

TRAGEDY AND RHETORIC OF ENTHUSIASM IN HÖLDERLIN'S *EMPEDOCLES*

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Abstract || The rhetoric of enthusiasm is a recurring subject in Friedrich Hölderlin's work. His dramatic project *Der Tod des Empedokles* (1797-1801), clearly dramatizes the excesses associated to this rhetoric, both from an individual and collective point of view. Its most dreadful connotations were associated with discussions about the consequences of enthusiasm as moral experience in the context of protestantism and enlightenment of the time. As a result of this conflicting moral statute, the language of enthusiasm will become the constitutive center for the competing versions on the tragic conflict of its main character. In this article we will focus on the two first drafts of the work to analyze the way in which the rhetoric of enthusiasm originates the crisis in the city of Agrigento.

Keywords || Hölderlin | Enthusiasm | Empedokles | Tragedy | Revolution.

0. Introduction

Given its incompleteness, Friedrich Hölderlin's work, *The Death of Empedocles* (*Der Tod vom Empedokles*) seems to have been an unsuccessful attempt. All his manuscripts reveal this: in the period between 1797-1799, he produces three different plans, three drafts, and one dense speculative fragment about the play. However, there is no final and definitive writing.¹ Yet, *Empedokles* is a key text in the genesis of the last and most prolific stage of Hölderlin's poetic production (1800-1806).² The work stages a priest-philosopher's breakthrough into the city of Agrigento with a mystical and revolutionary message. The main character is denounced at once as a fanatical priest only interested in spreading anarchy within the city. Expelled from Agrigento, Empedocles decides to end his life by throwing himself from the heights of the volcano Etna in order to reunite with the original forces of nature; those whose imminent return he himself had announced through his redemptive preaching.

Depending on the many different interpretations of singular project, we are dealing with a political tragedy with a modern hero (Prignitz, 1985; Mögel, 1994), a martyrological, Christian drama (Kranz, 1949; Hölscher, 1965), or, in line with Weimar's classicism, with an attempt to emulate an ancient tragedy whose final resolution would have not been successfully achieved (Kommerell, 1961; Schadewaldt 1966). In view of these interpretations, Theresia Birkenhauer's exhaustive reading has underlined the extent to which an analysis of *Empedokles* following traditional parameters of tragedy can generate hermeneutic disorientation (Birkenhauer, 1996: 12). Indeed, focusing on the reconstruction of a dramatic logic *ex machina*, these approaches have tended to dodge the problematic dimension of the discourse about 'enthusiasm' in Hölderlin's tragic conception. As we will see in this article, tragedy will unfold precisely from the excessive identification that occurs among the main character, his mystical-revolutionary speeches, and the reactions of Agrigento's citizens. In order to understand the singular dramatic implications of this mystical discourse, we must first look at the particular status of the rhetoric of enthusiasm during the Romantic Period (1770-1830) (Richter, 2005).

1. Historical context

What was the meaning of the word 'enthusiasm' in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century? To answer this question, we must put aside the contemporary meanings of this term: despite common belief, for Romantic authors the word 'enthusiasm' was not restricted to the field of psychological or individual experience. It also represented a cultural and discursive phenomenon, influenced by a variety of

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1 | The manuscripts of *Empedokles* project are the so-called *Frankfurt Plan* (1797, StA IV, 145-147): a first version from 1798 (StA IV, 1-86), a second draft from mid 1799 (StA IV, 87-118), and a last version written during the winter of that same year (StA IV, 119-142). To these texts we must add the programmatic essay *Die tragische ode...*, the writing *Grund zum Empedokles* and the *Allgemeiner Grund*, created around September 1799 (StA IV, 147-168), as well as the speculative fragment *Das Werden im Vergehen* written during that same period (StA IV, 282-287). In this article, all references to Hölderlin's original texts come from the *Stuttgarter Ausgabe* (StA), published by Friedrich Beißner (see Bibliography). For the Spanish version I have used the translation by Anacleto Ferrer (Hölderlin, 1997). In unreferenced quotes, the translation is mine.

2 | The project coincides with a crucial reflection phase for the author: between late 1798 and early 1799, after his arrival to Homburg, Hölderlin devoted himself to a detailed exam of his personal and literary experience in his correspondence to friends and relatives, where he also talked about his religious, political and philosophical conceptions. Moreover, he provided a critical look at the intellectual situation in Germany. 1798 is also the year of his final discussion with Schiller. Already in August, he told his old mentor about a new aesthetic direction: "*ich folge um so freiwilliger Ihrem Rath, weil ich wirklich schon eine Richtung nach dem Wege genommen hatte, den Si emir weisen*" (StA VI.1, 249). Cf. his letters to Neuffer from the 12th November 1798 and to his brother Carl Gock from the 1st June 1799.

religious, moral, and philosophical assessments, all of them present during the 18th century. Thus, a good deal of the most controversial implications of the phenomenon of enthusiasm revolved around the pejorative and stigmatizing connotations established by the term *Schwärmerei*. Mostly understood as ‘fanatical delirium’, the term was originally used by Martin Luther to condemn those mystical-radical trends of the ‘left wing’ of the Reformation (Münzter, Zwingli). Using primitive Christian communities as a model, these groups had self-proclaimed depositories of an inspiration directly emanated from God (or the Holy Ghost), claiming exceptional attributes of authority for themselves, in order to introduce drastic social transformations (common property of goods and polygamy, among others). The aspiration of having a spontaneous access to the revelations through an ‘inner voice’ allowed them to present themselves as prophets of a ‘truth’ that, for Lutheran orthodoxy, could only derive from a strictly ecclesiastic realm.

During the 18th century, enlightened German thinkers appropriated the pejorative meaning of the word in order to stigmatize cultural manifestations outside the model of rational asceticism defended by the *Aufklärung* (Hinske, 1988). In this case, the terms *Schwärmerei* and *Enthusiasmus* were intended to condemn the chaotic empire of a wave of superstitious practices and readings, which had suddenly become an intellectual fashion for the educated public. The consequences were both moral and social: the *Schwärmer* superstition and mysticism in all of their manifestations, only contributed to reproduce a ‘sectarian spirit’ (*Sektengeist*), whose enigmatic language tended to fragment and hinder the development of the ‘authentic’ public debate. It was not a minor issue: they were discussing the type of ‘civil society’ imagined by the intellectual members of a bourgeoisie still in gestation. Ultimately, the proliferation of the *Schwärmer* discourse only seemed to aggravate the trend towards fragmentation and cultural isolation that had endemically troubled German territories since the time of religious wars. Thus, for authors like Martin Wieland or Friedrich Schiller, and despite their obvious ecstatic-emotional dimension, the poetic enthusiasm developed by poets like Klopstock or Bürger should never again recover the connotations of the religious *Schwärmerei* (Schings, 1977; La Vopa, 1998: 85-116; Hilliard, 2011).

However, after 1789, the notion of ‘enthusiasm’, previously limited to philosophy and religious morality, would be repoliticized and became a collective concept, directly inspired by the agitation of revolutionary crowds (Reichardt, 2000: 160). Kant himself would defend the term ‘enthusiasm’ in a famous passage of *The Conflict of the Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*, 1798): turning to a clear theatrical metaphor, he could only explain German sympathy for the Revolution as a phenomenon almost tantamount to ‘enthusiasm’.³

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3 | “La revolución de un pueblo lleno de espíritu, que hemos visto realizarse en nuestros días, puede tener éxito o fracasar. Puede acumular tantas miserias y horrores que un hombre sensato, que pudiera realizarla por segunda vez con la esperanza de un resultado feliz, jamás se resolvería, sin embargo a repetir este experimento a este precio. Pero esa revolución encuentra en los espíritus de todos los espectadores (que no están comprometidos ellos mismos en este juego) una simpatía rayana en el entusiasmo y cuya manifestación, que lleva aparejada un riesgo, no podía obedecer a otra causa que a una disposición moral del género humano” (Kant, 2004: 109).

Likewise, participants in the revolutionary process were perfectly aware of the fact that their political enthusiasm had a theatrical dimension, as it could reproduce the political alternatives of the time in the social space: through the language of prophetic exaltation and subjective ardor, the revolutionary enthusiast was an individual capable of transmitting his convictions to his fellows, urging them to side with the cause (Primavesi, 2008; Buckley, 2008). In words of Jacobin writer Georg Forster: “El entusiasmo siempre tiene algo teatral que aún debe ser exaltado por el teatro nacional francés”.⁴ Also, for a religious personality like Friedrich Wichmann, theater had an essential political function: “Apenas existe un instrumento más flexible y poderoso para el derrocamiento de los enemigos como las representaciones de dramas teatrales, adecuadamente versificados sobre los escenarios de las ciudades más pobladas”.⁵ As we can see, this perception was not an exclusive invention of Germans, but it was a consequence of Jacobin France, where the forms and representations of ancient theater had been a part of a markedly ‘sublime’ practice, focused on the cult of the revolutionary ideals and the liturgical mythification of great revolutionary days (Ozouf, 1991: 82).⁶

In spite of this, in the context of the new political situation in Germany, many authors considered that the ardor of enthusiasm should be limited, or even openly censured, within the theater, in order to avoid the public’s identification with revolutionary dramatic heroes (Szondi, 1978: 11—148; Port, 2005: 85—120). This position appeared paradigmatically defined by Weimar’s classicism: for Schiller and Goethe, tragic suffering had the task of purifying the individual from those Utopian visions in conflict with its social conditioning.⁷ Classical drama provided an aesthetic model able to prevent the pathological excesses of subjective distress. Through tragic suffering, the sublime moment of moral freedom was a gesture of resistance against the passions from the outside world, and also against those coming from inside of the subject. Thus, the dramatic *pathos* was to prompt reflection on the excesses resulting from political circumstances, rather than on the unilateral mimesis between the public and the heroes presented by theatrical fiction (Gross, 1994: 126).

Just like these authors, Hölderlin was perfectly aware of the role that theatre had acquired in the debates about Revolution in Germany. His own mentor, Schiller, was one of the most distinguished authors in this genre (*Don Karlos*, 1787; *Wallenstein*, 1798-1800; *Maria Stuart*, 1800; *Die Braut von Messina*, 1803, etc.), and had also devoted a whole series of writings to the reflection on the relations between the tragic and the sublime (*Über die Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen*, *Über die tragische Kunst*, 1792; *Vom Erhabenen*, 1793, etc.). It is not accidental, then, that many of Schiller’s characters—Posa, Wallenstein, and Demetrius—personified clear

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4 | “*Der Enthusiasmus hat immer etwas theatralisches, daß vom französischen Nationaltheater noch erhöht werden muß*” (Primavesi, 2008: 213).

5 | “[...] *kaum irgend ein biegsameres und mächtigeres Werkzeug zu Stürzung ihrer Feinde, als theatralische Vorstellungen trefflich gedichteter Dramen auf den Bühnen volkreicher Städte*” (Primavesi, 2008: 211).

6 | “Despite the wish to exclude tragedy, it constantly reappeared: in the bloody draperies of Lepelletier’s processions; in Roberjot’s costume, decorated with a funeral veil [...]; and in the mausoleum, the true monumental symbol of the Revolution, erected in dramatic isolation and around which moved the crowds of the processions, cypress in hand, and marching troops, bayonets reversed, a mourning veil on their standards, while the drums, veiled in black, rolled and the smoke of odoriferous woods and incense burned on the altars. A whole romantic sensibility is expressed in these ‘gloomy festivals, worthy of Ancient Rome’, they dispensed an emotion irreconcilable with the regular display of utopian joy, and they were freed from the desire to please; they occupied a place midway between fascination and repulsion. This was precisely the definition that Kant gave of the sublime (and in 1790, as that). By making room for ‘this negative pleasure’, the Revolutionary festival, in the early forms adopted in 1792, was unfaithful to its purpose”. Hölderlin could have been in contact with this type of representations through his Jacobin friends in Hamburg. See also Lemke 2011, 68-87.

examples of charismatic enthusiasts, whose projects failed due to the blindness caused by their political hopes (Link, 1983: 87—125).

Unlike his mentor, and as he later programmatically affirmed in his *Notes on Oedipus* (1804), Hölderlin's interest in classic tragedy seems to come from the most markedly catalyzing and sacrificial aspects of it. The staging of *Oedipus* was meant to evoke "las formas espantosamente solemnes, el drama como de un proceso por herejía"; "mundo" whose "lenguaje" was "entre la peste y la confusión del sentido y el espíritu de adivinación universalmente excitado".⁸ Ancient tragedy provided the poet with a ritual framework, within which the language of enthusiasm could be staged as a mystical discourse from the perspective of its most catalyzing and anarchist implications.

In this regard, and far from a coincidence, the choice of Empedocles as main character of his tragic project already reflected his position: for the educated of the time, the myth of Empedocles was a typical case of 'fanaticism of enthusiasm'. Thus, for example, enlightened authors like Gottsched, J. H Voß or Wieland identified in Empedocles a whole series of typical characteristics of the enthusiastic *Schwärmer*: a disrespectful attitude towards officially-sanctioned cult, mystical slander, melancholy illness, etc. Influenced by Horatio and Diogenes Laertius' chronicles, these authors considered Empedocles' sacrifice a simple performance, built by the 'poet-philosopher' himself to safeguard his legendary reputation. Consequently, far from any kind of divine inspiration, the mystical language of *Schwärmer* was mainly a theatrical gesture of farce and slander (Birkenhauer, 1996). In contrast to these conflicting judgments, Hölderlin's dramatic project would reclaim the legend's histrionic attributes; precisely the same uncertain and farcical dimension refuted by the enlightened critics.

At the same time, in this ideological-discursive context, it is quite significant that Empedocles was often represented as a religiously persecuted man. Johann C. Edelmann, a pietistic mystic, thus referred to the 'daring Empedocles', (*freymüthigen Empedocles*), the 'astute pagan' (*klugen Heyden*). In conflict with the Lutheran orthodoxy, Edelmann sided with the *Schwärmer* Empedocles, just like Gottfried Arnold in his *History of Heretics* (1699), as if this was an old link in the genealogy of enthusiasm: Empedocles, who had "visiones divinas" and a great "sumisión ante los dioses", had raised himself over the ordinary mass to be accused of "brujería".⁹ We will then see how the positive qualities underlined by the 'fanatic' Edelmann will appear again in the Hölderlinian characterization of this character. Thus, the poet manages to establish a close connection between the discourse and the character's fate, reinterpreting the Empedoclean legend from the ambivalent perspective of the *Schwärmer*-enthusiastic discourse.

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7 | Ibid. Port 2005, 9. Cf. Goethe's letters to Schiller from the 25th November 1797: "Ohne ein lebhaftes pathologisches Interesse ist es auch mir niemals gelungen, irgend eine tragische Situation zu bearbeiten, und ich habe sie daher lieber vermieden als aufgesucht. Sollte es wohl auch einer von den Vorzügen der Alten gewesen sein? Daß das höchste Pathetische auch nur ästhetisches Spiel bei ihnen gewesen wäre, da bei uns die Naturwahrheit mit wirken muß, um ein solches Werk hervorzubringen" (Goethe, 2011: 500).

8 | "das Drama wie eines Kezgergerichtes, als Sprache für eine Welt, wo unter Pest und Sinnesverwirrung und allgemein entzündetem Wahrsagergeist" (StA V. 201-202).

9 | "wenn sie in die göttliche Vorsehung eine tiefere Einsicht blicken liessen / und mehrere Ehrfurcht vor die Gotter zeigten / als der gemeine Hauffe / so hielte man sie sogar vor Hexen-Meister" (Quoted by Prignitz, 1985: 10).

In contrast with Weimar's classicism, within the framework of his break from his mentor Schiller, Hölderlin will turn then to the dramatic form (*trägische Ode*) in order to make the conflicts of the enthusiastic subjectivity at the heart of the public space visible, within a collective historical framework. Likewise, thanks to the tragic genre, the Greek world will no longer be a mere elegiac reference (as in his novel *Hyperion*), but it will be presented, through the city of Agrigento, as a specific public world, where Empedocles will be compelled to answer for his rhetoric and actions. Imbued with a sublime and apocalyptic *pathos*, the announcement of a 'religion of nature' will lead to a staging where 'enthusiasm' will appear as a discourse that can subvert social order. In this way, the figure of the enthusiastic subjectivity will emerge as the catalyzing rhetoric on the horizon of expectations opened by the revolutionary crisis.

2. The enthusiastic discourse as core of the tragedy

So where does the failure of this dramatic project lie? Why could Hölderlin never end any of these drafts? If we look at the different outlines of the work, we will be able to corroborate that, far from intending the representation of a linear and uniform dramatic action, its dramatic dialogues and soliloquies only offer different interpretations around the origin of the tragic breaking-off. In other words: the dialogues between the main characters use a series of reflections (*a posteriori* or anticipatory) against the emergence of the enthusiastic discourse personified in Empedocles. Here lies the singularity of the Hölderlinian tragic project. As we will see later, these versions will, in turn, be a series of retrospective readings into the controversial status of the rhetoric of enthusiasm as a collective discourse. In order to understand Empedocles' final destiny, it is necessary to reconstruct the different versions of his hubris; that original fault that led him to the sacrificial atoning act. Or in other words: how could Empedocles become an 'enthusiastic priest' in the first place?

2.1 The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm and Melancholy Illness

At this point, just like the hymnic self in the cycle of Tübingen (1788-1794), his figure was meant to personify the 'typical' mistake of the enthusiastic subjectivity, which by essence tended to rise above its earthly condition, suddenly infatuated by its contact with the divine. Priestly intoxication and delirium emerged from the immediate contact with the elements of nature: "En mí, / en mí confluisteis, manantiales de la vida, / desde las profundidades del mundo [...]" (Hölderlin, 1997: 41).¹⁰ Empedocles' main fault would have been to allow himself to be captivated by a "sentido ilimitado".¹¹ This disproportionate identification led to the arrogance of enthusiasm:

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10 | "in mir / in mir, Ihr Quellen des Lebens, strömet ihr einst aus Tiefen der Welt zusammen [...]" (StA IV.1, 14, vv. 300-301).

11 | "wohin Ihn treiben mag der unbeschränkte Sinn" (StA IV.1, 9, vv. 181).

“Los dioses se habían / puesto a mi servicio, yo solo / era dios, y lo proclamé con atrevido orgullo” (Hölderlin, 1997: 76).¹² Already in Hölderlin’s first poetic period, as a student in Tübingen (1788-1794), he used the term *Übermuth* to refer to the temptations of an unguided enthusiasm without any philosophical orientation. Such “soberbia” (*Übermut*)¹³ and “orgullosa” (*Stolz*)¹⁴ attitude was the origin of the hubris that had made him lose the gods’ protection: “Pues / los dioses se han apoderado de su fuerza, / desde aquel día en que, ebrio, este hombre / se proclamó un dios ante todo el pueblo” (Hölderlin, 1997: 53).¹⁵

Furthermore, in his essays about the poem, Hölderlin defined the main character’s tragic mistake as “soberbia del genio”.¹⁶ As Mecades declares in the first and second versions of the drama, it was an inherent characteristic related to the hero’s “discurso arrogante” (Hölderlin, 1997: 225).¹⁷ As we have mentioned, the genealogy of this hubris begun with his proximity to the divine, a power bequeathed by the gods that became most evident in the main character’s speech: “Le ha hecho demasiado poderoso / la confianza que ha llegado / a tener con los dioses. / Al pueblo le suenan sus palabras / como si vinieran del Olimpo” (Hölderlin, 1997: 219).¹⁸ But at the same time, both Empedocles and his pupil Pausanias emphasized several times during the work the power of his mentor’s speech.¹⁹ In all three versions of the work, arrogance and discursive sovereignty constitute two sides of the same coin.

At this point, each of Empedocles’ attempts to understand his own situation was trapped by his unexpected changes in mood and perception. Both his friends and enemies discovered in him a “sufrimiento propio y profundo” (*eigen tiefes Leid*, StA IV.1 4, v. 31); an unhealthy sadness that “nublaba” (*umwolket*) his spirit (StA IV.1, 107, v. 462). Kant, in his *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime* (*Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des schönen und erhabenen*, 1764) attributed the loss of the original sobriety and the arrival of unexpected attacks of melancholy to the ‘degeneration’ (*Ausartung*) suffered by the victims of enthusiasm. The melancholy disease—that pathological derivation of the enthusiastic discourse—reappeared here to suggest the ‘blindness’ effect that, according to Aristotelian poetics, prevented dramatic characters from being the owners of their own actions. Empedocles’ tragic fate arose not only from his enthusiastic vanity, but also from the pathological blindness caused by the ecstatic feeling.

Within the framework of this dramatic characterization, the comparison with the oriental *Schwärmer* would not take long to appear through Hermocrates, Agrigento’s official priest: “Soñador terrible, dirá, / como esos viejos arrogantes / que recorren Asia con sus bastones de caña / que allá una vez hace tiempo los dioses nacieron de su verbo”

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12 | “die Götter waren / Dienstbar mir geworden, ich allein / War Gott, und sprachs im frechen Stolz heraus- / O glaub es mir, ich wäre lieber nicht / Geboren” (StA IV.1, 21, vv. 481-485).

13 | StA IV.1, 11, v. 225; 94, v. 97; 96, vv. 134, 152.

14 | StA IV.1, 6, v. 106; 15, vv.319, 337; 21, vv. 483, 496; 44, v. 1030; 46, v. 1071; 84, v. 2015; 98, v. 215.

15 | «Denn es haben / Die Götter seine Kraft von ihm genommen» (StA IV.1, 10, v. 185-186).

16 | «Übermuth des Genies» (StA IV.1, 446).

17 | «Ein übermüthiges Gerede fällt / Mir bei», StA IV.1 94, vv. 97-98.

18 | «Das hat zu mächtig ihn / Gemacht, daß er vertraut / Mit Göttern worden ist / Es tönt sein Wort dem Volk, / Als käm vom Olymp» (StA IV.1 92, vv. 29-37).

19 | StA IV.1, 13, v.281; 21, vv. 489; 494-495; 53, v. 1210.

(Hölderlin, 1997: 57).²⁰ Once more, this description emphasized the hero's speech: possessed by the same arrogance as ancient mystics, Empedocles' words were those of a 'terrible dreamer' who had the superstition of making the divine present with his own words. This Hölderlinian characterization of the protagonist was not indifferent to the moral genealogies of the time: in Christian F. Duttenhofer's (1742-1814) *Geschichte der Religionsschwärmereyen* (1792-1802), the cause of the enthusiastic delirium lay in the negative consequences of the arid and warm weather, typical of eastern regions, where many of the first mystics and ancient philosophers had their revelations (Schings, 1977: 191—193). The image of the "bastón de caña" (Schilfrohr) was not a coincidence either: in this way, Empedocles appeared to identify with the 'arrogance' of those prophets who had esoteric knowledge and who had, according to writers of treatises like Duttenhofer, swarmed around Asian regions. In the manner of ancient Christian anchorites, or pietistic hermits, the main character had become a homeless pariah, devoted to the "vida salvaje", among "seres extraños" (StA IV.1, 45, vv. 1047—1061).²¹

2.2 From melancholy to historical *kairos*

As expected, this isolation did not result in any type of mystic-contemplative apotheosis, but rather in a blindness that in the end brought about the release of the protagonist's thanatic and suicidal tendencies. In the second version, the melancholy symptom was already a 'sign' anticipating the imminence of a fatal and transformative decision. Pausanias declares: "Me parece una mala señal / que el espíritu de los poderosos, / siempre gozoso, se obnuble de ese modo" (Hölderlin, 1997: 253).²² To which Empedocles answers: "¿Lo sientes? Eso indica que pronto / caerá a la tierra, entre borrascas" (Hölderlin, 1997: 253).²³ As we will later see, it is significant that both the references to the volcano and Empedocles' tragic decision appeared separately in the metaphor of an oncoming storm. Nature appeared invested in the temporality of the transformative *kairos*.

This is a singular novelty of his dramatic project that had an increasing significance during his last poetic stage. As a tragic protagonist, Empedocles personified, as early as in the first version of the work, this transformative dimension of the historical time related to the terrible and the disastrous: "Hay en él un ser terrible que todo lo transforma" (Hölderlin, 1997: 41).²⁴ After establishing a relationship with him, the rest of characters felt possessed by a particular temporal anxiety. As Pantea makes clear at the beginning of the first version, Empedocles' prophetic qualities have the ability to "dividir el firmamento" and, in a redeeming way, to announce "la claridad del día".²⁵ This experience of *kairos* was first explicitly identified by his pupil Pausanias:

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20 | «Ein fürchterlicher Träumer spricht / Er, gleich den alten übermüthigen, / Die mit dem Schilfrohr Asien durchwandern, / Einst durch sein Wort geworden sein die Götter» (StA IV.1, 11, vv. 222-225).

21 | We must remember that Hölderlin was still finishing the second volume of the novel when he started the first version of the drama. On the other hand, Asia and the Orient would become in turn a recurrent poetical and theoretical leitmotiv during the last phase of Hölderlin's work. Cf. *Die Wanderung* (StA, II. 1, 138-141), *Am Quell der Donau* (StA II.1, 126-129).

22 | «Ein böses Zeichen dünkt/ Es mir, wenn so der Geist, der immerfrohe, sich / Der Mächtigen umwölket» (StA IV.1, 107, vv. 461-462).

23 | «Fühlst du aus? Es deutet, daß er bald Zur Erd' hinab im Ungewitter muß» (StA IV.1, 108, vv. 463-464).

24 | «ein furchtbar allverwandelnd Wesen ist in ihm» (StA IV.1 30, v. 22).

25 | «Und wenn er bei Gewittern in den Himmel blicke / theile die Wolke sich und hervorschimmre der / heitre Tag» (StA IV.1, 3, vv. 17-19).

¿No te he visto / en tus acciones, cuando el bárbaro Estado / adquirió forma y sentido gracias a ti? / En su poder / experimenté tu espíritu y su mundo, cuando a menudo / una palabra tuya, en un instante, / creaba para mí muchos años de vida / y así se le abría una era nueva y bella al adolescente, / [...] / así me palpitaba a menudo el corazón, cuando hablabas / de la felicidad del mundo antiguo, el del origen, / ¿y no trazaste las grandes líneas del futuro / ante mí, igual que la mirada segura del artista / añade el elemento que faltaba para completar el cuadro? / ¿no ves claro ante ti el destino de los hombres? (Hölderlin, 1997: 73-75)²⁶

As we can see in this passage, Empedocles' words had, according to Pausanias, the status of a 'sacred event' that could anticipate the future. Significantly, the main character's prophetic power was also compared with the 'look of the artist', who can show his pupil the 'lines of future'. Such 'time' constituted in turn an open horizon in which men's expectations were planned. As in Tübingen hymns and *Hyperion*, historical prognosis was again underlined like an idiosyncratic feature of the enthusiastic subjectivity. In this regard, it is significant that no other passage of the work refers to the figure of Napoleon so clearly, because as in the last case, Empedocles' role in the revolutionary process was to give 'sense and shape' to the 'barbarous state' with his 'actions', thus creating the emergence of a new historical era. In this way, Pausanias also underlined, unsurprisingly, Empedocles' 'conquering' features: "Te has transformado y tu mirada brilla / como la de un conquistador" (Hölderlin, 1997: 143).²⁷ The hopes of the revolutionary crisis also resounded in Empedocles' actions.

These references are far from being coincidental when we take into account that, in 1797, when Hölderlin was beginning to see the first rudiments of his dramatic project, he also composed on different sides of the same page two odes entitled *Empedokles* and *Buonaparte*. On the other hand, Napoleon's identification with the idea of a 'historical caesura' was a common representation among Hölderlin's contemporaries. After the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire, many commentators of the time believed that Napoleonic charisma reflected an important figure with enough power to direct and order the political process, thus preventing the revolution from disappearing into a cycle of incessant catastrophes (Becker 1999, 90—91).²⁸ Later, Hölderlin's hymn *Celebration of Peace (Friedensfeier)* presented the Napoleonic advance as a Utopian-redeeming event on which Napoleon's foreign image acquired a familiar and known form, which was basically non-belligerent (*Freundesgestalt*, StA III: 534, v. 28).

2.3 Enthusiasm and public scene: the issue of infection

Therefore, and contrary to the initial conjectures drawn up by the dramatic characters, Empedocles' impassioned rhetoric did not emerged only from his melancholy distress, but also from other

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26 | «In deinen Thaten, da der wilde Staat von dir / Gestalt und Sinn gewann, in seiner Macht / Erfuhr ich deinen Geist, und seine Welt, wenn oft / Ein Wort von dir im heiligen Augenblick / Das Leben vieler Jahre mir erschuf, / Daß eine neue schöne Zeit von da / Dem Jünglinge begann; [...] / So schlug mir oft das Herz, wenn du vom Glück / Der alten Urwelt sprachst, und zeichnetest / Du nicht der Zukunft große Linien / Vor mir, so wie des Künstlers sichrer Blick / Ein fehlend Glied zum ganzen Bilde reiht; / Liegt nicht vor dir der Menschen Schiksaal offen?» (StA IV.1 19-20, vv. 443-456).

27 | «Du bist verwandelt und dein Auge glänzt / Wie eines Siegenden. Ich fass' es nicht» (StA IV 52, vv. 1177-1178).

28 | In this last text, the historical character appeared characterized as a 'hero' whose 'fast spirit' —the 'wine of life'— was impossible to contain, not even within the margins of the poem. These Bonapartist connotations will appear firmly again in his later writings (for example, *Dichterberuf*, StA II 47).

ideological and political reasons present in his speeches. In this regard, we can see the extent to which, for Hölderlin, a hubris that occurs at the metaphysical level (between the hero and the Gods) was insufficient as a motive for the composition of the tragic conflict. Beyond the challenge to the gods, and in order to provide it with effective implications as a dramatic representation, the ecstasy of enthusiasm had to be presented as a crisis within the city. Already in the first version of the drama, this ecstatic impulse led the main character to abandon his retreat and to appear before Agrigento's community. Pantea's speech staged the connection between the hubris of enthusiasm and its implications for community life: "Y la pujante / la naturaleza se muestra en torno a él; aquí se siente / como un dios en sus elementos, / y su gozo / es un canto celestial, entonces sale, también, / a mezclarse con el pueblo" (Hölderlin, 1997: 45).²⁹

We are dealing with the mythical genesis of the enthusiastic subjectivity as public discourse. This dimension is emphasized several times in the theatrical work of Empedocles. Thus, according to the author's original intention, Agrigento was far from being a peaceful place. As the *Grund zum Empedokles* makes clear, its residents were 'hyperpolitical' citizens; people who lived in a permanent state of revolution: "En medio de sus agrigentinos, hiperpolitizados, que estaban siempre discutiendo y calculando; en medio de las formas sociales de su ciudad, en evolución y renovación permanentes" (Hölderlin, 1997: 299).³⁰ However, as the drama progresses, and from the point of view of Critias the Archon, the riots were not presented as an exclusive fault of the citizens, but rather as a consequence of their excessive identification with Empedocles' intoxication of enthusiasm: "El pueblo está ebrio, como el mismo. / No atiende a leyes, ni a necesidades, / ni a jueces; las costumbres están inundadas / por un estrépito incomprensible" (Hölderlin, 1997: 55).³¹ Conferred with an ominous and terrifying sonorous dimension, the demonstrations were not represented directly; their actions and ways of expression are constantly compared with the excesses of the rhetoric of enthusiasm: a 'drunken' (*trunken*), 'incomprehensible yell' (*unverständlichen Gebrause*) that is an outrage against customs and good sense. In the second version of the work, the author underlined more precisely the state of fanatical blindness in which the city residents find themselves: "¿Oyes al pueblo ebrio? [...] / Lo sé, como hierba seca / se inflaman los hombres" (Hölderlin, 1997: 217).³² With the image of 'dried grass', Hermocrates alluded to the fire that ruined the harvests and started the riots in the countryside: men seemed to flare up in the same way before Empedocles. As we will later see, this was also one of the images used by the critics of revolutionary enthusiasm. According to them, the main danger of the language of enthusiasm lay in its ability to spread like 'fire' or an 'infection' among the poorest stratum of society (La Vopa, 1998: 85-116).

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29 | «[...] *Die Natur um ihn erscheint – hier fühlt er, wie ein Gott! / In seinen Elementen sich, und seine Lust / Ist himmlischer Gesang, dann tritt er auch / Heraus ins Volk [...]*» (StA IV.1, 6, vv. 84-87).

30 | «*Unter seinen hyperpolitischen, immerreichenden und berechnenden Agrigentinern, unter den fortstreben immersicherneuerden gesellschaftlichen Formen seiner Stadt [...]*» (StA IV.1, 158). Ibid. StA IV.1, 21, vv. 481-485.

31 | «*Das Volk ist trunken, wie er selber ist. / Sie hören kein Gesetz, und keine Noth / Und keinen Richter; die Gebräuche sind / Von unverständlichen Gebrause [...]*» (StA IV.1, 10; v. 189).

32 | «*Hörst du das trunkne Volk? / [...] Der Geist des Manns / Ist mächtig unter ihnen / Hermocrates. / Ich weiß, wie dürres Gras / Entzünden sich die Menschen*» (StA IV.4, 91; vv. 1-5).

Empedocles' rhetoric has led to a state of widespread rebellion in which both the people and their temporary leader seemed to influence each other: the delirium of enthusiasm can also be contagious. More than once, when popular favor turns against him, Empedocles accuses Agrigentines of being 'crazy' and 'intoxicated': "¡Oh ustedes, exaltados!",³³ "Están ebrios, di una palabra de paz, / para que vuelva el sentido al pueblo!" (Hölderlin, 1997: 97).³⁴ Indeed, it was a sort of infectious frenzy: "¡Vámonos, Critias! / Que con su discurso no nos arrastre!" (Hölderlin 1997, 61).³⁵ As we have already seen, *Rasenden* (furious) was the term that Empedocles used against Agrigentines, and also that was used by Hermocrates to characterize the dramatic hero's behavior; even Agrigentines used this word to describe their own actions.³⁶ Pantea also accused his father of being blinded by the same fury of enthusiasm when he cursed Empedocles: "Y si le ha maldecido mi padre, cegado / por la rabia, que me maldiga ahora a mí" (Hölderlin, 1997: 123).³⁷ And Delia, Pantea's servant, was afraid and could not recognize her mistress when her speech went beyond what was normal and seemed to dangerously mimic that of her lover Empedocles: "¡[...] Pantea! Me aterra que tanto / te exaltes con tus lamentos. ¿Acaso él, / como tú, también alimenta de dolor / su espíritu orgulloso, e insiste con violencia en las penas?"³⁸

Thus, the work creates some kind of mutual feedback between the voice of enthusiasm (possessed by a divine knowledge) and people's enthusiasm: one attracted the other, at the same time that both infected each other. At this point, and as the main character declared more than once, it was this delirious intoxication, which had previously taken possession of the people thanks to his words, that now has turned against him to permanently expel him from the community. In the second version of the work, this situation appeared stated through Hermocrates' words:

¿Acaso no lo ves? Los pobres / de espíritu han extraviado al espíritu / sublime, los ciegos al seductor. / Arrojó su alma al pueblo, traicionó, generoso, / a los dioses y entregó su favor a los vulgares, / [...] / [...] entretanto crecía / la ebriedad del pueblo; estremecidos / vieron cómo le temblaba el pecho / con sus propias palabras, y dijeron: / ¡No es así como escuchamos a los dioses! / Y a aquel hombre altivo y afligido, los siervos / dieron nombres que no voy a mencionarte. / Y finalmente toma el sediento la ponzoña; / el pobre, que no sabe permanecer ensimismado / y no encuentra a nadie semejante a él, / se consuela con la adoración maníaca / y cegado, se vuelve como ellos, / los idólatras sin alma [...]. (Hölderlin, 1997: 223)³⁹

The prophecy of enthusiasm turned into a curse enunciated by the priest against himself and imitated by the common people: it is now his own followers who rebel against Empedocles to cause his downfall. Retrospectively reinterpreted by the city priest, the tragic conflict emerged now from the plebeian pluralization of the

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33 | «*Oh ihr Rasenden!*» (StA IV.1; 27 v. 628).

34 | «*Sie sind, wie trunken, sprich ein ruhig Wort, / Damit der Sinn dem Volke wiedekehre!*» (StA IV.1, 30; v. 719-720).

35 | «*Laß uns gehen, Kritias! / Daß er in seine Rede nicht uns ziehet*» (StA IV.1; 13, v.281).

36 | Cf. respectively StA IV.1, 58, v. 1358, and StA IV, 61; v. 1431.

37 | «*Und hat er ihm geflucht, der Rasende / Mein Vater, hal so fluch er nun auch mir*» (StA IV.1, 44; vv. 1015-1016)

38 | «*Panthea! Mich schrökt es, wenn du so / Dich deiner Klagen überhebst. Ist er / Denn auch, wie du, daß er den stolzen Geist / Am Schmerze nährt, und heftger wird im Leiden? / Ich mags nicht glauben, denn ich fürchte das*» (StA IV.1, 44; vv. 1028-1032)

39 | «*Siehst du denn nicht? Es haben / Den hohen Geist die Geistesarmen / Geirrt, die Blinden den Verführer. / Die Seele warf er vor das Volk, verrieth / Der Götter Gunst gutmüthig den Gemeinen / [...] / [...] indessen wuchs / Die Trunkenheit dem Volke; schauernd / Vernahmen sie's, wenn ihm vom eignen Wort / Der Busen bebt, und sprachen: / So hören wir nicht die Götter! / Und Nahmen, so ich dir nicht nenne, gaben / Die Knechte dann dem stolzen Trauerden. / Und endlich nimmt der Durstige das Gift, / Der Arme, der mit seinem Sinne nicht / Zu bleiben weiß und Ähnliches nicht findet, / Er tröstet mit der rasenden / Anbetung sich, erblindet, wird wie sie, / Die seelenlosen Aberglaubigen [...]*» (StA IV.1 94, vv. 70-94).

enthusiastic discourse, which suddenly had escaped from the hands of its original individual to become a state of collective frenzy. Again we find the most controversial dimension of the enthusiastic discourse: the type of contagion caused by those 'impassioned' speeches grouped under the stigmatizing label of the *Schwärmerei*, whose ominous connotations returned with the new climate of revolutionary commotion.

Hermocrates' accusation fell within a very precise framework of ideological connotations: both liberal (Friedrich Gentz) and conservative (Edmund Burke, August Rehberg) critics were turning with delight to the stigmatizing leitmotiv of the 'contagious swarm' to condemn the celebratory rhetoric of Jacobin sympathizers. For the members of the elite, the main problem lay in the obscurantist effects that the new fanatical rhetoric was exerting on the revolution of the public space, through the transmission of strange ideas and impassioned declarations of faith.

All the characters then appeared trapped by the same kind of chaotic and destructive intoxication, tending to break off their social ties. In the second version of the work, the people's 'delirious' condition was emphasized again: "Una estrella errante se ha tornado / nuestro pueblo y temo / que este signo anuncie / aún cosas futuras, que él / incuba en su mente callada" (Hölderlin, 1997: 221).⁴⁰ Like Hyperion and Adamas, Agrigento's citizens have also become a 'wandering star', as their actions lacked a previous certain sense.⁴¹ And in a similar way to the Parisian people, Agrigentines' fervor had also turned them into a people whose actions were impossible to predict (Becker, 1999: 37-52). Thus transferred to a collective plane by means of dramatic staging, the enthusiastic discourse represented the peculiar type of historical uncertainty that had burst with the experience of the revolutionary crisis.

Once more, it was about the staging of the historical mission of the enthusiastic man of religion, now presented in his most disturbing consequences: a revolution of the social order stemming from the speech of just one fanatic man, indifferent to any type of authority or hierarchical order.⁴² Already in the first version, this was confirmed by Critias' moving speech:

El pueblo está ebrio, como él mismo. / No atiende a leyes, ni a necesidades, / ni a jueces; las costumbres están inundadas / por un estrépito incomprensible, / como las apacibles riberas; una fiesta ha sustituido a todas las fiestas, / y de los dioses los humildes días de fiesta / se han fundido en uno solo. Eclipsándolo todo, / el mago envuelve cielo y tierra / en la tempestad que nos ha preparado, / y mira y se alegra de su espíritu / en su tranquilo recinto. (Hölderlin, 1997: 55)⁴³

The shocking frenzy caused by Empedocles' speech was the

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40 | «*Ein Irrgestirn ist unser Volk / Geworden und ich fürcht', / Es deute dieses Zeichen / Zukunft'ges noch, das er / Im stillen Sinne brütet*» (StA IV.1, 93, vv. 48-52).

41 | Hyperion recalled his friendship with Adamas in this way: "Gozamos de nuestro extravío en la noche de lo desconocido, arrojándonos en las frías tierras del extranjero, y cuando era posible, nos perdíamos en las regiones solares, lanzándonos más allá de las órbitas de los cometas" ("wir haben unsre Lust daran, uns in die Nacht des Unbekannten, in die kalte Fremde irgend einer andern Welt zu stürzen, und wär'es möglich, wir verließen der Sonne Gebiet und stürmten über des Irrsterns Grenzen hinaus", StA III, 16).

42 | This was not the only literary example, but a recurrent subject in the time, addressed in Wieland's fable *Goldene Spiegel* (1772-1794), in *Die Räuber* (1781), and in Schiller's *Wallenstein*, until Keilist's *Michael Kolhaas* (1808) and the short story *Das Erdbeben in Chilli* (1807/1810) (not by chance both set in the time of the Reformation). Likewise, in a preparatory fragment of his dramatic project (*Zu Sokrates Zeiten*) of 1799, Hölderlin echoed the emancipatory connotations related to the radical religious movements of his time: "Wer richtet denn igt? / Richtet das einige / Volk? / Nein! o nein! wer richtet denn igt? / ein Natterngeschlecht! feig. u. falsch / das edlere Wort nicht mehr / Über die Lipp. / O im Nahmen / ruf ich / alter Dämon! Dich herab / Oder sende / Einen Helden [...]" (StA II, 318, vv. 1-12).

43 | «*Die Gebräuche sind von unverständlichem Gebräuse, gleich / Den friedlichen Gestaden, überschwemmt, /*

substitution of all creeds by only one: one 'God' and one 'feast day' instead of many. Or, as announced by the essay fragment "Sobre religion" (1796), one sole universal worship, instead of dispersed confessional churches.⁴⁴ The 'new religion', so many times theorized by Hölderlin and Hegel in their writings and correspondence, emerged here, in the context of the tragic action, as a riot aroused by the ecstatic language of the *Schwärmer*. Radicalizing the Utopia of the *Alttesten Systemmprogramm*..., this did not arise as a 'polytheism of thinking', but as moral anarchy in which all the norms of moral and good customs appeared subverted.

Empedocles' words produced a natural cataclysm in the community ("*Ins Ungewitter*").⁴⁵ As we have already mentioned, the enthusiastic discourse appeared more related to the experience of the historical-revolutionary *kairos*: "Eclipsándolo todo, / el mago envuelve cielo y tierra / en la tempestad que nos ha preparado". The apocalyptic imagery reappeared at the beginning of the second version, when Mecades warned about the dangers of this new religious sole rule: "Que uno solo agite así a la multitud / es para mí como cuando el rayo de Júpiter / prende el bosque, y aún más terrible" (Hölderlin, 1997: 217).⁴⁶ Both Jupiter (*Jovis*) and the image of the 'ray of Jupiter' (*Jovis Blitz*) appear several times in the text (StA IV.1, 6, v. 105; 46, v. 1075; 9). This insistence is not a coincidence: the symbol of the punishing ray, related to the Greek God Zeus, had a considerable weight on the list of images from French revolutionary propaganda (Kneißle, 2010: 45-46).⁴⁷ The image condensed in itself the unforeseeable temporal dimension of the revolutionary 'enthusiasm', in the place where its emergency threatened to subvert the forms of civil order.

On the other hand, the emphasis put on the discursive status of the dramatic conflict was also revealed by the discussion on the status of the priestly authority. At this point, Hölderlin presented Hermocrates as a priest who primarily functioned as a censor to inhibit the people's state of excitement: "La palabra del sacerdote quiebra el espíritu audaz" (Hölderlin, 1997: 59).⁴⁸ In the second version, Hermocrates insisted on the city authorities' censorship: "Por esta razón, ponemos / a los hombres una venda en los ojos, / para que no se nutran de demasiada luz / Lo divino no puede comparecer ante ellos" (Hölderlin, 1997: 217).⁴⁹ The danger was the people's proximity to the blinding light issued by Empedocles' 'divine' aura. At this point, Hermocrates was particularly aware of the demagogic-charismatic power latent in the discourse of the main character: "Quien se ha ganado al pueblo dice / lo que quiere; bien lo sé y no seré yo / quien se oponga, puesto que los dioses / aún lo toleran". (Hölderlin, 1997: 87).⁵⁰ Therefore, in this context of fanatic languages, the city priest is also aware of the fact that his dispute with Empedocles was taking place in the discursive field of persuasion and belief, a dimension in which, after all, they both had the same weapons.⁵¹

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Ein Fest für alle Feste und der Götter / Bescheidne Feiertage haben sich / in Eins verloren allverdunkelnd hüllt / Der Zauberer den Himmel und die Erd' / Ins Ungewitter, das er uns gemacht, / Und siehet zu und freut sich seines Geists / In seiner stillen Halle» (StA IV.1, 10, vv. 189-201).

44 | StA IV, 275-281.

45 | StA VI.1 10.

46 | «*Das Einer so die Menge bewegt, mir ists, / Als wie wenn Jovis Blitz den Bald / Ergreift, und furchtbarer»* (StA IV.1, 91, vv. 7-9)

47 | Illustrations of the king and the church could be seen in the anonymous painting *Souveraineté du peuple, déstruction du clergé, et de la royauté* (1793). There were two rays directed towards them both, which in turn were forming a triangle with the inscription 'Law' (*Loi*) (Kneißle 2010, 45-46). Cf. Kneißle, Daniela, *Die Republik im Zwielficht: Zur Metaphorik von Licht und Finsternis in der französischen Bildpublizistik 1871-1914*, Oldenbourg, Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010, pp. 45-46.

48 | «*Das Wort des Priesters bricht den kühnen Sinn»* (StA IV.1, 12; v. 255).

49 | «*Drum binden wir den Menschen auch / Das Band ums Auge, daß sie nicht / Zu kräftig sich am Lichte nähren / Nicht gegenwärtig werden / Dar Göttliches vor ihnen»* (StA IV.1, 91; v. 10).

50 | «*Wer sich das Volk gewonnen, redet, was / Er will; das weiß ich wohl und strebe nicht / Aus eignem Sinn entgegen, weil es noch / Die Götter dulden»* (StA IV.1, 25; vv. 585).

In this regard, Empedocles was reproaching the priests for reducing the 'divine free love' to a vulgar worship with their Manichean language: "Porque sentí sin duda, en mi temor / que queríais reducir a un culto vulgar / el libre amor divino" (Hölderlin, 1997: 81).⁵² Later, when they tried to become reconciled with the dramatic hero, Argrigentes themselves were echoing this accusation denouncing Hermocrates' charlatanism:

Y aún mueves la lengua? Tu, / tu nos has hecho malvados con tu charlatanería / nos has arrebatado el espíritu: nos has robado / el amor del semidios ¡tu! Ya no es el mismo. / No nos reconoce; ¡ah!, antes nos contemplaba / con dulces ojos este hombre regio; ahora su mirada / me trastorna el corazón. (Hölderlin, 1997: 159)⁵³

Thus, while Hermocrates tries to reaffirm the authority of the priestly word, Empedocles accuses the priests of having reduced the sense of divine religion through that same orthodox language. The political-religious dispute will thus appear dramatized like a conflict about the legitimacy of discourse.

3. Conclusions

In *The Death of Empedocles*, the stability of societal links is undermined, to later fall into a crisis due to the widespread installation of an enthusiastic discourse. In turn, the moment in which evil might have emerged became irrevocably ambiguous: infatuated with the excesses of the *Schwärmerei*, who had disappointed whom? Empedocles' mystic-delirious passion, or the arrogance of those who had surrendered to his madness? The fanaticism of the reformer, or the blindness of his beloved ones? The tragic misunderstanding arose thus when both sides of the intersubjective link melted down, and were made indistinguishable from one another, by means of the spread of the rhetoric of enthusiasm. Through this, the tragic hubris has infected the entire city, leading it toward self-destruction. Aware of this fault, being himself its paradigmatic personification, Empedocles will decide to expiate the excesses caused by his own discourse. Therein lies the reason for his final resolution to sacrifice his own life in the heights of Etna.

NOTES

51 | Some interpreters have warned this way about the existence of a "*Metaphorik der Manipulation*" (Primavesi, 2008: 266).

52 | «*Denn wohl hab' ichs gefühlt, in meiner Furcht, / Daß ihr des Herzens freie Götterliebe / Bereden möchtet zu gemeinem Dienst*» (StA IV.1 23, vv. 530-532).

53 | «*Regst du noch die Zunge? du, / Du hast uns schlecht gemacht; hast allen Sinn / uns weggeschwazt; hast uns des Halbgotts Liebe / geshtolen, du! er ists nicht mehr. Er kennt / uns nicht; [...]*» (StA IV.1 60, vv. 1397-1401).

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