

EARS Meeting
“Literature and Philosophy”
Department of English, University of Basel
5 December 2014
Schönes Haus (Nadelberg 6), Grosser Hörsaal

12.00-1.30pm Arrival & Lunch (Catering)

1.30-1.45pm Opening Remarks

1.45-2.45pm Talk & Discussion

David Rudrum (University of Huddersfield) “THE ACTION TO THE WORD, THE WORD TO THE ACTION”: READING *HAMLET* WITH CAVELL AND DERRIDA

Stanley Cavell and Jacques Derrida are more preoccupied with literature and with literary texts than almost any other philosophers of recent years. Both came to *Hamlet* comparatively late in their careers, and in both cases, their writings on *Hamlet* are somewhat peripheral to their philosophical projects. However, reframing their readings of this play through their writings on Austin’s concept of performativity can, as this paper will show, lead to a surprising reappraisal of their views on Shakespeare’s masterpiece, which in turn frames the concept of performativity in a new light.

Austin was notoriously dismissive of performatives spoken on stage; Derrida’s *Signature Event Context* challenges him on this view; Cavell’s “What Did Derrida Want of Austin?” aims to show how Derrida’s critique misses its mark. Curiously, however, when writing on *Hamlet*, it is Cavell—perhaps the foremost of Austin’s inheritors—who takes up *Hamlet* as a means of attacking Austin’s formulation, while Derrida—perhaps the foremost of Austin’s critics—takes up *Hamlet* as an opportunity subtly to revisit his earlier critique in ways far more receptive to the idea of performativity. For example, Derrida’s readings of *Hamlet* explicitly call attention to scenes involving classic performatives such as the swearing of oaths, or bearing witness.

Yet, as the quotation in my title indicates, *Hamlet* has its own ideas of how performativity works. Cavell’s precept that Shakespeare’s plays offer investigations of their own theatricality gives us to see that *Hamlet* takes up the very issues that troubled Austin, including speaking performatives on stage, and swearing to things with the tongue but not the mind. Cavell and Derrida’s readings of *Hamlet*, then, show us that the play is an invitation to revisit the concept of performativity, yet the play itself does so in ways perhaps more destabilising to the idea of performativity than Cavell and Derrida might have realised. In other words, *Hamlet* philosophises the performative more subtly than Cavell, Derrida, or even Austin.

2.45-3.15pm Coffee Break

3.15-4.15pm Talk & Discussion

Marc Nicolas Sommer (University of Basel) “THE APOCALYPSE OF THE UNREAL”: PROLEGOMENA TO AN AESTHETICS OF THE WEIRD

Like horror fiction—its closely related sibling—weird fiction is geared towards the evocation of a certain sensation; this sensation determines our judgment of a given work as weird. This means: weirdness is the predicate of an aesthetic judgment; an aesthetic judgment is a judgment determined by a certain subjective sensation. Our analysis of weird fiction must thus take the form of an analysis of the sensation that determines the aesthetic judgment. This sensation is a vague sense of unreality, which is felt as an amalgamation of fear and wonder. These claims will be substantiated by an analysis of the works of H. P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti.

4.15-4.45pm General Discussion

4.45-5.00pm Closing Remarks

Department of English, University of Basel

How to Get There

**Department of English /
Englisches Seminar**
Universität Basel
Nadelberg 6
CH-4051 Basel
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From Bahnhof SBB train station (= Swiss railway station):

Take tram # 8 direction Kleinhüningen
Get off at 'Marktplatz'
Walk up Sattelgasse, then up (steep) Imbergässlein until it hits Nadelberg
Turn right and walk up Nadelberg
The Englisches Seminar ("Schönes Haus") is on the left hand side after 20 m

From Badischer Bahnhof train station (= German railway station):

Take tram # 6 direction Allschwil
Get off at 'Marktplatz'
See above

From the airport

Take bus # 50 direction Basel Bahnhof SBB
Get off at 'Basel Bahnhof SBB'
Take trams #8 or #11 to 'Marktplatz' (see above)
Or take bus #30 from Bahnhof SBB to 'Universität' (see left side of map) and then walk to Nadelberg

Tram Stop 'Marktplatz'

