Afterword

Dwelling in Place

According to German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), we are truly who we are only as we are capable of dwelling in a particular place. In a lecture, "*Bauen Wohnen Denken"* ("Building Dwelling Thinking") given in 1951 in Darmstadt, Heidegger makes such dwelling clear:

> What, then, does *Bauen*, building, *mean*? The Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in a place…The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. This old word *bauen*, which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen* however also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord.
>
> —Translated by Albert Hofstader

In this passage, Heidegger links dwelling, building, and cultivating as fundamental to our being on earth. Heidegger is not merely expressing his nostalgia for a simpler time when most humans lived as subsistence farmers. Heidegger's real aim was to strip away the nonessentials of our existence and make us consider the fundamental nature of being human on earth. The basics have always been and always will be: dwelling, building, and cultivating.

We at *Windfall* are encouraged by Heidegger's emphasis on place, as well as by other interconnected aspects of his thought. Among his fundamental considerations, he regards poetry as the "foundation of the Word." Indeed, no philosopher has ever been as poet-friendly as Heidegger. In contrast to Plato, who wants to eject all poets from his ideal Republic, Heidegger wrote two volumes "elucidating" the work of Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), who was Germany's exemplary

poet of place in his native Swabia, that same part of southwestern Germany where Heidegger hailed from. It is no surprise, then, that we find Heidegger's writings full of ideas and perspectives that help us to think about fundamental issues that stimulate the writing and reading of poems. Sometimes the poetry of place is carried on the wings of philosophy!

Hölderlin and Heidegger were both deeply invested in the culture of ancient Greece—philosophy, mythology, language and literature. In terms of philosophy, much of Heidegger's work investigates the idea that western civilization took a "wrong turn" when Plato and Aristotle displaced reality to a transcendent world of forms or ideas, of which the things of this world are but imperfect replications. Plato and Aristotle, said Heidegger, avoided the question of Being, or had simply assumed it and moved on, in which avoidance they were followed by all subsequent Western philosophy. That very question of Being had been raised in the generation before Plato by Parmenides and Heraclitus, who later became known as the "Presocratic philosophers," as if their work could be defined only in relation to the "Socratic" philosophers who came after them. This manner of naming demonstrated how Western philosophy privileged the work of Plato and Aristotle, as well as avoided Being.

Being, for Heidegger, is "being-present-in-the-world." That is, Being can be expressed only by beings, entities in the here and now. Partly because of the way Western culture has avoided developing ways of understanding Being, and partly because of the indefinite and radically obvious nature of Being itself, we really only encounter it through experience, particularly the ways in which we do things in context. One of Heidegger's favorite examples is a hammer. Generally speaking, we use a hammer without having to be taught what it is for. The use of a hammer implies the use of other items in context, such as nails, boards, even whole dwellings under construction. Largely assumed and unquestioned practices inform the way we live on earth, and therein we encounter Being, usually without realizing it. As Jeff Malpas puts the matter:

> A large part of the radicality of Heidegger's philosophy, right from the start, lay in his attempt to engage with the fundamentally situated, placed, character of being and existence. But place, as Aristotle famously observed in a passage Heidegger repeats, is "something overwhelming and hard to grasp."

Therein too, we suggest, the poet encounters poems. If we consider poems the outcome of elevated attention, the images and content of poems arise from intuitive encounters with the world. Our attention is suddenly arrested by the ordinary, which had heretofore escaped our notice, often in a particular place wherein we dwell, like Barbara Drake on her farm near Yamhill, Oregon:

> And here I am in the pasture
> making my daily rounds.
> Every day is different, something new,
> something with a face like silk
> and eyes from a science fiction movie,
> something with breath
> like wind over yellow winter grass,
> something with teeth or mandibles or roots,
> with egg sac, or fur, or a stamen and pistil.

Or, we think of Walt Whitman, in section five of "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass*, which ends with a listing of humble items transformed by the ecstatic moment of elevated attention in which he perceives them ("ecstatic" in the root sense of "standing outside oneself"):

> And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
> And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
> And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones,
> and elder and mullen and pokeweed.

At the beginning of the following section, section 6, Whitman seems to anticipate Heidegger in terms of how we take so much for granted in the world:

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? . . . . I do not know what it is any more than he.

Whitman, of course, then poses several answers to the child's question which confirm grass in its being, but do not limit the grass to a single identity—its being remains open-ended and ongoing. After reading Whitman, we still "do not know what it is." He allows the indeterminacy of Being to exist by trying out different possibilities. When we let our attention be open to the ordinary, we let Being into our poems at the mundane level in which it can be apprehended and articulated.

Much of Heidegger's life work in his study of Being was animated by the way that "truth" has been understood since the days of the ancient Greeks. Under the influence of Aristotle and the Church, in the Middle Ages and beyond, "truth" became equated with *veritas* and *certitudo*, ultimately "rightness," as in the rightness of a proposition. The rightness of the proposition is the rightness of a conclusion supported by its premises (in poetry one need only recall the structure of the classical English sonnet, often a syllogism of three premises in three quatrains, followed by a conclusion in the couplet).

Heidegger, however, finds a different meaning to "truth" in the ancient Greek of Parmenides and others, and he translates the word "*aleitheia*" not as "truth," as commonly rendered, but as "unconcealment." That is, to the ancient Greeks, truth took the form of a discovery, a disclosure, sometimes a revelation. Heidegger wants us to try to imagine this "originary" meaning of "truth"—difficult as that may be after so many centuries of *certitudo*—in order to recover our fundamental relation to Being. Heidegger writes, "The Being of beings is the most apparent; and yet, we normally do not see it—and if we do, only with difficulty." It seems to us that unconcealment is one of the primary functions of poetry. Consider, for one instance among many poems, the process of unconcealment in the last poem in James Wright's *Above the River: The Complete Poems* (set in the South of France):

A Winter Daybreak above Vence

The night's drifts
Pile up below me and behind my back,
Slide down the hill, rise again, and build
Eerie little dunes on the roof of the house.
In the valley below me,
Miles between me and the town of St.-Jeannet,
The road lamps glow.
They are so cold, they might as well be dark.
Trucks and cars
Cough and drone down between the golden
Coffins of greenhouses, the startled squawk
Of a rooster claws heavily across
A grove and drowns.
The gumming snarl of some grouchy dog sounds,
And a man bitterly shifts his broken gears.
True night still hangs on,
Mist cluttered with a racket of its own.

Now on the mountainside,
A little way downhill among turning rocks,
A square takes form in the side of a dim wall.
I hear a bucket rattle or something, tinny,
No other stirring behind the dim face
Of the goatherd's house. I imagine
His goats are still sleeping, dreaming
Of the fresh roses
Beyond the walls of the greenhouse below them
And of lettuce leaves opening in Tunisia.

I turn, and somehow
Impossibly hovering in the air over everything,
The Mediterranean, nearer to the moon
Than this mountain is,

Shines. A voice clearly
Tells me to snap out of it. Galway
Mutters out of the house and up the stone stairs
To start the motor. The moon and the stars
Suddenly flicker out, and the whole mountain
Appears, pale as a shell.

Look, the sea has not fallen and broken
Our heads. How can I feel so warm
Here in the dead center of January? I can
Scarcely believe it, and yet I have to, this is
The only life I have. I get up from the stone.
My body mumbles something unseemly
And follows me. Now we are all sitting here strangely
On top of the sunlight.

In its overall development, the poem follows the process of daybreak as seen from an elevation above the sea. The poet seems inclined toward a feeling of transcendence, suggested by the shining of the sea and the emergence of the mountain in the third section, as well as feeling elevated above the sunlight in the last line. Along the way, in the first half of the poem still under the influence of night, the focus is on the entities dwelling nearby: the houses and lamps of St-Jeannet, truck and cars, a rooster, grouchy dog, shifting gears. However, even then, the goats are dreaming of remoter things: roses and lettuce in Tunisia. Galway (Kinnell)'s muttering and the poet's own body's mumbling attempt to keep him focused here. But the vision of the poem is transcendence, underlined perhaps by the poet's awareness of his own mortality—Wright died of cancer three years after the poem's 1977 publication—which gives a resonant reading to lines like "a man bitterly shifts his broken gears" and "this is the only life I have" and "my body…follows me." In the end, the poet feels transported above the shining sea, even above sunlight.

The whole play of light and dark in this poem, especially the association of light with the unconcealment of daybreak, is fundamental

to the way Heidegger says the ancient Greeks conceived of Being. When reading Homer, one encounters many instances of light associated with the emergence of gods and heroes, the larger-than-life scale of Being, fully unconcealed.

At the end of book six of the *Iliad*, Paris and Hektor are meeting in the streets of Troy (translated by Richmond Lattimore):

> so from uttermost Pergamos came Paris, the son of
> Priam, shining in all his armour of war as the sun shines,
> laughing aloud, and his quick feet carried him; suddenly thereafter
> he came on brilliant Hektor, his brother, where he yet lingered
> before turning away from the place where he had talked with his lady.

The word "shining" in all its permutations is the most common epithet in Homer, and the reader can hardly pass a page without encountering it. Similar uses of light for unconcealment can be found in other early Greek literature, such as Parmenides, Sophocles, and Pindar.

If truth is "unconcealment," the very word implies that "concealment" has already happened. Heidegger says concealment occurs in two ways: 1) because we have not discovered something (yet) and 2) because we have forgotten something and it has fallen into oblivion. Falsity is also considered a means of concealment, a complex one wherein something has to be unconcealed in order to be concealed on purpose. Heidegger gives most of his attention to what we commonly forget, indeed, that we even forget what we have forgotten: "The being slinks away into concealment in such a manner that with this concealment I remain concealed from myself." Perhaps we have conveniently forgotten what "forget" even means:

> But what does "forget" mean? Modern man, who organizes everything in such a way that he can forget it as soon as possible, should surely know what forgetting is. But he does not know. He has forgotten the essence of forgetting, supposing he ever did give a thought to it, i.e., extend his thought into the

essential realm of forgetting. This indifference with regard to "forgetting" does not at all depend on the hastiness of his "way of life." What is happening here proceeds from the very essence of forgetting, which withdraws itself and hides…The Greeks experienced forgetting as a coming to pass of concealment.

—Translated by André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz

As a function of poetry, unconcealment would seem obvious. As Heidegger put it, "Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is." Poets are always recovering the past, always reminding us of what we have ignored or forgotten, sometimes scolding, sometimes implying with irony, sometimes revealing by discovery. Heidegger, in his book *Parmenides*, asserts that the primary mythic metaphor among the ancient Greeks was that "day and night in general manifest the events of disclosure and concealment." He says that this can hardly be expressed, because it is something utterly self-evident to the ancient Greeks. Night conceals and Day unconceals. The interplay of light and dark has motivated hundreds of poems, especially poems of place, such as James Wright's "A Winter Daybreak above Vence" (above). Again, the function of light and dark in poetry would seem an obvious observation to make, but once we are made aware of their relation to unconcealment and concealment, we can see the interplay in poems that we read and anticipate it in poems that we write. Consider the first and last stanzas of Paul Hunter's "Dawn Arpeggio," set near Sisters, Oregon:

Down the valley at first light appear
more mule deer than horses and cattle
grazing mostly head down
though never quite in unison.
……
the sun climbs the rim of the world
and aslant this frosty field
barbed wire staves are drawn
as in a silent arpeggio a lift and pour
the valley empties of deer.

At dawn, first light still murky with night, the deer appear in the valley,

but when the "sun climbs the rim of the world," the deer vanish, their absence fully unconcealed in the light of day. Many are the ways that light and dark, those primal conditions of life on earth, can enter the life of our poems, assuming that we are open to the world that prevails outside of our well-housed, air-conditioned lives.

At *Windfall* we hardly ever get poems about night, though we spend up to half of our lives there. Whether through insomnia—that modern malady defined by our waking life extended by artificial lighting—or by long-established habit as "night owls," we are often awake in the middle of night. The rich traditions and imagery of night are explored by A. Roger Ekirch in his book, *At Close of Day: Night in Times Past*. Concealment is the essence of darkness, source of both fear and celebration.

Heidegger worried about the alienation of western humanity from earth and sky. For centuries Christianity led us to assume that everything exists only through the will of God. Late in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche "unconcealed" a reality that had already come to prevail in society in general: He wrote, *God is dead*. Heidegger explains that Nietzsche was not simply announcing the death of a deity; rather, he was announcing the momentous end of a cultural paradigm. Nietzsche wrote that when we lose God, we "unchain this earth from its sun." Nietzsche had recognized a shift in the paradigm, and he found it dangerous: "The wasteland grows; woe to him who hides wastelands within."

Without the assumption of God's order in the universe, we humans inherit the dominion of the earth, and Nietzsche found humankind unready for this responsibility. Western culture in the nineteenth century had already entered what Heidegger called the "scientific-modern" paradigm, in which science had come to replace God's will in determining the way things are. To Heidegger, scientific modernity led to the technological age in which we now live. The perspective and application of technology regards everything, including people, as a "resource" or a "standing reserve." For example, a hydroelectric dam (technology) treats water as a "standing reserve." Mark Wrathall

summarizes this well in his essay, "Between Earth and Sky":

> Heidegger's ultimate aim, then, was to use Nietzsche to get clear about the ontological structure of what is becoming the most prominent feature of the place of contemporary man—namely, the technologizing of everyday life. The technological world, Heidegger argues, is grounded in the fact that everything shows up as lacking in any inherent significance, use, or purpose. Heidegger's name for the way in which entities appear and are experienced in the technological world is "resource."

Wrathall further states: "The technological age has undermined our ability to feel rooted in a particular place. Therefore, the technological age has made it difficult to live a worthwhile life."

Of course Heidegger does not reject what might be called "appropriate technology," that which is required to dwell on earth, to build (see "hammer," above) or to cultivate. Mark H. Clark expresses this kind of building in his poem "Musty Buck Ridge":

> On that ridge, I built the house that enclosed my family.
> Built with the posts and beams exposed,
> So that my children could see the flow of the forces
> that held it together and tied it to the ground.

To Heidegger, dwelling was not exploitation, but the preservation and care of the earth and humanity. The earth conceals itself from us, but also shelters us and takes us back when we die. The 2011 Nobel Literature Prize winner, Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, evokes the earth and our relation to its mystery:

> Sketch in October
>
> The tugboat is freckled with rust. What's it doing here so far inland?
> It's a heavy extinguished lamp in the cold.
> But the trees have wild colors: signals to the other shore.
> As if someone wanted to be fetched.
>
> On my way home I see mushrooms sprouting through the grass.

> They are the fingers, stretching for help, of someone
> who has been sobbing alone down in the darkness.
> We are the earth's.
>
> —Translated by Robin Fulton

Wrathall again: "Heidegger's analysis, to frame it as succinctly as I can, is as follows: it is a relationship to things that have intrinsic importance that makes a life genuinely fulfilling. It is only our belonging in a particular place (existentially understood) that makes some things really matter." As Tranströmer says, "We are the earth's."

In the technological age, Heidegger says we are "homesick" for dwelling in one place inhabited by people and things that have existential (and not merely instrumental) importance. Such importance comes about when we give our attention to what Heidegger terms the fourfold: earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Heidegger actually wrote very little about the fourfold, but Wrathall has done his best to summarize:

> The four are meant, by Heidegger, quite literally. The earth is the earth beneath our feet, the earth that spreads out all around us as mountains and in trees, in rivers and streams. The sky *is* the sky above our heads, the stars and constellations, the sun and moon, the shifting weather that brings our changing seasons. We *are* the mortals—we and our companions—living our lives and dying our deaths. And the divinities—the most elusive members of the fourfold in this age—*are* divine beings, the "beckoning messengers of the Godhead."

For Heidegger the fourfold are interrelated. However, as Wrathall notes, the most "elusive" of the fourfold in an age that has no God to give meaning to things (see Nietzsche, above) is "the divinities." Heidegger felt that humankind inevitably would seek to acknowledge the mystery of Being, the kind of intelligibility of the world that we do not ourselves produce, or that which is "more than we know." Our rescue from the reduction to resource by technology is to find our way back to the unknowable, a.k.a. the divine. This is not something that we can make happen, but that will come upon us. In the meantime,

Heidegger thought we should maintain the communal rituals and practices we still have, to await the "weal that has been withdrawn."

Above all, we should dwell on earth in full awareness of earth and sky, accepting the challenge of our mortality—awakening to the primal conditions of our existence. It seems to us that Jane Kenyon (1947-1995), drawing upon the details of living on her farm in New Hampshire, as well as the play of light and dark, has integrated the fourfold in the following poem, published in 1990:

LET EVENING COME

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through the chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to the air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

We find Heidegger's idea relevant to dwelling and building poems in the Pacific Northwest. Philosophy such as Heidegger's can give us inspiration for poems by enabling us to see the ordinary ecstatically and to see how the place where we live can be unconcealed. William

Stafford, himself a reader of philosophy, put unconcealment eloquently in his "Ritual to Read to Each Other":

> For it is important that awake people be awake,
> or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
> the signals we give—yes or no, or maybe—
> should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.
>
> —Bill Siverly and Michael McDowell

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