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## Oppression results in Rebellion

*A detailed study on Aristotle's theory of 'Catharsis' in Tess of d'Urberville*

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### Abstract

This paper is focused on the concept of catharsis in Hardy's classic novel Tess of d'Urberville. Catharsis is the process of freeing strong or suppressed emotions through art. In the wake of research of Aristotle's texts, the analyzation presents numerous interpretations that have occurred over centuries, examines them and derives an elementary understanding of catharsis. Part of these works tries to trace catharsis in a sample of preserved tragedies of Greek drama, classic novel and dark comic. It investigates tragic characters, plot and tragic emotions i.e. pity and fear. The scope is to compare Aristotle's theory with how catharsis in any context is significant today to help to manage our emotions in real life. Catharsis in literature works a lot like therapy does in real life: by giving readers the opportunity to experience intense emotions from a distance, it allows them to let it all out. Cathartic works are especially good at spouting into repressed emotions that is, emotions that a reader or audience member may not typically allow themselves to feel. For instance, a person may be hesitant to cry over their own feelings of grief because ignoring their pain makes it feel more manageable, but if that person watches a character in a film collapsing into tears at a funeral, they may find themselves unexpectedly moved to tears. Last but not the least the study concludes by bringing forward an evaluation of this approach to the theory of Aristotelian catharsis.

**Keywords:** Suppressed emotions, catharsis, intense emotions, repressed.

### Introduction

Art is a form of Catharsis and it is an emotional discharge through which a person can achieve a state of moral or spiritual renewal or a state of liberation from anxiety and stress. It is a Greek word which means cleansing. In literature it is used for the cleansing of emotions of characters. It can also be any other radical change that leads to emotional rejuvenation of a human being. In other words, it is the release of strong emotions either in a character or in the audience by way of an artistic experience. Aristotle explains a tragedy as a complete story featuring high stakes circumstance. Tragedy must also be told through pleasing language and performed onstage rather than read. Finally, 'through pity and fear,' the audience should leave feeling cleansed emotionally (catharsis). Actually, that's one tall order, but a precisely appropriate one by Aristotle. Aristotle called this kind of experience catharsis, he actually coined the term catharsis, that is - when literature provides strong emotional experiences that ultimately result in a sense of purification. It is the process of releasing strong or pent-up emotions through art. Like a toddler playing quietly after a tantrum, tragedy and comedy can make us feel cleansed of emotions. While Aristotle was speaking specifically about catharsis and theater, we know that all types of art can make us feel deep, from Shakespeare's tragedies to blockbuster movies like Titanic to the vivid paintings of M. F. Hussain and Leonardo de Vinci. We seek those feelings out because they make us feel good in the end, even if they make us feel sad first. The aim of this paper is to present a wide range of ideas and approach towards the concept of catharsis. Today, the word 'cathartic' is often used to refer to just about any experience that provides someone with a feeling of emotional release. Although, the concept of catharsis is specific to literature, some of the same principles may apply generally to other forms of cathartic experience. For example, somebody who gives

away a box of things that once belonged to an ex-boyfriend might describe the experience as cathartic because it gives them a feeling of release from emotions of pain or resentment but that would depend on their having formed a strong bond of attachment to the objects in the box, just as readers must form a bond of attachment to characters in a cathartic work of literature.

Here now the researcher tends to release the cathartic experience of revenge that most of us have experienced more than once in our life-time. Revenge or vengeance can be defined as: *“An attempt, at some cost or risk to oneself, to impose suffering upon those who have made us suffer”* (Elster, 1990, p. 155) and is probably as old as humankind itself. For example, the Greek myth of Medea. When Medea’s husband Jason leaves her for Glauce, daughter of Creon; King of Corinth she kills her two sons to avenge her husband’s betrayal and says: *“It is the supreme way to hurt my husband”*. Medea was prepared to incur an extreme personal cost in order to avenge her injuries. Revenge’s propensity to turn into drama has made it an excellent theme for literature example Homer’s *Odyssey*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Duma’s *The count of Montecristo* and cinematography example Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill Volumes 1 & 2*. By thinking about those great cultural illustrations of vengeance one may overlook the fact that desire for vengeance is also an emotion involved in many tragic real-life events. The world’s historical and current affairs teach us that desire for vengeance often leads to a violent and escalatory spiral of revenge and counter revenge, which continues as long as the different parties involved are convinced that they have justice on their side. The world’s historical and current affairs teach us that desire for vengeance often leads to a violent and escalatory spiral of revenge and counter revenge, which continues as long as the different parties involved are convinced that they have justice on their side. One iconic example is Al-Qaeda’s attack on the World Trade Center on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 which killed thousands of people and was intended as revenge on the United States for insulting the Islam and for its presence in Saudi Arabia. This attack was avenged within a month by the United States bombing of Afghanistan and ten years later (May 2011) by the killing of Al-Qaeda’s founder and leader Osama Bin Laden. This latter event was followed 11 days later by a deadly suicide bombing in Pakistan by the Taliban, whose spokesman stated: *“We have done this to avenge the Abbottabad incident”* referring to the killing of Osama Bin Laden.” These events show that desire for vengeance is perhaps one of the most potent human emotions, which is deeply rooted in human nature and is both a cause and a consequence of intense pain, grief and suffering.

However, revenge is not always the result of an immediate aggression; sometimes it’s the result of long-time oppressions and suppression that give rise to rebellions. The concept of rebellion states a traditional definition that a rebellion is an act of violent and open resistance to an established government or ruler. This usually entail movements in the form of violence, brutality, ferocity, barbarity etc. A rebel renounces resists and breaks free from the custom and decorum of demeanor and norms through the use of force and also assumes a hostile attitude towards the dominion demanding submission and subservience. The ingrained conviction of rebellion as provoked by an individual’s annoyance and frustration with a unscrupulous and inhuman initiation.

On analyzing thoroughly, one would come up with one common question as what are the possible interest of revenge for a revenger? The first or primary interest of revenge could be to protect the offended sole from future harm. Although future suffering can be prevented by vengeance, it cannot undo the present suffering. Having suffered at the hands of someone else could elicit the motivation to make the offender suffer as well. A second interest of revenge, then, is that it could erect a steady balance in suffering between the offender and the offended. Taking revenge can be a means to fulfill this need. A third interest of revenge, then, is that it can restore the imbalance of power. A fourth way in which revenge can be favorable is that it can help to escape shame. The suffering at the hands of someone else and the associated split of power can ignite feelings of shame in an individual and this experienced shame might signal to others an individual’s failure. Therefore, the individual might develop a need to escape from shame and to restore pride in order to signal their success. A fifth, and final, benefit of revenge is that it can help to escape the mental pain of being harmed and subjected to an offender’s power.

### **‘Joker’ a suppressed character**

The Joker is a resembling character to Tess. He too was oppressed and suppressed by society which lead him to rebel in a horrific manner. The trend and story of Joker still being followed will aid to the suppression of Tess and on analyzing the character more closely will lead us to the understanding of oppression leads to rebel that happened with Tess. Joker a supervillain created by Bill Finger, Bob Kane, and Jerry Robinson who first appeared in the debut issue of the comic book *Batman* on April 25, 1940 published by DC Comics. The Joker is a very famous super villain character that the audiences and readers are well aware of over these years, a subordinate character formed to be defeated by our hero batman as to serve him the glory of a Just and unprejudiced character. Over the years since decades, we have celebrated the triumph of our hero but never ever really tried to figure out the past of the villains that led them to this gruesome world of evilness. Our character Joker is also part of that gruesome world and the researcher by selecting him has tried to analyze his life that what were the things he was surrounded with that led him to find solace in evilness. As the movie was announce, one thing for sure was that everybody was waiting to see what could be done with the character without Batman, the first time in any medium that the Joker would be a standalone story. Todd Phillip has tended to show how

a cruel and indifferent world can turn a person into a human monster. 'Joker' also rejects the simple storytelling standards of good and evil, or right and wrong, that are typical of the superhero genre.

As presented in the movie Arthur Fleck (the real name of the character who eventually evolve into the Joker) is a clown by vocation. He lovingly cares for his feeble mother. Fleck suffered severe emotional and physical abuse as a child from his mother and her boyfriend, and was institutionalized for many years. He is repeatedly harmed by strangers and society as a whole. He initially wants to be *well* and *happy* and to not *feel so bad anymore* before concluding that it is the world, and not him, that is truly broken.

Through this journey of awakening, the Joker as vigilante inspires a violent uprising by other dispossessed and rage-filled people, who disgusted by the behavior of their social and political leaders, including billionaire Thomas Wayne, the father of Bruce Wayne (Batman). In the film it is shown that such rich people hide behind philanthropy and noblesse oblige as they slur the working class and poor people of Gotham as "clowns."

The film is also a powerful indictment of neoliberalism and gangster capitalism, and a culture of cruelty that is causing great harm around the world. Neoliberalism as a form of gangster capitalism sells the lie that destroying the Commons, the social safety net, social democracy and a sense of shared human obligation and cutting taxes on the rich will somehow create economic growth, prosperity and freedom for all people. After several decades of failed experiments, such economic and social policies have been disproved. In reality, neoliberalism is socialism and welfare for the richest individuals and largest corporations and survival of the fittest for everyone else. The character of the Joker is forced into being by neoliberalism's assault on public services and its indifference to real human needs and also by the way neoliberalism and gangster capitalism create a feeling of social isolation and loneliness among people around the world. In the film, Arthur Fleck is denied mental health care by public hospitals and other programs, which are being "downsized" or terminated. Fleck is economically insecure. He is not paid a living wage for his work as a clown. He has no health insurance or other benefits. His mother is in dire need of medical assistance. His mind is medicated, programmed through the distorted, mediated realities presented by modern mass media. He is pathologically narcissistic, bending and interpreting events to put himself at their center. To great effect, this lack of narrative intelligibility challenges the implicit bargain between the film and viewer regarding the nature of the truth. The incidents of emotional stress and physical assault that turn Arthur Fleck into the Joker take place on neglected public transit, on dirty streets and in under-resourced public hospitals and mental health care facilities. At one key point in the story, Fleck kills three entitled white predator types in a subway car, who menace and assault him after he intervenes to aid a young woman who had become a target for their harassment. As the movie proceeds, Fleck grows from being a sad-clown wannabe comedian to a killer seeking revenge against those he sees as culprit.

For decades, neoliberal elites and other policy makers have tried to create "healthy" self-regulating subjects. They have failed. The Joker is the representation of that outcome and also the story of Arthur Fleck's liberation as a villain. One start trying to find similarities in Joker or at least a possible convergence but that never happens. A lot of the human persona of the Joker can be lost in understanding due to this mind set going in as a viewer. The purpose of this film is to weave an origin story of the future Clown Prince of Crime. This is a backstory that helps piece together the reason of the Jokers' insanity/hyper sanity. And it starts off by addressing mental trauma as the root cause. Joaquin Phoenix's Joker is an everyday man, who in the span of less than 2 hours invokes pity, then sympathy from the audience, before turning creepy and descending into a full-blooded terrifying presence as he embraces his inner demon and he finally becomes unhinged and starts dropping bodies without much emotions for it. Before this transformation though, the clinical destruction of Arthur's mind and soul by the system causes a lot of disturbance and turmoil for the viewer, making us feel for the Joker and somewhere agree to the Joker's justifications of what he is about to do. It is this humanization of a future psychopath that makes this story so remarkable, so tragically beautiful.

### **Cathartic oppression and rebellion in the novel 'Tess of the d'Urberville'**

Being a woman in a male society was not easy during the Victorian period. Women had a lot of obligations something which led to consequences, especially for Tess. Tess is a victim of her sex, oppressed by men and their society. Also, there are significant hypocrites when it comes to men and women and their way of actions as we looked upon it in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. The first man that comes in Tess's way is Alec D'Urbervilles, her cousin who was obsessed with her. Secondly, Tess meets Angel Clare, the son of a priest who was supposed to be the love of her life, a support and an understanding partner, someone in short has to be her Guardian Angel but unfortunately, he too turned out to be like any other men of the same society. The Victorian age was an age of transition and great upheavals in England. The country was slowly developing from an agricultural to industrial society. Agriculture and dairy farms were being replaced and the railway appeared as a dark menace of the fringe of the village which was the backbone of rural life. Tess is born into a poor family, with seven children, a father who is a drunkard and a mother who does what she can to help her family out. Tess is the eldest and not being a boy is more difficult. She has to work and help her family in a best way she can. Tess's mother wanted Tess to get married to be able to support the family. The mother shows a lot of oppression by telling her what to do and not telling her things she could have been better off knowing. However, Tess

is already objectified by the author as her family saw her as cash bearer and so whenever they need money or help, they send for her. Tess does what is expected of her and helps her family out as she can. She even puts herself in difficult positions to be able to help. At the end she sacrifices herself when giving up her husband to her sister Liza-Lu in terms of helping her family out, when she is gone.

In a male chauvinist society of Victorian era Tess tries to do the right thing and does not deliberately break any of the rules. However, she is by circumstances put in several difficult positions where she does not have a choice other than to do what she does. Tess is raped and gives birth to an illegitimate child. She is haunted by Alec, the pursuer and when she tries to start a fresh, he does not take no for an answer. Tess is oppressed not only by Alec but also by Angel, the man who could have been her supporter and savior. Angel is more in love with the image of a perfect woman than the real Tess. However, Angel marries her but leaves her because she has a past that he can't forget. This is a case of duplicity of his character since Tess has forgiven Angel for his past. At the end of the novel Tess is a sacrificial victim when laying at Stonehenge waiting for justice.

Tess is also a member of the parish and the church and she does all that she can to live by the words from the Bible, serving God and honoring her parents. However, the Church does not help her situation out. The parishers' talk behind her back and do not help her either as one could have expected good Christians would do. The ultimate betrayal from the Church is when Tess wants to bury her dead son and the Church refuses, as the child is illegitimate. Tess is in difficulties after Angel has left her, Angel's parents do not show her any affection. Angel's parents did not approve of Tess, as she was a simple dairy maid, not good enough for them. Furthermore, her brothers-in-law who are priests do not care either. This is a case of oppression from the Church as the men of the Church should have cared but did not. Moreover, Hardy compared Tess with Eve in the garden of Eden which also shows that she was not only a victim of her society but also that she was doomed. After separating from Angel Tess returns home and tries to find a job. Tess has a difficult time finding work and is forced to take a job at an unpleasant and unprosperous farm. She tries to visit Angel's family but overhears his brothers discussing Angel's poor marriage, so she leaves. She then hears a wandering preacher speak and is stunned to discover that he is none other than Alec d'Urberville, who has been converted to Christianity by Angel's father, the Reverend Clare. Alec and Tess are shaken by their encounter, and Alec appallingly begs Tess never to tempt him again. Soon after, however, he again begs Tess to marry him, having turned his back on his religious ways. Although Tess tells him that she has already married, Alec tells her that her husband is never coming back. In the meantime, Tess learns from her sister Liza-Lu that her mother is near death, and Tess is forced to return home to take care of her. Her mother recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies soon after. When the family is evicted from their home, Alec offers help. But Tess refuses to accept, knowing he only wants to obligate her to him again. He also offers to house the Durbeyfields on his estate as the family of Durbeyfield. Having no way out, Tess succumbs before Alec. In the meantime, Angel, realizing his fault, sets out to find Tess. When he meets Tess, Angel says that he has forgiven her and begs her to take him back, but Tess, in anguish, tells him he has come late: thinking he would never return, she yielded at last to Alec's persuasion and has become his mistress. She gently asks Angel to leave and never come back. She then blames Alec for causing her to lose Angel's love a second time, accusing Alec of having lied when he said that Angel would never return to her. As the argument becomes heated, she, in anger, stabbed Alec to death in his bed. Tess's action might seem justified, for Alec in so many ways destroy her life from the beginning. It is because of Alec's lie that she loses Angel, otherwise she might have waited for him. At the beginning of the novel, we find Alec is seducing Tess. It is nothing but male gaze and imposition of male sexual desire upon female. Consequently, the society also considers Tess as a fallen woman for at that time, and even today, virginity is related to purity. She is just like any other woman of the society who had to suffer when alone and independent, this savage society never allows an independent woman to have a good fate ahead especially if the society is dominated by the males. Alec's death seemed justified because he destroyed her life, but it does not take away the fact that Tess murdered someone. However, although Tess can be considered a murderess, she appears to be more morally pure than any other character in the novel. Nonetheless, due to the factors such as Victorian rules and even fate, she is sentenced to be hanged.

We get a sense of release of emotions as we feel, it is justified for Tess to murder Alec. It is a right action, for in those days, laws were prejudice towards woman. The actions of men were not judged or given much attention by law which is a product of patriarchy. Whereas women were easily prone to social judgement even today. However, she is given death sentence for her crime for which we feel sorry and sad as she did not deserve it. But if she has not killed Alec, then Alec's crime and ill-deed would have prevailed and there would be injustice in Tess's case. Whereas we as an audience follow Arthur Fleck and his descent into sheer insanity. As the film progresses, we see how Arthur is constantly drug down by his misfortunes and how society mistreats him. The film makes viewers sympathize with Arthur because his life has gone so downhill, and over the course of the movie, that sympathy slowly turns into fear of what kind of person Arthur is becoming. Whilst the actions of Arthur are less than favorable in the movie, you can't help but see where Arthur is coming from because the society that he and a lot of others live in, has given him nothing. Of all the portrayals of the Joker's popular character, Phillip's Joker is the most hurt and human. This Joker is a wounded soul who cannot mask his crippling depression, no matter how much makeup he puts on. Mentally and physically, Phoenix performs something alike to a macabre ballet, dancing ever closer to the state of madness; it is exposed and artful and the collapse of the mental psyche is certainly no joke.

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