

ABSTRACT

Greek tragedy portrayed the husband and wife relationship as fraught with hostilities and ambivalences. The purpose of this mini-dissertation is to examine these dysfunctions, and to explain them. I have approached the problem from several important angles. I have begun with selected aspects of Athenian Mythology and the foundation myths of Athenian culture to see whether there are recurrent themes that attest to inherent ambivalences and hostilities towards women within the mythological heritage of Athens. This approach is based on two assumptions: first, that the dynamics of interpersonal relationships portrayed in mythology and literature tend to mirror the modal patterns of cultures and second, the experiences of these modal patterns are the inspiration from which a culture draws its mythmaking. I then examine the context of the production of tragedy within the religious framework of the festival of the Greater Dionysia so as to establish a theory of the nature and function of Greek tragedy. The purpose of the second focus is to see whether there are connections between the workings of Greek tragedy and the thematic material it portrays. I have chosen four Greek tragedies within which to explore marital dysfunctions: Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Ajax* and *The Women of Trachis*, and Euripides' *Medea*. I have undertaken a close reading of the original texts and commentaries as well as a close reading of comparative translations of the texts for the purpose of this study.

My explorations reveal that Athenian society was aware of the risks of the dire imbalance prevailing within their social order, which was created by such a ferocious suppression and derogation of half their members. In addition this imbalance was redressed on a continual basis by the production of and through communal participation in tragedy in its function as a ritualistic mechanism for cathartic relief.

Thus I conclude that the production of tragedy served to reaffirm the *status quo*. Tragedy provided a process for the de-structuring of familial and social order first and then sought and promoted a process of psychological restructuring and re-integration. This occurred through the empathetic workings of Catharsis or purgation of negative emotions or feelings of guilt. The cathartic effects of tragedy were designed for men. As a collective therapeutic action it confirmed the male dominated order of society and reaffirmed the Athenian perception of a dualistic reality in the form of irreconcilable opposites: theatre versus life and female versus male. Tragedies were written by men and performed by men and thus we can expect all symptoms, signs and symbols of male and female conflict to be the products of the masculine psyche.

OPSOMMING

Griekse tragedie beeld die verhouding tussen man en vrou as vyandig en ambivalent uit. Die doel van hierdie skripsie is om hierdie disfunksies te ondersoek en te verklaar. Die probleem word vanuit verskillende invalshoeke benader. Eers het ek bepaalde aspekte van die Atheense mitologie ondersoek, asook die stigtingsmites van die Atheense kultuur. Dit is gedoen om vas te stel hoe dikwels die temas van ambivalente en vyandige houdings teenoor vroue hierin voorkom. Dié benadering is op twee aannames gegrond. Eerstens, dat die dinamiek van tussenpersoonlike verhoudings soos dit in die mitologie en letterkunde uitgebeeld word, die modale patrone van kulture weerspieël. Tweedens, dat die ervaring van hierdie modale patrone die inspirasie is vir 'n kultuur se mitevorming. Daarna het ek die konteks van die produksie van tragedies ondersoek binne die godsdienstige raamwerk van die Groter Dionysia, om 'n teorie oor die aard en funksie van die Griekse Tragedie daar te stel. Die doel van hierdie tweede fokus is om te sien of daar enige verbande tussen die werking van die Griekse Tragedie in die algemeen, en die tematiese materiaal wat dit uitbeeld, bestaan. Ek het vier tragedies gekies om huweliksdisfunksies te ondersoek: Aeschylus se *Agamemnon*, Sophocles se *Ajax* en sy *Die Vroue van Trachis*, asook Euripides se *Medea*. Ek het 'n noukeurige lesing van die oorspronklike tekste gedoen, kommentare geraadpleeg, asook vertalings van hierdie tekste met mekaar vergelyk om die doel van die skripsie te bereik.

My navorsing toon aan dat die Atheense samelewing bewus was van die risiko's inherent aan die wanbalans wat daar in hulle sosiale bestel bestaan het, en wat veroorsaak is deur die gewelddadige onderdrukking en minagting van helfte van hulle lede. Hierdie wanbalans is verder op 'n deurlopende basis hanteer deur die produksie van en gemeenskapsdeelname in, die tragedie in sy funksie as 'n rituaalistiese meganisme om *katharsis* teweeg te bring.

My gevolgtrekking is dus dat die produksie van tragedies gedien het om die *status quo* te bevestig. Tragedie het die gesins- en sosiale orde gedekonstrueer, en daarna gepoog om 'n proses van sielkundige herstrukturering en herintegrasie te weeg te bring. Dit het plaasgevind deur die empatiese uitwerking van *katharsis* of reiniging van negatiewe emosies of skuldgevoelens. Die reinigende effek van 'n tragedie was op mans gemik. As 'n kollektiewe terapeutiese handeling, het dit die manlik geörienteerde samelewingsorde bevestig, en die Atheense persepsie van 'n dualistiese werklikheid in die vorm van onversoembare teenoorgesteldes, herbevestig: die teater teenoor die lewe, en vroulik teenoor manlik. Dit was mans wat tragedies geskryf het en dit ook opgevoer het. Daarom kan ons verwag dat al die simptome, tekens en simbole van manlik-vroulike konflik die produkte is van die manlike psige.