Symphilosophie

Romantic Religion

Dissolution and Transcendence in the Poetics of Hölderlin

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ABSTRACT

A central element of Hölderlin's poetic project was to find a new language for transcendence in an age of immanence. To do so, he turned not to philosophy or theology, but to poetics. Its rhythmic nature, he argued, was capable of re-presenting the transcendent. This examination will begin with a brief historical consideration of the relation of transcendence and immanence, with particular attention to the influential philosophies of Spinoza and Fichte. It then proceeds to Hölderlin's consideration of the loss of the language of transcendence, and his project to develop a new one. The final section will examine how Hölderlin aimed to achieve this in his poetics.

Keywords: Romanticism, poetics, Hölderlin, transcendence, religion

RÉSUMÉ

Un élément central du projet poétique de Hölderlin était de trouver un nouveau langage pour dire la transcendance à l'âge de l'immanence. Pour ce faire, il s'est tourné non pas vers la philosophie ou la théologie mais vers la poétique. La nature rythmique de la poésie, affirmait-il, était capable de re-présenter le transcendant. Le présent article commence par un bref historique de la relation entre transcendance et immanence, avec une attention particulière prêtée à l'influence des philosophies de Spinoza et de Fichte. Il passe ensuite à la réflexion de Hölderlin sur la perte du langage de la transcendance et à son projet d'en élaborer un nouveau. La dernière partie de l'article examine la manière dont Hölderlin a cherché à réaliser ce projet dans sa poétique.

Mots-clés: romantisme, poétique, Hölderlin, transcendance, religion

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Introduction

C. D. Friedrich, *The Jakobikirche in Greifswald as a Ruin*, 1817
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It is something of a cliché to begin a consideration of German Romanticism with an image by Caspar David Friedrich.[1] However, *The Jakobikirche in Greifswald as a Ruin* (c. 1817), is particularly illustrative of the important religious dimension of early German Romanticism. The sketch, perhaps the study for an unrealized painting, transforms the church in Friedrich's native birthplace, still intact today, into a ruin.[2] As the viewer, we are situated in the nave, looking toward the altar directly in front of us. Almost the entirety of the church's roof is missing, leaving the columns that run the length of the nave pointing heavenward, their abaci now supporting only the wild plants that grow from them. Somewhat incongruous with the rest of the ruination

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[1] This article is based on a paper that was delivered at the Post-Secular Perspectives on Romantic and Victorian Poetry Colloquium, Duke University, September 2019. For a more detailed presentation of the topic of romantic religion, see: Alexander J.B. Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[2] Matthew Hargraves and Rachael Sloan, *A Dialogue with Nature: Romantic Landscapes from Britain and Germany* (London: Holberton, 2014), 46–47.

is the state of the apse, whose vaulting remains intact, and from which the figure of the crucified Christ is suspended. Christ's head leans slightly to his right, as if to make eye contact with the two of Friedrich's hallmark *Rückenfiguren* who stand below and toward the side aisle, surveying the ruin.

More conventionally, Friedrich's ruined church could be understood as a representation of the state of religion, depicting it as a crumbling institution in an ever-secularising world. Yet while it is undoubtedly a comment on religion in general, and Western European Christianity in particular, to interpret the ruin so does not do justice to the Romantic project it represents. For the Romantics the old language of transcendence, the language of the institutes of religion, was indeed in ruins, but this ruination betokened renewal. The roof opened to the sky, and the columns pointing heavenward, gesture toward the mythological abode of the transcendent. By rendering the church momentarily porous, the institutional language that had lost its meaning gives way to the transcendent which continues to exist beyond it. Friedrich's ruination of the intact church does in pen and ink what the early German Romantics sought to achieve by their own aesthetic explorations. The divine remained but the past language of transcendence had ceased to function in an age that increasingly thought in terms of immanence alone.

The Romantic desire to reconstitute this language was not merely sentimental or reactionary. The language of transcendence provided the unifying ground of subject and object, self and nature. With this ground gone, these conceptual pairs seemed increasingly to present themselves as antinomies. The vocation of the Romantic poet, as Friedrich Hölderlin saw it, was to reconstitute this language:

> Zu Sorg' und Dienst den Dichtenden anvertraut!
> Der Höchste, der ists, dem wir geeignet sind
> Daß näher, immerneu besungen
> Ihn die befreundete Brust vernehme.[3]

Here, in his poem *Dichterberuf* (*The Poet's Vocation*), Hölderlin writes of how the poets must now take up the duty of the hierophant. In doing so, however, he cautions that they must avoid both aesthetic egoism and intellectual arrogance, since to do so would come at the cost of their divine end:

> Furchtlos bleibt aber, so er es muß, der Mann
> Einsam vor Gott, es schützet die Einfalt ihn,
> Und keiner Waffen brauchts und keiner

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[3] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke (Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe),* eds. Friedrich Beißner, Adolf Beck (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1946–1985), 8 vols., II.1, 46-48, ll. 13-16 (Hereafter, GSA). "A different task and calling is entrusted to poets! | The Highest, he it is whom we serve | So that more closely, ever newly snug, | He will be heard with a friendly heart."

Listen, so lange, bis Gottes Fehl hilft.[4]

According to Hölderlin, rather than being attentive to the divine presence that they seek, the poets must instead be aware of the divine absence that is their challenge. In the same way that the ruination of the Jakobikirche by Friedrich opens again the possibility of divine communion, 'God's absence helps' the Romantic poet according to Hölderlin.

The past twenty years have seen tremendous contributions made to the study of early German Romanticism. In particular, this work has demonstrated the unique contribution the movement made to the history of philosophy, bringing it out of the long shadow cast by idealism.[5] However, the story of early German Romanticism is not one of philosophy alone. What has often received less attention is the role of religion in Romantic thought; a responsibility that must be taken up by those in the field of the study of religion. The concerns of religion play an undeniably central role in its intellectual history. Focusing upon the thought of Hölderlin, this examination places early German Romanticism in the context of the history of religion, at a time when the religious outlook of the West was undergoing profound change. Hölderlin was concerned with the loss of divine language, which had the capacity to hold together subject and object, self and nature, in a transcendent ground that united both. The loss of this language made these conceptual pairs appear increasingly as antinomies. This was evinced in the popular, but mutually exclusive philosophies of Spinoza and Fichte, which both sought an immanent foundation to replace the loss of the transcendent. A central element of Hölderlin's poetic project was to find a new language for transcendence in an age of immanence. To do so, he turned not to philosophy or theology, but to poetics, whose rhythmic nature, he argued, was capable of re-presenting transcendence. This examination will begin with a brief historical consideration of the relation of transcendence and immanence, before proceeding to Hölderlin's consideration of the loss of the language of transcendence, and the need to develop a new one. The final section will examine how Hölderlin aimed to achieve this in his poetics.

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[4] Ibid., GSA II.1, 46-48, l. 61-64. "But fearless remains, as he must, man | lonely before God, simplicity protects him, | and no weapons are needed and no artifices, | so long, until God's absence helps."

[5] See Margarete Kohlenbach, "Transformations of German Romanticism 1830-2000," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicolas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 271-275; Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "Romanticismo e postmoderno: Variazioni incomprese sulla critica della modernità," in *Prospettive sul Postmoderno*, vol. I, ed. by N. G. Limantis and L. Pastore (Milan: Mimesis, 2006), 27-59; Alexander J.B. Hampton "Religion and the Problem of Subjectivity in the Reception of Early German Romanticism," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology/Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte*, no. 22 (2015): 35-58.

1. Immanence and transcendence

In the past it was often the case that one encountered two mutually exclusive characterisations of Early German Romanticism, either as the aesthetic articulation of post-Kantian Fichtean egoism, or as the literary extension of Spinozistic monist pantheism. Both subsume the movement into immanentizing philosophical developments, which it in fact it resisted. Indeed, the incompatibility of these readings points toward their inadequacy, and the need to examine the wider intellectual-historical situation of the movement. This requires the adoption of a standpoint which is wider than that of the Enlightenment, the rise of critical idealism, or the age of revolution, and examining it in relation to much longer-term trends in the intellectual history of the West. In particular, this means giving due consideration to the gradual evolution of the system and structure of knowledge. Here one can draw upon a range of late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship by a diverse range of authors such as Marcel Gauchet, John Milbank, Michael Allen Gillespie, Jan Aertsen, and Charles Taylor.[6] Though their work differs in significant ways, what they hold in common is an overarching attempt to outline the transition from an understanding of reality secured in the transcendent, where the meaning and truth of things ultimately resided with the supernatural, to an immanent understanding, set over and against the transcendent, where meaning was grounded in the natural order, whether that be physical nature, or the self, or some uneasy combination of the two.

While a description of this transition is far beyond the bounds of this brief explanation, it is possible to illustrate this change briefly. The transcendent worldview was defined by its theurgic understanding of the cosmos, wherein all finite reality was shaped by God, not at a distance, but immanently. An illustrative example of this may be found in Bonaventura's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. In terms of nature, the text describes how "We may behold God in the mirror of visible creation, not only by considering creatures as vestiges of God, but also by seeing Him in them; for He is present in them by His essence, His power, and His presence."[7] Alternately, however, the same is true for the self. "Entering into ourselves," writes Bonaventure, "we ought to strive to see God … Here the light of Truth, as from a candelabra, will shine upon the face of our mind, in which the image of the

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[6] Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde: une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[7] Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), II.1, 11.

most Blessed Trinity appears in splendor."[8] In both cases, whether one turns inward or outward, to the subject or object, both are unified by the divine transcendent foundation that is beyond the particularity of both.

Over a long period, this God-saturated transcendent worldview changed through a process of conceptual evolution and reform, that can be termed immanentization. It is not possible to pinpoint any particular historical moment where this process begins. Indeed, the case can be made that it was always present. However, the process of the ascendency of this immanent view of reality began to coalesce with the development of late mediaeval nominalism, and was secured with the foundational role of this form of thought in the powerful intellectual revolution brought about by the Reformation. Immanentization allowed for the development of a worldview that could operate without reference to the transcendent. In so doing it came to exist, by incremental degrees, in opposition to the transcendent worldview as the legitimate understanding of reality. This is succinctly expressed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which brings us to the period from which Romanticism would emerge. In it we can find one of the first antithetical, binary uses of the terms transcendent and immanent.[9] Kant writes:

> We will call the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience immanent, but those that would fly beyond those boundaries, transcendent principles.[10]

Here, immanent and transcendent are opposed forms of knowing, with the former favoured, having its ground in experience, and the latter questioned, as moving beyond empirical strictures. Kant's position, and the development of critical idealism in general, was not so much the inauguration of a new way of thinking, as it was the punctuation point on a long process of immanentization. Kant may have said that he was 'limiting reason in order to make room for faith', but he was equally denying faith understanding of its object, and his language of transgressive flight is tinged with the accusation of *Schwärmerei*.[11] This was reflective of a larger state of affairs, where the immanent understanding of reality, as we can see in Kant's statement, is set over and against transcendent realism, such that transcendent statements appear increasingly problematic, unfounded, and even anachronistic.

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[8] Ibid., III.1, 18.

[9] Johannes Zachhuber, "Transcendence and Immanence," in *The Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Christian Theology*, ed. Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 164-181; Merold Westphal, "Immanence and Transcendence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, ed. Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111-126.

[10] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 295-6/B 352), edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 385.

[11] "Thus I had to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*", Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx, 117.

This process of immanentization also set out one of the definitive tasks of modern philosophy, which was to find an immanent ontology that no longer relied on problematic transcendent foundations. Though radically divergent, both Spinoza and Fichte shared this definitive task. If the aim of establishing this ontology was approached *ab extra* (i.e. from the standpoint of the object), as is the case with the substance monism of Spinoza, the foundation becomes the one monist substance that constitutes all reality. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza claims: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."[12] Consequently, according to Spinoza's logic, it is impossible to suppose that things could be other than the unique, infinite and necessary substance that Spinoza called God. God, therefore, was not transcendent of the world, but indistinguishable from it. Spinoza wrote that, "God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things."[13] Spinoza's collapse of transcendence into immanence was expressed in his oft-quoted formulation "*Deus sive Natura*," which meant that it was possible to conceive of the world in two separate ways beneath one infinite substance.[14] If on the other hand the aim of establishing an immanent ontology was approached *ab intra* (i.e. from the standpoint of the subject), as with the transcendental idealism of Fichte, then the foundation becomes the principle of the "I". At the centre of Fichte's philosophy is the self-determining activity of the ego, which was the ground of experience and the basis for consciousness. Fichte argued that philosophy need not generate its own first principle; rather it had only to engage this "I" to initiate an action free from a series of causes.

In this light, whilst the philosophical systems of both philosophers radically diverge from one another — Spinoza designating the single monist substance which constitutes all reality as foundational, and Fichte designating the principle of the "I", which thinks all reality, as foundational — they share the distinctively modern task of providing an immanentized ontology respectively through either substance or self, object and subject. With Spinoza and Fichte, Hölderlin and his fellow Romantics encountered two extremes of philosophy, both of which were separately capable of offering an immanent philosophical foundation, yet together constituted a problematic antinomy.

2. The loss of a transcendent language

Hölderlin would explore this problematic antinomy, making it the subject of both philosophical and poetic explorations. In the fragmentary *Über Religion*, Hölderlin observes how both physical causation and the moral

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[12] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, Proposition 15, in Spinoza, *Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), 40.
[13] Ibid., Part I, proposition 18, 46.
[14] Ibid., Part IV, proposition 4, proof, 158.

imperative constitute forms of divergent necessity, which nevertheless simultaneously adhere.[15] In turn, this leads us to search for a 'higher context' that unifies the two.[16] In searching for this, Hölderlin writes that: "Neither from himself alone, nor only from the objects surrounding him, can one experience that there is more than mechanism, that a spirit, a god, is in the world, but in a more living relation, raised above need, in which he exists with what surrounds him."[17] This 'living relation', the text goes on to explain, cannot be expressed conceptually. Hölderlin comments: "Those more infinite, more than necessary relations in life can also indeed be thought, but not *merely* thought; thought does not exhaust them."[18] Instead, they are expressed in action, as Hölderlin describes in his poem *Heimkunft*. The poem details the poet's return home to his family. It articulates his joy in returning to familiar countryside, the friendly faces of his neighbours, and the warm voice of his mother. Yet in responding to these he writes of how he lacks a language sufficient for expressing these 'living relations' whose nature is beyond causal and moral necessity. At home he blesses the family meal, and in enjoying kinship, he gives thanks. However, in both instances he asks to whom such thanks should be directed: "Vieles hab' ich gehört vom großen Vater und habe | Lange geschwiegen von ihm."[19] Consequently, Hölderlin sees his age as lacking a language for the holy that can express this sense of a reality beyond necessity: "Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Namen, | Herzen schlagen und doch bleibet die Rede zurück?"[20]

Hölderlin further elaborates this sense of a lost language in a letter written around the same time. He describes his own age as sharing conditions not unlike those that adhered just before the birth of Jesus and the emergence of Christianity. Both his own age and that of the late first century BC were times of spiritual dissolution. But both are also deeply pregnant with anticipation:

> The way things are now had to come about, particularly with regard to religion, and it is now with religion almost as it was when Christ appeared in the world. But just as winter is followed by spring, so the spiritual death of man has always been followed by new life, and the holy always remains holy, regardless of whether people respect it. And

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[15] GSA IV.1, 275–81. "'Herzen schlagen und doch bleibet die Rede zurück?' Philosophy, Poetry, and Hölderlin's Development of Language Sufficient to the Absolute," in *Philosophy and Literature and the Crisis of Metaphysics?*, ed. Sebastian Hüsch (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 20-33.

[16] GSA IV.1, 275

[17] GSA IV.1, 278.

[18] Ibid.

[19] GSA II.1, 98 (ll. 86-7). "Much have I heard of him, the great Father, | and long have I remained silent about him."

[20] GSA II.1, 99 (ll. 102-03). "Often we must remain silent; lacking in names that are holy | Hearts pound and nevertheless speech remains behind?"

there will be many who are more religious in their hearts than they like to or can say, and perhaps many of our preachers, who simply cannot find the words, say more in their sermons than others suspect because the words that they need are so ordinary and have been misused a thousand times.[21]

In particular, two things stand out in this passage. The first is the description of a loss of language appropriate for the transcendent and the holy, responsible for what Hölderlin calls a 'spiritual death'.[22] This is the case, he explains, for individuals, who are unable to express the feeling in their hearts, as well as for the clergy, who have inherited a language of religion that has become meaningless through both misuse and overuse. Later in the same letter, Hölderlin describes his own unwillingness to express his spiritual convictions for fear that he will be condemned by dogmatists for his heterodoxy, and equally by atheists for his foolishness.[23] This leads to the second element that stands out in the passage, expressed by his claim that 'the holy always remains holy'.[24] The loss of a holy language does not mean the destruction of the holy; rather divinity abides without a human voice. This same sentiment is expressed in Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion*, where the protagonist, in the context of the modern Greek landscape, considers the present state of the antique god Apollo: "Now he rose in his eternal youth, the ancient Sun God, [...] and smiled down upon his deserted country, on his temples, his pillars, which fate had thrown down before him like withered rose petals that a child thoughtlessly tore from the bush as it passed and scattered over the ground."[25] In both cases, despite the loss of a language, the object of that language remains, and the task of finding a new one becomes the vocation of the Romantic poet.

In a letter to Schiller, Hölderlin wrote of his plans to address this lacking spiritual language, whilst at the same time, identifying its loss with the problematic division of subject and object that resulted from immanentized ontology:

I want to find the principle that will explain, to my satisfaction, the divisions in which we think and exist, but which is also capable of making the conflict disappear, the conflict between the subject and the object, between our selves and the world, and between reason and revelation, - theoretically, through the intellect, without our practical reason having to intervene. We need an aesthetic sense to do this... [26]

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[21] GSA VI.1, 310.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] GSA III, 15-16.
[26] GSA VI.1, 203.

Hölderlin develops this aesthetic sense in his epistolary novel *Hyperion, oder der Eremit in Griechenland,* his largest complete poetical achievement. In it he sought to move away from speculative philosophy, and to explore the struggle between the ideal and real aesthetically. He outlined this in one of the many draft prefaces he wrote for the work:

> We tear ourselves loose from the peaceful *hen kai pan* of the world, in order to restore it through ourselves. We have fallen out with nature, and what was once one, as we can believe, is now in conflict with itself, and each side alternates between lordship and servitude. Often it is as though the world were everything and we nothing, but often too it is as though we were everything and the world nothing. Hyperion too was divided between these two extremes—to end that eternal conflict between our self and the world, to restore the peace of all peace that is higher than reason, to unite ourselves with nature into one infinite whole—that is the goal of all our striving, whether we want to understand it or not.[27]

In this passage, Hölderlin articulates what he understands to be the condition of his present age: All individuals are rendered as either lords over nature, or servants to it. All seek unity with nature, or liberation from it. Together, these respectively represented the immanent fundamental principles of Fichte's 'I' and Spinoza's substance. In the novel *Hyperion,* this struggle is dramatized in the striving of the eponymous protagonist: He attempts to liberate Greece in failed revolution. He experiences the ecstasy of love and tragic loss. He confronts betrayal and reconciliation in the intensity of philosophical friendship. Yet none of these particular moments overcomes the division that Hölderlin describes him as experiencing. Instead, it is only within the retrospective context of the totality of a life lived, that these moments of discord and harmony come together to form a unity. Towards the end of the novel, Hyperion describes how life reveals a rhythm of becoming and dissolution that characterise the course of life: "I look out to the sea and reflect on my life, its rise and fall, its bliss and its sorrow, and often my past sounds to me like the music of the lute, when the fingers of a master run through all the chords and integrate discord and harmony in a concealed pattern."[28] Hyperion's life, viewed together through the course of the novel, reveals what would come to characterise the central insight that Hölderlin would gain from his aesthetic approach: that the divine language which he was searching for was as much characterised by dissolution and absence, as it was by becoming and presence.

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[27] GSA III, 236; ibid., 163.
[28] Ibid., 47.

3. Dissolution and the language of transcendence

Hölderlin goes on to further develop this insight in the philosophical-poetical fragments and poetry that followed from the insights gained in *Hyperion*. In these he particularly focuses upon the role of dissolution in establishing a transcendent language. In the fragment *Das Werden im Vergehen*, Hölderlin explains that in the moment of dissolution, that which we seek through knowing its absence discloses itself as the possibility of everything that is not present to us: "In the state between being and not-being the possible everywhere becomes real, and the real ideal, and in free artistic imitation this is a terrible, but divine dream."[29] The terror that Hölderlin describes arises from the fact that it is only through the reproduction of this moment of dissolution that poetry can create a language for transcendence that is capable of making the unifying divine present. In this moment of dissolution, the 'divine dream' that Hölderlin describes is the moment when all is not-being joins all that is being to create an instantiation of absolute transcendence

This concept of dissolution as revelation receives its fullest articulation in *Über die Verfahrungsweise des poetischen Geistes*, one of Hölderlin's most sustained elaborations of this poetical-metaphysical theory, and also one of the most difficult prose fragments in all of his works. In it, Hölderlin explains how the poetic moment of dissolution constitutes 'the grounding and meaning of the poem', which is beyond any aesthetic representation or philosophical idea. This endows the moment of dissolution with 'its seriousness, its firmness, its truth'.[30] Hölderlin continues:

> This is the spiritually sensuous, the formally material quality of the poem... marked by the fact that it is everywhere opposed to itself: that it divides everything united, instead of the spirit's reconciling everything that is formally opposed, fixes everything that is free, generalises everything particular, because according to the meaning what is treated is not simply an individual whole, nor a whole united into a whole in connection with its own harmonious opposition, but a whole.[31]

The moment of complete dissolution that Hölderlin describes is capable of making the spiritual sensuous. This reflects the capacity of the poetic language of dissolution to make the transcendent present, or perhaps, better put, incarnate. This seemingly impossible state is characterised by what he calls the 'hyperbolic procedure' of poetic language, which is characterised by a constant going beyond itself.[32] He writes: "The pure [i.e. the transcendent absolute], grasped in each specific mood, conflicts with the organ [i.e. the

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[29] GSA IV.1, 283.
[30] Ibid., 245.
[31] Ibid., 245–46.
[32] Ibid., 246.

finite] in which it is grasped."[33] According to Hölderlin, what makes this new language of transcendence possible is 'the mediatory link between the spirit and the sign' that is achieved in the rhythmic "transition from the pure to this thing which must be discovered, and so back from this to the pure."[34] Accordingly, the purely transcendent is not contained in the matter of the poem, nor in the words that make it up, nor in the concept of being itself, (which is also a product of finitude), but in the failure of all of these. In this way, through the hyperbolic procedure, the poem generates what Hölderlin calls a "*point of opposition and union*, and that *IN THIS POINT THE SPIRIT* IN ITS INFINITY is PERCEPTIBLE."[35]

Über die Verfahrungsweise des poetischen Geistes is not straight-forwardly a work of speculative prose. Instead, the nature of the textual form which Hölderlin employs replicates the hyperbolic striving of poetics in a dithyrambic form. The sentences that make up the text last for hundreds of words, describing and enacting the rhythmic oscillation between subject-object-subject, extending themselves to the breaking point of both syntax and logic. In this way, the form replicates the message of *Hyperion*: that no conceptual apparatus invented by the subject can replicate the lived experience of encountering the transcendent absolute through the process of becoming and dissolution in the course of time. Where speculation falters, however, the form that Hölderlin gives to the text suggests the shape that a poetic response ought to take.

Much of Hölderlin's work is characterised by a desire for divine presence, and an awareness of its overwhelming dissolving transcendence. In one of the central strophes of his later hymn *Friedensfeier*, which anticipates a celebration that will unite gods and humans, Hölderlin writes:

> Denn längst war der zum Herrn der Zeit zu groß
> Und weit aus reichte sein Feld, wann hats ihn aber erschöpfet?
> Einmal mag aber ein Gott auch Tagewerk erwählen,
> Gleich Sterblichen und teilen alles Schicksal.
> Schicksalgesetz ist dies, daß Alle sich erfahren,
> Daß, wenn die Stille kehrt, auch eine Sprache sei.
> Wo aber wirkt der Geist, sind wir auch mit, und streiten,
> Was wohl das Beste sei. So dünkt mir jetzt das Beste,
> Wenn nun vollendet sein Bild und fertig ist der Meister,
> Und selbst verklärt davon aus seiner Werkstatt tritt,
> Der stille Gott der Zeit und nur der Liebe Gesetz,
> Das schönausgleichende gilt von hier an bis zum Himmel.[36]

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[33] Ibid., 248.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 249-50. Hölderlin's emphases.

[36] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Friedrich Beißner and Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1969), I, 165 (ll. 10-91). "Because, for a long time, he for lord of time, was too great, | And far

According to Hölderlin, for too long the divine has been without language, leaving the age of immanence to be divided against itself in antinomy, subject from object, nature from self. But as *Friedensfeier* points out, silence and absence are always pregnant with divine presence. In the *Dichterberuf* Hölderlin describes how to be attentive to the helping absence of God: 'Gottes Fehl hilft'.[37] As the *Friedensfeier* expresses, when silence returns there will also be language. That language is poetry, whose reconciliation applies from here up to the heavens.

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away reached his domain, but when did it ever exhaust him? | But sometime a god also may elect day-labour | Like mortals and share all destiny. | The law of destiny is this, that all experience themselves | That, when the silence returns, there be also a language. | But where the sprit works, we are also with, and quarrel, | Which to be sure, be the best. Thus me thinks now the best | When now his image complete and finished the master, | And himself transfigured thereby, steps from his workshop | The silent god of time and only love's law, | The beautiful-reconciling applies from here up to the heavens."
[37] GSA II.1, 48. l. 64.