

THIS CRAFT OF DESTINY: HÖLDERLIN'S HYPERION AND THE TRAGIC DIMENSION OF BEAUTY

ESTE ARTE DEL DESTINO: HYPERION DE HÖLDERLIN Y LA DIMENSIÓN TRÁGICA DE LA BELLEZA

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Resumen:

Propongo en este artículo pensar la dimensión trágica de la poesía como la senda intermediaria entre el destino y el arte, respondiendo a la siguiente cuestión: en una perspectiva idealista, de su concepción de lo trágico, Hölderlin no opone la libertad al determinismo, y así el destino se convierte en un problema filosófico. En la parte final de mi exposición, busco elucidar tanto esto como mostrar en qué medida su teoría de la belleza no necesita de una estética complementaria de lo sublime, como hace Schiller en sus ensayos estéticos. Lo que uno experimenta en la poesía es una "ocasión para la belleza", y esto aprendemos de Hölderlin. Así, mi primero paso es indicar las razones por las que Hölderlin se aparta de la manera moralizante de pensar de Schiller. Miraré brevemente en la forma como la cuestión se desarrolla en pasajes textuales del Hyperion o el Eremita en Grecia (1792-99), así como en algunos de sus fragmentos y versiones tempranas.

Palabras clave: Hölderlin – Hyperion – libertad – destino – tragedia.

Abstract:

In this article I propose to think the tragic dimension of poetry as the middle path between destiny and art by answering the following question: in an idealistic perspective of his conception of tragic, Hölderlin does not oppose freedom to determinism and so the destiny is for him a philosophical problem. I attempt to elucidate this in the final part of my exposition and intend to show that Hölderlin's theory of beauty does not require any complementary aesthetic of sublime, such as in Schiller's formulation. What is experienced in poetry is an "occasion for beauty", and this we learn from Hölderlin. So I would like first to prepare the terrain by indicating the reasons why Hölderlin deviates from Schiller's moralizing way of thinking. I shall briefly focus on how the proposed question is developed in some places of Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece (1792-99) as well as in some of its fragments and early versions.

Keywords: Hölderlin – Hyperion – freedom – destiny – tragedy.

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1. ***Introduction: freedom and destiny.***

The essay *On the Difference of Poetic Modes* contains the most concise statement of Friedrich Hölderlin's conception of tragedy: "the tragic, in appearance heroic poem, is idealistic in its significance. It is the metaphor of an intellectual intuition" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 175). Still according to the definition, the tragic poem would make emerge "that unity with everything living which, to be sure, is not felt by the limited soul, only anticipated in its [the soul's] highest aspirations, yet which can be recognized by the spirit" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 178). Since the poetical is linked to Hölderlin's philosophical thinking, the emergence of a tragic ground or "the idealistic basic tone" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 178) equals the manifestation of the "being proper" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 87) in the terminology of the well-known philosophical fragment *Judgement and Being* (1795). This is the case when Hölderlin comes to speak about the unity of subject and object. Accordingly, this unity is hence only a felt (*gefühl*) presupposition ungraspable in the constitutive originary division (*Urteilung*) within the form of judgement (it is said e.g. of an A, that it is X). The access to the object is therefore irreversibly blocked for the subject's epistemic conditions, *viz.*, for the *Judgement* to reach the *Being* and vice versa.

Nevertheless, the unity is representable or exponible (*darstellbar*) by means of its construction both in imagination and in memory with the free transposition in an "outer sphere" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 158), *viz.*, in the poetic language. The tragic for Hölderlin acquires special interest because it is the mode or literary genre in which the theoretically inaccessible is performed and expressed. Its meaning is announced as a paradox: "the hidden foundation of any nature", so states the *Significance of Tragedies*, where it appears only in detraction of its own and in a dismissal of its significance, *viz.*, "as insignificant=0" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 186). The strength is the inaccessible unity that annihilates the weakness, because it always requires the original division to appear in its linguistic or logical form (A — X). The weakness is hence the limited representation of the tragic hero. He plays the role of an insignificant sign in the poem, and must succumb in favor of an adequate exposition of its basic tone, namely the quoted "unity with everything living". One could say analogically, e.g. in biology, that for the unity with everything living to appear as the whole of individuals and species, it would demand the

individual perishing as necessary function of its organized appearing, once if every organic being were eternal, it would make nature ungraspable as a system of empiric laws. Of course this all must be considered formally, since Hölderlin was concerned with a “law of poetic calculation”, according to German studies.¹ But there are more than formal aspects involved: what we can call *destiny* here is meant in a technical Kantian sense as the natural determinate order.

Insofar as part of the spirit of time (*Zeitgeist*), we can understand Hölderlin's theory of tragedy historically and philosophically as a pendant to the question of natural destination, when modern Europe becomes aware of its self-certification as a society oriented toward a theoretical culture. From Rousseau to Schiller and Fichte streams a river that upthrusts the determinism of modern science with an emerging linear historically and progressive shaped consciousness by means of the idea of freedom, which in turn sets systematically the ground-idea of Kant's philosophy. As son of the *Lumières*, Hölderlin is an enthusiast of the French Revolution as well as his Jacobin coreligionists beyond the Rhine, and he is capable to grasp correctly what is going on as one of the strongest political tensions takes place at that time in the neighbor land (Kurz 2-15; Bertaux 13-63). He writes to J.G. Ebel on January 1797, namely between the Reign of Terror and the Coup of 18 Brumaire:

I believe in a forthcoming revolution of mentality and way of thinking which will turn into shame everything that has happened till now. Germany may contribute a lot. The more quietly a nation grows, the more splendid its maturation (Hölderlin “Briefe” 229).

The efforts in the yet old Germany, under the rules of *ancien régime*, seem to pass in silence beneath the spiritual bridge to France. Far away from guillotine's executions, Hölderlin writes to Hegel on January 1795 expressing his comprehension of *nature* on the basis of Kantian transcendental philosophy, and focuses specifically on the main of its aspects: “the way he [Kant] unifies the *mechanism of nature* (also of *destiny*) with its finality seems to contain properly the whole spirit of his system” (Hölderlin “Briefe” 156). His poem *The man* (1798), for example, reflects the idea of mechanism as fate. Thus sings its last

¹ See the pioneering studies of Ryan “Hölderlins Lehre vom Wechsel der Töne” and Gaier “Der gesetzliche Kalkül”.

strophe:

Is he from all the living not
The happiest? Yet deeper and more tearing
Takes the destiny, everything equaling,
Also the inflammable breast of the stronger.
(Hölderlin “Gedichte bis 1800” 264)²

The moral response to destiny is familiar to Hölderlin, though he does not affiliate himself to the Kantian program of freedom. We get to know one of Kant’s formulation of moral superiority in the frame of aesthetic judgement; we also do learn the mentioned systematic spirit from the second part of the third *Critique*, which Hölderlin speaks to his school friend Hegel about. But for what it matters here, so as stated in the analytic of sublime of the *Critique of Judgement*, the dynamically sublime in nature is represented as something capable to destroy us physically, such as thunderclouds, volcanoes, hurricanes, the boundless ocean, high waterfalls and the like. Such a threatening inevitability under which one can perish awakes the consciousness of a “faculty of judging ourselves as independent of nature”, which is complementary to our physical helplessness as natural beings. It reveals at the same time “a pre-eminence above nature that is the foundation of a self-preservation of quite another kind”, saving “humanity in our own person from humiliation, even though as human beings we would have to submit to external violence” (Kant 92).

The superiority we conquer through freedom is hence a moral one. Under the immediate impact of Kant’s ideas, Schiller attempts to exploit artistically this philosophical insight. He provides a new theoretic-aesthetical account which echoes throughout the 20th century in the theory and critique of art (Süssekind 75-120). In his conception, if *destiny* is inevitable for human beings in deterministic sense, in the *pathetically sublime* (modifying Kant’s terminology) one represents the human suffer in face of fate. On the other hand, this representation is also mobilized against suffering itself, once it calls “the inner freedom of the heart to consciousness” (Schiller “Vom Erhabenen” 512). Schiller links it to tragedy by understanding one of its constitutive moments as the “portrayal of the moral independence in suffering” (Schiller “Vom Erhabenen” 512).

2 Ist er von allen Lebensgenossen nicht/ Der seligste? Doch tiefer und reißender / Ergreift das Schicksal, allausgleichend,/ Auch die entzündbare Brust dem Starken.

That being said so, it remains us to see to which extent Hölderlin does not follow his master, whom he still writes on September 1795: "I belong to you – at least as a *res nullius* – and thus also the tart fruits I bring" (Hölderlin "Briefe" 181). The discrepancy is evident in Hölderlin's more speculative language, which differs from Schiller's moralizing one: suffering is not to be seen as just an index of moral reaction to be performed in tragedy. As we shall see, suffering is constitutive in *Hyperion's* world view. But how do we still explain such a difference, once we agree that the hero's annihilation (sign = 0) in favor of the adequate manifestation of nature in Hölderlin's words corresponds the Kantian and Schillerian sublime as annihilation of the sensibility, with the subsequent self-affirmation of morality? Is it necessary for the sublime to manifest itself for the feeling of moral superiority to be present? And what if freedom needs to be an appearance or a phenomenon? If something needs to appear in the tragedy, what would it be like?

First of all, it is important to observe that Hölderlin does not oppose the Kantian program of freedom. He also seeks to think the "freely use of the national" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 149), which can be seen as an alternative to the hitherto imposition of classicist rules (Szondi 352). In the same mitigate sense of freedom, Schiller also understands it analogically as liberty from rules (Schiller "Kallias oder über die Schönheit. Briefe an Gottfried Körner" 402). As for Hölderlin, it implies the poet's freedom in his humanity and craft, and even more: the poet and mankind without deities, *viz.*, without transcendence, whose task is nonetheless to take, "bare-headed under the storms of God [Zeus], / the father's beam itself" and to give it "wrapped in song to the people" (Hölderlin "Gedichte nach 1800" 119-120). This particular position of the poet described in the unfinished hymn *As When On a Holiday* (1800) is more horrifying than every natural events such as described by Kant, in face of which we are sent back to our own, in order to keep what remains: the moral law. If "rescue grows as well/ where there is danger", on the other hand, like we hear just before these verses from the very beginning of *Patmos* (1803), "God is near/ Yet hard to seize" (Hölderlin "Gedichte nach 1800" 165). And it is also a task of the poet to "establish what remains", as set in *Remembrance* (1803) (Hölderlin "Gedichte nach 1800" 189). The mortal threat of *nihilism*³

3 The word was coined in an open letter from Jacobi to Fichte (1799), where he objects aspects of the latter's philosophy. Jacobi's objections are not consistent at all, but their role in the late XVIII century is very important

is sung by Hölderlin and it is also the very attitude to comprehend modern times. The freely use of the national must be understood as use of what is proper to us as *modernes*.⁴ So we can understand all the poetological and formal Hölderlin's efforts as those of a self-aware modern poet.

In this wider sense and in face of destiny, the node of necessity is to be untied by the modern poet, and then his paradox is that he recognizes himself as an artist freely overcoming fate, while at the end of his formative path he perceives that what is surpassed has been necessary for his formation (*Bildung*). Opposite to Schiller's standpoint, morality here would stand not for "freedom in appearance" (Schiller "Kallias oder über die Schönheit. Briefe an Gottfried Körner" 409) but for "punishment" (Hölderlin "Essays and Letters on Theory" 82) – and also for acknowledgment.

Taking Hölderlin as an example, I propose to reflect, in the next two parts of this article, on the tragic dimension of poetry as the middle path between destiny and art by answering the question I allow myself to formulate so as follows: in an idealistic perspective of his conception of tragic, Hölderlin does not oppose freedom to determinism, and so the destiny is for him a philosophical problem, far from its solution, and without the risk of dogmatic relapse. I shall attempt to elucidate this question in the final part of my exposition by extending the tragic dimension of Hyperion to Empedocles, and intend to show that Hölderlin's theory of beauty does not require any complementary aesthetic of sublime, such as in Schiller's formulation, because it already includes both harmony and disharmony in itself. What is experienced in poetry is an "occasion for beauty" (Borges 10), such as we learn from Hölderlin, and beauty, so volatile and lancinating, is constitutively tragic. So I would like first to prepare the terrain by indicating the reasons why Hölderlin deviates from Schiller's moralizing way of thinking. I shall briefly focus on how the proposed question is developed in

to grasp the atheism as consequence of a consistent modern philosophical system, such as the one of Fichte (see Radrizzani 7-13).

4 Adorno strongly criticizes Heidegger's interpretation of the national or homeland (*vaterländisch*) as patriotic, as if Hölderlin's poetry had intention to support the central role of Germany in the history of thought: "the word homeland has been charged with a bad meaning in the past hundred-fifty years, when it was first written in those poems, and it has lost his innocence (...) Love to what is near, longing for the warmth of childhood have changed to exclusion, to hate against the other, and this can be not extinguished from the word. It is saturated with a nationalism, of which there is no trace in Hölderlin" (Adorno 349). The more accurate interpretation of the national as modern within the frame of the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* can be found in Ryan "'Vaterländisch und natürlich, eigentlich originell': Hölderlins Briefe an Böhlendorff" 246-276.

some places of Hölderlin's most successful work at the time of his "philosophical conception" (Henrich "Der Grund im Bewusstsein" 10), namely *Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece* (1792-99) as well as some of its fragments and early versions.

2. *Hyperion's tragic and conciliatory dimension.*

On October 1794, Hölderlin writes to his friend Christian Neuffer:

Maybe I can send you an essay about the *aesthetic ideas*, which also intends to be a comment on Plato's Phaedrus with some text on my own (...). Basically, it will contain an analysis of beauty as well as of sublime that is simpler than Kant's but, on the other hand, it is still more versatile – so like Schiller has partially already made in his *Grace and Dignity*, though he has dared a smaller step over the Kantian border than he should have done in my opinion. (Hölderlin "Briefe" 137).

The essay would never be written. But this perspective is confirmed when Hölderlin starts working on the so-called *Thalia* fragment of *Hyperion* in the town of Waltershausen (1794). The fragment describes two ideals of human existence: one of the utter simplicity or mere natural order, and one of the complete development or the organization "we are able to give ourselves" (Hölderlin "Thalia Fragment" 163). Human life unfolds as a movement from the former to the latter by treading an "eccentric path". This could be statically understood in the simplistic way which is grasped under the commonplace opposition between nature and culture. But the *relata* are dynamically thought and not in a linear way, so as if we were gradually moving from a simplicity (naive or natural) to a maximum of formation (sentimental or cultural); or still, as if we were impoverishing in relation to an original ideal such as the classicism wanted it to be set as model to be imitated.⁵ According to Hölderlin, the eccentric path goes from one point of "more or less pure simplicity" to the one of "more or less completed culture" (Hölderlin "Thalia Fragment" 163). This path is therefore to locate not in the center, but to be imagined as departing from center (*ec-centric*) and breaking the inert trajectory, *viz.*, decentering, putting the center aside, deviating and hence allowing – and

5 For Hölderlin's view of Schillerian distinction naive/sentimental, see Ryan "'Vaterländisch und natürlich, eigentlich originell': Hölderlins Briefe an Böhlendorff" 275.

even demanding – mistakes and successes, enthusiasm and melancholy, fullness and lack, as well as political victory and defeat. It also represents the bare transition between two closed opposite ideals.⁶ The path has both as departing point and as goal something to be described as “more or less”, since characteristically the ideal is that one does – and will – never know exactly at which infinite point the nature or the culture is to be completely reached in accordance with what had been idealized.

But since ideals for Hölderlin are not dead *imagoes*, they serve to account for the human existence as it might at least apparently be, namely a potential oscillation between projected wishes which implies kind of a different repetition. Put it theoretically, the absolute unity, be it of subject and object, be it of individual feeling and objective reconnaissance, is for Hölderlin no more achievable: “the blessed unity, the being in the sole sense of word is lost for us” (Hölderlin “Vorletzte Fassung” 236). On the one hand it would persist as the ideal (and nostalgia) of a classic Greece that might have never been, unless approximately in a construction based on experience, tradition or historical delivery and heritage (*Überlieferung*); on the other, it could be the unification of the gods with men in a “festive hall, whose floor is ocean, whose tables are mountains” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 181) – what again may express nothing but projected poetic visions. Hyperion must perform some of the essential directions of the eccentric path in the time of memory, which allows him to undergo an ordeal and prove that each direction demands its correction (*Zurechtweisung*) in the concrete narrative, once they seem only abstractly “always to be the same” (Hölderlin “Thalia Fragment” 163). One could say that the oscillations create the impression they will return always as the same, to the detriment of the possibilities of experience at all. But the Hegelian “worse for the facts” is not yet present, since the dynamic of memory Hölderlin emphasizes is not theoretical. In the five letters to Bellarmin that follow the general presentation, Hölderlin

6 Pierre Bertaux pointed in the 1960s the fact that this metaphor could be traced back to Johannes Kepler’s astronomic investigations. Kepler also studied at the *Tübinger Stift* in his youth (1589-1594), where Hölderlin has supposedly taken knowledge of some of his writings in its library as student in the period from 1788 to 1793. In Kepler’s *De admirabili proportione orbium coelestium* (1596) we find a table and a graphic exposition with the orbits (*Bahnen*) of Saturn and Jupiter. They are linked by a third orbit named *eccentric* (*via eccentrica*), which allows a transition from a concentric (Saturn) to another concentric (Jupiter) system. Since Bertaux wants to draw political conclusions, he says the eccentric orbit is the (in any case metaphorical) “revolution” movement in Hölderlin’s worldview, which implies a transition between two closed systems and the possibility of an (in any case political) openness (Bertaux 157-158). For a critical approach to Bertaux’s book, see Macor 103-125.

offers to the reader the unification's perspective of the divergent moments, *viz.*, the *love* – which is represented by Melite – and by Diotima in the final version (Hölderlin “Thalia Fragment” 179). But what is opposed to love still remains, *viz.*, the lack. And as we know both from dialectical thinking and from psychoanalysis (and Hölderlin from Plato), lack is constitutive to love. Hyperion depart with his friend Adamas to Smyrna and hopes to come back to Melite, whom he has not been seeing anymore, and regrets to Bellarmin in the same way he has started the fragment: “I left my home in vain and looked for the truth (...) beyond the sea” (Hölderlin “Thalia Fragment” 164, 183). “I have found nothing but you. I say you that, my Bellarmin! You also have found nothing but me” (Hölderlin “Thalia Fragment” 184). The meeting with the German friend and letter recipient Bellarmin is the one with the narrative itself to be developed in the final version published in two volumes, respectively in 1796 (I) and 1798-9 (II). Here the unification's perspective returns to articulate the three desiderata expressed to Neuffer. The step taken beyond Schiller is precisely the one we can assign with good reason to Hölderlin, if we consider that he would have had in mind to unify those points of view separated in the Kantian-Schillerian conception of beauty and sublime. According to Schiller, “in the presence of beauty, reason and sense are in harmony; in the presence of the sublime, on the contrary, reason and the sensuous are *not* in harmony” (Schiller “Über das Erhabene” 797-8). As for Hölderlin, harmony and disharmony can be reciprocally conciliated in face of his conception, which takes in what is different and strange in order both to interpret it regarding the conceived unity and to understand it as inherent to the artistic *modus faciendi* – and this by means of *Thalia's* “eccentric path” and the Heraclitean construct “the one differentiated in itself”, which is brought to explicit Hyperion's (and Hölderlin's) understanding of beauty:⁷

Poetry is the beginning and the end of philosophical knowledge. Like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, philosophy springs from the poetry of an eternal, divine state of being. And so in philosophy, too, the irreconcilable finally converges again in the mysterious spring of poetry. (...)

⁷ Taken from a Plato's quotation, according to which Heraclitus had expressed the nature of music as “the One at variance with itself drawn together, like harmony of bow or lyre” (Plato 187a). See Ryan “Hyperion oder Der Eremit in Griechenland” 185.

The great saying, the *εν διαφορον εαυτω* (the one differentiated in itself) of Heraclitus, could be found only by a greek, for it is the very being of beauty, and before that was found there was no philosophy. Now determination became possible, for the whole was there. The flower had ripened; now it could be dissected. The moment of beauty was now well known to men, it was there in life and thought, the infinitely one existed (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 66-67).

Terminus a quo and *ad quem* of philosophy (Arndt 62), beauty and poetry are here in the very heart of that Hölderlin’s conception mentioned above, which says that unity of subject and object is not graspable, only presupposed or felt. This lapidary formula will be the germ of Hegel’s speculative thought of “identity of identity and nonidentity” (Hegel 96), but it has other programmatic features in Hölderlin’s perspective, as described to Schiller in 1795:

I try to develop the idea of an infinite progress of philosophy, I try to show that the unneglectable exigency to be made at each system, the unification of subject and object in an absolute – I or whatever one wants to call it – is indeed possible aesthetically in the intellectual intuition, but theoretically only through an endless approximation like the one of the square to the circle; and that it is necessary an immortality both for the accomplishment of a system of thought and for the system of action (Hölderlin “Briefe” 181).

Hölderlin proposes – against the modern theoretical culture as well as against freedom *stricto sensu* of his masters – to accomplish *aesthetically* what from Kant on has configured through practical reason both Schiller’s poetic and Fichte’s systematic findings. In order to understand the *aesthetic* by means of an *intellectual intuition* one must bring up that “text on my own” about Plato’s *Phaedrus*. This aspect is clearer in the *Metric Version* (1794-95) of *Hyperion*, where Hölderlin rather takes into account the *Symposium*. Hölderlin reformulates the myth of Eros’s birth, which is known from the priestess Diotima in Plato’s dialogue. The *Metric Version* says: “as our original endless being became for the first time passive and the free full force felt its first limitations; as the poverty mated with abundance, there was love” (Hölderlin “Metrische Fassung” 192). This relationship between plenty and indigence has been already exploited in the *Thalia* fragment. The transposition of platonic myth of Eros’s birth into the Hölderlinian beauty conception brings within itself the oscillation (and

difference) that Hyperion was aware of as he started to tread his eccentric path. In the platonic version, Eros births from the mating of Poros (excess) and Penia (poverty) during the banquet offered in honor of Aphrodite's birth. Still according to the myth, Eros (the love) becomes the loyal server of Aphrodite (the beauty) (Plato 203b-c). In another version of *Hyperion*, viz., the *Hyperion's Youth* (1795), the relation of love and beauty reappears a little more detailed and rebuilds the perspective of eccentric path: "the love, which does not negate the nobility of its father and is always out of itself, how variously does it not err, but how easily!" (Hölderlin "Hyperions Jugend" 203). Hyperion admits: "the history of my youth is a change of contradictory extremes" (Hölderlin "Hyperions Jugend" 205).

As for the lost unity, Hölderlin acknowledges in the *Penultimate Version* (1795-96) that "we must lose it if we should strive for it, achieve it" (Hölderlin "Vorletzte Fassung" 236). Yet: "we tear ourselves away from the peaceful *Ἐν καὶ Πᾶν* [One and All] of the world in order to produce it on our own. We are disintegrated with nature, and what was once, so as we can believe it was One, now contradicts itself" (Hölderlin "Vorletzte Fassung" 236). What is to find within the always posed division of the unity (the One and All differentiated in itself), that is theoretically inescapable and practically unfeasible, this we can name as the present unity:

We had no idea of that infinite peace, of that being in the sole sense of word; we would not strive for unifying the nature with us; we would not think and not act if it were nothing at all (for us), we would be ourselves nothing (for us), if there were not that endless unification, that being in the sole sense of word. It is there – as beauty; it waits for a new reign over us, where beauty is the Queen. I believe one day we all will say: Forgive us, sacred Plato! We have transgressed against you. (Hölderlin "Vorletzte Fassung" 236-7).

But the conquest of a prosaic reign for beauty finds at the definitive *Hyperion*, or the *Hermit in Greece* a tragic outcome in the plot. The narrative of the engagement with Alabanda and some mercenaries in the war for the liberation of Greece against the Ottoman domination rebuilds the experience of strong frustration when Hyperion finally knows the true intention of his mates:

It is over, Diotima! our men have plundered, murdered, indiscriminately, even our brothers were killed, the innocent Greeks

in Mistra, or they wander helplessly about, their deathly faces calling Heaven and Earth to wreak vengeance on the barbarians, whose leader I was. (...) It was indeed a remarkable undertaking, to establish my Elysium with a pack of thieves! (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 96-7)

Once everything is ill-fated, such as already happened *in nuce* in the *Thalia* fragment, Hyperion faces his destiny: “fate casts me adrift in uncertainty, and I have deserved it”, he continues to his beloved, “I promised you a Greece, and instead you receive only an elegy. Be your own consolation!” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 97-8). The sorrow culminates in Book II, vol. II, with Hyperion’s *Song of Fate*. But since Hyperion is yet in an eccentric path, he is taken by the sobriety of his consciousness in the “correction” of narrative and memory that is potentialized in the “course of the remembrance” (Henrich “The Course of Remembrance” 189-205). Hyperion sings with his lute:

You move up there in the light
On easeful ground, blessed Geniuses!
Bright divine airs
Touch you lightly,
As the player’s fingers
Her holy strings.

Outside of Fate, like the sleeping
Babe, the Heavenly Ones breathe;
Chastely guarded
In modest bud,
Even for them
The spirit blooms,
And their blessed eyes
Gaze in still,
Eternal light.

But to us it is given
Nowhere to rest,
Suffering men
Falter and fall
Blindly from one
Hour to the next,
Like water flung down

From cliff to cliff,
Yearlong into uncertainty
(Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 119).⁸

The *Song of Fate* is placed between the definitive farewell of Alabanda and the letter in which Diotima announces her coming "loquacious death" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 122) and accept her destiny in the union of nature: "we part only to be more intimately one, more divinely at peace with all, with each other. We die that we may live" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 123); so as if she were giving him back the word Hyperion "began in me" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 123), viz., the *Ἐν καὶ Πᾶν*, whose "name is beauty" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 41). Since destiny is recognized in all its force as natural mechanism, Hyperion sings to the "blessed Geniuses", "outside of fate" (*schicksallos*) as a sleeping babe. The *Song of Fate* can be heard as an exemplar mirror of the remembered feeling of young Hyperion, at the time he faces the eccentric path on the beginning of the novel, but now contrasted with the consciousness he reaches at the end of narrative path. If the narrative is not a lyric result of his fate, so we must understand it as a lyrical rupture in the course of the prosaic. This crosses both the lost and regretted moment as well as the act of reconstruction in memory. It is also the acting memory in writing and remembering early feelings that sets free some conciliatory forces in the way from *pathos* to sobriety, namely the path of culture (*Bildung*) as it is classically understood and built. But once the problem is of destination, it treads a formation path that is distinct whether one is human or divine in the *Song of Fate*. The sublime image of man "flung like water from cliff to cliff yearlong into uncertainty" intensifies Hyperion's grieving. But the act of narrating reveals at the same time the conciliatory acceptance of tragic outcomes in its deep remembrance's experience, and this is perceivable when Hyperion tells Bellarmin about how he felt when Diotima's death was announced to him:

8 Ihr wandelt droben im Licht/ Auf weichem Boden, seelige Genien!/ Glänzende Götterlüfte/ Rühren euch leicht,/ Wie die Finger der Künstlerin/ Heilige Saiten. / Schicksallos, wie der schlafende/ Säugling, athmen die Himmlischen;/ Keusch bewahrt/ In bescheidener Knospe./ Blühet ewig/ Ihnen der Geist,/ Und die seeligen Augen/ Blicken in stiller/ Ewiger Klarheit./ Doch uns ist gegeben, / Auf keine Stätte zu ruhn,/Es schwinden, es fallen/Die leidenden Menschen/Blindlings von einer/Stunde zu andern,/Wie Wasser von Klippe/Zu Klippe geworfen,/Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.

Best of friends! I am at peace, for I want nothing better than the gods. Must not all things suffer? And the more excellent, the more deeply! Does not sacred nature suffer? O my divinity! that you could mourn as you are blissful – that was long beyond my understanding. But the bliss that does not suffer is sleep, and without death there is no life. Should you be eternally like a child, and sleep like that which is nothing? forego victory? not run through all perfections? Yes! yes! sorrow is worthy to lie at man's heart and to be your intimate, O nature! For it but leads from one bliss to another, and there is no other companion on the way (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 125).

Hyperion's perspective after all is of the reconnaissance of extreme polarization within the constitution of human experience toward its consciousness as a being living into the division of unity. When he rises to the loneliness of ideality and then looks back to reality, he faces a tragic fate in the sense of a "metaphor of an intellectual intuition": in the depths of this prose poem, Hyperion learns to grasp the serenity of unity with everything living and suffering. In other words: we are already ruptured as beings since we must die. But if it is in ideality that one reunites with everything living, on the other hand it is back to reality that this intuition is aesthetically and metaphorically accomplishable.⁹

3. Occasion for beauty, Empedocles and the craft of destiny.

Commenting to his audience on the final verses of John Keats's well-known sonnet *On first*

⁹ In general lines, I follow the ground-breaking book of Lawrence Ryan (1965), the first to take into account *Hyperion* seriously in the research work on Hölderlin (Ryan "Hölderlin's 'Hyperion'. Exzentrische Bahn und Dichterberuf"). He shows gradually, from the very first fragment to the published second volume, how complex the narrative structure of *Hyperion* is, both in regard to what is told to be lived as in regard to what is the "lived" from the point of view of the letter sender Hyperion. The goal of the narrative would be the "resolution of dissonances" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 1) arising in the "eccentric path", and the culminate point of "peace" quoted above would stand for the "highest formation of consciousness", as also defended by Schmidt (See Schmidt 959). This process of formation (*Bildung*) is *per se* unlimited: "So I thought. More soon" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 133), says the last sentence of the entire book. This teleologic model has been recently put in question, e.g. by Hansjörg Bay, who identifies Ryan's paradigm of an "unbroken successfully development" (Bay 10) as valid *sans phrase* till "nowadays" (1998) in German studies. According to Bay, the time has come for reviewing this paradigm with new studies on aspects not considered within it, which in turn make *Hyperion* "even more modern" by doubting the successfully "resolution of dissonances" (Bay 12). Nevertheless I take Ryan's model for valid, since it still allows to clarify the precise position of *Hyperion* at its own time, where the model of development of consciousness is strongly present in the philosophical background.

looking into Chapman's Homer (1816), Jorge Luis Borges noticed something strange on it because "it is a poem written about the poetic experience itself" (Borges 4). He quotes its last lines:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific – and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.
(Borges 4-5)

After few instigating words about the forms of appearance of poetry, Borges states that the poetic experience is "*an occasion for beauty*" (Borges 10). According to the reading he offers us, the verses of Keats revive the long dead Homer's translator and Shakespeare's contemporary rival George Chapman, doing this by 'looking into' his translations. His *first* looking into Chapman's Homer is also the *first* Borges's hearing of such verses from his father's mouth in Buenos Aires, when he felt "that something was happening" (Borges 5) to him as a 'fleshy' and 'bloody' being. This incident flattening time is retained in the memory like a *madeleine* experience, once the "*first* reading of a poem is a true one, and after that we delude ourselves into the belief that the sensation, the impression, is repeated" (Borges 6). Despite this kind of deflationary effect, poetry is always an experience that comes to occur every single time one reads, writes or recites a poem. Before the lines Borges quotes, Keats announces:

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.
(Keats 212)

So the Homer Keats meets is Chapman's. Having also written his *Hyperions*¹⁰, the young poet had been deeply touched by the folio edition of Chapman's translation of Homer, having browsed the book together with his friend Charles Clarke one entire night in the fall of 1816, and thereafter leaving the poem on Clarke's breakfast table (Hirsch 38-39). He contrasts the first look with everything he heard of Homer without breathing the pure serene of his 'demesne'. And then the epiphanic occasion for beauty arises for Keats: to look into Chapman is like looking through the skies when a new planet 'swims' before one's eyes. Confusing the conquistadors Cortez and Balboa, Keats imagines the looking into Homer as something like the first time Europeans have seen the eastern shore of the Pacific, in Darién (1513).

So grandiose it might have been, it also seems the occasion for beauty experienced by Hyperion while remembering his first depart from his hometown Tina. Transposed to *Hyperion*, I understand Borges's 'occasion for beauty' in the sense of "the name of that which is one and is all" (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 41). In a scene that is as fascinating as the "silent, upon a peak in Darien", Hyperion climbs the mount Tmolus in Sardis, in the surroundings of Smyrna, today in Turkey. He reaches the summit of the mount by noon and describes us a wonderful view of the flat landscape:

I stood, looking happily about me, relishing the purer airs of the sky. They were blessed hours.

Like a sea, the countryside from which I had climbed up lay spread before me, youthful, filled with living joy; spring's heavenly, unending play of colors greeted my heart; and, even as the Sun in the heavens found itself again in the thousand changes of light that the Earth sent back to him, so my spirit recognized itself in the fullness of life that was all about it, that beset it from every side.

(...)

10 The proposed reading is here focused on the main subject of beauty shared by Hölderlin, Keats and Borges. For more detailed investigation, I would allude to an early essay of Paul de Man, who associates Hölderlin's *Hyperion* to Keats's *Endymion* and Keat's *Hyperion* to Hölderlin's *Empedokles* (De Man 29-30). As for Keat's *Hyperions*, the first *Hyperion* was an imitation of and challenge to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *The Fall of Hyperion* a Dantean dream-vision (Keats 9-10). Anselm Haverkamp delivered an instigating study on Hölderlin and melancholy, which is followed in the English edition by an essay on Keats's *Ode on Melancholy*, but does not link Keats and Hölderlin directly and does not evaluate the suggestions of De Man (Se Haverkamp "Laub voll Trauer" and Haverkamp "Mourning Becomes Melancholia" 693-706).

I came back to Smyrna like a drunken man from a feast. (Hölderlin
“Hyperion and Selected Poems” 14-15)

Hölderlin knew the landscape from a translation of Richard Chandler's *Travels in Asia Minor and Greece* (1775-76) (Schmidt 933-934), and covers it with both a narrative and a mythological constructed layer, when, for example, he describes spending the night before climbing “among myrtles (...), where an ancient temple of Cybele looked out from the elms into the clear moonlight like a shy ghost” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 14). ‘Upon a peak in Sardis’, Hyperion fits into the role of his eponym, when the Sun, the Titan Hyperion's son Helios (Hesiod 371-374) “found itself again in the thousand changes of light” and his “spirit recognized itself in the fullness of live” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 14). Given atavistically the surname of the solar deity (Helios Hyperion), Hyperion also means “the high-one” or “the one-going-above” (*hyper-ion*), namely the one who climbs and recognizes himself in the marvelous vision of nature, which in turn is also the appearing part of oneself as “the one differentiated in itself”. But other than Chapman's occasion for beauty in Borges's eyes, beauty in Hölderlin's has a tragic dimension. We do know that not only from his losses, whether if it be the one of Alabanda or of Diotima as well as the one in the war for Greece's freedom. As long as he treads the eccentric path and recuperates the losses in memory, Hyperion detaches himself from all concrete realities. He becomes a *Hermit* as consequence of all the inner things he experiences, which give him in turn a still higher consciousness about his (poetic) loneliness. Back to Smyrna, he wants “to make good the deficiencies of human life” with the treasure of the Nature's loveliness he has received while in the heavens.¹¹ But then he finds only mockery and decides to live alone convinced of “the incurable corruption of my century” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 16). This appears also in the so-called Hyperion's invective (*Scheltrede*) at the end of the novel: “So I arrived among the Germans (...), barbarians from the remotest past, whom industry and science and even religion have made yet more barbarous, profoundly incapable of any divine

11 The same topic reappears in Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who after ten years in the mountains speaks to the sun: “You great star! What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine? (...) I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey. I need hands that reach out (...). Like you, I must *go down* (*untergehen*) as the human beings say, to whom I want to descend” (Nietzsche 3).

emotion etc.” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 128).

The poet Hyperion (and Hölderlin) becomes aware of his internal division. He is quite different from the image of artist Schiller gives us in his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). He states in his 19th letter:

No doubt the artist is the child of his time; but woe to him if he is also its disciple, or even its favorite. Let some beneficent deity snatch the infant betimes from his mother’s breast, let it nourish him with the milk of a better age and suffer him to grow up to full maturity beneath the distant skies of Greece. Then when he has become a man, let him return to his century as an alien figure; but not in order to gladden it by his appearance, rather, terrible like Agamemnon’s son, to cleanse it. He will indeed take his subject matter from the present age, but his form he will borrow from a nobler time – nay, from beyond all time, from the absolute unchangeable unity of his being (Schiller “On the Aesthetic Education of Man” 100).

If the Kantian Schiller thinks through the dichotomy real-ideal by circumscribing reality to the sphere of understanding and looking for ideality of beauty far from that sphere, Hölderlin assumes a constitutive division into the ideal regarding the reality with tragic features. The post-Kantian division into ideal (reason) and real (understanding) seems to him an unavoidable problem, the one of fate, since one does not find harmonious refuge even in the ideality, *viz.*, the reason. The cathartic function Schiller assigns to the poet in the aesthetic education would not take place anymore in a moralizing perspective, for even the education of the poet through the forms of a “better age” takes a classic ideal for granted, which is in turn the result of a historical construction. To suppose with Hölderlin the division within the ideal itself, like it remains from *Being and Judgement*, means therefore to recognize the historical features of literary genres in general and of the classic in its artistic products in particular, something Schiller also does in his *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, but rather to purge instead of conciliating with his age.

Back to the problem of fate, if Hölderlin does not oppose the mechanism of nature idealistically with liberty, so destiny reveals itself as a problem. In addition to the liberated forces in the narration of *Hyperion*, we can see a more specific formulation related to this problem in the reflections Hölderlin writes down when he conceives the drama *The Death of Empedocles* in Bad Homburg von der Höhe (1798-1800), having already written the so-called

Frankfurt Plan in 1797 while finishing *Hyperion*.

The death of Empedocles also has its place in *Hyperion*. The narrator expresses himself by sharing what we could consider as anticipating the stoic Nietzschean *amor fati*, for it is far from an ataraxic feeling what moves him after Diotima's confirmed death in a letter from his friend Notara. He answers this way:

My Diotima died a beautiful death. (...) Yes! all is over; (...) And now tell me, what refuge remains? – Yesterday I went to the summit of Aetna. There I remembered the great Sicilian who, weary of counting the hours, knowing the soul of the World, in his bold joy in life there flung himself down into the glorious flames, for 'the cold poet had to warm himself at the fire,' said someone later, to mock him (Hölderlin "Hyperion and Selected Poems" 125-126).

The mention of Empedocles is here obvious if we have in mind that both final work on *Hyperion* and begin on *The Death of Empedocles* are contemporary. The form in which Hölderlin intended to present this death was therefore more important than the choice of the hero itself, especially because he does not share the much common comprehension of Socrates's death as a martyr's as well as a Christian's one (Birkenhauer 200).

What appeared as the *beautiful death* of Diotima is now appreciated as the *free death* of Empedocles, who succumbs "through excess of intensity" (Hölderlin "The Death of Empedocles" 142). Like Hyperion, Empedocles "appears to have been born to be a poet, according to everything we know about him" (Hölderlin "The Death of Empedocles" 147). Once the tragic is for Hölderlin the poetic mode in which the hero must be annihilated in favor of what escapes from us to catch, *viz.*, the one's own death, the free perishing of Empedocles shows itself theoretically as a good material to be formed, though the drama itself as work defeated.

From the original *Empedocles*, three versions are extant and some theoretic essays such as *The Basis of Empedocles* and *The Fatherland in Decline* (according to Sattler's edition) or *Becoming in Dissolution* (according to Beissner's). While finishing *Hyperion* and starting on *Empedocles*, Hölderlin writes to Neuffer and reports a crisis of production in which the idea of the inner necessity of death (Hölderlin "The Death of Empedocles" 31) is relativized in face of the acknowledgment of an essential contraposition that emerges in the

foreground, namely the formal opposition the poetic spirit operates in a material (*Stoff*):

There is a hospital where every single unhappy poet like me can refuge with honors – the philosophy. (...) But I rather mercilessly succumb than separate from the sweet home of Muses. (...) I need less strength than lightness, less ideas than nuances (...), and that all because one reason: I fear the common and ordinary in real life too much (...), I am afraid of being disturbed by the reality in the inner concern (...), I fear for the warm life to be caught cold on the icy history of the day (Hölderlin “Briefe” 289-290).

Hölderlin reflects the inner crisis that makes the hero perish in his *Frankfurt Plan*, but he is now motivated by his authorial experience of *Hyperion* and knows his challenge:

Because I am more destructible than some others, I must try to take more advantage of things that act in a destructing way against me; I must take them in so far as they serve to my true life (...). Once I find them, I must take them always as an indispensable material, without which my innermost never will be completely presentable (...). The pure can only be presented in the impure, and if you try to show the noble without the ordinary, so it will result in an artificial whole or a nonsense (...). What is noble only manifests itself with the colors of destiny under which it emerges (...). The beauty assumes necessarily a form when it comes to reality, a form which is not natural for it and which only becomes natural if one adds to it the circumstances that gave necessarily it this form (...). Nothing noble can be presented without the ordinary (Hölderlin “Briefe” 290).

This crisis is the turning from the subjective toward reality. Hölderlin does conceive a poetic work which is able to conciliate the present time into an ideal of beauty that already belongs to an unity with what is entirely other to itself, *viz.*, disharmonic, and includes the present time so as it is: *prosaic*. In Schillerian terms, we could say the Hölderlinian ideal is not mere *naïve*, but consists of its reciprocal relation with the *sentimental*, which is intensified in the lyric poetry. It is therefore the feature the work of art should take, but it is also the configuration of human destiny. It is not anymore the death as “a necessity proceeding from his [Empedocles] inmost essence” (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 31), but the death as something attached to its external circumstances and conditions.

This is the problem formulated in terms of reciprocal relation between nature and art. According to *The Basis of Empedocles*, “art is the blossom, the perfection of nature” (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 144). Since nature is part of human, and since human being “did give himself gods” (Hölderlin “Hyperion and Selected Poems” 65), the divine would stand exactly in the midpoint of nature and art, and at the same time would provide what lacks in the reciprocal relation of the two. According to the language of Empedocles’s essays, human as *organic* beings are more artificial, *viz.*, perfection and product of nature which is in turn the more “a-organic”, *viz.*, the raw material that gives us nothing but the *feeling* of perfection, and never any *knowledge*. We can say there is accordingly a dialectical relation between nature and art which allows both opposed elements to coincide, both the spiritual human life that becomes artificially *aorganic* and the nature that also becomes artificially *organic*. In such a disharmonic harmony between both arises the death of individual, in which the organic gives up its selfhood in favor of aorganic and the aorganic gives up its universality in favor of organic. Empedocles is the hero who must die individually in favor of the whole he presents, *viz.*, the problem of fate for the divine-human and human-divine which finds itself in the transition from nature to art and vice versa. It is not anymore the individuality in excess that overflows, but the “real excess of intimacy (*Innigkeit*)”¹² (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 146-147) Empedocles must represent, which “comes from enmity” avoided in the inner refuge, *viz.*, it comes from “supreme conflict (*Zwist*)” (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 147). So the ideal unity, when real, imposes its *impossibility* as a division in which the individual perishing solves the problem of fate:

Thus Empedocles is the result of his period; his character points back to the period that produced him. His destiny exhibits itself in him as in a momentary unification, one that has to dissolve in order to become something more (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 147).

Destiny must be solved apparently for Empedocles as for all tragic characters, once they are all “more or less attempts to solve the problems of destiny” (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 148). Therefore, destiny is placed between art and nature. As touch point and

12 D. F. Krell translates as “intensity”. I think “intimacy” is closer to the meaning of *Innigkeit*.

hence as threshold of human and divine, destiny demands sacrifice “in which the whole human being becomes actual and visible” (Hölderlin “The Death of Empedocles” 147). It exposes the inaccessible, namely the unity with everything living that appears metaphorically as intellectual intuition. The path from nature toward art is the path of culture or formation (*Bildung*), in which human being errs like Hyperion in his eccentric way. And as formation, culture is a place of transition, “revolution”. If it has to represent adequately the sensible and deep unity of extremes, *viz.*, the two ideals of human existence, so it must account for the tragic character when it comes to perish between interiority and exteriority. In this sense, the tragic dimension of literature finds itself between destiny, which interpolates the human being as individual, and art, which in turn – other than religion – must be his answer to nature.

4. Conclusions.

The aim of this article was to show that destiny is a philosophical problem for Hölderlin, since it appears under the sign of nature order. The tragic dimension of poetry allows him, both as poet and philosopher, to state that the main problem to face is not that of determinism and freedom, but how modern poet copes with the “excess of intimacy” in a godless time. The occasion for beauty in a Platonic variant is that of flashy moments one can experience if she or he is no longer able to seize the Gods in the near: so the images of *Hyperion's* climbing in Tmolus, Keats's first look into Chapman and Borges's memories of his father reciting Keats. This experience of beauty has its philosophical name in Hölderlin: that which is one and is all and it is different in itself. Beauty is not an exclusive harmonious experience: it includes defeat, *viz.*, suffer. Hölderlin needs therefore no complementary concept of sublime, such as present in Kant's and Schiller's models. The attempt to give a form to it in a modern tragedy is also the attempt to show to what extent this concept of beauty can be conciliatory: a step beyond Hyperion's hermitage, Empedocles dies a free death as a man of his time, *viz.*, as an insignificant individual subject in favor of the manifestation of the all-nature. The failure of this *modern* drama may also be the testimony of that ungraspable unity with everything living.

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