Introduction
On Criticism and Other "Middle Subjects"

A work of literary criticism and philosophical theory in equal parts, *Jane Austen and Other Minds* demonstrates the standing of Jane Austen's fiction as a philosophical investigation in its own right, as well as a resource to ordinary language philosophy in the twentieth century. The book locates in Austen's fiction a kind of "linguistic phenomenology" available to the everyday world of the novelist, but not permitted her in intellectual history. The study also strives to honor the thought and teaching of Stanley Cavell (1926–2018). Though these two primary goals are inextricably bound together, the event of reading Cavell (reading Austen, and others) necessarily irrupts into the middle of a neater and all-English Jane Austen with J. L. Austin pairing that also concerns me at length. I take up the charge found at a relay-point in Cavell's late book, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (2005), where Cavell connects the "passionate exchanges" and rational play found in Jane Austen's novels to the figure of J. L. Austin, his mentor in the field of ordinary language philosophy, in the following way: "Because it is not to my hand here, or perhaps ever, to lay out a fuller geography of the courses that 'endless' passionate exchanges can take in satisfying the conditions of perlocutionary utterance, and because I think of myself here as wishing to honor Austin's work, I cite one brilliant source of such passionate exchanges that I imagine Austin would feel quite happy to be associated with, indicated in his announcing one of his once famous courses of lectures at Oxford, the one on the foundations of empirical knowledge, in roughly the following form: SENSE and SENSIBILIA. J. AUSTIN" (*P*, 188). This book seeks to answer a question raised for Cavell by the play of endless passionate exchanges within the constraints both of manner and time: Why would Cavell honor his philosophical teacher through homage to Jane Austen and in terms of the critique of the "foundations of empirical knowledge"?

This is a question that requires dealing with various modes, moods, and levels of performativity: literary and philosophical; intimate and public.

The inset question about the foundations of knowledge, of course, is not to be easily answered; surely not in any final way by a work of literary criticism. But the reassessment of our education in foundational knowledge occasions less ultimate registers of "passionate exchange." These are properly in reach. From the midst of things, such relations press meaningfully upon philosophical concerns as Austin understood them in *How to Do Things with Words*. Where the alliance with Jane Austen signaled by J. L. Austin's choice of the title *Sense and Sensibilia* may be imagined as acerbic, authoritatively witty, and coolly cultured in his own terms, Cavell's complex homage to Austin is more earnestly warm and more generous – if tortuous – in its involvement. It offers to make Austin posthumously happy by fully welcoming passionate (perlocutionary) utterance into classic illocutionary speech-act theory, and by extending Austin's range and circle of association beyond the lectures and famous Oxford Saturday mornings. Explaining why Cavell chooses Jane Austen as the means to make this enlargement around "passionate exchange" – when her writing and person have for so long been taken as examples of various confinements: Regency manners, heteronormativity, country estates – is equally this book's argument and performative task.

"Moderate-Sized Dry Goods"

J. L. Austin argues that sense data and material things "live by taking in each other's washing" (*SS*, 4). It is an image drawn from domestic life, though class-distanced from Jane Austen, the writer from whom he adapts the title of his 1947–1948 lecture series on modern sense-perception philosophy, *Sense and Sensibilia*. According to Austin, the ideas of both "sense-data" and "material things" trade on preoccupations found repeatedly in western theory of knowledge from Berkeley to Hume (on one track of this tradition from the eighteenth century), and from Bertrand Russell to A. J. Ayer (in another related line from the twentieth century). Austin thinks these ideas thrive insidiously by their pairing. "What is spurious," he claims, "is not one term of the pair, but the antithesis itself. There is no *one* kind of thing that we 'perceive' but many *different* kinds, the number being reducible if at all by scientific investigation and not by philosophy" (*SS*, 4).[1] In parallel with his contention that "[t]here is no one kind of thing that we 'perceive'," there is no one act of perception but a manifold of perceiving, sensing, and receptive activities: a plurality that is indicated but hardly exhausted by Austin's careful attention to the differences of usage among words like looks, appears, and seems.

One of Austin's most winning papers is entitled after the event of a small upset in the study, "Three Ways of Spilling Ink."[2] (The three ways and dimensions of ordinary-language analysis are: intentionally, deliberately, and purposefully/on purpose.) In *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin objects to the narrow use of the "moderate-sized specimens of dry goods" that so often serve as the constituents of a small rotating cast of "material objects" when philosophy presents narrative examples. Austin sharply criticizes the furnishings both as philosophical exempla and as language use. He also targets the metonymic thinking behind them, countering the picture of the world of things as a dry-goods store from an affirmatively critical vantage *within* the same "moderate" world (the world of William Wordsworth's "spousal verse" of "common day").[3] In doing so, Austin harkens back to one of John Locke's foundational metaphors for the mind and ideation, less famous only than the *tabula rasa*, and linked to it by Locke's own slippage of metaphor: "Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, a white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store"?[4] How indeed is a flat sheet of white paper furnished? Austin contrasts to the prop-like dry goods an alternate middle range of experiential entities that we would not usually call "material things" – a liquid grouping of streamy, fuzzy, and re-mediated phenomena. Austin contends that sense-data philosophy in general, and Ayer's approach in *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* in particular, employs an impoverished and hollowly tasked concept of the "material thing," as he reflects on the experiential omissions from the day's standard philosophical list of objects (chairs, tables, pens) that "the ordinary man" is said to perceive:[5] "We may think, for instance, of people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures in books or hung on walls, vapours, gases."

I will back up for a full run through the extraordinary passage at hand:

> 1. It is clearly implied, first of all, that the ordinary man believes that he perceives material things. Now this, at least if it is taken to mean that we would *say* that he perceives material things, is surely wrong straight off; for "material thing" is not an expression which the ordinary man would use— nor, probably, is "perceive." Presumably, though, the expression "material thing" is here put forward, not as what the ordinary man would *say*, but as designating the general way the real *class* of things of which the ordinary man both believes and from time to time says that he perceives particular instances. But then we have to ask, of course, what this class comprises. We are given, as examples, "familiar objects"— chairs, tables, pictures, books,

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> flowers, pens, cigarettes; the expression "material things" is not here (or anywhere else in Ayer's text) further defined.[6] But *does* the ordinary man believe that what he perceives is (always) something like furniture, or like these other "familiar objects"— moderate-sized specimens of dry goods? We may think, for instance, of people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures in books or hung on walls, vapours, gases—all of which people say that they see or (in some cases) hear or smell, i.e., "perceive." Are these all "material things"? No answer is exactly vouchsafed. The trouble is that the expression "material thing" is functioning *already*, from the very beginning, simply as a foil for "sense-datum"; it is not here given, and is never given, any other role to play, and apart from this consideration it would surely never have occurred to anybody to try to represent as some single kind of things the things which the ordinary man says that he "perceives." (*SS*, 8)

The passage transitions from the genre of comic philosophical satire to something like the lyric arts of performative attention. When Austin thinks of "familiar objects," he presents not a static, disconnected list of "material things," but a dynamic association moving from people to their voices to the flowing river to the mountain through which it cuts, to flame, to shadows and the flickers of cinema.

What the so-called "ordinary man" perceives and experiences is best made available when sourced in the resources of ordinary language. It is a world of moderately vibrant materialism and of the variously medium-scaled. We might call it a garden-variety Romanticism. This notion of the garden draws on its ordinary idiomatic phrasing, though it does make reference to the thought-picture of the garden as a picture of mind, as in the privileged setting of the "other minds" problem in an English backyard: "There is a goldfinch in the garden" (*PP*, 77). Despite the role Cavellian perfectionism will play in this book, this is not the garden of the William Godwin-Erasmus Darwin-Percy Bysshe Shelley line of Romantic perfectibility, where kings, priests, and statesmen eliminated, "A garden shall arise, in loveliness / Surpassing fabled Eden."[7] For Austin, the garden is a locale and figure of an original – not sin – but ordinary mistake, where one encounters a songbird misrecognized. Lecture II of *Sense and Sensibilia* begins: "Let us have a look, then, at the very beginning of Ayer's *Foundations* – the bottom, one might perhaps call it, of the garden path" (6).

The likely allusion to the English popular author Beverley Nichols is a hint. In the English phrase, to lead someone down (or up) the garden path is to mislead, to deceive them. But, redoubling the play of the idiom and its allusion, Austin's philosophical dispute with Ayer's *Foundations*

is precisely over the role of deception as providing a key of misguidance in the theory of knowledge. For Austin, "at the very beginning" of Ayer's theory and at the "bottom" of the garden is not a truth about the perception of objects (indirect and misperception), but an intellectual muddle and social mistake, a philosophical education in misleading (6). Austin's ready-to-hand garden metaphor preserves the sense of entanglement in the history of philosophy, but denies inherent philosophical profundity to Ayer's tradition. The beginning, the origin, is the root of the problem, its bottom. The garden here is not the mythic site of transcendental origin or utopian recovery, but of immanent, though fraught and even mysterious, communication. The garden path denotes a place of daily discovery and error. Knowledge in the garden is ready-to-hand and available. To cite from the everyday and conversational narrative poetics of the overlooked modernist novelist Henry Green, "[t]he argument … is that we cannot go outside everyday life to create something between reader and writer in narrative. The communication between the two will be on a common or garden plane." But, as Green goes on to note, in its premise of immanent exchanges of contact, "the common or garden plane" of communication is not free of mysteries and miracles. Rather, he wonders at the prior fact of language as an asset and means of exchange: "the mere exchange between two human beings in conversation is a mysterious thing enough. The mere fact that we talk to one another is man's greatest asset. That we talk to one another in novels, that is between complete strangers … is nothing less than miraculous if you once realise how much common experience can be shared."[8]

Cavell's major early essay "Knowing and Acknowledging" asks what we are doing to the precondition of embodiment by giving the standing of myth to this version of "other minds" skepticism. Cavell also thinks through the metaphor of accessing another's mental life as that of contemplating a garden (*Must*, 260–261; *Claim*, 368). He cites John Cook and the analogy that we may not be able to see our neighbor's crocuses (*Must*, 259). Indeed, there is a wider motif of thinking about flowers and about what we might call living walls and their fissures in ordinary language philosophy, including in John Wisdom's symposium on *Other Minds* (*In Quest*, 68–70). Cavell reconsiders the garden analogy so as to gain a clearer vantage upon the human "abilities" and "inabilities" of knowing that this picture of thought may help us to grasp, when Cook calls it a "circumstance" that conditions our knowledge, that we are not the other in pain. Cavell ponders what may count as the meaning of such a "permanent circumstance" as embodiment. In his most identifiably

Romantic and lurid mood regarding the thorns of life, Cavell invests in a Shelleyan allusion to the garden space, as he offers a kind of lyric paradigm of suffering transposed into the philosophical third person of Jamesian narrative: "the analogy captures the impression that I am sealed *out*; but it fails to capture the impression (or fact) of the way in which *he* is sealed *in*. He is not in a position to walk in that garden as he pleases, notice the blooms when he chooses: he is *impaled* upon his knowledge" (*Must*, 261). At a closely related moment in Part 4 of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell writes amidst discussion of various thought pictures: "[a]nother such description which arises in thinking about other minds is that of a garden which I can never enter. But this expression is really (mythologically) about a particular quality of the other's mind (it is not, say, a jungle, or dump yard or haunted house), and about a particular position I am in relative to it (say one of envy or disgust or fear). Such descriptions emphasize that I do not enter another's mind the way I enter a place. This is so far not much help; it does not distinguish either from entering, say, into marriage" (*Claim*, 368). Here the various locutions of *entering into* (a mind, a place, a marriage) serve as a relay of metaphors we live by in the metaphor of mind as location. They may structure alternatively dramatic or comedic possibilities of relation and insight. But more often they go unregarded. An additive troping declines into a subtractive trope, then hardens. Syllepsis is one of the resources of "the fierce ambiguity of ordinary language" (*Claim*, 180).

Admittedly rough-cast, these working concepts of the middle subject and the garden plane carry significant philosophical implications for the phenomenologies of reading and writing. Cavell's arrestingly melodramatic Romanticism departs from J. L. Austin's tone but draws from his tenacity in making distinctions. The dryly satirical mode of Austin contrasts to his colleague Gilbert Ryle's harangue on the "Myth of Descartes" as a wholesale "category mistake" in *The Concept of Mind*, the work (Austin says) of a "*philosophe terrible*" who "has chosen therefore to cast his work in the form almost of a manifesto."[9] Austin – who describes his method as "linguistic phenomenology" in the essay "A Plea for Excuses" (*PP*, 182) – offers something like a phenomenologically attuned list to counter his chagrin for positivist nomenclature: "pens are in many ways though not in all ways unlike rainbows, which are in many way though not in all ways unlike after-images, which in turn are in many ways though not in all ways unlike pictures on the cinema-screen – and so on, without assignable limit" (*SS*, 4). Austin makes such distinctions without limiting dualities. He advances by a plurality

that finds its method through examples and distinctions that search past pseudo-metaphysical binaries (including the insurgent opposition to binaries). After reading Austin at any length, one wonders why one, two, and three are the only philosophical numbers. Despite his "installing monogamous heterosexual dyadic church- and state-sanctioned marriage at the definitional center" of *How to Do Things with Words* at both a rhetorical and social level, in this way Austin's work throughout evinces the reformist's challenge to entrenched intellectual practices.[10] His non-dualistic project in linguistic philosophy and social performativity anticipates the ampler spatial poetics found throughout Eve Sedgwick's late work – a positionality of the "beside": "Beside is an interesting proposition also because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object."[11] In J. L. Austin's writings beyond *How to Do Things with Words*, we often find a companionable interest phrased differently. His important paper, "A Plea for Excuses," makes use of a Sedgwick-like nonce concept or "weak theory" to trace a bushy "ramiculated branch of philosophy" into the "coverts of the microglot." Here Austin bridles even at excuses as his announced subject beyond the title, since it is "unwise to freeze too fast to this one noun and partner verb." He voices his sometime preference for "'extenuation' instead" (*PP*, 175).

Austin's philosophical writings contain no sustained literary criticism and very few direct references to novels, beyond the allusion to Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. But an aside in "A Plea for Excuses" – "[a] course of E. M. Forster and we see things differently" (*PP*, 194) – casually indicates Austin's sense that the English novel may provide a resource to philosophical quandaries, serving at what he calls, with the tactical caginess of one who has served in intelligence during war, "the stage of appreciation of the situation." In his 1950 paper, "Truth," Austin urges philosophers at once to quit bullying their subjects and "take something more nearly their own size to strain at" (*PP*, 117). If perception, sizing things up, is an implicitly warlike act in this idiom, right-sizing philosophical observation may be irenic. In giving such focused critical attention to the compelling and problematically rendered middle scale, Austin may be seen to draw philosophical resources from the critical history of the modern novel and its imagined interdisciplinary courses. An enriching preoccupation with experience, perception, and an associative

"life" beyond just the sense of sight runs from Henry James (whom Max Beerbohm parodied in "The Mote in the Middle Distance") to Virginia Woolf ("The Mark on the Wall," "Solid Objects").[12]

Austin demonstrably owes something to the I. A. Richards of *Practical Criticism*: "There are subjects – mathematics, physics and the descriptive sciences supply some of them – which can be discussed in terms of verifiable facts and precise hypotheses. There are other subjects – the concrete affairs of commerce, law, organization and police work – which can be handled by rules of thumb and generally accepted conventions. But in between is the vast *corpus* of problems, assumptions, adumbrations, fictions, prejudices, tenets; the sphere of random beliefs and hopeful guesses; the whole world, in brief, of abstract opinion and disputation about which civilized man cares most." The history of criticism, summarizes Richards, is a history of "middle subjects."[13] William Empson, Richards's precocious student, says this about the interaction of "Sense and Sensibility" in *The Structure of Complex Words*: "A mathematician will often take an absurdly small context —'me seeing a stick'— and argue from what is inherent in that to a theory of continuity; a philosopher commonly takes 'my seeing my table' and finds inherent in it his theory of knowledge. You do not know his real context till you know what he has to say. It is the distinguishing mark of the expert of sensibility that he does the same; from the small specimen he leaps to the universal truth, commonly with references to infinity, and when he is wrong you do not want to introduce a larger context but a middle-sized one such as the human creature really knows about."[14] The challenge to bring dynamic, unscripted forms of thought to the shuttling acts we perform as literary theorists and critics, between theory of knowledge and the "small specimen," is the task of criticism outright. For Austin, the reductions of sense-data philosophy traffic in a world of moderately sized dry goods scripted into roles as "material thing" dummies. Yet the importance of consulting ordinary language is, as Cavell maintains, pursued *In Quest of the Ordinary*, that is, in recognition of the uncanniness and strangely receding distance of the ordinary.

"We may think, for instance, of people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures in books or hung on walls, vapours, gases." In the generativity of excess understanding, Empson's enthusiastic "expert of sensibility" stands not in contrast to but aligned with the mathematician and philosopher. All stand in need not of a new "larger context" but of the re-introduction of "middle-sized one[s]" such as other human creatures experience and

about which "material objects" themselves may afford knowledge, through greater working intimacy with their capacities, constraints, and limits.[15]

Austin's brilliant debunking of typecast "material things" is phrased at once in the form of a critical countermand, a kind of poetic reverie, and a list. It is offered in *Sense and Sensibilia* to remind readers of what they already practice as their knowledge of the world, grasped through ordinary natural language, delivered from the world-as-undertaken. Austin's critique of the positivists' rendering of "material things" offers a prescient challenge to the philosophical habits of phrase – but also of thought and exemplification – that evoke such concepts as "matter," "objects," and "things." His stubborn persistence in not allowing the convenient reduction of the "material thing" as a token of discourse is especially noticeable in light of the recent critical turn to new and vibrant materialisms of many stripes. In this instance, Austin fashions a type of sentence found increasingly in writings by new formalist literary scholars and by practitioners of object-oriented ontology: an ontologically level, syntactically straight, but philosophically careening list of disparate objects.

At their best, such lists generously distribute agency. Acknowledging entities as "autonomous forms," Graham Harman says these irreducible entities exist "all the way up and down the ladder of the cosmos." Then Harman enumerates the entity-forms of "lemon-meringue, popsicles, Ajax Amsterdam, reggae bands, grains of sand."[16] With comparable heterogeneity, Caroline Levine writes in a definitional passage of *Forms*:

> To capture the complex operations of social and literary forms, I borrow the concept of *affordance* from design theory. *Affordance* is a term used to describe the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs. Glass affords transparency and brittleness. Steel affords strength, smoothness, hardness, and durability. Cotton affords fluffiness, but also breathable cloth when it is spun into yarn and thread. Specific designs, which organize these materials, then lay claim to their own range of affordances. A fork affords stabbing and scooping. A door-knob affords not only hardness and durability, but also turning, pushing, and pulling.[17]

There is something at once delightfully ingenuous and soliciting of criticism about these lists that include "things" like reggae, soccer teams, popsicles, transparency, fluffiness (a predicate found in both meringue and in cotton), breathability, pushing and pulling. The total effect depends upon defamiliarization, but not simply to make us feel the primitively obdurate

or hard modernist version of things – to "*make the stone stony*," as Viktor Shklovsky once memorably claimed.[18] These lists of one-off "things," and increasingly the listicles in which they appear, might put us in mind, as Jacques Lezra recently notes, of the polyamorous love of all things in a poetic effusion like Pablo Neruda's "Oda a las Cosas" ("Ode to Things"). Yet affordances assume their human usage. When such concepts of objecthood or materiality are misapplied to the scope of today's "matters" without a critical sense of how things are mediated, material*ized* in forms of philosophical, cultural, and economic exchange, the amassed things and their essences or affordances can well cause the concept-laden feeling Lezra calls "deep dissatisfaction."[19]

Austin identifies the philosopher's original sin in the thought-picture that sacrifices ordinary language to sensa as the basis of an account of perceptual knowledge. That move amounts to the abandonment of the world as a garden. Throughout the *Sense and Sensibilia* lectures he pursues this case, most philosophers think unsuccessfully, as "the illusion of the so-called 'argument from illusion'" (*SS*, 4), and casts the world it has lost in the storied shape of a garden. Sandra Laugier observes of this passage in her summary of the lectures:

> At the beginning of *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin takes issue with the notion of "sense datum," which Moore and Russell introduced in order to avoid the problems raised by the notion of sensation, by thus specifying its "content" (an absolute premise that would, in a way, except the relativity of sensation). The idea that we can examine our sensations (or strip them down in such a way as to be able to obtain sense data, which for Austin amounts to the same thing) is "the original sin (Berkeley's apple, the tree in the quad) by which the philosopher casts himself out from the garden of the world we live in." The illusion Austin condemns is twofold: first, it is the illusion that I have a better chance of reaching "the real" by speaking about sense data than by speaking about objects and following the ordinary rules of language, and second, the illusion that there is a univocal definition of "real."[20]

In the substitution of sense data theory for the plurality of midsized and medium-zoned experiences, Austin laments not the loss of the Garden of Eden (he mentions the quad, keeping in mind he is a professor at Oxford). Rather, he laments the ruse of a knowledge production-and-validation by means of an exile from human scaled receptivities of knowing. The sense data account alienates what Austin imagines to be the very donation of knowing.

Unknowing, too, can be a distributed and inflected position. Austin alleges of the tradition of indirect perception that it utilizes and bequeaths

a diminished jargon of analytical language that hedges against an appropriate boldness in ordinary language. Against that picture, he invokes the variously lush but still scrutable, finite, multiple and yet specifiable – and pleasurable – garden world. Austin deploys garden variety types of ordinary language knowing. If we accept Jonathan Kramnick's argument on anti-representational philosophy and eighteenth-century poetry, an argument with aims very much compatible with Austin's work, and mine here, "perceptual acquaintance employs a kind of everyday skill or homely style."[21] With Kramnick, we can ask, what if our picture of knowledge isn't constructed in that usual way, as the product of the multipart mechanism, or modular story, of external/internal/external: an impression made upon a camera-like inlet through the senses followed by an image formed of the object by internal mental representation, finally articulated by expressive externalization?[22] Part 2 of Wittgenstein's Brown Book contrasts the "feeling of familiarity" with "familiar objects" not with skepticism or doubt, but instead with *surprise*.[23] By contrast to the presentation of ideas of sense data and the framing of a theory of perception based on painterly impressionism – and carrying through to the study of literature the argument that perception as such is not a major theoretical problem – the focus in *Jane Austen and Other Minds* is not on the epistemology of Austen's fiction, but on its relation to Austin's mode of performative felicity and Cavell's insistence on finding the place of acknowledgment. What if everything one wants out of knowledge is available, "fully sensible of its mysteries and fully open about them"? (*Senses*, 4). Plenty of limits, conflicts, and failures remain, but the machinery of Eden and hollow skepticism both move to the wings after this readjustment (which is also, à la philosophical satire in early Marx, a radical philosophical critique of the discourse of most everything that is said to exist).[24]

Austin commends not rest but *fieldwork* in his invocation of the garden site. This means not origin work but bottom work, requisite work in the language thicket: "drawing the coverts of the microglot"; "forget[ting] for a while about the beautiful and get[ting] down instead to the dainty and the dumpy" (*PP*, 175, 183). As opposed to the sublime and the beautiful, he thinks we are more likely to "get going on agreeing about discoveries" on that more modest and particular pairing of terms.

Though we encounter the garden of this world as a bewildering tactical situation, and it must be *made* public and available, there is a thread

to follow from Austin's investigations of linguistic phenomenology to Austen's fictional garden plane of conversations. Despite the apparent contempt of her object world of fabrics and furniture (the world Paula Byrne deploys to organize Jane Austen's historical writing life as "a life in small things")[25] – and in the face of the widely supported notion that Austen's philosophical background lies with the eighteenth-century British empiricists – J. L. Austin's satirical mode in *Sense and Sensibilia* shares with the fictions of Jane Austen an inalienable possession in language and a distaste for the premise that knowledge must be routed through an idiolect of indirect perception. Another way to say this – which Stanley Cavell labors to claim for himself as a practitioner of ordinary language philosophy in his early essay "Must We Mean What We Say?" – is that Jane Austen is entitled to philosophy, through nothing more than her position in the contested community of English as a natural language.

What I think of in this book as J. L. Austin's unexpected Romanticism is enabled as a challenge and a resource in this moment from "The Meaning of a Word"; the method it provisions contrasts ordinary language to an anticipatory defensive structure characterizing "doing physics" and "ideal" language: "Ordinary language breaks down in extraordinary cases. (In such cases, the cause of the breakdown is semantical. Now no doubt an *ideal* language would *not* break down, whatever happened. In doing physics, for example, where our language is tightened up in order precisely to describe complicated and unusual cases concisely, we *prepare linguistically for the worst*. In ordinary language we do not: words fail us. If we talk as though an ordinary must be like an ideal language, we shall misrepresent the facts" (*PP*, 68). This openness to failure – *availingness* to failure, even, given the non-ideal nature of all contexts – represents dialogue with failure as a possible outcome that is nonetheless more resourceful and less damaging than any insurance taken out against its possibility. The culmination of Austin's argument in *Sense and Sensibilia* is that, by seeking a single kind of statement about knowledge that is *incorrigible* (not subject to doubt or to further challenge, incapable of being proved wrong *in any context*), the sense data theory of perception seeks not so much knowledge as the elimination of risk. Its form Austin calls "not a maximally certain, but a minimally adventurous form of words" (*SS*, 103, 112, 139). For Cavell and Wittgenstein in related ways, it is this availability of felicity and failure alike that constitutes the possibility to go on (and go on well enough), to inherit, succeed, and take part; and occasionally to reach felicity.[26]

J. L. Austin once claimed that importance isn't important, truth is. Since its initial critical reception, the consensus of critical commentary on Jane

Austen's work has praised it for "small truths," contributions which one anonymous review (in 1854) made clear to distinguish from "half-truths" (*CH* I, 147). Walter Scott's famous review of *Emma* is only one example of how Austen's middlingness has long been taken to represent her commitment to realism in artistic production.[27] A century later, George Saintsbury found in *Emma* "the absolute triumph of that reliance on the ordinary."[28] Yet, by underwriting the ordinary with a canned and stabilized version of empiricism, in the dominant history of bourgeois realism and the scenario of the rise of the novel, we forget the intimate relation of this middle zone to unintelligibility and failure. Austen's history of middle subjects is precarious. The most sanguine of her Victorian admirers knew this at the level of style and characterization: "One degree less felicitous, and failure begins!" (*CH* 1, 130).

Cavell's remarks upon Jane Austen in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* are framed by a discussion of Wittgenstein that draws from the latter a philosophical method and set of aspirations that counter the idea of "philosophy as a chapter of science" (*P*, 112). As opposed to positivist scientific method, "philosophy's task is to assemble reminders" rather than necessarily add to knowledge (*P*, 112). In Cavell's eponymous chapter – and in the study before you – this prompt leads to a perspective on Austen as a writer who helps us assemble reminders of everyday life not in complacency or complicity but in the critique of the ordinary. Austen confronts "everyday life with itself" (*P*, 123). This book doubles down on the importance and multiplicity of the living entailment of reading Austen's work precisely because we understand her as a writer from whom we do not learn anything too much that is empirically new.

In *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*, Cavell adverts to Jane Austen's novels in the effort to honor and praise J. L. Austin, and in so doing, extend Austin's account of the institutional performative to improvised "passionate exchanges." Cavell relates a proleptic course of explanation by way of an insight into Austin, Austen and "the courses that 'endless' passionate exchanges can take in satisfying the conditions of perlocutionary utterance." Recounting why it took him so long to come to a serious engagement with Austen's novels – and outlining a course of study we must imagine now – Cavell describes the very late blooming of an "unconstrained fascination" with Austen (*P,* 126), one that begins with a recognition of her "narrator's renowned surface of containment" (*P*, 124). In the lecture version of "Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow," Cavell stunningly calls the "surface" of Austen's prose a "lethal calm."[29] He accounts for his late fascination with Austen's novels as a response not

to the "elation" and "thrill" of identificatory participation in the main marriage plots, but in response to "the stupidity, the silliness, the empty-headedness, the quality of being worn-out…of so many of her supporting players" (*P*, 126). No examples of the worn-out lives, or schticks, of Austen's "supporting players" are immediately provided. But any reader of the novels can conjure some names, from the relatively lively and famous (Mr. Collins, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Elton) to the burnt-out far reaches of the Austen character system (Mrs. Allen's rain-forecasting tautologies; the itch to act past the death of his host that characterizes the bit player Mr. Yates). To play this dispiritingly fun game yourself, read any stretch of the character entries found in Part 2 of Paul Poplawski's *Jane Austen Encyclopedia*.[30] Did Cavell associate these unforgettable caricatures with Thoreau's sense of lives led in quiet desperation?

The fascination with the ongoing non-life of Austen's "worn-out" characters is, of course, especially salient when read against the constitutionally optimistic, "exceptionalist" mood of Ralph Waldo Emerson's American perfectionism. In his engagement with Jane Austen, the dimensions of nation, genre, and gender all shift for Cavell, who thereby acknowledges powerfully (if so late) a fascination with Austen's novels as zones of decline and of oddly fruitful depletion.[31] The shift, I argue in the middle chapters of this book, reflects not simply an expansion of topic in Cavell's career but a re-disposition toward the material foundations of public feelings – one based in predicaments of thought and affect, as well as geopolitical structures that have bearings in and on gender and power. These new dimensions in Cavell's writing can be shown not only to have taken on, but to have been inspirited with, disorganizing displacement. Cavell in this sense thinks with gender and genre in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow,* to respond implicitly to the disorganization and decline of Anglo-American prestige that has unfolded globally in the years during which he published books (1969–2010). That paradoxically "new" yet entropically declining mood is appropriate not only to a cultural response to the challenge of envisioning a philosophical future in the already "filled" imaginations and positional spaces of Anglo-European high culture, as the old story goes (it is the dominant account from Emerson and Whitman and Hawthorne to Henry James – and one still very much alive to Cavell);[32] it is further appropriate to the contemporary scene of the ordinary in disinvested, now often-crazed British and American life, intimacies, and public space. Cavell's project in *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* has many more commonalities than differences with the field of twenty-first century affect theory (by Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart, Sianne Ngai and others) on

the dysphoric ordinary and public feeling. "The ordinary is a circuit that's always tuned in to some little something somewhere," writes Kathleen Stewart. "It can take off in flights of fancy or go limp, tired, done for now." In a passage evocative of Cavell's resonantly tired fascination with Austen's downstage characters, Stewart continues: "The ordinary throws itself together out of forms, flows, powers, pleasures, encounters, distractions, drudgery, denials, practical solutions, shape-shifting forms of violence, daydreams, and opportunities lost or found."[33]

This effort to reorient our understanding of what Cavell means, makes, and leaves to us in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* finds its partner in a long-overdue reset of our comprehension of the aims, mood, and methods of J. L. Austin. Austin is often taken to task for seeming to make both normative assumptions and undue claims about ordinary language, though in the essay "A Plea for Excuses," he cheerfully acknowledges that ordinary language "has no claim to be the last word, if there is such a thing" (*PP*, 185). "[I]t is necessary," Austin goes on, "first to be careful with, but also to be brutal with, to torture, to fake and to override, ordinary language" (*PP*, 186). Ordinary language in Austin's hands neither promotes a recourse to authoritarian "last words," nor does it supply any defense from brutalities of method, or provide refuge from violence both as a risk and as an occasional tactic. Cavell's interest in Jane Austen as a novelist of the ordinary responds with sensitivity to what he calls "the little deaths of everyday life" in her fiction, "the slights, the grudges, the clumsiness, the impatience, the bitterness, the narcissism, the boredom, and so on (variously fed and magnified and inflamed by standing sources of social enmity, say, racism, sexism, elitism, and so on)."[34] Cavell's work on the philosophy of film and in the genre he calls the "melodrama of the unknown woman" in *Contesting Tears* (1996) is one source of the #Metoo Movement's use of the term "Gaslighting."[35]

On the same page of the same text just quoted (his foreword to a 2007 book by the anthropologist Veena Das), Cavell reports:

> A decisive turn in my own studies in skepticism came from the realization that a skeptical process toward other human beings (others like myself, Descartes says) results not in a realization of my ignorance of the existence of the other, but in my denial of that existence, my refusal to acknowledge it, my psychic annihilation of the other.

Cavell himself presents the great theme and "decisive turn" of his work as the recognition – a recognition leading to many writing acts of intensive redescription – that the problem of knowledge ("ignorance") displaces

an even prior skepticism towards acknowledgment ("denial," "psychic annihilation"). Cavell presents this autobiographical description also as a datum of literary history in *The Claim of Reason*: "romanticism opens with the discovery of the problem of other minds, or with the discovery that the other is a problem, an opening of philosophy" (467). The present book seeks an audience in Romantic studies, but all the more engages with Cavell's theme of skepticism and acknowledgment via Jane Austen as an insecurely Romantic author. My Austen is one of Isaiah Berlin's "restrained" rather than "unbridled" Romantics.[36]

Jane Austen and Other Minds, too, begins from the further recognition of what we might call a second turn in Cavell's writing on Romantic writing.[37] An event takes place in Cavell's thought in the interval between the publication of *In Quest of the Ordinary*, with its tour de force accounts of English Romantic Poetry by Wordsworth and Coleridge (among others – Kant, Emerson, Poe), and *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* with its expression of a new interest in Austen, concerning dynamics of a vulnerable conformity and resistance to the ordinary, in the medium of literary fiction. This expression of Romanticism by prose, on my reading, is not so much a discursive or communicative grounding of the poetic leaps as an attentive grinding – an aversive frictional thought being worked beside some form of community of acknowledgment and experience of being known. The empiricism Cavell values is an abrasive retention of that skeptical-sociable rhythm, an adhesion that takes both sides, rather than the kind of "impress" that sinks into the subject unilaterally from without. We can glimpse something of this eventual (and eventual) shift in another text Cavell published in conversation with Veena Das, almost a decade after the publication of *In Quest of the Ordinary*: "My knowledge of myself is something I find, as on a successful quest; my knowledge of others, of their separateness from me, is something that finds me. I might say that I must let it make an impression upon me, as the empiricists almost used to say."[38]

With the exception of the first, chapters to follow take the common path of six chapters, each focusing on one of Jane Austen's six completed novels. The traditional format is meant both to help orient the reader who comes to the book for case studies in Austen, and to license philosophical departures. These risks can take a variety of shapes, large and small: sections that dwell with known information in a novel so as to weigh its acknowledgment differently (Chapters 3 and 6); chapters that push outward from a

major starting premise or structural feature of a novel, which do not return to offer a comprehensive textual reading of the fiction as a whole (Chapters 4 and 5); and intensive digressions on apparently minor interactions in the novels, where my hope is to revalue the fiction's philosophical standing and redistribute our attention as critical readers and teachers (Chapters 2, 3, 7). My sense of the common zone of the hopeful readerships of *Jane Austen and Other Minds* makes for a wide territory – including Austen scholars and scholars of Romanticism, colleagues and students of Cavell, and those committed to the history and contemporary role of ordinary language philosophy in literary studies. The last is a growing body; but I am also aware that the disciplinary engagements within such a project can feel crosscutting. The book overall might be judged to present Cavell and ordinary language philosophy *via* Jane Austen – using Austen's novels as a repository – and to share readings *in* Austen rather than *of* her works. But the book, and each chapter individually, also displays how Austen's prose fiction is a repertoire, in its acts and in its potentials, for a mode of doing ordinary language philosophy in its own right, and not simply a common stock for philosophy's later use. Every chapter, and almost every segment or section, has been developed and tried out in classrooms where it was Jane Austen who brought us there and held the collective attention.

Chapter 1, "Austen and Austin," presents the details of the book's central proposition that Jane Austen's novels are not conduct books sharing preset values but philosophical studies of conduct more in the J. L. Aust*i*nian sense. The chapter claims that Austen – in common with the grouping of ordinary language philosophers I engage in this book: Austin, Wittgenstein, and Cavell (most of all) – does not view perception itself as a philosophical problem of major interest. My approach departs from the widespread view that Austen's fiction reflects the mitigated skepticism of eighteenth-century empiricists and anticipates modernist literary impressionism. In the words of her Victorian critic G. H. Lewes, Austen's epistemological project includes her cultivation of a prose style not hyperrealized as visuality but "content to make *us know*" through the testing and textures of dialogue and character.[39]

Chapter 2, "Intelligible Community," reads Austen's first novel accepted for publication, *Northanger Abbey*, in terms of a zero-degree of intelligibility in communicative social exchange. *Northanger Abbey* presents Catherine Morland's entry not just to Bath society but into the linguistic public. Throughout the novel, Catherine is subject to stratagems of deceit by her false friends, Isabella and John Thorpe. The latter even makes a coercive (and dishonorably deniable) marriage proposal that Catherine,

in a state of absent-minded imaginative distraction, does not so much as uptake as information. J. L. Austin once identified untruth and unclarity as "the birthright" of all speakers. This mock birthright is the arrogation and entitlement of Thorpe. In a striking alignment of this kind of threat with its obverse – a critical investment of interest, if not fascination – Cavell explains his renewed reading of Austen only late in life as an exhausted intimacy with minor characters. In the tedious, packed rooms of Bath where nothing meaningful may happen, or originate, the main couple, Catherine and Henry, broach the possibility of intimacy through the precondition of the apartness of other minds.

Chapter 3, "*Sense and Sensibility* and Suffering," begins from the experimental philosophical writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein on the problem of other minds. Wittgenstein, like Adam Smith, positions suffering and pain as the paradigmatic experiences in discussion of other minds. (Austin's paradigmatic feeling is anger.) This chapter deploys a flattened point of view in terms of what it means to be "insensible," particularly in relation to the non-human paper and ink fictional characters in an "early" Austen novel. It reads *Sense and Sensibility* through a Cavellian exploration of the philosophical problems of skepticism and acknowledgment. Cavell presents his own reading of late Wittgenstein as one of an intimate frustration with the workings of criteria. The chapter uses that experience to model a necessarily and potentially productive frustration that modern novel readers often report with the main character/trait pairings of *Sense and Sensibility*. The chapter promotes the interest of otherwise flat writing as modeling forms of resiliency. Wittgenstein remakes philosophy as an opportunity for working out criteria while letting stand the dissatisfaction that is internal to the way criteria differ from the thing itself; he shares grammatical limits in relation to human experience even where there is nothing else to take over from linguistic practices, to get us "inside" them. These critical practices are especially vital to reading Austen's fiction written before her great success in writing novels of inwardness.

Chapter 4, "*Pride and Prejudice* and the Comedy of Perfectionism," interprets Austen's enduring, beloved comedy of marriage in dialogue with Cavell's philosophy of the perfectionist comedy of remarriage. In its first half I consider the charismatic art of *Pride and Prejudice* as a form of the conversational "sequel," as *Pride and Prejudice* the cultural phenomenon comprises an unbounded event of uncontainable circulation and exchange. The second half of the chapter gives visibility to Cavell's omission of the philosophical genealogy of the European concept of perfectibility from his Emersonian inflection of moral perfectionism. Cavell's

version of Emersonian "moral perfectionism" has never explicitly laid out or paid homage to the trajectory, tensions, and implications of perfectibility as a concept found in European philosophy and literature of the late Enlightenment. The omission impacts a Cavellian reading of *Pride and Prejudice* by laying new stress on how Austen uses comic style to articulate her own fictional stance against the disembodiment and rhetorical rigidity of much thinking on "perfectibility" – especially William Godwin's. Positioned at the center of *Jane Austen and Other Minds*, and (along with the next) one of two chapters that break out of their Austen frame, the chapter enacts a key argumentative hinge-movement regarding philosophy's historical and material conditions and gender as topics of emergent interest in the later works of Cavell.

Chapter 5, "Perlocutionary Entailments," engages with a larger transhistorical discourse of female personhood. Following Lionel Trilling, I consider how the challenges that accompany Austen's public status are echoed in the reading and enlarged reception history of *Mansfield Park*. I move this discussion back to the 1772 Mansfield Decision, and forward to consider the controversy surrounding the less momentous twenty-first century decision to place Austen on a British bank note. The open-ended, improvisatory, and finally uncontrollable nature of feelingly impactful speech links cultural and critical conversations to what J. L. Austin calls the perlocutionary realm of performative language. Perlocution, the dimension of language that most signals organizational breakdown, bogging down the progress of J. L. Austin's official illocutionary speech-act theory, is also the dimension or capacity of language through which paratextual literary encounters – allusions, conversations, revisions, and eventful readings – persist. This concern with the embodied but unbounded effects of language (doing things *by* our words as well as *in* them) evokes a central feature of the enterprise of literary criticism altogether, I argue. Thus a section of the chapter, "The Problem of Praise," engages with Cavell's post-Kantian adaptation of the very mood and project of criticism as praise open to rebuke.

One of the book's main goals is to read and put forward for attention a wider range of J. L. Austin's writings than is typically found in works of literary studies, given the outsized impact of *How to Do Things with Words* in literary and cultural theory. Chapter 6, "*Emma* and Other Minds," discusses Austin's critique of certainty in "Other Minds," and his account of the pluralities of verbal action in the essays "Pretending" and "A Plea for Excuses." Austin's arguments in these essays possess not only cognitive and epistemological dimensions; they are supremely rich investigations

of moral thought and sociality: dimensions of life that produce endless opportunity for mistake. Illuminating Austen's *Emma*, Austin's rejection of the exclusive dimension of certainty driving so much modern theory of knowledge goes hand in hand with his recognition of the epistemological character of social responsibility.[40] Rather than seeing presumption in Emma's matchmaking, this transmissible sociolinguistic form, I argue, is the serious sphere of implication at risk in *Emma*, where "expressions and behavior *place a claim on others*."[41] The novel's famous scene at Box Hill enacts these dynamics in a tour de force of recursive layers. The gap between what words say and what words do has seldom been so richly explored as in *Emma*. The ordinary-language philosophical topics treated in this chapter include moral luck, pretending, and the self-problematizing division (made famous by Paul de Man's reading of Rousseau) between exculpatory confessions and pleasure-taking excuses. The chapter begins with Austin's and Austen's joint critique of certainty alike as a philosophical and narrative goal. It ends by dislodging omniscience as a placeholder of philosophical value.

Chapter 7, "*Persuasion*, Conviction, and Care: Jane Austen's Keeping," develops from Cavell's striking interest in Michel Foucault's final works on "care of the self" (*Le souci de soi*). Cavell finds in Foucault an alternate version of the potential forms of life taken by moral perfectionism. Cavell in his autobiography *Little Did I Know* marks his engagement with Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*, or truth-telling, as it developed from a seminar Cavell co-taught with Arnold Davidson at The University of Chicago in 1999. As a fictional investigation of the conviction-persuasion distinction, *Persuasion* suggests rethinking the idea of being convinced through a practice of reason-giving whose grounds are to provide advance rationale for their validity of support. Rather, in Foucauldian practice Cavell finds "a place and an instrument of confrontation" (*P*, 155). Anne Elliot, the protagonist of *Persuasion*, undertakes a turn from the obedient subject of persuasion to a linguistic and social agent of conviction. This example of a late-Foucauldian reading of Austen in rapport with the ordinary, everyday, and *quotidienne* departs markedly from earlier influential Foucauldian readings of Austen which understand sociolinguistic and formal narrative features in terms of surveillance in the dispersed power/knowledge framework. I conclude the book's reading of Cavell's Austen under the aegis of "vulnerable conformity" by underlining a shift in the meaning of conformity as such. Drawing from language in George Saintsbury's 1894 essay on Austen, the chapter presents a curative and durational practice of "keeping" as an alternative to heroic investment. A term of art drawn from

such diverse practices as landscape painting and fruit and vegetable canning, "keeping" is a communitarian and haptic practice (a care of touch), a custodianship, not a relation of epistemological mastery or ideological debunking.

The chapter, finally, returns to the famous claim that Jane Austen is a "prose Shakespeare." It reconceives the comparison in terms of an uncomfortable affinity of physical comedy between Austen and Shakespeare, and specifically in the irruptive violence of *Persuasion*. In the image of a character's head as a broken hazelnut, the chapter also provides an exemplary object lesson for what it looks like to hold the wrong picture of other minds.