

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN AND THE CLANDESTINE SOCIETY OF THE BAVARIAN ILLUMINATI. A PLAIDOYER

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I deal with a grossly neglected aspect of Friedrich Hölderlin's involvement in his historical and intellectual period, namely, his relationship with the secret order of the Bavarian Illuminati. Hölderlin's native region of Württemberg was one of the organization's most active colonies, as was almost every other Duchy or city Hölderlin happened to live in. It was therefore not merely coincidental that he was personally acquainted with many Illuminati and read a number of important writings connected to the society. Nonetheless, Hölderlin-scholarship has hitherto failed to grasp the relevance of this aspect.

1 Introduction

This paper deals with Friedrich Hölderlin's (1770–1843) severely and surprisingly neglected relationship with the secret order of the Bavarian Illuminati. Hölderlin's involvement in his political context has been the subject of scholarly interest for many decades, occasioning a wide range of innovative research, for instance on his commitment to

the Republican tradition. Even so, his many biographical and theoretical connections with the clandestine society of the Illuminati, which dominated German public debate in the late 1780s, have remained at best peripheral, if not completely extraneous to the research interests of Hölderlin-scholarship. This is all the more striking since the Illuminati had gained by the end of the 20th century a well-deserved place in historical scholarship, subsequently coming to play a central role in pivotal books on key-figures in Hölderlin's life and thought such as Friedrich Schiller and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

In this paper, I shall make a strong argument in support of the need to fill this glaring scholarly gap. I shall thus focus first on the 'invention' of Hölderlin's Jacobinism in the late 1960s, which subsequently monopolized studies on the political aspects of Hölderlin's work, thus hindering the broadening of the research focus (§ 2); secondly, on Hölderlin's personal contacts to (former) members of the society and his acquaintance with the order's ideas (§ 3).

2 The Invention of Hölderlin's Jacobinism

At the end of the Sixties, and at the height of the political subversion that swept through Europe and the US, the French Germanist Pierre Bertaux published an essay that would radically change Hölderlin-scholarship and become a point of reference across national and linguistic boundaries for decades to come. Bertaux devoted his paper to Hölderlin's relationship to the French Revolution, in particular his personal connections with the German democrats, and commented on his many enthusiastic pronouncements on the French Revolution, tracing all political assessments to be found in his literary works. Bertaux moreover claimed that Hölderlin was not merely an interested observer of French events, but also – and this is the main feature of his

interpretative proposal – a Jacobin.¹ In 1969, Bertaux presented an expanded version of this research in his book *Hölderlin und die Französische Revolution*.² Aware as he was of the problematic character of the notion of ‘Jacobinism’, especially if applied to the German situation, Bertaux chose to use it in an extended sense, supposedly identifying every supporter of the French Revolution, with particular reference to a “radical republican attitude”.³

Reactions to Bertaux’s interpretation were immediate. The co-editor of the critical edition nominated ‘Stuttgarter Ausgabe’, Adolf Beck, was the first to comment on and sharply criticize Bertaux’s Jacobinist argument in the late 1960s.⁴ Without intending to deny Hölderlin’s commitment to the French Revolution in any way, Beck insisted on Hölderlin’s rejection of Jacobin politics as a way to rectify Bertaux’s one-sided reconstruction. Beck elaborated compelling arguments in favour of Hölderlin’s affinity with the Girondists,⁵ whose destiny he followed anxiously to the end, thereby explicitly rejecting Marat’s and Robespierre’s politics.⁶

¹ Cf. Bertaux, 1967/68.

² Cf. Bertaux, 1969.

³ Bertaux, 1969: 13. Already Voegt (1955: 18) and Scheel (1962: VII–XVII; 1969: 1130) pleaded for a redefinition of the concept of ‘Jacobinism’ in relation to the German territories, since “in a strict sense, there were no Jacobins in Germany between 1793 and 1794” (Voegt, 1955: 18).

⁴ In order to better understand the context of this dispute, one has to think that Bertaux spoke of “Jacobin violence” in reference to Hölderlin’s Empedokles already in the 1930s (Bertaux, 1936: 195), and that he proposed a kind of preliminary study to those of 1967/68 and 1969 three years before their publication (Bertaux, 1965). Beck had already criticized these contributions in the 1968 volume of the Hölderlin critical edition (StA, VII/ 1, 239–241).

⁵ Cf. Beck, 1967/68.

⁶ Cf. StA, VI, 1, 88, 95, 132.

The topics underlying the dispute between Bertaux and Beck quickly became popular in Hölderlin-scholarship, especially with Bertaux's reinforcement of his thesis in 1973 with the claim that Hölderlin was to be understood no longer simply as a Jacobin, but as a "neo-Jacobin on the road to socialism".⁷ Consequently, the number of studies dealing with Hölderlin's political convictions in the face of the French Revolution increased exponentially, leading to the discovery of many new elements.⁸ In particular, Beck's rejection of Bertaux's Jacobinism thesis was supplemented by contemporary historical achievements such as the distinction, among the German democrats, between 'Jacobins' and 'Liberals', whose main difference was traced back to the approval and rejection respectively of Jacobin politics beginning in late 1792 and exploding in 1793.⁹

In painting this fascinating political fresco, Hölderlin scholars have never delved into the role of secret orders in general nor of the Illuminati in particular. With just one exception.

In 1971, the German scholar Hans Graßl published a pioneering essay entitled "Hölderlin und die Illuminaten. Die zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergründe des Verschwörer-motivs im 'Hyperion'", in which he embarked on the reconstruction of Hölderlin's contacts with (former) Illuminati and showed how many and how important these private contacts were also for further literary and philosophical analyses.¹⁰ Graßl's study has been shamefully ignored by Hölderlin-scholarship, and the fact is all the more surprising for at least four reasons:

⁷ Bertaux, 1973: 9.

⁸ For a complete survey of the studies on this topic, see Macor 2006a, 19–51.

⁹ Cf. Kurz, 1975: 126f., 131f.; Prignitz, 1975: 210f. For the broader context see also Kaiser 1975 and, more recently, Cottebrune 2001 and 2002.

¹⁰ Graßl, 1971.

1) Hölderlin included in his only novel, *Hyperion* (1797–1799), a secret society;

2) already in 1968 the French philosopher Jacques d'Hondt had published a book entirely devoted to the clandestine contacts of Hölderlin's close friend Hegel (D'Hondt, 1968);

3) contemporary historical scholarship, in which Hölderlin-scholarship was demonstrably interested, in the same years focused on the pre-revolutionary clandestine organizations, including the Illuminati, starting at the very latest with Richard van Dülmen's book *Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten. Darstellung, Analyse, Dokumentation* of 1974 and reaching a point-of-no-return in Margaret C. Jacob's revolutionary monograph *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* of 1981;¹¹

4) Graßl introduced, in relation to the German political reflection of the late 18th century, the category "illuminatistisch-jakobinisch" as a corrective to the one-sided "jakobinisch", which he considered to be an inadequate description of German democratic trends; in particular, Graßl explicitly took issue with Bertaux, whose neglect of the pre-revolutionary clandestine ideas could not but compromise the value of his overall interpretation.¹²

It is clear that scholars should have felt the urgency to inquire into this matter, yet not a single Hölderlin scholar dealing with Hölderlin's alleged Jacobinism ever considered the role which the secret order of the Illuminati could have played in determining Hölderlin's political inclinations.

¹¹ Cf. van Dülmen, 1974; Jacob, 1981.

¹² Graßl, 1971: 137f.; Graßl, 1979: 356.

This state-of-affairs did not change even in the following decades, when W. Daniel Wilson published his seminal book *Geheimräte gegen Geheimbünde. Ein unbekanntes Kapitel der klassisch-romantischen Geschichte Weimars* (1991), and Hans-Jürgen Schings published his ground-breaking monograph *Die Brüder des Marquis Posa. Schiller und der Geheimbund der Illuminaten* (1996).¹³ Both books deal with Illuminati cells in Württemberg and Thuringia, i.e. the regions where Hölderlin grew up and lived for several years, yet still Hölderlin scholars were not roused from their dogmatic slumber.

It was only in 2002, more than 30 years after the publication of Graßl's essay, that the Germanist Ulrich Gaier made a strong case out of Hölderlin's acquaintance with many Illuminati, complaining of the scanty interest in this topic shown by the scholarship and calling for a reconsideration of these neglected aspects, which – we are told – would have been, and still are, far more promising than Bertaux's "extremely generic Jacobinism thesis".¹⁴

In recent years, in the aftermath of Wilson's and Schings's investigations, but also Jonathan Israel's comprehensive reading of the Radical Enlightenment, which devotes much attention to the Illuminati and their legacy, there has been a dramatic new wave of interest in the secret society of the Illuminati.¹⁵

It is my view that Hölderlin-scholarship has already missed too many opportunities not to promptly grasp this one.

¹³ Wilson, 1991; Schings, 1996.

¹⁴ Gaier, 2002: 98.

¹⁵ Mulsow, 2003; Riedel, 2003; Robertson, 2006; Robert, 2011: 281–292, 324–327; Israel, 2011: 828–845.

3 Hölderlin and the Illuminati

The secret order of the Illuminati was founded in 1776 in Ingolstadt by the professor of canon law Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830), and it spread until the mid 1780s through both Catholic and Protestant Germany, extending its influence even as far afield as Vienna and Italy. The aim of the society was to promote political and intellectual independence, to fight despotism and to introduce general and lasting freedom. In order to attain these goals, the Enlightenment had to be universalized and a revolution of the human spirit made possible.¹⁶

Thanks to the engagement of Adolph Freiherr von Knigge (1752–1796) and Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (1730–1793), the order developed into a truly impressive movement which infiltrated Freemasonry and had a profound impact not only on politics, but also on literature and philosophy. Figures of the first-order, such as the Göttingen philosophers Johann Georg Heinrich Feder and Christoph Meiners, the former Jesuit and later Kantian Karl Leonhard Reinhold, and literary giants such as Herder and Goethe, became members of the society,¹⁷ and other similar leading figures were *volens nolens* caught up in the organization's web: Schiller knew many initiates and discussed the society at length with them, although he personally did not join it.¹⁸ Estimates of the order's membership at its peak vary between 600, 2,500 and 6,000,¹⁹ but apart from these (not insignificant) differences, there is no doubt that it was one of the most relevant

¹⁶ For an introduction to the main historical facts and philosophical issues regarding the Illuminati see van Dülmen, 1974; Reinalter, 1997; Israel, 2011: 828ff.

¹⁷ Cf. Lauth, 1979; Wilson, 1991; Wilson, 1992; Fuchs, 1994; Schüttler, 1997a and 1997b; Radrizzani, 2010.

¹⁸ Cf. Schings, 1993; Schings, 1996.

¹⁹ Cf. respectively Le Forestier, 1914/1974: 399; Israel, 2011: 837; Whaley, 2012: II, 467.

clandestine organizations in Europe before the French Revolution. Not even the two edicts issued in 1784 and 1785 by the Bavarian elector, Karl Theodor Wittelsbach, which prohibited all secret societies, and in 1785 with explicit reference to the Illuminati, meant the end of the order nor of its influence on German culture, although they obviously caused a major setback in the management of the order's affairs.²⁰

As to the society's survival after the prohibition, there are at least two events to be mentioned. First of all, in 1787, important confiscated documents regarding the organization's secret activities were published,²¹ triggering a fierce controversy over the very nature of the Illuminati's political project in which the order's chief figures, Weishaupt in particular, stood accused of adopting a despotic attitude toward the lowest grades of the society.²² Secondly, some attempts were made to revitalize the order. In the late 1780s, members of the Gotha-Weimar cells under Bode's guidance worked on the philosophical system and structure of society,²³ and in the 1790s Schiller's patron, the Danish Prince Friedrich Christian von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg (1765–1814), aimed to reform the Illuminati society. He financed Weishaupt, who at that time lived in exile in Gotha, and involved the Danish poet Jens Baggesen (1764–1826), who travelled throughout Europe as his emissary, in the project to relaunch the order. Schiller was invited to serve as a theoretical leader and was regularly updated, despite the fact that he never joined the new organization nor did he endorse its methods.²⁴

²⁰ For instance, Weishaupt lost his position at the University of Ingolstadt, fled Bavaria and went to Gotha, but he was not the only one to suddenly change his life after the second edict, cf. van Dülmen, 1974: 90f.

²¹ These documents are listed in the Bibliography ('Sources') as 'Orig.' and 'Nachtrag'.

²² Cf. Schings, 1996: 163–186.

²³ Cf. Schüttler, 1997a.

²⁴ Cf. Schings, 1996: 128, 187f., 195–209.

I propose classifying Hölderlin's knowledge of the Illuminati's ideas according to two kinds of sources: the first is his personal acquaintance with members of both the original society and the new one projected by the Prince of Augustenburg; the second is his reading of the polemical writings regarding the confiscated documents published in 1787 and many other essays, reviews and works dealing with the secret society and its legacy.

I will show that Hölderlin's personal contacts with (former) Illuminati are a constant trait of his life, from his education at Tübingen University (1788–1793) through his stays in Waltershausen (1794), Jena (1794–1795) and Frankfurt am Main (1796–1798), up to the later sojourns in Homburg vor der Höhe and Stuttgart (1798–1800, 1804–1806). A brief (hence anything but complete) survey on this clandestine network may provide an idea of the true extent to which Hölderlin was confronted with secret issues, thereby gaining his personal insight into political matters.

Born in Swabia in 1770, Hölderlin lived there until 1793, becoming acquainted with both Freemasons and Illuminati: he grew up in a Masonic-oriented context connected to the Stuttgart lodge *Zu den drei Cedern*, whose members were themselves partly Illuminati.²⁵

The Illuminati's Swabian colony, baptized 'Pannonia' in the secret nomenclature, was in fact founded in the early 1780s, and involved among others Schiller's *Karlsschule* philosophy professor Jakob Friedrich Abel (1751–1829), who chose the name 'Pythagoras Abderites'. Abel is referred to in a letter of Johann Friedrich Mieg (1744–1811) to Weishaupt dated 20th April 1783,²⁶ and 'Pythagoras Abderites' is to be found also in the confiscated documents published in 1787, where his

²⁵ Cf. Breymayer, 2005; Breymayer, 2010: 48.

²⁶ Korr., II, 586.

role as a professor is seen as an opportunity to recruit members among the students.²⁷

It is my opinion that Abel was one of Hölderlin's main intellectual contacts with the world of the Illuminati, and this for three reasons: 1) Abel was philosophy professor in Tübingen exactly during Hölderlin's stay; 2) Abel was very close to Hegel, who was one of Hölderlin's best friends; 3) Hölderlin refers to Abel in his letters from Tübingen.

In 1790 Abel moved to the Philosophy Faculty at Tübingen University and thus became closer to his former pupil Hegel, as well as Hegel's friends. Abel's name occurs in the correspondence of Hölderlin himself and his circle²⁸ and, although at that time Hölderlin had already finished his philosophical studies and therefore did not need to attend Abel's courses, he nevertheless had to participate in Abel's annual examinations as an 'opponent', according to the disputatory method adopted in Tübingen.²⁹ Furthermore, he could not miss the opportunity to dialogue with the former teacher and collaborator of his literary model Schiller.

Abel was not alone in Hölderlin's circle in Tübingen to have clandestine connections: minor figures such as Johann Friedrich Flatt (1759–1821), Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1758–1815) and Immanuel Carl Diez (1766–1796) are also worth mentioning.³⁰ Furthermore, in September 1793 Hölderlin first met Isaak von Sinclair (1775–1815), who was to become one of his closest friends until 1806, the year in which Hölderlin was taken into the clinic in Tübingen. Sinclair came from Bad

²⁷ Nachtrag, 1787: 161, 163. For Abel's membership see also Schüttler, 1991: 14.

²⁸ Cf. StA, VI, 1: 57; StA, VII, 1: 200.

²⁹ Cf. Franz, 2005: 18f. For Abel's philosophy, clandestine activity and teaching, both in Stuttgart and in Tübingen, see Riedel, 1995: 384–387; Franz, 2005: 70–99; Macor 2011.

³⁰ On these figures see Graßl, 1971: 150; Schüttler, 1991: 117; Schings, 1993: 69; Schings, 1996: 36; Henrich 1997: 1041.

Homburg vor der Höhe near Frankfurt am Main, where the Illuminati had acquired plenty of adepts: the Landgrave of Hessen-Homburg himself, Friedrich Ludwig V (1748–1821), was member of the order as were his counsellor, Sinclair’s mentor Franz Wilhelm Jung (1757–1833) and Sinclair’s stepfather, August Leberecht von Proeck.³¹ Sinclair himself was too young to have entered the league of the Illuminati before its prohibition, but, helped by this biographical background and his profoundly political vocation, he was interested not only in the French Revolution, which he totally endorsed, but also in the German pre-revolutionary situation: his letters from Tübingen deal quite exclusively with political matters and mention only Illuminati or figures who were very close to them. Among them, special attention is paid to Abel.³²

Moreover, Hölderlin’s sister married in 1792 the former Illuminatus Christian Matthäus Theodor Breunlin (1752–1800), who is the “Th. - - - B. - -” mentioned in the order’s secret documents.³³

Also after moving to Thuringia – in December 1793 to Waltershausen to serve as a tutor for Charlotte von Kalb’s son and in November 1794 to Jena/Weimar – Hölderlin remained within the network of the Illuminati, becoming closer to the circle which was trying to renew the order, as his reference to Baggesen in his letter to Hegel of 10th July 1794 testifies.³⁴ Furthermore, Baggesen came to Jena in the Spring of 1795, i.e. exactly during Hölderlin’s stay.³⁵

³¹ Cf. Waas, 1936; Schüttler, 1991: 56, 80, 121; for the discovery of von Proeck’s membership, cf. Macor, 2006a: 132.

³² Dirnfeller, 1980: 124–127; Macor, 2006a: 130–135.

³³ Nachtrag, 161; for this information I am indebted to Dr Reinhard Markner. For further biographical details regarding Breunlin, cf. Brauer 2003, 185–188.

³⁴ StA, VI, 1: 127.

³⁵ Baggesen/Baggesen, 1831: II, 15, 18.

Between January 1796 and October 1798, Hölderlin lived in Frankfurt am Main where he worked as a tutor for the Gontard family. During these years his clandestine connections increased markedly, not only because Homburg and his friend Sinclair were now much closer, but also because Hölderlin himself moved in the clandestine circles of the city. It may be worth noting certain details of Hölderlin's stay in Frankfurt: Hölderlin arrived in January 1796 and immediately visited Sinclair in Homburg, where he met "very interesting men",³⁶ among them the Illuminatus Jung and probably Sinclair's stepfather as well, and where he returned a month later, in February 1796.³⁷ It may not be a coincidence that Hölderlin gave an exemplar of *Hyperion's* first volume, containing the description of a clandestine society and published in 1797, to the Illuminatus Jung, writing on the first page of this gift some verses stemming from Klopstock's *Gelehrtenrepublik*, a work belonging to the reading list of the Illuminati.³⁸

Furthermore, the young Schelling visited his friend Hölderlin in Frankfurt in the late Spring of 1796 after meeting the Illuminatus Johann Friedrich Mieg (1744–1811), who had recruited Abel in the early 1780s, and the Illuminatus Jacobin Georg Christian Gottfried Freiherr von Wedekind (1761–1831) in Heidelberg.³⁹

Among the closest friends of the family where Hölderlin worked in Frankfurt, there was also the famous anatomist Samuel Thomas Sömmerring (1755–1830), who is in my view a central figure for Hölderlin's stay in Frankfurt. Freemason, Rosicrucian, and, according to

³⁶ StA, VI, 1: 198.

³⁷ Cf. StA, VI, 1: 200f.

³⁸ StA, III: 354; cf. Gaier 2002, 79.

³⁹ Cf. Schelling, 100; for Wedekind's membership in the Illuminati order see Schüttler, 1991: 161f.

some sources, Illuminatus,⁴⁰ Sömmerring had been the best friend of the Freemason, Rosicrucian, Illuminatus and Jacobin Georg Forster (1754–1794).⁴¹ In 1797, during Hölderlin's stay in Frankfurt, Sömmerring organized the auction of Forster's private library in Mainz, which he therefore visited many times, not least in order to attend to all the formal requirements for leaving his position as a medicine professor at Mainz University. Sömmerring had lived and taught there for many years, and had even been invited to become a member of the *Deutsche Union*, an offer he refused.⁴² Sömmerring was the physician of the Gontard family, and he visited Hölderlin on the 2nd May 1796, publishing in the same year a book to which Hölderlin dedicated two epigrams.⁴³ Among Sömmerring's patients there were many Illuminati who were also Freemasons belonging to the *Zur Einigkeit* lodge,⁴⁴ and it was not merely by chance that Hölderlin managed to find employment for his former student Hegel with the Gogel family, whose householder was an active member of this lodge. During the negotiations for his new job in 1796, Hegel sent to Hölderlin a poem entitled *Eleusis*, which was the code-name of Ingolstadt in the Illuminati's secret geography.⁴⁵ According to Jacques D'Hondt, this poem was in reality supposed to favourably impress Hegel's future employer, whose clandestine activity was addressed in this way as a commune faith.⁴⁶ Even leaving aside this conjecture, there can be no doubt that Hegel was thinking of the Illuminati while writing the poem.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sahmland, 1994; Schüttler, 1991: 145.

⁴¹ Cf. Schüttler, 1991: 54; for their friendship see Querner, 1985; Dumont 1988.

⁴² Cf. Macor, 2006a: 164; on the *Deutsche Union* see Israel, 2011: 846–852.

⁴³ Cf. StA, VII, 1: 72; StA, I, 1: 227; on this see Borrmann, 1974/1975; Macor, 2007.

⁴⁴ For the list of Sömmerring's patients see Dumont, 1993; for their clandestine background see Macor, 2006a: 165.

⁴⁵ Cf. StA, VII, 1, 233–236, and Schüttler, 1991: 208.

⁴⁶ D'Hondt, 1998: 115.

Another crucial document confirming the “secret circle” of Hölderlin’s network in Frankfurt am Main is a eulogy of three Freemasons who were members of the *Zur Einigkeit* lodge, one of whom was the elder brother of Hegel’s employer. This eulogy was read in April 1798 and had been written by the former Illuminatus Johann Christian Ehrmann (1749–1827),⁴⁷ the personal physician of the brother of Hölderlin’s employer and a friend of Isaak von Sinclair’s: *Bei der Todtenfeier unserer Brüder Joh. David Gogel, Joh. Heinrich Diest, Abraham Chiron, in der Loge zur Einigkeit in Frankfurt am Main den 7. Aprilis 1798 an die Urne niedergelegt vom Br. Dr. Ehrmann*. This text was found in 1822 among Hölderlin’s private documents,⁴⁸ and thus offers highly relevant proof of Hölderlin’s belonging to the clandestine network in Frankfurt am Main. I have personally examined the copy of this document that can be found at the library of the *Orde van Vrijmetselaren onder het Grootoosten der Nederlanden* at the *Cultureel Maçonniek Centrum ‘Prins Frederik’* in Den Haag (shelf mark: 191 E 33: 1). Needless to say, this document has never attracted the attention of scholars.

In October 1798, Hölderlin moved to Homburg, where he remained for two years until 1800, reinforcing the many clandestine ties mentioned above. In the following years, until 1806, Hölderlin moved many times, living shortly at his mother’s home in Nürtingen (1800, 1803), but also in Stuttgart (1800), Switzerland (1801) and France (1802) as a private tutor and finally again in Homburg as a librarian (1804–1806). Throughout these years he remained interested in the politics of his times: in December of 1798, he visited Rastatt, where the Congress aimed to rearrange the map of Germany following the outbreak of the

⁴⁷ Cf. Schüttler, 1991: 46.

⁴⁸ Cf. StA, VII, 2: 529.

First War of Coalition the previous year;⁴⁹ in Stuttgart and Homburg he did not cease to consort with the same democrats and Illuminati he had met previously, and in 1805 he was involved, without consequences, in the trial for an allegedly planned attempt on the electoral prince's life. Sinclair was one of the main suspects.⁵⁰

In sum, even in such a brief overview as this there is evidence enough that Hölderlin moved in a secret network and was well aware of the relative issues.

In order to assess the real extent to which Hölderlin was versed in clandestine matters, there is yet another source to be considered, namely the literary works, reviews, essays etc. dealing with the Illuminati and their legacy. The following is to be understood as a kind of preliminary 'secret library' of Hölderlin, which should be substantially increased by future scholarship.

In the 1780s, Hölderlin regularly read the *Teutscher Merkur*,⁵¹ the journal edited by Christoph Martin Wieland with the close collaboration of his son-in-law, the Illuminatus Reinhold, where many essays and reviews regarding the Illuminati and their ideology were published.⁵² In the same years, Hölderlin was fond of Schiller's *Don Karlos* (1787), and most of all of the *Briefe über Don Karlos* (1788), in which Schiller dealt with the similarities (and differences) between the Marquis Posa and the Illuminati – no coincidence the *Briefe* were published in Wieland's *Teutscher Merkur*.⁵³ In fact, Hölderlin mentioned Schiller's play between 1788 and 1793, and in September 1793 he delved into some key

⁴⁹ On this see Lefebvre, 2002: 199–132.

⁵⁰ See Kirchner, 1949; Franz, 2012.

⁵¹ See e.g. StA, VI, 1: 13.

⁵² On Wieland and his journal see Wilson, 1991: 163–188; Wilson, 1992.

⁵³ See the excellent chapter devoted to Schiller's *Briefe über Don Karlos* in Schings, 1996: 163–186.

passages of the *Briefe über Don Karlos*, thereby showing his detailed knowledge of them.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Hölderlin demonstrably read the four volumes of the *Allgemeine Geschichte der Jesuiten* (1789–1792), written by Peter Philipp Wolf (1761–1808), who was a close friend of the Illuminatus Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827).⁵⁵ In the fourth volume, Wolf delivered an apologetic account of foundation, rise and prohibition of the secret order of the Illuminati, moreover delving into the persecution of some of its members.⁵⁶ Hölderlin took from the first volume of Wolf's work the motto for his novel *Hyperion*, both for an earlier (1794) and for the definitive version (1797), i.e. two verses of the epitaph on Ignatius of Loyola's gravestone.⁵⁷

The reading of Herder's *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität* (1793) and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795), in which both authors extensively dealt with the legacy of secret societies, are two further sources to be considered when investigating Hölderlin's commitment to the politics of his epoch.⁵⁸

In the face of all this, it is not surprising that in 1797 Hölderlin showed interest in the conspiracy theories of his time in two different works, i.e. in a preparatory version of his tragedy *Der Tod des Empedokles* and in his novel *Hyperion*, the first volume of which was published, as it happens, in 1797. In the former – and this is another

⁵⁴ Cf. StA, VI, 1: 31, 89, 92f.; I have worked on this aspect of Hölderlin's political thought, Macor, 2006a: 91f. For another perspective on Hölderlin's knowledge of Schiller's *Don Karlos* see: Thiel, 2004.

⁵⁵ On Pestalozzi see Schüttler, 1991: 117.

⁵⁶ Wolf: IV, 181–215.

⁵⁷ Cf. StA, III: 4, 163; Wolf, 1789–1792: I, 215: "Non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est".

⁵⁸ For Hölderlin's reading of these works see StA, VI, 1: 120f., 151; on these works and their 'clandestine ideas', cf. Wilson, 1991: 139–162, 189–211; Schings, 2003.

aspect which has never been dealt with – he used the term “Proselytenmacherei”, which was a key-word of the pre-revolutionary controversies, especially among Catholics and Illuminati;⁵⁹ in the latter, he introduced a secret society called *Bund der Nemesis*, whose aims, methods and language closely resemble those of the Illuminati: the members of this order claim to be the only ones who can “see” and who consequently choose among the “thousand blind helpers” the best ones to be made into “seeing helpers”.⁶⁰ Many other details could be dealt with, for instance regarding Hölderlin’s probably adopting certain expressions found in the *Originalschriften*, or some thoughts of former members such as Jakob Friedrich Abel.⁶¹ But – to use and partially reformulate a famous sentence from Schiller’s *Aesthetical Letters* – this is a task for more than a paper.

There remains, however, one last point to be dealt with. This concerns Hölderlin’s attitude towards the Illuminati, which was anything but one-sidedly positive: his picture of the *Bund der Nemesis* in the *Hyperion*, and the way he used the term ‘Proselytenmacherei’ in the preparatory draft of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, suggest that he did not share the order’s clandestine nature and methods, and that he aimed to overcome the shortcomings stemming from these aspects, since Hyperion sees the members of this secret society as “impostors [Betrüger]”,⁶² and Empedokles’ favorite pupil uses the term “Proselytenmacherei” with an undoubtedly negative intention, aiming to identify a wrongful approach to dissemination.⁶³

⁵⁹ StA, IV, 1: 146.

⁶⁰ StA, III: 34.

⁶¹ See respectively Gaier, 2002: 72–74, and Macor, 2006a: 119f., 124.

⁶² StA, III: 35.

⁶³ StA, IV, 1: 146. On Hölderlin’s use of both terms, namely ‘Betrüger’ and ‘Proselytenmacherei’, cf. Macor, 2006b.

Both Hyperion and Empedokles find themselves as poets and leaders of their respective societies only after having met, known and criticized one-sided approaches to political programs.

Evidently, Hölderlin's project of a poetical education addressing everyone owes more than something to his acquaintance with the secret societies of his time, whose shortcomings and errors he was willing to overcome and correct. Without doubt, Hölderlin's characteristic task is not conceivable without these clandestine organizations, and this is why I call for a rigorous historical investigation in order to reassess Hölderlin's political image.

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