

## TRAGIC PATHOS

Scholars have often focused on understanding Aristotle's poetic theory, and particularly the concept of *catharsis* in the *Poetics*, as a response to Plato's critique of pity in the *Republic*. However, this book shows that, while Greek thinkers all acknowledge pity and some form of fear as responses to tragedy, each assumes for the two emotions a different purpose, mode of presentation, and, to a degree, understanding. This book reassesses expressions of the emotions within different tragedies and explores emotional responses to and discussions of the tragedies by contemporary philosophers, providing insights into the ethical and social implications of the emotions.

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# TRAGIC PATHOS

*Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy*

DANA LACOURSE MUNTEANU



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*To Tutica (Felicia Amalia Florian),  
whom I have dearly missed and whose love I can never forget*

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## *Preface and acknowledgments*

Our fascination with literature depends to a great extent on how stories enrich our emotional lives. However, analyzing in a coherent manner the emotions that we feel for fiction remains extremely difficult. This book is an examination of how ancient Greeks described and understood the emotions stirred by tragedy. Since I have included an extensive introduction and ample explanations of my intentions before every chapter, I shall not bore the reader with a long preface, but shall list here only a few necessary disclaimers, followed by acknowledgments. What follows is not a study of Aristotle's *Poetics*, although both Aristotle and his *Poetics* receive extensive analysis, but a broader examination of pity and fear as tragic emotions in Greek thought. Although I have tried to cover diligently the bibliography relevant to my subject, it is inevitable that omissions will have occurred, which I regret but consider inevitable, as I have dealt with enormously popular authors and topics. Finally, as far as English is concerned, I remember starting graduate school and using my new adoptive language daily for scholarly matters: it felt at times as if I had played a character (as Rimbaud famously once said: "Je est un autre"). Nowadays English does not have any alienating effect on me, and many scholars and friends have made suggestions to improve the style used in this book, but I am sure that readers will still discover twisted idioms and infelicities. When they do, I can only ask for their clemency – and no one has put it better than Nünlist (2009, ix) in the preface of his recent book: "exasperated readers will, surely, take into account that the only other alternative would have been to write this book in my native language."

The task of thanking the many scholars and friends who have helped me in the making of this book is daunting, but I shall do my best, with apologies for the omissions, starting from the most recent to the earliest acknowledgments. The anonymous readers from Cambridge University Press sent me illuminating comments, made helpful suggestions, and important corrections, for which I am very grateful. I thank the editor,

Michael Sharp, for his prompt responses to all my queries and for his professionalism. I am deeply grateful to Professor Ann Micheleni for her essential insights throughout various stages of writing this book, for her patience with my shortcomings and her enthusiasm for my ideas. In later stages of writing, I benefited from the advice of two wonderful Aristotelian scholars, whom I thank wholeheartedly, Professor Elizabeth Belfiore (University of Minnesota) and Professor David Konstan (Brown University). Professor Belfiore generously took time out of her sabbatical a few years ago to read a very rudimentary draft and helped me rethink the structure of the book. I am much indebted to Professor Konstan who has emailed me detailed comments and suggestions on earlier (and sometimes abandoned) drafts; he has often saved me from transgressions with kindness. For the early, dissertational stage of the project, my thanks go first and foremost to Professor Kathryn Gutzwiller, University of Cincinnati, who offered me steady guidance and valuable suggestions.

I thank the Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati, for funding this project with Summer Research Scholarships (2007 and 2008). My good friend, Todd Reinhard, read parts of this manuscript carefully and offered stylistic suggestions, for which I am very grateful. A former graduate student, Andrew Connor, helped me with the tedious task of checking references. Jacqueline Riley, Head Librarian, University of Cincinnati, John Miller Burnam Classical Library, and Susan Scott, Library Director, Ohio State University at Newark, satisfied every bibliographical demand I had, which greatly facilitated the completion of this book. Former colleagues, staff, and friends in Cincinnati, especially Harry Gotoff, Gayle McGraham, Ann Hamill, Eleni Hatzaki, Peter van Minnen, Valentina Popescu, Michael Sage, Gisela Walberg, and Jean Susorney Wellington, provided encouragement and stimulating conversations during welcome breaks from long library sessions.

I am also deeply grateful to my colleagues in the Department of Greek and Latin, at Ohio State University, where I started teaching in 2009, for seeing originality in my work before it was officially accepted for publication. Particularly I would like to thank the following professors in the department for their collegial support and answers to various questions and demands related to my book: Ben Acosta-Hughes, Richard Fletcher, Fritz Graf, David Hahn, Bruce Heiden, Sarah Iles Johnston, and Timothy McNiven. Finally, graduate student Samuel Flores has helped me with indexing, for which I am thankful.

I would like to acknowledge my former Romanian professors, who often accomplished teaching miracles, after the Socialist regime had attempted to

*Preface and acknowledgments*

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shatter the “bourgeois” tradition of classics. Knowledge of ancient Greek in Romania during the nineties was delivered through a kind of oral tradition, almost without books (Latin was in a much better position in this respect). Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude toward the Department of Classics, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania, and its marvelous professors: Frieda Edelstein, Malvina Pătruț, Elena Popescu, Vasile Rus, and Mihai Nasta (Cluj and Brussels). Professor Popescu would write paradigms on the blackboard inspired by the Muse (or nineteenth-century German and French grammars), we would learn grammar from our notes based solely on her delivery; without a Romanian-Greek dictionary, we had to use a modern language (French, English, or German) to learn Greek vocabulary. I remember copying by hand passages from Homer or Herodotus from the only existing nineteenth-century French edition, with minimal apparatus criticus and no commentary; then came the adventure of translating and interpreting, often sharing my discoveries with my good friends, Camelia Mihuț and Laura Muncaciu. Perhaps my writing would have taken a different course, since Latin was second nature to me, if Professor Frieda Edelstein, whom I greatly admire, had not told me once that I had too much imagination to write on Latin syntax. I do not know whether she was right, but her Latin syntax course was one of the most intriguing philosophical approaches to language that I have encountered. My interest in Aristotle started in a literary theory class, conducted by Professor Muthu, in Cluj as well. I remember memorizing the definition of tragedy from the *Poetics* in Greek to impress the professor who was not a classicist (it worked); Aristotle must have impressed me, since I have continued to think about the meaning of his poetic theory.

On a personal note, I thank my husband, Cary LaCourse, for supporting my scholarly cause and never ceasing to believe in my star. Love and thanks go to my parents, Violeta and Laurențiu Munteanu, for all their help through graduate school and afterwards, and to my little boy, Lysander, for helping me put things in perspective.



*List of abbreviations*

Abbreviations of Greek authors and works generally follow the LSJ system. Classical journals are abbreviated in accordance with *L'Année Philologique*. Aristotle's works are cited by book and Bekker numbers. Plato's works are cited by book and Stephanus numbers. Here is a list of the most commonly used abbreviations:

## Aristotle's works

<i>de An.</i>	<i>de Anima</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Ethica Eudemia</i>
<i>EN</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>MA</i>	<i>de Motu Animalium</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>de Memoria</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	<i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>Ph.</i>	<i>Physica</i>
<i>Po.</i>	<i>Poetics</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topica</i>

## Plato's works

<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apologia</i>
<i>Grg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<i>La.</i>	<i>Laches</i>
<i>Lg.</i>	<i>Leges</i>
<i>Men.</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phlb.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>R.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>

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*Sph.*      *Sophista*  
*Tht.*      *Theaetetus*

## Aeschylus' works

*Ag.*      *Agamemnon*  
*PV*      *Prometheus Victus*  
*Pe.*      *Persians*

## Sophocles' works

*Aj.*      *Ajax*  
*Ant.*      *Antigone*  
*OC*      *Oedipus Coloneus*  
*OT*      *Oedipus Tyrannus*  
*Ph.*      *Philoctetes*  
*Tr.*      *Trachiniae*

## Euripides' works

*Alc.*      *Alcestis*  
*Hel.*      *Helena*  
*Her.*      *Hercules*  
*Herac.*      *Heracleidae*  
*IA*      *Iphigenia Aulidensis*  
*IT*      *Iphigenia Taurica*  
*Med.*      *Medea*  
*Or.*      *Orestes*

## Pindar's works

*N.*      *Nemean Odes*  
*P.*      *Pythian Odes*