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Abstract Title:  
The Power of Passivity in Reading Experience

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In "Finding as Founding," Stanley Cavell elucidates "the power of passiveness – a power to demand the change of the world as a whole," which is pre-eminently a consideration of the nature of "attraction." He shows the attractive power of passivity in the way Emerson's writing in "Experience" transfigures his son's death as a "call for philosophy." Here saying "yes" to what attracts us through the provocation of loss allows us to become more human.

In "Representing Grief: Emerson's 'Experience'," Sharon Cameron relentlessly traces the violence by which Emerson projects his dissociative experience of "the attributes of a personal loss" to be "the attributes of all experience without exception." Here Emersonian impersonality becomes inhuman.

Cavell and Cameron have called each other's readings "important." How important is their difference? For each reading undoes the other by way of what each takes to be most important in the way Emerson writes, and thereby in how we read, or refuse to read, the difference the experience of such writing makes possible.

Moreover, for Cavell, creatively reading Emerson shows how philosophy and literature are to be "give[n]. . . into one another's keeping"—a thought Cameron cannot help but find aversive.

Can reading "Experience" give philosophy and literature into one another's keeping? I will work through the aversive difference between Cavell's and Cameron's readings to see whether and how attraction to the "power of passiveness" can be fulfilled.