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“Prophetic, Dreaming on the Mounds of Heaven”: Schelling and Hölderlin and the Madness of Prophetic Time

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What lives [*das Lebendige*] within poetry is right now what most occupies my thoughts and feelings. I feel so profoundly how far I still have to go in order to grasp it, and nevertheless my entire soul struggles toward it and it seizes me so often that I have to cry like a child, when I keep feeling around, like my poetic representations lack something here and there, and I really can't pull myself out from wandering in this poetic errancy (*poëtische Irren*). Ach! Beginning in my youth, the world has always carried my soul back into itself and I still always suffer from this. There is of course a hospital to which all unfortunate poets of my kind can flee with honor—philosophy.¹

Eight years later in 1806, Hölderlin's suffering would land him in the hospital in the Autenrieth Clinic in Tübingen. In an historical irony, it wasn't until much later that it would become something like the 'hospital' for poets he was envisioning in this letter: the building, the so-called *Bürse*, would come to house the philosophy faculty and standing library for the University. Hölderlin, it must be said, was always ahead of his time! His was an experience of Heracleitean time, as the later hymns would conceive it, one in which the liveliness within poetry is transfigured into the ever-living fire of *prophetic* time and *logos*. What does it mean to speak of the prophetic? What does this strange word, wrenched

¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Michael Knaupp (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992), II, 710-711.

from the comforts of institutional religion as usual—Nietzsche’s “monotonotheism”—give us to hear? In a time of diminishing returns for the traditional regimes of religion, how does the promise of the prophetic still speak to us?

Although discussions of the ‘prophetic’ tend to be in passing in the texts of both Hölderlin and his former roommate and friend, Friedrich Schelling (there is no single work by either exclusively dedicated to this theme), we would like to suggest that they are nonetheless critical. What is at stake in our insistence that Hölderlin, the great poet of remembrance, and Schelling, who once exclaimed, “O the Past, you abyss of thoughts! [*Oh, Vergangenheit, du Abgrund der Gedanken!*],”² are deeply prophetic thinkers, indeed, that there is something prophetic at the heart of both the poetic word and philosophy? This question directs our shared thoughts in this essay. Our central texts will be Hölderlin’s *Mnemosyne* as well as the early (1811-1815) drafts of Schelling’s *Die Weltalter* (*The Ages of the World*) and it is our contention that with respect to the issue of prophecy these texts are mutually illuminating.

For Hölderlin (as well as Schelling in his own way), the prophetic cannot be altogether extricated from a time of madness—of the poet’s lived experience of his own loss of self and consequent non-being, as paradoxical as the formulation of having no self and having no being may seem. This, in turn, reveals something about the madness of time—experienced by the figures of poetic and prophetic madness in Hölderlin’s song. As *poetic experience*, Lacoue-Labarthe describes it as “a visit in memory of that experience, which is also in the non-form of a pure non-event.”³ Thus Hölderlin had to carefully calibrate between, on the one hand, the nothingness of being and the suspension of the ‘being-present’ of the present and, on the other hand, his potential existence within the nothing as a *Zeichen* or sign—as the potential site of the event of poetic language, perhaps even of language as such. When this careful calibration, this delicate suspension, tips “suddenly into strangeness,”⁴ this suspended present gives way to what we want to call the madness of prophetic time.

Mnemosyne, the hymn to the mother of all muses, Memory, was written in 1803, during the same time that *Patmos* and his Sophocles translations were finished. It was a time of great psychic unrest for Hölderlin. He had returned from the manic ambulations of his 1802 Bordeaux sojourn, having been somewhere along the way “struck by Apollo,” and looking, as his friend Matthison remarked, “pale as a corpse, emaciated, with wild and hollow eyes, long hair and beard, and dressed like a beggar.” Schelling would later recall to Gustav Schwab that after Hölderlin had come “unaccompanied, on foot, crossing through fields as though led by instinct” to see him, “it was a sad reunion,

2 See Manfred Schröter’s introduction to *Die Weltalter in den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813* (*Nachlaßband*), ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1946), xviii.

3 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 18.

4 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry*, 19.

because I was immediately convinced that this delicately strung instrument was forever destroyed.”⁵ Nonetheless, 1803 was somehow a productive year. His vocabulary of poetic images became more condensed, abstract, and, as Lacoue-Labarthe calls it, “idiomatic.” An idiom is a translation whose explanation is contained within the context in which it appears, and thus has the authority of the autochthonous.⁶ These new idioms feel mysterious, dangerous, and yet remote, especially as seen from the outside, from the position of the foreigner who first comes to the song. Hölderlin was responding to the need for new, modern-Hesperian-idioms grown of the age, and which markedly contrast with the speech of the ancients.

Whereas the Greek-tragic word, he says, is *tödlich faktisch*, mortally factual, corresponding to the more immediate and athletic relationship with the divine, the Hesperian word is *tödtend faktisch*, mortifyingly factual, producing an attenuated death in life, corresponding to the Junonian sobriety of our more distanced, mediated relationship with the gods who have vanished. It is the time of the *karge*, meager and barren *Angst*, in which the Germans that Hyperion comes upon in 1797 must “literally and hypocritically only be what they are called.”⁷ For both Schelling and Hölderlin, it is the time of the rise of mortifying positivism as well as the time that Schelling lamented in his break with Fichte as the rise of the auto-isolated and thereby alienated subject and its *Bauernstolz*, literally the self-congratulatory pride of a peasant who profits from nature without really grasping it. This lopsided and self-serving cultivation is at the heart of a contemporary nature annihilating *Schwärmerei*:

If an inflexible effort to force his subjectivity through his subjectivity as something universally valid and to exterminate all nature wherever possible and against it to make non-nature [*Unnatur*] a principle and to make all of the severity of a lopsided education in its dazzling isolation count as scientific truths can be called *Schwärmen*, then who in this whole era swarms in the authentic sense more terribly and loudly than Herr Fichte? (SW I/7, 47)

It is his lament in *The Ages of the World* of the stupidity of the *Verstandesmensch* and the insipid positivism and its consequently lethal *Naturvernichtung*, which, as in the Freedom Essay, is the fatal flaw that constitutes modernity, namely that “nature is not present to it” because it “lacks a living ground [*die Natur für sich nicht vorhanden ist, und daß es ihr am lebendigen Grunde fehlt*]” (SW I/7, 361).

5 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Textausgabe*, volume 9 (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984), 107.

6 Lacoue-Labarthe: “The idiomatic poem contains its own translation, which is a justification of the idiomatic.” Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry*, 18.

7 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion* (1797, part two, 1799), in *Kritische Textausgabe* 11, 206.

In response to this general character of modernity, Hölderlin admits in a letter to Susette Gontard from the end of June 1799 that:

Daily I must summon back the vanished god. When I think about great men in great times, how they renew everything in their surroundings, a holy fire, and all that is dead, wooden, the straw of the world, is transfigured into flames, which fly with them to the heavens, and then I think of me, how often I go around, a smoldering little lamp begging for a drop of oil so I can shine just a little while longer through the night—look! A strange shudder runs through all my limbs and quietly I say to myself that terrifying phrase: the living dead!⁸

Mnemosyne and *Patmos* both contain striking idiomatic images of the prophet, prophesy, and prophetic time, all of which are marked by the nearness of death. The first stanzas of each resonate strangely with one another in a general temporal atmosphere that can best be designated as *suspension*. For both, though we will chiefly concentrate on *Mnemosyne*, the opening stanzas themselves seem suspended in a temporal and ontological space separate from the rest of the poem. A world is announced that has the uncanny familiarity of a dream remembered darkly, the fascination of a feeling that is old, ancient, near in its infinitesimal distance, perhaps like trying to recall what it had felt like to be mad. There is the nearness of death in the conflagration that surrounds, ripens, cooks, and tests. These are Hölderlin's opening words in *Mnemosyne*:

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.⁹

This is not a world behind the world, or some kind of 'other world' or any sort of afterlife to which we are being called. It is rather the suspension between the far-reaching, distantly-divining longing for the unbound, like "serpents,"—the mantic symbol, par excellence—and the weight of the earth, that must be born, contained as "a load of cut wood."

And always
There is a longing that seeks the unbound. But much
Must be retained. And loyalty is needed.

⁸ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* II, 779.

⁹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 3rd ed., trans. Michael Hamburger (Oxford: Anvil Press, 1994), 519.

Back and forth, back and forth, the thought moves between these two extremes, the extremes of a weightless future and the dense gravity of the past, such that in this suspension itself, the two coalesce. Rather than being the lure of another world, it is the waiting of the world that has been cut: a suspension of the being of the world, of the present of the present, in which, as we see at the end of the first stanza, all three temporal dimensions are gathered together, dangling in a non-space on the brink of world and language.

Forward, however, and back we will
Not look. Be lulled and rocked as
On a swaying skiff of the sea.¹⁰

Suddenly here the lines tip into strangeness, stillness and silence. As Blanchot writes: “His solitude is the understanding into which he enters with the future; it is the prophetic isolation which announces time.”¹¹ It slips into a reverie not unlike that of Rousseau in his famous Fifth Walk where he remembers the time spent on his beloved island of St. Pierre in the middle of Lake Bienne in Switzerland, afternoons spent rowing out into the lake, allowing himself to drift back and forth, sometimes for hours. It was then, on his tiny boat suspended upon the waves of the water, that Rousseau felt most keenly the pure *sentiment de l’existence*. Compare Hölderlin’s last lines in stanza one with the following passage in Rousseau’s *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*:

But if there is a state in which the soul finds a solid enough base to rest itself on entirely and to gather its whole being into, without needing to recall the past or encroach upon the future; in which time is nothing for it; in which the present lasts forever without, however, making its duration noticed and without any trace of time’s passage; without any other sentiment of deprivation or of enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear, except that alone of our existence, and having this sentiment alone fill it completely; as long as this state lasts, he who finds himself in it can call himself happy ... which leaves in the soul no emptiness it might feel a need to fill.¹²

A present that bursts out of its moment and seems to last forever without any trace of time’s duration: here the feeling of the plenitude of existence is all there is, a fullness all the more striking because of its lack of being—of no-thingness.

Hölderlin was very much influenced by the work of Rousseau, and

¹⁰ Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 519.

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, “Madness *Par Excellence*,” *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. Michael Holland (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Wiley, 1995), 124.

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, trans. and ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 68-69.

some have even proposed that Rousseau may be one of the “half-gods” to which his later hymns often refer.¹³ He even wrote an entire poem about Rousseau, who was prophetically “gratified by a distant sun and the rays of a more beautiful time,” something that the “heralds [*Boten*]” can still find in his heart.¹⁴ Yet we are struck by the thought that Hölderlin must have felt an affinity with Rousseau not simply because he admired his radical, Republican spirit. Rousseau died while writing the Tenth Walk of his *Reveries*. He walked because at the end of his life he found himself an exile among his people, his work having been vilified and misunderstood, having seen his *Emile* banned and publicly burned and his house in Môtiers attacked by an angry rock throwing mob; a wanderer across borders in Switzerland, France, even to England (an ill-fated stay with David Hume), and at the end, a wanderer in the fields which today belong to the streets of Paris. He walked because he was trying to heal himself spiritually and emotionally from the damage that others had wrought, and because by walking his aging and fading imagination (according to him) was warmed again, and he could write.

Hölderlin also pursued a serious intentional practice of walking, having walked in the middle of the summer heat from Germany to Bordeaux and back that following winter. At the end of his life, Wilhelm Waiblinger reports that Hölderlin took a daily constitutional for four or five hours; it was also one of the things that enabled him to manage the great energy and fits of rage to which he sometimes fell prey.¹⁵ The figure of the wanderer in Hölderlin’s poetry emerges often, and *Mnemosyne* and *Patmos* are no exception. The wanderer is an exile, and a figure of the poet; sometimes the wanderer is a tragic hero like Empedocles, Antigone or Oedipus; sometimes it is a forlorn, destitute, mournful wanderer like Hyperion who rambles from the Greek world and eventually comes upon the Germans; but always, he is a figure of the prophetic. The prophetic affect, idiomatic in Hölderlin’s work, is in part marked by *Zorn*, anger or wrath. Everything about this prophetic perambulation is elevated to excess: the heights he walks, the distances he divines, the intensity of his affect, and the strangeness of his companion’s discourse on the dead who are remembered there by a wayside cross. These are the last lines in the second

13 Jürgen Link, *Hölderlin-Rousseau: Inventive Rückkehr* (Opladen and Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999).

14 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe I*, 268.

15 Wilhelm Waiblinger (born 1803) published a biography of Hölderlin’s life and madness posthumously, which was based on his journal entries detailing his first-hand experiences with him from 30 May 1822-31 December 31 1824. Pierre Bertaux’s book has published many of the journal entries in an effort to get more clarity on the case of Hölderlin’s madness and challenge the prevailing belief that he was ill with schizophrenia for the whole of the second half of his life. According to Waiblinger, “His day is simple in the extreme. Mornings, especially in summer, when he is much more agitated and tortured, he hauls himself out of bed before or with the sun, and leaves the house immediately, in order to take a walk in the yard. This walk lasts here and there four or five hours, so that he becomes tired.” Pierre Bertaux, *Hölderlin: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a. Main: Insel Verlag, 2000), 181 and cf. 268-287.

stanza of *Mnemosyne*:

Discoursing of the cross which once was placed
 There on the wayside for the dead,
 High up, in anger [*zorning*], distantly divining [*fern ahnend*]
 A traveler walks
 With the other, but what is this?¹⁶

What is this? What is this strangeness that we have stumbled upon? What is this—the question that cuts open the image as it reaches the most extreme point of excess. This same question is used as a caesura in *Patmos* as well. In this stanza, Hölderlin sings of the aftermath of Christ’s death and the consequent estrangement of his disciples.

The half-god’s honor and that of his friends
 Is blown away by the wind, and the Highest
 Himself averts his face
 Because nowhere now
 An immortal is to be seen in the skies or
 On our green earth, what is this?¹⁷

This speaks of an excess of overweening anger about the loss of what was, an insane nostalgia that traps the mind in the past, attempting to break through its boundary, death, in order to join it. Although Hölderlin is a thinker of remembrance, he is not nostalgic, as if the best way to respond to the burden of the present with all of its stupidities, ideology, positivism, and alienation, was the reactionary wish that a terrible today be replaced with a better yesterday. This results in the loss not only of the present, but also in the obfuscation of the past with projection and neediness; it is also therefore forecloses outright any real future, including a prophetic one. The wrathful prophet does not want the present moment *prima facie*, but rather wants to become free for the event of the present moment, to find the capacity for the free use of what we find to be our own.

At the end of *Mnemosyne*, the mother of the muses, Memory, dies. “Here mourning is at fault”—it is her tragic error, her *ἁμαρτία* (*hamartia*). Having transgressed the measure, exploding form, she is sacrificed, perhaps to save the arts, above all, the poetic word. Mournful attachment to the past *fehlt*—it *fails* and it *lacks* what the present moment demands. It is the lopsidedly catastrophic course of Ajax (suicide) and Achilles (death in battle), who are named in that last stanza of *Mnemosyne*. As *Patmos* closes, the vision of John’s end time, the Revelations attributed to him on the isle of Patmos, never comes. Instead, the

16 Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 521.

17 Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 491.

hymn finishes with mourning, the burden of an appeal to the cultivation of Apollonian sobriety in the form of “the solid letter [*der feste Buchstab*],” and that “the existing/be well interpreted.”¹⁸ And now hear the beginning lines of *Mnemosyne*, from the earlier draft:

A sign we are, meaningless
Painless we are and have nearly
Lost our language in foreign lands.¹⁹

We are a sign (*Zeichen*) that does not point to anything (*deutungslos*), and this being so, we have *almost* lost language. But not quite! These powerful words are speaking even as they speak of this near loss of speaking. Yet this is language on the edge of not being able to speak at all. As the event of language unfolds, the ambiguity of its potential being is felt in the poet as a wrestling with god. Comparing *Patmos* with *Mnemosyne*, we see two ways of understanding the outcome, flip sides of the same coin: a solid letter that requires great care (*daß gepflegt werde*), and the risk of language that has lost itself in the foreign, exiled from any horizon of meaning, gone the way of Ajax and Achilles, scattered in the ashes of Apollo’s blow, perhaps. As many commentators have noted, those lines from *Mnemosyne* resonate with these from his 1802 letter to Böhlendorff, written in the wake of his return from Bordeaux and after having received the terrible news that Susette Gontard, his Diotima, had died:

The tremendous element, the fire of the sky and silence of the people,
their life within nature, and their limitedness and satisfaction has
continually affected me, and as it is said of the heroes, so I may say
that Apollo has struck me.²⁰

How does one speak after the fire of the heavens has struck the Junonian sobriety of modernity? What is language that has been struck by Apollo? Above all in both hymns, Hölderlin calls upon *die Treue*, fidelity, not to any particular letter or words, not to any particular sign, but fidelity to the event itself, even if, as his confrontation with Sophocles’ tragedies showed him, fidelity would mean for the hero and the poet, the necessity of a *divine betrayal* (*göttliche Untreue*), a sublime forgetting, which, nevertheless, works best for keeping the memory of the divine ones eternally aflame. Even *Mnemosyne* is fated for the oblivion that

¹⁸ This is also most likely a reference to the controversy that was in full force at the time around evidence disputing the Apostle John as the inspired scribe of the Revelations on Patmos.

¹⁹ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* I, 436. There were several earlier drafts of *Mnemosyne*. The first draft had the title “The Snake” crossed out and replaced with “The Sign.” Cf. Jochen Schmidt, *Friedrich Hölderlin: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* in 3 Bände, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994).

²⁰ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 152.

is the abyss of the past.

As Schelling reported to Hegel in July of 1803, Hölderlin's own hold on the present moment had indeed shattered.

The saddest thing to see during my stay at home was Hölderlin.... Ever since this fatal journey [home from France], his mind has been completely shattered, and though capable of working up to a point on a few projects, like the Greek translations, otherwise he is absolutely mentally absent. He was a harrowing sight to see: his appearance was disgustingly neglected, and where his speech was less that of a lunatic, he had adopted the external mannerisms of someone in that state.²¹

Despite this, during his 36 hour stay, Schelling remembered that Hölderlin never did anything counter to his “old, noble, and upright being.”²² Six years after this heart-breaking reunion with Hölderlin, Schelling endured his own bout with the violence of Apollo felt as the blow of Caroline's death. In the 1811 draft of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling confessed that he was closer than “most people could probably conceive to this growing-silent of knowledge [*Verstummen der Wissenschaft*] which we must necessarily encounter when we know how infinitely far everything that is personal reaches such that it is impossible actually to know anything at all” (SW I/8: 200). Yet Schelling worked on the *Weltalter* for years, producing countless pages and drafts. Hölderlin, despite overwhelming psychic handicaps, and we would argue, perhaps *because of them*, never abandoned the desire to write.

In *Bread and Wine* Hölderlin linked the “poets in a destitute age [*Dichter in dürftiger Zeit*],” torn between the stupidity of modernity and the eruptive forces of madness, to the “holy priests of the wine god,” “which roamed from land to land in holy night [*welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht*]” (strophe 7). Although we have almost lost language in the dark night or in the incinerating force of the divine, we struggle to abide in our “holy drunkenness” while remaining “wakeful at night [*wachend ... bei Nacht*]” with our “holy memory [*heilig Gedächtniß*]” (strophe 2). The Dionysian disposition—drunk yet sober, mad yet reasonable, nothing yet everything, is also precisely how Schelling understood the problem of all philosophical thinking: everything comes down to the “holy drunkenness” that remains “wakeful at night.”

Years later, as excited audiences in Berlin, a decade after Hegel's death, awaited yet another new philosophy, Schelling made a bewildering turn to the gods whose coming we drunkenly but vigilantly remember. Philosophy does not begin in the light of day of rationality, but in the dark night of madness. “*Where there is no madness that is governed and brought under rule, there is also no powerful understanding [Wo kein Wahnsinn ist, der geregelt und beherrscht wird,*

²¹ Hölderlin, *Kritische Textausgabe* 9, 106.

²² Hölderlin, *Kritische Textausgabe* 9, 107.

da ist auch kein mächtiger Verstand].”²³ Stupidity or *Blödsinn*, however, does not ‘consist’ in a lack of intelligence—the intelligent are even more dramatically inclined to stupidity than are the dim-witted—but rather in the “absence of this originary matter [*Abwesenheit dieses ursprünglichen Stoffes*],” the lack of “*the madness, the potentia that lies concealed in the depths of the human Wesen [der Wahninn, der potentia in der Tiefe des menschlichen Wesens verborgen liegt]*.”²⁴ In the *Urfassung* of the *Philosophy of Revelation (Philosophie der Offenbarung)*,²⁵ Schelling had already linked this to both art and philosophy in a manner that strikingly anticipated the early Nietzsche: “The mystery of true art is to be *simultaneously* mad and level-headed [*wahnsinnig und besonnen*], not in distinctive moments, but rather *uno eodemque actu* [altogether in a single act]. This is what distinguishes the Apollonian inspiration from the Dionysian.”²⁶ This was, however, a distinction that Schelling had first announced in *The Ages of the World*:

But where there is no madness, there is also certainly no proper, active, living intellect (and consequently there is just the dead intellect, dead intellectuals). For in what does the intellect prove itself than in the coping with and governance and regulation of madness? Hence the utter lack of madness leads to another extreme, to imbecility (idiotcy), which is an absolute lack of all madness. But there are two other kinds of persons in which there really is madness. There is one kind of person that governs madness and precisely in this overwhelming shows the highest force of the intellect. The other kind of person is governed by madness and is someone who really is mad (SW I/8, 338-339).

As both Hölderlin and Schelling saw, we have lost the fire of the heavens. This is indeed a relationship to the past, but in remembering the past, one is also remembering that which, in displacing the stupidity of our relationship to the present, drives Mnemosyne to ruins. “Panthers or tigers do not pull the carriage of Dionysus in vain. For this wild frenzy of inspiration in which nature found itself when it was in view of the *Wesen* was celebrated in the nature worship of prescient ancient peoples by the drunken festivals of Bacchic orgies” (SW

23 Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* 1841/42: *Paulus Nachschrift*, 2nd ed., ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 97.

24 Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 186.

25 Schelling, *Urfassung Philosophie der Offenbarung*, two volumes, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 708.

26 Schelling, *Urfassung*, 422. Karl Löwith was among the first to insist upon this kinship. “The utter lack of madness leads not to reason but to imbecility. The fundamental stuff of all of life and existence is, according to Schelling as well as Nietzsche, the awful [*das Schreckliche*]: a blind power and force, a barbaric principle, that can be overcome but never eliminated and which is ‘the foundation of all greatness and beauty.’” *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (1935), fourth proofed edition based on the corrected third edition, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986), 154.

I/8: 337). Yet thinking is not called simply to ruin itself. Schelling returned to writing, and Hölderlin wrote some of his most staggering lines after 1802, even as his capacity to write was increasingly hindered. In the Freedom Essay, Schelling warned against the inability to find the “reconciling and mediating basis” that results in the “gloomy and wild enthusiasm that breaks out in self-mutilation or, as with the priests of the Phrygian goddess, auto castration, which is achieved in philosophy as the renunciation of reason and science” (SW I/7: 357).

Philosophy is born of the caesura from which it endeavors to speak. In his remarks on his translation of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, another work from the extreme tensions that characterized Hölderlin’s mind in 1803, we find the moment of caesura in which the tragic mating and sundering of god and mortal is suspended, in an atmosphere “where, among pestilence and confusion and universally inflamed prophesy, in idle time”²⁷ and “at the extreme limits of suffering,” nothing more exists but the “conditions of time or space.”²⁸ Hölderlin explains what he means:

In this, the human being forgets himself, because he is completely in the moment, and the god because he is nothing more than time; and both are unfaithful, time, because in such moments it categorically reverses itself ... and the human being because in the moment of categorical reversal he is forced to follow, and in what comes afterwards he can no longer resemble the beginning.²⁹

Hölderlin’s madness and his poetry were a fight with two gods, Apollo and Dionysus. His genius, in Blanchot’s view, arose from this. “Hölderlin was able to raise to the supreme meaning—which is that of poetry—the experience of illness, to link them completely to the whole of his spiritual existence and to master them for and through poetic truth.”³⁰ Let us imagine the relationship between Hölderlin’s madness and his poetic vision asymptotically, where madness is the curve to which the line of his poetic vision remains asymptotic, that is, etymologically, ‘not falling together.’ Such linking together of madness and poetry, as Blanchot saw, would have to observe the divine infidelity of proximity in distance. *Near, yet difficult to grasp, is God*. The relationship between the violent swings of madness and the steady approach of the poetic, constitute the two lines of his destiny with which he wrestled. Hölderlin’s fate as a poet was relentlessly and faithfully pursued (or perhaps we should say, *it* relentlessly pursued *him*) along the same track, a “movement that raises him to an always clearer consciousness.”³¹

27 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* II, 315.

28 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* II, 316.

29 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* II, 316.

30 Blanchot, “Madness *Par Excellence*,” 116.

31 Blanchot, “Madness *Par Excellence*,” 119.

Even during the “forty years his death lasted,”³² lived out in the carpenter Zimmer’s tower in Tübingen, when chaos had deranged his λόγος (*logos*), nevertheless, in song he remained luminous. Blanchot reports that Schwab, who visited Hölderlin when he was seventy years old, wrote, “the magical power which poetic form exerted on Hölderlin was prodigious. I never saw a line by him that was bereft of meaning: obscurities, weak points, yes, but the meaning was always alive, and he still wrote such lines when, during the day, no one could extract anything reasonable from him at all.”³³ The curve that describes his *mania*—the madness that, too, had its own course and pursued him relentlessly throughout life—fully permeates the subjective sense of his existence, from his sensitivity to the violent alteration in moods, often back and forth between the ecstatic joy of the moment and the abyss of despair lurking within it. After Zimmer died, Hölderlin began writing short seasonal odes in rhyme for visitors who wanted a little souvenir to take with them from the mad poet in the tower. He signed them as “Scardanelli”: a frigid mask to keep the excesses of life at bay.³⁴

Finally, in what way can one say that writing from the caesura is prophetic? How does the prophetic rage against the stupidity of modernity signal not the fantasy of a reactionary nostalgia (a fantastical past) or a cowardly flight to the highly capitalized otherworldly neuroses of institutional religion (a fantastical future), but rather a sense of the past that splits open the present into the fullness of time?

32 Blanchot, “Madness *Par Excellence*,” 114.

33 Blanchot, “Madness *Par Excellence*,” 114.

34 In a letter, Hölderlin writes: “Just like we used to think, I still believe, but in this way! Everything infinite oneness, but in this All an exquisite One and becoming-One, which, in itself, is not an I, and this would be God among us! ... Here in the innocence of life, here in the silver Alps, things will finally go easier for me in my heart. I am exquisitely occupied with religion.” Quoted in Bertaux, *Hölderlin*, 82. A commentator on this letter writes that when this particular style of Hölderlin’s appears, ecstatic and mysterious, it announces his existence in the mental border space between joy and horror, “as the highest exaltation in transition to enrapture, wherein, in the early words of the poet, ‘the eternal celebration of his thought plummets to the ground.’” Bertaux, *Hölderlin*, 82. Ludwig Binswanger noted this especially in the phenomenology of the manic mode of existence. He identifies the essence of the manic mode in the excesses of celebratory joy, a celebration “even to the climax of vertigo.” Bertaux, *Hölderlin*, 136. This is the demonic streak in many festivals, of the Greek Saturnalia, of Carnival, or the Day of the Dead. The higher one flies, the closer one comes to death. Thus, he says, “What we describe as manic-depressive disorder is merely a pathological formation and intensification of this universal principle of life and death, the entanglement of death in life and of life in death found everywhere.” Bertaux, *Hölderlin*, 136. The manic-depressive is the “antinomic man par excellence.” Bertaux, *Hölderlin*, 138. In him you find the soaring heights of Phaethon and the crashing lows that his ill-fated flight with the sun pronounced. The phenomenon of *deciduous* life is present: “the withering, decaying, moribund, deformed or disorganized, the grey, gloomy hateful, dirty, stinking, the worm crawling in the ground, the death’s head, the skeleton, the frigid mask or deformed visage, the discarded shards or scraps of paper lying around, etc.” Bertaux, *Hölderlin*, 138. The excesses that he had to defend himself from by turning to ice, or to stone: the living dead! “In my head it’s become winter sooner than outside. The day is very short. Even longer the cold nights. Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* II, 511. This is the 20 October 1793 letter to Neuffer.

The madness that explodes the stupidity of the present is the very madness whose negotiation with reason opens up the prophetic realm—the abyss of the past intimated as the future. Dionysus did not and could not manifest in the terms of public disclosure, manifesting only as an endless carnival of masks. The spell of presence, that is, the stupidity of the *Verstandesmench* who cannot think the mask as a mask, is broken by a more radical ἀνάμνησις (*anamnēsis*)³⁵ of the potencies of being itself. Moreover, although Jesus gave rise to the many public forms of Christianity, the Messianic remains no less obscure and calls for an equally radical *Andenken* (remembering) and ἀνάμνησις (*anamnēsis*). There is no thing to remember—the search confronts the infinity of what it seeks, but this shattering is also the possibility of not only breakdown, but breakthrough and liberation. The present is the repetition of a past always still to come.

When Schelling in all of the prefaces to the various attempts of *The Ages of the World* claims that *das Zukünftige wird geahndet*, the future is intimated, and *das Geahndete wird geweissagt*, the intimated is prophesied, or when Hölderlin speaks of the wandering and wrathful prophet as *fern ahnend*, distantly divining, divining what is always at a distance, they do not mean that one could say in advance of the future what the future will have been. The verb *weissagen*, common in Luther’s translation of the Bible, translates a verb that is now more commonly translated as *prophezeien*, to prophesy, from the Greek (προφήτης [*prophētēs*]), *to speak for the gods*. Such speaking issues from divine darkness, speaking in and to the present from a past that is always already eternally past and of a future that reveals the futurity of the future, not future events.

In the first draft (1811) of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling succinctly defines the prophet as the one who can discern the manner in which the past, present, and future hold together as a dynamic whole, the one who “sees through the hanging together of the times [*der den Zusammenhang der Zeiten durchschaut*]” (SW I/8: 151). He also asks: “what holds back that intimated [*geahndete*] golden age in which truth again becomes fable and fable again becomes truth [*was hält sie zurück die geahndete goldne Zeit, wo die Wahrheit wieder zur Fabel und die Fabel zur Wahrheit wird*]?” (SW I/8: 200). A relationship to the bottomless depth of the past is not only a relationship to the past, but also a relationship to the future, an anticipatory relationship to the future in which truth presents itself as fable and the golden age is intimated as a lost (buried in the past) but future paradise on earth. The way to the golden age that is “intimated [*geahndet*]” and “prophesied [*geweissagt*]” first necessitates that one go directly into the center of the past, much like Dante who journeyed toward *paradisio* by going directly into the deepest center of the *inferno*. The way to the infinite productivity of the future is through the infinite depth of

35 From *The Ages of the World*: “What we call knowledge is only the striving towards ἀνάμνησις [*Wiederbewußtwerden*] and hence more of a striving toward knowledge than knowledge itself. For this reason, the name Philosophy had been bestowed upon it incontrovertibly by that great man of antiquity” (SW I/8, 201).

the past and as such one becomes free for the present moment, which comes, as Schelling and Hölderlin painfully experienced in suspension and waiting, on its own time.