Tragic Effects

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Die Gedichte [Hölderlins] sind im Lärm der “undichterischen
Sprachen” wie eine Glocke, die im Freien hängt und schon durch
einen leichten, über sie kommenden Schneefall verstimmt wird.
Vielleicht deshalb sagt Hölderlin in späteren Versen einmal das
Wort, das wie Prosa klingt und doch dichterisch ist wie kaum
eines (Entwurf zu Kolomb IV, 395):

Von wegen geringer Dinge
Verstimmt wie vom Schnee war
Die Glocke, womit
Man läutet
Zum Abendessen.

Vielleicht ist jede Erläuterung dieser Gedichte ein Schneefall auf
die Glocke.¹

Amidst the noise of “unpoetic languages” (IV, 257) the poems (i.e.,
Hölderlin’s) are like a bell, hanging in the open air and already
brought out of tune by a light snowfall that is coming over it. Per-
haps this is why Hölderlin once, in later verses, speaks the word
that sounds like prose and yet is poetic in a way that few others
are (Draft for “Colombus,” IV, 395):

Put out of tune
By humble things, as by snow

¹. Martin Heidegger, “Vorwort zur zweiten Auflage [1951],” Gesamtausgabe 4: Erläuterungen zu
Hölderlins Dichtung (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1944), 7f. Henceforth abbreviated as GA, with volume
and page number. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.
Was the bell, with which
The hour is rung
For the evening meal.

Perhaps every elucidation of these poems is a falling of snow on
the bell.

Sage mir, was du vom Übersetzen hältst, und ich sage dir, wer
du bist.

Tell me what you think of translation, and I will tell you who you
are. (GA 53: 76)

JUST AS SNOW falls softly upon a bell, reading touches lightly upon
a text. And leaves a trace, however faint. A *Verstimmung*, a disordering,
resounds from within, leaving the voice of the bell out of tune, the tenor
of the text inescapably other than it was before—allowing existing forms
to be unsettled by “humble things,” revealing a new dimension of the past
that only becomes audible through its echoes in the present, in the moment
of reading. In the 1951 foreword to his *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*
(*Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*), Martin Heidegger claims that the
act of reading Hölderlin (and, by extension, of attempting to illuminate his
poetry amid the clamor of “unpoetic languages”) requires the active engage-
ment with a poetic text that both demands elucidation and resists mere
ordering. Indeed, these preliminary remarks suggest that when confronted
with those most conceptually distant examples of Hölderlin’s poetry, the late
hymns, interpretation can perhaps only take place as dis-ordering.2

And yet, as Heidegger goes on to insist in this same passage, the task of
the interpreter—“the last, but also the most difficult step of each interpreta-
tion”—is to erase every vestige of that dismantling operation she has only
just undertaken. While a reader’s elucidations may let the poem ring out
otherwise than before, they may not make themselves heard as such; after her
attempts at clarification the reader must aim to disappear without a trace.

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2. Dirk de Schutters argues similarly that for Heidegger, the “Umstimmung” that characterizes
reading in an authentic sense requires a “Verstimmung,” a disordering in the act of reading: in order
for the text to give itself “the law according to which it can be.” “The Parergonality of Reading: Hei-
degger reading Hölderlin,” in *Die Aufgabe des Lesers: On the Ethics of Reading*, ed. L. Verbeeck and B.
Philipsen (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 126.
. . . damit das im Gedicht rein Gedichtete um einiges klarer dastehe, muß die erläuternde Rede sich und ihr Versuchtes jedesmal zerkreichen. Um des Gedichteten willen muß die Erläuterung des Gedichtes danach trachten, sich selbst überflüssig zu machen. (GA 4: 8)

. . . so that what has been composed purely into a poem may stand forth a little clearer, the elucidating speech must each time shatter itself and what it had attempted to do. For the sake of preserving the poetized, the elucidation of the poem must strive to make itself superfluous.

In other words, the lucidity of the poem must appear to have always been there, in spite of the many steps, however arduous, taken to attain it. The practice of reading as Heidegger describes it here is thus not so distant from a historically stable concept of translation that bears the similarly impossible demand of seamless transfer: like translation, Erläuterung remains suspended between the inevitable disturbance of the text—its Verstimmung, its status out of tune—and the imperative to preserve its pristine integrity.

There is a point at which Heidegger does not only aim to elucidate Hölderlin’s writings but also acknowledges the need to “translate” them—and thus to reveal the nearly imperceptible layers of a text’s history that interpretation must uncover. In his 1942 lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn “Der Ister,” Heidegger asserts that the interpretation or laying-out (Auslegung) of any great work (he includes the Phenomenology and the Critique of Pure Reason in this category) amounts to “a translating within our German language” (75). To designate such works as “in need of translation” (übersetzungsbedürftig) is not at all to suggest, as one might intuitively guess, that they suffer from a lack of clarity; quite the contrary, their “need of translation” only underscores their significance insofar as it confronts us with other possible ways in which to “understand.”

In translating Sophocles, as we have seen, Hölderlin performed a double gesture that preserved intact a tension between fidelity and transformation, oscillating between a pure, often nearly absurd fidelity to the ancient text and an unsettling reorganization that, in the eyes of most of his contempo-

daries, hardly approximated the source text at all. As we have also seen, Ben-

3. Although the German word Erläuterung is commonly translated as “elucidations,” it is worth mentioning in this context that it derives from the verb “läuten,” to sound or ring out, rather than from the description of an action implying visual clarification. Thus the practice of interpretation implicitly (perhaps even explicitly, given Heidegger’s close attention to language and etymology) involves the process of allowing a text not only to become “lucid” but to ring out more clearly. This emphasis on sound extends in Heidegger’s discourse to terms like “Anklang.”
jamin identified this mode of translation, informed by the relation to “pure language” as such, as the most dangerous and hence most courageous of its kind. Thus it may appear upon first glance that what Heidegger describes as Erläuterung here—that stroking of the text that leaves no fingerprint behind—hews more closely to conventional modes of translation, insofar as they construct order from the artifacts of the past and reestablish it in the form of untainted identity. After all, for many of its practitioners the ideal translation has always been one that, like Heidegger’s ideal elucidation, leaves no trace at all. Yet in laying out the text of Sophocles’ Antigone in his “Ister” lecture, Heidegger turns to no other translation than Hölderlin’s (and, ultimately and with more satisfaction, his own). If, as Heidegger asserts in this lecture, all interpretation is a form of translation, all translation a form of interpretation—an interpretation that, moreover, must constantly cover its own tracks—why does he consult a translation that never ceases to speak its name? For there is no question that Hölderlin’s Oedipus and Antigone are far from pitch-perfect; one might even say that their status of being out of tune is what defines them.

One approach to the question may lie in the contrast of the second citation above, culled from the 1942 lecture: “Tell me what you think of translation, and I will tell you who you are.” Here it is not translation itself that secures identity—who you are—but the act of reflecting on it. Heidegger’s rather audacious statement claims the authority to interpret not merely a translated text but a reader of translation as well. The evaluative gesture concerns the manner in which translation ought to take place rather than the product of that taking-place; the rhetorical tone, meanwhile, mimicking the syntax of both the distinguished professor and the seer, conveys a sweeping command that nullifies the discordant complexity of the interpretive process and leaves one with—clarity. Yet it is a clarity that ultimately rings false within the larger framework of this text, which repeatedly indicates that the apparent simplicity of this exchange—tell me, and I’ll tell you—can only result from the stifling of an inherent discord that both tempts and vexes the lecturer throughout his lecture. In short, despite first appearances it is a highly ambivalent piece of work.

In this chapter I wish to focus on the stakes inherent in that ambivalence as they bear upon the reading Heidegger produces: a reading of tragedy and translation, of poetry and history, and finally of reading itself. The tension contained there may be most clearly expressed in a conflict, already evident in this single statement about translation, between a certain argumentative position—a position that might at best be called exclusionary, at worst totalitarianizing—and a tendency to undermine that position’s stability in the rhetorical
form of the lecture. While the practice of transmission from one language to another as well as that from text to elucidation hardly appears from the perspective of his discussion to be an object of debate, the demonstrative specimen that Heidegger produces emerges precisely in the form of, if not debate, then at least dialogue: *Tell me, and I’ll tell you.* Interpretation—*qua* translation—is in this sense not a usurpation of difference but an exchange with it, and that exchange with the foreign elements of text and language has lasting consequences. Consequences that cannot be swept away without a trace, that prove to extend far beyond the limits of what that initial promise of identity, of discovering “who you are,” may have indicated.

The remarks that frame this statement on translation contain both familiar and foreign elements, endowing the text itself with a somewhat fractured identity. On one hand, Heidegger’s lecture represents yet another chapter in his decades-long effort to articulate the singular status of Hölderlin’s poetry within a metaphysical tradition that had, in his view, thus far failed to comprehend it. It is not the first place in which he argues that Hölderlin’s writing offers a departure from the discourse of metaphysics that has shaped not only the course of philosophy but those of history and technology as well. And it will not be the last place; Hölderlin plays a crucial role in Heidegger’s thought up until his interview with *Spiegel* magazine in 1966. However, in this particular lecture Heidegger’s commentary on Hölderlin’s later work is unique insofar as it takes shape as an extended reflection on translation, even featuring Heidegger’s own practical attempts to render Sophocles’ Greek into his particular formulation of German. This foray into translation happens not only because Hölderlin’s texts require, as Heidegger puts it, a translation within their own language. Rather, Heidegger attempts to demonstrate how the poetic texts he considers here articulate a relationship between the foreign and the familiar that both dovetails with Hölderlin’s simultaneous work of translation, particularly his work on Sophocles, and allows the concept of translation itself to resonate distinctly with the experience of language and history. Hölderlin’s often obscure practice of carrying ideas and words across millennia in translated and otherwise transmitted forms demonstrates for Heidegger the radical expression of a language not at home with itself. This, in turn, evokes the ebb and flow of history as it shapes and is shaped within modernity. As a mode of representation, translation expresses in language an unsettling, disordering movement underly-

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4. The volume *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (GA 4) alone contains a collection of essays and lectures published between 1936 and 1963. In addition, the *Gesamtausgabe* includes three lectures on Hölderlin’s poetry, “Germanien/Der Rhein” (GA 39), “Der Ister” (GA 43) and “Andenken” (GA 52).
ing Heidegger’s concept of history and the status of the modern subject within it.

Not surprisingly, this reading brings Heidegger well beyond Hölderlin’s poetry and indeed beyond the poet himself, to the ancient texts that make themselves heard in his work. Reading Hölderlin’s late hymns demands at the same time an engagement with the Greek text that dominates his work of translation, and thus an interpretation of Sophocles’ (and Hölderlin’s) Antigone constitutes the central portion of this lecture. For Heidegger, not only Hölderlin’s theories of translation and modern tragic experience but also the poetry he composed at approximately the same time find agreement or Anklang (harmony) with Sophoclean language; the Greek text sets a tone that Hölderlin’s work echoes, both in active interlocution with Sophocles and in more subtle moments of influence. The difference between these registers of translation and contemporaneous poetic production is only slight, for both are part of a body of work that comes to acknowledge the foreign as crucial to the recognition of that which is one’s own. Reading and writing take place within a dynamics of exchange or dialogue (Zwiesprache) in which the foreign touches lightly upon the ownmost and changes it irrevocably, in which the distant past is brought to bear upon the present and leaves its own disturbance there. And at the same time, the concurrent acts of turning back to that past and reaching out towards the foreign together open another dimension that reveals the momentary convergence (Anklang) of past with present, of the foreign with that which is one’s own. The exchange between

5. Because I am primarily interested in the interplay between translation and tragedy structuring the “Ister” lecture, I have chosen not to foreground my discussion with Heidegger’s comments on Antigone from his Einführung in die Metaphysik. Although many of the same issues arise in that earlier text, such as the relationship of history to the deinon or Unheimliches, Heidegger does not relate them to Hölderlin’s poetry, nor to the dynamics of Zwiesprache as it informs his conception of both translation and history. For a thorough discussion of the role of tragedy and particularly sacrifice in the Einführung, see Schmidt, On Germans and 245–54, as well as his “Ruins and Roses: Hegel and Heidegger on Sacrifice, Mourning, and Memory,” in Endings: Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger, ed. Rebecca Comay and John McCumber. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 97–113.

6. With his concept of “Anklang” Heidegger means to distance his reading from one of “influence” in a conventional sense, and the result seems to epitomize the dynamics of “Zwiesprache”: “What we must keep constantly in mind is this: It is the prerogative of great poets, thinkers and artists that they alone are capable of letting themselves be influenced. . . . What the great ones give they do not have by way of their originality, but rather from another origin, one that makes them sensitive to the ‘influence’ of that which is originary in the other great ones” (I 50: Bedenken müssen wir stets dieses: Es ist das Vorrecht der grossen Dichter, Denker und Künstler, dass sie allein das Vermögen haben, sich beeinflussen zu lassen. . . . Die Großen haben das, was sie geben, nicht aus ihrer Originalität, sondern aus anderem Ursprung, der sie empfändlich macht für den ‘Einfluss’ des Ursprünglichen der anderen Großen [62]).
Sophocles and Hölderlin, with its staggering heights of poetic achievement alongside glaring and often baffling insufficiencies, may therefore represent in many ways a literary anomaly within the modern tradition of imitating Greek tragedy, but the regenerative process that it also models proves for Heidegger to be a fundamental characteristic of modernity experienced authentically. The concept of *Zwiesprache* that Heidegger develops in his readings of Hölderlin and Sophocles becomes in this lecture the primary trope of poetic production, of translation, and of history itself.

This emphasis in the lecture on the role of translation as means of exchange between present and past, identity and difference, tends to produce at least two distinct results. On a substantive level, the discussion of *Zwiesprache* inspires Heidegger to ever greater hyperbole regarding the special affinity of the Germans with the Greeks. It is on this point that the lecture has been most widely, and deservedly, criticized. As with his authoritative claim to know “who you are” on the basis of “what you think of translation,” this attitude clashes with the notion of *Zwiesprache* as he develops it in the lecture. At the same time, however, the modality of *Zwiesprache* also lends the lecture its shape and movement in another sense, for ultimately Heidegger will be unable to keep his distance from the dialogic structure that he identifies. As a result his lecture does not merely present a detached account of the exchange between Sophocles and Hölderlin (and thus of the symbiotic relationship between modern Germany and ancient Greece) but participates in that exchange, allowing points of reference to shift in the process of reading, owning the possibility—even the necessity—of being moved, unsettled, dis-ordered by the past (both ancient and modern) and its foreignness in the act of interpretation. In this respect his lecture constantly undermines what it argues, indicating that precisely those attempts to account for a more concrete relationship between difference and identity,


9. Fred Dallmayr describes Heidegger’s understanding of the Hölderlinian concept of recollection (“Andenken”) in similar terms, “not as a return to a finished past but rather as a meeting ground where past or alien experience reveals itself as also an impending prospect.” Rather than representing something “gone or vanished,” “the recollected experience returns to the greeting poet in a vivid counter-greeting, one not confined to the given moment.” Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 153.
the foreign and the ownmost, are fundamentally troubled by the disordering that must accompany its expression.

To revisit once again Heidegger’s encounter with Hölderlin’s poetry requires some justification. Few intersections of poetry and philosophy have been more closely examined, more exhaustively analyzed, and more painstakingly criticized than this one. One result of this scrutiny has been a frequent discrediting of Heidegger’s work on Hölderlin as reductive, decontextualizing, even violent. Heidegger strikes a dissonant chord for both readers approaching his texts on Hölderlin from a literary standpoint and those rooted in philosophy, and that dissonance has itself become the irresistible center of many analyses. Consequently, the practice of reading Heidegger reading Hölderlin has consisted virtually from the start in calling Heidegger’s controversial interpretations into question.

As Heidegger himself insists in his own defense, however (and not only in this lecture), his concern with Hölderlin’s writings has nothing to do with the “science of literature” (Literaturwissenschaft) in any conventional sense. With respect to this distinction, the lecture on “Der Ister” may represent something of a specimen piece. Leaving open more obvious questions regarding the content of the poem, Heidegger introduces the concept of attentiveness (Aufmerksamkeit) to describe his technique of reading in these remarks: “attentiveness in the sense of a fundamental attunement, out of which we have a sense only for the essential and have the sole vocation of marking out the essential from everything else so as to retain it in the future, to ‘attend’ to it (die Aufmerksamkeit im Sinne einer Grundstimmung, aus der wir stets und nur den Sinn haben für das Wesentliche, die Bestimmung, dieses Wesentliche aus dem Übrigen herauszumerken, um es künftig zu behalten, zu “merken” [GA 53: 14]).” “Merken” appears in quotes here, as if to emphasize its dual valence in this context, where it refers to both the need to “take note” of the essential in an attitude of Aufmerksamkeit and the gesture of remembrance, of “marking,” that allows the essential to be preserved for itself. In contrast to a method, grounded in metaphysics, that


11. Hölderlin’s Hymn “Der Ister,” trans. William McNeil and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 13f. Henceforth designated in the body of text as I, with relevant page number reference. Since, however, Heidegger’s writings are understandably difficult to translate in a manner that maintains the peculiar polyvalence of his German, it will often be necessary for me to modify the published translation or even depart from it completely.
would seek to decide the undecidable rather than engage with it—a “calculating, discovering, and conquering measurement of the world” (I 48, trans. modified: *eine rechnende, entdeckende, erobernde Durchmessung der Welt* [GA 53: 59])—Heidegger follows a mode of reading that does not generate understanding so much as submit to a moment in which understanding falls short. (This submission indicates an astute interpretive perspective in its own right, for it acknowledges and reiterates Hölderlin’s gesture of allowing the untranslatable to represent itself as such.) Insofar as Heidegger confronts the pitfalls of translation—and the translation of Greek tragedy in particular—this lecture might constitute nothing less than a reorganization (and reenactment) of Hölderlin’s own remarks on translation; yet it is a reorganization not based on the attempt to comprehend that earlier text but rather constructed around the impossibility of comprehension. Thus Heidegger preempts criticism of his interpretive practice by implicitly making his reading call itself into question as a reading, call reading as such into question insofar as he insists on an ineffaceable element of unreadability. As a result, while he consistently resists the call to formulate an ethics per se (as in the *Letter on Humanism*, for example), this lecture carves out another kind of ethical stance in the place of translation and finally in that of interpretation as such: a stance that questions the violence inherent in a practice of reading that erases its own tracks, that affirms instead, through the concept and technique of *Zwiesprache*, the excess gathered along the path. The snow on the bell. The subtle slide out of tune. Translation, as he writes elsewhere, should be a passing-on (*Überlieferung*) rather than a transformation; should reflect that which it collects along the trajectory of its history.12

If his lecture on “Der Ister” holds as a central insight the ambivalent practice of reading (and writing, or lecturing) as *Zwiesprache*, however, it is not long before he retreats from this insight. Only a year later, in a lecture commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Hölderlin’s death in 1843, he reduces the encounter with the foreign to the process of bringing the Germans “home.” The swiftness with which Heidegger backpedals to a more stable position in “Homecoming/To Kindred Ones” (*Heimkunft/An die Verwandten*), which appeared along with “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” (*Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung*) in the first edition of the *Elucidations* (1944), will ultimately highlight the radicality of his process in the “Ister” lecture. For—as this lecture illustrates both conceptually and rhetorically—if reading must engage in a dialogue with its object, then it always leaves a trace, on reader and text alike, that cannot be erased or made “one’s own.”

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The subsequent fading of that trace does not imply that the process of reading as Zwiesprache has reached its culmination but rather indicates the unfortunate retreat to another kind of reading altogether.

HÖLDERLIN’S POETRY FLOWS. It does not posit, nor does it attempt to situate itself on solid ground. For Heidegger, this is the sole characteristic of the late hymns, their only concern (Sorge); they comprise what he describes as the “poetry of streams” (Dichtung der Ströme), of movement without halt, of incessant wandering for its own sake. In contrast to the metaphysical tradition extending from Plato to Kant, in which the artist depicts a series of “symbolic images” (Sinnbilder) whose representations of the physical world remain subordinate to the ideas and values they approximate (GA 53: 19), Hölderlin’s poetry presents the reader with an image that is not at all “sinnbildlich,” whose sense or “Sinn” remains an enigma encompassed by the river in its glorious flow:

Wenn nun aber die Ströme in Hölderlins Dichtung in Wahrheit keine “Sinnbilder” sind, was sollen sie dann sonst sein? Wie sollen wir dann noch von ihnen etwas wissen können, wo doch all unser Wissen, und die Wissenschaft erst recht, in der Metaphysik Grund und Halt hat? Fast scheint es so, als sagte der Dichter selbst, dass wir von den Strömen nichts wissen können. Die Ister-Hymne schliesst, genauer: sie hört auf, mit dem Wort:

_What that one does, that stream_
_Weis niemand._ (GA 53: 21)

But if the streams in Hölderlin’s poetry are in truth not “symbolic images,” then what else can they be? How are we to know anything of them when all of our knowledge, and especially scientific knowledge, has its ground and foothold in metaphysics? It almost seems as though the poet himself were saying that we can know nothing of the streams. The Ister hymn closes, or more precisely, it comes to a halt, with the word:

_But what that one does, that stream_
_No one knows._ (I 19; trans. modified)

Despite attempts to define it in symbolic terms, the enigma remains intact, loosening knowledge’s every potential foothold. In fact, no knowledge can contain it—or rather, as we will see, it challenges the possibility
of knowledge as such. In Hölderlin’s poetry, that enigma takes shape conceptually as the river and rhetorically as a flow to which the reader can only succumb, even if she cannot know to what foreign soil it might convey her. For Heidegger, it is this perpetual motion that counts, that passage into the unknown that models the peculiar dwelling-place of humankind as a locus without rest, an “Ortschaft der Wanderschaft” (GA 53: 39).13 The stream is utterly foreign to the human being, “dem Menschen fern und fremd,” and yet at the same time it is irresistible, inciting a “going along” (ein Mitgehen) that undermines any stable or static notion of locality, Ortschaft. Indeed, it tears the human being away from that notion of locality in a most Hölderlinian sense: “The tearing and the certainty of the streams’ own path is precisely what tears human beings out of the habitual center of their lives” (Das Reissende und Gewisse der eigenen Bahn der Ströme ist es gerade, was den Menschen aus der gewöhnlichen Mitte seines Lebens herausreisst [GA 53: 32]). Hölderlin’s familiar image of the “eccentric path” becomes for Heidegger the unsettled dwelling-place of the human. And there is no other Ortschaft to which one might aspire.

From the start, then, Heidegger’s discussion of the “poetry of streams” alludes to sources other than the hymn featured in the lecture’s title, and these alternate sources soon assume center stage. Upon closer examination, the outline of geographical space in the lecture—the shape of the river, the curve of the path—reveals a relationship to time, to the conveyance of a lifetime, and in this sense Heidegger’s remarks begin to converge even more closely with Hölderlin’s own theory of tragedy; from this point, in fact, that convergence takes on a certain primacy. Heidegger’s assertion that the human being is torn out of a position of centrality by the sure motion of poetry is a close paraphrase of Hölderlin’s own remarks on Oedipus, drawn from a passage in which he names the poetic caesura as the rhythmic interruption upon which the entire balance of the tragedy turns. After this point in dramatic time—the point at which the blind seer Tiresias enters the scene—nothing will ever be the same again.

Er tritt ein in den Gang des Schicksals, als Aufseher über die Naturmacht, die tragisch, den Menschen aus seiner Lebenssphäre, dem Mittelpuncte seines innern Lebens in eine andere Welt entrückt und in die exzentrische Sphäre der Todten reisst. (FA 16: 251)

13. The published translation “locality of journeying” ([I 33] is perfectly serviceable but does not present the internal relationship of these two opposing terms, captured in the doubling of the suffix “-schaft.” The juxtaposed words in German evoke both the stark difference between situatedness (Ortschaft) and restlessness (Wanderschaft) and the oscillating movement linking the two in Heidegger’s reading.
He (i.e., Tiresias) steps into the course of fate as overseer of the natural order which tragically displaces the human being from his own sphere of life, from the midpoint of his inner life into another world, and tears him into the excentric sphere of the dead. (Constantine 64; trans. modified)

Where Tiresias steps in to stand guard over nature's powerful force, presented elsewhere in Hölderlin's remarks as the “tearing spirit of time” (FA 16: 370), the familiar march of fate is permanently disrupted, the direction of the tragic hero's future derailed in a single moment. Yet it is a temporal shift not entirely fulfilled by its forward orientation; for not only the future assumes a different shape, but the past—most plainly evident in the havoc of Oedipus' own memories when he learns the truth of his heritage—takes on an unexpectedly malleable texture. Remembered events, however distant, words spoken, sins committed with and without awareness signify something quite other than they once did. In this sense they only illustrate further the extent to which the tragic hero's perception of centrality has always already been a false assumption.

In these passages, the remains of the past thus contain within them a potentiality not yet realized, not yet unleashed; and this acknowledgment, as we have seen, lies not only at the core of Hölderlin's theory of tragic experience but also in his practice of translation. As we have already seen, the temporal disruption staged before an audience in Greek tragedy is reflected and intensified in Hölderlin's translation through the experience of a fractured syntax, neither Greek nor German, and of an “Oriental” element that is explicitly foreign to both registers but brought to light through a particular attitude of translation. Within that emergent dimension of “the Oriental,” Hölderlin aims to reveal within the tragedy something older than the Greek text—something other than that text—and that expression of internal difference proves to be integral both to tragic effect and to its redoubled intensity in translation. Once the exclusive referentiality of original and translation, the tragic text's perceived origin and its proper afterlife, become as unsettled as the hero they depict, there is no turning back to a familiar understanding of the past, for it has become as uncertain as the future.

For Heidegger in the “Ister” lecture, the streaming motion that epitomizes the dynamism of Hölderlin's river poetry inscribes a similarly unmistakable temporality, for the streams too are “zwiefach gerichtet” (GA 53: 33) (oriented in a twofold direction [I 29]): “The stream is a wandering of a singular kind, insofar as it goes simultaneously into what has been and what is to come” (I 29; trans. modified: Der Strom ist eine Wanderung von einziger Art, sofern sie zumal in das Gewesene und in das Kommende geht). Yet
identity proves to be even more elusive than it was for Oedipus, who does ultimately survey the ruins of his once-unknown past. Like the tragic hero wrenched out of his perceived centrality, the human being who cannot help but go along—whose ensuing Wanderschaft proves simultaneously to be his Ortschaft—becomes subject to a temporality that changes remembrance as well as anticipation, ebb as well as tide. Anticipation opens up not only that which is to come but also what has been; and even more crucially, remembrance in a genuine sense is no longer encompassed by the mere orientation toward past events. Rather, it confronts an inwardness whose meaning is still to come, that retains within it a hint of the undecided: “Genuine remembrance is a turning toward the undisclosed inwardness of what has been” (Echte Erinnerung ist Zuwendung zum unerschlossenen Inwendigen des Gewesenen [GA 53: 34]). The contradictory movement (gegenwendige Bewegung) that Heidegger views as inherent in both Hölderlin’s poetry of streams and his remarks on tragedy thus figures human experience in flux, as flux: as the continuous wandering both toward and away from an untapped interiority “to come,” as the endless oscillation between the familiar and the unknown, even if that unknown proves to be part of that which is most one’s own. Thus the movement of Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein (an awkward but close translation is “coming to be at home in not being at home”), constantly set into motion through the encounter with the foreign essential to translation, also describes the process by which history comes to be grasped.

At the same time, however, this dynamics of a poetry of streams also opens a radically other dimension of reading. For Heidegger’s discussion of the fluidity of Hölderlin’s poetry in relation to the contradictory movement of history is also a reflection on a particular mode of interpretation that he both names and performs in this text. If the poetry’s only concern is “coming to be at home within that which is one’s own” (Heimischwerden im Eigenen)—within that which is, in Heidegger’s paraphrase of Hölderlin, most difficult to find—then its flow must logically lead the human being in the direction of that “home.” Yet that movement, like the Gegenwendigkeit of the streams, proves to be far more elusive. Drawing explicitly on the terminology of Hölderlin’s letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff of December 1801, in which he discusses the difficulty of confronting not only the foreign (das Fremde) but also that which is one’s own (das Eigene), Heidegger describes the turn of Heimischwerden as a “passage through the foreign” (Durchgang durch das Fremde). Thus the poet’s orientation towards Heimischwerden can only come about as the result of a dialogue (Zwiesprache) with foreign voices, and the process of interpreting the poetry that results
must involve this dialogue. Not a relationship of influence per se, Heidegger
describes the dynamics of Zwiesprache as a confrontation with difference that
ultimately conveys the ownmost back to itself. Within this model, Hölderlin
engages in a particular mode of exchange with the Greek poets Pindar and
Sophocles, and not only in his translations of their work; his dialogue with
the Greeks, particularly Sophocles, resonates throughout the hymns he pro-
duced during that period of translation.

But what does this “ownmost” turn out to be? In the course of Heidegger’s
lecture it tends to diverge into two distinct directions—one determined by
a static relationship of Eigenes to Fremdes (evident in his reductive com-
ments on the letter to Böhlendorff), the other by a more dynamic concept
of translation as the fluid dialogue that maintains the locality of wandering,
the Ortschaft der Wanderschaft. Indeed, this latter concept seems even to
infect Heidegger’s style of argumentation, which is not precisely linear but
rather more spiral; in the first and second parts of the lecture, every forward
advance is interrupted by a repetition (Wiederholung), producing an effect
of halting momentum not unlike Hölderlin’s own description of the Ister
river itself: “Der scheinet aber fast/Rükwärts zu gehen . . . ” (4) (But it [the
river] seems nearly to go backwards . . . ). By the conclusion of the lecture,
this more fluid mode of conceiving the ownmost seems to have assumed
precedence—even if Heidegger does not quite acknowledge it—as the pos-
sibility of reaching mastery of so much “foreign” material is foreclosed again
and again.

Hölderlin’s letter to Böhlendorff from December 1801 has long inspired
commentaries on its theory of the relation between the foreign and that
which is one’s own, and Heidegger eagerly takes up the discussion in the
“Ister” lecture as well as in the essay “Andenken,” published in 1943. For
Heidegger, the letter articulates what he terms Hölderlin’s “law of history”:
for a people to approach that which is proper to it, it must first encounter
that which is foreign. Citing the famous lines from the letter, “but that
which is one’s own (das Eigene) must be learned just as well as the foreign
(das Fremde),” he describes the conflict between foreign and ownmost among
the Greeks as a process of attaining ownership, effectively of both elements:
“Only through that which is foreign to them . . . does that which is their

14. The former conception of “Eigenes” is the one found more frequently in Heidegger’s writings
on Hölderlin, including the essay “Andenken,” which was written in the same period as the lecture
and published in 1943 during the National Socialists’ highly publicized commemoration of the hun-
dredth anniversary of Hölderlin’s death. For extensive comments on the relationship of the foreign to
the ownmost in that lecture, see Fynsk, Heidegger: Thought and Historicity, 198–205.
Heidegger's assertions with respect to this interplay of the foreign with the ownmost leave his presentation at some distance from Hölderlin's actual statements in the letter. At no point, for example, does Hölderlin claim directly that the encounter with the foreign will result in a greater understanding of what is one's own. Rather, his primary argument is that modernity cannot simply adopt the aesthetic principles of the Greeks as its own, since their “culture”—the “talent for representation” that he calls “Junionian sobriety”—is our “nature” and cannot be assimilated from another source. Precisely this impossibility of obtaining that which is most our own from the experience of the foreign ensures that achieving our “nature” will remain our most difficult task.

Heidegger’s model is not Hölderlin’s. In fact, structurally it often appears closer to Schleiermacher’s notion of authentic translation as the openness to the foreign in the interest of expanding the self, as the practice of bringing the reader to the author while “leaving the author alone” as much as possible. However, Heidegger explicitly denies this particular provenance, insisting that his model of translation operates not in the interest of Bildung but rather the movement of history and the unconcealment of “the concealed essence of our own historical commencement (I 66: das verborgene Wesen unseres eigenen geschichtlichen Anfanges [GA 53: 81]). Moreover, the inherently expansive tone of the Romantic model also contrasts sharply with Heidegger’s narrower notion of Zwiesprache. For while Schleiermacher’s proposed methodology of negotiating difference in translation stipulates an openness to the foreign conceived universally, in the terms of Goethe’s notion of Weltliteratur, Zwiesprache for Heidegger is a gesture that is “removed from all coincidence” (jedem Zufall enthoben) by an unmistakable claim to historical specificity. “What is one’s own is that which belongs to the fatherland of the Germans” (I 49: Das Eigene ist das Vaterländische des Deutschen [GA 53: 60]), and its interlocutor in a proper sense is “the foreign that relates to the

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17. Miguel de Beistegui notes this similarity as well in a footnote to his interesting discussion of Heidegger’s conception of translation. He perceives a difference, however, in the two thinkers’ views of how the foreign affects the ownmost: while Schleiermacher’s perception of translation remains governed by a logic of appropriation (even if it is impossible) and hospitality (“the other idiom is invited to penetrate the sphere of my own”), for Heidegger it’s the other way around: “my own language is to become other, foreign to myself; translation is an experience of dis-propiation.” *Thinking with Heidegger: Displacement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 203n.
return home, that is, is one with it” (I 54: _das auf die Heimkehr bezogene, d.h. mit ihr einige Fremde_ [GA 53: 67]), the foreignness precisely of that which is one’s own—in other words, of the Greeks vis-à-vis the Germans. The proper negotiation of difference in Heidegger’s reading does indeed depend on the preservation of the foreign as such, but only insofar as that foreignness already stands in intimate relation to identity. Which raises the suspicion that, in its current form, it may not be so foreign after all.

Weil der Bezug Hölderlins zum Griechentum . . . weder klassisch, noch romantisch, noch metaphysisch ist, deshalb wird die Bindung Hölderlins an das Griechentum nicht lockerer, sondern umgekehrt inniger. Denn erst dort, wo das Fremde in seiner wesenhaften Gegensätzlichkeit erkannt und anerkannt ist, besteht die Möglichkeit der echten Beziehung, und d.h. der Einigung, die nicht wirre Vermischung, sondern fügende Unterscheidung ist. (GA 53: 67f.)

Because Hölderlin’s relationship to the Greek world is . . . neither classical nor Romantic nor metaphysical, his tie to the Greek world does not loosen; on the contrary, it becomes more intimate. For only where the foreign is recognized and acknowledged in its essential oppositeness do we find the possibility of a true relationship, i.e., of a union that is not a confused mixing but a conjoining in differentiation. (I 54)

Though he depicts their difference as a juxtaposition rather than a blurring of boundaries, Heidegger still continues to insist upon the “essential oppositeness” of German and Greek worlds. By arguing for the fundamental union of the two in Hölderlin’s work, he lets their relationship function as a mirror, while for Hölderlin the relationship was far more complex. From this perspective his description of the specific dialogue between Germany and Greece appears at odds with his presentation of Hölderlin’s poetry of streams as an ambivalent movement through the foreign, an infinite movement without clear origin or destination.

However, another strain of his argument begins to develop alongside this predominant oppositional structure, one that underscores the movement of infinite differentiation proposed by Hölderlin:

18. “For Hölderlin, that which is foreign to the historical humankind of the Germans is the Greek world” (I 54: _Dieses Fremde des geschichtlichen Menschentums der Deutschen ist für Hölderlin das Griechentum_ [GA 53:67])

19. Fynsk notes Heidegger’s tendency to overstabilize the complexity of Hölderlin’s insights, particularly in the later writings and the work on tragedy. See _Heidegger: Thought and Historicity_, 187–88.
Weil Hölderlin wie keiner seiner Zeitgenossen das innere Vermögen besitzen durfte, von Pindar und Sophokles beeinflusst, d.h. jetzt, dem fremden Ursprünglichen aus dem eigenen Ursprung ursprünglich hörig zu sein, deshalb hat auch Hölderlin allein aus der geschichtlichen Zwiesprache und Entsprechung es vermocht, uns diese Dichter und ihre Dichtung in einem ursprünglicheren Lichte zu zeigen. (GA 53: 62)

Because Hölderlin was able to possess, like no other of his contemporaries, the inner capacity to be influenced by Pindar and Sophocles—and that now means, of being subject, out of one’s own origin, to a foreign originariness in an originary sense—for this reason Hölderlin was also alone in his ability to reveal these poets and their poetry to us in a more originary light, out of historical dialogue and approximation. (I 50; trans. modified)

To be sure, the emphasis here on “Hölderlin alone” continues to support the problematic assertion that Sophocles and the Greeks are the privileged counterpart of Hölderlin and the Germans, that they present a “more originary” sense of history that will bring German identity back to itself. However, the passage also begins to undermine that relation. The purpose of the exchange with the foreign here is not only to search for one’s ownmost origin; if it were, perhaps that origin would not be as difficult to find as Hölderlin asserts. Rather, the origin itself becomes pliable in the process of searching: the ancient poets appear not in a more accessible form but “in a more originary light” as a result of their exchange with modernity. In alluding to Hölderlin’s contribution within the discourse of modern tragedy and of tragedy in a modern age—the idea that, even as the present is continually permeated by its relationship to the past, the past is not static—Heidegger begins to suggest that its translation as a mode of reading can shed another light, can send tremors through both the ancient edifice and its modern remains. That the oscillating movement to and from the past, the search altering both past and present—and not the return to a specific historical origin—may define both the act of reading and the experience of history within modernity.

Read along these lines, Heidegger’s account of Hölderlin reading Sophocles begins to take shape as something other than the violent appropriation of poetry in the interest of philosophical posturing. Like Hölderlin’s dialogue with Sophocles, it is also a moment of participation, a performance of Zwiesprache that has the potential to effect change in both past and present; Heidegger’s remarks both reflect and perpetuate the gesture they describe. And since that description presents a mode of interpretation and translation that refuses to be done with its source, that lets itself be disordered by their
contact, the effect of its continuation here is to undermine any definitive status of reading as such. This slippage becomes particularly evident in passages in which Heidegger must confront Hölderlin’s reading of Sophocles with his own, for in doing so he is forced to construct a reading of a reading, to take on a double original that always already exists both in Greek and in German and therefore maintains its own internal dissonance. In hearing this dissonance as it bears upon Heidegger’s own efforts here, one cannot help but observe how it tends to subvert the other, more dominant strain of thought at the heart of the text: that of the dynamics of foreign and familiar, _Fremdes_ and _Eigenes_, in the interest of establishing the special affinity between Germany and Greece. And if that subversive reading occasionally comes across as violent, it is in a sense other than the blind appropriation of the other into the economy of identity; rather, it is a violence through which the other makes itself counted.

Given the path that leads him through the texts in this lecture, Heidegger has no choice: he must translate Sophocles via Hölderlin, by involving himself in the same form of dialogue that he wishes to investigate. This involvement already becomes evident on more than one level in his extensive account of a single key passage, where he reflects on both Sophocles’s and Hölderlin’s renditions of the choral ode _Polla ta deina_. . . , _Ungeheuer ist viel_. . . . Rather than simply using Hölderlin’s version of the passage to augment his discussion, Heidegger argues that that particular version is comprehensible only in the context of Hölderlin’s translation (literally his carrying-over, _Übertragung_) of the tragedy as a whole, and he indicates that his more serviceable translation will effectively “translate” that incomprehensible element left by Hölderlin. Warminski unpacks the complexity of Heidegger’s justification: “In order to think the same of what Hölderlin says, it is necessary to say what he leaves unsaid, in other words, to say it differently, to say it otherwise” (Warminski 1990, 199).

Yet precisely by attempting to “say the unsaid” in the act of translation, Heidegger invokes the precedent of Hölderlin’s own emphasis on the “Oriental” element that had remained silent in the Greek. That link is further reinforced insofar as Heidegger describes his commentary as “remarks” or “Anmerkungen” (appearing in quotes in the text) in contrast to the ostensibly fuller notion of _Auslegung_, laying out.20 Consequently, the expected result of his translation and “remarks” also carries familiar echoes:

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20. Heidegger clearly distinguishes between the remarks he intends to present here and the more encompassing notion of an interpretation, further suggesting that his practice of reading will remain distant from conventional modes: “That an adequate interpretation of his choral ode . . . is beyond our capabilities in all respects, requires no further elaboration. Here too, remarks must suffice” (1 59: _Dass eine zureichende Auslegung dieses Chorliedes . . . unser Vermögen nach allen Hinsichten übersteigt, bedarf keiner umständlichen Versicherung. Auch hier müssen Anmerkungen genügen_ [GA 53:72]).
yet within the context of our task in these “remarks” on the Ister hymn, we must be content with some makeshift assistance; that is, we must make do with a translation that, with respect to what we have to think through, demarcates and emphasizes some things more clearly. . . .

What must be more clearly “demarcated” and “emphasized” in Heidegger’s version of translation? “Some things” (Einiges) may not only refer here to difficult sections of the Greek text but also that which he deems less than comprehensible in Hölderlin’s own version, for otherwise there would be no need for clarification, let alone for (re)translation. This raises the intriguing possibility that Heidegger aims to locate within Hölderlin’s work on Sophocles a line of inquiry that has thus far remained untranslated, unarticulated, unthought. Does Hölderlin’s constellation of poetry and translations after 1800 contain, like the Greek text with which it is constantly engaged, its own “Oriental” shadows? Heidegger, after all, deems not only the work of Sophocles but also of Hölderlin to be “in need of translation,” and of a peculiar sort of translation at that: one that itself might be called Hölderlinian, for as Heidegger explains, it “can even bring connections to light that lie within the translated language but are not laid out” (kann sogar Zusammenhänge aus Licht bringen, die in der übersetzten Sprache zwar liegen, aber nicht herausgelegt sind [GA 53: 75]). Heidegger’s “remarks”—his confrontation with both the text of Sophocles’ Antigone and Hölderlin’s complex process of working through that same text—aspire to illuminate those shadows, to set into motion just such a (Hölderlinian) translation. But what does that process of illumination imply for the shadowy texts it “translates”?

Here again, Heidegger displays an unexpected affinity with the Romantic model of translation and with Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics in particular. Translation is an act of interpretation, and every interpretation is a translation. Even within a single language there is need of translation, insofar as translation figures a space in which understanding is necessarily negotiated.

21. Schleiermacher’s view of translation was influenced to a great extent by his interest in hermeneutics; therefore the negotiation of meaning and the affirmation not only of commonality but also of difference are his central concerns. See his lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating” in Schulte and Biguenet 36–54.
rather than presupposed or even superimposed. However, for Heidegger the result of such negotiations is an understanding of an unusual sort: more precisely, it is an understanding that does not establish itself on solid ground but rather calls itself constantly into question. For as with knowledge when faced with the poetry of streams, the foothold given to understanding here proves to be extremely precarious.

Verständlichmachen darf nie heißen, eine Dichtung und ein Denken jedem beliebigen Meinen und dessen Verständnis-Horizont anzugleichen; verständlich machen heißt, das Verständnis dafür wecken, daß der blinde Eigensinn des gewöhnlichen Meinens gebrochen und verlassen werden muß, wenn die Wahrheit eines Werkes sich enthüllen soll. (GA 53: 76)

Making understandable can never be the same as assimilating a poetry and a thought to any arbitrary opinion or its horizon of understanding; making understandable means awakening our understanding that the blind obstinacy of conventional opinion must be broken and abandoned if the truth of a work is to unveil itself. (I 63; trans. modified)

The approximation of understanding is not understanding. Securing a place for the exchange between text and translation within the domain of what is already known, what is comprehensible, is tantamount to bringing its incessant and ambivalent movement, zwiefach gerichtet, to a grinding halt. On the other hand, if understanding comes to be aligned with attentiveness (Aufmerksamkeit) rather than knowledge—if, far from gaining mastery over the inherent difference of the foreign, understanding implies being radically exposed to, and learning to listen to, its offering of the not-known—then translation, and hence reading, itself becomes unsettling, or as he will soon name it, unheimlich. This is for Heidegger the “own and only element” (eigenes und einziges Element [81]) of translation and interpretation; the possibility of the “truth” of the work revealing itself, of “the true reading of the true word” (das echte Lesen des echten Wortes), depends on this exposure of and in the unsettling process of reading.  

22. Heidegger gives a very clear definition of translation as a gesture that moves well beyond the literal approximation of one language for another: “Translating is not so much a “trans-lating” and passing-over into a foreign language with the help of one’s own. Rather, translating is an awakening, clarifying, unfolding of one’s own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language (I 66: Übersetzen ist gar nicht so sehr ein “Über-setzen” und Hinübergehen in die fremde Sprache mit Hilfe des eigenen. Das Übersetzen ist vielmehr eine Erweckung, Klärung, Entfaltung der eigenen Sprache durch die Hilfe der Auseinandersetzung mit der fremden [GA 53:80]). This is not quite as close to Benjamin as it might appear at first glance; in the “Task of the Translator” (SW 1, GS IV:1) Benjamin is not
Within this context, both Sophocles and Hölderlin are exemplary for Heidegger because they produce texts that not only incite this unsettling reading but articulate it as well. Do not only perform in a structural sense the contradictory movement of which Heidegger speaks but reflect upon it as human experience at the same time. Their exchange, as conceived in the “Ister” lecture, demonstrates that the logic of translation is the fundamental movement of Heimischwerden in one’s own language and identity, yet that movement’s only real effect is to underscore the extent to which one is “not at home” (unheimisch) within those registers. It is thus a movement that represents not the mere expansion of acquired knowledge through Bildung, as Schleiermacher’s model of translation once promised, but a dialogue with the foreign that brings the ownmost to what it is but cannot know: das Unheimliche, to deinon.

Vielfältig das Unheimliche, nichts doch
Über den Menschen hinaus Unheimlicheres ragend sich regt. (GA 53: 71)

Manifold is the unsettling, yet nothing
More unsettling looms beyond the human.23

No longer is the human being merely monstrous; now, in Heidegger’s language, he is unheimlich, and in fact the most unheimlich of all things. While the centrality of the second choral ode of the Antigone (polla ta deina . . .) was implicit in Hölderlin’s translations, Heidegger explicitly identifies the passage as exemplary not only for the poetic dialogue between ancient and modern texts but also for the historical movement, the Ortschaft und Wanderschaft that their exchange names. The focal point of this assertion is his emphasis on the Greek word to deinon, which Hölderlin rendered as “das Ungeheure” and Heidegger retranslates, with ardent justification, as “das Unheimliche.”24 In his reading an “inner relation” (GA 53: 84) emerges

primarily concerned with the expansion of one’s own language but rather with the possibility that translation can illuminate the relation of each individual language to a “pure” language. I would argue instead that Heidegger remains, as he has throughout this lecture, more proximate to the tradition of translation within German Romanticism.

23. In what follows, I have chosen to translate unheimlich as “unsettling.” To be sure, this exchange erases some crucial nuances of the German concept; however, I choose “unsettling” here over “uncanny” insofar as it evokes the concept of “heim”—the home, that which is “settled”—which is central to Heidegger’s representation of the term.

24. As we will see below, Heidegger submits that this translation may be technically “wrong” but it is also “true.” This distinction highlights another one crucial to his thought, namely, that between truth as correctness (“adaequatio”) and truth as unconcealment, historically determined (aletheia). See
between the concern for “coming to be at home” (*Heimischwerden*) expressed in Hölderlin’s poetry—a movement of endless deferral that logically implies a state of “being not-at-home” (*Unheimischsein*)—and the *Unheimlichkeit* of the human in Sophocles’ tragedy, expressed in the choral ode and incarnated by Antigone herself. Thus the same passage that revealed for Hölderlin the strange but universal relation of the human to the monstrous now represents for Heidegger both the founding moment of the poetic *Anklang* between Hölderlin and Sophocles and the very condition of being human—for the Greek word that marks the human as a monstrosity is also revealed to be its unsettling “ground.”

Not surprisingly, then, Heidegger makes a case for a translation that expresses the choral passage’s intimate relation to the ambivalence at the heart of his concept of *Zwiesprache*, a translation in which “the contradictory holds sway” (*das Gegenwendige waltet*) (GA 53: 76). *To deinon* as he defines it reflects an internal structure of contradiction as such:

> Es bedeutet das Dreifache: das Furchtbare, das Gewaltige, das Ungewöhnliche. Jedesmal ist es gegensätzlich bestimmbar: das Furchtbare als das Fürchterliche und als das Ehrwürdige; das Gewaltige als das Überragende und als das nur Gewalttätige; das Ungewöhnliche als das Ungeheure und als das in allem Geschickte. (GA 53:78)

It signifies all three: the terrible, the powerful, the uncommon. Each time it can be determined oppositionally: the terrible as the dreadful and the venerable; the powerful as the overwhelming and the merely violent; the uncommon as the monstrous and as that which is destined in all.

For Hölderlin, the articulation of *to deinon* had everything to do with this final opposition: “the uncommon as the monstrous and as that which is destined in all.” Indeed, what is unsettling for Hölderlin is that unexpected contradiction, the recognition that the monstrous is also “destined in all.” Monstrosity beyond is perhaps bearable, comprehensible; monstrosity within, repressed and returning, is nothing less than awe-inspiring. And yet it also cannot be destroyed, only guarded carefully to thwart its inevitable emergence, only left to exist, in the nearly-silent form of a trace, alongside what we know as identity.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{25}\) Also in the context of this notion of trace, see Adorno’s critique of Heidegger’s early reading of Hölderlin in “Parataxis—Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins,” 166. Interestingly enough, Adorno, though
Heidegger’s insistence on the term *Unheimliches* likewise evokes the internal dissonance within the experience of being human, but in far more concrete and calculated terms. As articulated by the Chorus of the Theban elders, the movement of *Heimischwerden*, in its indivisible relation to *Unheimischsein*, is hardly an Odyssean journey of exploration and return, nor is it a quest that can have any particular destination at all. Indeed, the “adventurer” who thrives on the state of being “not-at-home,” of being, according to the Chorus, *pantoporos—überallbinausfahrend* is Heidegger’s translation—ultimately comes to nothing, because for him there is no essential difference between being at home and not being at home; he finds a “home” (in an inauthentic sense) in the foreign as such and takes that wilderness as his absolute.  

The authentically “not-at-home,” on the other hand, assumes the *Heimisch* as a point of reference despite its inaccessibility, thus remaining in a perpetual state of “not-attaining” (*Nicht-Erlangen* [91]). Presence prevails in the form of absence (*Abwesenheit in der Art der Anwesenheit*) as “doing without” (*das Entbehren*) becomes the only authentic relation to *Heimischsein*.

For Heidegger the Chorus’s revelation of *das Unheimliche* is crucial both in the context of the play and as an homage to the unique elasticity of the Greek language itself. With the invocation of *deinotaton*, he claims, Sophocles names precisely the contradictory tension which the human being bears as identity. Though he readily concedes that his translation is “falsch” in a conventional sense, Heidegger asserts that the polyvalence of his chosen term is not at all a modern superimposition upon the Greek text. On the contrary, he argues that by unifying the manifold possibilities inherent in *deinon*, *das Unheimliche* throws into relief a frame that already delimits the Greek concept, if only implicitly; meanwhile, it is our reluctance to bring this frame to light in interpretations and translations of these lines that stems from modern interference. In fact he claims that an “internal contradiction” (*inwendiige Gegenwendigkeit* [103]) was fundamental to the Greek sense of explicitly and often sharply critical of Heidegger, presents a very similar argument to that of “Der Ister,” figuring the vestiges of poetic language, “‘die Waffen des Wortes,’ die dem Dichter übrig bleiben,” not as “Stiftung” in the (early) Heideggerian sense but rather as unassimilated memory traces which remain “überschattet” but ever-present, perhaps not unlike the wandering figure of Antigone from which the Chorus cannot turn away.

26. Hans Sluga claims that this (for Heidegger, inauthentic) form of being “not-at-home” in fact describes the modern condition as outlined by Nietzsche: “it is in the wilderness that we construct our shelters.” However, this distinction relies upon a somewhat reductive reading of Heidegger’s idea of *Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein* as the mere precursor to “coming home”—which is, if one reads Heidegger carefully, itself an impossibility here. “Homelessness and Homecoming: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Hölderlin,” in *India and Beyond: Aspects of Literature, Meaning, Ritual and Thought*, ed. Dick van der Meij (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 509.

27. See the discussion of the Greek term *deinon* in Chapter 2.
being; not at all a dilemma to be overcome, ambiguity was preserved and valued:

Das Negative [der Griechen] behält sein eigenes Wesen und steht nicht in der Rolle dessen, was beseitigt und überwunden werden könnte und sollte. Weil es als Gegenwesen eigenen Wesens ist, muß es mit seinem Gegenwesen aus dem Grunde ihrer Einheit getragen und gewürdigt werden. (GA 53: 104)

The negative [for the Greeks] retains its own essence and does not exist in the role of that which could or ought to be cast aside and overcome. Because it exists as the counteressence of its own essence, it must be sustained and respected along with its counteressence on the basis of their unity. (I 84; trans. modified)

The status of being “unheimlich” in a Greek sense, therefore, retains for Heidegger a more measured connotation than the Christian notion of banishment from paradise. Only since Plato and the birth of metaphysics has Western culture given up this willful preservation of ambiguity, this tolerance of the negative in a radical sense, in favor of a “reductive and negating conception of the negative” (79: herabsetzende negierende Fassung des Negativen [GA 53: 95])—in other words, dialectics par excellence.28 Only with the essential privilege of the positive in metaphysical terms has the negative become intolerable. Thus das Unheimliche, insofar as it is framed by contradiction, names what is contained but not yet explicit in to deinon, a non-dialectical coextensivity of identity and difference: “in such a manner that the concealed ground of the unity of the manifold significations of deinon, in its concealed being, is grasped within das Unheimliche (so, dass mit dem Unheimlichen der verborgene Grund der Einheit der mannigfaltigen Bedeutungen des deinon und dieses so in seinem verborgenen Wesen gefasst wird [GA 53: 78]).

Ultimately, however, Heidegger’s translation is not merely concerned with the Greek word here but also with the German; for he expressly intends his line, “Vielfältig das Unheimliche,” to be a “translation” of Hölderlin’s “Ungeheuer ist viel” as well (GA 53: 85–86). In this sense he deliberately confronts the original in doubled form, effecting a displacement that leaves his version simultaneously at a greater remove from the Greek and more involved in its afterlife. For while his choice in rendering to deinon as das

28. Nussbaum is not far from this argument in her study of ethics and luck in Greek tragedy, in which she also claims that Greek culture tolerated a more ambiguous stance with respect to the tragic hero’s fate, a stance that from a modern perspective seems “repugnant to reason” (Nussbaum 25).
Unheimliche aims to expose a facet heretofore concealed by its conventional translation, concealed even in its original language, his “translation” of Hölderlin is no less an attempt to bring to light what its “original” had not yet said: “[We] must learn to recognize the concealed essence of the monstrous” ([Wir] müssen . . . das verborgene Wesen des Ungeheuren erkennen lernen):


The “monstrous” need not necessarily be thought only in the sense of the enormous. The monstrous is properly and at the same time the not-ordinary (das Nicht-Geheure). The ordinary [das Geheure] is the familiar, that with which one is at home. The monstrous is the not-at-home.

The reductiveness of this equation, the readiness with which it dispenses with the possibility that Hölderlin’s translation may express something other than what Heidegger now offers with his, presents a frustrating problem in Heidegger’s approach, to be sure. The implication is clear: if Hölderlin alone possessed the capacity to reveal Sophocles in a more originary light, so it must be for Heidegger alone in his exchange with Hölderlin. For Heidegger, Hölderlin evokes in his dialogue with Sophocles the same contradictory movement of history that he recognizes in both the choral ode and the “poetry of streams.” If that gesture remained unspoken in the “original,” it is the task of the “translator”—this particular translator—to release it into language.

However, while the acute violence of his transformation is barely concealed, Heidegger’s remarks here also demonstrate as much an engagement with the problematics of that violence as an exercise of it. It is in this sense that he describes to deinon as a “real word” (ein echtes Wort) that also names what it says, “itself an unsettling (unheimliches) word” (GA 53: 83); in the very polyvalence in which it revels, the word itself breaks down the possibility of resting upon understanding, undermines the stabilizing effects of violent translation—remains, at its heart, untranslatable. The translation that bears this foreign body within itself is the only kind that does not do away with the unsettling effect of the “real word.” Das Unheimliche thus no longer only describes the human being in Sophocles’ choral ode; it also gives a name to Heidegger’s practice of translation as a form of reading that
disrupts what precedes it, brings on a Verstimmung that changes its original from within—and thereby leaves itself vulnerable to change as well. The movement of Heimischwerden im Unheimischen may inhabit the choral ode on a denotative level, but it guides its “translation” on a structural level as well; Heidegger’s double translation of Sophocles and Hölderlin performs what it also purports to expose.

Perhaps that very performance, insofar as it enacts on a rhetorical level the epistemological engagement inherent in Heidegger’s notion of Zwiesprache, is essential in bringing human beings to the limit that the choral passage describes. Indeed, for Heidegger there may be no other way to present it. Taken alone, Unheimliches is “named poetically with the word deinon, but not unfolded on the level of thought” (I 91; trans. modified: dichterisch mit dem Wort deinon genannt, aber nicht denkerisch entfaltet [GA 53: 114]), relegated to the domain of “the scarcely sayable” (kaum Sagbares). Its very reticence marks an inaccessibility to knowledge in any conventional sense; Unheimliches can only only come to light as a “poetic knowledge” (dichtendes Wissen), as a particular aesthetic relation that renders useless all overtures of consciousness and lets its effects be heard only alongside a remainder which must remain silent, evoked in the negation of un- in Heidegger’s leading term. It is an aesthetic relation of imperfect “translation,” in other words, one that transmits its own lacunae rather than its abundance. In Heidegger’s view, Hölderlin achieved this form of translation—perhaps it was the only kind of which he was capable—and thus constructed a mode of reading and writing that took that incompleteness, rather than the negotiation of sense in representation (the Sinnbild), as its framework. As a reader of those texts alone and in dialogue with Sophocles, has Heidegger any choice but to follow suit? For if a knowledge established solely in a poetic register cannot be entirely grasped by consciousness (let alone by philosophy), it is conceivable only as that which signifies simultaneously as the translated and the untranslatable, and therefore it cannot entirely “make sense.” What it communicates can emerge only in dialogue with the poetic text—in a dialogue that leaves room for that unheard element to remain as such.

But what would such a dialogue resemble, and what would it communicate? Turning from Sophocles’ Chorus to the first scene of the tragedy, Heidegger expands upon these questions by attending to the particular literariness of the tragic text. As with the Chorus’s unsettling invocation of the Unheimliches, the opening scene between Antigone and Ismene presents for Heidegger what it names at the same time, causing its thematic content to double over into its form. In underscoring this duality Heidegger both indicates what Zwiesprache is not—namely, a stable dialogue between two
immutable sides—and begins to point towards what it might be, within both the process of reading and, in a larger sense, the movement of history.

IMMEDIATELY EVIDENT from his discussion of the choral ode is that Heidegger’s reading of the Antigone approaches the text from a different point of departure than that of other modern readers. As he asserts unequivocally, his concern is not with the conflict of state and family laws as represented by the opposing figures Antigone and Creon, but rather with an internal conflict that Antigone bears in an exemplary fashion.29 That different emphasis is reflected in the passages he chooses to discuss, for not only does he give primacy to the Chorus’s invocation of to deinon, he also bypasses the traditional focus on the clash between Antigone and Creon in favor of Antigone’s initial confrontation with her sister in a section entitled “The introductory dialogue (Zwiesprache) between Antigone and Ismene.” Whether it is by coincidence that Heidegger describes this textual exchange as “Zwiesprache” remains to be considered.

As in his remarks on the choral ode, Heidegger frames the section by distancing his account of the scene from Hölderlin’s translation, claiming repeatedly that the latter “does not attain the essential (das Wesentliche)” (GA 53: 122, 125). This “essential” element apparently inheres in the stark, graphic style of the Greek dialogue between the sisters:

Wort und Gegenwort der beiden Schwestern ist hier wie das Begegnen zweier Schwerter, deren Schärfe, Glanz und Wucht wir erfahren müssen, um etwas von dem Blitz zu vernehmen, der aus ihrem Ineinanderschlagen leuchtet. (GA 53: 122)

The word and counter-word of the two sisters is here like the meeting of two swords, whose sharpness, luster and force we must experience in order to apprehend something of the lightning that flashes when they strike one another. (I 98; trans. modified)

Within the scope of a literary exchange between sisters, then, we encoun-

29. GA 53: 147: “Von hier aus wird deutlich, daß das Gegenspiel dieser Tragödie nicht spielt in dem Gegensatz zwischen ‘Staat’ auf der einen und ‘Religion’ auf der anderen Seite, sondern zwischen dem, was die innerste Gegenwendigkeit des deinon selbst ausmacht, sofern dieses als das Unheimische gedacht wird . . . ” (From here it becomes clear that the counterplay of this tragedy is not played out in the opposition between the “state” on the one hand and “religion” on the other, but between what constitutes the innermost counterturning of the deinon itself, insofar as the deinon is thought as the unhomely . . . [I 118]).
ter a violence that is essential, *wesentlich*. Their dialogue must strike us with the force of clashing swords in order to have its proper effect. The sisters’ language may not cohere, or complement, or meet in compromise; their exchange is defined by its bellicose character. Yet it, too, is named as *Zwiesprache*, dialogue, just like the poetic-historical relation exemplified by Hölderlin and Sophocles, the exchange that inscribes reading in writing, the past in the present. Can the essential violence of this single textual example—Antigone’s dialogue with Ismene—extend to the dynamics underlying poetic *Zwiesprache*?

If the progress of Heidegger’s argument is any indication, the two modes of exchange may indeed have something in common. In his translation Ismene and Antigone do fire intense reproaches at one another—Ismene accuses Antigone of having a “hot heart” (*heißes . . . Herz*) turned only towards “the cold one” (*den Kalten*, i.e., her dead brother), while Antigone denounces her sister for standing before her and Polynices “in hate” (GA 53: 123)—but their altercation is also balanced in a specific passage by the familiar notion of *Anklang* (126). In a single verse, Ismene invokes for Heidegger both the urgency that drives her sister to act and the thrust of the entire tragedy:

> Als Anfang aber jenes zu erjagen, unschicklich bleibt’s, wogegen auszurichten nichts. (GA 53: 124)

But it remains improper to start out in pursuit of that against which nothing can be done.

As Heidegger points out, the image of pursuit here recalls the gesture already described in the choral ode as characteristic of the human being, his tendency to be *pantoporoś*, “überall hinausfahrend”; the improper pursuit (*Erjagen*) of this passage and man’s *Jagen* in the later one are both derived from the Greek *theran*, and therefore represent a hinge connecting Ismene’s words to the Chorus’s song: “Everywhere venturing forth, underway experienceless without a way out, he comes to nothing” (I 59; trans. modified: *Überall hinausfahrend unterwegs erfahrungslos ohne Ausweg kommt er zum Nichts* [71]). Yet the object of pursuit in Ismene’s claim is something quite other than the *machanóen* (*Gemache*, machinations) of the human in that example. What Antigone pursues (and what Ismene deems “improper,” *unschicklich*) is *ta amechana*, that against which nothing can be done (*wogegen auszurichten nichts*, GA 53: 126). While the human being with all of his might and machinations may have the power to cheat sickness and ill fortune, only
death leaves him “without escape” (ohne Ausweg). This much is clear from
the choral ode; quite literally, nothing can be done to stop death from taking
its inevitable place. But Antigone, far from struggling to escape, pursues that
inescapable end. What does it mean for her to do this?

To be sure, it takes her in another direction than that of the human
beings who are pantoporos. It is thus tempting, Heidegger concedes, to hold
Antigone’s deed separate from the actions of other human beings and in
particular from that which renders them unheimlich (GA 53: 121). She is,
after all, a heroine, a selfless figure who protests with her own body and her
own life the injustice imposed upon her brother by her uncle the king. Yet
in light of her insistence on pursuing the impossible in the exchange with
Ismene, Antigone is hardly excluded from the realm of the unsettling. On
the contrary, Heidegger submits that with a single gesture she reveals herself
to be the most unsettling of all, das höchste Unheimliche. That gesture is
simply the taking-on, the enduring, the suffering of to deion.

Doch überlaß dies mir und jenem, was aus mir Gefährlich-Schweres rät, ins
eigene Wesen aufzunehmen das Unheimliche, das jetzt und hier erscheint.
(GA 53: 127)

Yet leave this to me and to that in me that counsels the dangerous and
difficult, to take into my own essence the unsettling that appears here and
now. (I 103; trans. modified)

The human being has no means by which to orchestrate this taking-on, the
Greek pathein, as an act of will; rather, it is a gesture intimately linked to
what he is: “the not-at-home is nothing that human beings make themselves
but rather the converse: something that makes them into what they are and
who they can be (I 103; trans. modified: das Unheimische [ist] nichts, was
der Mensch selbst macht, sondern was umgekehrt ihn macht zu dem, was er
ist und der er sein kann [GA 53: 128]). Yet by undertaking this pursuit of
the impossible, that against which nothing can be done, Antigone takes das
Unheimliche into her essence (ins eigene Wesen) and thereby supersedes all
others in her Unheimlichkeit. She is “ausgenommen,” an exception, but not
as a figure excused from that unsettling quality which the Chorus invokes;
on the contrary, she is the most authentic representative of it insofar as she
takes deion into her very being (GA 53: 146).30

30. In a brief reading of the lecture, Schmidt points out that this reading of Antigone’s Unheim-
lichkeit suggests Heidegger’s attempt to understand “the nature which drives us into catastrophes,” by
means of a rigorous thinking beyond good and evil; in this regard Heidegger’s reading is “exquisitely
Thus, like the *Anklang* that echoes through the poetic relation between Hölderlin and Sophocles, Ismene’s admonition against pursuing *das Unrichtbare* resonates both with Antigone’s essence (*Wesen*) and the essential character (*das Wesentliche*) of the piece as expressed by the Chorus: that pursuit, precisely insofar as it is both impossible and irresistible, makes Antigone most *unheimlich* from the very start. While that resonance remains at this point “not yet grasped” (*noch unbegriffen*) (GA 53: 124), the dissonant language of the scene between Antigone and Ismene allows it to flash momentarily in its keenness.

What is modeled in this first literary *Zwiesprache* is therefore a violence other than that instigated by the act of interpretation *qua* appropriation, the violence of translation. That violence would involve the erasure of difference within the economy of the same. But the discord of this exchange between the sisters, like a translation that clashes starkly and on equal ground with its original, lets its uncomprehended (and perhaps incomprehensible) essence make itself heard. The opening dialogue of the tragedy thus takes preliminary shape as a literalization—“not yet grasped”—of the disordering dynamics of *Zwiesprache* that for Heidegger both provide the central theme of the tragedy and underlie its reception in modern poetry and history.

If the very first scene alludes to an awareness not yet grasped, however, how does that consciousness emerge poetically in the course of the tragedy, and from where? Heidegger locates it again within the Chorus’s words:

> Nicht werde dem Herde ein Trauter mir der,  
> nicht auch teile mit mir sein Wähnen mein Wissen  
> der dieses führet ins Werk. (GA 53: 74)

> Such shall not be entrusted to my hearth,  
> Nor share their delusion with my knowing,  
> Who put such a thing to work. (I 61)

The hearth (*der Herd, hestia*) that the Chorus evokes here is for Heidegger the site of being-at-home (*Heimischsein*); yet, as he points out, this would logically imply that the Chorus of Theban elders possesses some knowledge of that place—in contrast to the remainder of humankind, which remains suspended within the movement of *Heimischwerden* and is therefore *unheimisch*—for they speak of banishing from the hearth those who do not share

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1 “Greek” insofar as it avoids placing the tragedy within the context of Christian morality (Schmidt 259).
their insight. Is the Chorus not made up of human beings? Does its knowledge endow it with a status other than that of the human?

In fact, the Chorus remains entirely human, Heidegger states, because it does not know the knowledge of which it speaks, if knowledge refers to the certainty of consciousness. A distinct kind of knowledge of Unheimliches emerges in the Chorus’s words, but it is an Ahnen, a sense—an awareness not entirely aware of itself, because its materiality always withdraws in the very moment of its emergence. Though as the central figure of the tragedy the Chorus speaks the “poetic truth” (die dichterische Wahrheit [GA 53: 148]), “what is properly to be said” (I 106) (das eigentlich zu Sagende) remains unsaid in any explicit sense: “The ‘content’ of what is enunciated does not exhaust the truth of what is said” (I 106: Der ‘Inhalt’ des Ausgesprochenen erschöpft nicht die Wahrheit des Gesagten [GA 53: 132]). The spoken word conceals within itself something other than its own meaning that eludes any representation, however precise; whatever it means to say, therefore, language constantly speaks of its own Unheimlichkeit. And it is at this point that Heidegger stops, withdraws: “So no account of the ‘content’ of what is expressed, however precise, can bring us to the truth of this poetry’s word” (GA 53: 133: Also bringt uns auch keine noch so genaue Angabe des ‘Inhaltes’ des Ausgesprochenen zur Wahrheit des Wortes dieser Dichtung). Though his interpretation of the passage goes on after this statement, it has no place to go any longer. And yet in this moment in which reading exhausts itself, there is insight: “it is only with this insight that we arrive at the true beginning of understanding” (… mit dieser Einsicht kommen wir nun erst an den echten Beginn des Verstehens [GA 53: 134]).

What the Chorus finally presents us with, then, is a moment of failed reading, a moment at which no attempt to understand the meaning of words will find resolution, at which no consideration of the work’s content will generate a satisfactory account of the knowledge that these last lines of the choral ode convey. That knowledge “does not express itself immediately” (spricht sich nicht unmittelbar aus [GA 53: 134]), but remains at the level of Ahnen, where there is no possibility of translation—at least not of a translation that insists upon its own seamless completion. Yet even if it does defy the negotiation of understanding in a conventional sense, knowledge as Ahnen is no vague intuition: “It has its own lucidity and decisiveness and yet remains fundamentally distinct from the self-assuredness of calculative understanding” (I 108: Es hat seine Helle und Entschiedenheit und bleibt doch von der Selbstsicherheit des rechnenden Verstandes grundverschieden [GA 53: 134]). It is, to put it plainly, possible both to know and not to know at the
same time. Both to hear what is said in the act of reading and to absorb what is not said, even if it remains beyond one’s conscious grasp.

So what does this “knowledge” know? Above all, it knows a difference, for there are fundamentally distinct modes of being “not at home.” And that difference, expressed poetically by the Chorus, reflects a relation to the ontic-ontological difference at the very heart of Heidegger’s thought: the relationship of being (Seiendes) to Being (Sein) itself. For Heidegger, the hearth is the center, the “at home”—is Being (GA 53: 140), and the Chorus’s reflection on das Unheimliche sheds light upon “the Being of all beings” (das Sein alles Seienden [GA 53: 135]). Though being “not at home” in no way implies exclusion from the sphere of Being—indeed, as Heidegger notes, there are no limits on the movement of “hinausfahren,” however extreme—the human being that the Chorus describes as “überall hinausfahren unterwegs erfahrungslos” (pantoporos aporos) has adopted a way of being “not at home” that leaves him blind to any relation to Being. And it is this particular blindness, this inauthentic way of Unheimischsein that merits his banishment from the hearth; it is of this human being that the Chorus speaks in the final lines of the crucial ode.

Yet there is another course of Unheimischsein, one that entails far more risk and reveals its subject as far more unsettling—in fact as the most unsettling of all things. This is the course that Antigone takes in pursuing that against which nothing can be done (das Unausrichtbare) despite not knowing the outcome of that pursuit, in taking Unheimliches into her very being despite its futility. The risk (tolma, Wagnis) of taking on das Unheimliche ennobles her and excludes her from the Chorus’s condemnation, for precisely in that state of uncertainty lies the relation to Being. Her determination to confront that risk, already evident in the very first scene of the tragedy, points to the possibility of authentic experiencing itself, das eigentliche Erfahren.

Das Schlusswort verbirgt in sich den Wink auf die unentfaltete und noch unvollzogene, aber im Ganzen der Tragödie sich vollziehende Wagnis, zwischen dem eigentlichen Unheimischsein des Menschen und dem uneigentlichen zu scheiden und zu entscheiden. Antigone selbst ist diese höchste Wagnis innerhalb des Bereichs des deinon. Diese Wagnis zu sein, ist ihr Wesen. (GA 53: 146)

The closing word conceals within itself the sign toward that risk that has yet to be unfolded and accomplished but that is accomplishing itself in the tragedy as a whole, the risk of distinguishing and deciding between the
authentic and the inauthentic not being at home of the human. Antigone herself is this supreme risk within the realm of the deinon. To be this risk is her essence. (I 117; trans. modified)

Where the human being takes on this risk—takes it into her being, as Antigone does—there is a possibility, still undeveloped, but nevertheless in motion: the possibility of being “at home,” the “not yet awakened, not yet decided, not yet assumed potential for being at home and coming to be at home” (I 115; trans. modified: das noch nicht erweckte, noch nicht entschiedene, noch nicht übernommene Heimischseinkönnen und Heimischwerden [GA 53: 144]). It is a mode of experiencing that demands “doing without” (das Entbehren) with respect to its center, however, for any knowledge of that center can only consist in the revelation of a contradictory movement (gegenwendige Bewegung) from the nearness to being “at home” to the withdrawal from that relation. At the center, it turns out, there is nothing that can be found; the authenticity of Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein consists of the decision to pursue a particular mode of approach that allows for the experience of being unsettled, of taking on the risk in that which is unsettling and owning its central role in what we understand as being.

Sophocles’ tragedy reveals all of this—or rather points toward it in its refusal to reveal—but it is not alone in doing so. Poetry as such has the potential to participate in this refusal to be “found,” standing as a moment in which a question is posed and a “searching” is founded precisely where there is no hope of finding anything: “this poetizing finding-out . . . is the purest find of a purest searching that does not restrict itself to being” (dieses dichtende Er-finden . . . ist das reinste Finden eines reinsten Suchens, das sich nicht an das Seiende hält [GA 53: 149]). Like the possibility of being at home (Heimischseinkönnen), the poetic knowledge that a reader seeks in text always remains “to come,” “to be poetized” (zu-dichtend) even if it already appears on the page to be read.

And it is precisely this prefatory status of poetic knowledge as “the undecided, but still to be decided, for this poetry and in it” (das Unentschiedene, aber erst zu Entscheidende für diese Dichtung und in ihr [GA 53: 151]) that leaves it open to Zwiesprache, indeed marks that underlying process of exchange as a task both essential and infinite. The dialogic approach to the poetic text demands the same assumption of risk that Antigone takes on, the risk both of being unsettled and of unsettling the text in the act of reading. That Sophocles’ choral ode not only demands such a precarious relation to its reader but also depicts it allows that ode to resonate with the poetic-historical dialogue that will follow it, whether the reader is Hölderlin or anyone else, into infinity.
Und wenn demnach dieses Chorlied die höchste Dichtung des höchsten Dichtungswürdigen ist, dann könnte das wohl der Grund dafür sein, daß dieses Chorlied dem Dichter Hölderlin in der Zeit seiner Hymnendichtung immer neu zugesprochen wurde. (GA 53: 152)

And if, accordingly, this choral ode is the supreme poetic work of what is supremely worthy of poetizing, then this might well be the reason why this choral ode came to speak ever anew to the poet Hölderlin during the period of his poetizing of the hymns. (I 121f.)

The authentic relation to Being that the Chorus invokes in negative form, that Antigone embodies in her tragedy thus finds an analogue in the practice of reading as *Zwiesprache*, in the open development of possibility and the perpetual subversion of interpretive certainty.

Despite the assurance with which Heidegger outlines this task “to come” in the act of reading as well as poetizing (indeed, both are now part of the same process), therefore, his lecture ultimately offers anything but a resolution of that task. To do so would be to forfeit a responsibility inherent in the task itself. Thus the final section of the lecture is in some ways the most subversive of all; with its recurrent withdrawal from any conclusive position, it succeeds in undermining much of what it also attempts to construct. In the end, it shifts the focus of the lecture towards an essentially ethical dimension of reading, one based upon a curious conception of love.

The third and final portion of Heidegger’s lecture on “Der Ister” was never delivered. The semester in Freiburg ended with the conclusion of the second part, and part III, entitled “Hölderlins Dichten des Wesens des Dichters als Halbgott” (*Hölderlin’s Poetizing of the Essence of the Poet as Demigod*) languished in a drawer until the lecture’s belated publication in 1984. If, as Hans Sluga has asserted, the form of the lecture course itself resembles the movement that it describes—a wandering from the origin (Hölderlin’s poetry) toward the foreign (Sophocles) and back to the own-most—then this premature ending suggests that its final journey back to *das Eigene* was never entirely accomplished, because it was never heard, only implied by what preceded it. As it turns out, of course, this state of incompletion is oddly appropriate within the logic of *Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein* as Heidegger has already outlined it, for it only underscores the notion that the authentic relation to the hearth as Being cannot be

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“known” in any conventional sense. Interestingly enough, what Heidegger does say within this strange echo chamber both represents an attempt to return to the origin—not only to the start of this lecture, but to his other writings on Hölderlin as well—and forecloses the possibility of that return, now that, as Hölderlin writes in another context, what follows cannot resemble the beginning at all.

Consistent with the ongoing structure of forward motion and circling repetition that characterizes the lecture, the third section begins by returning—in this case to the Böhlerndorff letter, which, as Heidegger states now, does not simply outline an aesthetics of “literature” but calls attention to a fundamental responsibility native to the poets: the responsibility to speak of the “coming-to-be-at-home of the historical mankind of the Germans within the history of the West” (I 124; trans. modified: das Heimischwerden des geschichtlichen Menschentums der Deutschen innerhalb der abendländischen Geschichte [154]). The “law of history” itself is this movement of coming to be at home, and history is accomplished in this movement, which must be; for Heidegger, Hölderlin is the first poet to “experience poetically” the “German necessity of being not-at-home” (die deutsche Not des Unheimischseins [155]). Throughout this section, however, Heidegger also clearly vacillates between statements that affirm the concept of “homecoming” as the destiny of the Germans and those that emphasize the practical impossibility of such a return.

Virtually every page in which Heidegger discusses the law of Heimischwerden seems to treat the subject differently. At times he emphasizes the dynamism of a return to das Eigene with active verbs of opportunity such as “lernen” and “heimisch werden” (GA 53: 156), while only a few pages later he appears to retract that enthusiasm with verbs of stasis (“sein,” “bleiben”):

Das Finden des Schicklichen um Unheimischsein ist das Heimischwerden. . . . Das Zugeschickte und Schickliche aber bleibt für den Menschen stets das auf ihn Zukommende, Zukünftige. . . . Das Zugeschickte schickt sich so und anders und bleibt stets im Kommen. (GA 53: 159)

32. “The law of being-at-home as coming-to-be-at-home consists in the fact that historical human beings, at the beginning of their history, are not intimate with what is at home, and indeed must even become not-at-home with respect to this, in order to learn the proper appropriation of that which is one’s own in venturing to the foreign, and only to come to be at-home in the return from the foreign. [. . .] For history is nothing other than this return to the hearth” (I 156: Das Gesetz des Heimischseins als eines Heimischwerdens besteht darin, dass der geschichtliche Mensch im Beginn seiner Geschichte nicht im Heimischen vertraut ist, ja sogar unheimisch zu diesem werden muss, um in der Ausfahrt zum Fremden von diesem die Aneignung des Eigenen zu lernen und erst in der Rückkehr aus ihm heimisch zu werden. [. . .] Denn Geschichte ist nichts anderes als solche Rückkehr zum Herde [GA 53: 125]).
Finding what is fitting in being not-at-home is coming-to-be-at-home. . . . Yet what is fitting and fittingly destined for them always remains for human beings that which is coming toward them, that which is futural. . . . What is fittingly destined for us sends its destining in one way and another and always remains in coming. (I 128)

At the midpoint of a sort of ontological to-do list (the “zu”-prefix in German here indicating both completed and future tasks), Heidegger situates the poet; that which is to be realized, “das Kommende in seinem Kommen,” can only be preserved in poetry. Thus the poet speaks from between two possibilities, that of Heimischwerden and that of Unheimischsein, and the constant oscillation between the two implies the “doing-without” (Entbehren) that has already characterized the only authentic relation to Heimischsein (GA 53: 91). The poet must have the “courage” (“Mut,” also in quotation marks in Heidegger’s text) to record this movement, the trajectory of “historically grounding spirit” (I 128) (der geschichtlich gründende Geist [GA 53: 160]).

How does this “courage” express itself? In contrast to Benjamin, who located his concept of courage in the poet-translator’s self-sacrifice for the sake of the poetic truth to which the work of art inherently refers, Heidegger locates the poet’s courage in an internalizing, even self-motivated gesture. He calls this motivation “love”—a love that emerges as a longing for one’s own essence (Sehnsucht zu seinem eigenen Wesen), a desire to move outward into the foreign in order to return from a distance to that which is one’s own. Love is thus not entirely self-love, but it is also not entirely altruistic. Above all, it is the poet’s responsibility to channel that love into a preservation of “what is coming in its coming” (I 128) (das Kommende in seinem Kommen [GA 53: 160]). How can poetry express and preserve within it such a movement? And to what extent can it become intelligible in the process of reading?

Calling upon one of his favorite passages from “Brod und Wein,” Heidegger turns to this problem of love as it bears upon the experience of the foreign with a reading of the line “Kolonie liebt, und tapferes Vergessen der Geist . . . ” (The spirit loves colony, and bold forgetting). Here true love—spirit’s devotion to the “colony” as well as the particular sort of forgetting endemic to it—is distinct from a mere infatuation with difference.

Den Geist befällt nicht eine zufällige Lust nach dem Fremden. Der Geist “liebt” Kolonie. Liebe ist der wesentliche Wille zum Wesentlichen. (GA 53: 164)
Spirit is not befallen by some arbitrary desire for the foreign. Spirit “loves” colony. Love is the essential will for the essential. (I 131; trans. modified)

The thrust outward into the foreign thus also reflects a desire to attain “the essential,” *das Wesentliche*, thus in some sense to lay claim to it—in effect, to colonize it. For Heidegger, “love” refers to the desire to recognize within the foreign the ownmost, which has not yet been disclosed but can only be “won” upon returning.33 “Love” for the foreign thus implies a commitment to being “not at home” for the sake of coming to be at home (GA 53: 164). It is for this reason, moreover, that Spirit (Hölderlin’s *Geist*, which for Heidegger remains distinct from the Idealists’ *Geist*) has the courage to “forget” its origin in the interest of recognizing the foreign:

Die Tapferkeit des Vergessens in der Liebe zur Kolonie ist die Bereitschaft, im Fremden vom Fremden um des eigenen Willen zu lernen und dergestalt das Eigene, bis es die Zeit ist, hintanzustellen. (GA 53: 165)

The boldness of forgetting in the love of colony is the readiness, while in the foreign, to learn from the foreign for the sake of what is one’s own, so as to defer what is one’s own until it is time. (I 132)

The very idea of the foreign as “colony” obviously renders problematic the idea of an encounter on equal terms. “Colony” for Heidegger here refers to the “the daughter-land that is related and refers back to the motherland” (I 131, trans. modified: *auf das Mutterland zurückbezogene Tochterland* [GA 53: 164]); foreign and ownmost remain symbiotically linked, ensuring not only their fundamental relatedness but also their unequal standing in a relation of dependency. There would be no foreign, in other words, if it did not in some way give the ownmost back to itself.

This raises the question of how Heidegger thinks the concept of turning-back (*Rückkehr*) in his discussion of Hölderlin’s writings here. Insofar as it implies a return to the source, the “motherland,” the “hearth,” it inappropriately stabilizes one of Hölderlin’s key concepts in his reading of tragedy. As we have already seen, Hölderlin’s tragic vision ends in a moment of frightening stasis, in which “nothing more (exists) but the conditions of time and space,” in which suffering prevails and offers no path back to a more innocent state:

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33. I 131: “in the foreign, Spirit essentially wills the mother who . . . is indeed “difficult to attain: the closed one (*Der Geist . . . will im Fremden wesentlich die Mutter, die freilich . . . schwer zu gewinnen: die Verschlossene*) [GA 53: 164]).
In dieser (i.e. der äußersten Grenze des Leidens) vergißt sich der Mensch, weil er ganz im Moment ist; der Gott, weil er nichts als Zeit ist; und beides ist untreu, die Zeit, weil sie in solchem Momente sich kategorisch wendet, und Anfang und Ende sich in ihr schlechterdings nicht reimen läßt; der Mensch, weil er in diesem Momente der kategorischen Umkehr folgen muß, hiermit im Folgenden schlechterdings nicht dem Anfänglichen gleichen kann. (FA 16: 258)

In this [i.e., the outermost limit of suffering] the human being forgets himself, because he is entirely in the moment; the god, because he is nothing but time; and each one is disloyal: time, because in such a moment it turns itself round categorically and does not allow beginning and end to rhyme in it at all; the human being, because he must follow the categorical reversal in this moment and thus in what follows cannot resemble the beginning at all.

The end cannot resemble the beginning at all; the reversal that Hölderlin describes in tragedy explicitly forecloses the possibility of returning to familiar ground, for that ground has become unrecognizable. Strictly speaking, this is the only way to conceive of reversal (“Umkehr”) as Hölderlin presents it in his writings on tragedy.

Strangely enough, although his remarks here often contradict it, Heidegger seems to know this. Or if not to “know” it in an explicit sense, perhaps to know it in the spirit of Ahnen, that poetic knowledge (dichtendes Wissen) that acknowledges the unknown. For although he initially turns back to his own earlier writings in the attempt to stabilize his reading, he soon arrives at a recognition that this lecture, this mode of reading, does not resemble those others at all. In a discussion of the “poetic spirit” as the “Stromgeist” (spirit of the stream), Heidegger returns to the river poem he had scrutinized nine years earlier, “Der Rhein.” That which the poets must express, das Zu-Dichtende, is the holy (das Heilige), the determination of both the gods and the dwelling of humankind, which emerges from Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein (GA 53: 175). The poet who presents this structure as such must therefore stand between gods and men as a demigod (Halbgott), as an outsider capable of measuring the distance, and the difference, between mortals and immortals. Heidegger sums up and concretizes as follows:

Das “Dichterische” ist der Geist und das Wesen der Ströme. Der Dichter des Dichterischen ist der Halbgott. Diese Bezüge sind von Hölderlin in der Einfachheit ihrer Wesensvollendung klar geschaut und gesagt in dem
vollendetsten der Stromgesänge, in der Hymne “Der Rhein.” (GA 53: 173)

The “poetic” is spirit and the essence of the streams. The poet of the poetic is the demigod. Hölderlin clearly perceives these relations in the simplicity of their essential completeness and tells of them in the most complete of the river songs, in the hymn “The Rhine.” (I 139)

The terms are all present, front and center: simplicity, clarity, completion. Whereas the “Ister” leaves no one, neither the poet nor the reader, invulnerable to the unsettling effects of Zwiesprache, the “Rhein” offers everyone a place from which to take measure of others. “Der Rhein” simplifies what the “Ister” complicates; it clarifies what the “Ister” conceals. And perhaps, therefore, it offers, in contrast to its unruly counterpart, the possibility of a “complete” (vollendet) reading. This is the difference.

Aber gleichwie die Rheinhymne im Wesen des Rheins das Wesen der Ströme dichtet, so dichtet die Isterhymne im Wesen des Isters das Wesen der Ströme, und d.h. Wanderschaft und Ortschaft. (GA 53: 175)

Yet just as the Rhine hymn poetizes according to the essence of streams in the essence of the Rhine, so too the Ister hymn poetizes according to the essence of streams in the essence of the Ister, that is, journeying and locality. (I 140; trans. modified)

That is to say: in the movement from stream to stream, the essence of the streams itself has changed. Has presented itself otherwise. The source has divided itself in two, and in this sense it has unsettled its own status as source. The poetry of streams now contains within it a fundamental dissonance.

However, that dissonance cannot be reduced to mere opposition, for the “Ister” hymn insists on its own internal difference as well in its relationship to the foreign, which Heidegger now terms “hospitality” (Gastlichkeit).

So wundert
Mich nicht, dass er (der Ister)
Den Herkules zu Gaste geladen. . . . (GA 53: 175)

Thus it surprises
Me not, that he [the Ister]
Invited Hercules as guest. . . . (I 140)
By inviting the Greek Heracles to itself, the Ister does not only continue to distinguish itself from the quintessentially German Rhine but underscores the distance traveled between the age of tragedy and the age of Reason; in this sense the hymn “thinks an entirely different and new relation” (GA 53: 177) between ancient and modern registers, a relation that is only possible through Zwiesprache.  

But what exactly is “hospitality,” and how does it relate to the question of return that Heidegger continues to pose in this section? The “guest” is the one who remains who he is: the foreigner in his foreignness. Gastlichkeit refers to the capacity to recognize that foreignness and the decision to allow it to remain as such.

Herkules ist vom Ister nur zu Gast geladen. Er bleibt, der er ist, und ist doch als der Fremde “vom heißen Isthmos” aus dem Lande des “Feuers” im deutschen Lande gegenwärtig. In dieser Gastlichkeit des Isters liegt die Bereitschaft der Anerkennung des Fremden und seiner Fremde. . . . In der Gastfreundschaft liegt aber zugleich die Entschiedenheit, das Eigene als das Eigene nicht mit dem Fremden zu mischen, sondern den Fremden sein zu lassen, der er ist. (GA 53: 175f.)

Hercules has been invited by the Ister only as a guest. He remains the one he is and yet, as the foreigner “from the sultry Isthmus,” from the land of the “fire,” is present in the German land. In this hospitality on the part of the Ister there lies the readiness to acknowledge the foreigner and his foreignness. . . . In guest-friendship, however, there also lies the decisiveness not to mix what is one’s own, as one’s own, with the foreign, but to let the foreigner be the one he is. (I 141)

What the “Ister” hymn says in its Zwiesprache with the foreign is thus analogous to Hölderlin’s notes on the modern encounter with ancient Greece; crucial in both cases is not only the recognition of the foreign but the decision to bear its traces as difference. That decision, in effect, represents the ethical dimension of Zwiesprache, where the act of reading amounts to a renunciation (Entbehren, doing-without) of certainty, of stability, of Ortschaft: “The presence of the guest in the homely locale tells us that even in, indeed precisely in the locality of the homely, journeying still prevails and

34. Thus it would seem that Heidegger states the obvious when he claims that such a relation would have been both unnecessary and impossible for the Greek poets to conceive. However, if one takes seriously Hölderlin’s thoughts on the role of the “Oriental” in Greek tragedy, it becomes likelier that what he was attempting to uncover in Sophoclean language was precisely the trace of such a relationship to the foreign.
remains determinative, albeit in a transformed manner” (I 142: Die Gegenwart des Gastes im heimischen Ort sagt, daß auch und gerade in der Ortschaft des Heimischen noch die Wanderschaft west und bestimmend bleibt, wenngleich gewandelt [GA 53: 177]). Approaching that which is one’s own “is only as the encounter and guest-like dialogue with the foreign” (I 142: ist nur als die Auseinandersetzung und gastliche Zwiesprache mit dem Fremden [GA 53: 177]).

With the introduction of this idea of hospitality, Heidegger’s concept of return has changed. His own attempt to return to the “source” (Hölderlin’s poetry and his own earlier lectures) after the encounter with the foreignness of Greek tragedy leaves the certainty of the ownmost very much in doubt. This is true not least because the Ister hymn locates the foreign at its very source; its strange current, which seems almost to flow backward (Der scheinet aber fast / Rückwärts zu gehen . . . ), gives the river a different relationship to itself:

Hier, in diesem Fast-rückwärts-gehen, ist noch ein anderes Nicht-vergessen-können des Ursprunges. Hier wohnt einer so nahe dem Ursprung, daß er ihn schwer verläßt . . . ; nicht weil er nur im Heimischen . . . verharrt, sondern weil er schon an der Quelle das Unheimische zu Gast geladen hat und vom Unheimischen ins Heimische gedrängt wird. Der Ister ist jener Strom, bei dem schon an der Quelle das Fremde zu Gast und gegenwärtig ist, in dessen Strömen die Zwiesprache des Eigenen und Fremden ständig spricht. (GA 53: 182; my emphasis)

Here, in this almost going backwards, there is yet another not being able to forget the origin. Here someone dwells so near to the origin that he abandons it with difficulty . . . not because he simply remains at-home . . . but because already at the source he has invited the not-at-home as guest and is pushed toward the at-home by the not-at-home. The Ister is that stream in which the foreign is already present as guest at its source, that stream in whose flowing the dialogue between one’s own and the foreign constantly speaks. (I 146; trans. modified; my emphasis)

If the “Ister” hymn speaks of a way back to the source, then, that return does not only require the journey outward into the foreign. It demands that we recognize the presence of the foreign guest already at the source, “schon an der Quelle.” Zwiesprache itself is not a matter of choice; it speaks continually, whether we hear it or not. But to hear that speaking whether or not it is understandable, to allow for its unsettling effects, is to act as Antigone does in taking das Unheimliche into her very being. There is nothing more
unheimlich than the human, as Antigone shows in the highest sense, for the Zwiesprache that guarantees its permanent instability also describes its very ground. Heidegger’s early promise to tell his listeners “who they are” on the basis of their thoughts on translation thus attains another level of significance, as translation presents this logic of Zwiesprache in nuce.

Perhaps it is because he reaches this unstable place that Heidegger cannot reach a conclusion, except for the conviction that it would be impossible to conclude. In the final pages of the lecture (again, pages that were never delivered to their addressees as a lecture) he struggles to qualify the essential incompletion that his reading represents: “Nor should the opinion arise that these remarks might in themselves suffice in order to think the truth of this poetry, or even to experience the poetic word and the word itself in its own essential space (Wesensraum)” (I 166). If the reading is incomplete, however, that is not to say that Heidegger regards the poetry in question as having exhausted itself; on the contrary: “This poetry demands of us a transformation in our ways of thinking and experiencing, one that concerns Being in its entirety” (I 166: Diese Dichtung fordert von uns eine Umwandlung der Denkungsart und des Erfahrens, die das Ganze des Seins angeht [205]). There is still much “to do” before we can think the exchange with the foreign in relation to the movement of history, to the determination of Being.

Yet the task that reading poses here, the task of “turning over” (umwandeln) our way of thinking and experiencing, is one that Heidegger soon abandons. His next turn to Hölderlin’s poetry, the lecture and essay “Homecoming/To Kindred Ones (Heimkunft/An die Verwandten), shuts down the subversive operations of the “Ister” lecture by eliminating the problem of the tragic and thus stabilizing two key terms essential to das Unheimliche; grounding “homecoming” in understanding (Verstehen), he lets Hölderlin’s poetry once again speak of the special destiny of the Germans.

The enemy is foreign. The Germans are “the thinking and poetizing people” (das Volk des Dichtens und des Denkens, GA 4: 30). In 1943, the year that marked the hundredth anniversary of Hölderlin’s death and the end of the siege of Stalingrad, there is a certain urgency in that distinction. Now Heidegger no longer speaks of Heimischwerden, of the idea that Hölderlin’s poetry speaks of the incessant exchange with the foreign while preserving its essential difference; now another poem enacts a literal homecoming:

35. “Auch soll nicht die Meinung aufkommen, diese Anmerkungen reichten schon aus, um die Wahrheit dieser Dichtung zu denken oder auch nur dafür, das dichterische Wort und das Wort selbst in seinem eigenen Wesensraum zu erfahren” (GA 53: 204f.)
Die Elegie ‘Heimkunft’ ist nicht ein Gedicht über die Heimkunft, sondern
die Elegie ist als die Dichtung, die sie ist, das Heimkommen selbst, das sich
noch ereignet, solange ihr Wort als die Glocke in der Sprache der Deutschen
läutet. (GA 4: 25)

The elegy “Homecoming” is not a poem about homecoming, but rather
the elegy is, as the poetry that it is, homecoming itself, that still comes to
pass as long as its word peals as the bell in the language of the Germans.36

The semantic difference between Heimischwerden and Heimkommen, com-
ing-to-be-at-home and homecoming, may seem small and easily explainable;
the idea of homecoming corresponds more viscerally to lived experience, to
the fact that hundreds of thousands of young men had already fallen for the
sake of the homeland, all the while remaining oriented toward that “home.”
However, the difference is far from insignificant. While Heimischwerden im
Unheimischen reveals itself as a possibility that is basically untenable, Heim-
kommen directs itself to a destination that remains secret (ein Geheimnis).
And secrets can be told, though they must be guarded until the proper
moment.

The absence of the foreign is as conspicuous in this text as its presence
was dominant in the earlier lecture. Whereas in the “Ister” lecture, ethical
responsibility lay primarily within the notion of hospitality, in the decision
to preserve difference as such even at the source, here the “care” (Sorge) of
the poet inheres in the preservation of the secret held by all Germans, the
secret of proximity to the source (das Geheimnis der Nähe zum Ursprung
[24]). Sorge, in fact, here comes to replace the love that expressed the poet’s
courage as a fundamental openness, as hospitality to that which is unset-
tering, unheimlich. All that remains of the foreign is a sense of the bur-
den placed upon those who have proven themselves worthy of the journey
home.

Wiederkehren kann nur, wer vordem und vielleicht schon eine lange Zeit
hindurch als der Wanderer die Last der Wanderung auf die Schulter genom-
men hat und hinübergegangen ist zum Ursprung, damit er dort erfahre,
was das Zu-Suchende sei, um dann als der Suchende erfahrener zurückzu-
kommen. (GA 4: 23f.)

44 (translation modified). Henceforth designated as Hoeller, with page number.
Only he can turn back who previously, and perhaps for a long time, has wandered as a traveler and borne upon himself the burden of the journey upon his shoulders, and has crossed over into the origin, so that there he might experience what is to be sought, in order then as the seeker, to come back more experienced. (Hoeller 42; trans. modified)

Those who are worthy of returning have learned to hear the Sorge that the poet speaks: “‘The others’ must first learn to think the secret of sparing nearness” (‘Die anderen’ müssen erst lernen, das Geheimnis der sparenden Nähe zu bedenken [GA 4: 29]). And it is in this regard that the “others” become the poet’s relations (Verwandte). Caring for the secret thus implies insularity—and guarantees the exclusion of the foreign. For those with their eyes trained towards the homeland, not even a death on foreign soil can preclude the inevitability of return.

. . . sind dann nicht die Söhne der Heimat, die fern dem Boden der Heimat, aber mit dem Blick in die Heitere der ihnen entgegen leuchtdenden Heimat ihr Leben für den noch gesparten Fund verwenden und im Opfergang verschwenden—sind dann nicht diese Söhne der Heimat die nächsten Verwandten des Dichters? Ihr Opfer birgt in sich den dichtenden Zuruf an die Liebsten in der Heimat, der gesparte Fund möge ein gesparter bleiben.


. . . then are not the sons of the homeland, who though far distant from its soil, still gaze into the gaiety of the homeland shining toward them, and devote and sacrifice their life for the still reserved find, are not these sons of the homeland the poet’s closest kin? Their sacrifice shelters in itself the poetic call to the dearest in the homeland, so that the reserved find may remain reserved.

So it will remain, if those who “have cares in the fatherland” become the careful ones. Then there will be a kinship with the poet. Then there will be homecoming. But this homecoming is the future of the historical being of the German people. (Hoeller 48)

Whereas Antigone’s destiny in Heidegger’s view was to take das Unheimliche into her very being, the destiny of the Germans only one year later is quite opposite: the preservation of the center, the source, will bring the Ger-
mans back to themselves, bring them back home. Previously, in the logic of *Ortschaft* und *Wanderschaft*, the center could not hold; now it is held dear.

The conclusion to this piece, then, is very different from that of the “Ister” lecture; whereas in the latter text Heidegger appears in the end to back off from the notion that he has modeled any sort of understanding at all, calling attention only to the limits of understanding, in “Homecoming” he concludes with a call to action:

> Darum wendet der Dichter sich zu den anderen, dass ihr Andenken helfe, das dichtende Wort zu verstehen, damit im Verstehen für jeden je nach der ihm schickliche Weise die Heimkunft sich ereigne. (GA 4: 30f.)

That is why the poet turns toward the others, so that their remembrance may help in understanding the poetizing word, so that in understanding homecoming might take place in a fitting sense for each one of them. (Hoeller 49; trans. modified)

Significantly, it is not only through the saying of poetry but through the help of understanding that homecoming is possible, an understanding that takes place by means of a form of thought (*Andenken*). We are very far here from the notion of “poetizing knowledge” that Heidegger developed in the “Ister” lecture, as a moment in which understanding falls short in the face of the “hardly sayable”; we are far from his assertion that “truth” may lie in the recognition that thought cannot exhaust its poetic object:

> Sind wir aber stark genug zum Denken, dann kann es genügen, daß wir die Wahrheit der Dichtung und ihr Gedichtetes nur aus der Ferne, und d.h. kaum, bedenken, um von ihr plötzlich betroffen zu sein. (GA 53: 205)

Yet if we are strong enough to think, then it may be sufficient for us to think upon the truth of this poetry and what it poetizes, merely from afar, that is, scarcely, so that we may suddenly be struck by it. (I 167; trans. modified)

In “Heimkunft,” reading as *Zwiesprache* has been displaced by reading as prelude to thought. This is where the violence of interpretation begins anew. Despite the rhetoric of homecoming, it is a shift that signifies no return to an origin but a retreat into insularity, a flight from the possibilities of the foreign, a silencing of *Verstimmung*.

Only a few years later, Bertolt Brecht will himself experience an unsettling sort of “homecoming.” Returning to Europe in 1947, he will be con-
fronted with a “home” that had not only become unrecognizable in the aftermath of world war but also bore the fresh scars of unrepresentable events. His foray into tragedy at precisely this moment of return is significant insofar as he considers, not unlike Heidegger, the potential explosion of historical complacency inherent in the confrontation with the unsettlingly foreign.