

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Consumerism and the Western dedication to science and technology have reduced language to slums. Advertising clichés and task-oriented rather than truth-revealing language are tenements of these slums. In the midst of language slums, poetic dwelling becomes increasingly difficult to find.

In *Dwelling Poetically: Educational Challenges in Heidegger's Thinking on Poetry*, Haim Gordon proposes a reclamation project that replaces language slums with poetic dwelling. Great poetry, the “throbbing, shimmering, enlightening, beautiful phrases that articulate and reveal an aspect of reality,” cuts through the superficial and illuminates the great truths of existence.

Gordon makes it clear: he can't stand Heidegger the man, an unrepentant Nazi who dwelled inauthentically. Yet Gordon respects Heidegger the philosopher, especially his insights into poetry. “Language is the house of Being,” writes Heidegger. “In its home man dwells.” In terminology that has become familiar to twentieth-century philosophy, Heidegger regards poetry as a revealing of truth (*Aletheia*). The excessive calculating of the modern era conceals the essence of truth, which is at once a concealing-revealing.

Citing the poetry of Poe, Shakespeare, E.E. Cummings, Robert Frost, Stefan George, Pablo Neruda, and Rabindranath Tagore, Gordon recommends relating to poetry a non-philological, non-scientific, non-methodological manner. Language is not merely a means to communicate, but a way to approach Being. Engaging poetry means to learn it by heart. We must listen to great poetry without analysis, interpretations, deconstructions, and discussions of symbols.

Measuring one's life in accordance with the revealed truths of poetry is the essence of dwelling poetically. Great poetry provides clearings where truth emerges. Reading great poems helps us leap into a new way of life guided by happenings of truths that become unconcealed. Poetic engagement is not a touch-feely group therapy exercise, but a letting go into the world of poetic truths. Unlike Heidegger, Gordon recognizes the joy of poetry.

The major role of educator, says Gordon, is to help students relate to poetry while distancing from dominance of scientific method. Poetry leads to thinking, authenticity, questioning Being, to resoluteness in face of death. Poetry, not the teaching values, guides us to a genuine humanism. Values are not able to guide us in establishing a genuine humanism. Poetry, on the other hand, cultivates a sensitivity to evils in world.

Are language slums the result of consumerism or Western science and technology? Were there fewer language slums in Great Greece or the Elizabethan era than in contemporary corporate America? Are language slums

a frequent failing of inauthentic human beings and cultures? Is poetic dwelling as rare as Gordon suggests?

The final question, since it does not require tomes to explain, will be addressed.

Some of the language slums are being renovated by the world-wide emergence of Slam Poetry. Its originator, Chicago poet Mark Smith, believes, as Haim Gordon does, that poetry loses its power when it is not heard. In Smith's words, Slam Poetry is "a grab bag, variety show, which mixes together on open stages, special guests, musical and dramatic arts, and lots of audience interaction." Judges score a mock competition between poets. The egalitarian and inclusive philosophy of Slam Poetry culminates in the performance of the poetry. Slam Poetry celebrates joy of poetry and the community to which poets belong.

Slam Poetry is all the more refreshing and authentic because its setting is not the deconstructive classroom (where only the carcasses of overanalyzed poems remain), but the bars and taverns of every-day people. Audience members are not captive students cursing iambic pentameter, but passionate poetic dwellers.

Poetic dwelling is not a solitary affair but communal one. Slam Poetry underscores that point. Language slums when it remains on the page and fails to come alive in the voices and gestures of poets and interaction with their audiences.

I doubt Heidegger would have been enamored of Slam Poetry. But then, as Gordon points out, Heidegger's analysis neglects the joy of poetry. Dwelling poetically is dwelling joyfully. Can anyone dwell in Heidegger's famous House of Being without joy?

George David Miller
Editor, Philosophy of Education Special Series