

A black and white photograph of a dense forest. The trees have thick, gnarled trunks and branches, creating a complex, web-like pattern against the sky. The forest floor is covered in large, rounded rocks, many of which are heavily covered in moss or lichen, giving them a textured, almost sculptural appearance. The overall atmosphere is quiet and ancient.

Conversations 4

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Cavell and Literature

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Welcome to the fourth issue of *Conversations*, which explores Cavell's philosophic interest in literature, an oft-repeated and rehashed thematic prism and vantage point from which to address Cavell's work. However, it is our feeling that, at times anyhow, Cavell's interest in Wittgenstein and film dwarfs slightly his literary interests. We are constantly reminded, of course, of Cavell's last line in *The Claim of Reason*, expressed as "can philosophy become literature and still know itself?" This issue seeks to reverse the gradient of thinking somewhat to ask something like: "Can literature become philosophy, or philosophical, and still know itself?" Whatever pressure philosophy faces to respect, say, formal parameters of argumentation, does anyone yet conceive of literature facing similar professional pressure from the *opposite* direction? What sort of formal parameters ought literary study to respect, if any? Is this a plea for philosophy? Does Cavell count *here*?

We open with Bernhard Stricker, who, briefly discussing Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, asks if the flood of memories released by the protagonist's famous eating of the tea-laden madeleine is indicative of experience *missed* or experience *lost*. If missed, it was certainly missed in the moment. But if subject to recall, say, through literature, or literary rendering, *when* did the narrator of Proust's novel *ever* have his experience? Is such experience always-already *lost*?

Whether or how we can ever claim something not quite lost, but, perhaps, not quite intended, is addressed by Eric Lindstrom. Focussing on Cavell's treatment of J.L. Austin's "perlocutionary" utterances (rebranded by Cavell as "passionate" ones), the literary ante is specifically raised by looking at moments of intentions "unrealized" so to speak in the works of that other famous Austen, including *Emma*. Lindstrom, himself a Jane Austen scholar, has us ponder just what Austen *intended* in articulating her protagonist's convalescence. Is there a redeeming quality to Austen's ironical portrayal of human pettiness, or is it much more a vicious attack on the sta-

tus quo—as vicious, say, as any Nietzschean Romantic grandstanding, however muted?

Perlocution is further explored by David Kaufmann, though he makes it a point to conflate the illocutionary (conventional) operation of utterances with their perlocutionary force. Rather than looking at them as separate speech acts, Kaufmann reminds us that Austin’s ultimate agenda was to describe *the* ultimate speech act, however much we may benefit, in the early going, from separating illocutionary conditions from perlocutionary effects. Austin may not have explored perlocutionary utterances as much as “literary” people may have liked; Kaufmann, however, “aims to [drag] the literary back to pragmatics, aesthetics and everyday ethics” via a discussion of perlocutions.

But the elephant in the room may be whether or not one can theorize a complete speech act, with full illocutionary and perlocutionary affect brought to bear. Indeed, the quest for such totalizing knowledge (the “pure” statement”), the desire to comment on language from a position of everywhere and nowhere, raises the issue of whether or not philosophy’s claim on literature is *monstrous*. Can pragmatic and aesthetic concerns be explored simultaneously, or, in line with some critical “uncertainty” principle, does our ability to comment on one necessarily negate the other? Is the drive to establish pragmatics and aesthetics in its totality a hubristic enterprise? This is a way, perhaps, of characterizing the desire *to want to* unify Anglo-analytical and Continental dispositions of professional philosophy.

Allying himself resolutely with the Anglo-analytical tradition, Bruce Krajewski notes more than a hint of elitism in Cavell’s writing—the “esoteric” and oftentimes impenetrable characteristics of which are borrowed from other notable esotericists: Heidegger and Nietzsche. Some obviously balk at Cavell’s attempt to bring such notorious Continental influences into the mainstream of American philosophical currents. But Cavell has been largely *unsuccessful* in this regard. Krajewski’s essay reminds us perhaps *why* Cavell remains “strange” to the institutionalized American philosophy—not, that is, because he is unknowingly overlooked, but rather, *knowingly* repressed, say, for philosophy’s own good.

After much heady philosophical consideration of language and its sequent affects comes a warm and charming anecdote of “educational” intimacy, as Darko

Štrajn lets his mind wander to formulate a proper acknowledgment and appreciation of a fortuitous run-in with Stanley Cavell.

Lastly, Sam Cardoen formulates a Cavellian acknowledgement and response of his own, this time to Cavell's essay, "Knowing and Acknowledging" and his reading of *Endgame*. Cardoen cleverly notes that Hamm's negation of his own existence is a simultaneous expression of solidarity with all those now deceased—hence life negating and life affirming (solidarity) at the same time. This takes us back, perhaps, to the responsibility of all those who, upon uttering language, are faced with life or death. It remains up to all of us to choose life. Human desires may be abstruse, but we cannot renege on intelligibility, which means that literature and philosophy, aesthetics and pragmatics, must not lose sight of each other.

With all best wishes,

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