

fectionism, and films about remarriage. Plato gets paired with *His Girl Friday*, Emerson with *The Philadelphia Story*, John Locke with *Adam's Rib*, and Sigmund Freud with *The Lady Eve*, among others. The philosophical basis of democracy meets what's arguably the most democratic of art forms. Invoking Plato's notion, taken up and transformed by Emerson, of an imaginary city of ideas distinct from the quotidian city of things, Cavell traces the migration of moral perfectionism from ancient Greece to 19th-century Concord and on to 20th-century Hollywood.

The effect is seductive in its fulfillment of a double longing: academe's desire for public visibility and film's desire for recognition as high art. There is a tragic, unstable inevitability to the pairing, like the union of Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe, the brains of philosophy meeting the beauty and glamour of motion pictures. Yet for all its tensions, the union inexplicably endures.

In line with Cavell's vision of the social contract, his work convinces by the magnetism of its ideas rather than by the force of its rhetoric. His thinking often exemplifies the best qualities of the American ethos: its expansive, democratic vision, its drive for self-determination, and its emphasis on both the personal and social dimensions of its moral imagination. For him, as for Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, democracy is tested by basic social relations. The films about remarriage, Cavell convincingly argues, require us to judge whether the marriages depicted manage to fulfill the Romantic and democratic vision of a genuine "union."

Philosophy and film don't need each other, but, like Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant in *The Philadelphia Story*, they have something to say to each other. Cinema, by depicting the existential crises of being human, fulfills moral philosophy's need to be widely understood and applied. With its concentrated temporality, film lends itself particularly well to reflection on lived events and their consequences. And what is philosophy if not, like cinema, an elaborate way of watching ourselves? Both contribute to what Cavell calls the "kind of conversation [that] constitutes the bond that democracy . . . asks of itself." So does this book.

—ELIZABETH WILLIS

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**CATCH AND RELEASE:**  
*Trout Fishing and the Meaning of Life.*  
By Mark Kingwell. Viking.  
242 pp. \$21.95

Books populated by brothers, fathers, and fish invariably elicit comparisons to Norman McLean's poetic memoir *A River Runs Through It* (1976). *Catch and Release* has those elements, though not the larger-than-life loggers, Indians, prostitutes, and poker players of McLean's Montana youth. But like McLean, University of Toronto philosophy professor Mark Kingwell skillfully merges fishing with insights about love and loss, nature and human finitude, and grace and patience.

Kingwell emphasizes from the start that "This Book Is Not About Fishing," as he titles the first chapter, but rather about "thinking about fishing." The narrative spools around Kingwell's annual fishing trip to British Columbia with his father and two brothers. Fishing, he reflects, invites a "basic restoration of a state of native receptivity" to inward clarity. With a weekend on the water as his aperture, he examines what swims below the surface of life.

Kingwell manages to raise a mundane physical act—sitting silent in a boat with a line in the water—to the level of the metaphysical. His eye for comparisons and distinctions calls to mind a time when philosophy was as much aesthetic experience as rational enterprise. Anglers are like philosophers, he writes, in that "against all odds and evidence, they are liable to cling to methods and arrangements that worked once, or seemed to, yet do so no longer." On the debate over dry flies versus wet flies (dry flies lie on the surface whereas wet flies sink), he writes: "Dry-fly fishing necessarily puts wet-fly fishing down because it is more difficult to master, and therefore the odds against catching any fish at all are markedly high." But given the counterintuitive distinctions of angling (like those of philosophy), "elegantly catching nothing" while pursuing "the mastery of subtle technique" is preferable to inelegantly catching a bucket full of fish.

Kingwell manages to cover a large canvas with fine brush strokes. He muses on masculinity and the comforts of male silence, Aristotle's treatment of the tension between action and contemplation, and the relative virtues of

polenta and risotto—all this from having sat in a boat on a lonely lake in British Columbia. Throughout, his approach is more fly-fisher's cast than archer's shot: The lure is dispatched in a general direction, not aimed at any target in particular.

*Catch and Release* casts a series of lures in

hopes of playing and landing memories, grasping such meanings as life allows us to catch, and then, often, letting them go. In the end, this is a book about hope, for fishing is, “like all hope, an embodied paradox of desire and desire's defeat.”

—PETER CHURCH

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