Pragmatic action, imaginative action, annihilating action: the quest for self-realization in three major dramatic phases of the West (Elizabethan Renaissance, European nineteenth century, and the theatre of the absurd)

Bahee Hadaegh

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Pragmatic Action, Imaginative Action, Annihilating Action

The Quest for Self-realization
in
Three Major Dramatic Phases of the West
(Elizabethan Renaissance, European Nineteenth Century,
and the Theatre of the Absurd)

A Thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
The Award of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

From the
University of Wollongong

By:

Bahee Hadaegh

Faculty of Arts
University of Wollongong

2009
DECLARATION

I, Bahee Hadaegh, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts, department of English Language, University of Wollongong, Australia, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for a qualification at any other academic institution.

Bahee Hadaegh

Date:
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Abstract

This thesis argues that the quest for self-fulfillment is the recurrent motif of the three major dramatic eras of Western tragedy. This theme is a continuous but transforming tradition in which tragic heroes endeavor to approximate a more complete degree of self-realization respectively through outward action, inner imagination and an inaction that is also a reflective struggle to find meaning. Discussions of tragic theatre in the West have generally concentrated on a degenerative process of Western tragedy in terms of progressively atrophied dramatic action and gradual manifestation of passivity, nostalgia and nihilism. This thesis aims to show that, although the major course of transformation is from action to inaction, under the light of the continuous motif of the quest and the degree of success by which the characters approximate the wished-for self-fulfillment, Western tragedy is a regression in order to progress.

To demonstrate a connection across Western theatrical history, I look in turn at the three major dramatic eras of the Renaissance, the nineteenth century, and twentieth-century existentialist/absurdist stages. The regressive progress of Western tragedy from the Renaissance active quest to the imaginative quest of the nineteenth-century dramatic characters is demonstrated through Nietzsche’s understanding of Dionysian phenomenal-self forgetfulness, inwardness, suffering and rebirth. Such a progressive course is also evident when the seemingly negative inaction of the Absurd dramatic characters is viewed through the author’s own cultural background, considering the very basic mystic concepts of self-annihilation and self-realization.