Pli 10 (2000), 156-173.

Hölderlin and the Orientalisation of Greece

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In the last chapter of *Twilight of the Idols*, entitled "What I Owe to the Ancients", Nietzsche writes: "One does not *learn* from the Greeks – their manner is too strange, it is also too fluid to produce an imperative, a 'classical' effect".[1] About eighty years earlier, Hölderlin, whilst affirming to his friend Böhlendorff that 'the Greeks are indispensable for us', also warned him of the danger '[of] deduc[ing] the rules of art for oneself exclusive from Greek excellence'[2] and shortly after declared to the publisher of his translations of Sophocles that 'Greek art is foreign to us'.[3] *Fremd*, strange, foreign, is the same term used by both Nietzsche and Hölderlin to characterise what is Greek, and it is also their names which will be associated, by Heidegger, in his 1936 lectures on "The Will to Power as Art", to note that they were the only ones to extricate the classical from the misunderstandings of classicism and humanism, by opposing the positions of Winckelmann and of Goethe, and by rediscovering, behind the ideal of a naturalness compatible with reason promoted by classicism, "this character proper to nature which the Greeks of the great age named the *deinon* or the *deinotaton*, the monstrous".[4] That there is something profoundly foreign, obscure and disquieting in Greek art which no longer allows one to speak simply of "*griechische Heiterkeit*", "Greek serenity",[5] according to the classical formula, this is

[1] F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
[2] F. Hölderlin, Letter of December 4, 1801; in F. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, translated and edited by Thomas Pfau, Albany, SUNY, 1988.
[3] Ibid., letter of September 20th, 1803.
[4] M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 150
[5] Cf. the lectures of 1871, published in French under the title *Introduction aux études de philologie classique*, (La Versanne: Encre Marine 1994), p. 102, where Nietzsche refuses the simplistic opposition between a Christian pessimism and a pagan optimism, and declares: "Beware of the expression: Greek serenity".

exactly what Nietzsche undertook to show since *The Birth of Tragedy*, by making apparent, under the beautiful appearance and the measure characterising apollinian civilisation, the barbaric and titanic nature of its dionysiac foundation, and thus bestowing a fundamental importance to this oriental god that is Dionysus for the definition of what constitutes what is proper to the Hellenic [*le grec*]. Now, it is this dualism of appolinian and dionysiac which deeply divides ancient Greece and prevents it from attaining the simplicity of a model to follow: "...[S]centing out 'beautiful souls', 'golden means' and other perfections in the Greeks, from admiring in them such things as their repose in grandeur, their ideal disposition, their sublime simplicity – ...this 'sublime simplicity' [seems to me] a *niaiserie allemande*", Nietzsche writes in *Twilight of the Idols*.[6] This "German foolishness" is the prerogative of German philologists – and here Nietzsche mentions a certain Lobeck who had only detected "buffoonery" in the dionysiac rites,[7] - but it seems it is also that of Goethe and of Winckelmann, to whom he alludes later. They have also profoundly misunderstood the dionysiac and have thus ultimately judged the Greeks in the German way, that is solely in the light of their philosophers,[8] highlighting rational discourse rather than this expression of an excess of energy[9] that is the Greek tragic art understood properly, conceived as the work of the appollinian-dionysiac genius, and the mysterious union of these two instincts.[10] We cannot, then, understand the Greeks (and classicism never attains this, according to Nietzsche, who does not hesitate to affirm that "*Goethe did not understand the Greeks*")[11] unless we renounce making models out of them, and take note of the radical break between the Ancients and the Moderns. This is what Nietzsche, for his part, does with his notion of decadence, and what the post-Kantians, Schiller, Hölderlin, and Hegel, also did before him, as opposed to Herder and Goethe, who were, on the contrary, able to think that a modern could be the equal of an

[6] *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 118.
[7] Lobeck,(1781-1860) was the author of *Aglaophamus*, a sceptical study of the Mysteries which Nietzsche will judge as being "a worm dried up among books", but which Erwin Rohde declares to be "a work always worthy of admiration, despite the unilateral character of its hardened rationalism". Cf. *Querelle autour de "La Naissance de la Tragedie"*, ed. by M.Dixsaut, (Paris: Vrin, 1995), p.112, 191.
[8] *Twilight of the Idols*, p.119.
[9] Ibid., p.119.
[10] *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 4.
[11] *Twilight of the Idols*, p.120.

ancient, and that Winckelmann, for example, was nothing other than a Greek born, by chance, in the 18th century.

As Jacques Taminiaux ably demonstrated, in his already old thesis on *The Nostalgia for Greece at the Dawn of German Idealism*, the subtitle of which is: 'Kant and the Greeks in the itineraries of Schiller, Hölderlin, and Hegel',[12] there is, in fact, no nostalgia (that is to say, according to the etymology of the term itself, forged in the 18th century, suffering of exile and longing for return) towards Greece, other than in those who, in this Germany of early Romanticism, still find their models in foreign lands, and who feed, like Kant had already done, on the Rousseauist idea that the state of culture and the political and social order of the 18th century represent a maximum discrepancy with the state of nature, the condition man belongs to by birth. For it is precisely Kant, who, in his work 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History' of 1786, proposes a teleological reading of history, since everything happens as if history can be deciphered as the putting-to-work of a design of nature's which would end, through the conflict between nature and freedom, with their final reconciliation in an art that, reaching its perfection, would become nature again.[13] As Jacques Taminiaux notes in a recent article: "Nostalgia for Greece appears when Schiller, deeply engaged, in the course of 1788, in a feverish and enthusiastic reading of Homer and the Greek tragic poets, substitutes for the Rousseauist state of nature the image of ancient Greece".[14] For Schiller, then, everything was profoundly transformed in the move from Greece to Modernity, not only human existence but also the whole of nature, as is expressed in the poem 'Die Götter Griechenlandes', 'The Gods of Greece', which ends with this pure nostalgic plaint, opposing the ideality of the poem's content to the terrible reality of life:

> Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben
> Muß im Leben untergehen"
>
> That which ought to live eternally in Song
> Must in life perish.

[12] J. Taminiaux, *La Nostalgie de la Grèce à l'aube de l'idéalisme Allemand* (The Hague: Nijhoff 1967).
[13] Kant, "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human history", in *Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss, (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).
[14] 'Nostalgia for Greece at the Dawn of German Classicism', in *Turm-Vorträge, 1987-88, Hölderlin und die Griechen*, (Tübingen:Hölderlinturm, 1988), p.33.

Schiller does not, however, stay with this pure lament, since all the philosophical essays he will produce in the following years will be concerned with the elaboration of a problematic aiming to surmount the ordeal of exile. After *Anmut und Würde*, 'Grace and Dignity', and *Vom Erhabenen*, 'On the Sublime', in 1795 and 1796 Schiller publishes in *Die Horen*, the review he founded with Goethe, two texts which will quickly come to Hölderlin's attention, the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. It is in this latter text, in particular, that the opposition between Greece and modernity is understood as the difference between two ways of thinking, and relating to, nature: the naïve is what is nature, the sentimental is what searches for a lost nature. It is because the Greeks live intimately with nature that we hardly ever see in them traces of the sentimental interest which ties the moderns to natural scenes. The Greeks do not make a difference between nature and culture precisely because, with them, culture is deployed in proximity to nature and without rupture from it. This is why Schiller was able to say of the Greeks that "they felt naturally" while the moderns "feel the natural", and the feeling of nature in the modern "is like the feeling the sick has for health". Schiller develops a philosophy of history from this basis, and sees in this a progress dialectically realised in three moments. The first moment is that of harmony between nature and art, which, like Aristotle says in *The Physics*, "imitates or completes nature". In the second moment, art achieves its freedom by turning back against nature and by breaking the links uniting it with totality. We are faced, then, with an antithesis between the first and the second moment, between naïve and sentimental poetry, between ancient and modern poets, between reality and the ideal, since if ancient poets are nature, modern poets, by searching for a lost nature, make of it an ideal. In the third moment, in accordance with what Kant prescribed as "ultimate end of the moral destination for the human species", perfected art returns to nature, and reason and sensibility, nature and freedom, are reconciled. There is, then, a logic of history: nature must be annihilated by its opposite, destructive art, to find itself again in the ideal synthesis of nature and art which occurs as total accomplishment of the essence of man, who is a being at the same time receptive and spontaneous, natural and free, as Kant has shown. For what Schiller, opening the age of post-Kantianism along with Fichte, is looking for, is a conciliatory synthesis which permits the overcoming of the Kantian dualism between nature and freedom and so ends in an overcoming of nostalgia and in the possibility of finding beauty in finitude in order to thus have the mortals accede to the luminous serenity of the Olympian gods.

There is little doubt that the young Hölderlin also has the same references as Schiller – the Greeks, and Kant – as can be attested from a letter he writes from the Tübingen seminary to his friend Neuffer in July 1793, and as he repeats a year later in a letter to Hegel, dating July 10, 1794: "Kant and the Greeks are more or less my only reading". It is at this time that he finishes a first draft of his novel, which will be published in November 1794 in Schiller's review *Thalia*. This fragment opens with the Kantian idea of the opposition between nature and culture:

> There are two Ideals for our existence: a state of the highest simplicity, where our needs are in reciprocal accord with themselves, with our powers, and with all those in relation to us, through the mere organisation of nature, and without our assistance; and a state of the highest culture (*Bildung*), where the same condition is attained through infinitely more multiple and strengthened needs and powers, by means of the organisation that we are in a position to bestow ourselves.[15]

Hölderlin, who later in the text speaks of the "excentric orbit" (*die exzentrische Bahn*) leading from nature to culture, thus affirms an identity between the originary state of humanity and the state of its most perfect accomplishment, in the sense that man must learn to regain by the organisation he gives himself this accord with oneself that was the fact of nature. But this demand of a superior union, a hyperculture which would be the return to nature, as prescribed by Kant, is difficult to realise, since, if what animates Hyperion is the spirit of impatience, he must learn precisely this, that the return to this beautiful totality Hölderlin names both "nature" and "the sacred", and to which ancient Greece was able to correspond so harmoniously, cannot today be immediate. For what still guides Hölderlin here is the formula he discovers by reading Jacobi's book on Spinoza: *Hen kai Pan*, the One and the All, which will become the password uniting the three friends in the Stift, Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin, and later also the title for a poem of Goethe's (*Eins und Alles*). At that time, the Spinozism of "*Deus sive Natura*" merged with the pantheist feeling of a god identified with the totality of nature, the example for which Hölderlin finds in Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*. It is indeed in 1793, whilst he is writing this first draft of his novel, that Hölderlin, writing to his friend Neuffer, recalls "those divine hours when

[15] Hölderlin, *Stuttgarter Gesamtausgabe* [hereinafter, S]. (Stuttgart:Kohlhammer, 1957) band 3, p.163.

[he] return[s] from the womb of inspiring nature or from the grove of Ilissus where, resting among disciples of Plato, ...,[he] would follow him into the utmost depth, to the remotest regions of the land of spirit, where the soul of the world emanates its life into the thousand pulses of nature, whereto the effluvious forces return in their immeasurable circle".[16] But this aspiration for totality which makes Hyperion say, in the fragment published in *Thalia*: "What cannot be everything for me, for eternity, is nothing", comes up against the reality of finitude and of separation that it cannot abolish lastingly. The appearance of Melite, who is this beautiful totality incarnate, and who is thus the sacred itself become visible, certainly is this "ineffable event" of a deliverance from finitude:

> Gone was my earthly life, time was no more, and my Spirit, unfettered and resurrected, felt its affinity (*Verwandschaft*) and its origin.[17]

But this immediate apparition of the sacred, of a totality which remains exterior to infinity, which remains a false totality and a false infinity, cannot be appropriated by the separated being trying to unite itself with it. This is why the revelation of the sacred is inexorably followed by the painful consciousness of separation, which this revelation can be said to aggravate. The first draft of the novel says no more on this, and ends with the departure of the loved one, followed by the profound distress of Hyperion, who "seeks nothing else but to remove [him]self from the land of the living", but who nevertheless hears the appeal the world makes to him: "why do you scorn me?" – which lets one see that in him begins to be revealed the necessity to endure the separation, and not to remain with its unresolved antithesis of One-All and finitude, of homeland and exile, of Greece and modernity.

In the definitive version of the novel, if Hyperion's goal remains the union with nature in an infinite One-All, as the preface says, this goal is no longer pursued with the impatience demanded by the immediacy of the sacred, since the unique totality sought by Hyperion is no longer the beyond of an ideal identity but, as noted by Taminiaux,[18] the actual presence of a beauty unfolding in the sensible. Here is how Hyperion describes the appearance of Diotima.

[16] Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, p. 121.
[17] S, 3, p. 167.
[18] The analysis of the novel undertaken here is based on the reading by Taminiaux in *La Nostalgie*, op.cit., p131.

> Once I was happy, Bellarmin! Am I not so still? Should I not be happy even if the sacred moment when I first saw her had been the last?
>
> I have seen it *once*, the one thing that my soul sought, and the perfection that we put somewhere far away above the stars, that we put off until the end of time – I have felt it in its living presence. There it was, all that is highest! In this circle of human nature and of things, it was there!
>
> I no longer ask where it may be; it was in the world, it can return into it, it is in the world now, only more hidden. I no longer ask what it is; I have seen it, have known it.
>
> O you who seek the highest and the best, whether in the depths of knowledge, in the turmoil of action, in the darkness of the past, in the labyrinth of the future, in graves or above the stars! do you know its name? The name of that which is one and is all?
>
> Its name is Beauty.[19]

Beauty, then, is not this unity which excludes difference and holds itself beyond the finite, but on the contrary a totality which includes the finite and announces itself from within the finite. This beauty, much more than being Platonic is Heraclitean, for it is given in becoming and not in the eternity of the idea. This is why Hyperion, singing the praises of Greece and of beauty, is led to evoke a passage from Plato's *Symposium* where Plato cites Heraclitus's fragment (B 51), which speaks of the harmony of what differs from itself, the *palintropos harmonia*, the harmony of the bow and the lyre:

> The Greek saying, the *hen diaferon eauto* (the one differentiated in itself) of Heraclitus, could be found only by a Greek, for it is the very being of Beauty, and before that was found there was no philosophy."[20]

Here Hölderlin achieves a non-nostalgic relation to Greece, which no longer aspires to an impossible plenitude, as he writes to Neuffer in 1794, affirming that he is "starting to overcome that childish cowardice" which forces him to "eternally complain that the world is not an Arcadia". For what is overcome in this way, as Taminiaux rightly points out, is "the

[19] Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, ed. Eric L. Santner, (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 41.
[20] Ibid, p.67

Schillerian anthithsis of Greek light to modern darkness", and this overcoming "employs a link with the Greeks which would no longer be placed under the sign of a nostalgia for the *Hen kai Pan*, but instead under that of a serious meditation of the *Hen diaferon eauto*".[21]

Philosophy then, is not born out of the nostalgia for an absent unity, nor out of the exile from the All, but out of an accord with that which is in the difference of its multiplicity. For what is thus achieved is a concept of beauty different from that of Platonism and from that of the classicism of Goethe and Winckelmann: no longer the becoming-visible of the idea, but the harmony of opposites, no longer the static concept of an atemporal beauty, but the dynamic one of a living beauty that Plato himself, citing Heraclitus, has not perhaps ignored, as Hölderlin implies in the preface to *Hyperion*, when he exclaims, after having alluded to the already realised presence of being as beauty:

> I think that in the end we will all cry out: saint Plato, forgive us! We have gravely sinned against you!

For it is on the basis of such a sensible presence of beauty and of the effective presence of the union of the infinite with the finite that Greece is defined in *Hyperion* as the homeland of philosophy, in opposition to Egypt and the North:

> Do you see now why the Athenians in particular could not but be a philosophical people too?
>
> Not so the Egyptian. He who does not live loving Heaven and earth and loved by them in equal measure, he who does not live at one in this sense with the element in which he has his being, is by his very nature not so as one with himself as a Greek, at least he does not expewrience eternal Beauty as easily as a Greek does.[22]

It is, in fact, only Greece that is capable of this harmony with the sensible and with exteriority which procures it the harmony with the intelligible and interiority: neither the Oriental (the Egyptian), subject to an exteriority which appears like a "terrible enigma", nor the Nordic (the German), enclosed in an interiority without an outside, are capable of such a harmony and can be open to a beauty at the same time "human and divine". Must Greece, then, be resurrected? The failure of the military

[21] Taminiaux, *Türm-Vorträge 1987-88, op.cit.*, p.43.
[22] *Hyperion*, op. Cit., p.67.

expedition aiming to liberate Greece in which Hyperion takes part with his friend Alabanda shows, on the contrary, that this can only be a dream. For this harmony with the All cannot be taken by violence, nor represented in nostalgia. It can only be realised by the acceptance and endurance of separation. That is the meaning of Hyperion's words in one of the last letters of the novel:

> Best of friends! I am at peace, for I want nothing better than the gods. Must not all things suffer? And the more excellent, the more deeply! Does not sacred Nature suffer? O my divinity! That you could mourn as you are blissful – that was long beyond my understanding. But the bliss that does not suffer is sleep, and without death there is no life.[23]

Thus the stress is placed on difference, on the suffering of separation: neither humanity nor nature coincide with themselves. And Greece itself, rendered in the novel in a dynamic vision, can no less exclude division from itself. This is why Greece will have to not so much oppose itself from the outside to this figure of separation that is the Egyptian Orient, the model for which Hölderlin finds in Winckelmann and which announces the figure of the Jew in Hegel's writings of the Frankfurt period, as integrate profoundly to itself another figure of the Orient, ecstatic and dionysiac, which Hölderlin also names "aorgic". It seems, in fact, that the Orient is formed in this double figure (figure of separation and of limitlessness) every time there is the menace of an excess in the one or the other direction – an excess of culture and art, therefore an excess of separation from nature, or an excess of enthusiasm and thus an excessive union with the All.[24] Thus, opposed to the figure of Empedocles which embodies the spirit of impatience and the speculative desire for a premature union with totality, comes the figure of the adversary, Manes, the Egyptian priest, he who endures, and who both questions Empedocles's right to reconcile oppositions and personifies the capacity to endure the hold of the tension between art and nature. But opposed to this figure, as to that of Oedipus who sees himself return to a

[23] Ibid., p.115

[24] We have to remember, here, the theme of hyperbole, that is to say unification by extreme opposition, which reigns over the whole of the exposition of poetic individuality in the great essay 'On the Operations of the poetic Spirit'. It is a matter of individuality going from an excess of objectivity or an excess of subjectivity to the harmonious opposition of the objective and the subjective moment in the accomplished state of its formation, which is that of poetic creation.

terrestrial world and a solely spiritual death, a "deathless death", is the figure of Antigone who accomplishes the native reversal[25] of the Greek which takes her back from European sobriety to the Oriental element of celestial fire.

For the context in which Hölderlin is situated is that of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns that started in France at the end of the 17th century, and which Goethe and Schiller reactivated in Germany in the 18th century, at the time of *Sturm und Drang*. The essential problem put forward then was that of imitating the Greeks, who were considered as the summit of artistic accomplishment. The opposition of the Ancients and the Moderns had already been the theme of the novel *Hyperion*, and Hölderlin's conclusion then was that this opposition remained insurmountable, because of the insurmountable distance that separates us from the Ancients. This is why, in the first letter to Casimir Böhlendorff, it is written that "we must not share anything *identical* with them". In a short essay of 1799 entitled 'The Perspective from which we Have to look at Antiquity', Hölderlin insists on the difference between Ancients and Moderns, underlining the all too crushing character of the heritage they have bestowed us. We moderns find ourselves totally subject to the exemplarity of Antiquity. Hölderlin speaks of "our subjection to Antiquity", which seems like something positive, which has already been appropriated, and suggests that we can only choose between being crushed under the weight of what has been received, or violently opposing it. But in effect to battle with what has already been appropriated would mean to be linked with it even more tightly. For what is truly problematic in our relation to Antiquity is that it cannot be used as educational material for us, precisely because it is already formed and our own formative tendency [*tendance formatrice*] prompts us to seek a raw material which we could then form ourselves:

> What seems most problematic here is that antiquity appears altogether opposed to our primordial drive which is bent on forming the unformed, to perfect the primordial-natural so that man, who is born for art, will naturally take to what is raw,

[25] ['le retournement natal' – the phrase is the French translation of the Hölderlinian expression, 'die vaterlandische Umkehr' as used by Maurice Blanchot in his 'Hölderlin's Itinerary', in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). The English rendition of the term is derived from this translation, whereas Thomas Pfau translates the German as 'patriotic reversal'. – *trans.*]

uneducated, childlike, rather than to a formed material where there has already been pre-formed [what] one wishes to form.[26]

Hölderlin here explicitly says that Antiquity appears as opposed to us and that this opposition itself is what is the most difficult (*das Schwerste*) in our relation with it. It is clear that Hölderlin does not share the common opinion that sees in antiquity the childhood or youth of humanity, but considers, on the contrary, antiquity to be excessively formed. Moreover, he remarks that the general reason for the decline of the peoples is rooted precisely in this excess of formation which petrifies their living originality into positive forms and drives their authenticity to lose itself in luxury. That was, in fact, the cause of the decline of Greece, as it is expressed in a fragment of a late hymn:

Nemlich sie wollten stiften
Ein Reich der Kunst. Dabei ward aber
Das Vaterländiche von ihnen
Versäumet und erbärmlich gieng
Das Griechenland, das schönste, zu Grunde.

Namely they wanted to found
A Kingdom of Art. Yet in this
The native was by them
Neglected, and wretched went
Greece, the most beautiful, to its downfall.[27]

Thus the Greeks were not able to return to that which was properly native (*vaterländisch*) to them, they perished from an excess of art, because they did not manage to reconcile in themselves nature and culture, which would have meant the incessant renewal of one by the other.

What, however, characterises the moderns as much as the Greeks is this constant tendency of human nature that Hölderlin, following Schiller, names the "formative tendency" (*Bildungstrieb*). Nevertheless, this tendency has, when placed within the historical context, a different direction in antiquity and in modernity. This is precisely what Hölderlin explains in his first letter to Böhlendorff:

[26] Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory, op.cit,* p. 39.
[27] Hölderlin, S II, 1, p.228.

We learn nothing with more difficulty than to freely use the national. And, I believe that it is precisely the clarity of the presentation that is so natural to us as is for the Greeks the fire from heaven. For exactly that reason they will have to be surpassed in beautiful passion – which you have also preserved for yourself – rather than in that Homeric presence of mind and talent for presentation.

It sounds paradoxical. Yet I argue it once again and leave it for your examination and use: in the process of education the truly national will become the ever less attractive. Hence the Greeks are less master of the sacred pathos, because to them it was inborn, whereas they excel in their talent for presentation, beginning with Homer, because this exceptional man was sufficiently sensitive to conquer the Western *Junonian sobriety* for his Appolonian empire and thus to veritably appropriate what is foreign.

With us it is the reverse.[28]

From these lines we can conclude that there is an inversion in the relationship between nature and culture between the Greeks and ourselves. What for them is (oriental) nature, the sacred pathos and the fire from heaven, is for us culture. And what for them is (occidental) culture, clarity of presentation and Junonian sobriety, is for us nature. In all peoples, the formative tendency leads to the foreign element, in such a way that all which is proper and natural tends to be forgotten and left unmastered. This is why the Greeks can be surpassed in the flash of passion which is their nature, but not in what they excel at, in their gift for presentation.

Homer is the Greek *par excellence* because he was able to completely appropriate the foreign element, that is to say the western principle of limitation, of differentiation, to which Hölderlin gives the name of Juno in order to mark its eminently terrestrial character. Thus when Greek art displays measure and clarity, it teaches us nothing about Greek nature, contrary to what Goethe and Winckelmann were able to think, for this nature is, on the contrary, "oriental", or aorgic, a term he takes from Schelling. The aorgic, or anorganic, is the principle of nature in its infinite one-ness, as without form and organisation, whereas the organic is the principle of art that supposes an internal organisation, an opposition of parts.

[28] Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, op.cit., p. 149-150.

In the second letter to Böhlendorff, dated December 2nd, 1802, Hölderlin defines the character of the Greek people as "their habit to assume a foreign character and communicate themselves through them".[29] What then characterises the Greeks is tenderness, openness to the foreign, whereas what characterises the moderns is the sobriety proper to individuality closed upon itself. From this we understand that the Greeks have to protect themselves from their own unlimited tenderness with the aid of the foreign principle of differentiation. This is why, in the same letter, Hölderlin declares that "the athletic [character] of the southern people in the ruins of the ancient spirit made [him] more familiar with the specific essence of the Greeks". What is properly Greek is the necessity of applying the athletic principle of form in order to protect one's own self from the excess of oriental fire that constitutes one's nature, whereas with the moderns, it is precisely the opposite.

From this we can shed light on what Hölderlin was saying in the first letter to Böhlendorff:

> Hence it is also so dangerous to deduce the rules of art for oneself exclusively from Greek excellence. I have laboured long over this, and know by now that, with the exception of what must be the highest for the Greeks and for us – namely, the living relationship, and destiny – we must not share anything identical with them.
>
> Yet what is familiar must be learned as well as what is alien. This is why the Greeks are so indispensable for us. It is only that we will not follow them in our own, national [spirit] since, as I said, the *free* use of *what is one's own* is the most difficult.[30]

We cannot simply imitate the Greeks because our art has to respond to a nature which is diametrically opposed to theirs. We have to appropriate what is natural to them, sacred pathos and celestial fire, exactly as they had to appropriate what is natural to us, clarity of presentation and Junonian sobriety. We see from this that Hölderlin is opposed to classicism, for which Greek art is the norm for all future art. According to him, we must be moderns and not look to antiquity for our models. But we have, however, something in common with the Greeks, which is neither nature nor culture, but is higher than either of them, and of which they are only abstract elements: *das lebendige Verhältnis und Geschick*, the living relation, and destiny, or the address, which imply that, like

[29] Ibid, p. 152.
[30] Ibid, p.150.

them, we have to appropriate what is foreign to us. This is why, despite the fact that the Greeks cannot and should not be imitated, they remain indispensable for us. For we have yet to learn the use of what is proper to us, that is the clarity of presentation and Junonian sobriety that the Greeks mastered inasmuch as it was, for them, the foreign element of their culture. Therefore, the Greeks cannot help us with *our* art, but since *Greek* art gives us an image of *our* nature, it can help us accomplish what the Greeks lacked themselves, the achievement of free use of what is proper. The Greeks can then help us achieve what Hölderlin, in the *Remarks on Sophocles*, will name *die vaterländische Umkehr*, the native reversal.

The originality of the Hölderlinian conception of the relation between antiquity and modernity stems from the fact that, for Hölderlin, the Greek does not simply differ from the Hesperian as nature (infancy) from culture (maturity), but that both of them are in themselves divided between nature and culture, *phusis* and *techne*. Hölderlin, unlike Schiller, does not oppose the Greeks to the Moderns in an external manner. This is why there is no question, for him, of choosing between the Greek and the Modern side, between past and future. The Greeks are, in a way, an inverted mirror image of ourselves, they do not represent something of a bygone past. For they have more opened the possibilities of life than produced works that ought to be imitated. This is why they remain an example even though it clearly appears that they cannot nor should be imitated. We must, indeed, distinguish between the model and the example, between what has to be imitated in a static sense of reproduction, and what can be followed in a dynamic and inventive way.[31] We can learn a lesson from the failure of the Greeks, in the sense that what caused their ruination, the obsession with form, can serve for us as an example to follow which can lead us to turn our original cultural tendency towards the unlimited in the opposite direction, and direct it towards our earthly nature. We should not imitate their art and their culture, but we can nevertheless follow their example in such a way that we return to our proper nature and accede to this hyperculture which is the learning of the *free* use of what is proper to us. It is thus in their failure itself that the Greeks remain an example for us moderns.

[31] See in this matter Beda Alleman, who, in her article "Hölderlin between the Ancients and the Moderns" ('Hölderlin entre les Anciens et les Modernes', *Cahier de l'Herne Hölderlin*, 1987, p.315) cites Klopstock's epigram, entitled 'The Resolution of Doubt': "To imitate is forbidden, and yet it names me/ Your sonorous praises, always ever Greece / If the Genius in your soul is burning / Then imitate the Greek. The Greek invented."

Starting from this, we can try to understand the project of the later Hölderlin, the Hölderlin of the translations of Sophocles's tragedies. For, clearly this enterprise is concerned with trying to understand oneself and one's age better by taking this detour through foreign lands that Hölderlin had himself actually undertaken in his journey to Bordeaux. For, as is noted by Wofgang Binder in his article on 'Hölderlin and Sophocles',[32] there is a third way between mimetic academicism and rupture with tradition, and it is the one leading Hölderlin, as he writes to Schiller in 1801, to look to free himself from "servility to the letter of the Greek", showing that "the great precision" of Greek authors comes from their "fullness of spirit", in other terms showing that the "aorgic" spirit of the Greeks, pushed towards the unlimited, had to give itself in its art the strictest form in order to "be able to seize itself" – which is the problem of the Greeks itself, as Hölderlin says in his *Remarks on Antigone*, whereas that of the moderns is, on the contrary, in the absence of separation that characterises them, and because of their birth in a world of convention, where everything is rigidly structured in disciplines and compartments, to "be able to reach somewhere". It is then a matter of both making apparent the original oriental nature of the Greeks that they themselves have made redundant by losing themselves in what Schiller names "the far-away country of art", and of letting out those Moderns Hölderlin names more exactly Hesperians, inhabitants of the land of dusk, from their native world of convention by opening for them the possibility of fulfilling their destiny and thus of opening themselves up to the oriental foreignness of their culture. For the re-channelling of the Greek to its proper coincides with the accomplishment of Hesperian culture, which implies, as Wolfgang Binder stresses, that "Hölderlin translating Sophocles as it would have appeared if, in a favourable moment of the world, the Greeks were permitted self-accomplishment, does nothing other, when it comes to direction, than what his later poetry, that wants to be a 'native', and therefore hesperian poetry, will do".[33]

This is what he explains to his publisher, Wilmans, in a letter of September 2th0, 1803: "I hope that Greek art, which is foreign for us due to national conformism and defaults which it has been able to abide, will thus be presented more vividly (*lebendiger*) than is customary by my accentuating the Oriental element it had always distanced itself from, and by correcting its aesthetic faults."[34] Hölderlin proposes to orientalise

[32] *Cahier de l'Herne Hölderlin, op.cit.*, p.265.
[33] Ibid, p.267.
[34] S, 6.1, p.434.

Sophocles, in order to correct his artistic fault, which is that of an excess of art. What thus characterises Hölderlin, in relation to the classical purism for which the Greek can never be Greek enough, is his will to stress in the Greek what is non-Greek, what is *oriental*. This term has to be understood as one of the extremes between which world becoming unfolds, as can be understood from the lines in "*Wie wenn am Feiertage*" that say of nature that she is "older than the ages", and then, "than the Gods of Orient and Occident".[35] For, as is indicated by several poems where there is a reference to the Orient, to the forests of Indus ('The Eagle', Germania', 'The Ister'), to the cities of the Euphrates and the rues of Palmyra ('Patmos'), to Asia and the east ('At the Source of the Danube'), *der Orient*, the Orient, the East, means the country of origin of the dionysiac, which is to say of ecstatic enthusiasm, as Hölderlin shows in *Dichterberuf*, 'The Poet's Vocation':

> Des Ganges Ufen hörten des Freudengotts
> Triumph, als allerobernd vom Hindus her
> Der junge Bacchus kam, mit heiligen
> Weine vom Schlafe die Völker wekend.
>
> The banks of Ganges heard how the god of joy
> Was hailed when conquering all from far Indus came
> The youthful Bacchus, and with holy
> Wine from their drowsiness woke the peoples[36]

Oriental, then, means: more original, more free, more foreign, non-classical, non-conventional, immediate, dionysiac. We have to note, however, that with Hölderlin the duality is not, as with Nietzsche, that between Dioysus and Apollo, the dioynisiac being the oriental principle of the unlimited, and the apollinian the Greek one of form and limit. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche opposes these two principles like musical to plastic art, intoxication to dream, and shows how what differentiates the Greeks from the oriental barbarians is precisely the reconciliation of the organic and the orgiastic in tragedy, where the chorus is the musical and orgiastic element, and the action of the characters the apollinian dream which gives form and limit in the epic element to the dionysiac vision of the chorus. Nietzsche thus defines

[35] *Wie wenn am Feiertage*, lines21-22 in Hölderlin, *Poems & Fragments* , translated by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil, 1994).
[36] Ibid, p.177.

Homer as the artist of dream, completely abandoning himself to the beauty of appearance and form, but sees in him "the total victory of the apollinian illusion" against Dionysos, whereas Hölderlin sees the victory of Junonian sobriety over Apollo. For Apollo, the sun-God, is for Hölderlin not the principle of art, but in the contrary that of celestial fire. That the Nietzschean dionysiac coincide with apollinian fire can be no doubt explained by the double nature of Apollo, at once the most Greek of Greek gods and nevertheless also of foreign origin, asiatic or nordic, at once the god of art, having the lyre as attribute, but also the God bearing the bow menacing from afar, dispersing death, and communicating the future through oracles, with the intermediary of Pythia at Delphi.

Things, however, become more complex once we take into account that, in a letter to Willmans of April 2nd, 1804, Hölderlin specifies:

> I believe I have written throughout against excentric enthusiasm and have thus attained Greek simplicity; I also hope to remain faithful to this principle – if I may express more boldly what is forbidden to the poet – against excentric enthusiasm.[37]

Is not excentric enthusiasm the opposite of sobriety, the tendency to be borne towards the divine unlimited, the native and thus oriental element of the Greek? There seems to be a blatant contradiction: how can Hölderlin at once orientalise Greek tragedy, that is to say draw out the unlimited element in it, and write against it, against excentric enthusiasm? According to Beisner, who is here followed by both Beda Alleman and Wolfgang Binder, the entire problem has its root in the word *gegen*, which, in German, can have the sense of both "against" and "towards" or "turning to" (which, parenthetically, makes more of an enigma of the famous Nietzschean affirmation at the end of *Ecce Homo*: "Hat man mich verstanden? Dionysos gegen den Gekreuzigten ...).[38] If we interpret it in its second sense, the Hesperian poet follows his cultural tendency which is celestial fire, and thus attains Greek simplicity, which is nothing other than the ecstatic natural of the Greeks, their native opening to celestial fire. If we keep the oppositional sense of "against", we then have to assume that the orientalisation concerns only Antigone, which is the tragedy where the famous native reversal is produced, which is to say the tendency to return to the proper, the oriental element, whereas with Oedipus it is the cultural tendency that is strongest. It would then be

[37] S, 6.1, p.439.

[38] "Have I been understood? Dionysus against the crucified".

speaking solely of Oedipus that Hölderlin could have written against excentric enthusiasm, by translating it to achieve his own Hesperian return to the native. At least this is the interpretation given by Beda Alleman in her book on *Holderlin and Heidegger*.

Without being able to undertake, at this moment, an examination of these "corrections" that Hölderlin proposes to bring to Sophocles's text, it remains to conclude on this project of "orientalising" translation. For we are dealing, as Binder notes, with a triple project: that of the transcription of one language into another, of Greek into German; but also of the transposition of the original into a state of accomplishment it has missed by drawing out the oriental under the Greek; finally, an accomplishment of the Hesperian itself, since the oriental constitutes its cultural tendency. For Hölderlin this means neither transposing the Greek into German, which would no longer be Greek, nor carbon-copying the German from the Greek, which would still be Greek, but unreadable to us. Rather, it means correcting the excess of art which lead Greece to its downfall by making its oriental nature appear, which is to say, in the end, *translating the Greek into Greek* by letting it pass into another language and thus accomplishing what it could not bring itself to good end. What reveals itself in such a trans-lation is, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe stresses, that "*Greece*, as such, Greece *itself*, does not exist":[39] it is torn, doubled, not sutured into a monolithic, stable essence, which should be said of any people. What we know of it, the naïve, Junonian sobriety, Homeric clarity, the athleticism of form, is a *received opinion* [un *acquis*] destined to suppress the elemental force of the native Greek tendency to transgress finitude, this *oriental* principle of celestial fire that prevents Greece from coinciding with itself, and it is thus, paradoxically, this impropriety that constitutes precisely this "proper" which is for the Moderns to learn, as always, in foreign lands.

Translated by Hector Kollias

[39] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Hölderlin and the Greeks", in *Typography*, trans. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).