

KENOSIS, KATHARSIS, KAIROSIS:
A THEORY OF LITERARY AFFECTS

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By

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

Signed.....

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis explores theoretical aspects of the affective dimension of literature. Beginning with Aristotle's tying of katharsis to the drama, the pattern of affective relations is completed through the establishing of terms for each of the three broad traditional genres. These relations can be expressed in the ratio:

as katharsis is to the genre of the dramatic
so kenosis is to the genre of the lyric
so kairosis is to the genre of the epic.

Within each of these affective relations, further relations are determined for the identity structures within each genre. In defining these identity structures, the philosophical, theological, psychological and literary aspects of katharsis, kenosis and kairosis are explored. Of particular use in mapping these identity structures and literary affects were the philosophical theories of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, and Wittgenstein; the theological views of D.G. Dawe, John Macquarrie, Charles Pickstone, and Ernest F. Scott; the psychological theories of C.J. Jung, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva; the literary theories of Mikel Dufrenne, Stanley Fish, Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, Hans Robert Jauss, W.R. Johnson, Frank Kermode, William Elford Rogers, and D.T. Suzuki; and the literary works of Homer, Shakespeare, George Herbert, S.T. Coleridge, Charles Baudelaire, Wallace Stevens, and James K. Baxter.

Taking up Aristotle's project to grant cognitive value to the experience of art, this thesis argues for the centrality of identity structures within the dimension of the affective. The thesis further determines that

literature's affective dimension is the domain within which aesthetic identity is established. Such imaginative identity structures amount to a cultural catalogue of identity possibilities. As the keepers of this catalogue, the three interpretive genres amount to a body of affective knowledge that is its own dimension.

INTRODUCTION

The original working title for this thesis was "Kenosis: the self-emptying personality in the poetry of James K. Baxter". As work progressed, the thesis shifted its primary attention from the poetry of Baxter to the theoretical issues surrounding kenosis. Pursuing these theoretical concerns, the thesis became a study of the affective categories of literature.

Beginning with an investigation of the known, the growth of this thesis has followed a path of discovery. It was not anticipated that a concern for the lyric would lead to the wider concern for the affective categories of each genre. Starting with kenosis, it became apparent that, if it was possible to add one further category to Aristotle's determination of katharsis, then it was a requirement to determine a further category to account for the affective in the epic genre. The pattern of discovery remains integral to the argument. This history makes apparent why, in the finished thesis, an interest in the affect of lyric remains central. The study of the poetry of Baxter has been reduced to a small treatment in Chapter Six.

While the affective categories for each genre are seen as independent experiences, katharsis, through its familiarity and long history, has been taken as a model for establishing the other two affective categories. Because katharsis has been used for so long as the only general affective term applying to literature, it has been used historically to account for aspects of the other affective categories. Comparison of historical usage of kenosis with katharsis has established the parameters of the affective categories in literature. Based on this structural model, operating parameters are determined for the third broad genre, the epic. With these parameters in place, it is possible to name and describe the third term, kairosis.

In talking of genres, it needs to be said at the outset that the broad traditional genres treated here are to be seen as interpretive genres. Following the work of William Elford Rogers, this thesis treats genres as “modes of relation”. These modes “are constitutive of the understanding” of a text.¹ Building from Rogers' model, the modes of relation are seen to operate within the affective categories as identity relations. For each affective category there is established an identity relation that defines the interpretation of each genre. Each of these identity relations is grounded

¹ *The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983) p. 57. The theories of Rogers are treated in detail in Chapter Three.

in a model of matter. These models of matter are seen as constitutive of our understanding of each genre.²

Because genre is here treated as being about interpretation and not about the cataloguing of works, no effort is made to define what historical works would or might fit within the model of each genre. Indeed, examples are given of various interpretations of the same passage from a particular text as examples of all three of the broad genres. It is anticipated that the reader will bring an understanding of genre that is already based on the interpretation of genre. The thesis does not aim to offer new ways of defining individual works, but rather new ways of accounting for the existing experience of interpreting genre.

Traditionally each genre has been seen to have its particular field of interest. The epic is seen to concentrate on character, the dramatic to concentrate on action and the lyric to concentrate on the thematic. In establishing fields of concern that arise within the affective categories, this thesis argues that the epic can be seen in interpretation to amount to a discourse of time, the dramatic to a discourse of space and the lyric to a discourse of identity.

While there is an identity relation for each genre, identity itself is seen as the field of concern that constitutes our understanding of the

² A table of these relations is provided at the end of Chapter Four.

lyric. Because of this concentration on identity, aspects of lyric identity are treated in great detail in the final three chapters. The experience of kenosis, by its very definition, establishes identity as the focus of its operation. This lyric identity is defined as a constellation. Within this constellated identity, as found in the lyric, the positions of the reading and speaking subjects are determined within the pattern of self-object, self-Self, and self-other relations.

In the dramatic genre, identity is a readily apparent (if slightly alien) aspect of the affective category of katharsis: we see the hero transformed through a series of actions. This aspect of identity is treated as bodily identity and is defined in terms of causal relations.

In the epic, it is not so obvious that the affective experience of kairosis involves questions of identity. What is clear is that the epic involves characters and that such characters have identities that persist through time. Our experience of these characters as identities gives rise to the question, can kairosis be seen as an affective experience in line with kenosis and katharsis? Since our general assumptions about personal identity so very closely match the identity structures of the epic genre, it is not surprising that the experience of kairosis remains, for many readers, an obscure one. The very fact that there has, until now, been no term to describe this relationship is a clear indication of the density of assumptions of "naturalness" that readers make in interpreting the

identity relations within the epic genre. This aspect of identity is treated within the generally recognized area of memory-based identity.

Aristotle, it is argued, attempts to give to the affective experience the status that philosophy has for Plato, that of wisdom. His debate with Plato continues to haunt aesthetic experience within Western culture. Is the artistic experience, as an affect, the vehicle of knowledge? Do we learn through the series of emotions that we experience aesthetically, or do we simply experience these emotions for the duration? Through the determining of modes of identity relation as constitutive of our understanding of each genre, and through determining that such modes are aspects of the affective relations which hold in the interpretation of each genre, it becomes possible to argue for the cognitive gain from aesthetic experience. It is only through its affects that literature engages the questions of identity. When questions of identity are experienced within the affective dimension they arise in an aesthetic way that engages the reader's participation in these identity structures.

Further, in the final chapters of this thesis, it is argued that these very identity structures, as found in language and literature, constitute and catalogue our experiences of identity. While other modes that constitute and explore identity are examined (various forms of psychotherapy and religious contemplation), it is argued that the aesthetic experience of identity as found in the affective experience of literature is not only

constitutive of our understanding of literature as literature, but is also constitutive of our understanding of aesthetic identity as a mode of being.

The "message" of literature is borne by the affect. It is from our experience of kenosis, katharsis and kairosis that we know identity as the series of imaginative possibilities that are physically, culturally and psychically available. Such identities, while they impinge on our understanding of identity in everyday life, remain, nonetheless, residents of the affective dimension of literature. Such identities, while they are open to ideological manipulation, remain marked with the freedom of distance. Any appropriation of the affective dimension of literature comes complete with the inherent irony of reference: because I am Hamlet, I am not. It is because we are moved" by literature that the affective retains its own power; we remain subjects.