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NO QUARREL (PART 1)

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ISSUE #3: NO QUARREL (PART 1)

OREN IZENBERG

This issue of *nonsite.org* presents a conversation between literary scholars and philosophers, revisiting the ancient quarrel between literature and philosophy in a modern disciplinary context. These essays are revised and extended versions of papers originally delivered at "No Quarrel: Literature and Philosophy Today," a conference organized at Boston University in April, 2011 by Robert Chodat and Oren Izenberg, and sponsored by the BU Humanities Foundation.[1] Half of the essays appear now; five more will appear in November, along with responses to the issues they raise.

The schism between literary study and philosophy has long been sharper in America than in Europe. For more than a half-century, mainstream Anglo-American academic philosophy has been dominated by work that looks to science, logic, and mathematics for its models of knowledge, marginalizing questions of narrative, interpretation, and beauty. Over the same period, American literary scholarship has invested in eclectic versions of "theory" that address questions about meaning, intention, and culture without sustained attention to contemporary work in epistemology, the philosophy of language, or the philosophy of mind. As a result, any conversation that takes the disciplinary foundations of interdiscplinarity seriously is bound to reveal differences in assumption (about the stability of a historically variable term like

"literature"; about the rigor of a vague concept like "style"). It will also highlight differences of method (e.g., is a discussion of Wordsworth undertaken to improve our account of Romanticism or to improve our account of the self?).

Nevertheless, the writers assembled here seek common ground, connecting high-level conceptual problems with questions of historical change and the particularities of what Wittgenstein called "the stream of our lives," and making explicit how they understand some of the perennial questions hovering over all discussions of literature and philosophy: Can literature offer some kind of "truth"? What does a fiction have to offer a life? Do poems mean in some special way? We hope that "No Quarrel" might provide a model for how two different humanistic disciplines—disciplines with quite different institutional and intellectual histories—can come to understand one another more fully.

NOTES

[1.] Many thanks to those who helped make that event a success: Juliet Floyd, Charles Griswold, Susan Jackson, Maurice Lee, Carrie McGrory, Michael Prince, Amelie Rorty, Allen Speight, James Winn, and everyone who attended the sessions.

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ARTICLES

WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE, POETIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF

ELISABETH CAMP

Humans are inveterate storytellers. We make incessant and insistent narrative sense of the world around us and of our place in it—so much so that some scholars have suggested "*homo narrans*" as a more appropriate identifying description for our species than "*homo sapiens*".[1] Indeed, a long-standing tradition holds that our very self-identities have an essentially narrative shape: that who each of us is is determined by the stories of our lives, and that in some sense we create our selves by crafting those stories. In this essay, I focus on an especially compelling case of narrative self-construction: Wordsworth's *Prelude*. I argue that we do need rich, substantive selves of the sort delivered by narratives like *The Prelude*, both in order to evaluate our past actions and to guide future ones. However, the very feature which makes Wordsworth's poem so rhetorically powerful as an autobiography—his invocation of a robust teleological structure, which is imposed on him from infancy by Nature—also prevents us from embracing it as a model for our own self-understanding, because it conflicts sharply

with modern views about ontology. Contemporary advocates of a narrative conception of the self, such as Jerome Bruner, Alasdair MacIntyre and Marya Schectman, drop *The Prelude*'s objectionable ontological assumptions. But rather than placing the narrative conception of self on a firm metaphysical foundation, this actually intensifies the threat of fictionalism: the risk that the selves we fashion through stories are mere self-deluding illusions. I conclude by gesturing toward the characters within stories as an alternative literary model which avoids many of these problems.

1. Romantic Autobiography as Teleology

Wordsworth was—at least if you believe *The Prelude*—a pretty lucky guy. Endowed at or before birth with "that first great gift, the vital soul" (I.150), he was blessed with a childhood surrounded by Nature—what he calls a "Fair seed-time…Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (I.301-2): fostered, that is, on the one hand by the gentle beauty of breezes and murmuring brooks, and on the other by the awful sublimity of "sounding cataracts" (II.425) and "Winds thwarting winds" (VI.628, 631). Through this early "unconscious intercourse with beauty/ Old as creation" (I.562-3), he found that "the earth/ And common face of Nature spake to [him] / Rememberable things" (I.586-588). This "seed-time" in the countryside bears fruit as Wordsworth enters adolescence and begins to appreciate, not just Nature's external appearances, but her inward animating force. He has a growing sense that "A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides, / And o'er the heart of man" (V.491-2). He begins to experience "the sentiment of Being spread / O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still" (II.401-402). Increasingly, everything he sees appears to pulse with a single animating Spirit; now, he says,

> To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
> Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
> I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
> Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass
> Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
> That I beheld respired with inward meaning. (III. 130-136)

Wordsworth's growing awareness of Man's place within an animate, spiritual Nature culminates in his choice to become a Poet, creating works of art that reveal the beauty and power of Nature to his fellow man. Indeed, Wordsworth concludes that he has been "singled out" as a "dedicated Spirit" (IV.336) for this "holy service" (I.53-4): he is a "Prophet of Nature," tasked to articulate "what an empire we inherit / As natural beings in the strength of Nature" (III.195-6)—or more precisely, tasked to demonstrate how the imaginative powers

endowed in us by Nature enable us, not merely to inherit but to co-create an "empire" of the imagination, by spreading the "sentiment of Being" over the bare earth, and by uncovering Nature's noble dignity in even (or especially) the most apparently ordinary objects and people. According to *The Prelude*, then, Wordsworth is not merely a poet, but a dedicated Spirit of Truth and chosen Prophet of Nature: a high calling, indeed!

To be sure, it wasn't always easy. Wordsworth is forced by familial expectation and economic circumstance to labor in academia and in the urban jungle, under "That burthen of my own unnatural self, /The heavy weight of many of a weary day / Not mine, and such as were not made for me" (I. 21-23). He worries that he lacks the gifts and fortitude to become a true Poet. He has "his unruly times; / His fits when he is neither sick nor well, / Though no distress be near him but his own / Unmanageable thoughts" (I.136-139). At more than one point, "There was an inner falling off," when "a swarm / Of heady schemes jostl[ed] each other….all conspired / To lure my mind from firm habitual quest of feeding pleasures, to depress the zeal/ And damp those daily yearnings which had once been mine" (IV.278ff). And at his "soul's last and lowest ebb," after the failure of the French Revolution, with "a heart that had been turned aside/ From Nature's way by outward accidents," he falls prey to the worst horror of all– analytic philosophy:

> endlessly perplexed
> With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
> Of obligation, what the rule and whence
> The sanction; till demanding formal *proof*,
> And seeking it in every thing, I lost
> All feeling of conviction, and in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair. (XI.290-297)

Even in that dark hour, however, even when he was "bedimmed and changed / Much, as it seemed"—even then his "true self," "Nature's self," remained, like "a clouded and a waning moon" (XI.342-350). His "office upon earth" was still, as always, to be a Poet of Nature; he only had to remember and believe this. Ultimately, he concludes that "all/ The terrors, pains and early miseries, / Regrets, vexations, lassitudes" that he experiences along the way play "a needful part, in making up / The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself." Both the joyful play of his childhood and the vexatious trials of his late adolescence thus form materials for Nature's labor, in crafting a soul worthy of serving as her Prophet. "Praise to the end!," Wordsworth says. "Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ…as best might suit her aim" (I.340-356).

This is a teleological conception of life and of autobiography, with a vengeance. (A teleological structure is one in which a future goal guides the operative causal processes, much as a carpenter's ultimate idea of a table guides his cutting and gluing the wood.) As we've seen, *The Prelude* consistently employs heavily teleological language, with its talk of true callings and destinies; and Wordsworth characterizes the poem as the history of "the discipline / And consummation of a Poet's mind." To comprehend this history, Wordsworth must cultivate a global, retrospective view of his life up to this point. He recounts that he "rose / As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched / Vast prospect of the world which I had been / And was" (XIV.379-382). And what he sees from this high vantage is that, "from a very early age," Nature "had led me on" (VIII.676-679), serving as his active guide and mentor in molding him into a soul worthy of being her Prophet. It is this retrospective perspective which enables him to conclude that his life is "in the end / All gratulant, if rightly understood" (XIV.379-387): to conclude, that is, that the result explains and justifies his experiences along the way, by transforming them into means *toward* a significant end.

This teleological structure is implicated, not merely in the poem's descriptive content, but also in its structure and style. *The Prelude* is constructed so that "the work shall justify itself" (XIV.414), by demonstrating the growth and culmination of Wordsworth's poetic powers. It concludes by pointing to itself as evidence of the fulfillment of its goal—as proof of what has been "our guiding object from the first": to ensure that "my powers [are] so far confirmed…as to make me capable / Of building up a work that should endure (XIV.309-311). The 'enduring' work to which Wordsworth refers here is ostensibly *The Recluse*, a larger poem that was never actually published. But as M. H. Abrams argues, because *The Prelude* was intended to serve as a "portico" to *The Recluse* and thus as "part of the same building" as it, *The Prelude* itself becomes "an involuted poem which is about its own genesis—a prelude to itself."[2]

As Abrams also argues, *The Prelude* systematically tweaks the traditional form of autobiography as confessional in order to promote its model of "natural supernaturalism." Thus, where Augustine conceived of God as leading him through temptations to his allotted role as God's servant and advocate, guided by prayer and by Christ's intercessions; here Wordsworth conceives of Nature as leading him through challenges to his allotted role as Nature's servant and advocate, guided by poetry and imagination. By substituting Nature for God, imagination for Christ, and poetry for prayer, Abrams argues, Wordsworth updates the template employed by Christian authors like Augustine and Milton for the modern age, ultimately paving the way for the semi-autobiographical memoirs of Proust, Joyce, and others who replace God and Nature with Art.

As with the more classical confessional autobiographies that preceded it, *The Prelude*'s invocation of a teleological ontology has two crucial implications for the question of self-identity. First and foremost, it provides a rich, substantive identity for the self who is its focal subject. According to *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's given identity is, from the outset, to be a Poet and Prophet of Nature. This essential fact provides an overarching interpretive frame which governs the entire course of his life. It explains what happens to him and what he does: why he was so attracted to Lake Grasmere as a child, say, or his choice to stint academic study in favor of hiking the French Alps. It determines which features of his life and character are important and which are merely incidental. And it licenses certain emotional responses to the actions and events of his life: for instance, given that he is to become a Poet of Nature, it is appropriate to feel pride rather than shame at failing to fit into the social and intellectual milieu of Cambridge. Further, because Wordsworth is still in the midst of life, the self chosen for him by Nature offers a crucial guide for future action: in particular, it establishes that he should create a monumental epic, and he shouldn't become a cleric or a member of Parliament, as his family would have preferred.

The second crucial consequence of the poem's teleological ontology is that it makes the issue of self-identity seem primarily an epistemological rather than a metaphysical problem—a problem of self-discovery rather than self-determination. Like a stream, Wordsworth is naturally headed in a certain direction; and pursuing a different course of action would be "sinning greatly" against Nature (IV.335). This is not to say that he is mere putty in Nature's hands: unlike a stream or an acorn, he must actively participate in his own creation. Nor is there is any guarantee of success: just as many acorns fall on fallow ground, so is Wordsworth often at risk of being stymied or diverted. (At one point, he likens himself to another "unruly child of mountain birth, / The froward Brook," who is "Stripped of his voiceand left to dimple down / (Without an effort, and without a will) / A channel paved by man's officious care" (IV.51-6).) At several junctures, his fate depends on a stroke of highly contingent luck: most notably, an unexpected bequest that enables him to quit his day job. But even these external supports merely serve to "clear[] a passage for [him]," so that "the stream / Flow[s] in the bent of Nature" (XIV. 368-9) once again. All along, there is his "true self," "Nature's self," waiting to be actualized.

2. Analytic Debunking

Wordsworth is thus presented to a reader of *The Prelude* as a blessed soul, gifted with a high calling and the imaginative powers to achieve it. To a mainstream analytic philosopher, though, Wordsworth's faith in his fortunate fate is likely to look like a bad case of wishful thinking and metaphysical confusion. He is lucky only in the sense that he has succeeded in deluding himself into a self-aggrandizing lie. It may well be right, as Wordsworth claims,

that we 'spread the sentiment of Being' over the earth, by imbuing the objects and events around us with a moral life. Hume makes much the same point, in much the same terms, claiming that the faculty of taste "has a productive faculty, and [by] gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation."[3] It might even be true that Nature participates in or guides this 'spreading' or 'staining' in the sense that there is some general evolutionary advantage to projecting moral and aesthetic properties onto nature. But it is most certainly not the case that Nature designates individual people for particular tasks, like being a Poet, and then manipulates their surrounding circumstances—conjuring an advancing storm, say, or orchestrating their discovery of a little boat on a lake—to mold those individuals into agents capable of performing their allotted tasks.

A natural way to respond to the accusation that *The Prelude* manifests nothing so much as self-serving delusion is to point out that the accusation depends on treating *The Prelude* in a flat-footedly literal manner, one which ignores the various ways in which Wordsworth the author signals that he is creating a character—the hero of an epic poem—in the service of a larger project of promoting a secular, naturalized, neo-Humean conception of imagination, beauty and morality. This response is fair enough as a matter of literary analysis. Indeed, it allows us to identify another source of *The Prelude*'s rhetorical power: its appropriation and adaptation of heroic tropes from earlier epics like the *Odyssey, Aeneid, Divine Comedy,* and *Paradise Lost.* However, precisely because this response takes *The Prelude*'s 'literary' status so seriously, it also renders *The Prelude* problematic as a model for a narrative conception of self-identity. Many people in the past have believed, and many today continue to believe, in a powerful, purposive Agent who selects a particular destiny for each person and guides us toward its fulfillment. However, such a view is not seriously supportable by contemporary intellectual standards. Even proponents of Intelligent Design do not claim that specific, substantive self-identities are ontologically given or objectively determined; and Intelligent Design is itself at best a highly marginal view in serious academic discussions. Further, naturalistic teleological conceptions of evolution as a mechanism for explaining apparently adaptive properties of entire species have come under sustained attack over the last thirty years.[4] More fundamentally, however, many philosophers—especially, analytic philosophers—argue that a clear-headed examination of the metaphysical facts reveals that there is no self in the substantive sense required to determine a distinctive 'bent' or 'office' for any particular individual. Skepticism about substantive self-identities is not a recent development. Descartes concluded from the possibility that he could be massively deceived—about his surroundings, about possessing a body, even about his memories—that "I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind."[5] On this view, the only feature which distinguishes my self—my 'I'—from yours is introspective access: you and I are

spectators of different passing streams of appearance and thought, which we each interpret for ourselves. Hume concludes that even the bare Cartesian *ego* is an illusion; when I look inside of "what I call myself," he says,

> I always stumble on some particular perception or other….I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never observe anything but the perception. We are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. [6]

Locke arguably offers the most optimistic view: at least on one interpretation, he holds that a self encompasses the entire stream of memories accessible to a single consciousness:

> For as far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action; so far it is the same personal self. [7]

But even this relatively inclusive view is still radically minimal in comparison with the sort of self exemplified by *The Prelude*. In particular, even if Locke intends to include all of the memories and thoughts accessible to a single consciousness as elements of the relevant self, he clearly abjures any principle for generating a more fine-grained self relative to which some memories, thoughts, or actions could count as especially important or "true," while others are "sinning greatly" or not 'fitting' in some other way. Thus, whether the self is taken to be the consciousness that accesses a collection of memories and thoughts, the collection itself, or some combination thereof, Descartes, Locke, and Hume all assign the constituting elements of the self a single, uniform status. Indeed, for philosophical purposes they all take all selves are fundamentally equivalent: selves are numerically distinct, and trace different paths through space and time; but the selves themselves are basically fungible—a conclusion that Wordsworth would have strenuously rejected as further evidence of philosophy's sickly absurdity.

Contemporary philosophers like Derek Parfit have continued within this paradigm. They ask whether the same self would persist across radical transformations like bodily teletransportation or brain fission; and they typically conclude that there is no substantive self in any interesting sense of the term. Subjected to such counterfactual scrutiny, the choice even to elevate a single strand within the manifold of spatio-temporal possibilities as 'me' or 'mine' appears quite arbitrary; all there really is are more or less stable distributions of physical

and psychological properties.[8] Even contemporary analytic defenders of the reality of selves tend to offer fairly minimal, neo-Lockean criteria of psychological continuity, or else physical or biological analogues. Thus, none of these analyses even purport to address the question that Wordsworth challenges himself to answer, and that most of us ask ourselves at some point: "What is my true self, such that I should pursue and cultivate it?"[9]

3. The Ancient Quarrel

At this point, we appear to face a deep conflict: the "ancient quarrel" between beauty and truth, with florid literary fantasy on one side and dour philosophical reductionism on the other. The robust ontological assumptions that allow Wordsworth to present his life's story as one of development and fulfillment are so metaphysically dubious by contemporary standards that he can be rescued from the accusation of self-aggrandizing delusion only by treating him as engaged in fiction. However, the philosophical alternative appears to be just as insupportable.

For consider what it would be like to live as the minimalist self sanctioned by metaphysical investigation. Such a person would conceive of himself as a bare Cartesian *ego*,[10] and would employ only general rational and normative principles to determine how to act at any moment. He need not be a Cartesian skeptic: he could exploit a full range of beliefs about the world and his particular trajectory through it, including all the memories that arguably contribute to a Lockean self. The set of this particular self's beliefs would be unique, insofar as he traverses a unique trajectory through space and time. He could even be a free moral and epistemic agent (supposing such freedom to be possible); and he might settle, after sufficient rational reflection, on any of various general normative commitments: utilitarianism, say, or deontology.

However, at any given moment, this self would choose his actions by asking 'What should *one* do in these circumstances?', where 'these circumstances' are specified by all of his beliefs about how things are, and where his normative principles are determined by general rational considerations. Such an agent would make no distinctively personal choices, and have no genuinely personal commitments: he would wear whatever clothes, eat whatever food, perform whatever job, and cultivate whatever friends and family best fulfilled the overall rational calculus of ethics, convenience, and pleasure, given his beliefs about how these factors ought to be weighed and about the available candidates for action.

Although a life lived by these precepts might be morally exemplary, I do not think it would produce a recognizably human self. Such a self would not have any truly particular commitments, only general rational principles plus the inertia of historical contingency. Nothing he did or surrounded himself with would be genuinely his own: an object of his

own care and concern, for itself. And without any such personal commitments, it is not clear that such a self would be capable of robust emotional engagement—at least, not if we accept contemporary psychological and philosophical theories of emotion which hold that many emotions (e.g. pride, regret, hope, and fear) are grounded in a perception of threat or benefit to "me and mine," and by an investment in particular strands of the past and future as distinctively my own.[11]

Nor is it clear that such a life would actually be livable. Perhaps the core insight of existentialism, articulated most famously by Sartre in *Nausea*, is that many of our deepest and most important choices are fundamentally arbitrary in the sense of not being decidable through a rational calculus; and that awareness of their arbitrariness produces excruciating anxiety. This long-standing philosophical or phenomenological claim has been supported by recent empirical evidence about the so-called "paradox" or "tyranny of choice," which suggests that when people are offered multiple rationally viable choices, they experience more anxiety, are worse at selecting the objectively 'best' choice when there is one, and take less pleasure in their ultimate selection than when they are confronted with fewer options.[12] Thus, the philosophical love of depersonalized rationality threatens to produce lives that, if they are practically feasible at all, are significantly worse than those produced by cultivating a distinctive self with a constellation of genuinely personal commitments. As Wordsworth puts it, it seems that philosophy is a "speculative scheme[]—/ That promised to abstract the hopes of Man / Out of his feelings," (XI.224-226) but that ultimately produces only meaninglessness and existential despair.

4. Narrative Conceptions of the Self

Perhaps the choice is not as stark as I've made out: perhaps there is a way to reconcile a respectably parsimonious ontology with a practically viable psychology. Although analytic metaphysical views of personal identity tend to favor reductive or at most highly minimalist treatments of the self, not all contemporary theorists of personal identity are so resolute. In particular, a wide range of philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, and literary critics advocate a "narrative conception of the self." Although there are important differences among the views of various narrative theorists, Owen Flanagan provides a useful synopsis of the model's general contours:

> Many have converged on the insight that a narrative conception of self is the 'essential genre' of self-representation. One useful way of conceiving of the self is as a kind of structured life, structured in part by its temporal components—its beginning, middle, and ending—and by the relations among the various characters

who figure in our lives…The sort of connectedness that constitutes a normatively acceptable self or life is the sort that makes for a contentful story that involves an unfolding rationale for the shape it takes. [13]

The fundamental intuition is, as we might put it, to create substantive, fine-grained selves by imposing a narrative structure on the teeming complexity of trivial remembered detail that constitutes a Lockean self. More specifically, the view retains the basic interpretive structure exemplified by poetic autobiographies like Wordsworth's, while jettisoning their florid ontological assumptions about the guiding hand of God or Nature. Instead, selves are now taken to be *self*-constituting, in virtue of telling their own distinctive stories. Thus, Oliver Sacks claims that "each of us constructs and lives a 'narrative'…this narrative *is* us, our identities." [14] Jerome Bruner claims that "self-making is a narrative art" [15]; , "It is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood…self is a product of our telling and not some essence to be delved for in the recesses of subjectivity." [16] "In the end," he says, "we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives." [17] Similarly, Daniel Dennett writes, "We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography. The chief fictional character at the center of that autobiography is one's self." [18] Finally, Marya Schechtman articulates the claim that we construct our own selves by imposing narrative structure on our lives in especially explicit and forceful terms, arguing that "constituting an identity requires that an individual conceive of his life as having the form and the logic of a story…where 'story' is understood as a conventional, linear narrative." [19] One must have a full and "explicit narrative" of one's life, she says, in order "to develop fully as a person" [20]; "weav[ing] stories of their lives [is what] makes them persons." [21]

Most advocates of the narrative conception of self-constitution are not very explicit about precisely what they mean by 'narrative': Schechtman, for instance, simply appeals to "a conventional, linear narrative." However, they generally endorse the two criteria that Flanagan cites in the passage quoted above: a narrative involves a temporally ordered structure, with a beginning, middle, and end; and that structure is shaped by an "unfolding rationale," or what Noël Carroll calls a "presiding macro-question." [22] And this combination of features effectively produces a teleological structure. That is, narratives are structured in terms of a "forward-looking" trajectory to their ends; [23] and as a result, the ultimate significance of each of the narrative's constituent events—and indeed, whether it is worth mentioning at all—is determined by its causal or emotional contribution to moving the story toward its conclusion. Of course, stories may be told out of temporal order, disrupt our expectations about where they are headed, or withhold significant information until later in

the telling. Likewise, even important events may occur by happenstance; they may make sense only in the sense of fulfilling an "emotional cadence" [24] and not in virtue of any straightforwardly causal explanation. But at least in successful, satisfying narratives, initially surprising events acquire "retrograde necessity," through which "chance is transmuted into fate." [25]

When the general narrative criteria of a temporal dimension and an "unfolding rationale" are applied to the lives of individual persons, then they arguably produce a considerably more specific structure, one that closely mirrors the pattern exemplified in Wordsworth's poetic autobiography. In the context of individual persons, the temporal dimension is naturally fixed by a person's biological life (although there may be important antecedents and consequences extending beyond that life, as in *Tristram Shandy*.) Similarly, the narrative's "unfolding rationale" becomes that of the focal subject or protagonist pursuing a goal through obstacles—or, in more traditional terminology, a quest. Thus, Charles Taylor writes that "we must…understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'," as an "inescapable structural requirement of human agency." [26] And Alasdair MacIntyre declares,

> The unity of an individual life is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask 'What is the good for me?' is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion….[The unity of a human life] is the unity of a narrative quest…the only criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole are the criteria for success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest…A quest for what?…the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man. [27]

One might wonder why autobiographical narratives need to take as specific a form as that of anything resembling a 'quest'. Some theorists, like Jerome Bruner and perhaps Kenneth Burke, [28] appear to simply assume that all narratives are inherently structured in terms of agents pursuing goals through obstacles; but this is clearly too restrictive, insofar as it rules out many narrative histories, such as those concerning families and nations. However, I think we can justify something very close to this restriction within the context of an individual's biography. If a person's life is to be explained in narrative terms, then it must be governed by an overarching, forward-looking explanatory trajectory; and if that explanation is to be plausible and compelling, then it must have some significant causal basis. But further, if this explanatory-causal role is not to be filled by an external agent who manipulates the biography's focal subject, as in Augustine's *Confessions* or Wordsworth's *Prelude*, then it must be occupied by the subject herself. That is, the subject must be an agent who imposes an

explanatory unity on her unfolding life by striving to achieve some goal. Otherwise, we are left either with no unifying, sense-making 'rationale' for the narrative at all, or else with a 'rationale' that is presented as merely epiphenomenal: as emerging mysteriously from out of a miasma of blind contingency.

5. Problems for Narrative Accounts

At this point, then, it appears that contemporary versions of the narrative autobiographical conception of the self are poised to achieve the sort of highly particularized, personal teleological structure that is manifested in *The Prelude* while employing only metaphysically respectable means. Unless one is prepared to hold that all interpretation is inherently poetic and hence untrue, simply because it goes beyond the "bare facts" of raw psychological experience or physics—unless, that is, one is prepared to declare that all history is inherently fictional—then it appears that we can reconcile the ancient quarrel after all, at least with respect to personal identity. We can, that is, constitute substantive, meaning-conferring, action-guiding selves by constructing narratives which make overarching sense of our lives, so long as we don't pretend that events did take place that didn't actually happen.

I think that a narrative conception of the self has its heart in exactly the right place. It offers the right genus of analysis for developing a robust self-identity, one that captures the richly textured and highly particularized way in which we do, and arguably must, make sense of our lives. Specifically, narratives provide an overarching interpretive principle for selecting notable events from the teeming mass of trivia that fills the space-time trajectory of each particular individual. They relate those events to one another into a unified, coherent arc. And they thereby imbue them with meaning, assigning them explanatory, evaluative, and emotional significance in virtue of their relation to the narrative's "unfolding rationale." Some such principle for selecting and interpreting specific elements in relation to a coherent whole is necessary if we are going to generate robust, substantive selves from bare Cartesian 'I's and their attendant bundles of memories and thoughts.

However, I also believe the narrative conception cannot make good on its promise. Metaphysically respectable selves cannot be constituted out of the stories we tell about our lives, because the same individual cannot simultaneously play both the role of protagonist within her unfolding life and that of narrator retrospectively interpreting the life she has lived. The fundamental problem is that, as we've seen, narratives are structured in terms of a "forward looking" trajectory to their ends; but even lives that eventually exemplify a narratively compelling shape don't actually *have* ends until they actually end. In its effort to cleanse itself of objectionable ontological assumptions, the contemporary narrative

conception actually intensifies the threat of fictionalism confronted by Augustine and Wordsworth.

In this section, I present what I take to be the three most pressing objections to the contemporary narrative model of the self. In §6, I gesture at an alternative mode of interpretation that I believe can capture many of the narrative conception's insights while avoiding its primary drawbacks.

5a. Temporal Dependence

The first objection to the narrative conception is that it holds the meaning, value, and even existence of selves hostage to their ultimate temporal end. If narratives are supposed to constitute selves, and if a good narrative requires a satisfying end, then the only good selves will be those whose lives draw to a satisfying conclusion just at the point of death, leaving neither unfulfilled goals nor narratively extraneous time.[29] But lives often end at narratively inopportune moments: as Allen Wheelis says,

> That big vague thing, that redemptive fulfillment, is an illusion….A symphony has a climax, a poem builds to a burst of meaning, but we are unfinished business. No coming together of strands. The game is called because of darkness.[30]

Given the arbitrary vicissitudes of life's endings, we need to allow for the possibility of robust, fully actualized selves who die with some of their crucial business left messily undone. We want to be able to say of such people, not merely that they were on a trajectory toward developing an admirable self if they hadn't been cut off midstream, but that they actually achieved selfhood. Conversely, we also want to allow that someone could not only once have been, but could continue to be an amazing, robust, interesting person despite the fact that the world has largely left them behind: even if they are, say, stuck in a nursing home, surrounded by mentally and physically decrepit fellow residents, visited only periodically by desultory relatives. If we identify selves too closely with the lives they live, we risk losing the ability even to describe such a person's situation as tragic: because this long, empty tail of their life comes at the end, it plays a central role in determining the narrative arc of their life, and thus in turn in constituting their very self. The narrative conception thus risks stipulating that each of us gets exactly the life we deserve, insofar as the narrative of that life constitutes who we are.

The problem is not merely that the narrative conception assigns undue weight to a life's end in tallying up a self's merits and faults. According to the narrative conception, the significance of each episode within our lives is determined by its place in the arc of our overall life narrative.

But because that arc is itself a trajectory toward the story's end, no event can be assigned a determinate significance until that life is over—until we are in a position to stand outside the flow of time, and to "r[i]se / As if on wings, and [see] beneath [us] stretched / Vast prospect of the world which [we] had been."

Louis Mink articulates the crucial point in a frequently cited passage:

> Stories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles or ends; there are meetings, but the start of an affair belongs to the story we tell ourselves later, and there are partings, but final partings only in the story. There are hopes, plans, battles and ideas, but only in retrospective stories are hopes unfulfilled, plans miscarried, battles decisive, and ideas seminal. [31]

Mink's basic claim here might be interpreted in a merely epistemic manner: as claiming that we can't *know* whether our hopes will be unfulfilled or a parting will be final until the story ends. Within the context of the narrative model, however, this uncontroversial point takes on a more radical implication. Because the story of our lives is supposed not merely to reveal but to constitute our selves, the narrative view is committed to claiming that we actually *have* no identity, no self at all, until our lives are over. More precisely, insofar as the story of our lives at each moment within our lives is compatible with multiple, dramatically distinct futures, our self-identity at each moment is indeterminate among all the possible significances that the narrators at the end of each of those alternative futures would assign to it.

The narrative dependence of interim events on their contribution to the story's end doesn't rule out the possibility of ever making narrative sense of our lives as they unfold. Rather, like the first-time readers of a novel, we can (and often do) interpret events in "anticipation of retrospection" [32]: that is, by imagining which futures are most likely to unfold from this point on, and how this moment or possible course of action will appear relative to those potential futures. However, note that we employ our *current* values and desires in adjudicating among those futures. And this requires that we actually be someone right now: someone for whom certain options really are better or worse, even though the self who ultimately tells the story of our lives may have very different values, and even though the option we eventually choose will retrospectively become the narratively compelling one. But this requirement is not one the narrative conception can meet. Because, that is, it defines selves via narratives of entire lives, it cannot account for the sense in which we are already actual, here and now, well before our story ends.

5b. Teleological Dependence

The second major challenge for the narrative conception is generated by the fact that narratives are structured and unified in terms of a teleological end as well as a temporal one: a "quest," as Macintyre and Taylor put it. [33] The basic problem is that the lives of a large class of selves, who intuitively count as robust and fulfilled, fail to exemplify the right sort of overarching, goal-directed unity. Perhaps most obviously, many people organize their lives around multiple goals, each of which plays a significant role in constituting their identity, but each of which bears little relation to the others: for instance, they may pursue romantic 'goals' that are intentionally quite distinct from the goals that drive their careers. Similarly, some people—what Galen Strawson calls "Episodics" [34]—move through life without any special commitment to long-term, identity-defining goals at all. Instead, these people savor each moment, and meet each temporary challenge and opportunity as it comes. (As examples of Episodics, Strawson cites himself, along with such luminaries as Montaigne, Stendhal, Woolf, Borges, Murdoch, and Bob Dylan.) In neither case do we want to conclude that these people cannot have selves, or that their selves must be deeply fractured, simply because there is no narratively compelling connection among the disparate episodes or strands of their lives.

A second class of narratively problematic selves does live a strongly goal-oriented life, but in a way that produces spectacularly boring narratives. These people have as their overarching goal simply to *be* a certain kind of person: to achieve a particular personality trait, like serenity, for instance, or a certain professional status, like being the town doctor. When things go as planned, they achieve that crucial, self-defining quality quite early, and simply manifest it in a consistent, ongoing way from then on. The stereotypical *pater familias*, farmer, or town doctor coasts through life indefinitely, savoring the pleasures and confronting the challenges of each day and season, but without any particular expectation or hope of substantial change. Asked to tell the story of their lives, they'd say there wasn't much to tell, or proudly offer a one-line characterization. Much like Episodics, they accumulate many anecdotes—variations on an unchanging theme—in lieu of a compelling developmental narrative. I take it that this is an utterly familiar, even paradigmatic type of selfhood. But because the narrative conception focuses so strongly on becoming at the expense of mere being, it is forced to disvalue these selves. [35] (Indeed, it is notable here that *The Prelude* ends midway through Wordsworth's life's journey: once he has become a poet, there is nothing left to tell, although he continued to tinker with the poem for the rest of his life.)

The third and perhaps most obvious class of persons to pose a problem for the narrative model's teleological focus are individuals who lack the cognitive resources necessary for composing compelling life narratives or for forming long-term goals. According to the narrative conception, these deficits are quite dire: Bruner [36] claims that "individuals who have lost the ability to construct narratives have lost their selves"; in support of this claim, he cites

Sacks' description of such people as "scooped out, de-souled." However, a closer look at individuals with severe cognitive impairments suggests that this diagnosis is inappropriate. For instance, William Hirst argues that severe amnesiacs can not only preserve but develop their selves in important ways, "despite the impoverished post-onset narratives" that they generate.[37] Individuals with amnesia are capable of developing new behaviors, interests and life 'themes', in at least three ways: through "islands of preserved memory" for emotionally and thematically charged events, such as a child's wedding or a divorce[38]; through implicit memory which is inaccessible to explicit recall, but which guides current preferences and actions; and through "externalized and collective memories,"[39] such as physical and social cues in their environment which consistently remind them of their reality, eventually becoming encoded in implicit memory. Similarly, children and adults with Asperger's and high-functioning autism are typically significantly impaired when it comes to narrative generation and comprehension, specifically with respect to causal connections, evaluation, and overall coherence.[40] But they still display strong, specific personalities, interests, and commitments, which develop over time; and they certainly do not lack souls—at least no more than the rest of us. None of this is to minimize the severity of the deficits these people confront. Rather, it is to emphasize just how strong a claim is involved in the narrative conception's identification of selves with the narratives that individuals tell about their lives.

So far, I've focused on a range of individuals whose lives fail to exemplify the general teleological structure required by narrative. The narrative conception's commitment to defining lives and selves teleologically is also problematic in another respect. We saw in §4 that when the "unfolding rationale" that unifies and structures narratives in general is applied to an individual person's life, it takes the form of an overarching goal pursued by the protagonist. The problem is that many of the most important aspects of people's lives and selves arise not from what they do, but from what happens to them: the fascinating woman they encounter a party which they decided to drop by at the last minute, say; or the job that lands in their lap when the company's preferred candidate decides to change careers; or the debilitating stroke that forces them to relearn basic life skills and finally acquire a measure of empathy. As the poet Edwin Muir says in concluding his memoir:

> What is left to say when one has come to the end of writing about one's life? Some kind of development, I suppose, should be expected to emerge, but I am very doubtful of such things, for I cannot bring life into a neat pattern. If there is a development in my life—and that seems an idle supposition—then it has been brought about more by things outside than by any conscious intention on my part.[41]

Such influences from "things outside" aren't merely obstacles to be overcome in pursuit of an ongoing goal. Rather, they are the sorts of events that fundamentally alter our conception of what our lives can and should be. They are possibilities we cannot envision for ourselves before they happen, but that we cannot help but make into a fundamental aspect of our selves once they are thrust upon us.

The most tempting way to reconcile a teleological conception of a life's structure with the fact that in many of our most important aspects we are objects rather than agents, is to posit an external agent—God, Nature, Fate—who manipulates our surrounding circumstances to bring about a goal for us, one of which we may be still ignorant. But of course, if we embrace this option then we are back with Wordsworth: either ontologically deluded or merely indulging in a playful fiction. Either way, we lack a serious, epistemically respectable account of our selves in fully agential, teleological terms.

5c. Narrative Reliability

The first two objections I raised to the narrative conception leave open at least the possibility that a wide range of people might fruitfully define their selves in terms of the narratives they tell about their lives—albeit only at their lives' ends, or in anticipation of such retrospection. The final objection challenges the possibility that self-generated narratives can ever achieve epistemic respectability—that they can ever escape the twin specters of self-delusion and fictionalism.

The first version of the objection targets the memories from which we construct our self-narratives. Various theorists have argued that people persistently revise their memories in self-serving ways. [42] Such extreme pessimism appears not to be warranted—indeed, subjects are somewhat more likely to remember negative than positive events. [43] However, psychological and neurophysiological evidence does strongly suggest first, that the process of recalling an event alters and 'recodes' one's memory in light of the context of recall, and so that we are blocked in principle from an 'originalist' access to what really happened, or even our original experience of it. [44] Second, it also appears that subjects frequently mold their memories to fit a narrative form. Thus, people's spontaneous autobiographies typically conform to specific genres, such as *Bildungsroman* or tragedy; [45] and subjects typically judge the veracity of both their own and other people's reported memories on the basis of narrative plausibility: on whether those memories involve vivid detail, an intuitively coherent structure, and "characterological" consistency. [46]

Given just these two respects in which memory is "constructed" rather than given—and there are arguably others—it follows that the mere fact that our memories fit a narrative structure and that we don't recall any countervailing events doesn't justify our concluding that that our self-narrative accurately reflects what really happened, or even our past experience. There is at least as much reason to think that our *ex post facto* narrative has shaped memory in its image as the reverse.

If narratives are to constitute epistemically respectable selves, it must be possible for them to be checked against some external standard—it cannot just be that "thinking makes it so." Among proponents of the narrative conception, Schechtman is one of the few to explicitly address this challenge. She endorses a "Reality Constraint" on self-constituting narratives, which she proposes to meet by excluding factually inaccurate memories and self-concerning beliefs from the narratives that constitute selves.[47] However, given the empirical evidence for pervasive small errors in memory, this proposal produces a substantial risk that the resulting narratives and selves will consist largely of vague generalities, even though we falsely think our selves are richly fine-grained and substantive, and even though we need such substantive selves to evaluate our past and guide our future actions in a meaningful way.[48] A second version of the objection targets our experience of ourselves as causally efficacious agents. Daniel Dennett,[49] John Bickle,[50] Daniel Wegner,[51] and others have argued that the phenomenology of agency is an illusion; to support this claim they cite neurophysiological evidence that, for instance, the conscious decision to act occurs after the brain has already initiated action, and that simulating the appearance of causal efficacy often suffices to induce the phenomenology of agency. On their view, we are really just a seething pandemonium of competing "demons" or modular sub-routines, and our self-narratives are just confabulated consolation prizes. Although they take this argument to tell against the existence of selves under any conception, the narrative model is particularly vulnerable because, as we've seen, in the absence of an external Agent, the "unfolding rationale" which unifies a person's life narrative becomes a protagonist agent or "self-in-charge" pursuing a long-term goal.

If we combine both versions of the objection, it begins to seem quite likely that the narratives we tell of our overall lives are largely confabulated. Because we want to be the agents of our own destinies rather than passive victims of blind contingency, we tend to impute causal efficacy to ourselves as we pass through the various events that make up our lives, even when that efficacy is lacking.[52] And because narratives are one of the most powerful means by which humans interpret the world and our place in it, we strive to impose a coherent narrative structure on the sequence of events we experience, even when that structure is lacking. Together, the pressures to agency and to narrative coherence lead us to recall our past selves as protagonists in pursuit of a stable long-term goal. We tend to forget events that

don't fit that narrative; and our narrative is reinforced each time we recall a particular event while retelling our life story. The result is that we sincerely remember ourselves as having been, and hence take ourselves currently to be, more consistent, efficacious, and goal-directed than we really are. We interpret ourselves as having coherent histories and stable selves when the reality is likely considerably more messy and inchoate.

6. From Narratives to Characters

Some advocates of the narrative conception openly embrace the fictionalist conclusion. Most famously, Dennett claims that "we are all virtuoso novelists," putting "the best 'faces' on [our disunified behavior that] we can." [53] Richard Rorty goes even further, encouraging us to take the liberatory consequences of fictionalism seriously: one of Freud's great legacies, he says, was to "help[] us become increasingly ironic, playful, free, and inventive in our choice of self descriptions." [54] The problem is that an interest in truth—a Reality Constraint—is more than just analytic philosophical fetishism. Who I really am and what I really did matters enormously for assessing the moral implications of my past actions and for deciding what I should do in the future. The rash of legal trials in the 1990's centering around 'recovered' adult memories of childhood sexual abuse provides an especially stark demonstration of both the legal and ethical stakes of getting one's past narrative right, and of the ease with which even well-meaning people can get it dramatically wrong. But here, resolute philosophical minimalism offers little help. To evaluate our past actions and guide future ones in a meaningful way, we need substantive selves that go beyond the bare ontological minimum.

The narrative account's failure can be traced to two basic assumptions. First, the narrative account identifies selves with the lives they live. But lives are essentially temporal in a way that selves are not: they exist only over a span of time, while selves exist at each moment. And second, it interprets lives in terms of a specific structure, which arcs in a "forward-looking trajectory" to a concluding resolution. But many lives fail to exemplify this structure in any satisfying way. Taken together, these assumptions also produce a kind of schizophrenic split even in those selves whose lives do ultimately fit the narrative mold. On the one hand, the narrative account posits a knowing teller: someone who stands outside of time, surveys the entire scope of a life's constituent events, and knits them together into a unified whole. On the other hand, it posits a protagonist, embedded within life as it unfolds, pursuing a relatively fixed goal through largely unforeseen obstacles. But even the best of us cannot be both of these at once; at most, we can live in "anticipation of retrospection," attempting to imagine how things will appear to the narrators we will have become by the time our lives end.

I want to suggest that if we drop these two core assumptions, then we can retain what is most appealing about the narrative account, and more generally about an account inspired by literature, while avoiding its most damning faults. Obviously, I can provide only the barest sketch of how such an account would go here. But briefly, the idea is this. Narrative is just one species within a broader genus of what Louis Mink calls "the configurational mode of comprehension"[55]: the interpretive act of "seeing-things-together,"[56] by selecting and structuring a coherent unity out of teeming multiplicity. On the narrative account, the constituent elements are always remembered events; and the unifying structure is always temporal, and usually causal. Events and narratives are certainly crucial components in our understanding and construction of ourselves—albeit more so for some people, and at some stages of their lives, than for others. But many of the self-narratives we care about most are vignettes rather than full autobiographies: short stories about particularly poignant, revealing, or influential episodes within our lives. And these short stories themselves stand in need of selection, explanation and unification into a coherent overall self. Further, intuitively, selves also include many other elements that don't fit smoothly into a narrative account: most notably, standing commitments and dispositions to think, act and respond in certain ways. Indeed, these are likely to be the first things you mention when asked to describe someone, even if they never end up playing a significant role in advancing their life's "unfolding rationale."

Thus, in place of the temporal and teleological structure of narrative, I propose focusing on the stylistic coherence of a character, or on what Iris Murdoch calls a "texture of being."[57] On this model, a self is a distinctive way in which a particular 'I' inhabits, interprets, and engages with the world—a particular nexus of dispositions, memories, interests, and commitments that flesh out the bare skeletal ego in virtue of which multiple tokens of 'I' count as referring a single entity. Like a narrative, this nexus imposes a selective, unifying structure on a mass of more or less disparate elements. But both the kind of structure and the relation between interpretation and self differ between the two models.

Like a narrative, a character selects just a subset of an individual's feature as relevantly identity-constituting. But rather than asking whether a certain event advances the plot's "unfolding rationale," the character conception selects directly for whether a feature significantly contributes to making that person into a particular, distinctive self. Some features, like having hair, may be too unremarkable and ubiquitous to contribute to defining that person's character; while other features might be excluded as isolated accidents of history, or temporary conditions imposed from without. Further, among those features that are relevantly character-determining, some are more important than others, either in the sense of being more prominent or notable or else in explaining more of that person's further features.

The 'norm for selfhood' is not that one eventually satisfies a longstanding "quest," but rather that these structures of relative prominence and centrality interact to produce a coherent organizational gestalt, so that the person's characteristics as a whole hang together in an intuitively comprehensible, even aesthetically pleasing way.

A character is also like a narrative in that it allows for diversity of interpretation about how one selects, explains, and structures this collection of disparate elements into a unified whole. Most contemporary proponents of the narrative model take the diversity of interpretation very seriously, by assigning an essential role to the choice of *how* to interpret oneself in constituting the very self who *is* interpreted. The character conception could simply follow the narrative model here. But then it too would lose the resources to satisfy the Reality Constraint: to distinguish epistemically respectable self-interpretations from self-deluding ones. A better option is to say that a self just is a distinctive, structured complex of dispositions, memories, interests, and commitments; and that one's self-interpretation is a distinct issue from one's actual self. We can also say that self-interpretations are subject to the usual standards for judging theories: they should explain as wide a range of features as possible, as simply as possible. However, this still leaves considerable room for legitimate interpretive differences. And these differences make an especially important difference in guiding one's choice of future actions—indeed, often the choice among distinct courses of action just is a choice about which self-interpretation one wants to embrace and actualize.

Because it appeals to a much more flexible organizational structure, and because it drops the narrative account's radical conflation of interpreter and interpreted, the character conception fares considerably better with respect to each of the objections raised in §5. First and most obviously, by dropping the narrative account's focus on temporal conclusions, the character conception does not hold make the identity of a self at each moment hostage to the tale ultimately told by a retrospective narrator. Instead, a self can simply *be* who she is at every moment; and she can know who she is at each moment by reflecting on the commitments and memories that matter most to her, and by investigating how well her actual habits cohere with that self-conception.

Second, by dropping the narrative account's focus on teleological ends, the character conception avoids having to conceive of selves as split between a knowing teller and an engaged protagonist. Instead, a self can be simultaneously and integrally a center of interpretation and a locus of agency. We cannot abandon all commitment to the self as an integrated, actively self-promoting entity, on pain of abandoning the notion of selfhood altogether. Nor, *contra* Dennett, Bickle and company, should we abandon this commitment: however it happens, people often do make and carry out decisions, and do display a stable core of behavioral dispositions, such that others can predict and hold them responsible for

their actions at least over moderate periods of time. However, where the narrative model is forced to posit a implausible executive "self-in-charge," the character conception can hold that an individual's past and future behaviors are her 'own' so long as they can be interpreted as arising out of and fitting in in an intuitively coherent way with her other dispositions, commitments and habits.

Indeed, on this view, contra Dennett, selves are not fictional even in the fairly unobjectionable sense of being "*just* an abstraction."[58] Rather, as Owen Flanagan says, "one's self exists as a complex dispositional structure in the brain and is often involved in structuring experience, albeit unconsciously."[59] Further, one's primary task in achieving selfhood is not to attain some far-off goal, but to make oneself into an ever more coherent, rich, and aesthetically pleasing whole, by gradually training one's brain and body into a certain style or "texture of being." As Nietzsche puts it:

> One thing is needful.—To 'give style' to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed — both times through long practice and daily work at it.…In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste![60]

Although there is much in Nietzsche's broader account of self-actualization that I reject, I think his emphasis here on the aesthetic dimension of selves, and on the way in which we make ourselves organically and piecemeal, through the slow accumulation and dissipation of small habits, is illuminating.

The third advantage of the character conception is that, because it employs a criterion of coherence that is so much more flexible than that employed by the narrative conception, it can encompass a much wider range of selves, including 'Episodics' and those whose lives are relatively static. For some selves, a single, overarching feature—being a Poet of Nature, or the town doctor, say—may be highly central, explaining nearly everything about them. But for most selves, multiple overlapping but distinct strands of centrality will collect subsets of habits, commitments, and memories into kernels of personality. Similarly, the character conception can also make sense of people who lack the cognitive resources to form explicit long-range goals or narratives. The narrative model follows philosophical tradition in making

the self a highly reflective interpreter; but many individuals who plausibly have selves lack such a high level of self-awareness. On the character conception, having a self merely requires having a stable, coherent "self-presentation"[61]: a way of presenting ourselves to, and more generally engaging with and responding to, the world. Of course, most of us also have a fairly robust self-*re*presentation. However, according to the character conception this higher-order representation is just one element within a larger package, albeit one with an especially significant influence on our future actions and development.[62]

Finally, shifting away from self-representation through narrative and toward self-presentation as character also allows us to address the worries about narrative reliability. It is entirely plausible, even likely, that other people represent at least some aspects of our character more accurately than we do. Further, as we saw, our present memories are often unreliable guides to our original experiences. On the narrative model, such inaccuracies threaten the very existence of selves. On the character conception, by contrast, we are free to appeal to other people's reports, along with any other epistemically respectable source of evidence, in order to probe the accuracy of our self-representations. Self-interpretation thus becomes a kind of "personal science," which is "directed toward the evolution and preservation of a meaningful sense of self."[63] And when we do discover gaps between our self-presentation and self-representation, we can address them either by training ourselves into habits and commitments that we like better, or else by reconciling ourselves to a new theory of who we are.

7. Conclusion

I have focused on narrative theories of the self, not because I believe they are utterly wrong-headed, but because I think they are deeply natural, and because their failure points us in a better direction. Narratives are indeed a crucial tool by which many of us make sense of our lives. The problem comes in identifying selves too directly with the lives they live. If we drop the insistence on life-long autobiographies in favor of many short overlapping stories, we can hew more closely to the role narratives typically play in everyday self-representations; but then we also stand in need of a new criterion for unifying those stories into a coherent self.

I have also focused primarily on the specter of fictionalism: the risk that the selves generated by narratives will lack epistemic respectability. A related risk is that the narrative theory will lead us to devalue lives and selves that don't exemplify a compelling narrative structure, and specifically the model of a romantic hero embarked on a grand quest. At least some of us might end up achieving richer, more complex selves if we asked ourselves, not what "office upon earth" has been fixed for us, but how to sculpt a coherent, pleasing unity from the contradictory impulses we encounter competing within ourselves. As Wordsworth says, "There is a dark/ Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements, makes

them cling together / In one society" (I.341-4). But where Wordsworth invoked Nature to engineer this reconciliation for him, we must shoulder that burden for ourselves, in the here and now. [64]

NOTES

1. Fisher, Walter. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy Of Reason, Value, and Action.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. John D. Niles. *Homo Narrans: the poetics and anthropology of oral literature.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 2000).

2. Murray Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton 1971), 79.

3. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by Lewis Selby-Bigge, 3rd edition revised by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1751]/1975), 294.

4. See, for instance, Steven Gould and Richard Lewontin, "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossion Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B* 205 (1979): 581–598.

5. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, With Selections from the Objections and Replies,* translated by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1641]/1996), Meditation II.

6. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by Lewis Selby-Bigge, 3rd edition revised by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1739]/1978), 252.

7. John, Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited with an introduction by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press [1689]/1979), 336.

8. See, for instance, Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) and Ted Sider, "Criteria of Personal Identity and the Limits of Conceptual Analysis," *Philosophical Perspectives* 15 (2001): 189-209.

9. Marya Schechtman calls the metaphysical topic pursued by most philosophers of personal identity "the reidentification question" and the more Wordsworthian one the "characterization question. *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

10. That is, I take it, as simply the referent of tokens of 'I' under its distinctive first-personal mode of presentation.

11. See, for instance, Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and Kathleen Wilkes, "GNOTHE SEAUTON (Know Thyself)" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5 (1998): 153-65. Such views must be tempered to accommodate the fact that we do often respond emotionally to situations and individuals who are not in fact "me and mine," such as fiction or geographically remote situations. However, it is plausible that our responses in these cases depend on projection or analogy to cases that are self-involving.

12. See, for instance, Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: Ecco Press, 2003) and Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," *Science* 211 (1981): 453–458.

13. Owen Flanagan, *Self Expressions: Mind, Morals and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 67.

14. Oliver, Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 110.

15. Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 65.

16. Ibid., 85.

17. Jerome Bruner, "The 'Remembered' Self," in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, edited by Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 53.

18. Daniel Dennett, "Why Everyone Is a Novelist," *Times Literary Supplement* 4459 (1988), 1029.

19. Schechtman, *Constitution of Selves*, 96.

20. Ibid., 119.

21. Ibid., 117.

22. Noël Carroll, "Narrative Closure," *Philosophical Studies* 135 (2007), 5.

23. Noël Carroll, "The Narrative Connection," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 126.

24. David, Velleman, "Narrative Explanation," *Philosophical Review* 112:1 (2003): 1-25.

25. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 142, 147.

26. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 52.

27. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 203.

28. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945).

29. Indeed, on the narrative conception, even Wordsworth may fail to exemplify a good self, since it is widely agreed that he wrote his best poetry mid-career.

30. Allen Wheelis, *The Listener: A Psychoanalyst Examines His Life* (New York: Norton, 1999). Even Bruner admits, "No autobiography is completed, only ended" (*Making Stories*, 74). Note that autobiographies also often begin before the biological start of life, as in *Tristram Shandy*; this again brings out the fact that the narrative conception must be presupposing some further, perhaps biological condition for selfhood.

31. Louis Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," *New Literary History* 1.3 (1970), 557.

32. Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 23.

33. MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981. Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

34. Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 17 (2004), 430.

35. Further, to the extent that the narrative conception really aspires to constitute selves through the narratives of individuals' lives, it is not clear that it can offer a non-circular account of these selves: the narrative which organizes these individual's lives focuses on becoming a certain type of self, but the type of self they aim to become is not in turn substantively definable in narrative terms.

36. Bruner, Jerome. *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

37. William Hirst, "The Remembered Self in Amnesiacs," in *The Remembering Self*, 271.

38. Ibid., 264.

39. Ibid., 272.

40. See, e.g. Lisa Capps, Molly Losh, and Christopher Thurber, "'The Frog Ate a Bug and Made His Mouth Sad': Narrative Competence in Children with Autism," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 28 (2000), 193-204; Molly Losh and Lisa Capps, "Narrative Ability in High-Functioning Children with Autism or Asperger's Syndrome, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders,* 33.3 (2003), 239-251; Joshua Diehl, Loisa Bennetto, and Edna Carter Young, "Story Recall and Narrative Coherence of High-Functioning Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 34.1 (2006), 87–102.

41. Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), 290.

42. As Nietzsche puts it in an imagined dialogue between memory and pride: "'I have done that,' says my memory. 'I cannot have done that,' says my pride, and remains inexorable. Eventually—memory yields." *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1886] 1966), §69.

43. See e.g. Michael Ross, "Relation of implicit theories to the construction of personal histories," *Psychological Review* 96 (1989): 341–357; Willem Wagenaar, "Is memory self-serving?," in *The Remembering Self*; and Greg Niemeyer and April Metzler, "Personal Identity and Autobiographical Recall," in *The Remembering Self*.

44. Brian Reiser, John Black and Peter Kalamarides, "Strategic Memory Search Processes," in *Autobiographical Memory,* edited by David Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Jacek Debiec, Joseph LeDoux, and Karim Nader, "Cellular and Systems Reconsolidation in the Hippocampus," *Neuron* 36.3 (2002): 527–538. Borges reports that his father had a poignant theory of memory which nicely captures these empirical findings: "I have no memories whatever, I have no images whatever, about my childhood, about my youth. And then he illustrated that, with a pile of coins. He piled one coin on top of the other and said, "Well now this first coin, the bottom coin, this would be the first image, for example, the house of my childhood. Now this second would be a memory I had of that house when I went to Buenos Aires. Then the third one another memory and so on. And as in every memory there's a slight distortion, I don't suppose that my memory of today ties in with the first images I had." In light of this observation, he said, "I try not to think of things in the past because if I do I'll be thinking back on those memories and not on the actual images themselves" (quoted by Daniel Albright, "Literary and Psychological Models of the Self," in *The Remembering Self,* 35.). Albright comments: "Borges's father was sad because each act of memory estranged him further from the past he wished to recall; but in another sense he was appropriating his past, making it more truly his own, even as he distorted it; by his analogy, he was increasing his store of wealth, his coin supply, as he multiplied counterfeits of his prior selves."

45. Bruner, "The 'Remembered' Self."

46. Michael Ross and Roger Buehler, "On authenticating and using personal recollections," in *Autobiographical Memory and the Validity of Retrospective Reports*, edited by Norbert Schwarz and Seymour Sudman (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1994).

47. Schechtman, *Constitution of Selves*, 125.

48. Another option would be to appeal somehow to the narrative that an ideal observer would produce; but this move brings additional risks. A large part of the narrative model's intuitive appeal derives from the fact that it takes seriously the idea that selves are constructed through an act of interpretation. But part of what this means is that narrators with different personalities and interests will produce significantly different narratives of the same sequence of events. Thus, the narrative model cannot satisfy the Reality Constraint in a way that rules out any significant role for legitimate aesthetic and interpretive variation, on pain of undermining one of its primary advantages.

49. Daniel Dennett, "Why Everyone Is a Novelist," *Times Literary Supplement* 4459 (1988): 1016, 1028-29.

50. John Bickle, "Empirical evidence for a narrative concept of self," *Narrative and Consciousness: Literature, Psychology, and the Brain*, edited by Gary Fireman, Ted McVay, and Owen Flanagan, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195-208.]

51. Wegner, Daniel. "Self is Magic." In *Are We Free? Psychology and Free Will*. Edited by *John Baer, James Kaufman, and Roy Baumeister,* 226-247. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

52. Indeed, as Bruner ("The 'Remembered' Self, 48) notes, the agentive, teleological structure of narrative is so strong that autobiographical narrators who do not experience a strong sense of their own agency tend to present themselves as the victims of other, more powerful agents.

53. Dennett, "Why Everyone is a Novelist," 1029.

54. Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 155.

55. Mink, "History and Fiction," 549.

56. Ibid., 553.

57. Iris Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* supp. vol. 30 (1956), 39.

58. "Why Everyone is a Novelist," 1016.

59. *Self Expressions,* 70.

60. *The Gay Science*, §290.

61. Hirst, "The Remembered Self in Amnesiacs," 274.

62. Many philosophers will insist that there is a crucial difference between having a self and merely having a personality; that the former requires a capacity for higher-order attitudes toward one's properties and actions; and that this latter capacity is essential for moral responsibility. I have significant sympathy for this view. But I think it can be cashed out in terms of higher-order attitudes directed at one's various particular actions and properties rather than necessarily encompassing the self as a whole; and that a largely intuitive and inexplicit self-representation may suffice.

63. Niemeyer and Metzler, "Personal Identity and Autobiographical Recall," 128; cf. George Kelly, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (New York: Norton, 1955). A non-fictionalist narrative account can aspire to be "personal history"; but the narrative account relies heavily on memory, which is itself heavily constructed in a way that blocks originalist access to past reality.

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WORDSWORTH, WITTGENSTEIN, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE EVERYDAY

MAGDALENA OSTAS

I.

The idea that poetry just might be more philosophical than philosophy itself marks thinking about poetry and poetics in the Romantic tradition almost singularly. Poetry for the early German Romantics, for instance, speaks to and actually dissolves philosophical problems better than philosophy can; it outdoes philosophy in a certain ability of "thinking." For the Jena Romantics, it is a matter of the reversal of the genres in the ancient quarrel: poetry, in the broad sense, can for someone like Friedrich Schlegel actually do or enact something in the world of ideas that philosophy simply cannot, and philosophy thus ultimately takes second place to the Romantic poeticizing of the world. "Where philosophy stops, poetry has to begin," he announces. [1] Early German Romantic literature not only comes into hitherto unimaginably close contact and tangled concourse with philosophical thought. In works like the *Athenäum Fragments,* it also usurps philosophy's claim to the practice of what can go by the name of the properly philosophical. Around 1800, at least in German literary circles, it turns out that poetry can be more philosophical than philosophy itself.

While the English Romantic period is by no means characterized by the same intimate and intense intermingling of genres and traditions, British Romantics also mark and measure their literary enterprises as specifically philosophical achievements. One need not dwell on the exemplary yet unique case of Coleridge to confirm such a claim. Even in a text like Wordsworth's 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, which itself aggressively refuses the title of a philosophical defense, we find descriptions of the appeal to what Wordsworth famously calls the "real language of men" like the following: "Accordingly such a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets."[2] Among the 1802 additions to the document, we find defenses of his poetic practice of this kind: "Aristotle, I have been told," writes Wordsworth, "has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative" (*PW* 139). For Wordsworth in the Preface, to write poetry in the "real" (*PW* 118) or the "very" (*PW* 131) language of men is ultimately and perhaps paradoxically to make a claim to the reemergence of the philosophical impulse. Thus contrary to certain clichés about Wordsworth, it seems that the poet of *Lyrical Ballads* is actually invested in the resuscitation of a project he chooses to keep calling or at least keep marking specifically with the term "philosophy," and this project in turn is intimately linked to the reintroduction of "real" language into his poetic practice. Despite the fact that Coleridge predicts that Wordsworth will be "admitted as the first & greatest philosophical Poet" and instinctively foresees that he is capable of producing the "first genuine philosophic poem," he at the same time questions and protests against Wordsworth's vision of writing verse in the "real language of men."[3] It is the point, rhetorically, in relation to *Lyrical Ballads* about which Coleridge is most firm, hostile, aggressive, and expansive in his later meditations in *Biographia Literaria* when he considers the principles Wordsworth outlined in the Preface from his own avowedly "philosophical" point of view:

> My own difference from certain supposed parts of Mr. Wordsworth's theory ground themselves on the assumption, that his words had been rightly interpreted, as purporting that the proper diction for poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken, with due exceptions, from the mouths of men in real life, a language which actually constitutes the natural conversation of men under the influence of natural feelings. (*BL* 2: 42)

The connection between philosophy and real or everyday language thus unconditionally belongs to Wordsworth's early poetic vision alone. Real language for Wordsworth simply is "more permanent" and "more philosophical."

My interest in Wordsworth's comparatively quiet or indistinct dialogue with philosophical thinking leads me to turn neither to studies tracing the varied philosophic influences on his poetics nor to those examining the influence of his collaborator Coleridge on his early poetic theory and practice, but instead to a philosopher who, very much like Wordsworth, gives almost exclusive and even obsessive attention to everyday language—that is, who, like Wordsworth, believed that if there is something like real philosophical thinking, it can only come from a kind of deliberate rescue of ordinary language and the everyday sense of our words.[4] For there is a deep and rarely noted conceptual affinity between Wordsworth's conviction in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should be written in "language really used by men" (*PW* 123) or that the poet is "a man speaking to men" (*PW* 138) and Wittgenstein's overarching desire in *Philosophical Investigations* to "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[5] For both the poet and the philosopher, our language somehow has been led astray (both Wordsworth and Wittgenstein charge the opposition with linguistic extravagance—"inane phraseology" [*PW* 123], Wordsworth calls it), and thus the task is to lead it back to what one calls "real" and the other "everyday" language. What will occupy me in this essay is the epistemological priority both Wordsworth and Wittgenstein in this way assign to everyday language; I will be wondering throughout how it turns out in both *Lyrical Ballads* and *Philosophical Investigations* that the everyday *is* the philosophical, and how the singular attention to everyday language in both the case of the poet and the philosopher culminates in what one could call a novel epistemology. And one of my implicit claims will be that we can usefully read Wordsworth alongside Wittgenstein in this way, that is, that investigating this conceptual affinity—this valorization of everyday language in relation to the possibility of philosophical thinking—is not an irrelevant theoretical stretch of some kind but that it can reveal something about Wordsworth's early poetic project and vision, about the significance of the concept of the everyday in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, about the interrelationship between poetry and philosophy in the Romantic era, and about the ways in which through new models of reading literature and philosophy might be brought into forms of interrelation today.

Recently, Michael Fried has made recourse to an analogous mode or model of reading, one in which the work of the philosopher is asked to shed light on the stakes of a work of art and in which that work of art in turn brings into relief the contours of a philosophical project—in which the philosopher and artist become mutually illuminating, in other words—in his *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. In his reading of the work of the contemporary photographer Jeff Wall, for example, Fried overlays Wittgenstein's thinking about the category of the everyday with Wall's work in what the artist calls "near documentary," and the conceptual encounter yields a subtle and engaging account of both Wittgenstein's complex notion and the artist's own commitment to the everyday as an aesthetic category.[6] Fried

invokes the distinction between a usual, commonplace conception of the "everyday" and Wittgenstein's distinctive philosophical conception of the "everyday" to demonstrate that for both the philosopher and the artist, the appeal to the everyday involves an essential process of reconstruction and recomposition, one through which the everyday begins to come forward not as ordinary at all but as strange and unfamiliar—as once again capable of making an impression. Wall's participation in an aesthetic of the everyday involves not "straight" photography (or unrehearsed documentary snapshots) but, like Wittgenstein's, a careful, painstaking, and in Wall's case nearly unheard-of process of the reconstruction of everyday experience. Verisimilitude, to be sure, is not the stake in Wall's project; the point is not the accurate repetition or mimicking of something. Instead, labor and memory for Wall work to recapture or recompose what one feels has vanished. Although just one often takes months to shoot, some of Wall's photographs might be taken for snapshots, or perhaps it is important to say that part of their aesthetic involves that possible confusion between the artful and the unpremeditated. And like Wittgenstein's philosophical conception of the everyday, Wall's second-order, recomposed, revisited everyday finally makes its world emerge not as familiar but as unexpected, "surprising and new," as Wall puts it, or as something that again can be confronted and recognized. [7] What Fried's encounter with Wall and Wittgenstein highlights, then, is the way in which the everyday as an aesthetic category is essentially tied to making what Wittgenstein calls "life itself" again available for contemplation, and how the labor of making that "life" again available entails not a mirroring but a deliberative reassemblage. [8]

None of these concerns is foreign to how Wordsworth envisions his early poetic project. In his appeal to a poetics grounded in the "real" or the "very" language of men, Wordsworth—like Wittgenstein or Wall—is not interested in the orchestration of a verisimilitude but, instead, in creating an image in verse of both life and language as at once untouched, unmarred and yet remarkable. Coleridge simply termed it a gift for "giv[ing] the charm of novelty to things of every day" (*BL* 2: 7). Andrew Bennet has, less simply, called it an invitation in Wordsworth's poetry to be "newly ignorant" or "newly unknowing." [9] One only has to register the "sound" of the everyday in both *Lyrical Ballads* and *Philosophical Investigations* to register how language works in both sets of texts to startle us into a revelatory ignorance. As critics of both long have noted, many of Wittgenstein's hypothetical games and dialogues, like Wordsworth's poems, are very strange, strikingly unusual and even obscure. Language in *Lyrical Ballads* and *Philosophical Investigations* can be completely common and yet completely disconcerting. So that it turns out in both sets of texts that the appeal to an aesthetic of the everyday results in a revisiting or a recomposing of the everyday that finally sounds the tone of the unexpected.

Readers of Wordsworth have often taken his conception of "real language" to be either a self-evident or an ideological one; they have not been open to taking Wordsworth seriously when he writes that "real" language is "far more philosophical" than poetic language; and they have too frequently reduced the arguments of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to easy clichés about spontaneity, powerful feeling, and Romantic expression. Reading Wordsworth alongside Wittgenstein on the topic of everyday or ordinary language, this essay seeks to establish that for Wordsworth as for Wittgenstein, the everyday is not as a site of unreflective immediacy or "spontaneity" but instead is a second-order of meaning that, through the work of verse or philosophy, must be reassembled and recomposed. I hope to show how this recomposition or re-sounding of the everyday strikes the notes of a language that is—for Wordsworth as for Wittgenstein—always "far more philosophical" than any other.

II.

The question of how to read *Philosophical Investigations*—how to make sense of Wittgenstein's philosophical "reminders" and understand what they are to be reminders *of*—is a pressing and real one, for Wittgenstein does not indicate his guiding problematics in exposition in any way. Following Stanley Cavell, we might term this an aspect of the problem of the text's *availability*.[10] The *Investigations'* many games, monologues, and dialogues—some surreal in their simplicity—give the impression that their significance or meaningfulness cannot be accessed or made more distinct by coming to arrive at any further sense of *depth* in the text. Wittgenstein validates this impression in the *Investigations* when he writes in the following way about what we might call his method or his way of proceeding: "It is […] essential to our investigation 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" (§89). Thus, what Wittgenstein says throughout *Philosophical Investigations* is undisguised, "in plain view," exact and explicit. The text's hypothetical games, too, are similarly plain and utterly lucid: pretend two men are building a house, say you are sent shopping for apples, imagine someone says such and such. Everything lies in the open, bare and exposed. This is a declared goal of Wittgenstein's—to "disperse the fog" (§5)—and the demand for clarity or what he calls "perspicuous representation" (§122) in fact acts as a sort of compass for his voices throughout. The demand for a clear view is even raised at one point to the status of a "Weltanschauung," for it distinguishes and sets apart "how we look at matters" (§122).

Analogously, the poems collected in *Lyrical Ballads*, despite their "naked and simple style" (*PW* 145), are not an easy group of texts. They too are affected by and historically have been marked by the problem of availability. While Wordsworth writes in the Preface to the collection that without a moral purpose he would be no Poet (*PW* 124), the poems' "purposes" are often deeply obscure. That is, while many of the *Lyrical Ballads* in essence *seem*

didactic, give the recognizable sense that they are to be centrally moral, the actual moral thrust of many of the collection's poems—some decidedly bizarre, like "The Idiot Boy"—often seems very far out of reach. The nakedness and accessibility of Wordsworth's sheer style, on the other hand, has been consistently remarked on ever since Matthew Arnold famously characterized Wordsworth's poetry as having no style—no *literary* style, as if Nature took the pen right out of the poet's hand. [11] Coleridge, for instance, writes of Wordsworth's blank verse that no ear "could *suspect*, that these sentences were ever printed as metre"; M. H. Abrams of Wordsworth's "austere naturalness"; Paul de Man of lines "audacious in the sparseness of their means"; Geoffrey Hartman of their "weightless" or "unremarkable" quality; and David Perkins of the way in which "artlessness" is precisely the pleasure of the poetry. [12] Wordsworth's language, readers note, often seems to be transparent, and we are as unaware of it "as we should be of the glass in a window." [13] Already in 1825 Hazlitt comments with characteristic incisiveness on this "unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in *Lyrical Ballads*." [14] A noteworthy point of comparison between *Lyrical Ballads* and *Philosophical Investigations*, then, lies in the fact that both Wordsworth and Wittgenstein declaredly and emphatically place meaning in plain sight—and yet in the end one feels it is hidden from view.

Wittgenstein's philosophical notes and reminders, like many of Wordsworth's poems, stage the intercourse of voices. People *speak* in both of these sets of texts. Both are structured throughout as scenes of discourse—interchanges, crossings, and confrontations. An exemplary exchange in the *Investigations* that makes vivid this characteristic vocal give-and-take, for instance, runs thus:

> "But if the concept 'game' is without boundaries in this way, you don't really know what you mean by a 'game'."—When I give the description "The ground was quite covered with plants," do you want to say that I don't know what I'm talking about until I can give a definition of a plant?

> An explanation of what I meant would be, say, a drawing and the words "The ground looked roughly like this." Perhaps I even say: "It looked *exactly* like this."—Then were just *these* blades of grass and *these* leaves there, arranged just like this? No, that is not what it means. And I wouldn't accept any picture as the exact one in *this* sense. (§70)

In a reading that elucidates this essentially dialogic structure of Wittgenstein's text, Cavell argues that vocal exchanges and struggles of this kind represent a self's dramatized grappling with its own inclinations and temptations in thought, turning Wittgenstein's inquiry at every

step into a form of heightening self-scrutiny and self-confrontation. About this form of the *Investigations*, which he specifically places within the genre of confession, Cavell writes:

> Inaccessible to the dogmatics of philosophical criticism, Wittgenstein chose confession and recast his dialogue. It contains what serious confessions must: the full acknowledgement of temptation ("I want to say…"; "I feel like saying…"; "Here the urge is strong…") and a willingness to correct them and give them up ("In the everyday use…"; "I impose a requirement which does not meet my real need"). (The voice of temptation and the voice of correctness are the antagonists in Wittgenstein's dialogues.) In confessing you do not explain or justify, but describe how it is with you. And confession, unlike dogma, is not to be believed but tested, and accepted or rejected. Nor is it the occasion for accusation, except of yourself, and by implication those who find themselves in you. [15]

Cavell here underlines the intersection of the autobiographical and the philosophical operative in the genre of confession, and he traces that intersection to the workings of voice in the confessional text, a voice that is at once revelatory of inner experience and thoroughly impersonal. In *Philosophical Investigations*, "confession" for Cavell pivots on the local and actual movements and workings of the text's dominant voice and its many countervoices. Similarly, then, *Lyrical Ballads* is a vocally dynamic collection of texts, as Wordsworth orchestrates a poetics modeled on the structures of communicative contexts and situations—tellings, exhortations, responses, and conversations. As in Wittgenstein's, voices meet and run into each other in Wordsworth's texts. More than just stories or scenes of happening, many of Wordsworth's poems are investigations into the act of speaking or telling itself, something that importantly distinguishes the "lyrical" ballad from the traditional ballad grounded in the rehearsal of plot or event. [16] In a "lyrical" ballad, we can recall, it is the feeling that "gives importance to the action and the situation" (*PW* 128); the action alone or in itself is frequently unimportant, so that many of the poems are actually shaped by this sense of inconsequence or deflation in the events they narrate. This is a characteristic of the collection about which Wordsworth grows explicitly self-conscious, for instance, in his prefatory note to "The Thorn" in which he underlines the importance of the role of the storyteller in understanding the psychological crux of the poem, or in "Simon Lee," when he entreats his reader to weave his own "tale" out of the apparently trivial "incident" that constitutes the climax in the text:

O Reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle Reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it:
It is no tale; but should you *think,*
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.
(ll. 65-72) [17]

The passage from the concluding stanzas of "Simon Lee" exemplifies how language in *Lyrical Ballads* is at all times categorically anchored to character. "It represents," writes Roger Sharrock, "an attempt to abolish any diction, any literary medium, in favor of the only words which can convey the object or experience as nakedly as possible, the words of the original participants in the action." [18] Wordsworth's language thus seeks to be, as Hartman has written, "coterminous with life." [19] One of Wordsworth's most sensitive readers, Don Bialostosky, terms this anchoring of poetic language in voice and character an aspect of what he terms Wordsworth's "poetics of speech" in *Lyrical Ballads.* He writes that

[Wordsworth's] poem is not an imitation of something nonverbal in the medium of words but a fictive thing whose existence is literally verbal, a made-up speech which presents the possible declarations, questions, appeals, affirmations, denials, emphases, and ellipses of "a man speaking." [20]

As Bialostosky here underscores, Wordsworth's poems are thus free almost entirely of any imperative propelling them toward the transparent representation of stories or plots, just as Wittgenstein's reminders are often resistant to reporting on or exposing of ideas, and both are instead structured around literal utterance as the central animating event. Wittgenstein's polyvocal philosophical confession thus has something in common with Wordsworth's attempts to "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind" (*PW* 126). Both are methodologically invested in what Cavell has called the "phenomenological faithfulness of [the] reconstruction" of human experience—in other words, experiential fidelity to the shifts and movements of human thought and language as they come to unfold and take on meaning in the world. And both, furthermore, ground this phenomenological faithfulness in tracings and depictions of human voices. [21] Like *Lyrical Ballads, Philosophical Investigations* thus actively resists what Richard Eldridge appositely has called the "underdescription" of human experience and expression, a

phrase I take to describe a kind of resistance to a too-quick or too-general conception of the variability of human experiences. [22]

It follows that both Wordsworth and Wittgenstein also resist uses of language unanchored to or ungrounded in the specificity, tangibility, and one might say wholeness or completeness of a total speech situation. Both in *Philosophical Investigations* and *Lyrical Ballads*, language is emphatically *placed*. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein is tireless in asking us to situate utterance or to imagine, project, or describe not just what is said but what is said when and by whom and why. His examples almost universally begin with a primitive setting of stage and scene (one meaning of the term "language-game" [§7]) and only then move on to eliciting responses from a hypothetical set of speakers: let's say I send someone shopping (§1), what if I point to two nuts (§28), pretend we're playing a game with colored squares (§48), imagine someone says "Moses did not exist" (§79). In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's emphasis similarly falls on the localization and contextualization of his figures and speakers: one expostulates, the other replies; father and son hold intermitted talk about place; a speaker relates an exchange with a little cottage girl about her siblings; an old sea captain tells the story of the devastated and miserable Martha Ray; a speaker turns memories over in his mind a few miles above Tintern Abbey during a tour, July 13, 1798. Not all poetry, as John Stuart Mill claimed, is overheard. It is, rather, the economy of a poetics grounded in a local and specific communicative situation that gives many of the *Lyrical Ballads* their "overheard" quality, or their sense of issuing with an auditory familiarity from which we are ultimately excluded and on which we as readers are asked to eavesdrop. One stands before Wordsworth's early verse as a *listener*, in contrast to Keats, for example, who always desires a *reader*—an untangler of written language that is unmoored to a human voice, and a reveler who luxuriates in slow and densely woven time. Wordsworth, like Wittgenstein, anchors his voices in the world.

The dominant question that has troubled readers of both Wordsworth and Wittgenstein on the topic of common language, its forms of expression, and its situatedness in the world consequently has been similar: Whose language shall count as the "real" or "everyday" one, and with what authority or under which criteria do I assert the commonality and commonness of this language? Put differently: Which words are to act as representative of real or everyday language, what is supposed to be, as Wordsworth has it, the *very* (the "empirical," let's say) or what J. L. Austin might have called the *actual* language of men? In his reflections on Wordsworth's Preface and "the language of ordinary life," Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* comes to anticipate these questions when he confronts the "defects" of Wordsworth's theory in his retrospective reflections. Coleridge writes, "Every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings," and there is thus no ground, he finds, for privileging one instance of a language over

any other outside of what he calls the *lingua communis* (BL 2: 8, 55-56). Cavell gives voice to a variation of this problem in relation to Wittgenstein's appeals to the first-person plural—to what "we" say, to "our" criteria, or "our" language—in *The Claim of Reason*:

> It is, for [Wittgenstein], always *we* who "establish" the criteria under investigation. The criteria Wittgenstein appeals to—those which are, for him, the data of philosophy—are always "ours," the "group" which forms his "authority" is always, apparently, the human group as such, the human being generally. When I voice them, I do so, or take myself to do so, as a member of that group, a representative human. […] How can I, what gives me the right to, speak for the group of which I am a member? How have I gained that remarkable privilege? What confidence am I to place in a generalization from what I say to what everybody says? (*CR* 18).

Just as Wordsworth makes the audacious claim in the Preface that his poetry is written so as to "interest mankind permanently" (120) and reflects "the primary laws of our nature" (123), so Wittgenstein makes a claim to speak for what Cavell here calls human beings generally. Both are—from a certain point of view—preposterously arrogant claims, yet the specific kind of arrogance they bespeak for Cavell marks the arrogation of voice necessary to speak philosophically at all. [23] That is the mark of the philosophical voice—the claim to speak for a community, the claim to one's exemplarity. To make a claim that *this* expression is just the right one given *this* situation or *this* object before me, however, is not to insist on one's individual sense of things but to give oneself over to the ordinariness of the thing there and the ordinariness of the language used to speak about it. It becomes a claim about what one understands to be natural, inevitable, and only a matter of course; and it is as much a claim about language as it is a claim about the world. In a similar conceptual strain, M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* asserts that Wordsworth's conception of the real language of men is best understood as equivalent to a precisely "natural" language:

> In his use, the term "real" as the norm of poetic language is for the most part interchangeable with the term "natural"—"the real language of *nature*" is one of his phrases—and "nature," as elsewhere in Wordsworth connotes several attributes. First, the language of nature is not the language of poets as a class, but the language of mankind. It is not colored, as Wordsworth says, by a diction "peculiar to him as an individual Poet or belonging simply to Poets in general." Second, it is

exemplified in the language uttered by "the earliest poets," who "wrote naturally, and as men"; and in prose, its best present instance is "the closest to nature." [24]

At stake for Wordsworth in his conception of "real language," therefore, is the right to make a claim about what is—generally and regularly—instinctive, spontaneous, and thus "natural." It is a claim about what is actually important, unimportant, moving, engaging, or uninteresting for me and thus for us in the world. In the same way, Wittgenstein declares in the *Investigations* that he is only providing remarks on what he analogously terms the "natural history of human beings" (§415).

III.

There is sometimes a sense in *Philosophical Investigations* that the voices tangled in dialogue speak past each other, or that one voice is seeking to educate the other, or at least seeking to make itself understood, and that this encounter between one teaching and the other learning is not free from serious difficulties or even impasses. Wittgenstein's voices speak despite (or perhaps even because of) differences, gaps, and incongruities in their understanding. A recurring figure that appears throughout Cavell's readings of *Philosophical Investigations* is one that makes sense of these moments in Wittgenstein's text as what he calls "scenes of instruction." Cavell's understanding of these scenes or moments pivots on a connection between teaching or learning language and coming to be initiated into what Wittgenstein calls "forms of life" (§119), and in *The Claim of Reason* Cavell explains this connection by drawing a contrast between our "telling" beginners what a word means or our "teaching" them what things are and actually *initiating* them "into the relevant forms of life held in language and gathered around the objects and persons of our world" (*CR* 178). He writes similarly in a related formulation:

> Wittgenstein's thought is punctuated by ideas of normality and abnormality. It goes with a new depth in the idea that language is *learned*, that one *becomes* civilized. And in the recognition of how little can be *taught*; how, so to speak, helpless or impotent the teaching is, compared with the enormity of what is learned. (*CR* 111-12)

The feeling of helplessness or impotence Cavell here describes in the face of the "enormity" of what has to be taught and thus learned surfaces distinctly in one of Wordsworth's original *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), "We Are Seven." It is a poem that explicitly reflects on the sense captured when Wittgenstein's speaker runs out of justifications or clarifications or

explanations for his interlocutor, turns his spade over, and says, "This is simply what I do" (§217)—which I also take to mean, "This is what *we* do." "We Are Seven" stages a moment in which, like Wittgenstein's speaker whose spade hits bedrock, the educator realizes that explanations come to an end, exhaust themselves, and—in a moment in which it suddenly appears to be a matter of *his* education—that his efforts to induce the child to "go on" (§180) have to cease, and he has to give the child over to the thing to be learned itself. There is no knowledge—say, no one essential thing or one primary point—that the educator has to teach or communicate. It is the entirety of the thing to be learned—the ability to "go on" oneself—that makes the task of teaching in Wittgenstein's example so daunting and at times wearying or even impossible.

"We Are Seven," in this way, centers on a discrepancy between a young cottage girl and her adult interlocutor about what is to *count* in this world as a sibling, and thus a person, or a significant being. Their dialogue (both heartbreaking and humorous) begins thus:

> "Sisters and brothers, little maid
> "How many may you be?"
> "How many? Seven in all," she said,
> And wondering looked at me.

> "And where are they, I pray you tell?"
> She answered, "Seven are we,
> "And two of us at Conway dwell,
> "And two are gone to sea.

> "Two of us in the church-yard lie,
> "My sister and my brother,
> "And in the church-yard cottage, I
> "Dwell near them with my mother."

> "You say that two at Conway dwell,
> "And two are gone to sea,
> "Yet you are seven; I pray you tell
> "Sweet Maid, how this may be?"

> Then did the little Maid reply,
> "Seven boys and girls are we;
> "Two of us in the church-yard lie,
> "Beneath the church-yard tree."

"You run about, my little maid,
"Your limbs they are alive;
"If two are in the church-yard laid,
"Then ye are only five."
(13-35)

What is essential to note about the way the poem stages or poses the question of counting as a person is that it takes place entirely in the medium of a simplistic dialogue that turns wholly and playfully on the two speakers' usages of the verb *to be*. The young girl insists that, despite the death of two of her siblings, something of which she is fully cognizant and herself tells of, they still *are* seven in all, while her interlocutor asks, determinedly and repeatedly, how many they *be* and reasonably insists that they *are* only five. In the poem, the question of the young girl's having or living with or loving or disliking her brothers and sisters never arises, so that the exchange takes place entirely around the central question of who will *count at all* as a brother or sister—that is, who can at all "be." It is also important to note that these forms of relation (living with, loving, disliking) do not play a role in the girl's classifications of "being" because she in fact lives alone at home with her mother, since two of her siblings dwell at Conway and two are at sea. This question of being at all a person, or even counting as living despite being dead, will reappear later in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) in one of Wordsworth's most haunting mediations on death, "A slumber did my spirit seal." There, the enigmatic "she" of the poem while living to the speaker "seem'd a thing" (l. 3)—that is, precisely not a living being rushing, like the rest, toward death, but something nearly inanimate; when alive, she "could not feel / The touch of earthly years" (ll. 3-4). It is only when she dies and explicitly has "no motion" or "force" (l. 5) and cannot hear or see that her body begins to circulate and she comes into to a sort of "life": she is "Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course / With rocks and stones and trees!" (ll. 7-8). Thus the question of "being" in the world—counting—comes to Wordsworth in "A slumber did my spirit seal" not as an abstract question about the mind or the body but specifically as an internal interrogation of what it means to conceive of a person as a "thing"—she seemed a "thing": first an immortal thing, then a thing in the ground—and in "We Are Seven," the question surfaces as an exchange about what it might mean to use or to insist on a form of *to be*—"is" or "are"—to indicate a person's existence or significance. "We Are Seven" is as much about this question of using language to indicate existence as it is about the abstract philosophical questions of counting as a significant being for someone else or of the dead having significance for the living. The poem is entirely efficacious in making its "are" (we *are* seven) surprising and new.

The fact that the cottage girl narrates the death of her two siblings to the speaker in the poem and tells him of visiting their graves, eating her supper there, and playing in their vicinity pushes forward the question of what exactly the two disagree about and what exactly the speaker knows or feels he knows that the young girl doesn't. She understands that her brother and sister are no longer living; she understands that they lie in their graves, which she emphasizes "may be seen" (l. 36); but she contends that a tally of herself and her siblings yields seven and not the five that the requisite math (seven minus two) would dictate. She is not deluded; in fact, the poem may even suggest that perhaps the speaker himself is, since his account of their being only five pivots on his placing two of her siblings "in Heaven" (l. 62, 66), while the young girl has no misconceptions about their lying simply in the ground, a place where she, again, can eat and knit and play. The poem commences as the speaker asks about this "simple child" (l. 1), "What should it know of death?" (1. 4). But the young girl *does* know death, emphatically so, as she neither shuns nor hesitates around the topic in the poem and in fact volunteers a factual narrative: her sister Jane "in bed … moaning lay" (l. 50), and her brother John "was forced to go" (l. 59) as well. Yet she insists that they are seven in all, and the adult with whom she is speaking is certain that, correspondingly, he has something to teach her. His exasperation and the topic of the rational education he attempts to give her surface in the final stanza: "But they are dead; those two are dead!" (l. 65), he shouts. She, however, is unwavering and resolute (she "would have her will" [l. 68]) and thus has the last word in the poem: "Nay, we are seven!" (l. 69), the girl exclaims one final time, bringing the exchange to a close.

What, then, one might ask, doesn't the young girl *get*? What is it that her interlocutor wants her to understand that she apparently willfully refuses to register or accept? That death is death? How should one formulate the nature of the mathematical disagreement that the poem dramatizes? It would not be incorrect to say that the disagreement between the cottage girl and the adult speaker has to do at once with questions about ontology (what counts as a person), ethics (the significance of one being for another), morality (how we do or we should think about death), and language (when we can say or do say that a person *is*). To divorce any of these concerns or questions from each other in their crucial interweave in this text, I think, is to reduce the poem's complexity, that is, the "enormity," to recall Cavell, of what it is that this adult interlocutor actually might have to teach this particular child, that he would have to teach her—all at once—about language, ethics, morality, objects, and the significance of people in our world if he wanted to set her "are" straight. It hardly falls in line with the spirit of the poem to say that the adult objects to the girl's naive and irrational forms of attachment to her deceased siblings; he doesn't seek to deny the girl her childlike horizon of cares. There is no evidence at all in the poem that he disapproves of her affection for and fixation to the site of their graves, that is, to her behavior. He offers no signs of censure when she reports

her eating and knitting and playing at the gravesite and instead implicitly asks her to reflect yet again on the rational implications of her very own narrative and account:

> "And when the ground was white with snow,
> "And I could run and slide,
> "My brother John was forced to go,
> "And he lies by her side."
>
> "How many are you then," said I,
> "If they two are in Heaven?"
> The little Maiden did reply,
> "O Master! we are seven."
> (57-64)

Instead, then, one might say that what the speaker essentially objects to is the girl's insistent refrain ("we are seven"), in other words, how she answers him and comes to talk about the living and the dead in our world. He objects to her basic noncanonical redescription of a state of affairs, to the liberty she takes with the most ordinary of words, and what that license bespeaks about her understanding. She lives alone with her mother, and her dead siblings, lying just twelve steps from their door, are very much alive for her. Yet we don't say they *are* after they have died; she does. We might say just that, that they are still alive for us, or we might confess that when tallying we are still inclined to count them too. But to insist that they "are" is to break a foundational rule of the game—or to be a poet. What the young girl's insistent "are" registers, then, is her ability to make language stretch and reach to the limits of meaning, her ability to see something surprising and new in what we ordinarily say. Her "are" may be noncanonical, but it is feasible, possible, and falls within the horizons of comprehensibility for us. It would be simplistic to say that the cottage girl and her adult interlocutor simply disagree about usage. Rather, it is essential to understanding the spirit of the poem to say that the two actually don't share a world, and that we as readers are essentially drawn to the possibilities her world offers more than we are to his.

"We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language," writes Wittgenstein, "not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm" (§108). Wordsworth, too, finds a deep link between the word and its localized unfolding, or the form of life, form of feeling, and form of moral relation that it is able to register and record. Words for both the poet and the philosopher are essentially saturated with the lives into which they are woven. They are revelatory of what we speakers, again, find interesting, significant, moving, important, unimportant, or utterly mundane. Insofar as they register these things, they offer a

kind of record of what Wittgenstein called our natural history and Wordsworth the necessities of our nature, and insofar as philosophy too takes a consequential interest in that record, it is intimately bound to the poetic impulse. To reconstruct and reassemble that record in language in a way that renders it at once undamaged yet marvelous and surprising is one of Wordsworth's aspirations in *Lyrical Ballads*.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Schlegel, *Ideas*, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 261-268; 263. For an analysis of the relation between the literary and the philosophical in early German Romantic theory and practice, see especially Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's monumental *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998]), which argues that the notion of literature in Jena Romanticism arises and develops according to a specifically philosophical crisis left to the Romantics in the wake of Kant's philosophy. The authors write provocatively, "Philosophy, then, controls romanticism." They continue: "In this context, and crudely translated, this means that Kant opens up the possibility of romanticism. […] The romantics have no predecessors. Especially not in what the eighteenth century insistently held up under the name of *aesthetics*. On the contrary, it is because an entirely new and unforeseeable relation between aesthetics and philosophy will be articulated in Kant that a 'passage' to romanticism will become possible" (29). On the relationship between language, literature, linguistics, and the post-Kantian philosophical landscape in relation to Romanticism more generally, see also Angela Esterhammer's *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), which makes the following suggestive claim: "What post-Kantian linguists embark on as an explicit theoretical project, their contemporaries undertake as part of the task of writing poetry in a transcendental-idealist frame of reference: all face the challenge of understanding and using language as a medium that suddenly appears vital to the construction of reality. Anyone reflecting on the relationship between language and reality at the end of the eighteenth century seems obligated to redefine *language* in light of the way the Kantian system redefined *reality*" (104).

2. William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 1: 124. All further references to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* will refer to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text (*PW*).

3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 2: 156. All further references will refer to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text (*BL*).

4. On the relation between Wordsworthian Romanticism and philosophy from differing and especially useful perspectives, see also Richard Eldridge, "Wordsworth and a New Condition of Philosophy," *Philosophy and Literature* 18 (1994): 50-71; and David Haney, "Poetry as Super-Genre in Wordsworth: Presentation and Ethics," *European Romantic Review* 5.1 (1994): 73-89.

5. Stanley Cavell notes this conceptual affinity, though only in passing, in his *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), §116. Hereafter all references to *Philosophical Investigations* will be given parenthetically by section number.

6. Michael Fried, "Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday," in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 63-93.

7. Jan Tumlir, "The Hole Truth: Jam Tumlir Talks with Jeff Wall about *The Flooded Grave*," *Artforum*, vol. 39 (March 2001), 114; quoted in Fried, "Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday," 64. There are analogues to this conception of the ordinary in the history of philosophy, ones that likewise draw on the idea that what is familiar actually can be or become very strange, that what is nearest is furthest. One might think of Freud's conception of the uncanny or even the very idea of the unconscious; or one might think of certain trains in Heidegger's thinking (an affinity Fried himself highlights at length in his work on Wall). My point in this paper, however, will be less to interrogate the strictly philosophical contours of the notion of the everyday than, instead, to show how the idea of the ordinary or everyday and its strong connection to a certain philosophical project or tradition might be used to illuminate the stakes of a particular work of art.

8. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains,* ed. Georg Henrik von Wright with Heikki Nyman; rev. ed. Alois Pichler, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), 6e-7e; quoted in Fried, "Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday," 76.

9. Andrew Bennett, "Wordsworth's Poetic Ignorance," in *Wordsworth's Poetic Theory: Knowledge, Language, Experience*, ed. Alexander Regier and Stefan H. Uhlig (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 19-35.

10. See Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 44-72. Because he writes on the peripheries of both sides of the traditional philosophical divide, Cavell through his work writes within the very problem of "availability"—that is, the fact that writing is always inextricably a writing for, or a being available to. When he writes of the "availability" of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in this early essay, Cavell's use of the term "availability" underscores the tonally sensitive ear with which he writes or must write to the reception, uptake, and registers of his words and the horizons of interest that they record and

explore. Cavell's work in writing and thought thus consist of a certain labor of making himself understood—making his own thinking and voice turn available—and the very core of his philosophical insights lies precisely in the knowledge that to be understood is ultimately to be heard in language, and to be heard specifically in such a way that the repetition of one's own thoughts from one's interlocutor comes back to oneself as something recognizable as those thoughts and not something entirely misshapen.

11. Matthew Arnold, *Selected Poems of William Wordsworth,* ed. Harrison Ross Steeves (New York: Harcourt, 1922), 18-19.

12. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2: 80; M. H. Abrams, "Introduction: Two Roads to Wordsworth," in *Wordsworth: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. M. H. Abrams (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 3; Paul de Man, "Wordsworth and the Victorians," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 87; Geoffrey Hartman, "The Unremarkable Poet," in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 212; David Perkins, *The Poetry of Sincerity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 44.

13. John Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems, 1797-1807* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 18.

14. William Hazlitt, "Mr. Wordsworth," in *Selected Writings,* ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 347-358.

15. Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," 71.

16. On this point about the role of narrative or plot in *Lyrical Ballads*, see especially Stephen Parrish, "Dramatic Technique in the *Lyrical Ballads*," *PMLA* 74.1 (1959) 85-97, who argues that the theory of poetry Wordsworth lays out in the Preface actually disavows the purpose of a traditional ballad, namely, telling a story for its own sake (86); as well as Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's* Lyrical Ballads (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), who argues that Wordsworth's achievement in the ballad genre lies in "portraying precisely those states and feelings least susceptible to narrative presentation" (233).

17. All citations of the texts of *Lyrical Ballads* are taken from the 1798 edition of the collection in William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads *and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

18. Roger Sharrock, "Wordsworth's Revolt against Literature," *Essays in Criticism* 3.5 (1953), 396-412; 401.

19. Geoffrey Hartman, "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry," in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, 44.

20. Don Bialostosky, *Making Tales: The Poetics of Wordsworth's Narrative Experiments* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 17.

21. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 142. All further references will refer to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text (*CR*).

22. Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 8.

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

24. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 110-11.

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WITTGENSTEIN ON THE FACE OF A WORK OF ART

BERNIE RHIE

If I say of a piece of Schubert's that it is melancholy, that is like giving it a face.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Expression is the suffering countenance of artworks. —Theodor Adorno

To experience the aura of a phenomenon means to invest it with the capability of returning the gaze.
—Walter Benjamin

Aesthetic judgments and ethical choices take place as face-to-face experiences.
—Susan Stewart[1]

Wittgenstein was clearly fascinated by faces and face perception. But he seems to have regarded the face not only as something important to think *about*, but also, one might say, something profoundly useful to think *with*. For Wittgenstein, that is, the face was not only a special object of philosophical inquiry, but also a concept that functioned in a metaphilosophical register, having to do with philosophical methodology and intellectual vision: what we might call *physiognomic* vision. Taking to heart Wittgenstein's dual interest in the face as both privileged object and methodological guide, I argue in this essay that

Wittgenstein's numerous remarks about faces and face perception hold the key to a better understanding of the common, but still theoretically puzzling, phenomenon of aesthetic expression. Moreover, I suggest that by seeing the connections between aesthetic perception and the way we perceive faces, we can better appreciate the deeper stakes of ongoing theoretical disputes about the concept of aesthetic expression: especially debates about whether the expressive qualities of artworks are *real* or merely due to the projections of aesthetic beholders. What's ultimately at stake in such disputes, I will suggest, is the proper acknowledgement (or denial) of the expressiveness of the human body. Philosophical debates about the expressivity of artworks, that is, serve as proxies for debates about the ontologies—and, in particular, the expressive nature—of human beings as such.

I will begin with a brief characterization of the theoretical impasses that trouble current discussions and debates about aesthetic expression (among both philosophers of art and literary theorists), before turning to an exploration of what Wittgenstein's remarks about the human face can help us to see in the "faces" or "physiognomies" of expressive works of art.

I. Expression and Art

Understanding what it means to say that aesthetic artifacts—like poems, paintings, or melodies—can, or for that matter *cannot*, be "expressive," especially expressive of human emotions, has long been a vexing theoretical problem for the humanities. There are at least two major problems, or puzzles, that continue to trouble our understanding of the very idea of aesthetic expression. As will become clear, the two problems I have in mind are quite different, and indeed, many will think them diametrically opposed, and so I doubt that any one person will find both equally compelling. Yet between the two, I think they capture a good deal of why we find ourselves still having to ask fundamental questions about the nature and even, at times, the very possibility, of aesthetic expression.

The first of the two problems is one that will trouble only those who accept that what we call aesthetic expression is "real": that artworks do, in fact, *express* what we call feelings, affects, or emotions. The central problem faced by such thinkers, who assume aesthetic expression to be real, is to account for how it could possibly work: so I will call this the "how does it work?" problem. When a work of art involves an actual living human being, as in dance or song, the problem seems relatively simple, because the expressiveness of the performer's body would seem naturally to underwrite the expressiveness of whatever artistic composition is being performed. Whether that intuition is correct or not (and, of course, it's a contentious one) analytic philosophers of art who have tried to tackle the "how does it work?" problem have usually assumed it to be right, and have therefore set their sights on what they consider the much harder part of the problem of explaining aesthetic expression:

explaining, that is, what they consider the secondary or derivative expressiveness of self-standing artworks (like paintings, poems, or symphonies), which do not benefit from the central presence of a naturally expressive, living human body. Moreover, those philosophers (like Jerrold Levinson, Stephen Davies, and Peter Kivy) who have worked especially hard on this particular problem, have focused on art forms that are non-verbal and non-figurative, and so, somewhat unsurprisingly, instrumental (or absolute) music has become for them a privileged object of philosophical inquiry. [2] The understandable assumption is that if we can explain the emotional expressiveness of music that does not have lyrics or in any way feature the human voice or body, then explaining it elsewhere will be a relative piece of cake.

But anyone who has even dipped into this literature will know that agreement about the solution to this harder problem has been elusive, to say the least. One popular type of solution, which Stephen Davies calls "appearance emotionalism" posits a resemblance between musical properties (like rhythm or timbre) and the appearance of emotions as they are expressed by actual human bodies. Davies describes the link like this: "…music is expressive in recalling the gait, attitude, air, carriage, posture, and comportment of the human body. Just as someone who is stooped over, dragging, faltering, subdued, and slow in his or her movements cuts a sad figure, so music that is slow, quiet, with heavy or thick harmonic bass features, with underlying patterns of unresolved tension, with dark timbres, and a recurrently downward impetus sounds sad." [3] Notice, in this typical formulation, the strict focus on immediately perceptible surfaces or appearances, both those of the music itself and also of the bodily behaviors such musical patterns are said to resemble.

To understand the significance of this characteristic emphasis on aesthetic surfaces by recent philosophers of art, one needs to know something about the failed history of prior attempts to explain the expressiveness of artworks, attempts which often tried to plumb the inner depths of artists' minds. Earlier expression-theorists, like Tolstoy and Croce, had assumed that the emotions expressed by a work of art ultimately refer to emotions actually felt by (and so *within*) the creative artist, which could be externalized and then transmitted via the artwork to another person. As Tolstoy put it, in *What is Art?*: "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them." [4]

There are, of course, numerous difficulties with a position like this, including the logical problem that the argument would seem to commit a genetic fallacy in positing a causal link between the appearance of the finished artwork and the mental state of the artist said to have motivated its creation. Nevertheless, Tolstoy's expressivist position remains as popular as it is conceptually problematic, and similar difficulties have troubled the numerous subsequent

attempts (such as by Croce and Collingwood) to somehow ground the emotional meaning of works of art in the mental states of their creators.

It is in reaction to these earlier failed attempts to reach beneath the surface of a work of art in order to explain aesthetic expression that more recent philosophers of art (like Davies, Levinson, and Kivy) have turned their attention squarely to that aesthetic surface itself, looking at the resemblances between the appearance of artworks and the appearance of human emotions that I mentioned a bit earlier. But those more recent attempts, while apparently more promising than Romantic quests into the deep subjectivity of the artist, have had conceptual difficulties of their own. Their strength lies, as I suggested, in the way they methodically restrict their investigations to the surface features of aesthetic objects. However, here also is the very source of their greatest weakness, since they regard that aesthetic surface as intrinsically expressionless. The emotional expressiveness of absolute music, for nearly all the major contemporary philosophers of art, is not intrinsic but secondary or derivative to the primary expressiveness of actual human beings. For, as Davies puts it, "music is nonsentient, and only sentient creatures can be literally sad or happy." [5] So, as Peter Kivy has suggested, listeners must somehow "animate" the sounds in a certain manner, giving musical sound-patterns an expressive life they themselves do not (or rather cannot) possess. [6] Given the basically "projective" picture of the relationship between aesthetic surface and expressive import that is operative in most current philosophical debates about this aesthetic issue, we can see why various philosophers have had trouble convincing each other that they have found the one, true account of how it is we actually perceive the expressiveness of a work of art. If projection of some sort does indeed play a central role in the perception of aesthetic expression, disagreements about the accuracy of various accounts of such perception will necessarily remain irresolvable. Once we admit that there's no "fact of the matter" to the phenomenon of aesthetic expression, then who's to say whose aesthetic projection is the right one? And so, even for those who are convinced that the experience of aesthetic expression is real, how we can justifiably call it so remains very much an open question.

Now let me turn briefly to the second of the two major problems faced by the concept of aesthetic expression. Unlike the first ("how does it work?") problem, which has more powerfully gripped aesthetic theorists who work in departments of philosophy, this second problem will, I think, be much more familiar to those who work in departments of literature, where it has, in a variety of ways, exercised a profound influence on literary theory and criticism over the past few decades. This second way of regarding aesthetic expression as theoretically problematic does not (unlike the first) take expression's reality at face value, and then try to explain how it works. On the contrary, it "deconstructs" or otherwise dismantles the very picture of the human "subject" that is taken to underlie all traditional expression-

theories (like those of Tolstoy) and so radically alters what the very concept of aesthetic expression could possibly refer to. If, after the poststructuralist "death of the subject," there is no longer any unified inner self, and so, in turn, no unified field of cognitive or affective experience, then of course this will have profound consequences for the meaning, indeed the very possibility, of expression in the various arts. The problem *now* is to explain what aesthetic expression could possibly mean once the supposedly expressive subject has been philosophically deconstructed, radically de-centered, or simply reduced to a social construct. So I call this the "no-subject" problem for the concept of aesthetic expression: without the concept of subjectivity, whither the concept of aesthetic expression?

However, the ultimate theoretical and critical consequences of the so-called "death" of the expressive subject are not obvious, and have not, in fact, played out in any single, predictable disciplinary direction. For some literary critics, it has simply meant that what we traditionally call "expression" is, in truth, unreal, and the more philosophically inclined among them (like Paul de Man) have thus tended to regard the experience of expression as a phenomenal illusion, as an unstable "effect" (as subjectivity itself is now understood to be an "effect") of the anonymous play of language. For others, the philosophical death of the subject has opened the entire field of aesthetic expression to powerful forms of ideology critique: for if there is, in fact, no subject that can "express" itself in art, then it makes sense to ask what ideological commitments might motivate the continuing investment of particular artists, not to mention our culture as a whole, in that (now unmasked) idea? The theoretical critiques leveled by Language Poets (and their critical allies) against the expressive "I" (or voice) of traditional lyric poetry is a good example of the now widespread approach to self-expression I'm thinking of. [7]

But then again, there has also been an entirely different conclusion about the fate of expression that has sometimes been drawn from the dismantling of the Cartesian subject: that far from signaling the end of emotion, not to mention emotional expression in art, the deconstruction of the Cartesian "I" means, in fact, the radical liberation of emotion or affect from traditional (and restrictive) philosophical and psychological categories. As philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and literary theorists like Rei Terada have each, in his or her own way, suggested, perhaps the death of the subject only means the end of certain mistaken ways of thinking about affective experience: now, that is, we can see that emotions and all the various affects are not mere qualities or properties of bounded individual subjects, but have a robust and free-floating reality (even force) of their very own. [8] So the affective intensities of Olivier Messiaen's music or Francis Bacon's paintings should not in any way be regarded as "derivative" or somehow "secondary" to the emotions of actual human beings, since of course, on this view, human beings themselves no longer "possess" emotional experiences in

any literally "primary" sense. But these thinkers, who would unmoor (or as is it is sometimes put, "deterritorialize") the emotions from the psychological experiences of human individuals, have yet to explain something that even Nietzsche could not quite work out: how to justify the use of concepts (like "the will," or in this case the "emotions") that have their home in the way we ordinarily talk and think about persons, while jettisoning, or radically decentering, the concept of the person altogether. Though I have my doubts, this may of course be possible, but it remains to be done, and so, once again, as with the "how does it work?" problem, we are left with more questions than answers when it comes to the role of emotional expression in the arts.

II. Expression, Art, and Faces

That's where Wittgenstein comes in. Wittgenstein attributed profound philosophical importance to the concept of expression, and his later writings are filled with probing reflections on how properly to understand expression's pervasive role in human life and culture. He clearly recognized that such understanding was not easy to attain, for a great many of his remarks about expression concern common ways we tend to misunderstand how it works, and thus to misunderstand what it means to do such ordinary, everyday things as express pain, use words, recognize facial expressions, or express emotions by means of bodily gestures. If, as Wittgenstein everywhere suggests, there is a deep difficulty in understanding such apparently simple things as what it means to say "ouch," or to curse someone with a rude flick of one's hand, then is it any wonder we have had so much difficulty understanding the expressiveness of artworks, which are certainly no less complex than the complex beings who make them.

Deeply concerned as he was with the psychological concept of expression, Wittgenstein's later writings have a great deal to contribute to present-day discussions of aesthetic expression. So I would like to consider what Wittgenstein can show us about the expressiveness of aesthetic objects, like poems, paintings, and melodies. As I said at the outset, however, I will do so by focusing on his numerous remarks about faces, face perception, and physiognomy. For it is there that his most important insights for contemporary aesthetics are to be found, rather than in his very few explicit remarks about art and aesthetics, a subject about which he said famously little.

Anyone who has read widely in Wittgenstein's later writings will already know how intrigued he was by conceptual questions raised by the way we see and understand human faces. Not only did he spend a great deal of time thinking about face perception itself (in a few hundred remarks scattered throughout the later manuscripts), but significantly for us, he seems also to have been fascinated by how the way we understand the human face might

be conceptually related to how we understand other meaningful phenomena, which he often tellingly spoke of as possessing faces or physiognomies of their own. As he remarked in Part II of the *Investigations*, for example, a familiar word can often strike us as possessing a "face [*Gesicht*]," as if the word had become a "likeness" of its meaning (PPF §294).[9] And he recognized faces in a wide variety of other cultural phenomena, too, from the game of chess to the musical compositions of Bruckner, Haydn, and Schubert. During a discussion of the rules of chess in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein even suggested, quite simply, that "meaning" *is* "a physiognomy" (PI §568), and he once also remarked that he found the "face" of Bruckner's music rounder and fuller than the long and narrow one he associated with Haydn's.[10] This physiognomic way of thinking about aesthetic phenomena may explain why Wittgenstein would at one point liken the lack of a musical ear to the inability to recognize the emotional expressions of a human face.[11] For if understanding a work of music is somehow like understanding a face's expressions, then being deaf to the expressiveness of one may indeed have something to do with being blind to the expressions of the other.

This criss-crossing of concepts and ideas between traditionally distinct regions of philosophy—here between the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of art—is of course characteristic of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems. By seeing (and drawing) connections between apparently disparate phenomena (between faces and artworks, for instance), Wittgenstein was often able to perceive entirely new ways to understand, and thus sometimes to resolve, difficult philosophical questions, including those raised by the expressiveness of melodies or lyric poems.

Though it might seem highly peculiar (and even off-putting) to some that Wittgenstein would think of aesthetic phenomena as possessing faces or physiognomies, he was, in fact, far from alone among modern theorists of the arts in making recourse to talk about the human face in order to describe and understand the meaning and expressiveness of aesthetic objects. It is, in fact, rather striking how many philosophers and theorists have turned—if only in passing, but often at key moments in their writings—to metaphors associated with faces and face perception when grappling with the complex phenomenology of artworks. The epigraphs to this essay offer three representative examples, from Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Susan Stewart, but I could also have cited remarks by Béla Balázs, Allen Grossman, Paul de Man, Emmanuel Levinas, Gilles Deleuze, and Michael Fried (among many others).[12] It is as if, when thinking deeply about the meaning of a work of art, theorists like these can sometimes do no better than describe the experience of looking into another's face and seeing that other face looking back.

I want to suggest that what underlies this surprisingly common connection between artworks and faces is a widely shared (if usually non-explicit) intuition that the expressiveness of aesthetic objects is in some way conceptually related to our understanding of the expressiveness of the human body. And furthermore, I want to suggest that the way we understand the expressiveness of one can significantly determine our understanding of the expressiveness of the other. There is, so to speak, an internal relation between our theories of psychological expression and our theories of aesthetic expression. If we therefore want to hold on to the thought that art is, in fact, expressive, a great deal will depend on how we understand the expressiveness of the human figure. Yet at the same time, if we are convinced that art is *not* expressive (for whatever theoretical reasons), then that may, in turn, influence the way we see the human body itself: perhaps draining not only works of art, but the human body too, of their expressive powers. This, at least, suggests one reason why debates among critics and artists about the place of emotional expression in the various arts can themselves often feel so emotionally charged. Though ostensibly such discussions are "merely" about art, we can now see how they might also function as proxy debates about our own ontologies as human beings. For to ask about the expressiveness of art is to ask about nothing less, I would suggest, than the expressiveness of ourselves as embodied sentient beings.

This underlying link between the ontology of artworks and human beings explains why, as Michael Fischer has noted, analogies between literary texts and human bodies featured so prominently in the debates that swept through U.S. literature departments in the late 1960's, following the advent of poststructuralist theory.[13] For "rear-guard" inheritors of the phenomenological and New Critical traditions, like Georges Poulet and Murray Krieger, the literary text was understood to "benefit from the intelligibility of the mind, that is, the mind's capacity to express itself… in words [and] gestures."[14] For their avant-garde rivals, like Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, however, "Instead of a living body infused with meaning and consciousness, the text" was more often regarded as "a hollow shell or [even a] corpse," to invoke two very popular metaphors for the literary work, which came to be seen as intrinsically "lifeless."[15] And as I suggested in the previous section, this new attitude towards the text would, in turn, rebound upon the human body itself, transforming it, for de Man and for many others, from a primary site of expressive meaningfulness into just one more inscrutable—endlessly interpretable—text among others. As de Man put it in *Blindness and Insight*, even the simplest of utterances necessarily requires unending interpretation: "The simplest of wishes cannot express itself without hiding behind a screen of language…. The interpretation of everyday language is [therefore] a *Sisyphean* task, a task without end and without progress."[16]

It is hardly accidental, then, that poststructuralist theorists like de Man would take a special interest in the concept of the face, since the face is commonly regarded as a paradigmatically expressive surface, the most expressive surface on the human body. But rather than see the expressiveness of the human face as mirroring the expressiveness of aesthetic objects (like Wittgenstein), de Man claimed that the experience of the face is actually but an epiphenomenon of the anonymous (which is to say, non-human) play of language. As de Man put it in "Autobiography as Defacement": "Man can address and face other men… because he has a face, but he has a face *only* because he partakes of a mode of discourse that is neither entirely natural nor entirely human." [17] And in his essay on Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, de Man went on to claim that the experience of the face is inherently unstable, the result of a dizzying rhetorical process of face-giving and defacement that he famously called "prosopopoiea." For de Man, there is no end to the figurative emergence and eventual disfiguration of the face, for it is part of the very "madness of words," and "no degree of knowledge" can stop it. Incurable, the only therapy possible for this condition is the ironic insight that there is no point celebrating or denouncing it, since we human subjects are, in fact, "its *product* rather than its agent." [18] So for de Man, texts clearly cannot benefit from the primary expressiveness of actual human beings, since even that so-called "primary" form of expressiveness turns out to be a derivative, and linguistically produced, phenomenal illusion. What is truly primary is not the expressive human body, but language, and language understood as not even "entirely human."

That de Man would recognize the importance of the face to the explanation of crucial issues in the philosophy of art (like that of expression) only further confirms the broader importance I have been attributing to the concept of the face for modern aesthetics in general. However, that he would take a position on the significance of the face so radically different from that suggested by a thinker like Wittgenstein also suggests something equally important: that the status (or ultimate meaning) of the face in, and for, modern aesthetics is as highly problematic and contestable as it is apparently philosophically crucial. This is surely so because of course it will be hard to know what the significance of the face could (or should) be for the philosophy of art, when we late- and post- modern individuals have so much trouble being sure about the meaning (or meaningfulness) of the flesh-and-blood human face itself.

Consider, for instance, the following questions about the face, which were posed by J.M. Coetzee in his foreword to Cecile Pineda's debut novel, *Face*, which tells the story of a man with a horribly disfigured countenance:

What is this thing, this structure of skin and bone and gristle and muscle, that we are condemned to carry around with us wherever we go? Where does it begin, where does it end? And why does everyone see it rather than seeing me? Or – turning the questions on their head: Who is this I that dares to think of itself as concealed behind its face, other than its face, so that its face is not it? [19]

As with everything that Coetzee writes, these queries are profoundly ambivalent, and I wouldn't want too hastily to settle their meaning or intent. Does Coetzee mean to suggest that we are right to "dare to think" of our selves as concealed behind our faces, our inner subjectivity radically distinct from the outer appearances we present to the world? Or, put another way, is our inner self, rather, to be understood as private (and to that extent, free) with respect to the categories the social world insists on imposing upon us? Or, on the other hand, is Coetzee rhetorically suggesting that the very idea that there exists a split or a seam between the inner and the outer (where the face begins or where it ends) is a conceptually mistaken picture? Luckily, I don't need to settle the matter at the moment, because what really matters is that such questions about the face (and I mean all of them) *make sense*. Deep uncertainty, even outright skepticism: are these not the intellectual moods that for a long time now have characterized our (and our culture's) thoughts about faces and what they may or may not reveal about ourselves and other persons?

And this, of course, poses a deep problem for my attempt to argue that Wittgenstein's remarks about face perception have something to teach us about aesthetic expression and experience. For what are we to make of Wittgenstein's suggestion that familiar words have meaningful faces, or that the hearing of musical expressiveness is like the recognition of facial expressions, when there seems to be such widespread uncertainty about whether faces themselves are actually meaningful in the first place?

For Wittgenstein, meaning is to a word as mind is to a face; but he can liken a word to a face, in this way, only because he already regards faces as naturally expressive of mind. Consider, for example, this typical remark from *Zettel*:

"We see emotion."—We do not see facial contortions and make inferences from them (like a doctor framing a diagnosis) to joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features.—Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. [20]

If Wittgenstein is wrong about faces, that will surely compromise his physiognomic approach to aesthetic expression, even if he is right that there is a conceptual connection between the two—leaving us, perhaps, with a theoretical position not unlike de Man's.

And, indeed, I would not be surprised if some of my readers—especially my colleagues in literary studies—find it hard to believe what Wittgenstein seems so clearly to be saying. The direct perception of mental states? Emotion, personified in the face? Of course, in our everyday lives, many of us act and feel as if we could in fact see other people's feelings and emotions (and sometimes even their thoughts) written on their very faces, so to speak, but if we ask ourselves whether and how this can be, theoretical reflection will likely make it difficult to keep our grip on this ordinary intersubjective experience. Indeed, upon further thought, such immediate perceptual experiences of other minds will likely begin to seem only *apparently* immediate and direct, but in truth, we will think, they must involve some (perhaps tacit, or maybe lightning-fast) form of inference or interpretation. Otherwise, it would seem we are committing a category mistake of sorts: claiming to see mind (and mental states) where clearly there is only the body (and its overt behaviors).

The human face seems wonderfully expressive of mental states, but (so this argument might continue) this is only because it has evolved so superbly well as a readout of inner affective states. The perceptible appearance of the face's flesh, though, is certainly not *itself* imbued with intrinsic psychological content, whatever that could mean (at least this is what I might think if I continued reflecting along these lines): instead, perhaps we should think of the face as a complex signaling system, as evolutionary psychologists like Alan Fridlund have argued (Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps entertaining a similar thought, liked to call the face a "machine"). [21]

All the way from cognitive psychologists to poststructuralist theorists, a key underlying assumption that unifies so much contemporary thinking about the face (and indeed about the human body as a whole) is that its surface is without intrinsic psychological significance. As the developmental psychologists Annette Karmiloff-Smith and James Russell very succinctly put it: there is "nothing specifically *mental* about human faces." [22] What they mean is that the face can, by altering its spatial configuration, indicate, refer to, or signal psychological content, but the face as such is assumed to be without any mental meaning of its own: which is why it is presumed to need interpretation in order to be understood.

The roots of this attitude towards the face's appearance go deep and very far back in Western culture, but Descartes' fateful re-interpretation of human beings as composite entities made up of minds, on the one hand, and bodies on the other is clearly of special historical importance. After Descartes, the very idea of human expression suffers a deep inner division,

very like that suffered by the overarching concept of the human being: on the one hand, there is now that which is expressed (the feeling or emotion) and on the other, there is the perceptible bodily expression (a gesture or an utterance). Unsurprisingly, how one connects or re-connects the outer to the inner becomes a very troubling philosophical problem: the modern problem of other minds.

So though we do, of course, still *speak* of psychological expression (of "expressing" our thoughts, "expressing" our feelings) that is now, in truth, but a *manner* of speaking: our thoughts or emotions are not actually expressed *in* our expressions, but rather our so-called "expressions" are simply ways of referring, or pointing, to that *within* which passes show, as Hamlet once said. Or, as the cognitive psychologist Alan Leslie put it more recently: "Because the mental states of others (and indeed of ourselves) are completely hidden from the senses, they can only ever be *inferred*."[23] So we do not see actual grief, but only "the dejected havior of the visage"; not happiness itself, but only an upward curvature of the lips. But as Hamlet knew all too well, "one may smile and smile and be a villain," so we should take care lest we take the face at face value.

And so it now seems to many (like Leslie) simply self-evident that interpretation and inference are necessary in order to understand the linguistic and behavioral expressions of other human beings. But anyone who has traveled this far down this particular philosophical road, will need to acknowledge that interpretation or inference may not now be enough to re-connect the outer to the inner. Having rent that expressive connection apart, is there a way to weld them back together?

If this picture of the intrinsic inexpressiveness of the outer were in fact true, we could never be sure that our inferences or interpretations about others' mental states are correct. De Man would have a very good point, then, when he claimed that interpreting everyday interactions is a "Sisyphean task." And one does not have to be a literary theorist to recognize, given this way of understanding the surface of the body, that our access to the mental states of others will be uncertain or indeterminate, at best. Indeed, this is why the analytic philosopher Daniel Dennett embraces what he calls the "radical indeterminacy" of our mental state attributions, though, given his dual commitments to Darwin and pragmatism, he is (unlike de Man) happy to emphasize how we understand each other just fine for the purposes of everyday life.[24]

III. "The Face is the Soul of the Body"

Wittgenstein's later writings are, in large measure, a response to the epistemological uncertainty, even skepticism, that naturally follow from the Cartesian picture of the inner-outer split, the very sort we see shared by modern thinkers as otherwise different as Dennett and de Man. Since I can't provide a full accounting here of Wittgenstein's response to the

Cartesian picture of mind, let me outline just two key aspects of it, with an eye to our overarching focus on the face itself and the so-called "face" of the work of art. I want to start with what I see as Wittgenstein's basic *refusal* of the Cartesian picture of the mind.

Unlike the better-known French critiques of the Cartesian subject, which provisionally accept, and only then deconstruct, Descartes' binary of mind and body, Wittgenstein simply reminds us that we need not ever accept, in the first place, Descartes' deeply flawed picture of who and what we are. [25] For Wittgenstein, what makes no sense about the Cartesian picture is its famous conclusion that humans are composite entities. We are not minds and bodies, we are simply human beings. The twin concepts of mind and body can, of course, be theoretically abstracted from the primary concept of the human being, but the concept of the human being cannot be re-constituted once one regards mind and body (as did Descartes) as the true primary substances.

In numerous remarks, Wittgenstein gently reminds us of the primacy of the category of the human being in our understanding of ourselves and of other persons. Consider this well-known remark, for example, from the *Investigations*:

> … only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious. (PI §281)

Here Wittgenstein suggests that we do not see overt behaviors, interpret them, and then conclude that they are the behaviors of a human being, whom we can infer to be in this or that mental state. On the contrary, we first recognize the living presence of a human being, and so see that human body as immediately expressive of psychological life. Wittgenstein touched on this important point in one of the very late manuscripts, when he wrote: "It's always presupposed that the one who smiles *is* a human being and not just that what smiles is a human body…. I react immediately to someone else's behavior. I presuppose the *inner* insofar as I presuppose a *human being*." [26]

This is what he meant when, in a well-known remark in the *Investigations*, he claimed that we see other humans as minded creatures not because of some inference or explicit belief about the concept of the human, but because of a much more fundamental attitude we naturally take towards their appearance and behaviors: "My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul" (PPF §22).

If we talk about a person's body or about a person's mind, we are not talking about two distinct things, moving between the visible and the invisible: rather, we are referring to two aspects of one, single, undivided entity: the human being, him or herself. The body is not wholly body, as conceived by the scientific tradition that is the most powerful of Descartes' modern inheritors, but rather the body is always already expressive of psychological meaning. To think of the body as merely material substance (mere matter, mere flesh) is, in fact, to inflict upon it a violent theoretical reduction. And so, Wittgenstein can succinctly formulate his alternative to the Cartesian picture of the mind in one justly famous sentence: "The human body is the best picture of the human soul" (PPF §25).

The second important aspect of Wittgenstein's response to the inner-outer problem follows naturally from his basic refusal of the Cartesian picture, and is already very clearly suggested by it. The surface of the human body, that is, need no longer be conceived of as inexpressive, as without intrinsic psychological content, as we've seen is the case for so many different domains of modern thought, from philosophy to literary theory to psychology. The evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides and John Tooby simply echo modern scientific doxa when they write: "Normal humans everywhere not only 'paint' their world with color, they also 'paint' beliefs, intentions, feelings, hopes, desires, and pretenses onto agents in their social world. They do this despite the fact that *no human has ever seen* a thought, a belief, or an intention." [27]

But only if we insist on thinking of the body and its overt behaviors as somehow distinct from the mind and its mental states will we feel compelled by this characteristically modern view. There is, in fact, no conceptual problem with the ordinary belief that we can see mental states *themselves* in the very movements of the human face or body.

Wittgenstein was, in part, so deeply fascinated by the human face because its movements are often so complex and subtle that there is frequently no way to provide a purely spatial description of its appearance. Indeed, there is often no better way to inform another person of how someone else's face happened to look (or change) than by means of imitation: he made *this* face, we might say, or his face altered like this, while we imitate the expression with our own face. But what fascinated Wittgenstein is that this poses no problem at all when it comes to understanding the face's expressions, as it would if we needed to infer psychological meaning from purely spatial information. In the following remark, Wittgenstein attributes great importance to this simple (but telling) fact about face perception: "One may note an alteration in a face and describe it by saying that the face assumed a harder expression – and yet not be able to describe the alteration in spatial terms. This is enormously important." [28] Since we often cannot *directly* describe a face's appearance in purely spatial or quantitative terms, why insist that the mental states we attribute to faces are the *indirect*

outcome of an interpretive process? What sense does the idea of indirect psychological interpretation have if there is not necessarily a direct spatial perception we can contrast it with?

Of course, that we can immediately see mental states in the appearance of a human face does not mean that it may not be very difficult, in a given situation, to see or to figure out what someone else is thinking or feeling, but that is an ordinary *human* difficulty, not a deep philosophical problem. And it poses no trouble at all for the idea that the human body is intrinsically expressive of mind.

Wittgenstein was of course concerned with the expressiveness of the human body as a whole, but I believe he saw the human face as somehow special, and the bearer of particularly important lessons about expression for those who would wade into the murky waters of the philosophy of mind. And so though he would memorably call the human body the best picture of the human soul, he would also feel moved to write: "The face is the soul of the body." [29]

But as I said earlier, Wittgenstein saw many more things than just the human body as possessing faces or face-like qualities: things such as words, games, and melodies. These examples show clearly that when Wittgenstein attributes a physiognomy to a non-human phenomenon, he is not thinking of some merely phenomenal or perceptual resemblance. The family resemblance, if one exists, must be purely conceptual in nature. What, then, might Wittgenstein have been getting at when he saw words as possessing faces, or the game of chess as having a physiognomy, or the music of Schubert as having a countenance? In one of his rare lectures on aesthetics, he told his students this: "If I say of a piece of Schubert's that it is melancholy, that is like giving it a face (I don't express approval or disapproval). I could instead use gestures or dancing. In fact, if we want to be exact, we do use a gesture or a facial expression." [30] Indeed, Wittgenstein's radical re-consideration of the very meaning of the concept of a "surface" when it comes to our perception of the human body, ramified quite naturally into his thinking about cultural (and especially aesthetic) phenomena. What Wittgenstein realized was that just as the surface of the human body is intrinsically expressive of psychological states, so too, can be the "merely" material surfaces of human-made cultural artifacts: lyric poems, melodies, and pictures.

The text known as *The Brown Book* contains a fairly lengthy discussion of the concept of expression, and in it Wittgenstein seems to be especially concerned with the temptation we may feel to think of what is expressed and the expression itself as distinguishable. At one point in this discussion, Wittgenstein reproduces the following drawing of a face:

And he asks us to look at the face-picture and notice how, despite how primitively it is drawn, it can nonetheless strike us as possessing a distinct, particular expression. A familiar experience, of course, and not problematic in the least. But as Wittgenstein goes on to point out, we are often, upon reflection, tempted to draw a further (mistaken) conclusion about the relationship between the image and the particular expression we see expressed in it:

> And yet one feels that what one calls the expression of the face is something that can be detached from the drawing of the face. It is as though we could say: "This face has a particular expression: namely this" (pointing to something). But if I had to point to anything in this place it would have to be the drawing I am looking at. (We are, as it were, under an optical delusion which by some sort of reflection makes us think that there are two objects where there is only one. The delusion is assisted by our using the verb "to have," saying "The face *has* a particular expression." Things look different when, instead of this, we say: "This *is* a peculiar face." What a thing *is*, we mean, is bound up with it; what it has can be separated from it.) [31]

And so, when we say that a face, or image, or anything else, for that matter, has a particular expressive quality, it is all too easy to conclude that we are referring to some sort of conceptual "relation" between two distinguishable terms: what is expressed, and the expression's perceptible surface. In this way, the grammar of the verb "to have" may bewitch us into accepting a Cartesian-like distinction, the very one that has convinced so many modern thinkers that actual facial expressions stand in a relation to some distinct (often inner) mental state.

Wittgenstein's key point, though, and one that is absolutely crucial if we are to regain our grip on the reality of emotional expression in the arts, is that the concept of expression does not name a "relation" at all: expression does not *connect* inner to outer, mind to body, or emotions to their expressions. [32] What is expressed is present *in*, and *as*, the expression itself. To think otherwise will be to create the very problem of relationship (the "how does it work?" problem) that the idea of expression will then never be able to solve: the concept of human expression, once rent asunder, cannot be put back together again. Wittgenstein saw this temptation to break apart expressive phenomena into theoretically distinguishable

components as a basic (and tragic) consequence of the Cartesian picture of the inner and the outer. It will be a major concern throughout his later manuscripts on the philosophy of psychology, and the issue shows up particularly clearly in his many remarks on the topic of seeing aspects, some of which are reproduced as Part II, section xi of the *Investigations*. [33]

What concerns Wittgenstein, in his discussion of aspect-seeing, is our inclination to regard the perception of expressive qualities as indirect rather than immediate, a belief that follows naturally from the assumption that expressive phenomena themselves are instantiations of relations between multiple (and distinguishable) terms. If expression is in fact a relation, then of course the surface of an expressive phenomenon (like a melancholy melody) will need to be interpreted if the sadness is to be perceived in the music's sound patterns, which would be all we could directly or immediately hear (as theorists like Davies, Levinson, and Kivy assume). But in remark after remark, Wittgenstein asks us why we are so tempted to think of experiences of expression (or of meaning in general) as indirect, as if all we can see or hear or feel are what the natural sciences say our senses can, and that anything more that we "perceive" must be the indirect result of interpretation or projection?

Wittgenstein provides no knock-down arguments to refute once and for all such ways of thinking about perception. Instead, he simply wants us to see that we need not choose to think of our sensory experiences in that way, but of course, nothing can stop us from doing so if we insist on regarding the physical world as void of qualitative meaning. That stance, after all, is consistent with the scientific world-view, which claims that even colors do not have the same degree of reality as the primary qualities of spatial extension and mass. But we no more need to "paint" our world with colors than we need to "paint" our fellow humans with mental states; nor, I'd now like to add, do we need to "paint" artworks with expressive import.

Wittgenstein knew this last claim (just like the first two) would strike many of his readers as less than obvious, as the following discussion makes clear:

> Just think of the expression "I heard a plaintive melody"! And now the question
> is: "Does he *hear* the plaint?"
> And if I reply: "No, he doesn't hear it, he merely senses it" — where does that get
> us? One cannot even specify a sense-organ for this 'sensing.'
> Some would now like to reply: "Of course I hear it!" — Others: "I don't really *hear*
> it." (PPF §§229-230)

We are by now familiar with what is at stake in this back-and-forth. Notice, though, that Wittgenstein does not decisively settle the issue. He simply gives voice to both sides and then seems to ask: which voice is yours?

But what is especially telling, I think, is that these remarks about musical expression are immediately followed by a set of remarks about seeing (and not seeing) the psychological expressions of a human face. The subsequent remark about face perception reads like this:

> We react to a [timid] facial expression differently from someone who does not recognize it as timid (in the *full* sense of the word). — But I do *not* want to say here that we feel this reaction in our muscles and joints, and that this is the "sensing". — No, what we have here is a modified concept of *sensing*.
> One might say of someone that he was blind to the *expression* of a face. Would his eyesight on that account be defective?
> But this, of course, is not simply a question for physiology. Here the physiological is a symbol of the logical. (PPF §§231-2)

I consider this to be one of the most important and dense of all the remarks in Part II of the *Investigations*, so I cannot hope to do justice here to its many facets. But I will say that I take it to be primarily about the fact that though we can often immediately see emotional expressions in a face, that ability is not merely biological in nature (not simply "hard-wired" into us) but a kind of skill or technique that therefore requires enculturation (the full mastery of concepts like "timidity"). Whether or not we are *fully* familiar with a given state of mind will be *shown* by how we react to its appearance in others. Someone who is blind to a person's timid expression might, for example, treat him with indifference, rather than the sympathetic concern he wants or needs.

The numerous and profound implications of the idea that one might be conceptually, rather than physiologically, blind to the expressions of another person have been most thoroughly explored by Stanley Cavell, in the beautiful passages in *The Claim of Reason* about soul-blindness, for instance. [34] And as Cavell makes clear there, to fail or to refuse to acknowledge the soul or humanity of another person is, in fact, a standing and quintessentially *human* possibility, even temptation. That we can be blind to the humanity of another is a logical possibility that, in part, constitutes what it means to be a human being in the first place.

What I am intrigued by, for the moment, is the fact that Wittgenstein's remark about face-blindness so closely follows his discussion of musical perception, indeed coming right after we hear a voice exclaiming "I didn't really *hear* the plaint." It follows so closely, I suggest, because Wittgenstein regards blindness to the face's expressions as internally related to the blindness we might display towards emotional expressiveness in art. It follows as well, though, that such blindness to aesthetic expression will be no less a standing possibility, and even temptation, than the possibility of our being soul-blind with respect to one another. There is nothing to

stop us from regarding artworks as void of intrinsic expressive life, just as there is nothing to stop us from seeing the human face as without intrinsic psychological expressiveness. Indeed, "expression-blindness," to give this condition a name, appears to be a widespread and particularly powerful temptation in modern culture and philosophy. It is attested to no less by the numerous modern artworks about faces that portray them as masks, screens, or opaque enigmas,[35] than it is by so many of the theoretical discussions of the face I've canvassed in this essay.

But just like skepticism with respect to other minds, as Cavell has long argued, neither of the two forms of expression-blindness I am talking about can be philosophical refuted. Cavell's important discovery about skepticism was that far from simply being an intellectual error in need of correction, the skeptic's position expressed an important philosophical truth: that there is no absolute ground for the meaningfulness of our lives together (like a framework of concepts or rules), only the fragile attunements we ourselves maintain by means of our continuing investment in, and care for, our shared sense-making practices. There is thus nothing to stop any of us from withdrawing our acknowledgment of those attunements, fragile as they are, which is of course the skeptic's tragic choice. And just so, there is nothing to stop any of us from withdrawing our mutually attuned acknowledgments (fragile as they are) of the expressive meaningfulness of our very bodies, or of the artworks we make, enjoy, and study. The aesthetic expressiveness of art will indeed be but a fiction—and artworks will be dead: mere sounds, images, and dead letters—in so far as we choose (as we always can) to see them in that way. Indeed, as I think my essay has made clear, quite a few modern thinkers have already made that very choice.

But what I would like to suggest, by way of conclusion, is that that choice need not be one we ourselves feel compelled to make, as if it were somehow philosophically truer and less theoretically naïve to see the emotional expressiveness of artworks (as of ourselves) as something that's not *really* there, but rather some sort of interpretive projection, an animating fiction, or what have you. That, I think, is what Wittgenstein and others, like Adorno, Benjamin, and Susan Stewart, are suggesting, when they figuratively endow artworks with faces, and even sometimes with the face's power to return our gaze. Such physiognomically-inflected remarks are reminders that the very stuff, the materiality, of our aesthetic artifacts, no less than the flesh of our finite bodies, has the power to *express* mind and meaning. And so it may be that what is ultimately at stake in our continuing re-thinking of the category of aesthetic expression is not simply how best to understand art, but also how truly to see—that is, understand—our very selves.

NOTES

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversation on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 4; Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 112; Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p.188. I follow here Miriam Hansen's translation in "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology'," *New German Critique* no. 40 (Winter 1987): 187-88; Susan Stewart, "The Art of the Future," in *The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 17.

2. For a very useful overview of the state of current debates about aesthetic expression among philosophers of art, see Stephen Davies, "Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music," and Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Expressiveness as Hearability-as-expression," in Matthew Kieran, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), pp. 179-191 and pp. 192-204 respectively. See also the bibliography of references and suggested further reading appended to these two essays, on pp. 205-6.

3. Davies, p. 182.

4. Leo Tolsoy, *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 43.

5. Davies, p. 183.

6. Kivy notes, "… it is *because* of our strong tendency to hear music as 'animate,' as (at times) emotive utterances, that we perceive emotive properties in music; hear music expressively." Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 199), p. 6, emphasis added. See also, Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), esp. pp. 57-59.

7. For an excellent discussion of the critique of the lyric "I" by figures associated with Language Writing, see Marjorie Perloff, "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo," *Critical Inquiry* 25.3 (Spring 1999): 405-434.

8. On Gilles Deleuze's expressivism, see Brian Massumi, ed., *A Shock to Thought: Expression After Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 2002). See also Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001).

9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). The remarks on pp. 1-181 of this text will hereafter be cited with the abbreviation PI. For the 4th ed. of the *Investigations*, Hacker and Schulte decided to rename what has been known as Part II of PI *Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment*. Remarks from *Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment* (pp. 182-243) will be cited with the abbreviation PPF. In order to maintain continuity with the long tradition of commentary on the *Investigations*, however, I will continue to refer in my discussion to "Part II" of the *Investigations* when discussing remarks in PPF.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 22.

11. See, for example, PPF §§225-233. I discuss this conceptual connection below.

12. See, for example, Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970); Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1998); Allen Grossman, *Summa Lyrica* in *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992); Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1969).

13. Michael Fischer, *Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. chapter 3.

14. ibid., p. 37.

15. Fischer, p. 43.

16. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 11. Emphasis added.

17. Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984), p. 90.

18. ibid., p. 122.

19. J.M. Coetzee, "Foreword" to Cecile Pineda, *Face*, revised ed. (San Antonio: Wings Press, 2003), p. xi.

20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), §225.

21. See Alan Fridlund, "The New Ethology of Human Facial Expression," in James A. Russell and José Miguel Fernández-Dols, *The Psychology of Facial Expressions* (Cambridge, UK, 1997), p. 104. For Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the "abstract machine of faciality," see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), chapter 7.

22. Annette Karmiloff-Smith and James Russell, "Developmental Psychology," in Samuel Guttenplan, ed., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 253.

23. Alan Leslie, "Children's Understanding of the Mental World," in Richard Gregory, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 139.

24. See, e.g., Daniel Dennett's entry on "Daniel Dennett" in Samuel Guttenplan, ed., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 239. See also, Daniel Dennett, "Real Patterns," in *Brainchildren: Essays on Designing Minds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 95-120.

25. For a penetrating discussion of the unwitting Cartesianism of the supposedly anti-Cartesian poststructuralist "critique of the subject," see Vincent Descombes, "Apropos of the 'Critique of the Subject' and of the Critique of this Critique," trans. Eduardo Cadava, in Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 120-134.

26. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 2, eds. G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. G.C. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), p. 84.

27. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "Foreword" to Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. xvii. Emphasis added.

28. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 1, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), §919, p. 163e.

29. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 23.

30. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 4. See Roger Shiner, "On Giving Works of Art a Face," *Philosophy* 53.205 (July 1978): 307-324.

31. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 162.

32. My account of the post-Cartesian crisis of expression is indebted to Roger Shiner's superb essay, "The Mental Life of a Work of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40.3 (Spring 1982): 253-268.

33. For a terrific collection of recent essays on Wittgenstein's aspect-seeing remarks, see William Day and Victor Krebs, eds., *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

34. See Part Four of Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), esp. pp. 378-380.

35. To name just a few obvious examples, think of the art of Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, or Tony Ourlser. Cindy Sherman, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective*, eds. Amanda Cruz, Elizabeth A.T. Smith, Amelia Jones (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000); *13 Most Beautiful… Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests*, dir. by Andy Warhol (1964-1966, Plexifilm, 2009); Tony Oursler, *Tony Oursler* (New York: JRP/Ringier, 2001).

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LITERATURE, GENRE FICTION, AND STANDARDS OF CRITICISM

JAMES HAROLD

Many years ago, I adopted a deliberate policy in order to guide my choices in fiction reading. I resolved to alternate a "serious" book with a "fun" book: so Elmore Leonard's *Swag* would follow Vladimir Nabokov's *An Invitation to a Beheading*; after Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*, I picked up Stephen King's *Under the Dome*. I still follow this pattern, at least most of the time. The appeal of the approach is simple. Serious literature and genre fiction offer different kinds of pleasures. Serious literature is rewarding, but it requires some effort and attention, and so it makes sense to take a break and read something lighter in between, rather like running intervals.

The pleasures of genre fiction are thought to be the pleasures of relaxing, of familiarity, of *not* having to engage oneself fully, of allowing the novel to do the work of entertaining you. By contrast, the pleasures of serious art require effort of thought and feeling on the part of the audience, engaging the mind and the imagination actively as the reader thinks through the literary work. The distinction between these two kinds of pleasure quickly takes on an evaluative aspect, along the lines suggested by John Stuart Mill: "But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments a much higher value as pleasures than to those

of pure sensation."[1] The fact that the pleasures of literature are greater than the pleasures of genre fiction is supposed to be evidence of their aesthetic and moral superiority.

The distinction is made visible in the physical layout of bookstores: "Mystery," "Romance," and "Science Fiction" each have their sections, while "Literature" occupies its own distinct (and more esteemed) space. While *some* genre fiction is thought of as respectable and serious, it is not seen in this way unless it is seen as *transcending* its status as mere genre to become something more important. Edmund Wilson makes this explicit when he denies that Raymond Chandler's works, which he admires, are really detective novels:

> But Chandler, though in his recent article he seems to claim Hammett as his master, does not really belong to this school of the old-fashioned detective novel. What he writes is a novel of adventure which has less in common with Hammett than with Alfred Hitchcock and Graham Greene … It is not simply a question here of a puzzle which has been put together but of a malaise conveyed to the reader …[2]

Likewise, Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is not just a Western, and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is much more than a work of science fiction, so these works may be found in the "Literature" section.

The distinction between literature and genre fiction shapes our practices of critical evaluation in several ways. First, it is widely thought that genre fiction supplies its own internal criteria for success: for example, a mystery, *qua* mystery, must create suspense in the reader.[3] Second, it is also thought, though more contentiously, that literature is *not* appropriately judged in the way that genre fiction is, *viz.* according to a fixed set of criteria supplied by the genre itself, but rather according to more *universal* criteria. Third, and most controversially, literature is thought to be, perhaps because it cannot be judged in the rather rule-bound ways that genre fiction can and perhaps because of the "higher" pleasures it is thought to engender, better or more important than genre fiction. In this paper, I critically examine these three claims and some attempts to refute them. I defend the view that there are in fact real differences between the pleasures of genre fiction and literature, and there are also some differences in how we should critically assess them. But I do not try to argue that this difference constitutes a reason for thinking that literature is better than genre fiction, expect in some very highly context-sensitive sense of "better."

A word in advance about critical evaluation. This paper focuses on the evaluative principles that guide normative criticism. This kind of critical work, which aims to show what makes a particular book good, or bad, is only one aspect of criticism. In *On Criticism*, Noël Carroll claims that most academic critics are reluctant to offer evaluations of individual works. [4] Carroll notes that these serious critics (as opposed to mere reviewers) see the task of criticism as primarily interpretive, not evaluative. The literary critic gives a work context, illustrates its main themes and motifs, comments on its use of language, and perhaps situates it in a tradition. But a literary critic should be reluctant to praise or condemn, or otherwise judge the worth, of the literary works she discusses. Much of the academic interest in genre fiction, for example, is not focused on the question of what makes particular works good or bad, but on what such works can show us about the societies in which they are created and consumed. (A good example would be Stephen Knight's study of the social function and meaning of crime fiction. [5])

Carroll argues that this turn in criticism is a mistake – that critics *ought* to focus their attention on evaluation. I am sympathetic with this view, though I do not defend his position here. However, the division can be overstated. Much criticism combines both theoretical insight and evaluation – the two kinds of criticism are not mutually exclusive, and the difference is typically one of relative emphasis. In this essay, I focus attention on critical *evaluation*, criticism that attempts to show how and why some works are better than others. In the case of literature, at least, there are plenty of exceptions to Carroll's general rule: serious critics (not *mere* reviewers) who engage in thoughtful and reflective evaluation of particular works.

1. Genre standards

The first work of literary criticism, Aristotle's *Poetics*, is also the central model for genre-based criticism. Aristotle recognized several genres of poetry: tragedy, epic, comedy, and the satyr-play. In accordance with his more general methodology, Aristotle thought that the study of each type must incorporate an understanding of its nature, which includes, importantly, the *telos* of the type. For example, plot is the *telos* of tragedy – the story must culminate in a *katharsis* of pity of fear brought about by a downturn in the main character's fortunes. Aristotle derives quite specific principles about which tragedies are better and which are worse by pointing to specific features that contribute to that *telos* or aim. For example, spectacle, he argues, is not the most effective way to bring about the desired response in the audience.

> That which is terrifying and pitiable can arise from spectacle, but it can also arise from the structure of the incidents itself; this is superior and belongs to the better poet. For the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it,

someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome, as someone may feel upon hearing the plot of *Oedipus*. To produce this by means of spectacle is less artful and requires lavish production. Those who use spectacle to produce what is only monstrous and not terrifying have nothing in common with tragedy. For we should not seek to every pleasure from tragedy, but the sort which is particular to it. Since the poet should use representation to produce the pleasure from pity and terror, it is obvious that this must be put into the incidents.[6] [bracketed material inserted by translator]

Aristotle's method in the *Poetics* is very much in keeping with his methods elsewhere. The criteria in *The Nicomachean Ethics* for assessing moral character are likewise discovered from a study of humanity and its *telos*. An appropriate plot effectively and reliably gives rise to the emotions appropriate to tragedy; spectacle, by contrast, tends to produce monstrousness and not what is pitiable. Aristotle's rule against the overuse of spectacle, then, is derived immediately from his understanding of the aims particular to tragedy as a genre. What is supreme in achieving these aims for Aristotle is *plot*. The plot is the reason for the characters being the way they are, for the dialogue being what it is, and the plot is responsible for producing the key emotions in the audience (in this case, pity and fear).

Perhaps the greatest strength of this Aristotelean approach is that it readily identifies a mistake that one can make in reading and evaluating a work of fiction: mis-categorizing the work as belonging to one genre when it belongs to another. If one reads a horror novel as if it were a mystery, one will find fault where there is none, and one will fail to recognize good-making features. Just as one cannot watch a Noh theater performance as if it were Renaissance tragedy, and hope to understand or enjoy it,[7] it seems to be a principle of thoughtful engagement with a work of literature that one understand to what category it belongs and read it with an awareness of that fact.

While few contemporary philosophers or literary critics would aspire to the level of specificity that Aristotle made famous, the idea that understanding the purpose of a genre can help us to fix the criteria for works belonging to that genre is commonplace. A genre not only supplies certain fixed character types, story schemas, and other standard features, it also tells us at least something about what makes for success in that genre. As Kendall Walton notes, different kinds of art treat different properties of their members as standard, variable, or contra-standard.[8] Standard features (e.g., that the protagonist of a whodunit is a detective who attempts to solve the crime) do not attract our aesthetic attention. Variable categories sometimes do (e.g., the protagonist may be a professional detective or police officer, such

as Hercule Poirot, or an amateur, such as Miss Marple). Contra-standard features attract our attention by challenging the work's status in the category (e.g., when the narrator is himself the killer, as in Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*). Noël Carroll extends Walton's theory by deploying these distinctions to do evaluative work. [9]

If a work is intended by the author to belong to a particular genre or category, but it lacks a sufficient number of standard features of that category (or it has too many contra-standard features) then it may be judged a failure. (Of course, the author may *intend* to stretch or transcend the genre.) Knowing which features are standard, variable, or contra-standard for a particular genre not only calibrates the reader's expectations, it also implicitly establishes some baseline standards for judging the work's success *qua* member of that genre.

There is little doubt that there is something to Carroll's approach. A mystery that makes the killer too obvious to the reader fails in an important respect, as does one that obscures the evidence of the killer's guilt too thoroughly. The book will either fail to create, or fail properly to resolve, suspense in the reader. This is not to say that such a mystery would always be an *utter* failure; witty dialogue and well-drawn characters may still make it well worth reading, but it will be judged less good than it might have been if it had succeeded in creating and sustaining suspense about the killer's identity. Genres, then, supply at least incomplete, *pro tanto* criteria for the evaluation of works belonging to each genre.

2. Judging Literature

Once we leave genre fiction behind and turn to literary fiction, it is unclear how we might apply the Aristotelean approach. The question is what standards literary critics deploy in making their evaluations, if they do not make use of genre standards.

First consider an approach explained by the critic James Wood in his *How Fiction Works*, and demonstrated as well as in his other critical essays. [10] Wood focuses on particular ways in which language can be used in literature, and argues that these techniques can be employed well or poorly. In particular, he argues that the appropriate use of free indirect discourse must employ words that the characters themselves might use, not words that the author would choose. He offers up John Updike as an example of an author who fails this test, and who is therefore guilty of "aestheticism," that is, of having an overly literary style. Wood quotes a passage from Updike's *Terrorist*, in which Updike offers the reader the inner monologue of the main character, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, a devout, fanatical teenage Muslim:

> He will not grow any taller, he thinks, in this life or the next. *If there is a next*, an inner devil murmurs. What evidence beyond the Prophet's blazing and divinely inspired words proves that there is a next? Where would it be hidden? Who would forever stoke Hell's boilers? What infinite source of energy would maintain opulent Eden, feeding its dark-eyed houris, swelling its heavy-hanging fruits, renewing the streams and splashing fountains in which God, as described in the ninth sura of the Qur'an, takes eternal good pleasure? [11]

Wood then takes Updike to task for failing to make it plausible that these are the character's thoughts, rather than the author's. Having introduced this section with "he thinks," Updike appears to be trying to give us a glimpse of the *character's* train of thought. It is supposed to be the character who thinks "If there is a next" and who characterizes that thought as originating from an "inner devil." But Wood argues that this inner dialogue is not true to what we know about the character; these thoughts and phrases are clearly Updike's.

> We are only four pages in, and any attempt to follow Ahmad's own voice has been abandoned: the phrasing, syntax, and lyricism are Updike's, not Ahmad's … The penultimate line is telling: 'in which God, as described in the ninth sura of the Qur'an, takes eternal good pleasure.' … Updike is unsure about entering Ahmad's mind, and crucially, unsure about *our* entering Ahmad's mind, and so he plants his big authorial flags all over his mental site. So he has to identify exactly which sura refers to God, although Ahmad would know where this appears, and would have no need to remind himself. [12]

Wood's criticisms, like Aristotle's, are derived from the central purpose or aim of the book: in this case, *Terrorist*. But the aim in question has nothing to do with the plot or the emotions to be produced in the reader. Free indirect style is, Wood thinks, the cornerstone of modern narrative, because it combines the author's and the character's voices, and this combination, he thinks, what all modern literature is really about.

> Thanks to free indirect style, we see things through the character's eyes and language but also through the author's eyes and language. We inhabit omniscience and partiality at once. A gap opens up between the author and character, and the bridge – *which is free indirect style itself* – between them simultaneously closes that gap and draws attention to its distance. [13] [emphasis added]

For Wood, modern literature is about the tension between the author's voice and the character's voice, and that tension can be dealt with in better and worse ways. Our evaluation of literature is based on an understanding of the phenomenology of reading literature: the dual awareness that one is reading something written by an author, and one's immersion in a world of fictional persons created by that author.

Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen focus their critical approach to literature not only on the use of literary devices like free indirect style, but also on a literary work's treatment of various *themes*: "Literary appreciation is the appreciation of how a work *interprets and develops* the general themes which the reader identifies through the application of thematic concepts."[14] Some of these themes are perennial (e.g., free will and determinism) and some are topical (e.g., overcrowded cities and industrialization). Lamarque and Olsen do not mean that perennial themes are somehow part of the objective fabric of the world – universal, absolute, or transcendent — but they do insist that some themes recur again and again over time and across cultures: preoccupations with family, mortality, inevitability, and freedom, are, they think, widespread. By contrast, topical themes reflect the concerns specific to particular historical moments or cultural conditions. Works that treat perennial themes are more important than those that focus on highly topical themes; works of the latter kind tend to decline in relevance over time.

The best literary works can support a wide range of interpretations, and these interpretations are richer and deeper than the interpretations that are possible for a novel that focuses only on highly topical questions and problems. Consider Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was the best-selling American novel of the 19th century, but is now mainly of historical interest, because its central theme, the evils of race-based slavery, was highly topically specific, while its contribution to more enduring themes such as human equality has proved less substantive – in fact, it is now often criticized for its failure to render its black characters as fully human, and thus its failure to serve as a basis for an adequate examination of perennial human themes.

Lamarque and Olsen's criterion emerges from a *telos* that can be applied to all literature as such:

> One central, characteristic purpose defined by the literary practice and served by the literary work is to develop in depth, through subject and form, a theme which is in some sense central to human concerns and which can therefore be recognized as of more or less universal interest.[15]

This criterion represents the fusion of two ideas: that literary works are valued for the *ways in which* they realize their goals, which involves the kinds of literary tools employed by Wood, and that they are valued for to the extent to which the themes central to the work are perennially *important* to humans as such. So, in critiquing a work like *Terrorist*, we could look not only at the weaknesses in the use of various literary techniques, but also at how those techniques help (or fail to help) to realize the exploration of some theme, and whether that theme is merely topical (like "Americanization" [16]), or perennial.

Wood's approach and Lamarque and Olsen's might not be as different as they first appear. The reason that free indirect discourse matters so much, according to Wood, is that it thematizes an intrinsic problem for literature itself: the conflict between awareness of the author, and immersion in the fiction. This "theme," if it is a theme in Lamarque and Olsen's sense, is reflexive in a way that the theme of "freedom and fate" is not: it is a theme that is *about* fictionality. It's not clear whether this should count as a "perennial" theme, either, since it is specific to *modern* literature. Still, there seems no reason to think that themes cannot be reflexive in this way, engaging with the nature of literature itself.

3. Two kinds of criticism or two kinds of works?

We might summarize the foregoing by suggesting that genre fiction is supposed to be judged according to (a) a set of fixed formulae that apply to the work (b) in light of the fixed purposes of the genre. What's more, we might note that these purposes are (c) plot (rather than character or theme) driven. By contrast, literary fiction is to be judged according to (d) the importance of the themes it examines and (e) how well it makes use of literary and imaginative devices to realize those themes.

One might object, however. Why should we apply one set of evaluative criteria to genre fiction and another set to "serious" literature? Genre fiction treats themes too – some perennial and some topical – and makes use of devices like free indirect style more or less well. Couldn't we look for themes in genre fiction, and be attentive to the techniques shown in the writing? Indeed, this seems to be the approach of many serious critics who have written on genre fiction: they aim to show that despite their plot- and emotion-driven nature, good genre fiction is capable of just the kind of careful and moving treatment of serious themes as any work of literature. Consider Steven Marcus' discussion of Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. [17]

Marcus draws attention to what he thinks is the most important passage in Hammett's famous book, which was omitted from the film. In it, Sam Spade tells a story of an old client whose husband (Flitcraft) one day picked up and disappeared, only to move to a new city, remarry, and take up a work and home life almost identical to the one he had abandoned. Spade had

tracked Flitcraft down and discovered that the reason for his leaving is that while walking to lunch, Flitcraft was nearly hit by a steel beam falling from a construction site. This random event convinced him of the randomness of his own life, and he resolved to take off and start again. Spade notes that Flitcraft ended up in much the same situation as he started. Marcus comments:

> To begin with, we may note that such a sustained passage is not the kind of thing we ordinarily expect in a detective story or novel about crime. That it is there, and that comparable passages occur in all of Hammett's best work, clearly suggests the kind of transformation that Hammett was performing on this popular genre of writing. The transformation was in the direction of literature. And what the passage in question is about among other things is the ethical irrationality of existence, the ethical intelligibility of the world. [18]

The thematic content exemplified by the Flitcraft story is what raises this particular work of genre fiction to the status of literature, and thus allows us to evaluate it by the standards that Lamarque and Olsen set out.

Alternatively, we could try to fix the purposes of different types of "high" literature in the same way that we fix the purpose of a genre, and then look at to what extent the book follows rules that serve this purpose. Perhaps the very distinction between genre fiction and literature rests on a shaky foundation. Michael Chabon has suggested that high literature is really just another genre. [19] In addition to "the ghost story; the horror story; the detective story; the story of suspense, terror, fantasy, or the macabre, the sea, adventure, spy, war, or historical story; the romance story" and the like, he asks us to consider "the contemporary, quotidian, plotless, moment-of-truth revelatory story." [20] Each of these, including the last, is a genre, he suggests, with its rules and limits imposed by the expectations of the form. What is distinct about "high literature" is its plotlessness (or, more modestly, its lack of emphasis on plot), but this, he argues, is not, or at least not always, a virtue. It imposes limits and imposes expectations on the reader just as the genre of romance does. Similarly, in his discussion of film genres, Carroll maintains that even avant-garde and experimental films fall into genres, not based on the type of plot, but on other characteristic features, on the basis of which we form our critical judgments. [21]

These objections, however, go a bit too far. To suggest that literature is simply another genre of fiction, like the Western or the Romance, is to ignore a fact that Chabon, and Aristotle, acknowledge, and even emphasize elsewhere: genres are distinguished from one another principally by looking at the story-type, the *plot*. Insofar as works of literature fall into distinct

types, they do so on the basis of features other than plot, such as theme or character. So different kinds of great literature may indeed be categorized as falling into certain "types," but these types are not thereby genres, because genres are distinguished from one another according to their plot. This matters because plots are powerful emotion-producing machines. A Western differs from a Romance or a Detective story based on the story schema, and one can expect a particular emotional journey for each type; but the "quotidian, plotless, moment-of-truth revelatory story" offers no such schema for story or for the reader's emotional response.

It is certainly right that we can and should judge genre fiction by the standards applied to great literature, and great genre fiction stands up well to such scrutiny. To the Hammett discussion earlier, one could add examples from other genres as well. Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* deals with the enduring theme of the authenticity of emotion and fellow feeling; George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* invites us to consider the tension between the obligations of honor and family.

Further, works of genre fiction can offer exemplary models of free indirect discourse and other literary techniques, often playing with and exploiting the author's voice in the character. Elmore Leonard's crime novels made wonderful use of the inner voice of characters, while still offering an authorial perspective which can be slyly satirical. Consider the following passage from *Get Shorty*, in which a loan shark, Chili Palmer tracks down Leo Devoe, who owes $300,000:

> Chili stood away from the table, behind Leo and a little to one side. Two women in their thirties, wearing party dresses but not too attractive, were across the table from Leo, who was trying to get something going … A lot of color at the table, Leo looking like the Easter bunny in a pale green sport coat with gold buttons, an open pink shirt with one of those high Hollywood collars, Leo's face hunched in there behind sunglasses, hair slicked back. Chili watched the wheel spin and stop. The house won. As the two women walked away Leo told them the dinner offer was still on. They said thanks anyway and turned to each other rolling their eyes. Leo watched them go, the poor little drycleaner trying to be a high roller. [22]

The passage is funny and insightful, crisply conveying to us exactly what Chili thinks of Leo, and at the same time also casting light on Chili's own arrogance and prejudices. Of course, much writing in genre fiction does not hold up as well, but the fact that some of it does suggests that these criteria are not out of place in critically evaluating genre fiction.

Further, it is certainly right that much literature makes some use of formulas, just as genre fiction does, though these formulas do not dictate the structure of the plot quite so narrowly. In much character-driven introspective fiction, for example, the main character learns something about him or herself (although, occasionally, and contra-standardly, he or she fails to do so). When we read Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, which is framed around the history of Patty and Walter Berglund's marriage, we (rightly) expect that by the end, whether the relationship itself survives, Patty and Walter will come to better understand their own roles in the relationship and its problems.

But the formulae or rules that guide our evaluations of literature are not quite the same as those that guide us in reading genre fiction. First, as noted earlier, the expectations and purposes of genre fiction are strongly plot driven, and are tied closely to (more or less) standard emotional responses to the events in the plot: e.g., pity, satisfaction, surprise. Second, adherence to these formulae and expectations is much less common in literature than in genre fiction. Contra-standard cases like Christie's *Roger Ackroyd* are remarkable in genre fiction because they are so rare. Literature is much more apt to ignore or subvert the standard features of the type than Romances or Fantasy fiction is. These are differences of degree, not of kind, but differences nonetheless.

4. Comparing Literature and Genre Fiction

In an essay reflecting on his education as a writer, Michael Chabon writes:

> As a young man, an English major, and a regular participant in undergraduate fiction-writing workshops, I was taught – or perhaps in fairness it would be more accurate to say I learned – that science fiction was not serious fiction, that a writer of mystery novels might be loved but not revered, that if I meant to get serious about the art of fiction I might set a novel in Pittsburgh but never on Pluto. *The Long Goodbye* could be parsed by the literary critic for a class on Masculine Anxiety in the Postwar American novel, but it was unlikely to appear on the syllabus of a general twentieth-century American literature class alongside *Absalom, Absalom* and the stories of Flannery O'Connor.

In one sense, Chabon was mistaken: his own genre writing, such as *The Yiddish Policemen's Union,* which is a piece of detective fiction and historical fantasy, has been taken very seriously as literature, and one could point to many other examples, including novels by writers such as Margaret Atwood, Kazuo Ishiguro, Cormac McCarthy, and Graham Greene. But in a larger sense he is of course right. These exceptions are just that: exceptions. When works of genre fiction are recognized as great, they are seen as having *transcended* their genres, and having

shaken off the traces of their lesser origins. The fact that these books are great page-turners with gripping plots that cleverly anticipate and provoke suspense or pity in the reader is secondary to their treatment of theme and their use of literary techniques to examine that theme. Their greatness derives not from their use of genre plot-types but despite it.

But there is something missing from this view; we need not deny that in general, there is a difference between what makes genre fiction and literature good in order to see that some works can have the virtues of both, and, what's more, that being a good mystery can make a work *better* as a serious exploration of literary theme. Literary criteria and genre criteria are distinct, but they may work together and support one another.

Consider an example: Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union. The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is a piece of hard-boiled *noir* detective fiction in the mold of Raymond Chandler. (It is also set an alternative history in which Jews from Europe settled in Alaska after World War II instead of Israel, so one might say it has a little bit of fantasy, or at least speculative fiction, as well.) The genre he adopts brings with it some rules and types, and Chabon embraces them: the anti-hero, Landsman, is an alcoholic divorcee and a non-believer with a dark past; what appears to be a solitary murder turns out to be part of a vast, sinister conspiracy; and the writing is pure *noir*, embracing the clichés of setting, style, and characterization:

> Landsman has eight hours to go until his next shift. Eight rat hours, sucking at his bottle, in his glass tank lined with wood shavings. Landsman sighs and goes for the tie. He slides it over his head and pushes up the knot to his collar. He puts on his jacket, feels for the wallet and shield in the breast pocket, pats the sholem he wears in a holster under his arm, a chopped Smith & Wesson Model 39. "I hate to wake you, Detective," Tenenboym says. "Only I noticed that you don't really sleep." [24]

Change the names and remove the Yiddish and this passage could come from any Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe story. But the themes of the book, exile and the idea of home, are deepened by the use of these genre tropes, not sullied by them. Chabon is able to use the standard plot devices to highlight these themes, and the themes in turn draw our attention to the conspiracy to move the Jews of Sitka to Jerusalem. Will the Jews of Sitka find a home? What would it mean for them to do so?

If the distinct features of genre fiction can *enhance* literary value, what, then, is there to the idea that genre fiction offers not only different sorts of pleasures, but lesser ones, than literature? Here I think we should acknowledge that the rules and tropes of genre fiction can serve different purposes. When genre fiction aims principally to entertain, the formulae of the genre

make reading the book easier: one knows what's coming, and less energy and attention are required to enjoy it. Familiarity creates comfort, and one is then free to focus only on the aspects of plot and characterization to which the genre draws attention. But an author (or a reader) can also draw attention to the rules, and use those expectations to thematize ideas or to illuminate a motif in the story.

I do think then, that there is something to my old habit of alternating "lighter" and "heavier" reading. Some works provide greater effort and distinct pleasures than others. Most, but not all, of these are works that we call genre fiction. As to whether or not the pleasures of literature are *greater* in something like John Stuart Mill's sense (in which the higher, intellectual pleasures are far superior to the more sensory pleasures), this is less clear.

Noël Carroll suggests that some works of literature are of greater social importance than others, and this is what permits us to elevate great literature above great works of genre fiction. Similarly, Lamarque and Olsen prefer works that treat perennial themes over those that discuss topical ones. But, as noted earlier, genre fiction and literature, as categories, are not distinguished by their thematic content or social importance. Some works of serious literature are highly topical and not very richly drawn; some works of genre fiction treat perennial themes with seriousness and creativity.

What may be more helpful is a model defended by Ted Cohen. [25] Cohen notes that works of art turn their audiences into communities. Some communities are narrow, and some are broad. Broad communities, he says, are formed either "because the work has great depth or because it is pretty much all surface." [26] So we may prefer books that give rise to broad communities, as well as those that engender narrow, but deep ones. Different kinds of communities, he argues, have different values. Some communities, and presumably this is the case with the communities of enjoyment that form around great works of literature, are more enduring, as they are based on more perennial connections and concerns. Some communities are small and create a sense of intimacy; they pick out what makes this group of readers special. We need, Cohen says, both kinds of communities. And we need both kinds of books.

NOTES

1. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1979), p. 8.

2. Edmund Wilson, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" in his *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1950), pp. 257-265.

3. Noël Carroll, "The Paradox of Junk Fiction," *Philosophy and Literature* 18 (1994): 225-41.

4. Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

5. Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1980).

6. Aristotle, *Poetics, with the Tractatus Coislinianus, Reconstruction of Poetics II, and the Fragments of the On Poets*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), lines 1453b1-13.

7. Peter Lamarque, "Expression and the Mask: The Dissolution of Personality in Noh," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989): 157-78.

8. Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 334-67.

9. Noël Carroll, "Introducing Film Evaluation," in Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill, eds., *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Edward Arnold, 2000), pp. 265-78.

10. James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008).

11. John Updike, *Terrorist* (New York: Knopf, 2006), pp. 3-4; quoted in Wood (*op. cit.*), pp. 27-28.

12. Wood, *How Fiction Works*, pp. 28-9.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

14. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 403.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 450.

16. See Robert Stone's book review, "Updike's Other America," in the *New York Times* (June 18, 2006).

17. Steven Marcus , "Introduction," in Dashiell Hammett, *The Continental Op.* (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. ix-xxix. Marcus's essay is discussed in Joel Black, "Crime Fiction and the Literary Canon," in Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley, eds., *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 76-89.

18. Marcus, "Introduction," p. xviii.

19. Chabon's claims are discussed in Andrew Hoberek, "Introduction: After Postmodernism," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53 (2007), pp. 233-47. I am grateful to Robert Chodat for drawing my attention to this discussion.

20. Michael Chabon, "The Editor's Notebook: A Confidential Chat with the Editor," in *McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales* (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. 6.

21. Carroll (2000), "Introducing Film Evaluation."

22. Elmore Leonard, *Get Shorty* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990), pp. 52-3.

23. Chabon, "Imaginary Homelands," in *Maps & Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands* (New York: Perennial, 2009), p. 176.

24. Chabon, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), pp. 1-2.

25. Ted Cohen, "High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 151-56.

26. Ibid., 156.

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THE AMERICAN EVASION OF PRAGMATISM: SOULS, SCIENCE, AND THE CASE OF WALKER PERCY

ROB CHODAT

In 1989 Walker Percy delivered the annual Jefferson Lecture under the title "The Fateful Rift: The San Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind." His topic wasn't what one might expect from a practicing fiction writer—the future of the novel, the place of art in modern society. It was instead a philosophical one that had absorbed him ever since, as a young man, he had completed medical school, studied psychiatry and pathology, spent time in a sanatorium fighting tuberculosis, and undergone several years of psychoanalytic therapy: namely, the status of the modern natural sciences. His claim was that the natural sciences work well when seeking "to understand things and subhuman organisms and the cosmos itself," but grow muddled when they try "to understand man, not man's physiology or neurology or his bloodstream, but man qua man, man when he is peculiarly human."[2] This confusion is evident, Percy argued, not only in fields such as linguistics, which "is about the sounds people

make," but also in anthropology and sociology, where "rites" and "social roles" are described in the vocabulary of the natural sciences, their "reality" identified with measurable spatio-temporal properties (FR 276). A "coherent science of man," said Percy, would by contrast allow us to perceive "another kind of event" in the world, "quite as natural a phenomenon, quite as observable," focusing attention not on the "dyadic" relations between things and an interpreter, but on the three-fold or "triadic" relation between things, an interpreter, and another interpreter. These triadic relations ground our shared routes of habit and speech and make us members of a community rather than mere animals instinctively uttering noises. Such relations may not be as observable as brain cells or pieces of copper, but are nonetheless "as real as a cabbage or a king or a neuron" (FR 287), and are evident in our capacity to "assert a proposition," to identify something as a "flower" or "peach." These capacities constitute, said Percy, "a different sort of reality" that "lies at the heart of all uniquely human activity," a "nonmaterial, non-measurable entity" (FR 287).

The hero of Percy's essay, the figure credited with laying out a "coherent science of man," was Charles Sanders Peirce. Percy had encountered Peirce as early as 1947, when the editor Julius Friend gave him a copy of *The Unlimited Community*, a book Friend had co-authored a decade earlier. At the time, of course, Peirce's work was mostly the province of what the young Richard Rorty termed "neo-Pythagorean hedgehogs," and it stayed that way even after Percy wrote two extended pieces on Peirce, "A Triadic Theory of Meaning" and "A Theory of Language," in the early 1970s.[3] As their titles imply, these essays focus on questions of semantics and interpretation, but in the 1980s Percy began to attribute more far-reaching significance to Peirce. The most visible evidence is *Lost in the Cosmos* (1983), where he interrupts a series of elaborately imagined multiple-choice questions about modern moral psychology with a forty-page "intermezzo" on Peircian semiotics, extending it into regions "which semioticists, for whatever reason, are not accustomed to regard as a proper subject of inquiry, i.e., not texts and other coded sign utterances, but the self which produces and hears sign utterances" (83). Percy's immersion in Peirce continued when, after publishing *Lost in the Cosmos*, he received a fan letter from Kenneth Laine Ketner, a leading Peircian hedgehog who taught at Texas Tech University. The two men corresponded for almost five years, with letters almost exclusively devoted to the exegesis of Peirce, and Ketner felt confident enough about Percy's grasp of the philosophical issues that he invited the novelist to lecture to the Peirce Society in 1987. Percy in turn sent drafts of "The Fateful Rift" to Ketner, who responded with detailed criticisms and suggestions, and it was during their one face-to-face meeting, on the afternoon before the Jefferson Lecture, that Percy suggested Ketner write a biography of Peirce. This eventually became Ketner's idiosyncratic *His Glassy Essence: An Autobiography of Charles Sanders Peirce*, published in 1998, eight years after Percy's death.[4]

Given all this, it's only appropriate that scholars have begun to pay attention to Percy's Peircian strains. Most thorough in this regard is John F. Desmond, who has focused extensively on Peirce's and Percy's interest in medieval debates over realism and nominalism—debates that both men saw as the starting point of modernity.[5] Yet even as essays such as "The Fateful Rift" have won renewed attention, even as Percy's writings and letters on Peirce have been collected and published, even as critics have unearthed allusions to "triadic" and "dyadic" relations running through his fiction, one thing is notable for its absence: neither in Percy's work, nor in Desmond's discussions of it, nor in Percy's lengthy correspondence with Kenneth Ketner, does the term *pragmatism* play any significant role. Nor, similarly, does the name of William James, Peirce's longstanding friend, interlocutor, and occasional patron. And Percy's rare references to John Dewey, Peirce's student at Johns Hopkins and the third pillar of classical pragmatism, are brusque and dismissive: Dewey is accused, for instance, of thinking that "science was work toward the pursuit of truth and art was play in the interests of recreation" (qtd. Samway, *Percy* 277).[6] All these absences and dismissals are notable because Peirce has long been identified as the most original member of the early Metaphysical Club and the figure who developed pragmatism into a full-fledged philosophical position. They are notable moreover because Percy's writing, and especially his later writing on Peirce, coincides with the revival of pragmatism that began in the 1970s and has continued across a broad range of thinkers to this day—a revival of which Percy himself was aware, thanks largely to Ketner, who recommended the then-recent work of Rorty and Hilary Putnam and also sent him a copy of *Post-Analytic Philosophy,* the 1985 collection of essays edited by Cornel West and John Rajchman.[7]

In short, Percy brushed up quite closely with what Roberto Unger, updating a familiar claim, has recently called the American "national philosophy,"[8] yet both Percy's fiction and nonfiction seem entirely untouched by any conscious debt to it. In and of itself, this hardly sets Percy apart. Affinities to existentialism and so-called French theory aren't hard to spot among authors of the last half-century, and have earned a great deal of critical attention, but the same has never been true of pragmatism. It's telling that when Ross Posnock, who has done more than anyone to unearth pragmatism's connections to twentieth-century fiction, turns to a contemporary novelist such as Philip Roth, pragmatism as an influence and context recedes into the background.[9] But pragmatism's absence in Percy's work is importantly different, given not only his obvious talent for philosophical fiction but also his unusual proximity to a prominent segment of the pragmatist tradition. Recalling, then, another Cornel West title, we might find ourselves asking: why did Percy evade pragmatism—"evade," if not in the sense of deliberate rejection, then at least in the sense of unconscious neglect or indifference?

Perhaps it was pragmatism's reputation. Josiah Royce associated pragmatism with the "efficiency doctrine" of late Victorian America –an effort to avoid "the responsibility of being too thoughtful" [10] — and early European critics brought comparable charges, dismissing it as a philosophy "from the land of the dollar," a product of "American cultural barbarity," and "the counterpart of modern industrialism." [11] With pragmatism's revival have come renewed criticisms, and sour associations have attached to it so routinely that, in *Middle Passage* (1990), Charles Johnson could have a character criticize the greed and single-mindedness of his father, a ruthless businessman, by invoking one of James's most famous dicta: "material success is a pretty tyrannical proof for one's point of view. Truth is what *works*, pragmatically, in the sphere of commerce." [12] Even thinkers who identify strongly with pragmatism express reservations. West praises its "unequivocally ameliorative impulse" but criticizes its typical emphasis on middle-class professionals, and Unger warns us against embracing a "shrunken pragmatism," one that too easily devolves into apologies for the market and stale forms of representative democracy. [13]

Percy can indeed be understood as contributing to these moral and political criticisms, but in what follows I want to start with a somewhat different reason for his avoidance of pragmatism, one suggested by the terms of his Jefferson Lecture. At the center of "The Fateful Rift" is the question of which vocabulary most properly describes human thought and action: that used for "things and subhuman organisms and the cosmos" itself, the specialized terminology employed by chemists and biologists and physicists; or the language of purposes and beliefs, the everyday terms we use for understanding behavior, making assertions, speaking to one another, communicating? "The Fateful Rift" is, in other words, an essay in the philosophy of mind, and it was the position Percy carved for himself in this debate that allows us to understand why he neglected pragmatism even as it was making its high-profile comeback. To say how, I'll begin by situating Percy's claims next to those of certain prominent recent pragmatists and in section two turn to Percy's third novel, *Love in the Ruins* (1971), which expresses a deep familiarity with the questions pragmatists address but eschews their answers. My final section will sketch some reasons why the anti-pragmatist picture of mind implied in Percy's novel can stand in for other fiction written since pragmatism's revival. My hope is that knitting together this set of problems and figures will help illuminate how the split that has marked pragmatism from the beginning—a split that led an irritable Peirce to distinguish his views as "pragmaticist"—has persisted, and extends beyond the seemingly insular debates of contemporary philosophers. [14] In the process, I'll try not only to clarify why pragmatism's critics have often reacted to it with a combination of loathing and yawns, but also to speculate on the general relationship between pragmatism and modern fiction, and thereby address one distinctly American chapter in the longstanding ancient quarrel.

I. "Thinking" of Spain

Pragmatism's revival originated in debates about the mind. Why here? One answer is that, during the enormous expansion of research universities after World War II, tremendous developments were seen in brain science, computer science, and linguistics—developments that, as Alan Richardson said in 1998, constitute "the central story of Anglo-American intellectual life from the 1950s to the present."[15] It may be true, as Richardson also ruefully remarked, that literary critics of the postwar period were largely indifferent to these developments, but the same can hardly be said of Anglo-American philosophers. Analytic philosophy's disciplinary allegiance to logic and science, when fused with philosophy's traditional concern for mind-body questions, made it unusually well-positioned to reflect upon new empirical research into cognition and the brain, and by the 1960s "philosophy of mind" had come to the center of the field. The topic was therefore a natural place for philosophers of a pragmatist disposition to stake their ground.[16] And in the hands of thinkers like Richard Rorty and Daniel Dennett, two figures who from an early stage recognized their shared influences and concerns, the result was what Bjorn Ramberg calls a "post-ontological" understanding of the mind. Rorty and Dennett, in other words, were two of the most important figures hoping to avoid, as Ramberg puts it, the claim that the mind is *really* "something physical or material" or *really* "something non-material or non-physical."[17]

Such an interpretivist tightrope is at the heart of Dennett's first book, *Content and Consciousness* (1969), which Rorty discussed in two papers of the early 1970s and which focused on an antinomy at the heart of post-WWII philosophical debate. On the one hand, minds must be matter, continuous with the rest of the physical universe; believing otherwise would lend credence to poltergeists and magic potions. On the other hand, the activities associated with minds clearly seem unlike the motions of *mere* matter: the laws of physics seem self-evidently applicable to molecules and planets, but much less so when we say someone wrote a political constitution or painted the Sistine Chapel. What do we mean, then, when we say that John had a *thought* about Spain and a *wish* to visit it, but then made a *decision* not to go? Our grammar treats these italicized terms as objects, but it would be odd to try to locate them alongside other objects in time and space.[18]

As my opening sketch of "The Fateful Rift" suggests, this was precisely the antinomy that riveted Percy, whose shift in the 1940s from medical scientist to budding novelist occurred just as the cognitive and computational sciences were being inaugurated. Like his younger pragmatist contemporaries, Percy starts by distinguishing materialist descriptions of thought and behavior, which equate minds with "things and subhuman organisms," "our physiology or neurology," from intentionalist descriptions, which associate minds with the thoughts, beliefs, desires, and other mental states we describe in everyday speech. "*There is,*" announces

Percy in a sentence at the end of his essay, "*a difference between the being-in-the-world of the scientist and the being-in-the-world of the layman*" (FR 290). It is the scientist's "being-in-the-world" that allows her to describe planets and bacteria, "things and subhuman organisms," but the "being-in-the-world" of the layman occupies what Percy calls a "different sort of reality," resting upon the linguistic and social ties that constitute a "non-material, non-measurable entity." And what holds true of our triadic relationships also goes for us as individuals. A "material substance cannot name or assert a proposition," which accordingly means, Percy concludes, that "the initiator of a speech act" is also something that the natural sciences are incapable of recognizing: "The agent is not material." Examining triadic relations and agents can indeed be "scientific"; these phenomena are as "grounded" on "empirical observation and the necessities of scientific logic" as anything studied by chemists and physicists (FR 287). But they constitute a distinctive *kind* of science, a "science of man" as opposed to a science of the natural world. Far from being just the study of causal relations, notes Percy, "science" in the "root sense of the word" means "the discovery and knowing of something which can be demonstrated and verified within a community" (FR 271-72).

Pragmatists like Dennett and Rorty join Percy in warning against reductivism and what Dennett has derided as "gratuitously strong forms of materialism."[19] Consider the vast stage-setting required for a child to grasp that John is "thinking of Spain." Any number of behaviors could make such a state manifest: John could be standing near a map of Western Europe, reading about General Franco, talking with a Spanish friend—or staring distractedly into space, or casually preparing a four-iron on the eighteenth hole. No *one* of these behaviors correlates with any *one* mental state, so the language-learner will have to comprehend a huge range of other things before understanding that such a thought is occurring. And if we were super-physicists charting all the micro-physical movements in John's body, we would likewise notice an infinite number of cellular, molecular, and atomic motions that could occur while he is "thinking about Spain."[20] But if Percy and the pragmatist agree on these points, they differ over the question of just *why* and *how* such intentional states differ from physical states. The key to the pragmatist view is summed up in Dennett's notion of the "intentional stance," a phrase that Rorty happily adopted. The intentional stance is the attitude we adopt toward entities whenever assigning beliefs and desires that will allow us to make effective and efficient sense of them. What something is made of, what goes on inside it, whether it has consciousness: the Cartesian tradition has taken such questions to distinguish the minded from the mindless. But in pragmatist eyes, the real question is what purposes the concept of "mind" serve, hence how we identify mental states in the first place. To do *this,* we start from the "outside" and judge whether an entity's perceptible behavior seems complex enough to warrant positing a set of mental states motivating it. If, to take an oft-used example, we want to know why the chess-playing computer moves a rook rather than a pawn, we can check its

wires or the programmer's diagrams, but it's a lot less messy and time-consuming if we simply say that it *thinks* or *believes* that playing a rook is a wise tactic. [21]

"Thoughts" and "beliefs" are part of the repertoire of our so-called "folk psychology," and when Rorty and Dennett claim such folk-psychological states are ascribed rather than found, they don't mean they're ascribed arbitrarily. Local explanations and predictions are fit—more or less and much of the time—against a perceived larger background of purposes. Foresters sometimes say that trees "want" water or plants "hope" light is around the corner, and nothing in principle distinguishes these "wants" and "hopes" from those of the computer moving the rook. In both cases ascriptions are constrained by our desire (understood, for pragmatists, always in evolutionary terms) to regard entities as minimally rational. Given the tree's genetic constitution, saying it "wants" more light *works*, i.e., has high predictive value. [22] And for pragmatists, what goes for trees and computers also goes for human beings, the most fantastically intricate entities we encounter. Distinguishing beliefs from merely simulated "beliefs," desires from "desires," is irrelevant to gauging and predicting the perceptible behavior of embodied persons—including ourselves in our self-reflexive moments. The decision to adopt the intentional stance in any of these cases, says Dennett, "is pragmatic, and is not intrinsically right or wrong" (*Brainstorms* 7). Pragmatic, that is, rather than metaphysical: to attribute intentional states to a computer, tree, or person is to say exactly nothing about what "actually" underlies their behavior or whether someone is "really" at home inside. Which, as Rorty says, frees us from treating "the mind as the last bastion of intrinsicality." [23]

What Percy, then, dramatically calls "*a difference between the being-in-the-world of the scientist and the being-in-the-world of the layman*" is for Rorty and Dennett simply a difference in how we talk. Different descriptions for different circumstances; the scientist speaks one way in the lab and another at a family dinner. Following Quine, Rorty and Dennett readily accept that that such a view makes the language of intentionality an "essentially dramatic idiom": beliefs and desires provide a rough and ready way of saying how and why an entity behaved *before*, *during*, and *after*. [24] But from this they draw few ontological conclusions, either about our mental states or about the narratives that make them manifest. It is sometimes genuinely useful, they say, to describe the events in John's brain: talking less about "John" than about a jostle of parallel processes in a particularly sophisticated organ, a range of micro-systems that operate semi-independently from one another and are perceptible only through sophisticated technology. At other times it's genuinely useful to tell stories about an entire embodied person, to highlight the relative unity of John within some relatively circumscribed environment and some relatively delimited set of prior events, and accordingly to posit mental states such as "belief" and "desire." Which way *really* captures John's mind? Which view, as I phrased it at the start, most "properly" describes human thought and action? Contemporary pragmatists

say: it all depends. Percy, by contrast, believes not only that this question has a clear answer, but that Peirce provides it. Human beings represent a break in the universe, their "triadic" relationships a cleft in the order of being, and our narratives about John's thoughts can more or less accurately depict this reality. To claim that the distinctions between trees, computers, and humans reflect merely our descriptions and habits is to miss what is most essential about each of them.[25]

II. Shoring the Soul Against the Ruins

In chapter six of *Principles of Psychology*, James examines what he calls the "material monad" theory of mind, which tries to describe how consciousness emerges from the array of physical systems identified by nineteenth-century science. Each brain cell, the theory went, has its own consciousness, but a person's particular consciousness is "attached" to one particular cell (or group of cells). This "pontifical" or "arch" cell may be physically influenced by the surrounding cells, but nevertheless stands apart, the "center of gravity of the whole system." In response James notes that (empirically) no cell or cell group seems more central in the brain than any other, and that (conceptually) the theory creates an infinite regress: if cells have consciousness, why not say their molecules do as well, or even their atoms? In short, he concludes, such materialistic and "anti-spiritualistic" claims about consciousness ultimately do no more explanatory work than, as he puts it, "that well-known spiritual agent in which scholastic psychology and common-sense have always believed"—namely, "the Soul." Some people, James remarks, treat the mind as "the mystery of the Unknowable"; others treat it as "as a kind of stuff or material, to be measured out in great or small amount." But neither view warrants our undivided endorsement. As he says in the opening pages of *Principles*, when we "strive rigorously to simplify the phenomena" in these dichotomizing ways, "we soon become aware of inadequacies in our method."[26]

One way of summing up what I've said so far is that both Percy and pragmatism resist the idea that human thought is a measurable "kind of stuff of material," but that pragmatism's most important contemporary inheritors have done so by endorsing James's ontological neutrality. They acknowledge our different descriptions of mind but resist reifying these differences into separate realms of "reality." Hence Dennett lauds "the sort of anti-essentialism that is comfortable with penumbral cases and the lack of strict dividing lines"; hence Rorty praises "James's joy in the fuzziness of the pragmatist's view of things, its lack of sharp outlines."[27] I cite *Principles of Psychology* here, however, because James allows us to take the discussion a crucial step further. In "The Fateful Rift" Percy invokes a cluster of terms to describe the purposeful entity that remains unsullied by science: sometimes it is "self," "ego," or "psyche"; Heidegger's "*Dasein*" is cited as a viable option (FR 290); and as I noted earlier, special distinction is given to "agent," the thing that initiates speech acts yet remains "not material."

But another term for this entity is what James, with mild rebuke, calls "that well-known spiritual agent" assumed by "scholastic psychology and common-sense" alike. Particularly after Percy converted to Catholicism in the 1940s, it was this concept—"the Soul"—that played the most crucial role in his thinking, licensing him to address what "The Fateful Rift" calls our ultimate concern: "man falling prey to the worldliness of the world, and man as pilgrim seeking his salvation" (FR 291).

In his essay Percy seems to recognize that soul-talk introduces a new and importantly different region of thought than "ego" or "agent," and he snaps to an abrupt conclusion once he introduces it: "But that's a different story" (FR 291). But the soul is decidedly *not* a different story in *Love in the Ruins*, a novel that not only challenges pragmatism's instrumentalism but that does so by freely amplifying the psychological into the theological. Published just a year before Rorty's first articles on Dennett, *Love in the Ruins* is part moral allegory, part vaudeville act, and was characterized by Percy as a "futuristic satire set in the United States somewhere around 1983." [28] The narrator is Dr. Tom More, a forty-four year-old lapsed Louisiana Catholic whose life has collapsed since his daughter Samantha died of neuroblastoma five years earlier. Since her death, More has been abandoned by his wife, become an alcoholic, maintained various erotic affairs, stayed for several months in a mental institution, and lost most of his professional reputation. All of these things make More acutely aware of the gulfs separating him from his sixteenth-century namesake: "Why can't I follow More's example, love myself less, God and my fellowman more, and leave whisky and women alone?" [29] Political chaos compounds his malaise: the U. S. has moved into the fifteenth year of a war with Ecuador; race fights against race, city against city; and electoral politics has fractured between the Knotheads and the Lefts (descendents of the Republican and Democratic parties respectively). At the start of the novel, the country is said to be on the brink of "catastrophe," falling into chaos, possibly (speculates More) as God's retribution for centuries of slavery. "The U. S. A. didn't work!" he announces in the opening chapter. "Is it possible that from the beginning it never did work? that the thing always had a flaw in it, a place where it would shear, and that all this time we were not really different from Ecuador or Bosnia-Herzegovina, just richer" (56-57).

These "futuristic" features of the text are, however, nothing compared to the device that stands at the center of the plot, and which More presents as the solution to the catastrophes crowding around him: a machine he christens the "Qualitative Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer." The Lapsometer, says More in the opening pages, will redeem his increasingly directionless life and prevent the collapse of what he calls "the Christ-forgetting Christ-haunted death-dealing Western world" (3). It will do so not by solving hunger or adding to the material achievements of the world, but by diagnosing the spiritual ills that, in his eyes, plague

modernity. "These are bad times," announces More, with sicknesses that are "psychic rather than physical"; modernity has inflamed "the secret ills of the spirit" and rived "the very self from itself" (5). One particularly pressing symptom, as More sees it, is what he calls—echoing Pascal—"angelism" and "bestialism": the tendency for modern people to live either purely as mind, abstracting themselves from their condition, falling into self-consciousness, disengaging from social existence, or purely as body, embracing an entirely material existence and treating themselves merely as the loci of creaturely appetites. The Lapsometer will act, says More, as "the first caliper of the soul" (107), allowing patients to grasp concretely the spiritual ills that burden them. It will, as he says, provide "the very means of inoculating persons" against the extremes of angelism and bestialism (5), and "diagnose the maladies that poison the wellsprings of man's hope" (7).

The idea for the Lapsometer is double-sided. It originated, says More, in his one moment of scientific glory up to that point, a discovery he had made twenty years earlier when, following a chemical accident at Tulane University, he uncovered a direct link between Heavy Sodium or Chloride levels in people's bloodstream and sudden behavioral changes in the local populations. The Lapsometer builds on this early correlation, but now, instead of examining a patient's bloodstream, More examines the brain waves of patients to assess their attitudinal and behavioral dispositions. Using a prototype of the device (specially constructed for him by Osaka Instruments in Japan), More waves a hair-dryer-shaped receiver over the head of a patient and measures the electrical activity of "a pinhead-sized area anywhere in the brain: in the cortex, the pineal body, the midbrain—wherever" (29). The whole procedure takes about three minutes, and the results are registered on a decimal scale. So, for instance, the "deep pineal" area of Charlie Parker, the local golf pro, is measured at a phenomenally low 0.1 micromillivolts at one point (38) but a robust 6 mmv a few weeks later (45); the Brodmann 32 area of a graduate student registers at 7.6 mmv (34); the hypothalamus of Dusty Rhodes, a local proctologist, clocks in at 7.9 mmv (86); and so forth, through all the various characters More tests (which includes most people he meets). All these examinations and calculations demonstrate what More presents to us at one point as the motto of the empirical mind: "Observe, measure, verify: here's the business of the scientist" (190).

At the same time, however, Percy's narrator is, as he says, "after bigger game" than mere electrical activity, or even a set of broadly characterized dispositions. As one skeptic puts it, noting the name for his machine, the Lapsometer is designed to "measure the uh depth of the fall" (205). Or, as a more enthusiastic patient puts it, More wants to "register the knotheadedness of the Knotheads, the nutty objectivity of the scientists, and the mad spasms of the liberals" (52). Thus when he measures the activity of Charlie Parker's deep pineal region, he takes himself to be computing what he calls the "site of inner selfhood" (38). The

graduate student's Brodmann 32 area indicates not only 7.6 mmv of electrical activity, but also the fact that he has, in More's words, "so abstracted himself from himself and from the world around him … that he cannot, so to speak, enter the lovely ordinary world" (34). A young woman has an unusually high reading on her temporal lobe, which normally indicates "singular concrete historical awareness, vivid childhood memories," but exhibits even more activity in her parietal lobe, "the site of ahistoric perceptions that are both concrete and abstract" (54). Dusty Rhodes's 7.9 hypothalamus reading is taken to indicate a "powerful, frequently satisfied, but indiscriminate sexual appetite," which reveals that he's having an illicit affair with one of his secretaries (86-87). And the pineal region of Colley Wilkes, the chief encephalographer at the hospital where More stays, elicits "good readings at layer I, little or nothing at layer II"—classic symptoms, says More, of "a self successfully playing at being a self that is not itself" (112).

In short the Lapsometer attempts to correlate the two competing models of mind that I earlier said constitute a basic antinomy: the close-up views of the brain scientist, focusing on neural and other physical processes and privileging talk of cortexes and pineal regions, and a broadly holistic view in which we talk about intentional states, behavioral habits, "selves," "egos," and—if upgraded into a theological register—"souls" and "spirits." "My good luck came," says Tom More, "when I stumbled into a way of measuring the length and breadth and motions of the very self" (106-7). And for at least a good portion of the novel, More's methods of "measuring" are granted a degree of legitimacy. Dusty Rhodes, for one, does indeed seem to betray guilt about his secret affairs, and the graduate student is "abstracted" enough to have grown physically estranged from his wife. More's most striking diagnosis comes in the case of Mr. Ives, a retiree who has silently refused to participate in shuffleboard and other activities at the Golden Years Senior Settlement in Tampa. From the behaviorist point of view, expressed by one of More's hospital colleagues, Mr. Ives has clearly suffered a stroke and suffers from "senile psychopathy and mutism" (159), making him a prime candidate for the Happy Isles Permanent Separation Center—a euthanasia clinic. The Lapsometer, however, allows More to examine Mr. Ives's "medio-temporal region, near Brodmann 28," and to conclude that the man's "pineal selfhood" is perfectly intact and that his true problem is simply that he's "too damn mad to talk" (160). In an uproarious public debate with the behaviorist, More gets Mr. Ives to break out of his mutism and discuss his earlier life as a linguist, in particular his experiences deciphering a row of glyphs that belonged to a proto-Creek culture and hitherto never interpreted. [30]

Yet for all this apparent success, Tom More is ultimately a less than wholly reliable narrator. As Binx Bolling says of himself in *The Moviegoer*, More is "on to something" (13), struggling to resist the "despair" of a deadened life and fractured social existence, but what he is "on

to" brings him for most of the novel—like Binx again—into dubious and ethically troubling territories. [31] And the limitations of the narrator's perspective ultimately reflect the limitations of his invention. For one thing, More confesses to "feeling a bit like a phrenologist" while using the Lapsometer (32), and the novel includes a number of intelligent scientists who raise thoughtful doubts about his invention. Colley Wilkes, for example, is happy to use the machine to locate "brain tumors and such" (29), but finds More's talk of souls and spirits to be altogether "too metaphysical": "I'll stick to old-fashioned tumors and hemorrhages" (108). Similarly, Dusty Rhodes wonders whether correlating "wave patterns" with emotions isn't simply "subjective," and if there isn't "a lot of room for interpretation" in drawing the body-spirit correlations More wants to draw (84). [32]

The machine also suffers from guilt by association. For the character who makes the most use of the Lapsometer is not Tom More, but a comically satanic figure named Art Immelman. Immelman introduces himself to More as a coordinator between private and public funding agencies, tempting More with abundant financial support, but over the course of the novel he grows into a deceptive Mephistophelian character, mysteriously appearing out of the blue (often accompanied by the smell of brimstone) and flattering More with promises of the Nobel Prize. Immelman claims that the Lapsometer could not only diagnose people's spiritual ills, but also cure them outright—and indeed, with just a slight adjustment to the device, Immelman winds up trying just that, waving the machine over randomly chosen victims, causing massive psychological changes, and worsening the social chaos that More had hoped the Lapsometer would prevent. Far from moderating the excesses of people's disorders, the Lapsometer ignites a wildfire of sexual abandon among Immelman's victims, generating what one frightened character likens to "the St. Vitus's dance in the Middle Ages" (241). [33]

It is these sorts of failures that lead Tom More in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, the 1987 sequel to *Love in the Ruins*, to say that his ambitions earlier in life were "grandiose, even Faustian," and that the idea of "striking pacts with the Devil to save the world" was "nuts." [34] What most undermines the legitimacy of the Lapsometer, however, is the narrative structure of *Love in the Ruins* as a whole. More expresses his highest hopes for the machine in the opening pages of the text, when he assures his fellow Americans that he will redeem them: "I can save the terrible God-blessed Americans from themselves! With my invention! Listen to me" (58). Immediately after saying this, however, More notes that he is very sleepy, and decides to take "one little catnap" (58)—which implies that the bulk of the story we subsequently read is in fact a dream. When More awakes toward the end of the novel, having imagined the story we've just read, his attitude toward the Lapsometer has dramatically changed. He still sees the world as "broken, sundered, busted down the middle" (382-83), and still claims to be less concerned with "motor and sensory areas" than with "angelism, bestialism, and other

perturbations of the soul" (390). But he now realizes that his dissolute life of the previous five years has been a failed response to the death of his daughter, and that he has taken her death as a justification for selfishness. He has taken, he says, "a secret satisfaction" in her death, indulged a "delectation of tragedy, a license for drink, a taste of both for taste's sake," all evidence that at some level he was "not above enjoying" her suffering (374). Accordingly, the twenty-page epilogue of the novel, titled "Five Years Later," describes him returning to the Catholic rites he'd abandoned and happily wed to his former secretary, with whom he now has two children. Whereas the Lapsometer was invented on Christmas Eve, suggesting that the machine will replace the good news of Christ's arrival, the final section of the novel takes place on Christmas Day. [35] The final words of the text show More preparing a Christmas meal and then enticing Ellen into taking a nap with him, "not under a bush or in a car or on the floor or any such humbug as marked the past peculiar years of Christendom, but at home in bed where all good folk belong" (403).

Love in the Ruins, then, is a drama of two competing vocabularies, one of which encourages us to believe that the "breadth and motions of the very self"—cast in either psychological or theological terms—can be calculated down to the micromilivolt, and the other of which views such aspirations as conceptually muddled and morally hubristic. In the novel's final pages, the language of quantification drops away like a bad dream and is replaced by the discourse of the Catholic Church, which will shepherd the soul toward Christ. Nowhere does the novel suggest that these two vocabularies be reconciled or brought to a truce. Like Tom More, the reader has to choose: either reduce the self to brain waves and Brodmann areas, or describe the self as an immaterial agent, one constituted by the "non-measurable" reality of triadic relations. Whereas More begins by contriving what he calls the "first caliper of the soul" (107), he ends by seeking penance from his priest, expressing shame for his sins, intent on "showing a bit of ordinary kindness to people" and doing what he can "for our poor unhappy country" (399)—even donning a sackcloth as public penance. [36]

Contrast all this with recent pragmatist accounts of religion. Rorty, for one, has described pragmatism itself as a form of "romantic polytheism" that recognizes "there are diverse, conflicting, but equally valuable forms of human life," that "there is no actual or possible object of knowledge that would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs." If we view beliefs as habits of action, he says, we'll recognize that "the purposes served by action may blamelessly vary," and thus see God not as "One" or as "Kierkegaard's Wholly Other," but instead as "all the varied sublimities human beings come to see through the eyes that they themselves create." [37] For his part, Dennett has often been cast as a scientistic ideologue, particularly since *Breaking the Spell*, his 2006 book about religion, and it's true that what he calls his "materialist slogan" can sound reminiscent of a sneering Voltaire: "Yes, we

have a soul; but it's made of lots of tiny robots." But his affirmation here—"Yes, we have a soul"—deserves our attention as much as his deflation, for he uses it to clarify what he calls his own "secret to spirituality": keeping an "attitude of humble curiosity" and an "awestruck vision of the world," not insisting on an "immaterial soul" but staying "*centered,* and *engaged*" in the world around you.[38] While Rorty praises the "strong poems" that define human lives and cultures, Dennett proposes a more pantheistic allegiance to "The Tree of Life," a faith that doesn't force us to worship a "Being greater than which nothing can be conceived," but that recognizes the universe itself is something whose "magnificence" we should honor. "Is something sacred? Yes, say I.… This world is sacred."[39]

Pragmatists, in other words, have wanted to deny not that there is something holy about the world, only the claim that, as Dewey says in *A Common Faith* (1934), religious experience is "something specific," "a kind of experience that is marked off from experience as aesthetic, scientific, moral, political; from experience as companionship and friendship."[40] As I've been arguing, marking off—drawing tidy distinctions, staging either/or's—is precisely what *Love in the Ruins* is designed to do. It is precisely what leads a critic like John F. Desmond to say admiringly that Percy ridicules the effort to link "physical responses to psycho-spiritual states," that he fashions signs opening "Tom More's world … to the possibility of renewed links to the true semiotic-mystical community" (119). And it is precisely what leads V.S. Pritchett, in a more critical spirit, to spy a "sentimentalist" lurking in the novel's "hurricane of laughter."[41] Different as their responses are, Desmond and Pritchett are each intuiting an ambition Percy expressed in a letter to Kenneth Ketner written about two months before his Jefferson Lecture. He was, he confessed to his scholarly admirer, "not a student of Peirce," but only "a thief of Peirce": "I take from him what I want and let the rest go, most of it." And what he wanted, he said, was to use Peirce "as one of the pillars of a Christian apologetic," a way of getting his audience "open to 'news', of the singular (scandalous) event, the Jewish covenant, the Christian incarnation and news of same."[42] Six years before Percy delivered "The Fateful Rift," these efforts at a "Christian apologetic" created the series of forces options presented in *Lost in the Cosmos*, where answers to moral and political conundrums are neatly labeled "(a)" and "(b)" and followed by the stark command "*(CHOOSE ONE).*" But as I've argued, the wishes Percy outlines to Ketner were already present years earlier in *Love in the Ruins*, which, to recall Bjorn Ramberg's terms, asks us to see the mind as either *really* physical and material or *really* non-material and non-physical. In none of these cases is there any doubt about how readers are supposed to vote, and it may be telling that, while writing the novel, Percy had called it not *Love in the Ruins*, but *How to Make Love in the Ruins*.[43] For it is precisely the categorical note of this original title that makes Rorty, Dennett, and other

pragmatists balk, obscuring as it does the penumbral cases and fuzziness that they take to surround our blamelessly varied descriptive practices.

III. Ancestors and Descendents

In a recent essay, Mark Lilla has credited Michel de Montaigne with introducing a "personal" mode of philosophizing, one that directs attention away from first principles and toward the local, less generalizable, less systematic experiences of a particular life—one's daily routines, compulsions, pleasures, disappointments. For all his brilliance, says Lilla, Montaigne has "a disturbingly contemporary ring," for his this-worldly attention to ordinary concerns and habits makes him a progenitor to "the 'what, me worry?' school of philosophy" that was extended into the twentieth century, he says, by William James and Richard Rorty. To formulate his concern Lilla recalls criticisms of Montaigne offered by Pascal, who recognized, claims Lilla, "the human desire for something more," who saw that there is "something in us, or at least many of us," that "flees this mediocre life." Unlike Montaigne, and by extension James and Rorty, Pascal understood "the grandeur in our desire for transcendence," a desire that keeps us "dissatisfied with a mere animal existence." *L'homme passe l'homme*, says Pascal: man surpasses himself. [44]

Opposition to pragmatism has, as I noted earlier, a long and lively history, and Lilla's comments help us see both how the specific aversion I've identified in Percy fits into a larger intellectual history and how questions about mind and intentionality are hard to disentangle from questions about our moral and political goods. For one thing Lilla recalls a famous complaint by Chesterton, Percy's predecessor as a Catholic apologist: pragmatism may be a matter of human needs, but one of our first needs is to be something more than a pragmatist. For another he reminds us of how important Montaigne has been for certain contemporary pragmatists, most notably Stephen Toulmin, who sees Montaigne as having founded a truly modern philosophy that was disastrously obscured later by the Cartesian quest for certainty. But Lilla's comments are particularly suggestive when we consider Percy's confession, in a 1962 letter to Caroline Gordon, that his own "spiritual father" was Pascal, who originated the angelism/bestialism distinction at play in *Love in the Ruins* and who understood that "to be born, to live, is to be dislocated." A quick way of tying all these threads together would be to say that Pascal was to Montaigne what Peirce was to other pragmatists, and that Percy elected his affinities accordingly—needing, like them, to transcend the very scientific knowledge in which he had been steeped, and finding grandeur in the longing for transcendence. [45]

In the same letter to Gordon, Percy makes an observation that highlights just how such commitments have quite direct formal corollaries, and directed him toward particular kinds of fiction. "Actually I do not consider myself a novelist," he admitted, "but a moralist or

a propagandist. … [If I] kneel before the altar of Lawrence and Joyce and Flaubert, it is not because I wish to do what they did ….What I really want to do is to tell people *what they must do and what they must believe if they want to live.*[46] "Propaganda" and—Percy's word in his letter to Ketner—"apologetics": what sort of genres are these, particularly when they demand that we "flee this mediocre life"? Whatever else they may be, such forms are, as Percy recognizes, not quite what we typically think of as "novels." Over the course of its history and through all its permutations, the novel has been the genre most comfortable with what Lilla calls "this mediocre life," or what could less tendentiously be called the ordinary, the prosaic, the everyday, the unheroic, the no-longer-enchanted. The "long attention" that Montaigne claimed to pay to himself and his friends, the "countenances, humors, discourses" and "diverse and unconnected actions" that he sought to describe in his essays, eventually helped bring about Dorothea Brooke and Leopold Bloom. Yet Percy's sacral imagination makes him uneasy with these quotidian preoccupations, makes him fear that they will validate what Lilla terms "mere animal existence." Thus, as Lewis Lawson puts it, a text like *Love in the Ruins* strives to "go beyond realism, to use burlesque, pastiche, the absurd" in order to stretch our "range of vision" and challenge modernity's self-satisfactions. [47]

Percy has hardly been alone in employing this mode, of course, and the continued persistence of such forms, even after the heyday of postmodern experimentation in the 1960s and '70s, is arguably further evidence of how disconnected the revival of pragmatism has been from recent fiction. Again and again since pragmatism's revival we find texts that describe the mind in distinctly non-pragmatic ways, even if the results often look less like religious "apologetics" than one finds in Percy. Consider, for instance, the phenomena that N. Katherine Hayles has influentially described in her accounts of the posthuman. With, she says, the rise of cybernetics and computer science after World War II, the idea of "information" was gradually "de-materialized," increasingly seen as a "quantifiable entity" that could be moved around from one physical instantiation to the next. And the result has been a growing equation between humans and computers, as well as expanding "fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality." [48]

Thus, in Hayles' most well-known case study, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) is structured around the idea that the human body is "data made flesh": the protagonist, Case, sees his body as mere "meat," and one of his main interlocutors, Dixie Flatline, has ceased to exist as a physical body; he lives now as a personality construct within the computer (*HWBP* 36). Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) begins from a similar presupposition, imagining that, like computers, human beings could be infected with computer viruses. In Stephenson's vision, says Hayles, "we really are nothing more than information-processing mechanisms that run what programs are fed to us" (*HWBP* 279), an equation manipulated in the novel by L.

Bob Rife, the Texas capitalist who creates a virus designed to decimate all forms of human autonomy. At the heart of both these texts is something very close to Tom More's belief that measurable nerve impulses are equivalent to mental or moral states. To see the "flesh" as an expression of "data," to level the distinction between humans and computers, is to say that intentional states are calculable and determinate entities, quantifiable into discreet units, "a kind of stuff or material," as James says, "to be measured out in great or small amount." Indeed, Gibson and Stephenson go a step beyond More's basic idea: machines in *Snow Crash* and *Neuromancer* do not merely read or calculate individual minds, but come to replicate or replace them entirely.

A similar idea runs through Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003), which dramatizes Marvin Minsky's claim, cited by Hayles, that we will soon be able to extract human memories from the brain and export them to computer disks. The novel revolves around a young billionaire currency trader who seeks to become, much like Dixie Flatline, "absorbed in streams of information" when he dies, his body made "redundant and transferrable," "convertible to wave arrays of information."[49] "Great men historically," remarks his Chief of Theory, "expected to live forever even as they supervised construction of their monumental tombs," but the great men of the contemporary world—those attuned to what the novel calls "the truth of the future" (65)—have other options available: "Why die when you can live on disk? A disk, not a tomb? An idea beyond the body" (105). Over the course of the novel this conflation between minds and data is repeatedly challenged, as the currency trader confronts what one character calls "the importance of the lopsided, the thing that's skewed a little bit" (200). Yet the trajectory of *Cosmopolis* as a whole is as anti-linear as any of DeLillo's novels, and in the end it's never fully clear whether the protagonist renounces his Minsky-like aspirations. Dying of a gunshot wound, he returns to the visions of technologized immortality that he had been imagining all along: "He'd always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass…. The idea was to live outside the given limits, on a disk, in data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void" (206).[50]

Or consider a final case, where quantification comes to permeate the vocabulary of a non-Western moral psychology, to even more absurdist effect than in the other texts. At the start of Jonathan Lethem's *Gun, with Occasional Music* (1994), a Chandler-inspired private detective named Conrad Metcalf asks a client for his card in order to check the man's so-called "karmic levels," an idea he explains to the reader this way: "When the Inquisitor's Office set your card at zero, it meant you couldn't get caught slamming the door to a public rest room without sinking into a negative karmic level. The sound of that door slamming would be the last anyone heard of you for a long time, or maybe ever."[51] One can increase one's karma points by doing good deeds—"helping old blind nanny goats across the street," say (10)—but a

dark fate awaits the "karmically defunct," who are sent to cryonic "ice boxes" for storage. Predictably enough, government inquisitors "stretch the truth about just how much they're taking off or adding to your card" (33), and glancing over a newspaper Metcalf sees photo-ops that testify to Stalinesque abuses of power: "the congressmen shaking hands with the special-interest groups, the Governor shaking hands with Karmic Achiever of the Month" (40). The karma cards of a P.I. are usually restored when they finish investigations (karma infringements being part of the job), but as Metcalf's own efforts to solve a case bring him ever closer to the heart of corruption, government officials turn against him. "I assumed," he thinks while meeting with an inquisitor, "that this was the part where they built me back up to an acceptable level as closure to the case. Sort of a payoff for swallowing their interpretation of events without gagging too loudly" (137). But such a payoff never arrives, and after beginning the novel with sixty-five karma points—"big enough to work with, but small enough that the boys wouldn't be tempted to penalize me in the spirit of fun anymore" (34)—Metcalf is himself consigned to cryonic storage. Only six years later is he released, sent out into the world like a piece of "karmic flotsam" with seventy-five new points on his card (211).

Unlike in the case of Percy, there is little evidence that Gibson, Stephenson, DeLillo, or Lethem has ever come close to engaging seriously with pragmatism. Yet they can all be seen as descending from Percy's text, each foregrounding comparable ideas of an ontologized mind.[52] To be sure, each one of these fictions is deeply ironic about the impulse to reify *Geist*, and each extends Percy's claim that his own novel was a "futuristic satire" about a society on the verge of "catastrophe." In all of them, the reification of our intentional lives is just the most alarming or preposterous instance of a more widespread objectification: reductionism, science, and technology have engendered in these worlds not the greatest happiness for the greatest number, but tremendous violence and injustice. And unlike in Percy, these more recent novels don't respond to this strong materialism with any obvious turn to religious "propaganda." No character wakes from a dream and stakes his life on the idea of an immaterial soul. Nevertheless they can be placed next to Percy insofar as they imagine no alternative to the two options that *Love in the Ruins* makes explicit. What generates their sharply critical edge, in other words, is an implicit claim that runs along these lines: first, something like *the soul* would be the only genuine alternative to a robust materialism; and second, since a virulent form of materialism has so obviously colonized our late modern lives, any conception of a soul—understood as a moral orientation, a spiritual aspiration, or even a psychology—can be treated only with dark irony. Thus these texts too, though more complete in their satire than Percy, "simplify the phenomena" in precisely the way that James had identified at the end of the nineteenth century. Their "anti-spiritualistic" conceptions of mind merely invert "the mystery of the Unknowable."

This sharp opposition between the "anti-spiritualistic" and the "Unknowable" is a version of the distinctions that Lilla associates with Pascal, and what's important about making these historical connections is that they underscore how deep the sources of unease run for figures like Percy—deeper, perhaps, than many forms of contemporary historicism are prepared to recognize. What is first and foremost "in the ruins" in the texts of Percy and others is not merely this or that local event, and not merely the post-WWII American nation, but a much broader historical phenomenon, as Tom More explains: "It's not even the U.S.A., it's the soul of Western man that is in the very act of flying apart HERE and NOW" (115). Whereas Dewey could praise Francis Bacon—Montaigne's younger admirer—as "the great forerunner of the spirit of modern life," Percy for one takes his bearings in the very scholastics Bacon repudiated. Recuperating this tradition leads him not only to Peirce, and not only to the debates about mind and language that Peirce helped shape, but also, in more desperate moments, to the "quasi-prophetic function" he set for himself as he began *Love in the Ruins*: to warn his readers, he says, "by speaking of last things—if not the Last Days of the Gospels, then of a possible coming destruction, of a laying waste of cities, of vineyards reverting to the wilderness." Much the same point could be made about Gibson, Stephenson, DeLillo, and Lethem, each of whom is clearly thinking about modernity's large-scale motions as well as its potential collapse—even if, more than Percy, they remain guarded about what should come in its wake. [53]

Pragmatism, too, has often seen itself is such world-historical terms, yet it has never been readily capable of, or interested in, the fevered all-or-nothing visions that such authors express. The "soul of Western man," for Rorty and Dennett as much as for James and Dewey, has occasionally experienced vertigo in its transition to modernity, but to say it is "in the very act of flying apart" is both to simplify a complex set of historical developments and to ignore the very real compensations that for them these developments entail. None of which means, of course, that pragmatists could never respect or even treasure the work of Percy and his literary descendents. They certainly could. [54] But to do so would require that they treat these texts more as cautionary tales or thought experiments than as viable predictions about what could or should come to pass. Pragmatists, that is, will be inclined to follow Kenneth Burke's lead and treat these texts as extended proverbs: vivid, protracted warnings about what to avoid when describing the mind, what dark fly-bottles we can enter when we're not careful in our accounts of cognition and intention. The texts will seem to be primarily what Burke referred to as proverbs of "admonition," [55] and pragmatists could appreciate them much in the way that devout Christians might appreciate the thoroughly fallen worlds of Poe or Cormac McCarthy. But like such a Christian, pragmatists will have trouble accommodating any claim that these texts depict the *most* important truths about us, or what things are *really* like, or what we *essentially* are or have become. An author, they will say, isn't mistaken for

writing a book like *Love in the Ruins*, only for believing too strictly in what it says: seeing it as more than an occasional satire, the expression of a mood, something to cast aside when it no longer serves. To read in this way, to see Percy's dystopian visions as mere conceits or his picture of mind as misleading and fanciful, will seem to some readers to ignore or diminish the claim that his and similar texts make upon us. Pragmatism will seem to be merely shrugging off our most urgent questions—are we fundamentally material creatures or are we something more?—with a casual "It all depends." And it will seem, in turn, curiously unresponsive to the drama of intensity and obsessiveness that so much modern art articulates, substituting potent ideals of spiritual perfection and salvation for weaker, meliorist ideals of intellectual growth and social progress. [56] How we understand the pragmatist revival of the last few decades, and whether we want it to shape the fiction of the future, depends on which of these ideals we ourselves prefer, or which we find convincing, which we think we need to believe in order to live, and how prepared we are to choose one. [57]

NOTES

1. *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (Picador, 1983), *passim.*

2. Percy, "The Fateful Rift: The San Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind," in *Signposts in a Strange Land: Essays*, ed. Patrick Samway (New York: Picador, 1991), 271; henceforth cited parenthetically page number as FR.

3. On Friend's book (co-authored with James Feibleman), see Patrick H. Samway, *Walker Percy: A Life* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1997), 148-49. Rorty's remark about Peirce scholars comes in "Pragmatism, Categories, and Language," *The Philosophical Review* 70 (1961), 199. According to Patrick H. Samway, "A Triadic Theory of Meaning" and "A Theory of Language" were originally conceived by Percy to be part of a book project; see *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Samway (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), xvi. For the completed versions of these essays, see Percy's *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do With the Other* (1975; New York: Picador, 2000).

4. For Laine and Percy's correspondence, see *A Thief of Peirce,* ed. Samway. I call Ketner's biography "idiosyncratic" here because, much like Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus,* he adopts the role of an editor who has discovered the papers of a forgotten genius and proceeds to piece together his narrative from Peirce's essays and fragments.

5. Desmond, *Walker Percy's Search for Community* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004). For an earlier discussion of this pairing, see J. P. Telotte, "Charles Peirce and Walker Percy: From Semiotic to Narrative," in *Walker Percy: Art and Ethics*, ed. Luc Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), 65-79. That realism/nominalism debates helped generate "modernity" is a claim made more recently in Michael Allen Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

6. As with Percy's reading of Peirce, I'm less concerned here with whether he gets Dewey right (he doesn't in this case, it seems to me) than what he takes Dewey to have represented. George Herbert Mead, often mentioned as the fourth major figure among early pragmatists, does earn a good deal of praise in Percy's nonfiction, in particular in the later essays of *The Message in a Bottle*; see, for instance, 255-58.

7. *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Cornel West and John Rajchman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). For this letter and recommendation, see *Thief of Peirce,* ed. Samway, 19-23.

8. Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.

9. See Posnock, *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). A partial exception here among post-WWII novelists is Ralph Ellison, who has rightfully been seen by critics—Posnock included—as having inherited a great deal from pragmatism. But Ellison's connection to pragmatism was mostly second-hand, coming through his mentor Kenneth Burke.

10. Royce, *William James and Other Essays on the Philosophy of Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 27-28. To be fair, Royce partially exempted James from this sour view of pragmatism, admiring as James did "those who are weak in the eyes of this present world—the religious geniuses, the unpopular inquirers, the noble outcasts" (35).

11. The Europeans cited here are Constantin Gutberlet, qtd. in Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 98; Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, volume 1, trans Neville Plaice et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 275; Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 49-50. A comparable early criticism is Georg Lukács's discussion of William James in *The Destruction of Reason* (1952).

12. Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage* (New York: Scribner, 1990), 160. For recent theoretical criticisms, see—to name only a handful of representative voices—Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 15; William Spanos, "American Studies in the Age of the 'World Picture': Thinking the Question of Language," in *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald Pease and Robyn Weigman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 395; Charles Altieri, "Practical Sense—Impractical Objects: Why Neo-Pragmatism Cannot Sustain an Aesthetics," in *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature: Pragmatism and Literary Studies*, ed. Winifried Flück (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), 124; Paul Churchland's discussion of Dennett in *Neurophilosophy At Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-17; Jürgen Habermas, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Brandom, 31-55; Martin Stone, "On the Old Saw, 'Every Reading of a Text is an Interpretation': Some Remarks," in *The Literary Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2004), 186-208.

13. West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 4; Unger, *Self Awakened*, 28, 6. The qualification Unger mentions here may lead one to ask if his utopian, romantic writing really does represent "pragmatism"; on this point, see Martin Stone's review of Unger's book in the Notre Dame Review of Philosophy, http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=10543 (accessed June 11, 2011). The literature on the pragmatist revival is

by now too large to enumerate here, but for a good sampling, see *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and the more recent collection *New Pragmatists*, ed. Cheryl Misak (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

14. For an overview of Peirce's relation to James, see Sami Pihlström "Peirce's Place in the Pragmatist Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce*, ed. Cheryl Misak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 27-57. For a sense of how the conflict among pragmatists has continued, see Misak's *Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

15. Richardson, "Brains, Minds, and Texts," *Review* 20 (1998), 39.

16. In her homage to Rorty after his death in 2007, Annette Baier asks what the arc of Rorty's thinking would've been had he started with analytic ethics rather than analytic philosophy of mind. Given what I've said here, one answer is that his work would've reached a smaller audience. See Baier, "Can Philosophers Be Patriots?" *New Literary History* 39 (2008), 121.

17. Ramberg, "Naturalizing Idealizations: Pragmatism and the Interpretivist Strategy," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 1.2 (December 2004), 3. The phrase "post-ontological" is foregrounded in Ramberg's "Post-Ontological Philosophy of Mind: Rorty Versus Davidson," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 351-70. Obviously neither Rorty nor Dennett emerged out of thin air, and the roots of their "post-ontological" conception of the mind lie in their engagement with Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars, among others. The idea that Rorty was a pragmatist from an early stage, rather than turning to it only after his "early" analytic phase, has been convincingly made both by Neil Gross, in *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), and by his lifelong friend Richard Bernstein, in "Richard Rorty's Deep Humanism," *New Literary History* 39 (2008): 13-27. Viewing Dennett as a pragmatist, as both Ramberg and I do, is somewhat controversial, but it's also a view that Dennett has sometimes encouraged. Though he has often declined Rorty's invitations to join Rorty's "we pragmatists," he has also cited William James as one of his "philosophical heroes" (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 20), and he has acknowledged that, along with Rorty, he is "really in the American pragmatist tradition, which supposes that even the highest reaches of philosophy are just an extension of the everyday world of practical matters." This last remark was made near the start (3:05) of a joint radio interview with Rorty on the WBUR-Boston radio program *The Connection* (July 27, 2000). Dennett reinforces his pragmatist inheritance when, shortly after this claim, he says that "the aspiration of finding some transcendental truths that are just above and beyond any other kind of truth that we might find" is ultimately just "a hoax." For a broader sense of the relationship between Dennett and Rorty, see their exchanges in *Rorty and His Critics*, 91-108; and in *Dennett and His Critics: Demystifying Mind*, ed. Bo Dahlbom (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 184-202, 232-34.

18. See Dennett, *Content and Consciousness* (1969; New York: Routledge, 1986), including his analogy between these intentional states and concepts such as "voice" and "sake," 6-18. Rorty's two early papers were "Dennett on Awareness," *Philosophical Studies* 23 (1972): 153-62, and "Functionalism, Machines, and Incorrigibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972): 203-20.

19. Dennett, *Brainchildren: Essays on Designing Minds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 120.

20. For one of Dennett's own vivid examples, see the discussion of stock brokers and Martians in *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 24-29; henceforth cited parenthetically as *IS*.

21. "Intentional stance" first appears in Dennett's "Intentional Systems," reprinted in *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 3-22; henceforth cited parenthetically as *Brainstorms*.

22. On trees and other natural objects, see Dennett's *Brainstorms*, 272-73.

23. Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Essays Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110. These pragmatists certainly wouldn't deny that we *do* make crucial distinctions between trees, computers, and humans, nor would they deny that our folk-psychological attributions are temporally and geographically variable. Their point is that our (current) moral indifference to laptops and moral concern for human beings arises from something other than what goes on *inside* these things. Indeed, "worthy of dignity" and "endowed with rights" are themselves, from this perspective, ascribed rather than found, and thus involve all the un-metaphysical strategies of the intentional stance.

24. W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 219.

25. It's worth noting here that the phrase "intentional stance" has in recent years begun to have a good career in literary studies, thanks largely to the rise of cognitivist criticism. In, for instance, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2006), Lisa Zunshine makes heavy use of the term as part of an effort to say how, when reading fiction, we deploy a "Theory of Mind" to make sense of characters and their behavior. We understand, say, why Peter Walsh is "positively trembling" when he re-encounters Clarissa Dalloway because we ascribe to him the state of "emotional excitement." Zunshine, however, adopts pragmatism's intentionalist vocabulary while wholly ignoring its philosophical motivations and consequences. Not only does the phrase "Theory of Mind" evoke what Dewey famously

condemned as a "spectator theory of knowledge," but she relies on the very inside/outside dichotomy that the term "intentional stance" was designed to make irrelevant: "other people's bodies are our pathways to their minds" (134), and accordingly intentional states are said to be "underlying" behavior (15), somewhere 'behind" (9, 23, 34) a perceptible body, "hidden" from sight (27). Such phrasings betray a level of reification that is surprisingly akin to what, as I've just suggested, one finds in Percy—though stripped for the most part of Percy's philosophical seriousness.

26. James, *Principles of Psychology,* vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt, 1890), 176-80, 2.

27. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991), 421; Rorty, *Truth and Progress,* 106.

28. Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land,* 247.

29. Percy, *Love in the Ruins* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1971), 23; henceforth cited parenthetically by page number.

30. Desmond takes this scene with Mr. Ives to be central to the novel; see *Walker Percy's Search,* 135-36.

31. This trajectory in Percy's first-person narrators reaches its highest pitch in his 1977 novel *Lancelot,* in which the title character's effort to avoid "despair" eventually results in maniacal violence against his wife.

32. Perhaps the most intelligent of these doctors is Max Gottlieb, who shares a name with the exemplary disinterested scientist in Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* (1925). On the connection to Lewis's text, see Lewis Lawson, *Following Percy: Essays on Walker Percy's Work* (Troy, NY: Whitsun, 1988), 165-77; and Mary G. Land, "Three Max Gottliebs: Lewis's, Dreiser's, and Walker Percy's View of the Mechanist-Vitalist Controversy," *Studies in the Novel* 15 (1983): 314-31.

33. Immelman's Mephistophelian nature becomes clear at the end when More prays to Sir Thomas More to "*drive this son of a bitch hence*" and Immelman immediately "disappears into the smoke" (376-77). The sexual abandon that ensues after Immelman starts using the Lapsometer is clearly meant as a parody of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, a social change that Percy treated skeptically throughout his fiction and nonfiction. Indeed, in many respects *Love in the Ruins* deserves a place next to Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) among the most mordant novels published in the immediate wake of the sixties, and it's no accident that, according to biographer Jay Tolson, Percy admired Bellow's book enormously. See Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992)*,* 360.

34. Percy, *The Thanatos Syndrome* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1987), 67.

35. Joseph Bizup, "Hopkins' Influence on Percy's *Love in the Ruins,*" *Renascence* 46 (1994), 250. Bizup, we should also point out, makes a good case for viewing the bulk of the novel as Tom More's dream.

36. To be sure, More's transformation is never fully completed. In the epilogue, he confesses various sins to his priest—lust, drunkenness, envy—and admits that he is still unsure he has "contrition and a firm purpose of amendment" (397). Yet the incompleteness of More's transformation is hardly a contradiction: full transformation would not be available on this earth, even to the most fervent believer.

37. Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29, 34, 41.

38. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell,* 302-3. For a view of Dennett as scientistic ideologue, see, for instance, Leon Wieseltier, "The God Genome," *New York Times Book Review* (February 19, 2006), 11. To briefly pick up a topic introduced earlier (see note 19), one could argue that Dennett's turn to religion is further evidence of his pragmatist inheritance. Religion is, of course, a topic that any adequate account of American life needs to address, and pragmatism's emphasis on the public consequences of philosophy has led many of its leading American figures to address it at length.

39. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon, 1996), 520.

40. Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 10.

41. Pritchett's remark is quoted in Tolson, *Pilgrim,* 358. For an even more hostile reading of Percy's dualisms, see Land, "Three Max Gottliebs," 327-28. For another reading attuned to Percy's dualisms, see Cleanth Brooks, "Walker Percy and Modern Gnositicsm," in *The Art of Walker Percy: Strategems for Being* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Statue University Press, 1979), 260-72.

42. Samway, *Thief of Peirce,* 130-31.

43. Tolson, *Pilgrim,* 354.

44. Lilla, "The Hidden Lesson of Montaigne," *New York Review of Books* 58.5 (March 24, 2011), 19-21.

45. Percy's remark to Gordon is quoted in Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins,* 300; his remark about being "dislocated" is found in *More Conversations With Walker Percy,* ed. Lewis A. Lawson and Victor A. Kramer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1993), 163. For Toulmin on Montaigne, see his *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); *Return to Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

46. Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins*, 300. For Chesteron's, see his *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), 64.

47. Lawson, *Following Percy*, 176. Montaigne's remarks are taken from his essay "Of Experience." I'm thankful to Michael Prince for asking me to think of these generic issues more explicitly.

48. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 19, 5. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *HWBP*.

49. DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* (New York: Scribner's, 2003), 104, 48. Henceforth cited parenthetically by page number.

50. This last passage from *Cosmopolis* is followed by a long paragraph in which the protagonist's aspirations seem to be put into doubt:

> But his pain [from the gunshot wound] interfered with his immortality. It was crucial to his distinctiveness, too vital to be bypassed and not susceptible, he didn't think, to computer emulation. The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. So much come and gone, this is who he was, the lost taste of milk licked from his mother's breast, the stuff he sneezes when he sneezes, this is him, and how a person becomes the reflection he sees in a duty window when he walks by. He'd come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain. (207)

It's true that this passage seems to cast doubt on the viability of any Minsky-like aspirations for immortality through technology—a feature that allowed James Wood, in his *New Republic* review, to see the text as taking a sentimental turn at the end. But it is notable here that all the items said here to tell the character "who he was"—and this winding passage goes on for another two-thirds of a page—are all *physical* characteristics rather than what we would be described variously as his "personality," "self," or "soul." Till the very end, in other words, he identifies himself first and foremost as a physical *thing*, one that may or may not be "translated" or "transferable" into other physical things. The passage thus reinforces what I've been calling the ontologizing tendencies of the text.

51. Lethem, *Gun, with Occasional Music* (Boston: Houghton, 1994), 10. Henceforth cited parenthetically by page number.

52. One could cite earlier texts that ontologize the mind in similar ways, even before the pragmatist revival of the early 1970s. Early Pynchon, say: midway through *V.* (1963), Benny Profane, struggling with the increasingly "inanimate" world of cold technology and warfare, timidly offers up the term "soul"—but is summarily dismissed by the automaton SHROUD, who scoffs, "What are you doing, getting religion?" Such an early case, however, only helps illustrate part of my point, which is that little seems to change in American fiction after pragmatism returns to the intellectual scene.

53. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (enlarged ed.; Boston: Beacon, 1948), 28; Percy, *Message in a Bottle*, 104. This is obviously not to say one couldn't contextualize Percy, for instance, in less expansive ways and describe his writing as a response to developments in southern race relations, postwar consumer capitalism, etc. But one would need first to reflect in detail on action, intention, causality, explanation, and a host of other concepts, which in turn might allow one to say just how and why these more local contexts connect to and/or supersede the intellectual-historical contexts in which he clearly understood himself to be writing.

54. And they apparently have. Gideon Lewis-Kraus, who acted as Rorty's assistant in the last few years of his life, has reported to me that he once recommended Lethem's fiction to Rorty, who in turn read them all with great enthusiasm—particularly Lethem's early works inspired by Philip K. Dick (personal correspondence).

55. Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," reprinted in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 293-304.

56. Here I am summarizing Altieri's "Practical Sense—Impractical Objects."

57. One could argue pragmatism has already begun to shape some recent fiction, written by authors who were college students during the pragmatist revival. See, for instance, Keith Gessen's *All the Sad Young Literary Men* (2008) and Benjamin Kunkel's *Indecision* (2005), each of which make early allusions to pragmatism, and each of which enacts a movement through Rorty's three famous terms: in both books, a recognition of contingency among the characters occasions a fall into irony, which is balanced in the final pages by a decisive and comic commitment to social solidarity. Whether or not these two novels actually demonstrate all that pragmatism has to give to the arts is an open question. My thanks to Gideon Lewis-Kraus for directing me to them.

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POETRY

MIDSUMMER ZERO

SIMON JARVIS

Blue shines all afternoon long and the long day's dream burns slowly
down to its background, down to its canvas of dazzled
heat and of radiant brightnesses springing back up
from all whites and reflectors, from metals and mirrors
and walls and the beach and the micas in wavering tarmacs,
prone in their flat tracks pointing the cars and the cabs
through to the promenade, through to the palm-blistered strip.
There is not not anything true here; there is not no thought
whose single attention might burn as the day burns, holding
in flame and in fury to longing, or stuck to the nub
of some one refusal, some stubborn remainder of thought.
Only that all the surmises can lift and float off in this weather,
lift, float and drift to wherever I want them to go,
so that for I, I say you, or say she, when the distant
sail cuts the sealine and stitches the sea to the sky
or it twists and then vanishes, turns, and, inviting this idle
daydream or fancy, it glistens again in the blue.

Why should I ever endure to lie down on the beach?
Why must I fry myself here at the edge of the sea?
Some stand and undress; my face is the face of mere leisure,
looking at nothing, the pudding of nothing, jam of it, treat
earned, the deliciously vacant extent of a workless,
aliturgical, day, the perfection of finite privation.
It doesn't get better than this. From the strip with the palm-trees
I look out to sea, to the wall of the numberless ocean.
I still cannot make myself see it, I cannot disperse
except into flights and surmises and works of unfreedom.
Still in the sky I am pinned to some cloud, to some figure;
still at the edge of the town I am staring at pictures and maps.
It is as though I believe that whatever I see
can never have meaning, but points to a meaning elsewhere.
It is as though these white jet trails and cloud arabesques
all in collective negation refuse their own patterns,
blanking me down to the bank of impassible blue.

Now on the strand as my gazing still falters and dips
there pass in a gaggle the ciphers of perfect desire.
Almost as though I am already frozen or snapped
each instant is empty of memory, love or cognition.
Almost as though I could never recall or recover
your face and your voice, this sounding and resonant world
shrinks to a dot, to a punctual signal of wishing,
shrinks to the total, the whole, which soon matches it, set
there like a filter or theory erasing the waters,
set like a number which drinks them and singes them up.
Nothing can shake or discolour that number, which rages
in superillumining purity through every part.
Hard is the colour of numbers: hard its unending identity
counting whatever beside it is known in the world.
So as you saunter before me indifferent your nudity
pins all attention, detains it or traps as it veils
every gesture, as though you were clothed by the sun.

Not every meaning is structured like signification.
Not every meaning is shaped; inaudible, trackless, invisible,
it holds to itself in its pain and desire and duration.
So when you think you have known and met truth in its nudity,
so when immediate feverish rightness would crown all your wishes,
clothing them, burning self-evidence into the shape of a word,
sun-clear reports to the one who is clothed with the sun,
nevertheless underneath this a mute refutation
bears and enables each false wish, as paper endures
silently every falsehood emblazoned upon it,
silently carries the inks of unfailing negations,
still uncomplaining awaits an intelligent lie.
If I turn round I can see the Avenses and Zephyrs
travel or idle across or along the extended
road by the promenade, seeking their car parks and then

come to a stop where the painted line stops and the tarmac
offers a vacancy, offers relief and a halt.
A car is too vast and expensive and brilliant even to think of.
Even to notice it shakes every part of the blood.
So at each instant I see it I murder my wonder
pretending that I had foreseen this, that all this is all
only some trick of the earth, that it cannot shake spirit.
How can these colours I want to call natureless shine
except they must outshine whatever may shine in my words?
How can I bear their perfection, their apparently deathless and nude
mass of invariant colour, their azure or bubblegum pink?
Envy & rage bind the colours away from my sight
till I surmise them as featureless everyday stuff,
just what is there every day when I walk down the street
holding my work of indifference in furious effort
into my chest and my face as I try not to see what there is.
I must get on with my holiday. I must not waste any time.

Still at the last I return to the shadowless screen.
Still I come back to the terminal screen, as if meaning
were like some reward at the end of a colourless rainbow
or like six units of alcohol waiting for me

when I have finished composing this poem. They are some sweet
injurious drink and appeasement to silence the talkative dead,
silence my talkative organs, my liver, my heart, and my brain.
When these sweet numbers walk through me, I stand into panic,
hearing those voices which my being classified sane
demands I declare to be fictions, demands that I state
always and everywhere not that I hear, but must seem to hear voices,
seem to hear voices which urge me to works of despair.
Yes, but I hear them: yes, but they do not despair.
I hear them demanding I help them to sound and to live.
Now the processional treads through my throat and my palate.
Now it has come from its stations and niches and graveyards
out to this spot in the sun, where I freeze as it exits my mouth.

They depart into nothing, disperse in the limitless air.
Soon it will be just as though they had never been heard.
Now in the calm I can hardly hear even a word
staining the air, can hardly hear even a tuneful
slide or end-glide of them coming across from the sea.
They shall depart into numberless mountain and ocean,
they shall disperse into sky, into rivers and sea.
Now the remembered impossible sound of their voices
gives me no sight of your face: I may not recover
compulsion of love from the feints and the trips and surmises
through to its silent and unpredeterminate name.
Get in the car. I can hear it: I hear its wrong engine
burning the earth, and the note of its fuels and metals.
I no longer deafen myself with their significations,
do not for now send these tones to somebody elsewhere,
even as driving along by the palm-blistered strip

I try once again not to use the wrong side of the road.

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