



PIERIDES, COEPTIS ADDITE SUMMA MEIS  
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Ovid’s grand poetic treatise, the *Fasti*, structured on the Roman calendar, seems to end rather abruptly on the last day of the sixth month. The author himself would later explain that it was his fate – that is, his forced exile – that interrupted the work in progress. The invocation pronounced on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June implores the Muses to provide the material for the next six months, to complete what he has begun – *Pierides, coeptis addite summa meis* – but the book goes no further.

As it turns out, the 30<sup>th</sup> of June is the day I have to put an end to my writing at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Sadly, my blissful year here in Berlin has to come to a halt. Unlike Ovid’s case, however, exile created the ideal conditions for my work. The gracious administration, the generous staff, the outstanding librarians, not to mention the intellectual energy transmitted among more than thirty international scholars, all contributed to form an exceptionally productive atmosphere. Unlike Ovid’s case? Upon reflection, it seems that my leaving will feel more like an exile. The project that I brought here in its first stages,

on the intersection of music and madness in literature, is now near completion. It remains for me to give an account of my year's accomplishments. To this end, I turn to fond memories of all the wonderful people I had the privilege to know here – my Muses, so to speak – who inspired me to finish what I began and who therefore can best give the work its final touches. *Pierides, coeptis addite summa meis.*

I arrived in August with little more than a couple of papers, scattered notes, and a vague conception of the project's form. The central problem was to understand the preponderant coupling of mad and musical experience that coursed through Romantic literature from Wackenroder to Kleist and Hoffmann. Although the focus would be on German writers around 1800, I knew that I would have to reach back to Diderot's musical fool – *le neveu de Rameau* – and extend my questions, through Nietzsche and Wagnerism, to Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. I also recognized that the protagonist of the story would be neither tonal art nor psychological disturbance per se, but rather language itself. The literary language that I saw developing in these texts appeared to serve a new autobiographical impulse, where the uniqueness of the self was persistently regarded as something altogether elusive and therefore incommensurate with any straightforward verbal description. Accordingly, these writers seemed to turn to metaphors of the mad and the musical as instances where representation or reference failed, so as to salvage, however fragily, the core self from the limitations and falsifications of representational discourse. That, at least, was my incipit. Within weeks of coming to Berlin, I realized that the Wissenschaftskolleg would allow these beginnings, *meae coeptae*, to grow, change, and flourish.

From the start, I enjoyed engaging and fruitful conversations, especially through the Tuesday colloquia, the common lunches, and my weekly meetings with Eva von Kügelgen and Mordechai Kremnitzer. The countless discussions bore both directly and indirectly on my own project. I benefited greatly from talking with Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, who has worked extensively on problems of the voice and orality. The musicologist Judit Frigyesi, the philosopher Irad Kimhi, and the classicists Oliver Primavesi and Luca Giuliani all helped me to formulate better the issues I was grappling with. I could conveniently turn to the theologian Ingolf Dalferth for references on transubstantiation for my chapter on Kleist or to the patristologist Cristian Badilița for precise information on the biblical allusions I spotted in Heine. Patrizia Nanz's lucid questions on political theory and Carla Hesse's expertise on eighteenth-century moral philosophy impelled me to rethink some of the problems that emerged in my reading of Rousseau and Diderot. Charles Taylor guided me through the difficulties of Hegel's interpretation of the Enlightenment. Hans Zender

pushed me to be clearer in sorting out metaphors of performance, audition, and madness in my analysis of Hoffmann. Yet it was also from less expected corners that I received excellent hints and suggestions on how to proceed. The art historians – Barbara Stafford, Monika Wagner, and Charlotte Klonk – pointed me in various intriguing directions that I would not have otherwise discovered. I even found fresh impetus from fields as distant as jurisprudence, cultural anthropology, economics, and medicine. My year in exile from exile readily proved to be an interdisciplinary paradise. Indeed, for a scholar devoted to the ideals of Comparative Literature, there could hardly have been a more stimulating place.

In addition to providing an extraordinary working environment for me and a comfortable, inviting place for my family, the Wissenschaftskolleg gave me access to many marvelous opportunities. The staff graciously supported a special weekend seminar for me and my European colleagues on the “Afterlife of Antiquity”. Hans Zender kindly asked me to write the commentary for his latest recording of compositional settings of poems by Friedrich Hölderlin and Hugo Ball. I was honored with invitations to speak at the Zentrum für Literaturforschung and the Freie Universität, where I could test chapters in progress. It was also through the Kolleg that I got the chance to present my entire project at length in a televised interview with Alexander Kluge, filmed in Potsdamer Platz at the height of the Berlinale.

Now, as I dutifully pack up the piles of photocopies and the inordinate number of books purchased over a year, occasionally pausing for a glass of water during the veritable *canicule* that has descended upon the Prussian capital, I can only hope that I shall be able to bring back with me some of the intensity, illumination, and truly familial warmth that will forever define my experience at the Wissenschaftskolleg.