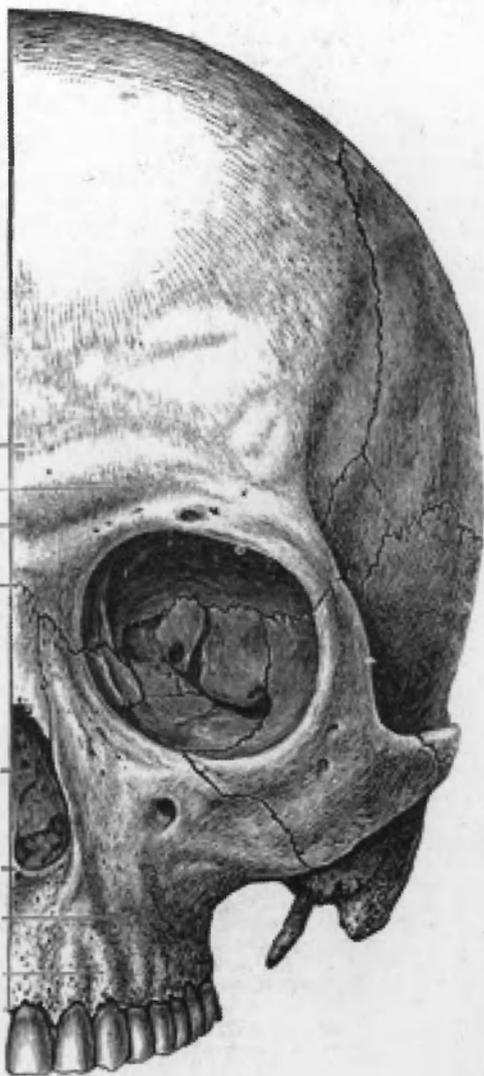


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**DEATH
CORPOREALITY
& THE SIGN**



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In addition to editing and publishing these papers we also hosted several workshops over the course of the year. In the fall, we hosted Milton scholar and Professor of English at the University of Toronto, Stephen Orgel, who gave a talk about the early modern period. In the spring, we hosted Professor of English at the University of Toronto, and author of *The Book of David*, Nicholas Heng, who discussed the future of the English language. We are also grateful to Professors James Shapiro, Joseph Strickland, and David Irvy for participating in our After Hours series. Thank you to Nicholas Wong, our faculty advisor, who has provided guidance and support throughout the year. We are grateful to the English Department for its generous funding, making it possible for us to publish this issue.

Anna Feuer & Justin Tashy
April 2011

The ninth issue of CJLC explores texts ranging from Renaissance scaffold plays and 18th century elegy to cultural and art criticism about contemporary East Asia. The papers published engage with the relationship between language and the body in its most visceral states. Our authors apply New Critical, New Historicist, Marxist, and psychoanalytic lenses to offer original and insightful readings.

We begin with Juan Lamata's "Deadly Sentences," a historicist analysis of the performance of royal power on and off the stage. Making use of an underdiscussed genre of Renaissance drama as well as Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Lamata argues that playwrights, in their depictions of capital punishment, subtly subverted the claim to the Divine Right of Kingship.

Next we move from an exploration of death in a dramatic context to "Poem as Tombstone" by Erica Weaver, a look at the ambiguity of the poet-speaker in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." Through a close-reading of the poem and a related text by Wordsworth, Weaver reveals that the blurred identity of the epitaph's writer and subject forces a direct confrontation with death in the poem itself.

We see a continued interest in control over the body in "Mesmerism and Modern Times" by David Berke. Berke discusses the manipulation of the female body in two of Hawthorne's novels, *The Blithedale Romance* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, and relates this to the narrative control that Hawthorne exerts on the reader, thus making a direct connection between corporeality and representation.

In Rachel Heng's "Ghost in the Shell," the connection between body and sign is further complicated in her analysis of a murder and a terrorist attack in post-recessionary Japan as a breakdown of the signifying chain. Using a critical framework borrowed from Jameson, Heng identifies the body as the site of the empty signifier in these gruesome incidents and the film *Ghost in the Shell*.

While Heng identifies the body as sign, Nicholas Wong's Lacanian reading of Xu Bing's artworks *Book from the Sky* and *Book from the Ground* emphasizes the materiality of the sign itself. Wong analyzes Bing's efforts to cleave the form of the Chinese character from its content and offers an alternative to the standard reading of the two texts as diametrically opposed. He further locates their point of contact in the development of human subjectivity in the mirror-stage.

In addition to editing and publishing these papers, we also hosted several events over the course of the year. In the fall, we hosted Milton scholar and Professor of Law at Florida International University Stanley Fish, who gave a talk about the tenuous relationship between theory and practice. In the spring, we organized a faculty panel comprised of English Professors Erik Gray, Molly Murray, Bruce Robbins, and Maura Spiegel, who discussed the future of the English discipline.

We are also grateful to Professors James Shapiro, Joseph Slaughter, and Marilyn Ivy for participating in our After Hours series. Thank you to Nicholas Dames, our faculty advisor, who has provided guidance and support throughout the year. We are grateful to the English Department for its generous funding, making it possible for us to publish this issue. 

Deadly Sentences

The Drama of Early Modern Public Execution
and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*

by Juan Pedro Lamata

*What figure of us think you he will bear?
For you must know, we have with special soul
Elected him our absence to supply,
Lent him our terror, dress'd him with our love,
And given his deputation all the organs
Of our own power: what think you of it?*

Measure for Measure 1.1.16-21

In an age when the apparatuses of government, because of practical constraints, could not directly involve themselves in the everyday lives of their subjects, public and overwhelming displays of power were a common vehicle for aggrandizing the strength of the monarchy and creating the illusion of absolute authority.¹ Limited by administrative and military resources, royal authorities relied on a program of symbolic propaganda and persuasion as a fundamental tool of governing. A single, breathtaking display of might could create long and lasting impressions of authority among thousands or tens of thousands of spectators.

This analysis will explore the relationship between such extreme exhibitions of power as the public execution and the representation and recreation of these rites of authority on the early modern theatrical stage. The highly theatrical nature of executions made them highly adaptable to the work of dramatist, and many plays of the era were based on actual crimes and executions and enjoyed popular acclaim in England for many years. Did these plays, which sometimes included execution scenes or representations of judicial proceedings, and which typically espoused heavily didactic messages against sinning and disobedience, merely reinforce the ideology of the state, or was there a more subtle way in which they subverted the monarch's claims to authority and encouraged playgoers to question the rights of kingship? What would the effect have been on an audience steeped in the traditions of political theater to see those same political and religious rituals reenacted for the purposes of entertainment? To answer these questions this investigation draw on a number of works from the era but will close with an inspection of Shakespeare's depictions of public execution and power in *Measure for Measure*, a play fundamentally concerned with the idea of justice and the relationship between governance and public performance. Such a work, in which characters representing government officials explicitly engage in theatrical performance within the play for their own political

benefit, offers a perfect window to explore the relationship between governance and performance and to more fully understand what one of the greatest dramatists of the time, and of all time, had to say on the subject.

Spectacular Power and the Stage of Kingship

A theatrical conception of power—that is, an understanding of both the inherent power of theatricality and the theatrical potential of power—was not unknown to either early modern monarchs or their subjects. Elizabeth's coronation was described as “a stage wherein was shewed the wonderfull spectacle,”² prompting literary critic Alice Hunt to recently argue that “Elizabeth's coronation and procession demand to be read and interpreted as drama.”³ Similarly, both Elizabeth and James are known to have explicitly described their power in theatrical terms. When speaking before the English parliament, Elizabeth is quoted as having said, “We princes are set as it were upon stages in the sight and view of the world,”⁴ while for his part, James argued that “a king is as one set upon a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures the people gazingly do behold.”⁵ Clearly, both rulers shared an understanding that even their “smallest actions” could be made to resonate beyond their immediate effects through the gaze of their spectator-subjects.

'Let Them Know that Ye Can Strike:' The Sovereign's Power Over Life and Body

The public execution should be considered the central production in the early modern monarchical program of power demonstrations because no other spectacle so literally rendered the monarch's absolute power over the bodies and lives of his or her subjects. If the monarch could rule over life and death, then there was no sphere that he or she could not theoretically control.

In *The True Lawe of free Monarchies*,⁶ which King James published in 1598, James laid out his argument for the absolute power of kings, explaining how “the king is over-lord of the whole land, so is he master over every person that inhabiteth the same, having power over the life and death of every one of them.”⁷ James posited God as the ruler of the soul, and the king as the ruler of the body. According to James, the power of the king was contained *in* his body, and was a power *over* bodies. Moreover, in locating the power of the state within the body of the monarch him or herself, this argument personalized the law as the king's law, evidenced by the description of peace as “the king's peace.”

Especially in the case of treason, the monarch did not merely intervene on the behalf of justice as a mediator between two parties, but retaliated directly against an offender who had violated his or her personal will. Holinshed's *Chronicles* describes the execution of the Babbington plot conspirators:

“Ballard the preest...was dismembered, his bellie ript up, his bowels and traitorous hart taken out and throwne into the fire, his head also...was set on a short stake vpon the top of the gallows, and the trunk of his bodie quartered and imbrued in his owne bloud, wherewith the executioners hands were bathed, and some of the standers by..

besprinkled.”

From his description, we can tell the execution was an event of the highest order. Holinshed describes how “there was no lane, street, allie, or house in London, in the suburbs of the same, or in the hamlets or bordering townes neere the citie...out of which there issued not some of each sex and age...as they thronged and ouerran one another for hast, contending to the place of death.”⁸ Additionally, Holinshed repeatedly employs theatrical terms to explain the execution. He identifies the event as a “tragedie” and as a spectacle attended by “thousands of people with earnest eie.” The condemned criminals themselves are said to have been “spectacles odious to God and man.”⁹

Yet all this violence and strength needed to be justified. Though the public execution unquestionably demonstrated that the monarch *could* rule over the life and death of his subjects, it did not explain *why* he or she was endowed with such incredible power. This explanation was provided by the claim of divine kingship, which, after the English Reformation and Henry VIII’s demand that he be recognized as the “sole protector and Supreme Head of the Church and clergy of England,”¹⁰ a demand repeated by his Protestant heirs, saw its use expanded.

The Protestant Reformation and the Appropriation of the Church

With the formal separation of the English Church from the Roman Catholic Church, Henry VIII proclaimed himself the supreme head of the Church of England and demanded oaths of allegiance from all priests and church office holders in the 1530’s. Sedition and treason laws were passed which “allowed no distinction between principled objection to royal policy and outright heresy,”¹¹ and invariably, matters of religion became matters of state, and vice-versa.

In 1559, Elizabeth mandated that a specific homily proselytizing the divine right of kings be read at least four times a year by parish priests.¹² One of these mandatory readings, entitled “An Exhortacion concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,” preached a divine order to the universe and warned that if we “Take away kynges, princes, rulers, magistrates, judges and such states of Gods ordre, no man shal ride or go by the high waie unrobbed, no man shall slepe in his awne house or bed unkilld, no man shall kepe his wifre, children and possessions in quietness...and there must nedes folow all mischief and utter destructuon, both of soules, bodies, goodes and common wealthes.”¹³ According to this sermon, those who did choose to rebel against authority could expect to be swallowed whole by the earth, destroyed by sudden fire, struck with leprosy, or “stinged to death with wonderful straunge firy serpentes.”¹⁴ With multiple mandatory readings across every parish church in England, this was as close to mass propaganda as the Tudor monarchy could produce.

Thomas Beard, an English clergyman and schoolmaster to a then unknown Oliver Cromwell, furthered this argument in his book *The Theatre of God’s Judgments*, published in 1597. Beard not only claimed that the monarch’s power to administer justice descended from God, but that the violent and public end inflicted on criminals

by royal authorities should be interpreted as proof of God's existence, writing that executions demonstrated "the vengeance which God inflicteth on murderers."¹⁵ His presentation of God's will in explicitly theatrical terms underscores just how deeply the policy of ruling through spectacle was ingrained in the early modern mind.

Dying Correctly: Confession and Martyrdom

Yet simply claiming that the public execution was a function of divine justice did not make it so, and, at the moment of execution, royal authorities still needed something to visually and unequivocally confirm their claims of divine authority. The line between righteous ruler and abusive tyrant was too easy to cross, and a definitive and convincing legitimization of the immense force unleashed during an execution was necessary. The sort of definitive and completely convincing justification of the monarch's claims of dispensing divine justice could only come from one person, the condemned criminal him or herself.

A public confession of guilt and an admission of repentance from the very person convicted to death, the very person possibly condemned to endure horrific physical tortures, could do everything royal authorities could not do for themselves. And while Early Modern jurists had no problem employing physical torture to elicit confessions, there was a more subtle way in which the monarchy's discourse of execution encouraged condemned criminals to voluntarily confess their crimes in public.

Royal authorities attempted to elicit confessions from convicted criminals by playing on their concern for the safety of their soul. One homily, "An Exhortation Against the Fear of Death," told the story of a rich man who descended into the underworld "and being in torments, he cried for comfort, complaining of the intolerable pain that he suffered in that flame of fire: but it was too late."¹⁶ Thus, the confession was presented as the only means to redemption and salvation, and orchestrating a confessional performance from the condemned criminal became the state's way of legitimizing executions. Consequently, the very theatricality of the execution became the means of justifying it; the convict's performance on the scaffold determined the legitimacy of the proceedings, and these confessional performances came to be expected by the large crowds who attended such spectacles.

Henry Goodcole, the minister of Newgate prison during the early seventeenth century, wrote that "the people expect a confession always at the time of any man's execution."¹⁷ The thousands of "sorrowful spectators" who flocked to these events did so partly out of the desire to see the condemned "make a good end."¹⁸ The expectation of performance was such that Goodcole and other eyewitnesses to executions frequently categorized gallows performances as either successful, "died well," or disgraceful, "died badly."

Yet by tailoring their physical behavior on the scaffold to mirror that of martyrs, condemned criminals could portray themselves as wrongfully accused sufferers under the persecution of an illegitimate and tyrannical force. The early modern audience would have been very familiar with the behavior of martyrs at public executions, as the Tudor monarchs actively fostered the growth of a tradition

of Protestant martyrologies as a form of state propaganda. John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments, or Book of Martyrs*, placed in every cathedral and many churches by government order in 1570, laid out the proper behavior for martyrs when dying for the true faith by relating the actions of Christian martyrs who suffered under the reign of Mary I.¹⁹ Foxe's book argues that the proper way to die and convey the message of martyrdom is to show no fear of death through either speech or action and to display a brave demeanor as evidence of a clear conscience and unfair persecution.

Such methods of resistance transformed the public execution into a battlefield of discourses. As historian Jane E. Dawson argues, "The religious authorities wanted to demonstrate that they were condemning a heretic, whilst the accused portrayed himself as a persecuted martyr."²⁰ If successful, condemned criminals could transform the scaffold into a sort of altar. The act of martyrdom was one which transformed social deviance into a positive ideal and which threatened to overturn the symbolic significance of and justification for public executions.

The Playhouse: Home of Theatricality

Because actual public executions in early modern England were so intensely and inherently theatrical, it is natural to look to the world of drama for insights into and critiques of what amounted to gruesome spectacles of political theater. Not only did the theatricality of executions lend itself to reproduction on the playhouse stage, but the widespread popularity of executions, criminals, and even hangmen almost guaranteed a financially successful, if not artistically inspiring, performance. In the period from 1592 to 1658 we know of twenty plays based on actual murders and executions.²¹ Of these plays, now referred to as scaffold plays, only ten survive, yet all ten involve guilty and repentant criminals, aspects of divine intervention, and work to present state authorities and the public execution as components of a divine framework of justice. Based on this description, it would seem that these plays merely reproduce the official discourse surrounding public execution. This paper will demonstrate how even these seemingly laudatory and uncritical works seriously call into question the validity of the arguments behind public state executions as a form of divine justice and destabilize the theatricality implicit in such spectacles.

Primarily, an audience both accustomed to attending actual executions and steeped in the culture of martyrdom would have been deftly attuned to any gestures meant to elicit pity on behalf of the repentant criminal. Even though these scaffold plays were exorbitantly didactic and explicitly presented the criminal protagonist as a bad example to follow, there was always the possibility that they might, intentionally or not, evoke too much pathos on behalf of the character or characters condemned to execution. Just as actual executions always ran the risk of becoming scenes of martyrdom, so too were these homiletic scaffold plays in danger of being taken over by their guilty protagonists.

Though not technically a scaffold play in that it was not based on a contemporary English murder, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malvi* employs subtle symbols to encode the Duchess's strangulation with overtones of martyrdom. When Bosola, the man entrusted by the Duchess's brother to carry out her execution, asks

"Doth not death fright you?" the Duchess responds confident of her place in the after-life, answering "Who would be afraid on't,/Knowing to meet such excellent company/In th' other world?"²² A little later, the Duchess reconfirms her belief in heaven and her faith that she will find her way there when she exhorts her executioners to "Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength/Must pull down heaven upon me."²³ Her resolution for death and her willingness to endure pain and suffering for the sake of truth would have fit perfectly within the schema of martyrdom laid down by John Foxe.

Alice of Faversham, guilty of murdering her husband in both the play *Arden of Faversham* and in real life, fully expects to be conveyed to heaven after her execution, stating, "Forgive me, Arden: I repent me now,/And, would my death save thine, thou shouldst not die./Rise up, sweet Arden, and enjoy thy love,/And frown not on me when we meet in heaven."²⁴ Similarly, in *A Warning for Faire Women*, Anne Sanders, another husband killer, claims "I am as well resolud to goe to death./As if I were inuited to a banquet," after which the Doctor administering her confession praises her and reassures her, saying "Done like a christian and the childe of grace,/Pleasing to God, to angels, and to men,/And doubt not but your soule shall finde a place/In Abrahams bosome, though your body perish.../twill raise vp to you a crowne of glory in another world."²⁵ This language of martyrdom transforms their guilt into a positive action and directly undermines both the official discourse of public execution and the explicitly stated didactic intentions of scaffold plays themselves.

Additionally, while moments of divine intervention in scaffold plays function to present the apparatuses of state justice within a divine hierarchy, the very need for direct divine intervention unintentionally uncovers a latent uneasiness with the shortcomings and inefficiencies inherent to human judicial systems. *A Warning for Fair Women*, which claims to be a "true and home-borne Tragedie,"²⁶ offers multiple examples of events which characters within the play attribute to divine intervention. When Browne, the would-be murderer of Master Sanders, is frustrated in his efforts by a fortuitous act, he exclaims "Except by miracle, thou art deliuered as was neuer man.../And my purpose thwarted by some malignant enuious starre."²⁷ Throughout the play, characters and even animals inexplicably perceive some pending misfortune.

At the moment of the crime, when Browne believes he has killed Sanders and implores the audience to "Looke how many wounds my hand hath giuen him," Sanders miraculously utters the words "Iesu receiue my soule in thy handes,"²⁸ echoing Jesus' last words in the *Gospel of Luke*, words commonly paraphrased by supposed martyrs at the moment of death. Browne is so startled by these words that he asks himself "What sound was that?.../Who was it then that thundered in my mine ears,/The name of Iesu?"²⁹ and immediately begins to feel regret, complaining of an "agonie of soule," and revealing that "were it to be done againe/I would not do it for a kingdomes gaine."³⁰ Later, in an event that reappears in multiple plays including *Arden of Faversham* and *Macbeth*, Sanders's blood will not wash from Browne's hosiery, leading the mayor to later claim "in the case of blood,/Gods iustice hath bin still myraculous."³¹

This close association between the miraculous and the state officials who ultimately apprehend and condemn criminals ultimately reveals the inability of the state to independently administer justice of the quality it professed to dispense. If the apparatuses of government were already supposedly part of a divine hierarchy, then there should have been no need for direct divine intervention in order to rectify or supplement their deficiencies. Moreover, these plays suggest that divine justice, when manifested on earth, unavoidably becomes compromised.

This imperfection is further highlighted by the disturbing tendency of these plays to contain one or more characters who are wrongfully, or unnecessarily, executed. In *A Warning for Faire Women*, Roger Clemente, Anne Drurie's servant, is put to death for delivering a letter to Anne Sanders, while in *Arden of Faversham*, Bradshaw, a "goldsmith and receiver of stolen goods,"³² is sentenced to die for the same offense. While on the scaffold, Bradshaw complains to Alice, saying "Mistress Arden, you are now going to God,/And I am by the law condemned to die/About a letter I brought from Master Greene./I pray you, Mistress Arden, speak the truth:/Was I ever privy to your intent or no?"³³ Alice's response repeats the official mantra about the importance of the soul, yet feels completely unsatisfactory, even a little haunting: "You brought me such a letter,/But I dare swear thou knewest not the contents./Leave now to trouble me with worldly things,/And let me meditate upon my Savior Christ,/Whose blood must save me for the blood I shed."³⁴ The inadequacy of this response is confirmed by Bradshaw's last words, "My blood be on his head that gave the sentence!"³⁵ a powerful enjoinder in a play which believes in the power of curses. Significantly, this final interjection on the part of Bradshaw immediately precedes the mayor's order, "To speedy execution with them all!"³⁶

Yet the most powerful and, perhaps paradoxically, most subtle form of discourse destabilization performed by plays representing judicial proceedings was a direct result of their very representational nature. In an essay titled "Tragedies naturally performed," James Shapiro argues that in staging judicial proceedings, "the theater took on the prerogatives of the state [and]...acted very much as the state" just as the state appropriated the tools of theatricality. Shapiro claims that a result of this, the "stage takes on the symbolic identity as the site of a criminal's punishment."³⁷ The significance, Shapiro argues, is that the theatrico-juridico functions of the state came to be re-positioned within the morally ambiguous world of the theater. Yet more significant than the repositioning of state functions to a less sacrosanct environment was how the theater transformed sacred state spectacles of power into secular spectacles of entertainment. By presenting the theatricality of the state as something purely theatrical, the theater destabilized the intended meaning of spectacles such as public executions. The theater's recreation of state theatricality distanced that theatricality from its intended discursive meanings and moved it into the ambiguously moral, or perhaps amoral, world of entertainment.

What would it have meant for an audience member who attended *A Warning for Fair Women* to witness the pageantry of a state execution recreated as a theatrical production? Such an audience member would have seen how a Doctor bids Anne to confess, saying "prepare your selue for death,/The houre is nowe at hand.../At length acknowledge and confesse your fault,/That God may be propitioner to your soule,"³⁸

and would have watched Anne reply "Here I confesse I am a grieuous sinner."³⁹ Later, the theatergoer would have listened to Anne extol the effects of confession, saying to the Doctor, "Your words amaze me, and although ile vow/I neuer had intention to confesse/My hainous sinne, that so I might escape/The worlds reproach, yet God I giue thanks/Euen at this instant I am strangely changed."⁴⁰ It is not unreasonable to suggest that, after watching the onstage recreation of actions which during an actual execution were intended as the physical proof of a criminal's sinful nature and of the state's divine role, the early modern theatergoer would have left the playhouse with a heightened awareness of the artifice inherent to the performances which were so crucial to conveying the discourse of authority during executions.

However, it is possible to argue that this subversion could have been contained, to some extent, by the audience's suspension of disbelief; after all, the theater does not present itself as artificial or inauthentic, but asks the theatergoer to believe in the "truthfulness" of what he or she is about to see. The performance is not conscious of itself as a performance, and therefore, perhaps the integrity of judicial theatricality would not have been as deeply compromised by theatrical representation as has been suggested. Still, the theater is artificial, and even if an audience member would have suspended belief throughout the entire production, he or she would have left knowing that what they had just watched was a performance. Furthermore, it is likely that a play more conscious of its own theatricality, such as Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, in which some characters explicitly perform and are unequivocally identified as actors, could be significantly more subversive than a tragedy like *A Warning for Faire Women*, in which the actions of its characters are not obviously labeled as artificial.

Measure for Measure and the Problem of Doubling

While it would be inaccurate to term *Measure for Measure* a scaffold play, as it is based on fictional events and does not include an explicit scene of execution, an argument could be made for its inclusion within just such a group of works. Actual execution scenes were banned from the stage by royal decree, so aside from the few exceptions which somehow got by the eyes of royal censors, such scenes had to be displaced and disguised within the play. Exactly this form of displacement and deception occurs in *Measure for Measure*. For one, the setting of the play itself seems unclear. While events in the play suggest an urban and trade-heavy metropolis, such as London, the names of the characters imply an Italian setting while the Duke's title is that of Duke of Vienna, which itself problematizes the existence of Barnardine, a pirate condemned to death by a landlocked dukedom. Additionally, while scenes of execution do not occur in the play, the individual components which made up the ritual of public execution still persist: Claudio undergoes confession, and Isabella, either the wronged martyr or the dangerous heretic, pleads for his life.

Measure for Measure was first performed in 1604, one year after James's accession amidst a tense atmosphere defined by the newly crowned king eager to exhibit his power. As James claimed in his treatise of governance, the *Basilikon Doron*, a new ruler should, upon taking the throne, commit an immediate act of

public execution to “make them know that ye can strike.”⁴¹ Because of the multiple similarities between some of Duke’s habits and those of James’s, some scholars have claimed that Shakespeare intended his Duke to be a direct representation of James himself. Although a straightforward equivalence between both rulers may be untenable, it is indisputable that many of the play’s lines and themes resonate with historical events occurring at the time of its writing. For example, Claudio’s explanation of his precarious position to Lucio strongly echoes James’s previously cited advice from the *Basilikon Doron*, as Claudio says, “Whether that the body public be/A horse whereon the governor doth ride,/Who newly in the seat, that it may know/He can command, lets it straight feel the spur.”⁴² Moreover, both James and the Duke saw the fundamental right of kingship as the power over the life and death of their subjects, as the Duke reminds Angelo before leaving Vienna, “Mortality and mercy in Vienna/Live in thy tongue and heart.”⁴³

Measure for Measure is undeniably, and explicitly, a play about justice. With references to “the public ear,”⁴⁴ and its multiple representations of public spectacles, it is also about the early modern technique of ruling through spectacle. When Claudio explains to Lucio why he will be executed, he reveals his awareness of the symbolic pretenses of his execution. He says that Angelo “awakes me all the enrolled penalties...for a name,”⁴⁵ and his friend Lucio similarly accuses Angelo of using Claudio’s execution as political propaganda. When he tells Isabella of her brother’s peril, Lucio claims that Angelo “hath picked out an act,...To make him [Claudio] an example.”⁴⁶ The final act, which takes place at “the city gates” and includes stage directions for the “Duke, Varrius, Lords, Angelo, Escalus, Lucio, Provost, Officers, and Citizens at several doors,”⁴⁷ most demonstrates the use of public spectacle as a government tool. In this act, the Duke intends to take back his throne with a spectacular demonstration in front of every one of his subjects.

Moreover, if we imagine the fundamental power of the early modern monarch to have been a power over the body, then it is difficult to imagine a play that more directly addresses this issue. By putting Claudio to death for the act of fornication, Angelo is literally trying to establish his power over the bodies and bodily desires of his subjects by exerting his power of execution. The metaphor Claudio uses for Angelo’s statesmanship is one of a rider spurring his horse, that is, by physically making his power felt. Additionally, when Angelo decides he will make a deal with Isabella to save her brother, he frames it thus: “Redeem thy brother/By yielding up thy body to my will,”⁴⁸ again positioning his control over the bodies of his subjects as his foremost concern. Immediately after this scene, Angelo threatens to torture Claudio if she does not relent, “or else he must not only die the death/But thy unkindness shall his death draw out/To ling’ring sufferance.”⁴⁹

Importantly, both the Duke and his deputy Angelo believe themselves to be dispensing a form of divine justice. When speaking of the power he has temporarily relinquished to Angelo, the Duke says, “He who the sword of heaven will bear/Should be as holy as severe,”⁵⁰ while Angelo says of the Duke, “I perceive your Grace, like pow’r divine.”⁵¹ Yet the impossibility of dispensing perfect justice on earth is highlighted by Isabella’s response to Angelo when she learns that her brother must die for such a minor offense, arguing, “’Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth.”⁵²

This reply draws attention to the incompatibility of divine law with earthly practice. Most strikingly, however, by collapsing the role of church and state leader into one character, *Measure for Measure* demonstrates how early modern rulers exploited the discourses of religion and of the soul to elicit confessions from condemned criminals.

After the Duke invests Angelo with his powers, or as he says, "lent him our terror,"⁵³ he visits a friar and commands him thus: "Supply me with the habit and instruct me/How I may formally in person bear /Like a true friar."⁵⁴ The Duke intends to "visit both prince and people,"⁵⁵ so that he may "see/If power change purpose, what our seemers be."⁵⁶ With no sense of irony, the Duke purposes to don a disguise in order to spy on his own deputy and discover if there is a difference between how those invested with power present themselves to the public and how they behave in private. Unbeknownst to himself, the Duke becomes the subject of his own, or rather Shakespeare's, investigation, providing the best example of a counterfeiting authority figure. The issue truly comes to a head in Act Two, Scene Three, when the Duke, "*disguised as friar*" enters the prison and orders the Provost "to let me see them [the criminals], and to make me know/The nature of their crimes, that I may minister/To them accordingly."⁵⁷

At this point, the Duke seeks to do more than merely hide his identity, but to assume the roles and powers of an officer of the church, thus confirming his earlier description of power as something which could be dressed with. To the audience, his disguise means that his actions as a friar lack actual authority and should be interpreted as artificial performances, yet the ease with which the Duke takes on the powers of a church officer simply by dressing himself as one casts doubt on his authority and actions as Duke. His true identity becomes unstable, and all his actions are in danger of being interpreted as false performances.

The inauthenticity of the Duke's actions as friar becomes extremely important once he begins to interview the various prisoners in attempts to draw confessions from them. The official discourse on the soul posited that confession was the only way of preventing eternal damnation, yet when the Duke embarks his mission to extract confessions from prisoners, he does so without any actual confessional authority. He cannot seriously be concerned for the safety of their souls if he is willing to perform the actions of a friar without actually being one.

When the Duke, dressed as a friar, goes to attend to Claudio before his execution, he urges Claudio to "be absolute for death.../Reason thus with life:/If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing/That none but fools would keep; a breath thou art,/Servile to all the skyey influences,.../thou art death's fool."⁵⁸ Claudio initially seems to be swayed by this argument, representative of the official discourse on execution and death, saying, "I humbly thank you./To sue to live, I find I seek to die./And seeking death, find life: let it come."⁵⁹ Yet after consulting with Isabella immediately after this scene with the Duke, Claudio reveals that he is far less comfortable with the thought of death.

Initially, he seems resolute, both reassuring his sister that "if I must die,/I will encounter death as a bride,"⁶⁰ and agreeing with her in her rejection of Angelo's offer of his release for her virginity, as he says simply, "Thou shalt not do't."⁶¹ But after Isabella instructs him to "be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow,"⁶² all

he can say is, "Death is a fearful thing."⁶³ After this, Claudio offers an evocative and humanistic defense of life, lamenting, "Ay, but to die, and go we know not where./ To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,/...to become/A kneaded clod.../The weariest and most loathed worldly life.../is a paradise/To what we fear of death,"⁶⁴ before concluding with the most pathetic of appeals: "Sweet sister, let me live."⁶⁵ Clearly, Claudio emphatically rejects the ideas promulgated by the official discourse on life and the soul.

And he is not alone in his rejection, as Barnardine, the play's other prisoner, likewise refuses to passively accept his death. After initially refusing to awake and be hanged, the Duke enters "*disguised as before*" and commands Barnardine, saying, "O, sir, you must; and therefore I beseech you/Look forward on the journey you shall go." Barnardine retorts, "I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion,"⁶⁶ and exits the scene unscathed. This successful defiance on behalf of Barnardine underscores the weakness of the state's discourse on death.

The final act of the play contains a direct confrontation between Isabella, who earlier had promised, "If ever he [the Duke] return and I/can speak to him, I will open my lips in vain, or discover his government,"⁶⁷ and Angelo, who had mocked her by inviting her to "say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true."⁶⁸ This conflict between simple truth and embellished authority, a conflict echoed in *John Foxe's Acts and Monuments*, comes to the fore when Isabella charges, "Even so may Angelo,/In all his dressings, caracts, titles, forms,/Be an arch-villain."⁶⁹ Thus, this final scene puts pressure on the ability of true justice to overcome and uncover the false appearances of would-be justicers.

Isabella begins her appeal by telling the duke, "O worthy prince, dishonor not your eye/By throwing it on any other object,/And give me justice, justice, justice, justice!" thereby demanding that all eyes turn to her and that the spectacle become centered on her person. At this point in the play, it is likely that Isabella is still dressed in a novice's habit, and such garb would only make it easier for the citizens of Vienna, and the play's audience, to identify her character with that of a wronged martyr. To an early modern audience, this moment in the play would have been reminiscent of an execution scene and would have contained equal amounts of dramatic tension and have had equally high stakes. At this moment, the audience knows Isabella to have been wrongfully abused by the Duke's deputy, and their estimation of the Duke would have rested on his ability to restore a fair sense of order. Unsurprisingly, Isabella adopts some of the same tactics used by condemned criminals to subvert the meanings of official spectacles.

Aside from her dress, itself a symbol of religious purity, Isabella also adopts language typical of martyrs. When she affirms, "For truth is truth/To th' end of reck'ning,"⁷⁰ and promises "to make the truth appear where it seems hid,/And hide the false seems true,"⁷¹ she embodies the ideal of "suffering for Truth's sake," which, for martyrs in early modern England, John Knott argues, "was at the heart of protestant Christianity."⁷² In her suits to the Duke, Isabella references her chastity, her time in a sisterhood, and how she prayed and kneeled to Angelo for mercy before he gave in "to his concupiscible intemperate lust."⁷³ When the Duke refuses her appeals and charges that "someone hath set you on,"⁷⁴ Isabella implores the "blessed ministers

above” to keep her in patience and “unfold the evil which is here wrapped up.”⁷⁵ Her final words before she attempts to leave further reinforce her identification with the persona of a wronged martyr: “I, thus wronged, hence unbeliev’d go!”⁷⁶

As Isabella is led to prison, Friar Peter promises the Duke that he will extract a confession from her, claiming, “Her shall you hear disprov’d to her eyes, /Till she herself confess it.”⁷⁷ Additionally, while she is making her case against Angelo, he accuses her of madness, saying to the Duke, “My lord, her wits, I fear me, are not firm.” Similarly, the Duke dismisses her at one point by saying, “She speaks this in the’ infirmity of sense.”⁷⁸ This charge of madness could perhaps have been a substitute or a preliminary for the charges of witchcraft or heresy. Such accusations directly contest Isabella’s position within the discourse of heroic martyrdom by casting her as a threat to legitimate religion, and were not uncommon during the early modern period.

When it becomes necessary, for the course of the proceedings, to bring Friar Lodowick to testify, the Duke finds that he must leave and return in his old disguise. In the meantime, Escalus asks Lucio if he knew “Friar Lodowick to be a dishonest person,” to which Lucio replies, “Honest in nothing but his clothes.”⁷⁹

At the conclusion of the Duke’s questioning, Escalus orders officers to “Take him hence; to th’ rack,” and threatens torture, saying, “We’ll touse [i.e. pull apart] you/Joint by joint.”⁸⁰ The resolution of the play comes when Lucio, in his attempts to subdue the Duke disguised as friar, accidentally “pulls off the friar’s hood, and discovers the Duke”⁸¹ and immediately exclaims, “This may prove worse than hanging,” once again suggesting the availability of torture techniques to the state apparatuses of Vienna. This act of unmasking reveals both the Duke’s multiple identities and the impossibility of his maintaining them. While the audience would already have been aware of his dual role, this moment would have directly drawn their attention to his impersonation of a church official and to his illegitimate assumption of their powers. Moreover, throughout the play, we see how the Duke shifts in and out of personalities and in and out of the public view to confirm and exercise his power. His initial decision to abdicate his throne was driven by his desire to have Angelo impose stricter laws, “and yet my nature never in the fight/To do it slander.”⁸² Thus, with the character of the Duke, Shakespeare shows how the early modern state needed to create the illusion of seemingly different institutions, discourses, and persons to uphold its rule. Though the separation between church and state had been effectively abolished by the Reformation, the monarchs of early modern England still found it necessary to maintain the appearance of separate institutions. This is the illusion which *Measure for Measure* dissolves. 

 notes

¹ J.P.D. Cooper, *Propaganda and the Tudor State*, 3

² Richard Mulcaster, *The Passage Of Our Most Drad Sovereigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth Through The Cittie Of London to Westminster The Daye Before Her Coronacion*

³ Alice Hunt, *The Drama of Coronation: Medieval Ceremony in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), 146

⁴ Keith Reinhart, "Shakespeare's Cleopatra and England's Elizabeth," 82

⁵ *Basilikon Doron*, 312

⁶ *The Trve Lawe of free Monarchies: Or, Th Reciproock and Mvtvall Dvtye Betweixt a free King, and his naturall Subjectes*, 94

⁷ *Ibid.*, 101

⁸ Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1587), 914-5

⁹ *Ibid.*, 913-5

¹⁰ J.R.Tanner, *Tudor Constitutional Documents*, 17

¹¹ J.P.D. Cooper, *Propaganda and the Tudor State*, 215

¹² *Ibid.*, 221

¹³ Bond (ed.), *Certain Sermons*, 161-2

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *Certain Sermons*, 167

¹⁵ Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of God's Judgments* qtd. in R.A. Foakes *Shakespeare and Violence*, 31

¹⁶ *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I*, vol. 1, 60

¹⁷ Henry Goodcole, *A True Declartion of the Happy Conversion, Contrition and Christian Preparation of Francis Robinson*, pamphlet.

¹⁸ Raynor and Cook (eds.) *The Complete Newgate Calendar*, vol. 2, 59

¹⁹ R.A. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence*, 28

²⁰ Jane E. A. Dawson, "The Scottish Theater of Martyrdom," in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, 262

²¹ Charles Mitchell, *Shakespeare and Public Execution* Appendix C, 128

²² John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, 4.2.205-8

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.2.228-9

²⁴ *Arden of Faversham*, 19.77-81

²⁵ *A Warning for Faire Women*, 20.15-20

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Epilogue

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.77-9

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.84-6

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.34-7

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.47-9

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.84-6

³² *Arden of Faversham*, title page

³³ *Ibid.*, 18.2-6

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.7-11

³⁵ *Arden of Faversham* 18.38

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.39

³⁷ James Shapiro, "Tragedies naturally performed" in *Staging the Renaissance*, 106

³⁸ *A Warning for Fair Women* 17.134-9

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.147-9

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.133-6

⁴¹ *Basilikon Doron* qtd. in Charles Mitchell *Shakespeare and Public Execution*, 88

⁴² *Measure for Measure* 1.2.162-5

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.1.44-5

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.2.101

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.2.169-74

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.4.64-8

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.1

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.4.163-4

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.4.165-6

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.2.264-5

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.1.372

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.4.50

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1.1.19

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.3.46-8

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.3.45

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.3.53-4

- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.3.7-8
⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.1.5-11
⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.1.41-3
⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.1.83-4
⁶¹ Ibid., 3.1.103
⁶² Ibid., 3.1.107
⁶³ Ibid., 3.1.116
⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.1.118-31
⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.1.133
⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.3.58-61
⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.1.194-6
⁶⁸ Ibid., 2.4.170
⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.1.55-7
⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.1.45
⁷¹ Ibid., 5.1.66-7
⁷² John Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1695*, 1
⁷³ *Measure for Measure* 5.1.98
⁷⁴ Ibid., 5.1.112
⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.1.115-8
⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.1.119
⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.1.161-2
⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.1.32 and 5.1.47
⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.1.262-5
⁸⁰ Ibid., 5.1.312-3
⁸¹ Ibid., 5.1
⁸² Ibid., 1.4.41-2

Poem as Tombstone

Epitaphs, Thomas Gray, and the Poet in His Grave

by Erica Weaver

In his "Essays on Epitaphs," William Wordsworth claims that the epitaph is "grounded upon the universal intellectual property of man; – sensations which all men have felt and feel in some degree daily and hourly; – truths whose very interest and importance have caused them to be unattended to, as things which could take care of themselves" (354). The epitaph draws on universal themes, blending shared human feelings with the distinct sensations caused by an individual's death. The resonance of this universality has allowed the epitaph as a poetic form to enjoy a long-standing tradition, and, from ancient grave-markers to modern tombstones, the epitaph is visible to visitors in every churchyard. This form as written word takes on new dimensions in Thomas Gray's 1751 poem "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," which concludes with the poetic speaker's own epitaph. Here, the jarring duality of viewpoint—with the poetic speaker functioning both as narrator and as a buried man observed by an unknown "kindred spirit"—blurs the distinction between the speaker and his subject, introducing concerns of selfishness and immortality amidst transience (l. 96). Moreover, the concluding epitaph and the problems that it raises transforms the poem itself into a monument on which the epitaph is inscribed, so that the work becomes the poet's tombstone. In the end, the tensions involved in the poet's dual status as both living and dead never fully disappear. While the poet buries himself by ending the poem with his own death and epitaph, the reader must continually pull him out of this grave and set him back on his walk to reread the poem.

Gray's poem is preoccupied with the epitaph tradition. He adopts the very themes that Wordsworth later prescribes, as he writes "upon departed worth – upon personal or social sorrow and admiration – upon religion, individual and social – upon time, and upon eternity" (Wordsworth, 330). Focusing on similar themes of worth and admiration, Gray writes of the harvest, of ambition, and of "the dull cold ear of death" (l. 44). Although he writes of the dead collectively, Gray adds more specific details as well, describing how "For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn, / Or busy housewife ply her evening care: / No children run to lisp their sire's return, / Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share" (l. 21-4). These details, which apply to the collective, point to the irony that while individual men are unique, most epitaphs are strikingly similar.

Ultimately, Gray is unconcerned with questions of uniqueness of this kind; rather, his themes allude to the desire for immortality amidst transience. As he ambles through the churchyard, he laments the buried poor and their defenselessness

from disdain or disregard on the part of the living. While the speaker walks, he describes how the sculptures decking the poor's tombstones are largely shapeless and "[t]heir name, their years, [are] spelt by th' unletter'd muse" instead of being etched in polished verse (l. 81). The narrator focuses on such uncouthness and wonders if other passersby will respect the dead as he does in spite of their inelegant graves. He even postulates that some of the dead may have possessed great abilities, observing, "Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest, / Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood" (l. 59-60). He suggests that even very powerful men—men of genius or great ability—will never achieve the slightest fame if they die before making their abilities known. In Gray's landscape, all earthly glory passes away. More shockingly, though, "a holy text" serves only to "teach the rustic moralist to die" (l. 83-4). Seemingly, then, there is no afterlife either—only the broken remains of epitaphs and the fading of the dead in the memory of the living. Yet, as Wordsworth claimed, a belief in immortality is a crucial precondition for the writing of an epitaph. Their very writing serves as a means of self-perpetuation, and, in drafting an epitaph, the author longs to negate his own death and subsequent oblivion. Thus social feelings lead naturally to a wish to be remembered, and this struggle for immortality is embodied in the epitaph—even if it is only carved in a tombstone that will be worn away by the elements.

In this landscape, even as gravestones crumble away, it is clear that memory after death depends furthermore on chance encounters; someone living must walk through the graveyard and stop to read the inscriptions for the epitaphs to have their effect. If the epitaph goes unread, it may as well cease to exist, since it will not be fostering the living memory, which it is intended to create. Gray asserts that "On some fond breast the parting soul relies," underscoring this need for future visitors to amble through the churchyard and pause to theorize about the people buried there, as the speaker does (l. 89). Chillingly, Gray then reminds the reader that such chance encounters are not the solace of the buried poor alone; rather, every man will be forgotten in his grave, even the poet. To this effect, the poem takes a decided shift after line 93, when the poet-speaker begins to be addressed in the second person, and thus the speaker becomes the subject of his own poem. Yet he is not addressed as he is now; rather, he is addressed as one who is dead, as he imagines some "kindred spirit" who "If chance, by lonely contemplation led" may inquire after his fate (l. 95-6). What then follows adds another element of jarring uncertainty, as "Haply some hoary-headed Swain" may direct the theoretical "kindred spirit" to the poet's grave (l. 97). Thus the reader is left uncertain as to whether any such man will come asking about the poet after his death and whether a swain will direct him correctly to the poet's grave if he ever comes. Both odds depend on "chance," and if the swain directs the visitor, it is only "haply" that he does so. Everything depends on happenstance, as the traditional fabric of the poem begins to crumble, supplanted by a narration of the poet's own funeral procession.

The collapse of the division between the narrator, or epitaph writer, and the subject transforms an epitaph that is normally composed to preserve the memory of the departed into one that not only glorifies the poet but also comforts him in his own death. The inscription of the epitaph consoles men for the loss of their departed

loved ones and reminds them that they will be remembered in a like fashion, and so the consolation is both for the present and the future. Gray's poet-speaker, in writing his own epitaph, consoles himself for his own loss—that is, his future death. Thus the epitaph, which concludes "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," is self-aggrandizing in two ways: first, it spreads the poet's own glory in his hope for remembrance after death, and second, it serves to console himself.

This epitaph is self-aggrandizing in a third way as well. Wordsworth notes the unique role of the epitaph-writer, observing that "his delineation, we must remember, is performed by the side of the grave; and, what is more, the grave of one whom he loves and admires...it is truth hallowed by love – the joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living!" (332-33). In the case of Gray's poet-speaker, the epitaph functions as a sign of the speaker's own self-love. By eliminating any distinction between the mourner and the mourned, the speaker goes beyond consoling himself and hoping for future fame. In writing his own epitaph, he also performs the role of Wordsworth's mourner at the graveside. In accepting this performance, the poet-speaker demonstrates his profound sense of self-love, which manifests itself, again, as a concern of both the present and the future. In the present, the poet simply longs to express his own admiration of himself; in the future, he hopes to foster this admiration elsewhere. To complete this relationship between the epitaph-writer and his subject, however, at least part of Gray's speaker must be dead, since this mourning necessitates a dead "other" for whom to grieve, and, since this "other" represents a separate stage in his own existence, the death must be internalized.

The speaker cannot be fully dead, seeing as he must be alive enough to compose his verses, and yet it is impossible to write a true epitaph for anyone living, since the epitaph can only appear above a filled grave. Thus, when the poet-speaker drafts his epitaph, he climbs into his own grave, and the epitaph is delivered in the voice of the deceased, speaking from the tomb. This is not the speaker from the grave whom Wordsworth describes as one who "admonishes with the voice of one experienced in the vanity of those affections which are confined to earthly objects, and gives a verdict like a superior Being, performing the office of a judge" (335). Rather, the epitaph in Gray's poem is presented in the third person, leading the reader to question whether the poet-speaker composed it at all, or if it was written by an unknown future mourner. Since the entire epitaph scene is a projection of the speaker's mind, however, it must have originated in his own mind as well.

Regardless, the problem remains that epitaphs are meant to be about their subjects—not their authors, a fact that is endlessly complicated in Gray's poem, where the author and the subject are the same man. Wordsworth demands that an epitaph ought not to "withdraw the attention of the Reader from the Subject to the Author of the Memorial" (364). By contrast, this withdrawal is evident in the poet-speaker's epitaph, since the reader cannot escape the idea of the author, even when the author's signature is supposed to be absent. Because the distinction between author and subject has collapsed, it is impossible for the epitaph to maintain a focus on the subject alone. Furthermore, Wordsworth urges epitaph-writers to remember, "in a permanent Inscription things only should be admitted that have an enduring place

in the mind" (364). In spite of this notion, "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard" is replete with transience and the desire to reclaim immortality. Perhaps the attempt to arrive at immortality succeeds for the poet, since the reader cannot mourn him as a dead man; instead, he is forced again and again to think of the living author. Since the reader cannot escape thoughts of the epitaph's composition, he continually circles back to the earlier part of the poem, where the poet is merely strolling through a graveyard at night.

The tension between the poet as living author and dead man is even more complex because the reader sees the subject both in life and in death within the space of a single poem. Wordsworth provides an apt comparison for this duality when he describes how "the image of an unruffled Sea has still remained; but my fancy has penetrated into the depths of that Sea – with accompanying thoughts of Shipwreck, of the destruction of the Mariner's hopes, the bones of drowned Men heaped together, monsters of the deep" (338). In Gray's poem, the reader maintains the image of the peaceful churchyard, even as he sees into the graves beneath the turf. The visibility of the tombstones—open to all passersby and elements—reinforces this duality, since the reader at once visualizes a peaceful late-night stroll and a funeral procession. Even as the reader visualizes the Swain's description, when he narrates, "The next [day] with dirges due in sad array / Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne," the reader remembers that he is ultimately hearing the voice of the poet, who is supposedly being borne through the churchyard in a coffin (l. 113-14).

This complicated duality provokes the subjective emotions of the spectator, relying heavily on a reader who may or may not come to mourn the poet's epitaph. As Horace advised in his Epistle to the Pisones, *Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi* (l. 102, "If you wish me to weep, you yourself must first feel the grief"). In order for a reader to mourn the poet, a true impulse of grief must underpin the composition of his writing. Nonetheless, the reader is left to wonder what exactly Gray's poet-speaker is grieving for, since it is impossible to know whether he grieves for his own insurmountable loss or for something larger. To conclude the poem, Gray provides only the epitaph, which, within the fiction of the poem, may or may not have been written by the poet-speaker. The Swain advises the reader—who has now taken the spot of the "kindred spirit"—to "Approach and read (for thou canst read)" (l. 115). This command introduces another conflict: that between the eternal and the momentary, for it is impossible to know how long the reader will pause, if he comes at all, while serving as a reminder that the epitaph ultimately depends on literacy as well. Wordsworth observed that the very difficulty of epitaph-writing is "to give to universally received truths a pathos and spirit which shall re-admit them into the soul like revelations of the moment" (359). Thus, in penning his epitaph, the poet must not only collapse the barrier between the author and the subject but also that between the moment and eternity.

What medium could be more fitting for this bold point of rupture than that of the poem? Wordsworth acknowledged, "It need scarcely be said, that an Epitaph presupposes a Monument, upon which it is to be engraven" (322). By inscribing an epitaph into the poem, Gray renders the poem as a tombstone, that is, a lasting monument carved with all of the marks of the grave. Here, better than in any Poets'

Corner, the poet finds a place of burial within his own poem, and the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" surpasses all of the constraints of elegy to become, itself, a tomb. 

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Mesmerism and Modern Times

Change in *The House of the Seven Gables*
and *The Blithedale Romance*

by David Berke

The *Blithedale Romance* and *The House of the Seven Gables* have the same basic plot, a twice-told tale that centers on the power of mesmerism. As critic Taylor Stoehr describes, in both self-proclaimed romances, “a crime against society...is committed...which results indirectly in the rise to power of a witch or wizard...with mesmeric control over the actions of a daughter or granddaughter of the original sinner” (52). In both novels, the main struggle is the mesmerists’ power over an innocent young woman who had no part in her forebear’s “crime against society.” However, mesmerism also manifests itself in many complex ways outside of these novels’ core plotlines. Mesmerism is associated with everything from technological and scientific advances to progressivist political and literary movements. Mesmerism, as such a multivalent presence in Hawthorne’s writing, does not have a simplistic meaning or moral attached to it, and the common readings of mesmerism in Hawthorne’s work fail to capture this breadth.

This paper finds its basis for a new reading in a sketch idea that Hawthorne wrote in one of his notebooks: “questions as to unsettled points of History, and Mysteries of Nature, to be asked of a mesmerized person” (Stoehr, 51). Hawthorne was toying with the idea of mesmerization as a process that can provide answers to the most trying of questions. Stoehr dismisses this entry, claiming that “nothing so pat as the 1842 idea would be allowed to dominate” any of Hawthorne’s work (51). To the contrary, in his writing about mesmerism in his novels, Hawthorne uses mesmerism to explore difficult questions about change, about history in the making. In *The Blithedale Romance* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, mesmerism is associated with changes in wide-ranging sectors of personal and national life, all related to a central ideological struggle in both novels: the tension between old conservative ways of life and new progressive ideas about how these ways should be changed. The literary form of the Romance is heavily implicated in this exploration of change and clash of ideologies.

Although my reading of mesmerism as an exploration of change seems an ostensible departure from most criticism that has been written on mesmerism in Hawthorne’s work, it in fact builds on the common critical consensus. Most readings have focused on the ways mesmerism is associated with witchcraft and possessive sexuality. Critics often find the origins of these associations in an 1841 letter from Hawthorne to his then-fiancee Sophia, in which he writes,

If I possessed such a power over thee [as mesmerism], I should not dare to exercise it; nor can I consent to its being exercised by another...the sacredness of an individual is violated by it...an intrusion into thy holy of holies—and the intruder would not be thy husband! (307)

Mesmerism is such a power that it dominates the individual totally, entering her “holy of holies” in a way other forms of power cannot. The sexual component of this power is evident in the “husband” remark and has been thoroughly documented by critics like Taylor Stoehr (47). Though Hawthorne does not invoke witchcraft in his letter to Sophia, the connection between witchcraft and mesmerism is equally prevalent in his work, as F. O. Matthiessen notes, writing in *American Renaissance* that Hawthorne found in his fiction “a psychological equivalent for the witch’s evil eye in the contemporary abuse of mesmerism” (51). A portrait of mesmerism similar to that presented in this epistle appears throughout Hawthorne’s fiction. In *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator Coverdale notes that, during instances of mesmerism, “the strong love of years melted away like a vapor” in female subjects (555-556), and “at the bidding of...these wizards [mesmerists], the maiden... would turn from him [her lover] with icy indifference...the individual was virtually annihilated.” Again, the refutation of the male lover (the “husband” in the letter) and the “violation”/“annihilat[ion]” of the individual are associated with mesmerism, as well as witchcraft (through the use of “wizards”).

These associations with possessive sexuality and witchcraft are consistent with a reading of mesmerism as an exploration of change. Change is necessarily about accepting something outside of the normal. Mesmerism itself embodied change affecting American society, since it had been brought from France only a few years prior and was widely accepted as a scientific innovation. It was “the nation’s first popular psychology” (Coale, 273). Thus, the sexuality ascribed to mesmerism can be interpreted as the erotic nature assigned to most anything that is different or other; it is a classic instantiation of the “Exotic-Becomes-Erotic” theory now popular in the social sciences (Bem, 1). In linking mesmerism with witchcraft, Hawthorne frames modern mesmerism in historical terms. If mesmerism was the first American “popular psychology,” then witchcraft can be read as the nation’s first popular mental illness.

The most straightforward ways that this future manifests itself in Hawthorne’s writing is through changes that fundamentally alter everyday patterns of living. Both novels, though particularly *The House of the Seven Gables*, are replete with such changes. The contemporary Pyncheons live in a time when rapid strides in science and technology are remapping American life.¹ As Robert Levine writes, *Gables* is “Hawthorne’s most modern work” (293), which “draws on, and indeed can seem to be inspired by, the exciting technological developments of the period.” When Clifford and Hepzibah flee from the Colonel’s cursed house on a train, Clifford rambles for several pages to a fellow train passenger, linking the recent innovations in communication and transportation with mesmerism. He begins with a paean to the railroads, proclaiming, “These railroads...are positively the greatest blessing that the ages have wrought out for us. They give us wings...they spiritualize

travel!" (183). He argues that the telegraph, what he calls another "spiritual medium" (186), should be used exclusively for "lovers" who "might send their heart-throbs... words such as these 'I love you forever!'" (186-187). The telegraph, as critic Gillian Brown points out, should be used exclusively for love, desire and intimacy (403). After stating the evils of the static ancestral home, Clifford proclaims, returning to this spirituality of scientific innovation, "The world is growing too...*spiritual* to bear these enormities...the harbingers of a better era are unmistakable. Mesmerism, now! Will that effect nothing, think you, towards purging away the grossness out of human life?" (emphasis added, 183). Before and after this mention of mesmerism, Clifford only discusses technological changes. Mesmerism is the clear odd innovation out in Clifford's speech. Mesmerism is included, despite its conspicuous difference from the other matters at hand, and its associations with possessive sexuality and witchcraft inform the conversation about these new technologies. He also interrupts his speech to proclaim the coming of "rapping spirits" (186), a reference to the occult ensconced in this same language of the "spiritual." This occult spirituality in mesmerism and the railroad is chiefly related to their ability, in Clifford's mind, to infuse mankind with a nomadic youthful beauty, which is contrasted with stationary old age. Mesmerism purges "grossness" (exterminating anything that is unbeautiful), just as railroad travel allows a man to go "wherever...*the beautiful* shall offer him a home" (emphasis added, 184). In this discussion of technological change, Hawthorne constructs a clear binary between the old ways of life, old age, and isolation and these new technologies (with mesmerism fitting loosely in this category), youthful beauty, and nomadism. Clifford literally transforms into a younger man, a "youthful character" shining in him, as he discusses technological innovations and mesmerism:

Clifford's countenance glowed, as he divulged this theory [the binary discussed above]; a youthful character shone out from within, converting the wrinkles and pallid duskiness of age into an almost transparent mask. The merry girls let their ball drop upon the floor, and gazed at him. (184)

Clifford embodies the ideal he describes. This youthfulness has a virile edge; the emerging artifacts of Clifford's once formidable beautify cause the "merry girls" to "let their ball drop upon the floor," as if his beauty mesmerizes them.

Through the association of all these technological advances with mesmerism, Hawthorne conveys their violative potential. In his exaltation of these changes, Clifford imagines an "ethereal" (186) future where these technologies reign and the "world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time." In Clifford's view, the wholehearted embrace of these technological innovations leads to a world of absolute, simultaneous unity, a lived proto-Internet in which technology interconnects us to the point that everyone is everywhere and within everyone simultaneously or, in other words, at a single "breathless point of time." This universal unification violates the individual in the same possessively sexual way mesmerism does. The technology that facilitates this unification more than any other, according to Clifford, is "electricity," and Samuel Coale notes in his study of mesmerism, "spiritualists [of Hawthorne's time] used the

language of electricity...to describe the relative positions of men and women" (277). In the spiritualist's lexicon, electricity was used to establish "relative positions," power of one over another. As the transfixion of the "merry girls" shows, it is the men who sexually dominate the women within this discourse of technological innovation.

This vision of the technological future is the antithesis of Clifford's current situation, completely cut off from all society save his homely sister Hepzibah. In his imagining of the future, the "individual [is] virtually annihilated" (*Blithedale*, 556), and possessive sexuality is universal—again contrary to Clifford in the present, as he is a virgin (*Seven Gables*, 101). In negotiating these changes in terms of mesmerism, Hawthorne sets up the central ideological battle of the novel. On one end of the spectrum is the isolated and asexual conservatism of the Pyncheon forebears and the old Clifford, the status quo. On the other end is this new, enlivened Clifford, who embraces change and advocates a complete technological unity. Hawthorne was not unique in using mesmerism to frame this ideological struggle between the status quo and ideas of change. Charles Poyen, the French émigré who brought the "science" of mesmerism to New England in Hawthorne's time, wrote that his practice "attacks and overturns all received notions...all that has been inculcated upon us by philosophy and education!" (304). Mesmerism was change incarnate, and thus serves as the ideal vehicle through which to illuminate this struggle between conservative and progressive impulses relevant to the novel's time.

While technology is the main form of change in *The House of the Seven Gables*, innovations in political and social thought dominate *The Blithedale Romance*. As Poirier remarks, *Blithedale* is infused with a critique of the "monomania" of contemporary reform movements (116), particularly those in the transcendentalist vein. Fiedler likewise describes the "comic character" of Transcendentalism in Hawthorne's novel (432). However, *Blithedale* is not just a parody, but also a larger negotiation of these social changes, again through mesmerism.

The social innovations explored in the novel are embodied by Blithedale farm, the agrarian socialist community in which the protagonist Coverdale (a proxy for Hawthorne), Hollingsworth (Emerson), Zenobia (Margaret Fuller), and their forward-thinking associates come to break "the rusty iron framework of society" and make "Paradise anew" (449, 444). Blithedale is associated with mesmerism from the first sentence: "That evening before my departure for Blithedale, I... attend[ed] the wonderful exhibition of the Veiled Lady" (441). The "Veiled Lady," as is immediately explained, is "a phenomenon in the mesmeric line" (441). Mesmerism and Blithedale are chronologically linked; Coverdale is travelling from one to the other. Mesmerism is also more directly associated with the reformers of Blithedale. For instance, Hawthorne writes of the settlement's female leader, "Zenobia...is merely her public name; a sort of mask... a contrivance...like the white drapery of the Veiled Lady" (443). Zenobia is compared with the "phenomenon in the mesmeric line," and Coverdale later marvels that Zenobia is so magical that she must be "a sister of the Veiled Lady" (465), which turns out to be literally true. The Veiled Lady (and Zenobia's sister) is Priscilla, who also comes to live among the reformers at Blithedale, thus reinforcing even further the connection between the reform community and mesmerism. Possessive sexuality and witchcraft are, of

course, present as well. Hollingsworth tells Zenobia that Coverdale “talks about your being a witch” (465). Indeed, Coverdale calls her an “enchantress” (465), not only highlighting, as Matthiessen notes, the association with witchcraft, but the possessive sexuality of Blithedale. Blithedale quickly becomes a tangle of competing romantic interests, particularly among Priscilla, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Coverdale. As Poirier notes, Coverdale describes “what he calls the ‘inextricable knot of polygamy’ among the bows” of his favorite natural hideaway near Blithedale (Poirier, 120). This hideaway is a microcosm for the entire community, making that “knot of polygamy” similarly representative of the amorous situation at Blithedale.

The possessive element of this sexuality comes through Hollingsworth, who bewitches Zenobia and Priscilla, two open, ardent feminists, into unthinking love. On a walk with her fellow reformers, Zenobia swears to “lift up my own voice in behalf of woman’s wider liberty!” (510). Hollingsworth responds with vitriolic misogyny, declaring:

Her [woman’s] place is at man’s side. Her office, that of the...unquestioning believer... woman is...vain, destructive of her own best and holiest qualities, void of every good effect, and productive of intolerable mischiefs! ...woman is a monster...without man as her acknowledged principle! (511)

Coverdale—along with the reader—expects strong “resent[ment]” from Priscilla and Zenobia toward the chauvinist Hollingsworth (512). Instead, Priscilla responds with “entire acquiescence and unquestioning faith” (512), and Zenobia, with tears in her eyes, says she has “deep cause to think you [Hollingsworth] right.” With Hollingsworth’s forceful manner and words that “annihilat[e]” the women’s personhood (as Coverdale phrases it, Hollingsworth “deprived woman of her very soul” [*Blithedale*, 512, 556]). Hollingsworth takes violent possession of these women, along with all of womankind. His hold over Zenobia is so violently powerful that she drowns herself when he chooses Priscilla as his exclusive love interest at the novel’s end. This mesmeric control is not just figurative. As Coverdale marvels bitterly at the sisters’ “acquiescence” to Hollingsworth’s “masculine egotism,” he states that the sisters have fallen prey to “some *necromancy* of his horrible injustice” (emphasis added). Hollingsworth employs a hypnotic sorcery to take control of the sisters. Conservative and progressive social ideologies are at war before Coverdale’s eyes, via “necromancy,” which is synonymous with mesmerism. The individual—here the female individual—is destroyed through social and political progressivism, similar to what Clifford described with technological change. This complex interplay of mesmerism (including its witchcraft/possessive sexuality associations and its own embodiment of change) with different forms of social change across the two novels illustrates how change can assault, violate, and destroy the individual. Hawthorne thus makes change writ large as unsettling to the reader as Zenobia and Priscilla’s infatuation with Hollingsworth is for Coverdale. Hawthorne’s alarm about change and its consequences for American society echoes, in a certain sense, his extreme anxiety over the prospect of his wife Sophia allowing a mesmerist to have his way with her.

While Hawthorne's message about change is ostensibly alarmist and dire, The conclusion of this ideological battle over change raging across the two novels ends with something far removed from simplistic condemnation. The complexity of the conclusion is embodied in the character of Holgrave, who demonstrates both technological and social modes of change. He is "a public lecturer on Mesmerism" (126) who self-admittedly descends from a long line of mesmeric wizards (223), beginning with the original Maule. He is associated with the reform movements of Blithedale farm, as well as many other progressive causes, through the "reformers, temperance-lecturers, and all manner of cross-looking philanthropists;—community-men and come-outers" with whom Hepzibah sees him consorting (62). Matthiessen glosses Holgrave as a social reformer, "a detailed portrait of one of Emerson's promising Young Americans" (331). This description misses the breadth of Holgrave's association with different types of change, but certainly pegs down one of the progressive identities contained within him.³ Holgrave is a writer (as most Blithedale residents are) and once "spent some months in a community of Fourierists" (126) similar to that at Blithedale. He also employs and embodies Cliffordian technology. Holgrave is a "Daguerreotypist" at present, the practitioner of this new technology that, during this period, was as new as the telegraph and the railroad. Moreover, he has spent his entire life traveling, a modern nomad without a family home. He fulfills Clifford's new technological ideal of the young mover who sees no greater evil than "to plant a family" (132), as Holgrave himself phrases it.

Since he contains all of these changes within him, Holgrave is representative of how all of these ideological struggles negotiated through mesmerism are resolved: the changes appear to fail. Holgrave 'fails' when he forsakes his progressive ways. "You find me a conservative already!" he remarks at the end of *Seven Gables* (222). He agrees to settle with the Pyncheons in the Judge's country house, thereby forsaking the ideal of the modern nomad that Clifford articulated (before he too capitulates and joins the couple in their move). Technology fails to unify the Pyncheons with the world in the way Clifford dreamed. The grand liberal experiment of Blithedale is likewise a crippling failure, ending in the horrific death of Zenobia. Hollingsworth lives on; his conservative ideology survives while the socialist farm fails. As Coverdale tells the reader, "I left Blithedale within a week of Zenobia's death, and went back thither no more" (583). It is a permanent break, an absolute failure.

The resolution of this ideological battle becomes far more complicated, however, when this exploration of change is related to literary form. Hawthorne quite explicitly labels both of the novels as romances. This identification with the romance genre is self-evident in the title *The Blithedale Romance*, and the very first sentence of *The House of the Seven Gables* is a self-reflexive musing on the romance. This genre is integral to Hawthorne's exploration of change, his mediation of the battle of old against new. Fredric Jameson hits on this importance when he explains Northrop Frye's "theory of romance" as:

A wish-fulfillment or Utopian fantasy which aims at the transfiguration of the world of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and

imperfections will have been effaced. (110)

The romance is a genre of “transfiguration”—of radical change. It recounts an attempt to make “Paradise anew” (*Blithedale*, 444), as Coverdale phrases it, or, to use Clifford’s wording, to get “the flower of Eden” to “bloo[m]” again (*Seven Gables*, 217). The romantic nature of these two novels is what allows them to explore and experiment with the changes, many of them with Utopian valences, that confronted Hawthorne in his time. To write a romance is to engage with change, is to admit that there is some value in mapping an attempt at it, some value in exploring its possibilities. Hawthorne’s rejection of progressivism appears a contradiction to the romance genre’s commitment to the value of change.

Mesmerism is a product of storytelling. After Holgrave narrates Alice Pyncheon’s miserable fate, he notices “an incipient stage of that curious psychological condition” overtake his “auditress” (150). Before he releases her, Holgrave muses that he “could complete his mastery over Pheobe’s yet free and virgin spirit” if he so chose, after entrancing her through the act of storytelling. In *Gables*, Clifford’s ramblings on the train and Hollingsworth’s rhetoric are both less explicit versions of narrative mesmerism as well. In *The Blithedale Romance*, a scene similar to the one with Holgrave occurs, except this time it is Zenobia, the “enchantress,” who tells a horror story about the Veiled Lady (as it was with Holgrave, the story within the story is itself about a mesmerized woman). The act of storytelling hypnotizes Priscilla. A veil is thrown upon her at the story’s conclusion, and Priscilla “stood droopingly in the midst of us, making no attempt to remove the veil” (507). She is transfixed; the magnetism of storytelling has overcome her. These parallel incidences illustrate that mesmerism and what it entails are not only associated with the changes that Hawthorne’s romances explore, but with the very *process* of that exploration. Storytelling gives Holgrave sexually possessive power over Pheobe’s “free and virgin” soul, and since both storytellers are occult—an “enchantress” and a self-proclaimed “wizard” (*Blithedale*, 465, *Seven Gables*, 223)—storytelling is linked with witchcraft as well. Importantly, both Zenobia and Holgrave are repeatedly mentioned to be writers as well as storytellers (Holgrave is reading about Alice from his manuscript), so their narrative attributes are as related to the written word as the spoken one. This association with the writer was far from anomalous or accidental. Outside of his fiction, “Hawthorne often described the artist as...a mesmerist” (Coale, 273), further cementing the relationship between mesmerism and the art of storytelling.

Hawthorne portrays the characteristics of the changes he explores (and that his narratives ostensibly reject) as intrinsic to himself as a writer and storyteller; at the same time, his chosen literary form implicitly vindicates change while the narrative details their dangers and eventual failure. Any straightforward conclusions about the ideological tensions in the novels are called into question. Fiedler writes of *The House of the Seven Gables*, “Man is restored...by love of a good woman and not by utopian social schemes” (240). He continues disdainfully, “No wonder that more sentimental critics never weary of insisting that the thematic resolution of *The House of the Seven Gables* ‘may well justify preference for it over *The Scarlet Letter*.’” However, the characteristics of the genre suggest that these novels are more

than “sentimental” conservative stories that make cases against change. This logical inconsistency necessitates a re-evaluation of just what these novels have to say about change.

It is true that *The Blithedale Romance* ends with the violent dissolution of the farm, a seeming rebuke of the social changes that motivated the community. But the protagonist Coverdale still dreams about Blithedale, “our beautiful scheme of a noble and unselfish life” (584), as he calls it, and laments, “More and more I feel that we had struck upon what ought to be a truth.” His closing thoughts on the community are far from a stinging rebuke. As he argues here, the social changes failed, but the ideas behind them are still “a truth.” The novel thus becomes about the impossibility of realizing these truths in the real world, the messiness that inevitably arises in the transition of change from theory to practice, rather than a flat-out rejection of those changes. The storyteller as mesmerist enchants us with a sort of charmed space between the two, demonstrating the failings of reality and asserting the “truth” of theoretical progress. Hawthorne’s novels are less a straightforward condemnation and more an exploration of this tension.

While *The House of the Seven Gables* may seem more resolute in its conservative conclusion—the conclusion sentimental critics valorize and Fiedler dismisses—this romance has a much more complex and perhaps even sinister edge to its ideological conclusion. The Pyncheons simply relocate from one family house to another. There is no indication that the ancestral sorrows that consumed the House of the Seven Gables will not someday inundate the Judge’s mansion as well. In fact, just as Seven Gables was baptized with the original Colonel’s blood, the Pyncheons’ right to the “elegant country-seat of the late Judge Pyncheon” is granted only through the death of said Judge (219). The Judge “choke[d] with blood” as he died, *the exact same way* the Colonel died hundreds of years earlier. Given these parallel deaths, there is the possibility that this new family house is doomed to the same fate as the previous one, given that it is christened in exactly the same manner. Moreover, in the novel’s concluding paragraph, Hawthorne writes of Pheobe as someone “over whom he [Holgrave] had thrown love’s web of sorcery” (225). As described in this line, this union of Pyncheon and Maule is an occult, mesmeric act, with Holgrave employing necromancy to garner Pheobe’s love. He takes possession of her. His relationship with Pheobe is that of Alice Pyncheon and Thomas Maule the carpenter, except Holgrave has adapted their relationship to fit the conservative mold of husband and wife. Reading *The House of the Seven Gables* as an acceptance of conservative values is thus as shallow as reading *The Scarlet Letter* as a straightforward condemnation of adultery. Holgrave subversively smuggles mesmerism—with all its implications of change—into his new, ostensibly conservative life, just as Hawthorne smuggles narrative mesmerism and exposure to change into his ostensibly conservative ending. If *Blithedale* offers a vantage point on the discrepancies between change in theory and in practice, *Gables* illustrates how, both on the levels of narrative action and of literary form, the seeming triumph of the conservative can be, in reality, change entwining itself with the status quo.

As this reinterpretation shows, Hawthorne investigates “unsettled points” (Stoehr, 51) through the framework of mesmerism, but no easy answers result.

Hawthorne's storytelling is the antithesis of the ideological process in Levi-Strauss's myth, which "works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation" (Levi-Strauss, 440). There is no mediation in Hawthorne; the progressive ideas of change possess truth, but the old ways keep their hold on the real world. Progress fails at the same time that it is subversively incorporated into the conservative. It is a bitter stalemate, and so the tension between these "oppositions" is just as palpable at the end of the novels as it is at the beginning. The Hawthornian romance is thus not a mediation or resolution of an ideological struggle, but an assertion that these struggles continue eternally. With its simultaneous associations with literary storytelling and change, mesmerism suggests that literature is intrinsically implicated in this eternal struggle. Literature—and particularly the romance genre—offers a space of "transfiguration" between reality and the abstract, a space where these competing forces of old and new can meet. Hawthorne presents a compelling and mature view of what literature can be when it abandons the pretensions of fiction that claims to mediate or answer real-world problems as fraught as those confronted in *Blithedale* and *Gables*. Novels should elucidate the webs of tensions and associations surrounding given problems that are otherwise invisible. ■

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Ghost in the Shell

Anxiety, Exultation, and the Body as an Empty Signifier in Recessional Japan

by Rachel Heng

In March 1995, members of “new religious group” Aum Shinrikyō released sarin gas, an agent used in chemical warfare, on Tokyo subway lines at the peak of rush hour, in an act of brutal domestic terrorism. Two years later, a 14-year-old boy only identified by the authorities as Shonen A (“Youth A”) decapitated a younger boy with a hand saw and left his head in front of a school gate with a note in its mouth, challenging the police to “a game.” Both events shocked recessionary and politically-fraught Japan, being threats that came from within the country itself, raising questions about how to understand these acts of apparently unprovoked violence. This paper suggests that one way is to read them as the explosive culmination of a fascination with empty signifiers produced by and assimilated into a late-capitalist society driven by a highly developed sign economy. In these acts of violence, the human body in its supposedly self-evident mortality comes to be the most important signifier of all. They display a fascination with the empty signifier that ultimately erupts in these somewhat morbidly experimental acts of violence. This notion of the body as the site of the empty signifier is one of the central foci in the film *Ghost In The Shell* (1995), a mass cultural product that at once fears and celebrates this absence, a tension that resonates within the Aum Shinrikyo and Shonen A events. Though the end of the film seems to be an empowering affirmation of human autonomy in shaping and choosing identity and thus meaning that is signified, its conclusion nevertheless necessitates destruction for renewal, the very problem that enacts itself in real life when Aum Shinrikyō and Shōnen A attempt to probe the depths of the empty signifier.

The breakdown of the established signifying chain that we read in the Shonen A killings and the sarin gas attacks suggest a crisis of signification that can be linked to the economic and socio-political conditions of recessionary Japan. After World War II, Japan was reconstituted as an artificial, inadequate nation-state, having a U.S.-imposed constitution at its core and the enduringly symbolic figurehead of the emperor etched into its national consciousness. In her paper “Revenge and Recapitulation in Recessional Japan,” Marilyn Ivy proposes that the new nation-state of Japan was “one not fully empowered to enact the prerogatives of nation-statehood except by other means. Those means were, of course, economic, and the economic miracle would henceforth function as the stand-in for Japan” (Ivy, 819). Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, for instance, lays out the previously highly aggressive nation’s renunciation of war, disallowing the country from maintaining any kind of

military power whatsoever, be it land, sea, or air forces. An improperly constituted nation-state deprived of the usual means of dominance, Japan turned to economic development to rebuild its shattered national pride.

Similarly, Yumiko Iida, in her paper "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s," discusses the economic and political conditions that produce and reinforce the phenomena of empty signifiers, suggesting that political culture in the second half of the twentieth century was unexciting, disappointing and failed to live up to the expectations of the people. She comments: "Following that collapse, Japanese society first witnessed the opening of a politicospiritual void, followed by a flood of commercial signs to fill that vacuum" (Iida, 435-436). The avid consumption of commercial signs in a late-capitalist economy created a sense of increasing virtuality; the concept of objects and the image that products conferred or possessed were consumed instead of the products themselves. Significantly, Iida associates the burgeoning sign economy as a reaction to the "politicospiritual void," that is, a desire in the 1970s to define Japanese identity by economic success rather than political ideologies that were absent or tenuous, as Ivy points out. In a recessionary period, then, this anxiety was amplified. So while people were still steeped in the way of life produced by the sign economy that burgeoned before the 1990s, an era when "the commodification and consumption of one's own body has become a pleasurable activity in itself" (Iida, 434), even the tenuous foundations of meaning and justification that this way of life was based on, that is, economic success to fill a socio-political void, were demolished in the economic recession, leaving only the empty signifiers of an absent economic success: abandoned theme parks that failed in the 1990s, abandoned urban and industrial sprawl, etc. The problem was that the "fantasia of ever-proliferating consumer signifiers could be accommodated, could be enjoyed, as long as it still signified success. When economic success could no longer stand in the position of the signified of last resort, then proliferation became increasingly unbearable" (Ivy, 820). The anxiety of the empty signifier on a national level can be read as transposed onto the particular lives of Shōnen A and Aum cult members, who, in a world where the body itself is commodified, felt their own subjectivities compromised and absent. This state of absence produced by the empty signifier of the commodified human body leads to the schizophrenic effect of anxiety and exultation, dual drivers of the violent impulse.

Shōnen A's first act of violence was to attack two young girls with hammers, killing one of them. His second was even more disturbing: strangling a younger boy and beheading him with a hand saw, leaving the severed and mutilated head in front of his school gate with a note stuffed in its mouth. Newspapers reported that he had displayed violent tendencies before, mutilating and killing cats, frogs and birds. There is a great temptation to dismiss him as an aberration of nature, or the product of overexposure to violent and inappropriate media (thousands of comic books and pornographic videos were found in his room). Yet the actions as explained by the youth himself in court and from his diary entries point at something more intriguing. On March 16, after the attacks on the two girls, he wrote in his diary: "I carried out sacred experiments today to confirm how fragile human beings are...I brought

the hammer down, when the girl turned to face me. I think I hit her a few times but I was too excited to remember." That these were "sacred experiments" suggests a kind of morbid, scientific curiosity to the acts. These were not random or explosive acts of passionate violence. Rather, they seem almost ritualistic. Iida attributes his actions to

the difficulties of constituting the self and workable linkages between the self and the world, the poverty of the immediate experience of the living body, and the increasing dominance of an enlarged self-consciousness that no longer has a clear sense of the border between inside and outside...

...an acute sense of doubt about the self-evident fact of life, and even less evident fact of death, a doubt that seems to have deeply troubled and fascinated the boy. (Iida, 444, 446)

Her explanation points to a fundamental sense of detachment and alienation on the part of Shōnen A with regard to the human body, that of his own and of others as well. The body becomes an empty vehicle, one that is meant to be synonymous with mortality and human subjectivity but somehow becomes drained of its signified meaning. It is this profound sense of doubt about the connection between the physical existence of the living human body and supposedly self-evident nature of life that motivates Shōnen A to kill.

Fredric Jameson's notion of "the breakdown of the signifying chain" in his article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" is perhaps useful in analyzing the motivations that Iida suggests lie behind the Shōnen A murders. He describes the signified as more than objective meaning or content, being instead the "meaning-effect," that has the illusion of existing objectively but is rather defined by the relationships that exists within a network of signifiers. It is the breakdown of this relationship, the "signifying chain," that results in schizophrenia "in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (Jameson, 72). He explains,

With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words, of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time...This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect, here described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity. (Jameson, 72-73)

For Shōnen A then, the human body becomes one of these pure material Signifiers, unrelated to anything he can empirically experience or relate to. It is "by razing this illusionary system of mediation and splitting meaning from objects [that] the boy seems to have attempted to view the world from a point of view outside the realm of human constructions, a world of sheer material" (Iida, 446). This is a world of unrelated, abstract, and purely material signifiers. In perceiving the troubling absence of a supposedly signified referent, that is human life and subjectivity, Shōnen A sought to

destroy the apparently empty signifier itself, the human body, in order to somehow grasp this elusive connection through its annihilation. Just as Iida suggests, Shōnen As “anxiety about the artificiality of the world became compelling” (Iida, 446), producing an urge to destroy it in order to reveal the Real. That this anxiety is the reason for his violent murders ties in with the “heightened intensity” of the conception of the human body as a purely material, liberated signifier; we recognize at once in Iida’s “acute sense of doubt” a sort of panic or dread that can be read as Jameson’s identification of “the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality.”

Yet it seems that this dread or sense of doubt is not the only impulse behind the murders. Shōnen A reveals in his threat letter to the *Kobe Newspaper*:

Thinking “I’ll do it,” I was able to enjoy killing someone, alone, without anyone noticing it. The fact that I’ve purposely gathered the attention of the public is that I’d at least like to have my self recognized as a real, living human being, even if only within the fantasies of all of you – I, who until now, and from now on, continue a transparent existence. (Ivy, 830)

The notion of his “transparent existence” supports the reading of his motivations as a sense of anxiety and dread about the empty signifier of the human body in relation to subjective experience, yet simultaneously, one cannot help but notice the enjoyment of the act of killing itself that Shōnen A describes. He writes in the note stuffed into his victim’s severed head: “I enjoy killing so much I can’t stand it.” This disturbing expression of violence points to the flipside of the purely material, empty signifier: Jameson’s “euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity.” Shōnen A kills with a kind of curious, experimental relish and morbid enjoyment. Above all he enjoys what he does; it is after all a “game” that he proposes in the note he leaves in the mouth of his victim’s severed head. It is at once the combination of and the tension between the negative anxiety and positive euphoria produced by the empty signifier of the human body upon the breakdown of the signifying chain that are the catalysts for Shōnen As explosive violence.

Interestingly, Shōnen A invents a god, “Bamoidooki,” in whose name he carries out the murders. He actively creates his own signifier, the proper name of the god, to represent the impulse or purpose that drives his killings. The act of the sacred experiment itself necessitates a name, an entity, a signifier to denote and concretize the unique human subjectivity that motivates it. In this way, Shōnen A creates meaning; he demonstrates a fascination with the signifier and the signified meaning-effect, and just as he experiments destructively with the seemingly empty signifier of the human body through murder, he experiments constructively with the creation of an abstract concept through the concrete signifier of a named god. We see the same desire to understand the link between meaning and its signifier, to grasp the connection between the solidity of names and objects and the subjectivity or meanings that they are bound to. The creative process of naming, the autonomous formation of a signifier, suggests a kind of joyous fascination produced by the unlimited potential of the blank slate, that is, the world of empty, purely material signifiers. This creative fascination can be read perhaps, once again, as a kind of “euphoria, the high, the

intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity.”

Behind the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attacks we find a similar combination of opposing forces – anxiety and euphoria – in relation to the empty signifier of the human body. The group was founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984 as a religious movement but only gained international notoriety in 1995 with the sarin gas attacks. Aum Shinrikyō’s teachings were based on a patchwork of yoga, Buddhism and Christianity. Asahara published a book in 1992 identifying himself as “Christ” and predicting nuclear “Armageddon,” in which the world would end as a result of World War III and only the members of Aum Shinrikyō would be spared. Iida points out that most of the intelligent and accomplished people who joined the cult explained their reasons for joining “in terms of satisfying an emotional lack” or “the attraction of living a communal life with those who shared the same beliefs, often as a substitute for their broken families” (Iida, 441). Particularly, she gives the example of a female ex-student who described her state of lack as a feeling of “floating 10 cm above the ground” (Iida, 442). These members experience a sense of disconnectedness, a breakdown of the signifying chain of social harmony and meaning. Their detached experience of daily life, of floating above the ground, can be linked to Shōnen A’s feeling of leading a transparent existence. While explaining her reasons for joining the cult, one member of Aum, Miyuki Kanda, describes her “mystical experiences,” dreams that were detailed and distinct:

It was different from what you usually call dreams. Everything was extremely realistic. It would have been easier if you could make a clear-cut distinction, and say, “Okay, this is a dream and isn’t the same as reality,” but things very much like those in reality appeared in my dreams and confused me. “Is this reality? Or isn’t it?” Gradually I couldn’t distinguish between the two, or maybe I should say that my dreams became more real than reality. This bothered me. “So what is reality?” I asked myself. (Murakami, 305)

Reality is indistinguishable from dreams, the supposedly self-evident fact of life doubtful. Everyday experience is alienated, detached, consisting of empty signifiers; likewise, symbols of social meaning and unity such as that of the family unit are emptied of their supposed meaning. Cult members sought to perfect themselves through asceticism, obsessed with transforming themselves into higher, evolved, transformed beings. We see in this desire an obsession with mortality, the body, humanness, and what it means, an obsession that manifests itself in the cult’s human experimentation and brainwave ‘harvesting,’ suggesting an anxiety about imperfection and lack.

Yet at the same time we see a similar joyous exultation of the cult in their perceived world of empty and disconnected signifiers; humans were experimented on with the same morbid relish that Shōnen A demonstrated in his acts of murder, that is, a desire to understand and grasp solidly the concept of human mortality itself. Going even further than Shōnen A, the human body was not the only signifier that the cult manipulated and experimented with; Aum’s entire ideology is based on the hodgepodge amalgamation of unrelated religious symbols and narratives, that

is, signifiers snatched out of context and deprived of their meaning, given instead new signification within the framework of Aum's philosophy. This philosophy consisted of "an eclectic combination of religious icons and spiritual ideas based on a New Age blend of Tibetan Buddhism, yoga, and occult mysticism combined with modern medicine, a Hindu pantheon of gods, and notions of Christian apocalypse," (Iida, 440) blended with a scientific hyper-rationality and propagated through the medium of comic books published by the cult. Aum thus appropriated various signifiers and detached them from their referent meanings, creating and experimenting with new ones. Once again, this suggests "euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity." Thus Aum demonstrates similarly the opposing forces of anxiety about a lack and euphoria from this very emptiness that result in explosive destructiveness; in this case, the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995. In their ecstatic proclamations of apocalypse and world renewal the cult demonstrated a similar exultation in destruction as Shōnen As expressed joy for killing; while the latter kills to deconstruct, reconstruct, and thus grasp the link between the empty signifier of the human body and human subjectivity itself, the former destroy in order to deconstruct and reconstruct the empty Signifiers of social order itself. That is, apocalyptic world renewal suggests a reforming of the signifying chain; a reattachment of meaning-effects to the signifiers of social and thus human existence much in the same way Aum reattaches new meaning-effects to the religious icons they appropriate. The condition of absence produced by the proliferation of empty signifiers produces the dual schizophrenic effect of anxiety and exultation, an explosive impulse that simultaneously fears and desires the breakdown of the signifying chain of human meaning embodied by physical existence, producing the utopian wish for renewal and regeneration, a wish that seems to be fulfilled in the film *Ghost In The Shell* (1995).

The film is set in 2029, when people's minds are connected to one another directly by a global electronic network. The main character is Major Motoko Kusanagi, known simply as "the Major." A police officer with an enhanced cyborg body, she leads the investigation to arrest the Puppet Master, an elite and elusive hacker. Eventually she finds that the Puppet Master hacks human minds and leaves victims with implanted fake memories in order to control them. The Major comes to question her own existence as an artificial construct and begins to feel a strange sense of connection with the Puppet Master. As the investigation goes on, she learns that the Puppet Master is also looking for her. Similar to the real-life events of Shōnen A and Aum Shinrikyō, a kind of simultaneous anxiety and exultation in the empty signifier of the human body in particular can be traced in the world of *Ghost In The Shell*. The title sequence near the start of the film features a female cyborg body being 'born.' The first image of the body confronting the viewers focuses on the machinery that forms the head of the cyborg, cutting to a holographic image of the brain. The sequence goes on to show the complex intertwining of biological muscle and artificial machinery laid bare, ending with the cyborg emerging from water, the layer over her skin peeling off to reveal a body that looks completely human and natural. This opening sequence highlights the problematic relationship between the signifier and the signified meaning-effect, bringing to our attention that this is a world where

human bodies are modified with advanced technology, a world in which a manufactured robot with artificial intelligence is barely distinguishable from a human whose body parts, even brain, have been enhanced with technology. The Major pensively questions this notion in the boat scene with fellow police officer Batou; she asks him curiously how much of his body is original, wondering herself what it means to be human with a mechanized body and enhanced brain processes. Not only the external, objective signifier – the physical body – of human identity and subjectivity is warped, but the signified meaning-effect itself is alienated from its original self-evident wholeness: consciousness and thought processes, inextricably linked to subjectivity and human individuality, are themselves altered and enhanced.

The title sequence that highlights the machinery underneath a completely natural-looking human body probes this disconnect; the original signifier of humanness, the organic human body, is drained of its original meaning. Unique human subjectivity is no longer a self-evident fact indicated by the signifier of the physical body and its processes. This is a world where memories can be manufactured; for instance, we see the garbage collector whose mind has been hacked by the Puppet Master and has false memories of a non-existent family. Human subjectivity itself is altered through the manipulation of the physical, by enhancing and altering biochemical properties of the human brain. By changing the signifier of the human body, the signified meaning-effect of human subjectivity itself is altered and rendered uncertain.

Throughout the film, the Major expresses anxiety about this uncertainty. She questions Batou about how she knows she has a “ghost,” that is, unique human consciousness or a soul, and not simply false memories invented by someone. The signifier of the human body no longer provides a guarantee of its original signified meaning-effect. This produces Jameson and Iida’s “anxiety about loss of reality” and “acute sense of doubt” that is reflected in the Major’s questioning of her own humanity and her affinity with Project 2501, a manufactured robot with the semblance of a “ghost,” that is, individual human consciousness. This is echoed in the scene where the Major takes a boat ride through the city and sees someone in an office who looks exactly like her. In a world where human bodies, signifiers, are indistinguishable from each other and from robots, the signified meaning-effect of unique human subjectivity is no longer confidently grasped. This results in Jameson’s notion of the “purely material signifier” that comes before the subject with “heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect.” This effect is produced in the scene where the Major wanders through the city and we see it through her eyes. The sequence of scenes that cut from one image of the city to another suggests Jameson’s notion of schizophrenia; the sequence seems to be questioning the connection between the places and people in the city that it portrays. The sequence contains no commentary or plot action, only ritualistic background music. This portrays a kind of disengagement on the part of the Major in viewing the city; she is not actively involved with it, but observing from a distance in an almost cinematic manner, and only the outward materiality of these objects, people, and places is evoked. They become purely material signifiers that the viewer perceives as fragmented images, “[Signifiers] in isolation” (Jameson, 73), forming “a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers” (Jameson,

72). This idea is reinforced by the multitude of signboards we see in the scenes, lined up haphazardly along streets, over the river, behind and in front of the Major. In this scene we have an accumulation of symbols, words, and images on signboards that represent the solid, material signifier. Their sheer abundance suggests a kind of overwhelming chaos, where the confusion of purely material signifiers produces an anxiety about the lack of any graspable meaning.

Yet at the same time, we see a certain exultation in this world of empty signifiers. The Major enjoys diving in the river despite the fact that she could sink and die if her heavy robotic body's floaters fail, a sort of ecstatic challenge to the near immortality of her body. She relishes the non-human aspect of her body as much as it perturbs her. The scene where she fights the garbage collector (who is under the control of the Puppet Master), set against a background replete with signboards and the city skyline, is one that celebrates the violence the Major is capable of thanks to her modified body. As she is invisible, cloaked by thermo-optic camouflage, we see only the man she is attacking, who spirals in a series of graceful somersaults and flips as he is tossed around by the Major. The scenes are highly stylized and almost beautiful, with the graceful arching of water droplets indicating the Major's invisible, brutal kicks and punches, set against a geometric, orderly tessellation of buildings and signboards. The circular rippling and arching of the water, together with the seemingly weightless movements of the man's body that is being invisibly attacked, have an undeniably graceful quality to it, and the scene is visually stunning. Violence then becomes an aesthetic event, suggesting almost ecstatic celebration and exultation in the Major's non-humanness. The same technology that leads to ambiguity and lack with regard to the signified meaning-effect of human subjectivity by transforming the signifier of the body also leads to a fascinated delight in power. Finally, at the end of the film, the Major merges with the Puppet Master to form a new being that is neither the former nor the latter. Its final conclusion is the Major's lines: "Where does the newborn go from here? The Net is vast and infinite." The film thus ends with a kind of affirmation: one exults in the site of lack because of its limitless possibilities for recreation, renewal, and invention. *Ghost In The Shell* thus expresses the duality between anxiety and exultation produced by the empty signifier of the human body, an idea materialised and literalized in the symbol of the cyborg body itself.

In the film, signifiers are emptied of their original, reassuring meaning-effect through replication, alteration, and manipulation of the signifiers themselves, just as the conditions of recession in Japan of the early 1990s empty the previously amassed consumer signifiers of their meaning-effect, the reassuring narrative of economic success. The "self-identification of Japan with economic prosperity alone" (Ivy, 819) means that the breakdown of this economic narrative is no less than a breakdown of the prevailing narrative of national identity. In the face of such a breakdown come the dual instincts of anxiety and exultation, a tension which produces the utopian wish of regeneration and renewal in the site of a lack. This utopian wish that is suggested in the fantasy of mass-cultural production *Ghost in the Shell* is perhaps what drives both Aum Shinrikyō and Shōnen A – a wish that, while slightly more tenable in anime, only leads to destruction and breakdown in real life. 

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Picturing China

Reading Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* and *Book from the Ground*

by Nicholas Y. H. Wong

Myth, indeed, must be included in a general theory of language, of writing, of the signifier, and this theory, resting on the formulations of ethnology, psychoanalysis, semiology and ideological analysis must widen its object so as to take in the sentence or, better, to take in sentences...the mythical is present everywhere sentences are turned, stories told...all utterances which could be brought together under the Lacanian concept of the imaginary.

Barthes, "Change the Object Itself," 169

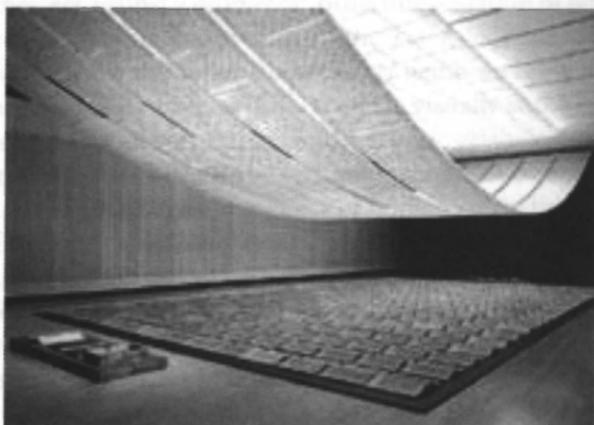


Fig. 1: Xu Bing's "Book from the Sky" (1987-91). Ink on paper. Photograph courtesy of booklyn.org

Sky to Ground: Perfect Mirror Image?

Following the 2009 publication of *Tianshu: Passages in the Making of a Book*,¹ a groundbreaking collection of essays examining the bibliographic and technical details of *Book from the Sky* (1987-91), it seems that critics have exhausted their methods of reading the work through the angles of print culture, new media, art history, rules of orthography and calligraphy. In this comparative study of *Book from the Sky* and *Book from the Ground* (2003-ongoing), I turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis as a critical gaze on what it means for Xu Bing, critics, and viewers to take *Book from the Ground* as a mirror image to *Book from the Sky*. Emerging from this dialectical reading of the works is my secondary aim to uncover

Xu Bing's artworks as potential sites of cultural translation.

One familiar reading of Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* is its resistance to ideology, by which I mean the way in which language is controlled in the hands of the political elite. The final installation piece seems an artistic remake of cultural authority (Fig. 1): four thousand characters were carved onto wooden blocks and later printed onto numerous volumes, posters and hanging scrolls according to traditional techniques. Yet, on closer look, critics and viewers recognize that the Chinese characters were slightly altered so as to be rendered meaningless. According to Martina Koppel-Yang, *Book from the Sky* attacks the redundancy of the signs found in official art and propaganda, embodying what Wang Guanyi calls the "excess of meaning" (*yiyi fanlan*) in the New Wave Art Movement, through the semantic emptiness of the characters.² To any viewer who reads Chinese, the shock of encountering unreadable characters opens a deep crisis in the dispersal of meaning, where the Saussurean relationship between signifier and signified becomes as strained as ever. These 'Chinese' characters no longer have a center – they lack referential privilege and have to rely on other forms of signification, such as the materiality of the work (its appearance as hand-printed books/scrolls and its architectural layout), flying in the face of many theories of truth that are traditionally connected to language. The three title characters, however, conform to the Chinese script (Fig. 2), suggesting that these characters also oppose the absence of signification with their individual parts as the radical/phonetic constituents are somewhat recognizable in form. In other words, these 'Chinese' characters bear an uncanny resemblance to real ones found in the Chinese language, as if they were 'misspelled' with more or less strokes than usual. If *Book from the Sky* is strictly intended as a critique of power, what is the meaning of its counterpart, *Book from the Ground*, that aims at a global, totalized language, a stable relationship between the signifier and the signified?

In his handbook *Picturing Equality: Xu Bing's New Ways of Seeing*, Xu Bing champions *Book from the Ground* as a direct contrast, a move from the crippling illegibility of *Book from the Sky* into "a universal visual language that will be accessible to anyone engaged in modern life."³ The obscure fusion of Chinese artistic traditions and Western conceptual art that produced the "illegible site of mystery" in *Book from the Sky* would finally give way to a site of global capitalism, whose language *Book from the Ground* borrows to "transcend the predicament of culture."⁴ Begun in 2003, *Book from the Ground* refers to the novel that Xu Bing writes solely based on icons drawn from "pre-existing sources such as public information systems and corporate logos," which are also collated into "a 'font library' computer program (Fig. 3) to accompany the book."⁵ Ultimately, the goal is to create a single script that uses image recognition as a pragmatic and utopian tool of communication, which claims to increase literacy and transcend culture. However, seven years in the making, and *Book from the Ground* has run aground with material difficulties. According to Jesse Coffino-Greenberg, Xu Bing's assistant, the studio in Brooklyn, New York, makes up for the lack of pre-existing signifiers in *Book from the Ground* by inventing new ones which bear an uncanny resemblance to the old, so that Xu Bing can further probe the expressivity of the icon and complete the novel.⁶ In this case, just how viable is Xu Bing's struggle for a democratic space that renders cultural translation unnecessary,

and how far can one recall Xu Bing's intention for a dialectical reading of *Book from the Sky* and *Book from the Ground* before the underlying assumption of the pictorial turn⁷ – the primacy of image over text in present times – turns upon itself?



Fig. 2: Xu Bing. 1987-1991. "Book from the Sky." Ink on paper.

Perhaps Xu Bing is aware of the porous boundaries between theory and practice, vision and execution when *Book from the Ground* takes *Book from the Sky* as its mirror image. Sky and ground become diametrically opposed, yet this easy structuring belies a radically different material approach in creating both works. Simply put, *Book from the Sky* uses carved typesetting blocks and archaic Chinese block printing techniques with the usual loaded symbol of panels and scrolls, while *Book from the Ground* purports to use universal signage from contemporary times. One is unintelligible, while the other appears to be a universal code. Yet in a sense, both works serve as the perfect visual example of the poststructuralist rupture of neat, self-contained oppositional concepts – Xu Bing's binary of "ground" and "sky" critiques itself through radical internal differences. Reading against the grain, one could definitely take *Book from the Sky* as Lévi-Strauss's *bricoleur* who uses "instruments he finds at his disposition around him," resulting in the work's logically heterogeneous, Psalmanazar-like patchwork of strokes,⁸ while *Book from the Ground*, despite its aim of a "finite discourse," is based on the *bricolage* of universal icons. It partakes in the myth of the *engineer*,⁹ whose invisible hand mends the work's indeterminate use of grammar in between icons thanks to culture-specific notions of image and language. *Book from the Ground* hence derives its meaning from *Book from the Sky*, and its minimal use of signifiers rivals the excessive use of signifiers in the latter. However, *Book from the Ground* also gestures toward a lack of the center – there is the "play," using Derrida's term. Despite the determinate meanings assigned to particular icons, there is no fixed way of reading the syntagmatic relation of icons.¹⁰ Given the critical difference within just one category, the simultaneous need to find common ground as well as difference between the binary concepts of sky and ground, text and image, illegibility and legibility in both works, becomes significant.

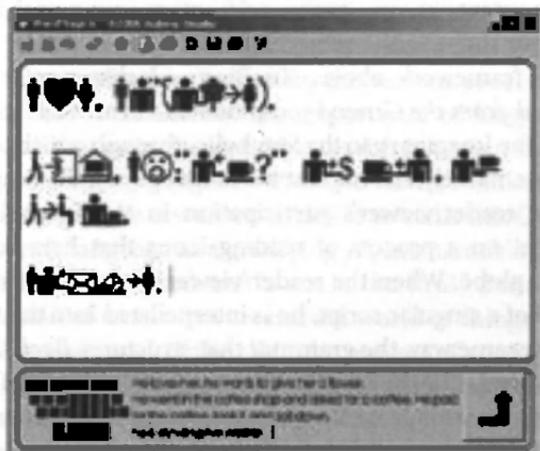


Fig. 3: Screenshot of Xu Bing's Word Magick Computer Program that can translate text into a "language of icons." Photograph Courtesy of Spencer Museum of Art.

Viewer as Subject: Between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in Book from the Ground

Whose mirror does *Book from the Ground* use when it takes *Book from the Sky* as its image? Who does the looking and where does one look in the mirror for its desired image? In the following sections, I read the problematic of the icon in *Book from the Ground* as the focal point of the viewer's eye in relation to the formation of "I" as subject. To briefly outline Lacan's three orders of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, I borrow the language of Saussure (signifier/signified) and Jakobson (metaphor/metonymy). In the Symbolic order, it is the differences between signifiers that determine their meanings, linked to the metaphorical use of language, where something stands in for the other and excludes it. In the Imaginary order, it is identification with the signified and signification that structures the relations of the subject's desire, linked to the metonymic use of language, where something stands in proximate and inclusive relation to the other. As for the Real, it exists outside of language and cultural codes, and hence is exterior to both the Imaginary and the Symbolic, fully resisting symbolization and standing for the impossible. For the purpose of my argument, I focus on Lacan's idea of the "mirror stage," in which he proposes how the "I" is formed through identification with one's own image or in relation to others in the Imaginary order, and later, through language found in the Symbolic order.¹¹ Lacan proposes that human infants enter a stage in which they identify with external images of the body, as reflected in a mirror for example, that leads to the mental representation of an "I." This mirror image of a unified body, or *imago*, allows the infant to establish a relation to its world, wherein the "ideal-I" contrasts with the infant's physically weak and fragmented body. For Lacan, it is important that the "mirror stage" establishes the "I" as a fictional projection of subjective unity dependent on visual images of external objects and others that one encounters in the world. This identification with an Other is further enacted

in sociolinguistic contexts as one grows and enters into social relations through language, which gives shape to the subject's personality.

Using the framework above, Xu Bing's idealist project of transcending culture through *Book from the Ground* recapitulates the move of its reader/viewer as infant subject from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, through which one constitutes the "I" through an Other, namely, the hegemonic language of global capitalism. Literacy, in this case, is the reader/viewer's participation in the Symbolic and monetary economy, dependent on a process of reading icons that have supposedly gained currency across the globe. When the reader/viewer identifies, at a mirror stage-like level, with the ideal of a singular script, he is interpellated into the Symbolic order of global capital. In the same way, the grammar that structures *Book from the Ground* is assumed to be universal, like the brief iconographical 'sentence' of Wrigley chewing gums. The left-to-right arrangement of icons in sentences (generally of a subject-verb-object order) gestures towards an easy syntax, and the use of graphemes, for example, the arrow and the thinking bubble, and even the way Xu Bing incorporates objects into predicate glyphs, hint at the fluency of a universal grammar that is accessible to any reader/viewer.

However, I argue that the viewer's failure to read *Book from the Ground* as one would read a text can be attributed to Xu Bing's assumption that his concatenation of 'iconic' sentences in a sustained narrative is equally and immediately legible as simple series. Even as one attempts to use the Symbolic to transcend this deadening fixation with the Imaginary by transforming the icons into meaningful words, *Book from the Ground* remains trapped in its Chinese language 'model' of image-making, subverting any easy attempt to solve the differences between signifiers in the sentences of the text. The work becomes a staging ground for the Lacanian schizophrenic who is unable to unify his biographical experience and psychic life due to the failure of sentences. Soon, the work is bound to fail as a socially communicative machine, where some icons stand rudely without comprehension, prompting an endless slide along the chain of 'signifier'-icons. Lacan would affirm that the confusion of grammar at the sentential level of *Book from the Ground* reveals a breakdown in the signifying chain, since the encounter of the work is tied to the arduous task of furnishing links between the icons, where the viewer as subject moves "from signifier to signifier... that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves."¹² Perhaps Barthes' theoretical connection between sentence and the Imaginary has its token applicability in *Book from the Ground*. Where one encounters the sentence, it is always naïve and intuitive, and in the Imaginary order, one takes solace in the false sense of mastery and comprehension over the narrative. As in the mirror-stage that is associated with the Imaginary, the viewer of *Book from the Ground* constitutes the Real in the false images of the icons and settles for an incomplete meaning that preserves oneself as a viewer. In reading icons that seem to have direct meanings, the viewer might feel somewhat accomplished, since he does not experience the same frustration in encountering the nonsense 'Chinese' characters in *Book from the Sky*. In other words, even if the "schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers"¹³ and the viewer misrecognizes the Real in the Imaginary of signifieds, his narcissism

is made understandable through *Book from the Ground*.¹⁴

As seen, *Book from the Ground* fails to inspire an organizing vocabulary in the Symbolic realm of the signifiers given the various processes of reading and (mis)identifying in the work. Clearly, the importance of language in structuring experience and socializing us in the world bears with it its own shortcomings – pure language, as in Saussure’s *langue*, is not within the viewer’s individual control, but is always anterior. In directing its unconscious desire towards this Other, *Book from the Ground* aspires towards language as a gratifying yet unattainable form of reality. The Symbolic chain of signifiers introduces “a cut in the Real” during the signification process: “it is the world of words that creates the world of things – things originally confused in the “here and now” of the all in the process of coming into being.”¹⁵ Yet to enter language, Lacan argues that we are cut off from the Real, that inaccessible realm which is always out of the reach of signification, outside the Symbolic order. Hence, in interposing Lacan with *Book from the Ground*, any project that seeks to transcend culture on the basis of language is an inescapable act, but also one doomed to failure.



Fig. 4: Examples of icons created by Xu Bing based on the system of image recognition in the Chinese language. Courtesy of ArtAsia Pacific Magazine.

Picturing Chinese: Image Recognition and Ordinary Language

What does Barthes mean when he proposes to read sentences using Lacan’s concept of the Imaginary? If all sentences form the basis of narratives, how does Xu Bing’s *Book from the Ground* testify to the importance of Lacan’s linking of sentences to the Imaginary, and by extension, Xu Bing’s ambition to link language and the construction of the self in the social?

In particular, I turn to Roland Barthes’ essay, “Change the Object Itself,” which suggests an alternative critical approach with regard to the explosion of signifiers in Xu Bing’s iconographic novel. He argues for a new semiology that shifts its operational concepts from “sign, signifier, signified and connotation” to “citation, reference and stereotype,” since myth breaks down, leaving in its wake the mythical, hence blurring the separation of “the signifier from the signified, the ideological from the phraseological,” where signifieds are transformed “into new signifiers, infinitely citing one another, nothing come to a halt.”¹⁶ As Hubert Damisch notes, the icons collected in *Book from the Ground* should not be treated as a “signifier,” but if needs be, it is a “citation,” given its plagiarized origin in the global economy of signs, where the boundaries between the signifier and the signified overlap.¹⁷ Does the icon contain both the signifier and the signified in a self-sustaining loop of signification? And if one were to read and decipher *Book from the Ground* aloud, will the enunciated words take on the role as “signified” in relation to the “signifier”

of the visual icon? Clearly, such an inversion explodes the binary distinction made in Saussurian linguistics, begging the need for a different metalanguage that examines the icon beyond the level of the text.

So how can we classify the icon in *Book from the Ground*? Is it a pictorial image? Xu Bing claims that the developments of our material world have fundamentally reversed our primary modes of reading from phono-semantic writing back to image: “today’s ‘big village’ has reignited the historical process of early linguistic development, beginning again with pictographs.”¹⁸ It is no surprise when Xu Bing cites French thinker Jean Douet’s essay, “Proposal to the King for a Universal Script, with Admirable Results, Very Useful to Everyone on Earth,” for its proposal to use Chinese as a “potential model for an international language.” Yet according to Douet, the “universal script” is hardly limited to “the form of Chinese characters per se,” but a potential “system of recognition upon which the Chinese language is based.”¹⁹ Curiously, Xu Bing endorses what Douet claims as the imagistic quality of Chinese writing, bringing to mind American Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa’s productive misreading of Chinese characters as comprising mainly pictographs or ideographs (see Fig. 4) and grammatical classes are claimed to be derived from verbs, making the sentences transitive and thereby reflecting nature in constant flux.²⁰ Given that the vast majority of Chinese characters originated as phono-semantic compounds²¹ with no evidence that they are intended to be understood as images, Xu Bing’s professed logic of the image is dangerous. In line with his allegiance and differing interests in both works of art, *Book from the Ground* ironically becomes the ideal expression of the image that traces its roots in the “system of recognition” when reading a Chinese character. *Book from the Sky*, which literally mimics the ‘form’ of the Chinese character, inverts itself into a collection of non-images – while they resemble its ‘form,’ the distorted ‘Chinese’ characters are not based on Xu Bing’s purported “system of recognition upon which the Chinese language is based.”

As we discover cracks in Xu Bing’s binary distinctions of image and text, there is also little resistance in reading the icon in *Book from the Ground* as text. The sentence is abused beyond the brief iconographical “sentence” of Wrigley chewing gums and the like. The parataxis of icons in the novel exposes its deficiency to hold complex grammatical functions, hence making it less amenable for the novel to “narrate a longer story” with cohesion.²² In other words, the visual icon, functioning as substitute for the ‘word’ that is typed into the ‘font library’ computer program, is transplanted into a semblance of a literary text where icons are organized in parataxis, namely, as sentences in the novel. Jakobson’s distinction between *metaphor* and *metonymy* finds neurological evidence in the word-recognition process, and is useful to parsing the similar tension between the *icon* and the *sentence*.²³ Metaphor confounds metonymy, since the syntactic use of icons in *Book from the Ground* comes into conflict with the semantically dense pictorial system of icons.²⁴ As shown in Fig. 5, the play of color and spatial arrangement across the page overcompensate for the confusion of grammar across the concatenation of icons. Yet, the readability of the novel is predicated on the use of the functional sentence and the connection between the signifiers, hence indirectly putting pressure on the self-sufficiency of the icon as mere “citation.” As *Book from the Ground* strives for a language without the cultural

peculiarities of grammar, its arrangement of icons in the form of sentences ironically gestures towards a steady reliance on culture-specific modes of textual organization for structural support.²⁵

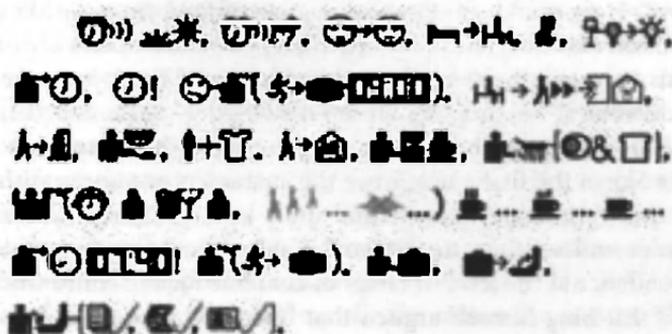


Fig. 5: Xu Bing's *Book from the Ground* (2003-ongoing)

Pre-Mirror Stage: Between the Symbolic and the Real in *Book from the Sky*

In comparison to the subtle workings of Lacan's mirror stage in *Book from the Ground*, its counterpart, *Book from the Sky*, suggests the influence of Lacan's mirror stage from the very first, frustrating encounter. That critics place undue importance on deciphering the illegible characters is telling enough. In fact, *Book from the Sky* was first titled "The Mirror of the World – An Analyzed Reflection of the End of This Century," bringing our psychoanalytic reading of the work back again. As Lacan would diagnose from his account of the mirror-stage, the Chinese-literate viewer of *Book from the Sky* expects meaning, or a "unity in intention," and is plunged into a process of psychosexual development, forced into identifying meaning with the uncanny signs in the Chinese characters. Yet the *specular* I of the viewer, based on pre-oedipal and pre-linguistic visual perception, fails to turn into the *social* I, which is inflected by cultural conventions and norms, because the mirror is already distorted at the mirror-stage.²⁶ The viewer is deprived of an "identification with the other," deprived from the language that initiates one into the social because one cannot even identify with its own false mirror image to exercise libidinal dynamism and create a stable "ideal-I."²⁷ Here, the viewer is not subject to Freud's reality principle that would make him suspend the pleasure of deciphering the empty 'Chinese' signifiers. Rather, he engages in an analogous process of constructing the ego from the mirror-text, forced into an endless *misrecognition* of the Real through the materiality of the nonsense 'Chinese' characters. In teasing out the logic behind each stroke, the Chinese-literate viewer would most likely aim to construct a sense of "reality" in and through language that is at least communicative on the visual level.²⁸ Placed in front of the mirror, this Chinese-literate viewer of *Book from the Sky* is worse off from the viewer of *Book from the Ground*, since the viewer knows from the moment that the characters are not legible Chinese that one cannot attempt to constitute the Real through the false Chinese characters.

Perhaps critics and viewers have hampered their appreciation of *Book from*

the *Sky* by focusing on the nonsense 'Chinese' character as a sign to be deciphered, both in terms of its meaning and its relation to the work. What would happen if the work, as Barthes proposes, "take(s) in sentences...under the Lacanian concept of the imaginary?" How would a theoretical reading of *Book from the Sky* benefit from Barthes' definition of the mythical, in which "everywhere sentences are turned, stories told (emphasis in original)?"²⁹ Any sensible reading of *Book from the Sky* cannot forget its architectural language as an art installation piece, one that transcends grammar and the sentence. The conventional notion of the sentence is absent from *Book from the Sky* in the first place, since the characters are unrecognizable. On its own accord, the work achieves structural unity by organizing itself into Volumes I- IV, with titles and subtitles to the work "laid out coherently in the translation with correspondence at the level of tables of contents for the entire work and for its major parts."³⁰ Xu Bing himself argued that "fascicle numbers and page numbers were rendered with tally marks based on the character zheng," providing the viewer with an identifiable mark of structure that resides in the Symbolic.³¹ Clearly, any reading that privileges the 'Chinese' character in the Imaginary will impoverish the wealth of details found in the Symbolic, as represented by the differentiated elements of the 'Chinese' characters. If the Real is that which exists outside of language, and resists symbolization, can we also think of *Book from the Sky* as a work of art that approaches the realm of the Real?

A New Comparative Literature: Myth and Cultural Translation in Book from the Sky

In viewing *Book from the Sky* as floating between the Symbolic and the Real, I propose the move from Xu Bing's supposedly universal language of global capitalism in *Book from the Ground* to the pre-mirror stage Lacanian subject in *Book from the Sky* as the original site of cultural translation and exchange. *Book from the Sky* does not employ sentences in the grammatical sense but rests on structures of signification outside of language and a physical 'ground' that is both external to *Book from the Ground* and directly functional as a mirror. In Fig. 1, one could look to the intriguing architectural layout of the piece, how the Platonic form of the hanging scrolls is mirrored by its instantiations in the books laid out on the ground. Ehrenpreis corroborates this neatly: "While the text of *Book from the Sky* remained illegible, in subsequent installations, Xu Bing began to emphasize the symbolic aspects of the two key components of the work. The graceful arc of the hanging scrolls calls to mind the Chinese character representing 'sky' and the perfectly square shape of the arrangement of hand-printed books on the floor reproduces the Chinese character representing 'earth.'³² Also, when Xu Bing renamed the work *Book from the Sky* after its critical reception in 1989, he declared that the new title did not simply mean a sacred text. It was a reference to "the patterns left on the skin of a person who has been struck dead by lightning. People looked at these patterns, which were like words written by the sky, and they couldn't understand them."³³ What sustains the idea of myth in *Book from the Sky* is clearly its internal unity despite new critical and artistic readings.

Based on the lack of signification in the 'Chinese' characters, I am inclined

to treat *Book from the Sky* as a peerless work of art, one that 'explains' its characters through a self-sufficient system of characters, with an almost mythic quality of a riddle solving. Yet is *Book of the Sky* a self-referential paradox of 'sky' and 'ground,' in which dialectical meaning emerges only through Xu Bing's revisionist work of *Book from the Ground*, or is it a complete, unified system of its own? To answer this question, one cannot apply the analysis of *Book from the Ground* to its predecessor, since there is no conflict between Jakobson's distinction between metonymy and metaphor, or between the level of sentence (Lacan) and the individual icon (Barthes) due to the lack of signification in the 'Chinese' characters. *Book from the Sky*, as Lydia H. Liu argues in her essay "The Non-Book, or the Play of the Sign," relies on the Saussurian linguistic difference of one stroke, the smallest discrete unit that gives the character its supposed "meaning."³⁴ Ultimately, the lack of signification in the 'Chinese' characters in *Book from the Sky* makes the artwork indecipherable to Chinese and non-Chinese readers alike. In its Symbolic system, the artwork forces both kinds of readers into an extra-linguistic, democratic space of reading its architectural language, for example, of 'sky' and 'ground,' rather than privilege a Chinese reader's knowledge of the Chinese language. One could definitely revise Barthes' ideas and look to mutually incommensurable grounds as in the Lacanian pre-mirror stage, instead of 'language' that *Book from the Ground* unconsciously relies on, to find where "narratives of identification, and all acts of cultural translation" are articulated.³⁵ It is the lack of conventional language in *Book from the Sky* that sets itself apart in this dialectical reading of both artworks. Even when Xu Bing argues that *Book from the Ground* is the way to envision a global, democratic site of cultural exchange, the artwork has to first take *Book from the Sky* as its mirror image in the Lacanian sense and realize its grammatical limitations in order to establish the Symbolic. *Book from the Sky*, contrary to Xu Bing's expectations, is what *Book from the Ground* aspires to but could not be. 

notes

¹ Cayley, John, Xu Bing and others, *Tianshu: Passages in the Making of a Book*, ed. Katherine Spears. Quaritch, London, 2009. For further reading, see *Persistence/Transformation: Text as Image in the Art of Xu Bing*, ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Dora C. Y. Ching, Princeton University Press, 2006.

² For a brief introduction to the art of the Chinese New Wave and its members' experimentation with the semantic emptiness of signs, see Köppel-Yang, Martina. *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*. Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003, p. 26-27.

³ See Ehrenpreis in his essay, "Picturing Equality, Transcending Culture." Ehrenpreis, David and Xu Bing. *Picturing Equality: Xu Bing's New Ways of Seeing*. James Madison University, 2008, p.3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20. "The 'Font Library'/'Word Magick Computer Program is one that translates sentences typed in English into a language of pictograms. On p. 22 of his essay, "Regarding *Book from the Ground*," Xu Bing contrasts the natural, pre-existing and universal aspects of the image in the age of new media to the subjective, invented and personalized writing systems as a basis to launch his project, *Book from the Ground*: "All of these elements are pre-existing. I have only collected and organized them. In certain respects, this language transcends our structures of knowledge and the limitations of geographic and cultural specificity; it reflects the logic of real life and objects themselves rather than any pre-existing text-based knowledge."

⁶ During my visit to the Xu Bing studio in Brooklyn, New York (April 2010), his assistants allowed me to browse the incomplete copy of *Book from the Ground* and observe their job of inventing icons that were eventually incorporated into the novel and the "Font Library"/'Word Magick Computer Program.

⁷ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Picture Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁸ As Lydia H. Liu notes in "The Question of Meaning Value," *Tokens of Exchange*, Duke University Press, 1999, George Psalmanazar's invention of the Formosan Alphabet and his fabricated ethnography in *A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* rely on readily existing, textual sources, such as "contemporary popular travel literature and the Jesuits' accounts of the Orient, including authors such as George Candidius, an early-seventeenth-century Dutch missionary to Taiwan, and the French Jesuit Louis le Comte, who was sent to China in the same year (1688) as Father Fontenay by Louis XIV," p.17.

⁹ See p. 285 of Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Writing and Difference*. Tr. Alan Bass. The University of Chicago Press, 1967. Derrida cites Claude Levi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage* from *The Savage Mind* as a tool of literary criticism and takes apart the binary opposition between engineer and *bricoleur*: "Since Levi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that *bricolage* is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*... every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage* and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs*, then the very idea of *bricolage* is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹¹ For more details on the mirror stage and how the Imaginary is the space of the ego, see Jacques Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experiences" (1949). *Écrits, the First Complete Edition in English*. Tr. Bruce Fink. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1999. p. 75-81.

¹² Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, Durham, 1999, p. 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴ In contrast to the relatively cool reception of *Book from the Ground*, the 1989 exhibition of *Book from the Sky* in Beijing's National Museum, *China/Avant-Garde*, caused Xu Bing to lose favor with the Chinese government. Many official critics have decried him as a "bourgeois liberal" as a result of the work.

¹⁵ See Jacques Lacan's "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" (1953) in *Écrits, the First Complete Edition in English*. Tr. Bruce Fink. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1999. p. 237-265.

¹⁶ Barthes, Roland. "Change the Object Itself." *Image, Music, Text*. Tr. Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang, New York, 1997, p.168.

¹⁷ In the footnotes on p. 16 of his *Picture Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, W.J.T. Mitchell correctly points out the problem of the icon as sign: "This negative version of the pictorial turn was already latent in the realization that a semiotics constructed on the model of the linguistic sign might find itself incapable of dealing with the icon, the sign by resemblance, precisely because (as Damisch notes) 'the icon is not necessarily a sign' (Sebeok, *Tell-Tale Sign*, p. 35)."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3, at 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁰ See Ernest's Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. City Lights Publishers, 2001 and its influence on Ezra Pound's ideogrammic method and the poetic movement of Imagism.

²¹ Also called radical-phonetic characters, which are composed of 'radicals' (that supply meaning) and phonetic complements (that guide the pronunciation). For further reading, see Qiu Xigui's *Chinese Writing*. Tr. Gilbert L. Mattos and Jerry Norman. Early China Special Monograph Series No. 4. Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley (2000).

²² *Ibid.*, 3 at 19.

²³ Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." *Studies on Child Language and Aphasia*. Mouton, 1971. *Metaphor* can be briefly defined as the substitution of one word for another, while *metonymy* involves a linear form of displacement.

²⁴ See Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976.

²⁵ It must be noted that these icons are used in certain fields of production and selected modes of communication. For example, where the viewer must have prior access to the Internet to have come into contact with certain icons. It can also be argued that someone must have invented the symbols before positing their quality as transparent, universal icons. That Xu Bing claims his icons as originally *bricolage* in nature, or, collected from around the world, should not be confused with the capitalist mode of determining what gains currency through widespread use.

²⁶ Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits, the First Complete Edition in English*. Tr. Bruce Fink. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1999. p. 75-81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 at 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 at 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1 at 60.

³² *Ibid.*, 3 at 25. See Endnote 13 in "Regarding *Book from the Ground*."

³³ *Ibid.*, 3 at 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 at 70.

³⁵ Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge Classics, London, New York, 2004, p. 238.



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