

'Die Blume des Mundes': The Poetry of Martin Heidegger

Author

Travers, Martin

Published

2012

Journal Title

Oxford German Studies

DOI

[10.1179/0078719112Z.0000000005](https://doi.org/10.1179/0078719112Z.0000000005)

Rights statement

© 2012 Maney Publishing. This is the author-manuscript version of this paper. Reproduced in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher. Please refer to the journal website for access to the definitive, published version.

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/48487>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

‘ “Die Blume des Mundes”:
The Poetry of Martin Heidegger.’

Martin Heidegger viewed poetry as the union of Being with the world, as the granting (‘Stiftung’) of meaning through the recall of the ‘originary’ of language, which has been returned to the environment of its inception, when concept and word formed a tangible union. Poetry makes possible the revelation of that which is fully immanent: our thinking presence in the world. As Heidegger noted in his first major publication, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), ‘Dichtende Rede’ is ‘die Mitteilung der existenzialen Möglichkeiten der Befindlichkeit, das heißt das Erschließen von Existenz’.¹ Poetry is a home-coming. As he later explained, ‘das Dichten läßt das Wohnen des Menschen allererst in sein Wesen ein. Das Dichten ist das ursprüngliche Wohnenlassen’.² It vouchsafes a realm beyond a world dominated by a functionalist and quantitative mindset that Heidegger called ‘das Ge-stell’, an unholy (and Heidegger would have meant that term literally) alliance between modern technology and the logic-obsessed intellectual paradigms of Western philosophy. Poetry seeks to undo this conceptual hegemony. It moves ‘innerhalb der Sphäre der Subjektivität als derjenigen der inneren und unsichtbaren Präsenz’.³ It is the medium in which the speaker of language returns to language. Poetry is ‘die Blume des Mundes’.⁴

Heidegger explored the valency of the poetic word in a series of works that began with his lectures on Hölderlin in the 1930s and the publication in 1948 of *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, and culminated in a number of

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1972), p. 162.

² Heidegger, ‘“...Dichterisch wohnt der Mensch...”’, in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1954), pp. 181-198 (p. 196).

³ Heidegger, ‘Wozu Dichter?’, in Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), pp. 269-320 (p. 307).

⁴ Heidegger, ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’, in Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1959), pp.159-216 (p. 208).

studies written in remarkable succession: ‘Die Sprache’ (1950), ‘Die Sprache im Gedicht’ (1952), ‘Aus einem Gespräche von der Sprache’ (1954), ‘Das Wort’ (1958), and ‘Der Weg zur Sprache’ (1959). These essays were collected under the title *Unterwegs zur Sprache* in 1959. In them, Heidegger’s celebration of the poetic act is directed outwards, towards his encounter with the poetry of Trakl, George, Rilke and Benn, whom he regarded as the custodians of the dynamic agent: *logos*, ‘das Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse des denkenden Sagens’.⁵

These same comments and this almost transcendent appropriation of the discourse of poetry could, however, well have been directed inwards, for Heidegger too had been a writer of poetry, producing an impressive body of verse that runs in tandem to his great works of philosophy. In his thinking, Heidegger lived through language. Language was not only at the conceptual centre of his philosophy; it constituted the very medium through which that philosophy became possible. Words were explored in themselves and for themselves, and their connotative richness opened up in the act of interpretation. As one commentator has noted, ‘Heidegger’s play on the hidden life of words, his pulsating cadence, his use of metonymy in which concrete attributes stand for abstract entities and abstract segments represent or enact a concrete whole, seem to become simultaneously transparent and hypnotic’.⁶ Here, philosophic truth (particularly in Heidegger’s later work) no longer corresponds to empirical statement or the terms of propositional logic. It is a process, a working through, a journey that Heidegger (and the reader) must make in an attempt to make sense of the relationship between language and world. The destination of that journey is already implicit,

⁵ Heidegger, ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’, p. 198. The secondary literature on Heidegger’s poetics and his reading of poetry is vast. Seminal studies include Else Buddeberg, *Heidegger und die Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1953), and Veronique Foti, *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiesis/Sophia/Techne* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992).

⁶ George Steiner, *Heidegger* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1978), pp. 16-17.

indeed in one sense already there in the effort to reach it.⁷ Even those who could not entirely accept the content of Heidegger's philosophy were drawn by the power of its language.⁸

Heidegger's poetic output was substantial. He began writing verse in 1910 at the age of twenty-one, and wrote his final poem in 1976, in the year of his death. These poems were written at important and, occasionally, at critical points in his life and career, and they clearly performed a function that was both intellectual and personal. Indeed, his final poems were essential texts in his re-establishing (perhaps even redefining and intensifying) his relationship with Hannah Arendt. He published them in journals, and then as pamphlets or slim volumes produced by local publishers, intended for family and friends. These poems stand in an oblique relationship to Heidegger's philosophical writing, now expanding, now deepening, and sometimes problematising (intentionally or not) that writing. They are an essential part of his *oeuvre*.⁹

⁷ 'Wir wollen jedoch nicht weiterkommen. Wir möchten nur erst einmal eigens dorthin gelangen, wo wir uns schon aufhalten'. See 'Die Sprache', in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, pp. 11-33 (p. 12).

⁸ As Karl Jaspers remarked after his initial reading of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* in 1927, 'jetzt sah ich ein Werk, das durch Intensität der Ausarbeitung, Konstruktivität der Begrifflichkeit, Treffsicherheit eines oft erleuchtenden neuen Wortgebrauchs sofort Eindruck machte'. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie* (München: Piper, 1977), p. 98. For Jaspers' reservations about Heidegger's language, see *Philosophische Autobiographie*, pp.106-07.

⁹ Hugo Ott seems alone amongst Heidegger scholars in recognising this. See Ott, 'Der junge Martin Heidegger als Lyriker: Zu zwei (veröffentlichten) unbekanntem Gedichten (1911 und 1915)', in *Geteilte Sprache: Festschrift für Rainer Marten*, ed. by Utz Maas and Willem van Reijen (Amsterdam: Verlag B.R. Grüner, 1988), pp. 85-90. To the thirty-three poems that had already appeared in the volume *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (published in 1983 as volume 13 of the *Gesamtausgabe*), the four poems published in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges: 1916-1976* (volume 16), and the nine in *Besinnung* (volume 66), have been added those of *Gedachtes* (volume 81 of the *Gesamtausgabe* published in 2007), which contains more than five hundred poems (or, more accurately, texts that may be read as poems).

Heidegger's earliest poems were written while he was a theology student in Freiburg. Introspective, autobiographical and even confessional in ambit, they are ventures into the past of his childhood, spent in the village of Meßkirchen in Upper Swabia, where he was born in 1889. Heidegger believed strongly in the importance of continuity and tradition. As he noted, 'das Gewesene, das heißt [...] jenes, was versammelt noch währt und uns bestimmt'.¹⁰ In his later work, such as *Holzwege* (1950), the philosopher integrated motifs drawn from his rural background into his writing, seeking to secure the grounding of theory. Such motifs, of forests, fields and lanes, were metaphors of physical rootedness, suggesting the immanence of the ever transcendent in the ever present.¹¹

The same emotive pull to integration and the same desire for continuity is evident in poems such as 'Sterbende Pracht' (1910), 'Wir wollen warten' (1911) and 'Fernes Land', unpublished but dating from his student days. 'Sterbende Pracht', written in November 1910 and published in the *Allgemeine Rundschau* in October of that year, reveals the power of this evocation; but it also suggests its problematic status:

¹⁰ See 'Dank an die Heimatstadt Messkirch', in Martin Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges: 1910-1976* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), pp. 558-561 (p. 559). Heidegger's words reveal more than simply an attitude to the past; they also point to a way of grasping time, or rather of positioning the subject towards time. As he noted in his fictional conversation with a Japanese interlocutor in 'Aus einem Gespräche von der Sprache', 'Herkunft aber bleibt stets Zukunft. Wenn beide einander rufen und die Besinnung in solchem Rufen einheimisch wird...'. See 'Aus einem Gespräche von der Sprache', in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, pp. 85-155 (p. 96).

¹¹ Of course, we can read Heidegger's rural nostalgia politically, in terms of *Heimat* ideology. But it is also undeniable that Heidegger's experience of his native countryside provides his explication of ontology with a characteristically tactile and grounded dimension (as is evident in many of the key tropes of his later work, such as 'Gegend', 'Holzweg' and 'Lichtung'). As Will McNeill rightly notes, 'it is the essence of home that provides [for Heidegger] the *first* answer to the question of the meaning of being'. See 'Heimat: Heidegger on the Threshold', in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays On the Work of the 1930s*, ed. by James Risser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 319-349 (p. 320).

Lachender Frühherbst,
 Das Gartentor auf!
 Führt mich, du goldner,
 Im jung-tollen Lauf.

Noch einmal zu grüßen
 Die sterbende Pracht,
 Noch einmal zu wandern
 Zwischen Abend und Nacht.

Dein raschelndes Laub
 Erschauend im Tod
 Spürt noch im Fall
 Die nahende Not.

Dein sehnedes Träumen
 Im sonnarmen Tag
 Sucht es die müden
 Rosen im Hag? ¹²

‘Sterbende Pracht’ returns to the past. Its subject, then, is recalled time and this is reflected in the widespread use of the present tense and present participles, which create a sense of immediacy: the then is now. These devices, together with the anaphoric motif ‘noch einmal’, fuse re-caller and the re-called, memory and experience. The opening lines capture the energy and enthusiasm of the boy (and the man viewing the boy in retrospect), who is about to leave his home and enter the surrounding autumnal landscape. The latter is apostrophised throughout. This is an animistic world (‘Laub’, for example, is the subject of ‘spürt’ in the third stanza). Indeed, in the final

¹² *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 5.

two stanzas, Heidegger disappears entirely as the lyrical subject of the poem. The mood, however, significantly changes in these final stanzas when the autumnal is invoked in images of decline and decay. The setting is no longer bucolic, and the winter makes its presence felt in hues dark and ominous.¹³

The tone is one of unease, and this emotional disposition is reflected in the poem's form. The four quatrains are marked initially by an 'abcb' rhyme, but this soon gives way to an irregular scheme. Likewise, the short tetrameter opening lines, which convey a sense of exuberance as the past is relived 'im jung-tollen Lauf' of the youthful Heidegger, give way to a more sober tone in the subsequent stanzas, as that early enthusiasm is qualified. The poem, which begins with affirmation (and an exclamation mark), now ends in quizzicality (with a question mark).

Ultimately, 'Sterbende Pracht' is an act of imposition. As Heidegger expressed it in a further poem from this period, 'Fernes Land': ('[ich] suche, suche Kinderglück').¹⁴ But in this poem too, the longed-for recovery of a bucolic (and perhaps uncomplicated) childhood is edged by darkness (through evocations of a 'fahles Mondlicht', 'Spuk' and a 'Totenkopf'). Ultimately, the boy's pleasure in the past (his 'Knabenlust') is undermined through evocations of a landscape that is both enigmatic and ominous.

The dark demiurge that runs through these poems may have had a deeper cause. In the early part of 1911, Heidegger's doubts about his religious faith (caused partially at least by his exclusion from the path of a Jesuit training on grounds of ill health) reached a crisis during a return visit to Meßkirchen.

¹³ *Gedachtes*, p. 6. Hugo Ott talks about 'das Dunkel einer depressiven Empfindlichkeit', which permeates these early poems. See *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1992), p. 72,

¹⁴ *Gedachtes*, p. 6.

Here, Heidegger went through a lengthy process of introspection, which culminated in the abandonment of his Catholic faith and thoughts of becoming a priest. He now gave up his academic focus upon theology in favour of philosophy, which led him the following year to enrol for courses in mathematics and philosophy at the University of Freiburg, and to prepare for a university career. One poem, in particular, registers this crisis of religious faith: ‘Ölbergstunden’, published in March 1911 in the *Allgemeine Rundschau*. It is a crucial text in Heidegger’s spiritual journey:

Ölbergstunden meines Lebens:
 im düstern Schein
 mutlosen Zagens
 habt ihr mich oft geschaut.

Weinend rief ich: nie vergebens.
 Mein junges Sein
 hat müd des Klagens
 dem Engel “Gnade” nur vertraut.¹⁵

The ‘Ölberg’ is Gethsemane, an olive garden to which Christ comes down in *The New Testament* following his teaching in the temple. Here he prays and looks for guidance from God on the eve of His betrayal and crucifixion.¹⁶ In the accounts of the Gospels, Christ is described as ‘troubled and deeply distressed’ (Mark 14: 33).¹⁷ Even after the appearance of the angel, his agony continues, his sweat falling ‘like beads of blood’ to the ground (Luke 22:44). In the poem, Heidegger’s *persona* too has reached a nadir brought

¹⁵ *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 6.

¹⁶ See the Gospels Matthew 26: 36, Mark 14: 32 and Luke 22: 39.

¹⁷ In the words of Luther’s Bible, ‘[Er] fing an zu zittern und zu zagen’ (Markus 14: 33).

about by a crisis in his faith, which seems to be hovering near extinction (the ‘mutlosen Zagens’ of line 3).¹⁸

The form of the poem reflects this vacillation. Although the rhyming scheme is regular across the two stanzas (‘abac/abac’), reflecting its tight discursive nature (its confessional message), the overall form of the poem is unconventional and produces a discordant effect. This sense of unease, of restlessness is reinforced by the differing line lengths and changing metre. It is noticeable that when spiritual relief comes in the grace (‘Gnade’) dispensed by the angel (although this is represented simply as an act of faith by Heidegger’s *persona*: ‘nur vertraut’), it is placed in inverted commas.¹⁹ The tone of the poem is infused with a melancholy bathos: redemption and the security of religious faith are things that have been hoped for rather than achieved.

Religious faith falters; redemption must take a more personal form. In the summer of 1915, Heidegger met the twenty-two year old Thea Elfride Petri, who was studying economics at the same university. She was a protestant; he a Catholic, but this did not prevent their marriage, which took place in March 1917.²⁰ Heidegger dedicated to his new wife a number of his poems, amongst which was the unpublished ‘Meinem Seelchen ...’, written in December 1915. Here, the male ‘Seele’ addresses the female ‘Seelchen’, her affectionate status captured in the diminutive form:

¹⁸ See Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 67-8.

¹⁹ These inverted commas have been omitted from the standard English translation of the poem. See Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 68.

²⁰ In a Protestant service: Elfride was a Lutheran. Heidegger’s marriage to her was clearly one step (and perhaps the decisive one) in his liberation from what he had come to see as the confines of Catholicism and those of his family background, the environment that he so ambivalently evokes in his early poems.

Und Gedanken aus der Stille steigen,
wie aus dem bergverborgnen Dorfe her
der Stundenschlag ...

und die erdgelöste Seele sucht ein eigen
Land, wo keine Grenzen, keiner Zeiten Wiederkehr,
das ohne Wandertag ...
und wie im Schauer müd gespielter Geigen
stirbt der Wunsch, und jede Lust wird schwer
im Wellenschlag ...
und sinkt – nur Seele will sich neigen
zu Seele wie aus Ewigkeiten her
zum Liebestag –.²¹

In a letter written to his fiancée in February 1916, Heidegger looked back to a recent evening where they had consummated their love: ‘es waren wieder so ganz *unsere* Stunden, Kant, gemütliches Abendbrot – Plaudern und letztes Erleben; alle Welt und Lebensmöglichkeiten in ihren großen Grundströmungen sind in unseren ineinanderflammernden Seelen zusammengeflossen – ’.²² ‘Meinem Seelchen ...’ not only structures that personal experience but locates it within a broader existential process, the removal of barriers to his intellectual development. The poem begins by mapping the same terrain that Heidegger had evoked in his childhood poems (the ‘Stille’ and the ‘bergverborgnen Dorfe’), before eliding into a more metaphysical realm. The product of religious upbringing, Heidegger, an ‘erdgelöste Seele’, has felt the promptings to transcendence, seeking a land beyond time and space, the borders and temporal parameters that he has

²¹ *Gedachtes*, p. 9.

²² *Gedachtes*, p. 10.

grappled with philosophically.²³ He has struggled to meet the experiential impasse that these have imposed ('jede Lust wird schwer'); indeed, the reference to 'müdig gespielter Geigen' suggests the physical and mental strain that has been involved in this venture. The process being described here has remained unresolved, until now, when these energies can be sublated in the final experience described in the concluding lines: the physical union of the 'Liebestag'.

The poem begins *in medias res* with 'Und', the first of a series of such conjunctions. These conjunctions, however, do not tie objects together (indeed, the poem is marked by consistent ellipsis); rather, they act as temporal markers. Typographically, the poem looks ungainly and disorganised, with its stanzas and lines of unequal length and its ellipsis, which leaves lines without conclusion. And yet, 'Meinem Seelchen ...' is one of the few poems that Heidegger wrote with regular metre and rhyme ('abc' throughout), as if to reflect the tranquillity he had reached after the stormy years of 1911-1912. The metre is largely trochaic, which gives a weight to its narrative thrust, suggesting deliberation and solemnity. Ensuring its internal coherence is the frequent use of alliteration, most notably sibilation, as if the poet wishes to bring the reader back to the 'Seelchen' motif of the title. Frequent use of caesuras helps structure the clear argument of the poem, and foreground central tropes such as 'Grenzen' and 'Zeiten', the defining but also restraining boundaries that Heidegger has sought to move beyond.

²³ And not just philosophically. We know from Heidegger's correspondence at this time with his fellow student, Ernst Laslowski, that the obstacles were also material and social. We also know of Heidegger's determination to overcome them, for this 'Über-sich-haben-können-des-Größeren ist das Geheimnis des Großen'. Quoted in Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 70.

Heidegger's marriage with Elfride and his promotion to *Privatdozent* in the Philosophy department at the University of Freiburg in 1918 brought to an end the period of introspection that had given rise to his early poems. There now followed twenty years or more of poetic inactivity, as Heidegger consolidated his reputation through works such as *Sein und Zeit* as one of the most original thinkers of the age. What followed was a period of consolidation, but one that was not without its problems, as the advent of the Third Reich in 1933 drew the philosopher into a political realm in which he was an enthusiastic if naive participant. By late 1934, his apostasy from the new state was over and Heidegger returned to philosophy and, eventually, to poetry.²⁴

Between the late 1930s and the mid-1940s, Heidegger produced a very substantial body of poetry. Whereas his earlier poems had shown little evidence of his philosophical activities (his developing concern to establish an ontology of being), this later poetry is deeply centred in that thinking. In 1941 the volume *Winke* appeared in the Heuberg-Druckerei in Heidegger's home town of Meßkirchen, and this was followed in 1947 by the collection *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, printed by the Buchdruckerei Benteli in Bern. In his postscript to *Winke*, Heidegger warned the reader against approaching this writing as 'Dichtungen', adding 'die *Winke* sind Worte eines Denkens'.²⁵ Indeed, many of these texts are closer to jottings,

²⁴ This brief observation will be seen by many as an insufficient, indeed inexcusably lenient comment on Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi state. The secondary literature on the issue is vast. For a more extensive and critical account of this period in Heidegger's life, see Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), and George Leaman, *Heidegger im Kontext: Gesamtüberblick zum NS-Engagement der Universitätsphilosophen* (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 1993).

²⁵ *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 33. 'Winke', Heidegger tells us elsewhere 'sind rätselhaft. Sie winken uns zu. Sie winken ab. Sie winken uns *hin* zu dem, von woher sie unversehens sich uns zutragen'. See 'Aus einem Gespräche von der Sprache', p. 117. Hent de Vries has translated 'Winke' as a 'giving of signs, calling, seducing', gestures from a higher source. See '“Winke”: Divine Topoi in Hölderlin, Heidegger, Nancy', in *The Solid*

aphorisms and *aperçus* than poems, as conventionally understood. Some, indeed, are simply translations from Greek.²⁶ Others, however, display all the qualities of a poetic text: they employ figurative language, they scan metrically, they are rhymed, and they are formed in recognisable stanzas.²⁷

That Heidegger should have been defensive about this writing is understandable. Even in those texts that are unambiguously ‘poetic’ there are signs that he was striving for something that he found difficult to attain. This is witnessed both by the fact that a number of these works possess the same heading (‘Winke’, for example, is used as a title, or part of a title, thirteen times), and that they rework the same themes and employ the same imagery (there is, for example, an entire series devoted to meditations on the notion of ‘Seyn’ [‘Sein’], and that trope appears in a number of other poems).²⁸ Nevertheless, these poems are informed by a single guiding and explorative intellectual spirit, the origins of which lie in Heidegger’s developing philosophy, and his movement (‘Kehre’) away from the purely metaphysical concerns of *Sein und Zeit* and towards an exploration of the role of language in making the border regions of thought visible.²⁹ So much

Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin, ed. by Aris Fioretos (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 94-120 (p. 117).

²⁶ See Keith Hoeller, ‘Is Heidegger really a Poet?’, *Philosophical Topics*, 12 (1981), 121-138. Hoeller, however, does not satisfactorily explain what he means by ‘a poet’ or ‘a poem’.

²⁷ As David Farrell Krell has pointed out, in his approach to poetry Heidegger played down the importance of metrical analysis, of scansion and versification, promoting instead the more direct grasp of what Krell calls ‘Seinmetaphorik’, a reading of poetry around key tropes such as ‘wandering’, ‘homecoming’, ‘nearness to the origin’, and ‘the holy’. But as Krell also points out, Heidegger was a gifted metrist, fully able to exploit formal properties of the poetic statement. Indeed, his own prose can often be scanned in the manner of poetry. See Krell, ‘The Wave’s Source’: Rhythm in the Languages of Poetry and Thought’, in *Heidegger and Language: A Collection of Original Papers*, ed. by David Wood (Coventry: Parousia Press, 1981), pp. 25-50, particularly pp. 25-26. For comments on Heidegger’s control of conventional poetic form, see Ott, ‘Der junge Martin Heidegger als Lyriker’, p. 89.

²⁸ See ‘Der Ring des Seyns’, in *Gedachtes*, pp. 67-71.

²⁹ Julian Young sees the initial ‘turn’ (‘Kehre’) in Heidegger’s work, away from explorations into the immediate presence of Being towards its mediation through art and

is clear from the first poem in the ‘Winke’ volume, ‘Das andere Denken’, written in the summer of 1938:

Nimm die letzte Glut der Segnung
erst vom dunklen Herd des Seyns,
daß sie zünde die Entgegnung:
Gottschafft – Menschentum in Eins.

Wirf die Not der kühnen Lichtung
zwischen Welt und Erde als Gesang
aller Dinge zur Errichtung
frohen Danks an Fug und Rang.

Birg ins Wort die stille Kunde
eines Sprunges über Groß und Klein
und verlier’ die leeren Funde
jähem Scheins im Gang zum Seyn.³⁰

Although Heidegger was adamant that these ‘Dichtungen’ ‘[waren] nicht eine in Verse und Reime gebrachte “Philosophie” ’, their conceptual framework nevertheless derives from his theoretical writing of the period.³¹ ‘Seyn’, ‘Lichtung’, ‘Gesang’ and ‘Wort’ are terms that form the fundamental vocabulary of works such as *Vom Ereignis* (1936-38) and *Besinnung* (1938-39), in which the distance of metaphysical thinking is sublated through the self-articulation of the word. As Heidegger explained

particularly language, as part of his ‘transition to *Ereignis* thinking as manifest in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* (1936-8). See Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 1-3. For an overview of the (still unresolved) issues involved, see Dieter Thomä, ‘Stichwort: Kehre: Was wäre, wenn es sie nicht gäbe?’, in *Heidegger-Handbuch :Leben - Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 134-141.

³⁰ *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 23.

³¹ *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 33

in his preface to the former work, ‘hier wird nicht beschrieben und nicht erklärt, nicht verkündet und nicht gelehrt; hier ist das Sagen nicht im Gegenüber zu dem Sagenden, sondern ist dieses selbst als die Wesung des Seyns’.³² Heidegger, then, aspires to a union of thought and language where the latter is not simply a vehicle for the former: it is the former grasped as the presence of being. It is this ‘anderes Denken’ that the poem celebrates.³³

The three stanzas in quatrain form all begin with an imperative: you (the reader, but certainly Heidegger himself) should execute a ‘Sprung über Groß und Klein’ to prepare a clearing of the ground ‘im Gang zum Seyn’. The exhortations are intended to motivate, to prepare the philosopher and those who will accompany him for a venture of renewal. Heidegger thought of his philosophical project as a ‘Destruktion’ of the heritage of metaphysical thinking that has dominated the western mind since Plato who, according to Heidegger, was the first to establish the subject-object divide, a moment in the process of conceptual self-alienation that culminated in the Cartesian *cogito* model.³⁴ Heidegger exhorts us in almost vitalist fashion to embrace ‘als Gesang’ the energetic overcoming of this ‘leeren Funde’ in a direct engagement with ‘Seyn’, which knows of no such divide.

³² *Vom Ereignis* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1969). p. 4.

³³ The relationship between thought and poetic language is a recurring matter of interest in the late Heidegger. It is a relationship that he largely attempts to articulate in metaphorical rather than in analytical terms. For as he notes in ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’, we may wish to see a transparency between the two (in terms of expression and representation, for example), ‘in Wahrheit sind jedoch Dichten und Denken aus ihrem Wesen durch eine zarte, aber helle Differenz in ihr eigenes Dunkel auseinander gehalten: zwei Parallelen, griechisch *para allelo*, bei einander, gegen einander über sich auf ihre Weise übertreffend’. See ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’, p. 196.

³⁴ Heidegger saw ‘Destruktion’, often written with the prefix separated, as a positive process, a clearing of the conceptual ground. As he explained in *Sein und Zeit*, ‘negierend verhält sich die Destruktion nicht zur Vergangenheit, ihre Kritik trifft das “Heute” und die herrschende Behandlungsart der Geschichte der Ontologie, mag sie doxographisch, geistesgeschichtlich oder problemgeschichtlich angelegt sein. Die Destruktion will aber nicht die Vergangenheit begraben, sie hat *positive* Absicht’. See *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 22-3.

The tone of the poem is missionary and sustained by liturgical imagery ('Segnung', 'Gottschafft'). The sense of vigorous direction is reflected in the flowing enjambements (there is just one sentence in each of the three stanzas), suggesting the energy of renewal. It is, however, an energy that is fully contained, as the form of the poem testifies. The metre is largely trochaic, suggesting the affirmative nature of the process, and the poem is framed within a regular rhyming scheme ('abab/acac/dede'). The philosophy that the poem advocates is not the result of Nietzschean excess, but the culmination of carefully meditated conviction.³⁵

The sixteen sections of *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* can best be read as extended mediations on the subject of 'Seyn' and its related attributes such as 'Aletheia' (the disclosing of truth), 'Gelassenheit' (balance/composure), and 'Logos' (the shining forth of the Word). These concepts are returned to time and again (and sometimes supported with footnotes) in a kaleidoscopic fashion that allows, in the spirit of *e pluribus unum*, multiple nuances to emerge in what is a singular entity. Some of the sections are short: the fourth, 'Sonata sonans', contains four poems; the following one, 'Amo: volout sis' ['I love, and want you to remain yourself], only one. Others such as 'Wende', section three, and 'Winke', section eight, are substantially longer. The repetition of key themes throughout these cycles underscores in an almost hypnotic fashion Heidegger's conviction that truth can only emerge through the gradual self-revelation of language.

This conviction is most clearly voiced in the poem 'Ernte', from the 'Wende' section, which possesses an insistence of expression that gives voice to a mind bent on definition:

³⁵ As Heidegger observed elsewhere, 'Dichten und Denken sind nicht getrennt, wenn Trennung heißen soll: ins Bezugslose abgeschieden.' 'Das Wesen der Sprache', p. 196.

Erst wenn Dein Denken
 dieses Lassen ist:
 Seyn-lassen, nämlich: Seyn
 in dessen eigenen Schrein,
 ist Denken dorthin eingebracht,
 woher es einstig zgedacht,
 ist Denken Ernte,
 die Dich von Dir selbst entfernte,
 ist *dein* Denken
 nicht mehr Deines,
 ist es reines
 Opfer. *Ist* ...
 Andenken,
 das sich selbst vergißt.³⁶

‘Ernte’ consists of a single fourteen line stanza. In spite of what looks like careful, almost fastidious punctuation, conventional syntax is abandoned as the poem strains to articulate the consciousness of the lyrical subject (possibly the poet addressing himself as an Other – ‘dein’) in the full flow of self-definition, or, more precisely, a consciousness that follows in the wake of guiding terms it is struggling to define.³⁷ The exertion that is evident in this process of enquiry is reflected in the formal structure of the poem, in its irregular metre, its uneven line lengths and unusual ‘abccddeaffgag’ rhyming scheme. The forward momentum of the poem reaches a climax in line 12, where an ‘*Ist*’ is left suspended through an elision. The emphasis

³⁶ *Gedachtes*, p. 81.

³⁷ It is a struggle that consistently pushes the semantic parameters of Heidegger’s language beyond conventional meaning, but rarely to the point where that language and the individual tropes involved lose sense. Indeed, for all its surface ambivalence (some might say obscurity), Heidegger’s writing reflects ‘die Strenge der Besinnung, die Sorgfalt des Sagens [und] die Sparsamkeit des Wortes’ that he saw as a precondition for the articulation of thought. See ‘Brief über den “Humanismus”’, in Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 313-364 (p. 364).

given to the ‘*Ist*’ forces the reader to reconsider in a less mechanical light the ‘ists’ of the preceding lines, which would otherwise look like simple copulas instead of emanations or manifestations of the substantive ‘*Seyn*’.³⁸

The tension, almost a sense of struggle, that is inscribed in the form of the poem is due to the central paradox that the poet is confronting: the fact that *his* thought only achieves maturity, bears fruit (‘*Ernte*’), when it becomes the self-less thought of pure ‘*Seyn*’, and disconnected to a thinking subject including that of the poet himself (where ‘*dein Denken/ [ist] nicht mehr Deines*’). In this state, it simply ‘*ist*’. To achieve this state of unselfconscious knowing, the poet surrenders himself to thinking in a process that is signified through ‘*lassen*’. Now ‘*Denken*’ can become ‘*Andenken*’, meaning both to remember or to retrieve as a memory, in the manner of an ‘*Andenken*’, but also to direct thinking towards an object but (as the concluding line testifies) in a way that loses the pressures of purpose.³⁹ Here, the wilful intentionality of ‘*zugesacht*’ (line 6) is no longer. True thought takes place beyond self-consciousness.

Many of the poems in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* possess a brittle impersonality. No one is named, there are no interlocutors, and the external world is bracketed out. ‘*Seyn*’ seems an ontology that exists for itself, a bastion of existence that the lyrical subject of these poems moves towards and around. ‘*Gespräch*’, however, from the same ‘*Wende*’ section, does

³⁸ As Heidegger had already explained, ‘*wir wissen nicht, was “Sein” besagt. Aber schon wenn wir fragen: “was ist ‘Sein’?” halten wir uns in einem Verständnis des ‘ist’, ohne daß wir begrifflich fixieren könnten, was das ‘ist’ bedeutet*’. See *Sein und Zeit*, p. 5.

³⁹ As Heidegger noted elsewhere, ‘*Denken ist Andenken. Aber Andenken ist anders als die flüchtige Vergegenwärtigung von Vergangenen. Andenken bedenkt, was uns angeht*’. See ‘*Denken ist Andenken*’ in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges, 1910-1970*, p. 481. And what concerns us, Heidegger later adds, further expanding the trope (and now using ‘*an*’ as a prefix), is the ‘*zu-Bedenkende*’. As he explains, ‘*wird es bedacht, dann wird es mit Andenken beschenkt. Wir bringen ihm das An-denken entgegen, weil wir es als den Zuspruch unseres Wesens mögen*’. See ‘*Was heisst Denken*’, in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, pp. 123-137 (p. 124).

look outwards, to an encounter with the other. The other here, it is true, may well be one Martin Heidegger confronting another, but a dialectic is nonetheless taking place, which has as its subject communication:

Daß zur Sprache erst
 die Sage komme, Ungesprochenes sich verhehle,
 daß aus Sage erst
 Unsägliches entwachse in ein Wachstum,
 nicht als Grenze, daran lauernd,
 weiterwollend wir uns stoßen,
 nein: als Fuge eines An-fangs
 in die Weltnis,
 weltende Ent-wendung des Gesagten
 in die Stille, die erfüllt von Ankunft
 aus dem Eigentum der frey Entschiedenen
 zum Hehl der Eignis –
 daß sich solches schicke,
 sey Gespräch.⁴⁰

The innovative thrust of ‘Gespräch’ makes itself immediately felt in Heidegger’s choice of *vers libre*. There are no stanzas (the entire poem consists of a single sentence, creating an energetic profusion that is supported by the flowing enjambements), and no recognisable metre and rhyme, although the alliteration of ‘w’ and ‘e’ phonemes secures its internal coherence. ‘Gespräch’ not only moves beyond poetic form; it also dispenses with conventional syntax, most notably main verbs. In their place, Heidegger uses the subjunctive mood and past and present participles to suggest the fluidity and hypothetical nature of the process he is describing, a

⁴⁰ *Gedachtes*, p. 91.

process in which the unsaid becomes the said.⁴¹ ‘Becomes’, however, may not be the right word, for the process is far from linear or definite. As the central term, ‘weltende Ent-wendung’ (line 9), indicates, communication with others (but also here with oneself) may mean both a covert appropriation, a purloining of the worldly content of what is said, and a turning away from the same into the stillness of self-sufficiency and self-knowledge (‘Eigentum’).⁴² It is only this protected interiority (the ‘Eignis’), chosen by those brave souls (the ‘frey Entschiedenen’), Heidegger seems to be saying, that paradoxically guarantees, as the concluding words of the poem suggest, true communication in a ‘Gespräch’.⁴³

‘Gespräch’ reflects the increasing trend in Heidegger’s writing to use both neologistic formations, evident in ‘weltende’, and lexical items that have been uncoupled from their prefixes, such as ‘An-fang’ (and with ‘Ent-wendung’ we have an example of both practices). In a later essay,

⁴¹ It is possible that Heidegger is attempting here to recreate the effect of the ‘middle’ voice in Ancient Greek. The middle voice had a ‘flexibility of verbal meaning’ that was able to ‘fluctuate between intransitive notions of entering into a state or condition or activity and transitive notions indicative of actions being performed upon the grammatical subject’. See C.W. Conrad, ‘Active, Middle, and Passive: Understanding Ancient Greek Voice’, <http://artsci.wustl.edu/cwconrad/docs>. In short, middle voice abolishes the distinction between active and passive, precisely the distinction that Heidegger wishes to see undone in his notion of communication.

⁴² It is the potency of silence unleashed as a quality of language. As Heidegger noted in his ‘Winke’ series, ‘Schweiget im Wort./ So gründet die Sprache’. *Gedachtes*, p. 127.

⁴³ Elsewhere, Heidegger had written, ‘Jeder ist jedesmal im Gespräch mit seinen Vorfahren, mehr noch vielleicht und verborgener mit seinen Nachkommen’. See ‘Aus einem Gespräche von der Sprache’, p. 123. This may be true, but for Heidegger at this time there were a number of quite specific interlocutors who were part of his dialogue, including the Jewish Rumanian poet, Paul Celan. Celan had visited Heidegger at Todtnauberg in July 1967, impressed by the integrity of Heidegger’s philosophy and language but also deeply worried by the philosopher’s support for the Nazi regime in the 1930s. The anticipated dialogue did not, however, resolve matters, and Celan gave voice to his disappointment (albeit in muted tones) in the poem ‘Todtnauberg’ written shortly afterwards. It was a moment that raised for philosopher and poet alike issues concerning the relationship between language and ethics, communication and honesty: in short, whether there can be a community of mind without a community of trust. Robert André makes the ‘Gespräch’ motif central to his reading of the relationship between the philosopher and poet in his *Gespräche von Text zu Text: Celan – Heidegger – Hölderlin* (Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 2003).

Heidegger will write: ‘in Erfahrungen, die wir mit der Sprache machen, bringt sich die Sprache selbst zur Sprache’.⁴⁴ In ‘Gespräch’, language foregrounds itself through individual word formations and through the often enigmatic relationship between them, which defies clear interpretation. The reader is not only compelled to decipher words that are inherently, and intentionally, ambivalent, but also to make connections between these words. In doing so, we trace precisely that shifting mental process that is inscribed in Heidegger’s poem.

‘Wir lesen’ from the ‘Furche’ section, one of the final poems in *Gedachtes*, likewise possesses a plural subject. The setting is almost certainly the Heideggers’ second home, the cabin in Todtnauberg (Upper Bavaria), and for that reason the other person may be that of the philosopher’s wife, Elfride:

‘Wenn der Schnee ans Fenster fällt ...’

—

Er fiel und fiel
 und lautlos klang ein zögernd Spiel,
 das unsere Herzen suchen ließ
die Sammlung in ihr heiles Wesen,
 daß’ Vermögen uns verhieß,
 rein den Unter-Schied zu lesen:
 ungesagtes Zugetrautes,
 kaum gewagtes Nie-Geschautes.⁴⁵

‘Wir lesen’ is a poem of delicate intimacy; not on account of any private disclosures but because it centres on an experience that is bonding two people. The title of the poem invites us to imagine these individuals

⁴⁴ *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ *Gedachtes*, p. 257.

absorbed, quite independently of one another, in the process of reading. They are turned inwards against the harsh conditions without, the snow falling.⁴⁶ The couple are together yet apart, and the poem attempts to capture the mystery of a communion that is achieved without words (the ‘ungesagtes Zugetrautes’ of line 7). It is this state of achieved harmony and serenity that is the ‘Vermögen’ enjoyed by the subjects of the poem.

The discursively unifying nature of Heidegger’s mind is evident throughout. Apart from the initial spondees in the opening line, suggesting the persistence of the rain, the poem is written in iambic tetrameters and possess an ‘aabcbdd’ rhyming scheme, formal mechanisms which create the impression of equipoise and serenity (‘Sammlung’). Although written as a single stanza with frequent enjambements, the poem exhibits consistent internal rhyme in its alliteration, which serves to tie the often cryptic senses of the poem together. Stasis is captured within movement.

‘Wir lesen’ is formed throughout by parataxis, a characteristic also of Heidegger’s philosophical writing.⁴⁷ Words such as ‘Spiel’, ‘Sammlung’ and ‘Vermögen’ have no grammatical connection, displaying an evocative power that is quite independent of the oblique syntactical relationship between them. This is also true of the key notion, ‘Unter-Schied’, a typical Heideggerian formulation that encapsulates meanings that are converging and diverging at the same time. It was a term he used in his essay *Die Sprache* (1950) to capture the ethereal mood evoked in a poem by Trakl. There, Heidegger tells us, ‘der Unter-Schied hält von sich her die Mitte auseinander, auf die zu und durch die hindurch Welt und Dinge zueinander einig sind’. And he adds, ‘also sie [die Dinge] austragend, trägt er sie

⁴⁶ A scene set up through a quotation from the poem ‘Ein Winterabend’ by Georg Trakl.

⁴⁷ See Erasmus Schöfer, *Die Sprache Heideggers* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1962), pp. 168-172.

einander zu'.⁴⁸ Applied to Heidegger's own poem, 'Unter-Schied' refers to a movement of equivocation that ultimately leaves (as it is meant to leave) the unsaid and the never-seen of the final lines suspended without resolution between presence and absence.

In many of the later poems in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* we can discern the presence of another person: a companion, physically present or simply longed for, invoked as an interlocutor, a soul mate or a witness to the development of Heidegger's thinking. In 1950, that presence took the real form of Hannah Arendt. She had been his student in Marburg between 1924 and 1926, and a relationship had ensued.⁴⁹ There then followed a period of almost a quarter of a century of silence, as Arendt returned to America to start a career for herself as an academic and writer. Then in 1950 the two meet again. Mutual respect and attraction allow the time that has elapsed to be forgotten; or if not forgotten at least elided into the present where the relationship can be regained.⁵⁰ The two lovers, meeting in the now fraught, now understanding presence of Heidegger's wife, Elfride, exchange letters. Heidegger also wrote poems, sending the first series of five as an appendix to a letter to Arendt on the 10 February, three days after their first reunion in Freiburg. These initial poems were soon followed by two further sets, of eight and four poems respectively. Some are philosophically general in their themes, and are formed within the speculative idiom of the poems in *Gedachtes*, but others are more personal, and engage directly with the

⁴⁸ *Die Sprache*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Daniel Maier-Katkin's *Stranger from Abroad: Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, Friendship and Forgiveness* (New York Norton, 2010) adds little to Elzbieta Ettinger's earlier *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) other than speculative context.

⁵⁰ And perhaps at a higher level, where they can meet as intellectual equals. As Arendt observed in a letter to her husband, 'wir haben, scheint mir, zum ersten Mal in unserem Leben miteinander gesprochen'. See Hannah Arendt/Heinrich Blücher, *Briefe 1936-1968* (München/Zurich: Piper, 1996), p. 207.

renewal of his friendship with Arendt.⁵¹ In a letter written to Heidegger in February 1950, Arendt confessed that she felt neither German nor Jewish, calling herself ‘Das Mädchen aus der Fremde’.⁵² This was to provide the title of one of Heidegger’s first poems to her:

Die Fremde,
 die Dir selber fremd,
 sie ist:
 Gebirg der Wonne,
 Meer des Leids,
 die Wüste des Verlangens,
 Frühlicht einer Ankunft.
 Fremde: Heimat jenes einen Blicks,
 der Welt beginnt.
 Beginn ist Opfer.
 Opfer ist der Herd der Treue,
 die noch aller Brände
 Asche überglimmt und –
 zündet:
 Glut der Milde,
 Schein der Stille,
 Fremdlerin der Fremde, Du –
 Wohne im Beginn.⁵³

⁵¹ But even where philosophy provides the shared idiom, the personal forms the content. Thus the concept of ‘Ereignis’, increasingly meant in Heidegger’s writing of this period as a supplement or extension to ‘Logos’, comes, in a poem simply titled ‘Ereignis’, down from metaphysical abstraction to embrace the world: ‘das Ereignis hat die Liebe [...] an den Unter-Schied enteignet/ ihm zur Treu/ Getrenntestes geeignet’. ‘Das Ereignis’ in Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998), p. 88.

⁵² Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger, *Briefe*, p. 76

⁵³ Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger, *Briefe*, pp. 79-80.

Hannah Arendt experienced throughout her life feelings of displacement and homelessness. Just weeks before her reunion with Heidegger, she had written to her husband Heinrich Blücher, fearful she was losing his affection, that she could not live ‘ohne jegliche Verbindung mit einem Zuhause, mit etwas, worauf Verlaß ist’.⁵⁴ Written in unrhymed free verse of eighteen lines of largely paratactic intensity, ‘Das Mädchen aus der Fremde’ picks up on such sentiments in its tropes of alienation and isolation. The sentiments expressed are apodictic, *ex cathedra* formulations that employ no active verbs (the simple copula ‘ist’ is used three times). A situation, a being-in-the-world in Heidegger’s terms, is being addressed in stark philosophical language. Heidegger had read Arendt’s letter to him as a *cri de coeur*, and he now offers his ex-lover counsel and guidance. Seeking to belong, the poem seems to say, can only lead to heartbreak and further pain: it is a ‘Wüste des Verlangens’. The ‘Fremde’ must be embraced; it entails both departure and arrival, an end but also a beginning (‘Fremde: Heimat jenes einen Blicks,/ der Welt beginnt’). The state of displacement can be transformed precisely through the same ‘Blick’, an image that meant much to Heidegger. It not only refers to the act of perception, which is the basis of understanding, but in more personal terms it evokes the initial contact between the two back in 1924, which was established by a glance, the gaze of the young Arendt in one of Heidegger’s lectures.⁵⁵ The now mature woman would have understood the reference, and understood that the regained affection of Heidegger was perhaps the home that she was seeking.

⁵⁴ Hannah Arendt/Heinrich Blücher, *Briefe*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ As Heidegger wrote, ‘mitten ins Herz [traf ihn ihr] Blick, der am Katheder mir zublitzte – ach es war und ist und bleibt die Ewigkeit, weither in die Nähe’. See Manfred Geier, *Martin Heidegger* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2005), p. 49.

Indeed, subsequent poems composed for Arendt suggest that Heidegger was attempting to integrate her into his life and work.⁵⁶ So much seems evident from the poem ‘Holzwege’:

Laß hier den Namen
Dir und mir
Nur *einen* Zier:

daß früher Samen
späte Reife
sie begreife,

der wir verkamen,
die erst kommt:
als Glut, die frommt.⁵⁷

‘Holzwege’, referring to forest paths that do not follow a regular route or clear direction, indeed, might be seen as errors, was the title of the first book that Heidegger published in Germany after a long period of enforced silence in 1950. He gave a copy to Arendt after their initial meeting, which she kept beside her on a bedside table. The poem celebrates this intimacy. With its short lines and compact ‘abb/acc/add’ rhyming scheme, ‘Holzweg’ charts the unity of two minds. This symbiosis is evident from its opening stanza, the ‘dir’ and ‘mir’ of the second line being almost homophonic, an identity that does not require (but receives anyway) the emphasized ‘*einen*’ of the

⁵⁶ The House of Being now has an occupant, for we read in an untitled poem sent to Arendt on 12 April: ‘Wahre in die tiefste Kluft/ Deiner Seele alles Leid [...] Darin der Schmerz wohnt, das Geschmeid/ geschmiedet uns zum Hort des Seyns’. See Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger, *Briefe*, p. 96.

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger, *Briefe*, p. 92. Hannah Arendt would not have been the first of Heidegger’s readers to find his neo-logistic turn of phrase difficult to comprehend. As if in anticipation of this, Heidegger adds a note in parenthesis ‘(eines Dinges verkommen: noch nicht ankommen bei...)’.

third line. That this has been a process that has taken place through time is made explicit in the temporal markers of the poem: the ‘früh’ has become ‘spät’, but this lies, as the gestational imagery suggests (and we must note the intimate connotations of ‘Samen’, line 4), in the organic nature of their relationship.

If Hannah Arendt provided personal motivation for Heidegger’s poetry in the post-war period, it was René Char who acted as its literary inspiration.⁵⁸ Heidegger met the French poet through the philosopher Jean Beaufret who was largely responsible for re-establishing Heidegger’s reputation in France after 1945, and whose queries to Heidegger in 1947 had led to a major (re)formulation of the philosopher’s views in his *Brief über den “Humanismus”*. Seminars were organised at Le Thor in Provence in 1955, 1966, 1968 and 1969, which Char, whose volumes *Le Marteau sans maître* (1934) and *Feuillets d’Hypnos* (1945) had confirmed him as one of the most promising writers of the Surrealist generation, attended. On these occasions, Jean Beaufret tells us, Heidegger deliberately adopted a marginal role: ‘Heidegger écoute plus qu’il n’explique. De cette écoute jusqu’au silence naît la possibilité de correspondance sans répondre’.⁵⁹

Heidegger and Char were unlikely associates; the former had lent vociferous support to the Nazi regime in 1933, whilst the latter had been a member of the French Resistance during the German occupation. But what they had in common transcended their erstwhile politics: a commitment to the primal nature of words (their ‘originary’), which both saw exemplified in pre-

⁵⁸ But there were other influences closer to home, including that of Gottfried Benn, whose poetry Heidegger discovers at this time. See Martin Travers, ‘Gottfried Benn’s *Statische Gedichte* (1948) and the Final ‘Turn’ towards the Poetic in the Work of Martin Heidegger’. *German Life and Letters* 63 (2010), 179-193.

⁵⁹ Jean Beaufret, ‘L’entretien sous le marronnier’, in René Char, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), pp. 1137-1145 (p. 1138).

Socratic writing; a rejection of logic and the correspondence theory of truth; a promotion of mindfulness, a creative receptivity to the murmurings of the world; and a view of language as ‘gesturing toward the irreducible Other’.⁶⁰ Although we should not talk about direct influence here, there was certainly a convergence of ideas between the two men, reflecting a shared aesthetic that often converged on similar tropes in its articulation, as in the following definition of the poetic that Char penned in response to a query by Heidegger in 1966 (‘Weg’ and ‘Haus’ were key terms in Heidegger’s poetic): ‘la poésie ne rythme plus l’action, elle se porte en avant pour lui indiquer le chemin mobile. C’est pourquoi la poésie touche la première. Elle songe l’action et, grâce à son matériau, construit la Maison, mais jamais une fois pour toutes’.⁶¹

In 1963, Heidegger published seven poems in his volume *Gedachtes* dedicated to Char. In his dedication, Heidegger spoke of ‘die Verwandlung des Mannigfaltigen in die Einfalt’; it is ‘jenes Abwesenlassen, wodurch das Einfältige anwest’.⁶² The fourth poem in the series, ‘Ortschaft’, reads like a programmatic statement of these sentiments. Eschewing conventional poetic form in favour of *vers libre* (in this case heightened prose), Heidegger meets here the idiom of Char’s verse both in the evident self-reflexivity of the poem (it brings to the surface of the text thinking about the conditions of that thinking) and in its use of *loci*, metaphors of place, reflecting the shared conviction that poetry grows out of the specific environment of its origins. Thematically, the poem articulates a quest, a journey, gesturing at a destination that withholds itself:

⁶⁰ See Michael Worten, ‘“Between” Poetry and Philosophy: René Char and Martin Heidegger’, in *Reconceptions: Reading Modern French Poetry*, ed. by Russell King and Bernard McGuirk (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1996), pp. 137-57 (p. 143).

⁶¹ See ‘Réponses interrogatives à une question de Martin Heidegger’, in Char, *Oeuvres Complètes*, pp. 734-736 (p. 735).

⁶² *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 183.

Die das Selbe denken
 im Reichtum seiner Selbigkeit,
 gehen die mühsam langen Wege
 in das immer Einfachere, Einfältige
 seiner im Unzugangbaren
 sich versagenden Ortschaft.⁶³

Like Char, Heidegger had a strongly developed feeling for the physical presence, the mystery, of specific localities, and admired painters such as Braque and Cézanne, who were capable of reproducing their aura.⁶⁴ During the period of his greatest contact with Char, Heidegger wrote three poems celebrating Cezanne, whose depictions of the landscape of Provence allow the latter seemingly to emerge on its own terms. Heidegger had already anticipated this capacity to register the self-disclosing quality of the external world in his notion of *aletheia* (truth as self-revelation or disclosure), and had committed himself to a philosophical and poetic process that would allow it to find expression. It is this process, which Heidegger increasingly related to his excursions through the countryside of his native Swabia, that he attempts to find words for in the second poem in the series, 'Wege':

Wege,
 Wege des Denkens, gehende selber,
 entrinnende. Wann wieder kehrend,
 Ausblicke bringend worauf?
 Wege, gehende selber,
 ehemdem offene, jäh die verschlossenen,
 spätere; Früheres zeigend:

⁶³ *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 223.

⁶⁴ Heidegger came to Cézanne through his reading of Rilke's letters in 1946. For a full account of Heidegger's developing enthusiasm for the French painter, see Günter Seubold, 'Der Pfad ins Selbe: Zur Cézanne-Interpretation Martin Heideggers'. *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 94 (1987), 64-78.

nie Erlangtes, zum Verzicht Bestimmtes –
 lockernd die Schritte
 aus Anklang verlässlichen Geschicks.
 Und wieder die Not
 zögernden Dunkels
 im wartenden Licht.⁶⁵

‘Wege’ possesses no clear lyrical subject or object. The central question, posed in lines 2-3, floats free of a recognisable referent, existing as an imponderable query. The paths upon which the thinker treads seem to have their own sense of (mis)direction. They are without outlook (an English term that equates to the paronomasia of ‘Ausblick’) offering no clear view of the environment or where the paths may eventually end. Past experience does not help; such paths were open once, but for future travellers they are closed. Thinking is not something that resolves; clear destinations are not necessarily part of the journey.⁶⁶

The indefinite nature of the process described in the poem is reflected in the irregular line lengths, lack of grammatical markers and the absence of main verbs. In their place, the widespread use of present participles gives a sense of flow and even flux to the ‘Wege des Denkens’ that forms the sole recognisable subject of the poem. It almost studiously avoids conventional metre and rhyme, and yet the frequent caesuras and the anaphoric repetitions of ‘Wege’ and ‘selber’ point to a structuring of experience, as if its indeterminacy (the ‘nie Erlangtes’) is being refracted nonetheless through a unity of consciousness. The theme is intellectual exploration, and that does not, cannot, take place in a world of signposts, the easy truths of

⁶⁵ *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 222.

⁶⁶ A process that Heidegger calls in Latin *eundo assequi*, which he defines as ‘im Gehen, unterwegs etwas erlangen, es durch den Gang auf einem Weg erreichen’. See ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’, p. 169.

propositional logic that support paradigms in which truth and non-truth confront one another. Both Heidegger and Char rejected such paradigms. And yet as the final lines of the poem seem to be saying, there is a destination, a point beyond the ‘zögerndes Dunkel’ that embraces the voyager on his journey, a light that awaits him when he reaches that insight (perhaps the clearing, *Lichtung*, in the forest) where truth, if only for a moment, stands revealed.⁶⁷

Martin Heidegger’s poetry ended when he did. In May 1976, Heidegger died and was buried in the churchyard of his hometown, Meßkirchen. Death had always been a central concern in his philosophy, but Heidegger made a distinction between physiological and ontological death.⁶⁸ The latter is a death-in-life for *Dasein*, not simply physical extinction. Death is a reality that is brought forward into life. It is this that the individual will have difficulty confronting, not the latter, because what destroys the individual is existential death, incompleteness, the failure of ripening, when ‘Da-sein’ has failed to exhaust its ‘spezifische Möglichkeiten’.⁶⁹ Death is not the undone; it is the un-done. For that reason, perhaps, there is little in Heidegger’s poems written in the final years of his that suggest a maudlin fear of death or dying.⁷⁰ And yet the final, untitled poem of the *Gedachtes* volume (in the section dated 1972-1975) is clearly intended as a leave-taking:

Wage die Stille
Stille die Waage

⁶⁷ In William S. Allen’s words, ‘the oscillation and reciprocity within poetic naming is the oscillation and reciprocity of being as it opens out and holds together both hiddenness and revealing’. See Allen, *Ellipsis: Of Poetry and the Experience of Language after Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Blanchot* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 82.

⁶⁸ *Sein und Zeit*, p. 241.

⁶⁹ *Sein und Zeit*, p. 244.

⁷⁰ And yet an earlier series of poems, ‘Hütte am Abend’, is replete with sepulchral aphorisms such as ‘der Mensch ist vom Seyn gebraucht/ für den Tod’. See *Gedachtes*, p. 243.

Höre das Her
Schweige das Hin

Schwanke nichtmehr
Danke und sinn

Stille die Waage
Wage die Stille⁷¹

We must not assume that this was the final poem Heidegger wrote, although it occupies final place in the section of *Gedachtes* that is given over to personal poetic meditations on the past, his friends and his loved ones, and comes after those written at Christmas 1974, four months before he died. Even if we cannot take this context for granted, it is clear that the ‘Stille’ with which the poem opens and closes represents the cessation of activity, or even the stillness or quiet of death. The mood of the poem is terminal but not sombre; there is no hint of personal despair (indeed, there is no discernible lyrical subject, the familiar enunciating ‘Ich’). An irrevocable place in time has been reached, and this is confirmed by a single temporal marker (the ‘nichtmehr’ of line 5). A moment of critical decision has arisen, and this accounts for the urgency of the voice that addresses itself throughout in the imperative form. Vacillation, hesitation (‘Schwanke’) is no longer possible. The poet will face the silence of the future (‘Schweige das Hin’) on the basis of his surety of the past (‘Höre das Her’).

The poem gives voice to an existential state that is positioned between stasis and movement. The two are, ultimately, related, dependent upon one

⁷¹ *Gedachtes*, p. 45.

another, as is suggested by the form of the poem, which brings active and meditative, 'Wage' and 'Waage', 'Höre' and 'Schweige' into alignment. This is achieved through a number of economical techniques: the brevity of the lines, pervasive alliteration ('s' and 'w' consonants and 'Höre das Her') and, above all, by the homonymic clusters of the opening and closing stanzas, where verbs become nouns and nouns become verbs. A similar formal balance is reflected in the overall structure of the poem, which consists of four two-line stanzas of largely dactylic dimeter lines. There is no rhyming scheme, but each line, other than those of stanza 4, concludes with a substantive. It is in stanza 4, however, that the meditative core of the poem dwells: the exhortation to thank and reflect. The latter lacks a referent but, precisely because of that, points to a process of intellectual scrutiny that must accompany the venture into the unknown. This process (almost certainly that of dying) is an open one, and this is reflected in the poem's lack of punctuation, most notably a final period; but it is not one of dissolution. The structure of the poem effects an *inversio*, with the final stanza inverting the terms of its opening counterpart. In doing so, it confirms the sense of controlled finality that has formed the dominant tone throughout the poem. Not resignation, but acceptance, knowing that this particular death can undo nothing.⁷²

⁷² Indeed, for those who feel they have moved beyond material linearity, it may even confirm the underlying pattern of life: 'erst wieder Tod/ entspricht/ im Ringe/ dem Frühgedicht/ des Seins'. See *Gedachtes*, p. 129.