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FOUNDATION AND POETRY: HEIDEGGER AS A READER OF HÖLDERLIN

*A poet's currentness is not in the content,
sometimes it is regardless of the content,
almost despite of it.*

M. Cvetaeva

Abstract. Around 1930, Martin Heidegger approached Hölderlin's poetry, welcoming his solicitations and hints in order to redeem the experience of the usage of language after the linguistic interruption of *Being and Time* that showed him the poverty of metaphysical language. Linguistic poverty is closely linked to metaphysical poverty and to the historical and destiny-related impossibility to grasp Being. From the 1930s onwards, the issue concerning the sense of Being becomes for Heidegger an issue concerning the sense of language. Heidegger appears to be "employing" Hölderlin, subordinating his philosophical intuitions to the gears of ontology. Thus, in Heidegger's meditations, Hölderlin's merit is outlined as the intuition of the outcome of Western metaphysics in terms of the extreme oblivion of Being and the rambling of thinking, foreseeing the end of an era and introducing the dawn of a second beginning: the one of poetizing thinking.

Keywords: Heidegger, Hölderlin, poetry, Christ, German Idealism, madness

1. Hölderlin: The Poet and *Natur*.
2. Religious education and the centrality of Christ.
3. Poetry, philosophy, and beauty.
4. Heidegger as a reader of Hölderlin.

1. HÖLDERLIN: THE POET AND *NATUR*

In the 19th Century an eager generation was born, “boldly and strenuously, in a Europe whose traditions had been shattered, it was marching from all quarters towards the dawn of unprecedented freedom. (...) One only of the splendid company, the most typical, survived for many, many years in the world whence the gods had fled – Hölderlin, whose fate was the strangest of them all. His lips were still ruddy; his ageing frame still moved to and fro across the German soil. (...) But his senses were no longer awake, being shrouded in an unending dream. The jealous gods, though they had not slain him, had blinded the man who had made their secrets known. (...) His mind was enwrapped in a veil (...) When at length he died, his passing attracted no more attention in the German world than the falling of an autumn leaf. (...) Unread, unrecognized by a whole generation was the message of this last and purest of the splendid company.”¹

Such evocative words by Stephan Zweig briefly sketch Friedrich Hölderlin’s life (1770-1843), also known as the greatest German lyric poet after Goethe, a Romantic who lived outside the borders of Romanticism, someone who dared to serve art exclusively, in the service of Gods and not men. As a poet, he underwent the sufferings of a great soul, groaning and disdaining the spiritual brutality of his time. He chose to “glorify what excels,” being aware that such a mission would deprive him of many joys. Hölderlin belongs to the race of those who are not able to rest anywhere. Unperceived, the “wonderful desire for the abyss” begins, as a mysterious attraction looking for its own depth.

Hölderlin is a modern poet, as his existential eradication is also an intellectual one. His poetry does not transform the “poetic” element into the conquest of romantic aesthetic autonomy, but rather he confers a religious dimension to such a “poetic” element, thus electing it as a mission in itself: “No other German poet had so overwhelming a faith as Hölderlin in poesy and its divine origin. He transferred to the concept of poesy his own unalloyed purity. Poetry for Hölderlin

¹ S. Zweig, *The Struggle with Demon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*, trans. C. and E. Paul, Pushkin Press, London 2012, 25.

was the essential meaning of life. (...) Just as the invisible ether fills the interspace between heaven and earth, so does poesy fill the abyss between the heights and the depths of the spirit, bridge the gulf that separates gods from men.”²

Hölderlin’s entire work, as well as his poetic path, should be evaluated in the light of his cultural education at the *Stift* of Tübingen. In such a cultural environment, Hölderlin integrates the study of Kant with Fichte’s intuitions, elucidated through a Spinozism with Platonic flavour, thus allowing the declension of Spinoza’s “One and All” through a mythical fantasy comprehending life in all-encompassing unity and harmony. He acknowledged Kant’s critical method as an essential preparatory moment of thinking, a sort of preliminary training to the system, emphasizing its transcending any kind of sensualism. He appreciated Fichte’s thoroughness of thinking to the point of calling him “a titan fighting for humanity”³ and he acknowledged the important role played by the opposition I and Not-I in the conflict between nature and freedom. Moreover he learned about Spinoza mainly through the once popular *Letters Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* (1785) by Jacobi: Hölderlin interpreted the feature of the “One and All” not exclusively as all-encompassing infinite substance, but rather as the fundamental feeling pushing him since his early youth towards nature and its power. Concerning Plato, he appreciated his remarks on beauty – to which he added a tragic tone, – and on the importance of myth for thinking. The Platonism he embraced does not take into account the split between idea and reality, but rather takes the idea as permeating the whole of reality. This stance urged him to consider the foundation of the “mythology of reason,” within which myth gets to be the connecting point between *logos* and *poiesis*. According to Hölderlin, while rising above allegorical symbology, myth produces a new spirituality, within which the gods themselves are called into existence as original powers and not as simple concepts. However, the identity

² Ibid., 49.

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Letters*, trans. C. Butler, C. Seiler, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, Ind. 1984, 32.

of these powers, that are simultaneously mythical and mystical, is not recognized by the poets anymore.

According to Hölderlin the gods live with the poet in deep intimacy, as much as Nature does. In *Hyperion*, he will develop an idea of Nature that is able to overcome death and restore a lost harmony to life, ultimately redeeming its finitude.⁴ Hyperion's soul is in full harmony with Nature, while joining in the protagonist's happiness and pain. Within such a depiction of Nature, the gods are real presences and they participate in the young man's vicissitudes, as we note in the letters to Bellarmino about Diotima's death.⁵

Full awareness of Nature leads the poet to experience space as a display of its sacrality. Thus, in such a realm of Nature, ancient Ionia and Jena are not that distant. Germany is actually the place where the existence of the poet is accomplished and depleted, or rather, one may say, the most immediately available land compared to the beloved ancient Greece. For him, Greece is not only land, people, culture and gods, but rather the achievement of the long awaited occurring future. From Greece he expects the fulfilment of the promise concerning the return of the gods and a new dawn.

In this respect, Hölderlin belongs to the Greek world no less than Hesiod and Pindar. Hence, Hölderlin reactivates the bond with Nature, i.e., that "correspondence of loving senses" (as the Italian poet Ugo Foscolo claims) entirely pervading his soul. However, such a "religion of Nature," within which the gods are the focal point from which the element of light expands, gradually starts to embrace and include some Christian elements as well.

At first they are rejected and then they become present through the mediation of the central figure of Christ. Concerning religion, he became increasingly aware of the abyss separating his poetic religion of

⁴ See F. Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, in: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and selected poems*, ed. E.L. Santner, Continuum, New York 1990, 41.

⁵ See W.F. Otto, *Theophania. Der Geist der Altgriechischen Religion*, Rowohlt, Hamburg 1956, 15.

nature from Christianity; however he always remained desperately attached to Christianity and to the figure of Christ.

2. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

Hölderlin was educated by his mother in Pietism; however, he did not believe the Christian doctrine and figures to be an immediate expression of his religious life, as he did not take their mediating value as valid or adequate enough to accomplish his mission as a poet. However, Pietism somehow influenced the poet's spiritual education,⁶ notably as far as spiritual isolation is concerned, so as to inspire him to live religiously in solitude. The God of the Christian tradition was not able to gather within itself all those elements that Hölderlin believed essential to any *Volksreligion*: the religious element, people and the world. He "departed from the Christian message, finding a suitable expression of his experience in the ancient world of gods and deities of original creation."⁷

Only later would he feel the need to introduce the figure of Christ, which would in turn progressively acquire an ever increasing synthesizing power, inasmuch as he entered into conflict with the Olympic gods. Thus, after a phase of refusal and detachment from Christianity, the figure of Christ emerged in his poetry and stood out in all its importance.

However, who is this Christ the Romantic poet is talking about?

Since his time in Tübingen, Hölderlin – together with Schelling and Hegel – saw in the figure of Christ a possible declination of the "One is All" through which he interpreted the advent of the "Kingdom of God" and of the "invisible Church." Along the articulated and complex path

⁶ On the influences of Pietism on Hölderlin, I refer to reader to W. Dierauer, *Hölderlin und der spekulative Pietismus Württembergs gemeinsame Anschauungshorizonte im Werk Oetingers und Hölderlins*, Juris Druck u. Verlag, Zürich 1986.

⁷ R. Guardini, *Hölderlin. Weltbild und Frömmigkeit*, my trans. from German into English, Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, Ostfildern 1996, 243. According to Guardini's interpretation, Hölderlin's relationship with Christianity develops according to three phases, articulated by an initial moment of juvenal religiosity, followed by a deep crisis and by the new appropriation of the figure of Christ.

of the poet, from his theological education at the *Stift* until the last lyric poems, composed while he was still of able mind, the Christ he referred not simply the historical Jesus, since Hölderlin credited him with the attributes of “God” and “demigod”; the employment of such attributes does not aim at emphasizing the kenosis of God becoming man, but rather at the differentiation from God the Father. The poet acknowledged Christ’s divinity and placed him next to Hercules and Dionysos; he was the last god, the future coming god. Christ entered Hölderlin’s poetry precisely as an absence, as one who must come back.

Christ is the lord of future time.⁸ He has some features connecting him to the second power of Schelling, as that factor allowing the return to the full union between the Father and the Spirit.⁹ Christ is the transitional moment, he is the presence in the historical destiny of the West.¹⁰

“The fact of being the end distinguishes him from the two brothers. Heracles is in the primary time; he is a fighter, the winner of adversary powers, commander of chaos, founder, sufferer and ruler at the same time. Dionysos overcomes the divisions of existence through the power that unifies everything of inebriation and transformation. Christ, instead, comes the day when the world is turning to the end and is ‘becoming evening.’ He indicates the falling night and establishes there a ‘promise’: A celebration of the ‘gratitude,’ the Eucharist, as to give disciples the strength to believe, he educates them to understand until the solution comes (...) the mundanization of the biblical Kingdom of God.”¹¹

Hölderlin waited in hopeful anticipation for the accomplishment of the *eschaton* and the fulfilment not only of the idealized “Kingdom of God,” from his youth, but also of the arrival of gods. As a prophet, he

⁸ See M. Frank, *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die neue Mythologie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1982.

⁹ See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1977.

¹⁰ See H.G. Gadamer, *‘Who Am I and Who Are You?’ and Other Essays*, trans. R. Heinemann, B. Krajewski, SUNY Press, Albany, N.Y. 1997.

¹¹ R. Guardini, *Hölderlin. Weltbild und Frömmigkeit*, op. cit., 719.

asks for faith, that is to say that one believes in the return of Greece, in the transformation of life.

The idea of a future behind such an understanding of history includes within itself a reference to eternity, to what is ready to come for all eternity. This is not some sort of Chiliasm, but rather a confident waiting for the moment when Eternity becomes temporal. Precisely in light of such a pressing requirement of Hölderlin's thinking and poetry, it is thus possible to grasp the whole range of his poetic mission, of singing as remembrance, as the memory of the promises.¹²

The absence is not only deprivation, but also an historical destiny, designated by the poet on the threshold of the fulfilment of the promise: it is the time of the night. Hölderlin's poetry of nature is a Romantic theophany that is always accomplished in the hour of twilight. Before light fully disappears, for a moment, just for a moment, a god mysteriously comes down to earth; it seems to touch the top of the highest trees and those who lie under the trees among the flowers; it is full of the exciting certainty that the distance between the earth and sky has disappeared, between men and gods, insomuch as the delicate evening breeze enveloping and permeating the senses of mortals, reviving them after the afternoon's burning heath, appears to be the actual emanation of the invisible, and yet the always present, soul of the universe.

Whenever light is perceived again on earth, the god leaves the mortal space and returns to the numinous one it inhabits. Gods live in eternal glory although they do not perceive it; this is why they approach men, so that they testify to the bliss provoked by Olympic glory. Gods need the hearts of humans, as through them they can know their own eternal splendour.

3. POETRY, PHILOSOPHY, AND BEAUTY

As Hölderlin conceives of it, poetry is the resolution of matter in spirit, as a sort of suspension of the law of gravity on matter. His po-

¹² See F. Hölderlin, *The Poet's Vocation*, in *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, op. cit., 153; *Patmos*, 244; *Remembrance*, 264.

etry “is a dissolving of earthly matter into spirit, a sublimation of the world into the world-soul; it is never a condensation, a thickening, a consolidation.”¹³

Poetry, thus, becomes somewhat of a mirror for philosophy, marking the borders separating Hölderlin from German Idealism, that means a threshold according to which his works cannot be in toto ascribed to German Idealism. His aim is to deeply re-signify poetry, assigning to it a superior dignity, while bringing it back to its original function, as a teacher of humanity.¹⁴ Within such a glorious action of the restitution of the *proprium* of poetry, Hölderlin achieves a true philosophical itinerary inherent to the composition of poetry. This allows him to embrace the idea that poetry is the essence of all knowledge, not lastly the very essence of religion, following the Hegelian position according to which every religion would be poetic in essence.¹⁵ Thus poetry acquires a foundational dimension in relation to reality and religion, as Heidegger had the merit to emphasize.

In the line “what poets are for?” the whole meaning of Hölderlin’s mission is condensed: Poets provide foundation to what is meant to last in the framework of the dialectics between eternal and ephemeral. They provide a foundation through the composition of essential poetry giving consistency to Being.

On the basis of such a description of the activity of poetry, Heidegger writes: “Poetry is a founding by the word and in the word. What is established in this way? What remains. But how can what remains be founded? Is it not that which has always already been present? No! Precisely what remains must be secured against being carried away; the simple must be wrested from the complex, measure must be opposed to excess. What supports and dominates beings as a whole must

¹³ S. Zweig, *The Struggle with Demon*, op. cit., 63.

¹⁴ I refer the reader to Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Oldest System Programme of German Idealism*, in: *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J.M. Bernstein, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, 185.

¹⁵ See F. Hölderlin, *The Significance of Tragedy*, in: *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, op. cit., 193.

come into the open. Being must be disclosed, so that beings may appear. But even this, though it remains, is transitory.”¹⁶

What is left to the care of the poet?

“The poet names the gods and names all things with respect to what they are. This naming does not merely come about when something already previously known is furnished with a name; rather, by speaking the essential word, the poet’s naming first nominates the beings as what they are. Thus they become known as beings. Poetry is the founding of being in the word. What endures is never drawn from the transient. What is simple can never be directly derived from the complex. Measure does not lie in excess. We never find the ground in the abyss. Being is never a being. But because being and the essence of things can never be calculated and derived from what is present at hand, they must be freely created, posited, and bestowed. Such free bestowal is a founding.”¹⁷

It is legitimate to understand such a prerogative of poetry in relation to philosophy as a foundational act of reality, that is to say in the terms of a declension of the issue concerning foundation, along the lines described by the ontology of art.

It is therefore consistent to detect, within the German poet’s intention, the announcement of a theoretical itinerary aiming at entrusting poetry with the role, until now performed by religion, of providing existence to the world. Such an intention has been formulated since the early Juvenal notes and is also stated in *The Oldest System-Program of German Idealism*. While his friends from the *Stift* years (Schelling and Hegel) believe that it is essential to restore the split, the divergence, the laceration, Hölderlin instead knows that such a split is un-restorable, as it is the peculiarity of the human soul. The poet does not accept any conceptual mediation, or *Aufhebung*, and from the start turns down every form of dialectical mediation.¹⁸

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, trans. K. Hoeller, Humanity Books, New York 2000, 58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁸ Cf. O. Pöggeler, *Hölderlin, Schelling und Hegel bei Heidegger*, Heidegger Studien 28(1993), 320.

Within such a “conscious unhappiness,” accepting pain and laceration as irreconcilable terms, the aesthetic category of beauty is conceived, which receives its most accomplished formulation in the *Hyperion* composed by Hölderlin between 1792 and 1797, in the form of a preliminary draft. In this very novel, the poet writes one of his most beautiful and most philosophically rich pages, offering enough elements to grasp at the same time his derivation from Idealism and its overcoming: “The first child of human, of divine Beauty is art. In art the divine man rejuvenates, and repeats himself, He wants to feel himself, therefore he sets his Beauty over against himself. Thus did man give himself his gods. For in the beginning man and his gods were one, when, unknown to itself, eternal Beauty was. I speak mysteries, but they exist. – The first child of divine Beauty is art. Thus it was among the Athenians. Beauty’s second daughter is religion. Religion is love of Beauty. The wise man loves Beauty herself, eternal, all-embracing Beauty; the people love her children, the gods, who appear to them in multifarious forms. So it was, too, among the Athenians. And without such a love of Beauty, without such a religion, every state is dry skeleton without life and spirit, all thought and action is a tree without a top, a column whose crown has been cut oft.”¹⁹

Hölderlin’s ideal of beauty holds in itself an inseparable tragic element. Beauty is not seraphic or comforting, but rather it is conciliation “among disharmony,”²⁰ which makes union possible while preserving the distinction of opposite elements and their conflict; it is what subtracts consciousness in relation to the aesthetic realm, as the negative sign. Hölderlin’s beauty appears to have that very same bitter flavour discovered by Arthur Rimbaud, although within a total and exclusive difference in the discovery and acknowledgement of the self. While Rimbaud had to experience failure and dissolution, and be totally deserted in order to discover the bleakness of daybreaks, Hölderlin had to be totally consumed with the gods in order to rediscover the mystic face of nature, thus ultimately detecting within beauty the sign of absence.

¹⁹ F. Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, op. cit., 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

Such a form of beauty, so close to the threshold of nothingness, carries within itself the distinctive mark of the abyssal proximity, a portion of negativity that, maybe, not even in Hegel's highest speculations, could fully reveal its range to the point of breaking into the "ground" of aesthetics. Indeed, Hegel conceived of the negative through a deeply speculative effort within the horizon of the foundations of dialectics, constituting the logical core of the real; the negative has, at first, the shape of the difference between the I and its own substance and, secondly, that of difference between the substance and itself. In his lessons of aesthetics the negative will become *Auflösung*, "dissolution," "resolution," in order to express the dialectic requirements of the system, according to which art, as the first moment of the philosophy of the Spirit, must be overcome and then dissolve into a more suitable form for the expression of the true form of the Absolute. Therefore, according to Hegel, the reach of the negative is still functional to the *Aufhebung*, and, in order to achieve the triumphal march of the absolute Idea, it should be ready to leave behind the negative outside the realm of aesthetics.

Hölderlin, instead, appears to be moving in the opposite direction. He conceives of the negative within beauty as precisely moving away from the tragic element that is the most appropriate category in order to determine the double belonging of beauty to both nothingness and Being. Thus, Hölderlin breaks into the "ground" of aesthetics, as he acknowledges the negative inside beauty as its most original dimension. Such is the meaning of the tragic seed in Hölderlin's poetry, whose most accomplished representation is found in Empedocles. The seeds for *The Death of Empedocles* are already present between the lines, in Hyperion, during the Frankfurt years. Empedocles combines the two moods of the soul expressed by *Hyperion*, i.e. the adoration of the divinity of nature and the escape from an unsatisfactory human form of life.

Compared to Hyperion, the novelty of Empedocles lies in the fact that his soul is involved in the conflict, within the irreconcilable dialectics between the I and Not-I. Perhaps it is not incorrect to consider Empedocles as a modern tragic hero, as his internal laceration is not only

moral, but also psychological. Facing his laceration he chooses death, not however as one of the characters of Greek tragedy, not as one of Aeschylus' masks withstanding death as a tragic sufferance, since he rather chose death willingly, with a joyous awareness.

Death does not simply happen to close a biological cycle, but it is rather an event accomplished in reference to the Whole, that on the one hand deprives mankind of what is given and on the other hand delivers back what has been denied.

Empedocles cannot be part of the tension towards the "One and All," or maybe he is not willing any more. Empedocles is the tragic hero that is not happy with Hegel's logodicy. He rather stays, in Hegel's words, within the power of the negative. Through such a character, Hölderlin accepts and bears the load of the torment of the negative, avoiding every solution attempting to reconcile opposite terms, overcoming the negative. He rather chooses to stay within the negative, experimenting with it all the way as pain, limitation and absence, thus achieving the dialectics of feeling, opposed and in opposition to the dialectics of the concept. According to such an order of emotional patterns, Empedocles' limit – that limit because of which he chose death – possibly lies in the fact that he cannot reasonably account for the external world, or for the internal unity between his I and Nature.

4. HEIDEGGER AS A READER OF HÖLDERLIN

Around 1930, Martin Heidegger approached Hölderlin's poetry, and this encounter lasted a lifetime. In a letter dated December 31st 1934 to his friend Elisabeth Blochmann, Heidegger writes: "That morning when You were reading Hölderlin (6. XI), I started my educational course, and I read some passages precisely from the letter of 1.I.1799. And yesterday I concluded my course with that impressive letter of 4. XII. 1801 (...). [Hölderlin] has pre-established the misery – that has a renewed beginning – of our historical There-being, so that we could wait for it. And our misery is the lack of misery, the powerlessness towards an original experience of the issues concerning the There-being. And the angst in front of interrogation resides on the West; exiles popu-

lations on aged paths and quickly drives them back to already decrepit dwellings.”²¹

In 1936, he was in Rome, invited by Giovanni Gentile to speak about Hölderlin and the essence of poetry, on which occasion he dealt widely with the interpretation of the major assumptions behind the poetic stance of our lyric Poet, that will soon become the preferred topic of any discussion concerning “poetizing thinking,” namely the domain of poetry as language’s originating place, and poetry as the foundation of Being and thought’s supreme need. Such an hermeneutic scenario of enquiry is called upon for the elucidation of Hölderlin’s lyric poems. As is well known, in 1939 Heidegger attempted the exegesis of *Wie wenn am Feiertage...*, whose main theme is the relationship between Nature and the poet; moreover in 1943 further publications came out of the “elucidations” on the poems *Andenken* and *Rückkehr in die Heimat*, whose underlying lines go back to the relationship between the Sacred and the poet, the reciprocal implication between language and the poet, and memory. Precisely as the effect of his meditations on Hölderlin, Heidegger will thoroughly explain his departure from aesthetics towards the ontology of art.

Hölderlin holds an undiscussed record among all the poets Heidegger examined (Hebel, Rilke, Trakl, and George); and his consideration as the German lyric poet comes from a precise need in Heidegger’s thought, that is to say to receive a suitable wording to express what metaphysical language cannot express. Just as a researcher would do, Heidegger welcomes Hölderlin’s solicitations and hints in order to redeem the experience of the usage of language in *Sein und Zeit* (1927). The linguistic interruption of *Being and Time* showed him the poverty of metaphysical language and our ordinary language. Although language is what most properly defines mankind, as it is co-existential with *Dasein*, it is also the most remote experience mankind is able to have.

We are lacking proper language. The time of missing language is also the time of poverty, i.e., the time in history when Being is hiding, in the

²¹ M. Heidegger, E. Blochmann, *Carteggio 1918-1969*, trans. R. Brusotti, and my trans. from Italian into English, Il Melangolo, Genova 1991, 135.

phenomenology of Heidegger's *Seinsfrage*; this means that it is an era characterised by a linguistic limitation understood as a limit in the historical opening of Being itself. Linguistic misuses and words' wear and tear testify to and provide confirmation of such an original loss. Contemporary words are the result of exploitation; they have lost the power to embed mankind in the thing it is indicating and, in consequence of such a loss, mankind ends up being displaced from its original linguisticity.

The linguistic wear and tear, of which Heidegger attempts to provide an interpretation, is a rather complex topic of discussion. The report concerning language's deficiencies and mankind's manipulation against its own interests is just the most striking feature of an issue deeply rooted in the question on the sense of Being. Hence, linguistic poverty is closely linked to metaphysical poverty and to the historical and destiny-related impossibility to grasp Being. Precisely in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger experienced linguistic poverty, although in that context the issue specifically concerned metaphysical language only; the incompleteness of the 1927 work thus suffered the consequences of the incompetence of metaphysical language and more generally of the relationship between existence – or *Dasein* – and language. The work was left uncompleted, as appropriate language was missing, and such a shortcoming was taken as deeply linked to the oblivion of Being. On the grounds of this discovery, Heidegger emphasized more than once in his meditation that, more than formulating a new language, it would be necessary to change the relationship through which language is believed to be linked to Being.

From the 1930s onwards, the issue of the sense of being becomes for Heidegger an issue of the sense of language. Therefore, Heidegger's meditation posterior to the *Kehre*, aims precisely at the original need of thinking, through which the possibility to be the house of mankind is restored to words. In this respect, the remarks concerning Hölderlin's poetry become the preferred instrument in order to re-signify mankind's linguisticity. Thus, inhabiting and poetizing become synonyms for the consecration of the ground achieved by poetry, establishing that which endures.

In this ambitious research project, incorporating the helpful hints coming from the poetic word, Heidegger appears to be “employing” Hölderlin – according to Gadamer, the poet who loosened Heidegger’s tongue – subordinating his philosophical intuitions to the gears of ontology. Thus, in Heidegger’s meditations, Hölderlin’s merit is outlined as the intuition of the outcome of Western metaphysics in terms of the extreme oblivion of Being and the rambling of thinking, foreseeing the end of an era and introducing the dawn of a second beginning, the one of poetizing thinking: “Hölderlin became at the same time the one who poeticized the future ahead, in an epoch when thinking once again aspired to know all history up to that point absolutely.”²²

The meaning and limits of Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin have been thoroughly discussed by many scholars, according to a two-fold evaluation of both the constrictive nature of Heidegger’s exegesis, and the legitimate emphasis on its merits. Precisely in the light of the abundant critical literature on the topic, as well as thanks to a re-evaluation of Heidegger’s perspective on Hölderlin, it appears obvious that Heidegger has built around the poet a framework biased by the constraints imposed by the issue of the meaning of Being. In order to promote the ontological retrieval of the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger does not hesitate to almost leave out all those elements that are nevertheless essential to the full understanding of the aesthetic and theoretical grasp of the German lyrical poet. Thus, the “poetic thinking” of the philosopher shapes an image of Hölderlin that is missing some crucial features, such as German romanticism and idealism as privileged sources of his lyrical education. In addition, while achieving the romantic analysis of the symbol and the allegory, Heidegger grasps their bond with mythopoetic language, thus not departing greatly from the romantic project of the poetic ideal, although he does not recognize his debt to German Idealism.²³

²² M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. P.E. Emad, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 2000, 143.

²³ Concerning Heidegger’s possible debt to German Idealism, I refer the reader to R. De Oliveira Feitosa, *Das Denken der Endlichkeit und die Endlichkeit des Denkens. Untersuchungen zu Hegel und Heidegger*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1999; F.-W. von Herrmann, *Der Begriff der Phänomenologie bei Heidegger und Husserl*, Kloster-

Interviewed by *Der Spiegel* Heidegger claimed: “My thinking has an essential connection to Hölderlin’s poetry. But I do not think Hölderlin is just any poet, whose work is a subject, among many others, for literary historians. I think Hölderlin is the poet who points toward the future, who expects the god.”²⁴

According to Heidegger, Hölderlin is the necessary medium, granting to the issue of foundation the status of an intimate topic proper to poetry and philosophy, thus constituting an essential turning point in order to account for the declination of the *Seinsfrage* after the missed achievement of *Sein und Zeit*. Poetry is, on this line of thinking, the prosecution and the corroboration of the positions expressed in the 1927 work.

Possibly, the highest merit of Heidegger’s interpretation is to have grasped how the essence of Hölderlin’s poetry is historical at the highest possible degree. The philosophy of history behind his production is all aimed at emphasizing how history is the expression of the divine. History is *historia signa temporum*, under the sign of the negative though, that means under the sign of the absence of the divine in the present, therefore denoted as a time of poverty; however it is also the history of the signs of the presence of the divine in the time to come, that is to say the history of the epiphany of the divine moving from a dialectics of absence/presence. History has a providential meaning and it is an eschatological history as well.

In the famous text *What Are Poets for?* Heidegger moves precisely from the spiritual and intellectual poverty of the present time, while including it in the path of the already traced critique of metaphysics:

mann, Frankfurt a.M.1998; D. Janicaud, *Heidegger-Hegel: un “dialogue” impossible?*, in: *Heidegger et l’idée de la Phénoménologie*, Kluwer Academic Publisher, Dordrecht - Boston - London 1988; O. Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers*, Neske, Pfullingen 1963; O. Pöggeler, *Heidegger und Hegel*, Heidegger Studien 35(1990); O. Pöggeler, *Hegel und Heidegger über Negativität*, Heidegger Studien 30(1995); D. Schmidt, *The Ubiquity of the Finite: Hegel, Heidegger and the Entitlements of Philosophy*, MIT Press, London 1990; J. Van der Meulen, *Heidegger und Hegel oder Widerstreit und Widerspruch*, Westkulturverlag, Meisenheim a. Glan 1959.

²⁴ M. Heidegger, *Only a God Can Save Us*, in: *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. R. Wolin, The MIT Press, London 1992, 112.

“For Hölderlin’s historical experience, the appearance and sacrificial death of Christ mark the beginning of the end of the day of the gods. Night is falling. Ever since the ‘united three’ – Herakles, Dionysos, and Christ – have left the world, the evening of the world’s age has been declining toward its night. The world’s night is spreading its darkness. The era is defined by the god’s failure to arrive, by the ‘default of God.’ But the default of God which Hölderlin experienced does not deny that the Christian relationship with God lives on in individuals and in the churches; still less does it assess this relationship negatively. The default of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world’s history and man’s sojourn in it. The default of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world’s history. The time of the world’s night is the destitute time, because it becomes ever more destitute. It has already grown so destitute, it can no longer discern the default of God as a default.”²⁵

The task of the poet is placed at the beginning of an opening in history; the poet is the mere perpetrator of the historical process; Being itself calls on the poet to join in and perform the function of naming the original absence. While fulfilling this task, the poet also has to preserve the mystery of the origin, that determines the relationship between mankind and Being, taking charge of a true mission; the poet has to mark a new era, naming the time of poverty the poet presides at and the mode of its unveiling. Within the frame of such a vision of the world, poetry is a hymn to the future and a hope for fulfilment, i.e., the narration of a promise announcing the return.

Perhaps, the very unconditional nature of poetry, a life dedicated to poetry, the full achievement of his “vocation as a poet,” is what caused Hölderlin’s madness. The first signs of the illness appeared already in 1801. In his pathology there is no clear breakdown or obfuscation of his self-awareness. Quite the contrary. If Karl Jasper’s analysis

²⁵ M. Heidegger, *What Poets Are for?* in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. R. Wolin, Harper & Row, New York 1971, 89.

received a clinic validation, – according to which the poet’s illness had two phases, one around 1801, marking the shifting from health to illness, and the other around 1805-1806, with obsessive pathological developments, – we would refer precisely to the transition from one phase to another as the moment when Hölderlin fought against the “blinding” of his spirit, imposing self-discipline upon himself in order to avoid the crushing that prevailed upon the self.

Gradually, his sensibility showed signs of illness; in a letter written in 1796 to his brother, he compared himself to an old plant in a vase, one already fallen on the ground, that, had lost all its gems, was wounded to its roots, and was now grafted into new ground, and without hardly any attentive care, had been saved from withering, but was still parched. And in another letter dated 1799 he wrote: “My actions and my words are so often awkward and absurd, as, like geese, I stand flat footed in water, flapping my helpless wings towards the Greek sky.”²⁶

Such a strong self-awareness at the moment of the clear appearance of the illness would become stronger; just as the captivity within reality would become increasingly strong. For forty years, Hölderlin would be dragged into the vortex of madness; Scardanelli would become his self; he would start to confusedly speak amorphous words; and yet the lyrical poems from this time are simple, clear, short strophes, rich in descriptions; preferred topic, Nature and its seasons. “At other times he would sit at the piano, playing a brief succession of notes again and again and again, while his fingernails, grown rank, clicked on the worn keys. In one way or the other the demented man would perpetually satisfy his need for rhythm, an elemental music sounding through his worn-out brain as the wind murmurs for ever through the strings of an Aeolian harp.”²⁷

²⁶ Letter written by Hölderlin in K. Jaspers, *Strindberg and Van Gogh: An Attempt of a Pathographic Analysis with Reference to Parallel Cases of Swedenborg and Hölderlin*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson 1977, 136.

²⁷ S. Zweig, *The Struggle with Demon. Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*, op. cit., 76.

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