
Empedokles and the Absence of Sacrifice

Joseph Suglia

A single thesis seems to cover the whole of the vast critical literature that surrounds Friedrich Hölderlin's dramatic fragments, *Der Tod des Empedokles*: the tragic hero, it is claimed again and again, sacrifices himself in order to synthesize the previously incompatible spheres of art and nature, or heaven and earth. Commentators of the fragments tirelessly display a kind of hermeneutic desire for closure and reconciliation in their remarks. However, in this fragmentary work—one of the titles of which announces the death of its tragic hero—death takes place nowhere in the space of its presentation. The absence of anything resembling a scene of self-immolation causes a certain interpretive distress. Empedokles' "suicide" is inevitably described as if it were a *fait accompli*, despite its complete absence from the texts under consideration. Commentators continually refer to Hölderlin's initial self-interpretive remarks in order to corroborate their well-worn thesis that Empedokles' death issues in reconciliation, that the poet-philosopher passes beyond death and enters into another world that would surpass the world of the dead. Although the opening salvo of the Empedokles project does indeed end in a scene of self-sacrifice, there is absolutely no reason to believe that the succeeding texts slavishly imitate this basis. Interpretation—as Heidegger pointed out powerfully in the opening pages of *Sein und Zeit*—finds in a text what it places into it.

Let us consider this opening moment, the effects of which still determine the scholarship of the fragments. In a letter to his brother written in the summer of 1797, Friedrich Hölderlin alluded to a project that sent him into transports: "Ich habe den ganz detaillierten Plan zu einem Trauerspiel gemacht, dessen Stoff mich hinreißt" (SW6 247).¹ This sketch would become known as the "Frankfurter Plan"—the original schema of Hölderlin's only existing tragedy, *Der Tod des Empedokles*. This original design of the "drama" will be discarded. Whereas the "Frankfurter Plan" elaborates what one might call an "identificatory" tragic scheme, the successive modifications of the

dramatic fragments undermine its grounding framework.

The reflective idealist pathos for reconciliation between the self and the world is particularly evident in Hölderlin's description of the fourth act:

Seine Neider erfahren von einigen seiner Schüler
die harten Reden, die er auf dem Aetna vor diesen
gegen ihn aufzuhezen, das auch wirklich seine Statue
umwirft und ihn aus der Stadt jagt. Nun reift sein
Entschluss, der längst schon in ihm dämmerte, durch
freiwilligen Tod sich mit der unendlichen Natur zu
vereinen. Er nimmt in diesem Vorsatz den zweiten
tieferen schmerzlicheren Abschied von Weib und
Kindern und geht wieder auf den Aetna: Seinem
jungen Freunde weicht er aus, weil er diesem zutraut,
dass er sich nicht werde täuschen lassen, mit den
Tröstungen, mit denen er sein Weib besänftigt, und
dass dieser sein eigentlich Vorhaben ahnden möchte.
(SW4 148)

The resolution to die would be the necessary consequence of Empedokles' theory that all things flow together in relations of affinity and divisiveness.² Empedokles would accordingly decide to sacrifice himself *for the sake of the idea*; his suicide would be a philosophical suicide. Empedokles' innermost drive, according to the "Frankfurter Plan," is to "unify with infinite nature," to become indissociably bound together with all-englobing *hen kai pan*, to coalesce with the infinite through his self-sacrifice. But the promise of coalescence, as announced in the originating plan of the drama, does not exactly result in coalescence, but rather in the self-erasing representation of coalescence. Unification will be replaced with the *simulacrum* of union.³

In the "first version" (c. 1798) of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, however, Empedokles is continually identified with "the infinite." The infinite may be understood by what Hölderlin terms in his theoretical and poetological fragments "intellectual intuition" (*intellektuelle Anschauung*): an immediate relation between subject and object that *effaces the limit*, suspending the distinction between them. Panthea's euphoric

description of Empedokles—that to be him is life itself ("Er selbst zu sein, das ist das Leben und wir andern sind der Traum davon")—suggests that the tragic hero is already indissociable from, and has achieved total union with being itself.⁴ Her very name, Pan-thea, is evocative of such an immediate union. The desire for the realization of the totality of being has already been accomplished. The limit that would circumscribe the self from the "life" that would be posited outside the self is transcended. Empedokles is further qualified as illimitable in Delia's more sober remark of admonition to her friend that she loves the unrestricted unrestrictedly ("Den unbegrenzten liebst du unbegrenzt" (SW4 7)).⁵ Hermokrates, the priest who functions in the "first version" as his nemesis,⁶ similarly identifies Empedokles with the limitless. Empedokles was expelled by the gods, Hermokrates claims, "weil er des Unterschieds zu sehr vergass/Im übergrossen Glück, und sich allein/Nur fühlte" (SW4 11). Empedokles, then, who does not attend to the difference, is much like the sages of which Hölderlin wrote in "Die Weisen aber..." who only differentiate spiritually/intellectually and, for the fault of making a purely ideal distinction, are victimized by nature:⁷

Die Weisen aber, die nur mit dem Geiste, nur
allgemein unterscheiden, eilen schnell wieder ins
reine Seyn zurück, und fallen in eine um so grössere
Indifferenz, weil sie hinlänglich unterschieden zu
haben glauben, und die Nichtentgegensetzung, auf
die sie zurückgekommen sind, für eine ewige nehmen.
Sie haben ihre Natur mit dem untersten Grade der
Wirklichkeit, mit dem Schatten der Wirklichkeit,
der idealen Entgegensetzung und Unterscheidung
getäuscht, und sie rächt sich dadurch... (the text
breaks off at this point). (SW4 237)

Empedokles is similarly punished with boundless destitution ("mit gränzenloser Öde nun gestraft" (SW4 11)) for refusing to recognize the original difference.

One means of interpreting this passage from *Empedokles* would be to consider it through the speculum of "Urtheil/Seyn." According to the logic of that text, the "I" posits itself as identical with itself

only by not regarding the separation that divides it from itself. (The self posits itself as the same with itself, "ungeachtet dieser Trennung," Hölderlin writes.) For Hölderlin, self-consciousness proceeds from out of the opposition of the "I" to itself. By forgetting the difference, the opposition from which self-consciousness issues, the self is able to recognize itself as the same as itself ("ich [erkenne mich] als dasselbe"). The paradox is that the self is opposed to, and yet at the same time the same as itself, since the self posits itself as itself in the opposed ("im entgegengesetzten"). The self recognizes itself as its own other and yet exteriorizes itself as its own double at the same time—a paradox that is markedly Fichtean.⁸

Let us return to the passage from *Empedokles* that led us down this path of reflection. Empedokles, according to Hermokrates' interpretation, "forgot too much the difference," "felt himself alone," and was therefore expelled by the gods. To *which* difference is Hermokrates referring? The context suggests that it is the difference between gods and mortals, which is certainly one of the primary concerns of *all* of Hölderlin's writing.⁹ Empedokles' transgression was to have presented himself as a divine figure before the Agrigentine people and to have relativized the difference by his self-deification. And yet the succeeding phrase ("er fühlt sich nur selbst") seems to suggest something more. "Felt himself alone": Empedokles, according to Hermokrates' interpretation, *only* felt himself, and this auto-affection was made possible by the fact that he "forgot the difference." Empedokles felt himself, and this *sentiment de soi* was the consciousness of being determined by nothing other than himself,¹⁰ as he himself claims he is by identifying himself as "the one who is born free": "die Freigeborne, die aus sich allein/Und keines andern ist" (SW4 15). Empedokles presents himself as the absolute self¹¹—not merely as one who was purely conscious of himself, but as one who was intimately connected with the sources of the natural world: "[I]n mir/In mir, ihr Quellen des Lebens, strömte ihr einst/Aus Tiefen der Welt zusammen" (SW4 14). Empedokles' auto-affection was an inner experience that led to the disclosure of the sources of the natural world: "Es sammeln in der Tiefe sich, Natur,/Die Quellen deiner Höhn und deine Freuden,/Sie kamen all' in meiner Brust zu ruhn" (SW4 70). Empedokles, then, felt himself unconditionally and felt himself to be the source of nature at the same time; i.e. he is an idealist in the rigorous sense.¹²

The absolute synthesis of subject and object had been obtained, and yet this synthesis belongs to an inaccessible past. Empedokles' "fault," according to Hermokrates' interpretation, would be the forgetting of the separation that lies at the origin of selfhood, or to put it more generally, the inability to sufficiently engage with difference—the leitmotif of much of Hölderlin's writing.¹³ The neglect of (the) difference (between the self as subject and as object) is what produces (social) difference—the banishment of Empedokles from the *polis*.¹⁴

The first version of the *Empedokles* follows the "Frankfurter Plan" in its presentation of a complete union between selfhood and the world. One could say with justification, however, that the last versions of the dramatic fragments undermine their opening tendency. The grounding framework of the project—which announces a philosophical program in which sacrifice would lead to reconciliation—will become complicated.

On first appearance, the text entitled *Grund zum Empedokles* (1799)—which originated, according to Beißner, roughly at the same time as the third version of *Der Tod des Empedokles*¹⁵—seems like a theory or program that would elaborate the fundamental principles of the "drama" (but of which version or versions?).¹⁶ It is, however, by no means certain that one is justified in separating this text from what have become known as the three extant versions of *Empedokles*. What appears as the author's own interpretive statements on what he thought he accomplished in the first two versions may be also read as another instantiation of *Empedokles*, rather than as an explanatory ground that should be set alongside—and hence outside—the "drama."

After having established the fundamental principles of tragedy, Hölderlin presents—in the section of the text entitled *Grund zum Empedokles*—the immediate ground of Empedokles' sacrificial decision. In "pure life," Hölderlin writes (without giving one a means of understanding this term), nature and art, *physis* and *technē*, are "opposed only harmoniously" (*nur harmonisch entgegengesetzt*) (SW4 152) insofar as they are bound together by a relation of unification and separation.¹⁷ The division between art and nature affords a reciprocal relation (in a manner that radically transforms the *Wechselbestimmung* between the I and the Non-I in Fichte):¹⁸ art fashions nature and thereby makes of itself its "blossom" (*Blüte*) and "perfection" (*Vollendung*), whereas

nature only becomes "divine in conjunction with the diverse yet harmonious art" (*erst göttlich durch die Verbindung mit der verschiedenartigen aber harmonischen Kunst*). Whereas art (as the "organic") gives form to *physis* and is imposing of measure, nature belongs to the sphere of the "aorgic"—that is to say, the formless, the immeasurable. Both pre-representational nature and human founded-institutions of art exist in a relation of interdependency in "pure life": each complements the other, "compensating for the shortcomings of the other, which that one must necessarily have in order to be entirely that which it can be as a particular" (*ersetzt den Mangel des andern, den es nothwendig haben muß, um ganz das zu seyn, was es als besonderes seyn kann*) (SW4 152). Art has a compensatory function, imposing measure upon the immeasurable, stabilizing and introducing constancy, while the aorgic offers a counter-movement that undoes constancy and measure. Thus it would seem that art has a redressive character that seeks to offset the deficiencies of nature, while art requires nature's supplementary complementation.

But "pure life," Hölderlin reminds us, only exists as a feeling. In order for intimacy to attain the level of intelligibility, the "organic" and the "aorgic" retreat from the other into their respective spheres. If it is to be known, nature (which exists, Hölderlin suggests, prior to all comprehension) must separate itself into the extremity of its unruly freedom and assume its amorphous ("incomprehensible" [*des Unbegreiflichen*], "insensible" [*des Unfühlbaren*] (non-sensuous)) character, while art must withdraw into the interior space of the "organic" (the constructed), until both reciprocally exchange their fundamental properties. In terms of this differential configuration, art and nature separate themselves into the extremity of their mutual isolation, but this anthesis leads to a reciprocal determination (*Wechselwirkung*) in a manner that is Fichtean.¹⁹ The "organic" adopts the features of its counterpart, becoming limitless and chaotic, while the "aorgic" becomes measured, constant, and constructed.

There is, then, a moment in which the violent opposition between art and nature is reconciled, and yet this reconciliation is excessive (it presents one with an *Übermass*[-] *der Innigkeit*), insofar as the counterparts unify with each other so intimately that they discard their originally differentiated form and invert their relationship to the other: each of the antipodes now converts into the other, adopting its properties, and exchanges its position with the other. In the space

between the terms lies "the struggle and the death of the individual" (*der Kampf, und der Tod des Einzelnen*) (SW4 153), by which Hölderlin means the negation of the distinctive identity of the tragic hero. The death of the individual—situated at the juncture between art and nature—is the tragic medium that allows art and nature to substitute their properties with each other.²⁰

The "aorgic" and the "organic" enigmatically maintain their mutual exclusivity, however: each finds itself in its counterpart, and restores itself in the other. There is, then, not an absolute fusion or a simple restoration of the original intimacy. Both members are destroyed in their individual, self-subsistent particularity and unite not by way of a speculative, "idealistic" fusion, but in a "real supreme struggle" (*reale[r] höchste[r] Kampf*) (SW4 153). Both return to their fixed determinations by passing into the other. The intensification of the conflict is the moment of the "highest reconciliation" (*die höchste Versöhnung*) in which both members of the conflictual pair attain their individuality by way of the division that separates them. Neither lose their individual self-sufficiency altogether; both *are* in relation to the difference from which they issue. The reconciliation between them is merely apparent, inasmuch as both interpenetrate only at the highest degree of their polarization. The union of the pair thus proceeds out of "the most intense enmity" (*[die] höchst[e] Feindseeligkeit*). It would seem that Hölderlin's own description (or *narration*) of the division between art and nature transforms the fundamental tenet of Empedoklean philosophy that the emanations of nature are bound together by forces of affinity and dissociation.

According to the logic of the *Grund zum Empedokles*, there is only an instantaneous and deceptive presentation of the unification of opposites, however. The apparently all-unifying moment between the organic and the aorgic is nothing more than a *Trugbild*—a term that, in the eighteenth century, according to the Grimm *Wörterbuch*, carried the connotation of a deceptive sense perception without a corresponding empirical object (*"täuschende sinnliche Wahrnehmung"*), and most likely served as the Herderian translation of *phantom*.²¹ The passage in question is worth citing directly:

Aber die Individualität dieses Moments ist nur ein Erzeugnis

des höchsten Streits, eine Allgemeinheit nur ein Erzeugnis des höchsten Streits, so wie also die Versöhnung da zu sein scheint, und das Organische nun wieder auf seine Art, das Aorgische auf die seinige auf diesen Moment hin wirkt, so wird auf die Eindrücke des Organischen die in dem Moment enthaltene aorgischentsprungene Allgemeinheit wieder besonderer, so dass der vereinende Moment, wie ein Trugbild, sich immer mehr auflöst, sich dadurch, dass er aorgisch gegen das Organische reagiert, immer mehr von diesem sich entfernt, dadurch aber und durch seinen Tod die kämpfenden Extreme, aus denen er hervorging, schöner versöhnt und vereinigt, als in seinem Leben, indem die Vereinigung nun nicht in einem Einzelnen und deswegen zu innig ist, indem das Göttliche nicht mehr sinnlich erscheint, indem der glückliche Betrug der Vereinigung in eben dem Grade aufhört, als er zu innig und einzig war, so dass die beiden Extreme, wovon das eine, das organische durch den vergehenden Moment zurückgeschreckt und dadurch in eine reinere Allgemeinheit erhoben, das aorgische, indem es zu diesem übergeht, für das organische ein Gegenstand der ruhigen Betrachtung werden muss, und die Innigkeit des vergangenen Moments nun allgemeiner gehaltner unterscheidender, klarer hervorgeht. (SW4 154, emphasis mine)

The struggle between the warring partners results neither in an indistinguishable coalescence, nor in a simple opposition. The struggle ends in a simulacrum. The reciprocal determination of each by the other is "like" the *Trugbild* of unification, and yet this simulation itself dissolves and gives way to a "more pure generality." How is one to understand this "dissolution"? The intimacy between the organic and the aorgic is, once more, *excessive*; the moment of unification cannot sustain this excess and does not persist: the opposites are suspended and the synthesis is dissolved. The synthesis must become disengaged for two reasons. First, the intimate reconciliation of the split must undo itself, as we have seen, in order to be known. The synthesis

must generalize itself, if it is to attain to the level of intelligibility. Secondly, the moment of unification is *instantaneous* because it may not be restricted to any finite instantiation. The "union" of art and nature, Hölderlin remarks, is not reducible to a "single individual" and is "therefore not too intimate, in that the divine no longer appears physically..." Were the synthesis to be perpetuated in the tragic hero, the general would lose its universal character in the particular (the "unique," the "individual"). Because the resolution is of the strictest generality, it cannot be restricted to the particular; it must unravel itself, causing the tragic hero to perish.²²

Absolute unification, then, occurs "like" a *Trugbild* played out on the stage of the tragic drama through the death of the tragic hero. But what is the role of the tragic figure Empedokles in relation to the conflict between of the organic and the aorgic? Empedokles—as the "son" who "arose out of the deepest oppositions" between art and nature—interiorizes the *Wechselbestimmung* between the aorgic and the organic. Empedokles' time, Hölderlin remarks, demanded an *Opfer* [a victim, an offering, a sacrifice]. For Hölderlin, the death of the tragic hero is not a personal sacrifice, but is effected by an epochal transformation: "So individualisiert sich seine Zeit in Empedokles, und jemehr sie sich in ihm individualisiert, je glänzender und wirklicher und sichtbarer in ihm das Räthsel aufgelöst erscheint, um so nothwendiger wird sein Untergang" (SW4 158). The tragic hero individuates the simulated synthesis of art and nature, which inescapably results in the destruction of the synthesis. By becoming the external representation, indeed, the embodiment of this synthesis, he must go under.

In *Grund zum Empedokles*, the spaces of nature and art, divorced into the incommensurableness of their respective spheres and unified by the difference that separates them, are phantasmally represented by the tragic hero through his self-annihilation. Inasmuch as unity is replaced with its *Trugbild*, the *Grund zum Empedokles* counters the initial strategy of the "Frankfurter Plan," which presented a tragic schema in which there would be an identification between subject and object through the vehicle of sacrifice. The "third version" of the dramatic fragments follows the inexorable logic of this counter-movement.

It is significant that the third version of the *Empedokles* was written roughly contemporaneously with *Der Grund zum Empedokles*,

since it similarly undermines the *Frankfurter Plan's* expression of a desire for an unmediated unity between subject and object. One could say with justification that the latest versions of the dramatic fragments undermine its opening tendency. The fundamental perspective of the drama is modified in its final version with the appearance of Manes, an Egyptian who is described as a "seer" (*Seher*) and "the one who is all-experienced" (*der Allerfahrne*) in the "Entwurf zur Fortsetzung der dritten Fassung" (SW4 168). As one whose consciousness embraces all modes of temporality, Manes effectively undermines the foundation of Empedokles' sacrificial project.²³

In the strange colloquy that ensues between Manes and Empedokles, questions that pertain to identity are answered only equivocally. When Empedokles asks after the identity of the Egyptian stranger ("Was? woher? Wer bist du, Mann!" (SW4 133)), Manes identifies himself with Empedokles' race (the mortals) and thus designates Empedokles as mortal—that is, as one who is capable of dying: "Der Armen Einer auch/Von diesem Stamm, ein Sterblicher, wie du" (Ibid.). Empedokles responds by declaring that he is dead to the living, and that the dead rise to meet him. He thus refers to Manes as a phantasm, the apparition of one who has died: "Kein Wunder ist! Seit ich den Lebenden/Gestorben bin, erstehen mir die Todten" (SW4 134). Manes' response suggests that Empedokles is absent from the place of the dead ("Die Todten reden nicht, wo du sie fragst" (Ibid.)). By declaring that the world of the dead is not the space of his questioning, Empedokles' role as a sacrificial figure is annulled in Manes' speech. And by referring to his voluntary assumption of death as a "black sin" (*schwarze Sünde*), Manes calls into question the basis of Empedokles' sacrificial decision. Empedokles appears in the dialogue as a "false priest" (*falscher Priester*) (SW2 120)—to refer to the langue of "Wie wenn am Feiertage..."—but sin is perhaps not reducible to moral negativity, and falsehood is perhaps not reducible to error.²⁴

Throughout the dialogue, Empedokles' decision to immolate himself is rendered problematic.²⁵ It remains profoundly ambiguous, for instance, whether Empedokles' decision to sacrifice himself is an exercise of freedom. To what extent is Empedokles' decision to sacrifice himself a "right" that is expressive of the freedom of the

will? Manes asks if Empedokles is the only one who has the "right" (*Recht*) - and in this term resonates Empedokles' earlier declaration of the right to death ("Denn sterben will ja ich. Mein Recht ist diß" (SW4 122)). There is a certain discontinuity in the dialogue between the representation of sacrifice as the result of voluntarism and as act that will have been motivated by a thoroughgoing causal determinism. Manes' description elides the voluntary character of his self-sacrifice and suggests an almost mechanistic determination: "Der Tod, der jähe, er ist ja von Anbeginn,/Das weisst du wohl, den Unverständigen/Die deinesgleichen sind, zuvorbeschieden" (SW4 135)). According to Manes, at least, Empedokles is following a supervenient appeal that is pre-determined and that does not permit the intervention of subjectivity. Hence Empedokles follows *ananke* in a manner similar to Ajax in the first and second versions of "Mnemosyne": "Mit eigener Hand/Viel traurige, wilden Muts, doch göttlich/Gezwungen..." (SW2 194 and 196). Suicide is an act that is submissive to the laws of divine necessity, and yet the remark that succeeds this description suggests that Empedokles' death has been voluntarily appropriated: "Du willst es und so seist!" (SW4 135). According to Manes' interpretation, then, Empedokles willfully assumes a death that is prescribed to him and that is his right in a manner that invites comparison with the tenth of Schelling's *Philosophische Briefe*. It becomes difficult at this point to assert with any degree of certainty that Empedokles is one whose death is either willed or "pre-programmed."²⁶

The temporality of Empedokles' sacrifice is also significantly problematized. Manes' designation of Empedokles as "the sacrificial beast that does not fall in vain" (*Das Opferthier, das nicht vergebens fällt*) (Ibid.) gives a teleological determination to his sacrifice in a manner that recalls "Der Tod fürs Vaterland": "Umsonst zu sterben, lieb' ich nicht doch/Lieb' ich zu fallen am Opferhügel" (SW1 299). And yet, paradoxically, the act of sacrifice that *will* take place has already taken place ("Es ist geschehn" (SW4 138)). Everything that has taken place will take place, Empedokles announces to Pausanias, before his departure (his *Abgang*), and what *will happen* has *already* happened: "Geh! fürchte nichts! es kehret alles wieder/Und was geschehen soll, ist schon vollender" (SW4 133). With these strange words of leave-taking, Empedokles sends his disciple off and implies that he is subject to a state of extreme passivity *vis-à-vis*

an event that infinitely exceeds his subjectivity. Because suicide is an event that has already occurred,²⁷ it cannot be set "in front of" one's self as an act to be executed. Illustrative to this context are the final verses of the second version: "Denn Einmal bedurften/Wir Blinden des Wunders" (SW4 118). The miracle is Empedokles' sacrifice.²⁸ The *Lesarten* show that Hölderlin originally employed the present tense: "Und wohl uns. Denn Einmal/Bedürfen des Wunders/Wir Blinden ja doch!" (SW4 637). That the "final" version historicizes the event of sacrifice is not fortuitous. The praeterite form²⁹ suggests that both death and the reconciliation that death would bring about belong to an inaccessible past—but a past that will be recuperated in the future. The call of the past to the future effectively renounces the present as the time in which sacrifice would occur. Inasmuch as the future of sacrifice recovers its history, there is no "now" in which it could take place. The present appears only as a yawning abyss in which both the future and the past precipitate. The category of presence is annulled. The time in which Empedokles would immolate himself is a time without presence.³⁰

It is no accident, from this perspective, that Empedokles' departure (*Abschied*) is an *endless farewell*. Empedokles can neither conclusively take his departure from his disciple nor from the one who arrogates to himself the absolute right to interrogation.³¹ To Manes' question whether he is departing, Empedokles responds, "I am not going yet, O old man!" (SW5 140). The moment of suicide is delayed in an interminable suspension. When the day goes under, Empedokles remarks, he will be seen again: "Lass mich izzt, wenn dort der Tag/Hinunter ist, so siehst du mich wieder" (Ibid). Empedokles' death appears as ahead-of-himself, "occurring" in terms of a postponement. Empedokles does not sacrifice himself in the space of the drama—he will have sacrificed himself, sometime or other.

Everything that must occur has already occurred, thus complicating the sacrificial project as a *possibility*. Without the intervention of the *act* of sacrifice, the tragic schema has already completed itself. The depths of the past return into the proleptic temporality of futurity ("so musst es werden"). The time that absolutely lacks the present moment dispenses with the instant when *absence* would become an *act*. Suicide perpetuates itself in an immobile movement as an infinite absence.

In assuring the futurity of Empedokles' self-offering, Manes

assumes the role of historical consciousness. His function is to "preserve" and "recollect" Empedokles' dissolution.³² According to the logic of the "third version," his role is to attest to Empedokles' sacrifice: to preserve *what will happen because it has already happened*. Manes' request for a legacy ("Doch wolltest du mir nicht, wie dies ergieng bei deinem Volke, sagen?" (SW4 134)) will be translated into a testimony in the "Entwurf zur Fortsetzung der dritten Fassung":

+ Manes, der Allerfahrene, der Seher erstaunt über den Reden des Empedokles, und seinem Geiste, sagt, er sei der Berufene, der tödte und belebe, in dem und durch den eine Welt sich zugleich auflöse und erneue. Auch der Mensch, der seines Landes Untergang so tödtlich fühlte, könnte so sein neues Leben ahnen. Des Tages darauf, am Saturnusfeste, will er ihnen verkünden, was der letzt Wille des Empedokles war. (SW4 168)

What remains in the final version of the Hölderlinian "drama" is not the immediate presentation of death, but the promise of the announcement of a volition (Wille). In the last extant version, Hölderlin transformed the entire orientation of the work by renouncing the will to self-sacrifice. Der Tod des Empedokles is perhaps something other than an unfinished text. One must pose the question: Could there ever be a successful completion of the work? The necessarily elliptical character of the Empedokles announces the absence of death from the time of presentation, the impossibility of sacrifice, the failure of sacrifice to become an act that would secure human mastery over the impossible. The fragmentary nature of Empedokles, seen in this light, seems to be tied to its success.

There are moments in Hölderlinian verse that are indeed resemblant of idealist pathos and the doctrine for which spirit is identifiable with the world. The speculative idealist solution, however, is neither definitively accepted nor rejected in Hölderlin. Sacrifice is the metaphor for intellectual intuition according to "Über den Unterschied der Dichtarten" and "Die Bedeutung der Tragödien": it would be the "transference" (the *transport*)—to refer to the language of the *Anmerkungen zum Oedipus*—or disclosure of being itself. And

yet the moment of disclosure never arrives in any of the multiple versions of *Der Tod des Empedokles*. Hölderlin's theoretical claims about the essence of the tragic project do not quite correspond to what is enacted in the text of his only surviving dramatic fragments. If the "Frankfurter Plan" sketches out a tragic schema that results in a fusion, the later modifications of the text evoke the impossibility of such a synthesis. Even the very unfinished character of the fragments belies the possibility of unification, and evokes, as well, the impossibility of presenting such a relation.

If there is a desire in *Empedokles* for a dialectical-sacrificial synthesis, this synthesis only "occurs" in terms of its simulation. Both identification between subject and object and the sacrifice that would bring the moment of identification about are prohibited. In the absence of a scene of sacrifice, *Der Tod des Empedokles* becomes a tragedy of tragedy—or, if you would, a tragedy that concerns the failure of tragedy. Empedokles never appears to die, but suffers the endless torments of death or the indefinite postponement and impossibility of dying. The fragments concern the failure of sacrifice, the failure to make of sacrifice a project, to make of death a possibility over which the will could dispose. Empedokles' suicide—which never arrives, is never presented—never quite serves the function of communicating the union of subject and object, which in "Urtheil/Seyn" is named "being as such," "absolute being," and "intellectual intuition." In lieu of a suicide, a void.

Northwestern University

Notes

¹ All references in parentheses are to Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke* (SW). The volume number is given first, then the page number.

² On Hölderlin's appropriation of the historical Empedokles' theory of elements, see Hölscher.

³ For interpretations that concern themselves with the alleged speculative and dialectical dimensions of Empedokles' desire to commit suicide, see Lacoue-Labarthe and Söring.

⁴ For a discussion of the question of Hölderlin's alleged pantheism, see Hölscher, *passim*.

⁵ For a revision of this verse in a dialogue between Empedokles and

Hölderlin himself, see Saeger, 430. Hölderlin is made to say to his creation: "Unbegrenzt liebt ich dich/Unbegrenzten."

⁶ The name "Hermokrates" is derived from a rather minor character in the Platonic *Timaeus* and *Critias*. For the thesis that Hermokrates is identifiable with Hegel, see Pöggeler, 108.

⁷ For a discussion of "Die Weisen aber..." in relation to the *Empedokles* fragments, see Laplanche, 109.

⁸ For a very lucid exposition of this paradox, see Neuhouser, 114-15.

⁹ For a discussion of this matter, see Corssen.

¹⁰ This is no doubt a reference to the Fifth Promenade of Rousseau (a reference that would require a separate study to elaborate upon), which, as Paul de Man has argued, is of some moment for the Hölderlin of "Der Rhein." Cf. De Man, 38. For a discussion of the ostensible 'Rousseauian' characteristics of the *Empedokles* fragments, see Link.

¹¹ Cf. Binder, 67-8.

¹² On the question of auto-affection in Hölderlin, see Völkel.

¹³ According to Laplanche, there are two equally legitimate and nonetheless contradictory interpretations of Empedokles' fault; one can either maintain, with philological justification, that Empedokles' sin was to have "forgotten the difference" (as Hermokrates claims) by having desired to integrate himself with the totality of being, and, with equal justification, that he "severed the sacred alliance" by "thinking of himself alone" (as Empedokles says in his soliloquy). Cf. Laplanche, 107-8.

¹⁴ It should be emphasized that Empedokles' expropriation and expulsion from the city by Hermokrates and the Agrigentian people is related secondarily to his self-presentation as one who "forgot the difference." Cf. Constantine, 141.

¹⁵ Beißner claims that the "Grund zum Empedokles" originated at the earliest in August or September 1799 (SW4 371), and that the third version was composed at the earliest in September of the same year (SW4 362).

¹⁶ Indispensable to my interpretation of the "Grund zum Empedokles" is Lawrence Ryan's magisterial study *Hölderlin's Lehre vom Wechsel der Töne*.

¹⁷ According to Corssen, the relation of separation and unification between art and nature conforms to Hölderlin's description of the tragic project in the "remarks" that were appended to his controversial *Oedipus* translation. Cf. Corssen, 142.

¹⁸ For a useful discussion of *Wechselbestimmung* ("reciprocal determination") in Fichte, see Waibel.

¹⁹ "Wechselwirkung" is, of course, a Fichtean term. For an account of this procedure in Fichte, see Koch.

²⁰ Gerhard Kurz identifies the description of Empedokles' suicide in this passage with the tragic figure that "= 0" in "Die Bedeutung der Tragödien."

Cf. Kurz, 200.

²¹ For the etymology of the term "Trugbild," see Grimm, 1257.

²² For a discussion of the sacrifice of the tragic hero in relation to the disjunctive synthesis between art and nature, see Szondi, 18.

²³ Cf. Cornelissen, 109.

²⁴ Cf. Ibid., 108.

²⁵ This point made very forcefully by Katherina Grätz in her *Der Weg zum Lesetext: Editions-kritik und Neu-edition von Friedrich Hölderlin's 'Der Tod des Empedokles.'* Cf. p. 21.

²⁶ Cf. Cornelissen, 108.

²⁷ Compare the original draft of the text: "Geh! fürchte nichts! es kehret alles wieder/Und was geschehen soll, ist schon geschehen" (SW4 671).

²⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey was probably the first to identify the "miracle" in this passage with Empedokles' sacrifice. Cf. Dilthey, 414.

²⁹ Klaus Rüdiger Wöhrmann addresses the temporal discrepancy between both drafts. Cf. Wöhrmann, 54.

³⁰ Cf. Cornelissen, 104-5.

³¹ I derive the phrase "absolute right to interrogation" from Foucault, 83.

³² See the text entitled by Beißner "Über Werden im Vergehen" (SW4 282-87).

Works Cited

- Binder, Wolfgang. "Hölderlins Dichtung im Zeitalter des Idealismus." *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* (1965/1966): 57-72.
- Constantine, David. *Hölderlin*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Cornelissen, M. "Die Manes-Szene in Hölderlins Trauerspiel *Der Tod des Empedokles*." *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* (1965/1966): 97-109.
- Corssen, Meta. "Die Tragödie als Begegnung zwischen Gott und Mensch: Hölderlins Sophokles-Deutung." *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* (1948/1949): 139-87.
- de Man, Paul. "The Image of Rousseau in Hölderlin." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia U P, 1984. 19-46.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1905.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Father's 'No.'" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977. 68-86.
- Grätz, Katherina. *Der Weg zum Lesetext: Editions-kritik und Neu-edition von*

Friedrich Hölderlin's 'Der Tod des Empedokles.' Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Volume XI, Part I, Section I. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1952.

Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke: Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*. Ed. Friedrich Beißner. Stuttgart: Cotta-Verlag, 1946-1985.

Hölscher, Uvo. *Empedokles und Hölderlin*. Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1965.

Koch, Reinhard Friedrich. *Fichtes Theorie des Selbstbewußtseins: Ihre Entwicklung von den "Eignen Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie." 1793 bis zur "Neuen Bearbeitung der Wissenschaftslehre" 1800*. Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1989.

Kurz, Gerhard. *Mittelbarkeit und Vereinigung: Zum Verhältnis von Poesie, Reflexion und Revolution bei Hölderlin*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. "The Caesura of the Speculative." Trans. Robert Eisenhauer (modified). *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*. Ed. Christopher Fynsk. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1989. 208-35.

Laplanche, Jean. *Hölderlin et le question du père*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1961.

Link, Jürgen. "Schillers Don Carlos und Hölderlins Empedokles: Dialektik der Aufklärung und heroisch-politische Tragödie." *Elementare Literatur und generative Diskursanalyse*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1983. 87-125.

Neuhouser, Frederick. *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1990.

Pöggeler, Otto. *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Freiburg: Aber, 1973.

Ryan, Lawrence. *Hölderlins Lehre vom Wechsel der Töne*. Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1960.

Saeger, Uwe. *Empedokles, Theatertexte 2*. Ed. Peter Reichel. Berlin: Henschel, 1990. 351-452.

Söring, Jürgen. *Die Dialektik der Rechtfertigung: Überlegungen zu Hölderlins Empedokles-Projekt*. Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1973.

Szondi, Peter. *Versuch über das Tragische*. Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1961.

Völkel, Frank. "Im Wechsel des Urteils und Seins: Zu Fichte und Hölderlin." *Sein—Reflexion—Freiheit: Aspekte der Philosophie Johann Gottlieb Fichtes*. Ed. Christoph Asmuth. Amsterdam: Grüner, 1997. 95-111.

Waibel, Violetta. "Wechselbestimmung: Zum Verhältnis von Hölderlin,

Schiller, und Fichte in Jena." *Fichte-Studien* 12 (1997): 43-69.

Wöhrmann, Klaus Rüdiger. *Hölderlins Wille zur Tragödie*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967.

Revolutionäre Frauen –
Therese Hubers Sara Seldorf
und Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Marie Roland¹

Sabine Sievern

Betrachtet man die Darstellung der Französischen Revolution und ihrer Folgen in der deutschen Literatur, so ist eine auffallende Zentrierung der Handlung um einen männlichen Protagonisten zu erkennen. Dies trifft unter anderem auf Georg Büchners *Dantons Tod* (1835) und Christian Dietrich Grabbes *Napoleon oder die Hundert Tage* (1831) zu. Allerdings übte die Französische Revolution auch auf Autorinnen, deren Werke sich auf eine weibliche Hauptfigur konzentrieren, ihren Reiz aus. Nicht nur stellt Therese Huber mit der fiktiven Sara Seldorf eine Frau in den Mittelpunkt ihres Romans *Die Familie Seldorf* (1795-96), der vor dem Hintergrund der Französischen Revolution den Untergang der Familie Seldorf beschreibt, sondern auch Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach setzt sich in ihrem Drama *Marie Roland* (1867) mit einer weiblichen, auf historischen Tatsachen basierenden Hauptfigur auseinander, nämlich der Führerin der girondistischen Fraktion, Marie Roland.² In diesem Beitrag soll dementsprechend die Darstellung der Französischen Revolution und das revolutionäre Verhalten der Protagonistinnen von der weiblichen Warte aus untersucht werden. Während bereits zahlreiche Untersuchungen zu Hubers Roman existieren, die *Die Familie Seldorf* auch im Zusammenhang mit anderen Werken vergleichend analysieren, wurde bisher nur wenig zu *Marie Roland* publiziert und ein Vergleich der beiden Werke bislang nicht in Betracht gezogen. Es stellt sich die Frage, ob durch diese Schilderung der Französischen Revolution, ungeachtet der unterschiedlichen Genres und des zeitlichen Abstands zwischen den beiden Werken, eine einheitliche Darstellung der Revolution entsteht. Oder führt ein Vergleich der beiden Frauengestalten und ihres revolutionären Verhaltens trotz des gemeinsamen Themas der Französischen Revolution zu