

# The Kantian Sublime and the Theory of Tragedy: Comparing Schiller with Schelling

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**Abstract:** This article aims to investigate how Schiller and Schelling apply the Kantian sublime to their theories of tragedy according to the following axes: Firstly, I examine five of Schiller's essays (1792 – 1801), which, unlike Kant, strongly defend art's capacity to manifest the sublime. Herewith I discuss a shift in Schiller's thought (1801), whereby Reason is viewed as a subterfuge against nature's might and tragedy as man's optimal "tool" towards confronting it. Secondly, considering Schelling's lectures on *The Philosophy of Art* (1802 – 1804), I explain how and why freedom can be best presented in the tragic work of art through the indifference between freedom and necessity. Thirdly, questioning both views' adequacy in interpreting the essence of the tragic, I conclude that the Schellingian one offers a clearer insight into the tragicness of human nature as such, as a condition for the realization of freedom.

**Keywords:** Kant, Schelling, Schiller, sublime, tragedy

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is threefold: Firstly, I will examine to what extent Schiller and Schelling differ from Kant in their account of the sublime [*das Erhabene*] and its relevance to the beautiful [*das Schöne*], as well as how they apply the sublime to their theory of tragedy. Secondly, I will try to answer the question whether or not the sublime coincides with the tragic [*dem Tragischen*] and, thirdly, I will attempt a comparison between the two as to the way they approach the complex essence of the tragic.

## I. Schiller on the tragic and the sublime: 1792 – 1801

Regarding Schiller's first thorough engagement with Kantian aesthetics, he began to study the *Critique of Judgment* [*Kritik der Urteilkraft*]<sup>1</sup> (1790)

<sup>1</sup> Kant, I., 1793. *Kritik der Urteilkraft*. In: Windelband, W., ed. *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*,

in 1791, the precepts of which he tried, in the following year, to incorporate into his theory of tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Taking the Kantian –mainly the dynamically– sublime [*Dynamisch-Erhabene*] as a point of reference, Schiller also defends art’s –and not only nature’s–<sup>3</sup> capacity to manifest the sublime alongside the latter’s close connection with man’s grandeur of Reason [*Vernunft*]. Specifically, in the text “On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects [*Über den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen*]”<sup>4</sup> (1792), he argues that if we attribute a moral purpose [*einen moralischen Zweck*] to art, it loses all its freedom [*Freiheit*]; a freedom which is necessary for the production of free pleasure [*freies Vergnügen*] and aesthetic impact [*ästhetische Wirkung*]; and here free pleasure should be understood as harmonization of ends and means, where the beautiful interests imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] and mind [*Verstand*] equally, and the sublime interests Reason and imagination.<sup>5</sup>

In relation to the sublime, and in agreement with Kant,<sup>6</sup> Schiller asserts that the feeling of pain [*Unlust*] is a precondition for that of pleasure [*Lust*], since, through the realization of the incapacity of the imagination to intuit an object in its entirety, we discover another, super-sensual ability within us.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Schiller here speaks of the terror of the imagination, unlike Kant, who associates terror [awe] only with the dynamically sublime.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Schiller conceives Kant’s mathematically sublime [*Mathematisch-Erhabene*] in a somewhat variant way, without completely separating it from the dynamically sublime, as we will see in

Vol. 5. Berlin: Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Akademie Edition); Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by Pluhar, W. S. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

<sup>2</sup> Diamantopoulos, V., 2018. *Das Reflexionserhabene – Analyse des Erhabenen bei Schiller im Licht seines späten Pessimismus* (PhD Thesis). Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Kant, I., 1793. Kritik der Urteilskraft, *ibid.*, pp. 252 – 253; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 26, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects. In: *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical; including Dissertation on the “Connexion between the animal and spiritual in man”*. London: George Bell & Sons, pp. 360 – 372; *Über den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen*. In: Zeno.org. *Friedrich Schiller – Theoretische Schriften* [Accessed: 2023-6-6]. Available at: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schiller,+Friedrich/Theoretische+Schriften/Über+den+Grund+des+Vergnügens+an+tragischen+Gegenständen>.

<sup>5</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects, *ibid.*, pp. 363 – 364.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, I., 1793. Kritik der Urteilskraft, *ibid.*, pp. 244 – 246; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 23, pp. 97 – 100.

<sup>7</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects, *ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, I., 1793. Kritik der Urteilskraft, *ibid.*, pp. 260 – 261; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 28, pp. 119 – 120.

some of his later writings.<sup>9</sup> In addition, with regard to the [also] Kantian concept of the safe [spatial] distance from a physical threat, which Kant presupposes for the experience of the dynamically sublime,<sup>10</sup> Schiller adds the factor of the mitigation of the feeling of pain on the part of the person who suffers, so that, in the case of tragic art, the spectator can also experience the feeling of pity [*Mitleid*].<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, and here lies Schiller's important differentiation from his predecessor, he refers not only to the moral value of the repentance of a bad character, but also to cases where a bad deed "charm[s] our mind even at the cost of morality [*selbst auf Unkosten der moralischen zu ergötzen scheint*]"<sup>12</sup> How, then, can such a thing be explained? Schiller associates the sublime with morality, but not on the basis of the Kantian categorical imperative [*kategorischen Imperativ*], since what interests him is freedom in the representation [*Darstellung*] of passion. Therefore, even the representation [on stage] of the violation of the moral law is used by a skilled poet in order to create the highest pleasure [*höchstes Wohlgefallen*]; namely, the superiority of morality [*Sittlichkeit*] over sensuousness [*Sinnlichkeit*], aiming equally at the satisfaction [*Befriedigung*] both of the heart [*Herz*] and the mind.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, regarding the ways of achieving maximum pleasure, in his text "On the Tragic Art [*Über die Tragische Kunst*]"<sup>14</sup> (1792), Schiller emphasizes the need to arouse pity through the inevitability of compelling circumstances and not on the basis of the hero's personal responsibility or guilt [*Schuld*]. However, he also believes that free will is thus significantly curtailed. On that account, he criticizes ancient tragedy because of its emphasis on fate [*Schicksal*]. While he considers that pure pity is excited by the presence of the latter, passive empathy is not enough for him. Instead, the audi-

<sup>9</sup> Diamantopoulos, V., 2018. *Das Reflexionserhabene – Analyse des Erhabenen bei Schiller im Licht seines späten Pessimismus*, *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Allison, H. E., 2001. *Kant's Theory of Taste – A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 328 – 239; Kant, I., 1793. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *ibid.*, pp. 260 – 261; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 28, pp. 119 – 120.

<sup>11</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects, *ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>13</sup> Diamantopoulos, V., 2018. *Das Reflexionserhabene – Analyse des Erhabenen bei Schiller im Licht seines späten Pessimismus*, *ibid.*, pp. 78 – 80; Schiller, F., 1884. On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects, *ibid.*, pp. 370 – 372.

<sup>14</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the Tragic Art. In: *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical; including Dissertation on the "Connexion between the animal and spiritual in man"*, *ibid.*, pp. 339 – 360; *Über die tragische Kunst*. In: Zeno.org. *Friedrich Schiller – Theoretische Schriften*, *ibid.* Available at: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schiller,+Friedrich/Theoretische+Schriften/Über+die+tragische+Kunst>.

ence must simultaneously exercise the freedom and independence of *its* Reason.<sup>15</sup>

Concerning the primary role of aesthetic pleasure as a prerequisite for the fulfilment of a moral function, I believe that these two poles remain inextricably linked. After all, he states that “it is the union of these two that can alone elicit emotion [*Rührung*]. The great secret of the tragic art consists precisely in managing this struggle well”.<sup>16</sup> Moving on to his other texts, we find out that Schiller deals with the Kantian sublime in a more systematic way from 1793 onwards. In his text “Of the Sublime – Towards the Further Realization of Some Kantian Ideas [*Vom Erhabenen – Zur weitem Ausführung einiger Kantischen Ideen*]”<sup>17</sup> (1793), he distinguishes between the theoretically [*Theoretisch-Erhabene*] and the practically sublime [*Praktisch-Erhabene*]. Here Schiller speaks of a nature hostile to the senses, but compatible with the natural faculty of Reason within us. And against this hostility, we activate two distinct forces: The first relates to our ability to acquire knowledge [*Vorstellungstrieb/Erkenntnistrieb*] and the second to our desire to maintain our existence [*Erhaltungstrieb*]. In full agreement with Kant, therefore, Schiller’s theoretically sublime corresponds to the mathematically sublime, and the practically sublime to the dynamically sublime respectively. Man’s freedom, then, becomes conscious through the experience of the practically sublime.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, Schiller significantly differentiates himself from Kant, in that he distinguishes between *two* categories of the dynamically sublime. First, he mentions the contemplatively sublime [*Kontemplativ-Erhabene*], whereby it lies in the power of the imagination to decide whether “objects” such as darkness or silence –which are not life-threatening– can arouse fear. For this reason, he seems to prefer the next category of the pathetically sublime [*Pathetisch-Erhabene*], which

<sup>15</sup> Diamantopoulos, V., 2018. *Das Reflexionserhabene – Analyse des Erhabenen bei Schiller im Licht seines späten Pessimismus*, *ibid.*, pp. 87 – 92; Schiller, F., 1884. On the Tragic Art, *ibid.*, pp. 346 – 349.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>17</sup> Schiller, F., 2004. Of the Sublime – Towards the Further Realization of Some Kantian Ideas (1793), trans. by Wertz, W. F., Jr. *Fideli*o 13(1–2), pp. 90 – 99. doi: [https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fideli\\_o\\_archive/2004/fidv13n01-02-2004SpSu/fidv13n01-02-2004SpSu\\_090-friedrich\\_schiller\\_of\\_the\\_sublim.pdf](https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fideli_o_archive/2004/fidv13n01-02-2004SpSu/fidv13n01-02-2004SpSu_090-friedrich_schiller_of_the_sublim.pdf); Vom Erhabenen – Zur weitem Ausführung einiger Kantischen Ideen. In: Zeno.org. *Friedrich Schiller – Theoretische Schriften*, *ibid.* Available at: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schiller,+Friedrich/Theoretische+Schriften/Vom+Erhabenen>.

<sup>18</sup> Schiller, F., 2004. Of the Sublime – Towards the Further Realization of Some Kantian Ideas (1793), *ibid.*, p. 90.

is a power destructive to man. Yet, it is necessary that this force does not really threaten its recipient, in order for him to be able to evaluate it aesthetically. For this to be possible, it is again up to the power of the imagination –and even more decisively, in this case– to safeguard the aestheticization [Ästhetizität] of passion, a fact that is best realized in tragedy. For something to be considered pathetically sublime, then, two conditions are necessary: First, a lively representation of passion, and second, an idea of resistance to suffering as evidence of our capacity to act freely. While, through the first, the spectacle becomes passive, through the second it is transformed into a sublime one; namely, *essentially* tragic.<sup>19</sup>

In his next text “On the Pathetic [Über das Pathetische]”<sup>20</sup> (1793), the hero’s pathos [Pathos] must not only have no impact on his moral integrity, but very often it is *his* choice, as proof of obedience to his moral duty. Thus, the concept of duty functions practically as a motive [Motiv] and his passion as an act of free will [Willenshandlung]. For this reason, we must separate the resistance against a physical threat from that against the cause of passion, which is the only one appropriate to the Ideas of Reason [Ideen der Vernunft].<sup>21</sup> In this context, it is important to note that Schiller here distinguishes between the aesthetically sublime and the morally sublime, which means that the same object is able to produce a different effect, depending on whether we judge it in a moral or an aesthetical point of view; and this is because “our being [Wesen] consists of two principles and natures [zwei Prinzipien oder Naturen], so also and consequently our feelings are divided into two kinds [Geschlechter], entirely different”.<sup>22</sup> However, a question arises here: Is Schiller attempting, from here on, to separate morality from sensuousness? In my opinion, this is not the case. After all, in the last paragraph of this text he implies that one must give each of the two poles its “share”, so that both can shine independently in the end.<sup>23</sup> What is new here is the emphasis on the power of the imagination, which Schiller needs in order to answer the question of the stage representation of moral Ideas.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 98 – 99.

<sup>20</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the Pathetic. In: *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical; including Dissertation on the “Connexion between the animal and spiritual in man”*, *ibid.*, pp. 142 – 168; Über das Pathetische. In: Zeno.org. Friedrich Schiller – Theoretische Schriften, *ibid.* Available at: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schiller,+Friedrich/Theoretische+Schriften/Über+das+Pathetische>.

<sup>21</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the Pathetic, *ibid.*, pp. 146 – 149.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167 – 168.

## II. Schiller's shift in his account of the tragic and the sublime

Regarding Schiller's text "On the Sublime", it puzzles scholars before they even begin to read it, because there is controversy as to the date of its composition. Some commentators place it between 1794 and 1796, as it does not comprise a different account of the sublime in comparison to the texts written at that period of time,<sup>24</sup> while others place it in 1801.<sup>25</sup> Personally, I agree with Diamantopoulos' view, according to which this text is composed at two different times: The first part is indeed written around 1793, but the second part constitutes another shift in the author's thought, "negative" enough this time.<sup>26</sup> Henceforth, Schiller presents the forces of nature in a very pessimistic way, speaking of misfortunes in life – such as the inevitability of death – that can be overcome only by Reason. The sublime, then, provides us with a way out of the world of the senses, to which the beautiful has held us captive, and through the confusion of the understanding [*Unfaßbare für den Verstand, die Verwirrung*], it brings out what the latter cannot grasp by its own means; namely, the supersensible [*übersinnliche*] faculty within us.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, we have a completely new concept here, the confusion [or terror] of the understanding, considerably different from Kant's mathematically sublime – which refers to the failure of the imagination to summarize or represent large objects in one intuition.<sup>28</sup> Within this framework, Schiller stresses that the disorder of nature [*Unordnung der Natur*] fascinates much more than, for example, a beautiful and orderly French garden, also favouring the embrace of chance [*Zufall*], which eludes the

<sup>24</sup> Benn, S. M., 1991. Schiller and the Sublime 1759–96. In: *Pre-Romantic Attitude to Landscape in the Writings of Friedrich Schiller*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 139, 143. doi: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110867268-010/html>; Hay, K., 2022. On the Tragic-Sublime and Tragic Freedom – Thinking with Schiller and Schelling. *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg* 52, p. 164. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cps.6094>.

<sup>25</sup> Gellrich, M. W., 1984 – 1985. On Greek Tragedy and the Kantian Sublime. *Comparative Drama* 18(4), p. 320. doi: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41153142>; Robertson, R., 2013. On the Sublime and Schiller's Theory of Tragedy. *Philosophical Readings* 5, p. 194. doi: <https://zenodo.org/records/35551>.

<sup>26</sup> Diamantopoulos, V., 2018. *Das Reflexionserhabene – Analyse des Erhabenen bei Schiller im Licht seines späten Pessimismus*, *ibid.*, pp. 132 – 133.

<sup>27</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the Sublime. In: *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical; including Dissertation on the "Connexion between the animal and spiritual in man"*, *ibid.*, pp. 134 – 137; Über das Erhabene. In: Zeno.org. *Friedrich Schiller – Theoretische Schriften*, *ibid.* Available at: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schiller,+Friedrich/Theoretische+Schriften/Über+das+Erhabene>.

<sup>28</sup> Kant, I., 1793. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *ibid.*, pp. 248 – 250; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 25, pp. 103 – 106.

understanding's desire for unity [*Einheit*]. That being so, it is as if chaotic nature is intertwined with the ends of the freedom of Reason, which triumphs over the understanding as a sensory-dependent faculty. Here, then, a new conception of the sublime emerges, which Diamantopoulos rightly calls the reflective sublime [*Reflexionserhabene*], as it brings to the fore the aesthetical reflection activated by the tragic depiction of natural complexity and human despair.<sup>29</sup>

As per above, while Schiller does not clearly indicate a positive way out of the evils [*Übel*] of nature or fate, he does not seem to give up any hope of "salvation" either. In this context, we may well speak of a shift in the Schillerian approach to the sublime, admittedly marked by a generalised pessimism –possibly strengthened by Schiller's infection with tuberculosis at the time–, which is looking to actively motivate the human being towards reflection and justification, in an aesthetical way, of life's adversities.<sup>30</sup>

### III. The philosophy of art in Schelling's system: 1800 – 1802

Commencing with the *System of Transcendental Idealism* [*System des Transcendentalen Idealismus*]<sup>31</sup> (1800), Schelling's interest in art lies in the possibility of the realization of freedom through artistic activity. Since, according to Schelling, pure Reason [*reine Vernunft*] cannot realize the absolute –the unconditional ground [*der unbedingte Grund*] of the conditional–, it is up to practical Reason [*praktische Vernunft*] to do so. Although he sees practical Reason as an infinite approximation of a regulative ideal, Schelling adds that the creative freedom of artistic activity produces its own law as beauty, in the harmony [*Harmonie*] of form and substance [*Form und Stoff*] of the work of art, thus making possible the identity between freedom and necessity [*Identität der Freiheit und Nothwendigkeit*], man and nature, the ideal and the real. Art, then, presents and produces the absolute [*das Absolute*] in the finite world [*endliche Welt*]. Moreover, very important here is the aforementioned infinite approach to a regulative ideal, a constantly evolving process towards avoiding the realization of

<sup>29</sup> Diamantopoulos, V., 2018. *Das Reflexionserhabene – Analyse des Erhabenen bei Schiller im Licht seines späten Pessimismus*, *ibid.*, pp. 152 – 155.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156 – 157.

<sup>31</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1978. *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. by Heath, P. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia; Schelling, F. W. J., 1997. *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus*. In: Hahn, E., ed. *F. W. J. von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 1st Part, Vol. 3. Berlin: Total Verlag (CD-ROM/Windows-Version), pp. 1021 – 1228.



the absolute, as this would lead to dogmatism, which Schelling strives to avoid. Therefore, given Kant's "inability" to convincingly provide a principle for the thing-in-itself [*Ding an sich*] in practical Reason, Schelling attempts to replace the passivity of the subject through its own activity,<sup>32</sup> showing how art becomes "the only true and eternal organ [*das einzige wahre und ewige Organon*] and document [*Dokument*] of philosophy".<sup>33</sup>

Whereas in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* artistic activity is grounded on the activity of the subject, the next period in Schelling's thought is defined as absolute idealism [*absoluter Idealismus*], whereby the world is constructed through Reason. Starting with the work *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* [*Darstellung Meines Systems der Philosophie*]<sup>34</sup> (1801), the absolute should now be apprehended as the absolute Reason [*absolute Vernunft*] or as total indifference [*totale Indifferenz*] of the subjective and the objective.<sup>35</sup> In this context, art is still considered highly important for the representation of the ideal in the real world, for both transcendental and absolute idealism rely on the power of the imagination, which ensures continuity between the theoretical, practical and philosophical aspects of art.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. Schelling on the tragic and the sublime

The first thematization of the tragic in Schelling's work appears in one of his earlier writings, the *Philosophical Letters of Dogmatism and Criticism* [*Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*]<sup>37</sup> (1795), in the "Tenth Letter [*Zehnter Brief*]" of which he describes tragedy as the manifestation of the most fatal necessity [*Verhängniß*], against which the tragic hero can do nothing other than voluntarily accept his punishment. In particular, he takes tragedy as an illustrative example of what should never happen in a world enveloped by "the light of Reason [*dem Licht der Vernunft*]", aiming at demonstrating the "unsuitability" of ancient tragedy as a model of practical action amenable to critical thinking, since the primacy of necessity, by rendering

<sup>32</sup> Krell, D. F., 2005. *The Tragic Absolute – German Idealism and the Languishing of God*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 184; Shaw, D. Z., 2010. *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*. London and New York: Continuum, pp. 3 – 66.

<sup>33</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1978. *System of Transcendental Idealism*, *ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>34</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1997. *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie*. In: Hahn, E., ed. *F. W. J. von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 1st Part, Vol. 4, *ibid.*, pp. 1328 – 1342.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, § 1, pp. 1333 – 1334.

<sup>36</sup> Shaw, D. Z., 2010. *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>37</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1997. *Zehnter Brief, Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*. In: Hahn, E., ed. *F. W. J. von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 1st Part, Vol. 1, *ibid.*, pp. 289 – 292.



the individual passive, contradicts the essence of art, which is the affirmation of freedom.<sup>38</sup>

In the next major work of his aesthetic theory, the lectures on *The Philosophy of Art* [*Philosophie der Kunst*]<sup>39</sup> (1802 – 1804), already immersed in the principles of absolute idealism, his previously subjective idealism of 1800 is substituted by an attempt to construct the absolute through the power of the intellectual intuition [*intellektuelle Anschauung*] of Reason itself.<sup>40</sup> Here the absolute is God, whose essence is to affirm himself, “to translate his reality from an unarticulated identity into a differentiated world of form.”<sup>41</sup> Now, if we particularly turn to Greek tragedy, we will see that freedom can survive the very worst blows of necessity. In that respect, the task for art is to dig to the core of necessity and yet discover human freedom still to be safe and sound.<sup>42</sup>

The type of art that can best manifest this indifference is drama; because only when there is a clear conflict between the integral will of the hero and the events in the external world, can both fate and freedom be vividly represented.<sup>43</sup> Hence, not only must a poetic form present a narrative of events, but “participation in the characters must be added [...] in the events themselves”. Only thus does “participation become action and deed [*Handlung und That*]”, which, if it is to move the soul, the hero must be “placed before our eyes [*selbst vor Augen gestellt wird*]”.<sup>44</sup> Here, perhaps for the first time in Schelling’s philosophy, it becomes clear that the identity between freedom and necessity cannot be something that is or has always been present, but must be seen as something being realized; and this realization, which is to be understood both as action and as enlightenment or knowledge, is necessarily tragic.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Hay, K., 2011. Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns oder das Tragische als Struktur der Philosophie Schellings. In: Hühn, L. – Schwab, P., eds. *Die Philosophie des Tragischen – Schopenhauer-Schelling-Nietzsche*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 248 – 250; Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 9 – 11.

<sup>39</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. by Stott, D. W. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Schelling, F. W. J., 1997. *Philosophie der Kunst*. In: Hahn, E., ed. *F. W. J. von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 1st Part, Vol. 5, *ibid.*, pp. 1905 – 2177.

<sup>40</sup> Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*, *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> Vater, M., 1998. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. In: Kelly, M., ed. *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* 472. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 220 – 224. doi: [https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil\\_fac/472](https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil_fac/472).

<sup>42</sup> Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*, *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>43</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, pp. 248, 261; Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*, *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>44</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 251; Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*, *ibid.*, pp. 75 – 77.

<sup>45</sup> Hay, K., 2011. Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns oder das Tragische als Struktur der Philosophie Schellings, *ibid.*, p. 252.

At this point, the question regarding the importance of Schelling's notion of the sublime arises, concerning which the lectures on *The Philosophy of Art* are divided in two main sections, the "General Section [*Allgemeiner Theil*]" and the "Specific Section [*Besonderer Theil*]". While in the former Schelling elaborates on the nature of art and how his aesthetics relates to his philosophy, in the latter he attempts a detailed "construction [*Konstruktion*]" of the different forms of art. Schelling uses the notion of the sublime in both sections.<sup>46</sup> In the "General Section" the sublime is explained as a key category within the general system of his philosophy of art, whereby "that which constitutes the informing of the infinite into the finite [*Einbildung des Unendlichen ins Endliche*], expresses itself within the work of art primarily as sublimity [*Erhabenheit*]; the other, that which constitutes the informing of the finite into the infinite, as beauty [*Schönheit*]"<sup>47</sup>.

Further, borrowing Schiller's words from his text "On the Sublime", he is surprisingly paraphrasing him<sup>48</sup> stating that sublimity in nature takes place in one of two ways: "We refer it either to our *power of apprehension* [*Fassungskraft*] and are defeated in our attempt to form an image of its concept; or we refer it to our *vital power* [*Lebenskraft*] and view it as a power against which our own dwindles to nothing [*in nichts verschwindet*]"<sup>49</sup>. In this sense, the concept of chaos plays a fundamental role as the primal aesthetic intuition [*ästhetische Anschauung*] of the sublime, since the inner essence of the absolute is primal chaos itself. Of course, the connection between the experience of the sublime and chaos is by no means a novel one. In the *Critique of Judgment*, for example, Kant writes that "it is rather in its chaos that nature most arouses our ideas of the sublime, [...] provided it displays magnitude and might [*Größe und Macht*]"<sup>50</sup>. However, the Schellingian concept of chaos acquires a new meaning linked to the absolute, which reappears throughout *The Philosophy of Art* – and not

<sup>46</sup> Hay, K., 2022. On the Tragic-Sublime and Tragic Freedom – Thinking with Schiller and Schelling, *ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>47</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, § 65, p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> According to the translator of *The Philosophy of Art* and Katia Hay, Schelling here misquotes Schiller's text "On the Sublime", which does not refer to the sublime as the result of a confrontation with a natural force, but to a "sublime object".

Hay, K., 2022. On the Tragic-Sublime and Tragic Freedom – Thinking with Schiller and Schelling, *ibid.*, p. 169; Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 302 (note 3).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, § 65, p. 86.

<sup>50</sup> Kant, I., 1793. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, *ibid.*, p. 246; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 23, pp. 99 – 100.

only there, as will be shown below.<sup>51</sup> From this perspective, tragedy is the most appropriate art form for the manifestation of the sublime; because the tragic hero, “engaged in a struggle with misfortune [*Unglück*], a struggle in which he neither wins a physical victory nor capitulates morally [*weder physisch siegt, noch moralisch unterliegt*], is only the symbol [*Symbol*] of the infinite, of that which *transcends all suffering* [*was über alles Leiden ist*]”.<sup>52</sup>

Still, how can someone transcend all suffering through his inner disposition? Is that kind of stance attributed to the power of Reason, as in Kant? Not really, as Schelling emphasizes on that human being who is able to internalize necessity through freely accepting his misfortune. The highest possible misfortune is to become guilty by fate without genuine guilt [*wahre Schuld*], as in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*.<sup>53</sup> In this context, Schelling does not agree with Aristotle, for whom, in his *Poetics*, it is necessary that guilt be contracted through error [*Irrthum*].<sup>54</sup> And this is also what differentiates necessity, fortuitousness [*Zufälligkeit*] and the tragic: An external misfortune is not itself tragic, as it depends on empirical necessity [*empirische Nothwendigkeit*] and can be comprehended by the understanding. Empirical necessity is not necessary in and for itself, hence it cannot suspend chance. By contrast, the necessity that appears in tragedy can only be of an absolute sort and is thus tragic itself. Sublime, on the other hand, is only when the bearer of this absolute necessity freely accepts his punishment [*freiwillig die Strafe übernimmt*], transfiguring himself into the highest identity with necessity. That this punishment must also be of a necessary form is further strengthened by the fact that the Gods should by no means appear in order to help the characters or be hostile against them; and this is why Schelling disregards Euripides’ trick of *deus ex machina* as an evasive intervention for the essence of the tragedy.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, one could object that this interpretation of the ancient drama is too restrictive. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for instance, the chorus stresses that the motives for her action are determined both by personal choice and ancient punishment [*ἄτη*], as if she is the bearer of a curse

<sup>51</sup> Hay, K., 2022. On the Tragic-Sublime and Tragic Freedom – Thinking with Schiller and Schelling, *ibid.*, pp. 178 – 179.

<sup>52</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, § 65, p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252; Sophocles, 1904. *Oedipus the King*. In: *The Tragedies of Sophocles*, trans. by Sir Richard, C. J. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1 – 58.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, 1984. *Poetics*, trans. by Bywater, I. In: Barnes, J., ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 2325.

<sup>55</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, pp. 254 – 258.

sequel deep rooted in the distant past.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* fits perfectly Schelling's aspect of the internalization of fate, a fact that we can observe in *Antigone* as well, albeit in a different way. When Antigone chooses to act out of respect to the moral and not the civil law, she knows that she will be punished in the end. Therefore, although she doesn't freely accept her guilt, she opts freely for her loss.

Based on the above, I believe that one would better look at the "bigger picture" when assessing Schelling's theory of tragedy, in an endeavour to trace the tragedy of human existence itself. In line with Katia Hay's and David Farrell Krell's respective views,<sup>57</sup> one should attempt to read Schelling's theory of drama together with the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* [*Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*]<sup>58</sup> (1809) and *The Ages of the World* [*Die Weltalter*]<sup>59</sup> (1811 – 1815), as I will elucidate below.

## V. Comparing Schiller with Schelling

To begin with, we should bear in mind that we are dealing with a theory of drama [in Schiller] versus a philosophical system into which a theory of drama is integrated [in Schelling]. Also, while both of them borrowed elements from Kant's theory of the sublime, they modified it in a really distinct way. For Schelling, through the correlation between the beautiful and the sublime –since "both qualities appear inextricably interwoven [*unauflöslich voneinander durchdrungen*] in everything that in a broader sense is absolute in and for itself [*für sich absolut*]"–,<sup>60</sup> through the dissolution of individuality into the "world soul", the trag-

<sup>56</sup> Gellrich, M. W., 1984 – 1985. On Greek Tragedy and the Kantian Sublime, *ibid.*, pp. 326 – 327; Sophocles, 1904. *Antigone*. In: *The Tragedies of Sophocles*, *ibid.*, pp. 147 – 148.

<sup>57</sup> Hay, K., 2011. Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns oder das Tragische als Struktur der Philosophie Schellings, *ibid.*, pp. 257 – 260; Krell, D. F., 2005. *The Tragic Absolute – German Idealism and the Languishing of God*, *ibid.*, pp. 70 – 148.

<sup>58</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1997. *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*. In: Hahn, E., ed. *F. W. J. von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 1st Part, Vol. 7, *ibid.*, pp. 2978 – 3029; Schelling, F. W. J., 2006. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Love, J. – Schmidt, J. New York: State University of New York Press. Shall hereafter be referred to as "*Freedom treatise*".

<sup>59</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1942. *The Ages of the World*, trans. by de Wolfe Bolman, F., Jr. New York: Columbia University Press; Schelling, F. W. J., 1997. *Die Weltalter*. Erstes Buch. (Aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß.) In: Hahn, E., ed. *F. W. J. von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 1st Part, Vol. 8, *ibid.*, pp. 3244 – 3335.

<sup>60</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, § 66, p. 91.

ic hero manages to affirm God's infinity via the realization of his freedom.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, what is the exact role of morality in this context and its relation to the Kantian approach? Sublimity, for Kant, consists in the acknowledgment of our physical impotence in front of an irresistible physical threat, without, however, allowing the feeling of fear to prevail, as proof of our moral capacity.<sup>62</sup> For Schelling, by contrast, the aim is not respect for the moral law as such, but the affirmation of freedom. Of course, this also has to do with morality but from another angle.<sup>63</sup> For Schiller, the affirmation of freedom constitutes a battle with necessity, whereas for Schelling, there is no such division. In other words, it is like Schelling's free man producing his freedom, whereas Schiller's alternative is more like a defense against the hostile natural forces through reflection – especially in the text "On the Sublime".<sup>64</sup>

This, however, does not mean that there are no similarities between the two. Both Schiller and Schelling believe in the importance of the beautiful alongside the sublime. In "On the Sublime", in particular, Schiller mentions that man also needs the beautiful as he must not ignore his senses, by which he is also determined. Therefore, the cultivation of both contributes to man's fulfilment as a perfect inhabitant of nature.<sup>65</sup> Further, Schelling notes the importance of the chorus in ancient drama as a symbolic person in a way similar to Schiller, who, in his essay "On the Employment of The Chorus in Tragedy [*Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie*]" – Prologue to the play *The Bride of Messina* [*Die Braut von Messina*] – (1803), regards the chorus as a necessary accompaniment towards the mitigation of the affects through reflection.<sup>66</sup> However, Schelling criticizes Schiller's use

<sup>61</sup> Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*, *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>62</sup> Allison, H. E., 2001. *Kant's Theory of Taste – A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, *ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>63</sup> Hay, K., 2011. Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns oder das Tragische als Struktur der Philosophie Schellings, *ibid.*, pp. 253 – 256; Young, J., 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy – From Plato to Žižek*, *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>64</sup> Scheier, C.-A., 2011. Schelling und die Epochen des Tragischen. In: Hühn, L. – Schwab, P., eds. *Die Philosophie des Tragischen – Schopenhauer-Schelling-Nietzsche*, *ibid.*, pp. 201 – 202.

<sup>65</sup> Schiller, F., 1884. On the Sublime, *ibid.*, pp. 141 – 142.

<sup>66</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 259; The Schiller Institute, 2002. *On the Employment of The Chorus in Tragedy (1803) by Friedrich Schiller* [Accessed: 2023-6-6]. Available at: [https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid\\_91-96/931\\_chorus\\_trag.html](https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid_91-96/931_chorus_trag.html); Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie. In: Zeno.org. *Friedrich Schiller – Dramen* [Accessed: 2023-6-6]. Available at: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schiller,+Friedrich/Dramen/Die+Braut+von+Messina+oder+die+feindlichen+Brüder/Über+den+Gebrauch+des+Chors+in+der+Tragödie>.

of the chorus there for lack of indifference and impartiality, as he attributes the choric passages to separate speakers.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the chorus for Schelling necessarily “consists of several persons who nonetheless portrayed only one [*nur Eine vorstellten*]”<sup>68</sup>

To sum up, the opposites remain opposites in Schiller’s approach. This also explains why he places too much emphasis on remorse, when he analyses the sublimity of a [previously] bad character.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, Schelling distinguishes between the ancient and the modern drama, stressing that the morality of the tragedy should be of a noble nature [*edler Art*]. The presentation of a transgressor by character “would be possible only in the other tragic case, where an extremely unjust person is cast from fortune to misfortune [*ein äußerst ungerechter Mensch aus dem Glück in Unglück gestürzt würde*]”<sup>70</sup> And this is not the case in ancient tragedies, as the transgression there always appears imposed by fate.<sup>71</sup>

As for Schelling’s aforementioned “holistic” insight into the tragicness of man, although he breaks away from the identity philosophy [*Identitätsphilosophie*] from 1809 onwards,<sup>72</sup> the idea that the realization of freedom depends on misfortune is already present in *The Philosophy of Art*<sup>73</sup> and further developed, initially in the *Freedom* treatise, through the concept of a necessity lying at the core of every single existence as the condition for the possibility of freedom. The standpoint of the text is no longer that of an absolute Reason, as in 1801,<sup>74</sup> but of an absolute indifference [*absolute Indifferenz*] between the ground [*Grund*] and everything that exists [*alles Existirendes*], which resides in the abysmal darkness of the non-ground [*Ungrund*];<sup>75</sup> an indifference dynamic and rich, though, given that it is the “source of all life [*Urquelle alles Lebens*]”, as indicated in *The Ages of the World*.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, pp. 260, 321 (note 179).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>69</sup> Hay, K., 2022. On the Tragic-Sublime and Tragic Freedom – Thinking with Schiller and Schelling, *ibid.*, pp. 186 – 189; Schiller, F., 1884. On the cause of the pleasure we derive from tragic objects, *ibid.*, pp. 367 – 370.

<sup>70</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256 – 257.

<sup>72</sup> Goudeli, K., 2002. *Challenges to German Idealism – Schelling, Fichte, Kant*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 96 – 118.

<sup>73</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., 1989. *The Philosophy of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>74</sup> See above, footnotes 34 and 35.

<sup>75</sup> Hay, K., 2011. Die Notwendigkeit des Scheiterns oder das Tragische als Struktur der Philosophie Schellings, *ibid.*, pp. 258 – 260; Schelling, F. W. J., 2006. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>76</sup> Krell, D. F., 2005. *The Tragic Absolute – German Idealism and the Languishing of God*, *ibid.*,

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, without abandoning morality, Schiller emphasizes on aesthetic freedom through the unrivalled power of the imagination. He also presents the experience of the sublime as a means, whereby we are reminded of our superiority over nature – echoing Kant’s view that the aesthetic judgments of the sublime prepare us for morality.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, for Schelling there is nothing “against”, as externality’s dread is also within us; something which implies that he does not consider art as a tool through which we will become better human beings.<sup>78</sup> In that regard, he abstains from the, at times, empiricist Schillerian approach,<sup>79</sup> towards a dive into the tragic essence of human nature as such; this incessant wheel driven by madness as a result of “the highest conflict between the cosmic potencies [*Potenzen*], the will [*Wille*] that negates expression and leads to contraction [*Zusammenziehen*] and the will that strives for fulfilment and expansion [*Wiederausbreiten*]”.<sup>80</sup> This conflict, a child of chaos and darkness, is “the innermost [character] of all things [*das Innerste aller Dinge*]”;<sup>81</sup> a celebration of freedom, with necessity always by its side.

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<sup>77</sup> Allison, H. E., 2001. *Kant’s Theory of Taste – A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, *ibid.*, p. 343; Guyer, P., 1997. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 331; Kant, I., 1793. *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, *ibid.*, pp. 265 – 266; Kant, I., 1987. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.*, § 29, pp. 124 – 126.

<sup>78</sup> Hay, K., 2022. On the Tragic-Sublime and Tragic Freedom – Thinking with Schiller and Schelling, *ibid.*, pp. 175 – 177.

<sup>79</sup> De Man, P., 1996. *Aesthetic Ideology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 139 – 147.

<sup>80</sup> Goudeli, K., 2002. *Challenges to German Idealism – Schelling, Fichte, Kant*, *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>81</sup> Krell, D. F., 2005. *The Tragic Absolute – German Idealism and the Languishing of God*, *ibid.*, pp. 128 – 131; Schelling, F. W. J., 1942. *The Ages of the World*, *ibid.*, p. 228.



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