

[The Ister]

The Ister

At the height of World War Two, the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century delivered a series of lectures on a poem about the Danube river, by one of Germany's greatest poets.

The philosopher was Martin Heidegger, who in 1927 achieved worldwide fame with his magnum opus, *Being and Time*. Heidegger embraced the National Socialist 'revolution' in 1933, becoming rector of Freiburg University. His inaugural address culminated in 'Heil Hitler!'

After clashing with the Nazi bureaucracy, he resigned the rectorate in 1934. Nine years later, as the tide of the war was turning against Germany, Heidegger spent the summer semester lecturing on the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin. He focused on a poem about the Danube known as 'The Ister.'

Rather than an esoteric retreat into the world of poetry, Heidegger's lectures were a direct confrontation with the political, cultural and military chaos facing Germany and the world in 1942, a time the philosopher characterised in his lectures as "the stellar hour of our commencement." The poem in question began with the lines:

Now come fire!
Eager are we
To see the day

The film *The Ister* takes up some of the most challenging paths in Heidegger's thought, as we journey from the mouth of the Danube river in Romania to its source in the Black Forest. However controversial Heidegger continues to be, his thought remains alive in the work of some of the most remarkable thinkers and artists working today. Four of these conduct our voyage upstream along the Danube: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Bernard Stiegler, and, finally, the filmmaker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.

Winding through the shattered remains of the former Yugoslavia, through a Hungary busily restoring its national mythology, and through a Germany that is both the heart of the new Europe and the ghost of the old one, the Danube itself is the question of the film.

By drawing the places and times of the river into a constellation with Heidegger's thought, the film invites the viewer to participate in some of the most provocative questions facing Europe and the world today. These questions - of home and place, culture and memory, of technology and ecology, of politics and war - beckon us now as they did Heidegger in 1942.

Vist the website <http://www.theister.com>

Read Mary Anne Francis's introduction to [The Ister introduction](http://www.criticalpositions.org) for Critical Positions
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