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Introduction

Violence is everywhere, it seems; in the streets, in the news, and on our favourite television programs. In this work, I will explain Aristotle's aesthetic theory of catharsis in Greek Tragedy and then apply it to three American television series set in violent post-apocalyptic worlds. The analysis of these programs will allow the reader to explore what Aristotle might have to say about the potential catharsis available for modern societal problems such as war, border disputes, religious tensions, and even fear of advancing technology, among other issues. I look at Aristotelian catharsis, specifically, and I have chosen to apply the theory to the violence in post-apocalyptic television in order to illustrate the level of overt and gratuitous violence present in the programs, to evaluate its necessity and purpose. I do not engage with theories of catharsis outside of psychological and Aristotle's own applications of the concept for several reasons, foremost among them being space and time in this article, as well as the overlap with psychology of Aristotle's aesthetic theory. Due to this natural overlap and natural progression from the original theory, this application is given priority over the others. This article does contain graphic descriptions of violent actions contained in the programs. A discussion of violence in post-apocalyptic television need not necessarily include graphic descriptions, but the inclusion elucidates the level of violence depicted on-screen to demonstrate the necessity, or lack thereof, of that level of violence. I do not preach an anti-violence message, nor does this article presume to know what the individual person is capable of internalizing in a psychologically healthy or age-appropriate way. The point is to establish whether the overt violence in post-apocalyptic television programs does its viewer a service, as catharsis, or if the programs simply normalize the violence.

I. Understanding Aristotle

In his aesthetic work *Poetics*, which by some is considered “imperfect,”¹ Aristotle claims of art that it must contain a true idea, which is mimicked in some visible and meaningful way, in order to create a sense of pleasure within the viewer.² For Aristotle, a true idea and its mimicry could be easily seen in the Greek Tragedy about which he wrote, which is evident in a modern context in the post-apocalyptic television shows pertinent to this discussion. In the context of the television show, the true idea need only be possible in the world in which it is being depicted. Tragedy evokes all sorts of emotions while telling a story, incorporating multiple imitations of serious, completed, and consequential actions. According to Aristotle, it is essential that the actions of the characters effect the representation, or the mimicry, of the events for the drama to qualify as a tragedy. Further, Tragedy must not only evoke emotion in the viewer, but must specifically and most importantly evoke pity and fear. The qualification as Tragedy relies on this disproportionate quantity of pity and fear over and above all other emotions and these particular emotions must be a direct result of the events of the tragedy constructed according to Aristotle’s formula.

The parts of a tragedy set out by Aristotle in *Poetics* are particular and required. The first part of the tragedy sequence is ‘plot’ and this refers to the full series of events depicted as well as the specific sequence of the events. Aristotle states that “the Plot is the imitation of the action- for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents.”³ For Greek Tragedy, plot was clear and evident, as a stage play was somewhat limited because of the technological capabilities of the day. However, in modern television plot takes shape in many forms including but not limited to the production location some of the special effects, neither of which was available in Aristotle’s day, and both of which can play a role in the story. The second part of Tragedy is ‘character’ and this refers directly to the qualities of the character and not the character him or herself. Aristotle states that “character determines men’s qualities,” “reveals a moral purpose,” and that it “comes in as a subsidiary to the actions.”⁴ Character plays a huge role in terms of how the scenes and events fit together, as a character must be true to life⁵ and the events must be seen to fit with the qualities of the character as presented, as well; although Aristotle concedes that some poets of his time were lacking in their rendering of characters and their qualities.⁶ The third part of Tragedy is ‘thought’ meaning that which is “required whenever a statement is proved,”⁷ such as a moment of pause after a character is shown a way forward, “or, it may be, a general truth enunciated,”⁸ such as a time when a moment of revelation occurs. Thought is “the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances”⁹ and is required at particular moments in order to provide an art and rhythm to the speech of the play. In modern cinematic or television tragedy, this can even take the form of narration.

The fourth part of the tragedy is ‘diction,’ which combines manifestations of theory as well as the physical sounds of speech. Aristotle states that by Diction he means “the mere metrical arrangement of the words,”¹⁰ which refers to the art and theory of the structure and

¹ Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, 3rd ed., (London: Routledge, 1997), 36.

² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. W.H. Fyfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1448b.

³ *Ibid.*, 1450a.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1454a.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1450a.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1450b.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1449b.

sound of language itself, and not the words themselves or what is actually being said. He later adds that by 'Diction' he also means "the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose."¹¹ In this latter statement, Aristotle clarifies that he does, in fact, refer to both the artistic expression of language as well as the message portrayed by the specific words. The fifth part of Tragedy is 'song' which is "chief among the embellishments" and "rhythm, harmony, and song are combined with language."¹² For Greek Tragedy, the use of choric song is almost a stage presence in itself and it is used strategically in the same way that a character would have lines which are placed thus and so, and which have meaning and which lead into other events. Aristotle claims "[t]he Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors" and that "it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action."¹³ In addition, the choric song should relate to the story and not be thrown in haphazardly. This part of tragedy is not found too often in modern cinema and TV, but it can be seen in other forms of modern art, such as theatre and dance, in which multiple people perform the same movements or sing the same parts of a song.

The sixth and final part of Tragedy is 'spectacle' which Aristotle states "has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry."¹⁴ The spectacle that would be seen on stage is not so much a reflection of the writer as it is of the set builders and special effects supervisors. It is also appropriate to add here that the same is true of modern plays and of television and film. In each of these modern versions of Tragedy, a crew in charge of locations, sets, editing, and special effects would take the place of the traditional stagehands for a play. Aristotle continues, "[f]or the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet." Spectacle for the Greek Tragedy is external to the story and characters but is used in concert with the other parts of the tragedy to produce the effects Aristotle tells us are desirable for the audience.

We must understand the composition of Tragedy as well as its purpose and the purposes of its constituent parts. The events evoking pity and fear must be of a specific type, in a specific order, and satisfy a specific purpose. Aristotle explains that there are simple and complex plots which correspond to the actions that occur in life.¹⁵ It is the complex plots that result in a scene of suffering, evoking the pity and fear.¹⁶ The scene of suffering "is a destructive or painful action, such as a death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds and the like."¹⁷ In Greek Tragedy, and indeed as Aristotle had in mind in *Poetics*, it is in these scenes that one sees the physical manifestations of whatever violent act is inflicted on the character off stage, as in Greek Tragedy the violence itself is never shown on stage. Whether it was because of religion, tradition, or simple cultural convention, showing the act of one human setting upon another or upon an animal or the imitation of an active death was simply not done in Greek Tragedy or Comedy.¹⁸ It is specifically in these scenes in modern television that one finds not only the type of overt physical violence in question, but also the sometimes-

¹¹ Ibid., 1450b.

¹² Ibid., 1449b and 1450b.

¹³ Ibid., 1456a.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1450b.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1452a.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1452b.

¹⁸ Alan H. Sommerstein, "Violence in Greek Tragedy," in *The Tangled Ways of Zeus* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30-34 and 44-45.

extended suffering, evoking levels of emotion, including pity and fear, that might be uncommon to Tragedy or everyday life.

The purpose of the pity and fear, and ultimately the catharsis which takes place because of either purgation or purification,¹⁹ is pleasure. However, there is intuitively something a bit strange about the experience of seeing the suffering of others as pleasurable for the viewer or onlooker, and there is something even stranger about any reason pleasure would be derived from it in the first place. When a tragedy takes place or someone suffers, whether physical or mental, the suffering or tragedy is thought to be negative. Once the focus shifts from the identification of the tragic event or the suffering, to the experience of watching the tragic event or suffering, emotion of the onlooker must be considered. There is a psychological component to this process. The experience of watching allows a viewer to transition through a stream of emotions and come out the other side having a sense of pleasure. It is not that a viewer experiences only pleasure while watching someone suffer; it is that the final emotion experienced in the process is normally pleasure, after the end of the event and after the release or transformation of the emotions.

Aristotle claims that pity and fear are necessary and central to it becoming what he calls the “perfect tragedy,” and he states that a tragedy “should... imitate actions which excite pity and fear,” and “that the change of fortune presented must not be ... of a virtuous man ... from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us.”²⁰ It is important to realize that he puts “emphasis...on pity and fear.”²¹ Modern aesthetic philosopher Eva Schaper explains that “[c]atharsis is the telos of tragedy,” meaning that the cathartic outcome is the point of Tragedy, or the end game.²² As well, Schaper claims that “[t]ragedy may arouse various emotions, but among its incidents must be those arousing pity and fear through which catharsis of “such emotions”-passions in general including pity and fear-can be effected.”²³ Very clearly, the process of catharsis, which is based specifically on the very carefully crafted and ordered Tragedy, requires among the emotions it evokes pity and fear, in order to proceed as planned or to work as indicated. It is here that Aristotle begins to exposit the differences between simple and complex plots.

Aristotle claims that in the complex plot there are two actions which can occur and result in the scene of suffering mentioned earlier: ‘Reversal of the Situation’ and ‘Recognition.’²⁴ Aristotle states that “[a] Complex action is one in which the change is accompanied by such Reversal, or by Recognition, or by both” and that Reversal and Recognition “should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action.”²⁵ A Reversal of the Situation is part of a complex action in which a “change of fortune” for the character takes place, and is a modification of the plot in virtue of which the action turns to the opposite direction, keen to adhere to the rules of necessity and probability.²⁶ Aristotle gives the example of the messenger in Oedipus revealing Oedipus’ true identity to him, and instead of providing relief about Oedipus’ mother to the titular character, the opposite was provided.

¹⁹ Leon Golden, “The Purgation Theory of Catharsis,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31/4 (1973): 473-4. DOI: 10.2307/429320.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b.

²¹ Eva Schaper, “Aristotle’s Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 18/ 71 (1968), 137, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2217511> .

²² *Ibid.*, 131.

²³ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

A more modern example of a reversal would be Luke Skywalker in the Star Wars franchise, in which the character avoids and subverts the Dark Side, in favour of the Force, only to find out that a leader of the Dark Side is his father,²⁷ Darth Vader (a.k.a. Anakin Skywalker), who ultimately succumbed to the Dark Side years ago leaving his family behind.²⁸ Luke makes a choice between 'light and dark' in those moments when confronted with the information about Vader's identity, despite being in his father's physical clutches and on the brink of death.²⁹ One can easily identify the characters, the action, the necessity and the probability in these situations and see how the Reversal can take place. Recognition, Aristotle continues, is some enlightenment that occurs for the character which produces either "love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" and he states that the "best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the Situation" as is shown in the preceding example.³⁰ Recognition of a thing or of some bit of information is certainly capable of producing emotion in the viewer, but the recognition of persons together with a Reversal is what produces the pity and fear so necessary to Tragedy, and it is only that which leads directly to catharsis. Think of Luke Skywalker choosing the Force.

Catharsis, in accordance with Aristotle's *Poetics*, has been understood in two different ways by its readers and translators in classical philosophy. Most understand it as a purgation of emotion, and some understand it as a purification of emotion.³¹ In a colloquial and a literal sense, catharsis is very much a 'purging' of the emotions involved in the process in question. To purge, as a standard conception, is to entirely rid oneself of the item or emotion of which one aims to be rid. It is a removal of that thing from oneself. This was a concept that was seen not only in Aristotle, but also Plato, and is the prevailing understanding of catharsis over time.³² On the other hand, catharsis is understood as a purification of the emotions involved in watching a tragedy unfold, and to purify, as a standard conception, is to transform an item or emotion from one state to another. The emotion, in this case, undergoes a change, and there is no outright removal of anything, except for maybe the burden of the original emotion. According to Aristotle, it is in the outcome of the process that one finds pleasure. For catharsis to bring pleasure as a direct result of an art form only makes sense. It is only because it seems so staggeringly peculiar for one to derive pleasure from watching a mock-up of the suffering of others that one even takes pause in the consideration of the steps required to arrive at pleasure from a tragic drama.

There is a view of catharsis as simply venting after exposure to a stimulus which raises the aggression level in a person.³³ Schaper claims that "[c]atharsis...and the enjoyment that goes with it, is the answer, and no amount of translating or transliterating the term will get us round the fact that this is something which can only be had in the experience of art; it follows from the structure of the work in its essential nature".³⁴ Schaper here questions whether poetics is all Aristotle had in mind when discussing the artistic application of catharsis, and follows with a question of whether there is any additional art form to which catharsis can truly be applied. In fact, philosopher Leon Golden highlights the idea that there may be a difference in the way catharsis is meant to be used depending on the Aristotelian book in which it is

²⁷ *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, dir. Irvin Keshner (20th Century Fox, 1980).

²⁸ *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*, dir. George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2005).

²⁹ *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a.

³¹ Schaper, "Aristotle," 132.

³² Graham, *Philosophy*, 36-7.

³³ Douglas A. Gentile, "Catharsis and Media Violence: A Conceptual Analysis," in *Societies* 3 (2013): 492-3. Also see Graham, *Philosophy*, 35-38.

³⁴ Schaper, "Aristotle," 136.

discussed.³⁵ It is possible that there is simply a larger artistic context within which we can understand catharsis, “and the enjoyment that goes with it.” With the larger context in mind, we can turn to the modern television program and assess it as an artform worthy of inclusion in the application of Aristotle’s catharsis. The more-or-less recent rash of post-apocalyptic television shows can be placed in this wider context and assessed in terms of the value of the violence present as the purification or purgation involved in the process. The art form in question is Tragedy, and the post-apocalyptic television programs, which are indeed tragic from an emotional standpoint, contain all the traditional hallmarks of Aristotle’s description of a tragedy. However, these shows also contain violence, which goes beyond the boundaries of traditional Greek Tragedy, which will become a problem for saving Aristotle’s theory of catharsis, and which will be addressed in a later section.

II. Clinical Evaluations of Catharsis

Purification and purgation are looked at as the only two options for an outcome about Aristotle’s catharsis, but that is only provided the evaluation is of one type of catharsis theory. Aristotle’s catharsis can be split into a few theories from a psychological standpoint. It is necessary to evaluate why it is that some scholars and scientists not only recognize an idea of catharsis regarding violence, but also that some hang their hats on it. Many studies have been performed to understand catharsis in a clinical sense, from the theories surrounding the process itself, to the relationship of these concepts to media violence or sometimes just violence in general. There are differences between the various theories of catharsis, which I will detail. Additionally, there is some concern over whether catharsis is possible at all in the context of violent media, as is evident by the ever-growing stack of studies concluding against cathartic methods and theories involving violence.³⁶

Multiple studies over the last 50 or so years have concluded that catharsis is not possible in a variety of specific situations. In the social sciences, catharsis is divided into a few categories: a) the aggression catharsis hypothesis (hereafter ACH); b) revenge catharsis; and c) therapeutic expression catharsis.³⁷ The ACH relies on external stimuli for catharsis, and the other categories rely on some action on the part of the patient or subject for catharsis to occur. The ACH examines the commonly held belief that viewing violence allows a person already experiencing an emotion to “vent” that emotion and that it will result in a reduction in future aggression.³⁸ The idea of venting is similar to the way Aristotle discussed catharsis. Venting is a way to rid oneself of emotion, so it would fall under the Aristotelian category of purgation.

One study in 1975 relied on “[e]arly formulations of the catharsis hypothesis ... [which] stated that catharsis refers to a reduction in motivation, not behavior.”³⁹ The study pertains to the sub-category of intention and looked at college age males,⁴⁰ showing them violent as well as violence-adjacent material. The study’s conclusion claims that there is a lack of any

³⁵ Golden, “Purgation Theory,” 474-5. Golden asserts based on McKeon’s work that ‘catharsis’ is meant to be interpreted in *Poetics* as purification and purgation in *Politics*.

³⁶ Gentile, “Catharsis,” 492.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 492.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 492-3.

³⁹ Sidney A. Manning and Dalmis A. Taylor, “Effects of Viewed Violence and Aggression: Stimulation and Catharsis,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31/1 (1975): 180. Also see Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears (1939) for additional information about early looks into the catharsis hypothesis.

⁴⁰ As per Seymour Feshbach’s study, published in Carmichael’s *Manual of Child Psychology* (3rd ed.) in 1970, which established that there were differences between the sexes in reaction to violent stimuli.

type of catharsis when subjects are presented with violent stimuli, stating that the introduction of the stimuli 'instigates' additional violent behaviour.⁴¹ A 1979 study, at Lehigh University in the United States which focused on college age females, addressed the after effects of television violence. The subjects were given a questionnaire which focused on violent TV shows from the 1977-78 viewing season. The study revealed that there was strong correlation between higher 'manifest hostility' and lower 'hostility guilt' on the one hand, and a preference for violent television content on the other, and it concluded that the ACH is invalid, or the results would be non-correlative.⁴²

Regardless of that which is argued about whether catharsis is possible, they all argue for theories concerning a catharsis which is purgative and not purifying. Indeed, there is some concern with whether catharsis in the face of actual violence is possible, but there is little information available about implied violence and how it affects people, as is the case in Greek Tragedy. It is possibly the fact that the overt violence gets in the way of, thereby preventing, purgative catharsis, that seems to upset the psychological community where research is concerned. Perhaps it is worth considering that many scholars involved in the Aristotelian discussion of catharsis advocate for a definition of catharsis that is transformative, or purifying, rather than purgative.

The ancient world knew much about some things, but their knowledge of clinical topics and modern mental, emotional, and medical states (from a scientific perspective as we understand it today) was limited. As such, we certainly cannot fault an ancient thinker for getting it wrong within a modern clinical context. What we can do is to apply our current knowledge to those ancient ideas to find the good in them. For purposes of this work, we will look at both purgation and purification, in order fully illustrate the deficiencies in the ACH.

III. Violence in Post-Apocalyptic Television

We now turn to the issue of violence in television programs, more specifically post-apocalyptic television, and why it is important to the discussion. In Greek Tragedy, the violence itself happened off stage, but on-screen, there are only so many ways of depicting the conflict and depict it they do. The most visually impactful variation of on-screen violence is that of overt or blatant person-on-person actions. In order to fully grasp what is at stake here, one needs a definition of violence applicable to all the various ideas to be discussed. A working definition of gratuitous violence might be 'actions done to another for the sake of the action, rather than out of necessity, and not actions out of self-preservation in the immediate circumstance.' Included in this definition are 'people acting out of an assertion of dominance for their own gain and not out of self-preservation or necessity.' Aristotle describes a type of violence which is pertinent and appropriate to Tragedy, specifically. He states, "[t]hose who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy; for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it."⁴³ The type of violence which can be considered unnecessary or gratuitous, the type shown in some of the television shows to be discussed herein, is not what Aristotle had in mind to qualify as a tragedy. Only one of the three television programs discussed herein might truly qualify as a tragedy, because of the gratuitous violence present in the other two. This depiction of violence

⁴¹ Manning and Taylor, "Effects", 184-5.

⁴² Lawrence A. Fehr, "Media Violence and Catharsis in College Females" *Journal of Social Psychology* 109 (1979): 308.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453b.

has become increasingly prevalent in television and film over the last few decades. It is not only turning up in more and more television, but the degree of violence shown on-screen is getting higher as time goes on. It is important to understand what violence is, how it looks, and how it is or should be defined in an Aristotelian context.

Violence can look different to each person and it can depend on the source of the depiction. The conveyance of the above definition of violence does not necessarily require that all parts of the action be shown on screen; however, it is becoming a more popular method of depiction. There are really two types of violence being portrayed using television filming and editing processes. The first is what I will call a *near-miss*, where the camera stops filming or the editor cuts away just as the graphic violence is about to occur, leaving the audience's imagination to complete the action for itself. This is popular on television shows that are heavily regulated due to the network's ownership, such as a religious or a child-centred corporation, or due to their viewing timeslot and potential viewership, and is the brand of violence that is closer in nature to Greek Tragedy. The second type of violence shown on television is what I will call a *completed action*, where all parts of the violent acts are shown, including the moment of impact of some implement or weapon, as well as a stark visual on the damage incurred by the victim in the scene. This type of violence is popular on pay-networks or shows that are on late at night when most children would not typically be watching. Although the program's timeslot has historically been a major factor in deciding the content of a television show, now with the advent and success of streaming services, it is becoming less and less of a consideration. In fact, some television shows are owned by and run solely on streaming services, never seeing standard network airwaves.

Violence in either of the above forms offers the storyteller the opportunity to convey a message in a specific way. Psychologically speaking, shock value is added to a work if the completed action style of violence is included, but one needs to temper that addition with the damage viewing that violence of that magnitude can do. Here, it is prudent to inquire whether violence has a hand in desensitizing its viewers to real violent acts. If all a program shows a viewer is a higher degree of violence than that which is standard or comfortable or healthy, then when a person comes across a violent act in life, his or her compassion or tolerance or willingness to assist is arguably impaired. It cannot truly be known whether this problem would be true for all people or what degree of on-screen violence would be effective in creating a negative impact or desensitization; however, it is fair to say that it is problematic. One needs to know how much is 'too much' and where the line should be drawn. A guideline one might keep in mind is that the type of suffering and pseudo-violence Aristotle discusses in *Poetics* is specific to his idea of artistic entertainment and is not applicable to other types of violence, even those common in his own day, such as Roman gladiator games, which were strictly for blood-lust, ritual, and entertainment, but not art. In any analysis performed one must assess, too, the purpose of the piece being evaluated and determine it to meet artistic criteria first and foremost. It must be art.

IV. Illustration and Application

Catharsis as either purgative or purifying will be illustrated in the context of the violence shown on-screen in three different television programs: *The Walking Dead*, *The 100*, and *Zoo*. It is just as easy to evaluate television series' as it is a film, due to the small story and character arcs presented in the shows. The violence evaluated herein, part of a smaller story arc, does not consist of those actions which are aimed at self-preservation or self-defence in the immediacy of the actor's situation. Violence, again in the context of this paper, is defined as those physical actions taken by one person or group of people against another person or group of people which stem from malicious intent that is implied or explicitly expressed in

some way by the actor. As well, not all the violent content will be evaluated in detail. The program content to be evaluated in accordance with theories of catharsis are only the most impactful examples from the duration of each show. It is utilizing these scenes that I will elucidate the violence and attempt to determine whether the violence is necessary in order to complete the process of catharsis. It should be noted that all three of the television shows discussed herein were originally written as books or graphic novels before they were television screenplays. This discussion has only to do with the television depiction of the stories and characters and does not discuss the written works. As well, I have not taken any of the descriptions from the written works.

A. The Walking Dead

The first program to be evaluated is *The Walking Dead*. This television show, about zombies and the end of the world as we know it, appropriately began on Halloween of 2010 and depicts a cast of characters learning to survive in and after a zombie apocalypse. The show is set in Atlanta, Georgia and the surrounding areas in the United States for the first few seasons, then the characters move northward up the East coast for the next couple of seasons, concluding just outside of Washington D.C. for the 6th and remaining seasons. The zombies in the show are referred to by different groups as different names, but the main group followed on the show calls them 'walkers' almost exclusively. The leader of the main group of characters is Rick, a Deputy Sheriff for a county outside Atlanta. Rick is a father and husband who, in the first episode, wakes up in a hospital after being in a coma for a month due to an on-the-job shooting, to find that the world has changed and his family, as well as the other inhabitants of his town, are either dead, 'walkers', or just gone.⁴⁴ The actions Rick is willing to perform in order to ensure the safety of his loved ones change over the course of the seasons. His wife and son, Lori and Carl, respectively, are foremost among the group of people that Rick makes some atypical decisions to protect, resulting in the death of his Sheriff's department partner Shane and some exceptionally bloody rampages on walkers. The rest of the Atlanta group includes Daryl, a well-meaning crossbow-toting biker, and Carol, an extremely damaged, middle-aged woman who loses everything and cannot seem to handle the violence and killing after a certain point.

Maggie, the daughter of a farmer, is introduced in season two and becomes part of the main group. She is later the wife of Glen, another inhabitant of the Atlanta camp, who is introduced in the first episode of the series, and ultimately bears Glen's child, naming him Herschel after her by-that-time deceased father. She comes under the diplomatic tutelage of a former United States Congresswoman and current leader at a community called Alexandria, just outside of Washington D.C. where the group ends up for several seasons. Maggie uses the newfound knowledge and skill to broker treaties with other communities and make major decisions for the group in Rick's absence. She also heads a sister community to Alexandria around the time of the birth of her child, and sees it flourish alongside the other communities in the show. Having to endure the death of her entire family, her own kidnapping, grave illness, attempts on her life at the hands of several groups, and an extremely complicated pregnancy with little-to-no medical relief, all while having to fend off the walkers, Maggie hardens herself, becoming known as The Widow,⁴⁵ and is a force with which to be reckoned.

As the seasons progress, the group adds members on the road, and they make their way North to Alexandria. The walled-in town is everything they have dreamed of finding. It is

⁴⁴ "Days Gone Bye," *The Walking Dead* (New York: AMC Networks, October 31, 2010).

⁴⁵ "The King, The Widow, and Rick," *The Walking Dead* (New York: AMC Networks, November 26, 2017).

clean and well organized, and the people are careful and considerate. The only problem is security, but after a bit of time Rick's group manages to fix that aspect of the town's organizational structure. The biggest antagonist in the series to that point shows up when, on supply runs for Alexandria, the group begins to encounter people called the Saviours. The Saviours have struck a deal with a sister-town to Alexandria called the Hilltop⁴⁶ and they now demand that Rick's group give them half of everything they have, as they did with the Hilltop. At first it seems absurd and the small subgroups of Alexandrians simply decline the demand, killing the Saviours if they must in order to get away, eventually defending the Hilltop by wiping out what is thought to be the Saviours' headquarters. Carol and Maggie are taken hostage during this endeavour and it is revealed that the group is headed by a man called Negan. During the rescue of the women, many more of the Saviours are killed, and word gets back to Negan that Rick's group will not go quietly into an agreement with him. The build-up of the encounters with the Saviours up to the time of Carol and Maggie's rescue is increasingly more violent and unpredictable as the episodes go on.

The scene to be evaluated in this series is one in which the viewer finally sees Negan on-screen for the first time in the series after over half a season of only being discussed. After multiple failed attempts by Negan's lieutenant at a persuasive conversation with Rick, the Saviours force a traveling group of Alexandrians into the forest where Negan and hundreds of Saviours lay in wait. A gravely ill and pregnant Maggie, Glen, Rick, his son Carl, and many other important members of the Alexandria group are all forced out of their vehicles and to their knees in a clearing while a barbed-wire-covered-bat swinging psychopathic Negan comes into frame from out of an RV. The group of Alexandrians had been stripped of their weapons when they arrived at the clearing, leaving them vulnerable to not only walkers but also anything the Saviours and Negan can throw at them. Reluctant to show any weakness in front of his son, Rick is averse to following Negan's orders, no matter how simple they are. Glen and Darryl, previously kidnapped by the Saviours, are taken out of the back of a vehicle and lined up with the rest of the Alexandrian's. Upset by the fact that Rick is unwilling to kowtow to him, Negan plays a children's game to choose who to kill and uses the bat, which he calls Lucille after his late wife, to bludgeon to death Abraham, a beloved Alexandrian and member of Rick's group since the days after Atlanta. This scene would not be quite so shocking if Negan had not been belly-laughing and repeatedly calling Abraham a 'champ' as the screen went dark while still playing the audio of the impact, symbolizing the life leaving Abraham's body.⁴⁷ Possibly worse in this predicament is the fact that the first couple of blows are shown in full view of the camera from Abraham's perspective, as well as an angle from an outsider's point of view. The moments of impact, direct person-on-person violence that is unnecessary to the story, are unmistakable as one watches this scene.

As this story is stretched over a season finale into the premiere of the following season, it is not until months later in real-time that the viewing audience learns the full scope of Negan's brutality, or even who he actually kills in this scene, as the victim's face is not shown until the premiere. Negan's logic in this new age is such that he, alone, is entitled to the upper hand and anyone who stands in his way is undoubtedly in the wrong. To Rick, Negan states, "when I sent my people to kill your people for killing my people, you killed more of my people...not cool."⁴⁸ This pseudo-alliterative, sarcastic remark was meant to stand in spite of the fact that much of the season leading up to this moment had been focused on introducing the brutality of the group of Saviours in the first place. As well, the Saviours had attempted to rob, maim,

⁴⁶ "Knots Untie," *The Walking Dead* (New York: AMC Networks, February 28, 2016).

⁴⁷ "The Day Will Come When You Won't Be," *The Walking Dead* (New York: AMC Networks, October 23, 2016).

⁴⁸ "The Last Day on Earth," *The Walking Dead* (New York: AMC Networks, April 3, 2016).

and kill multiple groups of Alexandrians at several points in time. Negan states that the “New World Order” is as follows, and it is to “give me your [stuff] or I will kill you.”⁴⁹ He continues that Rick has killed more Saviours than he is “comfortable with” and for doing so, Rick must pay.⁵⁰ After killing Abraham to drive his point home, Negan wants Rick to submit to him, but Rick is still reluctant. When Negan attempts to force people to look at the carnage attached to Lucille, Darryl has an outburst in protest. Negan claims that, because of a previous warning about outbursts, he is justified at that point in killing another of Rick’s group, maintaining that the first outburst was “free” because it was “an emotional moment.”⁵¹ Negan turns to Glen and beats him on the head with Lucille in the same manner as in the murder of Abraham only moments ago. The camera angle allows the viewer to see Glen’s eye pop out of its socket and hear him mutter “I will find you” to his pregnant wife Maggie, followed by Negan bludgeoning Glen multiple times until the camera shows a bloody pulp on the ground next to what is supposed to be Glen’s headless dead body and twitching hand.⁵²

The series gives us much to evaluate in this case. The plot and characters are straightforward, in that there is a clear protagonist and antagonist in the scene and the conflict is evident. Each character has had ample time in the series for his or her qualities to be established and the arrangement of the incidents for the plot has already been established. The antagonist is in complete control of the situation in the finale, so there is only one direction that the scene can go. However, once the premiere begins, the audience is finally granted the Reversal and Recognition necessary to complete the process of catharsis. Thought is in the silence between Negan’s movements and statements. Diction can be seen in the type of statements Negan makes, as they are inflammatory and cruel, meant to enhance the already frightening predicament the main group is in. Song can be heard in the rhythmic way Negan communicates, in the whistling he performs at incredibly strange moments, and in the strategically placed thumps and thuds heard when Lucille makes contact with Abraham and Glen. Spectacle is also quite straightforward in that in an already bloody and terrifying world, the antagonist has the power and means to make the scene even more bloody and terrifying and does. Spectacle is also seen in the fact that the scene is set in a forest clearing.

Reversal of the Situation can be identified in the moment that Negan begins to make deadly contact with Abraham. Up until that point, the peril of deadly force and brutality is only a threat. The moment Lucille connects with Abraham’s head, the threat becomes real and the previously only potential threat of Negan acting in a psychopathic and murderous manner becomes actualized. In that same moment and in the few moments which follow, the truth of Negan’s identity as a murderer and psychopath, as well as the truth of the amount of danger the group is actually in is show to all and the characters and audience alike recognize that truth. The audience pitied the group for being under Negan’s thumb in this way and for being subjected to such egregious brutality. We feared for the future of each of the characters, both for their physical and their emotional well-being. A purgative view of catharsis rids the viewer of these negative emotions once the scene is over and it is more-or-less known what the future holds for each of them. A purifying view of catharsis releases the tension by transforming the pity into compassion for the members of Rick’s group and the fear into courage to carry on in the new and dangerous world of which they have just been made aware. In either case, there is a certain pleasurable release that is experienced by the viewer who goes through the process thus described.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, edited for profanity.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

In a much larger context, the types of concerns this particular show and the catharsis derived from it are presumably assisting viewers to work out are concerns about war, famine, and communicable disease, no matter its source. As humans we have an innate need for safety which is not always met. Even our own imaginations can sometimes get the better of our logical minds, as fear can overpower what we know as true. In light of a the jarring exchanges between the United States and North Korea in the last few years, as well as the current health crisis, watching this kind of brutality on-screen and, in theory, experiencing the catharsis associated with it on this program may allow the viewers to feel more at ease with or less anxious about impending war, the possibility of economic and resource loss, or any type of mass spread of illness. From the perspective of the ACH, it should be very possible that, after experiencing the catharsis which could come from watching much more or the entirety of this particular show, a feeling of triumph against one's oppressor or the 'other' could result. In this series, the largest group or 'army' the main characters face is the walkers, and if one is to take that story arc as fodder for modern life, then the fact that each of the main characters has developed a unique and successful way to tackle that problem might leave each audience member with the pleasurable viewpoint that victory is possible in whatever modern conflict may arise. If catharsis is actually available to a viewer, in spite of the level of violence shown on-screen, then this depiction of post-apocalyptic life can assist in working out fears in everyday life.

B. The 100

The television program *The 100*, which airs during the Spring and Summer, starts off on a violent note. The history in the story line is that Earth was ravaged by a self-inflicted global nuclear apocalypse in the year 2013; the year the show begins airing. The story is set ninety-seven years later and four generations of people on a composite international space station called the Arc have given way to the survivors depicted in the story. Faced with rapidly dwindling resources, the leaders on the Arc must find out if Earth is survivable. To do so, they send their minor prison population to the ground. 100 children between the ages of about ten and eighteen descend in space pods to the earth and must fend for themselves upon arrival. They are met with hostility and violence by the current population of the planet; people who are not even supposed to exist. Through the seasons, we see the characters discovering Earth and adjusting to life in an inimical environment, while trying to survive the continuous deluge of groups of 'native' peoples, or Grounders, who want the Arc inhabitants gone. From there, the characters take charge of their existence and establish their geopolitical and technological legitimacy. Unfortunately, the original cause of the nuclear apocalypse is now again a threat and it forces people from and under the surface of the earth. The remaining seasons of the series are devoted to showing the survivors of the various groups band together for their own sake.

The main characters depicted on *The 100* are deeply flawed, mostly young, and naïve to the brutality of which people are capable. Octavia is a 16-year-old girl who knows very little of society, was mistreated by her parents and the other Arc inhabitants, and was kept hidden all her life in the Blake family's quarters because of the 1-child law imposed on Arc residents. Once she was discovered, some months before the descent to Earth, her only living parent was floated into space from an airlock as punishment for breaking the law. The first season shows Octavia fall in love with the Earth, filled with glowing insects, plants that make silly noises, and green rolling hills with waterfalls. She also falls in love with Lincoln, the healer of a Grounder tribe, which causes its own set of issues. Once Octavia starts speaking the native language, a bit of a pigeon dialect, and wins over some of the more senior members of Lincoln's tribe, she trains with their war chief, Indra, later becoming her second-in-command.

From that point, she is taken much more seriously, eventually coming to lead the combined tribes, known as Wonkru (pronounced as written), during the time of the second global nuclear apocalypse on Earth when they were forced to live underground for six years. For Octavia, the brutal loss of Lincoln in season 3 sent her emotionally down a road from which she never quite came back, and during her years as a leader, she was brutal and unforgiving.

Abby is a beautiful, calculating, brave, and incredibly intelligent doctor. She has an immense amount of compassion for humankind, no matter their origin, and wants only what is best for her daughter, another main character, and those around her. Although she has guilt about getting her husband floated for trying to warn Arc inhabitants of the dwindling resources, she rationalized it by seeing it as a necessary evil in order to keep the peace on the Arc. From the first season, Abby is shown as a complicated character, having to balance love, ambition, and her medical ethics, often falling far short of where she would have liked to land. Due to the previous Arc Chancellor grieving the death of his son, she takes over for a time as Chancellor of Arkadia, the community that the Arc inhabitants built on the ground after it fell to Earth. Abby is one of the inhabitants of a now-defunct religious group's bunker sheltering people from the second nuclear apocalypse beginning in season five, and she takes a leadership role there, as well.

The scene to be evaluated here is one in which Abby, Octavia, Indra, and others are in the bunker during what became known as the dark year. They are attempting to deal with dying soy crops, which, to that point, had kept everyone in the bunker alive as a protein source. It had previously been determined that another protein source will have to be utilized and Abby suggested using the human meat of the dead inhabitants of the bunker. As a physician, Abby knew the repercussions and she shared with the rest of the leaders present that without ten percent of a diet from protein everyone in the bunker will die. The dead are the only reliable source of that much protein and in order to keep the source fresh, they will institute a fight-to-the-death style punishment for any wrongdoers, no matter the crime. The group decides that it will be honest with the bunker inhabitants about the source, and at first it is posed as an option, but soon the people who opted out of eating the meat are beginning to sway to the other side those who opted in and conflict arises. A frustrated and still bloodthirsty Octavia, now known colloquially in the *Grounder-tongue* as *Blodreina*⁵³, the Red Queen, has previously been persuaded by Abby to punish those who do not eat the protein because they will physically starve.

One day in the mess hall, Octavia stands up from her chair after seeing people not eating the human meat. Indra says to the people "don't let their sacrifice go to waste."⁵⁴ At this point, Octavia has already made it a crime not to be a cannibal. She confronts a central table of people who refuse to eat, touting her now well-known line "you are Wonkru or you are an enemy of Wonkru...choose" while pointing a gun at each of the people at the table individually. If they eat, they are Wonkru and they live. If they refuse to eat, they are the enemy of Wonkru and they must be executed. The last time Octavia used that line on a group of people, she cut all of them down with a blade and was the only person left standing. One by one, Octavia yells "you eat or you die"⁵⁵ at her people. One by one, they refuse. One by one, Octavia shoots them. The room around her is full of those trying to make their own decisions about whether to eat or refuse; all of them terrified. After three people die by her hand, a leader from the group who was holding out eating, and incidentally sending the message that it was ok to opt-out, yells "enough, I'll eat," with other holdouts shortly following in the consumption of the human meat. After the frenzied incident, the law is

⁵³ "The Dark Year," *The 100* (Burbank: The CW Television Network, July 24, 2018).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

obeyed for the remainder of the dark year, and the crops do recover, though Octavia never really does.

It might seem as though Octavia was the only character present in this scene needing evaluation against a backdrop of Aristotelian theory, but it does not go without saying that Abby was just as responsible for the deaths, if not more so, and Abby's character later responds to the guilt from that year and the unspoken persuasion she had over Octavia in the bunker. Octavia, however, was already a warrior, already bloodthirsty, and already unapologetic about life taking. The plot has given us events that are true enough to what life on Earth in that world would be like, and characters that are just as flawed and questionable as we all know humans to be. Thought is seen in the truth told by Indra and Abby, in that one must consume the protein or one will indeed perish at one's own hand, and the silence brought on by that truth. Diction is illustrated in the use of particular phrases by Octavia. Song is in the repetition of those phrases and the rhythm created by the words, pauses, and gunshots. Spectacle is in watching a leader shoot her own people to force cannibalism and that the gunshots and deaths are shown on-screen.

In this Complex plot, there is a fairly straightforward Reversal of the Situation and Recognition. The people in the bunker with Octavia think that eating the human meat will continue to be optional, but the Reversal of the Situation comes in when Octavia forces people to choose. We not only see a Reversal of the Situation for the inhabitants, but also for Octavia, as she embarks on a path she cannot walk back. The reversal is linked intrinsically with Recognition in this scene, as the recognition in the scene happens the moment she pulls the trigger. She realizes and reveals that she is doing this for power and not for the good of Wonkru, but she does not stop. It is stated in the scene that, while people who do not eat the meat will starve and die, it should also be their own choice; not forced upon them.⁵⁶ The moment Octavia emotionally snaps and shoots her people, she removes each person's autonomy; something she fought hard for earlier in the series. The viewing audience then recognize who Octavia really is; a tyrant.

The pity and fear that result from the scene about the dark year are layered. It is easy to pity the people in the bunker for having to live under the rule of someone so brutal and unpredictable. It is clear that Blodreina is interested in retaining as much power as possible; at whatever cost. However, it is also clear that she is still very young and is influenced by those around her, especially Abby and Indra. If one is to calculate from the information given throughout the series, then Octavia is 17 years old when Wonkru is formed in the bunker, and since only 6 years pass underground, she is 19 at the time of the shootings and 23 when they exit the bunker. Octavia may also recognize in those moments that she has been influenced by the women around her, and if that is the case then it is surprising she did not shoot them as well. There are in fact many reasons to pity Octavia, in spite of her brutality. The characters certainly have reason to fear her, and not knowing what to expect next from her provokes and inculcates even more fear in and from the characters and viewers.

A viewer would presumably find catharsis from this violent and emotional scene at the point at which the shooting stops and people in the bunker begin eating. These events signal the end of the of force and brutality, a part of the Reversal and Recognition process, as well as an assured future for all those who eat the human flesh. An emotional sigh of relief might be experienced because whatever happens next could never be as horrible as those moments just endured. Even the knowledge that the inhabitants must undergo a year of eating human meat while the soy crops are regrown is nothing compared to the horror of what Octavia had just put her people through; not knowing who would be next or what might be next. If one views catharsis from the standpoint of purgation, then this scene could rid the viewer of the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

fear of the worst as well as the pity for the bunker inhabitants. Purgation could theoretically have advantages in this context because of the complete removal of that sort of negativity. If viewed from the perspective of purification, then the pity might be transformed into compassion for Octavia and the bunker inhabitants, and the fear might be transformed into a sort of courage to make it through the remainder of the time underground. Purification could have advantages in this context because of the positive emotions in place at the end of the cathartic 'process'. That is not to say that there would not eventually be positive emotions to take the place of the old negative emotions with regard to purgation, but since it is not a part of the purgative process, it is not to be mentioned here in any detail. If catharsis is possible with the violence depicted, then the complex plot in this story lends itself to either purgation or purification; as, pleasure is found at some end point when experiencing either process.

The types of fear in *The 100* from which one can find release have more to do with class, race, nationality, religious affiliation, and geographical claims. The overarching concerns in this series effect and include all of humanity, regardless of their location on the planet, but the individual story arcs include clan wars based on geography, religious groups and cults attempting to convert and kill thousands, as well as multiple expressions of classism, which come up at several points throughout the series. These story arcs about these struggles mimic our current-day problems of border issues, terrorist attacks, and modern conceptions of racism and classism, both locally and globally. Employing this series, if catharsis is truly available to the viewer in spite of the violence shown on-screen, then a viewer could find relief from fears of any or all of these concerns, resulting in the pleasure of knowing there would be triumph over an opposing group or some dangerous faction of humanity; labels notwithstanding, of course. The messages a viewer can take away in addition to Aristotle's catharsis, and those are of a political nature as described. They are forewarnings about what can happen if situations are handled abhorrently or even just improperly.

C. Zoo

In the television show *Zoo*, which aired on a widely available television network early on Sunday evenings during Summers between 2015 and 2017, the viewer is introduced to animals that have been fed a genetically altered molecule over the period of about a decade, triggering a long-dormant ability to communicate with each other and to think and behave in what an observer would see as a very human-like manner. The ominous foreword the program used during the first season states that “[f]or centuries mankind has been the dominant species. We’ve domesticated animals, locked them up, killed them for sport. But what if all across the globe, the animals decided ‘no more’? What if they finally decided to fight back?” The bulk of the first season covers the process of the main characters uncovering the genetic mutation in the animals and figuring out how to stop and correct it. The second season shows how the characters adapt to life among the government and corporate conspiracy to cover up the existence of the molecule and genetic mutation. The third season skips ahead in time showing a sterilized population trying to cope with the end of humanity, despite having corrected the original issue with the animals, and dealing with wild hybrid animals out for human blood.

The main character, American zoologist Jackson, lives in Kenya at a Safari camp with his best friend and clever local guide, Abe, as well as his physician mother, who had divorced his disgraced and seemingly mentally ill professor and scientist father many years ago. After noticing behavioural signs in the animals which are curiously similar to the types of concerns his own father had about the future of the animals, Jackson shares his observations and concerns with those close to him. In the first two episodes, he physically saves both his future love interest, French government agent Chloe, as well as his friend, from a pride of African

lions that has unexpectedly decided every human in their way should be torn to shreds. Jackson is later placed on a team of people headed by a private organization, which includes Chloe and Abe and several others, put together to find the source of and solution to the problem with the animals. Jackson is determined not only to get to the bottom of the issue with the animals but is willing to go to any lengths to understand his father. A conspiracy is uncovered, and the team is sent to investigate a link between a powerful but dubious corporation and issues with animal behaviour. The team investigates animals worldwide, finding that while the assumption about the crooked corporation is correct, the cause of the mutations in the animals is much worse and the situation much darker than anything they ever imagined. As well, the problem is not something they can deal with on their own.

The scene to be evaluated for this series is the beginning of the third season's premiere, in which Jackson can communicate with hive-minded animals, as he has now genetically mutated like the animals due to childhood experiments his father performed on him. After a nefarious group of scientists had air-dispersed what they claimed was a cure for the animals but was also a way to sterilize the population of the world, the animals took over on Earth in most places, and humans became refugees everywhere. The season is set 10 years after the dispersal of the sterilizing agent and there have been massive walls erected and safe-zones dedicated to keeping people out of harm's way. Soldiers and volunteers patrol large areas, putting down animals that are a threat to humanity, and bringing people to safety who are still on the wrong side of the barriers. Jackson, having the ability to communicate with the animals, operates under the guise of having a piece of technology that turns the animals away so that people do not know about his ability. In reality, he is simply able to telepathically speak to them.

On a rescue mission with a group of his peers, Jackson encounters a pride of lions that he has befriended and come to control, and he subdues them as they are about to mindlessly attack the group from behind. He then speaks to them out loud, saying "Whoa...Pedro, Samson, where'd you guys run off to?"⁵⁷ It is as if the lions are friends with the humans and should have been with the group the whole time. A few moments later, a large group of hybrid animals, created by the group that released the sterilizing agent a decade earlier, is shown hurtling toward the group and Jackson tells the lions to attack the hybrids with a hand-wave and a simple command: "attack."⁵⁸ The animal-on-animal violence is ferocious and surreal, showing the actions of neck-biting and flesh-tearing, despite the lack of blood shown on-screen. The fighting happens quickly and somewhat in the background of people running around, with Jackson and his team get the rest of the group of humans out of the area and back to the safe-zone.

The hybrids are decidedly more deadly and vicious than standard animals and they probably would have torn the group to shreds, but there is a problem with what has just happened. Jackson's group carries weapons which presumably could have taken down the hybrids without the assistance of the lions, but no one used any of their weapons against the hybrids. In my estimation, using the lions as a weapon is just as bad as killing the animals oneself. Jackson essentially kills the hybrids himself in a brutal way, using the lions as a weapon. As well, since he can communicate with animals, Jackson is murdering something that is suspiciously close to what he now is, and in a violent manner. This scene could just as easily visually depict a human murdering a group of humans, in terms of understanding the violence and motive.

The plot here is clearly complex. The characters include the animals due to the context now identified, and while a viewer could previously in the series count Jackson among the

⁵⁷ "No Place Like Home," *Zoo* (New York: CBS Network, June 29, 2017).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

'good guys' it is not altogether clear anymore which side he is on. There is also some question as to whether there is a middle ground or no sides at all. Thought is represented by the silence before and after the attacks, as well as the silence before and after the commands to kill. Both Jackson and the animals pause for thought. Diction can be found in the specific and simplistic commands: 'whoa' and 'attack' and a lack of much else. Song is heard in the noises the animals make, which in this scene are almost rhythmic and strategic. Each sound serves a specific purpose and is carefully placed to notify, warn, and signal. Spectacle is comprised of a couple of visual items. First, the scene is set close to the border of Washington State in the American Pacific Northwest, which is typically green even in the cities, but ten years post-apocalypse is dirty and infertile. Second, and probably most obvious, there are hybrid animals on-screen fighting to the death with lions controlled by a human being. The premise of the scene itself is a bit of a spectacle.

Due to the complexity of the plot, Reversal of the Situation and Recognition are also quite complex. Reversal has two considerations. Jackson and his group appear to be in danger and appear to be on the 'right' side of the circumstances. However, when Jackson reveals to the viewer that he can control the lions and then proceeds to set them upon the hybrid animals, Jackson's allegiances are called into question as is any perceived danger. One questions whether Jackson is a good person, according to a standard conception of goodness, or at the very least questions his motives: whether he is acting in the best interest of others, looking for power and glory, or is on the side of the animals. If Jackson can control the lions or any other animals, then no one is in any real danger, and for him to hide the fact that he is controlling the animals himself is deceptive. Reversal of the Situation is in the change from viewing Jackson as a good and righteous character to a deceptive and cruel character. He reverses the situation on the viewer and has also done so to his fellow characters without their knowledge. As well, there is a reversal of the situation for the lions, who at first are looked at as a threat but are revealed to be under the control of another. The revelation of that control is the link to Recognition. The audience sees the lions shift from predator to subservient in the blink of an eye and, as that happens, Recognition of Jackson as the Alpha, not the prey, shows the audience that Jackson may not be the righteous man presented in previous seasons. In fact, it alludes to Jackson, himself, as the dangerous one.

The pity that the viewer feels for the humans in the scene is transferred to the animals, as is the fear that the viewer might have felt for the humans against the animals or hybrids. The pity and fear the viewer feels for the animals being controlled by Jackson is complicated but present, and it is released, or purged, when the lions win the fight with the hybrids. The pity for the animals under Jackson's control is transformed, or purified, when the humans are shown escaping the perceived danger of the hybrids. Although Jackson has control of the lions, he is using a pack mentality. Pity is transformed into something like natural curiosity about another species. The fear is transformed into awe in the same way, when the hybrids go down at the *hands* of the lions. There is an emotional tug-of-war happening when the audience begins to see Jackson as both human and animal. The duality inside Jackson is what allows for the flux of pity and fear in this scene. If catharsis is possible based on the outcome of the scene in its entirety, considering the violence shown, then the pleasure of seeing one's own species get to safety, in this case the viewers watching the humans escape, is achieved whether pity and fear are purged or purified.

The type of violence revealed on-screen the majority of the time in *Zoo* is far closer to that of Aristotle's Greek Tragedy, in that when violence is perpetrated by a human on an animal or another person, the moments of impact are not shown and there is not quite so often a bloody aftermath depicted on-screen. Although there are some hard-to-watch scenes involving oncoming swarms of insects or birds, and hordes of small rodents about to devour humans alive, the moment a human being falls or begins to scream, the editing cuts to

something else. It is certainly suspenseful, but hardly gory. It is not until the animals fight each other on-screen that the series depicts the violence on-screen. If the animals had been fighting humans or humans had been fighting other humans, it is reasonable to assume the violence would not have been shown and presenting the violence in this way is unnecessary to the story. If Jackson is in fact controlling the animals for his own gain, as it is somewhat implied in the scene described, then the violence shown is gratuitous and unnecessary. If he is controlling them for the safety of the people and the lions themselves, then the violence shown, while not entirely in line with how a Greek Tragedy would have been conducted, is justified in accordance with our previously conceived definition of violence. That question of intent is left unanswered in the series. If catharsis is possible at this level of violence, depending on intent, then we are far more likely to have experienced it watching this series.

The viewer is also confronted by disconcerting emotions about animal evolution and genetic mutation. In everyday life, the viewer is challenged by the impending possibility that other groups might emerge in the same way the animals did. In popular thought, it is often alleged that Artificial Intelligence could put humanity in a similar position. In a program like *Zoo*, one must confront one's fears about how humanity would cope on a global scale, or what a new world would look like if A.I. took over or had the upper hand. Additionally, there are fears of advancing technology, such as neural interfacing and creating hive minds. One questions what could happen to humanity, our individuality, and our rights, if any of the advancements came to pass. For a viewer to be able to remove or transform the fears associated with these potential situations is advantageous. *Zoo* allows a viewer to get emotionally involved in that potentiality in a safe way and explore possible outcomes, without the violence detracting from efficacy of the processes of purgation or purification.

Conclusion

To attempt to understand and define catharsis in the context of current dramatic television is entirely appropriate. In a modern context, an understanding of catharsis as either purgative or purifying is suitable, and one need not understand it exclusively in terms of one or the other. There is seemingly merit from the perspective of both sides in terms of the psychology behind Aristotle's platform. There is also merit in looking at the many considerations that each brings up in the discussion about violence. One may not agree with an assessment of violence as good or bad, or with a determination of television as containing too much or too little violence, but it is easy to agree that the level of violence present in a television program can detract from or add to the efficacy of the processes of either purgation or purification.

One question readers or viewers may be left is whether a television show containing this much violence is artistic. Aristotle wants us to make sure that whatever we evaluate as Tragedy is, first and foremost, art. To do that, the violence cannot be a distraction nor a detractor from any present artistic value. If it is, then it is no longer artistic, and the violence only serves the purpose of being present for shock value. It is in the latter circumstance that violence begins to whittle away at our natural compassion, desensitizing us to what we see on-screen. That can translate into a desensitization to what we may see in everyday life. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that gratuitous violence does not serve an artistic purpose, in terms of Aristotle's Tragedy, and is harmful to a viewer. Whether a post-apocalyptic television show offers catharsis is strictly dependant on the amount and severity of the violence present in it, and too much leaves it lacking as Aristotle's art.

It is a lovely sentiment to want to save Aristotle's theory of catharsis, but as can be seen throughout the article, there is not much left to save. The social sciences community has shown that "venting" using violent media does not produce catharsis according to an Aristotelian definition. They have also shown that violent media can have entirely the

opposite effect, as was illustrated by the 1975 and 1979 studies discussed. The philosophical community has shown that according to Aristotle's overall body of work, the most probable true definition of catharsis that Aristotle had in mind when he wrote *Poetics* was that of purification. However, purifying catharsis cannot be achieved via media violence, only via therapeutic interventions. Although there is a strong inclination to identify what happens to us when we watch violent media as catharsis, it is not so, in the true clinical definition, nor in the Aristotelian sense. It is not possible to achieve any sort of catharsis in the face of the type of violence portrayed in post-apocalyptic television shows, let alone in other media. There are several factors that must be considered, as can be seen in the series' described herein, not the least of which is the intent of the character. The concluding facts are that this type of media can only serve to normalize violence, and that any attempt to apply Aristotle's catharsis to media must be specific to those with a lack of violence on screen.

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