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## *P. HERC. 1581: THE ARGUMENT*

For the student of ancient literary criticism no recent papyrological publication can have deeper interest than Maria Luisa Nardelli's patient and thorough study of *P. Herc. 1581*<sup>1</sup>. For the convenience of the reader, Nardelli's restored text is reproduced here with only a few suggestions for further improvement.

### Fr. I

ὅτι ποιη] |<sup>1</sup> τῆς μιμητῆς ἐσ[τι πρά] | ξεως τελέας  
 προσ[... | ...]μεν τῶν ὁμολ[ο] | γημένων· ληπτ[έον  
 μὲν] |<sup>5</sup> ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ ποι[ητι] | κῆ χρήσιμον πρὸς  
 [ἄρε] | τήν, καθαίρουσα, [ὥς] | ἔφαμεν, τὸ μόριον· |  
 προσθετέον δ' ὅτι [ἔσ] |<sup>10</sup> τιν ἐκάστη τέχνη  
 ἀρχῇ] | τοῦ βελτίστου, τῶν | καθ' αὐτάς πεφυκ[ό] |  
 των, γίνεσθαι· κα[.] | τ[.] χάριν τοῦ τόπ[ου] |  
<sup>15</sup>... ] καὶ ποεῖ κάθ[αρσιν]

### Fr. II

τ]αῖς ψυχαῖς ἔνεστιν ἂ | [φρο]σύνη μὲν ἐν ταῖς |  
 [σο]φωτάταις, ἀκολασί | [α δ'] ἐν ταῖς σωφρονεσ |  
<sup>5</sup>[τα]ταις· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ | [φό]βοι μὲν ἐν ταῖς ἀν |  
 [δρεῖαι]ς, φθόνοι δ' ἐν | [ταῖς μ]εγαλοψύχαις· θε |  
 [ωρ]εῖν δ' ἔστι περὶ τὰς | <sup>10</sup>[βι]ωτάς ἡ[δον]ᾶς  
 κατ[ᾶ] | το]ὺς ὕπν[ους...] δ' ἐν | [μ]έθαις κ[.....]ις  
 καὶ | <sup>15</sup>[ἐν τῆς ψυχ]ῆς πάθε[σι]

(11. fort. οὐδ' ἐν Nardelli 12. fort. κ[αύσο]ις c. asyndet.)

1. *La Catarsi Poetica nel PHerc. 1581*, «Cronache Ercolanesi» 8 (1978) 96-103.



Fr. III

..]ντινα καὶ τέχνην ἄλ | [λην] ἀποδεικνύει καὶ |  
[τὸν] θυμὸν ὡς[.] πολὺ | [..]η τὰ λεγόμενα κ[α]τὰ |  
⁵[τῶν] ἀγαθῶν ποητῶν | ..]ος δὲ οὐδαμῶς | .....]εται,  
φησί, δι | αμαρ]τάνειν ἐξὸν μη[. | ..μ]ιμητικ[ήν  
τ]ὸν κ[. | ¹⁰.α]ὐτῆς ἀδοξίας δ[. | ..]αιτ[.]  
μ[ι]κρῶι διο[ρ | θῶμα]τι τὴν ἀμαρτία[ν | ..... ]ανεα  
φρων [.]ο | [— — —]α[.]μεν

(fort. ὥσ[τε] vel ὥς [ἄν] Nardelli)

Fr. III bis

ἄρε] | ¹τὰς ποητῶ[ν — —] | τον ἐπιδει[κνύει ἐν τῶι |  
λόγῳ [τὴν] κά[θαρσιν τῶν] | ἀμαρτιῶν [— — τῇι] |  
⁵κατορθώσει [— — —] | ηαν τις τρό[πος — —] | μη τὰς  
τερπ[νάς — —] | τὰς ἀμαρτία[ς — —] | των σκοπεῖν  
[— — —] | ¹⁰ ταὐτὸν μὲν [— — ἀμαρ] | τία τὸ κατα-  
[λέγειν...] | τραγωιδίαν εἰ[— — —] | οὐδὲ τὸ  
ψευδῆ [— — κα | τ]αλεγειν οἶα [— — — | ¹⁵ .]ον  
πο[ιο]ῦν [— — —]

(6 e.g. ἡ ἄν, ἡ ἄν, ἡ ἄν Nardelli)

Fr. IV a

— — — ]αν περι | [— — πο]ίησιν | [— — —]ας ὡς |  
[— — —] ὥς εἰ τῶν | ⁵ [— — —] εἰ καί γε | [— — —]ον  
πρα | [— — —] εἶναι | [— — —] μόνων | [— — —] διαλε |  
¹⁰[— — —]ται, φημί, | [— — ποι]ητὰς καὶ | [— — —]  
υμενους | [— — —] καλοὶ ὦν | [— — —]α[.]τε

(9f. e.g. διαλέ | [γειν Nardelli 10 fort. ἄρε]ται Nardelli)

Fr. IV b

τέλεον [— — —] | ρις γίνε[ται — —] | νειν τέχ[νη  
— —] | τις εἶναι [— — ἐ] | ⁵λέου κάθα[ρσις τρα] |  
γικὴ καὶ κ[— — —] | κη τῶν τ[— — ἐ] | λεινῶν



ει[ — — — ] | τῶν ἄλλο[τρίων ποιη] | <sup>10</sup>τικὴν α[ — — — ] |  
 τελέου [ — — — ] | τελέου δρά[ματος — — ] | μας τὸν  
 δ[ — — — | .. ] τε[ — — — | .. ] διδο [ — — —

(2f. e.g. ἁμαρτά]νειν Nardelli 4f. fort. φόβου καὶ  
 ἐ] | λέου cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1449 b 27 6f. fort.  
 ἔκ[ωμωιδι] | κὴ cf. Iamblichus *De mysteriis* 1.11 p. 40  
 Parthey)

Fr. V

ταῦτα [ ] ι [ — — — ] | λεν ἀπα[θ — — τρα] | γωιδία  
 κ[ — — — ] | α ταῦτα δ[ — — — ] | <sup>5</sup> εἰν ἡ μὲν [ — —  
 ἄλλο] | τρίωι, ἔφαμ[εν, — — ] | ποιε φοβε[ρ — — ] |  
 θειν ἡδε[ — — — ] | πᾶσαι μη[ — — — ] | <sup>10</sup>συνέργ-  
 ᾶζ[ουσι — — ] | κες τι δεῖ [ — — — ] | τις ἤττο[ν — — ] |  
 τὰς τοιαύ[τας ποιή] | σεις ὥστε [ — — — | <sup>15</sup>...]  
 ντη[ — — —

(7. vel fort. ποιεῖ Nardelli 9. fort. πᾶσαι μη[χαναὶ  
 Nardelli)

Fr. VI a

— — — ] ην | [ — — — ] καὶ | [ — — — ] κα | [ — — — ] βης |  
<sup>5</sup> [ — — — ] ε | [ — — — ] υ | [ — — — ] ω | [ — — — ] αι |  
 [ — — — | <sup>10</sup> — — — ] ας | [ — — — ] υ | [ — — — ] κη

Fr. VI b

ν [ ] κριτων [ — — — ] | τοῖς ἔχουσι λυσ[ — — — ] |  
 οὐκ ἂν ὀκνήσε[ιεν ὅ] | μολογῶν τοσ[ — — — ] | <sup>5</sup> ονος  
 αὐτὰς εἶν[αι — — ] | μεν συνχωρησ[ — — — ] | βελτίο-  
 νος τοῖς [ — — — ] | τας δὲ τούτοις [ — — — ] |  
 μενοὶς πᾶσα [ — — — ] | <sup>10</sup> βελτίστου δι[ — — — ] |  
 ἤχθη μέχρι ἂν [ — — ἐ] | δείχθη πότερ[ον — — ] | ἡ  
 ποιητικὴ [ — — — | .. ] ωσ[ .. ] ι τὸ πρ[ — — —

(2. fort. λῦσ[αι Nardelli sed etiam de λυσ[ιτελεῖ cogitare possis  
 4f. fort. βελτί]ονος Nardelli)



Fr. VII a

— — — ]κης τινος | [ — — — ]βηκεν σεμε[ | [ — — — ]  
 ποιήσειεν | [ — — — ] αὐτὸς | <sup>5</sup> [ — — — ] ἐπὶ τῶν επε |  
 [ — — — ]ρι ἄλλων δε | [ — — — ] μενων και | [ — — — ]  
 τοι | [ — — — ]τι | [ — — — ] νη [ . . . ]ου | [ — — — ] ην [ — — — ]

(1 e. g. ποιητι]κῆς Nardelli 6 vel μέχ]ρι Nardelli)

Fr. VII b

ατι[ — — — ] | τος [ — — — ] | παρ [ — — — ] | εἶπον.  
 [ — — — ] | <sup>5</sup> τὸν π[ — — — ] | ρικην [ — — — ] | ητιν [ — — — ] |  
 τεσε [ — — — ]

(5f. fort. ρητο] | ρικὴν Nardelli)

We can only be frustrated by the mutilated state of this highly interesting discussion. The general thrust of this passage is nevertheless clear. The author of this present treatise, possibly Philodemus<sup>2</sup>, is discussing a theory of dramatic catharsis. Evidently this theory is one he himself holds (I, 7f. [ὡς | ἔφαμεν, IVa, 10 φημί, V, 6 ἔφαμεν, and VII b, 4 εἶπον), although at some points in the argument he contrasts or compares his views with those of someone else (III, 7 φησί, and perhaps also III,2 ἀποδεικνύει and III bis, 2f. ἐπιδει[κνύει ἐν τῷ] λόγῳ). Unfortunately these allusions to some second writer fall in mutilated fragments and pose an insoluble problem.

The preservation of the first two fragments however is sufficient basis for at least tentative discussion and seems to permit identification of the main thrust of the argument: even in the most well-regulated of men there exist pockets of folly, unreason, and passion (these snakes may be seen to come out of the woodwork in the case of dreams, intoxication, and the like) (so fr. II). Poetry, on the other hand, is conducive to purging one of τὸ μῶριον (I, 8): presumably this word, rich in Aristotelian associations<sup>3</sup>, serves as a blanket term for the phenomena of spiritual unreason and disquiet discussed in fr. II. From such later parts of the papyrus as fr. III bis, 12, fr. IVb, 5f. and 12,

2. Previous discussions have largely centered on the question of authorship (Nardelli 96 n. 1 with reff.); in recent years qualified writers have grown more cautious about ascription to Philodemus.

3. Nardelli 101.





and also more generally from echoes of Aristotle's discussion of tragic catharsis that one finds especially in fr. IVb, it is evident that when our author writes of poetry, it is tragedy (or at least dramatic poetry in general) that is uppermost in his mind).

Indeed, mention of catharsis, hamartia, mimesis, and pity (and fear?) make it clear that the present writer is fishing in very Aristotelian waters indeed, and the bulk of Nardelli's study is given over to demonstrating that this discussion is written in language taken from Aristotle and the Peripatetics. But it is no less clear that, no matter how Peripatetic the language of the theory of catharsis set forth in the first fragments, it is by nature thoroughly un-Aristotelian. In view of the association of ideas in frr. I and II, it seems that the value of (dramatic) poetry is that it provides a catharsis: it purges the spectator of τὸ μῶριον (and it is at least possible that in later portions of this argument ἁμαρτία is pressed into service as a synonym for τὸ μῶριον to denote essentially moral shortcomings in the spectator, a thoroughly un-Aristotelian usage if true).

Much ink has been lavished on the problem of catharsis in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Simply (but I hope not simplistically) he meant something like this. A general biological principle is that the achievement of any kind of entropy is inherently pleasurable (*Rhetoric* 1360 b 19); catharsis is a special instance of this natural law (*Politics* 1342 a 11); the catharsis provided by tragedy is the special pleasure purveyed by the tragic experience<sup>4</sup>. Nowhere in this train of thought is it expressly stated (nor, I think, implied) that such catharsis needs be morally or spiritually improving, nor that such improvement is the essential *raison d'être* of poetry. By way of contrast, these latter elements seem explicitly set forth in fr. I and II of *P. Herc.* 1581 and may well have been dwelt upon in the worse-preserved portions of the papyri. In short, Aristotle's idea of tragic catharsis has been taken over by some epigone and transformed into a moralizing defense of poetry.

This is Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 1.11 pp. 39f. Parthey:

Ἔχει δ' ἔτι ταῦτα καὶ ἄλλον λόγον τοιοῦτον. αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων παθημάτων τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν πάντα μὲν εἰργόμεναι καθίστανται σφοδρότεραι

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4. If the *Poetics* did once have a Book Two devoted to comedy, there is no evident *a priori* grounds for excluding the possibility that Aristotle also broached a theory of comic catharsis, although it would be rash to think that such an authentically Aristotelian theory is attested by *Tractatus Coislinianus* 3. For a cautious but probably not over-conservative assessment of this issue cf. A.P. McMahon, *On the Second Book of Aristotle's «Poetics» and the Source of Theophrastus' Definition of Comedy*, HSCP 28 (1917) 1ff.



εἰς ἐνέργειαν δὲ βραχεῖς καὶ ἄχρι τοῦ συμμέτρου προαγόμεναι χαίρουσι μετρίως καὶ ἀποπληροῦνται, καὶ ἐντεῦθεν ἀποκαθαιρόμεναι πειθοῖ καὶ οὐ πρὸς βίαν ἀποπαύονται. διὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἐν τε κωμῳδίᾳ καὶ τραγῳδίᾳ ἀλλότρια πάθη θεωροῦντες ἴσταμεν τὰ οἰκεῖα πάθη καὶ μετριώτερα ἀπεργαζόμεθα καὶ ἀποκαθαίρομεν· ἐν τε τοῖς ἱεροῖς θεάμασι τισι καὶ ἀκούσμασι τῶν αἰσχυρῶν ἀπολυόμεθα τῆς ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ἀπ' αὐτῶν συμπιπτούσης βλάβης.

This almost passing reference to tragic and comic catharsis is not quite the only post-Aristotelian reference to catharsis in ancient literature<sup>5</sup>, but it is unique among such passages in its interest. The passage quoted here is taken from a discussion of the acquisition of spiritual imperturbability. The basic idea of the reference to dramatic catharsis seems to be that by observing the passions of onstage characters we somehow become purged of our own (identical?) passions and thus arrive at that desirable condition of *apathia* or *ataraxia* that is the *summum bonum* in Iamblichus' thinking. As it stands this statement is more than somewhat obscure: the precise nature of the passions thus to be purged, and the mechanism by which purgation is achieved, are scarcely specified. The abruptness of Iamblichus' statement leads one to speculate that he is not floating a notion of his own but rather alluding to a doctrine of literary criticism already in circulation.

Nardelli has taken notice of this passage insofar as she has pointed out the parallel of ἀλλότρια πάθη with fr. IVb,9 τῶν ἄλλο[τρίων and fr. V,5f. ἄλλο] | τρίωι. Two further parallels may be pointed out. First, at fr. IVb,5-7 κάθα[ρσις τρα] γικὴ καὶ κ[ωμωιδι] | κὴ is an attractive possible restoration; if so, this text and Iamblichus would stand closely together in taking the concepts of tragic and comic catharsis as a single entity (and also in evidently ignoring the considerable problems such a combination appears to raise). Second, at fr. V,2 Nardelli makes the attractive conjecture ἀπα[θ- which, in view of the tenor of the preceding argument, may well indicate the state of the theatergoer after undergoing the purgation of dramatic catharsis. If this understanding is correct, then the argument of *P. Herc.* 1581 bears an even closer resemblance to Iamblichus' mention of dramatic catharsis, since the passage quoted here is taken from a discussion of the acquisition of spiritual imperturbability.

5. Besides Iamblichus and the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, Proclus Diadochus, *In Platonis Rempublicam* 1.42 (p. 50 Kroll) speaks of the τῆς πρὸς τὰ πάθη μετρίας ἀφοσιώσεως provided by tragedy and comedy, but dwells on the way this purgation can degenerate into spiritual excess rather than describing the purgation itself. Certainly for us the salient point is that, in Proclus' discussion, there is no hint that such purgation or catharsis is morally or spiritually improving.



So, at least one claim to the contrary,<sup>6</sup> *P. Herc.* 1581 appears to be unique in expressing a theory not at all dissimilar to that apparently broached — or, more precisely, alluded to — by Iamblichus: by observing the doings and sufferings of others on the stage<sup>7</sup> the spectator is somehow purged of his appetites and passions and so is induced to achieve the tranquillity of *apathia*<sup>8</sup>. Thus there exists reason for suspecting that the treatise represented by *P. Herc.* 1581 might be the «source» that might be thought to stand behind Iamblichus' discussion of tragic and comic catharsis in *De mysteriis*<sup>9</sup>.

## PAPYRUS HERCULANENSIS 1581. Η ΤΡΑΓΙΚΗ ΚΑΘΑΡΣΗ

Π ε ρ ί λ η ψ η.

Ὁ πάπυρος *Herculanensis* 1581, ὅπως ἐρμηνεύθηκε πρόσφατα ἀπὸ τὴν ἰταλίδα παπυρολόγο Maria Luisa Nardelli, δίνει τὴν ἐντύπωση ὅτι ἀποτελεῖ μιὰ συζήτηση πάνω στὴν τραγικὴ κάθαρση. Ἡ Nardelli θέλει νὰ δείξει ὅτι ἡ γλῶσσα τοῦ χωρίου αὐτοῦ εἶναι περιπατητικὴ. Ἡ ἄποψη ὥστόσο γιὰ τὴν κάθαρση ποὺ ἐκτίθεται ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀντι-ἀριστοτελική, γιατί εἶναι ἐξαιρετικὰ ἠθικολογική. Στενότερη συγγένεια τοῦ χωρίου αὐτοῦ δὲν ὑπάρχει μὲ τὴν *Ποιητικὴ* τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους, ἀλλὰ μάλλον μὲ ἓνα παρόμοιο ἠθικολογικὸ χωρίο ἐνὸς Νεοπλατωνικοῦ, τοῦ Ἰαμβλίου (Περὶ τῶν Μυστηρίων 1. 11).

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6. S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, London 1907, 406 n. 1 draws a comparison between Iamblichus' statement and Timocles, fr. 6 Kock. This similarity however is at best superficial: above all, Timocles makes no mention of catharsis.

7. If this is what is intended by ἀλλότριος at fr. IVb, 9 and V, 5-6.

8. If *apathia* is indeed important to the present theory of dramatic catharsis, we might better understand why this theory would arrest the attention of Epicureans.

9. The present writer is no papyrologist and is obliged perforce to accept the validity of Nardelli's work both in general and in detail. In view of the ostensible importance of this papyrus for the history of ancient literary theory, further papyrological investigation might prove welcome.