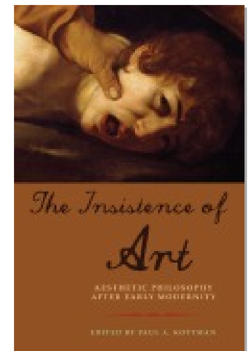
# The Insistence of Art

Paul A. Kottman




Published by Fordham University Press

Kottman, P. A..
The Insistence of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy after Early Modernity.
New York: Fordham University Press, 2017.
Project MUSE., https://muse.jhu.edu/.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/51041

Accessed 18 Mar 2018 00:52 GMT

CHAPTER 4

# Literature, Prejudice, Historicity: The Philosophical Importance of Herder's Shakespeare Studies

*Kristin Gjesdal*

It is a commonly held that philosophical hermeneutics—hermeneutics as a theory of understanding and method of interpretation—develops as part of romantic philosophy and its reaction to the ahistorical thinking of the Enlightenment.[1] In the following I take issue with this assumption. I suggest that hermeneutics, as a modern philosophical discipline, is solidly planted within the Enlightenment tradition in German eighteenth-century philosophy. This is particularly clear in the early work of Johann Gottfried Herder. In his early work, Herder articulates a hermeneutic theory that is based in a systematic discussion of reason's situatedness in history. As such, he anticipates the most profound insights of romantic philosophy, showing, as it were, how romanticism is itself a continuation of the Enlightenment paradigm.

Herder's contribution to modern hermeneutics has not been adequately appreciated. This is partly because of a twin misunderstanding. First, it has been thought that Herder develops a critical hermeneutics, a set of systematic reflections on the historicity of thought and its impact on interpretation and human self-understanding, only in his later work (*Another Philosophy of History* and the more teleological writings such as the *Letters on*

*Humanity*).[2] Second, it is assumed that the theory Herder develops in this period is fairly similar to the position later associated with Gadamer and the ontological turn.[3] Both of these assumptions are wrong. Herder's early work—as it develops in response to the Enlightenment and anticipates the later paradigm of romantic philosophy—is driven by a fundamental awareness of the historical conditionedness of the interpreter. Further, his hermeneutics, still far from the framework of post-Heideggerian philosophy, is oriented around an epistemic rather than ontological (or existential) agenda. While recognizing that prejudices make up enabling as well as limiting conditions of knowledge, understanding, in his view, is a problem of overcoming illegitimate and unreflected sets of beliefs. Herder's hermeneutics does not give rise to a discussion of the authentic ways in which human self-understanding is realized through engagement with the great works of the tradition, but occasions a theorizing of the conditions under which the historically situated interpreter gains the reflective distance needed for self-critique and liberation from unsound prejudices and a more adequate understanding of the text or expression in question.

In this context, Herder's work on Shakespeare proves particularly important. Throughout the 1760s, Shakespeare's theater was a topic of much discussion in Germany. Although some were fascinated by Shakespeare's recently translated dramatic works, the critical audiences asked if these plays, clearly violating the dominant understanding of art, could pass as art. Thus the reference to Shakespeare provides all that Herder can hope for: It is an example that engages a broader, enlightened audience, concerns critics as well as philosophers, rests right at the heart of the newly developing discipline of aesthetics, and is an issue that invites systematic and critical reflection on the cultural-historical conditionedness of reason. It is with these concerns in mind that Herder turns to Shakespeare. And, further, it is through his work on Shakespeare that Herder develops the hermeneutic turn that has been hinted at, yet not fully brought out, in his earlier work on literature and taste.[4]

Herder's essay on Shakespeare is available in two drafts as well as a final version. The availability of the drafts makes it possible to study the step-by-step development of Herder's thought. In the years between 1770 and 1773, Herder does not change his assessment of Shakespeare—or, for that matter, of the reigning critique of Elizabethan drama. What changes, though, is Herder's attempt at analyzing *why* Shakespeare's tragedy has been misunderstood as well as his effort to carve out an alternative, more adequate theory of understanding.[5] Herder's work on Shakespeare—as it progresses from an emphasis on the singularity of the work (the first draft),

through a focus on its historicity (the second draft), and all the way to the last version's emphasis on the historicity of the interpreter—should not be read only as a literary aesthetics but also as a contribution to hermeneutics, indeed a contribution that can help us understand how the later debate about Shakespeare, such as we encounter it in A. W. Schlegel, among others, could find its shape and articulation as, at one and the same time, a theory of and an exercise in interpretation.

I begin with an analysis of the first draft and then trace the development of Herder's hermeneutic position through the second and third versions of his essay on Shakespeare. In the course of drafting and redrafting the essay Herder develops a claim about the individuality of the work of art, a thesis about the inherent historicity of symbolic expression, and, finally, an analysis of the epistemic challenges of prejudices brought about by the historical-cultural situatedness of the interpreter. I close by offering some general remarks on the relevance of Herder's insight and the differences between his epistemic position and the ontological focus that dominates post-Heideggerian hermeneutics.

## *Genius, Individuality, and Symbolic Expression: The First 1771 Draft*

In the first draft of "Shakespeare," Herder addresses the position of the poet and critic Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg. Against a rigid, classicist paradigm in art,[6] Gerstenberg seeks to vindicate the aesthetic relevance of Shakespearean theater. Gerstenberg, however, was not alone in this endeavor. At the time, there were two main strands of defense. First, it was claimed that Shakespeare's dramatic works did indeed meet the standards of Aristotelian poetics, if only the *Poetics* were read in the right way. Second, it was suggested that in order to get beyond the classicist rejection of Elizabethan drama, it is not Shakespeare's work, but Aristotle's *Poetics* that must be subject to reinterpretation. If the *Poetics* is seen as a descriptive rather than a normative account, Aristotle's work could be taken to illuminate or even be used to defend the aesthetic promise of the English playwright. It is the latter rather than the former strategy that is reflected in Gerstenberg's work.[7]

Herder sympathizes with Gerstenberg's wish to take Aristotle's poetics back from the classicists, thereby launching a reappraisal of Shakespearean drama (*W*, 2:522). With regard to Gerstenberg's arguments, however, Herder is less impressed. If Gerstenberg pursues the right *end*, he nonetheless approaches it with the wrong *means*. On Herder's account,

Gerstenberg's defense is marred by two problems. Gerstenberg, he argues, gets Aristotle wrong. Further, he is not convinced by the deeper, aesthetic premise that Shakespeare and Aristotle can at all be judged in light of each other. In this context, it is the second, more principled point that is of interest.

While Gerstenberg is engaged contra orthodox classicism in a defense of Shakespearean drama, he does not analyze the most fundamental (classicist) premise of the German Shakespeare debate: the idea that one can judge a modern work of art in terms of standards deriving from ancient Greek poetics.[8] At this point Herder's argument represents a fundamental shift of orientation. Instead of debating the particular affinities between Shakespeare and Aristotle (from the point of view of the literary critic), Herder questions the relevance of such a comparison in the first place (from the point of view of the philosopher).

Against the tenors of Gerstenberg's defense, Herder musters three arguments. He develops (a) a claim about the singularity of the work of art, (b) a suggestion about the historical content of Shakespeare's drama, and (c) an effort to sublate the potential tension between the singularity claim and the general description of Shakespeare's drama as historical in content by discussing the unique relationship between innovation and tradition as it is realized in creative genius. Each of these points is deserving of a more detailed discussion.

(a) Classicist poetics is typically perceived as striving for a definition of drama. This definition, in turn, is related to criteria of genre.[9] Herder, however, argues that Shakespeare's drama cannot be pigeonholed by such criteria. Rather, it is characterized by the fact that it transcends traditional genres. It is—along the lines of Polonius's poetological reflections in Hamlet[10]—tragic, comic, historical, and pastoral all at the same time (*W*, 2:524). Herder, significantly, does not concoct a novel genre into which Shakespeare's work would fit and in light of which it could be aesthetically validated. At a principled and theoretical level, he questions the helpfulness of universal genre definitions. Shakespeare's work, he claims, is unique. Moreover, each of Shakespeare's plays is unique to the extent that it needs, in Herder's words, to name itself—that is, to implicitly or explicitly articulate the poetic ambitions by which it should be measured (*W*, 2:524).

Herder extends this point to literature as such. The perception of literature through rules or fixed (genre) definitions risks reducing the work to a faint version of itself (*W*, 2:524). Hence it is not only Shakespeare's drama, but also Greek tragedy that is misunderstood within the classicist paradigm. Just as it was in the case of Elizabethan art, Greek tragedies

neither could nor should be lumped together under a general label or be taken to exemplify a set of universal aesthetic norms. Each tragedy must be studied as distinct and individual, and appreciated in its specific style and manner (*W*, 2:525).

(b) Having questioned the usefulness of abstract genre definitions and universal norms in aesthetics, Herder proceeds to offer an alternative reading of Shakespeare—one that transcends the understanding of Elizabethan drama in light of Aristotle's *Poetics* and the genre definitions it licenses. In working out his own account of Shakespeare, Herder makes no attempt at drawing a sharp distinction between the formal aspects and the content of his plays, both of which were targeted by the classicist critics.[11] Instead, he suggests that Shakespeare's drama presents the audience with a history (*Geschichte*) that is far more complex than the well-structured plot recommended by Aristotelian poetics (*W*, 2:525).

Herder does not offer a precise definition of the term "history."[12] Within the framework of his essay on Shakespeare it assumes at least three different meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the past (*W*, 2:525). On the other hand, it refers to the particular narrative or plot of a given drama (*W*, 2:525). In some cases, it refers to both of the above, that is, to the way in which the past is preserved in the narratives of tradition (as "dramatic history," *W*, 2:535). Yet the term *Geschichte* is central to Herder's argument, so central, indeed, that it is placed in relative opposition to a traditional reference to drama (*W*, 2:528).[13]

The introduction of the term *history* might be helpful from a literary point of view (in that it contributes to the reevaluation of Shakespearean drama).[14] From a philosophical standpoint, however, it produces a possible inconsistency. For even though the term *history*, in the threefold meaning of the term, might aid the reevaluation of Shakespeare, it also represents a general(izing) category and thus jeopardizes the claim that every work must be treated as singular in the sense of giving itself its own name and standard.

This inconsistency is overcome only by the introduction of Herder's next point: the description of Shakespeare's work as *both* individual *and* reflective of its historical context. In Herder's understanding, it is the notion of artistic genius that offers such a mediating position. Genius, for Herder, is not simply an ability to produce original works of art. It is the ability to rework the available resources of a given tradition in an individualized and novel way.

(c) True to the rhetoric of his time, Herder describes Shakespeare's creativity in the language of aesthetic genius (*W*, 2:526).[15] Genius is a force

or spontaneity; it is not viewed as a quality of the work (as an object of aesthetic appreciation). Creativity—which is not exclusive to art, but part of all symbolic production—is connected to individual perception and feeling. Yet creativity is not opposed to taste and culture. It is opposed, rather, to imitation and stifling aesthetic forms. That is, in Herder's work, genius is associated with a certain relation to the historicity of the symbolic resources: It is defined by its capacity to expand the prevalent symbolic tradition and create novel expressions that, in turn, are recognized by the critical audiences as aptly reflecting their self-understanding.[16] The work of creative genius is both individual and expressive of a shared culture and tradition. In Herder's view, the classicist paradigm advocates an ideal of imitation and fails to account for these dimensions of art: the individuality as well as the historicity of expression (which, for Herder, are closely related)—and, importantly, it fails to account for the intrinsic relation between the two, that is, for how tradition exists only in perpetual renewal. In Shakespeare's drama, by contrast, we encounter no imitation of this sort (*W*, 2:526).[17]

As already mentioned, Herder, in this essay, initially uses the term *history* to describe the narrative structure and/or the historical reference point of Shakespeare's drama: Shakespeare's drama does not present an idealized world of heroes and demigods, but reflects historical events, be they real or hypothetical, recounted truthfully or shaped by poetic imagination.[18] By introducing a notion of creative genius, Herder can argue that it is not just Shakespeare's narratives or the historical reference of his work but also the very creation of it that emerges as historical. Shakespeare's drama is historical in that it brings out novel expressive possibilities and thus expands the field of thinking and action, that is, the realm of symbolically mediated reason. Shakespeare does not imitate tradition. In drawing on the resources of tradition, genius responds to his or her own time—and yet he or she does so in a genuinely innovative way.[19] Genius does not consist in the ability to express the eternal harmony of nature (as the classicist would have it).[20] Nor does it consist in a simple return to the past, or a rejection of it (as the romantics would later be taken to argue).[21] Genius, rather, is a capacity to articulate, in a concrete, particular, and sensuous form, a given historical framework as it progressively expands the pool of available symbolic resources. This is why the introduction of the category of genius, as defined by the young Herder, solves the potential tension between the singularity claim and the general claim about Shakespeare's theater evolving around "history." It suggests that the appeal to history (or historicity) need not be limited to the content of Shakespeare's drama or tradition as

such, but could also refer to art's capacity to contribute to the dynamic development of culture.[22] And it suggests that the work of art is not simply particular—in the sense of being torn from the tradition—but a synthesis of the particular and the universal, that is, individual.

In this way, Herder's reference to creative genius solves the tension between the singularity claim (that each work articulates its own "standards") and the universalizing claim (that Shakespeare's tragedies present "history"). Yet the reference to genius is not unproblematic, for, despite Herder's seeking a new description of art—the work being unique yet reflective of its tradition—the category of individual, creative genius typically refers to a distinctly modern frame of mind. Herder, however, is committed to an explanatory model that sheds light on ancient as well as modern drama. Hence, he needs to re-craft the essay and highlight, from the beginning, how tradition is kept alive by innovation and change. He must emphasize, as a shared feature of premodern and modern tragedy, the historicity of art, hence freeing not only Shakespeare's theater in particular, but also symbolic expression in general, from its ahistorical configurations. At this point, Herder's argument is substantially redirected. At stake is a shift *from* a focus on the tension between individual work and generalizing aesthetic models, on the one hand, *to* a focus on the historicity of symbolic expression, on the other. This shift, in turn, is made possible by—but does not culminate in—the reference to aesthetic genius. Furthermore, it represents a first step in the direction of a hermeneutic turn in Herder's theory: If the work of art is understood as the work of genius, it is viewed as intrinsically historical and in need of understanding, rather than something to be judged by reference to a set of a priori aesthetic rules.[23] Although Herder's emphasis on the historicity of the work is not a sufficient criterion for a fully fledged hermeneutic philosophy, it is nonetheless a necessary condition—and, as such, is completed with his discussion, in the second draft, of the historicity of the work and, in the final version, of the interpreter.

## *The Historicity of Symbolic Expression: The Second 1771 Draft*

Although Herder's introduction of creative genius redirects the focus from the problem of rules and generalizations in aesthetics (the tension between individual creation and universalizing rules) to the idea that drama (or symbolic expression in general) reflects its historical context and initiates historical-aesthetic change, this point remains underarticulated and is introduced ad hoc toward the end of the first draft. In the second draft, his argument moves from a negative critique of generalizing models of art and

symbolic expression to a positive account of the intrinsic historical character of art in particular and symbolic expression in general.

In this context, Gerstenberg's work, with its attempt at defending Shakespeare by reference to rules gleaned from Aristotle's *Poetics*, no longer makes up the polemical foil. Herder now addresses a number of new literary issues, including the question of whether an author needs to be true to the historical material and the claim that Shakespeare's characters are too diverse to create a unified aesthetic whole. He develops the idea, already implicit in his appeal to *Geschichte*, of Shakespearean drama as a unity-in-difference. In explaining this point, however, the second draft is considerably longer and in certain respects less structured than the first draft. Yet it is possible to isolate and analyze three steps that bring Herder from a worry about universalist theories of art to a full-fledged account of the historicity of art in particular and symbolic expression in general. He discusses (a) how Shakespeare's drama escapes rule classification, (b) how it offers a concrete reflection of humanity, and (c) how it, in doing so, is reflective of modernity as such.

(a) According to Herder, Shakespeare's drama challenges the idea of a stylized, rule-driven theater and presents the most vivid scenes and characters on stage. The plot of a Shakespeare play cannot be easily summarized. Nor is it possible to identify a central topic around which Shakespeare's theater revolves. Shakespeare, Herder claims, presents us with the multiplicity of history itself. A reading of his work along the lines of genre, rules, and universal concepts would leave us with an effigy; his drama would, in Herder's words, be as lifeless as dried flowers (*W*, 2:531).

In the first draft, Herder insists that each Shakespeare play must give itself its own standards—indeed, there are as many standards as there are situations in the piece (*W*, 2:542). In the second draft, this is emphatically repeated (*W*, 2:532). There is, Herder suggests, no one set of rules for drama, not even for each particular drama, but an infinite number of potential standards or rules (*Regelkanon*) responding to the various aspects of the individual plays. In Herder's image-laden lexicon, Shakespeare's drama does not present us with a beautiful painting, but with a full display of light similar to those created by the sun reflecting in a drop of water (*W*, 2:532).

(b) Herder's critique of the desire for transtemporal genre definitions has been read as a plea for a nationally, regionally, or locally oriented aesthetics that would reduce the meaning of the work to its immediate historical surroundings, viewing it as intrinsically bound up with a cultural or

even national spirit.[24] This, however, is wrong. As it emerged in a German language area that was not yet unified (but, indeed, also in France), the Shakespeare debate was fueled by nationalist sentiments.[25] Yet as Herder sums up and further refines this debate, he offers a critique of the nationalist reception of Shakespeare. Herder, in this context, makes three important points.

First, if Herder is influenced by the British and their celebration of Shakespeare's aesthetic genius, he is not, for that reason, blinded by their contributions. In fact, he opens the second draft by suggesting that Shakespeare might be better understood by a foreigner than by his fellow English. The English, he points out, typically celebrate Shakespeare as their national poet. They fail to see that Shakespeare's work does not belong to one particular national or linguistic culture, but to humankind as a whole (*W*, 2:530). If Shakespeare should be understood as the national poet of the English—or, at a principled level, art understood as national art—such an argument would not have made sense.

Second, Herder claims that there is no such thing as cultural purity. This argument follows from his account of the linguistic mediation of culture. In *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (published in 1772, just prior to the final version of "Shakespeare"), Herder criticizes the notion of human beings as *Nationaltiere*: "If human beings were national animals so that each such animal had invented its own language for itself quite independently and separately from others, then this language would certainly have to display 'a *difference in type*,' such as the inhabitants of Saturn and of the earth may perhaps have vis-à-vis each other" (*PW*, 158). Intercultural interaction is enabled by the fact that in the diversity of languages there is nonetheless a unifying linguistic orientation (human being expressing itself symbolically). By definition, a culture draws on other cultures, be they past or contemporary. Not even the art of the ancient Greeks was closed off and self-sustained (like the classicists would have it), but borrowed from Egypt and other cultures. Herder criticizes Winckelmann for judging Egyptian art on Greek premises,[26] but also reminds the classicists of the fusions of culture at the very heart of the Greek art they so admire (*APH*, 21).[27]

Third and finally, Herder, right from his earliest work, advocates the importance of multilateral cultural exchange. That is, he not only argues that cultures de facto are impure, but also that they de jure benefit from exchange with other cultures. In his reflections on translation Herder emphasizes the benefits of engaging other cultures on their own terms.[28] Intercultural exchange aids in expanding the interpreter's horizon of

understanding.[29] It tunes the interpreter to an infinitely rich spectrum of human possibilities and establishes a critical space in which unreflected aspects of her or his own field of practice and reasoning can be scrutinized.

Against this background, Herder, in his second draft, introduces the idea that Shakespeare's drama presents us with the history of not just the Elizabethan era but also of humanity as a whole (*W*, 2:532). In Shakespeare's drama, the audience encounters examples of the infinite possibilities of human existence, a panoply of different points of view and practices (*W*, 2:535).

What previous critics considered a weakness—for example, that Shakespeare did not remain entirely truthful to historical events or that his plays were too crowded and the characters too diverse—is in Herder's view a strength. The fact that Shakespeare presents us with a multitude of events and characters, that he poetically processes the historical material, does not indicate a lack of unity. The unity presented in his drama, however, is not one that can be conceptually summarized, but that of humanity as realized in and through a plurality of thoughts, actions, expressions, and experiences. At this point, the historical situation in which Shakespeare's drama emerges cannot be distinguished from the stories or histories he produces. His drama is, in short, the drama of modernity.[30]

(c) By this move, Herder shifts his focus from an analysis of the *work* (its having a unity despite the lack of universal genre definitions) to the *experiential outcome* of historical-aesthetic interpretation, a topic that he had already touched on in short pieces such as the essay on taste[31] and would further explore in *Another Philosophy of History*.[32] Shakespeare, he suggests, gives form (*Gestalt*) to a tradition to which the reader herself or himself belongs. Shakespeare could not have written as the ancient Greeks did without, concomitantly, betraying the cultural and historical horizon of his own world—and, by implication, that of his audience. In order to write like the Greeks, he would have had to step out of his own historical context and evoke a life-form long gone. This is neither possible nor desirable. Thus, Shakespeare must change the form as well as the content of drama. Thus, Shakespeare's drama reflects his time (*W*, 2:548). If one judges Shakespeare by Sophocles' standards, one is bound to overlook the intrinsic historical nature of symbolic expression—Sophocles' as well as Shakespeare's—but also the genuine possibility of self-reflection that the modern audience is afforded through Elizabethan theater. The fact that Shakespeare's drama does not easily lend itself to genre definitions, the fact that it traverses literary styles and conventions, is indeed part of its intrinsic historicity.[33] With this claim, Herder anticipates what Hölderlin

would later refer to as the inaccessibility of Greek nature, that is, of Greek spirit as it presented itself to the Greeks.[34]

In the second draft, Herder goes beyond the reflection on the historical differences between the Greeks and the moderns. By introducing the element of self-understanding in art, Herder conceptualizes the epistemic challenges and cultural gains of engaging with temporally distant works in a hermeneutically responsible way. Hence, the second draft transcends the framework of the first in that it reflects on the historical situatedness of the work and the way in which it affords self-understanding and self-reflection (by understanding the work better, the interpreter also gains a more adequate understanding of his or her own situatedness within tradition).

However, if the text is situated in history, as Herder's point about self-understanding presupposes, then, we may assume that this is also the case with the reader. That is, if the text, as we learn from the second draft, does not inhabit a timeless point of nowhere, but is part of a given, historical culture, then this also applies to the interpreter. The interpreter's outlook, too, is shaped by his or her historical and cultural context. The very same point that makes for the historicity of literature, its emerging from a concrete cultural context, all the same enables and limits the horizon of the interpreter. Hence, Herder must proceed to address the problem of prejudice in understanding. This makes up the philosophical challenge of the third and final version of the Shakespeare work. In its final form, Herder's essay is no longer a treatise on the historical forms of tragedy, but an inquiry into the hermeneutical problem of prejudice.

## *Prejudice and the Historicity of the Interpreter: The Final 1773 Draft*

The final version of Herder's essay takes advantage of the groundwork laid out in the drafts and presents by far the most worked out and well-crafted argument. It further elaborates the difference between ancient and modern drama, as well as the general point about the historicity of art. However, in the final version, Herder also expands his focus. In the first draft, he asks, "How do we best understand Shakespeare's drama?" In the second draft, he proceeds to raise the question "How do we best conceptualize the difference between ancient and modern theater?" He responds to these questions by emphasizing, respectively, the singularity of the work and its being situated in the intersection between innovation and tradition (thus, potentially, affording the interpreter a better understanding of his or her culture). In the third version of the essay, he conducts a reflective

turn, taking into account the position of the philosopher theorizing the nature of drama in particular and art more universally. "Why," he asks, "is it that both ancient tragedy (and, for that sake, philosophy) and modern drama have been misunderstood?" His response not only mirrors the previous essays' reflections on the reception of Greek and Elizabethan tragedy in French and German eighteenth-century culture, but also involves thoughts on the epistemic status of the interpreter.[35] The situatedness of the interpreter is an enabling condition for understanding, yet all the same it constitutes a potential limitation for hermeneutic work. It is only when Herder has taken into account the historicity of the interpreter as well as the text that we can speak of a fully developed hermeneutic consciousness in his work.[36]

True to the central focus of the essay, Herder's argument is backed up by an analysis of the nature and historical development of Greek and Shakespearean drama. Again, I proceed by isolating the various steps of his argument. Herder (a) points out that the interpreter's image of the past, be it ancient Greek or modern culture, is often reflective of the concerns governing the age and, thus, is expressive of conscious or preconscious prejudices. Furthermore, he shows (b) how the cementing of prejudices is part of tradition itself. Finally, he asks (c) how, in historical work, illegitimate prejudices can be criticized and overcome. Each of these points is in need of further discussion.

(a) With regard to Greek drama—as a paradigm case of the historicity of art—Herder reiterates three points that have already been made in the previous drafts, but in the final version he fleshes each out in greater detail and with new argumentative rigor.

First, Herder reminds the reader that drama is inherited from the Greeks and passed down as a core element of the Western tradition. Throughout this mediation, the idea has gradually taken shape that Greek drama can be laid out in terms of certain rules, which are, in turn, explicated in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Greek drama, however, is not a universal, rule-bound category. Wishing to combat the classicists on their own grounds, Herder traces the development of ancient tragedy from its simplest beginnings to its more elaborate Sophoclean form.[37] On this reading, Sophocles' work does not represent the timeless, paradigmatic case of Greek drama. It is viewed, rather, as the outcome of gradual, historical change.[38] Herder's insistence on the intrinsic historicity of Greek drama echoes the thrust of his first draft. However, in the final version, Herder is willing to draw a more radical conclusion from this insight and theorize the relationship between ancient and modern philosophy.

Next, Herder combines the main points of the second draft (Shakespeare's modernity and the historicity of art) with his newly won insight into the role of prejudice. What we moderns perceive as the rule-bound nature of Greek drama is in reality not a question of rules, but reflects the living content of Greek culture. Greek drama has been passed down through tradition, and modern readers approach it with a certain familiarity. Yet despite its continuous mediation in tradition, modern readers are not even close to understanding Greek culture. Instead, we typically cling to reductive and simplifying images of ancient drama that have been cemented over the centuries. We modern readers entertain an image that reflects our own tradition to the same or an even stronger degree than it reflects Greek culture. What Herder's contemporary audiences deemed the artifice (or rules) of classical tragedy was, for the Greeks, their nature—that is, their immediate way of realizing their humanity (*S*, 9). Furthermore, their second nature did not, as the classicist took it, involve a process of simplification, but shows increasing complexity and elaboration (*S*, 11). This, Herder worries, has been covered up by a historical reception that tends to see Greek antiquity as unified and static.

Tradition presents us with the works of the past, but all the same removes us from them.[39] Herder's hermeneutics represent an effort to reflect on the procedures through which the interpreter gets beyond false prejudices *and* a discussion of the benefits to be reaped from such an enterprise.

Finally, Herder insists that modern audiences cannot take for granted that their grasp on Greek tragedy reflects Greek tragedy as it was. It might as well reflect the misconceptions, additions, and elaborations of a long-spanning tradition. Hence the focus of the historicity thesis shifts from the *work* (as laid out in the second draft) to the *interpreter* and his or her tradition. Herder clarifies this point by discussing the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*. In doing so, he refers not only to the history of drama and art but also to the history and self-understanding of philosophy, that is, our thinking about art and culture.

Not only Sophocles, but Aristotle, too, should be read in light of his own time. When approaching Aristotle "without prejudice and from the standpoint of his own time," we realize that what he values in Sophocles is very different from what the classicist appreciated in his work (*S*, 12). Aristotle, Herder claims, does not celebrate the eternal harmony or the simplicity of Sophocles' drama. He expounds on the "variety" of Sophocles' poetry and, equally important, sees him as an innovator. In Aristotle's interpretation, innovation was "the essence of this new poetic genre" (*S*, 13). According to Herder, Aristotle is interested in Sophocles' transformation of drama,

which made him into something of a "new Homer" (*S*, 13). Sophocles is not judged by the criteria of the past. Nor is he judged by a set of allegedly timeless and universal standards. He is, rather, assessed in light of his ability to express, in a unique way, his own time. And if we appreciate how Sophocles expressed and transformed his tradition, we should also realize that Aristotle "philosophized in the grand style of his age, and that he bears no blame at all for the restrictive and infantile follies that have turned him into the paper scaffolding of our stage" (*S*, 13).

Whether this interpretation of Aristotle is at all adequate is a question that transcends the scope of this essay. My point is simply, first, to emphasize that Herder, by shifting the focus from what Aristotle is *saying* (about Sophocles and Greek drama) to the question of what he is *doing* when treating Sophocles' drama in a given way (as a novel contribution to classical tragedy), shows how strong an interest he takes at this point in the historical dimension of philosophy as well as art. Second, I have emphasized how Herder expands his focus to include the reception of Aristotle and a discussion of how a series of prejudices has misinformed our judgment of Greek and modern poetics. How we look at Greek tragedy and philosophy is, in other words, not only a question about our judgment of the past, but also a reflection of the critical self-understanding (or lack of such) of the present.

(b) In his study of tragedy, Herder contemplates the changing of taste over time and across cultures, but he also, and more importantly, adds to his discussion of the particular work a set of more or less systematic reflections on the situatedness and the prejudices of the interpreter. His discussion of prejudices brings the focus back to Shakespeare, but it also completes Herder's hermeneutic turn. This involves two steps: a shift from a critique of specific prejudices (pertaining to the reception of classical and Elizabethan drama) to reflections on prejudice as such, as well as a discussion of how prejudices make up an inherent part of the tradition, thus enabling as well as delimiting the work of the interpreter. A bit more will have to be said about each of these points.

According to Herder, both Shakespeare's defenders and his critics have been held back by unhealthy prejudices. Even though Shakespeare's work has been expounded on "by the multitudes who explain, defend, condemn, excuse, worship, slander, translate, and traduce him" (*S*, 1), Herder sets out to "show that both sides have built their case merely on *prejudice* [*Vorurteil*], on an illusion that does not really exist" (*S*, 3–4). In both cases, Shakespeare's work is observed through the lens of classicism and is thus reduced to "nothing but caricature" (*S*, 4). Herder certainly wishes to get

away from the prejudices of classicism—though he himself is rather one-sided in his review of this aesthetic paradigm. Yet more important than getting around a particular set of (classicist) prejudices is the effort to discuss the general impact of prejudice on understanding.

The most dangerous of all prejudices is that of imagining that one's own point of view is untainted by the historical and cultural context in which it finds its shape. Hence, the chief mistake of classicist aesthetics is neither to approach nonclassical art with measures derived from classical literature nor to misread Greek tragedy, but, rather, to believe that its own point of view is universal and free of prejudice.

Prejudices take shape and solidify through the very same tradition that uncovers and mediates the past to the interpreter.[40] Greek and Elizabethan tragedy offer two prominent examples of this. In Herder's words: "It is from Greece that we have inherited the words *drama*, *tragedy*, and *comedy*; and just as the lettered culture of the human race has, on a narrow strip of the earth's surface, made its own way only through *tradition*, so a certain stock of rules, which seemed inseparable from its teaching, has naturally accompanied it everywhere in its womb and its language" (*S*, 4–5). Prejudices result in a projection of one's own values or understanding of a given subject matter onto a work that is derived from a different historical and cultural context—thus potentially affirming or criticizing a straw man rather than engaging in a genuine encounter with a position that possibly deviates from the basic beliefs of the interpreter.[41] This risk not only figures in the interpretation of art but also, in equal measure, in philosophical work. Aristotle's *Poetics* is a case in point. Although Aristotle's work is passed down in tradition, it is, at the same time, preserved and possibly also distorted (*S*, 12).

(c) How, then, is the interpreter to proceed in order to reflect on, be aware of, and possibly also challenge his or her prejudices? Herder's recommendation is unambiguous and harks back to the theoretical framework worked out toward the end of the first draft. The only way for the interpreter to challenge his or her prejudices (and here we sense the fundamental difference between Herder's and Gadamer's notions of prejudice) is by trying to situate the work within its own time or context of origin (*S*, 12). In the Shakespeare essay, Herder does not offer much to show how such a situating of the work in its original context should take place.[42] Instead, he proceeds to discuss what may be gained from such a procedure.[43]

Through critically investigating one's own prejudices in the encounter with the expressions of temporally or culturally distant lifeworlds, the interpreter not only gains a better understanding of the work at stake, but also

of himself or herself and his or her own culture. Hence the purpose of the final version of the Shakespeare essay is not only to validate the work of the English playwright but also to reflect on the cultural self-understanding of the German-speaking world. When Herder, in 1765, voices the need for an anthropological turn in philosophy (*W*, 1:132 and 134), this does not simply indicate an interest in the study of other cultures but, through such study, also involves the encounter with one's own prejudices in approaching temporally or culturally distant horizons. That is, it implies a historicist-hermeneutic turn: historicist in the sense that the understanding of a given work from past (or distant) cultures cannot be taken for granted but requires scholarly interpretative work,[44] and hermeneutic in the sense that the interpreter, throughout this process, analyzes his or her own prejudices on a given subject matter and continuously subjects them to critical examination, thus gaining understanding of a temporally and/or critically distant text as well as a more reflected understanding of himself or herself and his or her own culture.[45]

At a concrete and practical level, this is why it matters to Herder that the German audiences are able to read Shakespeare without categorizing or rejecting his work in terms of classicist standards. The Shakespeare essay seeks to demonstrate, performatively and theoretically, why such a reading is at all worthwhile. At this point, it is also possible to see why Herder, in recommending a historically sensitive interpretation of Shakespeare paired with a historicist hermeneutics as such, approaches Elizabethan drama by way of a discussion of Greek tragedy: He wishes to counter the reigning prejudices about drama in particular and art in general by genealogically tracing drama back to its early beginnings. Hence, the Shakespeare essay, in its third and final version, is not only or primarily a work on literature, but, at a most basic and fundamental level, an essay on understanding.[46]

Having discussed the argumentative structure of the Shakespeare essay in its three extant versions, I find that two significant questions have been left unanswered: Why has the hermeneutic importance of the Shakespeare essay been overlooked by major strands of hermeneutic philosophers as well as readers of Herder's work? And why, beyond the historical framework of eighteenth-century scholarship, is it worth returning to Herder's hermeneutics? I would like to end the essay by offering a preliminary response to these questions.

One reason that the philosophical importance of Herder's Shakespeare essay has been neglected could be that its readers have focused only or predominantly on the final version of the essay.[47] However, such a focus

avoids the question of why the essay, in its original form, was repeatedly deemed in need of re-crafting. This question is especially urgent in light of the fact that Herder's assessment of Shakespeare and his critics essentially remains the same throughout the drafts. However, although Herder's view of Shakespeare remains unaltered, his hermeneutic position gains increasing depth and sophistication. It moves from asking how the uniqueness of Shakespeare ought to be understood, via an elaboration of the historicity of the work, to an inquiry into the nature of interpretation in general and prejudices in particular. Whereas the first two drafts emphasize, respectively, the particularity and the historicity of the work, the final draft highlights the constitutive historicity of the interpreter. Against this background it is clear that the misunderstanding of Shakespeare is ultimately rooted in a more fundamental misunderstanding of interpretation.

A second point worth mentioning is the tendency, among philosophically minded readers, to assume that Herder's engagement with Shakespeare amounts to little but literary history or, at most, poetics. This, however, is plainly false. The young Herder's literary analyses were produced almost twenty years before Kant published the *Critique of Judgment*. For Herder and his generation, art is not a subject of pure aesthetic judgment in the Kantian sense of the word. Rather, art is the predominant form through which the Enlightenment audiences encounter culturally distant life-forms, and even the predominant form in which they encounter their own tradition (works of the past). As much as art is viewed as beautiful, it is also treated as a historical object—and thus as an object that generates scholarship as well as epistemological queries about the nature of understanding and the way in which prejudices tend systematically to hamper the outlook of historical interpretation.[48]

Why, then, is it worth returning to the young Herder's work on the historicity of understanding? Since the publication of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer has been allowed to almost solely define the concerns and commitments of hermeneutics.[49] Gadamer is, in my view, right in emphasizing the constitutive role of prejudices. He is not right, however, in claiming, first, that the Enlightenment tradition in hermeneutics had no notion of the enabling function of prejudices in understanding and, second, in concluding from his own emphasis on the enabling role of prejudices that understanding is, fundamentally, self-understanding: that is, a participation in the ongoing mediation of the truths of the great works of art.[50] For Herder, all understanding has an element of self-understanding, but it cannot, for that reason, be reduced to it. Understanding is, primarily, about understanding others, and only to the extent that this process triggers

critical self-reflection—which it necessarily ought to and constitutively can do—does self-understanding play a role. For Gadamer, though, self-understanding is about the interpreter getting a deeper, more fundamental grasp of his or her own situatedness in tradition. The work of tradition asks him or her to live more authentically, bids him or her to "alter her life."[51] This conception of understanding is problematic in that it allows little room for reflective (independent or impartial) assessment of the validity of the truths conveyed by the works of the past.[52] It is also problematic because it is an open question whether Gadamer, with this identification of understanding and self-understanding, really manages to make good on his idea of *Bildung* as an education in tradition and culture that is made possible through conversation with the works of the tradition. That is, whereas Gadamer pays attention to the conditioned character of historical and hermeneutic work, he is, when judged from a Herderian point of view, less sensitive to the fact that every text is produced in a given historical period and answers questions that were felt to matter within this particular world (or answers questions that are still ours, albeit in a way that is no longer plausible, acceptable, or aesthetically contemporary).[53] Herder, by contrast, focuses on this dimension of hermeneutics in the second draft of "Shakespeare," and it remains a defining premise for the discussion of prejudice in the final version. This is precisely why he claims that history (with its search for the uniqueness of the past) and philosophy (with its quest for universal questions) must work together in order to avoid philosophy's becoming a merely abstract discipline and history's becoming a discipline without relevance or direction.[54] For Gadamer, questions that we can no longer take as ours—say, the question of whether Shakespeare's tragedies count as art—can be addressed only in an inauthentic way (*TM*, 374). For Herder, this is precisely the kind of situation in which the prejudices of the interpreter are typically at their most persistent, and he urges that the interpreter seek to acknowledge the questions addressed by a text as rational or valuable within its own historical framework. Further, Herder insists that the interpreter needs to distinguish between the meaning of a given text and its truth-value, be it existentially or epistemically coined. Only then can he or she gain knowledge about the past as past—and thus engage in a real dialogue (if such a dialogue proves possible). From a point of view like Herder's, Gadamer's model, which sees tradition as an ongoing answer to questions that remain valid and philosophically pertinent, is ahistorical. Herder's hermeneutic model, as it unfolds through his early work on Shakespeare, is valuable because it reveals alternative ways of addressing the interrelatedness between understanding and self-understanding, thus

making sure that our engagement with the resources of the past does not end up being stifling, but, as Gadamer himself would put it, a genuine, ongoing conversation.

NOTES

This essay is a lightly edited version of my contribution, published under the same title, in *Die Aktualität der Romantik*, ed. Michael Forster and Klaus Vieweg (Tübingen: Franke-Verlag, 2013), 53–69. The text is republished with the permission of the editors.

1. In Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, the beginning of modern hermeneutics is led back to Schleiermacher's romantic philosophy. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2003), 184–97. Further references to this work will be abbreviated *TM*. The text in which Gadamer discusses Herder, *Volk und Geschichte im Denken Herders* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1942), centers on Herder's notion of folk culture and does not address his theory of interpretation. For a more thorough discussion of this point, see my "Aesthetic and Political Humanism: Gadamer on Herder, Schleiermacher, and the Origins of Modern Hermeneutics," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2007): 275–96.

2. It is symptomatic that even a judicious reader like Robert Norton reasons that Herder's work on literature from 1772 is an "example of the young Herder's ideal of historical analysis at its practical best. But it was the last time that he would limit his investigation of the problem of history solely to art or aesthetics. Excited by the prospects that opened before him, Herder began to add more concrete detail to his theoretical plans in his next major work, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* of 1774. This essay also marks the beginning of a new era in Herder's intellectual life, for after its publication he began to devote himself increasingly exclusively to history." See Robert Norton, *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 80–81; see also ibid., 76. Also the Deutscher Klassiker edition suggests that Herder's work on Shakespeare is fundamentally a contribution to *literary* theory. See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Günter Arnold et al., vol. 2, ed. Gunter E. Grimm (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), 1169 ("Überblick"). Further references to *Werke* will be abbreviated *W*, followed by volume and page number.

3. Hans Dietrich Irmscher, among others, argues that Herder represents an early version of Gadamerian philosophy. See Hans Dietrich Irmscher, "Grundzüge der Hermeneutik Herders," *Schaumburger Studien*, Heft 33, Bückeburg, 1973, 17–57.

4. See Johann Gottfried Herder, "Fragment of a Treatise on the Ode" and "Essay on a History of Lyrical Poetry," in *Selected Early Works*, ed. Ernest A. Menze and Karl Menges, trans. Ernest A. Menze with Michael Palma (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1992), 35–53 and 69–85.

5. Another important contribution is the slightly earlier "Über Thomas Abbts Schriften" (1768). This text, however, does not so much address the problem of prejudices and the epistemic conditions of understanding as the nature of (historical) meaning. See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 167–78. Further references to this work will be abbreviated *PW*, followed by page number.

6. Both Gerstenberg and Herder viewed classicism as a strictly rule-oriented, deductive approach to art. For a more nuanced discussion of classicist aesthetics, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

7. Gerstenberg had already pleaded that Shakespeare's tragedies should be read as "lebendige Bilder der sittlichen Natur" and thus moved the English playwright away from what Herder perceived as the mechanical rule-following of the Francophile critics. Wilhelm von Gerstenberg, *Briefe über Merkwürdigkeiten der Litteratur* (1766), the 15th through the18th letters, reprinted in *Shakespeare in Germany, 1740–1815*, ed. Roy Pascal (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 55–71 (the quote is from page 57).

8. It should be noted that the reference to Aristotle was not internal to Shakespeare's plays, but, rather, part of the particular, classicist mind-set that dominated aesthetic discourse in France and Germany at the time.

9. Early on, Herder had been interested in such a project, but also in the coupling of artistic media with the different senses. See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture*: *Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. and trans. Jason Gaiger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also Rachel Zuckert, "Sculpture and Touch: Herder's Aesthetics of Sculpture," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 3 (2009): 285–99.

10. This point, too, is borrowed from Gerstenberg. See *Briefe*, *Shakespeare in Germany*, 66.

11. That is, he casts modern dramatic action, which lacks an overall dramatic unity in light of which it assumes meaning, as *Begebenheit* rather than *Handlung* (*W*, 2:548).

12. Herder's style was a source of aggravation for Kant, who vents his frustration in his review of *Ideen*. See "Review of Herder's Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind," in Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 2005), 201–20. For a discussion of Herder's philosophical style, see Hans Adler, "Herder's Style," in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*, ed. Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2009), 331–50.

13. Herder's use of the term "Geschichte" is analyzed in Hertha Isaacsen, *Der junge Herder und Shakespeare* (Berlin: Verlag von Emil Ebering, 1930), 19–30.

14. It allows, for example, for the inclusion of ghosts, witches, people of all classes, and other character types that were not in line with the aesthetic sensitivities of classicist drama. Furthermore, it allows for a reevaluation of Shakespeare's language, which was often subjected to drastic measures of "improvement" in the German translations. See *W* 2:524–26.

15. Here Herder follows Edward Young, among others. Young had been emphasizing the originality of Shakespeare and claimed that "the first ancients had no merit in being originals: they could not be imitators. Modern writers have a choice to make, and therefore have a merit in their power." See Martin William Seinke, *Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition" in England and Germany* (with the original text) (New York: G. E. Stechert, 1917), 47 and 64–65. Young's work had been translated into German in the late 1750s and *Conjectures* was published in German in 1760.
See also John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 240–41.

16. In anticipation of Kant's famous claim that the work of genius is exemplary, Herder views genius as the power to create exemplary expressions. For Kant's point, see *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §46.

17. Thus Herder's emphasis on feeling one's way into an author's original work in the essay on Abbt. See "On Thomas Abbt's Writing," *PW*, 174.

18. This question will play a more important role in the second draft. The debate over historical truthfulness in poetry was part of the English reception of Shakespeare.

19. For a helpful discussion of Herder's notion of genius, see Peter Michelsen, "Regeln für Genies: Zu Herders "Fragmenten" "Ueber die neuere Deutsche Litteratur,"" in *Johann Gottfried Herder 1744–1803*, ed. Gerhard Sauder (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), 225–237.

20. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 326–31.

21. Gadamer repeats this misunderstanding, which can be led back to Hegel's polemical account. See *TM*, 58–60. See also Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik* (diss., Bonn: Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität, 1956).

22. For Herder, historical culture is linguistically constituted and language historically mediated. In this respect, Herder's view of art is related to his assertion of the historicity of language. This connection is emphasized in *W*, 1:181. As soon as language is viewed as historically constituted, it follows that it is not studied as an object or a thing, but, rather, as a function. Again, there is a parallel between Herder's philosophy of art and his philosophy of language. This also sheds light on Herder's bracketing, in this period, of his interest in sculpture in order to focus on tragedy, poetry, and other linguistic arts. Language, furthermore, is genuinely human precisely in its historicity. According to Herder, neither God, nor animal, but only human being could invent language (*Treatise on the Origin of Language*, PW, 87 and 96).

23. For an extrapolation of this point, see Hans Dietrich Irmscher, *Johann Gottfried Herder* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 84. My reading of this point differs from Irmscher's, who argues that Herder's insistence on the need for interpretation of the work of genius is a sufficient condition for us to speak of a hermeneutic turn in his work.

24. See, for example, Friedrich Gundolf, *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1920).

For a more recent ascription of such ideas to Herder, Bhikhu Parek's argument is worth noting. Parekh worries that even though Herder can account for intercultural diversity, he lacks a viable notion of diversity within a given culture. Again, the young Herder's work on Shakespeare demonstrates that such a reading does not hold. See Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 73.

25. See Robert S. Mayo, *Herder and the Beginnings of Comparative Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 31.

26. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Cambridge: Hackett, 2004), 15. Further references to this work will be abbreviated *APH*.

27. See also John Zammito, "Herder and Historical Metanarrative: What's Philosophical about History?" in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*, 70–71.

28. In a text from 1764, Herder writes: "How little progress would we have made, were each nation to strive for learnedness by itself, confined within the narrow sphere of its language." "On Diligence in the Study of Several Learned Languages," in *Selected Early Works*, 31. See also "First Collection of Fragments," *Selected Early Works*, 109.

29. Here translation plays an important role. Yet in Herder's view translation can never replace the original. In *Fragments on Recent German Literature* (1766–77), he writes, " When I find my way back to my native land again,

then I feel sorry for those who want to read Homer in a translation, even if it were as correct as possible. You are no longer reading Homer, but something which approximately repeats what *Homer* said inimitably in his poetic language" (*PW*, 41). In this context, it is worth keeping in mind how Shakespeare's work, when being translated into German, was heavily edited (rendered in alexandrines, monologues cut out, and so on). For a discussion of these issues, see Susan Bernofsky, *Foreign Words: Translator-Authors in the Age of Goethe* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 1–45. For a discussion of the claim that Herder aspires toward a translation of the tone of the original work and not only its letter, see Gerhard Sauder, "Herder's Poetic Works, His Translations, and His Views on Poetry," in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*, 305–30.

30. I discuss this point in more detail in "Reading Shakespeare, Reading Modernity," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 9, no. 3 (2004): 17–31.

31. In this essay from 1766, Herder reflects on how the study of history dissolves the prejudice that one's own time is the best of all and that "the current taste is the only one." See "On the Change of Taste," *PW*, 255.

32. See *APH*, 56–57. Here Herder discusses, among other things, the differences between engagement with art and mere philosophical-didactic lectures on other cultures and one's own.

33. In *Kalligone*, Herder leads this insight back to Edward Young and praises him for realizing that to imitate the ancients is ultimately to do something different from what they did (*W*, 8:652). This point, though, was already spelled out in the first draft, but also in the Fragments, where Herder claims that ancient works could not have been produced by moderns, just "as little as we Germans will ever receive a *Homer* who is in all respects for us that which Homer was for the Greeks" (*PW*, 42).

34. Hölderlin, too, places this in the context of the hermeneutic challenge that "what is familiar must be learned as well as what is alien." See letter no. 236 (to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff), in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 150.

35. With this turn to prejudices, the understanding of other traditions becomes important for the conceptualization of understanding as such, including the understanding of the interpreter's own tradition. For Gadamer, however, this insisting on the foreign even in one's own tradition reflects an illegitimate objectivization of tradition. See *TM* 165–67 and 174.

36. Yet the full depth of this hermeneutic consciousness is visible only when the final version of the essay is read against the background of the drafts. In the first draft, Herder grapples with the problems of general

definitions and rules in philosophy of art. In the second, he touches on the historicity of human reason. Only in the final version does he conduct a fully reflective turn by asking how this shapes the interpreter's outlook. In this sense, Herder develops a universal hermeneutics: He is not interested in the interpretation of a particular kind of text (ancient texts, the Bible), but in the conditions of possibility for interpretation as such.

37. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Shakespeare*, trans. Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 8–17. Further references to this translation will be abbreviated *S*.

38. This point will later be crucial for Hegel's treatment of Sophocles in his *Aesthetics*. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1212–25.

39. This insight is also reflected in *Sculpture*, where Herder ponders how the moderns at one point viewed Greek sculpture through the moral lens of the Middle Ages and its dislike of nudity and erotic poses. See *Sculpture*, 49–51.

40. Herder here anticipates Kant's critique of prejudices. I discuss the hermeneutic relevance of Kant's notion of prejudice in *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 123–127.

41. At this point it gets particularly clear how Herder differs from Gadamer, who emphasizes that an interpreter cannot understand a question he or she would not himself be asking (*TM*, 374).

42. This is discussed in the Abbt essay (*PW*, 167–77).

43. The topic is to some extent new with the Shakespeare work but is followed up in *Another Philosophy of History*, where Herder discusses his idea of *Bildung*. See *APH*, second section.

44. As argued by Jens Heise, the plurality of culture is intrinsically connected to its existence in time. See Jens Heise, *Johann Gottfried Herder zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1998), 19.

45. This might sound like a familiar Gadamerian topos. I do, however, discuss the fundamental differences between Herder and Gadamer at the end of the essay.

46. Such a suggestion does not underestimate the close connection between Herder's critique of a rule-governed aesthetics, on the one hand, and his critique of universal history, on the other. For an overview of Herder's critique of Schlözer's universal history, see Robert S. Leventhal, "Progression and Particularity: Herder's Critique of Schlözer's Universal History in the Context of his Early Writings," in *Johann Gottfried Herder: Language, History, and the Enlightenment*, ed. Wulf Koepke (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1990), 25–46.

47. Hertha Isaacsen's *Der junge Herder und Shakespeare* is an important exception, though the study is concerned with Herder's reading of Shakespeare's drama rather than the historical-hermeneutic philosophy to be gleaned from the text.

48. Again, *Another Philosophy of History* is a case in point. See for example the first section, where Herder anticipates Hegel's understanding of Egyptian art. Herder, however, insists on judging Egyptian art in light of its own standards (*APH*, 3–21).

49. This is even more so after a number of Anglophone philosophers have turned to Gadamer in order to escape the framework of traditional post-Cartesian epistemology. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), chap. 8. See also John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 115–19; John McDowell, "Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism," in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald, and Jens Kertscher (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 173–94; and Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), chap. 3.

50. As Gadamer puts it, "To reach an understanding . . . is [to be] transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were'" (*TM*, 379).

51. "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics" (1964), in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 104. Gadamer at this point draws on a poem by Rilke. See Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 503.

52. This is particularly clear in Gadamer's casting the interpreter's relation to tradition as a matter of play (*TM*, 101–10).

53. When Gadamer speaks of the necessity of temporal distance for understanding, he is, characteristically, thinking of the mediating force of tradition. Hence he writes: "Time is . . . no gulf to be bridged, [but] it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted." This position is presented as an alternative to the "naïve" historicist assumption that "we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity." Against the idea of such advancement, Gadamer musters the normative notion that "we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*" (*TM*, 297).

54. See "How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People" (1765) and "On the Change of Taste" (1766), *PW*, 3–33, 247–57.