

Introduction

Hölderlin is a beginning.

—Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen*, VII–XI³⁴

I. Hölderlin as a “Transition”

Few themes resonate as powerfully on Heidegger’s long and winding thoughtpath as those connected to homeland, *Heimat*, homecoming, and *Heimkehr*. There are, of course, many dimensions to this preoccupation with home in Heidegger’s work. In his writings from the 1930s we can find a strong political emphasis on themes connected to rootedness, the homeland, the *Volk*, the German nation, and the earth. In the years after the Second World War we can notice the preeminence of the native region as a way to withstand the calculative thinking that pervades the atomic age and its technological dominion. During the 1960s, the theme of the homeland runs through virtually all of Heidegger’s occasional speeches in Messkirch and southern Germany that speak to the effect of homelessness upon the fate and destiny of the human being. In the *Spiegel* interview, Heidegger stresses that “everything essential and great has arisen solely from the fact that humans had a home and were rooted in a tradition” (HR: 325/GA 16: 670). In all of these different iterations and reflections on the home and on the alien effects of uprooting, the one voice that resonates most powerfully is that of the Swabian poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Hölderlin’s writing will have an enormous influence on Heidegger as he comes to approach questions about art, the earth, language, time, technology, and the sacred. In so many of his excursions into new realms that emerge in his thinking—the dialogue between think-

ing and poetry, the meaning of the fourfold, the claim of language as it relates to nearness, dwelling, measure, and the appropriating event—the figure of Hölderlin looms large. More than this, the very structure and trajectory of Heidegger’s whole sketch of a history of beyng belongs, I will argue, to Hölderlin’s poetic understanding of history as one marked by the departure and hoped for return of the gods.

Hölderlin, in this sense, stands not as a historical figure who belongs to a specific era of German history or intellectual life; on the contrary, he stands for Heidegger as the name of a myth, thought as a possibility and hope for a German future. What this myth of “Hölderlin” countenances is a decision about the future of the West, a future whose very possibility rests upon the Germans resolutely giving heed to Hölderlin’s call for authentic homecoming. Yet even as Heidegger will take up his dialogue with Hölderlin, he will renounce any attempt to situate his reading of the poet in a traditional literary or historical way. Rather, he states, “we renounce the claim to uncover the historically correct Hölderlin” in favor of a beyng-historical reading of the poet (GA 52: 4). This version of Hölderlin envisions him as proposing a conflictually intimate (*innig*) relation to the earth that is “no longer metaphysical” (GA 52: 99).³⁵ Through his poetizing, Heidegger will claim, Hölderlin is able to provide the hints and intimations of “slow footbridges” (*langsamen Stegen*) that afford an opening to a “transition” (*Übergang*) between the time of the gods’ departure and the time of their coming (GA 52: 94–96). This poetic transition in a time of need offers to Heidegger a way of thinking through the nihilistic plight of Western humanity announced in Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God. In this way, Hölderlin becomes for Heidegger the poet blessed with “knowing about the realm of decision between the godforsakenness of beings . . . and the grounding of a godhood of the gods” (GA 75: 7). What this decision involves is, however, less a “moral-anthropological” or “existentiell” choice than it is an originary de-scission (*Ent-scheidung*) that cuts off and scissions the connexus between human beings and gods through an appropriating event that reconfigures history (CP: 69, 81, 179/GA: 65, 87, 103, 227). For Heidegger, this decision essentially occurs “as the erupting fissure of beyng itself,” something that needs to “to be grasped beyng-historically, not *morally-anthropologically*.” To enter into the time-space of this decision, Heidegger insists, demands a “leap” or *Sprung* “into the belonging to beyng in the full essential occurrence of beyng as event.”

It is only through this leap—a leap reserved “*For the few—For the rare*”—that there can be anything like a “first penetration into the

domain of the *history of being*.” But before this leap can happen, Heidegger avows, there must occur a preparation and “preparedness for the transition from the end of the first beginning and into the other beginning.” Moreover, for both this preparation and transition there needs to occur a revolutionary turn or *Kehre* in the human being’s relation to language, one whereby language is understood not as a tool for communication or control but as “that appropriating event (*Ereignis*) that disposes over (*ver-fügt . . . über*) the highest possibility of human being” (HR: 121/GA 4: 38). And it is in this breach between the thoughtless application of language to effect mastery over the world of beings *and* that “domain in which poetry unfolds its power” that Hölderlin stands before us as the poet “of” decision—in a double sense (GA 39: 213–214). That is, not only does Hölderlin’s poetic word prepare a historical decision for the Germans but this word is itself the expression of a de-scission or *Riss* that emerges from beyng itself and that stands as the beyng-historical expression of a profound conflict at the heart of beyng.

What this decision entails is something that Hölderlin’s poetic word prepares us for, a preparation that stands before the German *Volk* as its ownmost mission, task, and vocation. And for Heidegger it is Hölderlin who, as “poet of poets, poet of the Germans,” stands as that essential figure whose historical destiny is “to become a power in the history of our *Volk*.” Here, Heidegger speaks of Hölderlin as the poet who stands as “the founder of beyng”—or more specifically, “the founder of German beyng because he has projected such beyng the farthest . . . out ahead into the most distant future” (HGR: 194–195, 201/GA 39: 214, 220). To grasp Hölderlin’s place within the German future becomes for Heidegger one of the decisive tasks of his beyng-historical thinking. Taking up such a task and embracing it as the highest vocation of the Germans becomes for Heidegger an expression of “‘politics’ in the highest and authentic sense”—what Heidegger in his *Black Notebooks* would term “metapolitics” (GA 39: 214; GA 94: 115–116, 124). There, Heidegger writes:

The end of “philosophy.”—We must bring it to an end and thereby prepare what is wholly other—metapolitics.

What emerges out of this “metapolitics ‘of’ the German *Volk*” is a deeply political appropriation of Hölderlin’s poetry for a nonmetaphysical *mythos* of an other beginning of/in history. Within such a history, Heidegger positions the Germans as the saviors of the West. As he puts forward this metapolitical vision it is the German *Volk* that stands out as

playing a singular and exceptional role in preparing “the transformation of being,” one in which “only the German can say and poetize being in a new, originary way” (GA 95: 18; GA 94: 27, 95). Throughout his career Heidegger will repeat his messianic-nationalist claims that it is “the Germans alone” who await the task of “accepting the distant injunction of the beginning,” one bequeathed to them by the ancient Greeks.

Authorized by Hölderlin’s poetic word to offer a nonmetaphysical pathway out of the first Greek beginning, Heidegger turns to the German future to think through what he initially termed “the complete otherness of the second beginning” (BN I: 243/GA 94: 333). During the early 1930s Heidegger would refer multiple times to this possibility of “a second beginning” of thinking, one that he understood as pure possibility, a beginning whose very inception eludes the historicizing proclivities of modern scientific-technological thinking (BN I: 153–156, 171, 173, 175–176, 178, 243/GA 94: 209–213, 234, 236, 239, 241, 244). This possibility, as Heidegger thinks it, cannot be historically calculated in terms of a “utopian” future. Even less can it take the shape of a political program of reform. At root, the other beginning endures as a revolutionary hope for what exceeds human capability, a hope whose coming cannot be engineered or calculated in advance. The time of the other beginning, rather, comes to us as revolutionary and transformative; it is marked by suddenness and by the abrupt scission and tear that Hölderlin himself characterizes as “die reissende Zeit,” “the time that tears.”³⁶ For Hölderlin it is this kairological time of revolution and transformation that bespeaks the time of the gods’ coming.

What Heidegger draws from this Hölderlinian encounter with the time of the gods’ coming is a powerful sense of Germany’s destinal mission to save the West by coming into its proper sense of national identity, an identity characterized by an alien homecoming. Such a homecoming, Heidegger contends, can happen only through a poetic-philosophical dialogue with the ancient Greeks. Only by journeying outward from the German *Heimat* into the strange otherness of the Greek beginning, a journeying prefigured in Hölderlin’s famous Böhlendorff letter, can the German *Volk* come into its ownmost and proper sense of its authentic identity (E&L: 207/DKV III: 459–462). For Heidegger this journey outward from the home into the foreign occurs as a way “to learn from the foreign for the sake of what is one’s own” (HHI: 132–133/GA 53: 165–166). Such a journey “names the law of being un-homely as a law of becoming homely.” This vision of what I will call “an alien homecoming” constitutes a “law of history” for Heidegger, one

that appears as “the essential law of Western and German humankind” (HHI: 137/GA 53: 170). It is this theme of an alien homecoming to Hölderlin’s poetic hymns that will constitute the focus of this book. In chapter 1 I will provide the background necessary to understand the historical-philosophical situation of Heidegger’s “Hölderlin” by going back to the influence of Norbert von Hellgrath, the George circle, and the legend of a “secret Germany.” I will then situate Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine” by positioning it against the failure of Heidegger’s Rectorial Address and how in these hymns Heidegger finds a “metapolitical” form of an authentic apolitical politics of the homeland. In chapter 2, I take up this theme of an alien homecoming by offering a reading of Heidegger’s WS 1941–1942 lecture course *Hölderlin’s Hymn “Remembrance.”* There I explore how, in his reading of the poem “Andenken,” Heidegger reflects on Hölderlin’s journey to Bordeaux from Swabia against the logic of the Böhlendorff letter and its law of history as a journeying into the foreign as a return marked by an alien homecoming. While exploring Hölderlin’s sojourn in southern France, one that he understands as a kind of journeying to the ancient Greeks, Heidegger underlines the significance of “the experience of the foreign” as what remains essential to any proper homecoming. Homecoming here is always understood as a homecoming to what is one’s own; but, at the same time, it also involves a homecoming that is foreign to one’s own—since, Heidegger contends, at the heart of the homely lies something un-homely, uncanny, strange, and alien. It is in this sense that I speak of Heidegger’s Hölderlin lectures as an “alien homecoming” since, according to this peculiar logic, the proper comes to itself only in its coming into the foreign. Chapter 3 offers a reading of Heidegger’s SS 1942 lecture course *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister”* and continues with the theme of an alien homecoming to highlight the war years. Chapter 4 suggests a historical bridge to understand and properly situate Heidegger’s dialogue, “The Western Conversation” (1946–48), the focus of chapter 5. These two chapters present a view into the postwar changes within Heidegger’s earlier *Hölderlinbild*. Here, Heidegger’s own Swabian heritage comes to play an inordinate role in the way he conceives of this postwar German situation.

This turn to Hölderlin is not to be understood, however, as a nostalgic return to a simpler time of unity and un-alienated oneness. On the contrary, what Heidegger learns from Hölderlin is the profound experience of separation, scission, and alienation that lies at the heart of all homecoming. Heidegger locates the source of such a scission in

Sophocles's choral ode from *Antigone* where he finds a reenactment of the tragic law of all alien homecoming—namely, that only by becoming homely within our home can we ever come to a proper sense of how it is utterly pervaded by the un-homely. As he reflects on Sophocles's chiasmic pairings of *hypsipolis/apolis*: *pantoporos/aporos*, Heidegger claims that it is only by being alienated from the hearth of the home that we become homely in being un-homely. It is this *deimos* character of our being that pervades the human sojourn upon the earth as one marked by an alien homecoming. That is, in its dwelling at home in the hearth of its own settlement, the human being is simultaneously marked by an uncanny, strange, and unsettling force that renders it alien to itself, unhomely in its home. As Heidegger puts it in the Ister lectures: "The human being in its own essence is a *katastrophe*—a reversal that turns it away from its own essence" (HHI: 77/GA 53: 94).

Heidegger will undertake this journey of alien homecoming through his conversations with pre-Socratic philosophers (Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides) and archaic poets (Pindar and Sophocles). Yet part of this conversation will also be mediated in and through Heidegger's dialogue with the poetic hymns of Hölderlin, whose own vision of the Greek dawn pervades Heidegger's work—especially during the 1930s and '40s. We shall see in what follows how Heidegger, in the midst of the National Socialist Hölderlin-mania of the 1930s, carves out his own singular relation to the poet, a relation that is curiously bifurcated and chiasmic. On the one hand, Heidegger will distance himself from the crude political uses of Hölderlin's poetic word carried out by National Socialist partisans such as Kurt Hildebrandt, Willi Könitzer, and the contributors of politically aligned journals such as *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* and the *Völkischer Beobachter*.³⁷ In response to these crudely constructed appeals to "Hölderlin's poetry as one of the most precious avowals of the racially- and blood-bound bequest of the German soul," Heidegger will write in the *Black Notebooks*: "Hölderlin— . . . It would be better if for the next hundred years we still did not utter that name or allow it in our newspapers" (GA 94: 265). And yet, on the other hand, Heidegger will conscript "Hölderlin" in the service of his own *Heimat*-bound vision of authentic National Socialism, purged of its own machinational designs and brutal political calculus. This Hölderlinian dream of German national self-renewal and transformation will grow out of Heidegger's reaction to the devastating defeat of the First World War and the humiliation inflicted on the German *Volk* by the revanche-inspired Treaty of Versailles (GA 96: 40; GA 94: 148).

As Heidegger sees it, in our way of taking up Hölderlin's poetic word, we are faced with a decision about the future of being. On the one hand, we find the human being positioned between commemorating the first beginning and preparing for an other beginning. At the same time, we humans have lost the very thread that might help us to bind ourselves back to the event of being that gives itself over to us even as it withdraws into concealment.

If we are to be capable of ever corresponding to the event of being (in the sense of *Ent-sprechen*), Heidegger avows, then the path to such correspondence must lead to a genuine encounter and confrontation with Hölderlin. It is this encounter that marks one of the most decisive struggles in Heidegger's entire corpus. From the time of the rectorate up through the 1960s, Hölderlin will remain for Heidegger an essential conversation partner, the poet whose very name bespeaks the plight of humanity in the godforsaken world of technological machination and positionality. In this sounding of Hölderlin's poetic word, Heidegger seeks to locate a site for thinking the one thing necessary: the decision about the flight and arrival of the gods.

But it would be foolhardy to misread what Heidegger says about Hölderlin: he is not and can never become the "savior" of the German *Volk*. Such grandiose hopes serve only as a palpable example of the bankruptcy within contemporary German thinking. On the contrary, Hölderlin—or, more properly, the late hymns of Hölderlin—offer(s) an *Übergang* or transition for the German *Volk* between their historical *Untergang* or decline and their futural *Aufgang* or ascent (GA: 71, 271–272). Hölderlin's works do not and cannot of themselves save. Rather, they prepare a pathway from out of the darkness of the world's night in that they genuinely encounter the gods' failure to arrive—*der Fehl Gottes* (GA 5: 269; SPF: 82–83). Moreover, they help those who hear their word by attuning them to the profound loss and devastation of such a destitute time—its abyssal *Abgrund*—by initiating a mood of sacred mourning (*heilige Trauer*). This sacred mourning comes to us not merely as sadness at the loss and departure of the old gods; on the contrary, "it is nothing less than the sole possible, resolute readiness for awaiting the divine. . . . That the gods have fled does not mean that divinity has banished from the *Dasein* of human beings. Here it means that such divinity precisely prevails, yet as something no longer fulfilled, as becoming dark and overcast, yet still powerful" (GA 39: 95). Here, sacred mourning is understood less as an affective-psychological state than as what needs "to be thought in a more inceptual way as an

attunement through which the silent voice of the [poetic] word attunes the essence of the human being in its relation to being" (GA 54: 157). This focus on the inceptual force of sacred mourning will constitute one of the essential themes of chapter 1 focused on Hölderlin's *Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine."*

In a profound and essential sense, then, sacred mourning is far more than a subjective response to a condition of loss; it emerges, rather, as a preparatory attunement for a transition to an other beginning for thinking. By granting access to what has vanished from the earth, sacred mourning attunes us to the temporal happening of *remembrance* or *Andenken*: "not a mere making-present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of something past (*Vergangenen*)" but a "commemorative thinking (*Andenken*) of what has been (*das Gewesene*) as the not yet unfolded" of a futural coming (GA 4: 16, 100). Remembrance, in this sense, thinks futurally from out of that which has been—but not in any traditional philosophical or scientific way. Rather, remembrance comes to us as a decision concerning the absconding and arrival of the gods. But again, this decision is not a moral-anthropological one. It manifests itself in any straightforward "historiological" way (*historisch*) but emerges out of the scission of gods/humans within the history of *beyng* (*Seynsgeschichte*), one that lets the appropriative event come into play. And since *beyng* eventuates as withdrawal, concealment, refusal, restraint, and mystery, it is hardly surprising that the thinking and commemoration of what is coming must forego the metaphysics of presence to attune itself to the absencing/absconding of the gods. Within the history of *beyng*, this departure of the gods properly occurs as a decision "of" being and it is in response to such a decision that Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin's poetic word will unfold.

In the early years of National Socialist rule, Heidegger believed in the proximate possibility of a revolution in German *Dasein* that would help to usher in "the empowerment of being" (GA 94: 36, 37, 43, 45, 62). This empowerment would entail not the mere empowerment of beings or of individual subjects, but of being itself (GA 94: 57, 45, 40). That meant above all that philosophy could not initiate this revolution, nor could it steer it onto an originary path for the *Volk*. All philosophy could do is to *prepare* the way for such a revolution through incessant questioning. The Greeks were the first to engage in "the relentless questioning struggle concerning the essence and being of beings." This beginning by the Greeks "still is," Heidegger insists; "it brought about a wholly new attunement in whose resonance we still stand" (GA 36/37:

8). As Heidegger conceives it, this Greek beginning fell into oblivion starting with the work of Plato and Aristotle. Over the course of two millennia and more, the history of this oblivion has only intensified, culminating in the machinational dominion over beings set into place by the early modern philosophical revolution in science. What emerges from this bleak antimodern diagnosis of modernity's spiritual bankruptcy is nothing less than a vision of a new German task and vocation: to recommence what the Greeks once commenced in the first beginning. Such a task, Heidegger insists, constitutes "the innermost and utmost charge of the Germans" (GA 94: 66).

This dream of German greatness, nourished on the energy of the political revolution of 1933, would founder, however, on the failure of the movement itself and on Heidegger's disastrous experiment as rector of Freiburg University. The miscarriage of the National Socialist revolution, its failure to confront the unbridled dominion of planetary technology by authentically rooting the *Volk* in the homeland, leads Heidegger to seek a purer form of revolutionary, national transformation that he finds in the poetic language of Hölderlin. It was in Hölderlin alone that Heidegger uncovered an essential turn back into the inceptual, a turn that would keep the promise of the futural revolutionary power of the Germans. Yet one of the lessons that Heidegger learned from the failures of the National Socialist experiment was that it would take time to prepare the way for a genuine revolution. Even after the trauma of the German defeat and his denazification tribunal, Heidegger would still cling to Hölderlin—but now with the awareness that it would require an immense amount of work to begin to genuinely hear his word. Writing in January 1946, Heidegger confesses:

I have the feeling that a hundred years of concealment are still needed until one has an inkling of what awaits us in Hölderlin's poetry. (GA 97: 70)

II. Philosophical "Andenken": Hölderlin as the Voice of the Other Beginning

What endures during the period of Heidegger's Hölderlin writings that constitute the focus of this book (1934–1948) is a fundamental question: can a space be opened for inceptual thinking? Moreover, can Hölderlin's poetry

help us to open such a space? Throughout all the changes of Heidegger's complex and labyrinthine *Denkweg*, through the political disappointments, the *Auseinandersetzung* with planetary technology, the thinking of the history of being, the reflections on art and poetry, Hölderlin remains *the* voice that Heidegger hears as he attempts to reflect on the authentic task and mission of the German *Volk*. As Heidegger continually emphasizes, Hölderlin's poetic word "prepares the other beginning of the history of being" (GA 70:167). Moreover, considered in its being-historical sense, Hölderlin's word provides nothing less than "a *transition* from the first beginning into the other beginning," a transition from the destitution of a world in which the gods have fled into a world that prepares itself for their return (GA 70: 167). And in this delicate and difficult relation between the first beginning and the other beginning, Hölderlin teaches the Germans to ready themselves for this leap by preparing the *Anlauf* (running start) through an attuned form of *Andenken* (remembrance). In this way *Andenken* becomes essential for Heidegger as a form of *commemorative thinking* of a beginning whose inception is still to come, a beginning that remains as a beginning only in its coming. As Heidegger puts it, "such *Andenken* springs forth from out of a dialogue of thinking with poetizing," a dialogue whose very meaning lies in granting a site for humans to dwell in a poetic relation to the earth.

In his own inimitable way, Hölderlin concerned himself with the fate of language in an epoch where the gods had fled. Reflecting on the being-historical significance of this plight, Heidegger comes to think it precisely through Hölderlin's topoi of "homecoming" and "poetic dwelling"—of the human being's "Aufenthalt" or sojourn upon the earth ("Der Rhein," vv. 127–129). It is by confronting "the bounds / Which God at birth assigned / To him for his term and site" (Der Rhein, vv. 127–129) that the human being comes to its own proper *ethos* or sense of dwelling/abiding the destinal dispensation granted to it by history (SPF: 202–203). Yet the bounds of human life are not the only bounds within which *Dasein* finds itself. On the contrary, there are epochal lines of partition granted by the history of being that shape the destiny of those, like Heidegger, who understand history in terms of homecoming and the advent of the gods. These lines of partition fall outside the sphere of philosophical engagement; their power derives from a *mythos* about the history of being shaped by Hölderlin's own *mythos* concerning the departure and the arrival of the gods. Heidegger's elegiac lament—"we come too late for the gods and too early for being"—echoes throughout

his work as a way of characterizing this epochal transition “between the times” (GA 97: 54–55; GA 13: 76). And only insofar as the human being addresses the gods’ departure in the spirit of sacred mourning, and only to the extent that it prepares itself for the return of the gods in a comportment (*Verhalten*) of reserve and restraint (*Verhaltenheit*), will the opening for the other beginning properly occur (*sich ereignen*). But again, the path to such an opening cannot be engineered, nor is it a matter of sheer waiting. Letting the opening appear will properly occur only insofar as human beings are appropriated to the event of such an opening, an e-vent that comes as a *remembrance*. Here *Andenken* does not represent something past as what lies behind the poet in the realm of memory or reminiscence. Rather, it stands before him as both a task and “decision concerning the essence and vocation of the Germans and therewith the destiny of the West” (GA 95: 18).

The poetic power of *Andenken* lies in enacting a living relation between past and future as well as between what is local and native *and* what is strange and foreign. For Heidegger, this poetic sense of *Andenken* provides a way of thinking (*denken*) *toward* (*an*) this dynamic movement between past and future, future and past, that is never uni-directional but always a back-and-forth oscillation between what has been and what is coming. The encounter with Hölderlin comes to constitute a deeply mindful reflection on the history of thinking understood against and in terms of the history of *beyng*. Because the Germans have not yet been able to embrace Hölderlin as “*the poet of poets*,” they have been unable to connect with their futural task and calling. Moreover, if the Germans fail to heed this calling, Heidegger concludes, then their own failure would constitute not merely a national fate but would encompass the fate of the entire Occident. In this way, Heidegger goes back and forth between offering his devastating critique of modern machinational existence and holding out hope for the coming to self-awareness of the German *Volk* that will “save the West.” As he puts it in his Heraclitus lectures of SS 1943:

The greatest and the authentic trial of the Germans is at hand, that trial . . . whether they, the Germans, are in accord with the truth of *beyng*, whether beyond their readiness to die they are strong enough to save what is inceptual in its inconspicuous flourishing against the small-mindedness of the modern world. (GA 55: 181)

And yet, as ever in Heidegger's reflections about the fate of the modern world, it is "the Germans and only the Germans who can save the West" (GA 55: 108). During the war years it is this commission, granted to the Germans from out of the history of *beyng*, that animates Heidegger's own ingrained sense of a national supremacy marked by the Germans' status as a chosen people.

We have a task. Only the question remains whether we ourselves are capable of *being* this task. Every German man has died in vain if we are not engaged hourly in saving a beginning for the German essence beyond the now utter and final self-devastation of the whole of modern humanity. (GA 96: 256)

As Heidegger confronts the devastation and destructiveness of technological modernity in all its depredatory forms, he returns to this theme of German preeminence and singularity, since it is "only the Germans who can poetize and say being in a new originary way" (GA 94: 27). As Heidegger lays out his reading of the history of *beyng*, the special German role within this history gets conjoined with the voice of Hölderlin. Here the name of "Hölderlin" predominates as synonymous with "the preparation of the inceptuality of the other beginning" (GA 70: 156, 167). Heidegger goes on to ask, "why is it that Hölderlin's word still has not been experienced and still yet has not been known as the voice of *beyng*?" This way of posing the question forcefully attests to Heidegger's own claim that his way of engaging the work of Hölderlin does not take the form of an "interpretation." Rather, he understands it as an "Aus-ein-ander-setzung" or confrontational setting-asunder that does not spring forth from his own reflections, but from what he terms "the voice of *beyng*" (GA 71: 337). In this affirmation that Heidegger's engagement with Hölderlin is one that proceeds from a "hearkening" to the voice of *beyng*, we find ourselves in the perilous waters of what Max Kommerell has called Heidegger's "Hölderlin violence."³⁸ If this violence were merely circumscribed within the realm of Hölderlin philology or philosophical-poetical criticism, we might be able to overlook Heidegger's tendentious reading of the poet. But Heidegger's uninterrupted conjoining of Hölderlin's work with German destiny and the future of the Fatherland extends beyond the realm of "critical" interpretation to Heidegger's own *ex cathedra* pronouncements that emerge from his communion with "the

voice of *beyng*.” All of these tendentious dispositions come together to render Heidegger’s Hölderlin writings highly controversial, precarious, and even perhaps unsparingly “fatal.”

What ultimately confronts us, then, in Heidegger’s alien homecoming to Hölderlin is a crisscrossed testament to the oppositional force and contentious strife that Heraclitus identifies at the heart of being, a chiasm redolent of the Greek tragedians. There we can locate a difficult legacy of contradiction and paradox—of a deeply ethical thinker who abandons the tradition of ethics for his own *metapolitical* reading of a German *Heilsgeschichte*—a destinal history of *beyng* with the Germans as the only people capable of “saving the West” (GA 55: 108; EdP: 40). It is as a chiasm between an ethical attunement to the hiddenness of being *and* an overreaching errancy marked by arrogation and arrogance that Heidegger’s thinking comes to us. In the Hölderlin lectures we find the difficulties of this crisscross as what marks and shapes the very movement and energy involved in thinking the authentic vocation of the German *Volk* as it comes to terms with the legacy of the first Greek beginning. Moreover, it is this chiasmic structure that will mark Heidegger’s Hölderlin lectures as a doubled form of an alien homecoming: both to the privileged vocation of the Germans in a *Sonderweg* version of *Seynsgeschichte* and to a poetic form of dwelling that holds forth the hope of a recovery/*Verwindung* from the machinational destiny of Western metaphysics and technology. We will need to remain attentive to the crisscrossing patterns of each of these initiatives as we trace the paradoxes that come to shape Heidegger’s alien homecoming to, through, and with the poetic voice of Hölderlin. For what Heidegger’s engagement with Hölderlin offers is nothing less than the brutal contradictions of his own National Socialist metapolitics of “poetic dwelling.” Yet, given all of these chiasmic crossings and double movements, we are pressed to ask: who *is* Heidegger’s Hölderlin?

III. Who Is Heidegger’s Hölderlin?

To follow all the twists, turns, bends, detours, and dramatic divagations along the path of Heidegger’s life journey with Hölderlin would require the skills of a master navigator schooled in the practice of philosophical reflection and poetic imagination, as well as in the subtle arts of theatrical self-staging and -presentation.³⁹ Heidegger did not simply read

Hölderlin and offer commentary on his work. He needed Hölderlin as the “mouthpiece” (*Sprachrohr*) for a new and radical form of thinking, a poetic-philosophical attempt to open up a language that would be able to “turn back,” “get over,” or “recover from” (*verwinden*) the language of Western metaphysics.⁴⁰ Reinhard Mehring goes so far as to claim that in 1934 Heidegger donned a “Hölderlin mask that required the grand staging of regularly scheduled lectures.”⁴¹ Yet no matter how cynically or innocently we read Heidegger’s Hölderlin reception, it is hard to separate the idiosyncratically political use of Hölderlin from the various attempts at Heideggerian self-staging. As Mehring sees it, Heidegger’s own language becomes “rhapsodic” in its engagement with the texts of Hölderlin taking on the character of a poetic-thinkerly song announcing the dawn of a new age. But whether we read Heidegger’s distinctive voice throughout his Hölderlin lectures naïvely, critically, reverently, or condescendingly, it is difficult not to notice its singular character. Heidegger does not simply “comment” on Hölderlin’s poems, as if he were engaged in the academic work of interpretation, exegesis, or critique. There is a unique style and tone to the lectures that emerges out of Hölderlin’s own distinctive language and yet is unmistakably Heideggerian. Anyone who has heard the disc recordings of his Hölderlin readings can attest to the inimitable timbre, resonance, and inflection of Heidegger’s voice with its dramatic, if not prophetic, tone quality.⁴² Heidegger enters into the world of the poet in hallowed tones, opening himself and his listeners to a fundamental attunement that does not follow the lines of calculative reckoning but beckons us to the hidden possibility of poetic dwelling. Throughout the Hölderlin lectures, this form of dwelling will take different shapes. During the mid-1930s it will take the form of a radically German *Kampfgemeinschaft* or “community of struggle” in battle with the forces of Western enlightenment rationality; by the postwar period, however, Heidegger will have shifted ground and will come to speak of a non-nationalistic form of Hölderlinian dwelling as “a destinal belongingness to other peoples” (PM: 257/GA 4: 337–338).

Yet throughout all of the political shifts—from his early enthusiasm for the National Socialist revolution (1933) through his despair in 1945–1946 on to his postwar revival and triumph in the 1950s–1960s—the role of Hölderlin in his thinking will remain essential. Heidegger expressed the fundamental tenets of this Hölderlinian faith in one of his entries from *Contributions to Philosophy*:

The historical destiny of philosophy culminates in the knowledge of the necessity [*Notwendigkeit*] of making Hölderlin's word be heard. The ability to hear corresponds to an ability to say, which speaks out of the question-worthiness of being. For this is the least that must be accomplished in preparing a space for the word. (If everything were not perverted into a "scholarly contribution" marked by a "literary-historical" approach, then one would have to say that a preparation for thinking must be created in order to interpret Hölderlin. To "interpret" here does not mean making "understandable"; instead it means to ground the projection of the truth of his poetry in the meditation and attunement in which futural Dasein sways.) (CP: 334 /GA 65: 422)

Heidegger continues to deny that his way of engaging Hölderlin takes the form of an "interpretation." Rather, he understands it as an "*Auseinander-setzung*" or "confrontation" with Hölderlin that does not spring forth from his own reflections, but from "the voice of being":

for this thinking about Hölderlin is a kind of "setting-asunder" (*Auseinander-setzung*), which is, however, again taken in a being-historical sense and not as a wrangling about what is and is not correct. This is a "setting-asunder" of historical necessities in their historicity; in this sense, it is not a "thetically imposed" arrangement (*veranstaltete* "Setzung") from us but, rather, an obedient listening to the voice of being. (GA 71: 336–337)

But how are we, as obedient listeners, to find our proper relation to "the voice of being"? And who might be able to discern whether the echoes that we hear in Hölderlin's words stem from our own historical position or from that of being itself? Heidegger's posture of prophetic intimacy with the word of Hölderlin made some of his listeners extremely uneasy already in the 1930s. Among fellow National Socialists, the critique of Heidegger's "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (1936) was immediate. In 1937, Dr. Willi Köntzer published a "response" to Heidegger's essay in *Wille und Macht*, "the leading Organ of National Socialist Youth" edited by the NS Minister of Youth Affairs, Baldur von Schirach. Köntzer, who praises Hölderlin as "the German poet whose

work was just as much a deed as the sacrificial deed of [World War I] heroes whose spirit he celebrates in song,” finds Heidegger’s rendering of Hölderlin troublesome. Köntitzer charges that “Herr Professor Heidegger wants to interpret Hölderlin’s poetic work and the essence of poetry on the basis of five arbitrarily chosen words, which do not interpret the work of the poet in the spirit of devoting himself to that work. Rather, he employs the means of a language that, in its essence, is wholly foreign to us and he does so with the methods of a philosophical orientation for which at the very least we can find no trace in Hölderlin.”⁴³ Köntitzer then attacks Heidegger for being too attached to his own *Weltanschauung* and its goals. Against Heidegger’s vision, he claims, “We want to view Hölderlin in light of *the experience of a whole Volk*, not in the obscure gloom of the academy’s departmental clubs. The poet who stands close to the Volk (not = popular!) belongs to the Volk (not = masses!), and whoever seeks to serve him, opens the path to understanding him.” For orthodox National Socialists such as Köntitzer, Heidegger’s own cryptic language threatened to bury the *völkish* pronouncements of Hölderlin under the mantle of academic hermeticism.⁴⁴

But even serious Hölderlin specialists such as Max Kommerell had problems with Heidegger’s highly individual approach to Hölderlin’s texts, finding in it an “interpretative violence” that went far beyond anything authorized by the profession of literary scholarship.⁴⁵ In a letter to Heidegger from July of 1942, Kommerell offers his thoughts on Heidegger’s essay “Hölderlin’s Hymn: As on a Holiday” (1941), claiming that he “does not understand the basic premise of [Heidegger’s] essay.” He sees immediately that what Heidegger offers here is not in any traditional sense an “interpretation” but rather a “document of [his] encounter” with Hölderlin. What emerges from this encounter, Kommerell suggests, is that Heidegger “authorizes” a “turn in/of destiny” whereby, as he tells Heidegger, “the destiny that is Hölderlin reveals itself as that destiny for which you stand.” Here Kommerell penetrates to the core of Heidegger’s *Hölderlinbild* in that he questions the very basis of Heidegger’s approach, asking him on whose authority does he make claims that burst forth as ex cathedra pronouncements, pronouncements which, like Hölderlin’s own oracular utterances, appear to resemble the entreaties of a prophet: “Where is the transition point where your own philosophy flows into Hölderlin and where, in such a decisive way, from out of your description of the human situation, does it become a metaphysical pronouncement marked by an absolutely final certainty?” Kommerell recognizes the brilliance

of Heidegger's approach and the singular significance of his thinkerly contributions, yet he remains troubled by Heidegger's assumption of a prophetic role that seems to him ill-suited to the time. As he closes his letter to Heidegger, Kommerell comes to his final observation: "After so much candor, let me risk one last thing: Your essay could be—I do not say it is—it could very well be a disaster!"

Kommerell's insights remain striking even after the long trail of commentary on Heidegger's work. He recognizes the abiding tension in Heidegger's Hölderlin essays between their interpretive violence and their philosophical profundity, a tension that shapes so much of Heidegger's work on the poet and that we will have to explore in the coming chapters. But Kommerell also discerns another crucial feature of Heidegger's approach—namely, how Hölderlin's prophetic voice in the poems will be transformed and metamorphosed into Heidegger's own form of philosophical prophecy bound up with the power of myth and the call of the gods, forces that decidedly fall outside the realm of both literary-historical scholarship and academic philosophy. Hans-Georg Gadamer touches on such a reading in his remark that "it was Hölderlin who first loosened Heidegger's tongue" (FS: 51/GA 15: 351).⁴⁶ Through Hölderlin, Heidegger opened himself to the powerful insight that "language is the supreme event of human existence" (EHP: 58/GA 4: 40). Moreover, he came to see language as the domain in which we stand nearest to the mystery of being, hearkening to its hidden resonances in a way that we are brought into being's sway, appropriated to its own way of holding us in its playful, yet dangerous, way of manifesting. In fundamental Hölderlinian words—earth, homeland, the holy, being, the gods, dwelling, destiny, conversation, danger, event, destitution, nearness, flight, measure, the open, beginning, sign, coming, transition, turning—Heidegger unearths a nonmetaphysical possibility for doing philosophy in an originary, poetic way. Authorized by Hölderlin as it were, Heidegger now finds a new voice that abandons the academic jargon of *Being and Time* for a new thinkerly means of expression that seeks "a genuine revolution in our relation to language" (GA 40: 57). What begins to emerge in his first Hölderlin lectures and talks comes to fruition in the still private manuscripts *Beiträge zur Philosophie* and *Besinnung* that offer a new way of speaking, one highly influenced by a Hölderlinian inflection.

In these years during the mid-1930s Heidegger attempts to achieve something that, analogously, Nietzsche ventured in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

a prophetic voice that seeks to deconstruct the authority of all other prophets by authorizing its own form of “saying” (*Sage*). If Zarathustra becomes a “Wahrsager” (“prophet” or, more literally, “truth-teller”) for a distinctive and new kind of truth, then we can also say that Heidegger, in attuning himself to the language of Hölderlin’s late hymns, likewise becomes a “Wahrsager” authorized by Hölderlin’s own voice.⁴⁷ Kommerell recognizes this profound transformation in Heidegger’s language, one that involves Heidegger in an “event of appropriation” (*Ereignis*) whereby “Hölderlin became [for Heidegger] an inescapable destiny.”⁴⁸ In the years just after he finishes his cycle of university lectures on the poet, Heidegger attempts to write in a wholly new idiom: the dialogue form. In 1946/1948 he composes “Das abendländische Gespräch”—a lengthy conversation between an “old man” and a “young man” about the meaning of Hölderlin for the contemporary situation in postwar Europe. As the young man puts it, “in the poetry of Hölderlin the possibility of another appearance of *beyng* awaits us, a possibility that can not be accomplished through willing,” but only through a releasement toward our destiny, a *Gelassenheit* that honors the mystery of *beyng*’s way of withdrawal, concealment, withholding, and dispossession (GA 75: 81). This comportment of honoring the mystery of things that we do not understand abides as Heidegger’s Hölderlinian release toward the “destiny of *beyng*” (GA 75: 82). Many see in this Heideggerian comportment a kind of hermetic mysticism or authoritarian arrogance that cloaks itself in a language of destinal inevitability, one that relieves Heidegger of any political responsibility for the notorious “error” of his National Socialist affiliation. And yet we can also find here a new kind of ethical thinking, a poetic *ethos* of dwelling authentically upon the earth that calls us to our originary home in being, an *ethos* marked by a deep responsibility to being’s own way of self-disclosure in/as concealment.

IV. Language, “Ethos,” and the Ethicality of Being

Before we take up this question of poetic dwelling, however, we will need to address these underlying tensions in Heidegger’s appropriation of Hölderlin. Heidegger himself understands this appropriation as Hölderlin’s word calling to him in a “primordial calling that is itself called by that which is coming (*das Kommende*)” (EHP: 98/GA 4: 77). There are deeply ethical moments in Heidegger where we are confronted by the

uncanny polarities of human being, those irreconcilable tensions that render us as beings in kinship with both gods and beasts. Heidegger's interpretation of Sophocles's *Antigone* chorus—in both *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) and *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* (1942)—attempts to explore these polarities in terms of the uncanny (*un-heim-liche*) violence at the heart of human attempts to find a home (*Heimat*) within being. What emerges from Heidegger's reflections on Antigone's fate is a deep distrust of any "ethical" pronouncements about human comportment. What Heidegger unearths here is a deeply metaphysical impulse to erect rules, principles, and directives that set "standards" (*Maßstäbe*) for human behavior that will be binding in advance. These kinds of calculative measures wind up detaching human beings from their specific historical ground, uprooting them from the earth and rendering them as useful pieces that fit within the system of the *Gestell*, a "positionality" that positions whatever is present.⁴⁹ From his earliest lectures in Freiburg, Heidegger understood ethics in an Aristotelian sense as intimately bound up with what Aristotle termed "rhetoric." Rhetoric in this sense involves becoming attuned to the unique, ever-changing temporal contexts/moods that shape our understanding of language in its practical, concrete situatedness in the world. Rhetoric speaks to these moods, highlighting their kairological significance and rooting speech in the habits, familiar practices and ways of dwelling that constitute our world. Here Heidegger comes to understand language as intimately bound up with our *ethos*, our habitual haunts (*ethea*) and ways of abiding in the abode granted to us in our dwelling. For him, language is the genuine abode (*ethos*) of human beings, the place where we belong and that we share with other beings. Language forms our very sense of community and of our belonging to a specific people in a historical epoch, situating us in terms of that people's historical destiny.⁵⁰

Since so much depends upon how we engage language and since, in the present epoch our language has been threatened by the very technicity that weaves all beings into instrumental units comprising a great web of cybernetic information, Heidegger deems it essential that we rethink our relation to language. But, as Heidegger reminds us, "we are not yet underway to [language]. We must first turn back to that place where we already properly abide (*eigentlich aufhalten*)" (GA 12: 179). But we can only come to such a place if we can "find in the proximity of poetic experience with the word a possibility for a *thinking* experience with language," since it is precisely this proximity "that everywhere

pervades our sojourn (*Aufenthalt*) upon this earth” (GA 12: 177–178). What matters above all to Heidegger here is that we become attuned to the language of the poet and let it appropriate us to our authentic belongingness to being where we come to experience language as our proper home, “the house of being” (PM: 239, 274/GA 9: 313, 361). Poetry, especially the poetry of Hölderlin who poetizes the essence of poetry as the poet’s highest vocation, can help “human beings find the way to their abode (*Aufenthalt*) in the truth of being.” As such an abode, poetic dwelling takes the form of an *ethos* where we are held open (*aufhalten*) to the withholding (*vor-enthalten*) event of being. Language, as our proper *ethos*, becomes a deeply ethical concern for Heidegger especially as a way of measuring our responsibility for being and for recognizing the claim (*Anspruch*) that language (*Sprache*) makes upon us. But despite its ubiquitous presence in our lives as a means of communication, and as an instrument for speech that makes things accessible to us, “language still denies us its essence” (PM: 243/GA 9: 318). As Hyperion puts it in a letter to Diotima:

Men chatter like birds . . . but believe me, and consider that I say to you from the depths of my soul: Language is a great superfluity. (H: 159/DKV II: 131–132)

But language’s proper essence (*Wesen*), the way that it prevails essentially (*west*), occurs as a “saying” (*Sagen*) that relinquishes (*ent-sagen*) its propriety into that which is improper. If we were to say this in German, we might say something like this: “Die Sprache west nicht einfach als ein Sagen, sondern als ein Ent-Sagen (language essentially occurs not simply as a ‘say-ing,’ but as the withholding/renunciation of say-ing).” This movement of withdrawal, concealment, withholding, and recession belongs to language as that which is most proper to it, that which is its own. Poetry, as the primordial form of language, that which makes language possible, does not deny this concealment or simply try to “overcome” it by transforming concealment into revelation (GA 4: 43). Rather, poetry discloses this concealment *as* concealment, or that which ever recedes from human machination and control, the hidden dimension of the earth that makes the artwork possible in the world of human dwelling.

In our quotidian exchanges with language, what takes precedence are topics of immediate interest, daily occurrences, questions, and concerns.