

DOI: 10.1111/gequ.12407

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The divine and the open text: Five steps for reading Hölderlin's *Homburger Folioheft*

Jakob Helmut Deibl^{1,2} 

¹Research Centre Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

²Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Regensburg, Regensburg, Germany

Correspondence

Schenkenstraße 8–10, Universität Wien, 1010 WIEN, Österreich.

Email: helmut.jakob.deibl@univie.ac.at

Abstract

This article deals with Hölderlin's *Homburger Folioheft*. It elaborates on the thesis that the question of God or the divine can contribute to exploring both the richness of the poet's extensive manuscript, which fans out in many textual stages, and its fragmentary form. I argue that, despite its fragile textual form, the collection must be perceived as a unity and that reading it means oscillating between the textual stages without privileging the last version. I show that the reference to the divine often can be found at the core of the poet's vast changes to the text. The absence and return of the divine introduces a transformative dynamic into the text, a dynamic about which Hölderlin himself reflects in some passages.

Dreifach umschreibe Du es,
Doch ungesprochen auch, wie es da ist,
Unschuldige muss er bleiben
("Germanien," *Homburger Folioheft* 62: 20–22)

RICHNESS AND FRAGILITY

The 35th annual conference of the *Internationale Hölderlin Gesellschaft* in Bad Homburg, Germany, in 2016 was dedicated to Friedrich Hölderlin's *Homburger Folioheft* (HF), a fragmentary corpus of manuscripts that is currently highly

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Authors. *The German Quarterly* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of American Association of Teachers of German.

debated.¹ Sabine Doering, then President of the Society, encouraged further research on the work when she spoke of the “in seinem poetischen Reichtum noch immer nicht ganz erschlossenen Manuskript Hölderlins” (Doering 306).

The first person to take the fragments seriously and to integrate many of them into a systematic interpretation of Hölderlin was the theologian Erich Przywara (1889–1972) in his 1949 book entitled *Hölderlin*.² This book, which has received almost no attention in research on either Hölderlin or Przywara, spans a range from Hölderlin’s earliest poems to the fragments of the *HF*, which Przywara interprets from an apocalyptic point of view.³ Przywara states that these fragments reveal the (hidden) core of Hölderlin’s entire oeuvre:

In diesen Entwürfen und Bruchstücken brechen jene Grundmotive hervor, die durch den gesamten Hölderlin hindurch wirken, aber verhüllt. Sie bleiben offenbar in einem tieferen Sinne Entwürfe und Bruchstücke: in dem Sinne, daß es ihm versagt bleibt, diese tieferen Grundmotive in voller Klarheit auszusprechen. (Przywara 151)

According to Przywara, Hölderlin’s texts are deeply imbued with the clash of two different conceptions of history. Opposed to conceptions of completion and harmony (*Hellenic thinking*) that prevailed for some time in his writing, the perception of history in its ruptures (*Johannine-apocalyptic thinking*) is revealed in the fragments belonging to the *HF* (and in other fragments as well). These ruptures even permeate the form of the text, which assumes a fragile character: Przywara regards the fragmentarity and fragility not only as a deficiency, but also as unveiling an apocalyptic truth about reality. In line with biblical thinking, Przywara considers the apocalyptic not as hopelessness, but rather as the breakthrough of the saving God.

In the following, I will not delve into Przywara’s reading of Hölderlin, but I would like to build upon his insight by focusing on the concept of God or the divine in the fragments of the *HF*. I will elaborate on the thesis that the question of God or the divine can contribute to exploring both the “poetischen Reichtum” (Doering 306) of Hölderlin’s manuscript and its fragmentary and fragile form. Richness and fragility are both related to the presence and absence of the divine in the text.

I will proceed in five steps. First, I will elaborate on the perception of the *HF* as a unity—despite its fragile textual form. Then, I will explain what a reading that takes into account the fragile textual form of the *HF* might look like. Next, I will address the first passage in the *HF* that undergoes thorough revision—a passage related to the absence and return of the holy names, or the divine. In a further step, I will show what dynamic the question of the divine introduces into the text. Finally, I will interpret two passages of the *HF* as poetological commentaries on the position of both the poet and reader in relationship to the text. Each section will discuss a concrete example from the *HF*.

So far, no study exists on the significance of the *Gottesfrage* in the *HF*. The original contribution of this article lies in placing the reference to the divine in direct

connection with the fragility and overflowing richness of the text. Where the concept of God appears in the text, it undergoes a dynamization that ranges from rupture to multiplication. Certainly, this textual disruption occurs in other places in Hölderlin's work as well, but the *HF* is particularly well suited for this study: the frequency with which this connection is found in a delimited corpus of great importance for Hölderlin's work suggests that the pattern is not merely random.

TEXTUAL UNITY AND GUIDING MOTIFS (FIRST STEP)

The growing interest in the *HF* confronts us with the fundamental question of how best to approach this ninety-two-page collection of manuscripts written and arranged by Hölderlin from 1801–06. The *HF* emerged from many stages of revision but remained in an unfinished state and was not published by the author himself. In addition to some of Hölderlin's best-known poems ("Heimkunft," "Brod und Wein," "Der Einzige"), it contains numerous drafts, fragments, notations, glosses, and blank pages. Its textual form comprises clean copies, overlapping text stages,⁴ and interleaved text segments, and sometimes shows a tendency toward dissolution. In the course of revisions, Hölderlin made vast changes to the text, but often without rendering earlier stages invalid by crossing them out—a process that Johann Kreuzer has called "Sprachfindung" (84).

Given the heterogeneous character of its shape and the huge number of topics it touches upon, the *HF* cannot be brought under one structuring principle, nor is there just one privileged approach to it. Roland Reuß best summed up these difficulties: "Die 92 Seiten des Folioheftes widerstreben konventionellen methodischen 'Zugriffen' der literaturwissenschaftlichen Gegenstandsaneignung" (Reuß, *Ordnung* 80). Nevertheless, the *HF* forms a unity, with twenty-two interleaved double leaves (plus an extra double sheet attached) composing *one* volume. According to Reuß, approaching the *HF* in its "integrale Werkzusammenhang" (86) is suggested by its specific *booklet* form:

Der Schutz bereits, den die ineinandergelegten Blätter bieten, deutet auf so etwas wie ein zu Bewahrendes, das als Ensemble angelegt ist – und es lohnt sich durchaus, freilich vorurteilsfrei und ohne dogmatische Grundannahmen, der Frage nach Kohäsion und Kohärenz des Heftes insgesamt nachzugehen. (86)

This goes along with Emery E. George's assessment that Hölderlin's concern was clearly "not to compose his poems as individual works of art, but rather to group them or at least to plan certain sequences." Comprehensive thematic and "structural connections" open up the possibility of treating the *HF* as an "einheitliches literarisches Phänomen" (George 282–83) despite its textual fragility. The unity of the collection in the shape of a booklet does not deprive the single elements of their individuality, it is rather a quality that permeates all the individual elements (poems,

segments, notations, and glosses) and makes the *HF* a specific reference point for interpretation.⁵ As a collection, the *HF* provides a sheltered space for individual fragments and segments that would otherwise be detached from any context or perhaps be lost altogether. Taking the *HF* seriously as a coherent corpus facilitates perceiving internal connections, keywords, lines of development, thematic focal points, and leitmotifs. This allows for constructing constellations of textual elements that initially might appear to be unconnected.

The *HF* as an ensemble contains leitmotifs that indicate possible but not exclusive paths to guide the reader through the textual landscape.⁶ This article argues that the question of the divine—as the question of the absence and the return of God (in the text)—represents one such key to the corpus. That is thematically not unusual for Hölderlin’s work: in Hölderlin’s entire poetic and philosophical oeuvre, the question of God (*Gottesfrage*) is a central motif.⁷ Also in the *HF*, the concept of God or the divine can be found on almost every page of the volume, appearing in various guises as God, gods or demi-gods, Father, Zeus, Spirit, Heracles, Christ, and the Celestials, among others.⁸

An example illustrates how references to the divine make it possible to draw an arc across many pages of the *HF*. The draft of the hymn “Patmos” begins with the gnome: “Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott” (*HF* 19, lines 15–16). These verses were not present in the first-draft stage and were only inserted afterward over the pre-existing text, “Wo aber die Gefahr ist wächst / Das Rettende auch” (Reuß, “*Gefahr*” 11; *HF* 19, lines 17–18). The later words serve perhaps as a kind of introduction, intervention, or explanation preceding that momentous sentence that speaks of danger and salvation. To clarify this, an interpretation of the entire poem would be necessary, which is not feasible here. What is decisive for the context of this article is that Hölderlin takes up the phrase again at the end of the *HF*, but now frames it in the form of a question. The draft “Die Nymphe,” under which the title “Mnemosyne” appears, reads in part: “und fühlen / Ob nah ist der Gott” (91, lines 1–2, 8, 10).

Two forms of openness meet here. First, the meaning of the paratactic gnome from “Patmos” must remain open, for too many questions accompany it: Is “der Gott” also the subject of the sentence “Nah ist” (“Nah ist [der Gott] / Und [er ist] schwer zu fassen”) or is its subject missing (“Nah ist [–] / Und schwer zu fassen [ist] der Gott”)? If “der Gott” is also the subject of “Nah ist” and one could therefore say “Nah ist der Gott,” why is it then “*Und* schwer zu fassen”? Should it not rather be: “Nah ist der Gott, *aber* schwer zu fassen”?⁹ It is important to note that with the phrase containing “der Gott” an indeterminate openness occurs: What is near? Why is it delayed by not being mentioned immediately in the very first line (“Nah ist...”), but only at the end of the second line (“... der Gott”)? A second, related form of openness appears in “Die Nymphe” in the form of a question: it is now necessary to “fühlen / Ob nah ist der Gott.” Unlike in “Patmos,” there is no doubt here that “der Gott” is the subject of the sentence. However, the question arises as to whether the sentence, whose subject has now been clarified, is true at all. We must *feel* “Ob nah ist der Gott.”

Soon afterward, in “Die Nymphe,” there is another passage that corresponds to the two mentioned above: “Lang ist / Die Zeit, es ereignet sich aber / Das Wahre” (*HF* 91, lines 39–41). Originally, line 39 only read “Lang ist” and therefore resembled “Nah ist” from “Patmos” very closely (only later did it become “Lang ist die Zeit”). Both lines consist of two monosyllabic words and, strikingly, begin with a predicate adjective (“Nah ist” / “Lang ist”), delaying the subject and leading the reader to ask who or what is near or long. With the answers—God and time—two key concepts of the *HF* are established, the relationship of which will be referred to also in the following sections. Here it may suffice to have shown how one can find important correspondences between individual phrases if one considers the *HF* as a unity, as one corpus.

FIDELITY TO THE FRAGILE TEXTUAL FORM OF THE *HF* (SECOND STEP)

As critics have tried to conceive of the *HF* in its entirety without overlooking its fragile textual form, they have often employed the metaphor of a workshop. In contrast to the notion of the corpus as a ruin, Dietrich Uffhausen writes, “Kein Trümmerfeld also, das da vor uns liegt, sondern die Werkstätte eines Dichters” (Uffhausen 176). In reference to this metaphor, Ursula Brauer notes that “Werkstätten, solange in ihnen gearbeitet wird, pflegen nicht aufgeräumt zu sein” (268). Anke Bennholdt-Thomsen and Alberto Guzzoni also describe the manuscript collection as “werkstattsmäßig” (7). With the metaphor of a workshop, these critics all bring into focus a place associated not with a finished product but with a working process. Michael Franz slightly modifies the metaphor when he talks of an “Atelier” (9) and emphasizes the artistic character of this open process.

The workshop and studio metaphors describe the form in which the *HF* has been handed down to us today and with which we must come to terms. However, there is no evidence that Hölderlin as a poet would have aspired to this particular shape of his texts nor did he aim for deliberate fragmentation (Uffhausen 185). As Kreuzer is right to have noted, it must not be claimed that “Hölderlin habe in den ‘Gesängen’ eine fertige Gestalt nicht mehr angestrebt” (71). The absence of a final textual form is not a strategic poetic ploy; rather, it indicates a confrontation with that which eludes direct representability. As I will discuss below, the fragmentary form can be seen also as an expression of the struggle with the question of the divine and of how God can be addressed in language.

Gunter Martens’s reconstruction of the development of the *HF* plausibly suggests that Hölderlin started to compose the volume as part of a larger project of publishing a series of poems (“Was ist”). Indeed, the volume begins with three elegies, followed by three hymns in free rhythm, which indicates a precisely planned conception. The three elegies are written as a clean copy, and the hymns too are very well worked out, albeit incomplete. The first gaps in the text become apparent in “Patmos,” the second of the three hymns. Obviously, the intention of the *HF* changes. Instead of a

fair copy for publishing, it becomes more and more a “Werkstatt,” as Martens also frames it (51–52). If one continues to follow the course of the booklet, the texts take on the character of drafts in varying degrees of development. Later, when the process of fair copy had already stalled, Hölderlin also made changes to the already completed elegies at the beginning of the volume.

Since Hölderlin added new stages of single words or lines next to or above an already existing text version without crossing out the previous ones, many pages of the *HF* represent a web of text segments that is difficult to disentangle. In recent decades, the textual genesis and chronological sequence of the stages have been reconstructed in an impressive manner, with the edition of the *HF* in the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* (a continuous facsimile edition with a diplomatic transcription by D.E. Sattler and Emery E. George) and the presentation of the *HF* on the homepage of the Württembergische Landesbibliothek (Hans Gerhard Steimer’s *Diachrone Darstellung*, <https://homburgfolio.wlb-stuttgart.de/>) representing milestones.

The great success in discerning the stages and presenting them in chronological order must not lead us to consider the latest stages as the authorized final versions. Unravelling the evolutionary development of the text cannot compensate for the lack of a final text. It is not self-evident to regard a later stage as more significant than an earlier one, relegating the earlier stage to a merely preliminary status if it has not been crossed out. Thus, instead of the principle of linear evolutionary enhancement of a text, this article is guided by a principle of fidelity to the text in its actual form. Martens argues, “dass zumindest für den Fall, dass keine ausdrücklichen Tilgungen des Dichters vorliegen, von einer alternativen (oder gar mehrfachen) Geltung neben- oder übereinander geschriebener Texte auszugehen ist” (“Die Seiten” 147). It is not about corrections, but about “Erweiterungen des Vorstellungsraums” according to the “Gestaltungsprinzip der Simultaneität, das sich weitgehend einer Widergabe in der Linearität des Druckes sperrt” (148–49). Attempts to constitute a (hypothetical) final text from the latest stages risk abandoning the richness of these stages. This insight of Martens has not yet been fully accepted in the research. Certainly, in light of the publication of the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* and the research of the past decades, the current consensus is to no longer understand Hölderlin’s work as a collection of finished texts. A deep awareness of the poetic process has indeed emerged. Nevertheless, I have the impression that the focus is often on the final stage of revision. For example, in his highly commendable study of an important passage from the elegy “Heimkunft,” Wolfram Groddeck writes that the key question is “welche Variante die letzte ist und folglich für den Kontext der Reinschrift die verbindliche Formulierung darstellt” (Groddeck 255).

Reading or interpreting the *HF* means then not only finding constellations of textual elements, such as keywords and leitmotifs, throughout the *HF*, as shown in the preceding section, but also oscillating between different stages. With Martens we can say that a linear reading of the text or “eine eindimensional-schlüssige Interpretation” would deprive the “komplexen poetologischen Strukturen” of their “bewußt gesetzte Mehrdeutigkeit” (*Hölderlins Poetik* 39). In the form in which the *HF* has been handed

down to us, we as readers are drawn into a poetic process. The unfinished (or unfinishable) nature of the text was not intended by the poet, but nonetheless does not simply represent a failure. We can also read it as the opening of new dimensions of meaning. Therefore, we must not only interpret the fragments as if they were finished texts, but also as the places where *a linear text formation is interrupted* and where drafts either cease or their stages multiply.

In this respect, we can approach the *HF* as an “open work” (Eco) that invites the cooperation of the reader. Since a linear reading cannot do justice to the text, which fans out into many stages, significant engagement on the part of the reader is required. The reader must resist separating different stages of a poem, all of which can more or less lead to different final texts, and instead must move between the stages to preserve the text’s quality of multiplicity. Meaning can result from the transitions between the stages, from the ruptures in the text, and from the constellations of individual text segments. Of course no single interpretation can claim ultimate certainty. The textual form of the *HF* forces us to keep multiple meanings in a space of possibility.

Here, I turn to an example to illustrate fidelity to the text in its stages and its fragile form, and show, as in the previous section, how a single reference opens up onto other texts of the *HF*. I focus on a poem entitled “Die Titanen,” which has remained in draft status. It is the third of Hölderlin’s hymnic poems, which are written in free verse, and it follows the aforementioned poem “Patmos.”

The location of the poem after “Patmos” is important, since, as argued, that poem leaves the reader with a problem. The aforementioned gnome “Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott” opens the poem, which proceeds by posing the question of how religious (in this case Christian) myth can inspire people with forms of community and memory that are still vivid in modernity, that is, since the time of Christ (Vöhler 217–38). At the end, the poet offers the reader a word of comfort: “der Vater aber liebt / Der über allem waltet / Am meisten, daß gepflegt werde / Der veste Buchstab und Bestehendes wohl / Gedeutet. Dem folgt deutscher Gesang” (*HF* 28, lines 7–11). But what form should this new (German) *Gesang* take? If we continue reading in the *HF*, it is not the new song that follows, but a further problematization of what faithfulness to tradition—*keeping the letter* and *interpreting what endures*—can mean. “Die Titanen” begins with a note of disillusionment, the question or problem of “Patmos” has not been solved. The poem declares: “Nicht ist es aber / Die Zeit” (lines 13–14). These gnomic words, a later addition to the text, direct attention to the notion of time, which already pervaded “Patmos.” This poem warned the reader not to miss the right time: “Denn wiederkommen sollt es / Zu rechter Zeit. Nicht wär es gut / Gewesen, später” (24, lines 1, 3, 6).¹⁰ Now we read at the beginning of “Die Titanen” that *the time is not*. In fact, the poem seems to announce a delay of what “Patmos” had put forward at the end as a consolation or a prospect. However, if we recall “Die Nympe,” we can expect an eventual answer. The poem gives us hope that the delay that “Die Titanen” presents is not an endless postponement: “Lang ist / Die Zeit, es ereignet sich aber / Das Wahre” (91, lines 39–41).

The first stanza of “Die Titanen” reveals the problem that generals and poets, men and women, in ancient and modern times, have died: they are no longer the living center of the community to which the poetic “I” belongs. For the time being, the poetic “I” is only left with the possibility of asking, “Wohin sie sind” (*HF* 28, line 29). However, a little later in the second stanza it reads: “Viel offenbaret der Gott” (29, line 6). This sentence covers exactly one line and ends with a full stop. Between the announcement of the search for the deceased, which gives us cause for thought (compare 28, line 20), and the affirmation that God (still) reveals much, come three verses that Hölderlin revised several times. They are at the top of a new page (29), opposite the last stanza of “Patmos,” which spoke of faithfulness to Scripture. If one’s eye is drawn from the last stanza of “Patmos” to the page next to it, one finds the theme of writing and fidelity (“daß gepflegt werde / Der veste Buchstab und Bestehendes wohl / Gedeutet”) taken up again. These few references clearly show a connection between “Patmos” and “Die Titanen.”

Let us now look in more detail at the three verses that are situated between “Wohin sie sind” (*HF* 28) and “Viel offenbaret der Gott” (29). If we follow the diachronic rendering of the *HF*, Hölderlin first writes:

Denn manches von ihnen ist
In treuen Schriften überblieben

Although many important women and men have died and we ask where they have gone, still *much of them*—some quality of who they were—has been handed down in writing. With the addition of two more lines, the passage then assumes a finished form—four lines, two full sentences that end with a full stop. It reads:

Denn manches von ihnen ist
In treuen Schriften überblieben
Und manches in Sagen der Zeit.
Viel offenbaret der Gott.

The written texts are complemented by the oral legends and the hint that God reveals much. Later, however, Hölderlin revised the passage. Note that the changes occur very close to a fundamental statement about God. In the following, the later stage is indicated in italics:

Denn manches von ihnen ist
In treuen Schriften überblieben *und manches*
In des Raumes Grenzen
Und manches in Sagen der Zeit. *Gestalten der Zeit.*
Viel offenbaret der Gott.

Hölderlin revised these lines again and repeated what he had already written in the previous phase of revision. These last additions are indicated with bold text.

Denn manches von ihnen ist
 In treuen Schriften überblieben *und manches*
 In des Raumes Grenzen
 Und manches in Sagen der Zeit. *Gestalten der Zeit.*
In des Raumes Grenzen in Gestalten der Zeit
 Viel offenbaret der Gott.

Although no new material is added in this revision, syntagms are repeated and regrouped. While Norbert Hellingrath (4: 208), Friedrich Beißner's *Stuttgarter Ausgabe* (2: 217, 850), and Jochen Schmidt's edition in the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag (1: 390) only give the first version, Michael Knaupp's *Münchener Ausgabe* presents the last revision phase as conclusive:

Denn manches von ihnen ist
 In treuen Schriften überblieben und manches
 In des Raumes Grenzen in Gestalten der Zeit.
 Viel offenbaret der Gott. (1: 391)

We thus encounter two different renditions of the verses, a first and a second (or last) version, so to speak, both of which can be regarded as complete.¹¹ This is certainly not wrong; however, Hölderlin himself did not cross out or eliminate the earlier version of the text. The complex process of revision becomes invisible with a focus on either the first or the final version, and the tension that lies in the existing text is lost.

Let us now recapitulate the process and try to move between the stages without neglecting any of them. Hölderlin arrives at a first formulation that sees the great characters who have died as remaining in the writings and (oral) sagas. This formulation has a calm and clear shape; the end of each line coincides with a unit of meaning: "Und manches von ihnen ist / In treuen Schriften überblieben / Und manches in Sagen der Zeit. / Viel offenbaret der Gott." As Hölderlin now brings forward "und manches" into the second line ("In treuen Schriften überblieben und manches"), the formulation gains speed and becomes more restless: line end and sense unit no longer correspond. Is this a first indication that the process of transmission itself is becoming precarious? True, the writings remain, but the flow of reading falters. The words "und manches" already intrude into the verse that speaks of the writings, but then the end of the verse is reached: "In treuen Schriften überblieben und manches." Do the writings still correspond to the sagas of the respective time ("in Sagen der Zeit")? Or do we rather have to ask where and when those writings continue to have an effect? The revision gives the following answer: what remains has an effect within the boundaries of space; it is spatially limited ("In des Raumes Grenzen") and not universal, and it must embody itself (again and again) in individual characters of the respective time ("in Gestalten

der Zeit”). In contrast to the transmission of what has been handed down in the sagas, its embodiment in characters at a certain place at a certain time increasingly becomes the focus of the text.

The sentence “Viel offenbaret der Gott” remains unchanged. What effect does it have on the text in transition? Does it relieve the situation of the complex events of transmission or does it make the whole problem even more urgent? We could summarize the first view in this way: the process of transmission has become precarious, but God still reveals much. The second view would be that while God does reveal much, this is in danger of fading into nothingness because the old forms of transmission that we have inherited from great women and men no longer provide significant opportunity to express what God reveals. I plead for preserving this ambivalence.

The quoted passage with its different stages does not offer a solution; rather, it reveals a problem that becomes virulent already in “Patmos” and is further elaborated in “Die Titanen.” The entire *HF* participates in this difficulty and is itself an attempt to deal with it: Can the poet develop a form of song that is mindful of the great women and men of the past and at the same time contributes to an embodiment of their memory in a new guise? The poetic process that becomes visible in the passage through the stages is part of this search for new forms of expression for what has remained “In treuen Schriften.”

THE DISAPPEARANCE AND THE RETURN OF THE DIVINE (THIRD STEP)

In this section, I will show that the textual dynamic of the *HF* is closely connected to the question of the divine. As already noted, God or the divine can be found on almost every page of the *HF* and can function as a leitmotif for its interpretation. However, the concept of God or the divine is crucial for understanding the text not only due to its frequent mention. Remarkably often, it appears at the core of the author’s vast changes to the text that cause it to rupture or fan out into numerous alternative stages and in this way take on a non-definitive, fragile shape. The presence and absence of the divine acts as a dynamizing force within the text, since it prevents a final, closed form of the text and opens it up to new possibilities and to constant re-elaboration.

Let us dwell for a moment on the quotation from “Die Titanen” just discussed: “In treuen Schriften überblieben.” In a manner similar to the approach here, Felix Christen also references this phrase in his consideration of how we can handle a text that has been handed down to us only as a draft (“Die Titanen” and, more generally, the *HF*). However, he refers less to the multiplication of versions than to the breaks and gaps in the text. He asks how *we* ourselves can be faithful to this text that is faithful to us (“In *treuen* Schriften überblieben”) and answers: “Liegt mit einem Entwurf kein vollendetes Gedicht vor, so umfasst seine ‘Einheit’ das Entworfenen ebenso wie das nicht Ausgeführte: die Lücken zwischen den Entwurfsteilen” (Christen 102). With regard to the *HF*, we can say: As readers, we must remain faithful to the text in its concrete form, with its gaps, with what is missing and what is lost—not only to what

remains at the end of a complex process of transmission, edition, and re-elaboration. I would like to show this with an example from the elegy “Heimkunft,” which is closely connected to the disappearance and reappearance of God in the text.

“Heimkunft,” the first text in the collection, appears to have initially been written out as a clean copy. The poem consists of six stanzas; revisions to the text first appear in the second part (stanzas four to six) and accumulate especially in the sixth stanza, where, for the first time in the *HF*, a passage has been completely revised. That passage touches on the issue of the speakability of the holy names or the name of God. In the clean copy we read:

Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Nahmen,
Herzen schlagen und doch bleibt die Rede zurück? (HF 4, lines 34, 38)

At this point, not only alternative versions to single words are suggested (as before), but a completely new version of a distich is given. With hardly any deletions, this pair of lines develops over several stages that I cannot report on in detail here.¹² Knaupp’s *Münchener Ausgabe*, which draws on Sattler’s *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, reconstructs the following final version:

Aber Erfindungen gehn, wo Einfälle das Haus hat
Arm ist der Geist Deutscher. Geheimerer Sinn. (1: 371)

The *holy names*, which refer to the possibility of addressing the divine and which in the first version can already solely be stated *in their absence* (“es fehlen heilige Nahmen”), are not crossed out, but several other versions are written above them, in which the holy names are not mentioned. If we move between the stages, we can see that the revisions accomplish what the original version expressed thematically: they show the process that leads to the absence of the holy names in the text. This absence becomes indiscernible if one focuses just on the last stage. Oscillating between the stages, we must preserve that which would be at risk of being lost as an obsolete stage in a consideration solely focusing on the genetic development of the text. The absence of the holy names, first pronounced denotatively, then accomplished performatively in the stages, must be maintained.

Traversing the stages, we undergo a transition between a question (“und doch bleibt die Rede zurück?”) and its gnomic, sentence-like, repeatedly varied answers:

Feinlich wie sichs giebet eigenen Sinn (HF 4, line 36)
Arm ist der Geist Deutscher. Ein höherer Sinn. (line 35)
Arm ist der Geist Deutscher. Ein zärtlicher Sinn. (lines 34–35)
Arm ist der Geist Deutscher. Geheimerer Sinn. (lines 34, 39)

These versions ultimately result in a barely hinted-at meaning that simultaneously withdraws itself: “Geheimerer Sinn.” The newly emerging text, which no longer

mentions the holy names, cannot irretrievably detach itself from them and retains the reference to them—just as in the second line of the first version of the distich, the beating of hearts (“Herzen schlagen”) expresses a form of affective connectedness to the missing holy names. Yet these new stages still cannot pronounce them, as in the first version (“doch bleibt die Rede zurück”). If one looks at the two verses and their different stages, they show the tension that accompanies the im-/possibility of naming the name of God, which becomes visible in the text as a trace of editing. The repeated revisions that are grouped around the absence of the holy names can be interpreted as an expression of the struggle to find God’s name in the text. They represent an opened space of possibility, which the reader can traverse in a repetitive reading.

Many pages later in the folio, on page 70, the holy names reappear in the text: “heilige Nahmen, o Gesang” (*HF* 70, line 22). This page, which has so far received little attention in the scholarship, connects the recurrence of the holy names with the overcoming of resistance in the renewal of song, as signaled by the “aber” in the line “wir aber singen” (line 1). Page 70 also raises the issue of how the renewal of the holy names takes place in the text of the *HF* itself (“dasselbst”): “schon blühen daselbst / heilige Nahmen, o Gesang, aber” (lines 14, 22). This “aber,” which is not succeeded by anything, underlines the precarious situation of the statement. Just as the distich quoted earlier has a performative character in that it carries out the absence of the holy names in the stages themselves, so too page 70 not only speaks of the holy names but also (performatively) introduces a new name for God: in the middle of the page, Hölderlin offers the name “Gott in Anmuth” (line 13).

In Kantian terminology, the word *Anmuth* refers to an aesthetic quality. It is neither a theoretical description of an object of knowledge nor does it belong to the realm of practical (i.e. ethical) action. Rather, it refers to a mood or atmosphere that encompasses subject and object and overcomes their separation. In addition, the verb *anmuten* refers to a mode of referencing that goes beyond direct pointing and the intentional accessing of an object. This space beyond the separation of subject and object, beyond denotative meaning and immediate access, allows Hölderlin to speak (again) of God. The realm of *Anmuth* is indeed opened by divine spirit—“und zu athmen die Anmuth, / Sie, die geschickliche, schenkt ihnen ein göttlicher Geist” (*HF* 11, line 15–16)—and traverses time, flourishing in the past, present, and in a time to come—“Anmuth blühet, wie einst, und gegenwärtiger Geist kömmt” (2, line 10). The poet’s task, then, is to give *Anmuth* aesthetic expression in his song (“wir aber singen”).

THE DYNAMIC OF GOD WITHIN THE CHANGES OF THE TEXT (FOURTH STEP)

In the selected examples from the *HF*, we encountered the divine or the holy names in their presence (“Viel offenbaret der Gott”; “Nah ist / [...] der Gott”; “schon blühen daselbst / heilige Nahmen”), absence (“es fehlen heilige Nahmen”) or

questionableness (“ob nah ist der Gott”). In each case, the reference to the divine was accompanied by changes in the text. While the *HF* does not find an answer to the question of God (*Gottesfrage*), the question keeps the text moving.

I would now like to address in more detail the dynamizing force that emanates from the divine and affects the text. For this purpose, I refer to a pivotal passage in the elegy “Brod und Wein” (*HF* 5–10), which follows in the *HF* after “Heimkunft.” This poem, too, was initially written out by Hölderlin in fair copy in the *HF*, before the poet began to revise the text. The additional layers of “Brod und Wein” exceed those of “Heimkunft” many times over. They begin at the end of the third stanza, that is, at a turning point in this nine-stanza poem. We can reconstruct three versions of the last line of that stanza, none of which are deleted:

Dort ist das Sehnen, o dort schauen zufrieden wir auf. (7, line 1)
 Dorther kommt und zurück deutet der kommende Gott. (line 3)
 Dorther kommt und da lachet verpflanzt, Gott. (lines 2–3)

With increasing intensity (“Dort . . . o dort”), the first version names a place of longing, which in the first half of the verse still seems distant, but which in the second half gives the impression that the “wir” to whom the poet ascribes himself has already reached this place and can look up satisfied, the longing having been quenched and turned into contentment. God, the divine, or the holy names do not appear in this version. In the second stage quoted above, which represents the first revision of the line, God appears in the text as coming (“der kommende Gott”), lending the line momentum. The originally linear direction (the reference to a place of longing, the imagined arrival, the transformation of longing into contentment) changes into a complex game of contradictory directions: “Dort” (first stage) develops into “Dorther” (second stage), making the second stage of the line enter into a spatial tension with the first version. This tension also shapes the second stage, namely in the transition from “Dorther kommt” to “und zurück deutet.” In this tense movement, appearing then both at the transition from the first to the second stage and within the line in its second version, God finally manifests himself, admittedly not as a static entity, but as a forthcoming God who comes from a distant imagined place of longing and points back. Any attempt here to grasp a linear trajectory of successive motions must fail in the face of the simultaneity of conflicting directions. Finally in the third stage, the adverbs of place (“Dort”; “o dort”; “Dorther”) are complemented by a “da.” For the first time, a location of God can be named. However, this place itself is marked by a shift—God occupies this place as “verpflanzt,” or transplanted. The place where God can be spoken of emerges from a complex interweaving of conflicting movements and no longer represents a stable position. Moreover God’s laughter dissolves any attempt by the reader to hold on to certain orientations and unambiguous determinations. God is thus no longer conceived of as *fundamentum inconcussum* (firm foundation) or as origin, but as the center of a series of shifting directions, as the symbol of transplantations of textual elements and perhaps ideational fluidity and even playfulness.

At this juncture at the conclusion of the third stanza begins a plethora of revisions that do not come to rest until the end of the poem. If one reads the text in its transmitted form, it seems as if abundant changes are initiated, with God as the symbol of the transplantations. Steimer's diachronic presentation of the *HF* shows that this impression corresponds to the course of development of the revisions. First, Hölderlin changed the line discussed above and then followed with many further stages of revision.

THE OPEN TEXT (FIFTH STEP)

In several steps in this article, I have located references to the divine in the *HF* in close proximity to Hölderlin's changes to the text. In many cases, revisions accumulate and the text becomes fragile where it refers to the divine. However, this is not just an external interpreter's observation; in the *HF*, there are some indications that Hölderlin himself reflected upon this. As a conclusion, I want to give two examples.

Luigi Reitani writes of the perception of the texts of the *HF* as a constellation (*una costellazione*): Many of the stages or the glosses added could be read as commentaries on passages preceding them temporally (1777). This can help us to understand some further changes in the sixth stanza of "Heimkunft" that we have not yet discussed. Before the above-mentioned distich, which speaks of the absence of the holy names, the line reads, with reference to God: "Wenn wir seegen das Mahl, wen darf ich nennen" (*HF* 4, line 25). Above this question, Hölderlin adds another question: "wie kann ich sagen" (line 24). The question related to God—the question, that is, of who the addressee of the blessing is—turns into the more fundamental question of language in general: How are we able to speak at all? If we keep in mind the original question, the new version also resonates with how the divine can become present in language at all. A little later the distich follows that speaks of the absence of the holy names, which are no longer mentioned in the later stages. Hölderlin then places on the left side, in the form of a column next to the sixth stanza, the question previously inserted into the text: "wie / kann / ich / saagen" (lines 42, 44, 46, 48). Perhaps we can think about it this way: a revision that the poet places where it concerns the naming of God ("wie kann ich sagen" next to "wen darf ich nennen") becomes a gloss that comments on the writing process itself ("wie / kann / ich / saagen"). It is above all the divine that leads language into a crisis. The *HF*, as it is handed down to us in its fragmentary and fragile character, offers a glimpse into the poet's attempts to cope with this crisis in a creative way.

The second example refers to the hymn "Germanien," which creates a picture of the time of the vanished gods and thus revolves around the topic I highlighted in all the other poems treated in this article: "Entflohene Götter! auch ihr, ihr gegenwärtigen, / Wahrhaftiger, ihr hattet eure Zeiten" (*HF* 59, lines 18–19). For Hölderlin, however, this is not an end point, but rather indicates a transformation that also concerns the divine. The poem poses the question of how the "Göttersprüche," of which there are

still countless (60, lines 16–17), can be communicated to human beings: How can there be an openness toward them (62, line 8)? In the penultimate stanza, we find a first answer:

Nicht länger darf das Geheimniß mehr
Das Ungesprochene bleiben,
Nachdem es lange verhüllt ist.
(lines 10–12)

What has been unspoken and veiled must no longer remain a mystery. But then, the poetic “I” asks how this revelation can take place so that the proper modesty of human beings toward the gods is preserved. Hölderlin writes, in a second step, that the true (the divine) must appear in the following way:

Dreifach umschreibe Du es,
Doch ungesprochen auch, wie es da ist,
Unschuldige muss [er] es bleiben. (lines 20–22)

Truth or the divine can only become accessible in a dialectic: it must appear—it must not remain unspoken—and yet at the same time it must remain unspoken. If the divine must but cannot be spoken, its utterance is at the same time its revocation. We have already come across this several times: let us consider, among the fragments on page 70, the phrase “heiligen Nahmen, o Gesang, aber,” which breaks off so abruptly with the revocation “aber”; or, at the beginning of “Patmos,” the delay that occurs after the words “Nah ist,” before the next line continues “Und schwer zu fassen der Gott”; or the original version of the distich from “Heimkunft,” in which a hiatus appears between the beating hearts and the deficiency of language: “Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Nahmen, / Herzen schlagen und doch bleibet die Rede zurück?”

Returning to the three verses just quoted from the sixth stanza of “Germanien,” we observe that Hölderlin refers to a change of medium: from utterance, which is not possible, to writing, or more precisely, “umschreiben.” Speaking allows only *one* version to be heard at a time, and several versions only in linear succession, whereas the written text can simultaneously record and show several stages. The word “umschreiben” has a double meaning in German: on the one hand, it means to revise/rewrite something already written and, on the other, to paraphrase something. What cannot be uttered can perhaps be paraphrased or rewritten. The divine cannot be expressed directly, it must be *paraphrased*. The divine cannot be represented or captured in writing; with a gesture of revocation, that which is written must be *rewritten/revise*d again and again.

The word “dreifach” (“Dreifach umschreibe Du es”) probably has both a theological and a philosophical meaning in this passage. Firstly, it refers to the Trinitarian dogma, which one could interpret with Hölderlin as a threefold circumscription of (the one) God. It is not three entities that come together, but rather one in threefold

paraphrase. Secondly, “dreifach” in the context of German Idealism also reminds us that the spiritual (*das Geistige*) or the divine never consists of a mere position (simple, immediate) or its negation (double, one step of mediation), but can only be addressed in a negation of negation (triple, two steps of mediation). This negation of negation, or mediation of mediation, no longer knows direct access either to the position or its simple negation. What is philosophically a basic idea of Hegel’s, Hölderlin has attempted to implement in the *HF* in a poetic way. Just as there is never a synthesis (of thesis and antithesis) in Hegel that brings the process of development to a settled conclusion, the multiplicity of stages in Hölderlin’s manuscripts (“Dreifach umschreibe”) cannot be reduced to an end result or a conclusion.¹³ This form of writing neither affirms nor negates the divine, but thinks of it as *the open*.¹⁴

ORCID

Jakob Helmut Deibl  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7820-0569>

ENDNOTES

¹ This research was funded in whole by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) P 36887-G. The *Homburger Folioheft* (manuscript 307), hereafter abbreviated as *HF*, is cited by page and line number according to Dietrich Sattler’s reconstruction in supplement volume 3 of the *Frankfurter Ausgabe (Faksimile Edition)*. Sattler’s page numbers correspond to the original pages in the folio. This edition appears under Hölderlin as author in the works cited, while all other Hölderlin editions appear under the names of their editors.

² See Faber 117–304.

³ Kathrein contains a chapter on Przywara’s interpretation of Hölderlin (77–100).

⁴ I use the word “stages” to refer to different *Textstufen* or *Schichten* that I basically consider to be of equal significance. In this way, I avoid the word “variants,” which gives the impression that there is an actual text to which a certain number of variants, which are to be regarded as secondary, are placed alongside. I refer primarily to the work of Gunter Martens (“Texte ohne Varianten”).

⁵ This reception has only been made possible since the publication of the *HF* as a unit in the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*. Beginning with the “Marbacher Quartheft” from Hölderlin’s youth to the “Nachtgesänge” and the *HF*, which accompanied the poet for several years, his work repeatedly reveals a yearning for the compilation of collections. Accordingly, these also represent an independent reference point that lies between individual texts and the oeuvre as a whole.

⁶ See Burdorf.

⁷ See Deibl, “Möglichkeit, Wiederholung, Offenheit.”

⁸ To my knowledge, the concept of God in the *HF* has not yet been the subject of a dedicated study.

⁹ See Deibl, *Abschied und Offenbarung*.

¹⁰ See Deibl, “Versetzungen.”

¹¹ Luigi Reitani’s edition lists both versions, one below the other (978).

¹² See Groddeck.

¹³ See Appel. The scheme of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis is an invention of Hegel’s interpreters and cannot be found in his philosophical works.

¹⁴ See Appel and Deibl.

WORKS CITED

Appel, Kurt. *Zeit und Gott. Mythos und Logos der Zeit im Anschluss an Hegel und Schelling*. Schöningh, 2008.

- Appel, Kurt, and Jakob Deibl. "Hegel, Hölderlin e l'apertura della Gottesfrage." *estetica. studie recherche*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2000, pp. 439–478.
- Beißner, Friedrich, et al., editors. *Sämtliche Werke*. By Friedrich, Hölderlin, Kohlhammer, 1942–1985. (Stuttgarter Ausgabe), 8 vols. in 15.
- Bennholdt-Thomson, Anke, und Alfredi Guzzoni. *Analecta Hölderliniana IV – Zur Dreidimensionalität der Natur*, Königshausen & Neumann, 2017.
- Brauer, Ursula. "Hölderlins hymnischer Entwurf 'Dem Fürsten'. Begründung der Textzuordnung Homburger Folioheft S. 57/58. Anmerkungen zu diesem Fragment." *Hölderlin. Philosophie und Dichtung*, edited by Valérie Lawitschka, Edition Isele, 2001, pp. 234–272.
- Burdorf, Dieter. "Der Text als Landschaft. Eine topographische Lektüre der Seiten 73 bis 76 des Homburger Folioheftes." *Neue Wege zu Hölderlin*, edited by Uwe Beyer, Königshausen & Neumann 1994, pp. 113–141. Schriften der Hölderlin Gesellschaft 18.
- Christen, Felix. "Treue Schrift. Überlegungen zu Hölderlins Entwurf 'Die Titanen.'" *Hölderlin Jahrbuch*, vol. 40, 2017, pp. 97–114.
- Deibl, Jakob Helmut. *Abschied und Offenbarung. Eine poetisch-theologische Kritik am Motiv der Totalität im Ausgang von Hölderlin*. Metzler, 2019. Studien zu Literatur und Religion 2.
- Deibl, Jakob Helmut. "Ästhetik – Poesie – Religion. Eine Verhältnisbestimmung im Ausgang von Hölderlins theoretischen Schriften mit einem Ausblick auf die Elegie 'Heimkunft.'" *Literatur/Religion*, edited by Wolfgang Braungart et al., Metzler, 2019, pp. 57–84. Studien zu Literatur und Religion 1.
- Deibl, Jakob Helmut. "Möglichkeit, Wiederholung, Offenheit. Zur Gottesfrage in Dichtung und Philosophie Hölderlins." *Gott nach Kant?*, edited by Klaus Viertbauer and Stefan Lang, Felix Meiner, 2022, pp. 149–80.
- Deibl, Jakob Helmut. "Versetzungen: Wiederkunft zu rechter Zeit? Hölderlins 'Patmos' im Gespräch mit dem Landgrafen von Homburg, dem Seher Johannes und dem Komponisten Hans Zender." *Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos. Hölderlin lesen, Ikkyū Sōjun Hören, Musik Denken*, edited by Violetta Waibel, Wallstein, 2020, pp. 239–271.
- Doering, Sabine. "Ansprache der Präsidentin zur Eröffnung der 35. Jahrestagung am Freitag, den 20. Mai 2016, in Bad Homburg vor der Höhe." *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, vol. 40, 2016–2017, pp. 306–311.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni with an introduction by David Robey, Harvard UP, 1989.
- Faber, Eva-Maria. *Kirche zwischen Identität und Differenz: die ekklesiologischen Entwürfe von Romano Guardini und Erich Przywara*. Echter, 1993.
- George, Emery E. "Homburger Folioheft." *Hölderlin Handbuch, Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, edited by Johann Kreuzer, Stuttgart, 2011.
- Groddeck, Wolfram. "Die Revision der 'Heimkunft.' Hölderlins späte Eingriffe in den Text der ersten Elegie im Homburger Folioheft." *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, vol. 28, 1992–1993, pp. 239–263.
- Hellingrath, Norbert von, et al., editors. *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch kritische Ausgabe*. By Friedrich Hölderlin, Propyläen, 1913–1923. 6 vols.
- Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by Dietrich Eberhard Sattler, Stroemfeld, 1975–2008. (Frankfurter Ausgabe), 20 vols., introductory vol., and 3 supplements.
- Kathrein, Elisabeth. *Christentum in apokalyptischer Welt: Eine Anfrage an Friedrich Hölderlin*. LIT, 2018.
- Kreuzer, Johann. "Philosophische Hintergründe der Christus-Hymne 'Der Einzige.'" *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, vol. 32, 2000, pp. 69–104.
- Knaupp, Michael, editor. *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. By Friedrich Hölderlin, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992–1993. (Münchener Ausgabe), 3 vols.
- Martens, Gunter. "Die Seiten 90–92 des Homburger Folioheftes. Bericht über die Gruppenarbeit." *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, vol. 40, 2017, pp. 142–149.
- Martens, Gunter. "Hölderlins Poetik der Polyphonie. Ein Versuch, das Hymnenfragment 'Die Nymphe/Mnemosyne' aus den Handschriften zu deuten." *Hölderlin. Sprache und Raum*, edited by Valérie Lawitschka, Edition Isele, 2008, pp. 9–45.

- Martens, Gunter. "Texte ohne Varianten? Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der Frankfurter Hölderlin-Ausgabe in der gegenwärtigen Situation der Editionsphilologie." *Probleme neugermanistischer Edition*, special issue of *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, vol. 101, 1982, pp. 43–64.
- Martens, Gunter. "Was ist und zu welchem Ende studiert man das Homburger Folioheft? Entstehung, Nutzung und Überlieferung der bedeutendsten Sammelhandschrift von Gedichten Hölderlins. Eine Spurensuche." *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, vol. 40, 2017, pp. 38–79.
- Przywara, Erich. *Hölderlin*. Glock und Lutz, 1949.
- Reitani, Luigi, editor. *Tutte le liriche*. By Friedrich Hölderlin, Mondadori, 2004.
- Reuß, Roland. "Ordnung, Chaos." *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, vol. 40, 2017, pp. 80–87.
- Reuß, Roland. "Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch (...)" *Philologie als Rettung: Essay*. Stroemfeld, 2016.
- Schmidt, Jochen, editor. *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. By Friedrich Hölderlin, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992–1994. (Klassiker-Ausgabe), 3 vols.
- Steimer, Hans Gerhard, editor. *Friedrich Hölderlin Homburger Folioheft: Diachrone Darstellung*. 2020, homburgfolio.wlb-stuttgart.de/. Accessed 3 Mar. 2023.
- Uffhausen, Dietrich. "Bevestigter Gesang: Hölderlins hymnische Spätdichtung in neuer Gestalt." *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft*, vol. 28, 1995, pp. 175–200.
- Vöhler, Martin. "'Patmos' vor dem Hintergrund von Hölderlins Idee einer neuen Griechentum und Christentum synthetisierenden Religion." *Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos. Hölderlin lesen, Ikkyū Sōjun Hören, Musik Denken*, edited by Violetta Waibel, Wallstein, 2020, pp. 217–238.

How to cite this article: Deibl, Jakob Helmut. "The divine and the open text: Five steps for reading Hölderlin's *Homburger Folioheft*." *German Quarterly*, 97, 2024, pp. 6–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gequ.12407>