II

Perduta la battaglia

Die Schlacht verloren

The battle lost

But sometimes, too, a clear eye loves the shadow,
And for pleasure attempts sleep, before it is needed;
Or a faithful man likes to look into the night.
Yes, it is fitting to dedicate wreathes to the night, and songs,
Because it is sacred to the wanderers and the dead,
Yet itself endures, eternally, in freest spirit.
But, so that something that endures might be there for us,
Even in this time of vacillation, in the darkness,
Night must also grant us oblivion and sacred drunkenness,
Grant us the flowing word which, like lovers, does not slumber,
And also a more abundant cup and a bolder life,
And sacred powers of memory, so that we can watch and wake.

"Brod und Wein," II

Portland Opera costume studios

II • PERDUTA LA BATTAGLIA

Welcome to the *Turandot* chorus! We need you to come into the shop, as soon as possible, so we can take your measurements.

Portland Opera costume shop manager,
30 July, 2003

Until the mid-1990s (my middle-forties) I performed music publicly only in amateur brass and wind ensembles – football and symphonic bands in school and college, the brass ensemble at the university where I work. Then changes in circumstances – a sour experience with a new brass ensemble director, returning to church after years in the spiritual wilderness and realizing that I could transfer my brass skills to sing the bass harmony of hymns easily – led me first into church choir, then my university's little faculty-staff noontime choir, and then – o coraggioso! o audace! – into responding to the newspaper's "call board" announcement soliciting auxiliary, unpaid choristers for the Portland Opera's 1999 production of Aïda. I sang the bass part of some little piece I knew, and I was in!

In the spring of 2003, when a career setback made it just the right moment, I picked up my Turandot score. I bought the London-Mehta-Pavarotti-Sutherland CD and the DVD of the 2002 Salzburg production (with its awful casting of both Calaf and Turandot!). Then I read, listened and sang along at home for a few months. No one had told me any specific ways to learn the part. As a newbie opera singer I was like so many of my language students: I really didn't know much about how best to learn the stuff. I had never had voice lessons. Still haven't. Just an amateur.

MOONLIGHTING IN *TURANDOT*

Our chorus director had a reputation for getting right into a new opera at full speed. At our first rehearsal she wasted no time with preliminaries. Moreover, even if musicians have an anarchic streak in them when it comes to relating to the outside world, they know the value of the dollar and the hour. labor-organized regular opera choristers, like symphony orchestras, enforce the clock. So with her usual briskness, and with not even a few do-re-mi drills, our director said, "Let's start at the very beginning." That's a very good place to start if, for example, you're doing the Verdi Requiem and you want to get into the music and also need to warm up. But that's rather precipitous if it's the first rehearsal and you're at the start of Turandot, with its "Ah!'s" and cries of "Muoja! / Let him die!" We zipped and then plowed and then stumbled through the score until we could handle no more. My confidence took a beating early on when I saw that the sixty-fivish fellow next to me was handling our part with ease and gusto. But during the break he told me that he had retired from several decades with the San Francisco Opera, including some major roles.

After thrice-weekly evening rehearsals the first three weeks of August, we had three more in early September, then a break while part of the regular chorus prepared for Figaro in October. By the three rehearsals in the first week of October we were to be "off the book" – singing without looking at our piano-voice scores. I was but one of many who prepared and half-surreptitiously used small-print cheat sheets, even beyond opening night, though then only for backstage short-term memory boosts. ♪

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as an Ethiopian prisoner of war in the 1999 Portland Opera production of *Aïda*

> As he reached the conclusion of Liù's death scene, Toscanini laid down his baton and said, "The opera ends here, because at this point the Maestro died. Death was stronger than art." … Toscanini might have been speaking not just of Puccini's last work but of Italian opera in general.…With him, the glorious line, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, came to a glorious conclusion.
>
> Weaver in Ashbrook/Powers, 3[2]

My musical performance résumé until middle age reads mostly instrumental and, more particularly, brass – school band and such. That included some carefree years in the Yale football band, infamous for its halftime vulgarities. I can own up to devising some of them.

I did have a few years of childhood piano lessons that all through my life have paid off royally in basic musical competence. But my serious vocal experience began quite late. I grew up in a small town in southern Oregon, far away from symphonies, opera houses, and even elevators; for a long time, not surprisingly I guess, I didn't much care for opera.

In college a course in music and literature, and another in music and philosophy, gave me Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and Don Giovanni. Then love, or something very much like it, attracted me to a girl whose Italian-American mother's family lived on Italian Grand Opera (much Verdi, not so much Puccini). Their attachment was not nearly so much to a cultivated cultural commodity to be consumed during a visit to the Met as it was a living, unself-conscious social heritage that, on festive days or just in casual interchange in the home, mixed indiscriminately with the lowbrow Italian popular music of the years around 1900. And that for good reason, since the lowbrow-highbrow distinction is not very valid here. Certainly the great operatic voices of the time did not observe it. Caruso himself recorded "O sole mio" and also – remember that Italy was allied with the United States, Britain and France in the First

World War – "Over There." That rendition must first be heard merely to be believed; only then can it be appreciated, if that is the proper word. "Hoe-ver there! Send the ward, send the ward, send the ward!"

The resulting marriage lasted only a few years, and its end was a wound that festered under its scar well into the middle years of my life, "nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita." But I kept its opera component. Travel in Europe strengthened my affection for Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Because the production of Meistersinger that I saw in Nürnberg lasted from six until a quarter past eleven in the evening, I also enhanced my operatic stamina or, as the Germans call it, Sitzfleisch ("calloused butt"). Der Freischütz I added to my passive repertory through an outdoor summer production by the Hamburg Opera in Weber's home town of Eutin. A real thunderstorm during the Wolf's Glen midnight bullet-casting scene with the Devil made the experience complete. There was also, at various times thereafter, the usual Vienna State Opera and Volksoper fare of the developing German professor and an associated summer fling that turned into a second marriage, which has endured. Its children make it clear what else can endure and be endured – that is, they have endured much from my life as a public performing artist who takes being an amateur so seriously that he has to create his own comic relief.

Still, opera remains the sketchiest part of my musical knowledge, and my interests remain specialized. Aside from Meistersinger I have attended no operatic performances of Wagner, though I have played the overtures in brass and wind ensembles and long ago read the appropriate Nietzsche texts. Perhaps I would be a better singer and human being if I tried to like Benjamin Britten. I did attend the world premiere of Bernard Herrmann's Wuthering Heights, staged in my home city, but was neither moved nor impressed.

Then there's Russian opera, a virtual cipher to me. To borrow a phrase that a great historian of Germany used to describe the difficulty of learning the German language: life is too short for me to memorize Russian in order to do Shostakovich or even Musorgsky. (I don't like the Grove Encyclopedia's spelling any more than you do.) All that would change, of course, if I were actually invited in appear in any such productions, and I would gladly memorize, just on spec, hundreds of lines of Old Church Slavonic, if there were just a bare hope of being in on Janáček's Glagolitic Mass, even though that offers no prospect of costumes or makeup.

I first heard Turandot, all the way through, only when I began learning my part. Initially I didn't like the piece, though I never contemplated withdrawing from the production. Turandot seemed musically odd, not just in its Chinese tones, but because it claimed to be Italian opera and yet it wasn't Verdi. Of course I knew that Puccini, and Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Leoncavello as well, were Italian opera. But I had performed Verdi on stage, and that put him in a privileged category of Italian Opera: what I feel and own, not just know.

Soon enough, though, I was wallowing in Turandot's outrageous musical beauty. But I still simply could not figure out how it was supposed to fit together as a whole – and especially not the huge, and hugely comic, roles given to Ping, Pang and Pong.

I was averse to Turandot also because it challenged some of the fundamental aesthetic tenets about "highbrow" art that I had absorbed in my undergraduate education and had not needed to dust off and air out since then. In my scholarly interpretation of more familiar works of art I had long since dispensed with those categories. But then, when I was, so to speak off-guard and off-duty, not in my professional identity, I encountered something odd: an Italian opera that sounded Chinese in

some places, and like a movie score in others. Most of all, though, my puzzlement (think of Yul Brynner in The King and I) kept and keeps coming back to this, really – Ping, Pang and Pong. This happened outside my usual cultural bulwark and bailiwick, yet still within the "serious" region of culture that, I thought, demanded that one understand it and not just enjoy it.

A year or so before I had read Jonathan Spence's Treason by the Book, which tells us really all we need to know about the death of a thousand cuts in old imperial China. While I can certainly laugh my head off at Ping, Pang and Pong, Spence reminded me, in the way of Chaplin's The Great Dictator, that the pretend-violence of the stage and screen still points to the horrors of reality. Puccini was known to be uninterested in politics, despite the decoration he received from Mussolini ••for that pompous celebratory piece he composed for Il Duce. But it is unimaginable that Puccini was unaware of the anarchy, insurgency and beheadings in China that were in the news precisely when he was composing Turandot.

Yes, it really was Ping, Pang and Pong. The names were bad enough, or rather so bad they were good, if all you want is a chuckle and a sly wink at Gilbert and Sullivan. The three ministri were just so much fun, but they didn't belong in an opera about beheadings – a serious point, even if Turandot is a comedy in the sublime sense. Comic moments in Shakespeare or, certainly, even Faust – no problem. But what to do with the bumptious boisterous invasion of levity into the deadly seriousness of the buildup to Calaf's life-and-death commitment to attempt the riddles? And then, when we're all ready to find out how, precisely, Calaf is going to beat the riddle rap and escape the ax, why the long first scene of Act II? It's not just the length of the scene. Ping, Pang and Pong do a pretty good Italian-Chinese take on hoofing it in the Catskills, or an anticipation of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby

in the "Road" movies. Or, even better, of Zero Mostel and friends in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum? How does this sound, with a little help from Sondheim: "Everyone – especially an Unknown Prince – ought to have a hundred maids"? As Calaf and Liù say later, pretty much, "Stop it! You're killing me!" (Shouts from the audience: "Keep the day job, professor!")

So I fell back on my earliest systematic exposure to aesthetics, which was thoroughly Germano-centric, especially with regard to how I classified and judged artistic periods and movements. What I found in my cultural storehouse and toolkit were, first, some giant works that I had internalized until they were no longer just literary texts. But there were also some remnants of quaint historical and stylistic methods of interpreting texts and, as Danto puts it, the narrative that relates them to each other and to their times. My atavistic tools did help me initially as I undertook to interpret Turandot for myself. I also read around in the standard critical literature about Puccini. But I had to make the piece make sense for me, not just learn what it meant to the musicologists. Scholarship, except for scholars of course, is a means, not an end. I am a scholar used-to-be, which is different from a scholar-has-been or a scholar-wannabe.

For all the fast action at the start, the opening moments of Turandot contain a lot of retrospective information. Explanatory, or backgrounding, or "analytic" episodes, as I learned to call them when I was studying German literature at Yale in the previous millennium, can be a boring kiss of death to dramatic or operatic action. Puccini solves the problem by compressing the retrospectives to the absolute minimum. It is a technique whose value I would have understood even as a student who was just reading the libretto. He also punctuates those "flashbacks" with the violence of the chorus and guards. The latter is an element of staging that students

of literature may not detect in the library, but which will be grasped immediately by anyone who is on stage in a mob scene, gasping for breath and wishing for a stair rail that isn't there. I recalled reading, in graduate school, I. A. Richard's dictum that serious students of Shakespeare need not be able to write a good Elizabethan sonnet, but they should at least have written one themselves, even –or especially? – if it is a bad one. It is a custom the academic critics of literature, including myself when I used to be one, have ••honored much more in the breach than in the practice. That is one reason why academic scholars of literature produce such awful prose when they are on their day jobs. The less said here the better about the Publications of the Modern Language Association.

The aria "Perduta la battaglia" is an expanded variation on the "analytic" technique. Reportage substitutes for actual enactment on stage, saving both time and money. It also helps get around the problem of causing unsightly gore, which can be hard to stage plausibly – if, say, you need to behead someone, or gouge out Gloucester's eyes in Lear. Hollywood, of course, can do these ghastly tricks much better than the stage, and seems to like to, as does the world in general. In Turandot the "analytic" technique is used to have the barbarian Timur, whom the Unknown Prince has just recognized as his aged, disguised father, recount his misadventures, though without the cinematic benefit of flashbacks enhanced by screen effects. After defeat in battle Timur was succored by the slave girl Liù, who secretly loves the Unknown Prince, because he had once smiled at her. (Copious relative and dependent clauses are almost indispensable in opera summaries.)

Now that the audience knows this improbable but necessary background, and can easily guess that the Unknown Prince will be the next suitor, the action can

move forward "synthetically," as we called it at Yale, by "putting together" love, riddles, dangers, revelations and more love. The modern meaning of "synthetic" may apply here too: not just "put together," the original meaning, but also "contrived" or even "not genuine." It's all done for the sake of luxuriant music and luxuriating passions, in the characters, the audience, myself, and, for all I knew when I began rehearsals, Puccini. So what else is new in opera? To the atavistic earnest student of German literature though, it's scandalous. All that preparation was – it appeared – for no deeper meaning. It was bad enough that, contrary to the Aristotelian aesthetics of my youthful studies, the fundamental action of the piece was subordinate to characterization. Worse still, both seemed to be there just for the sake of the music, and I was now loving that music more and more.

Turandot also seemed "baroque" to me. (I realize the anachronism, but might claim that certain parts of Europe did not wash off the Baroque with the cold shower of the Enlightenment before they wallowed into Romanticism.) To me, the structure of Turandot – the lack of an overture, the lengthy first act, the very brief final scene, and all the attention to Ping, Pang and Pong – appeared to be anything but regular and balanced. Even its macabre and lascivious world reminded me of the baroque, since that era in central European history is so bloody and, when it can take time out from its wars, so preoccupied with the grosser dimensions of sexuality and whatever other bodily functions came to mind. In the political realm alone we see the social misery, the garish mass violence (whether top-down or bottom-up), the fatal consequences of missteps at the top, which for the nobility often meant death by the headsman's ax. There were even worse ways to be executed back then, as we know from the examples of the Earl of Essex, the quasi-lover of Elizabeth I. He barely escaped the penalty

that was paid in full by Robert François Damiens, the would-be assassin of Louis XV. Drawing and quartering – disembowelment and castration while still alive, followed by dismemberment, or being pulled limb from limb by teams of horses, with molten lead being applied to the failing joints, fits right in with Turandot's "horrible martyrdom! The sharp irons! The spiked wheels! The searing grip of the pincers! Death long-drawn out!" (III.i.). (The lines are very challenging to the amateur opera chorister: wide-interval eighths and sixteenths at a tempo of 100 quarter-notes a second; no doubt the intent was to simulate the spasms of the victims.)

In my earliest exposure to German literature I had been taught, or at least had learned, to sneer at its baroque drama and poetry as crude and bombastic. Lately I have developed a new affinity to it, perhaps by way of a renewed familiarization with the Lutheran hymnal, which is a sort of anthology of German poetry of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Those are texts which we noticed only fleetingly even in graduate school. And yet, at any given moment in our modern world, they are probably being read and, certainly, sung by more people than are the works of Goethe and Schiller or, much less, those of Lessing or – here we reach or exceed the bounds of obscurity – the even much lesser-known Dichter und Denker to whom the world of academic Germanistik still devotes so much attention.

But here we still need to use some of those old critical tools. Turandot does have a decidedly un-baroque feature: it follows the classical unities of time and place. That, however, was something I had been taught –not so much by my professors as by the repository of ancient criticism in the Yale library – to regard as a sign of pseudo-classical slavish attention to superficialities. Those features were of a kind particularly reprehensible to scholars working in an environment where history

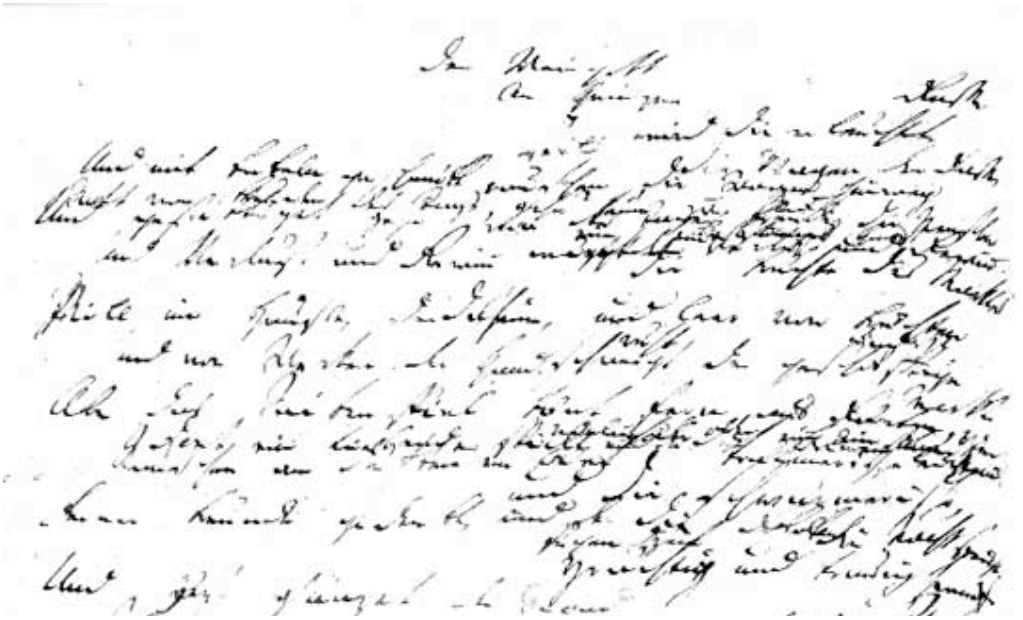
and the history of literature still had meaning and a Kultur had an essence and a telos. Classical unities, acknowledged as having their roots in Latin or, much more desirable, Greek sources, nevertheless clearly had a reek or – worse – a fragrance of the effeteness of France. They were a set of artificial and superficial principles against which German literature, helped by the example of Shakespeare, had had to rebel in order to create the drama of Sturm und Drang that would then lead to Goethe and the emergence of a truly German literature and, eventually, a culturally and even politically unified German nation. (We talked little of how those effete French were somehow so successful in war, and we knew even less about what went on, or did not go on, in the bedroom of Frederick the Great, or what certainly did go on, in the Prussian military, at least in the officers' quarters, after their equivalent of "Taps.") As for what was to happen during the time of Goethe, we learned that the approaching end of history would be declared by Hegel, himself then to be superseded by Marx, who then was superseded by...

But never mind. The aesthetic of Turandot perplexed me. For all the direct sensual pleasure I was getting from the music and the prospect of appearing on stage, I pondered on atavistically. I continued to look for deeper and higher meaning and aesthetic rationale, and it is not without amusement that, a third of a century later, I recalled my own intellectual atavism, because I was enjoying Turandot so darn much. Still, I had to start figuring it out in the terms and concepts of a one-time German major and Ph.D. candidate. Either we had a lousy plot (and it was then, by necessity, a lousy opera); or we had a lousy plot (but who was to care, except maybe some musty German traditionalists?). Was Turandot actually a more deeply unified piece, with Ping, Pang and Pong intended to contribute something inte-

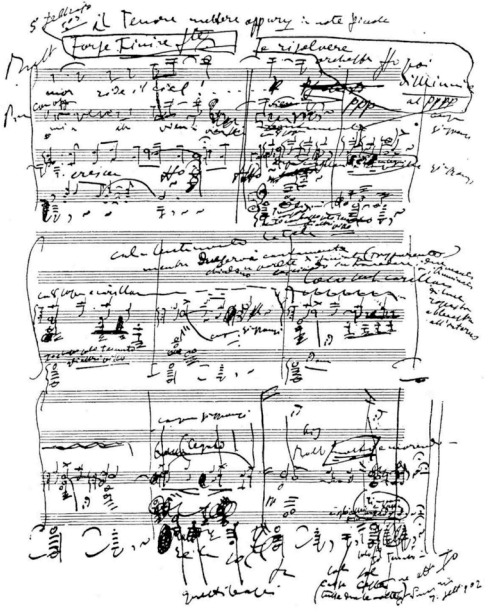
gral to it, like the merry-morbid gravediggers in Hamlet, or the sourpuss Malvolio in Twelfth Night? The gravediggers assert humor and on-going life in the midst of violence and death, and the sad-sack's pomposity and triviality amplify the final connubial bliss, from whose realm he is physically ejected. So was Turandot giving us something between Faux-Chinese Marx Brothers and a pre-Mao Gang of Not Four But Three?

Hindsight helps, but it does that, by definition, only afterward. What happened when I turned to Turandot was that I found a wide and deep hole in my cultural background. I knew nothing about the piece, not even the "Nessun Dorma" aria used as the theme-song of the 1990 World Cup. I knew almost nothing about Puccini, and I came to realize all that right when I was reading Danto, and doing both Danto and Turandot in the midst of wars both cultural and actual. My university library and the internet provided the facts I needed, but facts are not thoughts; they have no meaning by themselves. I had to try to fit Turandot into my cultural "horizon of expectations," as Hans Robert Jauß put it in a book of his that I read in graduate school. I don't know whether anyone reads Jauß anymore, though I'm glad I did.

A third of a century after graduate school, I encounter my cultural artifacts, and all of the humanities, including especially history, no longer as a scholar of the humanities, but rather as one who can and, given the ever more evident finitude of my life, must look for what they say about our humanity. Yes, I am constructing the meaning of the artifact. Better, I am construing it, adding my specific meanings to the ones it began with. That should not be confused with academic post-modernism. Although I didn't know it at the time, I was going against Danto, insisting that I had a narrative into which I could fit Turandot. ❦



MS of the first few lines of the first stanza of "Brod und Wein." Hölderlin started with ••four phrases (the heavy-ink parts on the right half of the text-block). He then overlaid them with more phrases, often adding further corrections to the additions, until some expressions have as many as ••four distinct stages of development. At the same time, he maintained, without seeming effort, the metrical structure of the classical ••distichon, as is shown by the alternation of unindented and indented lines. The MS carries the original title of the poem,. "Dem Weingott" ("To the God of Wine").



MS page of *Madama Butterfly*

II • PERDUTA LA BATTAGLIA

> I really meant to proclaim that a certain kind of closure had occurred in the historical development of art, that an era of astonishing creativity lasting perhaps six centuries in the West had come to an end.…It was not my view that there would be no more art, …but that whatever art there was to be would be made without benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage in the story. What had come to an end was that narrative but not the subject of the narrative, I hasten to clarify.
>
> Danto, 21, 4

I DEVOTED MOST OF A YEAR AT YALE to writing my senior thesis about one – I say, one – German poem: "Brod und Wein" (approx. 1801), by Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843).[3] To be sure "Brod und Wein" is a great poem, but even within its own culture it is obscure; it is caviar to the general. Not until *Turandot*, half a lifetime later, did I explore and experience a work of art so personally and, in the sense that art can lead us to re-examine the rest of our world, so intensively and extensively. The aesthetic experience was worth every moment. I use "aesthetic" in both its common sense of "appreciation of art" and its connotation of sublimity of emotion. If you are unfamiliar with "Brod und Wein," Eliot's "Wasteland" somewhat resembles it, though with less depth, erudition, passion, faith, and, of course, hope. Hölderlin, moreover, wrote not just one but half a dozen such exegeses of the meaning of his culture and the position of the individual in it. His manuscripts, with revision piled on revision, and most of them not edited during his lifetime, are as challenging to decipher as Puccini's manuscript scores.

While I was puzzling my way through "Brod und Wein" and the rest of German literature, others at Yale, some of them living in the same residential college, were otherwise occupied. One, who lived two floors above me in the same entryway in 1966-67, became a President, serving in Washington while I was singing in *Turandot*. I knew even

back then that he had a prominent father, but the evidence from upstairs and my mistaken notion of the spelling of the family name led me to assume erroneously that the son was the scion of the Anheuser-Busch family. On the same floor that year, through a fire-door, was a future head of the Federal Communications Commission. Somewhere nearby in the same residential college, and , already then making a national name for himself, was the cartoonist who would later become the scourge of the two Presidents, father and son. Elsewhere on campus while I was at Yale were a law student who would succeed the father-President and then be succeeded by the son-President; his future wife, the future senator from New York and herself a presidential contender; a future senator who would lose to the son-President in 2004, a future governor of Vermont who would lose in the 2004 primaries to that other future senator; and a future senator from Connecticut who would run for Vice President on the losing ticket in 2000. I do not recall seeing, much less speaking to, any of them except the future head of the FCC. But the libraries of Yale are big and in them there are many carrels; getting one on a Saturday night was never a problem. I could get all the Hölderlin I wanted, there, in my room, or anywhere I had the poem. Neither DKE nor Skull and Bones, nor even the Yale Political Union, had anything to give me.

Hölderlin's command of poetic German in its most elevated register loses nothing in comparison to Goethe's. But Hölderlin's concerns make him much more akin to the other German giant, Schiller. That is not surprising, since Hölderlin had cut his philosophical and poetic teeth on Schiller, while also directly ingesting, in their native languages, and thoroughly digesting, into his own thought and language, what appears to be the entire vital essence of Scripture and of classical Greek thought, art and literature as well. He did that before he was my age when I finished my dissertation. Not much later he lost his

mind, though he lived as many years after that as before. Some scholars suggest that he was faking madness to avoid the consequences of being associated with a group that was conspiring against the tyrannical Duke of Württemberg (about whom more shortly).

Schiller has received his due as a cultural icon, a poetical and dramatic *praeceptor germaniae* in the "Land of Poets and Thinkers." The German-speaking countries name their streets after such figures, certainly out of respect for them, at least among the public elite. Also, considering the violent twists and turns of central European history, it is safer and cheaper to do so than to use the names of today's politicians or rulers and than to have to replace them with other names every quarter of a century. Where names of rulers, statesmen and politicians were used anyway, the Twentieth Century saw at least four changes of street names, or five for the territory that made up the now-defunct East Germany. That is where I would have lived had my grandparents not emigrated to Nebraska (if indeed had I been born at all, since my father would likely not have survived the war serving in Hitler's navy rather than in Roosevelt's).

Schiller's poems are, or at least were, memorized by generations of schoolchildren, including those in the once-huge German-American community in the United States; his dramas still serve as mainstays of the German stage. And Schiller is, to boot, a "good German:" he is useful both in his native culture and in American college German programs because he can be vaunted as a voice of early nineteenth-century German liberalism (in the positive sense of that word). He was the creator of freedom-loving William Tell, a champion of freedom of thought in his *Don Carlos*, and the poet of the "Ode to Joy" that Beethoven took for his choral symphony about brotherhood and peace. In our time that has become – hope springs eternal – the tri-

umph-song of the breaching of the Wall and then the supra-national anthem of the European Union.

But Schiller's prose writing, especially on the philosophy of culture, is insufficiently appreciated. Here I mean not his essays on specifically artistic topics, but rather his thought about the dynamic of psyche, language, society and historical event that produces – but then also somehow eventually destroys – a civilization and its culture; or does so, that is, if one persists in believing that history is, or can aim to be, something other than the chronicle recorded by the city scribe or a self-serving myth, the "Noble Lie" of a utopia, and that civilizations are determined by something more or other than geography or germs, blood and iron, or guns, germs and steel, or floods, famines and emperors. In short, Schiller (and the amazingly fertile German philosophers and historians of his time and the rest of the Nineteenth Century) did much to give modern Western thought the notion of an objective and yet a causal narrative of history, and with that the urge to develop theories to discern the organic development, decline, and even resurgence of a *Kultur* ("culture" or "civilization" or both – take your pick). If they thought in terms of an "end of history", however, they certainly did not think that the end of history would bring the end of art.

In prose, Schiller developed his theory and analysis of history, civilization and culture in the epistolary essay "Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen" / "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Human Beings" (1795). The title is curious, almost a scandalous frivolity considering what was going on at the time in France and, as they were then called, "the Germanies". But for Schiller "aesthetic education" means the development of the human being and of human society, both as a whole; and "Erziehung" indicates that for him the history of a culture is not one of modern, neo-Darwinian, non-teleological passive evolution from one stage to the next, with no stage or

form of life allowed to claim superiority. Rather, Schiller writes secular *Heilsgeschichte*, a history of cultural salvation, an attempt at an exegesis of the Book of History to see how divinity once came to Earth and dwelt among and within us, equally in ancient Greece and in the Holy Land, and how humankind might experience a second coming, not just of an individual savior but of an entire saved culture, where the stone that had so long been rejected (Germany) would become the cornerstone of the new temples of Attica and Jerusalem. Figure that out, and you'll feel much better; then all you have to do is help history along – but how?

(For Hölderlin, and Schiller and Goethe as well, when it comes to New Jerusalems and Germany, the less said about Berlin, the better. And neither Hölderlin nor Schiller has much to say about that pre-figuration of Berlin, classical Rome; Goethe was enamored of Italian Rome but then again, he had the money to travel there and live well in what is now the "Casa di Goethe" on the Corso.)

Schiller's elegiac poem, "Der Spaziergang / The Walk" (also 1795), composed in classical elegiac couplets, outlines his theory of cultural evolution as it applies to ancient history. The rhymed strophic poem "Die Götter Griechenlandes / The Gods of Greece" (1788) had already added the modern perspective: what is it that has brought about our Fallen Age? Is there any hope? and, as Marx and Engels, Schiller's descendants on the black-sheep side of the German intellectual family would later put it, What is to be done? But Schiller just set the table for Hölderlin. Schiller – and others, too, of course, but Schiller most famously at the time – formulated the axioms and postulates, extracted and organized the data. (By "data" I mean significant cultural phenomena, not mere statistics.) And he gave German thought and literature the conceptual and poetic foundations to theorize about culture through the medium of poetry, where poetry aims both to be art (to

deliver beauty) and Scripture (to convey truth, more specifically revealed truth) – again, with no thought that the end of history would bring about the end of art.

Poetry as a medium for serious philosophical and scientific exposition is known from other times and places (Hesiod, Pope, the elder Darwin, Eliot). The German tradition, however, is far more central to its native culture, both in the œuvres of great poets and in the way it is embedded so deeply in the culture and tied to other prime forms of expression in it. In Hölderlin's instance the immediate nexus includes Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and Schelling, the latter two of whom were his schoolmates at the academy in Tübingen. Yes, Keats and Eliot wrote of, respectively, the beauty and truth or the horror and meaningless of individual existence and an entire civilization, but they wrote also of so much else. "The Wasteland" is Eliot, of course, but Eliot is not just "The Wasteland." To grasp Hölderlin in his cultural "race, temps et milieu," think of Pope, Gibbon, Mill, and Blake rolled into one, with some Arnold, Newman and the more serious aspect of Tennyson ("Locksley Hall") added for flavor.

If we look at "Brod und Wein" from *outside* the poem, we can say that Hölderlin creates an intellectually challenging but also poetically visionary exploration of what it means to be human, what culture means and how it comes about. From all that he concludes how history works, which is the applied part of the whole theoretical business. Viewed in its original context, "Brod und Wein" is a deep reflection about classical mythology and the roots of Western civilization. But it also comprises a meditation about the very same concepts and phenomena that we find in the latest research about cultural anthropology and paleoarchaeology as those modern disciplines attempt to correlate with each other some features of ourselves and our culture that are so provocatively but still mysterious associated: the emergence of consciousness, the explosion of

art, the innovation of agriculture, technology and urbanization, and the proliferation and specialization of social structures in a span of time that is much too short for ordinary evolution to produce it, along with, and perhaps related (or perhaps not?) the rapid innovation of language, which may or may not have depended on certain physiological innovations. These days a lot of the heavy betting here is on the emergence of language, while at the same time the linguistics people are telling us that language is arbitrary symbols without inherent meaning, that meaning itself is essentially meaningless. Hölderlin, two centuries earlier, put those two trains of thought together: language is the motivator and facilitator of consciousness and culture, and thus of history; it is also the cause of alienation and historical decay, of *an* End of History which, however, does not have to be *the* End of History.

But we also have to look at Hölderlinian History from *within* the poem: Something has gone horribly wrong, the fictive speaker of Hölderlin's world and time says to his companion. But maybe there's still hope. History *does* have meaning, and we have not yet reached the End of History. Our best Signs, our intuition and our feeling for the monuments of our civilization, tell us where to find the answer. So let's go! / "Dorthin!" First stop: Greece. The landscape is right, but we need to go from Now back to Then, when human existence was harmonious with Nature and the Divine. Turns out it's not that easy. Back then, Man was too smart to be comfortable with the Immanent Unity, but not smart enough to understand it completely. A key moment was the emergence of language, linked to the emergence of self-consciousness. Language is the power to name and thus, it may seem, understand; it permits social organization and the constructions of civilization, with its buildings and the arts, as responses to the Divine. But it also creates alienation, distance between subject (mind) and object (thought, outside world, Deity).

When the alienation becomes severe, it appears that the gods that were in the world have left it. Social alienation and individual depression ensue, but some, among them the most sensitive, alienated, and depressed, can perceive the signs of past unity and coming re-unity. The Signs are Bread and Wine, melded toward the end of the poem into the Eucharist of post-classical Western civilization, the symbols of Dionysos and Ceres from the classical past, and just the simple evening refreshment on the table as the speaker and his companion engage in a moonrise revery.

As I entered into *Turandot*; as *Turandot*, which had been proclaimed the end of Italian Grand Opera, entered into me; as I linked it to my reading and my reading to it; as I strove to understand what Danto meant by the end of art history, sensing already that I was not going to like what he had to say; and as I reflected on the nature and fate of culture and civilization that so occupied us in 2003, even before the beheadings in Iraq made agonizingly more macabre those in *Turandot*, I came back to "Brod und Wein." But really, I had never left it. It was all there in my mind and heart and language, where I had carefully and wonderingly and lovingly put it thirty-five years, or half a human lifetime, before as I accepted my bachelor's diploma and soon enough turned to quite other areas of German literature.

Or rather, it was there where *Hölderlin* had put it. It had taken me twenty years from the start of my life to acquire this precious basic artifact and tool and experience and aesthetic education; later, perhaps twenty years from the end of my life, I had it when I needed it most. Even if I didn't know it at the start of rehearsals, I was ready for *Turandot*, for Danto, for a look at my reading and at contemporary events, and for a trip back to "Brod und Wein." Your education – and of course I can't remember just who said this – is what you still have left after you have forgotten what you learned. ◠