

Classic Poetry Series

Friedrich Holderlin
- poems -

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Friedrich Holderlin(20 March 1770 – 6 June 1843)

Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin was a major German lyric poet, commonly associated with the artistic movement known as Romanticism.

The poetry of Hölderlin, widely recognized today as one of the highest points of German literature, was little known or understood during his lifetime and slipped into obscurity shortly after his death; his illness and reclusion made him fade from his contemporaries' consciousness – and, even though selections of his work were being published by his friends already during his lifetime, it was largely ignored for the rest of the 19th century.

In fact, Hölderlin was a man of his time, an early supporter of the French Revolution – in his youth at the Seminary of Tübingen, he and some colleagues from a "republican club" planted a "Tree of Freedom" in the market square, prompting the Grand-Duke himself to admonish the students at the seminary. He was at first carried away by Napoleon, whom he honors in one of his couplets.

Like Goethe and Schiller, his older contemporaries, Hölderlin was a fervent admirer of ancient Greek culture, but had a very personal understanding of it. Much later, Friedrich Nietzsche would recognize in him the poet who first acknowledged the Orphic and Dionysian Greece of the mysteries, which he would fuse with the Pietism of his native Swabia in a highly original religious experience. For Hölderlin, the Greek gods were not the plaster figures of conventional classicism, but living, actual presences, wonderfully life-giving and, at the same time, terrifying. He understood and sympathized with the Greek idea of the tragic fall, which he expressed movingly in the last stanza of his "Hyperions Schicksalslied" ("Hyperion's Song of Destiny").

In the great poems of his maturity, Hölderlin would generally adopt a large-scale, expansive and unrhymed style. Together with these long hymns, odes and elegies – which included "Der Archipelagus" ("The Archipelago"), "Brot und Wein" ("Bread and Wine") and "Patmos" – he also cultivated a crisper, more concise manner in epigrams and couplets, and in short poems like the famous "Hälfte des Lebens" ("The Middle of Life"). In the years after his return from Bordeaux he completed some of his greatest poems but also, once they were finished, returned to them repeatedly, creating new and stranger versions sometimes in several layers on the same manuscript, which makes the editing of his works problematic. Some of these later versions (and some later poems) are fragmentary, but have astonishing intensity. He seems also to have considered fragments, even with gaps and unfinished lines and unfinished sentence-

structure, sometimes as poems in themselves. Both these tendencies (the obsessive revisions, the stand-alone fragments) used to be taken as proof of his mental disorder, but they were to prove very influential on later poets such as Paul Celan. In his years of madness, Hölderlin would occasionally pen ingenuous rhymed quatrains, sometimes of a childlike beauty, which he would sign with fantastic names (most often "Scardanelli") and give fictitious dates from the previous or future centuries.

Dissemination and influence

Hölderlin's major publication in his lifetime was his novel *Hyperion*, which was issued in two parts (1797 and 1799). Various individual poems were published but attracted little attention and in 1799 he also attempted to produce a literary-philosophical periodical, *Iduna*. His translations of the dramas of Sophocles were published in 1804 but were generally met with derision over their apparent artificiality and difficulty caused by transposing Greek idioms into German. In the 20th century, theorists of translation such as Walter Benjamin have vindicated them, showing their importance as a new – and greatly influential – model of poetic translation. *Der Rhein* and *Patmos*, two of the longest and most densely charged of the hymns, appeared in a poetic calendar in 1808.

Wilhelm Waiblinger, who visited Hölderlin in his tower repeatedly in 1822-3 and depicted him in the protagonist of his novel *Phaëthon*, urged the necessity of issuing an edition of his poems and the first collection of his poetry was issued by Ludwig Uhland and C. T. Schwab in 1826. They omitted anything they suspected might be 'touched by insanity'. A copy was given to Hölderlin, but some years later this was stolen by a souvenir-hunter. A second, enlarged edition with a biographical essay appeared in 1842, the year before Hölderlin's death.

Only in 1913 did Norbert von Hellingrath, a member of the circle around poet [Stefan George](http://www.poemhunter.com/stefan-anton-george/), bring out the first two volumes of what eventually became a six-volume edition of Hölderlin's poems, prose and letters (the 'Berlin Edition', *Berliner Ausgabe*). For the first time, Hölderlin's hymnic drafts and fragments were published and it became possible to gain some overview of his work in the years between 1800 and 1807, which had been only sparsely covered in earlier editions. The Berlin edition and von Hellingrath's impassioned advocacy of Hölderlin's work shifted the emphasis of appraisal from his earlier elegies to the enigmatic and grandiose later hymns. At the same time, Hölderlin's appeals to the Germans became all too easy to abuse among nationalists and finally among Nazi-inflected groups. Already in 1912, before the Berlin edition began to appear, [Rainer Maria](http://www.poemhunter.com/rainer-maria-rilke/)

Rilke composed his first two Duino Elegies whose form and spirit draw strongly on the hymns and elegies of Hölderlin. Rilke had met von Hellgrath a few years earlier and had seen some of the hymn drafts, and the Duino Elegies heralded the beginning of a new appreciation of Hölderlin's late work. Although his hymns can hardly be imitated, they have become a powerful influence on modern poetry in German and other languages, and are sometimes cited as the very crown of German lyric poetry.

The Berlin edition was to some extent superseded by the Stuttgart Edition (Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe) edited by Friedrich Beissner and Adolf Beck, which began publication in 1943 and eventually saw completion in 1986. This undertaking was much more rigorous in textual criticism than the Berlin edition and solved many issues of interpretation raised by Hölderlin's unfinished and undated texts (sometimes several versions of the same poem with major differences). Meanwhile a third complete edition, the Frankfurt Critical Edition (Frankfurter Historisch-kritische Ausgabe), began publication in 1975 under the editorship of Dietrich Sattler; it is still in progress. There are other editions; it should be noted that no two of them show all the major poems in congruent textual status. Strophes and readings are sometimes arranged in different ways from one edition to the next.

Though Hölderlin's hymnic style – dependent as it is on a genuine belief in the divinity – creates a deeply personal fusion of Greek mythic figures and romantic nature mysticism, which can appear both strange and enticing, his shorter and sometimes more fragmentary poems have exerted wide influence too on later German poets, from [Georg Trakl](http://www.poemhunter.com/georg-trakl/) onwards. He also had an influence on the poetry of [Hermann Hesse](http://www.poemhunter.com/hermann-hesse/) and [Paul Celan](http://www.poemhunter.com/paul-celan/). (Celan wrote a poem about Hölderlin, called "Tübingen, January" which ends with the word Pallaksch - according to C. T. Schwab, Hölderlin's favourite neologism "which sometimes meant Yes, sometimes No").

Hölderlin was a poet-thinker who wrote, fragmentarily, on poetic theory and philosophical matters. His theoretical works, such as the essays "Das Werden im Vergehen" ("Becoming in Dissolution") and "Urteil und Sein" ("Judgement and Being") are insightful and important if somewhat tortuous and difficult to parse. They raise many of the key problems also addressed by his Tübingen roommates Hegel and Schelling. And, though his poetry was never "theory-driven", the interpretation and exegesis of some of his more difficult poems has given rise to profound philosophical speculation by thinkers as divergent as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Theodor Adorno.

Music

Hölderlin's poetry has inspired many composers.

Vocal music

One of the earliest settings of Hölderlin's poetry and perhaps the most famous is Schicksalslied by Brahms, based on Hyperion's Schicksalslied. Other composers of Hölderlin settings include Peter Cornelius, Hans Pfitzner, Richard Strauss (Drei Hymnen), Max Reger (An die Hoffnung), Alphons Diepenbrock (Die Nacht), Richard Wetz (Hyperion), Josef Matthias Hauer, Stefan Wolpe, Paul Hindemith, Benjamin Britten, Hans Werner Henze, Bruno Maderna (Hyperion, Stele an Diotima), Heinz Holliger (the Scardanelli-Zyklus), Hans Zender (Hölderlin lesen I-IV), György Kurtág (who planned an opera on Hölderlin), György Ligeti (Hölderlin-Phantasien), Hanns Eisler (Hollywood Liederbuch), Viktor Ullmann (who wrote settings in Terezin concentration camp), Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Walter Zimmermann (Hyperion, an epistolary opera) and Wolfgang Rihm. Wilhelm Killmayer based in 1986 two song cycles Hölderlin-Lieder for tenor and orchestra on Hölderlin's latest poems. Kaija Saariaho's Tag des Jahrs for mixed choir and electronics (2001) is based on four of these poems, Graham Waterhouse composed in 2003 Sechs späteste Lieder nach Hölderlin for (singing and speaking) voice and cello on six latest poems.

Many songs of Swedish alternative rock band ALPHA 60 also contain lyrical references to Hölderlin's poetry. Finnish melodic death metal band Insomnium has transposed and used Hölderlin's verses in several songs.

Instrumental music

Robert Schumann's late piano suite Gesänge der Frühe was inspired by Hölderlin, as was Luigi Nono's string quartet Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima and parts of his opera Prometeo. Josef Matthias Hauer wrote many piano pieces inspired by individual lines of the poems. Carl Orff used Hölderlin's German translations of Sophocles in his operas Antigone and Oedipus der Tyrann. Paul Hindemith's First Piano Sonata is influenced by Hölderlin's poem Der Main. Hans Werner Henze's Seventh Symphony is partly inspired by Hölderlin.

Ages Of Life

Euphrates' cities and
Palmyra's streets and you
Forests of columns in the level desert
What are you now?
Your crowns, because
You crossed the boundary
Of breath,
Were taken off
In Heaven's smoke and flame;
But I sit under clouds (each one
Of which has peace) among
The ordered oaks, upon
The deer's heath, and strange
And dead the ghosts of the blessed ones
Appear to me.

Friedrich Holderlin

Another Day

Another day. I follow another path,
Enter the leafing woodland, visit the spring
Or the rocks where the roses bloom
Or search from a look-out, but nowhere

Love are you to be seen in the light of day
And down the wind go the words of our once so
Beneficent conversation...

Your beloved face has gone beyond my sight,
The music of your life is dying away
Beyond my hearing and all the songs
That worked a miracle of peace once on

My heart, where are they now? It was long ago,
So long and the youth I was has aged nor is
Even the earth that smiled at me then
The same. Farewell. Live with that word always.

For the soul goes from me to return to you
Day after day and my eyes shed tears that they
Cannot look over to where you are
And see you clearly ever again.

Friedrich Holderlin

As On A Holiday

As on a holiday, when a farmer
Goes out to look at his fields, in the morning,
After cool lightning has fallen through the hot night,
And thunder still echoes in the distance,
And the stream returns to its banks,
And the earth becomes green and fresh,
And drops of joyful rain from heaven rest
Upon the vines, and the trees in the grove
Stand shining in the quiet sun —

Thus poets stand in favorable weather:
Those whom no master, but rather Nature,
Mighty and beautiful in its divinity, wonderfully
And universally present, educates with gentle embrace.
And when Nature appears to sleep at some seasons,
Either in the sky or among plants or nations,
So the aspect of poets is also mournful.
They seem to be alone, but their foreknowledge continues.
For Nature itself is prescient, as it rests.

Now it is day! I waited to see it come,
And what I saw — my words bespeak holiness!
For Nature, who is older than time,
Standing above the gods of the Occident and Orient,
Has awakened to the sounds of arms.
All-creating Nature feels the enthusiasm anew,
From Aether down to the abyss,
As when she was born of holy Chaos,
According to the established law.

And as fire shines in a man's eye
When he plans something great,
So a fire is kindled again in the minds
Of poets, by the signs and deeds of the world.
What happened before, scarcely sensed,
Becomes apparent now for the first time.
And those who plowed our fields
In the form of smiling laborers
Are now recognized as the all-living

Forces of the gods.

Would you question them? Their spirit moves in song,
Grown from the sun of day and the warm earth,
And from storms, those of the air, and others
Originating farther within the depths of time,
More perceptible and meaningful to us,
Drifting between heaven and earth, and among nations.
They are thoughts of the common spirit,
Quietly ending in the mind of the poet,

Which, long familiar with the infinite,
Is struck quickly, and shakes with the memory.
Set on fire by the holy radiance,
It creates a song — the fruit born of love,
The work of gods and man,
Bearing witness to both.
Thus lightning fell on Semele's house,
As poets relate, since she wanted to see
A god in person. Struck by the god,
She gave birth to holy Bacchus,
The fruit of the storm.

Thus the sons of earth now drink in
The fire of heaven without danger.
And it is our duty, poets, to stand
Bare-headed under the storms of God,
Grasping with our own hand
The Father's beam itself,
And to offer the gift of heaven,
Wrapped in song, to the people.
If our hearts are pure, like children,
And our hands are guiltless,

The Father's pure radiance won't sear;
And the deeply shaken heart, sharing
The suffering of the stronger god,
Will endure the raging storms when he approaches.

But alas, if from - - - - -
- - - - -
Alas!

And if I now say - - - -
I had come to see the gods,
They themselves cast me down to the living,
Me, the false priest, down to darkness,
That I sing a song of warning to those able to learn.
There - - -

Friedrich Holderlin

At The Middle Of Life

The earth hangs down
to the lake, full of yellow
pears and wild roses.
Lovely swans, drunk with
kisses you dip your heads
into the holy, sobering waters.

But when winter comes,
where will I find
the flowers, the sunshine,
the shadows of the earth?
The walls stand
speechless and cold,
the weathervanes
rattle in the wind.

Friedrich Holderlin

Bread And Wine

Round about the city rests. The illuminated streets grow

Quiet, and coaches rush along, adorned with torches.

Men go home to rest, filled with the day's pleasures;

Busy minds weigh up profit and loss contentedly

At home. The busy marketplace comes to rest,

Vacant now of flowers and grapes and crafts.

But the music of strings sounds in distant gardens:

Perhaps lovers play there, or a lonely man thinks

About distant friends, and about his own youth.

Rushing fountains flow by fragrant flower beds,

Bells ring softly in the twilight air, and a watchman

Calls out the hour, mindful of the time.

Now a breeze rises and touches the crest of the grove —

Look how the moon, like the shadow of our earth,

Also rises stealthily! Phantastical night comes,

Full of stars, unconcerned probably about us —

Astonishing night shines, a stranger among humans,

Sadly over the mountain tops, in splendor.

Friedrich Holderlin

Celebration Of Peace

The holy, familiar hall, built long ago,
Is aired, and filled with heavenly,
Softly echoing, quietly modulating music.
A cloud of joy sends fragrance
Over the green carpets. Shining in the
Distance, a splendid row of gold-wreathed
Cups stands, well-ordered, full of ripe fruits.
Tables stand at the sides, rising above
The leveled ground. For now in the evening
Loving guests have gathered, coming from far.

And with half-shut eye I think I can see
The prince of the festival himself,
Smiling from the day's earnest work.
Though you like to deny your foreign origin,
And even when you lower your eye, tired
From the long crusade — forgotten, lightly shadowed —
And you assume the appearance of an acquaintance,
Still you're recognized by everyone; your superiority
Alone almost forces one to his knees.
Being nothing in your presence, I know
You are not mortal. A wise person can
Explain a lot, but where a god appears,
There is different clarity.

He isn't of the present, yet doesn't come unannounced;
And one who feared neither flood nor flame
Doesn't surprise us without a reason, now that all is quiet,
And dominion is invisible among spirits and humans.
That is, just now the work become audible,
Long in preparation, from morning to evening.
For the thunderer's echo, the thousand-year storm,
Roars immeasurably down towards rest, resounding
In the depths, while peaceful sounds rise above it.
But you, days of innocence, become dear to us:
Today you bring the festival, beloved ones!
And the spirit flourishes in the evening stillness,

And I must counsel you, friends, to prepare the wreaths
And the food, since now we're like eternal youths,
Even if our hair were silver grey.

There are many I should like to invite, but you,
Who were devoted to mankind in a friendly, yet
Earnest way, and who liked to stay at the well
Under Syrian palms, near the city... the fields
Of grain rustled in the wind, the coolness drifted
Down from the shaded holy mountain,
And the loyal clouds, your friends,
Cast their shadows around you,
So that your holy, daring radiance shone gently
Through the wilderness upon men, o Youth!
But then a deadly fate enshadowed you
More darkly, terribly and definitively
In the middle of your words. Thus everything
From heaven passes quickly, but not in vain.

For a god, knowing always the proper measure,
Touches sparingly and just for a moment the homes
Of men — unexpectedly, and no one knows when.
But then something boisterous may appear,
And wildness may come to the holy place from afar.
Grasping about roughly, it touches upon madness,
And fills some intention thereby.
Gratitude doesn't follow the gift
From the gods immediately:
It has to be deeply studied first.
For if the giver hadn't been cautious,
From the blessing of the hearth both
Floor and ceiling would have gone up in flames.

We've received much from the gods.
Fire was handed to us, and the ocean's
Flood and shore. Much more,
For alien powers have become familiar
To us in a human way. The stars
Over your head can teach you things,

Although you can't equal them.
Yet of the all-living ones — from whom
Issue much pleasure and song —
One is a calmly powerful son.
Knowing his father, we recognize him,
Now that the high Spirit of the World
Has descended to mankind
To keep the holidays.

He had long become too great to be
The Lord of Time, and his territory
Extended far... when would it
Have exhausted him? But a god
May once choose mundane life also,
Like mortals, and share their fate.
One law of fate requires that people
Should know each other, so that when
Silence returns, there will also be a language.
Where the spirit is at work, we are present too,
And talk about what is best. To me, the best
Is when the picture is done, and the artist
Finishes and steps transfigured from his workplace,
The quiet God of Time, and only the reconciling
Law of love extends from here to heaven.

Man has learned much since morning,
For we are a conversation, and we can listen
To one another. Soon we'll be song.
And the picture of time, which the great spirit unfolds,
Lies as a sign before us, indicating that a covenant
Between himself and others, himself and other powers exists.
Not he alone, but also the unconceived and eternal ones
Are recognizable in the picture,
Just as our mother, the earth, recognizes herself,
And light and air, through the plant kingdom.
But the all-gathering day of the festival
Is the ultimate sign of love, the witness
Of your existence, o holy powers.

The gods aren't revealed in miracles now,
Nor do they remain unseen as during a storm;
Now they are met together as guests,
A holy number, holy in every way,
And present in choruses of song.
And the person they love most,
Their favorite, is here.
Thus I've summoned you to the banquet
Now prepared, you, the unforgettable one,
To the evening of time, o Youth,
To be the Prince of the Festival.
And our race will not sleep
Until all the promised, immortal gods
Are here in our halls
To speak of their heaven.

Lightly breathing winds
Proclaim your arrival;
Valley mists announce you all,
And the earth, still sounding from the storm.
Hope colors the cheeks;
Mother and child
Sit before the house door,
Looking upon the peace.
Few seem to die:
A premonition, sent from the golden light,
Holds the soul back;
A promise retains the eldest.

Now all labors,
The seasoning of life,
Are prepared and completed above.
Everything pleases,
Simple things the most.
The long-awaited
Golden fruit
Has fallen from the ancient tree
After terrible storms,
But then is guarded, like a treasured possession,
By holy Fate with gentle weapons:

This has the shape of the gods.

Like a lioness, Mother,
Nature, you lament,
Since you lost your children.
Your enemy, all-loving one,
Has stolen them from you,
Since you adopted him almost
To be your own son, placing
Gods in the company of satyrs.
Thus you've created much
And buried much,
Because that which you brought
To light too soon, all-powerful one,
Now hates you.
But this too you recognize and accept,
For whatever arouses fear prefers
To rest insensate below
Until its time has come.

Friedrich Holderlin

For Zimmer

The lines of life are various,
Like roads, and the borders of mountains.
What we are here, a god can complete there,
With harmonies, undying reward, and peace.

Friedrich Holderlin

From In Lovely Blue

Like the stamen inside a flower
The steeple stands in lovely blue
And the day unfolds around its needle;

The flock of swallows that circles the steeple
Flies there each day through the same blue air
That carries their cries from me to you;

We know how high the sun is now
As long as the roof of the steeple glows,
The roof that's covered with sheets of tin;

Up there in the wind, where the wind is not
Turning the vane of the weathercock,
The weathercock silently crows in the wind.

Friedrich Holderlin

Half Of Life

With its yellow pears
And wild roses everywhere
The shore hangs into the lake,
O gracious swans,
And drunk with kisses
You dip your heads
In the sobering holy water.

Ah, where will I find
Flowers, come winter,
And where the sunshine
And shade of the earth ?
Walls stand cold
And speechless, in the wind
The weathervanes creak.

Friedrich Holderlin

Homecoming

1.

It is still bright night in the Alps, and a cloud,
Authoring joyfulness, covers the yawning valley.
Playful mountain breezes rush and toss about, and a ray
Of light shines abruptly through the firs and disappears.
Chaos, quivering with joy, hurries slowly to do battle.
Young in form, yet strong, it celebrates a loving quarrel
Among the cliffs. It ferments and shakes within its eternal
Limits, for the morning accelerates in ecstatic dance.
The year advances more rapidly out there, and the holy hours,
The days, are more boldly ordered and mixed.
A storm bird marks the time, and stays high in the air
Between the mountains, announcing the day.
Now the little village awakens down below. Fearless,
Familiar with the heights, it peers up beyond the treetops.
It senses the growth, for the ancient streams fall like lightning,
And the ground yields fine mists under the crashing waters.
Echo resounds, and the vast workplace flexes its arm,
Sending forth its gifts, by day and by night.

2.

Peaks of silver shine silently above,
And the sparkling snow is full of roses.
Still higher above the light lives the god, pure
And holy, pleased with the divine play of light beams.
He lives there quietly and alone: his face is bright.
At home in the ether he seems ready to grant life
And create joy for us. Gradually and sparingly,
Remembering the necessity for moderation and the needs
Of the living, he sends true happiness to the cities
And houses, and mild rains to open the countryside,
And soft breezes and gentle seasons of spring.
With a gentle hand he cheers the saddened,
Renews the seasons, the creative one, refreshes
And touches the quiet hearts of the elderly.
Down into the deep his influence extends: it
Reveals and illumines, just as he pleases.
And now life begins again. Gracefulness

Flourishes as it did before, and the Spirit
Is present and approaches, and a joyful
Disposition fills its wings.

3.

I had much to say to him, for whatever poets think
Or sing about is addressed mainly to him and his angels.
I asked him for much, out of love to the Fatherland,
So the Spirit wouldn't suddenly fall upon us unbidden.
I prayed much for you too, my landspeople, who have cares
Inside the Fatherland: to whom holy gratitude, smiling, brings
Back the exiles. At the same time the lake rocked my boat,
And the steersman sat quietly and approved our journey.
Far on the lake's surface joyous waves surged under the sails,
And now the city rises brightly in the early morning,
And our boat came well guided from the shaded Alps
To rest in the harbor. Here the shore is warm
And the open valleys are friendly, brightened by
Beautiful pathways, flourishing and shining toward me.
Gardens lie round about, bright buds open, the song of birds
Welcomes the wanderer. Everything seems familiar;
Even people passing by greet each other as if they were
Friends, and every face appears like kin.

4.

But of course, this is the land of your birth, the soil
Of your own country: what you seek is close by and
Rises to meet you. The traveller stands before you,
O happy Lindau, surrounded by waves, like a son
At your door affectionately singing your praises.
This is a welcoming gate to the nation, inviting you
To travel forth into the distance, a place of promises
And miracles, where the Rhine, like a mythological
Animal, breaks its way downwards into the plains,
And the jubilant valley leads through the bright
Mountains toward Como, or off toward the open sea
In the direction of the sun. But the sacred
Gateway prompts me to go on home instead,
Where the busy highways are familiar to me,
To visit the countryside and beautiful valleys
Of the Neckar, and the forests, where godlike green
Oak and beech trees and silent birches gather, and

A friendly spot in the mountains still holds me captive.

5.

Dear friends are there to welcome me.
O voice of the city, voice of my mother!
You touch and awaken what I learned long ago.
But it's really them: sun and joy shine for you,
My dear ones, almost brighter than ever in your eyes.
Yes, it's still the same. It thrives and ripens,
For nothing that lives and loves relinquishes loyalty.
Best of all, this treasure, which rests under the arch
Of holy peace, is reserved for young and old alike.
I speak foolishly. It's pure joy. But tomorrow
And after, when we go out and view the living fields,
When the trees are blossoming on Spring holidays,
I'll speak and share my hopes with you, dear friends.
I've heard much about our great Father, but I've said
Nothing. He renews passing time above in the heights,
And he reigns over mountains. He'll soon bestow heavenly
Gifts and call for brighter song and send many good spirits.
Come, you preservers! Angels of the year! And you,
6.

Angels of the house, come! May the power of Heaven spread
Through all the veins of life, ennobling and invigorating
And dispensing joy! So that joyful angels attend upon
Human goodness every hour of the day, and that
Such joy as I experience now, when loved ones
Are properly reunited, be suitably sanctified.
When we bless the meal, upon whom shall I call,
And when we rest after the day's activity, tell me,
How will I offer thanks? Should I call the Highest by name?
A god doesn't like what is inappropriate. Maybe our joy
Isn't big enough to grasp him. We must often remain silent,
A sacred language is missing — hearts are beating and yet
Speech can't emerge? But the sound of string music
Resonates hour by hour, and perhaps that pleases
The approaching gods. Begin the music, and the worries
Almost vanish which would have affected our joy.
Willingly or not, poets must often concern themselves
With such things, but not with others.

Friedrich Holderlin

Human Applause

Isn't my heart holy, more full of life's beauty,
since I fell in love? Why did you like me more
when I was prouder and wilder, more full
of words, yet emptier?

Well, the crowd likes whatever sells in the
marketplace; and no one but a slave
appreciates violent men. Only those who
are themselves godlike believe in the gods.

Friedrich Holderlin

Hyperion's Song Of Destiny

Holy spirits, you walk up there
in the light, on soft earth.
Shining god-like breezes
touch upon you gently,
as a woman's fingers
play music on holy strings.

Like sleeping infants the gods
breathe without any plan;
the spirit flourishes continually
in them, chastely kept,
as in a small bud,
and their holy eyes
look out in still
eternal clearness.

A place to rest
isn't given to us.
Suffering humans
decline and blindly fall
from one hour to the next,
like water thrown
from cliff to cliff,
year after year,
down into the Unknown.

Friedrich Holderlin

Looking Outward

The open day is bright with pictures for everyone,
when green fields appear on the distant plain,
before the light of evening yields to twilight,
and reflections of light alleviate the noise of the day.
The inner being of the world often appears clouded
and hidden, and people's minds are full of doubts
and irritation, but splendid nature cheers up their days,
and doubt's dark questions stay distant.

Friedrich Holderlin

Mnemosyne

The fruits are ripe, dipped in fire,
Cooked and sampled on earth. And there's a law,
That things crawl off in the manner of snakes,
Prophetically, dreaming on the hills of heaven.
And there is much that needs to be retained,
Like a load of wood on the shoulders.
But the pathways are dangerous.
The captured elements and ancient laws of earth
Run astray like horses. There is a constant yearning
For all that is unconfined. But much needs
To be retained. And loyalty is required.
Yet we mustn't look forwards or backwards.
We should let ourselves be cradled
As if on a boat rocking on a lake.

But what about things that we love?
We see sun shining on the ground, and the dry dust,
And at home the forests deep with shadows,
And smoke flowering from the rooftops,
Peacefully, near the ancient crowning towers.
These signs of daily life are good,
Even when by contrast something divine
Has injured the soul.
For snow sparkles on an alpine meadow,
Half-covered with green, signifying generosity
Of spirit in all situations, like flowers in May —
A wanderer walks up above on a high trail
And speaks irritably to a friend about a cross
He sees in the distance, set for someone
Who died on the path... what does it mean?

My Achilles
Died near a fig tree,
And Ajax lies in the caves of the sea
Near the streams of Skamandros —
Great Ajax died abroad
Following Salamis' inflexible customs,
A rushing sound at his temples —
But Patroclus died in the King's armor.

Many others died as well.
But Eleutherai, the city
Of Mnemosyne, once stood upon
Mount Kithaeron. Evening
Loosened her hair, after the god
Had removed his coat.
For the gods are displeased
If a person doesn't compose
And spare himself.
But one has to do it,
And grief is soon gone.

Friedrich Holderlin

Once Gods Walked...

Once gods walked among humans,
The splendid Muses and youthful Apollo
Inspired and healed us, just like you.
And you are to me as if one of the Holy Ones
Had sent me forth into life, and the image
Of my beloved goes with me,
And wherever I stay and whatever I learn,
I learned and gained it from her,
With a love that lasts until death.

Then let us live, you with whom I suffer
And inwardly strive towards better times
In faith and loyalty. For we are the ones.
And if people should remember us both
In years to come, when Spirit again prevails,
They'd say that these lonely ones lovingly
Created a secret world, known to the gods alone.
The earth will take back those concerned
With impermanent things: others climb higher
To ethereal Light who've been faithful
To the love inside themselves, and to the spirit
Of the gods. Thus they master Fate
In patience, hope and quietness.

Friedrich Holderlin

Out For A Walk

The margins of the forest are beautiful,
as if painted onto the green slopes.
I walk around, and sweet peace
rewards me for the thorns
in my heart, when the mind has grown
dark, for right from the start
art and thinking have cost it pain.
There are lovely pictures in the valley,
for example the gardens and trees,
and the narrow footbridge, and the brook,
hardly visible. How beautifully
the landscape shines, cheerfully distant,
like a splendid picture, where I come
to visit when the weather is mild.
A kindly divinity leads us on at first
with blue, then prepares clouds,
shaped like gray domes, with
searing lightning and rolling thunder,
then comes the loveliness of the fields,
and beauty wells forth from
the source of the primal image.

Friedrich Holderlin

Patmos

The god
Is near, and hard to grasp.
But where there is danger,
A rescuing element grows as well.
Eagles live in the darkness,
And the sons of the Alps
Cross over the abyss without fear
On lightly-built bridges.
Therefore, since the summits
Of Time are heaped about,
And dear friends live near,
Growing weak on the separate mountains —
Then give us calm waters;
Give us wings, and loyal minds
To cross over and return.

Thus I spoke, when faster
Than I could imagine a spirit
Led me forth from my own home
To a place I thought I'd never go.
The shaded forests and yearning
Brooks of my native country
Were glowing in the twilight.
I couldn't recognize the lands
I passed through, but then suddenly
In fresh splendor, mysterious
In the golden haze, quickly emerging
In the steps of the sun,
Fragrant with a thousand peaks,
Asia rose before me.

Dazzled I searched for something
Familiar, since the broad streets
Were unknown to me: where the gold-bejeweled
Patoklos comes rushing down from Tmolus,
Where Taurus and Messogis stand,
And the gardens are full of flowers,
Like a quiet fire. Up above
In the light the silver snow

Thrives, and ivy grows from ancient
Times on the inaccessible walls,
Like a witness to immortal life,
While the solemn god-built palaces
Are borne by living columns
Of cypress and laurel.

But around Asia's gates
Unshaded sea-paths rush
About the unpredictable sea,
Though sailors know where
The islands are. When I heard
that one of these close by
Was Patmos, I wanted very much
To put in there, to enter
The dark sea-cave. For unlike
Cyprus, rich with springs,
Or any of the others, Patmos
Isn't splendidly situated,

But it's nevertheless hospitable
In a more modest home. And if
A stranger should come to her,
Shipwrecked or homesick
Or grieving for a departed friend,
She'll gladly listen, and her
Offspring as well, the voices
In the hot grove, so that where sands blow
and heat cracks the tops of the fields,
They hear him, these voices,
And echo the man's grief.
Thus she once looked after
The prophet that was loved by God,
Who in his holy youth

Had walked together inseparably
With the Son of the Highest,
Because the Storm-Bearer loved
The simplicity of his disciple.
Thus that attentive man observed
The countenance of the god directly,
There at the mystery of the wine,

Where they sat together at the hour
Of the banquet, when the Lord with
His great spirit quietly foresaw his
Own death, and forespoke it and also
His final act of love, for he always
Had words of kindness to speak,
Even then in his prescience,
To soften the raging of the world.
For all is good. Then he died. Much
Could be said about it. At the end
His friends recognized how joyous
He appeared, and how victorious.

And yet the men grieved, now that evening
Had come, and were taken by surprise,
Since they were full of great intentions,
And loved living in the light,
And didn't want to leave the countenance
Of the Lord, which had become their home.
It penetrated them like fire into hot iron,
And the one they love walked beside them
Like a shadow. Therefore he sent
The Spirit upon them, and the house
Shook and God's thunder rolled
Over their expectant heads, while
They were gathered with heavy hearts,
Like heroes under sentence of death,

When he again appeared to them
At his departure. For now
The majestic day of the sun
Was extinguished, as he cast
The shining scepter from himself,
Suffering like a god, but knowing
He would come again at the right time.
It would have been wrong
To cut off disloyally his work
With humans, since now it pleased
Him to live on in loving night,
And keep his innocent eyes
Fixed upon depths of wisdom.
Living images flourish deep

In the mountains as well,

Yet it is fearful how God randomly
Scatters the living, and how very far.
And how fearsome it was to leave
The sight of dear friends and walk off
Alone far over the mountains, where
The divine spirit was twice
Recognized, in unity.
It hadn't been prophesied to them:
In fact it seized them right by the hair
Just at the moment when the fugitive
God looked back, and they called out to him
To stop, and they reached their hands to
One another as if bound by a golden rope,
And called it bad —

But when he dies —he whom beauty
Loved most of all, so that a miracle
Surrounded him, and he became
Chosen by the gods —
And when those who lived together
Thereafter in his memory, became
Perplexed and no longer understood
One another; and when floods carry off
The sand and willows and temples,
And when the fame of the demi-god
And his disciples is blown away
And even the Highest turns aside his
Countenance, so that nothing
Immortal can be seen either
In heaven or upon the green earth —
What does all this mean?

It is the action of the winnower,
When he shovels the wheat
And casts it up into the clear air
And swings it across the threshing floor.
The chaff falls to his feet, but
The grain emerges finally.
It's not bad if some of it gets lost,
Or if the sounds of his living speech

Fade away. For the work
Of the gods resembles our own:
The Highest doesn't want it
Accomplished all at once.
As mineshafts yield iron,
And Etna its glowing resins,
Then I'd have sufficient resources
To shape a picture of him and see
What the Christ was like.

But if somebody spurred himself on
Along the road and, speaking sadly,
Fell upon me and surprised me, so that
Like a servant I'd make an image of the god —
Once I saw the lords
Of heaven visibly angered, not
That I wanted to become something different,
But that I wanted to learn something more.
The lords are kind, but while they reign
They hate falsehood most, when humans become
Inhuman. For not they, but undying Fate
It is that rules, and their activity
Spins itself out and quickly reaches an end.
When the heavenly procession proceeds higher
Then the joyful Son of the Highest
Is called like the sun by the strong,

As a watchword, like a staff of song
That points downwards,
For nothing is ordinary. It awakens
The dead, who aren't yet corrupted.
And many are waiting whose eyes are
Still too shy to see the light directly.
They wouldn't do well in the sharp
Radiance: a golden bridle
Holds back their courage.
But when quiet radiance falls
From the holy scripture, with
The world forgotten and their eyes
Wide open, then they may enjoy that grace,
And study the light in stillness.

And if the gods love me,
As I now believe,
Then how much more
Do they love yourself.
For I know that the will
Of the eternal Father
Concerns you greatly.
Under a thundering sky
His sign is silent.
And there is one who stands
Beneath it all his life.
For Christ still lives.
But the heroes, all his sons
Have come, and the holy scriptures
Concerning him,
While earth's deeds clarify
The lightning, like a footrace
That can't be stopped.
And he is there too,
Aware of his own works
From the very beginning.

For far too long
The honor of the gods
Has been invisible.
They practically have to
Guide our fingers as we write,
And with embarrassment the energy
Is torn from our hearts.
For every heavenly being
Expects a sacrifice,
And when this is neglected,
Nothing good can come of it.
Without awareness we've worshipped
Our Mother the Earth, and the Light
Of the Sun as well, but what our Father
Who reigns over everything wants most
Is that the established word be
Carefully attended, and that
Which endures be interpreted well.
German song must accord with this.

Remembrance

The northeast blows,
my favorite among winds,
since it promises fiery spirit
and a good voyage to mariners.
But go now, and greet
the lovely Garonne,
and the gardens of Bordeaux,
where the path runs
beside the steep bank,
and the brook runs into the deep stream,
and a noble pair of oak and silver
poplars look down from above.

I remember well
how the crowns of the elm trees
lean over the mill,
and a fig tree grows in the courtyard.
On holidays dark-skinned women
walk upon the soft earth,
and in March,
when night and day are equal:
cradling breezes waft
across the gentle pathways,
heavy with golden dreams.

But someone hand me
the fragrant cup,
full of dark light,
that I may rest.
It would be sweet
to sleep among the shadows.
It isn't good
to stay mindless
with human thoughts.
On the other hand, conversation
is also good: to speak
the thoughts of the heart,

and to hear much of days of love,
and of deeds that occur.

But where are our friends —
Bellarmin and his companion?
Many are afraid to go to the source,
since treasure is first found in the sea.
Like painters, they gather up earth's beauty,
and they don't scorn winged war,
or to live alone for years
beneath the bare mast —
where the city's festivities
don't flash through the night, or
the sound of strings and native dancing.

But now the men
have left for India...
from the windy peaks
and vine-covered hills
where the Dardogne
comes down with the great
Garonne; wide as an ocean
the river flows outward.
But the sea takes
and gives memory,
and love fixes the eye diligently,
and poets establish
that which endures.

Friedrich Holderlin

The Course Of Life

You too wanted better things, but love
forces all of us down. Sorrow bends us more
forcefully, but the arc doesn't return to its
point of origin without a reason.

Upwards or downwards! In holy Night,
where mute Nature plans the coming days,
doesn't there reign in the most twisted Orcus
something straight and direct?

This I have learned. Never to my knowledge
did you, all-preserving gods, like mortal
masters, lead me providentially
along a straight path.

The gods say that man should test
everything, and that strongly nourished
he be thankful for everything, and understand
the freedom to set forth wherever he will.

Friedrich Holderlin

The Ister

Now is the time for fire!
Impatient for the daylight,
We're on our knees,
Exhausted with waiting.
It's then, in that silence,
We hear the woods' strange call.
Meanwhile, we sing from the Indus,
Which comes from far away, and
From the Alpheus, since we've
Long desired decorum.
It's not without dramatic flourish
That one grasps
Straight ahead
What is closest
To reach the other side.
But here we want to build.
Rivers make the land fertile
And allow the foliage to grow.
And if in the summer
Animals gather at a watering place
People will go there, too.

This river is called the Ister.
It lives in beauty. Columns of leaves burn
And stir. They stand in the forest
Supporting each other; above,
A second dimension juts out
From a dome of stones. So I'm
Not surprised that the distantly gleaming river
Made Hercules its guest,
When in search of shadows
He came down from Olympus
And up from the heat of Isthmus.

They were full of courage there,
Which always comes in handy, like cool water
And a path for the spirit to follow.
That's why the hero preferred

To come to the water's source, its fragrant yellow banks
Black with fir trees, in whose depths
The hunter likes to roam
At noon and the resinous trees
Moan as they grow.

Yet the river almost seems
To flow backwards, and I
Think it must come
From the East.

Much could
Be said further. But why does
It hang so straight from the mountain? That other river,
The Rhine, has gone away
Sideways. Not for nothing rivers
Flow in dryness. But how? We need a sign,
Nothing more, something plain and simple,
To remind us of sun and moon, so inseparable,
Which go away — day and night also —
And warm each other in heaven.
They give joy to the highest god. For how
Can he descend to them? And like earth's ancient greenness
They are the children of heaven. But he seems
Too indulgent to me, not freer,
And almost scornful. For when

Day begins in youth,
Where it commences growing,
Another is already there
To further enhance the beauty, and chafes
At the bit like foals. And if he is happy
Distant breezes hear the commotion;
But the rock needs engraving
And the earth needs its furrows;
If not, an endless desolation;
But what a river will do,
Nobody knows.□

Friedrich Holderlin

The Journey

Suevia, my mother, happy land!
You also are like your more shining sister
Lombardy over there
Flowed through by a hundred streams
And trees in plenty, white with blossom or reddish
And the darker, deep, full green, the wild trees
And the Alps of Switzerland overshadow you too,
Neighbourly; for near the hearth of the house
Is where you live and you can hear
Inside from silvery vessels
The spring rushing that issues
From pure hands when touched

By warm rays
Crystal ice and tipped over
By the lightly quickening light
The snowy summit drenches the earth
With purest water. For that reason
You are born loyal. Hard
Living near the source to quit the place.
And your children, the towns
On the long lake in the haze
On the willowy Neckar and on the Rhine
All think
Nowhere would be better to live.

Friedrich Holderlin

The Neckar

My heart awakened to life in your valleys,
Your waves played around me.
And all of the fair hills that know you,
Wayfarer, are known to me as well.

On those peaks the winds from the sky
Relieved me from pains of bondage,
And silver-blue waves shone forth from the valley,
Like the joy of life pouring out from a chalice.

Mountain springs hurried down to you,
My heart with them, and you took us along
To the quietly splendid Rhine, down
To its cities and pleasant islands.

The world seems to me yet beautiful, and my eyes
Search out with desire the charms of the earth,
To golden Paktolos, to Smyrna's shores,
To Ilion's woods. How I'd like to

Go ashore at Sunium, and ask for the silent road
To your pillars, Olympia! Before age
And storm winds bury you as well
In the ruins of Athens' temples,

Along with the statues of its gods. For you
Have long stood alone, pride of a world
That no longer exists. And the beautiful
Islands of Ionia, where sea air

Cools the hot shores and rushes through the woods
Of laurel, when the sun warms the grapevines,
And, oh, where golden autumn changes
The sighs of the poor people into songs,

When the pomegranate ripens, when the orange trees
Nod in a green night, and the gum trees drip
Resin, and drums and cymbals resound
To labyrinthine dances.

Perhaps someday my guardian deity will bring me
To these islands, but even then my thoughts
Would remain loyal to the Neckar
With its lovely meadows and pastoral shores.

Friedrich Holderlin

The Titans

It's not yet
Time. They are still
Unbound. And the indifferent don't care
About godly matters.
Let them puzzle it out
With the Oracle. Meanwhile, during the festivities,
I'll take my ease thinking of the dead.
In the old days, many generals died
and lovely women and poets.
Today, it's many men.
But I am alone.

and sailing on the ocean

The sweetly scented islands
Ask where they are.

For something of them remains
In writing and in myth.
God reveals so much.
For a long time the clouds
Have influenced what's below
And the holy forest, fertile as a god,
Has sent down roots.
The world's riches burn too intensely.
For we don't have the song
That will shake our spirit free.
It would consume itself,
For the heavenly fire can never
Endure captivity.

Yet men enjoy
The banquet, and in celebration,
Their eyes are brightened by pearls
On a young woman's neck.
Also games of war

and through

The garden paths
The memory of battle clatters;
The resonant weapons

Of heroic ancestors lie soothed
And still upon the breasts
Of children. But the bees hum
Around me, and where the plowman
Makes his furrows, birds
Sing against the light. Many give
Help to heaven. The poet
Sees them. It's good to rely
On others. For no one can bear his life alone.

For when the busy day
Catches fire,
And heavenly dew glistens
On the chain
Leading lightning from sunrise
To its source, even mortals
Feel its grandeur.
That's why they build houses
And the workshop is so busy
And ships sail against the currents
And men exchange greetings
Holding out their hands; it's sensible
On earth, and not for nothing
Do we fix our eyes on the ground.

Yet you sense
A different way.
For proportion demands
That coarseness exist
For purity to be known.

But when the first cause
Reaches into the earth
To make it come to life,
People think the heavenly
Have come down to the dead
And the all-knowing has dawned
In a boundless emptiness.
It's not for me to say
That the gods are growing weak
Just as they come into being.
But when

and it goes

As far as the part in father's hair, so that

and the bird of heaven
Makes it known to him. Wonderful
in anger, that's what matters.

Friedrich Holderlin

Then And Now

In my youth I enjoyed the morning
And wept at night; now that I'm older
My day begins with doubt but
Its end is sacred and serene.

Friedrich Holderlin

To The Fates

Grant me just one summer, powerful ones,

And just one autumn for ripe songs,

That my heart, filled with that sweet

Music, may more willingly die within me.

The soul, denied its divine heritage in life,

Won't find rest down in Hades either.

But if what is holy to me, the poem

That rests in my heart, succeeds —

Then welcome, silent world of shadows!

I'll be content, even though it's not my own lyre

That leads me downwards. Once I'll have

Lived like the gods, and more isn't necessary.

Friedrich Holderlin

To The Sun God

Where are you? Drunk, my mind becomes
Twilight after all your ecstasy. For I just saw
How the enrapturing young god,
Tired from his journey,

Bathed his youthful hair in the golden clouds.
And now my eyes follow after him,
But he is gone away to reverent
Nations which still honor him.

I love the earth, which mourns with me.
Like children when they are upset, our grief
Changes to sleep. And as rustling winds
Whisper over harp strings

Until the fingers of a master entice
A prettier music, thus mist and dreams
Play around us, until the beloved returns,
And charges us with life and spirit.

Friedrich Holderlin

When I Was A Boy

When I was a boy
a god would often rescue me
from the shouting and violence of humans.
Then, safe and well, I would play
with the meadow flowers,
and heaven's breezes
would play with me.

And as you delight the heart
of plants, stretching their tender
arms toward you,
Father Helios,
so you delighted my heart,
and I was your beloved,
holy Luna, just like Endymion!

All you faithful
friendly gods!
I wish you knew
how my soul loved you!

Naturally I couldn't call you
by name then, nor did you use
mine, as humans do, as if
they really knew each other.

But I was better acquainted with you
than I ever was with humans.
I knew the stillness of the Aether:
I never understood the words of men.

The euphony of the rustling
meadow was my education;

among flowers I learned to love.

I grew up
in the arms of the gods.

Friedrich Holderlin