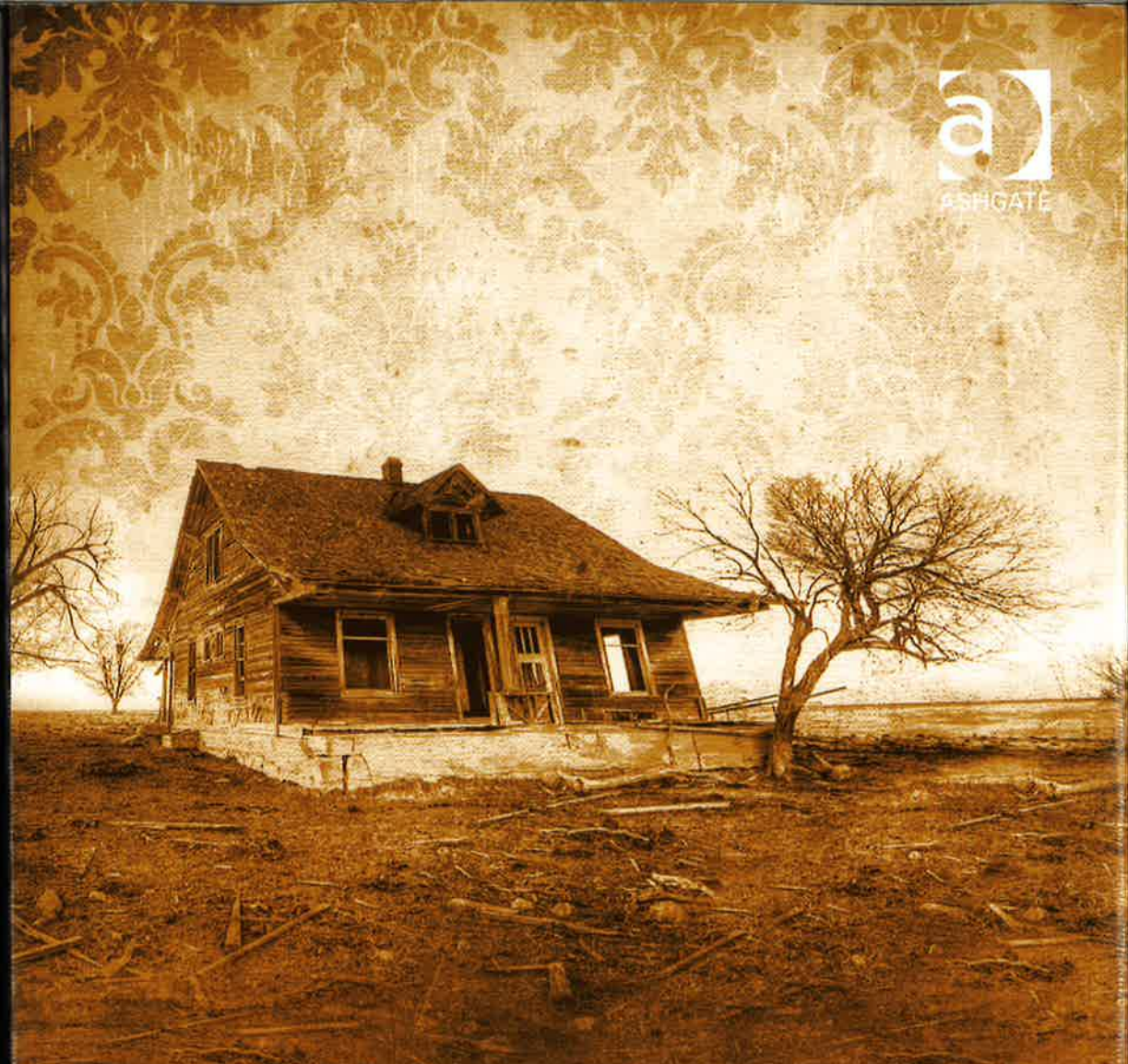




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EDITED BY

DANIEL BOSCALJON

RESISTING THE  
PLACE OF BELONGING

Uncanny Homecomings in Religion,  
Narrative and the Arts

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Chapter 5  
The Paradox of Homecoming: Home is  
Where the Haunt is

Kimberly Carfore

The world is in crisis. The crisis involves a proliferation of complex and uncertain phenomena like global financial instability, poverty, immigration, climate change, species extinction, water scarcity, ethnic and cultural conflict, etc. Some people respond to such phenomena by attempting to save the world from its critical condition. However, as Jacques Derrida observes, “the convulsive effort to save a ‘world’” is itself a symptom of the crisis, for the crisis is precisely that there is no single “world” in crisis, no common home or dwelling to save, “no more *oikos*, economy, ecology, livable site in which we are ‘at home.’”<sup>1</sup> The very idea of home (coming home, being at home, etc.) is cracked open by all that which is not at home, all that which is away, uncanny, and other.

To respond to the crisis of the world today, what is called for is not more efforts to save our common home. What is called for is participation in the deconstruction of home, participation in the opening up of home to the coming of that which is strange, foreign, unexpected, and impossible. Only then will a just world arrive. This is the work of deconstruction: opening up the home to the impossible conditions of its own reality, opening up the home so that something wholly other can come. Derrida continues:

The deconstruction of logocentrism, of linguisticism, of economism (of the proper, of the at-home [*chez-soi*], *oikos*, of the same), etc., as well as the affirmation of the impossible are always put forward *in the name of the real*, of the irreducible reality of the real—not of the real as the attribute of the objective, present, perceptible or intelligible *thing (res)*, but of the real as the coming or event of the other.<sup>2</sup>

What follows is an elaboration on the deconstruction of home, particularly in light of the sense of the messianic conveyed in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interviews and Interventions 1971–2001*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, 2002), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 367. Translation modified by Pheng Cheah, “Non-Dialectical Materialism,” in Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, 2010), p. 76.

deconstruction of home, for Derrida, affirms a messianic call for the arrival of an event of justice, yet his messianic affirmation takes place without a determinate messiah and without a determinate messianism, whether Jewish, Christian, or otherwise. The arrival of the event of justice is always to come, infinitely exceeding the limits of presence. Accordingly, the messianic call for justice is a call for something or someone to come that displaces place, exceeding the limits of every home. In other words, welcoming the other, the wholly other, foreigner or stranger into one's home is a welcoming of an impossible event—a justice that exceeds the coordinates of what we currently understand to be possible. To welcome home the *arrivant* is to practice what could be called a postsecular “religion without religion,” opening up to the otherness or “alterity” that overflows the proper boundaries that mark the home apart from its other (believers from non-believers, saints from sinners, the saved from the damned, the sacred from profane, etc.). Welcoming the stranger into one's home marks the arrival of an event of justice, an event that implodes these otherwise neatly categorized boundaries—sacred/profane, religious/secular, familiar/foreign, self/other—opening to the paradoxical space of the uncanny homecoming. When the stranger comes home, that home becomes uncanny, and the paradoxical space of this uncanny homecoming marks the arrival of an event of justice.

This chapter is divided into four parts: 1) I articulate Derrida's understanding of the messianic without a messianism, including an account of the incalculability and otherness that marks the messianic; 2) I discuss the injustices that haunt the dwelling spaces of global society and prevent anyone from being at home; 3) I express an invitation to respond to injustice by welcoming the singular otherness of every other (human and non-human), such that the ghosts of our history are welcomed as newcomers and given places at our homes, although it renders strange what would otherwise be familiar to us; 4) finally, I give an overview of similar responses to otherness that can be found in the humanities, specifically in feminism and eco-feminism.

In the impossible event of welcoming the other, what shows up is a ghost—an absent presence, a haunting that calls for justice. Accordingly, for homecoming to be a just practice, it must be a matter of coming home to a haunting—a haunted house—and preparing for a messianic event of justice with no hope of the presence of a determinate Messiah. The messianic call for justice is a call to exorcise the ghosts of history by respecting the wholly otherness of their arrival. Preparing for this event, a messianic event without a determinate Messiah demands a radical openness that brings justice to those others who have been excluded or otherwise rendered invisible throughout history.

### Messianic

Every messianic call for justice happens somewhere, in some historical context, wherein the justice that is called for takes a particular form and is thus implicated in a particular messianism—a particular understanding of how justice

is determined. A Jewish call for justice and a Christian call for justice are not unsituated messianic structures, but are situated in the messianisms of Judaism and Christianity. Furthermore, a call for justice is situated in a messianism even if the call is not expressed in explicitly religious terms. Thus, Derrida notices that Marx's seemingly atheistic call for justice involves its own messianism reflected in Marx's understanding of the dialectical movement of history.

It is not possible to live in the messianic in general, stripped of all contexts or all messianisms. Yet, in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, what is proposed is precisely a messianic without a historical messianism or determinate Messiah. But how is this possible? How can one “remove a biblical surface from a messianic structure?”<sup>3</sup> How do we practice a messianic justice without a messianism? How do we practice a religion without religion? We must welcome the arrival of the messianic without knowing or having a determinate expectation of what the messianic is. Therefore, the arrival of justice would not necessarily be the second coming of Jesus Christ, but it also does not rule out the possibility of Christ as the Messiah.

Similar to the Jewish custom of setting an extra place at the Passover table, Derrida performs a “messianic opening to what is coming ... to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope ... nothing and no one would arrive otherwise.”<sup>4</sup> This movement is filled with anxiety, “since it involves the operation of taking into one's home the *unheimlich*, the one who is not part of the home, the stranger.”<sup>5</sup> It is uncanny, such that a home opens a space for discomfort and unfamiliarity rather than comfort and the familiar. Therefore, the ethics of a home calls for radical openness, or openness toward that which is foreign. What would happen if a stranger actually arrived to claim his or her seat at the table? Who would this stranger be and how might we react?

The space at one's table is a constant reminder of the uncanniness of home. Welcoming the stranger, the newcomer, the messianic without a determinate Messiah is the impossible task at hand. It is the task of justice—“a welcoming that is a little uneasy about what is to come, a little spooked. For welcoming is unnerving.”<sup>6</sup> It is unnerving in the sense that radical openness demands radical uncertainty, which is rightfully anxiety producing. The uncanny home is both descriptive and prescriptive. It is descriptive in that justice requires welcoming, and welcoming the other happens to be unnerving. In another sense, Derrida conveys a prescriptive tone, as if to say that one *should* become unnerved. However, it is ultimately neither prescriptive nor descriptive—any prescription telling you what to do and any description of what is are parts of the familiar home that the

<sup>3</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington, 1997), p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1994), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Caputo, *Prayers*, p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

stranger disrupts. Upon arrival, the stranger states "Deal with me in my alterity" (an imperative), which means dealing with the other without assimilating them into your horizon of de-, pre-, and pro-scriptions. Uncanniness *should* trouble the is/ought dichotomy, opening to the unnerved welcome.

To be unnerved or unsure of what one is waiting for, what one is opening to or welcoming, is to be living at the boundary of what is livable or habitable. Derrida uses the image of a desert to express such an uninhabitable habitation. This desert implies an emptiness or barrenness. It is only in this barren space that we can encounter a messianic openness that makes tremble the borders, structures, and expectations that determine what or who the Messiah is, what or who justice looks like. The barren space of the desert is the space of the wholly other, a wholly other that is so radically other that it resists identification with any particular name, for example, God. Leaving this space open, **untouched—a paradox—is** maintaining a space to make possible the impossible. **Practicing radical openness** within the boundaries of our own homes extends **outside of our homes, opening up** the possibility of a more just future.

That which is wholly other may or may not imply God. If the Messiah were definable, it would lose its uncanniness or radical alterity. If one could predict its arrival, one could prepare for its coming, making it no longer wholly other, or an event to come. In short, for the wholly other to be wholly other, it cannot be present. The arrival of the wholly other is, in this sense, strictly impossible. The wholly other must arrive in a rupture within the possible, a rupture that opens a space for justice to come. As John Caputo says:

The passion for the impossible is precisely not to be quenched. The one who is coming ... the *tout autre*, can never be present. He must always function as a breach of the present, opening up the present to something new, to something impossible. Were the horizon of possibility to close over, it would erase the trace of justice, for justice is the trace of what is to come beyond the possible.<sup>7</sup>

This space beyond-the-possible is the space of the messianic, and the trace of one to come. Welcoming the messianic into our homes is a great place to enter these remarkable spaces—cultivating a passion and promise for justice to come.

The messianic without a Messiah is messianic because it is always calling for the arrival of justice, yet there is no being that would possibly bring this justice—no Messiah—insofar as justice is an impossible task. Justice is always to come, never fully present. Moreover, lest those who hear Derrida's messianic call feel disempowered, it is important to mention that this call for the impossible does not imply inaction. It implies an ongoing vigilance in maintaining an ethical obligation towards bringing justice. The disjointed or impossible condition of bringing about justice is precisely what makes justice possible. Without this impossibility, justice "rests on the good conscience of having done one's duty, it loses the chance of the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. xxiv.

future."<sup>8</sup> Losing the chance of a future means losing the chance for inheritance. This does not imply making a home in an unrealizable future instead of a past, but rather to remain open to a future and past that are not present or (re)presentable, but wholly other.

The absolute alterity of the other must remain ineffaceable in the name of justice, the impossible, and the future to come. Furthermore, it is not only the alterity of some others that evokes Derrida's concern; it is the alterity of every single other. Derrida writes: "Every other is altogether other." In French, this is palindromic: "tout autre est tout autre," where its translation is both "every other is altogether other," and "altogether other is every other."<sup>9</sup> Maintaining the ineffaceable mark of the other, of every other, calls for a respect for the absolute singularity of every other. It does not mean that one would indiscriminately open up his or her borders to welcoming any other, nor would they indiscriminately close their door upon the arrival of the other. What it does mean is that respecting the absolute alterity of every other would be responding to the unique imperatives of each, breaking open the limits of the possible, welcoming the impossible, and responding to the singular call of justice issuing from the otherness of every other.

When entering into a relationship with any other, that other is translated or assimilated into one's own horizon of perception or meaning. Therefore, upon the arrival of that which is other, the other loses its sense of otherness because it is now in relation to a self or non-other. Real hospitality implies an impossible openness that cannot be fulfilled. In other words, hospitality toward the other is always already contaminated by hostility toward the other. Derrida expresses this paradox with the term "hostipitality"—a portmanteau term combining hospitality and hostility.<sup>10</sup> To put this another way, there is no way of relating to the other without also narcissistically appropriating its alterity. "There is not narcissism and non-narcissism; there are narcissisms that are more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended."<sup>11</sup> As I have mentioned already, this is not meant to discourage action. Rather, the ontological impossibility of fully welcoming the other compels us toward ethical and political obligations characterized by ongoing encounters with the imperatives of all others—a commitment to responding to the call of justice.

This is the ethics and politics of deconstruction. "To prepare oneself for this coming [*venue*] of the other is what can be called deconstruction."<sup>12</sup> Deconstruction is a practice of welcoming the alterity of every other, which could also be described as a practice of welcoming the other. This is likewise the task of doing justice to the other. Remember Derrida's provocative phrase: "*Deconstruction is justice.*"<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 195n37.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York, 2002), p. 358.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974–1994* (Stanford, 1995), p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Caputo, *Prayers*, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Acts*, p. 243.

If deconstruction is justice, then deconstruction is a practice of an uncanny homecoming. Deconstructing the demarcations of home and opening one's home to include strangers, ghosts, the unexpected, and the impossible is the task at hand, the task of justice. Practicing this impossible task in our own homes—in mind and body—opens us to the messianic structure, therefore welcoming the embodiment of new structures of reality. This messianic call for justice, although not to be quenched, is the ongoing call for new ways of welcoming the other.

### Haunting

The call for justice emerges in the disjunction of time—a paradoxical space of non-resolution or impossibility, a gap that opens to invite the ongoing call for justice to arrive and remains open for what is to come. Derrida opens his *Specters of Marx* with the words of Shakespeare's Hamlet, who decries, "The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!"<sup>14</sup> The time is out of joint indeed. Ecological, economic, social, psychological, and spiritual problems plague us, and never has the crisis been so extensive, so multifaceted. In these difficult times we face difficult issues. The call for justice is communicated through the voices of subjugated, oppressed others—women, children, racial minorities, animals, and the environment, to name a few. The one who bears witness to injustices present in the other, the stranger, the foreigner inherits the responsibility as one's duty to set things right. We may not want it and may curse its presence, nagging memory, or haunting voice, which is very much the case. Derrida's idea of *haunting* is exactly this—a nagging memory, obsession or voice. That which haunts is the return of those subjugated, oppressed others that have been excluded in history.

The call for justice in the presence of the other is a *haunting*—"A certain revisitation of the present by a ghost from the past."<sup>15</sup> The haunting other is a ghost, a *revenant*. Its constant presence and relationship to us through time is Derrida's *hauntology*.<sup>16</sup> To exorcise ghosts is to "grant [ghosts] the right," even if it is "making them come back alive."<sup>17</sup> To exorcise is not to chase them away, but to give them a place at one's table and a hospitable welcome. The visible other, which has been made invisible through violence, oppression, or injustice, is kept alive as the *revenant*, the ghost, and calls for justice through its haunting apparitions. It calls for your attention or, more appropriately, demands your attention, through the glance, the touch, the voice—it *haunts*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Caputo, *Prayers*, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> For more on *hauntology*, see Derrida, *Specters*, pp. 10, 51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177n2.

Living one's life means living in the impossible space of a justice to come, the space of haunting. One dwells in one's haunts. "To live, by definition, is not something one learns ... from oneself," but "only from the other and by death."<sup>19</sup> "What happens between ... life and death, can only *maintain itself* with some ghost."<sup>20</sup> These ghostly apparitions, these fuzzy boundaries are representative of the vagueness and openness to ambiguity necessary in cultivating justice. In our ongoing interactions with one another, it is important to practice muddying boundaries or opening these liminal spaces. In these liminal spaces between life and death, sacred and secular, self and other, foreign and familiar lies an ontological space for new development, a space for new possibilities—for the future. Injustices from the past can be reconciled through the haunting presence of the ghost. Attending to these nagging memories or obsessions, whatever they might be, exorcises these ghosts, and creates a more just past, present, and future.

Derrida writes that "haunting is historical,"<sup>21</sup> expressing the lives and deaths of past others, calling for justice to bring about the future. This implies an ongoing process of encountering alterity, uncomfortable spaces despite apprehension, disinterest, or fear. In relation to the home, this implies an ongoing openness to the other, the stranger, the guest. Maintaining that open place at one's table demonstrates the importance of remaining open to the possibility that all one's comforts could be shattered by the arrival of the other. This is not to say that one allows every stranger, guest, or foreigner into one's home. What it does imply is accepting responsibility and practicing discernment—a responsibility and commitment to our haunts—our uncanny homecomings.

"Given that a *revenant* is always called upon to come and to come back, the thinking of the specter, contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future. It is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived—from the *arrivant* itself."<sup>22</sup> As haunting is historical, the thinking of the specter is reminding oneself of the imperatives it speaks. When thinking of the specter—one's haunts, obsessions, nagging presences—that which shows up is the *arrivant*.

### Arrivant

Where the *revenant* is a ghost, the *arrivant* is a guest or newcomer, not a determinate Messiah. Derrida describes the welcoming of the *arrivant* as always to come, in the future (*avenir*, translated literally as "the future"). *Revenant* means "a coming back" or "return" where *revenir* literally means "to come back." Where *arrivant* is the messianic future and the coming of justice, what shows up as the *revenant* is

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196n39.

always a ghost. The thinking of the ghost “is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived—from the *arrivant* itself.”<sup>23</sup>

The *arrivant* is always “to come” (*à-venir*), in “the future” (*l’avenir*), such that when the *arrivant* haunts, it marks the coming of a past that calls for a more just future.<sup>24</sup> In the hope and promise of one day bringing about justice, the *arrivant* continues to arrive, as an unpredictable force that haunts us with its compelling alterity. Deconstruction is the practice of welcoming the alterity of the *arrivant* as it shows up in the haunting calls for justice issuing from all others. Dwelling in the space of haunting, deconstruction welcomes every ghost as a newcomer.

Injustice plagues so many beings right now. It is impossible to keep track of all the others calling for justice. As haunting is historical, injustices show up as ghosts—fuzzy representations of past events, which should be set right. The thinking of the specter is an impossible task, indeed. Taking on this impossible task, Derrida lists 10 “plagues” of the current global civilization (the “new world order”): unemployment (or social inactivity); exclusion of the homeless and stateless; economic war; contradictions of the free market; national debt; the arms industry; nuclear proliferation; interethnic wars; mafia and drug cartels (phantom states); and the limits of the concept and practice of international law.<sup>25</sup> This list does not include the injustices I mentioned earlier—the ecological crisis, social, spiritual, and psychological problems, etc. As humans become more aware of their interconnection among and within species, it is important to begin including the injustices of non-human others in our lists. As Derrida’s list focuses primarily on injustices done to human beings, it raises the question as to whether Derrida really honors the compelling alterity of *every* other.

What about non-human others? David Wood (2007) responds to this question in his attempt to propose an ecological deconstruction or “econstruction—a living, developing, and materially informed deconstruction.”<sup>26</sup> According to Wood, deconstruction can and does indeed respond to the alterity of the natural environment. “Environmental destruction gives us a wake-up call of epic proportion, and is surely a candidate for the status of *arrivant*.”<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Wood suggests that Derrida’s list of plagues should be extended to include the environmental crisis.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, when Wood made this suggestion to Derrida in conversation, Derrida “quickly accepted this suggestion.”<sup>29</sup> Dwelling in the space of haunting, deconstruction is a messianic practice of welcoming every

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 81–4.

<sup>26</sup> David Wood, “Specters of Derrida: On the Way to Econstruction,” in Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (eds), *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (New York, 2007), p. 267.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 588.

ghost as a newcomer, even animals, plants, and ecosystems. Moreover, Wood is not alone in his ecological approach to the *arrivant*. This is also the argument that Timothy Morton makes in *The Ecological Thought*, where he suggests that we should welcome all beings as strange strangers, where the phrase “strange stranger” is his translation of Derrida’s *arrivant*.<sup>30</sup>

As *oikos* (Greek for home) translates to the English prefix *eco* of ecology (as well as economy), it is important to extend our conception of home to include earth as home—an uncanny move indeed. The multifaceted crisis we face demands an expansion of worldviews, including an extension of our ideas of history and inheritance. Did we inherit the earth? What is our responsibility towards non-human others? Where did we come from? Where are we going? What is a homecoming? This expansion forces humans to think on an evolutionary scale rather than through closed conceptions of self and other, familiar and foreign, sacred and profane. We open ourselves to different implications of these questions of home, deconstructing our notions of home for a just world to arrive—not a world to be saved, but rather a world to be questioned.

Animals, plants, trees, ecosystems—these certainly are strange strangers. How do we welcome the alterity of these creatures? What are the ethics of a home that includes trees, plants, animals, and ecosystems? Following the trends of the eco-humanities, we can observe how others have already extended the concept of uncanny homecomings to include non-human others. Exemplified by David Wood’s ecological contribution to deconstruction, we can also see such an extension occurring in another philosophical movement with which deconstruction is closely affiliated—feminism. Like Wood’s transformation of deconstruction into ecological deconstruction, feminism has entered ecological expression as eco-feminism.

### Feminist Others

As quoted earlier, obligations towards the familiar, the at-home are “always put forward *in the name of the real*.” Attending to alterity is a way to respect the singularity of all others, including non-human others. Feminist theorists have accomplished much by way of bringing more attention to alterity, specifically in relationship to the otherness of gender and sexuality. Many feminists articulate ways in which the patriarchal structures of Western civilization objectify the alterity of women, subjugating and subordinating women to the subjective agency of men. To attend to this alterity and welcome it on its own terms is to subvert the domination of women that has marked the history of patriarchy. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir recognizes this subversive power in her

<sup>30</sup> “I develop the concept of the strange stranger from Derrida’s *arrivant*, the ultimate arrival to whom one must extend ultimate hospitality.” Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), p. 140n39.

classic work of feminist philosophy when suggesting that “the very fact that woman is *Other* challenges all the justification that men have ever given” for assimilating women into their own identity.<sup>31</sup>

Eco-feminist theorists extend feminist concerns with the domination of the alterity of women to address the domination of all others, human and non-human. In other words, eco-feminism addresses the domination of women while also addressing the underlying logic whereby oppressive hierarchies and asymmetries facilitate the domination of women as well as the domination of nature, the poor, and racial and ethnic minorities. This follows the definition of eco-feminism set forth by Karen Warren, for whom eco-feminism focuses on overcoming the “logic of domination,” which underlies multiple forms of domination (sexism, naturism, racism, classism, ethnocentrism).<sup>32</sup> All of the oppressive hierarchies and asymmetries of globalization are thus folded together with feminism.

Respecting the alterity of human and earth others does not call for differences and otherness to be incorporated so that everybody is the same. That would be what the eco-feminist philosopher Val Plumwood calls an “uncritical reversal,” and it is this behavior that reinforces the very structure we are working to do away with.<sup>33</sup> For Plumwood, the answer in resolving this dualism is to cultivate continuity with difference, where we recognize both the interconnectedness of things as well as their alterity. In Morton’s terms, this means recognizing every being as part of the interconnected “mesh” (continuity) and as a strange stranger (difference).<sup>34</sup> This also resonates with the work of the feminist theorist Donna Haraway, particularly her category of “companion species,” which figures the coevolutionary interconnectedness between species while also affirming the “significant otherness” of species.<sup>35</sup>

Feminists’ work with alterity deconstructs the conceptual framework that keeps us “at home.” Recognizing the coevolutionary interconnection between species, specifically the human to non-human relationship, is welcoming these strange strangers into our homes. Overcoming the logic of domination opens space for recognizing our ongoing obligations towards these others. The coevolutionary relationship is articulated in Haraway’s discussion of the human-to-lab-animal relationship: “Response ... grows with the capacity to respond, that is, responsibility. Such a capacity can be shaped only in and for multidirectional

<sup>31</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, 2009), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Karen Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism: Revisited,” in Louis Pojman and Paul Pojman (eds), *Environmental Ethics Readings in Theory and Application*, 5th edn (Belmont, 2008), pp. 33–48.

<sup>33</sup> Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, 1993), p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, 2008), pp. 90, 97, 165.

relationships.”<sup>36</sup> We are enmeshed in these multidirectional relationships. It is therefore our inheritance and responsibility as humans to include non-human others into our homes, ethics, and politics. This is not to be taken literally, however. It would be ridiculous to allow all animals into our homes. What this does mean is that species extinction is our responsibility. What it calls for is the deconstruction of one’s assumption of home as well as one’s haunts. This might mean developing a more comprehensive environmental ethic, as well as recognizing what it means to share a common home—the earth. As the global crisis extends to ecological proportions, it is our duty to respond to the singular call of justice issuing from these creatures and, in this, welcoming their alterity.

### Conclusion

Trends in feminism and eco-feminism show that Derrida’s messianic sense of justice is situated amidst other philosophical movements that aim to welcome the alterity of human and earth others. One need not adhere to Derrida’s work or to any determinate form of deconstruction to participate in the messianic without a messianism. One only needs to come home: to dwell in one’s haunts and welcome ghosts in ways that respect them as arriving newcomers and also let them come home.

To come to one’s haunted home, to one’s impossible place, one is called to make the boundaries and borders of home more just, more open and amenable to strangers, newcomers, and other others. One is called to recognize that one’s home is only home when haunted by all the ghosts who could not be present, by all the strangers rendered invisible throughout history. This includes non-human others who have been oppressed under current structures of home.

As one’s home is pervaded with things familiar, common, and domestic, it might appear questionable that a home is a just home insofar as it is haunted by that which is uncanny, alien, foreign, strange, and absent. The hip hop artist Sean “Diddy” Combs asks this question in his recently released song “Coming Home”: “Is a house really a home when your loved ones are gone?”<sup>37</sup> Derrida would answer that this is precisely when a house is really a home. Participating in the deconstruction of home, it is evident that a home is really a home precisely insofar as it is haunted by the absence of loved ones and other others that call for our concern and compassion, for welcome, and for a place at home. A home is really a home precisely insofar as it is impossible. Opening up all possibilities and every determinate Messiah and messianism, we can come home, strangely coming back to our old haunts and preparing vigilantly for justice to come.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Sean J. Combs, “Coming Home,” in *Last Train to Paris* (Bad Boy Records, 2010).



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## Chapter 6

## Uncanny Courage and Theological Home

Verna Marina Ehret

The idea of theological homecoming places us before a mystery that we are immediately drawn to in its ability to center our lives. At the same time, we are unsettled by this home because it places us before an abyss of the unknown we can never fully grasp. In the process of narrating home, some find themselves attempting to encompass all aspects of theological home in a single, all-embracing narrative, eliminating the unknown abyss. Others embrace difference by claiming there is no over-arching narrative of home. There are multiple, incomplete narratives because human understanding cannot fully grasp theological home – if it can be grasped at all. In the dialectical tension of these two ways of narrating theological home, there is tremendous exclusion. Those who seek a single narrative find no place in the ever-shifting world of multiple narratives, while those who diverge from an over-arching narrative are cast out, finding no home. Theological home is uncanny because it presents what is both familiar and unknown. An over-arching narrative sacrifices the uncanny, to the detriment of a person's ability to return home. At the same time, multiple disconnected narratives embrace the uncanniness at the expense of a sense of belonging.

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a path of integration, a way that people can be gathered into a home that both is and is not one's own, an uncanny home, through the recognition and acceptance of the multiple voices of sacred history. To construct this path, this chapter builds the notion of the transcontextual narrative as a narrative of mediation within religious communities, thereby enabling the creation of integration within difference.

### Sacred Space and Courage: Foundations of Uncanny Theological Homecoming

What makes theological homecoming uncanny? The uncanniness comes in the mystery of the sacred – the sacred is a place of simultaneous belonging and uncertainty. One feels at home in the sacred and at the same time aware that one cannot fully grasp this sacred in human language and knowing. Theological homecoming can be tied to space, but what makes the space a theological home is not the space itself, but rather one's interpretation of it and one's narrative of how one fits into the space. The significance of the space is the home to which it points and of which it is a symbol. Theological homecoming points toward the