

Heidegger and Literature: An Introduction to the Question

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What if the formulation *Heidegger and Literature* were turned into question? What if, rather than asking about an assumed relation, the relation was problematized? Rather than linking Heidegger to the proper names of literature – as though such names as Mann, Trakl, Hölderlin, Sophocles etc., had an assumed and already determined status – what would then endure in each moment would be the presence of that relation as a question. Retaining the question would open up fields of genuine investigation. Hence the point of departure would be less Heidegger and Literature and more *Heidegger and Literature?* A question to which responses were not just awaited, more significantly each response would have a transformative effect both on how ‘*Heidegger*’ then figured and ‘*Literature*’ was itself understood. In other words, allowing for the endurance of the question – Heidegger and Literature? – undoes the possibility that there is a singular Heidegger that is then connected and reconnected to differing instances of the literary. Part of the significance of the chapters comprising this volume is that not only does the question of literature (and its complex relation to poetry) continue to be reconfigured, it is also the case that those processes of reconfiguration reposition Heidegger; again, a repositioning that allows for a type of plurality to attend the proper name. A cautionary word needs to be introduced here. This is not a plurality that refuses the possibility of judgement. On the contrary, it is a conception of plurality that demands that the stakes of judgement be allocated an exacting precision.

There is Heidegger the figure within German cultural history; equally as present is Heidegger the reader of both literature and poetry. Heidegger the philosopher continues to figure, as does Heidegger the

maker of political interventions. Heidegger(s) continue(s). These positions – and each one allows as much for its own nuanced presentation as it does continual forms of mutual overlap – are examined and allowed to emerge within the confines created by the demands of literature. Literature becomes therefore a setting. Each chapter of this book presents its own form an analysis. Taken as a whole rather than advance a unified project, which would have had the effect of singularizing both ‘Heidegger’ and ‘Literature’, what emerges, as noted above, is a plurality of possibilities. ‘Literature’ can have a literal presence; equally it can be contrasted to ‘poetry’. Literature can be assumed, or it can remain present as a question. Literature, in eschewing an essential determination, opens up the possibilities of different construals and evaluations of Heidegger (and equally of literature itself). On the one hand, an approach of this nature is consistent with Heidegger’s own identification of ‘thinking’ and ‘poetry’. Equally it might be remarked that such a possibility – resisting essentialism – has often been thought as the unique province of literature. (Though then, it might be argued, the latter was, in fact, a specifically philosophical claim about literature.) At every moment decisions need to be taken and positions both justified and expanded.

The difficulty here – and it should be acknowledged from the start – is that there cannot be a single summary position that can be stated in advance, one which would then provide a synthesis of the project as a whole. Nonetheless, while each chapter is a study in its own right, and needs to be assessed as such, given the particularity of individual projects, there are still important forms of complementarity between them. Equally there are points of disassociation and resistance as well as assimilation and connection. All emerge, in part, as the consequences of what can best be described as the radicality of Heidegger. Whether the actions, be they philosophical, cultural or political, that form part of that radicality can be deemed a success or a failure continues to endure as one of the great interpretive questions. (Indeed, it should be added that Heidegger is one of the very few philosophers whose limits actually matter philosophically. Discovering those limits creates further openings rather than announcing the end of a project.) Specifically, here, what the openness of the interpretive question maintains is the fact that literature emerges – and again that emergence has to be positioned in relation to Heidegger’s own conception of poetry – as an integral part of Heidegger’s attempt to reposition what counts as the philosophical. What this means is that for Heidegger the philosophical comes to be aligned with ‘thinking’ rather than the history of metaphysics. That history is the way

philosophy, as conventionally construed, has conceived of itself thus far. For Heidegger, it is a conception that is premised on the refusal to identify and allow for the potentialities incorporated with the history of philosophy. Moreover, for Heidegger, it is the failure to note that both philosophy's current form, as well as its history, is in the gift of that potentiality, even if the latter is systematically effaced. Heidegger's work aspires to provide the philosophical with what might be described as an abyssal grounding. Again, such a move would be linked to the overcoming of metaphysics.

If there is a way of particularizing the latter – metaphysics – then two of its defining elements are the following. Firstly, the philosophical is thought in terms of the calculative with the concomitant reduction of language to the purely instrumental or the conventionally communicative. The second is the identification of philosophy with both presence and immediacy and thus the differing forms that the immediate can take. In his Afterword to “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger described the ‘task’ of that essay thus:

The foregoing reflections are concerned with the riddle of art (*‘das Rätsel der Kunst’*), that riddle that art itself is. They are far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the riddle (*‘Zur Aufgabe steht, das Rätsel zu sehen’*). (GA5: 67)

For Heidegger what is named here in this passage as ‘art’ is not to be understood in terms of the immediacy of its presence. It is neither the givenness of the object nor the object's presence within the conventions of art history. Equally, there is no attempt within this formulation to view the work of art – and this position could be extended to cover all objects of interpretation (thus both art and literature as conventionally conceived) – as that which can be reduced to a singularity. Once this were to occur, then the work of art could be given a complete description. One that would either be coextensive with an interpretation or form the basis of an interpretation. In both instances, though the degree would vary, description and judgement would then coincide. For Heidegger there is a cost. The propriety of the work of art is refused. What stands against both immediacy and presence is the identification of the work of art with the ‘riddle’. Again, what matters here is how to respond to the ‘riddle’. It can never be a question of resolving it. Any attempt to force a resolution onto the riddle would be to refuse the work of art by seeking its closure. Closure would be a form of presence. It would that interpretive move which insisted on establishing the coextensivity of the signifier and the signified. Heidegger distances both closure and presence. His position is

not to solve it but ‘to see the riddle’ (‘das Rätsel zu sehen’). It should also be noted, again, that this is described as a ‘task’. The latter can be understood as the repositioning of the philosophical by stemming the hold of metaphysics. That stemming, and the concomitant opening, would be a form of grounding, an abyssal grounding. (Remember that the abyssal in Heidegger’s German is the *Abgrund*.)

Part of the significance of art is that it is already the staging of one of the dominant aspects of Heidegger’s philosophical project. In sum, that aspect is the revealing and concealing of Being. A position that accords importantly with the distinction that Heidegger establishes between the ‘sayable’ and what he designates in a number of contexts as ‘the unsayable as such’ (‘das Unsaybare als solche’). For Heidegger, the latter is not just linked to poetizing either as a literary form or as general abstraction, but to worldly being. Hence the line from Hölderlin that he continues to cite and that can be viewed as orientating a great deal of his thought: ‘dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf dieser Erde’ (‘Poetically men dwell on this earth’). Already in this line it is clear that whatever ‘poetry’ is allied to or describes, there is an ineluctable link to the question of the being of being human. At its most straightforward, the line can be understood as claiming that ‘dwelling’ is that which occurs beyond the hold of calculation and instrumentality. The further and utterly central implication is that poetry opens the space in which the propriety of human being can be thought. It is not merely located and specified in the poem: it is poetry, and thus the poetic, that is already there allowing that which is proper to human being to appear. And yet, precisely because language can always be incorporated within the calculative and thus function purely instrumentally, what is then lost once the calculative prevails is any insight into the nature of dwelling. It needs to be noted that, for Heidegger, being and dwelling have an important comparability. Moments of illuminating interconnection are central. What predominates is, of course, the positioning that stems from the centrality of the revealing and concealing of Being. In terms of its affirmative positioning, poetry, for Heidegger, has at the very least a double register, insofar as it allows for the truth of human being whilst at the same time naming that which is proper to Being; the latter is the affinity between poetry and dwelling. (Just to reinforce the claim; it is this affinity that the line from Hölderlin has already identified.)

Once poetry always comes to name more than the activity of the poet or the history of the genre of poetry, an important question then arises: what then of both that genre and literature itself? The question cannot be viewed abstractly. It only has real force once it is located within the

project of Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics. It is a question therefore that is posed not just at the limits of Heidegger's philosophical writings, it is also the question that allows these limits to be investigated and Heidegger's philosophy to be delimited. Again, both of these measures have to be viewed as openings and therefore as ultimately productive.

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As noted at the outset, the chapters comprising this book do not create a synthetic whole aspiring to be a complete, let alone exhaustive, account of Heidegger and literature. The relation that has been created is viewed as a locus to be explored resulting from the relation's presence as a question having been maintained. Indeed, the projects of some chapters can be read against those of others. Two elements of the impossibility of unity are important. The first, as noted above, is that the occurrence of this divergence at the heart of the interpretive project is productive. The second is that it harbours an inner truth. Namely, the divergence in question is that which the proper name 'Heidegger' demands, and as significantly it is what the interplay of literature and poetry allows.

Joseph Cohen is concerned with the way in which 'literature' as a separate domain seems to fall outside Heidegger's philosophical project of the thinking of Being. He takes the ineliminable presence of literature and Heidegger's refusal to attribute to it an essential quality as the basis of then going on to argue that it is literature's presence that allows Heidegger's thinking of the essence to be questioned. The implications of this questioning are as much directly philosophical as they are implicitly political. Literature becomes linked to the invocation of a 'plurality of worlds' that is unavailable to Heidegger's thinking. (As will be seen, this theme has a certain constancy within the volume as a whole.) What emerges here is that literature works in the context of Cohen's study to delimit Heidegger.

Both Ben Morgan and Ingo Farin's chapters take the relationship between Heidegger and Thomas Mann as their point of orientation. Heidegger did not write on Mann explicitly. Mann figures most significantly in a number of Heidegger's letters to Arendt. There is therefore in the Mann-Heidegger relationship the presence of a figure whose own writings on the world and her thinking of the affective plays a role in understanding Heidegger's response to Mann. For Morgan, the

importance of Mann is that he presents a lost opportunity. It is as though Heidegger read Mann almost purely as a literary distraction. And therefore not as the creator of works in which there were ‘experiments’ on how to live. Mann provided, but Heidegger ignored, modes of life that brought current developments within literary practices, as well as scientific discoveries, to the fore. Heidegger’s insistence on *Dasein* as the way in which human life was to be thought failed to take up the resources – imaginative resources – made possible by literature. In the case of Mann this would have demanded that Heidegger shift his philosophical thinking in order that Mann’s literary work be accorded the significance that was attributed to Hölderlin.

Ingo Farin uncovers an affinity between both Heidegger and Mann in terms of what Farin describes as a commitment to a form of ‘conservative revolution’. Farin’s important contribution is to situate Heidegger’s writings of the 1930s and 40s, recently published, then translated as the *Black Notebooks*, in terms of a political positioning that has an affinity with Mann’s. Here the question of Heidegger’s politics has been expanded. Again, what becomes central is the way that Mann’s engagement with the question of life as it occurs within the form of the novel opens up the difficulties, the complexities, more generally the openness that comes from worldly engagements. Again, the question is, had these been the object of Heidegger’s reflections, even though that would not have diminished his commitment to a conservative revolution, that commitment may have led in directions other than the one taken. The important conclusion here is that Heidegger should have been as attentive to literature as he was to poetry.

Andrew Mitchell takes up the question of the possibilities of literature within the Heideggerian corpus through an examination of Heidegger’s fleeting encounter with Henry Miller’s *The Colossus of Maroussi*. Mitchell’s chapter is as much an engagement with questions of description and the connection it has to Heidegger’s development, at the time of the Zollikon seminars, of the ‘phenomenology of the inapparent’, as it is a return to Heidegger’s politics. That return is occasioned for Mitchell by a reflection on Heidegger’s use of literature. It might be argued here that both Heidegger and Miller are concerned with modes of description that, while allowing for the presence of the described, significance (perhaps in every sense of the term) lies equally in the fact that what forms of presence also announce are sites of absence. Presence and absence both have to figure within acts of description. The real is ‘supplemented’ by traces of the absent, thus reconstructing what counts as the real. This

occurs in Miller's writings on Greece. Equally, they can be noted at work in Heidegger's own travel writings. Heidegger gives philosophical expression to the position in his development of a 'phenomenology of the inapparent'.

Krzysztof Ziarek demonstrates the care with which Heidegger's overall conception of poetry needs to be approached. Ziarek keeps returning to the way the distinction between poetry as a literary genre and poetry and poeticizing in Heidegger's writings is presented. The significance of this move is to show how the nature of the relationship between thinking and poetry/poeticizing – that is, between *Denken* and *Dichten* – defines Heidegger's larger philosophical project. Moreover, it is this connection that demonstrates that Heidegger's work will always overcome any attempt to reduce it to that which is simply preoccupied with art (the latter taken broadly). Poetry, in being in excess of the generic determination, is, Ziarek argues, that which opens up Heidegger's domain of philosophical thinking. What is opened up as a result is the question of the ways in which a return to poetry might equally be that in relation to which the limitation of that 'thinking' might then be uncovered.

Christopher Fynsk addresses the question of poetry both in relation to Hölderlin and in its own right. Justin Clemens is equally concerned with poetry, while David Ferris uses Heidegger's writings on Hölderlin in order both to clarify and to delimit further the Heideggerian project. Fynsk reintroduces, via the body and the body's implication within the poetic, the relation that Heidegger's philosophy has to death. While the preoccupation with death is thought to have ended with Heidegger's move from *Being and Time*, Fynsk demonstrates that as late as *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1954) what marks human being is that it is the only entity 'capable of death as death'. What becomes important therefore is the nature of the relation between the 'use' of poetry, a use which can be defined in terms of its capacity to stage the truth of human being while simultaneously allowing the truth of language to appear, and the ineliminability of death. What is poetry's relation to death? The question has force precisely because both the relation of human being to language and the relation to death involve different but related senses of propriety. Clemens uncovers the emergence of the way in which poetry is presented by Heidegger. In order to do this, he approaches poetry through an interpretation of the 'tool' in *Being and Time*. What is of interest therefore is the undoing of utility. He argues that the broken tool, in its becoming 'unhandy', opens up the need to think that which can no longer be defined by use. The resources of *Being and Time* will not allow a sustained

engagement with the consequences of the critical distancing of utility to occur. It is possible then to read the move to poetry and the subsequent involvement with language as occurring in the space opened by the impossibility of maintaining the effective presence of that which is ready-to-hand. And yet, given Heidegger's own interpretations of the poetic, one important consequence of the move to poetry is that part of what still remains – perhaps *pace* Heidegger – is the project of the mobilisation of poetry's continual possibilities. In other words, what Clemens maintains as fundamental is the attribution of a future to poetry.

Ferris focuses directly on Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin. His chapter can be read as responding to two prompts. The first is to account for why Hölderlin figures in the way that he does within Heidegger's writings. Part of answering that question, while making clear the ways in which way Heidegger interprets Hölderlin, also demands an explanation of who Hölderlin is for Heidegger. What is important therefore is recovering the Hölderlin that figures within Heidegger's texts. The second prompt follows. Is there another Hölderlin? Another figuration of the poet? Responding to the question of the status of Hölderlin, Ferris quotes from *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*. Heidegger writes that "Hölderlin's poetry is for us a destiny" (GA4: 195/224). What emerges here, and Ferris pursues this question with the care and the detail it demands, is the status of this 'us'. The interplay of 'we' and 'us' is pursued through Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretations and equally, and this in part in response to the second prompt, in Hölderlin. What that means is that the limitations of Heidegger's positioning of Hölderlin are recovered from Hölderlin's poetry itself. Not only does Ferris demonstrate the presence of another Hölderlin, he uses that Hölderlin to critique Heidegger's. Were this position to hold, then it is the work of poetry that undoes that way in which poetry and the figure of Hölderlin occur in Heidegger.

Sean Kirkland and Silvia Benso write on Heidegger's relation to Ancient Greek theatre, specifically works by Sophocles and Euripides. Kirkland's project begins with a sustained discussion of 'place' in order to develop an interpretation of 'ethos' within Ancient Greek philosophical and literary texts. He then goes on to use Heidegger's reading of the first stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone* to develop a philosophical interpretation of the figure of Antigone which, while not Heidegger's, is nonetheless deeply informed by Heidegger's thinking. His interpretation depends upon an understanding of her 'ethos'. For Kirkland, Antigone moves from a

position in which she has a place within a clearly demarcated world, to one in which she is no longer at home. She has been radically displaced. Kirkland traces the movement of Antigone from her having a place to her having become dis-placed. He notes that this is also the possibility that always attends human being. The latter is signalled by Heidegger in his analysis of 'das Unheimliche' ('the uncanny') which is his translation of the Greek – *ta deina/to deinon*. Human being is the being who is 'unhomely'. One of the important conclusions that can be drawn from Kirkland's chapter is that Antigone is not a tragic figure in any conventional sense. It is rather that she exemplifies the plight of human being as such. For Heidegger what prevails, even now, is a fundamental 'homelessness'. One so severe it is not even noticed. To read the Antigone, and to focus on the figure, is for Heidegger to note another fundamental truth concerning human being.

Silvia Benso offers a sustained interpretation of home and 'strangeness' through an analysis of both Sophocles and Euripides' *Medea*. What marks out Benso's interpretation is that the figure of Antigone is not presented as the absolute other, and thus the counter position to being at home. Rather she is, in Benso's terms, 'the other within the house'. She is condemned to suffer precisely because the unhomely and the homely work together. The difference that she has to live out is a difference from which there is neither escape nor reconciliation. In order to dramatize the way in which her presence as the unhomely is to be understood, Benso contrasts her to Medea. Heidegger did not write about Medea. She did not figure. Benso argues that she too is unhomely, though in a radically different sense. Medea's actions are the refusal to be the subject of fate. Moreover, to refuse her, Medea, dignity elicits a response. Benso argues that what she stages is the fraught recognition that 'the power to give birth also has the ability to give death'. The way out is the overcoming of conflict in the name of the shared. What Benso is doing can be interpreted as allowing literature to present, delimit and limit Heidegger's project. This occurs in the context of this chapter not by denying the necessity to take up the link between human being and the unhomely, but rather by an analysis of the Medea that suggests that the unhomely is a more complex position than Heidegger had initially recognized.

Claudia Baracchi's ostensible area of investigation is the conception of place that emerges from Heidegger's 'reading' of Trakl. Poetry and language are central in this context insofar as Heidegger argues in *Der Sprache*, the first of his two texts on Trakl, that it is in and through

language that the human becomes what it is. This recognition occurs, of course, within the already noted distinction between the equation of language with the calculable and the instrumental on the one hand, and, on the other, the presence of the properly human. Here there is an appearing that is language's other work. This other work is poetry. And yet at this precise moment a complicating factor emerges. For Baracchi, there is a 'striving', a coming to language. Were this to occur there had to be an attendant sense of coming to be placed. This sense of place, she argues, stands in stark opposition to the nomadic. It announces what she describes as an 'aversion to the *allos* – the other'. This positioning of Heidegger is not brought from the outside. On the contrary, it forms part of his interpretation of Trakl. The force of Baracchi's analysis is to show that while Heidegger continues to distance the possibility of alterity, and thus a pluriverse that works in concert with the multilingual, a position that is premised on the continual effacing of other aspects of Trakl's poems, the possibility of an affirmation – one both affective and potentially geographical – remains. For Baracchi, the move away from Heidegger is not the result of abandoning poetry and a concern with language. Rather, it is to attribute to both a different quality and thus to envisage a different conception of human being. Language and human being remain interconnected. It is rather that language reveals the primacy of both 'dissemination' and 'peril'.

Charles Bambach locates an affinity between Heidegger and Celan. In part it is based on the possibility of identifying in Celan's writings a systematic engagement with Heidegger. Hence the interpretive question is, in part, reversed. Instead of looking into Heidegger's interpretation of poetry, the force of Bambach's analysis is that it concerns poetry's (here Celan's) engagement with Heidegger. Obviously, what has to endure is the presentation of Heidegger's thinking of poetry and of poetic language. However, that presentation is undertaken in order to trace poetry's relation to thinking. Or perhaps, more emphatically, poetry as a site of thinking. That relation is the work of poetry. These connections are not abstract. After a biographical study demonstrating the personal connections between Celan and Heidegger, Bambach embarks on a detailed reading of Celan's poem "Schliere." What emerges is an interpretation that highlights the way the poetry works through Heideggerian 'topoi'. This is not to claim that Celan simply incorporated Heideggerian themes within his poetry. Rather, the work of language that is the work of poetry continues to reference the impossibility of completion and thus to allow for the resounding presence of what has already be identified as the