

The Myth of Tragedy: Fictions of Dialogue in Mendelssohn's  
*Briefe über die Empfindungen* and Shaftesbury's *Moralists*

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For many philosophers fiction serves only to illustrate (as examples) or to corroborate (as thought experiments) their assertions.<sup>1</sup> For others, however, the necessary characteristics of fiction are constitutive of the claims philosophy can make. Plato's dialogues are the prime example. In recent decades, scholars have begun to take their literary aspects more seriously.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere does Plato speak for himself or present his system of thought. All claims are made in the context of the dramatic interplay between characters. Narrative framing, the historical reputations of interlocutors, and ironical layerings of mediality all bear upon the questions, ideas, and myths to which figures give voice. It is the exhilarating and humbling experience of reading the dialogues that comprises their philosophical import.

Such respect for the fictional characteristics of the dialogue form has received much less attention for latter-day examples of the genre. Scholarly commentaries on Early Modern dialogues, from Galileo to Shaftesbury and beyond, tend to assume that one of the speakers is a direct mouthpiece for the author.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Moses Mendelssohn's first published works, such an attitude might seem to be justified. In the preface to his *Philosophische Schriften* (*Philosophical Writings*, 1761), he writes,

Ich bekenne es, daß sich zu bloß spekulativen Untersuchungen, kein Vortrag besser schickt, als der strenge systematische. Ich traue mir aber das Vermögen, oder die Fertigkeit nicht zu, meine Gedanken beständig an eine so strenge Ordnung zu binden. (JA 231)<sup>4</sup>

Here Mendelssohn professes that systematic treatises are more appropriate for representing philosophical ideas than fictional forms. The humility with which he justifies the poetic choice of presentation is belied in the very volume it introduces, as other essays (e.g., *Über die Wahrscheinlichkeit*, »On Probability«) are exemplary specimens of systematic organization. But regardless of why Mendelssohn chooses *not* to present his first speculative investigations in a systematic treatise, the fictional forms Mendelssohn *does* choose have functions and effects that are important to identify in any analysis of their speculative import.

This paper attends to the interplay of narrative framing, character construction, and genre convention in a philosophical work by Mendelssohn,<sup>5</sup>

*Briefe über die Empfindungen* (*Letters on the Sentiments*, 1755), and argues that it engages seriously with the genres in which it is written, dialogue and epistolary novel. In fact, the fictional elements work in tandem with the thematic issues represented in the text to both illustrate and – more interestingly – challenge the arguments made by authoritative characters. The generic performance of the text devolves from epistolary fiction into the narrative of a dialogue without any satisfactory closure. This pointedly incomplete framing of the *Briefe* plays with generic expectations with the surprising effect of undermining the arguments made by the character usually assumed to be the spokesperson for Mendelssohn. Instead of beginning in *medias res*, the *Briefe* end there: they come to an abrupt and unframed close with a speech about the theatrical presentation of ill fortune. In contrast to many of Plato's dialogues that conclude with a myth, Mendelssohn's *Briefe* end with an unfinished discussion of tragedy.

*Briefe über die Empfindungen* comprise a series of 15 letters between Euphranor, a young German nobleman, and Theokles,<sup>6</sup> an older British philosopher sojourning in Germany. The letters are introduced by a brief preliminary report and rounded off with a conclusion and notes by the editor. The exchange is initiated by Euphranor after duties have torn him away from the idyllic site of learning at the feet of the British sage. The first two impassioned letters from Euphranor are very much in the effulgent style of contemporary sentimental epistolary novels. The next five letters are all from Theokles, and rather quickly seem to leave behind all trace of the fictional frame as they launch into fine psychological, aesthetic, and metaphysical distinctions. In letters 8 and 9 Euphranor finally responds, and the last six letters are again all by Theokles. This organization explains the temptation to see this framing device as a simple ruse to create a straw man (Euphranor) against whom to expound Mendelssohn's aesthetic theories. Often Theokles' letters do not even pay lip-service to the conventions of letter-writing: many of them begin and end without any personal acknowledgement of their supposed addressee. The divisions between letters in Theokles' two series seem to function more as chapter breaks between parts of a systematic treatise (the kind disavowed by Mendelssohn in the preface to *Philosophische Schriften*) than the openings and closings of letters between people. This might lead one to suspect Mendelssohn of disingenuousness not only in the modesty of the cited passage from the introduction, but also in the true form of presentation. Despite his asseverations to the contrary, Mendelssohn is not only *able* to write systematic accounts, but he has *actually done so* here under the thin guise of fictional letters.<sup>7</sup>

Mendelssohn's modesty might be misplaced, but this paper will show that his characterization of the mode of presentation is not dishonest. The fictional frame is no mere disguise for systematic argumentation, but rather

is vital to any responsible reading of the text. The argument will take two steps to demonstrate the philosophical work of the literary form. First, a comparison of character dynamics in Shaftesbury's *Moralists* and Mendelssohn's *Briefe* uncovers the two texts' stance on language and communication. Second, attention to the hidden action in the *Briefe* reveals a curious dramatic structure and generic shift from epistolary novel to dialogue to tragedy. These genre innovations in the *Briefe* offer an interpretation of the strange way the text breaks off and comment on the insidious pitfalls of authorship and the seemingly unavoidable Christianization of philosophy in the modern era.

#### Character in The Moralists and Briefe über die Empfindungen

The *Briefe* announce their debt to Shaftesbury's *Moralists* in the first sentence: »Theokles, ein englischer Weltweise und Namenserbe jenes liebenswürdigen Schwärmers, der uns durch die *Rhapsodie* des Grafen von Shaftesbury bekannt ist, hatte seine Heimat vor einiger Zeit verlassen.« (AS 9) <sup>8</sup> In order to understand the subtle but important interplay the German text stages, it is necessary to observe the fictional structure of the English one in some detail. Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), first published *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody* in 1709 and then included it in his collected works, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* in 1711. The subtitle of the text underlines its dialogic form: *Being a Recital of Certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects*. It consists of three parts and features three characters. Philocles is a skeptic and the narrator of the text. Palemon is a nobleman in the city with a taste for philosophy and a predilection for enthusiasm. Theokles is a country gentleman philosopher and »sociable enthusiast.« Each part represents the conversation of a different day. The first reports the most recent colloquy between Palemon and Philocles and provides the motivation for writing: namely Palemon's desire to have a record of Philocles' conversations with Theokles, which had taken place sometime previously. The second two parts describe the two days of conversations between Philocles and Theokles at the latter's country estate.

*The Moralists* shares with Platonic dialogues a complex emphasis on its own disputed mediacy. In fact, they demand a reading of the »argument of the action.«<sup>9</sup> The medium of Shaftesbury's *Moralists* is already brought into play with its subtitle: »a recital of certain conversations.« While the term »recital« announces the text to be a performed reading of colloquies (like *Theatetion*), and the ensuing narrative shows it to be a first-person account (like *The Republic*), the text in fact takes on the form of letters. Each of the three sections sports the header »Philocles to Palemon,« and the initial para-

graph of the first two sections is clearly a personal address to Palemmon. The introductory passage of the first section is a clever encomium to Palemmon as a political player and philosophical enthusiast (231).<sup>10</sup> This is typical of the laudatory rhetoric common in 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century letters and dedications. Readers are pined for an epistle: a type of writing in which people separated by distance share news and events. What follows instead is a first- and second-person account ('I said, you said') of a conversation in which Philocles and Palemmon were recently engaged. A very strange letter, indeed: instead of imparting news from afar, this one tells the recipient what he has just experienced himself.

The scene and motivation for writing this odd document are not revealed until the end of the first section. During their conversation, Philocles confesses that he has recently undergone a »sudden ... change of character« – from his wonted irreverent skepticism to earnest enthusiasm – during a visit to Theocles' idyllic estate (246). Palemmon insists on knowing the details of this story: he demands, in effect, a *conversion narrative*. Philocles is then obliged to »recount ... what passed in those two days between my friend and me in our country retirement« (247). Only now, one third of the way into the entire text, does the generic promise of the subtitle, »a recital« make sense. Philocles writes to Palemmon: »I engaged, for your sake, to *turn writer* and draw up the memoirs of those two days, beginning with what had passed this last day between ourselves, as I have accordingly done, you see, by way of introduction to *my story*« (247).<sup>11</sup> The letter we thought we had been reading turns out to be the introduction to a conversion narrative, similar in language and form (if not in the content of new beliefs) to the tales of repentance so popular among the nonconformists Shaftesbury disdained. Indeed, Philocles stresses the perils of this kind of confessional writing: »Again and again I bid you beware: you knew not the danger of this philosophical passion, nor considered what you might possibly draw upon yourself and *make me the author of*« (247). The same passage that reveals in retrospect the genre of the text, then, is framed as a warning against the fanatical seductions to which readers will be exposed. Here and elsewhere in this first conversation, Philocles' wary skepticism creates an amicable distance from his supposed conversion to enthusiasm.

The first paragraph of the second section still praises Palemmon by voicing regret at the new scene of writing. Whereas the previous day's conversation with Palemmon had been inspirational and supportive, this morning finds Philocles »alone, confined to my closet, obliged to meditate by myself and reduced to the hard circumstances of an author and historian« (247). At every turn, the dialogue repeats with new topoi the ironical stance against writing that Plato stages in the *Phaedrus*. The only thing that saves Philocles from the writing block of companionless solitude is a divine dream that

fortunately comes to aid the narrator by transporting him to »a distant country, which presented a pompous rural scene. It was a mountain not far from the sea, its bow adorned with ancient wood and at its foot a river and well-inhabited plain, beyond which the sea appearing, closed the prospect« (248). The conversion narrative inaugurates itself with an evocation of the classical idyll. This dreamlike Arcadia turns out to be identical with Theocles' country estate, and hence the lonely closet is transformed into a paradisaical scene of dialogue.<sup>12</sup> It takes this kind of pastoral (purely literary) landscape to enable Philocles' transformative inspiration with Theocles' measured but passionate »sociable enthusiasm.« Just a few days later, as evidenced earlier in the text, Philocles will return to the city and to his ironizing winks.

Once ensconced in the idyll, however, Philocles is susceptible to the same dangers of fervor about which he warns Palemmon. The third section is labeled »Philocles to Palemmon,« like the first two, but the text dives straightaway into the narrative of the second day with Theocles, without any address to Palemmon or introductory preamble. In all 43 pages of this last epistolary recital, its addressee's name is never mentioned. Not even at the end of the document do we get any kind of closing address to Palemmon. The text ends with the conclusion of the narration of the second day's discussion. There is no return to the framing fiction of the initial motivation to write at Palemmon's behest at all. Instead, readers are treated to Theocles' rhapsodic performance and Philocles' dramatic metanoia. Philocles is so absorbed by the recital of his own conversion to enthusiasm that he forgets the person for whose sake he is writing it down.

The climactic event of Philocles' transformation deserves attention: »I was considering what would become of me if after all I should, by your means, *turn philosopher*« (336). Philocles, still playing the role of the skeptic, frames his conversion as a question in the second subjunctive (future less vivid). The phrasing, moreover, is reminiscent of the end of the first letter. Just as Philocles there writes to Palemmon that he will »for your sake, turn writer,« he now says to Theocles that he may, »by your means, turn philosopher.« There are, in fact, two conversions here. The first chronologically is the one to philosophy; the second, to authorship. Both of them are necessary conditions for the text we are reading. An Aristotelian could note that the conversions have opposing kinds of causes: the turn to philosophy takes place by a mere efficient or mechanical cause (*by the means of Theocles*); the turn to writing has a final cause (*for the sake of Palemmon*). The comparison invited by the echo of syntax between these disparate parts of the text highlights philosophy's origin here in lowly mechanistic causes. Instead of having its source in the divine inspiration of a final cause, philosophy is the means to the end of writing. It is brought about by pushes

from others rather than by its own power to draw. The parallelism thus ties the vaunted enthusiasm of the dramatic conclusion to the equivocating irony of the scene of writing.

The narrative situation and linguistic formulations of the *Moralists* undermine any easy identification of its author, Shaftesbury, with the wise Theocles.<sup>13</sup> They in fact constitute a substantive critique and necessary qualification of the harmonizing vision of nature, beauty, and man's place in the world that the thapsody presents. In the same way, Mendelssohn's fictional frame – especially when viewed in light of Shaftesbury's precedent – frustrates any attempt to reduce the *Briefe* to a decorative endorsement of Theocles' positions. The contrasting constellation of character relations in the two texts is quite revealing about their respective positions on the dynamics of communication and human access to metaphysical truth.

In *The Moralists*, Philocles – the skeptic, the writer, and the convert – is also the go-between for the other two characters, who never meet. Palamon, the city politician, only knows about Theocles, the country gentleman, through the verbal and written accounts of Philocles. Theocles is never shown even to be aware of Palamon's existence. Philocles' role is hence that of a reluctant prophet proselytizing for the enthusiastic philosophy to which he has converted. The names of the three characters emphasize this intercessory relation: Theocles = glory of god; Philocles = glory of love; Palamon is evocative of Palamon, the courtly lover in Chaucer's *Knights' Tale*.<sup>14</sup> Thus the three characters correspond to a Trinitarian schema and intercessory model of salvation: God, the human Lover, and Love as the figure of their relation. Of course the dialogues ironize this simple model in many instances, but it remains a clear organizing principle for the general structure and internal functioning of the text throughout.

In Mendelssohn's *Briefe*, these clear relations are interestingly muddled. We do have three characters: a wise philosopher, an ardent student, and a messenger between them, but the text itself does not suggest an intercessory salvation. Only a comparison with *The Moralists*, to which the text directly alludes, invites consideration of the sociological model. Euphranor in this scheme would correspond to Shaftesbury's Palamon: the nobleman enthusiastically seeking wisdom while occupied by political duties in society. Mendelssohn's Theocles, meanwhile, is clearly in the position of Shaftesbury's Theocles: the wise philosopher in his idyllic retreat who imparts a harmonious view of nature and humanity that balances sentiment with reason. That would make Mendelssohn's Eudox, the messenger between the other two characters, correspond to Shaftesbury's Philocles. So far, the matches fit quite neatly: Lover of wisdom (Palamon / Euphranor); wise philosopher (Theocles / Theocles); intermediary go-between (Philocles / Eudox). Yet the differences such a comparison makes clear are much more interesting than the similarities.

Most obviously, the country philosopher in the first edition of the *Briefe* bears the name of the city politician in *The Moralists*: Palamon. This move could be an ironizing wink, warning readers not to fall into the trap of mapping out correspondences with Shaftesbury too strictly.<sup>15</sup> It could also be a more substantive commentary on the unfinished drama of *The Moralists*. As noted above, Philocles does not present any return to the original frame and motivation for his writing at the end of the dialogues. Readers are therefore left in the dark about the fate of Palamon, who had begged for the account to begin with. If we take the editor of the 1755 *Briefe* at his word, then readers can surmise that the text of *The Moralists* was successful in converting Palamon to Theocles' brand of sociable enthusiasm. In that case, Shaftesbury's Palamon has now even gone abroad with a mild missionary zeal to spread a (now scholastically glossed) gospel of moral sense ethics and aesthetics in Germany. Either way, the irony or fancy of the name switch is erased in all subsequent editions of the *Briefe*. When it was first published anonymously – and by some accounts without Mendelssohn's knowledge<sup>16</sup> – the »englischer Weltweise« was Palamon. In his *Philosophische Schritten*, which Mendelssohn published under his own name in 1761, the newly revised *Briefe* put to rest any doubt about the correspondence of characters by renaming the »liebenswürdiger Schwärmer« Theocles.

Above and beyond this simple name switch, the nature of the relation between Euphranor and Theocles is fundamentally different from that between Palamon and Theocles. Despite all his vaunted veneration for Plato, Shaftesbury tones down or omits one important aspect of Platonic dialogues: the erotic interplay between characters. Any hints of flirtation in *The Moralists* can only occur with Philocles (the intercessor / writer),<sup>16</sup> because the other two characters are never in direct or indirect contact. It is quite striking that in a dialogue modeled on Plato, the very character whose name and function point to *Love* nevertheless eschews the intercessory power of Eros that plays such a necessary role in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Mendelssohn's text, however, consists in the communication between Euphranor and Theocles: the letters they write to each other. These letters positively drip with the erotic phraseology of contemporary romance. The preface sets the tone:

Während seines Aufenthalts zu \*\*\* hat [Theocles] mit einigen jungen Edelknechten allda Freundschaft geschlossen, die völlig nach seinem Geschmack waren. Unter diesen ist er einem Jüngling aus dem Hause \*\*\* der in der Folge unter dem Namen Euphranor vorkommen wird, am meisten zugezogen, und aus Liebe zu demselben halt er sich, seit einiger Zeit, in einem kleinen Orte an der S \*\*\* auf. Der Jüngling besucht öfters Theocles' einsamen Aufenthalt, wo sie in zufriedener Stille ihre Stunden

der Freundschaft und der Betrachtung weihen; und wenn der Jüngling genötigt ist sich von seinem Freunde zu trennen, so setzen sie ihre Liebkosungen in Briefen fort. (AS 10)<sup>17</sup>

The editor's erotic casting of the friendship is repeated in the language of the letters. Especially Euphranor's addresses to Theokles are couched in flirtatious banter. The very first sentence of the first letter (in striking contrast to the witty erudition of Philokles' first address to Palemon) smacks of physical eroticism: »Schon den vierten Abend bringe ich ohne Theokles' Umarmung zu, und jeder Augenblick füllt meine Seele mit der wehmütigen Erinnerung jenes unaussprechlichen Vergnügens, das ich in deiner Gesellschaft genossen« (AS 11). Any homo-erotic pleasure in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was certainly unspeakable, but Euphranor does a pretty good job of *writing* it in both veiled and open ways in all of his four letters.

Mendelssohn re-injects Platonic eroticism into the philosophical exchange after Shaftesbury's prudish dilution of the dialogue form. It now becomes evident how he has also removed the Christian schematics that Shaftesbury had imposed on it. *The Moralist* works by a Christian model of salvation. Philokles is to Palemon as Beatrice is to the pilgrim Dante. Humans cannot see the glory of god (Theocles!) directly, but must approach the divine through beneficent intermediaries. In Mendelssohn's *Briefe*, in contrast, Euphranor does not need an intercessor to sponsor and manage his approach to Theokles. The Philokles figure, the letter-carrier Eudox, is reduced to a skulking melancholic. This shift invites readers of both texts to re-read Shaftesbury's Philokles as a procurer or pimp. By re-eroticizing the inherited Platonic form, Mendelssohn has also purified it from an over-determined – Trinitarian, even: Philokles functions a slyly pandering holy spirit – Christian structure.<sup>18</sup>

The new dynamics of approaching divine knowledge are modeled instead on Platonic love. In *The Moralist*, there is no indication of any age difference between the three main characters. In the *Briefe*, Theokles' experience and Euphranor's youth and physical beauty are stressed repeatedly. Theokles is cast in the role of the elder lover and guide to the young beloved, as Socrates praises in his speech about love. As in the *Symposium*, too, the expected roles of lover (the elder man) and beloved (the beautiful youth) are reversed. Instead of the more senior man chasing the more attractive youth, as common in Attic culture, the older Socrates and Theokles receive ardent advances from the younger Alciades and Euphranor. Indeed, the two young men are similar in many ways: they are promising, passionate, and handsome noblemen at the beginning of their political careers. In both cases, the elder men have high hopes for them putting their philosophical education to good use. This parallel might strike a note of warning about

Euphranor's future: if he follows in the footsteps of Socrates' protégé, then massive failure, tragedy, and scandal are in store for Theokles' *Liebling*.

A further important difference between Shaftesbury's *Mendelssohn's* texts concerns the scene of writing and the third character. *The Moralist* has one writer: the intermediary figure, Philokles. Above I argued that Philokles' double conversions (to enthusiasm and to writing) trouble each other. Authorship is performed as a thoroughly mediated, impure act. Regardless of a writer's conviction, any attempt to communicate beliefs will be fraught and compromised by the intractability of language and the inescapability of rhetorical situations. The *Briefe*, in contrast, have three writers (two letter-writers and an unnamed editor). Euphranor and Theokles both speak for themselves to each other. One would think, then, that Mendelssohn could dispense with the intermediary figure altogether. Why bring in a go-between when the human and the divine, the sensual and the rational, can communicate directly? Eudox is not just a third figure: in the flirtatious relationship between Euphranor and Theokles, Eudox is a third wheel. The presence of this seemingly superfluous character in the *Briefe* is vexing. Though his counterpart in Shaftesbury is the sole narrator, Philokles, Eudox pointedly does not write anything. The name of this non-writer means »good opinion/belief.« Perhaps it is only possible for beliefs to be good – not to betray themselves or go away – as long as they remain unwritten. Not writing, however, also means not having a voice of one's own. Despite the felicitous prefix of his name, Eudox is a troubled and troubling figure in the *Briefe*.

Eudox is entirely invisible until well into the 6th letter, when Theokles mentions »unsem Freund, den britischen Eudox; der dir dieses Schreiben überreichte« (AS 27). Thus he is quite literally the messenger in the *Briefe*. Instead of authoring the relation between the two other characters as in Shaftesbury, however, he is the means whereby Euphranor and Theokles can read each other's written self-presentations: he is the postman for and the witness to the others' relationship. This first mention of Eudox in the 6th letter, for instance, heralds the only truly personal confessional passage in Theokles' letters. Immediately after introducing Eudox, the older philosopher confides the story of his own journey through doubt and despair to a dramatic conversion. Unlike Philokles' meandering that came about through a personal encounter in conversation with Theokles, Theokles' conversion is effected by reading.<sup>19</sup> After the narration of this transformation is finished, Theokles produces Eudox as a witness for the remarkable transformation, and finally as a kind of listless disciple, following in Theokles' wanderings across the continent (AS 27–29).

Eudox reappears again in letters 9 and 13–15. In each case, his presence is connected to a particularly personal, dark, or melancholic moment.

Though the »editor« provides a note claiming he is called British Eudox »seiner patriotischen Gesinnungen halber« (AS 27), modern commentators point out that his epithet references the British reputation for a high rate of suicide.<sup>29</sup> In the ninth letter, Euphranor recalls Eudox at the very moment he introduces the new topic of the justifiability of suicide to the correspondence. In the revised version, Euphranor adds,

Dort wandelt er in der Laube auf und nieder. Wie munter! Sein gesetzter Sinn muß so weiterlärmisch nicht seyn, denn der trübe Himmel scheint ihn noch eher aufgeheitert zu haben. Ohne ihn zu unterbrechen, fahre ich in meinen schwermüthigen Gedanken fort. (JA 272)

Ostensibly it is Euphranor who is heavy-hearted and Eudox who seems happy, but Eudox only comes to Euphranor's mind in this precise moment when he goes from contemplating the darkest thoughts to mentioning suicide for the first time outright. Eudox »appears«<sup>31</sup> to Euphranor at the transition between despair and suicide. He is a shade at the outer border of life.

Eudox is announced as the bearer of letter 6 to Euphranor. He is likely also the carrier for all of Theokles' letters 3-7 as a bundle: this would explain Theokles' calling the document a »Schreiben« (piece of writing, AS 27) rather than »Briefe« (letters). It would further motivate the lack of salutations and personal conclusions at the beginnings and endings of this block of five letters. Though the text does not say so explicitly, Eudox must have also been the means of conveyance for Euphranor's letters in response (8 and 9). The messenger walking up and down in the garden, waiting to deliver a reply as the recipient writes in his study, is a common scene in epistolary fiction. Either way, it is very illuminating that although Eudox presumably carries *both* letters 8 and 9, he is only expressly associated with the latter. Eudox then reappears in letters 13-15, in which, in reply to Euphranor's 9<sup>th</sup> letter, Theokles recites a dialogue with the messenger. Eudox here carries on a two-day defense of suicide against Theokles' patient counterarguments. The non-writer Eudox never has authorial control over his own voice; instead, his appearances in the letters shadow the most disturbing moments in the other writers' epistles.

Mendelssohn's *Briefe*, in letting the philosopher and the youth communicate directly, might seem to circumvent the problems of mediality inherent in the writing position in Shaftesbury's *Moralists*. In fact, however, Mendelssohn cannot dispense with the go-between. Shaftesbury's wretchedly pandering Philocles is rendered as Eudox into an uncanny figure who haunts those passages that aim most earnestly for deep, personal confession. Even when one attempts to bypass the procuring spirit of mediation, its shade inevitably veils any baring of soul. Instead of dismantling the Trinitarian

structure of the *Moralists*, Mendelssohn's *Briefe* convert Shaftesbury's holy spirit into an unholy ghost.

#### *Dramatic Structure and Genre in Briefe über die Empfindungen*

Letters 8 and 9 constitute a nodal crux in the text. They are the only replies Euphranor writes to Theokles. These two missives comprise or contain two centers of the *Briefe*: the middle of the 15 letters is the 8<sup>th</sup>, and the midpoint of the text (in terms of page numbers) occurs during the 9<sup>th</sup>. Like an ellipse, the *Briefe* have two foci. They alternately determine the two different dramatic arcs for the text as a whole. Letter 9 leads directly to the extended discussion of suicide (and dialogue with Eudox) in letters 13-15. Letter 8 leads to the aesthetic discussion of letters 10-12: the grounding of pleasure in the representation of a sensuous or intellectual perfection. The arrangement of the letters together with the narrative frame of the editorial conclusion create a bifurcation that suggests two very different endings. The second half of the text thus emphatically avoids the clear, logical chronology that would have been easy to arrange. Both thematically and narratively, an ordering would make sense in which Euphranor's letter 8 is followed by Theokles' letters 10-12, to which Euphranor replies again with the melancholic letter 9 followed by Theokles' letters 13-15: first aesthetics, then suicide, then the culminating reunion described by the editor. Instead, letters 8 and 9 instigate separate paths that cannot transpire in a single, logical timeline, but that then converge in the personal discussion that makes up the text's conclusion. This puzzling order demands attention.

Eudox, as shown above, is still waiting for Euphranor to finish writing during the composition of letter 9. This means that the messenger must have brought both epistles 8 and 9 together to Theokles at the same time. Yet Theokles' replies take two separate paths based not on both letters, but on each separately (8 → 10-12; 9 → 13-15). Two narrative details make the successive transpiring of these paths both necessary and impossible. For one thing, Theokles opens the 13<sup>th</sup> letter with reference to the rupture with which he closed the 12<sup>th</sup>: »Ich war eben auf jenem Hügel mit meiner schwärmerischen Andacht, wie ihr sie zu nennen pflegt, beschäftigt, als ich unsern Eudox von ferne erblickte« (AS 55). The sentence is wryly self-aware. Figuratively, Theokles says that he was in the climactic throes of rapture. Literally, Theokles says he was *on the hill*. When theatrical actors describe what they see in the distance – often other characters as they approach – they conventionally stand at a higher level in order to show that they see further. The literal meaning of Theokles' phrase thus sets the stage in turn for a figurative reichshosopia. This mise-en-scène of theatrical convention – in one of Theokles' rare moments of orientation within the

fictional frame – serves to highlight the disorientation in narrative logic. The claim to see Eudox approaching is a continuity problem. The messenger cannot *just now* be bringing the 9<sup>th</sup> letter (which thematically would make much more sense, because the conversation with Eudox that Theokles goes on to recite in letter 13 directly concerns the issues in letter 9: suicide). He must have arrived earlier to deliver letters 8 and 9 together. And yet the presence of the messenger is only announced now, four letters after his arrival.

Even less easy to explain is the editor's narration in the concluding section. He writes, »Euphranor konnte sich der Begierde nicht länger erwehren, an Theokles' Unterredung mit dem Eudox persönlich Teil zu nehmen« (AS 69). This conversation had been reported in letters 13-15, the response thread to Euphranor's 9<sup>th</sup> letter. So »he traveled to them.« Yet the editor adds, »aber dieses geschah, bevor noch Theokles den achten Brief beantwortet hatte« (AS 69). If Euphranor did not wait to receive the replies to his 8<sup>th</sup> letter, much less those to the 9<sup>th</sup>, there is no way he could have had report of the conversations that he has an irresistible urge to join. In stressing that Euphranor headed out for Theokles after the 8<sup>th</sup> letter, moreover, the editor tangles up any attempt to unravel a clear narrative thread. In fact, we have two possible threads, both emanating from the separate centers of the text in letters 8 and 9. The narrative confusion creates a choose-your-own-adventure moment in retrospect: readers can select the path of aesthetic rhapsody or that of suicidal casuistry.

In the second half, the *Briefe* do not function as letters: they are never read by their intended recipient. This fact creates a huge gap in the performative structure of the text. Letters 1-9 are dialogical: they are written by one party, and read by another, who then responds. But letters 10-15 are blank shots. They are communicative volleys that never land near their intended target. The two diverging paths after letters 8 and 9, are rendered monologues into a void by Euphranor's impatience. Both paths, however, converge on the same ending in the final dialogue that is no ending, and hardly a dialogue, at all.

Before turning to the editorial conclusion of the *Briefe*, it is necessary to observe the generic journey of Mendelssohn's text. Shaftesbury's *Moralists*, as shown, initially seems to perform as epistolary fiction before revealing itself as the narrative »recital« of dialogues. Although Mendelssohn's *Briefe* do disembody into a reported dialogue, they attain their interesting complexity – both in their rhetoric sinuateness and in their narratological structure – primarily through their currency as letters. Mendelssohn's text thus invites itself to be read as a proper epistolary novel.<sup>22</sup> One of the greatest effects of this kind of fiction comprised of realistic documents is its resistance to synoptic viewing. The size of a work of art Theokles praised in quoting

Aristotle on magnitudo – big enough to cause wonder yet not so big as to defy comprehension – becomes less and less possible the more layers of incommensurable realia are included to represent the story and characters. How could anyone »take in at glance« (AS 15-16) the massive yet seductive complex of material that goes into constructing Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-1748)? The epistolary novel as an artistic practice thus threatens to bust the limits imposed on art by the wisest critic in the *Briefe*.

An attempt to behold the structure of the *Briefe* as a whole only points toward the ways Mendelssohn's text, too, chafes against the desideratum of synoptic viewing. The text finally breaks out of the generous mold of epistolary fiction in the conclusion, which recites a conversation about tragedy. After reporting a confession of Euphranor about having been seduced by Theokles' intellectual enemy, Du Bos, the older philosopher breaks into a long harangue on the function of sympathy in tragic drama. The *dialogue* for which Euphranor had yearned turns out to be a *monologue*. The editor reports 1/3 of a page of Euphranor's speaking, three lines of Eudox (AS 70), and then four pages of Theokles' speech (AS 71-74). Moreover, just as in *The Moralists*, there is no return to the narrative frame in the conclusion. The text ends abruptly with no clear concluding note or reflection even in terms of Theokles' view on tragedy, much less any returning acknowledgment of the fictional situation that launched the *Briefe* to begin with. Readers are left with neither intellectual nor dramatic closure.

The displacement from epistolary narrative to dialogue lands obliquely in a speech on tragedy. The explanation Theokles offers for the puzzling fact of tragic pleasure concludes with an anatomy of sympathy, which is itself a mixed sentiment (the topic, one may recall, that initiated the *Briefe* to begin with). It is the only unpleasant sentiment that properly holds an attraction for us (as opposed to the practiced callousness that most of Du Bos' gory examples require). Theokles defines sympathy as »die Liebe zu einem Gegenstande, mit dem Begriffe eines Unglücks, eines physikalischen Übels, verbunden, das ihm unverschuldet zugestoßen« (AS 73). This definition explicitly ties love (the category of which sympathy is a type) to tragedy (the phenomenon that requires sympathy as explanation). This is not the first time that a discussion of dramatic art closes a dialogue dealing with love: Socrates in the *Symposium* is still up at dawn, draining another bowl of wine with the tragic poet Agathon and the comic poet Aristophanes, arguing (as they nod more in sleep than agreement) that tragedy and comedy could be the product of one artistic mind. In other Platonic dialogues, when Socrates reaches his limits, Socrates resorts to the power of myth by narrating a story. In Mendelssohn's *Briefe*, meanwhile, Theokles takes refuge in an explanation of tragedy – offered as a monologue without interruption or assent from his interlocutors. What he gives them is a *myth* of tragedy that

binds its power to the same erotic source that initiated the correspondence to begin with: love plus distance. Read this way, the abrupt ending of the final sentence can be seen as giving closure to both intellectual and aesthetic circles in the text: »Denn die Erinnerung, daß es nichts als ein künstlicher Betrug sei, lindert einigermaßen unsern Schmerz und läßt nur soviel davon übrig, als nötig ist, unserer Liebe die gehörige Fülle zu geben« (AS 74). The myth of tragedy that Euphranor and Eudox are called on to believe is that the representation of suffering can make us more perfect lovers – but only when we are aware of the representation *as a fiction*.

This final lesson is both corroborated and challenged by another detail of the narrative frame. Like many novels of the mid-eighteenth century, the *Briefe* are introduced by a fictional editor who claims to have access to the original documents.<sup>23</sup> This device is characteristic of the ways new epistolary novels tie fiction to the real world. Both practices became prevalent in the years after Shaftesbury's *Moralists*, so that Mendelssohn's sequel to the earlier piece provides evidence for (as well as reflection on) these genetic and technical developments in the first half of the eighteenth century. Both also underscore a new kind of heightened verisimilitude emerging in literary products: the fictions are presented as facts. In a way, this gesture towards factuality undermines the argument Aristotle offered for why poetry is more philosophical than history.<sup>24</sup> It is curious, therefore, to see it at work in a fictional philosophical exchange such as the *Briefe*.

After introducing the characters Theokles and Euphranor in the preface, the editor writes:

[T]he letters ... sind mir durch einen *seltenen Zufall* in die Hände geraten, und ich konnte mich nicht enthalten, die kleine *Verrätheri* zu begeben, sie der Welt bekannt zu machen (AS 10).<sup>25</sup>

[Two details are worth noting here: on the one hand, the editor gains access to the letters by an unlikely coincidence, which might suggest that Euphranor and Theokles are not his close friends. On the other hand, the editor still characterizes the act of publishing the letters as a betrayal, which implies that there is a friendship or trust to betray. Who is this editor?

Aside from occasional footnotes, the editor next announces himself in the conclusion. He first reports how Euphranor could no longer resist the desire to join Theokles and Eudox in person. For this reason, he says, »glaube ich meinen Lesern keinen unangenehmen Dienst zu erzeigen, wenn ich noch zum Beschlusse hieher setze, was bei ihnen mündlich über diese Materie abgehandelt worden« (AS 70). As far as the editor's recital reveals, no one is present at these discussions other than the three friends. In fact, the editor expressly stresses the duo of Theokles and Eudox as the object

of Euphranor's desire. In order to maintain the illusion, conscientiously fostered by the narration, that the editor is a real figure in the fictional world, readers must imagine one of two possibilities: either there is a fourth person, a secret voyeur, on the scene; or Eudox is in fact the editor.

This ambiguity of the editorship is part of the text's performance, but the latter surmise (that Eudox is the editor) is quite compelling. It would explain the rare chance by which the letters fell into the editor's hands. Eudox is, quite literally, the deliverer of the letters: their *Geber* as well as their possible *Herausgeber*. It would also make sense of the breach of trust that the publication entails. The supposition, however, forces a revised calculation of the ratio of writers to characters. Now, instead of three writers and four characters, the hypothesis makes the three writers identical with the three characters. Eudox, who had seemed to escape the perils of writing, is suddenly revealed guilty of all the treachery that authorship *and* publication entail.

This revelation, tenuous as it may be, is not confined to an assessment of the character of a single figure, but forces a substantial re-evaluation of Mendelssohn's text in relation to Shaftesbury's. Instead of purging the Platonic dialogue from the schematics of Christian salvation, Mendelssohn's *Briefe* now seem to be revealing the hidden unavailability of the relational third figure. Not only is Eudox an uncanny attendant to moments of melancholy or confession between Theokles and Euphranor, as shown above; now he would in fact be the same suspect figure of the writer that Philokles represented in *The Moralists*. His agency is even more insidious by virtue of its concealment. It evinces two lessons: 1) The dynamics of Christian soteriology impose themselves not only on ancient philosophers who never knew them, but also on modern philosophers who try to avoid them; and 2) Authorship is a dirty business: better do it anonymously.

### Concluding Aporia

Several ways that Mendelssohn's fictional frame infects the arguments in the *Briefe* are now visible. Form and content in this philosophical text prove not to be as distinct as previously assumed. Without the dramatic contextualization of the fiction, the arguments in the *Briefe* would be far less interesting. When viewed together with the intertextual clues, narrative logic, and contradictory gestures of the text's drama, the characters' theories multiply in suggestive power. To make clear the importance of this reading for understanding Mendelssohn's aesthetic theory, it is helpful to compare the text to another correspondence involving three friends.

In many ways, Mendelssohn's *Briefe über die Empfindungen* are prophetic. Whereas the fictional friends in the *Briefe* are separated during their corre-

spendence on pleasure and then finally come together for in-person discussion of tragedy, events transpired the other way around for the historical friends G. E. Lessing, Friedrich Nicolai, and Mendelssohn. One year after the publication of Mendelssohn's *Briefe*, Lessing had to leave Berlin and the pleasure of their company. From the autumn of 1756 to the spring of 1757, the three friends embarked on one of the most famous epistolary exchanges in German literature, later published as *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel* (*Correspondence on Tragedy*). The parallels to the fictional situation in the *Briefe* is clear: like Euphranor, Lessing is sad to move away from his esteemed philosophical mentor. Like Eudox, Nicolai plays the go-between. He receives Lessing's letters and carries them over to Mendelssohn's house, where the two read and discuss them together. Mendelssohn, then, is appropriately Theokles, the wise philosopher who gently corrects his wayward admirer, and who is always assumed to be the spokesperson for the author of the *Briefe*.<sup>26</sup>

Yet any closer look at the substance of the positions taken by the friends regarding tragedy shatters this convenient parallelism. Nicolai sparks the debate by sharing a tractate in which he claims that tragedy, instead of aiming to teach a lesson or inspire virtue, should above all else inflame the passions. In this argument, he echoes many of Euphranor's remarks in the *Briefe über die Empfindungen*. Then it is Lessing who takes it upon himself to correct Nicolai's undiscerning enthusiasm for any and all passions by hapsodizing about the primacy of sympathy. Lessing clearly channels Theokles and even explicitly cites Mendelssohn's dialogue to champion sympathy as the soul of tragedy. In fact, Theokles' claims that tragic fear is »nichts als ein Mitleiden, das uns schnell überascht,« and that sympathy alone is the »Seele unseres Vergnügens« in the theater (AS 72) become the basis for Lessing's arguments about the nature of tragedy. This prompts Mendelssohn to write back and critique Lessing's (and Theokles') reliance on compassion, and to argue that admiration (*Bewunderung*) should in fact be the goal of tragedy. Mendelssohn's letters to this effect grapple once more with the problem of suicide, and hence pick up on an obsession of the ghostly melancholic figure from the *Briefe*, Eudox. Thus the parallels between the fictional and historical correspondences are entirely reshuffled. When considered from the perspective of plot and situation of the *Briefwechsel*, Mendelssohn is in the position of his presumed spokesperson in the *Briefe*, Theokles. From the point of view of the content, however, the historical Mendelssohn is much closer to the silent but hidden editor of the *Briefe*, Eudox.

This shift between the position of authorized mouthpiece and that of clandestine editor is emblematic of the aporia at the heart of Mendelssohn's *Briefe über die Empfindungen*. Though it has always been taken as a didactic dialogue with a clear authorial position represented by the letters

and speeches of Theokles, the literary analysis undertaken here reveals that the dialogue has great aporetic potential.<sup>27</sup> This formal destabilization is reflected in the theoretical content of the aesthetic argument at stake in the *Briefe*. Lessing cannot be blamed for reading the *Briefe über die Empfindungen* as championing sympathy as the purpose of tragedy, but the reading performed in this article reveals the text's structural elements that call that conclusion into question. Mendelssohn's position on tragedy in the *Briefwechsel*, meanwhile, may seem to be at direct odds with the one taken in the *Briefe*, but in fact it only contradicts the views expressed by the character Theokles.<sup>28</sup>

The *Briefe* as a dramatic document of philosophical import underscores yet a fourth perspective on the purpose of tragedy, one that is aligned with Plato's aporetic dialogues. Instead of reducing tragedy simply to sensationalism (Nicolai), sympathy (Lessing), or admiration (Mendelssohn), what if all these effects can be put in the service of inviting spectators to realize that they do not comprehend the world and society as fully as they had assumed? What if, in fact, Mendelssohn had hit upon the correct formula for the purpose of tragedy and dialogue when he looked to Aristotle's insistence on *thumai*? But rather than translating it as admiration (*Bewunderung*), as Mendelssohn does in the *Briefwechsel*, a more accurate rendering of this word in the context of the *Poetics* would be wonder (*Verwunderung*).<sup>29</sup> Tragedies and dialogues do philosophical work by knocking away presumed knowledge and replacing it with acknowledged bafflement. As Plato's Socrates says, wonder is the only beginning of philosophy, (*Theaetetus* 155d). Philosophical investigations become possible with the awareness of one's own inability to account for the improbable plausibilities of tragedy or the conceded contradictions of dialectic. Although this explanation of tragic and dialectical aporia is never offered explicitly in either the fictional or historical correspondences, it becomes legible not merely in their formal structure revealed here, but also in remarks made by Mendelssohn himself. In 1761, Mendelssohn republishes the *Briefe* under his own name with a long commentary, *Rhapsodie, oder Zusätze zu den Briefen über die Empfindungen* (*Rhapsody, or Additions to the Letters on the Sentiments*). While airing potential objections to his aesthetic theory of perfection suggested by reading Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Mendelssohn admits that he cannot fully account for everything: »Ich wünsche vielmehr durch meinen Versuch einen philosophischen Kopf zu dieser würdigen Untersuchung aufgemuntert zu haben« (AS 161).

Thus the conversation about tragedy at the end of Mendelssohn's *Briefe* functions as the myths told by Socrates after the failure to define terms discussed in Plato's dialogues. The pregnancy of its incompleteness mir-

rors the action of both the tragedies under discussion and the dialogue of which it is a part. In the action of the seemingly didactic dialogue, an aporia between sympathy and admiration is hidden. The very fissure of this impasse, however, opens up the wonder in which tragedy ends and philosophy begins. Thus the aesthetic perfection in which Mendelssohn and Theokles insist on grounding tragic pleasure finds completion in this striking image of inconclusiveness.

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- 1 I would like to thank Jane Brown and Willi Goetschel for inspiring dialogues about an early version of this paper at a conference at the University of Washington, April 2015. I am also grateful for helpful comments from two anonymous reviewers for the *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch*.
- 2 See, for instance, Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues*, Cambridge 2002.
- 3 This neglect of dialogic form is beginning to dissipate. For an overview of recent scholarship on post-classical dialogues, see Till Kinzel and Jarmila Mildorf, 'New Perspectives on Imaginary Dialogues, in: Imaginary Dialogues in English: Explorations of a Literary Form', ed. Till Kinzel and Jarmila Mildorf, Heidelberg 2012, pp. 9–28. The well-argued article on Shaftesbury's *Moralists* in even this volume, however, does not examine the fictional dynamics of the dialogic frame and still assumes that the character Theokles is a mouthpiece for the author: Michael Szczelka, 'Towards a Dialogic Consensus on Ethics and Religion – Shaftesbury, Berkeley, and Hume', pp. 61–80.
- 4 Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 1, ed. Fritz Bamberg, Stuttgart, 1971. Cited parenthetically: *JA*.
- 5 Willi Goetschel has made an eloquent call for such attention. This essay is an attempt to engage with the »new form of discourse« Goetschel claims Mendelssohn created in his early writings. See his Writing, Dialogue, and Marginal Form: Mendelssohn's Style of Intervention, in: Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics, ed. Reinier Munik, Dordrecht, 2011, pp. 21–37, here 22, 25.
- 6 In the first edition of *Brüfte* (1755), this character is named Palamon. In subsequent editions beginning with the revision of *Brüfte* published in his *Philosophische Schriften* (1761), Mendelssohn changed the name of Palamon to Theokles. For the sake of clarity, I refer to this character of Mendelssohn throughout as Theokles. The reasons for this choice will become clear below. In general, the spellings of character names in this essay will identify them as Mendelssohn's (Theokles, Euphratos, Eudox) or Shaftesbury's (Theokles, Philokles, Palamon).
- 7 This, in effect, is the stance most commentators have taken in their assessment of the *Brüfte*. They assume Theokles to be the stand-in for the author, and address their remarks to the evaluation of his arguments. For excellent examples of such scholarship, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Dionana's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford 2009, p. 201; Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics: Vol. 1: The Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 346–53.

- 8 Moses Mendelssohn, *Ästhetische Schriften*, ed. Anne Pollok, Hamburg 2006. Cited parenthetically: *AS*. Occurrences of »Palamon« are silently changed to »Theokles«.
- 9 This phrase, coined by Leo Strauss, is a shorthand justification for taking seriously details of the setting, plot, framing devices, narrative techniques, and character dynamics in philosophical dialogues. See Strauss, *The City and Man*, Chicago 1964, pp. 50–64; and Seth Benardete, *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, Chicago 2000, *passim*.
- 10 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence Klein, Cambridge 1999.
- 11 Emphases in citations from Shaftesbury are mine.
- 12 This is another mark of counterpoint to the *Phaedrus*, where the city-boy Socrates must be out in the countryside – where he is »out of place (*atopos*) – in order to perform his erotically charged, ironical critique of writing.
- 13 See Shayda Hoover's excellent essay, »Voice and Accent«: Enthusiastic Characterization in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*, in: *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 37/1, 2013, pp. 72–96. She does not mention the details of structure and language touched on here, but she convincingly demonstrates the text's irony by showing how even the ideal of sociable enthusiasm is a role that one plays rather than a goal that can be fully attained.
- 14 This is Anne Pollok's assessment of the *Nemesiswühl* (*AS* 293). Fritz Bamberg, in contrast, insists that the change was made to correct an erroneous identification in the first edition (*JA* 1, 606).
- 15 Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: a Biographical Study*, Tuscaloosa 1973, p. 23.
- 16 See, for instance, the opening of part 3 (296–297).
- 17 In the 1761 revision, Mendelssohn replaces »caresses« (*Liebkosungen*) with »conversations« (*Unterredungen*). If anything, the fact that the later self-censorship seemed advisable only serves to underscore the potentially scandalous eroticism of the original.
- 18 For another example of Mendelssohn playfully turning Enlightened Christian theology against itself, see Jonathan Hess's striking reading of *Jenusalem*, in his essay Mendelssohn's Jesus, in: *Germania, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, New Haven 2002, pp. 91–136.
- 19 This could be another detail to explain the original name for Mendelssohn's Theokles (Palamon) as a post-*Moralists* convert. If Shaftesbury's Palamon is converted to enthusiasm by Theokles' letters, then his conversion, too, was brought about by the written rather than the spoken word. As if to contradict this hypothesis, Theokles names the authors of his sotriological texts: Leibniz and Wolff. On the other hand, however, Lessing and Mendelssohn together penned the essay »Rope ein Metaphysiker!« (1756) to argue that Pope's *Essay on Man*, which in many passages is simply a versified crib of Theokles' speeches in *The Moralists*, is in truth a Leibnizian text. Hence the parallels can still hold.
- 20 E.g., Pollok, *AS* 295.
- 21 The name here is telling: Eudox = good opinion. *Doxa* means mere appearance as well as opinion. In Plato, *doxa* is commonly associated with the sophists and is contrasted with true knowledge.

- 22 Which was in any case inevitable for a text entitled *Letters on the Sentiments* for a post-Pamela (1740-1741) sentimentalist reading public.
- 23 For example: DeFoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719); Richardson's *Pamela* (1740-1741); Wieland's *Agathon* (1766-1767); Goethe's *Werther* (1774).
- 24 Poetry represents potential and likely universals rather than the actual and accidental singularities of history (*Poetics*, book 9).
- 25 Emphasis mine. The omitted clauses mention Mendelssohn's *Philosophische Dialoge*, which, like the *Brigfe*, were published anonymously in 1755. This further reference to actual events involves the fictional characters even more complexly in a reality that is artificially veiled through the masking practice of anonymity. The entire clause was omitted the 1761 revision.
- 26 In addition to the latter-day critics cited above as making this reasonable assumption, one can also include Mendelssohn himself. In *Rhapsodie* (1761), Mendelssohn writes in his own voice to revise some of the claims made by Theokles in the *Brigfe*.
- 27 For the distinction between didactic and aporetic dialogues, see Szczekalla, p. 68.
- 28 For an alternative account of the shift from sympathy to admiration in Mendelssohn's tragic theory, see Beiser, pp. 206-210.
- 29 For a persuasive account of Aristotelian *katharsis* as a form of aporetic wonder, see the introduction to Joe Sachs's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Newburyport 2005, pp. 10-17.

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