

CALL FOR PAPERS: Stanley Cavell and the Vicissitudes of Love

University of Warwick
19 May 2023

WARWICK

INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY

Keynote Speakers:

Dr Catherine Wheatley, King's College London

Dr Rachel Malkin, University of Oxford

Love—its offering, its acceptance or avoidance and the ramifications of both—is a central theme of late American philosopher Stanley Cavell's work. Whether it be familial love, as in Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*, romantic love, in works as diverse as *Othello* or the remarriage comedies of mid-twentieth-century Hollywood, self-love, as in the rejection of possessive love in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* or the unknown woman melodramas, or even the "little community of love" (1979: 109) that meets the tribulations of the everyday with hope and reciprocity, Cavell's writings on the ordinary, scepticism and "other minds", desire and acknowledgment, and moral perfectionism often hinge on the complex human relations involved in this most complex, and often confounding, of human emotions—although it's unclear whether love can be strictly defined as an emotion at all. (And if it isn't purely an emotion, what *is* it?) As humans, love affects and inflects everything with believe and do, how we live together, and how (and whether) we choose to divide ourselves.

In "The Avoidance of Love", he is explicit about love's capacity to not only embrace but consume: "[I]f you would avoid tragedy, avoid love; if you cannot avoid love, avoid integrity; if you cannot avoid integrity, avoid the world; if you cannot avoid the world, destroy it (2015: 322). For Cavell, "Another awful truth of finitude is that, unlike gods, we mortals are not generally reliable mind readers, so that love between mortals, to be known, must be spoken" (2004: 382). But how to speak it? In the remarriage comedies, it is spoken again and again—articulated through confrontation and conversation (often in the form of verbal sparring) in an ongoing commitment to everyday lives and the flesh and blood beings who populate them. Cavell refers to film as 'still a story of the adventure of love': In *The Philadelphia Story*, he writes, Tracy Lord's desire to be "worshipped instead of loved" is evidence not only of her "ignorance of her sexuality", but also, ultimately, of her humanity (1979: 171).

The University of Warwick's School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures and the Institute for Advanced Study present a one-day interdisciplinary conference on Cavell, love, philosophy, and Cavell's philosophy of love. Cavell's life's work itself is highly interdisciplinary, straddling the line between analytic and Continental philosophy and encompassing everything from the philosophy of mind, ethics and ordinary language theory to literature, the visual arts, music, drama and of course film. We hope to convene a spirited cross-section of scholars from many of these disciplines to discuss Cavell's enduring influence on the humanities and social sciences. We welcome abstracts that engage and interrogate Cavell's philosophy of love: the philosophical questions love engenders and how Cavell envisages and engages them. It is our hope this conference will culminate in an edited collection as part of the [Warwick Series in the Humanities](#), Routledge.

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Suggested topics include:

- Love and the Philosophy of Mind/Scepticism
- Love and Ethics
- Love and Moral Perfectionism
- Love and Self-Reliance
- Love and Language
- Love and Marriage
- Love and Parenthood
- Love and Gender/Sexuality
- Love and Racial Identity/Ethnicity
- Love and Friendship/Intersubjectivity
- Love and Politics/Democracy/Neoliberalism
- Love and History/Memory/Trauma
- Love and Aesthetics
- Love and Auto/biography (e.g. Cavell's love of the movies and music)



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Please send abstracts (max. 250 words) along with a brief biography to Cavellandlove2023@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions is **16 December 2022**.

Catherine Wheatley is a Reader in Film and Visual Culture at King's College London. She has published widely on questions of film, ethics and aesthetics. Her writings on Stanley Cavell include a monograph, *Stanley Cavell and Film: Scepticism and Self-Reliance at the Cinema*. In 2022, she co-edited a special dossier, *Projecting Cavell*, for the journal *Screen*. Catherine also writes regularly for *Sight & Sound* magazine and is a convenor of the BFI's Philosophical Screens series.

Rachel Malkin is 2022/2023 Departmental Lecturer in English and American Literature at the University of Oxford. She has published on Cavell and American poetry and on the role of film in Cavell's project. Her book in progress considers Cavell's work alongside the writing of American literary contemporaries.

Works Cited:

Stanley Cavell (1979), *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

Stanley Cavell (2004), *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

Stanley Cavell (2015), *Must We Mean What We Say? 2nd Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).