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NO QUARREL (PART 2)

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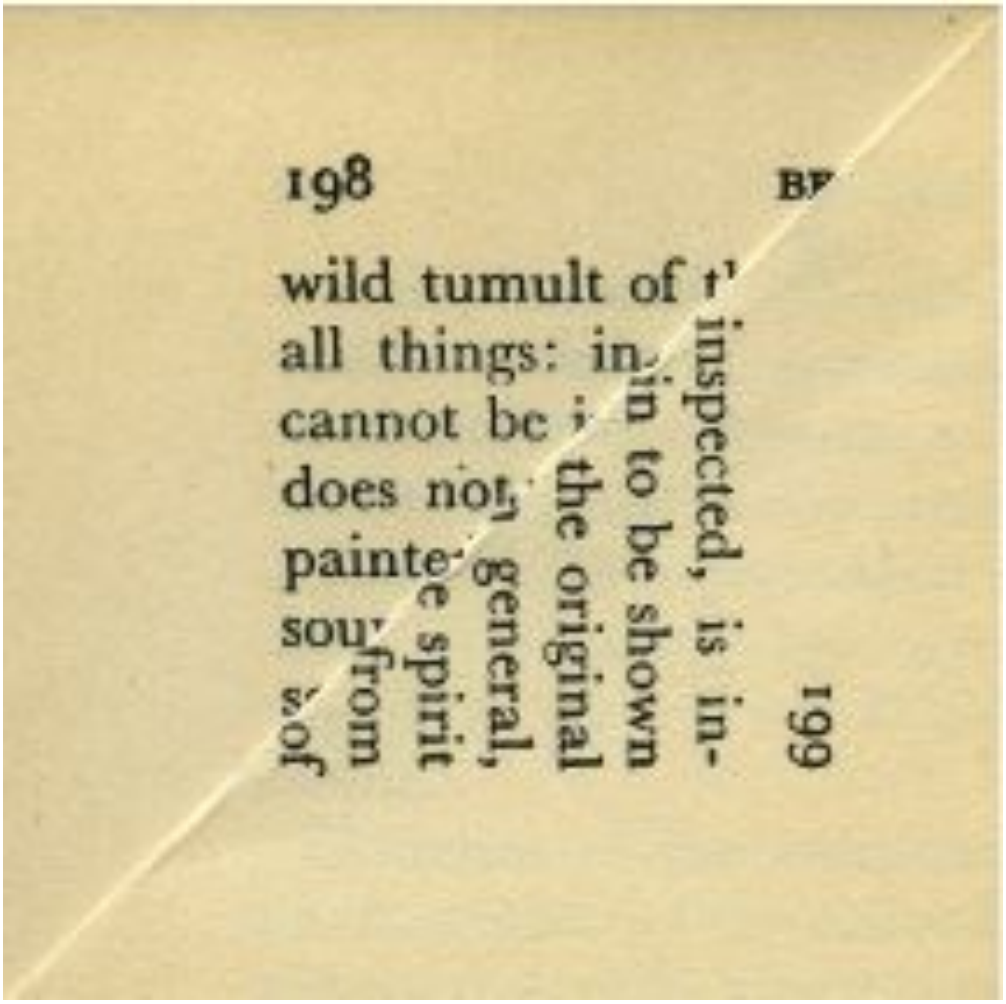

Erica Baum, "Wild Tumult" Dog Ear (2010)
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ABOUT NONSITE

ISSUE #4:NO QUARREL (PART 2) WINTER 2011/2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

ARTICLES

RESPONSES

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

ISSUE #4: NO QUARREL (PART 2)

OREN IZENBERG

This issue of *nonsite* presents the continuation of 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] The first five essays may be viewed here.

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

THE QUESTION OF POETIC MEANING

JOHN GIBSON

"I really would like to know what it is
you do to 'magnetize' your
poetry, where the curious reader, always
a bit puzzled, comes
back for a clearer insight."
—John Ashbery, 'The Tomb of Stuart
Merrill'

I. Introduction

Poetry has not fared well in contemporary philosophical aesthetics.[1] While there have been a few heroic attempts to correct this,[2] in recent years philosophers of art have published more on gardening and comics than on poetry; and one should note that of late philosophers have not published all that much on gardening and comics. The situation is not unlike what we would have if we found that our colleagues in Philosophy of Science had failed to consider physics or that those in Ancient Philosophy had somehow overlooked Socrates. Whatever the reason for the philosophical avoidance of poetry, the result is an embarrassingly conspicuous omission in the philosophy of art's coverage of its own field.

What I would like to do here is explore one respect in which philosophy, especially the philosophy of language, has much to learn about the nature and possibilities of meaning from poets and critics. If each of the arts is associated with a set of defining philosophical problems — in the novel, say, the problem of fiction, in painting that of depiction, in music the expression of emotion, and so on — then among poetry's defining problems is the problem of meaning. At any rate, if one is speaking about modern lyric poetry, as I shall be, this is surely among the most interesting problems, since for over the past two hundred years — roughly when poetic romanticism was born [3] — each subsequent generation of poets has found itself increasingly happier to linger near the line that separates sense from nonsense, at least as philosophers and linguists, if not always poets and critics, conceive this line. [4]

The problem, as it shall interest me here, is the following. Poetry is, according to a deep-rooted view, the communicative art *par excellence*: poems are vehicles of communication, among much else, of course. They *speak* to us, and this is among the chief reasons we value them, contrary to what recalcitrant formalists might tell us. And the philosophical puzzle is that poems very often do none of the things philosophers tend to think language *must* do if it is to bear meaning. Indeed in a great amount of modern poetry — especially poetry of the modernist sort that, as the tired joke has it, likes to say 'go to hell' to the reader — we often find an extraordinary communicative act carried out in language that strikes us, initially at least, as inscrutable, in fact language we would dismiss as meaningless if we were to encounter it outside the context of a work of art. How can this be? That is, how can a use of language at once strike us as a powerful and effective form of communication and yet renounce the very resources we employ when endowing words with meaning in virtually all other linguistic contexts? Simon Blackburn has said, with admirable understatement, that no one 'would claim that the study of metaphor has been one of analytic philosophy's brighter achievements.' [5] If philosophy still struggles to understand how sentences like 'Juliet is the sun' can be true, bear meaning, or simply convey a thought, one has an acute sense of how limited its resources must be when confronting a poem like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Wallace Stevens' 'New England Verses'. What I shall do here is offer a few suggestions concerning how philosophy might develop these resources. I won't be offering anything like a new theory of meaning, even of poetic meaning. But I will try to show in a general way how we might try to reconcile the communicative force of poetry with the unconventionality and sheer inventiveness of its language. My concern is to try to make sense of a certain power poetry has — this power to communicate when, from the linguistic point of view, one should not be able to — and, like any power, a poet of course enjoys a certain amount of freedom to exercise it or not. But if the power I identify is not omnipresent in poetry, I do hope to show that a discussion of it reveals a few general features of how poems communicate, and that the uniqueness of the

kind of meaning they can bear should be of more interest to the philosophy of language and of art.

To be perversely clear, I should emphasize that in setting up the problem this way I am not assuming that there is such a thing as *the* meaning of a poem, contained, as it were, in a poem in all of its fullness regardless of whether anyone actually reads the poem. Nor am I assuming that poems bear the same species of meaning sentences do, or that meaning in poetry consists in the making of a kind of claim or statement, the offering up of discrete bits of information, and so on. My curiosity is much more basic than all of this, and it can perhaps best be put in terms of what I find to be a baffling yet extraordinary skill all good critics possess. It is the critic's ability *to make meaningful* a poem that delights in its attack on sense and syntax, indeed whose surface seems positively opaque from the linguistic point of view. And I am interested in this act of making meaningful in an altogether basic sense: what must a critic *first* do with language of the especially difficult poetic sort so much as to get it to appear to speak? What happens when she rolls up her sleeves and gets to work beating sense out of that which at first blush appears madly and proudly senseless? I won't have much to say about the fully articulate statements of meaning a critic attributes to a poem and its various lines, though a study of the sort I offer here will naturally lead in this direction.[6] I find the initial act of attributing meaningfulness of the most minimal sort astonishing enough, and that is what I shall concern myself with here.

II. Hearing Meaning & Hearing a Question of Meaning<

I will develop my discussion of poetic meaning with constant reference to metaphor, but let me say immediately that I will nowhere suggest that poetic meaning is just a kind of metaphoric meaning (the fact that we can find poems without metaphors should make one skeptical of the very idea). What I dwell on in this section is the fact that poems and metaphors tend to *raise a question of meaning* in very different ways, and seeing this will help us understand more clearly what the problem of poetic meaning amounts to. According to a common conceit in the philosophy of language, metaphor represents the 'dark side' of language, the furthest point we will reach if we set out in search of the final outposts of meaningfulness.[7] There is something to this, but we will be much more likely to find a poem than a metaphor when we reach the end of the line, and it is important to see why.

There are (at least) two respects in which we experience meaning in poetry in a way that is considerably more complex than is the standard experience of meaning in metaphor. In common cases: (i) poetic meaning is experienced as *latent*, that is, there is frequently and importantly a felt gap between understanding the language of a poem and understanding the

poem itself; and (ii) we experience poems as having a *twofoldness of communicative content*, that is, as speaking and so producing meaning on two distinct levels. I'll discuss each in turn.

Latency vs Immediacy. When we offer a metaphor in standard conversational contexts, we do so with the hope of bringing to clarity the point we are pursuing, by forging, say, a shared framework of thought and feeling in respect to whatever it is we are trying to get others to understand as we do. For example, assume you are having drinks with friends from work and you are all struggling, in a playful way, to pinpoint exactly what makes a certain colleague so unlovable. After a number of abortive attempts, you say, 'I've got it! Bill is Brooklyn without the charm'. Your friends laugh and nod in satisfied agreement, convinced just as you are that this is pretty much exactly what Bill is. In uttering this metaphor in this context, you expect that any member of your linguistic community with a reasonable amount of experience of her own culture will get it, and that she will get it in a way she surely would not have had you said that your colleague is Montreal or Savannah without the charm (for one, the metaphor will no longer be ironic if we replace Brooklyn with a city of fabled charm). And, more importantly, you expected, and indeed found, that listeners grasped the meaning, the point, of the metaphor *immediately,*[8] without the aid of any (measurable) act of interpretation: they got it, and their getting it was effortless.[9]

In this respect, if metaphors raise a question of meaning, then it is usually a purely philosophical question. If we are familiar with the terms of a metaphor (Bill, Brooklyn, and charm), then we shall hear the meaning of the metaphor simply upon hearing the metaphor itself. If certain philosophers and linguists skeptical of the idea of metaphoric meaning are correct, this sense will be mistaken. But we nonetheless do have the impression that a successful metaphor achieves a kind of immediate expressive perfection. The philosophical problem is how this can be — how can we hear not only meaning but a kind a truth or aptness in metaphors, when on the whole they are literally, and wildly, false? — not whether metaphors can really provoke this experience of meaning in the listener (they obviously can).

Poems are usually very unlike metaphors in this respect. Consider two. Neither is much longer than a standard metaphor — this is why I have chosen them — but each offers a very different kind of encounter with meaning:

> Who put canned laughter
> Into my crucifixion scene?
> —Charles Simic, 'The Voice at 3:00 A. M'[10]

and

Between one flower plucked and the other given
the inexpressible nothing
—Giuseppe Ungaretti, 'Eternity' [11]

[Tra un fiore colto e l'altro donato
l'inesprimible nulla
'Eterno']

Note that the problem here is not quite with the meaning of the *language* of the poems. Their language is, in a sense, perfectly clear. But if the language of these poems is clear, the meaning of these poems is not. I assume that we take these poems to be trying to *say* something, but that we do not grasp what it is they are saying in any sort of immediate or pre-reflective way, certainly if we have no previous rapport with them. Of course we have much to work with in our attempt to render them meaningful, for example the striking images these poems conjure up: of a laugh-track playing behind an act of martyrdom; of a great expanse of emptiness stretching between two objects (or acts) of simple beauty. Indeed, we can detect a kind of thematic kindredness in these poems and to that extent a kind of shared communicative purpose: though one is more playful than the other, they each seem to be trying to say something about life, and it doesn't seem to be especially pleasant or optimistic. But all of this seems to be of the order of suggestion. It hardly seems to be descriptive of anything we should be inclined to call their meaning.

In this respect, the meaning of a poem, contrary to that of a metaphor, is standardly experienced as a kind of *problem*. It is a sign of poetic success if a poem demands to be studied before it can be understood; it is generally a sign of failure if a metaphor must be: metaphors, like jokes, are an embarrassment to the speaker when no one gets them. Even a young student reading Catullus count the ways he loves Lesbia knows that Catullus' poetry might be about more than what it 'says' — despite his poetry's apparent simplicity and obviousness — and that his professor will expect him to be aware of this possibility when interpreting the poem. In other words, even if we experience the meaning of a poem as immediate, we also know to be skeptical of our experience. The point this brings home is that we frequently do not, strictly speaking, *hear* the meaning of a poem so much as we hear a poem as *occasioning a question of meaning*, a question we devote ourselves to answering if we are to make sense of the encounter with meaning a poem initiates. In the context of poetry, we usually take meaning to be a destination and not a point of departure.

Twofoldness of Content. Consider the following. Critics may, and in fact once did, debate whether the line 'Do I dare to eat a peach' in T.S. Eliot's 'Prufrock' ought to be read as an expression of sexual desire or as an acknowledgement that the speaker has dentures.[12] And a critic might reasonably suggest that before we can understand Eliot's poem, we must understand this metaphor — what 'to eat a peach' means in this context — and all the others like it we find in the poem. For if we haven't understood what the various lines of a poem mean, surely there will be a hole in our understanding of the poem itself. But note that if we illuminate the meaning of this metaphor, and indeed the meaning of every line of the poem, we still would not take ourselves to have thereby illuminated *the meaning of the poem*. For it would still be perfectly legitimate for one to say, 'I see that this is what all these lines mean, but what does the *poem* mean?'[13] And we can ask this because we know that the meaning of a poem, unlike the meaning of a metaphor, is not a kind of *sentence* meaning at all, and so casting in relief the semantic content of every line of a poem can still leave us in utter darkness about the meaning of the poem itself.

Language in poetic contexts has the tendency to be doubly productive of meaning, and this distinguishes it in an important way from ordinary ('standard') uses of language, including metaphoric uses. If I sent you an email with clear and precise instructions on how to arrive at the funeral of a childhood friend, it would be plain weird to say of it, 'I see, but what does this email *mean*?' But if I sent you a poem with the very same content, it would not only be appropriate but expected. My poem will likely turn out to be a bad poem, but that is immaterial. What is important is to see that simply putting language in the context of a poem occasions this unique, and further, question of meaning. In ordinary contexts, the meaning of an utterance is just the content it conveys. Things get complicated once we begin to consider irony, metaphor, and the like, in which the speaker seems to say one thing yet mean another.[14] But even here there is but one communicated content, and coming to grasp it is a matter of distinguishing 'what is said' from 'what is conveyed' (if I say that 'James is a train wreck' you will not think I am telling you that James is the name of a train that has been in a terrible accident but that it is the name of a person whose life bears a striking resemblance to one). But the double content of a poem is a doubleness of communicative content: the meaning of the lines that constitute the poem and the meaning of the poem itself. Each is important, and each asks to be understood, appreciated, and the competent critic will arrive at an (at least) implicit sense of how they interlock if she is to make sense of a poem. This further meaning is what is often called *work* meaning, and it is a kind of meaning artworks, but few other things under the sun, bear. As a kind of work meaning, it is meaning that accrues to the poetic object itself, and it is almost always irreducible to any feature of its linguistic or semantic surface.

I can now say something precise about what the problem of poetic meaning amounts to, at least as it shall concern me here. What we need to understand is what we *do* with a poem so that we can come to hear it as fully enriched with meaning, as saying something, anything. What underwrites the skill of a critic such that she can fill this gap between the first encounter with a poem and the first experience of its meaning? What aspect of a poem and its language generates *work* meaning, and how? And, perhaps most importantly, how do we hear a question of meaning rather than nonsense or simply nothing in poetry marked by latency? In the case of apt metaphors and well-formed literal sentences (in one's tongue), it is *because* we hear meaning in a stretch of language that we take it to be communicating, to be *saying* something. If we remove this direct and immediate encounter with meaning, then exactly what occasions a question of meaning in the first place?

III. Imagination & Meaning

If we are to offer a plausible account of how we come to hear poetry as enriched with meaning, we need to cast some light on what *kind* of meaning we are talking about here. Part of the problem is that there is a picture of poetic meaning we need to find a way around, a picture that is oddly hard to escape, however obviously silly it is. Put simply, on this picture, when we attempt to understand a poem we set out in search of a kind of master-proposition or über-statement the content of which is equivalent to the meaning of poem. To find the meaning of a poem, on this picture, is to expose in the poem an implicit claim, point, declaration — a linguistic item of some sort — to the effect that *I mean this*! And the particular 'this' a poem means has the function of unraveling the mysteries of meaning the poem occasions in the reader. What gives this picture its intuitive force is the habit of thinking that meaning is always essentially (i) linguistic, and (ii) propositional. Though poems often have lines that bear these sorts of meaning, I think that *poetic* meaning is ultimately neither. Of course, whatever a poem means will bear important links to whatever its language means — it would be madness to deny this. But the way forward, I'll suggest, is to look beyond a poem's language and towards something this language creates, something fundamentally imaginative and not linguistic. Let me explain.

I mentioned above that not only poems but works of art in general can bear a unique kind of meaning, what we call work meaning. It is a general mystery in aesthetics how artworks can bear this sort of meaning (how, for example, do non-linguistic art forms such as painting, music, and dance strike us, at least at times, as bearing communicative content?) and each of the arts presents a unique way of encountering this problem. In all forms of literature — poetry, prose, and drama — the very basic problem of work meaning is the following. Since literary works are creatures of language, we are clearly talking about a linguistic object when we ascribe meaning to them. But it is no ordinary sort of meaning, for it is not descriptive

of any feature of the language of a work, surely not of anything a work actually says. To say that *As I Lay Dying* as a work is about, and hence meaningful in respect to, ephemerality and the impossible implications of the passage from existence to inexistence — at least in the mind of one attempting to make sense of the burden of death — is manifestly *not* to describe some content conveyed by any of Faulkner's sentences, as though for this to be a legitimate statement of the book's meaning it must amount to a claim to be found on the surface of Faulkner's creation. But then of what, exactly, are statements of work meaning descriptive? Precisely *where* do we encounter work meaning, if not in the language of the text?

We have fairly well-developed resources for explaining how works of prose fiction can do this. In the case of standard sorts of works of fiction (think of garden-variety realist novels), work meaning is arrived at by exploring the content not quite of a work's language but of the *world* it creates, what we commonly call a *fictional* world. And virtually every theory of the 'world-generating' capacity of works of fiction link this power to a certain imaginative activity. Just consider any of the dominant make-believe, simulation, or possible-world theories of fiction, all of which cast the language of literature as having an essentially *creational* function. Language in the context of literature functions not, or not just, to 'convey a content' but to conjure up a world, and it is a world we can encounter only if we read the language of a work as specifying a kind of imaginative stance to take towards it content, texturing in this respect a sense of fictional space for our appreciative and critical exploration. And note that worlds and what we might find in them bear a kind of meaning, though surely not of the sort words and sentences bear. When applied to a world and all that we find in it, meaning is a matter of *significance* and not *signification*. It is not meaning in a semantic sense but *meaningfulness* as the phenomenon of bearing of *value*, *import*, and *consequence*, and it is brought to light when we attempt to articulate how and why a work's presentation of character and circumstance *matters* for creatures such as ourselves. It is here that we find the *vision*, in a quite literal sense, of a work, and without a consideration of this we'll find ourselves shamefully mum when called upon to say what a work might mean. The point is, through our imaginative involvement with literary works, we give ourselves access to a much broader range of meaning, significance, and aboutness, meaning that we will miss entirely to if we take a purely, or merely, 'linguistic' stance towards a work of literature. [15]

There is an obvious sense in which work meaning is *interpretation-dependent*. We can, if we wish, read many novels 'naively', that is, as simply about fictional people going about their fictional business (though good luck reading Joyce, Faulkner, or Beckett 'naively'), in which case we shut ourselves off from the full encounter with meaning a work can offer us. But to treat a novel as a *work*, and not merely as a *fictional story,* is to attempt to interpret it and hence to bring to light the kinds of meaning only *a work* can bear. And if meaning in modern lyric

poetry is more challenging than in common kinds of novels, it is largely because poetry offers fewer occasions to be read naively. Indeed, without interpretation, without some conception of work meaning, one often cannot begin to make sense of the language of much modernist poetry, of what it is even 'saying'. One always mentions John Ashbery here. Consider the opening lines of one of his more recent poems:

> Not the smoothness, not the insane clocks on the square,
> the scent of manure in the municipal parterre,
> Not the fabrics, the sullen mockery of Tweety Bird,
> Not the fresh troops that needed freshening up. If it occurred
> in real time, that was OK, and if it was time in a novel,
> that was okay, too. From palace and hovel
> the great parade flooded avenue and byway
> and turnip fields became just another highway.
> […]
> —John Ashbery, 'A Worldly Country' [16]

Note the faint, playful echo of the heroic couplet, the poetic form of high subject matters and hence of poems in which content, and so meaning, matters. And indeed we find in his poem the stuff of those great, high subjects: images of time, the State, warfare, social class, but mixed in with Tweety Bird and a barrage of negations without any mention at all of what subject(s) of the negations might be. This, of course, makes it rather difficult to determine what the poem is saying at even the most basic semantic level, and so we set out in the hopes of finding an interpretation that will allow us to articulate what the poem is even *about*.

Now much lyric poetry is not fictional or even narrative-based: much lyric poetry tells no story, properly so-called. And without a story, indeed without the presence of fiction, one does not have the basic ingredients for making a *fictional world*, the very currency of communication in the case of most prose literature. Thus it may initially appear puzzling how this account of work meaning could possibly apply to poetry. But what is important for our purposes is not the notion of fiction but the role of *the imagination* in generating work meaning. And poems obviously offer much to the imagination. Even in a poem as proudly incoherent as Ashbery's, we have a striking clash of *images*, of *objects* placed in a violently contradictory imaginative space. And if one is, like Ashbery, a product of postwar New York, then what better way could there to be to convey to the reader the exhilarating but profoundly disconcerting nature of the experience of Manhattan than this, a city in which a municipal building sophisticated enough to have 'parterre' may very well stand under the (likely illuminated) 'sullen mockery of Tweety Bird'? Isn't that precisely the experience of

walking from the Upper Eastside to Midtown? And to negate these images, as Ashbery does, is to ask us to imagine saying No, at a rather cosmic level, to all of this (while, still, of course, celebrating it, as New Yorkers inevitably do). Now this may be a pithy interpretation, and a very thin sort of meaning. And it is very unlikely that Ashbery or any of his better critics would be pleased with such a reading, insisting as they often do that he explores not cities but subjectivities.[17] But I've only just begun. The point is, we are beginning to see that approaching the poem in terms of the imaginative space it creates allows us to get a poem that would otherwise seem incapable of speech to begin to communicate. This is the capacity, the genius really, we find implicit in the activity of a talented critic, though surely the talented critic will go on to elicit more refined forms of meaning from the poem than I have here.

This reveals something important about why we do not experience poems whose language strikes us as nonsensical *as nonsense*, and seeing this will help rid us of the terrible and simplistic habit of regarding entire expanses of modern poetry as turncoats to meaning and confederates of the irrational just because their language is anarchic.[18] We find nonsense in a linguistic unit that is hopelessly ill-formed (so-called semantic nonsense: 'I baptized at you and then mathematics') or whose utterance bears no logical relation to any item in its communicative environment (so-called contextual nonsense: 'I'll have a beer and a sandwich,' said not to a waiter but to a student who has asked a question in class).[19] It may be the case that the poems of Simic and Ashbery produce sentences that are nonsensical in either of these ways; but since the meaning that most matters is *work* meaning, this alone is not sufficient to produce a nonsensical *poem*. In fact, if we are being precise, sentences, but not images, can be nonsensical. Images can clash, disconcert, confuse, startle, even freak us out a bit. And that can be their point, the very thing that generates their communicative content. But images and imaginings are not, strictly speaking, ever experienced as *nonsensical*, and thus our experience of poems with nonsensical language is not thereby an experience of nonsensical *works*. Even if a poem is shot through with nonsensical language, once we pass, as we must, from the linguistic space of a poem to the imaginative space it creates, we pass into a realm that is potentially rich in meaning.

What we have when we first turn to a poem is an uninterpreted mass of images. And it is the sense that these images are pregnant with potential significance that explains why we hear a question of meaning rather than nothing or nonsense in a poem of even the most semantically rebellious sort. As with novels, we must *do* something with the poem if we are to make available its meaning. And this will take the form of engaging with the content of a poem imaginatively and not merely linguistically. It is ultimately the assuming of an imaginative stance that allows us to begin to experience a poem as enriched with meaning of the poetically

interesting sort, even when the language of the poem appears to rejoice in its assault on sense and syntax.

IV. Meaningful Objects

Philosophers are often tempted by the idea that metaphors mean whatever they do partly by virtue of figuration, of the images they create,[20] which are virtually always experienced as contradictory or impossible on some level (Bill can't possibly *be* Brooklyn, with or without the charm). Thus locating the communicative content of poetry partly in the kind of imaginative experience it provokes, as I have, is not an unexpected move; nor does the chaos of the imaginings some modernist poetry offers present a unique problem for the idea that they can bear meaning; if metaphors can get away with it, poems should be able to, too. But more needs to be said to bring to clarity the point I have been pursuing. Specifically, I need to give shape to this provisional idea of an 'imaginative space' I am developing here and what it means to say that it is productive of meaning. To do so, I will again turn to a consideration of metaphor, with the hope that what I find here will cast light on poetry, too.

Consider a metaphor that enjoyed fifteen minutes of fame during the 2008 US presidential election. It was said that a certain candidate was 'a penis in desperate need of Viagra' —though the metaphor is not as clever as it would like to be, it adds something to know that it was said of Sarah Palin and not John McCain. This metaphor clearly offers much to the imagination. But the question is exactly what is it we are imagining when we hear it, or when we hear any metaphor for that matter? If we understand this metaphor, surely it is not because we *literally* imagine a person *as* a penis, nor, for that matter, as the sun, a bulldozer, or an island, to mention other metaphors philosophers like to discuss. What would it be to imagine this? I suppose it would be to think of a penis or the sun but just with human eyes, and perhaps a mouth and nose. This is hardly helpful, and at any rate it gets us closer to cartoon than to a meaning. Nor does it help to weaken it and imagine the person not *as* but merely *like* these objects, as the 'hidden simile' account of metaphor would have it. 'Like' in which respect, exactly, for surely a word is owed concerning the nature of similarity? Like the sun, Juliet is *radiant*? Like the troubled penis, Palin is *impotent*? But these too are metaphors, so we've moved no further ahead. To this extent, the making explicit of the putative hidden term of the simile has the risible effect of just adding another metaphor to the figurative mess we are trying to clean up. And if we try to take the metaphor out and look for *literal* respects in which Juliet and Palin are 'like' these objects, we are back to the problem of imagining the sun with a human face, but now just with something *like* a human face. This is thoroughly unhelpful.

A very useful idea here is the notion of *semantic descent*.[21] Put as simply as possible, semantic *ascent*, as Quine introduced the notion, is what we do when we move from a linguistic item to a claim about a linguistic item ('James is a train wreck' to "James is a train wreck' is true"). At each step of ascent we move farther away from the world and deeper into language about language. Semantic descent, however, goes in the opposite direction. Instead of looking for higher-order linguistic or metalinguistic items, in semantic descent we rather try to get *below* language, as it were, to a consideration of the *things*, the *objects* that language is about. That is, in semantic descent we cast off the linguistic at just the right moment and allow a bit of the world to frame our thought of the subject of a metaphor. Thus in 'Juliet is the sun', *the sun* — the very object — figures in our sense of the metaphor, in effect functioning to *qualify* Juliet. And the sun (just as a train wreck, a penis, Brooklyn, and other objects of metaphor) bears a kind of meaning for us, but it is clearly not linguistic in nature. It consists in the set of associations, connotations, resonances, values, and so on that any object that matters in our form of life will have. The sun has meaning of the irreducibly cultural sort, and in the sense of significance and not signification; and it has this meaning insofar as we find it beautiful, productive of life, and generally an all around essential and essentially good bit of the cosmos.[22] Of course, a community of vampires would find it horrible, and this is why 'Juliet is the sun' would have been an insult rather than praise had Dracula written *Romeo & Juliet*. This should make it clear that semantic descent, in my usage, is descent from the linguistic to the cultural. More descent than this — say to a sense of something like 'objects in themselves' quite apart from the sense they have in a form of life — will make communication of the sort I am interested in here all but impossible.

To imagine the sun is to imagine it as an object charged with a kind of aesthetic, cultural, and moral significance. And in hearing a metaphor such as 'Juliet is the sun', we place our thought of Juliet within the imaginative space created by the thought of the sun. Our experience of the metaphor need not resolve into a *coherent* image of, or claim about, Juliet if it is to convey.[23] It is both unnecessary and unhelpful to hear the metaphor as *claiming* that 'Juliet is (precisely) thus and such' or as asking us to imagine Juliet (literally or metaphorically) *as* the sun. It is enough to place her in the imaginative space created by the image of the sun and allow her to linger there for a moment, framing our thought of her in productive and, ultimately, meaningful ways.

It is in this respect that we find that poems and metaphors are most closely related in the family of meaning. What Simic does in writing 'Who put canned laughter/into my crucifixion scene' is not altogether unlike what Shakespeare did with 'Juliet is the sun.' In the case of Simic's poem, we allow the image of our crucifixion accompanied by an impersonal, ridiculous laugh-track to frame how we think of our lives, just as in the case of Ashbery we allow the

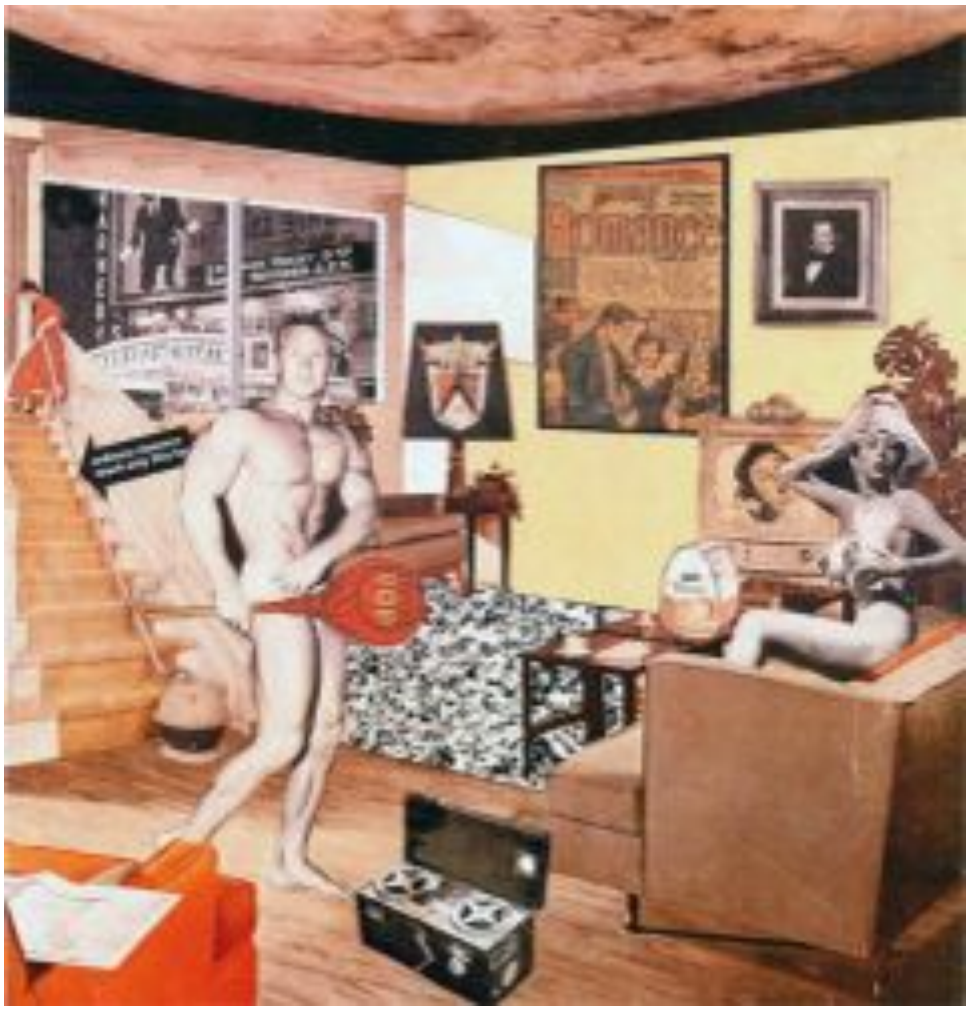
violent clash of images of high and low culture — and much else besides — to act as a stage upon which we rehearse thoughts of our world and the mayhem of experience it offers. And one needn't consult only modernist oddities to see this. To come to hear Wordsworth's poetry as about more than just pleasant leas and lovely trees, to come to hear it as a reflection on, as critics sometimes like to put it, 'the problematic condition of the modern subject,' it is enough to allow his poetic re-enchantments of nature to offer us what the real world never quite delivers, an imaginative space that puts us in touch with what we've lost, in this way telling us both what we need and casting aspersions on modern culture for making it unavailable to us.

To attempt to see metaphors and poems as at least partly communicating imagistically — by virtue of the 'objects', in the most general sense, they bring to view — is in a respect to emphasize the *painterly* dimension of these otherwise linguistic creatures. And if it seems odd to say that objects and not just sentences, images and not just assertions, can convey, consider the following, explicitly painterly form of communication, which I hope shall bring my point home.

Assume I wish to convey to you why I am so unhappy, despite my smart job in a smart city, smart friends who adore me, and so on. I could simply list for you properties that I truly bear, for example, that I am forty-two, unfulfilled, alienated, and so on. But besides being tedious this is also a rather ineffective way of expressing what I wish to express, given the alternatives. So I opt for a bit of helpful figuration and instead offer a much more succinct kind of communication. Imagine that I say to you that '*this* is what I have always wanted my life to be like,' pointing to:

Edouard Manet, Still Life with Melon and Peaches. c. 1866

And then after a moment's pause I say, 'but unfortunately, *this* is the life I actually have,' indicating the following:



Richard Hamilton, Just What Is It That Makes Today's Home So Different, So Appealing? (1956)

This is as good an example of semantic descent as one could hope for. In an obvious and literal sense, a worldly object — the painting I indicate — contributes to the meaning of what I have said. What I have in effect done here is given you a subject of thought — my life — and two radically different *modes* or *framework*s [24] with which to conceive it: for thinking about and so ultimately coming to understand it. The descriptive thickness of my communicative act resides in how successful these images are not in telling you *what* to think about my life but *how* to think about it. You now know, for example, that I have a romantic streak, that I'd prefer a simpler life in a simpler place, and that I have somehow managed to fill my life with campy, superficial crap. Or so I feel. But what makes this form of communication especially rich is not that it allows us to derive 'true descriptions' of my life, though it does make a bit of this possible. It is rather a matter of how each work offers a very precise environment of thought and feeling into which we can place an otherwise formless, indeterminate conception of a life. By putting these objects in a certain relationship with a subject — my life — I charge

their aesthetic features with a kind of moral significance: they now come to represent 'ways of being in the world'; that is, they represent a life as tethered to very different kinds of value and forms of possible experience.

In a sense, every poem has a subject for which the poem itself functions as a framework of thought and feeling, much as the paintings in my example do. In some poetry the subject is explicit: Lesbia and love in Catullus, for example. But in a great expanse of modern poetry, however, the subject is implicit, at best suggested and so only half visible, and criticism is in part the struggle to find it and bring it to full view. Even of poems that seem to say what they mean and mean what they say, we know to search for their unmentioned subject, as we do when we read Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' as ultimately about the nature of poetic creation and not just strange happenings in Xanadu, even though the poem only explicitly talks about the latter. And if latency is characteristic of our experience the meaning of a poem, it is not because it takes so long to unearth its hidden meaning. The idea of 'hidden' meanings can be dangerously misleading, suggesting as it tends to the idea of a master-proposition upon which critics converge when they've unraveled the mystery of a poem. We frequently experience poetic meaning as a far-off destination not because the meaning of a poem is so deeply hidden in its language but because the kind of communicative act in which a poem engages is extraordinarily complex, beginning with language and words but then soon passing from this into a richly, and at times bizarrely, textured imaginative space, the exploration of which is potentially interminable. This is why we do not believe in the existence of interpretations of poems to which nothing more can be added, that say *everything* that can be said about a poem. Poems, and artworks more generally, strike us as always saying 'I mean more than that' in the face of even our best interpretations and most competent critics.

All this should make clear that while I do wish to emphasize the communicative role of images in metaphors and poems, I am in no way attempting to reanimate that old body of theory that equates the meaning of a metaphor with a *single* image or picture, one that 'shows' a metaphor's meaning. This is why I enlist the notion of an imaginative space and not of an image to explain the mechanics of communication here, since the former is much broader and more accommodating than the latter. Among other things, an imaginative space can tolerate the presence of *a number* of images and objects, and it can also acknowledge the contradiction and at times incoherence of the imaginings metaphors and poems often produce, something a single-image theory of figurative communication will find very difficult. At any rate, while the philosopher of language may be forgiven for entertaining the idea that metaphors produce *an* image in which their meaning, in some way, resides, it is clearly silliness to think that *poems* generate a single, solitary image in virtue of which they convey. Perhaps some do, but it is too much to think that poems that communicate imagistically always do

so by resolving, in some mysterious way, into a single image. Part of the motivation for introducing the notion of an imaginative space is to avoid the problems invited by the single-image theory without abandoning the sensible idea that images nonetheless are a standard currency of communication in poetry, and indeed in figurative language more generally.

As I said above, the full generation of poetic meaning — that is, of the densely wrought patterns of significance and sense a talented critic will attribute to a poem — will require much more than the minimal activity of making-meaningful I am considering in this paper. This is to admit that if we approach a poem armed simply with our imaginations, we'll barely get any further than I did with Ashbery, and this is not very far at all. But an account of how we get from the minimal meaningfulness I have explored here to the richness of criticism shouldn't be very hard to devise, though it is beyond the scope of this paper. Critics, educated and experienced as they sometimes are, are usually members of a rather complicated form of life, a practice in which one can participate only once one has mastered everything that goes into what Arthur Danto calls the 'atmosphere of theory'[25] in which artworks are created, interpreted, and consumed. This background of ideas will include a general sense of the poetic projects that define a tradition, the ideas of culture, art, and philosophy that inform it, a sense of a particular poet's standing interests, past works, and so on. All of this is part of what guides, constrains, and informs a critic's imagination and its ability to elicit from a poem all that it means but about which it may say virtually nothing, just as we saw it does in the case of modern subjects in Wordsworth and poetic creation in Coleridge. And it is this surrounding culture of ideas, history and criticism that reveals what critics know well and the rest of us too little, and so why a critic's imaginative engagement with a poem is often so much more productive than is the amateur's, despite the latter's enthusiasm and good intentions. What I have tried to identify here is the necessity of the form of imaginative engagement I have outlined, and of how this casts light on how we take the first, and perhaps just the first, step in the process of making a poem meaningful. Of course it requires considerable time, work, and often the aid of a fine critic, to move successfully from this first shimmer of sense to the experience of a poem as fully enriched with meaning. The story of this is the story of nothing less than the interpretive enterprise itself, the products of which are works of criticism, and my arguments in this paper concern just the first moment in this grand affair. But I do hope that some of what I have said brings to light possibilities for thinking about these further matters.

VI. Conclusion

By way of a conclusion, I'll assert, without argumentation, that our experience of much poetry, modernist or otherwise, bears the mark of the problems I have addressed here, though usually not nearly as completely and proudly as, say, Ashbery's poetry does. Yet even if there

are poems that do not strike us as problematic as those I have discussed here, we do find these the basic problems lurking somewhere, behind some line, in virtually every modern poem, and a great many premodern. At any rate, it would be silly to claim that the poets I have used to set up my argument are *exceptions* to the rule of how we experience meaning in poetry. What would the rule be to which these are exceptions? That poems are generally composed of clear, literal language? That the meaning of most poems is transparent and immediately available to anyone who reads them? It is hard to say this with a straight face. All one needs to grant me is that poets of the sort I have explored represent a kind of limit-case, and that in coming to understand what happens at this borderline, we'll be able to throw light on what happens when poems approach it to whatever extent they do, that is, when they strike us as communicating in excess of whatever their 'language' means, and partly by virtue of the kind of imaginative space they open up to appreciation. [26]

NOTES

1. This is certainly true of Anglophone philosophy of art; and while our Continental brethren have done much better at keeping poetry in view, even there the habit is usually to speak of 'the poetic' in the rather loose Heidegarrian sense, as an exemplary form of artistic 'revealing'. See Anna Christina Ribeiro (2007) for a discussion of the avoidance of poetry in analytic philosophy of art and aesthetics. It is worth noting that there are recent signs that analytic *philosophy of language* is beginning to take a serious look at poetry, and this might create a space for analytic aestheticians to rediscover poetry. For example, a recent volume of *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (edited by Ernie Lepore and published in October 2009) is dedicated to poetry.

2. When I speak of efforts to correct this, I have in mind philosophers whose work either straddles the analytic/continental divide or who have carved out a unique space apart from these two traditions, for example 'new' Wittgensteinians, pragmatists, etc. Figures such as Stanley Cavell and Richard Eldridge come to mind, as does Simon Critchley's work on Wallace Stevens (see Critchley, 2005).

3. The dates commonly given for the birth of poetic romanticism are quite arbitrary, though if one is concerned with English romantic poetry, 1798 is good place to start, as this is when Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads*. There was poetry properly called romantic before this — Blake, for example, published *Songs of Innocence* in 1789 — but this would be the point at which English poetry became generally conscious of being part of what we now call the romantic movement.

4. Certain 'new' Wittgensteinian philosophers are pleased to call (most) poetry nonsensical, and intend this as kind of compliment (see, for example, Rupert Read, 2007). The poetic darling of these philosophers is commonly Wallace Stevens. I'll assert without argumentation that this is unfair to both Wittgenstein and Stevens. Another sort of philosopher is pleased to link the question of whether a poem is meaningful to the question of the meaningfulness of its language, which is much closer to the philosophical picture I am attacking here. This sort of philosopher tends use John Ashbery as an indication of a poet who has abandoned meaning (see, for example, Troy Jollimore, 2009). For reasons I give below, I think this too is misguided, and it is worth noting that Ashbery himself would find such a claim unfair to his poetic projects, insisting as he has that much of his work is *about* — and hence meaningful in respect to — something, for example 'the experience of experience' (as quoted in Poulin, 1981, 245).

5. Simon Blackburn (1984), 180.

6. To say the same thing, this is *not* a paper on interpretation, though I do think that the problems I explore should be seen as groundwork for a satisfying account of the interpretation.

7. For example, in William Lycan's state-of-the-art of introduction to the philosophy of language, the final section is entitled The Dark Side and is on metaphor (no mention of poetry). See Lycan (2008), 173-176.

8. Samuel Guttenplan gets at the same idea when he speaks of *transparency* as one of the three 'truths' of metaphor: 'When Romeo says that Juliet is the sun we are no more brought up short by this than if he had said, for example, 'I love Juliet', or 'Juliet is standing on the balcony'. As is well known, speakers of a language simply do hear its sentences as meaningful [...] It is this immediate 'getting', whether of a sentence in a familiar language or a scene, that I call transparency, and my claim is that it is just as true of metaphors as it is of those utterances we regard as unproblematically literal.' (Guttenplan, 2005, 21)

9. If our comprehension of metaphors is standardly experienced as immediate, our attempts to isolate and render their meaning in literal, even propositional, terms almost never is. But note that this concerns our ability to *explain* metaphoric meaning, and it is a different issue from the one I am explaining here: our impression that *we grasp* metaphoric meaning immediately. Metaphors are philosophically funky because while we usually take ourselves to experience their meanings immediately, we very rarely think we that we can come up with adequate statements or descriptions of their meaning. This is one way of putting the problem of paraphrase, in respect to both metaphors and artworks.

10. In Simic (1999), 3.

11. In Ungaretti (2002), 4-5.

12. T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in Eliot (1991), 7.

13. I do not wish to imply work meaning is something like the cumulative effect of line meaning, or that line meaning is even primary to work meaning. Indeed, and as I argue below in my discussion of John Ashbery's 'A Worldly Country', there are cases in which we can arrive at a sense of line meaning only once we have a sense of work meaning, that is, once we already have a grasp of the point of the poetic work itself and what it is trying to convey. I thank Rob Chodat for pointing out to me the need to be clear about this, and about the need to acknowledge the complexity of how the parts and the

whole of a literary work interact to produce meaning. I acknowledge this complexity gradually in this essay, and here the story is only half told.

14. As Elisabeth Camp notes, metaphors do enjoy a kind of twofoldness, and the point I am putting on offer is simply that it is not a twofoldness of communicative content. As she says, 'We are simultaneously aware of both the focal subject (me, Bill) and the representing frame (Anna, bulldozers), as distinct entities. But this awareness of their distinctness doesn't just not undermine, it often heightens, the richness of their imaginative interaction. Further, just as with pictorial seeing, the two components are united into a single cognitive state, of thinking of the one entity *through* our conception or characterization of the other' (Camp, 2009, 113). With this in mind, one might say that twofoldness in metaphor typically functions to produce a single communicative content, the *one* meaning a metaphor bears; in poetry has the function of producing two distinct levels at which a poem means, conveys.

15. My talk of imaginative spaces should not be taken to be descriptive of something the reader consciously conjures up in the private cinema of his mind. Indeed it is not a psychological claim at all. That we enter into a kind of imaginative space when appreciating and discussing literature is made manifest by the extraordinary capacity of critical discourse to ascribe to literary works forms of meaning that are in utter excess of their linguistic meaning, of anything their words actually *say*. In this sense, justification for talk of an imaginative space is given by nature of critical discourse itself, and without some such notion a great many of the claims of criticism will appear mysterious, gratuitous, or unintelligible.

16. In Ashbery (2007), 1.

17. See, for example, Charles Altieri (1984, 132-164), John Koethe (2000, 67-89), and Helen Vendler (2005, 57-78).

18. I do not doubt of course that there is such a thing as 'nonsense poetry', nor do I think that talk of various poets embracing 'irrationalism' are misguided. What I do not think, and for the reasons I am outlining here, is that any of this implies we ought to abandon all talk of meaning when speaking of the irrationalist or nonsensical tendencies of modern poetry.

19. For a helpful discussion of this, see Alison Rieke (1992), 6-8.

20. See Richard Moran (1997), Elizabeth Camp (2009) and Troy Jollimore (2009).

21. See Samuel Guttenplan (2005), chapter 4. I am entirely indebted to Guttenplan for the idea of semantic descent, though I make no claim to employing the idea exactly as he does.

22. This should make it clear that I am only asking for descent from the linguistic to the cultural. More descent than this — say to a sense of something like 'objects in themselves' quite apart from the sense they have in a form of life — will make communication of the sort I am interested in here all but impossible.

23. It is worth confessing that my idea of an imitative space will not allow us to get to those very fine-grained and precise meanings some philosophers think metaphors, at least on occasion, can convey. I am skeptical that we get quite this level of precision from metaphors, but if one is sympathetic to the idea, then one will rightly think that my account of an imaginative space won't help us explain it. At any rate, I am not trying to offer an adequate theory of metaphoric meaning in this paper. All I wish to say is my reflections on semantic descent and imaginative spaces show us how we can initially experience a metaphor as communicating, and no doubt more needs to be added to the story to explain how we arrive at the more refined, complex, and exact meanings we perhaps at times experience in a metaphor.

24. See Camp (2009) for an interesting discussion of metaphor, fiction, and frameworks of thought.

25. See Danto (1964).

26. Earlier versions of this paper were read at the University of Southampton for the annual meeting of the British Wittgenstein Society, the University of Parma, the University of Tampere, and at Boston University for the wonderful "No Quarrel: Literature and Philosophy Today" conference. I am grateful to Avery Kolers, Nancy Potter, Bernie Rhie, and especially Rob Chodat and Oren Izenberg for their helpful criticisms and suggestions. I would also like to thank Alan Golding for bringing to my attention the Ashbery line with which I begin the paper.

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THE MOTIVE FOR METONYMY (A PAROCHIAL THEME IN TWO PARTS)

JENNIFER ASHTON

Part 1

The Toronto Research Group, founded by Steve McCaffery and Canadian avant-garde poet bpNichol, issued a number of reports on its poetic investigations in the early 1970s, among them a report on translation, which they defined as "an activity upon a source text and a transportation of selected material into a new context."[1] One of the major findings of the reports was, as Nichol and McCaffery explain, the range of poetic possibilities that can be produced through a particular translative protocol, namely that of the "homolinguistic translation." "If we no longer consider translation as being necessarily an informational service — the one tongue's access to another –" they write,

> then it can become a creative endeavor in its own right. Moreover, it is no longer necessarily dependent on a heterolinguistic context. In a homolinguistic situation, the translative act need not involve the subjective formulations of verbal,

> notational equivalents, for the vocabulary is settled as an objective phenomenon before any creative departure. The shift of notational systems (with its attendant problems) are eliminated at the outset. (*Rational Geomancy* 32)

The research experiment consists, then, in figuring out what is required to abandon "informational service," and it's in this pressure to relinquish information that homolinguistic translation emerges as a key protocol. This protocol is one that McCaffery has adopted in a number of experimental projects including his recently reissued *Every Way Oakly*, a homolinguistic translation of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*.

As we'll see, *Every Way Oakly* is a work that in fact involves a great deal of "activity upon the source text." What doesn't change between the source text and the text of the translation, however, is the language in which each text is written. As McCaffery himself explains in his introduction, the poems of *Every Way Oakly* are to be understood as

> initial investigations in the concept of homolinguistic translation (i.e., translation within the same language) and the use of such translation to generate contentually new texts that, nonetheless, obey certain of the basic tenets of translation (the passage from a source to a target language and the preservation, in that passage, of some trace of the source elements). [2]

Having a "source language" that is the same as the "target language," we find ourselves with a further question, in this case, about the very object of translation: what "trace of the source elements" is being preserved, if it's the words but *not* the language they're part of that is being changed? If (to recall McCaffery and Nichol's report) "one tongue's access to another" is not a matter of access between languages, what is being accessed?

But if it's the words but not the language that are being changed in homolinguistic translation, one could ask, isn't homolinguistic translation just the same thing as paraphrase? Why isn't every paraphrase a homolinguistic translation? We can begin to feel the force being exerted on the separation of homolinguistic translation and "informational service" in McCaffery and Nichol's report, since in fact there's no requirement that homolinguistic translation absolve itself of the duty to perform informational service. And as long as it doesn't, it would seem as though there's nothing to save a project like *Every Way Oakly* from, if not the heresy of paraphrase, then the banality of paraphrase. But as we'll see by looking at one of the translated poems, the theory of translation under which it operates enacts a heresy of paraphrase and in doing so performs a sort of ingenious solution to the heresy of paraphrase.

Before we turn to McCaffery's text, it will be useful to see what Stein's poems look like in a more conventional "heterolinguistic" translation. Here is Stein's original poem, "A Purse":

> A purse was not green, it was not straw color, it was hardly seen and it had a long use and the chain, the chain was never missing, it was not misplaced, it showed that it was open, that is all that it showed. [3]

And here is its translation into French as "La Bourse," from Jacques Demarcq's 2005 *Tendres Boutons*:

> Une bourse n'était pas verte ni couleur paille, elle était à peine visible et avait servi servi longtemps et la chaîne, la chaîne ne manquait jamais, elle n'était pas mal placée, elle montrait que c'était ouvert, c'est tout ce qu'on voyait. [4]

Demarcq's translation of the first two clauses — "Une bourse n'était pas verte ni couleur paille" for "A purse was not green, it was not straw color" — seems close enough to Stein's on the semantic level: any English-French dictionary will give us "vert" for "green," "couleur," for "color," and "paille" for "straw." And the translation is even closer on the syntactical level: in the French we find nouns, negating particles, adjectives, etc., pretty much equivalent to and exactly in the place and order we find them in the English.

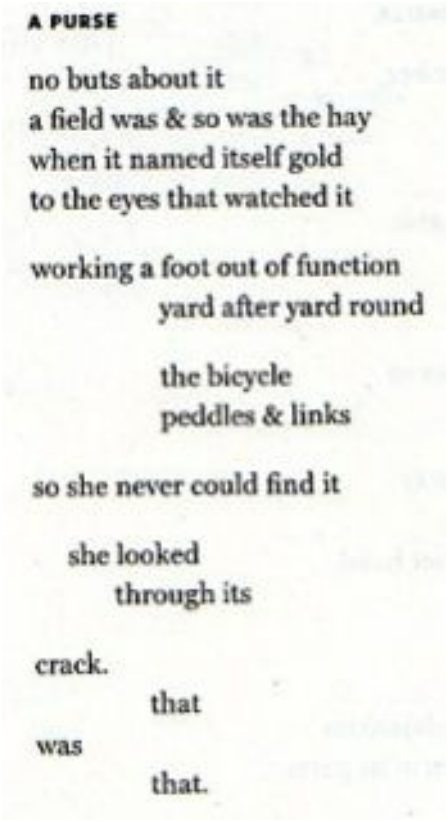
But certain liberties emerge as the translation continues. Demarcq gives us "avait servi servi longtemps" for Stein's "had a long use." Perhaps "longtemps" seems insufficiently "long," so we need the insistence of "servi servi" to get the force of "long use." Or maybe Demarcq doesn't want us to lose the fact that there's a rhyme in Stein's poem ("it was not green…it was hardly seen"), so he gives us "n'était pas verte ni…avait servi," but that doesn't help explain the repetition. And we can see a certain liberty taken as well where "misplaced" is rendered as "mal placée." On the one hand there's a semantic as well as visual proximity — "mal" corresponds closely to "mis" and "placée" to "placed" — but Demarcq's word choice actually produces a puzzle about Stein's meaning where there might have been none at all, had the translator written instead "la chaîne n'est jamais égarée" (the chain is never mislaid).

So with this translation, what information is being communicated? Where is the French tongue accessing the English? And what is *not* being being accessed or communicated? The shared sense and the shared letters between "misplaced" and "mal placée" capture a certain "information" from Stein's poem (to recall Nichol and McCaffery's report), or we might say a certain "content" (if we take McCaffery's language from his introduction to *Every Way Oakly*): the verb "place" and the "bad" associations of "mis-," the shared "m's" and "l's"

and "c's," and the sounds that go with them. But there's a referential dimension that isn't being communicated or accessed at all. For while with "mal placée" the translator has given us a sense equivalent to one available to any speaker of English (we can read "misplaced" as "badly placed"), something closer to "the chain was never mislaid" – a good paraphrase, we might say – would help establish the reference Stein's poem makes to the tiny chain that attaches to an interior coin purse in handbags from the period. The chain is never misplaced because it's attached to the purse, and the chain can only be seen when the bag is open ("it showed that it was open and that is all").

With "égarée," then, we might lose some of the patent "information" of the text — the "m's" and "l's" and "c's" and the verb "place" contained in "misplaced" — and the aural and visual experiences they afford. But we would retain information that helps us imagine the object — the purse — that the poem is intended to represent. Demarcq's translation gives us the inverse: we might get from it access to something closer to the material information in Stein's poem "A Purse" but we get less access to the purse that that material is being used to represent. We get the experience of the original, but not quite the meaning.

Here is McCaffery's translation of "A Purse" from *Every Way Oakly*:



A PURSE

no buts about it
a field was & so was the hay
when it named itself gold
to the eyes that watched it

working a foot out of function
yard after yard round

the bicycle
peddles & links

so she never could find it

she looked
through its

crack.
that
was
that.

(Oakley 57)

Homolinguistic translation may have emerged, according to Nichol and McCaffery's report, from an effort to abandon "informational service"; nevertheless the first line of this translation, "There are no buts about it," performs a very straightforward "informational service." While it is not a translation of any meaning of the source text, and it's certainly not a paraphrase, it is a very literal description of the entire poem if "it" refers to Stein's "A Purse." "There are no buts about it" because the clauses of "A Purse" are either coordinated by an "and" or no conjunction at all. The word "but" never occurs. My point here isn't that McCaffery is really doing "informational service" when he claims homolinguistic translation is a means of avoiding it. As we'll see, these informational gestures signal instead a very different way of understanding "one tongue's access to another," one that does indeed abandon what McCaffery and Nichol mean by "informational service."

The lines that follow "no buts about it" spin out various associative logics, operating at the level of syntax, reference, sound and sense, sometimes simultaneously. The purse that "was not green" in Stein's poem becomes "the field that was," in McCaffery's, and "straw" becomes "hay when it named itself gold." There's no mistaking the Rumplestiltskin allusions

here. The translator spins out his associations in a thread that starts as straw and turns to gold. The allusion continues, when McCaffery spins Stein's chain into "bicycle/peddles and links." The bicycle's chain is already slipping, however, since the "peddles" associated with it are already working two different referential registers, one that associates the pedals of a bicycle with the pedals of a spinning wheel, but another that associates the pedaling of either with the peddling of goods and extends the thread of "purse" and "gold."

Repeatedly in interviews as well as in the introduction to *Every Way Oakly,* McCaffery acknowledges his debt to what he calls "allusive referential," an experimental concept and technique he developed in collaboration with Fluxus founder Dick Higgins. And the debt is easy to see if we look at Higgins's own explanation of the concept in "Notes Toward an Allusive Referential":

> 1) I think *a*. Let us call *a* my "object." 2) As artist, I observe that though I try to think *a* simply, I find that my mind moves on to *b*. I could fight this and insist upon mentioning *a* only. This would cause anxiety, of course, but that might have its uses. However, instead, I accept the displacement. *B* now becomes the new object, which I will call a "referential" [the substitution]. 3) But I find that when I refer to *b* in my original context, that the sense of *a*, if the intuition has been a close one, remains. *B* is justified by its heightening of the experience of *a* — though a displacement, the allusion (or movement from *a* to *b*) has created a vivid effect in my mind. 4) The reader need not go through the beginning of the process. The reader simply reads *b* and feels *a* (ideally). [5]

If we map Higgins's "allusive referential" scenario onto the example of McCaffery's translation, we start with Stein's poem as the "object" that the artist is "thinking" — Stein's "A Purse" is McCaffery's *a* (as we know from the mention of the fact that there are "no buts about it"). And we could say that in thinking about this object *a*, which, in addition to lacking any "buts" also includes such things as "A purse was not green, it was not straw color" and "the chain was never missing," McCaffery finds his mind moving on to green fields and straw spinning into gold and bicycle chains and the peddling of goods. And as Higgins suggests, why "fight this," why stick to the referents given by *a* only? So McCaffery does not stop at at the first line, which we might describe in Higgins's terms as "mentioning *a*." The translation goes on and gives us the ways in which the artist (the translator, in this case) "accepts the displacement"; the translation records for us the effects of his new object *b,* which is the "referential" complex of Rumplestiltskin and bicycles and economic exchange.

In this respect, as I began to suggest earlier, we could say the homolinguistic translation doesn't involve giving up "informational service" at all. If anything, the translation's "allusive referential" involves an intensification of the information, since what we get in *b* is both a sense of *a* and the effects of *a* on the translator. In other words, the information is not just what's available in *a* (the lack of "buts," an idea of green, an idea of money); it's also *a*'s effects on the translator, the "movement from *a* to *b*" that creates, as Higgins puts it, "a vivid effect in my mind." And not only is *b* "justified by the heightening of the experience of *a*," but its heightening seems to consist in part in compounding these experiences for new subjects, for readers who encounter *b*: As we recall from Higgins, "The reader need not go through the beginning of the process. The reader simply reads *b* and feels *a."*

What we have is clearly a kind of causal chain of experience, or a circuit even, but what kind of a chain is this? If the "heightened experience of *a*" is something that can travel from one person to another, then this chain is surely one that's not only hardly seen, but never seen: In reading "A Purse," I would have to feel the feelings, think the thoughts McCaffery felt and thought in reading Stein's "A Purse." But how can one person actually feel another person's *a?* More plausibly, we might think that the causal chain involves a proliferation of effects from the same *a* — not different subjects having the same feelings about *a*, but the same *a* producing different feelings in different subjects. But then we also have a different source of pathos — how can I tell if my *a* is the same as your *a?* Not how can I feel another person's *a,* but how can I know another person's *a?*

In the first instance, "one tongue's access to another" looks like a kind of Whitmanian fantasy of shared embodiment ("every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you"). The second instance, meanwhile, requires not so much one tongue's access to another as one text's access to another. But the access between texts in this instance is just as literally embodied as the access between tongues in the first. As McCaffery explains in the introduction to *Every Way Oakly,*

> In the present translation, [the] cubist perceptual method has been preserved and Stein's method of observation and description has become my method of reading and translating…. The source texts (Stein's original pieces) become textual still lives placed under the rigor of translational observations so as to generate their target texts along the lines of allusive reference and connotational structures and possibilities. (ix)

If I can't feel what McCaffery feels, but nevertheless, by the workings of the allusive referential, I am to feel his *a* when I read his *b*, then it looks as if it's something about the object *a* that must pass from text to text and become available in my experience of *b*. Indeed, for this to happen the source text and target text themselves must function as objects, as things that require a perceptual method for a method of reading.

One of the Tortonto Research Group's other major discoveries, also from its 1973 report on translation, was a "link between found poetry and translation": "The translative movement from a source to a target language was seen," write McCaffery and Nichol, "to involve a shift in the context of signs. Like translation, the found poem is an activity upon a source text and a transportation of selected material into a new context" (*Rational Geomancy* 56). While the difference between the translation and the found poem is left unstated here, we can infer that it must be a difference above all in the degree of "activity upon the source text." If translation and found poetry both involve "activity upon a source text," the found poem simply represents a minimization of that activity to as close to zero as possible. In this respect, all translations could be said to be a version of found poetry — some of them just involve more activity upon the source text than others. Moreover, the likeness extends further if we go back to the earlier discussion of the "allusive referential." In the case of a found poem, there's no question that reading *b* will enable me to feel *a,* since the target text *b* shares not just some things but everything with its source text *a*.

We can see more clearly now what might be at stake in raising the question of paraphrase in this context. If the heresy of paraphrase is that by losing the form of the text you lose experiences that are crucial to the meaning of the text, then a paraphrase that could somehow keep all that experience of the text would look like a kind of solution. In the case of found poetry, you certainly have a way of keeping all the experience of the text because you keep all of the form of the text. The fantasy of the link between found poetry and translation seems to be the same fantasy as Higgins has for the allusive referential — that you can somehow keep the experience of *a* even when the movement to *b* involves a lot of "activity upon the source text." If I can always feel *a* when I'm reading *b,* with *b* I haven't lost, much less violated, the experience of the source text. If the heresy in the heresy of paraphrase was that the paraphrase gave you the meaning of the text without the experience of it, the triumph of the homolinguistic translation – basically also the triumph of found poetry — is that it gives you the experience of the text without the meaning of it.

Part 2.

We have already seen how the metonymic displacements in McCaffery's translation of *Tender Buttons* are designed to proliferate experiential effects, and how those effects depend on a highly literalized sense of the information a text contains. Of course for McCaffery, and indeed for some of the most influential experimental poetic movements of the late 70s and 80s, in particular the Language movement in the U.S., Stein's work was understood to privilege metonymy. And it's not just a commonplace among the Language writers and their affiliates, but a commonplace in Stein criticism as well, to treat *Tender Buttons* as eschewing metaphor in favor of metonymy. Christopher Knight, for example, describes the poems as given over, in Roman Jakobson's terms, "to one pole, the metonymic with its consequent suggestion of contiguity and realism, over the other," namely metaphor.[6] And for Stephen Scobie, this privileging of metonymy is what allows Stein's poems to "break[] out of the logocentric, patriarchal world…the imposed 'identities of metaphor; along the horizontal axis of combination, it offers the unlimited freeplay of dissemination."[7]

A more recent body of work, following on the heels of language poetry and also heavily influenced by it, has turned not to Stein, but to Wallace Stevens, whose lyric commitments and New Critical champions have previously lumped him with T.S. Eliot among the Language movement's "bad" modernists (as opposed to the "good" ones like Stein, Laura (Riding) Jackson, William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky). And although this new interest in Stevens has functioned not exactly to recruit him for metonymy, the critique of his commitment to metaphor (which can be found in the work of poets from Frank Bidart to Rae Armantrout to Jennifer Moxley) has, I'll argue in the second half of this paper, functioned to produce a skepticism that goes beyond the Language poets' enthusiasm for the explosion of meaning into an "unlimited freeplay of dissemination" and for systemic indeterminacy. It has been instead through something like a radicalization of metaphor rather than metonymy that meaning as such has come to be understood not as inherently indeterminate but inherently false, and that truth has come to inhere in the refusal of holding any beliefs at all.

In a recent interview, Armantrout discusses a poem from her book *Next Life*, called "Reversible", which begins:

> Try this
>
> Shadows of leaves
> between shadows of venetian blinds
>
> bounce
>
> like holes

> across a scroll of a
> player piano
>
> But are similes reversible?
>
> Try this.
>
> Trunk of a palm tree
> as the leg
>
> of a one-legged
> ballerina.[8]

"To my mind," Armantrout says in the interview,

> the simile that follows is not reversible. That is, someone might well imagine, fancifully, that a palm tree's trunk, below its little skirt of fronds, looked like a ballerina's leg, but no one would look at a ballerina's leg and imagine that it looked like a palm tree. So that's an answer, of sorts. But, for me, it opens up another question: what does it mean if similes aren't reversible? If they're out of balance, does that undercut their validity."[9]

I'll make clearer what this has to do with Stevens specifically in a moment, but for now the point is just to establish Armantrout's particular way of suspecting metaphor – a suspicion that is actually compatible with a more general suspicion of the prospects for truth claims, and a suspicion that Stevens, I will argue, not despite, but entirely in keeping with his understanding of and commitment to the motives for metaphor, shares.

In what sense is a metaphor "invalidated" if it's not "reversible?" What would it mean for a metaphor to be "valid" in the first place? We can get a sense of what might be at stake from a 1992 essay in which Armantrout prefaces an extended reading of a poem by Lyn Hejinian with a passage from an essay in which Hejinian, on the one hand, criticizes metaphor for its conservation of meaning and, on the other hand, celebrates metonymy, in good postmodern fashion, for what amounts to its indeterminacy:

> Metonymy moves attention from thing to thing; its principle is combination rather than selection. Compared to metaphor, which depends on code, metonym preserves context, foregrounds interrelationship. And again in comparison to

> metaphor, which is based on similarity, and in which meanings are conserved and transferred from one thing to something said to be like it, the metonymic world is unstable. While metonymy maintains the intactness of particulars, its paratactic perspective gives it multiple vanishing points. [10]

Armantrout, in turn, goes on to praise Hejinian's poetry for its metonymic workings and the "restless attention" they generate, in contrast to a poem by Sharon Olds, whose "mainstream verse," Armantrout deplores for the ways that it "impl[ies] that people and things are serviceable, interchangeable, ready to be pressed into the service of metaphor" (*Collected Prose* 41). The metaphor that is served, moreover, is a "system" with "no outside…no acknowledged division within it. It is imperialistic" (*Collected Prose* 41). What then is the relationship between what Armantrout sees as the "imperialism" of metaphor and what Hejinian sees as its conservation of meaning?

Now it might seem like a contradiction for Armantrout to claim, on the one hand, that similes are irreversible; and on the other, that "people and things…pressed into the service of metaphor" have been rendered "interchangeable." The logic that can exchange "my love" for a "red rose" obviously depends on the principle of interchangeability, a principle that functions above all to conserve the qualities of one thing in our ideas about another. But once the rose becomes the vehicle and my love the tenor (or we might say, using the language of cognitive linguistics, as well as of translation, once the rose becomes the source and my love the target for this transfer of qualities), the one subsumes the other, annexes it in good imperial fashion. And Armantrout is willing to use an even more predatory analogy to make the point. As she says in a 1999 interview with Hejinian: "Metaphor is like one thing swallowing another: the bulge of the antelope in the boa's midriff. Metaphor should make us suspicious, but we can't do without it." [11]

Wallace Stevens was certainly aware of the power of metaphor to conserve certain qualities even as it obliterates the object of its transactions. In "Poetry Is a Destructive Force," the second poem in a 12-poem sequence Stevens published under the title *Canonica* in the *Partisan Review* in 1938, tenor and vehicle fight it out, and only one emerges intact, having utterly consumed the other:

> That's what misery is,
> Nothing to have at heart.
> It is to have or nothing.

It is a thing to have,
A lion, an ox in his breast,
To feel it breathing there.

Corazon, stout dog,
Young ox, bow-legged bear,
He tastes its blood, not spit.

He is like a man
In the body of a violent beast.
Its muscles are his own . . .

The lion sleeps in the sun.
Its nose is on its paws.
It can kill a man. [12]

To say that the thing one has at heart is a lion or an ox is to construct a metaphor, where the heart shares the stoutness, the physical power, of a notoriously powerful beast. In the next stanza, however, the "be" verb that enacts the initial equivalence is eliminated, and the metaphorical transformation of the heart into a beast is enacted through sheer juxtaposition: "Corazon, stout dog, young ox, bow-legged bear." Apparently the less of "is" there is, the more literal the metaphor becomes, so literal that the man whose heart is like a beast can actually taste that beast: "He tastes its blood, not spit." The transformation is complete, and the consequence of its completion is that the man himself becomes a metaphor, marked by the signal "like": "He is like a man." Yet in no longer being a man but merely being "like" a man, he is also wholly consumed by the original figure: "He is like a man/In the body of a violent beast." The vehicle of the metaphor, the beast that began as a figure for the man's heart, has now swallowed its tenor in a violent act of consumption, such that the man has become its heart. Meanwhile the beast, overcome by the exhaustion that follows a kill, lies down for a nap: "The lion sleeps in the sun./Its nose is on its paws." What we have learned then, is that "Poetry is a destructive force" because "it can kill a man." And more specifically, it is the heart of poetry — metaphor — that kills him.

Now I don't for a moment think Armantrout has Stevens's postprandial lion in mind with her metaphorical boa fat after its kill. But throughout each of her two most recent books, *Next Life,* published in 2007, and *Versed,* published in 2009, she produces poems that invoke and test the boundaries between tenor and vehicle and make self-conscious work of addressing metaphor as such. Obviously many poets across many centuries have shared a self-conscious interest in the devices of their craft. In each of these recent volumes, however, Armantrout

has also produced a poem that reads as nothing if not a kind of a homolinguistic translation of another more familiar poem of Stevens, "The Poems of Our Climate," which, as it happens, immediately follows "Poetry is a Destructive Force" in the *Canonica* sequence, and takes up what it might look like to rid poetry of the desire to represent things as other than what they are.

In *Next Life,* "Close," one of Armantrout's allusions to "The Poems of Our Climate," offers, in the place of Stevens's "Clear water in a brilliant bowl/Pink and white carnations" (Stevens 193), "Dry, white frazzle/in a blue vase." (*Next Life* 11). Moreover, following Stevens's' "still one would want more, one would need more/More than a world of snowy scents," Armantrout gives us, in "Help," fron her 2009 book *Versed*, "a frozen swarm/of incommensurate wishes."[13] And while initially at least, the

> Creased, globular,
> shiny, baby
>
> pumpkins on stalks
> upright in a vase,

may seem a lot less plausible as a version of Stevens's "pink and white carnations" (if nothing else because they can't possibly be anything other than fake pumpkins), there is no mistaking the allusion to Stevens by the end of the second section of the poem:

> A space
> "inside"
>
> can't bear
> to be un-
>
> interrupted.
>
> I mark it:
>
> "I" "I" "I" (*Versed* 16)

The three "I's" lined up so starkly here are nothing if not an instantiation of the "evilly compounded vital I/…made..fresh in a world of white" in Stevens's poem.

The "stutter" of "I's" enacts a more general commitment in Armantrout's work to something like a poetics of hesitation. And what Armantrout's poems hesitate over is the confidence required in making propositions — truth claims — of any kind. In an early talk on "poetic silence," Armantrout points out a problem with a tendency in certain experimental prose poems, whose "declarative sentences…tend," she says, "to create a tone of certainty" (*Collected Prose* 22). Citing an example from Bob Perelman, she points to how his declarative sentences, "do not invite silence," but instead invite "assent": "After each sentence, one makes a certain effort, and then has the sensation, the satisfaction, of getting the point. And at least for me, there is the experience of assent. Yes, he's right." (*Collected Prose* 23). She puts this even more succinctly in a 1999 interview: "Perhaps I associate the discursive with an attempt to persuade. …I've used my poems as an alternative to that. They make fissures and gaps show, structurally reflecting a state of doubt" (*Collected Prose* 89). Armantrout combats this "tone of certainty," the "satisfaction of getting the point," and pursues this "state of doubt" in a number of ways, but most vividly in her critique of metaphor and her embrace of metonymy. In making metaphor stand for propositionality as such (*x* is *y*), Armantrout's work is littered with efforts to construct and then disrupt the workings of various metaphorical operations. The undoing of metaphor, moreover, is often accompanied – and even more often, displaced – by patently metonymic gestures, which by emphasizing sheer juxtaposition between seemingly incommensurate statements, serve to enact the "gaps and fissures" she thinks promote a "state of doubt."

Extending such splicing effects, Armantrout also draws heavily on what she and many of her readers identify as "found language." As she puts it in a 2006 interview with Charles Bernstein, "A lot of what I do is really notational, and I suppose the art comes in the way the notes are combined. That is, I use a lot of sources, and I don't mean to imply at all that it's all found language, but I do…overhear things and make notes."[14] In another interview, she calls some of the lines in her work "faux found language" — language that looks found but is of her own making (Burt & Ogden 21). Such tactics serve, of course, to generate uncertainty about the meaning of the language by obscuring its sources, making it impossible to identify or differentiate them.

As we have already seen in the link between homolinguistic translation and found poetry in McCaffery and Nichol's research reports, one way of explaining this tactic is to say that it works to preserve the material "information" of some prior speech act even as the meaning of that prior speech act is irrevocably transformed or even obliterated. That is, insofar as found language retains the form of the source only to produce completely new and surprising effects — what it gives us is effects *in the place* of meaning. And if, as I have argued elsewhere, language poetry and postmodernism more generally have been marked by

a tendency to conflate the meanings of poems with their effects, the post-language-poetry tendency we see in Armantrout transforms a poetics of indeterminacy into a Stevens-like poetics of uncertainty, although, as we'll see, it involves a more radical (and I would argue, a more implausible) skepticism than anything Stevens could have imagined.

As an insurance executive, Stevens couldn't have been more conscious of the uncertainty built into any project that depends on predicting effects. As Michael Szalay persuasively argues in *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State,* Stevens writing in the wake of the financial panic of 1929 and the subsequent formation of Social Security, saw insurance and poetry as analogous endeavors that understand the epistemological implications of actuarial statistics. As Szalay puts it, "Stevens eschews the political models of central planning that begin from the assumption that collectivities can rationalize and intend the economies they constitute."[15] The fact that the consquences of any given act are in principle subject to turning out differently from how we intend them to turn out – the risk built into any action – becomes, for Stevens a motive to capture instead the perpetual process of acts generating effects, a process that, as Szalay shows, is completely assimilable both to metaphor making and to the circulation of money:

> [If] Pound wanted the state to keep money "moving, circulating, going out the front door and in the tax window," Stevens wanted just to trace and capture this motion itself. For he saw in money a profound, connective fungibility, the same that John Maynard Keynes identifies when he notes that "*the importance of money essentially flows from its being a link between the present and the future."* (Szalay 144)

Stevens's *Canonica* sequence quite dazzlingly bears this out. From "A Parochial Theme" through "Poetry Is a Destructive Force," "Poems of Our Climate" and the "The Man on the Dump," and concluding with "The Latest Freed Man," Stevens oscillates between the literal and the figurative, real objects and represented ones, sound and sense, in order to execute a continual unsettling of propositions so that each poem concludes with an idea that can't be fully contained within the framework with which it began, and the next poem attempts to absorb it into a different and more accommodating framework which, in turn ruptures. Throughout the sequence, Stevens continually returns to questions of metaphor-making and variations the structures of exchange and fungibility that make it possible.

The sequence culminates (though importantly does not end) in "The Man on the Dump," where figurative images are ultimately shed as waste. Many of these — a can of pears, a bouquet of flowers, a "tiger chest" — invoke earlier images from previous poems in the sequence, only here they appear manufactured and packaged, post consumption, and removed

altogether from the economy of exchange. The point of the man being "on the dump" is that he can watch the images accumulate as things, that the images themselves have been rendered literal, purified of any metaphorical impingements: "Everything is shed; and the moon comes up as the moon/(All its images are in the dump) and you see/As a man (not like an image of a man),/You see the moon rise in the empty sky" (Stevens 201). The privileged position of the man on the dump is that of being able to see "as a man" rather than as "an image of a man" – as a literal rather than a figurative man — and to see "the moon as the moon" rid of all its images; it is the privileged position of seeing the truth.

But as soon as Stevens's man on the dump questions the source of that truth — "where was it one first heard of the truth?" — he raises the question of how we come to know it, how we come to know anything. The answer is a word: "The the," and the article doubled in this way gestures toward an infinite range of possiblities (a grammatical signal that a noun is to follow followed by the signal treated as a noun) without determining any particular one among them. Not surprisingly, the next poem in the sequence, "On the Road Home," gives us an "I" who says "There is no such thing as the truth," and a "you" who says "There are many truths,/But they are not parts of a truth" (Stevens 203). And the sequence ends with "The Latest Freed Man," where we find ourselves "escaped from the truth" into a world that "was everything being more real, himself/At the centre of reality, seeing it" (Stevens 205). For Stevens, the inevitable "escape from the truth" that both insurance and poetry entail is ground for celebration — if our knowledge of the world (and our power to control effects in it) is necessarily incomplete, then all representation, whether in the form of poems or in the form of securities, is "a supreme fiction."

For Armantrout writing sixty years later, representation is, for the same reason, to be treated as an object of our profoundest suspicion, and the critique of metaphor becomes a way to imagine representation's defeat. If metaphor is a matter of making false assertions (my lover is not like a rose, a ballerina's leg is not like a palm tree), then one way in which metonymy avoids the risk of falsehood is the degree to which its turnings give us not likenesses (or more important, unlikenesses) of things, but parts of a thing or indices of a thing. In Armantrout, the thing persistently indexed, I would argue, is — and, despite Armantrout's commitment to multiple sources for the language of her poems, not at all paradoxically — a self. But it's not a meaning-making self. The "I" that stutters itself out in triplicate in "Help," for example, is "evilly" compounded just like Stevens's "I" in "The Poems of Our Climate," but what compounds Armantrout's "I" are the infinite, uncontrollable, and incompletely knowable effects of language, both found and made. And her poems don't represent those effects; they embody them.

Armantrout's rewriting of Stevens doesn't simply rescue metonymy from metaphor (and, like the language poets, rescue indeterminacy from meaning) but does so in order to produce a more generalized critique of the very possibility of meaning. I want to close by suggesting that in this respect she participates in a more general flight from representation that has taken place under the heading of affect theory. This repudiation of representation has been based largely on the neuropsychological research that Sylvan Tomkins published between 1962 and 1992 in the four volumes of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* and articulated in critical texts like Eve Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, which draws on Tomkins's study of shame to reimagine the hermeneutic relation between readers and texts and offer an alternative to what she thinks of as fundamentally paranoid interpretive procedures that insist on ascertaining meanings and treating all literary effects as intentional. Sedgwick proposes, as she puts it, to "address aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside those that do" and to refuse "to reverse those priorities by subsuming nonverbal aspects of reality firmly under the aegis of the linguistic." [16]

Quite the opposite, *Touching Feeling* persistently subsumes the linguistic under the aegis not just of the nonverbal, but more specifically of the neurophysiological. The performativity in Sedgwick's subtitle thus derives from Austin but only to render speech acts completely continuous with bodily expressions like a blush or sweat, which are not propositional in form and, however we might invest them with values of authenticity, do not and cannot make truth-claims. Affect theory thus matches the post-language poetry of writers like Armantrout; where Armantrout gives us propositions without beliefs, affect theory gives us human expression without propositions.

The goal in both is to rescue the speaking subject from a world in which it seems that nothing it could say could be its own – a world in which everything is poised for translation and repossession. The self expression that modernism never wanted and that postmodernism sought to repudiate is here restored to the speaking subject but only on the condition that words function like sweat or blushes – they belong only to the speaker, but she means nothing by them.

NOTES

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ON GOING ON: RULES, INFERENCES AND LITERARY CONDITIONS

PAUL GRIMSTAD

Both in and out of the game and
watching and wondering at it.
—Walt Whitman

At §293 in *Philosophical Investigations,* Ludwig Wittgenstein imagines the following scenario:

> Suppose everyone has a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine the thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word 'beetle' had a *use* in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is. That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression

> of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.[1]

Richard Rorty says Wittgenstein's thought experiment boils down to the question: "Can a descriptive term have a sense if its application is regulated by no public criteria"; a question to which Wittgenstein—or at least the voice at §293—appears to give the answer no. Since the beetle example is about the "grammar of the expression of sensation," Rorty says that for Wittgenstein words like "pain" have a sense only as long as they "are *not* treated as a name of something whose presence or absence swings free of all differences in environment or behavior."[2] To talk about pain as "qualia" or as a raw feel is just to add a nuance to a language game; one that would allow us, as Rorty puts it, to "disjoin pain from pain behavior" linguistically. But adding nuances to a language game in this way does not mean the word "pain" (or "beetle") points to some inner quale; i.e., its use is not a matter of private ostension.

The question of whether a term can have a meaning if its application is regulated by no public criteria, though, arises even more clearly from a different set of examples in the *Philosophical Investigations*: examples pertaining to the notorious problem of "rule following." In these examples, questions about what it means to follow a rule become questions about how words in general are subject to criteria of correct and incorrect application. And such questions, I want to suggest here, invite comparison with some of the basic arguments of what is sometimes called analytic pragmatism. Impressed by Wilfrid Sellars' insight that in order properly to be *saying* something we have to take ourselves as being in the "logical space of reasons," analytic pragmatists like Rorty and his student Robert Brandom, (despite their acknowledged debt to thinkers like William James and John Dewey) mount a fundamental criticism of the "classical" phase of pragmatism. In his essay "Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin," Rorty says Dewey's naturalism amounts to a blurring of the "distinction between the question 'What causes our beliefs?' and the question 'What justifies our beliefs?'"[3] As Rorty cautions in a later essay, we should not "treat the causal ability of certain events to produce non-inferential beliefs…as a justification for [the] holding [of] those beliefs."[4] If Dewey thought the human animal moved on a smooth continuum from causes to justifications—from nature to norms, we might say—analytic pragmatists inherit from Sellars an apprehension about blurring the line between sensory events and justified belief. What Wittgenstein says at §293 about the public criteria by which language use can be taken as meaningful is comparable, in ways that matter, to the analytic pragmatists' telling us that in order to be saying anything at all we must be able to justify our claims.

In wanting to identify some affinities between Wittgenstein's later thought and analytic pragmatism, I will focus here on sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* dealing with rule-following and private language. The first thing I want to claim is that Wittgenstein and Brandom each remain committed to versions of what Kant called the *quid juris* question: by what "right" are we entitled to take experience, knowledge, belief etc. as meaningful—an issue Kant tried to satisfy through transcendental argument.[5] The second, related thing I want to claim is that the sort of inferentialism Brandom is concerned to elaborate, as well as Wittgenstein's exploration of the rule-following paradox, are each bound up with what it means to "go on in the same way": on the one hand, the role of 'etc' or '…' in Wittgenstein's number series examples; on the other, Brandom's distinction between, say, parrots that respond reliably and differentially to discrete stimuli and discursive creatures that can go on in the game of giving and asking for reasons. I think Brandom and Wittgenstein basically agree that, as Brandom puts it, "intentionally contentful states and acts have an essentially normative pragmatic significance."[6]

But is Wittgenstein's idea of the criteria by which we take our talk to be meaningful a matter of "inference"? And if it isn't, then what exactly are the normative criteria in relation to which we recognize what it means to "go on" in a given language game? In a third section I consider these questions in light of Stanley Cavell's claim that in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein provides the 'literary conditions of [his] philosophical aims."[7] What exactly does Cavell mean by "literary conditions"? Do literary conditions have their own forms of entitlement? Would such conditions—say, Wittgenstein's particular scene-setting, thought experiments, aphorisms, and dialogues—amount to an alternative form of justification? Could a tactful or artful (or beguiling or captivating or worrisome) *ordering* of words—what we might simply call a style—itself generate the criteria for *claiming*? How exactly can, as Cavell puts it, "an ordering of words [be] its own bottom line, [and] see to its own ground?"[8] Considered next to Brandom's normative pragmatics of inference, Cavell, I try to show, finds in the *Investigations* a kind of claiming inseparable from a *way* of writing.

I.

At §143 we find Wittgenstein wanting to "investigate the language game" in which a pupil is taught to follow the rule of adding 2. The investigator will be confident the pupil understands the rule when the pupil starts "going on to write down [the series] independently." But at §146 the investigator begins to wonder just what is to count as the pupil's having "got the system." For example, what if the pupil were consistently to add 2 and then, upon reaching 1000, start adding 4 (996, 998, 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012); and in doing so thinks she has gone on in accordance with the rule? Here we run into something that looks like a paradox. As Wittgenstein puts it, the paradox involves the way "we can think of *more than one* application

of an algebraic formula and every type of application can in turn be formulated algebraically." The rule itself, in other words, is not enough to determine what it will mean to go on in the same way for an indefinite number of future applications. The dilemma is neatly expressed at §85 in the aphorism "a rule stands there like a signpost," which I take to mean that there is nothing about the rule that dictates how it is to be interpreted, and so there is room for doubt about what it would mean to apply the rule correctly.

A little further on, we find Wittgenstein setting up a similar problem. At §193 he imagines a

> machine symbolizing its action [such that] the action of a machine…seems to be there in it from the start. What does that mean?—If we know the machine, everything else, that is its movement, seems to be already completely determined. We talk as if these parts could only move in this way, as if they could not do anything else [and in doing so] we use a machine, or the drawing of a machine, to symbolize a particular action of the machine. For instance, we give someone such a drawing and assume that he will derive the movement of the parts from it (just as we can give someone a number by telling him that it is the twenty-fifth in the series 1, 4, 9, 16, ...).

As with the number series example, there is here a question about what it means to move from a formula to the derivation of a series. But here the move occurs more explicitly as a conflation of causal and logical registers.[9] Why does the example of the machine-as-symbol involve a conflation of cause and logic? Because it mistakenly construes a description of the machine's causally coordinated physical components as a warrant for saying that *therefore* the machine will continue to function in this way in the future. The treating of the machine as a "symbol" of its functioning is turned into an inference about its future states. This conflation of a causal with a logical determination involves the invention of a special kind of entity: what Wittgenstein calls, at §194, the "ideally rigid machine." As with the rule-following example, there is here the supposition that a causal event—encountering a signpost, a teacher's pointing, a machine's symbolizing in the picture of its components the totality of its applications—could rigidly determine what it means to go on in the same way, indefinitely. This ideal of super-rigidity, which Wittgenstein imagines at §218 as being guided by "rails invisibly laid to infinity," results from what Brandom calls an "assimilation of normative compulsion and causal compulsion [such that] if the normative 'must' were a kind of causal 'must,' it would have to be a puzzling, super-rigid sort" (*MIE,* 14). Linking the examples of rule-following and the machine-as-symbol, John McDowell explains how Wittgenstein gets us to picture "following a rule as the operation of a super-rigid yet (or perhaps we should say 'hence') ethereal machine"[10] The reason McDowell considers swapping in "hence" for

"yet," I take it, is because the sort of super-rigidity imagined as impervious to unforeseen malfunction would have to be an ideal ("ethereal") one. [11]

Shortly after the example of the machine Wittgenstein arrives at the well-known statement at §201 of "our paradox":

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict.
>
> It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which it *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases.

The "paradox" Wittgenstein elaborates here has a number of distinct aspects. The fact that "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord [*Übereinstimmung*] with the rule" is what Brandom calls the "gerrymandering" aspect of the paradox; that is, the way no finite stretch of behavior can generate the distinction between correct and incorrect performance in relation to a rule (*MIE,* 20-21). At the same time, to "give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it," generates a related but distinct "regress" problem. Anandi Hattiangadi describes the regress problem like this: "if understanding the content of an expression requires grasping a rule for its use, we can always wonder what understanding the *rule* consists in." [12] But there is another aspect to the paradox elaborated at §201: the way Wittgenstein seems to want to get out of the illusion that there is a paradox at all, while at the same time convincingly imagining the (however fictive) problems of gerrymandering and regress. If the second paragraph of §201 states that there is a way of following a rule that is *not* an interpretation, then this means that there is a way of following a rule that simultaneously provides a criterion for understanding what it *means* to follow the rule—that a norm is somehow *implicit* in the *practice* of following a rule—and so would be immune both to regress (rules for interpreting rules for interpreting rules) and to gerrymandering (no finite stretch of behavior can generate the distinction between correct and incorrect performance in relation to a rule). The change in tone between paragraph one and paragraph two at §201—the way the first imagines a paradox that the second diagnoses

as a "misunderstanding" at work in the setting up of the problem—seems designed to show both how we can become bewitched by worries like regress and gerrymandering, and at the same time show the "paradox" isn't a paradox at all.

II.

If the illusion that there is a paradox in Wittgenstein's rule-following example arises from a conflation of the causal and the logical, it invites comparison with what Sellars called the "myth of the given," so important for later pragmatists like Rorty and Brandom. What is the myth of the given? It is the myth that causal determinations (what the empiricist might call "impressions") could serve as a foundation for discourse in the space of reasons. The critique of the myth of the given follows from the view that brute deliverances of the senses alone are not enough to get a language game going; indeed, that the capacity even to make non-inferential observation reports already *depends* on the normative ability to subsume experienced particulars under general concepts.[13] While, say, parrots can be trained to be reliable differential responders, parrots (or ravens, to use an example dear to both Edgar Allan Poe and Nelson Goodman) do not then go on to keep playing the game of giving and asking for reasons.[14] Parrots are in this sense like a piece of iron that "responds" to rain by rusting, or a photo-electric cell wired up to tape recorder which says "red!" when we shine red light on it.[15] "Merely reliably responding differentially to red things," as Brandom puts it

> is not yet being *aware* of them as red. Discrimination by producing reliable responses (as a machine or a pidgin might do) sorts the eliciting stimuli, and in that sense classifies them. But it is not yet a *conceptual* classification…[genuine discursive practice arises] when that responsive capacity or skill is put into the larger context that includes treating the responses as inferentially significant: As providing reasons for making other moves in the language game, and as themselves potentially standing in need of reasons that could be provided by making still other moves.[16]

Brandom's description of the criteria by which we recognize that a language game is being played—that there is discourse, that things are being *said*—depends on an ability to make reliable responses that are *inferentially* significant. Beyond the mere "sorting" of stimuli, to say something is to endorse other inferences one's claim commits one to. To be able to say things in this sense—to be able to take *responsibility* for one's claims—is for Brandom what is means to "go on" in a language game.

Brandom's distinction between reliable differential responses and inferentially significant claimings sounds close to the distinction made vivid in the "beetle-in-the-box" thought experiment, particularly where Wittgenstein writes: "if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant." May we then say that Wittgenstein here describes, and criticizes, a version of the myth of the given? That is, in criticizing the view that the word "beetle" points to whatever is in the box, are you offering a version of the claim that causal occurrences are not themselves enough to get a language game going? Can we take the voice at §293 to be saying that you cannot share an observation if it does not *already* comport to features of public criteria—let's call these justifications in the logical space of reasons—and so therefore it is wrong to think that you are pointing to something private when you use the word "beetle" (or "pain")? [17]

While I think there's a genuine point of affinity here, I do not think the beetle example asks us to think of meaningfulness as arising from a giving and asking for reasons. That is, I don't think Wittgenstein treats meaning as necessarily a matter of inference. But then what *is* Wittgenstein's understanding of the public criteria in relation to which one is able to go on in the same way in a language game? Consider the question in light of the other examples discussed in the last section. The error Wittgenstein diagnoses in the "ideally rigid machine" is the tendency to treat a picture of the machine's causal functioning as a symbol for its going on in the same way, indefinitely. To treat the determinism implicit in the image of the cogs and gears as a warrant for saying "therefore" the machine will go on in this way in the future is to imagine a set of rails extending a pattern unwaveringly into the future in accord with instructions specified in a rule. Like the confusion brought on by the myth of the given, here the causal relations that seem "symbolically" communicated are imagined to provide a *logical* determination. Consider this now in relation to rule-following: the teacher asks the student to continue the series "2,4,6,8…" and the pupil "follows" the rule such that, at 1000, he starts to write "1000, 1004, 1008…" , claiming that he is going on in the same way. So the teacher thinks it means one thing to follow the rule and the pupil another. That they *both* take their interpretations of "add 2" to be in accord with the rule means that the rule's "standing there like a sign post" opens up the possibility for a number of competing interpretations of what it means to go on: rules for interpreting rules for interpreting rules…(regress); and a complimentary dilemma in which any finite stretch of observed performance can be made to accord with any rule (gerrymandering). But for Wittgenstein the point of this apparent paradox is not, as Brandom would have it, to provide fresh theorizing for making explicit how norms might be implicit in a practice, but rather to say simply that there "must be a way of obeying a rule that is not an interpretation." [18] So while both Brandom and Wittgenstein, in their different ways, link meaning to use, and both are mindful that, as Brandom puts it, "the

'must' of justification or good inference is not the 'must' of causal compulsion," (*MIE,* 12) and while each seems to think there needs to be some public criteria by which moves in a language game can be treated as meaningful, there is nevertheless a crucial difference between them.

This difference comes down to their different ways of understanding the idea that a norm could be implicit in a practice. Brandom describes his own approach as a

> rationalist pragmatism [that] gives pride of place to practices of giving and asking for reasons, understanding them as conferring conceptual content on…states suitably caught up in those practices [and] it is a rationalist expressivism in that it understands expressing something, making it explicit, as putting it in a form in which it can serve as both premise and conclusion in inferences. Saying and thinking *that* things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment…and undertaking *responsibility* to entitle oneself to that commitment." (*AR,* 11)

Again, for Brandom an instance of saying is meaningful (that is, conceptually contentful) just insofar as it can "serve as both premise and conclusion in inferences," and this claim is part of Brandom's rationalism. But his rationalism is also a pragmatism because our entitlement to our sayings is matter of "mastering [their] inferential *use,*" such that one's know-how includes knowing "what else one would be committing oneself to by applying the concept" (*AR,* 11). So our practices implicitly harbor norms which logical vocabulary then *expresses* and makes explicit.[19] Given the way Brandom enlists the later Wittgenstein for his project of inferentialism—the way the account of rule-following in the *Investigations* involves an effort to understand how a norm can be implicit in a practice—it is tempting to see Wittgenstein as holding the view that an *inferential* relation remains implicit in the practice of following rules in actual cases. But while Wittgenstein is, like Brandom, concerned with the public criteria by which our sayings are taken as meaningful (the question of the conditions under which one is entitled to say something), nothing in his examples indicate that he thinks inference is the particular form such criteria take. But if not the relations of inferential compatibility that confer entitlement through what a given claim commits one to—of what one becomes *responsible* for in saying something—then what exactly *is* Wittgenstein's account of criteria? If Brandom thinks that "going on in the same way" means knowing how to make moves in the language game of giving and asking for reasons (to be able to play that game is to be able to go on), what exactly is Wittgenstein's account of *how* it is that we are able to go on in a language game?

III.

In what remains, I want to try to unpack a bit more the idea that Wittgenstein's understanding of the conditions under which one is able to go on in a language are something other than Brandom's "inferentialist" account.[20] Wondering how and to what extent "Wittgenstein's writing is essential to his philosophy," Stanley Cavell suggests that in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein provides "literary conditions for its philosophical aims."[21] While not explicitly responding to Brandom's way of reading the *Investigations,* Cavell's notion of literary conditions might be thought of as an alternate approach to understanding how Wittgenstein imagines norms as implicit in practice. That is, the way he shows how certain philosophical problems take on a life of their own even as they are being dismissed as false problems; and the way the captivating imagining of the problem is itself the *condition* under which some particular form of saying becomes possible. Getting one's readers to grasp what seems to be a paradox about rule following, only to switch gears and show that the "paradox" is really a kind of philosophical mirage, is to do philosophy (or perhaps to try to get out of the compulsion to do philosophy) in a way such that an entitlement to one's claims is established on, as it were, literary grounds. While not quite making Cavell's claim for specifically literary conditions, John McDowell says something similar when he writes that in passages like the second paragraph of §201 a "mythology is wrung from us, in our need to avoid the paradox of the first paragraph, only because we fall into [a] misunderstanding," since the paradox imagined at §201 is "not compulsory"; that is, it "starts with something Wittgenstein aims to show up as a mistake."[22] Instead of treating the paradox at §201 as the discovery of a philosophical problem about rule following, we should treat it as a convincingly imagined mythology, and one that is dispelled in the idea that there must be a way of following a rule that is not an interpretation.

In an "Introductory Note" added to "The *Investigations'* Everyday Aesthetics of Itself," Cavell describes his appeal to literary conditions as part of his "learning to ask for further conditions of the [*Investigations'*] existence—its form as fragments, its palette of terms of criticism, its sparseness of theoretical terms, as if every term of ordinary language can be shown to harbor the power of a theoretical term."[23] The finding of a theoretical term "harbored" in a term of ordinary language is imagined as the way the form and order of the *Investigations* is a function of its "patently, all but ostentatiously, literary gestures"; gestures that are, Cavell says, the work's "grounds." This merger of the "ostentatious" and the "ordinary" in Wittgenstein's style is a matter for Cavell, not only of not fixing what isn't broken (of introducing a theoretical vocabulary where one is not needed), but of unslotting words from theoretic trajectories with the aim of restoring to them their full range of expression. The series of situations or moods brought out in the *Investigations*—say, the moment when it appears as though *any* sequence of

numbers could be made out to accord with the rule; or the way an infinite regress of rules for interpreting rules opens up when we raise the question of what it means to apply a rule; or the way the image of the machine, as a picture or symbol of its functioning, is thought to count as a determination of its future states; or the way the thing we call "beetle" could be continually changing, or even be absent—each of these literary gestures lure us into entertaining the *Investigations'* peculiar fictions, and might be treated as so many conditions of possibility for Wittgenstein's philosophical aims. We can then begin to hear the paradox at §201 as very particularly voiced, as if it were a matter of conjuring a symptom that something had gone wrong in our way of wording things. To refuse to treat the "paradox" at §201 as requiring of us an effort to provide a theory of how norms are implicit in practices is to discover that what was taken to be a genuine problem is really a kind of fantasy, brought on by the way we're using words like "rule," "course," "determine," "action," and "accord."

The rhythm or interval between the first and second paragraphs of §201 might then be generalized as a way of imagining what it means to go on in a language game; not as an inferential game of giving and asking for reasons, but as a method for exemplifying the way certain "problems arise when language goes on holiday" (*PI,* §38). Wittgenstein's method involves arranging words such that the staging and diagnosing of certain philosophical mythologies are at the same time experiments in ways of going on; ways of moving from sentence to sentence. Later in the *Investigations,* Wittgenstein seems himself to want to generalize the movement of his writing: "Phrased *like this*, emphasized like this, heard in this way, this sentence is the first of a series in which a transition is made to *these* sentences" [*PI* §534].[24] The transition occurs, not so much as a licensed inference, but as a logic the order of the sentences makes possible.

At a different point in his "Introductory Note," Cavell asks us to think of the "perspicuousness" of the Wittgensteinian aphorism in relation to the feeling of necessity we have in the experience of formal proofs. Following the aphorism in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics,* that "Proof must be perspicuous" (say, the feeling of necessity that arises in showing that the interior angles of a triangle add up to 180 degrees), Cavell thinks of perspicuousness in relation to style. This is imagined as a "certain unity or reordering of ordinary words [as] (non-formal) moments of complete clarity, ordinary words, that is, which are not meant to line up as premises to a conclusion…Is there perhaps an ordering of words that is its own bottom line, sees to its own ground? Would we, I mean, be prepared to describe any such ordering in this way?"[25] Cavell wonders what one would have to do to words to get out of them a certain kind of clarity; to ground their meaning in an order. A kind of literary tact—the sound of *these* words in *this* order—would then serve as the condition under which we are entitled to mean in our own, and find meaning in another's, words. The sort of

perspicacity striven for here is not a matter of lining up reasons (it would not be "formal" in the way that a proof is formal), but of an attunement to arrangements of words in specific contexts.[26]

We might say this is a matter of arriving at a method that is both attuned to the conditions of a language game and experimental in the sense of trying out new arrangements that push against the edges of a language game. To borrow a phrase from Walt Whitman's own extravagant experiment in ordinary language, we could think of this as being "both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it."[27] A method both beholden to the conditions under which meaning can occur (the new saying can be *shared* with others), and yet at the same time watching and wondering at those conditions as they stretch to accommodate other orders, is strikingly close to what Cavell calls, in a different essay, "speaking inside and outside language games" as "a case of speaking without justification but not wrongfully."[28] Being both in and out of the game such that one's "rights" to one's claims are ensured in ways other than the narrowly justificatory is exactly what seems to be expressed in the famous lines at §217: " 'How am I able to obey a rule?'—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way that I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'." Fusing the rule-following paradox, the conflation of cause and logic made vivid in the machine-as-symbol example, and the relation of "private" language to public criteria, the exhaustion of justifications—the spade reaching bedrock—wrings from the speaker at §217 an inclination to say something that cannot be made any more explicit. The exhaustion of justifications bottoms out in a way of *putting* things.

In a section called "The Private Language Argument," one of forty-six such subheadings in the last section of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell says that Wittgenstein imagines the possibility of a private language in order to "release the fantasy expressed in the denial that language is something essentially shared"; and that these sections from the *Investigations* are "peculiarly colored by the tone of someone allowing a fantasy to be voiced."[29] I take it that what Cavell calls "voicing" is the *condition* underwriting the claim that language *is* something essentially shared, and that this occurs not only in the fantasy scenes Cavell finds in the sections on private language, but throughout the *Investigations*. It is as if the fantasy of private ostension arose as an effect of something *done* at the level of composition, such that what is voiced—what is made perspicuous—is the distinction between a language that has lapsed into default settings and a language kept alive in its ordinariness. A compelling dream like the beetle vignette, in which the thing to which we take ourselves to be pointing were itself, potentially, continually changing, is then not so much the final word on the erroneousness of

the idea of private language, as it is a striking way imagining of what can go wrong when we allow certain philosophical habits to lure us into believing a "problem" is a problem at all.

How exactly, on this construal of conditions, are we to understand the relation of philosophy to literature? Or as Cavell more dramatically puts it: "Can philosophy become literature and still know itself?" (*CR* 496). The placing of the word "know" in this closing sentence of *The Claim of Reason* makes all the difference in taking Cavell's own philosophical aims to be what they are: namely, a re-aligning of the question of criteria, away from its presumed proximity to knowing (what are the conditions under which this cognition or experience becomes possible?), and toward something Cavell calls philosophy's "becoming literature." "Know" is here given back to philosophy as a word it must do something new with, and "literature" perhaps now names an attunement to the tension between our words and their future applications. Only by a relentless re-attunement to how we're using our words, Cavell seems to be saying, is philosophy able to go on. And this occurs, for Cavell and for Wittgenstein (and, I would argue, also for writers like Emerson and Whitman) through an experimenting with the different kinds of intelligibility that can be arrived at from within a shared linguistic inheritance.

With Cavell's idea of literary conditions in mind, we might aspire to mean—in our ongoing interdisciplinary language game between literature and philosophy—something new by the "critical" in literary criticism: namely, criticism as an investigation into the conditions under which literary or philosophical works can be taken as meaningful, such that those conditions allow for a shared accounting of—genuine agreement and disagreement about—such works. For Wittgenstein, the conditions under which such claims become intelligible do not come down to a game of giving and asking for reasons, but are a methodical heightening of the problem of taking responsibility for what we say, understood as a uniquely *literary* responsibility. Going on means listening closely to the conditions under which our sayings become shareable, and doing so at every turn.

NOTES

1. All quotations from Wittgenstein are from *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd. edition, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Edgewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1958), and indicated by section number. My thanks to Rob Chodat, Ian Cornelius, Richard Deming, Jay Elliott, Juliet Floyd, John Gibson, Oren Izenberg, Ross Posnock, David Possen, and Ken Winkler for helping me to think about Wittgenstein, pragmatism, Cavell and other aspects of this essay.

2. Richard Rorty, "Cultural Politics and the Question of the Existence of God," in *Philosophy As Cultural Politics,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11-12.

3. Richard Rorty, "Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin," in *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 295-296. For Sellars on the relation of sense data to knowledge claims, see Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,* with an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 13-25 [hereafter cited as *EPM*]); and Willem A. deVries and Timm Triplett, *Knowledge, Mind and the Given: Reading Wilfrid Sellars's* "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000) xxx-xxxii, and 76-77.

4. Rorty, Richard. "Cultural Politics and God," 10-11. In an earlier essay called "Dewey's Metaphysics," Rorty writes that Dewey makes the mistake of "crossing the line …between causal [relations] and the self-conscious beliefs and inferences they make possible," cautioning that "nothing is to be gained for an understanding of human knowledge by running together the vocabularies in which we describe the causal antecedents of knowledge with those in which we offer justifications of our claims to knowledge." See Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism,* Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1982, 82.

5. Explaining the need for a deduction of the categories of the Understanding from logical functions, Kant appeals in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to an explicitly jurisprudential language: "Jurists, when they speak of entitlements and claims, distinguish in a legal matter between the question about what is lawful [*quid juris*] and that which concerns the fact [*quid facti*], and since they demand proof of both , they call the first, that which is to establish the entitlement of the legal claim, the deduction" (*CPR* A 84 / B 116).

6. Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing & Discursive Commitment.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 13. (Henceforth cited parenthetically as *MIE*).

7. Stanley Cavell, "The *Investigations'* Everyday Aesthetics of Itself," in *The Literary Wittgenstein.* eds. John Gibson and Wolfgang Hummer. (London: Routledge, 2004), 20.

8. Cavell, "The *Investigations'* Everyday Aesthetics," 21.

9. For more on the conflation of the causal and the logical in Wittgenstein's "ideally rigid machine," see Meredith Williams, *Blind Obedience* (London: Routledge, 2010), 155-160.

10. John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," in *Mind, Value & Reality.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 230-231.

11. In his powerfully imaginative interpretation of Wittgenstein's rule-following examples, Saul Kripke highlights the distinction between the "machine as abstract program…and the actual physical machine, which is subject to breakdown," comparing Wittgenstein's machine-as-symbol to Turing machines. Turing machines are "ideal" in the sense that they stand for all a machine needs to be able to do in principle to carry out program-like instructions. See Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language,* 35-36 n.24 [henceforth cited as *WRP*]. For a detailed explanation of Turing machines, see Charles Petzold, *The Annotated Turing: A Guided Tour through Alan Turing's Historic Paper on Computability and the Turing Machine* (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, 2008).

12. Anandi Hattiangadi. "Making It Implicit: Brandom on Rule Following," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* (Vol.66, No.2, 2003), 427.

13. For Brandom's unpacking of this Sellarsian point see *EPM,* 123-130; 139-144. For a helpful account of how Brandom (glossing Sellars) construes the myth of the given as hinging specifically on the move from sense data to noninferential beliefs, see Danielle Macbeth, "Inference, Meaning and Truth in Brandom, Sellars and Frege," in *Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit,* eds. Bernhard Weiss and Jeremy Wanderer (London: Routledge, 2010), 198-201.

14. For Goodman's arguments about how the predicate "grue" radicalizes Hume's skeptical solution to the problem of justifying induction, see "The New Riddle of Induction" in *Fact Fiction and Forecast* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). For the relevance of grue to the gerrymandering problem in Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox, see Kripke, *WRP* 20-21; 58-59. In the case of Poe's poem "The Raven," a confusion of reliable responses with genuine sayings is precisely the narrator's predicament: the bird repeats by rote a sound the narrator takes to be a series of replies to his increasingly

desperate and tormented questions about his "lost Lenore." For more on how "The Raven" animates the problem of "going on" in this way see my *Experience and Experimental Writing From Emerson to the Jameses* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

15. The iron example is taken from *MIE,* 87-88. The example of the photoelectric cell hitched up to a tape recorder—the point of which is that we "cannot readily imagine continuing a conversation with [such a] gadget"—is from Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 189.

16. Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 17. (Henceforth cited parenthetically as *AR*)

17. Commenting on John McDowell's construal of the "myth of the given," Avner Baz makes just this point when he writes: "justification by an appeal to an unarticulated something [the 'myth' that our words could normatively relate to something essentially foreign to them] is no justification at all [and so] the unarticulated something…drops out of consideration as irrelevant, just like Wittgenstein's 'private object,' and can make no contribution to the intelligibility…of our thoughts (judgments, beliefs)." Avner Baz, "On When Words Are Called For: Cavell, McDowell, and the Wording of the World," *Inquiry,* 46: 4, 473-500, 2003, 477-78. See also John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge :Harvard University Press, 1994), 3-23.

18. Cautioning against Brandom's belief that Wittgenstein's way of imagining "norms implicit in practice [requires] work on the part of philosophers to uncover and make explicit," John McDowell thinks that "there is no reason to suppose there must be a level of normativity *below* the level at which linguistic practice is described in terms of explicitly using this or that concept, and it is no concern of Wittgenstein's to suggest that there is." (John McDowell, "How Not To Read *Philosophical Investigations,*" in *The Engaged Intellect* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009], 98; 108; my emphasis).

19. Brandom sometimes uses the example of conditionals to illustrate what he means by expressivism: "Before introducing the [logical vocabulary of conditionals] one can *do* something, namely, endorse an inference. After introducing the conditional, one can now *say* that the inference is a good one. The expressive role of the conditional is to make *explicit,* in the form of a claim, what before was *implicit* in our practice of distinguishing some inferences as good." (*AR* 81) For an account of conditionals as introduced into inferential practice as an "algorithmic elaboration," see Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Toward an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 31-55.

20. Nor is it a matter, in my view, of radicalizing the problem of induction along the lines of Kripke's claim that Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox stands in need of a Hume-like "skeptical solution." See Kripke, *WRP,* 66-69. For a compelling, and somewhat different, account of Kripke's construal of the rule-following paradox—as a question of the "right" by which fellow rule-followers "taken into the community" [*WRP,* 110] and the "normative silence" of persons—see Oren Izenberg, *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 94-95.

21. Stanley Cavell, "Introductory Note," in *The Literary Wittgenstein,* 20.

22. John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," 231; 236.

23. Cavell, "Introductory Note," in *The Literary Wittgenstein,* 20.

24. The context of the discussion at §534 is that of considering two ways of understanding the meaning of a sentence. On the one hand, understanding a sentence can be thought of on the model of one sentence being "replaced by another which says the same"; on the other, "only by these words in these positions" [§531]. For Wittgenstein, what it means to understand a sentence includes aspects of both [§532]. I appeal to §531-534 in conjunction with §201 because the *way* Wittgenstein shows the "paradox" to be a mirage depends, I argue, on his ordering sentences in such a way that transition from one to the other is not a matter of inferential compatibility relations, but a function of what Cavell calls "literary conditions."

25. Stanley Cavell, ""The *Investigations* Everyday Aesthetics," in *The Literary Wittgenstein,* 21.

26. For a nuanced account of the relation between conditions, criteria and context in Cavell's thought, see Steven G. Affeldt, "The Ground of Mutuality: Criteria, Judgment, and Intelligibility in Stephen Mulhall and Stanley Cavell," in *European Journal of Philosophy,* 6:1, 1-31.

27. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass.* (New York: Library of America), 30.

28. Stanley Cavell, "The Argument of the Ordinary," in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 83; 69; henceforth cited as *CHU*. Cavell makes this point specifically in relation to the way the "interlocutor" in the *Investigations* "poses a great task, the continuous task of Wittgenstein's prose, oscillating between vanity and humility. Skepticism appears in [the *PI*] as one of the voices locked in this argument, not as a solution or conclusion" (Cavell, *CHU,* 83).

[29.] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy.* (New York: Oxford, 1979), 344. (Henceforth cited as *CR* in the text). Anyone who has read even a little Cavell knows that he remains interested (to put it mildly) in such fantasies: why and how they persist, what their persistence tells us about human life and the self, and what they tell us about the desire for something like philosophy (issues Cavell takes up, in all of his work, under the theme of skepticism). By placing my emphasis here on how Cavell describes Wittgenstein's *way* of writing as indispensible to his philosophical aims, I certainly do not mean to suggest that Cavell is concerned to read Wittgenstein as dissolving, once and for all, such fantasies. For Cavell's positioning of his reading of Wittgenstein on rules in relation to Kripke's claim that §201 sets up a problem in need of a "skeptical solution," and how this is matter of what it means to "go on," see Cavell, *CHU,* 69-96.

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CONFIANCE AU MONDE; OR, THE POETRY OF EASE

OREN IZENBERG

1.

This paper is an attempt to give content to some intuitions about what I will call "ease" in poetry. The *state* or *condition* of ease, I will define provisionally as a fit of person to world, a relation to experience that is uncrossed, unchecked, undarkened by some more familiar alternative states of mind or conditions of life: skepticism, anxiety, alienation, repression, bad faith. The *poetry* of ease (should such a thing exist) would be poetry that does not speak of that state as one speaks of an unknown country we might wish one day to visit—Cockaigne, Bensalem, Innisfree—but rather a poetry that expresses ease as we express our native air: stirring it with our living presence, not exhausting it with our efforts. In a more technical idiom, a poetry that expresses ease would be expressive in the same unpressured and oddly passive sense of the word "express" that we use when we say that our genetic material *is expressed* in our phenotype, or when we say that a natural language *expresses* the grammar that makes it possible. This as-yet-hypothetical mode of expression is one of the things that could distinguish ease from its poetic siblings and semblables, and from other, more haunted pictures of satisfaction: the costumed rusticity of pastoral *otium*; the sentimental vitalism of Romantic "indolence"; the ferocious atavism of the highest High Moderns, desperate for rest

"at the still point of the turning world"; the tranquilizing yet still polemical drone of our contemporary conceptual and ambient poetries.[1]

I should say at the outset that ease is a topic that I've found, with predictable irony, very difficult— both to conceptualize and to exemplify. The difficulty of conceptualization is, I think, overdetermined. Part of it is no doubt temperamental; for the state I'm after—a state not just of relief from anxiety, but of release into life— is one that I find hard to lay hold of experientially. My own stance toward the idea of ease is something like Horace's Ode 2.16: "*Otium divos rogat in patenti/ prensus Aegaeo"* ["Peace, the sailor prays, caught in a storm on the open Aegean."]. I am, however, for reasons I hope to explain, theoretically (which is perhaps to say, thoroughly unnaturally) committed to it as a thought worth having.

Jean Paulhan, in a remark that Wallace Stevens admired (admiring that which he most certainly did not possess) spoke of "la confiance que le poète fait naturellement—et nous invite à faire—au monde."[2] The privileged naturalness of the poet is a traditional vanity. The *concept* of ease, as a natural fitness for the world, does not in and of itself demand peculiar experts or expressive geniuses.[3] Paulhan's idea of an *invitation* to ease, however, does seem to require some idea of expressive felicity; it is thus readily available as a poetic idea or an ideal of poetry. The constellation of the state of confident ease with the act of invitation may be discovered in the opening lines of *Leaves of Grass*:

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> I loafe and invite my soul,
> I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
>
> My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
> Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
> I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
> Hoping to cease not till death.
>
> Creeds and schools in abeyance,
> Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
> I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
> Nature without check with original energy.[4]

Whitman's poem thematizes the confidence that Paulhan has in mind. Does he also express that confidence, invite us to it? I don't think so. For here, even at the commencement of the most daringly presumptuous celebration and song in the tradition, we can hear the note of mortal fear sounding in the poet's thought that the apparent perfection of his health and the manifest vitality of his sentences exist only to mark the time between the present moment ("in perfect health begin") and the death that will bring him not to a deeper ease but to utter "cease." We can intuit, too, the shaping presence of encroaching conflict—conflict without which Whitman's insistence upon warding off the hazard of "[c]reeds and schools" would be nonsensical. What cannot be forgotten or abolished must be actively held "in abeyance;" what cannot be credibly argued (that being two is "as good" as being one, that there is no material distance between persons or qualitative difference between posessions) must be boldly, willfully "assume[d]"—as one assumes a premise, or a pose, or a feigned and bombastic persona. The provocation to Whitman's particular invitation to ease is not a confident consubstantiality but rather a separation of self and soul; indeed, the very idea of an invitation seems on its face to *require* the thought that ease lies at some distance away; separated from us by a gulf that is at once temporal and conceptual. Perhaps "ease" is always "Là," as Baudelaire suggests in "L'invitation au Voyage":

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux,
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

[My sister, my child
Imagine how sweet
To live there as lovers do!

To kiss as we choose
To love and to die
In that land resembling you!
The misty suns
Of shifting skies
To my spirit are as dear
As the evasions
Of your eyes
That shine behind their tears.

There, all is order and leisure,
Luxury, beauty, and pleasure.] [5]

Paulhan's sentence denies the implied geography of such invitations. Or perhaps "denies" is the wrong word; like Whitman's pressured affirmations, like Baudelaire's wishful exclamations, a denial is at once too easy and plausibly self refuting. Denial exacerbates the conflict that "confiance au monde" is meant to dispel (self-skepticism, world-skepticism) by preserving antagonism inviolate under the sign of negation. The force of Paulhan's confidence is not to be found in the stridency of his rhetoric, nor in the truth of his propositions. It is, rather, the scoring of his sentence that abolishes, to the best of its ability, the boundless distance and endless futurity of luxury and calm. Note, for example, the way the interpolated clause ("et nous invite à faire") separates an intentional state ("confiance") from its object ("le monde") without interpolation signifying an interruption or a deformation. Here, it is Paulhan's *syntax* that raises compelling questions about the form and nature of ease not just as a thought, but as an achievable style. More specifically, it intimates the possibility of an expressive achievement—non-justificatory, non-explanatory, and therefore non-agonistic—that lies within his idea of "invitation."

In thinking about how—or whether— poetry might issue such an invitation to others or to one's own soul, much will depend on where an "invitation" lies on the continuum that connects any number of speech acts. Most centrally, it depends on whether we take poems to consist in acts of description or assertion (propositions about what is the case, verifiable or falsifiable as the evidence allows, as in the Whitman case); acts of intimation (of something evermore about to be, as in the Baudelaire case), or, as I prefer to think, and will try to argue, acts of exemplification like Paulhan's syntax, bodying forth what is. [6] The verdict on that question will in turn have some bearing on the question of where ease itself lies within the conceptual field that contains the actual, the possible, and the merely imagined or hoped-for. [7]

I've already admitted to a personal resistance to the idea that idea that ease is ready to hand in experience. But part of the difficulty of exemplifying ease as a term of *art* describing a species of *artwork*—or perhaps more precisely, a species of art without work—may be a result of a generic resistance. By this I mean to note the persistent appeal of a description of poetry as constitutively committed to or originating in varieties of doubt or dissatisfaction. Allen Grossman has argued that "valid poetry comes to be only when the man or woman with work to do has exhausted all means other than poetic for doing the work that needs to be done."[8] Such difficulties and doubts may even be seen as constitutive of the medium or the act of representation altogether (c.f. Nietzsche on the Origins of Language in *The Gay Science,* for example, or Freud on the origins of representation in *Totem and Taboo*).

At present, however, the uneasy account of poetry is most likely to be presented, not as a quirk of temperament, a feature of genre, or a quality of medium, but as a historical claim. Really, as two interrelated historical claims—a claim about the special difficulties of *modern* poetry predicated upon a claim about the special difficulties faced by the subject in modernity. The canonical example of this mounting of formal crisis upon civilizational crisis is, of course, T.S. Eliot's proclamation, in "The Metaphysical Poets": "it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult."[9] This hypothesis is rendered more than merely aesthetic by its relation to Eliot's equally notorious account of the "dissociation of sensibility" that sundered ratiocination from emotion sometime in the seventeenth century, with the unfortunate aesthetic-existential result that poets "thought and felt by fits, unbalanced."[10] If Eliot's account of difficulty and "dissociation" presided over the first half of the twentieth century, it is Adorno's insistence that lyric's song be heard in the key of negation that sits astride the second. As he puts the case in "Lyric Poetry and Society," "The lyric spirit's idiosyncratic opposition to the superior power of material things is a form of reaction to the reification of the world, to the domination of human beings by commodities that has developed since the beginning of the modern era, since the industrial revolution became the dominant force in life."[11] To the degree that Adorno's argument has any consequences for practical criticism, we might say that it is expressly devoted to ferreting out those aspects of modern lyric most fully charged with expression of ease, of a subject's suitedness for existence (The "unfathomable beauty" of Goethe's "Wanderers Nachtlied) and reversing their polarity: "Their pure subjectivity, the aspect of them that appears seamless and harmonious, bears witness to its opposite, to suffering in an existence alien to the subject and to love for it as well—-indeed their harmoniousness is actually nothing but the mutual accord of this suffering and this love."[12] For Adorno, lyric's apparent access to "the thought of a free humanity" is expressed as an epigram of unease: "lyric work is always the expression of social antagonism."[13] Here is how he puts it an aesthetic theory *Aesthetic Theory: "*Art's *promesse*

du bonheur means not only that hitherto praxis has blocked happiness, but that happiness is beyond praxis. The force of negativity in the artwork gives the measure of the chasm separating praxis from happiness." (12) [14]

The same commitment to hearing the historical antagonism in the sweetest song underwrites contemporary versions of the claim to lyric's resistance to ease. But just as we might note the way Adorno's epigram on lyric work slides with little friction from modernity (the industrial revolution and commodity capitalism) to eternity (the "always" present character of social antagonism), so to we can observe the elasticity of a range of putatively historicist explanations that always seem to result in the same claim—whether the claim is about the British seventeenth century, the German nineteenth century, the advent of postmodernism, and the avant-garde's reaction to 9-11. [15] The mind is driven out of nature; the subject is homeless in the world; all poetry is elegy. The failure of historical difference to make all the difference (or even much of a difference at all) in the story we tell, suggests that it may not be some particular account of history—anti-modernist, Marxist, or otherwise— that is to blame for the fact that Paulhan's claim that the poet has and invites confidence in the world seems strange rather than natural. Such strangeness may be dreamt of in our philosophy.

In his recent work, Richard Eldridge makes an historicist case for poetry's difficulty in familiar terms, citing what he calls the "commonplaces of modernity" ("the growth of scientific and technological knowledge, increasing urbanization, and expanding market economies," along with the ideology of the Germans in the last decades of the 18th century) to explain the triumph of "subjective particularity" as a result of which "[i]ndividuals begin to have to make a way of life, more and more by skill and will and less and less by necessity and tradition. [16] But what is distinctive about Eldridge's otherwise familiar reiteration of the commonplaces of modernity is the explicitness with which he acknowledges that his history of subjectivity is underwritten by a set of *metaphysical* claims even as it relegates the *causal* structure of what he calls "ontological fact" to a distant second: "the ontological fact of the exteriority of discursive consciousness to nature…has not always and everywhere been prominent in consciousness or culture. It has not always and everywhere been thought to be worthwhile to dwell on it." [17] But the force of calling this condition one of "ontological fact" is surely that whether one finds it worthwhile to dwell *upon* it or not, the subject of this sort of "discursive consciousness" must nonetheless dwell *within* it. Sometimes that dwelling will be a conscious process; the mind must *act* to "find what will suffice," as Stevens has it in "Of Modern Poetry"; sometimes it will be a passive acceptance of traditional forms of life ("It has not always had/ To find: the scene was set; it repeated what/ Was in the script."). But both active seeking and passive repetition are forms of negotiation with ontological fact; with the existential lack that harrows the homeless mind into acceptance of traditional consolations

or that drives the will toward new solutions. And negotiation, Derrida reminds us, has at its root "neg-otium, not-ease, not-quiet," before going on to draw out the consequences: "If you would like to translate this philosophically, the impossibility of stopping, this means: no thesis, no position, no theme, no station, no substance, no stability, a perpetual suspension, a suspension without rest." [18]

Ultimately, I am less interested in criticizing the tension between historicism and its philosophical roots that marks our institutional culture, than I am in thinking about the consequences of that tension for the making of poems. As I see it, the ontological conception of "discursive consciousness" as exterior to nature places upon poetry a limit of expressive variation. That limit is the poet's knowledge of the apparent *requirement* of subjective unease, borne into speech.

Here are two instances of such limit or constraint:

> My fiftieth year had come and gone,
> I sat, a solitary man,
> In a crowded London shop,
> An open book and empty cup
> On the marble table-top.
> While on the shop and street I gazed
> My body of a sudden blazed;
> And twenty minutes more or less
> It seemed, so great my happiness,
> That I was blessed and could bless. [19]

Things
        come and go.
Then
       let them.

Having to—
what do I think
to say now.
Nothing but
comes and goes
in a moment.
      *
Cup.
Bowl.
Saucer.
Full. [20]

Two cups—one empty and one full. Two evocations of the transient moment that comes and goes—one ecstatically full, the other a zenlike emptiness. On their surfaces these poems seem to invite nothing but contrast: the verbal music and discursive fluency of W.B. Yeats's recollection of past happiness with the pressured staccato reticence of Robert Creeley's attempt to achieve satisfaction with and in the present; the well-furnished world of shops and tabletops in which Yeats finds himself with the stark "things" and abstract obligations of Creeley's placeless meditation; the parsing intelligence of Yeatsian rhyme (where "gone" and "man" stand locked in their defining mortal hostility) with the verbal atomism of Creeley's world in moments and pieces. But for all their differences, what the poems share in my ear is not exactly a tone, but a performed constriction upon achievable tone; a ratio between aspiration and achievement. Yeats's evocation of ecstasy—figured here as the blaze of the body—is hemmed in by a duration that is comically precise and approximate at once. Creeley quenches the blaze, affects a low affect equanimity, and instructs himself to will nothing but for things to act as they will; but the arrival of adjectival fullness at the nominal feast betrays a descriptive vehemence that belies satieity. [21]

As crucial moments within poems that are themselves sequences (each stanza comes at roughly the halfway point in its longer series, each poem stands at a revisionary moment in a poetic career), these passages represent or project an internal limit to the poem's understanding of what constitutes an available style. In the same way, these overtly philosophical poems stand in predictive relation to a whole range of contemporary poetries that situate themselves and their problems more explicitly in history, but perform similarly

straitened emotional ranges. If I were to produce paradigmatic examples of what I mean here—poetry of immense ambition and scope that nevertheless denies itself the fullest imaginable range of *tonal* variety on what I take to be philosophic grounds, I might point to Canadian Poet Lisa Robertson's XEclogue, for its explicitly punitive relation to the pastoral tradition of ease:

> I needed to pry loose liberty from an impacted marriage to the soil. I needed a genre to gloss my ancestress' complicity with a socially expedient code; to invade my own illusions of historical innocence. The proud trees, the proud rocks, the proud sky, the proud fields, the proud poor have been held before my glazed face for centuries. I believed they were reflections. The trees leaned masochistically into my absence of satisfaction….The nasty hours brim with the refinements of felicity. [22]

Or else to the British poet Keston Sutherland's *tour de force* poem of love immersed in the acid bath of politicized negativity, "Hot White Andy":

Lavrov and the Stock Wizard levitate over to
the blackened dogmatic catwalk and you eat them. Now swap
buy for *eat*, then *fuck* for *buy*, then *ruminate* for *fuck*,
phlegmophrenic, want to go to the windfarm,
Your • kids menu lips swinging in the Cathex-Wizz monoplex;
Your • face lifting triple its age in Wuhan die-cut peel lids;
ng pick *Your* out the reregulated loner PAT to to screw white
chocolate to the bone. The tension in an unsprung
r trap co
→ The tension in an unsprung trap.
ck QUANT unpruned wing: sdeigne of JOCK
of how I together grateful anyway I was
Its sacked glass, *Punto*
→ What is
be done on the sly is manic gargling, *to*
to blacken the air in hot manic recitative from a storm throat,
WLa-15 types *to* Tungsten electrodes Aaron Zhong,
feazing that throat into fire / under its
hot life the rope light thrashes I in its suds, [is] *Your* chichi news noose
/ Dr. Unicef Cheng budget slasher movie hype on *Late Review*
I keep dreaming about you every single night last
night I you making love Stan, I didn't know him then
it hurts, and *I* disappear but the nights stick.
Abner Jon Louima Burge Cheng. [23]

But such examples would be misleading precisely because by their strength and distinctiveness they misrepresent the generality of a virtually exceptionless state of affairs. The reader of ambitious contemporary poetry will find an anger scale on which the negative emotions are broadly represented—by many flavors of rage and indignation, passionate bewilderment, ecstatic mourning and even flatness in response to loss. There are also many shades of humor to enjoy—broad, sophisticated, sly, wry, campy, brutal. Both of these spectra of feeling– the rageful and the comic– belong, by and large, to the *humiliated* person, or to what Adorno calls "degraded humanity" [24] —the person whose occasions for speaking are instances of the world's failure either to accommodate her existence or to provide a justification for his desire to exist. For our poets, such ease that poetry may achieve will always suspect itself of denying reality ("an illusion of historical innocence") or else it will use fugitive and fragile moments of ease to register pain through the force of its cancellation. ("Hot White Andy" moves toward it's ending thus: "you are impossible to forget/ the face ecstasy screams under, / lighting the world you damage and repossess.")

What one will not find is an assay at the question that Yeats's asks at the outset of "Vacillation":

> But if these be right
> What is joy?

Nor will there be anything to sustain Creeley's conviction in *Pieces*, that

> Love's consistency
> favors me

2.

One way to imagine an alternative to the infinite nuances of negativity that fill our reading and making in the present is as not so much as a challenge to the *history* that frames us, (what Eldridge describes as the acute spin that a cultural moment places on an ontological fact) but as a challenge to the metaphysics that lies beneath that history.[25] I'd like to begin the project of putting the concept of ease on different philosophical footing by making a connection between the expressive problem of *poetic* ease that I've been discussing, with an expressive problem that has determined the reception of one of the most important works of philosophy of mind in the last twenty-five years.

In *Mind and World,* an expanded volume of the 1991 John Locke Lectures at Oxford, John McDowell sets out to address what he calls a "philosophical anxiety" central to the whole enterprise of thinking. How, the question goes, can we make sense of the idea that persons can both be natural—which is to say *material beings*, subject to the laws of material, and also be spontaneous and meaningful, which is to say beings who give themselves reasons and who act on the reasons they give?[26]

This anxiety, McDowell explains, is the product of two philosophical views, both widely held—indeed versions of them are held by McDowell himself. First, is the idea of "minimal empiricism." Minimal empiricism asserts, against any lingering Platonism or transcendentalism, that it is our "cognitive predicament" to confront the world in and through the lens of experience and the scrim of our senses.[27] But minimal empiricism is also the idea that in order for our thinking to be in any sense directed *at the world* (as in the case of making judgments about it, or even just of fixing beliefs that the world is some particular way) then experience must be more than a passive receptivity. To put it in the terms that McDowell

borrows from Quine, experience must stand in relation to thought as a "tribunal," rendering verdicts *from* the world on our judgments or beliefs *about* the world.

The second view is what McDowell calls the "dichotomy of logical spaces."[28] In order for a mental state to count as having "content"—indeed in order for it to count as thought at all—it must have a normative aspect, "standing in rational relations to what we should think, not just in causal relations to what we do think."[29] This is obviously true in the case of judgments; the word itself bears with it normative freight. But this normative character is equally present in belief. Even a minimal belief about what lies in front of me is not just mute fact, but part of a logical picture. It can be the basis for other, more complex beliefs, or be entailed by other, more basic ones. Wilfrid Sellars has termed this normative framework—in which some mental state can be taken to be warranted by or provide warrant for another—the "logical space of reasons." The problem is that "experience," conceived as the impact of the world on the human sensorium, is not generally understood to belong to the logical space of reasons. It belongs rather to what McDowell is willing to call "the logical space of nature." Experience, on McDowell's account, has a different kind of intelligibility: "the kind we find in a phenomenon when we see it governed by a natural law," by cause and effect, by the senseless movement of particles.[30] "Empirical content" then, would seem to be an impossible animal. Experience, subject to the laws of nature, could serve as a *cause* of belief, as a thrown rock causes the expanding ripples in a pond. Or, as McDowell puts it, experience might serve as an "exculpation" of belief: we do not hold people fully responsible just for seeing what they cannot help but see. But it is not at all clear how experience, conceived of as a bare getting of impressions, could count as a *reason* for belief. Nor is easy to see how a natural process governed by strict causal laws could be compatible with the normative relations necessary for experience to serve as a tribunal for thought. The alternatives would seem to be on the one hand the bare getting of experience, but *without thinking*, and on the other the human faculty of reason and spontaneity unbound from the world: a "frictionless spinning in the void."[31]

The result is a conflict that will be familiar to readers of poetry. It is Wordsworth's impasse at Simplon Pass "when the light of sense goes out/ but in a flash" leaving the imagination to supplement the eye's failure. It is Shelley's terror at Mont Blanc that "to the human minds imaginings / silence and solitude were vacancy." It is Stevens's Ordinary Evening in New Haven, in which the "eyes plain version" is both "the vulgate of experience" and also "part of the never-ending meditation."

For McDowell, as for Eldridge, such anxieties are understood to be a historical problem—what he calls "characteristic anxieties of *modern* philosophy" (my emphasis). And the conceptual force of the claim to the problem's modernity is familiar. The source of a perceived disjunction between mind and world is the result of the purely nomothetic

description of the natural given by modern science. But for McDowell, crucially unlike Eldridge, what makes the modern anxiety *anxiety* is not the degree to which the problem of thinking has finally, at long last manifested itself in thought; it is, rather, the degree to which our impoverished conception of nature has *concealed* something about the nature of thought. McDowell seeks to exorcise modern philosophical anxiety by pointing out that it *is* our nature as the kinds of beings we are to give and respond to reasons, speak in justification or explanation. In the ordinary course of living a human life, entering into language and culture, achieving maturity in a fully social world we actualize natural potentialities for normative life. "The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being's eyes to them."[32] This opening of the eyes, McDowell calls, traditionally enough, *Bildung*.

This account has the virtue of holding onto the distinction between the space of reasons and the space of laws and causes, but with the priviso that we revise a conception of nature reductively mischaracterized as belonging exclusively to the latter. With an expanded sense of the natural (one that is "partially reenchanted") experience can seem to be, *perceptually*, a reason and not just causes. *Impressions* (the impact of the world on perception) can *already* be the appearance that something is the case to a suitable subject to "one who possesses the relevant concepts."[33] They can have a normative character without ceasing to be impressions. The reason why we possess the relevant concepts is because we are beings in whose nature it is to do so. McDowell refers to this potential as our "second nature," though the term can be misleading: second nature may be temporally second, a product of maturation as well as education and socialization, but it is not second in naturalness. The whole complex thought is contained in a slogan, or what McDowell calls a *reminder*: "nature includes *second nature*."[34] There is much more that could be said about McDowell's particular solution—for and against it, and about the complex philosophical culture in which it signifies; much of that is relevant to poetry. (In particular, his argument against the idea of non-conceptual content is, or ought to be, important to debates in literary aesthetics.) There is also a case to be made for McDowell's immediate relevance to the accounts of poetic modernity that I have already cited: Most specifically, I might note that McDowell's partially reenchanted nature directly addresses the Eliotic account of dissociation, albeit in reverse. For Eliot's Donne, "[a] thought…was an experience; it modified his sensibility,"[35] for McDowell, an experience is for us a thought; it modifies our thinking. Likewise, McDowell's wish to provide for an account of human thinking that would be compatible with human freedom answers to the same pressures as Adorno's celebration of poetic negativity.

For present purposes, however, I want to focus somewhat myopically on a peculiar rhetorical feature of McDowell's argument. Indeed, it is precisely the *mode* of argument (or non-argument) that many of McDowell's critics have found most difficult or troubling. McDowell, in issuing his reminder, deliberately refrains from what he calls "constructive philosophy"—the giving of arguments, the casting of theories, the answering of what he calls "how possible" questions. McDowell's mode of argument—his rhetoric of reminder—is motivated by the belief that anyone not in the grips of a reflection-induced delusion *already* knows that nature is not brute, that it contains "second nature"—that our capacities to develop into reason-involving beings is a part of our natural way of being, and that a mere reminder is adequate to allow us to "achieve a way of seeing things." [36]

This philosophical quietism is provoking. In a representative objection, Crispin Wright has insisted that "some massive unstated assumption would seem to be at work in McDowell's suggestion…that our initiation into such discourses is a matter of perfectly ordinary human upbringing which our nature equips us to receive." [37] With characteristic verve, Jerry Fodor says of the proposition that second nature is natural, "It's not enough for *McDowell* to say that it is and that you can get some down at the *Bildung store*: he has to say how it could be short of spooks." [38] Robert Pippin, on the other hand, reads McDowell as an agonist in spite of himself, ("grappling with" the question of a conceptualized experience "if not answering" it, as though any discourse on the matter served to undermine the aspiration to quietism. [39]

By McDowell's lights, however, the very thinness of the concept of second nature is a feature rather than a bug:

> [t]he reminder that the idea of second nature is at our disposal is just that, a reminder— not a piece of news, not a report of a substantial achievement in philosophical theory. What we are reminded of should be something that we knew all along, but were intelligibly induced to forget under the stress of philosophical reflection. What we are reminded of should be in itself—that is, considered in abstraction from the feeling of being confronted by deep and difficult intellectual problems that it is supposed to liberate us from—thin and obvious. [40]

If this thin obviousness has contestable merits as a philosophical strategy, it has considerable promise as a poetic one. Stevens argues for the particular felicity of "confidence" by distinguishing it from other "words": "words of understanding, words of reconciliation, of enchantment, even of forgetfulness. But none of them would have penetrated to our needs more surely than the word confidence." [41] This is a semantic judgement shared by Ernst Bloch: "Hope is not confidence. Hope is surrounded by dangers, and it is the consciousness

of danger and at the same time the determined negation of that which continually makes the opposite of the hoped-for object possible." [42]

Just as confidence is hope cut free from its surrounding dangers, so too a "reminder" is an invitation cut free from a discursive environment of argument and persuasion. It is a performance of knowledge that causes anxiety to lapse, that opens our eyes to the obvious without insisting upon it. Or to put the point slightly differently, the idea of a reminder *is* the idea of a poetry of ease.

What difference might it make for poetry if we were to conceive of its work, not as the historically changeful wrestling with an ontological condition of exteriority to the world—a condition that we might realize more or less explicitly (indeed, the virtue of much modern poetry is supposed to reside in the degree to which it comes to *live* with this condition with the highest degree of explicitness)— but rather as a series of reminders, testing our capacity to live out our natures as natural beings? What would this enable us, as critics, to hear? What would it allow us, as poets, to write? What would it enable us, as inhabitants of the world, to say? [43] This far along, I can only sketch a framework which answers might fall. The first promise would be a loosening of the prohibitions on range that I discussed above with reference to Modernist and contemporary poetry. We might think of this as the achievement of what Keats called "full-throated ease." Or, as McDowell seeks a partially re-enchanted nature, we could call it the reenchantment of song. Such a song would not be an elegantly tuneful proclamation of substantive doctrine, of the kind we find in Wordsworth's famous McDowellian argument in the Excursion:

> My voice proclaims
> How exquisitely the individual Mind
> (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
> Of the whole species) to the external World
> Is fitted:–and how exquisitely, too,
> Theme this but little heard of among Men,
> The external World is fitted to the Mind.

(note here Wordsworth's stridency, his insistence upon the rarity of the news, how impressed he is with the force of his own geius at penetrating to the truth). It would be something else—something altogether more inviting. George Peele is surely an unlikely candidate for a poet of ease (considering his possible status as collaborator in the brutalities of *Titus Andronicus)* but his short lyric "A Summer Song," combines the thematic of desire satisfied

with an utterly satisfying verbal music in a way that I find difficult to resist. Which is to say, I hear in it none of the difficulty of resistance that I have elsewhere been describing:

> When as the rye reach to the chin,
> And chopcherry, chopcherry ripe within,
> Strawberries swimming in the cream,
> And school-boys playing in the stream;
> Then O, then O, then O my true love said,
> Till that time come again,
> She could not live a maid. [44]

This is a poem of wit. It anticipates a knowing audience; one that would have a learned grasp on the conventions of *carpe diem*, and a knowing appreciation of play upon them. But there is no *irony* in the play of this poetic argument: this moment of ripeness, the poem confidently proclaims, will certainly recur—because love is serial and nothing new under the sun is to be expected. But one would have to *wait* for another such moment to come round again—and why wait when ecstasy is ready to hand? There is no friction in such an interpretation, just as there is none in its formal vehicle. The poem redoubles fulfillment with fulfillment, meeting an expectation so artfully and gracefully that there is no mystery; nothing to dissent from. So if it is the case that I do not have revelatory interpretation of this poem, such critical failure (if that is what it is) seems just right: one critical corollary to full-throated ease should be the lapsing of the puzzlement and need that drives us to articulate even ease as an arguable proposition. [Yeats: "You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence"; Karl Shapiro: ""The meaning of poetry, as far as language is concerned, is the meaning of hey-nonny-nonny."]

At the same time, I do *want* more to say. Implicit in the idea that perception itself is already conceptual, already available for thought, is the idea that we might do more than merely bask in beauty, we might seek its content without thereby imposing ourselves upon it and destroying it in the process. We need a more fully developed vocabulary for articulating the content in such experience. We might call this the reconceptualization of song. [45]

At the opposite limit of the integral that defines poetry, we find talk. Talk is, perhaps an unlikely style in which to seek out ease, given its imbrications in social life with all its anxieties and complications. But McDowell's argument suggests the compatibility of ease and sociability. Here I might point to the most urbane of poets, so immersed in second nature that he famously declared "I can't even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there's a subway handy, or a record store or some other sign that people do not totally *regret* life." [46]

In "Having a Coke with You," Frank O'Hara rediscovers a familiar truth: that in the right company, even the most ordinary action

> is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne
> or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona
> partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian
> partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yoghurt
> partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches
> partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary
> it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as still
> as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
> in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth
> between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles [47]

In this poem, the judgment that having a coke with his beloved is "fun" accomplishes much the same expressive work that I am ascribing to ease. To say that O'Hara's "fun" is rigorous is, I hope, not to spoil its fun. I have argued elsewhere that "Fun" in O'Hara is not a form of mere exquisite sensibility, but rather a way of judging and sorting the world. [48] Indeed, it is a judgment of complex and capacious determination. O'Hara's capacity to consider under one measure things that would ordinarily be considered fun and things that are not at all obviously "fun" (going to San Sebastian, being sick to your stomach) is something like grace in its capacity to elevate the fine and to redeem even regrettable aspects of experience. But the philosophy of O'Hara's fun improves upon the theology of grace (from the perspective of a desire for ease) by imagining a potentially infinite number of experiences contributing *rationally* to a judgment of the world. Thus, resemblance to religious icons, gustatory pleasures, natural beauties, and even personal affections can all contribute rationally to the work of thinking, and give rise to an experience of belonging to the world whose *legibility* is a necessary condition of its existence. As O'Hara proclaims of those afflicted with a more straitened range in art and in life:

> it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience

which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you about it

***

Some final thoughts. Whenever I have presented this material, I have often encountered—in myself as much as in others—a resistance one might call moral. Ease is easy. That is, I feel obligated—professionally, as it were—to acknowledge the degree to which this way of approaching the problem of ease could seem to be abandoning some of the hard questions that animate us as readers and teachers; and not just critically, but ethically and politically. I take this resistance seriously, even as I try to argue that such anxieties are not wholly obligatory. McDowell is hard on the philosophy that would not take the difficulties *we think* we face seriously, that does not, as he puts it, respect that "real insight is operative in seeming to be faced with that obligation."[49] To put the thought most starkly, "It matters that the illusion is capable of gripping us."[50] To say that it matters is to say that there is at least a *felt* obligation to distinguish between impressions and reasons, between the way things appear to us unreflectively and the considered and critical judgments we form with great labor of thought. There is no question that history of poetry is in large part the record of the lived experience of a dichotomy between the "logical space of nature"—brute nature with its blind causality—and the "logical space of reasons" with its intentions and reason involving agency.

So two questions remain. First, how to think about poetry in a way that might respect the grip of the illusion—that respects the psychological pressures upon lives as real—without taking that *respect* to be the same thing as being *wrapped up* in the illusion. And second, how to think about the lived difference between an "anxiety" sponsored by a metaphysics of unease, and all the other sorts of "anxiety" that would be consistent with a philosophical embrace of ease. (which is to say, all the anxieties that a person might rationally feel in a complex and troubling historical moment.)

I would like to believe that a poetry of ethical or even political concern could achieve different effects and better thought if it were to *begin* with a metaphysics that did not doom it to wandering in advance, and forever. But here, perhaps tellingly, I have no ready example. And that uneasy note seems as good a one as any to end upon.

NOTES

1. C.f. Tan Lin, in an interview describing his goals for *plagiarism/outsource:* "Here I would say that the project is about a softer, ambient avant-garde that works against radical disjuncture or the montage/ shock effect, and perhaps the most shocking effect is that of the author (in relation to his/ her own or somebody else's textual material). These effects seem dated to a specific period of the historical avant-garde or the neo avant-garde, and I wanted to question some of these assumptions with work that might be relaxing, boring, absorptive, sampled freely and without effort, easy, etc. This kind of textual material is appealing for reasons specific to particular text production and distribution formats. In other words, I didn't want this to be avant-garde, I wanted YOU or me or her to read it like web surfing, or a mash up or something we do all day long, or like Pepys' *Diary*. And then maybe we could embrace Helena or Pepys or you or me." Tan Lin, "Interview with Tan Lin," *Galatea Resurrects* #12, ed. Eileen Tabios, May 18, 2009. <http://galatearesurrection12.blogspot.com/2009/05/tan-lin-interviewed.html>

2. Stevens cites what he calls Paulhan's "happy phrase" in "A Collect of Philosophy," *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton J. Bates (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 200.

3. Friedrich Schiller insists on the *necessary* naiveté of genius in "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" : "From the naive way of thinking flows in a necessary manner also a naive expression, as much in words as movements, and it is the most important ingredient of grace. Genius expresses its most sublime and deepest thoughts with this naive grace; they are divine sayings from the mouth of a child." "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry", The Schiller Institute, trans. William F. Wertz, Jr, 2005. http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/schiller_essays/naive_sentimental-1.html

4. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose,* ed. Justin Kaplan, (New York: Library of America, 1982), 188.

5. Charles Baudelaire, "L'Invitation au voyage," in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James N. McGowan, ed. Jonathan *(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993*), 108.

6. This use of the term has some relation to Goodman's account of exemplification as denotation—as "possession plus reference"—but it begs some of the questions that have been posed to Goodman (by Monroe Beardsley, for example) about the *difference* between possessing and denoting. Properly speaking, exemplification would seem to imply intentional *use* of a possessed property to secure denotation. I am in fact closer to Beardsley's sense of the matter when he argues that some properties possessed by of a work of art are worth taking note of (as "good-making") whether or not they are also exemplified by it in Goodman's intentional sense. Monroe Bearsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1981), xlii.

7. C.f. Hume: "'Tis an established maxim in metaphysics, *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence,* or in other words, *that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible"* (*Treatise,* I.ii.2). Whether what a mind can exemplify is or could be *actual* is another question altogether.

8. Allen Grossman, *The Long Schoolroom: Lessons in the Bitter Logic of the Poetic Principle* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 3.

9. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose* of *T. S. Eliot*. ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 65.

10. Ibid.

11. Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature,* ed. Rold Tiedemann, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1: 37, 38.

12. Ibid., 41.

13. Ibid., 45.

14. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 12-13.

15. Susan M. Schultz responds to my earliest attempt to imagine "poetry of ease" as an alternative to the restricted emotional range of contemporary poetry: "I have only gestured at a much larger body of poetic evidence responding to the events of 9/11, and to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Suffice it to say that this is not a poetry of "ease"….[T]his is not an age of ease, and its poets cannot impose ease upon dis-ease. But the poetry of seams that poets describe enables them to "construct", literally and figuratively, a world out of the pieces." *A Poetics of Impasse in Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* (The University of Alabama Press, 2005).

16. "Narrative Rehearsal, Expression, and Goethe's 'Wandrers Nachtlied II'", in *Narrative, Emotion, and* Insight, ed. John Gibson and Noel Carroll (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 110.

[17.] Richard Eldridge, "The Situation of the Subject in Modernity" (Unpublished ms, 2008), cited with permission.

[18.] Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 13. One compelling, but I think symptomatic, version of this ambivalently suspended historicism may be found in Rei Terada's recent *Looking Away*. Terada is interested in historical (specifically, post-Kantian) modes of attention and feeling that resist the psychological burden of what she calls "facticity." Such resistance to the need to affirm or endorse the given world gives rise to a dissident stance and style she terms "phenomenophilia"—a dwelling upon fleeting and unassertive appearances. But it is precisely insofar as Terada takes an interest in the phenomenophile to put her in the vicinity queer theory's resistance to the oppressive normativity even of hope, in its call for "a vacation from orchestrated affirmation," that she participates in the normative metaphysics of the theory of the subject. When I say normative, I mean to register the degree to which this unease is a disciplinary or professional habitus, for critics, certainly, but for poets as well.

[19.] W.B. *Yeats*, "Vacillation," in *The Poems*, rev. ed., ed. Richard J. Finneran, *vol. 1* of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, ed. Finneran* and George Mills Harper (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 249.

[20.] Robert Creeley, "A Step," in *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley*, *1945-1975* (*Berkeley*: University of California Press, 1982), 382.

[21.] Empson's account of the "essential trick" of pastoral (having simple people speak of universal feelings in a learned language) is not inherently an *ideological* critique of the genre; but he does note the paradoxical "vehemence" of the lines in Marvell's "The Garden" that conceptualize most clearly the indifference or lack of distance between thought and its object: "Annihilating all that's made/ To a green thought in a green shade." See Richard Empson, "Proletarian Literature," in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 11-15.

[22.] Lisa Robertson, "How Pastoral: A Prologue," in *XEclogue* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1993), unpaginated.

[23.] Keston Sutherland, "Hot White Andy," *Chicago Review* 53 (Spring 2007), 1. While something of the character of the poem is evident even from this passage on the page, the full impact of the poem's spectacular dis-ease can best be felt from watching him in performance, enacting the way a conception of our contemporary condition funnels through us and transforms us into mad puppets of discourse seeking calm in the storm of our own bodies.

Sutherland's recent essay, "Happiness in Writing," in *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms* (London: Seagull Books, 2011), attests to the powerful powerful role that ontological claims play in setting—more polemically, *constraining*; most provocatively (and tentatively), *deforming*—the horizon of much contemporary poetry's expressive (affective and conceptual) possibility. The essay reads Adorno's punitive insistence upon the requirement of doubt for thought into the minutest revisions of Wordsworth's claims about happiness. But Sutherland's most significant quarrel (somewhat compressed in the essay) is with Husserl's certainty in his perceptions under the *epoche* and ultimately with Descartes foundational certainty. In contrast, for Sutherland "Happiness in writing is found in the trial of enduring, intense and ineliminable doubt or not at all" (242).

This is an eloquent voicing of what I might call somewhat unhappily, an insistence upon ontological humiliation. Sutherland, by contrast, calls it "ontological fidelity" (251)—a dramatic difference in temperament, at the least. Such fidelity founds the work of style (making and reading) in an account of the person who is required as a matter of good faith and good theory to doubt everything: first and most crucially to doubt his or her own experience: our best sense, our best loves. Such doubt, adequately respected, is, for Sutherland, the determining ground of a *responsible* or even a *necessary* style. The occasion of doubt may be in general or specific ways political (which is in part to say, *lived*) and the temptations to certainty are often politicized (such was often the case for Wordsworth and his claims about happiness and where it is to be found) but the obligation to doubt is prior. I take Sutherland's claim about happiness to be an entirely plausible psychological claim *given his premises*.

[24.] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 397.

[25.] This turns out to involve two separate problems: First, a philosophical question about the *possibility* of ease—again, not just now, in our difficult present, or in some lost past or better future, but altogether. (After all, the oft-noted repetitive quality of ideological readings or the predetermined outcomes of deconstructive readings can only be counted a fault if there is a real—and not just a desired—alternative to repetition.) The second is a problem for the philosophy of language: should there in fact be a state of ease, what would be the form of its expression? This, too, actually involves two separate questions, one metaphysical, and the other psychological. The first is about the *nature* of language: Would the demands of expression—whatever they are—vitiate or falsify the ease that is expression's putative content? The second about the *function* of language: If there is such a state, wouldn't it lack all imaginable *motive* to expression? The former claim might be familiar to readers of Derrida. The latter, perhaps to readers of Benjamin: In the essay "On Language as Such and the Language of Men," Benjamin distinguishes between "pure language" (*reine Sprache*) "that knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication," a language of names (*Namenssprache*) "*through which* nothing is communicated, and *in which*

language communicates itself absolutely" on the one hand; and the "bourgeois notion of language" as communicative, message-bearing speech on the other. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays*, *Aphorisms*, *Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1978), 65.

[26.] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), henceforth cited parenthetically by page number as *MW*. I should acknowledge that his way of describing McDowell's central preoccupation in *Mind and World* is nonstandard. Most often, McDowell's account draws his discussion—and thus, discussions of his work—closer to the epistemic problems that arise from the possibility of our "minds simply [being] out of touch with the world" (*MW,* xiii): most acutely, the problem of skepticism. In taking McDowell to be concerned with the broader possibility (or the danger of the impossibility) of rationality, I follow his own suggestion that perceptual experience is only a "type" of puzzlement that he means to address. What he calls "responsiveness to reasons"—also, "freedom"—is another, parallel puzzlement, though he allows that the connection may seem "surprising." Where there may the possibility of surprise, I take it, is where the heart of the work is being done. (see xiii of McDowell's introduction). I thank Matthew McAdam for discussion of this point.

[27.] McDowell, *Mind and World,* xii.

[28.] Ibid., *xv*.

[29.] Ibid., 68.

[30.] Ibid., 71.

[31.] Ibid., 67.

[32.] Ibid., 92.

[33.] Ibid., xx.

[34.] Ibid.

[35.] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 64.

[36.] John McDowel, *Mind and World*, xii.

[37.] Crispin Wright, "Human Nature?" in *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. Nicholas Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 155.

[38.] Jerry Fodor, "Review of John McDowell's *Mind and World*: in *In Critical Condition: Polemical Essays on Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 8.

[39.] Robert Pippin, "Leaving Nature Behind or Two Cheers for 'Subjectivism'" in *Reading McDowell*, 58.

[40.] John McDowell, "Comments on Hans-Peter Krüger's Paper" in *Philosophical Explorations* 2 (May 1998), 122.

[41.] Wallace Stevens, "A Collect of Philosophy," 200.

[42.] Ernst Bloch, "Something's Missing: A Discussion Between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*: *Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 17.

[43.] If this were to manifest itself as a generic question, we might want to consider whether, as George Barker insisted, "All poems are elegies"; a thought repeated in abstract form by Robert Hass: "the word is elegy to what it signifies."

[44.] George Peele, "A Summer Song" in *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1918*, ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 151.

[45.] I should say as an aside, this is why I am interested in the McDowell of *Mind and World,* with its central preoccupation with perception, rather than say, McDowell's, or indeed anyone's, *moral* theory, which might at first blush seem a more promising place to consider the cluster of attributes I've associated with ease. Poetry is most interestingly contentful (when it is) not by its propositions, but by its looking and by sounding. It is the conceptual content of *sensibility* that is most urgently at issue.

[46.] Frank O'Hara, "Meditations in an Emergency" in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara,* ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 217.

[47.] Frank O'Hara, "Having a Coke With You" in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, 360.

[48.] Oren Izenberg, *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 272.

[49.] John McDowell, *Mind and World*, xxiii.

[50.] Ibid., xi.

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OVERLOOKING IN STENDHAL

JAMI BARTLETT

Our eyes told each other that they love themselves [*sic*].
Stendhal, diary entry in English, March 14, 1810

1: The annotated self

On the twenty-fifth of February 1805, Henri Beyle had a very good day. "*Maximum of wit in my life*," he begins a diary entry—this in his shaky English, the rest in French—about an afternoon declamation lesson at Jean Dugazon's followed by a return to Mélanie Guilbert's apartment, where he valiantly continues an interminable courtship:

> [F]or the first time in my life, I was brilliant with prudence and not in the least with passion. I was aware of what I was doing all the time, but without being bothered because of that, without being embarrassed. I don't believe I've ever been so brilliant, nor filled my role so capably. I was wearing a waistcoat, silk breeches and black stockings, with a cinnamon-bronze coat, a very well arranged cravat, a superb frill. Never, I believe, was my homeliness more effaced by my character.[…]This was undoubtedly the finest day in my life. I may enjoy greater successes but I'll never display more talent. My perception was just strong enough

> to guide my sensation; a little more, and I'd have let myself be carried away by the latter. [1]

Conflicted and self-conscious: this is a familiar Stendhal. The assurance of his narration—pretty remote for a diary—is only just destabilized by the kinds of qualified successes that hearten the perennially frustrated. And so the voice that was cultivated to sound "unsurprised by the world's knaveries" [2] winds up sounding less jaded than defensive, determined to make even the slightest advantage disproportionately enriching. This is Stendhal the contender, the same Stendhal who describes Julien's entrance at a café in Besançon, "What disdain our provincial would inspire in those Parisian schoolboys who by the time they are fifteen have already learned how to enter a café with such distinction!" and then adds gratuitously, "But those children, so stylish at fifteen, by eighteen have become *common*." [3] Stendhal often described the role of the novelist as the creator of obstacles, the circumstances that offer the hero the opportunity to forge himself through an encounter with the world and the freedom to do it badly; it is the narrator's job to set the standard that the hero is trying to meet, and to generate the reader's sense of admiration and horror when that standard is broken or disregarded altogether. In the diary, Stendhal aims to be his own novelist and his own narrator at the same time: he engineers a foolproof opportunity for "best self" expression in the event with Mélanie, and he describes the force of his "perception" of that event as a hero might describe the force of a narrator's voice as it spirits him through a rough patch. The hero can't help but prove himself under these conditions, and Stendhal believes that he can recreate them, because the self-consciousness of the performance is exactly the thing that is called for. To be able to live in the awareness of what one is doing all the time without being embarrassed is probably the best shot at a best day that any of us could ever have. And so, despite Mélanie's reputation as something of an elegant whore, her simultaneous affairs with at least five other men, and her blatant attempts to keep Stendhal in suspense, he will pursue the actress for five long months before their affair begins, follow her and her illegitimate daughter to Marseilles, and pine away in a separate room at their hotel from mid-summer to the end of their affair in early fall. She is Stendhal's first mistress, and if there is in his tone a fatalism that seems to forecast both the affair and its inevitable decline, there is also the thrill of having gotten something *right* this one afternoon, something both ideal and imitable.

Stendhal's characters, creatures of will and ambition, often meet their obstacles in one another. Because the moments of conflict between characters are meant to feel radically undetermined, and the determination of those conflicts create character, readers often get the sense that Stendhal's characters are imprecisely drawn. (Paul Valéry called them the

"emanation of an indistinguishable number of unknowns."[4]) But while Stendhal's mercenaries treat one another as means to ends, we can see Stendhal using the precisification of his vague character descriptions to move his plots along. I argue that the imprecision of these descriptions speak to Stendhal's attention to the edges of details that allow for an attribution of their form—what Jean-Pierre Richard calls "circumscription"—as a kind of motivating constraint, as the antecedent logic that makes narrative desire possible. The vacancy of a character like Julien Sorel is circumscribed by his oscillation between redness and blackness, and when he enters the seminary, he tries "to arrive at the *non culpa*," a way of being neither of the world nor convinced of its "pure nothingness," in much the same way that Stendhal himself achieves "perception." These are typical Stendhalian constructions, objects of desire made more attractive because they are *states*. And they are states so vaguely described that longed-for possession of them can never lead to satisfaction—the successful end of a narrative—but to disquiet, unhappiness, and thus, to more narrative. I draw from a range of theories about vagueness in language to supplement my analysis of Stendhal's characterizations, looking at how we identify vague things, how we expect them to behave, and how we go about making them more precise. What is important for Stendhal's understanding of the relation between Julien and the *non culpa*, and the action of narrative desire in his work as a whole, is the fact that the object of desire is "not yet" resolved, and that it is enough to know that it will be made precise someday.

Stendhal returns to and annotates his diary entry later on, a practice he describes in *De L'Amour* as the "deep philosophy" of a return to the text, a "plunge into my life story, into a comparison of my happiness then and now." The act of comparing happinesses through marginalia would hold a particular fascination for Stendhal because it abstracts the mood that occasioned the note in the first place, and in effect short-circuits the paralyzing pleasures of reminiscence in order to mobilize the kind of reimagining that, somewhat counterintuitively, underwrites philosophical analysis. As we saw in the entry above, a dispassionate Stendhal can reimagine the borderline between his homeliness and his character as a space he can fill; as he puts it in *De L'Amour*, "one begins to analyze pleasure philosophically" when one engages in a comparison, because "nothing paralyzes the imagination like an appeal to memory."[5] The Stendhalian voice emerges here as an interleaving of the re-read text and his remote annotations to it. "[R]everie cannot be imprisoned in a marginal note," he writes, but the pleasure of comparison "furthers my knowledge of man."[6] Stendhal's habit of revisiting texts is driven not so much by a desire for *self*-understanding, but by a desire to understand *selves*. "Deep philosophy" is deep because it seeks to subsume the particular experiences of a man under the general laws of "man". The revisited text reveals the circumstances under which it was written, but not in a way that would feature the rarity or ephemerality of those circumstances. Destabilized by annotation, interpretation, and memory, it is the catalyst for an

abstraction that enfolds a particular experience into a general knowledge of human nature, and its moments of contextualized reverie into a distance against which the present, too, might measure itself. The annotated self is what it was, is, and will be all at once. And it is this notion of a law-like account of human nature that will allow Stendhal to predict that even the best day ever will be bested.

When Stendhal describes his "deep philosophy" in *De L'Amour*, the context is his re-reading of Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*; but that distinction, between fiction and life, matters surprisingly little. The marginalia he adds to his own diary entry feels similarly motivated, in that it is not so much a qualification of his original insights than an extension of their reach. Next to the first paragraph of his entry, he writes, "My whole soul appeared; it caused my body to be overlooked; I had the appearance of a very handsome man, of Talma's kind." Next to the second, he reiterates that the day was won "As far as talent is concerned. The day I possess [Mélanie] will be far finer." Both of these annotations negotiate the distance between the experience, the representation of experience at the moment of composition, and the feeling of re-reading through an unexpected *nearness*: Stendhal is clear that it is not just his character but his soul that is on display that afternoon, that Mélanie overlooks rather than effaces his appearance, and he intuits that the day he has won something tangible will be better than even this best self, and for similar reasons. In some respects, Stendhal's self-estrangement is very old news: his work is littered with deliberately self-contradictory descriptions of character. But the impression of nearness that we have been given here is different, and it is something we ought to try to understand, because it shows us that the fascination with social strategy that lies behind everything he writes is emerging out of a drive to sort through all kinds of borderline cases in his descriptions of characters and objects. We are looking at what it means to "get it right" in Stendhal, but rather than assessing the *meaningfulness* of something as bivalent, tautological, and achingly personal as his self-presentation to Mélanie Guilbert, we are describing its function. Stendhal's ability to rest easy with radically indeterminate descriptions and the situations that make them possible presents us with an opportunity to understand this impression of nearness as both a state of being and a strategy that is symptomatic of Stendhal's investment in vague descriptions as productive of meaning and desire. Because Stendhal's characters are always threatening both to fly apart and to sink into typologies—even their boredom, as Erich Auerbach notes, is "no ordinary boredom"[7] —his attention to the work of the blurry borderline case makes him a useful site for an investigation of how the process of unfinishable precisification could pin its openness on the promise of closure.

The story that Stendhal tells about the role of the author as the creator of obstacles shows up in one form or another in the literary criticism about Stendhal's theory of character. The "deep philosophy" that allows Stendhal to subsume his particular experiences into general laws of human behavior suggests that his account of character is retroactive, that in being able to open up and organize several different removes from the self, he shows us that character could be thought of as a kind of container waiting for its contents to settle. This is the assumption behind Leo Bersani's claim that "Julien attacks *in order to be attacked*…and by striking back at him, society gives Julien the chance both to recognize his most profound desires and to make reparations for his 'crimes.'"[8] A lot of different aspects of character get caught up in this rather paranoid kind of reading, because it so easily diffuses Stendhal's contradictory descriptions into his novel's psychological and social ambience. When Stendhal writes of his whole soul appearing to Mélanie, he organizes his widely-flung attributes as a kind of vertical register of selves; Jean-Pierre Richard argues that "The Stendhalian hero is not endowed with a *character*: he is not straining constantly toward his definition or his essence…. Free and malleable he glides, like the novel that relates his adventures, over an eternal present"[9] and so the redirection of this movement toward a goal beyond the self allows Stendhal to conceptualize his body as transparent in this scene, as a window through which his soul is seen even as it is directed elsewhere. So, whether it's the dispassionate return of the marginal note or the finality of Stendhal's social triumph that allows him to isolate this image of his soul in the diary entry, he is revising any aspiration he has toward inner knowledge into an "appearing" thing, an *objective* thing, a *best* thing. The soul in relation to character is both an internal *and* an external form, rather than a straining toward definition or essence. The afternoon with Mélanie stages the moment when Stendhal's character sees how it can become itself, when "best" comes to refer back to a general quality of selves as well as a subjective evaluation or representation of self.

So, when Stendhal writes of his whole soul appearing, he seems to be refiguring the contradictory attributes of his character into something greater and more coherent. A soul conventionally escapes some of the constraints of a body—most particularly, its inescapably social nature. Jean Starobinski calls this Stendhal's understanding that "his ugliness can only be annulled by his carriage, through which his body ceases to be a thing and becomes a symbol,"[10] an idea that complements Richard's view of the transparent body with a literalization of the symbol as an interpretation, a way of "carrying" meaning. By the same token, it is only through the artifice of "character" that something like a true self becomes available. Stendhal organizes the annotated self vertically: his body is overlooked. In a letter to his sister Pauline, written the day after his meeting with Mélanie, Stendhal describes the afternoon in terms that stress the vertical organization of the self. His was "a public appearance that was positively above the human": "After all, you know how ugly I am:

women whom I had offended complimented me on the figure I cut!" "This is the first time, at the age of twenty-two years and one month, that I have been able to gain ascendancy over myself to be amiable from calculation and not from passion."[11] The figure that is cut from Stendhal's revisions is that of both a visible soul in an invisible body, and of a transparent "appearance" in an explicitly manipulated body, and the form of the annotated letter narrates this simultaneity as an experience that satisfies, if it doesn't directly express, Stendhal's intentions. On the page and in the room he moves from character to soul and back again, oscillating between but also packing into each the ground that belongs to the other.

The picture is complicated even further when Stendhal insists that the day was won for "talent," defining "talent" as a skill for reiterating this performance. In the letter to Pauline the language is similar but the goal is much more cautious: "Perhaps I shall have greater successes, but I shall never display as much talent."[12] Given the confidence of his other notes, this seems a surprising reversal. Stendhal classifies the day as a particularly revelatory performance, but not as a resounding success. This is what Paul Valéry will call the world of "display, comparison, and counter-evaluation" that builds the Stendhalian Ego, becoming "somehow, for itself, *an effect of the effect it creates on a large number of unknown people*." [13] On Valéry 's account, a self necessarily (even antagonistically) grounded in convention, is "a creature formed by an opinion, an absurd public monster to whom the real man gradually yields and conforms."[14] The literary effort commensurate with this shamming—a faith in a natural self conceived through a calculated manipulation of convention—is from truth to the will-to-truth. In a tone that tries too hard, Stendhal crams together "all the symptoms most expressive of *sincerity*" in order "to write in accordance with his own *character*, which he knew—and could *imitate* to perfection," leaving behind only "a determination to be himself, to be genuine to the point of falsity."[15] Valéry's italics rather neatly sum up the three analyses of Stendhal's characterization we have seen so far: the transparency of character in Richard, Starobinski's sense of the "carriage" of self as an imitation or symbol of sincerity, and Valéry's understanding of character as a creature of convention. Each of these three analyses point to irresolvable contradictions, because transparent, interpreted, and conventional selves are inherently dispossessed. Stendhal refuses character while he embraces soul, he thinks of carriage as a symbol of the natural self, and he works to stabilize through repetition a character that is already compromised by its sociality.

The argument that Stendhal derives character from a set of irresolvable contradictions is awfully persuasive, not least because he claims that the need to escape one's self is the origin of all desire. Ultimately, even his best self is inadequate: he writes of wanting, if only twenty times per year, "to become whatever individual he wishes, provided that individual exists."[16] In these lines— one of the twenty-two articles of *The Privileges*, a contract with

God that Stendhal made a year before his death to wield shape-shifting power over himself and others (the most expansive of which specifies that "A hundred and fifty times a year, he will be able to obtain, on request, that a particular person completely forgets him" [17]) — Stendhal clearly demonstrates the tension between the assertion of his own singularity and the desire not to be limited by it that motivates all of the critical perspectives we've seen so far. It's a tension that develops its own critical life, so that those sensitive to the self-consciousness and contradiction central to Stendhal's "deep philosophy" route their definitions into two divergent tautologies: the first characterized by Stephen Gilman as a "paradoxical 'ism' which pretends to conceptualize how it feels to be [Stendhal]—a unique condition of consciousness—rather than any sort of general theory,"[18] and the second by Léon Blum as "the conviction that the exact knowledge of the facts, the rigorous application of logical procedures can lead to everything, even to happiness, can take the place of anything, even genius; that the writer's gift, for example, consists in a certain number of definable or assimilable recipes, and that art is just one of the aspects of universal science."[19] Whatever the discrepancies of scale that these definitions work through, each rewrites a referential relationship as a representative one, theorizing Stendhal's own claims for the nature of things as the substitution of *Stendhal* for whatever he conceptualizes. This results in a strange kind of bidirectional contingency: the "conditions of consciousness" that compose the self of Stendhal, and the "assimilable recipes" that compose the universal science are already dependent on the thing that they make possible (Stendhal himself, his "happiness"), and yet these conditions and recipes are only infrequently available for combination at any given time. While such contingencies beg the question of how personal, limited knowledge could produce "anything, even genius" and be produced by "everything, even happiness," and how we can even know what the limits of such knowledge are, they confirm the sense that Stendhal's understanding of character is little more than an inelegant dodge. But what these readings ignore is the fact that Stendhal thought that at least once *he got it right*, and that he tried repeatedly to theorize why. As we have already seen, many of these issues of characterization arise at the borderline between Stendhal's soul and Mélanie's apprehension of it on that Monday afternoon.

Stendhal's self-description can illuminate a reading of character in his fiction; this is where we must begin if we are going to talk about the self in Stendhal. But once we find ourselves in Stendhal's "deep philosophy," it is clear that something larger and more comprehensive is at stake. Chasing down all of his "conditions of consciousness" and "assimilable recipes" has made us prey to an infinite regress. The argument I posed at the beginning of this essay is that Stendhal pays attention to an object's circumscription, to the edges of details that allow for an attribution of their form, and that he uses circumscription as a kind of motivating constraint. Circumscription is an antecedent logic that Stendhal thinks makes desire possible—it is the

force behind the desire to become an entirely different person for a single day, the promise of being whole by taking up another fragmented form. In order to figure out what it means for an indefinite self in indefinite circumstances to definitely "get it right," we are going to have to work from the outside in, and look at the way Stendhal works with circumscription, how he delimits what it is he's thinking about when he thinks about the self.

The borderline between the soul and the other is drawn by the frustrating incompatibility of Stendhal's hatred of affectation on the one hand, and his own emotional lability on the other. Starobinski thinks about the borderline between the soul and the other in terms of Stendhal's desire "to affirm himself by an act of power which will impose on others his absolute singularity, or to metamorphose ceaselessly, to become other than himself,"[20] and in the proliferation of his pseudonymous identities, both of which render his name "something full and something empty."[21] Nietzsche makes a distinction between the Kantian and the Stendhalian *beautiful* that usefully mobilizes Starobinski's description, because it takes the contingency behind Stendhal's understanding of character and recasts it as "potentiality," which as we will see, captures that sense of expectation that allows Stendhal to claim that the day when he wins Mélanie could be "far finer" than even his best day. ""That is beautiful,' says Kant, 'which pleases without interesting.' Without interesting! Compare this definition with this other one, made by a real 'spectator' and 'artist'—by Stendhal, who once called the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*…. To him it is just the *excitement* of the will (the 'interest') by the beauty that seems the essential fact."[22] Potentiality is inborn in Stendhalian pleasure, it is a relation between the object of beauty and its subsequent recollection, but also and more crucially, it is a relation between the object of beauty and an effect (happiness) that is expected but not yet available. The present pleasure of a performance of talent is satisfying in a different way than the pleasure that comes with the nearness of an annotated text. In Stendhal's "deep philosophy," distance enables return or arrival, but it is the promise of arriving that sensualizes the experience of distance, that allows Stendhal to reimagine the borderline between his homeliness and his character as a space he can fill. Hippolyte Taine makes the point that the vacillating nature of Stendhal's descriptions makes his readers do much of this work with him:

> When your idea, for lack of reflection, remains imperfect and obscure so that you cannot bring it forth by itself, you gesture at something which it resembles; you leave the short, direct expression to fling yourself left and right into comparisons. Thus it is from impotence that you accumulate images; failing to outline your thought sharply the first time, you repeat it vaguely several times over, and the

> reader who wants to understand you must atone for your weakness or laziness by translating you to yourself, explaining to you what you wanted to say and didn't. [23]

Taine suggests that it is difficult to sort out Stendhal's understanding of character because it is caught up in the movement of the Stendhalian beautiful. Taine sees that the act of comparison is primarily an act of revision, just as it is in Stendhal's marginalia, and he sees that what he calls its "impotence" produces an accumulation of observations similar to those produced by Stendhal's "deep philosophy." However, because the promise of happiness is guaranteed, the horizon of its potentiality can recede indefinitely, and this takes the pressure to craft a consistent description of character off of Stendhal, at the same time that it encourages him to keep trying.

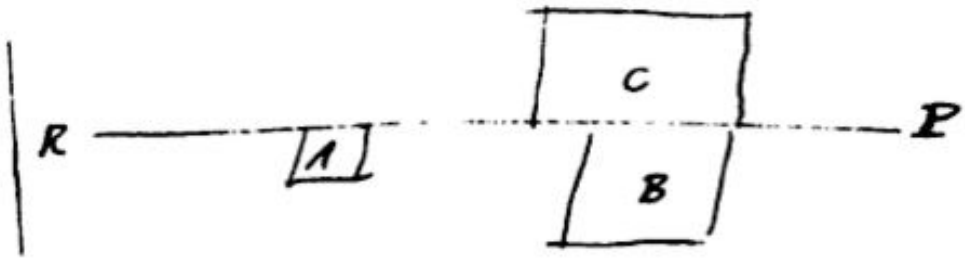
2: *Every* (or almost every) aspect of objects

All of these readings demonstrate that Stendhal cares much about the description of characters; that he stages the refinement of their self-contradictory descriptions at events filled with obstacles that are often other characters; and that because these characters are inherently dispossessed as transparent, interpreted, and conventional selves, the work of their refinement never ends. But if we are going to make sense of Stendhal's "best day," we need to think about what an ending that incorporated these observations would look like. "Perception" is a word that does a lot of this work in the diary entry, and he draws it from the *Idéologues*, whose insistence on utility would define "the proper sense of the word *know*" as always connoting "the ideas of *circumscription* and of specialty," [24] or the *uses* to which knowledge could be put. Perception thus necessitates a knowledge that circumscribes with an intention to *use*: a primary and undifferentiated flood of experiences becomes *perception* when it develops detail and implementation. Jean-Pierre Richard argues that Stendhal's "experience begins with passion, but his most lucid venture lies in circumscribing this passion, in knowing it fully, and in establishing between those burning moments of his life a continuity of feeling that poses no threat to his consciousness." [25] Circumscription recalls the vertical organization of Stendhal's annotated self. It emphasizes the nearness of passion over the isolation of reflection by invoking an anterior form that supervenes on the particulars of experience, rather than allowing them to edge one another into irresolvable contradictions. We could think of Julien Sorel as a useful case here. He occupies a self-contradictory position in the Hôtel de La Mole because the form that imposes itself on him is fundamentally incompatible with the particular characteristics he is trying to cultivate in the salon. In a lonely moment among the swells, he thinks, "That's the immense advantage they have over us….The history of their ancestors raises them above common feeling, and they do not have to be always

worrying about making a living. What misery! he added with bitterness, I'm not fit to talk about these great subjects. My life is just a succession of hypocritical poses—for I haven't a thousand francs a year to feed myself."[26] Whatever fortune Julien accumulates, the anterior logic of the novel will never allow him to escape the determinative influence of his origins. What's more, this logic is explicitly embedded as a form of characterization from without: Julien describes himself as subordinate not to the swells themselves but to the ancestors whose inheritance "raises them above common feeling."

Richard also finds a literal origin for Stendhal's interest in circumscription—the "immobilizing potential" of mathematics: "He loved it not at all for its power of deduction and continuity or for its relentless movement, but quite to the contrary, for the fixity that its formulas and its theorems force upon realities that are by nature unstable."[27] Unlike the Stendhalian hero, who turns to juridical law to make sense of and restitution for transgression only to be disappointed by its misuse, Richard takes Stendhal himself to favor the mathematical *a priori* precisely because it is the sort of law that can never disappoint. And yet, it does disappoint. Richard acknowledges that this discrepancy is "curious," since "it is not the spirit, but the *letter* that decides" the just and unjust, and Stendhal holds the law accountable for its corruption in his novels.[28] But the only specific references to mathematics in *The Life of Henry Brulard* allow us to make sense of this disenchantment. "My enthusiasm for mathematics was based principally perhaps on my horror of hypocrisy," he writes:

> What then when I realized that no one could explain to me how it is that a minus times a minus equals a plus (- x – = +)? (This is one of the fundamental bases of the science known as algebra.)….
>
> At the age of fourteen, in 1797, I imagined that higher mathematics, which I have never known, contained every or almost every aspect of objects, so that by going on I would come to know certain, indubitable things, which I could prove to myself whenever I wanted, about everything.
>
> I was a long time convincing myself that my objection concerning – x – = + could never possibly enter M. Chabert's head, that M. Dupuy would only ever answer it with a lofty smile, and that the experts I questioned would always make fun of me.
>
> I was thereby reduced to what I still tell myself today: that – times – equals + must be true, since self-evidently, by continually employing this rule in a calculation, you end up with results that are true and indubitable.
>
> My great misery was this figure:



> Let RP be the line separating the positive from the negative, everything above it is positive, just as everything below it is negative; how, by taking square B as many times as there are units in square A, can I manage to make it change sides to square C?
>
> Or, to adopt a clumsy comparison that was made even clumsier by M. Chabert's supremely Grenoblois drawl, suppose the negative quantities are a man's debts, how by multiplying 10,000 francs of debt by 500 francs, will he or can he manage to acquire a fortune of 5,000,000, five million? [29]

This problem is worth quoting at length because of its allegorization of Stendhal's relationship to the mathematical *a priori* as, first, a set of hypocritical teachers whose loftiness and ridicule demonstrate the real snag in his attempt to escape hypocrisy by learning a discipline riddled with unfathomable truths; second, as a figure whose very arrangement suggests this opposition as an improbable conversion or "changing sides" across a horizontal boundary; and third, as a word problem about accumulated debt whose clumsy reiteration in "drawl" should be on the page but isn't, and thus represents the illegibility at the heart of Stendhal's confusion as an absent destination, a literal debt. This is a conceptual problem made worse by language and analogy, which confuse as they try to distract us from the bedrock conventionality of the antecedent form. Without too much effort, we can make this crisis of mathematical conversion into an extension of the contradictions that dominate criticism of Stendhal's characters and of Stendhal himself, of the unstable body as an invisible and yet sublimely manipulable borderline, made up of a carriage that is both repetitively and socially constructed to communicate an inner soul. These contradictions, which entail nearness, and the anticipations of nearness, are arranged into a sudden and inexplicable hierarchy, and the frustration of not arriving is re-read as the hypocrisy of mathematical laws.

The second (and last) mention of mathematics in the autobiography takes up this problem, as Stendhal compares his knowledge of geometry to statics, and realizes that if, in geometry, parallel lines are "two lines which, extended to infinity, would never meet," in statics, "Two parallel lines may be considered as meeting if extended to infinity."[30] Being "considered as meeting" is just a way of forming the question differently for a discipline that is all about the mechanics of stationary bodies, but Stendhal cannot imagine "considering" as a valid strategy for mathematics, whose concepts don't change. If only he had been advised of the way things really are, he writes, if an "astute confessor, a good Jesuit" had said at last: "You can see that all is error, or rather that nothing is false, nothing true, all is convention. Adopt the convention which will earn you the best reception from the world."[31]

I think that these examples make Stendhal's affection for mathematics as contingent as his characters' problems with juridical law—the contradiction on which Richard bases his discussion of Stendhal's interest in circumscription—but more importantly, it demonstrates how fraught the idea of the borderline is in each of the contradictions we have examined so far. The impossible divide between negative and positive and the impossible collapse of parallel lines both have at their core an untranslatable truth that depends on a promise of satisfaction it never delivers. Stendhal describes the return to a text that marginalia makes possible as a kind of disinterested deep philosophy, giving him the distance to abstract himself into humanity's representative; but it is really the *approach* that produces an affective relationship, and that approach crucially relies on the assurance that satisfaction will arrive. "Considered as meeting" is a useful construction for Stendhal because it describes both an as-if postulation and the perspective it implicates. Stendhal's inability to imagine "considering" parallel lines in a different way is an anxiety about an approach without the promise of satisfaction, not simply because it will never be clear to Stendhal what it is that he's imagining—that must be taken on faith—but because it reroutes his approach in an unfamiliar direction.

3: A cinnamon-bronze coat

In 1822, Stendhal wrote a flip essay under the name "Blaise Durand" on "The Geology of Morals" that shows the following "granite rocks" (C, C) with "vegetable detritus" filling in the shaded areas at (2, 2):

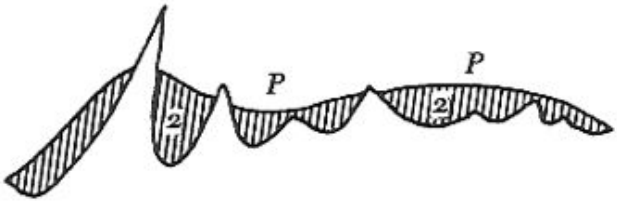


Figure 1.

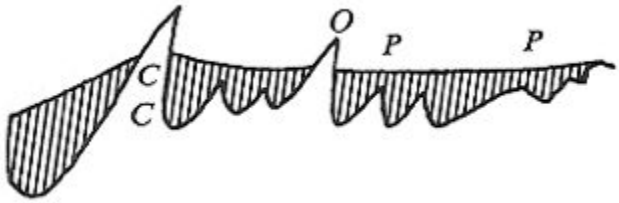


Figure 2.

"Granite is the natural character of a man," writes Stendhal of Figure 1, "his habitual way of seeking happiness. Character is like the features, one starts to notice it at the age of two or three, it's perfectly apparent at sixteen or seventeen, it manifests its full force at twenty-six or thirty." The filling at (2, 2) "is what politeness, the way of the world, and prudence do to a character."[32] Character is the stone contour of the landscape; politeness and conventionality an overgrowth that obscures all but the most extreme features of character. For Stendhal, this structure has two consequences, which he uses Figure 2 to illustrate: the first is that a "young man" may think (P, P) is a plain, not realizing that, as soon as he must do something important, "he will follow the contour of the *granite* in his character," a reversal that corresponds to the granite of his physical features, which he may be able to make the best of but can't irrevocably alter. The second consequence is that, "Once we know what our character is, we can prepare ourselves *for the good and the evil* which are predicted in books describing such characters." We throw these anterior types into the future, whether they're "violent," "phlegmatic," or "tender and melancholy, like J.-J. Rousseau" and we try to imagine the circumstances that will test them, the circumstances that will present them with choices and indeterminate possibilities for action. This complicates the nature of the transparency at the heart of Stendhal's characterizations. Of the afternoon at Jean Dugazon's where Stendhal cut such a perfect figure, he writes "This is the first time, at the age of twenty-two years and one month, that I have been able to gain ascendancy over myself to be amiable from calculation and not from passion."[33] Through its investment in filling-in, "The Geology of Morals" cashes out a discussion of the constitutive relation between self and other to make a point about how we refer to indeterminate objects. The language that gets folded into the concept of transparency—that of overlooking—assumes that it may not be the transparent

but the opaque that creates an illusion of depth, and that a characterization either way is itself a kind of improvisational act of approaching.

"The Geology of Morals" describes approaching as a prediction of the circumstances under which the granite of a young man's character is made manifest. But because these improvisational acts of approaching operate through and are informed by literary representations of character, they describe more than just the logical relation between those qualities that make a character "violent" and the inevitable emergence of its contours. Stendhal is in fact developing a theory of vagueness itself, of the nature and treatment of relations of predicates with indeterminate extensions. His diary is littered with them. After some under-specific descriptions of his brilliant achievement of perception he writes, "I was wearing a waistcoat, silk breeches and black stockings, with a cinnamon-bronze coat, a very well arranged cravat, a superb frill."[34] The cinnamon-bronze coat pulls focus because it is strikingly overdeveloped and vague at the same time, and also because it marks a shift in Stendhal's descriptive process in the passage. The facts of his waistcoat are objective and declarative—the breeches are silk and the stockings are black—but neither description allows for nuance. By contrast, the "well arranged cravat" and "superb frill" contain highly subjective judgments, but judgments that are stabilized and communicated by convention. In-between, the cinnamon-bronze coat points to a kind of painstaking specificity, and at the same time the impossibility of combining terms in a coherent, repeatable or otherwise communicable way. Like the predicates "is tall" and "is early" there are borderline cases of "red" and "orange" that must appear "cinnamon-bronze," and there are no sharp boundaries between coats that are "cinnamon-bronze" and those that are not. If we were to be so stodgy as to run this inductively, we could say that Stendhal's coat was "red," that after one washing it became one hundredth less "red," and yet that it was still discernibly "red" at that time. But we could easily imagine a case in which the coat is washed so many times that it became "cinnamon-bronze," without sacrificing the inductive structure of our argument. Theories of vagueness seem not merely to allow for, but to *depend* upon the kind of precisification that Stendhal seems to be encouraging us to perform. In this case, it is not quite the logic that is fuzzy, but the object. Insofar as Stendhal throws the cinnamon-bronze coat into a heap of clothes that are more or less sufficiently described, he seems to be trying to define something that is itself unclear, not being deliberately cagey about its description. Thanks to Stendhal's description, we can imagine a continuous gradation of colors, such that, on either side of a particular color lies a color that is distinct but not discriminably different from it, and thus, for any acceptable precisification of or a word like "cinnamon-bronze," there would be shades of cinnamon-bronze that were not discriminably different from shades that were not cinnamon-bronze.

Recent theories of vagueness in the philosophy of reference have relevance for our discussion of Stendhal's descriptions, because they have increasingly focused on the naturalness of vague terms like the cinnamon-bronze coat; which is to say that they have focused on descriptions that seem peculiarly and positively deficient in semantic meaning, rather than being overly general, simply undecideable, or merely ambiguous. Patrick Greenough, for example, has proposed what he terms a "minimal theory" of vagueness as "epistemic tolerance." He argues that vague terms (like *tall*, or old; like cinnamon-*bronze*, or *good character*) draw no clear or known boundary—because we are ignorant of where the boundary lies. The best we can do is ostensively define what it would mean to be a borderline case of some vague term by giving examples. In other words, while there could in principle be a time that clinched the moment when a red coat becomes cinnamon-bronze, we don't know what it is, or how we could find it. Both Stendhal's geology of morals and Greenough's minimal theory are trying to cross-sect congenitally vague objects in order to make a space for and a point about the space that binds them to their root polarities. The "red/cinnamon-bronze" spectrum is, in other words, not unlike that of (P, P)/(C, C). And both theories locate themselves in the ostensive learning of a language: the moment we realized the coat was sometimes red and sometimes cinnamon-bronze, is the moment when a young man feels the pull of his granite character. The story this analysis of vagueness tells is about a certain kind of mastery—over meaning, over self, over the delimiting effects of an anterior form—but it also recognizes the way that mastery is fundamentally illusory, and that preparing ourselves for the challenges that characters "like us" are bound to face isn't a gesture of control. In one of the few prolepses in *The Red and the Black*, Stendhal's narrator imagines that:

> In Paris, Julien's relations with Mme de Rênal would swiftly have been simplified; but in Paris love is born of fiction. The young tutor and his mistress would have found the explanation of their situation in three or four novels, or even in some couplets from the Gymnase. The novels would have outlined for them the parts to play, showed them the model to imitate; and sooner or later, although with no pleasure, perhaps reluctantly, vanity would have forced Julien to follow the model. [35]

This is a statement about a kind of ignorance, born of the disjunction between Julien's sense of his own character and the one he could have learned about in novels; but it's also a statement about the circumstances under which the novel is the kind of novel it is. The fact that neither Julien nor Stendhal is anyone (or anywhere) else becomes the muddling-through motivation that drives the plot along. The simplified scenarios promised by some *other* kind

of novel would remove the inhibitive openness that only play without parts gives us; there would be no pleasure in following that other sort of novel.

One of the things that puts the theory of epistemic tolerance in dialogue with this particular passage is its inadequate grasp of the ignorance that motivates it. After all, how can we know that any particular ostensive example—whether "The coat is sometimes red and sometimes cinnamon-bronze" or the character of a Parisian novel—expresses an ignorance that is grounded in its predicate's vagueness, and not merely some ancillary lack of information? How do we know "red" is the problem, and not, say, the fact that we don't know what a coat is? How can we choose the right Parisian novel? Greenough has to add some qualifications to his minimal theory in order to standardize what we talk about when we talk about vagueness; he has to argue that, under normal conditions, vagueness consists in our ignorance about the meaning of a predicate, not that our ignorance arises from vagueness itself. Stendhal's own conditional project tries to arrange something like Greenough's normal judgment conditions: he locates ignorance in the vagueness of Julien's circumstances only because no other possibilities for ignorance seem to exist. If Julien had seen himself and his situation in another character, the story would have been simplified. And yet, when Stendhal describes Julien's own hesitations—"sooner or later, although with no pleasure, perhaps reluctantly"—he indicates that some mechanism or other would slow down and confuse the relationship. Stendhal gives us too many variables to argue that vagueness consists in Julien's ignorance, but they intuitively seem appropriate if they are, instead, the kinds of ignorance that arise from vagueness.

Responses to Greenough's minimal theory have argued that, in relying so much on epistemicism—on our own ignorance of the borderline case—Greenough turns these potentially endless constraints against himself. If each precisification raises the possibility of its opposite, the result is the overgeneration of vagueness. Brian Weatherson argues that if every vague term has only vague boundaries, then Greenough must be assuming that we intuitively "know what the parameter of application of a vague term is," and can allot it the appropriate constraints.[36] On this account, Stendhal's characterization of vagueness has one important advantage over Greenough's: the presence of an overgenerating narrator who sets and polices the standard that the hero is trying to meet. We see the narrator's intervention in this scene at the seminary, where Julien works on his posture and demeanor via a series of comparisons that are always interrupting his progress. That he is driving toward a "pure nothingness" that is simultaneously detachment and despair allows him to compare himself to the laity, whose own lack delivers them to a kind of intractable faith:

> Julien tried first to arrive at the *non culpa*, which is the state of the young seminarist whose mode of walking, whose ways of moving his arms, eyes, etc. have certainly nothing worldly about them, but do not yet advertise the person as being absorbed by the idea of the other world and the *pure nothingness* of this one.
>
> All the time, Julien would find sayings of this kind scrawled in charcoal on the corridor walls: What is sixty years of travail when weighed in the balance with eternal bliss or the eternal boiling oil of hell? He did not despise these any more; he understood that he should keep them constantly in front of his eyes. What will I be doing all my life? he asked himself; I'll be selling places in Heaven to the faithful. How will that place be rendered visible to them?—by the difference between my appearance and that of the laity.
>
> After several months of incessant application, Julien still retained the air of thinking. His ways of moving his eyes and setting his mouth did not proclaim an implicit faith, ready to believe all and maintain everything, even unto martyrdom. With anger Julien saw himself worsted in this kind of thing by the coarsest peasants. They had good reasons for not having a thoughtful air. [37]

Julien's attempt at a kind of perception is characterized by the approach toward the circumscribed thing with intent. He aspires to a "not-yet," to the imminent otherworldliness of the young seminarian, and then to be a kind of conduit for communication of the faithful with their place in Heaven (a nearness) and then finally, to the "implicit faith" of a priest, a readiness to self-sacrifice. We should note that it is a memento on the walls of the seminary in the form of a rhetorical question that most effectively keeps these aspirations in view, and performs the work of ironic detachment that pushes him toward them. Not-yet, nearness, and readiness are all vague, absent-center relations—they generate a passage as long as this one, not by negotiating between two bivalent polarities, but by describing the asymptotic haze of approach that seduces Julien ever toward indeterminacy. The only thing that interrupts his striving is the recognition that others are better positioned to be indeterminate, that they are on a different trajectory altogether, and so "had good reasons" for the better fit. This is how vagueness is for Stendhal a kind of ignorance commensurate with a characters' availability to narrative omniscience. In the first instance, the reader supplies a constraint that gets incorporated; in the second, the constraints are already present and the reader follows a line of precisification; and in the third, both the type and its particular case are filled in, leaving us to flesh out its nuances—to create depth in the flatness of contradiction. This is a clear case of the generative powers of vagueness, and not simply as a characterological tool. Because Stendhal overgenerates conflicting representations of events and characters,

he elicits different parts of a vague relation from his readers, a much more dynamic and intuitively "right" understanding of the role vagueness plays in language—from denoting and ostension to borderline relations—than Greenough's minimal theory. The ignorance that so clearly motivates Stendhal's descriptions stems from a series of investigations into the nature of perception as a kind of circumscription.

This interest in generative constructions of vagueness is the subject of three notable responses to Greenough's article: Nicholas Smith's "Vagueness as Closeness," Matti Eklund's "What Vagueness Consists In," which posits a theory of vagueness as semantic competence, and Brian Weatherson's "Many, Many Problems," which argues for vagueness as indeterminacy. An examination of the features they bring to a discussion of vagueness can help us make some conclusions about what it is that Stendhal is contributing to our understanding of vague descriptions, and what is motivating his theory of characterization. Smith's argument, that vagueness is "closeness", states "For any set *S* of objects, and any predicate '*F*'—vague or precise—a competent user of '*F*' can discern relationships of closeness or nearness or similarity amongst the members of *S*: closeness or nearness or similarity in the respects that are relevant to—or determine—whether something is *F* (for short, '*F*-relevant respects')."[38] We can think about this in Stendhal's terms if we see closeness as a manifestation of one thing approaching another: orange is closer to red than green is to red, for example. Closeness is spatial, continuous; vagueness can be theorized as a relation of closeness because if, say, orange and purple are very close in red-relevant respects, then they are "very close in respect of truth."[39] Whereas many philosophies of vagueness argue that we learn things by ostensive examples, anterior structures that we remember and subsequently compare experiences and predictions to, Smith argues that ostension sets up a relation of objects that is much more dynamic and applicable to subsequent encounters than a memory of the object itself as it floating in space. Indeed, even when Julien aims for the *non culpa*, he is established in a relation to other people and things, and becomes (in effect) an absent center until he is found. The absent center couldn't be more different from the ostensive object, and yet here we can already see that something is missing in Smith's definition that Stendhal intuitively "gets": we don't need to see Julien *exactly*, or pin his striving to a definite state, to build all of the comparisons that his "appearance" makes possible. Not only must Smith have a set of things, *S,* and whatever "*F*-relevant respects" connect them on hand before that relation is motivated by vagueness; he also needs to have a distance metric on hand to see which things are close and which are not, and what kind of closeness chain could bind not-close things together. Julien figures that metric as character: in his striving toward and failing of other states; in his thwarted imaginings and inchoate jealousies of other persons.

Eklund makes a similar move in his theory of vagueness as semantic competence: "Vagueness must rather be conceived as a particular species of either semantic or ontological indeterminacy, or perhaps instead (I think preferably) as a particular source of semantic indeterminacy."[40] On this account, semantic values constitute the meaning of a given expression. When these "meaning-constitutive principles" cannot be satisfied, the semantic values are the only ones that can come close. If no assignment of semantic value comes "sufficiently close," that expression lacks a semantic value; when there is a tie among several semantic values for closeness, the expression is indeterminate.[41] The capability that allows users of a language to call a tie, an indeterminate, or an acceptable assignment of semantic values to an expression is semantic competence. Like Smith, Eklund assumes that it is ostension that helps us learn how words mean what they do, and ostension is (as Stendhal argues above), a variable exercise, producing a range of different kinds of competence across a spectrum of possible usage. For example, the parameter of application that any given expression can have doesn't really need to be known in order for Julien to use terms like "coarse" or "beautiful"—chances are, the use of such terms doesn't denote familiarity with their higher-order applicability. In fact, as Julien's turn to the rhetorical question illustrates, the reminders of conventional usage that litter the path he uses to approach a circumscribed object can often lead to ironic detachment.

What vagueness consists in, then, for Eklund and Smith, is a kind of semantic incompleteness. What we need to rectify or precisify this incompleteness is a relational gut-check, aligning close semantic values and judging expressions to be vague within that closeness. But what we continue to take from Stendhal, despite these many ways of understanding the contradictions he motivates throughout his descriptions, is that there is something crucial in the approach with intent, something that can't be captured by evaluations of sets, even when those sets are overgenerated, remotely connected by a chain of relevant respects, or tied inside a parameter of application.

Brian Weatherson gets at something like this—and uses a terminology somewhat more congenial to Stendhal's understanding of Julien's aspiration toward pure nothingness—with his theory of vagueness as indeterminacy. Julien remarks, "I'll be selling places in Heaven to the faithful. How will that place be rendered visible to them?—by the difference between my appearance and that of the laity." We know that Julien aspires to a hard-to-define state, the *non culpa*, that lies between this world and the next. But what we might not notice right off is that he intends to use the visible traces of that vague state (a "mode of walking", "ways of moving his arms, eyes") as an indication that he can make an invisible place visible. Ultimately, the vague term isn't just Julien, but the place in Heaven that has not yet appeared. Weatherson argues that the precisification of a vague term "remedies not just a defect in a particular

word, but a defect in the content-generation mechanism," and we see that clearly here, as *being* vague vouches for Julien's ability to determine the boundaries of vague things.[42] Julien is betting that a statement about "that place in Heaven" can be meaningful for others—can even be believed—if his own "appearance" can be brought to bear on the determination of its content. For Weatherson, a precisification-space—a space in which a vague expression is made more precise—must be seen as a relation between *all* kinds of precisification content, and judged to be true or false on that total assignment of content. If Julien were to say, "Here is your place in Heaven" (assuming the statement is true), then via the usual constraints placed on precisification, his statement must be true no matter how his listener understood what was indicated by "here." And this would be a problem, since "here" is always a pretty specific place, and, in practice, many precisifications of the term will probably not hold. However, rather than expanding the idea of "here" to account for all those places—which would be unnecessarily generative—we could, as Weatherson states, say that a precisification "assigns content to *every linguistic token in the world*, and that the truth-conditions of every one of these tokens is then determined in relation to that global assignment of content."[43] For Weatherson, Julien's own state is not only relevant, but necessary information for the listener who wants to see her place in Heaven—it is the ground on which "here" is built.

By unloading truth-values onto their objects, Weatherson forces the relation between those objects to account for their consistency, vagueness, or contradiction. What I have been arguing is that this is the kind of motivated constraint we've seen in Stendhal's descriptions of characters; for it is only through inter-referential relationships that objects take on their intriguing polyvalence and significance. As a boy, Stendhal searched for the perfect mathematical equation: "At the age of fourteen, in 1797, I imagined that higher mathematics, which I have never known, contained every or almost every aspect of objects, so that by going on I would come to know certain, indubitable things, which I could prove to myself whenever I wanted, *about everything*."[44] But the inescapable pressures of the social world turn even mathematics into an occasion for hypocrisy, rather than knowledge. Stendhal's development of a theory of vagueness seeks to redress the failure of certainty and indubitability, to explain all the ways language can go right in a social situation, and all the not-unrelated ways it won't. His theory is that approaching the perfect contradiction *with intent* supplies a kind of satisfaction that no "mathematical" understanding of its elements can really give. The ascription of values to different senses of one's precisifications produces a useful friction that captures the very core subtleties of a character—and it works precisely because it can't quite be theorized. Like Weatherson's understanding of vagueness as indeterminacy, Stendhal's characterizations compare and generate elements that otherwise don't make a lot of sense. In his 1805 diary entry, Stendhal speaks of being "aware of what I was doing all the time,

but without being bothered because of that, without being embarrassed."[45] He can't yet know there is nothing to expose.

NOTES

1. Stendhal, *The Private Diaries of Stendhal*, ed. and trans. Robert Sage (Garden City: Doubleday, 1954), 130; 135.

2. Peter Brooks, "Secret Notes and Pistol Shots," *Approaches to Teaching Stendhal's* The Red and the Black, eds. Dean De la Motte and Stirling Haig (New York: MLA, 1999), 36.

3. Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, trans. Roger Gard (New York: Penguin, 2002), 174.

4. Paul Valéry, "Stendhal," *Modern Critical Views: Stendhal*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 14.

5. Stendhal, *Love*, trans. Gilbert and Suzanne Sale (New York: Penguin, 1975), 64.

6. Stendhal, *Love*, 64.

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43. Weatherson, "Many," 483.

44. Stendhal, *Life*, 364.

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RESPONSES

QUARRELSOME: RESPONSE TO CAMP, HAROLD, AND CHODAT

JONATHAN KRAMNICK

Editorial Note: In this article Jonathan Kramnick responds to Elisabeth Camp, James Harold, and Robert Chodat, whose articles can be found in Nonsite.org Issue #3

Talk about interdisciplinarity has been so concerned lately with the relation between the humanities and the natural sciences that one sometimes forgets that the term has any other meaning. So it is refreshing to see this crop of papers about the much older "quarrel" between literature and philosophy. Although the three papers I was asked to comment upon share little in the way of common ground—Camp discusses the self; Harold is concerned with genre; and Chodat takes up pragmatism—they do have a common structure. The philosophers spend some time with literary texts; the literary scholar reaches over into philosophical debate. And in doing so, each reveals something about the art of the other: how philosophy or literary study poses questions, treat texts, and make arguments.

Elizabeth Camp for example pursues a theory of the "rich, substantive selves" she thinks we need "to evaluate our past actions and to guide future ones" by first looking back at Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. The paper quotes liberally from the poem to establish what she takes to be Wordsworth's model of a teleological selfhood grounded in the natural order of things. On this view, nature provides Wordsworth with an already formed self. He need

only discover that he is a "Poet of Nature" through the various incidents he chooses to recount in his great autobiographical poem. Crossing the Alps, stealing a boat, mourning the boy of Winander, and the like reveal his "'true self', 'Nature's self,' waiting to be actualized." Wordsworth describes a "robust" selfhood, but his terms are untenably ontological and teleological. He is committed to the discovery of real, actually existing selves and believes that every self has a pre-set task. So even though Wordsworth's self may be "robust," it fails to provide a model for *us*, loathe as we are to commit ourselves either to ontology or teleology: "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." It is most certainly not the case, in other words, that Wordsworth is right, so we had better look elsewhere to "generate robust, substantive selves." Thus ends Camp's use of a work of literature, but not her use of literary terminology. Passing quickly over the "analytic debunking" that would dispense with the need for robust selves in the first place (a tradition here represented by Hume and Strawson), Camp spends the rest of the essay engaging critically with ideas of "narrative" selfhood and outlining at the end a solution to the problem of the self founded on "character."

I don't have much to say about the discussion that follows the section on Wordsworth. My own inclinations lead toward the analytic debunking for which Camp has no patience. I'm with Hume. Every time I try to catch my "self" all I apprehend are some perceptions. I also don't see why we need to have a theory of the self in order to talk about actions, or why the self need be "robust" (whatever precisely that means) in order for agents to deliberate on their behavior. No matter. I'm sure Camp has good answers to these questions. And for what it's worth, I like the turn to character at the end. Where narrative selves are supposed to be the coherent subjects of their own stories, characters show simply a unified comportment over a given slice of time. We should "drop the insistence on life-long autobiographies in favor of many short overlapping stories." Hear hear.

My concerns are instead with the handling of Wordsworth. Camp cites the poem copiously in the early going and seems genuinely interested in setting up her theory of selfhood in contradistinction to what she imagines to be his. Wordsworth thus provides both an historical foil and literary background. Even so, I found the discussion of *The Prelude* quite unsatisfying. Camp doesn't misrepresent the poem. Her quotations are in context and accurate. (Or they're accurate at least for the nonstandard 1850 edition she uses.[1]) Camp doesn't exactly misread the poem either. Rather, she doesn't *read* the poem at all. She treats the speaker's romantic autobiography as if it were Wordsworth's. This collapse of any distinction between the

speaker of the poem and the poem's author produces a certain naiveté, as if all utterances in the poetic first person are actually Wordsworth's account of himself rather than lines of a poem he was writing. Camp jumps out of the gate with *Wordsworth* as the "lucky guy" who is endowed by nature with a "vital soul," and from thence all bets are off: "Wordsworth's growing awareness of Man's place within an animate and 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." Again, this sort of thing rings naïve for a reason: it fails to recognize the distinction between speaker and author, which, like the distinction between narrator and author in works of fiction, founds the critical sensibility. To recognize the distinction and distance between the speaker of a poem and the poem's author after all is to recognize that a poem is a made artifact, with a certain form. And to recognize *that* is to begin to get to work.

I'm pretty sure Camp knows this. In a revealing series of sentences midway through the discussion of the poem, she says that Wordsworth *might* be saved from accusations of philosophical simplemindedness by an invocation of the poem's "'literary' status": "A natural way to respond to the accusation that *The Prelude* manifests nothing so much as self-serving delusion is to point out 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." Yet, she thinks we can only take this so far. While the response is "fair enough as a matter of literary analysis," it "renders *The Prelude* problematic as a model for a narrative conception of self-identity." Why is this rendering a bad thing? Why shouldn't Wordsworth's creation of his speaker as a character in the poem feed into the sort of character-centered model of the self she advocates at the essay's end? Camp doesn't say. So these hints at a "literary" part of the puzzle are something of a missed opportunity. And that is too bad. We can fit Wordsworth precisely to the project Camp designs but that would require us to move past bare content and engage the poem as a formed artifact.

On the face of it, James Harold's thoughts about popular and serious writing are at some distance from Camp's discussion of the self. She uses Wordsworth to do some philosophy. Harold talks philosophically about a literary topic. Yet, here too I felt a certain grating against my own practices and expectations. Harold wants to "defend the view that there are real differences between the pleasures of genre fiction and literature" and in doing so he also wants to defend "critical *evaluation*, criticism that attempts to show how and why some works are better than others." Harold's point is not to say that one shouldn't read genre fiction or that discerning what works are better than others makes any sort of statement about value. He defends a "highly context-sensitive sense of 'better'" and is motivated throughout to discover a rationale for reading and valuing mysteries, thrillers, horror fiction, and the like. I would agree with all this, were I asked, but I'm usually not. I think that is by itself interesting. For

some time now, audible talk of judgment has rarely been heard in academic literary study. While many of us would surely say that the works we write about and teach are worth studying for a reason, overt acts of ranking and evaluating—this work is better than that; this facet of a work is why it's great—receded from the literary disciplines years ago as something like the mark of professionalism: the putting of the object of one's study at a distance of analysis. We buried judgment into the practical acts of veneration that go into making a living in English: this work repays one's interest, we say without saying, in different registers over the lifespan of the business. Likewise, spending much time on evaluative statements of one or another kind is typically a sign that one has left disciplinary pursuits for something else, like selling books. Witness the career of Harold Bloom. So I think a conversation with philosophy in which the terms involve judgment is likely to be one-way and brief.

And yet I also welcome Harold's provocation to lessen the analytic distance on occasion and ask whether detached critical reading should be the only kind we take seriously. Harold speaks of pleasure, which is certainly one part of the reading experience, but doubtless there are others: curiosity, shock, delight, fear, and so on and on through the many-faceted domain of the imagination. We've seen as of late some renewed interest in taking literary experience seriously as experience, in for example the work of Rita Felski. Much of that work would profit, or has already profited, by contact with philosophy, especially of the phenomenological bent that is not represented in these essays (the tradition of Merleau-Ponty, for example). We needn't consider the turn to experience as one away from rigor, however, so much as a bringing of our techniques of formal analysis to the qualities of literary experience itself.

I think there is reason to consider this kind of conversation as a quarrel-free point of contact between philosophy and literature. Both have something to say about the contours and character of phenomenal experience. Harold's comments on the importance of *theme* in the constitution of great works however ultimately get us on the wrong track. Talk of universal themes produces a certain eye-glaze, or worse an eye-roll, and I think ought to do so. The sort of argument Harold takes from Lamarque and Olsen—that the "characteristic purpose" of literary works is to develop in depth some allegedly universal theme ("family, mortality, inevitability, and freedom," and so on)—advances little over Samuel Johnson, for whom identifying the universal was an important way to distinguish literature from other forms of writing at a moment when such distinction could provide energy to critical prose rather than run it into banality. In any case, talk of universal themes glazes the eyes because such themes always disappear when looked at closely. And they do so because they have neither formal nor phenomenal properties. But we needn't be detained by themes in order to soften the habitual detachment of critical reading. Neither critical reading nor philosophical argument

has to forswear literary experience; indeed it is likely such experience has a form illuminated by each.

Robert Chodat's paper takes a different approach from either Camp or Harold. He doesn't use philosophy to demarcate kinds of literature or literature to establish an account of the self. He remains instead within the historical bounds of most work in his discipline and asks instead how one tradition of twentieth-century thinking (pragmatism) might or might not have influenced the work of one of its major authors (Walker Percy). Chodat weaves in an out of Percy's novels and works of non-fiction alike in order to reveal the author's attraction to a philosophical tradition with which he was also in considerable tension. The stakes are high: nothing less than the revolution in the mind-body problem brought about by combined developments in artificial intelligence, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology. On Chodat's account, Percy finds in Pierce a resistance to the possibility of physical reduction elsewhere countenanced by the pragmatists themselves. According to Percy, humans "represent a break in the universe," a "cleft in the order of being" which accommodates a set of terms different in kind from our talk about mere matter: selves and egos and, "upgraded into the theological register," even "souls" and "spirits." In contrast, contemporary pragmatists like Rorty and Dennett brush off such ontology-talk by answering "our most urgent questions—are we fundamentally material creatures or something more? — with a casual 'It all depends'." So we are left with a choice between the commitment to "potent ideals of spiritual perfection" and "meliorist ideals of intellectual growth and progress."

Chodat leaves this as an open question and yet, for all the delicate working in and out of Percy's texts, I felt myself missing some of the declarative brio of Camp and Harold, if only to make Percy feel a little less of a museum piece. The questions haunting this elegant and moving essay are indeed "urgent," and yet the intellectual and literary terrain seem unnecessarily narrow. Pragmatism nudges out other areas of philosophy where the mind-body problem was at center stage, the tradition from Nagel through Chalmers and well beyond for example. And I couldn't quite see what in Percy's work itself spoke to the dilemmas of reduction with which he seemed evidently to be concerned, or how he attempted any sort of resolution other than by means of plot.

One famously urgent problem is how, in Chodat's words, the "view of the brain scientist, focusing on neural and other physical processes" could account for the felt experience these processes yield. With their presentation of first-person experience in third-person form, literary works do their part in addressing this problem. They don't solve it, but they do provide some ground for conversation.

NOTES

[1.] Insofar as standard practice is to use the 1805 edition unless one has a particular interest in the 1850 edition, Camp's use of the 1850 edition as "*The Prelude*" rather than "The 1850 *Prelude*" does speak to disciplinary protocols, as well as to the fact that this poem supposedly about Wordsworth's ontologically grounded and teleologically unfolding self was, ironically enough, constantly revised, never finished, and not published in his lifetime.

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WITTGENSTEIN, THE HUMAN FACE, AND THE EXPRESSIVE CONTENT OF POETRY: ON BERNARD RHIE AND MAGDALENA OSTAS

GARRY L. HAGBERG

Editor's Note: In this article, Garry Hagberg responds to Bernard Rhie and Magdalena Ostas, whose essays can be found in Nonsite.org Issue #3

In his insightful article "Wittgenstein on the Face of a Work of Art," Bernard Rhie begins by setting out an important distinction that is all too easily elided: that between the human face as a topic to think about, and the human face as something – a kind of conceptual tool – to think with. The latter allows us to reconsider human expressivity, and, importantly, to do so in a way that is not in the first instance committed to, or intrinsically supportive of, a dualistic conception of selfhood. That conception, as Donald Davidson (among others) has said, continues to exert a powerful influence on our thinking even after its worst faults are explicitly identified and expressly repudiated – like many simplifying conceptual templates

or, in Wittgenstein's sense, pictures, it goes underground. And from there, it drives us to struggle with the problem of explaining how it is that a great metaphysical divide has been crossed – how it is that an internal, private entity such as a human emotion has been made physically visible upon the surface of a material object. Rhie sees a deep connection – to my mind a connection of the first importance for gaining an understanding of the very possibility of artistic expressivity – between our natural capacity for discerning expressive content in faces and our equally human capacity for discerning expressive content in the arts. Physiognomic perception, rightly understood, is in truth not in the first instance dualistic; unlike the conceptual picture of dualistic selfhood, it does not place us at an inferential distance from the otherwise hidden expressive content. And in not introducing an inferential gap between the inner content of the expression and its (we think merely contingently) attached outward manifestation, it does not establish from the outset a philosophical problem asking for an explanation, a theory, of how that gap is crossed.

Rhie sees the strength and the power of a number of such theories – but he also sees that that strength and power is dependent upon first having implicitly subscribed to the dualistic sub-structure lying beneath the question. His project then, appropriately, is not one of criticizing the various available theories and then adding his own, but rather it is one of working to achieve insight into the presuppositions that motivate the problem to which the available theories are answers. It is a Wittgensteinian undertaking, and his conception of philosophical progress is internal to this methodology. Rhie shows, in short, that in writing about the human face, Wittgenstein is doing very much more than only writing about the human face. Indeed, Wittgenstein, as Rhie compellingly shows, is thinking with facial expressivity as a tool for more deeply understanding the physiognomy of embodied expression.

But the problem of artistic expressivity, the now-conventional one that is built upon a metaphysical substructure that takes as granted the inferential gap separating expressive content from that content's manifest form, as Rhie indicates, calls for more than a brief description. It is a virtue of Rhie's discussion that he sees the importance of differences on this score: Some works of art involve performances by living human beings where their persons constitute the materials of the artform, e.g. dance; some works are performed by persons but where the person is present but using an instrument, e.g. music; and some involve works that leave their personal creators behind (but keep their expressive traces), e.g. painting or drawing. The degree of presence of physiognomic expressivity is a result of the location of the artwork along this continuum from embodied to (what we might then call) disembodied work. Rhie helpfully shows that the problem of artistic expressivity will then be regarded as easiest on the one extreme, and hardest on the other, i.e. where the body is fully present, the expressivity is explained as natural human expression (although conceptually framed by

artwork status); where the body is fully absent, and yet expressive content is unquestionably present, we face what, on these conceptual foundations, is then taken to be the hardest problem.

Stephen Davies' neat term for one approach to this problem, "appearance emotionalism," holds, as Rhie reminds us, that it is a relation of resemblance that lies at the heart of art's expressive content. That resemblance, on this view, is discernible between the expressive comportment of a human body (I'll return to the implicit danger of using the term "body" in this context in a moment) and the contours of, e.g., melody and rhythm. A close relative of this view, advanced by Peter Kivy, is similar in emphasizing contour, but differs in that, in this case, the viewer is thought to project animate qualities onto the otherwise inert surface of the work. We give (in the case of music) sound patterns expressive life by projecting onto them expressive traits that we would perceive in the naturally expressive comportment of truly animate creatures, i.e. human beings. The important distinction here, as Rhie captures it, is between (1) perception on the one hand – where we see the resemblance that is already there between animate comportment and the contours of expressive work, and (2) projection on the other hand – where we take what we know from our perception of natural human expressivity and then, turning it around, project it onto what we then perceive as the expressive content of the work. There is significant insight in Rhie's observation that one needs to see some of the problems of the classical expression theories (e.g., Tolstoy, Croce, and Collingwood) in order to understand how we arrived at the strong emphasis on appearances or on the surfaces of works of art in recent theories of expression. The assumption beneath those classical theories, i.e. that any emotional content of a work must record or refer back to an initial emotional experience of the artist, led straight to insuperable difficulties: how do we identify the originating emotion with any specificity; how do we distinguish between right and wrong determinations of expressive content; why should originating emotional experience circumscribe all future work-meaning; how do we get past the fundamental other-minds problem of knowing another's emotional state in the first place; why should we reduce the function of the work singly to that of an inner-content delivery system; etc. All those philosophical troubles were left behind by changing the focus to the surface – on the first view, we just see resemblances between the appearances of two kinds of things as a fact of perception; on the second view, we see expressive content through a natural or hard-wired perceptual habit of animating by projecting onto the otherwise inanimate art object. Neither requires the placement of an originating emotion on the part of the artist at the center of the theory; neither requires a revivification of the Romantic myth of the deep and profound emotional experience of the creative genius fueling the external manifestation of that inner content in outward form; neither requires that the correct interpretation of a work is, and only is, the receiving of that emotional message as packaged and sent. But the

two types of view – the classical expressionist and the more recent appearance-emotionalist – have something in common that Rhie intimates but perhaps does not state as forcefully as his lucid discussion has earned the right to do.

In saying that it is the body that exhibits naturally expressive contours – gait, stance, posture, position, speed of movement, grace or its absence, and so forth – one is already insinuating, consciously or not, at the deepest level of our thinking on these matters a dualistic conception of selfhood. (Rhie does, very much to his credit, point this out, but given its profound importance for thinking our way clear of misleading conceptual pictures that have shaped aesthetic thought for generations, I rather want him to shout it from the rooftops in direct and forceful language and then articulate the implications fully). To say that it is the body – rather than a person – that exhibits expressively behavior is to think in accordance with dualistic dictates (precisely the ones from which Wittgenstein's philosophical observations on naturally expressive action will deliver us); the body has its expressive contours, which themselves are taken to be the external packaging, the outward manifestation in material form of prior immaterial content. In short, this is the Romantic myth's true, if submerged, origin. And it is the true origin of both much theorizing about artistic expression and of the very structuring of the problem that motivates and (from beneath) shapes that theorizing. It is this – precisely, a dualistic conception of the self, where (1) expressive content is believed to be wholly contained internally, and (2) expressive action is believed to be posterior to and separable from that prior internal emotive content – that the classical and the more recent problem-formulations have in common. Schematically stated, the situation is this: the Cartesian points to the source in the inner world; the behaviorist points to the embodied movements of the outer world; the classical expressionist points with the Cartesian to the inner determinants of content; the appearance emotionalist points with the behaviorist to the outward determinants of content. Simply put, both pairs of theorists have buried in their conceptual substrates a picture that they share in common beneath their more visible differences.

That picture is subtly and exactingly taken apart by Wittgenstein. It is not repudiated with a large-scale counter-proposal, nor is it refuted in a manner internal to its own terms (which would end, as much philosophy has in fact done, with arguing ultimately for the priority of one side or the other, thus staying within the dualistic categories that framed the problem in the first place). And once the overarching picture is taken apart, the pieces are shown not to fit together into a whole as we initially thought, so the progress is very unlike that of reductive analysis. This progress, by contrast, is measured by a deep change in vision, a change in the way of seeing what is now exposed as the shaping influences, influences considerably more powerful than we might have realized, the entire problem-field. It is precisely here that Rhie's contribution is of such value: it brings into sharp focus the widely dispersed remarks

Wittgenstein made on the recognition of facial expressivity, and he shows why these remarks are of the first importance in understanding not only the character of, but indeed the very possibility of, artistic expressivity over and against the problems generated by a misleading conceptual model of selfhood. (It is a mark of Rhie's intellectual generosity that he also considers the position claiming that the person has been eradicated in some recent theory, where this concept is shown to have been illusory all along. I will not pause to consider this view's interesting and instructive lack of plausibility here, other than to say that it refutes itself in its first articulation, since to speak with intelligible content of the "we" in the sentence "We have come to see the person as an illusory mirage-construct" one has to refer to a set of selves who allegedly discovered the fact. It would take another full discussion and some time to explain this properly. Rhie rightly says that this view, in any case, would leave us with more difficulty about artistic expression than we started with.)

So what does Rhie see in Wittgenstein in connection with artistic expression, exactly? Rhie is not only reminding us that Wittgenstein returned to the topic of facial recognition hundreds of times throughout his writings; any close reader of Wittgenstein knows that. What Rhie is doing is assembling a number of Wittgenstein's observations in order to loosen the grip of a picture that holds us captive (to use Wittgenstein's famous phrase). A familiar word can strike us as having a face; meaning itself is a kind of physiognomy; the lack of a musical ear stands parallel to an inability to recognize facial expressions; observations that are instructive run crisscross over distinctions that (given a prior subscription to the underlying picture) we would expect to be hard and fast, i.e. the distinction between the nuanced recognition of facial expressivity in an animate human being and the nuanced recognition of expressive content in an inanimate artwork; blindness to one aspect of a work can be akin to the kind of moral insensitivity that would turn a blind eye to subtle expressions of human suffering or difficulty. What this cluster of interrelated themes sounds like, so far, is a set of analogies between abilities to recognize expressive content in faces and parallel abilities to recognize expressive content in art. What the traditional (from the present point of view, picture-bound) expression theorists will say at this point is that all analogies break down, and that our philosophical task is to provide a convincing explanation of how the perception of expressive content is possible on the inanimate side. But Rhie's point is deeper, and that point cannot be captured in these terms or properly acknowledged within any such response. His point is that, if we are sufficiently mindful of and attentive to our actual human practices, we will see that these are not analogies, and they do not naturally divide, on the level of practice, into animate and inanimate sides. It is the underlying picture that leads us to see the matter in that polarized way. The truth, Rhie is suggesting, following Wittgenstein, is far more interesting.

The explanations offered by the expression theorists (both classical and more recent) involve the perception of pre-existent contour-resemblances on the one side, and the projection of animate content onto those contours on the other. It is at this juncture easy to say that what the Wittgensteinian observations show is that the perception of expressive content on the animate side is unproblematic. That is, the perception of expressive content on the inanimate side is, again, the problem (and what Wittgenstein is doing is simply trying to attach what is philosophically problematic to what is philosophically unproblematic and so remove, or at least significantly dilute, the problem – a kind of innocence by association). This way of taking the Wittgensteinian contribution, Rhie is suggesting, is easy to grasp, and it is – instructively and deeply – wrong. To focus on the inanimate side (which in truth, on the level of actual recognitional phenomenology, is a side that, as a pre-demarcated area, does not exist) as a methodological desideratum is to blind ourselves to aspects of the phenomena in question that will help us see the entire problem-field anew. The issue – here Rhie's initial distinction comes into play forcefully – is that we need to think with the experience of facial recognition when thinking about artistic expressive content. And to do that requires our meticulously thinking through the nature of, the character of, animate faces. (It can be instructive to note that, at just this juncture, we might be tempted to classify all such cases under the heading "animated faces." This itself would be an initial wrong step: we use the expression "animated face" to describe one kind or category of facial expressivity, often, but not always, in contrast to flat, dull, immobile, motionless, inexpressive, poker-faced, or other kinds of faces. To run them all together under a generic term is to prejudice the investigation against subtlety from the outset.)

One thing of central importance that we can learn from the part of our natural history concerning expressive content recognition in faces is that the process, as Wittgenstein observes, is not like – in truth not anything like – the model of facial recognition that a dualistic conception of selfhood would encourage. That is to say, it is not like a medical doctor framing a diagnosis from symptoms as an inferential process. Now, it is true that mediation between evidence and emotive-content attribution can take place, but in the vast range of ordinary cases it does not. "Joy" and "grief" are not words waiting at the end of an inferential chain. Nor do we deduce the presence of emotional states: All persons exhibiting facial contours C have emotion E; this person is exhibiting facial contour C; etc. The face, Wittgenstein is showing, does not in the ordinary case mediate its own expressive content.

How might one capture this point further to amplify Rhie's clarifying use of these passages for gaining a clearer view of the character of artistic expression? For one thing, a musical arranger might take the original piece as composed at the piano, and then, through an extended creative process involving trial and error, thought about timbres, thought about registers, thought

about harmonizations, and so forth, begin to piece together an arrangement of that original piece. That is an intelligible example of mediation between content and its later expression. Or one might transcribe a cello suite for the guitar, involving similar mediating cognition along the way from original score to completed transcription. In another domain, a forensic accountant might look for, then see part of, a pattern of misreported accounts, and then, on that basis, predict the appearance of the next one, look for it, and find it, further confirming the inferential chain. The kind of recognition that Rhie is putting to work here is not at all of this kind – it is, in the ordinary case, not mediated. And if we do have occasion for mediated reflection of facial expressivity, it will likely be a case in which the person in question is attempting to hide an emotion under, as we say in such cases (but not always), the surface. ("Oh yes; now that I think of it, I saw him turn away for a moment and touch the corner of his eye when she was mentioned – and that fits with what you are saying about how upset he must actually be"). The emotion, to put it one way (and Wittgenstein is suggesting this as one way of speaking among others) is personified in the face. What these contrasts bring into focus is that the idea of immediacy need not just be a truncated version of the hidden facts of inferential or mediated perception where everything outward is in truth evidence for the inner. What they bring into focus – and this is Rhie's extraordinarily helpful contribution here – is that we will cling to such pictures only so long as we leave undisturbed a Cartesian or dualistic conception of selfhood as the foundational architecture upon which everything else concerning expressive content must be built. If the human self is thought to be composed of (in the first instance) metaphysically inaccessible emotive content, content that is then (in the second instance) contingently signaled through facial movements, then we will forever be saddled with a problem concerning how those intangible inner contents cross the ontological divide into the inanimate realm. And where the surfaces, the external appearances, are conceived in the first instance to be always expressively inert or in their primary state without expressive content of any kind, then the question will invariably concern the relation between two kinds of things. The modern problem of expression in the arts has been formulated in precisely these terms.

An attitude towards a soul, in Wittgenstein's phrase, is not reducible into component parts: it is not an amalgam of a perceived body and an inferentially justified claim concerning its soul-habitation. If, as Rhie correctly says, we speak of a person's body or a person's mind, we are not speaking about two ontologically distinct elements contingently brought together in this amalgam before us. And I want to add to this: if we speak of evidence for a person still having a soul, still being alive, still being animate (we think we might have seen a finger very slightly twitch), the person of whom we are speaking is in very serious medical condition. That language game, against the dictates of the picture, is not the one actually hidden beneath our ordinary discourse that would only misleadingly appear non-dualistic. And if that is true, then

the model that generates the problem of the relation between the two kinds of things is (1) falsely applied to other (i.e. artistic) cases, and worse (2) false to the nature of human beings in the first place. We see human mental states, emotions, nuanced expression (of a kind and with variations far more subtle than philosophy often acknowledges) in persons, not in bodies that provide evidence for hidden ghostly mental entities. And if we get clear on that, we then have at least a chance of clarifying, in a way true to the wondrously complex and intricate phenomenology of facial recognition, just what it is we see in works of art and how it is that we see it. What has been said here, following Rhie following Wittgenstein, by no means offers a full account (nor does Rhie intend his discussion as one), but it opens a door to a new way of seeing the entire issue, a way free of the conceptual picture that generates a problem-template that, once established, has proven very difficult to dislodge.

Metaphysical dualism leads us to assume that the content of an expression is both prior to and separable from what we then construe as its embodiment. And Wittgenstein, as Rhie reminds us, called attention to the often-concealed power of the verb "to have" in such contents: to say that a drawing of a face has this particular expression suggests that what it has is taken on by it, that what it has was separate from and prior to it. And here again, then, the question of the relation arises: how exactly are the face and its expression related? But if we look to the close details of our actual language, we see that it does not conform whatsoever to what a misplaced scientism might dictate, i.e. that extended matter is the only kind of thing unproblematically real, and that matter is in the first instance value-neutral and expressively inert. How, we then ask, could we arrive at a perception of extended matter that includes those metaphysically less stable, indeed metaphysically less real, things? Rhie does not go into this here – one cannot do everything at once – but the dualistic view, conjoined to a misplaced scientism, also generates a conception of language. That conception parallels the view of persons as body-plus-soul amalgams; it is the picture of inert signs-plus-meanings. And that in turn quickly gives rise to a question concerning the relation of signs to meanings, and we are embarked before we know it – that is, before the underlying picture has been identified and subjected to independent scrutiny — on the project of relation-specifying theory formulation. Expressive content, so we think under the influence of this picture, is not really out there in the way the materials that carry that content are, and meanings are not really out there in the way that the physical signs and sounds that carry them are. Thus, as Rhie succinctly capture it, seeing expressive content either as animating fiction or as interpretive projection removes what is actually central to human physiognomic perception and recognition to the ontological periphery, just as (taking the discussion into the linguistic field) what we say, what we intimate, what we imply, what we enact in speech, how we remake the world with metaphor — in short, what we do with our words – is removed to the periphery of any investigation into the reality within which we live.

Magdalena Ostas, in her fine and linguistically nuanced contribution, shows on the other hand that the closest scrutiny of our language is anything but secondary to, or merely prefatory for, philosophical progress. The incorporation of what we say, of real language, into poetry is, as she shows, one way of integrating philosophy into poetry. Here the sides clearly are those of the ancient quarrel, poetry and philosophy; what philosophy might learn, or learn better, from poetry is just how to pay the closest attention to language, to linguistic practice and to linguistic nuance and complexity. Ostas begins with the excavation of a deep affinity: Wordsworth saying in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should be written in "language really used by men," and Wittgenstein's wide ranging efforts to "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." As Ostas shows, what they both want to avoid, in Wordsworth's wonderful phrase (anything but self-exemplification), is "inane phraseology." Phraseology, as we already have reason to believe given Rhie's project above, is I truth hardly a small matter in philosophy (I take it as evident that phraseology is of the essence in poetry): if we can overcome the dualism that would separate soul from body, expressive content from its expression, animate significance from brute materiality, and – now here – meaning from saying, then we will arrive at a vantage point from which, in philosophy too, how we say what we say is of the essence. We have seen that how we say it – our phraseology – can unwittingly shape expectations concerning how an answer to a problem will be developed, what will and will not be accepted as an answer to that problem, what is and is not regarded as relevant to the settling of that problem, and, perhaps most importantly, what is in the first place so much as taken as a problem. In poetic expression, as Ostas beautifully shows, the content of the expression is instructively not separable from the expression; saying and meaning are not two things metaphysically rent asunder in a manner that requires theoretical explanations of verbal reunions.

Ostas discusses the way of seeing exemplified in Michael Fried's recent reading of the photographer Jeff Wall's work. Fried finds there the remaking of the everyday, the commonplace, the ordinary; he finds objects portrayed anew, revitalized, and – as Fried brings in Wittgenstein – revivifying of "life itself." One aspect of this photography-induced reawakening of what we might call real-setting vitality comes through grasping, against the embedded conceptual pictures and their corresponding expectations, that those objects, persons, places, and settings of our quotidian world, newly arranged, newly juxtaposed, newly positioned, and seen (in Wittgenstein's sense) in a new light (in photography's case this phrase functions both metaphorically and literally simultaneously) are anything but inert. They are not like the brute materiality of extended substance that comes in the first instance without a sense of animated expressivity – at least they need not do so. Words – the real words of women and men – like the things and places in Wall's photographs as Fried sees them (a critical vision that is itself re-enlivening), are not in the first instance mere dead signs awaiting

the embodiment of the linguistic analogue of prior and separable spirit-content. Ostas is directing our attention to the creative processes of the reassembly, the re-composition, the re-sounding of our ordinary language in a way directly parallel to Fried viewing Wall; that is, in such a way that our language becomes, through poetic transformation, philosophical.

Ostas reminds us of Wittgenstein's remark, one of fundamental importance to grasping what is original and conceptually reorienting about his philosophical methodology (and what sets that methodology in striking contrast to the scientific model prevalent in the methodological mainstream): "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." That is the contrast between a contribution to knowledge and a contribution to human understanding, and it is of deep importance for Ostas' project precisely because the question concerning poetic truth can hereby be helpfully reformulated. Rather than asking what knowledge, or what kind of knowledge, poetry delivers, and, once that is settled, whether that knowledge is new or a kind of knowledge not available elsewhere, one can instead ask what contribution poetry makes to human understanding, and whether that kind of contribution is unique to this art-form. And with the preceding two thoughts (the special life ordinary language shows when reassembled and recomposed within poetry, and the methodological point concerning human understanding) behind her, Ostas is well positioned to shed a good deal of light in succinct form on the kind of poetry she is examining.

It has been said that, if you are a politician trying to hide something, you should hide it in plain sight. Nobody will look for it there – they will be looking in, and closely attending to, concealed, dark, underground places. And thus they will not see what is right in front of them for what it is. Ostas identifies this aspect of *Lyrical Ballads* (and one could add here a much longer list of poetry that has this special quality since that stylistically foundational work), this sense of the plainness of word-presentation that carries in its undercurrent a sense of something else, a sense of not-yet-fathomed content. That under-content, hidden in plain sight, we come to understand through what Ostas rightly sees as the dialogic structure of many of the passages in *Lyrical Ballads* (as is also true, she rightly observes, of *Philosophical Investigations*.) The way we satisfy the need for fuller understanding aroused by that sense of hiddenness-in-plain-view is to gain a full grasp of the way the words and phrases interact, the larger interconnections between words, phrases, and passages, the resonances these words sound with and against each other. (*Philosophical Investigations* demands precisely this kind of reading as well.) To read for the interactive work of words is what it takes to see how, when juxtaposed in ever-new ways, when re-enlivened, when recomposed, when re-sounded, our words have life.

Ostas observes that, in Wordsworth, "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." To the extent that we truly understand the act of speaking or telling therein represented, I want to say, we must first understand the dialogic-interactive functions of those words down to an extremely minute level (a degree of attentiveness to meaning-constitutive minutiae that philosophy could well learn from poetry). And this is a way of saying that words, when taken only by themselves (actually it is, I think, impossible to take them in isolation and genuinely understand them for what they are), hide content in plain sight. On any such atomistic or scientifically modeled approach to words, we take them as if they were inert signs that had isolated meaning-units attached; or (to connect back to the underlying picture, the half-buried architectural foundation discussed above) as though they were merely the linguistic analogues of mind-soul amalgams. Ostas's sensitive approach functions as a corrective to this conceptual misdirection: "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." But in following out these remarkably helpful thoughts, there is one place where I think Ostas should go farther – significantly farther – than she does. It looks initially like a rather small matter.

In writing of the distinctively lyrical ballad, Ostas observes that it is the feeling that gives importance, and she adds that, "the action alone or in itself is frequently unimportant." Given all that she has said to cast light both on the relations between Wordsworth's poetic language and Wittgenstein's conception of language in *Philosophical Investigations*, as well as what she has said about the distinctive philosophical character and function of Wordsworth's language, Ostas is perfectly positioned to say that, in truth (i.e. against dominant underlying conceptual pictures), there is no such thing as action alone, no such thing as action in itself. It is, to use a well-worn philosophical phrase, always already placed, and this shows – because linguistic usage is always already "placed" in just the sense she has so lucidly described – the full extent to which words and deeds, action and language, are in reality proximate and complexly interwoven. And so, actions as actually performed (i.e., real action like Wordsworth's real language) by human beings, and events as experienced by human beings, are always already intertwined within the fabric of a life-narrative with previous actions and events, within trajectories throughout a life of such engagements, with actions considered but not performed, with events anticipated or imagined but not had, and countless other variations on this theme. And the language that captures the nuances of these complexly interacting actions and events in a human life, i.e. poetry, mimetically has its words within its structure interacting in complex and unpredictable ways as well. Once we see this issue in its larger frame, it becomes clear that this is not a small matter: just as Rhie said of the

understanding of the very possibility of expressive content in the arts (and its connections to conceptions of selfhood), this issue goes to the heart of human self-understanding, of how we make sense of experience. But then here as well, one cannot do everything at once (and my fundamental purpose here is to help articulate some of the implications stemming from two pieces with which I happily find myself in very considerable agreement).

The contrast Ostas draws between Wordsworth and Keats is a profound one, and it casts into high relief one distinctive mode of aesthetic experience. One approaches, she says, Wordsworth (at least in his early work) as a listener; Keats, by contrast, leads one in as a reader "of written language that is unmoored to a human voice." Listening to Wordsworth in one's mind's ear brings to prominence the connection between this kind of poetic language and the place we normally listen to words-in-action, i.e. human dialogue. And as we have seen, it is within those dialogues (and I want here to say only within) such dialogues that we are able to discern the sense-making, meaning-constitutive interrelations that make those linguistic actions what they are. Thus what is to my mind of central importance in what Ostas is saying at this point is that it is decidedly not the case that words-as-signs are stationed in a holding repository with fixed meanings attached and ready to be deployed as individual operatives of a collective team (a sentence) when called for. On the contrary, poetic usage, as I intimated above, is also itself an instance, and exemplification, of what poetic language represents: it involves the creative and context-specific interaction of words, phrases, sentences – the makings of language games – that, through the linguistic analogue of chemical reactions, circumscribe their own limits and give rise to possibilities of expression which a highly sensitive ear – the ear of the poet – will "hear." (There is a direct parallel in philosophy to work in the Austinian tradition.) And what poets can hear, in this sense, gives rise to what they can say; the content of the one is dependent upon the other. All of this is what lies beneath Ostas's radiant sentence: "Wordsworth, like Wittgenstein, anchors his voice in the world."

That world is one in which we live and which we cannot reduce: words are far too complex a set of instruments to assign to each a fixed and single employment. To learn a word is thus dependent upon a form of life, a way of living, an irreducible set of complex interrelations between elements – persons, hopes, fears, aspirations, affections, past experience, developmental narratives and their teleologies, things, categories of things, layered and embedded practices, modes of attention and of responsive attentiveness, patterns of avoidance, aesthetic sensibilities, interactive preferences — in short, *life*. Ostas offers a brilliant reading of Wordsworth's 1798 "We Are Seven" in precisely these terms, and she shows how much more than the isolated meaning of a word (the word "are" in the sentence "We are seven") one would have to teach the girl who insists on counting two of the dead among her seven tallied persons. In the lines, "You run about, my little maid,/Your limbs they are

alive;/If two are in the church-yard laid,/Then ye are only five," the meaning of what we might initially assume to be among the most unproblematic of all words – a word right before us in plain sight – quickly becomes overwhelmingly complex, when we think about it in terms of what the girl needs to understand in order to come into alignment with the "are" in "ye are only five." And this connects directly back to the issues we considered above in connection with Rhie's deeply engaging contribution: the simple, schematic dualistic conception of the word, when drawn from a dualistic conception of selfhood that also generated the dualistic conception of the problem of artistic expression, is hopeless when brought up against the difference of vision between the two worlds invoked by the two employments of "are" (again, as employed in the sentences "We are seven" and "Ye are only five.") The two "are" usages, as Ostas rightly puts it, "don't share a world."

The way of seeing awakened by the girl's insistence, that special way in which we show our allegiance to an expanded, indeed poetic, ontology within which the deceased are countable with us, or loyally remain here, in an extended sense, among us, is a function of the re-enlivening of a word — the re-assembly, the re-composition, the re-sounding. One misreads Wittgenstein if one insufficiently attends to what is herein discussed as the poetic interaction, the meaning-constitutive dialogical interweave, of the words he puts to work. Just as one misses what is hidden in plain sight if one insufficiently attends to the philosophical dimension of the ever-new poetic re-employments of our language. The ancient quarrel can safely be left behind.

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