

BOOK REVIEWS

As well as having reviews of a range of books, each issue we hope to have a special feature. This issue the special feature is a review of two novels, The Words To Say It by Marie Cardinal and The Other Side Of You by Salley Vickers. In the relatively closed world of therapy and philosophy it is easy to forget that most people do not read therapy or philosophy books, nor do they think about their lives in the terms commonly represented in therapy and philosophy books. Rather than acknowledging this we tend to ignore it or to think about it as somehow less important or valid. This encourages us to split up life up into discrete sections, rather than adopting a more holistic perspective. Within the existential tradition it is even more difficult to understand because it has always used genres other than formal philosophy to represent its ideas - Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in the 19thC and Sartre in the 20thC reached out to their audiences via the medium of literature rather than academic philosophy because they felt it was better suited to what they wished to communicate. It can be argued that if philosophy is about the way we live, then the novel is better suited to represent the issues we meet in life because it is more 'experience-near' than is formal abstract philosophy.

The Other Side of You

Sally Vickers. (2006). London: Fourth Estate. 304pp. Hardback. £14.99

This is the fourth novel by U.K. writer Salley Vickers. Like her other novels it touches on philosophical themes but unlike lesser books hers are not philosophical works with plots or debates grafted on, they are novels in which the characters engage with profound issues of living. As she gets one of her characters to say, *'there's no cure for being alive'*.

The connection between philosophy and life as lived is important but unfortunately problematic and this difficulty illustrates how the same issues are dealt with differently by novelists and philosophers. Whereas a philosopher has to abstract in order to give a clear account of a phenomenon, a novelist can take the ideas and explore how the characters live them. This view suggests that the novel is a better medium for illuminating the cumulative effect of the myriad choices and dilemmas we meet that come to constitute our lives, than works of philosophy. I tend to agree. This concern for what philosophy cannot handle is what gives literature a distinct role in the exploration of philosophical problems. It is not surprising that novelists sell more copies than philosophers, as they speak more directly to people's lived experiences.