"INSPIRATION'S DARLING CHILD": THE ROMANTIC ODE

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Abstract: The ode is usually an explicitly public utterance, but one which revises public expectations of its subject-matter, thus drawing attention to the individual originality of its author. It is simultaneously a highly formalised genre and one fundamentally aspirational in its ambitions. Pindaric, Horatian and Anacreontic models help shape many odes written in the Romantic period, but the aspirational idiom tends to predominate, making the poems frequently about their own license, typically Romantic exercises in poetic reflexivity. My discussion looks at poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Moore, Hölderlin and Leopardi to compare rhetorical tactics by which Romantic odes visibly take on the conflicted task of formally exploring a response to their subject exceeding received expectations. Their pursuit of the exorbitant is here argued to be another example of post-Kantian exploitation of the philosophic legitimacy Kant granted the aesthetic to express what we might feel about things beyond our power to conceptualise them. Poets considered here use odes to envisage freedoms they desire – national, political and personal. In Romantic poetry, though, the realization of these visions becomes conspicuously literary, involving a shift from the subject described to the medium claiming to treat it with such originality. While the ode's all-encompassing writing furnishes political encouragement, it can also, as in Hölderlin's case, worryingly produce aesthetic excellence at the expense of personal coherence.

Keywords: odes, Romanticism, reflexivity, poetry, nationalism, liberty, madness

Odes, more than comparably effusive hymns, elegies, songs and lyrics, have defining formal characteristics: a sequence constructed out of strophes, antistrophes and epodes, or strictly numbered Alcaic metres. But their project is historically invested in a kind of enthusiasm publicly expected to break the limits set by formal prescription. I want to look at the way in which this combination of definition and transgression of definition allows odes, in the peculiarly self-conscious writing of the Romantic period, to alter what is expected of poetry within a particular discursive epoch. In privately exceeding its public occasion the

ode refashions public expectations. Professional, prosodic credentials *and* the licence typical of poetic originality are brought simultaneously into focus by odes. While satire and parody, irony and imitation expose the anticipated form and content of genres often in a critical manner, it is the ode that, from the start, bids to outdo poetry's received conventions for the management of its own afflatus. In this exchange, as David Duff has put it, a "brinkmanship" may be in play.[1]

The ode combines celebration with invention. The ode's trademark apostrophes untie themselves from their addressee. Mary Robinson's ode to Coleridge's baby son, Derwent, "sweet baby boy," in a variant on Coleridge's own "Frost at Midnight," strikingly unrealises Derwent when it finally greets him as "Inspiration's darling child" – the ode's baby, not Coleridge's![2] The ode's apparent surplus to poetic requirements, breaking its contract with its subject, is publicized as what it is about. But in an age when poetry, after Kant, is licensed to supplement philosophical discourse, the ode articulates the pressures on it to say that it *is* about what cannot be said. I will look at poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Moore, Hölderlin and Leopardi to compare rhetorical tactics by which Romantic odes take on their impossible task.

Odes, though, are of many different kinds and sub-sets. A titular "to a" is often sufficient signal that an ode is to come. But each kind of ode places a self-defining emphasis on the distance between historical, traditional practice and a kind of numinous quality for which, equally historically, the ode appears permitted to strive. David Duff in his study of the Romantic uses of genre enumerates many variants – Anacreontic, choral, Pindaric, Peter Pindaric, Horatian, royal, and a kind of "ur-genre" or, following Herder, "the fountain-head of poetic art."[3] Interest in the originary quality of the ode, its claim to inaugurate an unprecedented art form and diction, fits the self-image of much Romantic-period writing.

Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," a major precursor of the ode's Romantic apotheosis (in English at least), strikes oracles dumb as it advances into a language proper to the originality of the Christian revelation visible against the classical register it surpasses. There is a new propriety in Milton's exceeding of the originality of his classical precursors making his claim for poetic originality inseparable from Christian supremacy. Once achieved, though, the ode's religious purpose renders its song "tedious":

1 David Duff, "The Romantic Ode and the Art of Brinkmanship," *Études Anglaises* 73, no. 2 (2020): 137-59.

2 Mary Robinson, "Ode Inscribed to the Infant Son of S. T. Coleridge, Esq.," l. 72, in *The Poetical Works of the Late Mrs Robinson*, 3 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1806), 1:221-25.

3 David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173-74.

But see, the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest:
Time is our tedious song should here have ending.
Heav'n's youngest-teemed star,
Hath fix'd her polish'd car,
Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending;
And all about the courtly stable,
Bright-harness'd Angels sit in order serviceable.

(ll. 237-44)[4]

The "order serviceable" of star and angels now takes pride of place – in a startling anticipation of the Romantic idea of the intrinsically metaphoric power of poetry to transpose itself into another, more timely discourse, when appropriate.

What, roughly, were the classical sources of all this over-reaching? Pindaric odes have a more metaphysical resonance than their successors. Pindar's odes combined metrical regularity with a surrender to enthusiasm that could over-ride syntactical orthodoxy to greater or lesser degrees. They were conducive to more general reflexions on inspiration and ambition, expansions developed by Romantic practice. Horatian odes became more versatile, incorporating private meditation and encouraging the reader's attention towards the ambiguities of the language used.

Arguably there was, as Ralph Cohen asserts, a "return" to the ode in the eighteenth century, a homecoming that could engage with the current state of poetry, as does Thomas Gray's Pindaric ode, "The Progress of Poetry."[5] For Abraham Cowley, echoing Horace, "Pindar is imitable by none; / The *Phoenix Pindar* is a vast species alone."[6] Gray's ode does revive in its own way the immeasurable (Horace's "*immensusque ruit profundo*") quality of the ode's virtue:[7]

Her track, where'er the goddess roves,
Glory pursue, and generous Shame,
Th' unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame.[8]

4 John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), 113.

5 Ralph Cohen, "The Return to the Ode," in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 203-24.

6 Abraham Cowley, "The Praise of Pindar," ll. 1-2, in *Pindarique Odes, Written in Imitation of the Stile and Manner of Pindar* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1656), 18-20. Cowley echoes Horace's praise of Pindar in *Odes* 4.2.

7 See *The Odes of Horace*, trans. James Michie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 212-13.

8 Thomas Gray, "The Progress of Poesy. A Pindaric Ode," l. 65, in *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969), 170.

The anticipation of the conclusion to Wordsworth's 1803 sonnet "To Toussaint L'Ouverture" – "man's unconquerable mind"[9] – does not provide the conclusion, though, of Gray's ode, which ends rather in a moment of Horatian moderation with claims for a stylistic ascendancy, which, if not quite that of "the Theban eagle" (Pindar), nevertheless soars "far above the great" (l. 123). Similarly, Gray's bard of the ode of that name starts as a Welsh political animal, but his Welshness mutates into a fatal web of "tuneful art" and finally he urges again the interests of his poetry:

> The verse adorn again
> Fierce War, and faithful Love,
> And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest.[10]

This is not aestheticism by any means, but it is an exercise in testing the possibilities of poetic form at a particular stage in English literary history. The skill and learning are there to be judged by the surplus to conventional expectation they might create in the highly educated reader of poetry.

The difference between Gray's rhetoric and that of the Romantic compositions I want to look at is that, while the freedoms of Gray's and Cowley's odes are "metageneric," to use David Duff's term, they are not meta-poetic in a philosophical sense.[11] The category of the meta-poetic only becomes available when poetry is differentiated within a field of other related discourses. It may have inherited a fixed position in relation to science, history, and politics and other fields, but to the post-Kantian way of thinking, its constant remaking of itself could produce a poetry of science, history or politics, and so on.

As well as forms of address constructed out of Pindar's enthusiasm and Horace's urbanely variegated description we have the even earlier Anacreon's invitation to another kind of apostrophe altogether. In the use of Anacreon by the young Thomas Moore, under the name of "Thomas Little," lightness, speed and fluency of individual imagery contribute to a poetical effect which now looks to be in the service of his nationalism. Devotion to wine and love justifies Anacreon's choice of the form of the "ode." He engages directly with inspiration, which, if not divine or conceptually ambitious and overreaching, does blur the detail in pursuit

9 "To Toussaint L'Ouverture," l. 14, in *William Wordsworth*, The Oxford Authors, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 282.

10 Thomas Gray, "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode," ll. 125-27, in *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, 198.

11 Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, 19, 205.

of an overall effect of being possessed. Moore seized on the way that Anacreon's manner might give the lead not so much to philosophy as to politics. His Anacreontic odes do this by making frivolity of detail transfer attention to the whole as the source of the poem's meaning. In the same way he wanted English enjoyment of Irish sentimentality to be recognized as actually framing English sensibility, making the Irish manner of expression tune English feeling to an Irish melody. The ode's ability to contrive a unity which saves the superficial or devalued or disappeared and makes them relevant and material to some larger purpose must have resonated politically with the enormously popular Moore. "Anacreon Moore" was a title given him on the strength of translations and imitations of Anacreon's odes written close to the time he was discreetly involved with the United Irishmen. "One little hour of joy to me / Is worth a dull eternity."[12] If it is Irish levity which saves the English from their habitual dullness, recompense to a subjugated and brutalized Ireland is perhaps due?

Moore's cunning restraint is very different from the uncompromising address of Percy Shelley to his subject when writing odes. In the 1819 "Ode to the West Wind," the whole of nature is mobilized in order to extend a politically active self beyond its own mortality, as if it could recreate itself in time with the cyclical renewal of the seasons. The "Ode to Naples" of the following year, by contrast, is founded on numbered strophes and antistrophes, rather than sheer elemental enthusiasm. More conventionally if experimentally Pindaric, on one occasion taking up Pindar's athletic idiom, the later ode extravagantly animates countries and cities to join with Naples in the battle with an invading northern civilization of "Celtic wolves" (Austria).[13] Supporting this abstract "Spirit" of revolt are historical references to specific past and present struggles, from the Battle of Philippi lost by Roman republicans to the contemporary constitutional struggle in Spain. It takes on the prophetic role the "Ode to the West Wind" desires for the poet, the power to predict, even create in the mind's eye, the political outcomes the speaker wants. Those, however, remain figurative. Slightly earlier than the "Ode to Naples," the "Ode to Liberty," as Michael O'Neill notes, had been concerned more with "the poet's role" than with speaking to contemporary events.[14]

12 Thomas Moore, "Ode LXVII," ll. 7-8, in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, ed. A.C. Godley (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), 32.

13 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to Naples," l. 174, in *The Poems of Shelley*, Vol. 3: *1819-1820*, ed. Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest and Michael Rossington (London: Routledge, 2014), 645; for athletic imagery see Antistrophe 2B. For how Shelley might be "experimenting with a strict Pindaric form," see Michael O'Neill, "Sonnets and Odes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 339-40.

14 O'Neill, "Sonnets and Odes," 339.

Although it explicitly summons a contemporary Europe to the bar to account for itself, its manner becomes optative – "Oh, that the […]" – and the origin of its hopes and predictions often occupies the inventive energies of the poem more than the detail of the better state of "Liberty" it envisions. That originating "Spirit" rises and then sinks in spectacular fashion, tracked by the poet's reflexive imagery:

> My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
> Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
> Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
> As waves which lately paved his watery way
> Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.
>
> ("Ode to Liberty," ll. 281-85)

The poem's style, its contradictory expansions and contractions, give us a more immediate grasp of the meaning of freedom than any political example. Shelley of course knows this, and his *Realpoetik* is calculated and knowing, making a political statement out of the exigency in which proper freedom can only be imagined not demonstrated.

Giacomo Leopardi, like Moore, was a nationalist working by formal means to conceive plausible unities in unpromising situations. Leopardi could write exalted poetry in the form of the ode. In emulation of Pindar, his very early *canzone* "All'Italia" (1818) joins the concerns of poetic and political unity in the most elevated of tones. To imagine Italy in unified form, his poem must range across history in order to join up disparate pieces of the Roman and Greek past in ways that make them resonate with each other. The extraordinary feats of belonging, which the ode can achieve in its spectacular poetic leaps and crossovers, have to be successful, have to convince in order for Leopardi's nationalist point to be made. Were he to attach these to some anterior force he would sound like Shelley, but he is happier to let the persuasive coherence of his prosody do the work, showing rather than telling. Poetic and political coherence are closely bound up, one with the other.

Yet Leopardi's poem also reads like a theory of the Anacreontic ode. The non-existent Italy of the present is evoked through the characteristic power of the poem to survive this failure of a particular reference. The poem evokes a new Italy by reminding readers that the modern use of classical precedent creates not a commentary but a new poem. Just as Latin literature made Greece its own, so modern writing in Italian must appropriate the achievement of Latin literature in its own distinctive form. "All'Italia" evokes Homeric epic, the *Aeneid*, and then, significantly, the celebration by the Greek poet, Simonides, of the Greeks defeated

at Thermopylae. The point is that Greek poetry was the benchmark of Roman heroism, and Leopardi wants to place modern Italy in the same line of succession. Poetic continuity is symmetrical with redescribing defeat as victory. The poetically successful form is consubstantial with its tragic content. The poet's call to arms, "L'armi, qua l'armi," is in fact a call to himself as a poet to produce an Italian *ricorso* of the classics. Once more, analogously to this in-house success, only in poetry can we encounter Thermopylae's "invitte schiere / De' corpi" (unconquered ranks of bodies):

> Io credo che le piante e i sassi e l'onda
> E le montagne vostre al passeggere
> Con indistinta voce
> Narrin siccome tutta quella sponda
> Coprir le invitte schiere
> De' corpi ch'alla Grecia eran devoti.
>
> ("All'Italia," ll. 68-73)

> (It seems to me your trees and rocks,
> your sea and mountains
> murmur to the passing traveler
> how the undefeated ranks
> covered the entire shore
> with undefeated bodies sworn to Greece)[15]

To object that the bodies are dead *because* defeated is to miss Leopardi's exclusively literary nationalism. Their fictional liveliness signals the poem's literary feigning of a living, modern Italy through the presumption of form over content. Once more, the ode is all.

The success of Leopardi's poem, analogous, we shall see, to that of Hölderlin's poetry, takes precedence over its absent subject – a nation in the case of Leopardi, the self in that of Hölderlin. In so doing it both diagnoses the parlous state of present affairs and offers hope of something different. To work, the poem itself must stand in for the non-existent national unity it cannot depict. The interchangeability of past and present grows more convincing the more its success appears literary. But the effect is to provide a criticism of reality for not playing along – rather as Anacreon's more bibulous inspiration chides reality for not keeping up.

[15] Giacomo Leopardi, "All'Italia," in *Canti*, bilingual edition, trans. Jonathan Galassi (London: Penguin, 2010), 7.

The same happens later in lighter style in the Parnassian Leconte de Lisle's Anacreontic ode, "La Rose" (1862). The poem is innocent of political gesture, although Leconte de Lisle's republicanism was always dormant, but the same technique is there for all to see. The conclusion of the poem is to have evoked a flower summoning and integrating classicism by means of a new aesthetic agreement, Parnassian but sensuously immediate:

Ruisselante encor du flot paternel,
Quand de la mer bleue Aphrodite éclose
Étincela nue aux clartés du ciel,
La Terre jalouse enfanta la rose ;
Et l'Olympe entier, d'amour transporté,
Salua la fleur avec la Beauté![16]

(Dripping from her father's tide,
when Aphrodite hatched from the blue sea,
sparkling naked with the sky's illumination,
the jealous Earth gave birth to the rose;
and all Olympus, transported by love,
greeted the flower with beauty.)

Wordsworth, like other Romantics, apparently invented genres – preludes, excursions, lyrical ballads – but these called out to be compared to apt predecessors, and in fact took their shape from such comparisons. Rather in the manner of the "internalized quest romance" which Harold Bloom used as an effective catch-all for Romantic innovation,[17] preludes and excursions were internalized epics, and "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey" hovered between being an elegy on Wordsworth's youthful sensibility or a monumental ode to his own interiority. The moment where one maybe can distinguish the ode from elegiac effort is where the poem allows the question: Are we just being given a monument, or are we witnessing a clever leap beyond the normal boundaries of introspection, something like Chateaubriand's outrageous idea of writing his memoirs from beyond the tomb?

16 Leconte de Lisle, "La Rose," ll. 14-18, *Odes Ancréontiques* in *Poèmes Antiques* (1850), in *Oeuvres de Leconte de Lisle*, ed. Edgar Pich, 4 vols. (Paris: Societé d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1977), 1:171-72. The author's translation.

17 Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), 3-24.

Keats, intensifying the reflexive turn of the Romantics, even writes an ode *about* writing an ode to oneself. Other odes vicariously apostrophize himself through Keats's chosen subject – Nightingale, Grecian Urn, Melancholy – but his "Ode to Psyche" makes of that reflexivity its subject. Psyche may be the "latest born" of the Olympians, but for a Romantic poet writing typically self-reflexive poetry she is contemporary. Her belatedness lets him "sing, by my own eyes inspired." She provides, like Chateaubriand's conceit, a viewpoint from where he can be external to himself, his own priest, architect and gardener. The poem exhibits "the wreathed trellis of a working brain," taking for its subject "the wreathed trellis of a working brain." Self-consciousness is surprised in the act.[18]

After Kant and Schiller, lyric and elegy are philosophically understood as encompassing forms, huge containers for everything else. Subsequently, we moderns typically mourn a nature lost behind our attempts to understand it. We can only elegise this world lying forfeit behind the barrier of our ideas of it. Since it is lost, the elegiac stance demands a double invention from the poet: expression of our feeling of loss but also creation of the object for registering our loss of it.[19] Lyric, inclusive as elegy, can summon any use of language which eschews description and narrative. Relinquishing the felicities of depiction and the diachronic mapping of plot, the lyrical effusion responds to a prompting beyond usual literary competences. And in so doing, lyric evokes a larger self, a subject exceeding its self-understanding. Lines like "Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!" in Coleridge's "Dejection" Ode (l. 49) show the author moving into what James Chandler called Wordsworth's "second nature."[20] Since the unmediated world eludes representation and story, the nearest we can get to it is through the pleasures of indirection. The secret of lyric is to talk about nature by talking about ourselves.

More optimistic than these genres, the ode does not mourn but simulates the reappropriation of unmediated vision, "too deep for tears." This feigned completeness was what worried Coleridge about Wordsworth's "Immortality" Ode. Friedrich Hölderlin, in odes and hymns, comparably imagines a primal ontological

18 *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), 364-66. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, ed. Maurice Levaillant and Georges Moulinier, 2 vols. (Paris: Édition Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957).

19 Walter Benjamin says much on this, principally in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928; *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne [London: New Left Books, 1977]). See also Anselm Haverkamp, *Leaves of Mourning: Hölderlin's Late Work, With an Essay on Keats and Melancholy*, trans. Vernon Chadwick (New York: SUNY Press, 1996).

20 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. John Beer (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 353; James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

language, one in which, because it is already poetic, the poet can say anything. Hölderlin's odes are distinguished from his hymns and elegies by metrics, not scope. Although this optimistic scenario may result from a poetic over-stretching, philosophically suggestive for post-Kantians from Hölderlin's friend Hegel to Heidegger, Gadamer, Adorno, Dieter Henrich, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and others, it also worryingly connects Hölderlin's poetic achievement and his personal disarray, as noted by the French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, who confronts this dilemma most directly and informatively in his book *Hölderlin et la question du père*.[21]

The post-Kantian philosopher Fichte, Hölderlin had told Hegel, tried "to get beyond the fact of consciousness *theoretically*," but this passage into an unconscious self seems in Hölderlin's case to be presented as an experience, not a theory.[22] Fichte postulates a conundrum of "reflection" in which the abyss beckons. If knowledge of the world is in fact reflection upon our own capacity for understanding the world, then this reflection must discover an endless otherness *within* our own experience, an unspeakable resistance, a "not-I." In Fichte's idealism, as always avoiding Kant's postulation of an existence for things-in-themselves, this resistance must still be tailored to the I whose productive imagination constructs a world necessary for our moral vocation to be practicable. But there is a contradiction here: as the not-I soubriquet suggests, Fichte abbreviates everything outside consciousness to the negative of what we can be conscious of, sculpting it to be symmetrical with our knowledge, but grasped as its boundary. The idea of an experience not matched to our conscious control is ruled out of court. But it is into such an inchoate, disorganized exterior which nevertheless belongs to us, lapping on the shores of our knowledge, that Hölderlin's poetry plunges like his Empedocles into the volcano. However, a consequence of a poetry that does function beyond law and symbolic order is an artistic career like Hölderlin's, one that sets up the disquieting congruence between madness and poetic productivity. This, at any rate, is the alarming conclusion Jean Laplanche begins his commentary by postulating.

This Hölderlin is the opposite of Coleridge. The transition from the verse-letter Coleridge writes to Sara Hutchinson to the form in which he actually published it as an ode is thematic. The version published in the *Morning Post* in October 1802 uses the ode to make conventional the excess of emotion which in the verse-letter was personally unmanageable. One may prefer the verse-letter, as many have done, but it is a different kind of poem, not an ode. Hölderlin, if you like, would have thought the disordered experience of the verse-letter to be already an ode.

21 Jean Laplanche, *Hölderlin et la question du père* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961).

22 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, trans. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009), 48.

While one must not assume too strict a division between madness and normality, a strength of Laplanche's analysis is that he sees and does not gloss over the fact that if Hölderlin's poetry thrives on madness, his life does not. Disaster for him is a poetic triumph, madness "*par excellence*," as Maurice Blanchot puts it.[23] Is this not too sanguine an acceptance of the cost paid for poetry of mesmeric power? Should we not, as human beings, be embarrassed that it takes such mental dislocation to give the best account of ourselves? The poetic form here does not knowingly compensate for admitted disconnections and failures of reference as it does in Leopardi and Shelley's odes. There, exorbitant fictions are strategically motivated, implying the scandal that it takes such straits to imagine nations and national liberty. With Hölderlin, the language appears startlingly literal, as if he were describing the dark side of our moon, something literal but invisible to the rest of us. In his ode to "Mnemosyne" we are signs without interpretation, "Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos."[24] But that is what we are, not a metaphor for what we are.

This extreme might appear to be a great adventure for the literary theorist but it strikes the psychoanalytic critic Laplanche as a distressing case of psychotic schizophrenia. The authority of poetic language obviously grows enormous if we can be reduced to its signs in such a way as is meant to evoke a fullness beyond the limitations of "our language." But this identity is unliveable, it is no one's language, which is why it has become the exemplary language, bleached of all ideologies, treasured by Blanchot and Adorno. Yet sometimes in Hölderlin's poetry, as in "Patmos" (very Pindaric in its mythic treatment of Christianity, for David Constantine[25]), when the poet speaks and then reflects upon his words ("So sprach ich"), it is the consequent abduction of the self that enables his poem to continue:

> So sprach ich, da entführte
> Mich schneller, denn ich vermutet,
> Und weit, wohin ich nimmer
> Zu kommen gedacht, ein Genius mich
> Vom eigenen Hauß.

23 Maurice Blanchot, "Madness *par excellence*," in *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. Michael Holland (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 110-29.

24 Friedrich Hölderlin, "Mnemosyne" (second version), in *Selected Poetry*, trans. David Constantine (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2013), 172.

25 David Constantine, in Hölderlin, *Selected Poetry*, 390.

(So I spoke, when more swiftly
Than ever I had expected,
And far as I never thought
I should come, a Genius carried me
From my own house.)[26]

But the estranging Spirit is also Hölderlin's genius, what he possesses uniquely, which lays out a poetic path before him, wherever he goes. The Christian, supernatural dimension of the poem, its huge historical and geographical abstractions, turn out, in conclusion, to be the maintenance of this poetic language:

[…] der Vater aber liebt,
Der über allen waltet,
Am Meisten, daß gepfleget werde
Der veste Buchstab, und bestehendes gut
Gedeutet. Dem folget deutscher Gesang.

(but what the Father
Who reigns over all loves most
Is that the solid letter
Be given scrupulous care, and the existing
Be well interpreted. This German song observes.)[27]

Hölderlin's problem sheds light on Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," a poem modelled on the irregular Pindaric form used by Abraham Cowley (Hölderlin had learned from Klopstock's versions of Pindar). At such moments, wrote Hazlitt wittily, Wordsworth "may be said to take a personal interest in the universe." Hazlitt also recognised that a new kind of reading was at stake. Wordsworth's readership has to start "*de novo* on a *tabula rasa* of poetry."[28] Coleridge saw only absurdities resulting from poetic presumption: the proper forum for such discussion is reserved for religious discourse alone. But for Hölderlin's narrator in "Patmos," "göttliches Werk auch gleichet dem unsern" ("the work of gods, too, is like our own");[29] and Wordsworth thought that his ambition was licensed by the genre in

26 Friedrich Hölderlin, "Patmos," ll. 16-20, in *Poems and Fragments*, bilingual edition, trans. Michael Hamburger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 462-63.
27 Hölderlin, "Patmos," ll. 223-27, in *Poems and Fragments*, 476-77.
28 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-34), 88-89.
29 Hölderlin, "Patmos," l. 60, in *Poems and Fragments*, 472-73.

which he wrote – the ode – where, like Virgil exceeding the normal expectations of the reader of his *Eclogues*, "*paulo majora canamus*" ("we sing in somewhat higher strain").[30] He often wrote odes which were occasional, but whose occasions were there to be surpassed. It is as if what it is an ode allows you to say has become his subject-matter; his kind of ode describes as well as uses the higher strain which it permits, and Wordsworth looks for moments that trigger that diction: "Ode – 1817," "Ode – The Pass of Kirkstone," "Ode – Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendor and Beauty." Even the earlier "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" was originally entitled just "Ode." Coleridge adheres to dualism – a division which allows reality to be different from and so possibly much more than our worldly knowledge of it. We can only have faith in what a comprehensive understanding might deliver. His dualism means that, for his criticism in *Biographia Literaria* the comprehensiveness of Wordsworth's language becomes ridiculous: the child philosopher, the use of Plato's myth of anamnesis to furnish immediacy, "thoughts and images too great for the subject."[31] Poetic success deemed inseparable from this kind of disturbance of personal boundaries becomes poetic failure in Coleridge's robust criticism of Wordsworth. But is Coleridge the one asking for too much? "Nicht alles will der Höchste zumal" ("Not all things at once does the Highest intend"),[32] says Hölderlin, as if conscious of an obscurity quite properly still to be clarified.

Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's poem is certainly that of a Christian decrying what he takes to be implicit Pantheism. But it is also the reaction of a poet to a Romantic ode of immense confidence, one capable of confronting us with what it would be like to possess a literary Absolute. The kind of madness in which you imagine you have a language adequate to the entirety of your life, conscious and unconscious, can, in exceptional authors, produce extraordinary poetry. Ultimately, though, this poetic universalism is still a kind of confinement because it is poetry. The Romantic philosophers confronted this problem in different ways. One was Coleridge's religiosity, another was the Jena School's formulation of *der Roman*, or a literary form whose generosity allowed poetry to be refigured sympathetically in other forms of discourse. Poetry becomes hybrid, a *Mischgedichte*, a composite work recruiting other literary genres to support its inordinate ambitions. And why stop there? Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* beckons; but beyond even that ambition, ideas from Marx to Benjamin that poetry might refigure itself in different

30 Virgil, Eclogue 4, l.1 in *The Eclogues*, bilingual text, trans. Guy Lee (London: Penguin, 1984), 56.

31 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*. ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 2:138-39, 147, 138.

32 Hölderlin, "Patmos," l. 61, in *Poems and Fragments*, 472-73.

forms of human practice altogether, becoming what Shelley called "the poetry of life,"[33] begin to democratize an activity founded on the most exclusive efforts of cultural expression. But that is another story.

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[33] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), 502.

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