

What Did Aristotle Mean by 'Catharsis'?

John Kirby · Classics and Comparative Literature · Purdue University

The Definition — "formal def" ^{is in me of the form causes}

"Tragedy is a representation [*mimēsis*] of a serious, complete action that has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting, and not by narration; [this *mimēsis*] brings about, through pity and fear, the *katharsis* of such *pathēmata* [*tên tōn toioutōn pathēmātōn katharsin*]." *Poetics* 6 (1449b 24–28); adapted from Richard Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics I* (Indianapolis: Hackett 1987)

A's program
↓
but not explained in the extant work. ? book 2, now lost

metaphoric
not everybody
can understand

A MATRIX OF THE POPULAR THEORIES ^{approaches} _{ground by ancient} _{arguments over} _{own subjectivity}

1. The meaning of *pathēma* in the phrase *pathēmātōn katharsin*

typical tr. — 'emotion' in A.

- G. Else: no, the tragic event, act around which the drama turns
- Kirby: no, adopt standard translation

2. The site of *katharsis*

in the audience?

a tragedy (Else) in the tragic character
in the city
yet speaks to the most secret

tragedy a cognitive event: Kirby = understanding
Katharsis — clearly, obviously
Leon Golden
↑
reference (usage, of Ar. in politics)
but is that the same thing here?

3. The Semantic Field of the *katha(i)r-* Family

basic sense: cleansing, purifying, clarifying, purifying

↓
as *katharsis* = pure
n. *katharmos*
as *katharmos* → in the vein, but character as well

J. Beramp (1970), *Eliz. Belfiore* 120

4. The meaning of *toioutōn* ('such') in the phrase *tōn toioutōn pathēmātōn* ('of such *pathēmata*')

not pity + fear (i.e. these), but their opposite
hold on to purgation model
Belfiore's
new purgation model

5. The nature of the genitive *pathēmātōn*

is it objective
separated

a subjective → work "of the teacher" → is she teaching

↑
K. Gibson has — a *katharsis* that the emotions produce

The Department of Classics
University of Washington

cordially invites you to a talk on

**"What Did Aristotle Mean
By *Catharsis*"**

by

John Kirby
Purdue University

Friday, October 31, 1997
Denny Hall 216 / 3:00

John Kirby is Associate Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, and Chair of the Program in Comparative Literature, at Purdue University. His publications embrace classical rhetorical and poetic theory, metrics, textual issues, and areas of current literary theory, particularly semiotics, narratology and reader-response. He is the author of *The Rhetoric of Cicero's Pro Cluentio* (Amsterdam 1990), and the editor of two forthcoming collections, *The Comparative Reader* and *Landmark Essays on Ciceronian Rhetoric*.

Prof. Kirby's week-long visit to the University of Washington is co-sponsored by the Department of Classics and the Department of Speech Communication.

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What is the Demogogon for? — "Aristotelian" question
Praxis - 4 "causes" — really, sources of tragedy

material — metal, buff

formal — Halloran —

efficient — maker

final — what is it for — what is its telos

↳ the most important question
so far tragedy, what is it for?

Is Catharsis the final cause —

if so, then we can apply the Q. to any media form

purification: characters: Oedipus — didn't know, so technically pure
Medea — did know

but how do pity + fear purify pity + fear

Why would we want to purify ourselves of pity?

again: how do pity + fear purify pity + fear

pleasure & medical experience? No

not + ancient medicine allopathic, not homeopathic

doesn't the — pleasure in aesthetic cognition that result from mimesis

Chain of events?

Paterman's — positive reaction of pity + fear

move from particulars to universals + back again