DEMOCRATIC AND POPULAR REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF ABDLHAMID IBN BADIS MOSTAGANEM

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

MASTER

Literature and Civilisation

Cathartic Aspects in Confessional Writings: Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905) and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession (1883)

Submitted by:

CHEHRI Youcef

Board of Examiners

Chair: Ms. ABDELHADI Nadia	**University of Mostaganem**
Supervisor: Dr. DJAFRI Yasmina	**University of Mostaganem**
Examiner: Ms. GHERNOUT Soumia	**University of Mostaganem**

Academic Year: 2019-2020

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear family and friends

People whom I love and respect

To my precious mother Amina

To the back bone of the family, my father Mohamed

To my beloved sisters Ikram and Fatima

To my Godmother Hayet who has given me love and support throughout my life

To my grandmothers and grandfathers, whose blessings, have everlastingly filled me with joy and contentment.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Yasmina Djafri for her guidance and assistance

I would also like to thank the honourable board of examiners for assessing my dissertation.

In addition, I would like to thank Pr. Abbes Bahous for his assistance and for being a true inspiration to me

Finally, I would like to thank all the teachers who assessed me during my five years at the University of Mostaganem.

Abstract

The cathartic and healing experience in art are often linked to watching tragedies, listening to music, painting, or writing confessions. Research has shown that when beholding a tragedy, it constitutes a healing result which is described by Aristotle as a catharsis of negative emotions. This particular use of this word has given rise to the richest and most extensive discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the secondary sources, partly because Aristotle provides no explanation of it, and partly because it is considered a powerful metaphor that people are led to seek in it the meaning of their own healing experience in response to tragedies. This study aims at finding a relation between Catharsis and the confessional tradition, for it investigates the cathartic aspects in confessional writings: in *De Profundis* by Oscar Wilde (1905) and A *Sister's Confession* by Guy de Maupassant (1883) and it evaluates both the readers and the confessional writer's shared cathartic experience. Based on a review of the literature on Aristotelian Catharsis, theories on the effects of tragedy, and the confessional tradition, a thorough analysis was executed on the two designated works: *De Profundis* and *A Sister's Confession* to reveal their cathartic aspects despite being works of prose and not drama, by accentuating on the tragic element that both works introduce and seem to offer. The analysis of these confessional works demonstrated a common point that of 'tragedy', which, essentially, evokes pity and fear for readers and cleanses negative emotions of that sort. The results indicate that the chosen materials possess a healing element that of catharsis.

Keywords: Catharsis, Aristotle, *Poetics*, Aristotelian Catharsis, healing experience, tragedy, pity and fear, confessional writing, confessional tradition.

Table of Contents

Chapter Two: The Confessional Tradition: Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905), and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession (1883)

Chapter Three: Cathartic Confessional Writings: De Profundis (1905) and A Sister's Confession (1883)

General Introduction

General Introduction

From aeons ago, the crafty and former art of writing appeared in many forms, and since the very first time that literature existed, it progressed from a tool to record history, to a more sophisticated and versatile one. Therefore, it allowed, and still allows human beings to express their emotions, chronicle their triumphs and downfalls, or confess a sin they had committed. The art of writing had been shaped and reshaped in a diverse way to serve various purposes: either to achieve a stylistic appeal, thus, focusing on aesthetics, or prosaically through expressing unfiltered scenes from everyday life and its practicalities through tragedies that trigger readers' emotions. In addition, writing can sometimes be considered as a tool of catharsis. A term that has been used differently in many occasions and contexts, Catharsis was originally used by Aristotle in *Poetics* to express the spectators' healing experience when watching a tragedy where pity and fear are evoked vicariously. Elaborately speaking, the healing effect of writing is experienced by the reader, as well as, the writer. On that account, the confessional writing is one of the most common and prevalent writing style in literature that serves such purpose, that of healing. Hence, the theory of catharsis provides a useful account of the healing experience that is partook by the reader when reading confessions.

The Confessional writing is known as a first-person style and often presented as an ongoing diary or letters, distinguished by revelations and fruitions of person's deeper and darker motivations. Whether it bears a fictional tragedy through confession, or a candid execution of the confessional tradition with its religiosity, the latter is speculated to possess a cathartic experience where the writer attempts to purge his negative emotions from what could be thwarting and hindering his mind or his characters minds by revisiting his or their traumatising tragedies. Such experience can appeal to the reader of these confessional descriptions. Therefore, the reader experiences catharsis by being exposed to tragic events

that imitate reality. Accordingly, the writer or his vicarious character becomes the thespians in their tragedy. Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905) and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession (1883) are specimens of a cathartic experience through confession. For Wilde, De Profundis is in a large part an effort to find a way of rationalising his suffering. 'Where there is sorrow there is holy ground,' Wilde writes, paraphrasing a stanza from Goethe that his mother used to recite. 'Someday people will realise what that means. They will know nothing of life till they do' (DP, 29). Wilde endeavoured, during his time in prison at Reading Gaol (1895-1897), to make sense of his past actions, confessing to himself first, then to the people whom he loved second. His attempt to find peace within his tragedy was bound to undergo an internal challenge which could only happen through confession. As for Maupassant, A Sister's Confession (1883) is a naturalistic short story that narrates a story of two sisters, Marguerite and Suzanna. Marguerite is dying in her deathbed, and as a catholic, she was primed to summon for a priest, and confess to purify herself before she dies. Her confession reveals a dark secret, which marks a modern tragedy caused by jealousy and lack of rationality. As a result of an outgrowth of realism, naturalism in literature sought to depict humanity in a more scientific and psychological manner ("naturalism", *Encyclopedia Britannica*). Starting as a philosophical notion in late 19th century, the French naturalist writers concentrated on the filth of society and the travails of the lower classes as the focal point of their writing. Being one of the pioneers of the naturalistic philosophy, Maupassant's most recurrent themes deal with social injustice, poverty, relationships, etc (Kuhn 10). Based on the idea that environment determines and governs human character, he relied on sharply reductive, satiric techniques directed against his favourite target: women ("Maupassant", *Encyclopedia Britannica*). On that account, A Sister's confession depicts these respects in their most relevant form.

This thesis examines the relation between Catharsis and the confessional tradition. To do this, it investigates the cathartic aspects in confessional writings namely in *De Profundis* by Oscar Wilde (1905) and A *Sister's Confession* by Guy de Maupassant (1883) and it evaluates the readers and the confessional writer's shared cathartic experience. That being the case, this topic was opted for: first, the scant information about confessional writing when relating it to the idea of 'catharsis'. Moreover, half of the studies evaluated claim that catharsis is only proper to drama. Up to now the nature of catharsis remains unclear. Second, by applying the theory of catharsis on confessional writing, which was used for decades by a number of authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, André Gide, Sylvia Plath, etc., it is an illustration that stresses how literature, as same as music, is a means of therapy to the mind and soul. Last but not least, I believe that this research will open a discussion on how to evaluate the readers' cathartic experiences in prose. In this dissertation, the terms 'Catharsis' and 'Healing' are used interchangeably to emphasise the modern usage of *Katharsis.*

I have observed through my research that an author's experience is meant to be examined from various angles. For instance, Wilde's letter is an example of how confessional writing (via his revelations in this letter) opens to the reader a safe space to self-expression without being confined to any literary jurisdiction, where the writer is allowing himself to be vulnerable and raw as a way to make a truce with him/herself. Therefore, this form of writing is alluding at the idea of therapy through writing, as well as, reading as a therapy.

I have arrived at few questions that will help forge this research, to what extent is the confessional writing cathartic in the work of De Profundis by Oscar Wilde and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession? Does confession represent a result of epiphany? Is the cathartic effect shared by the writer and reader? Does tragedy in prose bring about a cathartic effect? These questions will help study and scrutinise the aspects of catharsis in the works mentioned above. To help answer the research question, three hypotheses are delineated to

make sense of the potential answer of the research question. First, the cathartic aspects are present in Oscar Wilde's De Profundis and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession. Second, the healing effect is shared between the reader and writer in confessional writing. Third, prose can possess a similar cathartic element as drama.

My thesis is composed of three themed chapters. The first chapter at length, will offer a definition of the terms 'catharsis' and 'confessional writing', as well as, a background to each one in order to provide the appropriate context for this research. In addition, it will elaborately delve into Aristotelian Catharsis along with its various interpretations from least to the most recent ones. It will attempt to highlight the power of catharsis, confession as a literary outlet, and as a catholic tradition. Finally, it will accentuate the therapeutic assets of confessional writing to build a link with catharsis. Furthermore, the second chapter will namely deal with introducing the chosen works where it provides a studied background to each work and their writers. It also makes significant distinctions between De Profundis and A Sister's Confession, mainly, as being two works of literature that harness the confessional tradition. Eventually, this chapter will contribute in propounding an understanding of the depth of each designated work. In tandem, the third chapter will make use of the theoretical, critical, and literary backgrounds of the previous chapters to generally examine the cathartic aspects in the chosen confessional writings. Besides, this chapter will specifically scrutinise and discuss the primary sources' of cathartic effects. Finally, this chapter will offer an insight about the shared cathartic experience between the writer and reader.

Chapter One:

Aristotelian Catharsis and the Confessional Tradition

Introduction

Speculations about the essence of healing through art vary, thus a clear understanding is highly ambivalent and elusive. However, through writing confessions, an emotional release known as catharsis is well-identified to be a central constituent in bringing forth a healing element. With that being stated, this first chapter will include a definition of catharsis as a term with its old and new connotations. In addition, an unequivocal background will cover Aristotle's theory of catharsis, and then it will proceed to offer different interpretations of Aristotelian catharsis from its former interpretation to the most recent renditions. The chapter will also highlight the function of catharsis and the power of its narrative usage in myths, drama, and novel. Besides, the chapter will attempt to make a significant linkage between catharsis and confessional writings which it proposes a binary healing effect. The latter will be defined and illustrated through different literatures, first, as a religious rite in Catholicism, and second, as an effective literary outlet. Finally, the chapter will attempt to cite the cathartic aspects in the confessional tradition in order to accentuate the healing effects.

1.1. Definition

Since the definition of Catharsis varies among researchers, it is important to clarify how the term is used. According to Oxford Dictionary, the term Catharsis refers to the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from strong or repressed emotions. Catharsis is commonly defined as the purification or purgation of emotions (especially pity and fear) fundamentally through art. The term 'catharsis' in modern English is derivative from the medical term ***Katharsis***[1] κάθαρσις (Greek: "purgation" or "purification"). In psychotherapy,

[1] The term is going to be used in this research under two spellings: old spelling "Katharsis", and the new spelling "Catharsis".

catharsis is often associated with the elimination of negative emotions, affect, or behaviours relative to undiagnosed trauma. In Brill's translation of Freud's *'Selected Papers on Hysteria' (1909)*, Freud defines the term as a purging through vicarious experience (5-6). However, in criticism, catharsis is a metaphor used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* to describe the effects of true tragedy on the spectator.

.

1.2. Background

As the great period of Athenian drama was reaching an end at the beginning of the 4th century BCE, Athenian philosophers began to analyse its content and formulate its structure. In the thought of Plato (c. 427–347 BCE), the history of the criticism of tragedy began with speculation on the role of censorship. To Plato (in the dialogue on 'Nomoi' the Laws) the state was the noblest work of art, a representation (mimēsis)[2] of the fairest and best life. He feared the tragedians' command of the expressive resources of language, which might be used to the detriment of worthwhile institutions. He feared, too, the emotive effect of poetry, the Dionysian element that is at the very basis of tragedy (Conversi and Sewall 2019). As an attempt to mend this potentially insidious influence of poetry, Plato recommends banning many of the great classics of Greek theatre from his ideal state, including even those written by Homer. He contends that 'the only poetry that should be allowed in a state is hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good men' ("The Republic" 203). In other words, Plato believes that the hearers of poetry should only be allowed to hear poems which incite them to piety and to the imitation of the great deeds of good men. Therefore, he recommends the tragedians to submit their works to the rulers, for approval, without which they could not perform. Tragedy is known to be, by nature, exploratory, critical, and independent. As a result, it could not live

[2] Mimesis, basic theoretical principle in the creation of art. The word is Greek and means "imitation" (though in the sense of "re-presentation" rather than of "copying"). Plato and Aristotle spoke of mimesis as the re-presentation of nature.

under such a regimen. Plato was opposed by his student Aristotle in The Poetics (c. 335 BC), particularly, on the idea of the good and bad influence of poetry and drama on the hearer/viewer.

For Plato, the function of these poetry and drama is through imitation which is almost adverse and damaging for the spectators if the hero is propounding a non-pious behaviour that it is open for imitation. Thus, according to Plato 'bad taste in the theatre may insensibly lead you into becoming a buffoon at home' ("The Republic" 204), whereas, Aristotle views the function of poetry and drama quite differently. According to Aristotle, the primary function of these arts is katharsis. Through viewing a tragedy, says Aristotle, the viewer is 'accomplishing by means of pity and fear the cleansing [katharsis] of these [negative] states and feelings' (Poetics, 26). For Aristotle as for Plato, drama is imitation, but Aristotle, instead, sees the characters of a certain tragedy as the imitators of plausible but ultimately fictional events. Furthermore, the viewer relates and connects with this imitation, and as a result, is cleansed through the "pity and fear" they feel for and with the characters. The viewers, then, vicariously participate in the tragedy and are, in fact, motivated to the opposite course of action from imitating what they have seen.

1.3. Aristotle's Catharsis

In opposition to Plato's censorious view on tragedy, Aristotle defends the purgative power of tragedy [catharsis] in his book Poetics and, in contradiction to Plato, makes of moral ambiguity the essence of tragedy. A perfect tragedy for Aristotle is one that imitates actions that results "pity and fear" (Butcher 1895) He uses Sophocles' Oedipus the King as a paradigm. Near the beginning of the play, Oedipus asks how his stricken city (the counterpart

of Plato's state) may cleanse itself, and the word he uses for the purifying action is a form of the word catharsis.

The concept of catharsis provides Aristotle with his reconciliation with Plato, a means by which to satisfy the claims of both ethics and art. Aristotle defines tragedy in Book VI as "an imitation of an action that is serious [μίμησις mimesis], complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (51). Therefore, for catharsis to emerge, tragedy should arouse pathos and phobos (pity and fear) in the viewer and brings about catharsis. According to Kearney, catharsis invites us beyond a pathology of pity to compassion and beyond a pathology of fear to serenity. In that account, these negative emotions are "distilled and sublimated into a healing brew". (52)

However, within Poetics, Aristotle's definition of the term is not sufficiently clear, so what does it actually mean? Noreen W. Kruse, in her meticulous study on the process of Aristotelian catharsis, contends that Aristotle's Poetics is not as lucid as translations make it appear. Leon Golden renders that part of Aristotle's definition which treats catharsis as follows: "It [catharsis] is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents." (qtd. in Kruse, 163). Another translation of the same line was translated respectively by Fyfe as: "a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude—by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament…it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions."(1449b25-6). Yet, a complete consensus on the term is prone to ongoing debates since there are several interpretations of it that make a studied definition which parallels with Aristotle's views and intentions, highly unreachable.

1.4. Interpretations of Aristotelian Catharsis

Aristotle renovated traditional views about tragedy to evaluate his stances about the structure and effect of tragic genre (Munteanu). The Aristotelian definition of tragedy associates the emotions of pity and fear as the audience's response towards tragedy, namely in Greek culture, the manifestation of the emotions is correlated to "the enigmatic notion of catharsis" (238):

> ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι᾽ ἀπαγγελίας, δι᾽ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.(Aristot. Poet. 1449b24-8) (Kassel 1966)
>
> A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions (6.1449b23–28) (Eldridge 287)

Pity and fear, two interdependent emotions, are aroused in the souls of the spectators through a process of resonation with the good and virtuous hero/heroine when watching his or her fearful and pitiable ills. Their strength depends on beliefs about the importance and value of the hero's ills (Eldridge 1994). According to Helen Briassoulis, the spectators feel fear, a self-regarding emotion, because they envisage the same ills likely happening to them for similar reasons. The greater and the closer, the dangers presented, the greater the fear felt (1097).

Therefore, they feel pity, "an over-regarding emotion" (1097) for the tragic hero because, they cogitate that his motive is benign and does not deserve suffering. Hence, as Aristotle

asserts, the suffering is often caused by *Hamartia*[3], an ineluctable error that was a primary ramification of the credulity or a lack of reason from the hero/character. However, Aristotle cautioned that not all events are tragic, i.e. arouse pity and fear. Tragic are those that are very strong to cause disaster, serious damage, and, thus, dread and extreme sorrow, fury or hate of people who can do harm, injustice backed by power, suffering caused by a friend, unwitting commitment of disgraceful acts and repentance after learning the truth, and competition for a common good that cannot be enjoyed individually. Those involving flawless persons who have bad ending, rotten persons who have good ending and rotten persons who have bad ending are not tragic (Eldridge 1994; Carr 1999; Sokolon 2006).

According to Kruse, some commentators believe that catharsis is a moral or intellectual clarification or enlightenment for the audience. However, catharsis has been identified more frequently as the purgation of audience's emotions; the purification of an action which would otherwise be considered censurable through plotted elements, or even the removal from the mimesis of that which would, in reality, produce confusion. The multitude of speculations about catharsis can be divided into three basic categories: clarification, purgation, and cleansing. Each of these views has features which render it worthy of consideration as a significant explanation (164).

1.4.1. Clarifying Catharsis

This interpretation accentuates on the nature of catharsis as a process of clarification or enlightenment. According to Hardison, for example, the term means "clarification" and is aligned with the pleasure Aristotle says we derive from learning something. In tragedy,

[3] The term hamartia derives from the Greek ἁμαρτία, from ἁμαρτάνειν hamartánein, which means "to miss the mark" or "to err". It is most often associated with Greek tragedy, although it is also used in Christian theology. Hamartia as it pertains to dramatic literature was first used by Aristotle in his Poetics.

Hardison claims, this enlightenment is associated both with our discovery of the relationship between incidents and universals and with our ascertainment of how things come about (116-8). Gassner asserts that catharsis is an emotional purgation and that the characters in a drama act as our proxies, but he also believes that it is the intellectual and moral clarification we experience while watching a tragedy which separates this form melodrama and enables the catharsis to take place (109-10). Thus the 'clarification Theory', forged by Leon Golden (1976), recognizes the true nature of the 'Poetics' as a technical treatise. It relates to the theory of imitation and to the discussion of probability and necessity. By 'Catharsis' particular is generalised, individual is universalized. Thus, Catharsis is a process of learning and therefore is pleasurable.

1.4.2. Purgative Catharsis

This view stresses the function of catharsis as emotional purgation or therapeutic relief. According to Bernays, who fundamentally propounded in his highly influential analysis of the catharsis question, Aristotle's concept of catharsis represents a process of purgation in which the emotions of pity and fear are aroused by tragic dramas then somehow eliminated from the psyche of the audience for him "Katharsis - a treatment of the obstructed person, which seeks, not to repress, but to stir up and drive forth the element which obstructs him, and in this manner to give him relief" (459). Butcher, for example, contends that 'as the tragic action progresses, when the tumult of the mind, first roused, has afterwards subsided, the lower forms of emotion are found to have been transmuted into higher and more refined forms' (254).

If one takes the homoeopathic[4] understanding into consideration, the latter would very much coincide with purgative catharsis in its effects. Indeed, in the Politics, the only other work in which Aristotle mentions catharsis; his reference is limited to the concept of emotional relief, and this through music (252-55). In it is he delves into the efficiency of music in purging and releasing negative emotions. According to Andrew Ford, Aristotle's Politics argues that music has cathartic effects and that catharsis should be understood as a harmless release of emotions. (309-10). Furthermore, catharsis interpreted as a psychological release for the spectators renders the concept a better rejoinder to the Platonic dictum that tragedy encourages debilitating emotions than do the readings which relate to cleansing and clarification (Kruse 1979).

1.4.3. Cleansing Catharsis

This understanding views catharsis as cleansing or purification, and identifies the concept as a function of plot or a product of mimesis. Schaper, among others, believes that "it would be entirely un-Aristotelian to think of the telos[5] of something in terms other than structural." It is her contention that a "therapeutic interpretation" forces us to "shift from a structural analysis to descriptive psychology, and to regard tragedy as a means of achieving a certain end" (135-36). According to 'The Purification Theory' (House 1956) 'Catharsis' means that our emotions are purified of excess and defect, or reduced to intermediate state. Thus, 'Catharsis' is more or less, a type of moral conditioning.

[4] A belief that a substance that causes symptoms of a disease in healthy people would cure similar symptoms in sick people, thus, "like cures like".
[5] From the Greek τέλος for "end", "purpose", or "goal" is an end or purpose, in a fairly constrained sense used by philosophers such as Aristotle. It is the root of the term "teleology", roughly the study of purposiveness, or the study of objects with a view to their aims, purposes, or intentions.

1.4.4 Recent Interpretations

Most of the old interpretations and views of Aristotle's concept of catharsis, specifically, to what regards to the function of tragedy, propound similar understandings. Bernays represents the old view in his Theory of Katharsis, where he offered a medical interpretation for the understanding of Greek tragedy. Bernays connected the cathartic process with the ecstatic practices of the Dionysiac rites (Momigliano 1969). Therefore, this old view deems catharsis as a process of psychological healing, since humans experience build-ups of undesirable emotions like pity and terror, which can be aroused and then released by watching tragedy. However, new interpretations suggest several views that perceive this Aristotelian notion differently. The most recent interpretation of catharsis regards it as a process whereby the audience learn to control their emotions, thus "purifying" the soul of bad emotions in the same way that the good soul is "purified" of evil in a *tempering* condition (that is, the good learns to keep evil under control). Hence, catharsis is referred to the debilitation of the tragic passions of the spectator to a balanced measure (Flinsler 1900). The latter suggests a process of ethical balance based upon Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This recent view is highly indebted to the Aristotelian ethics which defines virtues as a mean between extremes (Munteanu 2011):

> λέγω δὲ τὴν ἠθικήν: αὕτη γάρ ἐστι περὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις, ἐν δὲ τούτοις ἔστιν ὑπερβολὴ καὶ ἔλλειψις καὶ τὸ μέσον. οἷον καὶ φοβηθῆναι καὶ θαρρῆσαι καὶ ἐπιθυμῆσαι καὶ ὀργισθῆναι καὶ ἐλεῆσαι καὶ ὅλως ἡσθῆναι καὶ λυπηθῆναι ἔστι καὶ μᾶλλον καὶ ἧττον, καὶ ἀμφότερα οὐκ εὖ: τὸ δ᾽ ὅτε δεῖ καὶ ἐφ᾽ οἷς καὶ πρὸς οὓς καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα καὶ ὡς δεῖ, μέσον τε καὶ ἄριστον, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς. (1106b.16-23) (Bywater 1894)
>
> I refer to moral virtue, for this is concerned with emotions and actions, in which one can have excess or deficiency or a due mean. For example, one can be frightened or bold, feel desire or anger or pity, and experience pleasure and pain in general, either too much or too little, and in both cases wrongly; whereas to feel these feelings at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner, is to feel the best

> amount of them, which is the mean amount—and the best amount is of course the mark of virtue. (1106b.16-23) (Rackham 1934)

House and other scholars consider this passage to be the key to understanding the catharsis clause in the *Poetics* (Munteanu 2011). Therefore, House writes that:

> A tragedy rouses the emotions from potentiality to activity by worthy and adequate stimuli, it controls them by directing them to the right objects in the right way; and it exercises them, within the limits of the play, as the emotions of the good man would be exercised. When they subside to potentiality again after the play is over, it is a more 'trained' potentiality than before. This is what Aristotle calls κάθαρσις(Katharsis) (109-11).

Janko, in his proposal, promotes catharsis, to be taken as "balance" of emotions in the definition of tragedy (341). In other words, their antithetical view to Bernays, regards catharsis as a "tempering" or "purification" of emotions rather than "purging". Bernays argued that the catharsis which we obtain from watching a tragedy operates similarly, arousing and releasing undesirable feelings of pity and fear. The weakness of his approach is his assumption that Aristotle held the same wholly negative opinion of the emotions that Bernays attributes to Plato, and would therefore regard them as needing to be cleaned out periodically (Janko 1992). Aristotle recognized that "well-balanced" emotional reactions are a crucial factor in making correct choices and thus in forming and maintaining a settled good character (343). According to Janko, sometimes one should feel such emotions, as pity, anger or fear, if they are felt towards the right object, to the proper degree, in the correct way and at the right time (343). In other words, he contends that the emotions must be felt "rightly for the circumstances": that is to say, to have too much fear will make one a coward, a little to no fear, makes one a fool. Thus, if we feel the correct amount of fear relative to the situation courage would be attained. Proper compassion, justified anger and the right degree of courage can and should affect moral choice (*Nicomachean Ethics III* 1115b11-20). The ethical interpretation is that the tragic process is a kind of elevation of the soul, an inner illumination

resulting in a more balanced attitude to life and its suffering. Tragedy makes us realise that the divine law operates in the universe, shaping everything for the best.

1.5. The Function of Catharsis

On the question of the function of, what is vaguely known as, catharsis, Aristotle ends his definition of tragedy with the statement that tragedy "accomplishes by means of pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions" (Po.1449b27) without giving us a thorough discussion of the concept. The absence of such discussion coerced many scholars to re-examine some of his other works in order to reconstruct a potential understanding of Aristotle's views. Hence, scholars relied primarily on *Politics* VIII and the extant *Poetics* to, supplementing these with his discussions of the emotions in the *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics* (Janko 1990).

Since the definition of tragedy makes the catharsis of pity and fear essential to the genre, the plots of tragedies, in drama or novels, "are best structured in such a way as to represent the kinds of actions that are best suited to arouse those emotions" (1452b32). According to Aristotle, a good tragedy should not depict the fall of decent men from good fortune into misfortune, since this does not excite pity or fear, but is miaron,"disgusting" (1453b36), for him, they are polluted and they provoke feelings of shock or revulsion instead. Therefore, this evidently constitutes the opposite of catharsis. He also accentuates the concept of mimesis (imitation) in theatre—this could be applied to novels and short stories as well— "it should, moreover, imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation" (1452b25) (Fyfe 1932).

As indicated previously, catharsis calls upon the interests of the audience, introducing it to the notion as a form of moral purification through which a sense of discipline is placed on the audience's reaction to pity and fear. For the author of a tragedy, incidents that arouse pity and fear could be considered as deliberate artistic placements in the plot that allows the audience to experience these emotions, thereby compelling the tragic character to change, develop and move towards a higher realm of moral purification. Therefore, emotions that are aroused through Catharsis have several guided intentions, and are not mere haphazard activities. To put it mildly, the purpose of catharsis is to give the audience a feeling of relief or purgation of emotions that have been built up throughout the course of a drama. Typically, this purgation occurs after a major catastrophe or tragic event that the protagonist encounters. This tragic event is commonly one that the audience can relate to such as death or loss (Briassoulis 2019). Nevertheless, as stated by Aristotle, the tragic is associated to the emotional registers of "pity and fear", thus avoiding the untragic and the repulsive, this "shows no inclination to enlarge the experience of pity and fear from tragedy into anything resembling a world view" (Halliwell 1987). In connection, Halliwell refutes that we should be "moving towards a formulation of what Aristotle considered to be the essence of 'the tragic' taken as a complete vision or experience of at least one face of reality…Such an explanation of the idea of tragedy has no place in the Poetics". (126)

1.6. The Power of Catharsis in Narrative

One of the most enduring functions of narrative is catharsis. From the ancient Greeks to the present day, the healing powers of storytelling have been conspicuously recognised and revered. Evidently, the power of narrative and its influence are regarded as the primary function of how catharsis is fundamentally forged. Through channelling a representation of ordinary life, whether virtuous, or sinful in theatre and prose, the audience (spectators and

readers) experience a purging of emotions, thus, evoking pitiful and fearful sentiments through imitative narrative. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle dealt with the purgative character of representation as a double act of *muthos-mimesis* (plotting-imitating). More specifically he defined the function of *katharsis* as 'purgation of pity and fear'. This comes about, he explains, whenever the dramatic imitation of certain actions arouses pity and fear in order to provide an outlet for pity and fear (Kearney 2007).

The recounting of experience through the formal medium of plot, fiction or drama permits the audience to gain knowledge about certain situations, namely, in tragedies, along with their emotional and practical dimensions. Therefore, this very act of creative repetition allows for a certain kind of pleasure or release. According to Kearney, in the play of narrative re-creation we are invited to revisit our lives—through the actions and personas of others—so as to live them otherwise. He goes to add that "we discover a way to give a future to the past" (51). So, in order to understand the power of catharsis one should rely on its causality, i.e. what causes the purging, the clarification, the tempering, and the cleansing of *pity* and *fear*. The latter is pronounced by Aristotle to be a result of mimesis, the vicarious imitation of what is tragic. Furthermore, catharsis is often expressed as a power of vicariousness, of being elsewhere (in another time or place), of imagining differently, experiencing the world through the eyes of strangers.

The German dramatist and literary critic Gotthold Lessing (1729–81) held that catharsis converts excess emotions into virtuous dispositions. Other critics see tragedy as a moral lesson in which the fear and pity excited by the tragic hero's fate serve to warn the spectator not to similarly tempt providence ("Catharsis", *Encyclopaedia Britannica)*. The interpretation generally accepted is that through experiencing fear vicariously in a controlled situation, the spectator's own anxieties are directed outward, and, through sympathetic identification with

the tragic protagonist, his insight and outlook are enlarged. Tragedy then has a healthful and humanizing effect on the spectator or reader.

1.7. Narrating Pain in Quest of a Cathartic Experience

Literature has been, for many decades, a means to self-expression. Though, as far as drama and tragedy are concerned, they were the first forms to achieve what Aristotle and Plato called out in their dialogues. Despite their oppositions, both of them believed in the power of tragedy and its 'serious imitation' on the audience/spectators. Plato did not necessarily mention the term catharsis or alluded to it, but he was extremely selective when it comes to tragedies. As for Aristotle, his view on tragedy was evident, he deemed the cathartic aspect in tragedy as salient for the audience as it purges and cleanses their unwanted feelings, and that is by arousing pitiable and fearful emotions from incident of the same nature which incite those emotions to emerge. There are many forms where catharsis is the main focus or unintentionally brings about its effects on the reader and spectator, this purging and clarifying element is constituted in the following:

1.7.1. Myths

The healing character of narrative goes back to the earliest forms of myth. Keareny asserts in his thorough analysis of *Narrative Imagination and Catharsis* that myths are machines for the purging of wounds: strategies for resolving at a symbolic level what remains irresolvable at the level of lived empirical experience (3). Coincidentally, L´evi-Strauss observes that human existence is cursed by a tragic, because impossible, desire to escape the trauma of our autochthonous origins - namely, the desire to buck our finitude. In the Oedipus cycle, this tragic curse is epitomized, as noted, by the patrilineal names for wounds that bind us to the

earth. And the poetic role of *muthos-mimesis* that comprises tragic drama (as Aristotle reminds us in the Poetics) is to narrate our heroic desires to transcend our terrestrial nature: Cadmos kills the dragon, Oedipus defeats the sphinx. For Levi-Strauss, great mythic narratives are attempts to procure cathartic relief by balancing these binary opposites in symbolic constellations or "mythemes." In short: what is impossible in reality becomes possible in fiction.

1.7.2. Drama

Catharsis in classical theatre is pervasive and omnipresent via its characters and tragic scenes that project human life in its essence. One simply cannot proceed by talking about drama and theatre without mentioning an honourable name whose name rings bells in everyone's ear whenever it is uttered. William Shakespeare occupies a unique position in the world of literature, for he was not only a poet but also a dramatist. He wrote copious plays which are till this day, studied and scrupulously scrutinised by scholars. Shakespeare's historical drama Julius Caesar (1599), Caesar was betrayed by his comrade, Brutus, and was brutally murdered. Brutus feels an overwhelming amount of guilt due to this action and catharsis occurs when he commits suicide bringing a purge of emotions. However, it is important to point out that, Aristotle's view on tragedy focuses on the imitation, this imitation is required to be relative to tragic incidents so that the audience relate or see themselves in it, thus feel pity and fear during the process. A melodramatic act for example, will most likely to ruin the cathartic experience. This idea is expressed by Kearney who contends that there was always the danger of a pathology of pity, a sentimental or histrionic[6] extreme where the spectator loses his/her wits and becomes blinded by excessive passion. For him, "empathy

[6] Histrionic extreme is melodramatic response to a touching scene. To put it mildly, to feel, and therefore, react excessively.

might veer towards an over-identification with the imaginary characters unless checked by a countervailing movement of distance and detachment" (51-52).

Another example of catharsis in modern theatre is in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949), the main character, Willy Loman, evokes a sense of pity from the audience due to the understanding of the desire of achieving the American Dream. When he commits suicide, the audience experiences catharsis, because the fear of not achieving personal goals and the effect of this is something that resides in many people. Similarly, In Sophocles' drama Oedipus Rex[7] (around 429 BC), Oedipus has unknowingly married his own mother. Catharsis occurs when he realizes this tragic fact and gauges his own eyes out as a means of cleansing his guilt.

1.7.3. Novel

Much more could be said here about narrative catharsis. There is Aristotle's theory of cathartic affect in the Poetics and James Joyce's rewriting of it in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)*. However, it is noteworthy to understand that there is a subtle difference between Catharses, as it affects the author and the audience: where Aristotle focuses on the purgation of the spectators' emotions, Joyce applies it to narrators. His own poetic persona included:

> Myself unto myself will give
> This name, Katharsis-Purgative.
> I, who dishevelled ways forsook
> To hold the poets' grammar-book,
> Bringing to tavern and to brothel
> The mind of witty Aristotle,

[7] Once **Oedipus** realizes that he was not able to avoid the prophecy and is responsible for the plague, he is disgusted with himself and stabs his own eyes using Jocasta's golden brooches. Oedipus blinding himself reflects his emotional pain and reveals that he has taken responsibility for his actions.

Lest bards in the attempt should err
Must here be my interpreter.. (“The Holy Office” 1905)

A Künstlerroman[8] in a modernist style, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)* traces the religious and intellectual awakening of young Stephen Dedalus, a fictional alter ego of Joyce and an allusion to Daedalus, the consummate craftsman of Greek mythology. Stephen questions and rebels against the Catholic and Irish conventions under which he has grown, culminating in his self-exile from Ireland to Europe. The work uses techniques that Joyce developed more fully in *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). When Joyce visited Carl Jung in Zurich - hoping he would cure his daughter, Lucia - Jung replied that he could not cure Lucia’s madness and that Joyce had only managed to cure his own by writing Ulysses[9]. In short, Joyce is Stephen Dedalus ‘writing the book of himself’ in order to save himself from melancholy. Therefore, alluding to the notion of the effects of cathartic experience through the narrator’s point of view, though it can be implied for the audience since it offers purgative effects via its leading character. As the Irish playwright Brian Friel remarked, “Irish literature is opulent with tomorrows, penned in the optative mood, its words serving as weapons of the dispossessed. The suffering of historical defeat, failure, exile and disinheritance, is narratively transformed into a cathartic act of fiction”. (qtd. in Kearney 2007)

On that account, many speculations can be derived from literary works questioning their nature, namely, their therapeutic effects on the audience and themselves per se. Those works, such as: Joyce’s A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man (1916), is an illustration of how

[8] A Künstlerroman, "artist's novel" in English, is a narrative about an artist's growth to maturity. It could be classified as a sub-category of Bildungsroman.

[9] As Jung told Joyce biographer Richard Ellmann, Lucia and Joyce were “like two people going to the bottom of a river, one falling and the other diving.” (1959) (Lucia suffered from Schizophrenia)

recounting one's past via a character that holds similar characteristics as a representation of real, and also as an act of purging to reconcile with one's past self, this might suggest to the idea of confession (Freud 6).

1.8. Confessional Writing

Theologically, confession is 'the accusation that a man makes of his own sins to a priest, with a view to necessary absolution' (Barton 1961). It is the sacrament of penance and is sought when man has made an offence against God. Confession is then seen as a necessary condition for receiving the forgiveness of God (1 John 1:8 ff). However, in literature, confession is an autobiography, either real or fictitious, in which intimate and hidden details of the subject's life are revealed. Confessional writing is a first-person style that is often presented as an ongoing diary or letters, distinguished by revelations of a person's deeper or darker motivations. The writer is not only autobiographically recounting his life, but confessing to his sins. Writing about a secret is a form of confessional writing. This type of writing can be healing and cathartic. It can appear in the form of an essay, letter, poem, book, or jottings in a journal. Generally speaking, confessional writing is a healing way of expressing sentiments on the page (Raab 2019).

1.8.1. Confession as a Literary Outlet

The first outstanding example of the genre was the *Confessions* of St. Augustine (c. AD 400), a painstaking examination of Augustine's progress from juvenile sinfulness and youthful debauchery to conversion to Christianity and the triumph of the spirit over the flesh. Others include the Confessions of an *English Opium-Eater* (1822), by Thomas De Quincey, focusing on the writer's early life and his gradual addiction to drug taking, and *Confessions* (1782–89), the intimate autobiography of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. André Gide used the form

to great effect in such works as *Si le grain ne meurt* (1920 and 1924; *If It Die*...), an account of his life from birth to marriage.

Another form of confessional Writing is found in ‘confessional poetry’, a phrase burst into common usage in September of 1959. Confessional poetry is the poetry of the personal or "I." This style of writing emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s and is associated with poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and W. D. Snodgrass. Lowell's book Life Studies was a highly personal account of his life and familial ties and had a significant impact on American poetry. Plath and Sexton were both students of Lowell and noted that his work influenced their own writing. The confessional poetry of the mid-twentieth century dealt with subject matter that previously had not been openly discussed in American poetry. Private experiences with and feelings about death, trauma, depression and relationships were addressed in this type of poetry, often in an autobiographical manner. One of the most well-known poems by a confessional poet is "Daddy" by Plath. Addressed to her father, the poem contains references to the Holocaust but uses a sing-song rhythm that echoes the nursery rhymes of childhood:

> Daddy, I have had to kill you.
> You died before I had time--
> Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
> Ghastly statue with one gray toe
> Big as a Frisco seal

Confessions are meant to release negative emotions along-time stored in the back of our minds which usually engender dark thoughts, simulated by guilt and remorse. However, confessional writing should not be confused with writing about trauma, although sometimes the subjects overlap. Confessions are secrets that may not be connected to trauma; they could be secrets, passions or dreams (“Confession Is Good For the Soul: 7 Ways To Stimulate

Confessional Writing." *Psychalive*). While they are mostly known to be secrets, the degree of confession differs from a person to another. One can admit or confess his admiration for someone as a way to express a pleasant feeling of love and admiration. Whereas, in a different scheme of things, a person might confess a crime he committed. In this case, confession comes into play to express a deeper secret which is a murder, an awful feeling of regret and anguish. Therefore, similar to religious confession, expressive writing encourages individuals to explore their deepest thoughts and feelings about upsetting experiences. For such emotional purges to work, people must be completely honest with themselves ("Does Confessing Secrets Improve Our Mental Health?" *Scientific American*).

1.9. Confession and the Catholic Tradition

Originally confessions started a Judeo-Christian tradition, the acknowledgment of sinfulness in public or private, regarded as necessary to obtain divine forgiveness. Hence, the mission of the Old Testament prophets was to revive a sense of sinfulness and an acknowledgment of people's guilt. In tandem, Catholic doctrine came into full bloom in the sixth century to expand and clarify the sacrament (Stott 1974). The term confession expresses at the same time an affirmation of faith and recognition of the state of sin. In ancient Christianity, the confession of faith accompanies the renunciation of demons. The *Confessions*[10] of St. Augustine (c. AD 400) illustrate this dual theme. In a similar fashion, the ancient and primitive recognized that their sins unleash the anger of the gods. To counter the divine wrath, a Ewe, for example, throws a little bundle of twigs—which symbolizes the confessor's sins—into the air and says words symbolizing the deity's response, "All your sins

[10] The book tells of Augustine's restless youth and of the stormy spiritual voyage that had ended some 12 years before the writing in the haven of the Roman Catholic Church. In reality, the work is not so much autobiography as an exploration of the philosophical and emotional development of an individual soul. The Confessions broke entirely fresh ground as literature, and the genre of autobiography owes many of its characteristics to Augustine.

are forgiven you."(Hamman 2015) According to Karl Jaspers, the admission of sin cannot be explained only by anguish or by the feeling of guilt; it is also related to what is deepest in humans—i.e., to what constitutes their being and their action. Therefore, the awareness of sin is one of the salient features of religion.

1.9.1 The Confessional Tradition and Its Therapeutic Assets

The Confessional tradition is usually linked to the prevalent concept of confession Peccati[11]. Besides being a confession of sins, the therapeutic element in catholic confession is said to be the central purpose of confession. Carl Jung critically examines the suppositions of Catholic confession and psychotherapy. His article, "Psychotherapy and the Clergy" (1952), represented a composite of positive values of both disciplines. He concludes that: first, the Catholic Church possesses a rich instrument (in the form of confession) that can be utilised as a ready-made pastoral technique. Second, the Catholic form of penance serves as a source for immediate release of tension, however temporary. Third, the Catholic Church is rich in symbolism that appeals to the unconscious mind, and thereby makes it more accessible. As far as psychotherapy is concerned, for Jung, it involves no direct condemnation for any "bad behaviour." It is more objective and easier to handle because of its comparative simplicity and lack of ritualism. Finally, psychotherapy can speak to almost every person on some level or other. However, with confession's expansion from its rigorous and religious origins, it is still serving the exact same purpose through other mediums such as the medium writing.

[11] The Confession of Sins

Conclusion

As a summary, Aristotelian catharsis is an ambiguous concept that has been debated for centuries. Hence, in criticism, many interpretations were proposed in order to make sense of the term [catharsis]. Catharsis occurs when the two independent feelings of pity and fear are cleansed, and ultimately, caused by watching or reading a tragic story. Thus, confessional writing represents a form of healing when there is the recounting of tragic incidents that result catharsis, i.e. the release of the negative emotions. Not only for the confessional writer, but, as well as for the reader of these confessions.

There are copious examples of confessional writings that contribute in evoking pitiable and fearful emotions, which are then released and cleansed after the reader's exposure to tragic incidents that project a relatable experience for him or her typified in certain characters or the writer's own experience. Therefore, this autobiographical subgenre is used in sundry themes, and as a focal medium in the writings of many well-known literary titans which the next chapter will carefully illustrate.

Chapter Two:

The Confessional Tradition: Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905), and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession (1883)

Introduction

Confessional writing is considered therapeutic, not only for the writer of those confessions, but also for the reader. Therefore, throughout history, this originally religious rite was used in different literatures often in a form of candid confessions documented by the writer himself, such as, *Saint Augustine's Confessions*, which was written by Saint Augustine between 397 and 400 AD. In particular, confession is also prevalent as a central theme or as a subtheme in novels and short stories. In this respect, this chapter will introduce two different writers with two different stories that approach confession differently. The first work is a letter entitled 'De Profundis' (1905) by the Irish writer Oscar Wilde where he confesses his sins and his hedonistic life which inflicted a great pain upon him. Moreover, the second work is a short story called 'A Sister's Confession' (1883) penned by the renowned French writer Guy de Maupassant wherein the latter harnesses confession as a central theme. In this perspective, this chapter will highlight the time frame of the period when these works were written, providing a studied background that will help make sense of these selected works. Finally, this chapter delves into the thematic element of these designated works. Thus, it scrutinises and thoroughly examines the nature of the chosen materials in order to understand the historical context and the nuances that are noteworthy and relevant to this research.

2.1. Oscar Wilde's Downfall

2.1.1. Background

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854-1900) is an Irish poet and playwright born in Dublin of a prestigious family who knew the value of art and science. During the early 1890s, Wilde was recognised among his peers, and became one of the most popular playwrights in London. He is best remembered for his epigrams and plays, his only novel The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), and the circumstances of his criminal conviction for "gross indecency",

his fatal imprisonment, and his battle with meningitis which culminated in an early death at age 46.

In retrospect, at the zenith of his fame and success, in a time when The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) was still being performed in London, Wilde had the Marquess of Queensberry prosecuted for criminal libel (Harris 1916: Holland 2004). The Marquess was the father of Wilde's close friend, Lord Alfred Douglas whom he was rumoured to be more than a close friend. Therefrom, unlike this day and age, the Victorian Era's attitude on intimate same-sex relationships was ostensibly hostile and severe. Nineteenth century Britain was vehemently against such practice, which it deemed it as gross indecency, and more or less as a mental illness (Blakemore 2018). Therefore, homosexuals during the Victorian age were to be hung for such an unlawful act according to the Offences Against the Person Act (1828). According to Erin Blackemore, homosexuality was considered to be a disease, and was treated by psychiatrists through hypnosis in order to reverse it. The libel trial uncovered evidence that caused Wilde to drop his charges and led to his own arrest and trial for gross indecency with men. After two more trials, and after reaching a verdict, he was convicted and sentenced to two years' hard labour, the maximum penalty, and was jailed from 1895 to 1897.

2.1.2. During Imprisonment

Wilde first entered Newgate Prison in London for processing, and then was moved to Pentonville Prison, where the "hard labour" to which he had been sentenced consisted of many hours of walking a treadmill and picking oakum. A few months later he was moved to Wandsworth Prison in London where the regimen of "hard labour, hard fare and a hard bed" was applied on inmates, the latter aggravatingly affected Wilde's delicate health. Five months after, Wilde arrived at Reading Gaol, where he was able to write for the first time since his

imprisonment. However, Oscar Wilde's health was increasingly deteriorating because of the harsh conditions in prison: the hard labour, manual labour, and poor food which he endured, thus he quickly began suffering from hunger, insomnia, and disease (Ellman 1988). Wilde was not, at first, even allowed paper and pen but Richard Haldane, who was a liberal and who championed Wilde's case, eventually succeeded in allowing him access to books and writing materials. Suffered from his close supervision, physical labour, and emotional isolation, Wilde usurped the opportunity to write again and showcased his experience in prison. Major Nelson, a new prison governor, thought that writing might be more *cathartic* than prison labour, and treated him with respect and provided him with writing and reading materials (Belford 2000). Since contact between Wilde and Douglas lapsed, Wilde decided to write a letter which he entitled Epistola: In Carcere et Virculis ("Letter: In Prison and in Chains"), then it was later published posthumously in part in 1905 by his literary executor and friend, Robert Ross, and in full in 1962 under the title De Profundis[14] ("From the Depths"). Nelson gave the long letter to him on his release on 18 May 1897 (Ellmann 467). While writing De Profundis, Wilde was working on The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898), a poem that commemorated the harshness and bitterness of prison life and system which he published anonymously and signed 'C.3.3.'[15]In his exile to France, he spent the rest of his remaining life living on the charity of friends under the pseudonym Sebstian Melmoth (Hart-Davis 813). In his semiconscious final moments, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, which he had long admired (Beckson 2019). In 1900, he died of cerebral meningitis at the Hotel D'Alsace, and buried at Cimetière Parisien de Bagneux in Paris.

[14]The title, meaning "from the depths", comes from Psalm 130, "From the depths, I have cried out to you, O Lord"
[15]Wilde's cell number at Reading Gaol prison.

2.2. Epistola: In Carcere Et Virculis: De Profundis by Oscar Wilde (1905-1962)

2.2.1. Overview

Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905) is a long letter written at Reading Gaol prison. It consists of 50,000 words in total. It is considered to be a confessional account of his life in an autobiographical fashion (Kail 141; Ellmann 510) where it represents a bitter and eloquent reproach to Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie) who is a close friend to Oscar Wilde and who was believed to be his companion and lover. The intense relationship they had was hardly discreet and was deemed extremely unconventional during the Victorian age. Often, De Profundis is perceived as a love letter, but it actually exceeds this confining objective. The letter was, in fact, a recrimination, and an artistic indictment addressed to Douglas. In it, Wilde accuses Douglas of shallowness, selfishness, greed, and for being 'the absolute ruin' of his art (DP.7) and proceeds to mention other faults and wrongdoings. De Profundis traces the spiritual growth that Wilde experienced tangibly in prison. After losing everything he holds dear (DP.36), Wilde transforms his hardship into art. While the letter is a poignant *cri de coeur* that offers fascinating insights into Wilde's life in prison and confessions into an artful piece, with its eloquence, passion, and literary excellence, it serves as a universal statement about love, injustice and the importance of suffering in one's life. In addition, it is a curious document: part apologia, part aesthetic discourse, part religious testimonial, part retort to religion, it simply is a profound and inspiring treatise on the meaning of suffering. In short, De Profundis typifies a record of a modern tragedy of an artist's descent from fame to infamy which strangely, spiritually marks his rise due to self-revelation.

2.2.2. Themes

- **Tragedy**

A tragedy in its traditional sense is usually defined as an event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe ("Tragedy"). Thus, tragedy is a major theme in De Profundis. In this letter, Wilde begins by addressing that his 'ill-fated and most lamentable friendship has ended in ruin and public infamy for me' (DP.3). For that, the latter offers an autobiographical account of an artist's tragedy written by the tragic hero himself in prison and who once was in the pedestal of fame (Ellmann 510). Oscar Wilde's tragedy is distinctly personal where it begins with him standing in the pillory of public contempt and humiliation, resulting in his imprisonment and falling from grace because of his miscalculated actions, lack of logic, and weaknesses, such as, namely devoting his time to Bosie who was, more or less, the absolute ruin of his art. The like of which happens to every hero in a tragedy, Oscar Wilde states 'I also had my illusions. I thought life was going to be a brilliant comedy...I found it to be a revolting and repellent tragedy.'(DP.29). In addition, he gives a detailed description of the reasons that were behind his downfall, and ultimately his self-created tragedy stemmed from his toxic relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas which culminated in his trial, his imprisonment, and public derision.

- **Confession and Epiphany**

Oscar Wilde's confession in De Profundis manifests itself in the unfiltered descriptions of his past life. The latter were expressed in a querulous tone against his close friend Bosie whom he was involved with in an unusual relationship that was a leading cause to his downfall and decay, not only as a well-known figure, but as an artist. Thus, he contends that

‘the sins of another were being placed to my account. Had I so chosen, I could on either trial have saved myself at his expense, not from shame indeed, but from imprisonment’ (DP.37). Deliberately, Oscar Wilde confesses his sins against art but he never admits his guilt or sin against God or society. Wilde acknowledges that crimes against art can be committed only by an artist. According to him, ‘sins of the flesh are nothing. They are maladies for physicians to cure, if they should be cured.’(DP.38). However, the letter delves into the effects of pain and suffering on Oscar Wilde while in prison. Albeit, he reflects that on his past and namely his actions that made him stand in humility. He confesses his hedonistic pleasures that blinded him and grew his vanity; Wilde writes ‘I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a flâneur, a dandy, a man of fashion.’(DP 56) Evidently, confession plays an important role in Wilde’s self-reflection and self-revelation. By adopting a philosophy of truth during his dire situation, Wilde granted himself internal peace.

As a result of his imprisonment, Wilde elaborated on a new philosophy that he started harbouring. Therefore, De Profundis is an attempt to find a way of rationalising his suffering. "Where there is sorrow there is holy ground," (DP 47) Wilde writes, paraphrasing a stanza from Goethe that his mother used to recite. In addition, Wilde showcases a sort of epiphanic attitude when it comes to life and how he used to live it (DP 57). Thus, he offers a plethora of analogies of his past life, and what he wishes to change when he would get exonerated. Wilde expresses his new view on art, and how suffering is a vital element that his art was lacking (DP 57). Moreover, the letter accentuates the importance of leading by love and not hate (DP 39), similarly to Christ, whom Wilde considered to be a role model, and a mollifying thought that palliated the dire predicaments in prison, and namely his tragedy. For him, Christ ‘treated worldly success as a thing absolutely to be despised. He saw nothing in it at all. He looked on wealth as an encumbrance to a man. He would not hear of life being sacrificed to any system

of thought or morals' (DP 81). As a result, Oscar Wilde's epiphany is indicated as a spiritual revelation ushering him to his new intended path, or rather a Christ-like path. The latter alludes to his new mystic views (DP. 111).

2.3. Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession (1883)

2.3.1. The Influence of Religion on French Literature

Religion in 18th and 19th Century France

During the age of Enlightenment in the 18th century, questions of Christian theology were the great issues that divided opinion in France, as in the rest of Europe; but from the 18th century on, in France as elsewhere in Europe, thinkers of the Enlightenment moved the arguments on to new areas, replacing arguments about which form of religion was best, with discussions about the nature of man, the nature of authority, and of society. Yet, the discussions of the Enlightenment were themselves born out of the great debates about religion that began with Martin Luther and the Protestant schism. The great French thinkers of the Enlightenment, Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire and others, were all products of the Christian culture into which they were born. Even Voltaire, frequently cited for his attacks on religion, was not an atheist. He was a "theist", who came to believe that religion was an intensely personal matter not something to be organised by churches.

For most of the past thousand years, France was considered to be one of the principal "Catholic" countries of Europe. From the time of Charlemagne until the emergence of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, France was one of the main powers in a continent where Catholicism was the only mainstream form of Christianity. After that, most of France, and particularly the French monarchy, maintained the Catholic faith while many other parts of Europe, including England, Switzerland, the Low Countries, and much of Germany and

Scandinavia, adopted differing forms of Protestantism. After the French Revolution in 1789, religion in France was brought under state control, discouraged as anti-revolutionary, and monastic orders were abolished. But in 1801, Napoleon signed a Concordat with the Vatican, which restored much of the church's former status. For most of the nineteenth century, France was officially a Catholic country; but in 1905 the landmark law was passed, establishing the Separation of the State and the Church[16].

The Revolution's attempt to replace Christian culture with a new revolutionary culture, failed, and Catholicism - or reactions against it - dominated French art, literature, and music in the nineteenth century. While religion itself was not the theme of much major painting or literature (though plenty of minor works), it did inspire many of the 19th century France's great composers, notably Fauré, César Franck, Widor or Berlioz, who wrote major works of sacred music. In literature, Balzac, one of the century's greatest novelist, was strongly marked by his Christian culture. His portrayal of life in nineteenth century France, la Comédie Humaine (1847) is that of life in a profoundly Catholic national tradition. In addition, Maupassant, the greatest writer short stories and naturalist, despite his despise to religion, he harnessed religious culture in many of his writings, and actually dedicated a collection of short stories and tales of Religion that includes 'Theodule Sabot's Confession' (1883), 'The Marquis De Fumerol' (1886), 'My Uncle Sosthènes' (1882)), 'Legend of Mont St. Michel', and 'Father Matthew' (1885).

[16] Also known as the Law of 1905 which formally sealed the the separation between Church and State The hindmost marked the beginning of so-called French secularism, which proclaimed the freedom of conscience and guaranteed the freedom to practice religion.

2.4. Guy de Maupassant (1854-1896)

One of the most venerated French storywriters is Guy de Maupassant, a master of the objective short story. Basically, Maupassant's stories are anecdotes that capture a revealing moment in the lives of middle class citizens. The latter are typically recounted in a well-plotted design, though perhaps in some stories like "Boule de suif" (1880; "Ball of Tallow") and "The Necklace" (1881) the plot is contrived, the reversing irony too neat, and the artifice is apparent. In other stories, like "The House of Madame Tellier" (1881) *La Confession*/A Sister's Confession (1883), Maupassant's easy and fluid prose captures the innocence and the corruption of human behaviour. Most of his stories come from a naturalistic perspective. Thus, tragedy is a very ubiquitous theme in his writings. Maupassant represents life in a very gloomy way, yet gives a gleam of hope implicitly without romanticism.

2.5. A Sister's Confession (1883)

2.5.1. Overview

A Sister's Confession is a short story written in 1883 and was included in Maupassant's famous collection of short stories called *'Contes du jour et de la nuit'* (1885). The latter composes of one of his masterpieces, *'La Parure'* or 'The Necklace' (1884). In A Sister's Confession, Maupassant dabbles into the human behaviour, contrasting innocence and guilt, morality and iniquity, gravitas and light-heartedness. Maupassant gracefully paints a story of two sisters, Marguerite de Thérelles who is fifty six years old, bedridden, and dying. Suzanne, her older sister, sixty-two, is at her bedside. The two sisters have lived together forever, Suzanne had been engaged, but the man, whose name is Henry, suddenly died shortly before the marriage and Marguerite had then sworn to her older sister that they would never separate, even if it meant not marrying. She had kept her word. Even though, a profound sadness that

stems from regret of an internal evil disturbed her throughout her life, she even ‘had aged earlier than her sister’ (1). However, such decision was a consequence of a horrid and an indelible past. Therefore, the story, through Marguerite’s last words, offers context into Marguerite past, in order to make a truce with the unbearable present of hers as she seemed miserably ill in her deathbed. Therefore, in a form of a candid confession before God, her sister, and the priest, Marguerite confesses to her sister of what she did to her fiancé when she was only twelve years old. In this respect, Maupassant captures a tragic story exposing naturalistic and dehumanising states of human behaviour.

2.5.2. Themes

- **Jealousy**

During the nineteenth century, French literature characterised with an obsession with jealousy. Virtually, every major French novelist employed it as a central plot device. At the same time, jealousy became a key theme for a broad range of medical, journalistic, and moralist authors interested in the study of contemporary mores (Belenky 2008). Maupassant’s use of this theme in this story is thoroughly examined since most of his writings channel the realities of ordinary French people, thus propounding an emphasis on the middle class. Masha Belenky argues that it was through narratives of jealousy that French writers grappled with the crises of political and moral authority, anxieties surrounding changing gender roles, and new ideas about marriage that defined post-Revolutionary France. Therefore, in A Sister’s Confession, the young sister Marguerite develops feelings for her sister’s fiancé Henry de Sampierre. Marguerite hostility against her sister Suzanne and abhorrence against Henry grew stronger after knowing that the two were going to get married. Thus, she proclaims:

> Je vous ai vus ; j'étais là, dans le massif. J'ai eu une rage ! Si j'avais pu, je vous aurais tués !
>
> Je me suis dit : Il n'épousera pas Suzanne, jamais ! Il n'épousera personne. Je serais trop malheureuse... Et tout d'un coup je me suis mise à le haïr affreusement. (283)
>
> I had seen you two; I was there, in the shrubbery. I was angry! If I could I should have killed you both! I said to myself: 'He shall not marry Suzanne, never! He shall marry no one. I should be too unhappy.' And all of a sudden I began to hate him dreadfully. (4)

Marguerite's belligerent behaviour and attitude towards her sister's relationship stems from jealousy, consequently, she recounts the incident that happened when she was young, she reveals her dark secret which she had been keeping for so long. Maupassant's simple and pithy style of description professes and indicates Marguerite's reason of killing her sister's fiancé that of which was motivated by none other than jealousy, as she pronounces clearly her motive 'I was jealous, jealous! The moment of thy marriage approached. There were only two weeks more. I became crazy. I said to myself: 'He shall not marry Suzanne, no, I will not have it! It is I whom he will marry when I am grown up. I shall never find anyone whom I love so much.' (4). Hence, jealousy was used to project and depict an impressionistic tableau for social and cultural debates in the decades, not only between the French Revolution's radical challenge to religious and political authority, but most importantly to the advent of psychoanalysis at the century's end (Belenky 2012).

- **Tragedy**

Tragedy is a recurrent theme in the French novel and short story in the nineteenth century. Thus, Maupassant's naturalistic views involve the use of significant details to indicate the neuroses and vicious desires masked by everyday appearances (Robinson, et al 2019). In many of his short stories, Guy de Maupassant's pessimism is pervasively apparent. It appears

clearly in this short story that deals with pessimistic events and emotions where his characters fall victims of ironic necessity that of madness or some other tragic events (Khun 2016). The tragedy in A Sister's Confession is linked to an appalling event that happened in the past. Furthermore, this tragic event is unravelled to be a murder which was driven by jealousy, and is typified in Marguerite poisoning her sister's fiancé:

> J'ai pris chez maman une petite bouteille de pharmacien, je l'ai broyée avec un marteau, et j'ai caché le verre dans ma poche. C'était une poudre brillante... Le lendemain, comme tu venais de faire les petits gâteaux, je les ai fendus avec un couteau et j'ai mis le verre dedans... Il en a mangé trois... moi aussi, j'en ai mangé un... J'ai jeté les six autres dans l'étang... les deux cygnes sont morts trois jours après... Tu te le rappelles ?...(284)
>
> I took a little medicine bottle that mamma had; I broke it small with a hammer, and I hid the glass in my pocket. It was a shining powder ... The next day, as soon as you had made the little cakes ... I split them with a knife and I put in the glass ... He ate three of them ... I too, I ate one ... I threw the other six into the pond. The two swans died three days after ... Dost thou remember? (5)

Relative to the context of the story, Marguerite confesses her err and hateful crime to her sister Suzanne as she was rasping her last sour breath. In addition, in European traditions swans are usually associated with fidelity, loyalty in marriage, and monogamy, because they mate for life (Andrews 1993, I Corinthians 7:10). Hence, killing the two swans is a symbolism of killing love, prosperity, and namely, ending a potential marriage in a very tragic manner. The latter happens to be prohibited in Christianity. In relation to the story, Marguerite's intention of killing Henry culminates in success, even though she ate from the same deadly cake he ate from, she does not die. However, her guilt and dark secret were a constant alarm to her during her lifetime. Generally speaking, Maupassant's brand of pessimism depicts social awareness and inspires social change by provoking the very malign strand in human beings.

- **Confession**

Confession is often attributed to religion, specifically to Catholicism. Therefrom, France, despite the wave of Positivism in the country during the 19th century, was still considered to be Catholic. Thus, religion remained present in society and was harnessed in different forms of art, namely in literature where many writers, such as Maupassant, Dumas, and others, used some of its aspects to represent their society and beliefs. Relatively, one of the major themes in the story is 'confession', hence the title. The story starts with a gloomy and despondent setting in an apartment where Marguerite, a fifty-six year old woman is dying, and beside her bed was her old sister Suzanne who is sixty-two. Marguerite was extremely ill and was ready to summon a priest at her deathbed to confess for her sins. According to Catholicism rites, Extreme Unction is the name given to Anointing of the Sick when received during last rites. Anointing of the Sick is generally accompanied by celebration of the sacraments of Penance (confessing one's sins) and Viaticum (Holy Communion). Many Christians, most notably Catholics, believe that sins must be confessed to a priest before death. The priest can then absolve the dying of their sins, so that they can be properly prepared for the afterlife. This confession may help alleviate any guilt, regret, secret, or sin the dying person may have had in their life (Taylor 2012). Maupassant seems to be conversant with the Last Rites in Catholicism, he accurately describes the desolate setting where the story takes place (an apartment) to possess a 'sinister aspect, that air of hopeless farewells' where 'the priest being momentarily expected to give extreme unction and the communion, which should be the last.'(2) Moreover, a major part of the story is Marguerite's penance of her wrongful doing against her sister Suzanne which, more or less, represents the plot twist and the climax of the story. Thus, it nominates 'confession' a central theme of the story. In short, Maupassant typifies sorrow and death in the most tangible form through a poignant scene of a sister's confession in deathbed.

- **Sisterhood**

A theme that is almost inevitable to ignore or dismiss throughout the story is sisterhood. Maupassant, via the characters of Marguerite and Suzanne, offers a thorough examination of a relationship that is, for the most part, based on love, forgiveness and sacrifice, but which also holds an underlying uncommunicative dark secret that has been carried along for an extended period of time. On that account, the twelve year old Marguerite pledges "Big Sister, I do not want thee to be unhappy. I do not want thee to cry all thy life. I will never leave thee, never, never! I — I, too, shall never marry. I shall stay with thee always, always, always!"(1). Essentially, the sacrifice made by Marguerite was to never marry and remain close to her sister who lost her fiancé as a result of poison. The latter, still showcases a level of solidarity and unison, regardless of the latent motives and uncontrollable necessities. Having said that, as the story unfolds, the dark secret is confessed in front of Suzanne and the priest, where marguerite admits of killing Henry (Suzanne's fiancé). Hence, Marguerite's life 'seemed afflicted by some secret, gnawing trouble. Now she was to be the first to die.'(2), at her deathbed, she confesses to her sister and asks for forgiveness, as she states, 'I am going to die ... I want you to forgive me' (5). Moreover, despite the pain and anguish that was inflicted on her by her sister, Suzanne chooses to forgive Marguerite who was in her semiconscious state. Ultimately, Maupassant ends the story with a powerful and poignant line which is "I forgive thee, I forgive thee, Little One.". The sisterly love between the characters is indelible and immutable; it is simultaneously intense and dramatic in the story. Therefore, Maupassant's depiction of sisterhood is highly profound. He uses the character of Suzanne resorts to love and forgiveness rather than hostility that she was treated with in the past by her sister.

Conclusion

To conclude, the selected works represent confessional writing from two divergent perspectives. First, in a form of a personal experience and as a self-reflective journey expressed through the devastating story of Oscar Wilde throughout his poignant letter *De Profundis*. Oscar Wilde resorts to confession and spirituality stimulating by that a level of self-awareness and mysticism. Second, as a focal theme, it was depicted through the characters' experience, and was expressed in Guy de Maupassant's *A Sister's Confession.* Furthermore, the writing of confessions is a personal, and an intimate articulated blather in quest of reaching a certain outcome, or a way of healing from a psychological affliction. On that account, healing through confession alludes to the notion of purgation through art. In this connection, Confessional Writing can be said to be a form of catharsis to the reader and the writer. Hence, Catharsis is strongly relative to the predominant idea of confessing someone's sin or secret. This feeling is shared and present in those works, and will be scrutinised in the next chapter.

Chapter Three:

Cathartic Confessional Writings:

De Profundis (1905) and A Sister’s Confession (1883)

Introduction

The term ‘Catharsis’ is often pervasive in drama, and is used in relation to Aristotle’s work *Poetics*. However, in its modern usage, the cathartic effects can surpass and exist in many forms of art and literary genres, such as prose and poetry. This chapter will attempt to illustrate the cathartic aspects in confessional writings by offering a thorough description of the relation between tragedy and confessional writing. Ultimately, this final chapter will delve into Oscar Wilde’s De Profundis (1905) and Guy de Maupassant’s A Sister’s Confession’s (1883) cathartic quality for the readers, and studies their relevance to Aristotelian catharsis by accentuating on their common point of tragedy. Finally, this chapter will provide an understanding of the cathartic experience that is shared between the reader and writer of confessions.

3.1. Cathartic Aspects in Confessional Writings

The cathartic and healing effects are prevalent in many forms, and can be achieved through a psychological process that is formally applied to reach a purgative impact on individuals. Be that as it may, one cannot mention catharsis without alluding to Aristotelian catharsis and his theory about the purification of negative emotions when beholding a tragedy or listening to music. Correspondingly, confessions appear to offer a similar effect that transmutes into the same result, that of ‘healing’. In the words of Freud:

> The form of deploring and giving vent to the torments of the secret (confession) is in itself an adequate reflex. If such reaction does not result through deeds, words, or in the lightest case through weeping, the memory of the occurrence retains above all the affective accentuation. (6)

Freud contends that in other cases talking in the form of venting the torments of one's secrets is in itself a form of expression to eschew an unreasonable reaction and that happens via confession. Freud goes on to assert that, 'the reaction of the person injured to the trauma has really no perfect "cathartic" effect unless it is an adequate reaction like revenge. But man finds a substitute for this action in speech through which helps the affect can well-nigh be "ab-reacted" (*abreagirt)*[17]' (5). Nonetheless, since the understanding of catharsis is commonly debated in psychology, this view is open to different interpretations despite its remarkable effects in psychotherapy (Stein 2011).

In other words, even though Freud's main focus was on speech as a means of discharging and purging negative emotions through confession, this still can be applied to writing. By putting emotional turmoil into words, one's perspective will most likely be altered. Thus, when giving a concrete form to secret experiences, the latter will help categorise and designate them in new possible ways. For instance, when certain emotional experiences are translated into concrete forms (written words and stories), the scope of these concerns start to embrace a simpler, and a less menacing context (Pennebaker 2016). Confessional writing is sometimes viewed as a memoir. Critics are usually inclined to the idea that of its equivalence to a selfie, and to a certain degree, a narcissistic practice that is inscribed in the very word 'memoir': me-moi (Morrison 2015). While there is limit to what one can share, the value of confession goes beyond this patronising description. The genre has a long history starting by Ovid's Amores, St. Augustine's Confessions, Rousseau, De Quincey, and American poets such as: Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and John Berryman. Therefore, when a writer confesses a sin, shortcomings, and dark secrets through his or her writings, whether in a

[17] The German *abreagiren* has no exact English equivalent. It was therefore rendered " ab-react," by Abraham Bill in his translation of the book (1909), he elucidates that the literal meaning is to react away from or to react off. It has different shades of meaning, from defence reaction to emotional catharsis, which can be discerned from the context.

direct or indirect form, it remains a personal and intimate work of art: 1) Because of its utility, 2) and because of its emotional and artistic value for the artist.

Nevertheless, it is vital to include that the purging experience is formally and simultaneously shared between the reader and the writer, likewise, a tragedy's gist of cathartic experience is shared between the spectator and the tragedian (Stroud 2019). Namely, stemming from the fact that the cathartic effect is stimulated and aroused via the triggering of pity and fear by the writer, who through his/her confession or the recounting of tragic incidents brings about: purgation, clarification, purification, and tempering of negative emotions. Consequently, the writer and reader are cleansed from their negative emotions due to the shared or separate cathartic experience. Hence, catharsis and confession, for the most part, coincide in their healing linkage. Despite the fact that catharsis is a term that is often found in drama, its applicability in prose is highly functional (Hathaway 298).

Furthermore, the cathartic experience is realised differently when reading confessional writings. As a part of the power of vicariousness, the reader feels as if he or she is being elsewhere (in another time or place, experiencing the world through the eyes of strangers (Kearney 52). On that account, such experience is expressed and indicated by many renowned writers, such as, Shakespeare. The latter spoke of the wisdom which comes from exposing ourselves, he said, 'expose thyself to feel what wretches feel' (35). Therefore, in confessional writings, the author recounts personal struggles or the suffering of a fictitious character that he or she has created vicariously, which appeal to the 'human sufferer' (Adam 71) that resides in every human being. Those confessions set forth an imitation of triggering experiences that stimulate certain feelings such as, pity and fear. The latter contribute in the cleansing and moderation of these negative emotions for the reader.

3.2. Catharsis in De Profundis (1905)

Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905) holds an account of an artist's past hedonistic life. Penned in remorseful and querulous fashion, De Profundis is a long confession made by Oscar Wilde in order to reach a state of clarity and awareness about his life and struggle in prison. This dramatic element is present in this poignant and self-reflective letter. In it, he stands as the fallen hero in his own tragedy. According to Aristotle, in his definition of a tragedy, he stresses that it is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, and that happens through evoking pity and fear of the spectators. Therefore, it results in the proper purgation [katharsis] of these negative emotions (26). However, in Wilde's tragedy, the imitation is present, but it is not a stylistic choice. It is rather a genuine depiction of what happened to the hero of the tragedy, who is in this case Oscar Wilde. In other words, Wilde is the author of his own tragedy (Kail 142). The power of tragedy seems to be something that can affect the young and old, educated and uneducated. Since Aristotle proclaims that the imitation of an action in a tragedy, by means of the fear and pity it makes us feel, ends in a cleansing of feelings of that sort, which leaves us to ask demandingly, is Wilde's tragedy cathartic?

So far as the moral nature of tragedy is concerned, Wilde's tragedy is an overt scene that contains an artist's descent from fame to infamy. What makes Wilde's tragedy cathartic is the very nature of it. He recounts his past actions that were the main cause of his downfall, he then clarifies them. He confesses of what he inflicted upon himself and took accountability of what has befallen him as he addresses Bosie:

> I must say to myself that neither you nor your father, multiplied a thousand times over, could possibly have ruined a man like me: that I ruined myself and that nobody, great or small, can be ruined except by his own hand. (55)

In the form of confession, Wilde endeavours to rationalise his suffering, 'now that I realise that it is in me, I see quite clearly what I have to do' (57) he asserts, as he prepares himself to seek for a 'mode of self-realisation'. He realised that 'the secret of life is suffering' (66). Despite the hard conditions in prison for Wilde, and the predicament that he had to endure as a ramification of his behaviour, it was both a humbling and hellish experience. As the tragic hero of his tragedy, he embraced his existing condition. However, as an artist, Wilde harnesses his suffering to reach a mollifying ending to his tragedy. In his letter he writes, acknowledging his sufferings, 'I could not bear them without meaning…nothing in the whole world is meaningless and suffering least of all' (57).

From a reader's perspective, when reading the story of an artist who once stood in symbolic relation with the art and culture of his age, and who wrote and knitted one of the most refined works of literature in the most sophisticated mellifluous style, has fallen out to become a pariah, a man of no importance in a cell that is surrounded with nothing but walls. Such story is considered to be a sad and tragic one. If we were to fictionalise Wilde's life, the reader might even see himself or herself in the character of Wilde, for it imitates a reality that the reader might have experienced or one that he or she is sensible of. Because of mimesis, the reader ought to experience a state of catharsis when reading a tragedy of that sort, in this particular condition where pity and fear are moderated or cleansed.

In other words, despite the fact that it is a subjective experience, the reader experiences catharsis when he or she are affected by the tragic hero (character) and the story (plot), for they are the central elements in a tragedy according to Aristotle (Poetics, 31). Therefore, in De Profundis, through the confessional account of Wilde in his self-inflicted tragedy, the reader is provided by a unity of moderated feelings, clarifying by that the negative emotions that are confronted when reading this letter. Moreover, Wilde's recount of his sufferings and

hardship in prison appeal to 'the human sufferer' in us readers. In chapter five of A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man (1916), James Joyce elucidates this point in the following passage:

> Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause. (204)

Aristotle believed that the end of tragedy is to please; however, teaching may be the by-product of it. With the benefit of hindsight, Wilde's self-realisation and epiphany typifies the end of his tragedy. Wilde remembers his trial that led to his imprisonment (1895-1897), and how it made him feel as he wrings his hands in impotent despair and says 'What an ending! What an appalling ending!' marking his ruin and 'repellent tragedy'. After writing De Profundis and rationalising his suffering, he writes in a hopeful tone 'What a beginning! What a wonderful beginning!' (DP 85). On yet another level, Wilde tragedy is what Aristotle aimed to explain in *Poetics*. He spoke of the beauty of tragedy and its healing objective (Else 188-9). Thus, this claim makes Wilde's tragedy a healthy one. Such pleasing is superior to the other pleasures because it teaches civic morality.

3.2.1. Discussion

Wilde is a hero of a tragedy he put himself into, a self-inflected pain caused by a lack of logic and rationality caused him his career and reputability. When Aristotle pinpointed the characteristics of a tragedy, he asserted that the hero should be neither of an especially good character nor of an especially bad character, but somewhere in between these two extremes (Poetics 37), the latter position contributes in the tempering and moderation of negative feelings of the spectators/readers. Wilde appears to fit in this description, even though he is a non-conventional tragic hero. Often misunderstood and misquoted, Oscar Wilde fame was a

result of his wit and genius. However, like any other human being, as an artist he was not exempted from wrongful doings or from punishment. His infamy and downfall was caused by himself. And like any tragic hero, Wilde was once in a pedestal, he then found himself in the lowest and most ostracised form in a society that cheered for him in his golden days, but shouted and cursed at him with the most malign words when he stood in shame and public contempt.

Through the exigent reading and understanding the life of Oscar Wilde as a human being and as an artist, one cannot spot the difference between the two. Wilde has lived life fully. He devoted himself to art and lived up to his works. In relation, in the only novel written by Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) represents the mind of Wilde, more or less, his personality intermingles with that of Dorian. Wilde once wrote in one of his letters, 'Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be — in other ages, perhaps' (352). Dorian is characterized by his evasiveness and his obsession with *objets d'art*. For example, when Basil comes to console him about Sibyl's death, he is unwilling to discuss the matter. He does not want to admit the possibility that his behaviour was reprehensible:

> I must admit that this thing that has happened does not affect me as it should. It seems to me simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded. (100)

Hence, Dorian personifies a conflict between Dionysian and Apollonian elements particularly fascinating to his creator (Dawson 2007). Similarly to Wilde, Dorian Gray avoids becoming involved with any experience for fear of it causing him possible pain (DP 57). This suggests that his behaviour symbolizes Wilde's unconscious (i.e. unacknowledged) attitudes. The novel offers many unconventional notions that caused a controversy in decadent era

during the Victorian age such as: homosexuality, dandyism, aestheticism, and hedonism. Therefore, the novel propounded the mind set of Wilde, who once understood life from one side and ignored the other half (DP 68). In other words, his utopian world burdened him from seeing the dystopian world that constitutes of 'suffering'.

Suffering seemed to be foreign for Wilde until his imprisonment, where he was coerced to hard labour, which was something that he had never experienced or done before. Wilde in De Profundis, speaks of suffering as a purifying act, something he lacked along with Humility (57). Therefore, the value of this letter exceeds the confining objective that of a 'love letter'. It is a confession that Wilde was eager to let out, not only for a reasonable necessity, but to find his soul. More explicitly, after writing his confession, he wrote to his friend More Adley:

> It is the most important letter of my life, as it will deal ultimately with my future mental attitude towards life, with the way in which I desire to meet the world again, with the development of my character: with what I have lost, what I have learned, and what I hope to arrive at. At last I see a real goal towards which my soul can go simply, naturally, and rightly. (Hart-Davis 419)

Although Wilde does not narrate in his confession an elaborate scene of self-discovery or a dramatic moment of revelation such as we find in the confessions of Augustine or Bunyan, there is a conversion in De Profundis that is central to Wilde's confession and his plans for a vita nuova[18]. This revival of wanting to live anew in Wilde's letter calls for a moral lesson. He was able to flip the unpleasant narrative, that of prison, by thinking about the future and planning to live life with a new philosophy, an honest philosophy[19].

His evaluation of his former life and his acceptance of all its experiences led him to the "discovery" of De Profundis, and the counterpoint of the hero before the fall, an earned sense

[18] Wilde determined for a new life is a result of his conversion to become like Christ who he considered to be a poet who understood life better than anyone alive. (pp.57-72)
[19] A part of David Hume's philosophy in his essay entitled *Philosophical Honesty.*

of humility. Humility becomes the focal point of Wilde's conversion in art and in life: ‘It is the last thing left in me, and the best: the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived: the starting-point for a fresh development’ (57). By adopting a philosophy of truth, our philosophical investigations will ultimately involve one's identity, one's sense of self. This should come as no surprise, since philosophy in the Western European tradition has always been heavily inflected by introspection, such as, Socrates' emphasis on ‘knowing himself,’ Augustine's Confessions, Descartes' cogito, Kant's Apperception. Wilde discovers what he has shunned and stood indifferently to: ‘the other half of the garden’ (DP 68). Therefore, his alteration alludes to an epiphany that was experienced by Wilde while philosophising his sufferings in prison. Knowingly, Wilde let out of all the negative feelings that he stored, in order to reach a state of awareness where he is healed from them by confrontation. The latter is experienced by the readers as well. Since it evokes negative emotions, such as pity and fear, they are distilled into a healing brew (e.i. catharsis). The reader is predominately partaking in the tragedy, and simultaneously experiencing a moderation of his or her negative emotions which is known as Catharsis.

3.4. Catharsis in A Sister’s Confession (1883)

A tragedy in its strictest sense cannot have a happy ending, for that a happy ending is reserved solely to comedy. Instead, it ends with a tragic resolution that usually bears a moral lesson (Kruse 164). Meanwhile, tragedy, for the most part, is inevitably a stylistic choice that aims at reaching a cathartic effect by evoking pity towards the character and fear for others. It namely occurs in drama, as well as, novels, poetry, and short stories. A suitable example of this effect is Guy de Maupassant’s A Sister’s Confession which is a naturalistic short story written in 1883. A Sister’s Confession tells the story of two characters, Marguerite and

Suzanne. More succinctly, it represents a tragedy that is revealed through the confession of the tragic hero. Therefore, in order to understand its cathartic effect, it is vital to comprehend the several dimensions of the story and its multi-layered nature. First, as a naturalistic short story, and second as a tragedy that possesses a healing effect of catharsis via confession.

As a naturalist short story, *A Sister's Confession* typifies the pessimistic brand of naturalism. Maupassant is often referred to as a dark and pessimist author (Kuhn 9), his writings are usually categorized simply as gloomy, grotesque, and dark (Dufour-Maître, Naugrette 220). However, Firmin Roz illustrates Maupassant's pessimism through patterns in Maupassant's writings. Maupassant is cruel to his heroes: his pessimism includes unfavourable human struggles such as disease, madness, and death. For example, Roz notes that Maupassant's writings possess a haunting thought of loss, death, or some sort of unsatisfied ending (9806). In A Sister's Confession, the author wields the emotions of the readers by introducing a repellent introduction of a woman named Marguerite dying on her bed as he begins the story with the first following lines:

> Marguerite de Thérelles allait mourir. Bien qu'elle n'eût que cinquante et six ans, elle en paraissait au moins soixante et quinze. Elle haletait, plus pâle que ses draps, secouée de frissons épouvantables, la figure convulsée, l'œil hagard, comme si une chose horrible lui eût apparu. (276)
>
> Marguerite de Thérelles was dying. Although but fifty-six, she seemed like seventy-five at least. She panted, paler than the sheets, shaken by dreadful shiverings, her face convulsed, her eyes haggard, as if she had seen some horrible thing. (1)

Maupassant brings the readers' attention to this unpleasant situation that of death. He gives adequate description of agonising moments of the protagonist character Marguerite. In the story, Marguerite lives with her sister Suzanne who is older than her, both unmarried because of a particular tragic event that happened in the past. With this nonlinear narrative, Maupassant conceptualises the reader's perception of the character that is presented in the

first lines. In contradiction, being a naturalist story, the short story offers a philosophical standpoint of 'ends and means'. However, Maupassant, generally, envisaged existence as meaningless chaos, man as victim of inexplicable forces and death as total extinction (Lock 74). Maupassant continues to provide background for his character. He invokes the element of shock by describing a terrific incident where Marguerite confesses to her sister about a horrible thing she did when she was a child. One may wonder if this is the worst that could happen to a 12 year-old girl, yet Maupassant does not stop the tragedy there.

As a tragedy, A Sister's Confession recounts the story of Marguerite who is dying in her deathbed and is expected to receive extreme unction (1). As the protagonist of the story, Marguerite's past seemed to be lurking but lingering in her mind and filling her with distress and dismay. As a twelve year-old, Marguerite was very close to her sister, but like any other tragic hero, she falls into what Aristotle called 'hamartia'. As a result of the fatal flaw, the hero falls from a high position, which usually leads to his/her unavoidable death. Marguerite's jealousy resulted in a literally fatal ending, where she poisoned her sister's fiancé and ended up killing him. She then kept this dark and disturbing secret with her till she got old and ill. Suzanne, with a deep sadness and despondence, vowed that she would never get married, which Maupassant dramatically described her donning a 'widow's weeds', 'She put on widow's weeds, which she never took off' (2)[20]. Meanwhile, Marguerite reaction was of profound regret that steeped her heart in stealth and tortured her throughout her life because of that hidden truth. Theatrically, even though she ate from the poisoned cake she gave to Henry de Sampierre (Suzanne's fiancé), she did not die and was bound to suffer a ramification of her horrid action. As a result, Marguerite decided to devote her life for her sister:

> Ma vie, toute ma vie... quelle torture ! Je me suis dit : Je ne quitterai plus ma soeur. Et je lui dirai tout, au moment de mourir... Voilà. Et depuis, j'ai toujours

[20] French version : Elle prit des habits de veuve qu'elle ne quitta plus.' (277)

> pensé à ce moment-là, à ce moment-là où je te dirais tout... Le voici venu... C'est terrible... Oh !... grande soeur ! (284)
>
> My life, all my life...what torture! I said to myself: 'I will never leave my sister. And at the hour of death I will tell her all'...There! And ever since, I have always thought of that moment when I should tell thee all. Now it is come. It is terrible. Oh ... Big Sister! (5)

Furthermore, Marguerite, as she was reaching her tragic ending, she confessed of the secret that she kept for so long, and was granted forgiveness from her sister. Thus, such ending alludes that Maupassant, in a way, diminishes the fear in his readers with such ending to achieve a healing affect which makes A Sister's Confession a cathartic tragedy in essence. In other words, it marks a sigh of relief for the readers. The reader is exposed to these horrible events from the outset of the story, and reacts to the uncovered secret through the confession of Marguerite who is the hero of the tragedy.

According to Aristotle, the hero should neither be a villain nor a wicked person for his fall; otherwise, his death would please and satisfy our moral sense without generating the feelings of pity, compassion and fear (ch. 3, p. 36-7), similarly to the character of Marguerite who was a victim to human frailty. Therefore, in order to reach this cathartic effect, the ideal tragic hero should be a good man or a woman with a minor flaw or tragic trait in his character. The entire tragedy should issue from this minor flaw or error of judgment.

In regard to the cathartic effect that constitutes tragedy, A Sister's Confession depicts, or rather imitates reality remotely from any idealism. In his theory of Mimesis, Plato says that all art is mimetic by nature; art is an imitation of life. He believed that 'idea' is the ultimate reality. Art imitates idea and so it is imitation of reality (Golden 118). Therefore, Maupassant, through his characters, mirrors human frailty and susceptibility in face of discomfort.

Sullivan argues that Maupassant uses this very conscious writing style to achieve his goals in describing realistic human encounters, as realistic encounters could not be possible through romanticised or idealised scenarios. Because Maupassant's writing objectives are linked to his own moral compass, his writings are intricately tied to his ideals of morality, social class, and so forth. The latter showcases Maupassant's choice in moderating his readers' negative emotions by appealing to their emotional needs.

3.4.1. Discussion

According to Nicolas White, naturalist fiction is characterised by two plot shapes: first, the rise and fall of modern tragedy. And second, the pessimistic anti-plot (522). The first of these forms is exemplified by Maupassant in his short story 'A Sister's Confession'. Marguerite and Suzanne are two sisters who have been living with each other since they were born, and they continued to live under one roof unmarried, until they became old and grey. Marguerite, who is younger than Suzanne but looks older, was keeping a dark and disturbing secret from her older sister since she was twelve years old. As she revisits the past in her deathbed, Marguerite confesses of what she did to her sister's fiancé. Because of jealousy and a strong despair in Marguerite's heart, she kills Suzanne's fiancé Henry with the unmanly weapon; poison. Her sister decides not to marry and Marguerite pledged that she will do the same by not marrying. Thus she made a sacrifice to amend for the awful act she committed, that of murder. Consequently, she remained with her older sister. In the words of Maupassant:

> Elles vécurent ensemble tous les jours de leur existence, sans se séparer une seule fois. Elles allèrent côte à côte, inséparablement unies. Mais Marguerite sembla toujours triste, accablée, plus morne que l'aînée comme si peut-être son sublime sacrifice l'eût brisée. Elle vieillit plus vite, prit des cheveux blancs dès l'âge de trente ans et, souvent souffrante, semblait atteinte d'un mal inconnu qui la rongeait. (278)

> They lived together all the days of their life, without ever being separated a single time. They went side by side, inseparably united. But Marguerite seemed always sad, oppressed, more melancholy than the elder, as though perhaps her sublime sacrifice had broken her spirit. She aged more quickly, had white hair from the age of thirty, and often suffering, seemed afflicted by some secret, gnawing trouble. (3)

Comparably to Shakespearean tragedy, it is a story about two characters, a hero that must suffer because of some flaw of character, because of inevitable fate, or both. Marguerite's secret seemed to cause her an internal conflict. With such a heavy burden, it was one of the main reasons of her death. In relation, internal conflict is one of the most essential elements in a Shakespearean tragedy. It refers to the confusion in the mind of the hero. It is usually the main reason for the hero's fall, along with fate and destiny. The tragic hero, often, cannot make a decision, which results in his ultimate failure. Hamlet is a perfect example for that. Over the course of the play, his indecision and frequent philosophical hang ups create a barrier to action. Internal conflict is what causes Hamlet to spare the life of Claudius while he is praying.

Moreover, similarly to Shakespeare, Maupassant chooses poison as a weapon for Marguerite who is overwhelmed by her feelings of irascibility and abhorrence, killing her sister's fiancé in a moment of irrationality. According to Weisberger, choosing poison for Romeo's death lent Shakespeare an opportunity to draw out the character's mental anguish for the audience, in a soliloquy where Romeo visits the apothecary's shop and agonizes over the ingredients for his suicide ("Poison Pen: Deadly Potions in Shakespeare's Plays"). One can only assume that Maupassant's choice is justified by his possible desire to create 'dramatic moments' that are often exceptionally unique to Shakespearean tragedy. For that, tragedies that resonate with audiences (readers) forge a healing aspect, which is what Aristotle metaphorically termed as Katharsis. In other words, tragedies help the readers feel and release

emotions through the aid of tragedy. For instance, a Shakespearean tragedy gives us an opportunity to feel pity for a certain character and fear for another, almost as if the readers are playing the roles themselves. For example, the hero's hardships in A Sister's Confession may compel them to empathise with her despite her murder. As same as, when heroes like Hamlet die, they feel both sorry for Hamlet and happy that Claudius has received his proper punishment.

Marguerite's confession unravelled the tragedy and unveiled a new dimension for the story as she confesses to her sister and to the priest in her deathbed. Maupassant recognises that the fall and sufferings and death of such a hero would certainly generate feelings of pity and fear. As Aristotle says, 'for our pity is excited by misfortunes undeservedly suffered, and our terror by some resemblance between the sufferer and ourselves' (Poe. 37). One may disapprove that Marguerite suffering is indeed well-deserved, and that she has suffered the consequences of her action. However, the tragic hero in Maupassant's story has fallen under certain circumstances of age. She committed the murder when she was twelve and regretted it shortly after the fact. Even though she ate from the poisoned cake, she did not die, and was destined to suffer by keeping a dark secret, as well as, sacrificing for her old sister as an amend. Maupassant's chooses for his character to possess a certain humane and fleshy quality, with a balanced amount of vice and virtue. That is to say, the reader is ineluctably experiencing a moderation of negative emotions, that of catharsis. Finally, As Joseph Conrad puts it, in his description of the reader's interest and the effect in Maupassant's works:

> The interest of a reader in a work of imagination is either ethical or that of simple curiosity. Both are perfectly legitimate, since there is both a moral and an excitement to be found in a faithful rendering of life. And in Maupassant's work there is the interest of curiosity and the moral of a point of view consistently preserved and never obtruded for the end of personal gratification. (26)

3.4. Cathartic Effect on the Reader and Writer

The relationship between the reader and writer is usually explained by modern critics in triangulated form. The producer represents the 'self'; the text is identified as the 'object', and the audience as the 'other'. John Fiske recognises this relationship of these three groups and he asserts that:

> Understanding works of art generically, however, locates their value in what they have in common, for their shared conventions form[s] links not only with other texts in the genre, but also between text, and audience, text and producers, and producers and audiences. (Fiske 110).

Alternatively, when analysing a narrative from the point of view of intention, this could be, the writer (self), text (object), and reader (other). Therefore, the shared experience, between the reader and writer, occurs when the text possesses an imitation of or a description of a relatable situation that is stemmed from a shared cultural background.

For the purpose of examining the reader's experience of catharsis through a text, this concept begins with the validation of meaning[21] (Baudrillard 121). The validation of meaning is the reader's task which happens by testing his connection with the characters of the text. Meanwhile, the writer ensures to create an imitation of reality (hyperreality) that appeal to the reader. Barthes reveals a basis of identifying shared experience between the writer and the reader:

> The writer may assume that the reader has experiences, and that experiences they (the writer) have had are ones that the reader has also had, or the writer's experiences are similar to the reader's experiences. For example, setting a story in a common location, like a dentist's waiting room, a lift, etc. relates to the reader because the reader has 1) waited for something 2) has been in a similar location or 3) has read or watched a story where one of these locations features. (qtd. in Stroud)

[21] This is a generic term used to describe an accepted but subjective truth communicated by the text to the reader

However, particular to catharsis and its origins as a term, Aristotle describes the engagement of a reader with a text and whilst this engagement may differ, depending on the form of the text, the genre, the detail, identification with a character and more, all of these qualities are leading to a similar outcome: the moderation and 'cleansing' of negative emotion. This engagement is located when the reader exposes him/herself to a tragedy written by the writer and which appeal to the 'human sufferer' of the reader. Therefore, this healing element aims at balancing the emotions of the reader and engages him or her in the course of action depending on the type of the text. For instance, if the text is a form of confession that comprises a certain narrative that recounts an elaborate first-hand account of the author's tragedy, the reader may experience catharsis because of the strong imitation of real life (which in this case is a personal and candid account of something that happened to the author himself). By the same token, the work of Oscar Wilde *De Profundis* (1905), which documented his life in prison and 'repellent tragedy', epitomises the shared experience of catharsis between the reader and writer. The author, by writing in a form of venting, cleanses him/herself from a trauma he suffered from, or a particular secret he or she kept hidden for a long time.

Conclusion

As a confessional works of literature, both *De Profundis* and *A Sister's Confession* provide a healing effect for the readers. Confessions in their essence aim at cleansing negative emotions for their writers and simultaneously for their readers. In De Profundis, Wilde's candid and first-hand letter recounts his downfall, and rationalises his suffering in prison via the form of confession. Such action inspires the reader to sympathise with Wilde despite his

shortcomings. Therefore, his tragedy engages the reader emotionally, and balances his or her negative feelings causing by that a state of catharsis. On the other hand, Maupassant's A Sister Confession offers a naturalistic description of a female tragic hero who killed her sister's fiancé. Marguerite kept that secret with her until her last moments in her deathbed where she summons for extreme unction to confess her sin to the priest and her sister. At last, she cleanses herself from what tortured her throughout her life by receiving her sister's forgiveness. The reader, consequently, feels pity and fear for such a tragic story. Hence, the reader experiences a temperament in his or her emotions because the cathartic effect displayed in the story. In short, the cathartic aspects in these works denote that confessional writings identify with the concept of catharsis.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the cathartic aspects in confessional writings reflected in both Oscar Wilde's De Profundis (1905) and Guy de Maupassant's A Sister's Confession (1883). Based on the Aristotelian theory of catharsis in tragedy, a meticulous analysis was applied on the selected works mentioned above. It can be concluded that these works of prose ultimately possess a healing effect that was alluded to by Aristotle in drama. The results indicate that confessional writing, with its tragic elements, thematically holds a number of cathartic aspects, which are conspicuously present in De Profundis and A Sister's Confession.

In addition, not only does this research illustrate the cathartic aspects in confessional writings, but it also raises the question about the reader and writer's experience. In retrospect, the fatal flaw (hamartia) committed by the hero, who is a moderately 'good person' attempting to do something admirable, is what carries the spectator from fear to pity. The result that this accomplishes is described by Aristotle first as a *katharsis* of such feelings (1449b 27 -28). While the unanimity about a definition of catharsis is inconceivable, one thing that tends to be lost or slighted in all the literature about *catharsis* is the root sense of washing or cleansing that gives it its force as a metaphor (Sachs 12). Aristotle tells us that the imitation of an action in a tragedy, by means of the fear and pity it makes us feel, ends in a cleansing of feelings of that sort. Therefore, the healing element is strongly related to the imitation of what could possibly evoke negative emotions for the spectator or reader when beholding a tragedy. This imitation should be truthfully channelled to represent a real life situation where the tragic hero is fundamentally involved in a certain environment with an action that evokes feelings of that sort. The latter was discussed by Aristotle in *Poetics* as a part of his theory on drama.

Nonetheless, being works of prose, the chosen works demonstrated a similar effect that is proper to drama. Both *De Profundis* and *A Sister's Confession* are confessional writings that use the pattern of confession varyingly. However, they commonly share a tragic element that is usually dramatic and possess a theatrical nature. Moving forward from that element, both works confer a cathartic effect that is experienced by the reader, as well as, a healing effect that is experienced by the writer. Through Wilde's confession and his unfiltered account of his tragic life as an artist in the letter of De Profundis, Marguerite and her confession of the murder she committed after keeping it a secret from her sister Suzanna in the short story A Sister's Confession, both showcase a form of dramatization. Thus, both indicate the linkage of pity and fear in a tragedy that produces the image of a human being who is simultaneously the responsible cause and the innocent victim of destruction. Moreover, they also indicated respectively that the unity of ruin, responsibility, and blamelessness is produced only if the tragic figure reflects something good and decent in the humanity we share. As discussed by Suchs in his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* when he advances 'our feelings of fear tell us, with a gradually increasing sense of inevitability, that an original beautiful choice can have no good outcome; while the sense of undeserved suffering in our feelings of pity tells us that there was no decent way to avoid that choice.' (13), one can infer that while catharsis limits the generalisability of the results, this approach provides new insights into the possibility of catharsis in prose, and the shared cathartic effect between reader and writer of confessional writings.

The central strand in this research explores the notion of catharsis and its applicability on prose, namely, confessional writings. By taking the existing gap in previous studies into consideration, the findings of this research challenge former and recent interpretations of catharsis, and provide a fresher view about the reader and writer shared experience in confessional writings in the case of its possession of tragic themes. Being a term that is

proper to drama, catharsis occurs through the spectator's exposure to a tragedy. Prose equally harnesses tragedy within its countless narratives. Therefore, the cathartic aspects in prose are highly conceivable, as typified in the chosen works of this research

Appendix

Daddy (1962)

BY SYLVIA PLATH

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time——
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one gray toe
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
Where it pours bean green over blue
In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
I used to pray to recover you.
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak.
I thought every German was you.
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.
With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of you,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two——
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

The Holy Office (1905)

BY JAMES JOYCE

Myself unto myself will give
This name, Katharsis-Purgative.
I, who dishevelled ways forsook
To hold the poets' grammar-book,
Bringing to tavern and to brothel
The mind of witty Aristotle,
Lest bards in the attempt should err
Must here be my interpreter:
Wherefore receive now from my lip
Peripatetic scholarship.
To enter heaven, travel hell,
Be piteous or terrible
One positively needs the ease
Of plenary indulgences.
For every true-born mysticist
A Dante is, unprejudiced,
Who safe at ingle-nook, by proxy,
Hazards extremes of heterodoxy,
Like him who finds joy at a table
Pondering the uncomfortable.
Ruling one's life by common sense
How can one fail to be intense?
But I must not accounted be
One of that mumming company –
With him who hies him to appease
His giddy dames' frivolities
While they console him when he whinges
With gold-embroidered Celtic fringes –
Or him who sober all the day
Mixes a naggin in his play –
Or him whose conduct 'seems to own'
His preference for a man of 'tone' –
Or him who plays the ragged patch
To millionaires in Hazelpatch
But weeping after holy fast
Confesses all his pagan past –
Or him who will his hat unfix
Neither to malt nor crucifix
But show to all that poor-dressed be
His high Castilian courtesy –
Or him who loves his Master dear –
Or him who drinks his pint in fear –
Or him who once when snug abed
Saw Jesus Christ without his head
And tried so hard to win for us
The long-lost works of Aeschylus.
But all these men of whom I speak
Make me the sewer of their clique.
That they may dream their dreamy dreams
I carry off their filthy streams
For I can do those things for them
Through which I lost my diadem,
Those things for which Grandmother Church
Left me severely in the lurch.
Thus I relieve their timid arses,

Perform my office of Katharsis.
My scarlet leaves them white as wool:
Through me they purge a bellyful.
To sister mummers one and all
I act as vicar-general
And for each maiden, shy and nervous,
I do a similar kind of service.
For I detect without surprise
That shadowy beauty in her eyes,
The 'dare not' of sweet maidenhood
That answers my corruptive 'would',
Whenever publicly we meet
She never seems to think of it;
At night when close in bed she lies
And feels my hand between her thighs
My little love in light attire
Knows the soft flame that is desire.
But Mammon places under ban
The uses of Leviathan
And that high spirit ever wars
On Mammon's countless servitors
Nor can they ever be exempt
From his taxation of contempt.
So distantly I turn to view
The shamblings of that motley crew,
Those souls that hate the strength that mine has
Steeled in the school of old Aquinas.
Where they have crouched and crawled and prayed
I stand, the self-doomed, unafraid,
Unfellowed, friendless and alone,
Indifferent as the herring-bone,
Firm as the mountain-ridges where
I flash my antlers on the air.
Let them continue as is meet
To adequate the balance-sheet.
Though they may labour to the grave
My spirit shall they never have
Nor make my soul with theirs as one
Till the Mahamanvantara be done:
And though they spurn me from their door
My soul shall spurn them evermore.

Bibliography

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Maupassant, Guy de. *A Sister's Confession, A Stroll.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016, pp. 1-6.

Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis: The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings*. 2nd ed., Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2002.

Secondary Sources

Books

Adam, Julie. *Versions of Heroism in Modern American Drama*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1991, pp. 71-72.

Aristotle, *Aristotle Poetics*. Translated by Joe Sachs. Focus Publishing, 2006.

---. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, translated by W.H. Fyfe.,. London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1932.

Barton, John. M. T., *Penance and Absolution.* New York, Hawthorn Books, 1961, p. 65.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Glaser MI: University of Michigan Press. 1991, p. 121.

Bernays, Jacob. *Outlines of Aristotle's Lost Work on the Effects of Tragedy*. Translated by James I. Porter. 1970.

Belenky, Masha. *The Anxiety Of Dispossession: Jealousy In Nineteenth-Century French Culture*. Bucknell University Press, 2008.

Belford, Barbara. *Oscar Wilde*. Random House, 2000, p. 272. Bloom, Harold. *Oscar Wilde*. 2nd ed., Chelsea House, 2011, p. 40.

Butcher, Samuel. H. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art : with a Critical Text and Translation of the Poetics.* London :Macmillan, 1911.

Bywater, Ingram. *Aristotle' Ethica Nicomachea*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1894.

Carr, Brian. *Pity and Compassion as Social Virtues*. Philosophy, 1999, pp. 411–429.

Conrad, Joseph. *Notes On Life And Letters*. Garden City, N.Y., and Toronto, Doubleday, Page & company, 1921, pp. 25-27.

Dufour-Maître, Myriam, Florence Naugrette. *Flaubert et Maupassant.* Univ. Rouen Havre, 1981.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Dramatic theory and criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. New York. Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1974.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

---, Richard. *James Joyce*. Oxford University Press, 1983.

Finsler, Georg. *Platon Und Die Aristotelische Poetik*. Nabu Press, 1900.

Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge. 2011, p. 110.

Ford, Andrew. *Catharsis: The Power of Music in Aristotle's Politic*. Oxford Scholarship Online. 2004, pp .309-336.

Freud, Sigmund. *Selected Papers On Hysteria And Other Psychoneuroses*. Translated by Abraham Arden Bill. 1st ed., Journal of Nervous And Mental Disease Pub. Co., 1909, pp. 5-7.

Hart-Davis, Rupert. *The Complete Letters Of Oscar Wilde*. London, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962.

Halliwell, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics*. 2nd ed., Duckworth, 1998, p. 126.

Hathaway, Baxter. *The Age Of Criticism - The Late Renaissance In Italy*. 1st ed., Cornell University Press, 1962, pp. 298-99.

Harris, Frank, and Bernard Shaw. *Oscar Wilde, His Life And Confessions*. Horizon Pr., 1974.

Holland, Merlin. *The Real Trial Of Oscar Wilde. Perennial*, 2004, p. 300.

House, Humphry. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Hart-Davis, 1956.

Hume, David. "Philosophical Honesty." University of Victoria, 2002, Victoria BC, Canada.

Janko, Richard. *From Catharsis to the Aristotelian Mean*. Ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Princeton University Press, 1992.

Jung, C. G., "Psychotherapy and Religion." *Psychology and Religion*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1952.

Kassel, Rudolf. *Aristotle's Ars Poetica.* Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1966.

Maupassant, Guy de. *Contes du jour et de la nuit.* La Bibliothèque électronique du Québec. pp. 276-286.

Momigliano, Arnaldo. *Jacob Bernays*. Amsterdam, North-Holland Publishing Company. 1969.

Munteanu, Dana LaCourse. *Tragic Pathos*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011.

Murray, Penelope, and Peter Wilson. *Music And The Muses: The Culture Of Mousike In The Classical Athenian City*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2010.

Nietzsche, Friedrich W, and Douglas Smith. The Birth of Tragedy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Plath, Sylvia, "Daddy". *The Collected Poems*. Dd. Ted Hughes. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2018, pp. 222-223.

Plato, *Plato's The Republic*. 2nd ed., Translated by Desmond Lee. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1974.

Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg. *Essays On Aristotle's Poetics* Princeton University Press, 1992.

Roz, Firmin. "Guy De Maupassant." *Library of the World's Best Literature: Ancient and Modern*. Ed. Charles Dudley Warner. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008, pp. 9803-9808.

Schaper, Eva. *Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure*, The Philosophical Quarterly, 1968, pp. 135-36.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. by George Richard Hibbard, Oxford UP, 2008.

Sokolon, Marlene. K. *Political Emotions: Aristotle and the Symphony of Reason and Emotion*. Northern Illinois, University Press. 2006.

Stott, John. *Confess Your Sins: The Way of Reconciliation*. Eerdmans, 2017.

Taylor, Elizabeth Johnston. *Religion: A Clinical Guide for Nurses*. New York, Springer Publishing Company, 2012.

White, Nicholas. "Naturalism." *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, edited by William Burgwinkle et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 522–530.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Isobel Murray. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Journals

Anoop, Gupta. "Rethinking Aristotle's Poetics: The Pragmatic Aspect of Art and Knowledge." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2010, pp. 60–80. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jaesteduc.44.4.0060. Accessed 25 Feb. 2020.

Briassoulis, Helen. "The Catharsis of the Commons." *International Journal of the Commons*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2019, p. 1092–1111. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26819589. Accessed 1 Mar. 2020.

Eldridge, Richard. "How Can Tragedy Matter for Us?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52(3), 1994, pp. 287-98.. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/431428. 12 December 2019.

Else, Gerald Frank. "Aristotle on the Beauty of Tragedy." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 49, 1938, pp. 179–204. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/310703. Accessed 5 July 2020.

Harvey Kail, “The Other Half of the Garden: Oscar Wilde's De Profundis and the Confessional Tradition”, *Prose Studies 1800-1900*, 2:3, 141-150, DOI: 10.1080/01440357908586084. Accessed 2 December 2019.

Gagnier, Regenia. “‘De Profundis as Epistola: in Carcere Et Vinculis’: a Materialist Reading of Oscar Wilde's Autobiography.” *Criticism*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1984, pp. 335–354. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23110543. Accessed 8 Apr. 2020.

Golden, Leon. “The Clarification Theory of ‘Katharsis.’” *Hermes*, vol. 104, no. 4, 1976, pp. 437–452. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4475981. Accessed 25 Feb. 2020.

---. “The Purgation Theory of Catharsis.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1973, pp. 473–479. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/429320. Accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

---, “Plato’s Concept of Mimesis”, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1975, pp. 118–131. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/15.2.118 Accessed 4 June 2020.

Kearney, Richard. "Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis." *Paragraph*, vol. 30 no. 1, 2007, pp. 51-66. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/214012.Accessed 2 December 2019.

Kruse, Noreen W. “The Process of Aristotelian Catharsis: A Reidentification.” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1979, pp. 162–171. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3219373. Accessed 2 December 2019.

Lear, Jonathan. “Katharsis.” *Phronesis*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1988, pp. 297–326. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4182312. Accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

Lock, Peter W. “Pattern and Meaning in Maupassant's ‘Amour.’” The French Review, vol. 41, no. 1, 1967, pp. 70–75. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/384506. Accessed 2 July 2020.

Malcolm, Heath. “Aristotle's Poetics.” *The Classical Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1988, pp. 231–233. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3065566. Accessed 1 Mar. 2020.

Maxon, Helen F. "Sincerity and the Subject in Wilde's De Profundis." *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1998, www.questia.com/read/1G1-188997363/sincerity-and-the-subject-in-wilde-s-de-profundis. Accessed 13 May 2020.

Saunders, Max. Review of *"Confessional" Writing and the Twentieth-Century Literary Imagination*. *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 19 no. 3, 2012, p. 627-628. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/mod.2012.0070. Accessed 22 December 2019.

Stroud, Allen. "Catharsis as Process." Writing in Practice: The Journal of Creative Writing, vol. 5, no. 1, 2019, www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wip-editions/articles/catharsis-as-process.html. Accessed 30 May 2020.

Worthen, Valerie. "Psychotherapy and Catholic Confession." *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1974, pp. 275–284. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27505253. Accessed 2 December 2019.

Web Articles

"A Brief Guide to Confessional Poetry." *Poet.org*. 21 Feb. 2014, www.poets.org/text/brief-guide-confessional-poetry. Accessed 11 September 2019

"A Timeline Of LGBT Communities In The UK". *The British Library*, 2020, www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/lgbtq-timeline#. Accessed 2 May, 2020

Borghini, Andrea. "The Philosophy of Honesty." ThoughtCo, Feb. 11, 2020, thoughtco.com/philosophy-of-honesty-2670612.

Berkson, Karl. "Oscar Wilde". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oscar-Wilde. Accessed 10 Mar, 2020.

Blackemore, Erin. "Gay Conversion Therapy's Disturbing 19Th-Century Origins". *HISTORY*, 2018, https://www.history.com/news/gay-conversion-therapy-origins-19th-century

“Catharsis”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/art/catharsis-criticism. Accessed 20 October 2019.

"Catharsis ." Lexico - Oxford Dictionary. 2019, www.lexico.com/definition/catharsis. Accessed 30 November 2019.

Conversi, Leonard W., and Richard B. Sewall. "Tragedy - Theory Of Tragedy". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2012, https://www.britannica.com/art/tragedy-literature. Accessed 25 Jan, 2020.

Dawson, Terence. “Dorian Gray as Symbolic Representation of Wilde's Personality”. *The Victorian Web*, 2007. www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/dawson16.html. Accessed 01 July 2020.

"Deathbed Confessions and Conversions". *Bible Study Guide.* 2016 www.biblestudyguide.org/articles/death/deathbed-confessions-and-conversions.htm Accessed 28 April 2020.

Dumesnil, René, and Martin Turnell. “Guy de Maupassant.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Guy-de-Maupassant. Accesessed 6 july 2020

Graham, Elyse. “Wilde's De Profundis.” *The Victorian Web*, 2008. www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/graham2.html. Accessed 22 December 2019.

Hamman, Adalbert. G. “Prayer.” *Encyclopædia Britannica,* 2015. www.britannica.com/topic/prayer. Accessed 12 December 2019

Plath, Sylvia. “Daddy.” *Poetry Foundation*, 1981, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48999/daddy-56d22aafa45b2. Accessed 25 February 2020.

Pennebaker, James. W. “Does Confessing Secrets Improve Our Mental Health?.” *Scientific American*, 2016, www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-confessing-secrets-improve-our-mental-health/. Accessed 20 December 2019.

Raab, Diana. “Confession Is Good For the Soul: 7 Ways To Stimulate Confessional Writing.” *Psychalive*, 2019, https://www.psychalive.org/confession-is-good-for-the-soul-7-ways-to-stimulate-confessional-writing/. Accessed 15 December 2019.

Robinson, Andrew. "Augusto Boal: Brecht And Beyond – The Boal Method". *Ceasefire Magazine*, 2016, www.ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/augusto-boal-brecht-boal-method/. Accessed 23 Feb 2020.

“Secularism and Religious Freedom”. *France Diplomacy*, 2020. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france/article/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france#:~:text=The%20Law%20of%201905,-This%20law%20definitively&text=It%20abolished%20the%20Concordat%20of,the%20freedom%20to%20practice%20religion. Accessed 15 May 2020.

Smethurst, Colin et al. "Naturalism". *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, 2019. www.britannica.com/art/French-literature. Accessed 19 May 2020.

Weisberger, Mindy. “Poison Pen: Deadly Potions in Shakespeare's Plays”. *Live Science*, 2016, https://www.livescience.com/54520-shakespeare-poison-pen.html. Accessed 4 July 2020.

Theses

Kuhn, Gielle. *Exploring French Short Stories: Guy de Maupassant's Writing Style and Social Justice*. 2016. Andrews University, Undergraduate degree. Honors Theses. www. digitalcommons.andrews.edu/honors/144

Movies

Everett, Rupert, director. *The Happy Prince*. 2018, www.amazon.com/Happy-Prince-Colin-Firth/dp/B07N8JQYYK. Accessed 6 June 2020.