

Oxford University Faculty of Theology:
Centre for Theology and Modern European Thought

Heidegger on Language, Poetry, and the Holy

*A one-day colloquium on themes of language, poetry and religion in
Heidegger.*

***Judith Topping** (University of Oxford) Heidegger's Early Reading of
Romantic Poetry

***Paola-Ludovika Coriando** (University of Freiburg) Language and simplicity:
Hölderlin and Heidegger

Paul Davies (University of Sussex) Poetic Moods and the Idea of the Holy.

Simon Jarvis (University of Cambridge) Language, Truth and Verse

Robin Purves (University of Central Lancashire) Heideggerian Influences on
British Poets of the 1960s and 1970s.

***George Pattison** (University of Oxford) The Philosopher and the Word of the
Novelist: Heidegger, Death, and Russian Literature.

Salvation is in Suffering: Heidegger between Hölderlin and Luther

Heidegger's reading of poetry—and indeed his own most poetic writing—is usually associated with his middle period: his university lectures on Hölderlin in the 1930's, published as *Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung* (1937) and *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (1944), and his private lecture on Hölderlin and Rilke, 'Wozu Dichter?', published in *Holzwege* (1950). Consequently, Heidegger's reading of poetry is also indelibly associated with his support for National Socialism. His public engagement with Hölderlin followed the National Socialist Party's official endorsement of the poet as a 'cultural prophet'¹; his own interpretation of both Hölderlin and Rilke turns on precisely their role as 'prophets' or 'priests' of a god to come—a coming which it is the particular role of Germany to prepare. In his 1934-5 lecture course on Hölderlin's poems 'Germanien' and 'Der Rhein', Heidegger presents the poet as announcing precisely what Heidegger himself understands the rise of the Nazi Party to be, namely a new because German history for the West: 'The hour of our [German] history has struck'.²

This essay is concerned with the quasi-theological aspect of this nationalist claim. Heidegger is, in effect, enunciating a de-Christianized eschatology. In his 1936 lecture 'Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung',³ he interprets the new age announced by the poet—the 'hour of German history'—as an apocalyptic one: 'Es ist die Zeit der entflohenen Goetter *und* des kommenden Gottes'.⁴ Hölderlin, Heidegger explains, no longer looks back to the West as originally identified with the Greeks and their gods, but 'anticipates' (*vorausnehmen*) a new historical time, a new beginning for the West to be identified with the Germans and the god that is to come. The hour for this new beginning, Heidegger claims, has now begun.⁵ (It is worth reminding ourselves that the same attitude of realized eschatology is embodied in the very term *Drittes Reich*, which Arthur Moeller van den Bruck coined not only as an analogue to the two preceding German 'kingdoms', but also with deliberate reference to the 'Third Reich' prophesied by the 12th-century Christian apocalypticist Joachim of Fiore: the millennial kingdom of Christ. The Catholic journal *Hochland*

¹ See Claudia Albert (ed.), *Deutsche Klassiker im Nationalsozialismus : Schiller, Kleist, Hölderlin* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1994); my thanks to Damian Love for drawing my attention to this. (See 'Samuel Beckett and the Art of Madness' [unpublished DPhil dissertation, Oxford 2004], 152).

² Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen 'Germanien' und 'Der Rhein'*, ed. Susanne Ziegler (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 3rd ed., 1999) (= GA 39). Cf. Kathleen Wright, 'Heidegger and the Authorization of Hölderlin's Poetry', in Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme (eds.), *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, Technology* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), pp. 164-174; esp. p. 167.

³ Published as *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (1936-1968)*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2nd ed., 1996) (=GA 4).

⁴ 'It is the age of the gods that have fled *and* of the god that is coming'; GA 4, p. 47.

⁵ See Wright, 'Authorization', p. 173, n. 9.

criticized Van den Bruck and the NSDAP as early as 1931 for applying a term properly belonging to a truly universal Christian kingdom to a secular political ‘Ersatzreich’.⁶)

In his 1946 talk on Hölderlin and Rilke, ‘Wozu Dichter?’, Heidegger no longer believes that the eschatology he has found in Hölderlin is a realized one. But what he has given up is only the identification of Hölderlin’s coming god with the Third Reich, not the eschatological expectation as such:

Die Wende des Weltalters ereignet sich nicht dadurch, daß irgendwann nur ein neuer Gott oder der alte neu aus dem Hinterhalt hereinstürzt. Wohin soll er sich bei seiner Wiederkunft kehren, wenn ihm nicht zuvor von den Menschen ein Aufenthalt bereitet ist? Wie könnte je dem Gott ein gottgemäßer Aufenthalt sein, wenn nicht zuvor ein Glanz von Gottheit in allem, was ist, zu scheinen begänne?⁷

This quote supports the view that Heidegger’s Hölderlin-interpretation in the early years of the Nazi era was not merely a way of rationalizing his political attitude, but that, on the contrary, his support for the Nazis was rooted in a pre-existing, quasi-theological taste for eschatology which survived even the breakdown of Heidegger’s conviction that that eschatology was realized in National Socialism.

One constitutive element of this eschatological outlook on the part of Heidegger is a belief in the (loosely termed) sacramental efficacy of human suffering to prepare, or effect in anticipatory fashion, the presence of ‘god’—whether ‘a new god or the old one anew’.⁸ This belief is rooted in the philosopher’s much earlier, first encounter with Romantic poetry during his student and early lecturer years.

As a preliminary to discussing Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin’s poetry, it will be useful to look at a representative poem. ‘Brod und Wein’, which serves as the starting point for Heidegger’s 1946 lecture, ‘Wozu Dichter?’, was written in 1800. It divides time into two (arguably three) eras, the golden age of ancient Greece, when the gods were present on earth, and raised man to an almost divine height of artistic and cultural achievement; the night following the departure of the gods; and their anticipated return. The pivotal stanzas are VII and VIII.

VII

⁶ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, ‘Das Dritte Reich und die Sturmvögel des Nationalsozialismus’, *Hochland* 28 (June 1931), pp. 193-211.

⁷ ‘The turn of the age does not happen by a new god, or the old one anew, bursting from his ambush. Where should he turn upon his return, if no dwelling has been prepared for him by mankind? How could there be a god-fitting dwelling for the god if a glow of divinity did not first begin to shine in all that is?’; Heidegger, ‘Wozu Dichter?’, in *idem.*, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950), pp. 269-320; p. 270 (= GA 5).

⁸ GA 5, p. 270.

Aber Freund! wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter,
 Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.
 Endlos wirken sie da und scheinen's wenig zu achten,
 Ob wir leben, so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns.
 Denn nicht immer vermag ein schwaches Gefäß sie zu fassen,
 Nur zuzeiten erträgt die göttliche Fülle der Mensch.
 Traum von ihnen ist drauf das Leben. Aber das Irrsal
 Hilft, wie Schlummer, und stark machet die Not und die Nacht,
 Bis daß Helden genug in der ehernen Wiege gewachsen,
 Herzen an Kraft, wie sonst, ähnlich den Himmlischen sind.
 Donnernd kommen sie drauf. Indessen dünket mir öfters
 Besser zu schlafen, wie so ohne Genossen zu sein,
 So zu harren, und was zu tun indes und zu sagen,
 Weiß ich nicht, und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit.
 Aber sie sind, sagst du, wie des Weingotts heilige Priester,
 Welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht.

VIII

Nämlich, als vor einiger Zeit, uns dünket sie lange,
 Aufwärts stiegen sie all, welche das Leben beglückt,
 Als der Vater gewandt sein Angesicht von den Menschen,
 Und das Trauern mit Recht über der Erde begann,
 Als erschienen zuletzt ein stiller Genius, himmlisch
 Tröstend, welcher des Tags Ende verkündet' und schwand,
 Ließ zum Zeichen, daß einst er da gewesen und wieder
 Käme, der himmlische Chor einige Gaben zurück,
 Derer menschlich, wie sonst, wir uns zu freuen vermöchten,
 Denn zur Freude, mit Geist, wurde das Größre zu groß
 Unter den Menschen und noch, noch fehlen die Starken zu höchsten
 Freuden, aber es lebt stille noch einiger Dank.
 Brod ist der Erde Frucht, doch ist's vom Lichte gesegnet,
 Und vom donnernden Gott kommet die Freude des Weins.
 Darum denken wir auch dabei der Himmlischen, die sonst
 Da gewesen und die kehren in richtiger Zeit,
 Darum singen sie auch mit Ernst, die Sänger, den Weingott,
 Und nicht eitel erdacht tönet dem Alten das Lob.⁹

⁹ 'But friend! we come too late. The gods do live, / But above our head, up in another world. / Eternally they act there, and seem to care little / Whether we live, so much do they spare us. / For not always is a weak vessel capable of containing them, / Only sometimes does man endure divine fullness. / Thereupon, life is a dream of them. But errancy / Helps, like sleep, and strong make need and night, / Until enough heroes have grown in the iron cradle, / Hearts which resemble the gods in strength and otherwise. / Thundering they realize it. In the meantime, I often think it / Better to sleep than to be thus without companions, / To wait thus; and what to do and to say in the meantime / I don't know, and wherefore poets in time of scarcity? / But they are, you say, like the holy priests of the wine-god, / Which travelled from land to land in holy night. // For when some time ago now—to us it seems long— / Up rose all those who had made life glad, / When the Father had turned his face from the sight of us mortals / And mourning began, rightly, all over the earth, / When, last, a silent genius appeared, comforting / Divinely, who announced the end of the day and left, / Then as a sign that he had once been there and would come / Again, the heavenly choir left several gifts, / In which we may, as always, rejoice in humanly fashion, / Since for spiritual joy greater things had grown too great / Among humans, and still, still we lack those strong for highest / Joys, but silently some thanks do live on. / Bread is the fruit of the earth, but it is blessed by light, / And from the thundering god issues the joy of wine. / Therefore do we think of the those in

Here and elsewhere in Hölderlin (at least as Heidegger interprets him), the return of the god is predicated on the human realization of his absence. This is the role of the poet ‘in time of scarcity’: fully to expose himself to the darkness of the present night, and to proclaim that darkness to his fellow men. This role is fraught with pain and risk. It requires the poet to sustain a mood of holy mourning about what can no longer be invoked, leading to an ‘overwhelming affliction’ (*Bedrängnis*) of needing to name what is to come. The urge is distressing because it involves awareness of the extreme danger the poet is exposing himself to: awareness that his victory may mean his defeat; that his mastery, his founding act, may require his sacrifice, his falling victim to the forces of darkness or insanity.¹⁰

This idea of eschatological affliction is one that Heidegger worked out a little over a decade earlier in relation to St Paul’s anticipation of the Return of Christ. In *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, a lecture series delivered in Freiburg in 1920/1, Heidegger argues that the appropriate or authentic response to the promised return of Christ—the response first advocated by Paul—is eschatological affliction (*Bedrängnis*): a subjective experience of temporality ‘without order and fixed spots, which cannot be grasped by any objective notion of time’, and thus gives rise to an existential insecurity or uncertainty issuing in an intense and undelegable ‘watchfulness’.¹¹

But the Hölderlin interpretation foregrounds an aspect of this affliction which, although present in the Paul interpretation, is muted by the Biblical source text, and which is nevertheless essential to Heidegger’s developing eschatology: suffering not merely as the necessary epiphenomenon of a more central task—say, watchfulness or struggle—, but as itself quasi-sacramentally efficacious for the task which Heidegger envisions. My claim is that this attitude is the result of a distinctive fusion, in Heidegger’s 1910’s search for alternatives to the traditional Catholicism of his youth, of Romantic literature and a particular kind of Protestant theology.

Heidegger first encountered Hölderlin in a Reclam edition of the poems in 1908, when Heidegger was still in grammar school.¹² His headmaster, in Heidegger’s graduation report, remarks that Martin ‘read a little too much German literature, in which he was very well versed, at the expense

heaven when we eat and drink, / Which were here and shall return in due time, / Therefore do the singers sing earnestly sing of the wine-god / And not vainly invented sounds the Old One’s praise’.

¹⁰ *Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Germanien’ und ‘Der Rhein’ (Wintersemester 1934/35)*, ed. Susanne Ziegler (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 3rd ed., 1999), pp. 18 and 62-3 (=GA39); cf. Wright, ‘Authorization’, p. 171.

¹¹ *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, ed. Matthias Jung, Thomas Regehly, and Claudius Strube (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995), pp. 98 and 104 (= GA 60).

¹² See Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), pp. 57-9 (=GA 1).

of other subjects'.¹³ Shortly thereafter, the publication of several volumes of Rilke's (post- or neo-romantic) poems became one of the highlights of Heidegger's university years.¹⁴

Heidegger's earliest writings, dating from 1909 (the year of his graduation from high school), display little of this literature's influence on him. These essays are polemical pieces in the service of the Catholic anti-Modernist cause, to which Heidegger was committed until his university years, and exemplify a muscular, Darwinist Christianity. So for example, Heidegger argues in a review of Johannes Jørgensen's 1903 autobiography *Lebenslüge und Lebenswahrheit* ('*Per mortem ad vitam*', *Der Akademiker*, March 1910), that just as all 'higher life is predicated on the demise of the lower forms', so the higher, 'spiritual life' requires the 'killing' of 'what is low' in oneself. Rather than being a cause of suffering, such self-mortification or 'carrying [the] cross' naturally brings joy. Extending his earlier biological analogy, Heidegger expounds: 'Das Glück ist nur möglich durch die Lebenslüge. Wird Ibsen recht behalten mit diesem Satze? Nein; er widerspricht einem biologischen Grundgesetze. Die Wahrheit muss naturaliter zum Glücke, die Lüge zum Untergang führen'.¹⁵

In 1911, following the promulgation of the Anti-Modernist Oath, Heidegger experienced a breakdown that forced him to remain at home for a whole semester, and from which he emerged as no longer a theology student working towards the priesthood, but as a philosophy and mathematics student. During this time, and again during another period of personal crisis, in 1915, Heidegger wrote a number of poems deeply indebted to Romantic ideas and styles. The 1911 poems are recognisable pastiches of Romantic poetry; their recurrent use of the Romantic 'angel' trope is directly dependent on Rilke's use of the figure in several of his *Neue Gedichte*, most notably 'L'Ange du Méridien', which also inspired Heidegger's phrase 'Hineingehalten in die Nacht'—another term laden with eschatological significance in his corpus.¹⁶ Vis-à-vis the anti-Modernist texts of 1909 and 1910, these poems show an abrupt change of perspective on pain and suffering. In contrast to the prose texts, the poems present pain not merely as a temporary or

¹³ Rpt. Thomas Sheehan, 'Heidegger's *Lehrjahre*', in John Sallis *et al* (eds.), *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), pp. 77-137; p. 127, n. 49.

¹⁴ See GA 1, pp. 57-9.

¹⁵ "Happiness is only possible through the life-lie." Will Ibsen prove to be right with this statement? No; it contradicts a fundamental biological law. The truth must *naturaliter* lead to happiness, the lie to downfall'; '*Per mortem ad vitam*. Gedanken über Jørgensens "Lebenslüge und Lebenswahrheit"', *Der Akademiker*, vol. 2, no. 5 (March 1910), pp. 72-73; rpt. in Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2000), pp. 3-6; p. 5 (=GA 16). The Ibsen reference is to *The Wild Duck*, Act V: 'Tar De livslognen fra et gennemsnitsmenneske, sa tar De lykken fra ham med det samme'. ('Rob the average man of his life-lie, and you rob him of his happiness at the same stroke'.)

¹⁶ Heidegger's poem 'Ölbergstunden' also borrows its title from Rilke's 'Der Ölbaum-Garten' (in *Neue Gedichte*).

secondary effect of the emancipation from the ‘lower drives’ or ‘Triebwelt’,¹⁷ but as a permanent condition or companion of joy and solace. In ‘Ölbergstunden’ (published April 1911), the experience of spiritual solace, constituting an assurance of authentic faith, is wrested (and can arguably be wrested only) from intense emotional conflict.¹⁸ In ‘Julinacht’ (written summer 1911), joy is not so much born of sorrow as permanently wedded to it: ‘joy, is thy bride’s name “mourning”?’¹⁹

A similar sense of the abiding importance of suffering pervades Heidegger’s correspondence of the time. In 1915, upon a physical and emotional breakdown following Heidegger’s dissolution of his engagement with the Catholic Marguerite (‘Gretel’) Weninger, Ernst Laslowski wrote him a long letter pitying the ‘inhuman difficulty [*Schwere*] of this sacrifice’, but also acknowledging that the intensity of Heidegger’s philosophical ‘vocation’, which raises him ‘above the sphere in which “love” and “happiness” can flourish’, demands it. ‘This suffering’, Ernst assures him, ‘will be a source of strength to [him] and make [him] wise for many things’. And not only Heidegger himself: ‘How peculiar it is; this sacrifice, like all real, great renunciation, does not embitter...but enlivens and enriches, me also; I too feel the purifying power of your decision’.²⁰

But a more systematic development of this general sense of the significance of suffering only occurred in the years following. After his disillusionment with ultramontanist Catholicism around 1911, and his further estrangement from the Catholic establishment after being passed over for a Catholic chair he had hoped for in 1916, Heidegger consciously cast about for an alternative conception of the Christian faith. He was attracted to Schleiermacher’s positing of religious experience as the basis of theology²¹; but many factors, including the readings in Romantic poetry, led him to regard not a feeling of dependence but a feeling of affliction with our own

¹⁷ GA 16, 7.

¹⁸ Ölbergstunden meines Lebens: / im düstern Schein / mutlosen Zagens / habt ihr mich oft geschaut. // Weinend rief ich: nie vergebens. / Mein junges Sein / hat müd’ des Klagens / dem Engel ‘Gnade’ nur vertraut.

¹⁹ Ewigkeitslieder / Singst du mir wieder. / Entführst mir die Seele / In waldstille Weite / Tauchst mich in gottnahe / Unendlichkeiten. / Julinacht / Zauberin / Heimwehlösende / Künstlerin. / Daß früh im Feld / Heut die Sonne starb / Daß in Dämmerung sank / Was ich tags erwarb. / Daß sangesmüd / Der Fink verstummt / Und mürrisch kalt / Der Nachtwind brummt, / Daß die Linden lauschen / Dem Sterbelied, / Daß die Blätter rauschen, / Als ob ich von dir schied— / Wird mir zur herben / Schauernden Frage: Glück deine Braut / Rufst du sie ‘Klage’?

²⁰ ‘[A]ber dieses Leid wird für Dich eine Quelle der Kraft sein und dich für vieles wissend machen.... Wie eigen das ist, dieses Opfer wirkt, wie jede echte, große Entsagung, nicht verbitternd, nicht negativ, sondern belebend bereichernd auch auf mich, auch ich spüre die läuternde Kraft deines Entschlusses’. Letter from 21 November 1915, rpt. in Alfred Denker, Hans-Helmuth Gander and Holger Zaborowski (eds.), *Heidegger und die Anfänge seines Denkens*, being *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 1* (Freiburg: Karl Alber Verlag, 2004), pp. 50-2; p. 51 (=HJB 1).

²¹ Heidegger gave a private lecture entitled ‘Das Problem des Religiösen bei Schleiermacher’ on the occasion of Elfriede Heidegger’s birthday, 1 August 1917; remembered in two letters by Heinrich Ochsner, dated 2 and 5 August 1917; noted in ‘Schriftenverzeichnis (1909-2004)’, compiled by Chris Bremmers, in HJB 1, pp. 419-598; p. 469.

finitude, contrasting so sharply with the eternity and peace of God, as the basic religious experience. Beside Augustine's 'restless heart', the young Luther's *theologia crucis* became especially important for him in this context.

On 9 September 1919, Heidegger wrote to his wife that reading Luther has made 'much that used to be torturing and dark, light and liberating', and has opened a 'wholly new perspectives on the problem of a philosophy of religion'.²² What he refers to is Luther's *theologia crucis*, expounded most succinctly in his Heidelberg Disputation with Johannes Eck:

The manifest and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness. The Apostle in 1 Cor. 1:25 calls them the weakness and folly of God. Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn »wisdom concerning invisible things« by means of »wisdom concerning visible things«, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering (*absconditum in passionibus*).²³

But while Luther regards *Christ's* suffering as revelatory, Heidegger transfers the revelatory function to man's suffering. One (dissident) Catholic source for this attitude is the work of Hermann Schell, whom Heidegger read with enthusiasm between 1909 and 1911. Schell was, like Hölderlin, a one-time student of the Tübingen *Stift*, and strongly influenced by the Catholic Tübingen School. In 1898, Schell's works were temporarily placed on the Roman Index, partly (as he was informed the following year) for their 'over-emphasis of the quasi-sacramental efficacy of death and suffering, and concomitant endangerment of the necessity of [the sacraments of] baptism and extreme unction'.²⁴ In *Katholische Dogmatik* (1889-1893), his *magnum opus*, Schell explicitly defines the essence of martyrdom or *martyrium* ('witness') as suffering, and describes this suffering as sacramental, that is, as a channel of man's participation in the life of God:

The essential quality of the baptism of blood [martyrdom] is the *suffering* that is borne... Therefore the Holy Scriptures call *every suffering* a baptism; the baptism of blood is only the highest degree of the baptism of suffering and sorrow. Through Christ's weakness and suffering, all *evils* that man is subject to until the dissolution of death have been transfigured into a *means of salvation*..., a bond that unites the sorrowful, the oppressed, [and] the weak...in a special way with the crucified.²⁵

²² Gertrud Heidegger (ed.), *'Mein liebes Seelchen!': Briefe Martin Heideggers an seine Frau Elfride, 1915-1970* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005), p.100.

²³ Translation unattributed. Compare *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* (Heidelberger Disputation), ed. J. R. F. Knaake, being Volume I of the Weimar Ausgabe (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883-), pp. 353-374; p. 361.

²⁴ Raimund Lachner, 'Herman Schell', in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 9 (1995), columns 88-99.

²⁵ Schell, *Menschwerdung und Erlösung. Heiligung und Vollendung*, ed. Heinrich Petri and Paul-Werner Scheele (Munich: Schöningh, 1994), p. 407 (being vol. 3 of *Katholische Dogmatik in sechs Büchern*, 3 vols, ed. Josef Hasenfuss und Paul-Werner Scheele [Munich: Schöningh, 1968-1994]); author's emphases.

But Heidegger developed a more radical conception of the participation in the divine brought by human suffering—a conception that turned precisely on the humanness of man’s suffering, his suffering at or from his own finitude. For this, I would argue, a main source was Hölderlin.

On 30 August 1918, Heidegger noted to his wife Elfride: ‘Hölderlin wird mir zur Zeit ein neues Erlebnis—gleichsam als ob ich ganz ursprünglich erstmalig mich ihm näherte’.²⁶ What Heidegger was discovering at the time was Hölderlin’s justification of human suffering as the necessary supplement of divine perfection. Perfection, in Hölderlin’s view, implies a complete being-at-rest in oneself, and consequently, beatitude. At the same time, however, complete self-sufficiency excludes self-awareness, because self-awareness can only arise in the ‘space’ of an enduring self-difference, that is, within (or for) an incomplete self.²⁷ Although in one sense self-sufficient in themselves, the gods thus require humans to *witness* to their perfection, and thus to supplement their lacking awareness of that perfection:

Es haben aber an eigner
Unsterblichkeit die Götter genug, und bedürfen
Die Himmlischen eines Dings,
So sinds Heroën und Menschen
Und Sterbliche sonst. Denn weil
Die Seligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,
Muß wohl, wenn solches zu sagen
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Namen
Teilnehmend fühlen ein Andrer,
Den brauchen sie....²⁸

More often than not, this vicarious (or ‘participating’) ‘feeling’ of humans for gods takes the form of suffering, which functions as a negative witness to divine perfection, and awakens the gods to their own contrasting blessedness. Hölderlin sees his own poetry as both evoking and continuing this witness, for example in ‘Hyperions Schicksalslied’, sung by the protagonist towards the end of the epistolary novel *Hyperion*²⁹:

Ihr wandelt droben im Licht
Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien!

²⁶ ‘Hölderlin is becoming a new experience for me at the moment—almost as if I am approaching him wholly originally (and) for the first time’; Heidegger (ed.), *Mein liebes Seelchen!*, 77.

²⁷ See Gerhard Kurz’s marginal notes to ‘Der Rhein’ (1801), in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Gedichte*, ed. Gerhard Kurz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), pp. 162-166; p. 164. The following discussion and selection of quotes is deeply indebted to Damian Love, ‘Samuel Beckett and the Art of Madness’ [unpublished DPhil dissertation, Oxford 2004], pp. 159-169.

²⁸ ‘Der Rhein’, ll. 105-114; in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), pp. 328-334 (here p. 331).

²⁹ Heidegger writes to Hannah Arendt on 23 August 1925 that ‘among the few books on [his] “desk” is Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*’; in Ursula Ludz (ed.), *Hannah Arendt / Martin Heidegger: Briefe 1925 bis 1975* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2nd ed., 1999), p. 46.

Glänzende Götterlüfte
 Rühren euch leicht,
 Wie die Finger der Künstlerin
 Heilige Saiten.

Schicksallos, wie der Schlafende
 Säugling, atmen die Himmlischen;
 Keusch bewahrt
 In bescheidener Knospe,
 Blühet ewig
 Ihnen der Geist,
 Und die seligen Augen
 Blicken in stiller
 Ewiger Klarheit.

Doch uns ist gegeben,
 Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
 Es schwinden, es fallen
 Die leidenden Menschen
 Blindlings von einer
 Stunde zur andern,
 Wie Wasser von Klippe
 Zu Klippe geworfen,
 Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.³⁰

The temporal and restless existence of humans, in its difference and distance from divine peacefulness and stasis, is the main source of our suffering. However, in its role as witness, suffering, for Hölderlin, also becomes a source of joy for humans, because it constitutes their own proper participation in the divine (indeed their excess over the divine, recalling the gods from the ‘Nothing’ of oblivion).³¹

This sense of suffering forms the basis of a new self-understanding on Heidegger’s part at the time. In 1918, he writes to his friend Elisabeth Blochmann:

[W]o ein Persönlichkeitsleben mit innerer Wahrhaftigkeit auf dem *Wege* der Vollendung ist—und wir sind doch *wesenhaft unterwegs*—da gehört ihm notwendig zu die Herbheit des Gespaltenseins, der Rückfälle und neuen Anläufe, das unaustragbare Leiden am Problematischen und Fragwürdigen—das sind Wesensstücke, zugehörig dem Ethos des wahrhaft wissenschaftlichen und geistigen Menschen.³²

³⁰ ‘You walk up there in the light / On floors like velvet, blissful spirits. / Shining winds divine / Touch you lightly / As a harper touches holy / Strings with her fingers. // Fateless as babies asleep / They breathe, the celestials. / Chastely kept / In a simple bud, / For them the spirit / Flowers eternal, / And in bliss their eyes / Gaze in eternal / Calm clarity. // But to us it is given / To find no resting place, / We faint, we fall, / Suffering, human, / Blindly from one / To the next moment / Like water flung / From rock to rock down / Long years into uncertainty’; Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, pp. 157-158.

³¹ See *ibid*, p. 164.

³² ‘Where a personal life, with inner truthfulness, is on the way to perfection—and we are, after all, *essentially on the way*—there necessarily appertains to it the acerbity of being split, of relapses and new attempts, the

Similarly, in 1919, he justifies his break with institutional Catholicism in similar terms: 'Es ist schwer zu leben als Philosoph—die innere Wahrhaftigkeit sich selbst gegenüber und mit Bezug auf die, für die man Lehrer sein soll, verlangt Opfer und Verzichte und Kämpfe, die dem wissenschaftlichen Handwerker immer fremd bleiben'.³³ And again in 1921, he writes to his student Karl Löwith: 'Wir müssen uns *opfern* und in die *existenzielle* Beschränkung und Faktizität uns zurückfinden, statt uns an Programmen und universalen Problemen abzureflekieren'.³⁴

In the course of the early 1920's, Heidegger traverses the long arc of this attitude, arriving at the unexpected conclusion that philosophy must be 'fundamentally atheistic':

»Atheistisch« nicht im Sinne einer Theorie als Materialismus oder dergleichen. Jede Philosophie, die in dem, was sie ist, sich selbst versteht, muß als das faktische Wie der Lebensauslegung gerade dann, wenn sie dabei noch eine »Ahnung« von Gott hat, wissen, daß das von ihr vollzogene sich zu sich selbst Zurückreißen des Lebens, religiös gesprochen, eine Handaufhebung gegen Gott ist. Damit allein aber steht sie ehrlich, d.h. gemäß der ihr als solcher verfügbaren Möglichkeit vor Gott; atheistisch besagt hier: sich freihaltend von verführerischer, Religiosität lediglich beredender, Besorgnis. Ob nicht schon die Idee einer Religionsphilosophie, und gar wenn sie ihre Rechnung ohne die Faktizität des Menschen macht, ein purer Widersinn ist?³⁵

This journey from philosophy of religion to a-theistic method, and its repercussions in Heidegger's work of the late 1920's, must be more fully discussed elsewhere.³⁶

insuperable suffering of the problematic and the questionable—those are essential elements belonging to the ethos of the truly scholarly [scientific] and spiritual person'. In Joachim W. Storck (ed.), *Martin Heidegger / Elisabeth Blochmann: Briefwechsel 1918-1969* (Marbach: Deutsches Literaturarchiv, 2nd ed., 1990), p. 7.

³³ 'It is *hard* to live as a philosopher—the inner truthfulness vis-à-vis oneself and in relation to those one is called to teach requires sacrifices and renunciations and struggles which remain forever foreign to the mere scholarly craftsman'. Letter from 9 January 1919; rpt. in HJB 1, pp. 67-68; p. 67.

³⁴ 'We must sacrifice ourselves and find our way back into existential limitation and facticity, instead of reflecting (ourselves) away on programmes and universal problems'. Letter from 19 August 1921; in Hartmut Tietjen (ed.), 'Drei Briefe Martin Heideggers an Karl Löwith', in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, vol. 2, ed. Dietrich Papenfuss and Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1990), pp. 27-38; p. 31.

³⁵ Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, ed. Walter Bröcker and Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985), p. 246 (= GA 61). Compare Heidegger's letter to Matthäus Lang (from 1905 Rektor of Heidegger's grammar school in Constance) on 30 May 1928, where he associates the attitude represented by the Löwith letters firmly with philosophy rather than theology: 'Vielleicht zeigt die Philosophie am eindringlichsten und nachhaltigsten, wie anfängerhaft der Mensch ist. Philosophieren heißt am Ende nichts anderes als Anfänger sein. Aber wenn wir bei unserem Knirpstum zu uns selbst die innere Treue bewahren und aus ihr heraus zu wirken suchen, dann muß auch das Wenige zum Guten sein'; in Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt Campus, 1988), pp. 55-6.

³⁶ This is partly undertaken in my 'Heidegger and the Anti-Metaphysical Tradition in Christianity: A Source-Critical Essay', read at the *Oxford-Bonn Theological Seminar*, University of Oxford / Bonn University, August 2007 [unpublished].

What is Simple and Language– Hölderlin and Heidegger

Paola-Ludovika Coriando

(tr. G. Pattison)

1. Language and Dasein

Heidegger's best known statement concerning language runs „die Sprache spricht“. This statement is spoken in the horizon of a thinking that is concerned with the history of being, a thinking that is first developed in the *Contributions to Philosophy*.

In the *Beiträge* this definition of the essence of language becomes understood in terms of a leap, which is in contrast with the previous understanding of language and of man and opens up a transformed perspective (grounded in the manner of thinking). This has an indicative rather than a determinative character.

„Die Sprache spricht“ means that it is not man who speaks; that man, as *zoon logon echon* is not the ruler and owner of language (the leap), but that it is language that opens up the historical and existential co-ordinates of human being-in-the-world (Gründung). Language is thus no longer construed as one, albeit outstanding, property of the reasonable living being, but as the ‚happening‘ (Geschehen) of Dasein.

Dasein itself is to be understood as a signifying concept: it does not name an actually existing objective complex that is put in the place of the *animal rationale*, but points to something that ‚throws itself towards thinking‘, but which does not yet exist in the sense of a thoroughly historical being. Until now, the history of human beings has not been the history of Dasein, but that of the *animal rationale* and of the subject. It is for this reason that the essence of language is mostly occluded and does not speak from out of its essence but hides itself in forms that, as opposed to the Ereignis or event of lucid understanding can be called ‚Ent-eignis‘ or the dispossession of the proper essence of language. When this happens, all there is is the mere communication of information. [I've changed this a bit, to suit the audience, who won't immediately get the pun of Ereignis/ Enteignis] The ‚Conversation‘, of which Hölderlin says, ‚since we

are a conversation' just doesn't happen (mostly). This is a decisive point in order to understand Heidegger's turn towards poetry and especially to the poetry of Hölderlin.

If it is already the case in *Being and Time* that the phenomenological description of the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity culminates in the ethical summons to 'Become who you are!', so too is Heidegger's later thinking ever more clearly sustained by what one could, in a formally indicative manner, call a performative impulse. The jointure of the Ereignis, as developed in the *Beiträgen* by means of such terms as Resonance, Zuspiel ('Putting-in-play'), Leap, Grounding, the To-Come, and the Last God, is the attempt to correspond to a 'historical' tension, the tension between the Not-Yet of the complete, unconcealed happening of the essence (Wesung) of Being (a Not-Yet which is only indicated, and yet to be grounded), on the one hand, and the (historically dominant) Now of Seynsverlassenheit, which, in turn, bears within itself an experienced 'Need', a No-more, the No-more of the First Beginning of the Greeks (the prePlatonic philosophers). This thinking correspondence, however, is not a matter of conforming oneself to some state of affairs that is already to hand, but is a transformative projection.

It is plausible, at least at first, not to exclude the conventional, temporal sense of this Not-yet and No-more tout court. The First beginning of the Greeks is, after all, a dateable epoch in thinking, so too the metaphysics initiated by Plato and the modern transformation of this metaphysics in the philosophy of self-consciousness. Whether this way of understanding it is appropriate and, above all, whether it is fruitful for the dialogue with Heidegger, must be left open for now.

More important for our present purpose is the following: that the consequence of this tension between two truths, the truth that is historically contemporary in a strong sense, and that which is to come, which has not yet been grounded, is that the language of thinking acquires an ambiguous force. The spoken 'is' that normally accompanies a statement (and that, grammatically, is always understood), expands and at the same time leaves the level of what is simply laid out before the speaker so as to become a projection of some state of affairs, appealing to thinking by the fact that it withdraws from it. The force of such utterance is therewith something completely different from

that found in classical Western philosophy, which understands itself as rational cognition of the real.

Admittedly, and explicitly or not, an ethical stance is involved in every ontology, summoning human beings to behave in their factual life in a manner corresponding to what they know as their ontological essence. In this sense Plato's and Kant's philosophies also contain the appeal 'Become who you are'. But in these cases, the structuring of being involved in claims to knowledge, the 'is' of the human being and of Being as such, is something subsisting and unalterable.

In contrast, Dasein does indeed name a universal condition, but of a kind that changes as it is enacted in a fundamental-ontological thinking that has the quality of always being 'my own', and, over and above that, changes historically, in the thinking of the history of Being. Every human being is Dasein, is the disclosedness of Being in general. Yet this is not always fully accomplished and lived authentically but 'proximally and for the most part' in the manner of inauthenticity or, thinking of it historically, of Seinsvergessenheit, in the service of machination (Machenschaft) and enframing (Gestell).

2. Why Hölderlin?

Hölderlin became a companion in Heidegger's wayfaring, because his poetry lived from a similar tension and a similar essential ambiguity. What Heidegger thought as the hesitant resignation and as the abyss (or absence of groundedness), was poetically stated by Hölderlin as the basic tone of „holy sorrow“ concerning the absence of the divine and of the Holy in human history—at least, on Heidegger's own interpretation, which I am for the present merely summarizing.

For Hölderlin too, the present in which we live discloses the trace of something missing, something painful, and it is in this sense that Hölderlin too poetizes from the abyss and absence of groundedness.

Was den Dichter in das Sagen nötigt, ist eine Not. Sie verbirgt sich im Ausbleiben des Anwesens des Göttlichen. In der letzten Strophe seiner Elegie 'Heimkunft' gelangt dieser Ausbleib in das einfache, alles klärende und gleichwohl geheimnisvolle Wort: "es fehlen heilige Nahmen".³⁷

[What makes it needful that the poet speaks, is a Need. This is concealed in the absence of the presence of the divine. In the final verse of his elegy 'Homecoming', this absence finds expression in the word, 'holy names are lacking'—a word that is simple, entirely illuminating, and nevertheless mysterious.]

It is because Hölderlin endures the suffering of this need in his poetic vocation and bears it in an (absent) fullness, that Heidegger finds him to be an historical thinker in an eminent sense, the poet who, more than any other, relates to what is to come:

Hölderlin ist der Zukünftigste, weil er am weitesten herkommt und in dieser Weite das Größte *durchmisst* und verwandelt

[Hölderlin ist the most futural of the ones to come because he comes from the farthest away; and coming from so far away, he *traverses* and transforms what is the greatest].³⁸

To traverse and to transform means to give utterance to what subsists, to what is present, in such a way that it always points anticipatorily to something else, to an 'other' truth. The experience of a lack – experienced in being traversed – is at the same time a transformation. This is because the lack (the present) is determined by 'what is lacking' (but which has been) and as something lacking is, for the poet, still to come, i.e., is future. This is why Hölderlin's poetry does not evoke the utopia of an unattainable state, but the 'barren time' in all its barrenness, or, as Heidegger puts it: the experience of *Seinsverlassenheit*. In this way he invokes an 'is' in the midst of the no-longer and the not-yet, and it is in this sense that he is an 'historical' poet.

Because he is an historical poet, and because he expressly ponders the historical essence of poetry, Hölderlin is, in Heidegger's view, 'the poet of poets'.

³⁷ M. Heidegger, *Der Fehl heiliger Namen* [1974], in: *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 13.* Hrsg. v. H. Heidegger. Frankfurt a. M., S. 232.

³⁸ *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, a.a.O., S. 401. *Contribution to Philosophy*, p. 281.

"Hölderlin has not been chosen because his work, one among many, realises the universal essence of Poetry, but solely because Hölderlin's Poetry was born on by the poetic vocation to write expressly of the essence of Poetry. For us Hölderlin is in a preminent sense the poet of the poet."³⁹

The essence of poetry is determined historically by the tension between the absence of the gods, who have-been (the ,night'), and the expectation of a new ,day of the gods'; it is the ,premonitory remembrance' of a more fulfilled present.

Hölderlin's great poems, especially the hymns and elegies written between 1799 and 1805, speak of the gods, of human beings, of nature. Human beings and nature are in accord, because they mourn together for the lost gods and await a new age in which the divine will return. It is in such holy mourning that they are in accord.

Yet the harmony of this accord – like that between Being and Dasein in the age of Seinsverlassenheit and enframement – is an accord that shows itself more like a tear (pronounced ,tare' not ,teer'), as the pain that the flight of the gods, the self-dissembling of meaning, has laid upon beings-as-a-whole. This accord, in reality, is a breach, an empty place, an unanswered call.

3. The Last Poems

In the period of Hölderlin's work after 1806 this tear seems to have been closed up again. Between 1806 and his death in 1843, 47 texts have been transmitted that are referred to in German literary criticism as the ,Last Poems'. Most of their titles have the name of a season, whilst others name, e.g., Friendship, Love, The Good, Life, Man. One bears the title ,Greece'. Often the poems are signed Scardanelli and are dated, mostly to years before or after Hölderlin's own life span.

³⁹ Hölderlin and the essence of Poetry. Translated by Douglas Scott, in: M. Heidegger, Existence and Being. Vision Press LTD, London 1949.

The 37 years in which these texts were produced constitutes the long night of Hölderlin's ‚Umnachtung‘. Their language is simple and monotonous, the mood peaceful, content, transfigured, and recurrent images are constantly re-arranged and re-combined, as in a game of building blocks (J. Schmidt).

Much has been written about Hölderlin's mental illness. The scientific and psychiatric approach is, in its own terms, justifiable and correct. However, it is incapable of solving the riddle that these spiritual conditions set before us. The mad and the insane share the same co-ordinates of time and space as the rest of us, but at the same time they live in another world, a world into which they have been snatched away, a world closed off to us, just as our normal perception of the world has been lost to them. Every mental illness is at once a privation and a fullness. Both aspects are closed to the ‚healthy‘ and confronts us as a question that no science and no therapy are able to answer.

Hölderlin's last poems mostly speak in the the present tense. Their constantly recurring theme – which I can merely indicate here of is that of the accord of human beings and nature within the rhythm of the seasons. Human beings and nature are no longer characterized by the tear of mourning; their harmony is now of a more pacific and simple kind, an accord permeated by meaning.

To nature's bursting-forth and self-manifestation in the cycle of the seasons correspond the sensibility that poetically attaches itself to the rythm of nature and preserves the beauty of its self-manifestation and its bursting forth.

Die Zierde der Natur erscheint sich dem Gemüte,
Als wie entstanden sind Gesang und Lieder

Das Glänzen der Natur ist höheres Erscheinen,
Wo sich der Tag mit vielen Freuden endet,
es ist das Jahr, das sich mit Pracht vollendet,

Daß die Natur ergänzt das Bild der Zeiten,
Daß die verweilt, sie schnell vorübergleiten,
Ist aus Vollkommenheit, [...]

Der ganze Sinn des hellen Bildes lebet
 Als wie ein Bild, das goldne Pracht umschwebet.

The image – a word that often recurs – is the site of the accord between nature's and the poetic life of human beings, of the radiance and beauty of nature (the ekphanestaton) and the poetic spirit. In giving utterance to nature's yearly cycle, but also perserving it in silence, human beings live poetically as the ,between' of time's evanescence and the abiding of the whole, the ,meaning' that is presence in the yearly cycle. Giving voice to the yearly cycle human beings live poetically. In communion with nature the poet speaks its ,whole' meaning, completing life in the here and now of the yearly cycle with his knowledge of that cycle itself, of the fertile ground of its bursting forth.

This harmony is nevertheless no mere fusion with nature. Human beings – particularly poets – remain nature's other, and are only able to poetize nature insofar as they have removed themselves from an immediate relation to nature and have learned to delimit themselves in relation to her and to be more than a bursting-forth in time.

Die Sagen, die der Erde sich entfernen,
 Vom Geiste, der gewesen ist und wiederkehret,
 Sie kehren zu der Menschheit sich, und vieles lernen
 Wir aus der Zeit, die eilends sich verzehret.

To live poetically on earth the human beings must distance themselves from earth, they must project and hold onto their life in an Other, in the ,whole' and then once more draw this whole back into human life as poetic image. In this way the heart whose basic attunement is to this harmony becomes Spirit: ,The Saying ... of Spirit' occurs in those poetic words that give utterance to the yearly cycle (the having-been and the recurrence), the images in which it is narrated.

Spirit is not opposed to the heart, but is its original attitude: the recollective and expectant remembrance of the yearly cycle that connects the particular moment – the repose of winter, the awakening of spring, the splendour of summer, the dying-away of autumn – up to the whole of nature's bursting-forth and self-enclosure, thereby

delimiting it and allowing it to become a symbol of the ‚spiritual year‘. When this happens, the year appears

[...] mit seinen Zeiten
Wie eine Pracht, wo Feste sich verbreiten.

... with its seasons
As splendour does, where festivals take place

The year that has been spiritually delimited and lived poetically appears as the Holy, as human beings and nature celebrate their accord in the presence of the divine.

Hölderlin’s last poems are testimony to a process of learning. They testify to learning the basic tonality of human life, in that the tear, the pain of the remoteness of the gods appears as satisfied in a simple nearness, that is evoked as something beyond pain and hope, ever and again, ever the same, ever different. This nearness to what is simple, monotonous, self-recurring corresponds to the natural cycle in which it finds its meaning. Language rests in the element of what is simple: language speaks what is simple *as* meaning.

Is such speaking, is its basic tonality, an unconsciously undertaken therapy, is it the repose that allows the excess of pain to be anaesthetized by an involuntary refusal to face facts? Does it console by bringing about a state, a vision, that is really only an avoidance of or even a flight from pain? Do the late poems speak as equals of the great poetic works of the hymns and elegies, or are they merely testimony to a spiritual anaesthetic, to decline and ruination?

4. The legend of the friendly moment.

In order to discuss this question further, we need to take a step back and ask what happens when poetry gives voice to thinking, to the presence of the gods, to the fulfilled occurrence of essential Being (Wesung des Seyns) .

What is the force of such speaking? The presence of the divine – had it ever occurred? Will it ever come to pass? How? In what kind of experience? What is the basis for thinking of a fulfilled occurrence of essential being, and where does such a thought come from? Could it ever be experienced? Will it ever happen as an historical event? And what, in this context, does remembrance mean? What does it mean to become prepared?

At the start of this paper, I touched briefly on the temporal character of a kind of thinking and a kind of poetic thought that speaks of a future that is prepared for by the remembrance of something that has been and that resonates in the present.

If Heidegger's thought or Hölderlin's hymns and elegies had been concerned only to think or to poetize a distant event belonging to an intra-temporal past or an intra-temporal future, then we would not be talking about more than a subjective idea of utopia, feeding on the memory of some kind of golden age in the past that it was seeking to reinstate.

It is quite apparent that Heidegger's intention is different: he does not wish to think what-has-been and what is to-come as intra-temporal, but to think in the perspective of primordial time, from the *Zeit-Spiel-Raum*. Nevertheless, it is incontrovertible that such 'epochal' thinking also has intra-temporal aspects; it is incontrovertible that the 'other beginning' is also thought of as a new epoch in human history, as an epoch that is to come. In the following, however, I would like to filter out these epochal aspects and focus the enquiry in a way that seems to me more fruitful. That does not mean that I am abandoning the horizon of Heidegger's thought, merely that I am interpreting it with a certain hermeneutic force that, in my opinion, is demanded by the matter itself (*die Sache selbst*).

If we attempt to free remembrance and preparation from everything merely intra-temporal, then we could perhaps think of a transformation that would not (primarily) 'take place' 'sometime', when the fullness of Being and the proximity of the God would emerge from out of the present reality of *Seinsverlassenheit* and the absence of God. Rather, it is a transformation that would occur in language itself. In conversation, in communication and narration, another possibility would show itself, a possibility

that would not need to be actualized in order to take hold of our lives and transform them. But what does such speaking tell us? It tells of a particular moment of vision that has come into prominence, interrupting what is conventional and meaningless, a moment of assent and hope. This moment is neither an objective nor a subjective occurrence but a basic attunement that shows forth the world in another way. How ,other'? Because the world is, at a stroke, no longer subject to the duality brought about by the abyss of death and loss, of pain and meaninglessness. In this moment, the world is restored to its simplicity: it is what and as it is, and its simple Being is full of meaning.

Perhaps we know such rare, essential conversations, that festally interrupt our existence, like a new source of life. Every essential work of poetry – and, ultimately, every artistic work as such – is the attempt to open such a conversation, and every work of art lives from its orientation towards such moments, moments in which reality is transfigured and, at the same time, seen in a higher perspective. Such moments are moments of redemption, of which Goethe wrote (in *Elective Affinities*): ,and what a friendly moment it will be when they will one day awake together again'. This friendly moment, Goethe says, is the legend: what is to be read and reread and ever and again to be renarrated. It is poetic narration itself that establishes this moment and inscribes it in the world, thereby allowing it to become historical, i.e., because it is communicated in language.

But are such transfigurations, such moments of redemption a mere game, a fleeting self-deluding flight into a mystical world, whether that is experienced poetically or existentially, a world that, sooner or later, vanishes, with no abiding significance for ourselves or for the world? And assuming that we do know such moments of harmony, does it come down to being able to enjoy them as often as we can or to make the free (and perhaps also merely illusory) vision that they offer last as long as possible? Is the moment of transformation like a state of intoxication, in which things are suddenly disclosed, illuminated, and conjoined in a new light, only to lose their magic in the cool gaze of the understanding, leaving us once more face to face with a bare, meaningless reality?

Let us expand the question somewhat and ask: is what happens in thinking, in poetic creation, in showing (Zeigen), merely a matter of a certain state of affairs, of maintaining oneself as oneself in relation to what is essential; or is it rather a matter of thinking of this state of affairs as something that is essentially far off, something that must, by its very essence, remain distant?

5. Intoxication and Sobriety

In his interpretation of 'As on a feast-day', Heidegger writes as follows about nature when, in a moment of awakening, it shows itself as 'the Holy'.

Nature, omnipresent, all-creating, in-spires everything. It is itself in-spiration. It can only in-spire, because it is Spirit. Spirit holds sway as the sober but bold act of disposing [and ordering] that places everything that can become present in the well-ordered limits and articulated forms that allow it to [actually] become present.

What is cool and shady in sobriety corresponds to the holy. Such sobriety does not deny inspiration. Sobriety is the ever-ready basic attunement of readiness for the Holy.

Inspiration and sobriety are by no means contradictory, but belong together. Inspiration means being thoroughly attuned to the beauty of nature; it is enthusiasm, being filled with the divine; it allows human beings to forget the pain and the tornness of Being for a moment. Inspiration is the feast-day, the moment of vision in which the world is meaningful, in which everything appears as if inscribed in a higher order. Sobriety does not mean mere sobering-up, the cessation of intoxication, cancelling out the effects of inspiration and only capable of seeing what is meaningless and un-holy in life. Sobriety is the attitude that is ready for inspiration, yet at the same time different from it. This difference is the distance that makes saying and narrating possible and, at the same time the distance that allows us to know that it is possible to be otherwise. The moment of vision does not disclose meaning as a present reality but as a possibility that must ever and again be grounded in existence. Inspiration unites us

with what is meaningful, but sobriety registers our difference from any such unity, the difference of the human being from himself, which is grounded in the Logos and in language.

The reciprocal play of inspiration and sobriety, of the exalted moment and of the speaking-forth of this moment (the feast-day) is the horizon in which not only great poetry but also the [great] instances of Western thinking (as opposed, e.g., to Buddhist thought) lie and move. Inspiration – the moment – is neither to be understood merely as a state of affairs, nor is sober utterance merely a matter of being sceptical about the experience of fullness. Both belong together in respectively determining the basic tonality in which poetic diction and thinking, in which *language* speaks.

In Hölderlin's last poems it is what is simple in nature that inspires and moves the poet to tell of it. The sobriety that belongs to inspiration no longer shows itself as pain or as mourning, but as the harmony that is to be learned. It is a kind of equanimity that does not suppress or forget the pain but gently and softly embraces it as an infinite gift and task, the gift and task of ever and again coming into correspondence with what is simple.

Is this equanimity the obverse of Hölderlin's mental illness? Is it a defence against the excess of pain? And, if so, is it then, after all, a form of avoidance, the anaesthetization of the Spirit? These questions are probably to be answered in the affirmative. Yet such an answer is so far from undermining the significance of these texts that it rather confirms their significance. The last poems retain their relation to Hölderlin's earlier great poems and can only really say what they have to say in the light of these. Conversely, these too appear in another light in their relation to the last poems. They are the two sides of one and the same experience of an existence that, like every great existence, is shattered in an essential sense by what is essential. In a higher perspective, however, this means not giving up what is essential.

5. The Thinking of the Fourfold.

I should now like to deal briefly with a final point that seems to me to be important to mention. From the fifties and sixties on, the thought of the Fourfold indicates a change in Heidegger's thought that points to a certain parallel to Hölderlin's last poems, albeit under quite different presuppositions and without Heidegger expressly referring to it. Thinking that is oriented towards the history of Being does indeed still provide a measure for the thinking of the fourfold. The saying of it, however, acquires another valence. What is offered as a counter-projection to the world of technology and enframing becomes the phenomenological description of a world in which things – a bridge, a jug – gather the fourfold simplicity of earth and heaven, gods and mortals and let them be present. Such thinking speaks in the present. The thing gathers: here and now. The Fourfold comes to pass essentially, the simplicity of the four regions of the world, earth, sky, mortals, and gods. Indeed, the abandonment of and by Being still holds sway over all things, things show themselves as manipulable objects, heaven and earth have long since lost their magic and been acquired as possessions; human beings are indeed en route towards understanding themselves solely as 'human resources', as replaceable machines; death, the divine, and the holy have indeed been long since pushed out of the world of experience determined by enframing. Nevertheless, as in Hölderlin's last poems, Heidegger utters an 'is'. In texts such as 'The Thing' and 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' the fourfold is no longer merely seen as preparatory for the other beginning, showing itself but not yet bearing or grounding history. The fourfold *is*. In the midst of enframing, the thinker speaks the Other of what is merely contemporary, speaks it as an 'is' of higher worth.

The force of this 'is' relates us to Hölderlin's last poems. The tornness of the abyss, pointing to the event of appropriation still veiled by the distortion of the essence of Being, is not yet healed at a historical level. The fourfold, the simple 'is' not. Or it 'is' only in rare moments. Thinking knows of this not-being. Yet it is increasingly steady in its basic tonality, in its harmony with the simple essence of things. Here too the act of saying is permeated by a basic tonality that at the same time appears to have overcome the tornness of being. The thinking of the fourfold, albeit in another manner than in poetic diction, is in its way a legend, the legend of the friendly moment, the

moment of an essential being that must ever and again be given voice, and is only rightly spoken when it is most concealed and occluded.

6. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I should like to return to a couple of the questions I have touched on previously, not in order to provide definitive answers to them, but because they seem to me to be important to think about some more.

In his *Notes on Antigone* Hölderlin says: „The soul that works in secret finds remedy when, at the highest point of consciousness, consciousness is averted“. But what is this ‚highest consciousness‘? Is it the consciousness of the present age, or is the consciousness of the absence of the gods? Must human beings turn aside from the high-point of this pure presence, whether that is understood as the fulness of attention of the emptiness of withdrawal, in order to be able to live it otherwise, so as to live as the tear in being that the human being is.

Elsewhere Hölderlin says: „But when a time has passed, they know it‘. Following on from what was said previously, this could, amongst other things mean that the moment of vision, the present, must first be remembered, and, through remembrance transformed into expectation. The moment requires difference – it needs to be narrated, to become the subject of poetic diction – and it needs wayfaring companions and friends who share in acts of recollection and in the remembrance of days of happiness, and of the presence of love. In various stages of thinking and poetic creation – and perhaps in the various stages of life in general the play of inspiration and sobriety takes shape otherwise, always becoming other than it was in language. But this play of living poetically will always need a legend towards which to go. The play of difference needs a remembered land, in order that it might become futural. Hölderlin calls this Land: *Greece—Griechenland*.

Wie Menschen sind, so ist das Leben prächtig,
Die Menschen sind der Natur öfters mächtig,
Das prächt'ge Land ist Menschen nicht verborgen,

Mit Reiz erscheint der Abend und der Morgen.
Die offenen Felder sind als in der Ernte Tage
Mit Geistigkeit ist weit umher die alte Sage,
Und neues Leben kommt aus Menschheit wieder
So sinkt das Jahr mit einer Stille nieder.

The Word of Philosophy and the Word in the Novel: Heidegger, Death, and Russian Literature.

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The theme of our colloquium invites us to a reflection on ‘the word’, one of Heidegger’s central and abiding preoccupations, variously manifested in the existential phenomenology of *Being and Time*, the interpretation of the ‘word of Parmenides’, or the meditative soundings on the poetic word of Hölderlin. But there is one form of the word that seems conspicuous by its absence from the many words that accompanied Heidegger on his paths of thinking, and that is the word of the novelist. Not entirely absent, it may be conceded (note the early [1910] article on the Danish Catholic poet and novelist Johannes Jørgensen), but, relative to the attention given to the words of philosophers and poets, effectively absent.

For a thinker living in the wake of the extraordinary expansion of the world of the novel in the nineteenth century and contemporary with writers whose work is in some respects contiguous with this own—Mann, Musil, and Kafka, to name but three—this is, at the very least, worth noting. This is not least because it would seem that the novel would offer a resource for the analysis of contemporary Dasein analogous to that of the religious thinkers whose words, although remaining on the level of the ontic or existentiell, nevertheless, offer material for a more fundamental phenomenological reading. This thought is strengthened by Heidegger’s own comments in the foreword to the 1972 edition of his early writings, where he speaks of the intellectual background to those works: ‘What was contributed by the stimuli of the years between 1900 and 1914 cannot be sufficiently stated, but merely indicated by a small, selective enumeration: the second, more than twofold expanded edition of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*, the translations of the works of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, the awakening interest for Hegel and Schelling, Rilke’s poetic writing and Trakl’s poetry, Dilthey’s *Collected Works*’ (p. 56). What is striking about his ‘small, selective enumeration’ is that all but one of those listed come to be explicitly discussed in Heidegger’s own subsequent work. That one is the novelist, Dostoevsky.

Heidegger’s list, as he himself implies, is by no means original, but reflects the intellectual experience of a generation, and amongst his contemporaries there were not a few who were prepared to make the Russian novelist a resource for theology or philosophy on more or less

the same footing as a Nietzsche or a Kierkegaard—Karl Barth, Eduard Thurneysen, Georg Lukacs, or Romano Guardini, to name a few. Yet Dostoevsky is virtually absent from Heidegger’s published writings. The only substantial reference I have found to date is from the start of the first of the 1940 lectures on European Nihilism. Here, Heidegger offers a brief comment on the origins of the term nihilism, referring to Jacobi, Turgenev, Jean Paul, and then Dostoevsky. Only in this last case does he offer an extended quotation, from the foreword Dostoevsky wrote for the printed version of the 1880 speech on Pushkin, which may be regarded as a kind of manifesto for Dostoevsky’s concept of an authentically Russian literature. Amongst Pushkin’s merits, Dostoevsky suggests, is that he was—and I take up Heidegger’s quotation—‘the first to see and recognize for what it is a significant, morbid manifestation among our intelligentsia, our rootless society, which seems to hover high above the common people. He recognized it, and enabled us to place graphically before our eyes the typical, negative Russian character: the character who finds no rest and cannot be satisfied with anything permanent, who does not believe in his native soil nor in the strength of his native soil, who fundamentally denies Russia and himself ... who will have nothing to do with his own people, and who sincerely suffers from all this ...’ (3-4). However, this quotation is immediately followed by the comment that ‘For Nietzsche, though, the word *nihilism* means something substantially “more.”’ (4) In other words, Dostoevsky is merely offering an, as it were, local and solely ‘ontic’ account of what Nietzsche would show to be a fundamental feature of the history of metaphysics. Heidegger does not (and this may or may not surprise us) offer any further justification for this way of dealing with Dostoevsky: he does not, for example, even allude to the far more extended Dostoevskian discussions of nihilism in *Devils*, *The Idiot*, or *The Brothers Karamazov*, where it is explored a perspective that is both Russian and European, and interpreted as the manifestation of a religious and metaphysical crisis (as would be further emphasized in the development of Dostoevsky’s thought by such Russian philosophical interpreters as Soloviev and Berdyaev).

At this point, we might start to wonder whether Heidegger’s strategy vis-à-vis Dostoevsky is not marked by some kind of avoidance (just as, Kierkegaardian readers of Heidegger are likely to feel that although Heidegger acknowledges some points of contact with the Danish Christian writer, there are aspects of the sources that he assiduously avoids⁴⁰). Such a suspicion might be further fuelled by Otto Pöggeler’s testimony that for many years

⁴⁰ The same could also be said of Hölderlin, not least with regard to Hölderlin’s Christ-image. See ...

Heidegger kept a picture of Dostoevsky in his study, suggesting that the Russian writer was not without some particular significance to the philosopher. Commenting on Heidegger's relation to literature, Kostas Axelos, a co-organizer of Heidegger's 1955 visit to Paris, put it like this:

Il trouve des cas privilégiés qui s'accordent à la doctrine. Il a trouvé en Hölderlin un cas privilégié. Il y a aussi son incapacité à parler de poètes ou de penseurs qui ne soient pas allemands ou grecs. Je ne vois pas Heidegger pouvant parler de quelqu'un comme Dostoïevski. Il peut parler d'une certaine Grèce et d'un certaine Allemagne (30).

We can refine Axelos' comment somewhat if we note that, as we have heard Heidegger himself imply, he certainly *read* Dostoevsky, but yet he does not *speak of* him. Can we go beyond noting this, and registering a certain surprise or even disappointment? Can we identify what in Dostoevsky (apart from his not having been German or Greek) might have elicited Heidegger's resistance? Does Dostoevsky have a question for Heidegger that Heidegger would not like to have had asked?

In order to address these questions I shall proceed as follows. Firstly, I shall comment on the general character of the Dostoevsky reception in the German-speaking world in the pre-First World War period. Then, I turn to the recently published letters to Elfride, where we do in fact find a small number of references that nevertheless go some way to help us reconstruct how Heidegger might have been reading Dostoevsky. Finally, I move to the discussion of being-towards-death in *Being and Time*, where (I think) we find a scenario that is profoundly Dostoievskian—yet one that Dostoevsky interpreted very differently from Heidegger. This difference in interpretation, I suggest, reading Dostoevsky in the prism of his greatest commentator, Mikhail Bakhtin, throws into relief a more wide-ranging difference between the 'word in the novel' and the respective words of philosophers and poets, thus disrupting the axis on which some of Heidegger's key contributions hinge.

I think it important to proceed in this way, because, as will become apparent, the reception of Dostoevsky by Heidegger's generation was very different from that in Britain and America in the post-war world. If, more recently, the 'theological' (or, at least, the 'Christian') Dostoevsky has come much more to the fore, the 50s and 60s offered a proto-existentialist Dostoevsky, a Dostoevsky read in the light of Shestov, Camus, and Sartre, whose characters

were lonely outsiders in a godless universe, anguished by their failure to become the ‘supermen’ called for by the death of God. The image of Dostoevsky in the German-speaking world in the pre-First World War years was very different. The Dostoevsky period of this time has been recounted in William J. Dodd’s article, ‘Ein Gottträgersvolk, ein geistiger Führer—Die Dostojewskij-Rezeption von der Jahrhundertwende bis zu den zwanziger Jahren als Paradigma des deutschen Rußlandbilds’. As the title of Dodd’s article makes clear, what is at issue here is not only Dostoevsky, but the whole image of ‘Russia’ of which, in crucial instants, Dostoevsky became the bearer and/or the creator.

An early wave of Dostoevsky-reception saw him in the context of literary naturalism, reading him as a realist writer who described the urban life of capitalist Russia with ruthless honesty, but this was soon superseded by the Dostoevsky of expressionism, a Dostoevsky whose modernity lay not in his urban realism but in his metaphysical and psychological depths, his irrationalism, and his opposition to Enlightenment rationalism. In all these respects, Dostoevsky seemed fitted to be the voice of Russia itself: as Dodds comments, “‘Dostoevsky’ and ‘Russia’ were indeed often separable only with great difficulty” (p. 853). This ‘Russia’ was a Russia whose psychology was shaped by the endless steppes, its cultural isolation from the West, ‘mystical Russia’. Paradoxically, as Dodds suggests, ‘mystical Russia’ became a trope of the German Zeitgeist—and Dostoevsky was its prophet. Often, Dostoevsky was contrasted with Tolstoy, and usually to the advantage of the former. In this vein Spengler opposes Tolstoy’s Jesus, a mere social moralist, to Dostoevsky’s, who looked for a complete transformation of society. Specifically with regard to the years 1910-14, Dodds comments that the reception of Dostoevsky ‘was characterized by wonder and awe and from the strange experience ... that one was being carried along by what one didn’t fully grasp’ (856). This is epitomized by Alexander Döblin’s autobiographical remark that, as a school-boy in this period, he read Goethe and Schiller by day and Dostoevsky by night.

If the English-language reception of Dostoevsky was to be dominated by *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from Underground*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is indicative of the German-language reception that the first volume of the complete translation published by Piper-Verlag from 1906 onwards was *Demons*, a novel dealing with issues of revolutionary nihilism and nationalism, whilst the second volume was a selection of his *Political writings* (1907), drawn from the *Diary of a Writer*, a non-fictional periodical in which, amongst other things, Dostoevsky gave extensive expression to his ultra-conservative, ultra-nationalist

views, blending Russia's Christian mission with its imperial vocation, often, as in the Pushkin speech, with a strong emphasis on the humiliation of the Russian people as fitting them for a special identification with the kenotic Christ. The volume's editor, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, spoke of Dostoevsky as prefiguring 'the religious revolution', and his conception of where this revolution might lead is suggested by his 1922 book, *Das Dritte Reich*, a significant text in the ideological development of Nazism. Another commentator would speak, in connection with Dostoevsky, 'that Russia's vocation was, one day, to redeem the religious need of Europe' (861). At the same time Dostoevsky revealed 'the abyss' (861) that lay beneath the surface of Europe's century of progress. As such, Russia was essentially non-European and the volume of Dostoevsky's political writings was accordingly divided into four parts: Western Europe, Russia itself, the Balkans and the Orient, and Asia. In this perspective Dostoevsky himself could be spoke of as 'the quintessence of the "Asiatic" Russian soul' (860), a comment that could critically be turned, as by Richard M. Meyer, who spoke of Dostoevsky as a 'hysterical half-Asiatic' (861).

Political events themselves meant that, from 1912 onwards, Russia (and Dostoevsky) came to be seen more as a threat than as a source of mystical redemption, although even after the War, Stefan Zweig was only one who could say (in his 1921 Introduction to the novels of Dostoevsky) that 'The novel of Dostoevsky is the myth of the new Man and his birth from the womb of the Russian soul' (864). Similarly, Spengler could say that it would be to Dostoevsky's Christianity that the next thousand years would belong. And still in the post-War period, he could be a decisive intellectual influence on, e.g. Barth and Thurneysen, whose book very much echoes the traits described by Dodd as typical of the pre-War reception.

This impression is further underlined if we turn to the evidence of the letters to Elfride. This evidence is, admittedly, somewhat thin, and is limited to three letters. In the first of these, a letter of 28th August 1918 largely taken up with reporting various facts about life in the barracks, Heidegger asks his wife if she can get hold of a copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The second, a letter of 27th October 1918, is far more wide-ranging and deserves more extended attention. Describing how the night before he went to bed early to read the last three letters from Elfride that had arrived in a single delivery, he pictures her life with 'der kleine Jörg', and how, through her, the child will learn 'to feel the sense of being at home and the particularity of each thing, so that his soul is permeated by the parental home, childhood

happiness, sunshine and stillness—but also life’s clarity and clairvoyant assurance of life and true religiosity’. The letter then goes on to recall the time of their engagement, and how he experiences this as a stage of personal formation through its joys, self-giving, acts of self-entrusting to and self-forgetfulness in the other, in ‘Du’. In this spirit he notes that thinking about her in his quiet moments is like an act of solemn dedication (‘eine Weihe’) for their future reunion. In such moments he realizes ‘that every present is only ever the living actuality of what is of value in past and future life—that is to say, truly historic’ (87), which in turn leads to insights into forms of thought beyond those known to current ontological and natural sciences. So, he realizes, ‘Instead of leading to a pure, empty “I” the whole problem of the “I” leads to the fulfilled and primordially living [“I”] and its constituent elements—the fulfilling of values grounded in essential openness to value, pointing back to the essence of personal Spirit that I have apprehended as “Vocation”—only so do the eternal properties of the Spirit and their absolute confusion become conceivable—it is along these lines that the problems upon which I have hit while out here are moving, the carrying through of the principal of the historical consciousness— ...’ (87) This, then, leads him to thoughts about the future of his research and the developments in university life that can be expected in the decade after the end of the war. The ‘holy’, which, he says, Otto has misconceived, will play a central part here. ‘As to the problem of the devout life (‘das Problem des Frommseins’), which you have particularly felt coming out as a principal element from Dostoevsky, another time.’ (88).

Now, I do not know whether Heidegger had, in fact, received and been reading *The Brothers Karamazov*, but the themes of this letter, both in its personal and in its more theoretical aspect, bear comparison with that novel and, especially, key moments in the formation of its ‘hero’, Alyosha.

As readers of the novel will recall, Dostoevsky lays a special emphasis in introducing Alyosha on the boy’s childhood memories, a theme that will recur when Alyosha himself, in the closing pages of the book, urges the young boys to whom he has become a kind of informal teacher to live their future lives in the light of the memory of the good actions and friendships that have united them: ‘... although he lost his mother in his fourth year, he remembered her afterwards all his life, her face, her caresses, “as if she were standing before me.” Such memories can be remembered (everyone knows this) even from an earlier age, even from the age of two, but they only emerge throughout one’s life as specks of light, as it

were, against the darkness, as a corner torn from a huge picture, which has all faded and disappeared except for that little corner. That is exactly how it was with him: he remembered a quiet summer evening, an open window, the slanting rays of the setting sun (these slanting rays he remembered most of all), an icon in the corner of the room a lighted oil-lamp in front of it, and before the icon, on her knees, his mother ...' (18-9). As Alyosha's future development will make clear, this is very much a case, to use Heidegger's words, of the child acquiring a formative experience of 'sunshine and stillness—but also life's clarity and clairvoyant assurance of life and true religiosity'.

Like any Dostoevsky character, Alyosha is not to enjoy an uninterrupted fulfilment of such early promises, however. The death of his mother, the brutality of his father, and the general chaos of his family life, culminating in the murder of the father at the hands of one of his sons, make the monastery and the devout life at the feet of the blessed Elder Zosima an understandably attractive option. Even here, however, life does not go smoothly. Zosima is envied by a large faction in the monastery, and, on his death, his enemies are gratified when his body begins to rot—an event that dashes the hopes of those who had thought him a saint, worthy of having his body miraculously preserved. Amongst these is Alyosha, and it is in the turbulent period after the death of the Elder that Alyosha has what is perhaps the most explicitly described religious experience in any of Dostoevsky's novels. Rushing out from the vigil 'Filled with rapture, his soul yearned for freedom, space, vastness' (362). Gazing up at the night sky, 'The silence of the earth seemed to merge with the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth touched the mystery of the stars ...' So, Alyosha throws himself weeping to the ground, kissing the earth, not knowing why, but weeping 'even for the stars that shone on him from the abyss'. The more precise content of 'what happened' is not stated, but 'he felt clearly and almost tangibly something as firm and immovable as the heavenly vault descend into his soul. Some sort of idea, as it were, was coming to reign in his mind—now for the whole of his life and unto ages of ages. He fell to the earth a weak youth and rose up a fighter, steadfast for the rest of his life, and he knew it and felt it suddenly, in that very moment of his ecstasy' (362-3). Shortly afterwards, he leaves the monastery, and goes out into the world. Is this 'experience', then, expressive of what Heidegger called 'true religiosity', the 'I' becoming open to the eternal properties of spiritual life and its values, and what Elfride feels as 'the devout life' manifested in Dostoevsky's novels? Even if this is neither the explicit or intended reference, I suggest both that it focuses the 'religious experience' theme as found in Dostoevsky and that it also condenses what other

contemporary German readers of Dostoevsky were seeing as his mysticism, his portrayal of ‘the new man’, of which Alyosha was to be the most developed example.

The third letter likewise reflects what we have seen to be a characteristic feature of the German Dostoevsky-reception, namely a focus on his political writings. In a letter from Meßkirch (28.07.1920), Heidegger writes, ‘It is rather cool up here ... I am very happy again regarding the homeland, the meadows and fields and gradually I feel what it is to have ground under one’s feet—it so precisely fell into place with what is in Dostoevsky and I really strongly experience the contrast to people like Afra Geiger and others who simply live in their relationships’. And, later: ‘When you have time, do try to read Dostoevsky’s Political Writings; you will be very impressed—...’ (107). The motif of ‘earth’ is, of course, strongly present in Alyosha’s ‘mystical’ experience, but in Dostoevsky’s political writings this is further understood in terms of the ‘holy ground’ of the Russian people, an identity of person and land that gives a rootedness unknown to the cosmopolitan Westerner, a bond that joins the people both to each other and to God. For Dostoevsky, as for Heidegger, it is, of course, one of the salient features of modern science and the technological society that this primordial ‘given’ relationship is disturbed and even shattered by the reduction of life to a series of calculable relationships. If, on first reading, Alyosha’s ‘mystical’ experience hints at that privileged moment hinted at in *Being and Time*, the moment in which a person acquires authentic resolve to become who they are, the political writings seem to point more towards that confluence of themes of land, nationhood, and personal identity that come more to the fore in the 1930s.

But if Dostoevsky was so fit for Heideggerian purposes, what reason could there be for the philosopher to refrain from including him in the roll-call of *existentiell* witnesses to existential structures? How can we speak, even potentially, of a Dostoevskian critique of Heidegger?

I have indicated that the German reception of Dostoevsky, within which Heidegger’s own references to the Russian writer fit remarkable well, was a very particular reading. In many respects it paradoxically endorsed a certain kind of Slavophilism apparent in Dostoevsky himself, only applying it as a liberative solution to the crisis of German culture.⁴¹ Civilization would be rescued by what was deep, of the abyss, religious, mystical, of the earth, a new

⁴¹ Although one could further add, that many of the key tropes of Slavophilism were themselves adapted from German Romanticism and given a Slavic ‘twist’.

event in human history, a third kingdom. Such motifs are found in Dostoevsky's novels and sometimes endorsed by Dostoevsky himself in his non-fictional writings. However, as most Dostoevsky commentators now agree, many of these views are far from naively endorsed in the novels themselves. There they are subject to extensive and sometimes decisive critique.

Take Alyosha's religious experience. Not only is Dostoevsky in fact extremely vague as to what this consists in or how it impacts on Alyosha's life, but it is clear that, in his plans for a continuation of the novel, Alyosha would undergo many future permutations. I don't think we need to take at face-value the preliminary suggestions thrown out by Dostoevsky such that Alyosha would lose his faith and become a terrorist, but it is entirely characteristic of Dostoevsky's treatment of character that it cannot be condensed into a single, simple experiential or ideological 'moment'. Take another example, Prince Myshkin, the central figure of *The Idiot*. Myshkin too is described as having a kind of mystical experience, only in this case, despite the heavenly visions that the Prince seems to have been vouchsafed, Dostoevsky raises the question as to whether the whole thing may not have been merely the effect of epilepsy. In any case, there is a gap between the interior illumination provided by the vision and the working out of that illumination in life, so that Myshkin's religious experience is, in fact, unable to ground any decisive moral or personal transformation for himself or for those poor sinners amongst whom he lives. Religious experience and inner resolve cannot achieve more than ambiguous expression in the world—a situation for which the rotting corpse of the Elder Zosima, the most unambiguously and positively 'holy' personage in any of the novels is an apt symbol.

The same can be said of Dostoevsky's nationalism. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, Ivan's famous roll-call of horrors begins by citing such atrocities as those perpetrated by the Muslim Turks on the Christian Slavs of the Balkans—but the list climaxes with atrocities perpetrated by Russians on Russians, and Russian parents on Russian children. If Russia has been vouchsafed a special visitation from the Christ, this by no means confers any kind of collective sanctity that is to be had without being earned. Even more pointedly, the idea that Russia is, in some sense, a God-bearing nation is specifically discussed in *Devils*, where one of the main characters, Shatov, admits to having believed this. But he also says, very clearly, that this too is a form of human hubris and, moreover, that the idea originated with the demonically nihilistic Prince Stavrogin, a kind of Anti-Christ figure.

All of this, we may say, is testimony to those features of Dostoevsky's novelistic art that Bakhtin would refer to in his 1929 study of Dostoevsky's Poetics as Dostoevsky's dialogism, double-voiced discourse, heteroglossia, and polyphony. This is not simply a matter of Dostoevsky setting various ideological view-points or life-choices against one another (as, for example, he opposes the nihilism of Ivan Karamazov to the holiness of the Elder Zosima). Rather, it is Dostoevsky bringing to an extreme expression a basic feature of novelistic discourse as such, as Bakhtin makes clear in the 1934-5 work *Discourse in the Novel*—a work which, bearing in mind Heidegger's emphasis on the category of the 'word' of the philosopher and the poet, we could quite literally translate as *The Word in the Novel*. Discussing a shift in the study of stylistics in the 1920s, Bakhtin notes the gradual emergence of a sustained examination of the stylistics of the novel, as opposed to the stylistics of poetry. Here, he adds, 'these concrete analyses and these attempts at a principled approach [to artistic prose] ... made patently obvious the fact that all the categories of traditional stylistics—in fact the very concept of a *poetic* artistic discourse, which lies at the heart of such categories—were not applicable to novelistic discourse.' (261) He comments, 'The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls.' (261)

I should now like to see how this feature of the word in the novel might be critically applied in the particular case of Heidegger's account of death, an account that establishes the ontological possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-being-a-whole and thus plays a pivotal role in *Being and Time's* self-imposed task of re-opening the question of Being. Interestingly, it is in the course of this account, to be precise in the discussion of being-towards-death and everydayness in §51, that Heidegger makes one of his few explicit references to novelistic literature, namely to Tolstoy's novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Although Bakhtin himself acknowledges the genuinely novelistic (and thus genuinely dialogical) character of Tolstoy's literary art, we have seen that, in late Imperial Germany as subsequently, Tolstoy was often opposed to Dostoevsky precisely in terms of offering a more direct, unambiguous, less thoroughly dialogized representation of human existence. Whether this is true in general, it is, as we shall see, not entirely without justification in this particular case. That is certainly relevant to the question as to whether novelistic literature can support Heidegger's central argument in Division II.1 as a whole. For, whilst Tolstoy does indeed seem to endorse Heidegger's case, Dostoevsky offers what could be a striking counter-example.

§51 describes how, in the average everydayness of society ('Öffentlichkeit'), death is treated as a third-person occurrence. It is not so much shrouded in silence, but spoken of in such a way that it is not encountered as a possibility of my own existence. The dying person is spoken of and spoken to as if 'he will escape death and soon return to the tranquilized everydayness of the world of his concern' (253). This 'tranquilization' is offered both to the dying person and to those 'who 'console' him' (254). It establishes a barrier against anxiety in the face of death, but, in the mode of 'falling' nevertheless shows, despite itself, that this being-towards-death is an unavoidable issue for Dasein.

Tolstoy's tale—as befits Heidegger's account—opens with Ivan Ilych's colleagues learning of his death, which '... aroused, as usual, in all who heard of it the complacent feeling that, "it is he who is dead and not I."' (96) Ivan Ilych is a successful lawyer, who has lived a life entirely conformed to what might be expected of a successful lawyer. Until he becomes ill. Then, it's not as if he pretends he is not dying, but his dying seems to make no sense. 'The syllogism he had learned from Kiezewetter's Logic: "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself.' (131) Notionally, he now acknowledges its truth, but existentially it seems impossible. He cannot make sense of what this incomprehensible 'It' means: 'And what was worst of all was that *It* drew his attention to itself not in order to make him take some action but only that he should look at *It*, look it straight in the face: look at it and without doing anything, suffer inexpressibly. And to save himself from this condition Ivan Ilyich looked for consolations—new screens—and new screens were found, and for a while seemed to save him, but then they immediately fell to pieces or rather became transparent, as if *It* penetrated them and nothing could veil *It*.' (133) Increasingly aware that he had not, in fact, lived as he ought to have done, it is only at the end of the last three days of his life, days passed in screaming agony, a moment of compassion for his son takes him outside himself, 'and it was revealed to him that though his life had not been as it should have been, this could still be rectified'. (155) Ivan Ilych is no longer physically capable of communicating this insight to those around him, but the transformation of his inner state that this new orientation towards the world is enough.

"And death ... where is it?"

He sought his former accustomed fear of death and did not find it. “Where is it? What death?” There was no fear because there was no death.

In place of death there was light.

“So that’s what it is!” he suddenly exclaimed aloud. “What joy!”

To him all this happened in a single instant, and the meaning of that instant did not change. For those present his agony continued for another two hours. Something rattled in his throat, his emaciated body twitched, then the gasping and the rattle became less frequent.

“It is finished!” said someone near him.

He heard these words and repeated them in his soul.

“Death is finished,” he said to himself. “It is no more!”

He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died. (155-6)

In these words, Tolstoy seems to dramatize what Heidegger will describe as Dasein’s being ‘face to face with the “nothing” of the possible impossibility of its existence’ (266). In his last moments, Ivan Ilych exemplifies what it is to tear free from the ‘concernful solicitude’ of others, of the ‘one dies’, and experiences ‘an impassioned freedom towards death—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the “they” ...’ (266). Yet *Ivan Ilych* also poses a couple of problems for Heidegger.

As in the classic contrast we have seen drawn between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, the latter can, as here, seem to write with a kind of objectivity, an assumption of authorial omniscience. In this case, although Tolstoy’s tale serves to unsettle the ‘average everyday’ view of death, it does so in the light of a presumed knowledge on the novelist’s part of Ivan Ilych’s states of mind that were, in the story, inaccessible even to those who were with him in his death agony. The ‘reality’ depicted in the story is offered as a reality known by an objective consciousness, for which the differentiation of each individual’s interiority is no barrier. But whilst such presumptions may be allowable to omniscient narrators of fiction, are they allowable to philosophers?

Furthermore, even if we allow the novelist correctly to have described his character’s interior relation to death, Ivan Ilych is, after all, dying. He does not get up from his death-bed and return to the world. We do not see him *existing* in the complex circumstances and relationships of life with the constant, unchanging knowledge granted to him by his interior moment of vision, face to face with the possibility impossibility of his non-existence. Such a

life, if it was not merely to be offered in the mode of hagiography, and even if its narrator continued to be gifted with the power to read his subject's innermost thoughts, would presumably set a far greater challenge to the novelist. What would it be like to live in the light of such an instant? Could it be done? Could it be made actual?

We have already seen how, despite portraying an apparently decisive life-changing experience in the life of his 'hero' Alyosha, Dostoevsky nevertheless characteristically left his account sufficiently under-determined to allow for the possibility of significant future change in Alyosha. Even life's decisive moments, sometimes turn out not to be so decisive after all. The same might be said of the 'face-to-face' with death.

In this case, of course, Dostoevsky did not need to read anybody else's mind, since he had himself, as literally as is possible, been face-to-face with death when, at the age of 27, he was condemned to death by firing squad, with immediate effect. Although, twenty minutes later, as the first of those condemned with Dostoevsky were tied to the posts, ready for execution, a pardon was read out, commuting the sentence to hard labour, for those twenty minutes Dostoevsky believed that he was facing immediate death. He never described this in a first-person memoir, but in the novel, *The Idiot*, the eponymous Prince Myshkin tells the story of an acquaintance to whom just this same thing happened. Already, we notice, how this immediately qualifies whatever is said in the story by its association with the curiously ambiguous personality of the Prince. As with many of his stories and reflections, there seem to be loose ends and unanswered questions, the story ends abruptly and inconclusively, with the listeners waiting for him to go on and finish—'You're very fragmentary', as one of them remarks (61). There is to be no triumphant act of resolution à la Tolstoy.

As the Prince tells the story, the details of which he has learned by questioning his acquaintance, 'a certain man' whom he had 'encountered' the previous year, the man carefully allotted the time remaining of the last five minutes. 'He said those five minutes seemed like an endless time to him, an enormous wealth. It seemed to him that in those five minutes he would live so many lives that there was no point yet in thinking about his last moment ...' (60), and so, the Prince continues, the man made arrangements to say good bye to his friends, and decided to reserve just two minutes for thinking about himself and looking around for the last time. When those two minutes come, 'He knew beforehand what he was going to think about: he wanted to picture to himself as quickly and vividly as possible how it

could be like this: now he exists and lives, and in three minutes there would be *something*, some person or thing—but who?’ (60-1) Seeing the sunlight shining off the gilded dome of a nearby Cathedral ‘it seemed to him that those rays were his new nature and in three minutes he would somehow merge with them ...’ (61) His feeling about this and about his ignorance of what is about to come is described as one of ‘loathing’, yet even worse, we are told, was the ‘constant thought’: ‘What if I were not to die! What if life were given back to me—what infinity! And it would all be mine! Then I’d turn each minute into a whole age, I’d lose nothing, I’d reckon up every minute separately, I’d let nothing be wasted!’ Eventually, this thought so fills him with anger that he starts to wish they’d hurry up and shoot him. At which point the Prince stops.

Of course, the very fact that the story is being told lets us know that this ‘terrible’ thought was, in fact, realized. Unlike Ivan Ilych, but like the putative existential hero who anticipates the possibility of his own impossibility in the power of a moment of vision resolutely affirmed and held fast through the passage of time, he passes from this face-to-face with death back into everyday existence. How will he live? Will his life in fact be transformed by this face-to-face, this new configuration of the self’s relation to time and death? The Prince is asked, ‘...“what did he do with so much wealth [i.e., of time] afterwards? Did he live ‘reckoning up’ every minute?” “Oh, no, he told me himself—I asked him about it—he didn’t live that way at all and lost many, many minutes.” “Well, so there’s experience for you, so it’s impossible to live really ‘keeping a reckoning.’ There’s always some reason why it’s impossible.”’ (61)

Of course, we do not have to accept this conclusion. After all, these are only characters in a novel exchanging views. But what this exchange of views does highlight is the questionableness of claims to a decisive reorientation towards existence in the light of a face-to-face confrontation with the possible impossibility of my existence. As befits the word of the novelist, the articulation of that possible impossibility occurs in words that are ‘variform in speech and voice’, that combine ‘heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls’. Even in being uttered the possible impossibility beheld in the moment of decisive vision slides back into the polyphony of many voices, opinions, and points of view. It cannot be held to in existence, other than as one possibility amongst others. Nor—and this is Bakhtin’s view, at least—is the novelist obliged to offer us anything more. All he need do is open and engage for us a world of multiply

conflicting possibilities. If he wants to do more than that, he ceases to be a novelist and dons the mantle of the prophet, as Dostoevsky himself seemed to be prone to doing in his non-fiction.

Can the philosopher deal with this merely by affirming the secondariness of the novelist's word in comparison, say, with that of the poet? Is the novelist condemned in advance merely to recycle *Gerede*? Does the philosopher's faith in the primordial nature of the poetic word rest on a confusion of what was widely assumed to be the temporal priority of the poetic word? And, if so, does the late arrival of the novel preclude the possibility that, in its own way, the novelistic word brings to the fore a certain primordial quality of language, of the word as such; that what happens to 'the word' in the complex, stratified, multiply fractured, and unfinalized space of novelistic discourse is (at least) 'equi-primordial' with the 'gathering' of Being effected in the poetic word? And might it then be the case that, to adapt a Heideggerian formulation, the word, any word, is inevitably and necessarily 'always already' falling, that 'falling' is what language does (a possibility, incidentally, hinted at by Kierkegaard when, dismissing the myth of the serpent, he suggests that it was language itself that first tempted Adam)? But if that is so, how can we find the assurance that the philosopher seems to have found *either* (if we keep our eyes on *Being and Time*) that the self can become consciously (and therefore articulately) unified around a decisive act of self-choice in the face of death, *or* (if we apply the same question to the later works) that the poet is in a position to inaugurate an anticipatory celebration of the festal unity of gods and mortals? For the implication of the novelistic scenario of *The Idiot* seems precisely to be that any anticipatory act or word, even when it seems most serious, most decisive, is liable to unravel in time, or to slip into any one of the innumerable crevices that criss-cross the space between actually speaking persons.

Heidegger's account of anticipatory resoluteness in the face of death may offer one possibility for engaging the possible impossibility of my own existence; but it is only one possibility. As such it seems to fall far short of what might be required for grounding a general and reliable moment of vision that might bring our being-as-a-whole into its view. Exposed to the hum, the ebb and flow, and incompleteness of the novelistic word, the heroic profile struck by the philosopher becomes blurred, lost in the crowd, a possibility amongst possibilities, a key to the whole only to those capable of an act of faith that runs on ahead of any possible evidence.