

“The Presence of the Unhomely in the Home”:  
Reading Wordsworth with Heidegger

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**ABSTRACT:** I apply Heidegger’s notion of *Unheimlichkeit*, unhomeliness or uncanniness, to a reading of William Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. Wordsworth thematizes a kind of paradoxical being-at-home-while-not-being-at-home, which is a stance of authenticity in the work of Heidegger, and can be read as treating “nature” as a name of Being. Heidegger’s notion of unhomeliness proves to be a powerful tool in aiding our understanding of the dynamics of Wordsworthian nature poetry. In closing, I raise the possibility of Heidegger’s thought as the basis for a broader rethinking of Romantic poetry that could reconcile the differences between some prominent historical scholars of Romanticism.

**KEYWORDS:** romanticism; nature; poetry; uncanniness; abode

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“Eine *seltsame* Sache oder *gar* eine *unheimliche* Sache, daß wir erst auf den Boden springen müssen, auf dem wir eigentlich stehen.”

“A strange thing or even an *uncanny/unhomely* [*unheimliche*] thing, that we must first leap onto the soil on which we truly stand.”

Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (GA 8: 44/41)<sup>1</sup>

### HEIDEGGER, HÖLDERLIN, UNHEIMLICHKEIT

How does one read poetry with Heidegger? The question might seem strange at first blush, since, when we are reading Heidegger, we are very often literally reading poetry with Heidegger. It would seem, then, that we already have the answer in concrete form.

When reading poetry along with him, though, Heidegger’s readers almost universally have mixed feelings as to whether we are reading poetry the way we should read poetry. I would like to briefly focus here on Heidegger’s writings on Hölderlin, since in this article I will propose that we can use Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin to powerfully enhance our reading of another Romantic poet, namely, William Wordsworth. Scholars tend to acknowledge that there is something profound in Heidegger’s decision to read Hölderlin’s engagement with nature as an *ontological* meditation, and they typically feel there is something right about reading him as a kind of poet of finitude.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, strong consensus around the notion that Heidegger’s nationalist insistence upon reading Hölderlin as a poet of the Germans foreshortens the potential of his overall interpretation. Hölderlin is the poet of the “other beginning,” an event that, on Heidegger’s telling, is to be radical in its unfamiliarity. Yet in Heidegger’s writings on Hölderlin, this event seems always to be domesticated in being forced to belong to the familiarity of the German’s native soil.<sup>3</sup>

Charles Bambach illustrates how, in order to make Hölderlin’s poetry entirely about the German encounter with the event of Being via the recollection of the Greek ontological experience, Heidegger ignores much of the specificity of people, things, and locales in Hölderlin, much of which does not align with his nationalist reading.<sup>4</sup> It is due to this sort of suppression of details that, for Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei,

the greatest point of distinction between Hölderlin's sense of poetic thinking and Heidegger's comes down to "the problem of the subject."<sup>5</sup> Heidegger denies that the poet qua poet *is* a subject, and believes that poetry has the power to overcome subjectivism as a metaphysical paradigm. This implies the unimportance of contingent, individual experience: "In Heidegger's account, the poetic self, such as there is one, has no history of experiences as a being among beings."<sup>6</sup> Hölderlin, in violation of this reading of his work, places great emphasis on individual subjective experience in the production of poetry.<sup>7</sup> To sum up, we might take Michel Haar to be offering a synopsis of critical discontent with Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin when he says, "[It is] paradoxical that the philosopher of *Unheimlichkeit*, of anxiety, as well as of estranged joy, the thinker of the abyss of being as the wholly other than beings . . . has so fully privileged the poetic question for the Homeland and for the proper, familiar, domestic abode."<sup>8</sup>

The scholars cited above stick with the Heidegger-Hölderlin encounter, seeking to recover its promise from the pitfalls and blind spots borne of Heidegger's nationalism. That is an intuitive approach, and one that I certainly do not want to denounce here. I, however, propose to do something different. With the remainder of this article, I will use Heidegger's articulation of the poetic dynamics he sees in the work of Hölderlin to put forth a reading of William Wordsworth's *Prelude*. My premise is not at all that the Heidegger-Hölderlin relationship must be left behind, but only that moving the Heideggerian poetic lexicon that is developed around the notion of *Unheimlichkeit* to a non-German context might allow us to think in a fresh way about Heidegger's usefulness as an aide in reading poetry, especially Romantic poetry. Ultimately, we will see that Heidegger can help us resolve a critical impasse in historical Wordsworth studies, and that the experience of allowing Heidegger to help us through this impasse might even be able to help us think about what Romantic poetry is, in a broader sense. All of this is based on the conviction that Heidegger's term *Unheimlichkeit* is able to express a certain sense of the finitude of human language and existence that is either missed or

misrepresented in some other ways of talking about Romantic poetry, a claim that will be elucidated in what follows.

Before diving into the *Prelude* text, let me first offer some birds-eye observations about what motivates the task of reading Wordsworth via Heidegger. One of the catalysts for Heidegger's lengthy engagement with Hölderlin is that nature as φύσις is a Greek name for Being; Hölderlin's *Natur* can thus be mapped onto φύσις such that the nature poet becomes a poet of Being.<sup>9</sup> My sense is that the same can be done with Wordsworth, and that this does not represent a great departure from the assumptions of the Wordsworth scholars whom I engage here. The human being's relationship to nature-as-Being in Hölderlin's poetry is characterized by Heidegger as a kind of *Unheimlichkeit*, which I will mostly translate as *unhomeliness*, and not "uncanniness," in order to highlight the importance of the notion of the home. Human beings are unhomey in that they arrive at home among beings via the self-concealment of Being, thereby losing the source of homeliness as they gain a home. The poet is doubly unhomey in turning back toward the concealed home that is Being – an act which undermines the easy familiarity, the homeliness, of life in the world among beings. There is a very basic sense in which Wordsworth's story in *The Prelude* resonates with this dynamic. Wordsworth leaves the literal home of the Lake District in order to find himself at home on solitary and unfamiliar mountain passes in Switzerland and in other similarly unfamiliar environs. He leaves the natural scenes and natural entities that have always been emblematic, for him, of nature, precisely in order to seek nature. In what follows, I will show that the Wordsworthian "unhomeliness" in relation to nature corresponds to the unhomeliness Heidegger sees in Hölderlin in a more profound way than this, however.<sup>10</sup>

#### WORDSWORTH: ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE AND NATURE

Wordsworth begins *The Prelude* with the stated intention of offering up "some philosophic Song / Of Truth that cherishes our daily life" (1805 VI.230–231).<sup>11</sup> What follows over the course of the work is the story of *his* life, narrated as the story of the poet's winding relationship with

nature. To begin, I will introduce the passage that will be our focus, the so-called Simplon Pass episode, and then will lay out some established readings of the dynamics of this relationship in *The Prelude*, before showing how Heidegger can help us read the poem.

Here are the opening lines of the Simplon Pass scene, which serve as a convenient place to begin a discussion of those dynamics.

Imagination! – lifting up itself  
Before the eye and progress of my song  
Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,  
In all the might of its endowments, came  
Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,  
Halted without a struggle to break through,  
And now recovering, to my soul I say –  
'I recognize thy glory': in such strength  
Of usurpation, in such visitings  
Of awful promise, when the light of sense  
Goes out in flashes that have shown to us  
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,  
There harbours whether we be young or old.  
Our destiny, our nature, and our home  
Is with infinitude, and only there ... (1805 VI.528-539)

The passage above, which bursts into the middle of Wordsworth's narration of a hiking trip he took through the Simplon Pass in the Swiss Alps, marks the first point in *The Prelude* at which imagination is unreservedly celebrated as triumphantly having come into its own. The poem as a whole is the tale of the "growth of the poet's mind," and the growth of the poet's mind qua poet necessitates the growth of imagination.

From the first lines of the poem, the journey that imagination will take is depicted as that of a homeless being in search of a home. In the opening passage of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth asks, "What dwelling shall receive me, in what vale / Shall be my harbor, underneath what grove / Shall I take up my home?" (1805 I.11-13). Any reader's

understanding of the poem's meaning as a whole will be informed by the way in which she reads the dynamics of imagination's interaction with nature in this search for a home.<sup>12</sup>

The dynamics of this interaction – whether it is a confrontation, a vanquishing, a reconciliation, or something else – have been interpreted in many different ways. Generally, however, the debate has seemed to focus more on the task of defining the character of imagination than on considering that of nature. Instead, I will start here from the “nature” with which imagination is engaging: what it is, ultimately, but first, what it is not.

Nature is often taken to be suppressed, hidden from view, or overcome when imagination comes into its own in *The Prelude*, and the Simplon Pass episode is taken by some critics of very different stripes to be the paradigmatic case of this agonistic relationship. As a first example, I will briefly summarize *The Prelude* as understood by M. H. Abrams, whose reading is influential. The poem's story is a secularization of the biblical narrative as recounted in *Paradise Lost* and *Regain'd*. The poet starts as a child in Edenic harmony with nature. As imagination grows in strength, it rebels against nature, but it ultimately is led back to nature, by the end of the poem, by “spots of time,” which only are made possible by imagination, and which remind the poet of who he is, namely, a child of nature. *The Prelude* is thus a story of “unity achieved, lost, and regained.”<sup>15</sup>

The Simplon Pass episode stands directly in the middle of this saga and thus would be the high point of imagination's rebellion against nature, for Abrams as for others. Wordsworth and a traveling companion are sojourning across Europe and have just realized that they have crossed the peak of the Swiss Alps without knowing, at the time, that they were crossing it. Suddenly, in the midst of their dejection at having missed the climactic moment of the hike, Wordsworth is arrested by imaginative vision. The language suggestive of blockage and covering is indeed plentiful, offering potential confirmation of Abrams's thesis of a loss of nature in this climactic moment of the work's middle books. Imagination “lifts itself up” before “the eye.” The imaginative “cloud”

is heavy enough to prevent further movement; the poet's view of the path is "usurped," and, most importantly, "the light of sense / Goes out," revealing "The invisible world."

There can be no disagreement over the fact that a tradeoff exists between perception of outward objects of sense and imaginative perception of "the invisible world" here. This tradeoff reveals something fundamental about the self:

... in such visitings  
[...]  
... doth greatness make abode,  
There harbours, whether we be young or old.  
Our destiny, our nature, and our home  
Is with infinitude, and only there ... (1805 VI.532,  
535-539)

We will return to the topic of what exactly has been revealed, what the meaning of these lines is.

But what happens to nature in these lines? Is it really "lost," as Abrams's reading suggests? It is not right to say, as opponents of Abrams's interpretation such as Geoffrey Hartman do, that, in this moment, Wordsworth's "blindness to the external world which is the tragic, pervasive, and necessary condition of the poet" amounts to "the independence of imagination from nature."<sup>14</sup> To call this "blindness" the *necessary* condition of the poet implies the rejection of Abrams's belief that, ultimately, union with nature is "regained" by the end of *The Prelude*, after the Simplon scene. But our ability to arbitrate this dispute is hampered by the fact that we have not yet established what exactly nature is, in the passage or in *The Prelude*. We *can* say, though, what Wordsworthian "nature" is according to the assumptions of Hartman's claim. The notion that nature is suppressed relies on the observation that "the light of sense / Goes out," that sensible objects in the natural world are lost to sense. If this is right, though, then his belief that imagination blocks out "nature" in this passage receives its justification from the unstated assumption that nature is coextensive

with, and even identical with, the sum total of objects in the natural world.<sup>15</sup> This is not a warranted assertion about the meaning of nature in the poetry of Wordsworth. The “universe of death” (1805 XIII.141), the mechanical universe mentioned in Book XIII, is the material world viewed with “vulgar sense” (1805 XIII.140) and is by no means “nature.”

I would rather like to propose that Wordsworth’s “nature” is governed by a logic similar to Heidegger’s Being. As Being is distinguished from beings by the so-called “ontological difference,” so nature is distinguished from the things of nature. The moment when the light of sense goes out and the things of nature are lost is the moment that those same things of nature open up for the poet, via their own self-sacrifice, an encounter with nature itself. The loss of the things is not the loss of nature, because the two are not the same. Abrams believes that Wordsworth’s status as a nature poet depends on somehow *growing out* of this moment, whereas Hartman believes that Wordsworth cannot be a nature poet because the Simplon Pass experience is not a moment to be overcome, but instead expresses the zenith of Wordsworth’s development. Both views assume that, momentarily (Abrams) or finally (Hartman), an absolute disjuncture between poetic vision and nature takes place here. To the contrary, I read this passage as a depiction of abyssal insight into nature. A Heideggerian frame thus gives us a means to move beyond this critical impasse. To a certain extent, we can read the *Natur* of his Hölderlin lectures onto Wordsworth’s *nature*, reading nature, in both cases, as a name for Being.

As with the Hölderlinian poetic insight of the *Ister* lectures, we can speak here of a disorientation of the homely and the unhomely, of “the presence of the unhomely in the home” (GA 53: 177/142). This occurs on the most basic level as the imposition of a suddenly alien “natural” scene upon the traveler on the Alpine pass who, through five and a half books of the *Prelude*, has shown himself to be nowhere more at home than among natural scenes. Beyond that, though, the identity of the homely and the unhomely is enacted explicitly by the temporal rhetoric of the passage. “Our nature” is with infinitude – and yet this infinitude is temporally strange:

Our destiny, our nature, and our home  
Is with infinitude – and only there;  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be. (1805 VI.539-542)

To say that “our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude” sounds initially triumphant. Yet this home turns out to be revealed, in the immediately following lines, to be a home we can never reach: our destiny is not to dwell *in* infinitude, but to be oriented toward it, in “hope,” “effort,” “expectation,” and “desire.” None of these futurally oriented stances are compatible with already being at one’s destination, being simply *at home*. We discover, in imagination’s most soaring moment, that “our nature” is to be oriented toward “something evermore about to be,” but something that is never here. We are never, then, at home – despite the fact that coming to this realization requires precisely the process of coming to be at home in natural settings that unfolds during the poet’s childhood. We might sense a resonance here with Heidegger’s term *Aufenthalt*, simultaneously “abode” and “sojourn,” indicating at one and the same time a state of being at home and of being away from home. Our nature is *unheimlich*, *Nicht-zuhause*, sensing, even from within the abode, that it belongs elsewhere, that it is at home elsewhere, in an infinitude that we cannot reach.<sup>16</sup> The hoped-for union *would* occur in the future, if it ever occurred; it is placed in a future in that it is hoped for, desired, and expected, but the union is “evermore” delayed. This infinitude that we cannot reach, this ambivalent home, is nature.

**DER ISTER: HOMELINESS, UNHOMELINESS, TRAGEDY, COUNTERTURNING**

At this point, before continuing on with Wordsworth, a brief description of the Heidegger text that is arguably most germane to this reading is in order. The text I have in mind is the 1942 summer semester lecture course, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister.”* While the ostensible topic of the course is clearly Hölderlin’s poem “The Ister,” just over half the volume, its middle, is dedicated to a reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, especially its choral ode, through Hölderlin’s translation of

it. This is motivated by the fact that Hölderlin (sometimes) translates *δεινόν* as *unheimlich*, uncanny or unhomely – the word, Heidegger believes, that characterizes the Ister (the Danube River), which symbolizes the German poet. Not just unhomeliness, but (Sophoclean) tragedy, is thereby read into the “Ister” poem. Like a river, a human being is destined to lose sight of the ultimate source, as Being conceals itself in bestowing meaningfulness onto beings. In this way, the human being comes to be at home in a quotidian, mundane sense, becoming occupied with the beings with which it has familiarized itself, as a river could be said to become occupied with the streambeds it claims, away from the source and only by departing from the source. This very process of making a home, however, involves a straying from home in a deeper sense, in that Being is thereby lost – always already lost, we might say – to concealment. The term *Gegenwendigkeit*, counterturning, is used in the course of the lectures in two important and mirroring ways, both of which have to do with this dynamic of concealment. One way is the “counterturning of Being itself,” which refers to Being’s own dynamic of concealing-in-revealing as it conceals itself in the bestowal of the beinghood of beings (GA 53: 95/77). Reflecting the counterturning of Being is the counterturning of the human being as *δεινόν*, as unhomely. The human being loses Being to concealment as she takes her place among beings, such that Heidegger feels authorized to speak of “the unhomely as the ground of the human being” (GA 53: 83/68). The counterturning of the human being is the turning back to the always already lost (and therefore itself always unhomely) home that is Being, appropriately represented in *Antigone’s* choral ode, Heidegger claims, by the hearth, the center of the home (GA 53: 139-142/111-114). This turning back toward the hearth of Being, associated with (Sophocles’ or Hölderlin’s) poetry, involves a kind of dislodgement from beings.<sup>17</sup> *Antigone* as tragic hero is thus an embodiment of counterturning and a figuration of the poetic in her tragic readiness to face death, to depart from the world of beings: “It is [death] to which *Antigone* already belongs, which she knows, as one who already belongs to Being. For this reason,

since she is becoming homely in Being [*im Sein heimischwerdend*], she is, among beings, the most unhomely [*die Unheimischste*]” (GA 53: 150/120).<sup>18</sup> Heidegger returns to the “Ister” poem in order to associate this counterturning with the Ister River, which, for Heidegger, is the poet: the river “appears almost / To go backwards” towards its source or home.<sup>19</sup> It is in the figure of the wandering river that Heidegger’s sense of *Aufenthalt*, a simultaneous sojourning-abroad-and-coming-home, is illustrated most clearly: “This wandering that the river itself *is* determines the manner in which the human being becomes homely upon the earth ... The wandering that the river *is* holds sways and essences in the determination to win the earth as the ‘ground’ of the homely ... Wandering determines what it is to become homely upon the earth” (GA 53: 35-36/30-31).

It seems best, for the sake of distilled clarity, to add to the above a synopsis of Heidegger’s thinking in the lectures without reference to the imagery of a Hölderlin poem or the plot of a Sophocles play. I could not hope to do so better than Katherine Withy does here:

In entering [B]eing’s *polemos* and becoming pervaded by [B]eing, the human being gives up [B]eing. *In coming to its own essence or home, the human being gives up its essence or home* [emphasis mine]. In coming to presence, the human being absences ... The human being’s absencing, in turn, is the finding of [B]eing’s self-concealment – which here includes the concealment of the origin of the disclosive power ... Being gives itself and refuses itself to the human being, who is thus always seeking the homely.<sup>20</sup>

All that I would add to this is that the “seeking” that follows from the absencing is most essentially associated with tragic heroes or, more germane to our purposes here, poets.

**THE INFINITELY DEFERRED HOMECOMING: TIME AND DEATH IN  
THE PRELUDE**

I have already made reference to some of the *Ister*-lectures' claims about poetry in relation to Wordsworth's *Prelude*, but at this point, we can describe in a more comprehensive way how it manifests the *Ister* lectures' vision of poetry. The loss of nature – a loss which has always already happened (more on this temporal claim below) – takes place of *necessity*, as both Abrams and Hartman agree. The poet *qua human being* is compelled to wander in search of nature, the lost home, a task which Wordsworth ultimately undertakes in the most literal fashion possible, on a hiking journey, an *Aufenthalt*, through continental Europe. The poet *qua poet* looks always back to nature and, in a scene like the Simplon Pass episode, which we began discussing above, is subjected to a violent “counterturning” back toward nature as the lost home. But this home remains constitutively, tragically, out of reach, the poet's union with it always “evermore about to be.”

Let us continue further with the Simplon scene in order to see more fully how this plays out. I earlier made the claim that the “infinite” that the poet cannot reach is nature, but this is a claim that becomes firmer, I think, in what follows in the passage. After the text cited above, a frenzied vision of the natural world unfurls:

The brook and road  
 Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy pass,  
 And with them did we journey several hours  
 At a slow step. The immeasurable height  
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,  
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,  
 And everywhere along the hollow rent  
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,  
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,  
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears-  
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside  
 As if a voice were in them-the sick sight

And giddy prospect of the raving stream,  
The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,  
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,  
Were all like workings of one mind, the features  
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,  
Characters of the great apocalypse,  
The types and symbols of eternity,  
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.  
(1805 VI.553-572)

The vision simultaneously affirms motion and stasis, change in time and a status outstripping the flow of passing time: “woods decaying, never to be decayed,” “stationary blasts,” “first . . . last . . . and without end.”<sup>21</sup> The concrete things of the natural world appear in a state of dissolution, and imagination has initiated this scene, but it seems far more intuitive to read these lines as an encounter with nature than to see it simply and solely as an encounter with the imagination itself. Before, we learned that what is met is something that cannot be joined, and now we learn that it is something of absolute permanence. In a poem filled with premonitions of human mortality, it seems far more intuitive that this permanence is nature, than that it is human imagination – even if imagination is required for the kinds of visions of mortality that nature invites us to. The beings of nature indeed melt away here – there is nothing literal about the “Rocks that muttered close upon our ears- / Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside” – but the poet is (counter)turned overbearingly toward nature. I would like to suggest that this is *not*, then, a vision of nature as hopelessly *distorted* by imagination, which “comes athwart” some clearer view of nature and reveals its own truth rather than the truth of nature; rather, imagination, by suppressing the light of sense, opens up a view onto nature – nature in a more deeply Wordsworthian sense, not thought of as merely the things of nature. There is not a tradeoff between insight into nature and the awakening of imagination, but a positive correlation. There is also a dearth of one where there is a dearth of the other. This is the case in London, for example. The following passage repeats the logic of unity in multiplicity present at the end of the Simplon scene, but in a bad way:

An indistinguishable world of men  
 ...  
 Living amid the same perpetual flow  
 Of trivial objects, melted and reduced  
 To one identity by differences  
 That have no law, no meaning, and no end— (1805  
 VII.700, 702-705)

In neither case is a straightforward union with nature entertained as possible, but in the case of Simpton, imagination allows the poet, or perhaps compels him, to face the nature that he cannot join. This inability to join nature should make us hesitate before speaking of the *presence* of nature in that scene. To speak as Heidegger might, the poet does not dialectically achieve a union with nature, but is turned toward the home that remains unattainable (in Heidegger's language: concealed, *verborgen*). The poet is unhomely, *unheimlich*.

He cannot join nature because it lies in a future that is never to be obtained – and yet, nature is often spoken of as a kind of mother, which was there at his “sweet birthplace” (1805 I.277) and ensured that he “grew up / Fostered alike by beauty and by fear” in the “seed-time” of his soul (1805 I.305-306). Here, we might be tempted to draw a hard distinction between Wordsworthian nature and Heidegger's Being: it would not be right to say of the unhomely human being of the *Ister* lectures, such as the character Antigone, that Being *was* “present” in the “seed-time” of her soul, her childhood. Consider, though, Wordsworth's phrasing when he recalls the development of a “dim earnest, of the calm / Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves” (1805 I.284-285). Several layers of mediation place nature “itself” at a distance from the content of the memory. The “earnest” here spoken of is not knowledge of nature but of its “calm,” and this calm is found in the tangible hills and groves. This “earnest,” dim to begin with, is further mediated by memory. Once we distinguish between the things of nature and nature itself, even the nurturing power of nature in childhood is not exactly the *presence* of nature, even in the “dim” past of recollection.<sup>22</sup> In the Simpton scene, too, nature is not only associated only with futurity, but

also with a distant past: the “Characters of the great apocalypse” in the Simplon Pass are, taken most literally, the rock formations believed, in Wordsworth’s time, to have been caused by the waters of the Flood of Genesis, the first Apocalypse. Nature is before and behind us in time, but not with us. This bears a resemblance to the eschatological structuring of the human present presaged in Heidegger’s *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1920–1921) and taking shape in the *Contributions* and *The Anaximander Saying*: the present, governed by a metaphysics of presence that immerses itself in present beings, is a time of the forgetfulness of Beyng.<sup>25</sup> The apocalyptic breakthrough must take place, for Wordsworth as for Heidegger, through a futural projection instantiated via a remembering of the past – which requires a self-projection beyond beings at hand in the present, which melt away, like the rocks turned into “black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside.”<sup>24</sup>

Nature, in these ways, serves as a sort of origin which cannot be recovered, in a past that cannot be reclaimed, and as a future which can never be obtained. It is not the case, then, that nature is all the objects of “the light of sense” – a claim which no one has ever made, but which must be assumed in order to subscribe to the critical consensus that in this passage, imagination obscures and distorts the speaker’s view of nature. The beings in nature point to nature, but the final two lines designate them as “types and symbols” of nature, not nature itself.<sup>25</sup>

To epitomize what has been said: in the Simplon Pass scene, nature is articulated as a permanence and a home which the poet can never take part in, which is, for him, as a human being, “evermore about to be.” Yet the relationship is not one of simple disjunction. We are always, “evermore,” oriented toward this “home” in which we cannot partake – it is our “destiny” and our “nature.” Our “nature” is an orientation towards nature that is a self-projection never to be finalized in an obtainment of the goal. This is a sort of tragic stance, a recognition of an infinitude that forces us into an awareness of our own finitude. Wordsworth, to speak in a Heideggerian way, is a poet of human finitude. Perhaps it is not quite that nature *is* time, but it can only be experienced in relation to time. Our orientation toward nature

must be fundamentally temporal, the experience of something “without end,” absolutely unlike ourselves. Time is the axis on which the poet confronts nature: he is “with” nature, “at home” in nature, when he experiences himself as mortal, unable to share in the “infinite” that nature embodies. He is at home, then, only when he experiences himself as absolutely not at home, and with nature only when he experiences himself as absolutely not with nature. Imagination is the power to have this experience, to have this insight into what it means to be human. This is why imagination is a “power growing *under weight*” (1850 VIII.706).<sup>26</sup> The growth of the poet from childhood to maturity is the growth of this burdensome power.

Heidegger speaks of imagination in the Appendix attached to *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, where he says of Kant’s imagination that it is the “ground [*Grund*] of the possibility of the essence of ontological knowledge” (GA 3: 273).<sup>27</sup> We can confirm via what we have seen that the same can plausibly be said for Wordsworth, as long as we are right to read insight into nature as insight into Being – that is, as ontological insight.<sup>28</sup>

But what sort of insight into nature is won in the spot of time? Abrams speaks of “an intersection of eternity with time” in spots of time.<sup>29</sup> In some sense this is right, but “intersection” sounds more optimistic than the reality depicted by Wordsworth. “Intersection,” with its intimation of direct physical contact, leads one to think that the poet might in some sense experience himself as dwelling momentarily *in* eternity in some way, but this is not the case. Imaginative “spots of time” are linked, in *The Prelude*, with death – not just with the thought of mortality, but with literal death. They thus do not depict a union with infinite, eternal nature, but rather display our finite, non-eternal humanity. The Winander Boy passage tells of a boy who loves to blow “mimic hootings to the silent owls” (1805 v.398),

And when it chanced  
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,  
Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung  
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize

Has carried far into his heart the voice  
Of mountain torrents, or the visible scene  
Would enter unawares into his mind  
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,  
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received  
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This boy was taken from his mates, and died  
In childhood ere he was full ten years old.  
(1805 v.404-414)

Here we have much of the same constellation of imagery as in the Simplon scene: “torrents,” “mountain,” “rocks,” “woods,” and “heaven.” The subject is only a young boy, whom we might not expect to already be in possession of imaginative powers, but “torrents” are clearly associated with the arrival of imagination. By writing about the imaginative subject in the third person, he can link imagination directly with death. The boy sees into nature, but nature does not respond. It is not the boy but the “rocks,” “woods,” and “that uncertain heaven” which are “received / Into the bosom of that steady lake.” The imaginative vision into nature is the vision of a refusal, as nature collapses in on itself before the boy’s eyes, turning its back on him as all the “solemn imagery” of nature, even “heaven,” falls into the lake, whose “steadiness” is the steadiness of enduring nature.<sup>50</sup> As by Heidegger’s Kant, imagination opens up, in “spots of time,” a view of human finitude that is grounded in a certain experience of time (GA 3: 178–186/182–184). Imagination opens up an abyssal insight onto not beings or the things of nature but onto Being or nature. Nature is “the speaking face of earth and heaven” (1805 v.12) – not just the things on earth and the things in heaven. In the Simplon Pass, nature begins to speak:

The rocks that *muttered* close upon our ears-  
Black drizzling crags that *spake* by the wayside  
As if a *voice* were in them-the sick sight  
And giddy prospect of the raving stream . . . [emphases mine]

If nature is the speaking face of earth, and if it here begins to speak, these lines are not a sign that nature has been lost at the hands of imagination, as on the diverse readings referenced above, but, instead, that imagination has brought the poet overbearingly close to nature.

Everything we have said so far implies a notion of “imagination” that is not exactly “creative.” The most important thing about imagination is not, in other words, that it creates anything new; it orients the poet in a certain way to a nature that absolutely precedes and outstrips him. It opens him up to a reality that is not his reality and that he could never change: in this sense it even circumscribes the limits of his creativity. Imagination in the *Prelude* is a kind of stance of authenticity, or perhaps the catalyst for a grounding mood, in which ordinary relations with beings are suspended. We are always mortal, but we do not always recognize, or face up to, our mortality. It is only when we face nature that we do this.<sup>31</sup> To face nature is to authentically face infinitude, which, in turn, is to confront the fact that this infinitude is always, from our mortal standpoint, “something evermore about to be.” This is why those who live in London and Cambridge, and who do not live in the proximity of natural scenes, are characterized by artifice. They live inauthentically, as mortal beings excusing themselves from awareness of their own mortality. One chooses whether to live oriented toward nature or not, and much of *The Prelude* concerns this choice. To choose London and Cambridge over nature implies a kind of bad faith, whereas to choose to face nature is to open oneself up to the “sick sight” of one’s own finitude. Heidegger distinguishes between being “authentically unhomely” and inauthentically unhomely (GA 53: 146/117). The way of the poet, the way of imagination, is to be authentically unhomely, soberly aware of one’s mortal inability to join infinite nature.

When “the light of sense / Goes out” in the unexpected moment of imaginative visitation, we are taught “our nature.” Our nature is to be with-out nature. We are with nature only by seeing it as something we are irremediably outside of, by recognizing it as existing on a supra-temporal plane on which we do not ourselves exist and that we cannot reach. We do not always see this, as we generally find ourselves, perhaps inevitably, living inauthentically in a “world [that] is too much with us,

late and soon" (1994, 259, l. 1).<sup>52</sup> When our vision cannot advance past the things of the world, we lose our orientation toward nature. In the moment that imagination unexpectedly restores our authentic sense of our connection to nature, our irretrievably lost home, *truly* seeing becomes seeing abysses, to use the phrase from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2007:199).<sup>53</sup> We see into the truth of things, which means to see into the abyssal gap between ourselves and the infinitude of nature, implying the limits of our own vision. In Heideggerian terms, starting from what seemed the firmest and most homely ground, we experience the "ground as abyss [*Grund als Abgrund*]" (GA 65: 346). We see, as Richard Polt succinctly puts it, that "be-ing *has to* withdraw" [emphasis in original],<sup>54</sup> and that this is in some sense the result of, or is at least coeval with, our basic constitution as human beings.

There is thus a deeply Heideggerian irony in Wordsworth's phrase "our nature," as our nature is shown, in a sense, to be empty, its home and destiny residing in a future that is never to come, "evermore about to be," in a future in which the self *would*, but *will not*, regain unity with nature. "Our nature" is thrown projection, which cannot be a nature at all.

It would not be right to treat this emptiness, and the homelessness it implies, simply as Wordsworth's final word. By the end of *The Prelude*, the poet clearly seems to take himself to have come home, in some sense, to himself and to nature. We might view as analogous Heidegger's claim, in his 1946 "Letter on Humanism," that the "homelessness" of the forgetting of Being is a merely epochal event, suggesting that there might be a way home, even if we are constitutively sojourning, constitutively *unheimlich* (GA 9: 339/258).<sup>55</sup> For both of these writers, it is indeed the unhomely experience itself in which, to use Wordsworth's phrasing, "greatness *makes abode*" or comes home. Perhaps we might conjecture that the natural world can only become a home when it is refounded in the authentic temporality that is opened up in imagination's encounter with nature. The beings of nature could be read as "naturalized" in this authentic projection. The "growth of the poet's mind" would then be the story of Wordsworth's growing ability to find himself at home in this way.

Yet, just as Heidegger can speak of Antigone’s “becoming homely” while simultaneously insisting that she remains tragically unhomely (GA 53: 144, 150/115, 120), Wordsworth’s poetic soul will have to make an abode with a nature that it cannot strictly join. The abode, the home, will have to remain unhomely. This has to do, if we follow Heidegger, with what it means to be a human being at all. Here, I will depart from my practice of translating *unheimlich* as unhomely in order to render the following passage translatable: “The uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*] of the unhomely [*Unheimischen*] consists here in the fact that the human being herself is, in her essence, a *καταστροφή* – a turning-about that turns away from her own essence” (GA 53: 94/77). The catastrophic loss of the home in the pursuit of the home is as unavoidable and as human in *The Prelude* as it is in the *Ister* lectures.

#### CONCLUSION: READING ROMANTICISM WITH HEIDEGGER

We began by cataloging the justified complaints of recent scholars with regard to Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin. But, taking both that reading and our application of that reading to Wordsworth into account, what might Heidegger be able to contribute to our thinking about Romantic poetry?

We can answer that question beginning with an engagement with literary theorist Paul de Man. What follows is a discussion of de Man’s characterization of the Romantics generally, and then of the way de Man situates Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin against this general picture. In *Blindness and Insight*’s famous essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” de Man stages what he understands as a great debate over the meaning of Romantic poetry, and then, later in the book, in “Heidegger’s Exegeses of Hölderlin,” he might be said to implicitly throw Heidegger in with his opponents as discussed in “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” By briefly reenacting this debate and interrogating de Man’s response to Heidegger in light of it, we can come to an articulation of what it is that Heidegger can bring to our understanding of Romantic poetry. If de Man sees two quintessential Romantic poets, they are Wordsworth and Hölderlin, making his work a convenient starting point, given our concern here

with Wordsworth as a potential salve for the shortcomings of Heidegger's reflections upon Hölderlin.

The main opposition animating the divide delineated by de Man in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" is that between symbol and allegory as candidates for the basic mode of Romantic expression.<sup>36</sup> De Man says that New Critics like William Wimsatt, and also M. H. Abrams, claim or assume that symbolism is Romanticism's foundational mode of expression. The symbol, as defined by Coleridge and inherited by these scholars, is characterized by the supposition of a *natural* connection between the material sign and its transcendental referent.<sup>37</sup> This creates a happy point of intersection between the material plane and the eternal at which the utterance and the consciousness of the mortal human being can experience union with infinitude.<sup>38</sup>

For de Man, this is nearly the opposite of the real lesson of Romanticism, embodied for him by "Wordsworth's or Hölderlin's wisdom,"<sup>39</sup> which is the wisdom of allegory, where allegory is understood as refusing to indulge in symbolism's "nostalgia and [...] desire to coincide" with eternity.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, illustrating this idea, he argues that Hölderlin's poetry has a precisely "non-apocalyptic structure," by which he means that the apocalyptic union that is for Abrams definitional to Romanticism (and described above in Abrams's reading of Wordsworth) never takes place – and that this exclusion is essential to who Hölderlin is as a poet. De Man claims in his essay "Wordsworth and Hölderlin" that Romanticism, as exemplified by these two poets, finds its voice in its consciousness of a "failure" that is the awareness of a fractured self whose language can never achieve unity with the narrated self.<sup>41</sup> To de Man, the apocalyptic readings of the Romantics fail to see this central aspect of Romantic poetic thought. We might say, then, to import a Heideggerian word, that de Man chides these critics for failing to see a certain human finitude that he believes is central to Romanticism.<sup>42</sup>

It should be clear that there is a certain degree of overlap between the Heidegger-inspired reading of Wordsworth we have just performed and "Wordsworth's or Hölderlin's wisdom" as the foundation of Romanticism as seen by de Man.

Interestingly, however, after “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight*, in the essay “Heidegger’s Exegeses of Hölderlin,” Heidegger is depicted not as an ally, but almost as someone who shares in the delusions about language that de Man sees in Wimsatt and Abrams. For de Man, Heidegger’s Hölderlin yields Being in absolute presence: “Hölderlin states the presence of Being, his word is Being present, and he knows this is the case.”<sup>45</sup> This is basically a repetition of the ideology of the symbol, as laid out earlier in de Man’s book (and which I relayed above): the word, the finite material signifier, achieves perfect union with the infinity of nature (as Being). While de Man does agree with Heidegger that Hölderlin’s nature is Being, he claims that Heidegger sees Hölderlin as accomplishing the perfect phenomenalization of Being, whereas the real poetic insight, de Man claims, is the non-participation of the self in nature and the *failure* of poetic language to adequately name nature: “[A]s soon as the [poetic] word is uttered, it . . . discovers that instead of stating Being, it can only state mediation.”<sup>44</sup>

But, while we admittedly began this essay by sympathizing with scholars who have criticized Heidegger for failing to consistently allow Being to remain unhomey, de Man’s characterization of Heidegger’s position vis-à-vis Hölderlin is unfair: in the very commentary on the poem “As when on a holiday . . .” that de Man is citing, Heidegger confirms that Being-as-nature is the “un-approachable” for Hölderlin (GA 4: 63/85). There is no evidence that Heidegger says or believes that “Hölderlin states the presence of Being.” This assertion is contradicted by the entire discourse of *Unheimlichkeit* in the *Ister* lectures.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, if Heidegger’s readings of Hölderlin share with de Man an appreciation of a certain kind of human finitude expressed in the poet’s work, this appreciation does not take exactly the same form. What de Man calls *failure* is not the same as Heidegger’s *counterturning*: the one indicates a complete disjunction between the human being, or human language, and Being, whereas the other indicates the complex dynamics of unhomey homeliness. For all their complaints about Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin, it seems that Bambach,

Gosetti-Ferencei, and Withy do agree that the “positive” project implied in the notion of unhomely homeliness, if we can call it that, does correspond to a real project in Hölderlin: namely, the founding of a human abode on earth, in an unhomely relation to nature. In closing, we can distill the difference between what the above critics see in Heidegger’s Hölderlin and what I have sought to bring forth in the above Heideggerian reading of Wordsworth, on the one hand, and de Man’s sense of the two poets, on the other, by pointing to the closing comments of de Man’s lecture called “Heaven and Earth in Wordsworth and Hölderlin”, where de Man says, “in the long run, both Wordsworth and Hölderlin are equally poets of the earthly soul, of consciousness, and of historical time – *and not poets of nature*, of eternity [emphasis mine].<sup>46</sup> In Wordsworth, he says, “The mind . . . [asserts] its unbreachable separation from Being.”<sup>47</sup> I have argued that Wordsworth is, perhaps like Hölderlin, a poet of precisely that from which he stands in “unbreachable separation,” and the concept of unhomeliness names his position of simultaneous orientation-towards and separation-from nature as Being. The stance that corresponds to the making of the human abode is, in Withy’s wonderful phrasing, that of “owned uncanniness,” or, to stay true to our translation of *Unheimlichkeit*, owned unhomeliness.<sup>48</sup> When we own our own unhomeliness, we turn toward that from which we are unbreachably separated. In the Simplon episode, Wordsworth comes home, to the extent that he can do so, by owning his unhomeliness, recognizing the unsurpassable distance separating himself from the home. Imagination gives him a powerful experience of his own human limits in the face of nature.

This reading has been made possible by an implementation of Heidegger. Heidegger can offer us a way of thinking about Romantic insight that avoids the pitfalls of either Wimsatt’s symbolism or Abrams’s apocalypticism, on the one hand, which efface the finitude that we might want to call “Wordsworth’s or Hölderlin’s wisdom” – but it also offers us an alternative to de Man, on the other hand, who, in seeking to defend this wisdom’s authenticity regarding its own

finitude, seems to reduce this wisdom almost to pure “failure.” This approach allows us to respect previous scholars’ vigilance regarding Heidegger’s failings as a reader of Hölderlin but also provides a way for us to help Heidegger help us think about Romantic poetry in a fresh way.<sup>49</sup>

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German are mine. Also, I follow convention in citing Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe in the manner above, where "GA 8: 44/41" indicates citation of page 44 of volume 8, followed by 41, the page number of the standard English translation, which I do not use except where noted.
- 2 Heidegger does this in the Ister lectures through his thematization of the word *unheimlich*, Hölderlin's translation of *δεινόν* in Antigone (how the word *unheimlich* relates to human finitude will become clear later).
- 3 Thus, while Günter Figal claims compellingly in his essay "Radikalität" that Heidegger's political radicality, his anti-Semitic Nazism, is accommodated by the radicality of inceptual thinking (i.e., the thinking of the [other] beginning), it may also be true that his political commitments tame that very radicality. (See Günter Figal, "Radikalität," in *Heideggers „Schwarze Hefte“ im Kontext*. Ed. David Espinet, Günter Figal, Tobias Keiling, and Nikola Mirković [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018], 25–36). How this occurs is illuminated in work done by Rafael Winkler and Charles Bambach. Winkler observes that, in the Ister lectures, the poetic event, as the happening of Being, requires a "Hospitality [that] is a being-open to the foreigner in his foreignness without reservation ... Hospitality is a letting-be of the stranger in his strangeness" (Rafael Winkler, "Dwelling and Hospitality: Heidegger and Hölderlin," *Research in Phenomenology* 47 [2017]: 366–387, 382). As Bambach argues, however, "Heidegger's Hölderlin lectures [are] marked ... by a political vision that often undermines this Hölderlinian openness" (Charles Bambach, "Who is Heidegger's Hölderlin?," *Research in Phenomenology* 47 [2017], 39–59, 57). Rather than being experienced in its otherness, the "foreign Other serves the purpose of helping to bring the native dweller into closer relation to its home by offering such a stark contrast to its own sense of homeliness. In this way, it enters into the *territorium* of the native, on the native's terms, and

solely for the sake of the native's own sense of its native and national identity. In this way, Heidegger never comes to genuinely experience the "foreign" in the sense of Hölderlin's own poetic ideal of hospitality." (Charles Bambach, *Of an Alien Homecoming: Reading Heidegger's "Hölderlin."* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022], 225).

- 4 Bambach writes, "Heidegger suppresses certain essential features of Hölderlin's understanding of the foreign – the brown women, the allusions to the West Indies, to Columbus, to political revolution, and to Asia. Instead, Heidegger reduces them all to indications of Hölderlin's attachment to Greece as evidenced in the Böhlendorff letter. . . . [W]e will have to come to terms with Heidegger's violent suppression of these traces of the Other in the name of Graeco-German affinity" (Bambach, *Of an Alien Homecoming*, 119). It hardly needs to be said that these are foreign people, places, and concepts whose consideration does not fit easily with the National Socialist Heidegger's nationalist reading of Hölderlin.
- 5 Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 17.
- 6 Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 108.
- 7 The obligation scholars have felt to point out this discrepancy between the text of Hölderlin and Heidegger's reading of him might be said to create a hard limit to their appreciation, which I referred to above, of Heidegger's strategy of "ontologizing" Hölderlin. As Hölderlin becomes the German poet of Being, his preoccupation with specific places and entities is systematically forgotten. Gosetti-Ferencei is concerned particularly with Heidegger's refusal to engage the specifics of Hölderlinian geography: "The specificity of locale in Hölderlin's poems – landscapes, rivers, particular sites and experiences – is rendered by Heidegger as the intimacy of Being and its eschatological

‘coming’” (Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 67). Ironically, this elision of the “specificity of locale” can lead one to question why exactly it must be German soil that prepares the coming of the other beginning. As Katherine Withy observes of the *Ister* lectures, “the reading of Hölderlin ... is supposed to clarify Germany’s historical situation,” but “it is unclear ... precisely how it does so, given that [the *Ister* lecture course] fully ontologizes the reading of the ode” (Katherine Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015], 67).

8 Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*. Trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 142.

9 “Being discloses itself to the Greeks as φύσις” (GA 40: 108/110), and Hölderlin’s *Natur* is φύσις, Heidegger’s essay on “Wie wenn am Feiertage ...” asserts (GA 4: 49-77/67-100).

10 Admittedly, the original motivation for the project of reading Wordsworth with Heidegger had to do with far more general dispositional associations that seem to me to create some overlap in the atmosphere of the Wordsworth and Heidegger oeuvres. Both writers depict themselves as thinkers whose thinking must take place away from urban environs. This tendency can be expressed, in both, either positively as a celebration of natural or rural scenes or negatively as a disdain for modernity. Not unrelated to this is a certain pride in understanding oneself as a thinker whose thought is not merely abstract, certainly not academic, but somehow *embodied*. Both are famous walkers, who think while they walk – and, as a visit to Heidegger’s hut outside Freiburg or to the environs of Wordsworth’s youth makes clear, much of their walking must have been solitary walking, in sparsely populated areas. Along with this self-presentation of ruggedness comes an interest in everyday language (even if we might question for obvious reasons, in both Wordsworth’s and Heidegger’s case, whether the valorization of everyday language is consistent). I will not

return to these similarities, but they may come to mind in the following discussion of *The Prelude*.

I am not suggesting that these proclivities all fit together in any necessary way, even though it seems as if they do stand in a unified constellation in both Wordsworth's and Heidegger's self-understanding. Wordsworth scholar Celeste Langan briefly discusses Heidegger's description of Van Gogh's *Old Boots with Laces* in "On the Origin of the Work of Art" to suggest that both thinkers' conflation of the "rustic" and the "common" is anachronistic in their respective time and place (Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom*. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 7–12).

- 11 I will cite Wordsworth's *Prelude* according to the following rubric. In (1805 VI.230–231), 1805 identifies the specific version of the poem (1799, 1805, or 1850 – I will typically be working with the 1805 version). VI identifies the book of *The Prelude*, and 230–231 specifies the lines of verse within the book. Edition cited: William Wordsworth, *The 1805 Prelude*. In *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*. Eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton 1979).
- 12 In this opening scene, one additional element that is relevant to the reading that follows is the fact that imagination is associated with "clouds" or "vapour": Wordsworth declares that "should the guide I chuse / Be nothing better than a wandering cloud / I cannot miss my way" (1805 I.17–19). The imagery of the cloud (as a "vapour") famously returns in the Simplon passage that orients my reading. As Wordsworth is "A captive . . . coming from a house / Of bondage" (1805 I.6–7) at the outset, this detail may be a reference to Moses, who also escaped bondage without knowing where he would find a home and followed a cloud.
- 13 M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971).
- 14 Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1784–1814* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967), 41.

- 15 Paul de Man comes close to saying this. He justifies his conclusion that Wordsworth is not a nature poet via the notion that Wordsworth is one of “the first modern writers to have put into question, in the language of poetry, the ontological priority of the sensory object” (Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], 16).  
Paul Fry in 1996 pointed out that “in the Wordsworth criticism of the last thirty years ... all the influential rereadings have but one refrain: Wordsworth was not a nature poet” (Paul Fry, “Green to the Very Door? The Natural Wordsworth.” In *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 35 No. 4 [1996], 535-551, 535). He observes that, after scholars like de Man, “in the eighties’ return to the issue of social determinants theorized in its most sweeping form by Alan Liu, history manifested as ideology takes over the role hitherto played by language or imagination and reveals, through commentary, a parallel truth: ‘there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government’” (here Fry cites Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*. [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989], 104).  
Fry’s statement would have to be revised today, in light of eco-criticism’s subsequent engagement with Wordsworth, although the “nature” that is at issue there is largely not the nature we are dealing with here.
- 16 C.f. Heidegger’s discussion of *Angst* in *Being and Time* (GA 2: 250/188).
- 17 The notion that inceptual thinking and the greatest art need to dislodge themselves from beings is repeated in many ways and contexts by Heidegger in the 1930s and beyond, but the exact character and severity of this dislodgement is not necessarily consistent. Matt Dill is very right to say that “Heidegger is primarily interested in the kind of art that may allow for the overcoming of metaphysics as such” (Matt Dill, “Heidegger, Art, and the Overcoming of Metaphysics.” In *European Journal of Philosophy*

25.2 [2017], 294–311, 298–299). In the *Contributions to Philosophy* and elsewhere, the need to break free from beings in order to overcome metaphysics is expressed in the starkest possible terms: only if “the human being . . . cast[s] herself loose from beings” can metaphysics be overcome (GA 65: 452). Does art need to “cast itself loose from beings” in order to overcome metaphysics? This sounds complicated and perhaps unfeasible.

Richard Polt convincingly points out, however, that in “On the Origin of the Work of Art,” roughly contemporaneous with the *Contributions*, inceptive (we might say, post-metaphysical) thinking is associated with the sensuous happening of art. At least in context, his conclusion seems right when he says that “the emergence of be-ing from beings” is “not as un-Heideggerian as it may seem” (Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: Heidegger’s “Contributions to Philosophy”* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006], 248).

It may not be the case that these two positions suggested by Heidegger can be reconciled.

18 I recognize here that I break from the translation approach of Will McNeill and Julia Davis in translating both *unheimlich* and *unheimisch* as “unhomely” (Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis, [Bloomington: Indiana Press University, 1996]). Clearly, a full-length translation of the *Ister* lectures should, as they do, distinguish between the two words. That said, I do not think that “unhomely” is a fundamentally wrong translation of *unheimlich* in isolation, but is one that emphasizes a certain element in the word, and I have accordingly made this translation choice in order to highlight the concept of the home as inherent to the word. It admittedly puts me in a worse position to translate passages such as this one, since it is hard to come up with any possible translation of *heimisch* and *unheimisch* other than the (in my case, repeated) choices of “homely” and “unhomely” (McNeill and Davis also translate *heimisch* and *unheimisch* this way).

- 19 First cited at GA 53: 4/3,5. This passage is the original pretext for Heidegger's introduction of the notion of "counterturning."
- 20 Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny*, 136. Withy does not capitalize Heidegger's "Being" like I do. I have capitalized it in citing her for clarity, to distinguish it from "beings."
- 21 Paul de Man: These are "instances of what Goethe calls *Dauer im Wechsel*, endurance within a pattern of change, the assertion of a metatemporal, stationary state beyond the apparent decay of a mutability that attacks certain outward aspects of nature but leaves the core intact" (Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*. Second edition [University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1983], 196-197).  
It is worth noting that the word "nature" here has a kind of provisional status for de Man, as will be discussed later.
- 22 Although we must acknowledge a clear tonal difference, we might think here of Katherine Withy's reference to the "obscure whence" of thrownness in Being and Time in which, despite in some sense being a source, "Being is ... withheld" (Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny*, 99).
- 23 Although Wordsworth explicitly pairs "hope" and "expectation," the tragic impossibility of this hope finds something of an analogue in Heidegger's assertion in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* that "The structure of Christian hope [*Hoffnung*] ... is radically different from all expectation [*Erwartung*]" (GA 60: 102/71-72).
- 24 In both Wordsworth scholarship and Heidegger scholarship, the assumption of a secular eschatological stance has been said to be basic to the kind of thought each writer pursues. Abrams frames his reading of Wordsworth around the notion of "apocalypse by imagination" (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 335) whereas Ryan Coyne speaks of "the eschaton as origin" as a thread running through Heidegger's thinking from the lecture course on Paul in 1920-1921 to the notion of *Verhaltenheit* and the eschatology of being as developed in the 30s and 40s (Ryan

Coyne, “Eschatology and Metapolitics in the *Black Notebooks*.” In *Heideggers „Schwarze Hefte“ im Kontext*. Ed. David Espinet, Günter Figal, Tobias Keiling, and Nikola Mirković [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018], 69–86, 79).

- 25 A rather Heideggerian question related to this discussion (very fleetingly named in the body text below) is not quite directly asked, but is very much invited, by certain critical engagements with Wordsworth: Is nature time? Or, rather, is time the horizon upon which nature must be confronted? Or is Wordsworth in fact deluded, taking the self’s relationship with what is actually time to instead be its relationship to “nature”? Something like this last claim has been made before. Paul de Man holds that what seems to be a confrontation with nature turns out in Wordsworth to be more fundamentally a confrontation with time (Paul de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E.S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, Andrzej Warminski [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993], 74–94). Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* sees it as really a confrontation with the past of the poetic tradition and the striving after a future that is discontinuous with this past (Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Second edition [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 38–39 and 125–126). The appreciation of the centrality of temporality in *The Prelude* is a breakthrough, but it seems overhasty and uncharitable to Wordsworth to jettison the concept of “nature.” If we are to think with him and not against him, we need to address the key words “imagination” and “nature” as they appear in – and dominate - his text. When de Man says in his review of Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* that Bloom is to be celebrated for moving beyond the “catch-all term ‘imagination’” and “the category of nature” in his study of Romantic poets – and, furthermore, that the use of these terms by Frye and Abrams has “driven a fatal wedge between the accepted interpretation of the romantic poets and *their actual statement*” [emphasis mine] (de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 269–270) – one has to

wonder which strange version of *The Prelude* de Man had gotten his hands on. To read Wordsworth without central consideration of “imagination” and “nature” is not to read Wordsworth’s “actual statement” at all.

26 The 1805 version is “Power growing with the weight” (1805. VIII.1805. VIII. 706).

27 This formulation comes in the *Gesamtausgabe*’s included Davos dispute lecture notes.

28 In the Kant book, Heidegger says that the “radicalism” of this thought should not be underestimated, despite the fact that Kant himself “shrank back in fright” before it: it implies that the “point of departure in reason has been blown up,” and indicates “the demolition of the bases of Western metaphysics hitherto” (GA 3: 273). If Wordsworth’s nature is Being, then Wordsworthian imagination’s power is no less radical, nor less ontological.

29 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 387.

30 Another passage associating imagination and death comes in the case of the drowned man at Esthwaite’s Lake, and yet another comes in a flashback to childhood in Book XI. Eight-year-old Wordsworth goes to Esthwaite’s Lake on two consecutive days. The first day, he sees a pile of clothes on the shore with no owner in sight. The next day, he sees a group of men in a boat, fishing a dead man out of the water.

the dead man, ‘mid that beauteous scene  
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright  
Rose with his ghastly face, a spectre shape –  
Of terror even. And yet no vulgar fear,  
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,  
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen  
Such sights before ... (1805 v.470-476)

Imagination has already shown the poet-to-be visions of death. Similarly, the “spot of time” that immediately follows the only actual use of that famous phrase, in Book XI, tells the story of six-year-old Wordsworth finding a valley where a murderer has been

hung long ago, in which some visual reminders of his hanging still remain. Wordsworth calls this a scene of “visionary dreariness” (1805 XI.310), the word “visionary” implying imaginative perception.

31 A natural comparison to make here would be between the authenticity we might say we are tracing in Wordsworth’s imaginative moment and Heidegger’s authentic being-toward-death in *Being and Time*.

32 From “The World is Too Much With Us:”

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! [...]

(William Wordsworth, “The World is Too Much With Us.” In *The Works of William Wordsworth* [Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994], 259, ll. 1-4)

33 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. In *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* (Munich: de Gruyter 2007), Volume 4, 199.

34 Polt, *The Emergency of Being*, 142. Polt renders *Seyn* as “be-ing” where I have been using “beyng.”

35 The human being, says Heidegger, is not *yet* able to take up or take over her abode, or dwelling, in the world: “What throws in the projecting [*im Entwerfen*] is not the human being, but Being itself, which sends the human being into the ek-sistence of being-there as her essence. This destiny takes place [*ereignet sich*] as the clearing of Being, which it is. It protects the nearness to Being. In this nearness, in the clearing of the ‘there,’ the human being lives as the ek-sisting one, without yet being able today to truly experience this dwelling and to take it over” (GA 9: 337/257).

36 I am aware that Heidegger has much to say on symbol and allegory, but since the point here is to use de Man’s position as a foil, to go into that would be a distraction, as it would force us to depart in a prolonged way from the vocabulary with which we have been engaging Wordsworth through Heidegger.

- 37 De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 192.
- 38 This summary of de Man's position is tailored to our concerns here. To give a slightly less context-dependent sense of what that position is, de Man's charge is that the notion of an intersection between mind and eternity involves completely submitting the ostensible infinitude of nature to the allegedly mortal human mind, with the result that Romanticism becomes, for these critics, a kind of idealism. Despite speaking of "Wordsworth's naturalism," Wimsatt summarizes the Romantic achievement – in the same sentence as the one in which he uses that phrase – by saying that "the common feat of the romantic nature poets was to read meaning into the landscape" (W.K. Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery." In *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* [Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954] 103–118, 110). This strong interpretation tends to make nature so much like the subject that what we have, "in the last analysis," says de Man, "is a relationship of the subject toward itself . . . and we end up with something that resembles a radical idealism" (de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 196). Abrams's talk of apocalyptic union shares, de Man thinks, in this wish for an easy union between mind and nature.
- 39 De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 226.
- 40 Here again, for the sake of focus, I omit any extensive explanation of how the link between allegory and this "wisdom" is justified. However, I will cite de Man's statement at fuller length here: "Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. In so doing, *it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self*, which is now fully, though painfully, recognized as a non-self. It is this painful knowledge that we perceive at the moments when early romantic literature finds its true voice" [emphasis mine] (de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 207).

- 41 De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 58.
- 42 In “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight*, this finitude is largely discussed through de Man’s articulation of Wordsworth’s self-conscious failure to become one with nature in *The Prelude*. The literary device that corresponds to the recognition of this failure or this finitude is allegory.
- 43 De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 250.
- 44 De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 259.
- 45 Admittedly, de Man did not have access to the *Ister* lectures – although, again, his claim here is contradicted by the text he is discussing, as well.
- It seems possible that part of what leads de Man’s understanding of Heidegger on Hölderlin astray is the fact, as de Man rightly puts it elsewhere, that “Heidegger . . . sees Hölderlin as an eschatological figure” (“Temporality in Hölderlin’s ‘Wie wenn am Feiertage. . .’” [de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, 65]). The eschatological stance described by Heidegger with regard either to Hölderlin or to the other beginning, as referenced by both me and Gosetti-Ferencei as I cite her earlier, does not correspond to the happy, uncomplicated union with Being-as-nature-made-present that de Man in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” associates with Abrams’s Romantic imaginative apocalypse. The eschatological stance of the poet is unhomely and therefore recognizes that it cannot force Being into unconcealment.
- 46 De Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, 146.
- 47 De Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, 146. That de Man, with this statement, might be read as serving as a precedent for reading Wordsworth’s nature as Being admittedly occurred to me only late in the writing of this article. The oppositional stance I have staked out against him here is, as a result, perhaps a tad one-sided.
- 48 Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny*, 178.
- 49 Thank you to David Wellbery for his rich response to this paper at the Literature & Philosophy Workshop at the University of Chicago.