

Why Aristotle Could Not Have Written *katharsis* As the Goal of Tragedy

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SUMMARY

The perennial search for the meaning of *katharsis* in the definition of tragedy in *Poetics* 6 – as either purification, purgation, or clarification – has posed dilemmas and contradictions for over 450 years, at least since the Greek was first translated and commented upon in 1548 by Francesco Robortello. Following three renowned 19th- and 20th-century German scholars who expressed their frustration with the seeming irresolvability of the problems, Anton Smerdel, a Croatian scholar in 1937 set the stage with his own work for a number of subsequent scholars – including a Macedonian classicist, M.D. Petruševksi, in 1954, myself in 2003, and a French-Italian-Brazilian specialist, Claudio William Veloso, in 2007 -- to publish arguments why Aristotle could not have written the word *katharsis*, which makes Aristotle's dramatic theory much more consistent internally and, also, more acceptable as philosophical principles that are still applicable today (because his alternative goals become more salient historically and theoretically). In this session I recount the basics of the whole story, give some of the newest arguments to counter recent criticisms of the seemingly radical view, note some of the internationally known scholars who are now accepting the new position, and explain how this impacts Western aesthetics. Significant time will be left for questions, and no knowledge of Greek is presupposed.