

ENCHANTMENT AND EMBARRASSMENT IN THE LYRIC

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In a supposedly enlightened and disenchanted age, why has lyric poetry continued to behave in ways that are now inadmissible or even unimaginable in any other kind of discourse? Unlike narrative and dramatic genres, the lyric, from its earliest surviving examples to the prosaic poetry of the present, is evidently unable ever to be *simply* disenchanted but only *ostensibly* or *conspicuously* so, its burden of myth and wonder always to be at least partially resisted yet never to be entirely overcome. Gestures of animation, invocation, and praise, apparently artificially imposed (dis)order as well as spurious gnomic and vatic sayings with claims to universal or transcendent knowledge seem to be *marks of the lyric as a genre*. This would raise little concern if lyric writing did not so frequently profess earnestness and intimacy, rejecting fictional status and thereby preserving a capacity to *lie*.

Through meticulous readings of French and German poets active during the long 19th century, including Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Valéry, and Rilke, this dissertation offers a *theory of poetic license*, that is to say an attempt to elucidate why lyric poems traditionally have been allowed to speak in manners that elsewhere would be judged unfounded, untruthful, or even mad. Five discrete lyric phenomena structure the text: meter, measure, lies, animation, and praise. Although these phenomena are neither exclusive to the lyric genre nor found in each of its instances, they correspond to strategies for regulating the balance between enchantment and disenchantment, a constitutive function of lyric writing. Whereas established approaches to the modern lyric's techniques of enchantment seek to explain them either as mere residues of former superstitions or as wholly new forms of "re-enchantment," this thesis provides the conceptual resources required to conceive the lyric's privileged relationship to (dis)enchantment

in strictly poetological terms, which help us understand the persistent *poetic* efficacy of ancient and modern texts alike. *Enchantment and Embarrassment in the Lyric* hence both advances a theoretical argument about the lyric genre and intervenes in broader debates by providing new tools for conceiving the process of secularization.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Klas Molde received his B.A. from Stockholm University and an M.A. from Cornell University, both in Comparative Literature. He has published articles in international journals *Labyrinthe* and *Lexis*. He has also written criticism for Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* and given talks at numerous universities in America and Europe. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

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INTRODUCTION: ENCHANTMENT AND EMBARRASSMENT

Lyric enchantment, as soon as it is recognized as such, is inseparable from the possibility of lyric disenchantment. And disenchantment as the effect of poetry's failure to enchant is never merely the absence of enchantment: it is embarrassment. Such enchantment and such embarrassment are both the subject and the impetus for this dissertation.

The question that I raise anew is why lyrics have continued in an era more or less enlightened and disenchanted to speak in ways hardly admissible in any other form of discourse. Gestures of animation, invocation, evocation, and celebration as well as artificially imposed order along with spurious gnomic and vatic sayings with claims to transcendent or universal knowledge seem to be marks of the lyric as genre – even when such traits are absent from the texts themselves. Unlike other genres, the lyric, from its earliest surviving examples to the prosaic poetry of the present, is evidently unable ever to be *simply* disenchanted but only *ostensibly* or *conspicuously* so, its burden of myth and wonder always to be at least partially resisted, never finally to be overcome.

The lyric as we know it appears to have its roots in sacred rituals and magic incantations; yet this is of little help in seeking to understand the lyric's efficacy as a *literary* genre, if literature is conceived as that discourse which, while not unaffected by them, has at least a minimum of autonomy relative to the dogmas of religion, the rules that govern political and legal life, and social norms.¹ The lyric only becomes readable as such (that is as the literary genre which we have come to understand by it) when and where its status as effective prayer or summoning ceases to provide satisfying explicans for all of its features and functions. (Which does not

¹ I may appear here to follow a romantic tradition according to which the artwork more than any other human making testifies to the fact of human freedom. I do not wish to make any claims concerning literature's capacity to indicate, grant, or constrain freedom; suffice it to say that whatever a term like "autonomy" might mean, no other form of language seems more fit for its predication.

preclude that literary value may be ascribed to religious texts, nor does it suggest that the lyric ever may be entirely cut off from its supporting discourses.)

It has indeed often been observed that the lyric more than any other literary genre carries with itself its own archaic, cultic, ritualistic past, preserving as part of its repertoire speech acts that ought to have long lost their efficacy. But as Heinz Schlaffer recently has noted, it is much more difficult to explain why lyrics are still read and written in modernity than to account for how such forms arose in the first place.² However, I will argue that there are few good reasons, although indeed many bad ones, for the prosaism of the present and the generalized mistrust of the lyric. To assert that lyric is the paradigmatic genre of modernity would be claiming too much, but to assert that it most intensively reflects on one particularly salient aspect of the experience of modernity, and in so doing comes to alter retroactively what it means to write, to speak, and to sing lyrically, would be saying much too little.³

Not all lyrics aim primarily to enchant, and those that do may appear to fall short of their goal while somehow nevertheless convincing as poems. Hence in no way can the lyric be identified with an enchanting function, nor can all elements of those that do enchant be subordinated to this purpose. What follows is not a definition of the lyric but a contribution to its theory,⁴ carried out through a comparative poetics as practiced in readings of some poets active during a decisive period in the history of the genre. What is at stake is conceiving how lyric poetry in modernity increasingly comes to reflect on and agonize over its own role and

² See Schlaffer 2012, 169.

³ For a theory of the lyric as the paradigmatically modern genre, see Renate Homann. *Theorie der Lyrik. Heautonome Autopoiesis als Paradigma der Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999. A less programmatic, qualified version of this argument can be found in Achim Geisenhanslüke. *Nach der Tragödie. Lyrik und Moderne bei Hegel und Hölderlin*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2012, which argues that Hölderlin's late songs preempt the Hegelian declaration of the end of art by founding a new beginning for modern poetry.

⁴ For some recent attempts to *define* the lyric, see Dieter Lamping, *Das Lyrische Gedicht*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989 as well as Eva Müller-Zettelmann's *Lyrik und Metalyrik. Theorie einer Gattung und ihrer Selbstbespiegelung anhand von Beispielen aus der englisch- und deutschsprachigen Dichtkunst*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2000 and Rüdiger Zymner's *Lyrik. Umriss und Begriff*. Without assessing these contributions, I note that Zymner's minimal definition is at least amenable to what I call lyric enchantment.

conditions of possibility, and thereby to shed new light on the genre itself, that is on its past and future capacities.

The poems and poetic phenomena I investigate are of course peculiar to a specific time period and to certain authors, often seen as exceptional or even incomparable. However, while I do not wish to deny the singularity of corpora nor of individual works – my inquiries demand unceasing attention to such singularity, which is not simply to be subsumed under a typology –, my overarching aim is to *reduce* rather than to *proliferate* complexity; in any case, my goal is not to produce more complexity of *meaning*. Hence, by comparing the incomparable – to the incomparable –,⁵ I do hope to add to the understanding of the poems I treat but above all to the understanding of those discrete lyric phenomena according to which this dissertation is structured: meter, measure, lies, animation, and praise. These occur across authors, national traditions, and, in different guises, historical periods. In analyzing these phenomena as *lyric* phenomena, I do not assert that they constitute *necessary* properties of the lyric, nor that they are *exclusive* to lyric texts – although some of them are dependent on characteristics commonly associated with the lyric, such as versification, the first person voice, and various tropes; and I do claim, if for none other than pragmatic reasons, that the lyric genre is indissociable from *some relation* to enchantment, however thin or negative this relation may be, and whatever capacious conception of enchantment this claim may require. The purchase here is not an ability to distinguish lyrics from other texts but rather what happens were one to think, as I propose to do, of the lyric as that genre where (dis)enchantment is at issue. The focus on genre is what lets me juxtapose seemingly incommensurable poets, and this juxtaposition in turn is what allows me to pinpoint problems in poetics instead of performing exegeses of individual oeuvres or texts, adding to what is in each case already a vast amount of commentary. It is by recognizing that the poets who supply the chief material for my readings – Hölderlin, Mallarmé,

⁵ While my means and aims are markedly different from those outlined by Marcel Detienne in his *Comparing the Incomparable*, there are some similarities, to which I will return.

Rilke, and Valéry – are suggesting diverse answers to problems they have in common that their unique achievements and their individual conceptions of the specific work of the lyric come to light. It is not a matter of overlapping themes but indeed of poetic phenomena particularly pertinent to the lyric genre, of problems that the modern lyric inherits from its predecessors and that are especially satisfyingly worked through in the examples I choose.

In not primarily focusing on the inexhaustible singularity of the poets and poems I study but instead on what I call discrete lyric phenomena, it may seem as though I am concerned above all with confirming the universality of certain poetic events. This is for a philosopher like Alain Badiou the only productive use of comparative literature and of comparison as method: “a sort of experimental verification of this universality” (46). Such “verification” is of course most convincing when applied to remote traditions that are taken to have evolved more or less independently from one another. For the champion of comparison Marcel Detienne, whose aims are not Badiou’s, the same holds: comparison will yield the most fruitful results when applied not to neighboring traditions but to the incomparable, which for him means more or less unrelated societies and practices. In distinction, I try to read and compare traditions and poets that are indeed neighboring but on whose singularity and incomparability has often been insisted. The lyric phenomena into which I inquire can be said, in so far as they are “choices made in preference to other possibilities” (in this case other lyric responses to the flight of the gods), to be akin to Detienne’s “comparables” (32). What allows me to construct them is a notion of genre as something that retains at least a minimum of coherence over time and across traditions.

My conception of genre is essentially pragmatic and not normative. As with any identifiable form of art, it cannot be ruled out that an artifact appears which must be recognized as a lyric while at the same time lacking something that we have taken to be essential to the genre. It would then highlight some other feature which in turn becomes intrinsic, or rather it would render explicit or at least more precise *what it was* in that feature we previously took to be indispensable that actually *is* constitutive, and we would be forced retroactively to reconsider or

adjust our assessment of the genre in question and its instances. This is precisely what the poets I read accomplish, in spite of their enormous differences, and it is what makes them modern: faced with the inadequacies of its supporting discourses (myth, religion, metaphysics), lyric poetry is forced reflexively to consider more narrowly in what the relationship of the lyric to those discourses consisted. We may say that the cultic (pre)history of the lyric explains certain features of the lyric in modernity; however, it is equally and perhaps more informatively true that the reflexivity of the modern lyric explains the *poetic* efficacy of those earlier forms that appear rooted in religion and superstition or wholly determined by a ritualistic, civic, or ideological function. Modern forms of enchantment do not necessarily operate wholly differently from pre-modern forms of enchantment. In any case, the former teaches us as much about the latter as vice versa. In this way we have decided that the lyre was not essential to the lyric, but something that the lyre helped produce; closed forms were not essential to the lyric, but some sense of (dis)order; religion was not essential to the lyric, but something which the lyric has in common with religion; gods, daemons, or spirits were not essential to the lyric, but some inhuman category not fully accessible within lyric discourse itself but to which the lyric nevertheless attempts to establish a relation; animism was not essential to the lyric, but some acknowledgment of the wonder that spirit does arise out of or in mere matter; etc.

Lyric's reflexivity in modernity teaches us something about the lyric genre, not only how to read *modern* lyrics. In transforming the genre, modern lyric poetry changes our understanding of its logic along with our comprehension of its previous instances. I do not conceive of genre as something transcendent or ahistorical – every new, accepted addition to a genre may compel us to reevaluate what that genre is – but as something transhistorical for precisely the reason that it may always be transformed retroactively. So Archilochus, most of whose poetry was not intended to be accompanied by the lyre, did not qualify for the Alexandrian canon of lyric poets, while to us his texts are instantly recognizable as lyrics. Instead it is Pindar who appears to pose a problem for our post-Romantic lyric norms (but unnecessarily so, as I will argue).

It is uncontroversial to hold the central problematic of the modern lyric to be the continued possibility of aesthetically produced wonder and enchantment in a rational world and in an existence that knows and wills itself to be finite. The lyric has conventionally been associated with seduction, enthusiasm, elevation, and indeed enchantment. Such traits along with a tendency to mythologize are taken as constitutive of what we call “lyricism” in general and the “odic” or the “hymnic” in particular. From this it is tempting to infer that lyric modernity can be construed broadly as a reaction against the disenchantment that Max Weber described in sociological terms as the result of secularization and rationalization of the modern West. The role of the lyric in modernity, then, would be to draw on its own magical past to invent various new forms of enchantment, in opposition to crude materialist or progressivist accounts of history, thereby serving as a reminder that moderns may never rid themselves entirely of their archaic past.

Whether one wants to construe such a project as conservative or as a necessary part of a progressive dialectics, the risks are obvious. The lyric’s capacity to name and propensity to mythologize (some would say to ideologize) along with its power to charm and to seduce can evidently be harnessed to any end. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, after decades of incisive and unsettling investigations into the relationship between poetry and philosophy, ancients and moderns, concludes that poetry, in order to obviate disastrous appropriations, must become prose. “Poetry” is here not defined in terms of versification but rather as what we have come to refer to as lyricism, specifically as it appears in those sophisticated European poets who have elicited the interest of philosophy. Correspondingly, prose is not defined as continuous text uninterrupted by line breaks. Rather, “‘prose’ should in fact be understood as another name for ‘sobriety’” (58).

To anyone interested in the lyric, and more particularly in its manifestations and conditions of possibility in modernity, “the Idea of poetry as prose” (59), with all its critical, disenchanting benevolence, cannot satisfy, even if that which must be given up is narrowed

down to “the mythological” or “the hymn.”⁶ The poem as prose would be a lyric purged of its charms as well as its dangers, more or less transparent to itself, approaching the discourse of philosophy.

On the side of the spectrum opposite that of Lacoue-Labarthe’s call for a “prosaic,” “sober” poetry (for which he seeks support in a Hölderlin filtered through Adorno and Benjamin), one finds the late Friedrich Kittler’s assertion: “Poetry – so long as it is not fought and circumscribed by philosophy – is essentially an invocation of the gods.” (68)⁷ In other words, poetry is a “divine gift”; it is that in which humanity accomplishes more than the merely human (68).⁸

Without accepting Kittler’s premises, I venture the claim that much of the lyric’s characteristics is anyhow inextricably *related* to the divine, if the divine is construed quite “prosaically” as that inhuman third which, belonging neither to objective nature nor being a direct result of human willing, escapes other discourses’ demand for transparency. Whatever reproaches one might bring to bear on Hegel’s theory of the lyric, he was right in maintaining the lyric’s partial opacity to itself. A completely translucent, self-conscious lyric would no longer be a lyric. And this is not merely because, as Hegel has it, all art – indeed any non-philosophical human practice – is but a necessary step on the dialectical ladder toward conceptual thinking. Rather, the lyric is that literary genre in which opacity and lucidity, enchantment and

⁶ “The mythological,” writes Lacoue-Labarthe, “is precisely what it is necessary to ‘put down’ or depose” and thereby “to take leave of the hymn, to quit it” (52). Of course his claims must be understood in a specific post-Heideggerian context, but this demand of taking leave of the hymn would render poets like Rilke and Valéry illegible, and miss a crucial feature that haunts the lyric even when absent from it.

⁷ Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The spectrum of which I speak here is of course in some ways rather limited. It is a post-Romantic affair in the context of continental philosophy that concerns at bottom how to come to terms with a certain Heideggerian heritage. It should be added that the terms “sober” and “sacred” are not necessarily opposed in this tradition but rather intimately connected, which of course is the entire meaning of Hölderlin’s coinage *heiligenüchtern*, “sacred-sober.” However, Kittler’s sharp difference from Lacoue-Labarthe is that the leave-taking of the hymn is for the former at most a fact, never an imperative.

⁸ Regardless of whether one finds this notion embarrassing, it is, contrary to appearances, entirely commensurate with Kittler’s earlier focus on discourse, media, technology, and war: the gods are for Kittler part of that third which, neither human nor nature, comes to order and determine our situation. He confesses: “This function of invocation appears to me so important, because thereby the limits of the human are transgressed.” (69) And “at least the lyric is always close to cultic forms” (85).

disenchantment, are negotiated. The purpose of the lyric, at least from archaic Greek lyric and throughout the classical tradition, was never *merely* to enchant, nor is its function under modern conditions simply to resist disenchantment.⁹ Instead, the lyric genre can be construed as a pressure chamber that regulates the balance between enchantment and disenchantment, wonder and sobriety, in a world perpetually deficient in one or the other.

The lyric thus conceived is never a discourse simply “on” or “about” the divine or enchantment. If the lyric is that discourse in which enchantment and disenchantment are negotiated, this means that the lyric actually *produces* enchantment as well as its failure. For Hegel, whose theory of the lyric as expression or imitation of the interior movements of the individual subject will serve no prominent role in what follows, lyric poetry, by being the art form closest to conceptual thinking while nevertheless preserving a central and indeed insurmountable opacity, plays a special role with respect to the divine (which, it should be remembered, for Hegel is the center toward which all historical artistic production converges): “the lyric alone, in rising towards God, can strike the note of praise of his power and his glory” (1975, I, 175).¹⁰ “On the other hand, the Divine, as in itself *pure* spirit, is an object of intellectual reflection [*denkenden Erkenntnis*] alone. But the spirit *embodied* in activity, because it always reverberates only in the human breast, belongs to art.” (176)¹¹

I bring up Hegel as an authority neither on the divine nor on the lyric but as helpful for understanding the relationship to enchantment that I take to be integral to lyric discourse. Lyric speech is not intrinsically enchanting or essentially divine, but the lyric is that art form which precisely by its proximity to conceptual thinking comes to emphasize the gap between the two

⁹ In *Soliciting Darkness. Pindar, Obscurity, and the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003, John Hamilton explores the poetics of lyric obscurity in the Pindaric tradition. While this is an excellent case study, I argue that the lyric in fact always refers to something that cannot be named within or extrapolated from the lyric discourse itself. Badiou puts this point nicely, although in the service of his own philosophy (16-27).

¹⁰ “die Lyrik allein vermag in der Erhebung zu Gott den Preis seiner Macht und Herrlichkeit anzustimmen” (1986, XIII, 230)

¹¹ “Das göttliche dagegen als reiner Geist in sich ist nur Gegenstand der denkenden Erkenntnis. Der aber in Tätigkeit verleblichte Geist, insoweit er nur immer an die Menschenbrust anklingt, gehört der Kunst“ (231)

and negotiate between poetic enchantment and what lacks it. To a Hegelian the absolute itself may of course be enchanting, and the absolute is nothing if not conceptual, so what enchants can by no means be equated with the mystical or the ineffable. As we will see, for the poets of the long nineteenth century who most subtly reflect on the movement between enchantment and disenchantment, the absolute, conceived crudely as the identity of subject and object or of spirit and matter, can be the source of both nihilism and praise – often within a single poem.

In emphasizing the power of language as such, the lyric draws attention to the possibility or impossibility of an identity of the speaker(s) and the world. Yet such an identity, like language itself, never reaches perfect transparency within the lyric. And from its viewpoint (as opposed to the viewpoint of philosophy) this is not something to be overcome but rather in so many ways to be negotiated.

The essential opacity of the lyric has often been noted. Northrop Frye calls it the “blocking point.” He writes that “[the lyrical] world is one of magic and mystery, one that we must soon leave if we are to retain our reputations as sober citizens of the ordinary one. But there is still a residual sense that something inexhaustible lies behind it.” He goes on to remind us that

[t]wo highly cerebral poets, Mallarmé and Rilke, have said that the end and aim of lyrical poetry is praise. They did not say this in any sort of conventional religious context: they were not talking about a prefabricated heaven but an earthly paradise we stumble on accidentally, like the castle of the Grail, a paradise we can bring to life for ourselves if we ask the right question, which is, according to Chrétien de Troyes, “Who is served by all this?” (31)

Indeed, whom does all this serve, what is the point of such elaborate opacity? Why bother with a discourse that cannot help but gesture toward something it itself cannot conceptualize, perhaps not even adequately name? What can possibly be the purpose of the insistence on what, neither human nor nature, is inaccessible to the lyric yet nevertheless not left alone by it?

Such are the questions philosophy may pose to poetry and has done throughout their history. From a Hegelian point of view, philosophy is the discourse according to which

everything is conceptual, whereas poetic discourse circumscribes something for it unnamable. Yet it is worth stressing once again that if lyric poetry is not (and can never be) conceptual knowledge, for Hegel it is that form of art which nevertheless stands in closest proximity to the transparency of philosophy. Given the obliqueness of the lyric relative to other literary genres, this may appear contradictory. However, it is precisely *because* the lyric is *all but* conceptual thought that it becomes the medium for the regulation of obscurity and clarity, enchantment and disenchantment. This does not mean that lyric poetry affirms something *in principle* unknowable, only that it acknowledges something, anything at all and at a given moment, to be *in actuality* opaque. The lyric does not furnish the means to overcome enchantment, myth, and opacity, in which it always, however minimally or negatively, partakes. Instead, the most successful lyrics supply the best tools for relating to, managing, and transforming these ineluctable features of human experience.

The most convenient explanation of modern poetry's strategies to enchant is that lyric poems receive their tropes from an archaic past, of which they will always carry remnants; at the same time, poetry gives free reign to the apparently uncontrollable impulse to mythologize, providing a fictional medium in which myth can do little harm.¹² The nostalgia for an old mythology and the wish for a new one is of course a commonplace of the 19th century, and it is safe to say that the perils of this idea to our day are at the center of debates concerning the use and abuse of poetry. Supplementing the enlightened critique of old idolatry, the author(s) of the untitled fragment known as "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism" (*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*) first called for a "mythology of reason" to remedy the mechanical world-view allegedly caused by the progress of the sciences and the state's blindly and instrumentally operating on free men. Such imagery becomes ubiquitous in subsequent Romantic literature in both France and Germany.

¹² This is the case for Schläffer, according to whom we may enjoy the delightful "means" of lyric while renouncing its unenlightened "goals." See especially the final chapter in *Geistersprache*.

Manfred Frank, who has gone further than anyone else in tracing this desire for a new mythology through both literature and philosophy, writes that “poetry itself and *as such* becomes the new mythology [my emphasis]” (1988, 206). But while Frank’s reading is forceful it can also lead to misconceptions. As he himself has pointed out, one or perhaps *the* primary function of myth is to found communities whose members it ties to each other, often in lieu of other forms of legitimation. Construed in this comprehensive manner, myth has no place, or rather ought not to have a place, in modern societies. In Frank’s words:

We need no new myth, and above all no new irrationalism or neovitalism, such as they discordantly resonate with numerous contemporary defenses of myth. But we do need a sharpened consciousness of the critical social and cultural situation, of which the sharp-sighted diagnosis is the unforgotten accomplishment of the early Romantics. (1989, 11)¹³

In the best case and in its most conscientious examples, then, the modern lyric would come up with ways of enchanting that require no actual mythological, metaphysical, religious, or otherwise superstitious commitments, and therefore harmonize with the new materialist, secular, atheist modes of approaching the world. In this way, it would square the circle, creating a translucent opacity. Yet it is unclear how poetry then might contribute to a “sharp-sighted diagnosis” of “the critical and cultural situation.” It would appear rather to become mere escapism or a form of waste management, a medium in which the compulsion to myth may satisfy itself while, in transforming it into “fiction,” minimizing its damaging ideological effects.

This is the view recently put forth for instance by Joshua Landy, in his well-informed reading of Mallarmé’s “Sonnet en yx,” also known as “Sonnet allégorique de lui-même.” Landy concludes his exposition by claiming that the poem affords “a training in the two skills that make life bearable: generating fictions, and persuading ourselves that they are true.” The upshot of Landy’s reading is that the reflexivity of modern lyric, which given the history of the genre involves a reflection on the means and ends of poetic enchantment, provides a training in what

he calls “*lucid self-delusion*” of order and meaning (89). In what follows, I will have reason many times to return to Mallarmé and to, among others, Landy’s reading of him. Here I wish merely to note a few reservations and a question. Throughout his analysis, Landy celebrates the cognitive training afforded by fiction. Yet Mallarmé occasionally shuns the word “fiction,” preferring to speak instead of “lies.” The conflation of these terms results in an overly innocuous understanding of what Mallarmé’s strategies for enchantment are meant to achieve. It is true, as Landy writes, that Mallarmé does not view the world itself as a fiction but rather as, in itself (that is without creative human intervention), meaningless. However, the problem is not simply the absence but the insufficiency of extant myths, beliefs, and ideologies. As Novalis knew and feared, one or the other superstition has always already usurped the space left free by the flight of the gods.¹⁴ Hence, Mallarmé’s (as well as Hölderlin’s, Valéry’s, Rilke’s, and so many others’) is a war on two fronts: on the one hand, it is about staving off nihilism; on the other hand, it is about mythologizing or even lying *better* than whatever forces may already occupy that vacuum threatening a post-metaphysical world. Here, the maintenance of the distinction between lie and fiction appears to me essential for understanding the specific work of the lyric. How does it come that poetry, for over two thousand years conveniently tucked away from other discourses as fiction, starts to insist on its capacity to lie?

If it is accurate, as I argue, that the lyric genre has an intimate and inextricable relationship to enchantment, and if Landy is right to stress the formative function of modern literature’s reflexivity, then the instruction in enchantment which Mallarmé’s lyrics afford cannot be limited to their specific modes of functioning, nor to Mallarmé’s oeuvre as a whole. Rather,

¹⁴ “Where there are no gods, ghosts reign [...]” (148) A similar fear guides and misguides Walter Benjamin’s brilliant but questionable essay on Goethe’s *Wahlverwandschaften*. Conversely, Frank notes that “for Adorno and Horkheimer (and also for Hans Blumenberg) ‘Myth’ is itself a form of enlightenment; because the mythic worldview supposedly aids human being’s orientation in an environment that everywhere threatens him with death: science only carries on the work accomplished by myth with other, sometimes more effective means” (1989, 96). More recently and in relation to English Romantic poetry Simon Jarvis has pressed home this point. See the section entitled “Counter-spirits” in his *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007, in particular 40.

the reflexive negotiation of enchantment and disenchantment is an essential feature of what modernity means for the lyric genre, and, I would like to suggest, this feature is all the more pronounced in those “great” poets who have been treated as incomparable (often precisely because of this feature). However, the notion of the modern lyric as laying bare the genre’s intimate relationship to operations of enchantment is precisely what provides the necessary ground for comparison. In addition, the notion that it is precisely *poetic* enchantment that is being reflected in the modern lyric allows for a more precise conception of earlier lyric phenomena. I reject the notion of “re-enchantment” because it suggests that modern forms of enchantment are *essentially* different from earlier ones, and that the former are to be understood from the vantage point of the latter. For me it is rather a question of how modern forms of lyric enchantment may help us comprehend the lasting *poetic* efficacy of earlier lyrics and gain insight into some fundamental lyric operations.

It is investigations into such operations that form the substance of this dissertation. In the first chapter, I analyze how meter, rhythm, and rhyme alter and are altered by the lyric’s changing relationship to the divine. What interests me here is how the “outer form” of lyrics becomes invested with philosophical and theological import. The German tradition of writing in free rhythms, often considered unique yet obviously propelled by the influence of partly misapprehended ancient models, has long been associated with a breaking free from ready-made theological models. Max Komerell was perhaps the first to assert the systematic connection, in this tradition of lyric writing, between the uses of free rhythms and, as he puts it, the poets’ respective “individual relationship to the divine” (431). Much more recently, Giorgio Agamben has suggested that “[t]he absence of the gods is one with the disappearance of closed metrical form; atheology immediately becomes a-prosody” (2005, 87). While I question the claim that poetic rhythm has an inherent theological or atheological *meaning*, it is undeniable that lyric features such as meter, rhythm, and rhyme have played a decisive role in both bringing about and resisting the poetic (and specifically lyric) trauma that, following one of

the poets under scrutiny, I call the flight of the gods, as well as in creating new forms of enchantment. This goes for both French and German poets (and of course has less explicitly pronounced parallels in other traditions). Since the ascription of any specific metaphysical or anti-metaphysical thought content to discrete prosodic traits is untenable, the question of the role of rhythm in managing experiences of disenchantment and in producing lyric enchantment will have to be decided in each case. Hölderlin's is perhaps the most closely studied among the key players of this dissertation. While for a large part of the twentieth century poetological inquiry into the formal constitution of his poetry was overshadowed by philosophical and mythological exegeses, work on Hölderlin's versification has in fact been consistent. Recent notable studies, such as Winfried Menninghaus's *Hälfte des Lebens. Versuch über Hölderlins Poetik*, Boris Prevešić's *Hölderlin's Rhythmus*, and Anita-Mathilde Schrupf's *Sprechzeiten. Rhythmus und Takt in Hölderlins Elegien* have tended to downplay the larger philosophical dimension of Hölderlin's poetry in favor of a strictly descriptive approach. If this dissertation can be viewed as a contribution to philosophical poetics, it is not because my studies aim to (re)construct a philosophical system, but because they hope to contribute to the understanding of why certain canonical poets have yielded so much philosophy. When it comes to Hölderlin, the bifurcation in the scholarship is perhaps indicative of how he responds to metaphysical problems with non-metaphysical, strictly poetic strategies – a crisis of meaning is not necessarily best managed by more meaning. In the French tradition, Mallarmé is of course the poet most immediately associated with the crisis of verse and comes to respond to it within the parameters of the particular literary context into which he inscribes himself. The almost sacred status he accords to verse, his emphasis on the magic of rhyme, and his notion of the “mystery” do not make him a theological poet but indeed correspond to strategies of enchantment, as is underlined by such recent works as Landy's analysis and Quentin Meillassoux's *Le Nombre et la sirène. Un déchiffrement du Coup de dés de Mallarmé*.

Common to both Hölderlin and Mallarmé is a sometimes disquieting emphasis on the

necessary *nationality* of poetry, its reliance on aesthetic possibilities unique to a given language and tradition. In light of this, the status of a poet like Rilke, who stressed what he called a *jubelnde Vaterlandslosigkeit* (“triumphant lack of fatherland”),¹⁵ whose finest works owe as much to French symbolism as to German free rhythms, and who at the end of his life found formal and mythopoetical renewal by turning to writing in French, becomes crucial for the articulation of a transnational poetics. And what is to be said today of Valéry’s classicism, his insistence on apparently exhausted mythic material and his extreme formal conservatism in the face of the poetic revolution initiated by his master?

In chapter two, I analyze the concept of measure in a broader sense. For all of the treated poets, meter is correlated with what one for lack of a better word could call a philosophical notion of measure, which resonates with remnants of older cosmologies that it more or less subverts.¹⁶ At stake here is the role of the poet, what he or she should hope to achieve, and the relationship of lyric poetry to that divine third which marks its necessary blind spot, its inherent opacity. If all of the selected poets seek the limits of lyric speech within their particular discursive situations, they each in their own way run the risk of *going too far* or aiming to achieve *too much*. Blasphemy, hubris, humiliation, and embarrassment are possible outcomes of failing to practice *moderation*. However, what is taken to constitute poetic excess and moderation undergoes important changes – one might even argue a reversal – during the course of the long nineteenth century. This transformation corresponds roughly with the

¹⁵ It is in a letter dated January 15, 1918 that Rilke responds to his colleague Marie von Mutius’s concerns:

[...] – at bottom one would have to write all languages, just as that which you, understandably, now utter as complaint: this lack of fatherland would also let itself be confessed in triumph, in positive terms, as a belonging to the whole. Since childhood my heart and my mind were disposed toward this world-equality [*Welt-Ebenbürtigkeit*], I cannot go back, and so you may imagine how I suffer. (1992, 204)

For more of Rilke’s utterances on the subject, see Joachim W. Storck, “Rilke’s ‘jubelnde Vaterlandslosigkeit’” in *Rilke-Rezeptionen = Rilke Reconsidered*. Ed. Sigrid Bauschinger. Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1995, 1-14.

¹⁶ For a trenchant history of the concept of measure, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Maß” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000-2005, III, 846-866.

transition from a poetry of the absolute to absolute poetry (however contestable these terms may be). Wolfgang Binder writes in a careful essay: “Absolute poetry, in place a century later, would in Hölderlin’s eyes be hubris, akin to that of Empedocles. In the era of metaphysics there can only be a poetry of the absolute.” (61) Crucially, it is in a post-metaphysical era on the other hand any poetry of the absolute, conceived as such poetry that speaks about, of, to, or for any absolute being or mind, that becomes hubristic, unmeasured. Rising up against the gods, against old idols and sovereign powers, may be construed as an expression of hubris. But so may the very appeal to gods, the construal of God as a force redeeming humans from their finitude, or the deification of an uncompromised human subjectivity. In this way, blasphemy becomes pious and piety blasphemous. This is of course not a linear development but a dynamic that plays out in different registers in all of the writers I study.

During the long nineteenth century, lyric poets are forced to reckon with the most severe discrepancy between aspiration and realization. Yet in reconfiguring poetry’s relationship to the divine, they do not lower their ambitions but are compelled to articulate that about which *poetic* (and more exactly *lyric*) enchantment is and always has been. Hence Mallarmé’s “Nothing” is, in spite of the initial capital letter, always qualified, and what are ostensibly his poems of disenchantment often give voice to an affirmative reservation. “L’Azur”: “The Sky has died. — Matter, I need your aid! [...] to lose all thought of cruel Ideal or Sin [...] in vain revolt, what can we flee toward? / Haunted I am. The Blue! The Blue! The Blue!” (—*Le Ciel est mort.*—*Vers toi, j’accours! donne, ô matière, / L’oubli de l’Idéal cruel et du Péché [...] Où fuir dans la révolte inutile et perverse? / Je suis hanté . L’Azur! l’Azur! l’Azur! l’Azur!*, 23/l, 14-15); “Brise Marine”: “The flesh is sad—and I’ve read every book. [...] Still, my soul, listen to the sailors sing!” (*La chair est triste, hélas! et j’ai lu tous les livres. [...] Mais, ô mon coeur, entends le chant des matelots!*, 25/l, 15); “Quand l’ombre menaçait...”: “Space, its own peer, whether it fail or grow / rolls in this tedium trivial fires to show / the genius kindled by a festive star” (*L’espace à soi pareil qu’il s’accroisse ou se nie / Roule dans cet ennui des feux vils pour témoins / Que s’est*

d'un astre en fête allumé le génie, 67/I, 36);¹⁷ or why not recall the septet, symbol of hope, that appears at the end of “Sonnet en yx” and of *Un Coup de dés*, or the siren emerging in the future anterior, concluding “À la nue accablante tu,” the companion piece of his most famous poem? The same gesture is to be found also in Valéry’s “Cimetière marin,” culminating in the famously pompous imperative “The wind is rising!... We must try to live!” (*Le vent se lève!... Il faut tenter de vivre!* 1971, I, 221/I, 151), and in Rilke’s eleventh sonnet to Orpheus. When Rilke writes “that is enough” (*Das genügt*) he is not inviting anyone to settle for less. Rather, “enough” means “just right.” It is the right “measure.”

Auch die sternische Verbindung trügt.
Doch uns freue eine Weile nun
der Figure zu glauben. Das genügt. (II, 246)

Even the starry union deceives.
Yet gladly let us for a while believe now
In the figure. It is all we need. (1995, 431)¹⁸

Belief, deception, pretense, lies, and myth are then the subject of the following chapter. That of lying is, in its various forms, perhaps the gravest accusation against which the modern lyric has had to defend itself. What interests me here is not whether such accusations are in various cases well-founded but how they are able to pose themselves in the first place.

In literature’s prehistory, during that time when, as the Romantics like to remind us, poetry and philosophy were one (namely in archaic and classical Greece), contentions regarding poets’ lies or at least inaccuracies eventually became widespread. Even Homer could be mistaken, if not downright absurd. Allegations of this kind are only possible in a culture in which the distinction between poetry and thought, *μῦθος* and *λόγος*, is nascent but has not yet

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, volume and page numbers for poetry in the original language refer to *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* edited by Michael Knaupp (Hölderlin); *Œuvres complètes* (Mallarmé); *Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden* (Rilke); and *Œuvres complètes* (Valéry). Double page references refer to the English translation first, then to the original text.

¹⁸ Stephen Mitchell’s translation is here unusually misleading and has been modified.

yielded separate discourses. Homer and Hesiod could err or even lie because their works were understood as knowledge about the world, cosmological, theological, and empirical. Certainly, even in archaic Greece the poets were not the only ones whose discourse laid claim to truth, and conflicts could of course arise.¹⁹ Yet what the muse transmits to the divinely inspired bard was not subject to verification. Homeric knowledge was not primarily knowledge *about* the world or of anything *in* the world. Rather, Homer gave the Greeks their world. To question Homeric knowledge, one has to step out of the very world it constituted. If philosophy is the name of the discourse eventually to do so, one must nevertheless remember that divisions within the poetic tradition preceded this bifurcation, and here the emergence of Greek lyric plays an essential role.

Bruno Snell has written influentially on the advent of individual as opposed to collective consciousness among the early Greek lyricists.²⁰ His most famous example is Sappho's fragment 16, in which the poet contrasts her own viewpoint with those of others. Anne Carson's translation:

Οἱ μὲν ἵππῆων στρότον, οἱ δὲ πῆσδων,
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπ[ί] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἐγὼ δὲ κῆν' ὄτ-
τω τις ἔραται· (26)

Some men say an army of horse and some men say an army on foot
and some men say an army of ships is the most beautiful thing
on the black earth. But I say it is
what you love. (27)

The idea that part of oneself is not wholly determined by divine powers (or at least not by those which dominate "some men") allows for positing one's individual opinion against others' and is a prerequisite for calling into question the knowledge passed down by epic. However, crucially,

¹⁹ See Marcel Detienne's classic study *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*. New York: Zone Books, 1999.

²⁰ See the chapter "The Rise of the Individual in the Early Greek Lyric" in *The Discovery of Mind. The Greek Origins of European Thought*. Trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1953, 42-70.

curiously, and less often noted, is that Sappho in the following stanza somewhat rescinds what many have seen as her radical claim to autonomy:

πά]γχυ δ' εὔμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ'· ἄ γὰρ πολὺ περσκέθοισα
κάλλος [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἑλένα [τὸ]ν ἄνδρα
τὸν [ἄ]ριστον

καλλ[ί]ποι]σ' ἔβας ἔς Τροίαν πλέοι[σα]
κωῦδ[ε] παῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων το[κ]ήων
πά[μ]παν] ἐμνάσθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὔταν
]σαν (26)

Easy to make this understood by all.
For she who overcame everyone
in beauty (Helen)
left her fine husband

behind and went sailing to Troy.
Not for her children nor her dear parents
had she a thought, no—
]led her astray (27)

The beauty and originality of Sappho's language and her undeniably novel conception of the particular pain and ecstasy of a discrete individual may ultimately be more interesting than whatever she owes to the epic worldview. But precisely because her lyric is often cited as emblematic of a new era in the history of the Western mind, it is worth remembering that while the poem rejects the stock images of masculine, militaristic beauty, the universality of Sappho's claim (that the most beautiful thing is that which one loves), is demonstrated through the example of Helen, "who overcame everyone in beauty," leaving "the best man" (τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἄριστον) for Troy, being "led astray," one conjectures, by love. Here is contrasted the individual's particular susceptibility to the gods, in this case Eros or Aphrodite, with the unshakeable truth of myth: Helen *is* the most beautiful woman and Menelaus *is* the best man. "Easy to make this understood by all."

The example with which Sappho demonstrates her own conception of beauty in fact

contradicts it, but this conflict is never spelled out. Instead it is, according to an ancient tradition, Stesichorus, roughly Sappho's contemporary, who was forced to reckon with poetry's capacity to lie.²¹ Having written a lyric slanderous of Helen – not, however, in disagreement with the depiction of her in the *Illiad* –, he was allegedly blinded by her. Realizing his mistake, he retracted his view in a palinode or two, now praising her virtues and attacking instead Homer and Hesiod for their unfair and inaccurate treatments of her. Of the former lyric nothing remains, but of the latter we have four lines:

μάτας εἶπον· μέτειμι δ' ἐ' ἕτερον προοίμιον.
οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὔτος·
οὐδ' ἔβας ἐν ναυσίν εὐσέλμοις,
οὐδ' ἴκεο περγαμα Τροίας. (44)

I spoke follies. I will go seek another prelude.
This story is not true:
neither did you go in the well-decked ships,
nor did you arrive at the gates of Troy.

Either Homer or Helen has spoken falsely. Either Homer was right in depicting Helen the way he did, in which case Stesichorus placates her by lyric lies, or Homer was wrong, in which case he lies or is fooled by the muses, Helen's half-sisters. While confirming the importance of epic material for the early lyric, Stesichorus' fragment at the same time displays how the lyric genre is that medium in which epic (and with it poetry *tout court*) first becomes contested. Since the lyric genre succeeds epic in the history of Greek poetry (that is as the predominant written genre), this may seem a matter of course. However, what fascinates about the palinode is the open avowal of and reflection on the lyric's capacity to be subject to falsity, spurious myths, and even willful lies. Certainly in both Homer and Hesiod there are lies and deception. The muses of the *Theogony* state this in no uncertain terms:

²¹ See Plato, *Phaedrus* 243a and Isocrates, *Helen* 64. The first explicit accusation against poets of lying is ascribed to Solon. See Maria Noussia-Fantuzzi, *Solon the Athenian, the Poetic Fragments*. Leiden: Brill, 2010, 109.

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ' , εὔτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι. (I, 27)

We know how to utter many falsehoods appearing to be true
But we also know, whenever we wish, to sing truths.

The element of uncertainty built into epic stems from the fact that the narrator is nothing but a mouthpiece for the muses' divine wisdom. However, for the bard of Greek epic to interrupt himself, explicitly questioning the veracity of an earlier account, is unthinkable.²² Stesichorus, on the other hand, either was not guided by the muses in composing his first poem about Helen, or abandoned them to avoid the punishment of their half-sister. What matters is that early lyric preserves the ability to mythologize, but it can also confirm or critique prevailing ideologies, and, most importantly, reflect on this capacity quite exoterically. The lyric genre is from its inception *counter-mythology*. This does not mean that lyrics are therefore necessarily a *critique* of myth, but merely that the starting point of the lyric is that there *is* myth. The question is how to respond to this fact, how to mythologize *better*, whatever this might mean. Perhaps nowhere is this critique of myth by means of myth more clearly spelled out than in Pindar, who asserts in the first *Olympian*:

ἦ θαυματοῦς πολλὰ, καὶ πού τι καὶ βροτῶν φάτις ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον
δεδαίδαλμένοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις ἐξαπατῶντι μῦθοι (28-29)

There are indeed many wonders,
and it may be that in men's talk
stories are embroidered beyond the truth,
and so deceive us with their elaborate lies (2007, 3-4)

The example he gives is striking. After recounting in juicy detail the supposedly traditional

²² See again *Phaedrus* 243a. See also Schläffer: "That [...] in the 7th century BC the various forms of lyric rose to prominence and the authors of poems became known by name is connected to the embarrassment with which a more stringent demand for truth had associated the epic. For the lyric can dispense with that problematic gesture with which the epic bard had declaimed and justified his privileged knowledge. It can do without the invocation of a muse, without the presentation of long past events and without precise information about the world of gods" (1990, 63).

version of Pelops' myth, in which his father serves him as a stew to the gods, who unsuspectingly have their full, Pindar rejects it as blasphemous slander.

ἔμοι δ' ἄπορα γαστρίμαργον μακάρων τιν' εἰπεῖν· ἀφίσταμαι·
ἀκέρδεια λέλογχεν θαμινὰ κακαγόρους. (52-53)

As for me, I cannot call any of the blessed gods a cannibal.
I stand aside;
the slanderous seldom win themselves profit. (2007, 4)

A number of studies have focused on Pindar's poetry in light of the prevailing ideologies during the time of his *floruit*.²³ I simply want to stress that in order for the lyric to perform this operation, to critique myth using myth – a strategy crucial for the modern poets to whom this dissertation is devoted – it has to retain or recover its capacity to lie, over and against the disarmament named “fiction.” I wish not here to enter into the debate whether lyrics are always or sometimes fiction,²⁴ merely to approach the question why Hölderlin too could write a palinode with divine addressees (I, 239), why Mallarmé planned to name his “Lyric volume” “*The Glory of The Lie* or *The Glorious Lie*” (I, 696), or why Rilke, in a similarly approbative, even laudatory tone, consecrated one of his most successful late poems written in French – a poem which Paul de Man, without proffering much in the way of a reading, takes as the corrective for Rilke's entire oeuvre – precisely to lies (de Man 1979, 55-56). Indeed these poets become incomprehensible if one does not allow them the prerogative not merely to create fictions but to lie as an essential part of poetry's power both to blame (or, for the moderns, “critique”) and to praise.

Peter Sloterdijk has recently commented in passing that the author(s) of the so-called

23 For instance Anne Burnett, “The Scrutiny of Song: Pindar, Politics, and Poetry.” *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1987): 434-99 and Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, as well as Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000, 185-207 and “The View from Halicarnassus: Aristotelianism and the Rhetoric of Epideictic Song,” cited below.

²⁴ Käte Hamburger has most influentially argued for the non-fictional status of the lyric subject. See her *Logic of Literature*. Trans. Marilyn J. Rose. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1973.

Earliest System-Program of German Idealism seem unaware that the creation of a new mythology by necessity involves crafting new lies. Sloterdijk goes further than Frank and Lacoue-Labarthe in not simply stating that we do not “need” a new mythology but acknowledging the fact that there *are* new mythologies: mass culture supplies us with a wealth of myths allowing for the populace to “let off steam” (*abzureagieren*, 29). Yet there is no reason to suppose any naïveté among the early idealists. That the fear of disenchantment was widespread at the time does not mean a complete absence of myth. If poetry is the medium of a new mythology, it is simultaneously a means to fight ghosts (though perhaps not the ones Novalis feared, nor in the name of his God). The lyric lies and in affirming its lying invites us to believe it, if only because it is preferable to the lies we would otherwise believe. In processing and reflecting myth, the lyric lets us come to terms and deal with the fact that there *is* myth. It teaches us to lie in the best way possible.

However, lyric lying is never a private affair. In Landy’s account of Mallarmé’s poetry as offering a “training in enchantment,” the ceremonial and collective dimension of his work – most apparent, perhaps, in his notes toward the “Book” – is altogether missing (86). Certainly it is this dimension within Mallarmé’s program for enchantment that gives the greatest cause for discomfort, yet it is precisely *because* the lyric knows the risks involved in the affirmation of myth – or, with Mallarmé, the “mystery” – that it creates its lies transparently. In affirming *these* lies, we are not affirming lying but simply these lies *instead of others*, the worst of which is perhaps that there are no lies, no mythologies, and no ideologies.

At the same time, the lyric knows better than any other genre that the world itself is shapeless, with no ultimate meaning; form and order cannot be taken for granted and value has to be ascribed “mythically,” “ideologically.” (Or one might say with Alain Badiou that even universal truths must be materially constructed.) This is why the lyric cannot opt for sobriety and disenchantment and why it is not ashamed openly to display its own artificiality. Jonathan Culler has remarked on the embarrassment that modern apostrophic lyrics have tended to cause. As

he notes, apostrophes have often been dismissed as insignificant, merely conventional, inherited from the ancient sources whose importance for Romantic and post-Romantic lyrics can hardly be overestimated. This notion, that apparent archaisms in modern lyrics can be explained through the identification of ancient models, in which they allegedly served a different, ritualistic or religious purpose, is still today prevailing and of course not completely false.²⁵ But it presupposes on the one hand a notion of literary inheritance as something entirely passive, even among the best poets, and on the other hand that ancient forms of enchantment were in each case categorically different from modern ones.

Chapter four is devoted to problematizing these views. For if the apostrophe is the “pure embodiment of poetic pretension” and “perhaps always an indirect invocation of the muse,” then one must ask why such a mechanism of animation and enchantment becomes most subtly and most insistently affirmed, reflected, and reinvented by those poets for whom utter *disenchantment* and indifference was always a possibility, always at issue (Culler, 158). The apostrophe, as well as the self-conscious artifice of the lyric more generally, does not persist *in spite* of the disenchantment of the world but rather *because* of it. For the author(s) of the *Earliest System-Program of German Idealism*, it is the inability of modern physics to render justice to human experience and the state’s treatment of humans as cogs in its wheel that necessitate a sensuous religion. If this notion eventually collapses upon itself, it is nevertheless indispensable for understanding the subsequent work of the lyric. It is precisely *because* we are, and the modern lyric knows that we are, from one perspective, to use Mallarmé’s words, “vain forms of matter,” that indeed matter itself must be apostrophized and thereby animated (I, 696).²⁶ What is crucial here is that the source of disenchantment and that of enchantment are *identical*. In the first instance, the insight into our material constitution is disenchanting, because it postulates that we are *mere* matter, that is to say an identity of matter and matter. In the

²⁵ See Schlaffer 2012.

²⁶ Cf. Baudelaire’s “Spleen (II)”, quoted in Culler (162), and Mallarmé’s “L’Azur,” quoted above.

second instance, however, the insight is enchanting, because it affirms that spirit *does* arise out of (or rather in) mere matter, which entails not an identity of matter and matter but an identity of *spirit* and matter. Just as apostrophic poetry animates what lacks sentience, so matter *has* given rise to mind (and with it all that it creates, including gods, myths, and apostrophic poetry). Such insights are more pronounced in intensely apostrophic, late Romantic poets like Mallarmé, Rilke, and Valéry, but already in Hölderlin the gods depend on mortals, that is on destructible matter:

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 Seeligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,
Muß wohl, wenn solches zu sagen
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Nahmen
Theilnehmend fühlen ein Andrer,
Den brauchen sie [...] (I, 345)

But their own immortality
Suffices the gods, and if
The heavenly have need of one thing,
It is of heroes and human beings
And other mortals. For since
The most Blessed in themselves feel nothing
Another, if to say such a thing is
Permitted, must, I suppose,
Vicariously feel in the name of the gods,
And him they need [...] (2013, 505)

Far from explainable by poetic inheritance alone (be it from Pindar, Sappho, or any other of Hölderlin's objects of study), lines like these teach us how to understand the claim that ancient lyrics had on their original audiences and indeed may still have on us. Instead of subordinating Hölderlin's poetics to some (a)theological program embedded in Greek and Christian myth, what I pursue is the *lyrical* efficacy of his invocations. What are the poetic *uses* of the divine? Conducting a pragmatics of the heavenly, I do not pursue Hölderlin's unique relationship to the divine but on the contrary aim to extrapolate and isolate gestures which make this incomparable poet readable within the broader, transnational and multilingual context of 19th century lyric

responses to disenchantment. Furthermore, with Hölderlin as with the other poets treated, I attempt to approach embarrassing invocations not as a generic vice but as philological interventions intended to address problems highlighted at a specific historical moment but nonetheless endemic to the lyric; that is, I try to approach ancient forms of lyric enchantment from the viewpoint of its modern forms rather than vice versa. Reading the classical tradition backwards, I do not consider modern attempts to enchant as archaic residues but rather benefit from the heightened reflexivity of modern lyrics in order to understand the transhistorical validity of the earliest lyrics to which we have access. Specifically, I let the moderns' relative transparency of tropes inform the understanding of that old magic to which modern lyrics allegedly cannot or should not have access.

Hölderlin's late, long songs (*Gesänge*) are often called "hymns," but this designation can be contested if by hymn one understands a song or a poem praising a deity, a person, an animal, or a personified thing or concept. Between 1790 and 1793, Hölderlin wrote twelve poems explicitly named hymns ("Hymne an die Freiheit," "Hymne an die Menschheit," "Hymne an die Schönheit," etc.) and his early works include an additional many lyrics written explicitly to (*an*) things, concepts, places, gods, an animal, people, and the German people. This praxis of naming disappears entirely after 1800.²⁷ Here too the explanatory purchase of ancient lyrics, be they Pindar's or Sappho's, quickly reaches its limits. Whereas the ancient poets suffered no dearth of objects to praise, for Hölderlin this is precisely what is lacking.²⁸ As he so concisely

²⁷ Several scholars have made this observation, among them Winfried Menninghaus (103) and Boris Previšić (141-142).

²⁸ Greek poets could of course also search for the appropriate object of praise and even thematize this search. Pindar's second *Olympian* famously begins:

ἀναξίφορμιγγες ὕμνοι,
τίνα θεόν, τίν' ἥρωα, τίνα δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν;
ἦτοι Πίσα μὲν Διός· Ὀλυμπιάδα δ' ἔστασεν Ἡρακλῆης
ἀκρόθινα πολέμου·
Θήρωνα δὲ τετραορίας ἔνεκα νικαφόρου
Γεγωνητέον [...] (1-6)

Hymns ruling the lyre,
what god, what hero shall we celebrate?

puts it in the first version of the elegy “Heimkunft”: “holy names are missing” (*es fehlen heilige Nahmen*, I, 322). Hölderlin would eventually abandon the conventional elegiac form, but what he accomplishes is not a transition to the hymn but an exploration of what the modern hymn might be. The question concerns precisely what still can and should be invoked and praised. Hölderlin knows only what may no longer be praised. The first few lines of “Germanien”:

Nicht sie, die Seeligen, die erschienen sind,
Die Götterbilder in dem alten Lande,
Sie darf ich ja nicht rufen mehr, wenn aber
Ihr heimatlichen Wasser! jetzt mit euch
Des Herzens Liebe klagt, was will es anders,
Das Heiligtrauernde? (I, 334)

Not them, the blessed, who once appeared
Those images of gods in the ancient land,
Them, it is true, I may not now invoke, but if,
You waters of my homeland, now with you
The love of my heart laments, what else does it want, in
Its hallowed sadness? (2013, 491)

In the spirit of ambivalence and paralipsis which characterizes all of Hölderlin’s poetry from this period, he begins the following stanza by nevertheless calling out to precisely these gods, whom not even “the one and only” (*der Einzige*), Christ, may replace.²⁹ Hölderlin did indeed praise “native waters,” however (and it is impossible not to recall Pindar, for whom water is “best” although never a sustained object of praise).³⁰ What matters here is not whether Hölderlin’s late songs ought ultimately to be designated as hymns. (They lack discrete objects of praise yet

Indeed Pisa is Zeus’; Heracles established the Olympic games,
first-fruits of war;
but Theron, on account of his victorious four-horse chariot,
one must proclaim [...]

Yet the *laudandus* is determined beforehand; indeed, Pindar is under contract to praise him. And if the poet so much as feigns a problem of praise in this passage, it is rather that there are too many than too few worthy of his songs.

²⁹ “Denn zu sehr / O Christus! häng ich an dir [...]” (I, 468) “For too greatly / O Christ! I’m attached to you [...]” (2013, 537)

³⁰ Cf. *Olympian* 1: “ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ / ἅτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μέγανορος ἔξοχα πλούτου [...]” “Best is water, while gold is a blazing fire / such that it shines in the night preeminent amid lordly wealth [...]”

undeniably contain much hymnic language and do not, as Lacoue-Labarthe thinks, result in a leave-taking of the hymn as such. I am probably not the first to be tempted by the graceless term “para-hymn.”) Rather, these poems are instructive because they not only present a crisis of the hymnic but initiate a search for legitimate objects of praise after the flight of the gods and the abolishment of old idolatry. As I demonstrate in the final chapter of this dissertation, the question “What is to be praised and how?” is fundamental to all of the poets I read and indeed for the lyric 19th century at large. I treat this question above all as a poetological one, though with irrefutable (a)theological and ethical implications. If the function of praise is intrinsic to certain forms of poetic enchantment and wonder, then these depend on the articulation or invention of new ways of praising and on new objects of praise.³¹ The crisis of the praiseworthy is, among other things, a crisis of genre, indeed a crisis of the hymnic but also, by extension, a crisis of the lyric. However, the poems I read are only of interest insofar as they provide a positive response to this crisis. Hölderlin may be most deeply entrenched in old forms of enchantment and the mythology from which it drew blood, but in recognizing the flight of the gods he does not simply wallow in “sacred mourning” but instead ceaselessly displaces, transposes, and reverses operations of praise. The importance of such operations for the work performed by the lyric in the long 19th century can hardly be overestimated. On this field Mallarmé and Rilke are perhaps the subtlest practitioners.

Mallarmé does not simply affirm negativity or praise everyday objects but also invokes and praises matter itself and that which serves as a medium of praise; he writes poems praising poets or other poems, and even poems praising the collapse of poetry in light of new media (his “Homage” to Richard Wagner). Mallarmé indeed applies a vocabulary of consecration to what seems the most trivial objects and occasions. But he does not merely make poetry out of “low”

³¹ “Wonder” (*Staunen*, *émerveillement*, θαῦμα) is here not to be understood along the lines of the “miraculous” but as a subjective effect. Rather than applying a theory of the wondrous I accept the fact of poetically produced wonder as a datum, the challenge of which a philosophical poetics ought to accept. It is not possible to understand a poet like Rilke if one does not take into account both the wonder it describes and enacts and that which it produces in the reader.

themes. His response to the dead sky ("L'Azur") is not primarily glorification of the sepulchral (although his poetry comprises more than a few tombs). Instead, the practice of praise becomes the subject of a number of intricate inversions and recursions. One need look no further than to the opening poem of his collected *Poésies*, the 1893 "Salut":

*Rien, cette écume, vierge vers
A ne désigner que la coupe;
Telle loin se noie une troupe
De sirènes mainte à l'envers.*

*Nous naviguons, ô mes divers
Amis, moi déjà sur la poupe
Vous l'avant fastueux qui coupe
Le flot de foudres et d'hivers;*

*Une ivresse belle m'engage
Sans craindre même son tangage
De porter debout ce salut*

*Solitude, récif, étoile
A n'importe ce qui valut
Le blanc souci de notre toile. (l, 4)*

*Nothing, this foam, this virgin verse
designating the cup, no more;
so plunges far away a corps
of sirens, many in reverse.*

*We all, my various friends, we sail
with myself on the poop-deck now
while you as the majestic prow
cleave wintry seas of blast and gale;*

*spurred by a fine intoxication
and fearless even of its swerving
I stand and offer you this toast*

*solitude, star, or rocky coast
to things of any kind deserving
of our sail's white preoccupation. (42)*

Performing a toast, the speaker does not explicitly proclaim to what is toasted, although we know that the poem was read at a literary banquet before being published. The "virgin verse," of which the recited poem is an example, is compared to the foam in the cup which he has raised

in celebration. However, this foam or verse, a “nothing,” designates only the cup that contains it, that is the instrument of celebration and praise. In a like manner, a troupe of sirens, figures of dangerous seduction as well as poetic inspiration, designates nothing but the place.³² Yet the cup is of course raised in celebration of that which the verse it metaphorically contains might concern: solitude, reef, star (all figuring prominently in Mallarmé’s poetry) or anything else worthy of the poets’ care. The ship sailing on the sea of verse that designates nothing but what contains it, and that means the medium of its own consecration, may nevertheless come upon such things of which poetry must speak, thereby getting us out of the infinite loop or tautology of praise. Yet the ambiguous syntax makes it possible also to understand solitude, reef and star in apposition to “toast,” in which case what appeared the objects of praise again become its instrument, which means that we could escape the circle only by affirming the poetic value of whatever merits poetic value (*n’importe ce qui valut / Le blanc souci de notre toile*).

If this seems tautological, self-serving or perhaps even nihilistic, one must recognize that, in addition to being composed for an occasion where self-congratulation was not out of place, its function at the beginning of the collection is simply that of an imperative: there shall be celebration and that celebration shall be celebrated. The poems that follow present possible answers to the question what else ought to be praised after the encounter with Nothing (*le Néant*).

The success of Rilke’s poetry must be measured against its obligation to praise, even in the face of death and destruction. He could not be clearer about this. In an untitled poem of 1921 one speaker questions a poet: “Oh say, poet, what are you doing? / – I praise” (*Oh sage Dichter, was du tust? / – Ich rühme*, II, 293). A monograph has been devoted to the topic without

³² Cf. *Un Coup de dés*: “NOTHING // WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE / OTHER THAN THE PLACE // EXCEPT / PERHAPS // A CONSTELLATION” (*RIEN // N’AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU // EXCEPTÉ / PEUT-ÊTRE // UNE CONSTELLATION*, 178-181/I, 384-387) Two slashes indicate a new page; one slash indicates a new line.

coming close to exhausting it.³³ “Nothing is too small for me” (*Nichts ist mir zu klein*) affirms the speaker of the lyric opening *Das Stundenbuch*, who lovingly paints it large on a background of gold and extols it (I, 157). This is how the monks of the first part of *Das Stundenbuch* build God:

Wir bauen an dir mit zitternden Händen
und wir türmen Atom auf Atom.
Aber wer kann dich vollenden,
du Dom. (I, 164)

We build on you with trembling hands
and we pile atom upon atom.
But who can complete you,
you dome.

Here not only does the medium of praise become the object of praise, but the most praiseworthy (God) is identified with the material structure built in his honor. Just as the Hölderlinian gods could not feel by themselves, so here God is dependent on his material creation in art. Rilke would go on to praise cathedrals and statues, most prominently in the *Neue Gedichte*. In recognizing the inseparability of such material incorporations from the idea of God, indeed the primary status of the former, God is no longer the father but a son to whom we must give birth (I, 207) and whom we must nurture with our praise, for which all deities “wait like schoolboys” (*sie warten auf Lob wie die Schüler*, II, 405).

If the object of our praise issues from “us,” then surely we must be praised as well:

[...] – Vielleicht sind wir *oben*,
in Himmel andrer Wesen eingewoben,
die zu uns aufschauen abends. Vielleicht loben
uns ihre Dichter. [...] (I, 330-331)

[...] – Perhaps we are *above*
worked into the heaven of other beings
who gaze toward us at evening. Maybe their poets

³³ See Gerhard Ammelburger, *Bejahungen. Zur Rhetorik des Rühmens bei Rainer Maria Rilke*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995.

praise us. [...] (2009, 105; 107)

We do not benefit from this praise, as little as the angel of the *Duino Elegies* is interested in hearing our thoughts about him. Therefore: "Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one" (*Preise dem Engel die Welt, nicht die unsägliche*, 385/II, 228). For this we get nothing in return, beside that which praise brings into presence. However, the praise of the here and now (*das Hiesige*) is not a praise of life in opposition to death, rather: "*Life and Death: they are one, at core entwined.*" (*Leben und Tod: sie sind im Kerne Eins*, 1975, 83/II, 286) Or as the eighth *Sonnet to Orpheus* has it: "Only in the realm of Praising may Lament / walk." (*Nur im Raum der Rühmung darf die Klage / gehn*, 425/II, 244). One is tempted to correct Rilke: *living and dying* are one, but hardly *life and death*.³⁴ Such ambiguities appear less innocent if one considers the celebration in *Fünf Gesänge* of the "war-god" (*Kriegs-Gott*). The lyric obligation to praise is anterior to its objects and the flight of the gods leaves a void waiting to be filled. Such is the impression when reading the equally embarrassing seven so-called phallic poems, in which the male member is forced to carry the weight of all that marvel gods and myth served to displace, resulting in an implosion, a short-circuiting of praise rather than a recursion. Yet these failures are enormously instructive, for they demonstrate what is at stake in the lyric's response to the flight of the gods and the expiration of old idolatry: the productive channeling of those forces which religion and cultic practices previously had served partly to contain. The war did not prove a rejuvenation, and the sacralization of coitus is in our pornographic age risible. Such are the risks of lyric enchantment.

Valéry, standing on firmer classicist ground, also seeks to preserve the praiseworthy and

³⁴ This slippage is found also in Jacques Derrida's notion of "life-death," which designates the same logic, and which of course is not meant to postulate an identity of life and death but of living and dying, something that he analyzes in terms of an "economy of death" and later as autoimmunity. See respectively *The Postcard. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1987, 359 and *Rogues*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005, passim. Martin Hägglund has developed these thoughts at length in *Radical Atheism. Derrida and the Time of Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008 and in *Dying for Time. Proust, Woolf, Nabokov*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012. Cf. in addition Hölderlin's famous fragment "In lieblicher Bläue...": "Leben ist Tod, und Tod ist auch ein Leben." (I, 909)

the wondrous for a disenchanted world. The motto of his most famous poem, “Le Cimetière marin,” comes from Pindar’s third *Pythian* ode and spells out the program: “Do not, my soul, long for an immortal life, / but make the most of what you can realistically achieve.” (μή, φίλα ψυχά, βίον ἄθάνατον / σπεῦδε, τὰν δ’ ἔμπρακτον ἄντλει μαχανάν, 2007, 52/61-62) Valéry inscribes himself within a tradition of celebratory poets and in doing so suggests that his sober, intellectual enchantment has a precedent in those ancient lyrics which allegedly depended on superstitious credulity for their effect.³⁵ However, with Pindar Valéry shares not only a certain pragmatism but, like Hölderlin, a high regard for water. In 1935, Valéry published his “Louanges de l’eau” in a pamphlet sponsored by Perrier, the well-known brand of bottled sparkling mineral water. In this odd prose poem, the poetic language of praise and the language of advertising (which Roland Barthes would later define as mythological) become indistinguishable. Is this not the ultimate proof of the undesirability of a poetics of praise in a disenchanted world? Yet Pindar too was under contract.

Not unlike Rilke, Valéry appears a belated poet, brilliantly and embarrassingly refusing to give up his encomiastic means, which have been proven as fitting for outdated mythic material as for the branding of consumer goods. Is there anything that distinguishes a poetics of praise, however subtle, from the production of surplus value on the market place? And has not the modern reinvention of myth, especially the myth of a people, proven always to be disastrous? Why persist in a literary genre that professes to be the most earnest, most intimate, yet depends on the prerogative to lie? Sloterdijk thinks that the Romantic idea of a new mythology *de facto* has been realized in mass culture, which provides enough noble lies to keep revolutionary tendencies at bay. And certainly the entertainment industry offers a wealth of myths with which people make sense of their otherwise senseless lives. In light of this, whatever enchantment the

³⁵ Jean Ygaunin has devoted eight slim volumes to this tradition. See his *Pindare et les poètes de la Célébration*. Fleury-sur-Orne: Minard, 1997. For a version of Pindar and the Pindaric tradition that stresses not Valéry’s relative lucidity but rather an obscurity at the heart of Pindar’s poetics, see John Hamilton, *Soliciting Darkness. Pindar, Obscurity, and the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003.

lyric might contribute seems to be merely a sophisticated version of such perhaps necessary but nevertheless ideologically suspect sense-making – noble lies for the intellectual.

Above I have chosen only some pedagogical examples of undesirable consequences of a poetics of praise and celebration (while omitting the most obvious, that is the nationalist appropriations of Hölderlin, whose most sophisticated proponent is of course Martin Heidegger). A generalized suspicion of the lyric has in fact long been widespread. In a famous essay that reads side by side Baudelaire's "Correspondances" and "Obsession," Paul de Man goes so far as to assert: "The lyric is not a genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding, the possibility of a future hermeneutics." "Correspondances" is, he writes, "emphatically *not* a lyric. Yet it and it alone, contains, implies, produces, generates, permits (or whatever aberrant verbal metaphor one wishes to choose) the entire possibility of the lyric" (261-262). The lyric, in short, renders intelligible, through anthropomorphism, a brute reality which, were we to put it in writing (as he believes Baudelaire accomplishes with "Correspondances"), would be utterly unintelligible and non-consolatory. "Correspondances," with its laconic statements, exhibits the absurdity of the lyric's mendacious attempts to overcome alienation. "Obsession" makes us at home in the world by masking its meaningless dread and inhospitality to our desires for presence and meaning. What would do justice to the experience of actual loss and, I take it, utter disenchantment, would be "to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say, prosaic, or better *historical* modes of language power" (262). If the vocabulary here seems radical, the conclusion is not. Instead, it takes for granted a narrow post-Romantic (rather than Romantic) conception of the lyric that fails to do justice to the historical possibilities of the genre, making some of its most canonical and earliest forms as unintelligible as "Correspondances" is to de Man.

Apparently in contrast to this, there is Jeffrey Walker arguing, based on a one-sided version of Pindar's odes, for a more originary notion of the lyric as versified argument or

“epideictic song.” According to Walker,

when we strip away (inevitably) the charm of Pindar's prosody or, for that matter, his now lost music and choreography for choral performances, what remains is recognizably, or “just,” a piece of epideictic oratory, one that anticipates the later prose-tradition of such rhetor-sophists as Gorgias and Socrates. (23)

Walker's point is salient in that it highlights the problem Pindar has posed for Western theories of the lyric (his problematic status is, I believe, why Hegel gives him so much attention), and he is right in maintaining that any such theory will have to accommodate a case like Pindar. However, the notion that we ought to “strip away” the splendor of Pindar's language as well as the music to which it was performed (which is present to us if not in the musicality of Pindar's language then at least in the form of his repeated references to song, lyre, musical modes or harmonies, etc.) in order to arrive at what Pindar “really was,” as though these elements were not essential to making him – for us as well as for the ancients – a lyric poet, is unacceptable. For if the ultimate end of Pindar's poetry is praise (Bundy)³⁶ or persuasion (Walker) – which is simply another way of saying that the ultimate end of Pindar's poems was to please his contractors – such an end can only be reached insofar as audiences are willing to listen, which they hardly were just so that they could be persuaded, but because Pindar's songs were beautiful, ravishing, enchanting, divine. Walker's account completely leaves out what one might term Pindar's poetics of wonder or the wondrous, which both constitutes the force of his poetry and designates the danger of hubris.³⁷ As for Walker's broader claims about the archaic lyric, it may as well be called prayer in verse as oratory in verse.

Walker writes not without reason of the “creeping Pindarism” of the twentieth century, which he identifies with the notion that Lacoue-Labarthe gets from Benjamin, but which is really rather common in poetic practice, namely the notion of poetry as prose. Walker does not

³⁶ See Elroy L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica I-II*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1962.

³⁷ Mark Payne suggested the importance of Pindar's underexplored poetics of wonder to me in a conversation.

mention Hölderlin, the most Pindaric of modern poets. Perhaps Walker would have considered him an embarrassing example, as the German poet's Pindarism has often been associated with the odic, hymnic, and patriotic aspects of his lyrics, rather than with the sobriety for which he obviously also strove.³⁸ Yet if the object of praise and the aim of persuasion are much less clear than in the case of Pindar, in Hölderlin's late songs apostrophic exclamations stand in sharp contrast to declarative and assertive (one may even say argumentative) statements. In this Lacoue-Labarthe would see the becoming prose of poetry, and by de Man's definition Hölderlin's late gnomic songs would hardly be lyrics.

Although de Man and Lacoue-Labarthe on the one hand and Walker on the other seem to operate with opposite definitions of the lyric, they arrive at more or less the same verdict. They all find the lyric, or at least the dominant modern conceptions of lyric, restrictive, mendacious, if not dangerous, and they all conclude with a call for the prosaic. But could it not be that the mendacity of modern lyric is not simply an effect of ideology (be it Platonic, Aristotelian, or whatever invisible power may dominate the present) but a conscious resistance to the placating gesture of "fiction"? Only a poetry that asserts, however covertly or obliquely, can lie, can ideologize. With the awareness and reflection of the flight of the gods, the apostrophic lyric, with its simultaneous claim to earnestness and insistence on a privilege to speak the obviously false as lie, poses a problem.

This dissertation emanates in an attempted theory of *poetic license*, which serves to explain what may justify such a genre. If the flight of the gods can be said to collapse poetic license, then any theory of poetic license must include the license to fail and an ability on the part of the lyric to process such failure. On de Man's account, something like a "critical lyric"

³⁸ Among those who have wanted to present an alternative to the Pindaric Hölderlin is Winfried Menninghaus, who highlights the poet's writing in smaller forms and with Sappho as the ancient model. See *Hälfte des Lebens. Versuch über Hölderlins Poetik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005. However, from Pindar Hölderlin acquires not only his vatic tendencies, which are what Menninghaus associates with the ancient "poet-priest" (*Dichter-Priester*), but also his predilection for terse, gnomic, often sobering statements.

would be a contradiction in terms. “Correspondances,” precisely because it “explains” “Obsession,” cannot be a lyric. “No lyric can be read lyrically nor can the object of a lyrical reading be itself a lyric.” (254) However, one may question both the usefulness and the historical accuracy of such a claim. Among the characteristics that de Man associates with lyricization is “the grammatical transformation of the declarative into the vocative modes of question, exclamation, address, hypothesis, etc.” (261). I suggest that it is both more illuminating for understanding the work of the lyric and more fruitful for grasping genres not as “terms of resistance and nostalgia” but as trans-historical media of communication to speak of a gnomic – or, with Walker, epideictic – and an apostrophic or invocatory pole of the lyric, which would not correspond to but in complex ways be related to an enchanting and a disenchanting pole, a sacred and a profane pole, a mystifying and a demystifying pole, an affirmative and a critical pole, an intoxicated and a sober pole, and so on. What matters to me is that the lyric is able to – and perhaps *must* – contain these oppositions within itself. As I argue, the lyric depends on *some relationship* to enchantment, but this relationship may very well be negative. What is important is that a disenchanting, prosaic lyric brings attention to the failure of enchantment, just as a melic, apostrophic, celebratory lyric always to some degree displays the artifice by means of which it enchants. What enchantment itself *is* I do not define. In so far as they enchant, the lyric phenomena of which I write demonstrate what viable enchantment could be. But nothing guarantees their success. There is another outcome of the juxtaposition of Baudelaire’s two poems, one upon which de Man does not touch. In comparison to the laconic, impersonal, disaffected statements of “Correspondances,” the mythical framing, apparent animism and exuberant outcries of “Obsessions” may, according to Culler like all apostrophic lyrics, prove *embarrassing*. If the apostrophe is the prime example of lyric pretension, its failures are all the more discomfiting. Yet to every mode of lyric enchantment corresponds a form of embarrassment, if – in successful lyrics – sometimes invisibly. Many later readers have been more enchanted and less embarrassed by Hölderlin’s vatic tendencies, his piety, his

misconceptions of the Greeks, his sometimes forced poetic forms, and his patriotism than was his original audience. Rilke's delicate preciousness manifest in a uniquely musical language, his active ignorance and naïve refusal of philosophy, his apparent animism and mythopoesis are, along with his understanding of the existential situation of the poet, sources of both attraction and repulsion. Mallarmé's alleged incomprehensibility, his silly reflexive games, his hermetic inwardness and his claim to purity are what detract his detractors and what pleases his devoted readers. And so on. To lay oneself open to and to partake in lyric enchantment is running the risk of disenchantment and embarrassment. Perhaps it is no longer, pace de Man, Walker, and Lacoue-Labarthe, primarily fear of the ideological implications of lyric lies that renders the lyric suspect but rather our unwillingness to run the risk of embarrassment, from which lyric enchantment may never be separated. Indeed, we have come to view enchantment itself as something embarrassing, something that we allow ourselves in the ironic or post-ironic consumption of mass culture but that does not belong in (the study of) art deserving serious, critical attention. What follows is an attempt to give the complex mechanisms of lyric enchantment and embarrassment precisely such attention. What is at stake is whether we ought to be mindful of the necessary mendacity of the lyric and opt for the prose of the present or seek out a space for a hymn confident in its power *both* to enchant *and* to embarrass.

1. METER

In a remarkable 1943 essay Max Kommerell asserts the systematic connection, in the German tradition of lyric writing, between uses of free rhythms (*freien Rhythmen*) and what he calls poets' respective "individual relationship to the divine." Careful to point out that articulations of this relationship by no means confine themselves to poetry in free rhythms and that such poetry does not concern itself exclusively with matters divine, he nonetheless asks "if there does not persist a tendency of this form to this theme and how such a tendency might be explained" (432). In other words, just the empirical observation, which he supports with canonical examples, will not do: the form or rather forms of free rhythms are, as it were, called for whenever a great poet breaks with religious dogma and gives shape to new configurations of the human in relation to the divine and hence to new forms of poetic enchantment. The tendency to which Kommerell refers is inherent in one particular tradition, which through its very instability derives the strength at least occasionally to surpass all others. Right from the outset of his essay, it is evident that the stakes are high. The lyric writing in free rhythms that he is about to read represents for him not only the pinnacle of one literary tradition and hence the best of what one language has brought to presence. It is also taken as evidence for the singularity and even superiority of this literary tradition over and against its neighbors: "As questionable and worthy of questioning as all of this is, so unquestionable is the attraction of the thus constituted structures, which denote not only the peak of our poetry but also the farthest possibilities of our language, the natural greatness of which the lyric of other countries miss." (431)

The ideological, indeed political implications of these wartime statements are unmistakable and draw support from a familiar topos: through its particular similarities and differences with respect to ancient European languages, German has allowed for an appropriation of above all Greek meters, unparalleled in any other modern tongue. Adapting classical and archaic meters to the rhythm of their native language, with its gradation of stress

accents and the ictus on semantically dominant root syllables, German lyric poets were able to create a discordant analog of the foreign measures, “naturalize” them, and by the very same operation reconnect with the oldest forms of Germanic poetry, the “free rhythms” of alliterative verse (*Stabreim*).³⁹ This rich sequence of poetic production is well-documented and Kommerell offers a brief recapitulation: from Klopstock’s misunderstanding of Pindar’s odes as free forms via Herder’s theories of national particularity to the lyrics of the young Goethe and beyond, German free rhythms have been associated with a certain religious élan, with dithyrambic enthusiasm: “For a long time, that is, this form has enabled under the pretext of divine possession an unchained speech and has the gesture of mysterious disclosure.” (433)

Although Kommerell’s observation is of signal importance in trying to understand the implication of meter and rhythm (and, I might add, of the presence or absence of end rhymes) for concepts of poetic enchantment and for the range of poetic responses to the increasing obsolescence of myth and metaphysics in the long 19th century, the critic has surprisingly little to say about the nature of the relationship he has discovered. The rhythms that “tend” to lyric reconfigurations of the divine in an uneasy movement between enchantment and disenchantment appear to have a merely conventional relation to the effects produced by the poetry. It is not so much *what* rhythms are freely joined that drives Kommerell’s interpretation as the mere fact *that* there are free rhythms, the individual meanings and effects of which remain largely obscure. As he goes through the most prominent examples of German poetry written in these forms, he leaves precisely the metric and rhythmic structure of the texts all but untouched. Only “under the pretext of divine possession” is poetic language able to free itself and unveil something which stricter forms serve to contain; at the same time, this pretext is first articulated

³⁹ To speak of the old Germanic alliterative verse as consisting of free rhythms is of course anachronistic, if not simply misguided. Alliterative verse may appear freer to moderns used to identify poetic constraints with relatively uniform meters and end rhymes; but of course it had its own metric constraints, the “liberation” from which in rhythms that still bear its marks would have completely different implications. Yet what matters for Kommerell is not so much the continuity of the German tradition as its originality vis-à-vis others, denied for centuries by Francophile normative poetics from Martin Opitz to Johann Christoph Gottsched.

in or by those free rhythms which it alone permits. The specificities of each poet's individual relationship to the divine is not made up of prosodic traits but merely marked by them. The lack of instantly recognizable meter signals a specific type of ambition, which, however, is realized only semantically.

If Kommerell appears overly cautious in approaching the question of a possible theological import of rhythm (and more generally the relationship between prosody and enchantment), Giorgio Agamben, not unaware of Kommerell's observations, claims more confidently about the implications of closed and especially rhymed forms versus free rhythms that

the history and fate of rhyme coincide in poetry with the history and fate of the messianic announcement. One example is enough to prove beyond a doubt that this is to be taken quite literally and show that this is not a question of secularization, but of a true theological heritage unconditionally assumed by poetry. When Hölderlin, on the threshold of a new century, elaborates on his doctrine of the leave-taking of the gods—specifically of the last god, the Christ—at the very moment in which he announces this new atheology, the metrical form of his lyric shatters to the point of losing any recognizable identity in his last hymns. The absence of the gods is one with the disappearance of closed metrical form; atheology immediately becomes a-prosody. (2005, 87)

This remarkable sweeping statement is as thought-provoking as it is misleading. What above all must be noted is that for Agamben it is the theological that determines, dictates, prescribes the poetical. Poetry, that is here to say the lyric, has assumed the Christian legacy of rhyme "unconditionally," which means that insofar as it is "prosodic,"⁴⁰ it is dependent on theological commitments. That end rhymes, although of debatable origin, is a Christian innovation is a common notion both among its champions and its detractors.⁴¹ The most troubling aspect of Agamben's statement is that the function of rhyme – just as that of free

⁴⁰ In order for Agamben's statement not to become absurd, "prosody" must here be understood in apposition to "closed metrical form."

⁴¹ Among the latter counts Friedrich Kittler (85). According to Hegel "in very early times Christianity *forcibly* introduced rhyme into Latin versification despite the fact that this versification rested on different principles" (1975, II, 1024, my emphasis). There is no scholarly consensus on the origin of systematically employed end rhymes in the European lyric.

rhythms – becomes little more than that of a marker, a flag signaling not even primarily a poetological program but above all a theological one, which, no matter how intricate the structure of a given rhymed text, predetermines the frame within which its complex prosodic effects should be understood. *This* appears to be the fate of rhyme and perhaps of (the study of) prosody in general.

It is in response to such modes of reading that Simon Jarvis has attempted to articulate what he terms a “materialism of the beautiful” (1998, 13), which would grant prosody itself a kind of thinking and a kind of knowledge, “a form of prereflective cognition” that does not entirely lend itself to translation into semantic content (2008, 101). This view may seem perfectly in accord with Agamben’s notion of rhyme as incorporating the promise of the messianic announcement, but for Jarvis the meaning and function of such features as end rhymes would have to be determined in each case, lest it be reduced to a marker which may very well refer to some body of thought but which itself, in its various manifestations, does not think. According to Jarvis the whole conundrum of conceiving prosody as a discipline is just this dependency of prosodic features’ values on the particular prosodic “system” in which they are put into play. Imagining with reference to Adorno “prosody to take its cue from the philosophy of music as cognition,” Jarvis writes:

For each [...] work the vocabulary and procedures of prosody could not be given in advance, but would need to emerge in the course of enquiry, attentive to the languages for prosody historically and nationally and personally available in each case [...], yet not truncating reflection in blind obedience to them. (1998, 12)

This becomes particularly apparent when Jarvis examines the status of rhyme in relation to a Christian critique of idolatry, with results rather opposite those of Agamben. In a reformed England of the 18th century, falling prey to the superficial charms of rhyme could be construed not as faithfulness to some messianic promise but as the very epitome of superstitious idolatry: “Rhyme has laid waste to classic Rome, and erected the papist one.” (2011, 18) It is no surprise

that Agamben should not share this disparagement of rhyme (nor, for different reasons, does Jarvis). But what is problematic is not primarily the evaluation of rhyme as a poetic device but the very notion that rhyme or any other prosodic feature, whether it be treasured or chastised, has a meaning not contingent upon its instantiation in a given poetic discourse. The most carefully constructed rhymed verse would, no matter its internal economy of meaning, always first and foremost be determined by the fact that there *is* rhyme. In distinction, Jarvis maintains that the cognitive function of rhyme is precisely that it allows for poetry to establish ever-new effects and economies of meaning.

When rhyme itself, however, has become attenuated to a flag, a rallying point, a party card, these effects of long-term self-interlocution and self-relinquishment appear blocked or choked. These colours of sound are bound down beneath the myth: not form but its logo, not craft but its brochure, a Cause. (20)

Instead of treating “verse as haircut” (2010, 619) the task is “to listen in to rhyme’s thinking through and beneath the over-saturated symbolic roles it has usually been made to play in our cultures” (2011, 21). The decisive point here is that a prosodic feature such as rhyme does not merely have a cognitive function in addition to a symbolic one, which would align the text with an aesthetic, philosophical, ideological, mythological, or theological body of thought, or simply indicate its poeticity; instead, prosody as cognition, although always grappling with whatever symbolic heritage, has the capacity to subvert from within the particular symbolic associations of any prosodic phenomenon. If prosody thinks, it does so in a manner quite different from mathematics, with which it has, nevertheless, often been compared since Romanticism.⁴²

⁴² Alain Badiou’s distinction of mathematical from poetic language may here be helpful:

Mathematical language is characterized by deductive fidelity. By this we are to understand the capacity to link up statements in such a way that their sequence is constrained, such that the set of statements obtained through this procedure triumphantly survives the test of consistency. [...] What, in effect, is a consistent theory? It is a theory such that there are statements that are impossible within it. A theory is consistent if there exists at least one “correct” statement in its language that is not inscribable within it or that the theory does not admit as veridical. (24)

Prosodic thinking is decidedly *not* universal in the sense that the values with which it operates are subject to ultimately incalculably rich discursive backgrounds. Because of this, the wish for prosody as rigorous science or even for a cohesive philosophy of meter may very well prove misguided. An utterly disenchanting, neutrally measuring prosody would ultimately have to give up its own object of study.

Jarvis' observations are of great significance for the line of inquiry which I pursue in this chapter. At the same time, the approach he advocates admits and perhaps renders inevitable a proliferation of prosodic meaning that is potentially endless, something which, if not in itself methodologically problematic, runs counter to the comparative aims of this dissertation. Scholarship on canonical poets such as Hölderlin and Mallarmé hardly suffers from deficient attention to their ostensibly infinite singularity, be it semantic or prosodic – it is rather a certain refusal of comparison that prevents recognition of how they use the resources of their respective traditions to think through metrically, rhythmically, resoundingly from within their discursive situations a problematic that by all means may serve as a basis for comparison.

Agamben is right to stress the theological implications that the enchantment of rhyme (or of meter more generally) sometimes takes on while always at the risk of embarrassing or being reduced to an idol or fetish. Yet there is little reason to believe that (a)theological investments of meter would lend themselves to philosophy in quite the manner Agamben wishes, something which the following passage from *The End of the Poem* in fact betrays:

Only occasionally in modern works on metrical structures is rigorous description accompanied by an adequate comprehension of the meaning of meter in the global economy of the poetic text. Aside from hints in Hölderlin (the theory of caesura in the *Anmerkung* to the translation of Oedipus), Hegel (rhyme as compensation for the domination of thematic meaning), Mallarmé (the *crise de vers* that he bequeaths to twentieth-century poetry), and Max Kommerell (the theological or, rather, atheological meaning of *Freirhythmen*), a philosophy of meter is almost altogether lacking in our age. [...] In any case, it is certain that a poet's consciousness cannot be investigated without reference to his technical choices. (1999, 34)

A chief aim of philosophical poetics must be precisely to combine “an adequate comprehension of the meaning [or better: the function] of meter in the global economy of the poetic text” (as well as in the global economies of national or linguistic or generic traditions) with concepts of lyric (dis)enchantment that would render such meanings or functions comparable.

In what follows, I seek to demonstrate how in two neighboring lyric traditions meter, rhythm, and rhyme are compelled in various ways not only to assume a function of enchantment but also to think through what specifically poetic – which here means versified – enchantment has been and may still be. My purpose is not to arrive at some idea of national specificity but to enumerate and analyze a wealth of strategies for lyric enchantment that ultimately cuts across national and linguistic borders.

Prosodically engendered enchantment is of course as old as the lyric itself. Valéry reminds in an essay that “it is the poet's business to give us the feeling of an intimate union between the word and the mind”:

This must be considered, strictly speaking, a marvelous result. I say *marvelous*, although it is not exceptionally rare. I use *marvelous* in the sense we give that word when we think of the miracles and prodigies of ancient magic. It must not be forgotten that for centuries poetry was used for purposes of enchantment. Those who took part in these strange operations had to believe in the power of the word, and far more in the efficacy of its sound than in its significance. Magic formulas are often without meaning; but it was never thought that their power depended on their intellectual content. (1958, 65)

Although with Jarvis (and no doubt to an approving nod from Valéry himself) one may question the distinction here between sound and intellectual content, arguing instead that sound *is* intellectual content, the poet's remarks bear witness to the crucial insight that if the outcome of poetry can still be marvelous, its means are not categorically different from those magic formulas of earlier times. Yet the latter were part of a communal language which drew its efficacy from deeply rooted cultic practices developed over time.⁴³ A language of this kind does not have to make itself an object of reflective inquiry in order to be efficacious. In modernity no

⁴³ See for instance Marcel Detienne's classic *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (39-52).

such language exists.⁴⁴ Hence what Kommerell discovers in the German tradition of writing in free rhythms is not just a systematic correlation with matters divine but that in these forms the possibility of lyric enchantment itself is for each poet somehow at stake.

This heritage has at times bolder peaks but practically never the assuredness which marks the poetic traditions of other countries. It goes from crisis to crisis, often in leaps, turning back on itself, disavowing what has been achieved, happily setting off on new beginnings. None of our great poets was content merely to compose; each determined wholly by himself his relationship to the world and to the ultimate questions rather than clinging to what it had been if determined beforehand according to an inheritance of convention, attitude, or religious mode of thinking. (431)

As will become clear, there is cause for revising such a claim to singularity for the German lyric. Nonetheless, Kommerell's observation is of utmost importance, for without pursuing its consequences he articulates pointedly the distinction between what with Jarvis could be called the symbolic and the cognitive functions of poetic form. On the one hand, Kommerell notes that free rhythms have, or rather are, "the gesture of mysterious disclosure": they are a sign of priestly, vatic, even messianic speech. On the other hand, such speech lends voice to the poet's *individual* relation to the divine. If the correlation between free rhythms and enchantment were merely conventional, which is really how Kommerell treats it, his observation would have little interest. However, as he hints and as recent scholarship confirms, what Kommerell calls poets' relationships to the divine is to a considerable degree *constituted in rhythm*, and it is thus better to speak of their individual *strategies for poetic and especially lyric (dis)enchantment*, of which meter and rhythm are a crucial component. And rhythm understood here not only as opposed to semantic content but sometimes as opposed to the melodic, euphonic dimension of words as well.

⁴⁴ Which is simply to say that neither the role of the poet nor any particular form of invocation or incantation can be taken for granted, and that novelty or at least originality eventually becomes part of what it means to enchant.

That Kommerell was not able to supply even a semblance of a philosophy or theory of meter, whose possibility he nevertheless suggests, can be explained in part by his relative disinterest in Klopstock, that rhythmic revolutionary who initiated the sequence of lyric writing under Kommerell's scrutiny. So novel and complexly motivated – indeed obscure – was Klopstock's insertion of and subsequent liberation from ancient meters in German that even for a sophisticated critic writing in the 20th century the poet's way toward free rhythms could assume a primarily symbolic function, even though Klopstock's poetological writings themselves contain attempts toward something like a philosophy of meter and of what may appear as its dissolution.

It is not difficult to understand why Klopstock did not fit well into Kommerell's (or for that matter Agamben's) schema, for while his first odes in free rhythms do indeed speak of matters divine, the relationship that the poet articulates to the ubiquitous and ever-present God (*dem Allgegenwärtigen*) is not particularly unique and does not in fact articulate any "individual" configuration of divinity. Rhythmically adventurous odes such as the relatively early "Die Genesung," "Dem Allgegenwärtigen," "Das Anschauen Gottes," "Die Frühlingsfeier," "Der Erbarmer," "Die Glückseligkeit Aller," and "Die Genesung des Königs" praise the Father in conventional ways that conceptually bring little new to the table. The speaker of the poems oscillates rapidly between lamenting his mortal, material condition and praising the infinite divine presence to which his soul longs to return:

Dieser Endlichkeit Loos, die Schwere der Erde
Fühlet auch meine Seele,
Wenn sie zu Gott, zu dem Unendlichen
Sich erheben will. (1974-, I, 145)

The lot of this finitude, the weight of the earth
My soul feels too,
When it strives to rise up toward God
The infinite.

A much later “ode” like the “Psalm” of 1788/1789 could end each (rhythmically free) stanza with a quote from Holy Scripture.

As Winfried Menninghaus observes in an incisive article on Klopstock’s poetics, the ambivalence with which Klopstock’s lyrics have often been met runs deep and stretches back to their initial publication.

Whoever cherished the high pitch of “*Empfindsamkeit*” could nonetheless feel enervated by the straining epiphanies about spirits, angels and devils. Whoever welcomed Klopstock’s ambition to a poetic religion could find the form in which it was presented artificial and eccentric [*abwegig*]. Conversely, the formal innovations were celebrated and at the same time the content, the ideological “superstructure” [*Oberbau*], was viewed with ironic distance, or else the writer of odes was played off against the poet of *The Messiah*. (1989, 259)

If Klopstock is a poet of enchantment, or of that version of which German calls *Begeisterung*, then he is also and perhaps equally a poet of embarrassment. The inextricability and interdependence of these fundamental aspects of the lyric is perfectly demonstrated in the ambiguous and conflicting reactions Klopstock’s poems may provoke in one and the same reader. But what in this context is even more compelling is how his poetological project brings to awareness that enchantment and re-enchantment, or rather new and old forms of poetic enchantment, are by no means mutually exclusive. In many cases they work together, and sometimes they are impossible to disentangle. In Klopstock’s case, there is not yet the looming threat of universal disenchantment, of the leave-taking of the gods, including God. The rebellions and crises that mark the young Goethe’s lyrics are likewise missing. Klopstock is both a good Lutheran, a violent idol-breaker, and among the most radical inventors of poetic enchantment the classical tradition of German lyric writing came to know. If Klopstock, like so many after him, attempts to create a poetic religion, it is not in the first instance by means of some theological program or through a critique of the religious institutions of his time. It is by means of rhythm. And the idol Klopstock breaks is, above all, rhyme.

Jarvis has shown convincingly how the suspicion of rhyme in the British tradition was associated with a certain religious (reformed) critique of idols, ornaments, and sensuous charms more generally.⁴⁵ Rhyme could be seen as magic, as witchcraft, feeding on superstition. Klopstock's rejection of rhyme is similar insofar as he regards it as a foreign (specifically French, hence Catholic) intruder. And he is no less categorical than its English detractors. One need not turn to Klopstock's programmatic essays to grasp the basic tenets of his poetics. The ode "An Johann Heinrich Voss" (1782), written after Klopstock had rejected rhyme for decades and the lyric's addressee had recently published his translation in hexameters of *The Odyssey*, uses no uncertain terms:

Zween gute Geister hatten Mäonides
 Und Maro's Sprachen, Wohlklang und Silbenmaß.
 Die Dichter wallten, in der Obhut
 Sichrer, den Weg bis zu uns herunter.

Die spätern Sprachen haben des Klangs noch wohl;
 Doch auch des Silbenmaßes? Statt dessen ist
 In sie ein böser Geist, mit plumpem
 Wörtergepolter, der Reim, gefahren.

Red' ist der Wohlklang, Rede das Silbenmaß;
 Allein des Reimes schmetternder Trommelschlag,
 Was der? was sagt uns sein Gewirbel,
 Lärmend und lärmend mit Gleichgetöne?

Dank unsern Dichtern! Da sich des Kritters Ohr,
 Fern von des Urtheils Stolze, verhörete;
 Verließen sie mich nicht und sangen
 Ohne den Lärm und im Ton des Griechen. (1974-, I, 446)⁴⁶

Two good spirits had Maeonides'
 And Maro's tongues, euphony and measure.
 The poets journeyed, safe in their

⁴⁵ See Jarvis, "Why Rhyme Pleases."

⁴⁶ Klopstock helpfully supplies the poem's meter:

U—U—U, —UU—UU,
 U—U—U, —UU—UU,
 U—U—U—U—U,
 —UU—UU—U—U.

Care, the path down to us.

The later languages surely still have euphony;
But do they also have measure? Instead
An evil spirit with clumsy rumbling,
The rhyme, has moved into them.

Mere talk is euphony, mere talk is measure;
Only the rhyme's clangoring beat of the drum,
What for? what does its whirling tell us,
Brawling with the same sound over and over again?

Thanks to our poets! When the quibbler's ear,
Far from haughty judgment, misheard,
They did not fail me but sang
Without racket and in the manner [*Ton*] of the Greeks.

Here is a German example of rhyme reduced to “a flag, a rallying point, a party card,” to use Jarvis' words (2011, 20). And indeed the German discussion of rhyme had been highly polarized for almost half a century. The fight against Johann Christoph Gottsched's normative poetics did not always allow for much nuance, just as the older critic refused to grant any merit to the likes of Klopstock. What is of note in the programmatic poem to Voss, however, is that the euphony and measure (*Wohlklang und Silbenmaß*) that formed the basis of ancient metrics are just like rhyme designated as *Geister*, “spirits” or “ghosts,” the former being good ones whereas the latter is of the bad kind. In other words, Klopstock does not denigrate the “evil spirit” that is rhyme in the name of disenchantment and sobriety but avowedly because for him, in the German language, it is not the most efficacious way in which poetry (that is to say prosody) can think and thereby enchant. One brief passage will have to suffice to sum up Klopstock's complex poetological program:⁴⁷

The perceptions [*Vorstellungen*] that the meaning of the words produce in us do not reach us as quickly as those that arise through the movement of words. In the first case, we begin by transforming the sign into the signified; in the second case, the movement seems to be precisely what they express. This illusion [*Täuschung*] must be as important to the poet as it is advantageous to him. (1989, 148)

⁴⁷ For an excellent reconstruction see Menninghaus, “Klopstocks Poetik der schnellen ‘Bewegung.’”

Meter and rhythm think, and not just faster but in certain ways also better than exclusively conceptual thinking. The "movement" (*Bewegung*) of words gives rise to "perceptions" (*Vorstellungen*) as well as feelings that go beyond or beneath what words as signifiers corresponding to signifieds can express. This is for Klopstock the essence of specifically *poetic* enchantment. The image with which he chooses to illustrate the functioning of the surreptitious operations performed by what he calls "the wordless" is as apt as it is beautiful: "The wordless draws around in a good poem as do in Homer's battles the gods, visible only to a few" (*Überhaupt wandelt das Wortlose in einem guten Gedicht umher, wie in Homers Schlachten die nur von wenigen gesehnen Götter*, 1989, 172) This statement is worth taking very seriously. If the rhythmic movement of the poem is what constitutes its specifically poetic enchantment – that is the form of enchantment that can only be produced in and by poetry – then it is telling that the configuration of divinity to which it corresponds is decidedly not Christian but Greek. Rhythm has, when we get around to the words themselves and their meanings, already moved us, and to a degree predetermined or rather colored our understanding of them, attuned us to the specific register in which they are to be understood, just as fortune or misfortune in the Trojan war is, when the battle begins, already determined by the often conflicting wills of the Greek gods. Hence Klopstock allocates the enchantment of poetry to a prereflective, prediscursive realm. In this sense, euphony and measure *are* spirits that haunt any reading of his odes: they are what animates them, what makes them more than dead letters, that which precedes semantic meaning and opens a dimension of thought that is not only conceptual.

Crucially, Klopstock's assertion must not be understood as a metaphysical claim about the principally unknowable – something which influences understanding while it itself cannot even in theory be understood –, but as a strictly poetological and epistemological statement. As Klopstock himself pedagogically shows, the animating movement of poetry can very well be studied and more or less successfully rendered into words. It all comes down to the temporality of reading. The wordless movement constituted by words' various degrees of stress vis-à-vis

one another, which in German is never absolute but always dependent on the larger syntactic context, moves us before we get down to deciphering the meaning of words and clauses, and influences that deciphering in a way which in each individual case can be described but never systematized, never articulated as a prosody which could then be applied to other poems.⁴⁸ Above all, the poem's principle of enchantment can never be exhaustively articulated *within* the poem. The rhythms of poetry necessarily work on us by means of a principle to which the poem itself does not have full access discursively. This principle may be deceptive, a trick, yet the temporality of reading prevents us from catching more than a glimpse of it while it does its work of thought with us, just as Homer's gods do not linger visibly after the events they bring about.

This enchantment after a Greek model as the intervention of forces that only with a temporal delay can be cognized reflectively of course stands in stark contrast to the rather conventionally conceived Christian God who is addressed in Klopstock's early hymns in free rhythms, a contrast that testifies to the relative independence of Klopstock's poetological conception of divinity and enchantment and that which his poems thematize and perform semantically, namely the one furnished by Lutheran theology. At the same time, it becomes clear that enchantment as the effect of the prereflective movement of words (*Wortbewegung*) after all cannot dispense with a semantic medium in which to realize itself. In this manner, the rhythmic constitution of Klopstock's poems becomes their "content," the agent of the enchantment they are meant to effect, and the metaphysical, mythological, ideological, or theological material the "form" in which it realizes itself. God is an idea subordinated to, indeed a mere pretext for, the enchanting movement of poetry. Martin Opitz claimed: "The business of poetry was at first nothing else than a theology in disguise / and instruction in matters divine" (*Die Poeterey ist anfanges nichts anders gewesen als eine verborgene Theologie / vnd vnterricht von Goettlichen sachen*, 7). In Klopstock it is rather the teaching of things divine that

⁴⁸ As Jarvis points out, "prosody cannot be grounded on the model of the measurement of an object" (1998, 6).

serves pragmatically to cover up the rhythmic enchantment which is primary. Yet the latter is not opposed to theological or metaphysical mechanisms of enchantment. It does not come to replace the lyric's supporting discourses, which were to become increasingly obsolete, nor is it dependent on their particular character.⁴⁹

As is well known, Klopstock articulated his poetics in opposition to Gottsched and his rhymed alexandrines, which appeared a French import ill-suited for the German tongue. Rhyme had faded to a mere indicator of a crippling foreign influence and had therefore to be traded for a means of poetic enchantment less encumbered by such symbolic weight. This liberation of German poetry from its leading competitor by means of ancient rhythms and Protestant sentiments was aimed at the constitution of a new national poetic community that Klopstock of course was unable to institute. On the one hand, he refused to make any concessions to the taste of the populace; on the other hand, he was not content to let poetry be a private affair or his newfound means of poetic enchantment serve merely as an expression of his own individual relationship to the divine. The results were – disenchanting.

What the German lyric inherited from Klopstock was not a stable tradition or even a repertoire of forms or motives available to the community of poets but rather a disjunction between poetic vocation and communal participation grounded in poetics itself. Precisely that which was meant to distinguish German poetry and secure for it a unity over and against foreign influences destabilized the procedures of lyric writing to the point where it ultimately became individualized, if not privatized. This means not just trivially that free rhythms are (per definition) unrepeatably structures but that they became symbolic of a rhythmic enchantment not regulated by the semantic material it traverses. By divesting poetic enchantment from theological program Klopstock indeed opened German verse to articulations of new relationships to the divine, albeit at a cost.

⁴⁹ As Menninghaus notes, this modern, even radical notion undermines Klopstock's more conservative theory of language into which it is inserted (315).

Kommerell is right to locate an original uneasiness at the heart of the German tradition of writing in free rhythms, an uneasiness that is nowhere as strongly felt as in the late poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, where rhythmic thinking has a crucial part not only in clandestinely producing lyric enchantment but also in articulating its essence as inseparable from the risk of disenchantment and embarrassment. In distinction to the young Goethe or Novalis, Hölderlin does not simply receive the notion of free rhythms as a de facto possibility for lyric writing; it is not a model which he adapts, although he was of course well aware of Klopstock's groundbreaking work. As Boris Previšić recently has shown, Hölderlin arrives at free rhythms through an arduous process of decomposition and partial recomposition of classical meters.⁵⁰ Here I will not offer a genealogy or attempt further to describe the formal evolution of Hölderlin's poetry but merely with the help of extant research indicate the complex metric operations through which lyric poetry, according to Hölderlin, may still legitimately enchant. What is at stake in particular is the intimate relationship between enchantment, meter and rhythm, and the role of the individual poet vis-à-vis a (national) community.

Whatever the extent to which Hölderlin's poetry legitimizes its nationalist appropriations, it is clear that for him poetry is necessarily bound to a language and to a historical culture, which nonetheless does not preclude that poetry and the lyric in particular may function as a mode of transhistorical and transnational communication. I will have the occasion to return to the crisis of the hymnic which Hölderlin's late songs epitomize; here I wish just to call attention to the fact that if the long poems in free rhythms do not deserve to be designated as hymns and indeed are not designated as such by their author, then this has as much to do with the *subject* of praise as with its *object*. "The addressee that the invocation is to make present as well as the community of believers, which should come together in the cult, are missing." (Previšić, 142) Instead of "hymn" Hölderlin uses the word song, *Gesang*, to refer to the unparalleled long poems he

⁵⁰ See Previšić, *Hölderlins Rhythmus*.

composes in the first years of the 19th century. This term, which is not exactly technical or systematically employed but clearly not to be understood in the colloquial sense either, has been analyzed incessantly in the secondary literature and still gives rise to commentary.⁵¹ In his study, Previšić identifies the notion of song with the free rhythms that for him and many other readers constitute the culmination of Hölderlin's work. And there is some support for this view. *Gesang* of course appears as a reference in many of the earlier poems, yet whenever it is invoked in a not merely colloquial sense it is designated in its absence.⁵² In "Der Wanderer" the traveling speaker asks in vain nature to grant him a song; in "Der Abschied" it is situated in the past; in "Der Main" and "Das Ahnenbild" it is located in mythical time; whereas in "An die Parzen" and "Der Archipelagus" it is anticipated. Several poems ("Mein Eigentum," "Die Liebe," "Der Gang aufs Land") mention it in the conjunctive mode. "An die Kürze," a short epigrammatic lyric lamenting its own brevity, refers to song as something available in the past but no longer; however, by associating song with length or even the never-ending, it also interestingly points forward to a later phase of expanded forms:

"Warum bist du so Kurz? liebst du, wie vormals, denn
Nun nicht mehr den Gesang? fandst du, als Jünglich, doch,
In den Tagen der Hoffnung,
Wenn du sangest, das Ende nie!" (I, 190)

"Why so brief now, so curt? Do you no longer, then,
Love your art [*Gesang*] as you did? When in your younger days
Hopeful days, in your singing,
What you loathed was to make an end!" (2013, 83)

Of importance is not just the notion of song as something that resists coming to an end. The asclepiadic stanza also, in introducing a second voice into the poem, sets up a trial in which the

⁵¹ Notably Jürg Friedrich, *Dichtung als Gesang. Hölderlins "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." im Kontext der Schriften zur Philosophie und Poetik 1795-1802*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 2007.

⁵² The exceptions appear to be "Gesang des Deutschen" and "Deutscher Gesang." Yet here too there are qualifiers. The former ends with a hesitating gesture toward a future German Delos or Olympia; the latter was never completed.

poet's failure to sing becomes a communal matter that nevertheless has its ground in individual misfortune (and vice versa): "As my fortune, so my song" (*Wie mein Glück, ist mein Lied*, I, 190). The unhappiness of the poet is the cause of his muteness and conversely his inability to sing is the source of his unhappiness. The incomplete elegy "Das Gasthaus" (also called "Der Gang aufs Land") is accompanied in the margins of Hölderlin's manuscript by the distich "I wanted to sing a lighthearted song, but I never succeed / For my fortune makes speech never come easily" (*Singen wollt ich leichten Gesang, doch nimmer geling mirs, / Denn es machet mein Glück nimmer die Rede mir leicht*).⁵³ Yet little is won as the poet apparently recovers his voice to take up again larger forms. In the "Elegie" of 1800 the "bright soul song" (*heller Seelengesang*) belongs to a lost youth and the speaker fears that he is meeting a future "without lament and without song [...] in the all too sober realm" (*ohne Klag' und Gesang [...] im allzunüchternen Reich*, I, 289). If the final stanza allows for a more hopeful disposition, it is nevertheless no more than "a prayer" for renewal (I, 290). The poem's subject appears initially in the first and third person singular, yet as in the second stanza remembrances of happier days dominate it slides into a collective *wir*, which appears again in the final stanza once the lonely singer has uttered his prayer and thereby allowed for some hope. Similar attitudes are expressed in elegies of larger format, the triadic "Brot und Wein" and "Heimkunft." The former ambiguously asks whereto has disappeared that song which once pleased the gods (I, 376/367) before affirming a collective *wir* as fulfilling the promise of "the ancients' song" (*der Alten Gesang*, I, 380-381). In the latter the distinction between a community benefiting from song and the task of the bard is once again sharply articulated:

Vieles hab' ich gehört vom großen Vater und habe
 Lange Geschwiegen von ihm, welcher die wandernde Zeit
 Drogen in Höhen erfrischt, und waltet über Gebirgen
 Der gewähret uns bald himmlische Gaben und ruft
 Hellern Gesang und schickt viel gute Geister. [...] (I, 322)

⁵³ See the facsimile in *Sämtliche Werke. Frankfurter Ausgabe. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, VI, 272-273.

Much in the meantime I've heard of him, the great Father, and long now
I have kept silent about him who on summits renews
Wandering Time up above and governs the high mountain ranges,
Him who soon now will grant heavenly gifts and calls forth
Song more effulgent, and sends us many good spirits. [...] (2013, 337)

Yet in the following stanza of the poem's first version the optimism is moderated and the poet is once again forced to question the legitimacy of his speech:

Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Nahmen,
Herzen schlagen, und doch bleibt die Rede zurück? (I, 322)

Silence often behoves us: deficient in names that are holy,
Hearts may beat high, while the lips hesitate, wary of speech? (2013, 337)

The final distich reinforces the discrepancy between the position of the singer and the community that he is to serve:

Sorgen, wie diese, muß, gern oder nicht, in der Seele
Tragen ein Säng' und oft, aber die anderen nicht. (I, 323)

Whether he like it or not, and often, a singer must harbour
Cares like these in his soul; not, though, the wrong sort of cares. (2013, 337)

Previšić reads the beating of the hearts which remains in spite of the lack of “holy names” as the autonomous functioning and persistence of poetic meter over and against the absence of objects of praise and the collapse of the community which were to perform it: “The meter (‘hearts beat’) is the only thing that remains when ‘holy names’ ‘are missing.’” (73) At the same time, the clinging to a strict meter appears to be precisely what prevents the “bright song” from becoming manifest. Previšić argues that, through elaborate use of aeolic forms and by introducing a metric-rhythmic variance, that is a conflict between what the meter prescribes and the reading which the rhythm of the language requires, already “Heimkunft” contains in principle

the possibilities of free rhythms. That Hölderlin in this poem nevertheless has not yet given up the classical elegiac form Previšić explains as follows: “The metric corset lends the poem the possibility of speaking of that which it is not: song.” (75) “In its own decomposition [...] the elegy points [...] to the song.” (76)

Indeed it is true that in Hölderlin’s elegies as well as in several odes song is figured as something past or yet to come. Previšić is right that if the constitution of *Gesang*, construed as a medium in which a community realizes its potential relationship to the divine, is one if not *the* goal of Hölderlin’s poetry, then *Gesang* cannot be understood as the truth-content of some poetic saying or of the working through of thematic (including mythological) material. Instead, it must be comprehended as a *way* of writing poetry that would be equal to a singing. This is not to say that poetry would have to become more “musical,” whatever that would mean, and especially not in opposition to poetry as *thought*. Rather it means that the new kind of poetry promises thinking *in* and *through* song. However, here arises the problem which inadvertently faces any kind of poetic thinking: that of its communicability. As Hölderlin’s poems approach the condition of song, the risk that threatens them is unintelligibility. This does not mean that they could not be understood, that they would be semantically hermetic. It simply means that the specifically poetic thinking that takes place in them may be lost to the reader, who fails precisely to transform the dead letters into song.

Numerous passages in Hölderlin’s poetry attest to the intimate connection between form and what he understands as the divine (and what I understand as poetic enchantment).⁵⁴ Yet the problem is ultimately not theological but poetological, insofar as these terms can be distinguished in Hölderlin. The chronology of his works as well as the fact that Hölderlin does occasionally refer to his late poems as songs tempt scholars to think of his writing in teleological terms, figuring the long poems in free rhythms as de facto manifestations of *Gesang*. But simply

⁵⁴ Hölderlin’s distinction between *vergeistigende Kunst* and *belebende Kunst* is helpful (the closest English can come to translating these terms would perhaps be “intellectualizing art” and “animating art”). See his “Wink für die Darstellung und Sprache” (II, 96-100).

to equate song with free rhythms is problematic to say the least. It is often not sufficiently acknowledged that Hölderlin was not the first German lyricist to make use of free rhythms. This mode of writing was after all available to him from the outset. With this in mind, it must be explained why it appears that the trajectory of Hölderlin's lyric writing can be described as a steady, gradual liberation from meter. Previšić makes a crucial observation. Although it is simply a way of stating the very definition of free rhythms, it cannot be stressed enough:

The metric forms and the forms in free rhythms complement each other. [...] The metric form can only be understood rhythmically and the rhythmic form can only be understood metrically. For instance, without the layer of blank verse the song *Germanien* is not comprehensible as song. [...] The Hölderlinian poem cannot definitively and unambiguously position itself if it wants to live up to the goal of letting true song resound. Rather, a distance to what is named "preserves itself" in its new metric-rhythmic difference, which highlights the principle of complementarity [*Ergänzungsprinzip*] between metric and rhythmic poems. (233)

It becomes clear why Hölderlin, independent from Klopstock in particular, must go through and indeed retain some of the metric forms that will render his free rhythms intelligible as free *rhythms*. *Gesang* cannot be understood as something that fully realizes itself with the absence of an immediately apparent metrical structure, for this notion renders impossible to explain the always ambiguous references to song within those poems which in the secondary literature on Hölderlin are almost invariably identified as such. An oft-quoted, gnomic passage from "Friedensfeier" runs:

Viel hat von Morgen an,
Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander
Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang. (I, 364)

Much, from the morning onwards,
Since we have been a discourse and have heard from one another,
Has human kind learnt; but soon we shall be song. (2013, 529)

These lines certainly give voice to a more optimistic outlook but can by no means be taken to celebrate the actual arrival of song, which remains something like a regulative ideal. Without addressing the tense of Hölderlin's statement, Previšić writes:

The poem itself is the *Friedensfeier* ("Celebration of Peace"), for the sign is no longer caught in the binarity between *signifiant* and *signifié* but makes possible a "song" in and through itself. Already the sounding materiality is a statement, becomes "discourse" [*Gespräch*]. The combination of visual and acoustic realization annuls a binary understanding of the sign, something that can be confirmed on the syntactic-rhythmic level. (190)

Which leaves only one question: why, then, does Hölderlin locate song in the imminent future and not in the present? Since "Friedensfeier" is one of the earlier begun yet repeatedly revised poems in free rhythms, the equation of song with those that follow may not have been particularly problematic if it were not for the fact that other appearances of the word in the "Homburger Folioheft" – which collects elegies as well as poems in free rhythms and fragments from the same time (1802-1807) – further complicates the notion of *Gesang* as something like a genre now available to the poet. In "Die Titanen" the speaker complains again: "song is missing" (*es fehlet an Gesang*, I, 391), and in another fragment:

[...] manchen Gesang, den ich
Dem Höchsten zu singen, dem Vater
Gesonnen war, den hat
Mir weggezehret die Schwermuth. (I, 408)

[...] many a song which to
The Highest, the Father, I once was
Disposed to song, was lost
To me, devoured by sadness. (2013, 617)

One should of course not underestimate the unfinished, fragmentary nature of these texts, but a dismissal of them as no more than spontaneous personal utterances expressing the dismay of a poet at his own impotence is nonetheless problematic, for song itself, insofar as in

Hölderlin it is employed as a poetological term, must be understood from the vantage point of a community, a *wir*. Indeed, “pure song” would be something from which the poet could subtract himself without endangering it:

Was kümmern sie dich
O Gesang den Reinen, ich zwar
Ich sterbe, doch du
Gehest andere Bahn, umsonst
Mag dich ein Neidisches hindern. (I, 412)

What do they matter to you
O song, that are pure; indeed
I die, but you
Follow a different course, in vain
Shall the envious try to impede you. (2013, 625)

What is this ideal of song such that it may function apart from its author, who in the very act of apostrophizing it simultaneously gives it life and figures it as indifferent both to himself and to “the envious” (*ein Neidisches*), which, in a reverse movement, is divested, by the neuter gender, of personhood? Of course one could understand these lines as the wish of a poet for his work to outlive him, in which case there would be nothing remarkable about them. Yet the speaker does not designate the song as his, and the disassociation of successful song and the first person singular is in fact consistent in Hölderlin’s poetry of this period. Hence what is at stake is not the survival of this or that song, and especially not as guarantor of future fame.

If such scattered notes from the “Homburger Folioheft” nevertheless do not have the authority of finished works, one may compare them with a far more canonical passage. As is so often the case with Hölderlin, the constitution of the various versions of “Der Einzige” presents considerable philological difficulties. Especially the second half of the poem was subjected to major revisions and substitutions over the span of several years, and the various editors of Hölderlin’s works make different decisions as to which version, if any, may be considered a

finished text. However, in addition to its poetic qualities, the text is essential for understanding what the transition to free rhythms meant for Hölderlin.

Although it cannot be established with certainty which of the poems in free rhythms Hölderlin conceived first, the position of “Der Einzige” after the three elegies “Heimkunft,” “Brot und Wein” and “Stutgard” in the “Homburger Folioheft” suggests that it may be the first attempt at this type of writing. Previšić has supplied an ambitious albeit debatable rhythmic analysis of the various versions and fragments of the poem (214-228). I wish not to expand on or critique his reading yet nevertheless to indicate, for the purpose of an imminent comparison, a couple of differences which clarifies what I understand to be at stake in Hölderlin’s complicated relationship to meter and rhythm. What would have been the eighth stanza of the first version of “Der Einzige,” had it been complete, contains the following lines:

Es hänget aber an Einem
Die Liebe. Diesesmal
Ist nemlich vom eigenen Herzen
Zu sehr gegangen der Gesang,
Gut will ich aber machen
Den Fehl, mit nächstem
Wenn ich noch andere singe.
Nie treff ich, wie ich wünsche,
Das Maas. Ein Gott weiß aber
Wenn kommet, was ich wünsche das Beste. (I, 389-390)

To One alone, however,
Love clings. For this time too much
From my own heart the song
Has come; if other songs follow
I’ll make amends for the fault.
Much though I wish to, never
I strike the right measure. But
A god knows when it comes, what I wish for, the best. (2013, 539)

Perhaps nowhere else in Hölderlin’s oeuvre is the intertwinement of theology and poetics, or in my terms between enchantment and prosody, more satisfyingly articulated. The lyric, whose title cannot be rendered accurately in English (candidates like “The One” or “The Singular” suggest

an assuredness regarding the poem's subject matter which it nowhere exhibits), addresses, like "Friedensfeier" and "Patmos," the historical role of the figure of Jesus, and reluctantly questions his exceptional status vis-à-vis earlier incarnations and impersonations of the divine, specifically Zeus' sons Heracles and Dionysus. The uneasy dialectic or oscillation between the exceptionality of Christ and the need for a material diffusion of divinity does not come to a resolution or a standstill in the first draft of the poem, which nevertheless ends with a comparison that figures heroes and poets as suffering fates similar to that of Christ on earth:

Und sehr betrübt war auch
Der Sohn so lange, bis er
Gen Himmel fuhr in den Lüften,
Dem gleich ist gefangen die Seele der Helden.
Die Dichter müssen auch
Die geistigen weltlich sein. (I, 390)

And sorely troubled in mind
The Son was also until
To Heaven he rose in the winds,
So too, the souls of the heroes are captive.
The poets, and those no less who
Are spiritual, must be worldly. (2013, 541)

These lines sanction a meta-poetic reading of the preceding stanza as well. The "One" in the first line of the eighth stanza is of course most readily identified with Christ and "love" with the Holy Spirit, which through the line break become sharply distinguished from one another (*Einem / Die Liebe*). The relationship between the two is thoroughly problematic; indeed, it is exactly the relationship between the divine or enchantment and its individual mediations or manifestations that the poem puts into question. The following lines' self-chastisement is correspondingly ambiguous. At first glance it may seem as though the error of the poet lies in the fact that his song proceeds from his "own heart" rather than from the "One." If such were the case, we would have to do with a fairly simple opposition between the selfishness of the singer and the love of Christ. However, the likening at the end of the unfinished lyric of the poets' function to that of

Jesus renders possible a different reading, in which the relationship between the task of the individual poet and poetic enchantment in general would be at stake.

Both Hölderlin and Klopstock construe poetic rhythm as something divine. In order to make sense of this, one must not view it as a gift of the gods but only consider that it, like language itself, may not be possible to think either from the vantage point of nature or from that of culture alone.⁵⁵ To miss the measure is to speak in a language that does not yet or that does no longer exist. Yet Hölderlin's goal is precisely the constitution of a prosodic language which would survive the poet and even be indifferent to both his and his works' survival. To sing too much from one's "own heart" is to become idiosyncratic, unintelligible to the song's intended audience, with whom the poet no longer shares a language.⁵⁶ The conflict which he must manage is that between the institution of a new metric-rhythmic language and his own voice within it. For on the one hand, Hölderlin laments in the notes to *Oedipus* the absence of a more clearly defined set of communal poetic devices (μηχαναί) among the moderns (II, 309).⁵⁷ But on the other hand, he knows that if such a craft is to be instituted – which may very well turn out to be impossible – it must happen through the efforts of individual poets. To find one's voice in a communal language that by the very same gesture comes into being is the ideal of song, is *Gesang* itself. The "god" that knows would be the guarantee of such a language as the possibility of poetic enchantment. But poetic enchantment is here inseparable from a genuinely poetic *thinking*, that is a *prosodic* thinking. Rainer Nägele writes apropos the promise in "Friedensfeier" that we will soon be song: "here the 'we' as the subject of the discourse [*Gespräch*] is not a subject that would already be there and among other things also speak, instead it is constituted as 'we' only in the discourse, it is the discourse, insofar as it, in

⁵⁵ Jarvis refers to Wordsworth for this point (2008, 112).

⁵⁶ In a letter dated November 2, 1797, Hölderlin writes to his brother: "Ich bin mit dem gegenwärtig herrschenden Geschmack so ziemlich in Opposition, aber ich laß auch künftig wenig von meinem Eigensinne nach, und hoffe mich durchzukämpfen." (III, 669-670)

⁵⁷ For this dimension of Hölderlin, see Monika Kasper, *Das Gesetz von allen der König. Hölderlins Anmerkungen zum Oedipus und zur Antigonä*. Königshausen & Neumann: Würzburg, 2000.

anticipation and deferred, shall be song” (16). “Where discourse was, there song shall be, and song would then also be a new thinking, a new poetic reason [*Vernunft*], sober and intoxicated at once.” (19) This is a thinking that must be singular in so far as it depends on unique rhythmic relationships constructed in the context of individual poems, sets of poems, or entire corpora, and therefore it cannot be measured since there is no *Maß* universally applicable. Still, thinking must as such always be communicable, which in this case requires a recognizable metric-rhythmic difference necessary for the very identification of such thought. Here is where *thinking* becomes indistinguishable from *feeling*. A famous passage in “Der Rhein,” according to which the immortal gods are “in need of” mortals, is here appropriate.

Es haben aber an eigner
Unsterblichkeit die Götter genug, und bedürfen
Die Himmlischen eines Dings,
So sind Heroen und Menschen
Und Sterbliche sonst. Denn weil
Die Seeligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,
Muß wohl, wenn solches zu sagen
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Nahmen
Theilnehmend fühlen ein Andrer,
Den brauchen sie [...] (I, 345)

But their own immortality
Suffices the gods, and if
The Heavenly have need of one thing,
It is of heroes and human beings
And other mortals. For since
The most Blessed in themselves feel nothing
Another, if to say such a thing is
Permitted, must, I suppose,
Vicariously feel in the name of the gods,
And him they need [...] (2013, 505)

Nägele comments: “One form of this palpability [*Fühlbarkeit*] and of felt time – and it is perhaps the only form – is manifest in what one could call a feeling for rhythm. The world discloses itself in rhythm.” (99) Indeed, the feeling of mortality, that is of time, is made possible through “a feeling for rhythm,” which at the same time gives existence consistency, and thereby intelligibility, and underscores its finitude. It becomes clear that if the god mentioned in the

eighth stanza of the first draft of "Der Einzige" acts as a guarantee for the possibility of poetic-prosodic enchantment (what Jarvis calls prereflective thinking), he is nevertheless himself dependent on rhythm. The lines "[...] But a god knows / When the best I wish comes true" mean not that a god, when he comes, will know what the poet wishes, nor that a god knows when arrives the object of the poet's desire. Instead, it means that whenever that for which the poem aims succeeds, a god will know it (and be known), for a form of poetic enchantment will have taken place in that thinking and that feeling which a particular poetic rhythm effects against the backdrop of a metric-rhythmic language that renders it intelligible and tangible.

In light of the poet's self-chastisement in the first draft of "Der Einzige" the revisions and substitutions the poem undergoes may appear contrary to expectations. Previšić writes apropos this passage: "It seems as though not striking [*Verfehlen*] the right 'measure' constitutes the song. An improvement, striking the right 'measure,' is the promise of 'other' songs. [...] It is not about simply improving this song, but about singing 'others.' Only in other versions can the 'error' [*Fehl*] be corrected [*aufgehoben*]." (219) He goes on to identify the "error" with the poem's straying from Pindar's triadic schema and with the partially missing sixth and seventh stanzas. This seems plausible enough, but it becomes more complicated once one starts to consider more carefully what it might mean for the song to have sprung too much from the poet's "own heart." Since the later versions that completely leave out the self-accusatory eighth stanza by no means provide anything like stable metric schemata but rather go in the opposite direction, dispensing with *any* recognizable metric pattern, rhythmic unruliness cannot be the problem. Previšić tries to articulate the distinction between singing too much from the own heart and striking the right measure as an opposition between Aeolic and choriambic verse forms. Referring to Karl Philip Moritz's claim in his *Versuch einer deutschen Prosodie* that the choriamb (— ∪ ∪ —) is the most harmonious prosodic foot in German⁵⁸ and identifying its absence in the eighth stanza where is found instead a wealth of Aeolic units, Previšić correlates the "own heart"

⁵⁸ See *Werke*, III, 496-497.

not with an abandonment of meter *nor* with specifically German rhythmic possibilities but quite the opposite: with an indulgence in the forms of Sappho and Alcaeus, which is moderated not until the following stanza.

Although Previšić's reading of this pivotal passage and the opposition he sets up between the choriambic and the Aeolic are debatable,⁵⁹ I will not attempt an alternative interpretation of the stanza's rhythmic structure but accept as a hypothesis that the poet's own heart belongs to Aeolis and more specifically to Lesbos, and that it wishes to express itself in the meters of the island's famous poets. Latter-day readers accustomed to construe individuality as idiosyncrasy may feel more inclined to associate the poet's particularity with the audacity of absolute rhythm, but here it is worthwhile to consider Winfried Menninghaus's argument for a Sapphic Hölderlin that infiltrates even the most Pindaric of his long poems.⁶⁰ "Der Einzige" does indeed begin in an arguably Pindaric manner, yet in all versions emanates in something decidedly different. Menninghaus notes how the Lesbian poets, in sharp distinction to the unmistakably public character of Pindar's choral lyrics, from the first attempts by Herder and others to theorize the genre, are associated with a notion of the lyric as marked by musicality, singularity, and individuality, a notion predominant to our day. Seen from this point of view, it

⁵⁹ For instance, the pherecratic that for Previšić connotes an Aeolic poetics never appears in isolation but is always either lengthened or abridged. In addition, he claims that Hölderlin's use of the choriamb is Pindaric as opposed to Aeolic; however, Hölderlin tends to expand the choriamb in ways not admitted in Greek meters (250). Pindar himself in fact used both choriambic and Aeolic forms. For an overview of Pindar's meters, see Gregory Nagy, 439-464.

⁶⁰ See Menninghaus 2005. Although Menninghaus throughout identifies correspondences between the Aeolic and a notion of the lyric as intimacy and individuality, he also makes the decisive observation that for Hölderlin it is often rather a matter of creating tension between form and content: "Die Leistung der künstlerischen Form, so Hölderlin, besteht nicht in der glanzvollen Präsentation ihres Gehalts, sondern in der kompensierenden Eroberung dessen, was ihr am meisten fehlt." (87) A most striking example that Menninghaus adduces is *Sapphos Schwanengesang*, written in Alcaic rather than Sapphic form (94). Previšić also addresses this problematic of iso-/allomorphism in the conclusion to *Hölderlins Rhythmus*, but takes it perhaps too lightly, for to the extent that lines like "[...] Diesesmal / Ist nehmlich vom eigenen Herzen / zu sehr gegangen der Gesang [...]" are Aeolic or appears in an Aeolic context, this may just as well be considered a counter-tendency to what is being expressed. Such irresolvable hermeneutic problems signal that rhythmic thinking may not primarily call for interpretation, if by interpretation is meant the translation of "the wordless" (Klopstock) into semantic meaning. The mere contextualization of rhythmic structures may not be enough to exhaust the effects, cognitive and enchanting, which prosody produces.

perhaps becomes less enigmatic that Hölderlin should use Aeolic forms at that moment when he accuses himself of relying too much on his own predispositions. However, even as he abandons the Aeolic units in the second draft of the poem he finds grounds for self-critique:

[...] Eigenwillig sonst, unmäßig
Gränzlos, daß der Menschen Hand
Anficht das Lebende, mehr auch, als sich schicket
Für einen Halbgott, heiliggesetztes übergeht
Der Entwurf. Seit nemlich böser Geist sich
Bemächtigt des glücklichen Altertums, unendlich,
Langher währt Eines, gesangsfeind, klanglos, das
In Maasen vergeht, des Sinnes Gewaltsames. Ungebundenes aber
Hasset Gott. [...] (I, 459)

[...] Wilful at other times, immoderately
Boundless, so that the hands of men
Impugn whatever is living, more than is fitting for
A demigod, the design transgresses beyond
What's divinely ordained. For since evil spirit
Has taken possession of happy antiquity, unendingly
Long now one power has prevailed, hostile to song, without resonance,
That passes away in measures, a violence of the mind. But God hates
The unbound. [...] (2013, 547 – translation modified)

Here a reversal appears to have taken place. Man's "willfulness," or better, "obstinate idiosyncrasy" (with which I for lack of better alternatives translate the German *Eigenwilligkeit*) "impugn[s] whatever is living," unmeasuredly, limitlessly. God, the divine, that is enchantment, "hates" what is boundless (and/or vice versa: what is boundless hates God). It is an "evil spirit" that has taken hold of "happy antiquity" and what remains is only a lonely something, "hostile to song, without resonance, / That passes away in measures [or meters]." The precise interpretation of these lines is a matter of some difficulty, but the basic conflict is nevertheless clear. Previšić notes that in this passage Aeolic forms are either missing or fragmented by line breaks, and no other larger metric units can be meaningfully identified (226). In other words, the abandonment of metric form is for the Hölderlin of these years as erroneous as their retention.

Where does this leave us? That is, where does this leave *us*, the *wir* which was to

become song? “Behind” is one possible answer. The second draft of “Der Einzige” ends:

[...] einige sind, gerettet, als
Auf schönen Inseln. Gelehrt sind die.
Versuchungen sind nemlich
Gränzlos an die gegangen.
Zahllose gefallen. Also gieng es, als
Der Erde Vater bereitet ständiges
In Stürmen der Zeit. Ist aber geendet. (I, 459-460)

[...] some there are, saved, as though
On beautiful islands. Learned are these,
For they have been subject to
Temptations without end.
Countless fallen. So it went when
The Father of Earth prepared what is constant
In storms of the age. But that is ended. (2013, 549)

“Is however over,” as a more literal translation of the last sentence goes. Yes, the song is over, and what remains are a few isolated learned men on their pretty islands. A shift in emphasis to the individual is in fact noticeable much earlier in the draft, where “one is / Something for himself” (*einer / Etwas für sich ist*, I, 458). This thought is more pronounced in some scattered notes in the “Homburger Foioheft”:

Ein anderes freilich ist,
 Unterschiedenes ist
 gut. Einer jeder
 und es hat
Ein jeder das Seine. (I, 410)

It is admittedly another,
 Distinct is
 good. Each and every one
 and has
Each and every one his own.

It is a matter of the “*apriority* of the individual over the whole” (*apriorität des Individuellen über das Ganze*, I, 422).

In Hölderlin's sea of fragmentary notes one may find support for almost any interpretation, which can then be contradicted by yet another free-floating assertion. Nonetheless, in what appears to be the successive fragmentation of Hölderlin's writing in the "Homburger Folioheft" metric units or patterns only occasionally emerge – indeed isles for the learned.⁶¹ This insular poetics has rung true with later readers' fragmented experiences of a fragmented world. For a long time it seemed more likely to find truth midst disintegrated stuttering than in coherent structures, which appeared to promise more than they could keep. But from the viewpoint of Hölderlin's elsewhere articulated poetics of "palpability" (*Fühlbarkeit*), the utter dissolution of meter and the unpredictability of rhythm must be seen as a collapse, for the fragmentation is more radically temporal than it is spatial, which means not only that history is no longer thought in terms of large diachronic structures but also that with rhythm the very experience of time, that for which the gods need us – men's feeling vicariously for the gods is nothing if not rhythmic enchantment –, is lost.

Klopstock articulates rhythmic enchantment as "the wordless" (*das Wortlose*), which acts faster and therefore precedes the constitution of semantic meaning. He speaks in his poetological texts of rhythm as "additional expression" (*Mitausdruck*), supplemental to the content of words, but as Menninghaus has shown, his theory contains the kernel of a much more compelling theory of rhythm that refutes the hierarchy that subordinates rhythmic to semantic meaning – if in the case of rhythmic enchantment it is indeed a question of *meaning* (1989, 316 and *passim*). Previšić denies this aspect of Klopstockian poetics in the interest of Hölderlin's novelty (240). But if not the autonomy of rhythm, what does Hölderlin invent for it? According to Menninghaus meter as allegory.

For the fragmented metric citations are not only placed next to and against each other for their immediate affective values [*Affektwerte*]; with their material attributes are simultaneously invoked historical fragments of knowledge [*historische*

⁶¹ See already "Thränen."

Wissensfragmente], which reach from the long vanished context of their first use – Sappho's and Alcaeus' odes – to the contemporary debate over the Sapphic and Alcaic ode as paradigms of the lyric. (2005, 83-84)

Furthermore, in perfecting Klopstock's poetics of the wordless, Hölderlin's attention to rhythm by no means precludes, as in the case of the older poet, euphony and melody as part of the thinking and moving that takes place in and by prosody (Jarvis).

In spite of this, just as the reader of Klopstock's odes needs considerable training before being able accurately to recite them, one may wonder by whom Hölderlin's near-invisible (and near-inaudible) metric-allegoric structures are discerned or even felt, especially in the archipelago of fragments that comprises the larger part of the "Homburger Folioheft." Perhaps the few learned saved on their islands – not, in any case, the *wir* of *Gesang*. In other words, Kommerell's intuition appears not to have been ungrounded: the enchantment of free rhythms turns into an individual, at times even private affair. This is after all what it means when song emerges "too much from one's own heart." Later generations have of course found such failures appealing, often visionary, and readers have come together either to affirm the unfulfilled promise of a community or its impossibility, even undesirability; but for Hölderlin himself it was, at least at a certain moment in time, indeed a matter of failing. Whether again taking up the task or affirming the failure itself, interpreting Hölderlin's disclosure and subsequent abandonment of a field of fruitful metric-rhythmic difference as symptomatic of a hopeless and dangerous attempt to institute a new religion or mythology is not as productive for understanding the fate of his strictly poetic mode of enchantment as is construing the yearning for the communal as itself stemming from a crisis of form and the absence of a poetic (prosodic) language fit for (communicable) thought. Here one must tone down Hölderlin's singularity to regain perspective of the long transnational preparation for the emergence of free rhythms and of free verse. Paradoxically, that which was meant to liberate German poetry from such unfit French imports as rhyme and the alexandrine and thereby to provide it with a proper identity and a shared

medium for poetry – namely the adaption of Greek meters and the privileging of rhythm over homophony – instead gave way to highly individualized forms of writing. If the circulation of an apparently unrestricted multiplicity of forms today can be identified with the literary revolution around 1800, it could nevertheless not content either Klopstock or Hölderlin, whose desires were perhaps inherently contradictory: the former nurtured a cheerful yet disenchanting elitism and contempt for the populace which culminated in the 1774 *Gelehrtenrepublik* but was articulated clearly already in the 1758 *Von dem Publico* with its disparagement of “the great crowd” (*das große Haufen*), yet his poetics down to the most intricate prosodic details is inextricably entangled with questions of religion and nationhood; the latter, who conceived himself as willfully opposing the taste of his contemporaries, also famously called for μηχαναί, rules for calculation (*Geseze*), a kind of firm ground for poetic enchantment on which poets could rely and which would ensure them a place in society (*eine bürgerliche Existenz*, III, 309).

The singularity of heroic outsiders is for good reasons more palatable than their longing for national unity and religious community. But if rhythm and meter (and prosody more generally) is thus ideologically charged and can be, or at least aspire to be, a medium for collective enchantment as well as the affirmation of national identity, it is never a question of one nation and one language autonomously coming to its own but of a rivalry in which different national models of poetic enchantment are pitted against each other. When Kommerell writes that the German lyric tradition “has at times bolder peaks but practically never the assuredness which marks the poetic traditions of other countries,” one may surmise that among the “other countries” he is thinking of one in particular. Emphasizing the allegedly greater individuality, that is the greater genius, of German poets, he is able to make a lack of “assuredness” into a distinguishing trait and a mark of superiority vis-à-vis in particular the neighbors (at the time of the essay’s publication not just rivals but enemies) on the other side of the Rhine. This paradoxical strategy of seeking unity through difference is not peculiar to the critic but rather a conflict that plays out in lyric practice itself, not seldom as metric-rhythmic difference. Rhythmic

individuality *needs* metric commonality, but the reverse holds true as well: the use of rhythm lets meter come to light, divests it from its merely symbolic role and makes of it an instrument of *thought*. Yet the more autonomous the rhythm, the less visible the metric backdrop; thus the relative brevity of the tradition of writing in free rhythms, and thus scholarship on Hölderlin has been divided between scrupulous description and philosophical speculation.

There is something inherently contradictory about a “tradition” of free rhythms, as the liberation of rhythm tends quickly to undermine the very metric ground on which it stands. The experience of this danger proved equally if not more traumatic in the tradition possessing that “assuredness” which the German lyric had never achieved, and in it questions of nationality, community, and the possibility of a poetic enchantment freed from the strictures and superstitions of received religion are no less at stake. Komerell notes how the German canon of lyric writing “goes from crisis to crisis, often in leaps, turning back on itself, disavowing what has been achieved, happily setting off on new beginnings.” It is perhaps not surprising that he does not mention what is arguably the most famous crisis of verse: “Crise de vers.”

If Mallarmé is the name posterity associates with this crisis, it is not because he brought it about or was the first to observe it, but because he, like Hölderlin, is that poet who within his national and linguistic tradition (neither Mallarmé nor Hölderlin would differentiate between the two) and *through poetic practice* pursues the consequences of this crisis to their ultimate conclusions. What becomes apparent in both cases is an intimate connection, not to say an unentangleable knot, or even better: a suture that unites questions of meter and rhythm, or more generally of verse, with poetically produced enchantment and with a thinking (that is a performance) of community and nationhood. While not wishing to deny the irreducible singularity of the two prophets-poets my aim is to compare these two incomparable lyricists – which itself already amounts to a form of heresy – in order to find grounds for a comparative philosophical poetics which would not only be useful for grasping the enormous stakes, in the long 19th century, of an

autonomously produced lyric enchantment, that is a form of poetic wonder not dependent on any particular metaphysical or theological doctrine, but also for better understanding those earlier forms that purportedly *did* depend on such external guarantees. On this last point, Mallarmé is quite clear: the confrontation with Nothing (*le Néant*) does not simply lead to a desperate search for some substitute to fill in the void after guarantees of meaning and order formerly taken for granted; rather, we – and the poet in particular – must seize the opportunity, against the backdrop of nothingness, lucidly to comprehend how the rituals and ceremonies of old, in spite of their now-evident falsity, *did* manage to assemble a community and create that order and that meaning which in modernity have allegedly gone missing. In an informative essay aptly titled “The Same,” Mallarmé encourages his contemporaries to “go into the church along with art: and if – one never knows! – the sparkling of old songs consumed the shadow and lit up a divination long veiled, there might suddenly be lucidity about the joy to be instated” (2007, 249). He goes on:

When the old religious vice, so glorious, which was to divert toward the incomprehensible sentiments that were natural, in order to give them a solemn grandeur, is diluted in the waves of the obvious and the plain-to-see, it will nevertheless remain true, that devotion to one’s country, for example, if it is to find its backing elsewhere than on the battlefield, needs a religion, is of the order of piety.

Finally, he concludes: “it was impossible for the race not to bury in religion, even if since abandoned, its intimate, unknowable secret. The hour has come, with the necessary detachment, to start digging, in order to exhume ancient and magnificent intentions.” (251)

It is easy to dismiss such statements as deriving from a burgeoning nationalism and an after all rather common idea of the 19th century, the elaboration of a new mythology or a religion of art. However, while the old religion was “glorious” it was also a “vice.” Christianity, for all its metaphors of illumination, is nonetheless a religion of obscurity in so far as it confuses means and ends due to an attachment which has clouded, since the founding of the church, its true

“ancient and magnificent intentions.” Mallarmé does not call for piety but holds piety to be a desirable outcome of a lucid and detached exhumation of religion’s secret. The mistake would be to believe that between old and new forms of enchantment a radical break has taken place, or that the wonder which poetry produces is henceforth limited to whatever in it might survive the conviction of nothingness, first now harmlessly enjoyable in “detachment.” For Mallarmé, nothing in religion *per se* is of interest: it only fascinates him to the extent that its workings cannot be completely dissociated from those of lyric poetry properly understood. For as he asserts in “Magic,” a no less tellingly titled essay, “between the old procedures and the magic spell that poetry will always be, a secret parity exists” (264). The poet is a “literary sorcerer” –

Verse is incantation! And one cannot deny the similarity between the circle perpetually opening and closing with rhymes and the circles in the grass left by a fairy or a magician. [...] Nothing that once emanated, for illiterates, from this human artifice, summed up in the book or floating imprudently outside it at the risk of volatilizing anything similar, wants to disappear today, at all: but will regain the pages, which are, par excellence, suggestive, and full of charm. (264-265)

For anyone accustomed to a view of Mallarmé as the poet of hermeticism, emptiness, and disenchantment, the optimism of this passage is striking. From the wonders of the magicians of old *nothing* will disappear after the encounter with Nothing. The “human artifice” of ancient rituals is threatened not even by the transition from oral to print culture and, by extension, not by the new media of Mallarmé’s own time. We seem to find ourselves a far way from the “Crise de vers,” yet the two texts stem from roughly the same period and were both published in the 1897 collection of prose poems, essays, and observations *Divagations*.

It is important to note that although Mallarmé firmly believes that the possibility of whatever really took place in terms of enchantment will be preserved, the particular poetic device which exemplifies “the magic spell that poetry will always be” is not arbitrary but, after all, the guarantee of a certain continuity as well as of a certain exceptionality. Rhyme is intrinsic to that meter which has guaranteed the popular intelligibility of French verse: the alexandrine, the

modern “hexameter” (203).⁶² It is to a large degree this form which gives French poetry that “assuredness” Kommerell found to be lacking in the German tradition. And indeed, Mallarmé concurs with the later critic’s observations, albeit, of course, evaluating them differently. Mallarmé begins with (self-)flattery his later famous lecture delivered at Cambridge’s Pembroke College in 1892:

Until now and for a long time, two nations, England and France, the only ones, have evinced a parallel superstition of Literature. One passing the torch with magnanimity to the other, or taking it back and shedding light on their mutual influence; but – and this is the object of my talk – not so much this alternative (which somewhat explains my presence before you, even speaking my language), than, first of all, the special aims of a certain continuity in masterpieces. In no way can genius not be exceptional, with the height of an anomalous crown sticking up above the angle; yet it only projects, as elsewhere, vague or abandoned spaces in order to entertain, on the contrary, an order and almost an admirable ability to gather together lesser structures – chapels, colonnades, fountains, statues – and produce, all together, some uninterrupted palace, open to the royalty of everyone, out of which arises a taste for homelands: which, in this double case, hesitates, in its delight, before a rivalry of comparable and sublime architectures. (182-183)

Here, Germany, for all its geniuses, is shuffled aside along with other “vague or abandoned spaces” incapable of constructing that unifying structure called Literature, “out of which arises a taste for homelands.” The extent to which the crisis of verse is a crisis of *nationhood* becomes all the more apparent across the Channel. If it may appear in Hölderlin as though free rhythms were the only vehicle fit for giving shape to the perceived national crisis in which results the violent clash with the foreign, it becomes clear with Mallarmé that, at least as far as French poetry is concerned, free verse may very well *be* this crisis. And the lack of preparation in the form of an adaptation of ancient meters, unsuitable to the relatively accentually insensitive French tongue, makes it all the more severe. For Mallarmé, “the mysterious law of Rhyme” is what constitutes in principle “the superiority of modern verse over ancient verse, which forms a whole but doesn’t rhyme; it fills up, once and for all, the metal used to make it, instead of taking

⁶² “rhyme [...] is one with the alexandrine, which, in its poses and the multiplicity of its play, seems devoured by its rhyme as if that sparkling cause of delight triumphed from the very first syllable; before the sudden wing beat that carries you off” (166)

it, rejecting it, becoming it, proceeding musically, taking a stand, making a Diptych” (167). Without rhyme, the moderns may very well be inferior to the ancients and (hence) France to Germany.

There is no reason here to overplay the latent rivalry with Germany, the fragmentary tradition of which deserves Mallarmé’s mention only in a later added note. Indeed, Mallarmé appears more or less unaware of the German heritage of free rhythms.⁶³ What is striking, however, is how the French poet not simply affirms the superiority of his own national literature but admits that the stability of its tradition opens it to a particular kind of vulnerability. If Kommerell is able to make a strength out of a weakness (lack of metric stability forces poets to articulate rhythmically their individual relationship to the world, including the divine, from the ground up), Mallarmé hesitantly grants that the very stability of French verse threatens it from within, as it were, with utter exhaustion. On the one hand, he says to the Brits: “no gap in literary succession should ever be allowed to exist in your country or in mine, even in discord” (190). Yet the *succession* of *poetry*, is predicated on an *interruption* of *meter*. The traditional – or, with Mallarmé, “official” – verse is “overused” and

Literature, despite the need [...] to perpetuate it in every age, represents something singular. French meter, especially, which is delicate, would be used intermittently; now, thanks to its period of stammering rest, the eternal verse can rise again, with perfect intonation, fluid, restored with perhaps supreme complements. (184)

“Grant that French poetry, because of the primacy accorded to rhyme, in its evolution up to us, is intermittent: it shines a while, exhausts its inspiration, and waits.” (202) One has played too frequently on the organ of the official meter (1998, II, 697) and “it would not be disadvantageous for it to rest a bit” (699). At the same time, Mallarmé does maintain that “the alexandrine can

⁶³ “What is remarkable is that, for the first time in the literary history of any people, concurrently with the grand general and historic organs, where, according to a latent scale, orthodoxy exults, anyone with his individual game and ear can compose an instrument, as soon as he breathes, touches, or taps scientifically; he can play it on the side and also dedicate it to the Language.” (204) One could perhaps argue that in German poetry of the century preceding Mallarmé’s remarks, orthodoxy did not exult.

arrive at an infinite variety, follow all the possible movements of passion" (699). He will never give up on the official verse for the simple reason that the metric-rhythmic difference, the precondition for poetic thought and enchantment, can in the French tradition never be as rich in free verse as articulated within classical forms. In other words, the appearance of metric structures in apparently free forms will ultimately not allow for as many perceivable variables as that offered by a relatively liberated but nevertheless intact alexandrine. It is not the case, as Quentin Meillassoux has remarked in an equally brilliant and contestable study of *Un Coup de dés* to which I will have reason to return, that Mallarmé, in creating a metric schema unique to that poem, achieves something in principle more singular than all poems in free verse, because the latter would have at least their absence of rules in common (46-47). Maintaining, crucially, that "it's best to be ignorant only intentionally" (2007, 186), Mallarmé acknowledges that free verse is "a seductive game [...] played with recognizable fragments of classic verse, to be eluded or to be discovered, rather than involving a sudden discovery, totally new" (206). Yet the poet, fully aware of the metricity of free verse, does see greater possibilities in a relatively liberated meter. Along with bold enjambments, laxer rules for the placement of the caesura and the grouping of syllables, one agent of this relative liberation of meter is the voluntary pronunciation of the *e muet* (or *e caduc*) occurring between consonants inside a line of verse. As Meillassoux puts it with reference to perhaps the most prominent *vers-librist*:

For [Gustave] Kahn, regularity and rhyme remain possibilities of free verse, which contain them as one of its many variants: The new form is thus, according to him, in a position of universality vis-à-vis metrical verse, which is but a particular and sedimented expression of it. Mallarmé suggests, on the contrary, that it is fixed meter that, once affected with the uncertainty of the silent *e*, finds itself in the position of a general form containing its opposite as one of its possibilities. (182-183)

What is of interest here is not the logical priority of strictly metric verse or free verse, an opposition in which Mallarmé hardly believed. Free verse can be "whatever one wants, so long

as a pleasure repeats in it” (204).⁶⁴ In other words, what is indispensable in meter is the fulfillment of an anticipation of repetition; without it, free verse would not be worthy of its name. But what is crucial here is Mallarmé’s ultimate privileging of a metric-rhythmic difference within metrically unambiguous poetry rather than the appearance of metricity within free verse. Here Mallarmé chooses a strategy diametrically opposed to that of Hölderlin, thereby rendering the two comparable, and it is not difficult to see what in each case guides the poet’s decision. The question that I would like to pose is whether to these two different strategies adopted in the face of the possibility of rhythmic nihilism corresponds two different forms of lyric enchantment and, if so, whether these are two discrete and mutually exclusive poetological options or rather an opposition to be overcome.

Hölderlin of course also began his work on rhythm within metrical forms. In relevant ways, the elegiac distich was for Hölderlin what the alexandrine was for the poets who later began tampering with verse in French. As Previšić has shown in great detail, Hölderlin’s path toward free rhythms consisted of a gradual decomposition of predominantly Greek – but also modern – meters.⁶⁵ The freedoms that Hölderlin grants himself in his elegiac writing form, according to Previšić, a precondition for the later attempts in free rhythms. Much as the occurrence of *e muet* in the alexandrine would allow for alternative syllabic counts and thereby alternative rhythms, both metrical and non-metrical, Hölderlin loosens up the elegiac measure by sanctioning several different rhythmic interpretations of the same verse and by simply ignoring the sharp caesura in the pentameter, creating an uninterrupted undulation that curiously violates the classical form by smoothening it rather than breaking it up. In addition, so Previšić argues, it is possible to isolate Aeolic units that indicate the metric syncretism that was soon to flourish. Previšić invokes Heidegger’s notion of *das Sichsparende* to describe the self-containment and self-preservation of an elegy – specifically *Heimkunft* – in which all the

⁶⁴ “[...] ce qu’on veut, à l’infini, pourvu q’un plaisir s’y réitère” (1998, II, 207)

⁶⁵ See the chapter “Metrische Flexibilität in der Elegie” in *Hölderlins Rhythmus*. See also Anita-Mathilde Schrupf, *Sprechzeiten. Rhythmus und Takt in Hölderlins Elegien*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011.

necessary prerequisites of free rhythms are at hand but as it were veiled by the metrical form: “Thus on the metric-rhythmic level song in free rhythms can take shape already within the elegiac distich.” (72n28) On this point, however, Previšić is ambiguous, and for good reasons. He writes that in Hölderlin’s late elegies “a full resonance [*Volltönigkeit*] spreads itself, *as though* the song *took place* [my emphases]. A strong tendency toward free verse can hence be discerned. At the same time it becomes possible to explain why Hölderlin nevertheless does not abandon the form of the elegy. The metric corset lends the poem the possibility of speaking of that which it is not: song.” (75) Here it is clear that if *Gesang*, however it might look (and above all: sound), in Hölderlin’s “terminology” stands for an always yet to be realized poetic ideal, it certainly does not abolish meter, or at least not metricity; however, the metric-rhythmic difference decidedly does not take place *within* meter, or at least not within any *given* meter.

An essential distinction between Europe’s two most profound crises of verse hence emerges. In order to understand what necessitates this difference, one must bring to mind that on which Hölderlin’s poetics of extra-metric metric-rhythmic difference relies. As became evident, it is essentially twofold: On the one hand, Hölderlin’s perfects the enchantment that Klopstock called *das Wortlose*, a rhythmic movement and generation of affect and meaning that not only exceeds but precedes what can be conveyed semantically. On the other hand, Hölderlin elaborates what we with Menninghaus can call an allegorical application of meter, tapping into a network of forms and genres that stretches back at least as far as to Sappho and Alcaeus, and which constitutes a virtually infinite field of meaning. It is easy to see why neither of these options presented itself to Mallarmé. The range of readily recognizable meters and metric units available to a 19th century French poet was so severely limited that their allegorical uses quickly would be exhausted. And even if a system of accentuation were to be imposed artificially on French verse,⁶⁶ the implementation of foreign meters would hardly be, as Hölderlin demands,

⁶⁶ For a convincing refutation of the accentual theory of French verse, see Benoît de Cornulier, *Theorie de Vers. Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé*. Paris: Seuil, 1982.

Fühlbar, palpable. Even in the Germany of the previous century the feasibility of such a venture was under hot debate, and if Klopstock described *das Wortlose* as capable of acting immediately on the reader, this alleged immediacy was nonetheless contingent upon a considerable amount of learning and training, as is evinced not least by Klopstock's own reading instructions and many programmatic poetological essays.

In his way, Mallarmé does consider these options but rejects anything like an absolute rhythm. He understands "that a seductive game is being played with recognizable fragments of classic verse." But, he writes, "from this liberation, to hope for something else, or to believe, seriously, that every individual possesses a new prosody in his very breath – and also, of course, some new spelling – is a joke, or inspires the platforms of many prefaces" (2007, 206). For Mallarmé it is crucial that poetry furnishes a form of enchantment that is unique to it, and this must be drawn from the very fact of verse:

Any poem composed for a reason other than to obey the ancient genius of verse, is not a poem... You [...] might once, and that's even every day's occupation, have had an idea of the concept to treat, but undeniably in order to forget it in its ordinary sense, and to give yourself wholly to the dialectic of Verse. As a jealous rival, to whom the dreamer yields mastery, it resuscitates, to the degree that it, glorious and philosophical and imaginative, revives a celestial vision of humanity! Without it, there is just beautiful discourse out of some mouth. (166)

The dissociation of poetry from mere "beautiful discourse out of some mouth" is telling. Mallarmé does insist on something like "the wordless" in poetry, if that is understood as a form of thinking that takes place both *beyond* and *before* the constitution of semantic meaning, in other words a thinking that does not merely accentuate or contradict the discursive content of the poem. But Klopstock's beautiful notion that "the wordless draws around in a good the poem as do in Homer's battles the gods, visible only to a few," seems not to be applicable, because in Mallarmé it is not primarily rhythm that thinks but subtle euphonic correspondences. In general terms, Mallarmé's poetry is simply not one of movement. Meillassoux makes this decisive

observation:

'Fixing the infinite' is indeed the fundamental programme of Mallarméan poetics, a programme that renders it a stranger to those notions, so valorized by modernity, of 'becoming' and 'dynamism'. For Mallarmé, a poem is a pure crystal that allows to transpire an evanescent flickering. Nothing really evolves in this poet's work, at least in his mature poems: Nothing takes the time to grow, nothing develops continuously. Nothing decays either, moreover; nothing truly perishes. (140)

In his essay on Klopstock's poetics, whose lasting influence on the German tradition of lyric enchantment extends well into Mallarmé's century, Menninghaus describes the poet as drawing on a "thirst for movement" originating among the understimulated upper classes in 18th century England and France (309-10). Movement in all forms becomes an antidote to melancholia. Although Mallarmé no doubt belongs among the preeminent poets of ennui, as a product of bustling 19th century Paris his malaise, like Nerval's or Baudelaire's, emerges historically as the effect of a surplus rather than a deficiency of movement. Enchantment as acceleration is out of the question, not because movement is not enchanting, but because its enchantment is now of a lower kind: it has become the cheap enchantment of progress and spectacle, of fashion and newspapers (with which Mallarmé, as is well-known, had a complex and interesting relationship). The poet may be a mystagogue but not a demagogue – he is not an agitator. Equally mistaken would be to read Mallarmé's scintillating structures as pointing to some beyond in which all movement has been cancelled, aligning enchantment with inertia. As sacred a role as Mallarmé ascribes to rhyme, and to end rhymes in particular, his poetry has nothing to do with the messianic promise that Agamben identifies with this poetic device.⁶⁷ Rather, incessant, chaotic, essentially vacuous movement forms as it were the background to Mallarmé's poetry, it is the given. What is enchanting, however, is the creation of a maximum of order within an apparent maximum of disorder. Here, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, stanzaic patterns as well as syllable

⁶⁷ It may, however, be justified and meaningful to speak with relation to Mallarmé of what Jacques Derrida calls a "messianism without religion" or "a messianic without messianism," that is to say simply the openness toward an undecidable, in other words contingent, future (2006, 74).

and word count are all indispensable tools. A self-contained surface structure is immediately recognizable in all of Mallarmé's published poetry; even the most syntactically confusing lyrics are frozen: they do not move, but we are invited to move within them. One does not have to subscribe to Meillassoux's philosophical project nor to his reading of *Un coup de dés* at large in order to grant him that for Mallarmé it is indeed a matter of "fixing" rather than of moving, and precisely of fixing infinity, insofar as infinity is construed as contingency, that is as the ultimate disorder of the world.⁶⁸

From the historical context, too, one can easily understand Mallarmé's preference for closed forms. Nevertheless, the alexandrine is exhausted and must be allowed a rest. To this problem of the simultaneous necessity and exhaustion of official verse, Mallarmé presents several solutions, the first of which is a bifurcation. "This is where we are now: the separation," he establishes in his talk at Cambridge. "Very strict, numerical, and direct, with the play of its two parts, the former meter subsists, alongside experimentation." (2007, 183) To avoid the unproductive schism between the *Parnassiens* and the *vers-librists*, he proposes different roles for free and closed forms: "the two efforts can complement each other" (II, 699). Exactly what functions are to be assigned the different types of writing is unclear. "The official verse ought only to serve in moments of crisis of the soul" (698), Mallarmé remarks in one interview, "we cannot sing all of the time" in another. "The occasions are rare which call for the whole scope of language [*toute l'ampleur du Verbe*], all the glow of speech [*parole*], the whole symphony of words. It is because they were ignorant of this that the *Parnassiens* now witness the diminishment of their work." (711) Here, again, it is the alexandrine that stands for "the whole scope" and "all the glow" whereas free verse consists of particular forms for individual expression.

⁶⁸ On this point see, most recently, Joshua Landy's reading of Mallarmé's "Sonnet en yx"/"Sonnet allégorique de lui-même" in *How to Do Things with Fictions*, especially 83-84.

[O]n grand occasions, poets will obey the solemn tradition, of which the preponderance comes from the classic genius: it's just that, when there's no reason, because of a sentimental breeze or for a story, to disturb those venerable echoes, a poet will think carefully before doing so. Each soul is a melody that needs to be renewed; and for that, each becomes his own flute or viola. (2007, 205)

"The official verse should stay, because it is born of the soul of the people." (II, 711) It is well known that Mallarmé was deeply concerned with the possibility of a "popular cult" (2007, 195) allowing for "the Crowd" (251) to assemble and celebrate in ceremonies or masses "Divinity, which is never anything but Oneself" (244). Mallarmé's own directions for such a procession are to be found in his notes toward the "Book." Here, the alexandrine plays no role as such, although it has been argued, most recently by Meillassoux, that the recurring number 24 must be seen as symbolic of the twenty-four syllables of the alexandrine (12). In an episode of "crisis of the soul" Mallarmé, attempting to do poetic justice to the death of his son Anatole, questions whether *any* verse will do the job:

à A.
Hymen père et fils –
peut-être en vers (I, 519)

to A.
Hymen father and son –
perhaps in verse (2003, 11)

Or perhaps the poet is only asserting that the only union that could possibly take place between father and son would have to be forged in poetry. At the same time, however, even this most intimate moment of grief must be somehow consecrated publicly:

sous entendre peut-être la cérémonie – pompes funèbres etc. – bref ce qu'a vu le monde – (enterrement messe? pour ramener cela à l'intimité – la chambre – vide – absence – ouverte – le moment où son absence finit, pour qu'il soit en nous – (I, 538)

perhaps imply the ceremony – funeral etc. – in short what the world saw – (burial mass? to bring it all back to intimacy – the room – empty – absence – open – the moment when

his absence ends, so he can be in us – (2003, 61)

The re-functionalization of meter that Mallarmé proposes (official verse: grand occasions; free verse: individualized expression) does not appear to have much purchase on his own writing. Mallarmé's "Book," like so many other 19th century projects aimed at founding poetically a new religion that would preserve the unifying, exulting aspect of Christianity (here more specifically Catholicism) while dispensing with its doctrines of divine intervention and eternal life, necessarily fails. Meillassoux suggests in *Le Nombre et la sirène*, his "decipherment" of *Un Coup de dés*, that this most ambitious of Mallarmé's completed works succeeds where the abandoned project does not: in bringing about a "diffusion" of the divine, a type of enchantment produced in and by meter insofar as it relies on a count, not of syllables as in classical French verse, but of words. In (perhaps) introducing into his poem a numerical code that even when (by chance) deciphered contains within itself a moment of uncertainty – is there a code or not, has chance been fixed or not? – Mallarmé submits himself to a kind of passion in which "immortality is at stake" (will the code be decrypted and if so will it confirm for the reader the author's genius or provoke embarrassment at what may appear a mere juvenile game?). A presence of the divine, which Meillassoux identifies with chance itself, is thus diffused mentally in the community of (hesitant, doubtful) readers.

Meillassoux holds that the beauty of this gesture is that it can only take place once, like the Passion of Christ, lest it become a farce. The philosopher's notion that the word count of *Un Coup de dés* constitutes a meter with only one instance is problematic insofar as repeatability is intrinsic to metricity. Yet the idea that *Un Coup de dés*, ostensibly *the* poem to liberate French lyric writing from the straightjacket of verse, is metrical is instructive, because it speaks to the strategy for lyric enchantment that Mallarmé employs more generally, not only in the singular construct that is *Un Coup de dés*. The instability in "the code" that Meillassoux highlights – which ultimately comes down to counting *peut-être* as one or two words – would then

correspond to an intra-metric metric-rhythmic difference. This is important because it indicates that for Mallarmé enchantment means not simply to construct and artificially impose order on the mess that is our world but *to create poetically an order that would master disorder while nevertheless not denying the latter, allowing it instead to emerge as such within the poem, that is within order*. Mallarmé of course emphasized that in a successful poem nothing is left to chance. But it is not quite right to say as Joshua Landy does that “the poem forms a magic circle from which all contingency is banished” (85). It is true that nothing in a good poem is not deliberate, but that does not mean that there is no room whatsoever for deliberate contingency. The poem’s fight against chance does not amount in each case to its abolishment and especially not to its denial. If poetry mendaciously constructs order where there is none, if the author defeats chance word by word (II, 234), this must be achieved by the reader too, and precisely in the face of the irreducible, yet manageable, fact of contingency. If one accepts Meillassoux’s assertion that chance – one might as well speak of *le Néant* – is “the God of the moderns” (121), then “Divinity, which is never anything but Oneself,” necessarily articulates itself in relation to this god and not in a space where it has been abolished by principle. If poetry were just a matter of imposing order midst chaos, it would not be essentially different from all other human activities that fight entropy. Manmade order is only divine in relation to contingency, containing it as a possibility. In the world, disorder is the rule, and the poem appears as an exception. In the poem, order is the rule, but chance is present if not in the making then in the reading.⁶⁹ The “method” of Mallarméan poetics is to create an order so overdetermined so as to allow for variance and possible disorder to emerge within it without in fact endangering it. As *Un Coup de dés* has it, manmade order sanctifies chance, but the reverse holds true as well: man, the “Self”, becomes divine only under constant threat of chaos, *le Néant*.

This distinction becomes truly significant only once one considers the chief competing

⁶⁹ Mallarmé’s sanctioning of the voluntary pronunciation of *e muet* is perhaps the clearest metrical example (I, 818).

model of aesthetic enchantment available at the time of Mallarmé's writing: that of Richard Wagner's *Musikdramen*. The French poet's ambivalent relationship to the German composer, moving between admiration, rivalry, resignation, and triumph, has been studied thoroughly.⁷⁰ That the Wagnerian threat is perceived as quite real is made evident in Mallarmé's "Hommage" to Wagner, in which he is hailed as no less than a god. Mallarmé's principal critique of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is, as has often been noted, that its enchantment after all relies on representation, and, moreover, representation of a particular myth to a particular people.

The public, with a piety that belongs to former times, first Hellenic, now German, considers the representation of origins. It sits calmly, with an odd kind of happiness, fresh and barbarous: the subtlety of the orchestration ripples the veil, and decorates the magnificence of the origin. (2007, 111)

A grave, justified, and, one must say, later commonplace contention. What Mallarmé calls for instead of mediocre Wagnerian mythopoesis is "a mystery, something other than representative, and, I dare say, Greek" (246), modeled on the eucharist rather than on tragedy. According to Meillassoux, *Un Coup de dés* accomplishes precisely this by incorporating the god that is chance and "diffusing" it among its readers. However, there is plenty of evidence that although representation of arbitrary but politically charged mythic material is the accusation that Mallarmé levels against Wagner, there is something else which for the poet is equally if not more troubling. As he notes, Wagner's "orchestral scores, when compared with those of Beethoven or Bach, [are not] simply music" (169). It is this fundamental insight which allows one to understand the extraordinary attraction that Wagner held. But if not music, what is to arise out of Wagner's scores? According to Friedrich Kittler, not primarily an art at all but rather a *medium*: "Arts only maintain symbolic relations to the senses, which they take for granted. Media, on the other hand, have in the Real itself a connection with the materiality with which they work. [...] Reflection and imagination, education and literacy, all those psychic capacities that classical-romantic poetry

⁷⁰ See especially Lacoue-Labarthe 1991, 91-160.

had to presume in order even to reach people, were at once obsolete.” (160-161) Wagner was the first composer to work with the entire acoustic field and its physiological effects in the audience members as such, bypassing the symbolic realm which is that of poetry and not least that of symbolism. “Wagner’s new medium, sound, explodes six hundred years of literacy and literature.” (171) That Wagner’s orchestra merely “decorates the magnificence of the origin” is hardly written in good faith. Rather, Wagner’s “sound” encompasses the entire field of the audible: “Wind and breath, sound of nature and voices of humans, [are] indistinguishable.” (172) This by no means precludes representation but what above all is directly represented, in the terms of Wagner’s home-cooked Schopenhauerian Buddhism, is the Will (*der Wille*).

Kittler does well to maintain the novelty of Wagnerian enchantment. However, it is no less true that Wagner only perfected technically within his new-found medium an ambition that has its forerunner in the German lyric tradition. Kittler mentions Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Bettina Brentano, but is there not also a curious affinity between Wagner’s *Weltatem* and Klopstock’s *Wortlose*, the rhythm of which, like Wagner’s sound, is to act on the reader/listener prior to any reflective processing of the symbolic operators that are words? In fact one can speak of a German tradition of lyric enchantment that posits an extra-metric metric-rhythmic difference against the French tradition’s intra-metric metric-rhythmic difference. In Hölderlin’s late songs, a more or less autonomous rhythm is interrupted by metric patterns that set up networks of meaning within a movement that precedes them. But just as the recitation of Klopstock’s odes must be learned and rehearsed, Hölderlin’s allegorical metrics is for initiates and not for the crowd. A large part of Wagner’s genius, which Mallarmé recognizes but addresses only obliquely, is to invent a world of sound ordered according to no classical forms yet within which emerges, thanks to the leitmotif technique, meaningful referential structures that require no prior knowledge, only a sense for melody and rhythm. The closest to such an intuitively acquired receptivity that Mallarmé can come is the French ear’s sensitivity to the subtle modulations of the alexandrine. If the alexandrine is the French hexameter and must be

preserved, it is because “it is born of the soul of the people,” in opposition to Wagner’s imposed shapelessness and his mendacious representations of origins.

Mallarmé’s official response to the threat against verse is to repurpose it, assigning different functions to free and closed forms. *Un Coup de dés*, in at the same time expressing, in Kommerell’s words, “the poet’s individual relationship to the divine” and allowing for at least the possibility of universal metrical intelligibility, apparently collapses or fuses the respective functions of traditional and free verse, which Mallarmé does not apply rigorously to his own writing. Yet if it effects a diffusion of the divine (Meillassoux) it is hardly for the crowd. The wish for a national community based partly on meter is not realized by but rather conflicts, no less in Mallarmé’s case than in Hölderlin’s, with the enormous ambitions of poetry, navigating between exhausted meters and esoteric if not private doctrines.

What remains are nevertheless two strategies of metric-rhythmic enchantment: one effected by an ordering that indeed, we can say with Landy, “trains” the reader to manage, control, and at the same time accept disorder (86); another corresponding to a sensitivity to the rhythmic movement of language allowing for a kind of thinking that is not independent from discursive thought but also not reducible to it.⁷¹

If the French canon exhibits a proclivity for the former, articulated through intra-metric metric-rhythmic differences, whereas a German tradition of free rhythms beginning with Klopstock employs extra-metric metric-rhythmic differences to produce enchantment as “wordless” movement, any notion of specifically national forms of metric-rhythmic enchantment is instructively collapsed in a cosmopolitan, bilingual latecomer like Rilke, who was not only equally at home in the language of French symbolism and in the strictest of forms as he was in

⁷¹ Lacoue-Labarthe understands the impossible project of the “Book” as the attempt to surpass in poetic performance the power of music, and especially its rhythm: “l’idée rythmique du Livre est la condition même de son ‘fonctionnement’ archi-théâtral. Parce qu’en réalité le rythme est une archi-musique” (151).

free rhythms influenced by Klopstock and Hölderlin,⁷² but in his final creative phase also wrote French and German poems on the same theme side by side in so-called *Doppeldichtungen* and cultivated a formal syncretism that could allow simultaneously for accentuated Greek elegiac pentameter and a playful rhyme scheme that gives equal weight to caesurae and line breaks.

Götter schreiten vielleicht immer im gleichen Gewähren
wo unser Himmel beginnt;
Wie in Gedanken erreicht unsere schwereren Ähren
sanft sie wendend, ihr Wind.

Wer sie zu fühlen vergaß, leistet nicht ganz die Verzichtung
dennoch haben sie teil.
Schweigsam, einfach und heil legt sich an seine Errichtung
plötzlich ihr anderes Maß. (II, 318)

Gods, for all we can tell, stride as richly bestowing
now as in former years;
gently their wind as well reaches our harvests, blowing
over more loaded ears.

Quite to forget it will quite to elude the relation:
they will perform their share.
Suddenly, silently there, prizing your proudest creation,
ponders their different scale [*Maß*]. (1960, II, 347)

These lines, written in 1924, when the majority of Rilke's output was Francophone, joins the "magic of rhyme" with the "wordless" movement of Greco-German rhythms,⁷³ and simultaneously thematizes the precarious relationship between prosody and enchantment. The

⁷² For a discussion of Rilke's relationship to Mallarmé and to symbolism in general, see Beda Allemann, "Rilke und Mallarmé. Entwicklung einer Grundfrage der symbolistischen Poetik" in *Rilke in neuer Sicht*. Ed. Käte Hamburger. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1971, 63-82. Nägele's analysis of Rilke's "An Hölderlin," which fruitfully investigates the relationship between the two poets, can be found in *Interpretationen. Gedichte von Rainer Maria Rilke*. Ed. Wolfgang Groddeck. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999. Rilke's use of free rhythms in the *Duino Elegies* was perhaps first analyzed by Hermann Weigand. Werner Schröder has attempted a complete metric-rhythmic description of them in *Der Versbau der Duineser Elegien. Versuch einer metrischen Beschreibung*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1992.

⁷³ Something which also happens in ten of *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, as Weigand points out (50). Hegel is skeptical of such experiments, which from his point of view must seem embarrassingly regressive. "For the two systems rest on opposite principles, and the attempt to unite them in the way indicated could only conjoin them in this very opposition itself; and this would produce nothing but an unresolved and therefore inadmissible contradiction. Thus viewed, the use of rhyme [combined with rhythm] is to be allowed only where the principle of classical versification is to prevail solely in more remote echoes and with the essential transformations necessitated by the system of rhyme." (II, 1034) Whether in Rilke we are dealing with a "remote echo" or something more is up to each reader to decide.

divine appears in the plural but in no determinate shape (*Götter* rather than *die Götter*) and their “guarantees” (*Gewähren*) are independent of time and place. We perceive their traces “[a]s though in thoughts,” that is in prosodic as opposed to merely discursive thinking, and are “turned,” like at the end of a line, by their invisible presence. Hölderlin’s notion of *Fühlen*, that capacity of mortals on which gods depend and which is a prerequisite for poetic enchantment, returns, and promises in its very forgetting the sudden arrival of another meter or measure (or, in Leishman’s translation, “scale”). In the two stanzas of this brief poem, written according to a singular but strict metric design, the distinction between intra- and extra-metric rhythmic-metric difference is dissolved: the lyric is composed according to no extant metric scheme but in it elements from earlier forms are nonetheless present and indeed felt (if not recognized) by anyone with a rudimentary proficiency in the German language; at the same time, the second stanza, no less meticulously constructed than the first, almost surreptitiously violates its rhymed structure, each pattern thereby appearing only once.

It is, however, in the wealth of French lyrics written between September 1923 and September 1926 that Rilke’s prosodic infidelity most interestingly unfolds. The imperative behind this body of work, which cannot be reduced to a frivolous experiment, can be explained biographically only in part.⁷⁴ Paul de Man completely misconstrues the significance of the French poems when he writes that they “correspond to the renunciation of the euphonic seduction of language” (55). On the contrary, Rilke begins his French oeuvre composing lyrics more intensely euphonic than anything, with the exception of a few sonnets to Orpheus, since *Das Stundenbuch* – and this in sharp distinction to the German poetry of the same period. (This had perhaps become apparent if de Man had chosen not only to read the German *Gong* [II, 396] but it’s French counterpart [V, 306] as well.) Yet a careful reading of the French lyrics, which, far from constituting a regression to an earlier stage’s mendacious promise of totality through

⁷⁴ The encounter with Paul Valéry clearly played a role, and it is easy to imagine a creative crisis after the completion of the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which Rilke could not hope to surpass. The poet’s illness may also have been a factor: the foreign as escape from the suffering self.

harmony, a poetics ostensibly overcome with the free rhythms of the *Duino Elegies*, does not simply reverse de Man's dichotomy. Although it is clear that Rilke's French poetry is an exploration of the Romance language's specific prosodic possibilities – as manifested in the great emphasis placed on assonance and rhyme and the adoption of (often fragmented) French meters – the at first conspicuous differences between the German and the French Rilke are gradually reduced as a peculiar cross-fertilization takes place, evident not least in de Man's example, the rhythmically (and syllabically and stanzaically) free *Mensonges I-II*.⁷⁵ As thematic – often mythic – material spills over from the French to the German poems, an increased condensation and bold enjambments (*harte Fügung*) conversely interrupt the serenity of the French corpus without reducing its euphonic charms.

Rilke's *Duino Elegies* is Kommerell's final example of what he understands as the uniquely German tradition of free rhythms. That Rilke's "individual relationship to the divine" would continue to "express itself" in a last mythopoetic phase, oscillating between extremes of reduction and expansion, the abstract and the concrete, between French and German, euphony and dissonance, was the cause for much contemporary irritation and has yet to find a worthy

⁷⁵ See chapter three. I quote here only the first stanza, to demonstrate the form to which I refer:

Mensonge, arme d'adolescent
 arrachée à la forge du hasard
 toute brûlante....Poignard,
 sais n'importe comment.
 Clôture bâclée, brusque mur!
 Corps et geste sans tête
 auxquels, éperdument, on prête
 un visage trop pur.
 Plante soudaine et hybride
 qui, poussant dans le vide
 atteint parfois trois mètres de haut,
 et se fane trop tôt
 pour n'avoir connu aucune saison.
 Maison, belle maison,
 trop belle pour nous qui vivons dehors,
 maison qui a tort
 parce q'on ignore...
 Maison trop durable encore
 en face de la mort. (V, 298)

reception.⁷⁶ Rilke's last lyrics amount to nothing less than a *relativization* of the great cycles for which he is remembered,⁷⁷ just as his bilingualism relativizes the specificity of national poetries and the forms with which they are most intimately associated. Rilke's unorthodoxy of rhythm and rhyme does not primarily liberate *from* metric constraints but *to* them. This is accomplished by divesting these constraints from their symbolic status as markers of allegiance (Jarvis): neither rhyme (Agamben) nor euphony in general (de Man) makes a messianic promise, nor can free rhythms be reserved for a uniquely German and at the same time individual relation to the divine. The superimposition of the wordless movement of rhythm, meter as allegory, and rhyme's half-subliminal musical thinking can perhaps be dismissed as an exaggerated, empty display of lyric virtuosity that helplessly continues after all has been said. Like Mallarmé, Rilke works to dissociate the enchantment of rhythm and rhyme from religion and metaphysics. But Rilke's "triumphant lack of fatherland" (*jubelnde Vaterlandslosigkeit*, 1992, 204), his transnational form of poetic enchantment, also effectively interrupts ideologies of meter operative for centuries. It thereby corresponds to a metric emancipation – again an emancipation as much to meter as from it – that an absolute poetry, in distinction to a poetry of the absolute, considers *measured*.

⁷⁶ For an overview of the early reception of Rilke's French poetry, see KA V, 409-415.

⁷⁷ A late example of Rilke's attempts again to mythologize anew is the unnamed poem that starts with the lines "Jetzt wär es Zeit, daß Götter träten aus / bewohnten Dingen..." Here the earlier mythemes are no more than "Bruchstellen unseres Mißlingens" (II, 394).

2. MEASURE

Das Leben ist ein Ding des Übermuts. (II, 132) Thus runs one line from a rarely analyzed rhymed ode in free rhythms that Rilke wrote 1915 and dedicated to the 18th century Swedish poet, composer, and performer Carl Michael Bellman.⁷⁸ “Life is a matter [thing] of –.” The German *Übermut* (like the Swedish *övermod*) is difficult to render accurately in English. “Audacity,” “temerity,” “effrontery,” and “impudence” all narrow down the meaning of what translates literally into an “excess of courage,” which in combination with pride amounts to *hubris*.

What might it mean that life itself is a matter of excessive courage? And why does this notion, at once empty in its generality and emblematic of Rilke’s poetics, appear in a poem addressed to a lyricist whose songs deal not with heroic deeds but above all humorously and empathetically with human fallibility, not shying away from the more sordid sides of existence?

The idea that life should be somehow excessive or demanding of an excess appears to confirm a popular view of Rilke as quintessential poet of exuberance – of sentiments and the sensuous; of superabundant forms, imagery, and euphony; of promised but never realized aesthetic redemption.⁷⁹ Much like Klopstock and Hölderlin, Rilke is, despite his wide appeal, divisive, always aiming for genuine, uncompromising lyricism, and (thereby) always risking kitsch, embarrassment, and humiliation. In his most widely read poems, Rilke cultivates a grand, vatic style in which it by his time ought no longer to be possible to write without losing face. If his linguistic mastery and inventiveness are undeniable, he nevertheless only combines and perfects virtuosically forms on the cusp of becoming obsolete. Inadmissibly indulgent, Rilke is for many a poet of charms, ornaments, and fetishes, seduced by his own talents.

⁷⁸ For a resourceful essay on Rilke’s encounter with Bellman, see George C. Schoolfield, “Rilke, the Rococo, and Bellman.” *Monatshefte*. 47.4-5 (1955): 233-244.

⁷⁹ See Paul de Man: “Rilke’s work dares to affirm and to promise, as few others do, a salvation that would take place in and by means of poetry.” (23)

As I will show in this chapter, however, Rilke is, in spite of the delicate, luxurious sheen of his lyrics and his predilection for quasi-eschatological discourse, more than anything a poet of *moderation*. As such, he makes explicit and performs at a particular historical moment what has always been a central function of the lyric: to act as a pressure chamber for the regulation between enchantment and disenchantment, affirmation and critique, inebriation and sobriety, the sacred and the profane. If this function can be understood as peculiar to the lyric in a transnational and transhistorical sense, this means that the lyric is that genre which, in reflecting upon its own conditions, lets come to light that *there is no measure (Maß)*, or rather that what is to be regarded measured, temperate, or prudent at a given historical moment is for the lyric, because of its capacity and propensity to enchant and embarrass, to articulate. This is neither to affirm nor to deny that the lyric is more measured than any other genre or form, nor to claim that a negotiation of hubris and temperance is at stake in all lyrics. The relationship between lyric meter and measure, for instance, is often intimate but not compulsory. Yet insofar as lyrics aim for enchantment – which is always in surplus or in deficit with poetry correspondingly at risk of either promising too much or wallowing in resignation – the adequate measure of hopes and aspirations, for poets and for their readers, will be at issue.

It is at first glance counterintuitive that a tradition of poetic reflection on measure should culminate in Rilke's lyric lavishness, but it is precisely in nurturing the loftiest of aspirations that he carefully circumscribes what it is up to poetry to promise and provide. The semantics of measure is fruitfully present in Rilke's work from *Das Stundenbuch* to the very last lyrics; however, as with all recurring motifs in his oeuvre, one does best not to look for conceptual consistency but on the contrary to presume that Rilke took poetic interest in the notion because of the manifold ways in which it can operate poetically. The functions of such terms as "overabundance," "overflow," "excess," "towering" (*Überfülle, Überfluß, Übermaß,*

Übersteigung)⁸⁰ are shifting and disallow the construction of a terminology. The prefix *über-* has as many positive as negative connotations, which a quick glance at the *Ode an Bellman* confirms.

Mir töne Bellman, töne. Wann hat so
Schwere des Sommers eine Hand gewogen?
Wie eine Säule ihren Bogen
trägst du die Freude, die doch irgendwo
auch aufruhet, wenn sie unser sein soll; denn,
Bellman, wir sind ja nicht die Schwebenden.
Was wir auch werden, hat Gewicht:
Glück, Überfülle und Verzicht
sind schwer. (II, 132)

Resound for me, Bellman, resound. When has
a hand thus weighed the heaviness of summer?
Like a pillar its arches
you carry joy, which indeed also
rests somewhere, if it is to be ours; for,
Bellman, we are after all not levitating.
Whatever we do has weight.
Happiness, overabundance, and abstinence
are weighty.

Like no other, Bellman has weighed the weight – the “heaviness” – of summer, carrying with equanimity the load of “joy,” “happiness,” “overabundance,” and – “abstinence.” Generally known as a composer of lyrics for light entertainment to be performed in informal settings, Bellman here becomes a “pillar” supporting a burden consisting of both plenitude and abstinence (*Überfülle und Verzicht*), which, however, do not cancel each other out but are given equal weight by the accentuated adjective that concludes the stanza’s short, unrhymed last line.

⁸⁰ The word *Übersteigung*, as it occurs conspicuously in the first line of *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, is often rendered as “transcendence.” See for instance *Ahead of All Parting. The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Random House, 1995, 411 and *The Poetry of Rilke*. Trans. and ed. Edward Snow. New York: North Point Press, 2009, 351. This invites misreading, as “transcendence” carries theological and metaphysical baggage from which the cycle of poems clearly aims to distance itself. Susan Ranford and Marielle Sutherland choose “exceeding,” which, if a bit awkward, appears to me more appropriate. See *Selected Poems*. Trans and ed. Susan Ranford and Marielle Sutherland. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011, 183.

That life is heavier than the heaviness of all things Rilke had stated over a decade earlier in the first *Buch der Bilder* (I, 276), and that happiness presents a greater challenge than unhappiness Hölderlin had remarked gnominically in “Der Rhein.”⁸¹ But if for Hölderlin hubris is consistently correlated with *nefas*, the breach of divine law, the very maintenance of measure may in Rilke’s poetry call for excess. A passage omitted from the final version of Rilke’s *Ode* is helpful.

Die Räume, Bellman, sieh, die Lichter hindern,
daß uns das Übermaß der Nacht entzückt,
nur dieser Kreis von leichten Kindern
ist windlichthell und an-gerückt. (II, 532)

Spaces, Bellman, see, the lights prevent
the excess of night from seducing us,
only this circle of light children
is bright as wind and can ad-vance.

The “excess of night” here presents a temptation to yield to its delightful heaviness, resisted only by the bright- and lightness of children. The capacity to bear the heaviness of life amounts not to a strength but to a form of levity. The excess of courage is demanded by an excess of joy and misery which it alone can serve to moderate.

If the first part of the lyric presents the hardships of happiness, the second half deals conversely in the happiness of hardships:

Da schau, dort hustet einer, doch was tuts,
ist nicht der Husten beinah schön, im Schwunge?
Was kümmert uns die Lunge?
Das Leben ist ein Ding des Übermuts.

Und wenn er stürbe. Sterben ist so echt.
Hat er dem Leben lang am Hals gehangen,
da nimmt ihn erst das Leben ans Geschlecht
und schläft mit ihm. So viele sind vergangen
und haben Recht!

⁸¹ “Denn schwer ist zu tragen / Das Unglück, aber schwerer das Glück.” (I, 347-348)

Zwar ist uns nur Vergehn,
doch im Vergehn ist Abschied uns geboten.
Abschiede feiern: Bellman, stell die Noten
wie Sterne, die im großen Bären stehn.
Wir kommen voller Fülle zu den Toten:
Was haben wir gesehn! (II, 132-133)

Look there, someone coughs, but no matter,
is not the cough almost beautiful, its momentum?
Why be concerned about the lung?
Life is a thing of courage in excess.

And what if he died. Dying is so sincere.
If all his life he was a burden to himself
then at last life grabs him by the crotch
and sleeps with him. So many have passed on
and they are right!

Indeed to us is but decay,
but in decay there is farewell for us.
To celebrate farewells: Bellman, place your notes
like the stars in Ursa Major.
Full of excess we arrive among the dead:
What have we seen!

In a manner not unusual for Rilke, the acknowledgment of the inseparability of living and dying leads to an embarrassingly morbid affirmation of illness and suffering.⁸² The properly lived life that requires an excess of courage is one in which the momentum of a cough “almost” gains a kind of beauty, its repetition marking, like rhyme, an utterly precarious persistence in time.⁸³ Rilke asks us not merely to accept temporal finitude but to “celebrate partings,” comparing music – the most ephemeral of the arts – with the preeminent symbol of order and eternity, the stellar constellation.⁸⁴ That such ceremonies call for courage and lightheartedness is easy to see. *Übermut* is not to be equated with heroic perseverance. It is not so much hubristic as it is

⁸² On this problematic, see chapter five.

⁸³ It is precisely by giving the impression of a suspension of time that rhyme, in *Das Stundenbuch* identified with God (I, 185), underlines its passing. Malte Laurids Brigge: “Wenn man so ein Gedicht langsam hersagte, mit gleichmäßiger Betonung der Endreime, dann war gewissermaßen etwas stabiles da, worauf man sehen konnte, innerlich versteht sich. Ein Glück, daß er alle diese Gedichte wußte.” (V, 557) See also Giorgio Agamben on the crisis that is *The End of the Poem*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999, 109-118.

⁸⁴ For an influential and still useful analysis of the constellation figure in Rilke’s poetry, see Beda Allemann, *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke. Ein Beitrag zur Poetik des Modernen Gedichts*. Pfullingen: Neske, 1961, 70-86. See also chapter three below.

humble; or rather, what Rilke calls *Übermut* marks the site of a transformation where hubris and humility are indistinguishable, where blasphemy becomes pious and piety blasphemous. In the ostentatiously worldly setting of Bellman's bacchic songs these religious terms may seem out of place, just as the revelry and misery they depict are anything but measured. But if life itself is excessive, *ein Ding des Übermuts*, then the measured way of living it may indeed correspond to a hubris become inseparable from a piety divested of any beyond or absolute.

Measure is not for Rilke, as it to a certain degree is for Hölderlin, an abstract concept amenable to philosophical speculation. It is not primarily an *idea* but of interest for poetry only insofar as it can be – and according to Rilke indeed has been – materially and historically embodied. Should Bellman's mixture of raciness and rococo still prove hard to associate with temperance, Rilke's notion of measure is spelled out in a more expected historical context and in a more frequently read lyric. The second *Duino Elegy* ends with the following climactic stanzas:

Erstaunte euch nicht auf attischen Stelen die Vorsicht
menschlicher Geste? war nicht Liebe und Abschied
so leicht auf die Schultern gelegt, als wär es aus anderm
Stoffe gemacht als bei uns? Gedenkt euch der Hände,
wie sie drucklos beruhen, obwohl in den Torsen die Kraft steht.
Diese Beherrschten wußten damit: so weit sind wirs,
dieses ist unser, uns so zu berühren; stärker
stemmen die Götter uns an. Doch dies ist Sache der Götter.

Fänden auch wir ein reines, verhaltenes, schmales
Menschliches, einen unseren Streifen Fruchtlands
zwischen Strom und Gestein. Denn das eigene Herz übersteigt uns
noch immer wie jene. Und wir können ihm nicht mehr
nachschaun in Bilder, die es besänftigen, noch in
göttliche Körper, in denen es größer sich mäßigt. (II, 207)

Weren't you astonished by the caution of human gestures
on Attic gravestones? wasn't love and departure
placed so gently on shoulders that it seemed to be made
of a different substance than in our world? Remember the hands,
how weightlessly they rest, though there is power in the torsos.
These self-mastered figures know: "We can go this far,
this is ours, to touch one another this lightly; the gods
can press down harder upon us. But that is the gods' affair."

If only we too could discover a pure, contained,
human place, our own strip of fruit-bearing soil
between river and rock. For our own heart always exceeds us,
as theirs did. And we can no longer follow it, gazing
into images that soothe it or into the godlike bodies
where, measured more greatly, it achieves a greater repose. (1995, 343)

Here it is not a matter of *Übermut* but of “caution,” “circumspection” (*Vorsicht*).⁸⁵ And nevertheless, while the measure of the Attic steles is certainly different from that of Bellman’s songs, the two are not incommensurate. In the *Ode* to his 18th century colleague, Rilke stresses the weight, the heaviness of joy and resignation alike, a sharp contrast against the ease with which the figures on the ancient monuments carried their “love and parting.” But in the imagination of the poet it is clearly not that in ancient Greece loss and other amorous matters were of any less significance. They had no less weight but were “placed so gently on shoulders.” At the same time, Rilke refuses to make this an issue of mentality (*Geist*) or disposition (*Haltung*). It gradually becomes evident that love and parting not only, like the poem first suggests, “seemed to be made / of a different substance than in our world [my emphasis]” but were so. This is not to say that Rilke is naïvely equating Attic ideals with social reality but that the Greek imaginary was *materially* different. What this means becomes clear in the elegy’s final stanza. If the “heart” is the locus of love and parting, what controls and indeed moderates it is precisely forms of matter: there are “images that soothe” the heart and its passions; and in “godlike bodies” it is “measured more greatly,” or, paradoxically, “more greatly moderated.” Images and divine *bodies* “make” love and parting and carry some of their weight, which without such embodiments would rest entirely on the shoulders of men. That the heart is measured more greatly in the divine means not primarily that it is measured against something greater than itself and thereby tempered: it means that the greatness of the Greeks and their gods are one with their measure, that moderation is what makes them great.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of possible translations of *Vorsicht* with reference to this passage, see David Michael Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life. Reading Hölderlin’s Question of Measure after Heidegger*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005, 2.

This can of course be taken as a rather commonplace philhellenism by no means unique to Rilke or to his particular historical moment. What we are presented with appears a mere rehashing of Johann Joachim Winkelmann's *Edle Einfalt und Stille Größe* ("noble simplicity and calm grandeur") that came to define the tastes of an entire age. The "power" (*Kraft*) of the figures is contained, stored in the torsos without being put to use: a tempered excess embodied but not realized in action. However, Rilke is not strictly speaking a classicist poet. For a classicist, measure is of the essence, but it is not fundamentally *problematic*, not *at stake*, not *questioned*, *interrogated*, *unsettled*, at least not from within. And in Rilke's case it is ultimately a question of the heart, what Hegel identified with a peculiarly Christian interiority but which is here simply a nexus of attachments. The figures on the attic steles are able adequately to measure their bonds to others thanks to the containment afforded by what Rilke calls elsewhere outer, symbolic, or mythic "equivalents," that sensuous and material measure which every period needs. "For our own heart always exceeds us, / as theirs did" – another way of putting that life itself is hubristic, *ein Ding des Übermuts*. "We" share nothing in particular with the Greeks, yet it belongs to the definition of a heart to form attachments and engender affects that it cannot contain: that organ which produces love, joy, and farewells is not enough on its own to manage them and must in Rilke's view therefore transfer some of their weight onto images and divine bodies (or, in Bellman's case, notes). It is only such external manifestations that render the passions bearable, give them a different, lighter, material.

What are these outer equivalents such that they are able to harbor the excesses of the heart, and why do they become a question for the lyric in particular? In Rilke's terms, the aesthetic embodiments of the heart's excesses do not constitute a medium in which it becomes transparent to itself but rather is that in which it faces its own opacity. That the heart transcends itself means that it reflects itself more or less *opaquely* in images and divine bodies, which measure it. This discursively inaccessible yet implicitly acknowledged blind spot, a structural feature of the lyric, is often identified with the divine, that is to say with measure itself, which is

of course constituted materially and only accessible as materially embodied while nevertheless not *being* this material (*Stoff*) or identified with it as a *Maßstab*. Conversely, what the lyric sometimes calls the divine is frequently nothing but its own ineluctable opacity. Behind it lures nothing supernatural but indeed something at the same time *unnatural* and *inhuman*, insofar as it is taken to be neither a product of nature nor an active, that is willful, creation of man. It is what man more or less unknowingly creates but whose effects on him exceed what he (“our own heart”) can intend or predict. Gods and myths may serve as placeholders; media, technology, and “discourse,” as well as poetic meters, prosody, and language itself are, in various less obsolete theoretical edifices, of the same order.

What is called for in Rilke’s elegy, then, is not a different relationship to the principally unknowable but to what, in any given situation, neither falls entirely within the grasp of human agency nor is wholly determined by natural necessity. Not encumbered by such categories, Rilke’s ancients knew – a practical rather than theoretical knowledge – the extent of their own influence, and granted the gods theirs. The Greeks were *beherrscht*, which Stephen Mitchell translates as “self-mastered” but which can mean also simply “mastered,” that is restrained but also controlled by the gods, who, while created materially, quite autonomously “can press down harder upon” their subjects. The ancients, in making pictures and divine bodies, were careful (*vorsichtig*), for they *took care* of love and parting by creating images that ruled over men. They created gods but reserved a place for the human: this is measured.⁸⁶ To be measured is further to be in accordance with, attuned to the gods’ inscrutable wills, and in this manner to establish a relationship to the divine is *enchanting*.⁸⁷ The measure is the divine and the divine is the

⁸⁶ It has often been observed that for Rilke, man can only be circumscribed – only be measured – by that which he is not: god, angel, animal, thing. For instance, Manfred Engel comments: “In seiner Analyse der condition humaine bedient sich Rilke eines Verfahrens, das in anthropologischen Betrachtungen eine lange Tradition hat: Was der Mensch ist, läßt sich am besten mittelbar, durch Bestimmungen des Nicht-Menschlichen sagen.” (KA II, 612-613) The approach could be called a negative anthropology.

⁸⁷ The transformation of Rilke’s notion and praxis of attunement (*Stimmung*) from the early *Stimmungslyrik* to the late, purportedly absolute poetry, has been analyzed with reference to the motif of the window by David Wellbery in “Der Gestimmte Raum. Von der Stimmungslyrik zur absoluten

measure; to hit the right measure is enchantment: “Weren’t you astonished by the caution of human gestures / on Attic gravestones?” (159) Or, more literally: “Did [they] not induce wonder in you?” If this is the case, however, measure is the constitutively unnamable of the lyric, the opacity on which it depends, and for precisely this reason it cannot be found and received, adopted, appropriated, from Attica or elsewhere. Yet as the inhuman third that negotiates between man’s freedom and mute nature, it cannot be willfully created either. This is the paradox of absolute poetry, or at least of absolute *lyric*.

Hegel held that “the lyric alone, in rising towards God, can strike the note of praise of his power and his glory.” He gives no positive account of the lyric features that allow for this but interestingly ascribes the lyric’s capacity to establish relations with the divine to a *lack* of determinacy:

[T]he Divine, explicitly regarded as unity and universality, is essentially only present to thinking and, as in itself imageless, is not susceptible of being imaged and shaped by imagination [...] For visual art, which always requires the most concrete vitality of form, there is therefore no room here [...] (1975, I, 175)

If for Hegel even the lyric is ultimately too individuated, too differentiated to handle “the Divine, explicitly regarded as unity and universality,” lyric as prayer is nonetheless able to “strike the note of praise.” This ability, which Hegel grants the lyric quite apart from any concrete religious context, appears in the earliest recognizable lyrics we possess to emerge from cultic settings of communal worship, whether Greek or Hebraic; and the influence of Alcaic and biblical models when the lyric was first theorized can hardly be overestimated. It is thus tempting to comprehend the lyric’s privileged relationship to the divine as residual, based on traits acquired

Dichtung.” As will become clear, I am somewhat more reserved vis-à-vis the idea of absolute poetry, that is, in Wellbery’s words, of “sich selbst setzender Dichtung” (171), at least as far as the lyric is concerned. For in fact Rilke continues to his very last poems to emphasize the lyric’s positing not just of itself but of something not wholly accessible within lyric discourse but which conditions and measures it. An analysis of the intricate relationship between measure (*Maß*) and attunement (*Stimmung*) exceeds my ambition here; the best places to start are Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht’s and David Wellbery’s respective articles in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe* (III, 846-866; V, 703-733).

for religious functions that no longer can nor need be filled, or else simply to the lyric's formal affinity with prayer or other ceremonious speech. However, the modern lyric takes an active interest in prayer and ritual not because it would be the origin of lyric speech as such but because it allows for the exploration of one particular lyric mode among others.⁸⁸ If the lyric through its constitutive opacity is structurally bound to that which I call the unnatural inhuman third between human freedom and natural necessity, then the specific ways in which the form of prayer approaches its particular configuration of this category, the divine, will ineluctably be of interest to a modern lyric reflecting on its own conditions, means, and purposes. For the divine strictly speaking is only one mode in which the lyric's measure appears. Hence it is misleading to assert of the modern lyric that its gestures of invocation, adoration, and supplication arise out of and thereby can be explained by the forms of prayer.⁸⁹ More accurate is that the modern lyric employs prayer as one of its vehicles, uses it to understand itself and uses itself to understand prayer as a particular way of approaching the inherent opacity of the lyric genre. Lyric poetry's occasional affinity with psalms and ceremonies is more fruitfully thought from the vantage point of the lyric itself, that is its independent features (especially its means of enchanting), than from the perspective of its supporting discourses, of which religion is one. The modern lyric, and not least the modern lyric-as-prayer, clarifies the presence and nature of these lyric phenomena in older, sometimes not explicitly literary forms. In order to understand the lyric, one must therefore construe religion, myth, and metaphysics as its supporting discourses rather than vice versa.

⁸⁸ Roland Greene has proposed to view the lyric as a discourse in tension between ritual and fictional elements "theoretically available in every specimen of lyric" (11). This appears to me a useful distinction, although precisely because of its proximity to my own terminology I do not explicitly draw upon it. My concern is further that, by viewing it as one among many "secular rituals" (7), the lyric is construed as prayer, prophecy, or incantation with some added or subtracted property, whereas I instead try to think such speech on the basis of forms of lyric enchantment that I articulate in their own terms.

⁸⁹ As does Heinz Schlaffer in his nonetheless indispensable *Poesie und Wissen*: "Was Poetiken und Kunsttheorien als letzte Zwecke der jeweiligen Kunstarten ansehen, sind nur Hilfskonstruktionen und Ausdruck der Verlegenheit darüber, daß der ursprünglich sakrale Zweck obsolet geworden ist, die Mittel zu jenem antiquierten Zweck aber virulent geblieben sind." (94) More recently, in *Geistersprache*, he writes: "Es ist leichter zu verstehen, wie und wozu Lyrik erfunden wurde, als zu verstehen, weshalb es sie heute noch gibt [...]" (169) Indeed, the genetic approach is itself only a convenient construction and insufficient for understanding the mechanisms of lyric enchantment.

Ancient prayers thus become a lyric sub-genre rather than the modern lyric a secular prayer. But the modern lyric may of course happily use the form of the prayer to explore its own possibilities. Perhaps the greatest and most widely discussed example of such exploration of lyric-as-prayer is Rilke's *Stunden-Buch*, first published in 1905. Here is ambivalently performed some of the subtlest lyric reversals of measure. The lyric, in assuming the form and substance of prayer, uses it to establish and re-articulate its relationship to that which Rilke, mindful of the arduous work that is the transformation from a poetry of the absolute to an absolute poetry, still refers to as God.

The collection, a favorite among casual readers on spiritual quests, was received for most of the twentieth century alternatingly as expressive of genuinely pious religiosity or as a display of formal poetic virtuosity.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding the conflicts and contradictions that produce the pathos of *Das Stunden-Buch*, this is obviously not a real dichotomy. For Rilke, as indeed in a more generalized sense for the lyric at large, the poetic *is* pious, piety conceived as an appropriate acknowledgment of that third category, a product of neither natural necessity nor human freedom alone, which gives the lyric its measure.⁹¹ However, in an age of sobriety and disenchantment in particular, it is unclear in what this appropriate acknowledgment might consist. Rilke's poetry, however, demonstrates beyond a doubt that it is essentially active, creative, productive, and that the divine measure has to be made and maintained materially. For the monkish speaker of the first part of *Das Stunden-Buch*, it is therefore not hubristic to assert God's dependence on him and to ask anxiously what will happen to his glory in the absence of material support:

⁹⁰ A division noted for instance by Aris Fioretos in "Prayer and Ignorance in Rilke's 'Buch vom Mönchischen Leben.'" *The Germanic Review*. 65.4 (1990): 171-177, 171.

⁹¹ This must *not* be understood in terms of a "transcendental signifier" which would guarantee the ultimate *meaningfulness* of lyric discourse. On the contrary it involves references to the lyric's *thatness* rather than its *whatness*. The lyric poses a problem for the distinction between hermeneutics and discourse analysis insofar as correctly interpreting a lyric involves an account of its gestures towards its own conditions of possibility, which are nevertheless addressed only obliquely.

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?
Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)
Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)
Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,
mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn. (I, 176)

What will you do, God, when I die?
I am your jug (and I will shatter)
I am your drink (and I'll go bad)
I am your clothing and your calling,
you'll lose all reason, losing me. (2009, 27)

On the contrary, hubris would be to assume the indestructibility of a god waiting patiently beyond. Devotion is in the making, in tools and appliances put to use:

Es giebt im Grunde nur Gebete,
so sind die Hände uns geweiht,
daß sie nichts schufen, was nicht flehte;
ob einer malte oder mähte,
schon aus dem Ringen der Geräte
entfaltete sich Frömmigkeit. (I, 180)

There are at bottom only prayers,
thus our hands are consecrated,
so that they make nothing that does not supplicate,
whether painting or reaping;
already from struggling with the instruments
enfolds piety.

The love of God is thus identified with the love of things: "Gieb mir noch eine kleine Zeit: ich will die Dinge so wie keiner lieben" (194). But the divine measure cannot be identified with any one thing. In this the supplicant seems to confirm the Hegelian view that every work of art and every art form ultimately will be too determinate, too particular to grasp the divine conceived as "unity and universality":

Die Dichter haben dich verstreut
(es ging ein Sturm durch alles Stammeln),
ich aber will dich wieder sammeln
in dem Gefäß, das dich erfreut. (I, 189)

The poets have dispersed you
(a storm went through their stuttering),
but I want to recollect you
in the container of your choosing.

Yet this metaphysical claim that equates the inhuman third toward which the lyric gestures with unity and universality, that is the absolute, is plainly at odds with the notion of a material creation of divine measure. The tension here is between a poetry of the absolute, which, following Hegel, will never be sufficient to itself but always long for philosophy as the only discourse of the divine, and an absolute poetry which makes its own measure. However, a (lyric) poetry of the absolute as conceptualized by philosophy is as unthinkable as an absolutely absolute (lyric) poetry that takes as a measure its own activity. In the second part of *Das Stunden-Buch*, Rilke addresses this problematic using the metaphor of father and son, figuring the speaker as father and the opaque addressee as son:

Ich bin zurückgeblieben wie ein Greis,
der seinen großen Sohn nichtmehr versteht
und wenig von den neuen Dingen weiß,
zu welchen seines Samens Wille geht. (205-206)

I am left behind like and old man
who no longer understands his son
and who knows little of the newer things
to which is turned his offspring's will.

The divine third is hence understood as a result of human creative, poetic activity that, having become opaque and autonomous, in turn determines the human. Hubris would be to understand oneself as the inheritor of this work, this measure, rather than as a participating laborer in its creation; piety is to care, like a father, for the material survival of the son that is God.

What matters is not to make palatable some philosophical or even poetological position articulated in this period of Rilke's work but rather to understand what is the object and concern

of the tensions and contradictions which readers of *Das Stunden-Buch* may try in vain to smoothen out. The cycle is instructive because it, beyond its apparent aestheticism that clearly borders on kitsch and fetishism, demonstrates saliently within a highly particularized context (the orthodox religious life of a foreign land and a bygone era) the for the lyric perpetual ambivalence and negotiation between a poetry of absolute measure and an absolute poetry that provides its own measure. In the second part of the collection, *Von der Pilgerschaft*, God is addressed as “the by all measures immeasurable” (*der allen Maßen ungemäße*, 251). The divine is the immeasurable because it is itself the measure. As such the lyric can only be in accord with it, never make it present within its own discourse (which is why, again, an absolutely absolute lyric is unthinkable). However, if the measure of the lyric always has to be to some extent external to it, this implies no metaphysical transcendence: “No waiting for a beyond and no looking for another side” (*Kein Jenseitswarten und kein Schauen nach drüben*, 253). On the contrary, lyric measure is inherently precarious.⁹² Thus the prayer at the end of *Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft*:

Falle nicht, Gott, aus deinem Gleichgewicht.
Auch der dich liebt und der dein Angesicht
erkennt im Dunkel, wenn er wie ein Licht
in deinem Atem schwankt, – besitzt dich nicht. (259)

Do not fall out of balance, God.
Even he who loves you and who knows
your face in the darkness, when he vibrates
in your breath, – does not possess you.

On the one hand, there is no “possessing” measure, not even for an ostensibly absolute poetry.

If Rilke’s religious language is troubling, one may articulate the same insight using the

⁹² Of course the lyric may figure it as a metaphysical transcendence and the measure as absolute in the sense of unchangeable, just as any other statement is possible within the lyric, but this is by no means a structurally necessary feature of the genre. For Rilke it would amount to hubris and in modern lyric the measure is always to some degree *at stake*. See my discussion of Hölderlin below: even if one were to take his notion of measure as somehow absolute, one would have to grant that it remains without effect unless incorporated in contingent matter, something which chapter four addresses in greater detail.

supposedly disenchanted scientific language of Niklas Luhmann's sociological systems theory: literature, like all other social systems, contains a blind spot which limits the system's own observation of itself and its own conditions (29-32). What sets the lyric genre apart is that it nevertheless insists on establishing a relationship to this blind spot, negotiating it, managing it. On the other hand, the modern lyric, in reconfiguring this relationship, comes to an awareness of the fragility of its own measure, which may "fall out of balance." This does not mean that it may become unmeasured with regard to some other, higher measure (there is no measure of measure), but simply that the measure itself may be forgotten or even destroyed.

A measured or pious lyric, which at any given moment strikes the appropriate balance between a *finding* and a *making* of measure, is nonetheless not just a matter of artistic success. The insight variously articulated in *Das Stunden-Buch* concerning the essentially material and temporal constitution of that opaque third category which the lyric invokes and which gives to it its measure comes with cosmological, not to say ontological, implications. If poetic measure is not to be found safely resting in some beyond but is rather dependent on doing and making, this goes for everything else as well. One poem in the third and last part of *Das Stunden-Buch* is particularly remarkable for the bluntness and disillusionment with which it spells out and accepts this. The lyric deserves to be quoted in full.

Herr: Wir sind armer denn die armen Tiere,
die ihres Todes enden, wennauch blind,
weil wir noch alle ungestorben sind.
Den gib uns, der die Wissenschaft gewinnt,
das Leben aufzubinden in Spaliere,
um welche zeitiger der Mai beginnt.

Denn dieses macht das Sterben fremd und schwer,
dass es nicht unser Tod ist; einer der
uns endlich nimmt, nur weil wir keinen reifen.
Drum geht ein Sturm, uns alle abzustreifen.

Wir stehn in deinem Garten Jahr und Jahr
Und sind die Raume, süßen Tod zu tragen;
aber wir altern in den Erntetagen,
und so wie Frauen, welche du geschlagen,

sind wir verschlossen, schlecht und Unfruchtbar.

Oder ist meine Hoffahrt ungerecht:
sind Bäume besser? Sind wir nur Geschlecht
und Schoß von Frauen, welche viel gewähren? –
Wir haben mit der Ewigkeit gehurt,
und wenn das Kreißbett da ist, so gebären
wir unsres Todes tote Fehlgeburt;
den krummen, kummervollen Embryo,
der sich (als ob ihn Schreckliches erschreckte)
die Augenkeime mit den Händen deckte
und dem schon auf der ausgebauten Stirne
die Angst von allem steht, was er nicht litt, –
und alle schließen so wie eine Dirne
in Kindbettkrämpfen und am Kaiserschnitt. (I, 237)

Lord, we are poorer than poor beasts, for they
can die their deaths, if but instinctively,
while we are all going on undyingly.
Send us someone who'll learn devotedly
to train life on espaliers which May
will then begin around more seasonably.

For what in dying so alienly shakes us
is that it's not our death, but one that takes us
only because we've not matured our own;
therefore there comes a storm and down we're blown.

We stand within your garden year by year
as trees from which sweet death's desiderated;
by harvest, though, we're superannuated,
and, like those women you have castigated,
closed, useless and unfruitful we appear.

Or is this arrogance of mine unjust?
Are trees better? Are we merely lust
And sex and womb of women without caution?
We with eternity have played the whore,
and, when our time has come, the dead abortion
of our own death is all we labour for;
that twisted, miserable embryo
which (as in terror of some dread surprise)
has covered with its hands its budding eyes,
and on whose bulging brow even now protrude
its fears of all the suffering still to be, –
and all of us, like prostitutes, conclude
in child-bed spasms and hysterectomy. (1960, II, 91-92)

“We have whored with eternity” (*Wir haben mit der Ewigkeit gehurt*). The appeal to an eternal beyond has become the principal marker of unchecked poetic hubris and the confrontation with its empty gestures leads to a retroactive disenchantment and embarrassment that in spite of its

almost aggressive tone conceives itself as pious in comparison. Here, eternity, the end of all hopes and dreams, has become a whore, from whom one can derive comfort only in exchange for lies and denial. With this is contrasted the oxymoronic “overflow of poverty” (*Armutüberfluß*) that is divine, which is to say measured, knowledge (I, 273). What is produced through coitus with the hubristic notion of eternity is stillborn, a miscarriage, since it is the product of an avoidance of life and death alike, which only a wealth of poverty could take in fully, because it implies precisely the complete renunciation of any eternal beyond.

If Rilke’s understanding of the dependence of a fully lived life on the acceptance of mortality sometimes leads him to idealize destitution, this does *not* correspond to some call for sobriety or any loss of enchantment. For, as he puts it in a cycle appearing within *Das Buch der Bilder*, “The real is like the wondrous: / it measures the world in independent measures [...]” (*Das wirkliche ist wie das Wunderbare: / es mißt die Welt mit eigenmächtigen Maßen [...]*, I, 325). Of course this is not to say that the real imitates or approximates some realm of wonder or imagination from which it is separated but that giving up a notion of the wondrous as the miraculous supplies for it a more viable measure of marvel and amazement. In several poems Rilke employs a language of contentment to describe this operation. An untitled 1907 poem asserts that “we [...] must be content with that / which is visible.” (*Wir [...] müssen uns mit dem begnügen / was sichtbar ist*, I, 379) More canonically, the eleventh sonnet to Orpheus:

Auch die sternische Verbindung trägt
Doch uns freue eine Weile nun
Der Figur zu glauben. Das genügt. (II, 246)

Even the starry union deceives.
Yet gladly let us for a while believe now
In the figure. It is all we need. (1995, 431)

Such moderation is *not* to settle for less (it is unclear what “more” would really mean here) but rather the *precondition* for enchantment and astonishment in a disenchanting world. To believe

perpetually in the order and meaning-granting power of the constellation would be to elevate it to a transcendent and timeless guarantee independent of human making, which could only denigrate reality (*das Wirkliche* or *das Hiesige*) in supplying for it an untenable measure.

The ever-enigmatic angel of the *Duino Elegies* is similarly a figure of moderation. The tenth and final elegy begins: "Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight, / let me sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels." (*Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmgigen Einsicht, / Jubel und Ruhm aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln*, 389/II, 230) The angel can be bewildered and amazed, and therefore assent or accord, only because for it, as for us, the measure of the world is not to be found elsewhere. The violent or grim insight that there is no absolute measure is the condition for a worldly measure against which marvel may first emerge, and indeed as overpowering.⁹³ Moderation is the prerequisite for true excess; only through modesty can life become *ein Ding des Übermuts*.

Säulen, Pylone, der Sphinx, das strebende Stemma,
grau aus vergehender Stadt oder aus fremder, des Doms.

War es nicht Wunder? O staune, Engel, denn wir sind,
Wir, o du Großer, daß wir solches vermochten, mein Atem
Reicht für die Rühmung nicht aus. (II, 222)

Pillars, pylons, the Sphinx, the striving thrust
of the cathedral, gray, from a fading or alien city.

Wasn't all this a miracle? Be astonished, Angel, for we
are this, O Great One; proclaim that we could achieve this, my breath
is too short for such praise (1995, 373)

The angel is a symbol of moderation, yet it is not the *measure* and above all not *the* measure. It is merely one way among others of addressing the opaque, inhuman third, which in

⁹³ As a 1924 poem puts it:

Wunder ist nicht nur im unerklärten
Überstehen der Gefahr;
erst in einer klaren reingewährten
Leistung wird das Wunder wunderbar. (II, 314)

turn gives the lyric its measure. That we both construct and are constructed by such measures

Rilke makes clear in a stanza to Orpheus:

Götter, wir planen sie erst in erkühnten Entwürfen,
die uns das mürrische Schicksal wieder zerstört.
Aber sie sind die unsterblichen. Sehet, wir dürfen
jenen erhorchen, der uns am Ende erhört. (II, 269)

Gods: we project them first in the boldest of sketches,
which sullen Fate keeps crumpling and tossing away.
But for all that, the gods are immortal. Surely we may
hear out the one who, in the end, will hear us. (1995, 509)

“Let no god pass away” (*Keiner der Götter vergeh*, 533/II, 280), a late sonnet, which did not make it into the cycle to Orpheus, asserts wishfully. The exhortation presupposes that gods may indeed perish; they are not only “projected” or “planned” but can also go under. However, even their death is provisional, not precluding their reemergence at a different time, under a different guise. “Eros,” a beautiful poem from the same period, provides a pertinent example. Eros, as love (and not merely “the God of love” in this or that religion or mythology), belongs to the order of phenomena that depend on the opacity of the moment in order to be experienced:

Masken! Masken! Dass man Eros blende.
Wer erträgt sein strahlendes Gesicht,
wenn er wie die Sommersonnenwende
frühlingliches Vorspiel unterbricht.

Wie es unversehens im Geplauder
anders wird und ernsthaft... Etwas schrie...
Und er wirft den namenlosen Schauder
wie ein Tempelinnres über sie.

Oh verloren, plötzlich, oh verloren!
Göttliche umarmen schnell.
Leben wand sich, Schicksal ward geboren.
Und im Innern weint ein Quell. (II, 314)

Masks! Masks! Or blind him! How can they endure
this flaming Eros gods and men obey,
bursting in summer-solstice on the pure

idyllic prologue to their vernal play?

How imperceptibly the conversation
takes a new, graver turn... A cry... And, there!
he's flung the nameless fascination
like a dim temple round the fated pair.

Lost, lost! O instantaneous perdition!
In brief divinity they cling.
Life turns, and Destiny begins her mission.
And within there weeps a spring. (1960, II, 346)

Toward the end of Rilke's life, the French poetry in particular aims to preserve a host of divinities in a new light.⁹⁴ Simultaneously he develops a poetics often referred to as *Sprachmagie*, "language-magic," which, abandoning easily identifiable mythic material, produces some of the most convincing yet perplexing poetry of his last years.⁹⁵ Preparing for this practice are two lyrics that arose in immediate succession and that perhaps more exoterically than anywhere else in Rilke's oeuvre states the lyric's inherent opacity, its reference to something that cannot appear within it but to which it all the same refers as the source of its own measure. One might say that these poems measure the lyric's ability to supply its own measure. The first one is called "Der Magier."

Er ruft es an. Es schrickt zusamm und steht.
Was steht? Das Andre; alles, was nicht er ist,
wird Wesen. Und das ganze Wesen dreht
ein raschgemachtes Antlitz her, das mehr ist.

Oh Magier, halt aus, halt aus, halt aus!
Schaff Gleichgewicht. Steh ruhig auf der Waage,
damit sie einerseits dich und das Haus
und drüben jenes Angewachsne trage.

Entscheidung fällt. Die Bindung stellt sich her.
Er weiß, der Anruf überwog das Weigern.
Doch sein Gesicht, wie mit gedeckten Zeigern,
hat Mitternacht. Gebunden ist auch er. (II, 306)

⁹⁴ See especially Bernhard Böschenstein, "Antike Gottheiten in den französischen Gedichten Rilkes." *Rilke Heute. Der Ort des Dichters in der Moderne*. Ed. Vera Hauschild. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997, 214-235.

⁹⁵ To this type of poetry count among others "Handinneres," "Schwerkraft," "Mausoleum," "Jetzt wär es Zeit [...]," "Idol," and "Gong."

He calls it up. It shudders and begins.
What does? The Other; all that he is not
comes into being. And the whole being turns
a sudden face, far realer than he thought.

Magician, oh endure, endure, endure!
Make equilibrium. Stand upon one scale
with all you own, and let the far side bear
It, growing to decision or denial.

The spell takes hold. He knows the scales have tipped,
the call weighs heavier. Yet his face, as though
its hour-hand and minute- overlapped,
has stopped at midnight. He is spell-bound too. (1995, 167)

Its corresponding poem in French, "Le Magicien":

Le magicien, les yeux tout creux et vides,
émet le mot qui correspond...
Et déjà naît, dans le silence aride,
le trouble sourd d'un gros remous fécond.

L'excite-t-il, ou bien déjà l'arrête?
Et qui l'emporte -, est-ce le magicien?
On conçoit qu'un fait fatal complète
son geste qui ordonne et retient.

Le mot agit, et nul ne le reprend
Soudain, à certaines heures, ce qu'on nomme
devient...quoi? Un être...presque homme,
et on le tue, en le nommant! (V, 204)

The Magician

The magician, his eyes all hollow and empty,
utters the word that corresponds...
And already is born, in perfect silence,
the dull sound of a large fertile swirl.

Will he stir it, or perhaps already stop it?
And who takes it away -, the magician?
One recognizes as a fatal fact
his gesture that commands and captures.

The word acts, and nothing can take it back
Suddenly, during certain hours, what is named
becomes...what? A being...almost human
and by naming it, one kills it!

The poet-magician invokes and evokes “the other,” *es, das Andre* in the German poem, in French *[u]n être...presque homme*, and thereby animates it.⁹⁶ This other is “what he [the magician] is not,” because although it is dependent on human making it is ultimately not subject to human control or prediction but has acquired a peculiar autonomy – which is not to say that it is an *agent* but simply that its functioning does not answer directly to human intervention and can be rendered transparent only with a temporal delay. Any attempt to master it only results in its disappearance from view (*on le tue, en le nommant*). To prevent this, the poet-magician must “create” an equilibrium between his own command and the independence of that which he invokes. What at any given moment constitutes equilibrium is, however, not for him to decide but for the measure which the invoked inhuman third is or prescribes. The poet-magician’s invocation may have succeeded in setting up a connection with it (*der Anruf überwog das Weigern*) but is at the same time blinded by it: “[...] his face, like a clock with covered hands, / reads midnight. He too is bound.”

In this short but pedagogical poem is described one of the most misunderstood features of lyric discourse in general and lyric enchantment in particular. We need not look any further than to an even shorter poem composed three days later to find demonstrated what the misunderstanding amounts to. Rilke, a poet preeminently embarrassing as well as enchanting, elucidates both the charms of the lyric and the suspicion with which it is often met:

Glücklich, die wissen, daß hinter allen
Sprachen das Unsägliche steht;
daß, von dort her, ins Wohlgefallen
Größe zu uns übergeht!

Unabhängig von diesen Brücken
die wir mit Verschiedenem baun:
so daß wir immer, aus jedem Entzücken
in ein heiter Gemeinsames schau. (II, 772)

⁹⁶ Ulrich Fülleborn has called the case in which Rilke’s poetry of this period conjures up its objects “evocative,” *Evokativ*, “hovering somewhere in the space between vocative and nominative (172). See chapter four below.

Happy are those who know that behind all
languages there is the unsayable;
that whence, in pleasure,
great things come to us!

Unfettered by these bridges
which we build from this and that:
so that always, from every delight
we glimpse a serene unity.

The lyric seems always to affirm the value of something in principle unsayable. And the lyric may indeed seduce itself into doing so. Here, for instance, Rilke claims that those who “know” that there is something unknowable derive happiness from it. But such a philosophical position is of course not a generic trait of the lyric. Lyric enchantment is not dependent on unspoken metaphysical commitments and certainly not on any mysticism of the unsayable. What *is* a constitutive feature of the lyric, however, is its establishing, managing, and negotiating a connection to *something which the poem circumscribes but which according to the temporality of the poem cannot be rendered fully transparent within it.*

To read Rilke reflecting on the conditions of lyric writing is always more satisfying than to look for fits of philosophy. And it is not surprising that one of his most impressive expositions of the temporality of lyric opacity is to be found in a poem addressed to his principal forerunner in matters of poetic measure. The first stanza of the ode “An Hölderlin”:

Verweilung, auch am Vertrautesten nicht,
ist uns gegeben; aus den erfüllten
Bildern stürzt der Geist zu plötzlich zu füllenden; Seen
sind erst im Ewigen. Hier ist Fallen
das Tüchtigste. Aus dem gekonnten Gefühl
überfallen hinab ins geahndete, weiter. (II, 123)

We are not permitted to linger, even with what is most intimate. From images that are full, the spirit plunges on to others that suddenly must be filled; there are no lakes till eternity. Here, falling is best. To fall from the mastered emotion into the guessed-at, and onward. (1995, 135)

These lines may be understood as a rumination on human transience in general, for which waterfalls (Hölderlin's streams and rivers) are a metaphor more suitable than static lakes. However, what is celebrated is a filling of images that demands a "skillful" (*gekonnt, tüchtig*) falling and feeling. The *uns* of the second line refers to everyone and everything subjected to temporal finitude as well as in a more specific sense to the poets in conversation. The poet-magician (*Beschwörer*) Hölderlin, a "wandering spirit," abandons without regret or delay, and not least due to generic constraints, any fully fulfilled image, pursuing a new opacity, a new measure, which Rilke calls "the preceding god" (*der vorgehende Gott*).⁹⁷ This god does not stand waiting somewhere in the future but is, as the preceding god, the ever-elusive measure of the lyric. But lyric measure is only elusive because perpetually changing. Here, Rilke is not merely paraphrasing Hölderlin or describing his poetics but also highlighting productive contradictions and introducing subtle displacements.

[...] So auch
spieltest du heilig durch nicht mehr gerechnete Jahre
mit dem unendlichen Glück, als wär es nicht innen, läge
keinem gehörend im sanften
Rasen der Erde umher, von göttlichen Kindern verlassen.
Ach, was die Höchsten begehren, du legtest es wunschlos
Baustein auf Baustein: es stand. Doch selber sein Umsturz
irrte dich nicht.

Was, da ein solcher, Ewiger, war, mißtraun wir
immer dem Irdischen noch? Statt am Vorläufigen ernst
die Gefühle zu lernen für welche
Neigung, künftig im Raum? (II, 124)

Thus for years that you no longer counted, holy, you played
with infinite joy, as though it were not inside you,
but lay, belonging to no one, all around
on the gentle lawns of the earth, where the godlike children had left it.
Ah, what the greatest have longed for: you built it, free of desire,
stone upon stone, till it stood. And when it collapsed,
even then you weren't bewildered.

Why, after such an eternal life, do we still

⁹⁷ Manfred Frank treats rigorously the motif of the coming God in *Der Kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie. I. Teil*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982.

mistrust the earthly? Instead of patiently learning from transience
the emotions for what future
slopes of the heart, in pure space? (1995, 135)

Time is unmeasured and happiness is endless, yet nevertheless (or precisely for this reason) not felt but objectified as a “plaything.” The edifice Hölderlin erected is in accordance with the will of the gods yet nevertheless (or precisely for this reason) inevitably crumbles. The final stanza amounts to both an homage and an accusation. Hölderlin, paradoxically, *was* eternal, and his example should therefore teach us to have faith in the earthly, that is the temporal. However, the questions that comprise the stanza are not rhetorical, and the *wir*, like the *uns* of the lyric’s first stanza, does not exclude the speaker of the poem. Why indeed do “we,” does the lyric, mistrust earthly, tentative measures of feelings, looking instead for an absolute?

In the untitled late prose fragment that begins and is often called “In lieblicher Bläue [...],” Hölderlin famously poses and answers the question: “Is there a measure on earth? There is none.” (*Giebt es auf Erden ein Maaß? Es giebt keines.*) As he makes clear, this does not mean that there is no measure but, to speak in Hölderlin’s language, that it is heavenly rather than earthly. Here too Hölderlin answers his own question: “Is God unknown? Is he apparent as the sky? I think rather the latter. It is the measure of man.” (I, 908) What does this mean?

As Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht notes in his article on the subject, no other modern philosopher has pursued further the implications of the semantics of measure than has Hegel (857). In his *Encyclopedia Logic*, he gives a succinct definition: “Measure is the qualitative quantum; at first, as *immediate* [measure], it is a quantum, with which a being-there or a quality is bound up.” (1991, 170) In other words, measure, considered by itself, is indeed, as we are used to, quantitative. Yet it would have no purchase on what is measured if it did not also have a relation to *that* or *what* or *how* it *is*. Hegel takes several examples, of which the most pedagogical is that of the various states of water.

The identity of quality and quantity present in measure is only implicit at first, and not yet posited. This implies that each of the two determinations, whose unity is measure, also claims validity on its own account. In this way, on the one hand, quantitative determinations of what is there can be altered, without its quality being affected thereby, but, on the other, this indifferent increase and decrease also has a limit, the transgression of which alters the quality. Thus, for instance, the temperature of water is, up to a point, indifferent in relation to its liquid state; but there comes a point in the increasing or decreasing of the temperature of liquid water where this state of cohesion changes qualitatively, and the water is transformed into steam, on the one hand, and ice, on the other. When a quantitative alteration takes place it appears, to start with, to be something quite innocent; but something quite different lurks behind it, and this seemingly innocent alteration of the quantitative is like a ruse with which to catch the qualitative. (171)

Thus, for Hegel, there is nothing strictly speaking *measureless* (maßlos). More exactly, the measureless will never abolish the measure; on the contrary, it confirms it. The measure is the relational identity of quality and quantity; hence, a quantity that goes beyond this identity only acquires a new quality, that is a new relational identity, a new measure. Put differently, there is only relative measurelessness (ice is immeasurably cold and steam immeasurably hot with respect to liquid water), no absolute measurelessness. In this sense, Hegel speaks of “the self-sublation and restoration of measure in the measureless” (172). However, Hegel curiously adds to his succinct definition of measure a reflection on its historical implications with the divine:

As the unity of quality and quantity, measure is thus also completed being. When we speak of being, it appears initially to be what is entirely abstract and lacking all determination; but being is essentially what determines itself, and it reaches its completed determinacy in measure. We can also consider measure as a definition of the Absolute, and it has been said accordingly that God is the measure of all things. That is also why this intuition forms the keynote of many ancient Hebrew psalms, where the glorification of God essentially comes down to saying that it is he who has appointed for everything its limit, for the sea and the dry land, the rivers and the mountains, and equally for the various kinds of plants and animals.—In the religious consciousness of the Greeks we find the divinity of measure represented, with special reference to the ethical order, by *Nemesis*. Nemesis involves the general notion that everything human—wealth, honour, power, and similarly joy, sorrow, etc.—has its definite measure, the transgression of which leads to undoing and ruin. (170)

There is no absolute measure readily available and universally applicable (no measure “on earth”), but, Hegel adds, measure is “completed being” and it is possible to “consider measure

as a definition of the Absolute.” As the philosopher points out, it is not that every thing measures itself against some absolute measure (“God”) but that the divine is taken to be that which has given each thing its measure, the quantitative exceeding of which would transform its quality, often for the worse.

The interest of these remarks for the relationship between lyric and measure is at least twofold. First, it is worth noting the mention of the appeal to the divine as *measure* in the proto-lyrical forms of the Hebrew psalms. But instead of understanding the concept of measure theologically, which would then quite naturally occur in the exultation of God, I propose to conceive of the lyric as that genre which acknowledges its and our being measured without rendering present the measure which remains to it inscrutable, opaque. Second, with respect to Hölderlin, one may note Hegel’s reference to Nemesis, that Greek god who punishes all forms of hubris. This ethical dimension of measure is of course frequently present in Hölderlin’s poems, aside from the *Empedokles* fragments perhaps most famously in *Wie wenn am Feiertage...* and “Der Rhein.” In the former, Semele, who demanded a material proof of Zeus and to see him in all his splendor, is, as the myth goes, extinguished by his lightning bolt. In the latter, gods are said to punish whoever despises “the mortal paths,” “aspires to be equal to the gods,” and cannot stand “difference” (I, 345). This difference is a qualitative as well as a quantitative difference: the Hegelian notion of measure seems to apply. Hölderlin is not asking anyone to lower expectations: the measured is not the mediocre. For man too can experience “the highest,” that is *his* highest which, however, has nothing to do with divine eternity:

Die ewigen Götter sind
Voll Lebens allzeit; bis in den Tod
Kann aber ein Mensch auch
Im Gedächtniß doch das Beste behalten,
Und dann erlebt er das Höchste.
Nur hat ein jeder sein Maas. (I, 347)

The eternal gods are full

Of life at all times; but until death
A mortal too can retain
And bear in mind what is best
And then is supremely favoured.
Yet each of us has his measure. (2013, 511)

The measure is not a range on a purely quantitative spectrum within which man is to stay in order not to anger the gods. Rather, if everyone and everything has a measure, this simply means that there are quantitative determinations beyond which any given thing loses its identity. For a *man* to want to be a god does not mean to be a quantitatively different man but simply *not to be*. But if everything has its own measure, how can Hölderlin claim that there is no measure on earth? Surely Hölderlin is not simply saying that there is no *universal* measure applicable to all. What he refers to is rather an aspect of the philosophical concept of measure to which the lyric as genre has a special relationship.⁹⁸

In both of the poems mentioned, the lightning bolt appears as supreme danger, as that which befalls whoever surpasses the measure allotted; and in a frequently quoted letter, dated December 4, 1801 and addressed to Casimir Ulrich Boehlendorff, the poet writes of the flash of lightning: “[A]mong all that I can see of God this sign has become my chosen one.” (2009, 209) Certainly this statement has fascinating implications for Hölderlin’s (a)theology, but what is its poetic significance?⁹⁹ More precisely, what does this mean for Hölderlin as a lyric poet and by extension for the lyric more generally? (One may legitimately assume that it is in his capacity as a lyric poet that such a sign has been chosen for him.) The relationship between the lightning bolt and what might be termed the temporality of lyric measure is in fact given a terse gloss

⁹⁸ Hölderlin’s notion of measure has been debated hotly at least since Martin Heidegger’s 1951 lecture “...dichterisch wohnt der Mensch...” My purpose is not further to legitimize its alignment with this or that philosophy or “thinking” but to show how it brings to light and presents a particular configuration of one mode of lyric enchantment which itself is not unique to Hölderlin. If only because it is *not* articulated in direct response to or as an attempt to ventriloquize Hölderlin, I have to this end found Hegel’s exposition of measure more useful than Heidegger’s (an engagement with whom would not only be overambitious – hubristic – but unproductive for a comparative poetics aiming to contribute to the theory of the lyric.

⁹⁹ For an ambitious attempt to reconstruct Hölderlin’s (a)theology, mindful of the problems involved, see Wolfgang Binder, “Theologie und Kunstwerk” in *Friedrich Hölderlin. Studien*. Ed. Elisabeth Binder and Klaus Weimar. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987, 50-81.

immediately after Hölderlin's rejection of any earthly measure: "Is there a measure on earth? There is none. For the worlds of the creator never inhibit the course of the thunder." (*Nemlich es hemmen den Donnergang nie die Welten des Schöpfers*, I, 908) It is crucial here that *Donnergang* be translated as "course of thunder" and not simply as "thunder." For the *course* of the thunder emphasizes its relation to the lightning which precedes it in time and space. The thunder is an indexical sign of lightning which, seen from afar, in turn is a sign of the god that itself *is* god as event. It is not that "the creator" or Zeus "hides" in the lightning but rather that lightning, as an event, is what the Greeks call the divine. Friedrich Kittler writes that

the supreme god of the Greeks was the event. In his presence we mortals vanish as did Semele and so many others. The god does not announce himself, and he vanishes before we perceive him. That is the reason for his thunder. The event is followed by the series in the valleys with echoes resounding off the slopes, dull and increasingly weak, and lightning upon lightning strikes until everything has been gathered into a storm. It is one and the same lightning that rolls out in many thunders, but enriched by the knowledge of all the earth's mountains and valleys that rumble in response.

Without thunder as that which announces and/or confirms the presence of the divine and lets it reverberate on earth, that is, the sign would be empty: "it is not until the thunder that the god is present. [...] Only that which returns discloses itself. Recognition itself needs time and returns to its echoes." (2006, 65) Kittler makes clear that this is a specifically Greek way of conceiving the divine, but it is not difficult to see why for Hölderlin it is accorded a privilege. There is no measure on earth because what is on earth (or in "the worlds of the creator") is measured by what surpasses it, quantitatively and qualitatively. Hegel: "Measure is qualitative quantum; at first, as *immediate* [measure], it is a quantum, with which a being-there or a quality is bound up." (1991, 170) Thus we can say of water that it is "measured" when its temperature is anywhere between freezing and boiling. But the measure of something becomes known only in going beyond itself, that is into the measureless, which itself is a new measure; Hegel thus speaks of "the self-sublation and restoration of measure in the measureless (173)." The

distinction between the divine and the human is, then, not knowable from the vantage point of the human alone. In Kittler's words: "What connects heaven and earth is aslant to all knowledge." (2006, 64) As he points out, moderns may very well "know" lightning: we both understand the physical process that brings it about and can predict several days ahead of time the occurrence of thunderstorms. Hence the divine reveals itself as unknowable but is not unknowable *in principle*. To the Greeks, however, we may very well be gods (66). And nevertheless, as Kittler remarks and as we painfully continue to be reminded, we, for all our technology, are still not able to predict earthquakes and tsunamis (69).

The meaning of the figure of lightning becomes clear. What measures us and the lyric (the divine, God, lightning) cannot be known by us or by the lyric without a temporal delay (before arriving with us as thunder); and if God "is present" in thunder it is nevertheless only as a sign. "The god does not announce himself, and he vanishes before we perceive him." (65) In order to take our measure, we must go beyond it into the measureless, that is undergo a qualitative change. This can happen either in the form of becoming "gods" (that is – over time – the masters of a particular configuration of the divine, which will then no longer appear to us as such) or by simply ceasing to be (in seeking to master, equal, or just view the divine as such). The fate of the lyric is always to appear questionably and frustratingly mythical, metaphysical, religious, or ideological because it receives its measure from an instance of which lyric temporality refuses it knowledge. This may hold true in various ways and to different degrees for other genres as well, but it is the lyric's job to approach and address and thereby to teach how to relate to what is, at any given moment, *de facto* but not necessarily *de jure* unfathomable.

That this is not just a matter of one particular poetics or an "individual relationship to the divine," as Max Kommerell would put it, but rather reflects a condition of lyric writing with far-reaching implications, may be gleaned by looking forward to another eminently reflective poet, operating in a different tradition at the far end of the long 19th century. *Charmes* is the appropriate title

given to a book which consists indeed of charms, spells, songs, seductions, incantations, and, prophetic or oracular announcements (to give but a hint of the wide semantic field covered by the latin *carmen*). Among features that distinguish clearly Paul Valéry from his venerated master Mallarmé is that his thinking of the divine emphatically privileges pre-Christian religion and philosophy over and against any secular Catholicism of the crowd. As in the case of the other authors I have treated, however, what I wish to address is not any theological or philosophical position, possibly salvageable from the depths of his *Cahiers*, but the way in which Valéry uses models of the divine in his lyrics to think through their mechanisms and those of the genre at large. It is by no means surprising that Kittler, in his brief historical exposé of technologically determined configurations of time and being, should quote a line from Valéry's "Cimetière marin." The French poet took an equal interest in the "eternally renewed" movements of the ocean and in the sudden, violent flashes of lightning that sometimes connect it to the sky. In another long lyric or *charme* published in the same collection, there is the following at first reassuring stanza:

Va, la lumière la divine
N'est pas l'épouvantable éclair
Qui nous devance et nous devine
Comme un songe cruel et clair !
Il éclate !... Il va nous instruire !...
Non !... La solitude vient luire
Dans la plaie immense des airs
Où nulle pâle architecture,
Mais la déchirante rupture
Nous imprime de purs déserts ! (I, 134)

Light, you know, light the divine
Is a long way from the lightning terror
Outrunning and seeing us through
Like a clear and cruel nightmare!
It explodes!... Is about to reveal!
But no... Only solitude gleams
In the immense wound of the air
Where no ghostly architecture,
Nothing but rending and rupture
Prints pure desert on our minds! (1971, I, 173)

“La Pythie” comprises 22 stanzas, 18 of which feature the voice of the oracle herself. The majority of the poem consists of the priestess lamenting her use as a medium of the divine. It can be read as an anti-invocation: instead of the poet’s summoning of a divine or semi-divine instance as the ultimate guarantee of his discourse’s truth and legitimacy, the oracle appears to wish for nothing more than to be freed of her role as a “master of truth,” which causes her nothing but dismay.¹⁰⁰ Yet the renunciation of divine influence gives rise to an equally tormenting ambivalence. In an attempt to deny “that the supreme God of the Greeks [is] the event” (Kittler, 2006, 65), the oracle refuses to identify the divine with the unforeseen “lightning terror / Outrunning and seeing us through / Like a clear and cruel nightmare.” But the reinterpretation of “light the divine” as illumination and enlightenment is not fulfilled. The lightning flash leaves behind only “solitude” and “pure desert.” The divine never reveals itself; it does not even reveal the measure which it prescribes: “no ghostly architecture.” And so Pythia is forced to perpetuate her liaison with the “Creative Power” that makes of her whole nature an abyss and that deprives her of her own “mystery,” which has been usurped (*Puissance Créatrice; mystère*, 1971, I, 171/I, 134):

Qui me parle, à ma place même ?
 Quel écho me répond : Tu mens !
 Qui m’illumine ?... Qui blasphème ? (I, 131)

Who speaks to me in place of me?
 What echo is it answers: Liar!
 Who illuminates?... Who blasphemes? (1971, I, 165)

Divine inspiration is accused not only of estranging the mind from itself but also of introducing a split between mind and body:

Douce matière de mon sort,

¹⁰⁰ Marcel Detienne identifies the “diviner” as one of *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*.

Quelle alliance nous vécûmes,
Avant que le don des écumes,
Ait fait de toi ce corps de mort ! (I, 132)

Sweet substance of my fate,
How we lived in our alliance
Until you were gifted with these foamings
That turned you to a body of death! (1971, I, 169)

Valéry's suspicion of any poetics of genius or inspiration is well known and documented, and it is possible to an extent to read "La Pythie" as a long litany against any such "superstitious" conception of poetic production, which only covers up the work of rational calculation that goes into advanced lyric composition.¹⁰¹ The problem with such an interpretation is that Pythia's suffering is nevertheless quite real and is not figured as a product of social and religious pressures alone. When she beseeches her god to leave her alone, she merely confirms his power over her. Divine knowledge may be useless for human purposes, but here it is nevertheless what makes oracular (and, by extension, poetic) speech possible. On the one hand, the priestess begs to be relieved of her duties:

Sois clémente, sois sans oracles !
Et de tes merveilleuses mains,
Change en caresses les miracles,
Retiens les présents surhumains !
C'est en vain que tu communique
A nos faibles tiges, d'uniques
Commotions de ta splendeur !
L'eau tranquille est plus transparente
Que toute tempête parente
D'une confuse profondeur ! (134)

Be merciful, no oracles!
And, with your marvelous hands
Change prodigies into caresses,
Hold back all superhuman gifts!
Only in vain can you entrust

¹⁰¹ A passage from Valéry's 1927 "Lettre sur Mallarmé" is commonly quoted as evidence of this position: "*si je devais écrire, j'aimerais infiniment mieux écrire en toute conscience et dans une entière lucidité quelque chose de faible, que d'enfanter à la faveur d'une transe et hors de moi-même un chef-d'œuvre d'entre les plus beaux.*" (I, 640)

Our feeble stems with vortices
Unprecedented of your splendor!
Still water is far clearer
Than all the storms that are ancestors
To unfathomable confusion! (1971, I, 173)

On the other hand, in being freed *from* divine possession, she is being freed *to* her own mystery. The final three lines of the stanza are enigmatic. What is the “still water” and the “storm that are ancestors”? The oracle asks her god to realize himself elsewhere either because she wishes to preserve her calm or because she is *already* filled with “unfathomable confusion” and therefore can make no sense of the messages she receives. In light of the following stanzas, where she calls her eyes “Black witnesses” (*Noirs témoins*, 1971, I, 173/I, 135) and where her apostrophes change direction from a divine external power to her own “soul” and “life” and their contents, the latter interpretation seems more justified. Her painful convulsions ultimately give way to the following high-strung pronouncement in “a new and snowy / Voice” (*voix nouvelle et blanche*, 1971, I, 177/I, 136):

Honneur des Hommes, Saint LANGAGE,
Discours prophétique et paré,
Belles chaînes en qui s'engage
Le dieu dans la chair égaré,
Illumination, largesse !
Voici parler une Sagesse
Et sonner cette auguste Voix
Qui se connaît quand elle sonne
N'être plus la voix de personne
Tant que des ondes et des bois ! (136)

Honor of Mankind, Sacred LANGUAGE,
Ordered and prophetic speech,
Chains of beauty that enwind
The god bewildered in the flesh,
Illumination, and largess!
Now a Wisdom makes utterance,
And rings out in that sovereign voice
Which when it rings can only know
It is no longer anyone's
So much as the woods' and the waters' voice! (1971, I, 177)

Immediately striking in this final, climactic and all too exoteric stanza are the capitalizations. Here it is men and their sacred language that are the focus of attention, and “the god” is thus being thought on the basis of the holy rather than vice versa. The divine instance becomes peripheral in relation to that impersonal wisdom and voice which speak the prophetic discourse that here must be understood in apposition to language itself. The god has no more command over the voice than do the waves and the trees. In this sense, the ultimate stanza does indeed represent a liberation from that divine power which has tormented the priestess. At the same time, there is no escaping that language itself is a prophetic discourse in which a god (and what else?) gets caught. That is, even if the oracle overcomes her subjection to any particular deity and invokes instead language itself, the nature of her speech is the same: there remains something that speaks through her but that is not strictly speaking part of her.

The retention of this structure as a model of vatic and poetic speech would hold little interest were it not for the fact that Valéry systematically refuses any non-poetological theory that could legitimate it. In the lecture “Qual Quelle,” Jacques Derrida has analyzed as “Valéry’s Sources” that impersonal something which speaks in his lyrics and which the author denies any “explanation” in conventional terms of inspiration, privileging instead the rational, premeditated calculation of a text which is then allowed to unfold according to its own logic. As Derrida notes: “When [Valéry] analyzes what programs the duration and return of writing, he never does so in terms of genius, meaning, or force.” So what is it that programs, or, put differently, measures Valéry’s lyric writing? “The source for Valéry [...] must be that which could never become a theme.” Or more accurately: “this was the theme of that which could not be the thematized.” (1982, 279) Derrida goes on to emphasize, apparently approvingly, the importance, in what he treats as Valéry’s philosophy, of the individual consciousness:

Nothing in the world, or at least nothing that is presented within it, appears as phenomenon, theme, or object, without first being for me, for (an) ego, and without coming back to me as the opening, the very origin of the world: not as the cause of its

existence, but as the origin of its presence, the point of source on whose basis *everything* takes on meaning, appears, and measures itself. Everything, that is to say everything that is not I. The non-I is *for* the I, appears as non-I for an I and on the basis of an I. Everything: which is to say that the I, the exception to and condition for everything that appears, does not appear. Never being present to itself, the source hardly exists. It is there for no one. For what Valéry [...] calls the pure I, and what philosophers usually name the transcendental ego, is not the “person,” the ego or empirical consciousness of the psychologists. An unnamable, “unqualifiable” source, in effect it has no determinable character since it is not in the world and never presents itself. (280-281)

However salient the phenomenological and (anti)metaphysical point may be that Derrida here advances with respect to Valéry, it can be misleading when trying to understand Valéry’s thinking of and in the lyric. Considering that the question of source(s) is for Valéry essentially one of poetic production, and keeping in mind the forms which his imaginative writing assumes, it is remarkable that no lyric nor the word “lyric” occurs in Derrida’s lecture. In describing the poetic implications of the self’s inability ever to be fully present to itself (“the essential heterogeneity of the source”), Derrida reproduces a commonplace narrative:

At a certain moment in history, for reasons to be analyzed, the poet ceased being considered the prey of a foreign voice, in mania, delirium, enthusiasm, or inspiration. Poetic “hallucination” is then accommodated under the rubric of the “regime”: a simple elaboration of hearing-oneself-speak, a regulated, normed exchange of the same and the other, within the limits tolerated by a kind of general organization, that is, an individual, social, historical system, etc. (298)

This distinction between inspired and “regulated” poetic speech (or more generally between a “normal,” internal and an exaggerated, externalized alterity of the self) is of course crucial to Valéry and at stake in “La Pythie.” Yet Valéry does not *enforce* the distinction, nor does he try to think the transition from one mode of discourse to the other. On the contrary, he *downplays* without denying the difference between vatic and lyric language (which may of course overlap), generalizing and relativizing the predicament of the oracle. This is done using the subtlest means. Had the word *dieu* alone been capitalized, as one might have expected, the reader could have felt tempted to take *Illumination*, *largesse* in apposition to him and not to sacred language, and to interpret the rest of the concluding stanza pantheistically. But Valéry does not

proceed from a conception of the divine to an analysis of its mediation in poetic and prophetic speech. Rather it is the god that emerges as one particular configuration of that opacity which is intrinsic to the lyric. Derrida correlates this with or translates it into a philosophical notion of the self's ineluctable opacity to itself, that is of the impossibility (to conceive) of perfect self-presence; but for Valéry this is a question of poetic making. In other words, it is worthwhile if not imperative to consider Valéry's philosophemes from the viewpoint of the lyric. Only then does Valéry's rejection of psychoanalysis, which Derrida finds so enigmatic in light of the poet's preoccupation, not to say obsession, with the elusive processes of the (thinking and creating) mind, become understandable. Derrida:

why did Valéry so nervously reject psychoanalysis? Why did he seize upon the argument of the unnamable that he just as summarily could have used against all science? The connotation of nervousness, of precipitation, and of spasm are not insignificant. Valéry could have offered arguments, showed his disagreement, asked epistemological questions, differentiated his criticisms, vigilantly examined what then could be seen of psychoanalysis: but he did so only by opposing his formalist point of view—which therefore produces an effect of obscurantism here—to what he considered Freud's semantic, "significative" point of view about dreams. (300)

The philosopher's own response to this conundrum is not entirely off the mark. It is evident that Valéry, like Freud, accepts the essential opacity of the self to itself. The difference between the two concerns the nature of this opacity. For Freud, it is a consequence of the split of the psyche into consciousness and the unconscious, consisting of repressed experiences which surreptitiously influence our conscious thoughts and actions. The much more general distinction which Valéry elaborates between virtuality and actuality, or capacity and activity, resists being mapped onto the particular symbolic system of psychoanalysis. In fact, Valéry opposes *any interpretation* of virtuality, insisting on capacity as opacity, on what Derrida calls a "critical formalism." Curiously, however, while Derrida recognizes that this formalism is above all "poetic and linguistic" (304), he completely neglects the mutual implication of Valéry's critique of consciousness and his practice as a lyric poet. Instead Derrida suggests he may have found the

site of the poet's own repression and gestures toward a deconstruction of the opposition between form and meaning.

Nonetheless, Derrida's essay is useful for understanding Valéry's poetics, which in turn makes explicit constitutive features of the lyric in general. He writes that Valéry "relates perception to self-consciousness as potential to act" (303). "Le Sylphe," the short lyric which in *Charmes* immediately succeeds "La Pythie" and which constitutes a kind of lighthearted pendant to it, gives a few hints.

Ni vu ni connu
Je suis le parfum
Vivant et défunt
Dans le vent venu !

Ni vu ni connu
Hasard ou génie ?
À peine venu
La tâche est finie !

Ni lu ni compris ?
Aux meilleurs esprits
Que d'erreurs promises !

Ni vu ni connu,
Le temps d'un sein nu
Entre deux chemises ! (I, 136-137)

Nor seen nor known
I am the perfume
Alive, dead and gone
In the wind as it comes!

Nor seen nor known,
Genius or chance?
The moment I'm come
The task is done!

Nor read, nor divined?
To the keenest of minds
What hints of illusions!

Nor seen nor known,
A bare breast glimpsed
Between gown and gown! (1971, I, 179)

The sylph is capacity, virtuality, potentiality. It is that which, neither seen nor known, both living and dead, lends existence its “scent.” It may be identified with chance, genius, or a genie (the French *génie* means both) – all possible configurations of the divine or rather of that lyric opacity which both measures and enchants. As soon as the sylph has arrived it disappears, because actualized virtuality is no longer virtuality. “Neither read nor understood?” the sylph asks teasingly before promising “errors” to the “best spirits” (*meilleurs esprits*: poets, their readers?). The last stanza indicates that lyric opacity may very well be one of the flesh, but psychoanalysis makes too specific, violently narrows down and positivizes that virtuality of consciousness to which the lyric has a special relationship. From a poetological point of view, it is as senseless to identify with the unconscious that opacity which the lyric manages as with this or that configuration of the divine. Derrida is right to stress that Valéry’s critique of consciousness is a formalism, for the poet is interested in opacity as a structural feature and not in rendering it transparent. Like Zeus revealing himself only for an instance in the lightning bolt or the sylph gliding invisibly through the air, the lyric embodies and effects perceptions which its temporality denies full transparency.¹⁰²

Returning to Pythia, one can formulate Valéry’s difference from psychoanalysis in terms of two distinct interpretations of that famous imperative standing above the entrance to her temple: call them the modern interpretation and the ancient one. The former would understand γνῶθι σεαυτόν (“know yourself”) as an imperative to explore the self, rendering latent mental material manifest. The latter says: measure yourself against that opacity which prevents the

¹⁰² It is worth noting that this temporality of the event, which Kittler names “the supreme god of the of the Greeks,” and which is hence always at stake in their invocations, is recognized no less by one of his favorite objects of derision, Adorno, who analyzes it by analogy with fireworks and indeed with reference to Valéry:

The phenomenon of fireworks is prototypical for artworks, though because of its fleetingness and status as empty entertainment it has scarcely been acknowledged by theoretical consideration; only Valéry pursued ideas that are at least related. Fireworks are apparition κατ’ ἐξοχήν: They appear empirically yet are liberated from the burden of the empirical, which is the obligation of duration; they are a sign from heaven yet artifactual, an ominous warning, a script that flashes up, vanishes, and indeed cannot be read for its meaning. (81)

presence of the self to itself, whatever shape or name this opacity may assume. Of course, for whomever encountered the Delphic inscription human and poetic measure would be a *particular* configuration of the divine, which Valéry may find instructive but to which he is in no way subjected or committed. What matters is that it is the poetry which has been called absolute, ostensibly no longer dependent on any heterogeneous measure, which acknowledges and affirms a relation to a minimal opacity within the lyric subject itself, to which it must surrender before any measure or meter may be applied. Given Valéry's predilection for calculated necessity it is easy to see why such an opacity, while constitutive, may become cause for annoyance and embarrassment. A brief poetological statement first published in 1906 expresses this frustration at what the author calls his "intolerable flux"

SI je regarde tout à coup ma véritable pensée, je ne me console pas de devoir subir cette parole intérieure sans personne et sans origine ; ces figures éphémères ; et cette infinité d'entreprises interrompues par leur propre facilité, qui se transforment l'une dans l'autre, sans que rien ne change avec elles. (I, 94)

IF I take a sudden look at my thought as it is, I can feel no comfort in having to endure that interior speech, impersonal, without source; those transitory shapes; and that endless series of speculations broken off by their own facility, transforming one into the next, without changing anything in their course. (1971, I, 63)

It is poetic measure that fixes and orders this flux, but conversely one might say that it is the flux (*Hasard ou genie?*) that measures, which is to say limits, the autonomy of poetic measure itself.

"Absolute poetry," in order not to become a poetry of the absolute subject, involves a surrender:

JE m'abandonne à l'adorable allure : lire, vivre où mènent les mots. Leur apparition est écrite. Leurs sonorités concertées. Leur ébranlement se compose, d'après une méditation antérieure, et ils se précipiteront en groupes magnifiques ou purs, dans la résonance. Même mes étonnements sont assurés : ils sont cachés d'avance, et font partie du nombre.

MU par l'écriture fatale, et si le mètre toujours futur enchaîne sans retour ma mémoire, je ressens chaque parole dans toute sa force, pour l'avoir indéfiniment attendue. Cette mesure qui me transporte et que je colore, me garde du vrai et du faux. Ni le doute ne me divise, ni la raison ne me travaille. Nul hasard, mais une chance extraordinaire se

fortifie. Je trouve sans effort le langage de ce bonheur ; et je pense par artifice, une pensée toute certaine, merveilleusement prévoyante, — aux lacunes calculées, sans ténèbres involontaires, dont le mouvement me commande et la quantité me comble : une pensée singulièrement achevée. (I, 95)

I SURRENDER to the divine rhythm: reading, living where the words may lead. As they appear, they are written down. Their sonorities are harmonized. Their disturbance reforms itself, along premeditated lines, until they spring, splendidly and chastely grouped, into resonance. Even what surprises me is guaranteed [*Même mes étonnements sont assurés*]; it is concealed in advance, and is a constituent part of Number.

STIRRED to the fatal act of writing – and provided the ever-to-be measure [*mètre*] irretrievably fixes my memory – I feel the whole force of each single word, thanks to my prolonged waiting upon it. This uplifting rhythm [*mesure*], which I fill with color, keeps me free of false and true. I am divided by no doubt, tormented by no reasoning. Nothing random, but an extraordinary stroke of luck asserts and confirms itself. Without struggle, I can find the language for this felicity; and by way of artifice I can think a thought that is all certainty, miraculously provident – whose leaps are calculated, with no unwilled obscurities, and whose movement controls, whose wholeness fulfills me: a singularly perfect thought. (1971, I, 63, 65)

Absolute poetry is the opposite of a poetry of absolute measure; it is a poetry in which measure is taken to arise in accordance with the sonorous material of language and out of the poetic making itself. The measure is therefore “ever-to-be,” which presupposes what Mallarmé called famously “the elocutionary disappearance of the poet” (*la disparition élocutoire du poète*, II, 211) or, in Barbara Johnson’s straightforward translation, simply “the disappearance of the poet speaking” (208), who otherwise is at risk of prescribing a measure rather than following “the divine rhythm.” In other words, a poetry that rejects any external measure must correspondingly measure, temper, moderate the (lyric) subject itself and its ambitions. It is not simply a matter of conforming to that other Delphic motto, μηδὲν ἄγαν (“nothing in excess”), but of rethinking the meaning of excess and temperance. When Valéry inserts, above his most frequently quoted lyric, Pindar’s exhortation to his own soul not to “strive for immortal life” but to “make the most of the resources within reach,” as runs one possible translation of those lines from Pythian 3, this is not to placate the gods by preserving the distinction between the mortal existence of men and the ostensibly timeless being of the gods, but because immortal life is not life at all. As Hegel

points out, there is nothing strictly speaking measureless, and hence there is no measureless life – but a life that is not measured may take on a different measure than that of life.

It is instructive to consider how the influence of Pindar has come to be associated with the more hubristic elements of Hölderlin's poetry,¹⁰³ while in Valéry he can appear as a figure of moderation. Hölderlin's Pindar is seen as the model for vatic and patriotic tendencies and associated with the assumption of a privileged relationship to the divine. For Valéry, who more clearly thinks prophetic speech on the basis of lyric speech rather than vice versa, Pindar becomes a master of an immanent poetic enchantment that can dispense with immortality. The question here is what it means to *dispense* with immortality or any other configuration of the divine. Hölderlin never invokes immortality or even an afterlife as a proper object of human aspiration, yet the distinction between mortals and immortals remains important, even though the gods "need" men to escape their own indifference. It is clear that for Hölderlin this divine use of feeling mortals is a precarious phenomenon that may very well not take place. The only thing of which he seems to be sure is that any attempt on the part of men to resemble the gods will effectively preclude enchantment. Hölderlin's clearest example of such unreceptivity toward enchantment are the titans. Being themselves immortal, the titans are immune to the divine, and such is the fate of men until they acknowledge and will their own finitude. The first lines of the fragment "Die Titanen":

Nicht ist es aber
Die Zeit. Noch sind sie
Unangebunden. Göttliches trifft untheilnehmende nicht.
Dann mögen sie rechnen
Mit Delphi. [...] (I, 390)

¹⁰³ Winfried Menninghaus writes: "The more 'Pindaric' Hölderlin's great songs, the more the voice of the poet fashions itself as harbinger, indeed trailblazer of a higher 'connection,' be it 'God,' 'people,' or 'fatherland.'" (75) However, in distinction to Pindar Hölderlin cannot simply receive objects of praise from religion or society but must first invent them: "the (narcissistic) self-attribution of power by the word of the poet can hardly be taken further." (76)

Not yet, however,
The time has come. They still are
Untethered. What's divine does not strike the unconcerned.
Then let them reckon [*rechnen*] with Delphi. [...] (2013, 629)

“Delphi” can of course be taken as a metonym for the god to whom the Delphic temple was erected. When the time is right, titanic men can count *on* Apollo. However, the sentence may also mean: when the time has come, men will want to count *with* Delphi, according to its imperative μηδὲν ἄγαν, lest they be forced to *reckon* with it. In any case, the titanic present is disenchanting because unbound. The only way to escape it is “to think of the dead”:

[...] Viele sind gestorben
Feldherrn der alter Zeit
Und schöne Frauen und Dichter
Und in neuer
Der männer viel
Ich aber bin allein. (I, 390)

[...] In olden days
Died many generals
And lovely women and poets,
In modern times
A host of men.
But I am on my own. (2013, 629)

The dead are united in the poet's recollection; the poet is alone among titans believing themselves invincible. The more similar to the gods we take ourselves to be, the less enchanted we are. Hence, Hölderlin writes, “not for nothing / Are eyes fixed on the ground” – it is the condition for enchantment (*nicht umsonst sind / Die Augen an den Boden geheftet*, 633/I, 392). As such it is not a sign of resignation but of contentment. A stanza from “Der Rhein” that follows the warning of the ills that may befall a hubristic *Schwärmer* expands on this state:

[...] wohl ihm, welcher fand
ein wohlbeschiedenes Schicksal,
Wo noch, der Wanderungen
Und süß der Leiden Erinnerung
Aufrauscht am sichern Gestade,

Daß da und dorthin gern
Er sehn mag bis an die Grenzen
Die bei der Geburt ihm Gott
Zum Aufenthalte gezeichnet
Dann ruht er, seeligbescheiden,
Denn alles, was er gewollt,
Das Himmlische, von selber umfängt
Es unbezwungen, lächelnd
Jetzt, da er ruhet, den kühnen. (I, 345)

[...] happy he who has found
A well-allotted fate
Where still of his wanderings
And sweetly of his afflictions
The memory murmurs on banks that are sure,
So that this way, that way with pleasure
He looks as far as the bounds
Which God at birth assigned
To him for his term and site.
Then, blissfully humble, he rests,
For all that he has wanted,
Though heavenly, of itself surrounds
Him uncompelled, and smiles
Upon the bold one now that he's quiet. (2013, 505; 507)

Calm may come to “the bold one,” even as past sorrows are present in memory and as he longs for the very limits of human existence. *Seeligbescheiden* (“blessed-modest”), a distinctly Hölderlinian compound, describes the state of enchantment that the correct measure affords. Being measured is not just the precondition of enchantment but is enchantment itself: “all that he has wanted / Though heavenly.” It seems fitting that it is the lyric titled “Dichterberuf” which the following much-debated stanza concludes:

Furchtlos bleibt aber, so er es muß, der Mann
Einsam vor Gott, es schüzet die Einfalt ihn,
Und keiner Waffen brauchts und keiner
Listen, so lange, bis Gottes Fehl hilft. (I, 331)

But, if he must, undaunted the man remains
Alone with God – ingenuousness keeps him safe –
And needs no weapon and no wile till
God's being missed in the end will help him. (2013, 237)

Being able to do without god is what permits *poetic* enchantment, which is only diminished by the wish to be “in” god. And still this is not a matter of renunciation or settling for less. It is not a question of being content *without* the divine but of realizing that contentment *is* divine. That this must not be ascribed to Hölderlin’s personal (a)theology or reduced to a question of “the tyranny of Greece over Germany” but should be seen as a general requirement for strictly poetic enchantment, which is thought variously by the poets who try to achieve it, may be gleaned from a short lyric that Rilke wrote in French the year before his death and dedicated to his colleague Renée de Brimont.

Pour trouver Dieu il faut être heureux
car ceux qui par détresse l’inventent
vont trop vite et cherchent trop peu
l’intimité de son absence ardente. (V, 264)

To find God one must be happy
for those who invent him in distress
go too quickly and search too little
the intimacy of his ardent absence.

A few months earlier Rilke had written two notes, also in French, on the same theme: “When God will have been completely forgotten, albeit in such a way that one will have found the means to be happy and light without him, one will have (in spite of oneself) found him”; “When men will have completely forgotten the gods, having nonetheless found a light, carefree and happy state, it is then that the gods will be reborn, new and powerful without knowing it” (V, 652). On the one hand, Rilke warns against avoiding earthly cares through inventing some god that would redeem us from them. On the other hand, it is not clear why, having found a state of lightness and happiness without gods, men should be the slightest concerned with their return. Unless Rilke should suggest that the gods would come to upset the joyful state achieved in their absence, the three texts must mean that the return of the gods is *identical* to learning to live without them. Salvation is not to be found in God but in his forgetting, and “God” or “the gods”

are here lyric lies in the service of their own overcoming. The promise of their return is intended to facilitate a life without them, into which they will dissolve. In this state, the divine no longer appears as the terrifying flash of lightning, but as mild dew on the conductor that diverts it:

Wenn aber ist entzündet
Der geschäftige Tag
Und an der Kette, die
Den Blitz ableitet
Von der Stunde des Aufgangs
Himmlicher Tau glänzt,
Muß unter Sterblichen auch
Das Hohe sich fühlen. (I, 392)

But when the busy day
Has been kindled
And on the chain that
Conducts the lightning
From the hour of sunrise
Glistens heavenly dew,
Among mortals also
What is high must feel at home. (2013, 631)

Such passages have of course often been interpreted historically, that is in terms of a golden era, a fall, and a redemption of which Hölderlin provides a panorama from the pre-history of Greek culture to the present and beyond. Especially “Friedensfeier,” “Der Einzige,” and “Patmos” depict such a trajectory. According to their model, a form of piety would be necessary for a new classical age, sanctioned by the gods. Humans would not be ready for contact with the divine but must train themselves for what is to come.

[...] Es warten aber
Der scheuen Augen viele
Zu schauen das Licht. Nicht wollen
Am scharfen Strale sie blühen
Wiewohl den Muth der goldene Zaum hält.
Wenn aber, als
Von schwellenden Augenbraunen
Der Welt vergessen
Stilleuchtende Kraft aus heiliger Schrift fällt, mögen
Der Gnade sich freuend, sie
Am stillen Blike sich üben. (I, 452)

[...] But many timid eyes
Are waiting to see the light.
They are reluctant to flower
Beneath the searing beam, though it is
The golden bridle that curbs their courage.
But when, as if
By swelling eyebrows made
Oblivious of the world
A quietly shining strength falls from holy scripture,
Rejoicing in grace, they
May practice upon the quiet gaze. (2013, 563)

However, as “Friedensfeier” has it, enchantment is not only transient but unpredictable as well:

[...] So ist schnell
Vergänglichlich alles Himmlische; aber umsonst nicht;

Denn schonend rührt des Maases allzeit kundig
Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen
Ein Gott an, unversehn, und keiner weiß es, wenn? (I, 363)

[...] So all
That's heavenly fleets on; but not for nothing;

For sparingly, at all times knowing the measure,
A god for a moment only will touch the dwellings
Of men, by none foreseen, and no one knows when. (2013, 527)

This unpredictability can take the form of the lightning bolt, which violently connects heaven and earth, but also, as in “Patmos,” of the rainbow – “[...] Now silent is / His sign on thundering heaven [...]” ([...] *Still ist sein Zeichen / Am donnernden Himmel* [...], 2013, 563/I, 452) –, which connects earth with earth, or, again, of the dew on that modern invention which serves to *protect from* lightning. The contrast between these images is striking. If the event as exemplified by lightning could be the “supreme god of the Greeks,” it must now be contained, subdued, lest its roar drown out the sounds of song, which alone affords that poetic enchantment for which former revelations were only preparations:

Denn unermeßlich braußt, in der Tiefe verhallend,
Des Donnerers Echo, das tausendjährige Wetter,
Zu schlafen, übertönt von Friedenslauten, hinunter. (I, 362)

For now immeasurably, fading away in the deeps,
The Thunderer's echo, the millennial storm
Rolls down to sleep, intermingled with peaceful music. (2013, 525)

Such enchantment can take place only

[...] wo Himmlische nicht
Im Wunder offenbar, noch ungesehn im Wetter,
Wo aber bei Gesang gastfreundlich untereinander
In Chören gegenwärtig, eine heilige Zahl
Die Seeligen in jeglicher Weise
Beisammen sind, und ihr Geliebtstes auch,
An dem sie hängen, nicht fehlt [...] (I, 363)

[...] where heavenly beings are
Not manifest in miracles, nor unseen in thunderstorms,
But where in hymns hospitably conjoined
And present in choirs, a holy number,
The blessed in every way
Meet and forgather, and their best-beloved,
To whom they are attached, is not missing [...] (2013, 529)

The rainbow and the "heavenly dew" are not substitutes for the spectacles of lightning, but they let song, for the effects of which lightning and thunder were but the overture, become audible.

This alternation in heavenly signs plays an important role in all of the authors I study, and is treated further in chapter four. What remains here to be addressed is how the "immeasurable" sky comes to provide a medium for measure and moderation. Mallarmé's early lyric of disenchantment and impotence, "L'Azur," presents a poet oppressed by the sky, with which he enters into rivalry. Blasphemously rebelling against it, he summons fogs and personified tedium to his aid. Believing he has succeeded in killing the sun and vanquishing heaven, he appeals to matter for that enchantment which the dead sky cannot grant. His attempt to content himself

with the satisfactions of the masses seems strained, yet the disenchanting note on which the poem ends stems *not* from the sky's death but on the contrary from its resurrection.

En vain! l'Azur triomphe et je l'entends qui chante
Dans les cloches. Mon âme, il se fait voix pour plus
Nous faire peur avec sa victoire méchante,
Et du métal vivant sort en bleus angélus!

Il roule par la brume, ancien et traverse
Ta native agonie ainsi qu'un glaive sûr;
Où fuir dans la révolte inutile et perverse?
Je suis hanté. L'Azur! l'Azur! l'Azur! l'Azur! (I, 15)

Useless! the Blue has triumphed, soul; it sings
through the bells, sounding out to frighten us
all the more with its evil gloryings
from live metal in some blue angelus!

It drifts with the mist, ancient, running through
your innate torment like a trusty sword;
in vain revolt, what can we flee toward?
Haunted I am. The Blue! The Blue! The Blue! (2006, 23)

Again, here it is the celestial realm which, in reminding of "cruel Ideal or Sin" (23), *prevents* enchantment, as though the conflict the poet faces would dissolve if only the sky really were Nothing. Decades later, Mallarmé would compile under the ironically modest rubric "Plusieurs Sonnets" four of his densest poems, three of which address precisely that which remains after the sky has died (victoriously committed suicide, as one sonnet has it). Yet in each case the night appears to have darkened the heavens only to make more distinctly visible a spectacular light show. The setting of the sun gives way to "blaze of fame, blood in foam, gold, storm and stress" (*Tison de gloire, sang par écume, or, tempête*, 69/I, 37). And when this enchanting play of colors too has faded there remains the brightly shining hair of the beloved.

Quoi! de tout cet éclat pas même le lambeau
S'attarde, il est minuit, à l'ombre qui nous fête
Excepté qu'un trésor présomptueux de tête
Verse son caressé nonchaloir sans flambeau,

La tienne si toujours le délice! la tienne
Oui seule qui du ciel évanoui retienne
Un peu de puéril triomphe en t'en coiffant

Avec clarté quand sur les coussins tu la poses
Comme un casque guerrier d'impératrice enfant
Dont pour te figurer il tomberait des roses. (I, 37)

What! out of all that darkness not one shred
stays, in the dark that fêtes us (it's dead night)
except the arrogant treasure of a head
sheds its caressed nonchalance with no light,

yours yes a constant pleasure! yours alone
retaining from heavens that have gone
a trace of childish triumph for your crown

of light when on the pillows you lay it prone
like some child-empress's war-morion
that in your likeness showers roses down. (2006, 69)

Just like Hölderlin's divine thunderstorms had to pass in order for enchanting song to become audible, so in Mallarmé poetic brilliance is only visible once the blinding light of day is rejected:

Oui, je sais qu'au lointain de cette nuit, la Terre
Jette d'un grand éclat l'insolite mystère,
Sous les siècles hideux qui l'obscurcissent moins.

L'espace à soi pareil qu'il s'accroisse ou se nie
Roule dans cet ennui des feux vils pour témoins
Que s'est d'un astre en fête allumé le génie. (I, 36)

Yes, Earth has cast into this night afar
the startling mystery of sheer dazzlingness
beneath dread aeons darkening it less.

Space, its own peer, whether it fail or grow
rolls in this tedium trivial fires to show
the genius kindled by a festive star. (2006, 67)

Most difficult to spot is the constellation, that symbol of symbolism employed by Mallarmé, which was to enjoy an indeed illustrious poetic career. Although most of the time outshined by the sun or by city lights, or covered by clouds, the constellation, consisting of a group of stars, of course emits a light stronger than what warms and illumines us here on earth.

At the same time, the grouping of stars into constellations is a rather arbitrary earthly affair. Seen from elsewhere they do not just appear insignificant (even on earth they only *appear* significant) but would not have come to be in the first place. Their appearance depends on our habitual divesting the sky of depth; they are, as it were, an optical illusion. For Rilke, second only to Mallarmé in making use of constellations' symbolic resources,¹⁰⁴ their illusory nature ought, again, not to leave anything to be desired:

Auch die sternische Verbindung trägt.
Doch uns freue eine Weile nun
der Figur zu glauben. Das genügt. (II, 246)

The temporary belief in the constellation is measured with respect both to a less flexible faith and to a complete absence thereof. In the *New Poems*, Rilke speaks of “never fully-believed gods” (*nie ganzgeglaubte Götter*, I, 554) and hails the unicorn as “the never-believed” (*das niegeglaubte*, I, 470). But why is it necessary and how is it possible to believe in this measured way?

¹⁰⁴ Beda Allemann calls it “the most important figure in Rilke’s late works” (70). For an account of the distinction between Rilke’s and Mallarmé’s poetic uses of the constellation, see Allemann, “Rilke und Mallarmé. Entwicklung einer Grundfrage der symbolistischen Poetik” in *Rilke in Neuer Sicht*. Ed. Käthe Hamburger. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1971, 63-82.

3. LIES

There is a long-established philosophical and critical consensus that a poem's degree of success is not to be evaluated on the basis of its assertions' veracity, yet there is an equally strong consensus that successful poetry, like any authentic art, cannot for that reason be entirely devoid of truth. Poems, the story goes, operate according to a concept of truth different from that of ordinary speech: truth as revelation, prophecy, inspiration, remembrance, praise, or efficacious persuasion (archaic Greek poetry following Detienne); truth as mimesis of exemplary action (Aristotle); truth as testament to human freedom (Schelling); truth as sensuous appearance of the idea (Hegel); truth as unconcealment of being and opening of a world (Heidegger); truth as "truth-content" (*Wahrheitsgehalt*, Adorno); truth as verisimilitude (e.g. Barthes); truth as "power of eternally fastening the disappearance of what presents itself" (Badiou, 24-25); etc. In each of these theoretical edifices, the notion of truth as correspondence, correctness, or accuracy is deemed impoverished, even vulgar when applied to the type of claims that poems have on their readers and listeners; in each case truth is not primarily correlated with falsity: a poet who fails to make manifest truth of another, higher kind is not a lying poet but rather no poet at all.

Stanley Cavell has shown in a number of books and essays how trust and the possibility of fraudulence are crucial to the experience of the modernist artwork, which thereby only lays bare a constitutive feature of all art.¹⁰⁵ When we decide to spend time with a work of art, we place our faith in it, trusting that our time will not have been wasted. Modern art, be it literature, painting, or music, puts this trust to the test and tests the capacity of art to compel such trust. According to Cavell, our trust is betrayed when seemingly important elements turn out to be insignificant, or when something decisive is concealed to the degree that we could not possibly be expected to notice it. Trusting that the artwork is composed as it is due to some necessity

¹⁰⁵ See for instance "Music Discomposed" and "A Matter of Meaning It" (180-237).

and not arbitrarily is for Cavell analogous to religious faith. He writes: “religious experience is subject to distrust on the same grounds as aesthetic experience is: by those to whom it is foreign, on the ground that its claims must be false; by those to whom it is familiar, on the ground that its quality must be tested” (191). And the difficulties we have in communicating our experiences with art may be compared, he suggests, to the burden of not being believed (193).

There are, of course, clear parallels between what Cavell analyzes in terms of trust and fraudulence and what I want to convey as a matter of enchantment and embarrassment. Indeed, trust, faith, and belief *are* at stake in lyric enchantment, and a fraudulent *lyric* (as opposed to a novel or a painting or a piece of music) is perhaps *particularly* embarrassing. However, this affinity highlights a pivotal distinction, for the modern lyric insists on its capacity to *lie* as one of its strategies for enchantment. To a greater or lesser degree, it is even fraudulent for the poets I discuss *not* to lie; that is, the lyric comes to be seen as *either* lying *or* fraudulent, which is by no means a contradiction. Cavell’s notion of fraudulence does not require any knowing trickery: “the artist himself may not know” (190). But one cannot lie unwittingly – and the lyric must, in order to escape embarrassment, somehow demonstrate that its artifice and its falsities are *meant*.

In this chapter, I will maintain the saliency for the lyric of a mundane and profane notion of truth. This is not to debunk or even to critique those ambitious ontologies of the artwork which have elaborated alternative conceptions of truth, only to postulate that a global understanding of the lyric’s strategies of enchantment requires that one allow also a notion of truth as correctness to remain operative, and that one acknowledges how the lyric willingly makes itself accountable to it. Only in this way can the full implications of the lyric’s prerogative to lie be adequately assessed.

Perfectly transparent truth with no trace of ideology, idealism, myth, or metaphor, that is absolute veracity as the thoroughly literal and disenchanting, is not only unachievable but by principle unavailable to the lyric, which always retains at least a minimal, be it negative relation

to enchantment, and which depends on a constitutive opacity that measures it.¹⁰⁶ This of course does not prevent the lyric from telling truths, only from being a mere matter of facts or from telling the whole truth. It belongs to the freedom of the lyric – a freedom that may always be compromised – to tell either truths or lies (or neither).

Despite the many contradictions involved in Plato's banishment of mimetic poetry from his ideal state, the philosopher in fact saw this specifically lyric capacity quite clearly. Considering the enormous literature on Plato's relationship to poetry, it is remarkable how little attention is usually paid to the few lyric genres that Socrates is willing to admit without further qualifications: "hymns to the gods and the praises of good men" (ὕμνους θεοῖς καὶ ἐγκώμια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, 607a). These are not marginal forms of poetry: they are not theoretical constructions or philosophical desiderata but proper genres with plenty of representatives well-known to Plato. Hymns and praises make up a significant part if not the bulk of lyrics by Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides. In fact, most of the later canonized Greek lyric poets at least dabbled in these genres. For Plato they are of course admissible only in so far as they are subservient to the state and actively benefit it – but the question is precisely why and how they are able to benefit it in a manner that is clearly different from the devices of epic and tragedy.

Socrates confesses to being possessed since an early age of "a certain love and reverence for Homer" (595b), whom he regards not only as the foremost among poets but also as "the first teacher and beginner" (πρῶτος διδάσκαλός τε καὶ ἡγεμῶν) of the tragic poetry that was later to flourish (595c).¹⁰⁷ It is Socrates' commitment to truth that forces him nevertheless to indict Homer and his followers. The charge is twofold. First, poems are always merely imitations of imitations: just as the carpenter in making a couch is imitating the idea of a couch, so the

¹⁰⁶ For a critique of the correlation of the enlightened and the disenchanting with the absolutely literal, see Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007, 20, 29, and passim.

¹⁰⁷ This intimate link between the epic poetry of Homer and the more recent tragic genres is repeated throughout the dialogue. Cf. 598d, 605 c-d, 607a, and 602b.

painter of a couch always imitates this or that particular couch. This power of the painter's to bring anything at all into presence without paying closer attention to its inner constitution comes at a price: "The reason [his art] can make everything, apparently, is that it grasps just a little of each thing – and only an image at that." (598b) There is yet another remove between objects as captured by mimetic artists and the ideas to which these objects owe their being, for it is not the objects themselves that are being imitated but only their appearances from a particular point of view (φαντάσματα γάρ, ἄλλ' οὐκ ὄντα, 599a). Given the necessarily partial and superficial nature of any poetic imitation, Socrates is led to conclude that Homer and his followers, be they rhapsodes or tragic poets, can teach us nothing whatsoever about the subjects on which they speak. Because mimetic poetry only furnishes partial representations and not the things in themselves, any given representation can be contradicted by another representation of the very same thing. For instance, the magnitude of a thing varies according to whether it is inspected closely or viewed from afar, and, as in another example, the same things appear bent or straight depending on whether they are viewed in or out of water (602c). This is the play of appearances to which we are subjected insofar as we rely on the sensuous knowledge imparted by artworks. However, according to Socrates, there is another, superior way of attaining knowledge of objects that is not susceptible to the deceptions of the senses: "measuring, calculating and weighing" (602d). To these two ways of acquiring knowledge must, reasons Socrates, correspond two different parts of the soul, since it is "impossible for one thing to have opposite opinions about the same things at the same time" (602e). "The part of the soul whose opinions conflict with the measurements cannot be the same as the part whose opinions agree with the measurements." (603a)

The second cause for Socrates' indictment is that it is necessarily the former part of the soul to which mimetic poetry appeals and that some appearances offer themselves more readily to imitation than others. For instance, tragedy presents terrible events for scrutiny from all possible directions, fueling the passions and encouraging ceaseless conflict and lamentation –

whereas what Socrates regards as the superior, nobler part of the soul understands soberly to measure events and actively to face the calamity at hand. The pragmatic ground for this is that the detached, temperate, reasonable part of the soul offers little to no occasion for successful imitation, whereas the strife of the passions is the very medium of mimetic poetry and much easier for the “nondescript mob” of theatergoers to recognize (604e). What is remarkable in this connection is that in poetry is praised and poetry leads us to praise the very opposite of what in our own lives we deem, or are supposed to deem, praiseworthy. Socrates turns to his interlocutor:

I think you know that the very best of us, when we hear Homer or some other of the makers of tragedy imitating one of the heroes who is in grief, and is delivering a long tirade on his lamentations or chanting and beating his breast, feel pleasure, and abandon ourselves and accompany the representation with sympathy and eagerness, and we praise as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us in this way. [...] But when in our own lives some affliction comes to us, you are also aware that we plume ourselves upon the opposite, on our ability to remain calm and endure (605c-d)

In other words, mimetic poetry turns out to consist, insofar as it concerns philosophy, in an operation that radically reconfigures the objects and aims of praise. And it is here that the relationship between philosophy and poetry becomes not merely a negative one and therefore all the more complicated. Mimetic poetry has the dangerous capacity to praise and to elicit praise, but it is nevertheless *this very capacity* that Socrates wants to preserve as useful for the purposes of the state. For what is admitted to the proposed city is not no poetry at all but, again, “no poetry save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men” (607a).

That Socrates in his discussions of poetry in *The Republic* chooses to skip over the centuries that separate the dramatic forms of his day and the epic to which they are somehow indebted is often ascribed to the fact that contemporary Greece did not dispose of a unitary concept of the lyric under which the variety of poetic production that took place in the aftermath of epic could be collected. In *Protagoras*, however, a lyric poet is discussed at some length. The

argument concerns ostensibly a few lines by Simonides and whether they are consistent with one another. Protagoras holds that the mark of an educated man is the ability to distinguish in poetry “what has been rightly and what wrongly composed” (339a). Socrates decides to take the party of Simonides against Protagoras’ charges of inconsistency and unfolds the former’s ode as a case of anxiety of influence: in order to comprehend Simonides’ enigmatic statements and their internal accord, one must acknowledge the stakes involved in the rejection of a saying by Pittacus, to which the entire poem responds. While Socrates ultimately dismisses the business of poetic exegesis as unworthy of the conversations of educated men, who require “no extraneous voices” (347e), and even though his entire discourse on Simonides’ poem appears to be a parodic exhibition of the type of empty rhetorical skill that Protagoras esteems as the pinnacle of learning, Socrates shows just what might make the lyric sufferable: it speaks, or can be made to speak, like philosophy – that is, in assertions for which it can be held accountable. As Heinz Schlaffer puts it: “Lyric verse and philosophical prose can exist side by side, for, although in different forms, they speak of the same world.” (1990, 65)

Socrates’ ironic interpretation of Simonides’ saying does blatant and conscious violence to its meaning. However, rather than dismissing it wholesale, Plato preserves for the lyric a capacity to escape the realm of imitation, to which it of course also has access. Unlike epic and tragedy, the lyric can undercut the enchantments of mimetic poetry, including its own, with sobering arguments that have no divine or mythic guarantee and are therefore open to questioning. The Greek lyricists were historical persons speaking in their own voices. Quoting from them did not necessarily mean an appeal to authority, as would an earlier appeal to Homer and his muse. Lyric sayings were debatable – were even meant to be debated as their mode of survival. Thus Socrates invites poetry itself to present its apology “in lyric (μέλει) or other measure” (607d). However, even if mimetic poetry were somehow to prove itself useful, it is nevertheless to be condemned on the ground that it supplies only imitations of appearances, phantoms three removes from truth and reality. With lyric poetry things are less clear, for though

it often makes use of myth it is also full of individual judgments and gnomic sayings that cannot be said to imitate anything. For Socrates, mimetic poetry is certainly mendacious, but what really bothers him is that it nevertheless seems immune to accusations of lying. The lyric, on the other hand, is occasionally forced to admit to this vice. It is a curious detail that, in demonstrating the uselessness of Homer in matters of legislation, Socrates compares him unfavorably to Solon (599e), that great Athenian legislator who happened also to be a lyricist credited with the saying *πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἄοιδοί*, “poets [or, rather, singers] tell many lies” (109). In this way is forged a tacit compromise between poetry and rational discourse: by admitting to its fallibility, even possible mendacity, the lyric avoids immediately being dismissed as a childish game.

The point here is not to rehabilitate Plato’s views on literature or to figure him as a sophisticated theorist of genre but to comprehend what is the particular problem that the lyric poses for philosophy. In Plato is detectable an ambivalence vis-à-vis lyric discourse that stretches to our days, and which goes a long way in explaining why the lyric remains relatively undertheorized in antiquity. Either one admits the lyric’s claims to truth, in which case one is faced with the embarrassment that many of its assertions are nevertheless ostentatiously untrue, or more often unverifiable, if not absurd. Or one makes of the lyric too a matter of mimesis, disarms it as fiction, in which case it tends to become perfectly mysterious what its devices are meant to imitate.

The problem of how to read and do justice to the gnomic sayings of archaic poetry has proven especially puzzling to critics. In a couple of insightful essays, Mark Payne has addressed the deficiencies from which the dominant modes of interpretation suffer. On the one hand, historicist scholarship that strives to understand the proclamations of archaic poetry exclusively in light of the social setting in which they were first uttered is at constant risk of reducing lyric assertions to contemporary ideologies from which it may have been the very goal of the poet to distance himself. And even if the possibility of radical dissent is granted, such readings fail to

take into account the pretensions to universality of lyricists like Pindar and Simonides. On the other hand, more “literary” approaches in the tradition of New Criticism that tend to “fictionalize” the terse wisdoms of these poets neglect the fact that there is nothing fictional about the circumstances in which they appear (be they public celebrations or more intimate contexts). Of course Pindar’s odes contain myths – the veracity of which the poet himself puts into question –, yet many of his lyrics begin by brief statements with claims to universality, statements that cannot be ascribed to anyone but the speaker of the poem.

Payne’s proposal is to view these statements as purposefully open to appropriation. Whenever they appear, we are confronted with “a structure that invites its users to dismantle it and use it as they will” (2006, 173). “Gnomic lyric,” Payne writes, “presupposes its own transhistorical reception by addressing abstract formulations to a universal subject created by its own pronominal structures.”

The idea that the poem's meaning is exhausted in its immediate historical context is alien to the atemporal rhetoric of the poem itself. A reading that is faithful to this rhetoric will be one that endeavors to respond as the "you" the poem addresses, rather than one that attempts to imagine the response of someone else. The poems are not founded upon a "single-use" aesthetic but look towards their future reception. (182)

In other words, we are not to reconstruct the original circumstances under which such and such a claim might have been believable but to recognize that gnomic poetry asks us to discover from our own perspective circumstances on which such and such a claim would have purchase, thereby gaining a “conceptual vocabulary” with which to orient ourselves under these circumstances (2008, 19).

In a similar vein but with subtle yet important differences, Wolfgang Janke has argued for the transhistorical validity of archaic poetry’s apparently ungrounded universal statements. Although Janke despite his declared intentions remains close to Heidegger’s interpretation of ἀλήθεια as unconcealment and affirms the world-opening capacity of “the great linguistic

artwork" (14), the definition of truth he proposes for what he calls "archaic song" (which he does not confine to the archaic period of ancient Greece) is, like Payne's, pragmatic: true in the archaic sense is that which changes our mode of existence in the world; what is merely true in the sense of correct leaves us unaffected (Janke's terms are *kontingierend* and *indifferent*).¹⁰⁸

Janke is right that in many cases there are no facts at hand which could either confirm or disprove the dense, enigmatic sayings that are in fact endemic to the lyric (and interestingly more common in the modern poets he analyzes than in the genuinely archaic song from which they directly or indirectly drew). Indeed, a proper response to them cannot consist in verifying them against some original setting, for, as Payne observes, the very purpose of Pindar's songs is to transcend the after all fairly mundane occasions for their writing. Yet the problem becomes considerably more complicated once one looks more closely at the modern German examples with which Payne and Janke seek to demonstrate the transhistorical validity of their notions of truth (Hölderlin and Celan in the former's case; Hölderlin and Rilke in the case of the latter). Janke in fact touches upon this complication in the last sentence of his book, too late to unfold it. He asks whether Nietzsche's view that we have art in order not to perish of the truth ought not to be "modified archaically: We have archaic artworks of poetry in order mindfully to save the true reality of the world in its entire truth, which became a mere fable and perished" (290).¹⁰⁹

Formulated in more general terms, this question is in fact decisive for the modern lyric and should perhaps stand at the beginning rather than at the end of a book on lyric truth. The problem with all "poetic" conceptions of truth, including Richard Rorty's, on which Payne relies, is that while they avoid dismissing the lyric as trivially untrue or disarming it as fiction, they nevertheless figure its primary relationship to truth in purely positive terms. This does not mean that truth is a value, nor does it mean that all lyrics, on this account, are equally true. It means

¹⁰⁸ "Kontingierend heißt der Wert einer Wahrheit, die uns angeht, die unser Leben zufällig-schicksalhaft bestimmt und durchstimmt, erhellt oder verdunkelt, erhebt oder niederschlägt. Und sie ist umso wahrer, je tiefer und ernster sie von uns attendierend wahrgenommen wird." (288)

¹⁰⁹ "Wir haben archaische Dichtwerke der Kunst, um die wahre Weltwirklichkeit, die zur Fabel wurde und zugrunde ging, andenkend in ihrer ganzen Wahrheit zu retten"

simply that there is no opposite of truth other than its privation.

The shrewdest version of such poetic truth is arguably Martin Heidegger's. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, truth is thought according to the etymology of ἀλήθεια, which he translates as unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) but which could also be rendered by similarly graceless neologisms like unforgetting or unwithdrawing. The truth that is at work in poetry, under which Heidegger subsumes all art (70-76), is the opening and clearing in which beings first come to be as things that are. Heidegger grants that unconcealed truth may manifest itself as concealment, as refusal and dissembling (52-53); but the world itself that is opened cannot be a deception, for any judgment concerning mere semblances can only take place within a world opened up by the prior happening of truth as unconcealment. There is, strictly speaking, no outside of truth: "The truth that discloses itself in the work can never be proved or derived from what went before. What went before is refuted in its exclusive reality by the work." (73) Put differently, what is revealed in the world opened up by the work may reveal itself as concealment and dissemblance, but the world as such is per definition a true world.

Heidegger's assimilation of all art to poetry has some important consequences. For Heidegger, language itself is "poetic"; and language, in its poetic capacity, is "the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their conflict and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods" (71). That is, art, poetry, and language are essentially myth.¹¹⁰ And myth in this sense, insofar as it is operative, is always true, because it provides the basis on which any judgment regarding truth as correctness is made.

The purpose of this detour is not to offer yet another critique of Heidegger's ontology of the artwork but to bring into relief the fact that some of the most sophisticated poets of the long 19th century – some of which Heidegger himself reads – conceived of themselves as lying. If Heidegger is right that poetic truth, in the wide sense in which he understands it, opens up a world in which it first becomes possible to lie, then it is of course absurd to regard that world

¹¹⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe has analyzed carefully this structure (9-14).

itself as mendacious. Yet hubristic as it may be, it is a fact that poets themselves deem it possible to lie in this constitutive sense. Poetics and philosophy, in wishing to save poetry from fiction and the trivially untrue by introducing a “higher” concept of truth, risk divesting the lyric of its capacity to lie. However, such attempts have only increased critical suspicion of lyric mythopoiesis. Indeed, for influential readers from Benjamin to Lacoue-Labarthe, myth is *the* object of suspicion and more or less identified with ideology.¹¹¹

What is at stake is not whether art should be thought from the vantage point of truth (Heidegger) or rather from the perspective of the lie (Nietzsche). Rather, the question concerns *what the lyric does when it claims that it is lying* and whether such claims can be useful for understanding other lyrics and perhaps even the lyric as genre.

Philosophy is not alone responsible for the lyric’s becoming fiction along with the other poetic genres. The archaic lyric does not consist merely in praising and blaming or otherwise asserting but is marked by the occasions for its performance and the individuals involved in its production. As these occasions and these individuals become distant in time and space, there are, as Schlaffer notes (1990, 66), no firm ground for considering Sappho’s lovers any more real than Achilles’. But does this mean that the lyric is henceforth doomed to fiction? When poets in modernity seek once more to mean what they say, is this, as Schlaffer must hold, regressive and comprehensible only in terms of an archaic past, or is it disclosing an essential feature of the lyric?

The scandal of the lyric is grounded in two simple facts. On the one hand, it makes assertions and performs speech acts that, were they to be understood at face value or to appear in any other discourse, would be impermissible. On the other hand, the lyric – both as a genre arising historically in archaic Greece and as reconceptualized in the Romantic era – introduces an individual accountability as well as new forms of earnestness and intimacy.

¹¹¹ For Benjamin’s part I am thinking primarily of the essay on Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

Schlaffer is of course right in pointing out that “there arises in the lyric its own degree of fictionality” (1990, 65), but this only underlines the fact that the lyric is not like drama or the novel *a priori* fictional, which in turn affords it a unique relationship to myth.

The notion of a new mythology is among the most influential, difficult, and controversial ideas to put its mark on the literary and intellectual history of the long 19th century. With several books on the subject, Manfred Frank is perhaps the scholar who has probed deepest into its sources and applications. Although I engage Frank on several points, I do not in the following attempt to recreate once more the development, trajectory, and aftermath of that “mythology of reason” called for by the author(s) of what has become known as “The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism” (Hegel 1986, I, 236), which will serve as my starting point (although as Frank has shown, the idea of a new mythology can be traced back further into the 18th century).¹¹² My more modest goal is to determine the specific role of lyric poetry in this vast project, which is not merely a “moment” in literary history but an exploration of the means and ends of forms of poetic enchantment that, however ironic or distanced, are still inseparable from the idea of the lyric.

Despite lingering illusions of absolute enlightenment, it has become generally accepted that the power of myth in advanced societies is not gradually diminishing until it has finally lost its grip altogether, but that it reappears in ever new guises and *especially* once it is believed completely to have vanished. Nonetheless, the discourse on myth in German Romanticism and idealism around 1800 was unique for its blatant and often contradictory affirmation of mythological (re)invention, which comes to light not only in “The Earliest System-Program” (1796/7) but just as prominently in Friedrich Schlegel’s “Rede über die Mythologie” (1800) and in numerous of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling’s (other) texts from the same time.¹¹³ These

¹¹² See especially the lecture on Johann Gottfried Herder in Frank’s *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1982, 123-152.

¹¹³ Schelling has been identified with the fictional speaker of Schlegel’s “talk,” Ludovico; he is also one of the suggested authors of “The Oldest System-Program,” the others being Hegel and Hölderlin.

writings, which predict a glorious future for poetry once it has merged not only with all other forms of art but with the sciences as well, make no mention of the lyric. Indeed, Jena Romanticism has no fleshed out theory of the lyric, which can be ascribed to several circumstances.¹¹⁴ For my purposes, which do not include an investigation into the poetic origins of German idealism or the literary theory of early Romanticism, only a few factors must be noted. First, if the wealth of new poetry announced in these texts is to find its nourishment in myth, this presupposes precisely that which is found to be lacking. And the lyric, such as it was known to the likes of Schlegel, never produced a new mythology: this could only be the work of epic, which was to be updated in the form of a self-conscious, ironic, Romantic novel, containing all other genres within itself – a capacity at other times attributed to drama.¹¹⁵ But if epic is the presentation of myth and drama is the interpretation thereof (or at least its inclusion or instantiation) – in other words, if epic is the telling of mythic events and tragedy their imitation –, then the role of myth in lyric is less clear and hence the function of lyrics in the elaboration of a new mythology enigmatic. In Schlegel's "Epochen der Dichtkunst," the iambic tradition that followed upon Greek epic is called "the complete opposite of mythic poetry" (II, 291), which is not a diminishment. However, it is in one of his *Kritische Fragmente* that the unique status of the lyric in Schlegel's program becomes approachable. He writes:

¹¹⁴ For one suggestion, see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (99-100).

¹¹⁵ At the end of his *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling writes that

the most perfect composition of all the arts, the unification of poesy and music through song, of poesy and painting through dance, both in turn synthesized together, is the most complex theater manifestation, such as was the drama of antiquity. Only a caricature has remained for us: the *opera*, which in a higher and nobler style both from the side of poesy as well as from that of the other competing arts, might sooner guide us back to the performance of that ancient drama combined with music and song.

Music, song, dance, as well as all the various types of drama, live only in public life, and form an alliance in such life. Wherever public life disappears, instead of that real, external drama in which, in all its forms, an entire people participates as a political or moral totality, only an *inward*, ideal drama can unite the people. This ideal drama is the worship service, the only kind of *truly* public action that has remained for the contemporary age, and even so only in an extremely diminished and reduced form. (280)

Sapphic poems must grow and be discovered. They can neither be produced at will, nor published without desecration. Whoever does so lacks pride and modesty. Pride: because he tears his inmost essence out of the holy stillness of his heart and throws it into the crowd, to be stared at, crudely or coldly — and that for a lousy *da capo* or a gold coin. And it will always be immodest to put oneself up for exhibition, like an old painting [*Urbild*].¹¹⁶ And if lyrical poems are not completely unique, free, and true, then, as lyrical poems, they're worthless. Petrarch doesn't belong here: for the cool lover doesn't utter anything except elegant platitudes; and actually he is romantic [*novelistic*],¹¹⁷ not lyrical. But even if another creature existed who was so coherently beautiful and classical that she could show herself naked, like Phryne before all the Greeks, still there no longer exists an Olympian audience to appreciate such a performance. And it was Phryne. Only cynics make love in the market-place. [...] Sapphic is never cynical. (1971, 157)

Without yielding to the temptation of extrapolating from Romantic fragments a cohesive theory, it must be remarked that the very reticence of the early Romantics on lyric matters gives a certain weight to these only apparently commonplace statements. The fragment begins with a designation of Sapphic poetry in mythic terms. To be sure, Schlegel does not speak of the employment in Sappho's poetry of this or that myth but ascribes a mythic status to the lyrics themselves. Like myth, they cannot be produced at will. Yet at the same time, they are not figured as the product of a collective effort or even as belonging to a people or "community." The Sapphic (which here appears as more or less synonymous with the lyric) is correlated with individual interiority, but "inmost essence" and "holy stillness" are not valued as such, only as "completely unique, free, and true" as well as "coherently beautiful and classical," and even such a heart it would be imprudent to display to anything but an Olympian audience, whom it confirms.

By being per definition "true" and "never cynical," Sapphic (that is lyric) poems may act as a legitimization of the paradox that the call for a new mythology in fact is. Lyric performance presupposes a mythic Olympian audience, who is confirmed in the appreciation of the "completely unique, free, and true." In other words, the lyric *de-ironizes* and *de-fictionalizes* myth. A discourse of such intimacy and earnestness is of course at constant risk of contamination from "the crowd" and "the market-place," which is why it must assume the

¹¹⁶ My insertion.

¹¹⁷ The translator's insertion.

character of a mystery available only to initiates.

This selective and protective character of the lyric is apparent in that curious poem which the young Hegel dedicated and sent to his friend Hölderlin in 1796, "Eleusis."¹¹⁸ The poem, which resonates with several of Hölderlin's hymns composed in the years prior and which represents a position that Hegel was soon to abandon, is a remarkable display of disenchanting enchantment. Here, the goddess Demeter is invoked and the Eleusinian mysteries are praised, but it is also established that "not one note of the sacred / initiations [is] preserved" (1991, 8). The lyric does not create myth but is a medium for its affirmation and critique, a response to its presence or absence. The poem concludes:

Es trugen geizig deine Söhne, Göttin,
Nicht deine Ehr' auf Gass' und Markt, verwahrten sie
Im innern Heiligtum der Brust.
Drum lebstest du auf ihrem Munde nicht.
Ihr Leben ehrte dich. In ihren Taten lebst du noch.
Auch diese Nacht vernahm ich, heil'ge Gottheit, Dich,
Dich offenbart oft mir auch deiner Kinder Leben,
Dich ahn' ich oft als Seele ihrer Taten!
Du bist der hohe Sinn, der treue Glauben,
Der, eine Gottheit, wenn auch Alles untergeht, nicht wankt. (I, 232-233)

Your sons, Oh Goddess, miserly with your honor, did not
carry it through the streets and markets, but they cultivated it
in the breast's inner chambers.
And so you did not live on their lips.
Their life honored you. And you live still in their acts.
Even tonight, sacred divinity, I heard you.
Often the life of your children reveals you,
and I introduce you as the soul of their acts!
You are the lofty meaning, the true faith,
which, divine when all else crumbles, does not falter. (1991, 9)

A striking feature of Hegel's lyric is that it describes a secret that at the same time *cannot* and *must not* be spoken. But in fact the final lines of the poem make quite clear what of the addressed goddess must be maintained. It is "the lofty meaning, the true faith" (*der hohe Sinn, der Treue Glauben*). Here it is faith or belief itself which is divine. But belief in what? Certainly

¹¹⁸ For the social and intellectual context of this poem's composition, see Gilgen (186-191).

not in this or that mythologeme but, with a formulation from a contemporaneous fragmentary Hölderlin essay, that “there is more than machinery [...] in the world” (*Maschinengang*, II, 51). What is crucial here is that the view of the human world as something mechanical and ultimately reducible to objective causes and effects, which is the basis for the critique of the state in “The Earliest System-Program” and which had been addressed by Kant in his third *Critique*, is not figured as the disenchanting and thoroughly though regrettably enlightening truth of the matter but as *itself a superstition*. The adversary of the new mythology, then, is not simply a present utterly disinherited of myth but rather a reductive mythic image (the machine), allegedly backed up by reason, that is alien to the aspirations of free men.

This observation is pivotal for understanding the role of the lyric in the attempts toward a new mythology. For what is at stake here is not the various idealist and Romantic articulations of that which is “more than machinery” but a structural feature of the lyric which these ideas help clarify. The very notion of a new mythology may seem absolutely at odds with Schlegel’s demands that lyrics be completely “true.” However, this concept of truth is opposed primarily to the fictional, the cynical, and the ironic (which is not the same as claiming that the lyric cannot “contain” fictions, cynicism, or ironies). Schlegel clearly does not assert that lyrics speak the Truth (the whole truth and nothing but the truth). In his *Vorlesungen über Transzendentalphilosophie* he indeed claims that “[a]ll truth is relative” (XII, 92), a needless to say moot point philosophically that is nevertheless poetologically acceptable.¹¹⁹ As far as the lyric is concerned, this does not imply any perspectivism; rather, it means that the lyric can not only not be thoroughly disenchanting but that for the lyric there is also no other utterly disenchanting, sober, matter-of-fact discourse outside of it. There is no whole truth for the lyric, only a measured one. In other words, lyric myth does not profess to be absolutely true but only to be truer than some other myth to which it responds, which is another way of stating that the imperative of lyric myth is not to lie but to lie *better*.

¹¹⁹ For an assessment of Schlegel’s position, see Frank (1996).

What it means to lie better is of course different in each case, and nothing guarantees that the lyric will live up to its imperative: enchantment may always turn into embarrassment. But the lyric's defense against the allegation that poets lie is that there are nevertheless better and worse lies – indeed for the lyric there are strictly speaking *only* better and worse lies, among the most harmful of which is the myth of no myths, that is the identification of truth with absolute disenchantment and sobriety – the world as “simply” machinery.

Hölderlin's poetry critiques the myth of no myth by correlating it with the flight of the gods, itself a mythic event. Indeed, his lyric writings employ most consistently the strategy for poetic enchantment by which the ostensible absence of myth is figured in mythic terms, which range from the mocking via the alarming to the bitterly lamenting. The most compact and pedagogical example of this is perhaps the two hexameter lines that Hölderlin likely penned in 1797 under the title “Die beschreibende Poësie”:¹²⁰

Wißt! Apoll ist der Gott der Zeitungsschreiber geworden
Und sein Mann ist, wer ihm treulich das Factum erzählt. (I, 185)

Latest news: Apollo's become the god of journalists, press men,
And his blue-eyed boy he who reports all the facts. (2013, 61)

This small piece of *Zeitkritik* does not call for advanced exegesis; I quote it because it shows pedagogically how any mere matter of fact in Hölderlin immediately acquires a mythic dimension. Journalistic, descriptive poetry is here not figured as simply disenchanting and uninspired. Nor has Apollo been desecrated by the lowly ambitions of contemporary poetry. Instead, it is Apollo, the God of truth, light, art, and knowledge who has turned into the God of journalism in an age that conceives the faithful telling of facts as the model for enlightenment.

¹²⁰ As is not unusual in Hölderlin's poetry of this period, the second verse can be read both as hexametric and as an elegiac pentameter, the latter of which would make the couplet an elegiac distich.

In Hölderlin, every image of disenchantment is mythologically grounded. The naming of celestial bodies and the arrangement of constellations, which were to receive more positive connotations in such later lyricists as Mallarmé and Rilke, is a recurring example. In “Dichterberuf,” the designation and classification of the stars stand for the instrumental use of the heavenly, whose end is not enchantment but a violent controlling through counting:

Zu lang ist alles Göttliche dienstbar schon
Und alle Himmelskräfte verscherzt, verbraucht
Die Gütigen, zur Lust, danklos, ein
Schlaues Geschlecht und zu kennen wähnt es

Wenn ihnen der Erhabne den Aker baut
Das Tagslicht und den Donnerer, und es späht
Das Sehrohr wohl sie all und zählt und
Nennet mit nahmen des Himmels Sterne. (I, 330)

Too long now things divine have been cheaply used
And all the powers of heaven, the kindly, spent
In trifling waste by cold and cunning
Men without thanks, who when he, the Highest,

In person tills their field for them, think they now
The daylight and the Thunderer, and indeed
Their telescope may find them all, may
Count and may name every star of heaven. (2013, 235)

This image is used in a clarifying context and with greater effect in “Chiron,” the first of the *Nachtgesänge* and perhaps of all of Hölderlin’s poems the most intricately wrought with classical mythology. Chiron, foremost among the centaurs in intelligence and learning, and skilled especially in astronomy, becomes in Hölderlin’s poem a symbol of the rift between a mythic and an objectifying, scientific relationship to nature. In Chiron’s own voice: “[...] in the cool of stars I learned but / Only the namable [...] ([...] *bei der Sterne Kühle lernt’ ich / Aber das Nennbare nur [...]*, 249/I, 439). The naming of the stars is here conceived as a demystifying and disenchanting activity, but for a mythic creature like Chiron there is of course no sharp line between astronomy and astrology, and the very names the stars received were of course taken

from myth. Indeed, the constellation Centaurus is named in honor of Chiron himself. And in the very next stanza of the poem disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) is the work of the no less mythical hero Heracles: “[...] Disenchanted // That wild, sad open meadow the demigod, / Zeus’ servant came, the straight man [...] (*Das wilde Feld entzaubernd, das traur’ge, zog / Der Halbgott, Zevs Knecht, ein, der gerade Mann [...]*, 249/l, 439).

The clearest instance in Hölderlin of such mythologization of the very agents of demythologization is the unfinished “Die Titanen.” Here the temporality is reversed, and the present is not situated after but before the enchanted Olympian age: “Not yet, however, / The Time has come. They still are / Untethered [...]” (*Nicht ist es aber / Die Zeit. Noch sind sie / Unangebunden [...]*, 629/l, 390). In each case the movement between enchantment and disenchantment takes place within myth; the disenchanted is as mythical as the enchanted. It is not the absence of myth which constitutes a problem but the (perhaps tacit) mythic figuration of man as a titan or a hero born from a god. This critique of myth using myth aims never to abolish it altogether, something which the lyric genre does not permit. Even the identity between real and ideal depicted in “Friedensfeier” does not mean the end of myth. The resolution of all mythological, theological, and philosophical conflicts and contradictions is formulated in mythic terms. When the “heavenly” are no longer “manifest in miracles, nor unseen in thunderstorms” (*Im wunder offenbar, noch ungesehn im Wetter*, 529/l, 365) but rather “with us in our house” (*in unserem Hauße*, 531/l, 366) they have not simply vanished, only become consistent with what we know about the world.

Hölderlin’s poetry of blame centers on the sanctimonious and the hubristic rather than on the profane or the secular. The target is not the absence of myth but the presence of *bad* myth, the lack of care and conviction in the crafting of poetic lies. In fact, poetry may lose the capacity to speak truths or lies altogether as the very source of its earnestness becomes downgraded to decorative fictions. Hence, when Hölderlin accuses his colleagues of fraudulence it is not for having spoken falsely but for having feigned conviction and thereby failed to mean what they

say. In other words, Hölderlin condemns not what they say but how they say it.

Die scheinheiligen Dichter

Ihr kalten Heuchler, sprecht von den Göttern nicht!
Ihr habt Verstand! ihr glaubt nicht an Helios,
Noch an den Donnerer und Meergott;
Todt ist die Erde, wer mag ihr danken? –

Getrost, ihr Götter! zieret ihr doch das Lied,
Wenn schon aus euren Nahmen die Seele schwand,
Und ist ein großes Wort vonnöthen,
Mutter Natur! so gedenkt man deiner. (I, 193)

The Sanctimonious Poets

Cold hypocrites, of gods do not dare to speak!
You're rational! In Helios you don't believe,
Nor in the Thunderer or the Sea-God;
Dead is our Earth, so what fool would thank her? –

Take comfort, gods! For yet you adorn their verse
Though now the soul's gone out of your pilfered names;
And if some high-flown word is needed,
You, Mother Nature, they still remember. (2013, 99)

The earth is dead and the “soul” may have disappeared from divine names. There is a hypocritical lie which, on the verge of fiction, merely underlines this state of things, and there is a lie full of conviction, a song that may animate even soulless names. Here and elsewhere in Hölderlin's poetry the hubris of reason (*Vernunft*) and understanding (*Verstand*) is, as in the “The Earliest System-Program,” conceived in terms of *Scheinheiligkeit* (literally “pseudo-holiness”). Although Hölderlin may question the quality of any alleged experience of the divine, open disbelief is never an object of concern. On the contrary, the heretical and the orthodox are often dialectically reversed, as I showed in chapter two. In the ode to the Italian philosopher Lucilio Vanini, who was burned at the stake in 1619, the “despiser” of God (*Gottverächter*) becomes a “holy man” and his Christian persecutors “blasphemers” (*Lästerer*, 115/I, 196). Yet the wish that this holy man return from the dead to take revenge on the “barbarians” who killed him is in the final stanza tempered through a reference to indifferent nature (115/I, 196):

Doch die du liebtest, die dich empfang,
Den Sterbenden, die heil'ge Natur vergißt
Der Menschen Thun und deine Feinde
Kehrten, wie du, in den alten Frieden. (I, 197)

Yet she who had your love while you lived, received
You dying—holy Nature, I know, forgets
Our human acts and, as to you, gave
Back the old peace to your persecutors. (2013, 115)

The ode is often taken as an early example of Hölderlin's pantheism, but although nature is indeed holy it is also forgetful and amoral.

More famously, Hölderlin's experiment in strict Pindaric form, the fragmentary "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." figures the speaking poet himself as a "false priest" wanting more from the divine than what is manifest in nature. This kind of legitimation through admission of fallibility is a crucial component of the type of poetic enchantment that lyric lies afford. Admitting to having been wrong before, the poet is liable to be wrong again, albeit perhaps in a more successful manner. That this is indeed a matter of strategy is helpfully demonstrated by the "Palinodie" that Hölderlin begun around the same time (late 1799). A palinode is traditionally a poem in which a position ventured in an earlier poem is retracted. However, Hölderlin's palinode begins not with excuses but with accusations, questions, and exhortations:

Was dämmert um mich Erde! Dein freundlich Grün?
Was wehst du wieder, Lüftchen, wie einst, mich an?
In allen Wipfeln rauschts,

Was wekt ihr mir die Seele? Was regt ihr mir
Vergangnes auf, ihr Guten! o schonet mein
Und laßt sie run, die Asche meiner
Freuden, ihr spottet nur! o wandelt

Ihr schicksaallosen Götter vorbei und blüht
In seelger Jugend über dem Sterblichen [...] (I, 239)

Why, Earth, around me glimmer your friendly leaves?
Why, little wind, as once do you breathe on me?

In all the tree-tops there's a rustling,
Why do you rouse my soul and stir up the past
In me, you kindly ones? O be kinder still
And let them be, the embers of my
Joys! You were mocking me! Travel on, then,
You fateless gods, pass by, while high up you flower
In ever-youthful prime, this decrepit man [...] (2013, 145)

The position that is to be retracted is articulated within the palinode itself. We only get a hint at the retraction with the incomplete fifth stanza's call for reconciliation (*Versöhnung*). The recantation is prepared by a position that has always already been abandoned.

On the one hand, we are not likely to have much confidence in someone who constantly retreats from his own positions – or rather, we are not likely to have confidence in any one of his positions being “correct.” On the other hand, the constant recantations of earlier perspectives gives the impression of a commitment to *lying better* and at the same time provides lessons in doing so. Hölderlin names his poem “Palinodie” before the retraction has been conceived or at least before it has been written. The only way of escaping fraudulence is to exhibit freely one's own mistakes, which, because they are, although always already realized, actually *made* and *meant* in the poem and not merely recounted, amount to temporary strategic lies in the service of enchantment.

The imperative of earnestness is spelled out programmatically in “Dichterberuf,” where the poet asks rhetorically:

So sollt' es klingen, gleich als hätte
Muthig und müßig ein Kind des Meisters
Geweihete, reine Saiten im Scherz gerührt? (I, 330)

Then should it sound as though capricious
Curious, a child had been idly twanging
The Master's lyre, the hallowed, the pure, in jest? (2013, 235)

Indeed it should not. Rather, as the first version of “Brot und Wein” makes clear,

[...] nun denkt er zu ehren in Ernst die seeligen Götter,
Wirklich und wahrhaft muß alles verkünden ihr Lob.
Nichts darf schauen das Licht, was nicht den hohen gefällt,
Vor den Aether gebührt müßigversuchendes nicht. (I, 378)

Now in earnest he means to honour the gods who have blessed him,
Now in truth and in deed all must re-echo their praise.
Nothing must see the light but what to those high ones is pleasing,
Idle and bungled work never for aether was fit. (2013, 325)

The poet could not make his point more clearly or more emphatically. The song for which he calls and by which he is called must not be “capricious,” not childish, not “idly twanging,” not “in jest, not “bungled” but “in earnest,” “in truth and in deed.” Poetic enchantment cannot be carried out on a hit-or-miss basis, and its efficacy is contingent upon a resistance against the degradation of the praise of the gods to fiction. This does not mean that fiction cannot be seriously meant, and of course it can never be *proven* that Hölderlin’s lyrics are less fiction than classicist uses of ancient myth as embellishment. On the contrary, it is precisely *because* the lyric is always susceptible to fictionalization that it can never be asserted enough that it is, in this or that particular case, not fiction.

Rather than simply taking Hölderlin’s words for it, one might ask what it would look like for a poet, whose writings are under the constant threat of being fictionalized, and who is troubled by what he perceives as the contemporary division of all intelligible language into the faithful telling of facts on the one hand and fiction on the other, to try as well as he can to resist this dichotomy and to embrace in earnest lyric speech acts in the hope that they will not be taken as pretense. In fact, Hölderlin uses every conceivable means for a lyricist to convey conviction.

No lyric utterance is *a priori* either earnestly meant or fictive; the crucial point here is that lyric speech should be subject to the same kinds of procedures for determining conviction

or fraudulence as most other types of language. The desperate struggle to be taken seriously should be understood as a violent resistance to a concept of literature that dooms all its genres to fiction and imitation, and that reduces all lyric phenomena to “tropes.” However, this resistance is not simply to enable for the lyric a faithful telling of facts. It is just as much a preservation of the lyric’s capacity to be “in truth and in deed” faithless. Hölderlin’s sincerity is always both a remedy and a preparation for failure. He writes of the predicament of the German poet:

[...] es glühet ihm die Wange vor Schaam,
Unheilig jeder Laut des Gesangs. (I, 349)

And his cheeks are flushed with shame,
Unholy every note of his song. (2013, 599)

Every sound of his song is “unholy” – yet in his shame he is nevertheless “blessed” in the subsequent stanza.

Hölderlin’s method of using fallibility, insecurity and regret to convince is employed consistently and expertly. The language of atonement recurs frequently, sometimes straightforwardly, as in the short “Abbitte,” but more often ambiguously, as in “An die Deutschen,” where the poet hopes to be wrong in his negative appraisal of the Germans (77/I, 189; 97/I, 193), or in “Elegie,” which gives voice to the fear of in the future having to atone for youthful fervor in “the all too sober realm [...] / Where in illusoriness madly the swarm drifts along” (*im allzunüchternen Reich [...] / Wo bei trügerischem Schein irres Gewimmel sich treibt*, I, 289). As elsewhere in Hölderlin, the sober is here not the opposite of the mad; on the contrary, that which is “all too sober” is for the poet nothing but a mad drifting along. Put differently, the future may necessitate atonement for current sins, yet the poet, speaking in the present, knows that such atonement cannot be sincere. A subtle modification of this rhetoric can be observed in the second so-called *Nachtgesang*, “Thränen”:

Himmliche Liebe! zärtliche! wenn ich dein
Vergäße, wenn ich, o ihr geschicklichen
Ihr feur'gen, die voll Asche sind und
Wüst und vereinsamet ohnediß schon,

Ihr lieben Inseln, Augen der Wunderwelt!
Ihr nemlich geht nun einzig allein mich an,
Ihr Ufer, wo die abgöttische
Büßet, doch Himmlischen nur, die Liebe. (I, 441)

O heavenly love, the tender, if you I should
Forget, if you, the site that a fate has marked,
The fiery that are full of ash and
Even before that were wild, deserted,

Dear islands, you, the eyes of the wondrous world!
Since only you concern me and matter now,
You banks where the idolatrous, where
Love, but to heaven alone, does penance. (2013, 253)

Here, "heavenly love" is invoked only to be described in the following stanza as both a subject and an object of idolatry for which even holy men and heroes must atone.

Denn allzudankbar haben die Heiligen
Gedienet dort in Tagen der Schönheit und
Die zorn'gen Helden [...] (I, 441)

For too devoutly almost, too gratefully
In days of beauty there did the holy serve
And furious heroes [...] (2013, 253)

The conflict is even further compressed in the ode's final stanza:

Ihr waichen Thränen, löschet das Augenlicht
Mir aber nicht ganz aus; ein Gedächtniß doch
Damit ich edel sterbe, laßt ihr
Trügrischen, Diebischen, mir nachleben. (I, 441)

And yet, soft tears, not utterly now put out
For me the light of vision; a memory,
To make my dying noble, still, you
Thievish, deceitful ones, let outlast me. (2013, 253)

The “soft tears” through which the past is viewed are deceptive; they distort the memory of what was and the perception of what is. As the medium of remembrance, they may also completely blot it out. The poet appeals to their deceptive mnemonic function as the only way for himself to live on: in the lie.

It may well be argued that Hölderlin represents a turning point in the history of literature, after which it becomes increasingly more convincing to fail in one’s declared ambitions than to succeed, and this partly explains his argument with Friedrich Schiller, the implicit addressee of “Die beschreibende Poesie.”¹²¹ Of course, Hölderlin’s poems are not themselves failures – but nor do they simply represent failures. Rather, they contain failures as moments, as events, within them. And these failures are not private but poetic, paradoxically part of their poetic success. A certain degree of disenchantment is here even prerequisite for the credibility of poetic enchantment, a phenomenon that first becomes manifest with Hölderlin and that culminates in the 20th century. This maneuver involves a blatant writing against better knowing. Especially Hölderlin’s songs in free rhythms are constructed to give the sense that events of failed enchantment are simultaneous to the writing of the poems. The unfinished, fragmentary nature of many such lyrics reinforces this impression, perhaps most prominently at the abrupt, dramatic end of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...”:

Doch weh mir! wenn von

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 (I, 264)

¹²¹ Jochen Schmidt provides some useful context (DKV I, 606).

But alas! when from

And I say at once,

That I approached to see the heavenly,
They themselves, they cast me down, deep among the living
Me, the false priest, into the darkness, that I
Sing the song of warning for those willing to learn.
There

The coincidence between thematic material (poetic hubris; the poet as “false priest”) and the breaking down of the poem’s formal structure, which leaves it incomplete, is indeed suggestive. The unavoidable conflation of the fragmentary nature of the texts and Hölderlin’s highly deliberate and calculated *poetics of retraction* is a supreme difficulty for Hölderlin criticism. The case of “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” is particularly compelling, for insofar as this famous poem stages a crisis it only repeats an impasse which figures in a less acute manner in the preceding prose draft. Where the metric text breaks off, the prose draft reads

[...] Aber wenn von
selbgeschlagener Wunde das Herz mir blutet, und tiefverloren
der Frieden ist, und freibescheidenes Genügen,
Und die Unruh, und der Mangel mich treibt zum
Überflusse der Göttertisches, wenn rings um mich
und sag ich gleich [...] (I, 261)

[...] But when from
a self-inflicted wound my heart bleeds, and deeply lost
is peace, and free and modest sufficiency,
And the unrest, and the deficiency forces me to the
Overabundance of the gods’ table, when all around me
and i say at once [...]

The *weh mir!* that marks the formal collapse of the metric “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” is here missing. It does, however, appear seemingly free-floating on a cluttered manuscript page together with fragments of “Wie wenn am Feiertage” and “An die Deutschen” as well as bits and pieces of what would later be reorganized as the famous *Nachtgesang* “Hälfte des Lebens,”

among the few of Hölderlin's poems of which the poet himself arranged the publication.¹²² It is in this celebrated dense lyric's second and final stanza that the *weh mir!* was to find its home:

Weh mir, wo nehm' ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen. (I, 445)

But alas, where shall I find
When winter comes, the flowers, and where
The sunshine
And shade of the earth?
The walls loom
Speechless and cold, in the wind
Weathercocks clatter. (2013, 461 – translation modified)

From “Wie wenn am Feiertage...” only the mark of failure remains. It is the only component that is preserved for publication. Hölderlin's failures are anything but spontaneous. *Hölderlin repeats and recycles his own failures and embarrassments as indispensable components of the enchantment that constitutes his lyrics' success.* The premeditated fashion in which the poet employs his shame and humiliation does not, however, render them fictional or mere imitations of past experiences. Rather, the failure is knowingly repeated in the poetry, with each new draft.

“Der Einzige” is another case in point. Hölderlin never completed a text that may count as an authoritative version of this lyric, and in the first half of the poem little changes between the first and third draft. Although one may argue that the markedly different endings are distinct attempts at resolving the conflict between the singularity of Christ and a more “worldly” (*weltlich*) conception of the divine, this conflict is nevertheless retained as a necessary moment in the poem.

¹²² See FHA, VII, 108-109

Ich weiß es aber, eigene Schuld
Ists! Denn zu sehr
O Christus! häng ich an dir [...]

Es hindert aber eine Schaam
Mich dir zu vergleichen
Die weltlichen Männer. Und freilich weiß
Ich, der dich zeugte, dein Vater,
Derselbe [...] (I, 389)

And yet I know, it is my
Own fault! For too greatly,
O Christ, I'm attached to you [...]

And yet a shame forbids me
To associate with you
The worldly men. And Indeed I know
That he who begot you, your Father,
The same [...] (2013, 537; 539)

What is the status of this impasse, of this failure? Hölderlin clearly did not want to erase it: it is meant as failure. The poetic event here is not fictional; the lyric does not report on or imitate what took place in the past. Rather, ultimately untenable and mutually exclusive positions *are occupied* again and again, by the poet and by his readers, against better knowledge. The lyric is an instruction in failure and an exhortation to fail better. The poet's lies become acceptable, even convincing, because we are convinced that he has fooled himself most of all. The poet knows very well (*freilich weiß ich*), but "a shame" prevents him from simply speaking what he knows. What this shame concerns is best demonstrated in the last stanza of the poem's first draft:

Denn wie der Meister
Gewandelt auf Erden

Ein gefangener Aar,
[...]
Dem gleich ist gefangen die Seele der Helden.
Die Dichter müssen auch
Die geistigen weltlich seyn. (I, 390)

For as the master

Once moved on earth,
A captive eagle,

[...]

Like him the souls of the heroes are captive.
The poets must also
The spiritual be worldly. (2013, 541 – translation modified)

The “worldly men” here include not only ancient heroes but “the poets” as well. Demigods like Jesus, Dionysos, and Heracles no longer appearing on the face of the earth, the task of enchantment lies with the poets, whose relationship to the divine must no longer be merely contemplative but *productive*. This is confessed with some hesitation (*kühn bekenn’ ich*, I, 389). Christ, the “master,” is a “captive eagle,” and the souls of heroes are similarly trapped – whereas the poets must rather work to keep their feet on the ground. That for Hölderlin this borders on hubris is indicated by the latter versions of the poem, where embarrassment appears to have gained the upper hand and there is no mention of poets.

I have claimed that Hölderlin writes against his own better knowing. And in fact he reflects quite explicitly on this technique. In a letter to his worried mother, written in the summer of 1799, Hölderlin attempts to appease her concern over the apparently destructive tendencies in her son’s work: “You shouldn’t have been disquieted by those verses, dearest Mother!”

The poet must often say something untrue and contradictory which then of course resolves itself into *truth* and harmony in the greater whole, where it is said as something *transitory and perishable*. And just as the rainbow only shows its beauty after a storm, so in the poem truth and harmony emerge with even greater beauty and pleasure from falsehood and from error and suffering. (2009, 150)

A more comforting response might have asserted the fictionality of poetry and dissociated the speaker from the poet, effectively removing any commitment to the claims of the lyrics. Yet not even in consoling his venerated mother is Hölderlin willing to do this. What is more, his subsequent poems habitually fail to sublimate their errors into “*truth* and harmony of the greater whole.” Hölderlin does not know and momentarily, pragmatically deny the truth: he only knows

or suspects he will be proven (or, more likely, prove himself) wrong. The poet learns that he can only approximate, and that it would be a *graver lie* to claim anything else.

The world as mere machinery (*Maschinengang*) is for Hölderlin not its disenchanting truth but rather a particularly harmful mythic metaphor. Replacing it with others is not covering up the truth but replacing one lie with better ones. Hölderlin never speaks about lies as such because he believes he would like to speak the truth if he knew it. When he writes against better knowledge, he does not write against what he knows to be true; he writes what he knows to be less untrue. This is a principal and crucial difference between Hölderlin and later lyric liars of the long 19th century, such as Mallarmé, Rilke, and Valéry, for whom the capacity to lie becomes construed as one of the lyric's principal resources.

It is to my knowledge Mallarmé who first seriously and explicitly affirms the lyric habit of lying, even and perhaps especially in the face of what he apprehends as naked truth, a truth Mallarmé gives the name "Nothing" (*le Néant*). It is for good reasons that a letter which the 24 year-old poet writes to his friend Henri Cazalis on April 28, 1866 has become famous. The inseparability of enchantment from the possibility of disenchantment is here effectively demonstrated. For Mallarmé has good news. Not only is he satisfied with the poems about to be published in the prestigious journal *Le Parnasse*, poems that he finds "with the exception of one or two, which are not definitive, [...] excellent" (1988, 61); he has also conceived the beginning of his *Hérodiade*, and he is convinced "it will create an unparalleled effect" (59). However, it is precisely through his poetic labour, his thinking in verse, that Mallarmé has discovered an "abyss":

Unfortunately, in expanding verse this far, I have encountered [...] Nothing [*le Néant*], at which I have arrived without knowing Buddhism, and I am still too sad to believe even in my poetry and return to work, which this devastating thought has made me abandon. Yes, *I know it*, we are nothing but vain forms of matter – but quite sublime for having invented God and our soul. So sublime, my friend! that I want to render myself this spectacle of

matter, being conscious of it, and, at the same time, throwing itself fanatically into the Dream it knows not to be, singing the praises of the Soul and of all the similar divine impressions piled up in us since the beginning of time, and proclaiming, before the Nothing [*le Rien*] that is the truth, these glorious lies! Such is the plan for my Lyric volume, and such will perhaps be its title: *The Glory of the Lie* or *The Glorious Lie*. I shall sing in despair! (I, 696)¹²³

The drama of enchantment and disenchantment alters the very grammar of Mallarmé's writing. The subject of the participles "being," "throwing," "singing," and "proclaiming" should be the first person singular which governs the main verb of the sentence, *vouloir*, but the reflexive pronoun (*se*) changes the subject to "matter" or "this spectacle of matter."¹²⁴ The first and the third person of course have the same referent, as the matter is precisely *us*, who only in proclaiming and singing "glorious lies" can become more than *mere* matter, that is *sublime* matter.

If it is in expanding verse and not through any philosophical teaching that Mallarmé comes across Nothing, only a "Lyric volume" can be its response. The claim that Mallarmé wishes to make for the lyric as a genre is emphasized by the initial capital letter. Only the lyric is capable of affirming glorious lies, because it is both *proclamation* and *chanson*, both *Gespräch* and *Gesang*.

Although Mallarmé's resolution to sing in despair (or in resignation, *désespéré*) may appear to echo Hölderlin, the French poet does not merely propose to replace disenchanting lies with enchanting ones but, again, to lie in the very face of truth. For Hölderlin, it is simply not the case that "we are nothing but vain forms of matter" – this is rather the ideology of disenchantment, which is to be confronted not with truth but with myth more fit to man's

¹²³ For the sake of clarity I use my own translation here.

¹²⁴ The relevant passage in the original French:

je me veux donner ce spectacle de la matière, ayant conscience d'elle, et, cependant, s'élançant forcenément dans le Rêve qu'elle sait qu'elle sait n'être pas ; chantant l'Âme et toutes les divines impressions pareilles qui se sont amassées en nous depuis les premiers âges, et proclamant, devant le Rien qui est la vérité, ces glorieux mensonges!

needs.¹²⁵ Hölderlin does not lie conscious of “the Nothing that is the truth” but conscious only of what is *not* the truth. The importance of this point for understanding the development of lyric lying during the ensuing century can hardly be overemphasized.

In a forceful case study of Mallarméan enchantment, Joshua Landy writes:

Mallarmé would, it seems to me, reject the premise that the world is a fiction. “Les choses existent” (“things exist”), he is entirely happy to acknowledge. For him as for Nietzsche, the problem with life is, if anything, precisely the opposite: reality is *all too real*; deadly truths are all too easy to come by. What we need in response is not a mechanism for seeing through illusions but, quite the contrary, a technique for producing and sustaining them. (92)

It is not entirely clear what it would mean for the world to be a fiction, ontologically speaking, nor is Nietzsche’s position so simple or so consistent as to be so readily summarized. Landy is right that the very strategy of consciously lying (which he unfortunately conflates with fiction) is predicated on the *acknowledgment* that there are truths. Yet this does not equate a *knowledge* of this or that truth. The determination to lie in the face of more harmful lies does not presuppose that there is nothing but lies (or fictions); it does not exclude the existence of truths. It does not even exclude the existence of Truth, which, however, has no place in the lyric. It is

¹²⁵ In a fragmentary essay written in the form of a letter and sometimes titled “Über Religion,” Hölderlin preempts Nietzsche in viewing religion through the prism of life. Hölderlin is particularly interested in those phenomena for which practical reason appears to him unable to supply adequate norms:

So kann man von den Pflichten der Liebe und Freundschaft und Verwandtschaft, von den Pflichten der Hospitalität, von der Pflicht, großmüthig gegen Feinde zu sein, man kann von dem sprechen, was sich für die oder jene Lebensweise, für den oder jenen Stand, für diß oder jenes Alter oder Geschlecht schike, und nicht schike, und wir haben wirklich aus den feinern unendlicern Beziehungen des Lebens zum Theil eine schaale Geschmacksregel gemacht, und glauben uns mit unsern eisernen Begriffen aufgeklärter, als die Alten, die jene zarten Verhältnisse als religiöse das heißt, als solche Verhältnisse betrachteten, die man nicht so wohl an und für sich, als aus dem G e i s t e betrachten müsse, der in der Sphäre herrsche, in der jene Verhältnisse stattfinden.

“This higher relation [*Zusammenhang*] cannot be repeated in mere thoughts.” In other words, it is not a matter of some knowledge that has gone lost. Rather, the whole question of correctness must be reformulated.

In wie ferne hatten s i e R e c h t? Und sie hatten darum recht, weil [...] in eben dem Grade, in welchem die Verhältnisse sich über das physisch und moralisch nothwendige erheben, die Verfahrungsart und ihr Element auch unzertrennlicher verbunden sind, die einzelne Form und Art bestimmter Grundbeziehungen absolut gedacht werden können. (II, 55)

not a coincidence that the assuredness of Mallarmé's statement ("Yes, *I know it*") finds no echo in his lyrics. This is not because the lyric could not admit explicitly its own mendacity (it can). What it disallows is rather the "nothing but" ("we are nothing but vain forms of matter"). When Mallarmé in his poetry and elsewhere capitalizes Nothing, this does not elevate it to a master principle to which all of his poetry may be reduced. On the contrary, it ingeniously animates, ascribes mindedness to the very principle of reducing all mindedness to mere matter.

What should be clear from this is that the two types of lying outlined above (lying in order to lie better and lying in the face of "deadly truths") are by no means mutually exclusive. I have argued for a notion of lyric poetry as counter-mythology, which means not that it necessarily critiques myth, only that it presupposes the existence of myth. This holds just as well for Mallarmé's poetry as for Hölderlin's. Mallarmé wages a war on two fronts. On the one hand, there are deadly truths, that is *disenchanted* truths. On the other hand, Mallarmé knows full well that whatever vacuum left behind by the flight of the gods and the death of God will always already have been filled by the cheap if not harmful illusions and enchantments the present affords (from uppers like fashion to downers like Wagner). If truth is Nothing, then the task of poetry is nevertheless not simply to affirm any old myth "lest we perish of the truth," as Nietzsche once put it (1968, 435, emphasis removed). For Mallarmé, the translator of George Cox's *Manual of Mythology* (1867), myth has irrevocably become an object of scientific inquiry and classification. Mallarmé saw clearly that a myth which has become the object of a mythology is no myth at all. In fact, it cannot even serve as lyric lie but has been relegated to the realm of fiction. Myths of old were perhaps once glorious lies, but, pace Landy, there is no such thing as glorious fictions.

The question concerns how and to what extent Mallarmé is able to live up to Hölderlin's imperative that poets must be worldly. For the German poet, myth is enchanting precisely to the extent that it grounds us in the world. The tendency out of myth removes us from the world while making myth itself into fiction, that is something otherworldly, escapism. And Mallarmé's use of

admittedly obsolete mythic material is only one reason for the escapist impression his poetry has provoked and against which almost all of his devoted commentators have found it necessary to defend him. As Landy writes,

it might seem that we are being offered a mere *evasion* from the world, a refuge within a cosmos that is perfectly ordered but that does not exist. Perhaps poetry leaves the world itself just as it is; perhaps the latter's inadequacies become, if anything, only the more glaring as a result of our immersion in an ideal environment. (86)

Before addressing why Landy's response to such concerns fails to live up to Mallarmé's lofty aspirations, it is worthwhile to consider that if Mallarmé's poetry is not ultimately escapist, many of his lyrics are nevertheless *about* escapism, albeit in a way that often profoundly destabilizes the distinction between evasion and confrontation.

In the 1863 "Les Fenêtres," avoidance, affirmation, and compensation are subject to restless displacement. In the first half of the poem, a sick man makes his way from his bed to the windows.

Las du triste hôpital, et de l'encens fétide
Qui monte en la blancheur banale des rideaux
Vers le grand crucifix ennuyé du mur vide,
Le moribond sournois y redresse un vieux dos,

Se traîne et va, moins pour chauffer sa pourriture
Que pour voir du soleil sur les pierres, collers
Les poils blancs et les os de la maigre figure
Aux fenêtre qu'un beau rayon clair veut hâler,

Et la bouche, fiévreusement et d'azur bleu vorace,
Telle, jeune, elle alla respirer son trésor,
Une peau virginale et de jadis! encrasse
D'un long baiser amer les tièdes carreaux d'or. (l, 9)

Sick of the dreary sickroom and the pall
of stale incense rising from drab white drapes
to the big crucifix tired of the blank wall
the dying slyboots stiffens his old back, scrapes

along and, less to warm his gangrene than
to see a ray of sunshine on the stones

presses his white hair and gaunt facial bones
against the glass that bright light longs to tan.

And his mouth, feverish, thirsting for blue skies
as, in its youth, it went to taste its bliss,
some virgin flesh now long gone, putrifies
the warm gold panes with a long bitter kiss. (2006, 11)

The old man is here seeking to escape his dreary state, but in doing so he has to turn his back on Christ, his only hope to be redeemed from his mortal condition, to embrace instead a worldly bliss that he knows is gone, not to return. If he is thereby a “slyboots” (*sournois*, I, 9), this applies equally to the poet, who in the second half of the lyric claims to suffer a similar predicament.

Ainsi, pris du dégoût de l’homme à l’âme dure
Vautré dans le bonheur, où ses seuls appétits
Mangent, et qui s’entête à chercher cette ordure
Pour l’offrir à la femme allaitant ses petits,

Je fuis et je m’accroche à toutes les croisées
D’où l’on tourne l’épaule à la vie, et, béni,
Dans leur verre, lavé d’éternelles rosées,
Que dore le matin chaste de l’Infini

Je me mire et me vois ange! et je meurs, et j’aime
—Que la vitre soit l’art, soit la mysticité—
À renaître, portant mon rêve en diadème,
Au ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté! (I, 9-10)

So, holding coarse-souled man in detestation—
sprawled in pleasure where his mere appetites
feed; striving to gain that abomination
and give it to the wife suckling his mites—

I flee and cling to every casement through
which we can turn from life, and, blessedly,
in its glass bathed with everlasting dew
gold in the chaste dawn of Infinity

I see myself—an angel!—and I die;
the window may be art or mysticism, yet
I long for rebirth in the former sky
where Beauty blooms, my dream being my coronet! (2006, 13)

The sick man kisses the windowpane as “some virgin flesh now long gone,” and so (*ainsi*) the

poet sees himself in “the chaste dawn of infinity.” Yet the window does not just filter beautiful sunlight and warm putrefying lips; “the window may be art or mysticism” – its primary purpose is to set up a link with the world, not to escape it. Poetry can never immunize itself against the world. Realizing its contamination, the poet is gripped by a desire to flee, not *to* his art but *from* it.

Est-il moyen, ô Moi qui connais l'amertume,
D'enfoncer le cristal par le monstre insulté
Et de m'enfuir avec mes deux ailes sans plume
—Au risque de tomber pendant l'éternité? (I, 10)

O Self familiar with these bitter things,
can the glass outraged by that monster be
shattered? can I flee with my featherless wings
—and risk falling through all eternity? (2006, 14)

What distinguishes “Les Fenêtres” from other early poems on escapism is the explicit appeal to the “Self” in the final stanza (*ô Moi*). In “Angoisse,” the poet seeks refuge from himself and his fears in the “deep, dreamless slumber” afforded by the (presumably female) addressee of the poem (17).¹²⁶ In “Las de l’amer repos...” the artist wishes to abandon his tradition in favor of the levity and innocence he finds in Eastern idioms. “L’Azur” reverses “Les Fenêtres” by figuring *l’Idéal* as oppressive and matter as a potential savior, who, however, does not deliver. “Brise marine” puts into question its own desires for the exotic yet defends them as ineradicable. For “Le Sonneur” the only escape is death.

Mallarmé’s purportedly escapist poems are, on the thematic level, rather depictions of failed attempts at escape. When myth has been reduced to fiction and become the object of mythology, it cannot simply be replaced by some other fiction. If the glorious lies of the past consisted in gods, heroes, and their stories, Mallarmé’s glory will be neither dramatic nor narrative but decidedly *Lyric* (with a capital “L,” as the letter to Cazalis has it). At the same time,

¹²⁶ An earlier version of the poem is titled “To a Whore” (*À une Putain*).

for any lie to be or even to have been glorious, it must somehow partake in what is divine. This is in fact the position that Cox's *Manual* defends. The English cleric's ambition was evidently not just to write a handbook but to explain ancient mythology in light of the Christian faith by means of a common denominator, a powerful and absolutely just paternal God, which, according to Cox, was the properly *religious* purpose of a figure like Zeus. One could say with a pointed formulation that what Christianity and earlier myth have in common is, according to Cox, Christianity, or Christianity reduced to its most important principle. However, as Bertrand Marchal has shown meticulously, Mallarmé's translation of the *Manual* into *Les Dieux antiques* systematically undermines this attempt at a Christian assimilation of Indo-European myth. I cite here only the most compact example Marchal adduces. For Cox's assertion that "Zeus was a mere name by which [the Greeks] might speak of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being," Mallarmé has "Zeus était un pur nom, à la faveur de quoi il leur fût possible de parler de la divinité, inscrite au fond de notre être" (Quoted in Marchal, 137). Behind Zeus hides not Father Almighty but divinity as such, which does not contain us but is contained within us. Marchal speaks of "a Mallarméan anthropology" (139) and of "an anthropocentric theory of the divine," which conceives of God as "a kind of unconscious genius of man" (157).

The problem, of course, is that this genius is no longer unconscious. The realization that we have always been lying unwittingly brings both a danger of disenchantment (it was all – God, the soul, etc. – a lie) and an opportunity for enchantment (we *can* do without these specific lies and we *will* forge new ones – indeed we already have). Yet even the latter alternative is cause for concern, something the young Mallarmé saw clearly. For if the divine comes to be identified with man (or, as Mallarmé puts it elsewhere, with the Self), then this very insight risks emanating in hubristic self-sufficiency.

This is the subject of his most ambitious early poems. In the very same letter to Cazalis where is to be found Mallarmé's declaration that he will sing in despair glorious lies, he expresses some contentment at having made progress with what would become his (unfinished)

cycle "Herodiade," which thematizes the (lyric) problematic of the apotheosis of the Self and its consequent mythologization and celebration. What calls for immediate attention is the explicit admission by the poem's eponymous heroine that she has been lying throughout the "scene" that constitutes the lyric in which she appears.¹²⁷ Her interlocutor having left, Herodias utters the following lines:

Vous mentez, ô fleur nue
De mes lèvres!
 J'attends une chose inconnue
Ou, peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,
Jetez-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris
D'une enfance sentant parmi les reveries
Se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries. (I, 22)

You are speaking a lie,
naked flower of my lips.
 I wait an unknown thing
or, possibly, not knowing the mystery and your screams,
you may be flinging out the last and wounded groans
wept by a childhood feeling its cold and precious stones
finally separate in the midst of the dreams. (2006, 39)

The lie that Herodias has told – to her nurse but above all herself – concerns precisely her self-sufficiency in her own virginity, which is, she admits, extremely fragile. A kiss would cancel it "if beauty were not death" (29). Herodias' beautiful hair is "immortal," but her beauty is at the same time the source of her demise. She warns: "the strong blonde stream of my unspotted hair / bathing my solitary body freezes it / with terror" (*le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés, / quand il baigne mon corps solitaire le glace / d'horreur*, 29). To her nurse no less she is "dreadful" (33), as must be the man for whom she waits:

Comment, sinon parmi d'obscures
Épouvantes, songer plus implacable encor
Et comme suppliant le dieu que le trésor

¹²⁷ Originally conceived to be performed on stage, "Hérodiade: Scène" is the only completed and published poem from Mallarmé's projected cycle on the subject of Salome.

De votre grâce attend! (I, 20)

How, except among obscure
terrors, can we envisage the divinity
still more implacable and like a suppliant
whom all the treasures of your beauty must await! (2006, 35)

As in Sappho's φαίνεται μοι, whoever gets to sit next to the immaculate object of desire and affection appears a god. Yet Herodias admits no gods but herself. So when the nurse asks

[...] pour qui, dévorée
D'angoisse, gardez-vous la splendeur ignorée
Et le mystère vain de votre être? (I, 20)

For whom would you, consumed by pangs, keep the unknown
splendor and the vain mystery of your being? (2006, 35)

Herodias responds "For myself alone" (*Pour moi*, 35/ I, 20). What she desires is not herself as a desiring being, she does not desire her own desire, but *herself as void of desire*, or herself in an imagined state *before* desire:

[...] je ne veux rien d'humain et, sculptée,
Si tu me vois les yeux perdus aux paradis,
C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis. (I, 20)

[...] I long for nothing human; if you see
me like a statue with eyes lost in paradise,
that is when I recall the milk you gave me formerly. (2006, 35)

Herodias goes even further. She is not content with herself as anything but inanimate matter.

The floral metaphors accordingly give way to an identification with stones and metals.

Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!
Vous le savez, jardins d'améthyste, enfouis
Sans fin dans de savants abîmes éblouis,
Ors ignorés, gardant votre antique lumière
Sous le sombre sommeil d'une terre première

Vous, pierres où mes yeux comme de purs bijoux
Empruntent leur clarté mélodieuse, et vous,
Métaux qui donnez à ma jeune chevelure
Une splendeur fatale et sa massive allure! (I, 21)

Yes, for myself alone I bloom, in isolation!
You gardens blossoming amethyst, you know this,
endlessly buried in some dazzling deep abyss,
unknown golds that preserve your old illumination
beneath the somber sleep of earth's primeval days,
you precious stones from which these eyes of mine like pure
gems borrow their melodious and brilliant rays,
and all you metals that bestow that massed allure
and fatal splendor on my head of youthful hair! (2006, 35; 37)

The princess is well aware that this “horror of being virgin” makes idolaters of all her admirers, including herself (37). And any belief or practice that identifies itself as idolatrous has already become obsolete. However, given Mallarmé’s announcement of his poetics of mendacity, one may surmise that the accusation Herodias levels against herself does not amount to a complete renunciation of the position articulated earlier in the poem. Indeed, one may suspect that if the princess has lied, she has lied “gloriously.” So what is her lie, how is it glorious, and why does she openly admit it, at least in part rescinding its claims?

Throughout the brief dialogue, Herodias has, to the involuntarily barren nurse’s dismay, sung the praises of virginity and the self-sufficiency of auto-affection. Herodias is an erotic genius who is able to withstand the “horror” that is virginity. Although she does need external verification – *Nourrice, suis-je belle?* (I, 19) –, her desire is only for her own desirability, which has not to be proven in consummation. It is all of this that is revealed to be a lie.

It is trivially true of “Herodiade” as of so many other Mallarméan poems that it thematizes itself, its constitution, and its effects.¹²⁸ However, the early poem is not just *allégorique de soi-même* but addresses a broader poetological problem with extra-poetic implications. While it has often been read as a meditation on the viability of a non-representational poetics, “Herodiade” also treats the dilemma that presents itself with the consciousness of the divine as glorious lies

¹²⁸ Cf. Pearson 83.

and of man's sublimity in creating them. What makes these lies glorious is not simply that they concern such lofty matters as God and the soul but that they are a product of what Marchal calls the "unconscious genius of man." It is this genius that is divine, which means that the self-sufficiency of man was grounded in its not being apprehended as such. Indeed, the unconscious genius of man is divine *because* unconscious. Similarly, the problem of Herodias is not that virgin innocence is not fulfilling but that there is nothing innocent about her virginity, if there is anything virginal about her at all. Her conviction of her own power to enchant has rendered the landscape around her completely disenchanting:

Je me crois seule en ma monotone patrie
Et tout, autour de moi, vit dans l'idolâtrie
D'un miroir qui reflète en son calme dormant
Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant...
O charme dernier, oui! je le sens, je suis seule. (I, 21)

I feel alone in my monotonous fatherland
[...]
while everything lives in idolatry beyond
as a mirror reflecting in its slumberous balm
Herodias with her clear gaze of diamond...
O final charm, O yes! I am alone, I know. (2006, 37)

Ultimate enchantment, Herodias appears to think, is to see in the world around her nothing but reflections of her own beautiful gaze. But although she professes to "long for nothing human," the beauty of her gaze is in fact the product of nostalgia. (*Si tu me vois les yeux perdus aux paradis, / C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis.*) Herodias is reluctant to part with her virginity, but she nonetheless knows that such an active refusal is quite different from the Edenic state of oral union with the nurse. As Roger Pearson puts it, it is as though "she [the nurse] represented the whole lyric tradition which has nourished 'Herodiade' itself and from which 'Herodiade' constitutes such a radical departure" (1996, 86). The "lyric tradition" should here be understood along with its supporting discourses – myth, religion, metaphysics. The lyric can no longer tap directly into these discourses, but it also cannot completely free itself from them.

We do not know how Mallarmé had intended to conclude his cycle of poems dedicated to Herodias, of which the “scene” is only a “fragment,”¹²⁹ but it may appear an insuperable anticlimax when the princess, after so eloquently having stated her position, confesses her conviction to have been a lie. Yet the lie of perfect self-reliance becomes intelligible in the context of another lie which complements it. For the accusation that Herodias levels against herself concerns not only her radical claim to autonomy and hence poetry’s dispensation with its supportive discourses (and perhaps even its referential and representational functions). It regards equally the notion that the highest (poetic) beauty is to be found in the paralyzed gaze at a paradisiac past or that poetry’s sucking at the breast of myth is such a paradise lost. The nurse is a “woman born in crafty centuries / suiting the wickedness of some Sibylline lair” (*femme née en des siècles malins / Pour la méchanceté des antres sibyllins*, 2006, 37/l, 21). In other words, the nurse has fed Herodias lies – even glorious lies. If the princess has grown too old for this diet, she nevertheless cannot do completely without such nourishment.

The lie of self-sufficiency is Herodias’ (poetry’s) attempt to *lie better*. This lie is perhaps glorious insofar as she fancies herself the supreme divinity in a disenchanting land, asking rhetorically

là-bas, sais-tu pas un pays
Où le sinistre ciel ait les regards haïs
De Vénus qui, le soir, brûle dans le feuillage:
J’y partirais. (l, 22)

beyond, don’t you know some terrain
where the sinister sky’s glances are hated by
Venus who burns among the leaves at evening:
there I would go. (2006, 39 – translation modified)

At the same time, she knows herself to be a mere idol. She is not among the “divine

¹²⁹ The poem’s title when originally published in 1871 in *Le Parnasse Contemporain* was “Fragment d’une étude scénique ancienne d’un poème d’Hérodiade.” That the poem consists of a dialogue of course only underlines its distance from the dramatic form, whatever Mallarmé might have thought of the matter.

impressions that are gathered in us since the earliest times” but the product of rigorous self-fashioning. There is nothing unconscious and nothing innocent about her genius or her lying. With no nurse left to convince, she cannot even convince herself. However, the scene ends ambiguously, something which critics have wanted to exploit.

Vous mentez, ô fleur nue
De mes lèvres!
J'attends une chose inconnue
Ou, peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,
Jetez-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris
D'une enfance sentant parmi les reveries
Se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries. (I, 22)

You are speaking a lie,
naked flower of my lips.
I wait an unknown thing
or, possibly, not knowing the mystery and your screams,
you may be flinging out the last and wounded groans
wept by a childhood feeling its cold and precious stones
finally separate in the midst of the dreams. (2006, 39)

Pearson supplies an optimistic reading of these final lines, suggesting that “irrespective of the ultimate ‘mystère’ with which she aspires to be united and despite these her protestations, perhaps the sobbing sounds which have issued from her lips bespeak at last the emergence of ‘ses [hom. ces] froides pierreries’” (1996, 87). He further motivates this happy ending through a subtle reading of Mallarmé’s “Ouverture” to the cycle, consisting of a monologue held by the nurse, set before but written after the “Scene.” Because this introduction exhibits a complexity and lyric density not yet achieved by the dramatic “Scene” and because Mallarmé himself evidently found it a vastly superior poem.¹³⁰ Pearson sees it as a retroactive legitimization of Herodias’ position. However, it is worth keeping in mind that although Mallarmé clearly had high hopes for his “Ouverture,” he left it unpublished and in all likelihood incomplete. Pearson writes

¹³⁰ In the already quoted letter of April 28, 1866, Mallarmé boasts:

I have written the musical overture, which is still more or less in the state of a draft, but I can say in all modesty that its effect will be unheard of, and that the dramatic scene which you know is next to these lines but a kitsch picture next to a canvas by Leonardo da Vinci. (I, 696)

that with the nurse's introductory speech, "beauty has been rejuvenated in the voice of a symbolic Nourrice, the 'sein de la Beauté' herself, a new form of poetry to suckle 'Hérodiade'" (102). At the same time, he emphasizes how "a double reading, the one suggesting the unwanted return of the former 'golden' poetic language, the other looking forward to the future that is this poem, allows the reader to experience directly the 'agon' of this 'crepuscular' moment," that is the struggle between old and the new forms of lyric writing (100). Crucially, the struggle does not concern which is to become the dominant mode of the lyric but the very possibility of lying gloriously, in other words the *mystère* which Herodias mentions once her nurse has left the "Scene," and which Pearson dismisses as insignificant. Unlike him, I do not take the distinction between the reflexive and the referential functions of language to explain exhaustively the conflict between the new and the old. Although Mallarmé is careful to point out that it is his work on verse which has led to the confrontation with Nothing, there is more at stake in his crisis than a suspicion of reference and the possibility of a new conception of poetic beauty. In a fascinating letter of May 1867, Mallarmé writes to Cazalis about his "terrible struggle with that old and evil plumage, which is now, happily, vanquished: God" (1988, 74). This "plumage" indicates not only the void that God has turned out to be but also, as commentators have pointed out, poetry as it was understood as dependent on "God" as a placeholder for the divine and the prerequisite for poetic enchantment. However, if God is reinterpreted as man's unconscious creativity, this does not protect man himself from being dispelled as yet another lie. Mallarmé writes further:

I still need to look at myself in that mirror in order to think and [...] if it were not in front of this desk on which I am writing to you, I would become the Void once again. That will let you know that I am now impersonal and no longer the Stéphane that you knew,—but a capacity possessed by the spiritual Universe to see and develop itself, through what was once me. (1988, 74)

In order to think at all, the poet must first convince himself that he exists, and at the moment a

mirror seems to suffice. But it is safe to say that the problem of lying gloriously (that is unconsciously) in the face of Nothing as disenchantment would remain with Mallarmé to the very end.

Joshua Landy has devoted a number of perceptive texts to what he calls “lucid self-delusion” in Mallarmé.¹³¹ In the most recent version of his argument, Landy affirms “the two skills that make life bearable: generating fictions, and persuading ourselves that they are true” (89). Landy’s analyses are helpful for grasping the stakes of Mallarméan enchantment but suffers from a conflation of lie and fiction that is problematic because brushing aside or smoothening over such difficult and discomfiting notions as myth and what Mallarmé calls the “mystery.” Indeed, a “lucid self-delusion” is not a lie but a fiction, and a fiction in which we are compelled to believe is not a fiction but a lie. Certainly, Mallarmé does use the term “fiction” in relation to his own writing, but there is no indication that the words “lie” and “fiction” are interchangeable. I mention this not to invalidate Landy’s valuable readings but to indicate that the problem or potential of lyric lying, which is not unique to Mallarmé, could not receive its “solution” in an individual poetics or “method” but was to outlive its most subtle theoretician. The poems I have read so far are indeed lyric fictions *about* lyric lying. Before addressing Mallarmé’s glorious lies in action, it is instructive to consider the persistence of this tradition in his most famously faithful disciple.

La Jeune parque is the name of the long lyric with which Paul Valéry in 1917 breaks his poetic silence of 25 years. If his determination in quitting poetry in his early twenties was to reject the “idols” of literature and love,¹³² he can take it up again only by attacking the subject of idolatry head on. The thematic and narrative premises of *La Jeune parque* are almost embarrassingly similar to those of Mallarmé’s “Herodiade,” written half a century earlier. Another coming of age

¹³¹ See first and foremost his “Music, Letters, Truth and Lies: ‘L’Après-Midi d’un Faune’ as an *ars poetica*” and the chapter on Mallarmé in *How to Do Things With Fictions*.

¹³² See Jarrety 112-120.

poem, *La Jeune parque* consists of the internal struggles of the *Parque* or “Parca” who gives the lyric its title. The Parcae are the equivalent in Roman religion of the Greek Μοῖραι, the goddesses of fate who are commonly depicted as three old women. The figure with which Valéry presents us is therefore an anomaly and a deliberate break with tradition. We do not know which of the Parcae is speaking nor even if she belongs to the mythic troika. Stranger still, she is presented as an indecisive young girl or woman experiencing reluctantly something like a libidinal awakening. The poem is sometimes presented as a conflict between mind and body but concerns rather the choice whether to live at all – that is whether to be finite, to be mortal. As such, the lyric is of course absurd. Humans enjoy a restricted freedom over existence: We can decide, within certain boundaries, when to end it, but we cannot choose *whether* it ends. As for our birth, we can choose neither *whether* nor *when*. *La Jeune parque* can be read as a thought experiment, an absurd but in itself coherent fiction of what it would be like to have such freedom. Although as a goddess the Fate should perhaps be immortal, it may be the ultimate consequence of her power over life and death that she can choose whether to exist at all. Alternatively, she is simply becoming aware of her own mortality, which frightens or disgusts her to the degree that death appears the more palatable option.

Having been approached in a dream by a treacherous snake, she confesses that she is not immune against the temptation to exist:

Je sais... Ma lassitude est parfois un théâtre.
L'esprit n'est pas si pur que jamais idolâtre
Sa fougue solitaire aux élans de flambeau
Ne fasse fuir les murs de son morne tombeau. (I, 98)

– I know! Sometimes I'm tired and throw a scene –
The mind is not so pure it never kneels
To idols: lonely ardour does flare up
And drives away the walls of its sad tomb. (1997, 21, 23)

Here the mere thought of a less (or more) than ideal existence is dismissed as idolatry –

necessary, perhaps, but at all costs to be resisted. Life is but “an absence in a mortal shape, that cradles / Only itself [...]” (23). And yet the young Fate struggles to part with her dream of mortality, symbolized by the serpent’s bite which is its trace:

Mais je tremblais de perdre une douleur divine !
Je baisais sur ma main cette morsure fine,
Et je ne savais plus de mon antique corps
Insensible, qu’un feu qui brûlait sur mes bords :

Adieu, pensai-je, MOI, mortelle sœur, mensonge... (I, 99)

But still I shook, at losing a heavenly pain;
Began to kiss the neat bite on my hand;
And knew of the body I once felt as mine
Nothing – only a fire on its far edge:
Goodbye, I thought, to ME, the mortal sister, the lie... (1997, 23)

It is not so much earthly delights that the goddess misses as a “heavenly pain.” Like Hölderlin’s gods, she needs a mortal – more precisely her mortal self – to feel at all. However, this self is still deemed mendacious because contradictory, in distinction to the “ME in harmony” of the following line, a subject ostensibly capable of “pure acts,” at “One with desire” (1997, 25/I, 99-100).

Yet it is precisely in clinging to this former, virginal self that it, too, is discovered to be an idol, and a crumbling idol at that.

Je sens sous les rayons, frissonner ma statue,
Des caprices de l’or, son marbre parcouru.
Mais je sais ce que voit mon regard disparu ;
Mon œil noir est le seuil d’infemales demeures ! (I, 100)

My statue shivers under the fingering sun:
I feel its golden lust run through the marble.
But still I know what my lost look is seeing:
My dark eye is the door into the house of Hades! (1997, 27)

Once the young Fate has recognized her former oneness to be nothing but an unsustainable

idea/idol (εἶδος/εἶδωλον), there is of course no way back, and she is forced to choose between mortal existence and death. Indeed, it is her former, serene self that now assumes the character of a lie, as she confesses: “I was perhaps half dead or maybe half / Immortal [...],” which amounts to the same thing (1997, 29/l, 101). Having been stirred irrevocably and finally come to identify herself as mortal, she asks rhetorically:

Quelle résisterait, mortelle, à ces remous?
Quelle mortelle? (l, 103)

What mortal woman, knowing death, could stand
Against these tides? (1997, 33)

Leaning toward life, the Fate is forced to reconsider and reevaluate her former resistance against mortal existence – or rather her unwillingness to decide between (mortal) life and (immortal) death:

De l'âme les apprêts sous la tempe calmée,
Ma mort, enfant secrète et déjà si formée,
Et vous, divins dégoûts qui me donniez l'essor,
Chastes éloignements des lustres de mon sort,
Ne fûtes-vous, ferveur, qu'une noble durée ? (l, 106)

The soul made ready, pulse in my temple calmed,
My death a secret child, already forming,
And the divine distaste that set me free
To escape untouched from my allotted years,
Was all that ardour just a noble phase? (1997, 39)

Her former cryonic state, a half-immortality that was equal to a half-death, caused by a “divine distaste” for mortal life, her failed attempt to “escape untouched,” to preserve herself in unity and harmony, an immaculate idol, is now reduced to a “phase,” no longer a component of her identity.

Nevertheless she insists on the nobility of her former stance. Her failure to remain

unscathed, untainted by the future death that will be the outcome of her existence, and her inability to reject mortal life altogether are still ascribed to treachery and deceit on the part of another self:

Hier la chair profonde, la chair maîtresse
M'a trahie... (I, 108)

Yesterday the deep flesh, the mastering flesh,
Betrayed me... (1997, 43)

But in processing her compulsion to live, truth has gradually become a matter of indifference.

Addressing the tempting and yielding part of herself, she commands:

Sois subtile... cruelle... ou plus subtile !... Mens !...
Mais sache !... Enseigne-moi par quels enchantements,
Lâche que n'a su fuir sa tiède fumée,
Ni le souci d'un sein d'argile parfumée,
Par quel retour sur toi, reptile, as-tu repris
Tes parfums de caverne et tes tristes esprits ? (I, 108)

Be subtle... cruel... more subtle still... Tell lies
But get the knowledge! Teach me by what spells,
You coward – whose warm breath could not escape you,
Worried about a breast of scented clay –
By what returning twists, you creeping thing,
Did you take back your cave-smells and grim thoughts? (1997, 43)

Only lies could elucidate the enchantments that seduce her to live. She is soon forced to confess, however, that her conflicting desires may not be so easy to separate:

Le sais-je, quel reflux traître m'a retirée
De mon extrémité pure et prématurée,
Et m'a repris le sens de mon vaste soupir ?
Comme l'oiseau se pose, il fallut m'assoupir. (I, 109)

Do I even know what treacherous tide turned back,
Withdrawing me from my pure and unripe end,
Changing the sense of my enormous sigh?

Like the bird settling, I was forced to rest. (1997, 45)

Her struggle against what in her demands to live ends not in death but in exhaustion. It may be wiser not to exist, but this wisdom is exhausted along with the rest of her:

Dors, ma sagesse, dors. Forme-toi cette absence ;
Retourne dans le germe et la sombre innocence,
Abandonne-toi vive aux serpents, aux trésors.
Dors toujours ! Descends, dors toujours ! Descends, dors, dors ! (I, 109)

Go, wisdom, go to sleep. Create your absence;
Turn back to the seed and shady innocence,
Let yourself fall alive to snakes and treasures...
Sleep on, go down, and sleep! Down still, and sleep! (1997, 45)

The final sections do not so much reject the Parca's former position as the very basis on which it was articulated, namely that there is such a thing as a decision to exist, or – insofar as there is – that this decision is the result of some knowledge (*sagesse*) or conscious willing.¹³³ Once this is realized, it is her former self that turns out to have been an idol, an image of the “absolute woman,” who is now, paradoxically, also tired:

L'idole malgré soi se dispose et s'endort,
Lasse femme absolute [...] (I, 110)

The statue unwillingly lies down and sleeps,
Tired, absolute woman [...] (1997, 47)

“So, have my thoughts been dreams and vain goodbyes, / Since I'm alive?” (1997, 47/I, 110) The final question the goddess poses to herself receives no answer. Instead, she accepts existence in spite of herself:

¹³³ Jean-Luc Nancy has treated this topic in “The Decision of Existence,” *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993, 82-109.

Alors, malgré moi-même, il le faut, ô Soleil,
Que j'adore mon cœur où tu te viens connaître [...] (I, 110)

Then, Sun, I yield: against my will I worship
This body where you come to know yourself [...] (1997, 47)

This “heart,” which Alistair Elliot translates as “body,” is precisely not that of the absolute woman; yet the question of idolatry is not thereby resolved. To be sure, it is now neither the sun nor the absolute woman that is worshipped but the heart as that within which matter comes to know itself. The young Fate acknowledges that this heart may also be a “nothing” (*néant*) and that she may be engaging in yet another form of idolatry (“malgré moi-même”), yet also that this perhaps is a necessary form of idolatry (“il le faut”).

As a fiction that works through allegorically a certain metaphysical or anti-metaphysical problematic, the reversal of idolatry which Valéry’s poem demonstrates may not appear particularly urgent or even especially original in the context of its symbolist inheritance. However, viewed as a statement on a central lyric predicament, it is illuminating. As the poem with which Valéry returned to writing lyrics after the long hiatus following his famous crisis of 1892, *La Jeune Parque* is at the same time a response and an attempted solution to this crisis. As has been documented, Valéry’s decision to give up on poetry was intimately connected with a determination radically to question the idols that up until then had provided him guidance. Reminiscing in 1929, Valéry writes: “It was about breaking down all of my central ideas, or idols; and about parting with a self [*un moi*] which knew neither how to be capable of what it wanted, nor how to want that of which it was capable.”¹³⁴ Given this later assessment, regardless of its accuracy, it cannot come as a surprise that the question of idolatry should be of concern in the justification of again writing lyrically, nor that the poem which marks Valéry’s return should revolve around an identity crisis. The drama in which the reader is invited to partake effects a

¹³⁴ Cited in Jarrety 116, which treats at length the episode and Valéry’s own interpretations of it.

transition from the rejection of a particularized, temporal self as idolatrous via the reversal that figures idolatry on the contrary as the desire to preserve at all costs an innocent and self-sufficient self, to the acceptance of the own “heart” as a proper object of worship.

Crucially, the Parca is presented as *yielding* to this the sole tenable form of worship, giving in despite herself (*malgré soi*). This theme of temptation is no less prominent in another of Valéry’s most ambitious poems, “Ébauche d’un serpent,” where several cast members from *La Jeune parque* return (the Serpent, the Sun, Nothing), albeit with different symbolic baggage. For example, if in the earlier poem the reptile is an elusive part of the young protagonist’s self, “L’Ébauche” presents the reader with the more familiar, and more sinister, biblical figure of the snake. Here too is at stake the ineluctability of idolatry, superstition, lies, and active ignorance; but whereas the Fate speaks from the viewpoint of the tempted and eventually yielding, “L’Ébauche” is written from the perspective of the tempter. Accordingly, the sun, which in the earlier poem is that to which the self yields, the final object of invocation and celebration, hailed as an emblem of the inanimate universe which through the Fate’s “heart” comes to know itself – this sun is apostrophized at the outset of the latter poem as a “glaring error” (or better: “exploding fault,” *Faute éclatante*, 1971, I, 185/I, 138).

Toi, le plus fier de mes complices,
Et de mes pièges le plus haut,
Tu gardes les cœurs de connaître
Que l’univers n’est qu’un défaut
Dans la pureté du Non-être ! (I, 138)

You, my proudest accomplice,
And loftiest of all my snares,
You protect all hearts from knowing
That the universe is merely a blot
On the pure void of Non-being! (1971, I, 185; 187 – translation modified)

The sunlight, far from being the medium of enlightenment, seduces “hearts” into being by eclipsing that knowledge which allegedly would make existence unbearable. It may then seem

counter-intuitive that the sun should count among the serpent's accomplices, but it becomes clear that the star's pleasant illusion is celebrated only insofar as it will eventually be dispelled. The sun is an "error" and a "lie," and because it affords delights it makes the inevitable encounter with Nothing all the more terrible:

Grand Soleil, qui sonnes l'éveil
À l'être, et de feux l'accompagnes,
Toi qui l'enfermes d'un sommeil
Trompeusement peint de campagnes,
Fauteur des fantômes joyeux
Qui rendent sujette des yeux
La présence obscure de l'âme,
Toujours le mensonge m'a plu
Que tu répands sur l'absolu,
Ô roi des ombres fait de flamme ! (I, 139)

Great sun, sounding the reveille
To being, and clothing it with fire,
You who fence it in a slumber
Painted about with cheating landscapes,
Fomentor of the gay phantoms
Who enslave to the eye's seeing
The uncertain presence of the soul,
I have always enjoyed the lie
You throw across the absolute,
O king of shadows made of flame! (1971, I, 187)

The vengeful snake enjoys the sun's enchantment as a prerequisite for the disenchanting maneuver that is imminent, reversing (or complementing) Nietzsche's famous dictum that one only demystifies in order to mystify better. Much as for Nietzsche and for Mallarmé, the enchantment of the world is contingent upon what is presented as a lie. That this is a poetic lie, and more specifically a lyric lie (for Mallarmé as for Valéry, the poetic is essentially the lyric), can be gleaned from the designation of the serpent's seductive knowledge as "prose":

Ô quelle prose non pareille,
Que d'esprit n'ai-je pas jeté
Dans le dédale duveté
De cette merveilleuse oreille !
Là, pensais-je, rien de perdu ;

Tout profite au cœur suspendu !
Sûr triomphe ! si ma parole,
De l'âme obsédant le trésor,
Comme une abeille une corolle
Ne quitte plus l'oreille d'or ! (I, 143)

Ah, what a prose unparalleled,
What wit did I spare to throw
In the dedal downy windings
Of that most delightful ear!
Nothing, thought I, is wasted there,
All works on an undecided heart!
Triumph is certain, if my speech
Besieging the treasury of the soul,
Like a bee in a flower-bell,
Never quits that ear of gold. (1971, I, 197)

The snake's discourse is tempting but its ultimate goal is anything but enchantment. His "Innumerable Intelligence" (*Innombrable Intelligence*, I, 140) hides nothing from Eve, as it hides nothing from itself.

In *La Jeune parque* the snake is an accomplice of the sun; in "Ébauche d'un serpent" the sun is an accomplice of the snake. If the former serpent represents the knowledge of delight, the latter entices with the delight of knowledge – a knowledge that may prove ruinous. The final stanzas of the poem are addressed to the Tree of Knowledge, without which there would be nothing:

Tu peux repousser l'infini
Qui n'est fait que de ta croissance (I, 145)

You can press back the infinite,
It's only made of your increase (1971, I, 205)

But in encompassing everything, the Tree's knowledge is also disenchanting, as it reveals "That the universe is merely a blot / On the pure void of Non-being":

— Cette soif qui te fit géant,
Jusqu'à l'Être exalte l'étrange

Toute-Puissance du Néant ! (I, 146)

– The very thirst that made you huge
Can raise to the power of Being the strange
All-probing force of Nothingness! (1971, I, 205)

So it is that the knowledge of everything turns into a knowledge of Nothing. *Le Néant* is here an “overdetermined” concept, for Valéry as for Mallarmé associated with the anti-metaphysical realization that ultimately no underlying unity or principle serves to ground either subjective experience or objective reality. In the famous letter where the young Mallarmé relates his first encounter with this absence at the heart of things, the discovery concerns essentially our dependence on, indeed identity with, “mere” matter. The “vanity” of our material constitution is made up for only by the glory of our lies, the most sophisticated forms of which are furnished by lyric poetry, whose status is thereby not diminished but elevated. Valéry’s “Ébauche” presents a similar account but reverses the Mallarméan sequence. For it is the serpent, who insists on the vanity of all creation, who has the first and final word, the ironic or at least instrumental praise of the sun’s pleasant lie being no more than a brief interlude. Obscure as Nothing may seem, it is to the speaker of the poem rather the product of knowledge and transparency. The snake may operate with a “sure, mysterious finger” (*doigt sûr et mystérieux*, 1971, I, 191/I, 140), but he is himself immune to both mysteries and lies, reposing in the Tree of Knowledge as he does.

It would of course be ludicrous to identify the voice of the serpent with that of the poet; suffice it to note that the reptile fancies himself the master of his universe (Knowledge itself trembles in his gaze), and that he alone speaks in the first person. The snake is a harbinger of utter, insufferable transparency and as such an anti-lyrical force. Even the very Tree of Knowledge can be hailed as a “singer” and a “drinker” in its perpetual growth, whereas the *petits mots* of the serpent are too cynical to amount to anything but prose (1971, I, 202/I, 145). If the snake cannot sing but only hiss, this obviously does not have to apply to the poem in which he appears, but it is safe to say that Valéry’s text broaches the question of something like a cynical

lyric. Elsewhere, Valéry insists on the essential inscrutability of lyric speech,¹³⁵ and the designation of “Ébauche” as precisely a “sketch” indicates that we are dealing with an experiment, a hypothesis. Yet it remains the case that on the narrative level the lie – lyric or not – is conquered, and Valéry’s poetry itself turns out, for all its sophistication, to be eminently paraphrasable.

As I argue, the lyric, construed as a literary genre, is never *entirely* opaque to itself but contains always at least the possibility for critique of its own enchantments. A critical lyric is hence not only possible but always implied by the lyric function of regulating the balance between intoxicating enchantment and sober reflection. A cynical lyric, however, is a different matter altogether. The widespread critical embarrassment provoked by Valéry’s infamous excess of clarity and reflection should be understood as indicative of or even identical with a crisis of genre. In what is a remarkably perceptive and perhaps the most eloquent critical assessment of Valéry as a poet (which, however, symptomatically does not quote any of his poetry), Émile Cioran broaches the issues of indulgent clear-sightedness but fails to address it as a specifically lyric problematic. In a hyperbolic and polemic manner typical of Cioran, and intriguingly reminiscent of Hölderlin’s critique of mechanistic world-views, he sums up Valéry’s work as

un attentat contre tout ce qu’il pouvait y avoir en lui *d’irréfléchi*, une rébellion contre ses profondeurs.

Savoir démonter le mécanisme de tout, puisque tout est mécanisme, somme d’artifices, de trucs ou, pour employer un mot plus honorable, d’opérations; s’en prendre aux ressorts, se muer en horloger, voir *dedans*, cesser d’être dupe, voilà ce qui compte à ses yeux. (9)

an assault against anything there might be in him that is *unreflected*, a rebellion against his depths.

Knowing how to disassemble the mechanism behind everything, because everything is mechanism, the sum of all artifice, of tricks, or, to use a more respectable word, of operations; to go to the bottom of oneself, to transform oneself into a clockwork, to peek *inside*, to cease being duped, that is what counts in his eyes.

¹³⁵ See my reading of “La Pythie” in the previous chapter.

The encounter with Nothing, which he inherits from Mallarmé, prohibits Valéry from “conceiving a cult other than that of lucidity *for its own sake*” (*concevoir un autre culte que celui de la lucidité pour elle-même*, 10). Cioran goes so far as to claim that

dans son tréfonds, Valéry n'était pas poète; car tout son être aurait dû se rebiffer devant ce froid et impitoyable démantèlement du délire, devant ce réquisitoire contre le réflexe poétique le plus élémentaire, contre la raison d'être de la poésie [...]. (20-21)

deep down, Valéry was not a poet, for then his entire being would have shrunk back at this cold and merciless dismantling of delirium, at this indictment against the most elementary poetic reflex, against the *raison d'être* of poetry [...].

Valéry is not a poet but a *versifier*, a cynical “maniac of lucidity” (21).

Cioran's own notions about “being poet naturally” should, needless to say, be taken with a grain of salt (22). However, at stake is not the distinction between real poets and virtuoso impostors. Lucidity is not necessarily an anti-poetic or an anti-lyrical force, as Cioran seems to suggest. What his essay achieves is the highlighting of Valéry's exploration of the limits of the lyrically possible. Whether it is impotence or something else that drives Valéry to his cynical extremes is here beside the point. As Cioran writes, “absolute lucidity is incompatible with existence, with drawing breath. And, it must be acknowledged, a disillusioned spirit, whatever the degree of his emancipation from the world, draws more or less unbreathable air” (*la lucidité absolue [est] incompatible avec l'existence, avec l'exercice du souffle. Et, il faut bien le reconnaître, un esprit détrompé, quel que soit le degré de son émancipation du monde, vit plus ou moins dans l'irrespirable*, 23-24). For Valéry, lucidity is a desideratum but *absolute lucidity* is a threat, more or less acknowledged: “Luckily, he did not achieve the ‘imperturbable clear-sightedness’ of which he dreamt; otherwise his ‘silence’ would have continued until his death.” (*La « clairvoyance imperturbable » don't il rêvait, il n'y a pas atteint, fort heureusement; sans quoi son « silence » se serait perpétué jusqu'à sa mort*, 28-29) On the one hand, Valéry's entire

poetics is, according to Cioran, “the apotheosis of consciousness” (42). On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, the poet has grasped better than most “the urgency of the lie for existence” (37), as some of his most famous lyrics attest. Indeed, the Parca herself comments in dialogue with “her Philosopher” that

[...] Que tout fût clair, tout vous semblerait vain!
Votre ennui peuplerait un univers sans ombre
D'une impassible vie aux âmes sans levain.
Mais quelque inquiétude est un présent divin.
L'espoir qui dans vos yeux brille sur un seuil sombre
Ne se repose pas sur un monde trop sûr;
De toutes vos grandeurs le principe est obscur. (I, 165)

[...] If all were clear, all would be futile!
Your boredom would people a shadowless universe
With the inert life of souls devoid of leaven.
But a certain restlessness is the gift of the gods.
The hope in your eyes glittering on a dark threshold
Reposes on a world that is far from secure;
The source of all your greatness is none too clear. (1971, I, 269)¹³⁶

It is in making a fetish out of the transparency of consciousness – the “heart,” as the Parca calls it – that Valéry exposes the lyric intertwinement of enchantment and embarrassment, *enthousiasme* and *gêne*. To once more quote Cioran: “Of all superstitions, science is the least original. Certainly one may dedicate oneself to scientific activity, but the mere enthusiasm for it, *when one does not oneself take any part*, is at the very least embarrassing.” (*De toutes les superstitions, la moins originale est celle de la science. On peut sans doute se livrer à l'activité scientifique, mais l'enthousiasme pour elle, quand on n'est pas de la partie, est pour le moins gênant*, 32) Valéry's quest to purge poetry of every trace of inspiration and intoxication cannot lead to absolute disenchantment and sobriety but quite knowingly topples over into idolatry. For the lyric poet Valéry, as for Mallarmé, there can be no science but only Science. “Prestige in rigor, in thought *without charm!*” (*Prestige de la rigueur, de la pensée sans charme!*, 30) What

¹³⁶ “Le Philosophe et la *Jeune Parque*” was conceived in response to Alain's reading of the earlier poem. See Valéry I, 1693.

Cioran misses, however, is that if the lyric idolizes and glorifies this, it is precisely *because* it is inaccessible within lyric discourse. In approaching a language entirely devoid of charm, the lyric is inevitably marked by its absence. Any medium for absolute disenchantment becomes another vehicle for lyric enchantment. The insistence on lucidity serves to highlight the essential – if never absolute – opacity of lyric speech.

Et si j'inspire quelque effroi,
Poème que je suis, à qui ne peut me suivre,
Quoi de plus prompt que de fermer un livre?

C'est ainsi que l'on se délivre
De ces écrits si clairs qu'on n'y trouve que soi. (I, 165)

And if I inspire alarms,
Poem that I am, for him who cannot follow me,
What could be easier than to shut a book?

That is how to get rid
Of writings so clear they mirror nothing but oneself. (1971, I, 269)

With Cioran one may certainly ask how far the lyric can go in combatting the resistance of its own language. How much transparency can the lyric lie withstand? (“May the writer be very careful not to reflect too much on language, may he avoid at all costs making his obsessions manifest, and may he never forget that all important works are conceived *in spite* of language.” [Que l'écrivain se garde bien de réfléchir trop sur le langage, qu'il évite à tout prix d'en faire la matière de ses hantises, qu'il n'oublie pas que les œuvres importantes ont été faites en dépit du langage, 39]) However, here appears to elude the critic a perhaps decisive divergence between Valéry and his master Mallarmé. The difference concerns the role of the master. In distinction to such “maniacs of lucidity” as the Parca and the Serpent, the Mallarméan master never appears to assert himself in the first person. Writing of Valéry's early coming into his own, Cioran observes: “At an age when one fumbles, when one apes anyone and everyone, he had found his manner, his style, his form of thought. He still admired, no doubt, but *as a master*.” (*A un âge*

où l'on tâtonne, où l'on singe tout le monde, il avait trouvé sa manière, son style, sa forme de pensée. Il admirait encore sans doute mais en maître, 25) The question is whether this is possible, whether mastery and admiration do not strictly speaking exclude or at least compromise each other. *Maître Serpent* praises the sun for the mendacious light with which it masks the nothingness of existence, but the snake appears incapable of being duped, and hence incapable of being enchanted (although the sun's lie does "please").

A no less fantastic creature that does not mind being duped (and thereby enchanted) is the protagonist of Mallarmé's brilliant early metapoem "L'Après-midi d'un faune." The monologue with which the lyric presents us is spoken by an apparently confused mythic being, a faun. Comparisons have often been made between Mallarmé himself and his perhaps most famous persona. The faun is a flute player and hence, like his creator, an artist. And, no less than his creator, the faun appears to be the author of a most unlikely fiction. Strikingly, however, this does not make of the faun the master of the text in which he is housed. On the contrary, Mallarmé, in identifying with the faun, willingly gives up full mastery of the world he has created.

As the faun awakens at midday on the shores of a Sicilian lake, he reminisces about an earlier encounter with two delectable nymphs that ultimately eluded him. So frail and ephemeral were they that the faun is compelled to question their existence outside his own imagination, asking whether he has been in love with a dream. Indeed, most critics take it as a matter of course that the nymphs are but a deception. But were the faun to be certain concerning the nymphs' illusory status, we would be presented simply with a fiction within a fiction. Crucially, Mallarmé's lyric writing involves not merely the crafting of fictions but the formulation of lies. The narrative the faun tells is far from the progressive dispelling of an illusion. Rather, the nymphs go from being desired *in spite of* their perhaps imaginary nature to being worshipped *because of* it. Real or not, the nymphs have left on the faun an indelible sign of their seductive power. Like Valéry's young Fate, Mallarmé's protagonist is left with "some bite / of a mysterious kind from sacred teeth" (*une morsure / Mystérieuse due à quelque auguste dent*, 2006, 43/1, 24), and

although the enchantment in which the faun still revels may well be the product of his own flute playing rather than any external beauty (*beauté d'alentour*, 2006, 43/l, 24), he decides at a pivotal moment to give up his instrument.

Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, ô maligne
Syrinx, de reflleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends !
Moi, de ma rumeur fier, je vais parler longtemps
Des déesses ; et, par d'idolâtres peintures,
A leur ombre enlever encore des ceintures (l, 24)

Try, then, to flower again, organ of flights, malign
syrinx, across the lake-flats where you wait for me!
Proud of these sounds of mine, I'll speak perpetually
of goddesses; I'll lift more of the drapery
up from their shadows with idolatrous displays (2006, 43)

The faun's dispensation with his instrument represents a crucial decision. The flute is discarded as it shows itself to be the possible origin of enchanted delusion. However, the faun's discovery becomes not a source of disenchantment but of pride. In a single line, the nymphs are elevated to goddesses and demoted to objects of idolatry. That the intensity of the scene had been reinforced by the flute's "naïve melody" does not diminish it (*chant crédule*, 2006, 43/l, 24). Having confronted the possible illusion of seducing the nymphs, the faun decides not to dispel it but to take command. The enchantment of music is no longer necessary, because the faun has decided to affirm his "MEMORIES," be they deceptive or not (*SOUVENIRS*, 2006, 43/l, 24). To take command means here to relinquish a certain mastery.

Joshua Landy has argued that

the faun who believes the nymphs and the faun who doubts their existence both remain in place; but they are joined by a third (a dialectical third, one might say) which occupies a different ontological space, one which can access both of these states, observe their interplay and keep them, if not in harmony, at least in equilibrium. (1994, 61)

For Landy, there is no real doubt that the nymphs are figments of the faun's imagination, which

makes it difficult if not impossible to distinguish between lies, fiction, and what the scholar calls lucid self-delusion. Landy notes, however, that the faun “seems to require grounding for his fictions, a sense [...] that he has *not* simply made them up” (66). Indeed, without this “sense,” there would be little remarkable about the faun’s daydreaming. On my reading, the faun can preserve such a sense because he is not simply engaged in a conscious self-deception (which, in the end, is indistinguishable from what we call fiction). Instead, the faun willingly foregoes knowledge of the *possibly* mendacious nature of his memories, affirms his ignorance, and goes on to “expand” (*regonfler*, 2006, 43/1, 24) on what only *may* be a deception. It is only this operation that makes of the faun a potential liar and not merely a dreamer. This may seem like splitting hairs but is in fact of some consequence, for Landy is absolutely right in taking “L’Après-midi d’un faune” as an *ars poetica*.

From the reader’s point of view, the nymphs are of course, like the faun himself, a fiction. Although “Hérodiade” and “L’Après-midi d’un faune” are the two lyrics explicitly mentioned in the famous letter to Cazalis where Mallarmé declares his intention to sing lyric lies, one must read ahead in order to grasp fully the importance the poet attaches to lies, the calculated affirmation of ignorance, and a paradoxical form of mastery that requires precisely the loss of control. We may well see Mallarmé in his faun; however, the narrative in which the latter appears is nonetheless too obviously fictional to have room for any real lyric lies. It is a lyric fiction *about* lyric lies.

If lying gloriously comes to mean for Mallarmé the masterful renunciation of complete mastery, one ought to consider the appearance of the figure of the master in what are perhaps his most famous late poems: the sonnet which begins “Ses purs ongles...” (also known as “Sonnet en X” or “Sonnet en yx,” or, in its first version, “Sonnet allégorique de lui-même”) and *Un Coup de dés*. In the former, the “Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx” (2006, 68/1, 37); that is, the poet, or at least the poet conceived as master, is absent from the scene, something which critics generally see as confirmation of Mallarmé’s “impersonal” aesthetic

ideals. Obviously, the departure of the master means that whatever comes to pass in the poem can dispense with his mastery. Most notably, the master has taken with him the (in)famous “ptyx,” that “funerary urn” that does *not* contain the “vesperal dreams” that “Agony” sustains. Without delving into the overwhelmingly rich history of this object’s interpretation, it may be noted that this receptacle is the one thing that serves to celebrate “Nothing” or the “Void,” *perhaps* the sole thing that redeems it: *ce seul objet don’t le Néant s’honore* (2006, 68/I, 37). Whatever it was that served to collect and to contain our anguished dreams, which, like the Phoenix whose fire burns and thereby renews them, only dies in order to be born again, the ptyx no longer serves its purpose, with the result that our dreams now lie scattered, uncollected by any master, no longer assembled in honor of Nothing. The following two stanzas save the scene from utter disenchantment by describing what takes place without the masterful wielding of ptyx:

Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or
Agonise selon peut-être le décor
Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe,

Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor
Que, dans l’oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe
De scintillations sitôt le septuor. (I, 37-38)

Yet near the vacant northward casement dies
a gold possibly from the decorations
of unicorns lashing a nymph with flame;

dead, naked in the looking-glass she lies
though the oblivion bounded by that frame
now spans a fixed septet of scintillations. (2006, 71)

One may surmise that the “gold” in agony is related to, if not part of, those dreams that the Phoenix revives and that Agony sustains. This gold agonizes “possibly from the decorations / of unicorns lashing a nymph with flame” (71); that is, whatever remains in the face of Nothing after the departure of the master is troubled by the attack of the very symbol of non-existence (the unicorn) on that whose existence is, according to the faun, forever dubitable (the nymph). Yet in

focusing on the dead nymph in the mirror, that is on obsolete myth – and religion, as suggested by the cross (*la croisée*) and the “credences” of the second stanza –, the observer may miss the sudden formation from the lights that remain of a constellation, the only object mentioned positioned outside of the desolate space otherwise described and what becomes of those dreams which *ptyx* no longer contains. The difference between a constellation and the mythical or religious order for which it substitutes is, Landy sums up, that, at least for Mallarmé, “a constellation is *an ordering that tacitly admits its own arbitrariness*” (2012, 82).

However, regardless of how ingenious Mallarmé’s sonnet is, there is no indication that he saw himself as thereby having overcome the lyric problem of excessive lucidity. For the constellation is not just an instance and the symbol of the human imposition of meaningful order on that which has none; it also signifies the *sufficiency* of this ordering, something which by no means can be taken for granted. After all, if the constellation advertises its own arbitrariness, there is no reason why it would not immediately dissolve into the chaos whence it originated. That something as arbitrary as the distribution of stars in space should hold the hope of humanly sufficient order and meaning is no matter of course; hence the famous claim in *Un Coup de dés* that “NOTHING WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE OTHER THAN THE PLACE EXCEPT *PERHAPS A CONSTELLATION* [my italics]” (2006, 178-181).

In his recent masterful reading of *Un Coup de dés*, Quentin Meillassoux calls this “perhaps” (*peut-être*) the most beautiful ever written and places it at the center of his analysis (214). On Meillassoux’s account, which builds on and purports to complete a tradition of numerological interpretation of Mallarmé’s seminal poem, the perhaps concerns the existence of what he calls “the code,” “the one and only Number” to which the constellation would correspond (2006, 166/l, 373). The point, however, is not the number or the constellation itself but the painstaking means with which, if indeed the poem is coded, Mallarmé hides the code *to the point of endangering its very existence*, while nevertheless quite explicitly inviting the reader to go search for it.

We might very well think that he did want to code the poem, but that he *let pass* a few negligences in the final details – both *wanting and not wanting* to see his undertaking through to the end. That is to say that there is a strong possibility that Mallarmé basically knew no more than we do about his poem, and even that he did not wish to know more; and this because the Poem is in itself, in fact, a ‘machine’ for hypotheses – a machine that functions without him, indifferently to his innermost conviction. (147)¹³⁷

For Meillassoux, this contributes to making *Un Coup de dés* the one and only still valid attempt at “extracting messianism from its Christian matrix, reinventing a civic religion delivered from dogma, an emancipatory politics beyond the old Salvation” (221). For me, it is rather a particularly sophisticated and instructive instance of lyric lying and willful ignorance. In *Un Coup de dés*, the poetic ideal articulated decades earlier in “L’Après-midi d’un faune” is finally realized. The faun’s strategy consisted in taking the cue from what may be a lie, expanding on his possibly mendacious memories. Similarly, the master of *Un Coup de dés*, perhaps no less ignorant than his readers as to the existence of a “code” or “Number” (and thereby relinquishing full mastery – without, however, feigning his complete disappearance, as in “Ses pur ongles...”) sets up his poem according to a structure that *may* be wholly imaginary, thereby making it a possible object of *belief* or even *faith*.

What is it, then, that in which we are invited to believe, if only intermittently, temporarily? What is it in which we, after the demise of old idolatry, after the collapse of traditional myth and religion, which for Mallarmé could not and should not simply be revived – what is it in which we *must* believe, at least sometimes?

In the language of *Un Coup de dés* it is, quite simply, the constellation. And, I argue, the constellation comes to stand not simply for man-made order and meaning in general but for the potential *sufficiency* of such “arbitrarily” and “artificially” imposed order and meaning. From this point of view, it becomes possible finally to understand those famous lines from Rilke’s *Sonnet*

¹³⁷ The translation has been amended to remove a typographical error.

to Orpheus:

Auch die sternische Verbindung trägt.
Doch uns freue eine Weile nun
der Figur zu glauben. Das genügt. (II, 246)

To Paul de Man, this is a moment of nearly insuperable bathos. “The final affirmation, ‘Das Genügt,’ [...] seems almost derisive,” he writes, “a disenchanting concession” (54). But what is it, precisely, that Rilke claims to be enough? What does it mean to “believe [in]” the constellation “for a while”? If I claim to believe (in) the figure that the constellation traces, do I mean to say I think it really does depict this figure? But insofar as it is a constellation, it *does* depict a figure! It is tempting to conclude, then, that Rilke encourages us to indulge momentarily in the belief that the stars are not arranged into significant groups by man but by some supersensible being who has thereby invested them with transcendent meaning. According to this interpretation, we would have to content ourselves with disenchantment and meaninglessness most of the time, only now and again convincing ourselves that there is after all some ineffable intelligence which has invested the apparently chaotic universe with meaning.

Fortunately, Rilke suggests nothing of the kind; he merely asks us to believe (in) the figure, making no claims about its origin. And indeed, if as Landy puts it “a constellation is *an ordering that tacitly admits its own arbitrariness*,” then *to believe* it cannot mean but to believe that *such arbitrary ordering suffices*. What Rilke writes is enough, then, is believing for a while (and here we are dealing not with some “fiction,” “make-believe,” or “lucid self-delusion” but with genuine, earnest belief which can never be verified or disproven) that human ordering and investment of meaning in a universe that does not mean “by itself” are sufficient. Indeed, if this is not enough, then, *pace de Man*, nothing offered by poetry can ever be enough. There may be countless moments when this belief cannot be sustained, but a life wholly without such belief is after the flight of the gods hardly livable. “It is enough” means at the same time: “It is imperative.”

If lying gloriously and convincing oneself of the efficacy of lyric lies are one strategy for poetic enchantment, it is, for the poets who champion it, nevertheless not something new. Like Mallarmé, Rilke sees in the unicorn a figure of such practices. In one of *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, he hails it as “the animal that there is not.” The poem deserves to be quote in full.

O dieses ist das Tier, das es nicht giebt.
Sie wußtens nicht und habens jeden Falls
– sein Wandeln, seine Haltung, seinen Hals,
bis in des stillen Blickes Licht – geliebt.

Zwar *war* es nicht. Doch weil sie's liebten, ward
ein reines Tier. Sie ließen immer Raum.
Und in dem Raume, klar und ausgespart
erhob es leicht sein Haupt und brauchte kaum

zu sein. Sie nährten es mit keinem Korn,
nur immer mit der Möglichkeit, es sei.
Und die gab solche Stärke an das Tier,

daß es aus sich ein Stirnhorn trieb. Ein Horn.
Zu einer Jungfrau kam es weiß herbei –
und war im Silber-Spiegel und in ihr. (II, 258)

Oh this beast is the one that never was.
They didn't know that; unconcerned, they had
loved its grace, its walk, and how it stood
looking at them calmly, with clear eyes.

It hadn't *been*. But from their love, a pure
beast arose. They always left it room.
And in that heart-space, radiant and bare,
it raised its head and hardly needed to

exist. They fed it, not with any grain,
but always just with the thought that it might be.
And this assurance gave the beast so much power,

it grew a horn upon its brow. One horn.
Afterward it approached a virgin, whitely—
and was, inside the mirror and in her. (1995, 469)

As with the nymphs for Mallarmé's faun, the question of the animal's real existence in nature is suspended. It “hardly needed to / exist.” That this does not amount to blind affirmation of superstition Rilke makes clear in a letter. The unicorn stands for “all love for the unproven, the

ineffable, all belief in the value and the reality of that which our mind has created for itself and elevated throughout the centuries” (II, 748/1977, 68).¹³⁸ However, if the practice of lying gloriously is not new, the generalized lyric praise of lies may very well be a relatively recent phenomenon. The lyric does not begin with the openly declared, reflected lie. What happens with poets like Mallarmé and Rilke is the becoming exoteric of lyric lying. Far from a confession, which is how de Man treats it, Rilke’s late French couple of lyrics “Mensonges” is a credo, a hymn. The lie is for Rilke a proper object of invocation because, insofar as it is a glorious lie, it is part of that inhuman third against which the lyric is measured and that bars it from perfect transparency *and* complete opacity:

Mensonge, jouet que l'on casse.
Jardin où l'on change de place,
pour mieux se cacher;
où pourtant, parfois, on jette un cri,
pour être trouvé à demi.

Vent, qui chante pour nous,
ombre de nous, qui s'allonge.
Collection de beaux trous
dans notre éponge. (V, 302)

Lie, plaything we shatter.
Garden where we change place
to hide ourselves better;
or, where we might let out a cry
just to be half-found.

Wind that sings for us,
our own shadow growing long.
Collection of the handsome
holes in our sponge. (1982a, 53)

Unlike Mallarmé, Rilke does not single out God himself as a lie; rather, the lie belongs to a family “full of goddesses” and has “haughty Gods” for “brothers in law” (V, 300). In the second part of what may have been intended as a cycle, the lie is addressed with the following

¹³⁸ “alle Liebe zum Nicht-Erwiesenen, Nicht-Greifbaren, aller Glaube an den Wert und Wirklichkeit dessen, was unser Gemüt durch die Jahrhunderte aus sich erschaffen und erhoben hat”

assertion: "Because it is we who make you / one must believe that God consumes you"
(*Puisque c'est nous qui te faisons, / il faut croire que Dieu te consume*, V, 302). Not unlike Hölderlin's gods needing mortals to feel, the God here feeds on our lies. And so lying becomes a kind of obligation.

Je ne m'explique point.
On ferme les yeux, on saute,
c'est chose presque dévote
avec Dieu en moins.

On ouvre les yeux après,
parce qu'un remord vous ronge:
à côté d'un si beau mensonge,
ne semble-t-on contrefait? (V, 304)

I don't make myself clear.
We close our eyes, we leap;
with God at least
such an act's almost devout.

Later we open our eyes
because remorse is gnawing us:
next to such a handsome lie,
don't we seem counterfeit? (1982a, 57)

Would it be absurd to suggest that it is such an impression that grips the transfixed spectator of "Archaischer Torso Apollos"?¹³⁹ Is not the ancient God of Rilke's most famous sonnet precisely

¹³⁹ For reference:

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,

sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern. (II, 513)

hungry for lies, so that the comparatively counterfeited poet may satiate the deity only with further mendacious lyrics? But if Rilke's ode to lies is to be taken seriously, and if what is among the modern lyric's most well-known imperatives can be read as an imperative to lie, it must be emphasized again that it is a matter not of lying more but of lying *better*. The provocative nature of modern lyric appeals to the gods stem from the fact that these are not taken as illusions to be overcome but to be reconfigured. Be better fooled is the implicit motto of many a lyric, some of which are not themselves mendacious but *about* truth and falseness, necessary deceptions, and sweet lies. A fundamental lyric operation and strategy for poetic enchantment is, I have argued, not to do away with illusions but to replace them with better ones, demonstrating that if we cannot (and do not wish) to be free of them we are nevertheless, to a limited extent, free to choose among them. The lyric never shows us our illusions *merely* to dispel them but to demonstrate their irreducibility and thereby to open up however small a space in which to fashion them. Rilke has described this process of substitution and modulation in a poignant short lyric in French titled "Migration des forces":

Souvent devant les dévots se vide un masque
et l'idole s'excuse soudain
de son trône trompeur, de son faste fantasque,
de son or criard et commun.

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,

gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life. (1995, 67)

Certain de nos dieux s'épuisent et se dessèchent,
arides, ankylosés,
dans d'autres, en murmurant, se jette la source fraîche
d'une divinité reposée. (V, 356)

Often before the congregation a mask empties itself
and the idol suddenly apologizes
for its deceptive throne, its fanciful pomp,
its tacky, simple gold.

Some of our gods become exhausted and dried up,
barren, stiffened,
whereas in others there whispers the cool spring
of a well-rested deity.

How, then, do we exert our agency in this matter – how to fashion (or abolish) a “god”? In order to exchange one for another, it clearly does not suffice simply to deny the former. In a fragment, Rilke describes the gods as “these obstinate ones who thrive / on denial” (*ces obstinés qui vivent / de démenti*, V, 276). This utterance, which must be understood poetologically, means not simply that gods sometimes live on in spite of their existence having been repeatedly denied, nor that they will remain in effect somehow as long as men are concerned with denying their existence. Rather, the gods are poetologically *defined* as those notions that are able to survive the loss of belief in them and in fact depend on this disbelief for their poetic efficacy. But clearly gods may fall “out of use” (*hors d'usage*, V, 328), as Rilke puts it in another untitled poem of the same period.¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, this is for Rilke not a result of blasphemy or lack of faith but, in a move that shows the profound continuity of Rilke’s preoccupations throughout his works, of the

¹⁴⁰ The stanza is in fact an accusation:

Mais en vous mêmes, tout au fond de vous,
quel cimetière! Que de Dieux absous,
congédies, oubliés, hors d'usage,
que de prophètes, que de mages
abandonnés par votre désir fou! (V, 328)

Elsewhere, the tone is more reassuring:

Tout ce qui fut divin, reste divin.
Jamais le ciel ne perd une couronne.
Grande, assise, la déesse donne
aux dieux futurs la source de son sein. (V, 240)

loss of “things.” A lyric written in the last year of Rilke’s life puts this somewhat humorously:

J’ai trouvé un Saint-Esprit fort défait
derrière l’autel de la chapelle;
il n’avait point péri par méfait,
mais par cette éternelle

perte des choses qui nous surprend
de sa force singulière;
du rest, il l’avoue, c’est bien navrant
que de rendre l’absence mère. (V, 360)

I found a badly disheveled Holy Spirit
behind the altar in the chapel;
he had not perished from any misdeed,
but from this perpetual

loss of things that surprises
with its singular force;
besides, he avows, it is quite trying
to pass on the mother’s absence.

What it means to lie better – to lie gloriously – is of course different in each case. In the next chapter, I pursue further the implications of a material creation of the divine. What matters here is that the lyric recognizes certain desirable phenomena to be dependent on a capacity for lies or at the very least for willful ignorance. It is no doubt proceeding from this recognition that one might begin to explain the lyric’s perennially strong relationship to the phenomenon of love. An already cited Rilkean poem is a case in point.

Eros

Masken! Masken! Daß man Eros blende.
Wer erträgt sein strahlendes Gesicht,
wenn er wie die Sommersonnenwende
frühlingliches Vorspiel unterbricht.

Wie es unversehens im Geplauder
anders wird und ernsthaft... Etwas schrie...
Und er wirft den namenlosen Schauder
wie ein Tempelinnres über sie.

O verloren, plötzlich, o verloren!
Göttliche umarmen schnell.

Leben wand sich, Schicksal ward geboren.
Und im Innern weint ein Quell. (II, 314-315)

It is not that erotic love itself would be “just an illusion” but rather that any attempt to deflate it as such by reducing it to its supposedly constitutive components (such as “chemistry,” a set of positive attributes possessed by the loved one, or even a complex set of feelings and moods to which the lover may be subjected) will fail to do it justice or even debase it – and not because there would really be at stake something principally ineffable in Eros but because its subjective logic is such that it dissipates or becomes obscene or evil – sometimes retroactively – once it is completely parsed. This intrinsic opacity makes of Eros a “barbaric god” (*un dieu barbare*, IV, 26), as Rilke writes in the corresponding French poem, and his power a “nameless curse” (*namenlose[r] Schauder*). Eros destroys whoever approaches him without precautions and eludes whoever insists on mastering him. The only way to appease him is to feed him lies.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Cf. an 1888 fragment of Nietzsche’s:

Do you desire the most astonishing proof of how far the transfiguring power of intoxication can go? “Love” is this proof: that which is called love in all the languages and silences of the world. In this case, intoxication has done with reality to such a degree that in the consciousness of the lover the cause of it is extinguished and something else seems to have taken its place—a vibration and glittering of all the magic mirrors of Circe—

Here it makes no difference whether one is man or animal; even less whether one has spirit, goodness, integrity. If one is subtle, one is fooled subtly; if one is coarse, one is fooled coarsely;

but love, and even the love of God, the saintly love of “redeemed souls,” remains the same in its roots: a fever that has good reason to transfigure itself, an intoxication that does well to lie about itself— And in any case, one lies well when one loves, about oneself and to oneself: one seems to oneself transfigured, stronger, richer, more perfect, one *is* more perfect— Here we discover *art* as an organic function: we discover it in the most angelic instinct, “love”; we discover it as the greatest stimulus of life—art thus sublimely expedient even when it lies—

But we should do wrong if we stopped with its power to lie: it does more than merely imagine; it even transposes values. And it is not only that it transposes the *feeling* of values: the lover

is more valuable, is stronger. In animals this condition produces new weapons, pigments, colors, and forms; above all, new movements, new rhythms, new love calls and seductions. It is no different with man. His whole economy is richer than before, more powerful, more *complete* than in those who do not love. The lover becomes a squanderer: he is rich enough for it. Now he dares, becomes an adventurer, becomes an ass in magnanimity and innocence; he believes in God again, he believes in virtue, because he believes in love; and on the other hand, this happy idiot grows wings and new capabilities, and even the door of art is opened to him. If we subtracted all traces of this intestinal fever from lyricism in sound and word, what would be left of lyrical poetry and music?— *L’art pour l’art* perhaps: the virtuoso croaking of shivering frogs, despairing in their swamp— All the rest was created by love— (1968, 426-427)

If love is intrinsically mendacious, lies are not necessarily amorous. Love is perhaps always “lyrical” but not all lyrics are love poems. The lyric’s status since its inception as *counter-mythology*, its recognition of phenomena incompatible with uncompromising lucidity, and its affirmative acknowledgment in modernism of its inseparability from practices of lying together beg the question whether there are any *particular* lies necessary *to the lyric*, that is whether there are lies which would not necessarily be present in each lyric but without which the lyric would be inconceivable as a genre, and which would thereby mark each of its instances without having to be present.

There are at least two, I suggest. The first may be viewed as a specific case of the second and termed, quite simply, the *lie of form*. It is what Nietzsche describes in the following passage from *The Gay Science*, asking

was there anything more *useful* than rhythm to the old superstitious type of human being? One could do everything with it: promote some work magically; compel a god to appear, to be near, to listen; mould the future according to one's own will; discharge some excess (of fear, of mania, of pity, of vengefulness) from one's soul, and not only one's own soul but also that of the most evil demon. Without verse one was nothing; through verse one almost became a god. Such a basic feeling cannot be completely eradicated - and still today, after millennia of work at fighting such superstition, even the wisest of us occasionally becomes a fool for rhythm, if only insofar as he *feels* a thought to be *truer* when it has a metric form and presents itself with a divine hop, skip, and jump. Is it not amusing that the most serious philosophers, strict as they otherwise are in all matters of certainty, still appeal to *the sayings of poets* to lend their thoughts force and credibility? And yet it is more dangerous for a truth when a poet agrees with it than when he contradicts it! (2001, 85-86)

What Nietzsche highlights is that poetic meter and rhythm are both a source of powerful enchantment and a cause for embarrassment (or, with Nietzsche’s programmatic cheerfulness, amusement). And on this account, the enchantment to be gained is just “superstition.”

The equivocation here between what Nietzsche calls love and a much more broadly conceived notion of desire is symptomatic of the fact that the truth of love itself involves lies. And certainly love as a theme and an impetus of lyricism perpetuates an illusion fraught with ideology – but so does any discourse (be it scientific or pornographic) that posits “mere,” “animal” sexuality as the truth of the relationship between the sexes, whether or not it is supplemented with “emotions.”

In the first chapter, I argued that metric-rhythmic enchantment indeed always comes at the risk of embarrassment but that its force is such that a thought may very well be truer for being metric. Such prosodic thinking, a thinking that cannot be sharply distinguished from a *feeling*, will perhaps never be free from charges of superstition, for any attempt to separate prosodic from strictly semantic meaning will face their inevitable discrepancy. That Nietzsche in particular should seize upon this may seem ironic considering his idea of the conflict between the Dionysiac and the Apolline as the very essence of the artwork – the latter partly covering up but also giving shape to and only thereby making bearable the truth of the former, which would otherwise be shattering. Another version of the philosopher would no doubt have agreed that there is truth in rhythm, even if the truth it tells concerns precisely the necessity of a mediating and ameliorating lie. According to the early Nietzsche's view, form – and indeed poetic form – is both the condition for the appearance of truth and its compulsory denial.

However, before Nietzsche developed his antagonistic conception of the artwork to break once and for all with any classicist notion of Greek culture as spontaneously moderate and harmonious, Hölderlin had already made and applied lyrically an elaborate poetics out of what he saw as the constant disproportion between unbridled pathos and sober calculation. If the Greeks were masters of form, it was not because they were by nature temperate or due to some predilection for virtuosity. On the contrary, it was their propensity for boundless, overwhelming “holy pathos” which *forced* them in the opposite direction in their art, that is in the direction of formal clarity and carefully constructed measures (II, 912). The reverse applies in modernity, in a world where order and sober reasoning are, supposedly, as “inborn” as divine inspiration was to the Greeks.

What matters here is not the degree of accuracy of this speculative historical thesis but simply the notion that form – whatever is put in this concept, which in the case of Hölderlin's poetological reflections is a subject of much debate – exists *always* in productive tension with and contradiction of a truth which is thereby to be measured (or even “relativized”). For Hölderlin,

intoxication and sobriety, enchantment and disenchantment, are perhaps equally “true” – and, uncontradicted, equally unlivable. On the one hand, “fire of heaven” as divine revelation is, as several of Hölderlin’s most well-known poems make clear, lethal; the unbridled reign of reason, on the other hand, deprives poetry of its breathing space (II, 912).

These ideas are of course not exclusive to the lyric. In fact, Hölderlin articulates them in part through preparatory work on his own unfinished drama, *Empedokles* (I, 865-881). However, that formal strictures as a countertendency to a specific poetic occurrence was an originally lyric phenomenon is suggested around the same time by Friedrich Schlegel, who writes: “The general striving for inner and outer limitation – which so characteristically distinguishes the age of the origin of Greek republicanism and the age of Greek lyric poetry – was the first expression of the invigorated faculty for the infinite.” (2001, 98)¹⁴² It is not that the lyric responds to a tendency of thought or a way of conceiving the world with a particular form, such as can be argued in the case of the hexameter in epic or the iambic trimeter in drama. Rather, the lyric responds to “the invigorated faculty for the infinite” (Schlegel’s complex concept of which may here be bracketed) with formal constraints and limitations in general, with a plethora of finite forms. And these forms do not serve to accentuate or harmonize with an intellectual movement but rather to counteract it. Since its inception, the lyric is hence the *formed* genre par excellence, which of course does not mean that other poetic genres are less bound by form or that the lyric prescribes a certain kind of form; it is instead because the lyric is *not* conventionally bound up with any particular form or set of forms that its form – or ostensible formlessness – cannot help but have significance. And it is only due to a radical disjuncture between form and the experience it houses that the lie of form becomes not only possible but inevitable. It is this insight that Hölderlin formulates positively in the poetic program which guides his most innovative phase, where ever more elusive, esoteric experiences are conveyed in

¹⁴² Winfried Menninghaus quotes this passage in *Hälfte des Lebens* (88), to which the present discussion is indebted.

unprecedented matter-of-fact language, which is in turn estranged through the isolation, effected by line breaks, of prosaic statements like, in *Der Ister*, "Much could / Be said about this" (*Vieles wäre / Zu sagen davon*, 2013, 583/l, 476). The effect is, as Winfried Menninghaus notes, that "the late 'songs' are [...] simultaneously more sober *and* more enthused [*begeisterter*] than the earlier texts thoroughly devoted to enthusiasm and sublimity" (2005, 92). Poetic enchantment becomes palpable only in the medium of its denial. This roundabout way of producing it, whose possibility in modernity can ever less be taken for granted, admits, according to Hölderlin, of a greater mastery than had the ancients over what for them came natural. The Greeks were *forced* to create forms to contain their "heavenly fire"; the moderns can only light it through the meticulous calculation of poetic effects.

It is doubtless against this background that one must understand and rectify Paul de Man's uneasiness at what he understands to be Rilke's consistent profession of the hospitable relationship "between the semantic function and the formal structure of language" (54), ultimately expressed by the constellation that, according to the critic, "signifies the most inclusive form of totalization, the recuperation of a language that would be capable of naming the remaining presence of being beyond death and beyond time" (52). In fact, Rilke's constellation stands not for such an inhuman language but for the highly human capacity to ascribe order and meaning to that which by itself has none; in other words, Rilke does not ask us to believe the lie (that is, this *specific* lie) but to believe *in* the lie, that is to believe in our capacity to lie gloriously. In the same vein, that Rilke's harmonizing "euphonic seductions," unparalleled in German lyric language, are explicitly acknowledged as deceptive and therefore liable to misuse is hardly an argument against them but rather reveals them, at the far end of Rilke's poetic achievement, as products, examples, of that very capacity to lie which we are encouraged to cultivate (55).

However, de Man's concern arguably lies deeper than an individual poet's supposed denial of the necessary discrepancy between formal structures and semantic content. At bottom,

one senses a discomfort, if not a disgust, with what may be called the supreme lie of the lyric, of which the lie of form is merely one case. It is the lie of *animation*.

4. ANIMATION

"Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*" (269) Thus runs what is perhaps the most famous sentence of Kant's practical philosophy, if not of his entire writings. The words that Kant uses are *Bewunderung* and *Ehrfurcht*. These sentiments are produced by two different types of infinity: an infinite exteriority and an infinite interiority. As such, the starry heavens and the moral law are certainly worthy of awe, but they are not, strictly speaking, enchanting. As Kant writes, the first observation "annihilates, as it were, my importance as an *animal creature*, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital force (one knows not how) must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came" (269). As humbling as this image may be, it is if anything a picture of disenchantment and indifference. Similarly, the moral law is, viewed in isolation, not more than a theoretical construct. It is only through "the purposive determination of my existence by this law," an existence exposed to infinite indifference and contingency, that morality can become something like an animating principle (270).

The pure observation of the starry night sky, unsupplemented by a recognition of our sublime *difference* from the inanimate universe (or, as Kant puts it, from "mere animality," which appears to be the same for him), is potentially disenchanting in its effect, if not simply terrifying (270). However, it can also lead to superstition, which appears to be a larger concern for the philosopher: "Consideration of the world began from the noblest spectacle that can ever be presented to human senses and that our understanding can bear to follow in its broad extent, and it ended – in astrology." (270) In other words, the highest aspiration of human inquiry into the physical world (astronomy) risks always being thwarted – for fear of disenchantment, perhaps – by the basest human superstition (astrology).

An avid reader of Kant, Hölderlin was less careful to distinguish between the stellar disciplines. Writing to his friend Christian Ludwig Neuffer while still at the Tübingen *Stift*, the twenty-one year-old poet supplies a status update:

I will soon have finished my "Hymn to Humanity." But then it is a work of the lucid intervals, and they are far short of being a clear sky. Otherwise I haven't done much: learnt a few things about the rights of man from the great Jean-Jacques, and on clear nights fed my eyes on Orion and Sirius and the twin gods Castor and Pollux, that's all. Seriously, dear Neuffer, I am annoyed with myself for not having woken up to astronomy sooner. This winter I intend to devote myself to it in earnest. (2009, 10-11)

A few years later, Kant would be "virtually the only thing" he reads (24). To another friend, Hegel, he writes that his sole occupations are "Kant and the Greeks" (29). And indeed it is safe to say that Hölderlin's relationship to the "starry heavens above" is as Greek as it is Kantian. In *Die Wanderung*, the stars and their Greek constellations are a ubiquitous reminder of the ancient world and equally of its absence: "[...] under the stars too, / O Ionia, I think of you! But dear to men / Is what is present" (*[...] unter den Sternen / Gedenk ich, o Ionia, dein! Doch Menschen / Ist Gegenwärtiges lieb*, I, 339). The asterisms are an apparently ineradicable trace of a mythically enchanted world but can, from another perspective, just as well be seen as an indication of the divine's transposition from our world to a transcendent realm. Such is the experience of Hyperion, who in a draft for Hölderlin's novel reminisces about his youth:

Oft wenn über mir die Gestirne aufgiengen, nannt' ich ihre Nahmen, die Nahmen der Heroën, die einst auf Erden lebten – erbarmt euch meiner, ihr Göttlichen, rief ich, laßt mich vergessen, was ihr wart, oder tödtet mich mit eurer Herrlichkeit, ihr seeligen Jünglinge! – (I, 533)

Often when the stars appeared above me, I mentioned their names, the names of the heroes who once lived on earth – have pity on me, divine beings, I shouted, let me forget who you were, or kill me with your splendor, you blessed youths! –

Indeed, more often than not, Hölderlin's stars disenchant. The constellations may have mythical names, but this very act of naming, measuring, and counting is already a way of keeping the "heavenly powers" at bay, of making them subservient. As the ode *Dichterberuf* has it:

Zu lang ist alles Göttliche dienstbar schon
Und alle Himmelskräfte verscherzt, verbraucht
Die Gütigen, zur Lust, danklos, ein
Schlaues Geschlecht und zu kennen wähnt es

Wenn ihnen der Erhabne den Aker baut
Das Tagslicht und den Donnerer, und es spät
Das sehrohr wohl sie all und zählt und
Nennet mit Nahmen des Himmels Sterne (I, 330)

Too long now things divine have been cheaply used
And all the powers of heaven, the kindly, spent
In trifling waste by cold and cunning
Men without thanks, who when he, the Highest,

In person tills their field for them, think they know
The daylight and the Thunderer, and indeed
Their telescope may find them all, may
Count and name every star of heaven. (2013, 235)

If even the mythopoetic act of naming stars, this most innocent of activities, is a form of heresy, then one may wish to ask in what the proper relationship to the celestial realm consists. Is anything left but blind awe – or terror – in the face of the unknown?

That this is not Hölderlin's stance is clear from his enthusiasm for scientific progress and the important roles played by astronomical concepts in his poetry. With an ambitious monograph on the subject, Alexander Honold has proposed to read Hölderlin's entire oeuvre from the viewpoint of his interest in the movements of heavenly bodies and their effects on our conception of time.¹⁴³ The earliest and most unambiguous indication of Hölderlin's positive investment in modern astronomy is his 1789 celebration of fellow Swabian Johannes Kepler, the first lines of which are

¹⁴³ See Alexander Honold, *Hölderlins Kalender. Astronomie und Revolution um 1800*.

Unter den Sternen ergeheth sich
Mein Geist, die Gefilde des Uranus
Überhin schwebt er und sinnt; einsam ist
Und gewagt, ehernen Tritt heischet die Bahn. (I, 71)

Below the stars my spirit
dwells, above the realms of Uranus
it hovers and ponders; the orbit is lonely
and daring, demands an iron step.

Kepler's discoveries have not relocated the divine to the "cold of the stars" but transported *us* to hitherto invisible regions of space (I, 435). Insofar as the gods have escaped to the stars, we have to accompany them on their stellar journey. When we are no longer at a safe distance from which we may name them conveniently and put them to use, the stars become *animated*. For, as Honold does not fail to note, it is only from an earthly, human perspective that the distant stars appear fixed on the night sky; in reality, they are subject to constant, law-bound (if to us imperceptibly slow) movement (40-41).¹⁴⁴

There is, however, even from a terrestrial point of view a notable exception to the post-Copernican stasis of heavenly objects. It is not surprising that comets should hold a particular fascination for Hölderlin. In a fragmentary prose text written after his breakdown in 1805, the disputable authenticity of which has not prevented extensive commentary, Hölderlin affirms: "Would I like to be a comet? I think so. For they possess the swiftness of birds; they blossom with fire and are like children in purity. To desire more than that, human nature cannot presume." (*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*, 2013, 791A, 909) Indeed, it is easy to see how comets may come to

¹⁴⁴ Interpreting a difficult passage in Hölderlin's *Chiron*, Honold comments: "Als Gegenprobe zur kopernikanischen Lesart aber wäre der Vermutung nachzugehen, daß es sich hier um ein Indiz einer weniger beachteten Umwälzung des astronomischen Denkens handelt, die nicht Wandelsterne verstetigt, sondern die Fixsterne mobilisiert," which means that "Hölderlins vermeintliche poetische Rückfälle in das alte, ptolemäische Weltbild, sie wären unter dieser Voraussetzung nicht Residuen geo-stationären Denkens, sondern Indizien eines neuen, wiederum 'helio-kinetischen' Paradigmas" (41).

stand for freedom (*sie haben die Schnelligkeit der Vögel*), life (*sie blühen an Feuer*), and innocence (*und sind wie Kinder an Reinheit*). What is striking about the image, however, is that the comet is also the most inhospitable object that can be seen on the night sky. Of all visible celestial bodies, only comets pose a real threat to life on earth. Unlike stars, they do not give warmth to orbiting planets; and unlike some planets, they have no breathable atmosphere.

To wish to be a comet is to wish to be mere matter which has taken on the form of something that is more than mere matter. According to Hölderlin himself, this is characteristic of that "sacred madness" which may take hold of tragic heroes and which, in the "Anmerkungen zur Antigonä," counts as "the loftiest human phenomenon" (2009, 327).

In hohem Bewußtsein vergleicht sich [die Seele] dann immer mit Gegenständen, die kein Bewußtsein haben, aber in ihrem Schiksaal des Bewußtseins Form annehmen. So einer ist ein wüst gewordenes Land, das in ursprünglicher üppiger Fruchtbarkeit die Wirkungen des Sonnenlichts zu sehr verstärkt, und darum dürre wird. Schiksaal der Phrygischen Niobe; wie überall Schiksaal der unschuldigen Natur, die überall in ihrer Virtuosität in eben dem Grade ins Allzuorganische gehet, wie der Mensch sich dem Aorgischen nähert, in heroischeren Verhältnissen, und Gemüthsbewegungen. Und Niobe ist dann auch recht eigentlich das Bild des frühen Genies. (II, 372)

In high consciousness the soul then always compares itself with objects which have no consciousness, but which in their fate take on the form of consciousness. Such an object is a land grown barren, which in its original fertility has too greatly intensified the effects of the sun and becomes dry for that reason. The fate of Phrygian Niobe; as it is everywhere the fate of innocent nature, which everywhere in its virtuosity passes over into the all-too-organic, to just the degree that man passes over into the aorgic, in more heroic circumstances and motions of the affects. And Niobe is then quite properly the image of the early genius. (2009, 328)¹⁴⁵

What is it that leads the enchanted mind to compare itself, even desire, that which is completely without mind; what is the relationship here between "high" consciousness and *no* consciousness?

In "sacred madness," a heightened form of subjectivity to which no blasphemy is

¹⁴⁵ For a recent discussion of this passage that analyzes Hölderlin's procedure in terms of a *Verschriftlichung der Natur*, see Geisenhanslücke (133-135).

foreign, "innocent nature" everywhere appears more alive, animated.¹⁴⁶ Enchanted and enchanting is precisely that point at which matter becomes more than mere matter, thereby revealing their identity. But since this becoming is impossible to *experience*, a movement in the opposite direction is initiated as the hero(ine), in this case Antigone, likens herself to a desert or a stone.

Such speech is indeed "mad" in drama and at the very least embarrassing in the novel. When Hyperion laments, "Now I no longer said to the flower, you are my sister! and to the wellsprings, we are of one kind! like an echo, I now faithfully gave each thing its name" (*Nun sprach ich nummer zu der Blume, du bist meine Schwester! und zu den Quellen, wir sind eines Geschlechts! ich gab nun treulich, wie ein Echo, jedem Dinge seinen Nahmen*, 57/l, 647), he might as well be celebrating his convalescence after a bout of mental illness. In the lyric, however, such gestures are entirely permissible, even required: what Hölderlin calls high consciousness is one of its generic traits.¹⁴⁷

The poet's affinities with rivers, gods, mythical figures, and personified concepts are unmistakable characteristics of Hölderlin's odes, hymns, and elegies. That this is a matter of so many lyric devices, albeit without sharp boundaries against what one may indeed call lyric madness, was of course clear to Hölderlin himself, who after all was not subject to any unreflected animism or pantheism. That he was perfectly capable and willing to reflect quite soberly on the poetic practice of personification is evident from an essay the poet wrote as a twenty year-old student at the seminary in Tübingen. Investigating "Parallele zwischen

¹⁴⁶ It should be noted that Hölderlin's distinction between the organic and the "aorgic" does not correspond neatly to the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, nor does it correspond to the distinction between nature and art in any familiar sense. The organic is rather to be thought along the lines of the distinct, the purposive, and the intelligible, whereas the aorgic is that which appears to lack any organizing principle and therefore any sense. For a more extensive elaboration, see Jochen Schmidt's commentary (DKV II, 1192).

¹⁴⁷ It is instructive to consider such "lyrical" novels as Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia*, or Rilke's *Malte*: they reveal the madness inherent and normalized in lyric speech.

Salomons Sprüchwörtern und Hesiods Werken und Tagen," he gives his view on the trope as a poetic strategy:

Die Personifikation abstrakter Begriffe hat [...] ihren aesthetischen Werth. Wir nennen nichts schön und erhaben, was nicht auf unser Empfindungs- und Begehungsvermögen wirkt, vorausgesetzt nemlich daß das Urtheil, das wir fällen, unser eigenes und nicht nachgesprochen ist. Nun aber würkt kein Gegenstand auf unser Empfindungs- und Begehungsvermögen, außer unter einer *T o t a l v o r s t e l l u n g*. Wo wir zergliedern, wo wir deutliche Begriffe haben, empfinden wir schlechterdings nicht. Der dichter will aber auf das Empfindungs- und Begehungsvermögen wirken, oder welches einerlei ist, er hat Schönheit und Erhabenheit zum Zweck. Er muß also abstrakte Begriffe, die ihrer Natur nach mehr zur Zergliederung, zur Auflösung in deutliche Begriffe reizen, so darstellen, daß sie klare Begriffe oder Totalvorstellungen werden, das ist, er muß sie versinnlichen. Und diß ist das Werk der Personifikation abstrakter Begriffe.

Die Personifikation abstrakter Begriffe aber war den Dichtern des Alterthums weniger Zweck, als Notwendigkeit. Die Phantasie ist bei unkultivirten Völkern immer die erste Seelenkraft, die sich entwickelt. Daher alle Mythologien, Mythen, und Mysterien, daher die Personifikation abstrakter Begriffe. (II, 35)

The personification of abstract concepts has [...] its aesthetic value. We call nothing beautiful and sublime that does not affect our capacity to feel and desire, provided, that is, that our judgment is indeed ours and not an imitation. However, nothing affects our capacity to feel and desire but a *total representation* [*T o t a l v o r s t e l l u n g*]. Wherever we parse, wherever we have distinct concepts [*deutliche Begriffe*], we feel nothing. Yet the poet wants to affect our capacity to feel and desire, or, put differently, he aims at beauty and sublimity. And so he must present abstract concepts – whose nature it is to invite parsing and to resolve into distinct concepts – in such a way that they become clear concepts [*klare Begriffe*] or total representations, that is, he must render them sensuous. And this is the job of the personification of abstract concepts.

However, to the poets of antiquity, the personification of abstract concepts was not so much a goal as a necessity. Among uncultivated peoples, the imagination is always the mental power [*Seelenkraft*] that develops first. Hence all mythologies, myths, and mysteries, hence the personification of abstract concepts.

Which is to say that for the moderns, personification is *not* necessary, but a matter of choice, a function, a purpose (*Zweck*). In the vocabulary of the aesthetic philosophy of the time, the purpose is "beauty and sublimity." Taking up this line of thought again thirteen years later, having recently returned from Paris where he had the opportunity to view classical sculpture, Hölderlin's vocabulary is somewhat more idiosyncratic.

Der Anblick der Antiquen hat mir einen Eindruck gegeben, der mir nicht allein die Griechen verständlicher macht, sondern überhaupt das Höchste der Kunst, die auch in der höchsten Bewegung und Phänomenalisierung der Begriffe und alles Ernstlichgemeinten

dennoch alles stehend und für sich selbst erhält, so daß die Sicherheit in diesem Sinne die höchste Art des Zeichens ist. (II, 921)

Seeing the antiquities left me with an impression that has helped me understand not only the Greeks themselves but all that is highest in art, which even where movement and the phenomenalization of concepts and of every aspect of serious meaning is at its height still keeps every part in place, entire and true to itself, so that surety, in this sense, is the supreme kind of sign. (2009, 214)

If Greek "surety" (*Sicherheit*) is "the supreme kind of sign," what does this sign signify? A few lines on, Hölderlin writes no less enigmatically of nature as figure:

Das Gewitter, nicht bloß in seiner höchsten Erscheinung, sondern in eben dieser Ansicht, als Macht und als Gestalt, in den übrigen Formen des Himmels, das Licht in seinem Wirken, nationell und als Prinzip und Schicksaalsweise bildend, daß uns etwas heilig ist, sein Drang im Kommen und Gehen, das Charakteristische der Wälder und das Zusammentreffen in einer Gegend von verschiedenen Charakteren der Natur, daß alle heiligen Orte der Erde zusammen sind um einen Ort und das philosophische Licht um mein Fenster ist jetzt meine Freude [...] (II, 921-922)

Storms, not just in their greatest manifestation, but seen as power and figure, among the other forms of the sky, the effect of the light, shaping nationally and as principle and destiny, so that something is holy to us, the intensity of its coming and going, the characteristicness of the woods and the coincidence in one region of different characters of nature, so that all the holy places of the earth are together in one place, and the philosophic light at my window, they are now my joy. (2009, 214)

Nature – and not merely organic nature but what Hölderlin calls aorgic nature as well – is here at the same time regarded as trope and as divine. On the one hand, the materialization of spirit (concepts) in objects (sculpture); on the other hand, the animation of "characters of nature" as "holy."

The incomplete "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." is often cited as the most sustained exposition of Hölderlin's alleged pantheism.¹⁴⁸ And indeed, "the divinely beautiful Nature" (*die Göttlichschöne Natur*) appears in the famous poem "higher than the gods of Orient and Occident" (*über die Götter des Abends und Orients*, 463/I, 262). Yet there are several complications for an understanding of Hölderlin's nature as ubiquitously divine and therefore

¹⁴⁸ See for instance Jochen Schmidt's learned commentary in DKV I, 664.

always already enchanted. For if nature is "older than the ages" (*älter denn die Zeiten*) it was nevertheless itself once "begotten [...] on holy chaos" (*aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt*, 463/l, 262). And even if this notion were somehow rendered compatible with a Spinozist kind of pantheism, the habitual attribution of mindedness to natural phenomena would remain questionable, because this procedure runs counter both to Spinoza's notion of God or substance and to Hölderlin's own insistence, in the notes on *Antigone* and elsewhere, on the aorgic and that in nature which is utterly *without* consciousness.

Another indication of Hölderlin's interest in grasping "objectively" the connection between matter and mind are his two distichs to the contemporary anatomist Samuel Thomas Sömmering, which I discuss below. Together with the poet's clear awareness of figurality, these observations obstruct an understanding of his "spirits" as instances of mind independent of the essentially poetic acts that bring them about. Yet at the same time, the seeping over of animating language into other genres and media, such as the novel and letter correspondence, signals that it is not just a matter of generic conventions either.

This problematic is of course a pointed version of a complication for reading lyrics generally. The difficulty can be summed up as follows: either Hölderlin is 1) subscribing to polytheism, pantheism, and/or animism not far removed from madness; 2) writing fantastic fiction set in a world where rivers and concepts possess will and intellect; 3) using the conventional rhetorical figure personification; 4) simply not being serious; or 5) lying.

Granting that Hölderlin *is* serious, of which he at any rate takes great pains to convince, one is forced to acknowledge that no one of these alternatives appears to hold true for Hölderlin.¹⁴⁹ To the poet as a young student, personification was in antiquity a necessity, which amounts to the same as it not being personification at all. Performing a critical genealogy of tropes, Friedrich Kittler writes:

¹⁴⁹ For Hölderlin's poetics of earnestness, see the previous chapter.

When and insofar as the gods are dead, they are demoted to poetic figures. Dawn, which Homer solemnly invoked on each new day of his heroes' lives, was a goddess by the name of Eos; conversely the Romans and later the Christians, who were forbidden by principle to believe in gods and goddesses, could see in the divine name Eos only an allegory or a personification of the red solar globe in the morning. The invention of the so-called rhetorical figures served the purpose of a diminution of the gods' power and also that of the songs which had once invoked these gods and goddesses. Thus with one hand one could cling to Greek poetry – for according to the Romans themselves and even a few cleverer Christians, there was none more beautiful to be found –, and with the other hand the poems [*das Gedichtete*] could be reduced to a nullity, to which we still today refer using the Latin word *fiction*. (2013b, 67-68)

Poetic figures as the corpses of dead gods. By everywhere blurring the line between figurality and religiosity, it appears that Hölderlin is resisting or refusing this divine death; and the parting and coming of the gods is of course not only *the* theme of his poetry but the very premise of his lyric practice. However, this phenomenon is certainly not unique to Hölderlin. Heinz Schlaffer writes of "a sorcery disarmed into rhetoric though repurposed as poetry" (2012, 144) and notes that "in modernity, people who are no polytheists go on writing poetry as though they were and honor Venus, spring, joy, or a river like deities. Within the poem there applies a different religion than outside. Therefore there is a lyric after the lyric" (169).

If Schlaffer's notion of a post-lyric religiosity balances on the brink of the *Nichtigkeit* called fiction, he nevertheless attends to the ambivalence that cannot be erased from what critics generally have been too eager to call *prosopopeia* or personification. "More accurate would be the concept 'Demonization,' for in this transubstantiation are formed uncanny crossbreeds, half matter, half spirit, half dead, half alive. Through invocation as through metaphorical renaming, there arise spectral figures from another world." (59) Somewhere on a scale from dogmatic belief to fictional nullity are conjured up a host of beings that, precisely by being "half matter, half spirit, half dead, half living" draw attention to the distinction and the connection between matter and spirit, death and life. Personification may not be quite a necessity for the modern lyric, but this procedure of animation is, however subtly practiced – not only Hölderlin's poems would be unimaginable without it. For Schlaffer, this is a matter of feigning correspondence or harmony between human consciousness and the outer world. "The

magic of poems that are no longer incantations consists in the apparent adaptation of outer to inner conditions.” (143) This reflects a longstanding critical consensus. Northrop Frye writes of “an identity of subject and object” (32) and a lyric state in which “the mind is identified with what it contemplates” (33). Jonathan Culler notes how “we tend to assume” that “postenlightenment poetry seeks to overcome the alienation of subject from object” (158).

The unsettling implications of this have not been overlooked. Paul de Man seizes upon “the latent threat that inhabits prosopopeia, namely that by making the dead speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death” (1984, 78). However, it is not so much death itself that disconcerts as the opening of a dimension apparently between life and death.

The comforting cliché of a unity of self and nature, which guides so many interpretations of poetry, presupposes a discomfoting worldview; for such a correspondence between human subject and physical objects is possible only if nature is peopled by demons who react to poetic language. (Schlafler 2012, 145-146)

As among other Rainer Nägele has remarked (116-117), Hölderlin developed a habit of replacing the gods (*Götter*) with spirits (*Geister*), not only in his translation of Sophocles but also in revising his own lyrics. Gods, both personal and collective,¹⁵⁰ are posited on the same ontological level as “personified” rivers and “phenomenalized” concepts.

Nägele argues forcefully against understanding Hölderlin’s nature metaphorically or symbolically. In Hölderlin’s poetry, the critic writes, “plants are really plants, trees are really trees, and streams are really streams, not some metaphors or symbols for something else” (109). To support his point, Nägele brings up an indeed perplexing commentary of Hölderlin’s on a passage in *Antigone*.

¹⁵⁰ For Hölderlin’s notion of personal and collective gods, see the end of this chapter.

Nicht lang mehr brütest
In eifersüchtger Sonne du.

Auf der Erde, unter Menschen, kann die Sonne, wie sie relativ physisch wird, auch wirklich relativ im Moralischen werden. (II, 371)

You'll not much longer
Brood in the jealous sun.

Just as the sun becomes relative physically, so, on earth among men, the sun can really become relative in the moral sphere. (2009, 327)

Nägele seizes on the expression "on earth" (*Auf der Erde*) to argue that the "physical" sun (that is the sun as an object of study for physics) is no less of a construction than the "moral" one:

For the sun is not physical, as one generally presumes naïvely, but it *becomes* physical *on earth, among men* [...] if this is so, if the "physical" sun also just relatively, only *among men*, becomes physical, then the talk of a "jealous sun" is no less real than the talk of a "physical sun" [...] (143)¹⁵¹

It may well be that a good Kantian ought to avoid calling things-in-themselves "physical," and that they rather become physical according to a particular way of apprehending them. However, this does not preclude that some ways of apprehending an object are more well-founded than others or that there are criteria according to which we attribute consciousness to things, which may, however, always deceive.¹⁵² Moreover, Hölderlin's wording "on earth" implies that there is also a sun which is not on earth but in space. This sun, insofar as it appears to us, would of course still appear *to us*, but Hölderlin's note suggests an interest in the relationship between the terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial sun, and in the becoming *either* physical *or* moral of the sun. Should the sun or any other matter without mind (construed "physically") hold

¹⁵¹ "Die Sonne nämlich ist nicht physisch, wie man naiverweise meistens annimmt, sondern sie *wird* physisch *Auf der Erde, unter Menschen* [...] wenn dem so ist, wenn die "physische" Sonne auch nur relativ, *unter Menschen* erst, physisch wird, dann ist die Rede von einer "eifersüchtigen Sonne" nicht weniger wirklich als die Rede von einer "physischen Sonne" [...]"

¹⁵² For an excellent discussion of criteria and the attribution of consciousness, see the first part of Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979.

no interest whatsoever? Is there something inherently wrong in regarding objects as "merely" physical? Is it even dangerous or evil?

Certainly, Hölderlin critiques the predatory subjectivity with which modern science may be invested. But if the poetic animation of mere matter is enchanting, is there not something equally wondrous about there being things to which not only we are indifferent but themselves also? And in any case, is not the capacity to be enchanted by life and spirit predicated on there being that which is wholly devoid of spirit, of life?

The question concerns whether the lyric is supporting and building upon a belief in a universal unity between the world and consciousness or is, through (potentially embarrassing) lyric lies and fictions, hinting at the wonder that spirit *does* arise out of mere, indifferent matter in a world that itself has no meaning. Or, more precisely, the question is under what conditions the one or the other lyric practice will prove the more effective strategy for poetic enchantment. If it is true of the modern lyric that it aims to overcome the opposition between subject and object, spirit and matter, then it becomes a question of *how* their unity is thought. It may appear as though Hölderlin's critique of metaphoricity is simply blurring the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. But the relationship between the sentient and the nonsentient is also to be thought quite precisely, that is both from the perspective of matter's becoming spirit and from the perspective of spirit's becoming matter. It is clear that for Hölderlin, "pure spirit" (whatever that would mean) could neither enchant nor be enchanted. In the abandoned metric version of his *Hyperion*, Hölderlin lets his protagonist say,

Der reine leidensfreie Geist befaßt
Sich mit dem Stoffe nicht, ist aber auch
Sich keines Dings und seiner nicht bewußt
Für ihn ist keine Welt, denn außer ihm
Ist nichts. [...] (I, 518-519)

Pure spirit free of pain attends
Not to matter, but is also

Of every thing and itself unaware
To it there is no world, for outside it
Is nothing [...]

And, more strikingly, in the already quoted passage of *Der Rhein*:

Es haben aber an eigner
Unsterblichkeit die Götter genug, und bedürfen
Die Himmlischen eines Dings,
So sind Heroen und Menschen
Und Sterbliche sonst. Denn weil
Die Seeligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,
Muß wohl, wenn solches zu sagen
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Nahmen
Theilnehmend fühlen ein Anderer,
Den brauchen sie [...] (I, 345)

But their own immortality
Suffices the gods, and if
The Heavenly have need of one thing,
It is of heroes and human beings
And other mortals. For since
The most Blessed in themselves feel nothing
Another, if to say such a thing is
Permitted, must, I suppose,
Vicariously feel in the name of the gods,
And him they need [...] (2013, 505)

Accordingly, an immediate unity with the deity can lead to nothing but annihilation, as in Hölderlin's theory of tragedy, where "the God, in the form of death, is present" (*der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist*, 2009, 329/I, 373).

This notion of the divine's "need" for the medium of mortals and of perishable matter more generally informs not only Hölderlin's poetics but his philosophy of history as well. For the most palpable difference between Hölderlin's antiquity and the modern world, such as it is presented in the historical panoramas *Der Einzige* and *Patmos*, is precisely the collapse of the divine's material underpinnings, which is, although historically necessary, often lamented. The *Nachtgesang* "Lebensalter" is perhaps Hölderlin's most compact version of this thought.

Ihr Städte des Euphrats!
Ihr Gassen von Palmyra!
Ihr Säulenwälder in der Eb'ne der Wüste,
Was seid ihr?
Euch hat die Kronen,
Dieweil ihr über die Gränze
Der Othmenden seid gegangen,
Von Himmlischen der Rauchdampf und
Hinweg das Feuer genommen;
Jetzt aber siz' ich unter Wolken (deren
Ein jedes eine Ruh' hat eigen) unter
Wohleingerichteten Eichen, auf
Der Heide des Rehs, und fremd
Erscheinen und gestorben mir
Der Seeligen Geister. (I, 446)

You cities of Euphrates,
You streets of Palmyra,
You forests of pillars in the desert plain!
What are you?
Your crests, as you passed beyond
The bounds of those who breathe,
By smoke of heavenly powers and
By fire were taken away;
But now I sit beneath clouds, in which
Peculiar quiet comes to each one, beneath
A pleasing order of oak-trees, on
The heath where the roe-deer feed, and strange
To me, remote and dead seem
The souls of the blessèd. (2013, 457)

The simultaneously published "Thränen" calls Greek culture and religion "Visible, like a pondering man" (*Sichtbar, gleich einem sinnigen Mann*, 253/I, 441), emphasizing its visual presence and material incorporation. In "Lebensalter" the speaker's vision is clouded, sitting as he is beneath the smoke of the ancient splendor that has been consumed by heavenly fire.

Denn wenn es aus ist, und der Tag erloschen
Wohl trifft den Priester erst, doch liebend folgt
Der Tempel und das Bild ihm auch und seine Sitte
Zum dunkeln Land und keines mag noch scheinen. (I, 405)

For when it's over, and Day's light gone out,
The priest is the first to be struck, but lovingly
The temple and the image and the cult
Follow him down into darkness, and none of them now may shine. (2013, 491)

Thus *Germanien*. Remarkably, Hölderlin regularly invokes not the gods but their "images," as in the first lines of the same poem: "Not them, the blessed, who once appeared, / Those images of gods in the ancient land, / Them, it is true, I may not now invoke [...] (*Nicht sie, die Seeligen, die erschienen sind / Die Götterbilder in dem alten Lande, / Sie darf ich ja nicht rufen mehr [...]*, 491/I, 404).¹⁵³

For Hölderlin, the coming and going of Christ, the last demigod, is thus not associated with any messianism but rather marks the end of the happy communion between gods and men, and hence the deterioration of ancient visual splendor: "Too long, too long now / The honour of the Heavenly has been invisible" (*Zu lang, zu lang schon ist / Die Ehre der Himmlischen unsichtbar*, 563/I, 453). If according to Hölderlin what is lost may in part be recaptured through a process of interiorization and spiritualization, in which poetry of course plays a crucial part, it nevertheless becomes clear that the lyric for its gestures of animation cannot do without material support. Thus Christ himself is a thing, a "gem" or "treasure," albeit hidden:

Viel hab' ich schönes gesehn,
 Und gesungen Gottes Bild,
 Hab' ich, das lebet unter
 Den Menschen, aber dennoch
 Ihr alten Götter und all
 Ihr tapfern Söhne der Götter
 Noch Einen such ich, den
 Ich liebe unter euch,
 Wo ihr den letzten eures Geschlechts
 Des Hauses Kleinod mir
 Dem fremden Gaste verberget. (I, 388)

[I h]ave looked upon much that is lovely
 And sung the image of God
 As here among human kind
 It lives, and yet, and yet
 You ancient gods and all
 You valiant sons of the gods,
 One other I look for whom
 Within your ranks I love
 Where hidden from the alien guest, from me,
 You keep the last of your kind,

¹⁵³ See also, for instance, *Gesang des Deutschen* (I, 248) and *Der Main* (I, 229).

The treasured gem of the house. (2013, 535; 537)

That the dependence of the divine on a material basis for the purpose of animation as a strategy for poetic enchantment is less a matter of historic or religious specificity than of an insight proper to the lyric genre, is suggested by Rilke's virtuosic "Buch vom Mönchischen Leben," where the doctrine of the material creation of God leaves little doubt as to his reliance on mortals' ceaseless activity. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of voices that emerges from the *Stundenbuch*, one may indeed speak of a doctrine unfolded throughout Rilke's work and having some of its most compelling articulations in the collection of "prayers" that marks the early Rilke's most significant achievement. The piety of the speaker is that of a workman confronted with a difficult and arduous task. *Werkleute sind wir*, affirms one monk (I, 170). Addressing his ever incomplete God, he further asserts:

Wir bauen an dir mit zitternden Händen
und wir türmen Atom auf Atom.
Aber wer kann dich vollenden,
du Dom. (I, 164)

The expression "atom by atom" is not a metaphor but at most a hyperbole. Similarly, the dome is no metonymy (it does not 'house' God and it is not 'near' God) but at most a synecdoche (it is God or at least part thereof).¹⁵⁴ This is important for understanding the radicality of Rilke's gesture, which is not diminished but enhanced by the ambiguity inherent in lyric invocations. As Schläffer writes,

¹⁵⁴ Cf. "Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft":

Du bist das Kloster zu den Wundenmalen.
Mit zweiunddreißig alten Kathedralen
und fünfzig Kirchen, welche aus Opalen
und Stücken Bernstein aufgemauert sind. (I, 219)

The lyric invocation liberates appearances of their material heaviness and transforms them into metaphors of God. In this double movement – extending the name of the divine to sensuous appearances, attributing appearances to their spiritual center – the cultic function of metaphor, perhaps even its cultic origin, is to be sought. (2012, 55)

With Kittler et. al. one may say more precisely that metaphor understood as metaphor originates in the demise of such cultic settings. Rilke exploits the lyric's proximity to prayer, but if God is not merely likened to a pile of atoms (be it in the form of a cathedral or something else), this is not because they are "sensuous appearances" of a divinity that has its essence elsewhere; rather appearance in its widest sense here *is* essence and the divine identical to its material support. To be clear, this does not mean that things are imbued with a divine consciousness but that consciousness of the divine is dependent on things. God is dependent on things, but not all things are dependent on God, who is himself "only a guest of gold" (*nur ein Gast des Golds*).

Nur einer Zeit zuliebe, die dich flehte
in ihre klaren marmornen Gebete,
erschienst du wie der König der Komete,
auf deiner Stirne Strahlenströme stolz.
Du kehrtest heim, da jene Zeit zerschmolz. (I, 171-172)

Only to please an age (it is reported)
into whose marble prayers you'd been exhorted,
as monarch of the comets you disported,
proud of the rays that from your brow outrolled.
You went home when that age returned to mould. (1960, II, 38; 40)

The following lyric specifies which time is here at issue:

Das waren Tage Michelangelo's,
von denen ich in fremden Büchern las.
Das war der Mann, der über einem Maß,
gigantengroß,
die Unermeßlichkeit vergaß. (I, 172)

Those were the days of Michelangelo,
of which from foreign books I know so well.
That was the man whose stature could excel
all measure so,

that he forgot about what can't be measured. (1960, II, 40 – translation modified)

From the monk's perspective, the Italian Renaissance was, for all its splendor, unmeasured. As a consequence:

Der Ast vom Baume Gott, der über Italien reicht,
hat schon geblüht.
Er hätte vielleicht
sich schon gerne, mit Früchten gefüllt, verfrüht,
doch er wurde mitten im Blühen müd,
und er wird keine Früchte haben. (I, 172)

That bough stretched from God the Tree out over Italy
bloomed long ago.
It would, maybe,
have gladly had early-ripening fruits to show;
in the midst of its bloom it grew weary, though,
and no fruits will it ever render. (1960, II, 40)

It is only because he can become subject to human exhaustion that God elicits care and concern:

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?
Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)
Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)
Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,
mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.

Nach mir hast du kein Haus, darin
dich Worte, nah und warm, begrüßen.
Es fällt von deinen müden Füßen
die Samtsandale, die ich bin. (I, 176)

What will you do, God, when I die?
I am your jug (and I will shatter)
I am your drink (and I'll go bad)
I am your clothing and your calling,
you'll lose all reason, losing me.

With me gone, you'll have no house
where warm words will welcome you.
Without me, you'll have no sandals:
your exhausted feet will wander bare. (2009, 27)

The anxiety over the eventual perishing of any particular human receptacle, a loss which threatens God with meaninglessness and homelessness, even death, can be ameliorated only by ceaselessly reallocating piety to more viable things:

Es gibt im Grunde nur Gebete,
so sind die Hände uns geweiht,
daß sie nichts schufen, was nicht flehte;
ob einer malte oder mähte,
schon aus dem Ringen der Geräte
entfaltete sich Frömmigkeit. (I, 180)

There's nothing in the end but prayer:
our hands have been so consecrated,
prayer's risen from all they have created;
were ploughing or portraiture their care,
the tools' mere struggle generated
incipient piety there. (1960, II, 42 – translation modified)

God has existence only in things, and it is only through them that he may live on. Because these things owe their shape and meaning to human activity, God can no longer be construed as a father. Instead, Rilke gives new meaning to the phrase 'son of man':

Ich bin der Vater; doch der Sohn ist mehr,
ist alles, was der Vater war, und der,
der er nicht wurde, wird in jenem groß;
er ist die Zukunft und die Wiederkehr,
er ist der Schoß, er ist das Meer... (I, 206)

I am the father; more, though, is the son,
not only all the father was, but one
the father was not is in him begun:
he is what yet, and what again, shall be,
he is the womb, he is the sea... (1960, II, 66 – translation modified)

As a son, God has right to an inheritance, which is what makes him last:

Du erbst Venedig und Kasan und Rom,
Florenz wird dein sein, der Pisaner Dom,
die Troitzka Lawra und das Monastir,

das unter Kiows Gärten ein Gewirr
von Gängen bildet, dunkel und verschlungen, –
Moskau mit Glocken wie Erinnerungen, –
und Klang wird dein sein: Geigen, Hörner, Zungen,
und jedes Lied, das tief genug erklingen,
wird an dir glänzen wie ein Edelstein. (I, 209)

Venice, Kasan, and Rome shall come to you,
Florence be yours and Pisa's minster too,
Troisk's convent, and that cloister whose sunk ways
beneath Kiev's hanging gardens in a maze
of darkling corridors go winding round, –
Moscow, with bells like memories, – for sound
shall be yours also: fiddles, horns and voices,
and every song that deep enough rejoices
shall shine upon you like a precious stone. (1960, II, 68)

Among the things that constitute God are of course songs and poems. According to one lyric, poetic images are nothing if not incorporated into the larger structure that is the divine:

Für dich nur schließen sich die Dichter ein
und sammeln Bilder, rauschende und reiche,
und gehn hinaus und reifen durch Vergleiche
und sind ihr ganzes Leben so allein... (I, 209)

Only for your sake poets live unknown
and gather rich and rustling images,
and go out and mature through similes
and spend entire lifetimes so alone... (1960, II, 68)

Poets do not simply seek pictures *of* God or symbols *for* God but collect images that then together *are* God. The divine is image and thing, and can be addressed only as such. Thus Rilke's next collection of poems is *Das Buch der Bilder*, thus a large part of his *Neue Gedichte* is devoted to the praise of things. The divine, supposedly the purely spiritual, must become construed as wholly and only material before it can become imbued with the animating power of lyric address. Only what lacks a soul can be granted one by means of the apostrophic lie, which is mendacious only insofar as it is taken to describe a state of things rather than to bring it

about.¹⁵⁵ The lyric's privileged position as a discourse of poetic enchantment is due not least to this: that it can animate *without description*.¹⁵⁶ Yet paradoxically, it is precisely because the apostrophe or the invocation is always available to the lyric that it can dispense with it without loss of animating force. And since this force works best on that which does not already live a life of its own, animation is often preceded by paralyzation. Not only humans and animals but also putatively purely spiritual beings are first *reduced* to an idol, an inanimate object which serves to praise the god that it embodies, only *then* to be animated or reanimated. Hence Apollo or Buddha or an angel cannot be the object of contemplation, but a torso of Apollo, a figure of Buddha, a sculpture of an angel.¹⁵⁷

Even and especially that which is most spiritual of all must be given a discrete shape as tangible matter before it can be re-animated by the lyric act. This procedure is not unique to Rilke, who nevertheless masters and exploits it like few others. A humorous parallel may be found in Valéry's *hêtre 'suprême,'* where the homophony in French between the words for being (*être*) and beech (*hêtre*) effects a displacement of faith and piety, which now concern precisely the reanimation of an apparently dead organic structure after the threat of winter:

[...] ô Tristesse de saison,
Qui te consumes en toi-même,
Tu ne peux pas que ma raison
N'espère en le Hêtre suprême! (I, 161-162)¹⁵⁸

[...] oh seasonal Sorrow,
Consuming yourself within yourself,

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Schlaffer (1990, 64): *Ein Gebet [...] ist immer wahr, auch wenn es nicht erhört werden, sogar wenn der angeflehte Gott nicht existieren sollte*. More precisely, a prayer is, like illocutionary speech acts generally, neither true nor false but rather successful or unsuccessful.

¹⁵⁶ One may recall in this context Hölderlin's sarcasm against descriptive poetry, quoted in the previous chapter.

¹⁵⁷ See the *New Poems* "Früher Apollo" (I, 449), "Buddha" (I, 462), "L'Ange du méridien" (I, 462-463, quoted below), etc.

¹⁵⁸ The Supreme Beech was (is?) evidently a real tree that belonged to the Gides. The poem is dedicated to André's wife Madeleine. See Valéry's letter on the subject (1955, 451-453) and Gide's response (459), from which it is clear that the concluding turn to "our glorious language" (*notre illustre Langage*, 1971, I, 275/I, 162), so typical of Valéry, was against his original intentions.

You cannot hold back my reason
From hoping in the Beech Supreme. (1971, I, 273)

Yet it is no doubt Rilke who perfects an elaborate poetics of the reification and subsequent reanimation of the divine. However, things do not yield to such transformations without resistance. And the apparent mindedness of an inanimate thing may make it only all the more impervious to the poet's advances. While the *New Poems* retain from the *The Book of Hours* an interest in sacred things, Rilke intensifies the idolatrous procedure which he then continues to exploit throughout his oeuvre. Thus he begins his small cycle of "cathedral poems" with a sonnet devoted to a statue of an angel holding a sundial that attaches to the exterior of the Chartres Cathedral. That it is indeed the statue itself that is addressed and not a placeholder for something ineffable is evinced both by the name "Chartres" appended to the poem's title and by the angel's epithet "of stone" (*Steinerner*). This angel "feels," it is a "feeling figure" (*fühlende Figur*) with an irresistible smile; yet precisely because it possesses this perennial expression it repels whatever interiority with which we may want to equip it.

L'Ange du méridien
Chartres

Im Sturm, der um die starke Kathedrale
wie ein Verneiner stürzt der denkt und denkt,
fühlt man sich zärtlicher mit einem Male
von deinem Lächeln zu dir hingelenkt:

lächelnder Engel, fühlende Figur,
mit einem Mund, gemacht aus hundert Munden:
gewahrst du gar nicht, wie dir unsre Stunden
abgleiten von der vollen Sonnenuhr,

auf der des Tages ganze Zahl zugleich,
gleich wirklich, steht in tiefem Gleichgewichte,
als wären alle Stunden reif und reich.

Was weißt du, Steinerner, von unserm Sein?
und hältst du mit noch seligerm Gesichte
vielleicht die Tafel in die Nacht hinein? (I, 462-463)

In the storm that swirls around the strong cathedral

like some refuser's endless thought
one suddenly feels more tenderly
drawn to you by your smile:

Smiling angel, feeling figure,
your mouth fashioned from a hundred mouths:
are you not at all aware of how
our hours slide off your full sundial,

on which the day's entire sum at once,
completely real, stands in deep equilibrium,
as if all hours were ripe and rich?

What do you know, stone creature, of our life?
and is your face perhaps more blissful still
when you hold your tablet out into the night? (1984, 51)

The double movement of reification and reanimation is not exclusive to whatever *Kunstdinge* Rilke might happen upon but is, as has often been remarked, also a feature of the poems themselves. Thus the following poem, "Die Kathedrale" (I, 463-464), assumes the structure of a gothic cathedral, and directly after that "Das Portal," consisting of three sonnets, corresponds to the tripartite entranceways of such a cathedral (I, 464-465). At the same time, in being poems, these lyrics are more than physical objects, more, even, than architectural structures burdened by matter and function.¹⁵⁹

If according to the aesthetic program that informs the *New Poems* only this or that particular angel could be an object of Rilke's look and hence of his poetry, the angel of course eventually becomes one of Rilke's most central symbols. However, indifference remains a defining trait. The immaterial angel of the seventh *Duino Elegy*, which serves to circumscribe human existence, or indeed any finite existence, that is any existence *tout court*, from that which it is not, – is famously no more responsive than the figure decorating the cathedral in Chartres: "Angel, and even if I were [wooing], you would not come" (*Engel, und würb ich dich auch! Du kommst nicht*, 1995, 375/II, 223). However, since the angel of the *Elegies* assumes the

¹⁵⁹ On this point, cf. Simon Jarvis: "Poems are themselves a kind of fetish or idol. They are historical objects which often claim a more than historical truth; particular objects which often claim a universal meaning; they are things which almost claim the dignity of persons, things which claim to have not just a fixed price but an unmeasurable worth." (2006, 53)

impossible role of spirit, mindedness, and consciousness “as such,” it can delimit our existence only from one side, as it were. The complementary figure is not a sculpted deity but the less intimidating – though no less uncanny – doll.

One might wonder why Rilke should choose an anthropomorphic object to stand in for the indifferent and inanimate. Why not a pebble or a broken tool? One reason may of course be that he is after all interested in the objecthood of *man*, in man divested of any interiority. But more interesting is Rilke’s suggestion, indicated already in the *New Poems*, that it is neither shapeless stuff nor structures with clearly defined human purposes that are least receptive to the human compulsion and lyric imperative of animation.

It is worth pointing out here that Rilke’s dolls are no less complex and contradictory than his angels. In his essay “Puppen. Zu den Wachs-Puppen von Lotte Pritzel,” Rilke begins with one basic distinction. The object of his reflection are not the dolls of childhood, or rather, the dolls that interest Rilke have left childhood behind, and now appear just as impassive as they always were. If one were to encounter such a doll amidst more hospitable things, it would give rise to resentment:

sie würde uns fast empören durch ihre schreckliche dicke Vergeßlichkeit, der Haß, der, unbewußt, sicher immer einen Teil unserer Beziehungen zu ihr ausmachte, schlänge nach oben, entlarvt läge sie vor uns da, als der grausige Fremdkörper, an den wir unsere lauterste Wärme verschwendet haben [...]. (IV, 687)

it would almost anger us with its frightful obese forgetfulness, the hatred, which undoubtedly has always been a part of our relationship to it unconsciously, would break out, it would lie before us unmasked as the horrible foreign body on which we had wasted our purest ardour [...] (1978, 45)

Rilke goes so far as to blame the doll for the alienation of consciousness from itself.

Der Puppe gegenüber waren wir gezwungen, uns zu behaupten, denn wenn wir uns an sie aufgaben, so war überhaupt niemand mehr da. Sie erwiderte nichts, so kamen wir in die Lage, für sie Leistungen zu übernehmen, unser allmählich breiteres Wesen zu

spalten in Teil und Gegenteil, uns gewissermaßen durch sie die Welt, die unabgegrenzt in uns übergang, vom Leibe zu halten. (IV, 688)

With the doll we were forced to assert ourselves, for, had we surrendered ourselves to it, there would then have been no one there at all. It made no response whatever, so that we were put in the position of having to take over the part it should have played, of having to split our gradually enlarging personality into part and counterpart; in a sense, through it to keep the world, which was entering into us on all side, at a distance. (1978, 45)

The doll is more thing-like than a thing or, with Rilke's words, it is "less than a thing": "A poet might succumb to the domination of a marionette, for the marionette has only imagination. The doll has none, and is precisely so much less than a thing as the marionette is more." (– *Es könnte ein Dichter unter die Herrschaft einer Marionette geraten, denn die Marionette hat nichts als Phantasie. Die Puppe hat keine und ist genau um so viel weniger als ein Ding, als die Marionette mehr ist*, 1978, 47/IV, 689) In spite of all this, Rilke does not hesitate to address the doll's "soul," *die Puppenseele* (IV, 690). The origin of this *animus* is far from simple and can be approached only lyrically, that is here to say through apostrophic speech: "O doll-soul, not made by God, you soul, asked for capriciously from some thoughtless fairy, thing-soul breathed forth by an idol with mighty effort" (*O Puppenseele, die Gott nicht gemacht hat, du, von einer unbesonnenen Fee launisch erbetene, von einem Götzen mit Überanstrengung ausgeatmete Dingseele*, 1978, 49/IV, 692). Whatever else God may have accomplished, the oxymoronic "thing-soul" is not among his creations. Nor is it among the conscious operations of man, however, for such a "soul" would make of the doll a puppet, *eine Marionette*.

In the fourth *Duino Elegy*, Rilke proposes to solve this problem by according the role of puppet master to the angel, which is here the animating force itself, pure spirit meeting pure, or mere, matter. And yet the angel depends on human participation, performs only for man, is the product of his attentive gaze. The onlooker has

zu warten vor der Puppenbühne, nein,
so völlig hinzuschauen, daß, um mein Schauen

am Ende aufzuwiegen, dort als Spieler
ein Engel hinmuß, der die Bälge hochreißt.
Engel und Puppe: dann ist endlich Schauspiel.
Dann kommt zusammen, was wir immerfort
entzwein, indem wir da sind. Dann entsteht
aus unsern Jahreszeiten erst der Umkreis
des ganzen Wandelns. Über uns hinüber
spielt dann der Engel. [...] (II, 212)

[to] wait before the puppet stage, or, rather,
gaze at it so intensely that at last,
to balance my gaze, an angel has to come and
make the stuffed skins startle into life.
Angel and puppet: a real play, finally.
Then what we separate by our very presence
can come together. And only then, the whole
cycle of transformation will arise,
out of our own life-seasons. Above, beyond us,
the angel plays. (1995, 353)

It is as though subject and object, mind and matter, must first be separated, purified, before they can enter an ideal union. However, although the puppet and the angel serve the same poetological purpose as images circumscribing human existence from that which it is not,¹⁶⁰ they are of course not symmetrical. For whereas there is matter without mind, there is, strictly speaking, no mind without matter.¹⁶¹ To reproach Rilke with this would be senseless, for the world of the *Duino Elegies* is the "interpreted world," "full of pretense" (II, 212). Rilke furthermore knew that regardless of how inscrutable this process, the arising of mind from matter, not identical to but perhaps, in Rilke's manner of speaking, "equivalent" to the transformation of the "the visible" (*das Sichtbare*) into "the invisible" (*das Unsichtbare*) which forms one of the central imperatives of the *Elegies*,¹⁶² – takes place at a particular location, or better: within a particular enclosure: the skull.

¹⁶⁰ Manfred Engel supplies an incisive commentary on this operation (II, 612).

¹⁶¹ Sebastian Rödl has written perhaps the most impressive recent attempt at thinking the implicit materiality of all first person knowledge, what he calls spontaneous knowledge as opposed to receptive knowledge, the latter presupposing the representation of an object (128-131).

¹⁶² For Rilke's notion of external equivalents to internal occurrences and vice versa, see for instance a 1912 letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé (1975, 266)

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Rilke's charming yet eerie little story/essay "Urgeräusch" is that the identity of mind and matter, which, in its various reductive formulations, so often has induced disenchantment and alienation, in the poet rather produces wonder and amazement – not unaccompanied by a dose of embarrassment, however. If Rilke's applications of animating devices such as prosopopeia and invocation appear so many remnants from a time in which poetry really believed in its incantatory power or acted naively in an always already enchanted world, it is helpful to recall this remarkable text, which indicates with exceptional clarity a locus of marvel in Rilke's poetics.

At the time of the narrator's schooling, the gramophone was "at the center of public astonishment" (*im Mittelpunkt des öffentlichen Erstaunens*, 1995, 299/IV, 699) and a zealous professor instructed his class how to assemble a primitive version of this apparatus, capable of both recording and playback. Several years later, when the narrator attends lectures in anatomy at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, it is the human skull with its sutures that gives rise to "enchantment" (*Bezauberung*, 1995, 300/IV, 701). He notices the similarities between the sutures in the skull and the traces left by the needle of the gramophone in the wax roll when recording, and the idea strikes him: what sound would be produced if one let run the needle not in the traces it has itself left in the wax but in the similar traces occurring naturally on the skull (*ein an sich natürlich Bestehendes*, IV, 702)? While Rilke does not speculate as to the precise nature of the sound thus produced, the experiment is presented as a possible means to expand the realm of the sensuous: "A sound would have to arise, a succession of sounds, a music . . ." (1995, 301). Who or what would be the composer of this music? If the human skull is not arbitrarily selected for the experiment, and if its purpose is, as Rilke explains, to render sensuous a part of reality hitherto inaccessible to us, then what is attempted is the translation into if not intelligibility then at least sensuousness of the traces corresponding to a "music" of life or even of mind – the soul... – and left in the dead matter of the skull.

Disappointing as we know Rilke's experiment must be, several things are worth noting about his proposal: The experiment is accompanied by amazement and wonder as well as incredulity, awe, fear, and fearful admiration (*Ungläubigkeit, Scheu, Furcht, Ehrfurcht*, IV, 702); it is "scientific" in nature (albeit in terms of its possible results silly – or fictional); the goal is to expand the sensuous such that out of inanimate matter, a dead trace, a part of the material aspect of life or consciousness otherwise unavailable to itself may become possible to perceive; and, finally, this project is placed in an analogy with the activity of the artist, who

am entscheidendsten an einer Erweiterung der einzelnen Sinn-Gebiete arbeitet, nur daß seine beweisende Leistung, da sie ohne das Wunder zuletzt nicht möglich ist, ihm nicht erlaubt, den persönlichen Gebietsgewinn in die aufgeschlagene allgemeine Karte einzutragen.

Sieht man sich aber nun nach einem Mittel um, unter so seltsam abgetrennten Bereichen die schließlich dringende Verbindung herzustellen, welches könnte versprechender sein als jener, in den ersten Seiten dieser Erinnerung angeratene Versuch? (IV, 704)

is working most decisively toward an expansion of the various sense-areas, although his substantiating achievement, which is ultimately impossible without the miraculous, doesn't allow him to put the areas he has personally gained on the open, general map.

But to someone who is looking for a means of establishing the ultimately urgent connection among realms so strangely separated, what could be more promising than the experiment suggested in the first pages of this memoir? (1995, 303)

Here, (a fictional) science works toward the same goal as poetry: it describes or even effects the production of order, meaning, and life out of dead matter and thereby expands the realm of the sensuous while appropriating from religion its aesthetics of awe and wonder. Rilke, otherwise so concerned with disenchantment and the dangers of a reign of technology,¹⁶³ sees in his experiment not a materialist reduction of life and mind that would collapse spirit into mere matter in postulating their identity, but an opportunity for expanding the senses fully congruent with his own artistic practice. What science attempts to describe (the transition of mere matter into animate or conscious matter and vice versa) is the wonder that Rilke's apostrophic poetry in its

¹⁶³ See in particular two of *The Sonnets to Orpheus* (1995, 445/II, 249; 1995, 481/II, 261-262)

way imitates and enacts. Rilke's fantasy is of course not that the workings of life or consciousness could be better *understood* by studying its material traces objectively and empirically, but that it could be sensuously *experienced* in a wholly new way.

The idea that a gramophone playing back the sutures of a human skull should produce "music" or anything but quite meaningless noise must of course remain just that – a fantasy. Yet then the experiment will have shown, in a way analogous to the doll, the indifference at the heart of those things with which we believe ourselves to be most familiar. Rilke's "Primal Sound" has a mythic quality to it; its suggestiveness is akin to that of more recognizably mythic constructs found in his poetry. But the enchantment it voices is depicted as completely compatible with the methods and aspirations (if not the results) of modern experimental science.

As with Rilke's lyric invocations, a certain awkwardness shadows his suggestion, and he concludes with a plea to the reader:

Wenn [der Versuch] hier am Schlusse, mit der schon versicherten Zurückhaltung, nochmals vorgeschlagen wird, so möge man es dem Schreibenden in einem gewissen Grade anrechnen, daß er der Verführung widerstehen konnte, die damit gebotenen Voraussetzungen in den freien Bewegungen der Phantasie willkürlich auszuführen. Dafür schien ihm der, während so vielen Jahren übergangene und immer wieder hervortretende Auftrag zu begrenzt und zu ausdrücklich zu sein. (IV, 704)

If, here at the end, [the experiment] is proposed again, with the previously affirmed caution, may the writer be given a certain degree of credit for resisting the temptation to arbitrarily carry the hypothesis further in the free movements of his imagination. The mission to do this, neglected for so many years and reappearing again and again, seemed to him too limited and too explicit. (1995, 303)

But what is it Rilke has been doing in his apostrophic poetry all these years if not carrying out in his imagination such experiments of animation?

Making things speak is one of the lyric's most prominent strategies for enchantment, and few poets go as far as Rilke in making use of it. It is not least his expert application of poetic animation that makes up the exemplary *lyricism* of his works and that causes embarrassment in readers with low tolerance for lyric lies. The ninth *Duino Elegy* contains perhaps the most

famous formulation of what is sometimes called Rilke's 'doctrine of transformation,' his *Verwandlungslehre*:

Erde, ist es nicht dies, was du willst: *unsichtbar*
in uns erstehn. – Ist es dein Traum nicht,
einmal unsichtbar zu sein? – Erde! unsichtbar!
Was, wenn Verwandlung nicht, ist dein drängender Auftrag?
Erde, du Liebe, ich will. (II, 229)

Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us,
Invisible? Isn't it your dream
to be wholly invisible someday?—O Earth: invisible!
What, if not transformation, is your urgent command?
Earth, my dearest, I will. (1995, 387)

After his gloss of this passage, William Gass feels "obliged" to add that when we take the cue from Rilke and "perceive fully, we do ourselves a favor, not the world" (143). However, the genius of poetic invocations is that they transform if not create their object in the very act of summoning. Before Rilke's invocation, the "earth" was indeed thoroughly indifferent and it would be absurd to speak of it as "wanting" something. But the earth that Rilke summons is one that – as soon as it is being summoned – has *already begun* the transformation into the invisible in us and, as part of us, may very well "want" for this process to be completed.

It may appear superfluous to point out that Rilke could not possibly have believed the world as a whole, or all the things of which it consists, to have feelings and desires before becoming part of us. Nonetheless, suspiciousness of such animism or, as Gass calls it, "mana worship" (146), continues to inform certain readers' aversions to lyric poetry in general and Rilke in particular. The lyric has thus become the ideological genre *par excellence*, forcing the most absurd gestures to appear "natural."¹⁶⁴

Gass makes a crucial point in the poet's defense, writing that

¹⁶⁴ Cf. de Man: "[Rilke's] entire strategy is [...] to let the poetic meaning be carried by the rhetorical and the phonic dimensions of language: the seductions of syntax and of the figuration have to make even the most extreme paradoxes appear natural." (1979, 53)

Rilke does not understand how the transformation of matter into mind works, but we should not blame him for that. No one does. After several thousand years of wondering, we still don't know. Although materialists will be happy to explain to us how the nervous system functions, and hope we shall confuse this explanation, as marvelous and detailed as it is, with an account of the character of consciousness and how consciousness came to be, they are not a step closer to crossing that threshold. (144)

Nonetheless, although there is disagreement even as to what kind of explication is possible or even desirable here, several important distinctions can and should be made. We know that the transformation of matter into mind takes place at certain physical locations, for instance, and we know that certain physical states correspond to certain mental states. If Rilke was not prey to any superstitions in this regard, he still inscribes himself into a (lyric) tradition which apparently disregards what we know about the relationship between mind and matter. Perhaps Rilke did not believe in the mindedness of trees, but what about Hölderlin's rivers? Pindar's lyre?

There is no doubt that much lyric language originated in a world where truth was conceived in a manner different from ours and where the living and the dead, the conscious and the unconscious, the external and the internal were less precisely and less strictly separated. Attempts to pinpoint exactly when a god becomes a personification or when the apostrophe of a thing goes from asserting to *performing* animation have little interest or chance of success. What compels interest, however, is how modern poets' relatively sober reflections on the relationship between mind and matter inform their uses of animation as a strategy for poetic enchantment.

Rilke did not believe that applying a gramophone needle to the sutures of the human skull would somehow yield a solution to the mystery of matter's becoming mind. But he did believe that such an experiment could, just as his lyrics' animating lies, provoke and begin to express our amazement at the wonder *that* life and consciousness *do* arise out of mere matter.

How suggestive in this context are not the two epigrams that Hölderlin composed late 1796 or early 1797 for his friend and doctor Samuel Thomas Sömmerring? The two distichs have, to my knowledge, received little genuine interest in the scholarship, and considered as poems there are indeed unremarkable.¹⁶⁵ What is fascinating about them is their very existence, and they become truly compelling once one dares to consider them as poetological statements, more specifically as reflections on the lyric imperative to animate.

Sömmerring was a German physician and anatomist who had practiced in the Frankfurt house of Gontard, where Hölderlin was a private tutor and met the love of his life, Susette, who appears in his poetry and *Hyperion* as Diotima. Although the majority of Sömmerring's writings are descriptive anatomy, he was a polymath with philosophical leanings and a noted figure among the great intellectuals of his time. Heinse, Humboldt, and Schiller read him; he was a correspondent of Goethe's; and none other than Kant wrote the afterword to his study *Über das Organ der Seele*. It is in Sömmerring's own copy of this book that Hölderlin's metrical remarks can be found. Before any sense can be made of those lines, a few words about the reception of Sömmerring's treatise are needed.¹⁶⁶

Although no one questioned Sömmerring's competence as an anatomist, the general view was that he, in trying to find the exact location of the "soul" – which, he argued, is the fluid contained in the ventricles of the brain –, had conflated physiology and metaphysics. As one might expect, Sömmerring did not receive much help from the postface supplied by Kant, for whom something like a "transcendental physiology" of course is a contradiction in terms. Any attempt to describe the soul, that is subjectivity itself, as a physical object in space is doomed to

¹⁶⁵ It is indicative how little Detlef B. Linke has to say about these highly topical poems, and that what little he does say is misleading, as he entirely leaves out their statements on "the public." See his *Hölderlin als Hirnforscher* (46).

¹⁶⁶ Here and in what follows I am relying largely on Peter McLaughlin's article "Soemmering und Kant. Über das Organ der Seele und den Streit der Fakultäten." See also Borrmann and Strack.

fail, because subjectivity considered as *such* precisely is not a material thing.¹⁶⁷ For Kant, this does not mean that one cannot talk about an "organ" of the soul, but such an object cannot strictly speaking *contain* subjectivity, let alone *be* it, only the physical processes associated with it or somehow corresponding to it. "*Can a liquid be animated?*" Sömmerring asks (37). Kant responds that a fluid may indeed have something like a "dynamic organisation [emphasis removed]" – which obviously does not in any way account for consciousness (84).

Sömmerring no doubt wanted more from Kant, whom he calls "the pride of our age" (80). The anatomist sought to show *objectively* that, with Hölderlin's words, "there is more than machinery, that there is a spirit, a god in the world" (2009, 234). However, as Hölderlin points out: "Neither from himself alone, nor from the objects surrounding him, can man experience" this (234). The keyword here is "experience," for consciousness and freedom can *only* be experienced, not 'known.' All the more striking, then, the verses pasted into Sömmerring's copy of his book.

Sömmerrings Seelenorgan
und das Publikum.

Gerne durchschaun sie mit ihm das herrliche Körpergebäude,
Doch zur Zinne hinauf werden die Treppen zu steil.

Sömmerrings Seelenorgan
und die Deutschen.

Viele gesellten sich ihm, da der Priester wandelt' im Vorhof,
Aber ins Heiligtum wagten sich wenige nach. (I, 188)

Sömmerring's soul-organ
and the public.

Gladly with him they see through the splendidly constructed body,
But on the way to the top the stairs become too steep.

¹⁶⁷ For a qualification of this position that nevertheless remains firmly within Kant's idealist framework, see, again, Rödl.

Sömmerings soul-organ
and the Germans.

Many stayed close to him as the priest strolled around in the parvis,
But in the sanctum itself few were willing to tread.

How are these little texts to be read? At least Sömmerring himself must have understood them as expressions of sympathy and approval. But what do they say about Hölderlin's poetics, about his conception of the task of lyric animation?

One may begin with the only apparently trivial observation that these epigrams are not fictions in which appears a protagonist named Sömmerring; rather, Hölderlin sarcastically comments on a contemporary debate about the nature of *this* world, *our* world. Further, any apparently animist or pantheist notions in Hölderlin's poetry must be read bearing in mind his intimate familiarity not only with transcendental philosophy but also with important discussions in the empirical sciences. And this is what provokes embarrassment at lyric animation: on the one hand the profession to speak, "soberly" no less, of the real world; on the other hand a refusal to conform to what we know about this world, knowledge from which the great lyric animators themselves apparently do not shy away.

Remarkably, it is through their similarly strained relationships to an embarrassed public that the poet and the anatomist find each other.¹⁶⁸ In a letter to his brother dated November 2, 1797 – where, as it happens, a certain Dr. Sömmerring is mentioned in passing – Hölderlin asserts himself: "I find myself pretty much in opposition to the prevailing taste of the day but do not intend to leave off from my own obstinate course in the future, and hope to fight my way through." (95-96) There follows a brief passage from Klopstock which emphasizes the importance of earnestness in poetry.

¹⁶⁸ Frieder von Ammon specifies that they were both rejected by representatives of Weimar Classicism: "In dem von Goethe brieflich kritisierten Soemmerring dürfte Hölderlin also sein Schicksal wiedererkannt haben; wie sich selbst sah er den Arzt als ein Opfer der Weimarer Klassik an." (190) Cf. Strack (199). As I argue, however, they have more than that in common.

Although Hölderlin's disenchantment with the public concerned matters of taste whereas Sömmerring was charged with misunderstanding Kantian philosophy in general and the relationship between metaphysics and physiology in particular, the poet conceives both himself and his addressee as *priests*, whose object is "the sanctum" (*das Heiligtum*). It is a few years later in "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." that Hölderlin refers to himself as a "false priest," warning that his eagerness to enter into direct contact with the divine might prove fatal.

That both a poet and an anatomist can assume the function of priest is strange enough, but what surprises above all are the shifting attitudes of the congregation. The 'titanic,' all too soberly calculating Germans, threatening with their science to turn the whole world into one large machinery, is a common theme of Hölderlin's poetry. Fittingly, it is a Greek who expresses most poignantly the alienation risked by modern science. Addressing himself to the Germans, Hyperion exclaims: "O! had I never gone to your schools. Knowledge, which I pursued down into the shaft, and from which in my youthful folly I expected confirmation of my pure joy, has corrupted everything for me" (*Ach! Wär' ich nie in eure Schulen gegangen. Die Wissenschaft, der ich in den Schacht hinunter folgte, von der ich, jugendlich töricht, die Bestätigung meiner reinen Freude erwartete, die hat mir alles verdoben*, 13, 615). This sentiment is of course voiced by a fictional character, but he merely states hyperbolically a worry pervasive in Hölderlin's works. Against this background, one may wonder how Sömmerring in his anatomical study of the brain could appear to the poet a priest presiding over a sanctuary.

The explanation is that the source of enchantment and the source of disenchantment are *identical*. To be sure, this is a *speculative identity*, as another friend of Hölderlin's a few years later would put it. In the section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* devoted to "observing reason," Hegel rejects in no uncertain terms the notion that the reality of spirit could be adequately represented through objective inquiries into its organs, as attempted by physiognomy and phrenology. "Spirit is a bone" runs the catchphrase of the passage, which is refuted in advance by the fact "that *being* as such is not the truth of Spirit at all. [...] What merely *is*, without any

spiritual activity is, for consciousness, a Thing, and, far from being the essence of consciousness, is rather its opposite; and consciousness is only *actual* to itself through the negation and abolition of such a being.” (1977, 205)

Phrenology represents for Hegel the most primitive attempt at grasping spirit (or mind or consciousness), but it is nonetheless dialectically productive, “for only what is wholly bad is implicitly charged with the immediate necessity of changing around into its opposite” and “because Spirit is all the greater, the greater the opposition from which it has returned into itself” (1977, 206). What concerns Hegel is not so much the refutation of phrenology per se as the much broader question of animation, that is the attribution of spirit (or at least life) to a thing and the attribution of thinghood to spirit (or, again, life): “When in other respects it is said of spirit that it *is*, that it has *being*, is a *Thing*, a single, separate *reality*, this is not *intended* to mean that it is something we can see or take in our hands or touch, and so on, but that is what is *said* [...]” (1977, 208) However, the proposition that “the self is a Thing,” which Hegel calls an “infinite judgment,” is at once a paradox and the harbinger of a speculative truth, for although spirit *is* not this or that particular object, it *becomes* itself through realization *in* objects: “consciousness no longer aims to *find* itself *immediately* but to produce itself by its own activity” (1977, 209). What matters for the purpose of an elucidation of animation as a strategy for poetic enchantment are precisely these two different modes of understanding the identity of spirit and matter. A single proposition – “spirit is a bone” or “the self is a thing” – can, depending on whether it is taken at face value or understood speculatively, be the source either of the highest enchantment or of utter disenchantment and embarrassment. The image with which Hegel illustrates this is striking.

The *depth* which Spirit brings forth from within – but only so far as its picture-thinking consciousness where it lets it remain – and the *ignorance* of this consciousness about what it really is saying, are the same conjunction of the high and the low which, in the living being, Nature naïvely expresses when it combines the organ of its highest fulfillment, the organ of generation, with the organ of urination. The infinite judgment, *qua* infinite, would be the fulfilment of life that comprehends itself; the consciousness of the

infinite judgment that remains at the level of picture-thinking behaves as urination. (1977, 210)

In Hegelian terms, Sömmerring's error lies precisely in his failure to understand the identity of self and thing speculatively. The question, then, is how Hölderlin could see something enchanting, indeed priestly, in this misunderstanding. The answer must be sought in the circumstance that Hölderlin is not aiming for philosophical knowledge but precisely for poetic enchantment. Kant and Hegel teach that spirit (or mind or consciousness) is not any particular thing and therefore does not have a specific location in space. Spirit is not a thing but it remains the case that some things are "spirited," animated, whereas others are not. Spirit may be nothing but its own activity, yet it does come to be only through realizing itself in matter. The task of poetry is not to explain exactly *how* this happens but to create a sense of wonder *that* it happens. For Hölderlin, this is achieved both by lyric lies of animation and by Sömmerring's philosophically misguided *Seelenorgan*. With vastly different means, Hölderlin and Sömmerring are doing the same thing.

If this appears contradictory, one might say with Hegel that it only repeats at a higher level the (speculatively true) contradiction that spirit is matter. For if *poetic* enchantment becomes an imperative only when the world is not always already enchanted by itself, one way of producing such enchantment is to juxtapose in images spirit with that from which it emerges (or that in which it is realized) but to which it cannot be reduced. As is clear from Hölderlin's monodistichs, such operations are dangerous, for the identity of spirit and matter can always be (mis)understood reductively. *Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das rettende auch.* (I, 447)

This extreme proximity of enchantment and disenchantment correlative to two different ways of grasping the identity of spirit and matter can be observed in Mallarmé's complaint, treated in the previous chapter, that "we are merely empty forms of matter," though at the same time "sublime in having invented God and our soul" (1988, 60). Here, reductive, disenchanting materialism is

not merely a risk but a *premise*. It is *because* we are, from one perspective, mere matter that our "invention" of "God and our soul" provokes awe. However, if we, as empty but sublime forms of matter, have crafted these glorious lies, matter also continuously acts upon us in ways over which we have no control, resulting, sometimes, in what nowadays is called seasonal affective disorder. Here are the first two stanza's of Mallarmé's "Renouveau":

Le printemps maladif a chassé tristement
L'hiver, saison de l'art serein, l'hiver lucide,
Et dans mon être à qui le sang morne préside
L'impuissance s'étire en un long bâillement.

Des crépuscules blancs tiédissent sous mon crâne
Qu'un cercle de fer serre ainsi qu'un vieux tombeau,
Et, triste, j'erre après un rêve vague et beau,
Par les champs où la sève immense se pavane (I, 11)

The sickly spring has sadly driven away
winter, clear winter, season of calm art;
and impotence stretches inside my heart,
yawning a long yawn, while my doleful blood holds sway.

White twilights grow lukewarm in my skull, bound
like an antique tomb by an iron band;
after a faint fair dream, I roam the land
sadly, where floods of sap parade around. (2006, 15; 17)

Crucially, the "blood" and the "skull" of the poem are not metaphorical. Commenting on his sonnet, Mallarmé declares it

a fairly new type of poetry, in which the material effects of the blood and the nerves are analyzed and combined with the moral effects, those of the mind and the soul. It could be called *Springtime Spleen*. When the combination is successfully harmonized and the work is neither too physical nor too spiritual, it can really stand for something. (1988, 11)

Indeed, the blood's "holding sway" is if not "harmonized" then at least balanced or measured in the final tercet by "the Blue" (*l'Azur*), Mallarmé's shorthand for the ideal as opposed to the real, the spiritual as opposed to the material:

Puis je tombe énervé de parfums d'arbres, las,
Et creusant de ma face une fosse à mon rêve,
Mordant la terre chaude où poussent les lilas,

J'attends, en m'abîmant que mon ennui s'élève...
— Cependant l'Azur rit sur la haie et l'éveil
De tant d'oiseaux en fleur gazouillant au soleil. (I, 11)

Then the scent of trees fells me, stunned, undone;
my face scoops out a grave for my reveries,
I gnaw the warm soil where the lilacs grow

and wait engulfed in rising tedium—though
the Blue smiles on the hedge, and quantities
of wakened birds bloom chirping in the sun. (2006, 17)

When a harmony between matter and "the Blue" is not merely thematically present but achieved in the work, "it stands for something." In fact, this harmony serves to reveal a deeper asymmetry. For in any harmony of spirit and matter, the latter will outweigh the former, since matter is always implied by spirit as the medium of its realization, whereas the opposite does not hold true. Yet, as I will show, lyric animation can work to produce wonder *both*, on the one hand, at the emergence and/or realization of spirit in matter *and*, on the other hand, at the indifference of unspirited matter. An identity of spirit and matter is indeed not the same as an identity of matter and matter, but once the former is properly understood as an identity of *spirit* and matter, the latter, too, may well prove enchanting. For just as spirit or mind or consciousness cannot be proved objectively, so there is no way of ascertaining the indifference and self-sufficiency of things over and against our means of apprehending them, which would be a contradiction in terms. Hence, lyric animation.

"Renouveau" describes the poet's powerlessness faced with the physiological and psychological effects of the seasons. There is no "rational" ground for his impotence; he is at the mercy of his body's responses to the weather (the arbitrary nature of which is of course emphasized by the usual association of spring with fertility). If these reactions run counter to his ambitions, they are, however, not "natural" either, are not in harmony with the surrounding world,

where "floods of sap parade around" and "wakened birds bloom chirping in the sun," a spectacle in which he is prevented from participating (17). The poet is at the same time exiled from nature and its subject, exposed to something *in* him which has no regard *for* him. Indeed, it is as though the ubiquitous reanimation in nature brought about by spring enters into competition with *poetic* animation, the premise of which is winter's sterility.

At its original publication (and in subsequent editions of Mallarmé's *Poésies*), "Renouveau" was juxtaposed with another lyric invoking nature as creative power. "Les Fleurs" begins as a hymn praising some of her loveliest creations: gladioli, hyacinths, myrtles, roses, lilies... Yet what educes the poet's gratitude are not these fragrant charms but those toxic species which may put an end to it all:

Ô Mère, qui créas en ton sein juste et fort,
Calices balançant la future viole,
De grandes fleurs avec la balsamique Mort
Pour le poète las que la vie étiole. (I, 11)

Mother who moulded in your strong just womb
blooms to sway phials waiting in the distance,
immense flowers offering the fragrant Tomb
for weary poets wilted by existence! (2006, 15)

Despite her beauty and animating energy, nature is unable or unwilling to nourish the poet, that wilting or wilted flower which no longer counts among her own, and for which her capacity to care apparently extends no further than euthanasia.

On the one hand, deified nature enchants as part of that divine third which acts opaquely on us and in us, eluding our attempts at comprehension until her work is done. On the other hand, her indifference produces disenchantment and doubt over our own indispensability.

It is such doubt that gives the title to a lyric from Rilke's final mythopoetic phase, which exhibits an ambivalence of enchantment and abandonment similar to that of "Les Fleurs" sixty years earlier.

Doute

Tendre nature, nature heureuse, où tant
de désirs se recherchent et s'entrecroisent,
indifférente, et pourtant base
des consentements,

nature trop pleine où se détruit et déchire
ce qui s'exalte trop tôt,
où de la rivalité du délicieux et du pire
naît un semblant de repos,

nature, tueuse par ton excès, créatrice,
toujours extasiée,
qui réchauffes et qui consumes le vice
sur un même brasier:

Dis-moi, silencieuse, ô dis-moi, suis-je
comme un instant de tes fruits?
Fais-je partie de l'abîme de ton vertige
où se jettent tes nuits?

Suis-je d'accord avec tes desseins ineffables?
Serais-je de tes révoltes un cri?
Moi, qui fus pain, suis-je tombé de la table,
miette perdue qui durcit? (V, 280)

Doubt

Tender nature, happy nature, where so many
desires search and cross one another,
indifferent, and yet base
of consents,

overfull nature, where that which exalts too soon
destroys itself and tears itself up,
where the rivalry of the delightful and the worst
gives birth to a semblance of repose,

nature, killer through your excess, creator,
always in ecstasy,
who heat up and consume vice
over a single flame:

Tell me, silent one, o silent one, am I
as an instant of your fruits?
Am I part of your vertiginous abyss
into which your nights throw themselves?

Am I in accordance with your ineffable designs?
Am I an outcry of your revolts?
I, who was bread, have I fallen from the table,

a lost crumb that hardens?

In a manner characteristic of Rilke's last poetry in both German and French, we are held in suspense through the first half of the lyric as to nature's position vis-à-vis the speaking subject. The initial omission of the invocatory *ô* may seem trivial, but the first two stanzas' reluctance to apostrophize nature in the second person is of course reflective of the doubt that inhabits the poem, for when nature is finally addressed explicitly in the fourth stanza, it is with a series of skeptical questions. Showcasing a recurring Rilkean technique, "tender" and "happy" nature is here interrogated as a being capable of furnishing answers at will yet simultaneously acknowledged as indifferent to the desire that it nonetheless supports.

Rilke emphasizes throughout his writings the importance of what he refers to as finding or making one's "own death," that is one's individual way of coming to terms with human finitude and thereby one's own life, out of which death inevitably emerges. Hence one of the prayers in *The Book of Hours*: "O Lord, give to each his own death. / The dying which comes from that life, / wherein he found love, meaning, and plight." (*O Herr, gib jedem seinen eignen Tod. / Das Sterben, das aus jenem Leben geht, / darin er Liebe hatte, Sinn und Not*, I, 236) At the same time, life and death can in an important sense never be ours, never be fully appropriated. The facts that life arises out of inanimate matter and that life depends on other life for its own viability mean that we do not have our origin or sustenance in ourselves: we are not the cause of our own existence.¹⁶⁹ This insight can give rise *both* to doubt *and* to wonder. The impersonality of "nature" or "life" is frightening:

¹⁶⁹ The Heideggerian resonance here is of course unavoidable, and indeed it is a thematically similar – though admittedly more complex and, unsurprisingly, German – poem of the same period as "Doute" that Heidegger reads in his famous essay "Wozu Dichter?" Without entering into dialogue, I cite the lyric's first few lines:

Wie die Natur die Wesen überläßt
dem Wagnis ihrer dumpfen Lust und keins
besonders schützt in Scholle und Geäst:
so sind auch wir dem Urgrund unseres Seins
nicht weiter lieb: *er wagt uns*. [...] (II, 324)

[...] Keiner lebt sein Leben.
Zufälle sind die Menschen, Stimmen, Stücke,
Alltage, Ängste, viele kleine Glücke,
verkleidet schon als Kinder, eingemummt,
als Masken mündig, als Gesicht – verstummt. (I, 210)

[...] their lives are lived by none.
Men are but chances, voices, brokennesses,
everydays, worries, many small successes;
even as children muffled and disguised,
mature as mask, as face unexercised. (1960, II, 69)

And yet,

Und doch, obwohl ein jeder von sich strebt
wie aus dem Kerker, der ihn haßt und hält, –
es ist ein großes Wunder in der Welt:
ich fühle: *alles Leben wird gelebt*. (I, 211)

And yet, though each is trying to get out
of that gaol self of his that hates and holds,
a mighty marvel in the world unfolds:
all life is being lived, no doubt. (1960, 11, 70)

The poem continues with a series of unanswered inquiries into what it may be that does the living in us and in everything that is lived. Like those of "Doute," these questions must go unanswered because what "lives life" is in the final instance indifferent to us – yet, as the later poem has it, at times oddly accomodating.

For Rilke it is equally a cause for wonder that on the one hand there are things which are thoroughly material *and at the same time* possess consciousness and even reason, not being indifferent to themselves, and that on the other hand there are things which are *merely* material and completely indifferent. It may seem as though Rilke's program of poetic enchantment consists simply in animating the inanimate, but this is far from the truth. Rilke's apostrophic poetry invites its readers to train their capacity to experience wonder at the inanimate *as well as*

the animate (or more precisely at animation as the arising of life and consciousness out of mere matter). Just as poetry uses invocations and apostrophes to bring wondrously to life mere things, so life *does* arise out of previously indifferent matter. Rilke's poetry gives its readers the tools to perceive as miraculous this ubiquitous fact. At the same time, apostrophes and invocations can serve to estrange us from the mundane observation that there are things that are wholly self-sufficient and independent of us. If one wants to dehumanize these things, one cannot simply describe them in the absence of any meaning-giving instance, as this would be undermined by the description itself, no matter how "objective." If in order to elicit wonder at animation one has to show the arising of living or even conscious matter out of mere matter, then, in order to elicit wonder at things' independence of us one correspondingly has to perform a movement in the opposite direction in paradoxically describing their 'desire' to be released of human attempts to animate them and invest them with meanings foreign to them. Yet another poem from *The Book of Hours* can serve as an example of this latter operation.

Das Erz hat Heimweh. Und verlassen
will es die Münzen und die Räder,
die es ein kleines Leben lehren.
Und aus Fabriken und aus Kassen
wird es zurück in das Geäder
der aufgetanen Berge kehren,
die sich verschließen hinter ihm. (I, 221)

The ore is sick for home. And hankers
to quit the coins and wheels that train
it up in all their pettiness.
And out of factories and bankers'
tills it will yet return again
into the opened veininess
of mountains that will close behind it. (1960, II, 78)

Yet such wishes are perhaps in vain, for human attachments to certain metals are so strong as to bring them into being, had they not already existed. "Das Gold" from the *New Poems*:

Denk es wäre nicht: es hätte müssen
endlich in den Bergen sich gebären
und sich niederschlagen in den Flüssen
aus dem Wollen, aus dem Gären

ihres Willens; aus der Zwang-Idee,
daß ein Erz ist über allen Erzen. (I, 531)

Imagine it weren't: it had at long last
to give birth to itself in the mountains
and rush down in the rivers
out of the willing, out of the stirring

of their will; out of the compulsive idea
that one ore is above all ores.

In a single gesture, Rilke exhibits the arbitrariness and even absurdity of human investments of meaning in inanimate objects and at the same time presents these investments as somehow a concern of the indifferent matter to which they attach. So strong are our investments in gold as a container of value and meaning that we cannot imagine a world without it. Yet the suggestion that perhaps we would have brought it about had it not existed means that we did not in fact bring it about and that it does not depend on us. Things may ultimately yield to our attempts at animation, but only reluctantly, like a cold mistress, and this unresponsiveness can elicit both desire and jealousy. Thus the lover of "Tristesse d'été," another seasonal poem by Mallarmé, exclaims: "I shall taste kohl wept from your eyes, and thus / see if it gives this heart stricken by you / the impassivity of sky and stone." (*Je goûterai le fard pleuré par tes paupière, / Pour voir s'il sait donner au cœur que tu frappas / L'insensibilité de l'azur et des pierres*, 21/I, 14) Here the sky, the image and medium of the divine conceived as pure spirit, is as insentient as the stones on the ground. More famously, perhaps, there is Rimbaud's appetite for rocks and stones that are precisely divested of any value as gems:

Si j'ai du *goût*, ce n'est guères
Que pour la terre et les pierres.
Dinn ! dinn ! dinn ! dinn ! Je pais l'air,
Le roc, les Terres, le fer (83)

If I have any *taste*, it is for hardly
Anything but earth and stones
Dinn! dinn! dinn! dinn! Let us eat air,
Rock, coal, iron (2005, 195)

Rilke writes of a "vague happiness to be matter" (*vague bonheur d'être matière*, V, 258). Such happiness can be neither real nor fictional, because the state of being (mere) matter is per definition insentience. In a different sense, however, *all* happiness is happiness to be matter, insofar as matter is a necessary condition for sentience. The lyric uses such apparently inane notions as the happiness of matter to hint at the wonder that the things with which we take ourselves to be most familiar have a form of being apart from and indifferent to us. Simultaneously, the acknowledgment that matter is a *necessary* condition for happiness generates awe at the marvel that it is possible to be at once both happy and material, that indeed this is the only form of happiness, that all happiness is in a sense happiness to be matter; while conversely the acknowledgment that matter is *not* a *sufficient* condition for happiness may, in the lyric, provoke the wish of things to be part of *our* world, to give up their independence. Consider Mallarmé's "Autre éventail," written on his daughter's fan.

O rêveuse, pour que je plonge
Au pur délice sans chemin,
Sache, par un subtil mensonge,
Garder mon aile dans ta main. (I, 31)

Dreamer, that I may plunge in sweet
and pathless pleasure, understand
how, by ingenious deceit,
to keep my wing within your hand. (2006, 57)

Inanimate objects addressing human readers is of course no new phenomenon but, for instance, a common feature of archaic Greek inscriptions;¹⁷⁰ but as is to be expected, Mallarmé adds a few twists. The fan speaking has not yet become what it is; it awaits completion in the reveries

¹⁷⁰ See Svenbro (26-43).

of its owner. The "subtle lie" (*subtil mensonge*) by which the daughter is asked to keep the fan is nothing but *this very plea and its speaker themselves*. The fan hopes for fulfilment in the hands of the girl, but, as becomes a thing with dignity, refusing to renounce its independence for some determinate human purpose, wishes simply to "plunge in sweet / and pathless pleasure." Nevertheless, the fan transmits to the air that it beats an urge to escape indifference, a yearning so strong as to result in madness:

Vertige ! voici que frissonne
L'espace comme un grand baiser
Qui, fou de naître pour personne,
Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser. (I, 31)

Dizziness! space is quivering, see!
like one immense kiss which, insane
at being born for nobody,
can neither spurt up nor abstain. (2006, 57)

The "doctrine of transformation" (*Verwandlungslehre*) that Rilke espouses in the seventh and ninth *Duino Elegies* is arguably the most fleshed-out version of the animating idea of things' will to completion in and through us. Rilke asks us to show the angel "how happy a Thing can be, how innocent and ours" (*wie glücklich ein Ding sein kann, wie schuldlos und unser*, 387/II, 229). As I have indicated, however, this "doctrine" is contrasted or complemented, without being contradicted, by his late works' increasing fascination with things' peculiar, never wholly successful resistance against us, seen for example in several variations of the well-known epitaph or *Grabspruch* of 1925:

Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust,
Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel
Lidern. (II, 394)

Rose, oh pure contradiction, joy

of being No-one's sleep under so many
lids. (1995, 195)

Of all flowers the most overburdened with connotations, it can hardly be conceived apart from its cultural significance. The rose is indeed sick, as William Blake's poem has it, for it has been so thoroughly apostrophized as to be inconceivable apart from its symbolic baggage. Immediately prior to the lines designed for his gravestone Rilke wrote the French prose poem *Cimetière*, asking:

Ô fleurs, prisonnières de nos instincts de bonheur, revenez-vous vers nous avec nos morts dans les veines? Comment échapper à notre emprise, fleurs? Comment ne pas être *nos* fleurs? Est-ce de tous ses pétales que la rose s'éloigne de nous? Veut-elle être rose-seule, rien-que-rose? Sommeil de personne sous tant de paupières? (V, 290)

O flowers, prisoners of our instincts toward happiness, do you return to us with our deaths in your veins? How to escape our grasp, flowers? How not to be *our* flowers? Is it that with all its petals the rose distances itself from us? Does it want to be only rose, nothing but rose? Nobody's sleep under so many lids?

The French text spells out more clearly a sense of wonder at the rose's self-sufficiency. The rose is invoked only in order that it may be left alone. The object most charged with symbolic meaning has to be addressed in order to estrange us from and elicit wonder at the general independence of things from human interpretations. Compare Valéry's delightfully ironic "Au Platane," which after seventeen hymnic stanzas heaping upon the tree symbolic and mythic language concludes by giving the word to the plane itself, who responds to the poet's designations:

— *Non, dit l'arbre. Il dit : Non ! par l'étincellement*
De sa tête superbe,
Que la tempête traite universellement
Comme elle fait une herbe ! (I, 115)

— *No, the tree says. He says: No ! by the glittering*
Of his splendid head ,
Which the storm treats universally

As it would a grass-blade ! (1971, I, 121)

However, although the influences from Valéry are undeniable at this stage of his production, Rilke would experiment with a new lyric language without clear contemporary parallels. If Valéry intensifies apostrophic language to ironic extremes, Rilke problematizes it by examining its conditions of possibility. In the transition from the French prose piece to the condensed German poem that was to become his epitaph, one observes an increasing complexity through the absence of the invocatory *ô*, the mention of a “pure contradiction,” the line breaks, and the perplexing capitalization of *Niemand*. Especially the removal of the unambiguous apostrophe at the beginning of the prose poem is emblematic of a strategy central to Rilke’s last poetic phase. In a still useful study from 1960, Ulrich Fülleborn goes so far as to credit the poet with the invention of a new grammatical case: the “evocative.” Neither clearly invoked nor merely mentioned or described, the rose is, like the more unconventional things of Rilke’s final period, inhabiting a case “hovering somewhere between vocative and nominative” (172). Fülleborn calls this a “magical case,” for it renders explicit a capacity implicit in the lyric apostrophe: the capacity to transform or even first to bring about the very object of invocation. This procedure is evident in the short lyric “Idol,” written in the summer of 1925 and among Rilke’s most successful poems of his final years. Here, the poet-magician’s only partly successful attempt to conjure up or lure out an unheard of deity is met with extreme resistance.

Gott oder Göttin des Katzenschlafs,
kostende Gottheit, die in dem dunkeln
Mund reife Augen-Beeren zerdrückt,
süßgewordenen Schauns Traubensaft,
ewiges Licht in der Krypta des Gaumens.
Schlaf-Lied nicht,—Gong! Gong!
Was die anderen Götter beschwört,
entläßt diesen verlisteten Gott
an seine einwärts fallende Macht. (II, 395)

God or goddess of the sleep of cats,
savoring godhead that in the dark

vat of the mouth crushes eye-berries, ripe,
into the sweet-grown nectar of vision,
eternal light in the palate's crypt.
Not a lullaby,—Gong! Gong!
What casts a spell over other gods
lets this most cunning god escape
into his ever-receding power. (1995, 197)

On the one hand, the divinity here evoked could hardly be more ineffable. Neither a cat-god nor a god of cats nor a god of sleep is described, but a god (or goddess) of the sleep of cats. On the other hand, an idol is per definition a material thing that, in being identified as such, is disqualified as a legitimate object of worship. But then again this diminutive divinity is not susceptible to the invocations to which other gods may hearken. Whatever serves to conjure other gods only lets this impalpable deity escape into its "power falling inwards" (*seine einwärts fallende Macht*). The poem describes a god that appears self-sufficient, shying away from human attempts at mastery. Yet it is that which "casts a spell over other gods," what enchants them, that allows this spirit to flee inwards to that place where it exerts its minimal power of animation.¹⁷¹ Although a god of sleep is necessarily a god not of activity but of a certain passive power, sleep is that which guarantees that a seemingly inanimate being continues to live while no longer conscious or while showing no external signs of consciousness. What the poem evokes is the most minimal, most receding divinity imaginable – and still the postulating of such a minuscule deity is considered (and affirmed) as idolatrous. A parallel poem in French written before the German lyric was finished puts the service of the I vis-à-vis the god in the conditional mood:

¹⁷¹ Cf. the slightly more exoteric "Chat":

Chat d'étalage, âme qui confère
à tant d'objets épars son rêve lent,
et qui se prête, en conscience-mère,
à tout un monde inconscient. (V, 274).

For an exposé of the fleeting, silent gods that populate much of Rilke's French poetry, see Böschenstein.

Divinité du sommeil des chats,
sous un ciel sans fentes
j'aurais été celui qui édifia
ton temple aux voûtes lentes.

Ton sanctuaire je l'eus construit (V, 288)

Divinity of the sleep of cats,
under a sky without gaps
I would have been the one who erected
your temple with slow vaults.

Your sanctuary, I would have built it

If the sky had been gapless, the speaker of the poem *would have* erected a temple, built a sanctuary. In the French as well as in the German poem, the appropriate way of recognizing the divinity of cats' sleep is inaccessible. What remains is the avowedly idolatrous activity of writing lyrics, which may still evoke and obliquely describe gods that have entered into a state of extreme abstraction, but which do no longer invoke or apostrophize anything.

The lyric evocation is here both more and less powerful than the customary invocation, for while it first brings about the entity addressed, it apparently fails fully to animate it. The evocative marks the collapse of invocatory poetry and thus treads the outskirts of the lyric conceived as that genre which enchants through lies of animation.

Yet is it not the god's or goddess's very unresponsiveness to the animating gesture which constitutes its divinity? The idol is the independent, self-sufficient, indifferent thing apotheosized. Its paradoxical identity as both completely ineffable and thoroughly material allows this deity to escape the poet's charms.

The veneration of divine indifference is a recurring theme of Rilke's poetry and occupies, at the beginning of the first *Duino Elegy*, one of its most prominent places.

Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich denn aus der Engel
Ordnungen? und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem
stärkeren Dasein. Denn das Schöne ist nichts

als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen,
und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmählt,
uns zu zerstören. (II, 201)

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
to annihilate us. (1995, 331)

But if equanimity is a desirable state according to the ethos of the *Elegies*, sheer indifference is reserved for the dead.¹⁷² Much like Hölderlin's gods who feel nothing without mortals, so it is up to us to save the angel from his indifference by telling him of "Things, / which live by perishing" (387). "He will stand astonished" (385). For lyric animation produces wonder at the identity of spirit and finite matter not only by depicting the latter's wish to be spirited but equally in voicing the divine's envy at earthly cares and at the mystery of the flesh. Thus it is the character of Hölderlin's Zeus "to reverse *the striving out of this world into the other into a striving out of another world into this one* (2009, 328). And thus Valéry's young Fate throws the Philosopher's awe right back at him:

Mortels, vous êtes chair, souvenance, présage ;
Vous fûtes ; vous serez ; vous portez tel visage :
 Vous êtes tout ; vous n'êtes rien,
 Supports du monde et roseaux que l'air brise,
 Vous VIVEZ... Quelle surprise!...
 Un mystère est tout votre bien,
Et cet arcane en vous s'étonnerait du mien? (I, 164)

Mortals, you are made of flesh, of remembering, and forebodings;
You were; you shall be; you have a certain face;
 You are everything; and nothing,
 Pillars of the universe, and reeds broken by the wind,
 You are ALIVE....How astonishing !...
 A mystery is all you possess,
And that enigma of yours chooses to wonder at mine? (1971, I, 266)

¹⁷² See the fourth *Elegy* with its ambiguous mention of *Gleichmut, wie ihn Tote haben, Reiche von Gleichmut* (II, 212).

To your mouth....And soon let me break, kiss,
This frail defense against uttermost being,
This quivering, fragile and holy distance
Between me and the surface, my soul, and the gods!... (1971, I, 161)

The lyric praise of and through animation risks ending in narcissism, a celebration of the self as that which is animated and animates in turn.¹⁷³ Faced with an increasing skepticism toward its animating lies after the flight of the gods, the lyric is forced to privatize its imperative to praise. Relying on an ancient tradition, already Hölderlin's *Muth des Dichters* praises "the proper god" (*den eignen Gott*, I, 241), and in a "Fragment of Philosophical Letters," the poet writes that everyone has "his own god,"

insofar as everyone has his own sphere in which he is active and which he experiences, and only insofar as several people have a common sphere, in which they are active and suffer humanly, that is, risen above need, only insofar do they have a common deity; and if there is a sphere in which they all live simultaneously and to which they feel they maintain a relation beyond need, then, but only insofar, do they all have a common deity. (2009, 234).

Such latter deities would become increasingly scarce in the lyric, as indeed their very desirability was radically questioned. Mallarmé would speak of "Divinity, which is never anything but Oneself, to which prayers have risen, in ignorance of their precious secret" (2007, 244). And it is perhaps symptomatic that the modern lyric's most elaborate call to praise, Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, consists not of the songs of Orpheus but indeed of lyrics to him, who is of course none other than the poet himself: hymns to celebrate the master of hymns, in other words.

In the absence of a "deity in common" and without resorting to myths of selfhood and identity – be it national or individual – is there for the modern lyric a way out of the antinomies and tautologies of praise? If celebration and praise is the very activity of the lyric, as is the

¹⁷³ Indeed, Freud associates with his notion of primary narcissism "eine Überschätzung der Macht [der] Wünsche und psychischen Akte, die 'Allmacht der Gedanken,' einen Glauben an die Zauberkraft der Worte, eine Technik gegen die Außenwelt, die 'Magie,' welche als konsequente Anwendung dieser größensuchtigen Voraussetzungen erscheint" (5).

conviction of the poets treated here, then what, out of everything that calls for our attention, is worthy of such treatment, and how more exactly can it be rendered justice?

5. PRAISE

“Paradise will belong to those who praise things” (*Auront le paradis ceux qui vantent les choses*, V, 354), Rilke promises in a short lyric of his final creative phase, reiterating a central tenet of his poetics. There are many reasons to ask what authorizes this promise. One may object that, paradise being per definition praiseworthy, it only makes sense that those presiding over it would be engaged in the activity of praise, all goals having already been achieved. Indeed, according to an old Christian conception, heaven is but a place where saved souls sing perpetually the praises of the Lord.¹⁷⁴ But this is not what Rilke is saying. It is, first of all, not God who is to be praised but *things* (insofar as gods and things are distinct for Rilke), and the promise is not made by Him – paradise is not His to give – but by Rilke, the poet. Second, praise is figured not as an effect but as the *cause* of paradise; it is in and through praise that paradise can be brought about.

Rilke is of course not simply blessing the sycophants. Paradise is not a product of positive thinking, nor is there conversely even in theory one paradise common to all. Rather, Rilke’s gnomic poem suggests that an adequate capacity to praise – which implies a proper understanding, whether intuitive or reflective, of the ends, means, and conditions of praise – will help in recognizing a paradise, should one be lucky enough to stumble upon it, or indeed in making it, should one be presented with the right raw materials, and should the situation allow it.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ See for instance Augustine in *The City of God*: “How great that felicity will be, where there will be no evil, where no good thing will be lacking, and where we shall be free to give ourselves up to the praise of God, Who will be all in all! For I do not know how else we might occupy ourselves, in a condition where we will neither cease from work through idleness nor be driven to it by need.” (1178)

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Northrop Frye’s already quoted reminder: “Two highly cerebral poets, Mallarmé and Rilke, have said that the end and aim of lyrical poetry is praise. They did not say this in any sort of conventional religious context: they were not talking about a prefabricated heaven, but an earthly paradise we stumble upon accidentally, like the castle of the Grail, a paradise we can bring to life for ourselves if we ask the right question, which is, according to Chrétien de Troyes: ‘Who is served by all this?’” (36)

The modern lyric is defined equally by the imperative to praise and by the extraordinary difficulty and frequent failure to live up to it, stemming from complications that have as much to do with the praising subject as with the praised object. However, even prior to this crisis of acclaim the obligation to laud is inscribed into the lyric genre. As a modern conception of lyric poetry began to solidify in the 18th century, two forms in particular were accorded higher status: the ode and the hymn, based chiefly on two ancient models: the songs of Pindar and the psalms of David.¹⁷⁶ In the long lyric 19th century, the more ambitious the poetic project, it appears, the more prominent the influence of these subgenres. Yet whatever lends itself to lofty aspirations is also amenable to playful parody, the telling apart of which can be a tricky matter. Such is the case of the “Psaumes” Valéry published in his *Mélange*, a collection of five decades’ fragmentary writings.¹⁷⁷ Though these poems do not possess the lyric density characteristic of *Charmes*, the first in the series pedagogically illustrates the embarrassing state of affairs for a conventional poetics of praise and its divine objects.

“PSAUME Y”

Tout à coup ma main sur toi, prompte et puissante, s’abattrà.
 Je te prendrai par la nuque pleine et ronde,
 À la base du savoir et du vouloir, entre l’âme et l’esprit.
 Je te tiendrai par le support de ta tête rebelle,
 Par le pivot de tes lumières;
 Je te presserai vers ce que je veux, et que tu ne veux
 Et que je veux que tu veuilles;
 Je te mettrai rompue et belle sous mes pieds, et je te dirai que je t’aime.
 Et je te ploierai par le col jusqu’à ce que tu m’aies compris, bien compris, tout
 compris,
 Car je suis ton Seigneur et ton Maître.
 Tu pleureras, tu gémiras;
 Tu chercheras une lueur de faiblesse dans mes regards;
 Tu lèveras, tu tordras tes mains suppliantes, tes belles mains très suppliantes,
 tes blanches mains comme enchaînées à tes yeux clairs.
 Tu pâliras, tu rougiras,

176 Cf. Heinz Schlaffer: “Das höchste Ansehen in der neuzeitlichen Hierarchie der Lyrik genossen jene Gattungen, die in der antiken Kultur bei Festen gebraucht wurden: Hymne und Ode. Im 18. Jahrhundert galten sie, wenn nicht alls heilig, so doch als erhaben. Erhaben ist, was einst die Menschen zu den Göttern erhob.” (2012, 96-97)

177 Additional “psalms” occur in Valéry’s famous notebooks and are collected in *Poésie Perdue. Les Poèmes en Prose des Cahiers*. Ed. Michel Jarrety. Paris: Gallimard, 2010.

Tu souriras, tu saisis dans tes bras nus mes jambes dures;
Tu m'aimeras, tu m'aimeras,
Car je suis ton Seigneur et ton Maître. (I, 318)

"PSALM Y"

Suddenly on you my hand, prompt, powerful, will fall
I shall take you by your nape that is full and round,
At the base of knowledge and will, between mind and spirit.
By the support of your rebellious head
I shall hold you, by the pivot of your attention;
Toward what I will I shall press you, and you do not will
Toward what I will that you will;
Under my feet broken and fair I shall place you and say that I love you
By the neck I shall ply you until I am understood, well understood, all understood,
Because I am your Master and your Lord.
You will weep, you will groan;
You will search for indecision in my gaze;
You will lift, you will wring your begging hands, your beautiful hands that are most
begging, white hands chained to your eyes.
You will grow white, then red,
Will smile, seize in your naked arms the strength of my legs,
And you will love me, and you will love me,
Because I am your Master and your Lord. (1969, II, 45)

This odd exhibition of sadism is notable not only for being purportedly a psalm written from the perspective of the Lord. In a manner not entirely incompatible with biblical depictions, God does not appear particularly praiseworthy. More at odds with traditional portrayals is that praise does not seem to please him unless it is compelled by force. But as the old joke goes, a true sadist will decline to strike the supplicating masochist and, conversely, Valéry's sadistic Lord can be trumped by servitude and devotion, thereby inspiring more pity than terror.

That the position of the praised is not especially enviable is a recurring motif in Rilke and expressed poignantly by the poem from *Das Buch der Bilder* that speculates

– Vielleicht sind wir *oben*,
in Himmel anderer Wesen eingewoben,
die zu uns aufschauen abends. Vielleicht loben
uns ihre Dichter. Vielleicht beten viele
zu uns empor. Vielleicht sind wir die Ziele
von fremden Flüchen, die uns nie erreichen
Nachbarn eines Gottes, den sie meinen
in unsrer Höhe, wenn sie einsam weinen,
an den sie glauben und den sie verlieren,

und dessen Bildnis, wie ein Schein aus ihren
suchenden Lampen, flüchtig und verweht,
über unsere zerstreuten Gesichter geht... (I, 331)

– Perhaps we are *above*,
worked into the heaven of other beings
who gaze toward us at evening. Maybe their
poets praise us. Maybe many of them
pray up toward us; maybe we are the goal
of strange curses that never reach us,
neighbors of a god whom they envision
far above, where we are, when they weep alone,
whom they believe in and yet lose,
and whose image, like a ray from their
searching lamps, fleeting and then gone,
passes across our scattered faces... (2009, 105; 107)

Songs of praise can make our world resound but they cannot make it from one world to another. And were such hymns somehow to reach us, we would not know what to do with them.¹⁷⁸ This may, as in Valéry's anti-hymn, result in a perverse power game. And, perhaps even more alarming, the "Lord" and "Master" is himself deprived of the capacity to praise, which in turn, if we are to believe Rilke, would dispossess Him of paradise.

Émile Cioran concludes his anything but panegyric appraisal of Valéry's oeuvre with a far-reaching claim: "In I no longer know which Upanishad, it is said that 'the essence of man is

¹⁷⁸ In a more prosaic context, that is the context of literary criticism, Valéry reflects explicitly on the uselessness, indeed even embarrassment, of praise:

La louange exerce et trouble la sensibilité bien plus que ne fait la critique. La critique engendre une sorte d'action, illumine des armes dans l'âme. L'âme, presque toujours, peut répliquer assez nettement aux paroles qui déprécient. Elle rend raillerie pour raillerie, désarticule l'objection, circonscrit le blasphémateur. Il est bien rare qu'elle ne trouve, dans cet *Autre* qui la tourmente, quelque vice, quelque faible, ou quelque dessein misérable qui lui serve pour se reprendre ; il est plus rare encore qu'elle ne trouve en soi quelque beauté cachée, quelque excuse profonde qui la sauve à ses propres yeux. Mais que faire avec la louange ? La discussion est impossible, inhumaine, immodeste. La louange détend l'être, et lui rend toutes choses suavement confuses. Il se sent comme après l'amour, qu'il eût fait avec le public.

On se trouve donc incertain, impuissant, en état de moindre résistance, vis-à-vis des hommages ; sans réponse précise, et comme sans liberté de vérité à l'égard de soi-même. On sait bien que personne n'est cru qui prétend se défendre du délice d'être honoré, et le cœur intimidé par cette opinion commune se conteste le pouvoir de douter de sa jouissance. Ce n'est là qu'une hésitation tout intime sur le choix du sentiment qui soit le plus vrai, entre plusieurs qui nous divisent et nous conviennent à l'égal. Mais l'embarras devient extrême s'il faut aussi qu'on le produise, et si l'on doit, comme je le fais, paraître devant tout le monde, donnant la main à celui qui s'exprime sur vous très gracieusement. (I, 1508-1509)

One should keep in mind that here, as in the psalm, Valéry is reasoning only as the recipient of praise. His nonetheless questionable statements therefore do not preclude benefits for the praising critic.

speech, the essence of speech is the hymn.' Valéry would have subscribed to the first assertion, and denied the second." (*Dans je ne sais plus quelle Upanishad, il est dit que 'l'essence de l'homme est la parole, l'essence de la parole est l'hymne.'* Valéry eût souscrit à la première assertion, et nié la seconde, 45) As I will show, there is cause to qualify and complicate this nonetheless illuminating verdict. But accurately circumscribing the locus of the hymnic in Valéry's poetics requires further inquiry into the origins of the double bind that is the modern lyric's concurrent imperative and interdiction of praise.

As is well known, Hölderlin, despite his Christian upbringing and education, adopted most decisively a Pindaric rather than Davidic model of praise. And of all the conspicuous differences between Greek lyrics and biblical proto-lyrics, the most immediately apparent concerns the praised object. In the psalms' case, the divine addressee is an intrinsic and indispensable property of the genre. Of course, the Greek poet of praise was by no means at liberty to choose whom to glorify, but unlike the Hebrew psalms, the victory ode is not as a genre dependent on any one recipient. As such, Pindar's praise is both more flexible and more precarious. On the one hand, his forms and modes of address may outlive the praiseworthiness of any particular athlete. On the other hand, this separability of poetic means and ends – controversial already in antiquity – implies the viability of the exalted object is no longer guaranteed as a condition for lyric speech, something experienced painfully and repeatedly in Hölderlin's poetry. His *Elegie* testifies to the withering of what once merited thanks.

Danken möcht' ich, aber wofür? verzehret das Letzte
Selbst die Erinnerung nicht? nimmt von der Lippe denn nicht
Bessere Rede mir der Schmerz, und lähmet ein Fluch nicht
Mir die Sehnen und wirft, wo ich beginne, mich weg? (I, 289)

I would like to give thanks, but for what? does not remembrance
Itself consume what remains? Does not pain
Rob my lips of convincing speech, and does not a curse

Paralyze my tendons and throw me, wherever I start, away? (2013, 204)

Here remembrance itself is called into question as capable only of further distorting the past. In fact, the thanks to which the poet feels compelled, but that he is unable to carry out, may well play a part in the demise of the ancient world he ceaselessly laments.

Denn allzudankbar haben die Heiligen
Gedient dort in Tagen der Schönheit und
Die zorn'gen Helden [...] (I, 441)

For too devoutly almost, too gratefully
In days of beauty there did the holy serve,
And furious heroes [...] (2013, 253)

The unmeasured use of divine gifts leads to destruction. Recognizing this, the poet utters his injunction: "Not them, the blessed, who once appeared, / Those images of gods in the ancient land, / Them, it is true, I may not now invoke [...]" (*Nicht sie, die Seeligen, die erschienen sind, / Die Götterbilder in dem alten Lande, / Sie darf ich ja nicht rufen mehr [...]*, 491/I, 401) For "deadly / And scarcely permitted it is to awaken the dead" (*tödlich ists / und kaum erlaubt, Gestorbene zu weken*, 491/I, 405).

"Dear to men / Is what is present." (*Menschen / Ist Gegenwärtiges lieb*, /I, 359) Yet famously, Hölderlin is unable to abide by his own decree, asking

Was ist es, das
An die alten seeligen Küsten
Mich fesselt, daß ich mehr noch
Sie liebe, als mein Vaterland? (I, 387)

What is it that
To the ancient, the happy shores
Binds me, so that I love them
Still more than my own homeland? (2013, 535)

Der Einzige, which these lines begin, is an unparalleled illustration and example of the dilemma confronting any modern poetics of praise. The lyric stages three central conflicts that in elaborate ways interlink. First, there is the notorious *agon* between antiquity and modernity, Greece and Germany. The veneration of the ancients becomes a problem when attachment to their sensuous splendor overshadows care for the fatherland. The poet is “as though into heavenly / Captivity sold” (*wie in himmlische Gefangenschaft verkaufft*, 535, /I, 387). One reason the poet adduces for being unable to break free of his bonds is his as yet unsuccessful search for Christ, who has hitherto been eclipsed by the poet’s service to Greek demigods:

Mein Meister und Herr!
O du, mein Lehrer!
Was bist du ferne
Geblieden? und da
Ich fragte unter den Alten,
Die Helden und
Die Götter, warum bliebest
Du aus? Und jezt ist voll
Von Trauern meine Seele
Als eifertet, ihr Himmlischen, selbst
Daß, dien’ ich einem, mir
Das andere fehlet. (I, 388)

My Master and Lord!
O you, my teacher!
Why did you keep
Away? And when
I asked among the ancients
The heroes and
The gods, then why were you
Not there? And now my soul
Is full of sadness as though
You heavenly yourselves excitedly cried
That if I serve one I
Must lack the other. (2013, 537)

Second, then, there is the conflict between Christ conceived as God’s only son and the multiplicity of divine incarnations in Greek religion. Put more crudely, it is the conflict between monotheism and polytheism. Crucially, however, Christ is not hailed as a redeemer come to deliver us from this world. On the contrary: if he is worthy of praise, it is because he, as the first

version of Hölderlin's poem has it, "moved on earth" (*Gewandelt auf Erden*, 541/I, 390).¹⁷⁹ Thus the third conflict – between immanence and transcendence, here and beyond – cuts across the opposition between Christianity and what was before it, regardless of what otherwise may tell Hölderlin's divinities apart.

As I indicated in chapter three, *Der Einzige* never resolves the conflict of allegiances it articulates, but the twofold admonition against indulgently elevating the past at the expense of the present or ungratefully seeking to trade this world for the glory of another would resonate throughout the lyric 19th century as part of what made it modern in an emphatic sense. Notably, Rilke's formative years are marked by such considerations, eliciting a wide range of poetic responses, some of which are quickly discarded, whereas others are perfected over decades. Although Rilke's poetics of praise is primarily associated with his well-known later cycles, where indeed is to be found its most forceful formulation and expert application, a vocabulary of praise, celebration, and consecration can readily be traced back to his very earliest works and distinguishes his prolific beginnings that are otherwise hard to navigate. A mere glance at the collections' titles confirms the sacred, ceremonial, celebratory intent – which is not without ambivalence: *Larenopfer*, *Traumgekrönt*, *Advent*, *Christus-Visionen*, *Dir zur Feier*, *Mir zur Feier*.¹⁸⁰ Almost without consulting Rilke's poetry, one can read this sequence of titles as a rehearsal of an inherited lyric problematic of praise. Invoking the Roman deities protecting home and family, *Larenopfer* is dedicated to Prague, the poet's city of birth, that is to a concrete external world, which is, however, valued primarily for its illustrious past. *Traumgekrönt* then reverses the perspective, from the past to the future and from an exterior to an interior space. The poet is crowned on account of his dreams for tomorrow; at the same time, his kingdom remains precisely that: a dream. The praise of fictions, be it visionary, risks a fictionalization of

¹⁷⁹ In a fragmentary draft for an alternative ending to the uncompleted poem, Hölderlin writes: "For the world is always cheering away / from this earth, so that it / Strips it bare; where what is human does not sustain it." (*Nemlich immer jauchzet die Welt / Hinweg von dieser Erde, daß sie die / Entblößet; wo das Menschliche sie nicht hält*, I, 469)

¹⁸⁰ *Christus-Visionen* and *Dir zur Feier* remained unpublished during Rilke's lifetime.

praise, a dead end which Rilke escaped, in the following collection, by reestablishing ties to the external world through dedications to contemporaries and a more expansive poetics of place. Still, the title “Advent” suggests a decisive event, a “coming” that will leave the world transformed. The time of publication underlines the Christian dimension, and indeed Rilke had been working simultaneously on his *Christus-Visionen*. These eleven poems treat various comings of Christ, but Rilke’s figure is powerless to redeem and, like Hölderlin’s, is venerated not as the way to another world but as a symbol of the divine’s material presence in *this* world. Such a presence is the beloved of *Dir zur Feier*, in whom is placed the hope of overcoming oppositions otherwise threatening the devout lover. But such reliance on a singular other of course compromises the poet’s sovereignty.¹⁸¹ *Mir zur Feier* consequently presents the attempt to devote the same attention and trust to things in general, thereby reiterating the imperative to praise this world while leaving unanswered the question of what in particular should be exalted. Thus in June 1906 Rilke can write:

Ich hab mich nicht den Dichtern zugesellt
die dich verkünden oder nach dir klagen
und wännen, deine Schönheit hinzusagen
wenn sie sie nennen: nicht von dieser Welt – (I, 361)

I did not join the ranks of poets
who announce you or lament you
and think they proclaim your beauty
when they call it: not of this world –

For:

War das nicht *diese* Welt, wo aus dem Tier
der Gott erwuchs zum klaren Namenlosen:
damit du ihn empfändest wie die Rosen
und trügest wie ein Teich. War das nicht hier? (I, 361)

¹⁸¹ As experienced through Rilke’s first separation from Lou Andreas-Salomé, the collection’s addressee.

Was it not *this* world, where from beast
there grew a god into limpid namelessness:
so that you'd feel him like the roses
and sustain him like a pond. Was that not here?

Yet admittedly, “who you are: that I don't know. I know / Only to sing your praises” (*wer du bist: das weiß ich nicht. Ich weiß / nur deinen Preis zu singen*, 359).

Faced with such uncertainty, the modern lyric needs badly a model. In “Der Brief des jungen Arbeiters,” which coincides with the completion of Rilke's most famous calls to praise in the ninth *Duino Elegy* and the first part of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, this need is made explicit: “Give us teachers who praise the earthly for us” (*Giebt uns Lehrer, die uns das Hiesige rühmen*, 1995, 317/IV, 747). Already the young Rilke recognized this deficit, turning to and inhabiting Pan, who is identified with the origin of song.

Mutter, du mit dem müden Knaben,
hör mich. Ich bin die Stimme im Wind.
Ohne mich kann kein Königskind
seine Märchen und Mythen haben.
Ich bin der Eine, vor dem die Haine
kein Geheimnis zu hüten haben;
denn ich bin, eh die Haine sind.
Ich bin der, welcher Alles beginnt;
und wenn ich schreite über die Steine,
werden die Steine Blüten haben. (SW II, 252-253)

Mother, you with the tired boy,
hear me. I am the voice in the wind.
Without me there will be no tales
nor myths about any royal child.
I am the one from whom the groves
have no secrets to hide;
for I exist before the groves.
I am he who initiates everything;
and when I tread on the stones
the stones burst into bloom.

For extra effect, the Greek god is here juxtaposed with Christ, “the tired boy,” whose regality is not so much cause for praise as its effect. The divine child's immortality is here undermined by a Greek model of worldly praise. However, what Rilke's young worker wishes to be taught is not

simply *that* this world is to be praised. He evidently already knows this. What he desires is to learn from examples *how* this world ought to be praised and *what* constitutes its praiseworthiness.

Here Pan is of little help. And it is telling that when Valéry chooses a couple of lines from Pindar as motto for the famous *Cimetière marin*, they are an injunction and an imperative of the vaguest sort.

μή, φίλα ψυχά, βίον ἀθάνατον
σπεύδε, τὰν δ' ἔμπρακτον ἄντλει μαχανάν. (61-62)

Do not, my soul, long for an immortal life,
but make the most of what you can realistically achieve. (2007, 52)

Ancient models can instruct what not to pursue but they cannot indicate what in modernity gives cause for celebration. It is not, of course, that Pindar suffered a dearth of objects to praise, but rather that to “exhaust the realm of the possible,” as one might also translate his exhortation, must mean something quite different for the modern poet.

Since Romanticism, it is to nature one turns for inspiration as imitation of antiquity no longer suffices. “If the master intimidates / Ask great Nature for advise,” as Hölderlin writes “An die jungen Dichter” (*Wenn der Meister euch ängstigt, / Fragt die große Natur um Rath*, I, 193). *Am Quell der Donau* invokes in vain the patriarchs and prophets of a lost world, who “were the first who knew / How to speak alone / To God” (*Zuerst es verstanden, / Allein zu reden / Zu Gott*, 479/I, 353). The modern poet is forced laconically to admit: “These are now at rest.” (*Die ruhn nun*, 479/I, 353)

Aber wenn ihr
Und diß ist zu sagen,
Ihr Alten all, nicht sagtet, woher?

Wir nennen dich, heiligenöthiget, nennen,
Natur! dich wir, und neu, wie dem Bad entsteigt
Dir alles Göttlichgeborne. (I, 353)

But if,
And this must be said, you ancients
Would never tell us whence it is that
We name you, under a holy compulsion we
Now name you Nature, and new, as from a bath
From you emerges all that's divinely born. (2013, 479)¹⁸²

Indeed, it is often animated and animating water that guarantees continued communion with the divine when transcendence is no longer the goal. Sources and wellsprings stand in for inscrutable origins; rivers and streams transport what once descended from the sky; and lakes and ponds reflect the heavens on earth. To Hölderlin, Europe's great waterways are demigods who point to the east as the inception of all things holy.

Denn, wie wenn hoch von der herrlichgestimmten, der Orgel
Im heiligen Saal,
Reinquillend aus den unerschöpflichen Röhren,
Das Vorspiel, wekend, des Morgens beginnt
Und weitemher, von Halle zu Halle,
Der erfrischende nun, der melodische Strom rinnt,
Bis in den kalten Schatten das Haus
Von Begeisterungen erfüllt,
Nun aber erwacht ist, nun, aufsteigend ihr,
Der Sonne des Fests, antwortet
Der Chor der Gemeinde; so kam
Das Wort aus Osten zu uns,
Und an Parnassos Felsen und am Kithäron hör' ich
O Asia, das Echo von dir und es bricht sich
Am Kapitol und jählings herab von den Alpen

Kommt eine Fremdlingin sie
Zu uns, die Erweckerin,
Die menschenbildende Stimme. (I, 351)

For as when high from the gloriously voiced, the organ
Within a holy hall
Untainted welling from inexhaustible pipes,
The prelude, awakening men, rings out in the morning
And far and wide, from mansion to mansion,

¹⁸² The most pathetic – and therefore most emblematic – example of this gesture is arguably Hyperion's at the end of Hölderlin's novel. See discussion below.

Now pours the refreshing, the melodious current,
Down to the chilly shadows even filling
The house with inspirations,
But now awake and rising to it, to
The sun of celebration, responds the
Community's choir – so the word
Came down to us from the East,
And by the rocks of Parnassus and by Cithaeron,
O Asia, I hear the echo of you, and it breaks
Upon the Capitol and sudden down from the Alps

A stranger it comes
To us, that quickening word,
The voice that moulds and makes human. (2013, 475)

But, as is clear from Hölderlin's lament over the ancients' reticence, modern man is unable adequately to heed this call without the proper mediation.

Denn vieles vermag
Und die Fluth und den Fels und Feuersgewalt auch
Bezwinget mit Kunst der Mensch
Und achtet, der Hochgesinnte, das Schwerdt
Nicht, aber es steht
Vor Göttlichem der Starke niederschlagen [...] (I, 352)

For much can our kind
Accomplish, and flood and rock and even the might of fire
With art can subdue,
Nor, noble in mind, recoils from
The sword-blade, but faced with powers divine
The strong will stand abashed [...] (2013, 477)

The inclination to go with the flow (of the Danube) to the source (of culture) emanates in just such an urge toward the infinite against which Pindar (and Hölderlin himself along with the measured and measuring poets who follow him) warns.

This does not mean that Hölderlin's rivers are unambiguously disqualified as viable objects of praise. As the poet famously notes, the Rhine, although at first drawn by its "regal soul" toward "Asia," eventually settles to nourish lands in the West (501/I, 343). The Danube, although taking a straighter path, proceeds at first only slowly, "all too patient" (*allzugeduldig*,

2013, 583/l, 476), and “almost [...] seems / To travel backwards (*scheinet [...] fast / Rückwärts zu gehen*, 2013, 583/l, 476).

“Yet what that one does, the river, / Nobody knows.” (*Was aber jener thuet der Strom, / Weis niemand*, 2013, 585/l, 477) The problem is that we tend to conceive of rivers as unidirectional and to orient ourselves toward dissolution in either the source or the sea. For Hölderlin, this is a problem of remembrance. On the one hand, time dissolves everything, as in the first lines of *Mnemosyne*.

Reif sind, in Feuer getaucht, gekochet
Die Frücht und auf der Erde geprüft und ein Gesez ist
Daß alles hineingeht, Schlangen gleich,
Prophetisch, träumend auf
Den Hügeln des Himmels. (I, 437)

Ripe are, dipped in fire, cooked
The fruits and tried on the earth, and it is law,
Prophetic, that all must enter in
Like serpents, dreaming on
The mounds of heaven. (2013, 587)

Commemorative praise is a way of resisting this perpetual movement: “always / There is a yearning that seeks the unbound. But much / Must be retained” (*immer / Ins Ungebundene gehet eine Sehnsucht. Vieles aber ist / Zu behalten*, 587/l, 437). On the other hand, the dwelling on the past as past and the identification with its heroic figures can dissolve the self in all-consuming melancholia. Whether looking upstream or downstream, the poet risks losing his composure, and so arises the Rousseauian fantasy of altogether escaping the currents of time: “Forward, however, and back we will / Not look. Be lulled and rocked as / On a swaying skiff of the sea (*Vorwärts aber und rückwärts wollen wir / Nicht sehn. Uns Wiegen lassen, wie / Auf schwankem Kahne der See*, 2013, 587/l, 437). That this is indeed just a fantasy and not a real option is clear from the following stanza, where melting snow provides an image of transience that seeps into the idyllic scenery (2013, 588-589/l, 438).

Hölderlin's praise of water would not be complete had he not also paid homage to the oceans. In *Andenken*, the open sea invites those for whom the quest after origins appears fruitless or overpowering.

Mancher
Trägt Scheue, and die Quelle zu gehn;
Es beginnet nemlich der Reichtum
Im Meere. (I, 474)

Many a man
Is shy of going to the source;
For wealth begins in
The sea. (2013, 579)

Some who take to sea in search of worldly riches will not come back. Unlike the calm waters wished for in *Mnemosyne*, the ocean does not exclude painful loss.

Es nehmet aber
Und giebt Gedächtniß die See,
Und die Lieb' auch heftet fleißig die Augen,
Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter. (I, 475)

But it is the sea
That takes and gives remembrance,
And love no less keeps eyes attentively fixed,
But what is lasting the poets provide. (2013, 579)

These lines belong to the most painstakingly interpreted of Hölderlin's poetry, and I shall leave aside further exegesis. Suffice it for my purposes to underline the precarious status of the Hölderlinian "aber." As elsewhere in his mature lyrics, the conjunction is here not used in a strong – or indeed any – adversative sense, but in analogy with the Greek particle $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$, which can have a weak adversative meaning yet often assumes a merely partitioning function.¹⁸³ The

¹⁸³ Jochen Schmidt makes this point, for instance, in the context of *Mnemosyne* (DKV I, 1048). Conversely, Hölderlin often omits or replaces the conjunction where it would appear appropriate, as in the famous first lines of *Patmos*: *Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott*.

activity of the poet does not so much contrast as complement those of the lovers and the seafarers. “What is lasting” or, better, “what remains” in poets’ commemorative praise is not just something that otherwise would have been lost (a rather banal claim) but the giving *and* taking (of the sea, of love) itself. Such, at any rate, is the impression of another adorer of water, as he over a century later conceives his most famous poem contemplating at the opposite coast.

In his comments on the composition of *Le Cimetière marin*, Valéry stresses that, in spite of its cerebral, reflective character and references to ancient Greek poetry and philosophy, what led to the lyric’s conception was not an idea or an image but an “empty rhythmic figure” (I, 1503). He dreamed of a work whose subject matter would unfold entirely out of self-imposed formal conditions (I, 1504). Hence, *Le Cimetière marin* is, as it were, dictated by the form of a decasyllabic verse, arranged in groups of six, an indefinitely repeatable pattern.

Valéry knows, of course, that such “purity” is a mere phantasm. Yet it is easy to understand how the *idea* of letting the poem’s rhythm determine its subject might emanate in praise of the sea: “The sea, the sea, perpetually renewed!” (*La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée!*, 1971, I, 213/I, 147)¹⁸⁴ Indeed, according to an old etymology, the very word “rhythm,” from Greek ῥυθμός, is supposed to have been created from the verb ῥεῖν, “to flow,” and observation of the constant, regular motion of sea waves.

However, as Émile Benveniste has shown – and as Valéry could not possibly have known but nonetheless nicely illustrates –, the trajectory from ῥεῖν to ῥυθμός is both more complex and more compelling. In fact, neither ῥεῖν nor ῥυθμός is ever applied to the sea, as indeed the sea does not strictly speaking “flow.” Instead, although indeed derived from ῥεῖν, “ῥυθμός, according to the contexts in which it is given, designates the form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile and fluid, the form of that which does not have organic consistency” (285-286). Rhythm, then, is the form of that which has no (consistent, determinate,

¹⁸⁴ Translation modified.

intrinsic) form, a snapshot of something always transforming. This is certainly true of poetic rhythm, which is precisely *not* repeatable ad infinitum but one particular, finite form within a medium – a meter – that admits variation. A poem, unlike the sea, must finitize its proliferation of forms and come to an end.

The question is how Valéry is able to carry on a lyric tradition in praise of water without setting out again in search of a source or letting himself be lulled by the gentle undulation of a peaceful lake. *Le Cimetière marin* may appear to set up a fairly crude opposition between the constancy of the sea and the symbol of finitude that is the graveyard overlooking it. The Mediterranean exhibits the “calm of gods”; it is a “store of sameness” (*calm de dieux; Stable trésor*, 1971, I, 213/I, 147-148). “And what a stillness seems to beget itself!” (*Et quelle paix semble se concevoir!*, 1971, I, 213/I, 148)¹⁸⁵ The earth of the cemetery is, correspondingly, depicted with macabre images of human frailty: “The gift of living has passed into flowers! / [...] / The worm channels its way where tears formed.” (*Le don de vivre a passé dans les fleurs! / [...] / La larve file où se formaient des pleurs*, 1971, I, 219/I, 150) The coupling of earth and sea (*terre/mer*) is no doubt central to the poem. Yet it takes little to reverse the apparent opposition. The “calm of the gods” turns out to be merely a moment – it is *one* rhythm (there is nothing like *the* rhythm of the sea). “Time’s temple” as well as “temple sheer to Minerva” (*Temple du Temps; temple simple à Minerve*, 1971, I, 213/I, 148), the sea takes and gives remembrance. For a “temple of time” is the very opposite of a temple of permanence, and so it is rather the dead who remain in place: “The dead concealed lie easy in this earth / That keeps them warm, drying their mystery.” (*Les morts cachés sont bien dans cette terre / Qui les réchauffe et sèche leur mystère*, 1971, I, 216/I, 149) Meanwhile, the real worm is after the living.

Pères profonds, têtes inhabitées,
Qui sous le poids de tant de pelletées,
Êtes la terre et confondez nos pas,

¹⁸⁵ Here too I have modified the translation.

Le vrai rongeur, le ver irréfutable
N'est point pour vous qui dormez sous la table,
Il vit de vie, il ne me quitte pas! (I, 150)

Fathers deep-laid, heads uninhabited,
Who under the weight of so many spade-loads,
Are earth itself and who confound our steps,
The real canker, the irrefutable worm
Is not for you asleep under the table,
He lives on life, it's me he never quits! (1971, I, 219)

Commentators generally note that the repetition in the lyric's last line of the initial apostrophe of the sea as "quiet roof" emphasizes its double set of connotations (*toit tranquille*, 1971, I, 147, 151). In the first few stanzas, it appears an endless expanse with sedative properties; toward the end of the poem, it is a tonic, an invigorating and intoxicating "salt potency" (*puissance salée*, 1971, I, 221/I, 151), whose crashing waves reanimate the troubled mind. As one surmises already from the poem's motto, the sea is not venerated as something permanent, be it as a permanent "rhythm" – a contradiction in terms according to the word's original meaning. On the contrary, it is treacherous, going from sleeping beauty to bitch-hound between two lines: "The faithful sea's asleep there on my tombs! // Glorious bitch-hound, keep out the idolater!" (*La mer fidèle y dort sur mes tombeaux! // Chienne splendide, écarte l'idolâtre!*, 1971, I, 217/I, 149) The idol, however, is not the sea, which merely reflects it mendaciously.

Et vous, grande âme, espérez-vous un songe
Qui n'aura plus ces couleurs de mensonge
Qu'aux yeux de chair l'onde et l'or font ici?
Chanterez-vous quand serez vaporeuse?
Allez! Tout fuit! Ma présence est poreuse,
La sainte impatience meurt aussi! (I, 150)

And you, great soul, still hoping for a dream
That will be delivered from these lying colors
Which sun and wave make here for eyes of flesh?
Will you sing, when you are vaporous?
Go on! Time flies! My presence here is porous,
Holy impatience also dies the death! (1971, I, 218)

The lie which suggests itself to the “eyes of flesh” is, unsurprisingly, the immortality that Pindar encourages his “soul” to give up.

Maigre immortalité noire et dorée,
Consolatrice affreusement laurée,
Qui de la mort fais un sein maternel,
Le beau mensonge et la pieuse ruse!
Qui ne connaît, et qui ne les refuse,
Ce crâne vide et ce rire éternel! (I, 150)

Skinny immortality, black and gilt-lettered,
Hideously laurel-crowned she-comforter,
Trying to make death a maternal lap,
– A pretty fiction, and a pious ruse! –
Who cannot know, and who cannot refuse
That empty skull, the eternal grinning gape! (1971, I, 219)

What first inspires the poet’s intimations of immortality is not the sea but the overwhelming luminosity of the midday sky.

Midi là-haut, Midi sans mouvement
En soi se pense et convient à soi-même
Tête complète et parfait diadème,
Je suis en toi le secret changement. (I, 149)

And Noon up there, Noon the motionless,
Thinks its own thought approving its own self...
Total head, and perfect diadem,
I am the secret changing in your mind. (1971, I, 217)

The following stanza then immediately exposes this idol as having more in common with the dead underground than with the glittering sea:

Tu n'as que moi pour contenir tes craintes!
Mes repentirs, mes doutes, mes contraintes
Sont le défaut de ton grand diamant! . . .
Mais dans leur nuit toute lourde de marbres,
Un peuple vague aux racines des arbres
A pris déjà ton parti lentement. (I, 150)

I am all you have to contain your fears!
My doubts, my strivings, my repentances,
These are the flaw in your great diamond...
But in their darkness under a marble load
An empty people among the tree roots
Have gradually come to take your side. (1971, I, 217)

However, *Le Cimetière marin* does not end with the abolition of idolatry, which is rather preserved in the most affirmative moment of the poem:

Oui! grande mer de delires douée,
Peau de panthère et chlamyde trouée,
De mille et mille idoles du soleil,
Hydre absolue, ivre de ta chair bleue,
Qui te remords l'étincelante queue
Dans un tumulte au silence pareil [...] (I, 151)

Yes, gigantic sea delirium-dowered,
Panther-hide, and chlamys filled with holes
By thousands of the sun's dazzling idols,
Absolute hydra, drunk with your blue flesh,
Forever biting your own glittering tail
In a commotion that is silence's equal [...] (1971, I, 221)

The sea is praised on the basis of its infinite finitude, its endless multiplicity of rhythms, but also for its finite infinity. Insofar as the sun's reflections promise a permanence exempt from the shifting rhythms of the world below, they are idols to be rejected. For as a potential object of praise and envy, the sun has already been discarded. On the one hand, then, the waves reflect an object more permanent than the sea itself. On the other hand, though, waves' foam and reflections are the most transient aspect of marine rhythms. And it is precisely through giving finite, momentary shape to what previously had been venerated as permanent that the sea is worthy of idolatry and praise.

No longer an infinite expanse provoking a phantasm of immortality, nor inhabited by a uniform movement suspending time, nor flowing from an inscrutable origin to a fixed destination, water is a medium of rhythmic variation, containing specters of timelessness as inevitable and

indispensable idols to be affirmed in their ephemeral existence. The “pretty fiction” and “pious ruse” having been exposed, praise of water is no longer praise of *nature*. The sea is a malleable figure whose artificiality is only underlined by Valéry's intensified use of apostrophe.

However, the movements of water need not enchant any less for being controlled by man. In the several poems Rilke devoted to various fountains, the praise of water becomes praise *through* and *by* water. According to a classical topos, founts and springs signify lyric activity. They figure the welling up from a deeply hidden source of poetic genius.¹⁸⁶ Notably, Rilke is just as interested in the downward movement of water halted by gravity. It is the movement of that which apparently never reaches its destination, a movement that gives rise to an imperative:

Ich muß mich nur erinnern an das Alles,
was an Fontänen und an mir geschah, –
dann fühl ich auch die Last des Niederfalles,
in welcher ich die wasser wiedersah [...] (I, 330)

I must only remember all those times
that fountains came alive in me, –
and I, too, feel the weight of the descent,
in which I saw the waters once again [...] (2009, 105)

One might expect such “downfall” to provoke resignation. If it is true, as the same poem asserts, “that heaven reaches out / to many things” (*daß Himmel Hände reichen / zu vielen Dingen*, I, 330), the fountain's jet seemingly grows tired before it can reciprocate the gesture. And yet the tone of the lyric's final stanza, part of which I have already quoted, is intensely ambivalent.

Vergaß ich denn, dass Stern bei Stern versteint
und sich verschließt gegen die Nachbargloben?
Dass sich die Welten nur noch wie verweint
im Raum erkennen? – Vielleicht sind wir oben,

¹⁸⁶ For a digression on the significance of this metaphor in the Pindaric tradition, see Hamilton, 97-129. Note the initial etymology of κελᾶδῆϊν, “to celebrate loudly,” whose original meaning according to Liddell and Scott is to “sound as flowing water.”

in Himmel anderer Wesen eingewoben,
die zu uns aufschauen abends. Vielleicht loben
uns ihre Dichter. Vielleicht beten viele
zu uns empor. Vielleicht sind wir die Ziele
von fremden Flüchen, die uns nie erreichen,
Nachbarn eines Gottes, den sie meinen
in unserer Höhe, wenn sie einsam weinen,
an den sie glauben und den sie verlieren,
und dessen Bildnis, wie ein Schein aus ihren
suchenden Lampen, flüchtig und verweht
über unsere zerstreuten Gesichter... (I, 330-331)

Did I forget that star next to star grows hard
and shuts itself against its neighbor globe?
That worlds in space only recognize each other
as though through tears? – Perhaps we are *above*,
worked into the heaven of other beings
who gaze toward us at evening. Maybe their
poets praise us. Maybe many of them
pray up toward us; maybe we are the goal
of strange curses that never reach us,
neighbors of a god whom they envision
far above, where we are, when they weep alone,
whom they believe in and yet lose,
and whose image, like a ray from their
searching lamps, fleeting and then gone,
passes across our scattered faces... (2009, 105; 107)

Subordinating metaphysics to a speculative poetics of praise, Rilke effectively relativizes transcendence. At the same time, he postulates a monadic existence in which subjects and objects of praise are completely separated and utterly isolated.

Given Rilke's equation of praise with the very task of lyric poetry, this cannot be his final say in the matter. By following the trajectory of poems that Rilke devoted to fountains he visited throughout the years, his poetic thinking on praise becomes gradually more readable. A paradigmatic *Dinggedicht*, "Römische Fontäne" is perhaps the most famous of these lyrics. Its clearly stated referent (a fountain by Villa Borghese in Rome) and its meticulously descriptive language provide resistance against viewing the sonnet as poetological statement. But as with so many of the poems in *Neue Gedichte*, light-handed prosopopoeia and complex intertextual relationships beg the question for just what kind of objectivity Rilke aims. His fountains are, at

any rate, not just objects of praise. If the marble structure occasions a reflection on praise, it is because it already accomplishes what the poet hopes to achieve.

Zwei Becken, eins das andere übersteigend
aus einem alten runden Marmorrand,
und aus dem oberen Wasser leis sich neigend
zum Wasser, welches unten wartend stand,

dem leise redenden entgegenschweigend
und heimlich, gleichsam in der hohlen Hand,
ihm Himmel hinter Grün und Dunkel zeigend
wie einen unbekanntem Gegenstand;

sich selber ruhig in der schönen Schale
verbreitend ohne Heimweh, Kreis aus Kreis,
nur manchmal träumerisch und tropfenweis

sich niederlassend an den Moosbehängen
zum letzten Spiegel, der sein Becken leis
von unten lächeln macht mit Übergängen. (I, 489-490)

Two basins, one rising from the other
within a round, wide, ancient marble rim,
and from the high one, water overbrimming
softly down to water, which waits below,

receiving its gentle talk in silence
and secretly, as in the hollow of a hand,
showing it sky behind darkness and green
like some unfamiliar object; while it

drifts peacefully away in its own lovely bowl
in circle after circle, without nostalgia,
only sometimes dreamily and drop by drop

threading its way down on the mossy carvings
to the last mirror, which, from there below
gazing up, smiles, seeing all is transition. (2009, 187)

Here it becomes clear that the water does not fail to reach something above but is purposively “tending” (*sich neigend*) toward a plane below. Its movement is decidedly centrifugal, expanding from its source “without homesickness.” The fountain is not thereby modeling a simple reversal of praise; rather, elevation happens through a mirroring detour. Only thus can heaven be shown “as an unknown object,” that is not as readymade redemption but as sensuous thing.

What is already above cannot be elevated and is therefore disqualified from poetry. A new poetics of praise then necessarily involves a *descent*, whose importance is amply illustrated by the very last lines of the *Duino Elegies*.

Und wir, die an *steigendes* Glück
denken, empfänden die Rührung,
die uns beinah bestürzt,
wenn ein Glückliches *fällt*. (II, 234)

And we, who have always thought
of happiness as *rising*, would feel
the emotion that almost overwhelms us
whenever a happy thing *falls*. (1995, 395)

The downward direction of praise is not a poetic *invention*. If a fountain can serve the poet as example (and not just as metaphor), it performs unknowingly a celebratory gesture the poem renders explicit. In an essay on landscape painting, Rilke describes how in the early Renaissance worldly praise happened as though by accident.

Man meinte zwar noch einen Ort anzugeben und nichts mehr, aber man tat das mit solcher Herzlichkeit und Hingabe, man erzählte mit so hinreißender Beredsamkeit und so sehr als Liebender von den Dingen, die an der Erde hingen, an der von den Menschen verleugneten und verdächtigten Erde –: daß jene Malerei uns heute wie ein Loblied auf sie erscheint, in welches die Heiligen einstimmen. Und alle Dinge, die man sah, waren neu, so daß mit dem Schauen sich ein fortwährendes Staunen verband und eine Freude an unzähligen Funden. So kam es von selbst, daß man mit der Erde den Himmel pries und sie kennen lernte, da man Sehnsucht war, ihn zu erkennen. Denn die tiefe Frömmigkeit ist wie ein Regen: sie fällt immer wieder auf die Erde zurück, von der sie ausging, und ist Segen über den Feldern. (IV, 209-210)

Certainly one still meant just to indicate a location, but one did it with such conviction and commitment, one narrated with such eloquence and so much as a lover of the things that clung to earth – the earth that men renounced and aspersed –, that that kind of painting now appears to us as a song of praise in its honor, to which the holy beings are attuned. And all the things that one saw were new, so that looking was bound up with continuous wonder and a joy at innumerable discoveries. And so it happened by itself that with earth one praised heaven and came to know the former as one longed to perceive the latter. For true piety is like a rain: it always falls down again upon the earth from which it parted, and it is a blessing over the fields.

Once again it is the movements of water that figure the poetic (or painterly) activity of praise. But as beautiful and incisive as Rilke's essay is, it also highlights a principal complication. Metaphysics aside, the "earth" is hardly more concrete "thing" than is "heaven." And even if it is specified as a meadow or a stream or as flowers or trees (IV, 210), why *this* meadow, why *these* flowers? The practice of praise as the attribution of value is per definition a discriminatory activity. If everything is worthy of praise, nothing is. If Rilke's fountains celebrate and not merely decorate, then – one must insist – what?

A late sonnet acknowledges this problematic while, in a tone perhaps too optimistic to be convincing, signaling its resolution.¹⁸⁷

Aber, ihr Freunde, zum Fest, laßt uns gedenken der Feste
wenn uns ein eigenes nicht, mitten im Umzug, gelingt.
Seht, sie meinen auch uns, alle der Villa d'Este
spielende Brunnen, wenn auch nicht mehr ein jeglicher springt.

Wir sind die Erben, trotzdem, dieser gesungenen Gärten;
Freunde, o faßt sie im Ernst, diese besitzende Pflicht.
Was uns als Letzten vielleicht glückliche Götter gewährten,
hat keinen ehrlichen Platz im zerstreuten Verzicht.

Keiner der Götter vergeh. Wir brauchen sie alle und jeden,
jedes gelte uns noch, jedes gestaltete Bild.
Laßt euch, was ruhig geruht, nicht in den Herzen zerreden.

Sind wir auch anders als die, denen noch Feste gelangen,
dieser leistende Strahl, der uns als Stärke entquillt,
ist über große, zu uns, Aquädukte gegangen. (II, 280-281)

When everything we create is far in spirit from the festive,
in the midst of our turbulent days let us think of what festivals *were*.
Look, they still play for us also, all of the Villa d'Este's
glittering fountains, though some are no longer towering there.

Still, we are heirs to those gardens that poets once praised in their songs;
let us grasp our most urgent duty: to make them our own.
We perhaps are the last to be given such god-favored, fortunate Things,
their final chance to find an enduring home.

Let not one god pass away. We all need each of them now,

¹⁸⁷ This poem was composed contemporaneously with *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, and its facile, unwarranted affirmation may well explain why it did not make it into that cycle.

let each be valid for us, each image formed in the depths.
Don't speak with the slightest disdain of whatever the heart can know.

Though we are no longer the ones for whom great festivals thrived,
this accomplishing fountain-jet that surges to us as strength
has traveled through aqueducts – in order, for our sake, to arrive. (1995, 533)

Lacking an authentic cause for celebration, we are invited to ponder the festivities of those who came before, whose enchanted gardens we have inherited. – Or we are not so much invited as called to duty (*diese besitzende Pflicht*). The hundreds of fountains at Villa d'Este in Tivoli still “mean” or “intend” us (*sie meinen auch uns*), yet it is unclear whether we are thereby celebrated or merely implied as celebrants. Despite its encouraging statements and grandiose diction, the poem's call to earnest praise rings frustratingly hollow. We may *need* the plastic gods of the past (*brauchen*), but we cannot *use* them (*gebrauchen*). The verb *entquellen* in the final stanza is appropriately ambiguous. *Entquellen* does something which overflows, an excess that cannot be contained. But *entquellen* does also that which unintentionally seeps out, as in *Tränen entquellen den Augen*. We are overwhelmed by a “strength” that we cannot contain or control.

I have already addressed some examples of lyrics giving praise to the self as animating power. In the encounter with ancient festivities, poets are forced to acknowledge that this power is not what it has been (and nor, by the same token, is the past). Any determinate object now putting up resistance, the agent of animation and praise therefore voids it of properties: “Your task is to love what you don't understand.” (*Dein ist zu lieben, was du nicht weiß*, 537/II, 283) Ultimately, such abstraction leads to experiments in intransitive praise. Another late poem depicts this as nothing less than a search for God, and here too it is a fountain which provides the clue: “Somewhere its beat is broken / on a soundless lull in the afternoon... / There, He is.” (*Irgendwo bricht sich sein Schlag / an einer lautlosen Pause im Tag... / Dort ist Er*, II, 281)

These enigmatic lines elucidates a French poem that Rilke devoted to the very same fountain a few years later and which deserves to be quoted in full.¹⁸⁸

La Fontaine

Je ne veux qu'une seule leçon, c'est la tienne,
fontaine, qui en toi-même retombes, –
celle des eaux risquées auxquelles incombe
ce céleste retour vers la vie terrienne.

Autant que ton multiple murmure
rien ne saurait me servir d'exemple;
toi, ô colonne légère du temple
qui se détruit par sa propre nature.

Dans ta chute, combien se module
chaque jet d'eau qui termine sa danse.
Que je me sens l'élève, l'émule
de ton innombrable nuance!

Mais ce qui plus que ton chant vers toi me décide
c'est cet instant d'un silence en délire
lorsqu'à la nuit, à travers ton élan liquide
passe ton propre retour qu'un souffle retire. (V, 34)

The Fountain

I want just one lesson, and it's yours
fountain falling back into yourself –
that of risked waters on which depends
this celestial return towards earthly life.

Nothing will serve as example
as much as your multiple murmur:
you, o light column of a temple
that destroys itself by nature.

In your fall, how each jet of water
modulates itself as it ends its dance.
I feel like such a student, imitator
of your innumerable nuance.

But what's more convincing than your singing
is that instant of ecstatic silence when
at night, drawn back by a breath, your own
return passes through your liquid leaping. (1982b, 41 – translation modified)

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Rilke's letters to Lily Ziegler and Baladine Klossowska, The relevant passages are quoted in II, 783 and V, 478, respectively.

Rilke here reiterates the fountain's lesson of a "heavenly return toward earthly life." Each jet is a "light temple / which perishes by its very nature." As such, it figures what Rilke, in another poem on the same theme, calls "the altering eternity" (*wandelnde Ewigkeit*, II, 282). This state does not imply an exemption from destruction. On the contrary, the jet's every atom of water constitutes it only for a second. The fountain outlives each its constitutive parts, and thereby demonstrates the ability of images, figures, even gods, to survive the demise of any particular material support. One may wonder, then, what the jetting water "risks." Certainly the wind may carry it off, or it could simply evaporate. But the final lines describe an instant when ascent and descent perfectly coincides. In this state, there is not so much a repetition or recycling or recursion of praise as a retraction of its subject and object, rendering the very directionality of praise indistinguishable.

Three poems that were further to treat the theme of running water remain fragmentary, and indeed the fountains' intransitive praise may well fail to concern us. After all: "Outside of what aids us and what harms us / can one be moved?" (*En dehors de ce qui nous aide et ce qui nous blesse / peut-on être ému?*, 282) In a typical Rilkean manner, the spring is then depicted as *desiring* to be part of our world:

Autre source

Ô source qui jaillit, ô volonté secrète
de vivre parmi nous et d'être de nos pleurs!
Vive divinité et transparente bête,
amante du départ, distraite soeur....
..... (V, 284)

Other Spring

O spring that spurts, o secret will
to live among us and to be of our tears!
Vivid deity and transparent beast,
lover of parting, distracted sister....
.....

Yet when the poet extends his formal invitation, it is with the understanding that the spring (*source*) praises simply its own origin (*source*).

Pour un autre source

.....échangeons nos avis, vante-moi la neige
qui t'a désaltérée à ne jamais sentir
l'insinuante sueur, le souffle qui s'abrège
et la velléité de revenir. (V, 284)

For Another Spring

.....let us exchange opinions, praise for me the snow
which quenched your thirst in order that you never feel
that insidious sweat, the breath cut short
and the desire to return.

As universal medium of life, water has every reason to praise itself. And it is these two aspects – universality and reflection – that form the basis for Valéry's prose poem "Louanges de l'eau," which a decade later literalizes, epitomizes, and arguably concludes the lyric tradition in praise of water. Valéry asks:

Comment ne pas vénérer cet élément essentiel de toute VIE? Combien peu cependant conçoivent que la VIE n'est guère que l'EAU organisée?

Considérez une plante, admirez un grand arbre, et voyez en esprit que ce n'est qu'un fleuve dressé qui s'épanche dans l'air du ciel. L'EAU s'avance par l'ARBRE à la rencontre de la lumière. L'EAU se construit de quelques sels de la terre une forme amoureuse du jour. Elle tend et étend vers l'univers des bras fluides et puissants aux mains légères. (I, 203)

How not venerate this very essence of all LIFE? And yet how few men understand that LIFE is no more nor less than WATER organized.

Consider a plant, regard a mighty tree, and you will discern that it is none other than an upright river pouring into the air of the sky. Through the TREE climbs WATER to meet light. Of a few salts in the earth WATER constructs a body that is in love with the day, to the whole universe stretching and outstretching liquid powerful arms that end in gentle hands. (1969, II, 10 – translation modified)

As the universe thus comes to know and to love itself, the figure of Narcissus, with whom I began this discussion of lyric praise, is again close at hand. And indeed, wherever there is “STILL WATER, landscape’s ultimate luxury, stretching her sheets of total calm in whose pure face the reflections of all things seem more perfect than their origins, [...] all Nature is Narcissus and with itself in love...” (8)

Unlike the majority of hydrophilic lyrics I have treated, Valéry’s praise of water appears not to privilege any one of its states or shapes. He praises “STILL WATER,” “MOVING WATER,” “MULTIFORM WATER” (8-9). He praises fog, snow, and hot springs. In Valéry’s poem, water is simply a universal requisite for life and animation. In contrast to *Le Cimetière marin*, “Louanges de l’eau” does not elevate the sea into an intricate symbol but figures it simply as water’s “greatest quantity” (*plus grand quantité*, I, 202). Glorifying water in general as “agent of life” (*agent de la vie*, I, 202), Valéry’s eulogy seems the most innocent of celebrations, immune against the innumerable charges of ideology leveled against the lyric genre’s encomiastic language.

Yet it is precisely due to their lack of specification that Valéry’s affirmations lend themselves to arbitrary ends. Upon closer inspection, it turns out the poet’s praise does not just honor water in general but was composed to promote one source of water in particular, namely the Perrier Springs. “Louanges de l’eau” first appears in what, borrowing from the vocabulary of our time, one might call an “infomercial” booklet published by the well-known brand of bottled water. Acting as preface, Valéry’s text is followed by articles on “Les Bienfaits thérapeutique de la Source Perrier” and “Comment et dans quelle circonstances servir l’Eau Perrier.”¹⁸⁹ Worldly praise as strategy for poetic enchantment appears to have compromised itself irrevocably as complicit in, if not indistinguishable from, the thoroughly ideological language of advertising.

¹⁸⁹ See commentary in I, 1710.

I have used the example of water to indicate a trajectory of lyric praise under conditions of modernity. Many other examples could have served well, but the selection of water is not random. After all, Pindar himself, the ancient poet of praise par excellence, teaches famously that “Best is water, while gold is a blazing fire / such that it shines in the night preeminent amid lordly wealth [...]” (ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ / ἄτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μεγάνορος ἔξοχα πλούτου [...], *OI.* 1, 1-2). The passage which this claim initiates has occasioned some debate. For whereas it is clear that gold shines brightest of material possessions, that the sun is the warmest of stars, and that Olympia is the greatest of contests, as Pindar goes on to attest, he leaves it ambiguous just of what water is best. That water here is indeed best *of* something and not simply the highest good in an absolute sense, is evinced not least by the qualifying particle μὲν. William H. Race comments:

Although μὲν is notoriously awkward to translate, the point is clear that water is not unqualified best, but is best from a certain point of view (μὲν). The question τί ἄριστον; underlies the entire priamel and water is not the definitive answer, but rather it qualifies it in one way. (121)

In what way, then? Water could of course be foremost among its kind, so that it would be best of the elements, for instance. But there is no evidence that Pindar (or his audience) was familiar with the doctrine of primal elements – and why, from a cosmological perspective, should water be best?

Race’s solution is neither new nor surprising, but it has an interesting consequence. “Best” means simply most essential for the existence of human life, a piece of ancient wisdom that Valéry’s “Louanges” echo. However, gold and glory are certainly also only best with respect to human needs (as indeed it is only for man that the sun is warmest of stars). It is hence not the case that Pindar is positing three wholly incommensurable realms, within each of which water, gold, and Olympian victory would be best, respectively. Nor does he demote or qualify the value of gold by pointing out that water is more important. Gold and water are incomparable

insofar as they are not different quantities of the same thing. But they *are* comparable insofar as they are both beneficial to man in one way or another. For that aspect of life which has to do with survival, water is best, because most essential; for that aspect of life which has to do with material wealth, gold is best, because it can be traded for anything; and for that aspect of life which has to do with recognition by others, an Olympian victory is best, because even if the winner has lost all other contests, it would be enough to prove his favor with the gods. None of these aspects of human existence is deemed inessential or dispensable. And, more important, all three statements are made with the same claim to truth. As far as men are concerned, these truths are absolute. At the same time, Pindar is of course obliged to honor wealth and athletic glory. Gold and Olympian victory are here the very conditions of praise. He did not begin a *Pythian* ode proclaiming the Olympian games greatest, and without gold he would not have begun at all, nor would Hieron of Syracuse, to whom *Olympian* 1 is dedicated, have even entered the horse race.

The lyric language of praise has always been inextricably ideological, as recent scholarship on Pindar fully acknowledges. But the notion that Pindar aimed only to please his clients is surely simplistic. One may say with Elroy Bundy that “there is no passage in Pindar and Bakkhulides that is not in its primary intent encomiastic” (3), but only on the condition that praise itself serves more than one end. Lyric praise is an ideological operation, but it is also a strategy for poetic enchantment, which one has to take into account to understand the long tradition of Pindaric poetry, or indeed why anyone but the *laudandus* and his closest of kin should have been induced to attend and listen to an original performance. Compelling praise is enchanting in general and not only to those whom it benefits, because it ascribes value to what could just as well be deemed worthless (gold, athletic victories, etc). Already the statement “Best is water” has potential for enchantment in that it ascribes a mythical value to what is really rather a bare necessity.

The question of what to praise has ideological implications, but the question of why there is lyric praise at all cannot be answered by reference to the social structures of any particular historical context. The conflation of these two questions lies at the root, I argue, not only of present difficulties in understanding ancient lyric but also of ancient failures to conceive lyric poetry as a genre. In both cases, the result is a disregard for the lyrical aim of enchantment in favor of the rhetorical aim of persuasion. Narrowly historicist approaches can at best achieve a partial explanation of why and how one thing is praised as opposed to another; they cannot account for the continued poetic efficacy of Pindaric praise beyond its original context – on which the poet himself arguably counted – unless the ground for later fascination should have no bearing whatsoever on the lyrics' intended effects.

The means of suasive, rhetorical discourse and of enchanting, lyrical discourse may of course be difficult or even impossible to distinguish empirically. Lyrics can convince and orations can spellbind. This fact has confused, both in antiquity and in modern times. Stephen Menn has recently argued that the reason why Aristotle has no theory of lyric poetry is that he does not consider it poetry at all but “just” epideictic oratory in meter.¹⁹⁰ Having done away with meter as the defining characteristic of poetry and instead postulated mimesis of exemplary action as its foremost element of realization, Aristotle is incapable of recognizing lyric poetry as such. Yet in spite of not theorizing the lyric, Aristotle has been accused not only of neglecting the genre but of distorting it. For Jeffrey Walker, Aristotle “implies a paradigm for lyric, albeit a restricted one.”

Consider, first, what happens when we eliminate verse or *melopoeia* as the defining feature of poetic discourse. What now remains to identify a lyric like a Pindaric ode or any lyric in the archaic paradigm that Pindar illustrates as “poetry”? The initial Aristotelian answer, I think, is nothing: the elder lyric now is indistinguishable, in theory, from oratory.
(35)

¹⁹⁰ Lecture held at Cornell University on March 3, 2014.

However, this, according to Walker, is not the theory of the lyric Aristotle “implies.” On the contrary: “For lyric discourse to be ‘poetry’ again, it must be re-imagined and in terms other than those of epideictic argument.”

The specifically poetic quality of lyric, in a post-Aristotelian poetic, must adhere in its representation of human action and, indeed, of a type of action. What is implied is not so much a full-fledged action, a “story,” for that would give us “epic” narrative, or drama proper. The Aristotelian lyric poem appears, instead, as a sort of *scene*, a crucial moment abstracted from an implied enclosing story – and the speaker’s utterance appears as an *apostrophe*. (35)

What is perhaps ironic about Walker’s account, is that he finds himself in perfect accord with Aristotle concerning what lyric poetry – such as it was known to the philosopher – is: epideictic with meter. Their only difference is that for Aristotle, such a discourse does not qualify as poetry.

As consequential as Aristotle’s underestimation of meter and rhythm may be, the philosophical treatment of lyric as rhetoric precedes him. In this particular regard, he by no means reverses Plato’s assessment of poetry. For Plato too only conceives of lyric in terms of what ought to be praised – not on the basis of praise itself as strategy for poetic enchantment (which, it should be added, presupposes blame and critique as correlative strategies for disenchantment and demystification). “Hymns to the gods and the praises of good men” are admitted into Plato’s ideal state because these specific objects of praise benefit it.

As I discussed in chapter three, the other reason why some lyrics are tolerated in the *Republic* is their essential openness to criticism. Their civic function is contingent on what they praise, which in turn is open to debate. To be glorified are above all the gods (of the city) and only reservedly virtuous men. Hence, when Aristotle himself writes a lyric in hymnic language apostrophizing Virtue but really honoring his esteemed friend Hermias, it is enough to bring on charges of impiety. Although there is little fodder in the poem for such accusations, they go to

say just how strictly coded were the permissible structures of praise still in Aristotle's time.¹⁹¹ The praiseworthiness of men ought to derive from the gods, not to compete with them. However, it is the lyric's very accountability that eventually brings about such competition.

The crisis of praise that marks the inception of lyric modernity should be attributed not simply to the old gods' demise as viable objects of worship but rather to the persistence of an archaic structure of praise which ascribes to the gods whatever is worth praising in men. Among the most compelling early illustrations of this crisis are the young Goethe's lyrics in free rhythms, in particular the Pindaric "Wandrer's Sturmlied" and the famous anti-hymn "Prometheus." While the latter confronts the problem head-on by refusing to credit Zeus with the feats of a titan, the former supplies images of the modern predicament of praise that are as enigmatic as they are compelling.

At the center of "Wandrer's Sturmlied" stands the mimetic rivalry of the poetic genius with Apollo, which David Wellbery has described incisively (1996, 147-156). The conflict concerns precisely whether the poet's worth – his praiseworthiness as well as his capacity to praise – comes from the god or has an independent source not contingent upon Olympian sanction. The latter would involve usurping Apollo's position, at first apparently accomplished by simply placing the genius in apposition to the Pythian deity.

Den du nicht verlässest Genius
Wirst ihn heben über'n Schlammfad
Mit den feuerflügeln.
Wandeln wird er
Wie mit Blumenfüßen
Über Deukalions flutschlamm
Python tötend, leicht, groß
Pythius Apollo. (I, 195)

The one you do not forsake, Genius,

¹⁹¹ For a rich study of this poem, see Andrew Ford, *Aristotle as Poet. The Song for Hermias and Its Contexts*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.

Above the mud path you lift him,
With wings of fire
He will walk
As on feet of flowers
Over Deucalion's flood ooze,
Killing Python, light, large,
A Pythian Apollo. (1983, 17; 19 – translation modified)

Apollo being the god of the sun and of light and warmth in general, the ambition to take his place necessitates an attempt to *outglow* him.

Weh! Weh! Innre Wärme
Seelen Wärme
Mittelpunkt!
Glüh entgegen
Phöb Apollen.
Kalt wird sonst
Sein Fürstenblick
Über dich vorübergleiten,
Neidetroffen
Auf der Zeder Grün verweilen
Die zu grünen
Sein nicht hart (I, 197)

Oh! Oh! Inner warmth,
Soulwarmth,
Midpoint!
Glow toward
Phoebus Apollo;
Else coldly will
His princely gaze
Pass over you,
Panged with envy
Dwell upon the cedar's power,
Which to be green
Waits not for him. (1983, 21)

Yet the enchantment of autonomy is quickly reversed in the poem's final, decisive stanza.

Wenn die Räder rasselten
Rad an Rad, rasch ums Ziel weg
Hoch flog
Siegdurchglühter
Jünglinge Peitschenknall
Und sich Staub wälzt'
Wie vom Gebürg herab

Kieselwetter in's Tal
Glühte deine Seel Gefahren Pindar!
Mut! – Glühte? –
Armes Herz!
Dort auf dem Hügel
Himmliche Macht
Nur so viel Glut
Dort meine Hütte
Dort hin zu waten! (I, 198)

When the wheels rattled,
Wheel by wheel, fast to the finish,
High flew
The whipcracks
Of the lads who glowed for a win,
And dust churned like hail
Tumbling down
Into the dale from the mountain,
Did your soul glow, Pindar?
Against perils
Courage. – Glow, did it?
Poor heart,
There on the hill,
Heavenly power,
Glow enough only,
There my cabin,
To wade my way there! (1983, 23)

The poem's second person is no longer the elevated genius of the first line but, in the end, a "poor heart." Here it is Pindar, to whom such hubris would be quite unthinkable, whose glow may be compared to that of Apollo himself. But the ancient poet's glow is of course linked with a concrete and in various forms recurring occasion for song, here exemplified by the chariot race. This is then likened to a gravel storm rushing down a mountain, an image of poetic inspiration. However, while the "dangers" against which Pindar's soul allegedly glowed can be traced back to the dangers of the charioteer and the glow itself to his triumph's supplying a cause for praise, the storm harassing the poet of "Wandrer's Sturmlied" lacks reference to anything calling for celebration, serving merely to illustrate the inspiration he hopes to acquire. His failure to compete with Apollo, then, is figured as an external as well as an internal collapse: his soul refuses to glow like Pindar's because the storm that this glow was meant to resist or channel in achieving disciplined mastery of poetic inspiration has turned out not to have any correlate in a

communally constituted occasion for song but instead to be a mere, literal storm like any other. Absent is not just an inner glow but also that which it is supposed to glow from and/or against: youths glowing with victory and indeed Apollo himself, from whom it issues. When the storm has thus turned out to be no more than bad weather, the poet seeks solace in his hut, where there is “just enough glow” to go on writing in a mode decidedly different from Pindar’s.

“Modernity is the wound of genius,” as Wellbery phrases it in conjunction with his reading of the passage (156). However, Goethe contrasts this not merely with a vague conception of poetic grandeur but also with a concrete situation and position from which to speak, sponsored by the god. Goethe’s lyric demonstrates that a crisis of the *hymnic* is at the same time a crisis of the *odic*, insofar as the power *to* praise and the merit *of* praise are both of divine origin. The attempted solution to this is to deify genius itself through praise, which in spite of the young wanderer’s failure becomes a commonplace of the lyric 19th century. Already Hölderlin could proclaim Rousseau a “demigod” – and that in a central passage of *Der Rhein* preaching moderation and warning against hubris (I, 346)!

The broad cultural transformations through which great men gradually come to take the place of gods should not be thought as a matter of specifically lyric (dis)enchantment, yet it is the lyric which processes this shift as a trauma *for the genre*, dependent as it is on its objects of praise. In Hölderlin, the poetic genius further complicates the contention among demigods vying for lyric praise. By Mallarmé, it is the only deity with the power to compel conviction. Because at first this new cult has neither clergy nor academy for support, it places an additional burden of praise on its members. The commemoration of late poets becomes a lyric subgenre, propagating new forms of immortality or, in its subtlest practitioners, questioning the very idea of immortality. “Genius is always past of future,” Wellbery comments (56). If what is praised is never present, melancholia and disenchantment are close at hand. Yet because death is part of what constitutes poetic genius, it also offers an opportunity for consolation and even celebration.

In his “tombs” for poets of the previous generation as well as in his “Toast funèbre” for the venerated Théophile Gautier, Mallarmé is exceptionally keen to exploit this fact. The initial, ambiguous address of his toast’s first line indicates the approach: “You fatal emblem of our happiness!” (*Ô de notre bonheur, toi, le fatal emblème!*, 49/l, 27) Who is this emblem that connects, in an apparent paradox, death and happiness? To identify it with the late Gautier would be a simplification, for Mallarmé invites not to celebrate the poet but “to declare / the poet’s absence” (*chanter l’absence du poète*, 49/l, 27). It is, perhaps morbidly, the very passing of the *laudandus* which makes him emblematic of *poetic* happiness. For the end of his life promises a more purely poetic afterlife, inaugurated by the toast itself. Gautier symbolizes happiness only insofar as he is “fatal.” But dying is of course not enough for posthumous realization. The poet’s parting is a matter of celebration only to the extent that his works are effectively commemorated through praise. Hence, the apostrophized “emblem” may be not so much the poet himself, nor his “transformation / into the virgin hero of posthumous expectation” (*[transmutation] / En le vierge héros de l’attente posthume*, 49/l, 27), but the toast itself which effects it, and for which his death is a prerequisite. Mallarmé’s curious syntax lends support to this reading.

Ô de notre bonheur, toi, le fatal emblème!

Salut de la démence et libation blême,
 Ne crois pas q’au magique espoir du corridor
 J’offre ma coupe vide où souffre un monstre d’or! (l, 27)

You fatal emblem of our happiness!

A toast of lunacy, a wan libation,
 not to the passage’s magic aspiration
 I raise my void cup bearing a gold monster in distress! (2006, 49)

Not only is it possible to take “You fatal emblem of our happiness” in apposition to “A toast of lunacy, a wan libation,” but simply reading the poem’s first two words as one reveals what is at

stake in Mallarmé's lyric: 'Ode, our happiness, you, the fatal emblem!' (*Ode, notre bonheur, toi, le fatal emblème!*)

Curiously and crucially, this ode is *not* a means of summoning the poet back into existence: "Your apparition is not enough for me / I myself set you in the porphyry." (*Ton apparition ne va pas me suffire: / Car je t'ai mis, moi-même, en un lieu de porphyre, 49/l, 27*) But if the alternative reading of the ode as the emblem is justified, and if it has thus set the poet in stone, one may wish to inquire just what about it is "fatal." The answer is simple and comes at the end of the stanza. Mallarmé's porphyritic monument over the master "holds all of him."

Si ce n'est que la gloire ardente du métier,
Jusqu'à l'heure commune et vile de la cendre,
Par le carreau qu'allume un soir fier d'y descendre,
Retourne vers les feux du pur soleil mortel! (l, 27)

Unless the bright fame of what he has done,
until the ashes' hour so common and so grim,
through glass lit by a dusk proud to fall there
returns toward the fires of the pure mortal sun! (2006, 49)

Eventually, the earth will likely collapse into the sun, and the sun into another star, erasing any trace of the glorified Gautier. Whatever Mallarmé knew or believed about this matter, it is clear that his porphyry is perishable. Is the toast "lunacy, a wan libation" because it must fail to render Gautier indestructible? Or would it rather be insane to hope for such permanence?

The following stanza suggests the latter meaning, for here Mallarmé continues to dispel "the passage's magic aspiration."

Magnifique, total et solitaire, tel
Tremble de s'exhaler le faux orgueil des hommes
Cette foule hagarde! Elle annonce: Nous sommes
La triste opacité de nos spectres futurs. (l, 27)

Sublime, total and solitary, then
he fears to breathe out the false pride of men.

'We are,' declare these haggard teeming hosts,
'the sad opaque forms of our future ghosts.' (2006, 49)

In a dizzying reversal, Gautier is remembered as a proponent of worldly praise, for his refusal to denigrate earthly existence (*La triste opacité*) in favor of the afterlife (*nos spectres futurs*) that is now being bestowed on him. Such an ability to affirm mortal life is here not a matter of positive attitude but of a poetic strategy, a practice of *looking*. In a letter, Mallarmé announces his ambition to hail the colleague as a seer in the most literal sense of the word: "I want to sing in couplets one of Gautier's glorious qualities: the mysterious gift of seeing with the eyes (remove mysterious). I will sing the seer who, placed in this world, has seen it, which people do not do... (*je veux chanter en rimes plates une des qualités glorieuses de Gautier: le don mystérieux de voir avec les yeux [ôter mystérieux]. Je chanterai le voyant qui, place dans ce monde, l'a regardé, ce que l'on ne fait pas...*, 1959-1985, II, 37) Consequently:

Le Maître, par un œil profound, a, sur ses pas,
Apaisé de l'éden l'inquiète merveille
Dont le frisson final, dans sa voix seule, éveille
Pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d'un nom. (I, 28)

The master's keen eye, as he went, brought ease
to Eden's restless wonder, whose last throes
in his unique voice wake the mysteries
of a name for the Lily and the Rose. (2006, 51)

If the speaker manages to "scorn the lucid horror of a tear" (*mépris[er] l'horreur lucide d'une larme*, 49/I, 27), then, it is not because Gautier is better off dead. On the contrary, the master was not only able to see the garden of earthly delights but also to put it into words. It is this capacity that now must be preserved, which conventional mourning prevents.

Yet something in Mallarmé's consolation seems disingenuous: "Is none of this destiny enduring? none? / Forget so dark a credo, everyone. / Radiant eternal genius leaves no shade."
(*Est-il de ce destin rien qui demeure, non? / O vous tous! Oubliez une croyance sombre. / La*

splendide genie éternel n'a pas d'ombre, 51/l, 28) Such a guarantee appears to relieve the speaker of his duty to praise. Yet whatever “eternity” is reserved for poetic genius,¹⁹² it is imperative for those who wish to follow its example that “a solemn stir of words stay alive in the air / in honour of the calm catastrophe” (*Survivre pour l'honneur du tranquille désastre / Une agitation solennelle par l'air*, 51/l, 28). “Radiant eternal genius” glows by itself rather than merely reflecting a light from elsewhere. As such, it “leaves no shade” but may of course be eclipsed, and this necessitates poetic care of the dead through praise. Thus when Mallarmé contributes a poem at the erection of a monument to Edgar Allan Poe, it is with the hope that “at least this block dropped by an occult doom, / this calm granite, may limit all the glum / Blasphemy-flights dispersed in days to come” (*Calme bloc ici-bas chu d'un désastre obscure / Que ce granit du moins montre à jamais sa borne / Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur*, 71/l, 38).

The intricacy of Mallarmé’s tomb poems stems largely from the fact that the writers they commemorate themselves were preoccupied with death as a not exclusively negative phenomenon. It is not just that Poe is “Changed into himself at last by eternity” (*Tel qu'en lui-même l'éternité le change*, 71/l, 38), which is to say that he is identified with the material traces, primarily his works, that survive him; but “death was glorying in that strange word” (*la mort triomphait dans cette voix étrange*, 71/l, 28). The ubiquitous presence of death is what animates Poe’s writings. The poetic *use* of death is a *means* of lyric praise. Death does not simply triumph *in* his works: it constitutes the triumph that *is* his works. Similarly, it is the very profanity of Baudelaire’s writings which consecrates them, the treatment of transience which perpetuates them.

Quel feuillage séché dans les cités sans soir
 Votif pourra bénir comme elle se rasseoir
 Contre le marbre vainement de Baudelaire

¹⁹² For Mallarmé, the praise of a particular poet is always praise of “the Poet,” of whom the departed here is one incarnation. On this point, see Pearson 2004, 177.

Au voile qui la ceint absente avec frissons
Celle son Ombre même un poison tutélaire
Toujours à respirer si nous en périssons (I, 39)

What foliage dried in any nightless town
could consecrate as she can and sit
against the marble of Baudelaire in vain,

departed from the veils that form her gown
with shimmers – she, his Shade, a guardian bane
to breathe forever though we die of it (2006, 73)

Baudelaire's prostituted muse is "a guardian bane," protective of his works at the expense of his (and our?) health.

Mallarmé carries out the celebration of poetic genius in more general terms with the teasingly titled, much-discussed "Plusieurs sonnets." Here too it is fundamentally threatened, yet praised for overcoming the disasters it inevitably must face. The reversal of praise enacted in the first of these sonnets is such that whatever poetry might have served previously to praise – sunset, stars, heaven with its promise of transcendence, or simply the external world in general – pales in comparison to the wonders that genius conceives.

L'espace à soi pareil qu'il s'accroisse ou se nie
Roule dans cet ennui des feux vils pour témoins
Que c'est d'un astre en fête allumé le génie. (I, 36)

Space, its own peer, whether it fail or grow
rolls in this tedium trivial fires to show
the genius kindled by a festive star. (2006, 67)

The disenchantment that ensues when nature is no longer enough to elicit praise is countered, once again, by the enchanting idea that linguistic genius is its own source of illumination. Lyric praise glows more brightly than its objects (unless they are themselves lyrics), yet the following

sonnet in the series introduces a poet of the old school expressing doubt whether light thus reflexively turned upon itself is not an image of sterility.¹⁹³

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui. (36)

A swan of old remembers it is he
superb but strives to break free woebegone
for having left unsung the territory
to live when sterile winter's tedium shone. (2006, 67)

Nonetheless, poetry is celebrated for surviving the dead of winter, or rather, it is celebrated *in order that* it survive the dead of winter, perhaps even be nourished by it. The poet (or the Poet) goes so far as to credit himself with emerging triumphant from his own suicide.

Victorieusement fui le suicide beau
Tison de gloire, sang par écume, or, tempête !
O rire si là-bas une pourpre s'apprête
A ne tendre royal que mon absent tombeau. (37)

The fine suicide fled victoriously
blaze of fame, blood in foam, gold, storm and stress!
If, below, regal purple is to dress
only my absent tomb, what mockery! (2006, 69)

But as Mallarmé was well aware, poetic immortality is contingent upon the continued existence of invested readers, who consequently must also be praised.

Quoi ! de tout cet éclat pas même le lambeau
S'attarde, il est minuit, à l'ombre qui nous fête
Excepté qu'un trésor présomptueux de tête
Verse son caressé nonchaloir sans flambeau,

¹⁹³ For a reading of Mallarmé's quartet that emphasizes the agon between an old, referential poetics and a new, reflexive one, see Pearson 1996, 166-190.

La tienne si toujours le délice ! la tienne
Oui seule qui du ciel évanoui retienne
Un peu de puéril triomphe en t'en coiffant (37)

What! out of all that brilliance not one shred
stays, in the dark that fêtes us (it's dead night)
except the arrogant treasure of a head
sheds its caressed nonchalance with no light,

yours yes a constant pleasure! yours alone
retaining from the heavens that have gone
a trace of childish triumph for your crown (2006, 69)

The resurrection of poetic genius is, like that of Christ, dependent on the communion of believers, without which “not one shred” remains of “all that brilliance.”

In the first and third chapters, I briefly touched upon the precarious consummation of this program for poetic immortality that Quentin Meillassoux sees in the monumental *Coup de dés*. According to his reading, or “decipherment,” the confirmation of Mallarmé’s genius is a count of words carefully indicated throughout the poem yet ultimately discoverable only by chance. The Mallarméan passion would consist in not only hiding “the code” from view but also in gently disturbing it, threatening its very existence. “Chance” or “Nothing” having replaced the Christian God, the ultimate glorification of poetic genius would be for it to become one with contingency. Such divinity, however, is the “treasure of a head” (*trésor de tête*, 69/l, 37), that is nothing without a posterior head devoted to it. As I indicated already in chapter one, Mallarmé saw in Wagner a chief contender for the occupancy of heads seeking enchantment. The German rival is celebrated reluctantly in the ambivalent “Homage” that concedes his divinity. Mallarmé’s playfully ironic tone should not prevent one from taking seriously the sonnet’s conflict between poetic genius and musical god. Although Mallarmé’s complex relationship to Wagner has many facets, some of which have been thoroughly studied and a few of which I have already treated, the lyric in which appears the troubling *Gesamtkünstler* addresses perhaps most compellingly the problem of a *congregation*, on which, rather than attempting anything like an exhaustive commentary, I will remark.

Homage

Le silence déjà funèbre d'une moire
Dispose plus qu'un pli seul sur le mobilier
Que doit un tassement du principal pilier
Précipiter avec le manque de mémoire.

Notre si vieil ébat triomphal du grimoire,
Hiéroglyphes dont s'exalte le millier
A propager de l'aile un frisson familial !
Enfouissez-le-moi plutôt dans une armoire.

Du souriant fracas originel haï
Entre elles de clartés maîtresses a jailli
Jusque vers un parvis né pour leur simulacre,

Trompettes tout haut d'or pâmé sur les vélins
Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre
Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins. (I, 39)

Homage

Already mourning, the silence of a pall
casts more than one fold on the furnishing
which the central pillar's collapse must bring
suddenly down with no memorial.

The old gay triumphs of our magic scrawl,
hieroglyphs by the thousand scurrying
to spread familiar flutters with their wing!
bury them in a cupboard after all.

From the original smiling noisy crowd
hated among the master lights has gushed
to a shrine born for their representation,

gold trumpets on the vellum swooning loud,
Wagner the god lighting a consecration
which the ink's Sibylline tears have scarcely hushed. (2006, 73)

"The old gay triumphs of our magic scrawl," that is the ostensibly antiquated art of poetry, has become at once foreign, like hieroglyphs, and all too familiar, its tricks no longer impressing.

"The thousand" are either the hieroglyphs themselves, exalting some long-forgotten deity, or the relatively small number of people devoted to an increasingly marginalized lyric tradition. These are then contrasted with "the original smiling noisy crowd" of Wagnerians, congregating at the

shrine in Bayreuth. Wagner's music may be despised by advocates of transparency, but its prophetic power trumps any vatic text. Whereas the *Musikdrama* is fit for public consecration, poetry has become a private matter that might as well be hidden away in a cupboard, incapable as it is of birthing new gods.

Mallarmé's syntax is, as always, supremely ambiguous, and there are other ways to interpret the sonnet. Given Mallarmé's absolute commitment to poetry, there is furthermore cause to question whether his lyric is really a homage in any conventional sense or rather (also) an attempt to break the idol with irony. Nevertheless, the poem's fundamental oppositions are fairly clear. To the new art and the old correspond public and private ritual. It is not that Mallarmé dreamt of his own Bayreuth. His aspiration for the hymnic Book were, as is well known, higher than that. Yet this project did not bear fruit, and whatever success one ascribes to *Coup de dés*, Mallarmé's practice of praise is if not private then at least profoundly personal. This does not, in fact, diminish it. As Roger Pearson has put it:

Whereas there is remarkable little reference in Mallarmé's published work or correspondence to figures of the past (whether historical, cultural, or indeed literary), there is ubiquitous evidence of a sustained and wide-ranging contact with people and particularly with other writers and artists (as even a casual perusal of the index to his correspondence will confirm). Where others might worship God or dedicate their paltry mortal efforts to His glory, Mallarmé repeatedly performs a secular ritual of praise and offering in honour of his fellow human beings. From his earliest juvenilia to his final sonnet (in honour of a departed but eternally admirable Vasco da Gama) he is constantly dedicating his writing to others and to the triumphs of human endeavour.

"Mallarmé is a ceaseless celebrant of life and living, of a present glory. Always giving, and always giving thanks." (2004, 189-90) Learning from him means not adopting his objects of praise but adapting his techniques of praise to the glory present in our own lives.

Of course, this does not mean that Mallarmé lacked a circle of likeminded spirits partaking in his particular acts of praise. I wish simply to stress the extreme tension between public and private in matters divine. On the one hand, there is his morose praise of "the god Wagner," who caters to "the original smiling noisy crowd." On the other hand, there are his more

heartfelt tombs for fellow poets, who must be protected against the slanderous rabble. Similarly, the divine “Master” of Mallarmé’s poetry never speaks up, existing in a state of perpetual withdrawal.

Mallarmé’s most moving attempt at apotheosis is also his most private. In the couple of hundred fragments that have become known as his “Notes pour un tombeau d’Anatole,” the poet confronts the death of his eight year-old son with a painful process of deification. Trying to make sense of their loss, Mallarmé describes the parents’ work of mourning: “mother bled and wept / father sacrifices – and deifies” (*mère a saigné et pleuré / père sacrifie – et divinise*, 59/1, 929). This gesture aims neither at bringing back the beloved nor at making him immortal. There will be no denying the brute fact of the child’s absence.

non – je ne
laisserai pas
le néant
———
Père — — — je
sens le néant
m’envahir (I, 940)

no – I will not let nothingness —
Father – I feel the nothingness invade me (2003, 73)

Yet as long as there remain his traces in those who have loved him, the boy escapes absolute Death.

non — pas
mêlé aux grands
morts — etc.
— tant que nous
mêmes vivons, il
vit — en nous
———
ce n’est qu’après notre
mort qu’il en sera
— et que les cloches
des Morts sonneront pour lui (I, 522)

no – not among the great dead – etc. – so long as we ourselves live, he lives – in us only after our death will he be – and will the bells of the Dead toll for him. (2003, 19)

However, there may be another reason why Anatole should not be placed “among the great dead” – those poets whom the father dedicated his completed tombs, for instance. Mallarmé’s notes are often understood as the search for a thoroughly atheist mode of mourning. And indeed, he writes of the

vent de *rien*
qui soufflé
(là, le néant
? moderne) (I, 901)

wind of *nothingness blowing* (this, the modern void)? (2003, 23)

But renouncing the idea of union in God does not prevent Mallarmé from proclaiming the boy himself a “young god, hero, sanctified by death –“ (*jeune dieu, / héros, sacré par / mort* –, 27/1, 905). In fact, the divinity Mallarmé confers onto his son exceeds whatever glory he bestows upon “the great dead,” none of whom is explicitly deified.

Mallarmé never completed, let alone published, any part of the projected poem for Anatole. The great pain associated with such an endeavor and the incommensurability of the project with Mallarmé’s other works are enough to understand why. Yet one may also ask, naïvely, what makes Anatole divine. The answer is of course: the irreplaceable part he played in his parents’ lives, in the unique relationship between father and son, which cannot be shared nor even adequately communicated.

Rejecting prefabricated deities, the modern lyric constructs new objects of praise. If the gods thus brought forth cannot be common to all (the populace with their “Blasphemy-flights” would rather dispel them “in some black brew’s dishonourable flow” [*le flot sans honneur de*

quelque noir mélange, 71/1, 38], as Poe's tomb has it), qua literature they cannot be kept private either. It remains to combine the two.

If Stefan George's praise, deification, and installment of the 16 year-old Maximilian Kronberger at the center of a new religion and a new state seems primarily of historical and sociological interest, one should ask whether such an operation would have been possible outside of the lyric genre. It is difficult to conceive of a dramatist or novelist occupying a position similar to that of George during the second half of his life. This is not only because the role of the prophet presupposes the ability to speak truths and lies seductively in the first person – that is non-fictional speech. It is also because the lyric licenses and even demands for its efficacy acts of praise, the objects of which at least in modernity are secondary to the end of enchantment.

As George first lays eyes on the young student in 1903, he has already met him. "Maximin" is not an unprecedented revelation but the fulfillment of an expectation. Assimilating his own experience to the collective of his circle, George affirms in the *Vorrede* to the deceased boy's *Gedenkbuch*: "We knew in him the incarnation of an omnipotent youth, such as we had dreamt of it." (*Wir erkannten in ihm den Darsteller einer allmächtigen Jugend, wie wir sie erträumt hatten*, XVII, 62)¹⁹⁴ From then on, Maximin becomes increasingly synonymous with the praiseworthy itself: "The closer we came to know him the more he reminded us of our notion [*denkbild*] and we adored the range of his primordial spirit and the stirrings of his heroic soul in the same measure as its incarnation in shape and gesture and language." (*Je näher wir ihn kennen lernten desto mehr erinnerte er uns an unser denkbild und ebenso verehrten wir den umfang seines ursprünglichen geistes und die regungen seiner heldenhaften seele wie deren versinnlichung in gestalt und gebärde und sprache*, XVII, 63) Maximin is of course an erotic fantasy but he is above all the ultimate incarnation of a praised *Du* which precedes him. For George had written hymns and poems of praise long before stalking his young god on the

¹⁹⁴ Volume and page numbers refer to *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden*.

streets of Munich. Already one of his early *Hymnen*, which Mallarmé found most beautifully titled,¹⁹⁵ highlights key features of the poetics of praise that will later form the basis for the Maximin cult. Its first stanza:

Dein auge blau • ein türkis • leuchtet lange
Zu reich dem Einen • ich verharre bange.
Den kiesel tröstet deines kleides saum.
Kaum tröstet mich ein traum. (II, 20)

Too long, too lavishly, your eyes – the blue
Of turquoise – shine for One. I wait in rue.
The stones are solaced by your garment's hem,
I scarcely by a dream. (1974, 16)

The image that George makes of his god is both oddly specific (*Dein auge blau • ein türkis*) and hopelessly vague (*Kaum tröstet mich ein traum*). Correspondingly, his notion of divine presence oscillates between the overpowering (it takes no more than a touch of the god's garment) and the ineffectual (a pebble cannot be consoled nor otherwise altered by cloth). Yet as impotent as this deity might be, it apparently warrants sacrifice and subjection.

Geruhe du nur dass ein kurzer schimmer
Aus deiner wimper brechend mich versehre:
Des glückes hoffnung misst ich gern für immer •
Nach deinem preise schloss ich meinen psalter
Und spottete dem schatten einer ehre
Und stürbe wertlos wie ein abendfalter. (II, 20)

But if you deigned to let a shimmer sever
Your lashes, piercing me, then I should frown
Upon all hope of ecstasy forever,
Discard my psalter, having sung your grace,
I should reject the shadow of renown
And perish like the moth, without a trace. (1974, 16)

¹⁹⁵ Thanking his young German colleague for a copy of the collection, an enchanted Mallarmé writes: “J’ai été ravi par le jet ingénue et fier, en de l’éclat et la rêverie, de ces *Hymnes* (nul titre qui soit plus beau); mais aussi, mon cher exilé (je dirai presque, oui), que vous soyez par votre main d’œuvre, si fine et rare, un des nôtres et d’aujourd’hui.” (quoted in SW II, 89)

Two further defining traits of George's poetics are here evident. First, the object of praise is strictly momentary. The blessing is reduced to the blink of an eye, and a nostalgic reference in the second stanza to "old gods" suggests a periodic replacement of divinities. Second, the activity of praise involves insertion into a strict hierarchy of values, according to which the worth of the celebrant is defined in relation to the celebrated, without whom he is "worthless like a moth."

By the time George decides on his deity, he has access to a large repertoire of hymnic formulae. Several poems written prior to the encounter with Kronberger would fit seamlessly among those composed in his honor. Not only are the identities of George's various addressees often indistinguishable but the line between speaker and addressee, subject and object of praise, is consciously effaced. In a prefatory remark to the second edition of *Das Jahr der Seele*, George affirms that "rarely are i and you so much the same soul as in this book" (IV, 7). If the testimony to Maximin's divinity requires a non-fictional discourse, George at the same times concedes the fabricated nature of his god, without whose sponsorship the prophetic voice of the poetry would be inconceivable. George has created Maximin, but Maximin has created George, insofar as the latter's subjectivity is identified with his adoration:

Nun wird wahr was du verhiesses:
Dass gelangt zur macht des Thrones
Andren bund du mit mir schliessest
Ich geschöpf nun eignes sohnes. (VI/VII, 109)

Now that you are strong and high,
What you prophecied was done:
You have changed our pact, and I
Am the child of my own son. (1974, 267)

Although this is openly admitted, the imperative to praise and pray supervenes on whatever conclusions such insight might provoke: "Was it I myself that bore him? / Pray, my soul, and shun reflection!" (*Hab ich selber ihn geboren? / Schweig gedanke! Seele bete!*, 1974, 334/VIII,

70) For George, praise is a command and a compulsion: "Kneel down and pray!" (*Knie hin und bete!*, 1974, 259/VI/VII, 94) This injunction may come from Maximin himself, whom George does not hesitate to "quote":

"Lass mich in die himmel entschweben!
Du heb dich vom grund als gesunder!
Bezeuge und preise mein wunder
Und harre noch unten im leben!" (VI/VII, 96)

"Let me float away into heaven,
Arise from the ground and be whole,
Remain on the earth to extol
And witness the grace that was given." (1974, 260)

But as I have shown, the command that there be praise ultimately stems not from this or that object but must be thought from the vantage point of the lyric genre as the principal discourse of poetic enchantment. For it is not that prior to Maximin's arrival the disenchanting members of George's circle were unfamiliar with this strategy. Rather, the master writes, "a few turned away from us toward the murky regions and praised madness as a blessing" (*wandten sich einige von uns abseits nach den dunklen bezirken und priesen den wahnsinn selig*, XVII, 62). The lyric poet would rather praise Nothing than not praise. The function of Maximin is not so much finally to provide an object of praise as to legitimate praise of what else would be *wahnsinn*. Maximin redeems the otherwise detested times: "Praise to your city where a god was born, / Praise to your time in which a god has breathed!" (*Preist eure stadt die einen gott geboren! / Preist eure zeit in der ein Gott gelebt!*, 1974, 261/VI/VII, 99)

Viewed by himself, Maximin is utterly empty. Fortunately, he is not asked to perform any miracles. The three *Gebete* directed to him asks little more than to die for his glory:

Endlich löse und beschwichte!
Hör mich bitten • hör mich werben!
Gib die wonne dir zu sterben
Wo ich dir am nächsten pflichte! (VI/VII, 106)

Loose at last and lull to rest,
Hear my wooing, hear my sighing,
Let me die for you where dying
Makes me yours and serves you best. (1974, 266)

The wonder of Maximin is reduced to the mere fact of his physical appearance: “his mere presence in space was enough to awaken in everyone the feeling of bodily scent and warmth” (*seine blosse anwesenheit im raum genügte um bei allen das gefühl von leibhaften duft und wärme zu erwecken*, 64). Yet even his body is remarkably void of properties. Maximin’s beauty is merely proclaimed, never described. The only characteristic singled out as particularly attractive is the boy’s voice. “This voice was especially moving – at its most powerful when he praised or pled or read us something from the poets and surprised us with a new sonorous magic.” (*Diese stimme war besonders rührend – am mächtigsten wenn er lobte oder verteidigte oder uns aus den dichtern las und uns überraschte mit einem neuen zauber des tönenden*, XVII, 63-64) On “his proudest evening” (XVII, 65), Maximin allegedly expounded the virtues of worldly praise: “i do not know whether i will ever come to understand those creatures who out of their dwelling make a hell for themselves and then invent paradises above it .. as far as i can see there is only glory” (*ich weiss nicht ob ich diese wesen je werde verstehen lernen die aus ihrem wohnsitz sich eine hölle bauen und darüber sich paradiese erfinden .. so weit mein auge reicht seh ich nur glanz*, XVII, 66). Maximin, himself an aspiring poet, derives his praiseworthiness from his capacity to praise. And in George’s verse he appears as the lyric animator par excellence.

Kunfttag III

Nun wird es wieder lenz..
Du weihst den weg die luft
Und uns auf die du schaust –
So stammle dir mein dank.

Eh blöd der menschen sinn

Ihm ansann wort und tat
Hat schon des schöpfers hauch
Jed ding im raum beseelt.

Wenn solch ein auge glüht
Gedeiht der trocken stamm •
Die starre erde pocht
Neu durch ein heilig herz. (VI/VII, 92)

Advent III

Now spring is here again,
You bless the air, the path,
And us on whom you gaze...
So take my faltered thanks.

The Maker breathed a soul
Through everthing in space,
Before our clumsy mind
Asked him to speak and act.

Where such eyes are alight,
The withered branches bud,
The stark earth tunes her beat
To so unstained a heart. (1974, 258)

The deification of Maximin is perhaps the last strained attempt at apotheosis of poetic genius. It goes without saying that in exalting his young god, George elevates himself. As Christ is the only way to his god, so George is the only way to Maximin. And, in the incestuous mise-en-abyme that the master's lyrics enact, so conversely Maximin is the way to George: "You who surround and question me, let this / Suffice: Through him alone I now am yours" *Die ihr mir folgt und fragend mich umringt / Mehr deutet nicht! ihr habt nur mich durch ihn!*, 1974, 318/VIII, 14)

The ascension of Maximin is of course premised on the death of Maximilian. It is not so much that the young boy could not live up to his divine status. He would be *too much* rather than *too little* for the role George accords to him. And as the "spirit of the holy youth" (*geist der heiligen jugend*, VIII, 15), he must never grow old. Whereas for Mallarmé Anatole's death ultimately renders poetic praise impossible, the passing of George's "son" is an indispensable component of a strategy for poetic enchantment. The comparison with Mallarmé is instructive, because George no doubt saw himself as fulfilling an ambition left unrealized by the older

colleague. In his celebration of French influences, “Franken,” George uses the same word to describe Mallarmé’s highest aspiration as he applies to that imago which Maximin approximates. Mallarmé was “dying for his notion” (*für sein denkbild sterbend*, VI/VII, 18). However, while the French poet purportedly remained torn between public and private, between the ineffably abstract and the unbearably concrete, George attempts to square the circle. When the dream of a national if not universal enchantment of the crowd does not correspond with the demands of Beauty, one invents a *Neues Reich*, a *Geheimes Deutschland*. And as the esoteric cult of Maximin grows increasingly obscure, the poems in his honor become more accessible and repetitive. The young god’s lack of qualities is both his strength and his weakness. Being open to projections, he is also replaceable, as indeed other boy-gods populate George’s final collection of lyrics.¹⁹⁶

Whereas Anatole’s tomb marks the unthinkable loss that no poetry can do justice, Maximin is but a momentary incitement for enchanting praise. George could not have known Mallarmé’s attempted apotheosis of his dead son, which remained unpublished until 1961, and as Ernst Osterkamp recently has shown it is rather in Hölderlin that one should seek the model for Maximin. George, who was as well acquainted with Hölderlin as was possible given the partial availability of his works at the time, had planned to publish a new edition of *Hyperion*, but appears to have changed his mind after the death of Kronberger. According to Osterkamp, the reason for this is simple: “Maximin is, all the way to the number of letters and choice of phonemes, the masculine derivative of Diotima.” (*Maximin ist, bis in die Zahl der Buchstaben und die Lautgebung hinein, das männliche Derivat von Diotima*, 145) Already Hölderlin wrote of “the new kingdom of the new divinity” (*der neuen Gottheit neues Reich*, 71/1, 657), and a line is to be drawn from his, Hegel’s, and Schelling’s “invisible church” to George’s *geheimes*

¹⁹⁶ See especially “An die Kinder des Meeres” (IX, 15-20).

Deutschland.¹⁹⁷ Yet the evident similarities between the two figures are all the more reason to highlight their differences, which have considerable ideological consequences. As Osterkamp puts it: “Maiximin is painted over Diotima in the service of religion-as-art, which replaces German idealism's political concepts of freedom with a desire to rule in a society of men.” (*Maximin ist eine kunstreligiöse Übermalung Diotimas, in der die politischen Freiheitskonzepte des deutschen Idealismus ausgelöscht sind durch ein männerbundisches Herrschaftsbegehren*, 150) One must then ask what permits George to perform such an operation.

It is important to point out that while Diotima is a fictional character who makes her first appearance in Hölderlin's only novel, Maximin is a lyric lie. Certainly, Diotima appears in a number of lyrics as well as in *Hyperion*, and she is based on a real woman who similarly suffered an early death. Nevertheless, strictly speaking Hölderlin did not intend for anyone to identify his Greek heroine with Susette Gontard, just as Hyperion is not just another name for Hölderlin. The conflation of Maximin and Maximilan, on the other hand, lies at the root of Goerge's poetic and prophetic authority. That George's world today appears as fictional as any fantastic narrative does nothing to change this fundamental difference.

What Diotima and Maximin share is, in one problematic word, holiness. The German *heilig*, like its English counterpart, meant originally “whole, sound, intact, untainted,” and indeed it is the function of Maximin and Diotima to heal the wound that is modernity, to reestablish the fullness of life and the unity of mind and body that ostensibly went lost with Greek antiquity. “Silence often behoves us: deficient in names that are holy” (*schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Nahmen*, 337/l, 322), Hölderlin in the first version of *Heimkunft* formulates the central problem of modern lyric praise. Yet “Diotima” is just such a name. In a lyric that bears it, she appears as “holy life” itself (*heilig Leben*, I, 189). Since she is “the holy” (*das Heilige*, 73/l, 659), the instant when Hölderlin first laid eyes on her was a “holy moment” (*heilige[r] Moment*,

¹⁹⁷ Eckart Förster discusses the Kantian origin of this idea in *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy. A Systematic Reconstruction*. Trans. Brady Bowman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012, 278.

70/657) when “all was hallowed, beautified through her presence” (*es war alles geheiligt, verschönert durch ihre Gegenwart, 72/658*). Diotima’s love heals and rejuvenates: “the wounds in your wings have already / Healed, and restored to youth all your old hopes leap alive” (*Die blutenden Fittige sind ja / Schon genesen, verjüngt leben die Hoffnungen all, 2013, 301/I, 294*). The vocabulary of holiness is no less pervasive in what concerns Maximin. George addresses him as *Bringer unsres heils* (VI/VII, 100) and commands: *Nun hebt das haupt! denn euch ist heil geschehn* (VI/VII, 99). In apparent modesty, the prophet writes of himself: “Only a flicker of the holy fire, / Only an echo of the holy tongue” (*Ich bin ein funke nur vom heiligen feuer / Ich bin ein dröhnen nur der heiligen stimme, 1974, 270/VI/VII, 111*) The purpose of this fire is not just to heal but to *purify*: “His mouth shall burn you clean, / You are on holy ground” (*sein mund / Auf deinem brennt dich rein / Du weilst auf heiligem grund, 1974, 259/VI/VII, 94*);

Rein blinkten unsre tempelbögen:
 Du blicktest auf .. da floh voll scham
 Was unrein war zu seinen trögen •
 Da blieb nur wer als priester kam... (VI/VII, 105)

Our temple-halls were pure and gloried,
 You raised your lids, and all the stained
 Fled to their sties, ashamed and sordid,
 And none were left but the ordained. (1974, 265)

Purest of all is, next to Maximin himself, his father/son, George:

Kam ein opfer sonder makel
 Freudiger zu deinem herde?
 Reiner von der Welt beschwerde
 Tret ich nie vor dein mirakel. (VI/VII, 106)

Purer victim never came
 To your shrine with greater gladness,
 Less ensnared in haste and madness
 I shall never seek your flame. (1974, 265)

Notoriously, George omits further specifications as to what such purity is pure of. Indeed, this is itself a “holy secret” (*heiliges Geheimnis*, VIII, 20). One can conceive of many factors contributing in making Kronberger the perfect candidate for cultic elevation. Yet whenever George approaches the miracle that is Maximin, the young god’s holiness is reduced to the fact of his physical presence, that is to his body: *Dein erdenleib dies enge heiligtum* (VIII, 11). At the same time, he is the “spirit of the holy youth of our people” (*geist der heiligen jugend unsres volks*, VIII, 15). It is, in other words, on Maximin’s pure, untarnished body that the people’s body (*Volkskörper*) of the *Neues Reich* is to be modeled. Osterkamp describes in no uncertain terms the most extreme version of this ideology as it is fleshed out in George’s final collection of poetry: “The notion of divine absoluteness is thereby degraded to the material banality of a demand for biological purity: God is nothing but the youthful body, in which the pure blood of the people still circulates.” (*Die Vorstellung göttlicher Absolutheit sinkt damit in die materiellen Niederungen eines biologischen Reinheitsgebots ab: Gott ist allein der jugendliche Leib, in dem das Blut des Volkes noch rein zirkuliert*, 200)

The idea of the holy, with its connotations of purity and unity, seems forever compromised. It would thus be a mistake to search, as does Hölderlin, for “holy names,” that is for something of absolute value. The modern lyric could still praise, of course, but it would be confined to objects whose value can be quantified, rendering them comparable to others of the same kind. For another crucial aspect of Diotima’s and Maximin’s holiness is of course their *incomparability*. “Words are in vain here,” Hyperion writes of Diotima’s effect on him, “and he who asks for the likes of her has never known her.” (*Worte sind hier umsonst, und wer nach einem Gleichniß von ihr fragt, der hat sie nie erfahren*, 92/1, 672)

Diotima is of course named after the mysterious woman appearing in Plato’s *Symposium*, from whom Socrates allegedly has learned everything he knows about desire. This has led scholars to situate the novel in a Platonist tradition, making of Hyperion’s great love a catalyst for the type of sublimating, idealizing desire directed toward pure forms that her namesake

espouses in Plato's dialogue and which is known popularly as "Platonic love." If this is to some degree warranted, even unavoidable, one should nevertheless remember that Hölderlin's Platonism is no less sophisticated than Plato's own. As perceptive readers have noted, neither Socrates nor Diotima gets the final word of the *Symposium*.¹⁹⁸ The concluding speech not only challenges the views previously put forth but rejects their premise: that it is Eros, or desire itself, which is to be praised. Indeed, Alcibiades finds himself unable to praise anyone else – "even a god!" – with Socrates around (214d). To the beautiful young man, the philosopher is, strictly speaking, incomparable.

You could say many other marvelous things in praise of Socrates. Perhaps he shares some of his specific accomplishments with others. But, as a whole, he is unique; he is like no one else in the past and no one in the present – this is by far the most amazing thing about him. (221c)

Just as according to Hyperion no one experienced in the bliss bestowed by Diotima would search for its likeness, so the rejected Alcibiades claims "no one else has ever known the real meaning of slavery" (219e). This makes Socrates divine, holy. Alcibiades recalls:

I once caught him when he was open like Silenus' statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike – so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing – that I no longer had a choice – I just had to do whatever he told me. (216e-217a)

In an important sense, Hölderlin's Diotima is to Hyperion what Plato's Socrates is to Alcibiades: On the one hand, she instructs Hyperion in an allegedly higher form of love not restricted to a singular individual but open to all that beauty which despite everything remains in their modern, disenchanting world. Indeed, she resists Hyperion's inclination to devote his entire existence to her, encouraging him instead to become an educator of the people (120/l, 693). Ultimately, Hyperion abandons his beloved to fight for Beauty itself, because "the holy theocracy of the

¹⁹⁸ See above all Martha Nussbaum's brilliant essay on "The Speech of Alcibiades" in *The Fragility of Goodness*, on which I rely in what follows.

beautiful must dwell in a free state, and this state will have a place on earth" (*die heilige Theokratie des Schönen muß in einem Freistaat wohnen, und der will Platz auf Erden haben*, 129/1, 700). On the other hand, this conception of love and beauty, according to which what is holy can be instituted through deliberate action, is undermined by Diotima's own irreplaceability. On her deathbed, she tries to prepare her lover for his loss: "The beautiful world is your Olympus; in it you will live, and with the holy beings of the world, with the gods of nature, with them you will be joyful." (*Die schöne Welt ist dein Olymp; in diesem wirst du leben, und mit den heiligen Wesen der Welt, mit den Göttern der Natur, mit diesen wirst du freudig seyn*, 198/I, 749)¹⁹⁹ Hyperion tries to take her advice. In his final letter to Bellarmin, he writes: "We too, we too, are not separated, Diotima, and the tears for you do not understand it. We are living tones, we harmonize in your euphony, nature! who rends it asunder? who may part lovers? –" (*Auch wir, auch wir sind nicht geschieden, Diotima! und die Thränen um dich verstehen es nicht. Lebendige töne sind wir, stimmen zusammen in deinem Wohllaut, Natur! wer reißt den? Wer mag die Liebenden scheiden? –*, 215/I, 760) What Hyperion understands and his tears refuse is that Diotima's beauty is not qualitatively different from any other beauty and is thus still present in beautiful nature. She would then derive her holiness from partaking in the indestructible beauty of the world. Hyperion's tears, however, are symptoms of another knowledge, and of another notion of the holy. If the holy is what is whole, this is not because it cannot be taken apart but on the contrary because it is only as a whole that particular beauties constitute something holy, and the whole that was Diotima is now gone forever. The holy is greater than the sum of its part.

This grants a better position from which to comprehend why the longest lyric Hölderlin devoted to Diotima is voiced not by Hyperion but by another Platonic figure, otherwise absent from Hölderlin's corpus. Meno's appearance in the lament for Diotima broadens the Platonic

¹⁹⁹ Translation modified to conform with Knaupp's edition of Hölderlin's *Sämtliche Werke*, which has *dein Olymp*, as opposed to *mein Olymp*, found in DKV and followed in Benjamin's English rendering.

intertext to include the dialogue that bears his name, in which famously are unfolded Plato's doctrines of anamnesis, metempsychosis, and the immortality of the soul. However, although this reference is unmistakable, Hölderlin's Meno is not Plato's noble general but a decidedly modern lover. In a distich, he succinctly restates the problem of lyric praise in modernity: "Celebrate – yes, but what? And gladly with others I'd sing now, / Yet alone as I am nothing that's godlike rings true." (*Feiern möchte' ich; aber wofür? und singen mit Andern, / Aber so einsam fehlt jegliches Göttliche mir*, 297/1, 293) In classically elegiac manner, the poem oscillates between despair at irretrievable loss and consolation by what after all remains. The Greek name Menon (Μένων) means literally "he who remains," and this has been seen as a reference to the allegedly eternalizing power of love, which would preserve the lovers in their union, over and against the appearance of separation and death.²⁰⁰ However, if the lover remains, there is no reason to extend this designation to the lamented beloved. Meno is not "he who remains eternally" but simply "he who is left behind" when the beloved is gone. By the same token, the holy is not that which remains whole no matter what but that which, insofar as it is holy, can be experienced only as a unique whole and not as a set of properties that may also be found elsewhere.

It may be unclear why this is a question of specifically lyric praise as a strategy for poetic enchantment. After all, Diotima is a fictional character conceived for a narrative text. But it is no coincidence that this articulation of holiness takes place in a lyric poet's novel. The modern lyric does not just seek the praiseworthy but aims to construct the worthiest of all, the immeasurable measure of praise which would authorize the poet's encomiastic activity. Yet identifying the holy with the beloved means relativizing it. The sacralization of Diotima can compel general conviction only insofar as she is fictive. Elevating personal preferences to theological doctrine, George's cult of Maximin represents the attempt lyrically to resist this fundamental insight.

²⁰⁰ See Jochen Schmidt's commentary in DKV I, 704.

Instructing in Eros, Socrates rejects the monomaniacal desire for a singular being yet in spite or because of this himself becomes the object of frenzied desire. Alcibiades claims to see something in Socrates that Socrates fails to see in anyone: the irreducibility of a singular beauty. In being blinded by love, drunk Alcibiades sees *more* than the perpetually sober Socrates. Ironically, the revelation of the singular beloved may lead the lover to see the unique value of other discrete beings, in a way that reminds of and at the same time reverses the ascent toward pure forms.

Exploring amorous subjectivity, the modern lyric thus praises the lover as well as the beloved. Just as it may be better to praise than to be praised, the beloved can prove less laudable than the lover. For in the best case, the lover's recognition of an incomparable other enables the discovery of unique worth elsewhere in the world. In the worst case, however, the fixation on a singular beloved forecloses other engagements. It is in response to this risk that Rilke conceives his idea of "intransitive love," most famously formulated in the first three *Duino Elegies*. Here it is not fulfilled desire but unrequited love that provides a model for worldly praise.

[...] so singe die Liebenden; lange
noch nicht unsterblich genug ist ihr berühmtes Gefühl.
Jene, du neidest sie fast, Verlassenen, die du
so viel liebender fandst als die Gestillten. (II, 202)

[...] sing of women in love;
for their famous passion is still not immortal. Sing
of women abandoned and desolate (you envy them, almost)
who could love so much more purely than those who were satisfied. (1995, 333)

It is not that unhappy love fails to live up to its object; on the contrary, it is in shooting over the target that love may transform the lover's entire world. Reciprocal lovers "keep on using each other to hide their own fate" (*verdecken sich nur mit einander ihr Los*, 331/II, 201). Therefore:

Ist es nicht Zeit, daß wir liebend
uns vom Geliebten befreien und es bebend bestehn:

wie der Pfeil die Sehne besteht, um gesammelt im Absprung
mehr zu sein als er selbst. Denn Bleiben ist nirgends. (II, 202)

Isn't it time that we lovingly
freed ourselves from the beloved and, quivering, endured:
as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension, so that
gathered in the snap of release it can be more than
itself. For there is no place where we can remain. (1995, 333)

Rilke praises the insatiability of desire, for it promises continued amorous activity. The beloved presents an obstacle, not because s/he would really put an end to desire, but because s/he holds the distracting promise of fulfillment which absorbs the laudatory attention that ought rather to be dispersed over the world.

Although Rilke does make reference to a canon of ungratified lovers, his notion of intransitive love does little to solve the modern problem of praise, since in celebrating a Gaspara Stampa, for instance, he is celebrating someone who herself supposedly celebrates intransitively. While the beloved's unique worth belongs to the logic of love, it is unclear what beside the absence of distinctly defined objects distinguishes Rilke's great lovers. What he calls to praise is perhaps not so much this or that lover (who may of course serve to exemplify great passion) as desire itself, the drive before it attaches to any objects. What Rilke would propose, then, is a return to the symposiastic order before Alcibiades' entrance. Yet this creates serious difficulties. As is pointed out at the beginning of Plato's dialogue, Eros had suffered a dearth of praise.

Our poets have composed hymns in honor of just about any god you can think of; but has a single one of them given one moment's thought to the god of love, ancient and powerful as he is? [...] I've actually read a book by an accomplished author who saw fit to extol the usefulness of salt! How *could* people pay attention to such trifles and never, not even once, write a proper hymn to Love? (177A-177C)

The ensuing speeches aim to rectify this, but the problems are compounded in modernity, which at least according to Freud places little value in the drive itself and in which a god of (erotic) love

is therefore absent.²⁰¹ As the first two lines of the third *Elegy* acknowledge, “It is one thing to sing the beloved. Another, alas, / to invoke that hidden, guilty river-god of the blood.” (*Eines ist, die Geliebte zu singen. Ein anderes, wehe, / jenen verborgenen schuldigen Fluß-Gott des Bluts*, 1995, 345/II, 208) Indeed, it is much easier to praise the virtues of the beloved than to revive or invent a deity. But the problem is severer yet, for without objects to which it can attach itself, the drive is, strictly speaking, nothing – or at least nothing accessible to poetic praise. Hence begins the hopeless quest for an original object of desire, either in the form of questions:

Ihr Sterne,
 stammt nicht von euch des Liebenden Lust zu dem Antlitz
 siner Geliebten? Hat er die innige Einsicht
 in ihr reines Gesicht nicht aus dem reinen Gestirn? (II, 208)

O stars,
 isn't it from you that the lover's desire for the face
 of his beloved arises? Doesn't his secret insight
 into her pure features come from the pure constellations? (1995, 345)

Or in the form of negations:

Du nicht hast ihm, wehe, nicht seine Mutter
 hat ihm die Bogen der Braun so zur Erwartung gespannt.
 Nicht and dir, ihn fühlendes Mädchen, an dir nicht
 bog seine Lippe sich zum fruchtbarern Ausdruck. (II, 208)

Not you, his mother: alas, you were not the one
 who bent the arch of his eyebrows into such expectation.
 Not for you, girl so aware of him, not for your mouth
 did his lips curve themselves into a more fruitful expression. (1995, 345)

²⁰¹ A note in the diary of Lou Andreas-Salomé confirms that Rilke was familiar with and shared Freud's viewpoint. Cf. KA II, 637-638, where Freud is quoted:

Der eingreifendste Unterschied zwischen dem Liebesleben der alten Welt und der unsrigen liegt wohl darin, daß die Antike den Akzent auf den Trieb selbst, wir aber auf das Objekt verlegen. Die Alten feierten den Trieb und waren bereit, auch ein minderwertiges Objekt durch ihn zu adeln, während wir die Triebbestätigung an sich gering schätzen und sie nur durch die Vorzüge des Objekts entschuldigen lassen.

Rejecting a maternal origin of lust, Rilke imagines an irreducible multiplicity: “this: that we loved, inside us, not One who would someday appear, but / seething multitudes” (dies: *daß wir liebten in uns, nicht Eines, ein Künftiges, sondern / das zahllos Brauende*, 1995, 349/ II, 210). However, the refusal to indicate any particularly praiseworthy pursuit risks ending in phallic autoaffection. Posthumously published simply as *Sieben Gedichte*, Rilke’s so-called “phallic hymns” belong without a doubt to the more embarrassing than enchanting moments of modern lyric praise. They are, as one might expect, also among the most instructive. For what is intended in phallic praise is a total libidinal inversion.

Nun hob er sich und wächst zum Firmament
ein Spiegelbild das neben Bäumen steht.
O stürz ihn, daß er, umgedreht
in deinen Schoß, den Gegen-Himmel kennt,
in den er wirklich bäumt und wirklich ragt. (II, 136)

Now to the firmament it rose and grew,
a mirror-image resembling a tree.
O fell it, that, having turned unerringly
in your womb, it knows the counter-heaven anew,
it which it really towers and really races. (1975, 53)

“Daring landscape” (*Gewagte Landschaft*), Rilke calls this “counter-heaven,” which he proposes as alternative to empty transcendence (1975, 53/II, 136). That this is conceived in direct opposition to specifically Christian ideas of redemption is evidenced by the vocabulary of resurrection and ascension.

Begreife nur:
das ist mein Körper, welcher aufersteht.
Nun hilf ihm leise aus dem heißen Grabe
in jenen Himmel, den ich in dir habe:
daß kühn aus ihm das Überleben geht
Du junger Ort der tiefen Himmelfahrt. (II, 138)

But understand for sure
this is my body which is resurrected.

Now gently deliver it from the burning grave
into that heaven which in you I crave:
that from it survival be boldly effected.
You young place of ascension deep. (1975, 59)

The failure of these poems may be overdetermined, but it merits closer consideration. Their problem is not so much their overt phallocentrism as the very ambition to a poetry of the drive. If in Rilke's times the lyrics could still count as enticingly blasphemous or even obscene, ours are perhaps better equipped to see the depressing emptiness of unattached sexual fulfillment. The earthly paradise that Rilke's *Gegen-Himmel* promises is an immanent transcendence no less empty than the beyond it is meant to replace. Unless, that is, it becomes the medium of worthwhile engagements with the world, which then once again has to be praised as concrete particulars. This was of course the aim of Rilke's diversion of praise from heaven to earth, yet the insistence on a god in common leads to the phallus as lowest common denominator, a short-circuiting of desire that cancels out the very world that was to be affirmed.²⁰²

To do Rilke justice, one must understand his praise of the empty drive pragmatically as a counter-mythology in opposition to what he sees as modernity's repression of sex and death, which especially Christian religion has served increasingly to hide from view. Numerous letters testify to this concern, and one is particularly quoteworthy. Just as according to Freud the ancients could celebrate the drive itself, so for Rilke they were able

das Wort "Tod" ohne Negation zu lesen; wie der Mond, so hat gewiß das Leben eine uns dauernd abgewendete Seite, die *nicht* sein Gegen-Teil ist, sondern seine Ergänzung zur Vollkommenheit, zur Vollzähligkeit, zu der wirklichen heilen und vollen Sphäre und Kugel des *Seins*. (1977, 53)

²⁰² In a letter to Rudolf Bodländer, Rilke writes of a "phallischen Gottheit, die vielleicht die *erste* wird sein müssen, mit der wieder eine Götterschar bei den Menschen einbricht, nach so langer Abwesenheit" (quoted in KA II, 537).

to read the word “death” *without* negation; like the moon, life no doubt has a side perpetually turned from us, which is *not* its counter-part but its extension unto entirety, unto completion, unto the really whole and full sphere and globe of *being*.

What Rilke here articulates is nothing less than a new conception of the holy, which informs all his late works and in particular the great cycles for which he is chiefly remembered. “Being” is holy, that is whole, *not* when it has been cleansed of what appears its opposite and negation but once the experience of death has been understood as in every way intrinsic to the experience of life. A *Sonnet to Orpheus* puts it in the imperative: “Be – and yet know the great void where all things begin, / the infinite source of your own most intense vibration / so that, this once, you may give it your perfect assent.” (*Sei – und wisse zugleich des Nicht-Seins Bedingung, / den unendlichen Grund deiner innigen Schwingung, / daß du sie völlig vollziehst dieses einzige Mal*, 1995, 487/II, 263)²⁰³ Although this doctrine is espoused most clearly in the late works, it can be traced back to Rilke’s poetic beginnings. And indeed it forms part not only of his self-understanding but of his general conception of lyric poetry.

Oh sage, Dichter, was du tust?
– Ich rühme.
Aber das Tödliche und Ungetüme,
wie hältst du’s aus, wie nimmst du’s hin?
– Ich rühme. (II, 193)

Oh speak, poet, what do you do?
– I praise.
But the monstrosities and the murderous days,
how do you endure them, how do you take them?
– I praise. (1975, 79)

The “poet” is not simply Rilke himself, who is here rather providing a general justification of the lyric with all its embarrassments. It is not that loss could be endured through quick acts of lyric

²⁰³ Mitchell’s translation is here questionable at best: “des Nicht-Seins Bedingung” becomes “the great void where all things begin,” “Grund” becomes “source,” and “innig” becomes “most intense.” This is an example of the general tendency among Rilke’s translators to use conventional metaphysical vocabulary where the German also admits a more colloquial or at least less pompous rendering.

affirmation. But training in worldly praise – an after all not exclusively lyric activity – involves the insight that only what can be lost is worth affirming and commemorating in praise and, conversely, only what is praiseworthy can give cause for lament: “Only in the realm of Praising may Lament / walk.” (*Nur im Raum der Rühmung darf die Klage gehn*, 1995, 425/II, 244)²⁰⁴

Occasionally, Rilke goes even further, positing not just a certain unity of life and death but their *identity*:

Leben und Tod: sie sind im Kerne Eins.
Wer sich begreift aus seinem eignen Stamme,
der preßt sich selber zu dem Tropfen Weins
und wirft sich selber in die reinste Flamme. (II, 268)

Life and Death: they are one, at core entwined.
Who understands himself from his own strain
presses himself into a drop of wine
and throws himself into the purest flame. (1975, 83)

If these lines can be interpreted in Rilke’s favor, the fascination with suffering and violence, in which at times result his conception of the holy as unity of life and death, nonetheless has consequences for his poetics of praise. Especially in the *Elegies*, proximity to death is a prerequisite for affirmation of life. And reminders of this constant proximity are above all those who pass away just as life is about to begin. Curiously, it is not for their own sake that these apparently most pitiful figures call out to us.

Schließlich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr, die Frühentrückten,
man entwöhnt sich des Irdischen sanft, wie man den Brüsten
milde der Mutter entwächst. Aber wir, die so große
Geheimnisse brauchen, denen aus Trauer so oft
seliger Fortschritt entspringt –: *könnten* wir sein ohne sie? (II, 203)

In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us:

²⁰⁴ Translation modified. Mitchell has “should” for “darf,” but Rilke’s claim is not just that one “should” lament only that which deserves praise but that only the praiseworthy is lamentable, and that, correspondingly, lamentation is evidence of such worth.

they are weaned from earth's sorrows and joys, as gently as children
outgrow the soft breasts of their mothers. But we, who do need
such great mysteries, we for whom grief is so often
the source of our spirit's growth –: could we exist without *them*? (1995, 335)

Death, of course, is “soft” or “gentle” only to those who are already dead. Yet without
consciousness of death, it would not be possible to *live*. Rilke proceeds to derive from the death
of a young demigod the very origin of music and poetry.

Ist die Sage umsonst, daß einst in der Klage um Linos
wagende erste Musik dürre Erstarrung durchdrang;
daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah göttlicher Jüngling
plötzlich für immer enttrat, das Leere in jene
Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft. (II, 203-204)

Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus,
the daring first notes of song pierced through the barren numbness;
and then in startled space which a youth as lovely as a god
had suddenly left forever, the Void felt for the first time
that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us. (1995, 335; 337)

It is in the charged void left by something precious that lyric praise and lament first find their
purpose. An early death does not merely let the surviving call themselves lucky. The
determination to die young may bring a more intense life, as exemplified by the fate of the hero,
which the traditionally neglected *Sixth Elegy* depicts. Accepting an imminent end, the ancient
hero dispenses with reflection – which means that this ideal, no matter how praiseworthy, is
firmly opposed to lyric deliberations. An heroic existence cannot be premeditated, and even less
can it be imposed on others. Oblivious to this, Rilke's notorious *Fünf Gesänge*, hailing the
outbreak of war in August 1914, are an attempt to institute collectively and under modern
conditions a cult of the hero, affirming death in the name of life.

Rühmend: denn immer wars rühmlich,
nicht in der Vorsicht einzelner Sorge zu sein, sondern in *einem*
wagenden Geiste, sondern in herrlich
gefühlter Gefahr, heilig gemeinsam. (II, 109)

In praise: for it was always praiseworthy
not to dwell in caution amid individual cares, but in *one*
daring spirit, but in gloriously
felt danger, holy in common.

Nowhere else are so apparent the inherent risks of Rilkean holiness. Modern fragmentation is here suspended in celebration of a holy community consecrated by danger and death. Rilke's later retractions from this enthusiasm are complicated by the ubiquitously asserted identity of praise and lament, joy and suffering, life and death. For it all comes down to the proper understanding of this identity – its speculative truth, to use Hegelian terms. In Rilke, the crucial insight that life depends on death, and that *living* is always at the same time *dying*, can provoke praise of death itself. Just as the affirmation of an unfulfilled sexuality as constitutive of worldly engagements turned into praise of a phallic deity, so the recognition of death as part and condition of life ends in invocations of a violent war-god (II, 206). Such equivocations lie at the heart of many an instinctive suspicion against modern lyric praise. *Aber im Rühmen, o Freunde, rühmet den Schmerz auch*, Rilke exhorts (II, 109). Yet unadulterated pain can be praised only in virtue of something else that redeems it. And the mass destruction of modern warfare soon proved irredeemable.

La vie s'éclaire dans la mort des choses, Rilke writes in a poem he never published (V, 152). But whereas repression of death may lead to a meaningless life, death does not by itself retrieve any meaning lost. And still Rilke insists that even untimely death can be justified. Inquiring into his morbid fascination with dead youths, he deduces: "What they want of me is that I gently remove the appearance / of injustice about their death – which at times / slightly hinders their souls from proceeding onward." (*Was sie mir wollen? Leise soll ich des Unrechts / Anschein abtun, der ihrer Geister / reine Bewegung manchmal ein wenig behindert*, 335/ II, 203) These spirits are of course only what remains of the dead in the world of the living: a painting, an inscription. Even so, there may be reason to nourish the memory of a death as that of a great

injustice. The word “Unrecht” is here a poetological term, not a moral one, as indeed from the viewpoint of lyric praise an early death is a benefit, not a flaw. Dying young forecloses the alienation that Rilke throughout the *Elegies* and elsewhere associates with adulthood and contrasts with the fuller existence of the child. What is more, the very brevity of a life may serve to increase its value. “Transience value is a scarcity value in time” (*Der Vergänglichkeitswert ist ein Seltenheitswert in der Zeit*, X, 359) as Freud puts it in his peculiar short text “Vergänglichkeit.” Ironically, this is figured as a retort to a young poet who without concrete evidence has been identified with Rilke.²⁰⁵ Yet Freud’s enigmatic piece is a fiction, part psychoanalytic case story, part imaginative literature; and arguably no poetry displays a keener awareness of transience value than do Rilke’s late works. In a late poem bearing the very same title as Freud’s digression, Rilke once more makes use of the fountain to figure the unity of growth and decay.

Aber Verfall: ist er trauriger, als der Fontäne
 Rückkehr zum Spiegel, den sie mit Schimmer bestaubt?
 Halten wir uns dem Wandel zwischen die Zähne,
 daß er uns völlig begreift in sein schauendes Haupt. (II, 316)

But decline: is it any sadder than the fountain’s
 turning-back to the mirror, which it dusts with scintilla?
 Let us maintain ourselves between change’s teeth,
 so that its gazing head fully grasps us. (1996, 181)

Individual losses remain lamentable, but to reject loss itself is to reject life. The *Ninth Elegy* sings of “Things / which live by perishing” (*von Hingang / lebenden Dinge*, 387/II, 229) – it is thus not just our own lives that become precious faced with destruction but things themselves derive their worth – their life – from vanishing. And “transient, / they look to us for deliverance: us, the most transient of all” (*vergänglich, / traun sie ein Rettendes uns, den vergänglichsten, zu*, 387/II, 229). That something ephemeral should rely on something even more ephemeral may

²⁰⁵ This proposition was first made by Herbert Lehmann in “A Conversation between Freud and Rilke.” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 35 (1966): 423-427.

seem absurd, but just as transience increases the value of the time that is, so value amplifies the impression of transience. Hence what is most valuable, “we,” is also the most transient. All lyric praise, which enchants through the effective attribution of value, must reckon with this logic, whether knowingly or not.

So ist schnell / Vergänglich alles Himmlische; aber umsonst nicht, writes Hölderlin with typical authority (I, 363). Indeed, it is not for nothing that what is heavenly is also volatile: it is heavenly not in spite but because of its brevity. Modern lyric phenomena from the cults of Diotima and Maximin to the insistent praise of nymphs and sylphs all recognize and exploit this fact.

The problem of modern lyric praise is hereby far from resolved. The imperative to celebrate *this* world does not help distinguish among the objects in it, and new conceptions of the holy leave it all but a private matter. What is more, the risks are obvious. Blurring the line between critique and complicity, praise of animation fosters fetishism and narcissism, while the lyric tradition in praise of water ends in advertising. Beauty is a business largely delegated to fashion and design, whereas the praise of desire seems increasingly impossible in an age promising instant gratification and commanding enjoyment. At the same time, attempts to moderate the reign of human subjectivity apparently leave the field open for violent war-gods. Last but not least, the lyric affirmation of necessity lies endangers any commitment to truth, and the knowledge that life depends on loss provokes praise of destitution.

If even the greatest proponents of lyric praise occasionally fall prey to such confusions, one might feel compelled to ask whether the risks are worth taking. Indeed, because the lyric imperative to worldly praise encompasses the condition of eventual death, or because the incitement to hold something to be holy can result in ideological obfuscation, critics have deemed it best to get rid of lyric praise altogether and opt instead, as Paul de Man influentially

has it, for “non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say prosaic, or better, *historical* modes of language power” (1984, 262).

The question whether to venture the risks of a contemporary hymn remains *the* question of lyric as principal discourse for poetic enchantment. Of course, the activity of praise is not reserved for lyric poetry. But the lyric enchants through praise and praises through enchantment. Even if one views lyric as “argumentative song” (Walker), this goes to say it is *not* in fact purely argumentative. Advocates of such sobriety should ask themselves whether their lives could do without the whole/holy as that whose worth cannot be analyzed into constitutive parts (Hölderlin), and whether it can be rendered justice without regard for its whole-/holiness as inclusive of its demise (Rilke). If not, the modern lyric provides instruction.

Yet the scandal of the lyric persists. For why should poetry in particular be privy to what is praiseworthy? And is it not intolerable that the poetic genre laying greatest claim to earnestness and intimacy also insists on telling blatant lies? It is as though the lyric reduces truth to a function of poetic praise. Consider the rest of the previously quoted, programmatic poem of Rilke’s:

Aber das Namenlose, Anonyme,
wie rufst du’s, Dichter, dennoch an?
– Ich rühme.
Woher dein Recht, in jeglichem Kostüme,
in jeder Maske wahr zu sein?
– Ich rühme.
Und daß das Stille und das Ungestüme
Wie Stern und Sturm dich kennen?
:– weil ich rühme. (II, 193)

But the anonymous, the nameless grays,
how, poet, do you still invoke them?
– I praise.
What right have you, in all displays,
in every mask, to be genuine?
– I praise.
And that the stillness and the turbulent sprays
know you like star and storm?
:– since I praise. (1975, 79)

This type of legitimation can be traced back to some of the earliest lyrics that survive. For Marcel Detienne, truth in archaic Greece was essentially performative and inseparable from the practice of praise. "When the poet gives praise," writes Detienne, "he does so through *Alētheia* and in its name; his speech is *alēthēs*, as is his mind (*nous*)." (49) If one can comprehend the function of such "magico-religious" speech in a strictly hierarchical society not yet upset by philosophy, the question becomes what in modernity could possibly justify it. Addressing this question requires a *theory of poetic license*.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A THEORY OF POETIC LICENSE

*La poésie se distingue de la prose pour
n'avoir ni toutes les mêmes gênes, ni
toutes les même licences que celle-ci.*
Valéry

In his 1837 preface to the second edition of his *Buch der Lieder*, Heinrich Heine remarks on a "strange feeling" (*wunderliches Gefühl*):

Seit einiger Zeit sträubt sich etwas in mir gegen alle gebundene Rede, und wie ich höre, regt sich bey manchen Zeitgenossen eine ähnliche Abneigung. Es will mich bedünken, als sey in schönen Versen allzuviel gelogen worden, und die Wahrheit scheue sich, in metrischen Gewanden zu erscheinen. (I, 564)

For some time something in me has balked at any poetic language, and, as I hear, a similar disinclination has shown itself in many contemporaries. It would seem to me that all too many lies are told in beautiful verse, and that truth shrinks from appearing in metrical garb. (1982, 3)

What Heine describes is nothing less than the historical restriction of poetic license. Although warnings against lyric lies are as old as the genre itself, Heine rightfully perceives his sentiment as a sign of the times. The flight of the gods and the loss of divine sanction imposes on poets new forms of accountability. As the lyric's supporting discourses lose their grip, no longer guaranteeing their minimum of enchantment, poetry's internal means of legitimation are placed under scrutiny; and it becomes up to each individual poet to *earn* or indeed to *create* his or her poetic license. This has repercussions not only for contemporary poetic practice but for the credibility of versified speech in general.

Since Heine, suspicion against rhythmic ratification of questionable claims has proliferated. For Paul de Man reading Rilke, any apparent convergence of sound and meaning is mendacious insofar as it can naturalize the most paradoxical statements and generally renders the conventions of poetic (and specifically lyric) language disproportionately hospitable to

universal truths. Rilke may be the ultimate example of this sonorous seduction, yet he merely exploits most expertly our innate propensity to believe that what sounds good must also make good sense. This credulity, of which Heine's suspicion is the corollary, seems an anthropological constant.

Such a basic feeling cannot be completely eradicated – and still today, after millennia of work at fighting such superstition, even the wisest of us occasionally becomes a fool for rhythm, if only insofar as he *feels* a thought to be *truer* when it has a metric form and presents itself with a hop, skip, and jump. Is it not amusing that the most serious philosophers, strict as they otherwise are in all matters of certainty, still appeal to the *sayings of poets* [Dichtersprüche] to lend their thoughts force and credibility? (2001, 85-86)

These words, quoted already at the end of chapter three, belong to a great admirer of Heine's, namely Nietzsche. Or rather they belong to one version of Nietzsche. Another version would no doubt agree that rhythm has cognitive functions and that a thought may very well be truer – or, indeed, falser – for having meter.

Wolfgang Binder has argued influentially that Hölderlin's odes – to be classified metrically as either alcaic or asclepiadic – demonstrate a remarkable relationship between rhythm and (truth-)content. Rather than questioning the very distinction between prosody and cognition, Binder locates in "Hölderlin's Verskunst" a quasi organic unity. For the two types of stanza are almost instantly recognizable from the kinds of movement they project: The alcaic measure imposes no sharp interruptions; it downplays line breaks and caesurae through its even alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. Nowhere – not even between stanzas – does an accumulation of stresses impede the reading.²⁰⁶ On Binder's account, it is therefore

²⁰⁶ Hölderlin's alcaic stanza:

u—u—u | —uu—u—
 u—u—u | —uu—u—
 u—u—u—u—u
 —uu—uu—u—u

exceptionally suited to the narrative aspects of lyric, to the account of historical processes and subjective transformations. This is in stark contrast to the asclepiadic form, which compounds the ictus at both caesurae and line breaks, forcing the reader to pause and parcel the stanza into often contrasting discrete units, which makes it especially apt for declarative, dialectical modes of speech. I have already cited a handful of Hölderlin's odes, most of which are alcaic. For reference, here is another asclepiadic poem together with its metric blueprint and Michael Hamburger's translation:

Wenn ihr Freunde vergeßt, wenn ihr den Künstler höhnt,
 Und den tieferen Geist klein und gemein versteht,
 Gott vergibt es, doch stört nur
 Nie den Frieden der Liebenden. (I, 192)

— u — u u — | — u u — u —
 — u — u u — | — u u — u —
 — u — u u — x
 — u — u u — u —

If you drop an old friend, laugh at the artist and
 Meanly, vulgarly judge, wronging the deeper mind,
 God forgives you; but never
 Break the quiet that lovers know. (2013, 93)

“Das Unverzeihliche” is constructed around an immediately evident antithesis: on the one hand, what is despicable yet nonetheless pardonable; on the other hand, veritable breach of divine law. This opposition is reinforced by a number of metrically motivated correspondences (*Freunde vergeßt – Künstler höhnt*) and contrasts (*tiefere Geist – Klein und gemein*). As Binder points out, there stands on each side of the asclepiadic caesura *one* notion, just as the ensuing pherecratic and glyconic juxtapose God's forgiveness with the one unforgivable sin. In summary, then:

[The asclepiadic stanza] forms arrangements, orders, architectures – in logical thoughts as above, but also in optical images and other materials that beg to be divided into parts.

This is in distinction to the alcaic stanza's character of movement, which in its wavelike motion makes palpable animated activity, in the soul or outside in objective reality. (94)

Just as Hölderlin would move on from odic forms, so scholarship on Hölderlin's rhythm has progressed far beyond Binder's somewhat schematic analyses, which have been justly criticized. Not only are there to be found pithy maxims in alcaic forms and narrative elements in asclepiadic measures, but the very convergence of form and content, which nevertheless remain distinct, has fallen into disrepute. What Binder venerates as "an almost naturalistic interpretation of rhythm" (*eine fast naturalistische Ausdeutung des Rhythmus*, 95) has repeatedly been exposed as anything but natural. And indeed it would be naïve to assume the asclepiadic rhythm to validate Hölderlin's "logical thoughts." A statement is a priori neither more nor less true for fitting into a pre-fabricated metric form. The asclepiadic stanza's hospitality to gnomic thought says nothing about the veracity of Hölderlin's proclamations. On the contrary, this mere semblance of truth only raises further suspicion concerning the poet's prophetic pretensions – at least in the modern critical mind.

Hölderlin's poetry teems with brief maxims and gnomic reflections. For the most part, they are embedded in larger lyric structures, but occasionally such a saying is placed at the beginning of a poem, as in *Patmos*, or makes up its entirety, as in "Das Unverzeihliche." Especially the latter case is instructive, for here no attempt at legitimation precedes or succeeds the claim itself. No dialectic justifies the statement rationally, and we are furthermore prevented from ascribing it to any fictional persona. We are compelled, in other words, to trust in the authority of the poet's vatic voice, afforded by his role as a "master of truth" or the deceptive verisimilitude of versification.

Few poets employ this technique as notoriously as a Hölderlin high on Pindar, but oracular declarations are an unmistakable element of both the ancient and the modern lyric. This Rilkean example from the last chapter is worthy of Delphi:

*Leben und Tod: sie sind im Kerne Eins.
Wer sich begreift aus seinem eignen Stamme,
der preßt sich selber zu dem Tropfen Weins
und wirft sich selber in die reinste Flamme. (II, 268)*

Although supposedly less under the sway of archaic models, the modern French lyric does not dispense with free-floating prophetic pronouncements. One need not look further than to the title of Mallarmé's most famous poem; for what is "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" if not precisely a prophecy of universal import? One may say with Meillassoux that Mallarmé's claim is justified – and the prophecy fulfilled – by the poem as a whole, but the saying is metrically (typographically) set off against the rest of the text in a way that not only permits but encourages its detachment as a general maxim.

Common to these statements is the importance of meter and rhythm (including end rhymes and typographical arrangements) for how they are to be understood. Again, a claim is *a priori* neither more nor less true for having meter; rather, prosody transforms the statement itself, which may well be truer in verse because its meter is now part of the statement. Yet this in no way predisposes the "sayings of poets" – Nietzsche's *Dichtersprüche* – for truth. As certain critics do not tire of cautioning, a statement may just as well merely *seem* truer – and thereby be *less* true – for having meter. And so we may think, for instance, that Hölderlin's demonstrated erudition, his education in philosophy and theology, entitles him to pronouncements that would otherwise seem unfounded; but there is nothing about his capacity as a poet – that is, as an expert maker of verse – which legitimizes them.

"Wisdom is both the principle and fount of writing well" (*scribende recte sapere est et principium et fons*, 309), Horace writes in his *Ars Poetica*. Ironically he turns in the very next sentence to Socrates, that great skeptic of poetic wisdom: "The Socratic papers can point out the subject matter for you" (*rem tibi Socraticae poterunt ostendere chartae*, 310). Yet perhaps the irony is only apparent. Mark Payne has argued that the Socratic dialogues' seemingly unfaithful discussions of archaic poetry may in fact be entirely in the spirit with which it was

composed. Taking as example the treatment in *Gorgias* of a Pindaric gnome, Payne calls it “a structure that invites its users to dismantle it and use it as they will” (2006, 173). A poetics of prophecy, then, would have to account for the constitution of such statements. It would also have to explain how they can retain their claims on readers once has dissipated the mystique of monolithic truth.

Here meter and rhythm of course play an unmistakable mnemonic role. Lyrics’ gnomic statements ask to be remembered and repeated in different circumstances, not just by being rhythmically seductive and thereby memorable but also, as in Binder’s examples, by being metrically aligned with other such statements. In addition, the asclepiadic stanza slows down the reading, inviting contemplation. It is worth emphasizing once more that the metric structure itself by no means can guarantee the poet’s declarations in fact to merit such consideration. But in rendering plausible statements that might otherwise seem questionable, metric-rhythmic enchantment may serve to indicate how an apparently false or trivially true dictum can hold universal validity or a new truth for each age. This feature sharply distinguishes the exhortatory poetry of Pindar from more decidedly didactic genres.

In Payne’s examples – which, beside Pindar, include Hölderlin, Celan, and Stevens – the reader becomes as much a source of truth as is the author. For Payne, the gnomic language of these poets provides conceptual resources whose very aim it is to be appropriated and reapplied in the light of ever new circumstances. However, although Payne’s account is helpful for understanding how there need be no contradiction between radical repurposing and remaining true to authorial intention, its focus on the emergence of novelty – that is of new cognitive possibilities – makes him relatively oblivious to the fact that the truth claims of modern and archaic lyrics provide not only resources but also restrictions, as in “Das Unverzeihliche.” That the world is in one way does, after all, mean that it is *not* in another way. The emphasis on conceptual resources is, therefore, perhaps deceptively innocuous.

Payne is careful to stress the capacity of lyrics to make nonfictional assertions about the world. Such claims are rarely objective, neutral, or open to verification. More often they are axiological, normative, even injunctive. The inventive language in which are housed the lyric's ostensibly timeless sayings does provide the resources to reevaluate values and to rearticulate our relationship to the world, but it does not do so neutrally or transparently. When Pindar proclaims, "That which comes from inborn nature is mightiest of all" (τὸ δὲ φύξ κράτιστον ἅπαν, *Olympian* 9, 100), or, "Someone of inborn distinction carries a lot of weight" (συγγενεῖ δέ τις εὐδοξία μέγα βρίθει, *Nemean* 3, 40), he prompts us, still today and regardless of what interpretive liberties we might allow ourselves, to think about the world, and the values we ascribe to it, in a very specific way.

If the conceptual invention of poets is never neutral nor even grounded in any internal consistency – the deficiency by which Payne distinguishes it from philosophy (2007, 14) – then why, again, should they be privy to some special knowledge regarding the constitution of the world, and hence regarding what is to be praised and what is to be blamed?

The answer, of course, is that they are not – at least not a priori, as a necessary result or prerequisite of writing lyrically. Rather, the lyric subordinates even the most authoritative truth claims to the end of regulating enchantment. Lyric language does not just praise through enchantment and enchant through praise; it does not simply espouse certain values but indeed supplies transhistorical linguistic (rhythmic and semantic) structures that promote the perpetual renegotiation of values. Successful lyric gnomes have their readers or listeners ask: "What must the world be like in order for this claim both to have been true there and then *and* to be true here and now, though not necessarily in the same way?"

It may always happen that no conceivable world will accord simultaneously with the poet's saying and with what we know from elsewhere to be the case, making the statement dispensable – or embarrassing. Even conceptually inventive lyric gnomes may lose all purchase and have to be discarded as lacking anything but historical interest. It is not the job of a theory

of the lyric to recuperate them. Such a theory should, however, be able to account for the mechanisms behind their success or their failure. Archaic lyric gnomes are not a primitive version of moral philosophy, nor is the ensuing lyric tradition of gnomic writing mere remnants from a time when (proto-)philosophical thinking happened in verse. At the same time, the transhistorical success of some lyric gnomes is not a matter of coincidence. Vatic speech is a strategy for lyric enchantment and as such a poetic skill, though it has little to do with foretelling the future. On the contrary: vatic speech succeeds in the lyric when it remains open to radically different futures without foregoing the necessary concretion of lyric language. The transhistorical test of lyric oracles does not concern their overall veracity but rather the range of (individual, cultural, historical) circumstances under which their concepts have traction.²⁰⁷ Yet the lyric can never immunize itself against the embarrassment of failed prophecy. The point is that this risk is not extraneous but built into the logic of the lyric as precisely a medium of enchantment *and* embarrassment. And the higher the aim, the harder the fall. Which makes the crafting of lyric gnomes and vatic speech among the riskiest of lyric strategies for enchantment.

It is not least from this poetological perspective that one must understand the prevalence, in both ancient and modern lyrics, of admonitions and calls for sobriety. What Hölderlin inherits from Pindar is not so much the vatic voice as a dialectic of hubris and humility, not to say humiliation. (Valéry's Pindaric epigraph for *Le Cimetière marin* is of course another example of this inheritance.) For if lyric pronouncements of professedly universal import serve to regulate the balance between enchantment and disenchantment, they do not aim always at enchantment, even though this would already imply the occasional failure and embarrassment. Lyric gnomes are perhaps in fact more frequently sobering than they are intoxicating: *Drum wohl ihm, welcher fand / Ein wohlbeschiedenes Schicksaal* (Hölderlin, I, 345). Often they are both at once: *Doch dies ist Sache der Götter*. (Rilke, II, 207) Crucially, lyric warnings against hubris include

²⁰⁷ The importance of this feature for our understanding of what constitutes success in the genre should be taken into account when assessing the relatively tardive evaluation of lyric works and the reluctance of even the least commercial institutions to promote them.

warnings against such far-reaching statements of which the warnings themselves are instances. When Pindar admonishes in the first *Olympian*, “If a man thinks his deeds will escape a god’s notice, / he is mistaken” (εἰ δὲ θεὸν ἀνὴρ τις ἔλπεται τι λαθέμεν ἔρδων, / ἀμαρτάνει, 63-64), the caution encompasses acts of lyric enchantment, which evidently involve more than a few glorious lies.

ἦ θαυματὰ πολλά, καὶ πού τι καὶ βροτῶν φάτις ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον
δεδαιδαλμένοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις ἐξαπατῶντι μῦθοι
Χάρις δ’ ἄπερ ἅπαντα τεύχει τὰ μείλιχα θνατοῖς,
ἐπιφέρουσα τιμὰν καὶ ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πιστὸν
ἔμμεναι τὸ πολλὰκις:
ἀμέραι δ’ ἐπίλοιποι
μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι. (28-34)

There are indeed many wonders,
and it may be that in men’s talk
stories are embroidered beyond the truth,
and so deceive us with their elaborate lies,
since the beguiling charm of words,
the source of all sweet pleasures for men,
adds lustre and veracity to the unbelievable.
The days to come will be the wisest judge of that (2007, 3-4)

Following de Man on Rilke, these famous lines would amount to a confession and a concession that threaten to undermine in advance the validity of Pindar’s vatic claims and perhaps of lyric assertions more generally. Indeed the gnome casts a shadow of doubt over the ensuing mythical narrative, which is furthermore contrasted with versions sung by other bards, whose authority is thereby relativized. And any reason to give greater weight to Pindar’s account will have to be sought in the “beguiling charm” of his words.

However, the passage from Pindar also provides an ingenious defense of poetic enchantment in general, and of prophetic enchantment in particular. The apparent commonplace that “days to come will be the wisest judge” is typical Pindaric augury, warning against its own pretension. For the future will judge not least Pindar’s own proclamations, thereby fulfilling this individual prophecy while rendering others obsolete and embarrassing.

More importantly, the epinician supplies a plea for poetic license to those who would rather seek to escape the risks of lyric lies and thereby forsake the possibility of poetic enchantment. It is not so much that lyric poetry would be “the source of all sweet pleasures for men.” Rather, there *are* “indeed many wonders.” This can be understood in two ways. Undoubtedly, even in a world without miracles, there is much to wonder at, and of which the lyric, as the principal discourse of poetic enchantment, must speak. But Pindar’s statement simultaneously serves to alert us to the fact that the world is always, through whatever mythic means and however minimally, *already* enchanted; and some myths are best tackled using enchanting counter-mythology – or indeed with lyric lies. The lyric is not simply a vehicle for enchantment but a medium for the regulation of (dis)enchantment, exploring its potentials and warning against its dangers. Its ceaseless dialectic of wonder and sobriety, hubris and humiliation, pathos and bathos, aims not at unbridled enthusiasm but at conviction in enchantment and embarrassment alike.

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