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**Talking around trauma: on the relationship between trauma, narration, and catharsis in literature\***

Both poetics and psychoanalysis have repeatedly drawn on the term catharsis. With respect to trauma, the term suggests that we explore which ways of dealing with trauma might have a palliative effect. In this contribution, I will employ a historical perspective to sketch some areas where psychoanalysis and artistic methods meet and then turn to two examples to discuss in detail certain aspects of how trauma has been dealt with in literature. I will demonstrate that the works discussed here are deeply involved in the functioning of traumas, so that they elude the – cathartic – perspective of healing again and again.

The concept of catharsis generally applied today is broader than the notion linked to Aristotelian tragedy. The most obvious reason for this shift is the fact that tragedy as described by Aristotle – as part of a public competition (*agon*) within the framework of a celebration and with the formal characteristics he called for – no longer has a place in modern literature. Nonetheless, Aristotle's definition of catharsis, as a cleansing of affect by means of pity (*eleos*) and fear (*phobos*) will continue to form a main point of reference in the discussion.<sup>1</sup> Reception of the concept of catharsis in the German-speaking world was long influenced by Lessing's interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Lessing views the Aristotelian tragedy as a "poem which excites compassion",<sup>3</sup> thereby transforming "passion into virtuous habits"<sup>4</sup>: "All species of poetry are intended to improve us"<sup>5</sup>, he exclaims and explains: "*The person to be most pitied is the best person* [...]. Therefore, whoever excites our pity makes us better and more virtuous."<sup>6</sup> With this view, Lessing presses catharsis into service for the moral betterment of society. Catharsis becomes a pedagogical tool which contributes to disciplining affects.<sup>7</sup> Here, evoking and purging passions means moderating them. The members of the audience leave the theater as improved persons.

Some years ago, however, Wolfgang Schadewaldt claimed that other interpretations are more plausible as explanations for these passages in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Tragedy does not aim to moderate strong affects but, on the contrary, to evoke them. In this reading, as well, empathy is essential – at least as long as it does not end in Christian pity. The shock and the empathetic feelings evoked by the hero's fate characterize tragedy and distinguish it from other genres. Schadewaldt interprets catharsis as that part of the drama which dissolves the turmoil of emotions evoked previously. The relief associated with this process creates pleasure. With this analysis, Schadewaldt rejects the notion that tragedy might have any moralizing purpose. Tragedy neither increases people's compassion, nor does it serve to improve them morally. Tragedy is instead an artistic form which can lead to a special kind of pleasure – tragic pleasure, a pleasure which Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, considered harmless. Moreover, just as in the ecstatic cults, the effect of this agitation and subsequent return to a normal state on individuals is comparable to that of a purgative treatment.<sup>8</sup>

There is a weakness, however, to this purely physiological interpretation of catharsis, an interpretation which leaves it devoid of all moral connotations. For according to this concept, the events that trigger shock and distress are irrelevant for the cathartic effect. This interpretation loses sight of the fact that *very specific* scenarios evoke emotion and that tragedy is concerned with precisely these events. The themes on which these scenarios focus

preoccupy the collective subconscious and have remained unresolved – for the Greeks, these were themes like the Persian Wars or, more generally, the substitution of the mythical world view with a rational one.<sup>9</sup>

Anthropological and medical connotations<sup>10</sup> open up perspectives on a broader concept of catharsis; this concept transcends the genre of the drama and was applied to oral narrative and artistic prose. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of catharsis was only loosely linked to the theory of the tragedy. Around the year 1900, the concept of catharsis experienced a new flowering, with far-reaching effects, and became a key component of the new discipline of psychoanalysis. Before Sigmund Freud conceived of psychoanalysis in its classic form, he worked together with Josef Breuer in the 1890's to create a method for healing hysterical disorders, a method which Freud himself termed "cathartic treatment".<sup>11</sup> In their *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895), Breuer and Freud described the cause of hysterical disorders as a psychological wound to which the individual was unable to react appropriately. As a result, the affect that was engendered by the wound was not abreacted, a phenomenon referred to by the authors as blockage. Catharsis is the process whereby this blockage – and thus, the aftereffect of trauma – is remedied. Language is capable of dissolving this blockage, for the memory of the original trauma has become capsulated in regions inaccessible to the will of the patient. The arduous process of analysis reveals this inaccessible knowledge by evoking the patient's associations and thus pointing the way to the original trauma. Freud attributed curative powers to the recollection and verbalization of phenomena and continued to rely on these powers in his later work. This early stage of psychoanalysis was characterized by an optimistic hope that the effects of trauma could be dissolved if recollected and expressed in the medium of language; trauma was seen as an individual phenomenon, something experienced in childhood.

This model of the cathartic effect of talking also exists for literature. But when applied to literature, the model is altered such that the personal constellation of physician and patient shifts, for writers speak to an anonymous audience, one which is incompatible with the special communicative situation and the confidential relationship between analyst and patient. Nonetheless, the transition from one pole to another is gradual, as illustrated, for example, by the fact that Walter Benjamin ascribes curative powers to the telling of fairy tales. On a general level, Benjamin asks – thus linking his reflections to the methods of psychoanalysis – "if not every illness might be cured, if it could only flow far enough out of the stream of storytelling – all the way back to the delta? If one considers how pain is a dam resisting the stream of storytelling, then one sees clearly that it is broken wherever the grade is steep enough to wash whatever is in its path into an ocean of happy forgetfulness"<sup>12</sup>. Here, Benjamin also attributes to speech the curative power to remove blockage. Just as in Freud's model, the unhampered flow describes the desired condition, in which the cause of an illness can be expressed verbally, set aside, and even forgotten.

Benjamin refers to the passing on of life experience as an important function of storytelling. But Benjamin also delineates a decisive change in both storytelling and in the sphere of experience, a change which separates the 19<sup>th</sup> from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He remarks "that the art of storytelling is coming to an end"<sup>13</sup> because the rapid changes in living conditions no longer allow experience which might be passed on as advice and wisdom to emerge. On the contrary: experience withers, while lack of orientation increases. Benjamin names World War I as the historical threshold for this process: "Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?"<sup>14</sup>

This diagnosis also applies in a special way to the concept of trauma. Under the impression of the war, Freud revised his theory and introduced the death instinct as an antagonist to eros. At the same time, the investigation of war neuroses suggested an extension of trauma theory, such that man-made disasters experienced during adult life were included as causes.

Although psychoanalysis long adhered to the idea that traumas were the result of experiences in childhood, after World War II, it was undeniable that man-made disasters were one of the causes of trauma. Studies on the survivors of the Nazi death camps lead to the development of a concept of an illness which, in the 1960s, William G. Niederland termed the survivor syndrome. Since the 1980s, trauma research has been characterized by increasing differentiation in a variety of disciplines.<sup>15</sup>

In 1920 Freud developed the concept that the cause of a trauma was an individually incommensurable violation of the stimulus protection mechanism. The individual's psychic apparatus was then forced to employ cathetic energy to bind the resulting damage; the result was that traumatized individuals obsessively re-lived the original traumatizing situation over and over again. To a certain extent, the concept of the compulsion to repeat and the introduction of the death instinct negate the optimistic perspective of psychoanalysis, a perspective linked to the ideals of the Enlightenment. For with this reconceptualization, Freud abandoned his earlier notion of overcoming trauma through recollecting and talking.

With the concept of extreme trauma,<sup>16</sup> more recent trauma research admits the existence of such an inaccessible realm. Individuals who have experienced the massive use of violence often suffer, as a result, from psychic disorders which persist for decades after the traumatic events. In recent years, exogenous factors have come to be considered increasingly important, with respect to both the situations which evoke trauma and to the further development of traumatization. The terms cumulative trauma and sequential traumatization<sup>17</sup> conceive of trauma as a dynamic process with effects on the children and grandchildren of trauma survivors.

The relationship between survivors and their environment plays a key role in determining the degree to which survivors will suffer from the affects of trauma. In an understanding, open, and empathetic environment, the affects of trauma will more likely be alleviated than in surroundings marked by hostility and rejection, where there is a threat of re-traumatization. The realization that whether or not trauma will be re-lived also depends on a society's reactions places a specific responsibility on that society.<sup>18</sup> Societies which have emerged after dictatorships or other situations marked by violence must deal with the psychic damage resulting from such political regimes. Trying to "close the books" not only ignores the ongoing suffering of trauma victims – it aggravates their suffering as well.

To this day, storytelling continues to fulfill an important function in the therapy of traumatized persons.<sup>19</sup> Just as in Freud's time, the construction of one's own story brings with it a cathartic effect, even though the assumption that speaking of trauma alone will cause the symptoms to disappear has been abandoned. Nonetheless, putting trauma into words is part of a first step towards achieving inner distance, so that the traumatized persons are less subject to the phenomena which overwhelm them psychosomatically. In this sense, the idea of assigning literature the task of collectively finding words to express trauma suggests itself. If we were to assign this cathartic aspect to literature on a trial basis, then it would be linked to a shift in function, from the individual to the collective. Just as psychoanalytical treatment liberates an individual from the effects of its psychic wounds, literary "treatment" through storytelling must liberate a community from its collective trauma. Naming the wounds,

calling them to mind with language, and describing their on-going effects should cause the symptoms to disappear. But this is where we reach the limits of the analogy. Although writing may in some cases have a beneficial, perhaps even curative function for the writer, it can dissolve neither collective, nor individual trauma. Furthermore, the relationship of speaking, through the medium of literature, to a heterogeneous, anonymous audience differs fundamentally from the physician-patient relationship. Literature should not be confused with therapy. As soon as a certain function is assigned to literature, it loses its autonomy and thus its essential innovative force.

And yet, in retrospect, we can observe that many literary works have played an important role in bringing the submerged and on-going effects of social catastrophes to the surface of our consciousness. In this recursive perspective, we can indeed assert the similarities between therapy and literature. In both cases, language opens up a hitherto unknown theme and at the same time enacts new ways of speaking. One can either view this as revealing a fact which was previously hidden or – in a sense less linked to a theory of disclosure – as a construction of reality claiming special urgency at the moment of its production. The use of language initiates a process which one might call, in the terminology of Jonathan Shay, a communalization of the trauma.<sup>20</sup> Public discourse is the medium of this process. In so far as literature unfolds a genuine form of literary speech within this discourse, it is involved in the collective work of expressing trauma through language and in the communalization of the trauma. The issue which then remains to be addressed is the special nature of the literary approach to trauma.

To speak of trauma in literature can mean different things. It seems useful to make the following systematic differentiations, which are, however, not intended to be exhaustive.

First, trauma can appear in literature as the representation of traumatized figures or groups of figures. On this level, there is evidence for parallels between literary descriptions and clinical findings. E.T.A. Hoffmann, for example – who was a lawyer in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and engaged in legal discussions about the abolition of torture – has described the traumatizing effects of tortured persons in his works in great detail. Hoffmann observed how bodily reactions and human behavior change after torture, and he did so long before psychiatrists developed the concept of trauma. Nowadays however, the literary description of traumatized figures sometimes becomes problematic, when literature is employed to illustrate clinical findings. When literature is reduced to case histories, the intrinsic value of literary discourse is lost.

Second, speaking of trauma in literature also refers to literature by traumatized authors; literary works from survivors of the Nazi death camps belong to this category. Testimony is a key word in this context. The Wilkomirski case lends itself to addressing the question of whether the texts themselves reveal if the author is traumatized, whether texts by traumatized authors are characterized by unique qualities. Wilkomirski's purportedly authentic account of his internment in Nazi camps and ghettos during his childhood was highly praised by literary critics. It was later disclosed that the author's name was a pseudonym and his story a work of fiction. What remains is the disturbing question of whether or not, in principle, any author can create an account which most readers would perceive as authentic. In other words, can the literary discourse of the authentic succeed, regardless of whether or not the author is indeed traumatized?

Third, we would then expect that trauma would be revealed in inherent elements of an author's style, independent of the way in which traumatized figures are portrayed. Is there some textual trace of trauma imprinted in these works like a watermark, some trait linked to their intrinsic form? If so, then it should be possible to decipher and interpret literature like a symptom.

At this point, the recipients enter the process of the constitution of trauma in literature. Trauma is embedded in each work in its specific form; but beyond this aspect of form, literary works are also communications between authors and audiences. Focusing exclusively on the work of literature and its aesthetic form loses sight of this communicative aspect. That is why the aftereffects of trauma must also be related to the production and reception of these works. Thus, fourthly, we should consider the entire tapestry of institutional and discursive relationships within which literature is produced and received. For this is where, in consensus and in conflict, the sense of trauma is negotiated. Here, the decision is reached whether a specific interpretation will remain incommensurable with a particular group of people or will be adopted by a group. In other words, this is where the communalization of the trauma takes place, a process which literature might initiate. In doing so, literature would trigger a process which in turn might prove to be cathartic under certain conditions.

All of the aspects sketched here are interwoven; in order to reveal the actual constellations in individual literary works, a closer analysis must follow. Rather than reviewing each of these aspects systematically, I will now focus on certain phenomena which are especially characteristic of the literary treatment of trauma, employing examples from texts by Stefan Zweig and Jean Améry. First, I will consider the indissolubility of the divided perspective on the traumatic event; then, I will turn to the question of how art – taken up to alleviate the effects of experience with violence – is involved with the mechanism of violence; finally, I will reflect on the relationship between talking and guilt.

Before the National Socialists persecuted Jean Améry – a survivor of several Nazi camps – as a Jew, they tortured him because he was a member of the political resistance.<sup>21</sup> Améry realized quite clearly that torture changed his life. Long before most psychologists, he was aware of torture's destructive long-term effects. He refers to its "character indelebilis",<sup>22</sup> separating the tortured from those who have not been tortured, even long after torture is over: Améry insists on this difference. This focus affects, on the one hand, his understanding of language and, on the other, his self-image as a victim, leading in turn to his behavior with respect to the group of the perpetrators.

Although Améry speaks publicly about his own torture experiences in detail unusual for one who has experienced torture, for him as well there is a point at which communication ceases: "The pain was as it was. There is no more to be said".<sup>23</sup> It is impossible to express the experience of torture, language fails in the face of it. With this statement, Améry demonstratively rejects any possible feeling of empathy precisely at the point where torture's key experience lies. This gesture becomes directly evident, for while his fellow humans also experience other emotions and can therefore recall them with the help of language, the pain of torture cannot be shared. Améry repeatedly emphasizes that torture leaves its victims as lonely individuals<sup>24</sup> whose lives will be accompanied by feelings of melancholy. Here, language cannot aid in evoking empathy and the feeling of shared suffering; at best, it can lead others to the threshold of difference. But if it is impossible to express experience in words, then there is no basis for the classic medium of the cathartic process.

Améry's rejection of empathy and his emphasis on difference emerges as a rejection of the illusion of an 'us' capable of uniting the I who speaks and the reader. Améry, the Austrian who remained in Belgian exile after the war, makes a conscious decision to write his texts in German. By writing about the torture he suffered, he confronts the collective of the perpetrators with the existence of the author as a victim. He shows his wounds and in doing so provokes a reaction. In connection with the analysis of his feelings of resentment against Germans, he develops the theoretical framework for this approach. Améry writes, with Sartre-like emphasis: "My feelings of resentment [...] exist so that the crimes will become moral reality for the criminal, so that he will be drawn down into the truth of his misdeed".<sup>25</sup> Thus, Améry insists on retaining his feelings of resentment against the perpetrators and their country. He hopes to trigger reactions not by false reconciliation but by confrontation with an unreconciled victim. Rejecting the idea of mutual understanding has a significant function in the current politics of discourse: during communication, differences in experience remain in the public conscious and the non-communicability of what has been endured also remains.

Thus, Améry's insistence on difference in experience becomes itself a sign. He communicates by marking a site where there can be no communication. Améry does not transmit the pain of torture itself but instead reveals the after-effects of torture and thus unremittingly confronts those who do not feel burdened by their involvement in the history of these crimes with the experience of torture. The tortured individual intervenes into the process of determining how his own torture will be transmitted, by leaving his mark on the construction of the past through language.<sup>26</sup> These interventions, which Améry repeatedly enacted through his literary works, can be seen as attempts to achieve the communalization of the trauma. But this does not mean that, in Améry's works, the impossible common ground between survivors and perpetrators comes in through the back door, as it were. Communalization refers instead to the reiteration of a difference, the presence of a disturbance.

In his work *Schachnovelle (The Royal Game)*, Stefan Zweig describes the torture of sensory deprivation and the psychic effects which result. But Zweig does not merely describe this traumatization; implicitly, he also asks how art functions. To ward off the danger of being overpowered and the impending dissociation of his ego, the tortured Dr. B. seeks refuge in the game of chess. He discovers a book describing games played by chess champions and replays them to the point of obsession. In Zweig's work, chess has a number of connotations; among other things, it is repeatedly referred to as an art.<sup>27</sup> An art which, in the case of Dr. B., appears in a state of emergency and serves as a "diversion"<sup>28</sup> from an intolerable state. This art is thus at first a successful escape strategy, which does not abolish the actual threat but does produce a different psychic attitude towards that threat and relief in view of the respite attained. One might say that the art of chess facilitates escape from reality. In this intricate case, an individual is threatened with destruction when forced to confront reality. Escape to fantasy worlds is thus desirable and salutary, albeit, only for a certain period of time. Later, preoccupation with the medium of escape becomes an obsession and a threat to the individual, similar to the threat emanating from sensory deprivation. Of decisive importance is the fact that the situation which leads to escape through the game of chess is reflected in the form of chess later practiced by Dr. B. The dynamics of threat, of being overwhelmed, of trauma, are written into Dr. B.'s greatest triumph – Dr. B.'s victory over the reigning world champion after he is freed. Trauma is ever-present in Dr. B.'s nervous style of chess.

Strictly speaking, Zweig does not portray trauma; he demonstrates, with the art of playing chess, how diversion can be a protective mechanism in the face of trauma. While Zweig does

name the innermost core of the threat, it appears only as a negative point of reference. There is no other possibility, for this core is nothing. To avoid being dissociated into nothing, Dr. B. finds diversion and, in the face of an unremitting threat, raises diversion to the highest level of artistic skill. Art is a vital instrument of escape. In a mad obsession, art again and again makes itself the centerpiece, unceasingly seeking to escape from its Other and, at the same time, concealing that Other.

The idea Zweig presents here – that it is impossible to represent trauma – has often been attacked in literature. This concept coincides with hypotheses from psychology. Several researchers refer to an inaccessible, non-representable sphere within the self, a foreign body within the soul. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub refers to this sphere as the empty circle: "This expression refers to the often latent but nonetheless powerful and ubiquitous perception of a lack of structure and representation. The 'empty circle' is not really empty but instead contains something that cannot be known or that cannot be represented psychically – empty spaces in the structure of the soul".<sup>29</sup> The constellation in Zweig's novella matches the relationship described by Laub. The void lies as a threat behind every form of action; here, emptiness quite literally takes the shape of sensory deprivation, the obliteration of all perception. This emptiness means the loss of the ego, the occupation of what is most individual by the Other, a colonization, expropriation. Art's expression does not reach the void; in Zweig's work, this emptiness also remains unrepresentable. But since art emerged from a defense against emptiness, it will always refer to that void.<sup>30</sup>

Can we attribute a cathartic function to this art of chess? Here, it becomes quite apparent that a positive, palliative effect simultaneously implies the diversion from a threat, thus producing blindness or misappreciation. Applying this mechanism to the functioning of language and literature would mean that expressing the cause of trauma through speech – as called for by psychoanalysis in its early days – is impossible, since trauma cannot be represented. As a consequence, what is expressed in literature should not be confused with trauma; it is, rather, an effect of the trauma, something derived from it in the process of writing. Many writers who are Holocaust survivors point out the difference between what can be articulated with language and what is experienced. For them, there is an unbridgeable abyss separating the two. This leads some authors to leave out certain events in their works, in particular in scenes taking place in the gas chambers.

Jean Améry was one such author for a long time. But in his novel-essay *Lefeu oder der Abbruch*, written in 1974, Améry abandons this self-imposed restriction, through the perspective of the main character. Lefeu experiences with shocking intensity the violence of his memories of his Jewish parents, who were deported from Stuttgart and murdered in a death camp. The memories evoked here differ from the memories of torture which form the fixed point around which Améry's essays revolve; first, because the focus is now on the fate of his persecuted family members, rather than on his own fate; second, because imagination through language and visualization are the media used to approach persecution. In his essay on torture, Améry points to an experience of violence which is bound to one's own body and is incommunicable. In *Lefeu*, in contrast, memory occurs through the medium of imagination; there is no somatic 'before' or 'after' this recollection.

The ordeal of memory through imagination forms a turning point in the text itself. Lefeu, who, prior to this experience, considered the power and autonomy of language to be negligible in comparison to reality, is suddenly confronted with language's productivity in the perception of the world. The problem of language with all its contradictions bursts upon

him when he is faced with the imagination of his parents' death in the gas chambers. A nocturnal trip through southern France and a glimpse of the flames of a natural gas production station trigger memories presented by Améry in an inner monologue:

"There, the flames must not have been visible: only blackish smoke billowed out of the chimneys and dug the graves in the sky, I cannot free myself from the pent-up words that obstruct reality for me. [...] the sky in the east was flaming and smoking and the giant smelled human flesh. [...] Did the groans of death penetrate the background clamor of sharp commando cries? Has everything long been destroyed by empty talk, so that it has no strength when it emerges from the depths of the buried, the grave depths of a memory rejected with a vehement gesture? This is how the parents were murdered: I cannot even say that, for in doing so, this event palely-faintly fades, just as it is exaltingly-upliftingly adulterated by metaphorical talk. [...] And yet, to remain silent would be to conceal."<sup>31</sup>

Numerous literary reminiscences, from traces of fairy tales to Paul Celan's *Todesfuge* to Eduard Mörike's *Feuerreiter*, are the media through which the protagonist imagines the fate of his parents. What remains an unsolvable contradiction is the fact that words do not do justice to reality, but are nonetheless necessary to bring reality into consciousness. What is buried can only be recollected if it employs the inadequate and incriminated cultural forms we have at our disposal. And for Lefeu, these forms are linked to the traditions of the German language; he thus employs, in his stream of thought, fragments from classic works of German literature. He works in the language which has become the language of the murderers.

The stream of language that now flows does not simply liberate. It does not, to use Benjamin's metaphor, wash away the dam of pain in the stream of storytelling. The use of language implies guilt. In *Lefeu*, Améry has put into words what he previously called "what will always be indescribable"<sup>32</sup>. But Améry's character knows that he has installed his own, imagined version of what occurred to take the place of the experience of those who were killed: "It is a game of language. The [Feuerreiter] which I [...] created is, to a certain extent, the substitute for the powerlessness of language; that is, the very different word appeared, one which had hardly anything to do with the deportation of the parents and their annihilation"<sup>33</sup>. Breaking through the silence enclosing the scene of his parents' murder is tied to its palimpsest-like superscription. Lefeu must pay a price for exploring the way he is psychically determined by this event: he must re-create his parents' murder with words and replace the silence with his own perception, a perception formed by his imagination. But only the dead would be able to testify to the entire extent of their suffering. For this reason, the intuitive wish to remain speechless is a gesture of solidarity with the dead. W.G. Sebald writes that when "the writing subject [...] relinquishes his/her capacity to remember in favor of remembrances, relinquishes consternation in favor of a message, the subject knows that he/she is taking part in a betrayal which breaches the trust of the dead"<sup>34</sup>.

By overcoming speechlessness, so it seems, monstrous deeds are washed away in verbal innocuousness and bonds with the dead are abandoned. However, Lefeu also releases the creative power of language, a power which enables him to trace his own connections with the past for the first time. Améry recognized this two-sided character of language. Constructing the traumatic situation with language implies ambivalence: the worst atrocities must always remain unspoken, but only the use of language opens up opportunities for working through trauma. Even narrations that "talk around" trauma can develop productive effects, by creating a narrative construction of trauma which, first, enables individuals to distance themselves internally from trauma and, second, by doing so, makes trauma communicable. This effect does not eliminate the trauma, nor does it cleanse the recipient, so that there is no cathartic

effect in the old sense. But like the tragedy, the literary expression of trauma confronts the recipient with a subliminally effective calamity and thus opens the way for a conscious positioning vis-a-vis the overwhelming and still powerful forces unleashed by trauma. Literature can hope to achieve no more. How a society which faces the traumatizing effects of its own violence will react to this confrontation, be it with empathy or with defensiveness, is a question which art can hardly influence. Here is where the political responsibility of the community lies. Thus, the definition of the cathartic in the face of trauma will always remain precarious.

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### References

\* Revised version of a lecture held at the conference "Catharsis", April 19, 2001 at the UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The text was written within the context of my study on the representation of torture in recent German language literature, *Die Folter in der Literatur. Ihre Darstellung in der deutschsprachigen Erzählprosa von 1740 bis 'nach Auschwitz'*. München: Wilh. Fink Verlag, 2004.

<sup>1</sup> In the German-speaking academic world a discussion about the translation of *eleos* and *phobos* emerged. Lessing translated *Mitleid* and *Furcht*, others, such as Schadewaldt, translated *Jammer* and *Schrecken*. The first stressed the implications relevant to Christianity, the second tried to avoid them.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Matthias Luserke (ed.), *Die Aristotelische Katharsis*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, New York: 1982, No. 77, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Lessing, *Dramaturgy*, No. 78, p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Lessing, *Dramaturgy*, No. 77, p. 190.

<sup>6</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Nicolai, *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel*, edited by J. Schulte-Sasse, München: 1972; letter from Lessing to Nicolai, November 1756, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> On this question see Matthias Luserke, *Die Bändigung der wilden Seele. Literatur und Leidenschaft in der Aufklärung*, Stuttgart, Weimar: 1995, in particular pp. 184-193.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Schadewaldt, "Furcht und Mitleid? Zur Deutung des Aristotelischen Tragödiensatzes," in Luserke, *Katharsis*, pp. 246-288.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Christian Meier, *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie*, München: 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hellmut Flashar, "Die medizinischen Grundlagen der Lehre von der Wirkung der Dichtung in der griechischen Poetik," in Luserke, *Katharsis*, pp. 289-325.

<sup>11</sup> Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, "Studies on Hysteria," in James Strachey, editor, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. II, London: 1955 (reprinted 1964), p. 267. Freud's understanding of catharsis was highly influenced by Jacob Bernays who formulated a concept of catharsis emphasizing medical aspects much earlier than Schadewaldt. In a later article, Freud employed the concept of catharsis again when he laid out his thoughts on "Psychopathological Characters on the Stage" and worked out their identificatory potential.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Erzählung und Heilung," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, vol. IV, series editor T. Rexroth, Frankfurt am Main: 1972, p. 430.

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- <sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Der Erzähler," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, edited by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main: 1977, pp. 438-465, p. 439.
- <sup>14</sup> Benjamin, "Erzähler," pp. 438-465, p. 439.
- <sup>15</sup> Werner Bohleber summarizes the most important phases in psychoanalytical research in his "Die Entwicklung der Traumatheorie in der Psychoanalyse," *Psyche*, 54 (2000), pp. 797-839. For a summary of current standard knowledge about trauma cf. Gottfried Fischer and Peter Riedesser, *Lehrbuch der Psychotraumatologie*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, München, Basel: 1999.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, "Extremtraumatisierung als kumulatives Trauma," in *Psyche*, 33 (1979), pp. 991-1023.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Hans Keilson, *Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern*, Stuttgart: 1979.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Jan Philipp Reemtsma, "Noch einmal: Wiederholungszwang," in *Mittelweg* 36, 7 (5) (1998), pp. 18-32, here p. 32.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam. Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, New York: Touchstone, 1995, pp. 187 ff.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, pp. 55, 189 etc.
- <sup>21</sup> Améry's significant and often acknowledged reflections on this torture were published in 1966 in the essay "Die Tortur" in the essay collection *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*. Prior to that date, Améry had not published any texts referring to his experience of torture or the time spent in Auschwitz. His public interventions focusing on this period began as a reaction to the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt.
- <sup>22</sup> Jean Améry, "Die Tortur," in *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Stuttgart: 1977 (first published 1966), pp. 37-58, here p. 51.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. for example Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, p. 90.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Améry writes: "I rebel: against my past, against history, against a present which allows the incomprehensible to freeze historically and thus adulterates it outrageously. Nothing has turned into scars." (Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, preface to the 1977 edition, p. 12).
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Stefan Zweig, *Schachnovelle*, Frankfurt/Main: 1974 (first published 1942), p. 19, 22, 24, 64.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.
- <sup>29</sup> Dori Laub, "Eros oder Thanatos? Der Kampf um die Erzählbarkeit des Traumas," in *Psyche*, 54 (2000), pp. 860-894, here p. 863.
- <sup>30</sup> On the clinical aspects of this process, cf. Dori Laub/Daniel Podell, "Art and Trauma," in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 76 (1995), pp. 991-1006.
- <sup>31</sup> Jean Améry, *Lefeu oder der Abbruch*, Stuttgart: 1982 (first published 1974), p. 124.
- <sup>32</sup> Jean Améry, "Im Warteraum des Todes," in Jean Améry, *Widersprüche*, Stuttgart: 1971, pp. 213-232, here p. 218.
- <sup>33</sup> Jean Améry, *Lefeu oder der Abbruch*, p. 129.

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<sup>34</sup> W. G. Sebald: "Jean Améry und Primo Levi," in Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (ed.), *Über Jean Améry*, Heidelberg: 1990, pp. 115-123, p. 122.

### **Short biographical note**

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