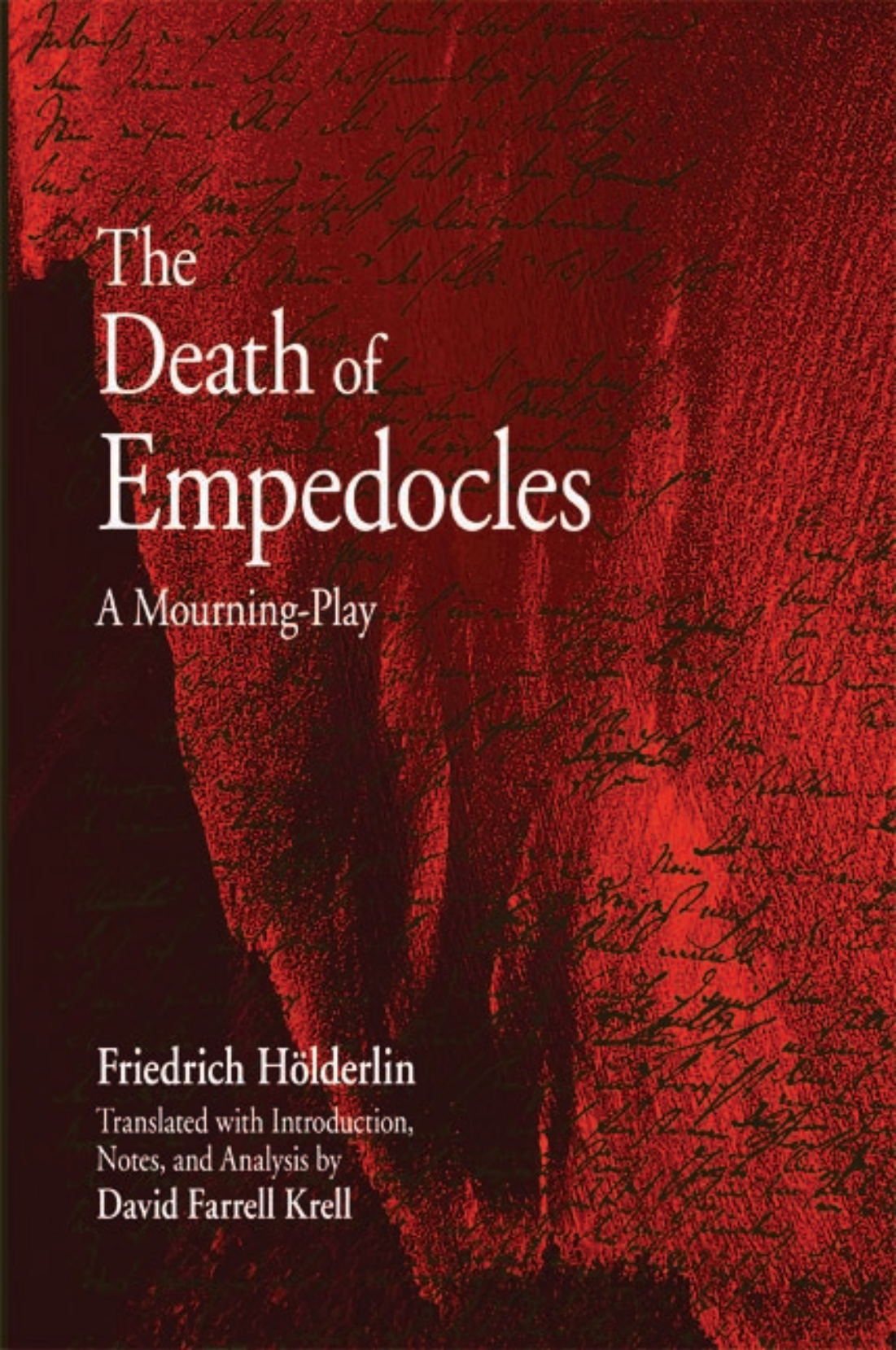
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Death of
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A Mourning-Play
Friedrich Hölderlin
Translated with Introduction,
Notes, and Analysis by
David Farrell Krell

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The Death of Empedocles

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The Death of Empedocles

A Mourning-Play

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN

A New Translation of the Three Versions and the Related Theoretical Essays with Introduction, Notes, and an Analysis by

DAVID FARRELL KRELL

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Preface

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN'S *Der Tod des Empedokles,* composed in three incomplete versions from 1798 to 1799, but never published during the poet's lifetime, is a masterpiece in fragments, a masterpiece in ruins. Hölderlin was an accomplished poet before he began his tragedy or "mourning-play," *Trauerspiel*,[1] and he had already made a name for himself through the publication of his novel *Hyperion;* yet in the three fragments or ruins of his play we have the monuments that mark the progress to his mature style. In the third version, abandoned as the year 1799 came to an end, we hear the prosody of Hölderlin's great odes and hymns, the poems written from 1800 until about 1806 for which he is best known and loved, among them, "As on a Holiday," "Bread and Wine," "The Rhine," "Celebration of Peace," Mnemosyne," and "Patmos." Portions of the Empedocles tragedy point toward Hölderlin's extraordinary translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus the Tyrant* and *Antigone,* published in 1804.

This is the first published English translation of all three versions of *The Death of Empedocles* as far as I am aware.[2] Between the second and third versions

1. The German word *Trauerspiel* may most often be taken as synonymous with *Tragödie.* Yet because mourning, *die Trauer,* constitutes such an important motif for Hölderlin's work, from his early novel *Hyperion,* through his drama *Der Tod des Empedokles,* to his late hymns, it seems best to use the English word *tragedy* only when its German cognate appears. I accept the risk of offending the English/American ear with the more literal *mourning-play* for *Trauerspiel.*

2. Michael Hamburger included translations of versions two and three in his dual-language anthology, Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments,* 3d ed. (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1994), first published in 1966. See 283–386. I have also benefited from Friedrich Hölderlin, *Œuvres,* ed. Philippe Jaccottet (Paris: Pléiade, 1967), 465–559, 656–68, with translations by R. Rovini and D. Naville.

in the present volume appear four essays toward a theory of the tragic, essays in which Hölderlin tries to clarify for himself the meaning of his own "mourning-play."[3] Those essays are as difficult to read and understand as the versions of the play themselves are pellucid. Together the essays and the play demonstrate that Hölderlin was not only one of the greatest poets of the German language but also one of Germany's greatest thinkers. His importance to German Idealism and Romanticism—and, well beyond these movements or periods, to thinkers and poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—is doubtless guaranteed by the late hymns. Yet *The Death of Empedocles* is a work that stands on its own, surviving on its own merits. It is not to slight the late hymns that Max Kommerell asserts that the third version of *The Death of Empedocles,* "in the sustained pace of its language," contains "the very best of Hölderlin" (MK 348). Whoever reads the mourning-play, along with the essays surrounding it, especially "The Basis of Empedocles" and "The Fatherland in Decline," will find both the play and the essays uncannily relevant for our own place and time. It will be clear to readers that the translation and explanatory notes treat Hölderlin as both poet and philosopher, a man of magnificent language and astonishing thoughts. His language stands alongside that of Goethe; his thoughts alongside those of Schelling and Hegel. Better said, both his writing and his thinking are incomparable, and one may here with justice paraphrase D. H. Lawrence on Whitman: ahead of Hölderlin—no one.

A word about the oddities of punctuation and the gaps in the text: everywhere in Hölderlin's manuscript are signs of haste, and no presentation of the text or translation of it should try too hard to hide them. Hölderlin often neglects to punctuate his lines, as though his thoughts will brook no pause; at the end of a line he very often skips punctuation altogether. In addition, when readers see gaps in the text of this English translation, they should assume that the gaps occur in Hölderlin's holograph—although nothing will substitute for checking with the various German editions. Jochen Schmidt's edition for the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, which serves as my principal German text, resists the temptation to constitute a finalized text, and that resistance requires that the text have lacunae in it. Finally, because Hölderlin's syntax becomes increasingly complex, involuted, convoluted, and distended as the versions proceed, often stretching over many lines of verse, a line-by-line translation has very often been impossible: English wails when forced to go without its subjects, verbs, and objects all lined up in a row. I have tried above all to capture the sense of Hölderlin's lines, and also to respect his meters and

3. See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory,* trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). "The Ground for Empedocles," in the present volume called "The Basis of Empedocles," appears at 50–61; "Becoming in Dissolution," in the present volume called "The Fatherland in Decline," at 96–100.

his prosody generally; I have also tried to follow him when he stretches the possibilities of the German language, drawing language itself, as it were, into uncanny territory. If, as Hölderlin once wrote, "translation is wholesome gymnastics for language" (CHV 2:538), it is also an occasion for pulled hamstrings and wrenched joints.

The four principal editions used for the translation, listed here chronologically, and with their code cited on the left, are:

StA 4 — Volume 4, Parts I and II *(Der Tod des Empedokles)* of *Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Friedrich Beissner. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1952ff. This is the Große Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe, most often referred to in the literature as StA. In 1969 Friedrich Beissner and Jochen Schmidt prepared for the Insel Verlag of Frankfurt a handy two-volume edition titled *Hölderlin Werke und Briefe.* I have not used that edition for the present volume. However, in 1973 Beissner presented the fruits of his many years of editorial labors in a small and inexpensive paperback edition of *Der Tod des Empedokles,* published by Philipp Reclam, Junior, of Stuttgart. I refer to this popular and very useful edition simply as Reclam, with page number.

FHA 12, 13, 14 — Volumes 12 and 13 (*Der Tod des Empedokles*) and volume 14 (*Entwürfe zur Poetik*) of *Friedrich Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Dietrich E. Sattler. Basel and Frankfurt: Stroemfeld and Roter Stern, 1988. This is the Frankfurter Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, most often referred to in the literature as FHA. This important edition presents not only Sattler's reconstructed text (in my page references always the *later* of the two page references) but also a variorum text, that is, a text that shows each of Hölderlin's many emendations to his text—his crossings-out, his entering of parentheses and brackets, his underlinings, his replacement texts, marginal jottings, and so on. Immensely complicated, the variorum text is nevertheless invaluable for readers who have no access to the handwritten originals.

CHV 1, 2, 3 — Volumes 1, 2, and 3 of *Friedrich Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke und Briefe,* ed. Michael Knaupp. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992.

DKV 1, 2, 3 — Volumes 1, 2, and 3 of *Friedrich Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in drei Bänden,* ed. Jochen Schmidt. Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994.

I have used the most recent edition of Hölderlin's works, Dietrich Sattler's chronological edition (the Bremer Ausgabe, published in 2004 by Luchterhand Literaturverlag, Munich, and indicated in this volume by the code BA 7, 8, with page number), primarily when questions of precise chronology arose. Readers should note the affiliation of Beissner-Schmidt and Sattler-Knaupp, such that the four major editions often fall naturally into two pairs, as it were: Friedrich Beissner and Jochen Schmidt worked together on the StA, as did Dietrich Sattler and Michael Knaupp on the FHA. One is therefore not surprised to find that Beissner and Schmidt tend to agree, as do Sattler and Knaupp. In the following notes, readers may assume that DKV and StA are in substantial agreement, and that FHA and CHV agree in their opposition to DKV and StA, unless otherwise noted. In not a few instances, however, each editor disagrees with all the others, and at those moments readers will realize how bedeviling Hölderlin's holograph can be. A look at the facsimile pages toward the end of the book will confirm their worst fears.

I have used DKV as the principal basis of my translation inasmuch as Schmidt excludes very little of Hölderlin's holograph text. Schmidt complains that Sattler's reconstructed text in FHA reduces the play by some 10% of its lines. Sattler would of course reply that he is simply following Hölderlin's instruction to delete a passage that no longer satisfied its author. However, because it is difficult to know precisely what Hölderlin would have deleted altogether from his three versions, as opposed to what he would have altered only slightly, I have decided to err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion. Only in rare instances have I altered the text of DKV, and here once again it was for reasons of inclusiveness. In those cases I have preserved the *numbering* of the lines in DKV (so that readers will have at least one German text to which they can readily refer) by giving the added lines letters (a, b, c, and so forth) instead of numbers.

Finally, I have throughout referred to the following works of primary and secondary literature by code:

DK — Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, ed., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* 3 vols. 6th ed. Zürich: Weidmann, 1951. Cited by fragment number. For Empedocles, see 1:276–375.

JV 1–4 — Christoph Jamme and Frank Völkel, ed., *Hölderlin und der Deutsche Idealismus,* 4 vols. "Specula 3." Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2003. The bulk of the material on *The Death of Empedocles* appears in vol. 3.

KSA 1–15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe der Werke,* 15 vols., ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin and Munich: Walter de Gruyter and Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980.

LV David Farrell Krell, *Lunar Voices: Of Tragedy, Poetry, Fiction, and Thought.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on *The Death of Empedocles.*

MK Max Kommerell, *Geist und Buchstabe der Dichtung: Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Hölderlin,* 6th ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1991 [originally published in 1940].

RA *The Recalcitrant Art: Diotima's Letters to Hölderlin and Related Missives,* trans. and ed. Douglas F. Kenney and Sabine Menner-Bettscheid. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

RC Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* trans. Tim Parks. New York: Borzoi Books, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

TA David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. Chapters 7–11 deal with Hölderlin and tragedy generally, chapter 7 focusing on *The Death of Empedocles.* Much of the material in the Notes and the Analysis at the end of the present volume derive from TA.

I would like to thank Marianne Schütz and Christa Haaser of the Hölderlin-Archiv for their generous help and support, particularly for providing the facsimile pages of Hölderlin's manuscript, and Professor Lore Hühn and Dr. Roswitha Doerendahl of the Universität Freiburg for providing the Stephanus edition of Empedocles' fragments. Dennis J. Schmidt, the editor of the series in which this book appears, has been a loyal and enthusiastic fan of Hölderlin and a staunch ally of my own efforts—my deep thanks to him. My gratitude to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at DePaul University, and its deans, Richard J. Meister, Michael Mezey, and Charles Suchar, for their generous support of my work over the years. Thanks to my sponsoring editor at SUNY Press, Jane Bunker, to the book's production editor, Marilyn Semerad, and to David Matthew Krell, who designed both book and cover, demonstrating that the former may be judged on the basis of the latter. This is Hölderlin's book, and perhaps Empedocles' book as well, but not mine; if the book were mine I would dedicate it to my friend Ulrich Halfmann, who helped expertly with many passages and lent, as always, generous support.

To those skeptics who wonder why I have here attempted the impossible—a verse translation of Hölderlin—and who may feel that I am not fit for the task, that I have not got a poetic bone in my body, I insist that there is such a bone in me, just one, a thigh bone wrapped in endless folds of prosaic fat. I have burned that bone in joyous desperation on the altar of Hölderlin's Empedocles. As both Schelling and Hölderlin understood, there is a certain freedom in attempting the impossible.

St. Ulrich and Chicago D. F. K.

Friedrich Hölderlin: A Brief Chronology

1770 Hölderlin is born on March 20, the first son of Heinrich Friedrich Hölderlin and Johanna Christiana Heyn, in the village of Lauffen on the Neckar, in the Swabian state of Württemberg.

1772 On July 5 Hölderlin's father dies of a brain stroke at age thirty-six. On August 15 Hölderlin's sister Heinrike ("Rike") is born.

1774 Hölderlin's mother marries Johann Christian Gock, a wine merchant and diligent burgher (soon to be mayor) in nearby Nürtingen. The four-year-old Hölderlin moves with his mother and grandmother to that town. Hölderlin loves his stepfather deeply; he later refers to Gock as his "second father."

1776 Hölderlin begins to attend school in Nürtingen and also has private lessons at home. His stepbrother Carl, to whom Hölderlin will be quite close, is born on October 29.

1779 On March 13, Hölderlin's "second father," having contracted pneumonia after helping to repair flood damage in Nürtingen, dies at age thirty. The nine-year-old boy is overwhelmed by what he later calls his "tendency to mourning." He is raised now by his mother and grandmother. His mother, who plans for her son to become a country pastor, will never relinquish her control over his inheritance. Hölderlin will never achieve financial independence; Hölderlin's mother will never make of him a minister.

1780 Hölderlin begins music lessons, first on the piano, then the flute. The boy shows considerable musical talent. He attends the Latin School and continues to have private lessons. Over the next several years he studies religion—his mother is a devout Pietist—Hebrew, Latin and Greek, Dialectic and Rhetoric. He is respected and well liked by his classmates. He reads travel-adventure books with enthusiasm, developing a special love for Greek antiquity. Neither of these tastes will change. At the Latin school, in 1782, he prevents the older boys from picking on a young newcomer—F. W. J. Schelling, who is five years younger than Hölderlin. Years later, Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel will be roommates at the University of Tübingen.

1784 The fourteen-year-old pupil begins to attend the boarding school at Denkendorf, not far from Nürtingen. He has a scholarship that is contingent on his studying theology for purposes of ordination. The school uniform is a monk's habit, the daily routine organized around four prayer hours. The pupils' reading is strictly censored. Hölderlin writes his first serious poems. He does well in his schoolwork, is sixth in a class of twenty-nine, and works hard at the Pietist discipline of "examination of conscience." On November 12 he writes the poem "M. G." ("To My God"). Pietism pervades his early work, and yet the next November he composes "The Night," the last stanza of which reads: "Thus he rests, except that the slave of vice / Is punished by the fearful, thundering voice of conscience, / And anxiety unto death tosses and turns on the soft bedding / Where voluptuosity itself wields the lash."

1786 In October Hölderlin transfers to the boarding school at Maulbronn Monastery. He falls desperately in love with the administrator's daughter, Louise Nast, who is two years older than he. She returns his affection and he becomes more desperate. A poem dedicated to his family, "My People," contains these lines on the death of his stepfather: "When on the terrifyingly silent deathbed / My mother, senseless, lay in the dust—/ Woe! I see it there before me, the scene of wailing, / Eternally hovering before me, the darkling day of death."

1787 In spring he waxes enthusiastic over the dramas of Schiller and the poems of pseudo-Ossian, whom he compares to Homer. In April he tells his mother he will never be a pastor; she is not pleased. He returns to Maulbronn, which he dubs "Cloister Crucifix." The romance with Louise Nast continues; he befriends Louise's cousin, Immanuel Nast. By the summer he has developed symptoms of (psy-

chosomatic?) tuberculosis. His "Lament," dedicated to Louise Nast under the code name "Stella," begins: "Stella! ah! we suffer greatly! if only we were in the grave—/ Come! come cool grave! take us both!" His study of Greek literature intensifies; he is becoming expert in the Alcaic and Asclepiadic verse forms, writes the poem "On a Meadow" in hexameters. Here for the first time he contrasts nature, which is life-giving and nurturing, to a noisome and absurd civilization—with its "walls of squalor, / Nooks and crannies of deception." Later, in his novel *Hyperion,* he will contrast "The School of Nature" with "The School of Destiny."

1788 In September he discusses with his mother the possibility of marrying Louise. His mother concurs: every country pastor needs a wife. On October 21 he enters the *Tübinger Stift,* or Protestant seminary, at the university and meets G. W. F. Hegel. Their curriculum: two years of *philosophicum,* three of *theologicum.* Like all the rest of the gifted students, these two hate the narrow-minded sectarianism and conservatism of their school. Only one of their teachers dares to peek into Kant. Within two years the students will own all three *Critiques* but will have to hide them under the boulders that line the banks of the Neckar River. In the winter of 1788–1789 Hölderlin joins a poetry circle at Tübingen with Christian Neuffer and Rudolf Magenau. "And if the rabble, a thousand strong, droned their warnings and tried / To throttle us with their thousand tongues of priestly rage / Banning all that's new, we'd laugh them off the stage, / We sons of the daughter of god, Justice."

1789 In an exchange of letters during the spring, Hölderlin and Louise Nast agree to break their engagement. The reasons: Hölderlin's lack of income and position, his moodiness and tendency to brood, his "unconquerable melancholy" caused by "frustrated ambition." Ambition to be what? Anything but a country pastor, preferably a poet. His mother disapproves of the breakup; Hölderlin begs her for money. That summer he studies flute with the virtuoso Friedrich Dulon. On July 14, the Bastille is stormed; weeks later "The Declaration of the Rights of Man" is proclaimed; on November 14 the local duke clamps down on the restive students of the *Stift.* Hölderlin knocks the hat off a schoolteacher's head out in the street because the teacher refuses to greet him properly; Hölderlin is sentenced to six hours in the university prison (doesn't every university need one?) for conduct unbecoming a student. Hölderlin hopes now to study law. "I can stand it no longer! eternally on and on / The little boy's steps, the steps of a prisoner, / Tiny steps

already measured out for him / To take each day, I can stand it no longer!" And this remarkable fragment: "I hate me! it is a nauseating thing, / The heart of humankind, weak and puerile and proud, / As friendly as Tobias's puppy dog, / Then once again so spiteful! Get me out of here! I hate me!"

1790 As the duke tightens his hold on the *Stift,* the students pursue their own education outside the walls in enthusiastic meetings and wine parties. Two of Hölderlin's major research papers are produced: "History of the Fine Arts among the Greeks" and "Parallels between Solomon's Sayings and Hesiod's 'Works and Days.'" Hölderlin earns a master's degree. On October 20, the fifteen-year-old *Wunderkind* Schelling joins Hölderlin and Hegel in the *Stift.* That summer Hölderlin meets the university chancellor's delightfully spoiled daughter; he writes poems to her code name, "Lyda." He reads Leibniz, is inspired by idealism, but also F. H. Jacobi's book *On the Doctrine of Spinoza,* which explicates Spinoza's philosophy of *nature.* Jacobi's book occasions the most exciting debate in the German universities over the next few years—the debate on monotheism versus pantheism and atheism.

1791 Into Hegel's album Hölderlin writes the pantheistic motto, Ἕν καὶ πᾶν, "One and All." That spring he hikes through the Swiss Alps south of Zürich down to Lake Lucerne; on his way home he travels through that part of Swabia in the Black Forest where the Danube has its source(s). Many years later, his poems "At the Source of the Danube" and "The Ister" will recall this journey. In June he learns of Louise Nast's engagement to another, vows he will never woo again, and refers once more to his excessive "ambition." In September Hölderlin's first published poems appear, his Tübingen hymns "To the Muse," "To Freedom," "To the Goddess of Harmony," and "My Recuperation." The first review of his poems, written by an established poet, is perhaps his best: "Hölderlin's muse is an earnest muse." In November he undertakes an enthusiastic study of astronomy, which will play an important role in his poems; he is particularly entranced by Kepler's discovery of the elliptical orbit. The ellipse, having as its two foci the opposing schools of nature and destiny, will be an important metaphor in his novel *Hyperion.*

1792 Having reached age twenty-two he reflects on what it means to come of age, both in his own life (between his mother's wishes for him and his own ambition to be a poet) and in his homeland, which

is struggling (as Kant had urged in his essay "What Is Enlightenment?") to reach the age of majority, to earn the right to speak out of its own mouth: *Mündigkeit.* By spring he completes his hymns "To Friendship," "To Freedom" (second version), "To Love," and "To the Genius of Youth." He begins now to sketch the novel, *Hyperion,* eventually published in two volumes, on which he will work until 1798. September in Paris is bloody, as the leaders of the Gironde fall to the guillotine; the French Revolution begins to devour its children and doubts spread among the democratically minded across Europe.

1793 In September Hölderlin meets Isaak von Sinclair, a politically engaged Jacobin; they will be lifelong friends. In the fall he visits Schiller, who becomes an important father figure to him; the famous poet arranges a tutorship for Hölderlin now that his studies in Tübingen are drawing to a close. In December Hölderlin leaves Tübingen and the chancellor's daughter behind, traveling eastward through Bamberg and Coburg to Waltershausen.

1794 In Waltershausen he tutors Fritz von Kalb, for the first six months successfully; then the boy becomes an adolescent. In April Hölderlin studies Schiller's *Anmut und Würde* ("Charm and Dignity," or "Grace and Worthiness") with enthusiasm. Fritz's mother, Charlotte von Kalb, is full of praise for the new tutor. From her, in late summer, he borrows Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre,* or "Doctrine of Science." In early September he sends his *Fragment of Hyperion* to Schiller for publication. In October he contemplates writing a tragedy on the death of Socrates, "in accord with the ideals of Greek drama." He wants to advance beyond the Kantian boundaries (preeminently beyond Kant's proscription of "intellectual intuition") and to reestablish the rights of the Platonic εἶδος. In early November he visits Schiller in Jena, who at that moment is conversing with a stranger; the stranger ignores Hölderlin, all the while thumbing through Hölderlin's *Fragment of Hyperion.* That evening Hölderlin learns that the stranger was Goethe. When he finally does engage in a conversation with Goethe at the beginning of the following year, Hölderlin finds him "calm, with genuine majesty in his gaze, and also love. . . . One often feels that one is talking with a generous father." Hölderlin attends Fichte's lectures, visits Schiller often, meets the beautiful Sophie Mereau, and befriends the philosopher Immanuel Niethammer. Charlotte von Kalb's companion, Wilhelmine Marianne Kirms, becomes a close, perhaps intimate, friend.

1795 Hölderlin is still in Jena with his difficult charge, Fritz von Kalb. The boy's mother, Charlotte, and Hölderlin agree, however, that the tutorship should end. She continues to help Hölderlin financially during the next few months. Hölderlin borrows from Schiller's shelves Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprentice Years,* a book that moves him deeply. He works on *Hyperion.* Exchanges of letters and meetings with Schelling and Hegel lead to a common endeavor, the brief but comprehensive philosophical manifesto we now call "The Oldest Program toward a System in German Idealism." In March the publisher Cotta agrees to publish Hölderlin's *Hyperion,* although he requests that it be shortened. At the end of May Hölderlin suddenly leaves Jena for Nürtingen, perhaps because of the pressure he feels in the company of "greats" such as Schiller, Goethe, and Fichte. He writes in letters of his "fruitless efforts" in Jena, which "distracted and weakened him"; to Schiller he admits that in Jena "the boy had to deal with men"; he compares himself to a seedling that has to be protected from the brilliant sunlight of a Schiller (CHV 2:614, 655, 665). In July and December he has further philosophical conversations with Schelling, the fruit of which, to repeat, we can glimpse in the *Systemprogramm.* A friend arranges a new tutorship for Hölderlin, this time on the estate ("White Hart") of the wealthy Frankfurt banker Jacob Gontard.

1796 Hölderlin is enthusiastic about his new tutorship, expressing admiration for young Henry Gontard—and for Henry's mother, Susette. By October Hölderlin's support of the French Revolution has dwindled; he finds himself to be "in a less Revolutionary condition." In November he refuses yet another pastorate his mother would like to arrange for him; for the first time he confesses to her in some detail his decision to be a poet.

1797 Hölderlin's friend Hegel becomes a tutor in Frankfurt. The two see one another often. "I love calm intellectual human beings, because they provide such good orientation." In mid-April the first volume of *Hyperion* is published. The first copy goes to Susette Gontard, the "Diotima" of Hölderlin's novel and his poems. By summer Schiller's judgment of his young protégé has become harsher; Goethe remains puzzled by Hölderlin's intensity. Both find him and his poetry excessively earnest. Nor are things going well at White Hart; Hölderlin feels himself torn between love and hate, *zerrissen von Liebe und Hass.* Little wonder that during these months he becomes intrigued with the ancient Greek thinker of Love and Strife, Empedocles of Acra-

gas. In August he composes a detailed plan for a tragic drama on that figure (see chapter 1, below). Actual work on the play will not begin until some fifteen or sixteen months later.

1798 February-March: much Revolutionary activity in southwestern Germany, where there are hopes to create an Alemannic Republic. Because of difficulties at White Hart and his cool reception by the "greats," Hölderlin's mood is bleak. "There are so few who believe in me." At the end of September Hölderlin is fired from his job at White Hart. Susette does not, perhaps cannot, save him. He moves to the nearby town of Bad Homburg, where his friend Sinclair resides. Here, on December 11, according to Dietrich Sattler (BA 7:7), or, according to other editors (and more likely to be the case), somewhat earlier, during October, Hölderlin begins to write *The Death of Empedocles* (see chapter 2). In mid-December he reads Diogenes Laertius's account of Empedocles.

1799 During this year, and until May 1800, he and Susette meet clandestinely; they cautiously exchange letters. These are months in which the thinker remains torn between love and strife. His poem "Achilles" treats not the cocky warrior but the forlorn lover of Briseïs who weeps on the seashore and begs his mother, Thetis, to comfort him. Hölderlin comments: "Son of gods! oh, if only I were like you, I could with intimate voice / Sing the lament of my secret suffering to one of the celestial ones." A letter to his mother in January defends the profession of poetry, "the most innocent of all occupations." Sometime in April, Hölderlin stops working on the first version of *The Death of Empedocles.* Between April and mid-June he begins a second version (see chapter 3). He plans to start a literary journal, to be called *Iduna,* to secure financial independence not only for himself but perhaps also for Susette; the publisher insists that the "greats" be involved in the project, however, and so it soon fails. During the last ten days of July he prepares a neat copy of the first 145 lines of the second version of *The Death of Empedocles* for possible publication in his proposed journal. In October and November he writes several essays on tragic poetry, trying to work out the problems of his own Empedocles play (see chapter 4). In December, after drawing up a new plan, he composes the third and final version of the mourning-play, it too incomplete (see chapters 5 and 6). A final "Sketch toward the Continuation of the Third Version" (chapter 7) is never fully elaborated; as far as we know, no more work is done on the mourning-play. In November he meets with Susette, giving her a copy of the recently published second volume of *Hyperion.* It bears the inscription, "To whom else but you?"

1800 May 8: the final secret meeting with Susette Gontard. In June Hölderlin visits friends in Stuttgart. They are struck by his evident ill health. In spite of severe health problems and depression, many poems—now in the mature style—are composed, among them, "To the Germans," "Rousseau," "Diotima: You Are Silent," "Menon's Lament for Diotima," "Stuttgart," "Bread and Wine," and "The Archipelago."

1801 In January Hölderlin begins a new tutorship in Hauptwil, Switzerland. On February 9, the Peace of Lunéville is concluded; Hölderlin composes *Friedensfeier,* "Celebration of Peace." In mid-April he terminates the tutorship; in early December he agrees to a new tutorship—in Bordeaux. He walks to Bordeaux, via Strasbourg, Lyon, and across the Auvergne. "Now I have to fear whether in the end things will go for me as they did for Tantalus of old, who became more of the gods than he could digest." Poems include "Half of Life," "At the Source of the Danube," "The Rhine," and "Germania."

1802 Hölderlin arrives during the last days of January at the residence of Consul Meyer in Bordeaux. He works on his translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus the Tyrant* and *Antigone.* In mid-May he resigns his post and walks back home, this time via Paris. At the beginning of July he arrives at Stuttgart, disheveled and disoriented; there he receives the news that Susette Gontard died two weeks earlier. Hölderlin returns to his mother's house in Nürtingen. There he works on the poem "Patmos." His mother complains that he takes too many long walks alone.

1803 Hölderlin polishes and refines his translations of Sophocles. He meets with Schelling for the last time. Both Schelling and Hegel distance themselves from their "mentally disturbed" friend.

1804 April: *The Mourning-Plays of Sophocles* is published. On June 19 Hölderlin leaves his mother's house and returns to Bad Homburg with Sinclair.

1805 February 26: Sinclair is arrested for his political views. Hölderlin too is arrested, but then released "by reason of insanity." July 9: Sinclair too is released—for lack of evidence. Hölderlin puts the final touches on his translations of Pindar's odes. Sinclair complains that Hölderlin is playing the piano "night and day."

1806 September 11: Hölderlin is committed—the most famous patient in the newly opened Autenrieth Clinic in Tübingen. He is forced to wear Professor Autenrieth's new invention—a face mask designed to prevent patients from screaming or speaking.

1807 In early May he is released into the custody of Ernst Zimmer, a Tübingen carpenter. He dwells in a tower on the Neckar, today called the "*Hölderlin Turm*." Music is his principal occupation, although he continues to write verses. Ernst Zimmer, his wife Elisabetha, and their daughter Christiane care for the poet until his death decades later.

1843 June 7, 11 P.M.: Hölderlin dies.

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General Introduction

ONE COULD ALMOST BEGIN a book on this period of Hölderlin's life (roughly, from 1797 to 1800) by saying that it was the best of times and the worst of times. That would be true in terms of both European politics, dominated by the bloody aftermath of the French Revolution, and Hölderlin's private life, his life of love, dominated by strife. Those best and worst of times in Europe and in the life of the twenty-seven-year-old struggling poet encroached on one another.

On April 16, 1797, the French army crossed the Rhine, bringing with it not only cannon fire but also the ideas that had long been firing the hopes of all young Germans. In Hölderlin's home state, Swabian Württemberg, as in the more northerly cities of Coblenz, Bonn, and Cologne, opposition to the local autocratic princes became more outspoken. Hölderlin and his circle of friends could dare to hope, and to hope realistically, that the *ancien régime* in Germany too was about to collapse. The Imperial Peace Conference in Rastatt, focusing on the conflict between Revolution and Regression (also called the Restoration), met from 1797 to 1799; Hölderlin attended the conference for ten days at the end of November 1798. There his friend Isaak von Sinclair, who was the representative of the relatively enlightened Duke of Hessen-Homburg, introduced the poet to the leaders of the south German reform movement. Although they all rejected the Reign of Terror, their revolutionary fervor and republicanism remained intense. Hölderlin returned to Frankfurt excited once again by the conflict between the forces of political and religious tyranny and the spirit of Rousseau in the German lands.

Once back home at White Hart, the estate of Susette and Jacob Gontard, where he was tutoring their son Henry, Hölderlin worked hard on the first draft of a project he had sketched out more than a year earlier and begun in earnest some weeks before. It was a tragedy or "mourning-play," *Trauerspiel,* on the death of the early Greek thinker, poet, rhetorician, and physician, Empedocles of Acragas.

Hölderlin had been tutoring young Henry Gontard since the beginning of 1796.[4] During the evenings he performed chamber music—he was a good pianist and an excellent flutist—with Henry's mother Susette and her friends. Within six months of his employment on the estate he confessed his admiration of Susette Gontard in a letter to Christian Neuffer:

> I am in a new world. I used to think I had insight into what is beautiful and good, but now when I see what all my knowledge amounts to, I have to laugh. Dear friend! there is a being in the world on whom my spirit can and will dwell for millennia, and still it will live to see how puerile all our thinking and comprehending turn out to be in the face of nature. Loveliness and loftiness, tranquillity and vitality, spirit and heart and form—they are all blessedly one in this one being. You can believe me when I say how rare it is to have even a premonition of such a thing, and then again how much more difficult it is to find it in this world. You know, of course, how I was—how completely I had disabused myself of every form of familiarity; you know how I lived without faith, how austere I was with my own heart, and therefore how wretched. Could I have become what I am now, as happy as an eagle, had this one, this very one, not appeared and transformed a life that had become pointless to me, rejuvenating, encouraging, cheering, and glorifying it in her vernal light? I have moments when all my old troubles seem entirely foolish to me, as incomprehensible to me as they would be to children.
>
> It is actually often impossible for me to think the thoughts of mortals when she is in front of me. That is why so little can be said of her.
>
> Perhaps I will be able to capture here and there in a felicitous line an aspect of her being, and then nothing would be held back from you.
>
> Yet it would have to be an hour without disturbances of any kind, an hour of celebration, were I to write of her. (CHV 2:624–25; RA 14–16)

"In the face of nature . . . spirit and heart and form . . . vernal light . . . celebration." Hölderlin's colleague on the estate, Marie Rätzer, the tutor of the three Gontard girls, confided her worries to a friend: "Frau Gontard is with Hölderlin all morning up in the pavilion and in her private quarters; the children leave them alone there, while the servants and housemaids are all over the house at their chores; and if *he* were to come home and notice it, things

4. The following materials on Hölderlin and the Gontards are taken from the factual fiction *The Recalcitrant Art: Diotima's Letters to Hölderlin and Related Missives,* ed. Douglas F. Kenney and Sabine Menner-Bettscheid (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 14–34, which cites the relevant sources. In what follows I refer to this book by the code RA, with page numbers.

wouldn't go well." *He,* of course, was Hölderlin's employer, Jacob Gontard, a wealthy Frankfurt banker—and Susette's husband.

By early July 1796 the French Republic's Sambre-Maas army was advancing on Frankfurt. Jacob Gontard remained in the city under siege in order to protect his interests, while Hölderlin left with Susette and the children to greater safety in Kassel. By this time Hölderlin was composing magnificent poems to "Diotima," the priestess of love in Plato's *Symposium,* the principal female character in his novel *Hyperion,* and now the principal female human being in his life. Near Kassel, in the resort town of Bad Driburg, Hölderlin and Susette Gontard presumably confessed their love for one another. When the siege of Frankfurt ended, the family and the tutor returned to White Hart. Tensions within the Gontard household grew during the coming months, the town gossips tsk-tsked, and Hölderlin exulted—once again in a letter to Neuffer, this one dated February 16, 1797:

> Since we last wrote to one another I have circumnavigated the globe of joy. I would gladly have told you how things are with me had I been able to stand still for an instant, had I been given a chance to look back. The wave swept me forward. My entire being was so absorbed in life that it didn't have a moment to think about itself.
>
> And it is still that way! I am still entirely happy, as I was in the first moment. It is a friendship—eternal, joyful, and holy—with a being who somehow strayed into this poor, dispirited, disorderly century of ours. My sense of beauty is now secure from all disruption. For all eternity it will be oriented by this bust of the Madonna. My intellect attends her school and my riven inmost heart daily finds repose and good cheer in her all-sufficient peace. . . . My heart is full of desire. . . . I can readily imagine, dear brother, that you crave to hear me say more about my happiness, and in greater detail. Yet I dare not! I have often enough wept and berated our world, where the best thing in it cannot be named on a piece of paper one will send to a friend. I shall enclose a poem to her written toward the end of last winter.
>
> . . . I only wish I could show you her image, for then I wouldn't need any more words! She is beautiful, as angels are beautiful. A tender, intelligent face, with all of heaven's charms! Oh! I could gaze on her for a thousand years, forgetting myself and everything else: how inexhaustibly rich is the silent, undemanding soul in this image! Majesty and tenderness, gaiety and seriousness, sweet playfulness and lofty mournfulness, life and spirit—all this is united in her, in her it all becomes one divine whole. . . . "Great joy and great sorrow come to those whom the gods love." It is no art to sail a brook. Yet when our heart and destiny plunge to the seabed and then soar to the sky—that is a pilot's education. (CHV 2:649–51; RA 22–26)

The pilot's education became quite stressful during the summer of 1797. By that time the gossip was in full blossom and *he* had become aware of it. When Marie Rätzer married at White Hart on July 10, Jacob Gontard saw to it that Hölderlin was not invited to the ceremony even though Hölderlin and Marie were friends. On that same day Hölderlin wrote once again to his friend Neuffer: "I am torn asunder by love and hate" (CHV 2:658; RA 28). It was as though the two cosmic forces of which the ancient Empedocles had spoken, Φιλία καὶ Νεῖκος, Love and Strife, had invaded and possessed Hölderlin. Worse, it was as though he could never simply choose love over strife, inasmuch as strife seemed to be at home in the very sphere of love. It also seemed that those whom the gods love reap both great joy and great sorrow as their reward—again, beyond their own power to choose and the desire of others to lay blame.

The final test in Hölderlin's sentimental education came during a terrible scene at the Gontard household in the last week of September 1798. Jacob, with Susette at his side, excoriated and expelled the tutor. Susette felt forced to concur—it would be best for him to go. Hölderlin, wounded perhaps more by Susette's complicity, or apparent complacency, or abject surrender, than by Jacob's sarcasm and self-righteousness, but wounded perhaps most of all by his own indecisiveness and passivity, fled Frankfurt. With the help of his friend Sinclair he found sanctuary in nearby Bad Homburg vor der Höhe. Now that the second volume of *Hyperion* was all but complete, he planned to begin work on his mourning-play, *The Death of Empedocles,* interrupting that plan in November for the trip to the Rastatt conference.

We know that Hölderlin's first stay at Bad Homburg (1798–1800, the years of *The Death of Empedocles*) was one of retreat, rest, and recuperation—without rest, however, and without recuperation. Suddenly he was deprived of his job, of young Henry, his devoted pupil, and of "Diotima" herself. Now there were only letters to and from her, exchanged during brief clandestine meetings. Hölderlin tried to lose himself in his work. The work in question would no longer be a discourse on "aesthetic ideas," no longer a commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus,* nor would it involve Fichte's lectures at Jena.[5] Hölderlin's ambivalent

5. On "aesthetic ideas" and Plato's *Phaedrus,* see the letter to Christian Neuffer dated October 10, 1794 (CHV 2:550–51). On Hölderlin's reaction to Fichte's lectures in Jena, see Hölderlin's letters to Neuffer and to Hegel dated November 1794 and January 26, 1795, respectively (CHV 2:553 and 568–69). In the first, Hölderlin calls Fichte "the soul of Jena," and he affirms that he has "never encountered another man with such depth and energy of spirit." Several months later, to Hegel, his judgment is more critical:

> At the beginning I strongly suspected him of dogmatism, and if I may be so bold, he really was standing on the cusp of it, and perhaps still is—he

attitude toward theoretical work in general, that is, his suspicion that philosophical speculation distracted him from his genuine poetic work, had been expressed years earlier in a letter to Schiller dated September 4, 1795:

> My displeasure with myself and with what surrounds me has driven me into abstraction. I am trying to develop for myself the idea of an infinite progression in philosophy. I am trying to show that the relentless demand that must be made on every system, namely, the unification of subject and object in an absolute—in an ego or in whatever one wants to call it—is possible, albeit aesthetically, in intellectual intuition. It is possible theoretically only through an infinite approximation, as in the squaring of the circle. I am thus trying to show that in order to realize a system of thought an immortality is necessary—every bit as necessary as it is for a system of action. I believe that I can prove in this way to what extent the skeptics are right, and to what extent not. (CHV 2:595–96; TA 218–19)

The ambivalence he felt toward theoretical systems and the "infinite progression" of philosophy is most strongly manifested in a letter to Immanuel Niethammer dated February 24, 1796: Hölderlin confessed that philosophy was "once again" his "only preoccupation," as he read Kant and Reinhold and heard Fichte reverberating in his brain: "Dame Philosophy is a tyrant, and it is more the case that I put up with her compelling me than that I voluntarily submit to it" (CHV 2:614). On Christmas Eve of 1798 he expressed his doubts about the possible progress of philosophy to Isaak von Sinclair. The letter is important because it begins with a reference to Diogenes Laertius's *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*. Hölderlin was reading Book VIII of Diogenes, on Empedocles, and was already at work on his mourning-play. The letter goes on to invoke the tragedy of philosophical systems as such:

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wants to take as his point of departure the *factum* of consciousness for all *theory*. Many of his assertions show this; that *factum* is just as certain and as conspicuously transcendent for him as it was for prior metaphysicians who wanted to transcend the existence of the world—his absolute ego (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside of it is nothing; thus there is no object for this absolute ego, for otherwise all of reality would not be in it; a consciousness without an object, however, is unthinkable, and if I myself am this object, then I am necessarily limited, if only by my being in time, hence not absolute; thus in the absolute ego no consciousness is thinkable; as absolute ego I possess no consciousness, and to the extent that I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, so that the absolute ego is (for me) nothing.

> These days I have been reading in your Diogenes Laertius. I've also experienced there something that I've encountered before, namely, the fact that the transiency and mutability of human thoughts and systems strike me as well-nigh more tragic than the destinies one usually calls the only real destinies. And I believe this is natural, for if a human being in his or her ownmost and freest activity—in autonomous thought itself—depends on foreign influences, if even in such thought he or she is modified in some way by circumstance and climate, which has been shown irrefutably to be the case, where then does the human being rule supreme? It is also a good thing—indeed, it is the first condition of all life and all organization—that in heaven and on earth no force rules monarchically. Absolute monarchy cancels itself out everywhere, for it is without object; strictly speaking, there never was such a monarchy. Everything that *is* interpenetrates as soon as it becomes active. . . . (CHV 2:722–23; RA 36–38)

Finally, in a long letter dated November 12, 1798, addressed to Christian Neuffer, Hölderlin expressed both his ambivalence toward philosophy and his doubts about his own talents as a poet in the context of the mourning-play on Empedocles:

> I have been here [in Bad Homburg] for a bit more than a month. I've been working quietly on my mourning-play in the company of Sinclair, enjoying the beautiful autumn days. I was so torn apart by suffering that I have to thank the gods for the good fortune of this calm. . . . What most occupies my thoughts and my senses now is vitality in poetry [*das Lebendige in der Poesie*]. I feel so deeply how far removed I am from achieving it, even though my entire soul is wrestling to attain it, and this realization overcomes me so often that I have to weep like a child. The scenes of my drama are lacking in this or that respect, and yet I cannot twist free from the poetic errancy in which I wander. Oh, from my youth onward, the world has frightened my spirit back into itself, and I still suffer from that. There is one hospital, it is true, to which a botched poet like me can honorably flee—philosophy. Yet I cannot give up the hopes of my youth; I would rather go down with honor than alienate myself from the sweet homeland of my muses, from which mere accident has banished me. . . . I am not lacking in force, but in agility; I don't lack ideas, but nuances; I'm not missing the main tone, but all the other tones of the scale; I've got light, but not the shadows. And all for one reason: I shy away much too much from the common and the ordinary in real life. I'm nothing but a pedant, if you will. Yet, if I'm right, pedants are usually cold and loveless, whereas my heart is overly anxious to be a brother to every person and every thing under the moon. I almost think I am pedan-

> tic for no other reason than love. . . . I'm afraid that the warm life in me will catch cold in the frigid history of our times, and this fear arises from the fact that I have proved to be more sensitive than others to every destructive force that has assailed me since my youth. . . . Because I am more vulnerable than many other people I must try to win some advantage from the things that have a destructive impact on me. . . . And, just so you know everything about this moody brooding of mine, I confess to you that for the past few days my work has ground to a halt, so that I have to fall back on ratiocination. (CHV 2:710–12; TA 219)

Hölderlin's mourning-play offered him a chance to escape from the tyranny of *Philosophia,* even if—or precisely because—the play itself was a wellspring of ideas (Hölderlin often used the expression *idealisch,* "ideational," to describe its characters), and even if he interrupted work on the second version to write a series of highly philosophical studies on tragic drama. As for the ideas themselves, Hölderlin found his way to them only gradually. Among these ideas, which were the principal ones?

There is only one genuinely philosophical problem, Albert Camus tells us in the first sentence of the first section of his *Mythe de Sisyphe,* only one problem that is truly serious: *c'est le suicide*.[6] According to legend, Empedocles' death is by suicide. Of all deaths, suicide is perhaps the most terrifying to us. We others, the stunned survivors, are always left standing outside of it, forlorn and uncomprehending. (In Hölderlin's play, as we shall see, the character named Pausanias occupies this outside position.) If suicide is the only truly philosophical problem, we may be forced to conclude that philosophy should have nothing to do with conceptual understanding, knowledge, wisdom, or will. The faculties relevant to philosophy may be reduced to a struggling imagination and a mournful memory.

Centuries before Camus wrote, the poet and thinker we call Novalis, Friedrich von Hardenberg, whom Hölderlin had met together with Fichte at the house of Immanuel Niethammer in early summer of 1795, said much the same thing: "The genuine philosophical act is suicide; this is the real beginning of all philosophy; every need for philosophical disciples leads in that direction, and this act alone corresponds to all the conditions and characteristics of the transcendental attitude. . . . Detailed elaboration of this supremely interesting thought."[7] This "supremely interesting thought" leads almost everyone who takes it up back to Empedocles of Acragas, Empedocles on Mount Etna.

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6. Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 15. It is no accident that Empedocles figures large in Camus' later work, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), which takes its motto from Hölderlin's *Death of Empedocles.*

7. Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs,* ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel, 3 vols. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1987), 2:223.

If there is a second genuinely philosophical problem, it may have to do with the suicide of an entire city or people. One could imagine a nation in which religious and political leaders dedicate their mediocre talents to deceiving the people, indeed, to inculcating in them a kind of progressive and fatal stupor. One could imagine a city or a country in which *stupidification*—a new word for a new phenomenon?—is the principal political and social goal, a city or a country in which avarice alone competes with stupefaction for supremacy. One could imagine a place where one does not know which of the two, stupidity or avarice, has won the upper hand, that is, whether the stupidity of the nation is permeated by avarice or avarice itself has driven the nation into sheer idiocy. Empedocles apparently feels this way about Acragas; Hölderlin apparently feels this way about Württemberg. Hölderlin's character Manes, in the third version of the play, speaks of "the one" who believes himself called on to save his city from its demise—even if that demise appears to implicate the gods themselves:

> The world around him bubbles in ferment, and all
> Disruption and corruption in the mortal breast
> Is agitated, and from top to bottom; whereupon
> The lord of time, grown apprehensive of his rule,
> Looms with glowering gaze above the consternation.
> His day extinguished, lightning bolts still flash, yet
> What flames on high is inflammation, nothing more;
> What strives from down below is savage discord. (ll. 364–71)

Hölderlin's Empedocles replies to Manes:

> When brother fled from brother, when lovers passed
> Each other by in ignorance, when fathers failed
> To recognize their sons, when human words no more
> Were understood, nor human laws, that was when
> The meaning of it all assailed me and I trembled:
> It was my nation's parting god!
> I heard him, and upward to unspeaking stars
> I gazed, the place from which he had descended.
> And then I went to placate him. For us there still
> Were many radiant days. It still seemed at the very end
> We might invigorate ourselves; and thus consoled
> By memories of the Golden Age, that all-confident
> And brilliant morning full of force, the frightful melancholy
> Was lifted from me and from my people also;
> We sealed with one another free and firm bonds,
> Appealing to the living gods in supplication.

> Yet often when I donned the crown of all the people's thanks,
> And when the nation's soul approached me ever closer,
> Crowding me alone, again the melancholy stole upon me.
> For when a country is about to die, its spirit at the end
> Selects but one among the many, one alone through whom
> Its swan song, the final breaths of life, will sound.
> I had an intimation, yet served the spirit willingly.
> And now it has transpired. (ll. 421–44)

Luckily, we who live in a postmodern, postindustrial society no longer need to fret about the atavism of religious leaders and the stupidity and avarice of political leaders; we no longer need to worry about the nation's parting god and the swan song of the god's departure, the final breaths of life.

Empedocles had been an object of Hölderlin's poetic imagination before he began to write his mourning-play. A passage from the second volume of *Hyperion,* written probably in 1798 at the Gontard household, touches on the story of Empedocles' death by suicide—his plunge into the crater of Mount Etna—and seeks an explanation for that suicide. A reference by Hyperion to his lost love "Diotima" precedes and frames the allusion to Empedocles:

> I too am at the end of my rope. My own soul repels me, because I have to blame it for Diotima's death; and the thoughts of my youth, which I once held in high esteem, now mean nothing to me. For they poisoned my Diotima for me!
>
> And now tell me, is there any refuge left?—Yesterday I was up on Etna. I recalled the great Sicilian of old who, when he'd had enough of ticking off the hours, having become intimate with the soul of the world, in his bold lust for life plunged into the terrific flames. It was because—a mocker afterwards said of him—the frigid poet had to warm himself at the fire.
>
> Oh, how gladly I would precipitate such mockery over me! but one must think more highly of oneself than I do to fly unbidden to nature's heart—put it any way you like, for truly, as I am now, I have no name for these things, and all is uncertain. (DKV 2:116; TA 56–57)

An equally intense identification with Empedocles, or, rather, with the disciples and admirers of Empedocles, had already been expressed in Hölderlin's lyric poem, "Empedocles." Hölderlin first sketched it in the summer of 1797, at the time of the Frankfurt Plan, which is the first document we have concerning the Empedocles play in Hölderlin's life and work (see the first chapter of the present volume). The lyric poem, in which the theme of love is central, took final form in 1800 and was published in 1801:

EMPEDOCLES

You seek life, you search, and out of the earth
Flows and blazes forth a godly fire to you,
And you, in shuddering exaction,
Cast yourself down into Etna's flames.

Thus the queen melts the pearls of her haughtiness
In wine; let them melt! if only you had
Not sacrificed your riches, O poet,
In the seething chalice!

Yet you are holy to me, as is the power of earth
That swept you away, bold victim!
And gladly would I follow into the depths,
If love did not hold me back, this hero.
(DKV 1:241; TA 220)

The words "shuddering exaction," *schauderndes Verlangen,* are repeated in the first version of the mourning-play, where they have quite a different impact. For there Empedocles himself utters them sarcastically in a moment of hesitation and self-doubt, perhaps even self-contempt. Empedocles has been hearing the pleas of his favorites, Pausanias and Panthea, from the beginning of the play: these disciples and friends worry that the master's planned suicide may be an effect of melancholy or punctured pride rather than a grandiose culmination of his life and teaching, an "ideal deed." Their doubts plague Empedocles increasingly as the three versions of the play succeed on one another. And they are doubts that can only cripple action. In act 2, scene 6 of the first version, Empedocles soliloquizes: "Shuddering / Exaction! What? death alone ignites / My life now at the end, and you extend / To me the terrifying chalice, the fermenting cup, / Nature!" (DKV 2:354; FHA 12:237). Queen Cleopatra may melt her pearls in a chalice of wine, but she does so out of arrogance or haughtiness (*Übermut*). If it is neither idealism nor melancholy that induces Empedocles' resolve, is it haughty ambition that tempts him with "one full deed and at the end"? In the lyric poem, love holds the singer back; the singer's voice is therefore closer to that of Pausanias or Panthea than it is to Empedocles. Why does the love of Pausanias, or that of Panthea, fail to hold Empedocles back? If it is neither idealism nor melancholy nor haughtiness, is it a failure to love that destroys the thinker? These doubts may prevent Hölderlin from successfully completing any of the three drafts. If the historical Empedocles leaps into the crater, Hölderlin's dramatic hero remains perched on the crater's rim forever.