

## An Elucidation of the Citation from Hölderlin's Poem "The Journey" in Heidegger's Essay "The Origin of the Work of Art"

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**Abstract:** At the end of his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger quotes a verse from Hölderlin's poem "The Journey (in German: *Die Wanderung*)." The verse reads as follows: "Reluctant to leave the place / Is that which dwells near the origin. (*Schwer verläßt / Was nahe dem Ursprung wohnt, den Ort.*)" For the elucidation of its meaning, the poem itself as well as Heidegger's lecture Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance" are investigated, because the same verse is cited in the lecture. This investigation will reveal the reason why it is difficult to leave art as an origin.

**Keywords:** Heidegger, Hölderlin, art, origin

This paper attempts to elucidate the final sentence of Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." The sentence is a quotation from Hölderlin's poem "The Journey (in German: *Die Wanderung*)." The quotation reads as follows: "Reluctant to leave the place / Is that which dwells near the origin (*Schwer verläßt / Was nahe dem Ursprung wohnt, den Ort*)."<sup>1</sup> This verse concludes Heidegger's essay and summarizes his understanding of the essence of art. Thus, it is evident that Hölderlin's verse seems to play an important role in "The Origin of the Work of Art."

Nevertheless, very little research has been conducted on the quotation thus far. Only a scholar named Karsten Harries mentions it in his

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50. This English translation includes the original German text of Hölderlin's poem "The Journey."

commentary on Heidegger's essay. However, Harries is not interested in its meaning, but only in Heidegger's emphasis on the relation between the Germans and Hölderlin's poetry. Harries says: "What the Germans need to do, Heidegger here claims, a claim that he reaffirms over and over, is to become the preservers of Hölderlin's poetry."<sup>2</sup> Then, Harries talks about the needy age of God's death and the significance of Hölderlin's poetry in this age. Therefore, Heidegger's citation from "The Journey" remains unexplained in Harries' commentary.

In this paper, I elucidate Hölderlin's verse in "The Origin of the Work of Art." First, I look at Heidegger's lecture *Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance"* (winter semester 1941/42), insofar as the same verse is cited and somewhat explained there. (§ 2.) However, his explanation there is not enough to fully understand the verse's whole meaning. Thus, I interpret Hölderlin's poem "The Journey" itself. (§ 3.) On the basis of this interpretation, I reflect on the meaning of the final sentence in Heidegger's essay. (§ 4.) The reflection will contribute to a deeper understanding of the conclusion of "The Origin of the Work of Art."

### **Heidegger's explanation of the verse from "The Journey" in his lecture *Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance"***

In the winter semester 1941/42, Heidegger gave the lecture *Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance."* The full text of this poem was interpreted in detail, whereas the other poems were only partially quoted and explained. When Heidegger interpreted the fourth strophe, he mentioned the verse from "The Journey." The beginning of the fourth strophe reads as follows:

Yet where are my friends? Bellarmine / And companion?  
Many a one / Is shy of going to the source; (*Wo aber sind die Freunde? Bellarmin / Mit dem Gefährten? Mancher / Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehn;*)<sup>3</sup>

Here, Hölderlin asks where his friends are. Heidegger says that it is not "a serious question at all, but more just the linguistic form of ascertaining that the friends are not there," insofar as only the poet "has already come home into his own."<sup>4</sup> However, this homecoming does not mean returning to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Karsten Harries, *Art Matters. A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art"* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 180.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance,"* trans. by William McNeill and Julia Ireland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 15-18. This English translation includes the original German text of the poem "The Journey."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

a particular geographic hometown, but “coming to be at home as the passage to one’s own (*das Heimischwerden als Gang zum Eigenen*).”<sup>5</sup> Hölderlin’s question implies that Bellarmine and the companion are not underway on the passage to what is their own. The verse that follows this gives the reason why they are not underway. They are shy of going to what is their own, namely to the source.

Heidegger distinguishes shyness from timidity. Timid people are apprehensive in view of what they are going to experience. Therefore, they want to avoid it. Shy people, too, fear what they are going to encounter. Nevertheless, simultaneously, they are drawn by what attunes them to shyness. What draws and frightens people in “Remembrance” is the source. Heidegger says: “Of what are those friends shy who are marked by shyness? Of the passage to the source. ... Shyness is shyness before the source itself.”<sup>6</sup> Since they are shy of the source, although they want to reach it, they hesitate to do so.

According to Heidegger, Hölderlin’s word “source” means “the origin of the waters of the homeland.”<sup>7</sup> The source authentically belongs to the homeland. It is most difficult to reside at the source, because the source points away from itself, “in the direction of the river flowing from it.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there are people who have overcome this difficulty and dwell in nearness to the source. However, the difficulty has been transformed into another difficulty. What is difficult for them is now the abandonment of the homely locale.

In this context, Heidegger quotes the following verse from “The Journey”: “With difficulty that / Which dwells near the origin abandons the locale (*Schwer verläßt / Was nahe dem Ursprung wohnt, den Ort*).”<sup>9</sup> The locale is the neighborhood surrounding the origin. To dwell near the origin means “to be a good neighbor to the ownmost of one’s own (*Nachbarschaft halten zum Eigensten des Eigenen*).”<sup>10</sup> This ownmost cannot be possessed, but always only “sought in a seeking. Seeking is now more precisely: the passage to the source.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, who dwells near the origin is underway on the passage to the source. Herewith, Heidegger ends his explanation of the verse from “The Journey” and continues to interpret “Remembrance.”

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 147. In this book, the English translation of the verse from “The Journey” is different from that in the book *Off the Beaten Track*.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn*, 148.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Given Heidegger's explanation, however, it is not clear why it is difficult to abandon the homely locale. He probably expects his readers to know the reason. However, for those people who are not familiar with "The Journey," they would not be able to understand the difficulty. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the meaning of the verse in the context of "The Journey."

### The interpretation of Hölderlin's poem "The Journey"

"The Journey" consists of nine strophes. The verse that Heidegger cited in "The Origin of the Work of Art" can be found in the second strophe. The second strophe needs to be considered along with the first one. In both strophes, Hölderlin praises his hometown of Swabia, which is personified as his mother. Since Swabia is a neighbor to the Swiss Alps, she stays in their shade and "dwells near the hearth of the house."<sup>12</sup> The "hearth" seems to be related to a well-known anecdote about Heraclitus, who was famous for his pantheism. It is reported by Aristotle that foreigners visited Heraclitus to learn his enigmatic theology. However, when they found him warming himself by his hearth, they were so disappointed that they hesitated to enter his house. Then, Heraclitus summoned them and said: "Come in, and don't worry; for there are gods here also."<sup>13</sup> According to this anecdote, the hearth of the house is the residing place of the gods. Therefore, Swabia dwells in the neighborhood of the gods.

This neighborhood is also indicated in the following verse: "and within you hear / The wellspring purl / From silver cups (*und [du] hörst, wie drinnen / Aus silbernen Opferschalen / Der Quell rauscht*)."<sup>14</sup> This verse does not make any sense, because wellsprings cannot purl and flow from cups, and there are no cups in the Alps unless human beings bring them there. Therefore, "silver cups" must be a metaphorical expression.

A clarification of what Hölderlin means by reference to silver cups is needed. "Silver cups" is not a correct translation of the original German word "silbernen Opferschalen." The English translation does not represent the meaning of the German word "Opfer," which signifies "sacrificial offering." Furthermore, the German word "Schale" does not refer to a cup but rather a

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, "The Journey," *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. by Eric L. Santner (New York: Continuum, 1990), 203. This translation includes the original German text of Hölderlin's poems.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Lee Miller, *Becoming God. Pure Reason in Early Greek Philosophy* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011), 8. Miller quotes this anecdote from Aristotle's book *On the Parts of Animals*. Heidegger also considered it once. See Martin Heidegger, "Brief über den 'Humanismus'," in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 355.

<sup>14</sup> Hölderlin, "The Journey," 202-203.

bowl. A bowl is a concave and rounded vessel usually larger than a cup. Therefore, the accurate translation of “silbernen Opferschalen” is “silver ceremonial bowls.”

The accuracy of the translation is essential because silver ceremonial bowls refer to the lakes in the Alps. When the sunlight is reflected from the water of the lakes, their surfaces shimmer in silver and look like silver bowls, not like silver cups. Silver bowls are usually used in ritual ceremonies to pray to God or gods. Therefore, the Alps are like a vast altar, covered with many silver ceremonial bowls. As an altar is a holy table in a church or temple, the Alps become the site where God or gods reside.

The silver lakes are the origins of many brooks and rivers around the Alps. So, the wellspring purls from them. Since Swabia is a neighbor of the Alps, she can hear the wellspring flowing with a murmuring sound in swirls and eddies. Hölderlin describes this flowing as follows: “Snowcaps (*Der schneeige Gipfel*) drench the earth / With the purest water.”<sup>15</sup> Since Swabia is closest to the snowcaps and the lakes of the Alps, she is born loyal to the origin.

Then, Hölderlin says: “A place of dwelling / This near the source is hard to leave (*Schwer verläßt / Was nahe dem Ursprung wohnet, den Ort*).”<sup>16</sup> This is the verse which is cited at the end of “The Origin of the Work of Art.” The source indicates the Alps and their lakes. What dwells near the source is the loyal Swabia. Therefore, the verse means that it is difficult for her to leave the neighborhood of the Alps. However, Swabia as a region is not able to move anywhere. So what dwells near the source refers to the Swabian people. The reason for their difficulty in leaving is revealed in the following verse: “All agree there is no / Better spot for home.”<sup>17</sup> The Swabian people know that the neighborhood of the Alps is the best spot for a home. Therefore, it is difficult for them to move somewhere else.

In view of Hölderlin’s verse that is cited in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” I quoted three English translations: “Reluctant to leave the place / Is that which dwells near the origin”<sup>18</sup>; “With difficulty that / Which dwells near the origin abandons the locale”<sup>19</sup>; “A place of dwelling / This near the source is hard to leave.”<sup>20</sup> They are more or less similar to each other. However, there is an important difference because of the German word “schwer,” which means heavy, weighty, difficult, hard, serious, indigestible, and so on. Then, the first translation stands out from the others, because “schwer” has nothing

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 50.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> Hölderlin, “The Journey,” 203.

to do with “reluctant,” “unwilling,” and “hesitant.” However, I think that it is the most appropriate translation insofar as the German word “schwer” has another meaning, namely “sad.” For it is sadness that the Swabian people feel when they leave the neighborhood of the Alps. The reason for their sadness is that they do not want to abandon the best spot for home. Therefore, they are reluctant to leave the place.

### Reflection on the ending of “The Origin of the Work of Art”

Now, I reflect on the meaning of Hölderlin’s verse, which concludes “The Origin of the Work of Art.” According to Heidegger, the verse is “a certain sign” for the decision in the following either-or situation:

[I]t is decided whether art can be an origin – and therefore must be a leap ahead – or whether it should remain a mere postscript, in which case it can only be carried along as a cultural phenomenon that has become routine. Are we, in our existence, historically at the origin? Or do we, rather, in our relationship with art, appeal, merely, to a cultured knowledge of the past?<sup>21</sup>

This situation clearly shows two completely different perspectives on art. From the first perspective, art can be regarded as an origin and a beginning, whereas art remains a postscript and a routine cultural phenomenon in the second perspective. Those people who adopt the first perspective are historically at art as an origin, whereas other people relate to art only as a cultured knowledge of the past. The second perspective is common in the modern society of the cultural industries. In contrast, the first perspective is quite unusual and thus requires an explanation.

In order to comprehend what Heidegger means by art as an origin, it is necessary to take a look at his understanding of art as founding: “The essence of art is poetry. The essence of poetry, however, is the founding [*Stiftung*] of truth.”<sup>22</sup> He understands founding in a threefold sense: bestowing, grounding, and beginning. Art bestows what has not existed before and overflows what is present and available for use. Art opens up the earth, which is the self-closing ground on which human existence rests. So whenever art happens, history begins. Therefore, art is a beginning.<sup>23</sup> According to Heidegger, history is not a series of past events, but rather “the

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<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 49-50.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

transporting of a people into its appointed task as the entry into its endowment.”<sup>24</sup> The task is the creative preservation of truth in the work. When this task is performed, the people enter what is given to it, namely truth. In this sense, art allows truth to arise. Then, Heidegger defines the word “origin” as follows: “To allow something to arise, to bring something into being from out of the essential source in the founding leap is what is meant by the word ‘origin.’”<sup>25</sup> According to this definition, art is the origin of truth. Truth originates from art.

It is evident that Heidegger has adopted the first perspective toward art. The question arises as to why he talks about the either-or situation, because his decision already seems to be made. The reason is that Heidegger is addressing those people who have adopted the second perspective on art. And he wants to help them make a new decision. In this context, the verse from “The Journey” is cited. According to my interpretation of “The Journey,” Swabia is reluctant to leave the neighborhood of the origin because it is the best spot for home. By quoting the verse, Heidegger implies that art as an origin is too good for those people to abandon. Therefore, when the people understand Hölderlin’s verse and the merit of the origin, they will decide to dwell at art as an origin.

## Epilogue

I want to conclude my paper with a quotation from an Asian thinker. The name of this thinker is Zhu Xi (朱熹). He was born in 1130 and died in 1200. He was influential in the development of Neo-Confucianism. He was also a poet and wrote many poems.

I want to introduce one of his poems, which talks about an origin. The title of the poem is 觀書有感 (관서유감). The original Chinese text reads as follows: “半畝方塘一鑑開 (반무방당일감개) / 天光雲影共徘徊 (천광운영공배회) / 問渠那得清如許 (문거나득청여허) / 為有源頭活水來 (위유원두활수래).”<sup>26</sup> It can be translated into English as follows: A half furrow is a quadrilateral pond, on which a mirror is open. / On the pond, the light of the sky and the shadow of the clouds play together. / I ask the pond how it is so pure. / Because there is an origin from which the lively water comes.

This poem emphasizes the pureness of the pond. Since its water is very clean, the pond looks like and functions as a mirror. Thus, it can reflect

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> 주희, 「관서유감」, 『주자시 100 선』, 장세후 옮김, 연암서가, 2013, 52-53 쪽.

all things, namely light and shadow. The pond is so pure because its origin keeps originating clean water. It is remarkable that Zhu Xi does not talk about the reflection of the pond but the play (徘徊) on the pond. The reason why all things come and play together on the pond is that the origin draws them to itself. There is no better spot to play together.

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