

3. In Pursuit of *Pursuits of Happiness*

WILLIAM ROTHMAN

A year after the publication in 1969 of *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Stanley Cavell observes in the elegant Preface he wrote for the 2001 edition, the effect on him, as he put it, “of putting the book behind me, or perhaps I should say, of having it to stand behind, freed me for I suppose the most productive, or palpably so, nine months of my life, in which I recast the salvageable and necessary material of my Ph.D. dissertation as the opening three parts of what would become *The Claim of Reason* and completed small books on film (*The World Viewed*) and Thoreau (*The Senses of Walden*). I consider those small books to form a trio with *Must We Mean What We Say?*, different paths leading from the same desire for philosophy.” If those three books form a trio, I take the fourth part of *The Claim of Reason*, completed in 1978, and *Pursuits of Happiness*, which in 1978 he was already writing, to form a duo—not, I would say, different paths leading from the same *desire* for philosophy, but from the trio’s *achievement* of philosophy.

1978 was also the year Cavell wrote “Thinking of Emerson,” in which he experienced a new-found sense of Emerson’s philosophical seriousness. He followed that essay two years later by “An Emerson Mood,” which goes further in acknowledging, and exploring, the profound affinities with Emerson he had come to intuit. It was not until the late 1980s, however, in *In Quest of the Ordinary, This New Yet Unapproachable America, Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, and the essays later collected in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*, that the full magnitude of Emerson’s impact on Cavell’s understanding of his own aspirations as a philosopher became clear. And with the publication in 2004 of *Cities of Words*, based on lectures in the course on “moral reasoning” he had first given in the late 1980s, Cavell affirmed that Emerson had assumed a privileged place in his thinking.

In *Cities of Words*, every chapter on a thinker presents a powerful, original interpretation of that thinker's work, an interpretation that reveals why it is illuminating to pair the thinker with the particular film—in almost every case, a remarriage comedy or an unknown woman melodrama—Cavell chose as a match—given, in each case, his powerful, original interpretation of that film. Taken together, these paired chapters compellingly make the case that although America has not inherited the European edifice of philosophy, its movies have engaged—do they still?—in conversations with their culture that are no less serious, philosophically. And Emerson is the linchpin that holds together this remarkable book, in which Cavell uses Emerson's writing, and only Emerson's, as both an object and as a “means, or touchstone,” of interpretation—as a tool for reading, and for *teaching* reading.¹

In the “Acknowledgment” section at the end of *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell tells us that “thoughts of remarriage as generating a genre of film began presenting themselves to me during a course of mine on film comedy I gave in 1974 at Harvard's Carpenter Center for Visual Studies.” It was in 1975 that Cavell presented his reading of *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). In 1976, he gave a version of the film comedy course designed to “test out those ideas as rigorously as I knew how.”² Thus, Cavell conceived of the book that became *Pursuits of Happiness* on the eve of his discovery of Emerson. Surely, his immersion in thinking about the distinctly American movie genre he named “the comedy of remarriage” was instrumental in motivating him to return to Emerson, only differently this time, and in enabling him to read Emerson's essays in a way he had never been able, or willing, to do before.

In *The Claim of Reason*, Emerson's name appears only once. In *Pursuits of Happiness*, he is invoked more than a few times. And yet, if Cavell had written “Thinking of Emerson” and “An Emerson Moment” *before* he had started writing *Pursuits of Happiness*, I don't doubt that Emerson would have played as privileged role as he does in *Cities of Words*. Already in his 1983 essay “Thinking of Movies” and in “The Thought of Movies” and in “A Capra Moment,” both written two years later, Emerson does take center stage.

1. Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 34.

2. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 275.

In *Pursuits of Happiness*, one key invocation of Emerson is the quote Cavell chose to caption the wonderful frame enlargement, in the chapter on *The Awful Truth* (1937), of Cary Grant, who manifestly *does* “carry the holiday in his eye” and is “fit to stand the gaze of millions.”³ When Cavell writes, near the end of the *Philadelphia Story* chapter, “Dexter’s demand to determine for himself what is truly important and what is not is a claim to the status of a philosopher,”⁴ Emerson, the champion of “self-reliance,” is surely the kind of philosopher Cavell takes Dexter to be. And although he’s not yet prepared to claim this in so many words, Cavell is Emerson’s kind of philosopher as well. The passage goes on: “But is what Dexter claims to be enormously important, a matter of one’s most personal existence, to be understood as of national importance? How is the acceptance of individual desire, his form of self-knowledge, of importance to the nation?”⁵ And these questions motivate the chapter’s closing pages, which go on to answer them. Or do they?

Cavell writes: “I take Dexter at the conclusion of *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), when he says to Tracy ‘I’ll risk it. Will you?’ to be saying that he’ll both risk their failing again to find their happiness together, and also finally risk his concept of that happiness.”⁶ Is such happiness *possible*? Is it even *conceivable*? It is in this context that Cavell invokes Matthew Arnold’s concept of the “best self.” “Arnold wishes to work out,” Cavell writes, “the rule of the best to mean the rule of the best self, something he understands as existing in each of us. It is of course common not to know of this possibility, but more natures are curious about their best self than one might imagine, and this curiosity Arnold calls the pursuit of perfection. ‘Natures with this bent,’ Arnold says, ‘emerge in all classes, and this bent tends to take them out of their class and make their distinguishing characteristic not their Barbarianism or their Philistinism, but their humanity.’”⁷

Here, Cavell does something rare in *Pursuits of Happiness* by drawing explicitly on ideas about the ontology of film he had worked out in *The World Viewed*: “the photogenetic power of the camera as giving a natural ascendancy to the flesh and blo-

3. See Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 43, 235.

4. *Ibid.*, 150.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 157.

7. *Ibid.*

od actor over the character he or she plays in a film”; “the camera’s tendency to create types from individuals, which I go on to characterize as individualities.”⁸ In this way, Cavell sets up his point that:

[...] there is a visual equivalent or analogue of what Arnold means by distinguishing the best self from the ordinary self and by saying that in the best self class yields to humanity. He is witnessing a possibility or potential in the human self not normally open to view, or not open to the normal view. Call this one’s invisible self; it is what the movie camera would make visible. The originality inspired by the love of the best self Arnold calls genius. So much he might have been confirmed in by Emerson, whom he admired, and by Thoreau, if he read him. But when he goes on to call the best self ‘right reason’ he parts company with American transcendentalism. The rule of the best self is the source of the new authority for which Arnold is seeking, the authority of what he calls culture, of what another might call religion, the answer to our narcissism and anarchy. It was his perception of society’s loss of authority over itself [. . .] that prompted Arnold to write *Culture and Anarchy*. In it he distinguishes two forms of culture or authority, the two historical forces still impelling us on the quest for perfection or salvation; he names them Hebraism and Hellenism.⁹

The governing idea of Hellenism, Cavell goes on, “is spontaneity of consciousness; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience.”¹⁰ The world “ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.”¹¹ Arnold finds that his moment of history requires a righting of the balance in the direction of spontaneity of consciousness more than it needs further strictness of conscience. “The more one ponders what Arnold it driving at,” Cavell writes, “the more one will be willing to say, I claim, that Dexter Hellenizes (as, in their various ways, do Shakespeare and Tocqueville and Mill) while Tracy Hebraizes (as Arnold says all America does).”¹²

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 158.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

Emmanuel Lévinas had a different take on the distinction between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” He criticized philosophy, born in Greece, for always “Hellenizing,” always denying or repressing the ethical standpoint particular to the Jewish tradition and rooted in the Hebrew language. For Lévinas, an Orthodox Jew, ethics, philosophy’s “other,” is *higher* than philosophy. His goal wasn’t to convert Gentile philosophers to Judaism, of course; but it was, in effect, to convert philosophy, not to “right the balance” but to transform philosophy from a “Hellenizing” into a “Hebraizing” practice that acknowledges the primacy of ethics.

In “What is the Scandal of Philosophy?,” Cavell, reflects on the striking resemblance—yet the strikingly different conclusions or morals the two philosophers draw—between Lévinas’s pivotal use of the passage in Descartes’s *Third Meditation* designed to prove the existence of God from the otherwise inexplicable presence within him of the idea of an infinite being, and Cavell’s own use of the same Descartes passage in *The Claim of Reason* in connection with the role of God in establishing for myself the existence, or relation to the existence, of the finite Other.¹³

Lévinas’s idea is that my discovery of the other, my openness to the other, requires “a violence associated with the infinite having been put into me”—“put into me” being Lévinas’s transcription of Descartes’s insistence that “the idea of God I find in myself I know cannot have been put there by a finite being, for example, by myself.” In Cavell’s words, “This event creates as it were an outside to my existence, hence an isolated, singular inside.”¹⁴ At the same time, “it establishes the asymmetry of my relation to (the finite) other in which I recognize my infinite responsibility for the other.” But when the idea of the infinite is “put into me,” Cavell asks, why should it be *infinite* responsibility for this other that is revealed, rather than, as Cavell believes, “infinite responsibility for myself,” together with “finite responsibility for the claims of the existence of the other upon me, claims perhaps of gratitude or sympathy or protection or duty or debt or love? In an extreme situation. I may put the other’s life (not just her or his wishes or needs) ahead of mine, answerable to or for them without limit.”¹⁵ Although my responsibility to the finite Other is finite, I

13. Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), ch. 6.

14. *Ibid.*, 145.

15. *Ibid.*, 145.

have an infinite responsibility to myself, in Cavell's view—an absolute obligation to *express* myself, to make myself intelligible to myself as well as to others, apart from which I cannot know myself, cannot make myself known to others, cannot achieve the acknowledgment of others (my acknowledgment of them, their acknowledgment of me), cannot walk in the direction of an unattained but attainable self, as Emerson liked to put it.

Cavell writes, “What the marriage in *The Philadelphia Story* comes to, I mean what it fantasizes”—or what Cavell is fantasizing that the film is fantasizing—is “a proposed marriage or balance between Western culture's two forces of authority, so that American mankind can refind its object, its dedication to a more perfect union, toward the perfected human community, its right to the pursuit of happiness.”¹⁶ And Cavell adds:

It would not surprise me if someone found me, or rather found my daydream, Utopian. But I have not yet said what my waking relation to this daydream is, nor what my implication is in the events of the film. Our relation to the events of film can only be determined in working through the details of the events of significant films themselves. And specifically, as I never tire of saying, each of the films in the genre of remarriage essentially contains considerations of what it is to view them, to know them.¹⁷

These last words help to set up the chapter's splendid conclusion, which calls attention to “the events of the ending of the film,” events that have, as Cavell puts it, “a peculiar bearing on the issue of viewing.”¹⁸ Reluctantly, I'll resist the temptation to spend all the time I have left reading Cavell's reading of the ending of *The Philadelphia Story*, and cut directly to the chapter's last sentences:

The ambiguous status of these figures and hence of our perceptual state will have the effect of compromising or undermining our efforts to arrive at a conclusion about the narrative. For example, shall we say that the film ends with

16. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 158-59.

17. *Ibid.*, 159.

18. *Ibid.*

an embrace, betokening happiness? I would rather say that it ends with a picture of an embrace, something at a remove from what has gone before, hence betokening uncertainty. Will someone still find that my daydream is not sufficiently undermined by this uncertainty, and still accuse me of Utopianism? Then I might invoke Dexter's reply to George's objection to his, and all of his kind's, sophisticated ideas: "Ain't it awful!"¹⁹

Cavell's shot-by-shot reading of this passage, another rarity in his writings about film, identifies the film's aspiration—or its fantasy of its aspiration—to be a marriage of Hellenism and Hebraism that might "bring American mankind a step closer to reclaiming its right to pursue happiness." And isn't Cavell declaring this to be his own aspiration in writing this chapter, or his own fantasy of his aspiration, as well?

Cavell is claiming here that *The Philadelphia Story* is intended to leave us in a state of uncertainty as to whether it is *merely* a daydream, as opposed to a daydream we *can* bring closer to reality. Shouldn't that uncertainty be enough to keep the film, or Cavell's account of the film, from being dismissed as a Utopian fantasy? And yet, by giving Dexter the last word, by indeed letting Dexter speak *for* him, isn't Cavell overcoming or transcending that uncertainty by taking Dexter's side? Isn't Cavell in effect saying—saying to us—"I'll risk it. Will you?" Or is this little scene Cavell is sketching, in which he responds to someone accusing him of spinning a Utopian daydream, part of the daydream he is spinning?

What I'm suggesting is that the uncertainty Cavell locates within *The Philadelphia Story* is mirrored by the uncertainty I am locating within his reading of the film. Then what is *my* "waking relation" to *Cavell's* daydream? If it convinces me of the film's "national importance, if I don't take it to be *merely* a daydream, couldn't someone accuse *me* of Utopianism? Then I would have to determine for myself how to respond. And I, too, might find myself saying: "I'll risk it. Will you?"

In saying that Matthew Arnold diverges from American Transcendentalism by identifying the best self with "right reason," Cavell doesn't *explicitly* take sides. But surely, he's on the side of Thoreau and Emerson. At least, his best self is. And although it seems accurate enough to say that Tracy Hebraizes, is it really true that

19. *Ibid.*, 160.

Dexter Hellenizes? That would suggest that Tracy and Dexter are equal in moral authority. They once were, but at some point between the brief prologue and the body of the film, Dexter undergoes a transformation, a conversion to humanity—although this happens off camera, as a comparable conversion does in Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946). (It’s not until *North by Northwest* [1959]—and, I might add, Leo McCarey’s *An Affair to Remember* [1957], made the same year—that a Cary Grant character undergoes such a transformation on camera, in front of our eyes.) By the time Dexter walks into Sidney Kidd’s office, he has already become a philosopher of Emerson’s—and Cavell’s—stripe.

If Dexter has truly become an *Emersonian* philosopher, he does not need his “spontaneity of consciousness” to be balanced with Tracy’s “strictness of conscience.” He has already found in *himself* that “saving balance” between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” That’s what gives him the authority to help empower Tracy to find that “saving balance” in herself. The “wonderful way of *life*” Emerson champions is to be *strictly* followed. Surely, in writing this chapter, Cavell sought, and found, a “saving balance,” a true marriage, between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” Hasn’t he always? His equal commitment to saying what he means and meaning what he says is his aspiration to marry “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.”

Arnold calls himself a perfectionist. But he’s not *Cavell’s* kind of perfectionist. Emerson is. At the time he wrote *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell had gone far on the path that was to lead him to give the name “Emersonian perfectionism” to the kind of perfectionism that he, like Emerson, believed in and aspired to practice. He wasn’t quite there yet when he wrote *Pursuits of Happiness*. But he was a lot farther along that path than I was. In *Pursuits of Happiness* Cavell observes that in 1978 “William Rothman and I offered a course jointly that took off from the material I had developed about remarriage and related it to other genres in (primarily) the Hollywood constellation of genres and to other films in which the actors and directors worked who were mainly responsible for the comedy of remarriage.”²⁰

The course we co-taught seemed to me at the time, through no fault of Cavell’s, a failure. By 1978, his understanding of the remarriage comedy genre was already largely set. This meant, for example, that what most piqued his interest in Ozu’s *Late*

20. *Ibid.*, 275.

Spring (Banshun, 1949) was its focus on a father for whom his daughter's happiness is the most important thing in the world—not a traditional Japanese father, but a kindred spirit to the woman's father in a remarriage comedy, as is the father in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950). I understood why, given Cavell's concerns, he would gravitate to the father-daughter relationship in these films. But I didn't yet understand why, given *my* concerns, I should find it thought-provoking too.

Cavell was born in 1926, a year before *The Jazz Singer*, so the films Cavell watched during the quarter of a century in which going to the movies was a normal part of his week were, with few if any exceptions, "talkies." And while "talkies" are *films* and thus subject to the ontological conditions *The World Viewed* explores, it was also a medium unto itself, a medium that film's material basis is capable of supporting. And, for Cavell, the comedy of remarriage is itself a medium, one of the media the medium of the "talkie" is capable of supporting. Thus, *Pursuits of Happiness's* claim that it is a "law" of the genre—that the comedy of remarriage *has* "laws" that each of its members must strictly follow is what is "Hebraizing" about the genre—each film at some point must acknowledge the woman in the film *as* the flesh and blood actress who incarnates her, thereby acknowledging that it is a film, not unmediated reality. But what *Pursuits of Happiness* primarily focuses on, what remarriage comedies themselves primarily focus on, as Cavell reads them, are the ways, different for each film, they find to obey the "law" of the genre requiring each film to earn its membership by entering into conversation with the other members. Obeying this "law" requires each film to achieve its own perspective on the genre as a whole, to enter the ongoing conversation among the genre's other members. It is no wonder, then, that Cavell, for whom ordinary language is both a medium of philosophy and an inescapable subject for philosophy, should find the comedy of remarriage, which revolves around conversation, takes the form of a conversation, and is *about* conversation, to be not only a subject of interest *to* philosophy, but to be itself a medium *of* philosophy. For Cavell, as he put it in a 1989 interview, "philosophy is at all moments answerable to itself, that if there is any place at which the human spirit allows itself to be under its own question [...], indeed, that allows that questioning to happen *is* philosophy."²¹

21. James Conant, "An Interview with Stanley Cavell," in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 66.

But I am saying all this after the fact. In the course Cavell and I taught together, my lectures were at cross-purposes with his. I had already begun writing *Hitchcock—The Murderous Gaze*, and my way of thinking about authorship was as firmly set as his way of thinking about genre, which was in any case so different from any of the theories of genre that then prevailed—and largely still do—within film study, and so different from the way I was thinking about film, that I didn't know how to make my lectures responsive to his, even though I was talking about films I loved and had a lot to say about, such as Griffith's *True Heart Susie* (1919), Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931), Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930), Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), Hawks' *Twentieth Century* (1934) and *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), as well as *Late Spring*, *Stage Fright*, and *Sunrise* (1927). The task I faced was all the more challenging for me because Cavell's own thinking had become so unsettled by his new encounters with Emerson that he was at a pivotal moment of his philosophical life. He was blazing a path through unexplored territory—a path I wasn't yet ready to take myself.

Cavell writes, "Film is an interest of mine, or say a love, not separate from my interest in, or love of, philosophy. So when I am drawn to think through a film, I do not regard the reading that results as over, even provisionally, until I have said how it bears on the nature of film generally and on the commitment to philosophy."²² My own writing, too, manifests a commitment to saying how my reading of a film casts light on the nature of film generally. And yet, although I was well-trained in philosophy, having been taught by the best, and have a taste for its pleasures, my writings do not manifest Cavell's further commitment to saying in each case how his reading of a film casts light on "the commitment to philosophy." My own further commitment, rather, is to saying in each case how my reading casts light on the art of writing film criticism that acknowledges film's poetry and thereby achieves its own poetry. From the outset, I have taken my philosophical bearings from Cavell's writing and teaching, without feeling the need to think through for myself the ways my kind of film criticism bears on philosophy, its significance *for* philosophy. I think it is accurate to say that my writing about film, like Cavell's, marries film criticism and philo-

22. Cavell, "Naughty Narrators: Negation of Voice in *Gaslight*," in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 340.

sophy, but that his is philosophy that is also film criticism, while mine is film criticism that is also philosophy. Cavell didn't teach me how to write about film. What he taught me was that by writing film criticism that was "under its own question," I was doing philosophy.

In *Must We Mean What We Say?* and *The World Viewed*, Cavell declared his affinity with the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* and with J. L. Austin, Cavell's own professor of philosophy. By characterizing his own writings as *modern* philosophy, Cavell, who was then in regular conversation with Michael Fried, also declared his affinity with modernist artists, declaring himself to be writing from within what he called the "modernist situation." In *Pursuits of Happiness*, though, references to modernism are altogether absent. Nor would the concept of modernism ever again figure prominently in Cavell's writings.

Then, too, in *The World Viewed*, Baudelaire played a central role in the book's reflections on film's emergence at the moment in the history of the traditional arts in which realism was the burning issue and modernist painting was emerging. And yet, as Cavell would observe in "An Emerson Mood," Emerson came as close as Baudelaire did—closer, really—to prophesying the advent of film's mode of viewing the world. How different would *The World Viewed* have been if Cavell had written it *after* the encounter with Emerson that led him to write "Thinking of Emerson" and "An Emerson Mood?" And how different would *Pursuits of Happiness* have been had Cavell begun writing it after completing those two essays? But perhaps this last question is moot, given that he'd been thinking about the genre he was to call "the comedy of remarriage" as early as 1974, and that, as I've suggested, his thinking about this quintessentially American genre surely played a role in leading him back to Emerson, and in empowering him to read Emerson in a way that enabled him to recognize that his writing is "under its own question."

By the end of the 1980s, Cavell had written *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, and the essays later collected in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*. In these books, Cavell paid in full the tuition for his intuition, first expressed a decade earlier in "Thinking of Emerson" and "An Emerson Mood," that his own writing had profound affinities with Emerson's. All of this thinking, and writing, about Emerson led Cavell to a further intuition. When he

was writing the trio of *Must We Mean What We Say?*, *The World Viewed*, and *The Senses of Walden*, and preparing for publication the first three parts of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell, like Wittgenstein and Austin, found himself in a “modernist situation” in relation to the tradition of philosophy in which he was trained. He felt he had no choice but to write philosophy in a way that broke radically with the mode of philosophical analysis that was, and largely still is, dominant within English-speaking philosophy departments. But Cavell had also inherited, at first unknowingly, concerns and procedures of an alternative philosophical tradition, founded in America by Emerson, embraced by his great reader Thoreau and, in Europe, by his devoted readers Nietzsche (and, through Nietzsche, Heidegger) and Bergson (and, through Bergson, Deleuze), and kept alive within American culture, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, by the films Cavell watched during the quarter of a century in which going to the movies was a normal part of his week. Cavell did not find himself in a “modernist situation” in relation to *this* tradition. And by the end of the 1980s he was finally ready to give the name “Emersonian perfectionism” to the way of thinking philosophically he had come to recognize as his own, no less than Emerson’s. Looking back from this altered perspective, *Pursuits of Happiness* can be seen as a new departure, but also as a transitional work, a way station on the path that would lead to *Cities of Words* and, finally, his philosophical memoir *Little Did I Know*.

In *The Murderous Gaze*, my chapter on *The 39 Steps* (1935) raised the question of the relationship between the Hitchcock thriller and the comedy of remarriage, but approached it very differently from the way Cavell did in a 1980 essay called simply “*North by Northwest*.” To achieve conviction in the philosophical seriousness of Hitchcock’s films, Cavell felt the need, in effect, to derive the Hitchcock thriller, as a genre, from the remarriage comedy genre, just as in *Contesting Tears* he was to derive the genre he calls the “melodrama of the unknown woman” from the remarriage comedy. I argued, rather, that what keeps a Hitchcock thriller like *The 39 Steps* from being a comedy of remarriage was the role of the villain, which was inextricably linked with the role, tainted with villainy, played by the author himself—that is, by Hitchcock, with his instrument, the camera.

In this context, it is worthy of note that I wouldn’t have written my chapter on *The 39 Steps* at all had not Cavell not made it clear to me, tactfully, of course, when

he read the manuscript after I had finished the chapters on *The Lodger* (1927), *Murder!* (1930), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), and *Psycho* (1960) and was convinced that the book was finished, that those four films, and the way I had written about them, did not fully acknowledge an essential dimension of my *love* for Hitchcock's art: the "matchless pleasures," as I liked to call them, that Hitchcock's films so generously offer. I knew Cavell was right. And so, I wrote the *39 Steps* chapter and strove to make my prose evoke the "matchless pleasures" of the British music hall, whose joyful mood Hitchcock's film lovingly captured, and thus cast.

For Hitchcock, *The 39 Steps* was a bridge connecting—and thus acknowledging the gap between—the Hitchcock thriller and the comedy of remarriage and the Hollywood genres Cavell understood to be derived from it. And my chapter on *The 39 Steps* was a bridge connecting, and acknowledging the gap between, Cavell's way of thinking about genre and my way of thinking about authorship—between ascribing a film's thoughts to the laws governing the genre itself, and ascribing them to an author's act of self-expression.

Cavell came to Harvard in 1963, my junior year. Film was already my great passion, and this charismatic young professor, newly transplanted from Berkeley, allowed me, a callow undergraduate, to enroll in a graduate seminar in aesthetics devoted to film. In *The World Viewed*, he calls that seminar as a failure. As I never tire of saying, it didn't fail me. Cavell agreed to be the advisor on my senior Honors Thesis. That it was on Wittgenstein is all I remember about it, other than that in my first draft I had numbered every paragraph as if I were writing the *Tractatus*, a reflection of a long-standing interest in logic—my father was a mathematician, while my mother had the spirit of a great tragedian. In my subsequent years as a student in Harvard's doctoral program, I enjoyed to the hilt the privileged vantage being a Harvard Ph.D. student in philosophy afforded on the tumultuous events taking place in America, sometimes inside Harvard Yard, no less than in Paris, in those wild and crazy years. For much of that time, dissertation and job market were barely on my radar screen, but I was thinking, and writing, seriously. I was living the life of an American Scholar, as Emerson extolled it.

When I was a student, Cavell's teaching already exemplified that "saving balance" between "Hellenizing" and "Hebraizing." My parents were wonderful people,

but to the best of my knowledge, neither of them ever “Hellenized” or “Hebraized.” Cavell was, indeed, the first person I’d ever known, certainly the first who ever knew me, whom I saw as a figure of real authority—the kind of authority I believed directors like Hitchcock, Renoir, and Ozu possessed. I didn’t see him as bald; I saw him as having, to invoke what an admiring contemporary said of Kant, “a broad forehead built for thinking.” And what did Cavell see in me? He saw in me then, as he always has, as he has always encouraged me to see in myself, my “best self.”

And yet, the dissertation into which I poured my heart and soul, for all its Cavellian elements, was rooted in ways of thinking, deeply personal to me, that predated my first encounter with Cavell. The central section was an expression of a deep-seated sense, which I believed—not wrongly—I shared with Hitchcock, that something all-important for human beings—something that Cavell, like Dexter in *The Philadelphia Story*, fervently believed to be a human possibility, however difficult to achieve—the possibility of going from haunting the world as if from the outside to really living within it, a metamorphosis so profound as to be tantamount to death and rebirth—was actually an *impossibility*—as impossible as it is for a viewer, or for the beings who dwell within a film’s world, to cross the barrier-that-is-no-real-barrier of the movie screen.

In my dissertation, I presented this central section as if it were an illustration of the general theory of artistic expression, worked out in the first section, that I derived from reflections on a paradox inherent in expression. In creating a work of art by an act of self-expression, the artist changes, becomes other than what he or she was. Then what “self” performs the act? What “self” does the work reveal?

All the time I was writing this first section, I had the gnawing feeling that there must have been a philosopher who had expressed such thoughts. How was I to know that this philosopher was Emerson? And far from exemplifying my theory of artistic expression, predicated on the idea that artistic self-expression changes the artist, my view of the art of film was incompatible with it, predicated as *it* was on the idea that authoring a film leaves the author unchanged. I concluded the dissertation with a close shot-by-shot reading of Hitchcock’s *Notorious*, but that reading failed to acknowledge, or address, the conflict between the what I can now recognize as the Emersonianism in the first section and the skepticism in the second. Nor did the revised rea-

ding I published in *The Georgia Review*, with the addition of numerous frames from the film, which I was to use as the model for the readings in *The Murderous Gaze*. As a consequence, a skeptical thread runs through *The Murderous Gaze* that co-exists uneasily with expressions of the affinity I had come to feel with the affirmative dimension of Cavell's philosophical outlook, to which *Pursuits of Happiness* gives fuller expression than any of his previous writings.

Just when I had finished the *39 Steps* chapter and was again satisfied that I had completed the book, news reached me that Hitchcock had died. That day, I began writing a "Postscript" that meditated on the welter of emotions his death aroused in me. The depth of my own feelings told me—I didn't need Cavell's prodding this time—that my book, intended to pay the tuition for the intuition that for Hitchcock film was first and foremost a medium of self-expression—would be incomplete unless I found a way to express how personal the writing of this book was for me, the strength of my attachment, not just intellectually but emotionally, to Hitchcock's films. It is a theme that runs through *The Murderous Gaze* that in a Hitchcock film, just because something is a fantasy doesn't mean it isn't also reality. The Postscript I composed, in a Hitchcockian spirit, accounts for the book's writing by spinning what is unabashedly a fantasy—Cavell might prefer to call it a daydream—without making any claim as to that fantasy's relationship to my waking reality. This is how the Postscript ends:

Film, in Hitchcock's work, is the medium by which he made himself known, or at least knowable—the bridge between himself and us. But it is also a barrier that stands between Hitchcock and us. It stands for everything that separates Hitchcock from his audience, and indeed for everything that separates any one human being from all others. By dedicating his life to the making of films that are calls for acknowledgment, while doing everything in his power to assure that such acknowledgment would be deferred until after his death, Hitchcock remained true to his art, and true to the medium of film.²³

23. Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 470.

In its insistence that Hitchcock art is about an impossibility, not a possibility, of the human spirit, this Postscript is the purest expression of what I've called the skeptical thread that runs through *The Murderous Gaze*, binding it to my dissertation. What the Postscript's final words consign to silence, the claim they authorize by that silence, is that in writing this book I had been true to *my* art. For all its melancholy mood, the Postscript thus declares the book to be an *affirmation*—if only an affirmation of the art of writing film criticism that is also philosophy.

Thirty years after I put *The Murderous Gaze* behind me, or had it to stand behind, I found myself again thinking almost obsessively about Hitchcock. For a new edition of *The Murderous Gaze*, I wrote a chapter that follows *Marnie* from beginning to end in the manner of the five original readings. In the Introduction to the first edition, I had observed that I could imagine the readings engendering a sense that Hitchcock's philosophical outlook never changed, as if, to paraphrase Norman Bates, Hitchcock was in his own private trap within which, for all he scratched and clawed, he never budged an inch. I recognized even then that a tension between two incompatible worldviews ran through Hitchcock's work, but argued that the inevitability of being suspended between those views *was* Hitchcock's worldview. When I wrote the new chapter on *Marnie*, I was well aware that I had originally favored the dark side of Hitchcock's art, encapsulated in the Oscar Wilde line he loved to quote: "Each man kills the thing he loves."

When I wrote *The Murderous Gaze*, I had no name for the affirmative side of Hitchcock's artistic identity. By the time I wrote the *Marnie* chapter, Cavell's writings on Emerson had given me a name, Emersonian perfectionism, and a historical and philosophical context in which to place it. And I could see that *The 39 Steps* and the series of Hitchcock thrillers he made before departing for Hollywood aligned themselves with comedies of remarriage, but only up to a point. Hitchcock couldn't simply embrace the American genre's Emersonian outlook because he wasn't yet willing to abandon the idea, which had always attracted him and on which his artistic "brand" was based, that we are all fated to kill the thing we love. In *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?*, the book I published two years after I wrote the *Marnie* reading, my central claim is that Hitchcock's ambivalence toward Emersonian perfectionism, and his ambivalence toward overcoming that ambivalence, was the driving force of his art.

The book discerns a progression from his British thrillers to his earliest American films (made when the Emersonian outlook was starting to suffer repression in Hollywood); to his wartime films; his postwar films; his masterpieces of the 1950s; and ultimately to *Marnie* (1964), in which Hitchcock overcame his ambivalence and *embraced* the Emersonian perfectionism he had always resisted.

When I was writing the original five readings, I was in almost daily conversation with Cavell. But as drawn as I was to his philosophical and moral outlook, I had always also been as drawn as Hitchcock was to the idea that we're all in our private traps and are fated to kill the thing we love. After all, the Postscript I wrote after Hitchcock died spun a darkly Hitchcockian fantasy in which it was my writing that had killed him. I began *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?* with the intention of balancing the scales, but in writing the book I found, happily, that, as I put it in the introduction, "the Moving Finger, having writ, tilted the scales in favor of the Emersonian perfectionism I find myself no longer resisting."²⁴ I had joined the club. I had become an Emersonian perfectionist. And unlike Groucho Marx or Woody Allen, I found myself happy to belong, for the first time in sixty-five years, when I was Vice President and my sister Judy President of the Two Club, to a club that would have me as a member.

In 2006, the first part of the "philosophical memoir" Cavell had begun appeared in *Critical Inquiry* under the title "Excerpts from Memory." This was to be the subtitle of *Little Did I Know*, the book he completed and published four years later. In telling the story of his life, Cavell's aspiration was, as he put it, to compose "a philosopher's or writer's autobiography, which tells the writer's story of the life out of which he came to be a (his kind of) writer."²⁵ To tell this story, he writes, "I would have to show that telling the accidental, anonymous, in a sense posthumous, days of my life is the making of philosophy."²⁶ Because our memories of movies are "strand over strand" with memories of our lives, to tell the story of the life out of which he became his kind of philosopher, he found it necessary to evoke every moment with such concrete particularity, that the resulting memoir reads like an elegantly written scre-

24. Rothman, *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?: Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 30.

25. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 5.

26. *Ibid.*

enplay. How else *could* he have learned, and taught, that it was possible for the story of a life to be written in a way that made philosophy?

For Wittgenstein, philosophy's goal is to bring philosophy to an end. For Cavell, too, philosophy is inescapably concerned with endings. In an essay called "Precious Memories in Philosophy and Film," I wrote: "in *The World Viewed*, he brought to an end the period of his life in which going to the movies was a regular part of his week. In *Little Did I Know*, he told the story of the period of his life that ended when he was reborn as the only kind of writer, the only kind of philosopher, who could have written such a book (or could have wanted to)." In writing this philosophical memoir, too, Cavell brought to an end a period of his life—the period that began where the story the book tells ends—the period in which he fully yielded to his longing for philosophy. Writing the book that tells this story is inseparable from the story it tells. In this writing, Cavell was as committed as ever to walking in the direction of the unattained but attainable self but, as I put it, "his way of moving forward was by looking back." In telling this story, he brought its meaning home. This "philosophical memoir" is "not only 'under its own question'"; it finds the answer it had been seeking with an all but unappeasable yearning. For Cavell, philosophy had achieved its end.

I'm still journeying on.