Introduction

PREMISE AND PURPOSE

> The activity of art is based on the fact that a man receiving through his sense of hearing and sight another man's expression of feeling is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it. To take the simplest example: one man laughs and another, who hears, becomes merry; or one man weeps and another, who hears, feels sorrow.
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> (Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, London, 1930, 171)

Certain assumptions about art can be found across cultures. The idea that works of art transmit emotions to the audience is formulated, for example, in Plato's *Ion* and resurfaces in Tolstoy's *What is Art?*. Yet, what lies behind such a general assumption of an "emotional chain" that links poet, bard, and audience? There is, in fact, not much agreement. Indeed, theorists continue to grapple with understanding the very formation of the emotions produced by art;[1] so, naturally, adequately understanding the subsequent physical, psychological, and ethical effects of these emotions is all the more daunting. This book will explore some specific, culturally circumscribed approaches to the emotional responses to tragedy in fifth-century Athens. Although the subject matter is rather tightly focused, it will be of interest, I hope, to audiences from various humanistic fields, for it examines not only how the ancient Greeks thought about the emotional effects of poetry, but also assesses what may be culturally specific as well as universally relevant in our reflections on art.

Pity and fear, the emotions mentioned so frequently in Aristotle's *Poetics*, have stirred much spirited discussion within scholarly circles. Stephen Halliwell and Jonathan Lear, two of the most prominent Aristotelian scholars

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[1] A subsequent section of this introduction will be devoted to explaining terminology (e.g., aesthetic emotion, etc.).

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of our time, debate the significance of pity in the *Poetics* as follows. Halliwell notes that the emotion has the "potential to contribute to the tacit redefinition of an audience's moral identity." Lear forcefully objects: "My response is this: that's very nice, if true. But what if it isn't? How would we ever know, especially if we are spending our philosophical time telling ourselves self-satisfied stories about the redemptive power of pity?"[2] The controversy reflects an impasse that well characterizes the mainstream approach to the subject of tragic emotions in fifth-century Athens. Scholarly focus has often been on understanding Aristotle's aesthetic theory, and particularly the mysterious concept of *catharsis* in the *Poetics* as a reply to Plato's critique of tragic pity in the *Republic.* My book has a different focus, as it will not seek the "right" meaning of tragic pity. Rather, it will broadly examine various cultural views about pity and fear as responses to tragedy (and, in passing, epic) in classical Athens and reassess emotional expressions of pity and fear within different tragedies to suggest moral, social, and political implications of the responses of the audiences to various plays.

Classicists have studied descriptions of pity and fear as tragic emotions particularly in the works of Aristotle.[3] Scholars have also emphasized the importance of emotions in Greek tragedy for fifth-century Athenian audiences, who expected the tragedians to move and entertain them.[4] The novelty of my study lies in recovering various cultural facets of the emotional responses to tragedy through a synthesis of sources, such as philosophical descriptions (Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle), fragments of comic poetry, and dramatic scholia, to the extent that they reflect ancient literary criticism,[5] reports about the original tragic performances, and emotional expressions of the internal audiences (i.e. characters and chorus witnessing the suffering of others within drama) in individual tragedies. In the treatment of each tragedy, most original are the assessments of the relationship between the emotional expressions of internal audiences and the likely and reported reactions of the external spectators. The emphasis will be on the

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[2] The quotations are to be found in two essays published in the same collection: Halliwell 1995, 94, and, respectively, Lear 1995b, 96.

[3] Most prominently, Halliwell 1986 and 1998, 168–201; Belfiore 1992, 177–254; Konstan 1999b, 2005a, in which he reviews some of his own earlier views on the tragic emotions in Aristotle, and 2006, with individual chapters dedicated to pity and fear.

[4] Stanford 1983; Heath 1987 and 1989. Among the earlier studies on the subject, see Shisler 1945, who examines gestures and other descriptions of actions (e.g. tearing clothing, kneeling, etc.) as concrete expressions of emotions in tragedy.

[5] For an update on the editions of the dramatic scholia and a brief evaluation of the ancient information that they contain, see Dickey 2007, 31–8. Kraus 2002 provides a useful review of the theoretical criteria for examining ancient and modern commentaries to classical texts as readings that reflect the taste of their authors and the interpretative interests of their times.

descriptions of the emotions as a result of viewing suffering through the eyes of internal spectators, which offer models of interpretation for external audiences.

EMOTION: EMOTION AS RESPONSE TO TRAGEDY, TO ART(S)

Materia teatrului este emoția. Nu mă duc la teatru pentru a audia o conferinta, ci pentru că e un spațiu unde, sufletește, mă deschid. Emoțiile sunt zona mea cea mai obscură, despre ele știu cel mai puțin și le exprim cel mai greu. Dacă am un blocaj este la nivelul emotiilor, nu al intelectului, nu al trupului. Iar teatrul trebuie să ne dea o educație pe care școala nu ne-a dat-o. Școala nu ne-a dat nici o educatie a emoțiilor, teatrul trebuie să ne-o dea. (Andrei Șerban, Romanian-American theater director, *Puncte Cardinale,* September 2008, 7)

The essence of theater is emotion. I do not go to see a play in order to hear a lecture but because the theater is a space where I open my soul. The emotions belong to my most obscure area; I know least about them and I express them with utmost difficulty. If I lack an ability to express myself – it concerns my emotions, not my intellect or my body. And theater must give us an education that school has not given us. School has not provided us with an education of the emotions; theater has to provide us with that.

Any book dealing with emotions has to define its subject, which is a notoriously difficult matter in this case. Indeed, fascinating studies have been written about the search for a comprehensive definition of emotions and have underlined the problems surrounding the concept as well as the possible solutions.[6] As Ben-Ze'ev has noted,[7] emotion is a complex phenomenon, which should be described on different levels: physiological, psychological, sociological, and philosophical. No level can fully define the emotion, but each contributes to the definition. An emotion, then, consists of a response to environmental stimuli that often produces physiological changes (i.e. flow of adrenaline, heart rate); it involves a psychological evaluation (cognitive and affective) of the stimuli; and, finally, it often leads to action and motivation. Philosophically speaking, an emotion raises problems that pertain to morality and rationality; sociologically, the emotion may vary in intensity and symptoms, according to factors related to culture, gender, age group, etc. The complexity of the emotions makes a holistic

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[6] Out of the numerous interesting studies of this sort, I have selected only a short list of essential readings here: two collections of essays edited by Solomon (2003), providing a historical survey of the topic, and (2004), combining philosophical, psychological, and biological approaches. Good summaries of the problems and controversies pertaining to emotions are offered, for example, by Lewis and Haviland 1993, Hillman 1999, and Ben-Ze'ev 2000, 1–78.

[7] Ben-Ze'ev 2000, 10.

approach almost impossible. Therefore, several disciplines have contributed significantly to the modern understanding of the emotions, most notably biology, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy. Moreover, the tremendous contemporary interest in emotions has produced significant recent studies in the field of classics.[8] Although the recent eclectic approaches to the subject have benefited scientists and humanists alike, they have also created some difficulties. Thus, while choosing one or two emphases in the study of emotion (for example, biological or sociological) represents a necessary norm, it also oversimplifies the subject, for almost inevitably researchers will emphasize the "correctness" of one type of study and dismiss partially or completely the validity of other perspectives.[9] In addition, controversies surrounding the emotions often derive from cause-and-effect relationships.[10]

A branch of modern philosophy of art has developed the study of the so-called aesthetic emotions, under two divisions: (1) expression theory, which analyzes the emotions expressed in art, and (2) reception theory, which concentrates on the emotions of the viewers, spectators, listeners, and readers, triggered in response to various arts.[11] While sharing all the complexities of the genus, aesthetic emotion presents additional difficulties.

Attempts to define a unified field of research have created a first predicament. Since various arts communicate through different media, can we speak of a unified mode of emotional expressions? The expression theory (1) analyzes, for example, how literary works "describe" emotions as well as how musical pieces "convey the impression" of certain emotions through sound-combinations.[12] But in the latter case, listeners do not always

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[8] An overview of the current directions in the study of emotions in classical scholarship is provided by Fitzgerald 2008, 1–25. Sokolon 2006, 33–48, reviews contemporary approaches (evolutionary, feeling theory, sociological, etc.) to emotions and their connections with Aristotle's thought.

[9] An example of this sort is the book of Griffiths (1997), which completely dismisses philosophical explanations for emotions and accuses philosophers of ignoring biological and psycho-linguistic developments in the field. It proposes that biological genetics and environmental sociology ought to be the primary tools in understanding the emotions.

[10] A famous controversy, for example, has centered around the question of whether emotions originate in the head or in the body, the James-Cannon debate, a kind of "chicken or the egg," which still divides some modern scholars. For a recent reappraisal of various difficulties, see Pert 1997, 135–43, as well as Lane and Nadel 2000. A current debate of importance, for example, concerns the degree of universality of the emotions (emphasized by evolutionary theorists) as opposed to their cultural specificity (emphasized by sociologists). For a concise general presentation of this controversy, see Keltner and Haidt 2001; from a linguistic point of view, see, for example, Wierzbicka 1999, 273–307. Cairns (2008) has evaluated the importance of this debate for the field of classics.

[11] Matravers (1998) offers a comprehensive presentation of the modern field. I have discussed modern theories more extensively and outlined a comparison between the modern and the ancient views about the aesthetic emotions elsewhere, in an article (2009).

[12] Collingwood (1938) developed the basic theory of emotional expression in art. Behrend (1988) and Kivy (1989) apply the expression theory of emotions to non-verbal arts, specifically music.

absolutely agree on the emotional outcome, and there seems to be no truly objective method of establishing the nuance of the emotions produced by non-verbal arts. "Expression" of emotion in art has been used ambiguously and it may cover a variety of meanings. With respect to painting, for example, it can mean the release of emotion by an artist (in a painting, etc), the pretense of emotion, the projection of an emotion in the painting by the viewer, etc.[13] Fortunately, my work does not require finding solutions to these problems. I shall examine the situations, manner, and reasons for which characters in Greek tragedies express emotions, particularly pity and fear and, furthermore, the way in which they describe these two emotions. My use of the expression theory will therefore be limited to reconstructing a kind of psychological profile of internal spectators and their reactions to suffering.

Reception theory (2) deals with the emotions of the audience as responses to the works of art.[14] Scholars have compared the "aesthetic" emotions (inspired by art) and the "regular" emotions (caused by real events). Some have argued that the former differ from the latter on two accounts: their *formation*, since the objects of the aesthetic emotions are not taken as "real," and their *consequences*, since they do not lead us to action. Take, for instance, the example of a novel such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina.* Can we be "saddened" by the fate of the unfortunate Anna, when we know that she does not exist? Furthermore can we aid any fictional heroine? No, we cannot. In fact, we do not act on our emotion, as we might in real life.[15] As far as the practical result of an emotion is concerned, it has been convincingly demonstrated that while, indeed, the aesthetic emotion does not compel us to action, the ordinary emotion does not necessarily have to result in taking action in real life either.[16] Thus, aesthetic emotion does not split from an absolute norm for being devoid of action.[17] On the other hand, the causes of the aesthetic emotion remain more problematic. To the question of how we can be moved by fiction, scholars from various fields have given the following answers:

(a) Aesthetic emotions are "irrational," because they have no "real" cause or purpose.[18]

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[13] Shibles 1995, 73, provides this example and further criticism of the expression theory.
[14] I am taking the meaning of "art" in the most general way, including visual arts, music, literature, and, for modern times, film. Unless I specify otherwise, I use the term "audience" in a very broad sense, which includes listeners, viewers, readers, etc.
[15] Radford 1975, 67–80. [16] Matravers 1998, 57–81.
[17] In the *Republic,* Plato worries about the opposite problem, namely that aesthetic emotion secretly leads to morally unwanted action (i.e. pity for tragic characters leads to grieving for personal loss in real life).
[18] Radford (1975).

(b) Aesthetic emotions occur in the game of "make-believe," in which the audience pretends to take fiction as reality, as children do while playing games; therefore, the emotions felt in response to art are not "real" but "quasi-emotions."[19]

(c) Aesthetic emotions are formed in a similar way to ordinary emotions, based on a set of presumptions, which we consider plausible whether they are real or hypothetically presented to our imagination.[20] We take fiction as a "true report," in the same way we read a piece of news, assuming that it is true. Let us say we are reading in a newspaper that someone has been imprisoned unjustly. Similarly, we read that an innocent Edmond Dantès has been thrown in prison on his wedding day in Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo*. The cognitive premises for both the fictional and the real stories do not differ. It is therefore likely that we have the same emotional reactions to both real and imaginary stimuli. According to this, aesthetic emotions do not differ essentially from real-life emotions.[21]

(d) Aesthetic emotions may be similar but not quite equal to the ordinary: they are triggered by a complex interaction between data-driven mental processing and hypothesis-driven processing.[22] Thus, we react based on the given data (i.e. an innocent is falsely imprisoned) but, at the same time, we realize the fictional nature of the subject (i.e. we know that Edmond Dantès is not "real" in Dumas' novel).

Let me briefly summarize the merits and shortfalls of each theory, even if a thorough critique is beyond the scope of this introduction. The strict cognitivist viewpoint (a) signals a paradox. The emotion aroused by fiction *ought not* to exist in the same way in which the emotion caused by real events does, because it does not have "true" cognitive premises. Nevertheless, as Radford himself admits, we appear to feel an emotion that has no base in reality. A step toward an explanation is Walton's association between fiction and children's games (b): we know that fictional scenarios are not real, yet we buy into them as if they were. This idea has a long tradition, as I shall show, and can be already recognized in Gorgias' ideas about tragic "illusion," or *apate*, in which the spectator willingly lets himself be deceived by a playwright's creation. However, Walton's theory does not explain entirely why the spectators believe that they feel genuine emotions, although they know that they are engaged in a kind of game, in which they only "pretend to" believe the fictional scenario. The "true report"

[19] K. Walton 1990.   [20] Currie 1990, 182–216, Matravers 1998, 42–55.
[21] Most prominently, Robinson 2005.   [22] Palencik 2008.

theory has the great merit to suggest that we *can* cognitively treat fiction as reality. Especially when we deal with emotion felt for "another," it seems to me, we can imaginatively participate in fiction to the point that we no longer care whether the premises of the story are real or imaginary. Thus, just as in the above given example, when someone suffers unjustly, the cognitive premise is similar whether we read a story based on a true fact or imagined, and therefore we may feel pity for the victim and indignation at those who inflict suffering. Nevertheless, it seems, the "true report" theory cannot fully explain the emotions that concern the self, such as fear or anger. And here the recent theory of Palencik that combines hypothetical and data-based thought processing (d) may soon lead to more complex and convincing explanations. We cannot directly fear a fictional danger or become angry at a character, unless we feel the emotions on behalf of other characters. Nevertheless, some spectators, for example, declare that they were truly afraid for themselves, when, for example, seeing the "Green Monster." What kind of fear is this? Is it the same kind that they would have felt if they encountered such a monster directly? The strict cognitivists might label this "absurd" or unfounded fear. The scholars who emphasize the rôle of imagination do not usually deal with this emotion at all. Some have rightly suggested that fear at the horror movie might have to do with activating ancestral, automatic brain responses to horrifying-looking creatures.[23] Indeed, the instinctive response, it seems to me, has to do with an instantaneous feeling of repulsion that could be shared regardless of whether someone faces real or fictional monsters. However, doesn't this type of initial reaction, aroused by both fictional and real stimuli, differ from "fearing" an approaching beast in a real circumstance? In the situation of a real dangerous encounter, in addition to the initial feeling of repulse, the emotion of fear likely involves other cognitive processes, such as real-ization of immediate danger, and probably compels us to action, such as running away from the monster or trying to kill it. And, indeed, the spectators in a movie theater may not feel this type of absolute fear (here the strict cognitivists might be right for once). Similarly, I think, we can never become "truly" angry, when imaginatively involved in fiction. Indeed, we cannot believe a "true report" in which a fictional character would insult us directly. A fictional villain may insult another character, whom we may like, or oppose a cause, for which we stand. But in such cases we become indig-nant, not angry, although (like in the case of fear) we might experience an initial wave of physiological symptoms that indignation shares with anger.

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[23] E.g., Hartz 1999, 560–7.

While modern theories do not fully articulate this distinction between emotions oriented toward others and toward self, they anticipate it. Thus, scholars who underline the similar cognitive premises for both data-based and aesthetic emotions often discuss emotions related to others (pity, compassion, indignation). Conversely, those theorists who argue that aesthetic emotions have to be different from real-life emotions often discuss a self-concerned emotion, fear. Pity and fear, the emotions that Aristotle grouped together as quintessential responses to tragedy, might in fact belong to very different categories of aesthetic emotions. The formation of pity does not differ much, whether the emotion is felt for real or imaginary misfortunes, whereas real and aesthetic fear seem not to resemble each other so closely in their formation.

My analysis focuses on the nature of emotions as response to art (i.e. aesthetic emotions), particularly to tragedy in ancient Greek culture. This subject is limited by time and culture, as it pertains to the philosophical descriptions (Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle) of pity and fear as reactions to tragic poetry (by extension sometimes to epic and visual arts), in fifth- and fourth-century Athens and, secondarily, the expressions of the tragic emotions within tragedies. Nevertheless, it can appeal broadly to scholars from various fields. Many of the problems raised by the ancient texts remain of interest for modern philosophy, psychology, literary criticism, and cultural history. Take, for instance, the psychological effects of the aesthetic emotions. How does the response to the suffering of another affect the viewer's own self? How does it relate to pleasure and knowledge? Consider the question of the audience's expectations for emotional arousal. Why have literary texts been judged according to their ability to "elicit" certain emotions? My use of modern theories of aesthetics is intended to shed a new light on certain aspects of the ancient accounts that have remained somewhat obscure to classicists. At times, I shall use both ancient ideas and modern theories to present certain problems that await solutions, such as understanding the varieties of tragic fear.

SOME SPECIFICATIONS: AESTHETIC EMOTIONS — POLITICAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

My approach will not avoid discussing possible inter-relations among drama, politics, and ethics. On the contrary, when authors, such as Plato, underscore the moral and social implications of the emotions felt for tragedy, I shall analyze those with due diligence. Similarly, if, for example, characters discuss the political significance of pity within tragedies, I shall

consider the implications of such comments for the audiences. On the other hand, we must not assume that moral and political facets of the tragic emotions were important at *all* times, in *all* ancient testimonies. Too often, modern interpretations of the ancient texts have subordinated the emotional responses to tragedy to social realities or politics. And this subordination sometimes only serves to obscure the subject. Take, for instance, a recent example of a contemporary analysis of the *Poetics* that explains the aesthetic response as a mere reflection of political attitudes:

As Aristotle famously observes in the *Poetics*, the finest tragedies – which is to say, the tragedies that most dramatically exorcise emotions of pity and fear – are "always on the story of some few houses," such as Oedipus, because the misfortune of someone better than us matters most (1453a–1454a15). Likewise, we might consider why the tragedy of Princess Diana's death could provoke mourning across the world, while the death of an indigent provokes apathy or, more accurately, nothing at all.[24]

Now does Aristotle mean that, in general, we care about the socially powerful while we do not care about the weak? Does this mean that the emotions elicited by tragedy in Aristotle's opinion are a reflection of the political hierarchy? Is it true that, overall, in society, our sympathy can be elicited only by celebrities? Generally, this does not ring true. Who has not wept over Dickens' orphan characters – who were certainly helpless and unimportant socially? Or who does not care about the hungry children of the contemporary world, though feeling sorry for them might not lead to our helping them? If so, is the socio-political position of Oedipus the important factor that triggers our pity? Yes and no. It is, but only incidentally, I think, not intrinsically. The political reading is a kind of anachronism, an example of modern "politicizing" of an Aristotelian point. To any careful reader of the *Poetics,* Aristotle's observation appears to be the result of complex psychological and philosophical presumptions rather than a reflection of social rankings. It revolves around the concept of the reversal of fortune and how we contemplate it.[25] Someone powerful and successful, such as an Oedipus, who rules over Thebes after he has solved the impossible riddle of the Sphinx, may seem to us infallible. Therefore, as Aristotle's constant emphasis on surprising (yet logical) recognitions and

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[24] Gross 2006, 4; on the problem of the "nobility" of tragic characters and of tragedy as genre, see Eagleton 2003, 1–23.

[25] Overall, Aristotle's emphasis is on plot as action, not on characters. As Belfiore 2000b warns, our modern translation "plot" of the Aristotelian term *mythos* is imperfect, and so is our modern understanding of it, influenced by narratology, which emphasizes character over action and has no equivalent for some Aristotelian concepts (e.g., plot as function of tragedy).

reversals implies, when such a hero falls from the heights we may be in a state of disbelief that leads to shock and, finally, to the Aristotelian *ideal* type of tragic pity and fear. If even such a person can suffer, we might just imagine how frightening the future looks for the rest of us. Similarly, the story of Diana could have served for a good Aristotelian plot.[26] The young and beautiful princess Diana, who had been married to one of the most privileged men in the world, appeared to have everything, and *should have* lived happily ever after (like Oedipus should have). And yet, she did not: she endured a bitter divorce and died suddenly. And that leads us to surprise, shock, and finally pity for her. As observers of the literary or real world, we entertain the illusion that those who possess political power, and moral and physical abilities live safely and happily. Therefore, the fall of such persons displays an impressive reversal of fortune to us, so essential for the Aristotelian plot. Thus, it is not that a servant could not elicit a form of our sympathy in tragedy (and we will see an instance in which a Phrygian slave tries to do so in Euripides' *Orestes*) or that a poor child in Ethiopia does not elicit a form of our pity, but this may be a different kind of emotion than what Aristotle wants from tragedy. Certainly a servant or a poor child does not seem immune to suffering. On the other hand, one should feel pity and shock for Andromache, who has become a slave after being a prosperous princess in Troy. As a tragic character, Andromache in fact, emphasizes this horrific reversal in Euripides' play. Yet, one could not, by Aristotelian standards, feel the same kind of "tragic" pity for a woman who has always suffered as a slave. On the contrary, we expect that certain people suffer, so that, when we see them suffering, we do not feel shocked, and, therefore, our pity for them does not fit Aristotelian criteria. Likewise, we *expect* certain people who are enemies to make each other suffer, but those instances of suffering do not provide material for good tragic plots; best tragic plots should portray *shocking* conflicts among the kin (*Po.* 14.1453b). Thus, it is not the political element *per se* that motivates our emotional reactions to the *Oedipus*, but that element remains ancillary to the philosophical in explaining the peculiarities of our aesthetic emotion.

Furthermore, at times, classical scholars have interpreted the aesthetic and the political as opposed concepts in the literary criticism of classical tragedy. The debate on whether ancient audiences expected foremost to

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[26] Perhaps objections can be raised to seeing Diana as a character of Greek tragedy; here I am simply developing the suggestion of Gross, to show that it is not the status in itself but rather the reversal that makes one's misfortune memorable. Wallace 2007, 1–8, has sketched a theoretical comparison between tragedy as literary genre and real events that appear "tragic" to us; for seeing "the tragic" as a mode of accepting heroically our mortality and suffering, see Morris 1991, 255–66.