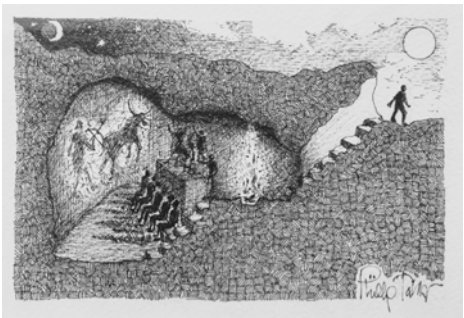


A Home in the World: The Ontological Significance of Home

Thomas Barrie



This chapter examines and explores the special case of the domestic regarding the perennial task of architecture — to assist humans in structuring their understanding of the world and their place in it. It begins with the ontological position of homelessness — the human condition of estrangement from a world, in the words of the American poet Wallace Stevens, “that is not our own and, much more, not ourselves.” Congruent with Stevens’ assertion that from this condition “the poem springs,” the roles of architecture in general and the domestic specifically are presented as agents that both explain our understanding of the world while providing potent settings to do so.

The chapter provides an in-depth discussion of representations of home in philosophy, religion and literature. From the human condition illustrated by Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, to the homeless condition presented in the *Odyssey*, to Henry David Thoreau’s reflections on the transformative potential of the simple dwelling and to Proust’s reminiscences of the comforts and anxieties of home, multiple and often contrasting depictions of home are presented. Throughout the author presents home as a potent cultural artifact that has played multiple roles throughout the history of human habitation: expressing cultural hegemonies; enforcing social roles and hierarchies; communicating social status; embodying concepts of self and family and; accommodating fundamental and ontological needs. The conclusion argues that home is a complex and ephemeral word — typically changed with multifarious and often deeply personal meanings — but that essentially serves not only to shelter the body but also to house the soul.