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Abstract_Title:

Passing judgment, conceding perfection: Free indirect style and versions of the Cavellian Secular.

This paper begins by returning to Cavell's early account (in *The Claim of Reason* and elsewhere) of "romanticism" as a "process of secularization" whereby finite individuals are asked to play "God" to one another--of verifying one another's existences for one another. From the start, the originality of Cavell's work rests on a recognition that what seems the harder role--the activeness of making oneself known--may be an evasion of the passiveness of allowing oneself to be known. The first part of the paper examines the tensions within Cavell's work between, on the one hand, his heroic investment in "acknowledgment" as the duty and burden of secular individuals, and, on the other hand, the figures of "decline," "lapse, and "concession" by which one signals one's readiness to be known--or acceptance of the other's knowledge.

The paper then turns to the question of free indirect style in third-person narration as literature's own performance of the passiveness and non-assertiveness of acknowledgment. What light can narratological debates on a style that enacts a split between the subject of experience and the agent of its verbalization shed on the Cavellian figures of accepting to be known? How does the crisis of skepticism--of allowing oneself to be known--map onto the peculiar event of a character's allowing herself to be spoken for, articulated, narrated? And how would this allow us to understand Cavell's, most recent turn toward "Jane Austen's narrator's renowned surface of containment"? (*Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* 124).