Conversations 7

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7

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Introduction: Acknowledging Stanley Cavell

EDITORIAL COMMENT

A year has elapsed since Stanley Cavell died, and in that time those who knew him and read his work, have been coming to terms with his permanent departure. For many it has not been easy, and part of this difficulty includes trying to say something in writing about what the loss has meant, or might entail, or perhaps better, what it stirs in us.

Shortly after Cavell's death, I was in conversation with the editors of this journal, and we were all thinking similar thoughts, namely, that a commemorative issue was in order. The editors graciously invited me to guest edit, and accepting the honor, I turned in kind to the community of Cavell's readers—his friends, colleagues, admirers, and others beyond the immediate circle—to solicit reflections. The idea, a familiar one for those inclined to commemorate the loss of a beloved, esteemed writer and thinker by offering further words, was to invite a small, representative, and willing group to share remarks in the wake of Stanley Cavell's death—that is, with an eye toward how his work lives on, and how he and his work have given us life. The present collection of dispatches is the result. There are, and have been, several similar initiatives afoot, and I believe, I hope, the benefactions here assembled are a fitting complement to those efforts.[1]

As we have individually and collectively been processing what it is like to inhabit a world lived without Cavell—without his peerless company, without his unmatched philosophical aid and insight—we are all now, no doubt, thrown back upon his works, his words (a pleasure, to be sure) but also turned to them this time with memories of our earlier encounters of reading, and in some cases, in many cases also encounters with the man himself. Perhaps it is not surprising then, that the tone of many of these

1. Other commemorative projects include: *ASAP journal*, http://asapjournal.com/tag/stanley-cavell; *Forma de Vida*, https://formadevida.org/?fbclid=IwAR3aW-ziPY1RGP7idwIZwyEHjV4GlO4XeQtIsXe-BmnIOHdkPmzglZUun-ds#scfdv15; and the *London Review of Books* editors' blog, https://www.lrb.-co.uk/blog/2018/06/20/the-editors/stanley-cavell.

pieces might be taken up as variations on the genre known as Acknowledgments—so often arriving in the algorithm, "I wish to thank *x* for doing *y* and inspiring *z*." The conceptual affiliation with Cavell's master-word *acknowledgment* is palpably evident, and I hope to say something about the significance of that connection. But first, I don't mean to suggest that the pieces for this special issue were *conceived* in the spirit of Acknowledgments, nor was my prompt to contributors framed along such lines, and yet, and yet, commemoration—"remembering together"—seems to have allowed for and encouraged a space of thinking and thanking (re-thinking, re-membering, *re*-re-membering, that is, re-cognizing coupled with the gesture of appreciative recognition) that feels kin to the kinds of things one wants, tries, to say in Acknowledgments. In this prefatory note, I am just putting a little more pressure on this resonance partly because I have long been fascinated—in Cavell's own work—with the particular tone, registration, detail, cadence, and duration of his many, many (formal, published) Acknowledgments ... and Prefaces, Forewords, Afterwords, and allied occasional pieces that functioned in a similar vein (e.g., "Words of Welcome").[2]

What I *did* say to the contributors was inspired by a conversation I had with Cavell in the months when he was just beginning to compose the autobiographical remarks that would become *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*. As Cavell reflected on his method for writing this work, he said: "I'm seeking those moments from my life that rise to the level of philosophical significance." Such a rich observation can turn us anew to *Little Did I Know*, and give us a fresh point of reference on how, say, a personal memory finds its way into the conversation of philosophy—and now, in Cavell's case, a permanent home in the history of philosophy. For our purposes here, though, since we are all readers of Cavell's work, we all have our own memories and moments to draw from; our first question will be to discern what of those thoughts and recollections we might wish to share with others, which may be worth sharing (by what criterion?)—rising to the level of philosophical significance. The discernment is not easy in easier circumstances; it is that much more trying in a state of mourning.

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2. Cavell, "Words of Welcome," in *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film*, ed. Charles Warren (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), xi-xxviii.

Thinking over Cavell's remark, and as I tried to understand the method it conveyed, in so far as such a thing is possible from a single statement (yet, later, it would be triumphantly glossed in the pages that form *Little Did I Know*), I suggested to the prospective contributor to this special issue of *Conversations* that she feel free to adapt the following strands of "approach" to her piece—deciding, as she preferred, to make them distinctive, or as a braid or weave. The nature of how each strand might be gathered, and how it could be related to other strands, remained an open question, and at that, one for experimentation and exploration. (I did also welcome other forms of prose, such as correspondence, journal entries, poems; and solicited ideas that might not be captured by familiar categories of type and genre).

So, a few words to define or refine a first "approach," or strand of thinking: I imagined that a contributor might select a passage, or passages, from the breadth of Cavell's writing that taught her something formally and conceptually. I inquired: how did this piece or passage tutor you—that is, by way of Cavell's distinctive literary-philosophical voice—for instance, to think for the first time, or anew, about some crucial element worthy of philosophical discernment? And then another approach might be drawn in: If you knew Cavell personally—were in his classes or among those he mentored; if you collaborated with him, or shared his company in some other capacity—please do integrate reminiscences that are pertinent to your thinking out of these reflections. If you only "encountered" Cavell in his writings, then perhaps you can draw from memories of salient moments in your life with his writings—among them the first time you read his prose, the first time you taught his work in a course, or other occasions that befit your reply to the first approach.

I continued: with these pathways in mind, you can take up a topic or theme or problem as it relates, for example, to Cavell as philosopher, as pedagogue, as scholar, as writer, as reader, as critic, as colleague, as advisor, as mentor, as musician, as composer, as improviser, as *cinéaste*, as opera lover, as traveler, as public speaker, as correspondent, as American, as Jewish, as Harvardian, as friend, and befitting the spirit of the journal, as conversationalist. A further possibility, yet another approach, could share the spirit of the much-needed, incisive remarks offered in the immediate weeks after Cavell's death by Nancy Bauer, Alice Crary, and Sandra Laugier, thereby becoming a piece that explores Cavell's legacy on some enduring topic, or as a contri-

bution to a contemporary trend or vexing problem that would benefit from his work.[3] However the contributors chose to take up or innovate from these suggestions, one thing is common and clear: we have before us a dynamic, unforgettable session of thinking further with Cavell as part of remembering him.

For those convened here, Stanley Cavell, in his personable, companionable presence, and to be sure, now and evermore in his writing, was and remains a gift to the gratifications of thinking itself. He was exemplary and thus provided a model to learn from while also prompting us to do our own work (which in many cases meant coming to terms and responding to his). For some, Cavell's interests were so compellingly conveyed by him—in his speech, in his writing—that we may have, on occasion, or for longer than that, lost sight of our own; more than a few students, acolytes, and fellow scholars have cited his achievements as an obstacle to their productivity, their own satisfactions (even happiness) in the midst of their attempts to independent scholarship. Like his work, Cavell himself, in his person, in the pitch and inflection of his voice, often proved magnetic and for that disorienting. We are familiar with the ersatz Emerson quotation "Who you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying," which feels apt.[4] But so do Emerson's own words: "The attitude, the tone, is all. [...] Let us not look east and west for materials of conversation, but rest in presence and unity. A just feeling will fast enough supply fuel for discourse, if speaking be more grateful than silence."[5] Now, in Cavell's absence, it remains to be known whether the attributes of his written work sustain a similar effect: that though we know it is worth our time and attention, saying precisely how and why may be beyond us. Let it not be behind us.

Fittingly, the following dispatches from the minds and memories of those who knew and loved Cavell, or contended in some fashion with his influence, are all, in some measure, "scenes of instruction"—even for those who met Cavell as adult colleagues and for those who never shared his company. If most of the contributors have had the pleasure and privilege of a personal relationship with Cavell, what is more striking is the continuity of the experience one has encountering Cavell's work in the classroom, in the lecture hall, and—far from his living presence, during his lifetime

3. "Stanley Cavell and the American Contradiction," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2018.
4. Emerson wrote, with his italics: "What you *are* stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary," "Social Aims," in *Letters and Social Aims* in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1903), 96.
5. Ibid.

and after it—in print: these disparate spaces convey a sensibility of a mind launched upon inquiry, and so where or whenever one joins Cavell, one will be launched as well. Whether one's encounter, then, was in person or on-the-page, the effect can evidently be much the same, which is to say: education with Cavell is, or can be, an ongoing, lifelong process. "Being his student," in the strict, literal sense is too limiting for what he has made possible for his readers—and continues to make possible, despite all, after his death.

Once, in conversation with Cavell, I pitched the idea that he might, because he could, one day prepare a volume comprised solely of his Prefaces, Forewords, Afterwords, front matter and back matter, including Acknowledgments, from many books (his own and not his own). He readily admitted that the sheer quantity would amount to a book, though we pondered—daydreamed—together what kind of book it might be: serial solicitations, each next one sustaining a mood of hospitality and cheer? How lovely. What a congenial context for philosophy's ongoing labors. In this imagined collection (that one can summon in one's own mind), I came to appreciate that its effect—albeit here as a moment of conceptual art, perhaps later as a printed artifact—would help to generate the feeling he conjures in the reader as a matter of course: namely, that she is welcome, a party to company she should like to have, holding fast to it now and into the future. For the complaints made concerning the "difficulty" of Cavell's prose, his style, there can be little doubt that one thing was never obscured: the ways in which his words made one feel invited, a legitimate partner for thoughts worth dwelling upon and sharing. For me, and so many others, such a gift has proved a grace.

Our collective remarks may be figured as Afterwords in themselves—or some variant: sketches composed in the wake of an auspicious experience, a veritable postscript, a kind of journal entry or notes from an expedition jotted down eagerly, aiming to capture the vitality of a crucial moment of mind and heart. From each new perspective, we catch a glimpse of recollection and remembrance married to sentiment and insight. Given that there are so many new readers yet to come, that is to say *posterity*, an audience emerging anew from "tomorrow and the day after tomorrow," perhaps we can take a measure from Cavell himself and think of these words, our words, as contributing to the spirit of welcoming. Not just consultations with ourselves, or shared reminiscences among friends and colleagues supplied as a votive for

support and succor, but perhaps most importantly, as an invitation to all of those for whom Stanley Cavell's work awaits. And how.

June 19th, 2019
DAVID LaROCCA

Acknowledgments

It is not an afterthought—how could it be?—to inscribe my own Acknowledgments at the end of these remarks, at the head of this issue. For me, it has been a genuine privilege to liaise this congress in honor of Stanley Cavell and a pleasure to collaborate with its generous members. Let me convey my sincere thanks to the contributors for taking the time to amplify Cavell's many gifts to us by acknowledging them. This gathering of "congenial spirits" formed, as it should, a group effort.[6] So many of the contributors helped me connect to promising prospects; if you see a name of someone you recommended, I send my thanks for the vote of support. In the scale of things, we are a relatively small community, and it seems even more important now, in Stanley's absence, that we know one another, or at the very least, know of one another. I am deeply grateful to the editors of the journal, Amir Khan and Sérgio Dias Branco for entrusting me with this project and for shepherding it through production. Moreover, several members of the journal's advisory board have been crucial in facilitating the development of content for the special issue.

An Extended, Ongoing Invitation

A note to readers and prospective contributors: if you wish to have your remarks on Stanley Cavell's legacy considered for a future supplement in *Conversations*, along

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6. Timothy Gould's phrase from "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, November 10, 2018.

the lines of the pieces collected in the present volume, or some other, please contact me directly at davidlarocca@post.harvard.edu and I will be happy to receive your proposal.

1. Apologies to Stanley Cavell

P. ADAMS SITNEY

I read *The World Viewed* as soon as it was published in 1971. Although I was outraged (and even at times disgusted) by that first reading, I was touched by its eloquence. My hostility was undoubtedly the premature judgment of a champion of avant-garde cinema toward a critic whose taste differed so radically from mine. I could hardly attend to what Cavell actually wrote at that time. My rage began with the opening chapter's claim that "in the case of films, it is generally true that you do not really like the highest instances unless you also like the typical ones." Here, I thought, was a parodic example of a professorial movie buff, taking what the Brattle Cinema in Cambridge happened to screen as the art of film. He amply declares that only a fool would judge paintings or music on the same basis. I wondered would he would say to someone who took the full range of books in the "philosophy" section of a typical Boston bookstore as the parameters of *his* disciple, noting at that time that there would be nothing by Cavell himself on such a shelf. (His 1969 collection of essays, *Must We Mean What We Say?* had disappeared by then. I had to order the book—hardcover only—from the publisher a year later.)

The fifteenth of *The World Viewed*'s nineteen chapters, called "Excursus: Some Modernist Painting," drove home to me what a loss Cavell's mind and pen were to what I then considered serious film study. In that chapter he brilliantly enacted the characteristic moves of his best writing, above all, by investing aesthetic distinctions with moral values. It didn't take the copious footnotes to that chapter to show how indebted his choice of privileged paintings was to Michael Fried's controversial (and dubious) taste. Yet his way of writing about them was astounding, and very moving:

> Acceptance of such objects achieves the absolute acceptance of the moment, by defeating the sway of the momentous. It is an ambition worthy of the highest

> art. Nothing is of greater moment than the knowledge that the choice of one moment excludes another, that no moment makes up for another, that the significance of one moment is the cost of what it forgoes. That is refinement. Beauty and significance, except in youth, are born of loss. But otherwise everything is lost. The last knowledge will be to allow even that knowledge of loss to vanish, to see whether the world regains. The idea of infinite possibility is the pain, and the balm, of adolescence. The only return on becoming adult, the only justice in forgoing that world of possibility, is the reception of actuality—the pain and balm in the truth of the only world: that it exists, and I in it.[1]

I had never read such Emersonian eloquence in defense of—in the description of the experience of—abstract painting. Sure: I had known that Cavell was a figure of the Harvard Philosophy Department who was beginning to bridge the abyss that then separated the readers of Anglo-American post-Wittgenstein analysis from the work of Heidegger. In the "Excursus" one could see that bridgework in operation, as Cavell pitted the "moment" against the "momentous" in the passage above, and even more brilliantly in his extensions of the words of "automatism," "candid," "medium," "representation," and "abstract" in that same chapter. He marshalled asyndeton to spin out the "abstract" nouns for the psychological and moral distractions such paintings obliterated, and then capped the observation poignantly with a verbless riff of inner rhyme: "Because these abstractions retain the power of art, after the failure of representations to depict our conviction and connectedness with the world, they have overcome the representativeness which came between our reality and our art: overcame it by abstraction, abstracting us from *the recognitions and engagements and complicities and privileged appeals and protests* which distracted us from one another and from the world we have constructed. Attracted from distraction by abstraction."[2] His diction echoes and twists key terms previously used in the chapter. Earlier he had boldly conflated representation as *mimesis* with political representation [*praesens*] without the slightest Heideggerian pretense to philological authority or

1. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 116-17.
2. Ibid., 117 (my italics).

to the recovery of an ancient synthesis. The paintings alone were sufficient authority and the language of the philosopher *represented* the depth of his response to them.

Luckily, the intensity and acuity of his moral vision of art impelled me to acquire *Must We Mean What We Say?* as soon as I was able. I write "Luckily"—because otherwise I might never have found a reason to read his essay "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Religion*." That essay allowed me to complete the dissertation I was struggling to write on Maurice Blanchot and Charles Olson. At that time, the scholarship and writing on Blanchot was scarce and thin. Most of what there was was French, and none of its authors seemed interested in tracing Blanchot's references. I had been able to pick out of his early writings unattributed phrases that he culled from Hegel, the Latin Vulgate, Heine, Ponge, and Kierkeggard, but it wasn't until I read Cavell's essay that I knew what I might do with that arcana. Cavell had read Kierkegaard on Authority as a proleptic text on modern art (among many other things, of less pertinence to me). Suddenly in the light reflected from Cavell's pages I saw all those oblique quotations of Blanchot's as attempts to define the impossible task of writing and representation in literature. That made my mundane task of academic writing possible.

Without meticulous biographies it would be impossible to untangle the priorities in the Cavell/Fried relationship. Fried might not have known Cavell's Kierkegaard essay when he published "Art and Objecthood" in 1967. Cavell might not have even written it by then: it appeared in his 1969 collection of essays. By opening that essay with a quotation from Perry Miller, the Harvard historian of Puritan theology, and ending with the dictum, "Presentness is grace," Fried had earned the contempt of such colleagues as Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster for his capitulation to the language of religion, while I found that hint of the metamorphosis of Puritan theology to the theory of art the most fascinating aspect of his polemic. But the explicit claims of Cavell were nevertheless more illuminating, as when he writes "[…] our serious art is produced under conditions which Kierkegaard announces as those of apostleship, not those of genius. I do not insist that art has become religion (which may or may not describe the situation […]) but that the activity of modern art, both in production and reception, is to be understood in categories which are, or were, religious."[3]

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3. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 175.

I believe my attitude toward Cavell's film writing began to change when I read his lengthy discussion of Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du jeu*, 1939) in "More of The World Viewed" in the *Georgia Review* in 1974. Then two years later, in the same journal, he published "Leopards in Connecticut" a definitive study of Howard Hawks' *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). It was the first, and utterly convincing glimpse, we had of what would become his *Pursuits of Happiness*, the finest study of a film genre ever written, and all the more impressive because Cavell actually discovered and delimited the genre: comedies of remarriage.

There was still one more bump in the path of my full appreciation of Cavell: between *The World Viewed* and *Pursuits of Happiness* he wrote *The Senses of Walden*. It was an insightful and often dazzling book on the second-best thinker of Concord. But I could not understand why he was focusing his mind on Thoreau and ignoring Emerson, the primary poet-philosopher of America. Of course, I did not realize then that I was repeating my previous error of judging the book by its critical subject. It took *Pursuits of Happiness*, a book utterly outside of my academic domain and territorial interests, to make me an avid reader of all that Cavell published.

At the time that I was reading *The Senses of Walden*, one of my preoccupations was the Americanness of the American avant-garde cinema. The chapters of my dissertation on Olson had brought me to a deeper understanding of Emerson and of his Puritan influences, convincing me that he had pioneered a pervasively influential national aesthetics by infusing everyday perception (and thereby art) with the visionary intensity of the tradition of Jonathan Edwards and the Mathers. Because I was so obsessed with the tropes filmmakers had forged from walking with a movie camera, or turning it upside down, or filming from cars, trains, and airplanes, a hitherto overlooked passage in the "Idealism" chapter of Emerson's 1836 book *Nature* drew my attention:

> Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position apprizes us of a dualism. We are strangely affected by seeing the shore from a moving ship, from a balloon, or through the tints of an unusual sky. The least change in our point of view, gives the whole world a pictorial air. A man who seldom rides, needs only to

> get into a coach and traverse his own town, to turn the street into a puppet-show. The men, the women,—talking, running, bartering, fighting,—the earnest mechanic, the lounger, the beggar, the boys, the dogs, are unrealized at once, or, at least, wholly detached from all relation to the observer, and seen as apparent, not substantial beings. What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the rail-road car! Nay, the most wonted objects, (make a very slight change in the point of vision,) please us most. In a camera obscura, the butcher's cart, and the figure of one of our own family amuse us. So a portrait of a well-known face gratifies us. Turn the eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture, though you have seen it any time these twenty years!
>
> In these cases, by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle,—between man and nature. Hence arises a pleasure mixed with awe; I may say, a low degree of the sublime is felt from the fact, probably, that man is hereby apprized, that, whilst the world is a spectacle, something in himself is stable.[4]

Consequently, a statement by Tony Smith disparaged by Fried in "Art and Objecthood" where I first encountered it, thrilled me:

> When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the '50s, someone told me how I could get on to the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never

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4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. I: Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 30-31.

> done. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art.[5]

The aesthetic results of these "experiences" are positively manifested in avant-garde cinema and polemically misapplied to sculpture and painting by Fried. One of my mistakes was thinking then that Cavell's closeness to Fried and his insistence on the priority of Hollywood films, and their escape from the demands of Modernism, blinded him to this, and generally, to the aesthetic dimensions of Emerson's philosophy. But when he turned, eventually, to Emerson, he revealed profundities in the bard of Concord that I hadn't been able to see.

Every few years in my long tenure at Princeton University I would offer a course in Film Theory. *The World Viewed* was usually included on the syllabus, making me fonder of it with each iteration. One time, co-teaching the course with Thomas Levin, a delightfully good-natured agonist whose perpetual disagreements with me enlivened such collaboration, I saw, as in a funhouse mirror, my own earlier prejudices toward Cavell incarnated by my colleague, who also deplored the objects valued in that book, but not for the same reasons I had discarded. It was great fun to become, at last, Cavell's advocate, and illuminating to have revealed the irrelevance of the objects of discussion.

By then I had met Cavell a few times. His generosity and kindness were outstanding. Over time the logic of his inquiries brought him to accept and champion what had been my own youthful enthusiasms, Emerson and Heidegger—and in so doing he gave us very useful instruction in what was most valuable in them—although he never "acknowledged' the importance of avant-garde cinema. Now that "film," as we both knew it, is a matter of the past and Modernism is no longer an arena of high-stakes contention, the grounds of our ideological opposition have dissolved into the atmosphere of critical history where my dispute will be an irrelevant footnote to his permanent eminence.

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5. Tony Smith, "Interview with Samuel Wagstaff Jr", *Art Theory: Texts, Writings & Manistos*, http://theoria.art-zoo.com/interview-with-samuel-wagstaff-jr-tony-smith.

2. Cavell as a Way Into Philosophy

RICHARD MORAN

Opening remarks given at a memorial event, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

It is of course a great honor for me to say a few words about Stanley on this occasion, and to say a few things about what he has brought to philosophy, what he has meant to me, and what his work contributes to American writing. And it is also clear that I have been given an impossible task, as anyone will know who has so much as an inkling of the variety and sweep of the texts, the questions, and the human phenomena that he has made available to philosophical reflection over the course of his many books.

And there are other difficulties in making such an address, and one for me personally, or a particular difficulty anyway, in saying something about Stanley Cavell's contribution to philosophy, and this arises from the fact that for me his body of his writing and his example plays a concept-determining role in my access to the idea of philosophy as such. I mean not only that without his example, I wouldn't have an understanding of what philosophy is, or can be, such that I could aspire to be part of it. I also mean, in thinking of his work as a paradigm, that it has the status of a standard or a measure, against which the various achievements of twentieth century philosophy are to be understood. On every subject that he has contributed to, he has raised the stakes on the level of intellectual seriousness with which they are pursued, and the kinds of questions that it is possible to ask about them.

For the plain truth is, I would never have tried for a career in philosophy, or to have formed the idea of being a writer of philosophy were it not for his example. I mean many things by that, perhaps chiefly that his daring, and his sense of philosophy as an adventure and not only a set of problems, inspired and sustained me over

many years when I was reading philosophy, writing in notebooks, but before I considered applying to graduate school. And when I finally did, it was on the gamble that if a great spirit like his had found some kind of home in the academic world, then perhaps it wasn't as inhospitable to life as my previous experience had led me to believe. Like many of us, I suppose, I was an unhappy, alienated undergraduate, prone to disappointment in myself, in my teachers, and in the books I was trying to read. Philosophy inspired me, but I was going to need a special kind of encouragement to think that I could take the risk of seeing if I could make some contribution to it myself. —“Philosophy inspires much unhappy love.”[1]

But I mean also something even more specific than that. In a literal and specific sense, I owe my first philosophical education to Stanley Cavell, even though it was many years before we met and he was never a formal teacher of mine.

As a college sophomore, I was drawn to the movies (it was the 70s, youth culture was movie culture) and I was both drawn to and intimidated by philosophy. And through luck I learned that there was this book about movies written by a Harvard philosophy professor called *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. I had no idea what “ontology” was, but as I started reading the first chapters I knew that I wanted in. It's hard to describe the excitement of discovering that intellectual voice, one for whom sophistication was not a pose, erudition not a hoard of possessions, brilliance not an avoidance of vulnerability and self-questioning but rather the means to make such vulnerabilities yield their insights. I remained intimidated, of course, but I also felt taken into the confidence of this voice, and eager to learn how I myself could earn that kind of confidence, as a reader, as a beginner. This was heady stuff for someone barely twenty years old.

The World Viewed was the first book of any kind which I immediately began re-reading as soon as I finished it. I just wanted more, and was eager to see how those first chapters would sound to me now that I had made it to the end of the book in a state of semi-comprehension. It's the book that taught me what reading and re-reading in philosophy are. That alone has been an invaluable, lifelong lesson. All through college and afterwards it was never out of my sight. I wanted it all, and I made the

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1. Cavell, “An Audience for Philosophy,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), xxii.

contents of that book my lesson plan. For years I made it a point to see every movie even briefly discussed in it, read every critic he mentioned, see the work of the painters he discussed, and begin reading the philosophers he was in dialogue with. As with Stanley's writing in general, its impact is not only in what he writes himself but what he makes available and puts you in touch with.

So, when my college courses were boring me or irritating me, I re-read *The World Viewed*, and tracked down everything in the endnotes. The education I received from that one book is incalculable and took place over many years. There are, of course, the films themselves which the book introduced me to: the films of Bresson, Truffaut, Bergman, Antonioni, Howard Hawks, *Children of Paradise* (Carné), Astaire and Rogers, Godard, Chaplin, Keaton, and W. C. Fields, Terrence Malick, Carl Dreyer, Fellini, Jean Renoir, Alain Resnais, Hitchcock, Kubrick, Kurosawa, Welles, Chris Marker, Jean Vigo (whose *L'Atlante* [1934] is the source text for films of remarriage) and Murnau.

It was through this book that I first encountered the criticism of James Agee, Robert Warshow, Andre Bazin, Michael Fried, William Empson, Northrop Frye, Clement Greenberg, Annette Michelson, and the criticism as well as the poetry of Baudelaire, beginning with his great essay "The Painter of Modern Life," the basis for a pivotal chapter in the book introducing modernism. It was from this book that I first discovered the paintings of Manet, Courbet, Delacroix, Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski. And finally, though I needed to work myself up to it, I first began trying to read philosophers like Rousseau, Heidegger, Hume, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Marx. Of course, this is not to say that I would never have encountered these figures, or at least some of them, had I never read *The World Viewed*. But Stanley's writing gave me a kind of permission of access, somehow combined with a sense that these could be my own personal discoveries.

Part of what I mean by the "concept-determining status" of his writing as philosophy is that whatever philosophy was, or whatever reading philosophy was, it had to, just as a reading experience, demand and reward going back over it again and again. This also meant that the writing had to bear up under any possible pressure of interrogati-

on, of meaning, truth, relevance, seriousness, as well as the reader's demand for pleasure and delight as well as instruction. And since any writing presenting itself as philosophical or of high intellectual seriousness will also be encountered in a milieu subject to its specific forms of disappointment, even of fraudulence and fakery, for Stanley Cavell's writing to bear up under the weight of demands and promise I placed upon it, it had to be writing that could earn and keep the trust of a youth quick to disappointment (and feeling betrayed) by the representatives of intellectual life on offer that one encounters along the way. What this has meant for me is that philosophical writing that didn't place all these simultaneous demands on itself, I have forever afterwards found difficult to take seriously as philosophy.

So this is part of what I mean by its "concept-determining" role in my life. But I also mean that the questions and the writers he has made available to philosophy are for me definitional of the subject of philosophy.

A self-conscious task Stanley took upon himself, pretty much all his life, is that of making a place within philosophy, as studied or practiced in the universities, for a number of writers and texts, which just about everyone agrees are of some kind of greatness and importance, often even canonical, but which nonetheless occupy an uneasy place considered as an academic subject. There are many such writers—Kierkegaard, Emerson, Montaigne, Rousseau, Freud—who are points of reference in philosophy as well as literature, and who are difficult to accommodate institutionally, (thematically related to their different concerns with the difficulties in making oneself intelligible.) This is part of what Stanley means in a late essay of his ("The Wittgensteinian Event") by the "pedagogical recalcitrance of Wittgenstein's text": "In such a case, in an academic context, the existence of such writers raises the question: just what counts as teaching these texts, what is learning from them?"[2]

Here, in a deeply characteristic virtue of Stanley's, what would for others be a purely rhetorical question is in his hands taken perfectly seriously, and constructively. We will take this very question as our task, as readers, and as thinkers, and find ways to make progress on learning what teaching this text could mean. And one thing we will do at the beginning is look to the text itself to articulate its lesson of how it is

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2. Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 210.

to be read. If the text if fully serious, it will be committed in its meaningfulness everywhere, and if as readers we are as demanding on our own responsiveness as we are on the text, we will be instructed in how to read it. Simple as that, really. It just helps to be possessed of the mind and heart of Stanley Cavell when you're doing it. What his writing provides, in countless instances, is the kind of intellectual feat of both patience and brilliance that you wouldn't believe was possible until you have seen it done yourself. And once you have seen it done, writing of that depth of responsiveness, serious down to its very syllables, after that encounter nothing else will do really. Writing that falls short of that, whether philosophy or criticism, will simply seem anemic and unserious by comparison. Hence this is another part of what I mean by saying that Stanley's writing is for me paradigmatic of philosophy as such.

This is not a gathering of people who need to be introduced to the work of Stanley Cavell, so I may be permitted not to review his accomplishments here and now. But people come to the writing of Stanley Cavell from a remarkable variety of directions, something which is itself one of his special accomplishments, and I would wager that no two people in this room have read all and only the same works by Stanley Cavell. So, this means that we don't all know the same things.

It is well known, for instance, that Stanley's work reflects on an astonishing variety of subjects, from Barbara Stanwyck to Descartes' *cogito*, but because his readers come from so many different places, they don't always know what is going on in the neighboring fields. So, for instance, those who primarily know his work on Wittgenstein, will be aware of his writing on Shakespeare, or film, or Thoreau, . . . and likewise, an admirer of his writing on Henry James or opera, will know that the author of these works is an important American philosopher, but may not be in a position to know just how crucial an interpreter of Wittgenstein he is, to go no further.

And so there may yet be point in underlining, even in this learned and distinguished company, the difference there is between (on the one hand) being, perhaps brilliantly eclectic and generous in one's intellectual sympathies, or taking an interest in Shakespeare or movies, and on the other hand, producing *these* works, writing unsurpassable books like *The World Viewed*, *Pursuits of Happiness*, and *Contesting Tears*, as well as the body of writing on Shakespeare first collected in his book *Di-*

sowning Knowledge. These are not just any books about film or about Shakespeare. Nor are they simply a gifted philosopher's reflections on literature or film. These are books that both absorb and respond to the wealth of writing on film or literature that precedes him, some of it, after all, by some of the most gifted writers or scholars in the language, and yet these are books which manage to raise the level of intellectual ambition for these topics and achieve something that future writing on them is now forever to be measured by.

As he writes near the beginning of *The Claim of Reason*, "A measure of the quality of a new text is the quality of the texts it arouses."[3] Well, for devoted readers and writers like me, aroused, raised, and cheered by writing of Stanley Cavell, a measure, a standard like that really puts us on the spot. Which is where we belong, I suppose. I am personally and profoundly grateful for his example and for his friendship these many years, for providing so many points of entry to the subject of philosophy, so many ways in; and for providing so many ways forward.

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3. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5.

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.

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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 ascendency to the flesh and blo-

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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]

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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

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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*

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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]

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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-

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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 the 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-

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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.

4. Encountering Cavell

RICHARD ELDRIDGE

I first came across Stanley Cavell's writing in the fall of 1974 in a senior seminar in the philosophy of mind at Middlebury College, co-taught by Stanley Bates and Timothy Gould. We spent most of the term reading Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* and P. F. Strawson's *Individuals*—books that at that time, before the widespread reception of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, Putnam-style functionalism, and central state identity theory, still counted as contemporary philosophy of mind. It was then felt by Bates and Gould, I conjecture, that something more lively and something having to do with subjectivity might be order. Both of them had been Ph.D. students with Cavell at Harvard, and so we turned to "Knowing and Acknowledging."

I had already read J. L. Austin's "A Plea for Excuses" and "Other Minds" with Bates a semester earlier, so the ground for my reception of Cavell was somewhat prepared by Austin's enterprise of attending to what we would really say when, in a spirit of diagnosing philosophical confusions. But Cavell's essay was different. He did suggest that the problem of other minds was somehow confused or ill-formed. But he also tried to figure out seriously how someone, anyone, might honestly and genuinely say and mean that he or she can never know, never really know, whether another human being is in pain. The answer turned out to be that one *could* really say and mean this if, but only if, one had failed to acknowledge another person, or failed, as it were, to acknowledge human existence *in* another. And *that*, in turn, could happen, if but only if one had fallen out of human relationship with the other and into narcissism, alienation, or what Cavell called (I was soon to learn) avoidance. In a yet further turn, that fall is not a simple mistake or confusion that can readily be avoided if one is simply careful with oneself. It is instead something that is all too liable and likely to happen to anyone. (This is the line of thinking that Cavell came to call, in *The Claim of Reason*, the truth of skepticism.) Partly this liability is a function of modern social

conditions, where there are radically differentiated and mutually opaque forms of labor and hence of social stance and identity. In *The World Viewed*, which we went on to read in the seminar, Cavell refers to the human wish, intensifying in the West since the Reformation, to escape

> subjectivity and metaphysical isolation—a wish for the power to reach this world, having for so long tried, at last hopelessly, to manifest fidelity to another. [...] At some point the unhinging of our consciousness from the world interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world. Then our subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation.[1]

As a late adolescent, studying philosophy in relative social seclusion and uncertain of what would come next, I was certainly ready to recognize myself in this picture. Partly this liability is a function of ego formation as such, as one comes to take up a discursively structured point of view on things and to engage in claim-making activity only under the scrutiny and corrections of others, so that one both desperately wishes to please others (the grownups) and desperately wishes to acquire a form of authority in claim-making performance that is absolute, metaphysically immune to challenge. (This is one of the sources of Lear's avoidance of the claims of others, especially Cordelia, on his own emotional responsiveness that is to him both unruly and frightening, as I soon came to learn from Cavell's "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*.")

And yet, however socially, psychoanalytically, and even metaphysically formed and persistent the experience of isolation, the wish for presentness, and the reactive temptation to avoidance are, it is also not true that nothing can be done about them. In "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," as well as somewhat less explicitly in "Must We Mean What We Say?" and "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy,"—texts to which I soon turned during that epochal fall of 1974—Cavell argues for the possibility and importance of honesty in giving voice critically to one's difficult responses to things (other people, modern works of art), including giving voice to

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1. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 21-22.

one's intimately entangled attractions, aversions, confusions, and bursts of identification. He contrasts the achievement of attentive critical voice with inattentive standings on dogmatic formula for defining the essence of poetry on the parts of Cleanth Brooks (poetry is inherently unparaphrasable) and Yvor Winters (poetry is necessarily paraphrasable). Both Brooks and Winters, he suggests, are defensively, reactively, and fruitlessly insisting on their respective formulas as a way of both claiming authority and avoiding coming to full terms with the unsettling details of specific pieces of difficult modern poetry. We can do better, Cavell suggests, if we avoid formulas for response and instead do the hard, patient, troubling, but also rewarding work of focusing on details in specific poems that either attract or repel us and then trying to figure out how and why these attractions and aversions happen. (In 1981 I learned from *Pursuits of Happiness* that a marriage could be built and rebuilt, day after day, through a kind of mutual criticism, improvisation, and wit via intimate attentiveness to one another and that that could be fun.)

Cavell goes on in "Aesthetic Problems" to extend this thought to philosophy as well, or at least to the kind of philosophy that appeals to what we say. Pattern and reason-giving are possible, and we may hope for agreement from others, but proof on the model of mathematics is never in view. In a justly famous passage, he sums up his conception of how the critic, the artist, and the philosopher might do their work in a humanly possible and plausible way.

> The problem of the critic, as of the artist, is not to discount his subjectivity, but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement, but to master it in exemplary ways. Then his work outlasts the fashions and arguments of a particular age. That is the beauty of it. [...] [P]hilosophy, like art, is, and should be, powerless to *prove* its relevance; and that says something about the kind of relevance it wishes to have. All the philosopher, this kind of philosopher, can do is to express, as fully as he can, his world, and attract our undivided attention to our own.[2]

2. Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 94, 96.

This passage—and the conception of philosophy as critical-expressive-persuasive activity that aims at (but never fully achieves) fullness of attention to the difficult phenomena of one's life with others that it expresses—has been the lodestar of my entire philosophical career. Together with some related passages about modernism in the Foreword to *Must We Mean What We Say?*, it was the basis for my personal statement in applying to graduate school about what I wanted to do in philosophy. My 1981 Ph.D. dissertation, written at Chicago under Ted Cohen (another Cavell student) explored and defended this view, in arguing (by way of critical readings of major philosophical texts by Descartes, Frege, Davidson, and Wittgenstein) that we are always in pursuit of self-reconciliation and community and that this pursuit might most fruitfully be carried on critically, expressively, and conversationally rather than by trying to grasp vainly after proofs. In *A Pitch of Philosophy*, Cavell characterizes his "conception of philosophy as the achievement of the unpolemical, of the refusal to take sides in metaphysical positions, of my quest to show that those are not useful sides but needless constructions"[3]—as in the constructed formulas of Brooks and Winters. When followed out carefully (as it can be), the somewhat odd grammar of this sentence makes it clear that the quest to show the emptiness of dogmatic formulas and to do something else instead is itself something to be achieved. I have found myself working, early and late, from within the grip of this quest.

Along the way I got to know Cavell personally, first at an evening at Ted Cohen's coop apartment in Chicago, where Cavell met with a group of somewhat starstruck students that included Stephen Melville, Paul Gudel, Mary Deveraux, Jeff Wieand, and Danny Herwitz. Still myself somewhat under the spell of a reading of Wittgenstein as some kind of communitarian—a reading I now regard as mistaken, in offering only another distorting summary formula that betrays the richness and expressive ambivalence of the text—I asked Cavell why he didn't take the private language argument to point to a more Hegelian conception of language, thought, and social life as all necessarily interrelated, with Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, say, as the fundamental object of study. (Perhaps only a graduate student would or should say something like this.) Gently, but memorably, he replied, "Sometimes a man's just got to

3. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 22.

get up, shake the dust off his shoes, and get out of town." (It was at this time that Cavell was working out his interest in Emersonian aversiveness, the positive flip side, as it were, of avoidance.) Later on there were some six or eight conferences (Penn State, Atlanta, Bloomington, Boston, Edinburgh, and a few others), where there were group dinners or lunches that included Ted Cohen, Stanley Bates, Tim Gould, Paul Guyer, Jay Bernstein, and Charles Altieri, among others. Cavell was unfailingly interested in and attentive to whatever I might be up to, despite the like demands of others on his attention that he repaid equally well. His genuineness and generosity of interest in and attention to others were perhaps his dominant character traits, along with his fierce intelligence and extraordinary ear. He supplied a two-sentence blurb for my 2008 book *Literature, Life, and Modernity* that is a masterpiece of insight, depth, and brevity. I could not then and could not now characterize my aims and (I hope) my achievements any better than he did in that brief remark.

As this rehearsal of influence and acquaintance makes clear, my philosophical work and much of the course of my life would not have been possible without Cavell's continuing presence in it, enabled and mediated by Gould, Bates, and Cohen (my teachers, his students) along with his writing. Cavell's conception of philosophy as an ongoing, open-ended, never fully dischargeable task of achieving responsiveness and responsibility, where moves can be made, insight and intimacies can be achieved, and fun can be had, if we are but attentive enough, but where finality is never in view, has been central to everything I do. I wish it were more central to the discipline and to our general culture. But perhaps we, or at least some of us, can still hope and work for that.

5. Stanley Cavell, Philosopher Untamed

LINDSAY WATERS

The great Stanley Cavell died late last month at the age of 91. Below, Harvard University Press Executive Editor for the Humanities, Lindsay Waters, recalls what made Cavell so special.[1]

Why not use the word "star," Stanley asked in his breakthrough book on movies, *The World Viewed*, why not "the more beautiful and more accurate word," rather than actor or actress? In philosophy he was a Hepburn, a Brando, a Dean, a Bacall, stars into whose souls he gave us entryways. I always thought of him and Hilary Putnam as the "glimmer twins." Time was on their side, for so many decades, thank the lord. And on ours, too!

We know he was here, and, alas, we know he's gone now.

Stanley attended monthly meetings of the Harvard University Press Board of Syndics. He dressed beautifully to attend our meetings, and he did his homework for them carefully, and spoke articulately on behalf of the books we had asked him to report on.

And he would join the Press staff for ordinary/extraordinary events like the showing over bag lunches of Rohmer's *A Tale of Winter*, a movie he'd pried open and made bloom in a chapter of his book *Cities of Words*, which we'd just published. A simple pleasure he shared with us on a summer day in the third floor conference room at 79 Garden Street.

He walked our earth, and we published many of his words once they'd started to flow from his pen, his typewriter, his word processor, when he'd overcome the long blockage wrought by his father's wraith and wrath.

In the Camelot years, as I am wont to think of them, Stanley was a knight of the realm under the directorship of Arthur Rosenthal, serving at the Press Round Ta-

1. This header and the remarks following it first appeared on the Harvard University Press website blog on July 16, 2018, less than a month after Cavell's death.—Ed.

ble for meetings with other nobles such as Helen Vendler, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and Samuel Huntington.

That he was a wonder was proven, paradoxically, by the vehemence of those who strove to deny he existed, from his father to a host of pygmies in cinema studies—a field he can fairly be said to have invented—and philosophy, two "professions" he offended deeply. And though a knight of Arthur's table he was never cavalier: he shined his shoes and wore a tie to our Syndics' meetings, but always chafed at the notion of belonging to a profession. Philosophy, truly, has always been untamed; as a human activity it predates all universities and all professions.

Was he perfect? No! What Auden said of Yeats we could say of him: "You were silly like us: your gift survived it all."

But he was civilized, and a friend. He sat down with us at the Press just as he sat down with our Syndics and with movie-lovers at the Brattle and the Harvard Film Archive to be silent and watch a movie and converse afterwards. He was always willing to join us and others, and to debate the way philosophers are always eager to do, on films like *Groundhog Day* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, and on topics from the ordinary to the miraculous to the most painful, such as the violence parents mete out unfairly to their children.

He deepened and enriched what can seem like the merely technical philosophical topic of skepticism, turning it into an ethical one, the question of how one person can know the mind of another. Watch Stanley conjuring the internal life of an acquiring editor for Harvard University Press: "When I try to imagine what it must be like to be in your position, with more projects in play than ordinary human beings can contemplate, and every one with a talented human being at the other end of your decision hanging on for dear life, I am amazed at your ability to show civilized good humor when you emerge into the world of choices and bottom lines." He had a project by a young colleague to tell me about: "I hate like hell adding to the hounds at your heels, but here we all are, each with our cry of hounds." Many authors have been kind, but few have gotten inside my shoes the way he did. This was him cutting right through the problem of Other Minds.

Stanley was a political thinker devoted to promoting equality between men and women and the races. Like John Rawls, he supported many women in their

studies, encouraging them to speak and write, to earn PhDs; many of them we have had the honor of publishing at HUP—Sianne Ngai, Yi-Ping Ong, Nancy Bauer. He gets deeply into the souls of male and female characters. I think of him as being like the heroine of the recent movie *Ladybird*, superficially first of all, because he was from Sacramento, but there is more: he renamed himself, like her, and he faced differences with his parents head-on. He did not try to eradicate skepticism. I saw as we talked that, just as I wanted to gloss over all the differences, he'd want to face them, as happened to us one day in a dispute about Pauline Kael's *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*-style of critical writing. I wanted to tiptoe around the abyss, but he wanted to stare into it and talk about it.

One day not long ago, I had a chance to harvest the fruit of his way. I think of this teaching of his under the rubric "The Philosopher as Producer," borrowing from Benjamin's idea of "The Author as Producer," where he claims you can judge artworks by looking at the artworks they produce by others. I think you can judge if a philosopher is productive if he or she causes others to talk—and not just talk, but change their lives. When I read the line Stanley wrote in *Little Did I Know* about how he could date the moment he realized his father hated him, as in wanted him dead, I immediately called my only brother (I have seven sisters) and told him the line, and Kevin responded, "I can date the moment I knew dad hated me. It was on the other side of the barn, and . . ." Thus began the most fruitful interchange we'd ever had, and it has continued to this day. We'd spent most of our lives not talking together at all. This is productive philosophy.

It wasn't just a "nice," professional relationship Stanley and I had. If you think Harvard means prestige and hierarchy, I ask you to consider the life and teachings of Stanley Cavell. As a younger man I hadn't quite realized that being someone's editor was a job you did til death did you part, but I am so happy in a sad way to report that Stanley is buried up on what should be called Philosophy Hill in Mount Auburn Cemetery, where he lies close to John Rawls, Bob Nozick, and other great thinkers. He was a star.

6. For My Teacher, Stanley Cavell

ALICE CRARY

Remarks given at a memorial event, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

I am honored to be here, with members of the Cavell family, with friends and with colleagues, to celebrate the life and work of Stanley Cavell, to whom I owe inestimably large debts of gratitude and whom I remember with the greatest affection and admiration.

Cavell's role in my life was that of a philosophical parent. He is well known to have held that "philosophy is the education of grownups,"[1] and the sort of parenting I am talking about involved opening the door of philosophy for my young adult self. This was not a matter of induction into a theoretical research program of the type that then already dominated academic philosophy. Cavell's way was to prompt students to confront and interrogate our own intellectual responses, leading us to ask "why we do what we do, judge as we judge,"[2] and positioning us to think for ourselves. This is a demanding pedagogical enterprise, and Cavell devoted singular amounts of time and energy to supporting the young thinkers around him. What I am going to recount is the story of two extraordinary things that he did as my teacher, circumstances all the more arresting in that I was not officially his student.

I first encountered Cavell at Harvard in the late nineteen eighties when I was an undergraduate. He had then already been one of the world's most admired and beloved philosophers for some decades, so there's nothing surprising about the fact that I was intrigued and that I enrolled in a course he was offering on Emerson, diligently scribbling down notes while he lectured about things like aversion to conformity and self-

1. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 125.
2. Ibid.

reliance. Although I didn't then have any clear sense of what it might be to bring these ideas to bear on one's own life, I felt an excitement I couldn't account for and wanted to hear more. I was, however, too timid to approach him or to go to his office hours. My professors generally struck me as otherworldly beings—not an unusual experience for a student from a non-academic background—and, in light of the simultaneously jubilantly playful and pointedly serious manner in which he carried off his extreme breadth of learning, Cavell was especially terrifying. Especially beguiling and therefore especially terrifying. I didn't ask him to advise my undergraduate thesis, even though it was dedicated in substantial part to his work. Yet, when it came time for the oral defense of the thesis, for which he was roped in as an examiner, he took pains to tell jokes and introduce asides with an eye to putting me at my ease. When, having received my A.B., I took a teaching job at an international school in Ecuador, he encouraged me to apply to Ph.D. programs in Philosophy and wrote in support of my applications. And, when, because my partner—Nathaniel—was at Harvard Medical School, I took a leave from my Ph.D. program at the University of Pittsburgh to spend an academic year back at Harvard, Cavell hired me as his research assistant and also as one of the teaching fellows for his iconic Moral Perfectionism lecture course. *That* is a quick overview of my earliest interactions with Cavell, and, although I would have an enormous amount to be grateful for if this were all there was to say, it is merely the backdrop for the more remarkable episodes I want to relate.

I left Pittsburgh two years before I finished my Ph.D. Through no fault of my own, I could no longer stay there, and the circumstance was the occasion of the only seriously unhappy stretch of time in my life. With an eye to getting me out of Pittsburgh, Nathaniel arranged to do a fellowship in public health at Harvard, and together we got positions as resident tutors at Mather House. In theory this was an extremely satisfactory setup for me to finish the Ph.D., but in practice things were not good. I was no longer able to work. My standard method involved an exercise of visualization in which I mentally map out a set of conceptual connections, and then, as it were, walk around the relevant space until I feel confident that I know it well. But I had been shaken in my ability to confidently move among a set of concepts. I couldn't do it, and for at least a good part of a year I gave up the idea of a career in philosophy, hoping only to finish a tolerable dissertation. Not that I was inactive during this peri-

od. I was teaching and interacting with philosophy peers, and this included checking in with Cavell from time to time. But even with close friends I didn't talk much about what I was going through, and I wouldn't have dreamed of burdening Cavell. For his part, he was, in my experience, capable of merrily expectant silences, intended to draw out a partner in conversation. But he wasn't inclined to ask uninvited questions. Nonetheless, he was one of very few people in my life who not only registered that I was not the same person I had been but also openly acknowledged that they knew this. Cavell was of course aware that this gesture of acknowledgment was anything but ethically insignificant—he is, after all, the philosopher who wrote the book about such matters[3]—and, far from shying away from the demands it imposed on him as my friend and teacher, he embraced them, finding ways to help me build back to my self-respect.

Once, when I was at my lowest, I met him in the late morning at the diner across Beacon Street from his house, where he used to meet students and colleagues, the Busy Bee.[4] We mostly talked about the sorts of things we in those days mostly talked about—writing, philosophical texts we had in common, mutual friends, feminism, politics, literature, movies, and so on—but I had been working up my courage to say something to him, and I did finally manage, with great effort, to utter something like: "I need someone to tell me that they believe that I can do this."

He showed his appreciation of my words by responding to me in his slow, winning manner. "Any day," he said, "any day."

After a moment, we went on speaking of other things. But he meant what he said to me, and he lived up to it.

They say no good deed goes unpunished, and my second anecdote does nothing to disconfirm this bit of conventional wisdom. Back when I was his research assistant, in 1994, I had asked Cavell whether he would officiate at a ceremony celebrating the relationship between Nathaniel and me. At the age of thirteen, I had recognized the label "feminist" as fitting my image of my own aspirations, and—taking my cue from a vision of the gendered social world that I won't discuss here—I had de-

3. See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, especially Part II. See also "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 220-245 and *Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
4. I am indebted to David Cavell for reminding me of the name of this establishment.

termined never to marry. When I read Cavell's work on marriage, his distinction between the institution and the ideal of marriage made a strong impression on me.[5] Even before I had come across the phrase "commitment ceremony," his writings on these topics had suggested to me the possibility of a non-institutional fête in honor of the ideal. So, if Nathaniel and I were to have such a gathering, I reasoned, Cavell was the only person who could rightly preside. During the difficult period after I left Pittsburgh, I simply let the idea drop, but, when things again became easier—a circumstance for which I am significantly indebted to Cavell—I revived the plan. Cavell himself reports that he "gladly accepted [my] request that [he] take on the role of leading what has come to be called a commitment ceremony,"[6] and, although that accords with my memory of events, I remembered being awed by how seriously he thought over our invitation. In 2000, Nathaniel and I had moved to Manhattan to take up our respective first assistant professorships, his at Cornell Medical School and mine at the New School for Social Research. When I again approached Cavell about our idea for a ceremony, he suggested that I come up to Boston to discuss it with him, which I of course did, though not without a little fear and trembling.

Nathaniel and I ultimately invited friends and colleagues to the grounds of a country house of Nathaniel's parents, in upstate New York, for September 15, 2001.[7] Four days before our gathering, planes flew into the World Trade Centers, just a few blocks north of the Battery Park City apartment in which we then lived. Even as, with thousands of others, we were trying to make our way on foot west and north of the towers, we decided that, if at all possible, we would go ahead with our plans. Although some friends and family members who had been planning to fly to New York were unable to join us, the party—which included, in addition to a good number of philosophers and doctors from Boston, more or less the entire philosophy faculty of the New School for Social Research—wound up being bigger, not smaller, than expected, swelling to more than two hundred guests. It was not a day on which anyone had scruples about bringing an extra friend, neighbor, or family member. Cavell him-

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5. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
6. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 519.
7. Within *Little Did I Know*, Cavell describes the ceremony as having taken place in Western Massachusetts. Although this is an error, it is an understandable one. The property at which the ceremony took place is in Hillsdale, NY, which is very close to the Massachusetts border, and the inn in which we put the Cavells up is indeed in Massachusetts.

self later said he had doubts about his performance as our master of ceremonies. Noting that he of course could not say "I pronounce you husband and wife," he said that afterward he berated himself "for not having been nimble enough to provide a closing statement involving all present [something that] would have achieved what Austin calls 'up-take' in a performative utterance."[8] Cavell's qualms notwithstanding, his conduct at the event was, as I have it memory, brilliantly magisterial, making the proceedings seem utterly natural and authoritative, and Cathleen Cavell was there with him, the two of them smashingly elegant, lending their effortless grace and dignity to the whole affair. Nathaniel and I had no doubt that the effect we wanted—that our union had been given the imprimatur of collective recognition—had been attained.

Cavell died at a time at which, with the rise of hate-driven, far right movements in the United States and elsewhere, political discourse and practice are becoming more sinister and violent. I know I am not alone among the philosophers assembled here in believing that it is now urgent to identify and employ resources for effective critique. Nor I am alone in holding that it is imperative to be willing to turn on and examine the philosophical tools we have inherited, leaving room for the possibility that we may need to reject some of them as unhelpful or even as themselves ideological. This exercise of self-scrutiny is the thing that Cavell taught most fervently, consistently underlining its importance for democratic society.[9] I close with my boundless gratitude to him, not only for inviting me into a fellowship of socially engaged philosophers, but also for helping me to overcome a blow to my self-conception that once made this philosophical life seem out of reach—and, indeed, for showing with such virtuosity that, far from being incompatible with joy, the seriousness of the endeavor is one of life's most glorious and happiest pursuits.

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8. Ibid., 520.
9. For more on this topic, see Nancy Bauer, Alice Crary, and Sandra Laugier, "Stanley Cavell and the American Contradiction," in *The Stone*, in *The New York Times* (July 2, 2018), https://nyti.ms/2Nh1cgg.

7. Stanley Cavell, with Time

ELI FRIEDLANDER

Remarks given at a memorial event, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

Let me start by saying how significant it is for me to take part in this conference commemorating and celebrating Stanley Cavell. I am grateful to Cathleen Cavell and Richard Moran for this opportunity, not only to speak, but mainly to listen to dear friends, friends whose companionship was indelibly marked by our common love for Stanley, by the admiration for his thinking, and by the inspiration and sustenance he provided for our own work.

What I will say will be inflected by the way Stanley touched my life and work. I must apologize therefore for having to speak, in the short and precious time I have, also a bit about myself. As I wrote these remarks I thought that I will most likely not be the only one to choose to speak of the ideal, the paradigm of the unity of person and thought that is Stanley Cavell. It is what was so striking to me when I first encountered him; it also became central to my dissertation project with him, and it remains to this day that through which I think of his continuous presence in my concerns with philosophy.

My dissertation bore everywhere distinct signs of this fascination with the coming together of the individual and universal that Stanley exemplified and thematized, this even though I availed myself of Harvard's "three papers option," writing, instead of a proper thesis, separate essays on Rousseau, Kant, and Wittgenstein. I can trace my concern with the intersection of the biographical and the political in Rousseau to the impact of a passage close to the opening of *The Claim of Reason* where Cavell presents Rousseau's writing as "a way to use the self as access to the self's society " (26). "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" was the inspiration for my se-

cond paper on the universal voice in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, in which what is most intimately mine, that is, meaning which manifests itself in feeling, is also that through which I can speak for all. Surprising as it was, especially for me, my work on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* eventually also gravitated to the truth of solipsism as that uniqueness of the "I" encapsulated in what one could call the logical expression of the autobiographical: "Life and World are one," or "The World is my world."

As it was nearing its completion, Stanley referred to my dissertation, in one of our regular meetings in the Chinese restaurant on Beacon Street, as my "three headed monster." This reference to the guardian of Hades, was, I take it, his witty and affectionate way of indicating both the disparity between its different parts, and because of that, its potential to be further formed. I would not exaggerate if I said that my work, conducted under Stanley's supervision, absorbed without my quite knowing how, his subterranean influence, and was since, material for about twenty-five more years of thinking and writing, followed by his attentive responsiveness, and then only partially represented in three books on Wittgenstein, Rousseau, and Kant into which the three papers evolved.

Heading back for Israel, upon the completion of my thesis, in the summer of 1992, I hoped for a new beginning but also dreaded the prospect of looking for an academic position, that is of justifying, upon returning home, my departure from the procedures of philosophy I was taught there before I left for Harvard. My return was eased by Stanley's visit to give the Harvard University press lectures in Jerusalem in November of that same year. Earlier discussions of the intersection of the personal and the philosophical could still fall under what Cavell calls "abstract autobiography," or "the autobiography of a species." There was also, for sure, the endlessly thought-provoking "autobiography of companions," the exploration of the conditions of film out of the memory of the experience of films, in *The World Viewed*. But, in these lectures, later published as *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*, the impression of the utterly concrete universality demanded by the autobiographical could not be missed. It is the impact of these lectures that led me to conceive of continuing the work I did on Rousseau in the thesis, with a consideration of his last autobiography, the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* as a work of Cavellian "moral perfectionism."

What moved me in writing on the *Reveries* was in part the need to account for the dark side of representativeness, suggested in the same passage of *The Claim of Reason* I already referred to: "You will have to decide," Cavell writes, "about [Rousseau's] bouts of apparent insanity. Are they merely psychological problems? [...] Or are they expressions of grief that society should conduct itself as it does? Not grief for himself, but for society, which willfully denies knowledge of its own conspiracies, and not just those directed against him."[1] The *Reveries* was Rousseau's ultimate measure in the face of the unanimous agreement of society to reject him. It is thus an autobiography that Rousseau writes for himself alone, and which opens with the words: "Here I am then, alone on earth." The time of writing, that is of the transfiguration of life in memory, is posthumous, after all has ended, making its truthful readability inescapably a matter of what I called "the afterlife of words."

Cavell's turn to autobiography in *A Pitch of Philosophy* became important for me in yet a different way. In the "Overture," added to the lectures upon their publication, he relates how upon the occasion of his visit to Jerusalem, he read some essays of Gershom Scholem. He suggests the pertinence of Scholem's concern with the power of the Jewish mystical tradition to regenerate modern spiritual existence, to his own questioning of the "potential regenerativeness of Emerson and Thoreau as thinkers."[2] Each of the three chapters of the book was further introduced by an epigraph from one of Scholem's essays. As Cavell puts it in the overture: "These epigraphs represent an entire mode of approaching aspects of matters I dwell on that is not directly or consecutively taken in my own text—matters of voice, ephemerality, the inexcusable, name, dedication, the latency of the self."[3]

The epigraphs are from the essay "Walter Benjamin and His Angel," and so the mode of approaching matters, Cavell refers to in the quote just above, is not Scholem's but Benjamin's. After Benjamin's death, Scholem's friendship for him translated itself into the task of rescuing his writings for posterity, challenging his Marxist reception, and as it were guarding the afterlife of his writings. The epigraphs Cavell chose thus quoted Scholem, yet still referred further back to what I perceived as the

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1. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*: *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 27.
2. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), x.
3. Ibid., xiii.

regenerative potential of Benjamin's writings. I was struck by how the son of Jewish immigrants to America was also relating himself thereby to two sides of Jewish existence in the twentieth century, to the one who, in the late twenties became a Zionist and established himself in Jerusalem, and the one who remained in Europe and took his life after a failed attempt to cross the border into Spain, fleeing the Nazi invasion of France.

I will not hide that these two sides were on my mind in part probably through my early, maybe too early, knowledge that my father's parents also tried in these fateful years to cross the French border, and upon being captured were sent to their deaths. My father through many detours and changes of names, later narrated in his memoirs, made his way to Israel. And my full Hebrew name "Elchanan" is made of the names of my grandparents "Elisheva" and "Hans."

Given the importance of Jerusalem as the setting of *A Pitch of Philosophy*, I should mention, in a different spirit, that a few years later, upon my invitation, Stanley spoke to an auditorium filled with young and attentive students at Tel Aviv University. I think that it is not only out of local patriotism that I cherish how he later referred with noticeable excitement and enthusiasm to our dinner with some of these students on a sandy beach of the Mediterranean. Tel Aviv became in his mind, I would like to believe, another half of the place, which he knew only as Jerusalem.

Further reading Benjamin, led me to tell Stanley, when we met next, in the same Chinese restaurant on Beacon Street, that I think I found *my* Emerson. He replied unforgettably: "Lucky Walter." Under certain conditions, that is, when the right person says that, it is enough to send you on your way for life. But, one shouldn't forget, that paired with the richness of Stanley's mind, as he endlessly absorbed and incorporated matters small and large, his recurring gesture was to recount his philosophical trajectory, always relating every new departure to its sources, insisting as it were on a philosophical diet as a necessity of the unity of a life in philosophy (I say this thinking of Nancy Bauer's so precise diagnosis of the predicament of being a student of Stanley caught between his love of what Stanley loves and the need to find for himself his own objects of devotion).

In taking on Benjamin as a departure from the circle of concerns that I relate to Cavell's immediate influence on my work, I searched for signs of continuity: for

instance in a short and inspiring essay he wrote on the occasion of the English translation of the first volume of Benjamin's *Selected Writings*, "Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities." I was further encouraged by conversations with Stanley on such parallels, not only between his *The World Viewed* and Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay, but also between his exploration of marriage and melodrama in film and Benjamin's essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, as well as on the central presence of *Hamlet* in his book on the German baroque mourning play.

It was as I was sitting next to Stanley at Alice Crary's wedding reception, of which she so movingly told us about earlier today, that I heard of his investment in reading, from beginning to end, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. This was a prelude to the writing of his own autobiography, to his taking up the incredible project described in the following terms: "I would have to show that telling the accidental, anonymous, in a sense posthumous, days of my life is the making of philosophy, however minor or marginal, impure, which means to show that those days can be written, in some sense are to be called to be written philosophically."[4]

Opening again *Little Did I Know* to prepare for this memorial conference, I was drawn to the book's opening moves, in particular to its astounding first paragraph beginning—"The catheterization of my heart will no longer be postponed"—and ending with—"We must actually look at what is going on inside the heart."[5] I soon gave up my plans to conclude these remarks with a short reading of the opening entry of these *Excerpts from Memory*, in part because (not for the first time in reading Stanley Cavell), I was stunned by the dense, so delicate yet so exact, weave of meaning, that unfolds in these opening pages.

Instead of the reading I envisaged, I will therefore end with a reflection on the specific character of this language, that is of its thoughtfulness, and speculate on its possible relation to the idea of writing a life accompanied by philosophy. Stanley Cavell thinks in language, which is no more and no less than following the implications of the knowledge that words are needed to express thoughts. The commitment of thought to language comes in different modes: it is evident in the importance Cavell attributes to ordinary language philosophy. And in the register of the voice, of telling,

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4. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 6.
5. Ibid., 1.

of recounting, as well as of the anecdotal that is omnipresent in his memoirs. Importantly, the gift of storytelling, so evident in his narration, is an inheritance that Stanley traces to his father. But here I want to recall other moments, just as Cavellian, crossroads in the text, where the line of the story seems to be traversed by different threads, and through their interweaving, raised to partake in another plane of meaning. Such latitude in meaning, even as one is going on to tell the uncertain gains and losses of a life advancing in time, cannot be delivered or freely improvised, but must be written. (Indeed, the return to what was written day after day, necessary to create this weave is the allowable exception to the pre-compositional pact that makes for the daily rhythm of beginnings and endings in the memoirs.)

The opening entry is in that respect, the first, exemplary moment, where an obstacle in the path of life, a thoroughly real, anxiety-provoking contingency is transmuted into a "departure in [...] writing."[6] But departure, entry, beginning, no longer postponing, become part of a pattern crafted by the threads of directness and delay, immediacy and detour, invasions and defenses, waiting and precipitation. And the forming of that pattern is not external to what it takes for Cavell to "write [his] way into and through the anxiety."[7] It stands for work to be repeated in addressing "accidents avoided and embraced, strangers taken to heart or neglected, talents imposed or transfigured, malice insufficiently rebuked, love inadequately acknowledged."[8] I would even chance to say, that it is essential to achieving the "balance between remembering and forgetting"[9] that Stanley speaks of in the last line of the first entry. It is that form of meaning in which remembering, as difficult as the memory is, or comes, is redeemed in being dissolved in the writing of the surroundings that are its original home.

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6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 4.
9. Ibid., 5

8. Continuing Education with Stanley Cavell

NAOKO SAITO

Remarks given at a memorial event, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

How many times in my life have I re-encountered my teacher, Stanley Cavell? The most memorable, the first encounter with him was in the winter of 1996 at Harvard—the image still vivid in my memory, the snow falling outside the window of his room, with me sitting in front of Stanley. At the suggestions of a teaching assistant of Hilary Putnam, who had read my term paper, I made an appointment with Stanley and introduced myself along with my abiding question regarding American philosophy. When I presented this as my being "torn" between Emerson and Dewey, Stanley reacted immediately and expressed his sense of sympathy with me. That was the beginning of a kind of continuing education for me and of the lifelong task I consider myself to have shared with him.

Since then, Stanley had a deep impact on my life and career at various crucial moments. One of them was the defense of my dissertation, *Democratic Education for Holistic Growth: Dewey's Naturalistic Philosophy of Growth Reconstructed in the Light of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism*, which took place at Teachers College in 2000. Stanley was one of the examiners. Another was my translation into Japanese of *The Senses of Walden*, which was published in 2005. I cannot remember how many times I had talked to him in order to accomplish this baffling task of translating his English into a foreign language (this with the help of Paul Standish who translated Cavell's English into a translatable English). The publication of the collection I edited with Paul, *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grownups* in 2012 was also momentous in my connection with Stanley. This was a product of a colloquium we organized at Harvard with Stanley and Hilary in the fall of 2007.

Most recently I cherish the memory of Stanley holding in his hand the book that Paul and I presented to him in March 2017: *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: The Truth is Translated*.

Without his presence over many years, when I went back and forth between Japan and the United States, and after I had physically settled and apparently settled down in Kyoto, I would not have been able to establish my career as a Japanese female researcher of American philosophy. I would like briefly to say that my encounter with Stanley cannot be separated from what I see as a cross-cultural dimension in his words and life.

Cavell as an Orienter: American Philosophy in Translation

In my academic work, with its tensions between Dewey and Emerson (and Thoreau), and between pragmatism and American transcendentalism, I have explored Cavell's ordinary language philosophy from the perspective of translation. Dewey's notion of communication contrasts with and is destabilized by the Emersonian and Thoreauvian notion of translation. As a Japanese person, I see Cavell as an "orienter" within America ("orienter" being a word he applies to Thoreau[1]). He encourages America to open its eyes to diverse cross-cultural dimensions. Anxieties about what America can become—both carrying its inheritance from Europe and freeing itself from that past—are inherent in Cavell's conception of America, and this crucially conditions his ordinary language philosophy. Cavell is a translator between different strands of thought and language, including the "dissonant voices" of American philosophy. He has described himself as working in "the tear in philosophy," the rift that has been left, in the wake of Kant, and hence connecting Anglo-American and continental philosophy.

His cross-cultural sensibilities are manifested even *within* American philosophy, in intra-cultural and intra-linguistic ways. He resists any facile account of the lineage between Emerson and Thoreau and pragmatism, which might indeed consti-

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1. See Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 125.

tute a further failure in their reception.[2] Emphasizing this tension, he has helped me to see that American philosophy has always been in the process of translation. My most recent book, which has the title *American Philosophy in Translation*, feels like a continuing gift from Cavell.

When it comes to the understanding of *other* cultures, Cavell invokes a deflationary yet apt, distinctively American idiom: riffing on the baseball terms "home" and "base," he suggests that the point may not be to hit a "homerun," not to understand another culture as a whole, but at least to try to get to "first base."[3] He rejects the mindset that is intent on finding equivalences. What is at stake is to be found in what happens as paths of thought intersect: in how each of us is to confront such moments in *re*orienting our ways of thinking; how each moment may turn us around, so that we learn to go on in new ways. His philosophy is then cultural criticism from within—and, that is, from within a certain sense of shame.[4] His critical stance within his own "native" culture has seemed to resonate, for me, with my own stance with my apparently native culture, Japan. His oblique cultural criticism has been a model for me for what it means to be a cultural critic at home.

Translating *The Senses*

In the light of these observations it will be apparent that my own experience of translating his *The Senses of Walden* has been most enlightening. What is written in the book as well as my struggle with the work of translation has shown me that translation *is* at the heart of his ordinary language philosophy.

Cavell hardly ever talks about translation explicitly, and yet in his pursuit of ordinary language philosophy, the idea of translation appears both as a substantive feature and as itself thematized. In the aforementioned edited collection, Paul and I

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2. See Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) and *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
3. See Paul Standish and Naoko Saito, eds., *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: "The Truth is Translated"* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) and Cavell, "Walden in Tokyo," to be published in *Stanley Cavell and the Thoughts of Other Cultures*, ed. Paul Standish and Naoko Saito.
4. See Cavell and Paul Standish, "Stanley Cavell in Conversation with Paul Standish," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 46, no. 2 (2012): 155-76.

have explored Cavell's work via the idea of *philosophy as translation*.[5] Cavell's language itself enacts this process of translation, in all its transitivity and volatility.[6] What Cavell means by translation is beyond any simple sense of linguistic exchange. Indeed the fantasy of any idea of equivalence brings with it the tacit assumption that languages are pure, stable, and more or less complete in themselves, which settles easily into a correspondence theory of truth, in a representationalist view of the world. In reality, translation involves an attunement to what happens in the encounter between different languages (Japanese, English, French, etc.), and this inevitably involves ordinarily the experience of a gap—a gap of the "untranslatable."[7] Language is open to new possibilities all the time, and hence, it both surprises us and disappoints us. Indeed, Cavell says, any sign opens to new possibilities—it has a "projective" nature[8]—and this is at the heart of translation. In Cavell's ordinary language philosophy, translation is at work not only inter- but intra-lingually. It involves experiencing "the difficulty of knowing that we do not know":[9] we are surprised by what is beyond our grasp.[10] Translation is not simply a substitute or metaphor for human transformation. Rather, as the experience of rebirth in rewording the world and of taking new interest in the world, translation *is* transformation: it is a *metonym* of our lives.

It is this very rich sense of translation that I acquired in my own experience of translating *The Senses of Walden*. Cavell's language asked to be translated in multiple senses—not simply from English into Japanese, between distinct language systems, but also from English to English! In "Walden in Tokyo," an essay Stanley wrote in 2005, in commemoration of this translation, he says that translation involves "the *trans*figuration from one form of life to another."[11] This is the experience I underwent

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5. See Standish and Saito, *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation*.
6. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 27.
7. Barbara Cassin, *Nostalgia: Where Are We Ever at Home?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).
8. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*: *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 180.
9. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso, eds., *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and International Culture* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press and The University Press of New England, 2015), 15.
10. See Naoko Saito, "Emerson and Japan: Finding a Way of Cultural Criticism," in *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and International Culture*, ed. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press and The University Press of New England, 2015), 217-35.
11. Cavell, "Walden in Tokyo" (my italics).

in the process of translation, a holistic conversion of the way I am engaged with language—both English as a foreign language and Japanese as my apparently native language, which belong to completely alien language systems. The distinctive experience here is that Cavell's language never allowed me to settle down on any fixed ground: it kept asking me to *be outside*—outside of the conventional definition of a word, of language in its dictionary definitions—as if I were at a border, poised unsteadily above an abyss. It was the experience of being outside within the language: or in Thoreau's words, the experience of acquiring the standpoint of a "double."[12] I perceive Stanley to be a philosopher who teaches his reader and his students to stay outside within the familiar: and who encourages us to speak, to borrow Thoreau's words, in "*extra-vagance*"[13]—that is, to wander outside.

This is related to his sense of immigrancy, both in the everyday sense of his father being an immigrant to the United States and in the philosophical sense of embracing "immigrancy as the native human condition."[14] In his autobiographical writings, Stanley expresses the sense of being caught in the abyss of culture, of being foreign in the native.[15] ("Immigrancy of the self" is the title of my chapter in *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation*.) The radicalism of his philosophy is the voice of cultural criticism from within. He always reassures me that there is a certain way in which one can be an outsider inside and that one can still raise a voice of criticism, while standing precariously on the border—within Japan, between Japan and America.

The Teacher Who Leaves: Kindred from Distant Lands

> To say, "Follow me and you will be saved," you must be sure you are of God. But to say, "Follow in yourself what I follow in mine and you will be saved," you merely have to be sure you are following yourself. This frightens and cheers me.[16]

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12. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 102.
13. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, ed. William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 216.
14. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 158.
15. See Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
16. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 160.

Cavell's text always allows me, the reader, to save space for something new to be discovered: there is always, to borrow Emerson's words, "a residuum unknown, unanalyzable."[17] Since the time of my first encounter with Stanley, more than twenty years have passed. The last time I paid my annual visit to Stanley and Cathleen, in Boston in March 2018, at a time when he was nearing the end of his life, his warm affection was again extended toward me. He had been and still is for me, in Thoreau's words, "kindred from a distant land."[18] And so there remains the poignant sense that "what is most intimate is what is furthest away" and that "the realization of 'our infinite relations,' our kinships, is an endless realization of our separateness" (*The Senses of Walden*). The greatness of Stanley Cavell as a philosopher and as a teacher is that he always leaves his student with the hope of (and sometimes in despair at the need for) finding her own words, instead of repeating his words. I confront what it is that I have to follow in my own way. He has left me with a sometimes desperate sense of singularity. I always felt that his words left me with new tasks. This time he has suddenly left, quietly and permanently: and again, I am left with the thought of what he calls "the pain of individuation."[19] This is the lesson of his many exemplary texts, and it requires continually to be read and re-read, and to be translated.

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17. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 214.
18. Quoted in Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 54.
19. Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 212.

9. At the Feet of the Familiar: Thoughts on Cavell on Emerson and Wittgenstein

STEVEN G. AFFELDT

> I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; … I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds.
>
> R. W. EMERSON, "The American Scholar"

My first substantive conversation with Stanley concerned Emerson. Having come to his work through my interests in Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophy, and skepticism, I arrived at Harvard as a graduate student in the mid-1980s hoping to work with him on these kinds of concerns—the concerns that had guided much of my undergraduate studies at Berkeley. Since I had read Part Four of *The Claim of Reason*, I shouldn't have been surprised to find that the center of Stanley's philosophical concerns had shifted somewhat away from Wittgenstein and toward Romanticism (as well as, at that point, Hollywood melodrama). But I was surprised, and that surprise turned to disappointment and distress upon attending the first few meetings of a lecture course on Emerson that he offered early in my time as a student. While I found Stanley's lectures interesting enough, I found Emerson all but entirely unreadable—often impenetrably obscure and, where not, ridiculously musty, pretentious, and overwrought. Since I wasn't generally given to condemning authors I'd only begun to read—the philosophical virtue of the principle of charity had been deeply inculcated in me at Berkeley—I'm certain that my hasty and confident condemnation of Emer-

son was, whatever else, an expression of the kind of dismissiveness toward American philosophical thought that Stanley has diagnosed. Our first substantive conversation, then, consisted in his patiently responding to my embarrassingly uninformed, but firmly expressed, exasperation with Emerson. I can still hear Stanley's voice as he assured me that he knew Emerson could be "hard to take."

Soon enough, though, I not only softened my judgment but came to share Stanley's admiration for Emerson. Partly, this change was produced by the ways in which his use of Emerson to articulate what he called Moral Perfectionism provided a path into Emerson's texts that I felt I could follow. However, it more importantly and more fundamentally turned on realizing that Stanley's approach to Emerson's texts was deeply Wittgensteinian. For me, especially salient points of affinity included the fact that Stanley read Emerson as showing how our language reflects and provides the conditions of our lives (how the terms in which we understand ourselves and our world express and shape our form of life), how our chafing at these conditions drives us to seek freedom in repudiating them and relying on our private power (drives us to try to speak outside language games), how this misdirected quest for freedom traps us in the emptiness of conformity (leaves us captivated by pictures or immobilized on slippery ice), and, to highlight only one further point, how genuine freedom and the recovery of expressive power depend not upon escaping our common language but upon abandoning ourselves to it or settling ourselves more deeply into it (rotating our axis of orientation and returning to the rough ground of our common language).[1]

Receiving this especially congenial Wittgensteinian Emerson was, quite literally, a life-changing boon. Not only did Emerson begin to figure prominently in my thinking and teaching (and less prominently in my writing), but thanks to invitations from Russell Goodman to help lead two National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored programs devoted to Emerson in the summers of 2003 and 2005, it led to my meeting my wife—and that has turned out to be more profoundly, and more hap-

1. This is an important point of contrast between Cavell's (Wittgensteinian) linguistic approach to Emerson and pragmatist linguistic approaches as exemplified in, for example, Richard Poirier's *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*. Whereas Cavell's Emerson sees our captivity as deriving from a repudiation of the common terms/conditions of our lives and finds the path of freedom in deeper resignation to them, Poirier's Emerson finds settled language as such as to be the source of entrapment and locates freedom in playfully rising above settled forms of expression. I've discussed these matters in my "Ascent and Resignation: The Structure of Liberation in Emerson's 'The Poet" (unpublished).

pily, life-changing than I could have imagined. At the same time, the very congeniality of Stanley's Wittgensteinian approach to Emerson and how productive I found it meant that I was slow to take any critical distance from it—to ask after the alignments that he creates and to consider how deep they reach, what interpretive and philosophical gains they produce, but also what interpretive and philosophical costs they may incur.

In this regard, it's worth noting that Stanley's own account of the alignment he finds between Emerson and Wittgenstein (or, more broadly, between American Transcendentalism and Ordinary Language Philosophy) evolves significantly over the course of his authorship. In his earliest works dealing with ordinary language philosophy and with Thoreau (as represented in *Must We Mean What We Say?* and *The Senses of Walden*), there are clear thematic relationships but Stanley does not himself draw any explicit connections. This changes following *The Claim of Reason*. In *In Quest of the Ordinary*, he tells us that the sense of the ordinary and of its philosophical pertinence that he finds in Wittgenstein and Austin are "underwritten by Emerson and Thoreau in their devotion to the thing they call the common, the familiar, the near, the low."[2] As the idea of "underwriting" suggests, this is to say that, at this point, he finds that the work of Emerson and Thoreau provide a kind of security or backing for Wittgensteinian and Austinian appeals to the ordinary. By the time of *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, Stanley has come to articulate the relationship he finds between the Emersonian and Wittgensteinian appeals to the ordinary as a matter of each underwriting the other so that, as he says, neither is "basic."[3] And finally, in his Introduction to *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (and so after composing all of his published essays on Emerson), he extends this idea of mutual underwriting by suggesting that he treats the texts of each as a "means of interpreting" the texts of the other.[4] The texts of each, that is, provide a kind of frame through which to read the texts of the other or, even, a provocation for reading the texts of the other.

2. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4.
3. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 77. Something of the extent and character of this sense of mutual underwriting is conveyed by a remark I recall Cavell making in the course of a seminar discussion of one of the essays in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*: he confessed his surprise that, on the occasion of delivering the two lectures that form the main body of the work, he found himself responding to questions about Emerson by invoking Wittgenstein and, likewise, responding to questions about Wittgenstein by turning to Emerson.
4. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.

The fact of this evolution suggests that Stanley was less concerned to articulate *the* philosophical relation between Emerson and Wittgenstein than in working within the light he found them to cast on one another. Further, given the obvious productivity of this approach, Stanley wasn't much concerned to dwell upon the equally evident fact that reading one philosopher in the light cast by another can blur or occlude important differences and block our exploration of the differences those differences might make. It has only been recently, in the context of a larger project considering the shift in Stanley's work following *The Claim of Reason* from conceiving of philosophy as a modernist enterprise to conceiving it as a Romantic quest, that I have, for myself, begun to consider these matters. I've begun trying to make clearer for myself what insights into Emerson or Wittgenstein (or language, or skepticism, or perfectionism, etc.) we owe to his alignment of the two as well as what insights, or questions, the alignment might cast into shadow and what yield peering into those shadows may bring.

My approach to these questions has been exploratory; a matter of poking around and tugging on various threads in Stanley's weave of connections between Emerson and Wittgenstein. At this stage, at least, I'm less interested in reaching conclusions than in coming to a better understanding of the complexities of the issues. One of the methods I've found especially helpful consists in juxtaposing passages from Emerson and Wittgenstein and, as it were, speculating on the various harmonies and dissonances I sense. In the bulk of the pages to follow, I'll share one such juxtaposition along with some of my quite preliminary and provisional reflections.

* * * *

Consider, then, the following passages in which Emerson and Wittgenstein each emphasize the importance of attending to the familiar. First, a passage from Emerson's early address "The American Scholar"—a passage that forms a central touchstone for Cavell and from which I've taken both my title and my epigraph:

> I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight

> into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the form and gait of the body;—show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law; ... and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order; there is no trifle; there is no puzzle; but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.[5]

Now put beside that the following passage from early in the so-called the methodological or meta-philosophical sections of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*.

> These considerations bring us up to the problem: In what sense is logic something sublime?
>
> For there seemed to pertain to logic a peculiar depth—a universal significance. Logic lay, it seemed, at the bottom of all the sciences. —For logical investigation explores the nature of all things. It seeks to see to the bottom of things and is not meant to concern itself whether what actually happens is this or that. —It takes its rise, not from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connections: but from an urge to understand the basis, or essence, of everything empirical. Not, however, as if to this end we had to hunt out new facts; it is, rather, of the essence of our investigations that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand. ... We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not toward phenomena, but, one might say, towards the

5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 68-69.

> '*possibilities'* of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kinds of statements* that we make about phenomena.[6]

Although I hope that at least some echoes between these passages are clear enough to begin to suggest why I juxtapose them, it will be helpful to make explicit a few especially salient points of connection.

First, although both Emerson and Wittgenstein are seeking to understand something or to gain some kind of insight, each rejects the idea that the understanding they seek will be achieved through new information. Indeed, there is more than a hint of the suggestion that the idea that the understanding we seek depends upon finding something new or something remote is a kind of distraction. It is, they suggest, a way of avoiding attending to what is before us and so of confusing, or replacing, the reflective and laborious task of seeking "understanding" with the more immediate gratifications of adding to our store of data—data that, itself, is precisely what we need to understand. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson rebukes this tendency toward what we might call high-minded distraction as "roving" and urges that, since "God is here within," "let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause."[7]

Second, both Emerson and Wittgenstein reject the idea that they need to hunt up new facts, penetrate phenomena, or explore remote and far-off lands because what they want to understand is precisely what is right before them—the familiar or what is present and open to view. That, they suggest, is what we somehow fail to understand. Hence, the familiar, ordinary, everyday is both present to us and remote from us or, more accurately, we are both present to it and remote from it. We are, if you like, intimately remote with one another—as close to the ordinary as it's possible to get, and yet somehow missing it all the same; like estranged neighbors or partners

6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edn., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), §§89-90.

7. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, 272. Compare, in this regard, Nietzsche's remarks in the opening section of the Preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves—how could it happen that we should *find* ourselves. It has rightly been said: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'; *our* treasure is where the beehives of our knowledge are. We are constantly making for them, being by nature winged creatures and honey-gatherers of the spirit; there is one thing alone we really care about from the heart—'bringing something home.' Whatever else there is in life, so-called 'experiences'—which of us has sufficient earnestness for them? Or sufficient time? Present experience has, I'm afraid, always found us 'absent-minded': we cannot give our hearts to it—not even our ears!" Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1968), 451.

who can't escape one another's presence but utterly fail to appreciate the life that intrudes upon them.

Third, in directing us toward what it is that we miss in the familiar, both passages invoke forms of a contrast between the deep, the essential, the central or highest, and the surface, apparent, open. Wittgenstein speaks of our wanting to understand the "basis" or "essence" of everything empirical, something that seems to lie beneath the surface so that we "feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena." And Emerson employs a contrast between the central, "the highest spiritual cause," and the outlying or peripheral, the "suburbs and extremities of nature." Further, each associates the deep or essential or central with an idea of the sublime. Emerson seeks "the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause" and Wittgenstein asks after the sense in which logic is sublime.

However, fourth, without rejecting some sense of the sublime, both Emerson and Wittgenstein *contest* the contrast between the deep, essential, central on the one hand and the apparent, surface, peripheral on the other. They suggest instead that we need to come to see the essential *in* the apparent, the essence *in* what lies open to view, the central *in* the peripheral, the sublime *in* the ordinary. The highest spiritual cause, Emerson suggests, is not remote, but "lurking" in "every trifle" of our everyday world. The basis or essence of everything empirical, Wittgenstein suggests, isn't hidden beneath the phenomena but is revealed precisely in the structures of, and relations among, the kinds of statements that we make about phenomena. "*Essence*," he says later in the *Investigations*, "is expressed by grammar."[8]

But within, or across, these points of connection there are also clear differences. Perhaps the most evident difference is in the tone of the writing. But that difference is connected with, and seems to be at least partly generated by, another—by the fact that Wittgenstein is seeking to understand the '*possibilities*' of everyday phenomena while Emerson is seeking insight into their *meaning* or *significance*. We might see this as a difference in the levels at which phenomena are considered.

In seeking to understand the 'possibilities' of phenomena, Wittgenstein is asking after the criteria that tell what something is and the grammatical relations that control when and how our concepts of those things may be meaningfully employed.

8. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §371.

Were Wittgenstein to take up Emerson's examples, he would be interested to explain why the ballad isn't "in the street" in the same way the meal is "in the firkin" or the milk is "in the pan."[9] He would seek the criteria for something's being a boat, as opposed to a ship, a dingy, a toy boat, a raft, or a floating trunk on which you've escaped a sinking ship. He might consider when someone could be said to have been given, or to have received, news of the boat. Have I given my employer the news that her boat has sunk and all aboard are lost if I hand her a report of severe weather, initiate steps to purchase a new boat, or offer her the card of a qualified funeral director? Maybe, maybe not. Wittgenstein will want to understand how the possibilities of these phenomena allow, in different circumstances, for both.

In contrast to Wittgenstein, Emerson takes the identities and possibilities of phenomena for granted, but seeks insight into their meaning or significance.[10] Further, and crucially, he sees the meaning and significance of phenomena as dependent upon their being infused by, and expressive of, a "highest spiritual cause" that binds them all together or ranges them on an eternal law as parts of a coherent, purposive, and ordered totality.[11]

This difference in the levels at which they are seeking to understand everyday phenomena, in the questions they direct to what is right before us, must, as I suggested, help to create their dramatic differences in tone. In the passage under consideration, Wittgenstein's tone or affect is generally quite flat—although there is a hint of the sense of impotent urgency expressed in the feeling that we have to penetrate phenomena. Often, however, his accounts of our failure to understand possibilities of

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9. A "firkin," by the way, is a specific size of cask in the English system of casks. Holding 8 gallons or 30 liters, the firkin is the smallest but one of the English cask units, twice the size of a pin and half the size of a kilderkin. Other such cask units include, in ascending order, the rundlet, the barrel, the tierce, the hogshead, the puncheon, the butt, and the tun. It was a relative of this last that was, unforgettably, celebrated by Melville in the "Great Heidelburgh Tun" chapter of *Moby Dick*.

10. There's an important qualification of this point that should be noted. Emerson holds that we fail to understand the true nature of individual things if we regard them in separation from what we've seen him call the "eternal law" or the "highest spiritual cause," for it is that "eternal law" or "highest spiritual cause" that carries their true nature. This bears comparison with the various levels at which Wittgenstein employs the context principle and with his insistence that it is *in language* that phenomena are to be understood.

11. For Emerson, the highest spiritual cause is always, ultimately, associated with coherence, order, and purpose—albeit with a coherence, order, and purpose that may not be immediately apparent. This is the basis of his conviction that "[t]here will be agreement in whatever variety of actions, so they be each honest and natural in their hour." For, as he continues, "of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem. These varieties are lost sight of at a little distance, at a little height of thought" (Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, 266).

everyday phenomena generate tones of surreal bafflement. Sometimes this surreal bafflement is inflected comically—as when he invites us to "Imagine someone saying: But I know how tall I am!" and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it."[12] And sometimes it is inflected through desperate rage—as when he tells us that he has seen a person in a discussion of the "privacy of sensations" "… strike himself on the breast and say: 'But surely another person can't have THIS pain!'"[13] Emerson's tone, by contrast, is full of Romantic longing and hovers on the edge of turning to poetry—"the meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; …." Whereas Wittgenstein's tone speaks most immediately to the prospect of relief from confusion and the satisfaction of finding or recovering our bearings, Emerson's tone holds out the prospect of a redemptive transfiguration of the ordinary and of the everyday. If the scenes of our everyday lives (perhaps especially in the context of the increasing routine, mechanization, and instrumentality created by an industrializing 19th century America) strike us as a "dull miscellany and lumber-room" of meaningless scraps, Emerson seeks a way of apprehending those very scenes, objects, and events that shows them "bristling" with the form, order, and purpose of the "highest spiritual cause." With the eyes of this mode of vision, what had seemed trifles are transfigured, imbued with meaning and significance, so that we recognize the sublimity of our ordinary world and that, in truth, "there is no trifle." (Here we catch sight of Emerson standing behind William Carlos Williams's red wheelbarrow.)

This brings us to what is, at least apparently, an especially important difference between Emerson and Wittgenstein and also to one of Cavell's most important moves in interpreting Emerson. The difference concerns the place of the divine or transcendent in the work of each, and Cavell's interpretive move concerns his construal of Emerson's invocations of the divine or transcendent.

Although Wittgenstein occasionally mentions God, evidently considered dedicating his *Philosophical Remarks* "To the Glory of God," remarked that he couldn't help but see problems from a "religious point of view," and was manifestly occupied with what we might call the state of his soul, notions of the divine or transcendent do not play any direct or evident role in *Philosophical Investigations* or other of his ma-

12. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §279.
13. *Ibid.*, §243.

jor works. This stands in marked contrast to Emerson. Emerson's intellectual formation was charged by his efforts to defend a metaphysics of divine causality against skeptical assaults, his professional life began as a Unitarian minister, and, most importantly, all of his writing is pervaded by invocations of the divine. As early as "The Divinity School Address," Emerson laments that what he there calls the "doctrine of soul" is no longer taught. "Men have come to speak," he says, "of the revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead." But, he tells his audience of soon-to-be Unitarian ministers, "It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake."[14] This basic idea is unchanged throughout Emerson's authorship and, indeed, this "doctrine of soul" may well be regarded as the central principles animating all of his work.

Obviously, sifting through the strands of this apparent difference, arriving at adequate understandings of the respective views of Emerson and Wittgenstein on these matters, tracing alignments and divergences and assessing their significance, would be an enormous undertaking that I can't even begin to enter into here. However, I do want to consider at least briefly the interpretive move Cavell makes in this regard. In particular, Cavell makes two closely linked interpretive moves that dramatically reduce the distance between Emerson and Wittgenstein on this score. First, he construes Emerson's invocations of the divine (God, the Over-Soul, the One, etc.) as amounting to, or as equivalent to, invocations of the sphere of language. Second, he construes Emerson's claims for our participation in the divine and our sharing in the creative power of the divine as amounting to, or as equivalent to, claims for the power we posses as speakers to all that language opens and enables. In effect, then, Cavell seems to treat Emerson's appeals to God as the basis, cause, and ground of the meaning of everything as equivalent to Wittgenstein's appeals to our shared language and forms of life.

Consider part of pivotal passage from near the center of "Self-Reliance" that seems, among other things, to speak to what Emerson means by the "highest spiritual cause" or the "ultimate reason" animating all things. The passage concerns the nature of what Emerson calls "the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded," and he tells us that "inquiry into [this aboriginal Self] leads us to that

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14. Emerson, "Address," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, 83 and 88.

source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct." Emerson goes on:

> In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. For, the sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them, and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed. We share the life by which things exist, and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and thought. Here are the lungs of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom, and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism. We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity.[15]

Emerson then begins the following paragraph with remarks that echo these, but use more explicitly theological language. "The relations of the soul to the divine spirit," he says, "are so pure that it is profane to seek to interpose helps. It must be that when God speaketh he should communicate, not one thing, but all things; should fill the world with his voice; should scatter forth light, nature, time, souls, from the center of thought; and new date and new create the whole."[16]

Speaking of this passage, Cavell says the following:

> It is true that when I hear Emerson saying (in "Self-Reliance"), "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity," I know that while others will take this "intelligence" to be an allusion to God or to the Over-Soul and a little condescend to it, I take it as an allusion to, or fantasy of, our shared language, and I aspire to descend to it.[17]

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15. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 269.
16. *Ibid.*, 269-70.
17. Cavell, "Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's 'Experience'," in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 117.

Cavell is surely right in suggesting that some readers of Emerson will be able to conceive no response to allusions to God other than condescension and, against such responses, his counter move of aspiring to descend to a fantasy of our shared language—that is, of seeking to work his way into that fantasy and allowing it to inform his reading—represents a way of taking Emerson fully seriously. However, Cavell's construal of Emerson's "lap of immense intelligence" (and other invocations of God) as expressing a fantasy of our shared language may also seem to evade grappling with Emerson's metaphysics and, in so doing, to represent a failure to take Emerson fully seriously *as Emerson*.

This much, I think, is clear. First, for those of us who wish to find in Emerson not simply a figure of historical interest but a thinker of contemporary philosophical relevance, Cavell's Wittgensteinian linguistic construal of Emerson's notations of the pervasive and active presence of God (the One, the divine spirit, etc.) is an obvious and dramatic advance over readings of Emerson that place a great deal of weight on Emerson's metaphysics but leave that metaphysics fundamentally mysterious—something that is not subject to argument or demonstration but must be felt by "the moral sense" or gleaned through immediate "intuition."[18] Second, Cavell's construal of this aspect of Emerson's thought yields very real fruit. Perhaps most importantly, it allows us to find confirmation of Emerson's claims for the nature and power of the divine *in the text of his writings itself*. Especially for a writer and reader, it is *in language* that the impersonal power that is the ground of our being and the source of our capacity for thought and action will be encountered most directly and palpably. On this construal of his thought, then, to take Emerson's remarks about God seriously doesn't require us to accept anything on faith. We (simply) have to recognize that, and how, his writing itself demonstrates his claims. How, that is, its endlessly astonishing connections, coherencies, and luminous moments of spontaneous "whim" testify to the agency of that "character" that he shows to "speak above our will."[19]

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18. A striking recent example of this latter tendency is Joseph Urbas's *Emerson's Metaphysics: A Song of Laws and Causes*.
19. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 266. See my "Emerson's Metaphysics," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 109-16.

At the same time, Cavell's move of effectively assimilating or equating talk of God to talk of language raises important questions. Here, I'll simply state two closely related questions that, to my mind, need to be explored more fully.

First, can Cavell's linguistic, secularized construal of Emerson fully account for, and preserve, the sense of sublimity and significance that Emerson celebrates in life being no longer a dull miscellany but infused with the "lurking" presence of "the highest spiritual cause?" Does some part of the sense of the illumination of the ordinary that Emerson celebrates, and invites us to experience, depend on its being also more than ordinary? Seeing the *divine* in the ordinary isn't simply appreciating the natural wonder of the ordinary. The infinity of a text, we might think, is not the same as the infinity of God, and celebrating apparently boundless human possibility isn't the same as celebrating human divinity.

The second question picks up the same issues as the first, but from the other side. I think it's clear that the intimacy of connection that Cavell sees between Emerson and Wittgenstein helps to energize and inform his redemptive reading of Wittgenstein. It helps, that is, to inform the ways in which he finds in Wittgenstein's tales of nonsense, bafflement, and the recovery of sense not only a depth of existential fervor but, more specifically, a continuous, broadly spiritual odyssey from (a kind of) perdition to (a kind of) redemption. This is not to say, of course, that these dimensions of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein derive solely from the association with Emerson. They were present, at least in embryo, as early as "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy." I wonder, though, whether the close association, if not equivalence, that Cavell's draws between Emerson's divine spirit and Wittgenstein's language might end up reacting back upon his vision of ordinary language and bestowing upon it a kind of halo of the transcendent. If what some might see as the taint of Emerson's metaphysics of divine presence and agency is, in some ways, washed away through the secularizing connection with Wittgenstein's ordinary language, might Cavell's picture of ordinary language, in turn, end up taking on some of that residual aura? Might ordinary language, that is, get colored in shades of the purity, depth, coherence, order, etc., of the divine? Might it become imbued with (some of) the salvific power of the divine even while we also recognize that it allows (but does not provoke?) its own repudiation in metaphysics?

* * * *

There's obviously more to be said about all the points I've touched on, but I will leave matters as they stand since my aim hasn't been to reach conclusions but to illustrate how I've begun to explore and assess the weave of connections Stanley draws between Emerson and Wittgenstein as well as how those connections inform his view of each. I confess to some trepidation about making these still developing thoughts public—partly because they *are* still developing. But, I've been helped past my hesitations by recalling a moment from what turned out to be my last philosophically substantive conversation with Stanley—a moment that I take as a kind of encouragement from Stanley himself. So, having begun by recalling my first substantive conversation with Stanley, I'll close by touching on the last.

While visiting Stanley not long after the publication of *Little Did I Know*, we walked from the house to have dinner at the neighborhood Japanese restaurant Stanley liked to frequent. Our conversation throughout the evening centered on *Little Did I Know* and moved more or less seamlessly between reminiscence, reflection on general questions of philosophical autobiography, and talking about some of the text's individual moments or episodes. One of the passages I had wanted to raise with Stanley appears very early and involves his account of a painful incident in which he sees his father humiliate himself. The incident, briefly, is this. While visiting his parents after defending his Ph.D. dissertation, Stanley had left a copy of *Commentary* magazine that he'd been reading on the plane lying on their coffee table. When family friends at the house for dinner were impressed to see the intellectually serious magazine, Stanley's father, in an effort to win standing for sophistication that he lacked, claimed it was his.

What had especially struck me about this episode is the fact that Stanley introduces it by remarking "We see our fathers naked, we men;" for that remark, I thought, was a quite direct allusion to the moment in Genesis, following the flood, when a drunken Noah falls asleep "uncovered in his tent" and his son, Ham, saw "the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside."[20] Ham is cursed for these acts—for seeing his father's humiliation and for adding to that humiliation by telling

20. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 11 and Genesis, 9:21-22, King James version.

his brothers—while the brothers are blessed because they protected their father's dignity by turning away their gaze and covering his nakedness. ("And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness" (Genesis, 9:23).

This passage in Stanley's text is clearly, whatever else, a complex moment of Oedipal drama. The son's triumph in defending his Ph.D. is juxtaposed with (perhaps it provokes?) the father's humiliating attempt to assert his own intellectual standing and that humiliation, in turn, (perhaps intentionally if not consciously) taints the son's triumphal return. The complexity is intensified by the fact that Stanley's telling of this story of seeing his father's spiritual nakedness immediately precedes his account of the moment, as he puts it, "at which I realized that my father hated me, or perhaps I can more accurately say, wished I did not exist."[21] Within this whirl of textual and psychological complexity, I had wanted to ask Stanley about the allusion to Genesis. I wondered whether he was using it to suggest that, in telling this tale of his father's humiliation, he, even if only retrospectively, earned the curse of his father's hatred. I also wondered whether he was suggesting that (for him? for sons?) the willingness to take on the curse of the father is necessary—necessary for taking on his own life? for being able to write his autobiography? And if the autobiography is also philosophical, I wondered what Stanley might be suggesting about the place that tales of humiliation and the courting of curses play in philosophy.

At the same time, the obvious painfulness of the incident and the psychological intimacy of the issues in play made me hesitant to raise the matter. In the end, though, and counting on the depth of our friendship, I did raise my questions. My recollection of how exactly I did so is vague—I may simply have said something along the lines of "I'm struck by your allusion to Ham in the early story of your father's humiliation" and gone on to recall the passages in Stanley's text and in Genesis. But my recollection of Stanley's response is absolutely clear and vivid. Initially, Stanley remarked that he hadn't had the Genesis story in mind in writing of men seeing the nakedness of their fathers. However, as soon as I had said enough to have brought the relevant passages from Genesis clearly to mind, Stanley visibly froze, his head turned

21. Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 14-15.

slightly to the side, his chin a bit elevated, and his gaze directed toward the distance as he let his thoughts collect. Then, after several long seconds, and in a gesture that was characteristic of Stanley when he had reached some insight or been struck by a realization, he sharply rapped the table with the knuckles of his right hand, turned toward me, and bathing me with one of his unforgettably radiant smiles said "It's nice to have smart friends." Following which, we went on to talk for quite some time about all of my various questions and more.

I take encouragement from this recollection, and share the story, because it emblematizes Stanley's intellectual generosity but also, and especially, his deep joy in seeing his work spur the thought of others. I don't know what Stanley might say in response to the thoughts I've begun to unfold here. I think I do know, though, that he would be glad for the fact of them; happy to see that his work is still provoking me to think. I hope that, initial and provisional as they are, these thoughts too would bring a smile to his face.[22]

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22. A version of the central section of this essay was presented as part of a colloquium on *Stanley Cavell: Constellations of the Ordinary* at the Pontificia Universidad Catholica del Peru in October 2019. I am grateful to Victor Krebs, the conference organizer and host, to my fellow colloquium participants (Avner Baz, Gordon Bearne, and Byron Davies), and to members of the audience for their questions and comments.

10. Cavell as Mentor

SIANNE NGAI

These remarks originally appeared in the Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 5, 2012, and are reprinted here with the generous permission of the editors at the* LARB.

I was a Grad student in English at Harvard in the mid-90s, but physically there for just three years, anxious to move to Brooklyn for a relationship as soon as I became ABD. In that brief but intense period of time, I tried to take as many courses offered by Stanley Cavell as possible. In my last year, I asked him to be a member of my dissertation committee. Looking back I'm still flooded with gratitude (and astonishment) by the fact that he said yes.

At the time I couldn't have said why I felt so attuned to Cavell's writing. I just knew, after reading his essay on moods in Emerson and Nietzsche ("Aversive Thinking") and then his books on Thoreau and remarriage comedy (*The Senses of Walden*, *Pursuits of Happiness*), that I wanted to read more, and to think and talk with him as much as possible about the things he thought were interesting. All the more so when I realized that, in person, Stanley Cavell was exactly like the voice his writing projected. That voice, no matter what it happened to be speaking about—Shakespeare and the avoidance of love, Jacques Derrida and J. L. Austin, the Hollywood women's film of the 1930s and 40s—was unfailingly generous and infectiously interesting. It was a meta-philosophical voice, preoccupied less with the wrongness of skepticism (that is, with skepticism understood as intellectual error, thereby capable of intellectual correction) than with its status as a basic condition of human life and also as a kind of madness, a denial of our shared reality with other minds. Cavell's voice was a kind of therapy against that madness. It was also an utterly and profoundly non-snobby voice: the voice of a philosopher concerned with philosophy's aversion to the ordinary, and with the nondiscursive aspects of ordinary language—its affect and for-

ce, its ontology as action—that seemed to interest so few other philosophers of language at the time. It was, finally and significantly, the voice of someone deeply interested in how gender inflects both of these problems.

I took four courses in a row with Cavell, all in the philosophy department: two graduate seminars on Lacan, an undergraduate lecture called "Aesthetics: Opera and Film," and a graduate seminar on *King Lear*. I loved these courses, even when I wasn't sure I understood what they were truly about. (It's called "Opera and Film," but what's it about really? I kept asking myself.) This was mostly due to my ignorance; I was still playing catch-up, in part by reading as much of Cavell's work as possible. But I think it was also due to the genuinely open and experimental nature of the courses Cavell taught. He was trying to work out certain questions in them, with us. This felt really thrilling.

"Opera and Film" was one of my favorites. The syllabus, as was always the case in Cavell's courses, was not so much eclectic as complex. We listened to and/or watched *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Tannhäuser*, *The Lady Eve*, *Now Voyager*, *Moonstruck*, *Smiles of a Summer Night*. We read J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* with Shoshana Felman's *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Catherine Clément and Susan McClary on women in opera, Baudelaire on Wagner, and selections from Cavell's own *The World Viewed* and *A Pitch of Philosophy*. Sometimes, delightfully, he would pause during a lecture, walk to the piano on stage, and play a passage or two from the score discussed in the reading. And as the semester progressed it became clear that what the course was "really about" was the peculiar ontology of what Cavell (adapting J. L. Austin) called passionate utterances: how they demand a response in kind, how words can be "owed," or thought of as a form of indebtedness to others. All of this was linked to the question of whether the split between words and music in opera was gendered, and to what became of the female voice in Hollywood melodrama.

Similarly, the grad seminar on *King Lear* was really about what Cavell called problematic praise, which was, in turn, another way to think about the complexities of aesthetic judgment and criticism. In addition to Shakespeare's tragedy, which foregrounds the consequences of false praise and ingratitude, we read Heidegger on

thinking and thanking ("What is Called Thinking?") and Henry James's remarkable story about mass-cultural author worship ("The Birthplace"). One day Cavell showed us a scene from *The Band Wagon* (1953) in which Fred Astaire, as Cavell read it, tries to find a way to express his indebtedness to African-American dance. Cavell noted the way in which Astaire, a song and dance man, is shown, strangely, in ¾ shot (cut off at the thighs) for the beginning of the film. It's not until after a routine in a penny arcade, in which Astaire does an extended duet with a black male dancer, that, as Cavell put it, pointing to his image on the screen, Astaire manages to "find his legs." Cavell read this performance as an act of praise, or as an expression of aesthetic indebtedness and gratitude; thinking also, as Cavell often did, about issues of race and appropriation, I wondered if it wasn't also readable as a kind of reparation or apology (which we often refer to as something "owed"). Both praise and apology belong to the class of what Austin called "perlocutionary" utterances, in which, as Cavell notes, the felicity of the action is dependent less on the "I" than the "you." In other words, if you do not accept my compliment or apology, then I haven't successfully complimented you or apologized.

Cavell's Lacan courses were more straightforward, organized around the French psychoanalyst's own famous seminars. The first, "Freud After Lacan," was on *Book III: The Psychoses* (Freud's reading of Daniel Schreber). The second, whose name I can't remember, was devoted to *Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Kant, Sade, Antigone).

I was the only first-year English grad student in "Freud After Lacan." This made taking the course feel a bit lonely (so much of grad school is about learning alongside the people in your cohort) and that much more intimidating. It was Lacan, after all, and I didn't have a buddy to confide in, to talk with about my confusions. I was too much in awe of the philosophy Ph.D. students in the class, especially the many advanced ones in their fourth and fifth years, to make friends with them. Above all there was the difficulty of Lacan himself: those daunting quasi-mathematical algorithms, that sublime, inaccessible Real. But offsetting all of this was the fascinating question: What was it about Lacan (and Lacan's interpretation of Freud, in particular) that Cavell felt he had to grapple with philosophically? The fact that it was Stanley Cavell—someone who constantly wrote about language and gender, but who no-

netheless was not on the chart of poststructuralists I'd been supplied with as an undergrad (a chart that included Lacan but not Cavell)—suddenly made Lacan all the more interesting.

In the classroom, Cavell was intense and serious, though often smiling. He had an amazing flash of a smile. While his syllabi were intricately structured, his pedagogy was open to the point that if he were struck by an issue in a text mentioned in someone's presentation, he would immediately revise the syllabus to assign that text in order to bring everyone else into the conversation. His way of thinking was explorative as opposed to combative, which is not to say that he never took issue with other thinkers. And though he was generous with his students, he didn't pretend to like everything they said. I once mentioned Theodor Adorno during a seminar, and Cavell, irritated but also showing a sense of humor about that irritation, said that Adorno always felt like a "flea in his ear."

In seminar I always tried to snag the seat right next to Stanley, on his left. (Mostly so I could hear him clearly; at the time I had a note-taking obsession, which involved transcribing every single word the professor said.) There was always a ring of auditors sitting around those of us at the table, and often these auditors were visiting from other countries. There were also professors and graduate students from various departments at BU and MIT. Once the philosopher Hilary Putnam was there; another time it was Stanley's wife. Cavell would talk first, in a directed but relaxed way, and student presentations on the reading followed. People worked really hard on the presentations, and they were almost always good. Somewhere in a file cabinet I still have all of their handouts about Freud and Lacan, including ones by Nancy Bauer (author of *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*) and William Bracken (now in the philosophy department at UC Riverside).

I was inchoate and jelly-like in graduate school (kind of like a slime mold), but Cavell was kind to me anyway. He seemed to take me seriously. He gave me a lot of his time. Once, after having lunch together, he said to me, "You're very dutiful." The gentlest of criticisms. Of course, I—dutifully—tried to be less so.

We have stayed in touch, albeit loosely and intermittently, over the last seventeen years. Here's the last email I sent him:

Dear Stanley,

Just a note to say hello and also how much I wish I could be at the conference on your work this October! (I committed myself to something else in Montreal on the same date, otherwise I **would** be there).

I actually had a dream last night in which I ran into you at a dog park. (Do you have a dog?) The dogs were happily playing somewhere off on the field, and you asked, “Did you put your name on the list to get my family newsletter?” I hadn’t. First thing I did when I woke up was to refind your email address on the internet, and that’s when I found out about the conference. Which kind of **is** a family.

Best wishes to you,
Sianne

Stanley wrote back and said he did indeed have a dog, Kaya, who always stays by his side during his days of writing. He said he didn’t have a family newsletter, but he did have an autobiography he was expecting to appear soon; if I sent him my address he’d send me a copy.

11. “Stay on Your Path, Young Man”

PAUL GRIMSTAD

Almost ten years ago I participated in the conference whose proceedings would become the volume *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism*.[1] Stanley sat directly in front of me and listened attentively to my talk, thrilling and scary, not to say awkward, reading out “Cavell writes...” and “Cavell says...” with the man right there. After the Q and A, someone, I don't remember who, brought me over and introduced us. Stanley shook my hand and with the other patted my shoulder and said, with a broad smile, “Stay on your path, young man.”

That brief introduction at the Barker Center led to an email exchange and to Stanley’s invitation some months later to have lunch at a Japanese restaurant near his home in Brookline. I read *The World Viewed* on the train up from New York and planned to ask him things about that great and strange book, but we didn’t talk about his work, or the paper I’d read, or about literature or philosophy at all. We spent two hours talking about how George Gershwin had merged Ravel-style orchestration with ragtime rhythms, Ben Webster’s tenor saxophone playing with Duke Ellington in the 1940s, agreed there was a hint of Sarah Vaughan’s vocal phrasing in Miles Davis’ solos and, eventually, talked more generally of the implications of jazz improvisation for American democracy (among other things). It was great to be in a music nerd conversation with someone whose knowledge of jazz was intimidatingly vast (greater than my own anyway), yet utterly personal and without a shred of snobbery.

After lunch he invited me over to his home a few blocks from the restaurant. I played the piano (I remember picking out a certain Bill Evans chord voicing which Stanley seemed to appreciate) and then we went a couple floors upstairs to his writing studio. There were stacks of papers and books and a broad table where, I assu-

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1. Richard Eldridge and Bernie Rhie, eds., *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011). My chapter is entitled “Emerson Discomposed: Skepticism, Naturalism, and the Search for Criteria in ‘Experience’,” 163-76.

med, much of the writing I'd admired had been put together. I was struck by the quotidian plainness of these objects. It was like peeking behind a curtain to see that what one had previously taken to be a mysterious lab where things like *Pursuits of Happiness* or part four of *The Claim of Reason* had been cooked up, was just a site of humble daily work. Mostly I was struck that day by Stanley's endless generosity.

Stanley was, I think, temperamentally incapable of conformism. It made sense that he was eventually drawn to Emerson, who says "self-reliance" is the aversion to conformity. That idea is central to Cavell's moral understanding of human existence (what he sometimes called moral perfectionism) and also with what he called a "lifelong quarrel with the profession of philosophy."[2] And yet Stanley *did* want to make the study of something as idiosyncratic as the *Essays* or the *Philosophical Investigations* a professional activity. Emerson and Wittgenstein, so different from each other in so many ways, both had a wrenching and dramatic agon with institutional forms of thinking, which in many ways force one to contort one's mind to fit either brute bureaucratic and managerial protocols or conform to the group consensus (hence the infinite value of eccentricity, oddity, independence); crises of vocation which they worked out in their writing. Stanley did this too and he did it courageously and honestly.

There could be something whimsical, even perverse, in his nonconformism. In the memoir, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*, Stanley notes the "pleasurable indecorousness" he felt in assigning films for philosophy seminars when no one else was doing that (I can't imagine Quine having his students watch *Bringing Up Baby*).[3] I always loved "Being Odd, Getting Even," that fascinating essay about how the sound of Poe's prose—Stanley says it has a "perverse brilliance"—imitates, or uncannily copies, the sound of philosophical argument.[4] It wasn't that Stanley didn't have a taste for logic. In everything he wrote there are arguments, and his prose, like that of late Henry James, always has a glowing thread of coherence running through it, even at its most serpentine and prolix. The sentences "follow" from one another, as the logician might put it. That thread of coherence isn't just about logic; it also has to

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2. Cavell, "The Politics of Interpretation (Politics as Opposed to What?)," in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), 31.
3. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 424.
4. Cavell, "Being Odd, Getting Even (Descartes, Emerson, Poe)," in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 99.

do with having an ear. Elsewhere in the memoir, he notes how his mother had perfect pitch and a preternaturally attuned sight-reading ability. Stanley the writer had some of that.

Relatedly, he was good at telling stories, a talent he explicitly associates with his father. One of my favorites involves Cavell's esteemed teacher, J. L. Austin, in Cambridge, Massachusetts to give the William James lectures in 1955 (and which eventually became *How to Do Things With Words*). Stanley remembered Austin agreeing to join a pickup baseball game, even though Austin didn't really know the rules. After having a look over the diamond, he grasped the basics, tossed his jacket on the ground, stood stiffly in the batter's box (in tie and cufflinks) and whacked the first pitch he saw over the second baseman's head into the opposite field. When he got to first, Austin—and this is my favorite part—*touched the base with his hand* and rounded toward second. It could almost be an example out of late Wittgenstein: who is to say that just because every other time you've seen someone get to first after a hit they landed on the base with their *foot*, you're not free to touch it with your *hand*? Nothing in the rules of baseball explicitly prohibits it (you are also free to toss the tennis ball three-hundred feet in the air when you serve, see *Philosophical Investigations* §68). Cavell ends the story by noting how fast Austin ran around the bases and remembered the expression on his face when he got in safely at second with a double. A slight, satisfied grin.

Unless you count the afternoon in the Japanese restaurant and the Brookline brownstone, I never had Cavell as a teacher. Yet it is easy to infer from hearing audio of lectures or interviews, or hearing others remember the classes they'd taken with him, that he was an enormously gifted teacher. From the memoir: "lecturing to these groups over the years [I felt] I was in each case facing a sample of young fellow citizens of mine to whom anything could be said that I found it worth saying and felt that aspirants to democracy should gladly hear, on the condition that I took pains sufficient to say it, as talent allowed, lucidly and provocatively."[5] Good description of teaching! Similar ideas might be imagined coming from John Dewey (Cavell's relationship with American pragmatism was interestingly fraught, I suspect in part because graduate students of his generation were force fed *Experience and Nature*). It's the

5. Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 425.

sound of someone paying attention, someone who cares. Students are rarely immune to that sound. They pick up on it as if tuning in to a certain frequency.

Stanley also had a good definition of writing: taking oneself by surprise. Looking for and elaborating upon the surprises generated in composition, building worlds of ideas or arguments or sounds (patterns of any kind, really) from out of those surprises, finding exhilaration and freedom in the process itself. All of that is as close to a “path” as I’ve ever been able to find. I didn’t even know that that, all by itself, could *be* a path!

12. Remembering Stanley Cavell

BYRON DAVIES

This memorial notice for Stanley Cavell was first published on the Harvard Philosophy Department website on June 25, 2018 and appears here with the department's permission.

For over four decades one of the most distinctive and original contributors to American letters—and one of the world's most significant proponents of what philosophy could learn from the arts—was a member of the community of Emerson Hall. But so long as Stanley Cavell is best known just as a philosopher who wrote about Shakespeare and movies (as he was first introduced to me), and even if his unassailable institutional legacy is as the advisor of generations of accomplished philosophers (and film and literary scholars), the task for philosophers memorializing Cavell is to communicate what he *taught* us, and in particular what he taught us to *do*.

We can begin by saying that Cavell was a reader of Wittgenstein. In particular, Cavell was a reader of the methods of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as methods for understanding ourselves. This not only opened that text to readers for whom frustrated attempts to locate a body of doctrines had closed it off; it also opened up lines of communication between that text and older understandings of philosophy as a method for arriving at self-consciousness (especially Kant's transcendental philosophy) as well as the methods of self-avowal characteristic of psychoanalysis.[1] Given that Wittgenstein's later philosophy is often read as conservative or quietist, it is important to note that Cavell's writing also located the emancipatory potential of *Philosophical Investigations*, particularly in Wittgenstein's exhortation that we turn our inquiry around our "real need."[2] In a conscious rebuke to misunderstandings of

1. Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64-67.
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §108.

what it meant to be an "ordinary language philosopher," Cavell saw, in his reading of Wittgenstein, the ordinary as precisely the site for philosophical criticism: "Wittgenstein's appeal or 'approach' to the everyday finds the (actual) everyday to be as pervasive a scene of illusion and trance and artificiality (of need) as Plato or Rousseau or Marx had found."[3]

One human need that Cavell articulated with particular poignancy was the need to speak for others (to constitute a community through one's speech), as well as the correlative need to be spoken for by others (to find oneself in the community of another's speech). In the first four essays of his first book, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, the significance of this need emerged through Cavell's interrogating the practice of Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin of asserting "what we say," apparently without empirical linguistic evidence. What could entitle them to such assertions? What criteria could they be relying on? Particularly as these questions were developed in Part One of *The Claim of Reason* (1979), Cavell insisted that our understanding of them will be distorted so long as we think of the ground of intelligibility as always given, as opposed to always at stake in—and as constituted by—our aiming to be intelligible to others. That is, the charge for being intelligible to others lay in us, in our ability to project criteria into new contexts (often requiring creativity and improvisation), and it could not—as Cavell reminded us, against persistent philosophical fantasies—lie in criteria alone.[4] Consequently, whereas others would have understood the question of what entitles us to assertions about "what we say" as a narrowly epistemological question, Cavell insisted that its full significance could not be understood without seeing its affinities with certain political questions—some of them familiar from Rousseau—including that of how to constitute a community when a pre-existing Social Contract is not assured, as well as when we suspect that "we are exercising our will not to the general but to the particular, to the partial, to the unequal, to private benefit, to privacy."[5]

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3. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 46.
4. See Steven G. Affeldt, "The Ground of Mutuality: Criteria, Judgment and Intelligibility in Stephen Mulhall and Stanley Cavell," *European Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2002): 1-31.
5. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 26.

Indeed, one of Cavell's abiding concerns was to draw attention to the ways in which the formulation of a philosophical problem might distort the real need or interest motivating that problem in the first place. This is most evident in his writing on skepticism, and in his arguments that the problem of skepticism about other minds ("How can I really know you are in pain?") is in fact a theoretical registration of our separateness from others—a feature of the human condition that cannot be "solved," though nothing is more characteristic of humans than to deny it or try to overcome it.[6] Among those, in their jealousy and possessiveness, who have struggled with this separateness are King Lear, King Leontes, and Othello, though it was in the book immediately following Cavell's plaintive reading of *Othello* at the end of *The Claim of Reason* that he began to give us his positive vision, not of tragedy but of comedy, and of how we might create a community founded on our shared separateness. Thus, in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981), Cavell argued, through readings of seven Hollywood romantic comedies, that, just as we cannot depend simply on preexisting criteria in order to be intelligible to one another, "There is no place to go in order to acquire the authority of connection...You cannot wait for the perfected community to be presented."[7] And yet, for the seven couples examined in that book, sometimes despite themselves, a community happens.

I did not get to see Stanley in the last year of his life. But in the nine years at the end of his life in which I did know him, I was inspired as he approached his aging with the happy spirit of an inveterate improvisor. He could always be relied on to ad lib. I remember in 2010—after a large standing-room-only occasion at Harvard celebrating the publication that year of his memoir *Little Did I Know*—the very last of us were filing out of the lecture hall: I turned around to find behind me the very man who had been fêted for the last two hours—only this time alone, human, and unguarded. "Ha, I didn't realize who was behind me!" I said to Stanley, to which he replied, "Don't worry—we're *all* behind you."

The fact that in the course of the deepest readings of some of our most public texts and films we can also find such authentically private assurances is surely a big

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6. Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say*, 96.
7. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 109.

part of what will keep many of us permanently pinned to Stanley Cavell's writing. In that way, his writing shows us how to go on.[8]

8. I acknowledge the support of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)'s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program at the Institute for Philosophical Research, in which I am under the supervision of Carlos Pereda.

13. Listening to Cavell

KAY YOUNG

We hurried to get the front row seats. Even to nineteen-year-olds, it was clear that what was happening in that lecture hall—fittingly, it was Emerson 105—was worth waking up for, worth pushing to the front for, as if we couldn't get close enough. And what we couldn't get close enough to was Stanley Cavell lecturing on Western philosophy—a course humbly called "Hum 5" ("Humanities 5: Introduction to Western Philosophy")—looking back, now forty years later, I can say it was probably the most significant intellectual experience of my life. Cavell's commanding presence—that big head, fixed gaze, and seriousness of purpose—made his entrance onto the dais, raincoat and brief case in hand, an anticipated event. But what dawns on me now is that it wasn't so much Cavell's presence or even what he said that made us feel a shared sense of urgency, but rather *how* he said it, how he performed this urgency that made us feel like we were somewhere else—a world viewed through Cavell's mind.

When Cavell spoke, it felt like he was turning his mind inside out, not so that we could see what he meant (I think more often than not we couldn't see what he meant)—but so that we could hear *how* he meant—the sounded feeling of meaning. Cavell's voice, that startling philosophic voice in his writing was more pronounced, more resonant, more dramatic in speech—because he performed his philosophic voice, pronouncing, resonating, playing his speech and his thinking like a great vocal instrument. Cavell performed language, played language as he played with language, as if speech was a musical instrument or as if thinking out loud was singing. We knew nothing of his past as a musician, or as the son of a pianist with perfect pitch, or as a young man who studied and aspired to compose music. What we knew was that at nineteen we felt hungry, that listening to him made us know our hunger, because he sounded that hunger—call it the feeling of having a mind. Philosophy, "doing philosophy," in the company of Cavell was mental food—it woke us to our intellectual cra-

vings because we heard his. Cavell embodied what it meant to take one's mind seriously by giving voice to where his mind traveled when he listened with that unparalleled attention of his to the language of other philosophers or Shakespeare or Hollywood films—a listening attention we yearn for and maybe also fear?

"Must We Mean What We Say?" is not "Must We Mean What We Write?" A matter of saying it—is Cavell's matter. As much as writing it matters, that comes second to what it means to speak it. Cavell, like Wittgenstein, returns time and again to why it is and how it is and maybe most essentially *when* it is that the world and the word come together in speech and when they fail to do so, as in—"[W]e forget that we learn language and learn the world *together*, that they become elaborated and distorted together, and in the same places."[1]

Two passages from "Must We Mean What We Say?":

> The philosopher, understandably, often takes the isolated man bent silently over a book as his model for what using language is. But the primary fact of natural language is that it is something spoken, spoken together. Talking together is acting together, not making motions and noises at one another, nor transferring unspeakable messages or essences from inside of one closed chamber to the inside of another. The difficulties of talking together are, rather, real ones: the activities we engage in by talking are intricate and intricately related to one another.[2]

And

> It sometimes happens that we know everything there is to know about a situation—what all the words in question mean, what all the relevant facts are; and everything is in front of our eyes. And yet we feel we don't know something, don't understand something. In this situation, the question, 'What is X?' is very puzzling, in exactly the way philosophy is very puzzling. We feel we want to ask the question and yet we feel we already have the answer [...]. Socrates

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1. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19.
2. *Ibid.*, 34.

> says that in such a situation we need to remind ourselves of something. So does the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language: we need to remind ourselves of *what we should say when*.[3]

Here are a few of the things Cavell does in these passages: change the visual portrait of the philosopher silently reading, bent over a book, as the model of what it means to "do" philosophy to an aural portrait of speaking together. He names "speaking together" "acting together" and he acknowledges the difficulties of such activities, most especially in their relation to each other. He goes on to speak about knowledge as bound to context, as in—"It sometimes happens that we know everything there is to know about a situation" and in so doing underscores the mystery of what it means "to know," which underscores the paradox of the human condition—what it means to know is also what it means not to know. He situates that feeling around the ocular—"everything is in front of our eyes" and "yet we feel we don't know something, don't understand something." Like Shakespeare, Cavell will make "ocular proof" something that which confounds as much as it explains, and so his reading of *Othello* in *The Claim of Reason*. Cavell brings in the verb "to feel" as the sense we have about this knowing-not knowing state, understanding-not understanding. It will be his attention to the non-visual, feeling of a word, feeling of knowing not-knowing, what he will call "the felt quality" of a thing that will come to define much of his work. And he concludes by drawing our attention to what he has been doing all along, which is the groundwork of ordinary language philosophy, the recognition of the contextual scene of language—*what we should say when*. "*What we should say when*" holds ordinary language philosophy's reply to metaphysics and to skepticism, and so Cavell's essay "Knowing and Acknowledging."

"Philosophers who shun the autobiographical must find another route to philosophical authority... (logic, as Kant says, is such a route)."[4] The route that aspires to metaphysical truth along the path of *if p ~ q* creates a voiceless "we" in the search for necessity and universality—where the particular and the meaning of the particular fall away or get erased clean. For Cavell, it is in our limits—that which defines the

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3. *Ibid.*, 20.
4. Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8.

very particular marks and tones of our voices and our stories—where philosophy's other route to authority lies. He connects this proposal to the directives of the two ordinary language philosophers who lead Cavell to his intellectual voice, J. L. Austin at Oxford and later Wittgenstein, whose work he comes to realize "demand a systematic engagement with the autobiographical."[5] Wittgenstein's motto—"'What *we* do is lead words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use'" and Austin's "to ask ourselves what we say when (that is, in varying contexts)"—bring us back to the everydayness of language and our lives, or language in the context of life. Reflecting back on the writing of "Must We Mean What We Say" from the vantage point of the 1994 lectures that compose *A Pitch of Philosophy* (some thirty-seven years later), Cavell writes:

> I was unprepared to claim that the interest in the new philosophy lay precisely in the necessity and openness of its arrogance and its autobiographicality, that these are not personal but structural features of the necessity to say what we say, that in thus laying their bodies on the philosophical line, and living to tell their tale, the likes of Wittgenstein and Austin must be tapping a dimension of philosophy as such [...]. The autobiographical dimension of philosophy is internal to the claim that philosophy speaks for the human, for all; that is its necessary arrogance. The philosophical dimension of autobiography is that the human representative, say, imitative, that each life is exemplary of all, a parable of each; that is humanity's commonness, which is internal to its endless denials of commonness.[6]

I take Cavell's coming to the autobiographical as a necessary feature of ordinary language philosophy and more generally as a philosophic line that makes possible its speaking for the human in response to 1) the erasure of voice of a metaphysics grounded in a priori logic and 2) in the necessity of voice in an ordinary language philosophy grounded in context. To acknowledge our limits—that to be human is to be grounded always in context—means to make autobiography a means to do philo-

5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. *Ibid.*, 10-11.

sophy, where “each life is exemplary of all, a parable of each.” For those of us who think about narrative, we say, “Yes, of course.” But for philosophers, this claim required, maybe still requires, defense—“Must We Mean What We Say?” is the defense of his teacher Austin that began Cavell’s career in philosophy. That posture and sound of defense come to be defining features of Cavell’s career. Speaking of Austin and Wittgenstein, he admits, “I was unprepared—and not just intellectually—for the intensity of hostility their work inspired.”[7] Beginning in defense of his teacher, Cavell finds his intellectual voice, a voice which will come to adopt tones of self-defense and of rightful inheritance, of hurt and of expansion, of humility and of grandiosity. They are shared tones Cavell comes to trace in other writers of Western philosophy. With that tracing comes a hearing of philosophy’s autobiographical voice. Here’s how he begins the Harvard-Jerusalem lectures that became *A Pitch of Philosophy*:

> The arrogance of philosophy is not one of its best kept secrets. It forever toys with worlds, and when it discovers humble human pride, like Kant’s in proving the necessary limitation of human knowledge, of Nietzsche’s in interpreting our resentments, it finds itself exorbitantly superb. A formative idea in planning these lectures was to pose the question whether, or how, philosophy’s *arrogance* is linked to its *ambivalence* toward the *autobiographical*, as if something internal to the importance of philosophy tempts it to self-importance. Arrogance and autobiography are clearly enough linked in such an outburst of Thoreau’s in *Walden* as “I brag for humanity,” and of Nietzsche’s in *Ecce Homo* as “I have [...] given mankind the greatest gift that has ever been given it [...]. I propose here to talk about philosophy in connection with something I call the voice, by which I mean to talk at once about the tone of philosophy and my right to take that tone and to conduct my talking, to some unspecified extent, anecdotally, which is more or less to say, autobiographically.[8]

“Arrogance,” “autobiography,” “ambivalence”—why these three when thinking about philosophy—how might they be linked? Perhaps each offers a mode or impulse for

7. *Ibid.*, 10.
8. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

voice, for imagining one has something to say. Perhaps, when voiced, each conjures the other when heard—as in—a right to claim and a tempering of that right, that claim; a necessary and liberating turn to "I" for its words and world and for the denial of those words and world; a space for imagining meaning-making and a space for imagining our limit to do so—

Cavell's "right to take that tone"—his claiming of that right—puts us in mind of his teacher Austin who says in "Lecture X" of the William James Lectures of 1955, reprinted in 1962 as *How To Do Things With Words*, "[T]o say something is to do something."[9] To which I add: And *how* you say something is to do something, too. For me, what Cavell's right to tone does is to represent our shared "right to take that tone"—that that 'right' and that 'tone' means something about what it means to be human.

To read Cavell "take that tone" in writing and to hear Cavell "take that tone" in speaking performs a belief in "other minds" and joins us together in a democracy of minds: Cavell's "right to take that tone" is our right, too. Cavell's hearing of autobiography in philosophy, "how I think and feel when," awakens us each to "how I think and feel when." It's not only philosophy that has a problem with the "I"—the academy resists such enunciations of "I." We are taught not to write from the position of "I," as if "that tone" will negate what makes for a strong argument—necessity and universality—and so, too, must fall short of "the truth." What Cavell's voice does is to make a claim for voice, for our voices, to help us grow more confident in our claim to voice and what we each have to say—which is *that* we each have something to say, something worth listening to.

Who are the teachers who help us claim voice? I believe they are the great teachers. They are the ones who help us each imagine that we have the "right" to think, to feel, and to say "I have a mind of my own—to think and to feel and to say. Such teaching feels urgent, rare, unforgettable, and freeing. Cavell was that teacher to me, to many of us.

I close with memories of Cavell teaching by way of Cavell's great teachers—J. L. Austin and Ernst Bloch. In *A Pitch of Philosophy* Cavell remembers what it felt like to be Bloch's student:

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9. J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge. MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 120.

> I close with an experience that assured me of an equivalent perfect pitch, of evidence of a world I think, at the limit of the world I had conversed with—an experience of music [...]. The moment came in Ernst Bloch's music theory class [...]. I was a second-year student at Berkeley. He was in his mid-sixties, my age now, and would sometimes tell stories of Paris around the turn of the century when he was a music student roughly my age as I was listening to him then. Sometimes he was moved by a memory to give a demonstration of what conducting essentially consisted in, asking what communication is, or what constitutes a cue; or he would cover both long walls of staved-lined blackboards with different dispositions of a C-major triad to warn against believing in simple or academic definitions of harmonic correctness or of proper voice-leading; or he would interrupt himself to read an excerpt from Plato, or from Confucius, or—a recent discovery of his—from Stanislavsky; or he might move to the piano to play a passage from a Schumann string quartet referred to by an anecdote from the history of Robert and Clara Schumann related in someone's letters; *and all in all he bespoke a world of aspiration so vivid, a life of dedication so extensive and so constant—as if a wish were being granted me every moment—that I would at the end of a class sometimes find myself having trouble breathing, and I formed the habit of walking immediately after each of its sessions into adjacent hills for an hour or so of solitude, as if I had become too consecrated to touch. Well, well, what do you expect of the effects of the spell of an old master on a young man?* [... T]he young wild with muteness, feeling for the first time intelligible, but to a world he at the time surmises not quite to be his [...]. It will take some years to discover another, but I knew from that time inescapably—not always hopefully—of the promise of some such existence."[10]

I read that and say, "Yes. Your experience of Bloch was ours of you." "[H]e bespoke a world of aspiration so vivid, a life of dedication so extensive and so constant—as if a wish were being granted me every moment—..." "It was like that for us with you."

10. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 48-49.

Cavell reflects on what it meant to be taught by Austin in his essay "Austin at Criticism" of 1965:

> Seven published papers are not many, and those who care about Austin's work will have felt an unfairness in his early death, a sense that he should have had more time. But I think it is wrong to say his work remains incomplete. He once said to me, and doubtless to others: "I had to decide early on whether I was going to write books or to teach people how to do philosophy usefully." Why he found this choice necessary may not be clear. But it is as clear as a clear Berkeley day that he was above all a teacher, as is shown not merely in any such choice, but in everything he wrote and (in my hearing) spoke with its didactic directions for profitable study, its list of exercises, its liking for sound preparation and its disapproval of sloppy work and lazy efforts. In example and precept his work is complete, in a measure hard to imagine matched. I do not see that it is anywhere being followed with the completeness it describes and exemplifies. There must be, if this is so, various reasons for it. And it would be something of an irony if it turned out Wittgenstein's manner were easier to imitate than Austin's; in its way, something of a triumph for the implacable professor.[11]

Austin's choice was not Cavell's, or at least Cavell didn't find the choice between teaching and writing a necessary one to make. Both were necessary. Both were urgent. What was "implacable" about Cavell was his need to say—"a matter of saying it." Cavell's teaching was not like Austin's—no didactic directions for profitable study, no list of exercises, no judgments about sound preparation or sloppy work and lazy efforts. Cavell was the student who carried forward Austin's training and directive—not in imitation, but in practice. Austin concludes the William James lectures with words about his own teaching and what remained to be done with it:

> I have as usual failed to leave enough time to say why what I have said is interesting [...]. I have purposely not embroiled the general theory [ordinary lan-

11. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 113-14.

> guage philosophy] with philosophical problems (some of which are complex enough to merit their celebrity); this should not be taken to mean that I am unaware of them. Of course, this is bound to be a little boring and dry to listen to and digest; not nearly so much as to think and write. *Moreover I leave it to my readers the real fun of applying it to philosophy*.[12]

How to do things with Austin's words is one way to define the contours of Cavell's work. Cavell *was* that "reader" who made a life of "the real fun of applying it to philosophy." Schooled on Austin's rigorous attention to "words when" and Ernst Bloch's intellectual soaring, what Cavell was *not* was "a little boring and dry to listen to and digest," but instead rigorous and soaring. "I have a bee in my bonnet," he might begin. And so the buzzing around would begin for all us as we traveled from sound to sound, the flowering of one idea to the next. Or maybe he would call it a philosophic mood, or maybe name it "the problem of other minds," or "Emersonian perfectionism," or "the melodrama of the unknown woman," or maybe he would draw attention to Shakespeare's sounding of Mamillius's sad tale of winter in his mother Hermione's ear, or give voice to Milton's definition of marriage as a "meet and happy conversation," en route to listening to the talking of a Hollywood comedy of remarriage in its embodiment of that conversation.

I hear his voice still—the fullness and depth, the distinct cadences, the acceleration as he moved closer to what he wanted to say, the slowing pauses as he added parentheticals that interrupted the idea's flow with examples begun with the word "say" or "which is to say" or with questions that made even more particular the direction of the idea's flow revealing a connecting link to circle back to where we had left off, the silences that brought us together in moments of shared recognition or reflection. How his voice traveled out of Emerson 105, one flight up, to the room where the nineteen-year-olds of the front row met each week with a remarkable philosophy graduate student, Steve Phillips, to discuss what was happening in our minds—Lisa Feurzig, David Kellogg, Paul Bayard, Steve Irwin, Dan Silver—and the one to whom I gave the epithet "smartest boy in class"—Jeff Saver—that boy who I still see in my mind's eye from the steps of Memorial Church walking through the Yard carrying a

12. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 163-64.

copy of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, that boy whose aliveness in Hum 5 I shared in and cherished, more than I can say. Hum 5 was not just the most significant intellectual experience of my life—four years later, after sitting together to hear Cavell and to hear one another's minds come alive in response to him and to one another, Jeff Saver and I married. And four years later, Cathleen and Stanley Cavell were there, at our wedding, to share in what happened, what continues to happen because of Hum 5 and listening to Stanley Cavell.

14. Stanley Cavell at Amherst College

THOMAS DUMM

In February of 2000, Stanley Cavell came to Amherst College to present two public lectures as the John C. McCloy '16 Professor of American Institutions. (I had nominated him for the lectureship the previous year, and he had been approved by a College committee and the president of the College at the time, Tom Gerety, who was himself a legal philosopher.)

It was a big deal. In the fall, the lecturer had been Ronald Dworkin. Others who had lectured through these early years of the lecture included such luminaries as Martha Nussbaum and George Kateb. (The first McCloy lecturer had been Fred Korematsu, who had unsuccessfully sued the U.S. government during World War II to end the Japanese internment program. Korematsu's invitation had been a sort of historical reparation, since John McCloy, for whom the professorship had been named, had directed the internment camp program for FDR, famously saying, when asked about its constitutionality, "Compared to my country, the Constitution is just a piece of paper.")

Stanley gave two lectures, "Night and Day: Heidegger and Thoreau," on February 10, and "Passionate and Performative Utterance: Extending Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*," on February 17. Both of these lectures, in modified form, eventually found their way into print in Stanley's *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Harvard University Press, 2005) as "Passionate and Performative Utterances" and "Thoreau Thinks of Ponds, and Heidegger of Rivers."

My intention here is not to discuss the substance of these two major essays. Instead, I want to tell two stories about Stanley and his character as both a thinker and person, occasioned by the events of those lectures.

Stanley presented these lectures in the Converse Hall Assembly Room, also known as the Red Room, one of the College's larger gather places, an amphitheater

that usually holds about 200 people maximum, but which, for both of Stanley's lectures, was filled to overflowing, with people hanging out at the room's multiple entrances to listen in.

For the first lecture, on Heidegger and Thoreau, the attention of the audience was total, and Stanley persisted in answering questions for some forty-five minutes after the lecture, before I finally insisted (as his faculty host) that we needed to head out to a dining hall on campus where there was a dinner in his honor, with about forty members of the faculty from Amherst and other Five College schools across various disciplines in attendance, each one of them wanting a chance to speak with him. He barely got to eat his meal that evening. But at long last, after hours in which he had been gracious and generous with his responsiveness to his interlocutors—some of whom were more than interesting and engaging, some less so—I finally was able to bring the festivities to an end, and we left the dining hall to walk back to the inn where he was lodged (then called the Lord Jeffrey Amherst Inn, but subjected to a recent and largely welcome name change, given the genocidal inclinations of the original Lord Jeff).

As we went into the night, my head was buzzing a bit at the sheer thrill of the event, one of those major intellectual events some of us live and hope for. But before we had walked more than a few yards toward the hotel, Stanley stopped dead in his tracks, grabbed me by the arm, turned me toward him so he could get my full attention, and asked, "Tom, was that all right?"

I was floored. Here was one of the most justly celebrated living philosophers, who had just delivered himself of hours of stimulating and deep insights into two crucially important thinkers, and he sincerely was concerned that he may not have adequately performed, may not have fully and clearly expressed himself, may not have done as well as he might have. I thought to myself, if Stanley Cavell suffers from such self-doubt, such levels of what some call "intellectual imposter syndrome," what hope is there for mere mortals like the rest of us (like me)? But upon reflection, it seemed to me that Stanley wasn't expressing self-doubt so much as he was expressing his deep sense of the inadequacy of all of our communications, all of our language never quite reaching where it aims, a consistent and deep Cavellian theme. But also, a pos-

ture that has as its price a constant self-questioning, a constant self-doubting, or self-checking.

The following week Stanley returned, and again delivered himself of a major lecture, this time revisiting the themes of Austin, the philosopher who, when Stanley was a graduate student at Harvard, had delivered the William James lectures, that eventually were published as *How to Do Things with Words* (Harvard University Press, 1955, 1962) and thus changed the course of Stanley's life. The major difference in the reception of that lecture is that rather than a large public dinner, a smaller, more intimate dinner was held at the president of the College's home.

Now, a little bit of context. That previous fall, as I mentioned, Ronald Dworkin had been the McCloy professor, delivering a lecture entitled "Do Values Conflict?" His lecture was fantastic, exploring a deep argument concerning intellectual and moral authority and its relationship to power, among other things, but what I remember most clearly is not the substance—it can be found in his subsequent book by that title—but his style of lecturing. He spoke at length without notes, in fully formed sentences and paragraphs, with clarity and precision. (I was later told that this was a signature style associated with Oxford and Cambridge University dons. I have no idea whether that is true.) After his lecture, a group of about twenty-five of us gathered at the president's home for a formal sit-down dinner. It was spectacular—waiters and waitresses with *hors d'oeuvres* on platters, a full bar, a multiple course meal—all a sign and seal of President Gerety's admiration for this prominent legal philosopher.

Upon arriving at the president's house this time, however, there was no sign of any such elaborate preparations. It turned out that the only faculty invited to the dinner were members of the philosophy department, along with myself and a visiting assistant professor of political theory in my department, about twelve of us all told. Indeed, there was no one tending bar—there was self-service for drinks and wine—nor was a table set for a meal. Instead, Tom Gerety greeted us at the door in open shirt and sweater (he had not attended the lecture), and showed us into what he called the library, a room to the side of the formal dining room, where TV trays were set up. We were invited to fill our plates from a buffet that had been set up in the dining room, and sit wherever we could find a seat, dragging our trays with us.

The food itself wasn't memorable—of course often College food wasn't—but there were elements of the dinner discussion that were. What I best remember is an assistant professor of philosophy button-holing Stanley to ask him if he had ever read this book that he, the young professor, had once read about performative locutions by a philosopher named Austin, because a lot of what Stanley was saying in his lecture seemed to be a lot like what Austin seemed to want to say. Maybe Stanley ought to read that book, he suggested. If Stanley liked, he'd send him the reference. Stanley sat there and nodded, and thanked the young professor for his advice.

The evening seemed to go along those general lines, with (fortunately?) few members of the philosophy department caring to engage Stanley in conversation. It was, mercifully, a brief evening. This time, as we were walking back to the inn, it was my turn to stop Stanley, having him turn to me so that I could express my apologies for what felt to me to be a deeply insulting and demeaning event. Stanley laughed. And then laughed some more. "Tom," he said, "Not to worry. I've experienced lots worse."

This was an illustration of something else—not Stanley's worry about an inability to overcome the problem of other minds, at the heart of his concern about communicating clearly in his Heidegger and Thoreau lecture—but his appreciation, based on hard experience, of the depth of the division between the analytic and Continental traditions in philosophy, and the difficulties someone like him constantly had to face when addressing a typical American philosophy department steeped in the analytic tradition, blissfully ignorant of anything beyond that narrow, oh so narrow, beam of light.

We returned to the inn, had a drink, and I walked home. Stanley went back to Brookline the next morning, and our friendship, at least, was more secure than ever. I would have later occasion to suggest (ironically) that he maybe would want to read Austin's *How to Do things with Words*. He would usually reply by suggesting that it may well be time for me to read "A Plea for Excuses."

15. In Memoriam: Stanley Cavell

ABRAHAM D. STONE

I remember distinctly the moment I learned that David Lewis had died. It was during my years as a postdoctoral fellow, when I was more than a little isolated, and so it turned out to have been some time—months, maybe—since the event.[1] I recall thinking: the world in which I thought I was living, during those months, turned out not to be the actual world, and so I turned out not to be the person I thought I was, but merely a counterpart of that person. And thus arose the half-formed thought (still only half-formed now, alas) that therein lay some insight into what is actually at stake in the conflict between counterpart theory and transworld identity.

There are very many different ways in which philosophical writing can be difficult. In Lewis's case (as in Hume's), the obscurity derives most of all from irony: philosophical theses are argued for, urgently, fluently, and with elaborate and ambitious systematicity, but there are only scattered and sometimes conflicting hints about whence the urgency derives. In Stanley Cavell's case (as in Emerson's, or Thoreau's, or Wittgenstein's) the difficulty lies largely in a different direction. There are a series of statements or short passages, each clear enough in itself, and some, at least, dealing with matters of obvious importance; but the rule of the series, the reason one follows another in just this order, is thoroughly opaque.[2] Hence Cavell's

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1. To be specific, this happened early in my four-year stint as a Harper-Schmidt Fellow at the University of Chicago (2001-2005). Before that, I was a Lady Davis Fellow at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for one year (2000-2001). The present remarks first appeared on the blog "Digressions and Impressions," curated by Eric Schliesser, on July 30, 2018.
2. In contrast to Lewis's judicial minimalism, Cavell strives constantly to raise the stakes, to avoid any philosophical decision on narrow grounds, to clear a broader ground. In *The Claim of Reason*, he mentions God so often that worried students have asked me if it is a "religious" work. I point out that he usually mentions Nietzsche and Marx in the same breath. As to whether or in what sense Cavell was religious, I would hate to say. I know he saw some great significance, which, however, I never understood at all, in the fact that his father had never visited Israel, whereas he had (to participate in a workshop with Reb Derrida himself!).

death leaves me with different thoughts: about the continuation and breaking of series, about whether we can carry on, and whether we should.

Moreover, although I met Lewis only once, I was Cavell's student for many years (as a doctoral student in philosophy, 1993-2000), and in fact he is the one person I regularly refer to (in talking to *my* students, for example) as "my teacher." But I was not one of his closest students. Our relationship was always difficult, no doubt in large part because of my deafness to so much of what he heard. And what he heard that I did not was not limited to such minor items as poetry, jazz, opera, and what to me are just some mildly amusing and/or disquieting old movies. It often extended rather farther, to the words coming out of my own mouth: I might realize too late, after leaving the room, that he had been responding to what I, without knowing it, had literally said. And yet this was a good way to be his student, because, beyond the many listable insights, methods, approaches, even simple facts that I learned from him, the biggest lesson of all, and the one most central to his thought, was about the philosophically essential and impossible nature of that relationship between teacher and student. The teacher, so to speak, at some point, breaks off and says: now continue as I would; and what happens next, if it is not just complete failure, may well involve violence or the threat of violence, or flattery and slavish imitation, or treachery and betrayal, or (as in *King Lear*) all of those combined.[3]

Cavell's death comes at a time when, though some think that Western philosophy has entered a golden age, others of us fear that it may have ended, that there is and will be no next member of the series after Cavell, after Lewis, after Derrida. But then, on the other hand: it also comes at a time when, having tried (but: *fairly* tried?) doing good, we find, strange as it may seem, that it does not agree with our Constitution. It comes, in other words, at a time when we may ask: why attempt to follow such teachers? Why not reject them and begin anew? The option of rejection—I mean, the option of rejecting our teachers, rejecting the whole tradition of philosophy from which we have emerged, rejecting America, rejecting Europe, rejecting Athens—seems eminently reasonable, more the voice of conscience than of inclination. This is

3. Cavell's hunger for recognition, for acknowledgement, could be as strong as Lear's (it was from self-knowledge that he wrote about that), and there could be an air of flattery and imitation in his presence, which he did not discourage. Some found this repellent. Sometimes I was one of them. But I can assure all such, at least, that any flattery they witnessed was sincere (as, indeed, imitation is always said to be). He was truly loved.

hardly the first such time, of course, but it would be a poor exercise in induction to conclude that it won't or shouldn't be the last: that what Justinian or Descartes or Carnap tried and failed can't and shouldn't now finally be accomplished.

Cavell's response to this, as I understand it, is that the apparent option of rejection is really an option of *repression*. I can't say how essential it is that this be taken as a reception of Freud: Freud's thought is yet another of the things important to Cavell which I feel unable to appreciate, or to which, perhaps, I am resistant. But it explains why Cavell, though he never followed Heidegger into, as he would put it, "the myth of having read everything," also never followed Wittgenstein and Emerson into "the myth of having read nothing." He worried constantly over the canonical figures of Western philosophy—not in a scholarly, originalist way, but beginning with them as he had received them, *stare decisis* (which meant, in some respects: beginning with a mere caricature of them). It explains, too, why lack of recognition, for himself or for his teachers, could so anger him: the story in which "American philosophy" means principally James and Dewey offended him, not as ignorant and inaccurate, but as a *deliberate* (though unconscious) suppression of Emerson and Thoreau. It explains his anger on one occasion when, responding to his description of the logical positivists as "self-stultifying," I said that what he took as self-stultification is actually self-control. "How can you make that distinction after Freud?" was his reply. For me, the time now was (and is) after Avicenna, after Descartes, after Kant, certainly, after Nietzsche, maybe even after Wittgenstein, but *not* after Freud (or after Marx). That was an excuse (elaborative) that he would not accept. But then why isn't this time also after Carnap (or after Neurath, or after Popper)? Cavell knew he could not, so to speak, point to a set of invisible, strong-as-logic (or even: strong-as-sociology) rails that would send me through one set of stops but not through the other. That he might say, in such a case, "Here my spade is turned," was to him not a reassurance but a tragedy.

What time is now? What world is actual? The questions are almost the same, maybe, after all. Indexicals show most starkly the irruption of the pragmatic (and the transcendental?) into semantics. If what is salient to me is not, or not often enough, what is salient to you, we can't speak to one another, even if we speak "the same language." If a lion could speak, how could we understand it? A lion or other non-human

animal—but how do we know which animals are humans? What about drills and children and idiots and Aristotelian or Derridean philosophers? If Locke associates the name "human," in the phrase "human(e) understanding," with a complex idea that includes whiteness and maleness (not to mention mechanism, traces of alchemy, Euclidean spatiality,...), and if we understand him, must we not make the same association? Locke, if I *do* understand him, would say that we must. "I know not, how Men [!], who have the same *Idea*, under different Names, or different *Ideas* under the same Name, can, in that case, talk with one another.") What if our salient points of reference—the chessboard, the well-known beacons and headlands, the *orbis magnus*—turn out to be non-actual, or no longer actual, already dead? What if the rock on which we hoped to found a wall or a state (or a church), which we had hoped to reach at last by clearing up the ground, removing some of the rubbish (even if that should require a sort of moral bog hoe), turns out to be a myth? If the concepts *origin* and *series* (or: permanence, progression, and reversion) are mythical, how can we continue any series? How can we fail to?

What I learned from Cavell—what we have all learned from him, if, as I think, the time now is after Cavell—is not solutions, but problems. We may not be able to continue. We may have no choice but to continue.

16. Cavell's Importance for Philosophical Aesthetics

NICHOLAS F. STANG

Stanley Cavell was a prolific writer—the author of seventeen books and countless essays—and a famously stimulating teacher, but it would be impossible to convey in a short piece like this what made his writing and teaching inimitable.[1] Instead, I will limit myself to trying to explain a bit of what I think is so important about Cavell's work in aesthetics.

For one, in an age of academic specialization—which was well underway when he began his career, but has accelerated ever since—Cavell's writings on film, on music, on literature, were impossible to categorize. Yes, they discussed traditional problems in the philosophy of art (e.g. the objectivity of taste, the expressiveness of music, authorial intention, etc.), but they also contained a lot that was not part of the dreary diet of mid-twentieth century analytic aesthetics or even philosophy as the discipline then understood itself: the meaning of modernism in the arts, the nature of marriage, the relation of skepticism to tragedy and melodrama, and much, much more.

It wasn't that Cavell was not interested in the boundaries that philosophers typically try to draw around their field—it was precisely that he was fascinated by philosophy's obsession with distinguishing itself from poetry, or from religion, or from psychotherapy, its need to distance itself constantly from what it could nonetheless never stop talking about. Cavell was convinced this exclusion revealed something important about the nature of modern philosophy, and he saw in it an echo of the characteristic gesture of high modernist culture (e.g. Clement Greenberg), that of distinguishing true art from mere kitsch.

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1. An earlier version of these remarks appeared on the blog "Aesthetics for Birds" on June 28, 2018.

This leads to a second way in which Cavell's thinking in aesthetics was original: the connections he drew between traditional problems of philosophy and issues in the rest of culture. His very first book, and one of his best, is a collection of essays titled *Must We Mean What We Say?* Like all of Cavell's works, it is difficult to summarize, but one of its main themes is the connection between the problems that were exercising analytic philosophers at the time—whether language is always "public" or can be "private" to what extent linguistic meaning is "conventional," whether we can ever know what another person is thinking or feeling—and issues that arose in the practice of the arts themselves: whether an audience can share an experience of a work, or whether we are left to our own private fantasies; whether the traditional art-forms were still ways of creating art, or could now only produce banal copies; under what conditions art can disclose an artist's experience, and whether it has to.

One of Cavell's most lasting contributions to the philosophy of art is that he showed how interwoven philosophy and the arts have been for the past century or two, and how deeply philosophical much of that art has been—not in the sense of advancing theses or arguments, but in Cavell's more Socratic conception of philosophy as the activity that is ready to put anything, including itself, in question.

The third and final way in which Cavell's work was deeply important is that, again refusing to simply accept established academic boundaries, he brought all of his philosophical and critical intelligence to bear on an art-form that in 1971 (when he published *The World Viewed*) he thought had been neglected or condescended to by others in the academy: movies, especially Hollywood talkies from the 1930s and 40s. In a series of books and articles Cavell showed that if we are willing to take our experience of these movies seriously, to devote to them the kind of attention we would devote to any serious work of art, we will see how *philosophical* they are, how deeply invested they are in moral questions of friendship, reciprocity, education, of what makes a human being distinctive and what makes a life excellent—in what Cavell calls *moral perfectionism*, a tradition of moral thinking he identifies with the American philosophers Emerson and Thoreau, as well as figures like Montaigne and Nietzsche.

I will conclude by quoting a long passage from what may be my favorite of Cavell's books, *Pursuits of Happiness*, an examination of five Hollywood movies from

the 1930s and 40s he identifies as "remarriage comedies." In it, Cavell discusses the wonderful scene from *The Awful Truth* in which Jerry (played by Cary Grant) forces his way into the home of the music teacher of his estranged wife, Lucy (played by Irene Dunne), expecting to find her in the music teacher's arms. Cavell writes:

> We know enough by this time of the practice of this kind of film to consider the sudden discovery of Lucy in front of the piano as the door flings open not as the surprising revelation that she is not after all engaged in an erotic form of life but that after all she is. Then it is her singing (whatever that is) that has been primarily felt by Jerry to be something beyond him, out of his control; not her singing teacher, who (whatever he is) is patently a secondary fiddle. Jerry, at any rate, is knocked to the ground by her performance here. His aplomb everywhere else is perfect. Lucy's strategy in her sister routine will require that he make the connection between her publicly singing a proper recital piece in a ladylike manner and her privately singing an improper piece in its appropriate manner. The epitome I say we are given of the life of marriage behind doors, for us to imagine, of marriage as romance, as adventure—of the dailiness of life, its diurnal repetitiveness, as its own possibility of festivity—is the moment of Lucy's response to Jerry's discomfiture as he tries to make himself inconspicuous at the unanticipated recital and winds up on the floor in a tableau with chair, table, and lamp. The spectacle he makes of himself starts a laugh in her which she cannot hold back until after she finishes her song but which pushes into her song to finish with it, its closing cadence turning to laughter. The moment of laughter and song becoming one another is the voice in which I imagine the conversation of marriage aspired to in these comedies to be conducted. We heard Lucy speaking to Aunt Patsy of the grand laughs she and Jerry have had. (All she will tell him, or warn him of, visiting him at his apartment, before becoming his sister, is that his ancient poem to her, which she is about to recite, will hand him a laugh.) At the musicale we are privileged to witness one of the grand laughs. This princess is evidently neither unwilling nor unable to laugh, indeed she generally seems on the brink of laughing. The truth is that only this man can bring her laughter on, even if

he is sometimes reduced to poking her ribs with a pencil. This may not be worth half a father's kingdom, but she finds it, since he asks, worth giving her-self for.[2]

2. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 262-63.

17. Undoing the Psychologizing of the Psychological

ARATA HAMAWAKI

Remarks given at a memorial event, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

In "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," first published in 1965, and later collected in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Stanley Cavell wrote:

> We know the efforts of such philosophers as Frege and Husserl to undo the "psychologizing" of logic (like Kant's undoing Hume's psychologizing of knowledge): now, the shortest way I might describe such a book as the *Philosophical Investigations* is to say that it attempts to undo the psychologizing of psychology, to show the necessity controlling our application of psychological and behavioral categories; even, one could say, show the necessities in human action and passion themselves. And at the same time it seems to turns all of philosophy into psychology—matters of what we call things, how we treat them, what their role is in our lives.[1]

Frege, of course, insisted on distinguishing between what is thought in any act of thinking, the content of thought, which he conceived of as having a propositional form, and the thinking of it. A thought is what can be common to different acts of thinking, whether of one's own or of another. It is thus essentially public, essentially shareable, unowned. By contrast the thinking of a thought is necessarily someone's,

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1. Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91.

necessarily owned, and so in that sense private. Frege depsychologized logic, by excluding the psychological from it. The logical must bear no trace of the psychological, for if that were not so, there would be nothing that could be true or false—and so no judgment, no belief, no propositional attitude, as thoughts have subsequently come to be called. There would be in Thomas Rickett's memorable words, merely "mooing." The first person is consequently banished from the logical order, for a first person thought is constituted by the thinking of it. But in depsychologizing logic as he did, Frege seemed to have psychologized psychology. Thus, in speaking of the *Investigations* as undoing the psychologizing of psychology, I take it, Stanley meant that it seeks to undo what Frege did. However, this doesn't mean undoing what Frege undid, that is, erasing the sharp boundary between the logical and the psychological, but rather to not cede the psychological to psychology: what the *PI* calls for is to further what Frege began, but, as it were, against Frege. In other words, Stanley saw Wittgenstein as reintroducing the first person as essential to the logical order, the order of what we think.[2]

The passage I read above immediately follows a discussion of the part of Kant's third *Critique* in which Kant introduces the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable. There, Kant notes, if someone is challenged on her judgment that something is agreeable, it is perfectly appropriate for her to retreat to saying, "well, it's agreeable to me." But if someone is challenged on her judgment that something is beautiful, it would, far from being appropriate, be "laughable" to retreat to saying, "well, it's beautiful for me." "For," as Kant says, "he must not call it beautiful if it merely pleases him."[3] "What," Stanley asked:

> are these examples supposed to show? That using a form of expression in one context is all right, and using it in another is not all right. But what I wish to focus on is the *kind* [my emphasis] of rightness and wrongness invoked: it is not a matter of factual rectitude, nor of formal indiscretion but of saying something laughable, or which would be folly. It is such consequences that are taken to display a difference in the kind of judgment in question, in the nature

2. Although this idea is still somewhat heterodox, there are some recent philosophers who have followed Stanley's lead. These include Sebastian Rödl and Irad Kimhi.
3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §7.

> of the concepts employed, and even in the nature of the reality the concepts capture. [...] And how can psychological differences like finding something laughable or foolish (which perhaps not every person would) be thought to betray such potent, or anyway, different, differences?[4]

Rightness and wrongness here are not measured by the norms of truth, meaning or pragmatic appropriateness. And yet, these judgments are not merely a matter of psychology either, even though, as Stanley observed, it can seem that way. There is such a thing as rightness or wrongness here, even though our judgments of rightness and wrongness are necessarily unsponsored in the familiar ways, by sensory evidence, proof, testimony, expertise, and so on. Like judgments of the beautiful themselves, the philosopher who appeals to everyday language "turns to the reader not to convince him without proof but to get him to prove something, test something against himself. He is saying: Look and find out whether you can see what I see, wish to say what I wish to say."[5]

Philosophical statements, like aesthetic statements, are essentially first personal—are mine to make. And the risk we bear in making them is not the risk of error but the risk of alienation and exposure, the risk of isolation—the discovery that I speak only for myself. What we may find is not that we disagree about a matter of fact, but that we do not share a world. Unlike my relation to the order of facts, I have a world only insofar as I bring it to expression, bring it to words. In that sense, it could be said, "the world is my world." To use Kant's language, such judgments have, or purport to have, necessary universal "subjective validity." And, according to Stanley, it is only against the background of necessities of this kind that there can be necessities of the logical kind. You might say that it is only against the backdrop of such subjectively universal necessities that propositions have their life, so that it is so much as possible for us to have propositional attitudes. *Contra* Frege, the domain of the logical cannot be insulated against the first person. (Or, in Kant's terms, reflecting judgment is a necessary condition of determining judgment.)

4. Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," 90.
5. Ibid., 96.

Kant famously said, "it must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all of my representations," thereby affirming that self-consciousness is not something that is opposed to objectivity but is, on the contrary, constitutive of it. I think of Stanley as inheriting, while transforming, Kant's dictum. For Kant the "I think" is the act of theoretical judgment; it is the "I assert" or the "I hold." For Stanley it would be more appropriate to say, "it must be possible for the 'I voice' or the 'I express' or the 'I appreciate' to accompany all of my representations." Giving voice to one's experience in the relevant sense is a matter of making a claim, but it is not making a factual claim, or even a practical one. It is giving expression to my appreciation of significance; in so doing I am not simply reporting something, but am making a claim on others to appreciate what I do. What is it that calls for appreciation? If I say, for example, "you have to go see this movie," say, Ozu's *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949). How are we to understand the "must" here? The "must" is not in a broad sense theoretical—that is, a matter of what one must believe, for if it were, it ought to be possible for me to take another's word on the matter. Nor is the "must" in a broad sense practical, a matter of something I ought to do, for a failure to do it would have to constitute a rift in our relationship, a breach of the mutual trust that is necessary to constitute a community. When I tell a new friend, "you must read Stanley Cavell," I believe that the "must" here is the same as in "you must see Ozu's *Late Spring*," which is the same "must" as in Rilke's "you must change your life" (from "The Archaic Torso of Apollo"). What calls for appreciation is neither theoretical nor practical, neither factual nor normative, neither cognitive nor conative, but somehow all of these at once. And it is not only that those familiar dichotomies are inadequate to a grasp of the phenomenon; it is that our sense of what calls for appreciation is, you could say, the common root from which the theoretical and practical orders spring and from which they cannot liberate themselves, the pivot on which "the whirl of organism" whirls.

The philosopher's remarks, as the critic's, may not only be met with disagreement but with worse, with complete indifference—with what Kant in the (first edition) Preface of the first *Critique* called "the mother of chaos and night"—since, unlike the sciences, neither have a guaranteed audience, but this does not render them dependent on individual fancy or whim. Far from it, as Stanley wrote, "philosophy, like art, is, and should be, powerless to prove its relevance; and that says so-

mething about the kind of relevance it wishes to have. All the philosopher, this kind of philosopher, can do is to express, as fully as he can, his world, and attract our undivided attention to our own."[6] It is impossible for me to imagine a philosopher who has expressed as fully as he can his world as did Stanley, and for us all he stands, as a further self, attracting undivided attention to our own—if we could only heed his warm, cheerful, hopeful, patient, invitation.

Like Kant and Wittgenstein, I don't view self-consciousness as a separate topic in philosophy but rather as central to understanding our relation to the world and to others. For both philosophers, the self is not a separate topic of thought—self-consciousness is not a separate content—but constitutes our relation to the world and to others. I believe that seeing how this is so requires unpacking Stanley's elusive but intriguing idea of "undoing the psychologizing of the psychological." Ever since my days as a graduate student, and as an advisee of Stanley's, I have found his work, in this and other respects, to afford the most compelling way of reading Wittgenstein as inheriting Kant's philosophy, and in turn to represent the most compelling way of inheriting and going on from the work of both. He has been a model for me of how to learn from the history of philosophy, how to make it relevant.

6. Ibid., 96.

18. Thinking (America) After Cavell: On Learning and Becoming Different

ALONSO GAMARRA

I read Stanley Cavell's *This New Yet Unapproachable America*[1] for the first time over a two-day bus ride from Montreal to Chicago. This happened a little bit more than a year ago, in March 2018, when I came back to the US, where I grew up undocumented.

The following essay tries to respond to that reading from both a deep attachment to Cavell's writing and a wish to learn how to think after his picture of American thinking. Alternatively, I can also say that this essay is an attempt at sitting with an irresolvable pull between the unapproachability of things, and the need of confronting the world with itself along the lines in which it meets in a series of topics and a place.[2]

The first of this essay's two points of departure is a concern with the fate of philosophy in America.

In "Finding as Founding," Cavell introduces philosophy as the work of lasting in one's receptivity and responsiveness to a changing world by both maintaining an orientation and recovering some way to go on[3] when faced with a "loss of foundation."[4] Thus, philosophy can be seen as a continuous search for ground, or for the conditions in which getting from one place to another becomes possible, which includes the philosopher's desires to go on in a particular way. The action of walking offers a way of imagining this understanding of philosophy, as a matter "of enduring as on a track" and "following on," which includes taking successive steps as much as falling, sitting, leaping, and changing directions, and so turning from a given path.[5] As an aversive suc-

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1. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
2. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125.
3. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 77.
4. Ibid., 109.
5. Ibid., 115.

cessor of previous attempts at doing philosophy, Emerson's way of thinking and feeling the possibility of a trajectory consists not only in giving attention to what happens when we cannot go on—either because paths change, or because we have been ignorant of their limits—but also to what happens after these ruptures. A key feature of Cavell's reading of Emerson's way of philosophizing is an understanding of the transcendental as the actualization of latent (or immanent) possibilities, which is to say the transformation of an orientation and a set of circumstances, each by way of the other.

One way to think about what makes Emerson's mode of philosophizing American, then, is to centre its refusal to impose any static category as a stake or analytic when faced with a dead end. For Cavell, Emerson's essays enact an aversive mode of inquiry, which expresses a conviction that some particular aspects of what we say and how we live require attention. As attempts at describing how particular modes of inattentiveness impoverish a common existence, they register and respond to this demand for attention only by enacting an uncertain process of transformation, which is to say, learning. Emerson's essays—as Cavell presents them—matter to the practice of philosophy because they take for their topics nothing more nor less than the conditions an ordinary world offers for its reproduction and representation. It is part of Cavell's picture of Emerson that "the conversion narrative... the slave narrative, and... the narrative of voyage and discovery,"[6] which constituted significant conditions of experience of his time, presented important Emerson with demands for attention. Similarly, it's also part of this picture that the object of Emerson's search lay beyond the conditions of his time, and that the form of his awareness of these limitations was chagrin. Thus, internal to Cavell's account of the practice of philosophy in America as exemplified by Emerson is an overcoming of the topics that express the conditions of experiencing the place from (and about) which Emerson was writing. After Cavell's own writing, these become imaginable as a process of learning that transforms existence, an aspiration for freedom, and a willingness for departure.

In returning to "Finding as Founding" while working this essay, I'm continuously made to see just how much more this piece of writing holds than what initially attracted me to it, and so how much more there is to give attention to than I am able to account for here. In particular, I struggle with questions on how to acknowledge the

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6. Ibid., 102.

ambivalence and complexity of the narratives Cavell offers as providing the structure and topics of Emerson's thinking. If Emerson is not the only one of his contemporaries to give serious attention to the topics of conversion, slavery, and voyage and discovery, then American philosophy—as Cavell understands it—holds many sources for us besides Emerson. Some of them, surely, necessary interlocutors on these themes.

Scenes of Subjection[7] and *In the Break*[8] come immediately to mind. Saidiya Hartman and Fred Moten's readings of Fredrick Douglass' transcription of his Aunt Hester's scream[9] – of what happened before, alongside and after Douglas' writing – enact two deeply attentive searches for more sources of American thinking, which surely put pressure on what we might call philosophy (after Cavell). It seems to me that a serious reading of Hartman and Moten's works alongside Cavell's writings on Emerson would have to begin by turning Cavell's picture of philosophy on its side. In different ways, Hartman and Moten both refuse ideas of recovery in which the possibilities for community and reason come after rupture rather in and through it. (Moten's first book does this straight from the title. And so much of the rest his work seems deeply creative to me precisely for how it insists on a different picture of finding the journey's end in every step of the road. I mean, for how he cares to remind us that we are each other's means without ends.) So, I say that thinking Cavell's picture of American philosophy after Hartman and Moten's pictures of thinking in America would turn some idea of philosophy on its side rather than over because there are different ways of thinking about what Cavell means by "philosophy ends in a recovery from terminable loss."[10] (Consider, for example, Cavell's remark on Wittgenstein bringing philosophy to an end 693 times in each of the 693 sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*.[11] This might come to describing something like the different ecologies of loss in and through which we try to get from one place to another.)[12] While thinking after Hartman, Moten, and Cavell's attempts at thinking and feeling

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7. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
8. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black. Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003).
9. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
10. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 114.
11. Ibid., 112.
12. James Baldwin and Mavis Nicholson, "Civil Rights | James Baldwin Interview | Mavis on Four," YouTube video, 1:08:08, posted by "ThamesTV," November 1, 2014, https://youtu.be/3Wht4NSf7E4, 16:36-17:22.

what it means to think and feel in America would surely rearrange every line of what we understand by philosophy, an exercise like this would hardly be philosophy's catastrophe. This comparative reading is not what I am prepared to do at the moment, though Hartman and Moten's works (as well as their ongoing conversations) shape my hesitation concerning how to talk about philosophy in America, a settler state, and—at times—whether this is something I wish to do.

This brings me to this essay's second point of departure, which is a concern with the claims of interrupted or unfinished attempts at recovering from loss. What are the claims of inchoate efforts at bringing terminable losses to an end?

The following excerpt is from my journal, written on March 15, 2018, when I crossed the border at Windsor:

> … the guard that interviewed me also interrogated an iraqi man who was visiting his mother: "how often does she visit you? how often? mom—you—visit—when? here, maybe google will translate it for you!" when the same guard interviewed me, he wanted to know why i was visiting for so long. no. wait. i'm moving too fast… what details do i have to hold? the man was maybe in his 60s and seemed to be more and more disoriented by the guard's impatience, which came across in the way he stopped at the end of every question, abruptly, as if to surprise or to sneak up on the people he interviewed, a you-should-know manner of address that carried with it the underlying implication that he knew you didn't know—or anyway that he was going to act as if you were a horse painted like a zebra, or a fake barn: "when was the last time you came to the states? one month? when your mom came to see you, who brought her? when did you leave iraq? why?" i didn't hear the man's name. it might not have been said out loud… on the highway now: i can't not look out the window—new providence baptist church. breakfast all day every day! israel united church. car wash. support more victories for veterans. what do i know? what can i not fail to know? what is failure?

I have come to think of this moment as a scene of dictation rather than a scene instruction because it shows how a dominating source of diction is brought to bear on where and how someone is made to be.

After crossing the border, I felt anger at the cruelty I saw, and a deep sense of powerlessness mixed with relief at not having been called out myself. I did not want to be asked if I'd ever travelled to the US on another passport. I wanted to see my family and friends. What I remember most clearly is the fog that had settled over the highway, and the lingering texture of a long-ago uncertainty, which made departure and arrival feel different from voyage and discovery.

My father's family started migrating from Peru to the Washington DC area starting the 1980s. With their support, my father and I travelled to Maryland in December of 1999, when I was eleven years old, and overstayed our tourist visas, hoping to regularize our status over time. The year after our arrival, section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act was extended. This extension offered a viable way for us to apply for permanent residency without having to leave the country and receive a ban, which could last anywhere from three to ten years. We applied. We waited. We lived undocumented. My father found a job and I started going to school. We moved from his sister's basement and into a rented apartment. Years later, my dad got a mortgage for a townhouse, and my mother, who lived in Lima, visited every few months.

In 2007, I received a half-scholarship at the University of Chicago, which I took rather hastily, and without thinking about my parents' means. Two years later, college became unaffordable. My father and I still had no status, and my mother, who had moved to Toronto after successfully applying for a Canadian permanent residency, offered to sponsor me as a dependant. By the end of my sophomore year in college, I decided to move to Canada rather than continuing to live undocumented in the US or returning to Peru for good.

I opened *The Claim of Reason* for the first time at the Miami International airport—a copy given to me as a parting gift by my friend Jackson Keenan-Koch, whose company and conversation offered me a handsome place for thinking and feeling my attachment to the country where I had lived on an expired tourist visa for nearly half my life. Waiting at the departure gate, Cavell's words came less as consolation and more as a conviction that if "the wish and the search for community are the

wish and the search for reason,"[13] then the constitution of a community, and the loss and generosity at its very centre, are matters of philosophical concern.

In 2015 I became a Canadian citizen and, in 2017, my father received his green card. Together, these two documents meant that I could legally come back to the US and see my family and friends; they meant that it was less likely for a border officer to look up the travel history on my Peruvian passport, and that if I had trouble crossing, I wouldn't risk exposing my father to detention and deportation. I made two trips. First, I wanted to cross the border and let time sink in, to think through the conditions in which loss cuts into our American lives in just these ways. Then, I wanted to see my father with a clearer head and a more capacious attention.

The border is at the centre of a contradiction that reaches all the way to America's own aspirations for freedom, which has greatly shaped my own life. However, the difficulties of countering the sources and dictations of supremacist nationalism and how these might come to bear on fate of American philosophy are concerns I can only approach partially and indirectly. I mean, they present conditions for which I cannot speak alone. In the second part of this essay, I will offer a few words for a conversation on the claim of uncertain or inchoate attempts at mustering a listening, persisting attention[14] long-enough to find a way to go on in the wake of loss. To one's own losses and those of others.

Through the process of writing this essay, I have also become convinced that the continuous effort at cultivating an empathetic ear—to what can and can't be said —underwrites philosophy insofar as philosophy is both called for and a call for community. Many works of contemporary anthropology—some of which are indeed conversant with Cavell's writing—attend to perilous attempts at re-inhabiting ordinary worlds in circumstances where endurance is a precarious material striving.[15] I will not think through these works or their multiple connections to Cavell's writing and

13. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 20.
14. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 101.
15. Diana Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Angela Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010); Clara Han, *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Bhrigupati Singh, *Poverty and the Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015); Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014).

concerns here, but limit myself to suggesting that insofar as they approach the generation, succession, and decay of relational forms by way of thick descriptions (or ostensive definitions), they may be read together in ways that are both orderly and frictively generative.

Instead, I will turn to an early film by Pedro Almodóvar, *La ley del deseo* (*The Law of Desire*, 1987), for its detailed description of four attempts at becoming different, or at the very least, "open for change."[16] In order to transit from Cavell's picture of pedagogy to Almodóvar's depictions of its uncertain process, I will draw from Lauren Berlant's reading[17] of Mary Gaitskill's novel, *Two Girls, Fat and Thin*.[18] I am attracted to both of these works for their capacity to speak on the difficulties of falling into silence. While Berlan'ts essay troubles neat distinctions between persistence and interruption, Almodovar's film, sketches the ambiguity of desire's capacity to remember the world.[19]

In particular, I am interested in Almodóvar's films because they explore the uncertainties of learning to desire community in aversion to the modes of diction that preceded, structured, and survived Francisco Franco's dictatorship. In them, the desire for conversation certainly expresses a process of learning that transforms existence, an aspiration for freedom, and a willingness for departure. However, Almodóvar also shows the process learning something that cannot be taught in a mode ambivalent mood. Concerning the fate of democracy in America, then, I am taking Almodóvar's films as capable of speaking to Cavell's own study of loss and its relation to listening, albeit from a different place.

Forms of Life and Generalizations

In the second essay of *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, "Finding as Founding," Cavell writes a description of philosophy after Emerson's search for some way of registering loss and continuing beyond the paralysis of grieving a loss that he can-

16. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 122.
17. Ibid., 121-160.
18. Mary Gaitskill, *Two Girls, Fat and Thin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).
19. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 21; Cavell, *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

not grieve.[20] In announcing and approaching the death of his only son in the essay "Experience,"[21] Emerson shows that philosophy stands for learning how to acknowledge and respond to loss, and that what is lost, which philosophy seeks to recover, is not an object, but a form of life.

The "Emerson essay" is Cavell's name for a way of responding to loss that is structured both by what loss reveals and by how this revelation rearranges the conditions of a shared existence, which is exemplified in Emerson's writing.[22] In describing this genre, Cavell offers the figure of the circle for condensing characteristics he goes on to elaborate: it's centre is everywhere and circumference, nowhere; every one of its sentences can be taken as its topic, such that there is no end to reading it; and its accomplishment depends on the will of a listening, persisting reader.

The Emerson essay stands for a radically plural and recursive of process of attunement and transformation that is accomplished as a piece of writing. It's radical plurality, expressed in the first of the claims through which Cavell describes this genre, can also be glossed as the idea that when loss cuts all the way to one's foundation, there is "no established public source"[23] on what direction is to be taken: everything matters. Every source of what we do and say comes to bear on each the attempt at recovering a connection with the world in and through a scene of rupture, such that the effort at learning what to make of a particular loss, which the Emerson essay enacts, consists in showing at least two different loops. As a mode of inquiry into what might come after rupture, one of its tasks is "to unearth the conditions of our diction,"[24] and so to place what has been lost within some larger picture of the world's sequences and consequences. That is to say, the Emerson essay joins a description of what has been broken to a description of the conditions in which breaking becomes possible and recovery, possible. Cavell returns to this idea often in his writing by remarking on the homonymity of the words "mourning" and "morning,"[25] bringing this consideration to bear on the disposition the essayist. The manner of thinking that the Emerson es-

20. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 106.
21. Emerson, R.W. "Experience," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Major Prose*, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2015).
22. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 108.
23. Ibid., 106.
24. Ibid., 81.
25. Ibid., 84; Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

say enacts and stands for has the structure of mourning as a descent into night, which anticipates the possibility of coming into the world again.

What the Emerson essay recovers, therefore, are possibilities of and for a shared existence, not immutable truths, but the ground on which so much as a true statement can be made. Earlier, I called these possibilities "forms of life." The concept of a form of life, in Cavell's writing, registers the relation between the two mutually constitutive figures of community and reason. While the figure of community makes it possible to imagine a mode of association,[26] the figure of reason renders the ways of knowing and doing (topics, words)[27] that association both demands and enables. Rather than transcendental and timeless categories, forms of life are temporalized and emplaced attunements. In *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, Cavell describes the Wittgensteinian concept of a form of life in more detail by using the Emersonian figure of a generalization:

> Generalization is an Emersonian tone or function most fully computed in "Circles" where the generation of new circles is associated with what we ordinarily call generalizations and genesis and generations; and also with the idea of general as meaning the multitude and as meaning a ranking officer and a ranking term; and equally with the idea of generosity. And if the figure of a circle is the self-image of an Emerson essay, then one generation in question refers to the genre of the Emerson essay.[28]

A generalization names the normative order that binds a collection of common things (general), which is as emergent (genesis) as it is successive (generation) because it is achieved continuously as a matter of association (generosity) and patterning (genre). Roughly, this is the background over which Cavell's picture of pedagogy can be understood: forms of life constitute the conditions in which possibility can be enacted and experienced.[29] Thus, the concept of a form of life can be used to describe situated knowledges and practices that continuously emerge through the specific communities

26. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
27. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 90, 93-4.
28. Ibid., 99.
29. Ibid., 81.

(or relationships) that make up an ordinary world.[30] On this picture, forms are vulnerable to the possibilities of coming undone and remaining unseen. This vulnerability, which I have so far referred to in very general terms as "loss" and "recovery," is more amply registered in Cavell's work also as a matter of flexibility, and—conceptually—as a concern with the truth and scandal of skepticism.

Cavell's concept of skepticism registers the limits of our situated capacities to grasp and so reproduce the forms of a shared world.[31] After Kant, Wittgenstein, and Emerson, Cavell describes this slipperiness as the "resistance of phenomena" and the "lubricity of things,"[32] and as the grounds for "our disappointment" with the success of our knowledge rather than its failure.[33] Skepticism, then, marks our disappointment with the success of situated knowledge because it faces us with the constitutive vulnerability of the relations that make doing and knowing possible. Uncertainty, after all, is an unavoidable condition of finding oneself bound to a world whose places and topics cannot be reduced to a single set of terms. (We are continuously exposed to the irresolvable pull between the world's demands and the limits of our partiality.) To frame skepticism as a recurrent possibility of knowledge implies accepting that we are irreparably exposed to loss, and so continuously called on to change courses, and to establish a way of moving between old and new trajectories.[34]

Learning is one of Cavell's names for the transformative process of becoming increasingly receptive to the world—a process that begins with finding it relevant (even if painful) when things shows themselves to be different than we expect. Wittgenstein's concept of the scene of instruction registers not only our exposure to the truth and scandal of skepticism—that we are never beyond the claims of learning, and that learning is not pain-free[35]—but also our acknowledgement of an imminent departure:

> "If I have exhausted"—very famous remark of Wittgenstein's scene—if I have exhausted the justifications for following the rules of mathematics or ordinary

30. Ibid., 81; Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988): 575-599.
31. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 88.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 89.
34. Ibid., 109.
35. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 171.

> language as I do, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then, I am inclined to say, 'this is simply what I do.' That was Wittgenstein. How to read this scene is at the core of a disagreement about how to read The Investigations more generally... The moral I draw focuses on the moment of impasse depicted as the teacher's falling silent, expressed, as I take the scene, not only in the sense of finality in the words, 'this is simply what I do,' but in the introduction of these words by the phrase, 'then I am inclined to say,' which suggests that the words are, in fact, not said... A way to draw what I think of as the moral of recurrent silence is to say that at some point in teaching, the pupil must go on, and want to go on, alone. Another way is to say that the teacher is to know both when even how to fall silent, and when and how to break his or her silence.[36]

Insofar as a scene of instruction joins the possibility of learning and the disappointing (or devastating) moment when the world shows itself to be other than one was prepared to anticipate, it marks a process of transition where doubt can yield to a more receptive disposition: "as it were[, I] turn my palms outward, as if to exhibit the kind of creature I am, and declare my ground occupied, only mine, ceding yours."[37] If generalizations—on this picture—stand for situated knowledge, then maybe the different ways in which people respond to skepticism can perhaps be imagined as situations of acknowledgement.

As a response to the scene of instruction, then, the figure of the posture of thinking registers different ways of searching for an orientation on uneven ground:

> ... suppose the leaps are uses of the feet to dance (not, say, to march)—as when one uses the hands to clap (not to clutch). But Nietzsche's leaping and dancing, like Emerson's dancing and standing and sitting, and like Thoreau's sitting long enough in some attractive spot, pose further questions of the posture of thinking, following, succeeding; in particular questions of *starting* to think.[38]

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36. Cavell, "Points of Departure: Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow," YouTube video, 1:08:08, posted by "GradSpotlight," August 14, 2012, https://youtu.be/bTCk_u1fpxc, 13:15-18:19.
37. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 115.
38. Ibid., 115.

Here, marching appears as an overbearing way of moving (which is to say philosophizing), as if clinging to the ground with one's feet, expecting that the ground appear only as one is prepared to grasp it, in a straight line. Cavell often refers to this clutching disposition as the more unhandsome part of our own constitution, which denies the separateness of the very forms "to which we seek attachment."[39]

Contrastingly, the more ecstatic postures of thinking that Cavell figures as falling and dancing enact philosophy as a capacious mode of receptivity and a capacity for transformation, which begins by abandoning any claims on the continuation of a sequence as one has known it. Indeed, this other way of recovering a way to go on requires letting the fragments of what has come apart, the world's parts to "draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight."[40] Of course, it's not easy. If forms of life constitute the (changing) ground beneath our feet—meaning, the conditions of a shared existence—then letting ourselves endure their foundering comes to letting the ground fall away beneath our feet. The invitation to imagine what it could mean for philosophy to proceed by leaping and dancing, however, is a reminder that our bodies can draw into the air—but only for a moment. Though we can leap, we cannot fly. This seemingly trivial observation can be given a deeper tone in the claim that there are no cures for being on earth,[41] where gravity is the strongest natural weight or attractive force exerted on us.

When a rupture marks the distance between two possible worlds (old and new), the posture of thinking that the Emerson essay adopts is an appeal to one's experience, not as a search for concepts to apply,[42] but as the achievement of silence.[43] As I understand it, rather than the absence of sound, Cavellian silence names the condition of being both exposed and attentive to an uncertain process of determination. This means enduring loss (or anyway, a negation of direction) along with observing the implications that ripple out from it, a practice where good-enough descripti-

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39. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 86.
40. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979) 25.
41. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),129.
42. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 86.
43. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 159-160.

ons of the conditions in which the world achieved its old coherence make it possible to see and judge its new one.[44]

As a generous response to rupture and skepticism, the Emerson essay not only musters the patience required for achieving a radical receptivity,[45] but also announces and provides the conditions of its search for recovery.[46] In this process, the essayist's task is to re-member what has been sundered, which is to say, to observe the interruptive elaboration of form as a process whose determining force is in every part's attraction for the others.[47] In writing after Emerson, Cavell uses the phrase "the power of passiveness"[48] to describe the capacity to receive the world as it shows itself (in media res), a power he contrasts with the powerlessness of "impotently clutching fingers"[49] and the denial the world's separateness in the forceful application of a concept. Philosophizing by leaping and dancing (both of which include falling) confronts us with a radical sense of our partiality, and so the need for a listening, persisting attention, which is certainly a matter of will,[50] but not only.

To me, there seems to be an irresolvable pull at the centre of what I earlier called the situation of acknowledgement. After all, our resources for learning – "economic, spiritual, epistemological, metaphysical, geographical" – are both "incompletely charted"[51] and finite. I take this to mean that they can only be charted in and through the perilous work of essaying. (Tuition is costly. Is this cost pragmatic?[52] The question, of course, cuts both ways. Is avoidance affordable?)

Another way of expressing this concern could be to say that the concept of situated knowledges and situations of acknowledgement prompt us to think about thinking in terms of sites (places, topics). Cavell's reminder that "where you can leap to depends on where you stand" 18 seems particularly important to me insofar as overcoming thinking as clutching means finding yourself perched at the threshold between two possible worlds, both leaping and falling into silence. These displace-

44. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 112.
45. Ibid., 80.
46. Ibid., 103.
47. Ibid., 100.
48. Ibid., 115.
49. Ibid., 86.
50. Ibid., 101.
51. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2000), 209.
52. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 115.

ments—gaps[53] or breaks that call for lingering attention[54]—constitute a particularly difficult places to occupy, let alone describe. After Thoreau, Cavell's name for whatever holds a reader long enough to start to think (again and again) is an attractive spot, a handsome place. Seen this way, a handsome place can be a resource for lasting through the exposures of falling into silence, and source for imagining what might be on the other side of an uncertain leap.

As a site where philosophy is possible, "what about America is forbidding, prohibitive, negative—the place or the topic of the place?"[55] This question loops back to the scene of dictation at the beginning of this essay. How might I account for the sources of the crossing guard's inquisitional demands in their word choice and tone? In the force behind them? In the way that force reached to me and the other people waiting silently in line?

How are we to know the ground we can occupy without turning our separateness (or someone else's) into isolation? And how are we to account for the expenses of occupying just this ground? Do I mean for these questions to sting? A sting is what you might feel when someone punches you with great force and agility, minimizing the surface area of the impact and drawing back their fist so as to both localize and intensify the impact. A sting, however, is also what you feel when you're cleaning out a wound. So, it's not in spite of knowing that a Cavellian interrogation of America would strive to leave us all intact that I ask these questions, but because of it. I would like all of us to be left intact. And what is that to look like? Where am I standing? (Of whom can I ask these questions? And who has been asking some version of them so long as what we call America has called for and provided topics for thinking and feeling deeply? My optimism here is not separable from a deep sense of hazard and uncertainty.) Having to learn something that no one can teach can inspire desire and dread, without either of these feelings shouldering out the other. (After all, isn't it always possible that in falling into silence—or in taking or avoiding just this or that leap from it—you might fail, where you could have otherwise succeeded in thinking and feeling something through?)

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53. Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
54. Moten, *In the Break*.
55. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 92.

Originating in Dismemberment

In "Two Girls, Fat and Thin," Lauren Berlant offers a picture of persisting, which stands in a more ambivalent relation to the possibility of learning something that can't be taught than Cavell's picture of the posture of thinking. Mary Gaitskill's novel—the subject of Berlant's essay—describes a friendship between Dorothy Never and Justine Shade, two women who share interest in the philosophy of Anna Granite, a figure who promises her readers "that identification with one's sexual and intellectual power can produce happiness and fulfillment, achieving a victory over the deadening normal world."[56] In addition to their interest in Granite, Dorothy and Justine also share "the painful optimism" of people trying to live with a history of hurt.[57] They struggle with the difficulty of finding a stable orientation after surviving child abuse.

With Gaitskill's novel, Berlant draws her attention to unheroic modes of agency-in-crisis,[58] which take place between the loss of foundation and the possibility of falling into silence. She focuses on how the pleasures of food, sex, and intellection allow Dorothy and Justine to both maintain and undermine an attachment to the possibility of transformation. Eating, for example, offers "a formalist strategy... of time- and space- making" which allows Dorothy and Justine to make pockets of time where for evading the pressures of the present moment through tactics of counter-absorption;[59] reading protects fantasy while simultaneously hedging the difficulty of becoming receptive to a world that reveals itself by disappointing the subject's (mis)recognitions;[60] using formal genres to over-determine the sexual encounter offers a holding environment while avoiding the threatening claims of inter-subjectivity.[61]

Moving swiftly from one pleasure to another means that there is no time for learning any lessons, though the possibility of turning avoidance into aversive thinking is not foreclosed altogether: "to live for one's snack is to live by the rhythm of one's own impulse for pleasure... a way of both being and not being in the world."[62]

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56. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 127.
57. Ibid., 126.
58. Ibid., 101, 124.
59. Ibid., 137.
60. Ibid., 146.
61. Ibid., 145, 151.
62. Ibid., 135.

What could be reduced to compulsive behaviour, Berlant insists, actually expresses a complex relation to a wounded, wounding attachment, which is maintained by continuously staging a process of absorption that allows Dorothy and Justine to persist in the capacity to desire by entering and averting the world at the same time.[63] For Dorothy and Justine, then, pleasure becomes a way of avoiding silence, and the avoidance of silence becomes a manner of preserving a wounded optimism against enduring the formlessness of falling into silence. This makes for an ambivalent relation to the possibility of becoming teachable in a way bears further reading and thinking. For Dorothy and Justine, interruption is the cost of maintaining a fragile optimism, of marking "a direction for the will to take,"[64] which they continuously defer. Berlant's reading of Gaitskill's novel makes it possible to ask in more detail after the work of persisting not only to read and to think, but also to endure falling into silence.

Depending on how one reads Cavell (when he claims that Emerson's writing is both pre-philosophical and already a work of philosophy), and on how one reads Berlant, the end of Gaitskill's novel might or might not stand for (something close to) the beginning of philosophy. *Two Girls, Fat and Thin* ends shortly after Dorothy comes to Justine's place unannounced and unexpectedly interrupts a sexual assault, helping Justine survive. Exhausted after this violent scene, "finally disburdened of the weight of bearing themselves," Dorothy and Justine fall asleep together.[65] As Berlant notes, though "this mutual fall into bed is not nothing,"[66] it is not exactly clear what it's relation might be to the possibility of becoming teachable. Berlant's distinction between self-continuity and self-extension[67] is useful for articulating the ways in which persisting to read and to think implies more than one mode of endurance, and for describing a scene where endurance and perfectionism become troublingly folded into each other. Is the end of a "self-consuming negotiation of ambivalence"[68] imaginable as the end of a terminable loss? Is it the same as the possibility of becoming "awfully teachable, for a minute"?[69] Is it a lesson learned?[70]

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63. Ibid., 133.
64. Ibid., 138.
65. Ibid., 158.
66. Ibid., 152.
67. Ibid., 99.
68. Ibid., 159.
69. Ibid., 125.
70. Ibid., 152.

I have so far tried to describe Cavell's picture of philosophy as the work of recovering from a terminable loss, and then tried to place alongside it a more polyvalent and interruptive account of persisting to read to think, which is neither (straightforwardly) unhandsome nor pedagogical. Berlant's essay, I suggested, provides a description of a relation between pain, history, and desire, which both expresses a concern with learning, and suggests that persisting is a matter of attachment, alongside reading and thinking. Often, these different dimensions of a larger, more complicated pursuit get in the way of each other, and the possibility of perfectionism doesn't become debased as much as it stalls out and flounders. Now I want to turn toward Almodovar's work – particularly to the film *The Law of Desire* – in order to ask after scenes where desire flounders in ambivalent attempts to imagine a more satisfying way to live. Where Cavell's picture of patience and thinking emphasizes the work of giving up a standing generalization in order to become receptive to a new signal, Almodovar offers narratives of unruly desires caught between silence and white noise.

One way to begin sketching the connections between Cavell and Almodovar's works could be to observe that they both share an interest in the works of Alfred Hitchcock, and then to gesture to its significance. After William Rothman, Cavell observes Hitchcock's attention to the fact that filming "inevitably proceeds by severing things, both in cutting and, originally, in framing."[71] Of course, this fact deserves keener attention than I can give at the moment, but for now, I will only say that Hitchcock's self-conscious use of film's murderous and idealizing capacity to dismember and re-member the world becomes a point of contact for Cavell and Almodovar's pictures of the truth and scandal of skepticism. Both Cavell and Almodovar explore narratives in which people come to know and respond to the lubricity of things by hazarding to become formless (nameless?) in order to become teachable (receptive?). Almodovar, however, seems to focus on markedly more ambivalent, ambiguous, and floundering attempts at transformation, caught between an ongoing history of hurt and the possibility of finding a more satisfying way to live.

Another way to sketch the possibility of putting Cavell's writing and Almodovar's films in conversation could be to ask after how Almodovar's characters meet the possibility of learning. Often, this is a question of the manner in which they come to

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71. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 165.

approach and acknowledge tragedy in their own lives. This approach will take up most of my reading. Almodovar's lead characters are continuously faced with the difficulty and uncertainty of having to re-member their lives in imperfect conditions, which is to say both to recollect and to reinvent them (out of nothing more and nothing less than convention). They are creatures of transition. They flounder in their contradictory and often equivocal attempts at transformation, as these attempts require a confrontation between their lives and words, and the lives that are imagined for them in and through the generalizations that constitute a shared world.[72] Bewildered by the lubricity of things, not knowing the meaning of their words, and wary (if not avoidant) of becoming formless, they don't so much leap as leap around. In a Cavellian mood, we might describe these attempts at becoming and remaining teachable as floundering modes of aversive thinking, caught in a struggle between the possibilities of achieving silence and refusing the world altogether.

Pablo (Eusebio Poncela) is a writer, filmmaker, and theatre director who enjoys being a small-time celebrity in Madrid, and Tina (Carmen Maura), his sister, is a trans woman, who is raising a teenage daughter – Ada (Manuela Velasco) – in an economically unstable situation. The relationship between Pablo and Tina is one of the film's centres for the ways in which it asks of them to improvise a conversation about a broken home and a shared history of abandonment. Another of the film's centres is Pablo's relationship with Juan (Miguel Molina), a lover whose desire for closeness and intimacy asks that Pablo examine what he takes love to be—and to acknowledge the separateness and partiality of a mutual education. Lastly, the film also turns on Pablo's relationship with Antonio (Antonio Banderas). Antonio is twenty years old. He idolizes Pablo and struggles with exploring his own desire for men in light of his family's conservatism. At the crossing of these pulls, Antonio becomes increasingly desperate and possessive until his refusal of the world's separateness turns fatal.

In this reading of *The Law of Desire*, however, I will focus on Pablo's writing as a medium for learning to think and to feel – which is to say, re-member – a shared world. This means that I will approach the film through Pablo's letters to Juan, as well as through the script he tries to write for a film loosely based on Tina's story. I

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72. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 125.

am interested in these objects because of the ways in which they register the ambiguity of Pablo's use of writing to both acknowledge and avoid the people in his life.

An important scene for introducing Pablo's character, and showing his lack of clarity comes early in the film as a talk show interview, where the host (Rossy de Palma) prompts Pablo to describe what he would ask for from an ideal lover. Pablo responds with a list:

> Well, [I would ask] that he not to come with me to parties but wait at home for the gossip; that he not interrupt me when I'm on the typewriter; that he read the same books as me; that he have knowledge of medicine, law, plumbing, and electricity. In short, that he adore me, but not nag me, and that he accept I am useless.

In declaring his uselessness at practical things along with his unwillingness to be bothered by other's people's desires, Pablo is saying at least two things. He prefers not to concern himself with figuring out how things work, or with thinking and feeling on terms other than his own. Paradoxically, though Pablo makes a living telling stories, he refuses to imagine what he cannot see. This scene announces Pablo's demand for extraordinary devotedness as one of the topics that will emerge throughout the fim in Pablo's relationships with Tina, Antonio, and Juan.

We see Juan for the first time at the premier of Pablo's film. They go to the afterparty together, and during a brief conversation in a bathroom stall, we learn that Juan will be leaving Madrid for the summer to work at his sister's bar near the coast. For the rest of the evening, Juan and Pablo socialize separately, although exchanging glances at a distance. The sequence ends with Pablo leaving the club alone after seeing Juan flirting and kissing someone else. Juan follows Pablo home. They talk. They take sleeping pills. They embrace and fall into bed together.

Early in the summer, Juan sends Pablo a short letter and a photograph of the Trafalgar lighthouse: "Dear Pablo: This is the lighthouse I talked to you about. You would like to film here. I love coming here at dawn. How are you? Write to me. A kiss, Juan." Pablo responds with a message saying that Juan's letter is "good," but not

what he needs. He also sends Juan a separate letter, which he asks Juan to sign and send instead:

> I didn't leave Madrid to forget you because if I forget about you, as you suggest, I'm afraid I'll be left empty. Tell me everything you're up to—the books you read, the films you watch, the records you've bought, if you've gotten a cold. I want to share everything that's yours. Only avoid telling me if you've met someone you like. That's the only thing I couldn't bear sharing. I want to see you. You decide when. I adore you.

Pablo's letter (to himself) exposes a range of ambivalent desires, proclaiming, hedging, and disavowing a wish for intimacy. For Pablo, as we see, to be adored is to be wanted beyond the responsibility of having to listen and to read long-enough to become receptive and responsive to an experience of the world when it exceeds his own. Juan's letter, on the other hand, expresses a desire for proximity rather than a particular object, and then describes his habit of sitting by the lighthouse and waiting for the sun to rise.

When Pablo's letters eventually stop, Juan calls to ask why he is not writing in a scene that makes explicit that the film is going to connect the topic of desire and the topics of writing and forgetting. As Pablo and Juan speak on the phone, we see close-ups of their faces looking (obliquely) in each other's direction across a split frame. Though Pablo is clearly moved by Juan's demand for reciprocity, it's impossible to tell whether he is willing to let Juan's feelings dawn on him—that is, appear as lost on him and so as requiring attention and recovery. Pablo's reply to Juan's question is as short as it is enigmatic: "I'm trying to forget, and when trying to forget, one doesn't write." It points in at least two different directions at once. On the one hand, Pablo is evidently saying that he is trying to forget—and move on from—Juan. On the other, however, he can also be understood as saying that he is trying to forget a way of knowing and doing desire, not so much for Juan's sake, as for his own. Do we know Pablo to be capable of this insight? And do we know him and Juan to share this intimacy? How does a person learn that someone else is capable of being different?

The film's concerns with desire, writing and forgetting take on a fuller dimension in Pablo's quarrel with his sister, Tina, over the script of his newest film. As with Pablo's TV interview, a scene that's significant for knowing Tina is her visit to the chapel of the school where she used to go as a child—the Ramiro de Maeztu Institute. This sequence begins with Tina and Ada—her daughter—walking down Serrano Street, passing by the school, and deciding spontaneously to sneak into the building. As they walk into the chapel, we hear and see the priest playing the organ to "O Virgen Más Pura," a hymn that Tina knows by heart, and mouths along to as she takes off her sunglasses and begins to look through the space: "O Virgin… wipe away my tears of bitter pain."

Singing, Tina approaches the priest—father Constantino (Germán Cobos)—and tells him that as a child she used to be a soloist in the choir. Father Constantino, his fingers still on the keys, replies that she reminds him of an old student, a bit. Tina shifts slightly, as if trying to find a more direct way to face him, before saying that she used to be that boy. Father Constantino stops playing the organ:

CONSTANTINO: Are you married?

TINA: No. I'm afraid I'm condemned to solitude.

CONSTANTINO: That can't ever be said.

TINA: I can. In my life there have only been two men. One was you, my spiritual mentor, and the other was my father. Both abandoned me. Now I can't trust in any other.

CONSTANTINO: Turn yourself to God. He will not ever abandon you.

TINA: Maybe you are right. I think I'd like to sing in the choir again.

CONSTANTINO: Not here, please.

TINA: Why?

CONSTANTINO: If it's God you're looking for, go to any other church. He's in all of them.

TINA: But my memories are here!

CONSTANTINO: Run away from them as I have run.

TINA: I don't want to. Memories are all I have left.

This sequence seems to announce Tina's difficulty in trusting others to acknowledge the claims of her pain. When Pablo tells Tina that he is writing a script inspired in her life, trust is at the centre of their argument:

> TINA: I don't have problems with men because for me it's already a long time since they no longer exist.
> PABLO: And that doesn't seem like much of a problem to you?
> TINA: What's going on? Are you also going to treat me as if I were a freak?
> PABLO: Hey stop. I didn't say that.
> TINA: Talk about your own problems with men and leave me in peace!
> PABLO: You want to listen to me?
> TINA: I forbid you to touch even the most minor event in my life. For however ridiculous it might be, I have the right to be respected.
> PABLO: But who said your life is ridiculous?
> TINA: No one needs to say it. I know.
> PABLO: Hey, hey, you wanna listen a minute?
> TINA: Yes, of course, yes—my failures with men are more than the plot of a script. I won't allow you or anyone to play with them.
> PABLO: No one is going to play with them!
> TINA: They're mine, you hear? Mine!
> PABLO: So go and poison your life with them if you like them so much
> TINA: I don't like them, son of a bitch! But I've had to pay a very high cost for those failures. They're all I have.

Tina does not trust Pablo to receive her pain—say to make it present to himself beyond genres that would make it so extraordinary and grotesque as to put her beyond the claim to "respect," taking her, for example, as something to be shown, an object of "ridicule," a "freak" ("fenómeno"). Hours later, Pablo shows up at Tina's apartment bringing two photographs of them as children, which he confesses to having kept against her wishes and then tears in two: "I promised not to ask you anything and I think I've kept my promise for all these years, but don't forget that in your past, there's also part of mine." Pablo's relationship with Tina—like his relati-

onship with Juan—demands that he re-member something he cannot see, a transformation, which the film makes possible in and through another loss.

Over the summer, Pablo begins an affair with a young man who is as extraordinarily devoted as he is possessive. Antonio paints the bathroom ceiling, fixes the light switch in the hall, and begins to manage more of Pablo's than than Pablo is willing to concede. When Antonio leaves Madrid to visit his family for a few weeks, he demands that Pablo write to him, and that he use a woman's name, "Laura P," so his family won't know that Pablo is a man. The letters Pablo exchanges with Antonio become—in a sense—an inversion of the letters he exchanges with Juan, as they place Pablo in the role of having to respond to someone else's denial of his separateness. This dynamic between Antonio and Pablo doesn't last, however, and Pablo eventually makes it clear that there is nothing between them: "Antonio: I don't love you. I still love Juan. I won't come to see you because I will go see him. Forget me and stop lying to yourself. I've never lied to you, Laura P." This exchange becomes a turning point in the film. After reading Pablo's letter, Antonio goes to look for Juan. Antonio finds Juan working the closing shift at his sister's bar and introduces himself as Pablo's new boyfriend. While Juan is confused by the news, he nevertheless accepts it. Wanting to talk in order to have a better picture of things rather than control them, Juan invites Antonio to see the lighthouse. While they walk along the cliffs, Antonio assaults Juan, throwing him down and to the water.

The following day, Pablo arrives in Juan's town to attend the funeral. After seeing Juan's body and his grieving relatives and neighbours, Pablo is met by a local police officer, who brings him into the station for questioning. Driven to learn what happened, Pablo drives to Antonio's house. To Pablo's horror, Antonio confesses to the murder. Both too early to recover from the loss and too late to prevent it, Pablo rushes out of the house and drives back to Madrid.

We see part of Pablo's drive as two superimposed shots half-dissolving into each other, a close-up of the car's wheels and an extreme close-up of his eyes as he begins to weep. The explicit blending of these two images seems to me to mark a not only an eminent voyage or willingness for departure, but also to indicate Pablo's eyes as the object that is to be transformed and liberated through mourning. As if it were Pablo's eyes that are on their way from one place to another. This sequence, however,

is interrupted by a crash. We see Pablo blink uncomfortably, as the tears obstruct his vision. Then the camera cuts to an approaching tree and we hear the crash.

The accident leaves Pablo severely injured and suffering from amnesia, allowing the film to loop back to its concern with writing, memory and desire. This happens in a scene at the hospital, which echoes the earlier quarrel between Tina and Pablo over the script of his movie. In an effort to help Pablo regain a knowledge of their bond, Tina tells him their life story, including her side of it, which she had earlier guarded:

> Our parents separated when we were very young. You stayed with mom, here, in Madrid. This is Madrid, and I went with dad, to Morocco. He's a painter, and he had a studio there. Pablo, there are things we've never talked about. It was my fault that our parents separated. I was involved with dad. One day, mom found us out, and, well, just imagine.

Seeing that Pablo can't piece things together on his own, Tina begins to despair: "your amnesia leaves me without a past. If you don't recover your memory, I will go mad!" With these words, she rushes to her purse and pulls out the two photographs that Pablo tore up during their argument. We see a black and white image of two boys in shorts, the index of an irretrievable past, dis-membered and re-membered many times over—until then—in isolation.

The reversal of positions in this scene, which recalls an earlier quarrel between Pablo and Tina over the script of his film, renders an uncertainty internal to the film's picture of forgetting. On the one hand, forgetting seems to stand for the possibility of interrupting one's own suffering, which in turn makes one's experience of that suffering (and of the world as a place where people suffer) inaccessible. On the other hand, forgetting seems to also stand for the possibility of abandoning a pattern, and giving more generous attention to how different fragments draw attention to themselves according to their own weight.

At the end of the film, we know that Pablo recovers his memory, and that he has arrived at a good-enough position to begin thinking and feeling deeply, if he can find a place to read persistently and the willingness to listen. We don't know, howe-

ver, if he rebuilds his relationship with Tina, or whether he will let Juan and Antonio's deaths happen to him. We don't know, that is, whether Pablo will let his mourning for them transform him. Of course, there are many more details in the film than I have been able to describe, some of which come to bear on Pablo's writing, and others of which mark new lines of inquiry.[73] Nevertheless, I hope I have said enough to show that Pablo's arrival at a threshold where he can see that there is work to be done comes to "a medium for philosophy,"[74] which is to say, to an important part in a process of learning and transformation.

Outroduction

On March 15, 2018, I found myself standing somewhere unapproachable—waiting in line at the Windsor-Detroit border, where someone I didn't know was cruelly bullied by a border officer and then taken to a separate room for more questioning. The man was in his early sixties. English was not his first language, and he was crossing into US to see his mother. I was moved by his silence and paralyzed by the anger and fear I felt at the guard's cruelty. It took me more than a year to realize that I also felt profoundly sad. At the beginning of this essay, I said that I have come to think of this moment as a scene of dictation rather than a scene of instruction because it shows how a dominating source of diction is brought to bear on where and how someone is

73. I have in mind, for example, the film's first sequence, which shows the end of Pablo's latest film, and then shifts between different registers (say, levels) of the diagetic world—from Pablo's film to the studio where the film dubbed to the theatre where it's screened. (Is this Hitchcockian manoeuvre telling us something about the way desire can be haunted? Is it offering dubbing as a picture of conformity?) Another detail I will not be able to describe at length is the sequence in which Juan and Pablo exchange gazes across a crowded room after the premier of Pablo's film. (Does it show that they are both hesitant and capable of following each other? And is this capacity to follow a counterpoint to Pablo's claim to want to be adored? Do Pablo and Juan's gazes offer a parallel text for understanding their words?) Similarly, I said nearly nothing anything about Antonio's character. Though he appears to be the most clutching of the four, he is also the youngest and the most sheltered. For those paying close attention to him throughout the film, it's possible to see that he is trying to learn how to kiss (and to imagine that he is equally trying to learn how to bottom). (Would giving attention to Antonio's essaying prompt us to ask after his capacity to learn in relation to his isolation? Could Antonio have become a different person if Pablo had taken the trouble to read him more patiently? But isn't the very possibility of a shift in Pablo's capacity to read precisely the film's drama?) Similarly, though I hint at Juan's Emersonian posture, I never address it directly, nor what to make of its success and failure. Lastly, I also say nothing of Tina's relationship with the detectives and the doctor that become central to the second part of the movie. (There is simply no end to reading.)
74. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 90.

made to be. (Is policing anti-philosophical? I mean, is it clutching?) If there is a mode of optimism that I wish to insist on at the end of this essay, it's that what is prohibitive about a place stands not only as its unapproachability[75] but also for its newness. This, however, takes compassion, which is to say, a willingness for (finding our limits in repeated acts of) description.

75. Ibid., 92.

19. Thinking with Cavell about (His) Death

ERIC RITTER

I am grateful to David LaRocca for inviting contributors to this special commemorative issue on the life and thought of Stanley Cavell. What follows is a brief philosophical reflection on what it means to think through the death of someone like Cavell, whose life and work continue to live on in so many respects and within so many people, as both this special issue and my experience in Stanley Cavell's study bear witness to. I would argue that it is difficult to think through Cavell's death adequately (that is, to get the right sort of concepts in play). The cause of this difficulty is a productive tension within the extraordinary ordinariness of the concept of death itself: between the fact of cessation of biological life and the various respects in which Cavell has not ceased to exist, especially within the hearts and minds of so many. I aim in this piece to think with Cavell—that is, using tools he has provided—about (his own) death, thus performing the very productive tension which is the subject of the essay. I interweave some anecdotes from the past year spent working with the Cavell family to inventory and organize Cavell's papers at the family's home in Brookline, Massachusetts.

1.

In August of 2019, a little more than a year after Stanley Cavell's death, I had the immense privilege of being present at the unveiling ceremony of his grave. For the occasion, a small group of Cavell's family had arrived at the family's home in Brookline, Massachusetts, to honor and celebrate Stanley Cavell's life. After the ceremony, and for the rest of the weekend, his presence lingered in the house. Our conversations kept returning to him. We even listened to a recording of Cavell masterfully playing jazz showtunes on the piano still standing in his living room. Yet despite those vari-

ous presences, he—Stanley Cavell—was absent. His body had been buried next to his longtime friends and Harvard colleagues, John Rawls and Robert Nozick, across the Charles River in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

I was in Brookline that summer because Cathleen Cavell, Stanley's wife of fifty years and literary executor, designated me, after his death, to organize and catalogue the masses of books and documents and papers with which her husband had filled his study. The task was to design and implement an initial archival system to remain in place until the Cavell family decided to transfer the material to a library or archive suitable for scholarly research. With the guidance of Vanderbilt University librarians, I designed a replicable archival system, and read, studied, sorted, and inventoried more than two-dozen archival boxes full of print material, plus thousands of digital files. Perhaps most importantly, I rediscovered an unpublished manuscript called *Here and There: Sites of Philosophy*, now in the process of posthumous publication.

The very nature of the archival project suggests that Cavell's death will not mark the end of what we will learn from him. Despite his absence from his home, he was present in the books, notes, journals, and unfinished works, in his photographs and pens, in the synecdoche of his younger son's baseball on top of his many annotated editions of King Lear. It is this productive tension between Cavell's absence or non- existence (e.g., the burial) and his continued presences or existence (e.g., his study and unfinished work, his family and friends, future scholarship and other creative work indebted to him) that I aim to briefly explore here. How do we make sense of Cavell's death in light of such vibrant echoes of his life? The problem is that our everyday usage of the concept is not yet clear to us. Surprisingly, the everyday concept of death itself contains the keys to help make sense of such a tension, if we can follow out the heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting applications of it without seeking refuge in an essential or Platonist core.

2.

There are several places in his expansive body of work where Cavell explores the connection between the completion or termination of a sentence and the terminati-

on of a variety of life—a "little death." There are also a few places in his work where Cavell registers the satisfaction of strong desire as a variety of, or as bearing a family resemblance to, a death. Taken together, we can take these family resemblances to provide the building blocks of a complex and unifying rule, or a conceptual web guiding many disparate applications, of the "concept" of death. In other words, to showcase something I have learned from Cavell, only after we have acquired a sense of the ordinary but extraordinary (taken together, one might say "uncanny") complexity and creativity within the everyday usage of the concept of death, can we begin to think philosophically about the meaning of Stanley Cavell's death.

Let us very briefly look at three quotations which help give shape to such a complex and creative concept. The first is from Cavell's preface to the updated edition of *Must We Mean What We Say?* (2002):

> [...] I understand the presence of notable, surprising anticipations to suggest something more specific about the way, or space within which, I work, which I can put negatively as occurring within the knowledge that I never get things right, or let's rather say, see them through, the first time, causing my efforts perpetually to leave things so they can be, and ask to be, returned to.[1]

The second is from *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990):

> I mean to leave everything I will say, or have, I guess, ever said, as in a sense provisional, the sense, that is, to be gone on from.[2]

The third is from *The Senses of Walden* (1972, 1981):

> Writing, at its best, will come to a finish in each mark of meaning, in each portion and sentence and word.[3]

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1. Cavell, "Preface to Updated Edition of *Must We Mean What We Say?*" in *Must We Mean What We Say: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xvii.
2. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 33.
3. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden, An Expanded Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 27.

Permit me to put aside the obvious differences in theme and content for a moment. Taken together, these passages can be taken to mean that, far from the repeated *termination* of a thought or sentence, Cavell's philosophy *never* achieves an end or termination, never "sees a thought through" or "gets things right." And this reading is so much as possible because, within the reservoir of our ordinary language and ordinary practices, we "repeat" or "return" to something because it is not *yet* finished. If this way of reading him were correct, then Cavell might be said to have *never* finished *any* of his sentences, to have never left us to ourselves before.

However, this is not what I understand Cavell to be saying in these passages. To speak as an ordinary language philosopher—hence I am claiming and hoping for your agreement but I am also powerless to *command* it—we also "repeat" or "return" to something (a text, problem, question, or person) not only because we have not yet finished it, but also because we have not yet *exhausted* it. We—or what I hope is a "we" — may come to have this relation to art objects and to people we love, for example, if we can find a way to "leave things so they can be, and *ask* to be, returned to."[4] It is in this latter sense of never exhausting a text or a thought, or of leaving things so that they ask to be returned to, that I read Cavell's report that he works "within the knowledge" that he "never get[s] things right," never "see[s] them through" the first time.[5] Finishing or terminating a thought or sentence—a "mark"—need not mean exhausting the object of the thought. In fact, the completion of an act of understanding may serve to increase our interest in what we have understood. Paradoxically, then, Cavell suggests that in leaving a text or a thought so that it is asked to be returned to, we may actually achieve the "completion" or "finishing" of the thought we are aiming at. We can thus begin to envision a sense in which Cavell has passed away already, in the writing of each mark, in the completion of "each mark of meaning."[6]

3.

To ask a more specific question, why does our thinking *about* a text, idea, film, or

4. Cavell, "Preface to Updated Edition of *Must We Mean What We Say?*," xvii (emphasis added).
5. One can detect a similar logic here in Cavell's description of the self of moral perfectionism as "a process of moving to, and from, nexts." Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 12.
6. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 27.

other aesthetic object—to take the clearest case—not exhaust that object? Cavell's response goes hand in hand with a related (and broadly speaking post-Kantian) recognition: when we think and perceive we are synthesizing information through a particular and singular lens which is neither a distortion nor imposition, but a condition for meaningful thinking. We might describe this recurring heuristic in Cavell's philosophy as a variety of, say, modernist transcendental idealism. It requires recognizing the limitations of experience, history, or culture, not as limits but as conditions for thinking. I believe Cavell takes this insight equally from early Heidegger, later Wittgenstein, and from a self-consciousness of the consequences of his own complex identity as a first-generation immigrant, secular American Jew, father, teacher, writer, and academic philosopher.

Moreover, the idea that our specificity and singularity are revealed whether we like it or not—that we *inevitably* "stick our neck out"—in philosophical thinking is another of the most consistent, complex, and rich themes in Cavell's work. In his well-known working through of philosophical skepticism, for example, Cavell detects a desire for a picture or fantasy of knowledge in which our claims to know reveal nothing at all about *us*. As I understand him, Cavell holds that, for certain forms of assertions anyway, including even some kinds of empirical claims, it is impossible to "get to know" an aesthetic object or person or aspect of the natural world without exposing *ourselves*—the particularity and singularity of our experience, identity, history, and so forth—to being known. We understandably tend to avoid the responsibilities which come from being known in this way; Cavell's philosophy teaches us that avoiding such responsibilities has both epistemic and ethical consequences. Many of Cavell's most beautiful and dense sentences vibrate with an affirmation of their own contingent (but ineliminable) conditions of singularity and particularity.

Finally, in terms of the form of these three passages, I take Cavell to be giving voice to something like philosophical reminders, in later Wittgenstein's sense. Such reminders are actively aimed at intervening in our lives by assisting us in an acknowledgment of a fantasy (of limitlessness, totality, or completion). The purpose of a reminder is importantly different from the purpose of a definition or rule, for example, *for what counts as* "seeing a thought through" or "coming to a finish in each mark." The aim of a philosophical reminder is to *do something* (with the words which

comprise the reminder): to successfully complete the speech act of *reminding*, and hence to counteract a particular habit or act of mental activity. Perhaps parts of Cavell's philosophy speak (only?) to those individuals who have come to self-consciousness about repeated temptations toward transcending or denying their rootedness in a particular embodied, temporal, and historical set of experiences.

4.

To bring these thoughts back to the subject of death, we can detect, in the philosophical reminders Cavell provides us of our own particularity and singularity, several family resemblances within the concept of death. There is first of all the death or termination of a fantasy of limitlessness, totality, or completion. Such a reminder to recognize one's particularity goes hand-in-hand with the recognition that the object of thought has not been exhausted, because it is a reminder of the "lens" through which one's experience of objects is refracted. Even if the counteraction of this fantasy allows for thinking, it is still difficult, because it requires giving something up.

But there is also, second of all, in these connections between death and thinking, a kind of indirect reminder that we live in time, that our thinking is conditioned by the passage of time, and hence that we will one day die. This Heideggerian echo can be read as pervading Cavell's philosophical reminders about our singularity and particularity in the following way. If there is something disappointing about the fact that our thinking cannot be "complete" in the sense of exhausting everything there is to say about a given text, person, or piece of art, then perhaps we harbor a disappointment about our "fatedness" (to use a Cavellian term) to living in time. Relatedly, perhaps there is something disappointing about the reality of our fatedness to continual growth and education in time. These are key Cavellian themes: that we harbor deep desires to deny not just significant but *constitutive* facts of our finite, earthly, and temporal condition. Again these limitations will show up *in particular cases* as barriers rather than conditions for thinking, and in *each* case we will need to find our way (back) to the ordinariness of living in time—which is also a living toward death.

In this sense Cavell's philosophy might be said to echo Plato's metaphilosophical description of philosophy as a "preparation for death." Each time we return to the ordinary (a place we have never been), we are also returning to the reality of death by resituating ourselves in time. It does not seem like an exaggeration to say that thinking in Cavell's philosophy is itself a "little death"—revealing the limits of our own experience and reminding us that we are beings who live in time.

In some respects Cavell's philosophy can be read as a theatre of the encounter between constitutive facts of finitude, such as our fatedness to living in time, and their denial. This region of Cavell's thinking might be described as a set of insights gleaned from encounters with the fantasies which would deny them. Cavell's philosophy is thus dialectical in this respect. However, this way of thinking is diminished when it is treated as a fact about something Cavell said or believed, rather than as a heuristic for one's own grappling with philosophical questions.

5.

Finally, if we take Cavell at his word that he meant "to leave everything I will say, or have, I guess, ever said, as in a sense provisional [...] that is, to be gone on from,"[7] then he might be described as having already passed away (in each new instant of "completing" a sentence—and thus, as having passed away as early as his earliest writings). With the completion of each sentence, with the finishing of each "mark of meaning,"[8] and with the satisfaction of the desire therein, there are countless little deaths strewn across his work. But aside from the interesting question of how to understand further these interplays or family resemblances, what does the *fact* of these family resemblances suggest about the meaning of Cavell's "literal" death? In other words, is Cavell's actual death—to which I bore witness at the occasion of the unveiling ceremony—the core or center of the concept of death, making these various "little deaths" in his written work mere ornaments or figurative extensions of that core?

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7. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 33.
8. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 27.

Cavell's answer, I believe, is that we should not think about concepts as having a literal or essential "core" with merely figurative or secondary or ornamental extensions protruding from that core.[9] Concepts such as death have an ordinary yet extraordinary complexity and texture which will be missed if we posit an essential or literal core. There is an uncanny sense in which we both possess an understanding or a "concept" of death and yet—since that concept cannot be reduced to a core rule or essential decision procedure—we do not possess an *exhaustive* or *complete* understanding of it. We both possess the concept of death and, in our efforts to understand the entirety of what we possess, it falls away from our grasp. Yet our wish to grasp the concept's essential core reveals our desire to exhaust the object of our thought, a desire which is strangely self-defeating, since it ends up making it impossible for us "finish" or "complete" it. What I have learned from Cavell is that we arguably require an awareness of such an ungraspable, expansive, and elusive conceptual web in order to understand our own experience—that is, we arguably require *philosophy* in order to understand our own experience. If we want to capture, let alone make sense of, the fact that Cavell continues to mean so many different things to so many different people, then the (extra)ordinary ordinariness of the concept of death is required. It is a concept which, if we can hear it, both registers the cessation of life *and* registers the continued "aliveness" of a thinker like Cavell.

Has Stanley Cavell died? Undoubtedly. His body is buried in Mt. Auburn cemetery, in Cambridge. Yet he continues to teach me how to think. On Cavell's account, it is the surprising structure of concepts themselves that encourage us, as we follow them, to retreat from the habitual in order to think: in which each instance of the concept is connected to every other, some closer and some farther from familiar usage, yet none of them absolutely core or essential. If Cavell has taught us how to think, then we are *thinking with Cavell* about (his own) death, thus performing the very tension between life and its afterlives which is the subject of the essay. As we do so, we find that in thinking philosophically, we are also coming to know the limits of our own experience and are thus reminded that we are beings who live in time. We

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9. This thought was formulated for me partly with the help of the work of Martin Gustaffson. See Martin Gustaffson, "Familiar Words in Unfamiliar Surroundings: Davidson's Malapropisms, Cavell's Projections," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19, no. 5 (2011): 643–68.

also find that Cavell is still "alive" in everything he has left behind, from the treasure of his study to his friends and family, and not least in the tools to affirm the creativity, complexity and partiality of "our" human grasp of the very concept of death itself.[10]

10. I am extremely grateful to Sabeen Ahmed for her sharp editorial feedback on this essay.

20. Form of Life, Buddhism, and Human Rights

DON SELBY

Stanley Cavell took up anthropological works for consideration in a way that we might characterize as staccato,[1] and has informed anthropological work in increasing and increasingly sustained ways.[2] As these works show, it is difficult to lift, so to speak, a single concept—say, the ordinary—out of Cavell's work, and treat it as if it were discrete, unentangled with neighboring concepts like language, or the uncanny, or nextness, to suggest only a few candidates. Still, what I will do here is highlight the fertility of Cavell's elaboration on Wittgenstein's 'form of life' for my ethnographic work on human rights in Thailand. I set out to show that were we to attend only to the register of cultural forms (more or less specifiable sets of customs, traditions, norms, values, habituated practices), as human rights debates that hew to cultural

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1. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Stanley Cavell, "Comments on Veena Das's Essay 'Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain'," in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 93-98; Cavell, Foreword to Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), ix-xiv.

2. See for example, Clara Han, *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Naveeda Khan, "Mosque Construction or the Violence of the Ordinary," in *Beyond Crisis: Re-Evaluating Pakistan*, ed. Naveeda Khan (London: Routledge, 2010), 482-520; Sameena Mulla, *The Violence of Care: Rape Victims, Forensic Nurses, and Sexual Assault Intervention* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Isaias Rojas-Perez, *Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Don Selby, "Patronage, Face, Vulnerability: Articulations of Human Rights in Thailand," *International Journal of Human Rights* 16, no. 2 (2012): 378-400; Don Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); and especially Veena Das, "The Signature of the State: The Paradox of Illegibility," in *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, eds. Veena Das and Deborah Poole (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004) 225-54;Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Veena Das, *Affliction: Health, Disease, Poverty* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Veena Das, Michael Jackson, Arthur Kleinman, and Bhrigupati Singh, eds., *The Ground Between: Anthropologists Engage Philosophy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*, ed. Michael Lambek (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Michael Lambek, *The Ethical Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Michael Lambek, Veena Das, Didier Fassin, and Webb Keane, *Four Lectures on Ethics: Anthropological Perspectives* (Chicago: Hau, 2015).

relativisim or 'Asian values' do, we would develop a partial view of how human rights emerged in the progressive, democratic moment surrounding and following the 1997 Thai constitution. More narrowly, the case I make, the case that one cannot make if one only takes form of life in the conventional sense of describing only social conventions, is that a central line of thought in the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand about what human rights were turned not on the nature of rights, but on a picture of the human. The picture at issue was one importantly inscribed within a certain, controversial school of Buddhist thinking. This paper will examine specific contests within Buddhism over what a human being is, with the particular claims to rights that flow from different pictures of the human. That is, it will take these debates, as they appeared in struggles over human rights, as pitching irreconcilable notions of the human form of *life* against one another. First, though, it is necessary to provide some orientation for readers unfamiliar with Thailand.

In the early 2000s, Thailand, having recently ratified a new constitution, assembled its first National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).[3] In many senses, this was the beginning, rather than the end, of the struggle to formalize, disseminate, and practice human rights in Thailand, and my research at that time concerned the work of the NHRC and several related organizations as they sought simultaneously to define human rights, advocate for them, and work out how to protect them in practice.[4] None of these endeavors was straightforward. Among the various parties – the commissioners, the bureaucracy supporting the commission, lawyers and NGOs connected to the NHRC – there existed diverse, often ambiguous, and sometimes mutually antagonistic views of what human rights were, and how they should be promoted. On top of that, the very terminology of human rights was unfamiliar to the population at large. The NHRC, therefore, faced significant challenges in description, education, and practice. One of the ways commissioners undertook this work began with the near-at-hand, and morally compelling: Buddhism. I will return to their deployment of Buddhism shortly, after some important table-setting with respect to the notion of form of life.

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3. Formally, it is the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand. The 1997 constitution was called "the people's constitution" for the unprecedented level of public consultation during its drafting process, and many regard it, to this day, as Thailand's most democratic constitution. (See, for example, Harding and Leyland 2011).
4. See my *Human Rights in Thailand* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2018).

Form of Life

While Cavell explores Wittgenstein's idea of form of life, especially in relation to language, criteria and grammar, extensively in *The Claim of Reason*,[5] he does so more intensively in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, which I will take as my starting point. There, he marks his difference from other views of *Philosophical Investigations*,[6] which take form of life to describe "the social nature of human language and conduct," a view he identifies as a conventionalist teaching for its stress on practices or conventions.[7] Such a view, or teaching, obscures Wittgenstein's preoccupation with the natural in forms of life. The conventionalist understanding of form of life Cavell calls the ethnological, or horizontal sense, which the biological, or vertical sense contests.[8] The former concerns conventions in the sense of practices and conduct, like promising, inaugurating, coronating, and so forth on the social plane, or horizon. Differences among these kinds of practices are differences of a cultural sort. Differences of the latter, vertical kind are those between the human form of life and "'lower' or 'higher' forms of life, between, say, poking at your food, perhaps with a fork, and pawing at it, or pecking at it."[9] Placing the emphasis on life, rather than form, shifts our attention to the vertical, natural, biological plane and to the limitation and conditions under which we apply criteria to others. These arguments for distinguishing these planes, and their corresponding directions of criteria, alerted me to an important, distinguishing aspect of the emergence of human rights in Thailand; that is, advocacy less for a specific notion of rights than a certain available, but marginal picture of the human.

In anticipation of a particular line of resistance, I should be clear here that the horizontal, ethnological aspects of form of life played important roles in human rights practices. As I have discussed elsewhere, considerations of face-work, for example, or rank, or status, or the moral authority endowed by motherhood, were crucial aspects

5. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998 [1953]).
7. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch, 1989), 41.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 42.

of alliance-building among individuals who were socially differently situated, of the ability of human rights advocates or claimants to apply pressure to recalcitrant officials, and of smooth social interaction between parties that could become adversaries.[10] Such roles on the plane of *form* of life were typically questions of practice, and did not largely raise criterial issues on which I focus here. My point of departure stems from Cavell's instruction on the difference, as rendered here, between custom and nature in *The Claim of Reason*: "The conventions which control the application of grammatical criteria are fixed not by customs or some particular concord or agreement which might, without disrupting the texture of our lives, be changed where convenience suggests a change [...]. They are, rather, fixed by the nature of human life itself, the human fix itself, by those 'very general facts of nature' which are 'unnoticed because too obvious', and, I take it, in particular, very general facts of *human* nature [...]".[11] What kind of fix are humans, by nature, in? Central aspects of our fix to which Cavell and Wittgenstein return repeatedly are our life in language and our solicitation of criteria.

In Part II of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein describes the human form of life in its connection to talking, offering up the idea that only those who "have mastered the use of a language" can hope, or grieve, as hope and grief are parts of the complicated form of life that includes talking.[12] Such things as hope, or joy, and grief, though, express themselves bodily in predictably enduring ways within the human form of life, leading Cavell to highlight three strands in Wittgenstein's description: It sees "the human as irreducibly social and natural, say mental and physical" in such ways that "human conduct is to be read," suggesting, in turn, that forms of *life* entail embodiment in ways that are meaningful.[13] The final strand Cavell characterizes like this:

> It perceives that everything humans do and suffer is specific to them as are hoping or promising or calculating or smiling or waving hello or strolling or

10. Don Selby, "Experiments with Fate: Buddhist Morality and Human Rights in Thailand," in *Wording the World: Veena Das and Scenes of Inheritance*, ed. Roma Chatterji (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 128-53; Selby, "Patronage, Face, Vulnerability"; Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*.
11. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 110.
12. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 174.
13. Cavell, *New Yet Unapproachable America*, 48.

> running in place or being naked or torturing. This listing is to recall patterns in the weave of our life, modifications of the life of us talkers, that are specific and confined to us, to the human life form, like running in place or hoping, as well as patterns we share with other life forms but whose human variations are still specific, like eating or sniffing or screaming with fear.[14]

The picture of the human form of life is one that intersects with particular *forms* of life, but is irreducible to them, as language is an inherent feature of the human form of life (being linguistic intersecting with particular languages, but irreducible to any of them). Language, in its turn as elemental to the human form of life, is how we ask for, or offer, criteria. The importance of criteria will become clearer below for the specific case I make with respect to Buddhism, as one version of Thai Buddhism bears criteria for the human that are simultaneously criteria for who is killable—indeed, who counts as righteous to kill. First, though, let me dwell on the articulation of criteria and form of life.

> For Wittgenstein's idea of a criterion [...] is as if a pivot between the necessity of the relation among human beings Wittgenstein calls "agreement in forms of life" (§241) and the necessity in the relation between grammar and world that Wittgenstein characterizes as telling what kind of object anything is (§373), where this telling expresses essence (§375) and is accomplished by a process he calls "asking for our criteria."[15]

Related to the idea that we learn language and the world together, captured in the phrase "wording the world"[16] we can see in this passage that agreeing in a form of life is agreeing in the grammar we use to tell what kinds of objects things are. This does not describe a kind of labeling, as I take it, but "expresses essence" in the sense that, on the conventional, conformist Buddhist view, the grammar telling us what a communist is also tells us that the communist is killable not just with impunity, but as a source of merit. On this view, the poor suffer the life they have because they, essenti-

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 50.
16. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 94.

ally, deserve their suffering on the basis of their regrettable *kamma*.[17] Not as a matter of custom or tradition, but as something like their fate. Maltreatment of the poor or of leftists responds, in ways that will become clearer shortly, to the question of criteria. How is it that we can call on criteria for who is killable, or who we may treat with disdain or abuse? The criteria are *kammic*: kill leftists because they are a source of merit for their killers; accept for the poor treatment unacceptable for the wealthy or prestigious, because that is their *kammic* lot.

Importantly, for Cavell, Wittgensteinian criteria constitute the everyday, such that the distinctions of killable or reverend (in, say, the person of the king) are everyday distinctions derived from criterial differences. Equally important, though, is that the constitution of the everyday by our criteria is just the possibility of repudiating these criteria.[18] The everyday holds within it the possibility of repudiating the everyday. A Buddhist orientation to *nibbana* as in principle attainable by anyone at any time is a Buddhist repudiation of the *kamma*-centric picture of the human, and is radically egalitarian. One ordinary picture of the human contests another, in a way that, from the *kamma*-centric view, winds up "disrupting the texture of our lives."[19] If our attunement in judgement (or form of *life*) is expressed through criteria, then our retuning not of values but of valuing, not of judgments but of judgment, of form of *life* is also expressed by criteria: the reconstitution of the everyday.[20]

As I aim to clarify in the following sections, the question of human rights in Thailand that interests me in connection to form of life (and critera, grammar, and the everyday) is the question of the human, more than the question of rights, and how this question found different answers in distinct, competing Buddhist pictures of the

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17. I will use the transliteration that most closely captures the Thai (and is common to Thai scholarship), *nibbana* rather than 'nirvana' and *kamma* rather than 'karma' (or merit).
18. Cavell, *New Yet Unapproachable America*, 51.
19. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 110.
20. I have in mind here the following passage from Cavell:
What I call something, what I *count* as something, is a function of how I *recount* it, tell it. And telling is counting [...].
(If to what we call something and to what we count as something we add the notion of what we claim something to be, we have gathered together the major modes in which we have invoked the fact of talking, the work of wording the world [...]; what we seem headed for is an idea that what can comprehensibly be said is what is found to be worth saying. This explicitly makes our agreement in judgment, our attunement expressed through criteria, agreement in valuing. So that what can be communicated, say a fact, depends upon agreement in valuing, rather than the other way around [...] Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion when we had to say that his notion seemed to make statements of fact turn on the same background of necessities and agreements that judgments of value explicitly do. (*The Claim of Reason*, 94).

human. That is, in some places the question of what counts as human—what criteria apply to work out counting as human—will bear on human rights, while in others, doctrinal debates over the nature of the human will be pivotal. These are not disputes over the proper (customary, conventional) way to give alms to a monk, or become or greet a monk, or defer to a superior. They are disputes over whether one's opponents count as fully human, what results from killing them. They are disputes over whether humans are intrinsically unequal because of differences in merit (and, therefore, deserving of wealth and power or poverty and subservience, fated to honor and supplicate, or to receive honors with all their social prerogatives and duties), or are intrinsically equal with respect to the immediate accessibility of *nibbana*. Because these distinctions arose most pertinently in the NHRC, though, I will turn to it before describing how Buddhism inflected its explorations of human rights.

Buddhism in The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand

The NHRC was the product of the 1997 "People's Constitution," so named for its origins (massive pro-democracy protests of military government in 1991 and '92), for the unprecedented degree of popular consultation that went into its development, and for the equally distinctive progressive spirit imbuing it.[21] When I began fieldwork in 2002, the NHRC was nearing the completion of its first year. As it struggled to arrive at a single, clear description of human rights, several members of the commission and the supporting bureaucracy (Office of the National Human Rights Commission, or ONHRC) turned to Buddhism to explain human rights. Two commissioners in particular, Khunying Amphorn Meesuk and the chair of the commission, Saneh Chamarik,[22] emphasized the connection between Buddhism and human rights, arguing that human rights have always been available, if latent or unnamed in human rights. Their path to this position, however, was not through the official Buddhism of the sangha (the governing monkhood). I will discuss below the differences between official Buddhism and the Buddhism

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21. Andrew Harding and Peter Leyland, *The Constitutional System of Thailand: A Contextual Analysis* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2011), 22-23, 217-50; Selby *Human Rights in Thailand*, 1-14.
22. In keeping with Thai scholarly convention, I will refer to Thai people by first name, including the title "*Khunying*" (a royally-conferred title comparable to "Lady"), and list bibliographic entries by first name. Thus, for example, I will refer to Saneh and khunying Amphorn from here on out.

informing these commissioners' views of human rights. The point I stress here is simply that, for an influential portion of the NHRC at that formative moment, human rights were answerable to a picture of the human, that the criteria for the human in this picture were decisively Buddhist, but of a marginal (if respectable) strand of Buddhist teaching standing importantly at odds with official Thai Buddhism.

Central to the adoption of this particular Buddhist picture of the human as the source or anchor or foundation of human rights in Thailand is, first, the conviction that human rights are ordinary insofar as they are Buddhist, but, second, that the ordinary ethics of an egalitarian Buddhism (that promoted by the commissioners) is a way of turning Thai society from an (official) ethic that normalizes social inequality. There is a sense in which the egalitarian Buddhism (deriving principally from the teachings of the monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) has been suffocated by official Buddhism, but that the turn the NHRC was striving to produce in Thailand was also a way of recovering the voice of this non-conformist model of Buddhism.

Suppression of monks on the fringes of the sangha's authority has a lengthy history in Thailand, and continues to the present with the defrocking of monks of the ascetic Santi Asoke meditation movement.[23] The relevant movement for the purposes of this paper is that of forest monks, or wandering monks, as they are sometimes called. Observing thirteen ascetic practices from the *Visuddhimagga*, or discourses of the Buddha, forest monks place importance on retreat from urban centers, opting for open-air, forest dwellings instead.[24] This removed them from the direct oversight of the

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23. Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1989), 161-62; Charles Keyes, "Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand," *International Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (1989): 121-42; Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 29-32; Donald K. Swearer, "Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 628-90.

24. These practices include:

1. *The refuse-rag-wearer's practice*: The *bhikkhu* collects refuse cloth for robes. Pamsukula means "refuse" in the sense of its being found in such a place as a street, charnel ground, or midden, or in the sense of its being in a vile state.
2. *The triple-robe-wearer's practice*: The *bhikkhu* has the habit of wearing the triple robe (ti-civdra), namely the cloak of patches, the upper garment, and the inner clothing.
3. *The alms-food-eater's practice*: The *bhikkhu's* vow is to gather and eat the lumps (pinda) of alms food offered by others. (The word *bhikkhu* is derived from *bhikkha*, meaning alms.)
4. *The house-to-house-seeker's practice*: The *bhikkhu* wanders from house to house collecting food; he is a "gapless wanderer" (*sapaddnacarin*) in the sense that he walks from house to house, to all houses, indifferently and without distinction, begging from everyone and showing no preference.
5. *The one-sessioner's practice*: The *bhikkhu* eats only one meal a day in one uninterrupted session.
6. *The bowl-food-eater's practice*: The *bhikkhu* receives and eats the alms mixed together in one bowl, and he refuses other vessels.

sangha, producing a tense relationship with official Buddhism.[25] They also broke from the convention of withdrawal from worldly activity, opting instead to help villagers with healing practices, to introduce new crops to farming communities, and to advocate for communities, as well as offering religious instruction: practices that led the sangha to describe them as lazy and doctrinally suspect.[26] Under this view, forest monks endured coercive persecution, sometimes including imprisonment, as late as the 1920s, which gradually gave way to grudging tolerance, then reluctant acceptance by the sangha.[27]

The forest monk Buddhadasa's scholarship and practice hewed closely to the *Visuddhimagga*, making him at once a challenge to the conservatism of the sangha, and yet doctrinally unimpeachable. The acceptance of the sangha, however, did not necessarily translate into a widespread lay embrace of Buddhadasa, much less his followers, whose this-worldly practices often included preservation of the natural environment. Such activity sometimes led to conflict with 'influential people's' economic agendas, and in one highly publicized case, led to the brutal hacking to death of the monk Phra Supoj. He was a student of the Bhuddadasa Study Group, and engaged in environmental conservation near Chiang Mai when he was murdered.[28] Neither his robes, nor his facility with Buddhist doctrine, as taught by Buddhadasa, to say nothing of the law, were enough to protect him when, engaged in this-worldly action, he tried, under the auspices of the Metthadhamma Forest Dhamma Center,[29] to pre-

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7. *The later-food-refuser's practice*: The *bhikkhu* refuses extra food (or further helpings) offered him after his only meal has been concluded.
8. *The forest-dweller's practice*: The *bhikkhu* adopts the habit of dwelling in the forest.
9. *The tree-root-dweller's practice*: The *bhikkhu* dwells at the root of a tree.
10. *The open-air- dweller's practice*.
11. *The charnel-ground- dweller's practice*.
12. *The any-bed-user's practice*: The *bhikkhu* sleeps on any place that is allotted to him when he is in a community of monks, and in that sense he is an "as-distributed user."
13. *The sitter's practice*: The *bhikkhu* refuses to lie down and when resting adopts the sitting posture. (The sitter can get up in any of the three watches of the night and walk up and down, for lying down is the only posture disallowed.) Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Sainst of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 33-34.
See also Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 1997).
25. Kamala, *Forest Recollections*, 172-86.
26. Ibid., chs. 7 and 8.
27. Ibid., 174-75, 187-97.
28. Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 17-18.
29. This is an initiative that sought, with the urging of "socially engaged Buddhists" like Sulak Sivaraksa, to extend Buddhadasa's teachings from the Suan Mokkh meditation center he established in 1932 in Surat Thani province to Northern Thailand's Chiang Mai province. (See Buddhadasa Study Group, "The Assassination of Phra Suvacanon: Background and Developments." http://www.liberationpark.org/news/supoj/summary.htm (2005)).

serve land donated to the center from the encroachment of developers.[30]

To say that Buddhadasa and his followers were marginal with respect to the sangha and the majority of the Thai laity is not, however, to say that his teachings were not the source of an important movement in Thai Buddhism. Socially engaged Buddhism, a trend deeply informed by Buddhadasa, and possibly most visible in the person of lay Buddhist Sulak Sivaraksa, was also taking hold among Sulak's contemporaries like Saneh and Khunying Amphorn.[31] It is not surprising, then, that both Saneh and Khunying Amphorn, in asserting that human rights are available in Buddhism, articulate this assertion in ways consonant with Buddhadasa's teaching.

For her part, Khunying Amphorn impressed upon me the idea that, given a (certain) Buddhist picture of the human, human rights follow naturally.[32] On the one hand, she described how the five precepts for lay Buddhists—abstaining from taking life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from intoxicants—and striving for collective harmony, especially through the cultivation of compassion, would both reduce human rights violations, and make dealing with potential or realized violations easier. On the other hand, she thought that there was no need, following this Buddhist line of thought and practice, to impose human rights on society, as they were already there. She explained, "We are all born with certain basic rights; we are all human."[33] This claim is deceptive in its apparent simplicity. In the first place, it is significantly at odds with the prevailing notion in Thai Buddhism that humans are not all equal to one another, as a matter of differences in *kamma*. Rather, it is widely—even officially—held in Thailand that Buddhism provides an explanation for social inequality in terms of merit, and a corresponding sense of what, given one's social position as a reflection of one's merit, one may reasonably expect in this life. On this score, then, Khunying Amphorn's claim appears as an importantly revisionary one that calls to mind several passages from *The Claim of Reason*.

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30. Buddhadasa Study Group, "The Assassination of Phra Suvacanon"; Selby, "Experiments with Fate"; Selby *Human Rights in Thailand*, 17-18.
31. The connection of the NHRC and Buddhadasa is clear in the NHRC's hosting of a memorial for Phra Supoj, who they honored as a murdered human rights defender.
32. She elaborates on these, and related themes, alongside further reflections on human rights by Saneh, in Saneh Chamarik and Khunyin Amphorn Meesuk, *Human Rights in Thai Society* (Bangkok: Office of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2004). [เสน่ห์ จามริก กับ คุณหญิงอัมพร มีสุข, สิทธิมนุษยชนในสังคมไทย (กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักงานคณะกรรมการสิทธิมนุษยชนแห่งชาติ, ๒๕๔๗).]
33. Cited in Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 20.

Convention, Revision, and Buddhism

Of conventions, Cavell writes that change is their intrinsic possibility: "[I]t is internal to a convention that it be open to change *in convention*, in the convening of those subject to it, in whose behavior it lies."[34] Conventions, as irreducibly social, are changeable exactly by those subjects whose behavior the conventions address. At least, some such subjects. Cavell continues:

> The internal tyranny of convention is that only a slave of it can know how it may be changed for the better, or know why it may be changed for the better, or know why it should be eradicated. Only masters of a game, perfect slaves to that project, are in a position to establish conventions which better serve its essence. This is why deep revolutionary changes can result from attempts to conserve a project, to take it back to its idea, keep it in touch with its history.[35]

There is a perhaps unexpected coincidence that the name Buddhadasa (for which a closer transcription from the Thai would be Phuttathat), translates as 'slave to the Buddha'. Taking these passages and Khunying Amphorn's together, we can read her claim not as offering an idiosyncratic, dubious understanding of Buddhism, but as a declaration of faithfulness to the Buddha's teaching, and a recognition of the implications of faithful attention to them. Put otherwise, proclaiming her faithfulness to these teachings is simultaneously claiming the position—a slave to the conventions, to the teachings of the Buddha—from which one can see how to change them for the better. Her claim, however, is not simply that the impetus for changes to Thai sociality comes from the horizontal plane of forms of life—that the conventions call for their own alteration or revision. She anticipates, or echoes, a concluding thought from Cavell along this line of thinking, in which he writes, "Underlying the tyranny of convention is the tyranny of nature."[36] What I see here is that Khunying Amphorn is not pointing out how exiting social conventions could be more efficient or expeditious or pleasing, but rather that, given slavish attentiveness to the teachings of the

34. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 120.
35. Ibid., 120-21.
36. Ibid., 123.

Buddha, it is the recognition of our nature as humans that calls for the revisions she promotes under the name of human rights. This is a direct extension of the kind of claim that Buddhadasa himself makes of his reading of the *Visuddhimagga*. In either case, the nature of the change Buddhadasa or Khunying Amphorn seeks is in the direction of conversion—conversion to a picture of the human that is emphatically egalitarian. Before exploring that further, however, there is a second sense in which Khunying Amphorn's position departs from mainstream Thai Buddhism.

In this second way, it is not at all clear on the conservative view of Thai Buddhism that 'we are all human' holds in any straightforward way. To get to the heart of this, we need to visit a different moment in Thailand's history, in which a reactionary (but officially sanctioned) variant of Buddhism was the inspiration for the massacre of students protesting the return to Thailand of a disgraced, and recently exiled, cabal of authoritarian leaders ousted in 1973. During the early 1970s, the very time when many of the first NHRC commissioners and bureaucratic support staff were students forming their political dispositions, or professors at Thammasat University, Phra Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu was rising to prominence both within the monkhood and with lay Buddhists. He did so with the repeated message that Buddhists should kill leftists, and I suggest that it is from his sort of widely-accepted view of the human, and of the killable human, that members of the NHRC seek conversion. I have summarized this previously along the following lines: Kittiwuttho broadcast his view that killing communists was a net merit-making activity in speeches and interviews, repeatedly defending this view against criticism. His opening argument was that those who threaten the Thai nation, Buddhism or monarchy personify Mara (the Evil One), which makes it the duty of Thai Buddhists to kill these part-human beings. As killing a fish to contribute to the monk's alms bowl, so killing leftists, asserted Kittiwuttho, brings merit to the killer.[37]

An interview he granted the magazine *Jaturat* in June, 1976, captures his thoughts especially clearly. When asked whether killing leftists or communists resulted in demerit, he replied, "Thai, even though we are Buddhist, should do it, but it should not be regarded as killing persons, because whoever harms the nation, religion, and monarchy is not a whole person. That means we do not intend to kill persons

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37. Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 24.

but rather Mara. That is the duty of all Thai. Killing people for (the sake of) the nation, religion and monarchy is meritorious, like killing a fish to make curry to put in a monk's bowl," (my translation).[38] Responding to criticism, Kittiwuttho took recourse to Buddhist doctrine to defend his position: "I still hold the opinion that killing communists is not demetorious. This is because for an act to be considered as killing and thus resulting in demerit it must fulfill the following conditions. First there must be an intention (cetana). Second, the animal must have life (pana). Third, one must know that the animal has life (panasannita). Fourth, one must intend to kill (vadhakacittan). Fifth, one must act in order to kill (upkano). Finally, the animal must die by that act (tenamaranan)."[39] Equivocating on the justness of killing communists and leftists, he continued, arguing that what he really meant was that Thai Buddhists should attack leftists ideologies: "Communism is a complex compound of false consciousness, delusion, greed, jealousy, malevolence and anger. It is not a person or a living animal. Thus killing communism is killing ideology."[40] In 1977, however, he seemed to "double down" on his earlier claim, and abandon the idea of killing only an ideology when, in a speech commemorating the founding of the Buddhist order, he admonished his audience of monks to "Let us take today as an auspicious moment to declare war on communists. Let us determine to kill all communists and clean the slate in Thailand. The Thai must kill communists. Anyone who wants to gain merit must kill communists. The one who kills them will acquire great merit."[41]

Kittiwuttho's preoccupation in all of these passages is whether, according to Buddhist doctrine, killing communists improves one's merit (*kamma*). He concludes that doctrine shows that it does. It strikes me as clear that his evasion—saying that he wishes only to execute ideology—is not what he took to be at stake. As I understand it, "If the communists on whom he rallies Buddhist Thai to declare war and eliminate

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38. Cited in Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 25. Kittiwuttho is by no means alone in mobilizing such ideas of the human and the partially-human-as-killable in the service of Buddhist nationalism. Comparable rhetorical moves advocating Buddhist nationalism have facilitated slaughter in Sri Lanka and Burma, as well. (See Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2002); Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 167-74; Selby, "Experiments with Fate," *Wording the World*, 136-137; Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 159, n.23; Stanley J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1, 86-87.
39. Cited in Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand: A Study of Socio-Political Change and Political Activism of the Thai Sangha* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1982), 152.
40. Cited in ibid., 153.
41. Ibid.

completely (in order to gain merit) are like the fish he suggests killing for the curry you would put in a monk's bowl (to gain merit), then in fact he advocates killing actual, living persons and not abstractions, just as he advocates giving actual, not abstract, curried fish to monks. Kittiwuttho called on Buddhism to justify large-scale murder but denies that the dead are, in fact, fully human."[42] For my present purposes, the central issues are Kittiwuttho's concerns with specific pictures of the human and near-human, and with merit. Both Buddhadasa and the figures I cite from the NHRC contest both of these foci; both the picture of the human and the obsession with merit.

Saneh, the chair of the NHRC, recognized that, although he considered Buddhism an innovative social reform movement, it is also vulnerable to dogmatic maintenance of "the status quo and the powers that be, instead of humankind, which is the central purpose of Buddhism. There would be a further danger in that it could even degenerate into becoming a coercive and oppressive instrument, instead of promoting *Path* towards human liberation [...]. If such is the case, Buddhism...would need its own transformation to be of true service to mankind."[43] Originally drafted in 1979, it is hard not to read this as an indictment of Kittiwuttho's contemporaneous theo-politics. Calling for a kind of renovation of Buddhism wherever it has become a dogmatic, coercive agent of the status quo, sees, first, human rights as an opportunity to recognize the coercive dogmatism of Kittiwuttho's sort emerging in the predominant form of Thai Buddhism. As Buddhism grounds human rights, human rights provide the occasion for its transfiguration. Second, where Kittiwuttho argues for the maintenance of a particular *form* of life (a religio-monarchical nation that faces the standing threat of leftist ideologies), Saneh positions Buddhism in the service of a form of *life* (humankind). This distinction bears within it a difference in emphasis between official Buddhism's emphasis on merit (which preserves the status quo of a stratified society, on the conviction that, in essence, you get the life you deserve as determined by *kamma*), and Buddhadasa's, and his followers', on nirvana. This,

42. Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 26.
43. Saneh Chamarik. *Buddhism and Human Rights* (Bangkok: Office of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2002) [เสน่ห์ จามริก. พุทธศาสนากับสิทธิมนุษยชน (กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักงานคณะกรรมการสิทธิมนุษยชนแห่งชาติ, ๒๕๔๕)] , 60.

again, entails a focus for Buddhism on the world *here and now*.[44] To bring out the implications of this difference in orientation (between absorption with the maintenance of a specific social order, defended by a doctrinal emphasis on *kamma*, and the contesting focus on the human, defended by a doctrinal emphasis on *nibbana*), I rely on a passage from Cavell's *This New Yet Unapproachable America*:

> I have suggested that the biological interpretation of form of life is not merely another available interpretation to that of the ethnological, but contests its sense of political or social conservatism. My idea is that this mutual absorption of the natural and the social is a consequence of Wittgenstein's envisioning of what we may call the human form of life. In being asked to accept this, or suffer it, as given for ourselves, we are not asked to accept, let us say, private property, but separateness; not a particular fact of power but the fact that I am a man, therefore of *this* (range or scale) of capacity for work, for pleasure, for endurance, for appeal, for command, for understanding, for wish, for will, for teaching, for suffering.[45]

We can see how the ordinary, in its connection to forms of life, also has available within it these contesting possibilities. An important aspect of the appeal to the sort of Buddhism that Buddhadasa offers is its doctrinal rigor, which allows it to be recognizably faithful to the *Visuddhimagga*. That is, it is ordinary, even as it is nonconformist. The ordinariness of founding human rights in this sort of Buddhism is a crucial aspect of its potential appeal to Thai Buddhists. Buddhadasa's doctrinal position opposed the sort of eternalism that he saw in mainstream Thai Buddhism: an eternal soul fluctuating between merit and demerit. He promoted, instead, an immantentism that sees *nibbana* as, in principle, attainable at any moment, given that it was the original condition of the mind.[46] It is, then, a careful reading of the canon that leads Buddhadasa to a novel, but rigorously canonical model of egalitarian

44. On this emphasis in Buddhadasa's work, see Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 411.
45. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 44.
46. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination,* trans. by Steve Schmidt (Bangkok: Thammasapa, 1992), 51-52; Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 412; Jackson *Buddhism, Legitimation and Conflict*, 137.

Buddhism. That these resources for reformation are available within the ordinary – are themselves ordinary – does not make them any less unsettling for those Thai steeped in the merit-oriented model of Buddhism. Cavell helps understand why this is in the following way:

> Sharing the intuition that human existence stands in need not of reform but of reformation, of a change that has the structure of transfiguration, Wittgenstein's insight is that the ordinary has, and alone has, the power to move the ordinary, to leave the human habitat habitable, the same transfigured. The practice of the ordinary may be thought of as the overcoming of iteration or replication or imitation by repetition, of counting by recounting, of calling by recalling. It is the familiar invaded by another familiar. Hence ordinary language procedures, like the procedures of psychoanalysis, inherently partake of the uncanny.[47]

Turning the Ordinary

If the ordinary alone has the power to move the ordinary, a consenquence is that moving the ordinary is liable to have the character of the uncanny, disrupting the texture of life. In the case at hand, human rights are not disorienting or nebulous or difficult to pin down completely and with precision because they are foreign impositions (though this could be how human rights enter a polity). Saneh and Khunying Amphorn went to lengths to demonstrate that human rights are already available in Buddhism (and, in consequence, that human rights may turn Buddhism). The work of bringing to the surface what is latent in Buddhism, then, is the work of generating a turn within Buddhism (the turn available not in *normalizing*, merit-oriented Buddhism, but in the *ordinary*,[48] marginal reading Buddhadasa offers), and this turn rests on a focus on the human form of life, rather than a focus on the horizontal plane

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47. Cavell, *New Yet Unapproachable America*, 47.
48. Thomas Dumm offers a careful reading of Cavell and Foucault to contrast the normal and the ordinary, considering the normal as coercive, pressing conformity, while the ordinary offers the promise of the unexpected, interruptive, of non-conformity. See Dumm, *A Politics of the Ordinary* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), ch.1.

of cultural difference or cultural integrity. This is a particular manifestation of the ordinary invaded by another ordinary. There is a further implication of this uncanniness of the ordinary. Cavell reflects on Wittgenstein's connection of language and form of life—and of learning them together—in *The Claim of Reason*.

> In 'learning a language' you learn not mearely what the names of things are, but what a name is; not merely what the form of expression is for expressing a wish, but what expressing a wish is; not mrerely what the word for 'father' is, but what a father is [...]. In learning language, you do not merely learn the pronunciation of sounds, and their grammatical orders, but the 'forms of life' which make those sounds the words they are, do what they do [...]. And Wittgenstein sees the relations among *these* forms as 'grammatical' also.
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> Instead, then, of saying either that we *tell* beginners what words mean or that we *teach* them what objects are, I will say: We initiate them, into the relevant forms of life held in language and gathered around the objects and persons of our world.[49]

In the case of human rights in Thailand, the NHRC and its supporting bureaucracy had the task of introducing a concept, and a series of practices, that were wholly unfamiliar to most Thai. We can think of their articulating human rights with and through Buddhist concepts as some specific inversions of the process Cavell describes. With respect to Buddhism, Thai human rights commissioners already enjoyed a form of life, and so, rather than being initiated into a form of life that included human rights, they were undertaking a process of initiating human rights into the form of life they shared. In explaining human rights as a hitherto secret, or invisible feature or facet of Buddhism, they were placing the emphasis on form of *life*, suggesting that humans were slightly, but decisively otherwise than conceived by the accepted view of official Buddhism (stressing merit and conformity).[50] They were, instead, reading out

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49. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 178.
50. It is worth noting, in passing, that two other influential innovations within Thai Buddhism, the Wat Dhammakaya and the Santi Asoke movements, while at variance, and to different degrees in tension, with the sangha, are nonetheless highly normalizing, conformist movements quite at odds in doctrine and practice from Buddhadasa. For a consideration of these movements in relation to Buddhadasa, normalization, and conformism, see Selby, *Human Rights in Thailand*, 27-32.

the implications that their (Buddhadasa-influenced) picture of the human had for Thai *forms* of life—that is, how an adjusted picture of the human demanded adjustments in social relations of the sort human rights propose.

My aim here has been to explore how Cavell's writing on Wittgenstein's notions of form of life brought into sharp relief specific aspects of Thai human rights advocates' efforts to describe, explain and work with human rights in the earliest moments of their formalization institutionally, conceptually, discursively and practically at the beginning of the 2000s. A straightforward cultural, or horizontal, reading of human rights' emergence in Thailand was part of my larger project (for example, describing how the risk of losing face, or of using or endagering status networks motivated particular tactics by human rights advocates and responses from different officials). Remaining on the horizontal plane, however, would have missed the nature of commissioners' and other human rights advocates' employment of Buddhism as a way of articulating human rights as already available, and the corresponding intervention within Buddhist teaching that human rights enabled. That is, raising human rights as latently available in Buddhism not only provides an ordinary language for human rights (allowing a presentation of them, in turn, as ordinary, if hitherto unnoticed), but also spurs a turn within Buddhism to a marginalized reading of doctrine that rigorously defends a distinctive picture of the human—a picture entailing egalitarian sociality that contests conformity to the stratified society deriving from the merit-oriented model of official Buddhism. This invasion of the ordinary by another ordinary, the uncanny interruption of the normal, the status quo, emerges most clearly in its specific character and consequences through attentiveness to form of *life* in ways elusive to analysis that remains on the horizontal plane.

21. The Child's Claim to the Transmission of Language

YVES ERARD

Sandra Laugier describes Stanley Cavell's contribution to philosophy as the bringing back of the human voice into central consideration: "For Cavell, the stakes of ordinary language philosophy (particularly Wittgenstein's and Austin's work) are to make it understood that language is spoken; pronounced by a human voice within a form of life."[1] How can I then express my own voice when all of my expressions are those of others? In other words, how is it that a child becomes part of her or his form of life? How does she or he claim her or his own voice? Presenting the transmission of language this way implies another way of seeing what language is, what learning language is, and finally what subjectivity in language is.

The Claim of Linguistics

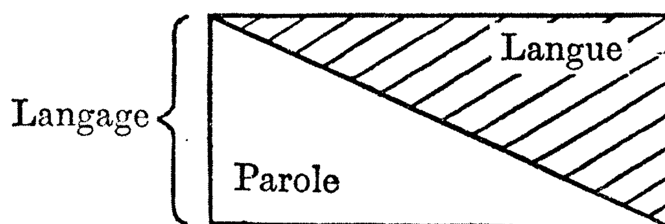
Linguistics, born with Saussure, has not much to say about childhood and has traditionally left the study of language acquisition to the psycholinguistic. In my book *Des jeux de langage chez l'enfant*, I review the state of affairs by showing a relationship between Saussure, Wittgenstein, Cavell and the study of ordinary language that initiates, let's say briefly, a modern view on language at the end of the nineteenth century.

If we look for mentions of words like "child" or "language learning" in Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, we would not find anything. Childhood seems indeed to be totally absent from the book that gave birth to linguistics. The refusal of

1. Sandra Laugier, "Voice as Form of life and Life form," in *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 4 (Helsinki: Nordic Wittgenstein Society, 2015), 63-82.

a diachronic point of view on language by Saussure seems to discard any interest in language learning. But if we take a closer look at his thoughts, it would appear not to be the case. It is in fact quite the opposite: the transmission of language will turn out to be a central insight of his linguistics.

At a conference in 1891, Saussure avoided defining languages as objects. He prefers to give some principles that will determine a point of view. The first principle lies in the fact that languages present continuity and transformation through time and space. In other words, languages are stable and unstable; they vary historically as well as geographically. These two facts are correlated, and the first task of linguistics is to take the infinite variations of languages into account and to recognize that: "By themselves, they are unperishable. It means that there is no reason their transmission stops due to a cause depending on their proper organization" (« *En elle-même elle est impérissable, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y a aucune raison pour que sa transmission s'arrête pour une cause tenant à l'organisation de cette langue.* »).[2]
This enduring feature of language doesn't depend on an individual's will but relies on the "speaking mass," on the approval of the collectivity: "Languages are inevitably social, language not inevitably. The language cannot exist without languages. Likewise languages imply the existence of a faculty of language" (*« La langue est forcément sociale, le langage pas forcément. Le langage ne saurait exister sans la langue. De même la langue suppose l'existence de faculté du langage.»*).[3] Saussure illustrates the relations between language, languages, and speech by this diagram:



To complete this picture of Saussure's thought we can add that language can only be observed in individual speech acts with at least two people involved. In these remarks, I focus on this intermediate zone of language where languages are transmitted and ask myself what precise role the child plays in this process.

2. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Ecrits de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 154.
3. Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Wiesbaden: OHarrassowitz, 1967), 31.

By reading a key scene of instruction in Stanley Cavell's *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (2010), I will interrogate this intermediate space in terms of a "linking of generations." This transmission has something to do with comprehension between generations; in that double meaning, children and adults understand and comprise or acknowledge each other (in French, the word *comprendre* can have these two meanings). This agreement between generations—this social contract, in a way—is described by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*: "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. [...]" (*"Richtig und falsch ist, was Menschen sagen; und in der Sprache stimmen die Menschen überein. Das ist keine Übereinstimmung der Meinung, sondern der Lebensform. Zur Verständigung durch die Sprache gehört nicht nur eine Übereinstimmung in den Definitionen, sondern (so seltsam das klingen mag) eine Übereinstimmung in den Urteilen."*)[4] The English version of the *Philosophical Investigations* translates *Übereinstimmung* as "agreement." This translation put too much emphasis on discourse depriving the vocal part of our attunement in language that involves voices, screams, claims, and silences.

The Child's Claim

A perfect place to hear the child's voice without too much distortion (caused by adults) are schoolyards. To do so, I will now refer to a video I recorded a long time ago in Lausanne showing the schoolyard of a daycare, which looks after children from five to ten years old—in these moments between school and home. Kids do their homework and then play inside or outside.

In the first video, a girl called Sarah engages in a ball game, the aim of which is to make the others sit by hitting them. The game becomes so loud and the game turn

4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Recherches philosophiques* , trans. F. Dastur and E. Rigal (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), §241-42.

so brutal that an educator gets involved.[5] The first thing to mention is the moment when you remove the adults from the children's world. Relations between children don't become more equal but, in this example, more brutal. Some children appear to be more childish than the others and certain voices tend to cover the others. Without grown-ups, there is still younger and older and our ways of contrasting grown-ups and children is a hard-line approach of this form of life. The second thing to mention is that some children are unable to follow rules. For example, Sarah pretending that if the ball touches the head, it doesn't count as a hit. Other children point her out as a cheater to the intervening educator.

In a second video, the educator speaks directly to Sarah. She tries to draw the attention of the girl pointing a threatening index finger at her, telling her she has to follow rules or do something else. The girl steps back, arguing that the one that chooses the game is the one that commands, pointing her finger at the educator. The adult then bends down to be at her height and tells her: "It is not because you chose the game that you have to command. There's nobody giving orders, the rules apply to everybody the same."[6]

Is the child's claim not bringing out a paradox here? Is there not a contradiction in setting the game while giving orders with a finger up and claiming at the same time that there's nobody ruling the game? Isn't the child right saying that the one that sets the game is the one that commands the game?

The third video takes place half an hour later. The children have tried to play but they don't really succeed to set the game. They start a lot of matches that quickly dissolve in unruled actions. The game ends when Sarah asks the educator for help. She gathers together the children of the yard to help them in their will to play. This desire is part of the game; it doesn't give any reason for one to obey rules. The question should then be reformulated: what if I don't follow the rules of a game? The issue is now set in terms of my need to follow rules. This type of necessity will show up in the next video, where Sarah continues to argue the rules while wishing to play. She still has something to add to what the educator says, and again the adult doesn't let her speak, leaving her no other option than to be part of the game or do something

5. To access the video, visit: http://av.unil.ch/hva/3447/v1-s1.mp4.
6 To access the video, visit: http://av.unil.ch/hva/3447/v1-s2.mp4.

else.[7] The one that formulates the rules dictates the rules and the child is required to keep silent. The child's claim is denied. I defended this idea in a paper from 2011, but I now have to confess that I totally missed the point.

In fact, in the first extract, the educator commands, but not for herself: "Nobody commands, Sarah, you play with the others, everybody with the same rules." The rules are a tool for a collective action. In the second place, when Sarah say "No, no, I'm the one that commands the game, because I'm the one who chose it." The educator takes Sarah's claim deeply into account: she first stands in an upright position and then bends down from her grown-up stance to face Sarah at her level. The educator has a democratic manner of seeing the rules: they apply the same to everybody. She also gives a special attention to Sarah. I was later told that Sarah was suffering ADHD.

When asked if the educator will play, she clearly answers "No," and adds that she will referee. The referee is part of the game but doesn't play. This figure of mediation is very important in the process of transmission because they represent the interface between the authority of the rules and the normativity of the rules, a difference noted by Descombes in *Le Complément du sujet* (2004). In setting the rules with authority, the educator enables the child to express her real needs: "I do play" claims the child when asked if she wants to play or not. She obeys the rules by necessity and not by obedience. The rules are not imposed on her by elders. She agrees to follow the rules because it meets her real need to be part of the game.

If we take a closer look at the scene engaging the girl and the educator, two phases have to be distinguished. In the first move, the educator calls out to Sarah in a stance with her finger demanding her to follow the rule. The child steps back and makes a claim. The voice of the adult covers the voice of the child. To find a term for the discussion, the taller person says "Do you hear me?"—that sounds like an order to silence. The child's voice is not being heard. In the second move, the educator gets closer to the child, squats down below the child's head, takes her hands and explains to her that the rules apply equally to every player. The grow-up holds a conversation at the child's level. Does the child learn the collective force of the rules? Impossible to know at this stage. Nevertheless, two conceptions of learning rules show up in Veena

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7. To access the video, visit: http://av.unil.ch/hva/3447/v1-s3.mp4.

Das words: first, by reference to Kripke's note about the educator who "simply stands in for the authority of the community," and second, a remark by Cavell, where the educator shows "a gesture of waiting" and positions herself where the child stands:

> Saul Kripke's (1982) view of the skeptical question as to how can we know when a child has learned something (e.g. to read) is to assert that we simply accept that learning has occurred when the child's response is similar to that of the community—the teacher then simply stands in for the authority of the community. For Cavell (1990, 70), there is an air of violence in this solution to the skeptical problematic, and he takes Wittgenstein's "My spade is turned, this is just what I do" to suggest instead a gesture of waiting. I want to think of an added dimension to this waiting. It is not only that the realization that justifications must come to an end somewhere when accompanied with a gesture of waiting will enable the child to learn, but also that the teacher might find that a different aspect of "knowing" may dawn upon her as the child plays with different possibilities.[8]

The Linking of the Generations

To spread a light on the transmission of language, I will now bring into focus the relation between the child and the adult, and the role of the child's claim in the comprehension between generations. I will exemplify it with a scene of instruction in *Little Did I Know*:

> When the rabbi at my mother's graveside dismissed the company of several dozen people in attendance [...] Ben refused to leave. As I took his hand he insisted that, "The coffin is still here." I replied that since Rabbi Epstein had dismissed us he must have his reasons. Ben could not be moved. He and I and the rabbi, and two workmen were the only ones left by the grave. I glanced at

8. Veena Das, "Adjacent Thinking: A Postscript," in Roma Chatterji, *Wording the World: Veena Das and Scenes of Inheritance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 377-78.

> the rabbi, who motioned to me to remain. "The child is right. The service is not over, but we have fallen into the custom of those in attendance as we lower the coffin and cover it with earth." This admired and distinguished old man had begun walking around to us on the other side of the open grave, and pulling a shovel from the place it had been stabbed into a neat pile of soil, invited Ben to put his small hands on the shovel's handle between the rabbi's large hands. Thus enabled to assist one another in wielding the large implement, they repeatedly, as the coffin was lowered, together sent small clumpy showers of earth down surprisingly softly tapping upon the coffin's lid in accompaniment to the rabbi's completing the chanting of his canonical prayers. Afterward, as Ben and I held hands to walk over and rejoin the withdrawn gathering of participants, I was, I suppose, undisguisedly, pent with uncomplicated yet mysterious elation at witnessing this inspired, lucid linking of generations before and beyond mine."[9]

This scene is highly interesting for the understanding of language transmission because Cavell says he is witnessing an "inspired, lucid linking of generations." The ceremony seems to have come to its end but Ben refuse to leave arguing "The coffin is still here." His father ties to convince him that Rabbi Epstein has certainly good reasons to have dismissed those in attendance, so the child's behavior is not unreasonable and his claim is not nonsense in relation to the custom. Here we can feel a kind of suspension of time in the narrative with Cavell looking questioningly at the rabbi and the two workmen, whose assistance is giving publicity to Ben's stubbornness. The child's voice is a dissonant voice in the sense Viktor Johansson defines it in his beautiful book *Dissonant Voices*:

> Sometimes we just do not know how to go on with each other; we hear voices that we just do not know how to respond to, but that seem to compel us to respond. Sometimes we are that dissonant voice and whatever we do we cannot make sense to the people we live with. There are times when a voice seems to

9. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 467-68.

> play a different tune than is played by the voices of a seemingly harmonious practice. It is a pedagogical difficulty, but it is a pedagogical difficulty not only because those voices disrupt our teaching, or is part of my learning. Dissonant voices disrupt our natural reactions, ways of interacting that we take for granted, or as given. Dissonance in a sense disrupts our forms of life.[10]

The dimension of waiting in this episode appears in the gesture Rabbi Epstein addressed to Stanley Cavell as Ben refuses to leave the edge of the grave. The rabbi plays the role of the mediator between Stanley and Ben. His agreement with the child lies in the coincidence of judgements: "The child is right." The nonsense of the child's claim turns out to be highly sensible and creates a link between an old man and a child. Both of them hold a shovel pointing at the grave, with Cavell forced to watch the disappearance of the coffin containing his mother's dead body. Cavell hears the earth drumming against the coffin's lid. This is a cruel but meaningful scene for someone who considers the acknowledgment of separation as intrinsic to any acceptance of the limitedness of the human condition. On the edge of the grave, Cavell is surprised that the small clumpy showers of earth are tapping softly upon the coffin's lid, as if he would have expected something, say, more brutal or more tragic.

This surprise sounds like a relief for Cavell, while Ben and Rabbi Epstein's insistence, in making him endure the process of separation until its very final end, sounds like a lesson: we show you that you can bear this type of separation as something uncomplicated. The mystery lies in the comprehension that both Ben and Rabbi Epstein demonstrate by the their lucid and inspired linking or, better say, attunement in language that includes Stanley Cavell before and beyond himself. The elation comes from the acknowledgment of the expressiveness of a father looking from above at the deep hole announces separation.

In "Time's a Trickster," Veena Das call this scene "the gift." I understand it as a gift of a son to his father.[11] The claim of the child—"the coffin is still here"—allows the father to make himself known: his entire body is in full despair on the edge of the

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10. Viktor Johansson, *Dissonant Voices : Philosophy, Children's Literature, and Perfectionist Education* (Stockholm: Doctoral Thesis in Educational Science, 2013), 20.
11. Veena Das, "Time is a Trickster and Other Fleeting Thoughts on Cavell, His Life, His Work," in *MLN* 126, no. 5 (2011): 943-53.

grave. He contemplates his mother disappearing under the earth, thrown by the wavering hands of a little child and an old man with two expert workmen, looking on at the pair of them. A natural body goes down at the same time as the expressiveness of bodies manifest the life of language in a link between Ben and Rabbi Epstein.

> To let yourself matter is to acknowledge not merely how it is with you, and hence to acknowledge that you want the other to care, at least to care to know. It is equally to acknowledge that your expressions in fact express you, that they are yours, that you are in them. This means allowing yourself to be comprehended, something you can always deny. Not to deny it is, I would like to say, to acknowledge your body, and the body of your expressions, to be yours, you on earth, all there will ever be of you.[12]

The scene at the grave is an inverse instruction scene where the adult comes to learn something from the child through the mediation of another adult. The adult's uncomplicated elation is nothing mysterious: it is the joy that is provided by an understanding of a witty remark such as "the coffin is still here." Wittgenstein highlights that "The game, I would like to say, has not only rules but also a point" (*Das Spiel, möchte man sagen, hat nicht nur Regeln, sondern auch einen Witz*).[13]

The common view of death is a wrong point of view. When one stands at the edge of a grave, one can only see a pile of soil falling softly on a coffin's lid, and the dreaded moment of separation appears surprisingly ordinary. The spade of our questioning the world is turned, hitting bedrock, the hole of our search has to be fill up again by a shovel. The elation comes with the understanding that enables the learner to say, as in an instruction scene in the *Philosophical Investigations* —that he "knows how to go on."[14] But Cavell doesn't continue alone on his path, a child holds his hand. A child that comprehended him so deeply that he is able to teach his father lessons. The linking of the generations is another expression for the transmission of language.

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12. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.
13. Wittgenstein, *Recherches philosophiques*, §241-42.
14. Ibid.

I realize now that positioning the camera at a distance, overlooking the yard, gave me a disengaged view of the action. I filmed the schoolyard as if it was a field. Space tends to acquire too much importance and the human down there, in the hole formed by the yard, tends to be defined solely by places without faces. I endorsed Pierre Bourdieu's structuralism by defining from outside the dominant/dominated of the language game—the adult being the dominant and the child being the dominated. This view is one of a distant neighbor, not a participant of the language game. Neither the normativity nor the authority of the rules applies to this kind of observer, one who contemplates the schoolyard as a squared hole where the living world is about to be buried by objective science. The paradox—"that the one that chose the game is the one that commands it"—only appears at this disengaged height.

My Voice in Other's Ear, the Other's Voice in My Ear

Cavell comes to know himself through the eyes of his son watching him on the edge of a grave. We see ourselves in the reaction of others to what we do or say. In this case, of how one should reply to a remark as "the coffin is still here," Cavell's question "must we mean what we say?" could now be paired with the question "must we mean what we reply ?" —giving us a more complete picture of the transmission of language:

This illustration of the speech circuit comes from a diagram that Saussure drew on the blackboard in his course of 1911. The meaning of what I say is located between my expression and what I perceive in the other's reaction to it, but also in this intermediate space between what the other asks and what I perceived of my answer. The other could indeed complain about my answer: "that's not what I was asking you."

My subjectivity lies in an intermediate space, *ein löchriger Raum*, *un espace troué*, as Sandra Laugier calls it—referring to Wittgenstein, in her paper of 2005 "*Le privé, l'intérieur et l'extérieur*." The signs of languages are not dead signs as long as they circulate in the speech circuit. We could also express that idea in a more ordinary way by saying that signs live in living conversations where I come to know myself through a multiple holed space that lets light come through in an intimate flow, as described by Veena Das:

> The obvious place to begin is by asking what it means to be in conversation with a younger generation whose future I will not be there to share, but which decisively defines the feel of my present. In this, a scene of some forms of ressentiment that one must feel as one contemplates one's absence, I also discover what it is to abandon my words to these other lives, and hence find myself by abandoning myself to the trust of the intimate other.[15]

15. Veena Das, "Adjacent Thinking," 377.

22. Encountering Cavell in the College Classroom: Four Undergraduate Experiences

ISABEL ANDRADE
STEPHANIE BROWN
LOUISA KANIA
NELLY LIN-SCHWEITZER
BERNIE RHIE

When I received the invitation from David LaRocca to contribute to this special issue of *Conversations*, to commemorate and celebrate Stanley Cavell's life and thought, I felt flummoxed, overwhelmed by the possibilities. There are so many different reasons I feel gratitude, deep gratitude, for Stanley, so many ways his writings and voice have left a profound mark on my intellectual development and career and even daily life. What text or moment or effect should I single out? Where to begin? Indeed, if I had not stumbled across *Must We Mean What We Say?* three years into graduate school, despairing, as I was at that time, of ever feeling at home in the academic world of literary studies (this was in the late '90s in the English Department at the University of Pennsylvania, where New Historicism was very much enjoying its heyday), I think there's a good chance that I would never have finished my Ph.D. I had great respect for my teachers and peers, but as hard as I tried (and I did try very hard; after all, it felt like the very possibility of a career was at stake), I could not see myself reflected in their scholarly interests or outlooks.

After reading "Knowing and Acknowledging" for the first time, however, I *felt* or intuited, even if I did not yet fully comprehend, what had been missing in the first few years of my graduate training (the self, voice, acknowledgment), and it was as though I could, for the first time, glimpse my own reflection, recognize *myself* or some *self* I would want to be, in the voice and words of a published scholar: in Stanley Cavell's voice. Without this experience of recognition and acknowledgment, I doubt I

would have stayed in the game (for graduate school had come to feel like merely a game). In a very literal sense, then, without Stanley's writings in my life, I don't believe I would be getting invitations to contribute anything at all to any scholarly journals whatsoever. Reading Stanley on acknowledgment, and in doing so, receiving the gift of acknowledgment itself, is what made it possible for me to finish graduate school (to even want to finish it). In the end, I wrote a dissertation, inspired by his example, on Wittgenstein's notion of physiognomy, and somehow, with that degree in hand, ended up landing the position I now hold, as a Professor in the English Department at Williams College, where I teach courses in "philosophy and literature" (some of them, happily, on Cavell!). Reason enough, don't you think, to feel deep, deep gratitude?

When I received David's invitation to write something for this commemorative issue, this particular story about my intellectual and professional indebtedness to Stanley is what first flashed to mind. And quickly, many others followed. But it didn't take long (just a good night's sleep) for me to realize what I really wanted to do with this invitation: to pass it along to others, in particular, to the students I had taught in my undergraduate courses on Cavell. And so, that's what I've done.

Every few years, I teach a course that is basically an introduction to Cavell. It goes by various names: once, I called it "Ordinary Language and Literary Theory," another year I called it "Contemporary Literature and Ordinary Language," and most recently (Spring 2018), I called it "Wittgenstein and Literary Studies." We read a lot of different things in this course. A lot of late Wittgenstein, of course, and J. L. Austin too. Texts by Cora Diamond, Stephen Mulhall, Toril Moi, Sarah Beckwith, and Naomi Scheman make appearances as well (along with many others; too many to name). But the heart and soul of the class (its *raison d'être*) is Cavell.

In his editorial invitation, David asked contributors to this special issue to consider "how Stanley's work lives on, and how he and his work have given us life." I've already suggested how his work has given *me* life, but I can think of no better way to show how Stanley's work lives on (and how his work promises to live on, well into the future) than by providing a venue for some of my Williams students to describe the transformative effect reading Stanley has had on them … how his work has given *them* "life."

My Spring 2018 section of “Wittgenstein and Literary Studies” was full of especially amazing, bright, intellectually adventurous students. It was a joy to teach, and teaching Cavell over the years to undergraduates, seeing how deeply he can touch and transform new generations of readers, is one of the clearest testaments to the inexhaustible vitality and ongoing importance of his work. For this piece, I invited four students whom I knew were especially deeply affected by Cavell’s work during this seminar. Two of them are philosophy majors, but none of them, I believe, intends to pursue philosophy at the graduate school level. When I emailed them to ask if they might be interested in contributing to this commemorative issue, all four of them immediately jumped at the opportunity. Like me, they feel deep gratitude to and for Cavell, and they were delighted to have this opportunity to share some of that appreciation with others.

I think—I hope—that Stanley would have enjoyed reading these four personal accounts of young thinkers and readers encountering his writings and voice for the first time. On behalf of these four students, and on behalf of the many students I’ve taught at Williams over the years who have been transformed and given life by their encounter with your writings, thank you, Stanley.

BERNIE RHIE

Isabel Andrade, ’18

The morning after Donald J. Trump’s election to president our college felt like a funeral home. We spoke in hushed voices and whispered our condolences. Over the next few months, this pain turned into anger, the stillness into uproar. Our campus was on edge with growing racial tensions and widespread distrust. At the time, my peers and I thought that the best response to a rising wave of racism and misogyny was to wield our intellectual strength against bigoted theories and justifications, bringing to light their inconsistencies and falsehoods. This was the context in which I first read Cavell.

In "Knowing and Acknowledging," Cavell reflects on the philosopher who "begins with a full appreciation of the decisively significant facts that I may be suffering and no one else is, and that no one (else) may know (or care?)."[1] However, instead of pursuing these facts, the issue becomes *deflected* into the language of philosophical skepticism as the philosopher delves into questions of whether we can have the same suffering. Cora Diamond describes deflection as "what happens when we are moved from the appreciation, or attempt at appreciation, of a difficulty of reality [experiences that are hard to get one's mind around, painful or astonishing in their inexplicability] to a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity."[2]

This notion of "deflection" has helped me understand myself and my community better. I have started noticing how sometimes we deflect from feelings of hurt, separateness, or powerlessness into arguments about structures of oppression and hierarchies of power. Sometimes that deflection provides a bird's eye view, helping us see structures at play which are unavailable to us when we just focus on the particular individuals that are here and now. However, we sometimes forget that this is but one possible perspective, and confuse our reality with the maps we've created of that reality.

Cavell writes that the ordinary language philosopher seeks to "discover the specific plight of mind and circumstance within which a human being gives voice to his condition."[3] Instead of seeing people as just devices for putting forward ideas which we can abstract and analyze, Cavell shifts focus towards the particular person and the context in which she is expressing herself. For me, Cavell's writing is a call to sympathetically inhabit the positions of those I disagree with, a call to come into an argument not with the goal of disparaging and refuting, but instead, seeking to understand the complexity of the other.

During debates and arguments, we often forget the humanity of those we disagree with, and we also forget our own human vulnerabilities. Under particular circumstances, certain modes of thought and ways of seeing the world can take a hold of us and grip us. At times, our over-reliance on argumentation is a way in which we may make unavailable to ourselves what it is to be human. This, I believe, is why Ca-

1. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 247.
2. Cora Diamond , "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy", *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 1, no. 2 (2003): 12.
3. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," 240.

vell promoted "modes of criticism that [...] do not leave the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him."[4]

One of the most well-known phrases among young conservatives nowadays is "facts don't care about your feelings," a quote popularized by Ben Shapiro in his criticisms of current college culture. This disregard of feelings, particularly the feelings of those we disagree with, is prevalent across the political spectrum, and it is deepening divides within our communities. Cavell's call to eschew the age-old opposition between emotion and reason is particularly applicable for us now. It is evident that facts alone cannot show us what we need in order to respond well to each other and our shared world.

Stephanie Brown, '20

"How does theory make you feel?" This was one of the first questions I was asked in my class on Wittgenstein last semester. It was also not a question my past two years studying philosophy at Williams had prepared me to answer. In fact, no one had ever asked about how my classes made me feel. At Williams, I am pre-med and a philosophy and psychology double major, with aspirations of becoming a psychiatrist. Feelings have motivated every step along my academic path, yet they were something I had almost accidentally kept private, as my feelings about what I learned never seemed important. Needless to say, I was so excited to answer this question, and to finally have an outlet to explain how philosophy makes me feel so full of wonder and hope that sometimes I worry I might just explode.

So, there was my first answer to how theory made me feel: excited, excited about all the problems I feel theory could solve. Then also frustrated, at all the things I felt I couldn't figure out yet. And then I realized something else: thinking about how using theory made me feel as though I, just me, had answers to the most important questions in the world. I realized that theory made me feel... powerful. And I felt that perhaps that is something I should question.

4. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 175.

As someone who was bullied for most of my childhood and teenage years, along with coming from a house with an emotionally abusive father, I've sought a mixture of things in philosophy—the ability to help myself, the ability to help others, and power. I never recognized my own search for power and control in my philosophical practice until that moment, when I was asked how theory made me feel. Until then, I had disguised my desire for power with my desire to help others.

When I read Cavell's "Knowing and Acknowledging," I saw myself in the skeptic's search for power, and I saw the danger that lay within it. In the separateness and fear, the acute loneliness of our private feelings, I recognized myself, my family, my friends, and my professors. The skeptic's loneliness feels like powerlessness which, in turn, as Cavell puts it, "presents itself as ignorance—a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack." I saw my own deflection of other's pain and my own pain as well, a psychological deflection into medical terminology as a manifestation of my desire to help, misguided by my fear of being powerless.

Being exposed to Cavell has undoubtedly made me a better person. I'm hoping that will translate into making me a better philosopher, a better friend, and a one day, a better doctor. I try not to shrink away anymore from uncertainty, confine myself or others to labels that determine our growth, or use my intellect to spread loneliness, as I see it so often being done by others. In the great space in between myself and the world, I try now to welcome my humanity, to embrace the uncertainty of existence while not allowing it to condemn my empathy. I suppose all that I need to say is that in every academic field I've explored, be it biology, chemistry, mathematics, or philosophy, all I've learned has seemed to be riddled with an insidious desire to transcend what we perceive as the confines of our humanity. Yet when I read Cavell, I see that when we let go of our need for power—our desire to transcend, to overcome the unknown—then our humanity is beautiful.

Louisa Kania, '20

When I signed up for Bernie's course on Cavell in the spring of 2018, I didn't know that I was signing up for a personal odyssey. As I began to read Cavell, I couldn't qui-

te place what it was in his essays that struck me, but his words shimmered with beauty, voice, and vital energy. Even when I couldn't follow all of the twists and nuances of his thinking, I felt his ideas resonating in my body. I found myself coming alive. On several occasions—particularly while reading "Knowing and Acknowledging" and "The Avoidance of Love"—my nose began to tingle and my eyes started tearing up even before I had mentally processed what Cavell was saying. Sometimes I felt the force of his words so strongly that I had to pause in the middle of my reading and lean back in my chair, pushing the text away from me to give his ideas more space to expand. Nor was Cavell far from my mind as I went about my days that semester; more so than for any other scholar I've read, I found myself thinking about him and bringing him up on an almost daily basis in conversations with friends.

Yet when I began thinking about writing this piece, now almost a year after having first read Cavell, I found myself worrying that I didn't know enough about him, that I couldn't speak to his ideas with any sort of intellectual depth or rigor. When I tried to think back on what I'd learned from him, what I remembered most of all was not a specific concept or idea but, rather, the *feeling* of reading him—the feeling, I realize now, of being acknowledged. And as I reread his essays and my class notes, it occurred to me that although I have stopped consciously invoking or referring to Cavell, his ideas have seeped deeply into my life and my way of being in the world. Much of the thinking and growing that I've done in the past year has emerged in some way from these seeds. In this sense, I have not been thinking about Cavell's ideas so much as I have been embodying and enacting them.

I spent the first two-and-half-years of college and much of my life before that searching for meaning, analyzing everything, and trying to find the "right" way to think and live—the system or set of rules that would fill up or explain away the emptiness and groundlessness that I felt lurking just below the surface of my experiences. I didn't trust my own perspectives and voice, and I looked, instead, to external standards and rules for guidance on how to think and act. This was true in my personal life as well as in my intellectual life. I often refrained from expressing myself in social situations, and I denied a place to my subjectivity in my academic pursuits, dismissing the validity of my personal experiences in the classroom and writing and talking as if I existed as a sort of abstract, disembodied mind.

But encountering Cavell and Wittgenstein (especially Wittgenstein as understood by Cavell) changed all of that for me. I began to recognize that my attachment to rules and my quest for some sort of ultimate meaning was misguided, that I had been searching in language and in reality itself for a fixed ground that wasn't there. As I started opening up to life's contingency, instability, and groundlessness, I found myself letting go of the incessant search for meaning that had driven me for so long. At the same time, as I explored the idea that meaning does not exist outside specific contexts and the forms of everyday life, I realized that I could not and should not dismiss my subjectivity.

Wittgenstein suggests that if we don't express our pain, we cannot learn the language to talk about it, while Cavell writes about the possibility that others can acknowledge pain that we are unable to see in ourselves. In Cavell, I found that kind of acknowledgment and, with it, the language I had been searching for—for experiences I hadn't been able to understand and pain I had been suppressing. Like the skeptic whom Cavell describes with his remarkable empathy and generosity, I realized that all that time I had been seeking a system of knowledge, I had been deflecting a deeper, more existential anxiety—a sense of aloneness. I had been longing for the sort of deep, meaningful relationships that give life color and richness, but the harder I looked, the more those sorts of relationships seemed to elude me.

I found my diagnosis in "The Avoidance of Love." Acknowledging and connecting with other people requires "self-revelation," yet I had been unwilling to be vulnerable, to let myself be seen by others. In trying to push away the separation and aloneness I felt, I had been afraid of difference—both of acknowledging differences and of being different myself. I had imagined—incorrectly, as Cavell showed me—that difference necessarily means severance. At the same time, I recognized myself in Cavell's description of King Lear in "The Avoidance of Love"; even as I was afraid of separation, on another level, I think I was afraid of true connection, of being seen and loved. In reading Cavell's essays, I saw how my fear of being vulnerable and revealing myself to others was not only a loss to me but also something that could hurt others. In failing to acknowledge my own fears and sense of isolation, I had been unable to offer complete acknowledgement to others. In this way, I had been, by Cavell's analysis, treating the people around me almost like fictional characters, denying their full

and complex humanity and limiting the depth of the relationships I could form with them. I had been living precisely the sort of tragic paradox that Cavell writes about: in denying difference and separation out of a desire for connection, I had failed to connect because I had not been present with or for the people around me. Moreover, if, as I believe, we become real through interaction with others, by reducing the people around me to fictional characters, I had also been reducing my own existence to a sort of fiction.

As Cavell writes, acknowledgement "is not a description of a given response" ("Knowing and Acknowledging"). It isn't something we can describe or define as an abstract category; it's something that we have to live, something that I am trying to live. I have been trying to live a life of presence and of acknowledgement, acknowledgement of both myself and others. Knowledge for knowledge's sake, with its pursuit of rules, theories, and fixed meaning, no longer holds the urgency or even appeal that it once did for me. Now what I care about is something much more human and embodied—learning to live fully in day-to-day moments, to respond skillfully to whatever is present, and to be in relationship with myself and with others. I am trying to realize—in the fullest sense of the word—what acknowledgment means and looks like in my life.

These reflections feel very personal, not at all like something fit to go into a scholarly journal. But learning is personal, and reading Cavell is especially personal. Stanley Cavell led me to explore some of my most fundamental fears, anxieties, and unspoken beliefs—a journey that, as I reflect on it now, makes me understand just how appropriate it is to describe Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein as "therapeutic." Cavell wasn't just another interesting theorist who gave me a neat, new way of thinking; he helped me see myself and my life more clearly. So, when I think back on what it was like to take a course on Cavell, I realize that I wasn't learning how to think; I was learning how to live.

When I first read "Knowing and Acknowledging," I wrote in my journal, "Every response is an acknowledgement in some way; a failure to acknowledge is its own type of acknowledgement. [...] Everywhere I am is somewhere; I'm always situated, affecting, and responding to what is around me. Being intentional and aware is so profoundly important. Every day, every interaction, even every moment offers an op-

portunity for acknowledgement. How then will I live? Can I live a life of acknowledgment?" I see now that these are questions I've spent the past year trying to answer with my life, and I know that I'll continue living with them. And for that, I am, and will remain, deeply grateful to Cavell.

Nelly Lin-Schweitzer, '21

I grew up less than a fifteen-minute walk from Stanley Cavell's house, knowing nothing of it. Chances are I even saw him once or twice in the street. That never-intersecting physical proximity stands in odd relief against the way that his work has entered my homes, in the lines from Cavell's "Excursus" that I read to my girlfriend, my mom, and my dad. There are strands of his ideas woven into my papers, my conversations with loved ones, and this tangle of thoughts and remembrances.

I'm dangled between two homes now—the one at college where I first learned about Cavell from Bernie and the one where my parents live. The rhythms of college-to-home involve transitioning from a sort of armored mania (armor cracks, of course, but I don't cry in front of other people) to a differently-armed disarmament. I relax at home, yes, but I still don't cry in front of other people. It's a cultural thing, maybe.

When I write "crying in front of people," I'm feeling around the concept without really touching it. Performative, but only the silhouette of the performance. Crying is theatrical but also a response to theater, and also a feeling.

To be honest, I do cry in front of people sometimes. I pretend that trying not to is a prerequisite for crying's authenticity, but I just remembered—some actors tell themselves not to cry in order to cry. Antiperformance becomes performance. Once, while I was shouting at you (I don't think I cared about prerequisites then). Once, in a packed room of sniffling listeners as a person spoke his poem. A bit like a theater audience, that. Neither was acknowledged. Can a body's expression (no longer suppressible—at least, made to seem so) double as acknowledgement? Is internally-performative suppression (which is maybe also expression) really necessary for "authentic" expression? Or are the tears pain itself, like tears in my papery explanations of intention and defected performance?

Like. I think I use comparisons a lot to try to make people acknowledge what I'm saying with responses of the right magnitude. The most I've ever inadvertently lied was by exaggerating scale because I wanted you to respond with the proper awe that the original size, in my mind, deserved (I knew it would underwhelm you). But what right do I have to the kind of response you give me? I'm still grappling with the ways in which racism, colonialism, globalization, etc. all ought to demand a particular response (or at least acknowledgment), and yet consciously dictating, pulling other people's strings, strays into puppet-master territory.

What do I do when something real I'm trying to say becomes ammo for jokes? The worst bit is I kind of get why you think it's funny. The part of me almost laughing makes me sick (or is this me making myself sick? Because it seems like the appropria-te response?). I'm afraid you're not ever going to see what I mean. When I talk to my mom sometimes, it's like a dam has burst open. She really listens. I'm not sure if I could break down what that means, or if I need to.

When I read Cavell, I let myself wonder.

23. Other Minds and a Mind of One's Own: An Essay on Poetry and Philosophy

LAWRENCE F. RHU

Apart from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness as well), I do not understand the value of any art.
STANLEY CAVELL, *The World Viewed*

In an early round of the famous competition between poetry and philosophy, reason claims the upper hand against emotion. Though Plato achieves nothing like absolute victory for philosophy in this regard, Stanley Cavell rightly discerns that the stakes in this contest are high: nothing less than the soul.[1] Not long after Plato, however, Aristotle ably defends poetry as an art that intends to work beneficially upon the passions to bring about positive results in both the soul and the commonwealth. Later, as Christian culture begins to supersede Hellenistic and Roman alternatives, St. Paul's resonant prioritizing of charity over eloquence (both human and angelic) starts to carry the day.[2] Early in the third century, Tertulian asks, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" and memorably crystalizes the distinction St. Paul suggests by contrasting light with darkness, Christ with Belial, and idols with the temple of God.[3]

In the following century, both Augustine and Jerome recount soul-searching ordeals over irreconcilable differences between paganism and Christianity. Augustine confesses his shame at shedding tears over Dido's suicide in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and he repents his early preference for the lofty rhetoric of Cicero over the lowly style of the

1. See Lawrence F. Rhu, "Competing for the Soul: On Cavell's Shakespeare," *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism* eds. Eldridge and Rhie (New York: Continuum, 2011), 136-51, 242-4.
2. 1 Cor 13:1.
3. 2 Cor 6:14-16

Gospels.[4] Later in the fourth century, Jerome produces a much finer Latin translation than Augustine found in the Vetus Latina; yet, he still experiences acute ambivalence between the claims of the two cultures he stands in the way of inheriting. Biblical prophecy strikes him as harsh and uncouth compared with Roman oratory; but a nightmare brings him before the divine tribunal for an angelic flogging and censure for being more a Ciceronian than a Christian. Then the Judge adds this reminder from Matthew 6:21: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[5]

Such recollections of earlier tensions between poetry and philosophy, in the first cases, and between eloquence and religion, in the second, run on parallel tracks toward a distant horizon. We can hear the classical reconciliation of kindred concerns in hexameters by Lucretius and in a popular tune by Mary Poppins. The Roman advocates smearing the rim of the cup with honey for the child to consume bitter but curative wormwood. The charismatic caregiver recommends a spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down. Both, it is worth noting, are themselves speaking poetically, or figuratively, in terms that serve well to commend poetry itself, which sweetens the pill and makes truth easier to swallow. In the middle distance between Lucretius and Mary Poppins, we can hear Shakespeare and Torquato Tasso, among others, invoking the same principle, ultimately from the same Roman source.

In *The Winter's Tale*, for example, when King Leontes expresses wonder at the lifelike statue of his allegedly deceased wife, Hermione, his tragicomic agon inspires him to make this paradoxical claim: "[T]his affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort" (5.3.76-7).[6] The sculptor Giulio Romano's achievement of verisimilitude awakens the ache of Leontes' grief over the loss of Hermione because her statue seems no merely accurate reproduction of her image; rather, it seems to be Hermione herself. And so, astonishingly, it turns out to be. Likewise, at the beginning of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Tasso begs the heavenly muse's pardon for embroidering hard facts in order to communicate saving truths to readers otherwise inclined to ignore challenges that history (and reality) pose. He appeals to the same Lucretian precedent as Shakespeare

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4. Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin, 1961), 1.13; 3.5.
5. Jerome, *Letter 22.30 (to Eustochium)*. Cited in Petrarca, "On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others" in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1948), 47-133, 113. See also Eugene F. Rice, Jr., *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 1-4.
6. William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). All Shakespeare quotes come from this edition.

in the passage above: "When we smear the medicine cup's rim with honey to fool a feverish child, you know that he drinks the bitter juice and thus recovers health. Just so the world rushes in wherever flattering poetry brims with her sweetest blandishments, and truth, disguised in fluent verse, seduces and persuades the most averse."[7]

Cavell's audacity as a thinker shines through his discernment of the truth of Cartesian skepticism *avant le lettre* in the allegedly intellectual, though genuinely tragic, agons of Othello and Leontes in Shakespeare. Their claims of their spouses' infidelities are mere allegations and, ultimately, cover-ups insofar as they "interpret a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack" and willfully misconstrue limits of the human condition as though they were shortcomings of mental acuity.[8] For example, when Othello commands Iago, "[B]e sure you prove my love a whore" (3.3.364), even if he had the patience to wait a few centuries for DNA testing, the forthcoming certainty would not satisfy his misplaced quest for proof either way it turned out. Ironically, Cavell's perception of what such willfulness anticipates may invite the sort of label Iago attributes to "the blood and baseness of our nature" when he says that they overrule reason and make us jump to "preposterous conclusions" (1.3.324-5). Cavell, however, would argue that fashionable skepticism does not overrule reason so much as it inhibits our honesty and courage to acknowledge what we cannot simply fail to know. In fact, skepticism often uses reason in the process of repressing valid intuitions when we shirk the responsibility of owning them. "Preposterous," in its root sense, may be loosely construed as "premature" or "ass-backwards." Inasmuch as Shakespeare's play appeared in the first decade of the seventeenth century and Decartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* was published over three decades later, Cavell's claim that Shakespeare anticipates Descartes may strike the positivist historian as jumping to conclusions. Yet, Cavell thus discovered ways of exploring the early modern epistemological crisis that give it a human face, first through Shakespeare but soon enough through film, whose creation he happily declared "was as if made for philosophy, meant to reorient everything philosophy has said about reality and its representation, about art and imitation, about greatness and conventionality, about judgment and pleasure, about skepticism and transcendence, about language and expression."[9]

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7. My rendition of Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Torino: Einaudi, 1971), Canto 1.3.
8. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, updated edn. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.
9. Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1996), xii, in a passage that echoes the book's epigraph.

In my experience and in Cavell's philosophy, the soul's journey is not merely linear; to borrow a phrase from Cavell, it includes "dimensions of the self," which is what Cavell calls youth or the stage of life when we are students, when he identifies them as addressees of the moral perfectionism he perceives in Emerson, Thoreau, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. The psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, whom Cavell summons in discussing his own "identity crisis" and discovery of his "life's work," calls this way of thinking about the self *and* the soul "epigenesis."[10] (Luther and Gandhi, two of Erikson's great subjects, were, of course, *religious* leaders.) The onwardness of the self or soul is not only a progress toward death. The "end" of the road may also signify its purpose, or *telos*, which one can find and renew on each step of the way toward the inevitable last gasp. Moreover, skepticism—and particularly the philosophical problem of other minds—which Cavell discerns in the greatest literary works of the English Renaissance, Shakespeare's tragedies, leads him increasingly to Romanticism in his "quest for the ordinary" in both language and experience. For they are not mutually exclusive, especially where (and when) meaning is concerned.

In the final paragraphs of "Knowing and Acknowledging," Cavell connects "the source of our gratitude for poetry" to "the philosophical problem of other minds." The metaphysical plight he identifies could as well be characterized as *the otherness of our own minds*, inasmuch as Cavell is poignantly describing an individual's sense of his, or her, or their own "unknownness" and "inexpressiveness."[11] But whether we

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10. See Erik Erikson, "Monsters and Felicities: Vernacular Transformations of the Five-Foot Shelf" in *Inheriting Cavell: Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. David LaRocca (New York: Bloomsbury, forthcoming), where I discuss the presence of these aspects of Erikson's thought in Cavell.

11. In certain ways, this essay is a continuation of "Monsters and Felicities, Ibid, which I conclude by citing the following passage from Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* updated edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 238-66, 265-6: "A natural fact underlying the philosophical problem of privacy is that the individual will take *certain* among his experiences to represent his *own* mind—certain particular sins or shames or surprises of joy—and then take his mind (his self) to be unknown so far as *those* experiences are unknown. (This is an inveterate tendency in adolescence, and in other troubles. But it is inherent at any time.) There is a natural problem of *making* such experiences known, not merely because behavior as a whole may seem irrelevant (or too dumb, or gross) at such times, but because one hasn't forms of words at one's command to release those feelings, and hasn't anyone else whose interest in helping to find the words one trusts. (Someone would have to *have* these feelings to know what I feel.) Here is our source of gratitude to poetry. And this sense of unknownness is a competitor of the sense of childish fear as an explanation of our idea, and need, of God.—And why should the mind be less dense and empty and mazed and pocked and clotted—and why less whole—than the world is? At least we can say in the case of some mental phenomena, when you have twisted and covered your expressions far or long enough, or haven't yet found the words which give the phenomenon expression, I may know better than you how it is with you. I may respond even to the fact of your separateness from me (not to mention mine from you) more immediately than you.

"To know you are in pain is to acknowledge it, or to withhold the acknowledgment of it.—I know your pain the way you do."

take that problem either way, personally or interpersonally, accomplished poets echo the connection Cavell is making in that essay between poetry and confounding feelings of separateness from others. For such poets not only link childhood problems of hearing and pronunciation to difficulties of understanding that dramatize the otherness of inexperienced young minds. They also find that such ordeals may foreshadow vocations in their chosen art. Misunderstanding, or being misunderstood, in this way, memorably impresses potential poets; and they may later work out, or work through, such experiences in their literary efforts. For them, memories of this kind ultimately heighten the stakes of poetic meaning.

John Hollander, for example, supposes that "the child in the American joke who innocently deforms Psalm 23's penultimate verse, assuring her adult listeners that 'Surely good Mrs. Murphy will follow me all the days of my life,'" may later realize that she was onto something deeper: "*something* more profoundly right about the line, the psalm, and poetry in general than any of her correctly parroting schoolmates."[12] Whatever that unnamed entity may be, Li-Young Lee reveals aspects of it in "Persimmons," where he shares how the fruits of his efforts to learn how to pronounce certain pairs of English words—like "persimmons" and "precision," "fight" and "fright," and "wren" and "yarn"—resonate pertinently with his deep love for his father. Lee's first language was Mandarin Chinese, and "Persimmons" recounts his struggles, on the frontier of mutual intelligibility, with the phonetics of American English. There he finds something deeper than Mrs. Walker, his sixth-grade teacher in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, may have dared to hope when she corrected his pronunciation. The stirrings of a poetic vocation may arise from moments of confusion like these, if only in retrospect.[13]

The experiences and claims of such poets remind me of translators wrestling with sacred texts like the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19. Elijah famously perceives Yahweh *not* in the wind, earthquake, and fire, which are so much to the taste of the prophets of Ba'al, the storm god, whom Yaweh has recently put to shame on Mount Carmel. Those boisterous natural phenomena tell Elijah nothing of the divine. After all that commotion has finally ceased on Mount Horeb, howe-

12. John Hollander, *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible*, ed. David Rosenberg (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 294.
13. Li-Young Lee, *Rose* (Brockport, NY: BOA, 1986).

ver, Elijah hears "a still small voice." At least the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version render what reaches Elijah's ears there in that way. Though the RSV updates many things, like the "Thees" and "Thous" of the KJV, it sticks with our cultural memory of such resonant phrasing. Yet, just as a psychoanalyst or a Romantic poet privileges childhood experiences as foundations of the heart's deepest understanding, learned biblical interpreters nowadays insist on both literary and historical context as well as linguistic knowledge to render and assess the terms of Elijah's experience. In that process, one such scholar, James Kugel, comes up with a new translation of the familiar old phrase above to express the paradoxical Hebrew wording in question. He suggests "the sound of the thinnest silence" as a more accurate translation than "a still small voice" because it conveys the oxymoron in the Hebrew original's phrasing. Thus, he breaks with the traditional English rendering to observe the literary, historical, and linguistic criteria of his scholarly profession.[14]

This gesture rhymes with Robert Frost's concern about poets who, in making choices they deem necessary in writing their poems, let sound predominate to the exclusion of other essential considerations. If hearing becomes the only sense that matters, it may trivialize common sense and undermine intelligibility. Frost concedes that sound in poetry is "the gold in the ore," and he promptly takes pains to make plain poetry's multiplicity of sounds among its many other different resources. But he then returns to the staples of most kinds of writing—thought, context, meaning, and subject matter—until he arrives back at poetry as "one more art of having something to say, sound or unsound. Probably better if sound, because deeper and from wider experience."[15]

A pertinent analogue to Frost's progress, from the importance of sound to the importance of having something sound to say, appears in Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* when Bernardo Soares, an assistant bookkeeper in the city of Lisbon and that volume's heteronymous author, puts himself in the shoes of Cesário Verde, a

14. James Kugel, *The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 167. Given what gets in our ears nowadays—earworms, as they are called—one has to wonder whether an echo of "The Sounds of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel is not perceptible in Kugel's phrasing.
15. Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1949), v-viii, v.

beloved nineteenth-century Portuguese poet and *flaneur*.[16] Soares imagines himself on the streets of Lisbon slipping "into an era prior to the one [he] is living in," and remarks, "I enjoy feeling I'm a contemporary of Cesário Verde, and that in me I have, not verses like his, but the identical substance of the verses that were his."[17] Thus, Soares virtually contends that he could satisfactorily paraphrase "O Sentimento dum Occidental" ("The Feeling of a Westerner"), the most immediately pertinent poem of Cesário's in this context. In other words (and my point here is entirely about *other words*), Soares could convey the subject matter of that poem, its raw material, so to speak, but not in Cesário's style. Soares confidently claims an intimacy of thought and feeling with Cesário, a spiritual kinship. Though he could not write comparable verses, he gets it: the sentiment expressed by the poem. In this regard, Cavell's comments about "The Heresy of Paraphrase" and the debate it stirred between Cleanth Brooks and Yvor Winters, might save us from "fits of philosophy" and "demands for absoluteness" as we "talk past one another" in straining to distinguish between the "substance" and "the verses" here in question.[18] As much as anything pertaining directly to their argument about poetry and paraphrase, Cavell's manner of writing—his colloquial tone and idiomatic precision—helps him persuade the reader that, in their exchange, literary criticism is in danger of projecting words beyond the boundaries of relevant usage or meaning.

Here we glimpse a contemporary version of the ancient argument between poetry and philosophy, or rhetoric and philosophy, since so much of the modern poetics of style derives from classical textbooks of speech, writing, and literary taste, like *De Elocutione* (falsely attributed to Demetrius Phalereus).[19] Of course, "modern," does not mean modernist; rather, it charaterizes the period that includes the cultural movement customarily described as the Renaissance, which historians call the early mo-

16. Pessoa created distinctive selves, poets with their own recognizable styles and concerns. He called them heteronyms, not pseudonyms, to emphasize their separateness from their creator and what (ironically, perhaps) we may call their integrity as individuals. In *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1991), José Saramago wrote a whole book about one of them, whose limitations themselves inspire this novelist to expand upon Reis's behavior in a variety of contexts: Lisbon as a refuge for aristocratic expats during the Spanish Civil War, Reis's affair with the maid who makes up his room in the hotel where he lives, his desperate pilgrimage to the shrine at Fátima.
17. Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, ed. and trans. Richard Zenith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 13.
18. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 74-82.
19. Philip Rollinson and Richard Geckle, *A Guide to Classical Rhetoric* (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1998), 49-52.

dern period because of its technological advances (like the compass, gunpowder, and the printing press) and European encounters with previously unknown people as faraway as "the round earth's four imagined corners," in John Donne's memorable phrase.

Nowadays anthologies of English literature often include appendices on literary terminology which serve as useful reminders of what poets once derived from classical elements of style: rhetorical figures of speech and thought in Greek and Latin that became features of literary style worth appropriating for composition in the contemporary speech of ordinary European languages. Imitation of these "schemes and tropes" was thus intended to demonstrate vernacular accomplishments of early modern poets and their inheritors both in Romance languages and in English. For various reasons, however, many such figures increasingly seem merely ornamental, rather than organic, qualities of modern languages. [20] Cavell admits his own struggle with such distinctions in his early encounters with Emerson's prose when he acknowledges his "inability for a long time to hear the sense of Emerson's sentences within, rather than despite, what seemed to [him] their detachable ornaments."[21] Nonetheless, the history of any art—like poetry or film, for example—makes enduring impressions upon its later practitioners, who uniformly share the human lack of the divine omnipotence to create *ex nihilo*. This sense of the past regularly demonstrates that "Custom is our nature."[22] Or, as Billy Collins claims in his moving tribute to "the bicycling poet of San Francisco," Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "the trouble with poetry is that it creates more poetry," which may seem to suggest some falling off in what comes later, or too late, due to its inevitably derivative nature.

Yet, by stealing an image from Ferlinghetti in praising his poetry collection, *A Coney Island of the Mind*, Collins seems not merely to confess but to embrace that very fault as his own in this particular poem, "The Trouble with Poetry"—until he

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20. See Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), *passim*.
21. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1. Cavell is describing his arrival at a view of Emerson akin to that of Frost, who describes how Emerson "pretty near [made] him an antivocabularian" and cites Emerson's praise of Montaigne to summarize his feelings about Emerson's writing: "Cut these sentences and they bleed." "On Emerson," *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, eds. Hyde Cox and Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Collier Books, 1968), 111-18, 112-13.
22. Cavell cites this *pensée* from Pascal in Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 111.

adds that Ferlinghetti's "little amusement park of a book" served as his constant companion "up and down the treacherous halls of high school." He thus subordinates all the fuss about literary influence as a matter of style to the power of poetry to protect us—like a magic lance or shield or wingéd horse in a romance—in the face of imminent dangers in everyday settings. A collection of poems thus became a teenager's *vade mecum*, even his *enchiridion*, during perilous moments of his passage from youth into early adulthood. Implicitly Collins's acknowledgment of his debt to Ferlinghetti, like Frost's play on the word "sound" above (as both a noun and an adjective), serves as a reminder of something beyond literary style. There is a world elsewhere, a world within, which otherwise may go unacknowledged and unexpressed in cases of what philosophy calls the problem of other minds. Despite his literary theft (and the trouble with poetry which inspires it), Collins, like Ferlinghetti, offers us such a place, a sort of secular catacomb, and the prospect of finding companionship there.[23]

In risking to write the way he wrote, Cavell refused to relinquish his discernment of an unavoidable literariness in philosophical writing and demonstrated his unwillingness to banish poetry from his cities of words. He ultimately came to admire and inherit the thinking and writing of Emerson and Thoreau, who both occupy an unusual place on the boundary between literature and philosophy. Both of them perfectly fit Frost's observation about the former, Emerson, whose name, Frost accurately observes, "has gone [around the world] as a poetic philosopher or as a philosophical poet, [his] favorite kind of both."[24] Besides favoring occasionally poetic prose, Cavell also insisted upon the recalcitrance of American Transcendentalism as a way of thinking. It resists the frequent reductiveness of pragmatism's quest for *solutions* to human problems and its proneness to simply change the subject when due consideration of certain existential predicaments requires both patiently abiding questions that may arise and a willingness to return another day for a further try in situations where progress seems, at the moment, impossible.[25]

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23. Billy Collins, *The Trouble with Poetry and Other Poems* (New York: Random House, 2007). Note the parallel claim about film that Cavell must rescue from neglect due to its obviousness: "a movie comes from other movies." *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, expanded edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 7.
24. "On Emerson," 112.
25. See Cavell, "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?", in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 215-23, *passim*.

In turning to Emerson and Thoreau, Cavell also turned to film, which he found "as if meant for philosophy."[26] Though his interest in the problem of other minds and his attunement to a person's experience in such metaphysical straits served him especially well in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, he had suspected something like that genre must exist in conversation with remarriage comedy long before he was writing the chapters in that later book. In *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cavell had already raised the question of "adjacent genres" and made pertinent reference not only to *Adam's Rib* but also to *North by Northwest*.[27] His discernment of the former's adjacency to melodrama and the latter's to romantic comedy suggests thematic overlaps between such films and invites further comparisons.

As mentioned above, the metaphysical plight Cavell identifies as the problem of other minds could as well be characterized as *the otherness of our own minds*, inasmuch as Cavell is poignantly describing an individual's sense of his, or her, or their own "unknownness" and "inexpressiveness." Moreover, the question of pronouns in this regard is a pertinent contemporary development insofar as it signals a crisis of confinement, or coercion, that we feel as individuals preemptively stuck in a slot by dictates of law and convention, the nomenclature of the state we're in, both politically and interpersonally. Traditional grammar labels such words *possessive pronouns*. Yet, they seem to function as adjectives that modify whatever nouns they are applied to; and adjectives describe attributes, not essences. They qualify. They do not identify.[28] In *Contesting Tears*, Cavell summons an episode from *Adam's Rib* (1950), a remarriage comedy in which Adam Bonner (Spencer Tracy) pretends to cry. He uses this episode to suggest that "an unknown woman" may plausibly reside within *his* (Tracy's) ostensibly masculine character.[29]

Walt Whitman, like Cavell, experiences such constraint empathetically, and he defies a basic principle of logic in his famous response to a question that he himself begs: *Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself. / (I am large, I*

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26. Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1996), xii, in a passage that echoes the book's epigraph.
27. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 33-4.
28. Of course, such adjectival pronouns also raise questions about ownership as an accurate characterization of our relation to our selves or anybody else's.
29. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 185.

contain multitudes).[30] Cavell specifically claims that the irony of human identity is a central theme in the movies he calls melodramas of the unknown woman; and, in his essay about *Now, Voyager* (1942), which takes its title from a poem of Whitman's, Cavell feels moved to speak in the voice of Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) and to impersonate *them* in the process.[31] Beyond the provocation of Cavell's assumption of this woman's dual identity as both character and actor—a performance of what nowadays we might term his gender fluidity as a writer—Cavell's essay on *North by Northwest* (1958) and *Hamlet* offers another film in a different genre (the romantic thriller) as a meditation on human identity. The mistaken identification of that film's protagonist, Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), as George Kaplan, a fictional agent in a ploy cooked up at the United States Intelligence Agency, raises fundamental questions about naming and being. As one of the agents around the conference table at headquarters in Washington, D. C., puts it, "How could he be George Kaplan when George Kaplan doesn't even exist?" This dilemma of non-existence, the virtual annihilation of the self, ironically conveys *in extremis* the plight of unknownness and inexpressiveness; and it figures memorably in a later exchange when Thornhill meets Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) in the dining car on the Twentieth Century Limited and Eve has just noticed the initials that appear on the matchbook Thornhill produces to light her cigarette.

> THORNHILL: My trademark—ROT.
> EVE: Roger O. Thornhill. What does the O stand for?
> THORNHILL: Nothing

Besides echoing Hamlet's famous line, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.67, as the movie's title and various other moments throughout the

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30. Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, section 51, in *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin, 1959), 85.
31. Fernando Pessoa loved Whitman and Emerson, among other American writers (for example, he translated *The Scarlet Letter* into Portuguese). No modern writer better illustrates the sense of the self that Whitman asserts, for Pessoa created distinctive selves, poets with their own recognizable styles and concerns. He called them heteronyms, not pseudonyms, to emphasize their separateness from their creator. In *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1991), José Saramago wrote a whole book about one of them, whose limitations themselves inspire this novelist to expand upon Reis's behavior in a variety of contexts: Lisbon as a refuge for aristocratic expats during the Spanish Civil War, Reis's affair with the maid who makes up his room in the hotel where he lives, his desperate pilgrimage to the shrine at Fátima.

film echo other phrases and aspects of *Hamlet*),[32] this exchange suggests that the self may be nothing more than a cipher, constituted, at most, by circumstances that momentarily inform it. The self will change or, perhaps, vanish when conditions change. Roger Thornhill is indeed George Kaplan, who doesn't even exist, since he now wears a target on his back that Eve's associates have mistakenly put there. In such a predicament the self's dissolution could have its advantages.[33]

There is poetry in the palpable threat of self-loss or, rather, in the felicitous expression of that threat; and we know that better than Thornhill when we read Cavell's nuanced interpretation of his dilemma. For example, his pun about Eve's holding the key to Thornhill's birth transforms the berth in the compartment they share, from New York to Chicago, into a resonant sign of the stakes in their first meeting: a sign not only of imminent death, but of resurrection as well.[34] Likewise, when Cavell first asserts thematic relations between Ibsen's *A Doll House* and the Hollywood films he explores, he specifically discerns not only the risks Nora runs in "her acceptance of her unprotected identity." As he proceeds, Cavell also becomes as plain and direct as one could ever wish about the poetry that informs these works: "Ibsen, and these films, declare that our lives are poems."[35] Hearkening to such poetry assists Nora in nothing less than "becoming a human being," and Cavell's reading of Ibsen may thus begin to awaken us to the presence of such poetry in our own experience. In this regard it had a somewhat kindred effect on Toril Moi's chapter on this play, which she presents under the title "First and Foremost a Human Being" in her book on Ibsen.[36]

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32. Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*.
33. In the opening of "Tabacaria" ("The Tobacco Shop"), Álvaro de Campos, another of Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms, expresses this sense of the self with a totalizing dash of Whitman's expansiveness thrown into the mix: "I'm nothing. / I'll always be nothing. / I can't want to be something. / But I have in me all the dreams of the world." Fernando Pessoa, *Forever Someone Else: Selected Poems* translated by Richard Zenith, 3rd Edition (Porto, Portugal: Assírio & Alvim, 2013), 178.
34. Cavell carefully insists that this play on words is not his but rather a response to Hitchcock's clear visual pun: Eve "incorporates the mother, perhaps the mother he never had, protecting him from the police by hiding him in the bellying container that shows she holds the key to his berth. (This wasn't necessary: the fact that she subsequently hides him from the porter sufficiently well in the washroom proves that.)" "*North by Northwest*," in *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes* San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1984), 152-72, 161.
35. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 23-4.
36. Toril Moi, "Becoming a Human Being," in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 223-47. Moi previously acknowledges her significant debt to Cavell, "*What Is a Woman?" And Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), *passim*.

What was Nora before she leaves? Or who? you may ask and, pointedly, claim that this poetry business not only sounds highbrow but also exclusionary if it denies Nora her prior humanity. Her husband, Torvald, however, performs that task of belittlement and deprivation by infantilizing and dehumanizing Nora. He treats her like a child and reduces her to the status of a pet with animal nicknames, which sound like terms of endearment but can be taken as threatening suggestions of her true condition in their marriage. In his anxious conformity, Torvald, of course, *recites* his own dark poetry, which contains nothing fresh or original; and its meaning is dawning in Nora's mind. But it was crafted by Ibsen; and his words—that is, the words of the play as a whole—have various senses, which are not always audible to everybody on stage, least of all to Torvald. For example, when he observes that Nora has "changed" (into her street clothes)—an action that brings home her intention, then and there, to leave her husband and children—we can hear Torvald's remark ironically as well as literally. Besides her attire, Nora herself has changed, in a spiritual sense. She has come to the realization that, if she remains in the house she shares with Torvald and her children, she is putting her humanity in further and greater jeopardy than if she leaves in an effort to acquire the education she needs "to become a human being."[37] The language in Nora's world and in the Hollywood movies that Cavell interprets does not sound poetic in any traditional, or high, literary sense; it sounds domestic and ordinary. But, if you listen up, it is poetry, and you will hear that our lives are poems.[38]

The multiple senses of words and the larger units they compose, like sentences and poems and plays, can bring us to a region of interpretation that, historically, includes the idea of scripture and the four senses of allegory, as they were formulated by medieval exegetes. Cavell invokes this notion prominently in the title and text of his "little book" on Thoreau, *The Senses of Walden*; but allegorical interpretation, in its basic form as construing one thing in terms of another, also helps Cavell express his understanding of the relation between Othello and Desdemona in *Othello*, which he considers "a failed comedy of remarriage."[39] Simply put, Cavell views their relation

37. In his essay on Ibsen in *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 247-64, Cavell writes of Nora's "duty to herself," her discovery "that she has allowed herself not to have a self, or to claim a self, at all," and her "claiming her right to exist."
38. "Bensinger, the poet" (Ernest Truex), in *His Girl Friday* (1940), hasn't a clue about such uses of language; and you don't need an Ivy League degree to see that. Your laughter will tell you.
39. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 142.

as an *allegory* of the collapse of skepticism with respect to the external world into skepticism with respect to other minds. This capacious insight into the overall philosophical drama that he discerns in Shakespearean tragedy enables Cavell to bring *The Claim of Reason* to a close and to write five more essays about Shakespeare's tragedies and tragicomedies.[40]

Any remotely complete list of significant literary turns (and terms) in Cavell's thinking and writing cannot omit his deployment of Northrup Frye's idea of the Green World in Shakespearean comedy and romance, which is structurally fundamental to Cavell's readings of Hollywood comedies of remarriage. The mention of romance, in turn, can remind us how Cavell uses that genre's typically episodic structuring of the stories it tells to describe the associative quality of his own thinking. He characterizes himself, in the manner of Thoreau, as a surveyor of the buffer zone between poetry and philosophy "forever trying to make out the geography of surprising adjacencies, inner and outer, spots of thought and of feeling whose comprehension exactly lies in their adjacencies, in what lies before and after them" As his thinking advances along these lines, Cavell weaves the words of John Hollander into a text of his own;[41] and he discovers that the quest, which is the very essence of romance, is the form that his inquiries tend to take: "This fantasy of surveying is a late version... of a quest myth, in which the goal of the quest is an understanding of the origin of the quest, is a version of the dream that dispatches you."[42]

That final pronoun, in turn, reveals the increasingly explicit autobiographical trend in Cavell's thinking from his first book, *Must We Mean What We Say?* to his last, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*, and raises this pertinent question: How can we tell the dreamer from the dream? Cavell's deployment of the word "exactly" above

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40. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 451-2; *Disowning Knowledge*, 6. Here it is worth recalling the etymology of the word "allegory." The first syllable comes from a Greek adjective for "other" and the second and third syllables come from a Greek verb meaning "to speak." The latter word in Greek derives from *agora*, the place for public speaking in ancient Athens, suggestively putting into play the tension between public and private, or esoteric, meanings.

41. Of course, the word "text" itself derives from the same root as "textile" and inspires many authors of romance to come up with metaphors about the challenges of spinning multiple yarns into the fabric of their compositions. E. g., Ludovico Ariosto in *Orlando Furioso* 13.81: "It seems I need many strands to finish the great tapestry I'm making." See Lawrence F. Rhu, *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory: Translations of the Early Poetics and a Comparative Study of Their Significance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 41-2.

42. Cavell, "A Reply to John Hollander," in *Themes Out of School*, 141-44, 143. Cavell's title, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1988) prominently displays this sense of his own way of thinking.

should reassure us of the precision of his perception, just as his acknowledgment of the constant effort required to achieve such perspicuity should remind us of his candor. Both acknowledgment and discernment, moreover, can help us respond to that question with another: Does the distinction between the dreamer and the dream hold? Or does it, rather, help us better appreciate Cavell's increasing reluctance to separate autobiography from philosophy? Or, as he puts it in "Thinking of Emerson," moods from objects? "This very evanescence of the world proves its existence to me; it *is* what vanishes from me... [T]his is not realism exactly, but it is not solipsism either."[43]

Medieval exegesis codified the fourfold reading of scripture into the senses of allegory: literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical.[44] Discernment of Thoreau's intention to write a scripture (or its modern equivalent, in the reduced circumstances that characterize the present age) persuades Cavell to read *Walden* as a text that abounds in a multiplicity of senses by no means confined to the traditional four and their specific categories. Moreover, understanding Thoreau's intention to write such a text reveals his claim to prophecy or divine inspiration to authorize his voice, even though he must touch his own lips in asserting his right to speak, a claim that Cavell calls arrogation of voice.[45] Dante made such claims for his *Divine Comedy* as a learned poet securely embedded within a shared Christian culture where his readership would recognize his intentions; and he used Psalm 114:1-3 as a prooftext to elaborate upon those claims in a letter to his patron, Can Grande della Scala.[46] Since the laity were mainly illiterate during the middle ages and the clergy, whose official language was Latin, exercised a monopoly on the authority to interpret scripture, Dante's daring assertiveness on behalf of his poem in the vernacular stands out in bold relief. But Luther's subsequent challenge to the Church of Rome's authority, with his assertion of the priesthood of all believers and his translation of the Bible into German, made

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43. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 10-19, 13. The essay's title itself, "Thinking of Emerson," straddles the distinction between subject and object, as though it is impossible to say where Cavell's thinking ends and Emerson's begins, and vice versa. Grammatically, the title intentionally blurs the difference between a subjective and an objective genitive, or moods and objects inasmuch as moods are generally construed as subjective.
44. Sometimes these "senses" are called "levels," but the latter term suggests hierarchical ranking, as though one or another sense is higher or lower than others, so I avoid the term "levels" in this regard.
45. See Cavell, *The Senses of "Walden": An Expanded Edition* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), 29: "He puts his hand upon his own mouth." See also Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), vi and 10.
46. Allan H. Gilbert, *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 202-6.

literacy an imperative for protestant culture and further transformed both the role of the writer and the readership of books, which circulated ever more widely due to the invention of the printing press.

Such 17th-century narratives as *Paradise Lost* and *Pilgrim's Progress* enjoyed wide popularity among New Englanders as rewritings of the sacred text; they served as third testaments and fifth gospels.[47] The vatic aspirations in Milton's summons of the heavenly muse represent that protestant author as a channel of prophetic revelations, communicated mysteriously through the Bible.[48] In a lower register, the dream of Christian, the pilgrim, performs a similar function among the daughters of the March family in Concord during the Civil War in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Such ambitions linger in nineteenth-century writers even as their sense of secular individualism increasingly separates them from biblical religion. Thoreau's desire to conduct some business with the Celestial Empire allegorizes his spiritual quest in terms of Yankee mercantilism and the China sea trade, but his transcendental mission remains legible as a pilgrim's *itinerarium mentis in Deum*, despite the economic considerations that animate the culture he must both resist and accommodate.[49] Though he may sound more like a Weberian exegete satirizing the spirit of capitalism than a pious Augustinian, he experiences his residence on earth with this conviction: "Nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being."[50] When he saunters in Concord, he identifies—metaphysically, if you will—with pilgrims to the Holy Land: "saunterers in the good sense," as he puts it, to distinguish those headed *à la Sainte Terre* from "mere idlers and vagabonds."[51]

In my youth, though hardly like Thoreau, I travelled a good deal in Concord. For five years, I attended Middlesex School, on Lowell Road, three miles west of "the rude

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47. See Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *God's Plot and Man's Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1985) *passim*.
48. I touch upon some of these passages in "After the Middle Ages: Prophetic Authority and Human Fallibility in Renaissance Epic," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of Literary Tradition*, ed. James Kugel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 163-84, 244-6.
49. See John Freccero, "Pilgrim in a Gyre," *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 70-92, 70: "St. Bonaventure was the medieval theorist who worked out the metaphor of the *intinerarium mentis* in great detail, but it remained for Dante to write the work which gave the metaphor substance and made great poetry from a figure of speech."
50. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, 2nd edn., ed. William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 90.
51. Thoreau, "Walking," *Thoreau: The Major Essays*, ed. Jeffrey L. Duncan (E. P. Dutton & Company, 1972),194-226, 194. See William deBuys, *The Walk* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2007), 8-9.

bridged that arched the flood" in that legendary town in Massachusetts. Of course, it was more than a century after the heyday of Transcendentalism, and the town was more akin to the place Robert Lowell describes in "Concord," a sonnet that begins "Ten thousand Fords are idle here in search / Of a tradition," and features "The ruined bridge and Walden's fished out perch."[52] Though Concord was 2,500 miles from Tucson, Arizona, where I grew up, my parents and I almost accidentally reached the decision that I would attend that particular school. My older brother, Roger, was a handful who worried my parents sick, so they began singing the praises of going away to school, like Eric, the boy next door, who had gone off to Loomis in Windsor, Connecticut. Having grown up in central Ohio and western Pennsylvania respectively, neither my mother nor my father knew much about New England schools; but Eric's recent departure gave them a place to begin this phase of their anxious effort to address a family crisis. Meal after meal at our dinner table, my mother's encomia of such institutions and her exhortations about the benefits of such an education fell on Roger's deaf ears while I, with no apparent stake in the matter, was unconsciously absorbing her message.

My mother's passion about education came from her family circumstances and the extra effort they required of her to attend college. On my father's side there were physicians with medical degrees from Western Reserve: his grandfather, Auguste Rhu, who had abandoned hopes of a career as a concert pianist to become a surgeon; and his father, Hermann, Sr., who joined Auguste's practice in the house where my father grew up in Marion, Ohio, and initially followed a similar path. His mother, Lucy White Rhu from Buffalo, New York, graduated from Vassar and wrote poetry.[53] On my mother's side, however, neither of her parents went to college, or even to high school in the case of her father, Lawrence Ford.

His large family from Dundee, Scotland, had arrived on our shores in 1888, when he was eight-years-old, and four years later a shortfall in family finances forced him, as the oldest son, to drop out of school in Pittsburgh after the eighth grade. Ultimately, he became a Baptist minister when he was thirty-years-old, mainly due to

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52. Robert Lowell, *Lord Weary's Castle and The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (New York: Meridian Books, 1961), 27.
53. There is not much evidence for this claim, but, in one of Eric Carle's menagerie books under "P," these verses by Lucy W. Rhu appear: *Consider the Penguin / He's smart as can be - / Dressed in his dinner clothes permanently. / You never can tell / When you see him about, / If he's just coming in / Or just going out!*

the interest he'd stirred by an invited talk he gave at a church in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, about various jobs he'd held up till then: gopher at the Pittsburgh Stock Exchange, scoreboard keeper at Forbes Field during the heyday of the Flying Dutchman (Honus Wagner), private eye, etc. Soon he received another invitation for a much longer stay among the Baptists. So, by the time I was getting to know him, people were referring to him as Dr. Ford with enough persistence to have broken his strong resistance to that unearned honorific. His name had also acquired a middle initial, "B," which by then stood for "Browning," though it derived from "Brownie," his nickname as a boy due to his densely freckled body's susceptibility to a deep tan.

The year after she graduated from high school, my mother worked fulltime to save money for her college tuition and expenses; yet, she still had to overcome further resistance to receive her father's permission, first, to apply to Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and, then, to matriculate. There Ruth met Hermann, Jr., who had taken no "gap year," so, he was a year younger than this new freshman classmate. Yet, even if that current idiom accurately applies in part to her experience, she did not *take* that gap year. Necessity required it, though it served her well. Ruth worked that year for the president of a bank who was a member of her father's congregation at the First Baptist Church on Franklin Street in Vandergrift, not far from the Presbyterian Church where the poet Li-Young Lee's father was the preacher a decade or so after my grandfather had retired and moved to Tucson.[54] The secretarial skills Ruth acquired at the bank enabled her to work for the president of Denison as an undergraduate. She also became the only "coed" to major in Economics, which, of course, is not to be confused with Home Economics. She always stressed the shortness of funds that initially put higher education out of her reach, but, though it went unsaid, her being a young woman counted against her. Her brother William, who was ten year her senior, had graduated from college and medical school by the time Ruth started her freshman year at Denison.

Recently, I chanced upon a diary my father briefly kept as a freshman there. On Monday January 1, 1933, he writes, "I leave tonight for Granville. I certainly will be glad to see Ruth again. I certainly have missed her company during vacation." On Tuesday he elaborates on this theme: "Saw Ruth today. She certainly looked well and

54. Li-Young Lee, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* (Brockport, NY: BOA, 2013).

is better looking than ever if that is possible. I only hope she was as glad to see me as I was to see her. She acted as if she was and she also mentioned the fact that she was glad to see me again." We need to look no further than these sentences for the problem of other minds as it relates to the heart's affections and whatever poetry we may discover there to write or read or live. Between "the fact" and acting "as if" (that is, between reality and theatricality), shadows of doubt may fall, no matter how many times "certainly" qualifies our observations in this regard. In fact, the number of times we use "certainly" may be a tell that conveys our uncertainty, as theorists of the unconscious observe. But poets seek words for shades of meaning to voice nuances of feeling and observation that, despite our separateness and isolation, may reassure and inspire us with the prospect of bridging the gap between ourselves and another or others, even if only on paper.[55]

When I first read those sentences in my father's diary, my wife and daughter and I were visiting my sister, Lucy, and her husband, Win, in Walnut Creek, California. We were all just back from the Palace of the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco, one of the predetermined stops on the unofficial *Vertigo* tour we planned for our visit. We went there, of course, to see a central prop in that suspenseful Hitchcock thriller, the portrait of Carlotta, which was, unfortunately, in the shop or out on loan, and nowhere to be found. Only a slightly lighter rectangle in an otherwise blank section of wall indicated where the painting was usually on display. At first that blankness seemed an aniconic anticlimax to our quest for something a little closer to the real thing. But then it seemed a still small voice reminding me that the movie itself had not used the original but only a reproduction of it. Besides, the original was only an oil painting of a woman who is now long dead; it was not the woman herself. What real thing were we seeking?

In reading *Vertigo* (1958), Cavell explicitly uses the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea as an aid to interpretation, which variously serves him elsewhere in pivotal readings of other plays and films as well: *The Lady Eve* (1941), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *The Winter's Tale*, and *Othello*, for example.[56] In the first three of those

55. See Fred Dings, "Paper Bridge," in *After the Solstice* (Alexandria, VA: Orchises Press, 1993), 38.
56. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film,* enlarged edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 84-7. See Lawrence F. Rhu, "A Skeptic's Reprieve: Cavell on Comedy in Shakespeare and the Movies," in *The Thought of Stanley Cavell and Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020) 170-187, especially 180f.

works (i.e., the comedies and the romance or tragicomedy), the generosity of Venus survives from Ovid's tale and overcomes most odds against immediate happiness in such a lover's passion when cold stone turns to warm flesh. In the tragedy, which Cavell calls a failed comedy of remarriage, Othello's skeptical gaze petrifies the woman into an alabaster beauty before he himself finishes the job with his bare hands and turns her into a corpse, reversing the Ovidian metamorphosis. Further casualties soon transform the stage and marriage bed into an unbearable sight.

Fortunately, however, tragedy was not the last word or the ultimate genre for Shakespeare. Tragicomedies like *The Winter's Tale* offered him exit strategies, and he found ways out of such apocalyptic finales of death and destruction as bring *King Lear* to a conclusion or haunt *Othello* as a possibility almost from the play's beginning. Wonder, rather than pity and fear, defines the dominant mood of key turning points in such tragicomedies as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. In the last act of Shakespeare's penultimate play, *The Winter's Tale*, when King Leontes allegedly beholds Giulio Romano's statue of his supposedly deceased wife, Hermione, his astonishment prompts this question about reality and artistic representation: *What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath?* (5.3.78-9). Without putting too fine a point on it, we can observe that the caesura in the second line arrives immediately after words that virtually define "caesura," which is a technical term from classical prosody. It derives from the Latin verb meaning "to cut," and it means a cutting of the breath mid-verse, a pause, like the sound of the thinnest silence. Even Shakespeare's allegedly "small Latin" provided him with such knowledge.

Shakespeare's philosophical range and theological consciousness also remains fully operational as he begins to turn from tragedy to tragicomedy. Inspired by Horace's Cleopatra ode as much as by history, Shakespeare had recently portrayed the death of that Egyptian queen and notorious epicurean (in a derogatory sense), as a triumphant hero of stoic transcendence in the last act of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Moreover, she not only preserves her dignity in dying by her own hand; she also earns the praise of Octavius Caesar, who celebrates her beauty thereafter in terms that resonate with ultimate concerns of Reformation Christianity about grace and works: *she looks like sleep / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grac*e (5.2.336-8). Just a few years later, in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare boldly echoes

Lucretius's argument for using poetry to make Hellenistic philosophy more palatable in a dramatic finale presided over by the aptly named Paulina. He thus transforms Leontes's agon at the crossroads of guilt and redemption into an epicurean transcendence of human anguish and an aesthetic transformation of human loss and mortality during three hours traffic on the stage: "For this affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort" (5.3.76-7).

Given the death of Leontes' eight-year-old son, Mamillius, sixteen years earlier (as well as Leontes' murderous imprisonment of Hermione and abandonment of their infant daughter, Perdita), the happy reunion of such a ruined family is a remote possibility in the world as we usually find it. It requires wonder and astonishment even to entertain the prospect of its temporary accomplishment. Yet, indoors at Blackfriars, where Shakespeare's tragicomedies were mainly performed, as in the dark at movie houses, where the hyperbolic extremes of melodrama were once mainly screened, audiences may quietly release their hidden screams despite themselves and find some comfort. The heart may be a lonely hunter, yet, even in the worst of circumstances, it doesn't necessarily give up the hunt entirely: *The art of our necessities is strange*.[57] The wonder of Shakespearean romance is a mode of recovery, even for adults, who sometimes hope against hope and despair of despair in order to proceed. If Cavell's is a philosophy for grown-ups, it still finds its voice, without embarrassment, in the extremes of melodrama and tragicomedy.

My mother's youthful fervor for education remained palpable to me in her parenting when I was a boy. Without forced arguments and excessive efforts at persuasion, it reached me compellingly and reminds me now of critical moments in my early years as a teacher when my classes were composed of 'tweens and teens. Sometimes my "gut reactions" to certain of their "behavioral problems" seemed to spring out of nowhere, yet they would succeed in communicating my seriousness with surprising efficacy. Later, I learned to "professionalize" such responses because they could have exhausted me in the long run; but, in the meantime, they were a gift from my young students whose provocations reacquainted me with realities of my own heart and its deepest values. Yet, I was not directly the target of my mother's dinnertime endorsements of the advantages of going away to school, just their collateral beneficiary. For

57. Shakespeare, *King Lear* (conflated text), 3.2.68.

I was doing fine at Doolen Junior High School in Tucson, when my older brother, Roger's, brushes with various authorities were prompting my parents to consider desperate measures. Though I preferred to hang out at the park and play sports during the summer, my mother still succeeded in urging me to pursue certain educationally beneficial activities, like reading for two hours a day during the summer and trying out for the Arizona Boys Chorus, that I would otherwise not have chosen as my pastimes. Thus, one day during dinner, amid another serving of fulsome praise of private schools such as neither she nor my father had ever attended, I was moved to ask, apparently out of the blue, "What about me? Why don't you want me to go to one of those schools?"

Of course, my question should have come as no great surprise, though it did. And soon thereafter my mother learned that the Admissions Director from a Massachusetts school had come to Tucson to recruit applicants. Though none of us had ever heard of Middlesex, she said, "Those schools are probably all pretty much the same," and urged me to meet him. The Director, a charmingly ironic man, seasoned his pitch with self-effacing open-mindedness and then gave all would-be applicants a preliminary test that resulted in the school's offering me a scholarship. By then, metaphorically speaking, the train had left the station, and I was on it. Almost a year later, however, I actually departed from El Paso on a very real train that took me to Chicago, where Eric's parent picked me up and drove me the rest of the way to Concord via Waterbury.

Those rides, by car and train in September 1958, and later by Greyhound bus, strike me as preludes to a beginner's experiences of anxiety about origins and destinations, which often comes with travel and changes of residence. Where do I come from? Where am I going? Where is home? Yet, who doesn't wonder about such things, even if they stay home? And who doesn't begin wondering much earlier than their early teens? Maybe that is what Nora means about becoming a human being: it gets you thinking. Your humanity involves giving wonder and worry their due whenever they arrive and time allows, or when we simply must. In Boston at the Museum of Fine Arts, Gaugin's triptych invites us to commune with his expression of this interrogative mood in distant Tahiti. In Lisbon, Bernardo Soares is one of the alternate selves, or heteronyms, of Fernando Pessoa, whose multiple personalities define so

much of today's literary sense of place there on the estuary of the Tejo. He writes of disquiet (*desassossego*) in ways that correspond to moods of anxiety that pervade so much of mid-twentieth-century existentialist writing in vogue during my youth.[58] Yet, Soares emphasizes his deep attachment to Lisbon, if not his rootedness there. So, my own experience of uprootedness, which took me faraway to a fancy school, may seem disproportionately remarkable to me. It was, no doubt, in many ways a privilege; yet, it may also have become an event that I factor into ordinary human experiences of homesickness and separation from one's family with too much emphasis. But what would be the right degree of emphasis?

Augustine writes of human restlessness in ways that Walker Percy found compatible with existential homelessness as well as traditional interpretations of *our* exile from the garden of Eden; and Percy arguably wrote the finest novel ever about New Orleans as a distinctive place with a particular culture—at least until John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* came along, thanks to Dr. Percy's help in rescuing the manuscript of that novel from oblivion after its author's death by his own hand.[59] Both of those novels, however, are composed, in counterpoint: they memorably play local color off against philosophy and theology to create specific worlds within worlds more generally accessible from outside. Toole's protagonist, Ignatius Reilly, summons "theology and geometry" when he reaches for detachment and perspective; Binx Bolling, the moviegoer who narrates his own story in Percy's novel, employs categories, like repetition and rotation from Kierkegaard, and others, like certification and the search, which he comes up with on his own.

For *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help*, Percy takes his epigraph from the opening of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, apparently unaware that it derives from the first paragraph of Emerson's "Experience," which begins with this question: "Where do we find ourselves?" and reveals the raw bewilderment of a father's grief over the loss of his five-year-old son, Waldo for Waldo, if you will. This crossroads of literary influence and inheritance becomes complicated when we learn that Percy belatedly regretted the omission of a second epigraph from Augustine, which he added

58. See Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails* (New York: Other Press, 2016).
59. "Forward to *A Confederacy of Dunces*," *Sign-Posts in a Strange Land*, ed. Patrick Samway (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 224-6.

to the paperback edition of his book: "God, give us the power to know ourselves."[60] Further complications arise when we read what Percy's biographer, Jay Tolson, makes of Percy's declining an invitation to deliver the 1987 Phi Beta Kappa Address at Harvard Commencement, the sesquicentennial of Emerson's "American Scholar." In *Pilgrim in the Ruins*, Tolson construes that incident as evidence of Percy's pervasive anti-Emersonianism and a defining characteristic of his world view.[61] Yet, in a letter to William Alfred, one of the Harvard professors eager to bring Percy to campus as a graduation speaker, Percy himself acknowledges that he simply does not know much about Emerson and, as a writer in his seventies with various projects underway, he simply has other priorities.

By the time I graduated from Middlesex, my father had sought to provoke me once or twice by calling me "Camus"; and, in a long-distance phone call from Concord, I had apologized to him for deciding to go to Harvard. Perhaps his teasing warrants deeper analysis, but it plainly reminds me of how ready I was to read *The Moviegoer* when it first appeared in 1961 and how much I enjoyed Percy's earlier essays, like "The Man on the Train," when I later encountered them. Camus and Sartre, as well as continental philosophy and fiction more generally, informed Percy's otherwise careful detailing of the world way down yonder and the people of New Orleans. As for my apology, my father simply laughed and said, "If that's the worst thing you ever do, you'll probably turn out OK." Of course, he should not have the last word on my conduct since 1963 when I was eighteen-years-old, but the funny thing is he was right in a way: Harvard was bad enough, though it did not bring out only the worst in me.

At Middlesex boarding students had limited access to the use of a phone, and such cross-country calls were (comparatively) expensive. So, mine were also infrequent, and they almost always began with, or promptly included, this question: "What time is it there?" as though time was as profound a concern as place and the distance it put between me and my family back home in Tucson. On first looking into *The Moviegoer*, however, I began to hear an intimate voice from afar, and it wasn't merely, or necessarily, Binx Bolling, the first-person narrator, who alone spoke to me.

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60. Walker Percy, *Conversations with Walker Percy*, ed. Lewis A. Lawson and Victor A. Kramer (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1985), 293.
61. I detail "further complications" in Tolson's account in "'Where do we find ourselves?' Emerson, Percy, and Ford as Unlikely Soulmates," *Anglo Saxonica* Ser. III, 12 (Lisbon: University of Lisbon Center for English Studies, 2016), 203-19.

Rather, as I began to sort out the story's various registers in description and dialogue and self-disclosure, it sounded more like what Percy elsewhere calls news from across the sea, whose message is not so much timely as time-altering.[62] Thus, many years later in researching documentary evidence of the friendship between Percy and Robert Coles, I was gratefully brought up short by this statement in a letter from Percy to Coles about the latter's citation of a passage of Cavell in *Walker Percy: An American Search*: "A happy confirmation: your quote from Cavell's book on *Ontology of Film*. It exactly expresses *The Moviegoer*'s implied ontology. (I'm glad Cavell wrote it after *The Moviegoer*.)"[63] In his citation Coles trims that passage of Cavell's virtuoso survey of relevant perspectives among modern philosophers, which summons the names of Hume and Kant and Locke and positions them in relation to Hegel and Marx and Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as contextual evidence for this claim about our experience of film:

> What we wish to see in this way is the world itself—that is to say, everything… To say that we wish to view the world itself is to say that we are wishing for the condition of viewing as such. That is the way we establish our connection with the world: by viewing it. Our condition has become one in which our natural mode of perception is to view, feeling unseen; viewing a movie makes this condition automatic, takes the responsibility for it out of our hands. Hence movies seem more natural than reality. Not because they are escapes into fantasy, but because they are reliefs from private fantasy and its responsibilities.[64]

I came to know Coles during my senior year at Harvard when I took Erik Erikson's course on the Human Life Cycle in the fall of 1966 and Coles was my section leader. It was, to say the least, a turbulent time in our country and in universities across the land. "The Avoidance of Love," Cavell's essay on *King Lear*, unforgettably registers

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62. Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 139-49.
63. Emphasis Percy's. This letter of December 7, 1978, along with numerous others from Percy to Coles, is in the Robert Coles Collection at Michigan State University. I am grateful to David Cooper for making them available to me and to Robert Coles for unfettered access to his papers at MSU and in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill).
64. Robert Coles, *Walker Percy: An American Search* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 156-7.

his contemporary response to the American tragedy then underway in Southeast Asia and here at home. The first of its two parts was written in the summer of 1966, and the second in the summer of 1967. Twenty years later at the time of its republication in *Disowning Knowledge*, Cavell acknowledges that his essay "bears the scars of our period in Vietnam; its strange part 2 is not in control of its asides and orations and love letters of nightmare."[65]

A few years later, Coles made his own remarkable contribution to the public conversation about the war in Vietnam. During the summer of 1970, he hosted Father Daniel Berrigan for a week at his home in Concord, Massachusetts, while the Jesuit priest was a fugitive from the FBI for his involvement in the destruction of selective service files in federal offices in Catonsville, Maryland. In March and April of 1971, their tape-recorded conversations first appeared in three successive issues of the *New York Review of Books* as "A Dialogue Undergound" and then were published as a book called *The Geography of Faith*.[66] During the previous decade, Coles had been active down south in the Civil Rights Movement, mainly as a reporter and researcher. His medical specialty as a psychiatrist sometimes involved him in court proceedings where the authority of such expertise gave him some influence on the treatment of activists in jail and on trial. His research focused on how individuals and families respond to political crises, and it constituted part of his own response to the struggle for civil rights in the South. But his role as a participant observer did not preclude taking sides. He did not want the detachment and objectivity prized by social science to immunize him against the moral and political passions aroused by social crises.

On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving 1966, Coles held our section meeting in his small office behind Claverly Hall on Mount Auburn St. because he anticipated that most students may have already headed home for the holiday by then. Among those few who came to class that Wednesday, the conversation turned to the anti-war prstudent demonstration against the war that had detained Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, during his visit to Harvard just over two weeks earlier. Protesters blocked his departure, first, in Quincy House; then, on Mill Street behind Lowell House, they forced a confrontation with him. Coles must have sensed how upset I was

65. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, x.
66. Robert Coles and Daniel Berrigan, SJ, *The Geography of Faith: Underground Conversations on Religious, Political and Social Change* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971).

about the news of that event, or perhaps he had already discerned how generally troubled and on edge I was overall in those days. Though we had not spoken personally before that small group meeting in his office, he phoned me out of the blue on the Friday after Thanksgiving and asked me how I was doing. He was upset too, as it turned out, though it took me a long time to fully realize the truth of that fact, which he was quite willing to share from the beginning of our conversations. I had encountered nothing at Harvard before like his candor and his political passion, and nothing like his kindness either, in the way he reached out to me that day. Gradually our friendship blossomed out of that call and became an inspiration for me thereafter. Thus, when Cavell discusses the need for an alternative response to the criticism of his colleagues "who were so fiercely contemptuous of the behavior of our distressed students" in 1969, I count my lucky stars, as my grandmother would put it, that I met Coles in that hour of my distress over two years earlier.

In the summer of 1968, I began working for him as a research assistant after my first year in the MAT Program at Harvard when I taught junior high school in Newton, Massachusetts. During my second year in that program, I returned to campus to finish my required courses, but I also taught two sections in William Alfred's humanities course on drama in the Program on General Education and continued working for Coles. First, I compiled the notes for his biography of Erikson, and then I gathered uncollected writings by and about both Walker Percy and Simone Weil, each of whom would subsequently become the subject of one of Coles' books. When I started working for him, he had written a profile of Erikson for *The New Yorker* which he was in the process of turning into a book that Little, Brown would publish in 1970; and he would soon do the same with Percy, though publication in *The New Yorker* and then in another book from Little, Brown, *Walker Percy: An American Search*, was delayed almost six years, until late 1978.

Though he failed to convince the magazine's editor William Shawn to publish such a piece about Simone Weil, Coles took particular pride in another *New Yorker* profile of his that appeared between those of Erikson and Percy. As a "southern writer," in Shawn's phrase to Coles when he first broached the idea of a Percy profile, Percy was already something of an anomaly for that magazine in the '70s, but Coles was astonished at the alacrity with which an editor called him at home about accepting his pro-

file of Dolores Garcia, an octogenarian with whom he became acquainted in Cordoba, New Mexico, during the early 70s after he moved his family to Albuquerque. She possessed a compelling voice as a moral witness, but she was a "marginal" American in most of the statistical categories that command attention: income, ethnicity, gender, and age, for example. Despite his wife's urging, Coles had resisted submitting the piece to *The New Yorker*. Given that magazine's urbane sense of itself and its readership, he doubted that a profile of such a woman would receive a sympathetic reading there. So, his wife, Jane, submitted it for him herself; and within a matter of days, Renata Adler from *The New Yorker* was on the phone saying, "Mr. Shawn loves it."

In a way it's as though Cavell's rival in exchanges about ordinary language philosophy, Benson Mates, had agreed to consult the land lady and abandoned the notion that one would have to poll an infinite number of speakers to satisfactorily answer questions about what *we* say in a given context. Of course, Coles had already spent many years consulting persons in many walks of life to understand what they felt about racial differences and making a living and raising a family, among other ordinary but nonetheless critical concerns. He wasn't *polling* anyone. He was patiently listening to hear what they meant and what they had it at heart to say. But Coles got lucky with *Una Anciana*, his profile of Dolores Garcia, whose title highlighted her philosophical wisdom. As a cub reporter fresh out of the University of Michigan and long before he had achieved his legendary status at *The New Yorker*, William Shawn had interned at the *Optic*, Las Vegas, New Mexico's daily newspaper. Still, in case there is any doubt about the gist of this profile, Coles lets its readers hear from Dolores's husband, Domingo, who has the last word: "She is not just an old woman, you know. She wears old age like a bunch of fresh-cut flowers. She is old, advanced in years, *vieja*, but in Spanish we have another word for her, a word that tells you she has grown with all those years. I think that is something one ought to hope for and pray for and work for all during life: to grow, to become not only older but a bigger person. She is old all right, *vieja*, but I will dare say this in front of her: she is *una anciana*; with that I declare my respect and have to hurry back to the barn."[67]

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67. Robert Coles, "*Una Anciana*," in *The Old Ones of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1973), 116-36, 36. Alex Harris, who took the photographs in this book, later collaborated with William deBuys to create its worthy successor, *River of Traps: A Village Life* (Albuquerque, NM: New Mexico University Press, 1990). Both deBuys and Harris moved to northern New Mexico in the early 1970s to work as research assistants for Robert Coles.

In becoming friends with Coles when and where I did, I got lucky too. Among other encouraging words I received from him were comments on poems I occasionally sent him; and, since I wrote very few and shared even fewer, his encouragement was unique in my experience for many years. Like Cavell, Coles was in an on-going struggle over ordinary language as opposed to "special brands of meaning" that presented themselves authoritatively in the vocabulary of his profession.[68] He also had a knack for friendship that managed to cross considerable distances of various kinds: regional and generational, social and political, to name only four. During the summer of 1968 he shared with me a letter he'd recently received from Walker Percy which contained this remark, "I never expected to find a Harvard psychiatrist plowing the same field I plow—very confusing." This expression of surprise sustains the mood of their earlier exchange when Percy remarks about a *New Republic* review Coles had sent him: "Your letter and Bernanos article throw an entirely new light on Coles... yours is the first good word I've seen on the Englished *Mouchette*. I said a good word for it (yes, something about those same damp villages and rainy woods) and then saw it chopped up by reviews."[69]

Percy's surprise at discovering a kindred spirit in Coles especially moved me. It reminded me of something I learned from Coles soon after I first read *The Diary of a Country Priest* by George Bernanos at his suggestion during the fall of 1966. Simone Weil, an activist French intellectual as readily identifiable with left-wing politics as Bernanos was with the far right, had written him a letter expressing both her admiration of that 1936 novel and her gratitude for *Les Grands Cimetières sous la Lune*, his 1938 book about the horrors he had recently witnessed on Majorca during the Spanish Civil War.[70] Weil felt solidarity with Bernanos' outraged response to the brutality that ideologues of whatever stripe may invoke abstract principles to justify, and she wrote to acknowledge the deeper similarity she sensed in their feelings of disenchantment with their respective political causes. Such false alternatives gave the appearance—and merely the appearance—of differences between them.[71] For Coles,

68. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 11. For one example among many, see Robert Coles, "A Fashionable Kind of Slander," in *Farewell to the South* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), 285-93.
69. Walker Percy to Robert Coles, 5/18/68 and 7/3/67.
70. Translated into English by Pamela Morris as *A Diary of My Times* (London: Boriswood, 1938).
71. Robert Coles, *Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987), 65-73.

both Weil and Bernanos stood out as compelling examples of moral behavior, as distinguished from moral theory, priorities that Coles himself acted upon from the outset of our budding friendship.

In December 1966, Coles gave a lecture in Erikson's course about Lawrence Jefferson, a fourteen-year-old boy who had desegregated a high school in Atlanta in 1961 together with a handful of other freshmen. In June 1967, when *Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear* was published, it included Coles' compelling account of that boy's experience as "John Washington, Pioneer Youth."[72] Under the title, "The Doctor Listened," Percy favorably reviewed Coles' new book in the Sunday *New York Times* Book Review, and Coles wrote him a letter expressing both gratitude for Percy's appreciation of his work and admiration of Percy's fiction and essays. Thus began their correspondence and friendship, which lasted until Percy's death in May 1990.

In December 1966, when Coles emerged from Divinity Hall after his lecture about Lawrence Jefferson, he invited me to drive down to New Haven with him later in the week. He needed to visit with C. Vann Woodward, the estimable historian of the South, and the drive would give us a further chance to talk in the car on the way to and fro. While he took care of business at Yale, I could visit a friend, if I knew someone there, or I could find something to do on my own, if I didn't. Frankly, I had no idea who he was talking about, but my suspicion of names like that—fancy, formal, pretentious—was irrepressible. "What do you call him? C?" were the first words out of my mouth in response to Coles' kind invitation. When he laughed, I told him I had a friend I'd be pleased to visit at Yale and quickly accepted his invitation.

A few days later, James Kugel, my classmate from Middlesex, and I had lunch together in New Haven and read a few poems, as we used to do during our Concord schooldays. The first time I'd visited him there was almost exactly three years earlier, November 22, 1963. That Friday morning, I'd turned in a paper on Hamlet's third soliloquy to David Kalstone (who would give it a C+ and say it showed improvement from my previous efforts). By the time I arrived, the Kennedy assassination had cancelled the Harvard-Yale football game, which had brought me to New Haven that day.

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72. Coles, *Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 97-121.

In the meantime, during those three years since Kennedy's death (1963-1966), activism against the Vietnam War had superseded the Civil Rights movement for priority in the political consciousness of most college students I knew; and, by the spring of 1968, assassins would create two more martyrs in those causes, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. Though I only learned this fact decades later, Coles wrote the last speech RFK delivered, with its stirring description of "ripples of hope," before he was gunned down on June 5 at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and died the next day.

Jim Kugel and I had started a Poetry Club at Middlesex, though, as I recall, we read more prose than poetry: T. S. Eliot, who fits the bill, comes readily to mind, but so do Proust and Faulkner, who do not. That day in New Haven we read Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane. With regard to Crane, I've recently been delighted to note words and phrases from his poems that crop up in my own, like "spindrift" and "visionary company"; and, in Jim's writing, Crane's phrase, "obscure as that heaven of the Jews," has a moment of prominence.[73] I credit Allan "Ozzie" Osborne, our English teacher during junior year, for my love of Crane, which proceeded naturally from a simple question I asked him about the epigraph to *Streetcar Named Desire*, a stanza from Crane's "The Broken Tower." It broached a topic that Ozzie addressed with such prompt and infectious enthusiasm that I was instantly eager for more and soon hooked on Crane. With regard to Stevens, Jim introduced me that day to "A Postcard from the Volcano," which thrilled me then and continues to do so now, from its opening sense of forlorn abandonment to its gorgeous celebration of what little remains:

> A dirty house in a gutted world,
> A tatter of shadows peaked to white,
> Smeared with the opulent gold of the sun.[74]

It is fair to say about Stevens what Frost says about Emerson: He is a philosophical poet and a poetic philosopher, my favorite kind of both. Moreover, his resistance to religiosity—whether early, in the youthful sonnet that inspired George Santayana to

73. *The Great Poems of the Bible: A Reader's Companion with New Translations* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 193.
74. Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 159.

respond literally in kind, with a sonnet in defense of religion; or later (and famously), in “Sunday Morning”—offers bracing companionship in an increasingly secular culture. Cavell, who writes very little about modern poetry, feels a strong affinity for Stevens and writes about him appreciatively, even defensively, as though he were a kindred spirit in need of some apologia, given philosophy’s treatment of him on a particular occasion. I hear the same empathy that Cavell demonstrates for Nora’s “unprotected identity” in the fellow-feeling he shows when considering the rejection of Stevens’ invited and then disinvited prose piece, which was turned down by the *Journal of Metaphysics* after he’d been led to expect publication there. Cavell hears Stevens’ all-but-obsessive plea for the connection between poetry and philosophy, or imagination and reason, as if it were his own.[75]

Whatever that connection may be at any given moment from one word to the next, Cavell’s central concern with the problem of other minds enabled him to understand our gratitude for poetry. Moreover, he discovered and exposed a literariness in Wittgenstein’s philosophy and then in Emerson’s and in Thoreau’s that made him confident that he could write about whatever he chose, like Shakespeare and film, and still be doing philosophy.[76] These perceptions moved me to write about those subjects through the lens of Cavell’s writing and, ultimately, when retirement gave me more time, to return to writing poetry. I may not have resumed that pursuit so promptly and gladly if Stanley Cavell had not advocated and demonstrated such a compelling, indeed redemptive, expressiveness on page after page of his prose.

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75. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 184-5. See Stanley Cavell, “Reflections on Wallace Stevens at Mount Holyoke” in *Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke, 1942-1944*, ed. Chistopher Benfey and Karen Remmler (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 61-88.
76. Cavell, “The Wittgensteinian Event” in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 192-212, 211-2.

24. Selections from *Preowned Odysseys* and *Rented Rooms*

LAWRENCE F. RHU

To the Reader:

I selected these poems from the manuscript of "Preowned Odysseys and Rented Rooms," my poetry collection-in-the-making.[1] It records a pilgrimage where mortality and mobility characterize the wayfarer's condition. He makes a journey that ultimately leads nowhere, and he travels second class in used conveyances to reach his destination. But, as he saunters along, the pilgrim himself changes, not his destination. He finds the end of the road in each step of the way and becomes the one he is.

"Connecting Flights," the first poem in this selection, can stand as a sign of my ambitions. It describes a business trip back home, where I had a chance to visit my elderly father. But it also demonstrates how a work of art can turn the world inside out and make you feel as though you share a heartfelt way of seeing with another person.

My highest hope for my poems is the achievement of that sort of response. May readers hear my words and say to themselves, in moments of recognition, "I know how he feels and what he means." Perhaps such readers may even come to think, "Now I know better what I feel and what I mean."

Don't we all need such provocation and reassurance? I certainly do.

1. Runner-up for the 2019 Marble Faun Award from The Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society.

Connecting Flights[2]

Twisted neon tubes illuminate
arcades that span Midway's moving walkways.
I'm flying home to see my father

and join a group of teachers to discuss
biblical poetry. At the Best Western
I share a room with Sharif, a Tucson native

whose Sufi wit provokes a second look
at God's almighty bipolarity
before we theorize about divine

machinery and traffic management
of transcendental flight for passengers
like us between stops halfway home.

No chariot of fire here gives us a lift.
My father soon will fall like fruit too ripe
with time, oblivious, the way his mother

ended up unhappily. She took her leave
in loneliness apart from family
and friends. Etched in bright green neon tubes,

like those at Midway terminal, a cactus
signifies the Saguaro Drug Store's open.
I often pass it, heading east on Grant.

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2. Winner of the 2019 Forum Prize from the Poetry Society of South Carolina, https://www.poetrysocietysc.org/connecting-flights. Poetry Society of South Carolina *Yearbook* (Charleston, 2019), 17.

In front of me the Catalinas call
to mind a water color that my father
painted one rainy day that made him keep

indoors. For a second the world looks inside
out and freshly rinsed—as though the mountains
stay with us, however far away we go.

Alternative Fact[3]

On the addition of Essie Mae Washington-Williams to the list of Strom Thurmond's children on the pedestal of his monument on the South Carolina Statehouse grounds

Let's not kid ourselves.
My powerful rhyme will not
outlive Devouring Time

or local bronze and gilded
monuments and, mostly,
does not rhyme. But after

more than five score years
of breathing air on earth,
Strom Thurmond's metal likeness

is moving right along:
striding into the future
on the Statehouse lawn.

Yet heirs caught up with him
above ground and atop
a granite plinth, where all

can read an afterword.
Crudely carved in stone,
but no mistake, the record

speaks of Essie Mae,
inviting us to ask
and learn of her three score

3. *Quorum* February, 2017 (online, Columbia).

and ten, well spent as teacher,
parent, citizen.
Many ghosts still cry,

“Remember me.” But now
her proper name’s restored,
this second draft allows

us here to hear of Strom
and Essie Mae, though words
are only breath, just air.

Vertigo[4]

to my daughter at the Museum of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco

Behold the empty space that typically
holds Carlotta's likeness—or a copy
of it—out on loan or in the shop

for restoration now while you are seated
on that wooden bench. Dressed like someone
dressed like someone else, Kim Novak tricked

Jimmy Stewart into thinking he'd killed
someone before he killed someone else.
Earlier he'd seen her on that bench

looking at what's now missing—or a copy
of it—where you are seated looking now
at the empty space that typically

holds Carlotta's likeness—or a copy
of it. Nothing's there and never was.
Together we're present at its absence

for a moment shared. Some vanishing point
puts all this in perspective. Keep that point
in mind, enjoy the view. And I will too.

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4. Winner of the 2019 Patricia and Emmett Robinson Prize from the Poetry Society of South Carolina, https://www.poetrysocietysc.org/vertigo. Poetry Society of South Carolina *Yearbook* (Charleston, 2019), 26.

A Late Rally[5]

In the first place, in the physician or surgeon
no quality takes rank with imperturbability.
WILLIAM OSLER, “Aequanimitas”

Experts in rewiring hearts
disturb my sleep. Perfect strangers’
cool reserve engenders dreams

of Lazarus healed without a tear
of joy or sorrow. Yet Osler earned
my dad’s esteem because he deemed

equanimity a virtue: Doctors
must practice patience with patients.
To ease my son about my heart

and myself about my son, we watch
a Youtube on pacemakers during halftime
in the Celtics’ game. Merely being

here with him quickens my sluggish pulse.
When our team hustles to catch up
and stretch their streak in overtime,

it sings Kyrie’s praise for mercy
coming down like rain on freshly
mown grass in the Boston Garden.

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5. Published in *fall/lines: A Literary Convergence*, Volume VI, 2019.

Attachment[6]

for Jim

...and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird,
and all the daughters of music shall be brought low.
Koheleth 12:4

Koheleth's words first caught
my ear in ninth-grade English.
You pictured how dawn's chirping
birds disturb light-sleeping

seniors and ignited
my imagination. *Now* always
turns to *then*, but still
your gloss remains a present

moment, "Remember now
your Creator in the days
of your youth." Planes roar
above my sublet quarters

near the terminal.
An old bird up early,
I con your recent versions
of Koheleth's verses: such news,

so clearly heard, renews
its claim. Despite the noise
of silver birds, the life
of words has kept us friends

6. Winner of the Poetry Society of South Carolina's John Edward Johnson Prize, Winter 2018, https://www.poetrysocietysc.org/attachment. Poetry Society of South Carolina *Yearbook* (Charleston, 2019), 19.

since freshman year. When clicked,
a pixilated paper
clip brings you these lines
online, my breaking news.

An Abnormal Psychlist's Secret History[7]

Consider what a repetition it would be to go spinning
along the Gulf Coast in a rental car by Keesler!
No kidding, this is a good idea all around.
WALKER PERCY to ROBERT COLES, March 1981

Perhaps the poor in spirit have it best.
Such poverty's no special feat,
though its discovery takes eternity
to own. Or so it seems
when little time and so much being
feel like youth itself, the very you-ness
of yours truly years ago. I owned a bike
and rode around the Garden District,
Irish Channel, Faubourg Marigny,
French Quarter, back Uptown,
further afield, and felt I was in luck.

My twelve-gear Schwinn inspires praise
for taking me all over New Orleans,
rejoicing in the flatness of its easy-going
low-lying cityscape. The jet black frame
and racing tires carried me back
from where I found myself, marooned
and castaway, to a fresh start
after I'd hit rock bottom far below
the poverty of spirit cutoff line.

That bike deserves such praise precisely now
because my patience, my last nerve,

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7. Short-listed for the 2017 Faulkner-Wisdom Gold Medal for Poetry. Published in *fall/lines: A Literary Convergence*, Volume VI, 2019.

must meet tough challenges of will and cool
reserve from handymen on just two wheels—
the bikes and the unlicensed scooters
DUIs reduce recovering addicts
and alcoholics to dependence on.
They don't show up on time or don't
stay long despite their ardent promises
and evident good will.

In what we used to call The World
Today, I now confess—because confession
is an irresistible way to muck about
in all my yesterdays—I'm one of them.
My impoverished spirit sank below the line.
Sometimes I turned in papers late.
I was discovered sleeping on the job. (no stanza break)
I drank too much. (Of course, I drank
too much. Why do you think I'm speaking
of recovery here and now?)
Tardiness becomes the place you live
year-round, and giant effort only
and good luck or, if you will, the grace of God
will set you free from such belatedness,
once force of habit makes it second-nature.

"I had to take my girlfriend to the ER
because she just fell off the porch"
won't do as explanation or excuse.
When I last saw her there she looked
stolid as ancient stoics once were famed
to be, but she was drunk or stoned,
though seated (aptly for a stoic)

on the porch. Her fall was easier to predict
than to prevent. Her bright new car was scarred
with “whiskey rash,” the bumps and dents and bruises
parking—parallel, head in or out,
or on some barren plain, miles from any trees
or traffic jams—can cause poetic sailors
in their drunken boats or handymen
whose revels start earlier each day.
“I need some lunch, but I’ll be back real soon.”
While you were gone, your ladder leaned
against our house for weeks—a permanent
attachment in all kinds of weather.

Once I awakened to my need for help
for drinking out of my control
and asked for what I needed, such help came,
in person or in prayer—whatever prayer
may mean besides the daily payment
of attention and deliberate care,
mindfulness of others and oneself.

“They’ll feed you to the alligators
way down there,” a Boston wit had cracked
in warning. Those echoing words returned
as comedy instead of lonely melodrama
when I looked out at my classroom
filled with Izod-shirted southern girls
and boys and saw his prophecy fulfilled. (stanza break)

When I was cycling back and forth to school
in New Orleans at thirty-five, I'd sobered up
for what the psalmist calls, depending
on the company you keep, a single day
or a thousand years. Since repetition
is the secret of this secret history,
the key is how time turns upon itself
and stops the spinning world somewhere
new yet unapproachable
because you are already there,
depending on the company you keep,
a single day or a thousand years—
one revolution of the sun.

Thanksgiving, 1966

for Robert Coles

Demonstrating what my gut already knew
by heart, anti-war protests made headlines
during McNamara's mid-November visit.

Most students leave early to beat the traffic
so you invite the rest to your nearby office,
aptly underground. When you learn I'm from Tucson

you show me a shoebox full of lemons and thank-yous
on Big Chief tablet paper with Crayola drawings
from school kids there. Holding those gifts to you

from when and where I'd left somewhat
in a hurry, my hands shake. I'm wondering less—
and much less vaguely—*What is coming next*?

After a day of touch football and turkey,
when the phone rings, I don't know how to say,
"Thank you for the call." You heard my anger,

I your candor and the laughs we shared.
I won't forget your gesture of concern.
Kindness is the right word for your reaching out.

If I'm one, you're one too—the human kind,
although it's human to act otherwise
and shun connecting. Despite tragic losses,

in Memphis and LA, you took your search
out West. When the desert smells like rain,
"ripples of hope" suffuse the air. Your kindness

changed the weather of my days.

Last Night I Felt like Katharine Hepburn[8]

in memory of Stanley Cavell (1926-2018)

The printer wouldn't let me print my latest
about mortality and you and me
in whatever English sounds the best.
I was in that mood when Hamlet just won't do,
whatever meds you're on, with all that talk
of letting be, the readiness is all,
and special Providence in a sparrow's fall.
And Hepburn came to mind to see me through.
I felt like her when people hated Hepburn.
Box office poison she was known as then.
Phillip Barry wrote that play about her
as an insufferable snob, one of the Lords
on Philadelphia's Main Line. They built
the local library in town, where she
found herself in Jimmy Stewart's stories—
all he had to show for many years
of little pay and lots of work. She griped
about "that corkscrew English" in magazines
like *Spy*, then paying Stewart (aka "Mike"
Macaulay Connor from South Bend)
just enough so he could still get by. "South Bend,"
she echoes, mockingly, "It sounds like dancing."
But soon she's praising his short stories, "Connor,
they're almost poetry," as he explains one's title
by its source, a Spanish peasant proverb:
With the rich and mighty always a little patience.
Give me a break! Have you read any poetry?

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8. *Forma de Vida*, no. 15 (January 2019) https://formadevida.org/lrhufdv15.

Talk about corkscrew English, look no further!
But then, I love the way she later says,
"I'm much beholden," when Connor tells her,
"There are rules." A little gallantry
shines through, as Hepburn learns he'd taken no
advantage when they both were drunk, though soon
she wonders, "Why? Was I so unattractive?"
They don't make them like that anymore,
I'd like to say, because they don't, and not
because I'd be the last to know. Yet still,
I'm glad to hear that corkscrew English rattling
inside me when there's nothing I can do
about the way things are, as opposed
to the way things are supposed to be.

Writing on a Wall[9]

I am neither Athenian nor Greek, but rather a citizen of the world.
—SOCRATES, at the University of Lisbon Metro station

Words on tiles lining the Metro stop
remind me of playing Scrabble. Once
Beth's competitive edge caught me
off guard. She was playing to win

a game I'd won before, taking for granted
nothing was at stake. In the myth
of my life, my father surprised me
like that one afternoon at golf

among the desert Protestants
in Tucson, which, for want of a better
word, I call home. How fiercely he wanted
to win! But practicing medicine left

no time for golf. Grandfather taught me
to play and turned chagrin at being
cut from the baseball team to balm:
calm dialogues and easy-going

efforts at improving my game
on the practice range. My handicap
slowly decreased until now,
though I stopped playing long ago,

9. *fall/lines* IV, 2017 (Columbia), 75.

my brothers remember me as
far better than I ever was, with no
handicap at all. Gratefully, I agree
as if I believe things improve unseen

in this vale of whatever it is we make
of ourselves until we play on links
elsewhere as naturalized citizens
of that world Sócrates still calls home.

In blue letters lining white-tiled walls
at University City he proclaims
his part in cities of words all may share.
The Athenians, you'll recall, disagreed.

5-Star Rental[10]

for my landlady, Felicidade

Creio que uma folha de erva não vale
menos que a jornada das estrelas.
—WALT WHITMAN, *Canto de Mim Mesmo*
(trans. José Agostinho Baptista), xxxi, 1

Midway through your bilingual "Song of Myself," I find
a shopping list with *pão* at its head and read on until
the Portuguese rendering of "I believe a leaf of grass is no less
than the journey-work of the stars" translates me
west-by-southwest overseas to the High Road to Taos and
Española's low-riders, north of Santa Fe where tourists succumb
to night skies though locals take what's given for granted.

In Lisbon, my day's work done, I return to rented rooms
lined with books in Portuguese and pass by mosaics of Camões
swimming for Goa and of Pessoa—four of him, at least, all dreams
with souls all their own—Moorish geometries and blue and white
azulejos, wall after wall bearing tales, Latinate words
and names opening up, vowel after vowel, even
at the Metro stop: Roman *arena* becomes *A-re-e-i-ro*.

In my inner ear the train'd soprano sustains those sounds,
rewording the world of *Leaves* in another's mother tongue.

10. *South Florida Poetry Journal* (August 2018), https://www.southfloridapoetryjournal.com/soflo-pojo-contributors.html, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7dLMmd05ZE.

Easter, 2016[11]

Anthropologists of resurrection must
include your hat among their golden boughs.
What were the odds the maître d' that day

would do his job at the Imperial Café
and hand your hat along to the concierge
of the Imperial Hotel—that round black flat-topped

flannel cap of sorts you wear so jauntily?
Right away, when you first felt the loss,
the duties of such jobs became our hope.

I'm no Aeneas saddled with a frail old man
and clinging son who soon will be without
a mom. I served no more than figuratively

in Vietnam: meeting my first wife during
the Tet Offensive and leaving her during
the Fall of Saigon. I went to see if that

would be the case with the concierge
and maître d' at the Imperial
in Prague. Would they do their jobs?

I came back, hat in hand, and your smile briefly
turned me into Spencer Tracy in *Adam's Rib*.
His Eve receives this present from her Adam:

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11. *jogosflorais.com* (Lisbon, 2018), https://www.jogosflorais.com/unpublishedpoems/2018/11/lawrence-rhu.

"Just the best hat in the world, for the best head"
—or some such line I don't yet have down pat.
Whether or not I earned it, who'd deny me that?

25. Acknowledgments: Thinking of and Thanking Stanley Cavell

DAVID LaROCCA

Thanking well is difficult work. And only someone who has attempted to convey thanks will know of the adversity one finds in trying to find (one's own?) words of thanks. In an academic or we might say more broadly, bibliophilic context, the name we give to that moment of expressed and explicit (which is to say sanctioned) thanks is (the) Acknowledgments. The Cavellian resonances and overlaps of significance for this capitalized, capstone forum will stand out in high relief, even at first glance. But it is to the deep relationships between what an understanding of the Cavellian concept (or conception or even better, re-conception) of acknowledgment might (or must) betoken about the genre we call Acknowledgments that I turn to in what follows.

In *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Reflections on a Register of the Moral Life*, Cavell writes of Introductions: "I confess I never skip them."[1] I can say the same about Cavell's ever-present Acknowledgments: they not only often provide insight into the gestation of his project (who he engaged, where he was working, what he was reading, the places visited, the events he attended, etc.), but also, more unusually, the inclusion of and working out of ideas in this space that is, for many others, merely a perfunctory space for thanks (and sometimes of them). The Acknowledgments as an addendum, and at that perhaps even a chore (because a cause of anxiety: where do I begin?), become in Cavell's hands, yet again, *an occasion for thinking*—even as they are, to be sure, for *thanking*.

In this customary place, a constitutive part of many if not most books, that has come to be called (the) Acknowledgments, I found Cavell's treatment of the custom

1. Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), xi.

transformed it. And part of the transformation involved distributing or re-distributing the specific labors of acknowledgment. In Cavell's vast archipelago of dispatches, Acknowledgments go by a variety of names, repurposed to Cavell's needs. For instance, the Preface to *The World Viewed* and the Foreword to *The Claim of Reason* carry many hallmarks of the Acknowledgments genre (e.g., a pedigree of influence and debts, naming individuals, referencing and charting one's intellectual path to the book that lies ahead, etc.). And there are numerous occasions in the course of his philosophical prose, that is, when he is "at work" as a professional philosopher, when acknowledgments are made, parsed, and integrated seamlessly into the fabric of the remark—yet, for his art and tact, they may go unnoticed; by contrast, repeated invocations of "my teacher J. L. Austin," might qualify as a signature instance of an overt mention.[2]

When I first began reading books by Cavell, it was the Acknowledgments that I first dwelled upon mostly deliberately, with the most curiosity. Looking back, perhaps my fascination, for a young wannabe scholar, this obscure Jude, had something to do with the impression that such writing would be among the more easily intelligible portions of his prose. So, a diversion then, but with good reason. Part of my broader interest lay in the question how such a book as this gets written—what contributes to its making and how the author understands that process. Here was a thinker, it seemed to me, writing with candor about his preoccupations and his influences, and, to be sure, those people and places that occupied his days and nights while creating the book. The preferred and thus default mode of the impersonal and the clinical in (much professional) philosophical prose is traded in, by Cavell, for the personal, even the private, befitting "autobiographical exercises," as he puts it in the subtitle to *A Pitch of Philosophy*—characteristics endogenous to the nature of any given Acknowledgments. In this delimited precinct, a place liberated from the expectations of argument form, I seemed to follow better the line of his thought since it mostly comprised a very glamorous list of persons and texts, sometimes a narrative of time and place, and just as often, seemingly off-the-cuff remembrances that had the quality of character studies and reports of intimacies, such as we find in private journals as well

2. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), viii.

as novels and, in particular, the best of metafiction: when the author stands beside her work, and perhaps "beside [herself] in a sane sense."[3] In this regard, Acknowledgments as a genre have the character of an aside, and so they beckon, with uncanny intimacy, as if something profound will be, or at least might be, revealed. And more than novelistic invention, however compelling, however satisfying, there was *also* an implied promise that an etiology or a natural history of a mind—and its lettered offspring—could be gleaned from a close reading of such behind-the-scenes catalogues of thanks.

For a mind in need of learning how to read such prose as his, the taxonomy of this particular type of paratext—which I first encountered in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, a book, at the time, one could buy in print as a recent publication at the legendary Talking Leaves bookstore in Buffalo, New York—provided, let me say, not just a grounding but more specifically an atmosphere, an air, in which to think, and even more precisely, if peculiarly, to thank. To have thoughts profound enough to require a registry of debts incurred and paths taken seemed (then and still does) an enticing, foreign possibility. By contrast, I wondered and worried about what would it be like to write acknowledgments, at length, for work that was *not* worthy of its gratitude, for example, where one's thanks would be an admission of one's vanity and not of one's generosity toward others; the failure to thank properly, appropriately, with propriety seemed a painful instance of human fallibility and the ironies that stalk us, and as I learned more about Cavell's work, a particular expression of tragedy.

Of course, as a young philosopher-in-training in Buffalo, under the mentorship of Newton Garver (who studied with Norman Malcolm and Max Black—who welcomed Wittgenstein to Cornell on his only visit to America, and Black who published Cavell's "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" in *Philosophy in America*[4] before it appeared in *Must We Mean What We Say?*), and Peter H. Hare (a genuine pluralist who studied with the greats of Columbia pragmatism and was longtime co-editor of *The Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society*), and Kah Kyung Cho (who studied with Heidegger and Gadamer)—I was coming to consciousness that one

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3. Henry David Thoreau, "Solitude," ch. five of *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854). See also Cavell, *The Senses of Walden, An Expanded Edition* (San Francisco, CA: Northpoint Press, 1981), 104.
4. *Philosophy in America*, ed. Max Black (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964).

could have so many people to thank for the creation of a book. Still, having people to thank is not the same as the act or art of thanking them. Clearly, even at first blush, Cavell's Acknowledgments were neither issued as a list to be dutifully checked off nor off-handedly submitted as an afterthought; his example proposed something entirely new to me: Acknowledgments as a genre of philosophy. In this encounter, I had not yet realized that, for Cavell, acknowledgment was a mode of disciplined response to an entire strain of Western philosophical thought.

Hare, knowing my youthful dedication to Emerson and what to his judgment (and so many others) was the peculiarity of Emerson as a legitimate subject in and for professional philosophy, said something to me that I could not assess with any depth or perspective at this early stage: as he warily handed over to me his copy of Cavell's *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, he added the proviso that I remember sounding this way: "since you love Emerson and philosophy, this is the writer for you. Love his work all you want, but do not emulate it." At the time, I had no bearing on what the warning might mean (especially to me), but it left me curious, if cautious. Even at this instant, I was more interested in what might be causing the scandal: what was it in Cavell's writing—this book or some other by him—that could lead a professional philosopher to recommend the work while also, somehow, warning against it? The book—and its author—was a gift given then somehow retracted. (Another professional philosopher, a bit later on, and in the same vein of exhortation about his style or method, remarked elliptically, but in a disparaging manner: "Cavell can get away with it. No one else." I wondered what was being or could be "gotten away with," and why one might or should want to get away with it.) In Hare's admonition, I see a classic scene of instruction, of *paideia*, of what we share with the young, what we make available to them and when—and why (as he was saying to me that I was, at last, *ready* to read something by Cavell). Hare's intentions, then, as now, feel genuine and uncynical, and absent any personal grudge or malice toward the author. Hare was, after all, a pragmatist and a pluralist, and so he seemed to be simply reporting on "conditions handsome and unhandsome" as he found them in his profession, the one I was trying to train in. As the years passed, I have interpreted his remark as a sign of a mentor's protectiveness. He seemed to know what the profession was capable of and he wanted to save me some grief.

My first impressions of reading *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* validated Hare's sense that I was suited to its content, even if it was, in all the ways one would expect, beyond me. I had been, after all, reading Wittgenstein and Heidegger and William James alongside Aristotle and Plato and Nietzsche—and Emerson, of course—so I could see in those disparate writers differences in style and topic, but I could not, as it were, judge their legitimacy or threat to any established professional community or cult—much less to those who would write about them professionally. In fact, if anything *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* seemed *perfectly reasonable* in its intellectual gregariousness and eclecticism, for there I found Emerson as the philosophical wellspring (I thought fittingly, at last) with robust tentacles outstretched to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Plato and Nietzsche, and even Dewey (though not always in a good way).

"No one thinks thanks," wrote Gertrude Stein toward the end of *A Novel of Thank You*, yet we have found a few who do: Emerson, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Cavell.[5] In the acknowledgments for *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, one can almost immediately discern a care and deliberateness rare for the form. And more than being thankful, he seemed thoughtful—the two modes or moods were joined. As for the genre as we *typically* encounter it, we could say that people are thanked, often it must be said, somewhat thanklessly, that is with a certain forced quality: in such cases, the demand to speak blanches the potency of what gets said. As the "thanks" pile up so quickly, there is much leaning on the thesaurus and conjugation: I wish to thank, I must thank, thanks are owed to, thanks to all who, many thanks for, with tremendous thanks, I express my gratitude to, I feel grateful for, etc. Bromides and platitudes abound as does the superlative case. By contrast, Cavell wrote with measured appreciation, which meant that one could feel the nuances of his gratitude. The gradations were subtle and for that significant. He did not overstate and so his statements felt honest.

If I found in Cavell's work a new way of thinking, what I found in Cavell's Acknowledgments, with their distinctive register of sincerity—and as I began to seek out his books eagerly, reading the Acknowledgments first, *before* the Introduction—was a new way thanking. We could ask: What is called thanking? I realize that the pun in

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5. Gertrude Stein, *A Novel of Thank You* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), 235.

English may be tiresome to some, at some point, especially if there is a fatigue with Heidegger who made so much of thinking and thanking (or *thencan* [to think] and *thancian* [to thank])[6], but for me, there abides such a remainder of fervor and fecundity in the relationship—a truly justified proximity, an undeniable intimacy for these two terms—that I risk sustaining it. I couldn't then, and I still can't, disentangle the one from the other: to think is to thank, and to thank is to think. What a discovery!

The truth of the equivalency can be expressed or illustrated in any number of cases. Take one, as I understand it, shared by Steven Affeldt: that when Cavell was asked "How do you have time to write?" He replied: "I'm writing right now."[7] This sentiment, to my mind, means that writing is predicated on a certain amount of socializing—being good company to one's friends and one's spouse, being a descent parent, being a teacher (whatever shape the classroom might take), reading and commenting on the work of others, etc.—and that only after such experiences, or with some amount of them, can one be solitary and take up the task of writing, that is, writing something worthy of one's commitments beyond the page. When we write (alone, as we must), we hear the voices of our teachers and students, our friends and families, the texts we have read and marked-up lovingly in the margins, and we are not alone (as we cannot be). Writing is a social event, after all, no matter the occasional tremor felt in the face of the endlessly receding white page of the digital word-processing file; still, what may be harder is not the void but contending with what one has, in fact, written. Cavell's Acknowledgments are distinctly his (again, the sincerity and thus singularity of his voice is unmistakable) but it is the community that surrounds him, that engages him, that he draws insight and support from—even as he himself is so often, as in the pages of this commemorative volume, noted as a rare source of insight and support—that finds its acknowledgment in his notes of orientation and appreciation.

We may bracket for a moment an ancillary (and still interesting) but also distracting aspect of the genre: the way in which Acknowledgments often serve as a kind of *curriculum vitae* of academic affiliation and patronage along with the registration

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6. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking? [Was Heisst Denken?]*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Perennial, 1976).
7. Steven Affeldt, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, November 10, 2018.

of awards, grants, and the anointing of intellectual and institutional approval by individuals and their various agents and agencies. In today's lexicon, this may strike us as a humblebrag. And such a thought makes one wonder about the *location* of the Acknowledgments: it appears as often in the front matter as the back matter, leaving us to ask what the convention of such placement is meant to signal: that one must pass through it in order to qualify for reading the book, or that having read the book, one is now prepared to understand something of its conditions for creation. With these endpoints in play, dialectical styles seem suddenly pertinent, as if we are speaking of "having" the first word or "getting" the last one. Is this predicament a variation on Emerson's notion that "great geniuses have the shortest biographies"?[8] And so likewise, in the author biographies or list of contributors to books, the academic stars have the one-liners while those without a recognition that precedes them, spend time articulating their efforts and effects; the author biography, it turns out, is a specimen of self-acknowledgment.

Beyond my overt, perhaps all too obvious remarks on the genre of Acknowledgments (especially for readers who notice patterns, and to be sure, who also have participated in making them), I wish to point up and point out how it is that Cavell's Acknowledgments, despite their extent, managed to do all this thanking with quite a light touch, where, in a paradoxical way, the tone—that is, one that suppresses or displaces a certain *drama* of gratitude—made the thanks seem so much more genuine, temperate, and enduring than they might otherwise be. It really felt, even from that first or second reading, that Cavell meant what he said.

If many writers of fiction and nonfiction alike are familiar with the task (perhaps variously a privilege and a burden) of composing remarks that acknowledge others—and their contributions to a given work—the very nature of how language might be deployed for such labor becomes of immediate and pronounced interest. For one thing, if "thanks" and "thank you" are generic, how do they become, in this brief space of the Acknowledgments, something more, which is to say, less—circumscribed as borrowed words must be for the special purpose of addressing specific people and their specific modes of aid, comfort, and correction? If the genre is so generic,

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8. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Plato; or, the Philosopher," in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 635.

how much one must court parody, even satire, in writing Acknowledgments? Almost at once, the apparently straightforward task of thanking becomes troubled by thinking, as if over-thanking itself might be a form of over-thinking. Such problems, invented or encountered, call for counsel. Where better to look, then, than to one of the maestros of Acknowledgments, one for whom the mode appears to be a natural milieu—not so much as if he invented it than as if it were invented for him. As our greatest theorist of acknowledgment, Cavell can seem called to fulfill the potential of the form. One need not be personally thanked in his Acknowledgments to notice that they are a breed apart from the familiar run of such lines—an education in thanks. Yet, if the forum is *pro forma*, how can or should we account for this Cavellian difference? And moreover, what it may teach us about the art and effort of acknowledging others? As Cavell was, and likely will remain, our Acknowledger-in-Chief, we can study from his model how one might achieve truly acknowledging Acknowledgments.

The genre of acknowledgments, such as we find it practiced among the standard paratexts of a given book or creative work, announces itself inadvertently as something of a Cavellian pun—doubtless, a striking double entendre on what we are compelled to name a "master tone" in his *ouevre*.[9] And indeed, I do mean to invoke and discuss (and acknowledge!) how this forum for thanks—viz., (the) Acknowledgments—is related to Cavell's understanding of acknowledgment as such, as he theorized it. Yet, once pointed out, the connection may be almost too painfully obvious and facile to repeat. Though I do not wish to belabor the richness of the pun, I am convinced that there remains much else in *Cavell's* creation of the Acknowledgment sections of his books that feels worth dwelling on, among many other things, that there appears to be a continuous call upon us—his readers, his audience—to find a way of expressing thanks as a mode of thought. The question we face in composing the Acknowledgments is never far away in Cavell's exhibition: how was the creation of this work possible? The gesture of answering it, of course, often subsumes a need to state explicitly how we achieved or failed to achieve what we set out to do (perhaps especially when such labor is, in matters of literary and philosophical invention, so rarely guided by a discrete teleology, much less a convincing way of offering proof that objecti-

9. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 134, 244.

ves have been reached, satisfyingly so or otherwise). My efforts here are, very evident to me, subject to these same laws.

In Cavell's Acknowledgments, we may see the ways in which we write for ourselves, that we are, in fact, our own *or* best *or* only audience (if only when we get beyond doubts concerning our capacity for expressiveness). Can we hazard to consider that thanking is a ruse—for it insinuates others in a project that is, in fact, foreign to them; that the insistence on the tracing of influences, the accounting for debts, etc., is a distraction from or a distortion of what lead one to this point? For as William Goldman is attributed as having said: "The easiest thing to do on earth is not write." Writing Acknowledgments, then, may pass as a form of therapy—a conversation in which an author tells a story about who and what *feels* pertinent. There is something of the séance in the art of such composition. Though these words are public, shared (as noted above), there is some inkling that I can yet claim them for myself, make them mine; again, how could a note of thanks do its work if the words that comprise it are not personal? As Cavell put it, across a span of three decades:

> Only in stages have I come to see that each of my ventures in and from philosophy bears on ways of understanding the extent to which my relation to myself is figured in my relation to my words.[10]

> When, in what follows, I feel pressed by the question of my right to speak for philosophy, I sometimes suggest that I am merely speaking for *myself*, and sometimes I suggest that philosophy is not *mine* at all—its results are true for every man or else they are worthless.[11]

In such remarks, we can hear Emerson—"what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men," which he describes as genius—and Cavell's concern about the interaction between the public and the private, for example, as when we feel, as Emerson did, that "every word they say chagrins us."[12] In *Cities of Words*, when speaking of

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10. Cavell, from the Preface to the updated edition of *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
11. Cavell, from the Foreword, "An Audience for Philosophy," to *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), xxv-xxvi. The Foreword is dated 1968.
12. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Essays and Lectures*, 259, 264.

Emerson's experience of the "inattentiveness and meanness" that defines the use of the very same words he has at his disposal, we are told that his "language is hence in continuous struggle with itself, as if he is having to translate, in his American idiom, English into English."[13] Let us submit that one of the special attributes of highly conscribed genres, such as acknowledgments—like love letters and condolences—agitates that "struggle with itself" that language is perpetually undergoing through us. Like all constraints, the rigidity of this particular art of letters exacerbates our desire to say something that is one's own (to thank another with satisfaction for us both), while keeping a vigil for the cliché, saccharine, vapid, and vain.

We are, by now, familiar with the genre as it is routinely practiced. The thanks tend to be ranked and arranged in some habitual fashion, learned by imitation and osmosis—"when I began this project" inaugurates the mood of reflection, of stock-taking. And then the paragraphs organize the kinds of people or entities being thanked: colleagues, grant-giving bodies, colleges and universities that funded the operation or made leave-time available; editors, staff at the press, rights holders lending permission to reprint, etc. Specific people are noted for their reading of earlier, less refined drafts of the work. Professional debts are registered, and slowly, more personal ones emerge, until the crescendo when the writer's intimates find their moment in print. Here, variously those who were supportive and (often) neglected during composition—family, friends, spouses and partners, perhaps children and pets—are mentioned for their aid and love and sacrifices, for every book represents some untold number of hours that the writer spent *away* from all these loved ones. Though solitary writing demands social hours, sometimes the society must only live within—either because one's audience has perished or because it has become estranged, both often beyond the control and thus the fault of the author. (In the last line of his Acknowledgments for *Stanley Cavell and the Claim of Literature*, David Rudrum's heartbreaking dedication to his son stands out in this regard: "Cedric, I only wish I could have spent the time it took to write this book with you instead."[14])

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13. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 8.
14. Cavell's own acknowledgment of his son, Benjamin, as well as his wife, Cathleen Cohen Cavell, at the end of the Foreword to *The Claim of Reason* (where he had already invoked his daughter, Rachel), presents the flip side of Rudrum's unenviable position, for they "took time I thought I did not have and converted it into energy I thought I had foregone," xxvi.

Somewhere in the mix, there is often a statement of the shortcomings of the work: one can think, surely, of the famous lament Wittgenstein makes at the outset of *Philosophical Investigations*, in his Preface: "After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I should never succeed. [...]," but we see it in Cavell too: "That I am alone liable for the opacities and the crudities which defeat what I wanted to say, is a miserably simply fact. What is problematic is the expectation borne by those who have tried to correct them, and to comfort the pain of correcting them."[15] These admissions of failure, or worry of its reality, may also be seen as prophylactics *against* failure, for if one signals a work's shortcomings before the critics arrive (Wittgenstein's admission appears in the *second paragraph* of his now-landmark text), there may be a measure of defense in place prior to anticipated attacks. Authors hope, of course, that such labors amount to something (especially if it means one's child was neglected in the process, or one's hard-won produce amounted to much less than one dreamed of, and so one's sacrifices—and the sacrifices of others—were for naught, or nearly so), but if errors, lacunae, or missteps remain, they are in the familiar phrasing, "the author's own." Such moments of melancholy and sober responsibility can seem very much like an apology—and *not* in the classical sense of a defense, but as a genuine admission or confession of lapse, of coming up short, of making a valiant if flawed effort. In these respects, and others, no matter the enthusiasm of the Acknowledgments, it is a tragic genre.

Part of the tragedy, perhaps largely *unacknowledged* in most Acknowledgments, is the genuine sense of disaffection one feels with the work one is presenting as one's own; such a mood or gesture would certainly strike out against the motives of the publisher, who should not want shortcomings heralded in the opening lines of the book, nor at the end of it. What one seems to be acknowledging, as one goes about thanking, is that one has fallen short of one's aspiration for the work, and yet that people who helped make some minimal progress should (still) be thanked for that modest advance. Partly, we can recognize in this spirit of defeat how we are troubled by our use of words, the very matter of the work at hand. As Cavell notes in *Cities of Words*, "[h]ere I recall Emerson's repeated idea that serious writers write beyond

15. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), vii; Cavell, Acknowledgments to *Must We Mean What We Say?* (December 1968), 14.

themselves, or as he puts the matter, that character (meaning our constitution and our writing) teaches above our will."[16] If one spends the better part of a book "writing beyond" oneself, the least one can do is acknowledge it, for worse and, apparently on this line of thinking, for better. For, as Cavell concludes: "to understand serious writing," which we may say is (always) our mandate in reading Cavell's work, "will precisely require us to question what a text asserts in order to arrive at the conviction that we are covering the ground gained in what its words actually contrive to say."[17] Our words fail us but then "there are no *other* words to say than the words everyone is saying."[18] One wants to affirm: I did the best I could with the words I had at my disposal. But then that is what everyone can claim, so what is my excuse?

The underlying tragic timbre is also recognized in the thanking of dead people—namely, that acknowledgment is never too late, though it may be belated. Influential teachers, friends, colleagues, and lost intimates (parents, spouses, children, students)—and non-intimates (one's heroes)—can all be summoned whether or not they are alive, and so the genre also accommodates quite handily the fugitive expressions familiar to the memorial. Is it too much to say, to claim, that we are what we remember? And if memory is, in part, a choice, something we can cultivate, then what we choose to remember—to commemorate—also speaks to our individual and collective values, priorities, and aspirations. As we are gathered to "remember together"—in this commemorative issue—we see how naturally suited Acknowledgments are to affording access to the expanse of one's memory: if I can remember it, it can be invoked, and if invoked, then thanked. Whether a person is "around" to read it matters not. (Dedications can go further still, by naming the famous and entirely well-known person that knows, as it were, nothing of one's work—but whose fame marks out some measure of significance; or, of naming the nonfamous person that very few know—thus assuring that the significance remains insular, largely unavailable. Epigraphs are affiliates to such appropriation-as-acknowledgment—Emerson sits at the lead of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* and a century earlier, in the year of Emerson's death, in the front matter of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* [*Die fröliche Wissenschaft*, 1882].) And yet, since it is not clear why such a public memorial should be

16. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 8-9.
17. Ibid., 9.
18. Ibid., 8.

made at all (why *are* Acknowledgments written?), one returns to the genre—especially in its most canny, personal moments—as sharing a mood with the epistolary and the diaristic, as a variant of the autobiographical.

For the many people who did write for the occasion of this commemorative issue of *Conversations*—and to whom we all must be grateful—I am also intrigued by the way some people, so near to Cavell intellectually (and in some cases personally), that is, so indebted to him, his work, declined or withdrew from contributing, citing not a lack of time but a sense of not being ready to speak or write of their indebtedness. This notion of "processing" grief, perhaps especially as a person is caught up with the demands of one's ongoing intellectual and everyday life, is trying. For example, when a parent dies, say, a child speaks most often from *emotional* loss, whereas when a person experiences the death of an *intellectual* mentor (whom one may or may not love like a parent, but often like a mentor, or elder guide or guru), taking up the pen in this double register can be quite difficult. I heard about how some who tried to write were unhappy with what they wrote—the work seeming forced, insincere even. Another description I heard appealed to the image of being "too close" to the memory of his death. Proximity and intensity both would seem to confound our efforts to thank, not liberate and lubricate them. Though we may feel full of thanks, in the face of translating that emotion through intellectual labors, we may grow or go silent—find ourselves speechless. First to lose, then to be at a loss; a tragedy duplicated. Such an affliction must be widespread, for we know the feeling of not being able to thank sufficiently the people we love the most, or respect the most, or by whom we count ourselves influenced the most. What a difficult discovery, the experience that a gift is, or creates, a kind of debt, and acknowledging that gift-as-debt can be the cause of a range of responses: anxiety, resentment, guilt, fear, frustration, desperation, silence, sadness, loquaciousness, procrastination, belaboring, getting it wrong, and forgetfulness.

Even as we thank, we can be haunted by the persistent, underlying sense that we may simply *forget* who to thank, as if (the most) important influences are integrated so well that they can no longer be identified or attributable as "outside" forces. "He ground them all into paint," wrote Emerson, "As a good chimney burns its smoke, so a philosopher converts the value of all his fortunes into his intellectual perfor-

mances," hence, at last, there is "no external biography" to be found.[19] With quotation marks in effect, a Freudian might say that such "forgetfulness" is a measure of the importance itself—and as a result that the most central and essential positive influences will, *must be*, left aside, go under- or even unacknowledged. But why? Narcissism, sure. Or mainly a measure of anxiety, where the fear of forgetting is enough to motivate its realization. And we have already spoken about the troubles with remembering—that one thanks insufficiently or inelegantly or (again tracking self-regard) with too much deference to one's good fortune in having such people to thank in the first place.

If there is something of an admitted challenge in writing about Cavell's works —his words—perhaps there is now, also, something of the struggle to write about him as a person. Some have managed to compose a statement, some have asked for more time but come up short; both seem worthy responses to a profound occasion for thinking. In both scenarios, though, we are given a chance to think anew about what it means to *have words* for our experiences and what it means to *lose* them. I cannot help but feel both are necessary: to make a bid for articulation (as a mode of self-understanding and/or in an effort to help a community in its understanding of itself) and also to be mindful of the need to remain quiet—perhaps to withhold or even *deny* words; or, to admit that on some occasions words do not present themselves; one remains speechless, beyond words, because one must. Sadly, all of these predicaments can be the cause of frustration and shame: those who speak, who write, may feel embarrassed by the offering (because it must, necessarily, fall short of the worthy qualities of its object of address), and those who remain silent (because for all their capacity to write—and in these cases, we are invoking significant writers on their own terms—they have not been able to get their emotional and intellectual bearing on a difficult matter). At this cleave point, the harder, harsher interaction between Acknowledgments and acknowledgment—both in a Cavellian mood—make themselves known. The stakes of moral perfectionism, and its aspiration for self-knowledge and human community, are undeniably evident, and imposingly so.

At the very end of Cavell's Acknowledgments for *The World Viewed*, we receive a report on the audiences *any* book can expect to have: "A book is written for two

19. Emerson, "Plato; or, the Philosopher," in *Essays and Lectures*, 635.

audiences: the one it may create, whose conversation it invites; and the one that has created it, whose conversation it invokes. Members of the latter may have been dead before the writer was born; if alive, they may be strangers, enemies, or friends he no longer has the right to name."[20] Cavell takes this concluding distinction as a moment to thank Rogers Albritton, "asking him to stand for the rest," which is to say, asking him to stand as a representative for those who *are* Cavell's audience, and for whom he can record his genuine thanks—for dead people cannot care that they are thanked, and living people who are estranged or imbittered or otherwise at odds will not be moved.

But then how quickly Acknowledgments become, despite all, memorial in nature, for who among us has a living memory of Cavell's beloved friend, Rogers Albritton? A few, perhaps, but not enough for us to understand why and how he should be representative for an audience worthy of such thanks. In short, why he deserves Cavell's praise remains a perpetual mystery, perhaps forever deferred, or only momentary informed (as, for example, in *Little Did I Know* and other "excerpts from memory"). So, if one's audience is truly so small, must be, then what are Acknowledgments for? Do we write them for ourselves, for those being thanked, for the anonymous reader who likely will never know the author nor those whom she thanks? In this run of questions, we are pressed to the disconcerting conclusion that the Acknowledgments are the most temporary and fleeting moment in any book—that they cannot stand up over time because time dissolves both the audience(s) and the author. Far from being the first thing to read (as if for "lustres" and indications of the origins and processing of insight), they should be neglected, even ignored altogether.[21] How quickly we get turned around.

Cavell often takes his time when composing Acknowledgments, which leads us to wonder if the length he devotes should be understood as a form of compensation for the book's content. In the Foreword to *Must We Mean What We Say?*, given the name "An Audience for Philosophy," Cavell's first line reads, as if responding to a disgruntled, incredulous referee for the press: "If the essays which follow do not compo-

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20. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971/1979), xv.
21. Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. III, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 137.

se a book, collecting resonance from one another, nothing I can say in introducing them will alter that fact."[22] An echo of Wittgenstein's lament from his Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, invoked above, can be heard, but also a spirit of the conditional that extends into the very pages of Cavell's work "after" the acknowledgments, for instance, most famously in the opening, paragraph-long question of *The Claim of Reason*, also in reference to Wittgenstein's *Investigations*: "If not at the beginning [...] then where and how are we to approach this text?"[23] A familiar conditional frame of mind remains decades later, in the bicentennial year of Emerson's birth, when Cavell writes in his Introduction to *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*: "It is not for me to say whether the present book, collecting all the writing I have published that is mainly and explicitly devoted to Emerson, satisfies any reasonable image others may have of a book about Emerson."[24] I, for one, am much caught up in the notion of a "reasonable image others may have of a book about Emerson," as if such a thing could be articulated, or for that matter recognized, much less achieved. And yet, though Cavell says it is not for him to say what such an "image," reasonable or not, might be, he does have something to say, in his own words: "What I wish to say is that if I were to write a book about Emerson," this is "that book, the only one, or kind, it is given to me to write about Emerson's work."[25] The achievement of the book, on this occasion, is contained, somehow, in the very limitedness—or we may say, uniqueness—of Cavell's approach to Emerson. The lines that follow begin "I cannot justify [...]," "I would feel justified [...]," and "The virtue I claim for my procedure [...]," such that the reality of his creation is already being thought of in terms of its audience. And this is something Cavell (innately?) feels called to express.

Let me pick up on the notion that Cavell possessed some kind of special power to adduce Acknowledgments, whether innately or not. For even if the style of his Acknowledgments is self-consciously cultivated (as it is in the lines found in the balance of the book demanding these thanks), and one suspects that in this case an instinct and a practice are not far apart, there is a question that writing Acknowledgments—even if they appear under the guise of a Preface, Foreword, Introduction, or

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22. Cavell, first page of Foreword, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, xvii.
23. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3.
24. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 4.
25. Ibid.

Afterword—always implies an admission of disappointment in one's offering. Indeed, Cavell's Introduction to *Cities of Words* veritably frames the long history of philosophy as a perpetual meditation on the bifurcation that obtains between human desire and disappointment.[26] Acknowledgments, then, are part of a project of compensation for coming up short—as if merely saying what one feels or thinks about the accomplishments of a given work (limited though they may be) might be enough to welcome a reader into the heart of the problem—in effect, to create an audience to share (in one's own) disappointment. Still, a portion of the work of such an act of compensation, could *also* be to show others what it is like to acknowledge (e.g., lapses, debts, etc.) and perhaps as importantly, *to be* acknowledged—that is to say, praised.

The issue of modeling this behavior (for one's audience) raises two further points. First, that writing lengthy acknowledgments ends up belaboring one's point. A reader can ask: is all this qualification and elaboration necessary? Is Cavell compelled to write with such magnitude not only to thank *but also* to protect or preserve the precincts of what he has written; has philosophy, "the profession," somehow demanded this kind of explanation from him? As Cavell has written, "[p]hilosophy inspires much unhappy love," and that may be all we need to know: contributing to professional, academic philosophy can, at times, feel like one writes chum for the circling sharks (a striking metaphor offered to me by an elder philosopher that made an impression on me, for obvious reasons; another image, from a different mentor, being that philosophers are like lepers—put to me with the question, "so *why* would you want to join the colony?").[27] Chum meet chump.

Moreover, in belaboring thanks, it remains an open question whether a person is capable of holding the note of thanks with sincerity; things begin cheerfully enough, but by the end, a reader (and the writer before her?) becomes fatigued with the duration and multiplicity of benedictions. The second point, then, is that as one belabors—especially in matters of thanks—one perhaps also, inadvertently, dilutes. In this respect, a simple dedication in the front matter may be the highest form of praise and thanks, while a protracted Acknowledgments may find the completist (eager to inscribe indebtedness to *all* involved) thanking his spouse and the intern who made

26. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 2-4.
27. Cavell, Foreword, in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, xxii.

photocopies. Not that they are placed in equal measure, much less in the same line, but that they share a space at all can seem striking. Can we not assume that copies were made by someone? And yet, and yet, the "organizing and participating in the preparation of pages of mine for publication" is at the heart of making a book, so why not?[28] Belaboring and dilution, then, can be taken as further risks of writing Acknowledgments, and perhaps more generally. Who is to say when enough is said? Likely not the author, though readers are regularly ready with a reply.

Funny enough (and at this point some humor may be called for), it may be noted that often a writer will spend appreciable time on the opening and concluding paragraphs of a book only to dash off the Acknowledgments, which then, seemingly without noticing, but as a matter of form, *become* the opening or closing paragraphs of the book. That is, the fashions of formatting have it that we commence or conclude our operations with these notes of thanks—as most feature films still retain the habit of opening and closing "credits" (the form's chosen synonym for acknowledgments), with room made for dedications at either end. Why do I find this humorous? Because in both cases, these very prominent paratexts seldom feel like they are part of the film, either by filmmakers or by those who write about the finished works of art. Critics, for example, seldom remark at length, if at all, on what the titles or scroll say, or mean; these moments of art and information, as it were, speak for themselves. Likewise, for books: how many reviews, or even philosophical meditations, have included extended reflections on the content of Acknowledgments? To be sure, how many Acknowledgments demand our attention as texts worthy of such study? At least in the case of Cavell's Acknowledgments, the making of them, and the giving of them, is predicated precisely on the conviction that what is written cannot be taken for granted—that is, only Cavell is in a position to say it. And since he means what he says, perhaps especially that he *must* in this coveted domain of sincere expression, their importance should be as central as anything else "in the book."

Taking the Acknowledgments seriously, though, may not be enough. "The familiar recognition that famous philosophers have failed to understand their predecessors, or say to do them justice [...]," Cavell writes, may be a goad to us at this time

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28. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, xxvi.

when interpreting Cavell seems somehow more precious and fragile than ever.[29] If we readers of his work and writers about it, had the pleasure and privilege of his commentary on our remarks (as some have had), we can be sure no such comments or correctives will be forthcoming now. We are on our own. I suppose we always were. What would it mean to do Cavell justice? As he continues: such a project "should perhaps be seen less as a matter of a need to transcend past achievements than as an effort to discover philosophy for oneself, as if philosophy exists only in its discovery."[30] Thus, we are not aiming "to do better" than him (whatever that would mean) so much as to do better by ourselves by appreciating "surprise at the fact that there should be such an enterprise that measures the value of our lives."[31] Such are the moments when consciousness—merely being aware that one is a thing that *has* awareness—is coupled with conscience and judgment. We marvel at the world in the same moment that we deem it worthy of our care; such a pairing has the character of doing justice.

One last, duly salient, example. At the end of the Acknowledgments placed at the beginning of his first book, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell states: "First books tend to over-ambitiousness, and nowhere more in the bulk of debts they imagine themselves able to answer for."[32] What I have said thus far about what we imagine or intend the authorship of Acknowledgments to mean has been in conversation with such a claim, admittedly pushing well beyond the bounds of first books. In the present context, though, I wish to conclude by way of asking what we, in these pages and elsewhere, imagine to be *our* ambition (now and seemingly without end) in acknowledging Stanley Cavell? As we estimate the bulk of *our* debts to Cavell, do we misjudge what we are answerable for? James Conant once spoke in striking terms of the "blessing and the curse of the father," that is, while Cavell was not just the subject of remarks on Conant's *Doktorvater*, but also a living audience for his remarks.[33] The blessings may be obvious to oneself, depending on who one is, but the curse is harder

29. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 7.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid
32. Cavell, Acknowledgments, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, xiii.
33. James Conant delivered remarks at a gathering commemorating the publication of Cavell's *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* at Harvard University in October 2010. The pairing of "the blessing and the curse" also appears in Conant's "The Concept of America," *Society*, November/December 2003, 25-26.

to trace and testify to. What, in fact, are we answerable to or for in answering to the call of Cavell's now completed corpus? Perhaps these are the sorts of questions we must ask and then spend a lifetime responding to—sometimes with many words (in the spectrum from well-wrought to unwieldy and worse), few words, or none. One reply may be that in so far as one feels answerable, compelled (compulsively?) to thank and to acknowledge, which in this case means to think continually about, Cavell, one may have stumbled upon a private reply. The debts can feel real and yet resist articulation; the articulation may come and yet fall short. There is no end to failing, or risk of failure, in the business of acknowledging others. But then this was a lesson Cavell showed us in his work, and such illumination is a gift, like so many others he bestowed, that we can be grateful for without qualification or exception. We can state simply, without belaboring our point any further, without diluting our sense of the words we were called here to articulate. Thank you.

Contributors

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