

Performing Catharsis

Enacting An Ancient Therapy

What is catharsis and how exactly do pity (eleos) and fear (phobos) and other emotions achieve it? Rather than examining catharsis as described in Aristotle's Poetics, this book instead places it within the context of performance in ancient Greece from the Paleolithic to the fourth-century BCE. Over the course of history, theorists and philosophers have explored catharsis using Aristotle as their starting point. Meineck takes a novel approach here; embedding Aristotle within the cathartic culture that was around him, the book traces how and why catharsis was enacted in ancient Greece, from the Paleolithic period up until the fourth-century BCE, placing it in its conceptual, religious, social and philosophical context. Over 12 chapters, the performance of catharsis is explored in caves in the Paleolithic, by Greek shamanistic healer prophet figures, in the Lesser and Great Eleusinian Mysteries and their reflection in iambic and lyric poetry, within the Homeric epic tradition, via the worship of Dionysos, and in fifth- and fourth-century BCE drama. Rather than seeking to know what catharsis is, we may instead ask what catharsis does and how it was practiced. Performing Catharsis is suitable for students and scholars of the ancient world working on drama, philosophy, religion and medicine, as well as drama and performance practitioners. Readers in the health, well-being and medical humanities communities will also find much of interest.

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