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The *Wednesday*

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

Who Needs Philosophy?

It was around the millennium that the worry about philosophy intensified. There was a need for a reassessment and a few books came out on this topic. Some of them gave a survey of the state of philosophy to see where philosophy was going. There were two books under the same title, *The Future of Philosophy*, one edited by Brian Leiter and the other by Oliver Leman. Reading both books and several others, one comes to the conclusion that philosophy, or at least analytical philosophy, is going through a crisis.

For the last two weeks we have been discussing, in our regular Wednesday meeting, several questions in this regard. We asked: Do we really need philosophy? Has philosophy added, improved or clarified anything? Wittgenstein thought that philosophy's task was to undo all the bad conceptual confusion it had created in its long tradition. He used the metaphor of the ladder that you climb and then discard. Ladders are useful for clearing houses. Fichte, in his late thinking, used the same metaphor but without denying philosophy a role. However, Fichte thought the role of philosophy is to explain everyday life and not to change it. He thought that philosophy gets us out of the confusion that was caused by theology. Wittgenstein thought that philosophy is only good in getting us out of the bottle that we were enclosed in it by our philosophically confused language. Both assume that the empirical (ordinary) standpoint of everyday life is correct.

But then what is the purpose of philosophy? What is philosophy? Is it just a mental game? Is it a secular version of a theology that has been moved beyond? Is philosophy coming to an end? Has it been taken over by the sciences? Is there a special sphere of discourse for philosophy? Alan White (his book *Toward a Philosophical Theory of Everything*) thought that philosophy has unrestricted (universal) sphere of discourse while the sciences have restricted (specialised) spheres of discourses. So, on his account philosophy has an unassailable castle that will survive any siege or attack. But Rorty, who ignited this debate in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, thought that philosophy doesn't have a proper sphere of discourse. Ironically, Rorty's criticism of philosophy is similar to Plato's criticism of poetry in his argument for the superiority of philosophy!

There is an added worry about the need for philosophy after it has become too professionalised. The Italian biannual review *Points of Interests* had recently called for papers on this very topic. It asked: 'What kind of public is nowadays interested in philosophy and what is the demand (i.e. the request) it proposes? And, moreover, which aspects of philosophy is it mainly interested in, outside universities? Is it possible that the current channels of diffusion (blogs, internet websites, media and mobile apps) and the relative heterogeneity of the recipients radically alter the original sense and purposes of philosophy, as well as the language? How may this alteration be explained? Is philosophy misrepresented in this way, or is it led back to its original vocation?' We can add that there are a couple of conferences in this country on philosophy in schools, and also philosophy and the media, trying to bridge the gap between philosophy and the public.

The question we are left with is: If we abandon philosophy, what will be left for us? Will it be science, art, or literature? Perhaps the way out is to go beyond the compartmentalisation of knowledge and argue for a philosophy that connects with all these fields and becomes more relevant to daily life.

The Editor

Words For Music

Music talks to us directly. The experience of music is mystical and emotional, yet the understanding insists on words that capture the essence of experiencing music. The article below discusses the relationship between words and music and argues that there is no need for words in enjoying music.

ALAN PRICE

In Schoenberg's great dialectical opera, *Moses and Aaron,* a despairing Moses cries out for a sign, a symbol or word to reveal the presence of God. 'O word, word, word, that I lack.' This need for a hidden key – some proof to explain what's stubbornly ineffable exacerbates the Jewish leader's frustration. An image, shaped by Aaron into a golden calf, has been made – materialism is the immediately available god now worshipped by the children of Israel. The word made God turned into flesh and fashioned as a thing of gold. Then Aaron points to a burning bush as a signal not showing God but *the way* to God. And Moses denounces what he perceives as a godless image.

Instead of calling on a supernatural agency to be manifest perhaps Moses should have asked for words to describe music, as some creative music of the spheres radiating from God's invisible presence. Desiring such a Pythagorean force might have proved difficult but not impossible. Many classical music lovers often refer to J.S. Bach as God, for if God exists then this is the transcendental music he would write: an angelic counterpoint, composed in Bach's Lutheran age, which mathematically and musically constructs a spiritual world. So why ask for a word to describe God? Moses, transported to our time could listen to a performance or recording of the B minor Mass and feel the presence of God. But which 21st century mortal is most capable of describing the effect of music in words? Is it the written statement of the composer, the musicologist, the performer, or listener? Yet wouldn't that be a redundant exercise? For does music have any intrinsic meaning other than being its own glorious abstract self? Humans are self-conscious creatures. After listening to say Bruckner's ninth symphony, John Coltrane's *Ascension* or an Indian classical music raga then the flow, the turbulence or river of notes disappear and on reflection we want to interpret the experience. Words either fall away, or attempt to enter our brains to 'explain' the meaning to ourselves or other music-loving friends, though this might be an irrational and absurd act.

'As neither the enjoyment nor the capacity of producing notes are faculties of the least use to man…they must be ranked among the most mysterious with which he is endowed' That's what Darwin said in *The Descent of Man.*

Mysterious certainly. But is music of the least use to man and woman? Society can certainly function without music but not without words. (Yet again if we follow the argument of a Levi-Strauss then before we constructed language our primal sounds made music, and our brains and tongues imitated the sounds of apes and birdsong leaving their phonetic musical fingerprint.)
Is there not an uneasy relationship between words and music twinned in performance? Certainly in popular song or poetry words can be harmoniously companionable. However the tensions dramatised in *Sprechgesang* (prefiguring the aural battery of rap) with its contrast of spiky speech and song is interesting to consider here. But still employing words, out of a musical context, as some sophisticated after-thought, to describe musical notation can be problematic.

'The inexpressible depth of music, so easy to

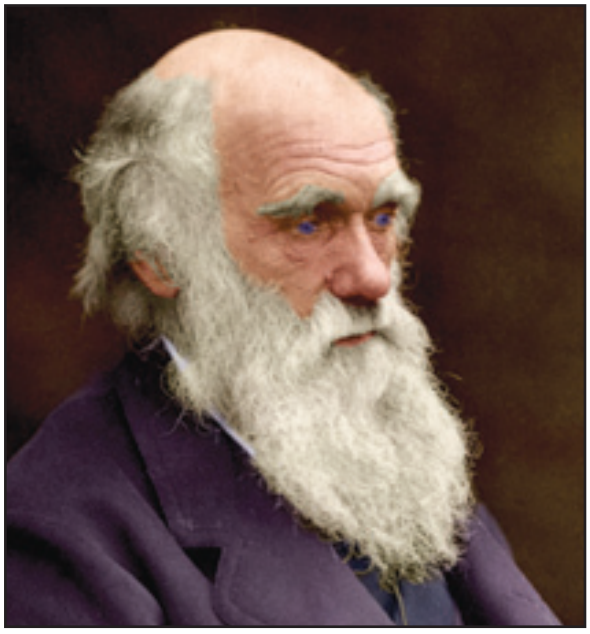
understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain…music expresses only the quintessence of life and its events, never those themselves.'

For Schopenhauer 'quintessence' is the pivotal word: a word that for me brings poetry into the discussion. Good poems, working well, contain, within their imagery, sensibility and music, a move towards being essentialist as well as quintessential. The less said the more conveyed. Art is often a supremely difficult process of editing. It's no surprise to learn that Samuel Beckett, a master of the pared-down text, loved both his involvement in cricket and playing the piano. As he tensely waited for more action during a long match or played a Schubert impromptu perhaps these activities both strained and relaxed him. Yet afterwards, when writing, did Beckett think his words mattered? He once famously declared he was here to make 'a stain upon the silence.' Perhaps music is the biggest creative stain on the silence. And the silence of pauses, written into music, and to be respected after its performance, might be the loudest stain of all. For Beckett creativity was a bleak, but also very amusing operation in the void. For readers and listeners, bringing their everything and nothing responses, art becomes a distraction, an entertainment, a summing up of experience until it reverts back to a challenge. And then unlike Beckett we crave for aesthetic fulfilment over emptiness.

I own many recordings containing booklets where writers explain the technicalities of a musical composition, what the composer was experiencing at the time of writing the work and attempt to describe, in perhaps literary, often poetic terms, just what the music is trying to say. Actually, very few music commentators have a strong literary background (An Edward Said on opera, Stephen Johnson on the symphony or a Bryce Morrison on piano music are an eloquent rare breed.)

> 'Music, as has often been said, is meaningful without having a paraphrasable meaning, is expressive without necessarily communicating something denoted by any linguistic expression…Leaving the concert hall after a performance of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, one is unlikely to say that the music is without content. One may be inwardly shattered, having understood the music very well and precisely for that reason refusing the clichés by which program-note writers struggle to articulate its link to a verbal discourse.'

That's an extract from Julian Johnson's 2002 book *Who Needs Classical Music?* I agree that to understand a work like the Mahler Ninth you need go away in silence, overwhelmed if it's been a good live performance, realising that you've been through a journey. (Each time I hear Bernard Haitink, live and on record, conduct this piece I discover and reclaim its mysterious power.) But I disagree about any attempt to write about the music; once you have 'understood' it will always result in a cliché response. I think that the musical journey is like travelling on a long trip in a foreign country where hours or days, after returning home,



Darwin

J.S. Bach

you need to reflect on what you've heard and jot down a few travellers' notes.

For some people it's not just the absorption of feelings, emotions and ideas of music which matters but a search for words to convey how your perception of the world has been subtly altered or changed. Having a musical epiphany does not necessarily mean describing it with a hackneyed phrase – for the act of listening deeply to music can raise your desire, then your expectations, hope, and skill with words to write as well as possible. We may have had a transcendent moment but paradoxically feel the urge to ground it on earth.

I've deliberately not included any examples of words attempting to describe, or even philosophise, about the string quartet, concerto or symphony. I didn't want to contrast and compare writers' examples. For behind all the metaphors that listeners employ is something so very difficult to capture - the pulse of music. This is a living, breathing concept that great conductors like Wilhelm Furtwangler instinctively knew you had to grasp.

Every time I hear that moment, when the flute enters, in the first movement of Bruckner's Fifth symphony (As highlighted on the live performance by Jascha Horenstein and the BBC Symphony Orchestra) its hidden pulse is revealed. Each note, repeating the pizzicato effect of the strings, is not just the work's musical core but what makes Bruckner's composition live - a simple yet profound equivalent of a human heart-beat. This heart, neither sentimental nor indifferent, beats on, adopting different guises in other instruments, particularly the brass, right through to the magnificent chorale and fugue that concludes the symphony. As you listen to Bruckner your heart beats a little faster to accompany this mysterious life-pumping energy that is called music: a force appearing to be beyond language but strangely asking us to provide a verbal or written response: a memorable phrase.

'We had the experience but missed the meaning.
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness.'

Working on his *4 Quartets* T.S. Eliot was greatly moved by listening to the late string quartets of Beethoven. Writing about listening to music we remain caught in that creative flux wanting our own very different and individual forms to try to convey its inexpressible power. Or maybe what only seems to be inexpressible. I think the gap's to be filled. And often.

The Trouble with Philosophy and Music

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting Held on 27th June

DAVID CLOUGH

How minimal or slim is the role of philosophy today? In the late 20th century Wittgensteinian Christian philosopher DZ Phillips talked about philosophy's cool place and went on to argue for some hermeneutics, not of Ricoeur's Reflection and Suspicion but of contemplation.

In the public sphere where public intellectuals thrive, both the more Nietzschean John Gray and the left Hegelian Raymond Geuss seem united at least around the idea that most ideas of political and moral progress espoused by Marxists and Liberals alike are illusions. A non-progressive view is better in their view. This was illuminated further recently when Jonathan Rée reviewed Geuss's latest book in the TLS. What stood out after reading and discussing that in our Wednesday meeting was how the Wikipedia article on Rorty, while mentioning other critics of Rorty, completely fails to mention Geuss either as a colleague (and fellow rebel) at Princeton or as a critic which is something Rée clearly draws out in his piece.

From my perspective I suspect that Blanchot's idea of an infinite conversation would not be the same as the Gadamer - Rorty one. Geuss might be rude about Gadamer and by extension his former late colleague Rorty, but the whole problem of tradition that Gadamer, Ricoeur and MacIntyre seemed to represent has to face challenges from today's identity politics. It seems harder now to defend tradition than it did thirty years ago when postmodern debates were at their fiercest. Against that we have the clipping or decline of critique discussed in earlier *Wednesday* issues.

Classic Music

I saw a book in Oxfam's window with the title *Moribund Music*. It is about the struggle to keep classical music going, given its greatly reduced status in society. Where ten years earlier the debate had been around dropping dissonant modernist music, now the debate seems to have widened. What is the future for orchestras and opera houses? How will they keep going?

Raymond Geuss

Recent schedules of the BBC Proms show a progressive evolution to include more and more popular culture. But even this may not work in the long term if it simply dilutes the definition of what classical music is. In philosophy, both Kant and Hegel had put music as the lowest of the arts since it was essentially non-cognitive. This seems particularly surprising since Beethoven was Hegel's contemporary! Later philosophers, such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, were keen on music. Wagner was influenced by Schopenhauer but he also exerted huge influence on Nietzsche. However, it is still true that music criticism is largely separated from philosophy. Even where a composer like Shostakovich has been discussed in a philosophical as well as political context, it is still true that the ability of classical music to stand for or illuminate historic cultural periods is generally underplayed. Music is an important aspect to me just as film and literature are. But how do we get more discussion of music into a debate, particularly in a period where it seems to be declining?

A Pantoum: Verse-Music

CHRIS NORRIS

Note: Maurice Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor has a second movement entitled 'Pantoum'. The pantoum is a verse-form of fifteenth-century Malaysian origin with quatrains rhyming abab and lines repeated as here, i.e., lines 2 and 4 of the first stanza reappearing as lines 1 and 3 of the second, etc. The form was picked up by French nineteenth-century poets, among them the Symbolists Verlaine and Baudelaire. In 1975 Brian Newbould published an article that showed in detail the extent to which Ravel's movement found its model in their poems. My pantoum has the composer's fictive thoughts in a running series of disjunctive exchanges with Verlaine and Baudelaire (the poets' remarks italicised).

Nice try – technique and artistry to spare!
Slow movement a pantoum, from the Malay.
Our compliments, Verlaine and Baudelaire!
Hard to pull off but I shall find a way.

Slow movement a pantoum, from the Malay.
Verse-imitators, yes, we've had our share.
Hard to pull off but let me find a way.
Still, verse to music – that's distinctly rare!

Verse-imitators, yes, we've had our share.
My art seeks form's perfection, not display.
Still, verse to music – that's distinctly rare!
No rest till this one sees the light of day.

My art seeks form's perfection, not display.
Our lives were two wild orgies of despair!
No rest till this one sees the light of day.
Take on our prophet's mantle if you dare!

Our lives were two wild orgies of despair!
My form must rise serene above the fray.
Take on our prophet's mantle if you dare!
Formal respects alone I have to pay.

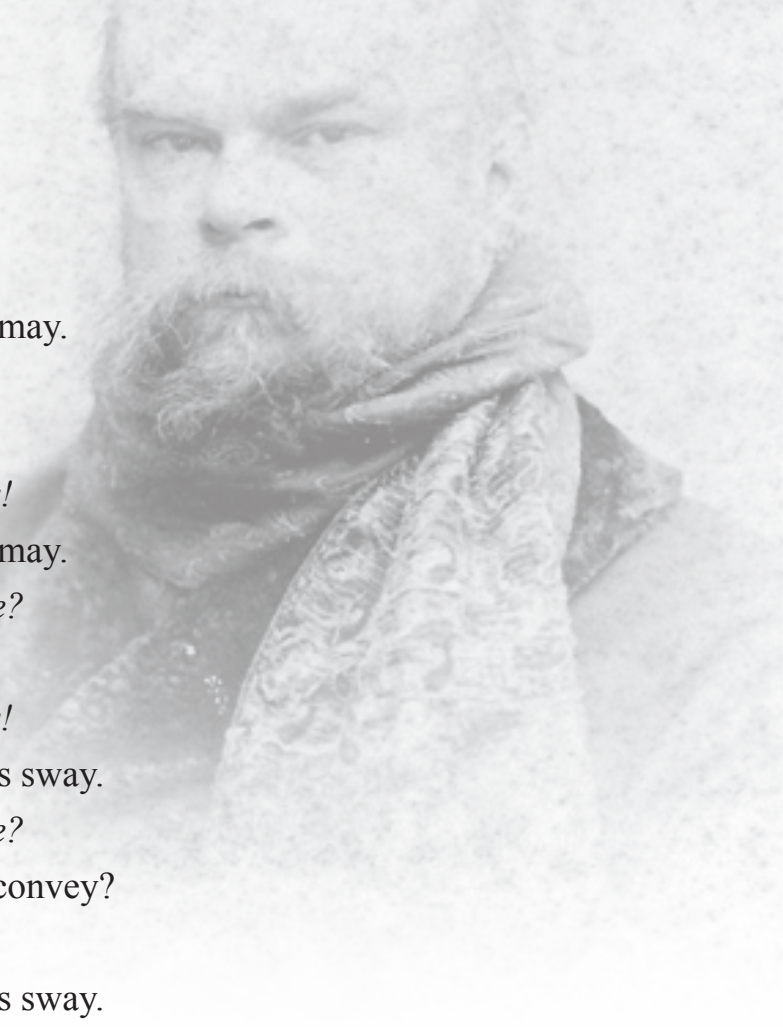
My form must rise serene above the fray.
Small chance, for all your craftsmanship and flair.
Formal respects alone I have to pay.
Hell's music haunts our verses, so beware!

Baudelaire

Small chance, for all your craftsmanship and flair.
See how my pantoum never goes astray.
Hell's music haunts our verses, so beware!
Pure beauty, like a double-roundelay.

See how my pantoum never goes astray.
Composed 1914, en temps de guerre!
Pure beauty, like a double-roundelay.
See Dionysus spurn Apollo's care!

Dionysus



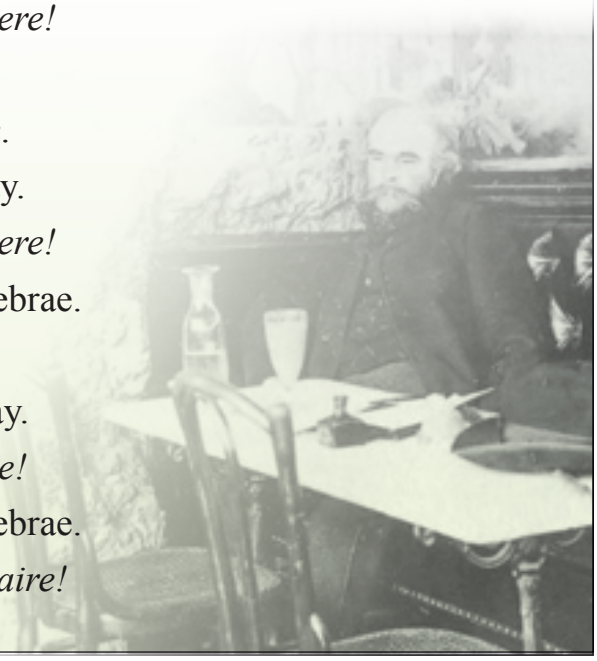
Composed 1914, en temps de guerre!
All due proportion, chaos held at bay.
See Dionysus spurn Apollo's care!
Let form preside and notes fall as they may.

All due proportion, chaos held at bay.
We'll count no formalist our lineal heir!
Let form preside and notes fall as they may.
What's it to us, your formal savoir-faire?

We'll count no formalist our lineal heir!
Hear how each measure yields to ratio's sway.
What's it to us, your formal savoir-faire?
How else should notes such equipoise convey?

Hear how each measure yields to ratio's sway.
You! hypocrite lecteur, semblable, frère.
How else should notes such equipoise convey?
Read us again, find out what's really there!

Verlaine



You! hypocrite lecteur, semblable, frère.
It's form alone may halt the notes' decay.
Read us again, find out what's really there!
These old verse-forms endure like vertebrae.

It's form alone may halt the notes' decay.
Nice try! technique and artistry to spare!
These old verse-forms endure like vertebrae.
Our compliments, Verlaine and Baudelaire!

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

EDWARD GREENWOOD

I suffer for all those my fancies claim
I've wronged, and feel I must atone,
I castigate myself in fruitless blame,
Suffering alone.

I walk barefooted on a painful road
Of scruples that can only mar
And never mend. The more my thoughts unload
The more there are.

With so much real suffering around
Why does my mind imagine more?
I constantly repeat the rituals I was bound
To do before.

I try to calm my agitated mind
But still can never make them cease,
The more I try indeed, the more I find
That they increase.

Why won't these teasing torments go away
And let my burdened days be free?
But no, I fear that they have come to stay,
Now part of me.

Though OCD is what they call my plight
Naming affliction does not cure it,
All I can do is keep it out of sight
And just endure it.

Death wish

You promise silence after life's long race
unless you strike before, carry away
your booty noisily after a chase
or be it, someone leaves one autumn day
to choose the only and the lonely way
that as he knows, will lead him to your base.

The roads are never emptying of those
who long for peace like searching for a rose
that flowers only once a century.
They, endlessly in rows, are following close
your lead to quietness, your eternity.

I saw their tracks, winds blowing through their coats
giving them wings, majestic sailing boats,
but when they landed, everything was still
and when they lay, a silence, to fulfil
your promise with a quiver in their throats.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws


Sebastien

Aphrodite of Aphrodisias

Who can look at Aphrodite of Aphrodisias with an innocent eye? On a cool autumn day, some years ago, I wandered into a corner of the Ashmolean Museum. I had intended to do some sketches and sat down on one of the supplied stools looking around, when my eyes fell onto a sculpture, which immediately captivated me. Unsettled by what I was seeing – her face was broken – I focussed on the marble statue. Every so often some ray of light would dance across her face as if trying to bring it back to life, illuminate her beauty once again and warm the marble back into flesh and blood. A kind of arty peepshow would proceed: the goddess's eyes were blinking, her lips filling up, the upper lip drawn back

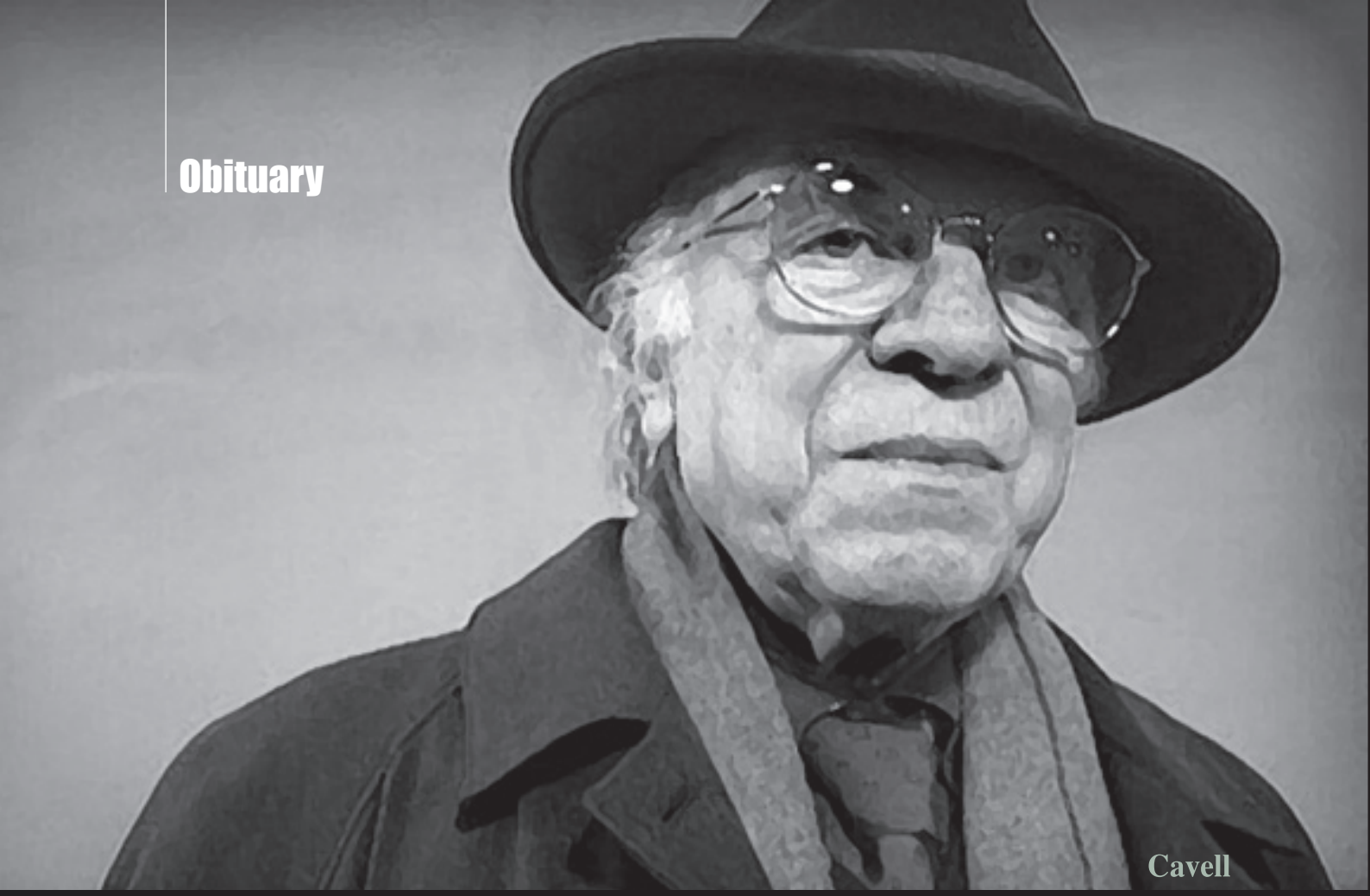
widening in a subtle smile, her heavy-lidded eyes sparkling, her shoulders hunched backwards in both recoil and craving.

I stayed for a while, very still, witnessing this mysterious transformation between sensual and spiritual.

Ancient sculpture has always been preoccupied with immortality – the translation of mortal humanity into something transcendental, into gods and goddesses. Modern sculptors have seen it differently. Aphrodisias can be found in the South-West of Turkey, in a fertile river valley in the ancient land of Caria. The city was founded in the 2nd century BC and its centre point was the temple of Aphrodite, famous in the ancient world for its many sculptures and artistic value. As there were quarries nearby with pure white and grey marble, a production centre for marble sculpture and highly skilled artisans and sculptors developed. Signatures of Ahrodisian sculptors could be found in metropolitan Rome in Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli. The goddess Aphrodite of Aphrodisias combined the local fertility goddess with the Greek Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, a religious export from Anatolia, that went far across the Mediterranean countries and grew beyond the officially accepted belief in Christianity. Around 500 AD the temple of Aphrodite became a church.

Artwork and Article by

Scharlie Meeuws



Cavell

The Voice Of Philosophy

A Brief Tribute To Stanley Cavell 1926-2018

DAVID CLOUGH

I don't know Cavell's work that well but his thoughts have featured in other works I have read. Firstly, Fergus Kerr's *Immortal Longings* and Gerald Bruns' book called *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*. Then I encountered him in the writings of Stephen Mulhall and the leading Kierkegaardian and literary commentator Edward Mooney.

Cavell's development of the so called Emersonian 'Perfectionism' was the thing that first puzzled me. Being less Wittgenstein centred (or JL Austin centred), my main interest was how Heidegger and Kierkegaard were being read. In that regard Cavell and Mulhall are not uncritical. I also knew something about the autobiographical tone Cavell adopts in his essay collection *A Pitch of Philosophy*. I also knew of the essay on Shakespeare's *King Lear* called the 'Avoidance of Love' printed at the end of Cavell's book *Must We Mean What We Say*.

Cavell, it seems, also read Derrida. He often reads two similar texts, films or play productions dialogically, almost along intertextual lines. I am not sure how to compare him to Rorty straightaway but it is an interesting question. As I am not a Shakespeare expert I hesitate to discuss *King Lear* but some interesting points around the issue of world collapse seem to be embedded in it.

Cavell asks how the voice of philosophy can be heard amid the commerce of everyday life. Cavell talks about his vocation in connection with what he calls voice - the tone of philosophy - and the right to take that tone, and to describe an anecdotal journey toward the discovery of his own voice. This is something Mooney also picks up in his book on *Lost Intimacy in American Thought*. While French

feminists lament the fate of operatic female characters Cavell seeks a kind of Otherness.

For Cavell, film and opera are the media of Otherness for women. Cavell's *Avoidance of Love* draws both on Shakespeare's *King Lear* and its prequel adaptation by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group, called *Lear's Daughters*. A good deal of the discussion is about the production of shame. But it is the American scholar Alan Bailey who extended the discussion of world collapse. Is Shakespeare a worldly poet? Do we agree about Shakespeare's worldliness, and in particular, is *Lear* his most worldly play? At the most mundane end of the spectrum is Stephen Greenblatt's view. For Greenblatt *King Lear* is a play about the anxieties of retirement for a suburbanite. 'It was not a matter of mistrust—[Shakespeare] seems to have loved and trusted one of his daughters at least. It was a matter of identity. If *King Lear* is any indication, [Shakespeare] shared with his contemporaries a fear of retirement and dread of dependence upon children.' This seems far too comfortable. Cavell's main point was to challenge a tidy division between character and structure.

But is it also possible to link Cavell's aesthetic project and Eric Voegelin's political thought, by way of the concept of 'second reality'? Cavell relies heavily on Austin and Wittgenstein in Cavell's approach to the question of how language relates to Heidegger's existential ontology. But also, Cavell is sensitive to the history of drama, combined with Voegelin's sensitivity to the drama of history. Bailey says that Voegelin's 'gnosticism' concerned 'political religions' promising immanent salvation through knowledge of the laws of history, or of human nature. In Voegelin in particular, the mass appeal of ideological second realities is a datum of the loss of the common world. Reading Thomas Pynchon's novels, Voegelin was struck by the author's 'almost classic examination of the pathological situations created by alienation and *paranoia*.'

If Lear is left alone in a shamed solitude, does this talk of a loss of the 'tension toward the beyond' as a Voegelinian expression for (philosophical or theological) love as a world-ordering phenomenon really stand up for Cavell or Mulhall? Since providence is the form this love assumes in the Christian *mythos* and in theology, in the post-Christian context of modern culture, 'the loss of the tension' takes the form of an evacuation of divine providence. It has to be filled by something else.

The Wednesday

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Foxgloves

Just two in this meadow barely a digit apart.
Bending together courtesy of a breeze.
Nods towards tales of wolves or sour spit.

In other places they are out in force,
like some forgotten emperor's fake army.
Blue bonnets wind-rock with fern to hold sway.

Each bloomed-stem a pretty poke at heaven.
On its own a soft exclamation mark,
But in hordes it lays waste.

David Burridge

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