A New Context for Constructing Aristotelian Comic Catharsis

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Comic Catharsis

Aristotle's *Poetics* states clearly that the purpose of a tragic plot is to produce catharsis. The emotions catharted in the incidents of tragedy and, hence the pleasure that is specific to tragedy, are pity and fear. These emotions are explicitly stated by Aristotle[1] and are still referred to constantly in the multifaceted and fruitful debate about tragedy through the centuries. Though Aristotle makes references to comedy in the *Poetics* and speaks of the structure of plot in terms that are equally applicable to comedy, he never states the emotions specific to comic catharsis. Lane Cooper,[2] Elder Olson,[3] and more recently, Leon Golden[4] have all submitted their estimations of what those emotions might be. Recognizing the importance of the clear use of terms in scholarship and the potential benefits to practitioners who see Aristotle's *Poetics* as a how-to manual of poesis, the search for the emotions in comedy which correspond to those of tragedy continues. The debate here has been marred by a lack of familiarity or agreement about what we could call the mechanics of metaphysics as set up by Aristotle in the *Poetics* and applied to dramatic art. The debate also would benefit by more openness to continuities and common characteristics among comedies and schools of critical throught. Most of all, giving more voice to Artistotle himself, the initiator of the dialogue on tragedy and plot and catharsis "making," seems to be a basic requirement of justice. We cannot dialogue without his ideas being translated in some fashion by intermediaries. Why not make him more than a mute participant in the discussion?

In this essay, I propose that an often ignored part of the *Poetics* be used as the launching pad in the search for comic catharsis:

> Now when enemy does it on enemy, there is nothing to move us to pity either in his doing or in his meditating the deed, except so far as the actual pain of the sufferer is concerned; and the same is true when the parties are indifferent to one another. Whenever the tragic deed, however, is done among friends—when murder or the like is done or meditated by brother on brother, by son on

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> father, by mother on son, or son on mother—these are the situations the poet should seek after.[5]

Pity, the primary emotion catharted in tragedy, is given a significant context in this paragraph. In the same breath, the concept *philoi* is emphasized in an uncharacteristically expansive way. The term *philoi* refers to all relationships between loved-ones and has a very rich meaning in ancient Greek society and in Aristotle's philosophical system. In contrast to Golden,[6] who locates the opposite of pity in indignation, I propose that the true dramatic opposite of pity be found in Aristotle's writings on *philoi*—friendship—conceived in this broad Greek way, of a bonding between loved ones. This choice not only satisfies the needs of dramatic structure as perceived by Aristotle, but also will produce a pair of emotions that have the same range of applicability to comedies throughout the centuries as Aristotelian pity and fear have had to tragedies of all stripes and historical periods.

Later in this paper it will become evident that some of the most influential comic literary critics have been working unconsciously on the common ground established by this Aristotelian human bond. A more useful set of comic parameters and emotions arises from looking closely at this context. Embracing this new content brings to mind a useful analogy. Catharsis is similar to the movement of sound waves in a music hall. Various factors play into the quality of the acoustics: the size of the hall, the presence of air, and the reverberating capacity of the material which makes up the walls themselves. The context of *philoi* is that material. Its bonding power affects the structure of the incidents (the walls which define the plot) and also affects the quality of the sound that moves through that structure. Imagine this structure as malleable or in the process of construction. As the play and its production are synthesized and put in motion, pity and fear are the qualities given to the waves of music characteristic of a construction which primarily exposes the vulnerability of the bond holding those walls together. Desire and affirmation, which I propose to be the emotions catharted in comedy, are the qualities impressed upon the waves of music which expose the power, attraction, and personal fulfillment associated with those same bonds. If that bonding were ineffectual, the structure might remain, but the material intrinsic to the walls themselves would retain no resonating capacity.

The Relationship between Plot and Catharsis

Catharsis is intimately linked with how a plot is structured. The key to understanding how a dramatist constructs a plot is to examine the material of which plots are made. Aristotle calls this material "likely and necessary incidents." The plot is an imitation of an action. We are given the sense of movement in a plot by a sequencing of perspective: the same incident that seemed to be likely as we looked at it as a possibility in the future seems to have been a necessary event to us

once it has happened. Having established this principle, Aristotle shifts the focus in chapter 13 of the *Poetics*, from plot as a structure, to plot as a structure functioning to produce pleasure. Here, he states that the "proper pleasure" of tragedy is pity and fear. Examining in what way pity and fear are related to the structure of plot and to one another can give us tell-tale clues as to what should be expected from the proper pleasure of comedy.[7] That is, whatever we decide is catharted in comedy will have to be related to the comic plot and to one another as fear and pity are to tragedy and to one another.

The Affective Meaning of Complex Tragic Plots and the Bond of *Philoi*

Complex plots involve the action of the hero in bringing tragedy upon him/herself. These are Aristotle's preferred plots, and they perform the function of tragedy most perfectly.[8] When speaking of the piteousness of a tragic event (the affective meaning of the tragic action or misfortune once it has occurred), Aristotle tells us that the poet should seek situations in which the tragic deed is done among *friends*.

Kenneth A. Telford, who best presents the workings of the *Poetics* as a product of Aristotle's metaphysical approach to reality, relates the concept of sufferings arising in bonds of *philoi* to plot structure. Telford reminds us that pity is "the tragic meaning (the affective property) which present incidents have in relation to the past."[9] He also adds an extremely important clarification regarding the tragic hero: "For in respect of the criterion of pity and fear it is not necessary that tragic characters be good, but only that they love what they harm, and as Aristotle says in the next paragraph, what the agent recognizes is that love."[10]

This section of the *Poetics* is dealing with the mistaken action of the tragic hero, the *hamartia*. In a complex plot there is a juncture created in the affective meaning by the mistaken action of the hero and the affective meaning of the misfortune. The affective hinge connecting what has happened and what the hero has done is the relationship of *philoi*. The *hamartia* adds to the intensity of the piteousness produced. The misfortune does not just happen to the hero. He has had a role to play in bringing it about (unintentionally, at least in Aristotle's preferred complex plots). The piteousness of the misfortune then abates since the pity is turned into a good for the hero in his showing courage and nobility in the face of the misfortune.[11] Pity is catharted.

Aristotle's pleasure principle contains the notion that resolution, closure, the completion of a movement is in itself pleasurable. Hence, the raising and resolving of any emotion—even pity and fear which are not "happy" emotions—has pleasure attached. In a complex plot, the structure and the releasing of the raised tensions of these emotions are completed simultaneously. A change is accomplished on both levels—structural and emotional. The action instigated by the protagonist and carried as the through-line of the play and the action seen as

the subjective catalyst for change within the protagonist are brought to a head together. The play has greater unity of action as a result.[12]

Thought is terminated by a change of thought; action is redirected by a change of action. The affection raised at the beginning of a tragic plot is fear, associated with thought and transformed by a recognition that what was once assumed to be fearful loses its fearsomeness. The affect raised at the end of the tragic action is pity. An event's piteousness can only be present to us once the event has actually taken place. In this sense, pity is actualized through action and brought to completion—catharted—through a change of action. When what is piteous has happened, another action or event can now begin.

I suggest that we extract the factors affecting comic catharsis in a complex plot from the criteria explored so far. If it is true that the *Poetics* describes the mechanics of a comic plot as much as a tragic one, then this must be possible. Hence:

i) The comic affective meaning of what happens to the hero is rooted in the concept of *philoi*— loved ones.
ii) The comic affective meaning or the emotion/affection raised at the end of the play is an emotion/affection which relates the present to the past.
iii) The emotion/affection produced (comedy's proper pleasure) is brought to its fullest completion when the action of the hero (the *hamartia*) is what instigates the action of the plot.
iv) The emotion/affection raised at the *beginning* of the play or within the incidents of the play is catharted through recognition—a change of thought, not action.
v) The emotion/affection raised at the *end* is catharted through a change of action.

Furthermore, a metaphysical analysis of structure and its intimate connection with catharsis shows that there must be "reflexivity" in the plot from the point of view of its affective meaning.[13] In other words, the emotion aroused at the beginning of the action is a reaction to what is about to happen, and the emotion aroused after the event has passed is a reaction to the event having happened.

Philoi Contextualizes the Emotions Catharted in the *Poetics* itself

There is sufficient reason given in the *Poetics* itself to warrant taking *philoi* as the context for comic catharsis, and Aristotle explicitly refers to the linkage of plot construction to the production of comic catharsis. Regarding structure, for example, in Chapter 11 Aristotle defines "recognition" in terms related to friendship and fortune. The terms he uses apply as much to the cathartic purpose of the structure of a comic plot as the cathartic purpose of the structure of a tragic plot. Aristotle states:

> A recognition, as the name signifies, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity in those determined to good fortune or misfortune. [He then describes various types of recognition]. But that which most belongs to plot, as well as action, is that which we have mentioned [a change from ignorance to knowledge which implies a change to friendship or to enmity], for this sort of recognition and reversal will possess either pity or fear and we have assumed that tragedy is imitation of such actions. Moreover, it is in respect of such actions that one happens to be fortunate or unfortunate.[14]

Regarding the concept of *philoi*, Aristotle states the appropriate ending to comedy to be not just a change from misfortune to fortune but, specifically, a change from enmity to friendship: "But the pleasure of this is not that of tragedy, but rather that which is appropriate to comedy, for there the greatest enemies of the plot, e.g. Orestes and Aigisthos, having at the completion become friends, withdraw, and no one is killed by anyone."[15]

When we substitute our unknown comic emotions into these parameters, we can safely say that whatever comic catharsis is, it is more dependent on the concept of friendship or *philoi* and the structure of plot for Aristotle than on anything else.

Speaking from the perspective of a metaphysical analysis of the *Poetics,* Telford states that: "what pity and fear would seem to have in common is their concern with misfortune."[16] Based on Aristotle's comments already quoted, what the emotions catharted in comedy would seem to have in common is their concern with fortune.

Philoi Defines Aristotle's "Self"

To deal holistically with Aristotle, we need to examine his definition of friendship, his paradigm for the various relationships that can be implied in *philoi* or loved ones. His definition of self is born of his definition of *philoi.* To understand Aristotle's perception of this bond, it is also helpful to take account of the Greek understanding of both *philoi* and recognition.

In his chapter "Relations and Relationships," in *Reading Greek Tragedy*, Simon Goldhill[17] develops the idea of *philoi* found in the works of Homer and Plato as well as in Greek tragedy. The word signifies much more than sentiment or friendship and even "need not be accompanied by any friendly feelings at all."[18] This relationship marks your position in society with its obligations, duties, and claims. *Ehkthros*, or personal enemy, has a similarly binding strength. The duty to disoblige one's *ehkthros* was as important in Greek life as to oblige one's *philos*. There is also a hierarchy of relations. In commenting on the *Oresteia*, Goldhill

points out that Pylades offers a hierarchy of the relations of *philos* and *ekhthros*: "the gods have priority." Orestes is "forced to transgress that tie of *philos* between mother and son in order to rectify her transgression (of a bond of *philos*—her adultery)."[19]

Recognition of one's *philos* or *ehkthros* is important to the Greek mind and is salient in plays that "revolve around uncertainty as to the legitimacy of particular relationships or obligations in the sphere of family relations and civic duties." Goldhill explains that recognition legitimizes those relationships. The constant interplay of *philos* and *ekhthros* within the family and in society is also reflected in the "terms of power and hierarchical orderings of society,"[21] as seen in the *Antigone* of Sophocles.

A significant definition of the self arises from this richer cultural meaning of *philos*. Goldhill describes the isolation and self-destruction that ensue when these relations are rejected or negated: "The solitude of Ajax, as he turns his sword inward on himself, matches his desertion of the external ties of *aidos* and *philia* as he has been rejected by the enmity of his surroundings. The self-destruction of Ajax is the concluding act of the stripping of the relations by which his self was defined."[22]

Analyses of Aristotle's philosophical writings on *philoi* also indicate that this understanding of a self defined by relations is primary. In "Aristotelian Friendship: Self-Love and Moral Rivalry," Ann Marie Dziob states that the term *autos* is central to Aristotle's understanding of *philos*.[23] Aristotle uses the word *autos* (self) very seldom and then only in ethical writings. Moreover, it is only in the chapters on friendship that Aristotle refers to another self—*allos autos*—or considers self-love—*philautia*. "'Self' for Aristotle uniformly describes the human agent responsible for his choices, the originating source of his own conduct."[24] Genuine friendship is the highest human good and is essential to self-awareness. Aristotle would go so far as to say "self is what one is when acting as genuine friend."[25]

The connection between self, friend, and life is summed up in the following way:

> It is only by means of his friend, we conclude, that the individual can thus recognize himself, seeing himself reflected as in a mirror—as he is, in his motives, actions, and life. For Aristotle, the very observing of one's friend, his actions, and his life, defines a loving act. We would add that to recognize a friend's motives for actions is to ascribe these same motives to one's own actions. Recognition of an other self thus produces a kind of self-affirmation, what might be termed self-love.[26]

It is of great importance to grant the appropriate weight to Aristotle's terminology and cultural and linguistic heritage. Both link the inherent affective property of an incident or action—stripping of relations versus a loving act—to the protagonist's vision of him/herself—self-destruction versus self-affirmation or self-love—and in a strikingly comprehensive way.

One can see here in very broad outline the characteristics of the comic as rooted in a negotiation of human bonding. The bonding involved can take a myriad of forms. It can also involve a transfer of emotional value—from genuine, human friend (in Aristotle's strict sense) to persons or things invested by the playwright with the same value as Aristotelian friendship for the protagonist. To avoid over-simplification, one only needs to keep in view an intelligent awareness of the various shades of intensity and the possibility of transference. If tragedy involves the destruction of the self through the harming of loved ones, surely comedy fundamentally has the opposite characteristic. Comedy is constructed in and around the reaffirming of self through the reaffirming of these bonds of *philoi.*

Thumos and Friendship

One further philosophical insight reveals another compelling reason to insist on this context for finding comic catharsis. The greatest human good in Aristotle's philosophical system is friendship. But, as Dziob explains, the process of becoming a friend involves the whole human person—or the combination of *thumos* (which she translates as "spiritedness") and reason. *Thumos* is described as follows:

> It is that power of the soul that is activated whenever something threatens or opposes what the soul seeks or cherishes as desirable and good; spirit rises to overcome the difficulty . . . in hope. In social and political life it is the indispensable temperamental basis for the fight against the vices within himself. The classical equivalent of conscience would seem to be a certain compound of spiritedness and shame. Spiritedness implies some kind of rational estimation, or comparison of the behavior with the standard: (Hence it is) the soul's fighting element.[27]

She continues later on to say that this fighting element is non-rational, but is trained by reason to be capable of actions geared toward its achievement of the highest human good: love of a friend and of oneself as a good for one's friend. *Thumos* characteristically keeps friendships alive through cooperative competition, a type of emulation and virtuous antithesis of envy.[28]

With these insights in mind, Aristotle's reference to comedy as that form of imitation of agents of action which choose to imitate the "base"[29] is best

interpreted as a very broad indication. If the most virtuous man is a friend in whom the desires of *thumos* (which can also be translated as the soul, the heart, and the seat of anger) are completely in line with reason, then a man who either does not have enough *thumos*, or the man in whom reason is still struggling to persuade *thumos* is less virtuous, more base.[30]

> We are brought to perfection by habits of feeling (NE 1103a26). Expressing these trained nonrational desires is part of what it means to be a fully functioning human. Unlike the Stoic ideal, Aristotle's psychology calls for a man's feeling the full range of emotions, such as grief, joy, and a competitive spiritedness. . . . When left unguided by reason (or law), thumos perverts the mind of rulers, even when they are the best of men.[30]

Note carefully the terms in which *thumos* is described: that which is stimulated to win and that which makes us fully human but which, unguided by reason, can pervert the mind. Aristotle later on in the *Poetics* clarifies that the baseness is "in respect of that part of the ugly which is ludicrous. For the ludicrous is that sort of mistake or ugliness which is painless and not destructive, e.g., the ludicrous mask is something ugly and distorted but without pain."[32]

Aristotle here is defining the action of the comic hero (mistake) as base because it is less than virtuous. It is ludicrous because it is harmless. The action or incidents that produce comic catharsis at a minimum do not involve suffering. However, the paradigm and context of *philos* and its dynamics within the person and his/her relationships, tell us that comic action can reach various levels of affirmation: on the one side of the scale, the affirmation of that "base," spirited *thumos* that is essential for virtue and is good in even its rawest form; and on the other side of the scale, *thumos* which reaches its fullest potential as the sustaining power and source of friendship and the self in its most actualized form. *Thumos* incites and sustains the greatest human good. It makes affirmation possible and in itself is a good, something to be affirmed.

The Affective Meaning of a Complex Comic Plot and *Philoi*

Based on this understanding of the context for catharsis, it seems logical to take desire and affirmation as the comic emotions and qualities of dramatic incidents which best express Aristotelian comic catharsis. To demonstrate how useful these comic emotions are for giving as full an accounting for the affective meaning of a complex plot with reversal and recognition as pity and fear do for the same kind of plot, let us look at *Twelfth Night Or What You Will*. If it is possible to place it within the four metaphysical causes of catharsis for tragedy and merely substitute pity and fear with desire and affirmation and simultaneously hear the

echo of the majority of critics' assessments of the affective meanings of the play, then the *philoi* context may be pointing us in the right direction.

Essentially, comic catharsis in a complex plot has the same four metaphysical causes as tragic catharsis and is related to plot as structural organization in exactly the same way. To quote Telford:

> The affective function of plot has four factors which constitute the four causes of (comedy's) proper pleasure. Catharsis, we will find, is the principle which accounts for all four. The affective meaning or proper function of a (comic) plot in its most complete form consists in the fact that a reversal of fortune, arising through a (ludicrous) mistake, befalls a character, and issues in a recognition. The four chapters thus discuss, in order, the (1) what, (2) how, (3) to whom, and (4) why which give the plot its (comic) meaning.[33]

The fortunate occurrence in *Twelfth Night* is Viola's marriage to Orsino as well as her reunion with her brother and the affirmation of the whole of their society of friends. This occurrence comes about through her ludicrous action of disguise and issues in the recognition of her self-affirmation and the value of the other bonds of *philoi* that have been affirmed.

When we take a cursory look at what critics have said about this play over the centuries, a number of points stand out. First, it has been praised as the most elegant, charming, and "perfectly constructed" of Shakespeare's comedies. Criticism has focused on the effective characterization and the "artistic unity" of the play, though it has also been faulted for lack of credibility. Some have examined how the graver and lighter themes of the play have been fused, others have given precedence to the theme of self-deception or indulgence versus moderation or its Saturnalian "holiday" celebration of freedom from "order." It is, according to critics, Shakespeare's highest achievement in the genre. It is an exploration of love and "manifests one of the primary principles of comedy: the education of man or woman in the correct attitude toward love."[34] Clearly, critics in these ways are commenting on the various dimensions of a comic complex plot displaying unity of action.

Helene Moglen in an essay entitled "Disguise and Development: the Self and Society in *Twelfth Night*"[35] presents a number of insights that reflect what we have been calling the action of *thumos* toward friendship: the movement between freedom and rigidity; the spontaneous response of Viola to hearing of Orsino; the prison of self-love in which Orsino and Olivia are entrapped; the assumed and real deaths of both Olivia and Viola's brothers as "a denial of the primitive infantile unity of the personality: a schism that necessarily accompanies self-awareness";

Orsino's isolation as fragmentation of the self. Moglen also comments in depth about the "freeing" nature of disguise: that Viola's disguise ultimately provides Orsino with a "corrective to illusion."

Self-awareness is defined in terms of being reunited with her twin. Sebastian's "identity crisis" is a tension between his relationship with his friend Antonio and his sister Viola. In the subplot, the relational is couched in social terms: personal freedom and expression, social formalism and responsibility. Malvolio is incapable of affection, refusing the function of disguise and rejects personal maturity and social stability by asserting egotism in a form which is anti-social and self-destructive.

Though her premises are Freudian, Moglen still lays out essentially the same *philoi*-context measurements of a comic complex plot which ends in a full catharsis of affirmation and desire. Surely this is the reason why it is considered Shakespeare's "happiest" play and the one with the most emotionally "complex characters" exploring the nature of love, as well as one pointed out for its tragic potential.[36] A comedy that successfully and deeply explores the nature of true fortune and our search and need for it, necessarily explores its opposite in all but the conclusion. Barbara Freedman in "Naming Loss: Mourning and Representation in *Twelfth Night*" disagrees with Moglen and the majority of critics who consider the play's ending so positive.[37] I would argue that faith in Viola's "vitality and optimism" and ability to attain and keep that which she desires and what she is on the brink of attaining at the end of the play is really what is at issue between these two critics. The play may "hesitate," but its direction is clear.

More Critics on Comic Action and Comic Catharsis

I stated earlier in this essay that the emotions specific to comic catharsis should have the same range of applicability that pity and fear do to tragedy. An Aristotelian presentation of the four causes of comic catharsis in *Twelfth Night* shows that the inclusive architectural/acoustical measurements of catharsis expressed in desire and affirmation can fulfill the structural and metaphysical requirements of plot and catharsis. These comic emotions and qualities of incidents may be recognized in the analyses of the majority of critics who have striven to express the play's cathartic characteristics within their own philosophical or literary systems.

To further demonstrate this, let us turn to the constantly recurring themes in critical analyses of comedy. The following quotations concerning the comic, comic catharsis, and comic action all reflect what has been developed on the basis of Aristotelian metaphysical analysis and the concept of *philoi* in this essay.

Thumos and Reason: the Struggle for Affirmation

Wylie Sypher[38] describes the interaction of *thumos* and reason in his discussion of the Feast of Unreason: unmasking, recovering lost infantile laughter, regaining old liberties, freeing our childlike desires from the voice of reason. Koestler, quoted in Wimsatt and Brooks,[39] describes another angle on the interaction of *thumos* and reason. This time it is in the direction of the affirmation of friendship. *Thumos* is being persuaded by reason when Koestler's self-criticism and freedom from instinct are highlighted in comedy.[40]

Sypher also points out that the comic response can be tribal, as seen in scapegoating. It seems quite obvious that scapegoating is the inverse of friendship and involves the affirmation of self not as friend but as *thumos* untrained by reason and virtue. The affirmation of self within the social bonds perceived as primordial, often entails a rejection of a bond that is in the last analysis, destructive for the protagonist and his more intimate or primary relationships. Leon Golden's[41] example from Old Comedy, *The Clouds*, serves our purpose here. Golden argues for indignation as the comic equivalent to pity. It is the primary motivating force and emotion in the protagonist as he decides to burn Socrates's school. I argue that this same action is an affirmation of the protagonist's familial and social bonds and, hence, of himself as defined by these, through the rejection of a disruptive bond he previously desired. Golden admits that indignation is specific to Old Comedy. Its applicability to comedy in general is narrower than pity's applicability to tragedy.

Thumos as that raw spiritedness bursting with positive energy is seen in the theories of Wimsatt and Brooks. Wimsatt and Brooks refer to the 19th century conception of the comic as closely connected to the natural and instinctive.[42] Laughter theory indicates that comedy contains a sense of freedom, triumph and well-being, and a return to the state of a pre-rational child. Frye seems to be referring to the same aspect of comic plot when he says: "The action of comedy in moving from one social center to another is not unlike the action of a lawsuit, in which plaintiff and defendant construct different versions of the same situation, one finally being judged as real and the other as illusory."[43]

What is being judged is what is desirable, what will bring affirmation of self as friend and what will not. At times, the comic hero is ludicrous in the sense of being ruled by *thumos*. In this case, the reversal bringing affirmation shows us and sometimes the hero (through a recognition which makes him "friend") what is the best way of behaving from the point of view both of self as friend and others as *philoi*.[44]

The Ludicrous Action as Disguise

The absurdity of the blocking character in many comedies is rooted in his/her "humor" or *elan vitale*. He repeats his obsession to the detriment of himself

and his society. The fortunate occurrence of the comedy catharts his obsessive desire through recognition and generally affirms the hero and his new society. When Frye compares tragedy with comedy in the following quote, he notes an interesting contrast between the action of the tragic hero and the action of the comic hero. In comedy, the ludicrous action can be in the form of disguise or the humility of exposing raw, untrained *thumos* as fully legitimate "spiritedness" and life instinct. *Thumos* is freed through disguise and disguise is a type of "ludicrous" action. A disguised character takes on the aspect of Aristotle's "unduly humble man" referred to by Dziob above. As Frye says: "Such hybris is the normal precipitating agent of catastrophe, just as in comedy the cause of the happy ending is usually some act of humility, represented by a slave or by a heroine meanly disguised."[45]

Desire and Affirmation of Self and the Overflow of Affirmation

Susan Purdie,[46] in the idiom of gender theory, points to the comic "drive" as an affirmation of self which comes first and foremost through a relationship that defines self as other self. The example she gives is the self-affirming relationship of a friendship with an erotic character. Citing *Pericles* as an example, Frye speaks about the initial incestuous relationship as a demonic antithesis to the hero's reunion with his wife and daughter in the comic resolution. It is a minor comic theme, but its enduring presence once more affirms that the "presiding genius of Comedy" is Eros[47] which must adapt itself to the moral facts of a society.

The overflow of affirmation stemming from this mutual recognition of self in friendship is seen further on in the same chapter of Purdie's book: ". . . the happiness of the characters," and the seriously cheerful ending as comic resolution is achieved through a "mood of celebration."[48] This statement becomes more interesting in the light of the affirmation afforded by friendship:

> In all such genuine friendships, this mutual recognition of friends as second selves must obtain. What this implies is that whatever appears good for a man as belonging to himself will also appear good for him, again, when it is possessed by his friend. This includes that self-awareness, or consciousness of being alive, which is desirable to the individual selves (NE 1170b1-5).[49]

Perhaps this is why rejoicing in the affirmation spills over into the audience in the "plaudite" referred to by Frye. The sense of "this had to be" which is so characteristic of tragedy is replaced by "this should be"[50] for a sympathetic audience of comedy. In friendship, the moral and the social are intimately linked. It is social precisely because the fullest affirmation is social, i.e., the affirmation of self as affirmable only through others—*philoi*. Hence, the response of those sympathetic

to the comic hero and his society will follow suit. Sypher echoes this in his ritual-centered analysis, saying that comedy foregrounds the erotic action and disorderly rejoicing, festival and struggle between logic and license.[51]

Under the *Mythos of Spring: Comedy*, Frye comments:

> What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will. In this simple pattern there are several complex elements. In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery, anagnorisis or cognitio.[52]

Afterwards, Frye speaks of the obstacles to the hero's desire as the action of the comedy. The overcoming of these obstacles is the comic resolution. Once again the hint surfaces: the comic emotional equivalent to fear in tragedy is desire. Frye further states that the twist and resolution in a comic plot is often more desirable than convincing.[53]

Thumos, as understood by Aristotle, even in its rawest, non-rational form is as necessary for the attainment of true fortune as reason is. It is also as worthy of affirmation. This is the argument of all comedy.

Philoi, Desire and Affirmation as a New Direction for Dialogue and Practice

One predominant, structure-related emotion—affirmation—is under the purview of this basic human dynamic—friendship and its attainment. It is given to us by Aristotle within the *philoi* context and described in various ways by many literary critics. Its comic structural twin— desire—also presides. At the very least, this method of approaching comic catharsis points us in a direction that contains new insights. It also helps us look at Aristotle's definitions more holistically. It invites theorists to recognize common ground. It clarifies for practitioners exactly what elements in a production are most directly linked to catharsis. It opens the possibility of various forms of catharsis. Finally, it raises philosophical questions for theatre scholars, practitioners, and audience: Is our sense of Aristotelian catharsis vague only because our age's sense of self and community is so radically distinct from his? Can we, on the basis of this context for catharsis and the common ground

of experiencing the pleasure of comedy, begin to expand our vision of ourselves, our interdependence, and the ethical dimensions of interpersonal relations? Acknowledging that catharsis is linked to a definition of self and perceived goods can clarify and spur the debate about both comic and tragic emotions in highly suggestive ways.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *Poetics*; *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Vol.II, ed. Jonathan Barnes (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1983) 1452b, 31.

2. Pleasure and laughter are the comic emotions according to Lane Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, with an Adaptation of the Poetics, and a Translation of the 'Tractatus Coislinianus'* (New York: Harcourt, 1922) 194.

3. Elder Olson, *The Theory of Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968) 37; Olson estimates that the emotions which most perfectly bring about *katastasis* or relaxation of concern are the emotions catharted in comedy.

4. Leon Golden, "Aristotle on the Pleasure of Comedy," *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992).

5. *Poetics* 1453b16-21.

6. Golden finds the true opposite of pity—indignation—in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1386b9.

7. I base much of my argument on Kenneth A. Telford's clear explications and compelling vision of Aristotle's philosophical constructs. Telford comments: "Chapters 7-11, then, deal with the formal cause or structure of the plot. They deal therefore with only one factor in plot. For the principle of likelihood and necessity can account only for the relations that are established between the incidents of the plot apart from the significance or meaning which they convey. Chapters 7-11 therefore deal with a problem that tragedy shares with comedy. For the difference between these two species of art does not lie primarily in their formal structure, since likelihood and necessity is the formal principle in both of them. Their difference lies rather in the affective function which each attains." *Aristotle's Poetics—Translation and Analysis* (South Bend:Gateway Editions, 1961) 98.

8. *Poetics* 1452b27-35

9. Telford 104

10. 105.

11. Note that pity (as in a piteous action that has taken place) is catharted by pity seen as the misfortune actually taking place and the change in action of the hero—his redirection toward virtuous action. Fear is catharted or ceases to be through recognition (a change in thought, not action) either prior to the *hamartia*, in which case the misfortune does not happen, or in a derivative way, once the misfortune has happened. In the latter case, the recognition cannot prevent the action, but highlights the catharsis of pity, the damage the protagonist has done to his loved ones, and the value of the bonds of those relationships. A complete catharsis is effected and a greater unity of action achieved.

12. Telford 96-97; 110-111; Telford compares the complex and simple plots this way:

"The simple plot has only the unity afforded by the likelihood and necessity of its incidents. It does not achieve a complete catharsis."

"The catharsis of pity and fear in the fullest sense as found in a complex plot thus establishes the completion of the affective function of tragedy. That is, the catharsis of pity and fear is the highest form of tragedy's proper pleasure. For pity and fear are most pleasant, not simply as affection, but when they are resolved or completed, and affections are motions which can be completed only by ceasing to be. A simple plot can establish the proper affections, but it cannot satisfy the mood it creates. In a complex plot there is, in the very incidents of the tragedy, a release of the tensions which constitute its affective function. A simple plot does not relieve these tensions, and therefore it is less pleasant.

What is more, the catharsis of pity and fear determines the completion, not only of the affective organization of a tragedy, but its structural organization as well. The mere fact that a tragedy, any tragedy, is constructed of incidents shows that it involves change. But the change in the sequence of incidents in a simple plot is indefinite. The change in a complex plot, on the other hand, has a beginning and an end which mark the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of a unity in the fullest sense, for they are marks of a completed change. It is in this sense that the best constructed play, one with a complex plot, is an imitation of one action. For the one action is the change which the protagonist produces, in his own action, through reversal or recognition. All the incidents in the tragedy are simply the specification and explication of the circumstances and conditions from which the change arises and into which it is completed."

13. 104: "In general, fear is an anticipation of impending misfortune, and unless what is expected finds its potentiality in present events there is no fear.... Fear, therefore, is related to likelihood as pity is to necessity. . . . Plot, therefore, has reflexivity in its affective meaning analogous to the reflexivity in its structure, for it is the incidents of the plot which give themselves their . . . (tragic) meaning."

14. *Poetics* 1452a30-1452b4.

15. 1453a36-41.

16. Telford 108.

17. Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 1986.

18. 82.

19. 84.

20. 85.

21. 98.

22. 86.

23. Anne-Marie Dziob, "Aristotelian Friendship: Self-Love and Moral Rivalry," *Review of Metaphysics* 48 (June 1993): 781-801.

24. 782.

25. 784-5.

26. 785.

27. 788, quoting Laurence Berns, "Spiritedness in Ethics and Politics: A Study in Aristotelian Psychology," *Interpretation* 12 (1984): 345.

28. 789: "We are now ready to establish what occurs in self-love The good man's non-rational desires that are *thumos* have, as explained earlier, been trained by habituation and persuasion (by reason) to respond to certain events. The desires of *thumos* converge with those of reason. When one loves oneself or a friend, therefore, one is moved eagerly, spiritedly, to demonstrate this love. . . . One manifestation (of this love) is accomplished by the response of *thumos* which loves another self as fellow competitor (for virtue)."

29. *Poetics* 1448a2.

30. Dziob 784:"Since a genuine friend wants what is best for his friend and virtuous actions constitute the best life for man as man, a friend identifies with his friend's desire to strive for virtue. Knowing that one's acts are virtuous is not identical with knowing that one is a virtuous man. Specifically, it is only by means of a friend that men know themselves as good men. Examine Aristotle's description of 'the unduly humble man' who seems not to know himself, 'else he would have desired the things he was worthy of, since these were good' (NE 1125a1923). By contrast Aristotle's proud, independent man does in fact desire the goods of which he knows himself to be worthy. This magnanimous man 'cares about few things only, and those great' (EE 1232b5; see MM 1192a26-29). Significantly, this great-souled man must be 'unable to make his life revolve round another, unless it be a friend' (NE 1125a1); for genuine friendship is the greatest human good."

31. 788.

32. *Poetics* 1449a31-38.

33. Telford 101.

34. *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. I, ed. Laurie Lanzen Harris (Detroit: Gale, 1984) 537-8.

35. Helen Moglen, "Disguise and Development: The Self and Society in *Twelfth Night*," *Literature and Psychology* 23 (1973): 13-20.

36. *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. I 537.

37. Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze, Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 205.

38. Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy," *Comedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956) 44.

39. William K. Wimsatt, Jr. & Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism, A Short History* (New York: Knopf, 1957).

40. 578; this would concur also with the basic premise of comic action in A. N. Kaul, *The Action of English Comedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970) 3. "And it is the action of comedy that is meant to be characterized by my subtitle as a conflict between abstraction and experience." Abstraction belongs to *thumos* and in comedy, I argue, it is the abstraction formed by *thumos* that initiates the action, the interaction of reason and *thumos* that continues it and the achievement of affirmation by experience that resolves it.

41. Golden 381.

42. Wimsatt & Brooks 570.

43. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays by Northrop Frye* (New York: Atheneum, 1966) 166.

44. 169, 219.

45. 210.

46. Susan Purdie, *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993) 120.

47. Frye 181.

48. Purdie 119.

49. Dziob 784-785.

50. Frye 167.

51. Sypher 32-33.

52. Frye 163.

53. 163, 164, 170.