

***Holderlin Town**

The title alludes to the German poet, Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin. He wrote around the early 1800s and was one of the greatest German lyric poets melding classical and Christian themes in his works. As a man, Hölderlin was often suffering and pessimistic, lacking both money and recognition. He got more attention long after his death. The first line of Carson's poem directly addresses Holderlin, "You are mad to mourn alone." This line is also relevant to Hölderlin's life because he was believed to suffer from schizophrenia or some form of insanity in his later years. Anne Carson writes this poem as her view on the person of Hölderlin. She responds to Hölderlin's attitude by playing to it. The tone in Carson's poem seems helpless, especially with the final line describing props hurtling past. She frames the poem with the word "you" to make sure the reader pays attention to the addressee. She seems to be saying, "Yes Hölderlin, the wells have gone dry, there's light but all the way at the bottom, everything's moving around you, and that's why you are going crazy." She agrees with his view to an extent, but calls Hölderlin mad to mourn his view of the world alone. Other people can relate.

Amendments

Holderlin (abby)

The idea that the wells have gone dry and there is starlight at the bottom, even without context suggests that there is still water present because SOMETHING is there reflecting the sky. The idea that a schizophrenic or otherwise mentally ill person may be related to a well in that they are both very deep and very empty, either mournfully or whatever. It does seem like a direct address to Holderlin, but since YOU is used, we must somehow try to put ourselves into the poem as well, just to cover all the bases of possible meaning.

tom (none)

Holderlin Town (tiffany)

I had no idea who Holderlin was until I read the analysis, but the fact that he was depressed and possibly schizophrenic helps to put the rest of the poem into context, although the themes could be applied to just about anyone. Depression/mourning is a pretty universal symptom of life. Anyway, as Casey points out, the speaker of the poem is speaking directly to Holderlin himself - "You are mad to mourn alone." "Wells gone dry" seems to allude to that point where you've cried so much that no more tears will come because you're dried up. "Starlight lying at the bottom" is a cool line because starlight is usually an overhead beacon, something that inspires hope. Here, instead, the light is at the bottom of a well, unable to illuminate anything because it is contained. It is then likened to "a piece of sound", which seems like a scream to me (maybe of anguish?). "Props hurtle past you" seems to situate Holderlin in a constant, stationed state of grief while the rest of the world moves past. Stuck in a rut.

monte (none)

Holderlin Town (mike)

I didn't know the reference to Holderlin, it makes a lot more sense that the poem addresses someone specifically. Mourning past the point of tears, hope lying at the end. A piece of sound, I'm not sure if that is a reference to a piece of music. At the bottom of emotional depletion lie starlight, incredible beauty, and music. Props is a great word, something that supports shouldn't be something hurdling past unless one is falling. In the line it also addresses the you of the poem. Who is the you, why are they really falling?

Holderlin Town Amendment: (matt)

I think here you should look at the line "like a piece of sound" in this poem, because having read about the reference I think this could be quite important. The sound of a poem is critical, especially to a lyrical poet. The idea that starlight lying in wells like a piece of sound gives me the image of wells of poetry, heavenly in origin, but the wells have gone dry. In the latter stages of his life, Holderlin wrote little poetry because of his mental illness. Here the poem calls him crazy for not finding someone to share his grief with, but the image suggests to me that it is already too late, he is too far gone into his madness. And this also ties into sense of helplessness by speaking about his inability to access the poetry that is still at the bottom of these wells inside him.

martin (none)

Holderlin Town (marina)

I really don't know much about Holderlin as a poet, but I suppose if he was indeed a romantic lonely poet, and had to go about his life in solitude and this poem is taking on his voice, which well, I can't really refute knowing pretty much nothing about the guy, and the whole version sounding credible enough to me, I think that the language of the poem kind of points to a more or less archaic and/or romanticized persona. Yeah, I'm rambling now...

craig (none)

Courtney (none)

Holderlin Town (casey)

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Holderlin Town (Allison)

The poem definitely appears to be about Holderlin the poet, who was a pessimist and lonely throughout the bulk of his life. I'm glad the analysis went into that. I would have liked to see some reference to the starlight, especially because Holderlin wrote so much about mythology and Christianity, which can lead to images of the sky and the heavens.

It's interesting that the starlight is at the bottom like a piece of sound, especially when starlight is usually seen. I don't know why Carson chose to talk about starlight and wells because as far as I could find, there were no direct references to Holderlin's poetry.