

The philosophy of the tragic has suffered a *peripeteia* of late. After two centuries of exerting a fascination over German scholars while benefiting from the respectful distance of most Anglo-American ones, the strand of interpretation associated most famously with Hegel and Nietzsche has recently come in for increasing criticism both from classicists and literary theorists. At issue primarily is the tragic dialectic, the notion that tragedy's staging of suffering allows for an ontological insight to emerge, which can be more or less reconciliatory depending on the thinker. Particularly as formulated in German Idealism around 1800, the tragic dialectic can indeed be distorting to the particularities of individual works. Today, the effort to generalize about Greek tragedy seems alien to most research in the Classics, which seeks, on one hand, to construct a historicist account of the genre and its role in Athenian society, and on the other, to explore its reception and interpretation over time. Between the synchronic and diachronic viewpoints, though, there has been little effort at mediation.

The paper will argue, however, that an idealist viewpoint on the tragic is uniquely able to bridge the gap between historical and reception-focused accounts of Greek tragedy. The importance of such a philosophical perspective does not come from its interpretation of individual works, but from its reflection on the history of the genre in ancient Greece and beyond. Idealist accounts of the tragic all seek, in one way or another, to explain why it is that drama was such a central part of Athenian cultural life, and why Greek works continue to be read and interpreted today. Taking Hölderlin's notes to his 1804 Sophocles translations as an example, the paper will argue that the idealist philosophy of the tragic sets forth an historical hermeneutics, a way of reading ancient tragedy that holds synchronic and diachronic considerations in a productive relationship. Throughout his writings, Hölderlin sought to understand both the particularities of Athenian culture and the contemporary importance of the classics. Far from being insensitive to the specificity of Greek tragedy, indeed, Hölderlin grapples tenaciously (if idiosyncratically) with the medium and historical circumstances of the genre. His work thus provides a fruitful ground for considering Greek tragedy and its reception in dialogue.

Hölderlin's account of tragedy seeks to determine its place in Athenian society and leads to a theory of the difference of this role in antiquity and modernity, an account of the possibility of reading ancient literature today. For Hölderlin, antiquity and modernity form a chiasm, in which each is implicated in and essential to the full expression of the other. This constitutes a theory of reception as dialogue and reciprocal self-definition. Hölderlin's interpretation of Sophocles is conditioned by a reflective consciousness of difference, which allows him to think synchrony and diachrony together. Unlike reception-theoretical readings, Hölderlin sets out a descriptive paradigm for ancient tragedy and, unlike positivist accounts, justifies the intelligibility of this paradigm through a play of similarity and difference. The philosophy of the tragic, understood as a dialectic of antiquity and modernity, articulates a reason and a method for the study of ancient literature and its reception.