

**TEXT 36**

**ELEUSIS**

To Hölderlin. August 1796.

Around me, within me, quiet dwells; the never-weary  
care of busy human beings sleeps; they give  
freedom and leisure to me - thanks to you, my  
liberator, O Night! - with white veil of mist  
the moon encircles the uncertain boundaries  
of distant hills; kindly the bright strip  
of the lake gleams across -  
memory sets far away the tedious clamor of the day,  
as though years lay between it and now;  
your image, beloved, steps before me,  
and the joy of vanished days; yet soon it yields  
to sweeter hopes of reunion -  
Already the scene of the long-desired, fiery  
embrace paints itself before me; then the scene of questions,  
of secret, mutual probing,  
what here in bearing, expression, cast of mind in the friend  
has changed since that time - the bliss of certainty,  
to find the fidelity of the old covenant firmer, riper still,  
the covenant that no oath sealed,  
to live only for free truth, never, never to make peace  
with the statute that rules opinion and feeling.  
Now desire negotiates with sluggish actuality,  
which lightly carried me over mountains, rivers to you,  
- but a sigh soon proclaims their quarrel, and with it  
the dream of sweet fantasies escapes.  
My eye rises to the vault of eternal heaven,  
to you, O shining star of night!

and forgetfulness of all wishes, all hopes  
streams down from your eternity;  
{the sense loses itself in contemplation,  
what I called mine vanishes,  
I give myself over to the immeasurable,  
I am in it, am all, am only it.  
To returning thought it becomes strange,  
it shudders before the infinite, and, almost astonished,  
does not grasp the depth of this contemplation.  
Imagination brings the eternal nearer to sense,  
weds it to form -> Welcome, you  
sublime spirits, high shades,  
from whose brows perfection shines!  
it does not frighten - I feel it is also the ether of my homeland,  
the gravity, the radiance, that flows around you.  
Ha! now the gates of your sanctuary itself spring open,  
O Ceres, you who once were enthroned in Eleusis! Drunk  
with inspiration, I would now feel  
the shudders of your nearness,  
would understand your revelations,  
would interpret the high meaning of the images, would hear  
the hymns at the banquets of the gods,  
the high sayings of their council. -  
Yet your halls are mute, O goddess!  
The circle of the gods has fled back to Olympus  
from the desecrated altars,  
fled from the grave of profaned humanity,  
the genius of innocence that conjured them here! -  
The wisdom of your priests is silent; no sound of the sacred  
initiations  
has saved itself down to us - and in vain seeks  
the researcher's curiosity - more than love  
of wisdom (that the seekers possess, and  
they despise you - to master it they dig for words  
in which your lofty meaning would have been imprinted!  
In vain! perhaps they grasped only dust and ashes,

into which your life will never return to them.

Yet even among mold and soulless matter they found pleasure,  
the eternally dead! - the self-satisfied! - in vain - there remained  
no sign of your festivals, no trace of an image!

To the son of initiation the fullness of lofty teachings,  
the depth of ineffable feeling, was far too holy  
for him to deem dry signs worthy of them.

Even thought scarcely grasps the soul  
which, outside time and space, sunk in intimation of infinity,  
forgets itself, and now awakens again

to consciousness. Whoever even wished to speak of this to others,  
though he spoke with angels' tongues, feels the poverty of words;  
he shudders at having thought the holy so small,  
at having made it so small through them, that speech seems sin to  
him,

and, trembling, he closes his mouth.

What the initiate thus forbade himself, a wise  
law forbade to poorer spirits: not to make known  
what, in sacred night, he had seen, heard, felt -  
lest, even among the better, the clamor of their mischief  
disturb him in his devotion, lest their hollow jumble of words  
make him angry at the holy itself, lest this  
be so trampled into the mire that one entrusted it  
even to memory - lest it become  
a toy and ware of the sophist,  
which he sold by the obol,  
a cloak of the eloquent hypocrite, or even  
already the rod of the cheerful boy, and so empty  
in the end that it would have the root of its life only  
in the echo from foreign tongues.

Jealously, your sons, O goddess, did not carry  
your honor into street and market; they guarded it  
in the inner sanctuary of the breast -  
therefore you did not live upon their lips;  
their life honored you; in their deeds you live still.

This night too I heard you, holy deity;  
the life of your children too often reveals you to me,  
I often intuit you as the soul of their deeds!  
You are the high meaning, the faithful belief  
which, a divinity, does not waver even when all else perishes.

Textual note: The source critical apparatus documenting deletions, substitutions, damaged manuscript edges, and draft layers is not reproduced line by line in this English batch. The translated main text follows the edited reading of Text 36, retaining the visible draft markers such as the opening brace and arrow where they affect the printed structure.