

A Poetics of Homecoming

A Poetics of Homecoming:
Heidegger, Homelessness
and the Homecoming Venture

By

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P U B L I S H I N G

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PREFACE

This investigation addresses a pressing anxiety of our time – that of homelessness. Tersely stated, the philosophical significance of ‘homelessness’ in its more modern context can be understood to emerge with Nietzsche and his discourse on nihilism, which signals the loss and continuing corrosion of the highest values hitherto. Diverging from Nietzsche, Heidegger interprets homelessness as a symptom of the oblivion of being.¹ The purpose of the present enquiry is to rigorously confront humanity’s state of homelessness and at the same time reveal the extent to which Heidegger’s thought engages with this pervasive phenomenon. Additionally, Heidegger’s various attempts to overcome, or more specifically, his thought provoking preparations for the overcoming of homelessness are also pivotal to the current investigation. Many commentators including Adorno, Lévinas, Löwith, Lacoue-Labarthe, de Beistegui, Sallis, Dallmayr, Bambach and Young have to some degree acknowledged or highlighted how important the motif of ‘homecoming’ is for Heidegger. While Robert Mugerauer in *Heidegger and Homecoming* provides a thoroughgoing account of Heidegger’s preoccupations with homelessness and homecoming.

Adorno and Lévinas offer scathing critiques of Heidegger’s thought as it relates to the theme of homecoming (*Heimkunft*) and the idea of the German *Heimat*, associating it with provincialism, paganism and further maintaining it has pernicious political implications.² Löwith, Lacoue-Labarthe, de Beistegui and Bambach also pay heed to the political significance underlying Heidegger’s conception of homecoming and his

¹ Cf. PM, p. 258

² With regards Adorno’s criticisms of Heidegger see *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. K. Tarnowski and F. Will, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, (henceforth, *The Jargon of Authenticity*), *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge, 1990 (henceforth, *Negative Dialectics*) and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-author Max Horkheimer, trans. John Cumming, London: Allen Lane, 1973. In terms of Lévinas’ critique of Heidegger see “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us”, in *Difficult Freedom, Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, London: The Athlone Press, 1990, (henceforth, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us”), *Totality and Infinity, An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2001, (henceforth, *Totality and Infinity*).

concern for the German homeland. Although they too can be highly critical of his nationalistic leanings, they provide more balanced interpretations of his writings.³ On the other hand, Dallmayr and Young tend to offer strongly positive accounts of Heidegger's thinking as it pertains to the notion of homecoming and his reflections on humanity's state of homelessness. Dallmayr in *The Other Heidegger* endorses a Heideggerian sense of homecoming over the type of nomadic thinking espoused by Deleuze, and Young in *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* deems Heidegger to be a physician of culture.⁴

Mugerauer in *Heidegger and Homecoming, The Leitmotif in the Later Writings* offers an intensely close and sympathetic reading of Heidegger. Through detailed accounts of many of Heidegger's 'later' texts, Mugerauer presents the story of Heidegger's personal and lifelong homecoming. Revealing the polyphonic nature of these later texts, he shows how Heidegger thoughtfully celebrates 'the multiple, often simultaneous, meanings of the unfolding of our world.'⁵ Mugerauer does a commendable job in narrativizing Heidegger's homecoming, and his forensic analysis of this theme is praiseworthy. However, unlike Mugerauer I consider it of great import not only to tell a story but to also critically engage with Heidegger's thought. Hence, I continually call into question Heidegger's various positions, for failure to do so allows one to be wholly transfixed by his 'dramatic tale.'⁶

In the present enquiry I chiefly focus on the poetic significance of Heidegger's sense of homecoming. I argue that Heidegger's discourses on

³ Cf. Karl Löwith's *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Heidegger, Art, Politics*, trans. Chris Turner, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990 (henceforth, *Heidegger, Art, Politics*) Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's *Retreating the Political*, trans. Simon Sparks, London: Routledge, 1997 (henceforth, *Retreating the Political*) *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, trans. Judi Olson, Ed. Christopher Fynsk, Harvard University Press, 1989 (henceforth, *Typography*) and Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political: Dystopias*, London: Routledge, 1998 (henceforth, *Heidegger and the Political*).

⁴ Cf. Fred Dallmayr's *The Other Heidegger*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. Also see Julian Young's *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁵ Robert Mugerauer, *Heidegger and Homecoming, The Leitmotif of the Later Writings*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. xix.

⁶ Richard Rorty in his essay "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" claims that despite Heidegger's suspicion of epic or storytelling, his 'ability to spin a dramatic tale' was his greatest gift. Cf. "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others, Philosophical Papers Vol. 2*, New York: CUP, 1991, p.69.

the notion of homecoming manage to retain fruitful insights that can contribute not just to a Germanic sense of homecoming but to a sense of homecoming that humanity at large can relate to and be enriched by. I make this contention despite some commentators who claim Heidegger's sense of homecoming is essentially tied to provincialism, paganism and an insidious form of politics. In saying this, the political controversy surrounding Heidegger's thought, particularly in relation to the period between 1930 and 1936, is not a dominant issue in the current investigation. However, this does not mean that the political import of Heidegger's homecoming venture will be suppressed or ignored. A more urgent concern for the current enquiry, which has already been alluded to, is humanity's state of homelessness. One of the foremost tasks of the present enquiry will be to elucidate how Heidegger's thought can help address this problem in a constructive way. Moreover, illuminating the philosophical significance of 'homelessness', uncovering its underlying cause or causes and determining whether or not it is possible for humanity to overcome its homeless condition takes priority in the following investigation. In this regard, Heidegger's interpretation of the human being as *un-heimlich*, uncanny or unhomely; his detailed discussions on nihilism, and his meditations on modern technology come to the forefront of this enquiry. Furthermore, it is by confronting those phenomena that contribute to or underlie humanity's state of homelessness that allows the homecoming venture to get underway.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Heidegger's Writings

- BP: *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- BT: *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and T. Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.
- BW: *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, 1996.
- CP: *Contributions to Philosophy, (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- CT: *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- DS: "Only a God can Save Us": 'Der Spiegel's Interview' in *The Heidegger Controversy, A Critical Reader*, trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo ed. Richard Wolin, London: M.I.T. press, 1993, pp. 91-116.
- DT: *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. J. M Anderson and E. H. Freund, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1966.
- EHP: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller, New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- FM: *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, finitude, solitude*, trans. W. McNeill and N. Walker, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- GA: *Martin Heidegger: Gesamtausgabe*, ed. F. W. von Herrmann, Frankfurt on Main: Klostermann, 1977 - . Numerals refer to volume numbers from this collected works.
- HCT: *History of the Concept of Time: prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- ID: *Identity and Difference*, trans. Kurt F. Leidecker, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1960.
- IM: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- IP: *Introduction to Philosophy – Thinking and Poetizing*, trans. Phillip Jacques Braunstein Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.

- KM: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James S. Churchill, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962.
- M: *Mindfulness*, trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary, New York: Continuum Press, 2006.
- N: *Nietzsche*, four volumes, trans. David Farrell Krell, San Francisco: HarperCollins 1979-1987. Roman numerals refer to volume numbers.
- OBT: *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: CUP, 2002.
- OM: “Overcoming Metaphysics” trans. Joan Stambaugh in *The Heidegger Controversy, A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin, London: M.I.T. press, 1993, pp. 67-90.
- OWL: *On the Way to Language*, trans. P. Hertz, New York: Harper & Row 1971.
- P: *Parmenides*, trans. A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- PK: *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Parvis Ermad and Kenneth Mealy, Indiana University Press, 1997.
- PLT: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- PM: *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge: CUP 1998.
- PR: *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- QCT: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- TB: *On Time and Being*, trans. J. Stambaugh, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- TI: *Hölderlin’s Hymn ‘The Ister’*, trans. W. McNeill and J. Davis, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- WCT: *What is called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray, New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

Hölderlin’s Writings

- HEL: *Friedrich Hölderlin, Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. Thomas Pfau, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- HPF: *Friedrich Hölderlin, Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger, London, Anvil Press, 2004.

Nietzsche's Writings

- AC: *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Classics, 1990.
- BT(N): *The Birth of Tragedy, Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, London: Penguin Books, 1993.
- DB: *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- EH: *Ecce Homo, How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- GS: *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- GM: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- HH: *Human All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, London: Penguin Books, 1994.
- TI (N): *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- TSZ: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. Graham Parkes New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- WP: *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

INTRODUCTION

EXPLICATING THE TITLE: 'A POETICS OF HOMECOMING'

This enquiry is entitled 'A Poetics of Homecoming'. Such a title requires explication. Firstly: What is meant by 'poetics'? and secondly: What does 'homecoming' signify? In the opening pages of *Poetics of Modernity* Richard Kearney provides a very lucid and insightful elucidation of the term 'poetics'. In this work he explores both a traditional and modern hermeneutic understanding of 'poetics', focusing particularly on Plato and Aristotle with respect to its traditional meaning, and then turning to Ricoeur and Heidegger for a more modern interpretation of its significance. In *Poetics of Modernity* we see how a sense of 'poetics' is to be found amongst the ancient Greeks. Herodotus accredited the term to writers such as Homer and Hesiod who helped 'make' (*poiein*) Greek culture by creating master or grand narratives. Within these master narratives a people or culture could be housed as they presented elaborate accounts of the origin of the world and how it was ordered, they also attempted to find truth for unexplainable phenomena and thus distilled meaning from otherwise incomprehensible events. Great poets like Homer and Hesiod told of how the gods were born, while their names, honours, arts and various appearances were also described. Furthermore, it was through the art of *poiesis* that Chaos became Cosmos.¹

¹ G.S Kirk in *The Presocratic Philosophers* describes how Hesiod in his *Theogony* deals with the relation between gods and goddesses and the ultimate source of Zeus' power and authority. However, most significantly Hesiod outlines the cosmogonical developments that preceded these events, as he charts the transition from the state of Chaos to the emergence of a Cosmos. Hesiod in his *Theogony* writes: "Verily first of all did Chaos come into being, and then broad-bosomed Gaia (earth), a firm seat of all things for ever, and misty Tartaros in a recess of broad-waned earth, and Eros, who is fairest among immortal gods, looser of limbs, and subdues in their breasts the mind and thoughtful counsel of all gods and all men. Out of Chaos, Erebus and black Night came into being; and from Night, again, came Aither and Day, whom she conceived and bore after mingling in love

Plato discusses how *poiesis* is related to artistic and divine creation and also identifies it as having an intellectual as well as practical dimension. Although Plato considers philosophical *logos* to be more significant than *poiesis*, in the tenth book of the *Republic*, Kearney highlights how in other Platonic dialogues such as *Ion*, *Meno* and *Phaedrus*, *poiesis* is recognized as a form of divine ‘inspiration’ or ‘enthusiasm’ (*entheos*, that is, full of the god). Kearney writes: “*Poiesis*, Plato concedes, can provide vision for what is otherwise invisible. It creates existing things from non-existing things.”² A more methodical and systematic definition of *poiesis* is provided by Aristotle in book six of his *Nicomachean Ethics* where he refers to it as an activity which aims at an end separate from itself. Aristotle distinguishes *poiesis* from *praxis*, which is taken to be an act that possesses its own end within itself. Furthermore, *poiesis* refers to the production or creation of something envisaged with respect to an image or notion of a product pre-conceived by the producer. Poetic things, *ta poioumena*, are those things shaped by human activity. Aristotle identifies three distinct types of knowledge, that is, ‘theoretical’, ‘practical’ and ‘poetical’, he ascribes to this latter category all those activities of production that give rise to some end which persists after the completion of a given activity, for example, the sculpture that remains after being sculpted by the sculptor. Thus for the Greeks the term *poiesis* can be attributed to any productive or creative activity that has an end beyond itself.

‘Poetics’ as it appears in more modern and post-modern contexts takes on a wide range of meanings. Linda Hutcheon for example offers insight into the significance of a post-modern poetics in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. She describes ‘poetics’ as:

...an open, ever-changing theoretical structure by which to order both our cultural knowledge and our critical procedures. This would not be a

with Erebus. And Earth first of all brought forth starry Ouranos (sky), equal to herself, to cover her completely round about, to be a firm seat for the blessed gods for ever. Then she brought forth tall Mountains, lovely haunts of the divine Nymphs who dwell in the woody mountains. She also gave birth to the unharvested sea, seething with its swell, Pontos, without delightful love; and then having lain with Ouranos she bore deep-eddying Okeanos, and Koios and Krios and Hyperion and Iapetos...”. Cf. *The Presocratic Philosophers*, ed. G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, Cambridge: CUP, 1993, p. 35

² Richard Kearney, *Poetics Of Modernity*, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995, p. xii. Henceforth, *Poetics Of Modernity*.

poetics in the structuralist sense of the word, but would go beyond the study of literary discourse to the study of cultural practice and theory.³

Ricoeur uses the term 'poetics' to name the creative process of 'semantic innovation', understood as an imaginative act that creates meaning in and through language, via symbols, poems, myths, narratives and ideologies.⁴ Heidegger the main focus of the current enquiry also interprets poetics in a broad sense. He remarks in the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935): "Poetry is thought of here in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate unity of being with language and word, that we must leave open whether art in all its modes from architecture to poesy, exhausts the nature of poetry."⁵ An important distinction comes to the fore in this particular passage, as Heidegger distinguishes between poetics thought on the basis of all artistic manifestations, including architecture, building and plastic creations and the narrower more specific form of poesy associated with the versifying activity of the poet.⁶ Heidegger acknowledges architecture, building and plastic creations as being poetic for they participate in the saying of being, a saying that surpasses mere linguistic verbalisations.⁷ On the other hand, poetry in its more restricted sense also proves crucial for Heidegger, for he relates it to the founding of being, to a distinctive type of building and to the most fundamental form of dwelling. In his address "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (1936), poetry is interpreted as 'the founding of being in the word'.⁸ Moreover, in "...Poetically Man Dwells..." (1951) poetry is construed as a 'distinctive kind of building', where building is interpreted on the basis of cultivating,

³ Cf. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 14. Henceforth, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*.

⁴ Cf. Richard Kearney, *Poetics Of Modernity*, p. xii

⁵ PLT, pp. 71-72

⁶ Cf. PLT, p. 72

⁷ Heidegger writes: "Language itself is poetry in the essential sense. But since language is the happening in which for man beings first disclose themselves to him each time as beings, poesy – or poetry in the narrower sense – is the most original form of poetry in the essential sense. Language is not poetry because it is the primal poesy; rather, poesy takes place in language because language preserves the original nature of poetry. Building and plastic creation, on the other hand, always happen already, and happen only, in the Open of saying and naming. It is the Open that pervades and guides them. But for this very reason they remain their own ways and modes in which truth orders itself into work. They are an ever special poetizing within the clearing of what is, which has already happened unnoticed in language." (PLT, p. 72)

⁸ EHP, pp. 58-59

caring and erecting.⁹ Poetry in this munificent sense of the word is once again revealed as a productive or creative act that points to something beyond itself, as Heidegger observes: ‘Merits due to this building, however, can never fill out the nature of dwelling.’¹⁰ For Heidegger, poetry is also essentially linked to the prospect of human beings being able to dwell poetically. He remarks in “...Poetically Man Dwells...” that poetry is not the imaginary flight of fancy that attempts to flee from the earth but is instead, ‘what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling.’¹¹ Thus it is the poet through his poetry that first enables human beings to dwell poetically upon the earth.

Throughout the current investigation I seek to employ ‘poetics’ in a way that interweaves both its traditional meaning with its more contemporary significance. ‘Poetics’ as it emerges in the present enquiry is taken in a broad sense of the word. The term ‘poetics’ is understood here in terms of a critical examination of humanity’s capacity to transform itself to point where human beings may come to dwell poetically upon the earth. This understanding of ‘poetics’ resonates to a certain degree with Kearney’s interpretation of ‘poetics’ as ‘an exploration of the human powers to make (*poiesis*) a world in which we may poetically dwell.’¹² For this to occur it is deemed necessary for human beings to learn how to experience themselves alternatively in a world alternatively experienced. Bearing this extended sense of poetics in mind, something that spans both practice and theory, it can be seen to have affinities with Richard Rorty who claims in “Deconstruction and Circumvention” that ‘poetic’ moments occur from time to time in many different areas of culture, that is, ‘in science, philosophy, painting and politics, as well as the lyric and the drama.’¹³

Having shed some light on the import of ‘poetics’ it is now necessary to illuminate the meaning of ‘homecoming’. The notion of ‘homecoming’ resounds with a multitude of meanings. It is a notion or theme that recurs extensively in many of the world’s great myths. Joseph Campbell in his examination of the theme of homecoming in myth draws attention to how the hero in these tales generally undergoes a three-part sequence of departure, initiation and return. In many cases the hero sets out on his

⁹ PLT, p. 213 and p. 215

¹⁰ PLT, p. 215

¹¹ PLT, p. 216

¹² Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining, Modern to Post-Modern*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 8.

¹³ Cf. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 14

adventure in response to a 'call' that orders him to leave home. Once having plucked up the courage to venture beyond the safe haven of his home the hero journeys into the realm of the unknown and undergoes a series of initiatory trials. Having completed the initiation process the hero typically yearns to return back home. Campbell notes: "When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy."¹⁴ Once the hero finally accomplishes his homecoming and returns home the adventure is understood to have come to a close. In these typical 'hero myths' home appears as a place of belonging and sanctuary where the returning hero is warmly welcomed.

It is thus unsurprising to find that the heroic mood is often one infused with a deep sense of homesickness. Homer's *Odyssey*, is a poem that could quite rightly be described as a poem of homesickness. The chief character Odysseus, like Campbell's archetypal hero, leaves his native Ithaca and undergoes a succession of trials over the course of his many adventures, and then seeks to return back home to his wife Penelope. Of the three stages of the heroic sequence identified by Campbell, it is the motif of homecoming (*nostos*) that most notably comes to the fore in Homer's work. This Greek word *nostos* is of particular significance. John Moriarty describes the word *nostos* as a 'teeming' and 'haunted' word. In his autobiography entitled *Nostos* he writes the following:

A teeming word it was therefore, this little word, *nostos*. Meaning return to the homeland, it teems with all the terrors and wonders natural and supernatural, of the ancient Mediterranean. It's a haunted word. It is haunted by the foul-smelling droppings of Harpies. It is haunted by the allurements of Sirens. It is haunted by the agonized roaring of Cyclops. It is a word to conjure with. [...] The word *nostos* and *odyssey* mean roughly the same thing. In the course of his *nostos*, Odysseus encountered and had to overcome everything in the world that contradicts and confounds the elementary yearnings of humanity. At one stage, his *nostos* became a *nekuia*, a journey to the land of the dead. As with *anodos* and *kathodos*, I thought, so with *nostos* and *nekuia* they imply each other. Until in his case they did imply each other Odysseus couldn't come home.¹⁵

Nostos is a word loaded with meaning, hauntingly so, and Moriarty does well to articulate its vast range of meaning in the passage cited above.

¹⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, p. 193.

¹⁵ John Moriarty, *Nostos*, Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2002, p. 88.

Beyond myths the theme of homecoming has continued to exert influence over poets, philosophers, and artists. A most basic sense 'homecoming' involving the return to one's domestic abode or dwelling place is described by Du Bellay in '*Heureux qui comme Ulysse*'.¹⁶ While a homecoming conceived in terms of a return journey to one's homeland after a sojourn abroad, is found in Hölderlin's 'Homecoming/To Kindred Ones', a poem that proves pivotal to Heidegger. Besides a homecoming to one's homeland, there is the possibility of a homecoming to what and who one is. This takes on philosophical significance for Heidegger who also turns to the Greek word '*nostos*' in "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?". Heidegger remarks:

Toward the end of the third part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* appears a section with the heading 'The Convalescent.' That is Zarathustra. But what does 'convalescent', *der Genesende*, mean? *Genesen* is the same word as the Greek *neomai*, *nostos*, meaning to lead home. 'Nostalgia' is the yearning to go home, homesickness. 'The Convalescent' is one who is getting ready to turn homeward, that is, to turn toward what defines him. The convalescent is under way to himself, so that he can say of himself who he is.¹⁷

Whilst recognizing the importance of the various senses of 'homecoming' articulated above, the sense of homecoming that is espoused within the present investigation is the homecoming to where one already dwells. Thus as John Moriarty remarks: 'All otherworlds and this world are one world.'¹⁸ In keeping with this broad sense of homecoming, no homeland or geo-political region is singled out for special attention.¹⁹ Moreover, undertaking this type of homecoming may involve a pan-ethnic journey whereby one is drawn or in need of appropriating the wisdom of many diverse cultures.²⁰

¹⁶ Cf. George Steiner's *After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford: OUP 1992, p. 430.

¹⁷ N. II, p. 212

¹⁸ John Moriarty, *Dreamtime, Revised and Expanded Edition*, Dublin: The Lilliput Press 1999, p. 195. Henceforth, *Dreamtime*.

¹⁹ What Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science* is of relevance here: "We who are homeless are too manifold and mixed racially and in our descent, being 'modern men', and consequently do not feel tempted to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today as a sign of a German way of thinking and that is doubly false and obscene among the people of the 'historical sense'." (GS, p. 340)

²⁰ Unlike Nietzsche, I do not regard all cultures as being subjugated to the ancient Greeks. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he declares that all other cultures and peoples are

Seeking to undergo such a homecoming indicates an acceptance or acknowledgement that humanity exists in a state of homelessness.

The motif of homelessness as a philosophical dilemma is dealt with in chapter one: 'Philosophy as Homelessness and Homesickness.' Furthermore, it is a motif I engage with throughout the entire enquiry, whether explicitly or implicitly. As was stated at the outset the philosophical significance of 'homelessness' can be seen to arise with Nietzsche who through his probing and insightful investigations into nihilism recognized that the highest values hitherto were beginning to lose influence and meaning.²¹ Heidegger on the other hand interprets 'homelessness' as a symptom of the oblivion of being.²² In the "Letter on 'Humanism'" he argues that the homelessness of modern humanity exists as a destiny sent by being in the form of metaphysics or nihilism, for Heidegger claims nihilism is another name for metaphysics.²³ He remarks: "This homelessness is specifically evoked from the destiny of being in the form of metaphysics, and through metaphysics is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such."²⁴ However, Emmanuel Lévinas ardently undermines Heidegger's construal of modern homelessness. Lévinas criticizes Heidegger's contention that homelessness is a consequence of the metaphysical neglect of the question of being; instead he argues that homelessness is a universal feature of the human condition that pre-dates Greek antiquity. Lévinas declares: "The notion of a man exterior to being and exiled on earth is older than Greek metaphysics, and has certainly already directed the development and orientation of this metaphysics towards the idea of a man foreign to the earth."²⁵ Taking

horses and chariots to the ancient Greeks who he considers the charioteers, drivers or leaders. He states: "And so we feel both shame and fear before the Greeks; although some, valuing truth above else, have dared confess the truth: that the Greeks are the charioteers of our own and all other cultures, but that chariot and the horses are almost always of too poor a quality, not a match for the glory of the drivers, who then make sport of driving the team into the abyss – clearing it themselves with a leap of Achilles." (BT(N), p. 72) In this passage Nietzsche could be considered to be voicing a strongly held belief held by many German writers and thinkers from the 18th century till the 20th century.

²¹ Cf. WP, pp. 12-13

²² Cf. PM, p. 258

²³ Heidegger writes in the essay: 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead": 'The realm for the essence and event of nihilism is metaphysics itself...' (OBT, p. 165)

²⁴ PM, pp. 258-259

²⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, "The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value and the Prospects for Humanism." in *Value and Values in Evolution*, ed. Edward A. Maziarz, New York: Gordon and Breach, 1979, p. 184.

serious heed of Lévinas argument, the current enquiry does not adhere, submit or succumb to Heidegger's seductive meta-narrative concerning the homelessness of modern humanity. Nonetheless, the type of homecoming that emerges in the present investigation can be seen to be marked by a two-pronged confrontation with nihilism, in the sense of a relentless quest for meaning and purpose on the one hand and the truth of being on the other hand. Therefore, it is perhaps more apt to speak of a poetics of homecoming as a poetics of unceasing venture.

Yet, entitling this work 'A Poetics of Homecoming' suggests a sense of 'home' is prioritized, that is, a place of belonging, meaning and purpose. By prioritizing a sense of 'home' a series of questions arise. To what extent is it fruitful to prioritize a sense of 'home'? If human beings were at home in the world would it lead to a state of complacency, would it bring about an end to all yearnings and venture? Is the challenge for humanity not to become at home in the world but rather for human beings to flourish in its state of homelessness? Have the great human beings been those who have prospered in their state of homelessness rather than those individuals who managed to become at home in the world? Moreover, does the preference for a 'home' have adverse political implications, even if unintended? Lévinas would argue that the prioritization of a sense of 'home', as a place of belonging has dangerous political consequences, for it implicitly sanctions the distinction between native inhabitants, those who are at home and outsiders, who are not at home.²⁶ Lévinas' argument is aimed primarily at Heidegger and his espousal of *Bodenständigkeit* (enrootedness). This argument must be kept in mind when investigating the motif of homecoming as it arises in Heidegger's texts.

Heidegger's 'Later Thinking'

It is a difficult and arduous challenge to elucidate and gain insight into the theme of 'homecoming' as it is dealt with by Heidegger, since it arises in his 'later writings', which are on occasions extremely elusive and enigmatic.²⁷ Moreover, there are times when reading Heidegger's later

²⁶ Lévinas writes in "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us": "One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to place, without which the universe would become insignificant and would hardly exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. And in this light technology is less dangerous than the spirits of the Place." (Cf. *Difficult Freedom, Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, London: The Athlone Press, 1990, p. 232.)

²⁷ Although it is perhaps difficult to pin point or define precisely what is meant by Heidegger's 'later writings' there is a general view that the text *Vom Wesen der*

writings that one finds oneself in a confounded and agitated state and the thought of providing a coherent and meaningful interpretation of some of his utterances seems next to impossible. There are statements to be found within his later texts that appear to be inaccessible and not readily available to any form of rational thinking. Is that their purpose? I find that I am unable to demonstrate the truth of some of these statements and I am compelled to wonder if these statements are inherently unintelligible. With regard to Heidegger's 'later philosophy' Lévinas states: "The light of comprehension and truth streams into the darkness of incomprehension and non-truth; power, bound to mystery, avows its impotence."²⁸ Heidegger himself is aware of the abstruse nature of his thinking that on occasions defies comprehension. He writes in his third and final major lecture course on Hölderlin's 'The Ister':

The river is the locality of journeying. Yet the river is also the journeying of locality. Such statements make it sound as though empty words were being strung together and exchanged, a procedure that only further the already existing indeterminacy of their meaning and of the essence to which they refer. This illusion of a mere playing with words cannot be overcome immediately. We must even concede that such statements cannot be understood directly. [...] Even those who once understand such statements are not able to understand them at any hour whatsoever.²⁹

However, Heidegger does offer an explanation for propounding these obscure statements when he remarks:

We are excluded from comprehending such statements so long as the appropriation of an essential transformation in our essence has not 'occurred' (*sich 'ereignet'*). Yet why then do we pronounce such statements? In order to prepare such a transformation, or rather, simply so that we may know that the river is an 'enigma' [*Rätsel*].³⁰

According to Heidegger, certain statements of his remain unintelligible only because human beings have not undergone the necessary transformation that would enable them to comprehend their meaning. Therefore the unintelligible as it emerges in Heidegger's texts exists only at a surface or basic level, and thus is to be distinguished from mere

Wahrheit (1930) represents a crucial point in Heidegger's *Kehre*. It is identified as a decisive turning point in Richardson's *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* with the approval of Heidegger.

²⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 275

²⁹ TI, pp. 33-34

³⁰ TI, p. 34

gibberish. These elusive statements are formulated by Heidegger in order to prepare the way for an essential transformation in the way human beings think and are in the world or more simply, to know something is an enigma or a mystery (*Geheimnis*), in this case the river Ister. This justifies my full attention to these enigmatic utterances in the continued absence of a full understanding of some of Heidegger's statements.

Having alluded to a transformation in the way human beings think and to the 'mystery', some seminal aspects of Heidegger's later thought have managed come to the fore. There is a constant demand in Heidegger's later texts that human beings learn to 'think' anew, that human beings cultivate a manner of thinking radically different from current modes of thought so that they may respond to the 'call' of being.³¹ Heidegger rejects representational, scientific and calculative thinking or what he calls 'technological-scientific rationalization',³² in favour of thinking that attends to the 'mystery' of being.³³ A recurring statement of Heidegger's in a series of lectures entitled *What is Called Thinking?* (1951/52) is that humanity has yet to learn how to think. By 'thinking' Heidegger means 'meditative thinking', 'essential thinking' (*wesentliches Denken*) or simply 'thinking' (*Denken*). Only through essential thinking can human beings tend to the truth of being and end their estrangement from being which underlies the nihilism of modernity.

In the essay "On the Essence of Truth" (1930) Heidegger notes that thinking the essence of truth entails 'openness to the mystery' (*die Entschlossenheit zum Geheimnis*), whereby mystery is understood as the concealing of what is concealed (*die Verbergung des Verborgenen*) and as such holds sway throughout the Da-sein of human beings.³⁴ For Heidegger, thinking cannot penetrate this mystery, it can only negatively indicate its presence by pointing out that there is 'something completely and utterly Other'.³⁵ Hence, he would find himself in agreement with Wittgenstein who famously wrote: 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'³⁶ Heidegger's conception of thinking as it relates to mystery also concerns his understanding of truth. Heidegger observes that

³¹ WCT, p. 164.

³² Cf. BW, p. 448

³³ See in particular "The Age of the World Picture" (QCT, pp.115-185) and "Science and Reflection" (pp. 155-182)

³⁴ PM, p. 151 and p. 148

³⁵ Cf. EHP, p. 43 and GA, 15, p. 363 (translated by Julian Young in *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, p. 20)

³⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 74.

truth is traditionally thought of in terms of correctness (*Richtigkeit*). Such a conception of truth relates to propositional truth, which Heidegger defines as: *veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem* (truth is the adequation of intellect to thing).³⁷ Unsurprisingly, Heidegger disavows this 'self-evident' and 'fundamental' interpretation of truth in the attempt to attain a more primordial understanding of it. Mystery is central to Heidegger's endeavour to reveal the essence of truth. Mystery is considered to be that primary untruth which holds sway over humanity and is described by Heidegger as non-essence (*Un-wesen*).³⁸ Non-essence is not simply absence but is also the covering over of truth. Similarly, 'to err' (*irren*), as a going astray is a consequence of mystery and in a way forms a type of counter-essence to the truth of being.³⁹ Mystery and erring belong essentially to truth; both paths profoundly shape human history and saying.⁴⁰ Moreover, the way of errancy and of truth both exist as distinct possibilities for human beings and this becomes crucial in his interpretation of modern technology. Heidegger manages to bring the issue of this 1930 essay to a head in a note he added in 1949. Here he introduces the expression *Seyn* 'thought as the difference that holds sway between Being and beings.' Furthermore, he declares: 'Truth signifies sheltering that clears (*lichtendes Bergen*) as the fundamental trait of Being.'⁴¹

The concealment of being by beings illuminates the prevailing difference, *Seyn*. To be aware that being and not beings lies in concealment is to recognize and acknowledge the ontological difference. Hence one comes to understand something of the relation between being and beings and what they are. Finally, Heidegger asserts that the essence of truth is the truth of essence.⁴² He claims that this is not a proposition but instead signifies that the essence of truth is the myth or saying of a turning (*die Sage einer Kehre*) within the history of *Seyn*.⁴³ This indicates a radically new understanding of human history as a series of *Sagen*, of epochs of the revelation of being.

³⁷ Cf. PM, p. 138

³⁸ Ibid., p. 146

³⁹ Ibid., p. 150

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 151

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 153

⁴² Ibid., p. 153

⁴³ In John Salis' translation of "On the Essence of Truth" he renders the German word *Sage* as 'saying' when its more primary sense is myth or legend.

Heidegger and Homecoming

Although Heidegger's later thought is provocative and at times enigmatic it also proves extremely fertile in contributing to a healthier, more fruitful way of being in the world. Furthermore, the motif or idea of homecoming plays a crucial role in this respect. As George Steiner writes in *Heidegger*, "‘home-coming’ is...both the process and goal of authentic being."⁴⁴ The notion of homecoming drives to the heart of Heidegger's thinking on being and this too is highlighted by Steiner.⁴⁵ Heidegger notes in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* how the Greeks called 'being' *ousia*, or more fully *parousia*.⁴⁶ Dictionaries translate this word as 'substance' but according to Heidegger this is a misleading translation. The more authentic translation includes a whole cluster of significances comprising of: 'homestead, at-homeness, a standing in and by itself, a self-enclosedness, an integral presentness or there-ness.'⁴⁷ Heidegger uses the German word *Anwesen* to adhere more truthfully to the scope of its meaning. Additionally, *parousia* tells us that 'something is present to us', it stands firmly by itself and thus manifests and declares itself, it is. Steiner shows how Heidegger's thinking on being is tied to 'homecoming' when he writes:

For the Greeks, 'being' basically meant this standing presence. Post-Socratic Greek thought, whether in Platonic idealism or Aristotelian substantiality, never returned to this pure and primal 'ground of being', to this illumination of and through the presentness of the existing. But it is to just this ground that we must strive to come home.⁴⁸

Although 'homecoming' is essential to Heidegger's thought; the unhomely and homeless nature of the human being is also of great importance. He states in his address on Hölderlin's 'Remembrance': "The thinker thinks toward what is un-homelike, what is not like home. The poet's questioning, on the other hand, is a commemorative questioning that puts the homelike itself into poetry."⁴⁹ This underscores a crucial distinction between the task of the thinker and the role of the poet. Chapters three, four and five attend to Heidegger's engagement and encounter with the 'un-homelike' and homeless state of humanity. In chapter three, it is the notion of the *un-*

⁴⁴ George Steiner, *Heidegger*, Glasgow: Fontana 1978, p. 49. Henceforth, *Heidegger*.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 49

⁴⁶ Cf. IM, p. 64

⁴⁷ Cf. IM, pp. 64-67

⁴⁸ George Steiner, *Heidegger*, p. 49

⁴⁹ EHP, p. 151

heimlich, the uncanny or unhomely that comes to the fore, while in chapter four it is Heidegger's confrontation with nihilism, that which constitutes modern humanity's state of homelessness that takes centre stage. In chapter five, modern technology is examined, for Heidegger regards it not only as being rooted in the history of metaphysics but sees it as signalling the final phase of metaphysics.⁵⁰ Thus modern technology is essentially related to humanity's state of homelessness.

The final two chapters attempt to redress humanity's homelessness. In chapter six I explore Heidegger's discourses on the nature of thinking, and poetry, as they prove crucial in founding the basis for Heidegger's homecoming venture. While in Chapter Seven I critically examine Heidegger's sense of homecoming as it emerges through his interpretation of Hölderlin's poetry. For he believes Hölderlin's poetry offers intimations of a homecoming for the German people. However, Heidegger does not interpret a poem like 'Homecoming/To Kindred Ones' as dealing with the theme of homecoming, instead he understands the poem itself as enacting the homecoming.⁵¹ He observes that Hölderlin's poem is not an occasion for celebration due to the poet returning home but is rather the tragic acknowledgment that one's 'homeland' or sense of 'home' remains withheld while the 'unhomelike' 'resounds all about'.⁵² By interpreting 'homecoming' as signifying more than the mere return to the soil of one's homeland, Heidegger understands it as a return to 'nearness to the origin'.⁵³ For Heidegger, this 'nearness to the origin' is a mystery and cannot be revealed by any form of analysis; furthermore, its mystery must be preserved.⁵⁴ According to Heidegger, poetry is capable of preserving its mystery; moreover, poetry as homecoming contributes to the transformation of the poet and those who are capable of listening to, and thinking of his words. These 'others' who take heed of the poet help him in his task.⁵⁵ Heidegger states: "That is why the poet turns to others, so that their remembrance may help in understanding the poetic word, so that each may have come to pass a homecoming appropriate for him."⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Cf. PM, p. 259

⁵¹ Heidegger states: "The elegy 'Homecoming' is not a poem about homecoming; rather, the elegy, the poetic activity which it is, is the homecoming itself..." (EHP, p. 44)

⁵² EHP, p. 32

⁵³ Ibid., p. 42

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 43

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 49

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 49

Opposition to the present Enquiry

By investigating and tracing out the motif of homecoming in Heidegger's writings opposition to this enquiry immediately comes to the fore in the shape of such thinkers as Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Theodor Adorno, Emmanuel Lévinas and Richard Rorty. Tensions emerge between what is argued for in this investigation and what Blanchot claims in *The Space of Literature*, as he writes: 'The poem is exile...' and he also states that the poet is 'always astray'.⁵⁷ Blanchot's understanding of the poet as remaining forever in the foreign and his claims for the essentiality of exile indicate that the poet is in a constant state of exodus. Thus contrary to Heidegger, Blanchot does not envision the poet as being able to provide or illuminate a homecoming for humanity. Gilles Deleuze's essay "Nomad Thought" can also be seen to lie in conflict with Heidegger, as he sponsors a nomadic type of thinking that resists or refuses to undertake any type of homecoming. Deleuze remarks:

We seek a kind of war machine that will not re-create a state apparatus, a nomadic unit related to the outside that will not revive an internal despotic unity. Perhaps this is what is most profound in Nietzsche's thought and marks the extent of his break with philosophy, at least so far as it is manifested in the aphorism: he made thought into a war machine – a battering ram – into a nomadic force.⁵⁸

Besides the texts of Blanchot and Deleuze that appear in opposition to the thought of Heidegger, Adorno and Lévinas also provide scathing critiques of some of his writings, particularly those that relate to the home, the homeland, rootedness and autochthony. In *The Jargon of Authenticity* Adorno is highly contemptuous of the provincialism that emerges in some of Heidegger's texts. He is especially critical of Heidegger for relating his

⁵⁷ Cf. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space Of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: Nebraska University Press 1982, p. 237. This can be viewed in conflict with a primary tenet of Heidegger's, who maintains in his lecture on Hölderlin's 'Homecoming/ To Kindred Ones' (1943), that the elegy 'Homecoming' is not a poem that meditates upon the theme of homecoming but rather that the poetic activity involved in composing the poem is representative of the homecoming itself. (EHP, p. 44) Moreover, Heidegger also argues the all poems written by poets who have entered into their poethood are poems of homecoming. (EHP, p. 221)

⁵⁸ Gilles Deleuze, 'Nomad Thought', trans. David B. Allison in *The New Nietzsche, Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, Cambridge: The MIT Press 1999, p. 149.