992: 260-90.

¹¹ The link between musical and cultic catharsis as elaborated by Dionysius Lambinus is rejected by Bernays (1970: 142-3 and n. 7).

medical treatment, and not just any treatment, but rather a cathartic one which discharges toxic substances. Thus the enigmatic pathological *mental* process is clarified; it is illustrated by the comparison with pathological somatic manifestations.]

In this explanation the comparison between “medical treatment and catharsis” acquires a stringent aspect. The reference to medicine offers a prominent area of cathartic practices and methods (cf. Hoessly 2001). The doctor gives the patient a remedy which stimulates the toxic substances and then eliminates them. The intervention brings “peace” to the patient. The tranquilization contains a hedonic aspect which Aristotle attributes to all cathartic methods. Catharsis is experienced “with relief”.

Bernays summarizes the terminological results of his study as follows:

Katharsis sei: eine von Körperlichem auf Gemüthliches übertragene Bezeichnung für solche Behandlung eines Beklommenen, welche das ihn beklemmende Element nicht zu verwandeln oder zurückzudrängen sucht, sondern es aufregen, hervortreiben und dadurch Erleichterung des Beklommenen bewirken will. (Bernays 1970: 144)

[Catharsis is a term, originally medical which is applied to mental states, and designates the treatment of a distressed person which does not seek to transform or repress the distressful element but rather to stimulate it, drive it forth and in this way bring relief to the sufferer.]

This concluding general definition contains the key aspects of the author’s concept. Catharsis, in Bernays’ interpretation, is a therapeutic course of “treatment” which is aimed at somatic as well as mental illnesses. The specific area of mental illness is designated by the semantic field of “distress” (“Beklommenheit”). The mentally ill person is referred to as “distressed” (“beklommen”) and his illness is expressed as a “distressful element” (“beklemmendes Element”). In order to describe the specific treatment in greater detail the writer has recourse to Greek medicine and its procedure of catharsis. Catharsis in the context of *Politics* should be read as a “medical metaphor” (“medizinische Metapher”) (ibid.: 148). The remedy does not aim to “transform” the “distressful element” or repress it by introducing an antidote (antipathic). On the contrary, catharsis therapy focuses on stimulation. This intensifies the toxic emotion in order to “draw it out”. The process of stimulation is homeopathically oriented; it addresses pathological elements and relieves them. On the whole, the process has a hedonic character, as it leads to “relief”. The ultimate goal of the dynamic process of catharsis from stimulation to discharge is relief.

The New Translation of the Tragedy Clause

In the second chapter, Bernays begins to develop his concept of tragic catharsis. This takes place in three steps. First of all he demonstrates the fundamental significance of *Politics* for the understanding of tragedy. Then, he provides an annotated translation of the catharsis passage from *Poetics*. Finally, he emphasizes the differences to Lessing's approach.

The problem of tragic catharsis is rooted in a lack of clarification. The *Poetics* lacks the announced and expectable elaborations on tragic catharsis in the 'tragedy clause'. While there are concise explanations as well as a definition for all other elements of the tragedy clause, there are no remarks on the conclusion of this clause. To explain this lacuna Bernays introduces the theory of the excerpter who "mercilessly cut out" (Bernays 1970: 146: "unbarmherzig weggeschnitten") parts of Aristotle's passage on catharsis which had originally been "extensive and replete with purely philosophical clarifications" (ibid.: 145: "umfänglich und von rein philosophischen Erörterungen erfüllt waren"). This gives rise to the task of filling the gap and elaborating on the scanty definition of catharsis according to what Aristotle had intended. Bernays' premise is by no means ironclad, but he needs it in order to justify his search for the content of "Aristotle's lost treatise" (ibid.: 149: "in der verlorenen Erläuterung") in the following chapter.

Bernays avails himself of *Politics* as a potential source of commentary for *Poetics*. He sees the former as the only text by Aristotle which provides a reliable basis for "determining the meaning of the main concept" ("Ermittlung des Hauptbegriffs", ibid.: 147), i.e. catharsis. The only way to reconstruct the lost remarks must commence with an analysis of *Politics*. Bernays is remarkably apodictic when he claims that "[a]ll clarifications which are not consonant with the above (p. 144) terminology gleaned from *Politics* have no claim to even be heard, no matter how grammatical or how much in agreement with modern aesthetics they are. For they are only that: grammatical and aesthetical in modern terms, but in no way can they be considered Aristotelian".¹² With this comment on his method, Bernays concedes that there could be alternatives to his explanation of tragic catharsis that would be "grammatically" correct and possibly conform even better to "modern aesthetics". The future controversy about catharsis, which the text would give rise to, is anticipated here. However, he goes on to state his interest and objective, that

¹² "Allen Erklärungen also, welche mit dem oben (S. 144) aus der Politik gewonnenen terminologischen Ergebniss sich nicht reimen lassen, muss, selbst wenn sie noch so streng grammatisch sind und noch so friedlich sich mit moderner Aesthetik vertragen, der Anspruch auch nur auf Gehör aberkannt werden; denn sie sind eben nichts als grammatisch und modern ästhetisch, unmöglich aber können sie richtig, d. h. aristotelisch, sein" (Bernays 1970: 147).

is, to reconstruct *Poetics* in the spirit of Aristotle.

After presenting his methodological premises, Bernays sets forth the following translation of the end of the tragedy clause: “Tragedy brings about the relieving discharge of such affections of the soul [pitying and fearful] by arousing (‘Erregung von’) pity and fear”.¹³ In this translation Bernays implements his findings from the analysis of *Politics*. He expressly does not speak in general of the “purification of passions” (like Lessing) but rather gives purification a concrete form, based on the medical model which effects healing by eliminating an ill-making substance. Bernays chooses the pithy term ‘discharge’ (“Entladung”), a neologism in Aristotelian studies, to designate the effect of tragedy. Thus the term obtains seminal importance in Nietzsche’s¹⁴ and Freud’s¹⁵ catharsis conceptions. Bernays employs the compound noun (‘dis-charge’) to refer to an existing, constrictive pressure, which is eliminated with the competent application of a remedy. The liberating moment of this process is marked by “relief”, a term Bernays derives from *Politics* where the “hedonic element” of “relief” (“Erleichterung”) is designated as constitutive for cathartic processes (Bernays 1970: 140-1). A combination of relief and discharge engenders the term “relieving discharge” with which Bernays characterizes the catharsis effect. Thus “relieving discharge” (“erleichternde Entladung”) becomes the central metaphor of his interpretation of catharsis. But what is discharged? According to his translation it is the “affections of the soul” (“Gemüthsaffectionen”) which, in itself, is a characteristic coinage meant to signify a “turn towards the habitual and chronic” (“Wendung in das Habituelle und Chronische”), as Bernays remarks in a note (ibid.: 148) which completes his explanations to the translation.

Bernays’ concise translation presents a new concept of tragic catharsis. He distinguishes his medical approach from Lessing’s moralistic interpretation which had never been seriously questioned¹⁶ until Bernays’ thorough revision. In place of “purification” (“Reinigung”), Bernays substitutes “relieving discharge” (“erleichternde Entladung”), and instead of “passions” (“Leidenschaften”) he uses “affections of the soul” (“Gemüthsaffectionen”). Instead of “transformation of the passions to practical virtues” (“Verwandlung der Leidenschaften in tugendhafte Fertigkeiten”), which presupposes a

¹³ “[D]ie Tragödie bewirkt durch (Erregung von) Mitleid und Furcht die erleichternde Entladung solcher (mitleidigen und furchtsamen) Gemüthsaffectionen” (Bernays 1970: 148).

¹⁴ Cf. Ugolini 2003: 316-42; Därmann 2005: 124-62; Most 2009: 51-62.

¹⁵ Cf. Dalma 1963: 253-69; Tremml 1997: 7-32; Bowlby 2009: 43-6, Gödde 2009: 63-91; Gödde and Zirfas 2016: 308-21.

¹⁶ Gherardo Ugolini designates Lessing’s interpretation of catharsis in the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* as the “dominant hermeneutic model of the nineteenth century” (2000: 337-8).

genitivus obiectivus, we have a *genitivus separativus*. Catharsis is no longer seen from a moralistic perspective, nor is it seen emphatically as part of the improvement of humanity (through the theatre). Bernays' alternative concept contains "a pathological aspect" (ibid.: 141: "ein pathologischer Gesichtspunkt") derived from Aristotle's diagnostic perspective (ibid.: 144).

This pathological framework which is so fundamental to Bernays' interpretation is explained in the context of his subsequent critique of Lessing (ibid.: 148-53), which deals in particular with two words of the tragedy clause: 'passions' (παθήματα) and the reference (τοιούτων) to the tragic emotions. In both cases Bernays uses his criticism of Lessing to highlight his alternative model. Unlike Lessing, he demands a clear distinction between πάθος and πάθημα, which he introduces as follows: πάθος is the condition of a πάσχων and refers to the affect which breaks out suddenly and then passes; πάθημα, by contrast, is the condition of a παθητικός and designates the affection which is inherent to the afflicted person and ready to break out at any moment. "To put it more succinctly, πάθος is affect and πάθημα is affection" ("Kürzer gesagt, πάθος ist der Affect und πάθημα ist die Affection", ibid.: 149).¹⁷

In this sense, not every theatre spectator experiences catharsis, but only someone who has a "deeply-rooted proclivity to a certain affect" ("mit einem festgewurzelten Hange zu einem gewissen Affect"), that is, in tragedy, the pitying and fearful (ἐλεήμων καὶ φοβητικός) and not the compassionate and the fearing (ἐλεῶν καὶ φοβούμενος) may "satisfy his inclination in a 'harmless way'" through catharsis ("durch die Katharsis ein Mittel erhalten soll, seinen Hang in 'unschädlicher' Weise zu befriedigen", ibid.). Bernays finds that this pathological interpretation of the παθήματα results in "the most perfect agreement between the definition and the intimations of *Politics* regarding the actual object of catharsis" ("die vollkommenste Einhelligkeit zwischen der Definition und den Andeutungen in der Politik auch hinsichtlich des eigentlichen Objects der Katharsis", ibid.).

This actual object of catharsis is, as Bernays trenchantly summarized his findings on *Politics*, "a human being who has lost his equilibrium" ("der aus dem Gleichgewicht gebrachte Mensch", ibid.: 145). As examples, Aristotle (*Pol.* 1342a12) had singled out "the pitying" ("der Mitleidige") and "the fearful" ("der Furchtsame"). This is why Bernays sees a fundamental accordance in *Poetics* and *Politics* regarding the individuals who are susceptible to catharsis. Such an individual is, due to a predetermined disposition (a lack of mental equilibrium), in need of a "discharge" ("Entladung") or a "draining of affection" ("Ableitung der Affection", Bernays 1970: 149).

¹⁷ Although Bernays's examples support his distinction, it is not tenable in the context of the corpus of Aristotelian works, cf. Bonitz 1867: 13-55.

After clarifying what an ‘emotional disposition’ is, Bernays deals with the question of the affects. Linguistically, in his view, Aristotle used τοιοῦτων in the tragedy clause to refer back to pity and fear. Lessing, however, had translated this term of reference as “these and suchlike” passions. In the spirit of his medical conception of emotion, Bernays reduces the spectrum of emotions allowed by Lessing. As points of reference Bernays singles out pity and fear, not as singular or transitory emotions, but in the lasting form of “affections” of pity and fearfulness.

Having accomplished his aim to combine both conceptions of catharsis (of *Poetics* and *Politics*), Bernays turns to the reconstruction of the passage eliminated by the excerptor.

Conceptions of Catharsis in Late Antiquity

The third chapter deals with catharsis in late antiquity. Three text analyses are presented to demonstrate that the medical conception of catharsis that Aristotle had applied to poetry was well known to the educated public. Furthermore, the selected authors, Iamblichus and Proclus, are shown to have been familiar with further (now lost) passages of *Poetics*, in which the impact of tragedy is discussed. Bernays intends to (1) demonstrate the continuity of a medical interpretation of catharsis for poetry, (2) name authors who had still access to Aristotle’s comments in texts which (3) make it possible to gain new aspects for the reconstruction of Aristotle’s conceptions.

The first passage is taken from Iamblichus’ treatise “Of the mysteries of the Egyptians” (*De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*).¹⁸ In the selected passage (22, 1), Iamblichus explains why phallic images had been set up against demons. Bernays translates the passage as follows:

Die Kräfte (δυνάμεις) der in uns vorhandenen allgemein menschlichen Affectionen werden, wenn man sie gänzlich zurückdrängen will, nur um so heftiger. Lockt man sie dagegen zu kurzer Aeusserung (εἰς ἐνέργειαν) in richtigem Maasse hervor, so wird ihnen eine maasshaltende Freude (χαίρουσι μετρίως), sie sind gestillt und entladen und beruhigen sich dann auf gutwilligem Wege ohne Gewalt. Deshalb pflegen wir bei Komödie sowohl wie Tragödie durch Anschauen fremder Affecte unsere eigenen Affectionen zu stillen, mässiger zu machen und zu entladen; und ebenso befreien wir uns auch in den Tempeln durch Sehen und Hören gewisser schmutziger Dinge von dem Schaden, den die wirkliche Ausübung derselben mit sich bringen würde. (Bernays 1970: 160)

[The forces (δυνάμεις) of the general human affections which exist in us be-

¹⁸ Bernays quotes Lambinus from the 1678 Oxford edition (Iamblichus 1678).

come, when one tries to repress them completely, ever more vigorous. In contrast, when they are enticed to come forward in a brief expression (εἰς ἐνέργειαν), in the correct measure, they obtain a moderate joy (χαίρουσι μετρίως), they are quenched and discharged and are calmed in a benevolent way without violence. For this reason we tend, in comedies as well as in tragedies, to satiate our own affections, to moderate them, and to discharge them. In the same way, by watching and hearing lewd things in the temples we protect ourselves from the harm which would be incurred by carrying them out.]

Bernays views this excerpt as an application of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis to the phallic cults. Iamblichus defends the “lewd rites” (“schmutziger Dinge”) with arguments taken from Aristotle’s poetical theory. The discharge theory, which Aristotle developed to explain psychological processes, is transferred to the field of sexuality (“to sensual desires”) (“auf sinnliches Gelüste”, *ibid.*: 160). In this way, however, the underlying Aristotelian model emerges clearly. Bernays designates this as the “solicitation theory” (“Sollicitationstheorie”, *ibid.*: 161), whereby he focuses on the aspect of excitement which Aristotle had developed to explain the psychodynamics of catharsis. The “solicitation theory”, used in the context of affections, (παθήματα) is carried over by Iamblichus to sensual desires (ἐπιθυμῖαι). Bernays sees evidence of the Aristotelian origin of the theory of “phallic catharsis” (“phallische Katharsis”, *ibid.*: 162) in unmistakably peripatetic phrases of the excerpt (such as δύναμις, ἐνέργεια, χαίρουσι μετρίως). The brevity of the passage is seen as further confirmation of Bernays’ belief that the views taken by Iamblichus were generally well known. An absolutely clear proof of the direct reference of the text to the Aristotelian *Poetics* however, is not delivered. His argumentation has an appellative character. Bernays judges the “fertile central thoughts” (“keimkräftige Kerngedanken”) worthy only of the “great master” (“ihres grossen Meisters”), i.e. Aristotle, and not of later epigones. Iamblichus had to have had recourse to the “missing explanations of catharsis from our *Poetics*” (“die aus unserer Poetik verschwundenen Erläuterungen über Katharsis”, *ibid.*).¹⁹

The second testimony that Bernays draws on derives from the lectures of Proclus on Plato’s *Republic*. Proclus raises the question as to why Plato had not permitted tragedy and comedy “although they serve as compensation (ἀφοσίωσις) for the affects which cannot be completely eliminated, nor can they be completely satisfied, but require rather a timely excitement (κίνησις)” (“obgleich sie doch zur Abfindung (ἀφοσίωσις) der Affecte dienen, die weder ganz zu beseitigen möglich, noch wiederum völlig zu befriedi-

¹⁹ Bernays implicitly returns to the second chapter of his treatise in which he had made an uncomprehending “excerptor” responsible for the lack of Aristotle’s clarifications on catharsis (*ibid.*: 145-8).

gen gerathen ist, die vielmehr einer rechtzeitigen Anregung (κίνησις) bedürfen", *ibid.*: 164). Again, it is the aspect of solicitation which Bernays emphasizes. Proclus also has the movement, or rather "excitement" ("Anregung") (κίνησις) of the affects as facilitating the desired relief. For this Proclus uses the term "compensation" ("Abfindung") (ἀφοσίωσις). The proof for his postulate that Proclus was referring directly to Aristotle's *Poetics* Bernays finds in the reproaches (mentioned by Proclus) which Aristotle was said to have expressed against Plato. The fact that Plato is not mentioned in Aristotle's *Poetics* is "compelling" ("zwingend") proof for Bernays "that Proclus had before him the lost dispute over catharsis" ("dass Proklos die verlorene Auseinandersetzung über Katharsis vor sich hatte", *ibid.*: 165). Bernays is convinced that Proclus furnishes in his text "the most outstanding keywords" ("hervorragendsten Stichwörter", *ibid.*: 167) concerning the controversy over catharsis. He uses both the term "compensation" ("Abfindung") (ἀφοσίωσις) and the seminal metaphor of the "drainage of overflowing dampness" ("Abschöpfung einer überfließenden Feuchtigkeit") (ἀπέρασις) (*ibid.*: 168). Bernays, however, devises this metaphor by means of a conjecture (from ἀπέρανσις). In his use of this and other conjectures we find in the excerpts of the third chapter, Bernays shows himself to be a master of text criticism; his proposals are largely taken over by Des Places in his critical edition of Iamblichus (2003).

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Bernays fails here, as well as in the entire third chapter, in his aim to recover the lost building blocks of the Aristotelian theory of catharsis by relying on the later, Neoplatonic texts. His attempt to extract leading concepts and metaphors from Iamblichus and Proclus in order to reconstruct Aristotle's *Poetics* is suggestive but, finally, by no means convincing.

When Bernays, at the end of this chapter (*ibid.*: 169), returns to Iamblichus's text and finds further evidence of the "drainage" metaphor (again by means of a conjecture), this does not enhance the validity of his contention. Despite the impressive argumentation of the third chapter, the author fails to meet his goal of rediscovering leading terms and metaphors of *Poetics*.

The Historicization of Catharsis

After reconstructing the Aristotelian theory of catharsis from various sources in the previous chapters, Bernays determines its function in the context of Greek life. He derives unexpected support for his argumentation in Aristotle's remark that Euripides was the "most tragic" (τραγικώτατος) poet (*Poetics* 53a29). Bernays uses this assessment as proof of his theory that Aristotle had conceived catharsis as pathological. If Aristotle had designated

Euripides as the “most tragic” poet, he could not possibly have called for a “moral improvement“ (“moralische Verbesserung”) as Lessing had claimed, or a “direct calming of the passions” (“directe Beruhigung der Leidenschaften”) as Goethe had required. On the contrary, his concept aimed at a strong disturbance:

Vielmehr eine Wollust des Zerreißens und der Zerrissenheit, eine ekstatische Verzweiflung, ein aus allen Tiefen des Verstandes und des Herzens aufstöhnendes Mitleid mit der zusammenbrechenden alten Welt und eine im Schauern schwelgende Furcht vor dem Eintritt der herannahenden neuen Zeit – diese Stimmungen sind es, welche aus der Persönlichkeit des Euripides in seine Dramen übergehen und nun auch den Zuschauer zu ähnlichen Orgien des Mitleids und der Furcht hinreißen. (Bernays 1970: 173)

[Rather a lust in ripping things apart and in destruction and ecstatic despair, and, rising from the depths of the mind and the heart, a compassion for the collapse of the old world and a debauched shudder of fear at the approach of the new age – these are the moods which are engendered by the personality of Euripides and which flow into his dramas and sweep the spectator away to similar orgies of pity and fear.]

The tragic sensations are here qualified in three respects. They reach an extreme level of intensity (“ecstatic”, “out of the depths of the mind and the heart”), they are formed in an ambivalent manner out of pleasure and unpleasure (“lust in ripping apart”, “debauched shudder of fear”), and they refer to the depiction of a tragic transition (from “the collapsing old world” to the “dawning of a new era”). With his elevated pathos and “the soliciting discharging catharsis” (ibid.), Euripides emerges as the “most cathartic” (“der kathartischste”) poet. After having placed Euripides on a pedestal as the paradigm of Aristotelian effect conception, Bernays stresses the fundamental commonality of Aristotle and Goethe in their rejection of moral effects. Goethe, according to Bernays, would surely not have had an objection to the Aristotelian concept of an “inherent expediency of tragedy”, with which the disturbing effects on the emotions are created (ibid.: 174).

Having gained the ‘authorization’ of Euripides and Goethe for his conception of catharsis, Bernays turns to the historical conditions of catharsis. He examines the time *before* tragedy, to clarify, on the “genetic path” (“genetischen Wege”, ibid.: 175), its significance in Greek life. Again, Bernays relies on Aristotle. As in the preamble, where he stressed Aristotle’s “consistently watchful consideration and regard for the somatic” (“eine stets wache Rücksicht und Achtung für das Körperliche”, ibid.: 144) in contrast to philosophical idealism, Bernays here also emphasizes the “empirical”, anti-idealistic perspective which Bernays shares (in opposition to the theories of tragedy of German idealism). Catharsis, he states, belongs

in den Bereich der ekstatischen Erscheinungen, welche im orientalischen und griechischen Alterthum um so häufiger vorkamen, je tieferen Reiz ein solches Auf- und Ueberwallen der gesammten Gemüthskräfte auf die lebhafteste Erregbarkeit jener Völker üben musste und je nachgiebiger das in seiner Herrschaft noch nicht befestigte Selbstbewusstsein den Menschen zu einer selbstentäußerten Verzückung entliess. Wo aber der Menscheng Geist sich noch nicht in sich selber eingewohnt hat, da wird das Aussersichsein für heilig und göttlich gehalten; und der öffentliche Cultus nahm daher den orgiastischen Taumel in seinen weihenden Schutz und bestimmte ihm feste Formen der Besänftigung. (Ibid.: 175)

[to the realm of ecstatic behaviour which occurred in Oriental and Greek antiquity all the more frequently, the more deeply such welling up and overflowing of all emotions appealed to the lively excitability of those peoples, and the more easily their as yet not fully fledged self-consciousness yielded to a self-annihilating rapture. Wherever the human spirit is not yet firmly under its own control, being outside oneself is considered sacred and divine; thus public cult placed orgiastic frenzy under its hallowing aegis and determined its fixed forms of assuagement.]

The phenomenon of “ecstatic behaviour” (“ekstatische Erscheinungen”), which can be found in all of the early cultures of antiquity (in Oriental and Greek antiquity), forms the point of departure for the historical development of the concept of catharsis. Bernays’ approach is based on the assumption that the people of these early cultures had a particular proclivity (“the lively excitability”) to enthusiasm (as “self-annihilating rapture”), in as much as their self-consciousness had not yet adequately developed “control” over itself. The enthusiastic tendency (to be outside oneself) originated in the weakness of self-consciousness. This tendency in Bernays’ view was subsumed in “public cult” which took the “orgiastic frenzy” under “its sanctifying aegis” and provided it with ways to achieve relief (“fixed forms of assuagement”). These processes were aimed at calming “motion through motion” and “the clamorous spirit through clamorous songs” (ibid.: 175).

Aristotle, as Bernays argues, had been cognizant of these correlations when he attempted (following the “traces of reality”) to comprehend the remarkable success in healing of cultic/musical therapies. Aristotle had interpreted these therapies in analogy to “medical experiences” and in this way had discovered cultic catharsis (which had not been “understood by the masses”). This finding had been presented in *Politics* (in the passage discussed earlier, see first chapter). Bernays reformulates it as follows:

Wie kathartische Mittel dem Körper dadurch Gesundheit schaffen, dass sie den krankhaften Stoff zur Aeussereung hervordrängen, so wirken die rauschenden Olymposweisen sollicitirend auf das ekstatische Element, welches wider die Fessel des Bewusstseins anschäumt, ohne sie aus eigener Kraft

sprengen zu können; in unablässigem Wühlen würde es die Grundvesten des Gemüths untergraben, fände es nicht einen Beistand an der Gewalt des Gesanges, von dessen Zuge hingerissen es nun hervorrast, sich der Lust hingiebt, aller Fugen und Bande des Selbst ledig zu sein, um dann jedoch, nachdem diese Lust gebüsst worden, wieder in die Ruhe und Fassung des geregelten Gemüthszustandes sich einzuordnen. In beiden Fällen also, bei der gewöhnlichen somatischen wie bei der ekstatischen Katharsis, wird durch Sollicitation des störenden Stoffes das verlorene Gleichgewicht wiedergewonnen. (Ibid.: 176)

[Just as cathartic remedies make the body healthy by drawing out the ill-making substances, in the same way the frenzied songs of Olympus elicit the ecstatic element which foams up against the chains of consciousness, without being able to break them; such relentless turbulence would undermine the foundations of the mind if it did not find support in the fierceness of the song, in whose trajectory it is now carried away, yielding to the pleasure of freedom from all constraints of the self. When this pleasure has been atoned for, the mind finds its way back to the calm and composure of the settled state of mind. In both instances, in the normal somatic as well as in the ecstatic catharsis, equilibrium is restored through solicitation of the disturbing matter.]

In his preamble, Bernays had introduced the “catharsis of enthusiasm” with the example of the songs of Olympus. He now elucidates the relationship between emotion and consciousness. The binding force of consciousness (“chains”) is contrasted with the unbound force of the emotions (as “the ecstatic element”). If the unstable condition of the psychic equilibrium (“calm and composure”) is undermined however, or lost, it may be restored with cathartic therapy. For it was “the person who had lost his equilibrium” who had been ordained as the object of catharsis (ibid.: 145). The application of musical means (“the power of song”) facilitates the recovery of psychic balance. With the “restoration of lost equilibrium” the function of ecstatic catharsis is fundamentally defined. Bernays adds two “ancillary requirements” (ibid.: 177) of ecstatic catharsis: it is temporary and it occurs “always in conjunction with pleasure” (“stets unter Lustgefühl”, ibid.: 176).

Taking into account these three conditions, ecstatic catharsis becomes a general model of psychological therapies. All other types of “mental pathos” (“Gemüthspathos”) can be treated according to this model.

Denn alle Arten von Pathos sind wesentlich ekstatisch; durch sie alle wird der Mensch *ausser sich* gesetzt; und bei der eigentlich so genannten, von Aristoteles und den Griechen unter Enthusiasmus gemeinten Ekstase treten die ekstatischen Erscheinungen nur darum am heftigsten auf, weil hier die Ekstase objectlos ist, sich an ihrer eigenen Flamme entzündet und nährt. (Ibid.: 176)

[For all kinds of pathos are essentially ecstatic; through them a person is taken *outside himself*. Regarding the so-called ecstasy by which Aristotle and the Greeks referred to enthusiasm, ecstatic manifestations appear most forcefully only because the ecstasy is without object and ignites and sustains on its own flame.]

The principle postulated here, that is, that all pathos tends to ecstasy, is employed by psychological catharsis therapies, in which pent-up pathos is reinforced, drawn forth and disgorged. Ecstatic catharsis, for Bernays, becomes a basic model ("paradigm", *ibid.*: 177) of therapy, because in "enthusiasm" maximum excitation is achieved. Enthusiasm is not produced by a specific object (it is "without object"); pathos takes on a life of its own ("most forcefully") in ecstasy. Bernays calls this pure pathos which is not "attached to a certain object" the "Urpathos" (*ibid.*: 176). According to this finding, Aristotle developed the theory of catharsis by connecting it to the psychology and the ethics of his philosophy. Bernays contends that Aristotle assumes a fundamentally liberal stance on emotions; he does not agree with Plato's "obsession with exterminating all emotions" ("Ausrottungssucht der Affecte"),²⁰ as observed in Plato's work (*ibid.*: 201), nor does he approve of the deadly radical cures suggested by the Stoics (*ibid.*: 177). On the contrary, Aristotle is concerned that the emotions be preserved. In his model of catharsis, the emotions purify themselves through sollicitation and thereby become "weapons of virtue".²¹ Aristotle reassesses pleasure (ἡδονή) and assigns it an activating role in his concept of catharsis. Pleasure derives its energy from ecstatic turbulence and develops an "interior" dynamic which "expands and bursts the bounds of the personality" ("von innen her die Persönlichkeit erweiternde und sprengende Lust", *ibid.*: 178), while "relief is achieved in the process of returning from the sudden agitation to the restoration of mental equilibrium" ("wonach sie auf einer plötzlichen Erschütterung und Wiedergewinnung des seelischen Gleichgewichts . . . beruht", *ibid.*).

After presenting his basic model (which includes therapeutic, ecstatic, and hedonic elements), Bernays deals with tragic catharsis which is distinguished from ecstatic catharsis, in that it refers to specific objects and therefore elicits only specific emotions. Because these emotions exist "in every normal human soul" ("in jedem normalen Menschengemüth") and are liable "to break out at any moment" ("jederzeit zum Ausbruche geneigt"), Bernays designates them as "universal emotions" ("universale Affecte", *ibid.*: 179). In Greece the development from tragic to ecstatic catharsis can be observed in

²⁰ Cf. the 'ascetic catharsis' of the Neoplatonists who aimed at an ascetic repression of the "sensual urges" (Bernays 1970: 170).

²¹ The quotation from Seneca (*De ira* 1.17) is the object of the elaborate footnote on the "value of emotions" (*ibid.*: 200-1, note 16).

the cult of Dionysus. Tragic poetry had developed out of the early forms of “rapture”

welche die ursprünglich bakchantische Ekstase für den inzwischen veränderten socialen Zustand festhielt zugleich und veredelte, indem sie die Stelle des objectlos enthusiastischen Taumels ersetzte durch eine auf ekstatische Erregung universal menschlicher Affecte angelegte Darstellung der Welt- und Menschengeschicke. (Ibid.)

[which secured and refined the originally Bacchantic ecstasy for the changed social conditions by replacing the insensate whirl with a portrayal of the world and human destinies aimed at the ecstatic excitation of universal human emotions.]

Historically, “Bacchantic” catharsis precedes tragic catharsis. The early forms of excitation brought forth a mere maelstrom of enthusiasm. Later forms retain the enthusiasm which they assign to a concrete object (the “portrayal of the world and human destinies”) and which appeals only to certain emotions. Fear and compassion were well-known as specifically tragic emotions long before Aristotle’s time. They are perceived as a pair and seen in the context of the effects of tragedy.²² Nevertheless, it is Aristotle who first develops the consequences of this insight for tragic art; not only in his *Poetics* but also in other contexts of his philosophy, pity and fear for him had to be portrayed

als höchst universale und als ekstatisch hedonische, also einer besonderen Katharsis eben so würdige wie fähige Affecte . . . Denn da er Selbstgenügen und Selbstgenuß (αὐτάρκεια) für die höchste Vollkommenheit ansieht, die allein Gott besitzt, der Mensch immer nur erstrebt, so musste er vor allen anderen Affecten in dem Mitleid und der Furcht die zwei weitgeöffneten Thore erkennen, durch welche die Aussenwelt auf die menschliche Persönlichkeit eindringt und der unvertilgbare, gegen die ebenmässige Geschlossenheit anstürmende Zug des pathetischen Gemüthselements sich hervorstürzt, um mit gleichempfindenden Menschen zu leiden und vor dem Wirbel der drohend fremden Dinge zu beben. Jedoch nicht diese Erkenntniss für sich, sondern erst ihre Verbindung mit der weiter dringenden, in der Rhetorik entwickelten Einsicht, dass Mitleid und Furcht innerlich verschlungen sind, und man den Andern nur wegen dessen bemitleidet, was man für sich selber fürchtet – erst dies Ineinsehen von Mitleid und Furcht befähigte den Aristoteles die Sollicitationsweise für sie zu finden, welche die wahrhaft kathartische ist und zugleich die innere Oekonomie der Tragödie so aufdeckt, wie es im dreizehnten und vierzehnten Capitel der *Poetik* geschieht. (Ibid.: 180-1)

[as sublimely universal and ecstatic-hedonic and thus worthy and apt emotions for a special catharsis . . . For, because he considers self-sufficiency and

²² As evidence Bernays cites Plato’s *Phaidros* 268d.

self-satisfaction (αὐτάρκεια) as the highest form of perfection, possessed only by God and aspired to by mankind, he had to recognize pity and fear more than any other emotions as the two gates through which the outer world penetrates the human personality. Through these doors the indestructible force of the affections bursts forth against the psyche's smooth enclosure to suffer with others who are experiencing the same feelings and to tremble at the chaos of strange and threatening things. This recognition, in conjunction with the even more far-reaching insight developed in *Rhetoric*, that pity and fear are inherently intertwined and that one pities another because of what one fears for oneself, enabled Aristotle to discover the mechanism of sollicitation which is the truly cathartic nature and internal economy of tragedy. He elaborates this in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of *Poetics*.]

Bernays believes that Aristotle places catharsis in the service of autarchy. As “universal” affects, pity and fear belong to the basic constitution of human beings; by virtue of their strong connection to the external world, pity and fear pull the individuals away from autarchy to which they aspire but cannot achieve. Thus, the cathartic discharge of the affections offers, from an ethical point of view, a perfect means by which to stabilize autarchy. Yet, Bernays also regards the analysis of fear and pity carried out in *Rhetoric* as one of the most significant prerequisites of the concept of catharsis. The rules from *Poetics* regarding the structure of plot, character constellations, and the “inner economy of tragedy” (“die innere Oekonomie der Tragödie”) were essentially linked to the tragic emotions. The “intertwining of pity and fear” becomes for Bernays the key to the concept of tragedy. The rules of the *Poetics* all aimed at preventing that “anything in the plot or the characters dissolve the intertwining bonds of pity and fear”.²³

The interconnection of pity and fear is illustrated in the metaphors of “mirror” and “reflection”.²⁴ Only when the tragic hero “despite all his singularity” retains the characteristics of the “general human character”, when he, as Aristotle had stipulated is “similar” (ὁ ὅμοιος) to the spectator, can the latter recognize himself “in the mirror” of the hero (*Poetics* 1453a5). The pity that the spectator feels for the portrayed suffering could, according to Bernays, in this way “throw back the reflection of fear to his inner self”, that is, “pity, in association with fear is safeguarded from singularity”.²⁵ Conversely, fear should not rob the audience of its “vital mental freedom”. To illustrate

²³ “Die dort gegebenen Regeln zielen alle darauf ab, dass nichts im Gang der Handlung oder im Charakter der Personen jenes Ineinander von Mitleid und Furcht auflöse” (Bernays 1970: 181).

²⁴ This and the following quotations on pity and fear are from Bernays 1970: 181-2.

²⁵ “. . . und das Mitleid, welches er für das dargestellte Leid fühlt, den Reflex der Furcht in sein eigenes Innere zurückwerfen könne. Das Mitleid wird also durch seine Verschwisterung mit der Furcht vor Singularität bewahrt” (Bernays 1970: 181).

this, Bernays uses the image of “refraction”. Fear should never be “directly” aroused by the “abominable deeds of a moral monster (μυαρός)”.²⁶ The result would not be catharsis, but rather the paralysis of the audience. From the tragic poet, a refraction of fear is expected. Only “in the refraction through personal pity” (“in ihrer Brechung durch das persönliche Mitleid”, *ibid.*: 181) should fear seize the spectator and convey to him an “intimation” of the hero’s suffering. When the tragic poet always “keeps tight the bond which connects both emotions by nature, then his work will, by itself, precipitate its cathartic, that is, ecstatic-hedonic excitement”.²⁷

What exactly does the “ecstatic-hedonic” excitement of tragedy consist of? Both of the tragic emotions, according to Bernays, follow a dynamic trajectory which culminates in ecstasy. Pity leads the spectator “to pass outside himself”; this allows him to “merge with the tragic hero”. This ecstatic movement of transcending oneself is accompanied by a feeling of “bliss” that makes the spectator forget the pain over the “pitied naked fact”. Fear, on the other hand, loses its “oppressive and painful” effects when it is mediated and refracted through personal pity. Under these conditions

kann der rein kathartische Vorgang im Gemüth des Zuschauers so erfolgen, dass, nachdem im Mitleid das eigene Selbst zum Selbst der ganzen Menschheit erweitert worden, es sich den furchtbar erhabenen Gesetzen des Alls und ihrer die Menschheit umfassenden unbegreiflichen Macht von Angesicht zu Angesicht gegenüberstelle, und sich von derjenigen Art der Furcht durchdringen lasse, welche als ekstatischer Schauer vor dem All zugleich in höchster und ungetrübter Weise hedonisch ist. (*Ibid.*: 182)

[the purely cathartic process in the mind of the spectator can take place so that after the self, in pity, expands to become the self of all mankind, it can come face to face with the terrible, sublime laws of the universe and their all-encompassing, incomprehensible power over all mankind and allow itself to be permeated by that particular form of fear which, as an ecstatic shudder before the universe, is supremely and purely hedonic.]

Bernays attributes a specific dynamics to both emotions. The spectator experiences a dual dissolution of the self which is attended by a dual pleasure. Pity is transformed by self-expansion into “bliss” and fear, in turn, loses its oppressive force and intensifies to become ecstatic “shuddering” in face of the universe.

Bernays’ concluding remarks are devoted to defining tragic fear. Pursuing

²⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452b36. Aristotle speaks abstractly of μυαρός.

²⁷ “und wenn er so das Band, welches die bei den Affecte ihrer Natur nach innerlich verknüpft, stets straff angezogen hält, wird sein Werk ihre kathartische, d. h. die ekstatische-hedonische, Erregung von selbst herbeiführen” (Bernays 1970: 181-2).

his objective of presenting an interpretation of Aristotle, Bernays furnishes evidence for “shuddering” from *Poetics*. At one point in the text, Aristotle replaces the common verb *phobeisthai* with the verb *phrittein*, which does actually bring the physiological aspect of being afraid into view, and is reminiscent of somatic symptoms, such as goose bumps, palpitations, and hair standing on end. However, it is not so much Aristotle and Greek medicine which form the actual point of reference of Bernays’ translation, but rather Goethe and modernity. If, in the opening chapters Goethe had served as an authority to refute Lessing’s moral interpretation of catharsis, moving towards the end of his treatise, Goethe becomes for Bernays a positive point of reference. He connects Goethe and Aristotle when substituting the expression “relieving discharge” with Goethe’s “pleasurable shudder”. The model for this is Faust’s visit to the Mothers. Ready to experience the “monster”, Faust surrenders wholeheartedly to “shuddering”: “I seek not my well-being in inactivity, shuddering is the best part of humanity” (“Im Erstarren such’ ich nicht mein Heil, Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bester Theil”).²⁸ The prospect of Goethe’s *Faust* opens up a bridge towards modernity. Goethe’s conception of the “pleasurable shudder” is placed within the Aristotelian tradition.

Bernays’ treatise on catharsis offers links to various disciplines. His concept clarifies the psychological dynamics of the medical process and defines ‘affection’ and ‘distress’, ‘excitement’, ‘solicitation’, and ‘discharge’, the condition of being outside oneself, ecstasy and enthusiasm as well as the return to pleasurable relief and the temporary restoration of the unstable mental equilibrium as its constitutive elements. This basic model is applicable in various fields. Bernays distinguishes the early forms of ecstatic, phallic, and Bacchic catharsis from the more sublime form of tragic catharsis, which Aristotle sets in opposition to the “ascetic catharsis” of the Platonists. Lessing’s moral interpretation of tragic catharsis is rejected as well as Goethe’s aesthetic one. Both fail to grasp the dynamics and effects of cathartic processes as presented by Aristotle.

Works Cited

- Bach, Hans I. (1974), *Jacob Bernays. Ein Beitrag zur Emanzipationsgeschichte der Juden und zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Tübingen: Mohr.
- Belfiore, Elizabeth S. (1992), *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion*, Prince-

²⁸ Goethe, *Faust* 2.6271-2. (Goethe 1949, 3.193).

- ton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Bernays, Jacob (1853), "Ergänzung zu Aristoteles' Poetik", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 8: 561-96.
- (1859), "Ein Brief an Leonhard Spengel über die tragische Katharsis bei Aristoteles", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 14: 367-77.
- [1880] (1968), *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, ed. by Karlfried Gründer, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- [1857] (1970), *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*, ed. by Karlfried Gründer, Hildesheim and New York: Olms.
- (2010), "Du, von dem ich lebe!". *Briefe an Paul Heyse*, ed. by William M. Calder III and Timo Günther, Göttingen: Wallstein.
- Bollack, Jean (1998), *Jacob Bernays, un homme entre deux mondes*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion.
- Bonitz, Heinrich (1867), *Aristotelische Studien*, Wien: Hof und Staatsdruckerei, Commission bei Karl Gerold, vol. 5.
- Bowlby, Rachel (2009), *Freudian Mythologies: Greek Tragedy and Modern Identities*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boyle, Nicholas (2010), "Goethe's Theory of Tragedy", *The Modern Language Review*, 105: 1072-86.
- Cooper, Lane and Alfred Gudeman (1928), *A Bibliography of the Poetics of Aristotle*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dalma, Juan (1963), "La catarsis en Aristoteles, Bernays y Freud", *Revista de Psiquiatría y Psicología médica*, 11 (6): 253-69.
- Därmann, Iris (2005), "Rausch als 'ästhetischer Zustand': Nietzsches Deutung der aristotelischen Katharsis und ihre platonisch-kantische Umdeutung durch Heidegger", *Nietzsche-Studien*, 34: 124-62.
- Fraenkel, Michael (1932), *Jacob Bernays. Ein Lebensbild in Briefen*, Breslau: Marcus.
- Funke, Hermann (1996), "Bernays und die Aristotelische Poetik", in John Glucker and Andre Laks (eds), *Jacob Bernays: un philologue juif*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion: 50-75.
- Gentili, Carlo (1994), "Bernays, Nietzsche e la nozione di tragico. Alle origini di una nuova immagine della Grecia", *Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Compare*, 47 (1): 35-66.
- Glucker, John and André Laks (eds) (1996), *Jacob Bernays: un philologue juif*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion.
- Gödde, Günter (2009), "Therapeutik und Ästhetik – Verbindungen zwischen Breuers und Freuds kathartischer Therapie und der Katharsis-Konzeption von Jacob Bernays", in Martin Vöhler and Dirck Linck (eds), *Grenzen der Katharsis in den modernen Künsten. Transformationen des aristotelischen Modells seit Bernays, Nietzsche und Freud*, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter: 63-91.
- Gödde, Günter and Jörg Zirfas (2016), *Therapeutik und Lebenskunst. Eine psychologisch-philosophische Grundlegung*. Mit einer Eröffnung von Michael B. Buchholz. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1949), "Nachlese zu Aristoteles' Poetik", in *Goethes Werke. Hamburger Edition in 14 Bänden*, ed. by Erich Trunz, Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 342-5, vol. 12.

- Golden, Leon (1976), "The Clarification Theory of 'katharsis'", *Hermes*, 104: 437-52.
 – (1972/73), "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 31: 473-9.
- Gründer, Karlfried (1968), "Jacob Bernays und der Streit um die Katharsis", in Hans Barion, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, Ernst Forsthoff and Werner Weber (eds), *Epirrhosis. Festgabe für Carl Schmitt zum 80. Geburtstag*, 2: Berlin: Duncker & Humblot: 495-528.
- Heath, Malcolm (2014), "Aristotle and the Value of Tragedy". *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 54 (2): 111-23.
- Hoessly, Fortunat (2001), *Katharsis: Reinigung als Heilverfahren. Studien zum Ritual der archaischen klassischen Zeit sowie zum Corpus Hippocraticum*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Iamblichus, Chalcidensis (1678), *De Mysteriis liber: praemittitur Epistola Porphyrii ad Anebonem Aegyptium, eodem argumento*, ed. by Thomas Gale, Oxford: Sheldon.
- [1966] (2003), *Les mystères d’Égypte*, ed. and trans. by Edouard Des Places, Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Kommerell, Max [1940] (1960), *Lessing und Aristoteles. Untersuchung über die Theorie der Tragödie*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- Lawrenz, Susanne (2007), *Ästhetisches Mitleid: Lessing, Bernays, Nietzsche*, <http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/2007/194> (last access 9 April 2016).
- Lear, Jonathan (1992): "Katharsis", in: *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. by Amélie O. Rorty. Princeton: 315-40.
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1985), "Hamburgische Dramaturgie", in *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, ed. by Wilfried Barner, Klaus Bohnen, Gunter E. Grimm, Helmuth Kiesel, Arno Schilson, Jürgen Stenzel, and Conrad Wiedemann, Frankfurt am Main: Dt. Klassiker-Verlag, vol. 6.
- Martinec, Thomas (2003), *Lessings Theorie der Tragödienwirkung: Humanistische Tradition und aufklärerische Erkenntniskritik*, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo (1969), *Jacob Bernays*, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company.
- Most, Glenn W. (2009), "Nietzsche gegen Aristoteles mit Aristoteles", in Martin Vöhler and Dirck Linck (eds), *Grenzen der Katharsis in den modernen Künsten. Transformationen des aristotelischen Modells seit Bernays, Nietzsche und Freud*, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter: 51-62.
- Porter, James I. (2015), "Jacob Bernays and the Catharsis of Modernity", in Joshua Billings and Miriam Leonard (eds), *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 15-41.
- Rebenich, Stefan (2002), *Theodor Mommsen. Eine Biographie*, München: Beck.
- Schings, Hans-Jürgen [1980] (2012), *Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch. Poetik des Mitleids von Lessing bis Büchner*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Seidensticker, Bernd and Martin Vöhler (2007), "Zur Einführung: Katharsiskonzeptionen vor Aristoteles", in Martin Vöhler and Bernd Seidensticker (eds), *Katharsiskonzeptionen vor Aristoteles*, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter: VII-XII.
- Treml, Martin (1997), "Zum Verhältnis von Jacob Bernays und Sigmund Freud", *Lu-*

- zifer Amor: Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Psychoanalyse, 10: 7-32.
- Ugolini, Gherardo (2000), "Tragödie", in Henning Ottmann (ed.), *Nietzsche-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler: 336-8.
- (2003), "'Philologus inter philologos'. Friedrich Nietzsche, die Klassische Philologie und die griechische Tragödie", *Philologus*, 147: 316-42.
- (2012), *Jacob Bernays e l'interpretazione medica della catarsi tragica: con traduzione integrale del saggio di Bernays Lineamenti del trattato perduto di Aristotele sull'effetto della tragedia*, Caselle di Sommacampagna, VR: Cierre Grafica.
- Wickert, Lothar (1967): "Theodor Mommsen und Jacob Bernays", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 205: 265-94.
- (1969), *Theodor Mommsen, Eine Biographie*, Leipzig - Zürich - Breslau - Berlin, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, vol. 3: Wanderjahre.
- Wilm, Marie-Christin (2009), "Die Grenzen tragischer Katharsis. Jacob Bernays' 'Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles' (1857) im Kontext zeitgenössischer Tragödientheorie", in Dirck Linck and Martin Vöhler (eds), *Grenzen der Katharsis in den modernen Künsten*, Berlin: de Gruyter: 21-50.