

# HÖLDERLIN AND THE MEASURE OF ENTHUSIASM

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Alexis C. Briley

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## HÖLDERLIN AND THE MEASURE OF ENTHUSIASM

Alexis C. Briley, Ph. D.

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*Hölderlin and the Measure of Enthusiasm* argues for a new understanding of measure (*Maß*) in German lyric poetry around 1800, focusing on the work of Friedrich Hölderlin. Rhythmically and syntactically, Hölderlin's poetry resonates with the tradition that associates lyric expressivity and inspiration, or *Begeisterung*. Within this context, most famously exemplified in Goethe's *Erlebnislyrik* and Klopstock's hymns in *freie Rhythmen*, poetry is more "free" for being more irregular. While Hölderlin's poetry assimilates the sense of *Begeisterung* as poetic inspiration, I argue, it abandons the mimetic relationship between form and subjectivity implied in the work of these earlier poets. Instead of evoking unfettered subjective expression, *Begeisterung* assumes its own kind of measure—what Hölderlin calls *das Maas Begeisterung*. Although Hölderlin is among the most central figures in modern literary criticism, or perhaps because of this, his work tests the limits of conventional critical methods. While previous critics have sought to define Hölderlin's measure by looking at his poetological writings or by tracing the instances of key phrases or concepts, I am concerned with the implications of measure for Hölderlin's poetic practice. Through a close analysis of individual poems and translations, I examine the senses of measure underlying the composition—and decomposition—of the work.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alexis C. Briley was born in Trenton, NJ in 1981, and grew up in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. She attended Deerfield Academy and Brown University, receiving a B.A. in Comparative Literature and German Studies in 2004. After college, she received a Fulbright Fellowship to study in Erfurt, Germany. While still a graduate student at Cornell, she was an Exchange Scholar at Princeton University in 2009-10, and at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin in 2001-12. She has taught at Cornell and the University of Southern California.

*For Alan*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

References to Hölderlin's works are assigned one of several abbreviations, followed by volume and page number.

- FHA*      *Sämtliche Werke*. Große Frankfurter Ausgabe. Ed. D.E. Sattler et. al. 20 vols. Frankfurt a.M.: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1975-2008. Print.
- HF*      *Sämtliche Werke*. Homburger Folioheft. Facsimile edition. Ed. D.E. Sattler et. al. Frankfurt a.M.: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1986. Print.
- KT*      *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe und Dokumente in Zeitlicher Folge*. Kritische Textausgabe. Ed. D.E. Sattler et. al. München: Luchterhand, 2004. Print.
- SF*      *Sämtliche Werke*. Stuttgarter Foliobuch. Facsimile edition. Ed. D.E. Sattler and Hans Gerhard Steiner. Frankfurt a.M.: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1989. Print.
- StA*      *Sämtliche Werke*. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe. Ed. Friedrich Beissner. 8 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1943-85. Print.
- SW*      *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. Ed. Norbert v. Hellingrath, Friedrich Seebass, and Ludwig v. Pigenot. Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1922. Print.

## PREFACE

The word *Maß* recurs throughout Hölderlin work, suggesting multiple interpretative possibilities. As a scientific term, measure implies *metrics*, the art of measuring, especially in a material sense, and is associated with regularity, repeatability, and calculability. In an ethical register, measure evokes Aristotle's doctrine of the *mean*, the principle that one should exercise moderation in all behavior. The poetic sense of measure shares aspects with both the scientific and the ethical. As the flow of repeated units of sound, or time, poetry is measured language. Like music, it aspires to be calculable in the order of number. As the art of what is "most appropriate," poetry also appeals to the ethical sense of measure: in its relation to a particular form, for example, a poem has a specific character, tone or *ethos*.

Hölderlin was finely attuned to the different resonances of the word measure. Rather than deciding on any one meaning, however, his work plays upon the overlapping senses of the term. Hölderlin's relationship to the idea of measure is particularly interesting in cases where his poetry becomes increasingly "irregular," such as in the hymns composed in *freie Rhythmen*. Even when he seems to move away from strict metrical forms, Hölderlin never abandons the idea of measure. Instead, he continues to assert the necessity of principle of order or restraint. In terms of Hölderlin's well-known Sophokles-*Anmerkungen*, poetry strives to achieve a "lawful calculation"—even and especially when the regularity of law is lacking. Again and again, Hölderlin's work takes up a version of the same question: if the "lawful calculation" of poetry does not have its basis in a regular order of discrete, measurable

units or numbers, how is it to be determined?

In my research, I notice the various ways this question—if not its solution—resurfaces in Hölderlin’s writings. Stated simply, my thesis is that Hölderlin’s work leads to a radical rethinking of measure. This has consequences for how we read the work of this central literary figure and how we understand his place within the development of German lyric poetry. But it also has the potential to reshape how we think about the concept of *measure* as a literary, scientific and ethical term. While measure seems to imply “order,” “lawfulness,” and “sobriety” (to cite a few of the key terms of my project), for Hölderlin, it also encompasses the apparently antithetical tendencies of chaos, madness, and enthusiasm. Hölderlin’s work calls into question a narrowly scientific or technical concept of measure, as well as the ethical sense of measure as a synonym for self-restraint. For Hölderlin, I argue, measure is a concept grounded in the singularity of an aesthetic experience. Unfolding the implications of this paradox, I show how Hölderlin’s work reveals the madness of measure, as an idea that depends upon the repetition of a formal law.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE MEASURE OF ENTHUSIASM

Hölderlin is among the most celebrated lyric poets in German. But his status as a major literary figure was not always thus assured. Misunderstood by his contemporaries, Hölderlin's work was long neglected, dismissed, or admired for the wrong reasons. For most of the nineteenth century, he was, as Nietzsche once remarked, "hardly known to the majority of his people." Attracted to Hölderlin's work as an alternative to the "classical" image of Goethe and Schiller, Stefan George and the poets of his circle initiated the first stages of a "Hölderlin Renaissance" at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since then, his life and work have been the subject of a massive body of scholarship, as rigorous as it is varied. In fact, Hölderlin could well serve as a case-study in the history of modern criticism.

More than other poets, however, Hölderlin's work was long overshadowed by the story of his tragic fate. As a young man, he was at the center of intellectual life in Germany around 1800. Nevertheless, he struggled to secure an independent living, moving from place to place in search of employment. He published little during his lifetime and incessantly revised his work. The period during which he composed the poems for which he is now best known, the *vaterländische Gesänge*, was also the most tenuous. During this time, Hölderlin gradually became a stranger to his friends and family, and in 1806, at the age of 36, was admitted against his will to a mental institution. During the second half of his life, Hölderlin lived in retreat from society

with the Zimmer-family in Tübingen. Although “mad” to those who had known him, he continued to write, producing the terse, lyrical poems of his mature period, which he signed with the mysterious moniker “Scardinelli.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hölderlin was born in 1770 in Lauffen am Neckar, a small village in southwestern Germany, and grew up in Nürtingen, where he was strongly influenced by Swabian Pietism. While still a child, he lost both his father and then his step-father, and was, by all accounts, deeply attached to his mother. After attending the Klosterschule at Maulbronn, he studied theology in Tübingen, where he met Hegel and Schelling. Like them, Hölderlin was inspired by contemporary philosophical debates and by the revolutionary spirit sweeping through Europe in the 1790s. After leaving Tübingen, he pursued a career as a writer, finding an early mentor in Friedrich Schiller, and attended Fichte’s lectures in Jena. The first volume of his novel *Hyperion*, published in 1797, was a popular success. He also dabbled in philosophy, and remained in contact with Hegel and Schelling, as well as a number of less prominent young German intellectuals of the time.

While his early career seemed promising, Hölderlin struggled throughout his lifetime. Refusing to follow his mother’s urging to become a priest, he accepted a series of increasingly dissatisfying positions as a private tutor. In 1796, he went to work for the Gontard family in Frankfurt. There, he met and fell in love with the wife of his employer, Susette Gontard, the Diotima of his poems and his novel *Hyperion*. In the fall of 1798, Hölderlin left Frankfurt, and, at the suggestion of his friend Isaac Sinclair, moved to nearby Homburg. During this time, Hölderlin sought to establish an independent living as a writer. He published the second volume of *Hyperion*, and began work on his tragedy, *Der Tod des Empedokles*. He also composed a number of essays, which he intended to publish as part of a planned literary journal, *Iduna*, and translated Pindar’s odes.

When the plan for the literary journal fell through, Hölderlin resorted once again to an itinerant existence as a house tutor. After a brief employment in Switzerland, he accepted a post in Bordeaux, journeying by foot to France in 1802. For reasons that remain unclear, he returned abruptly only a few months later. Around the same time, he would have learned of the death of Susette Gontard. Little is known about the specifics of Hölderlin’s journey to France and his eventual return, except for a few comments in the letters from the period—which are much shorter and sparser than previous correspondence.

With the help of Sinclair, Hölderlin returned to Homburg. In 1804, he published the Sophocles translations, and over the next three years composed some of his greatest poems. But then Hölderlin’s poetic career came to a sudden and tragic halt. In 1805, he and Sinclair were put on trial for treason. Due to his unstable mental condition, Hölderlin was unable to stand trial and, in 1806, was admitted to the Autenrieth clinic in Tübingen, where he remained for seven months. Records of Hölderlin’s diagnosis and care at the clinic have been lost, although he likely

In its earliest reception, Hölderlin's writings were viewed as the work of a "mad" genius. While dismissed by some as "lawless," Hölderlin's work also inspired a generation of poets who viewed it as the "romantic" antithesis of "classicism." What critics soon realized, however, is that the emphasis on Hölderlin's madness is strikingly out of tune with the writings themselves, which speak insistently of the lawfulness of poetry. Although formally incomplete and conceptually dense, the poetological writings of the Homburg period, for example, repeatedly seek to define the technical aspects of poetic composition, such as the "alternation of tones." Hölderlin's prose writings contain elaborate tables outlining the different "tones" that underlie different genres—lyric, epic, and tragedy.

Within this context, one passage in particular has achieved exemplary status as a central statement of Hölderlin's poetics: the opening section of Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen*, the "Notes" accompanying his translations of Sophocles's *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, first published in 1804:

Es wird gut seyn, um den Dichtern, auch bei uns, eine bürgerliche  
Existenz zu sichern, wenn man die Poësie, auch bei uns, den  
Unterschied der Zeiten und Verfassungen abgerechnet, zur μηχανή der  
Alten erhebt.

Auch andern Kunstwerken fehlt, mit den griechischen  
verglichen, die Zuverlässigkeit; wenigstens sind sie bis izt mehr nach

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underwent a series of traumatic treatments that would have been customary for the period. During this time, his manuscripts, containing many of his greatest poems, narrowly escaped ruin. Hölderlin was released from the hospital in 1807 and went to live with the Zimmer family in Tübingen, where he lived until his death in 1843, at the

Eindrücken beurtheilt worden, die sie machen, als nach ihrem  
gesezlichen Kalkul und sonstiger Verfährungsart, wodurch das Schöne  
hervorgebracht wird. Der modernen Poësie fehlt es aber besonders an  
der Schule und am Handwerksmäßigen, das nemlich ihre  
Verfährungsart berechnet und gelehrt, und wenn sie gelernt ist, in der  
Ausübung immer zuverlässig wiederhohlt werden kann. Man hat, unter  
Menschen, bei jedem Dinge, vor allem darauf zu sehen, daß es Etwas  
ist, d.h. daß es in dem Mittel (moyen) seiner Erscheinung erkennbar ist,  
daß die Art, wie es bedingt ist, bestimmt und gelehrt werden kann.  
Deswegen und aus höheren Gründen bedarf die Poësie besonders  
sicherer und charakteristischer Prinzipien und Schranken.

Dahin gehört einmal eben jener gesezliche Kalkul. (FHA 16,  
249)

Hölderlin begins his remarks by discussing the relation between Greek and modern poetry. In contrast to ancient Greek poetry, Hölderlin writes, modern poetry lacks “reliability” (*Zuverlässigkeit*), which is to say, it lacks the “repeatability” of classical art: that which may be “calculated,” “taught,” and “learned.” Modern poetry is in need of certain “principles” and “limits.” In calling for a more “regular” approach to poetry, to “elevate modern poetry to the *μηχανή* of the ancients,” Hölderlin also speaks of the task of poetry as a “civic existence” (*bürgerliche Existenz*).

Hölderlin’s claim that poetry is in need of a “calculable law” is frequently cited as evidence of his interest in the systematic, technical challenges of modern poetry. To

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age of 73.



cite one especially influential example, Lawrence Ryan's seminal study *Hölderlin's Lehre vom Wechsel der Töne* takes Hölderlin's remarks as a point of departure in arguing for a more rigorous approach to Hölderlin's poetics.

Es stimmt gewiß etwas nachdenklich, daß ausgerechnet jener Dichter, der es als seinen heiligen Beruf ansah, „zu rühmen Höhers,“—,darum gab die Sprache der Gott und den Dank ins Herz' ihm—, und dessen Dichtung von einem ekstatischen Zug ins Hymnisch-Visionäre beseelt ist, auch mit einem solchen Nachdruck die Forderung nach „sicheren und charakteristischen Prinzipien und Schranken der Poesie, ja nach einem zuverlässig anwendbaren „gesetzlichen Kalkül' erhob, den er sogar an der „μηχανή der Alten' messen wollte. Dem von der schöpferischen Ungesetzlichkeit—oder gar (wie in einer neueren Poetik zu lesen steht) der „Geistlosigkeit'—des lyrischen Dichten Überzeugten mag es befremdlich erscheinen, daß ein Dichter—ein eminent lyrischer Dichter!—das Wagnis unternimmt, die Struktur- und Entwicklungsgesetze der schöpferischen Begeisterung mit einer solchen Präzision ergründen zu wollen, wie sie Hölderlin's Lehre vom sogenannten Wechsel der Töne aufweist. (1)

In spite of the “ecstatic” tendencies of his work, Ryan observes, Hölderlin's writings emphasize the need for “characteristic principles and limits.” For Ryan, the lawfulness of Hölderlin's work finds its clearest expression in Hölderlin's idea of the *Wechsel der Töne*. Indeed, Ryan goes so far as to claim that Hölderlin's poetological writings on the alternation of tones, fragmentary as they may be, represent the cornerstone of a

poetic doctrine (*Lehre*).

While Ryan is right to emphasize the lawfulness of Hölderlin's work, his approach comes up short when faced with the poems themselves. While attempting to read individual poems in terms of Hölderlin's poetological writings, Ryan misses the fact that the "lawfulness" or "calculability" of poetry is precisely not of the same order as a regular system. That Hölderlin repeatedly insists on the need for a "calculable law" does not necessarily mean that there is one. Indeed, it may be that the imperative to establish the lawful calculability of poetry arises from the awareness that such a law is profoundly absent.

While citing key phrases from Hölderlin's poetological writings, Ryan also relies heavily on received ideas about the supposed "ecstatic" nature of poetry. When he speaks of "creative inspiration" (*schöpferische Begeisterung*) he invokes a conventional motif of eighteenth-century *Genie* aesthetics. In order to re-claim Hölderlin as an author who thought rigorously about poetic technique, Ryan is compelled to refute the tradition that views Hölderlin as a poet of "inspiration" and ecstatic genius. On the other hand, this does not necessarily mean that inspiration is opposed to lawfulness. *Begeisterung* does not necessarily imply "Ungesetzlichkeit." Indeed, perhaps "creative inspiration" goes hand in hand with lawful precision. Hölderlin's work may represent the epitome of ecstatic inspiration, but it is not therefore less lawful.

Although flawed, Ryan's approach is instructive for the way it sheds light on a problem that recurs in various ways throughout Hölderlin scholarship. Countering the prevailing nineteenth-century reception of Hölderlin as a mad genius, twentieth-

century criticism has sought to re-cast Hölderlin as a poet of sober technique. While minimizing the more “subjective” tendencies of his writings—the themes of pathos and inspiration, for example—such critics emphasize the lawful, technical dimension of Hölderlin’s poetics, often basing their readings of individual poems on his prose writings. By prioritizing the more systematic aspects of Hölderlin’s works, however, such critics overlook—and end up curiously repeating—the central conflict of Hölderlin’s poetic project. Although it takes on different forms in Hölderlin’s early and later writings, this conflict is alternately figured as a tension between *Nüchternheit* (sobriety) and *Begeisterung* (enthusiasm, inspiration), chaos and law, madness and measure. Whereas critics largely tend to come down on one side or another of this opposition, for Hölderlin, the relationship between these terms is more fluid. Instead of asserting the priority of one over the other, Hölderlin recognized that the opposition between *Nüchternheit* and *Begeisterung* is never fully resolved, and therefore functions as a constitutive tension.

Before turning to a closer analysis of Hölderlin’s work, this chapter examines the itineraries of Hölderlin’s twentieth-century reception as a poet of sober technique. Instead of offering a comprehensive summary of the massive body of scholarship on Hölderlin, I focus on what I take to be an exemplary instance of a pervasive misreading: the image of Hölderlin that takes shape in the closing pages of Walter Benjamin’s influential study of early German Romanticism, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (1919). Benjamin’s reading of Hölderlin is exemplary for the way he emphasizes the lawful, technical basis of Hölderlin’s

poetics. But Benjamin's approach is curiously elliptical. In this respect, I suggest, the appearance of Hölderlin in Benjamin's essay reveals something about the way Benjamin understands Romanticism, which is to say, the way that the modern still remains entangled in the problems of Romanticism. Benjamin's essay is haunted by Hölderlin, I suggest, much as Romanticism haunts the very idea of modernity.

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While focusing on the writings of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, Benjamin's essay culminates in the thesis that the "idea of poetry is prose" and concludes with a discussion of the notion of "sobriety" (*Nüchternheit*). Turning away from the Romantics at the center of his study, with this term Benjamin introduces a new figure in the final pages of the essay—one whose relation to the romantics is peripheral, but whose work shares a philosophical affinity with the romantic project.

Die Konzeption der Idee der Poesie also der Prosa bestimmt die ganze romantische Kunstphilosophie...Unter jenem Gesichtspunkt rückt in diesen weiteren Kreis, um nicht zu sagen in seine Mitte, ein Geist, der durch seine bloße Einschätzung als Dichter im modernen Sinne des Wortes (so hoch dieser auch gegriffen werden muß) nicht erfaßt werden kann, und dessen ideengeschichtliches Verhältnis zur romantischen Schule im Unklaren verharret, wenn seine besondere philosophische Einheit mit ihr unbeachtet bleibt. Dieser Geist ist Hölderlin, und die These, welche seine philosophische Beziehung zu den Romantikern stiftet, ist der Satz von der Nüchternheit der Kunst.

On the surface, the reference to Hölderlin is beside the point. What is to be gained by extending the already extremely difficult discussion of the “idea of poetry as prose” to encompass Hölderlin’s “principle of the sobriety”? More than being simply tangential, however, the allusion to Hölderlin is hauntingly central. Indeed, it feels like the appearance of a ghost. This is so, not just because Benjamin refers to Hölderlin as a “spirit.” Nor is it because such allusions—to Hölderlin, and to Hölderlin’s principle of sobriety, in particular—are a recurring motif in Benjamin’s work.<sup>2</sup> It is partly an effect of the way Benjamin builds up to the reference, delaying the name. And then there is the spatial logic implied—the characterization of Hölderlin as a figure both at the margins and “in the middle.” Drawing an analogy between the romantic “idea of poetry as prose” and Hölderlin’s “principle of the sobriety of art” (*Nüchternheit*), Benjamin’s remarks about Hölderlin leave the impression that Hölderlin has really been there all along. As Lacoue-Labarthe more than once observes, Hölderlin is for Benjamin “the secret—decentered—center of Romanticism” (“Poetry’s Courage” 178).

But why should Hölderlin be a secret at all? Why exactly does Benjamin hold him in reserve until the end if, indeed, he is central to his argument from the beginning? Benjamin’s argument—at least when it comes to Hölderlin—relies to an unusual degree on a series of seemingly tangential connections that turn out to be pivotal. In each case, the allusions to Hölderlin’s work reveal something about the

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<sup>2</sup> Similar instances can be found in Benjamin’s Hölderlin essay and in the essay on Goethe’s *Wahlverwandschaften*.

assumptions that inform Benjamin's approach to the Romantics. Is there something about Hölderlin's concept of sobriety that elicits—or in some way requires—such an elliptical approach? Is such tentativeness an instance of critical caution—or a shrinking back?

Benjamin's allusions to Hölderlin are strikingly tangential. What is it exactly that connects the Romantic idea of "poetry as prose" to the Hölderlinian "principle of the sobriety of art"? Strangely enough, Benjamin's understanding of the connection between these concepts hinges on a text that mentions neither. Nevertheless, for Benjamin, it exemplifies more than any other the significance of Romantic aesthetics. This text, which Benjamin quotes at length here, and again in the later essay on Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften*, is none other than the opening remarks of Hölderlin's *Sophokles-Anmerkungen*.

On the surface, it is unclear what interests Benjamin about this passage, as it says nothing directly about romantic aesthetics or the principle of sobriety. Benjamin's commentary on Hölderlin's text circles around the Greek word *μηχανή*, which he reads as a variant of "mechanical." Placing Hölderlin's comments alongside similar statements by Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis that describe the "deliberate," "mechanical," and "purposeful" aspects of poetic composition, Benjamin interprets the passage as a statement about the artwork's "philosophical" core.

Was am Strahl der Ironie zerfällt, ist allein die Illusion, unzerstörbar bleibt aber der Kern des Werkes, weil es nicht in der Ekstase beruht, die zersetzt werden kann, sondern in der unantastbaren nüchternen prosaischen Gestalt. Durch die mechanische Vernunft ist auch noch im

Unendlichen—im Grenzwert der begrenzten Formen—nüchtern das  
Werk konstituiert. (106)

In the process of clarifying the connection between Hölderlin and the Romantics, Benjamin is led away from focus of his study and yet also deeper toward its center. This passage, like the initial reference to Hölderlin, pivots on a type of antithetical reasoning: having established that reflection is the antithesis of ecstasy (the *μανία* of Plato), Benjamin thereby correlates reflection and sobriety (the antithesis of *μανία*), and having established the correlation of reflection and sobriety, he once again underscores the antithesis between reflection, which is “unassailable,” and ecstasy, “which can be disintegrated.”

Linking the Romantic idea of “poetry as prose” and the Hölderlinian “principle of the sobriety of art,” Benjamin suggests that the two concepts share a certain resonance.

Das Prosaische, in dem die Reflexion als Prinzip der Kunst sich  
zuhöchst ausprägt, ist ja im Sprachgebrauch geradezu eine  
metaphorische Bezeichnung des Nüchternen. Als ein denkendes und  
besonnenes Verhalten ist die Reflexion das Gegenteil der Ekstase, der  
*μανία* des Platon. (103-104)

Connecting the prosaic and the sober, Benjamin also links sobriety with the Romantic concept of “reflection.” In so doing, he is careful to distinguish reflection from “ecstasy, the *μανία* of Plato.” It is a curious figurative chain. Contrasting reflection with “ecstasy,” Benjamin aligns ecstasy with *μανία* (*mania*, madness), evoking—but not directly naming—the conventional Platonic opposition between *μανία* and

*σωφροσύνη* (*sophrosyne*, temperance). By way of an allusion to its opposite (*μανία*), Benjamin thereby implicitly connects *σωφροσύνη* with *Nüchternheit*. The translation of ecstasy as *μανία*, along with the opposition of ecstasy and reflection, conjoins reflection and sobriety: reflection, as Benjamin thus interprets it, is both sober and prosaic, where “sobriety” implies the opposite of ecstasy and the antithesis of Platonic *μανία*.<sup>3</sup>

Benjamin constructs a fragile constellation of linked and opposing concepts. And yet, every connection also suspends a certain tension. This is especially apparent in phrases such as “unantastbaren nüchternen prosaischen Gestalt.” The blunt, paratactic conjunction of these terms belies the subtle differences that hold them apart. Although they may be yoked together, “sober” and “prosaic” do not mean the same thing, and the conjunction that forms the “core” of the artwork—and Benjamin’s argument—begins to disintegrate after all.

I would suggest that the tension between terms points to something that Benjamin sees at the core of Romanticism but holds back from naming directly. But what remains unspoken in the connections between prose, sobriety, and reflection reveals something about the biases of Benjamin’s approach. As Winfried Menninghaus has shown, Benjamin deliberately defines reflection in rational terms, identifying the concept with conscious thought processes, rather than with feeling. In so doing, Benjamin breaks with the prevailing perception of romantic art: distancing reflection from ecstasy, Benjamin recasts Romantic art as a sober enterprise. As

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<sup>3</sup> “As the antidote to Platonic *μανία*,” Beatrice Hanssen summarizes, “sobriety [is] the law that rule[s] the structure of reflection, conceived of as a dialectic between



Beatrice Hanssen observes, “In contrast to aesthetic theories that either interpreted form as the expression (*Ausdruck*) of beauty or advocated the lawlessness of the ecstatic, creative Genie concept of the Storm and Stress Movement (*Sturm und Drang*), Benjamin define[s] Romanticism as a sober, prosaic mechanics of τέχνη or form” (148).

Taking this observation a step further, Menninghaus argues that Benjamin’s tendency to emphasize the sober, rational dimension of reflection against that of feeling has a polemical intent:

The strong accentuation of a conscious, rational character of Romantic thinking and writing is not only connected with Benjamin’s orientation toward the concept of reflection, to whose sphere of meaning the moment of intensified consciousness as a rule belongs. It evidently also has a polemic function for Benjamin: his study attempts, through the focus of its content as well as its rigid philosophical form, to break as strongly as possible with the depraved conceptualizations of the ‘Romantic’ which regard it as a formless poetry of the unconscious or of the dark nocturnal regions of experience. (35)

By underlining the conscious, rational basis of romantic reflection, Benjamin seeks to decouple Romanticism from its conventional associations with feeling and the unconscious. In his attempt to correct the biases of previous scholarship, however, Benjamin often distorts material to suit his own purposes.<sup>4</sup> At times, Benjamin swings

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sober self-limitation and ecstatic self-extension” (148).

<sup>4</sup> As Menninghaus observes, Benjamin relies freely on quotation, often

too far in the other direction, overemphasizing the philosophical core of romantic art at the expense of—and in direct opposition to—the “darker” elements of feeling, imagination, and the unconscious.<sup>5</sup>

Extending Menninghaus’s observations to the interpretation of Hölderlin, I would argue that the conjunction of the words “mechanical” and “reason” presumes an overly-narrow view of sobriety and potentially misinterprets Hölderlin’s comments about *μηχανή*.<sup>6</sup> While winnowing down to the philosophical “core” of Romanticism,

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distorting cited material. Benjamin goes out of his way to avoid references to feeling as a possible basis for reflection, which Fichte had associated with the unconscious element of art. In order to dissociate the Romantic concept of reflection from Fichtean intellectual intuition, Benjamin also ends up denying the role of feeling and imagination. Against Fichte, Benjamin argues, the Romantics “deny the unconscious in art and postulate a completely conscious context of reflection” (37).

<sup>5</sup> The absence of a certain critical vigilance notwithstanding, Benjamin still gets much right. “Benjamin’s considerable and in part more than marginal violence with regard to the general philosophical grounding of his arguments,” Menninghaus concludes, “does not hinder him from undertaking a largely valid ‘derivation’ of the cardinal concepts of Romantic poetology from the theory of reflection as their centre” (50). Why this is so is not entirely clear. Menninghaus postulates that the “avenues of Benjamin’s access to the Romantic theory of reflection are already preprogrammed by his own largely Romantic theory of language.” However, as Rodolphe Gashé points out, such an affinity thesis has its limitations, as it fails to account for Benjamin’s persistent criticism of the Romantics, whom he accuses of obscurity and self-contradiction. “However compelling and fruitful such an affinity thesis may be to account for what Benjamin does in his dissertation, its limits come to light as soon as the specificity and originality of Benjamin’s own thinking is to be established. Above all, it is incapable of accounting for Benjamin’s repeated, if not systematic criticism of Romantic philosophy. Indeed, *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism* is anything but a wholesale appropriation or celebration of Romanticism. Its presentation of the main axioms of Romantic thought is not without ambivalence. At times Benjamin shows little sympathy, or even direct hostility toward the Romantics’ insights” (52).

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin’s biases reveal something about the ghostly core of Romanticism that he discovers in Hölderlin. This “something” concerns the word *μηχανή*, which appears in the opening paragraphs of the *Sophokles-Anmerkungen*. The crucial question is whether *μηχανή* may be read interchangeably with the “mechanical” or, indeed, with “sobriety.” I return to these questions in the third chapter of this

Benjamin ends up displacing its “softer” side. But those aspects of the creative enterprise that Benjamin deliberately de-emphasizes—feeling, imagination, the unconscious—might actually play a critical role in the experience of reflection. Benjamin’s emphasis on *sobriety* is perhaps too sober—or not sober enough. But it is also, for that same reason, particularly revealing. By seeking to separate reflection from *μavía*, Benjamin nevertheless binds these concepts together. Indeed, it may be that “sobriety” is not as sober as it sounds.

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Where Benjamin draws a strict opposition between *μavía* and *Nüchternheit*, ecstasy and reflection, Hölderlin’s writings on the topic are more nuanced. In a fragment composed around 1800, alternately known as “Reflexion” and “Sieben Maximen,” Hölderlin comments explicitly on the concept of *Nüchternheit*.<sup>7</sup> While Benjamin may or may not have been aware of this text, Hölderlin’s reflections are far from irrelevant. Indeed, this text has been read both as a commentary on Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and as a response to the Athenaeum fragments—the Romantic corpus at the heart of Benjamin’s study. Whether or not Hölderlin intended the title to evoke the Romantic aphoristic style, his text serves as an interesting counterpoint to Benjamin’s treatise on the romantic concept of reflection. Like Benjamin, Hölderlin invokes a series of

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dissertation through a closer analysis of Hölderlin’s Sophocles translations.

<sup>7</sup> Like many of Hölderlin’s prose writings, “Sieben Maximen” remains a sketch. Consisting of seven aphorisms, it was likely modeled on the *Athenaeum* fragments of Schlegel and Novalis. Where Sattler gives the name “Sieben Maximen,” in Beissner’s earlier edition of Hölderlin’s writings, the text appears under the name “Reflexion” (StA, 4:1, 248-251).

oppositions. But Hölderlin's "reflection" on reflection, in contrast to Benjamin's, plays upon antitheses, setting terms in opposition only to invert and reverse them, thereby upsetting the logical hierarchies of high and low, up and down, warm and cold. In the process, I would argue, Hölderlin negotiates a middle course between ecstasy and sobriety. Ultimately, Hölderlin seems to say, being fully in control of one's senses may be just as dangerous as madness.

Like Benjamin, Hölderlin invokes the conventional Platonic opposition between ecstasy and temperance.<sup>8</sup> For Socrates, *σωφροσύνη* and *μανία* represent distinct "guiding and ruling ideas" [*ιδέα ἄρχοντε καὶ ἄγοντε*].<sup>9</sup> When irrational desire holds the greater power, it "rules" within us. While desire is innate, self-restraint is an

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<sup>8</sup>Although Plato is never named as such, the connection to Plato is far from irrelevant, as we know that Hölderlin admired Plato's *Phaedrus*. In a letter to Neuffer in October 1794, Hölderlin speaks enthusiastically about his intention to write an essay on aesthetic ideas, which was to begin with a commentary on a central passage of Plato's *Phaedrus* (StA 6:1, 137). Since this essay does not exist (and may never have been written), we are left to speculate which passages of Plato's text Hölderlin found most meaningful and why.

<sup>9</sup>Socrates gives an initial description of these guiding ideas in an early passage of the *Phaedrus*: "Now everyone sees that love [*ἔρως*] is a desire [*ἐπιθυμία*]; and we know too that non-lovers also desire the beautiful. How then are we to distinguish the lover from the non-lover? We must observe that in each one of us there are two ruling and leading principles [*ιδέα ἄρχοντε καὶ ἄγοντε*], which we follow whithersoever they lead; one is the innate desire for pleasures [*ἔμφυτος οὖσα ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν*], the other an acquired opinion which strives for the best [*ἐπίκτητος δόξα, ἐφιεμένη τοῦ ἀρίστου*]. These two sometimes agree within us and are sometimes in strife; and sometimes one, and sometimes the other has the greater power [*κρατεῖ*]. Now when opinion leads through reason toward the best and is more powerful [*τὸ ἄριστον λόγῳ ἀγούσης καὶ κρατούσης*], its power [*κράτει*] is called self-restraint [*σωφροσύνη*], but when desire irrationally drags us toward pleasures and rules within us [*ἐπιθυμίας δὲ ἀλόγως ἐλκούσης ἐπὶ ἡδονὰς καὶ ἀρξάσης ἐν ἡμῖν*], its rule [*ἀρχῇ*] is called excess [*βρις*] ... so I say that the desire which overcomes the rational opinion [*λόγου δόξης*] that strives toward the right [*ὀρθόν*], and which is led away toward the enjoyment of beauty [*πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀχθεῖσα κάλλους*] and again is strongly forced by the desires that are kindred to itself toward personal beauty, when it gains the victory, takes its name from that

“acquired opinion,” and when it holds power over desire, that power is called *σωφροσύνη*.

Plato’s concept of *σωφροσύνη* finds an analogue in Hölderlin’s text in the idea of *Besinnung* or *Nüchternheit* (sobriety).<sup>10</sup> Instead of *Ekstase* or *μανία*, however, Hölderlin favors the term *Begeisterung*. Like Plato, he is concerned with the relationship between *Nüchternheit* and *Begeisterung* as distinct “ruling ideas.” The third aphorism in the series defines the relationship thus:

Das ist das Maas Begeisterung, das jedem Einzelnen gegeben ist, daß  
der eine bei größerem, der andere nur bei schwächerem Feuer die  
Besinnung noch im nöthigen Grade behält. Da wo die Nüchternheit  
dich verläßt, da ist die Gränze deiner Begeisterung. (FHA 14, 69)

On the surface, Hölderlin’s remarks on the “measure of enthusiasm” (*das Maas Begeisterung*) would seem to imply that *Nüchternheit* measures and limits *Begeisterung*. Defining *Begeisterung* in terms of the absence of *Nüchternheit*, the statement, “Da wo die Nüchternheit dich verläßt, da ist die Gränze deiner Begeisterung,” suggests that *Nüchternheit* poses the limit of *Begeisterung*. This interpretation of *Nüchternheit* is consistent with Benjamin, who understands Hölderlinian sobriety as the opposite of Platonic *μανία*. However, Hölderlin’s

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very force [ῥώμης], and is called love [ἔρως]” (237d-238c).

<sup>10</sup>Hölderlin’s choice of *Nüchternheit* departs slightly from conventional translations of *σωφροσύνη*. In his translations of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, published around the same time as Hölderlin’s text, Leopold zu Stolberg renders *σωφροσύνη* *Enthaltsamkeit*, which he opposes to *Unmäßigkeit* as an approximation of *hubris*. However, Hölderlin’s choice of *Nüchternheit* encompasses the thematics of Plato’s *Symposium*, in which the wise Socrates remains sober throughout the night while his party engages in drunken revelry.

aphorism also subtly implies that enthusiasm serves as a necessary *limit to* sobriety. Far from offering a straightforward definition of terms, the phrase *das Maas Begeisterung* suggests both “the measure of enthusiasm,” as well as “the measure *that is* enthusiasm.” Depending on how it is read, Hölderlin’s aphorism may be taken as an argument for the necessity of *Nüchternheit* as a limit to *Begeisterung*—or the other way around.

Among eighteenth-century translations of Plato, *Begeisterung* is the preferred translation of *enthusiasmos* (from *entheos*, “having the god within”). The eighteenth-century treatment of *Begeisterung* inflects the whole of late-eighteenth-century poetics, both the poetry of *Empfindsamkeit* and the *Genie* aesthetic of *Sturm und Drang*. Against Plato, eighteenth-century critics reasserted the importance of *Begeisterung*, and thereby sought to elevate poetry above philosophy. In his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, published in 1771/74, Sulzer echoes Plato in asserting that good poetry cannot be composed in the absence of inspiration. In a similar vein, Graf Leopold zu Stolberg, a translator of Plato’s dialogues, emphasized the priority of poetry over philosophy as a divine gift. Stolberg’s 1782 essay “Über die Begeistrung” argues that the ability to experience divine inspiration makes the poet a “Seher,” in contrast to the philosopher, who remains merely a “Forscher” (“Über die Begeistrung” 42). Drawing inspiration from Socrates’s association of enthusiasm with the “dithyrambic” style of poetry, for Stolberg and other members of the Göttinger Hain, Pindar’s poetry becomes the privileged model of the enthusiastic expression of feeling.

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Hölderlin's comments on the relationship between *Nüchternheit* and *Begeisterung* represent a significant departure from eighteenth-century attitudes toward enthusiasm. As a response to Plato, Hölderlin's aphorisms reorder the relationship between poetry and philosophy, sobriety and enthusiasm. Silke-Maria Weineck has argued that Hölderlin inverts the Platonic association of poetry with *μανία* and philosophy with sobriety. For Hölderlin, Weineck suggests, "it is philosophy that becomes the—potentially—mad enterprise, whereas poetry takes over the labor of order and preservation that Socrates had assigned to the philosophers" (56). Overturning Plato, Hölderlin transforms poetry into a sober enterprise. In reversing the hierarchy between poetry and philosophy, however, Hölderlin also reveals the lurking potential for madness within philosophy. Against Plato, Hölderlin privileges poetry over philosophy, granting poetry access to *σωφροσύνη* and even suggesting that philosophy, taken to the extreme, is a kind of *μανία*.

In addition to the Platonic context, Hölderlin's comments on *Begeisterung* could also be viewed in light of eighteenth-century philosophical debates on enthusiasm. Noting the different senses of enthusiasm, alternately translated as *Begeisterung*, *Enthusiasm* or *Schwärmerei*, Peter Fenves argues that the tension between such terms reflects a paradox at the heart of Kantian moral philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Time and again, Fenves argues, "Kant laid out the same fundamental and irresolvable circle: transcendental freedom is the condition under which an agent can respond to a categorical, apodictic, unconditional—which is to say, moral—command as a command addressed to the agent; but according to Kant, the freedom of the agent can be recognized only in the experience of being commanded to act without regard to empirical conditions" ("The Scale of Enthusiasm" 105). As Fenves observes, the fact that the subject is free but commanded is contradictory. Moreover, the influence of a force beyond the subject evokes the very definition of Platonic enthusiasm.

Recognizing that he cannot altogether deny something like enthusiasm, Kant thus distinguishes an “empowering enthusiasm” (*Enthusiasm*) from a “debilitating *Schwärmerei*.” While *Enthusiasm* names the “condition under which moral feeling turns into worldly action,” *Schwärmerei* signifies a belief in “immediate inspiration” (103) and represents, according to Kant, “a transgression of the limits of human reason” (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, cited in “The Scale of Enthusiasm” 106). For Fenves, Hölderlin’s remarks on enthusiasm expose the inherent difficulty of Kant’s attempt to protect philosophy by distinguishing a “sober” enthusiasm from the *μανία* of *Schwärmerei*. Fenves goes on to argue that, in contrast to Kant, who characterizes *Schwärmerei* as a dangerous, fanatical way of thinking, Hölderlin presents *Schwärmerei* as the very experience of limitation (125). Challenging the assumption that it is possible to distinguish between critical enthusiasm and *Schwärmerei*, Hölderlin asserts that *Schwärmerei* is actually *good*, because it names the ability to experience life without mourning. In the course of Hölderlin’s comments on enthusiasm, Fenves suggests, *Schwärmerei* thus becomes synonymous with subjectivity itself (126).<sup>12</sup>

Reading Hölderlin’s remarks within the context of Platonic madness, on the

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While acknowledging the poetic context for enthusiasm, Fenves mainly focuses on the philosophical implications of Hölderlin’s text as a response to Kant and Schelling, rather than its implications for Hölderlin’s poetics. For a fuller analysis of the difference between *Schwärmerei* and Kantian *Enthusiasm*, see Fenves’s *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World-History in Kant*.

<sup>12</sup> While I agree with Fenves that Hölderlin assumes a more positive attitude toward enthusiasm, I believe this is already evident in his use of the term *Begeisterung*. In contrast to Fenves, I maintain that *Schwärmerei* continues to have a negative connotation for Hölderlin, as becomes clear in “Der Rhein,” where this term evokes a dangerous, fanatical relation to the divine. *Begeisterung* is thus closer to what



one hand, and Kantian enthusiasm, on the other, Weineck and Fenves both end up affirming *Begeisterung*. By advocating for the necessity of enthusiasm, Fenves implies that *Schwärmerei* and *Begeisterung* are interchangeable. Weineck, on the other hand, would reverse the terms completely, making *Begeisterung* into something sober in order to support the claim that Hölderlin inverts the priority of philosophy and poetry. Both readings resonate in different ways with the eighteenth-century recuperation of *Begeisterung* as a positive term, while re-ordering the priority of poetry and philosophy. In privileging *Begeisterung*, however, both Fenves and Weineck overlook the fact that for Hölderlin true moderation consists not in sobriety alone, nor in enthusiasm, but in the *balance* or *measure* of opposing tendencies toward excess and restraint. Hölderlin does more than simply reverse or invert the conventional Platonic relationship between enthusiasm and sobriety, poetry and philosophy: he turns these terms inside out. Indeed, the “sobriety” of Hölderlin’s approach may consist in offering neither an apology for nor an outright rejection of enthusiasm. Instead, Hölderlin will emphasize the balance of forces that both define and regulate one another. Because measure is not simply synonymous with sobriety, *μετρία* acts as a necessary counterweight to sobriety, which, on its own, is just as dangerous as ecstasy.

*Begeisterung* is not unambiguously positive, however.<sup>13</sup> By reintroducing the

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Kant calls *Enthusiasm*.

<sup>13</sup> Assuming a more restrained stance toward poetic inspiration, Hölderlin’s approach not only differs from eighteenth-century criticism; it is actually much closer to Plato. The Platonic concept of *enthousiasmos* is more nuanced than the eighteenth-century reception of the term would lead one to believe. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates characterizes madness as irrational *hubris*, a force that overwhelms the power of self-restraint. But *μετρία* is also a gift from the gods, and is to be esteemed as such: without the madness of divine inspiration, poetry would not be possible. Realizing that his

category of “sobriety,” Hölderlin, counterbalances the *μανία* of inspiration with a more cautious, prudent impulse. But he does not exclude the category of *Begeisterung* altogether. In returning the term to its Platonic roots, Hölderlin assumes a more attitude: *Begeisterung* is neither wholly positive, nor as dangerous as it may seem.

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The supposed “danger” of enthusiasm is the subject of a letter Schiller wrote to Hölderlin in 1796.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Benjamin, however, Schiller identifies this danger with philosophy.

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speech against *eros* could be interpreted as an affront to the gods, Socrates quickly retreats, acknowledging his error (*hamartia*), and seeking to purify himself. At one point, Socrates even suggests that the madness of *eros* is responsible for the fundamental impulse of philosophy: the longing of the soul for the beautiful and the good.

Seizing upon Socrates’ positive comments on enthusiasm, eighteenth-century critics used Plato’s dialogues as a philosophical justification for poetic inspiration. In so doing, however, they deliberately overlook the fact irony of Socrates’s remarks. When Socrates refers to the “dithyrambic style,” for example, associated as much with Dionysos as with Pindar, his comments usually have a gently mocking air. Within Plato’s writings, the conventional image of the poet merges with that of the bacchants, members of the cult of Dionysos: like the bacchants, the poets are possessed, out of their senses, and beyond themselves (*Ion* 534). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates ironically describes his speech as being dithyrambic, alluding at once to the cult of Dionysos and the inspired poetry of Pindar (238d). Divinely possessed, the poet is the interpreter of the gods (534e).

Given the dialectical nature of the dialogues, moreover—Socrates’ back and forth arguing of both sides of an issue—it is not clear whether his apology for *μανία* expresses a sincere conviction, a prudent retraction intended to appease the gods—or even, more simply, a playful concession to his interlocutors. It seems unlikely that Socrates—or Plato—would so willingly concede the position of philosophy to poetry. Indeed, Socrates’ positive remarks on divine *μανία* are motivated by sense of caution and prudence. Where he offers an apology for *eros*, this “retraction” is itself a performance of *σωφροσύνη*.

Fliehen Sie wo möglich die philosophischen Stoffe, sie sind die undankbarsten, und in fruchtlosem Ringen mit denselben versehrt sich oft die beßte Kraft, bleiben Sie der Sinnenwelt näher, so werden Sie weniger in Gefahr seyn, die Nüchternheit in der Begeisterung zu verlieren, oder in einen gekünstelten Ausdruck zu verirren.

By pursuing the “stuff” of philosophy, Schiller claims, Hölderlin risks becoming ungrounded from the “sensuous world” and relying too much on “artificial” expressions.<sup>15</sup> Evoking the conventional opposition of *Begeisterung* and *Nüchternheit*, Schiller nevertheless reverses the Platonic scheme that associates *Nüchternheit* with philosophy, and *Begeisterung* with poetry. For Schiller, philosophy leads not to truth but to artifice, while poetry is soberly grounded in the sensuous world. By remaining grounded in poetry, Schiller advised, “so werden Sie weniger in Gefahr seyn, die Nüchternheit in der Begeisterung zu verlieren.” Where Benjamin identifies sobriety with the artwork’s philosophical core, Schiller associates philosophy with frivolous enthusiasm (*Begeisterung*), making poetry into the sober enterprise.

Although they assign a different priority to poetry and philosophy, both Benjamin and Schiller presume a static relationship between sobriety and enthusiasm, or ecstasy, “the *μαρία* of Plato.” Hölderlin’s response is to turn these terms around. Against Schiller, he suggests that *Begeisterung* measures and limits *Nüchternheit*, and

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<sup>14</sup> In Jena, Hölderlin had attended Fichte’s famous lectures, and his enthusiasm for Fichte’s speculative philosophy elicited the disapproval of his mentor, who perceived Hölderlin’s philosophical pursuits as a destabilizing influence.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, this is strange advice coming from Schiller, whose own *Gedankenlyrik* expressly engages philosophical themes, and whose *Ästhetische Briefe*

that the virtuosity of the poet lies not in one or the other, but in the dynamic, “elastic” relationship between the two. The “danger” (*Gefahr*) Schiller identifies with losing sobriety in enthusiasm, Hölderlin identifies with a lack of measure, or proportion, between “warmth” and “cold.”

Das Gefühl ist aber wohl die beste Nüchternheit, und Besinnung des Dichters, wenn es richtig und warm und klar und kräftig ist. Es ist Zügel und Sporn dem Geist. Durch Wärme treibt es den Geist weiter, durch Zartheit und Richtigkeit und Klarheit schreibt es ihm die Gränze vor und hält ihm, **daß er sich nicht verliert**; und so ist es Verstand und Wille zugleich. Ist es aber zu zart und weichlich, so wird es tödtend, ein nagender Wurm. **Begränzt sich der Geist, so fühlt es sich zu ängstlich die augenblickliche Schranke, wird zu warm, verliert die Klarheit**, und treibt den Geist mit einer unverständlichen Unruhe ins Gräzenlose; ist der Geist freier, und hebt er sich augenblicklich über Regel und Stoff, **so fürchtet es eben so ängstlich die Gefahr, daß er sich verliere, so wie es zuvor die Eingeschränktheit fürchtete**, es wird frostig und dumpf, und ermattet den Geist, daß er sinkt und stobt, und an überflüssigem Zweifel sich abarbeitet. (FHA 14, 69)

Where Schiller and Benjamin see enthusiasm as a threat to sobriety, Hölderlin actually perceives a two-sided danger: the poet not only risks losing sobriety in enthusiasm, but also losing in enthusiasm what he gains in sobriety: “*Man kann auch in die Hohe*

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were published little more than a year earlier. Perhaps Schiller’s advice might be registered in the mode of self-critique.

*fallen, so wie in die Tiefe*” (69). In suggesting that the poet is “niemals von sich selbst verlassen,” Hölderlin refutes the idea that poetic inspiration is a kind of “ecstasy” or “μανία.” Instead, he ascribes a degree of control to the poet, without, however, denying the basic character of the poetic process as one of affective *Bewegung*. Noting that one can “fall upwards” as well as “into the depths,” Hölderlin emphasizes the need for a balance between *Begeisterung* and *Nüchternheit* as opposing tendencies of “gravity” and “elasticity” that prevent the poet from “losing himself” in either. In so modulating opposing tendencies, the poet remains neither too “warm” nor too “cold.”<sup>16</sup> While it seems paradoxical, sobriety actually *requires* spirit—the one measures the other, serving as both “rein” and “spur.” Instead of posing its opposite, sobriety is measured by enthusiasm—and *umgekehrt*.

What is striking about such remarks in contrast to Benjamin is how Hölderlin invokes conventional antitheses (up/down, hot/cold, enthusiasm/sobriety, poetry/philosophy) only to turn them inside out and upside down.<sup>17</sup> Hölderlin’s logical inversions are more than playfully contrarian, however. Rather, such reversals actually perform the kind of balance and moderation Hölderlin describes with the phrase *das Maas Begeisterung*. While the word *Maas* might be read as a synonym for *Nüchternheit*, in the context of Hölderlin’s aphorisms, it clearly represents a third term. *Maas* is what modulates *Begeisterung* and *Nüchternheit*. Or, to put this

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<sup>16</sup> The figurative language of “hot” and “cold” as characteristics that define the “elasticity” of the poet also recurs in Hölderlin’s well-known letters to Böhlendorff. Unlike many of Hölderlin’s poetic terms, “elasticity” belongs to the field of natural sciences. I suspect that this term finds an echo in Schelling and Hegel.

<sup>17</sup> I would venture that the entire text might be read as a witty performance of the second aphorism, which speaks of the poetic figure of “inversion” (FHA 14, 69).

somewhat differently, it is the name for what happens in the dynamic interplay between the two: the inversions and reversals that balance opposing tendencies.

The “measure” of Hölderlin’s approach also suggests a possible solution to the impasse of Benjamin’s claim that the core of the artwork consists in “sober prosaic form.” In preserving the sober core of the artwork from the danger of ecstasy, Benjamin’s statement not only lacks sobriety, but measure, as well. Where Benjamin turns away from the ecstatic, enthusiastic dimension of art and toward the sober, Hölderlin offers a third term. For Hölderlin, in marked contrast to Benjamin, the core of the artwork consists neither in ecstasy *nor* in sobriety, but in the *measure* between the two. But that also means that the core of the artwork is not unassailable—it is far more precarious. It therefore requires a more measured approach.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DANGER OF ENTHUSIASM: “WIE WENN AM FEIERTAGE...”

Composed just before 1800, Hölderlin’s “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” represents an early experiment in a style that would achieve its fullest expression in the poet’s so-called “late hymns.”<sup>18</sup> Formally and thematically, it is modeled on Pindar’s odes, and offers an extended meditation on the vocation of the poet and the process of poetic inspiration (*Begeisterung*). For these reasons, “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” is one of Hölderlin’s best-known poems. The fact that it remains a fragment, however, has also made it one of the poet’s most controversial texts. Early editions present the hymn as a unified whole, but a glimpse at the manuscript of the *Stuttgarterfoliobuch* reveals a palimpsest of revisions comprising two separate variants: an initial prose draft and an incomplete metrical version. In keeping with its Pindaric model, the metrical version of the hymn would have been composed of nine strophes, but breaks off in the middle of the eighth.<sup>19</sup> The prose draft contains the lines that would have formed the

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<sup>18</sup>Unless otherwise noted, citations refer to the re-constituted, “metrical” version of the text as it appears in Beissner’s *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*. An initial prose version of the hymn appears in the *Stuttgarterfoliobuch*, and its placement in the manuscript suggests that it was composed just before 1800. Beissner suggests that the hymn was most likely composed “in den letzten Monaten vor der Jahrhundertwende” (StA II: 2, 667). Rather than including it among the *vaterländische Gesänge*, Beissner groups this poem under the category “Einzelne Formen” (StA II, 1, 118-120).

<sup>19</sup>The “final” metrical version of Hölderlin’s hymn imitates the structure of alternating strophes characteristic of Greek choral lyric and Pindar’s victory odes. The poem’s opening simile (“Wie wenn am Feiertage...”) evokes the particular model of Pindar’s seventh Olympian ode. The Pindaric form consists of triads of two metrically equivalent strophes (strophe and antistrophe), followed by a third strophe of a different

conclusion of the hymn, but these verses trail off as well. In addition to remaining formally incomplete, the fragmentary conclusion leaves a number of thematic questions unresolved: while the hymn begins by affirming the role of the poet as a mediator between the divine and the community, its fragmentary concluding strophes are more tenuous, offering a radically divergent image of the poet. Instead of being able to convey the “holy,” the poet is “cast down” into darkness—a “punishment” reflected in the faltering of the poem itself. As a poem about the vocation of the poet, the indeterminate conclusion of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” thus takes on a particular critical urgency. What causes the poem to stumble at the end, and what does this say about the fate of the poet?

With its fragmentary conclusion, Hölderlin’s hymn has come to exemplify some of the formal, textual, and material difficulties surrounding the editorial presentation and critical interpretation of the poet’s work. Since the poem exists in multiple drafts and fragments, it is impossible to point to a definitive version, and the fragile, indeterminate nature of the text demands special philological attention.<sup>20</sup>

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meter (epode), according to the scheme (aab...). By contrast, Hölderlin's hymn is grouped into triads of metrically distinct strophes, following the scheme (abc, abc...). As Beissner points out, according to this structure every third strophe should (in principle) correspond, according to the pattern 1,4,7; 2,5,8; and 3,6,9 (StA II, 2, 677).

<sup>20</sup>Hölderlin's writings have elicited two of the most important critical editions in modern literary scholarship. Beissner's editorial work was long cited as a model of the philological scrutiny that Hölderlin's writings demand: while providing evidence for multiple versions of texts, Beissner's edition strives for readability. In order to make the text of Hölderlin's poems as legible as possible, however, Beissner is compelled to present a “clean” text that conceals the palimpsest of revisions and re-workings that appear in the manuscripts. The goal of representing the text in its unaltered form provided the impetus of Sattler's edition. Sattler's edition, meanwhile, has drawn an equal share of criticism, since it ends up compromising overall legibility in the interest of presenting an open interpretation of the texts.



Philological and editorial efforts notwithstanding, how is a reader to deal with the indeterminacy of this text, especially when faced with having to decide among several possible versions, each with its own interpretative possibilities? What weight (if any) should be given the text's material conditions, its placement on the page or its situation within the manuscript? Should the alternate versions serve as the basis for resolving formal, semantic, or syntactic ambiguities in one or more drafts? And if the poem cannot be treated as a coherent whole, on what basis (if any) is interpretation possible?

Without seeking to re-open these debates, I propose that the conclusion of Hölderlin's hymn exposes a conflict already at work in the language of the poem throughout. As a poem about the poet's vocation, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." incorporates a number of conventional figures for poetic inspiration. Where an earlier poetic tradition might associate such figures with the rhetorical effects of heightened expression, Hölderlin's poem instead calls into question the "subjective" mode of lyric such figures imply. Rather than serving as the formal equivalent of "inspired speech," these conventional poetic devices work to unsettle the very idea of a lyric subject. No doubt something of this order contributes to the impasse of the hymn's conclusion. However, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." might also be seen as a formal experiment in a different mode of lyric expressivity, one that eventually leads to the mature style of the so-called "late" hymns. From this perspective, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." reflects on the inherent travails of the poetic process for which *Begeisterung* serves not only as the source of inspiration—but also its limit.

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For a poem that takes the process of poetic inspiration as its explicit theme, figures of inspiration are over-determined from the start. Through the extended metaphor of a passing thunderstorm, the opening strophes of the hymn introduce the theme of inspiration in terms of the poet's relation to *Natur*.

Wie wenn am Feiertage, das Feld zu sehn  
Ein Landmann geht, des Morgens, wenn  
Aus heißer Nacht die kühlenden Blize fielen  
Die ganze Zeit und fern noch tönet der Donner,  
In sein Gestade wieder tritt der Strom,  
Und frisch der Boden grünt  
Und von des Himmels erfreuendem Reegen  
Der Weinstok trauft und glänzend  
In stiller Sonne stehn die Bäume des Haines:

So stehn sie unter günstiger Witterung  
Sie die kein Meister allein, die wunderbar  
Allgegenwärtig erzieht in leichtem Umfängen  
Die mächtige, die göttlichschöne Natur.  
Drum wenn zu schlafen sie scheint zu Seiten des Jahrs  
Am Himmel oder unter den Pflanzen oder den Völkern  
So trauert der Dichter Angesicht auch,  
Sie scheinen allein zu seyn, doch ahnen sie immer.

Denn ahnend ruhet sie selbst auch. (ll. 1-18)

As critics have noted, the opening metaphor of the storm, which carries over from the first to the second strophe, is modeled on Pindar's O. VII, and serves as an animating figural device. The referent of the pronoun "sie" (ln. 10) is ambiguous, however, possibly referring to the plural noun *Bäume* (ln. 9) or the *Dichter*, alluded to at the end of the second strophe (ln. 16). It also pre-figures (an anticipated echo) the singular feminine noun, *Natur*. Although the precise objects of the opening comparison remain unclear (the *Landmann*, the poets, the grapevine, the trees?), these lines establish a continuity between *Natur* and the figure of the poet. The image of *Blitz* evokes a sense of danger, but the change in the weather suggests that *Natur* is also a source of grace: as "all-present," "powerful," and "divinely beautiful," *Natur* nurtures and protects the poets.

While the metaphor of the storm thus serves as a conventional conceit, it also provides the animating inspiration for the poem itself. Thus, the allusion to *Natur* in the second strophe sets up the transition, in the third strophe, to *Begeisterung*.

Denn sie, sie selbst, die älter denn die Zeiten  
Und über die Götter des Abends und Orients ist,  
Die Natur ist jezt mit Waffenklang erwacht,  
Und hoch vom Aether bis zum Abgrund nieder  
Nach vestem Geseze, wie einst, aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt,  
Fühlt neu die Begeisterung sich,  
Die Allerschaffende wieder. (ll. 21-27)

In the reference to "Waffenklang," commentators often read an allusion to

contemporary political events. But one need not take a historical approach to appreciate how these lines characterize *Natur* as a force encompassing both unity and conflict. *Natur* is “älter denn die Zeiten” and “über die Götter des Abends und Orients.” In terms of a recurring opposition within Hölderlin’s writings, *Natur* exceeds the apparently disparate Oriental and Hesperian tendencies. Spatially, *Natur* encompasses both “Aether” and “Abgrund,” and evokes a mode at once lawful (“nach vestem Geseze”) and lawless (“aus heiligem Chaos”). Such descriptors suggest that *Natur* is an all-encompassing, “Allerschaffende” unity of opposites. But it is also the “holy Chaos” out of which such opposites open. In terms Hölderlin uses elsewhere in reference to Heraclitus, *Natur* evokes “the one differing in the same.”

The third strophe does not appear in the original version of the hymn, which instead contains a rough outline of what would become the fourth strophe. Although the original version does not name *Begeisterung* directly, something of this order is evoked in the allusion to “Ein Feuer angezündet in Seelen der Dichter” (ln. 31). Like the opening metaphor of the storm, the reference to fire is a conventional symbol of poetic inspiration. And yet, just as the metaphor of the storm is entangled in a complex opening comparison, the image of “fire” evokes a constellation of intersecting conventions. For one, “Feuer” plays on the original sense of *Geist*, as closer to “flame” than “breath.” At the same time, the reference to fire alludes to the myth of Prometheus and the hubris of stealing heavenly flame. Finally, the image of *Feuer* also connects *Begeisterung* to the theme of *Blitz*, which Hölderlin elsewhere calls “das Feuer vom Himmel.” This line thus marks a shift in the figural dimension of Hölderlin’s hymn from the literal reference to lightning in the opening strophes to

mythic connotations, most notably in the sixth strophe, which alludes to the myth of Semele and the birth of Dionysos. Here, the reference to *Blitz* functions neither as a literal or figural image of the storm, but as the mythological symbol of Zeus.

Daß schnellbetroffen sie, Unendlichem  
Bekannt seit langer Zeit, von Erinnerung  
Erbebt, und ihr, von heiligem Stral entzündet,  
Die Frucht in Liebe geboren, der Götter und Menschen Werk  
Der Gesang, damit er beiden zeuge, glückt.  
So fiel, wie Dichter sagen, da sie sichtbar  
Den Gott zu sehen begehrte, sein Bliz auf Semeles Haus  
Und die göttlichgetroffene gebahr,  
Die Frucht des Gewitters, den heiligen Bacchus. (ll. 45-53)

Transforming the opening figure of *Gewitter*, these lines refer to a text that appears immediately adjoining Hölderlin's hymn in the manuscript of the *Stuttgarterfoliobuch*: Hölderlin's translation of the opening of Euripides' *Die Bacchantinnen*. This passage narrates the myth of Semele in terms that explicitly connect the figure of the *Blitz* with fire and flame on the one hand, and the mystery of the grape on the other. In Peter Szondi's reading, the *Blitz-Motiv* relates poetry to wine, as figured in the birth of Bacchus, "[d]ie Frucht des Gewitters" (ln. 53), where the grape (*Rebe*) or grapevine (*Weinstock*) is a symbol of the poetic word (*Der andere Pfeil* 12).<sup>21</sup> What Szondi does

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<sup>21</sup> Szondi's *Der andere Pfeil: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Hölderlins hymnischem Spätstil* was published as a monograph in 1963 and included among the essays collected as *Hölderlin-Studien* in 1970. The typescripts of Szondi's more

not emphasize, however, is that this analogy is based upon the prior metonymy that relates the grape and the mythological figure of Dionysos: like Dionysos, the grape is born from the union of earth and sky, and the “Frucht des Gewitters” would thus refer not only to “den heiligen Bacchus,” but also to the grape and the word. Extending the analogy, the poet would occupy the position of Semele, who gives birth to Dionysos only in being struck by Zeus’ lightning bolt (ln. 51)—at once a moment of birth and annihilation. While the lightning represents both a source of danger—the exposure to the divine—and the origin of wine, the poet’s vocation is likened to Semele’s desire to “see the god,” and the origin of poetry would coincide with the destruction of the poet.

Setting aside, for the moment, the intricate web of figural possibilities, the central question that arises in this strophe is whether the poet is able to withstand direct exposure to the storm, the *Blitz*. “Spätestens jetzt, bei der Beschwörung des Semele-Mythos, der den Ursprung der Dichtung veranschaulichen soll, muß sich Hölderlin die Frage aufgedrängt haben, ob der Dichter, ob er selber überhaupt imstande ist, das himmlische Feuer zu ertragen, ob nicht auch der Dichter den Preis zu zahlen hat, den die zu Asche verglühte Semele zahlte” (*Der andere Pfeil* 12-13). As Szondi’s reading makes clear, however, to ask whether the poet is able to withstand “heavenly fire” already implies that the poet is in some way *like* Semele. Citing Hölderlin’s 1802 letter to Böhlendorff, in which he writes that he has been “struck by Apollo,” Szondi suggests that Hölderlin is ultimately unable to escape the same fate as Semele. Indeed, it may well have been his contact with “heavenly fire” that drove

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extended lectures on Hölderlin’s “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” and “Friedensfeier” were published posthumously in *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik*.

Hölderlin into the darkness of *Umnachtung* after his return from France. Composed before Hölderlin's journey, however, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." hesitates before this question, lingering over the possibility that the poet might be able to endure such forces after all.

Thus, while the sixth strophe relates the birth of poetry to the birth of Dionysos and hints at the tragic outcome of Semele's contact with the divine, the following strophes shift into another register, apparently affirming the poet's ability to withstand heavenly fire.

Und daher trinken himmlisches Feuer jezt  
Die Erdensöhne ohne Gefahr.  
Doch uns gebührt es, unter Gottes Gewittern,  
Ihr Dichter! mit entblößtem Haupte zu stehen,  
Des Vaters Stral, ihn selbst, mit eigener Hand  
Zu fassen und dem Volk ins Lied  
Gehüllt die himmlische Gaabe zu reichen.  
Denn sind nur reinen Herzens,  
Wie Kinder, wir, sind schuldlos unsere Hände,

Des Vaters Stral, der reine versengt es nicht  
Und tieferschüttet, die Leiden des Stärkeren  
Mitleidend, bleibt in den hochherstürzenden Stürmen

Des Gottes, wenn er nahet, das Herz doch fest ... (ll. 54-66)

Turning on the word "daher," these lines pose an implicit *contrast* between Semele

and the poets: while Semele is punished for attempting to grasp divine fullness, the poet is able to receive the heavenly gift and present it to the people, “wrapped in song.” The word “daher” leaves open the possibility that there is a causal relationship between Semele’s tragic example and the poet’s ability to “mediate” the contact with the divine through song. At the same time, the word “doch” suggests a further qualification, contrasting the poet with the *Erdensöhne*. Here, the poets are those who remain “pure of heart” (“reinen Herzens,” ln. 61): even though they grasp the “father’s ray,” the poets’ hands are “schuldlos” (ln. 62). In contrast to Semele’s encounter with the divine, then, the poet is not destroyed when the god draws near. The syntax of the lines “bleibt in den hochherstürzenden Stürmen / Des Gottes, wenn er nahet, das Herz doch fest” reflects the inherent danger of the poet’s contact with the divine—a danger that drives poetic language to the breaking point. And yet, this tension is apparently resolved in the concluding word “fest”: *unlike* Semele, the poet holds “fast” to (and through) the poetic word.

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Early editions, notably Norberth von Hellingrath’s historical-critical edition published in 1916, place a period after this line (“bleibt in den hochherstürzenden Stürmen / Des Gottes, wenn er nahet, das Herz doch fest”), a grammatical intervention that lends an even more determinate character to the clipped rhythm of its final word, “fest.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The earliest published version of the hymn appeared more than a hundred years after it was first composed, in the second edition of an anthology of poems of the *Goethezeit*, edited by Stefan George and Karl Wolfskehl (*Deutsche Dichtung*, ed. Stefan George and Karl Wolfskehl, vol. 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berlin 1910. p. 48f.). Here, the



Later editions have aimed for a more accurate representation of the text's fragmentary conclusion as it appears in the manuscript. Beissner's edition includes the remainder of the eighth strophe, as well as the draft of the final strophe:

Doch weh mir! wenn von

Weh mir!

Und sag ich gleich,

Ich sei genaht, die Himmlischen zu schauen,

Sie selbst, sie werfen mich tief unter die Lebenden

Den falschen Priester, ins Dunkel, daß ich

Das warnende Lied den Gelehrigen singe.

Dort

(ll. 67-74)

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poem is presented in a polished form, and concludes with the line "Und tieferschüttet, eines Gottes Leiden / Mitleidend, bleibt das ewige Herz doch fest." The poem appears in the same form in the first historical-critical edition of Hölderlin's work edited by Norbert von Hellingrath and published in 1916. (Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Norbert v. Hellingrath, München: 1916, p. 151f.). Hellingrath's edition also included the text of a final, fragmentary strophe in an appendix to the main text of the poem. Zinkernagel's critical edition, published in 1922, was the first to include the fragmentary concluding verses as part of the main text of the hymn. Beissner's edition, published as the second volume of the *Stuttgarter-Ausgabe* in 1951, follows this approach, including the final fragmentary strophe in the main text, while cataloguing variants in a separate volume of *Lesarten*. At the other extreme, Sattler's Frankfurt edition of Hölderlin's *Gesänge*, finally published in 2000, reproduces the text exactly as it appears in the manuscript, allowing a visual representation of the multiple versions and revisions that had formerly appeared only in the *Lesarten* of the text.

While the seventh strophe ends on a note of hopeful resolve, affirming the poet's ability to mediate the "heavenly gift" through song, the fragmentary concluding strophes evoke a far less confident mood. With a repeated cry of despair, "Weh mir!," the poem shifts abruptly into the first person, from a tone of resolution to one of doubt. Instead of affirming the poet's vocation, the final fragmentary strophes once again present the desire to see "die Himmlischen" as a kind of hubris resulting inexorably in the punishment of being "cast down" into "darkness"—a thematic unraveling that is reflected in the breakdown of the poem's form.<sup>23</sup> Although the ninth stanza would have completed the poem formally, the ending disrupts the thematic coherence of the hymn, casting into doubt any simple affirmation of the poet's vocation as mediator between gods and men. Where the seventh strophe had referred to song as the mediation through which the "father's ray" appears "concealed" (*gehüllt*), here the poem is compared to a "warning song."

Not surprisingly, editorial practices have had an impact on the critical reception of the hymn, with early critics neglecting the fragmentary final strophes, and later interpreters arguing for their central importance. One of the most important early interpretations of the poem, Heidegger's *Erläuterung* of "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." (1939-1941) relies on Hellingrath's edition and thus not only gives little attention to textual variants, but accepts the editorial decision to place the conclusion of the hymn before the fragmentary final strophe. While Hellingrath's edition appends a note

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<sup>23</sup> As we shall see, what is doubly strange about this moment is the way that the thematic breakdown of the poem actually seems to *coincide* with its formal dissolution. Even as the poem "fails," it also "succeeds" in representing this failure as a performance of its own unraveling.

containing the text of what would have been the final, ninth stanza, as this text derives from the prose draft, not the “final” metrical version, Heidegger does not mention it. Understandably, Heidegger's commentary raises a number of methodological problems, and has oriented most if not all subsequent readings of Hölderlin's hymn. Critics have amply documented Heidegger's lack of careful attention to the textual and formal difficulties of the poem, including blatant misquotations and willful editorial omissions. Indeed, such philological, technical, and formal problems orient much of the massive secondary criticism on Heidegger's use and abuse of Hölderlin's poetry.<sup>24</sup> In particular, critics such as Peter Szondi and Paul de Man direct their readings against Heidegger by reintroducing the final strophes. The omission of the final strophes, critics argue, is not only formally and philologically problematic, but poses potentially irresolvable difficulties for interpretation. Not only does the final strophe apparently contradict all that has come before; these verses themselves remain incomplete, seemingly enacting the very impediment they seek to describe: the failure of poetic language. As Rainer Nägele observes, these lines express the tension between what is claimed for the poet and what the poem is actually able to achieve.<sup>25</sup> Far from affirming the poet's ability to mediate the divine gift, presenting the “father's ray” wrapped in song, these final lines lapse into silence, communicating in their silence

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<sup>24</sup> De Man cites several of the most problematic: in his reading of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” Heidegger's choice of the word “entwacht” over the possible variant “entwächst”; and, perhaps more scandalously, in his reading of “In lieblicher Bläue,” Heidegger's complete failure to account for the fact that scholarship considers this poem of “dubious authenticity.” Other critics point to Heidegger's failure to treat the formal features of the poems: their rhetorical figures, metrical patterns, strophic structure, etc.

the impossibility of the task the poet has set for himself.<sup>26</sup>

Criticism has offered a range of possible explanations for why Hölderlin's hymn falters—generic, formal, thematic, philological, philosophical, and biographical. Some attribute the poem's failure to its strict adherence to metrical constraints—a claim supported by the fact that later hymns take a freer approach.<sup>27</sup> Although Hölderlin adopts a triadic form in many of the elegies and hymns written after 1800, this poem represents a unique example of a hymn composed of triads of metrically regular verses. In abandoning this attempt, Hölderlin is also led to abandon its particular triadic form for the metrically irregular triadic form that characterizes his best-known hymns, the *vaterländische Gesänge*. Others suggest that the poem falters because it does not adhere closely enough to its Pindaric model.<sup>28</sup> Possibly Hölderlin exaggerates the attempt to mimic Pindar's "austere style" and is unable finally to

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<sup>25</sup> See Nägele, *Text, Geschichte und Subjektivität in Hölderlins Dichtung* 180-88.

<sup>26</sup> Insofar as it performs its own unraveling, however, it may be that the final strophe of the hymn nevertheless "succeeds" in "failing." If Heidegger's interpretation errs in omitting the final strophe, allowing him to read the poem as a statement about the power of poetry to communicate the holy, readers that reintroduce the final strophe are forced to grapple with interpretive possibilities that are—strangely—no less "redemptive" for having made the poem into a "warning song."

<sup>27</sup> See Benn, *Hölderlin and Pindar*.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Weisinger has argued that "Hölderlin was unable to complete this hymn because his grasp of Pindar in 1799 was not firm enough and he strayed too far from the model he had consciously chosen" (257). More recently, Boris Previšić has read Hölderlin's hymn alongside Hölderlin's translations for Greek choral odes (particularly Euripides *Bacchantinnen*, which immediately precedes "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." in the manuscript), suggesting that Hölderlin's engagement with Greek metrical models is a critical step in the development of the free rhythms of the later hymns. While Hölderlin moves away from a close imitation of Greek metrical models, Previšić presents a compelling argument for the persistence of repeated "micro-rhythmical" patterns throughout Hölderlin free verse hymns. See Previšić, *Hölderlins*

resolve the hymn into a coherent whole. In either case, formal explanations invariably identify the failure of Hölderlin's poem with the problem of measure: either the hymn falters as a result of too much constraint—or not enough. What such critics fail to notice, however, is how the problem of measure is the formal equivalent of the hymn's central thematic conflict: it may be that the ending of Hölderlin's hymn represents what happens when song gets carried away with itself—or is silenced in its efforts to maintain order in the face of "chaos."

Such formal arguments also fail to acknowledge the fact that, as a Pindaric experiment, Hölderlin's hymn does not simply "translate" the thematic content of the prose draft into metrical form. Rather, I would suggest, something happens in composing the prose draft that occasions a shift to meter, just as something no doubt transpired in the process of translating the opening lines of Euripides' *Die Bacchantinnen* that prompted Hölderlin to reflect on the analogy between the myth of Semele and the vocation of the poet. This is not to say that progressive drafts represent "solutions" to problems that surface in the process of composition; probably Hölderlin's formal experiments lead only to more questions.

More commonly, critics seek to explain the end of the poem in terms of thematic tensions. Stated most succinctly, the tension expressed in these lines concerns the relationship between the "Heilige" and the "Wort," alluded to in the first two lines of the poem's much-cited third strophe:

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*Rhythmus*, particularly the chapter entitled "Übersetzung als Aneignung des Rhythmus" (86-113ff).

Jetzt aber tagts! Ich harrt und sah es kommen,

Und was ich sah, das Heilige sei mein Wort.

ll. 19-20

Critics differ as to whether “sei” is to be read in a subjunctive mood—as a possibility imagined but never actually realized. Alternatively, this line could also have an optative sense—a possibility wished for or invoked. Heidegger’s interpretation of the hymn, which omits the fragmentary conclusion, apparently affirms the poet’s ability to “say” the “holy,” a claim vigorously disputed by subsequent critics. By confusing the subjunctive and the indicative, Hans-Jost Frey notices, Heidegger conflates *saying* and *being*. Against Heidegger, Frey argues that the “poem’s discourse is the arrival of the sacred, not because but in spite of the fact that it expresses it” (185).<sup>29</sup> Paul de Man argues that the conjunction of “Heilige” and “Wort” is a possibility that the hymn’s fragmentary conclusion emphatically cautions against. Pointing to the third strophe, de Man regards the end of the hymn as expressing the *failure* of the poet to convey the sacred through song. Instead, the conclusion of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” would attest that the poet sacrifices himself in order to say *das Heilige*. That the poem breaks down at precisely the same moment, however, reveals an apparent paradox: if the poet

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<sup>29</sup> Frey follows de Man in his critique of Heidegger. Unlike de Man, however, his argument leaves open the possibility that Hölderlin’s poem does, in some way, express *das Heilige*. “Hölderlin’s discourse expresses what it is and what it expresses. But it is not what it expresses by virtue of its expression but through the way in which it expresses itself. This is what is special about this discourse: it expresses the event without ceasing to be it. Heidegger’s equation of *being* and *naming* is not justified, because it presumes that this coincidence needs no further explanation. Hölderlin, on the other hand, achieves the simultaneity—not the correspondence—of the two from their mutual exclusivity” (*Studies in Poetic Discourse* 190-91). The “tension” Frey identifies between *what* the poem expresses and the *way* it is expressed might be one way to understand the poem’s curious styntax.

must sacrifice himself in order to say the holy, then what is left of the word? Perhaps the final strophe refers only to a future possibility. Or perhaps Hölderlin's hymn actually "succeeds" in failing, offering in its faltering a mediated "warning" against unmediated contact with the divine.

In redeeming the final strophe, critics risk stumbling upon another version of the same problem they encounter in Heidegger, since the final "meaning" of the poem remains their central concern: as a performance of its own undoing, Hölderlin's hymn still communicates—even if its message is precisely the opposite of what Heidegger says. Whether the poem is to be read as a statement of the power of the poetic word to convey the holy—or a warning that such communication is impossible, the question remains whether the poet's sacrifice is one that song, this song, or any song—in some way requires. Indeed, if one can speak of "sacrifice" at all with regard to the final verses of Hölderlin's hymn, who or what is being sacrificed—the poet or the word? Or does the conclusion represent something more like a renunciation of the belief that song could convey *das Heilige*—or that it should?

Returning to the manuscript to fill in the gaps of Hölderlin's fragmentary hymn, Peter Szondi compellingly suggests that the poem's conclusion resembles the mode of an elegy, the suffering and sentimental longing it expresses being still too personal to achieve the more detached quality of hymnic address. Indeed, Hölderlin did explore the form of the elegy at some length in six major elegies composed around the same time as "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." Szondi identifies a tension between the word "Mitleidend" (ln. 65) in the eighth strophe and the abrupt appearance of the lyric

subject in the interjection “Weh mir!” (ln. 67), suggesting that “Mitleid” is fundamentally incompatible with the personal expression of suffering. “Das Mitleiden der Leiden des Lebens ist der genaue Gegensatz der Haltung, in der man nur sich selber hört” (*Der andere Pfeil* 18). Referring to the prose draft, Szondi notes that the interjection, “Weh mir!” was initially followed by an additional remark: “Aber wenn von selbgeschlagener Wunde das Herz mir blutet...” In the manuscript this phrase is crossed out and replaced by another: “Aber wenn von anderem Pfeile das Herz mir blutet...” (FHA 96-99). In Szondi’s reading, the pain expressed in the line “Weh mir” stands in for a “self-inflicted wound,” a wound that comes not from Zeus’s *Blitz* but “from another arrow.” “Vom anderem Pfeile blutet das Herz—von welchem anderen? Und von welchem darf, ja soll der Dichter getroffen werden? Die Hymne hat es schon gesagt: vom Blitz, vom himmlischen Feuer” (19). Rather than being struck “by heavenly fire,” the poet suffers from *another* wound, a realization that causes him to stumble and begin again: thus, at the same moment that “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” breaks off, another poem begins, and the poem that would become “Hälfte des Lebens” takes up where the earlier poem leaves off. Incorporating the line “Weh mir” from the earlier poem, “Hälfte des Lebens” makes clear that the source of suffering is something more personal. Perhaps, then, “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” falters at precisely the same moment that the subject enters the hymn and is confronted with the “Wahrhaftigkeit” that his suffering comes not from direct contact with the divine, but from himself.

In biographical terms, Szondi suggests, the “self-inflicted wound” could refer to Hölderlin’s longing and lament for Susette Gontard, the implied subject of “Hälfte



des Lebens.”<sup>30</sup> Reading these poems side-by-side, Szondi suggests that the suffering evoked here is the personal longing of Hölderlin’s “Liebesklage” (29), and “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” wavers because it is unable to translate the suffering of personal loss into genuine *Mitleid*—suffering or sympathy with and in the name of a “communal spirit” (*Gemeingeist*), alluded to in the fifth strophe of Hölderlin’s hymn. In generic terms, Szondi argues, “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” is an unsuccessful attempt to transform the elegiac into a hymnic mode: “Das Elegische mündet also nicht eigentlich ins Hymnische, ein qualitativer Sprung trennt die beiden Formen: der von der Erlebnislyrik zum selbstlosen Preis der Götter. Wer aber das Hymnische betritt, ohne das Elegische ganz abgestreift zu haben, erscheint bei Hölderlin als ‚falscher Priester’” (29). Unlike the genre of elegy, which belongs to the mode of *Erlebnislyrik* and expresses personal feeling, the hymnic (from Greek, *hymnein*) is a genre of “self-less” praise in which the personal experience of a lyric subject no longer plays a dominant role. While the later *vaterländische Gesänge* are able to achieve this style of detached hymnic address, “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” comes up short, a realization that Szondi speculates led Hölderlin to abandon this early experiment.

Es ist [das] Moment persönlichen Leids, das aus dem Hymnischen Raum, der den Dichter nur als ‚Dienenden’ kennt, verbannt ist. Daß Hölderlin, als er die Feiertageshymne zu schreiben unternahm, sich davon noch nicht ganz befreit hatte, geht daraus hervor, daß es dem hymnischen Ich am Ende ins Wort fällt und sein Recht verlangt. Daran

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<sup>30</sup> For my part, I find the biographical argument unconvincing in this case.

scheiterte die Vollendung der Hymne. Aus ihren fragmentarischen Schlußversen aber entstand das Gedicht, in dem wie in keinem zweiten dem persönlichen Leid sein Recht wurde. Erst nach diesem Scheitern, einem Scheitern, das zugleich Erkenntnis und Läuterung gewesen sein mag, konnte Hölderlins eigentliche Hymnendichtung, sein Spätwerk, beginnen. Sie ist nicht weniger persönlich als die Oden und Elegien, aber das Ich, dessen Stimme sie trägt, kennt einen anderen Pfeil als den des Gottes nicht mehr. (30)

At the same time, as this passage suggests, the concluding strophes of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” might be read as a dramatization of the process of *Erkenntnis* necessary to make the step from the elegiac to the hymnic: the self abandons itself not in an experience of ecstatic self-loss or elegiac longing but in a moment of profound self-consciousness. The self is not sacrificed to the One-All, which would be nothing short of the kind of hubris that leads to Semele’s tragic death, and yet the self is nevertheless overcome, allowing for a mode of expression that is at once not *less* personal, but more objective. As Szondi notes, the “Ich” does not disappear entirely from Hölderlin’s late hymns, but the voice it conveys is no longer merely that of an individual subject. The conclusion of Hölderlin’s hymn represents not the sacrifice of a self, then, but a mode of subjective lyric, one that arises not from the dynamic of elegiac longing and personal suffering but genuine “Mit-leiden”—a participation in something beyond the self.

Just as he reads the “self-inflicted wound” in terms of Hölderlin’s longing for Susette Gontard, Szondi’s reading of *Mitleid* as participation in the “communal spirit”

(*Gemeingeist*) evokes the particular context of revolutionary politics, and the failure to make the transition from the elegiac to the hymnic mode would reflect Hölderlin's inability to detach himself from personal suffering in order to partake in political action.<sup>31</sup> For Szondi, the conclusion of "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." recognizes this failure in the cry of despair that interrupts the completion of the hymn. Departing from Szondi, Paul de Man sees the moment of self-recognition in these lines somewhat differently: instead of a lamentation on the poet's inability to detach himself from personal sufferings to join in revolutionary enthusiasm, these lines identify such enthusiasm as a potential danger. As de Man points out, the language of the final stanza echoes the language of the sixth strophe, which alludes to the danger of Semele's desire to "see the god."

Transposed to a more thematic level, the end cautions against the belief that the kind of enthusiasm that animates a heroic act is identical with the predominant mood of a poetic consciousness. It can be said, of the heroic action, that it indeed establishes an unmediated contact with being, but it does so necessarily in a tragic mode, in the form of an apocalyptic death, alluded to in this poem in the death of Semele.

("Patterns of Temporality" 68)

For de Man, the "danger" Hölderlin's hymn cautions against is not only the danger of unmediated contact with Being, but, more specifically, the *enthusiasm* of heroic action

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<sup>31</sup> Again, I find such biographical-historical arguments unsatisfying, only partially explaining the formal and thematic peculiarities of the poem—if at all.

that the poet is compelled to give up.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the figure of the hero, de Man argues, the poet's relationship to Being is mediated through language, and while the heroic deed presents an "irresistible temptation," the poet recognizes the heroic as inseparable from tragedy.<sup>33</sup> Caught up in action, the hero is not fully conscious: "He does not fully know what he is doing when he abandons himself to a will that seems to come from beyond himself" (68-69). Contrasting the poet with the hero, de Man argues that the hero is compelled to self-sacrifice, while, for the poet, "such a sacrificial urge is a form of hubris and has to be resisted" (69). Instead, Hölderlin's hymn demands "a conscious renunciation of the heroic stance." Marking a shift from what Hölderlin calls the "heroic" to the "ideal" tone, for de Man the conclusion of "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." represents not the sacrifice of the poet, then, but the sacrifice of sacrifice—the renunciation of the logic of tragedy as the necessary

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<sup>32</sup> De Man's interpretation of the mythical allusion to Semele, in this essay, marks a departure from his claim, in an earlier essay, that the poet plays the role of "mediator," whose "supreme act is also a supreme sacrifice" ("Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin," 261). Here, de Man distinguishes between the role of the poet and the hero. It is the hero who succumbs to the "enthusiasm" of action, sacrificing himself to achieve unmediated contact with Being. The poet's "sacrifice" is different—and thus de Man here avoids the term completely. Instead, drawing on Hölderlin's doctrine of the "Wechsel der Töne," de Man speaks of the poet's role in this essay in terms of "renunciation."

<sup>33</sup> A fuller examination of this problem would take into closer consideration the philosophy of the tragic as it is elaborated in Hölderlin's *Empedokles* project and in the *Sophokles-Anmerkungen*. What de Man here calls the "heroic" (with reference to the terms of Hölderlin's *Wechsel der Töne*) is closely related to what Lacoue-Labarthe discusses (with respect to the *Anmerkungen*) in terms of the tragic basis of speculative philosophy (the philosophy of the Absolute). Lacoue-Labarthe famously argues that Hölderlin "caesuras" the speculative. De Man's insistence on language as a mediation that protects against immediate access to being follows a similar line of reasoning. Both point to patterns of difference and separation that recur in various iterations throughout Hölderlin's writings in opposition to "dangerous" forms of unity.

condition for poetry.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to Szondi, de Man argues that the term *Gemeingeist*, which Hölderlin derives from Rousseau, is political—not poetic. Like Rousseau, Dionysos is not to be read as a figure for the poet. Rather, “he is a political force connected with the practical organization of a society in as close as possible accordance with the true being of man...the political organization that results from the sacrifice of heroic action; his main concern, unlike the poet’s, is not with language” (68). In other words, Dionysos accomplishes in the political realm what the poet strives for in the realm of language: the sacrifice of heroic action. While heroic action offers the possibility of immediate access to being, the poet’s relationship to being is mediated through language. “Because his own medium, language, has a mediate relationship of a self-conscious, reflective type toward actions and deeds, the poet never achieves the same kind of proximity to being” (68). Once again, de Man insists on the *conscious*, *reflective* stance of the poet in contrast to the un-self-conscious abandon of heroic action. Indeed, for de Man it is *language* that serves as the “medium” of the poet’s self-conscious detachment from the general will. Without language, the political figure

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<sup>34</sup> Against Heidegger, who treats the poem as a continuous whole, de Man thus reads “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” in terms of Hölderlin’s doctrine of the alternation of tones. De Man understands the relation between the “naive” beginning and the “ideal” ending not in terms of a circular, “apocalyptic” pattern, but as a formal tension—the tension between the “heroic” and the “ideal” tone. Hölderlin’s alternation of tones allows de Man to read Hölderlin’s hymn according to what he calls, throughout the Gauss lectures, an “interpretive” pattern of criticism. The “interpretive” mode, in contrast to the “apocalyptic,” is concerned to show that the “ideal” knowledge was already there from the beginning: the “naive” prefigures the “ideal” just as the end “interprets” the beginning. For a more extended discussion of Hölderlin’s doctrine of the “alternation of tones,” see Lawrence Ryan, *Hölderlin’s Lehre vom Wechsel der Töne*.

never achieves this level of mediation.

In spite of their differences, there is a striking similarity in how de Man and Szondi read the final strophe of Hölderlin's hymn in terms of a dynamic of self-consciousness. Moreover, both trace the movement of reflection beyond simple modes of "sacrifice" and "renunciation." And yet, I would argue, the reflective stance de Man attributes to the poet is precisely the kind of self-consciousness Hölderlin's hymn gives up in what Szondi describes as its transition from the elegiac to the hymnic mode. Extending Szondi's argument, I suggest that the "hymnic" designates something beyond the self-conscious subject. In the place of a model of subjectivity based on self-consciousness, Hölderlin's hymn offers an alternative in the form of "Geist." While de Man maintains that *Gemeingeist* refers to something political, rather than poetic, Hölderlin's hymn deals with a specifically poetic form of spirit: what the third strophe names *Begeisterung*. Operating not only at a thematic level, *Begeisterung* can also be traced in the language of Hölderlin's poem, not, or not only in what it says, but in the folds of overlapping patterns of reference, figurative involutions, and elastic syntax that characterize its peculiar style. Rather than representing a movement toward greater self-consciousness, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." depicts the crisis of the subject at a moment of extreme exposure. Indeed, in the course of the hymn, the "subject" all but disappears except as an effect of *Begeisterung*, a force that suffuses the language of the hymn and thereby engenders song.

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The problem that critics track in the ending of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” is already anticipated in the linguistic tension of the opening strophes of the hymn and the referential problem of the initial simile. As we have seen, both the opening and the conclusion of the hymn concern the literal, figural, and mythic implications of the poet’s proximity to *Blitz*. And yet, it is precisely the poet’s proximity to the storm that is put into question by the referential ambiguity of the opening strophes, particularly the figurative accretion of the poem’s opening simile, which carries over from the first to the second strophe:

Wie wenn am Feiertage, das Feld zu sehn  
Ein Landmann geht, des Morgens, wenn  
Aus heißer Nacht die kühlenden Blize fielen  
Die ganze Zeit und fern noch tönet der Donner,  
In sein Gestade wieder tritt der Strom,  
Und frisch der Boden grünt  
Und von des Himmels erfreuendem Reegen  
Der Weinstok trauft und glänzend  
In stiller Sonne stehn die Bäume des Haines:

So stehn sie unter günstiger Witterung  
Sie die kein Meister allein, die wunderbar  
Allgegenwärtig erzieht in leichtem Umfängen  
Die mächtige, die göttlichschöne Natur.

Drum wenn zu schlafen sie scheint zu Zeiten des Jahrs  
 Am Himmel oder unter den Pflanzen oder den Völkern  
 So trauert der Dichter Angesicht auch,  
 Sie scheinen allein zu seyn, doch ahnen sie immer.  
 Denn ahnend ruhet sie selbst auch. (ll. 1-18)

As noted earlier, the objects of comparison remain ambiguous, as the “sie” implied in the second part of the simile could refer to one of two plural nouns that occur in the first and second strophes: the “Bäume” (ln. 9) or the “Dichter” (ln. 16). In Heidegger’s reading, these lines imply an analogy between the *Landmann*, who surveys his fields after the passing storm, and the poets, although the poets themselves are not mentioned until almost the end of the second strophe. For Szondi, by contrast, the poet is likened to the *Weinstock* and the *Bäume* that survive the storm.

Man erkennt indessen schon zu Beginn die Bedeutung der  
 Ineinsetzung von Rebe und dichterischem Wort, wenn man meint, in  
 diesem Landschaftsbild korrespondiere den Dichtern der Landmann,  
 der am Morgen des Feiertags auf das Feld geht. Denn die Dichter  
 stehen unter günstiger Witterung, sie stehen—nach einem späteren, viel  
 zitierten Vers—unter Gottes Gewittern mit entblößtem Haupte, wie der  
 Weinstock und die Bäume des Haines in der Nacht gestanden haben,  
 aus der die kühlenden Blitze fielen. (*Der andere Pfeil* 10-11)

The difference is far from trivial. Depending on how the analogy is read, the poet either stands within the *jetzt* of the storm (like the *Weinstock* and the *Bäume*), or after



the *jetzt* (like the *Landmann*, who surveys his fields after the storm has passed). While Szondi argues that the poet is exposed directly to the storm, referring also to the seventh strophe, which speaks of the poet's ability to stand "unter Gottes Gewitter," this reading complicates any interpretation of the hymn in which the poet maintains a *mediated* contact to the divine—through song. Instead, Szondi's interpretation implicitly aligns the poet with Semele, who in being destroyed by Zeus's *Blitz* represents the danger of unmediated contact with the divine. At the same time, Szondi collapses the difference between Semele, who gives birth to Dionysos, and Dionysos himself, who is made to serve not only as a figure for the grape and the poetic word, but also for the poet.

Szondi's interpretation is symptomatic of a confusion of subject and object positions already anticipated in the poem's opening analogy. Debating whether the poet is *like* the *Landmann* or *like* the trees, critics tend to overlook the fact that the "wie" of the opening simile functions not only to establish a comparison between different figures, but also as a description of *how* such figures relate to one another. Accordingly, the objects of comparison implied by the opening simile might be less important than the syntax of the comparison itself (*wie wenn*), and the emphasis would fall rather on the *action* implied by the verbs that are set in contrast. In Pindar's O. VII, on which the opening of Hölderlin's hymn is modeled, the opening simile likewise suggests more than a simple comparison between two figures:

As one who takes in his generous hand a golden bowl, his choice possession, wherein bubbles the dew of the vine, and gives it to his young son-in-law, pledging with drink one house to another, both for

the sake of those at the banquet and to honor his new alliance, and thereby becomes envied in the company of friends for this harmonious union—Thus I, sending flowing nectar, gift of the Muses and sweet fruit of thought, to men who win prizes, pay homage to the victors at Olympia and Pytho.<sup>35</sup>

In Pindar's hymn, the opening simile implies not only a comparison between the father who offers a toast in honor of his son-in-law, and the poet who offers a tribute to the victors at Olympia and Pytho; the act of offering a toast also becomes a metaphor for the poem itself, which is compared to "flowing nectar." As in Hölderlin's hymn, the syntax of the comparison is highly hypotactic, seeming to flow from one subordinated phrase to another.<sup>36</sup> This style is typical of Pindar's poetry, in which semantic and syntactic digressions serve to underscore the unity of the whole. Through a moment of playful self-reflexivity, the poem itself becomes the poem that is offered—song the very achievement it praises.

In marked contrast to Hölderlin's hymn, the subject of the second part of the comparison in Pindar is unambiguous: "I"—the poet, himself. In Hölderlin's hymn the pronoun that appears at this moment is "sie," which could refer to any number of

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<sup>35</sup> I refer to Weisinger's translation, which presents a literal rendering of Pindar's ode as it appears in Heyne's edition of 1798 (the edition used by Hölderlin in his Pindar translations).

<sup>36</sup> In certain respects, Hölderlin's syntax could be read as an exaggerated attempt to imitate Pindar's "austere style," what Hellingrath described as "harte Fügung" (*Pindarübertragungen von Hölderlin*). See Benn for further examples of this style in Hölderlin's poetry (143-47).

nouns named in the first two strophes.<sup>37</sup> Repeated six times within the second stanza alone, the pronoun “sie” refers both to the plural noun “Dichter,” and to the feminine singular noun “Natur” (ln. 13). Since it is often immediately unclear whether the pronoun “sie” is used in a nominative or accusative sense (as the active subject or the direct object of the verb), only the verb allows the reader to distinguish between the singular (*Natur*) and the plural subject (the poets). Such ambiguity has the effect of making it difficult to identify the subject from one phrase to the next, and references to *Natur* and *Dichter* are thus grammatically, syntactically, and thematically intertwined.

Part of the confusion is due to the fact that the reference to “Dichter” is grammatically preceded by and anticipated by the pronoun “sie.” Where critics have noted the ambiguity of the pronoun “sie,” they have overlooked the fact that, syntactically and semantically, the second strophe is structured as a type of inversion: in almost every phrase, the verb precedes the grammatical subject. A plausible explanation for this kind of inversion is that it is a technique that Hölderlin takes over from Pindar, where inversion serves both a syntactical and logical or rhetorical function, another name for which, in figural terms, is *hysteron proteron*: the first last. At the same time, inversion is a conventional figure for poetic inspiration, associated with Klopstock’s “dithyrambisches Schweifen.” That such inversions are more exaggerated in the metrical version of the hymn than in the prose draft suggests that metrical considerations also play a role, where inversion lends itself more easily to a rising meter—a characteristic feature of Hölderlin’s late hymns, even those that

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<sup>37</sup> This is emphatically *not* to say that “sie” *does* refer to more than one word at the same time, only that it presents multiple referential possibilities and echoes.

abandon a fixed metrical scheme. Whatever the possible cause, the effect of such inversions has radical implications for interpretation, not only contributing to the referential ambiguity of the text, but also (and at the same time) unsettling propositional syntax.

In this instance, such grammatical and syntactical overlapping has the effect of intensifying the parallel construction at the end of the stanza comparing the poets and *Natur* (a comparison within another, extended, comparison).

**Sie** scheinen allein zu seyn, doch ahnen **sie** immer.

Denn ahnend ruhet **sie** selbst auch. (ll. 17-18)

Like *Natur*, the poets appear “alone” but are always “divining.” The verb “ahnen” thus connects *Natur* and the poets. Implied in the verb “ahnen” is a kind of *Anschauung*—an ambiguously active yet passive mode of “perception” or “intuition” that seems to fold in on itself in the same way that the poets and *Natur* overlap syntactically and grammatically: the one defines the other in a reciprocal relation that is both active and passive. The fact that the poets are defined in their relation to *Natur* and vice versa is at once a figural and syntactical instantiation of *Begeisterung*—that in-spiriting, enflaming force that serves as the basis for poetic inspiration—and the animating conceit of the poem itself. *Natur* is already “all-present” in the second stanza, in the circulation of the pronoun *sie* that shifts between the poets and *Natur*, and in the grammatical, semantic, and syntactic inversions of the passage that make it difficult to distinguish subject from object.

It is not insignificant that the shift to the theme of *Begeisterung* in the third strophe of Hölderlin’s hymn coincides with the appearance of the lyrical “I” in Pindar.

Denn sie, sie selbst, die älter denn die Zeiten  
Und über die Götter des Abends und Orients ist,  
Die Natur ist jezt mit Waffenklang erwacht,  
Und hoch vom Aether bis zum Abgrund nieder  
Nach vestem Geseze, wie einst, aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt,  
Fühlt neu die Begeisterung sich,  
Die Allerschaffende wieder. (ll. 21-27)

Instead of grounding the “I,” as in Pindar, the opening simile serves to undermine the lyric subject. In place of an “I,” Hölderlin’s hymn asserts the influence of *Begeisterung* as the thematic equivalent of the grammatical and rhetorical figure of inversion that recurs so dramatically throughout the poem. The line “Fühlt neu die Begeisterung sich” (ln. 26), which first introduces the term *Begeisterung*, is itself structured as a syntactic inversion: the grammatical subject, *Begeisterung*, follows the inspiring action, *fühlen*. Figuratively and grammatically, *Begeisterung* stands in for the lyrical “I” as a force acting upon the subject.

Patterns of inversion also inform the critical sixth strophe of the hymn, which alludes to the myth of Semele. As in the second strophe, this passage is marked by the recurrence of the ambiguous pronoun “sie.”

Daß schnellbetroffen sie, Unendlichem  
Bekannt seit langer Zeit, von Erinnerung  
Erbebt, und ihr, von heiligem Stral entzündet,  
Die Frucht in Liebe geboren, der Götter und Menschen Werk  
Der Gesang, damit er beiden zeuge, glückt.

So fiel, wie Dichter sagen, da **sie** sichtbar  
 Den Gott zu sehen begehrte, sein Blitz auf Semeles Haus  
 Und die göttlichgetroffene gebahr,  
 Die Frucht des Gewitters, den heiligen Bacchus. (ll. 45-53)

In contrast to the second strophe, however, where the “sie” conveys the reciprocal relation of poet and nature, here the ambiguity of “sie” underscores the central thematic conflict of the poem. The initial “sie” of the passage (ln. 45) most likely refers to “Seele” (ln. 44), the subject of the previous stanza. Implicitly, the strophe sets up an internal comparison between “Gesang” (“Die Frucht in Liebe geboren,” ln. 47) and “den heiligen Bacchus” (“Die Frucht des Gewitters,” ln. 53). The soul of the poet receives the “holy ray”—an image of inspiration—and gives birth to “Gesang.” The second part of the strophe, which turns, as in the second strophe, on the word “so,” sets up a tenuous comparison between the poet and Semele—just as earlier the movement between strophes had set both figures in tension with one another. But here, as well, the reference to Semele is preceded by and anticipates the pronoun “sie” (ln. 50). Once again, the implied subject (Semele) follows the verb (“da sie sichtbar / Den Gott zu sehen begehrte”). While this phrase is not, strictly speaking, an instance of grammatical “inversion” (it is, after all, syntactically and grammatically “correct”), it has a similar figurative effect, displacing the grammatical subject to the end of the phrase. Figuratively, it is desire, more than the subject that drives the action. Moreover, the proper name “Semele” only appears in the genitive phrase “Semeles Haus” (ln. 51)—never as the active, nominative subject of the verb. Just as the active, heroic subject is punished, the name “Semele” is compressed into the metonymy of

“Semeles Haus,” an inversion that has the effect of contrasting Semele's “active,” “subjective” hubris with its corresponding punishment: the ellipsis of the grammatical subject.

In this passage, the ambiguous pronoun “sie” connects both the “soul” of the poet and the figure of Semele. Grammatically, the strophe thus supports an analogy between Semele and the poet, while the theme of the strophe is precisely the contrast between these figures. At the same time, the ambiguity of the pronoun “sie” indexes the central conflict of the poem, evoking an implicit comparison between Semele's desire to “see the god” and the interpretive desire to “read” into the pronoun the grammatical subject of the referent: Semele. Implicitly, the act of interpretation corresponds with the same kind of mythic hubris that leads Semele to seek the god, and the syntax of the passage exposes the fact that meaning depends upon being able to *posit* a subject, to infer a referent from a pronoun. The referential ambiguity of the passage poses a hazard analogous to the dangerous “enthusiasm” that inspires Semele to her tragic end.

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In certain respects, such instances illustrate some of the more abstract claims of Adorno's landmark essay “Parataxis” on the nature and significance of Hölderlin's “late” style. Like Norberth von Hellingrath a half century earlier, who identified the compression of Hölderlin's poetry with Pindar's “harte Fügung,” Adorno notes how Hölderlin's poetry puts pressure on the syntactic period, using the term “parataxis” to describe a range of syntactical, grammatical, and logical effects. Broadly defined,

“parataxis” encompasses inversion as a name for the effect of “artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax” (“Parataxis” 131).<sup>38</sup> As Adorno notes, the association of inversion and inspiration is not unique to Hölderlin. Not only is inversion a conventional feature Pindar’s poetry, it also figures prominently in the poetry of Klopstock and Goethe. Within this context, it is not surprising to encounter dramatic instances of inversion in a poem like “Wie wenn am Feiertage...,” which takes *Begeisterung* as its explicit theme.

And yet, as Adorno has argued, inversion serves a completely different function in Hölderlin’s poetry than in the more “subjective” mode of earlier poetic models. The significance of such patterns, Adorno suggests, is as philosophical as it is poetic. Characterizing Hölderlin’s rejection of periodic sentence structure as “a revolt against synthesis” (136), Adorno argues that Hölderlin’s “paratactic” style represents a critique of the speculative model of self-consciousness *as well as* the “expressive” tradition of lyric. Like other poets before him, Hölderlin rejects predicative syntax, turning to inversion as a figure more suited to subjective expression; but he goes a step further in rejecting the expressive ideal as well. “[Hölderlin] must have observed that in fact inversion, the darling of learned poetry, intensifies the violence done to

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<sup>38</sup> As Beatrice Hanssen points out, Adorno’s broad definition of “parataxis” resonates with Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz’s approach to the figure of inversion, which they understand as the Romantic trope *par excellence*. Tracing this figure in the works of Novalis, Hölderlin and Kleist, but also Kafka, Frank and Kurz identify the Romantic’s use of inversion with a critique of Fichte’s hubristic Idealism. As a trope for the “reflection of reflection,” inversion exposes the limits of the self-positing subject. While I agree with Frank and Kurz’s argument that inversion has broader philosophical implications, their approach is limited to Hölderlin’s philosophical writings. Like Adorno, they fail to offer a satisfying account of how inversion



language,” Adorno speculates, “Whether intentionally on Hölderlin's part or simply by the nature of things, this occasioned the sacrifice of the period, to an extreme degree. Poetically, this represents the sacrifice of the legislating subject itself” (136). While the “expressive” use of inversion simply mimics the conceit of subjectivity, for Hölderlin, inversion unsettles the logic of autonomous subjectivity.

In relating Hölderlin's “sacrifice of the period” to the “sacrifice of the legislating subject,” Adorno's argument hinges an analogy between the “expressive ideal of lyric” and the idealist self-positing subject: both would assert the autonomy of the subject over the object. For Hölderlin, by contrast, self-positing is tantamount to hubris. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Hölderlin's “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” In Hölderlin's hymn, as we have seen, patterns of syntactic inversion function to undermine propositional syntax, and with it, the very idea of a self-positing subject. Precisely because such inversions upset the logic of propositional syntax, however, such displacements could be read as the linguistic effect of *Begeisterung*: a force that exerts its influence on the poem in the folds and inversions of overlapping patterns of reference.

At first, the circulation of “sie” serves an animating effect, just as *Begeisterung* provides the source of inspiration for song. But the confusion of referents also has the effect of destabilizing meaning, thus providing a formal approximation of the kind of tragic hubris the song cautions against. Perhaps, however, such linguistic and figural displacement is the only way the poet is truly able to represent *Begeisterung*, since

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functions in the poems themselves. See Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz, “Ordo inversus: Zu einer Reflexionsfigur bei Novalis, Hölderlin, Kleist, and Kafka.”

inspiration is by definition felt in its effects—not something conjured or created. In receiving inspiration, the poet relinquishes the positing power of language, a sacrifice that necessarily undermines the integrity of the subject, as well. Where an earlier poetic tradition might have associated such syntactical inversions with the inspired speech of the lyric subject, in Hölderlin's hymn the effect of *Begeisterung* is felt as something beyond the subject working upon language. One might say that in Hölderlin's hymn, language is "subject" to *Begeisterung*, rather than the other way around.

By unsettling propositional syntax, such inversions challenge the very idea of "subjective" lyric as the inspired expression of a lyric "I." Indeed, the very idea that the subject is in some way "autonomous" is associated in Hölderlin's hymn with Semele's tragic hubris. But neither does such language represent the "sacrifice" of a subject to the will of a *Gemeingeist*. Hölderlin's lyric "I" does not abandon itself in an experience of ecstatic self-loss—far from it. In the figure of Semele, the sacrifice of self is represented as precisely the kind of danger the rest of the hymn cautions against. By giving up the power of self-legislation, the subject also preserves the self. Instead of perishing, as Semele does, the poet is preserved in the elasticity of poetic syntax. Although its expressive force comes from something beyond a lyrical "I," such "inspired speech" is no less measured than "Gesez," nor less "heilig" than "Chaos."

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LAW OF THE SONG: “DER RHEIN”

Like other hymns belonging to the group of poems known as the *vaterländische Gesänge*, Hölderlin’s “Der Rhein” (1800/1801) is composed in *freie Rhythmen*.<sup>39</sup> While the poem lacks a regular metrical structure, it is not, for that reason, without “measure.”<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, a curious comment, written in Hölderlin’s hand in the margin of the manuscript, insists on the inherent “lawfulness” of the poem:

Das Gesez dieses Gesanges ist, daß die zwei ersten Parthien der Form nach durch Progreß und Regreß entgegengesezt, aber dem Stoff nach gleich, die zwei folgenden der Form nach gleich, dem Stoff nach entgegengesezt sind, die letzte aber mit durchgängiger Metapher alles ausgleicht. (StA II: 2, 730)

While far from self-evident, the distinction between “Stoff” and “Form” supports the idea that the relationship between “content” and “form” is inscribed within a larger pattern—what Hölderlin calls the “law” of the song. While the poem as a whole lacks

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<sup>39</sup> My reading of the poem is based on the *Reinschrift* as it appears in Beissner’s edition (StA II: 1, 142ff.). Sattler’s “chronological” edition of the text documents the various stages of revision (FHA 8, 600 ff.).

<sup>40</sup> *Freie Rhythmen* is of course not the same as “free verse,” as Boris Previšić has shown in his study of Hölderlin’s rhythm. Using Hölderlin’s concept of the “Gesez dieses Gesanges,” Previšić shows how “Der Rhein” actually develops according to a formal law, one evident in the recurrence of regular rhythmic phrases. While I agree with the premise that even Hölderlin’s seemingly irregular poetry maintains an ordering principle, I am less concerned to demonstrate the *particular* metrical patterns

a regular metrical scheme, the hymn's strophes (15 in all) provide a regular structure of "parts" based not on the metrical foot, but on the *strophe* as an organizing unit of measure. The fifteen strophes may also be grouped into five triads. In rough summary, the first triad (strophes 1-3) introduces the figure of the Rhein, first evoked in the description of the river rushing down from the mountains, then personified as a mythological deity. The next (strophes 4-6) narrates the development of the river from youth to maturity. The third (strophes 7-9) reflects on the relationship between gods and men more generally, invoking the theme of hubris or Promethean excess in terms that echo the river's youthful rebelliousness. Shifting from mythological themes to more present concerns, the fourth triad (strophes 10-12) introduces the historical figure of Rousseau, viewed both as the philosopher of the revolution and the author of the meditative *Rêveries*. The final triad (strophes 13-15) describes a mythical wedding feast, alluding, by way of reference to another *symposium*, to the philosopher Socrates, and concludes with a direct address to Isaak von Sinclair, the friend to whom Hölderlin dedicated the poem in its final form.

Following Lawrence Ryan, most interpreters tend to understand the "law of the song" in terms of Hölderlin's doctrine of the "alternation of tones" (*Wechsel der Töne*), a theory sketched out in a series of prose texts composed around 1800. In its simplest terms, this theory holds that every poem is composed of a series of alternating "tones": the "naïve" or "natural" tone, followed by the "heroic" tone, and finally the "ideal" tone. For Ryan, Hölderlin's remarks about the process of poetic composition

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within individual hymns. Indeed, Previšić's work illustrates all-too clearly how much scansion is a matter of judgment rather than precise measurement.

are decisive. In fact, however, Hölderlin's comments about the alternation of tones are highly abstract. Above all, it remains unclear how they apply to the reading of individual poems. In the case of "Der Rhein," Hölderlin's marginal comment about the "Gesetz dieses Gesanges" makes it tempting to understand this "law" in terms of the alternation of tones, and to apply this theory to a reading of the entire poem. But this method runs into several problems, as Ryan acknowledges. The alternation of tones works well enough as a model for the first triad, perhaps, but what happens when we read the entire hymn in this way, applying an external theory in the form of a "law" to the reading of the poem as a whole?

Basing their interpretations of the hymn on Hölderlin's marginal comment on the "law of the song," critics are perhaps too willing to accept this law as self-evident. Confusing the river and the poem, commentators are quick to point out that the geographical name of the poem plays on the idea of what is pure (*rein*). But the name also alludes to a poetic theme: punning on the Greek word "rhein," to flow, "Rhine" shares a common root with "rhythm." Rather than reading Hölderlin's comment as a "riddle" to be solved, or as a clue to the interpretation of the poem, what happens if we take seriously the idea that the "law of the song" governs the development of the poem from the outset? In giving poetic form to the idea of "law," Hölderlin's poem discovers its own rhythm as a provisional, experimental solution to the question: what is measure?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> At the same time, we might ask, what kind of law is this, and where does it come from? Is it pre-scriptive, in the way, for example, that a prosodic signature provides a constraint within which a poem is composed? Or is it merely descriptive of a pattern or rhythm that emerges over the course of the hymn? Even accepting the

In this respect, a line from the end of the hymn, “Nur hat ein jeder sein Maas,” describes both the formal and thematic problem of the poem. At one level, the notion “To each his own measure” is categorically mad, since it yokes together the seemingly incompatible notions of singularity and measure. As Peter Fenves has argued, this line does not say that there is *no* measure (there is one), but “each” has its own—each line, each stanza, or indeed, each poem (Fenves, “Measure for Measure”). At first reading, Hölderlin’s hymn apparently deals with the tension between freedom and law. But it also represents the attempt to come to terms with a radically singular idea of measure. In negotiating the relationship between lawlessness and law, the poem challenges the apparent opposition between lawlessness and measure. What if lawlessness is not simply a danger to be overcome? Indeed, what if lawlessness is a necessary condition of law?

The tension between lawlessness and measure takes on particular urgency in the case of “Der Rhein,” not only as a formal question, but also as the central thematic crux of the poem. In the figure of the river, Hölderlin’s hymn traces the conflicting itineraries of freedom as a development from lawlessness to sober self-restraint.<sup>42</sup>

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likelihood that these comments were authored by Hölderlin (which it is the burden of editors and philologists to prove), what are we to make of the fact that these remarks seem to speak with an authority that arises beyond the poem? This impression derives from the form of the statement itself: grammatically, the law of the song is stated in the indicative, a structure that nevertheless conceals the fact that the agent—the force acting behind the statement—remains obscure. Instead, the grammatical subject, “das Gesez dieses Gesanges,” lends the statement the force of law as a performance of the very law it declares.

<sup>42</sup> Of the many early poems that anticipate the language and themes of “Der Rhein,” key examples include: the early hymns “Hymne an die Freiheit” (1790/91), and “Dem Genius der Kühnheit,” (1793), and the trilogy of poems that allude to Rousseau, “Hymne an die Menschheit” (1791), “An die Deutschen...” (1798/1800),

Originating in the “free” territories of Switzerland, the river rushes wildly from its source in the Alps, flowing first toward the east, before bending back in a westerly direction as it carves a path through the cities of the German Rhineland. As an allegory of freedom, the “course of the river” presents multiple interpretative possibilities. Thematically, its development from rebellious youth to “father of cities” follows the paradigm of a *Bildungsroman*. The geographical trajectory of the river also represents the development of civilization in terms of the alternation of opposed tendencies: the tendency toward the East, associated in Hölderlin's thought with “holy pathos” and *Begeisterung*, and the Hesperian tendency, associated with self-restraint and *Nüchternheit*.<sup>43</sup>

The allusions to Rousseau and Sinclair, meanwhile, place “Der Rhein” in a more overtly political context than many of Hölderlin's poems. Even if it is not reasonable to follow critics like Pierre Bertaux who claim that Hölderlin's madness was a front for his revolutionary political leanings, and that poems like “Der Rhein” contain encrypted political messages, such interpretations are not so easily

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and “Rousseau” (1799/1800). Of the so-called “late hymns,” “Friedensfeier” (1801-1803) engages similar themes.

<sup>43</sup> At the same time, as Wolfgang Binder has argued, the movement from youth to maturity (from East to West, and from enthusiasm to sobriety) coincides with a shift from a negative mode of freedom—freedom as freedom *from constraint*—to a positive one: freedom as tempered self-restraint. The freedom of the river as it flows “toward the East” is merely a freedom of will, while the course of the river as it bends toward the West represents a more regular, lawful kind of freedom (Binder 212-13). The course of the river embodies the paradox of Kantian freedom. Initially following its own desires, the Rhein represents the freedom of the rebel. For Kant, however, following one's own desires is the exact antithesis of freedom, since it means being beholden to external forces—even if such forces seem to arise from within. In contrast with this state of heteronomy, true *autonomy* is experienced as self-legislation—giving law to oneself—by limiting the influence of outside forces.

dismissed.<sup>44</sup> That Sinclair's revolutionary activities led to his arrest, with Hölderlin, makes the poem's final address doubly ambiguous: on the one hand, it lends Hölderlin's poem an ironic tone, and, on the other, that of a cautionary, prudent warning. Although the hymn asserts the necessity of temperance, it is not immediately clear whether it presents an outright rejection of the youthful, rebellious freedom initially figured in the image of the river—or the opposite.

The ambiguity of the final address to Sinclair actually points to a much deeper interpretive difficulty, one that has preoccupied the poem's many commentators: what is the significance of the figures who are named or alluded to indirectly in Hölderlin's hymn, and how we are to understand the progression of these figures in light of Hölderlin's comments about the "law" of the song? Are they different versions of a common type? How might they be alternately "alike" and "opposed"? Do they represent different models for the poet, or different modes of relating to the world—that of the hero, for example, or of the philosopher? Despite the massive body of scholarship on this poem, there is surprisingly little consensus about the particular meaning of these figures. This is especially the case for the figure of Rousseau, named in the poem's tenth strophe. Does Rousseau represent another version of the unnamed heroic figure of the previous triad, or does he somehow anticipate the figure of Socrates, alluded to in the poem's penultimate strophe? Such questions have consequences for how we read Hölderlin's poem, but also for how we understand his relationship to Rousseau—and all that Rousseau represents within the political,

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<sup>44</sup> Bertaux's argument that Hölderlin was a Jacobin sparked intense debate. (Pierre Bertaux, *Hölderlin und die französische Revolution*.) For a summary of this



cultural, and philosophical climate of Europe around 1800.

Apart from political concerns, Hölderlin's poem also addresses the *aesthetic* implications of freedom. In this context, it could be read as a response to the defining tropes of the eighteenth-century *Genie-Aesthetik*, with its "cult of originality" and its celebration of Promethean heroism as a model for poetic creativity. The opening image of the river as it rushes down from its source in the Alps invokes the motif of the *Stromgeist*, a conventional figure for poetic genius that goes back to Horace, and is closely associated with Pindar.<sup>45</sup> Where the first three strophes establish the thematic arc of the poem, the second triad marks a shift from the animating theme of genius to the question of origin. This too is conventional: at least since Plato, the celebration of divine inspiration is almost always accompanied by questions about where genius comes from.<sup>46</sup> Since inspiration is a form of enthusiasm, it is also a matter of whether

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debate, see P.H. Gaskill, "Hölderlin and Revolution."

<sup>45</sup> The figure of the current is the central animating device of Goethe's *Mahomets-Gesang*, to cite one prominent eighteenth-century example. But the trope of the current goes back to Horace: "Wie vom Gebirge der Strom stürzt, / So brauset, so stürmet des unerreichbaren Pindars / Vollströmender Gesang" (*monte decurrens velut amnis, imbres / quem super notas aluere ripas, / fervet inmensusque ruit profundo / Pindares ore*" (*Carmina* IV 2, 5-8).

A characteristic instance of this topos is the image that concludes the *Encyclopédie* article on "Enthousiasme": "On pourroit le [*génie*] comparer à ces grands fleuves, qui ne paroissent à leur source que de foibles ruisseaux: ils coulent, serpentent, s'étendent; & les torrens des montagnes, les rivières des plaines se mêlent à leur cours, grossissent leurs eaux, ne font qu'un seul tout avec elles: ce n'est plus alors un léger murmure, c'est un bruit imposant qu'ils excitent; ils roulent majestueusement leurs flots dans le sein de l'océan, après avoir enrichi les terres heureuses qui en ont été arrosées."

<sup>46</sup> To cite the opening of the same article on *Enthousiasme*, the question of genius is also first and foremost a question about origin: "Communément on entend par *enthousiasme*, une espèce de fureur qui s'empare de l'esprit & qui le maîtrise, qui enflamme l'imagination, l'élève, & la rend féconde. C'est un transport, dit - on, qui fait

genius has its source in madness or reason.

In the figure of the river, Hölderlin's hymn pivots between aesthetic and political considerations, drawing upon a range of commonplace motifs for the potential danger or excess that inheres in the idea of freedom. Instead of simply celebrating the creative potential of freedom or condemning the political danger of lawlessness, however, Hölderlin's poem negotiates a middle course between the discourses of *Genie-Aesthetik*, on the one hand, and reactionary politics, on the other. From the outset, Hölderlin's poem assumes the idea of law as constitutive. And yet, the form of this law is a matter of rhythm, rather than something given. In this respect, the "law" of the song is both *necessary*—and absolutely contingent. In its form, it is "lawful," but also "lawless."

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The extent to which political and aesthetic considerations are intertwined becomes particularly evident in the poem's famous fourth strophe:

Ein Räthsel ist Reintsprungenes. Auch  
Der Gesang kaum darf es enthüllen. Denn  
Wie du anfiengst, wirst du blieben,  
So viel auch wirkt die Noth,  
Und die Zucht, das meiste nemlich  
Vermag die Geburt,

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dire ou faire des choses extraordinaires & surprenantes; mais quelle est cette fureur & d'où naît - elle? quel est ce transport, & quelle est la cause qui le produit?"

Und der Lichtstral, der

Dem Neugeborenen begegnet.

(ll. 46-53)

Like the river, Hölderlin's response to the conventional poetic motif of origin takes the form of another figure closely associated with Pindar: the poetic *gnome*, or riddle. The fact that the syntax of the line is reversible, however, makes the phrase "Ein Räthsel ist Reinentstprungenes" a pure riddle: the riddle is of pure source, just as the pure source is a riddle. At the level of the letter, "Reinentstprungenes" also plays on the name of the river "Rhein," as the source of the riddle, which remains "pure" insofar as it occupies the position of both subject and predicate, origin and end.<sup>47</sup> Turning the conceit of origin inside out, Hölderlin's poetic *gnome* plays on the mysterious source of genius.

At the same time, the conventional notion of origin sets up the transition to another, related question about freedom:

Wo aber ist einer,

Um frei zu bleiben

Sein Leben lang, und des Herzens Wunsch

Allein zu erfüllen, so

Aus günstigen Höhn, wie der Rhein,

Und so aus heiligem Schoße

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<sup>47</sup> The thematic equivalent of the riddle's tautological structure is captured in the sense of fate (*Schicksal*), both in the inexorable logic of the line "Denn / Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben" [For / As you began, so shall you remain] (ll. 47-48) and in the image of the "Lichtstral, der / Dem Neugeborenen begegnet" [the ray of light / The newborn meets] (l.52-53). In both cases, the riddle provides a formal structure for a law that seems to arise from outside the poem, and whose source or cause remains a

Glücklich geboren, wie jener? (ll. 54-60)

The shift from the topos of “origin” to the question of freedom is curious for several reasons. First, the strophe hinges on an unspoken connection between the riddle of origin and the idea of freedom. Second, although the idea of freedom is introduced in the form of a question (Where is one who can remain free?), it is qualified in such a way as to imply that there is none—there is no man like the Rhine, no man who can remain free his whole life long. Shifting from a poetic *topos* to a rhetorical question about the one who is free, Hölderlin’s hymn pivots from the poetic to the political implications of freedom.

The elliptical logic of this strophe also characterizes the turn between the poem’s second and third triads. Where the first six strophes depict the course of the river, the seventh introduces a new figure. As in the fourth strophe, this shift initially appears in the form of a (rhetorical) question:

Wer war es, der zuerst  
Die Liebesbande verderbt  
Und Stricke von ihnen gemacht hat?  
Dann haben des eigenen Rechts  
Und gewiß des himmlischen Feuers  
Gespottet die Trotzigen, dann erst  
Die sterblichen Pfade verachtend  
Verwegnes erwählt  
Und den Göttern gleich zu werden getrachtet. (ll. 96-104)

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riddle for the reason that it cannot be known.

Although this figure remains unnamed, he recalls the familiar type of the Promethean hero. Like the trope of the river, Prometheus is a conventional figure for poetic genius. Thus, although the seventh strophe marks a shift in the course of the poem as a whole, it remains within familiar tropological territory. Like the river that rushes wildly, “wrenching at his chains,” the Promethean hero represents the self-destructive potential that accompanies creative genius. In the figure of the river, the poem posits an analogy between two different kinds of lawlessness or “excess”—one associated with creative power, the other with an excess of freedom.

The negative implications of freedom implied in the seventh strophe set up the transition to the eighth—the exact middle of the hymn. What might at one level be read as a warning about poetic excess also figures the problem of a dangerous, fanatical kind of freedom. The connection between a poetic enthusiasm and a more general fanaticism is made explicit in the reference to the popular image of the *Schwärmer*.

Es haben aber an eigner  
Unsterblichkeit die Götter genug, und bedürfen  
Die Himmlischen eines Dings,  
So sinds Heroën und Menschen  
Und Sterbliche sonst. Denn weil  
Die Seligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,  
Muß wohl, wenn solches zu sagen  
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Namen  
Teilnehmend fühlen ein Andrer,

Den brauchen sie; jedoch ihr Gericht  
Ist, daß sein eigenes Haus  
Zerbreche der und das Liebste  
Wie den Feind schelt' und sich Vater und Kind  
Begrabe unter den Trümmern,  
Wenn einer, wie sie, sein will und nicht  
Ungleiches dulden, der Schwärmer. (ll. 105-120)

In seeking to become the “equal” of the gods, the Schwärmer destroys “sein eigenes Haus.” Beissner reads *der Schwärmer* in terms of “die Trozigen” described in the previous stanza. Like “die Trozigen,” *der Schwärmer* would be

... der aufbrechende Mensch, der die zu Stricken gewordenen  
Liebesbande überlebter Bindungen zerreißen und trotzig im  
Bewußtsein des *eigenen Rechts*, des Rechts auf ein eigenes Leben, ein  
Leben nach eigenen Antrieben und mit eigenen Zielen, die  
gewöhnlichen Pfade der Sterblichen verlassen muß und so in Gefahr  
gerät, das menschliche Maß verwegen zu überschreiten: so will er den  
Abstand der Menschen von den Göttern nicht anerkennen, *nicht*  
*Ungleiches dulden* (v. 199 f.), will den Göttern gleich werden (v. 104  
und 119). (StA II: 2, 735)

As Beissner's interpretation suggests, the “danger” (*Gefahr*) inherent in the conduct of *der Schwärmer* is not only a form of hubris—a transgression against the gods—but a violation of his “own right” (*des eigenen Rechts*). For Wolfgang Binder, meanwhile, the figure of titanic excess is one who refuses to accept the limits of human finitude.

Noting that the term *Schwärmer* is also used by Luther to denounce religious fanatics, Binder interprets this figure as one who “seine den Göttern ungleiche Endlichkeit nicht annehmen will” (Binder 215).

The term *Schwärmer* replaces “Wilde,” the name assigned to this figure in an earlier draft of the hymn (FHA 7, 191). While “Wilde” suggests a more explicit association with Dionysian fervor (alluded to elsewhere in the poem, as well, particularly in the Rousseau triad), *Schwärmer* points to a specific set of historical and philosophical references. In addition to denoting religious fanaticism, by the eighteenth century it also carries a more general pejorative sense. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, it is used to denounce the fanatical violence of the political rebel. *Schwärmerei* is also closely connected with the philosophical problem of intellectual intuition, as the name Kant assigns to dangerous speculative thinking—thought exceeding the limits of reason. The *Schwärmer* is thus one who shows no respect (*Achtung*) for theoretical and practical limits, refusing, in the name of freedom, to obey distinctions.

Nevertheless, the notion of *Schwärmerei* is ambiguous in Hölderlin’s hymn. As Rainer Nägele points out, “Bei Hölderlin nun erscheinen sowohl das Schweifen wie auch die Schwärmerei weder als bloßes Fehlen und Irren, noch im ungebrochenen Enthusiasmus der Genie-Ästhetik” (*Hölderlins Kritik der poetischen Vernunft* 43). What eighteenth-century aesthetics treats as the source of enthusiasm, Hölderlin identifies with fanaticism. “Die Rhetorik der Genie-Ästhetik ... mit ihren Phantasmen des Schöpfens und Zeugens verfällt in Hölderlins Dichtung der schlechten Schwärmerei.” At the same time, Hölderlin does not altogether reject *Schwärmerei*.

“Damit erhält ... die Schwärmerei nun doch einen Platz in Hölderlins Dichtung...die Dichtung selbst benennt und begrüßt sie als *die Schwärmerische, die Nacht* (“Brod und Wein,” v. 15). Sie ist konstitutiv” (43). Instead of being simply negative, as it is with Luther and Kant, Hölderlin associates *Schwärmerei* with the process of poetry, itself: *Schwärmerei* is not, or not only, a destructive force, but a necessary condition for poetry.

While the allusion to the *Schwärmer* evokes the danger associated with a negative idea of freedom (freedom from constraint), the strophe as a whole introduces the theme of the necessary limit that separates and defines the difference between “die Himmlischen” and “die Menschen.” In terms that could be traced throughout Hölderlin's other writings, this mediating division represents a form of law as a system of *Nahmen*. The “name” is thus that which separates mortals from immortals—what maintains the distinction between the one and the other. Although the tragic theme of hubris is implied, the stanza does not say: the gods punish those who seek to be equal to the gods. Rather, action and consequences are stated as the injunction of a formal law: “jedoch ihr Gericht / Ist ... Wenn einer, wie sie, seyn will und nicht / Unglieches dulden.” The conditional construction of the statement is another formulation of the formal law governing the relation between gods and men with which the stanza begins: “Es haben aber an eigener / Unsterblichkeit die Götter genug...” The formal “es”—an un-translatable grammatical subject in these lines—speaks from a higher point of view (higher even than the gods) echoing the “es” of the fourth stanza: the grammatical referent of “Das Räthsel.” (“Auch / Der Gesang kaum darf *es* enthüllen”). The position of the “es,” it would seem, is the only vantage point from which to speak



of both the “*eigner* / Unsterblichkeit” of the gods and the “*eigenes Haus*” of *der Schwärmer*—what remains to each his “own.” For what is “proper” to the gods is not what is “proper” to men—the limit separating gods and men is also the law dividing what is proper to one or the other. Moreover, what is proper to the gods must remain foreign to men, just as it may be said that the gods “need” men.

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The tension between law and lawlessness becomes particularly evident in the figure of Rousseau, named in the poem’s tenth strophe.<sup>48</sup>

Wem aber, wie, Rousseau, dir,  
Unüberwindlich die Seele  
Die starkausdauernde ward,  
Und sicherer Sinn  
Und süße Gaabe zu hören,  
Zu reden so, daß er aus heiliger Fülle  
Wie der Weingott, thörig göttlich  
Und gesezlos sie die Sprache der Reinsten giebt  
Verständlich den Guten, aber mit Recht  
Die Achtungslosen mit Blindheit schlägt

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<sup>48</sup> In an earlier version of the poem, the name “Rousseau” does not appear, suggesting, as Jochen Schmidt points out, that the “dir” of this stanza could also apply to the subject of its dedication: the name “Vater Heinze,” replaced in a later version by “Isaak von Sinclair.” If this were the case, then it presents a compelling argument for reading this stanza alongside the final stanza of the poem. For our purposes, the connection will have to remain implicit.

Die entweihenden Knechte, wie nenn ich den Fremden?

(ll. 139-149)

This passage has been a focal point for some of the most insightful interpretations of the hymn. The main question that interests critics concerns the significance of Rousseau. It may well be, as Hölderlin's first editor, Norbert von Hellingrath, suggested, that the relationship between Hölderlin and Rousseau would have a lot to teach us about the cultural history of Romanticism. And yet, Rousseau remains an enigmatic character. Bernard Böschstein implicitly associates Rousseau's "lawlessness" with the danger of revolutionary fanaticism. For de Man, by contrast, this passage, and the lines that precede it, represents a "movement of surprised retraction, the gesture of someone who has just incautiously touched a live flame (ll. 154-55), and then retires to the repose of a contemplative inwardness" ("The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Hölderlin" 41-42). As a historical fact, Rousseau's writings both inspired the rebellious spirit of revolution—and eventually led to his exile and persecution. The allusion to the *Cinquième Promenade* in this passage places the figure of Rousseau within the context of his *retreat* from political action. Given such biographical facts, it is far from clear whether Rousseau belongs to the same category as the "lawless" *Schwärmer*—or represents a model of measured restraint.

While most critics tend to focus on the significance of Rousseau, one need not decide on the meaning of this figure to appreciate the way in which the description of Rousseau's speech as at once "lawless" and intelligible provides a model for the language of the hymn itself. Rousseau is one who speaks "aus heiliger Fülle / Wie der Weingott." At one level, Rousseau's speech seems to represent the very opposite of

the language of sober self-restraint. Possessed, it would seem, of ecstatic Dionysian fervor, his language is rather “thörig göttlich / und gesezlos.” As commentators observe, the reference to Dionyosos, as well as the word “gesezlos,” can be read as an allusion to Pindar, whose “dithyrambic” rhythms Horace famously described by way of an analogy with the lawlessness of a rushing current.<sup>49</sup> Like the river Rhein, Pindar is thus figured as a *Stromgeist*. Indeed, the term “lawless” becomes a conventional conceit for the poetry of original genius, as for example in Klopstock.<sup>50</sup> Within the context of eighteenth-century *Genie* aesthetics, Pindar's lawless dithyrambs are the paradigm of *freie Rhythmen*: verse “freed” of the constraints of regular measure.

The idea of “freedom” implied in the conception of *freie Rhythmen* as “lawless” is merely a negative one, however: freedom as freedom *from* constraint. Hölderlin's poetry proceeds from a different idea of freedom, one not incompatible with measure—albeit measure of a different order. This other kind of “measure” also finds its model in Rousseau, described as one who “speaks” but also one who “hears.” Rousseau's language is wild and “lawless,” and yet “Verständlich den Guten, aber mit Recht / Die Achtungslosen mit Blindheit schlägt / Die entweihenden Knechte.” The lines follow a peculiar logic: is Rousseau's speech intelligible to the good *because* they are good, or are the good only good insofar as they understand, in contrast to those who claim to understand and are in fact mere “slaves”? The confusion of cause and effect creates its own kind of lawless confusion, but one that echoes the inversion

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<sup>49</sup> See commentary by Beissner and Schmidt.

<sup>50</sup> Klopstock, “Auf meine Freunde” (1747): “*Willst du Strophen werden, o Lied? Oder / Ununterwürfig, Pindars Gesängen gleich ...*”. In the revised version of the poem, “Wingolf” (1767), these lines appear as: “*Willst du Strophen werden, o*

of “hören” und “reden” that breaks over the previous line. How is it that the gift of hearing is interchangeable with the gift of speaking? How is it that “reden” follows from “hören”?

As Rainer Nägele suggests, the “Achtungslosen” are those who believe they are free, but are really slaves because they are not able to “hear” the language of the purest. “Hören” would thus imply both “hearing” and “obeying.” By contrast, the “Good” are those who “hear,” and because they “obey,” are actually free. The relationship between the “Achtungslosen” and the “Good” thus turns on the paradox of freedom: those who think they are free, striving for autonomy, are actually slaves, while true autonomy is the freedom to obey the law. “Achten auf die Sprache,” by contrast, would mean “to hear” and “to obey” language *as a gift*, that is, as something given and as something foreign. In fact, these lines suggest a double gift: Rousseau is given the gift to hear and to speak, and in turn “lawlessly” gives the language of the purest. The economy of giving and receiving is thus inverted in the same way as “hearing” and “speaking.”

In Hölderlin’s hymn, the relationship between the self and its other is modeled in language, where the address to an other provides a means of addressing the self. “To hear” would also mean: to obey the law as something “given.” Nägele’s reading of the stanza is particularly sensitive on this point: “Beides, hören und reden, sind Gaben, von anderswoher gegeben, und so ist auch die Fülle, aus der der Redende die Sprache gibt.” The gift “to speak” follows the gift “to hear” because, as “gifts,” both speaking and hearing issue from someplace foreign—“von anderswoher.” To obey the law as

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*Haingesang? / Willst du gesetzlos, Ossians Schwunge gleich ...*”

something given is the very antithesis of “lawlessness” and “madness.” And yet, as something “given,” the source of language remains foreign. What it “communicates” is nothing but its own foreignness: “Törig ist die Sprache und das Geben der Sprache, weil die Sprache nichts sagt in ihrer reinen Sprachlichkeit. Als gesetzlos gegebene ist sie die Bedingung des Gesetzes”(66). Language is “mad” and “lawless,” Nägele claims, because it communicates nothing but its own condition as language in the form of its own law.

Extending Nägele’s observation, one could argue that “language” in this context is both lawful and lawless. Indeed, the very “lawlessness” of Rousseau’s speech—like the “lawless” rhythms of Hölderlin’s hymn—actually obeys its own kind of measure. This has consequences for how we read the term *Schwärmer* in the poem’s eighth strophe and the concept of self-consciousness that underlies it. In order to fully appreciate the significance of this strophe, however, it is necessary to review several of the most influential interpretations of Hölderlin’s hymn. Among these, Paul de Man’s reading of “Der Rhein” is perhaps the most illuminating, not only for what it says, but also for what de Man struggles to fully articulate in his approach to Hölderlin. Returning to this poem in several essays over the course of his career, de Man’s reading continued to evolve and change over time. What is it about this poem that de Man found so compelling—and so frustrating? For our purposes, this question less important for what it says about de Man than for what it reveals about Hölderlin’s poem. In the repeated efforts to read “Der Rhein,” de Man stumbles upon the central thematic conflict of the poem, which concerns the danger of a (potentially negative) kind of enthusiasm (or *Schwärmerei*), and the necessity of

maintaining distance from the “source.” At the same time, what causes de Man to stumble, one could say, is the recognition that the “error” of enthusiasm is not only unavoidable, but necessary.

To help make sense of this paradox—the notion of a necessary error—I then turn to Hans-Jost Frey’s reading of the poem. Like de Man, Frey focuses on the figure of Rousseau as one who “speaks” and “writes.” For Frey, the allusion to Rousseau places Hölderlin’s poem in relation to a foreign text, much in the same way that Rousseau’s text explicitly thematizes the distance that separates immediate experience from the narration of experience. The distance between texts, like the distance between immediate experience and its narration, takes the form of a necessary excess.

Bringing Frey’s notion of “necessary excess” together with de Man’s reading of “Der Rhein,” which emphasizes the necessity of a certain kind of error, I then return to the eighth strophe of Hölderlin’s hymn. This strophe has long been read in terms of Hölderlin’s early critique of Fichte’s absolute *I*. However, I suggest that it represents not just a critique, but also a *positive* contribution to the philosophy of self-consciousness. In describing the relationship between gods and men, this strophe defines *Schwärmerei* precisely in the same terms that de Man and Frey discover in their readings: as a necessary kind of error or excess. The idea that the gods “need” men can be read as an “argument” for a kind of thinking that exceeds the limits of reason (what Kant identified with the *Schwärmerei* of “intellectual intuition”). That Hölderlin’s “argument” is figured in poetry, however, rather than in the language of philosophy, is evidence of the potential Hölderlin saw in poetry for the kind of thinking that Kant excluded from philosophical critique.

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De Man reads the course of the river as an allegory for the dynamic of self-consciousness: “A violent moment of youthful hubris is followed by a return to a reflective mood, whereby the earlier impulse is recollected in tranquility, in a mood that suggests the Wordsworthian definition of the language of poetry” (“The Riddle of Hölderlin” 208-9). Returning to this poem is several different essays over the course of his career, de Man identifies the drive toward the east with a “pantheistic” urge, the “longing for the immediate possession of the natural object” (“Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition” 113). Elsewhere de Man describes the movement toward Asia in terms of the danger of “enthusiasm” and “heroic action”: “[B]ecause heroic action (that is, in conformity with the source) makes us too much the equal of the gods, it signifies our destruction, calls down upon us the sacred lightning which reduces us to ashes” (“The Image of Rousseau” 36).<sup>51</sup>

By contrast, the moment of “reversal,” when the river flows back to the West, would represent an instance of sober self-reflection and self-preservation.

Consciousness, which is the ‘sentiment’ of self (‘fühlen’), is like an obstacle being put in the way of the enthusiasm that draws man toward the sacred in order preserve him on the earth—precisely as the banks of the river Rhine, excavated by the river itself in its desire for the infinite, become the curb that keeps it from hurling itself directly into the abyss.

Self-consciousness is therefore what preserves us on the earth and protects us from a catastrophe like the one that destroyed Greece. (“The Image of Rousseau” 36)

Something—de Man calls it an “obstacle”—halts the river in its course and causes it to reverse direction.<sup>51</sup> Whatever the nature of this obstacle—and it remains mysterious—it serves a restraining function, causing the river to bend back in a westerly direction.

While de Man argues that the westerly course of the river represents a gesture of self-preservation, he also implies that the river’s youthful folly is a necessary stage

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<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that these terms directly echo those of de Man’s reading of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” (“Patterns of Temporality”), as discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>52</sup> In an earlier essay, de Man acknowledges that the nature of this reversal remains somewhat mysterious. “It is not really within the power of the Rhine itself, as the entity possessed of the particular destiny of the Western world, to reverse this original direction. It takes the intervention of a higher divine power which controls the half-god Rhine as much as the Greek destiny or *moira* dominates divine and human power in the *Iliad*. The intervention of this power, merely designated as ‘a God’ bends the Rhine back in the other direction and forces it away from its desire to escape from what it is (the spirit of the West), back into its actual destiny and its own being. To the Rhine itself, this merciful intervention must appear unbearable, a tragic death and defeat, the most difficult sacrifice of all” (114). At this point, de Man’s text becomes convoluted. As the editors of the Princeton Typescript note, the RCC version “continues this sentence with a semicolon and the words ‘renouncing one’s drive to,’ at which point the fragment ends” (125). In the Princeton Typescript, the text continues with a discussion of the moment of reversal, or *Umkehr*: “In this poem, concerned with the mystery of origin (‘Ein Rätsel ist reinentsprungenes...’) rather than with the mystery of the return upon oneself, this decisive moment is given little development and is not seen, so to speak, from the point of view of the river. We see the Rhine in its youthful violence as it races toward Asia; we see the intervention of the god and then suddenly, almost without transition, the mature Vater Rhein fulfilling its destiny far away from its source among other cities of Europe (stanza 6). At other places in his work, however, Hölderlin has given insight into the nature of this reversal, which he calls ‘vaterländische Umkehr,’ the return towards one’s own nation” (115).



in the course of its development. “With great strength, Hölderlin asserts that it is the presence of this stage which reveals the superiority of the Rhine over the other rivers: those who have not felt this urge do not have the same claim to freedom and nobility” (“Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition” 114). Or again, in a later iteration: “[T]his experience is far from being in vain. In revealing the danger to us, it makes us more experienced (*erfahren*) like the Rhine at the end of its course” (“The Image of Rousseau” 36). In other words, the youthful enthusiasm of the river is indeed an error, but a necessary one.

De Man’s reading of “Der Rhein” posits an analogy between the river, or, to be more specific, the course of the river, and the figure of Rousseau, who is named explicitly in the poem’s tenth strophe. For de Man, a great deal is at stake in this analogy. Both the river and Rousseau represent a certain dynamic of self-consciousness. The critical question is whether Rousseau is like the unnamed *Schwärmer* of the eighth strophe. Arguing explicitly against Bernard Böschstein, de Man insists that Hölderlin’s Rousseau needs to be regarded as a separate type. Like the *Schwärmer*, Rousseau “seeks and obeys the source.” But he differs from the Promethean hero insofar as he is forbidden to seize the fire directly. “On the contrary, he must seek the source not in the fire from heaven but on this earth which is his dwelling and his mother” (“The Image of Rousseau” 37).

Where “The Image of Rousseau” argues forcefully for viewing Rousseau apart from the figure of the *Schwärmer*, de Man’s earlier writings on this poem are more ambivalent on this point. In the earlier essay (“Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition”), de Man seems to imply that there is an affinity between the figure of the

*Schwärmer* and Rousseau. The *Schwärmer* is one “who cannot endure ‘inequality’ (*Ungleiches*),” de Main writes,

‘Ungleiches’ ... is the term that makes the transition to Rousseau: it alludes to the title of his early work *De l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les homes* which, more than any other of his writings, has helped to prepare the French Revolution. Rousseau’s political ideal of equality appears as the most modern form of the pantheistic longing for unity with the natural object ... It is equivalent to the drive of the Rhine eastward, equally necessary but equally dangerous: it leads Rousseau, in stanza 8, ‘to break his own house,’ ‘to curse what he loves most’ and ‘to bury himself and his own child under ruins,’ events descriptive of the historical upheavals that swept Europe in the wake of the egalitarian ideal. The most dangerous consequences of Rousseau’s message appear in stanza 10, where a distinction is made between the necessary danger inherent in the violence of all thought at its source and a different threat: original thought being misused by those base in soul (*die entweihenden Knechte*) who, in their blindness, undertake to destroy the source itself: the rabble that threw stones at Rousseau and forced him to flee or, on the historical level, the Terreur that corrupted the French Revolution” (116).

To put this somewhat differently, de Man insists on the difference between the Rousseau of the “Romantic Tradition”—the Rousseau we have come to associate with the politics of revolution—and another, more reserved figure. The Rousseau whose

dangerous ideas inspired the spirit of revolutionary violence resembles the river in its initial course toward the east. But Rousseau was eventually persecuted and forced into exile on account of his revolutionary writings. The fact that Hölderlin's hymn alludes to the *Cinquième Promenade* of the *Rêveries* places the figure of Rousseau within the context of his *retreat* from political action after the stoning at *Môtiers*.<sup>53</sup>

Posterity has primarily remembered ... Rousseau ... as the first to give political content to the pantheistic ideal. It is as such that he appears to be the very founder of romanticism. But Rousseau is seen here in a different perspective, reaching well beyond the youthful impulse of the *Treatise on Inequality*. Stanza 11 evokes the Rousseau of the *Rêveries* and of the end of the *Confessions* ... This new Rousseau is described by a specific mythological allusion to Herkules: he is the man who carried the heaven on his shoulders. (116-17)

In marked contrast to the later essay, here de Man sees an affinity between Rousseau and Herkules. Whereas later he identifies Rousseau with a return to the "earth," in the earlier essay, he distinguishes Rousseau from the "sons of the earth," which he here reads as an epithet for the Greeks. "In contrast to them, Rousseau is the man turned in the opposite direction: not towards the *Pan* of the earth and nature, but towards the translucent and mobile heavens of human consciousness and existence, as they *oppose*

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<sup>53</sup> Given such biographical facts, it is far from clear whether or not Rousseau furnishes a model for the poet, or serves as a counter-example for the dangers of speaking *too freely*. The figure of Socrates, by contrast, alluded to only indirectly in the penultimate stanza, seems to embody the opposite stance of one who remains sober throughout the night—and yet, as a philosopher, even one who speaks in riddles, represents an equally problematic model for the poet.

to material substance. The essence of Unity, which Western man had always placed in the natural object, becomes for Rousseau located in man's consciousness of himself as existent" (117).

The differences between de Man's earlier and later interpretations are subtle, but perhaps indicative of a deeper tension. Both interpretations insist on a specific error, but the nature of this error differs slightly from one to the next. In the earlier essay, de Man characterizes this error as a "pantheistic" longing for unity. Rousseau differs from the *Schwärmer* precisely insofar as he turns away from the "Pan of the earth and nature." The later essay associates the error of the *Schwärmer* more explicitly with the tendency to identify with the sensuous object.<sup>54</sup> In the earlier essay, Rousseau represents Hölderlin's turn away from the "romantic tradition": "Hölderlin thus describes Rousseau and himself in a manner which puts them beyond the romantic tradition ... Hölderlin himself is not the poet of this truly nationally Western art, but rather the poet of the *Umkehr*, of the movement by which the romantic sensibility turns away from its original ideal" (119). Describing Hölderlin as the "poet of the *Umkehr*," de Man's essay concludes by acknowledging that we do not have a clear vision of what such poetry would actually look like.

The later essay locates the moment of "reversal" in the figure of Rousseau himself and in the particular scene of the *Rêveries* to which Hölderlin's hymn alludes: Rousseau's account of the happiness he felt on the Island of St. Pierre, with its famous description of the "sentiment de l'existence." De Man insists that the "sentiment de

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<sup>54</sup> De Man's account of the "sensuous object" in the later essay is anticipated in the earlier essay in the curious discussion of Antigone and the figure of Niobe.

l'existence" Rousseau describes differs from mere sense perception. "The consciousness that appears here no longer emanates from objects but rather proceeds entirely from within ourselves" ("Image of Rousseau" 38). The nature of the distinction is critical.

The German word 'fühlen' ... can mean sense perception as well as 'sentiment.' The fate of thought is at stake in this ambiguity. For as we have seen this double feeling (sentiment-sensation) constitutes the obstacle that restrains the earthly creature in its rush toward being. Consciousness is founded by colliding with sensuously apprehended things which keep us at a distance from being. From an ontological point of view, sensuous things are therefore those that are the farthest from being, even though they play an essential role in the dialectic that preserves the earthly entities in the mode of existence proper to them. Hence there is a temptation to grant them an ontological priority over nonsensuous entities, and to make sense perception (the immediate contact with the object) into the ontological experience par excellence ... In giving in to this temptation, we commit a fundamental error, for we grant being to the entity that is most devoid of it. We put a screen of objects which have become opaque and static between being and ourselves, and thus cut ourselves off from the source forever; it is the forgetting of the source (often called incorrectly the forgetting of Being) that characterizes our present civilization" (38-39).

Whereas earlier de Man had described "error" in terms of the pantheistic longing for

unity, in this essay, “error” is defined as the identification with the sensuous object. And yet the sensuous object is a necessary “obstacle” that allows for a different kind of consciousness to emerge. But why?

The nature of the sensuous object as a necessary obstacle begins to make sense in light of de Man’s reading of the Fifth *Rêverie* and the importance he ascribes to the sound of water as a sense perception that precipitates the higher-order consciousness Rousseau calls the “sentiment de l’existence.”

It must be possible to apprehend things in such a way that they may appear as secondary in relation to a more fundamental entity that supports them and subtends them and which nevertheless is not being itself, which always remains inaccessible. This is precisely what happens in Rousseau’s Fifth *Rêverie*. The sound of the water that Rousseau perceives (or, it would be better to say, of which he has the ‘sentiment’) is the sound caused by the water which strives to plunge in the absolute depth of being but is prevented from doing so by the protective intercession of the earth; this sound of the water which Rousseau has ‘the sweet talent to hear’ ... l. 143), more penetrating than sense perception because more in conformity with being, apprehends objects as contained in an entity which has a definite ontological priority over them; this entity is called the earth—‘Erde’ or, often, ‘Mutter Erde.’ (39)

The “sentiment de l’existence” is a feeling, but it is more than a sense perception. At the same time, Rousseau’s contact with the sensuous object is what makes possible the

“the protective intercession of the earth.” In contrast to the earlier essay, where “earth” represented the pantheistic striving toward unity (the identification with the natural object), here de Man identifies “earth” with Rousseau’s “sentiment de l’existence,” or what he calls the “mediated apprehension of being in inwardness” (40). “Earth is precisely the going beyond the obstacle of sense perception toward being, a going beyond which remains all the same rigorously enclosed within the limits of the mediated. The ‘earth’ of Hölderlin ... designates the ontological priority of consciousness over the object” (40).

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The notion of a necessary “obstacle” might be another way to understand what Hans-Jost Frey, in his reading of the hymn, describes as the logic of “necessary excess.” Reading “Der Rhein” alongside Rousseau’s Fifth Promenade, Frey questions the nature of the relationship between the two texts. “By referring to the foreign text, the poem admits to being dependent on it and thereby questions its own integrity” (139). Instead of simply appropriating the foreign text, however, Hölderlin’s text preserves the foreign as foreign. In this way, the relationship between the two texts is actually analogous to the relationship, in Rousseau’s text, between experience and its narration. It is important, Frey argues, that Rousseau is named not only as a character, but as one who writes. “Hölderlin reads this text not just as information. He is interested in the relationship between the narrator and the narrated. Rousseau, not as someone presently experiencing by as someone who remembers past experiences” (144).

As Frey reads it, the “problem of the Fifth Walk is the representation of perfection” (157). Focusing on a central passage in which Rousseau recalls his experience on the island of Saint Pierre, Frey identifies in Rousseau’s text a split between experience, which is non-linguistic, and its narration, a relation he interprets in terms of a tension between plenitude and excess. Reflecting back, Rousseau describes the perfect happiness he felt on the island as an experience of “self-sufficiency.”

De quoi jouit-on dans une pareille situation? De rien d’extérieur à soi, de rien sinon de soi-même & de sa propre existence; tant que cet état dure, on se suffit à soi-même comme Dieu. Le sentiment de l’existence dépouillé de toute autre affection est par lui-même un sentiment précieux de contentement & de paix, qui suffiroit seul pour rendre cette existence chere, & douce à qui sauroit écarter de soi toutes les impressions sensuelles & terrestres qui viennent sans cesse nous en distraire & en troubler ici-bas la douceur (*OC* 10: 443-444).

In explaining what he experienced on the island, however, Rousseau nevertheless undermines the claim that the original experience was one of self-sufficiency. As Frey points out, the original experience actually requires the explanation: it is a supplement to something that seems to be perfect on its own, but is not. As Frey explains, the happiness Rousseau experienced on the island can only be fully appreciated in its absence, as a looking back.

Since happiness is the absence of shortcomings, one who is happy does not perceive the lack of understanding to be an imperfection. This only



comes into play retrospectively, when it is corrected by the explanation. The explanation bestows this shortcoming on the perfect self-sufficiency of happiness and then constitutes itself as its elimination. Insofar as it adds something that was not previously present, the explanation is necessary. Insofar as what it adds is perfect and complete, it becomes superfluous. It is paradoxically a necessary excess. The second, explanatory part of the Fifth Walk is thus to be incorporated in the entire text, even though it cannot be included. It is an augmentation that comes to the narrative and complements it, even though it should actually be self-sufficient and is not recognizably deficient until it is supplemented. (151)

By adding to an experience that was already perfect unto itself, Rousseau's narration of the experience is superfluous. Paradoxically, however, the explanation is also necessary: without it, Rousseau would not be able to convey the perfect self-sufficiency of the original experience.

In this respect, the narration actually *augments* the original experience.

“[W]hat is remembered in remembering is more than it was in reality. Contrary to first impressions, the relationship between the remembering narrator and the narrative in the Fifth Walk is not nostalgic. The narrative is superior to what was experienced. Narration is a superior experience to what is narrated. The narration, as a representation of what was, is not a makeshift substitute but an escalation. The linguistic rendering of what was is more than what was” (154). Where the original experience was perfect unto itself, the explanation of it records the split between

experience and its narration as something linguistic. In contrast to experience, which is “unmediated presence” (and therefore non-linguistic), narration is not self-sufficient (157). And yet, in representing perfection, narration actually enhances the experience.<sup>55</sup> Although perfection is by nature non-linguistic, it nevertheless “needs” narration.<sup>56</sup>

Returning to the Rousseau stanzas of Hölderlin’s hymn, Frey argues that the allusion to Rousseau’s Fifth Promenade evokes the problem of narration at the center of Rousseau’s text. At the same time, the “representation of perfection” can be understood, in Hölderlin’s text, as an analogy for the relationship between the human and the divine—the subject of the famous eighth strophe. As Frey points out, this theme does not come from Rousseau. Nevertheless, he argues, “Hölderlin apparently has found in Rousseau a certain, obviously exemplary, way of relating the connection to the divine. The Fifth Walk is mentioned just when the sudden realization of the weight of divine power gives way to fear. Rousseau’s text represents the conquering of this fear and the potential of a supportable relationship to the divine ...” (159). Like

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<sup>55</sup> “If it is perfect to be nonlinguistic, then language is a fault that must be overcome to reach perfection. But if language, as the manifestation of perfection, is not a fault, then the absence of language is the fault of perfection, and only language can make it what it is. Both are true: perfection’s absence of language allows it to be direct and is also its fault, that is, the impossibility to manifest itself as perfect. In the mediation that included it, perfection is lost. Language, subjected to perfection, is the necessary but superfluous excess. It is excessive because it is added to the nonlinguistic perfection that survives without it. It loses itself in that it must conceal its characteristic directness to be able to appear to itself” (157-58).

<sup>56</sup> The paradox of perfection Frey identifies with the “scandal of the superfluous.” While he does not remark upon the connection, the word “scandal” is a curiously appropriate analogy for the “transparent obstacle” de Man describes in his reading of the same passage in Rousseau’s Fifth Walk: both evoke the dual sense of a “stumbling block” that is also a “block to stumbling.”

Rousseau's text, Hölderlin's poem reveals the "paradox of the imperfection of the perfect," namely that to "have consciousness of the perfect, there must be imperfection" (163).

In Frey's reading, the original text depends on the foreign text, but also, for that reason, preserves the text as something irreducibly foreign. As Frey demonstrates, the logic of plenitude is also a logic of otherness: the relation between self and other. The "foreign" is both necessary and superfluous: in order to remain "foreign," it must be preserved at a distance, as something external. Translating this reading to the eighth strophe, Frey argues that the relation of gods to humans can be understood in terms of the relation between unmediated plenitude and language, which preserves the difference between gods and humans as a mediating separation. "Mankind is not the complement to God, because He has always been perfect. God does not need mankind because He is lacking something but because of His perfection, which makes it impossible for Him to sense His own perfection" (165). In comparison with God, who is perfect, mankind is superfluous. And yet, just as Rousseau's narration is necessary to augment the original experience, the gods "need" men to help them "feel" the state of their own perfection. "Hölderlin's relationship between mankind and god corresponds to Rousseau's relationship between the narrator and the narrative. Mankind's feeling is an augmentation to the perfection of god, just as narration is an augmentation to the perfection of narrative" (166). At the same time, the logic of a "superfluous but necessary excess" also helps explain the relationship between Hölderlin's text and Rousseau's Fifth Promenade, to which it alludes. "In referring to the other text, the poem makes known that it needs the other discourse, which feels in

its name ... This is why the text, as a perfect whole, pushes beyond itself. It has within it an excess, the reference to the other text. The text flows out in the necessary-superfluous discourse, which it needs although it is not lacking.” (169)

For Frey, the inner logic of Hölderlin’s hymn, including its allusion to Rousseau, is modeled on Rousseau’s own text, and the relation it posits between experience and narration. Expanding upon Frey’s analysis, Rainer Nägele suggests that the gods need an “other” but the other must remain other—otherwise the identification of gods and mortals lapses into fanatical *Schwärmerei*. Although Frey makes no mention of the term *Schwärmerei*, the notion of a “necessary excess” might be one way to understand the paradoxical relationship between lawlessness and freedom in Hölderlin’s hymn. *Schwärmerei* is not only the name for a negative, fanatical mode of freedom, but a constitutive element of the poetic process. Only in its singularity does the “other” remain foreign; only in remaining foreign does it obey the logic of the necessary limit separating gods and men. What this suggests is that any attempt to overcome *Schwärmerei* cannot appropriate the foreign “name” to any other name. But by remaining foreign, the name also remains open—radically singular: a riddle to be interpreted but not resolved. The ability to maintain the distinction separating gods and men—and thus prevent *Schwärmerei*—depends on a notion of irreducible otherness that is itself an instance of *Schwärmerei*. From this point of view, *Schwärmerei* is another name for the “necessary excess” that preserves the separation between gods and men.

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The eighth strophe of *Der Rhein* is typically understood in terms of the dynamic of self-consciousness, a philosophical problem that preoccupied Hölderlin as early as his stay in Jena. Reading this passage alongside the early prose fragment “Urtheil und Seyn” (1795), commentators understand the allusion to the *Schwärmer* in terms of Hölderlin’s critique of Fichte. In this text, Hölderlin was among the first (if not *the* first) to take issue with Fichte’s claim (in the 1794 *Grundlage*) that the absolute is subjective. An initial account of this critique appears in a letter Hölderlin wrote from Jena in January 1795. Speaking of Fichte’s *Grundlage*, Hölderlin writes,

He seeks to get beyond the fact of consciousness *theoretically*, a great many of his remarks show that, and this is just as certainly transcendental, and even more strikingly so, as when the metaphysicians we’ve had up till now have wanted to get beyond the existence of the world—his absolute *I* (=Spinoza’s substance) contains all reality; it is everything & outside it there is nothing; therefore for this absolute *I* there is no object, for otherwise all reality would be in it; but a consciousness without an object is not conceivable, and if I myself am this object then as such I am necessarily limited, even if only in time, and therefore not absolute; therefore no consciousness is conceivable in the absolute *I*, as an absolute *I* I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, therefore the absolute *I* is (for me) nothing. (*Essays and Letters* 48)

As Hölderlin sees it, Fichte takes a transcendental approach to the problem of

consciousness: although Fichte sets out to go beyond Kant, he nevertheless ends up reinstating the same metaphysical dualism between sensibility and the understanding he sought to avoid. Against Fichte, Hölderlin reasons that the absolute *I* cannot have consciousness of itself as a subject without assuming the prior differentiation of subject and object. But this means that the absolute *I* is not, in fact, absolute. In effect, Hölderlin turns Fichte's own reasoning against him, as Frederick Beiser succinctly summarizes:

[I]f the absolute ego contains all reality like Spinoza's substance, then it should be everything, having nothing outside itself; this means that the absolute ego cannot be conscious; but what cannot be conscious cannot be go; and hence Fichte's absolute cannot be subjective ... The suppressed premise of Hölderlin's argument comes from Fichte himself, and more specifically from his 'law of reflection': that to know anything determinate, to be conscious of it as this rather than that, I must oppose it to something; hence to know even myself as an ego, I must oppose myself to a non-ego. This was exactly Fichte's reasoning in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which Hölderlin now turns against him. From the law of reflection Hölderlin draws the conclusion that the ego cannot be absolute. Since to know itself the ego must oppose itself to the non-ego, it follows that the ego cannot be all reality because it must have something outside itself. Hence, on Fichte's own reckoning, the ego must be *finite*, and it becomes nonsense to speak of an *absolute* or *infinite* ego. (*Absolute Idealism* 388)

Apart from its significance for the development of idealist philosophy, Hölderlin's critique of Fichte's absolute *I* helps make sense of the notion, in the eighth strophe of *Der Rhein*, that the gods in some way *need* mortals. The gods represent an undifferentiated unity; like Fichte's absolute *I*, they have no consciousness—they cannot “feel” anything. Although they are perfect, the gods “need” mortals to “feel” in their name, because consciousness requires differentiation, and is therefore radically finite. In his commentary on the hymn, Bernhard Böschstein explains the connection this way, “Die Götter fühlen nichts von selbst, weil sie bei sich selbst die ununterschiedene Einheit sind. Sie fühlen sich erst, indem sie gefühlt werden, von den in sich selber unterschiedenen Sterblichen” (*Hölderlins Rheinhymne* 74). For Böschstein, the relationship between gods and mortals not only echoes Hölderlin's philosophical critique of Fichte; it also defines the central *law* that unites the seemingly disparate series of figures that populate the poem. “Hier ist, in der Mitte der Hymne, das allgemeinste Gesetz ausgesprochen, dem der Rhein, Rousseau und die Weisen unterstehen: jeder vertritt in anderer Art die Gleichzeitigkeit des unmittelbaren Zusammenhangs mit der Gottheit und der Getrenntheit von ihr, weil darin der Gottesdienst besteht” (74).

Extending Böschstein's argument, one could say that the “Gesetz dieses Gesanges” is none other than the “law” implied in the eighth strophe of the hymn: the necessary limit that both separates and unites gods and mortals. But this law turns on a paradox: it is only in their *separation* from the gods that mortals are in the best position to serve the divine. In terms of Hölderlin's Fichte critique, consciousness is only possible as a kind of “resistance.” As Böschstein explains, “Das Bewusstsein

wird ... als Erfahrung eines Widerstands dargestellt. Einen Widerstand kann nur das Mangelwesen empfinden, das um sich her anderes, von ihm Verschiedenes findet” (78). This implies that the gods “need” mortals to feel. Put differently, however, it suggests that consciousness depends not (or not only) on the split between the I and the not-I, but *also* on the productive tension this separation creates. As Böschstein puts it, this resistance “setzt ein fortgesetztes unendliches Streben voraus, die eigenen Schranken zu durchbrechen. Von da her wird auf andere Weise verständlich, warum der Rhein in den Grenzen der Satzungswelt niemals das Sehnen nach seinem Ursprung vergessen darf: weil er dann ohne Bewusstsein wäre und dem Vater, an dessen Stelle er führen soll, nicht mehr dienen könnte” (78). In terms of the poem’s central figure, the initial direction of the river Rhein as it flows wildly toward the east represents both a rebellious, potentially self-destructive tendency—as well as a *critical stage* in the river’s development into the “father” of cities.

By this logic, what first appears as an “error” is in fact a necessary stage on the path to “consciousness.” This is a separate but related outcome of Hölderlin’s critique of Fichte, and has implications for how we read the eighth strophe of “Der Rhein,” and the poem as a whole. The notion of “necessary error” is not an integral part of Hölderlin’s critique of Fichte, but a consequence of his own *positive* account of the absolute as it is developed in the early fragment “Urtheil und Seyn.” Against Fichte, Hölderlin identifies the absolute with the unity of subject and object—what he calls



“Being.”<sup>57</sup> Like Kant, Hölderlin concedes that the ground of consciousness is not attainable theoretically. But he suggests that it is knowable aesthetically—through intellectual intuition. By removing the “as if” clause that Kant attaches to aesthetic contemplation, Beiser explains, Hölderlin makes “the aesthetic not merely a relative principle or a way of looking at things but a constitutive principle about reality itself” (379). As Beiser reads it, Hölderlin’s “Urtheil und Seyn” can be seen as an attempt “to provide something like a transcendental deduction of the aesthetic ideas by showing how they are a necessary condition for the proper functioning of reason and the understanding.” As he further explains,

It is only the aesthetic ideas ... that set the proper limits to these faculties, preventing them from self-destruction and protecting them against skepticism. Reason will not produce anything rational, and the understanding will not create anything understandable ... unless each of these faculties are directed by aesthetic sense. This is because reason and the understanding *presuppose* but can never *experience* the idea of the whole. Both of these faculties are essentially discursive or analytical, proceeding from the parts to the whole. They operate effectively, however, only if there is some prior knowledge of the whole, some intuitive synthetic power that proceeds from the whole to its parts. It is just this synthetic capacity that is provided by aesthetic sense. (395-96)

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<sup>57</sup> For a more extended analysis of this text and its significance within the context of absolute idealism, see Beiser, *German Idealism* and Henrich, *The Course of*

The difficulty of Hölderlin's approach, from a philosophical point of view, is that it fails to provide an adequate picture of what aesthetic intuition actually looks like. As Beiser explains, however,

The problem still remains how it is possible to justify an aesthetic intuition. How do we explain or verify its content, what it purports to know? Here Hölderlin, like any artist, confronts a grave dilemma. To explain the meaning of an aesthetic intuition, and to establish the truth of its content, it is necessary to give it a determinate sense or to put it in more concrete terms; for, on its own, it amount to only a vague sense or feeling for the whole. (396)

Indeed, the dilemma Hölderlin faces is whether it is possible to offer a philosophical account of aesthetic intuition—or only an aesthetic one. “Hölderlin's solution favors the poetic over the philosophical,” Beiser concedes, “and it is indeed part of his general program to establish the priority of the aesthetic” (397). Turning from Hölderlin's philosophical fragments to his literary work, Beiser traces the outlines of Hölderlin's Fichte critique in the attempt to articulate a specifically *organic* relationship between the subjective and objective. Rather than viewing this relationship in causal terms, Beiser claims, “Hölderlin stresses how both the subjective and objective become what they are only through the other, or how each realizes its nature only through the other” (400). In the dynamic interplay between subjective and objective, Hölderlin's literary work not only extends his earlier, philosophical critique of Fichte's absolute *I*, but also takes aim at the concept of infinite striving, as

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*Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin.*

articulated in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. The problem is that Fichte's idealism makes humanity into the sole end of creation. "Rather than seeing nature as something inherently alive and rational, as a system of ends existing apart from human activity, Fichte viewed it as a mere obstacle to the striving of the will, as a mechanism whose rationality had to be forcefully imposed on it by the ego." While Hölderlin admired certain aspects of Fichte's ethical vision of the world, he objected to the view of nature that attended it. "Hölderlin did not deny—as Schelling will later stress—that human self-consciousness can be seen as the culmination of nature, the highest organization of its powers," Beiser explains, "But for him it was also important to see that human self-consciousness is only one part of the universe, which greatly transcends it" (401). For Hölderlin, in contrast to Fichte, the idea that humanity is the sole end of nature is tantamount to hubris. Human self-consciousness may be the culmination of nature, but it is not the sole end of creation.

Reading Hölderlin's unfinished tragedy *Der Tod des Empedokles* in these terms, Beiser argues that the figure of Empedocles represents the hubris of Fichte's moral philosophy.

Since nature does whatever he commands, [Empedokles] imagines that he himself is a god. But, of course, such hubris is the cause of his fall. Empedocles eventually realizes that rather than being a god himself, he is really only the mouthpiece of the gods, whose powers infinitely surpass his own. He finally sees that his self is not the end of creation, but only one part and moment of an infinite cosmos. To achieve unity with nature means not only having power over it but surrendering

oneself to it; it means losing one's individuality and returning to the universal whole. Hence Empedocles sees no more deserving fate for himself than leaping into the crater of Mount Etna. (401)

Recognizing his error, Empedocles plunges himself into the volcano. This leads Beiser to conclude that "Ultimately, both Fichte and Hölderlin shared the same goal: subject-object identity, the unity of the self with nature. But they had diametrically opposed means of achieving it: for Fichte, it demanded the will's titanic struggle to subdue nature; for Hölderlin, it required an intuitive sympathy with nature, a feeling of oneness with it" (401).

Beiser's general argument, that Hölderlin's Empedocles drama re-casts Fichte's subject-based philosophy in terms of titanic struggle, seems plausible. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that Empedocles' death represents a *tragic* fate: instead of the error of pantheism, he succumbs to the hubris of heroism. While avoiding the temptation of comparing himself with the gods, Empedocles sacrifices himself to the One-All. It is an extreme choice. The fact that Hölderlin never finished this tragedy should give some indication of the ambivalence of self-sacrifice as a solution to the problem of Fichte's moral hubris.

Beiser's interpretation of Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion* is more sensitive on this point. Reading the novel not only as a response to Fichte, but also as an attempt to reconcile Fichte's concept of striving with Spinoza's philosophy of nature as substance. "Fichte wanted the ego to be everything, because the aim of infinite striving is for nature to disappear; but Spinoza demanded that nature be everything, because he saw the self as a mode of the single infinite substance" (402). Instead of favoring one

or the other, however, Hölderlin attempts to chart a middle course between them. He does not simply reject Fichte, for, as Beiser points out, he “could not help but admire the humanism behind Fichte’s vision: like Prometheus, the Fichtean ego went to do battle against fate, and in doing so it rescued the powers of reason and freedom ... We cannot forever live in a state of harmony with nature, and we cannot simply reconcile ourselves to the necessity of nature, as Spinoza would like, because that would not foster the growth of the powers most characteristic of our humanity” (402-3).

In order to incorporate Fichte’s infinite striving, Hölderlin reinterprets it in terms of the Platonic concept of love.

Striving is not sheer will power, the obedience to an ethical command, as in Fichte, but the soul’s spontaneous longing for the eternal. Love unites the infinite and the finite, pure activity and limitation, because it involves not only a striving for the eternal that transcends any specific limit, but also a feeling that requires some obstacle or resistance. The concept of love explains the origin of limitation and finitude, Hölderlin maintains, because love involves feeling, and feeling is possible only because it is lacking something and something restricts it. (403)

Not only did Fichte’s concept of infinite striving threaten to destroy nature, Fichte “did battle against the passions and instincts, attempting to extirpate them to prepare the ground for the total triumph of reason” (403). To counter the nihilism of Fichte’s approach, Hölderlin turns to Spinoza’s concept of nature. In the historical schema Hölderlin inherits from Kant and Schiller, Spinoza’s original unity with nature is a lost ideal, while Fichte’s concept of infinite striving the represents the struggle to regain

paradise. Hölderlin's solution is to de-temporalize this theory. "Rather than placing one standpoint in the past and the other in the future, Hölderlin thinks that both belong to extreme but recurring phases of individual development, neither of which is more mature and wise than the other. These stages are not progressive, as if one supersedes the other, but they are circular, moving between opposite extremes" (405). In this revised scheme, Fichte and Spinoza represent two poles of an "eccentric orbit," to invoke a phrase Hölderlin uses to describe the course of life. More than the alternation of opposed tendencies, however, the eccentric path follows a uniquely personal direction. "Ultimately," Beiser explains, "Hölderlin makes the validity of philosophy depend on the individual's own choice" (405). In playing this "final trump card" Hölderlin effectively establishes the "the primacy of the aesthetic" as "the priority of literature over philosophy" (406), which is better able to represent the personal factors of experience. While this doctrine may seem radically subjective, Beiser concludes, it does not lapse into the same subjective idealism Hölderlin had sought to avoid in Fichte. To be so, however, it is important that Hölderlin's "eccentric orbit" is not only "personal" but "natural," "reflecting not only the spirit of the individual but also the movements of the universe itself" (406).

As Beiser suggests, Hölderlin's attempts to reconcile Fichte's concept of infinite striving and Spinoza's concept of the unity of nature eventually led him away from philosophy. Turning toward literature, Hölderlin was in a better position to represent the priority of the aesthetic. Beiser's commentary is far from comprehensive, however: while he offers a detailed account of Hölderlin's philosophical writings, he

merely scratches the surface of Hölderlin's aesthetic work. His suggestion that the task of poetry consists in showing "how one's personal development mirrors the movement of the universe itself" (406), while compelling, remains somewhat abstract. But it also offers a potentially fruitful point of departure for a deeper engagement with Hölderlin's poetry. The alternation between the individual and the universal might be one way to understand the symbolic interplay between the figure of the river Rhein, and the poem that bears the same name. The river functions not only as a something particular and concrete—the name for a specific geographical feature—but also as an allegory for the development of civilization, serving as a historical figure (or a spatial-temporal image) for the dynamic relationship between subject and object. At the same time, the development of the river helps explain why error—including the error of *Schwärmerei*—is not only unavoidable, but even necessary. Where Kant associated *Schwärmerei* with fanatical thought exceeding the limits of reason, for Hölderlin it is not (or not only) something dangerous, but a constitutive dimension of the poetic process. But this may mean that Hölderlin's poetic thought encompasses precisely the idea Kant found most fanatical: in the figure of the river Rhein, Hölderlin's hymn suggests that intellectual intuition is possible—if not theoretically, then perhaps aesthetically: in poetry.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE MEASURE OF *GESCHIK*: SOPHOKLES

Hölderlin returned from France in the summer of 1802 under mysterious circumstances. To friends and family, he had already begun to exhibit the signs of mental disturbance. During the next three years, he would complete his greatest works, including the *vaterländische Gesänge*. In the same period, Hölderlin also translated Sophocles's *Oedipus* and *Antigone* and Pindar's odes.<sup>58</sup> Hölderlin viewed his translations of Sophocles, published in April 1804, as one of his greatest achievements, and even sent a copy to Goethe. They were not well received. Among those in Weimar, Hölderlin's translations were viewed as wild and awkward—the antithesis of the eighteenth-century ideal of harmonious classicism. Among friends, they were seen as further evidence of Hölderlin's faltering mental faculties.

Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles were a shock to contemporary sensibilities. Even to modern readers, they sometimes appear clumsy and—if not “mad”—curiously literal. For one, they contain a number of blatant errors, probably owing to the fact that Hölderlin was not fluent in Greek, and relied on a flawed edition

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<sup>58</sup> Although Hölderlin completed the translations in 1803, he may have begun work on them in Bordeaux—or even earlier. The *Stuttgarterfoliobuch* contains an early draft translation of the first two strophes of the first choral *stasimon* from *Antigone*, probably composed in the fall of 1800 (FHA 16, 55-60). Alternatively, Hölderlin's initial interest in *Antigone* may have originated during the Homburg period while he was working on his *Empedokles*.



of the original.<sup>59</sup> They are also drastically literal at times, as for example in the opening dialogue between Antigone and Ismene.

Ἰσμήνη

τί δ' ἔστι; δηλοῖς γάρ τι καλχαίνουσ' ἔπος.

Was aber ist? Du offenbarst nämlich eines zornesrote ein Wort.

(ln. 20)

ISEMENE.

Was ist's, du scheinst ein rothes Wort zu färben? (ln. 21 )<sup>60</sup>

The awkward figure of a “red word” might be taken as evidence of a lack of grace and skill in Hölderlin’s abilities as a translator (as it was by Voß and Goethe).

Nevertheless, Hölderlin’s clumsy translation (also) brings out something of the awkwardness of the original. Indeed, this may have been Hölderlin’s intent. In letters to his publisher, Friedrich Wilmans, Hölderlin writes that he sought to “correct” the original Greek text by bringing out the foreign, wild element inherent in it. In terms that directly echo the letters to Böhlendorff, Hölderlin describes this “other” aspect of

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<sup>59</sup> Sattler identifies the source text as the 1555 Juntina edition, published in two volumes in Greek and Latin in 1781 (FHA 16, 63). Sattler’s edition of Hölderlin’s *Oedipus* and *Antigone* includes, along with the first-published version of Hölderlin’s text, a transcription of the Juntina edition with interlinear translations.

<sup>60</sup> The lineation of Hölderlin’s translation differs from the original. Whenever possible, I cite the lines from the Juntina edition as well as Hölderlin’s translation. When I refer to the Greek text only, I cite the lineation of the original. When I refer

Greek poetry as *das Orientalische* (“the oriental”).

Ich hoffe, die griechische Kunst, die uns fremd ist, durch  
Nationalkonvenienz und Fehler, mit denen sie sich immer herum  
beholfen hat, dadurch lebendiger, als gewöhnlich dem Publikum  
darzustellen, daß ich das Orientalische, das sie verläugnet hat, mehr  
heraushebe, und ihren Kunstfehler, wo er workommt, verbessere. (28  
September 1803; StA VI, 434)

In bringing out the Oriental element inherent to the language of the Greek original, Hölderlin thereby seeks to make the original more “lively.”<sup>61</sup> In seeking to bring out the “Oriental” element in the original, Hölderlin’s translations also strive to reveal what is “proper” to the Greek.

Hölderlin’s understanding of the Greek represents a radical departure from the model of classical harmony that had been the norm since Winckelmann. What we perceive as the “sober” character of Greek art (exemplified in Homer’s poetry) is merely superficial. In fact, Hölderlin will argue, the true, “proper” nature of the Greek is this wild, “Oriental” element. Since Greek art appears to us as sober, and since this sober character is actually foreign to Greek nature, Hölderlin’s translation aims to exceed the original—thus making the Greek text more foreign to its German readers. Put differently, Hölderlin’s translation aims to bring out the “foreignness” of the original as that which is most proper to it. In another letter to Wilmans (2 April 1804),

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specifically to Hölderlin’s translation, I cite the line numbers that correspond to his text.

Hölderlin describes the process of translation in similar terms.

Ich glaube durchaus gegen die exzentrische Begeisterung schreiben  
zu haben und so die griechische Einfalt erreicht; ich hoffe auch ferner,  
auf diesem Prinzipium zu bleiben, auch wenn ich das, was dem Dichter  
verboten ist, kühner exponieren sollte, gegen die exzentrische  
Begeisterung. (StA VI: 439)

In order to uncover the proper character of the Greek original, Hölderlin's translations work *gegen die exzentrische Begeisterung*. This could imply that the translation works “against” eccentric enthusiasm. However, as Charlie Louth points out, “gegen” also suggests “*in the direction of*.” If read alongside the letters to Böhlendorff, the second sense is more likely: Hölderlin writes “in the direction of eccentric enthusiasm” as a way of exposing the true nature of the Greek, the “Oriental” character that lingers beneath its smooth, “sober” surface. By bringing out the “eccentricity” and “enthusiasm” of the original, Hölderlin also reveals that which is “forbidden” to the Greek poet—the underlying *nature* that Greek *culture* corrects.

Hölderlin's comments help explain the sometimes perverse and awkward character of his translations. They also shed light on his interpretation of Sophocles—perhaps his most profound confrontation with the idea of Greek art and the dizzying nexus of art and nature, Greek and German.

Given the seeming “wildness” of the translations themselves, it is all the more striking that Hölderlin's accompanying *Anmerkungen* begin with a sober reflection on

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<sup>61</sup> For a further treatment of Hölderlin's theory of translation and its relation to eighteenth century practices, particularly as it is expressed in these letters vid. Louth,

the difference between ancient and modern poetry. When compared to Greek art, Hölderlin writes, modern poetry is in need of a “calculable law.”

Es wird gut seyn, um den Dichtern, auch bei uns, eine bürgerliche Existenz zu sichern, wenn man die Poësie, auch bei uns, den Unterschied der Zeiten und Verfassungen abgerechnet, zur μηχανή der Alten erhebt.

Auch andern Kunstwerken fehlt, mit den griechischen verglichen, die Zuverlässigkeit; wenigstens sind sie bis izt mehr nach Eindrücken beurtheilt worden, die sie machen, als nach ihrem gesetzlichen Kalkul und sonstiger Verfahrungsart, wodurch das Schöne hervorgebracht wird. Der modernen Poësie fehlt es aber besonders an der Schule und am Handwerksmäßigen, das nemlich ihre Verfahrungsart berechnet und gelehrt, und wenn sie gelernt ist, in der Ausübung immer zuverlässig wiederholt werden kann. Man hat, unter Menschen, bei jedem Dinge, vor allem darauf zu sehen, daß es Etwas ist, d.h. daß es in dem Mittel (moyen) seiner Erscheinung erkennbar ist, daß die Art, wie es bedingt ist, bestimmt und gelehrt werden kann. Deswegen und aus höheren Gründen bedarf die Poësie besonders sicherer und charakteristischer Prinzipien und Schranken.

Dahin gehört einmal eben jener gesetzliche Kalkul. (FHA 16, 249)

Commenting on the this passage in a telling moment of *The Principle of Reason*,

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*Hölderlin and the Dynamics of Translation.*

Heidegger suggests that the word “calculus” has a deeper sense and is not to be understood in a “quantitative-mechanical, mathematical way” (103). And yet Lacoue-Labarthe, among others, has faulted Heidegger for a lack of sobriety—especially when it comes to his appropriation of Hölderlin. As Lacoue-Labarthe remarks toward the end of his essay “Il Faut,”

It may not be sufficient to indicate, as Heidegger does again in *The Principle of Reason*, that calculation for Hölderlin should not be understood ‘in a quantitative and mechanical, or, let us say, a mathematical mode,’ even though this is after all somewhat obvious. And yet it is necessary to consider that it is indeed a question of calculation. And that such a calculation is the very condition of sobriety. (59)

For Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger is not “sober” enough because he fails to understand that sobriety is indeed a matter of calculation, even if such calculation cannot be measured in a mechanical or mathematical way.<sup>62</sup> While this may not altogether hold up as a critique of Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe’s remarks do cut to the heart of the matter: Hölderlin’s allusion to *μηχανή* does not translate literally as “mechanical”—at least not if we read mechanical as a word denoting the technical (or technological),

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<sup>62</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe is clearly indebted to Benjamin’s influential reading of this passage toward the end of his dissertation on the early German Romantics. This becomes especially evident when, in the closing paragraphs of his essay, he returns to the same passage from the *Anmerkungen* Benjamin had used to justify the connection between the Romantic idea of prose and the Hölderlinian principle of sobriety. “Heidegger’s *Dichtung* is—decidedly wants to make itself—the absolute opposite of prose” (58). “But,” he adds, “‘prose’ should in fact be understood as another name for

calculable dimension of art. It is certainly still a matter of calculation—or what Hölderlin would call “measure”—but a measure of a different kind.<sup>63</sup> The notion of a non-mathematical idea of calculation has consequences for how we understand the

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‘sobriety’” (58). In fidelity to Benjamin, Lacoue-Labarthe thus also subtly points beyond Benjamin.

<sup>63</sup> In another essay, Lacoue-Labarthe cites the same passage in order to refute Badiou’s call for philosophy to turn away from the Poem and toward the Matheme. Against Badiou, Labarthe argues that poetry is not incompatible with the rigorous philosophical thought Badiou associates with the Matheme. Recapturing the potential of poetry, at least and especially in the case of Hölderlin, requires separating Hölderlin’s thought from Heidegger’s “mythic” interpretation of it. For Lacoue-Labarthe, it means thinking Hölderlin’s work through Benjamin’s idea of prose. Following Benjamin, Lacoue-Labarthe cautions that the Matheme is not to be confused with the “mathematical.” Instead, the Matheme is actually “the Poem itself, that is, prose” (“Poetry, Philosophy, Politics” 36). This may sound like a simple matter of using different terms to say the same thing. But Lacoue-Labarthe’s aim is to decouple poetry from myth, on the one hand, and, on the other, from a narrowly mathematical understanding of calculation. Mobilizing Benjamin’s idea of “poetry as prose” together with Hölderlin’s concept of sobriety as a kind of non-mathematical calculation, Lacoue-Labarthe challenges both Heidegger and Badiou, who, in spite of their differences, both fail to appreciate the truly calculable potential of poetry, which is to say, poetry *as* prose. “Why should philosophy,” Lacoue-Labarthe asks in conclusion, “or what remains of it, ‘unsuture’ itself from the poem, if at the same time—and in the same movement—this can engage another politics, as the young Benjamin attests?” (37).

Lacoue-Labarthe’s critique of Badiou seems reasonable enough. While repeatedly gesturing toward this non-mathematical idea of calculation, however, Lacoue-Labarthe fails to offer a satisfying account of what it would actually look like. Following Benjamin, Lacoue-Labarthe identifies this central concept with the opening passage of Hölderlin’s *Anmerkungen*. While Benjamin translates *μηχανή* as “mechanical,” Lacoue-Labarthe is more tempered in his approach. Extending Benjamin, he argues that *μηχανή* does refer to the mechanical, “calculable” dimension of art, but that “calculable” is not to be understood in a mathematical way.

However, neither Benjamin nor Lacoue-Labarthe really delves beneath the surface of Hölderlin’s remarks, simply accepting them as self-evident. What neither seems to notice is how oddly peripheral Hölderlin’s text is. It does not mention any of the key terms that inform Benjamin’s discussion: prose, sobriety, Romantic aesthetics. And yet it is also absolutely central to his understanding of these terms. What is interesting is how this echoes something of the seemingly tangential quality of Hölderlin’s remarks themselves—an oblique point of departure for a commentary on the translations of Sophocles.

multiple valences of “measure” in Hölderlin’s work.

Looking more closely at the passage, a series of questions arise. It seems strange that Hölderlin should begin his comments not with a definition of “tragedy” or “translation,” but with a discussion of “artworks” in general. Hölderlin’s choice of the word *Poësie* is suggestive, being the preferred term among Romantic writers for the philosophical aspects of poetry, as opposed to *Lyrik* or *Dichtung*. Meanwhile, the impersonal “es” assertion “Es wird gut seyn” (a construction familiar from Hölderlin’s other writings) lends the text a tone of generality untethered from the more “subjective” utterance of a specific “I.” Hölderlin’s call to establish a “civic existence” (*bürgerliche Existenz*) for poets, and to “elevate modern poetry to the *μηχανή* of the ancients,” thus not only lacks the grounding orientation of a subject, but also a motive. Why is it assumed that poets are in need of a “civic” existence—and what exactly would this entail? Perhaps most puzzling is the Greek word *μηχανή*. What does it mean, and why does Hölderlin leave this word untranslated?

On the surface, Hölderlin’s remarks are surprisingly broad in scope. Instead of beginning his commentary with a clear statement about the principles that have guided his translation, as one might expect, or with a definition of tragedy, he departs from a series of seemingly practical concerns.<sup>64</sup> Hölderlin’s comments about the “Handwerksmäßigen” and the “civic existence” of poetry emphasize the tangible craft of the artwork. Rather than getting lost in abstraction, he seems to say, it is important

that poetry expresses something concrete: “daß es Etwas ist, d.h. daß es in dem Mittel (moyen) seiner Erscheinung erkennbar.”

The contrast between Greek and modern poetry seems to gesture in the direction of a well-worn issue: the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. As a commentary on *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, this might suggest that Hölderlin was inspired to translate Sophocles out of a desire to emulate Greek art. But the intent of these translations is not one of simple imitation. On the surface, Hölderlin’s appeal to principles of craft, order, and repeatability seems to accord with the kind of classicism that views the technical craft of poetry as a necessary condition for the autonomy of the artwork.<sup>65</sup>

But Hölderlin speaks of *μηχανή*, not *τέχνη*. Hölderlin’s choice of *μηχανή* is

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<sup>64</sup> By emphasizing the “calculable” and “lawful” dimension of classical poetry in contrast to the modern, Hölderlin’s remarks are in striking contrast to the reception of the translations themselves.

<sup>65</sup> The invocation of classical principles of reliability, lawfulness, and repeatability goes against the spontaneous, expressive model of lyric. As Rainer Nägele observes, “Jedes Wort in diesem Satz ist eine Herausforderung dessen, was seit drei Jahrzehnten das gängige ästhetische Credo ausmachte. Schule und Handwerk, Berechnung, Lehr- und Lernbarkeit statt freie schöpferische Produktion, zuverlässige Wiederholung statt überraschende Originalität und Einmaligkeit” (*Hölderlins Kritik der Poetischen Vernunft* 135). The emphasis on the reliability and repeatability of poetry seems much closer to Opitz and Gottsched than the more sentimental poetry of Goethe and Schiller, which stresses originality and singularity. But Hölderlin’s aesthetics also differs the kind of classicism espoused by Goethe and Schiller, with its narrow focus on technical questions. According to this model, as Nägele describes it, the technical craft of poetry serves to enhance the impression of an autonomous artwork. “Das technische Selbstbewusstsein der Produzenten dient nicht zuletzt dazu, den Schein des autonomen Werkes als Produkt freier schöpferischer Tätigkeit umso mehr und zwingender zur Geltung zu bringen. Je technisch raffinierter das Werk produziert ist, desto mehr verbirgt es die Bedingungen seines Produziertseins” (136). The artist’s craft is conceived as the inverse of the work itself: the more technically constructed, the more the artwork conceals its own conditions. It is singular because of—not in spite of—the technical basis of its creation. “Es ist einmalig, frei, und



curious for several reasons. First, because the word itself is obscure. In its connection with “lawful calculation,” *μηχανή* seems intended as a synonym for *τέχνη*: what modern art lacks is the “calculable,” “lawful” dimension of Greek art that Hölderlin associates with “schooling” (*Schule*) and “handicraft” (*Handwerk*). As Rainer Nägele comments in his reading of this passage, *μηχανή* has no discernable connection to the history of aesthetics—unlike *τέχνη*, which has a recognizable genealogy, “Spätestens seit Aristoteles ist *τέχνη* der griechische *Terminus technicus* für Kunst, während soweit mir bekannt ist, *μηχανή* im Zusammenhang von Kunst und Poetik nirgends eine Rolle spielt, außer im Sinn der Theatermaschinerie” (136). In spite of the confidence of the assertion (“Es wird gut seyn...wenn man die Poësie...zur *μηχανή* der Alten erhebt”) the precise meaning of *μηχανή* remains unclear. Certainly *τέχνη* would be an appropriate choice of terms to discuss the particular “craft” of poetry. But if by *μηχανή* Hölderlin really intends *τέχνη*, then why not use the more familiar term?

Outlining the main contours of the concept, Nägele notes that Aristotle defines *τέχνη* in distinction to three related but opposed ideas: *synetheia* (habit, practice), *physis* (nature), and *episteme* (knowledge). In contrast to habit, *τέχνη* implies a more deliberate kind of practice; in contrast to nature, it is a product of culture; and in contrast to knowledge, it connotes a more practical “know-how.” In its conjunction with different forms of knowledge, *τέχνη* is also a central concept in the development of the Western concept of the subject. As Nägele notes, “*τέχνη* impliziert eine gewisse Überlegenheit und Herrschaft des Subjekts über die Welt. Sie bildet zusammen mit der *episteme* den Inbegriff einer bestimmten Subjektformation in der abendländischen

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unbedingt dank seiner Technik” (136).

Tradition” (137).

The associations with *μηχανή* are far more limited in scope. In Greek, *μηχανή* signifies “device” or “instrument,” as for example the theatrical device of a *deus ex machina*. It is also the root of the English word “mechanical.” Like *τέχνη*, it connotes “craft,” suggesting a practical kind knowledge, but something far less deliberate. In this respect, Nägele suggests, *μηχανή* is actually much closer to *synetheia*. Indeed, its association with the “mechanical” seems to imply the very inverse of *τέχνη*. Unlike *τέχνη*, *μηχανή* implies the *subordination* of the active, “creating” subject. “Als diese Maschine stellt das Mechanische eine Umkehrung des Technischen dar: nämlich das Subject selbst unter-liegt der Mechanik und ist von ihr bestimmt.” (137). In place of the creative subject of *τέχνη*, the subject of *μηχανή* is subordinate to the mechanical, determined rather than determining.<sup>66</sup>

Extending Nägele’s argument, I would argue that Hölderlin choice of the word *μηχανή* instead of *τέχνη* is significant. But it is also noteworthy that he leaves this term un-translated. He does not say: “mechanical,” but *μηχανή*. The fact that Hölderlin uses this word without offering a translation might suggest that it is so common as to require no explanation—or that it is so foreign as to have no German equivalent. The

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<sup>66</sup> As something closer to “habit,” Nägele suggests, *μηχανή* may be heard to echo the other foreign term that appears in this passage, the French word “moyen.” Denoting “device” or “instrument,” *μηχανή* is also a “means.” Like the English word “mean,” the German *Mittel* is closely connected to “mediate” (*mittelbar*) as well as “middle” (*Mitte*). The word *Mittel* and its variants (*mittelbar/unmittelbar*, *Mittelbarkeit*, *das Unmittelbare*) play a central role throughout the “Notes,” as well as Hölderlin’s other writings. Not only is the word *Mittel* integral to Hölderlin’s definition of tragedy, for example, it also informs his conception of law (*das Gesez*).

While these etymological echoes are helpful, Nägele glosses over the fact that Hölderlin never actually uses the word *mechanical*.

decision to leave the word un-translated lends it the character of an enigma—something to be puzzled over, but not (necessarily) resolved. By leaving *μηχανή* un-translated, moreover, Hölderlin actually underscores the singularity of the term—a singularity that strains meaning to the breaking point.

Unlike the terms that appear with some frequency in Hölderlin's work—the words *nüchtern* or *Mittel* for example—*μηχανή* is unique. Indeed, the term may be a *hapax* in Hölderlin's corpus. If this is so, then the usual methods of analysis will not bring us closer to the meaning of the word—or its significance. While the meaning of key terms like *nüchtern* or *Mittel* might be traced in a catalogue of instances throughout Hölderlin's writings, the echoes of *μηχανή* resound from some other place. The genealogy of the term, its history of instances, is also of little use. Traditionally, scholarship appraises the value of the *hapax* as a measure of an author's particular idiom. More significantly, perhaps, the *hapax* also tests the limits of a critical methodology that relies on repetition. What happens when a word is radically singular? In order to understand what it “communicates,” it becomes necessary to trace what is not said. The significance of the word *μηχανή* is not to be sought in its etymology, then, or in the history of aesthetics. Moreover, its meaning is only partially explained by its conjunction with *Mittel* and its strangely apposite relation to *τέχνη*. For a fuller understanding of the term, it is necessary to turn to the translations themselves, and the Greek texts on which they are based—Sophocles's *Oedipus* and *Antigone*. Although the discussion of poetry at the beginning of the “Notes” initially seems out of place within a commentary on Sophocles, as we shall see, Hölderlin's definition of *Poësie* is profoundly implicated in his understanding of tragedy—and

vice versa. By defining *Poësie* in relation to a *kalkulable Gesez*, Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen* also imply the difference between *Poësie* and tragic transgression.

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The connection between *Poësie* and tragedy is already evident in the phrase *bürgerliche Existenz*, which anticipates a later passage in the *Anmerkungen*, when, turning to a closer analysis of Sophocles's tragedy, Hölderlin uses the word "bürgerlich" to describe Oedipus's tragic misinterpretation of the oracle.

Die *Verständlichkeit* des Ganzen beruhet vorzüglich darauf, daß man die Scene ins Auge faßt, wo Oedipus *den Orakelspruch zu unendlich deutet*, zum *nefas* versucht wird.

Nemlich der Orakelspruch heißt:

Geboten hat uns Phöbos klar, der König,

Mann soll des Landes Schmach, auf diesem Grund genährt,

Verfolgen, nicht Unheilbares ernähren.

Das konnte heißen: Richtet, allgemein, ein streng und rein Gericht, haltet gute bürgerliche Ordnung. Oedipus aber spricht gleich darauf priesterlich.

Durch welche Reinigung, etc.

Und gehet ins *besondere*,

Und welchem Mann bedeutet er diß Schiksaal?

Und bringet *so die Gedanken* des Kreon auf das furchtbare Wort:

Uns war, o König, Lajos vormals Herr

In diesem Land', eh du die Stadt gelenket. (251-52).

In this scene, Hölderlin argues, Oedipus interprets the oracle “too infinitely.” Instead of reading the oracle in literal, practical terms—as an injunction to maintain “good civic order” (*gute bürgerliche Ordnung*)—Oedipus gestures in a “priestly” direction. Leaping from the suggestion of something “unholy” (*Unheilbares*) to the need for “purification” (*Reinigung*), Oedipus’s misreading of the oracle reflects a slippage of another kind, as well.

The word *Reinigung* anticipates Aristotle’s definition of tragic *katharsis*.<sup>67</sup> For Hölderlin, however, the significance of this passage lies not in the idea of catharsis, but in the error of Oedipus’s interpretation of the oracle, which already reveals—and may even precipitate—a tragic knowledge or “consciousness” (*Bewußtseyn*). Hölderlin’s analysis of the tragedy repeatedly emphasizes the “wonderful angry curiosity” (*die wunderbare zornige Neugier*) that compels Oedipus to know more than he is able to grasp, “weil das Wissen, wenn es seine Schranke durchrissen hat, wie trunken in seiner herrlichen harmonischen Form, die doch bleiben kann, vorerst, sich selbst reizt, mehr su wissen, als es tragen oder fassen kann” (253). Like the term “bürgerlich,” which echoes the language of the opening passage of the “Notes,” the characterization of Oedipus’s desire for knowledge as breaking free from “limits” (*Schranken*) evokes the model of poetry (*Poësie*) Hölderlin finds among the ancients and seeks to emulate. Oedipus is driven along toward his tragic end by his “curiosity”

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<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the word appears again at the beginning of the third section of the “Notes” as part of Hölderlin’s definition of the tragic.

and “suspicion” (*Argwohn*) to know something he is unable to grasp and, indeed, perhaps already knows: “weil der unbändige, und von traurigen Geheimnissen beladene Gedanke unsicher wird, und der treue gewisse Geist im zornigen Unmaas leidet, das, zerstörungsfroh, der reißenden Zeit nur folgt” (253). Hölderlin identifies Oedipus’s “priestly” misreading with something that closely approximates the “death drive” as a desire for and “delight” in destruction.

Exceeding all limits, Oedipus’s action is described as wild, “unbound” (*unbändige*) and “lacking in measure” (*Unmaas*). Throughout the tragedy, Oedipus becomes more and more desperate to “gain control of himself” (*seiner mächtig zu werden*); as he strives for consciousness, he nevertheless becomes more “wild” and “foolish” (254). Characterizing Oedipus’s “striving” (*Streben*) as “das närrischwilde Nachsuchen nach einem Bewußtseyn” (254) and as “das geisteskranken Fragen nach einem Bewußtseyn” (255), Hölderlin identifies Oedipus’s tragic transgression with the pursuit of knowledge and consciousness. Striving and interpretation are one and the same, but the pursuit of knowledge, “all-seeking, all-interpreting” (*Allessuchende, Allesdeutende*), also becomes “all-consuming,” and thereby leads to destruction. (256).

Within the context of Hölderlin’s interpretation of *Oedipus*, “bürgerlich” signifies the opposite of “priesterlich,” a word that implies “lacking in measure,” without “limits,” as well as “foolish,” “wild,” “insane,” and “destructive” (*närrischwilde, geisteskranken, zerstörungsfroh*). By extension, the call to secure for poets a “civic existence” with which the “Notes” begin would entail: establishing order, moderation, and limits, rather than venturing in a “priestly” direction (i.e. towards the “infinite”). Although the reference to the “civic existence” of poetry is at

first bewildering, it suggests the essential connection between the model of poetry Hölderlin seeks to achieve and his specific interpretation of tragedy. It therefore becomes possible to read Hölderlin's more general comments on *Poësie* within the context of the Sophocles translations. To state this more emphatically, it may be that the idea of *Poësie* Hölderlin has in mind is one derived from tragedy, or, more specially, from the process of *translating Sophocles*. Hölderlin's insistence on the importance of establishing limits by bringing out the "reliable" and "repeatable" aspects of poetry also carries a tragic inflection, reflecting the desire to find measure, and thereby restrain the "wild" and "insane" desire for consciousness that characterizes Oedipus's tragic transgression.

Within this context, the first choral stasimon (second choral ode), known as "Ode to Man," carries a special significance as a text that seeks to describe the paradoxical relationship between nature and culture. Heidegger places this ode at the center of Hölderlin's river poems, which depict the relation between nature and culture as the dynamic of opposing tendencies. The connection is pertinent. But Sophocles's ode is also central to Hölderlin's interpretation of tragedy. Indeed, we know it was a text Hölderlin studied closely, even composing a detailed analysis of its metrical scheme. Moreover, Hölderlin's translation of the "Ode" sheds light on the peculiar use of the term *μῆχανή* at the beginning of the *Anmerkungen*.<sup>68</sup> While Nägele notes several

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<sup>68</sup> Although he focuses at length on Hölderlin's translation of the "Ode," to my knowledge Heidegger never commented in any particular detail on Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen*. The omission is curious, since, as we shall see, there is every reason to

key instances of the term *μηχανή* in Sophocles, including the initial dialogue of *Antigone*, he fails to notice its appearance in this passage. Thus, in what follows, I turn to a close analysis of Sophocles's text, and Hölderlin's translation of it, in order to better understand the close connection between tragedy and the concept of *Poësie* that frames Hölderlin's *Anmerkungen*.

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The first strophe introduces the ode's central theme: the nature of man, at once "terrible," "strange," and "marvelous."

πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ. κοῦδὲν ἄν-

Viel das Furchtbare. Und nichts als der

θρώπου δεινότερον πέλει.

Mensch furchtbarer regt sich.

τοῦτο καὶ πολιοῦ πέραν

Dieses auch des grauen jenseits

πόντου χειμερίῳ νότῳ

des Meers bei winterlichem Südwind

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suspect that Hölderlin's understanding of poetry (to say nothing of his poetic practice) was profoundly implicated in his interpretation of tragedy.



χωρεῖ, περιβρυχίοισιν

zieht voran ringsumtosten

πτερῶν ὑπ' οἴδμασιν.

der Flügel under dem Schwellen.

θεῶν τε τὰν ὑπερτάταν, Γᾶν

Der Götter auch die höchste die Erde

ἄφθιτον, ἀκαμάταν

die unvergängliche unermüdliche

ἀποτρύεται, παλλομένων ἀρότρων

erschöpft er, mit umwendenden Pflügen

ἔτους εἰς ἔτος ...

Jahr für Jahr...

(ll. 335-45)<sup>69</sup>

The word *δεινὰ* is famously difficult to translate, suggesting a range of seemingly contradictory meanings. In his reading of this passage, Heidegger renders it

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<sup>69</sup> FHA 16, 298. I follow the text and lineation of the Juntina edition, as it is reproduced in Sattler's edition of Hölderlin's translations. As noted above, the Juntina edition contains a number of errors, and thus differs, both in specific textual instances and in lineation, from modern editions of Sophocles's text. Sattler's interlinear translation of the Greek provides a basis for measuring some Hölderlin's interpretive choices.

*unheimlich* (uncanny), claiming that this translation most accurately reflects Hölderlin's interpretation of the original.<sup>70</sup> However, Hölderlin never uses this term. While the earlier translation of the strophe has "gewaltge," the published version contains "ungeheuer."

Vieles gewaltge giebt's. Doch nichts  
Ist gewaltiger, als der Mensch.  
Der schweiffet im grauen  
Meer' in stürmischer Südluft  
Umher in woogenumrauschten  
Geflügelten Wohnungen.  
Der Götter heilige Erde, sie, die  
Reine die mühelose,  
Arbeitet er um, das Pferdegeschlecht  
Am leichtbewegten Pflug von  
Jahr zu Jahr umtreibend. (FHA 16, 58)

Ungeheuer ist viel. Doch nichts  
Ungeheurer, als der Mensch.  
Denn der, über die Nacht  
Des Meers, wenn gegen den Winter wehet  
Der Südwind, fährt er aus

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<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne "Der Ister."* For a critique of Heidegger's interpretation, see Warminski, "Monstrous History: Heidegger Reading Hölderlin."

In geflügelten sausenden Häußern.  
 Und der Himmlischen erhabene Erde  
 Die unverderbliche, unermüdete  
 Reibet er auf; mit dem strebenden Pfluge,  
 Von Jahr zu Jahr ... (ll. 349-58)

In Sattler's literal rendering, "furchtbar" suggests "frightful" or "formidable," evoking a mixture of fear and awe. In the context of the strophe as a whole, *δεινὰ* denotes man's "frightful" nature: not only is he able to withstand the most extreme forces of nature, but also to cultivate the Earth and bend the animals to his will. The double sense of "Earth" as the "highest god" and the soil that he cultivates implies that paradoxical nature of culture: man's accomplishments are also a violation nature. Hölderlin's second translation of the passage gestures in this direction. Where the first version describes the labor of farming in more neutral terms ("...Arbeitet er um..."), the second evokes the potential violence of man's industry ("...Reibet er auf..."). Likewise, the "gently moving plough" of the first becomes an instrument of "striving" in the second. Where the word "schweiffet" conveys the image of man buffeted about by stormy winds, the later "fähret er aus" suggests a more active stance.

While the second version brings out the inherent violence of culture with respect to nature, here man is described not as "gewaltig" (violent), but as "ungeheuer" ("monstrous" or "immense"). Like "unheimlich," "ungeheuer" has an unusual history (from mhd. *ungehiure*, ahd. *un(gi)hiuri*, "unheimlich, grauenhaft, schrecklich"). Its apparent opposite, "geheuer" (from ahd. *hiuri*, "freundlich, lieblich") is no longer in currency. Rather, as the *Grimm-Wörterbuch* explains, the word

“ungeheuer” arises as a result of a “conceptual uncertainty”: “an der begrifflichen unsicherheit, die bei schwinden des präf. den gegensatz geheuer und ungeheuer aufhebt.” In this sense, “ungeheuer” is doubly “monstrous.”

The word *ungeheur* recurs in the *Anmerkungen*, as well, where it is used to define the nature of tragic transgression.

Die Darstellung des Tragischen beruht vorzüglich darauf, daß das Ungeheure, wie der Gott und Mensch sich paart, und gränzenlos die Naturmacht und des Menschen Innerstes im Zorn Eins wird, dadurch sich begreift, daß das gränzenlose Eineswerden durch gränzenloses Scheiden sich reinigt. (FHA 16, 257)

In this passage, “das Ungeheuerere” describes not man’s essential nature, as in the choral ode, but the “monstrous” “mixing” of god and man. Evoking Aristotle’s definition of catharsis, Hölderlin states that the representation of the tragic (not, it must be stressed, the tragic itself) effects a purification of *das Ungeheuerere*, transforming “infinite unification” into “infinite separation.” Another version of this formulation appears in the “Anmerkungen zur *Antigona*.” Although the comments are clearly parallel, the second formulation does not contain the word “ungeheuer.”

Die tragische Darstellung behruet, wie in den Anmerkungen zum Oedipus angedeutet ist, darauf, daß der unmittelbare Gott, ganz Eines mit dem Menschen (denn der Gott eines Apostels ist mittelbarer, ist höchster Verstand in höchstem Geiste), daß die *unendliche* Begeisterung *unendlich*, daß heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt, und

der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist. (FHA 16, 417)

As in the “Notes” on *Oedipus*, Hölderlin’s definition of the tragic begins with a predicative assertion, “The representation of the tragic depends on....” Where the first version has “das Ungeheuere,” however, the second substitutes “the immediate god, wholly one with man...” and, in parallel construction, “infinite enthusiasm...” In the first formulation, the “monstrous” unity of god and man “grasps itself.” The second version also evokes the “unification” of god and man, as the mixing of the “immediate” and the “mediated,” as well as a “separation” through which this unity is thereby “purified.” But in the second version, the process of separation is described in terms of a “consciousness that cancels consciousness.” The repetition of “gränzenlose” in the first version is captured in the recursive description of an “infinite inspiration” that grasps itself “infinitely”—a repetition that cancels itself. The reference to “Gegensätzen,” meanwhile, suggests that the logic of “unity” and “separation” is one of positing and opposition. But it also conveys a *reversal*, whereby the “monstruous” unity of opposites (god and man, immediate and mediate) is “purified” in being restored to a relation of opposition. The purifying separation effected through tragedy is therefore not achieved through an act of simple positing, but through a repetition that reestablishes an initial difference.

Within this context, “ungeheuer” is an apt word for the kind of unity that results from the “monstruous” mixing of terms that are, strictly speaking, opposed. For the word itself is an instance of what it describes (meaning both “ungeheuer” as well as its opposite, “geheur”). If there is something “uncanny” about the word *δεινόν*, as Heidegger claims, perhaps it has something to do with this monstrous “becoming

one.” For this reason, “ungeheuer” is more than a synonym for “gewaltig.” Substituting “ungeheuer” for “gewaltig,” Hölderlin’s second translation of the Ode therefore brings out the potential violence of culture, *as well as* the inherently *ambiguous* character of man’s relation to nature. Man is “monstrous” not only because he is violent, but because his nature conceals a “mixing” of opposed tendencies.

The next strophe enumerates man’s accomplishments, offering a catalog of the feats of culture and the powers of technology. It is through technology that man has tamed the animals (ll. 345-52), learned speech and built cities (ll. 354-360), and developed the means to navigate, avoid exposure and conquer disease (ll. 360-66). All of these arts testify to man’s formidable powers of invention and survival. In spite of his ability to devise the means for his survival, however, man still is no match for death. Although he has means to evade disease and avoid exposure, he cannot escape Hades.<sup>71</sup>

παντοπόρος

Aller-Wege mächtig

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<sup>71</sup> In his interpretation of this passage, Jacques Lacan reads “from” as “into.” “Having said that there is one thing that man hasn’t managed to come to terms with, and that is death, the Chorus says that he has come up with an absolutely marvelous gimmick, namely, translated literally, ‘an escape *into* impossible sicknesses.’ There is no way of ascribing another meaning to that phrase than the one I ascribe. The translations usually attempt to say that man even manages to come to deal with sickness, but that’s not what it means at all. He hasn’t managed to come to terms with death but he invents marvelous gimmicks in the form of sicknesses he himself fabricates. There is something extraordinary about finding that notion expressed in

ἄπορος ἐπ' οὐδὲν ἔρχεται.

Ausweglos zu nichts kommt er.

τὸ μέλλον Ἅϊδα μόνον

Das Zukünftige des Hades allein

φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται.

ein Entrinnen nicht wird ihm gelingen. (ll. 361-64)

Hölderlin's translation of these lines stays close to the original. However, instead of "Aller-Wege...Ausweglos," he substitutes "Allbewanderet / unbewandert—an alteration that retains the wordplay of the original, while shifting the emphasis from "path" to "wandering," thereby introducing a subtle variation.

Allbewandert,

Unbewandert. Zu nichts kommt er.

Der Todten künftigen Ort nur

Zu fliehen weiß er nicht... (ll. 378)

Instead of emphasizing the "means," Hölderlin's choice of "wandering" places this passage within the context of "error." Likewise, the decision to place a period after "Unbewandert" alters the meaning of the original. Where the original poses a contrast ("all-resourceful" / "without resource") and suggests a causal relation (without a "way," man comes to nothing), Hölderlin's translation juxtaposes "Allbewandert, /

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441 B.C. as one of mankind's essential dimensions" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 275).

Unbewandert,” and treats the result as a given by rendering it as an independent predicative clause: “Zu Nichts kommt er.” The first might indicate that because man is “all resourceful” he meets “nothing without resource.” Hölderlin’s version, implies, by contrast, that man is both “all resourceful” (and yet) “without resource.” Inserting a caesura in the middle of the line, Hölderlin’s translation might also imply that man’s resources *bring* him to nothing. The substitution of “Der Todten künftigen Ort” for “Hades,” literalizes a mythic theme, and thereby places even greater emphasis on man’s impending and *inevitable* death.

Rather than simply praising the impressiveness of man’s accomplishments, Hölderlin’s translation draws out the negative connotations of the original. By accentuating the dual implications of man’s “formidable” nature, Hölderlin’s interpretation thus highlights the central tension of Sophocles’s choral ode. While the ode begins by enumerating the accomplishments of man, the second antistrophe casts technology in a more ambivalent light: “wise” and “beyond expectation,” it leads man “sometimes to good” and “sometimes bad.”

σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχ-

Weises etwas das Erfindungsreiche der

νας ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’ ἔχων,

Künste über Erwarten besitzend,

τοτὲ μὲν κακόν, ἄλλοτ’ ἐπ’ ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει.

diesmal zu Bösem, ein andermal zu Gutem kommt er.



νόμους γεραίρων χθονὸς,

die Gesetze schaltend des Landes,

θεῶν τ' ἔνορκον δίκαν, ὑψίπολις,

der Götter auch beschworenes Recht, hochstädtisch,

ἄπολις, ὅτῳ τὸ μὴ καλὸν

unstädtisch. Bei dem das doch das Schöne

ξύνεστι τόλμας χάριν.

dabei ist um der Verwegenheit willen.

(Il. 367-73)

As Sattler's literal interlinear rendering makes clear, the language of the strophe is remarkably complex. The syntax is strained, marked by inversions and participle constructions. Like the earlier punning on "way," the play on ὑψίπολις and ἄπολις juxtaposes apparent opposites, drawing a contrast that stretches over the break in the line: *hochstädtisch* is man when he upholds the laws, *unstädtisch* when he does not. Alternatively, the paratactic conjunction of opposed terms could imply a causal relation: "high in the city," man is also "outcast from the city."

As a subordinate clause, the phrase "Weises etwas das Erfindungsreiche der / Künste über Erwarten besitzend" is particularly strange. While "etwas" gestures toward something difficult to define, the genitive τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας seems redundant. What exactly is meant by the "devices of art"? As we have seen, μηχανή, denotes

“device,” “contrivance,” or “craft.” Hölderlin’s earlier translation of the line *κρατεῖ δὲ μηχαναῖς ἀγροῦλον*, renders *μηχανή* as “Künsten,” thus implying the close relationship between “art” (*τέχνη*) and its devices.<sup>72</sup> But here *μηχανή* is subordinate to *τέχνη*. If *μηχανή* is not synonymous with *τέχνη*, then what is the difference between “art” and its “contrivances,” and what is it about the “contrivances of art” that is “wise beyond expectation”?

In the conjunction of the words *μηχανή* and *τέχνη*, the reader of Sophocles’s ode arrives at a predicament—one that tests the devices of interpretation. While capturing something of the strangeness of the original, Hölderlin’s rendering of the passage also contains a number of important differences.

Von Weisem etwas, und das Geschikte der Kunst  
 Mehr, als er hoffen kann, besizend,  
 Kommt einmal er auf Schlimmes, das andre zu Gutem.  
 Die Geseze kränkt er, der Erde’ und Naturgewalt’ ger  
 Beschworenes Gewissen;  
 Höchstädtisch kommt, unstädtisch  
 Zu nichts er, wo das Schöne  
 Mit ihm ist und mit Frechheit. (ll. 381-88)

He translation “beyond expectation” as “more than he can hope for” locates the center of action in man’s hoping and striving. Instead of *Recht* (*δίκαν*), Hölderlin translates “Gewissen,” suggesting an idea of justice at once less absolute and more “knowing.”

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<sup>72</sup> In the earlier edition of Hölderlin’s translation, this word is translated by the singular “Kunst” (FHA 16, 59).

Other choices bring out the negative implications of the original, as for example “Höchstädtisch kommt, unstädtisch / Zu nichts er.” Where the original could be read as offering two alternatives, Hölderlin’s translation implies the continuity between “high in the city” and “outcast from the city.” Likewise, the verb “kränken” makes explicit the idea that man’s actions represent a transgression of the laws of nature (man “sickens” and “corrupts”). Evoking both the material earth as well as the goddess of nature, Hölderlin’s choice of “Erde” echoes the first strophe, which describes the cultivation of the earth in terms that bring out the ambivalence of man’s relationship to nature. Here, the word *Frechheit* not only suggests that man is in violation of the laws of the earth, but perhaps even willfully, defiantly so.

The syntax of the line “Höchstädtisch kommt, unstädtisch / Zu nichts er” echoes the earlier “Allbewandert, / Unbewandert. Zu nichts kommt er.” Hölderlin’s translation draws out the wordplay common to both passages and thereby presents them as parallel. The word-for-word repetition of “Zu nichts kommt er” (a phrase not present in the original) poses an analogy between man’s inability to “escape” death and his transgression of the laws of the “earth.” In contrast to the original, Hölderlin’s translation is also starkly literal: he comes to nothing without (in the absence of) resource, but also “without resource” man comes to *nothing*.

Within the context of Sophocles’s *Antigone* as a whole, variants of the word *μηχανή* are unusually prominent, as Seth Benadete notes in his commentary on the tragedy:

Words with the stem *μηχαν-* occur seven times, used thrice by Ismene,

thrice by the Chorus, and once, between the two triads, by Creon.

Ismene says that (1) she is naturally without a *μηχανή* to act despite the citizens (79), (2) Antigone is in love with things that have not *μηχανή* (92), (3) it is unseemly to hunt out things that have no *μηχανή* (92); the Chorus say that (1) man prevails over the mountain-ranging beast by *μηχαναί* (349), (2) man contrives his escape from diseases that have no *μηχανή* (363), (3) man has in the *μηχαναί* of his art something wise beyond hope (365) ... Ismene's triad of impossibles is matched by the Chorus' triad of possibles, for their 'device-less diseases' means 'seemingly-device-less-diseases.' The one strictly device-less occasion that confronts man is death (361-2).<sup>73</sup>

While variants of the word *μηχανή* occur seven times within *Antigone*, three of these instances are in the "Ode to Man." The other instances of the word are almost all negative—that is, in terms of what *lacks* *μηχανή*. Indeed, in the course of the tragedy, the negative form of the word (*αμήχανοι*) denotes "deviceless," but also "impossible." In Hölderlin's translation of the "Ode," only the positive form of the word is used. In the first instance (ln. 52) the plural form *μηχαναῖς* is translated "Künsten." However, as we have seen, *μηχανή* is not simply synonymous with *τέχνη* (Kunst). Hölderlin does not translate *das Geschickte der Kunst* "the arts of art." By rendering *μηχανόεν* as *das Geschickte*, a nominalization of the adjective "geschickt" (skilled, clever), Hölderlin's translation draws a distinction between art (*Kunst*) and its devices.

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<sup>73</sup> Seth Benardete, *Sacred Transgressions: A Reading of Sophocles' Antigone* 17-18.

As Benardete notes, negative variants of the term *μηχανή* are used three times by the character Ismene. All three instances occur within a few lines of each other in the opening dialogue between Ismene and Antigone. Although she would also like to honor her brother, Ismene is more prudent than her sister, and pleads with Antigone not to disobey Creon's order.<sup>74</sup> Anticipating many of the themes of the "Ode," this exchange is often read in parallel with the later Chorus.<sup>75</sup> The language of the scene also prefigures several of the key terms of the "Ode," including *μηχανή* and *δεινόν*.

Ismene's three uses of *ἀμήχανη* have a roughly consistent meaning. In the first instance, Ismene uses the term to characterize herself.

ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι, τὸ δὲ

Ich zwar nicht als Ehrloses behandle es. Das aber

βία πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος.

mit Gewalt der Bürger Handeln, [dazu] bin ich ungeschickt.

(ll. 78-79)

Countering Antigone's claim that her inaction dishonors the gods, Ismene argues that she does not have the "means" (that is, it is not in her nature) to react with violence

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<sup>74</sup> In this respect, there are strong parallels between Ismene and the figure of the Chorus, which often functions in Sophoclean drama as a voice of sympathy and caution. Indeed, perhaps that explains why in this tragedy the Chorus and Ismene speak with the shared vocabulary of *μηχανή*.

<sup>75</sup> In his reading, Heidegger offers a sensitive and thorough reading of the passage, noting the repetition of the term *ἀμήχανη* in connection with the "Ode." However, in Heidegger's interpretation, the most important word of the "Ode" is not *μηχανή*, but *δεινόν*.

against the people. Sattler's translation, "ungeschickt" (awkward, unskillful), is a close approximation of the original *ἀμήχανος*, with the prefix "un-" serving the same function as the Greek alpha-primitive: while "ungeschickt" suggests the opposite of "geschickt," it nevertheless preserves the root word. In his translation, by contrast, Hölderlin opts for a different word:

Für ehrlos halt' ichs nicht. Zum Schritt allein, den Bürger

Im Aufstand thun, bin linkisch ich geboren. (ll. 80-81)

Where "Aufstand" introduces the idea of a particularly revolutionary kind of violence (one alluded to again at the end of the *Anmerkungen zur Antigone*), the choice of "linkisch" is as "awkward" as the word itself—as is the syntax of the phrase "bin linkisch ich geboren." While Hölderlin's translation departs from the literalness of the original in this instance, his choice nevertheless reflects the fact that *ἀμήχανη* has a less literal meaning in this passage. Literally, Isemene is "without means" of resisting the will of the people, but in this context *μήχανη* does not have the same sense as in the "Ode," where it denotes the concrete the "devices" of man's invention.

As Rainer Nägele has observed, the word "linkisch" also figures prominently in the concluding passage of the *Anmerkungen zur Antigone*, which asserts that the "infinite" cannot be grasped otherwise than from an "awkward" perspective ("das Unendliche ... ohnehin nicht anders, als aus linkischem Gesichtspunct kann gefaßt werden") (FHA 16, 421).<sup>76</sup> The reference to the "infinite" again echoes the description of the tragic representation as a process through which "die *unendliche* Begeisterung *unendlich*, daß heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn

aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt...” Within the context of Ismene’s remarks, the “infinite” may only be grasped “awkwardly” because it is ἀμήχανη—impossible, “unthunlich.”

The next two instances of the word have a slightly different sense, as Ismene seeks in vain to convince Antigone not to defy Creon’s order.

Ἰσμήνη

θερμὴν ἐπὶ ψυχροῖσι καρδίαν ἔχεις.

Is. Ein heißes für Erkaltete ein Herz hast du.

Ἀντιγόνη

ἀλλ’ οἶδ’ ἀρέσκουσ’ οἷς μάλισθ’ ἀδεῖν με χρή.

An. Doch weiß ich Genüge tue ich denen am meisten  
gefallen ich muß.

Ἰσμήνη

εἰ καὶ δυνήσει γ’: ἀλλ’ ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾷς.

Is. Wenn auch du imstande wärest [ ], doch Unmögliches  
begehrtst du.

Ἀντιγόνη

οὐκοῦν, ὅταν δὴ μὴ σθένω, πεπαύσομαι.

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<sup>76</sup> See Nägele, *Hölderlins Kritik der poetischen Vernunft* 138 ff.

An.     Nicht wahr wenn den nicht ich das vermag, werde ich  
enden.

Ἰσμήνη

ἀρχὴν δὲ θηρᾶν οὐ πρέπει τὰμήχανα.

Is.     Von Anfang aber zu jagen nicht ziemt sich das  
Unmögliche.

Ἀντιγόνη

εἰ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἐχθαρεῖ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ,

Wenn dies du sagen willst, wirst du angefeindet sein jedenfalls  
von mir

ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι προσκείσει δίκη.

Verhaßt auch dem Gestorbenen anliegen wirst du mit Recht.

ἀλλ' ἔα με καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἐμοῦ δυσβουλίαν

So laß mich und die [ ] meinige die Unbesonnenheit,

παθεῖν τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτο. πείσομαι γὰρ οὐ

zu leiden das Furchtbare dieses. Erleiden werde ich nämlich  
nicht



τοσοῦτον οὐδὲν ὥστε μὴ οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν.

so großes keineswegs, daß nicht [ ] schön ich sterben könnte.

(ll. 88-97)

The language of the dialogue conveys the contrast between the characters of Ismene and Antigone. Antigone is willful and passionate to the point of recklessness. Already in the first scene of the tragedy, already “from the beginning,” she has chosen a course that she knows leads only to disaster. For this reason, Ismene repeatedly calls attention to Antigone’s perverse desire: her heart is “warm” for cold things; she seeks the “impossible.” In this instance, ἀμηχάνων signifies far more than “awkwardness.” Here, that which is “device-less” is *impossible*, not only because it *cannot*, but perhaps also because it *may* not be done. Hölderlin’s translation is actually closer to the literal sense of ἀμήχανη.

ISMENE.

Wärm für die Kalten leidet deine Seele.

ANTIGONAE.

Ich weiß, wem ich gefallen muß am meisten.

ISMENE.

Könntest du es, doch Unthunliches versuchst du.

ANTIGONAE.

Gewiß! kann ich es nicht, so muß ichs lassen.

ISMENE.

Gleich Anfangs muß Niemand Unthunlichs jagen.

ANTIGONAE.

Magst du so etwas sagen, hass' ich dich,

Haßt auch dich der Gestorbene mit Recht.

Laß aber mich und meinen irren Rath

Das Gewaltige leiden. Ich bin überall nicht so

Empfindsam, daß ich sollt' unschönen Todes sterben. (ll. 90-99)

Instead of “Unmögliches,” Hölderlin translates “Unthunliches,” shifting the emphasis from what is “possible” to what is “doable.” Even though Hölderlin’s translation eclipses the root word *μηχανή*, his choice to connect *μηχανή* with “doing” (*tun*) is appropriate in light of the fact that, as Judith Butler observes, Sophocles’s tragedy centers on Antigone’s “deed.”<sup>77</sup> This is particularly evident in the scene immediately *following* the “Ode,” which revolves around the question of who “did” the “deed,” as well as the ensuing dialogue between Creon and Antigone when she assumes responsibility: not only does she commit the act, but does also does it again, and she “does not deny it.”

I would argue that Hölderlin’s translation draws a comparison between Antigone’s desire for what is “undoable” and the “Ode,” which speaks of the “devices” man has invented as a means of assuring his own survival. Like the more

general “man” of the “Ode,” Antigone “comes to nothing,” and man’s pursuit of technology can be viewed as analogous to Antigone’s tragic deed. The connection might help explain the apparent ambivalence of the choral ode, which characterizes technology both positively and negatively, as well as the nature of Antigone’s transgression, which exposes the conflict between the desire to honor the laws of the gods, and the demands of the *polis*. In both cases, the question that arises is: how can it be both? How can Antigone’s deed be in keeping with a “higher” law *and* in defiance of the laws of man? How can technology lead men “sometimes to good” *and* “sometimes to bad”? The obvious answer to the first question is that the laws of men are arbitrary—Creon had no right to forbid Antigone from burying her brother. While Creon may be partly to blame, Antigone is not simply a victim, nor is she a model to be emulated. Her action is tragic for the reason that she pursues the “undoable.” Hers is indeed an act of *hubris*, as Creon claims, a word that Hölderlin translates *Frechheit* (ln. 483)—the same word he uses in the choral ode to characterize man’s violation of the laws of nature.

Like the more general “man,” moreover, Antigone suffers τὸ δεινόν. Here, as in the draft version of the choral ode, Hölderlin translates “das Gewaltige.” But Antigone’s fate is no less “frightful” and no less *ungeheuer*. In the words of Ismene, Antigone takes the “impossible” as a “starting point.” Without disagreeing, Antigone replies that she must “suffer the most terrible.” For Heidegger, this makes Antigone an exemplary instance of the “uncanny” nature of man: she accepts the δεινόν as the essence of her being.

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<sup>77</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*.

Schon aus dem einleitenden Zwiegespräch zwischen Antigone und Ismene wird offenbar, daß auch Antigone, ja sie sogar in einem höchsten Sinne, dem Bereich des *δεινὸν* angehört. Sie macht das Erjagen des Unausrichtbaren zum Ursprung ihres Wesens. Sie wählt das Geschick als das, was allein schicklich ist. Dadurch nimmt sie das Unheimischsein auf sich. (Hölderlin's Hymne „Der Ister“ 136)

Antigone belongs to the realm of the *δεινὸν*. For Heidegger, this means that she appropriates what is most foreign, that which is “unheimisch.” This allows Heidegger to read Hölderlin's *ungeheuer* as *unheimlich*, not because it is simply “terrible,” “frightful” or even “violent,” but because it represents the appropriation of what is most foreign as one's own. The movement away from the self and back, which Heidegger traces in Hölderlin's interpretation of Sophocles and throughout his work, he also calls the “Gesetz der Geschichte,” a phrase that plays on the related senses of *Geschichte*, *das Geschichtliche*, and *Geschick* (153 ff.) Within this context, it becomes clear that what connects these terms is the word *Geschick*. Antigone “chooses destiny as that which alone is fitting” (“wählt das Geschick als das, was allein schicklich ist”), and thereby “appropriates” what is least proper. As Hölderlin's word for *μηχανή*, “Geschick” suggests “craft” and “skill” but also, as Heidegger surmises, “destiny” or “fate.” By choosing to pursue what is “undoable” (*ἀμήχανη*), Antigone appropriates what is least “fitting” as her own, and in so doing, assumes the *δεινὸν*—the most terrible—as her “fate.”

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As a possible translation of the word *μηχανή*, the word *Geschick* connects Hölderlin's Sophokles translations with the discussion of poetry that frames his 1801 letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff (composed just before his departure from France) (StA, VI: 1). The overarching theme of this letter is the relationship between the Greeks and the Hesperians. Like the opening paragraph of the *Anmerkungen*, Hölderlin's comments at first seem narrow in scope, evoking the conventional contrast between the Ancients and the Moderns. However, much more is at stake than a historical delimitation of Greek and German sensibilities. From Winckelmann to Schiller, the relation between the Greek and the German is figured in a series of terms: original and imitation, naïve and sentimental, nature and culture. Hölderlin turns these pairs inside out. Whereas Schiller's distinction between the "Naïve" and "Sentimental" rests on the assumption that the "Naïve" is also closer to nature (and therefore more original), Hölderlin's distinction between the Greeks and the Germans posits a "national" nature proper to each.

Wir lernen nichts schwerer als das Nationelle frei gebrauchen. Und wie ich glaube, ist gerade die Klarheit der Darstellung uns ursprünglich so natürlich wie den Griechen das Feuer vom Himmel. ... (StA VI: 1, 425)

While "Klarheit" (clarity) is proper to the Germans, "Feuer vom Himmel" (heavenly fire) is proper to the Greeks. At the same time, Hölderlin suggests that what is most "natural" or "national" to each culture is, paradoxically, the most difficult to "learn" or to "use." Drawing a contrast between the "natural" (national) and *Bildung* (culture), Hölderlin characterizes the cultivation of what is not originally proper or "angeboren"

(innate or native) as the “appropriation” of “das Fremde” (the foreign).

Es klingt paradox. Aber ich behaupt' es noch einmal ... das eigentliche nationale wird im Fortschritt der Bildung immer der geringere Vorzug werden. Deßwegen sind die Griechen des heiligen Pathos weniger Meister, weil es ihnen angeboren war, hingegen sind sie vorzüglich in Darstellungsgaabe, von Homer an, weil dieser außerordentliche Mensch seelenvoll genug war, um die abendländische Junonische Nüchternheit für sein Apollonsreich zu erbeuten, und so wahrhaft das fremde sich anzueignen.

Bei uns ists umgekehrt. (426)

For the Greeks, exemplified by the figure of Homer, “holy Pathos” is “native” and “national.” Because *holy Pathos* belongs to Greek nature, however, Greek *Bildung* tends in the opposite direction. To cultivate the opposite of their own nature, and thereby “appropriate” the foreign, the Greeks learn “Junonian sobriety.” For “us” (Hesperians), “it is reversed.” Since “clarity” and “sobriety” is “natural” for the Germans, their *Bildung* tends in the other direction. What is foreign to them is proper to the Greeks (*holy Pathos*).

For Hölderlin, the relation between nature and culture, what is natively proper and the appropriation of what is foreign, supersedes and envelops the relation between the Greeks and the Germans. What is proper is also, paradoxically, the most foreign. For this reason, Hölderlin argues, Germans should not imitate Greek art, since, *contra* Winkelmann and Schiller, what we experience as the “natural” clarity of Greek art is actually the *least* natural. Although Homer’s poetry embodies the “clarity of

presentation” and “sobriety” of Greek art, such qualities are not natural but a consequence of Greek *Bildung*. For the Germans to imitate Greek art as something more “natural” for being more “naïve,” is therefore to imitate what is actually most foreign to the Greeks (*Nüchternheit*)—that which already belongs to Germans as what is most proper.

Deßwegen ists auch so gefährlich sich die Kunstregeln einzig und allein von griechischer Vortreflichkeit zu abstrahiren. Ich habe lange daran laborirt und weiß nun daß außer dem, was bei den Griechen und uns das höchste seyn muß, nemlich dem lebendigen Verhältniß und Geschik, wir nicht wohl etwas gleich mit ihnen haben dürfen. Aber das eigene muß so gut gelernt seyn, wie das Fremde. Deßwegen sind uns die Griechen unentbehrlich. Nur werden wir ihnen gerade in unserm Eigenen, Nationellen nicht nachkommen, weil, wie gesagt, der freie Gebrauch des Eigenen das schwerste ist. (426)

The Germans and the Greeks have nothing in common, Hölderlin concludes, since they are the inverse of each other. For this reason, the Greeks should not be the model for the Germans. The relation between the Germans and the Greeks is therefore not one of mimesis but opposition: the Germans need the Greeks in order to learn “der *freie* Gebrauch des *Eigenen*” (the *free* use of what is [their] *own*). In Greek art, the Germans experience what is their own (*Nüchternheit*) as something foreign. If the Greeks and the Germans have anything in common, then, it is that which for both “das höchste seyn muß, nemlich dem lebendigen Verhältniß und Geschik,” (must be the supreme thing ... that is, living proportion and craft). For both Greeks and Germans to

achieve the “highest”<sup>78</sup>, they must learn the “free use of what is their own,” traversing the difference that separates the proper and the foreign, nature and culture. The movement, not the aim, is what they have in common.

The term *lebendiges Verhältniß* (“living proportion”) suggests the *dynamic* relation between opposed terms (Greek/Hesperian, nature/culture, proper/foreign, sobriety/holy Pathos). The difference, or “proportion,” is not absolute, but “lively.” But what about *Geschik* (“fate,” “skill”)? Does the “and” in this phrase (living proportion and skill) imply that they are the same? Within the context of Hölderlin’s writings, the word *Geschik* is ambivalent, denoting both “fate” as well as the “skill” of poetic craft.<sup>79</sup> The ambiguity is telling, however. For what kind of “craft” is implicated in the concept of *Geschik*? If it is read as “fate,” *Geschik* suggests something

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<sup>78</sup> In the second letter to Böhlendorff, after his return from Bordeaux, Hölderlin also speaks of having discovered “das Höchste der Kunst” (highest in art) (StA VI: 1, 432), here in terms of the “athletic” spirit of the Greeks—a notion that recurs toward the end of the *Anmerkungen zur Antigone*, as well.

<sup>79</sup> Denoting both “skill” and “fate,” *Geschik* belongs to a series of related terms, including *Schicksal* (fate), *Geschichte* (history), and *das Schickliche* (what is fitting). In the sense of “skill” or “craft,” *Geschik* is often read as another name for poetic technique. What is so fascinating about this word is how it brings together the apparently disparate themes of Hölderlin’s work: the historical scheme (*Geschichte*) that relates Greek and German, the theory of poetic composition as a striving to achieve what is most “appropriate” (*das Schickliche*), and the theory of the subject as a particular fate, or *Schicksal*. This is more than simple wordplay, however. Instead, it is evidence of how intimately related Hölderlin understood the issues of poetic composition, subjectivity, and history. All concern the idea of what is most “appropriate” as an awareness or consciousness achieved through the experience of limitation. But, as Hölderlin’s hymnic style attests, there is no external rule or “measure” for what is most fitting. This is why the experience of self-extension is ultimately just as important as self-limitation—why “error” is a necessary component of Hölderlin’s poetic practice, as well as an explicit thematic concern of the poems themselves. In negotiating the dynamic interplay of madness and “sobriety,” Hölderlin’s work finds its own “measure.”



inescapable or immutable, not in the sense of what is “natural” or “proper” (which implies a beginning), but inexorable. If *Geschik* conveys “skill,” then it suggests something similar to *Bildung*. Like the related term “schicklich” (fitting), *Geschik* could imply something innate (suited to) or acquired (fitting for some purpose).

In a well-known essay, Peter Szondi reads Hölderlin’s letter as the “overcoming” of classicism (“Überwindung des Klassizismus”). In contrast to Schiller, who relates the classical and the modern in terms of a simple opposition of nature and culture, for Hölderlin the relationship between Greek and Hesperian, nature and art, proper and foreign is one of “mirror symmetry.” As Szondi points out, however, the potential for inversions and reversals is kept open: the engagement with the foreign does not lead to a simple appropriation, and the tension between “pathos” and “sobriety” is never simply resolved. Instead, Szondi emphasizes the importance of the third term common to both: *das Geschik*. For Szondi, however, *Geschik* implies *τέχνη*:

Das *Geschik*, von dem das Werk sowohl des hesperischen wie des griechischen Künstlers zu zeugen hat, wäre das *Geschik* seiner Hände, seine Fähigkeit, die Töne zu ordnen und so dem Gedicht in *lebendiges Verhältniß* zu geben, nämlich ein Leben, das im Verhältnis der Töne zu einander besteht. *Geschik* ist, mit dem griechischen Wort, *τέχνη*. Im Zeichen dieses Wortes schein der Böhlendorff-Brief insgesamt zu stehen, es ist ein Brief aus der Werkstatt. (“Überwindung des Klassizismus” 366)

As a “letter from the workshop,” Hölderlin’s remarks center on practical, technical

concerns. The reference to the “workshop” recalls the opening passage of the Sophokles-*Anmerkungen*, which discusses the “hand craft” of poetry, while lamenting the fact that modern poetry is lacking in “school and craft” (*Schule und am Handwerksmäßigen*). Within this context, *Geschik* therefore implies something closer to “skill” or “craft.” Relating Hölderlin’s comment about the “highest” to the Pindar fragment of the same name (in Hölderlin’s translation: “Das Höchste”), points to an essential similarity between *Geschik* and *Gesez* (law). As a translation of *nomos*, Hölderlin defines *Gesez* as “strenge Mittelbarkeit” (strict mediacy). Glossing this connection, Szondi reads *Geschik* as a principle of law, order, and “mediacy.”

For Szondi, *Geschik* is a synonym for the “lawful,” “technical” craft of poetry. While insisting that the tension between proper and foreign is never resolved, Szondi’s characterization of *Geschik* tends more in the direction of sobriety than *Pathos*. Although he describes *Geschik* as a “third term,” he relates it to *τέχνη* and *nomos*. In the end, Szondi’s analysis of the passage is thus more “dialectical” than “lebendig.”<sup>80</sup>

For Hölderlin, by contrast, the Greek remains (and must remain) radically other. *Geschik* functions therefore less as a hinge (that which connects and articulates the relation between the Greeks and the Germans), than as the name for something that exceeds both: the “highest.” In a sense, Hölderlin’s *Geschik* means the opposite of what it says. While the name suggests something appropriate (a fate, a craft), it points

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<sup>80</sup> As Andrzej Warminski suggests, Szondi’s interpretation remains beholden to a (Hegelian) interpretation of the philosophy of history in terms of an “opposition between *das Eigene* and *das Fremde* mediated by a history of self-consciousness” (*Readings in Interpretation* 32). By making the art of the Greeks into the “other” of the Germans, Szondi thereby preserves the Greek as an essential, sublatale moment of the German.

to something that remains just out of reach—and therefore *lebendig*. In this respect, the multi-valence of the term is strangely appropriate: it is a “mad” word. While Szondi associates *Geschik* with sobriety, it is a genuine third term—one that encompasses the seemingly opposed tendencies toward sobriety and “pathos.”

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While it may be tempting to read *μηχανή* as a synonym for *τέχνη*, this runs counter to the idea of technology at the center of Sophocles’ tragedy. Alongside the opening dialogue, the “Ode to Man” represents the history of technology as a tragic transgression. What makes technology “monstrous” is not the potential of tragic hubris, however, but the fact that technology is something man receives from nature in the first place. Culture supplements nature, but, as something “given,” it is also received nature. The relation between nature and culture is thus not only inherently unstable, but “uncanny,” since it represents the “monstrous” mixing of opposed pairs.

Earlier, we observed the connection between Hölderlin’s translation of the “Ode” and the definition of the tragic that appears in his “Notes,” first in the commentary on *Oedipus* and again in a nearly identical formulation in the commentary on *Antigone*.

Die Darstellung des Tragischen beruht vorzüglich darauf, daß das Ungeheure, wie der Gott und Mensch sich paart, und gränzenlos die Naturmacht und des Menschen Innerstes im Zorn Eins wird, dadurch sich begreift, daß das gränzenlose Eineswerden durch gränzenloses

Scheiden sich reinigt. (“Anmerkungen zum *Oedipus*”; FHA 16, 257)

Die tragische Darstellung behruct, wie in den Anmerkungen zum *Oedipus* angedeutet ist, darauf, daß der unmittelbare Gott, ganz Eines mit dem Menschen (denn der Gott eines Apostels ist mittelbarer, ist höchster Verstand in höchstem Geiste), daß die *unendliche* Begeisterung *unendlich*, daß heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt, und der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist. (“Anmerkungen zur *Antigona*”; FHA 16, 417)

In both formulations, the description of the “monstrous” “unification” (*Eineswerden*) of opposed pairs (man and god, mediate and immediate) evokes the crime of incest, the originary transgression, as it were, of Sophocles’s Theban cycle. The theme of “incest” is not an explicit theme of the “Ode,” which focuses instead on the relation between nature and culture. However, something similar is implied in the description of man’s relation to the “Earth.” In Hölderlin’s translation of the opening strophe, man’s “cultivation” of the Earth is characterized as a violation: “Und der Himmlischen erhabene Erde / Die unverderbliche, unermüdete / Reibet er auf.” Indeed, Hölderlin’s translation brings out the mythic implications of this passage: man, who comes from the earth, also violates the earth in the development of culture.

Within the language of the “Ode,” the underlying theme of incest might also explain the curious patterns of repetition that characterize the word pairs παντοπόρος / ἄπορος (Aller-Wege / Ausweglos) and ὑψίπολις / ἄπολις (hochstädtisch / unstädtisch).

Although these pairs derive from the same root word, they present opposed meanings. The curious logic of such wordplay is, I suggest, the linguistic equivalent of the mythic theme of incest. Moreover, it is the same logic that characterizes Hölderlin's unusual definition of the tragic in terms of the "monstrous" (i.e. "incestuous") unification of opposites that this thereby "purified" through "separation."

As critics have noticed, Hölderlin's definition of *das Tragische* in the *Sophokles-Anmerkungen* turns on the opposition of *das Mittelbare* and *das Unmittelbare*. The root word of this pair, *Mittel*, suggests a connection to *μηχανή*. Within the wider contexts of Hölderlin's writings, *Mittel* is also a central figure in the definition of *das Gesetz* that appears in Hölderlin's commentary on the Pindar fragment, "Das Höchste":

Das Unmittelbare, streng genommen, ist für die Sterblichen unmöglich, wie für die Unsterblichen; der Gott muß verschiedene Welten unterscheiden, seiner Natur gemäß, weil himmlische Güte, ihret selber wegen, heilig seyn muß, unvermischt. Der Mensch, als Erkennendes, muß auch verschiedene Welten unterscheiden, weil Erkenntniß nur durch Entgegensetzung möglich ist. Deswegen ist das Unmittelbare, streng genommen, für die Sterblichen unmöglich, wie für die Unsterblichen.

Die strenge Mittelbarkeit aber ist das Gesetz. (FHA 15, 355)

Read alongside Hölderlin's definition of *das Tragische*, this commentary defines the relation between gods and men in strikingly similar terms. As in the "Notes," here Hölderlin emphasizes both the danger of "mixing" and the need to maintain a

separation between different “worlds.” In this passage, by contrast, Hölderlin defines the process of separation as one of opposition (*Entgegensetzung*) on which knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) depends. The understanding of knowledge in terms of “positing” recalls Fichte. However, here, as in the fragment “Urtheil und Seyn,” Hölderlin’s understanding of *Erkenntnis* and *Entgegensetzung* is oriented against speculative positing. Instead of a simple logic of opposition, by which a self posits itself in relation to an other, Hölderlin makes opposition internal to both self and other. That is why, in the language of this text, the “immediate” is as “impossible” for the gods as it is for men (*Deswegen ist das Unmittelbare, streng genommen, für die Sterblichen unmöglich, wie für die Unsterblichen*).

As in the “Notes,” Hölderlin’s commentary thus emphasizes the necessity of a separating difference (*unterscheiden*)—not for “tragic” reasons, but in order to ensure *Erkenntnis*. Here the separation that secures “strict mediacy” (*strenge Mittelbarkeit*) is called *das Gesez*, a word that contains the same root as “positing” (*setzen*), but has a different sense. *Das Gesez* determines the limit between what is finite and infinite, mediate and immediate, that which is possible as *μηχανή* and—as *αμήχανη*—that which remains *unmöglich, linkisch, unthunlich*. To cross this limit is a transgression of the law itself.<sup>81</sup>

As it has often been read, Hölderlin’s definition of *das Tragische* in his commentary on Sophocles redefines both tragic transgression and Aristotelian

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas Schestag’s extended reading of the terms “Gesez” and “Mittelbarkeit” in relation to this passage has proved fruitful to my own interpretation of these terms in the context of the *Anmerkungen* as a whole. C.f. Schestag, “The Highest.”

catharsis in terms of the relation between *das Unmittelbare* and *das Mittelbare*.<sup>82</sup> *Die tragische Darstellung* presents transgression as the transgression of *das Mittelbare*: the “monstrous” unity of man and God, which, strictly speaking, should remain apart. As a tendency of *unendliche Begeisterung*, the tragic drive exceeds *das Mittelbare*, moving beyond the earth and beyond the conditions of time and space, toward *das Unmittelbare*. Lacoue-Labarthe has argued that the tragic tendency can be expressed in terms of the speculative striving toward the Absolute, and is “suspended” in the *Darstellung des Tragischen*, as Hölderlin here defines it. By *representing* this tendency, by allowing the tragic to appear, *die Darstellung des Tragischen*, halts the striving toward the immediate, bringing it back into the realm of *das Mittelbare*, under *das Gesez*. The *Darstellung des Tragischen* “purifies” the tendency toward “gränzenlose Eineswerden” through a “gränzenloses Scheiden,” which reestablishes difference through separation.

However, what happens in the *Darstellung des Tragischen* is something more than a “suspension” or “halting” of the tendency toward *das Unmittelbare*. As a *separation*, the *Darstellung des Tragischen* also results in a turning about through which “die *unendliche Begeisterung unendlich*, das heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich fasst.” The moment of “separation” is thus also a moment of repetition through which opposites cancel each other. It is therefore also a moment of reversal, or better, *inversion*,

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<sup>82</sup> Of the many interpretations this passage has received, those that have most significantly shaped my own reading of Hölderlin’s remarks include Lacoue-

through which *das Unendliche* appears as *das Un-endliche*—as that which opposes *das Endliche*: „und der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist,” while God is only present in being opposed, *gegen-wärtig*. The tragic tendency encounters a limit in *das Endliche* through which the Absolute appears as that which is *unthunlich*, *unmittelbar*, ἀμήχανη—“weil das Unendliche ... ohnehin nicht anders, als aus linkischem Gesichtspunct kann gefasst werden” (421).

As a turning away from the immediate toward *das Mittel*, the reversal is a self-protecting gesture because it preserves a limit. This could be traced with respect to the moment, in each tragedy, on which, Hölderlin claims, “[d]ie Verständlichkeit des Ganzen beruhet” (251). In *Ödipus*, as we have seen, this is the scene in which Oedipus interprets the oracle “zu unendlich” (251) and “priesterlich” (252), instead of simply maintaining “gute bürgerlicher Ordnung.” Oedipus’s tragic *nefas* is therefore described as a “geistesranke Fragen nach einem Bewußtseyn” (255). In the course of the tragedy, Oedipus’s “insane” “striving” toward consciousness is “purified” through a language that becomes increasingly “raw.” “Eben diß Allessuchende, Allesdeutende ist auch, daß sein Geist am Ende der rohen und einfältigen Sprache seiner Diener unterliegt” (256). The “all-searching, all-knowing” character of Oedipus’s tragic striving is reflected in the “allzukeusche, allzumechanische” quality of Sophocles’s language. Instead of heightening the effect of Oedipus’s “insane” striving, however, the effect of such “raw,” “mechanical” language is to “cancel” the tragic transgression. “Alles ist Rede gegen Rede, die sich gegenseitig aufhebt” (257). But why?

As Hölderlin explains, albeit rather cryptically, the language of Sophocles’s

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Labarthe’s influential essay, “The Caesura of the Speculative.”



tragedy also reflects a form of “striving.” It is the “Sprache für eine Welt, wo unter Pest und Sinnesverwirrung und allgemein entzündetem Wahrsagergeist, in müßiger Zeit, der Gott und der Mensch, damit der Weltlauf keine Lücke hat und das Gedächtniß der Himmlischen nicht ausgehet, *in der allvergessenden Form der Untreue sich mittheilt...*” (258-59). The language of Sophocles’s tragedy is thus appropriate to a world defined by the “confusion of sense” (*Sinnesverwirrung*) which allows god and man “communicate” in the “all-forgetting form of unfaithfulness” (*in der allvergessenden Form der Untreue*). Once again, the repetition of the prefix “all-”, along with the vertiginous syntax of Hölderlin’s prose, connects the description of language to the interpretation of Oedipus’s tragic “striving.” The “confusion of sense” results not so much from an *absence* of meaning as from the absence of a gap (*Lücke*) separating gods from men. For this reason, language becomes “untrue,” because it no longer communicates the differences on which meaning depends.

At the same time (and for the same reason), the language of the tragedy repeats and thereby “cancels” and “purifies” itself, a moment figured as a “reversal” and a “betrayal.”

In solchem Momente vergißt der Mensch sich und den Gott, und kehret, freilich heiliger Weise, wie in Verräther sich um. — In der äußersten Gränze des Leidens bestehet nemlich nichts mehr, als die Bedingungen der Zeit oder des Raums.

In dieser vergißt sich der Mensch, weil er ganz im Moment ist; der Gott, weil er nichts als Zeit ist; und beides ist untreu, die Zeit, weil sie in solchem Momente sich kategorisch wendet, und Anfang und

Ende sich in ihr schlechterdings nicht reimen läßt; der Mensch, weil er  
in diesem Momente der kategorischen Umkehr folgen muß, hiermit im  
Folgenden schlechterdings nicht dem Anfänglichen gleichen kann.  
(258)

In such moments, man “turns against himself.” The reversal is therefore not the same as a return, for it exposes a fundamental disjunction: the incommensurability of beginning and end, which no longer “rhyme” with one another.<sup>83</sup> Hölderlin’s description of this moment as a “categorical reversal” (*kategorische Umkehr*) recalls Kant, where “categorical” would mean “conditioned” by time and space. Indeed, Hölderlin’s comment that the “In der äußersten Gränze des Leidens bestehet nemlich nichts mehr, als die Bedingungen der Zeit oder des Raums” seems to support an understanding of “categorical” in temporal and spatial terms.

Reading this passage in fidelity to Kant, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the retreat of God signifies the inscription of the law as separation or “critique”: “la Loi, ici, n’est rien d’autre que *critique*. Ou si l’on préfère, elle est la leçon même, voire le commandement de la *Critique de la raison pure*” (*Métaphrasis* 39). By the same logic, the presentation of the law corresponds to “la non-révélation, c’est-à-dire la *condition* de Dieu [...] *Condition*, au sens kantien, se dit, dans le lexique de Hölderlin, comme *moyen*, en français, ou *Mittel*—en général comme médiateté (*Mittelbarkeit*)” (41). As

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<sup>83</sup> At one level, this self-protective gesture of consciousness could be understood in terms of what, in the letters to Böhlendorff, Hölderlin describes as Greek *Virtuosität*: the alternation of tendencies toward *Begeisterung* and *Nüchternheit*. It would also be possible to understand the reversal that takes place in such moments as the movement “vom griechischen zum hesperischen,” the reversal of *das Fremde* and *das Eigene* through which “der *freie* Gebrauch des *Eigenen*” is actually achieved.

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, the Kantian sense of “condition” implies *das Mittel* (the mediate) as the condition of time and space. According to this interpretation, *kategorisch* would mean “according to a law that is absolute, unconditional and given by pure reason.”<sup>84</sup> By emphasizing the process of “separation,” however, Lacoue-Labarthe once again glosses over the fact that this separation occurs not only as a moment of separation or suspension, but *reversal*, and the “inscription of the law” is therefore *more than* a founding “critique.” Indeed, as we have seen, this moment contains an element of “monstrous” (and thereby self-purifying) repetition.

The idea of the “categorical reversal” recurs in the “Notes” on *Antigona*, as well. As in the earlier passage, this moment is described as “heilig.”

Wohl die Art, wie in der Mitte sich die Zeit wendet, ist nicht wohl  
veränderlich, so auch nicht wohl, wie ein Charakter der kategorischen  
Zeit kategorisch folget, und wie es vom griechischen zum hesperischen  
gehet, hingegen der heilige Nahmen, unter welchem das Höchste

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<sup>84</sup> Werner Hamacher offers a slightly different interpretation of the passage. “‘Kategorisch’, wie Hölderlin es hier verwendet hat vermutlich nicht nur die Bedeutung von ‘strukturelle notwendig, im Unterschied zu bloß hypothetisch’, sondern zugleich die Bedeutung des griechischen *kategoreo*, nämlich zum einen ‘wider jemanden reden’, ‘anklagen’, zum anderen ‘zu erkennen geben’, ‘anzeigen’, ‘verraten’” (“Parusie, Mauern” 121). In contrast to the Kantian sense of the term “kategorisch,” which indicates a “structural necessity,” Hamacher emphasizes the implied sense of “betrayal.” Rather than signifying the condition of time, Hamacher argues, the *kategorische Umkehr* exposes a temporal paradox: the “Fundamental-Paradox der Erinnerungs- und der mit ihr entspringenden Vorstellungs-Zeit” (“Parusie, Mauern” 123). Instead, Hamacher draws a comparison between the categorical reversal and the Pauline concept of the *katechon*, the restrainer which prevents the arrival of the Antichrist, and with it, the apocalypse, in which all time comes to an end. (“Parusie, Mauern” 128).

geföhlt wird oder geschiehet. (414)

Just as the earlier passage had drawn a parallel between the categorical turning of time and the categorical turning of man, this passage describes the categorical turning of time as occurring “categorically”—a formulation that echoes the definition of the tragic (“das die unendliche Begeisterung unendlich ... sich faßt”). The categorical reversal is thus not, or not only, a moment of separation, but of self-canceling repetition. In the language of the Böhlendorff letters, the moment of reversal parallels the shift from the “Greek” to the “Hesperian,” and also evokes the experience of “das Höchste.” Not only is this the title Hölderlin assigns to the Pindar fragment, which he interprets as a commentary on the “strict mediacy” of *das Gesez*, it also appears in the letters to Böhlendorff. There, Hölderlin writes, “Ich habe lange daran laborirt und weiß nun daß außer dem, was bei den Griechen und uns das höchste seyn muß, nemlich dem lebendigen Verhältniß und Geschik, wir nicht wohl etwas gleich mit ihnen haben dürfen” (StA VI, 426).<sup>85</sup> The “highest” is therefore not only a name for the law, but what is common to the Hesperian and the Greek: *das lebendige Verhältniß und Geschik*. The concept of “the highest” connects the tragic experience of “categorical reversal” and the sense of art as *Geschick*. Since, as we have seen, *Geschick* is Hölderlin’s preferred rendering of *μῆχανή*, the *kategorische Umkehr* might also refer to “mechanical” dimension of art.

The “Highest” is not only an experience of lawful separation, therefore, but of “mechanical” repetition—which is to say, an experience that entails the reversal of

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<sup>85</sup> The term recurs in the second letter to Böhlendorff, as well, which mentions “das Höchste der Kunst” (StA VI, 432).

opposed “categories.” This means that the law cannot be characterized as a founding “critique.” But neither is it the mere “confusion” of opposites—it is not the same as the “monstrous mixing” that is purified. In Hölderlin’s vocabulary, this *other* kind of unity—sometimes associated with “Chaos” and “madness” (*Wahnsinn*) is also “heilig” (holy, but also “whole”).

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While the “Notes” on *Oedipus* characterize Oedipus’s tragic transgression as an “insane striving for consciousness,” the commentary on Antigone describes madness as something “holy.”

Wohl der höchste Zug an der Antigonä. Der erhabene Spott, so fern  
heiliger Wahnsinn höchste menschliche Erscheinung, und hier mehr  
Seele als Sprache ist, übertrifft alle ihre übrigen Äußerungen; und es ist  
auch nöthig, so im Superlative von der Schönheit zu sprechen, weil die  
Haltung unter anderem auch auf dem Superlative von menschlichem  
Geist und heroischer Virtuosität beruht. (414)

Antigone’s “highest trait,” Hölderlin claims, is her “sublime mockery.” Insofar as it is the “highest human manifestation” madness is also “heilig.” Hölderlin justifies the use of the “superlative” (Antigone is the most beautiful, her madness is the “highest” trait) as an expression of the “heroic virtuosity” of the “human spirit.” In such moments, language becomes more “soul” than “speech.”

Hölderlin’s interpretation of the character of Antigone is dense and difficult. What motivates the seemingly paradoxical conjunction of “mockery” and the

“sublime,” “madness” and the “holy”? Hölderlin evokes the idea of a “daring” and “blasphemous” word in terms that offer a direct echo of the definition of tragedy.

Es ist ein großer Behelf der geheimarbeitenden Seele, dass sie auf dem höchsten Bewußtseyn dem Bewußtseyn ausweicht, und ehe sie wirklich der gegenwärtige Gott ergreift, mit kühnem oft sogar blasphemischen Worte diesem begegnet und so die heilige lebende Möglichkeit des Geistes erhält. (414-15)

Here the “blasphemous word” counters the “present god” and *thereby* “preserves” the “holy living possibility of spirit” (*die heilige lebende Möglichkeit des Geistes*). This moment is again figured as one of “canceling”: at the “highest” point of consciousness, the soul avoids consciousness—and thereby preserves itself. The repetition of *Bewußtseyn* functions as a negating repetition, thus performing the same experience it describes: an encounter that is also a moment of opposition, a moment of “superlative” destruction that is also one of “preservation.”

Although extremely abstract and enigmatic, Hölderlin’s comments about consciousness reflect his analysis of the scene in the tragedy when Antigone compares herself to Niobe (ll. 852-61 in Hölderlin’s translation). The image of Niobe, transformed into stone, figures the “reversal” of consciousness at its highest point. “In hohem Bewußtseyn vergleicht sie sich dann immer mit Gegenständen, die kein Bewußtseyn haben, aber in ihrem Schiksaal des Bewußtseyns Form annehmen” (415). It is unclear if “sie” refers here to Antigone or to Niobe, but the ambiguity points to the analogy between the two figures: comparing herself to Niobe, Antigone undergoes

a transformation similar to that of Niobe, who is turned to stone.<sup>86</sup> In her “fate” Niobe becomes an “object” without consciousness, but thereby takes on the “form” of consciousness.

The idea of transformation occasions the shift (otherwise unmarked in Hölderlin’s commentary) from an analysis of Antigone’s speech, to a discussion of the lines,

Sie zählet dem Vater der Zeit

Die Stundenschläge, die goldnen.

Hölderlin’s translation departs dramatically from the original, he says, in order to bring the original closer to our mode of understanding (“Um es unserer Vorstellungsart mehr zu nähren”) (415). Although the Greek text refers explicitly to Zeus, Hölderlin translates “father of time,” a choice which brings out the mythic implications of the original. Zeus is the “father of time” or the “father of earth” because he “reverses the striving out of this world toward another into a striving from another world into this one” (das Streben aus dieser Welt in die andre zu kehren zu einem Streben au seiner andern Welt in diese) (415). “Father of time” thus evokes a further image of reversal in the conflict of opposed tendencies “out of this world into another” and “from another world into this one.”

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<sup>86</sup> Hölderlin compares the “fate” (*Schicksaal*) of Niobe to the “Schicksaal der unschuldigen Natur, die überall in ihrer Virtuosität in eben dem Grade ins Allzuorganische gehet, wie der Mensch sich dem Aorgischen nähert” (FHA 16, 415). The contrast between the “organic” (here, *Allzuorganische*) and the “aorgic” (*Aorgische*) is central to the definition of tragedy Hölderlin discovers in composing his *Empedokles*.

Within the context of the foregoing discussion it might be assumed that “sie” refers to Antigone—or Niobe. In fact, these lines belong to the fourth choral *stasimon* at the beginning of the next act (ll. 981-1024 in Hölderlin’s translation). Looking more closely at the ode it becomes clear why Hölderlin reads the two scenes together. This passage is the crux of Hölderlin’s interpretation of the tragedy, offering “the most appropriate perspective from which the whole is to be grasped” (“als eigentlichster Gesichtspunct, wo das Ganze angefaßt werden muß”) (416). As Hölderlin notes, this Chorus is one of the most difficult and obscure passages of the entire tragedy. Moreover, the Chorus seems distant and “cold” towards Antigone. And yet, for that reason, this passage is also the most “appropriate” and the most “fitting” (*geschickt, schicklich*). “In sofern passet der sonderbare Chor ... aufs geschikteste zum Ganzen, und seine kalte Unpartheilichkeit ist Wärme, eben weil sie so eingentümlich schicklich ist” (417).

Among classical scholars, the meaning of this choral ode is much debated. It consists of three mythological narratives about figures unjustly imprisoned: Danae, Lykourgos, and Kleopatra. While all three stories cohere loosely around a central theme, the narratives themselves are somewhat obscure, and the connection to Antigone remains no more than implicit. Stylistically, the language of the Greek original is extremely convoluted, metrically complex, and rhetorically difficult. Add to this the fact that the text is more than usually corrupt in places, and it becomes easy to understand why some scholars have argued that the ode serves little more than a digression within the development of the tragedy as a whole. As one commentator summarizes,



The explicit paradigmatic point of the three stories is simple: fate is inescapable, and may require even the high-born to endure hardships, including imprisonment. Signpost phrases at the beginning and end of the Song explicitly compare these mythological fates to Antigone's; and Antigone herself is addressed twice in her absence. So, one one conventional, even banal, level, the ode represents the Elders' attempt at a kind of 'consolation' for her ... Yet the three stories are narrated in such a way that their particular correspondence to Antigone's situation, or even to each other, is far from obvious: the allusive, convoluted lyric style highlights certain aspects of each narrative, while much of the rest of the story (including some key events) goes unsaid—and unfortunately (esp. the last two stanzas) we cannot be sure what details of these myths would be taken for granted by a fifth-century audience. As in previous Songs, the Elders remain vague and reticent about their own opinions of Antigone's fate, and its precise relationship to these infamous narratives of the past.<sup>87</sup>

The general scholarly assessment of this Song thus confirms several of Hölderlin's observations about the "strangeness" of the passage and the "coldness" of the Chorus toward Antigone. And yet, for these reasons, it seems especially curious that Hölderlin would single it out.

In order to better understand why Hölderlin identifies this ode as the most

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<sup>87</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Mark Griffith (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 283-84.

“appropriate” and “fitting” vantage point for an interpretation of the tragedy as a whole, let us look more closely at his translation. In Hölderlin’s translation, Antigone is present throughout the entire ode, while modern editions have Antigone exiting beforehand. Although the Chorus addresses Antigone twice, in modern editions the Chorus’s speech is directed toward an absent figure. In Hölderlin’s translation, Antigone is “led away” after the Song, and the stasimon therefore functions more as an extension of the preceding dialogue. Hölderlin’s language captures something of the difficulty of the original, particularly at the level of syntax. Within the context of the original, however, the violence and awkwardness of Hölderlin’s language is strangely appropriate. The style of the passage is also “fitting” within the context of its central themes.

All three stories are examples of unjust punishment. Danae was imprisoned by her father, who had been told that her son would kill him. In this case, however, her father was unable to escape fate: Zeus impregnated Danae while she was imprisoned, and she gave birth to Perseus. Lykourgos, son of Dryas, was punished for his resistance to the god Dionysos. His story recalls that of Pentheus, the subject of Euripides’s *The Bacchae*. Lykourgos’s punishment “fits” his crime: failing to recognize Dionysos, the god of the bacchants, he goes “mad.” Although less clear, the story of Kleopatra is also one of imprisonment and its consequences: after she is imprisoned by her husband, Kleopatra’s children are blinded unjustly. In each case, punishment results not so much from a tragic fault (*hamartia*), as from a tragic “fate.”

The first strophe narrates the story of Danae. In contrast to the original,

Hölderlin's syntax is, if anything, *more* complex.

Der Leib auch Danaes mußte,  
Statt himmlischen Lichts, in Gedult  
Das eiserne Gitter haben.  
Im Dunkel lag sie  
In der Todtenkammer, in Fesseln;  
Ogleich an Geschlecht edel, o Kind!  
Sie zählete dem Vater der Zeit  
Die Stundenschläge, die goldnen. (ll. 981-88)

Hölderlin's translation emphasizes the physical condition of Danae's imprisonment. By making her body (*Leib*) the grammatical subject of the sentence, the syntax of the phrase divests Danae of agency. The contrast between "heavenly light" and the "darkness" of her cell not only provides a description of her punishment, but also hints at the eventual outcome of the story. Although Hölderlin does not name Zeus directly, the concluding lines of the strophe allude to the moment in the story when Danae is impregnated by Zeus's golden rain. By describing Zeus as "father of time," Hölderlin's translation departs from the original, transforming the figure of golden rain into a figure of time. But the beating of the rain becomes the beating of hours (*Stundenschläge*), and thus represents the physical, "calculable" dimension of time.

The transition to the next strophe hinges on a general interpretation of the story of Danae as the story of the "terrible power of fate" (*μοιριδία τις δύνασις δεινά*).

Aber des Schiksaals ist furchtbar die Kraft.  
Der Regen nicht, der Schlachtgeist

Und der Thurm nicht, und die meerumrauschten

Fliehn sie, die schwarzen Schiffe. (ll. 989-92)

The reference to *furchtbar* (*δεινά*) is a clear echo of the “Ode to Man,” as is the warning that follows. Fate is “terrible” because inescapable. The “Ode to Man” uses similar language to describe man’s inability to escape death. Within the context of the tragedy as a whole, both are instances of the Chorus’s strange reticence—their tendency to gloss over human suffering in favor of offering a more general statement about human nature. For this reason, the Chorus has often been accused of reverting to “petit bourgeois” concerns. Indeed, it would not be a stretch to say that the Chorus’s tendency to moralize often functions to cover over an inherent ambiguity—and thereby also reveals it. In the “Ode to Man” this might explain the ambivalent relation between nature and culture; in the present ode, it hints at the fact that the inevitability of fate is entirely inadequate to explain the inherent violence and injustice of these stories—and their connection to one another. In both cases, the Chorus falls back on the ambivalent word *δεινά* in order to account for something essentially mysterious.

The next part of the Song, which presents the story of Lycurgus, illuminates some of the more peculiar terms that appear in Hölderlin’s interpretation of the tragedy.

Und gehascht ward zornig behend Dryas’ Sohn,

Der Edonen König in begeistertem Schimpf

Von Dionysos, von den stürzenden

Steinhaufen gedeket.

Den Wahnsinn weint' er so fast aus,  
 Und den blühenden Zorn. Und kennen lernt' er,  
 Im Wahnsinn tastend, den Gott mit schimpfender Zunge.  
 Denn stoken macht' er die Weiber  
 Des Gottes voll, und das evische Feuer  
 Und die flötenliebenden  
 Reizt' er, die Musen. (ll. 993-1003)

The reference to “im begeisterten Schimpf” recalls Hölderlin’s characterization of Antigone’s “holy mockery.” In this context, Lycurgus (although never named explicitly) is described as “mocking” Dionysos. By introducing the modifier “begeistertem,” however, Hölderlin’s translation points to the strangely recursive character of Lycurgus’s “error.” As we have seen, *Begeisterung* is Hölderlin’s preferred translation of Platonic inspiration, or enthusiasm, and often appears (for Hölderlin as well as Plato) in reference to Dionysos and the ecstatic frenzy of the bacchants. The fact that Lycurgus’s mockery is “inspired,” therefore suggests that he mocks Dionysos—but in a manner befitting Dionysos.

Similarly, Hölderlin’s syntax in this passage is even more “wild” than in the original. Indeed, every sentence is structured as a type of inversion, in which the grammatical subject (“er”) *follows* the verb. As we have seen, syntactic inversion often functions as the rhetorical equivalent of *Begeisterung* in Hölderlin’s poetry. It is employed to similar effect in Hölderlin’s rendering of this passage, as well, highlighting the “wild” character of Lycurgus’s “inspired” speech. However, syntactic inversion also draws attention to a thematic tension. The punishment befitting

Lycurgus's crime is madness (*Wahnsinn*; Greek *μανίας δεινόν*, "terrible madness"). But it is only through madness that he "touches" the god with "mocking tongue." Madness is thus not only the punishment for his mockery, but also the *cause*. The confusion of cause and effect (itself a sign of "madness") is reflected in the syntax of the line "Den Wahnsinn weint' er so fast aus," which transforms the implied cause (*Wahnsinn*) into the direct object of the verb "ausweinen," while making the implied object (Lycurgus) into the active grammatical subject of the phrase. The word order of the phrase, moreover, which is structured as a type of inversion, reverses the logical relation of subject and object. *Wahnsinn* thus appears in the accusative, as the direct object of the phrase, but in the logical *position* of the agent. Adding to the (apt) strangeness of the phrase, the word "ausweinen" is a neologism that transforms a non-transitive verb (*weinen*) into a transitive one. In this case, the wordplay has the effect of heightening the tension between the cause and effect of Lycurgus's madness. It also helps explain the peculiar character of Lycurgus's "crime." Like Danae, he can hardly be said to have committed an "error" in the conventional sense—not only because his transgression (his "inspired" mockery) turns out to be appropriate, but also because his transgression is confused with his punishment.

The transition to the next example is unclear at first, partly due to the elliptical, circuitous way it is introduced. A list of place names orients the obscure and convoluted story of Kleopatra and her sons, bringing the narrative into indirect focus.

Bei himmelblauen Felsen aber, wo  
An beiden Enden Meer ist,

Dort sind des Bosphoros Ufer  
Und der Busen Salmidessos,  
Der Thraziern gehöret; daselbst sah, nahe  
Der Stadt, der Schlachtgeist zu, als beiden  
Phineiden ward die Wunde der Blindheit  
Vom wilden Weibe gestoßen,  
Und finster wars in den muthwillgen Augenzirkeln.

Von Speeren Stiche. Unter  
Blutigen Händen und Nadelspizen.  
Und verschmachtend, die Armen weinten  
Das arme Leiden der Mutter; sie hatten  
Ehlosen Ursprung; jene aber war  
Vom Saamen der altensprungenen  
Erechtheiden.  
In fernewandelnden Grotten  
Ernährt ward sie, in Stürmen des Vaters, die Boreade  
Zu Rossen gesellt, auf gradem Hügel,  
Der Götter Kind. Doch auch auf jener  
Das große Schiksaal ruhte, Kind! (ll. 1004-24)

The vertiginous perspective of the opening lines identifies the location of the story while delaying its implied subject. When the grammatical subject of the sentence finally appears (*der Schlachtgeist*) it is only to focalize the narrative through a

character otherwise unrelated to the story—an effect that heightens the sense of distance and disorientation of the passage. Meanwhile, the verb *sah* draws a contrast between the subject of the sentence (*der Schlachtgeist*) and the subject of the story: the sons of Kleopatra, who are blinded by their stepmother (their father’s “wild wife”)—and therefore cannot “see.” The fact that *Schlachtgeist* refers to the god of war, a mythic subject, lends a further sense of irony to the story, where the verb “see” could have either a literal or an allegorical meaning as a story about blindness told *from the perspective* of the god of war. Here, as well, Hölderlin’s translation brings out the violence of the original. The lines “Von Speeren Stiche. Unter / Blutigen Händen und Nadelspizen” evoke the gruesomeness of the scene, not only (as in the original) in the gory image of the needles with which the children are stabbed and the “bloody hands” of the perpetrator, but in the fragmentary character of the sentences and the break in the line, which evoke the sharpness of what they describe with almost cinematic precision.

It is initially difficult to identify the implied subject of the story (*Kleopatra*) because she is mentioned only parenthetically toward the end of the passage, in the phrase “die Armen weinten / Das arme Leiden der Mutter” (literally: the poor ones cried the poor suffering of the mother). By centering on the sons, the real subject of the story is displaced, just as the opening lines had an initially disorienting effect, even as they served to orient the setting. When Kleopatra is (finally) mentioned, it is not as the subject, or even as the direct object of the phrase, but as a genitive attribute of the direct object (*das arme Leiden*). At the same time, the repetition of the word “arm” in reference to the sons *and* to the mother evokes a strangely recursive logic (one even



more apparent in the wordplay of the original Greek: μέλεοι μελέαν πάθαν]. Carrying from mother to son, the repetition of the word “arm” suggests a heritable trait: the sons suffer through no fault of their own, just as their mother suffered.

The reference to Kleopatra’s noble lineage echoes a recurring motif of the Ode, and relates back to Antigone and the overarching theme of inescapable fate (*Μοῖρα*; *Schiksaal*). It also harkens back to the opening of the strophe, drawing a contrast between the setting of the story (described in bizarre detail) and Kleopatra’s “distant” origins. The lines “In fernwandelnden Grotten / Ernährt ward sie” not only suggests a remote origin (*Ursprung*), but something more mysterious, as well. The image of “grottos” evokes the spatial dimensions of a prison—Danae’s “cell,” Antigone’s “tomb.” But the word “nourish” is more positive. In this example, a dark, confined space is associated not only with punishment, but with origin. The image of “faraway grottos” thus serves as an apt figure for the story of Kleopatra, itself—whose origins, like those of the character, remain obscure. Indeed, if this story “fits” within the logic of the song as a whole, it is not only as a further example of unjust imprisonment, but as a symbol of (a) hermetic myth in which origin and end, cause and effect, action and consequence, parent and child, remain enclosed.

It is within this context, I suggest, that the fifth choral ode thus offers a “fitting” perspective on the tragedy as a whole, and helps situate (if not clarify) Hölderlin’s understanding of the “tragic.” For Hölderlin, Antigone’s “highest” trait is that of “sublime mockery.” Within the context of our reading of the fourth stasimon, Antigone’s “transgression” is likened to Lycurgus’s “inspired mockery.” In

“madness,” he “touches” the god; for the same reason, Antigone’s madness becomes “holy.” In the language of the ode, the inversion of “madness” and “holiness” is marked in the inversions of subject and object. In the development of the tragedy as a whole, it occurs in the scene when Antigone is led away to meet her fate. Sentenced to a “living death,” Antigone’s punishment is as “fitting” as it is “terrible.”<sup>88</sup>

As Antigone bemoans her fate, the Chorus reminds her that she must suffer the consequences of her actions and those of her family.

ANTIGONAE.

...Io! Ich Arme!

Nicht unter Sterblichen, nicht unter Todten.

CHOR.

Mitwohnend Lebenden nicht und nicht Gestorbnen.

Forttreibend bis zur Scheide der Kühnheit,

Bis auf die Höhe des Rechts

Bist du, o Kind, wohl tiefgefallen,

Stirbst aber väterlichen Kampf.

ll. 880-86

“Neither living nor dead” not only describes Antigone’s punishment, but also her “crime”: in striving to the “heights of justice,” she has fallen into the “depths.” The

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<sup>88</sup> Hölderlin describes this moment as one of “superlative” beauty (*Schönheit*) (414). Hölderlin’s remark likely refers to the moment, in the third act, when the

Chorus initially accuses Antigone of “daring” (*Kühnheit*), a crime that suggests the mythic implications of hubris. But Antigone has not defied the gods—quite the opposite. In defying the laws of man, she has upheld the law of the gods. Antigone’s “daring” is thus inadequate to explain her crime—or her fate. Perhaps intimating this, the Chorus then suggests another explanation.

πατρῴον δ' ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον

Väterlichen aber bezahlst du einen Preis. (ln. 854)

The Greek evokes an economic figure: Antigone “pays” the “price” of her fathers (literally: a “fatherly” price). Reducing Antigone’s suffering to something as banal as a financial transaction, the Chorus might be accused once again of petit bourgeois moralizing. On the other hand, the fiscal metaphor also points to the fact that the logic of crime and punishment depends, as it were, on a certain “economy.” The adjective “väterlichen” is curiously vague, and its placement at the beginning of the sentence—rather than in proximity with the noun (price)—suggests something incongruous.

By contrast, Hölderlin’s translation abandons the economic figure.

Stirbst aber väterlichen Kampf. (ln. 886)

The choice of “sterben” instead of “bezahlen” literalizes the metaphor. The fact that “sterben” is used as a transitive verb also brings out the inherent violence of the “transaction.” Antigone “dies” (or is made to die) a “fatherly battle.” Instead of the language of economy, Hölderlin’s translation substitutes the language of war. The martial “Kampf” also echoes the strange word “Scheide” (“sheath”) a few lines earlier,

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Chorus evokes Antigone’s “divine beauty” (349).

“Forttreibend bis zur Scheide der Kühnheit” (ln. 883). In Sattler’s “literal” translation, the line expresses the “extreme of daring”: “vortschreitend zum Äußersten der Kühnheit” (ln. 851). In this case, however, Hölderlin’s translation offers an even more literal rendering of the Greek ἔσχατον (from σχάζω, “to slit open”). It also provides a direct echo of Hölderlin’s definition of tragedy: “*daß das gränzenlose Eineswerden durch gränzenloses Scheiden sich reinigt*” (257).

The Chorus’s reference to the “fatherly battle” strikes a nerve (“Die zornigste hast du angereget,” Antigone replies). It also touches on the essentially paradoxical nature of Antigone’s “crime.”

ANTIGONAE.

Die zornigste hast du angereget

Der lieben Sorgen,

Die vielfache Weheklage des Vaters

Und alles

Unseres Schiksaals,

Uns rühmlichen Labdakiden.

Io! du mütterlicher Wahn

In den Betten, ihr Umarmung, selbstgebährend,

Mit meinem Vater, von unglücklicher Mutter,

Von denen einmal ich Trübsinnige kam,

Zu denen einmal ich Trübsinnige kam,

Zu denen ich im Fluche

Mannlos zu wohnen komme...

(ll. 887-898)

Antigone alludes to the “dear concerns,” the “myriad laments” of her family, the infamous Labdacids. The contours of the story are, of course, well-known: Antigone and her siblings are the fruit of the incestuous union between their father, Oedipus, and *his* mother, Jocasta. Antigone’s description of this crime is significant, therefore, not for what it says, but how. Even in the original Greek, the syntax of these lines is unusually complex and confusing—a style perversely appropriate to what it describes.

ἰὼ ματρῶναι λέκτρων

Io mütterliche der Betten

ᾗται, κοιμήματ’ αὐτογένη

Mißgeschicke, Umarmungen eigenerzeug-

τ’ ἐμῷ πατρὶ δυσμόρου ματρός,

te [zuteil geworden] meinem Vater mit der unglückseligen

Mutter,

οἷων ἐγὼ ποθ’ ἅ ταλαίφρων ἔφυν.

denen ich einst die Elende entsprossen bin.

ll. 861-865

The lines are nearly impossible to translate, suggesting several overlapping meanings:

“oh the misfortunes of the maternal bed, and the unfortunate mother’s incestuous union with my father,” or, alternatively, “oh the misfortunes of the maternal bed, and my father’s incestuous union with my unfortunate mother.” In other words, the “incestuous union” is alternately attributable to the mother or the father—an apt ambiguity, in this case. By introducing a “du” not present in the original, as well as an additional word (*Wahn*; “madness,” “delusion”), Hölderlin’s translation transforms these lines into an apostrophe: “du mütterlicher Wahn” (du motherly delusion). While

the attribution of the word “Umarmung” (embrace, union) is ambiguous in the original (belonging either to the father or the mother), Hölderlin introduces a possessive pronoun, *ihr* (here I read “Ihr” as “your,” but it could also be “her” or “their”—another telling ambiguity). The syntactically ambiguous phrase the “incestuous union with my mother/father” therefore becomes “*your* incestuous union with my father,” while the line “of unfortunate mother” is ascribed to Oedipus, rather than Antigone (although, of course, they have the same mother).

By transforming these lines into an address to the mother, Hölderlin’s translation not only adds something to the original, but *elides* the word *ἄται* (*Misgeschicke*). As a name for Antigone’s “crime,” as well as the crime of her family, it is significant that this word is absent from Hölderlin’s translation. Instead, Hölderlin substitutes the word *Wahn* (delusion, *μανία*), a “slippage” that stands in for the missing “mishap,” while the “mishap” itself remains unnamed. In this case, I would argue, Hölderlin’s “omission” is meaningful. By eliding the word *ἄται*, Hölderlin’s translation nevertheless *reveals* the “crime” that hovers just beneath the surface of Sophocles’s tragedy.

The word *ἄται* recurs more than twenty times in the original Greek text. Nevertheless, its meaning remains obscure, suggesting both the *cause* of misfortune, as well as its *effect*.<sup>89</sup> Lacan places this word at the center of his interpretation of *Antigone*, a focal point of his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960). As he points out, Sophocles’s tragedy draws a contrast between *Atè* and mere “error”

(*hamartia*). While Creon's actions are described at one point as a "mistake" (*hamartia*), this word is never used to characterize Antigone's crime. But whenever one tries to approach the meaning of the word *Atè*, it recedes. "One does or does not approach *Atè*, and when one approaches it, it is because of something that is linked to a beginning and a chain of events, namely, that of the misfortunes of the Labdacides family" (Lacan 264). Against the *polis*, Antigone assumes responsibility for burying her brother. Defying Creon's order, Antigone also "chooses" certain death in order to uphold the family "crime." "Antigone is required to sacrifice her own being in order to maintain that essential being which is the family *Atè*, and that is the theme or true axis on which the whole tragedy turns. Antigone perpetuates, eternalizes, immortalizes that *Atè*" (283).

Lacan's analysis of *Antigone* has much in common with Hölderlin's. In focusing on the concept of *Atè*, Lacan breaks with the conventional Hegelian interpretation of the tragedy, which presents the figures of Antigone and Creon as conflicting discourses overcome and reconciled through dialectical synthesis.<sup>90</sup> For Lacan, by contrast, Antigone represents the image of desire that goes "beyond" the limits of the human. His interpretation hinges on two critical scenes: Antigone's comparison of herself to Niobe, and the Chorus's characterization of Antigone's "divine beauty" (ll. 801-802). In comparing herself to Niobe becoming petrified, Antigone identifies with the "inanimate condition" of the death drive (281). This is similar to Hölderlin's interpretation of the same scene. In identifying with objects that

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<sup>89</sup> C.f. Mark Griffith's commentary (*Antigone* 120).

<sup>90</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenologie des Geistes* §444 ff.

have “no consciousness,” Antigone actually achieves a “heightened” consciousness: “In hohem Bewußtseyn vergleicht sie sich dann immer mit Gegenständen, die kein Bewußtseyn haben, aber in ihrem Schiksaal des Bewußtseyns Form annehmen” (FHA 16, 415).

In Lacan’s analysis, the image of Niobe being petrified is analogous to the image of Antigone after she has been sentenced and prepares to accept her fate. As she descends to her tomb, Antigone engages in a final dialogue with the Chorus. She has already accepted the fact that she must die a “living death.” Although she “laments” her fate, she remains unwavering in her resolve. Antigone’s attitude scandalizes the Chorus, and they are “blinded” by her image.<sup>91</sup> Lacan does not cite the text directly, but his summary of the main themes centers on the last ten lines of the third choral stasimon (fourth song). (I cite the original Greek with accompanying German translations, followed by Hölderlin’s translation. To be clear: Lacan refers to the original Greek and a French translation—not Hölderlin’s).

νικᾷ δ’ ἐναργῆς βλεφάρων

Es siegt aber leuchtend der Wimpern

ἱμερος εὐλέκτρου

Leibreiz der schöngebetteten

νύμφας τῶν μεγάλων πάρεδρος ἐν ἀρχαῖς

Braut der großen Tischgenossin im Herrschaftsrat

θεσμῶν. ἄμαχος γὰρ ἐμ



der Satzungen. Unbezwingbar nämlich ihr  
παίζει θεὸς Ἀφροδίτα.

Spiel treibt die Göttin Aphrodite.

νῦν δ' ἤδη ἔγω καὶ τὸς θεσμῶν

Nun aber schon ich auch selbst aus Satzungen

ἔξω φέρομαι τὰ δ' ὁρῶν. ἴσχειν

heraus werde ich gebracht dies sehend. Halten

δ' οὐκέτι πηγὰς δύναιμαι δάκρυων,

aber nicht mehr die Bäche kann ich der Tränen,

τὸν παγκοίταν, ὅθ' ὁρῶ θάλαμον,

in das alleinschläfernde, da ich sehe in das Brautgemach,

τὴν δ' Ἀντιγόνην ἀνύτουσαν.

diese aber Antigone den Weg vollenden. (Il. 795-

805)

Und die zu Schande wird es,

Das Mächtigbittende,

Am Augenliede der hochzeitlichen

Jungfrau, im Anbeginne dem Werden großer

Verständigungen gesellet. Unkriegerisch spielt nemlich

Die göttliche Schönheit mit.

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<sup>91</sup> As in the previous chapter, the term “scandal” is curiously appropriate as a figure for the “stumbling block” that is *also* a “block to stumbling.” As in my reading

Jetzt aber komm' ich, eben, selber, aus  
 Dem Geseze. Denn ansehen muß ich diß, und halten kann ich  
 Nicht mehr die Quelle der Thränen,  
 Da in das alles schweigende Bett'  
 Ich she' Antigonä wandeln. (ll. 824-834)

The subject of the ode is love (*Eros*). In the original, it is unclear exactly when the Chorus shifts from a discussion of love in general to address Antigone, in particular. Thus, in the lines cited here, it is unclear whether the “bride” refers to Antigone herself or the general figure of a “bride.” In either case, the syntax of the phrase and the image it conveys are highly peculiar: “Victorious is the shining desire that streams from the eyelids of the beautiful bride.” The second part of the phrase, “table-companion among the ruling council of laws,” is equally ambiguous, referring either to the bride—or to her desire. Hölderlin’s translation, which seems strange at first, is actually strikingly literal. The verbal noun “Mächtigbittende” conjoins “powerful(ly)” and “supplicating,” rendering the idea of “desire” all the more “powerful” as the conjunction of competing terms. It also highlights the fact that this word is not the same as *eros*, which Hölderlin translates “Liebe.” Instead of “ruling council,” his translation, “Anbeginne,” plays on the multiple sense of the Greek ἀρχαῖς. The next sentence draws a parallel between the desire of the bride, which is “victorious,” and the goddess Aphrodite, who is “invincible” in her “sport.” As in other instances (Zeus, Hades), Hölderlin translates the name of a mythic figure into an abstract noun: *Schönheit* (beauty). Similarly, Lacan reads in these lines not a description of

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of “Der Rhein,” the “scandal” occurs at a moment of transition and transformation.

Aphrodite, but an allusion to Antigone's "splendor," connecting the mythic figure to the specific image of the bride's shining "eyelids." Although the preceding lines refer explicitly to Aphrodite, Lacan thus reads them as a description of Antigone's "divine" and "blinding" beauty.

The next sentence, marked by the abrupt appearance of an "I," could be read either as a departure from the subject of the preceding lines—or its continuation. The repetition of the idea of "law" provides a possible hinge, as does the word "but" (*aber*), suggesting a contrast between the Chorus (*ich selber*) and—the bride? Aphrodite? Antigone? Although it signals a logical *connexio*, "*aber*" also functions as an anacoluthon, highlighting the *abruptness* of the shift that follows, from a general meditation on beauty to the particular figure of Antigone. The description of her tomb as a "bridal chamber," a recurring motif that links death with marriage, could justify reading the earlier "bride" as a reference to Antigone. But the "shining eyelids" of the earlier image is transferred to the eyes of the Chorus, who weep at the sight of Antigone. Here it is not Antigone, but the Chorus, who are "carried beyond the laws." No longer able to restrain their tears, they are, in effect, "blinded" by her image.

In Lacan's interpretation, this scene represents Antigone's beauty at the moment she crosses the threshold toward her living death, and thereby realizes her *Atè*. The image of Antigone at this moment overwhelms the Chorus, and causes them to break off their discourse on the general theme of love. "The violent illumination, the glow of beauty, coincides with the moment of transgression or of realization of Antigone's *Atè*... The moving side of beauty causes all critical judgment to vacillate,

stops analysis, and plunges the different forms involved into *a certain confusion* or, rather, an essential blindness” (Lacan 281; my emphasis). Lacan calls this “blindness” the “beauty effect.” Perhaps it is also this moment that Hölderlin has in mind when, in the passage of the *Anmerkungen* alluded to earlier, he describes Antigone’s “highest trait” in terms of “superlative” beauty (FHA 16, 414). For Hölderlin, as for Lacan, Antigone reaches toward the extreme, and thereby represents the “superlative of the human spirit” (414).

What Lacan calls the “beauty effect” defines for him the essential aspect of tragic “catharsis” (286). Rather than a moment of reconciliation or synthesis, catharsis results from an experience of blinding beauty. In Lacan’s account, the moment of catharsis is one of disjunction marked by the breakdown of critical faculties. Indeed, the “confusion” it creates is much closer to madness than the analytical rigor of “critique.” As we have seen, Hölderlin also identifies tragic “purification” with a moment of “separation” (*Scheiden*) and *reversal* (*Umkehr*). Both Lacan and Hölderlin reject the inherently “moral” idea of catharsis. For Lacan, catharsis does not have an “ethical” meaning in the conventional sense, but belongs to the category of “excitement” Freud calls *Triebregung*. In this respect, the experience of catharsis is actually much closer to *Begeisterung* than *Nüchternheit*. Remarking on the inadequacy of the French translation of this term, *Emoi*, Lacan notices something about the peculiar nature of cathartic “excitement.”

‘Emoi’ (excitement) has nothing to do with emotion nor with being moved. ‘Emoi’ is a French word that is linked to a very old verb, namely, ‘émoyer’ or ‘esmayer,’ which, to be precise, means ‘faire

perdre à quelqu'un ses moyens,' as I almost said, although it is a play on words in French, 'to make someone lose' not 'his head,' but something closer to the middle of the body, '*his means*.' In any case a question of power is involved. 'Esmayer' is related to the old gothic word 'magnan' or 'mögen' in modern German. As everybody knows, a state of excitement is something that is involved in the sphere of your power relations; it is notably something that makes you lose them. (249; my emphasis).

As Lacan suggests, the "excitement" involved in tragic purification is an experience not of losing one's 'head' but one's 'means.' To put this in terms of Hölderlin's interpretation of tragedy, what Lacan traces in the origin of the French word *Emoi* (excitement) is "moyen" (*μηχανή*). While we don't need Lacan in order to see the essential connection between tragedy and *μηχανή* (it is already there in Hölderlin), Lacan's comments help explain why the *absence* of *μηχανή* is not the same as madness (*Wahn*). 'To lose one's means' is not the same as losing one's head. Hölderlin's profound interpretation of tragedy shows us why this is the case: the opposite of *μηχανή* is not madness, but the "impossible" (*ἀμηχανή*).

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As we have seen, Hölderlin's *Sophokles-Anmerkungen* define the "representation of the tragic" in terms of a moment of reversal in which a "monstrous" unity is "purified" through "separation." In the "Notes" on *Oedipus*, this reversal (*Umkehr*) is traced in the language (*Sprache*) of the tragedy, which becomes increasingly "mechanical." The

“Notes” on *Antigona* extend this claim, drawing a contrast between the language of Greek and German. Within the context of the “Notes” as a whole, the distinction between the Greek and the German “word” not only reflects Hölderlin’s theory of translation, but also his understanding of the essential connection between translation and tragedy, as well as the competing demands of “modern” and “ancient” art with which the *Anmerkungen* begin. Let us look more closely at the passage, then, before retuning to the questions posed at the outset of the foregoing discussion.

In the “Notes” on *Oedipus*, the word “faktisch” is used together with “allzumechanisch” to describe the language of the tragedy (“Darum das allzukeusche, allzumechanische und faktisch endigende Ineinandergreifen...”) (257). In a similar sense, the “Notes” on *Antigona* evoke “faktisch” to describe the “mechanical” effect of language on the “body.” In Greek, the “word” (*Wort*) becomes “mittelbarer faktisch ... in dem es den sinnlichen Körper ergreift” (417). According to our time and our (modern) mode of representation (*Vorstellungsart*), by contrast, the “word” becomes “unmittelbarer, in dem es den geistigeren Körper ergreift” (417). The distinction between the “sensuous” and the “spiritual” body recalls the image of Niobe, who is transformed into something “all too organic” (sensuous) in striving toward the “aorgic” (spiritual). As we have seen, this is also an image of “consciousness” at its highest point.

In this passage, the tension between the “sensuous” and the “spiritual” marks the difference between the Greek and the Hesperian: while Greek nature tends toward *Begeisterung*, Greek culture tends toward *Nüchternheit*. For us, as Hölderlin explains

in the first letter to Böhlerdorff, “it is reversed.” Because Hesperian nature tends toward *Nüchternheit*, we must “learn” *Begeisterung*. Thus, the Greek word becomes “factual” in becoming more *mediate*—in grasping the sensuous body. For us, it is “reversed”: the word becomes more factual in becoming more *immediate*, that is, in grasping the spiritual body. For this reason, the Greek word is more “deadly-factual” because it literally *kills*, while the German word is “killing-factual” (*tödtendfactisch*) because it kills only in “spirit.”<sup>92</sup> “Das griechischtragische Wort ist todlichfactisch, weil der Leib, den es ergreift, wirklich tödtet” (417-18).

The difference between the Greeks and the Germans lies in their different “tendencies.” As in the letters to Böhlendorff, the word “tendency” expresses the aim of culture, rather than an essential nature. The aim of a given culture is to correct (or make up for) an inherent “weakness” (or lack). The main tendency (*Haupttendenz*) of the Greek is therefore “sich fassen zu können, weil darin ihre Schwäche lag” (418). By contrast, the main tendency of our time is to “hit” something, and thereby achieve the “fate” or “skill,” which we lack. Within the context of the foregoing discussion, the word Hölderlin’s uses here can hardly fail to resonate: *Geschik*.

[D]ie Haupttendenz in den Vorstellungsarten unserer Zeit ist, etwas

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<sup>92</sup> The reference to Zeus in this passage echoes the earlier discussion of the fourth choral stasimon, where Hölderlin justifies his choice of “father of time” instead of the mythic name as more appropriate to modern (Hesperian) modes of presentation (*Vorstellungsart*). There, Zeus functions to reverse the “striving out of this world into another” into a “striving from another world into this one.” Here, as well, Zeus is presented as a liminal figure, one that hovers between “this earth” and the “wild world of the dead.” Here, however, the “reversal” is between Zeus, who passes into the “other world,” and the “natural processes” (*Naturgang*) that he thereby forces *more decidedly* toward the earth.

treffen zu können, Geschik zu haben, da das Schiksaalose, das *δυσμορον*, unsere Schwäche ist. Deswegen hat der Grieche auch mehr Geschik und Athletentugend, und muß diß ... als eigentlichen *Vorzug* und als ernstliche Tugend haben. Bei uns ist diß mehr der Schiklichkeit subordinirt. (418)

In contrast to the Germans, the Greeks possess more *Geschik* (fate, skill). Among the Greeks *Geschik* is likened to “athletic virtue,” a term often used interchangeably with “virtuosity” in Hölderlin’s writings to evoke the physical character of Greek harmony and “grace.”<sup>93</sup> In contrast to the Greeks, *das Schiksaalose* (the absence of fate) is our “weakness.” The double negative of the formulation is confusing, but appropriately so, since we are defined not by what we are but by what we lack.

As a translation of *δυσμορον* “das Schiksaalose” suggests “that which is without fate,” but also “bad fortune.” In this context, the reference to the Greek term might allude to the lines, cited earlier, when Antigone describes the *Atè* of her family: “Io! du mütterlicher Wahn / In den Bettern, ihr Umarmungen, selbstgebährend, / Mit meinem Vater, von unglücklicher Mutter (πατρὶ *δυσμόρου* μητρός) ...” (ll. 893-895).<sup>94</sup> As the word connecting father and mother (and referring ambiguously to both), *δυσμόρου* is translated “unglücklich.” Like the English word “unhappy,” “unglücklich”

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In contrast to the Greeks, “we” who live under this “more authentic” (*eigentlicher*) Zeus are more subject to the force of time  
<sup>93</sup> Earlier passages in the “Notes” describe the “virtuosity” of Antigone (414) and Niobe (415). The second letter to Böhlendorff refers to the “athleticism” and “virtuosity” of the people of southern France in whose image Hölderlin discovers the “true essence” of the Greeks. The allusion to France recurs in the famous image of the “brown women” in the hymn “Andenken.”



suggests “infelicitous.” The incestuous union between father and unhappy mother “misfires”: in failing to “hit upon something,” it is also “without fate” (*schiksaalos*).<sup>95</sup> Likewise, because we lack fate/skill, we seek to “hit upon something”: we seek to “have *Geschik*.” For that reason, however, *Geschik* is *subordinate* to “Schiklichkeit” (“that which is fitting or appropriate,” but also “propriety,” “decorousness”). Since we lack *Geschik*, we must strive for “what is appropriate.”

Literally, the phrase “etwas treffen zu können, *Geschik* zu haben” sets “being able to hit upon something” and “having *Geschik*” in parallel: being able to “hit” something (felicitously) is to have *Geschik*. But does “having *Geschik*” in this instance mean having “fate” or having “skill”? In his reading of the passage, Thomas Schestag notices a curious slippage (or “splitting”) in the terms.

How the word *Geschik* should be understood [*zu fassen sei*] in these lines remains open. They 'hit' *Geschik* in such a way that the appearance of semantic and, more exactly, plastic construction of the word, in the look, is unsettled. Quietly trembles. The explanation of *Geschik* as a (more mediately factual) word breaks, because it is not possible to divide strictly between *Geschik* (in the sense of 'destiny')

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<sup>94</sup> Schestag hears in the word *δυσμορον* an echo of *Oedipus at Colonus* (Schestag 403).

<sup>95</sup> A variant of the word “sich treffen,” *das Trefliche* (“excellence,” literally: “accuracy”) can be found in Hölderlin’s letter to his brother, in which he describes the need to “seek out” what is “lacking” and thereby achieve “excellence.” “Wir müssen das Trefliche aufsuchen, zusammenhalten mit ihm, so viel wir können, uns im Gefühle desselben stärken und heilen und so Kraft gewinnen, das Rohe, Schiefe, Ungestalte nicht bloß im Schmerz, sondern, als das was es ist, was seinen Charakter, seinen eigentümlichen Mangel ausmacht, zu erkennen” (An den Bruder, 4 Jun. 1799; StA, VI: 1, 327).

and *Geschik* (in the sense of 'dexterity'). At the point where, and because, *Geschik* is 'hit' as a word, that is, it is comprehended, it is 'hit': it breaks. (Schestag 402)

Denoting both “destiny” (fate) and “dexterity” (skill), the word *Geschik* is “hit” and breaks apart. Extending Schestag's analysis, I would argue that the word *Geschik* is thus both “deadly-factual” and “killing-factual” because it “kills” mediately and immediately: mediately, because it literally (and mechanically) “splits” apart; immediately, because, in breaking apart, the word means exactly the opposite of what it says. The word *Geschik* is therefore as “fitting” (*schicklich*) as it is “awkward” (*ungeschickt*).

The wordplay of the passage (*Schiksaal*, *Geschik*, *Schiklichkeit*) is a *leitmotif* in many of Hölderlin's writings from this period. (One that Heidegger, in particular, was quite fond of). Within the context of Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles, however, the series carries a particular charge. As we have seen, *Geschik* not only appears as a translation of “fate,” but also of the “means” (*μηχανή*) of art (*τέχνη*) that lead men “sometimes to good, and sometimes to bad.” Indeed, *Geschik* may also designate the “means” of tragic catharsis, which is to say, what is lost in losing one's “means.”

Hölderlin's Sophokles-*Anmerkungen* convey a “split fate”: as the splitting of the word *Geschik* (“skill” and “fate”), and as the essence of tragedy.<sup>96</sup> At first it seems

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<sup>96</sup> As Heidegger once famously wrote, “Hölderlin's Dichtung ist für uns ein Schicksal” (*Erläuterungen* 195). The mythological resonances of this claim—to say nothing of its nationalist undertones—are highly problematic, identifying Hölderlin's poetry with the mythic language of tragedy and heroic sacrifice. Nothing could be further from Hölderlin's understanding of tragic fate. Elsewhere, Heidegger alludes to Hölderlin's poetry not as a “fate” but as a “Geschick”: “Also ist Hölderlin's Dichtung

that *Geschick* is necessary for the tragic “separation” (*Scheiden*) to occur. But the separation is also a self-canceling reversal: the purification of monstrous unity effected not through opposition (*setzen*), but repetition (*die unendliche Begeisterung unendlich, daß heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt*). Like the Greek “word,” which becomes “factual” in grasping the sensuous body, the tragic separation becomes more mediate. Like the German, which grasps the spiritual body, it is also *immediate*. In “separating” itself *from itself*, the representation of the tragic also “grasps” itself in a moment as “killing” as it is “deadly”: “*und der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist*” (FHA 16, 417).

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ein Geschick für uns” (*Zu Hölderlin* 350). Within the context of the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that *Schicksal* and *Geschick* represent two distinct ideas. But the slippage is also telling—for Heidegger, as well as for “us.” What would it mean to think of Hölderlin as a *Geschick*? The word splits open from within Heidegger’s discourse, both appropriating and disappropriating. Heidegger places “us” in relation to Hölderlin’s poetry as in relation to a “destiny.” But Hölderlin’s *Geschick* is not an inescapable fate. It is rather something more “fitting”: in “losing his means,” Heidegger thereby hits upon (a) *Geschick*.

## CODA

### MADNESS AND MEASURE: “IN LIEBLICHER BLÄUE...”

Hölderlin’s madness has been a decisive factor in Hölderlin’s reception since the nineteenth century.<sup>97</sup> Following the publication of Wilhelm Waiblinger’s biography,

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<sup>97</sup> The exact diagnosis and precise timeline of Hölderlin’s mental illness have been the subject of much debate among psychiatrists, philosophers, and literary critics alike. In the twentieth century, scholars sought to ground an assessment of Hölderlin’s mental condition in a clinical analysis of his biography, drawing on personal letters and first-hand reports by friends and relatives. Seeking to determine which writings were composed before and after the onset of mental illness, one of Hölderlin’s early editors, Franz Zinkernagel, turned to the Tübingen psychiatrist Wilhelm Lange for more specific information about Hölderlin’s diagnosis. For his part, Zinkernagel was mainly interested in determining which of Hölderlin’s writings were composed after the onset of madness, implicitly assuming that those writings were necessarily “sinnfrei” and therefore of less critical interest. Basing his account on the limited information available about Hölderlin’s treatment at the Autenrieth clinic in Tübingen, Lange’s study confirmed the diagnosis of “dementia praecox of a catatonic form,” dating the onset of Hölderlin’s mental illness to May 1801. Working under the assumptions of editorial scholarship at the time, Lange also argued that the works composed after this date, including the drafts of *Empedokles* and many of Hölderlin’s most well-known hymns, were marked by distinct “pathological traits.” The tendency toward free rhythm in the later hymns Lange cites as evidence of Hölderlin’s increasingly fragile state of mind, erroneously assuming a simple correlation between the apparent “lawlessness” of Hölderlin’s poetry and “madness.” Many of the works in which Lange purports to find evidence of Hölderlin’s madness were, in fact, composed earlier than Lange supposed, further unsettling assumptions about what constitutes the writings of a “sound” mind.

Subsequent critics have accepted Lange’s diagnosis almost without exception. While most follow Lange in dating the onset of psychosis to 1801, the timeline of Hölderlin’s mental illness has also been extended. Adolf Beck’s biographical studies suggested that the first signs of crisis are already evident during Hölderlin’s time in Jena (1795-96), and also shed new light on Hölderlin’s state of mind after his return from France in 1802. Others have modified the timeline to take into account different stages in Hölderlin’s mental illness. Drawing on more contemporary clinical terminology, Uwe Peters has argued that the initial phase of Hölderlin’s madness was probably triggered by the death of Susette Gontard in 1802, but did not develop into a

*Hölderlins Leben, Dichtung und Wahnsinn* in 1827/28,<sup>98</sup> the mad poet became something of a Tübingen attraction in later life, and was the subject of a series of fictional portraits.<sup>99</sup> An interest in Hölderlin's madness also inspired the rediscovery of his work at the turn of the twentieth century. With encouragement from George, Norbert von Hellingrath published the first volumes of a critical edition of Hölderlin's works before the First World War. While a new edition set the stage for a long overdue reassessment of Hölderlin's work, scholarship remained mired in questions about the poet's madness. Apart from biographical questions, critics continued to struggle with the consequence of Hölderlin's madness for the interpretation of his work: how are we to understand the fact that Hölderlin's greatest poetic achievements—in particular, the so-called “late” hymns—were composed concurrently with the first symptoms of mental illness? If they are found to be the work of a “deranged” mind, are the poems of the later period somehow “mad” themselves?<sup>100</sup> And are they therefore less deserving of critical interest?<sup>101</sup>

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serious case of schizophrenia until after Hölderlin's return to Homburg in 1804. See: Wilhelm Lange, *Hölderlin: Eine Pathographie*; Adolf Beck, *Hölderlin, eine Chronik in Text und Bild*; Uwe H. Peters, *Hölderlin: Wider die These vom edlen Simulanten*.

<sup>98</sup> Waiblinger visited Hölderlin in Tübingen on several occasions between 1822 and 1826.

<sup>99</sup> Of these, the most notable include Mörike's 1832 novel *Maler Nolten* and Bettine von Arnim's *Die Götterode*, published in 1840.

<sup>100</sup> A later generation of critics has sought to complicate discussions of Hölderlin's madness, putting into question the assumptions implied in the attempt to talk about madness in relation to the poet's work. While confronting the apparent fact of Hölderlin's mental illness, studies in this vein coalesce around two main questions: first, how is it that the phase of Hölderlin's greatest poetic productivity coincided with the period when, to the outside world, he began to exhibit the first signs of madness?; second, how are we to understand Hölderlin's madness in relation to the work, particularly in light of the fact that the writings repeatedly emphasize the necessity of law? Departing from Lange's early assessment that the writings of Hölderlin's mad

We may well wonder why Hölderlin's madness should exercise such a critical fascination, even though—and especially because—it cannot be verified.<sup>102</sup> While such questions may seem beside the point, the issue of Hölderlin's madness is not

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period exhibit a greater tendency toward lawlessness, such critics point to the fact that Hölderlin's writings on poetry—if not the poems themselves—reflect a concern for the systematic aspects of the poetic process. Even the notes to the Sophocles translations, dismissed by Hölderlin's contemporaries as evidence of his troubled state of mind, depart from the idea that modern poetry is in need of a “calculable law.”

<sup>101</sup> Even admitting that Hölderlin was mad, the question remains whether psychosis is incompatible with “sense.” As Karl Jaspers remarked in 1922, “Es ist unfruchtbar, auf Hölderlin'sche Dichtungen grobe psychopathologische Kategorien anzuwenden.” While he argues against reducing Hölderlin's work to psychological categories, Jaspers nevertheless ends up following Lange in noticing a marked shift in Hölderlin's work after 1801. In contrast to Lange, however, Jaspers does not simply dismiss the writings composed after this period as being less worthy of critical interest. Comparing Hölderlin with other artists such as van Gogh, Jaspers focuses instead on the positive correlation between madness and genius. Instead of simply dismissing Hölderlin's work as the product of an unsound mind, such criticism ends up idealizing Hölderlin for the wrong reasons.

<sup>102</sup> The controversy surrounding Hölderlin's madness reached a high point with the publication of Pierre Bertaux's 1978 biography. In a provocative departure from previous positions, Bertaux disputed the conclusion that Hölderlin was mad, arguing that Hölderlin's “madness” was in fact a “mask,” a calculated retreat that served to protect him from political prosecution after he was arrested for treason in 1805. Drawing on letters by and about Hölderlin, Bertaux assembled documentation that puts Hölderlin's diagnosis into question. Particularly revealing, he claimed, are several comments by Sinclair, who compared his friend's behavior to that of Hamlet. Bertaux presents an especially incriminating case against Hölderlin's mother, who denied her son an inheritance that would have gone a long way toward easing the difficulties he encountered in securing employment. Regarding the second half of Hölderlin's life, Bertaux points out that Hölderlin was admitted against his will to the Autenrieth clinic, and was there subjected to a series of now-questionable and de-humanizing treatments.

Whether or not one agrees with Bertaux that Hölderlin's madness was a mask, his study raises a series of further questions about the nature of madness and the institution of psychiatry around 1800. It also exposes the limitations of a psychiatric approach to Hölderlin's biography. Not only the etiology of illness, but also the diagnosis is a matter of debate, reflecting shifts within the history of psychiatry and the clinical view of psychosis. Whether or not Hölderlin was “really” mad may depend more on how we define “madness” to begin with. As such studies indicate, the question of Hölderlin's madness—and the extent to which it is reflected in the work—

easily resolved. On one side are critics inclined to dismiss the writings composed after the onset of madness. On the other are those, like Hellingrath, who contend that Hölderlin's work is coextensive with his life. "Wenn ich von Hölderlins Leben Ihnen sprechen will," Hellingrath wrote, in an early lecture entitled "Hölderlins Wahnsinn," "so ist das nichts anderes, als wenn ich von seinem Werke rede. Es gibt da nichts Doppeltes und Trennbare" (51). Indeed, Hellingrath argues that the work is the entire fate (*das ganze Geschik*) of the life, the life the entire fate of the work (51). Instead of being simply irrelevant, then, Hölderlin's madness becomes the "signature" of his fate. "Der Wahnsinn endlich ist unter der Geschehnissen seines Lebens das weithin Sichtbare, Signature der Form seines Geschiks" (52).

The idea that the poet's life is inextricably bound up with his madness, as the "fate" or "signature" of his work, has been a recurring theme in the scholarship of Hölderlin. In the short essay, "Madness *par excellence*," Maurice Blanchot renews Hellingrath's claim that Hölderlin's madness is the "signature" of his work. For Blanchot, the critical question is this: how is it that Hölderlin still writes, even when he has begun to show the first signs of madness? Not only does he write, but he writes some of his greatest poems after the year when psychiatrists date the onset of his illness (1801). Madness did not reduce Hölderlin to silence. On the contrary, Hölderlin somehow manages to put into words the "measureless experience" of being struck with madness.<sup>1</sup> In this Blanchot sees not a rupture but "the continuity of Hölderlin's destiny" (119). Like Hellingrath, who understands Hölderlin's madness as the signature of an inevitable fate, Blanchot makes madness into the signature of the work,

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is difficult, if not impossible, to define in clinical terms.

a work that gives expression to an experience that “lies short of all expression.”

Hölderlin’s fate is “the destiny of the poet, who becomes the mediator of the sacred...” (119-20). Blanchot’s characterization of the poet’s fate paraphrases Hölderlin’s hymn, “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” which speaks of the danger the poet confronts as mediator between gods and men.

Sounding a redemptive note, Blanchot maintains that the poet, as the mediator of the sacred, is able to communicate the immediate through song. In order to communicate the sacred, however, the poet must be struck: it is his “destiny.”

(T)he poet must be ruined in order that in and through him the measureless excess of the divine might become measure, common measure; this destruction, moreover, this effacement at the heart of language is what makes language speak, and causes it to be the sign *par excellence* ... Hölderlin knows this: he himself must become a mute sign, the silence which the truth of language demands in order to attest that what speaks nevertheless does not speak but remains the truth of silence. (124).

In being destroyed, the poet represents the “effacement at the heart of language,” and thereby becomes a “mute sign.” For Blanchot, the “mute sign” is in fact the “sign *par excellence*” since what it signifies is the silence that makes language speak.

Like Hellingrath, Blanchot assumes an unproblematic sense of *Geschik* (“fate”) as that which unites the poet’s life and work, ensuring their inevitable continuity. Moving seamlessly between the life and the work, however, Blanchot’s interpretation of Hölderlin reveals a curious slippage. By reading the “destiny of the



poet” as Hölderlin’s fate, Blanchot’s interpretation draws a grim conclusion: Hölderlin is struck but remains standing because, as a poet, he is able to communicate the sacred. In assuming the continuity between Hölderlin’s life and work, Blanchot invokes the logic of an inevitable fate—with unsettling consequences for the poet, who is reduced to a “mute sign.” Does the work in some way require the sacrifice of the poet? Is this sacrifice necessary to “communicate” the infinite? When Blanchot writes, toward the end of the same essay, that “the word is what restrains the limitless” (123), does this imply that there is a difference between the word and the poet? Is the fate of “the word” necessarily that of the poet? And is the fate of “the poet” necessarily that of Hölderlin?

Responding to Blanchot, Jean Laplanche sees Hölderlin’s work as a “Denk-Mal” of his life.<sup>103</sup> Laplanche puts into question Blanchot’s “unitary thesis,” which sees Hölderlin’s development as a “continuous destiny” (11). Although he rejects the premises of Lange’s psychobiographical criticism, Blanchot ends up affirming a similar conclusion, assuming a continuity between the life and work—with troubling

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<sup>103</sup> Laplanche does not dispute that Hölderlin was, at a certain point, “mad”—at least according to clinical accounts and observations by friends and relatives. Like Blanchot, he is drawn to the paradox that conjoins Hölderlin’s life and work: how is it that “the very moment that his mastery of poetic form is established and he definitively maps out the great Hölderlinian myths is also the moment at which he is on his way to madness?” (1) While Laplanche is not so naïve to suppose that poetic mastery is incompatible with madness, he takes this question as a starting point in order to dispute the assumption (one especially pervasive among Hölderlin’s psychobiographers) that psychosis is inherently “sinnfrei.” Instead, he asks, “is it not possible both to be mad and to be a poet, or be a poet and become mad, or be a poet and be mad on occasion, or a poet liberated by madness...?” (7)

consequences for the poet.<sup>104</sup>

A student of Lacan, Laplanche offers an alternative approach to the question of Hölderlin's madness. For Laplanche, the point at which Hölderlin's madness intersects with the work is to be found in the absence of the paternal function, what Lacan calls the "le nom du père."<sup>105</sup> Hölderlin's contact with Schiller in Jena precipitated his first major depression because it "reopened" the absence of the father—a revelation from which Hölderlin shrank in horror.

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<sup>104</sup> "However different their theories may be, these critics consider schizophrenia a factor that acts upon Hölderlin's spiritual development and poetic genius from the outside" (Laplanche 13).

<sup>105</sup> For Lacan, psychosis is marked by the absence of the regulating function of the "name of the father." Intervening to halt the imaginary identification of the subject with the "devouring mother," the "father's no" allows the subject to enter into the symbolic, and is associated with the "law" as a preserving separation. In the case of the psychotic subject, this regulating function is absent or defective. The absence of the "nom du père," it should be stressed, has nothing to do with the presence or absence of a father figure—as the Schreber case makes abundantly clear. It also suggests that psychosis is not an inevitable or irreversible condition; the treatment of psychosis would depend on the subject being able to enter into a relation with the symbolic in the production of a knowledge or "savoir" about his or her own psychotic certainty.

In the case of Hölderlin, the absence of the "father's no" is uniquely overdetermined, coinciding (all too "fatefully," one might say) with the biographical absence of a father figure. As a child, he experienced the loss of his own father as well as his step-father. He also had an extremely fraught relationship with his mother, as Bertaux documents all too well. Within this context, Laplanche identifies a pattern of "narcissistic oscillation" that recurs throughout Hölderlin's life and work: again and again, Hölderlin seeks out a father figure but ends up retreating in terror to the safety afforded by the mother. This pattern is characteristic of what Lacan calls the "mirror phase" of a child's development leading to the construction of an ideal ego. But the ideal ego is merely an imaginary self. Intervening to subordinate the mirror phase, the father function guarantees the subject's entrance into the symbolic order. In the absence of the "nom du père" Hölderlin is "stuck" in the pattern of dual object relations that characterizes the mirror phase, driven by the desire to preserve the image of the ideal ego. In life, this pattern defines Hölderlin's vexed relationship with Schiller and Susette Gontard, and it recurs within his work, as well, in the motif of the "near/far."

Noting the importance of the law for Hölderlin in spite of—or indeed because of—the absence of the paternal function, Laplanche also observes that, for Hölderlin, writing “keeps open for a certain amount of time what in the case of most psychotics is closed in the mode of being” (117). This is what allows Hölderlin to write that the absence of the gods “helps” (*Gottes Fehl hilft*), an assertion Laplanche finds unequivocally “insane.” In other words, writing allows Hölderlin for a time to maintain a sense of order in the face of impending chaos. Why should this be the case? Does writing stand in for the symbolic function, as the “law” that holds open for a time the devouring delusion? Why, moreover, does writing only function temporarily to restrain madness? Are Hölderlin’s later poems to be viewed as in some way less “successful” in holding open the foreclosure of the paternal function?<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> In his preface to the English translation of Laplanche’s seminal study, Rainer Nägele compares Laplanche’s idea of the work as *Denk-Mal* to Lacan’s notion of the ‘fading’ subject. “If the work is founded in the life and experience of a subject,” Nägele writes, “this foundation is also consumed ‘in the heart of the work.’ The work emerges at the vanishing point of life, it is the spot and mark of an event of taking leave: a *Denk-Mal*, a monument and mark of commemoration” (*Hölderlin and the Question of the Father* xiii). In being “consumed” in the work, the subject disappears. This characterization of the relation between life and work does bear a certain resemblance to what Lacan repeatedly called the “fading” of the subject: the disappearance of the subject in the production of *savoir*. Nägele cites Lacan: “(K)nowledge presents itself from the outset as the term where the subject vanishes” (*Seminaire XVI* 55). Drawing on Lacan’s term the “fading of the subject,” Nägele implies that the subject disappears in the passage from life to work. And yet the question remains: *which* subject? Lacan often referred to effects of “fading,” using the English word to designate the disappearance of the subject. However, one might also say that Lacan distinguishes between different kinds of subjects. The subject that disappears is the subject understood in its “classical sense.” As Jane Gallop explains, the “fading of the subject” corresponds to the “‘subversion’ of the classical, transparent subject of knowledge, the subject who can answer with his name or the first-person pronoun to the question ‘Who is speaking?’” (*Reading Lacan* 176). In place of the first-person pronoun, one could say, the subject of the unconscious appears as the grammatical placeholder “es.” Even if the vanishing of the subject can

Although Laplanche sets out to complicate Blanchot's unitary thesis, his attempt to recast the work as a "Denk-Mal" founders upon another set of problems. As Foucault points out, Laplanche's method assumes the legibility of the life in terms of recurring patterns. But how to understand such "repetitions," and what authorizes the movement between life and work? How, Foucault asks, "can language apply a *single and identical* discourse to poetry and madness? Which syntax functions *at the same time* on the level of declared meaning *and* on that of interpreted signification?" ("The Father's 'No'" 8). Seeking to go beyond the simple unity of work and life, Laplanche nevertheless assumes their legibility according to a recurring set of patterns.

What is the precise point of saying that the place left empty by the Father is the *same* place that Schiller occupied in Hölderlin's imagination and subsequently abandoned, the *same* place made radiant by the unfaithful presence of the gods of the last texts prior to leaving the Hesperians under the royal law of institutions? More simply, what is this *same* figure outlined in the *Thalia-Fragment* before the actual meeting with Gontard which is then faithfully reproduced in the definitive version of Diotima? What is this 'sameness' to which analysis is so readily drawn? Why this 'identity' so insistently introduced in every analysis; why does it seem to guarantee the easy passage between the work and what it is not? (11)

For Foucault, the attempt to read the work in terms of the life, and vice versa, is

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be described as an "event," in another words, it is also marked by the appearance of the "machine."

entangled in a historical tradition that has made it “natural” for us to think about the relation between madness and genius. The problem, as he sees it, has to do with a tradition of thinking about artistic genius in terms of heroic deeds. Is the artist’s work the same as the actions of the hero? By assuming the legibility of the artist’s life and work, criticism risks transforming the artist into a hero. In so doing, it becomes complicit in the tragic—and delusional—sacrifice of the artist to the work.

While Foucault questions the critical tendency to read the artist’s life in terms of his work, and vice versa, he nevertheless stumbles upon a similar set of problems. Noting that the psychotic is unable to accept the absence of the father’s “no,” Foucault observes that, in the case of Hölderlin, he directs himself *toward* this absence. “It is toward this ‘no’ that the unwavering line of psychosis is infallibly directed; as it is precipitated inside the abyss of its meaning, it evokes the devastating absence of the father through the forms of delirium and phantasms and through the catastrophe of the signifier” (16). In the successive drafts of Empedocles, composed during Hölderlin’s first Homburg period, Hölderlin “devoted himself to this absence” (16). But what exactly does it mean to devote oneself to the absence of the father’s “no”—toward the absence of a negative? Foucault implicitly identifies Hölderlin and the character of Empedocles who destroys himself by making himself into a mediator between the gods and men. In terms that evoke Blanchot’s reading of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...,” the poet sacrifices himself to preserve the world. In “devoting” himself to the absence of the paternal function, the poet transforms himself into “nothing”; attempting to bridge the gap, he becomes this very absence.

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While Foucault does not pursue the point, his characterization of the heroic self-sacrifice of the poet affirms the psychotic's delusion of being able to save the world. It also exposes the problem of thinking about madness and poetry in a way that requires the poet's self-sacrifice: it ends up repeating, indeed affirming, the psychotic's error. Instead of entering into the symbolic through the preserving separation of the law, the psychotic makes his life fill in for the word; instead of arriving at a *savoir* through speech, he sacrifices himself to preserve a delusion.

One way or another, attempts to make sense of Hölderlin's madness end up returning to the idea that the work in some way requires the sacrifice of the subject. Against this critical tendency, Stanley Corngold has argued for the persistence of the idea of a "self" throughout Hölderlin's writings. In framing his argument in this way, Corngold takes aim at Derrida's deconstruction of the authorial subject. He is also highly skeptical of the critical tendency, which he identifies primarily with de Man, to make the loss of self the very condition of writing. Corngold is troubled by the way French theory sacrifices the self, and associates this critical tendency with those who would valorize Hölderlin's madness. Instead, Corngold sees in Hölderlin's work the repeated attempt to protect the self, which threatens to disappear in its orientation toward the other. Rather than representing the vanishing or fading of a subject, Hölderlin's writing is "the record by language of a struggle to conserve in a superior mode of self what is threatened with loss" (*The Fate of the Self* 28). In marked contrast to deconstructive or psychoanalytic approaches to Hölderlin, Corngold sees writing not as the dispossession of self but as a means of self-preservation. Citing the example of Rousseau, who appears in the hymn "Der Rhein" as a figure of "forgetting,"

Corngold argues that in “its authentic modes, self mediates the moment of self-loss” (31). Following Blanchot and Laplanche, Corngold notes that Hölderlin’s greatest poems were produced concurrently with the apparent onset of mental illness. In contrast to these critics, however, Corngold sees this coincidence as evidence of Hölderlin’s “struggle to adhere to himself” (38). Instead of requiring the sacrifice of a subject, writing allows for the production of a self.

As Corngold points out, ideas of “self-fulfillment” and “self-loss” recur throughout Hölderlin’s work, particularly in the logic of the “near/far.” Whereas Laplanche views this pattern according to the model of Freud’s “fort/da,” in terms of a dynamic of “narcissistic oscillation,” for Corngold the tension between these tendencies constitutes a genuine “third term,” and serves a preserving function: Hölderlin “writes as one who is exposed,” but his incessant revisions also allow him to “defend against invasion” (39). Returning to Laplanche’s suggestion that writing allowed Hölderlin to sustain himself “for a while” when other psychotics would have been completely consumed, Corngold speculates that writing functions for a time as a substitute for the regulating power of the *nom du père*. Indeed, Hölderlin’s work could even be read as a “long, irregular paraphrase of the ineffable ‘Name of the Father,’ which defends against vacuousness, exaltation, or rage.” (46). Like Foucault, Corngold points to an apparent paradox: the absence of a regulatory function appears in Hölderlin’s work as the obsessive attempt to articulate a law.

In Hölderlin the law is at once slackened (he is schizophrenic) and tensed to the utmost (he is the poet of renunciation and the stipulation of differences. In the late hymns the effect it to heighten an

austere *consciousness* of the presence and absence of the gods. This dialectic, in which modes of having language and losing language contend, eclipses for a while the narcissistic oscillations of the mirror phase.

In the psychoanalytic perspective of Lacan and Laplanche, Hölderlin is exemplary, but not as a poet who, threatened by the virtual loss of language, articulated this loss, and in thus representing himself, created himself. Instead he is exemplary because in him poetry arises where in principle the condition of the possibility of the poetic function is absent.

From this perspective, the empirical practice of poetry literally assumes the function of the Name-of-the-Father. The torn unconscious goes over into ‘an external sphere’; the ‘Nom du Père’ becomes the ‘Non du Père’ of poetic activity. Hölderlin’s poetry repeats an unknown, unconscious text, sustaining him, as schizophrenic, for a time. His poetry keeps open this gap, which is not to be accounted a deficiency, because only the openness of poetry could ‘fill’ it; no empirical being could. Hölderlin’s isolation testifies to the inevitability of his separation from any being who could fulfill this function for him. He grasps for poetry, the issue of an absence in being, ‘God’s absence helps’ (*Gottes Fehl hilft*). (46)

Corngold pinpoints the most interesting question to arise in Laplanche’s analysis of Hölderlin: how is it that writing allows Hölderlin to maintain a semblance of order in



the face of chaos? Corngold speculates that the work actually eclipses the symbolic function. However, in clinging to an idea of self, Corngold ends up affirming the psychotic delusion. For Laplanche, the line “Gottes Feh! hilft” can only be read as an “insane assertion”: it makes sense, but only from the point of view of the psychotic struggling to sustain an imaginary self. For Corngold, by contrast, this line signifies the role of poetry as fulfilling the symbolic function by “filling” the gap left open by the absence of the ‘Name-of-the-Father.’ Against Laplanche and Lacan, Corngold resists the fading of the subject, thus keeping alive the delusion of a transparent, conscious self. Affirming the “continuity of self, conscious subject, and poetic work,” Corngold rejects the idea that the work appears where the subject vanishes. “So we are inevitably brought back instead to a conscious poetic agency endangered by schizophrenia but never absent: the fragile sense of self that seeks to maintain itself in poetry. Only in this way can we imagine Hölderlin seizing the threat to his language, seizing his madness as a question for his poetry: the question of the father, of the absence of the father” (47).

Corngold’s approach to the problem of Hölderlin’s madness puts into relief a series of critical questions. He is right to notice that the issue of Hölderlin’s madness localizes twentieth-century debates about the “death” of the subject, and to question the assumptions of a critical discourse that pits the work against the self. Corngold is troubled by the implicit assumptions of a criticism that posits the identity between the life and work and thereby sacrifices the author. He also rejects attempts by critics to rationalize Hölderlin’s madness as his “final poem.” He objects to Blanchot’s reading, in particular, which he identifies with the “temptation to construe Hölderlin’s madness

as accomplishing his poetic destiny” (52).

And yet, one could say, Corngold ends falling into the same trap, making the “self” the term that enables a passage between clinical and critical discourse (50). In order to “preserve the self,” he ends up “positing” another subjectivity: “an intentional poetic consciousness.” Corngold argues that the French attack on the subject ends up reconstituting it (49). But, at the other extreme, Corngold’s attempt to “save” the self ends up sacrificing it.<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, Corngold’s approach points to something that underlies every attempt to talk about Hölderlin’s madness. In various ways, critics assume that madness is incompatible with poetic achievement, and seek to save Hölderlin from

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<sup>107</sup> In a later essay, Corngold takes a more nuanced approach to the question of the “disappearance” of the subject, which he relates to a careful reading of *Empedocles* and the “sacrifice” of the poet represented there:

It is as a madman that (Hölderlin) disappears, and there attaches to his fate a shadow of decision, which could make it seem deliberate, an organized fall, less an alienation from his conflict than its metaphor. This disappearance does not have the magical power of sacrifice in the sense of an (illusory) union of man and god; it does not have the heroic, the titanic aura of Empedoclean suicide ... The crux is the expendableness of Hölderlin’s empirical being; he persists as the form of a man in whom the riven character of a historical period could be read. That form is madness.

From our own standpoint, it is hard to descry a German poetry arising in the first decade of the nineteenth century that needed Hölderlin enough to warrant a belief that his madness was a sacrifice to it. Had he known this, Hölderlin would have died mourning.

On the other hand, if one thinks of Hölderlin as the modern poet who more completely than any other lived the contradictions of his culture—amid the outbursts of violence and melancholy creating works from the omnipresent conflict of feeling and skill—so that in him these contradictions became objective with a definiteness of outline heightened by his abrupt end, his madness does become the philosophical sacrifice he contemplated. And then he would not have to mourn” (*Complex Pleasures* 76-77).

himself in order, ultimately, to preserve the very idea of a self. Is there not something inherently flawed about a critical approach that confuses the boundaries between the poet's life and work? Indeed, is there not something inherently "mad" about this method? As Blanchot explains, returning to these questions in a later essay,

To say: Hölderlin is mad, is to say: is he mad? But, right from there, it is to make madness so utterly foreign to all affirmation that it could never find any language in which to affirm itself without putting this language under the threat of madness ... Language gone mad would be, in every utterance, not only the possibility causing it to speak at the risk of making it speechless (a risk without which it would not speak), but the limit which every language holds. Never fixed in advance or theoretically determinable, still less such that one could write: 'there is a limit,' and thus outside all 'there is,' this limit can only be drawn by its violation—the transgression of the untransgressible. Drawn by its violation, it is barred by its inscription. ("Madness *par excellence*: Note for New Edition" 126)

From this point of view, it is not only a matter of what warrants the legibility of life and work in terms of one another, but also about how it is possible to speak about madness to begin with. If language is what makes possible the mediating separation that protects against madness, then to speak of madness would be to transgress the very limit that language, itself, institutes in speech. It is to communicate something that, strictly speaking, remains—and must remain—an enigma.

When critics speak of madness of the artist, as Foucault observed, they are beholden to a tradition that associates genius with *μανία*. More often than not, critics fail to acknowledge that the discourse of madness is highly conventional, an error that makes it all too easy to assume the legibility of the artist's life in terms of his work, and vice versa. On the other hand, this error can be revealing, as is the case with Hölderlin. In talking about Hölderlin's madness, critics end up repeating the defining tropes of his work. In confusing the themes of the work with those of the poet's life, criticism succumbs to its own kind of madness. In so doing, however, it stumbles on precisely the problem that most preoccupied Hölderlin: the tension between madness and measure. If it is difficult to separate the poet's fate from the fate of work, perhaps this is because measure and madness remain so profoundly and problematically intertwined. For Hölderlin, measure is itself a kind of madness. But for that reason, madness also has its own kind of measure.

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Among the poems Hölderlin is thought to have composed after the apparent onset of madness (sometime after 1806), the text known as "In lieblicher Bläue..." occupies an unusual—if disputed—place of prominence. In a central moment, this text poses a question, only to answer it in the following line.

Giebt es auf Erden ein Maß? Es giebt keines.

Is there a measure on earth? There is none. (Hamburger 789)

The poem's blunt disavowal of measure ("Es giebt keines") may seem to evoke a tone of doubt and despair. In a well-known essay on this poem, "Dichterisch wohnet der

Mensch...,” delivered as a lecture in 1951 and first printed in 1954, Martin Heidegger disputes this claim. Instead of negating all measure, he argues, these lines assert only the absence of a particular kind of measuring: measure understood as *geo-metry*, the measure of the earth, or scientific measure. Against this idea, Heidegger claims to find in Hölderlin’s poetry another kind of measuring, what he calls “poetic measure.”

Die Vermessung vermisst nicht nur die Erde, *ge*, und ist darum keine bloße Geo-metrie ... Die Vermessung ist keine Wissenschaft. Das Vermessen ermisst das Zwischen, das beide, Himmel und Erde, einander zubringt. Dieses Vermessen hat sein eigenes *metron* und deshalb seine eigene Metrik. (189-190)

For Heidegger, the absence of measure does not mean that there is no measure—far from it. The measure he has in mind, however, is not *scientific*, but *poetic*. Scientific measure is *geo-metry*: it only takes the measure of the earth. Against the scientific notion of measure, Heidegger claims that poetry is itself a kind of measuring: “Dichten ist ein Messen.” But poetry is not like scientific measure: it has its own metric. If we are to think of poetry as a kind of measuring, then we need to rethink the idea of measure itself. “Wir dürfen das Dichten, wenn es als Messen gedacht werden soll, offenbar nicht in einer beliebigen Vorstellung von Messen und Maß unterbringen.” As Heidegger explains, poetry (*Das Dichten*) is a special kind of measuring.

Das Dichten ist vermutlich ein ausgezeichnetes Messen. Mehr noch ... Im Dichten ereignet sich, was alles Messen im Grunde seines Wesens ist. Darum gilt es, auf den Grundakt des Messens zu achten. Er besteht

darin, daß überhaupt erst das Maß genommen wird, womit jeweils zu messen ist. Im Dichten ereignet sich das Nehmen des Maßes. Das Dichten ist die im strengen Sinne des Wortes verstandene Maß-Nahme, durch die der Mensch erst das Maß für die Weite seines Wesens empfängt ... Das Wesen des ‚Dichterischen erblickt Hölderlin in der Maß-Nahme, durch die sich die Vermessung des Menschenwesens vollzieht. (190)

To understand poetry as a kind of measure-taking is to grasp the profound connection between poetry and human existence. Poetry as measuring is no less than the measure of the essence of what it means to be human, which is to say: a mortal, finite being. In this sense measure is the measure *of* man: what defines man and the limits of the human.

Another passage, this one from Heidegger’s seminar on Hölderlin’s “Der Ister,” delivered in 1942, helps clarify some of the more abstract claims of Heidegger’s later essay. While the poem’s decisive answer to the question of measure might sound a plaintive tone, this is only if we understand measure as something deliberate. In seeking to measure the earth, however, we do violence to it. Pointing beyond this kind of measuring, Hölderlin’s poem insists on a different idea of measure:

Das klingt wie der Bescheid auf das Aussichtslose und die Verzweiflung. Und doch nennt es ein Anderes und zeigt in ein Anderes, gesetzt, daß wir dichterisch auf dieser Erde wohnen und das Gedichtete in seinem Erscheinen und in seiner Herkunft erfahren, und das heißt

ertragen und erleiden, statt es zu erzwingen und zu belauern. Versuchen wir das nur eigenmächtige Setzen und Erschaffen des Maßes, dann wird es Maßlos und zerfällt in das Nichtige. Bleiben wir nur gedankenlos und ohne die Wachheit des prüfenden Ahnens, dann zeigt sich wiederum kein Maß. Sind wir aber stark genug zum Denken, dann kann es genügen, daß wir die Wahrheit der Dichtung und ihr Gedichtetes nur aus der Ferne, und d.h. kaum, bedenken, um von ihr plötzlich betroffen zu sein. (Hölderlins Hymne „Der Ister,” 205)

Within the context of the seminar as a whole, Heidegger’s depiction of geographic measure as something violent and *unheimlich* (his translation of Sophocles’s *deina*) goes hand in hand with Heidegger’s sustained critique of technology (τέχνη). We cannot do away with the concept of measuring altogether, but we can understand measure as something less forceful. Instead of something we seek out, or attempt to “seize,” measure is what comes to us through poetry—suddenly, and without expectation (“...kaum, bedenken, um von ihr plötzlich betroffen zu sein...”).

In noticing the split between geo-metry and an “other” measure, Heidegger acknowledges a tension inherent in the concept of measure itself, which no longer strictly means what it says. *Maß* is not measure in the conventional sense—it is not a scientific measuring. It does not take hold of the earth by force. Instead, as poetic measure, *Maß* implies a fundamentally different kind of experience. Turning the word *Maß* on its head, Heidegger voids the term of its familiar meaning. Instead of something we “seize,” poetic measure is far more something that “strikes” us. In other words, it represents the precisely opposite of the conventional sense of measure.

Heidegger's choice of words "von ihr plötzlich betroffen zu sein" suggests a completely different figurative register that conventionally associated with measure. Instead of something regular and ordered, measure becomes the name for the kind of ecstasy or abandon usually associated with madness.

Heidegger is right to notice the tension inherent in the concept of measure. Heidegger's remarks on Hölderlin's singular idea of measure find an echo in a recently-published lecture Paul de Man delivered at Brandeis in 1959. Noting that the idea of measure recurs both as a defining theme and as the persistent formal question of Hölderlin's "late" style, de Man, like Heidegger, identifies Hölderlin's work with an idea of measure that exceeds simple geo-metry.

We are powerless to imagine the characteristics of an art that would not be an expression of unity in nature, whether actual or ideal. One word that recurs more and more often in the late Hölderlin contains some indication: it is the word *Maass*. *Maass* means balance, the proper balance between things human and things divine, but it also means measurement. [In the Irvine manuscript this sentence appears thus: "Some indication from Hölderlin is the term 'Maass,' which we must take to mean measurement rather than moderation in a moral sense."]

For us, as was spontaneously the case for the Greeks, measurement means primarily geo-metry, the measurement of the earth, and the most nostalgically Hellenic and, for that reason, the most dangerous of all our actions is the scientific measurement of matter, the truly Western form of *hybris*. In a Western world after the *Umkehr*, measurement



would no longer be of matter but of the substance of the mind, the logos. Measured language means poetry, and we can assume that the supreme form of Western art will be poetic, as the supreme form of Greek art had to be plastic. But the metrics of Western poetry will be different from the kind of metrics we know and which treat language still primarily as if it were a material substance, made of sound and measurable time. What strikes us as the most strange and alien in the extreme rhythmical complication of the late Hölderlin hymns may be a foreboding of this ‘architectonic of heaven,’ as he called it, which it remains for Western poetry to invent. (De Man, “Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition” 119)

Like Heidegger, de Man understands “the scientific measurement of matter” as a kind of *hybris*. In spite of this, however—another echo of Heidegger—he does not altogether abandon the idea of measure. Rather, measure is to be understood as something more than material calculation. De Man goes a step further than Heidegger, however, in recognizing that the “other” kind of measure has *technical* implications for poetry. Without going into any detail, de Man intimates that this non-material idea of measure might be one way to appreciate the “rhythmical complication of the late Hölderlin hymns.” If we accept this other measure, then we must also accept the possibility that even—perhaps especially—when Hölderlin’s language appears most “lawless,” it is, in fact, no less measured.

Unfortunately, de Man’s account of this other measure, one that “would no longer be of matter but of the substance of the mind, the logos,” remains undeveloped.

What does such measure actually look like? While de Man does not give any specific examples from Hölderlin's poetry, his essay concludes with a series of examples from other poets that point in the same general direction, including passages from Yeats and Rimbaud. De Man's commentary on these passages is more suggestive than definitive, however, and it's not entirely clear what they have in common with one another, or, for that matter with Hölderlin. Still, the essay's concluding paragraph provides a clue to the connection de Man finds in these poets:

The gesture with which Rimbaud turns away from what he seemed most to crave is the same movement that appears in the course of the Rhine as it turns Westward, or in Rousseau when, protected from the invasion of natural things, he finds happiness in the pure presence of his own existence. It is the movement of the *Umkehr*, and indicates that, however alien Hölderlin's poetry and thought may now appear, they are not altogether unique, but one among the first signs of a possible, future poetry. (121)

Reading Rimbaud's poem "Larme" alongside Hölderlin's "Der Rhein," de Man notices how both poems dramatize a moment of reversal. This movement could be historical, as in the case of the river Rhine as it returns in a westerly direction, or it may be more subtle, as in the example of Rousseau's *Rêveries* at the center of Hölderlin's hymn: the return to a sense of self through the encounter with the material object. This turning or reversal is also an instance of measure insofar as what was previously sought is found only the movement of retraction. Like Heidegger, de Man seems to have in mind an idea of measure that reverses the position of subject and

object: instead of being something that is sought out, measure is something that occurs, paradoxically, through the conscious renunciation of an active subject position.

In noticing the split between geo-metry and an “other” measure, Heidegger and de Man both acknowledge a tension inherent in the concept of measure itself. The problem is not simply that measure is absent, but that it is radically singular. Tracking the uses of the word *Maß* in “Der Rhein” and the elegy “Brod und Wein,” Peter Fenves identifies the idea of measure with the problem of modern poetry, which, in contrast to classical verse, lacks a stable meter.

If the experience of “Brod und Wein” is the undoing of the apodictic assertion that measure is ‘common to all,’ and if, as “Der Rhein” asserts, ‘only each one has its measure,’ only one statement is warranted: measure cannot be given. The very existence of measure is in turn made questionable: ‘Gibt es ein Maß? (‘Is there, or does it give, a measure?’). The fact that each one has a measure not only does not preclude such a question but gives any question or measure its urgency. Nowhere is this urgency more strongly felt than in the matter of poetic meter. Each poem, each stanza, each line of poetry doubtless has its measure, but—at least for the ‘Hesperian’—no measure is given. The date of modernity could in fact be determined by the absence of this, a metrical datum. Even if this absence were to be constitutive of poetry as such—and nothing in Hölderlin’s poetological writings goes against this statement—‘Hesperian’ poets are the ones who are unable to

escape the question of this absence: this absence is the unavoidable *technical* difficulty of each poem, each stanza, each line. In each case Hölderlin's poetry, or more precisely, its technical character, responds to the difficulty that 'only each one' has its measure, and for precisely this reason, no measure can be given. ("Measure for Measure" 35)

Against Heidegger, who fails to say anything about the particular form of "In lieblicher Bläue," Fenves argues that the problem of measure is, in essence, the technical problem of modern poetry. Unlike scientific measure, poetic measure takes place in the absence of a given measure. This does not mean that poetry has no measure, but only that no measure is given. Instead, each one has its own measure—each poem, each stanza, each line.

As Fenves argues, Heidegger confuses "measure" with "measure-taking." "While ignoring the particular technical features of a poem—and a disputed 'poem' at that—Heidegger presents 'doing poetry' in terms of its singular technique of appropriation: not only does it take measure, it is the only appropriate measure-taking, or the measure-taking that alone resists the appropriation of modern modes of technological measurement and standardization" (37). As Fenves points out, however, Hölderlin does not call poetry "measure-taking," and the violence of Heidegger's interpretation reveals something about the difference between philosophy and poetry.

While Heidegger's interpretation of "In lieblicher Bläue..." helps introduce some of the broader implications of the original notion of "measure" in Hölderlin's work, ultimately, his interpretation of the poem leaves open more questions than it

resolves. Just what would it mean to be “struck” by the truth of poetry? Moreover, as critics have amply documented, Heidegger’s interpretation of “In lieblicher Bläue...” is deeply flawed. At its worst, it exemplifies the precisely the kind of violent appropriation Heidegger’s own critique of technology sought to move away from.

First and foremost, Heidegger fails to account for the fact that both the text’s authorship and its form are a matter of intense debate. Hölderlin’s editor Friedrich Beißner places the text of “In lieblicher Bläue...” last in the volume of poems composed after 1800, in a separate chapter, under the heading “Zweifelhaftes” (StA II, 1, 372-74). For Beißner, the authenticity of the text is questionable for several reasons. First of all, the only extant version of the poem comes from Wilhelm Waiblinger, who published it as part of his novel *Phaeton*, in 1823.<sup>108</sup> Waiblinger was among those who visited Hölderlin in Tübingen after the onset of madness, and his journals provide a rare portrait of the poet in his later years. Waiblinger also went on to write the first biography of Hölderlin, the title of which, *Hölderlins Leben, Dichtung und Wahnsinn* (1827/28), already gives some indication of how he understood the interrelation of the poet’s life and work as the dual articulation of his madness. By placing the text of “In lieblicher Bläue...” within his fictional account of the mad artist Phaeton, Waiblinger might well have altered the language to suit his own purposes.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Waiblinger’s diaries from the period indicate that he had access to Hölderlin’s unpublished work, and planned to use portions of it in his novel.

<sup>109</sup> Unlike Beißner, moreover, Sattler believes that the text was in all probability composed in verse, as Waiblinger claims. Waiblinger’s remark that he received several pages from Hölderlin’s own notebook is corroborated by the fact that there are several pages missing Hölderlin’s manuscript. That these pages would have been exactly the right size to have contained Pigenot’s metrical reconstruction of the poem, Sattler concludes, makes it more likely that this text originally belonged to

While glossing over the questions surrounding the poem's authenticity, Heidegger also fails to acknowledge the fact that text, as it comes down to us, is composed not in verse like Hölderlin's better-known poems, but in prose. Both of these questions have obvious implications for how we read the poem, especially with regard to the concept of measure. What does it mean that the only extant version of the poem is composed in prose? Even supposing that Hölderlin is the true author of the text, how are we to understand the fact that it likely belongs to the period of his "madness"? And what do these contextual circumstances say about Heidegger's choice to make this poem the center of his discussion of "poetic" measure?

I for one believe that Heidegger was just cunning enough to gauge the full implications of his reading of "In lieblicher Bläue..." It is entirely possible that it represents a "mad" poem. And yet this does not mean it is lacking in measure. Far from it. Even with all the questions surrounding the provenance and presentation of the text, perhaps indeed because of these, this text reveals something about the connection between madness and measure. Heidegger is not wrong to find in this poem a critique of scientific measure, or the intimations of an alternative, "poetic" idea of *Maß*. But his interpretation stops just short of the kind of close reading necessary to grasp the full impact of this tension. Looking more closely at the poem, I would argue that "In lieblicher Bläue" makes sense as a text attributed to Hölderlin, if

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Hölderlin. "Damit haben sich Waiblingers Angaben zur Provenienz der *Phäëton-Segemente* als stimmig, somit auch als glaubwürdig erwiesen" (FHA, 33). Dismissing Beißner's argument that the triadic form would have been unlikely for a poem from Hölderlin's later period, Sattler argues that the poem could have been composed earlier. Indeed, if it had occupied the missing pages Sattler suspects it did, then this would indicate that it was composed around 1807/1808.

not authored by him. Within the context of its reception as a “mad” poem and the confusion of its form, this text exposes the madness that already underlies the concept of measure—and the measure that lingers on the far side of madness.

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Let us look more closely at the text of this poem, and the difficulties surrounding its interpretation. Within this context, a number of questions arise. How is it that the text of “In lieblicher Bläue...” functions in Waiblinger’s novel as the supporting “evidence” for the portrait of a mad artist? What is it about this text that is notably “mad”? And what does this say about the notion of “madness” underlying Waiblinger’s influential reception of Hölderlin?

The obvious answer to the first of these questions is that the text’s patent disavowal of measure (“Es giebt keines”) subscribes to a definition of madness as the absence of measure. The same logic also helps explain why, if Waiblinger did borrow this poem from Hölderlin, and if it was originally composed in verse, he decided to reproduce it in prose. Within the context of Waiblinger’s novel, the choice to present the text as prose assumes a correlation between madness and the absence of measure, and between the absence of measure and the absence of meter. To be mad, Waiblinger seems to imply, is to be without measure. A poem without meter is a mad poem.<sup>110</sup>

But the text itself challenges the simple association between madness and the

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<sup>110</sup> Of course, a madman can still write metrical poems, as Waiblinger notes, remarking that Hölderlin was able to write perfectly metrical poems that were nonetheless complete nonsense (“ganz metrische-richtige Alcäen ohne allen Sinn,” 285).

lack of measure. If madness is characterized by the absence of measure, and if the author of this text is a madman, then he is a madman who recognizes his own madness. For what kind of madman knows himself to be mad? In this case, the disavowal of measure is, in fact, a performance of measure. For surely the ability to recognize the absence of measure is, itself, a kind of measure? If, on the other hand, the author or persona behind this text is mad, why should we trust him when he says there is no measure: “Es giebt keines”? We would ourselves be mad to take the word of a madman.

Leaving aside for the moment the question whether and in what way this is a “mad” text, let us consider briefly how it functions in the context of Waiblinger’s novel, *Phaëton*, as evidence of the artist’s deranged mind. The novel concludes with a description of the artist that closely echoes Waiblinger’s diary recordings of Hölderlin.<sup>111</sup> In the novel, this description appears in the form of a letter from a “friend” of the artist to another, in which he describes Phaeton’s drastically altered appearance. The language of the passage is highly conventional, particularly the description of the artist’s madness:

Uns allen war er ein Rätsel. Er galt für einen Schwärmer. Immer klagte er über tausenderlei Dinge, wollte alles in größerem Maße, als wir begreifen, als wir geben konnten. (FHA 9, 287)

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<sup>111</sup> The references to the “Dorf T\*\*\*,” the *Tischlerhaus*, the *Mädchen* that greeted the visitor at the door, and the fact that the artist spoke in foreign words, are but a few examples. Even the syntax of the passage closely mirrors that of Waiblinger’s earlier description.



Nothing about this description challenges the conventional idea of madness as the absence of measure. By this account, the mad artist is a riddle (*Rätsel*) and a fanatic (*Schwärmer*): he exceeds all measure (*Maße*). He wants more than his friends can understand, and demands more than they can give.

In parting with his old friend, the narrator (in this instance: the author of the letter that the narrator reproduces) describes the sense of dis-ease he felt after his visit to the mad artist. After comparing the artist to a wild animal about in his cage, the letter concludes by issuing a warning to its addressee:

Außen blieb ich eine Zeit lang stehen und sah, wie er im Zimmer auf und abging. Ich dachte an die wilden Thiere, die so in ihrem Käfig wandeln, und rannte schauernd die Treppen hinunter.

Wird der verwegen aus den Schranken getretene, sich mit Gott zu messen erkühnende, in seinem Riesenschmerz in und durch sich selbst zermalmte Geist anderswo Licht, Maß und Wahrheit finden und wie?

Reizt ihn nicht, den höchsten Geist! Lernt ihn erkennen durch—  
Ruhe! Dann liebet! Dann betet an! Nur wer bei Fülle Maß hält, ist ihm ähnlich, dem Maße selbst. (FHA 9, 287-88)<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> The poetic density of this passage makes it difficult to translate. We will have to make to with an approximate rendering:

[Outside I lingered for a while longer, watching how he paced back and forth in the room. It reminded me of those wild animals, wandering in their cages, and I ran shivering down the stairs.

Will he ever find light, measure and truth, that spirit—  
venturing beyond limits, daring to measure himself against God,

Comparing the mad artist to a wild animal, the narrator describes how he fled the room in terror. His description of the artist as a “spirit” who ventures beyond limits, daring to measure himself against God, clearly associates madness with the hubris of going beyond mortal limits—a familiar trope from Hölderlin’s own poetic lexicon. The final warning is more difficult to grasp, however. When the narrator writes, “Do not rile him, the highest spirit?” does he refer to the artist—or to God? Or perhaps some other unnamed spirit?

This confusion is symptomatic of a deeper ambivalence, already hinted at in the analogy between the mad artist and the wild animal. While grammatically correct, the syntax of the phrase, “Ich dachte an die wilden Thiere, die so in ihrem Käfig wandeln, und rannte schauernd die Treppen hinunter,” nevertheless conveys a peculiar identification between the artist and the narrator who flees in terror. Is the narrator running away from the image of the artist—or its association, in his own mind, with the wild animal? The problematic association of artist, animal, and spectator, is further complicated when we compare this passage to Waiblinger’s diary description of how *he* felt after leaving Hölderlin’s house:

Ein Grausen durchschauerte mich; mir fielen die Bestien ein, die in  
ihren Käfigen auf und ab rennen, wir liefen betäubt zum Haus hinaus.  
(FHA 9, 285)

While the novel likens the artist to the animal in a cage, Waiblinger’s account is more

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          squelching his enormous pain in and through himself?

          Do not rile him, the highest spirit! Get to know him—in peace!  
          Then love! Then pray! Only he who maintains measure in the face of  
          fullness, resembles measure itself.]

ambiguous: is it the poet, or Waiblinger himself who feels like a trapped animal? Earlier in the same passage, he describes the “confusion” he felt after visiting Hölderlin: “Die schreckliche Gestalt brachte mich in Verwirrung” (284). Something about the encounter with the madman is profoundly disorienting—for Waiblinger as for the fictional “friend”—a confusion that results in the inversion of subject and object positions: the visitor who comes to gawk at the wild animal and the wild animal himself.

The “disorientation” that the encounter with the mad man provokes carries over into the “warning” the narrator gives his friend: “Nur wer bei Fülle Maß hält, ist ihm ähnlich, dem Maße selbst [Only he who maintains measure in the face of fullness, resembles measure itself].” These last lines would imply that the friend, unlike the artist, ought to maintain “measure” in the face of “fullness.” For then—and only then—does he resemble “measure” itself. It is a strange formula. Rather than providing a simple definition of measure, it suggests that the only way to define measure is with recourse to the word measure itself: measure is the ability to maintain measure in fullness. As a definition of *Maß*, it is curiously derivative, if not tautological: to have measure is to have measure. It is also, for that reason, strangely “excessive.” Although the narrator holds up the mad artist as a cautionary example, warning his friends to avoid the hybris of excess, the passage as a whole ends up putting into question the fragile logic that opposes madness and sanity to begin with: *Maß* is not simply opposed to *Fülle*; indeed, *Fülle* may be a necessary condition of

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The circumstances surrounding the publication of “In lieblicher Bläue...” (its inclusion in Waiblinger’s novel, and the resonances between the novel and Waiblinger’s diary account of Hölderlin) may seem tangential. However, these contextual factors offer a more complicated picture of Hölderlin’s reception as a “mad” poet. They also provide another lens through which to read the poem itself. If, as Heidegger claims, this text provides some insight into a uniquely “poetic” idea of measure—as distinct from scientific measure—then it is as a poem that unsettles the conventional opposition between measure and madness. It does so, I suggest, by revealing the excess that underlies measure, and the measure that inheres in fullness.

For a text that is supposed to serve as evidence of the artist’s madness, the poem itself is centrally preoccupied with the idea of measure. Indeed, as Beißner concedes, the thematics of measure lend support to the claim that Hölderlin is the true

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<sup>113</sup> The narrator’s “warning” also finds an echo in Waiblinger’s diary entry, where the word “Fülle” is used to describe Hölderlin’s state of mind during the period preceding his lapse into madness:

O vor sich den genialischsten, geistreichsten Mann, die größte reichste Natur in ihrem gräßlichsten Falle zu sehen—einen Geist, der vor zwanzig Jahre die Fülle seiner Gedanken so unaussprechlich zauberartig hinhauchte, und alles anfüllte mit der Tiefe seines dichterischen Strudels, und der jetzt einzige klare Vorstellung, auch nicht von den unbedeutendsten Dingen hat—o sollte man da nicht Gott anklagen?

In the diary, the word “Fülle” describes the “fullness” of Hölderlin’s thoughts and words—a fullness that Hölderlin both receives and transmits, “breathing it into his work.” At the same time, Waiblinger’s description of how Hölderlin “fills everything with the depth of his poetic eddy,” verges on cliché. Imagining the poet’s sad transformation, Waiblinger succumbs, strangely enough, to another kind of *Schwärmerei*.

author of this text. What is more, almost all of the instances of the term are entirely conventional: *Maß* implies measure and restraint—the opposite of excess. This can be seen, for example, in the first instance of the term, which occurs at the end of the first section.

Ist unbekannt Gott? Ist er offenbar wie der Himmel? dieses glaub' ich  
eher.

Des Menschen Maaß ist's. Vollverdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt der  
Mensch auf dieser Erde. Doch reiner ist nicht der Schatten der Nacht  
mit den Sternen, wenn ich so sagen könnte, als der Mensch, der heißt  
ein Bild der Gottheit. (FHA 9, 34)

Thematically, the allusion to the “thunder” of the “creator,” associates the absence of *Maaß* with the violent power of nature, which cannot be “restricted” or “hemmed in.” According to this conventional view, the absence of measure is associated with excess. By contrast, the repeated insistence on “purity” (*Reinheit*) and serenity (*Heiterkeit*), particularly in the poem’s second section, could be read as another name for the measure that is felt lacking.

Die Seele aber, wie ich glaube, muß rein bleiben, sonst reicht an das  
Mächtige auf Fittigen der Adler mit lobendem Gesange und der  
Stimme so vieler Vögel. Es ist die Wesenheit, die Gestalt ist's. Du  
schönes Bächlein, du scheinst rührend, indem du rollest so klar, wie  
das Auge der Gottheit, durch die Milchstraße. Ich kenne dich wohl,  
aber Thränen quillen aus dem Auge. Ein heiteres Leben se' ich in den  
Gestalten mich umblühen der Schöpfung, weil ist es nicht unbillig

vergleiche den einsamen Tauben auf dem Kirchhof. Das Lachen aber scheint mich zu grämen der Menschen, nemlich, ich hab' ein Herz. Möcht' ich ein Komet seyn? Ich glaube. Denn sie haben die Schnelligkeit der Vögel; sie blühen an Feuer, und sind wie Kinder an Reinheit. Größeres zu wünschen, kann nicht des Menschen Natur sich vermessen. Der Tugend Heiterkeit verdient auch gelobt zu werden vom ernsten Geiste, der zwischen den drei Säulen wehet des Gartens. (35)

The allusion to the eagle that soars toward *das Mächtige* evokes a familiar motif of tragic hubris. Against such excess, the passage alludes to the “serenity of virtue” (*der Tugend Heiterkeit*) and the limits of human nature: “Größeres zu wünschen, kann nicht des Menschen Natur sich vermessen.” Instead of soaring too high, man’s soul must remain pure, like “children.”

The thematics of cautious restraint continues in the third section, as well, with its allusions to the mythic figures of Oedipus and Hercules. Instead of mythic hubris, however, the text speaks of “suffering” (*Leiden*).

Augen hat des Menschen Bild, hingegen Licht der Mond. Der König Oedipus hat ein Auge zuviel vielleicht. Diese Leiden dieses Mannes, sie scheinen unbeschreiblich, unaussprechlich, unausdrücklich. Wenn das Schauspiel ein solches darstellt, kommt’s daher. Wie ist mir’s aber, gedenk’ich deiner jezt? Wie Bäche reißt das Ende von Etwas mich dahin, welches sich wie Asien ausdehnet. Natürlich dieses Leiden, das hat Oedipus. Natürlich ist’s darum. Hat auch Hercules gelitten? Wohl. Die Dioskuren in ihrer Freundschaft haben die nicht Leiden auch

getragen? *Namlich wie Herklues mit Gott zu streiten, das ist Leiden.*

Und die Unsterblichkeit im Neide dieses Lebens, diese zu theilen, ist  
ein Leiden auch. (35)

On the surface, this passage seems entirely consistent with the discourse of tragic excess: in “fighting” with God, Hercules must suffer, just as Oedipus suffers for his crime. The image of the stream “tearing” toward Asia evokes the language of Hölderlin’s river poems (particularly “Der Rhein” and “Der Ister”), which associate the “East” with the danger of exceeding limits. Within this context, the word *Maaß* implies the opposite of excess: that which limits and restrains the tragic impulse toward the east, toward the heavens. Whereas the absence of measure leads to suffering, *Maaß* serves a protective function, preserving the purity of the soul.

Nothing about the word *Maaß* in these passages suggests anything of the ordinary. If anything, there is an abundance—not to say excess—of conventional tropes. The meaning of word *Maaß* seems entirely in keeping with the conventional view that associates measure with lawful restraint, as opposed to dangerous excess. On the other hand, the language of the text is difficult to make sense of. For example, in the first quoted passage, the referent of the pronoun “es” (in the contraction “ist’s”) is obscure. Does it follow from the previous comment, “dieses glaub’ ich eher,” or does it refer to the remark that follows, “Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt der mensch auf dieser Erde...”? This ambiguity points to a central difficulty of the text as a whole: in spite of the recurrence of logical transition words (doch, aber, nemlich), sentences do not follow seamlessly from one to the next. No doubt this is one of the

characteristically “mad” (and maddening) features of the text. At one level, the text “fails” to communicate. But in so doing, it also succeeds in communicating a certain kind of inadequacy. Within this context, the pronoun “es” that recurs throughout the text functions as a placeholder for a certain excess—a remainder of signification.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the pronoun “es” often accompanies the word *Maaß*, as in the famous opening lines of the text’s second section.

Giebt **es** auf Erden ein Maaß? **Es** giebt keines. Nemlich **es** hemmen den  
Donnergang nie die Welten des Schöpfers. Auch eine Blume ist schön,  
weil sie blühet unter der Sonne. **Es** findet das Aug’ oft im Leben Wesen,  
die viel schöner noch zu nennen wären also die Blumen. (35)

In this passage, the pronoun “es” appears in the conventional formula “es giebt,” and as the neuter subject of the verb construction “es findet.” In the first case, it is the grammatical placeholder for a subject that is ambiguous or unknown. In the second, it takes over the grammatical agency of the sentence’s implied subject: *Auge*. Such constructions have the effect of displacing the implied agent to the end of the sentence or phrase, the grammatical position more often associated with the direct object, as in the sentence “Nemlich **es** hemmen den Donnergang nie die Welten des Schöpfers.”

Thus, where the thematics of the poem support a conventional idea of measure as the opposite of excess, the language of the text is disorienting. Not only does it encourage confusion—the confusion of referents most particularly—such confusion results from a peculiar excess of signification. Referring to multiple nouns at the same time, the repetition of the pronoun “es” functions as a maddening echo throughout the text. Instead of marking logical transitions, words like “nehmlich,” “doch” and “aber”



fail to connect, further impeding the comprehension of the whole. Thus, while it trades in the conventional *topoi* of measure, the text itself reveals a particular tension: it speaks of measure, but it does so in the language of the madman.

Earlier, we noted the peculiar redundancy of the formula “Nur wer bei Fülle Maß hält, ist ihm ähnlich, dem Maße selbst.” And yet, as a definition of measure, it is also peculiarly appropriate. The fact that it is impossible to define measure without recourse to the word measure is indicative of a deeper problem. With its many resonances, the word *Maß* is over-determined—its multiple interpretative possibilities leave the word strangely devoid of any particular meaning. It is a mad word. For the same reason, however, the “fullness” of measure provides a clue for understanding the measure of the text “In lieblicher Bläue...” in spite of its disavowal of measure—or perhaps because of it.

As I bring these reflection to a close, I want to look, finally, at one of the text’s more puzzling motifs: the theme of eyes (*Auge*) and seeing. To a certain extent, this theme is already presupposed in the text’s placement in Waiblinger’s novel, which invites us to look upon the poem, like the mad artist, as we would an animal in its cage. The repeated language of image (*Bild*) or figure (*Gestalt*) throughout the text suggests a deeper connection. From the beginning, the text’s opening description, “In lieblicher Bläue blühet mit dem metallenen Dache der Kirchthurm...” (34) not only *is* an image, but also frames a discussion of *Bildsamkeit*.

Wenn einer unter der Gloke dann herabgeht, jene Treppen, ein stilles  
Leben ist es, weil, wenn abgesondert so sehr die Gestalt ist, die  
Bildsamkeit herauskommt dann des Menschen. (34)

The appearance of a human figure within the tranquil scene of the courtyard seems out of place, but it also brings out man's "plasticity." The description of this figure as "detached" (*abgesondert*) and image-like, like a concrete object, gives a peculiar resonance to the phrase "ein stilles Leben." A "still life" captures the tranquility of the scene, but also equates such *Stille* (quiet, stillness) with the very opposite of (human) life: a excess of stillness. In this context, the recurrence of the word "es" highlights the fact that man is not an active (living) subject in the scene, but an image-like object.

Something similar occurs in the final section as well, which begins with the image of a mirror.

Wenn einer in den Spiegel siehet, ein Mann, und siehet darinn sein  
Bild, wie abgemahlt; es gleicht dem Manne. Augen hat des Menschen  
Bild, hingegen Licht der Mond. Der König Oedipus hat ein Auge zuviel  
vieleicht. (35)

Reflected in the mirror, a man is merely an image—he is like a painting of himself. The image of the man in the mirror is, in fact, a double image: there is the man, and there is the image that "resembles the man." There is the man, and there is the "es" that replaces the man as the grammatical subject of the phrase "es gleicht dem Manne." The following lines are like a riddle: "Augen hat des Menschen Bild, hingegen Licht der Mond." In spite of the word "hingegen," the sentence reads as an analogy: the image of man has eyes, but its "eyes" are like the light of the moon—a reflected image. The curious doubling inherent in the image of the image, the image of eyes, might be one way to understand the *gnome* that follows: *Der König Oedipus hat ein Auge zuviel vieleicht*. Oedipus's crime—his punishment—is less a matter of

blindness than an excess of insight.

The image of the image—a reflected image of man—also explains the bizarre, circular logic of the text’s concluding lines.

Doch das ist auch ein Leiden, wenn mit Sommerfleken ist bedekt ein  
Mensch, mit manchen Fleken ganz überdekt zu seyn! Das thut die  
schöne Sonne: nemlich die ziehet alles auf. Die Jünglinge führt die  
Bahn sie mit Reizen ihrer Stralen wie mit Rosen. Die Leiden scheinen  
so, die Oedipus getragen, als wie ein armer Mann klagt, daß ihm etwas  
fehle. Sohn Laios, armer Fremdling in Griechenland! Leben ist Tod,  
und Tod ist auch ein Leben. (35)

The redundancy of the phrase “wenn mit Sommerfleken ist bedekt ein Mensch, mit manchen Fleken ganz überdekt zu seyn” conveys the peculiar suffering (*Leiden*) of excess. It also describes the suffering of Oedipus, suffering characterized not so much by what is lacking (was *fehlt*), but by what is overly abundant. What makes Oedipus a *Fremdling in Griechenland* is this particular lack of measure, this madness of excess. But it is also a kind of madness that arises from *within* Greece as the inverted reflection of serenity. As an image, this reflection is a “still life,” which is to say: it is an image of death in life—and *umgekehrt*. Instead of either/or, it expresses the fullness—the excess—of both: “Leben ist Tod, und Tod ist auch ein Leben.”

As exemplary instances of excess, or the lack of measure, such doublings and inversions account for the apparent madness of Hölderlin’s text. But is it possible that the proliferation of reflected images also exemplifies the excess *that is* measure? Taken to the extreme, *Bildsamkeit* not only gives shape (*Gestalt*) to life, but makes life

into an image: *ein stilles Leben*. The question, *Giebt es auf Erden ein Maaß?*, and its answer, *Es giebt keines*, apparently proclaims the absence of measure. But the formulation “Es giebt keins” (There is none) could also be read as “There is no one.” If, as “Der Rhein” suggests, “Nur hat ein jeder sein Maß”—each one has its own measure—not only does this imply that every measure is singular, but also that there is no *one*. Maybe there is more than one measure—maybe, indeed, there are many? Of course, this statement is also absolutely mad. But perhaps that’s the point: instead of being associated with the lack of measure, madness could just as easily describe its excess—or *Fülle*.

On the other hand, Hölderlin’s poem also suggests the opposite. If in some way Hölderlin’s text reveals the madness of measure, then it does not follow that there is “no measure.” Rather, it may be that the sense of *Fülle* also brings us closer to the meaning of “measure” that Heidegger claims to discover in Hölderlin’s work. For Heidegger, this “other” measure is an alternative to geometry. If there is no one measure—if there is more than one—then “measure” denotes precisely the inverse of a metrics based on the order of ones. To conceive of this other metrics—the metrics of the many—exceeds the limits of reason. But this other measure also tests those limits—and exceeds them.

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