sometimes “after July 1970,” Heidegger composed a brief but bright reflection on several of Hölderlin’s so-called “last poems.”¹ The principal poem considered bears the title “Autumn” and opens with the line, “Nature’s gleaming is higher revealing.” The complete poem reads:

Nature’s gleaming is higher revealing,
Where with many joys the day draws to an end,
It is the year that completes itself in resplendence,
Where fruit come together with beaming radiance.

Earth’s orb is thus adorned, and rarely clamors
Sound through the open field, the sun warms
The day of autumn mildly, the fields lie
As a great wide view, the breezes blow

Through boughs and branches, rustling gladly,
When then already to emptiness the fields give way.
The whole meaning of this bright image lives
As an image, golden splendor hovering all about.

¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, „Das Glänzen der Natur ist Höheres Erscheinen;“ in Martin Heidegger, Zu Hölderlin – Griechenlandreisen, herausgegeben von Curd Ochwaldt (Gesamtausgabe 75, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), pp. 205-209. [cit. GA] The editor, Curd Ochwaldt, indicates that the text can be dated to „nach Juli 1970;“ but he also notes that this does not necessarily refer to the second half of the year 1970 (see p. 394 and pp. 398-399). All translations by Richard Capobianco and Marie Göbel, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to Marie Göbel for her collaboration. Though the translations of Hölderlin’s poems cited are our own (and more suited to Heidegger’s readings of these poems), we have nonetheless consulted Michael Hamburger’s elegant (but considerably freer) translations in his Friedrich Hölderlin, Poems and Fragments (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2007), which includes all the cited poetic lines except the final poem, Die Aussicht (“The View”).
During the 1960s, Heidegger had commended this poem to others, and it had apparently become a favorite of his. This is not at all surprising because, as I would like to illuminate here, Heidegger, nearing the end of his life, had come to find in this particular poem a fitting “saying” of what he considered to be the fundamental matter (die Sache selbst) of his lifetime of thinking.

After setting out the poem in full, Heidegger reflects that Hölderlin composed these lines one year before his death, which “brought to an end the long period of the dark night [Umbruch], a night [Nacht] replete with mystery, a nighting [Nachten] that grants such saying.” It is clear that Heidegger considered Hölderlin’s “madness” as a kind of “divine madness” and not as a mere mental “derangement.” In the “dark night” of his later years, Hölderlin could see what others could not, and, therefore, his “last poems” are capable of awakening us to “the astonishing,” and to the wonder of “the extraordinary in the ordinary.” Heidegger agrees with Norbert von Hellingrath’s observation that there is a remarkable “clarity and dignity” to the language that speaks in Hölderlin’s last poems. Only by proceeding with this insight,” Heidegger adds, can there be success in the effort “to properly hear and thoughtfully interpret Hölderlin’s last poetizing.”

And so he begins by addressing the first line of the poem: “Nature’s gleaming is higher revealing.” Before continuing, let us pause a moment to consider our translation of this line. The German reads, „Das Glänzen der Natur ist höheres Erscheinen.“ Das Glänzen is a favorite word of Hölderlin’s and of Heidegger’s, as will become more evident in what follows, but oftentimes this word is translated into English simply as “shining.” Yet this is inadequate. Das Glänzen requires a more striking translation, and English obliges with a number of alliterative words that carry forward both the form of the German word and its distinctive sense: gleaming, glistening, glimmering, glittering, glowing. Nature does not just “shine,” it “gleams.” Furthermore, note that this “gleaming” is a „höheres Erscheinen,“ a “higher appearing” or a “higher revealing.” “Appearing” for Erscheinen is perfectly suitable, but the German word also suggests something more elevated, sublime, and “holy,” and for this reason, “revealing” seems to be the better choice. Even so,

2 From his Black Forest Hütte in October 1966, Heidegger wrote a heartfelt 60th birthday greeting to Hannah Arendt upon her entering the “autumn” of her life, and he included a copy of this poem with his letter. Martin Heidegger und Hannah Arendt, Briefe 1925 bis 1975 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998), pp. 153-54. Not long after, he also mentioned this poem to his friend the clergyman Paul Hassler in a letter in the spring of 1967. In part, Heidegger writes to Hassler, who had been ill: “Above all, I wish that, in this period of recovery, undisguised nature addresses you and that through nature you are claimed by what never ceases to claim human beings. In one of Hölderlin’s poems, composed a year before his death, we read „Das Glänzen der Natur ist höheres Erscheinen.“ In view of these words, the talk about Hölderlin’s madness becomes puzzling.” Heinrich Petzet, Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929-1976, trans. by P. Emad and K. Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 127 (but I have omitted their interpolated translation of Hölderlin’s verse line).
for now the key matter is this: Nature’s distinctive “gleaming” is a manifestation, indeed, a “higher” kind of manifestation. But what exactly does this mean? We must follow Heidegger’s reading further.

Considering more closely the phrase “nature’s gleaming,” he observes that “we think of nature outside, the landscape,” and he cites a few lines from Hölderlin’s poem “The Stroll” (Der Spaziergang):

You lovely images in the valley,
Such as gardens and tree,
And then the footbridge, the narrow,
The stream barely seen,
How beautiful from bright distance
Gleams to the eye the glorious image
Of the landscape...

These images of the landscape are resplendent, but Heidegger cautions us: “Yet the landscape is not yet nature itself. Landscape, gathered around human beings and inclined toward them, indeed lets appear nature in an initial gleaming.” Note the distinction: The “landscape” (Landschaft) is not “nature itself” (Natur selbst). What Heidegger is articulating here should be very familiar to us; it is another saying of the “ontological difference” between beings and Being itself! For some reason, some recent Heidegger scholars have presumed that the later Heidegger abandoned his earlier guiding notion of the “ontological difference.” Certainly, he became wary of the expression over time because he found that he could not fully free it from traditional philosophical thinking, but the matter of the “difference” between Being and beings remained fundamental to his thinking to the very end. It may be true that in later years he became troubled that the “ontological difference”—this particular naming of the matter—came to be misconstrued as referring to nothing more than the traditional metaphysical “difference” between a concretely existing entity and its “essence” (between a “being” and its “beingness”) or, in the language of the modern philosophy of the subject, between an “object” and its “objectiveness.” Indeed, he readily admitted in later reflections that all previous Western philosophy had recognized and thematized in one way or another a “difference,” but he insisted that this was no more than a derivative “difference,” a difference in the realm of “beings,” and not the primordial and fundamental Differenz (Unterschied) between Being—temporal letting, giving, granting itself—and beings, that is, all that issues forth from out of the Being-process or Being-way, as I prefer to name it.⁴

Accordingly, we should not be surprised that in this very late (1970 or after) elucidation of Hölderlin’s poem, Heidegger in effect restates and reaffirms his long-standing consideration of the matter of the “ontological difference” by making the distinction between “nature” and “landscape.” Nature, “in an initial gleaming,” lets shine forth everything that belongs to the landscape. He cites a few lines from Hölderlin’s poem “The Merry Life” (Das fröhliche Leben) to make this same point:

Fairest landscape! where the road
Makes its way evenly through the middle,
Where the moon, the pale, rises,
When the evening wind comes up,
Where nature very simple...

He draws our attention especially to the last line and observes: “The landscape with the multiplicity of its images can let appear ‘simple nature’ only because the landscape gleams from out of nature, which, as the ‘simple,’ is of divine essence.” Thus: “Nature” is the “simple,” the “very simple,” which allows to come-to-presence all that is present in “the landscape.” Nature is the one and simple way whereby all things come-to-presence, and, as such, “is of divine essence”; that is, it is the “holy,” if we recall one of Heidegger’s favored names for Being itself drawn from his earlier readings of Hölderlin’s poetry. Further, to underscore this theme of how the “divine” One (ἐν, Being, Nature) allows All (ἐνάτομα, beings, the multitude of things of the landscape), he cites several lines from Hölderlin’s poem “Contentment” (Die Zufriedenheit):

The tree that flourishes, the crown of branches,
The flowers that ring the bark of the trunk,
Are from divine nature, they are one life,
Because above this heaven’s breezes lean their way.

Crystallizing his point, he states: “In the look of the landscape, which nature grants, the gleaming of nature is: ‘higher revealing.’” In other words, the untold abundance of luminous “images” of the landscape show themselves to us; they shine forth to us; they open to us and address us—but that whereby everything is manifest to us is Nature (Being). Furthermore, this allowing, letting, giving, granting of beings that is Nature (Being) is itself manifest to us in a unique way—it is precisely the higher revealing (appearing, manifesting) that is glimpsed and named by Hölderlin in the poem. Hölderlin also speaks in these lines of “heaven’s breezes” leaning (sich neigen) toward all things, with the suggestion of their bending in a concernful, sheltering, sparing, protecting way toward all that is. This is the language of the poet’s “last poems” that resonated so powerfully with the later Heidegger, that is, the language of Nature (ἐνάτομα, Being) inclined toward us.
toward all things, in a gesture of gentle nurturing and preserving. One could well argue, as I would, that just this perspective is what is so compelling and attractive in the later Heidegger’s thinking about Being; but at the very least, we should take note that long gone in such later reflections is his early view—perhaps the view to be expected of a younger man?—that “anxiety” and “strife” are constitutive of the relation between Being and Dasein.⁴ Heidegger’s commentary turns to the matter of time, which remained central to his thinking to the end:

The manifold of images in the manifold of seasons is pervaded throughout by the onefold of the year. The gleaming of nature lets appear the passage of the seasons. The gleaming of nature is not a state but a happening. In the passage of the seasons the year completes itself. Even so, this passage is not the mere one-after-the-other of the times of the year. Rather, in each season the other seasons appear, pointing-ahead and pointing-back, as they interchange with one another. The gleaming of nature is a revealing in which ever already the whole of the year shines throughout and thus constantly anticipates the individual times of the year. In this manner, the “higher” of the gleaming revealing shows itself, that is, what is peculiar and proper to nature shows itself.

The first two lines recall for us again Heidegger’s earlier renderings of Heraclitus’ saying of the ἐν – πάντα ραθεῖ as “One is All.”⁵ That is, the One (Nature, Being) lets be and gathers together All (beings, the landscape and the seasons). Yet the One that he is speaking about is not to be confused with any kind of metaphysical entity; as he makes clear, “the gleaming of nature” is not a state or condition (Zustand), but a happening (Geschehen). Nature (Being) is indeed temporal, dynamic, flowing, unfolding, but the temporality of Nature itself (Being itself) must not be construed simply as “the mere one-after-the-other of the times of the year.” We readily recognize that this critique of time as a mere succession of “moments” or “nows” goes back to Being and Time and to even earlier reflections of the 1920s. With these lines, Heidegger reprises one of the most fundamental themes of his life’s work—but it is a return within the “turn” (die Kehre) in his thinking. That is, although his criticism of linear time here is essentially the same as what it was in Being and Time; nevertheless, it is no longer a critique that proceeds from a phenomenological analysis of Dasein’s fundamental temporality (Zeitlichkeit). Rather, his reference is to Nature itself (Being itself). Nature itself offers the evidence of—shows to us—this more elemental temporality in the way, for example, that buds appear on trees in the dead of winter in recollection of summer and in anticipation of spring. The “gleaming” of Nature itself (Being itself) “reveals” this to us: “The gleaming of nature is a revealing in which ever already the whole of the year shines throughout and thus constantly anticipates the individual times

⁴ See also Capobianco, Engaging Heidegger, op. cit., chs. 3 and 4.
⁵ Capobianco, Engaging Heidegger, op. cit., pp. 81-82, 159.
of the year.” What we glean from this is that Dasein’s fundamental, authentic temporality (Zeitlichkeit), as it was worked out in Being and Time, takes on a new significance. Dasein’s temporality is structured as it is only because it is correlated to the temporality (Temporalität), the time-space (Zeit-Raum), of Being itself. Being unfolds Dasein. Being temporalizes Dasein. This is the leitmotiv of the later Heidegger’s thinking on time, and therein we recognize a principal effect of die Kehre in his thinking after Being and Time.

Heidegger looks to the poem “Autumn” again and seeks to better understand the character of the “higher” revealing that is announced in the first verse line. The key, he suggests, is to be found in the last two lines:

The whole meaning of the bright image lives
As an image, golden splendor hovering all about.

He reads these lines this way: “The ‘bright image’ is the shining look of the autumnally completed year. Yet the whole of this completion ‘lives’ as one single image that is formed, that is, shows itself to non-sensuous seeing as ‘golden splendor,’ which hovers about (umschwebt) everything and thus appears as ‘the whole meaning.’” This explication is dense and difficult to follow, but his meaning appears to be that Nature (the one, the simple, Being), which unfolds the landscape (all beings), manifests itself to us in a special manner that is different from the way that discrete things are manifest to us. Nature (Being) shows itself to us, but not as a being, not as something in the landscape. Therefore, we “see” Nature (Being) differently from the way that we “see” things. Not an ordinary seeing or perception, but a special “seeing” that glimpses the “whole” process of the unfolding of all things—the very presencing itself of everything. Presencing itself (Nature, Being) is a “golden splendor” that suffuses, bathes (‘hovers about’) everything that is. Heidegger does not mean to say, I think, that this special “seeing” is “non-sensuous” in the strict sense; rather, he wishes only to distinguish our “seeing” of Nature (Being) from our usual “seeing” of things. And, again, we can “see” Nature (Being) only because presencing itself is manifest to us in this special, “higher” way. Since the manifestation of Nature (Being) is unique, he can maintain, not in this particular commentary but in other statements in these same years, that Being is, relative to beings, inapparent. But, to repeat, this means only that Being is no being (Nature is not the landscape); Being is the No-thing that nonetheless shines out brightly to those who can “see” in this special way.

There is no question, then, that for Heidegger, Nature (the One, the Simple, Being) manifests itself to us; it is the “higher revealing” that Holderlin heralded.

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6 We find one such comment in the protocol for the last seminar at Zähringen on 8 September 1973, in GA 15, p. 399. And here, too, it is perfectly clear that Heidegger means that Being/presencing itself/dasein “shows itself”—manifests itself—in a different way from “beings” and that, therefore, a “phenomenology of the inapparent” is needed.
This “higher” manifestation is “gleaming” and “golden,” and he observes that these are favorite words of Hölderlin’s poetizing. What he does not mention, however, is that they are also favorite words of his own thinking. In the later work, there are numerous instances of his use of these words, and he had undertaken an excursus on these and related words in Pindar’s Isthmian 5 in an undelivered lecture course on Anaximander that was probably prepared for 1942.7 Being “shines forth” in a unique manner, and the uniqueness is captured especially by the poetic words “gleaming” (Glänzen) and “golden” (golden). Hence Heidegger comments, speaking as much for himself as for Hölderlin:

“Golden” names the highest and richest gleaming, the most luminous and most pure shining. The golden gleaming hovers about the whole, forms its wholeness, and is the completing. Nevertheless, “higher revealing” cannot be considered simply as a lacking remainder to be added on. The completing is not a supplement. Rather, it brings forth in the first place the orb of the wholeness of the whole that hovers about everything, just as a shining wreathe “wreathe” everything that appears. The “higher revealing” happens in the gleaming that completes [im ergänzen-den Glänzen]. This is nature—allows nature to linger as itself. And in this way, accordingly, is nature “divine.”

Nature (Being) shows itself as the gleaming “whole” that allows all beings to be and may be likened to a “shining wreathe” that “wreathe” everything that appears.” As this radiant “orb of the wholeness of the whole,” Nature (Being) is the “divine,” the holy. Most assuredly, this does not speak to any kind of traditional onto-theology. Nonetheless, this language does reflect the later Heidegger’s profound and abiding reverence for Nature (Being) as φύσις as the unceasing emerging, lingering, passing away of all beings and things, and of his experience of the essential joy that comes with our releasement to and harmonizing with the Being-way.8 Nature (Being), das Heitere, the Bright and Joyful itself—and our


8 Regarding such reverence and joy, we are reminded of a number of American thinkers and poets, including Jefferson, Irving, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Frost—and E.E. Cummings: “around me surges a miracle of unceasing/birth and glory and death and resurrection;” from his poem “i am a little church (no great cathedral)” (1958). E.E. Cummings, Selected Poems (New York: Liveright Press, 1994), p. 168.
relation to Nature (Being)—is for him the “brighter bliss” spoken of in Hölderlin’s line of verse:

When out of heaven brighter bliss
pours forth...

Finally, he returns once more to the first line of the poem: “Nature’s gleaming is higher revealing.” He observes that, in the end, this verse line is perhaps best elucidated by Hölderlin himself through another poem of his, a very special poem because it was probably composed on the last day of his life. The title of the poem is Die Aussicht, “The View,” and I note that it is hardly known to English readers since no translation of it appears in any major collection of Hölderlin’s poems. According to Heidegger, this poem is Hölderlin’s final gift to us, and he continues:

It opens to those who hear a view into the being [Dasein] of the poet, who speaks from out of the silent brightness of the dark night of his spirit that has come to rest. The poem is a lasting gift wherein the poet’s glimpse of the essence shelters in the simple word the “whole meaning” of everything that appears, in order to entrust it to our language as “the view” for all who see.

Heidegger presents the poem in full, and here it is in our translation:

The View

When into the distance passes the life of people dwelling,
Where into the distance glimmers the time of the vines,
Comes also thereby the empty fields of summer,
The forest with its dark image appears.

That nature completes the image of the seasons,
That nature stays, as the seasons glide along in haste,
Is from fulfillment, then high heaven gleams
Upon the people, as trees are wreathed with blooms.

Although Heidegger does not comment further on this poem, we can readily understand why he found it to be a culminating poetic statement of what he had attempted to say about the poem “Autumn.” The first stanza speaks to the temporality of Nature itself wherein and whereby all things, including ourselves, sojourn. The second stanza brings his fundamental message home: “That nature stays, as the seasons glide along in haste.” All that is given comes and goes, arrives and departs, but the giving itself (Nature, Being) “stays,” that is, remains one, whole, simple, complete. All things flow from out of “fulfillment” (Nature), and from out
of Nature ("high heaven") there "gleams," there pours forth, upon us, "people dwelling," a wholesomeness that makes us whole and brings us into the fullness of our essencing. For the later Heidegger especially, the gleaming, glistening, glimmering, glittering, glowing that is the manifestness of Being to Dasein—the φῶς at the very core of φαύνεσθαι—calls forth from us wonder and astonishment and great joy; brightens, lightens, and opens us; inclines our thinking toward thanking; and humbles us into recognizing the limit of all our saying, language, meaning—or as the poet expressed this, cited so approvingly by Heidegger at the close of his commentary:

Yet so very simple the images, so very holy these, that one is really often fearful of describing these.