

THE LOSS OF MADNESS

a tribute to Hölderlin



Bernard Cadogan

Illustrations by Dan Sperrin

New Zealand poet Bernard Cadogan brings together 31 of his poems as a meditation on the work of the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, recommending that you read one each day for a month, allowing yourself the time to engage with it.

Each of the poems in this book is a response to reading a poem by Hölderlin, or to his situation in an adapted villanelle form. Why that form, when Hölderlin did not write his hymns and elegies in rhyme? Because being as much unlike him as possible allows Bernard's own voice some space and time.

In Germany, Hölderlin is a vital part of the gymnasium and university curriculum, acting as a unifier over and above ideology. Yet he has no counterpart in English literature. What makes Hölderlin different from British Romantics is not just the greater power and dynamism of his verse, but a successful intellectual condensation that eluded his British counterparts.

Aotearoa New Zealand will become a republic. If we want to make this an inauguration and release of our energies, and not just an accident, New Zealanders would do well to consider the abundant and dynamic verse of the great German republican Friedrich Hölderlin.

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Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand will become a republic. If we want to make of this an inauguration and release of our energies and not just an accident, New Zealanders would do well to consider the abundant and dynamic verse of a great German republican. Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) was one of the greatest poets of the past millennium. A schizophrenic, he was confined to a tower over the River Neckar in Tübingen for the last 36 years of his life.



Friedrich Hölderlin
Pastel 1792 FK Hiemer

Why is he so important, why should Anglophone readers be interested in his German verse, and how did I come to write these poems?

Hölderlin has been identified as a watershed poet. Both the Marxist left and fascist right have claimed him. Yet he himself was a democrat and anti-authoritarian who rejected the Jacobin revolutionary project. Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno have identified with him on the left. Henze and Luigi Nono are leftwing composers who have set his poems to music, while Paul Hindemith, Benjamin Britten and Josef Matthias Hauer have also devoted their music to celebrating the pure beauty of his work.

It was Martin Heidegger, however, who made him his flagship poet. The way he summed up the significance of Hölderlin was to quote the words ‘Dichten und Denken’ from one of his letters. This means ‘composing poetry’ and ‘thinking’. In Heidegger’s

view, Hölderlin was the poet of the now, and Nietzsche was the thinker of that now.

British authors and readers shown an interest in Heidegger's poetry also, with Michael Hamburger (1998) and David Constantine (1996) making influential translations. The question for British poets and readers is what Hölderlin means in a post-Brexit UK, and a predominantly monolingual writing scene. Fewer white British poets speak a foreign language than has been the case since poetry was first recorded in the dark ages.

Still, we are right to be fascinated. This revolutionary poet of the Sturm und Drang was primarily influenced, as was the whole Sturm und Drang movement, by the writing of the British (and Irish) Counter-enlightenment, as Sir Isaiah Berlin identified it. Edward Young, William Collins, Thomas Gray, William Cowper, Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith and Edmund Burke, and the peculiar *Lord of the Rings* of that age – Macpherson's 'Ossian' – had a huge impact.

What makes Hölderlin different from British Romantics is not just the greater power and dynamism of his verse, but a successful intellectual condensation that eluded his British counterparts. British verse went wrong after Coleridge failed to engage with German idealist thought.

I first owned a selection of Hölderlin's verse in German when I was 20. It was a 1945 edition printed for the officers and officials who were to occupy Germany. Despite my diligence in reading it, I did not know what to make of it. However, something must have sunk in. EM Butler had argued in *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (1935) that Germans had been damaged by their worship of Hellenism. I never bought that. British poets from Tudor

times to Stephen Spender and John Fowles were influenced by Greece.

New Zealand poets are too. Just as the Greeks believed the river Arethusa travelled undersea from the Peloponnese to Sicily, so has there been a current of Greek themes in our verse consistent with our democratic values of inquiry. Need I drop names? From William Pemberton Reeves and Alan Curnow to Charles Brasch, Alistair Campbell and James K Baxter, Hellenism contributed to our poetic fluencies.

In Canto V of *Crete 1941*, I wrote about how Colonel Awatere was an impressive scholar of Greek and Latin, more so than the lawyer brigadiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Aotearoa New Zealand had another contribution from Hölderlin's Germany in the person of Auckland poet, Karl Wolfskehl (1869–1949), whom New Zealand poets could not make sense of, though in Australia, Harold Stewart and Patrick White would have had no trouble.

Hölderlin is too intelligent, synthetic and unifying a poet to write off ideologically in the way that Auckland writers wrote off Wolfskehl as 'too hard for New Zealand'. Nothing is too hard for Aotearoa New Zealand, certainly not a poet as young and energised and mentally daring as Hölderlin.

The onset of schizophrenia is almost a mystery with him. He does not present many of the preliminary symptoms of the illness. He was well-embodied and had a rich emotional life. He swam in lakes and rivers, he loved horses and rode well, he played the violin and piano. He had a daring and desperate love affair with his boss's wife when he served as a tutor in a banker's household. His poem in reminiscence of Bordeaux reveals how much

he liked the women there. It is redolent of sexual peace.

The ostensible causes are obvious: his widowed mother's loss of confidence in him after the sex scandal, his involvement in the treason trial of a friend who was subsequently acquitted. But we are missing something, and maybe that is none of our business.

Each of my poems is a response to reading a poem by Hölderlin, or to his situation in an adapted villanelle form. Why that form, when Hölderlin did not write his hymns and elegies on rhyme? To be as much unlike him as possible and to allow my own voice some space and time. Rainer Maria Rilke, a deep student of Hölderlin is there too. At various places in his 'Duino Elegies' I noticed him responding to Hölderlin's lines and themes.

There is nothing divisive about Friedrich Hölderlin. He remains a bringer-together across divides of faith and secularity, left and right alike. It is a moot point how ill he was in that yellow tower by the Neckar. He composed short childlike verse of pristine beauty in quatrains. Composers have been fascinated by them. He made out that his name was Scardanelli, and he received visiting students with unfailing calm and grace. He died a question mark, a wealthy man from family bequests, although he did not know it.

His old student friends, Schelling and Hegel, long regarded Hölderlin's life as a caution. Only on the eve of the first world war was his reputation restored by a young scholar, Norbert von Hellgrath (1888–1916) who was, himself, killed in action. His edition of Hölderlin's collected verse came out in five volumes in 1913, one more in 1916, with the final volumes in 1922 and 1923 that provided the basis for subsequent editions and readings.

My *Crete 1941* concluded with 'Sonnet to Hölderlin'. I am glad

to have had this chance to finally read Hölderlin in these latter years, as a necessity for my own poetry and not just as an option or scholarly labour.

As I mentioned at the start of this introduction, Aotearoa New Zealand will soon have a republic. Will it be a republic by default, merely the absence of monarchy, or will it be an inclusive republic of our deepest imagining? Let Hölderlin be our guide.

Hölderlin's God

Hölderlin's God was schizophrenia
whom he lived with in the yellow tower,
not in the Church or academia,

where Hegel and Schelling used their powers
to prove God a metamorphosis,
as if they could exorcise a flower

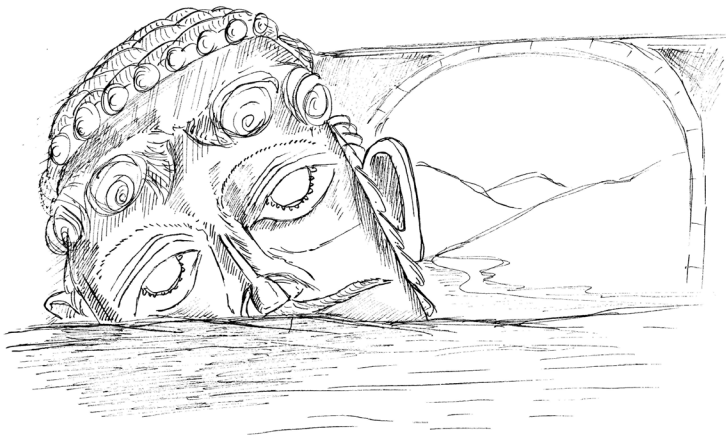
from the mind already porous
with perfected scent. God's subconscious
would be revealed to us dimorphous

and brought to light through the most monstrous
of designs, to which the poet succumbed.
Rimbaud beat the angel with nonchalance

that came to wrestle for a dithyramb.
Hofmannsthal walked away to serve music.
Some poets have opted to become dumb

than continue with these metaphysics
of voice and number. Hölderlin went mad
when speech turned into writ and rubric –
Achilles chanting his own Iliad.

☒ *Woodford Halse – 7 February 2022*



Der Herbstfeier

Once again fortune is experienced.
 A full heart arranges the busy rest
 of Autumn's holiday, and godparents

an end-time with the wine from last years' press.
 Harvest is grace – not a commodity,
 and she has a past of inviting guests.

Barbarossa's hard astonished body
 waded a Turkish river, till trampled
 by its flow. You and I, Poet, copy

that wanderer – nor do we bring samples
 like pedlars to fairs. Autumn is our store.
 On the borders of lands, we find ample

grief to occupy us, or else ignored
 as beggars, we are welcomed to surprise –
 taken for soldiers returning from war.

Now – the season of hard games and prizes.
 of Sport forgetting strife and politics,
 of Song that lost to fortune's devices –
 a cadaver brought to shore prophetic.

☒ *Woodford Halse – 12 November 2021*



Tages

Virgil the ploughman discovered Tages
 the divine child on a ridge, astounded
 he looked back, since it seemed both Hades

and the labouring heavens had compounded
 the kid that moment. The child laughed at him,
 sitting there, and waiting on the turned ground.

This Tages for us was Hölderlin.
 Whether erupted from earth or landed
 like lightning, we can have no occasion

to learn, beyond saying poetry stands
 between fires, and it happens in silence
 as the poet unseals his lips to brand

his language with those words. Hölderlin's science
 was of death, not his life's death, nor the dead
 in an Underworld, whose dependence

is upon our voices, but his own bred
 in night, which his mind survived as a child's.
 Not Orpheus leaving nothing unsaid –
 empty-handed. Hold up some dirt and smile.

☒ *Woodford Halse – 15 November 2021*



After Hölderlin

There is the coming down from the mountains
to the yellow tower, back to the dark
stream, which never lost touch with its fountains.

This is what happens when the mind is stark.
It goes about as naked as a horse –
loves openly in the fields and park.

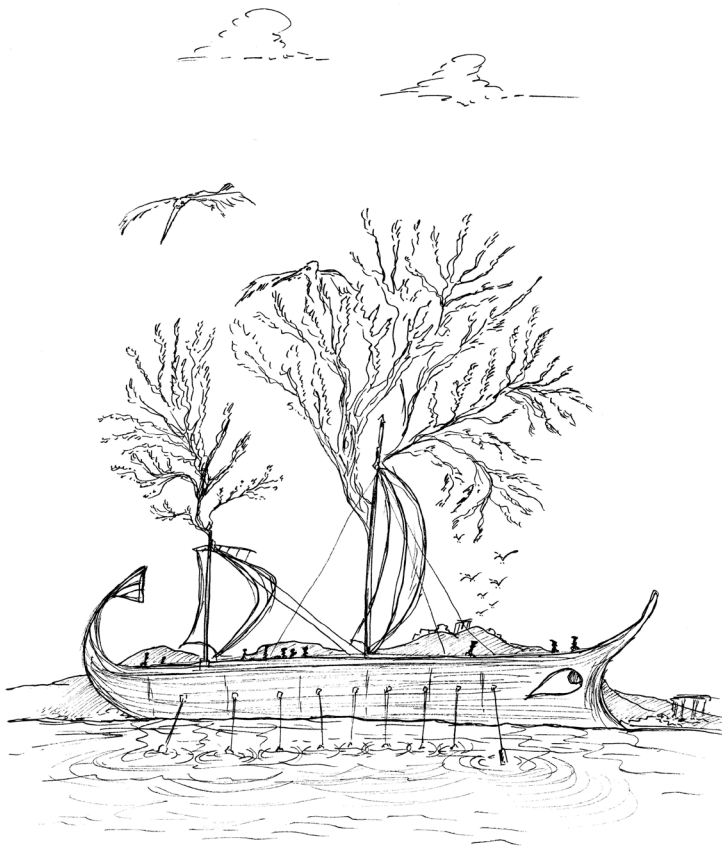
We will look in vain for any forced
analogies in his poems, any path
dependency, any trail for the course

of illness. His is an epitaph
for only an imaginary name –
while the poet died in ecstasy's bath,

drunk so he said, but driven and sustained
with flame. Because confirmation bias
and dementia set in later. The claims

he made upon the breakneck Chiron
of illness, were awesome. My alias
is him – just as John Clare chose Byron.
We are madmen – he is Elias.

☒ *Woodford Halse – 13 November 2021*



Leto – after Hone Tuwhare

I will die on Delos. No one may be
on that island – make love – be born and die.
I find myself sown there in blasphemy

that is really respect. Goddess, the lie
of the land proves you held a neighbouring
isle for support. Yes I will rely

on death on Delos, because I labour
at speech and revere the end of it.
Your son is an obelisk tapering

to a point. We are allowed to sit
surely, while he pairs with an omphalos.
Language carries on in the god's ambit.

Lingam is a better word than phallus –
how it breaks off at just the right angle.
This is how poetry is on Delos,

or anywhere else. Words land in tangles
of blood and cord. The best come stillborn
perfectly expressed – the next are gangly
and young – hero isles without death and corn.

☒ *Woodford Halse – 28 November 2021*

poetry & polis

The loss of madness will not be sold in bookshops. It was produced for those who pay for their subscription to Bernard Cadogan's newsletter *poetry & polis*. If you paid the regular annual subscription you will have received an ePub version of the book, while those of you who paid for a Client level subscription will have received a numbered copy of the limited edition printed book, signed and dedicated by the author.

If someone has shared this book with you, we encourage you to subscribe to *poetry & polis*. You will receive poetry, essays and political commentary. You will also find out how to write and read poetry, as well as how to understand and practise politics, geopolitics, and think like a political philosopher.

To start with, *poetry & polis* was sent out on a UK Friday evening with two or three of Bernard Cadogan's poems, some of which were followed by a commentary, as well as glimpses of his insights into the fraught area of international relations. There will never be a charge for these Friday newsletters.

In 2022, a second newsletter went out on a Monday evening that included in-depth commentaries on poetics, geopolitics and international relations and showcased two of Bernard's new poems. Subscribers pay to receive the Monday newsletters.

If this works as well as expected, a third newsletter will go out to paying subscribers with poetry, new and old, and hints and tips on how to write and read poetry.

From time to time, an international relations news brief will

be sent to Client level subscribers. These will not be archived on the website due to the very special, confidential nature of the contents.

When you subscribe, you will have full access to the newsletter's website, and you'll be part of a community of people who share your interests. If you haven't done so yet, please do so.

<https://bernardcadogan.substack.com>

About Bernard Cadogan

Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, Bernard is an accomplished poet, philosopher and historian. Since 1996, he has worked as a political advisor and speech writer, in particular as policy advisor to the prime minister. He has been a consultant to the New Zealand Treasury since 2011 and was appointed an honorary advisor to the Māori king in 2015.

He is especially interested in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, John Rawls and Charles Taylor, and his current focus is on post-colonial thought, the formation of empires, and the resilience, relevance and viability of small nation states.

Bernard holds a DPhil from Oxford University on the political thought, constitutionalism and racial policy of Sir George Grey (1812–98) in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Also by Bernard Cadogan

Crete 1941: an epic poem (2021)

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