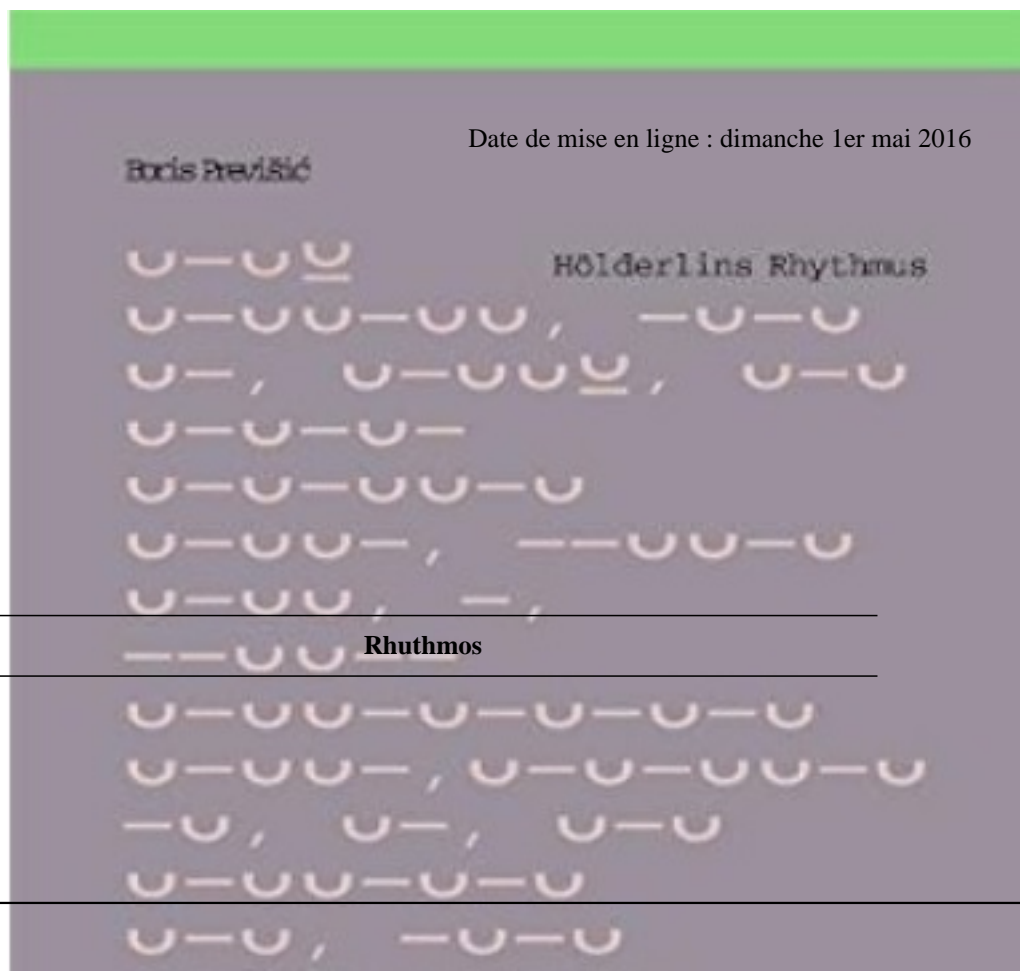


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Boris PREVISIC, Hölderlins Rhythmus : Ein Handbuch

- Lectures
- Recensions



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Boris Previsic, *Hölderlins Rhythmus : Ein Handbuch*, Frankfurt/Main, Stroemfeld, 2008, 320 p.

Following an inductive approach, rather than advancing a set of claims, the primary ambition of the present study is a practical one : to create a *« handbook »* for the rhythmical analysis of Hölderlin's poetry by describing rhythmical features of individual poems. The central focus is the group of free verse poems composed after 1800 known as the *vaterländische Gesänge*, interpretations of which, although numerous, have tended to privilege philosophical implications over formal considerations. Any formal approach to free verse must grapple with the possibility of assigning consistency to rhythmical pattern, a question which the title of this book decides by placing *Rhythmus* in the singular. Previsic's method is a systematic one, seeking to provide an *Überblick* of the development of Hölderlin's rhythm by treating *Rhythmus* as a coherent formal characteristic with its own significance.

Previsic pursues Hölderlin's poetic development as a genetic process, focusing particular attention on textual variations and revisions. Of central importance is the transition from metrical to free verse, described as a process of *metrische Dekomposition* that occurs both chronologically and synchronically within individual poems. The introduction explains the method used and an appendix provides the detailed analyses of individual poems on which the two central sections of the study are based. The first, entitled *« Voraussetzungen für den freien Vers, »* traces the shift from metrical to free verse in Hölderlin's odes and elegies, his translations from Greek, and exemplary poems from the sequence of *Nachtgesänge*, demonstrating how these poems test the limits of metrical form and exhibit a variety of rhythmical possibilities.

Through close formal and textual analysis, the book's second section considers rhythm in each of the major completed *Gesänge* (*« Die Wanderung, » « Germanien, » « Der Rhein, » « Friedensfeier, »* and *« Patmos, »* as well as the fragment *« Der Einzige »*), foregrounding different aspects of the *metrische-rythmische Differenz* : the semantic implications of rhythm, the relation between sound and syntax, the repetition of basic metrical periods and rhythmical patterns within free verse, and the relation between free verse and prose. Previsic's analysis of *« Der Rhein, »* to cite one example, supplements existing scholarship by interpreting the *« Gesez dieses Gesanges »* not only in light of the *Wechsel der Töne* or Pindaric strophic form, but in terms of the poem's own basic rhythmical phrases.

By approaching the problem of free verse through an analysis of metrical-rhythmical differences, this study makes the underlying and seemingly paradoxical assumption that Hölderlin's free rhythms are continuous with his use of classical meters. Rather than adopting a modern phonological or accentual system of scansion, Previsic grounds his use of classical prosodie terminology in a historical treatment that seeks to account for how poetic rhythm was understood by Hölderlin and his contemporaries. Following the work of several recent critics in bringing awareness to Hölderlin's familiarity with a variety of classical meters, Previsic also turns to Karl Philip Moritz's *Versuch einer deutschen Prosodie* (1786 ; 1815), a text which, though perhaps unknown to Hölderlin, represents a contemporaneous approach to the relation between rhythm, syntax and meaning characteristic of Hölderlin's free verse style.

Previsic's consideration of the rhythmical dimension of meter and the metrical character of free verse, as well as the interplay between rhythm and meaning, frequently characterizes Hölderlin's rhythm in terms of alternating tendencies. This idea is given particular shape in a chapter on Hölderlin's translations from Greek. After an initial *« metrische Phase »* in which Hölderlin seeks to imitate as closely as possible the meter of the original Greek, his translations of Sophocles and Pindar become more rhythmical and, paradoxically, more typical of the original : *« Je weiter sich Hölderlin vom Rhythmus des Originals entfernt, desto stärker imitiert er dessen Grundrhythmus »* (86) .

At the level of rhythm, Hölderlin's translations reflect the insights of the letters to Böhlendorff concerning the relation of the Germans and the Greeks. In similar terms, Previsic describes the development of Hölderlin's Eigenrythmus - rhythm coming into its own - as a hesperische Bewegung, toward and away from classical metrical forms.

Taken as a whole, this book offers a compelling narrative of the rhythmical tendency - understood both as the tendency toward rhythm and the rhythm of that tendency - of Hölderlin's poetry. In addition to providing a system or « handbook » for analyzing these rhythms, perhaps the greater achievement of the book is to demonstrate just how indispensable such analysis may be. While criticism has long recognized the central importance of rhythmical concepts for Hölderlin's poetics, particularly the caesura, Previsic's book returns such considerations to the actual rhythms of the poems themselves.