



After Dionysus: A Theory of the Tragic

William Storm

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William Storm reinterprets the concept of the tragic as both a fundamental human condition and an aesthetic process in dramatic art. He proposes an original theoretical relation between a generative and consistent tragic ground and complex characterization patterns. For Storm, it is the dismemberment of character, not the death, that is the signature mark of tragic drama. Basing his theory in the sparagmos, the dismembering rite associated with Dionysus, Storm identifies a rending tendency that transcends the ancient Greek setting and can be recognized transhistorically. The dramatic character in any era who suffers the tragic fate must do so in the manner of the ancient god of theater: the depicted self is torn apart, figuratively if not literally, psychologically if not physically.

Storm argues that a newly objectified concept of the tragic can prove more useful critically and diagnostically than the traditional and more subjective tragic "vision." Further, he develops a theory of the tragic field, a model for the connective and cumulative activity that brings about the distinctive Dionysian effect upon character. His theory is supported with case studies from Agamemnon and Iphigenia in Aulis, King Lear, and The Seagull. Storm's examination of the dramatic form of tragedy and the existential questions it raises is sensitive to both their universal relevance and their historical particularity.

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