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Abstract title:

Princes, Frogs and Craftsmen: Storytelling in *The Claim of Reason*

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Part IV of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* is dotted with stories. Extraordinary or fairy-tale happenings displace the more technical explorations of Parts I-III, sketching an imaginative landscape where princes turn to frogs, statues come to life, and men are fashioned from sponge and wire. United by a shared concern with human identity and embodiment, these stories extend Cavell's obsession with human knowledge and its limitation (the disappointment with criteria he inherits from Wittgenstein), and become stories of doubt and despair; parables, generally, that explore human "acknowledgement" and "avoidance".

Described by John Hollander as "a form of epistemological fabling", Cavell's stories have been praised by several critics for their novelistic density and accuracy. Sidestepping their literary achievement, however, my paper focuses on the *philosophical* achievement of these stories, on how exactly they ventilate the theoretical issues at hand. Is there a specific reason that Cavell's exploration of other-minds scepticism, a form of storytelling with heightened immediacy and intimacy, takes the precise form that it does? Does it succeed in fully exploring the problem of other-minds scepticism? If so, how? And could this exploration be performed in an alternative manner?

Cavell himself has always been fascinated by the stories traditional epistemologists have employed to explore the issue of other-minds and external-world scepticism. One of the great achievements of *The Claim of Reason*, indeed, is how it revivifies the setting of these stories (Descartes by his fire and Hume in his study), their characters (the solitary thinker and, in Descartes' case, the "malignant demon" who might be deceiving him) and, above all, their examples (Descartes' piece of wax, Hume's table, G.E. Moore's envelope). Instead of merely illustrating issues that could be presented in another way, these stories, in Cavell's view, are necessary to the sceptic's project.

The pertinent question, of course, and the central focus of my paper, is how exactly these examples function, and how they compare with Cavell's stories in *The Claim of Reason*. How exactly, we might ask, are we to characterize the story of the frog-prince, of the perfected automaton, of the moving statue? Are they philosophical examples? Thought experiments? Science fictions? Teasing out the narrative strands of Part IV, and attempting to answer some of these questions, will provide the working framework for my paper.