

From: Friedrich Hölderlin: *Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland* (1797-1799)

Hölderlin's "Hyperion's Schicksalslied" is embedded in the second volume, second book, of his novel *Hyperion*, published in 1799. It is an epistolary novel inspired by the neo-classical 'discovery' of Greek poetry, the idealizing of classical Greek culture, and also the Greek struggle against domination by the Ottoman Empire, foreshadowing the war of independence a bare two decades later. The fictional Hyperion takes part in a struggle, flees his homeland, returning as an older man to Greece. He then writes his reflections and observations to his friend Bellarmin. In one letter Hyperion reflects on the pain of leaving...friends, youth. Sitting at the shore of the Mediterranean, he takes his long-neglected lute and sings the 'song of fate' (*Schicksalslied*) that he learned from his friend Adamas.

Ihr wandelt droben im Licht
Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien!
Glänzende Götterlüfte
Rühren euch leicht,
Wie die Finger der Künstlerin
Heilige Saiten.

Schicksallos, wie der schlafende
Säugling, atmen die Himmlischen;
Keusch bewahrt
In bescheidener Knospe,
Blühet ewig
Ihnen der Geist,
Und die seligen Augen
Blicken in stiller
Ewiger Klarheit.

Doch uns ist gegeben,
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.

You walk on high in the light*
on soft floor, happy gods!
Luminous divine breezes
gently touch you,
like the fingers of the (woman) artist touch
sacred strings.

Fate-less like the sleeping
infant, the heavenly ones breathe;
chastely kept
in modest bud,
eternally blossoms
their spirit
and the blessed eyes
gaze in still
eternal clarity

But to us it is given
to rest nowhere,
the suffering humans
diminish and fall
blindly from one
hour to the next,
like water thrown
from cliff to cliff,
yearlong, down into uncertainty.

* This is a very literal translation, making no attempt at English poetry, but rather rendering the original with as little loss in imagery and meaning as possible.

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