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Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, \$85.00). Pp. x + 293. isbn 978 1 1070 0105 3.

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Shakespeare and confession is a welcome addition to current scholarship on Cavell and J. L. Austin.

There is a lovely moment at the end of Garrett Stewart's otherwise highly challenging "The Word Viewed: Skepticism Degree Zero," where he claims for Cavell the discovery that the punning of Edgar Allan Poe presents "no longer just the disaster of the unmeant but the present possibility of the unthought, exploratory rather than foreclosing" (91). Such inflection of a central Cavellian theme (notwithstanding his appeal to the language of the everyday, he still contends that we are never entirely in control of the words that we use) is a timely reminder of the interpretive richness of Cavell's prose. Moreover, as Stewart himself recognizes, further exploration along these literary-philosophical lines will advance only in the wake of Cavell's remarkably original contributions to philosophy, to cultural criticism, and to literary theory. Such efforts go forward, as Stewart writes, in Cavell's "honor, his shadow, and his debt" (91). *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies* is a superb contribution to Cavell scholarship. On finishing this collection of essays, indeed, one is left with a final impression of privilege, of special intimacy with those interlocutors whose career-long engagement with Cavell continues with sincerity on the page before us.

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Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, \$85.00). Pp. x + 293. ISBN 978 1 1070 0105 3.

Sarah Snyder, in a well-researched book, has focussed on a group of human rights activists behind the Iron Curtain who were instrumental in shaming, discrediting, and toppling communist regimes throughout the Eastern bloc. The saga of how a disparate group of journalists, poets, novelists, and scientists transformed the Soviets' seeming diplomatic victory at Helsinki in 1975 into the USSR's eventual demise is the essence of Snyder's story. The key to their triumph, she asserts, is the way they cleverly seized upon the possibilities of the human rights language of the Helsinki Accords and, basically, upended and hijacked the enforcement process.

The planning for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which would lead to the Helsinki Accords, was decades in the making. The Soviets had been angling since the 1950s to have a treaty that acknowledged the national borders that the brutal force of the Red Army had established in Eastern Europe after World War II. When the conference finally began in earnest in the 1970s, Snyder demonstrates with clarity how the middle-tiered states took the lead. Concerned that Europe would be a nuclear battlefield caught in the crossfire between the superpowers, and worried that the Iron Curtain had cleaved parents from children and husbands from wives, the Dutch and the West Germans pushed hard for an agreement. For the Soviets and the Americans the key elements were in Baskets I and II of the treaty. For the activists, the mother lode was in Basket III, which incorporated the saliency of human rights and a monitoring function. The US delegation signed and ratified the treaty because, as Snyder notes, Henry Kissinger looked contemptuously upon the human rights provisions, convinced they would have no influence over the internal matters of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the Kremlin believed that Basket III was just

feelgood pabulum incapable of penetrating the rock-hard barrier of national sovereignty. Leonid Brezhnev, therefore, signed the treaty without even reading it and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who was overjoyed by the now internationally agreed boundaries in Eastern Europe, saw Helsinki as a triumph. Others in the Politburo, however, looked at Basket III's human rights provisions and monitoring clauses and were not so sure.

In fact, the skeptics in the Kremlin were right. Snyder weaves a fascinating tale about the mobilization of dissidents and activists who saw the reporting function in the human rights section of the Helsinki Accord as an invaluable tool to make the Soviet Union honor the rights of its citizens via an international treaty. As the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group formed, it was determined to bring violations of Basket III to the attention of the CSCE's monitoring authority. The Kremlin was, at first, sluggish in its response to these efforts. For the Soviets, Yuri Orlov, Anatoly Scharansky, Yelena Bonner, Alexander Ginzberg and the seven other founding members were simply gadflies, pests, and nuisances. But when the West responded favorably to the group's stream of information about emigration restrictions, police harassment, and further violations of the Helsinki Accords, the KGB moved in.

The growing repression in the Soviet Union was matched by the heightened awareness in the United States about the worsening plight of the dissidents. Most important to this movement, Snyder notes, was the determination of the US Congress to transform what many in America considered to be another Munich Agreement into something viable and meaningful, especially for Soviet Jews who were refused the right to emigrate to Israel. As Congress formed an oversight body to monitor the Helsinki Accords, and as the delegation traveled to Europe to gather evidence, key meetings between Soviet dissidents and members of Congress created the momentum to give the activists hope, credibility, and leverage.

When Ronald Reagan came to power, however, human rights activists feared that everything they had worked for would come to a screeching halt. During the presidential campaign, the administration had voiced its strong displeasure with the Helsinki Accords for conceding territorial gains to the Soviets in Eastern Europe. Yet, Snyder argues, Reagan surprised everyone and became a staunch human rights supporter for Helsinki. His methods involved back-channel efforts to encourage the Soviets to allow the Pentecostals trapped in the US embassy in Moscow to emigrate, repeated letters to Brezhnev concerning the status and rights of high-profile dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov, and ordering the US delegate at the CSCE meetings to inquire about the whereabouts and health of human rights activists in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

While there was little to no visible movement at first, Reagan was eventually aided in these efforts by the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, who was confronted with reinvigorating a nation teetering between decay and calcification. Gorbachev and his new foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, worked to ease tensions with the United States over the flare-ups surrounding the dissidents – flare-ups that had led Congress to attach human rights provisos to trade bills. Increasing imports from the United States, Gorbachev recognized, was critical because these were desperate times for the USSR. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had put an enormous strain on the nation's budget. The USSR, therefore, needed technology to jump-start its antiquated economy and grain to feed its disgruntled, overworked, and hungry population. In Gorbachev's estimation, allowing a few Soviet Jews to leave the country was well worth

the price of gaining access to state-of-the-art computers and Kansas wheat. Yet that lessening of the state's repressive apparatus created a flood that eventually swept the Soviet Union into oblivion.

In short, Snyder argues, activists and dissidents had the foresight and courage to know how take on the vaunted Communist bloc and win. Some, like Anatoly Marchenko, died in this fight for freedom. Others, like Yuri Orlov, withered in the gulags in Siberia. The end result, however, was that their agitation fueled resistance across Eastern Europe and led to the collapse of the USSR and its allies.

Without question, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* has many strengths. There are, however, some pronounced limitations that prevent a good book from being a great one. First, in a study focussed on the transnational, grassroots work of activists, Snyder, despite her deep archival work and solid, unadorned prose, has not made that work readily visible. She provides excellent insight into who was in the various Helsinki Watch groups, she details the successes that they had in getting their message out to the West, but she provides no serious inquiry into how those networks actually functioned. How, for example, were they able to circumvent the KGB; smuggle pictures, manifestos, and evidence out of the USSR; transmit recorded messages which should have been blocked; and arrange meetings with foreign dignitaries while under tight surveillance? Similarly, how were activists in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, despite the omnipresent security apparatus and web of informants burrowed deep into their public and private lives, still able to outmaneuver state police bureaucracies like the Stasi? We learn from Snyder that they did, but we still do not know how.

Another weak spot in an otherwise sure-footed analysis is the emerging portrait of Ronald Reagan as a human rights advocate. Two of the key elements of human rights are universality and indivisibility. Universality means that those rights apply across the board regardless of political makeup – communist, socialist, democratic, or authoritarian – of that nation. Indivisibility recognizes that the array of rights – political, economic, civil, and social – can neither be severed from each other nor arrayed hierarchically. Ronald Reagan, however, violated both key principles. As Snyder clearly demonstrates, his concern was for those in Communist nations whose religious and free-speech rights were jeopardized. Yet those hardly constitute the panoply of rights or the spaces where human rights violations occurred. Thus, while he mounted consistent pressure on the Soviets to stop religious persecution and allow freedom of speech and travel, the economic exploitation and repression that rocked South Africa and Latin America did not register at all for his administration as egregious human rights violations. On the contrary, Reagan staunchly supported or countenanced apartheid in South Africa, death squads in El Salvador, and the Contras in Nicaragua. In other words, the government-supported slaughter of priests and rape of nuns in El Salvador did not compel Reagan to raise concerns about the assassination of religious officials or their silencing because they spoke out against the violent right wing. Similarly, when South Africa's pass laws restricted the movement of millions of citizens and became the basis for a series of brutal police crackdowns, Reagan showed no awareness of the incongruity between his advocacy for the freedom of Soviet citizens to move around freely and his ennui about the plight of Africans locked down in the shanty towns surrounding Johannesburg.

Yet complicating the very essence of Reagan as a human rights President provides insight into the parameters and conditions that aid or hinder activists who are pressing for US intervention. In the end, Snyder's Cold War saga not only reveals the activism

and brilliance of a band of courageous people but also exposes whose human rights were valued and, frankly, whose were expendable.

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Sinéad Moynihan, *Passing into the Present: Contemporary American Fiction of Racial and Gender Passing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, £50.00). Pp. viii + 181. ISBN 978 0 7190 8229 0.

In January 2008, during the South Carolina Democratic debate, candidate Barack Obama was asked whether he agreed with Toni Morrison that Bill Clinton was, skin colour notwithstanding, America's first black President. After expressing his admiration for how Clinton embodied some of the advances made in the South since desegregation, Obama explains that he would need to see Clinton dance before he could accurately judge whether Bill was in fact a brother.

A moment like this, calling up as it does the entire history of American racism, is a sharp reminder of how much is at stake in US identity politics and how much rides on the correct response to questions of authenticity. Four years later, after the sustained and dogged interrogation of his national, racial, religious – not to mention political – identity, as well as the inevitable disappointments of nearly a full term in office during the worst economic depression since the 1930s, Obama's answer to this sly question – invocation of the Civil Rights era followed by ironic racial stereotyping – looks both shrewd and thin. It is the kind of self-deprecation that made Obama electable and took some of the glare off the Harvard Law School polish. At the same time, Obama's response is such an obvious maneuver that it adds weight to the charge that he is somehow too calculated, knowing, disengaged, inauthentic.

A full and thorough exploration of the implications of Morrison's original remark and Obama's reaction to it would tell a revealing story about contemporary racial politics in the US. It would be a story where the practice of "passing" did not end with the late twentieth-century embrace of cultural hybridity but instead mutated and multiplied to encompass a dizzying proliferation of subject positions, evasions, performances, anxieties and humiliations. It would be a narrative where no one was quite what they seemed, where sexuality, gender, class, race, age, and geographical location folded and intersected in kaleidoscopic permutations that never adequately settled or provided the promised egalitarian opportunities of a properly committed multicultural society. It would be the tale of an extreme individualism that insisted on carving up and splicing together collective identities and histories into ever-finer and more nuanced combinations yet still failed to make a "self" that stays stuck together.

In fact, as Sinéad Moynihan shows in her fascinating study of contemporary fiction of racial and gender passing, the American novel appears determined to tell precisely this story over and over again. Contextualizing recent fiction within the longer history of passing in American literature, notably during the period from post-Reconstruction to the Civil Rights era, Moynihan persuasively shows how the long history of performance and deceit with regard to identity in the US continues to preoccupy writers as diverse as Louise Erdrich, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Philip Roth. In a series of compelling and detailed readings of novels mostly published or written during the 1990s (Erdrich's *Tracks* is the earliest book examined here, published in 1988), Moynihan follows the contortions of protagonists who are either too black or not