



Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution (Cultural Memory in the Present)

Rebecca Comay

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This book explores Hegel's response to the French Revolutionary Terror and its impact on Germany. Like many of his contemporaries, Hegel was struck by the seeming parallel between the political upheaval in France and the upheaval in German philosophy inaugurated by the Protestant Reformation and brought to a climax by German Idealism. Many thinkers reasoned that a political revolution would be unnecessary in Germany, because this intellectual "revolution" had preempted it. Having already been through its own cataclysm, Germany would be able to extract the energy of the Revolution and channel its radicalism into thought. Hegel comes close to making such an argument too. But he also offers a powerful analysis of how this kind of secondhand history gets generated in the first place, and shows what is at stake. This is what makes him uniquely interesting among his contemporaries: he demonstrates how a fantasy can be simultaneously deconstructed and enjoyed.

Mourning Sickness provides a new reading of Hegel in the light of contemporary theories of historical trauma. It explores the ways in which major historical events are experienced vicariously, and the fantasies we use to make sense of them. Comay brings Hegel into relation with the most burning contemporary discussions around catastrophe, witness, memory, and the role of culture in shaping political experience.



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