



Review of Heidegger on literature, poetry, and education after the “turn”

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BOOK REVIEW

Review of Heidegger on literature, poetry, and education after the “turn”, by James M. Magrini and Elias Schwieler, Routledge, 2018, 234 pp, New York and London; ISBN 978-1-13823891-6

Magrini and Schwieler’s book offers careful readings of Heidegger’s later texts in relation to a number of literary works, with the overarching aim of calling for a transformation in “education” in an age dominated by technology and the technical. Their book, fluently and elegantly written, has much to say to those working in Heidegger studies, literature and poetry studies, and especially in education and the philosophy of education.

The authors open with a helpful account of the development of Heidegger’s thought after *Being and Time* (the famous *Kehre* or “turn” in Heidegger’s thinking), but the distinctive feature of their book is their illuminating readings of literature and poetry in relation to some of the later Heidegger’s major motifs. Chapter 2 offers sensitive readings of the poetry of Hölderlin and Rilke in relation to Heidegger’s later notions of Being, language, and history. Chapter 3 brings the poetry of Tomas Tranströmer and Arthur Rimbaud into conversation with the Heideggerian themes of strangeness and familiarity, identity and difference. Chapter 4 presents a lengthy analysis of Joseph Conrad’s novel *Lord Jim* that opens up both the novel and Heidegger’s texts in new and thoughtful ways. Chapter 6 is a capstone chapter, insofar as the authors attempt to summarize their findings and apply them to the task of education. The Epilogue to the book appears to be an obligatory statement on Heidegger’s relation to National Socialism, and, unfortunately, it is quite out of tune with the rest of the book. The book deserved a more fitting concluding reflection, and one suspects that the authors thought so, too.

Yet to return to Chapter 6: This is a chapter that should be required reading for all those who care about the art of education. As the authors point out, much of the scholarship in this area has focused on the early Heidegger’s themes in *Being and Time*, but Magrini and Schwieler rightfully argue that there is even more to be learned from the later Heidegger’s reflections. Of particular importance is the later Heidegger’s critique of the domination of “calculative thinking” in our contemporary age and his emphasis on a recovery of a “released” (*Gelassenheit*) manner of comporting ourselves to others and to all things.

Under the pressure of “calculative thinking” today, education has been disfigured into an enterprise that is concerned chiefly with “efficiency” and “productivity” and the “achievement” of measurable standards. Lost, or at least forgotten, is the aim of fostering an attitude of care and concern for the safeguarding of things that allows for an ever-deepening understanding – and appreciation – of what is. Things are not merely “objects” of study in “units” of study in a standardized curriculum, but rather wondrous *presences* to us that call to us for attention and require ever more consideration. The authors put this well: “The privileging of calculative thought in all areas of our lives exhibits the tendency to obscure the human, or *humane*, element not only in education, but also in our everyday modes of navigating the world with others” (207). Educators at every level must be helped to become free of the often invisible constraints of the contemporary cultural frame of “calculation” and “measurement” so they can assist students to become free themselves for a calmer, richer, and more appreciative experience of everything that is.

The authors’ consideration of the later Heidegger’s themes in the interest of revising educational philosophy and practices is important and timely, and one hopes that they will not

only further develop their insights in Chapter 6, but also work actively to help implement these insights in the day-to-day practice of education at all levels. Magrini and Schwieler give eloquent testimony in this superb book to the wisdom of Heidegger's later thinking and how this wisdom can be a guide and inspiration for all of us:

Heidegger presents us with an authentic form of conversation that embraces the unpredictable and unsettled nature of human life in all of its ambiguity. In doing so, this conversation demonstrates a sense of guardianship for the preservation of *the primal mystery inherent in all things*. (208)

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