

The  
**RUTGERS  
ART  
REVIEW**

*Published by the Graduate Students  
of the Department of Art History*

*Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey*

*Volume 18  
2000*

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ISSN 0194-049X  
Typeset by Brian Clancy*

*Rutgers Art Review*  
Volume 18

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## Acknowledgments

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Among the generous donors listed above, the editorial board of *Rutgers Art Review* extends its particular appreciation to the Graduate Student Association/Graduate Publications Committee, Rutgers University, for its generous subvention towards the publication of this volume. Their continuing financial support has been vital to the success of *RAR*.

In addition, the board is grateful to the extremely cooperative group of outside readers who reviewed manuscripts submitted for this issue. Their critical expertise and advice were invaluable to our selection process.

We also would like to thank Anand Commissiong, Office Director of the Catharine R. Stimpson Graduate Publications Office of Rutgers University, without whose technical assistance this issue could not have been published.

Finally, the editor wishes to express his gratitude on behalf of *RAR*'s entire editorial board for the ongoing support of the faculty of the Department of Art History, Rutgers University, with special thanks to Carla Yanni for her timely, helpful advice, her good humor, and her generous efforts on behalf of the journal.

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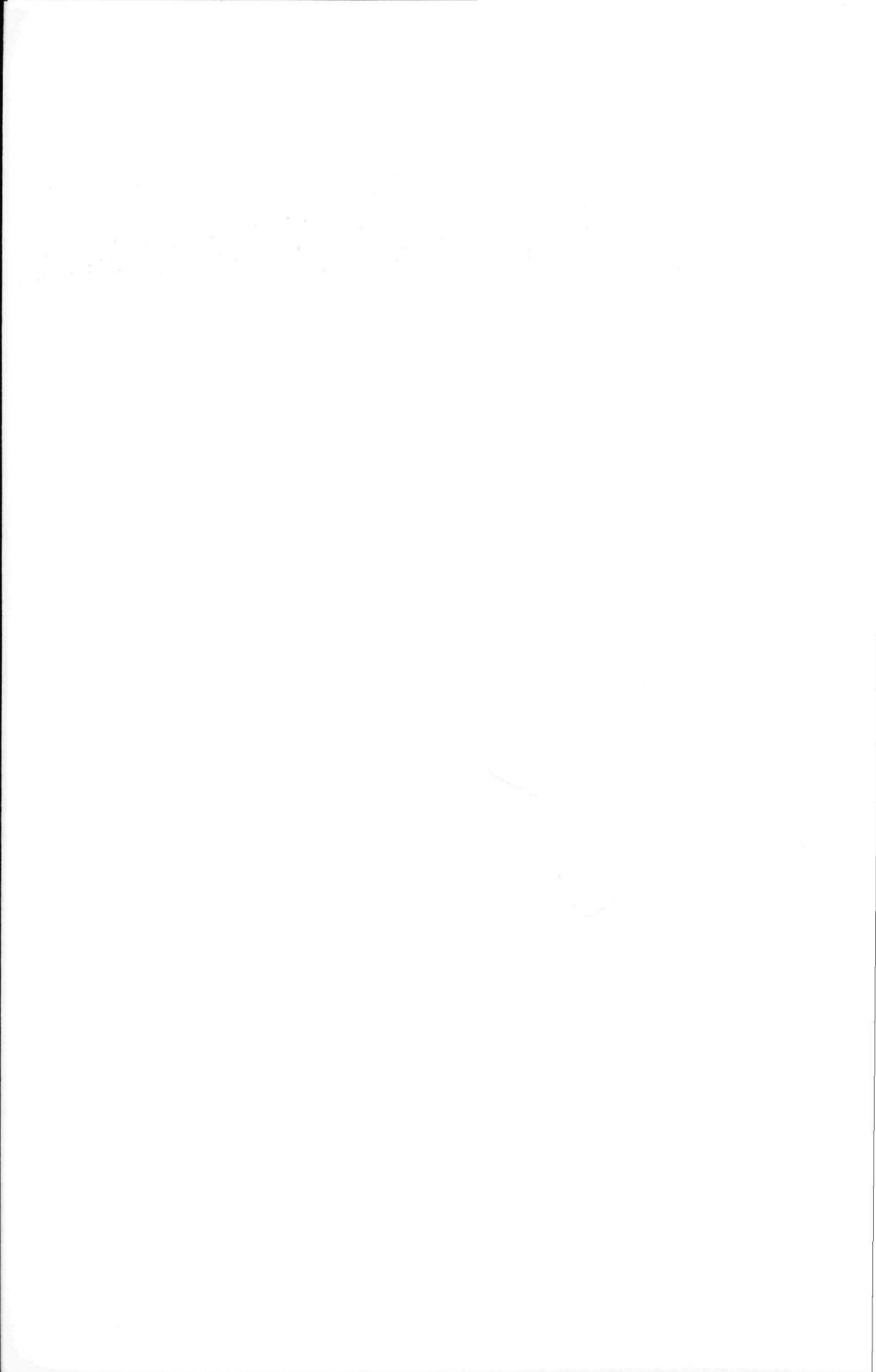
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**Robert Paul Bergman, 1945-1999**  
**A Tribute and Bibliography**



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Rare is the art historian who can successfully pursue a career path as rich and accomplished as that of Robert Paul Bergman. Dr. Bergman excelled both in academe and in the museum field, winning the respect of his colleagues and the gratitude of the multiple communities he inspired as a teacher, administrator, and responsible advocate for the arts.

After completing his Ph.D. at Princeton University, Dr. Bergman began his career as a full-time educator, teaching in the art history departments of some of the nation's most prestigious universities. First at Lincoln University (Visiting Instructor, 1968-1969) and the University of Rochester (Assistant Professor, 1971-1972), and later at Princeton (Assistant Professor, 1972-1976) and Harvard (Associate Professor, 1976-1981), he distinguished himself as a dedicated teacher. From the start of his university career he assumed serious administrative tasks as well, serving as Director of Undergraduate Studies at Princeton (1972-1975) and Director of Graduate Programs at Harvard (1980-1981).

From 1981 until his death in May 1999, Dr. Bergman took on the daunting field of museum administration, first as Director of the Walters Art Gallery (1981-1993) and then at the Cleveland Museum of Art (1993-1999). He continued to teach during these two directorships through adjunct appointments at Johns Hopkins and Case Western Reserve Universities. Among his many accomplishments during these years was the leadership of several professional associations; he served as Chairman of the Board of the American Association of Museums (1996-1998), President of the American Association of Museum Directors (1992-1993), and Chairman of the Board of the American Arts Alliance (1992-1994).

Dr. Bergman's volunteer efforts included participation in the highest levels of administration of the International Center for Medieval Art, the College Art Association, the National Cultural Alliance, and the Leadership Institute for Museum Management of the Getty Trust. While pursuing his own scholarly research and publishing regularly, he also advanced the scholarship of others as a member of the editorial boards of *Art Bulletin*, *Gesta*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, the *Census of Gothic Sculpture in American Collections*, *Dumbarton Oaks Publications*, *The Getty Foundation*, and the *Medieval Academy of America*. As a peer reviewer on numerous grant panels and in testimony on several occasions before the United States Congress (in 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, and 1993), Dr. Bergman continually offered his talents in service of the profession.

A loyal and generous friend of both the Department of Art History at Rutgers and the *Rutgers Art Review*, Bob Bergman remains one of this university's most beloved alumni, and his life stands as an inspiring example to all students of art history. With great pride, the *Rutgers Art Review* here publishes his complete bibliography as a commemoration of his lifetime of scholarly achievement.

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## The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush: From Text to Image

*Christina Tzvetkova-Ivanova*

Late-medieval Orthodox iconography, and particularly Russian iconography, is generally perceived in scholarly literature as evidence of a decline in religious art. The distinguishing signs of this break with previous traditions are thought to be the considerable influence of Western examples, the gradual complication of iconographic compositions, and the didactic and mystical essence of the subjects depicted. The main scholarly argument for this rather negative perception of late-medieval Russian iconography is its narrative character: "The dogmatic meaning of the icon ceased to be felt as the essential point, and the narrative moment frequently assumes a dominant role."<sup>1</sup>

This narrative or textual nature, however, does not necessarily constitute a refutation of the purposes and ideology of religious art. On the contrary, iconography has always been understood as inseparable from theology, functioning both as an expression and source of divine knowledge.<sup>2</sup> As Boris Uspenskij convincingly proved for the purposes of his semiotic analysis, the textological attitudes towards Russian iconography are not artificially imposed but rather immanent to it.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in the late-antique and medieval periods the function of iconography was perceived as parallel to that of religious books. So Gregory of Nyssa praised a certain icon in the fourth century: "[T]he image has clearly recorded through the colors of art the struggles of the martyr, as in a book. For the silent painting speaks on the wall, and does much good."<sup>4</sup> In order to justify the creation of and devotion to images, John of Damascus (650-749) even asserted the equal importance of books and images, depending on the audience: "For just as words edify the ear, so also the image stimulates the eye. What the book is to the literate, the image is to the illiterate. Just as words speak to the ear, so the image speaks to the sight; it brings understanding."<sup>5</sup> John's opponents in the iconoclast controversy did not underestimate the potentially informative role icons could assume for the illiterate; what they denied, rather, was the icons' ontological link with their divine prototypes.<sup>6</sup>

Another set of correlations between sacred texts and images appears in the exegeses of medieval theologians and their use of art. What is of particular interest for the present study is that the exegetes pointed out "art's capacity to assimilate more than one textual source within a coherent and plausible narrative."<sup>7</sup> There is also a consistent connection presented in iconographic manuals (*podlinniki*) between the priest and the iconographer, combined with common prescriptions for their moral behavior: "The priest and the iconographer should be either chaste or married, and living in accordance with the law; for the priest, officiating with divine words, prepares the Body of which we partake for the remission of sins, while the artist, instead of using words, draws and images a body, and gives it life."<sup>8</sup>

In consonance with this convincingly argued textual dimension of iconography and its distinct informative function, I am not inclined to perceive the narrative character as a sign of artistic or, even less so, religious corruption. In this study I propose to establish the precise textual background of a particular, late-medieval icon type,

*The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush* (Figs. 1-3). My choice of this icon is determined by its popularity, the rich textual material connected with it, and its independence from Western examples.<sup>9</sup> The focal point of this study is the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary, but I will also consider the other significant elements of the Burning Bush. I will discuss primarily the following questions: What is the nature of the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary as created in the patristic exegetical writings? What are the means—liturgical, hymnographic, and apocryphal—by which this correlation was transmitted to the cultural sphere of Orthodox Slavdom? What is the extant pictorial evidence which influenced the Russian icon, sometimes quite directly? All of these aspects will illuminate the genesis of the icon type and will enable an evaluation of its concordance with the dogmatic teachings of the Orthodox Church.

The presence of narrative elements, of course, does not force a purely textological approach to a work of art. In the case of the Burning Bush icon, however, it is vital to examine how the “quite fanciful and altogether bizarre”<sup>10</sup> parallels between the Old and New Testaments, as elaborated in the patristic exegetical writings, were depicted in a complicated iconographic composition centuries after those writings—that is, how text turned into image. Thus, my approach is influenced in its ideology and determined in its scope by the formulation that Eugene Trubetskoj gave to Russian iconography—“contemplation in colors.”<sup>11</sup>

### *The Foreshadowing*

The correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary, as established in the Greek patristic writings, is an expression of a non-literal attitude toward Scripture. The Old Testament was generally understood not merely as a depiction of historical events but as a communication of hidden symbols. Revelation of concealed meaning was achieved by two main approaches, the allegorical and the typological.

If we trace the exegetical use of a single, concrete Old Testament image such as the Burning Bush, we encounter a striking variety of usages, each possessing certain nuances in meaning. The term “foreshadowing” applies to the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary, and although in scholarly literature this term is commonly used as a synonym for “type,” the two terms are not interchangeable. The correlation type-antitype presumes an equivalence between two images, yet in most of the exegetical writings the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary is only partial. That is, the Burning Bush stands not for the Virgin herself but only for her virginity. In literary terminology this correlation would be defined as a synecdoche, thus as metonymic, while the same correlation as it occurs in the hymnography is metaphoric.<sup>12</sup> Thus the choice of the term “foreshadowing” reflects the idea of this metonymic character.

It was in the framework of Christology in which the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary arose. Neither the New Testament nor the works of the Church Fathers offers a systematic Mariology, only fragments of individual doctrinal points and meditations on the ethical figure of Mary based on the Gospel of Luke. The position of the Church Fathers is expressed primarily in the context of other themes, as a support either of catecheses or of apologetics. Nevertheless, they interpreted the evidence of Scripture and Apostolic tradition in a particular manner, and their interpretation prepared the future development of Mariology.



Fig. 1 Anonymous, *The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush*, Monastery of Solovki, late 16th c. Painted wood panel. Kolomenskoe District Museum, Moscow. (Author photo.)

The relation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary in the early Mariological tradition developed within the concept of Mary's virginity.<sup>13</sup> Ignatius of Antioch in the first century A. D. elaborated the dialectical comparison of Christ's human and divine natures by defining Mary's virginity, her conception, and Christ's death as the three great mysteries.<sup>14</sup> Justin Martyr (100-165) defended the belief in Mary's *virginitas ante partum* and was also the first to introduce the Eve-Mary parallel, a parallel



Fig. 2 Anonymous, *The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush*, 17th-18th c. Painted wood panel. Russian Museum, Moscow. (Author photo.)

often understood as evidence of foreshadowing yet proceeding in its soteriological and ethical significance far beyond this concept.<sup>15</sup> Clement of Alexandria (150-216) based his interpretation of the problem on the apocryphal *Protoevangelion of James*, repeating the idea of virginity *in partu*.<sup>16</sup> Origen (185-254) was the first to introduce the term *Theotokos* ("mother of God") and stressed Mary's perpetual virginity, calling her "ever-virgin."<sup>17</sup>





Fig. 3 Anonymous, *The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush*, 18th c. Painted wood panel. Archives of the former Kondakov Institute, Prague. (Author photo.)

The Cappadocian Fathers wrote about Mary entirely in the context of biblical exegesis, yet their writings played a significant role in the development of Mariology. Gregory Nazianzen (335-390), for example, supported the belief that she was virgin *in partu*, calling her "undefiled" and *Theotokos*. It was Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), however, who played the most important role in Mariology during the period of the Christological debates. Using the term *Theotokos*, he elaborated upon the Eve-Mary

parallel and implied that the Virgin Mary could defeat death by her virginity.<sup>18</sup> In the framework of his exegesis of certain biblical passages, Gregory of Nyssa makes frequent references to the Virgin Mary and to the soteriological significance of her virginity. It is in *The Life of Moses* that he makes use of the Burning Bush as a proof for Mary's debated virginal status: "From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: The light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush, even as the flower of her virginity was not withered by giving birth."<sup>19</sup> The Incarnation, Virgin Birth, and the two natures of Christ all play prominent roles in Gregory's exegesis, and the Burning Bush is the first of six foreshadowings of the Incarnation that he finds in the story of Moses.<sup>20</sup> He uses these foreshadowings to stress the perpetual virginity of Mary and both "the pre-existence and createdness of Christ."<sup>21</sup> Gregory of Nyssa's treatise is a good example of how the Burning Bush arose as a foreshadowing, not only in a set of variously interpreted concealed meanings of Exodus 3:2 but also as one of a multitude of foreshadowings of the Virgin Mary.<sup>22</sup>

Cyril of Alexandria (380-444) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (393-457) both refer to the parallel elaborated by Gregory of Nyssa. Cyril's Mariology is rooted in biblical exegesis and is entirely determined by the development of the Christology of the period.<sup>23</sup> The Christological definition is the essential problem for him; therefore, he emphasizes above all the Virgin Mary's "catalytic role in the divine economy, which enables Christ to accomplish what was necessary."<sup>24</sup> Theodoret refers to the Burning Bush in the general context of exegesis, especially because he writes in the fragmentary erotapocritic form, providing the full set of meanings he sees in the image:

The power and mercy of God are proclaimed by the circumstance that the bush, being mere brushwood, was not consumed by the unquenchable fire. I think however that other intimations are conveyed by this circumstance: that Israel, plotted against by the Egyptians, should not be consumed, but overcome his enemies; and that the Only-Begotten, being made incarnate and dwelling in the Virgin's womb, shall keep that virginity inviolate.<sup>25</sup>

Through its Christological significance this quite logical but still whimsical proof for Mary's virginal status, most strongly formulated by Gregory of Nyssa and reinforced by his successors, ultimately became one of the most often used metaphors in the literary and pictorial devotions to the Virgin.

### *The Metaphor*

Soon after the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary was established in patristic writings as a proof for Mary's virginal status, it passed into hymnography, but it changed considerably in doing so. There were seven hymns written to the Virgin Mary during this period, all of which, in the words of Vasiliki Limberis, "so effectively fixed the *Theotokos'* identity as a cosmological power."<sup>26</sup> As religious historian John Meyendorff has pointed out, "liturgical hymnology incorporated the results of the [exegetical] controversies and often became a form of credal confession."<sup>27</sup> All of the hymn texts illustrate Meyendorff's point, because they were embedded in the polemical defense of the Virgin Mary against the Nestorians and can therefore be called "fruits of the Nestorian crisis."<sup>28</sup> Two of the hymn texts, those by Proclus (412-485) and Theodotus of Ancyra (4th-5th c.), refer to the Burning Bush

while praising and affirming Mary's virginity, using it as part of a complex system of imagery depicting the Virgin in the literary genre of oration. Proclus writes:

She is the bridal chamber in which the  
Logos wedded the flesh.  
She is the living bramble bush of nature,  
Which the divine labor pains do not burn up,  
She is the true relieving cloud, the producer  
Of him in the body, higher above the Cherubim.  
She is the purest fleece of the heavenly rain  
From which the shepherd clothed the sheep.<sup>29</sup>

The important fact here is not only the placement of the Burning Bush in the context of Mariology but also the change in its meaning. What has been called a synecdoche, and thus a metonymic link, in the context of the exegetical writings here becomes a metaphoric link in Proclus' text. The Bush stands not only for Mary's virginity but metaphorically for the whole persona of the Virgin. Mary is a "living bramble bush of nature"—she is a fleece and a bridal chamber. Such is the form in which the exegetical conception passed into hymnography.

The Burning Bush became one of the most frequently invoked metaphors in the hymns that were incorporated into the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. Two of the feasts in particular—the Birth of the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation—proved immensely important to spreading the popularity of both the Burning Bush metaphor and the concept of foreshadowing itself. In liturgical texts for the Birth of the Virgin Mary, ideological stress falls on the fact that the Virgin was chosen from the very beginning to be an instrument for the Incarnation. Therefore, Old Testament foreshadowings pointing forward to her acquire special interest as "link[s] between the Old and the New, between the Law and the Grace."<sup>30</sup> A typical passage from *The Festal Menaion* reads,

Come, all ye who love virginity, and who are friends of purity: come ye and welcome with love the boast of virgins. She is the fountain of life that gushes forth from the flinty rock: She is the Bush springing from barren ground and burning with the immaterial fire that cleanses and enlightens our souls.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the Annunciation commemorates Mary's free acceptance of the vocation set before her; "she was not a passive instrument but an active participant, with a free and positive part to play in God's scheme of salvation."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the canon for the Annunciation is structured as a dialogue between Mary and Gabriel, rather than as unilateral message from the angel. In this dialogue the Virgin refers to the prophecy of the coming of Emmanuel but asks Gabriel how mortal men shall experience such a union with the Godhead. The angel answers with reference to the Burning Bush, here raised to the significance of a prophecy: "The bush that burned with fire and yet remained unconsumed, disclosed the secret mystery that shall come to pass in thee, O pure Maiden, full of grace. For after child-birth thou shalt remain ever-Virgin."<sup>33</sup>

Liturgical texts for the Marian feasts were not the only vehicle for transmitting the imagery deriving from the concept of foreshadowing. The entire structure of the Lenten office, being "an annual return to our biblical roots,"<sup>34</sup> prominently bears the imprint of the Old Testament. It is important to stress here that "the Old Testament

lessons have not been chosen fortuitously, but each has its place in the all-embracing unity of the Triodon,"<sup>35</sup> all looking forward to the great events following them. Thus the Exodus lessons establish parallels between Moses and Christ, between the Old and the New Passover, and between the crossing of the Red Sea and the redemptive death and rising of Christ. It is also remarkable that the scheme for the Old Testament readings was elaborated rather early, between the fifth and seventh centuries.<sup>36</sup> This emphasis on biblical roots reinforces the importance of foreshadowing as a basis for the literary imagery of the hymns, and thus the Burning Bush metaphor has come to occupy a critical place in the hymns sung during the Lenten office. One need quote only one of the numerous examples of this metaphor in the texts of the *Theotokion*:

Moses perceived in the Burning Bush the great mystery of thy child-bearing, O Virgin holy and inviolate; and the Children prefigured this most clearly as they stood in the midst of the fire and were not burnt. Therefore do we sing thy praises for ever.<sup>37</sup>

This representative text is quite significant because it in fact fuses two Old Testament passages, Exodus 3:2 and Daniel 3:23-25, into a single exegetical meaning.

Although it is not appropriate to regard the Burning Bush icon as the pure illustration of a particular work of hymnography, it is obvious that the liturgical texts of the fifth century amplified its popularity and importance as a foreshadowing. It should also be stressed that the Burning Bush appears in the liturgical texts in the framework of other metaphors deriving from the exegetical writings of the same period—a conceptual model that would later serve as the inspiration for its complicated composition in Russian iconography.

### *The Popular Echo*

In addition to the liturgical texts translated into Old Church Slavonic, there is another significant group of literary works that facilitated the transmission of the vital correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary. By transmission I mean here not simply the amplification of the correlation's importance and popularity but also its transfer into the Slavonic and, particularly, Russian milieu. This additional group of literary works, which date from about the twelfth century and introduced Byzantine theological concepts into Russian culture, consists of several apocryphal texts representing a kind of popular echo of official doctrine. We know of three such texts that refer to the Burning Bush in connection with the Virgin, all of which are of Greek origin but were translated with some additions and changes into Church Slavonic. Their presence in numerous manuscripts of Slavonic origin proves their importance to the process of transmission.<sup>38</sup>

The first apocryphal text is the *Conversation of the Three Hierarchs*, a representative work in the genre of questions and answers called *erotapokriseis*.<sup>39</sup> The *Conversation* comprises an imaginary discussion among Gregory Nazianzen, Basil the Great, and John Chrysostom.<sup>40</sup> A significant part of its content is devoted to the Virgin Mary and clarifies different biblical events in the light of foreshadowing. Reference to the Burning Bush occurs in the following context:

What does it mean that the bush was burning in fire and was not consumed? It was an image of the pure Virgin. As the burning fire did not burn up the tree by God's will, so the Word of God became flesh in the Virgin and did not burn, but preserved both.<sup>41</sup>

Such questions concerning the Virgin and the theologically related concepts of foreshadowing and predestination occupy such an important part of the *Conversation* because of their consonance with the very nature of the erotapocritic genre. That is, they convey significant doctrinal teachings in the popular form of riddles so characteristic of folkloric Christianity.

The second text is the *Names of the Mother of God*, a work typical of the genre of apocryphal prayer.<sup>42</sup> More specifically, it belongs to the so-called formulaic prayers, which invoke a number of secret, enigmatic names. A person afflicted with illness either simply carries a written list of these names or conducts a more elaborate ritual in which the names, above a vessel of clean water, are scratched onto a piece of bread that the sick person then proceeds to eat. It is important to stress that the apocryphal element here is not the text itself but rather the popular ritual that accompanies it, which is closely associated with magic. The *Names of the Mother of God* encompasses a list of seventy-two names of the Virgin Mary followed by an explanation revealing the concealed meaning of each name. Most of the names provide exact parallels to the metaphors used in liturgical texts, and it is significant that the Burning Bush occupies first place on the list, followed by the names *rod* and *root*. The corresponding explanatory text reads,

Bramble. So Moses came and saw a great vision of how the bush burned yet was not consumed.

Rod. As Isaiah said, there shall be a rod from the root of Jesse. And the root will blossom.<sup>43</sup>

The third apocryphal work containing a reference to the Burning Bush is a somewhat less popular text called the *Life of the Holy and Great Prophet Moses*, a work based exclusively on parallels between the Old and New Testaments. Significantly, this text is structured as a fictitious conversation between an Orthodox Christian and a Jew, in which the dichotomy of "self-versus-other" serves to validate and praise the Christian faith. The Burning Bush, as a sign for the birth of Christ, is one of the many prophecies used here as a proof for Predestination:

The bush was an image of the Virgin; as the burning fire by God's will did not burn up the tree, so the Word of God left the Virgin intact after she gave birth.... So our most pure Lady the Mother of God received God into her womb without being burned up and remained a virgin after the birth. By God's will the natural course was defied."<sup>44</sup>

It is exactly the popular nature of these three apocryphal works among Orthodox Slavs, particularly in Russia, that enabled the associations between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary to flourish in the Russian cultural milieu, itself so closely related to Byzantium. Together with the liturgical evidence, the apocryphal texts prepared the way for the Russian appropriation of Byzantine pictorial representations of the Burning Bush.

### *The Byzantine Images*

The earliest extant evidence of a pictorial depiction of the Virgin Mary within the Burning Bush, merging the Old Testament "historical" event with a representation of its concealed meaning, is connected to the most relevant holy site, the monastery at Mount Sinai. Monastic life developed early in this region, from about the middle

of the third century onward. The legend relates that in 330 St. Helena, in response to a request by the Sinai hermits, ordered the construction of a chapel consecrated to the Virgin Mary at the supposed site of the Burning Bush.<sup>45</sup> From the fourth century onward, the site evolved as an important pilgrimage destination, its status best proved by its depiction in Egeria's travel accounts.<sup>46</sup> The monastery itself, which was also dedicated to the Virgin, was most likely founded by Emperor Justinian I (526-65).<sup>47</sup>

From the sixth century onward, there is evidence of the creation and even serial production of two icon types at the monastery, both closely connected with the Burning Bush and representing typical *loca sancta* depictions.<sup>48</sup> The first type portrays the Virgin Mary standing frontally and holding the seated Christ, with a worshipper next to her.<sup>49</sup> The crucial element of this icon type is that it bears the inscription ἡ βῆτος (Burning Bush), which indicates that the icon was created at the Sinai monastery but does not reflect its content. The image of the Burning Bush itself, which Kurt Weitzmann insufficiently describes as a "naturalistic detail," is missing on this icon type.<sup>50</sup> The existence of ten very similar copies of the icon, differing only in the worshipper represented (such as Moses, Isaiah, Joachim, Simeon, St. George, or St. Sabas), offers evidence of its serial production. The second icon type linked to the Sinai monastery depicts Moses before the Burning Bush, the earliest examples of which appear in the frescoes in the catacombs of Via Latina in Rome and in the Dura synagogue.<sup>51</sup> The most important examples of this kind in Sinai are the mosaic above the triumphal arch in St. Catherine's Basilica, the votive cross in the Chapel of the Forty Martyrs, the miniatures in the illuminated manuscripts of the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, and many portable icons.<sup>52</sup>

From a certain moment onward, but according to the extant pictorial evidence not before the ninth or tenth century, the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary became manifest on both *loca sancta* icon types. On the first group of icons—those representing the Virgin standing frontally with a seated Christ and the figure of a venerating saint—the Virgin appears to be engulfed in the flames of the Burning Bush. A very interesting example of this new icon includes St. Catherine as the venerating saint, with a small representation of Moses loosening his sandals appearing between the two main figures (Fig. 4).<sup>53</sup> During the same period the second *loca sancta* icon type—that featuring Moses and the Burning Bush episode—acquired a new element, the Virgin Mary of the *Orant* type figured within the Burning Bush (Fig. 5). The figure of the angel remains on these depictions, and so the illustration of the biblical event itself is combined with a representation of its concealed meaning.

At Sinai there are other extant depictions of the correlation between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary that are independent from these two patterns. The earliest of these is the icon of the Ascension, originating from the ninth or tenth century, which shows a Burning Bush behind the *Orant* Virgin.<sup>54</sup> Another early example depicting the Virgin within the Burning Bush, a Crusader icon from the Venetian atelier, is significant here for the frame of its Virgin panel. In the middle of the upper frame the Virgin appears in a flaming bush with her hands raised as an *Orant* (Fig. 6), an image differing from the one ordinarily used for the Burning Bush type, that in which she suspends the Christ Child in front of her breast.<sup>55</sup> On the frame of the diptych, she is depicted between Joachim and Anna, which might be explained by the fact that the easternmost chapel of the Sinai basilica is dedicated to them. Another *loca sancta* icon type is a topographical picture, created in the sixteenth century, which contains a more realistic depiction of the monastery and Moses before the Virgin within the



Fig. 4 Anonymous, *St. Catherine with the Virgin in the Burning Bush*, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, 13th c. Painted wood panel. (Reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.)

Burning Bush (Fig. 7). After a certain point, as Kurt Weitzmann has explained, “the demand for *loca sancta* pictures could no longer be met with painted icons,” and a lithographic reproduction replaced them as a souvenir for visitors and pilgrims.<sup>56</sup>

The Burning Bush as a foreshadowing of the Virgin Mary is also associated in Byzantine iconographic tradition with the *Homilies on the Virgin*, written by James the Monk in the second quarter of the twelfth century.<sup>57</sup> The *Homilies* are devoted to the



Fig. 5 Anonymous, *Moses before the Burning Bush*, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, 12th c. Painted wood panel. (Reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.)

life of the Virgin from her conception to her visitation of Elizabeth. The text of James' work has survived in two manuscripts, the original deluxe manuscript now in Paris (B. N. gr. 1208) and its single existing copy, which is preserved in the Vatican Library (Vat. gr. 1162), both profusely illustrated by the major atelier then active in Constantinople. The representation of the Burning Bush as foreshadowing the Virgin Mary (Paris, B. N. fol. 54) shows Moses and Christ Emmanuel in a medallion in the Bush,





Fig. 6 Anonymous, *Diptych of Procopius/Virgin and Child*, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, 12th c., detail of right wing with Joachim and Anna flanking the Virgin in the Burning Bush. Painted wood panel. (Reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.)

again placed in the framework of the other foreshadowings in consonance with the well-known liturgical imagery.

In the early fourteenth century the Burning Bush became the subject of a monumental painting in a significant iconographic program in the Chora monastery (Turk. *Kariye Camii*) located in the northwestern part of Constantinople.<sup>58</sup> The eastern part of the *parekklesion* was used as a mortuary chapel devoted to the Last Judgment, on the walls of which appear portraits of various military saints. Along the south wall are represented the Old Testament foreshadowings of the Virgin, including the scene of Moses before the Burning Bush, an image important not for its iconographic pattern itself but rather for its representation of the Burning Bush in the context of other Old Testament foreshadowings.<sup>59</sup> Such a placement directly recalls the process of integrating the Burning Bush's literary, theological significance into liturgical traditions through patristic exegesis. Moreover, it indicates a possible source for the complex, Russian iconographic composition elaborating the same principle.

#### *The Russian Icon*

Whereas in Byzantine iconography the relationship between the Burning Bush and the Virgin Mary remained a peripheral, although significant, component of the representation of the Old Testament scene, in the Russian tradition it developed into a rather complicated composition devoted more directly to the Virgin Mary herself (Figs. 1-3). Associated with the celebration of the feast day of the prophet Moses on



Fig. 7 Anonymous, *The Virgin in the Burning Bush at Mount Sinai*, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, 15th c. Painted wood panel. (Reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.)

September 4, the Russian type of the Burning Bush icon emerged during the sixteenth century, and although it followed a certain development through minor changes, it provides a relatively stable iconographic pattern.

The most significant elements on the icon *The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush* are the scenes that occupy the four corners of the composition, which represent various Old Testament scenes foreshadowing the Virgin. The vision of the Burning Bush itself, always presented in the upper left corner of the composition, follows a stable iconography resembling that inherited from Byzantine tradition. On some of the Russian

icons the angel is represented here as well, combining an illustration of the biblical event with its symbolic meaning. Moses usually appears before the Burning Bush in a kneeling position, expressing obedience and devotion, yet some of the extant icons represent Moses twice, once kneeling and once loosening his sandals. Of these two scenes, however, that of Moses loosening his sandals is found to be more common in Byzantine iconography; the Russian preference for the kneeling image thus departs from Byzantine precedent, although it still follows directly from Sinai examples.<sup>60</sup> The Virgin Mary appears in the flames of the Bush. The Savior Emmanuel is depicted in a mandorla, the symbol signifying heaven, divine glory, and light—and the attribute of Christ's glorified body, emphasizing the conception of the pre-eternal Child.<sup>61</sup> This type of the Virgin, facing outwards with her hands raised in prayer and the Savior Emmanuel on her breast, is understood as a symbolic representation of the Church. Three other foreshadowings most often complement the Burning Bush itself: Jesse's rod (Isaiah 11:1-2), Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12-13), and the closed door of the sanctuary (Ezekiel 44:2-3). On some compositions a fifth scene is added, that of the Seraphim cleansing the lips of Isaiah with a burning coal (Isaiah 6:6).

On the Burning Bush icon, the Virgin Mary is placed in the center of an eight-pointed star consisting of two superimposed squares with curved sides, one red and one green. In the corners of the red square are the symbols of the four Evangelists—an angel, a lion, an eagle, and an ox. Nikodim Kondakov explains the presence of the star as an illustration of the *Akathistos* verse describing the Virgin Mary as "the Star that shows the Sun Christ."<sup>62</sup> This explanation, however, seems to me rather implausible, because the same symbol is typical of many other iconographic compositions that are not connected with this particular piece of hymnography.<sup>63</sup> The symbol of the octangular star is to be understood in a much broader context than this of Mariology; Leonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, for example, point out that it is a symbol of the eon to come.<sup>64</sup> The most conspicuous feature of the octangular star on the Burning Bush icon, however, is its color symbolism. The colors green and red, while having a manifold significance in iconographic tradition, here can be interpreted in light of the icon's distinct subject matter—the green alludes to the Bush, while the red can be associated with the burning fire.

The representation of the Virgin Mary herself is of the *Hodegetria* type, and thus the entire composition can be interpreted as a complex variation of this old icon type.<sup>65</sup> Originally, icons of the *Hodegetria* represented the full standing figure of the Virgin holding the Child on her left arm; after the eleventh century, the Child also appeared seated on the Virgin's right arm.<sup>66</sup> From the thirteenth century on the composition featured only a half-length figure of the Virgin, holding the Child either on the left or right arm, and it is this variation that the Virgin Mary on the Burning Bush icon follows.<sup>67</sup> Christ sits on her left arm, holding a scroll on his lap and giving a blessing with his right hand, while the Virgin herself gestures toward him with her right hand, her gaze directed toward the viewer. On the Virgin's breast is depicted a mountain on which a scene of the heavenly Jerusalem rises, with Christ the King presiding above. This representation derives from Daniel 2:44: "The God of Heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." In her hands the Virgin holds a ladder symbolizing the unity of heaven and earth as brought to fruition by the Incarnation.<sup>68</sup> The ladder refers to Jacob's ladder, although it also reveals, as Ivan Bentchev points out, an awareness of the symbolism of the *Ladder to Heaven* by St. John Climacus (525-605), a sixth-century monk in the Sinai monastery.<sup>69</sup>

The Virgin Mary is represented as a heavenly queen; accordingly, her clothing is interwoven with clouds, and angelic hosts and elements of nature surround her. The representation of the various hierarchies of angels, depicted with their attributes of stars, clouds, lightning, and swords, follows John the Evangelist's visions in Revelations. The angels represented in the green square are those of the clouds, the rainbow, the rain, and the wind; the angels situated between the points of the star are those of power, thunder, wisdom, war, fear, and frost. Icons originating from the eighteenth century onward provide inscriptions identifying these various types of angels.<sup>70</sup> This representation of the Virgin Mary as a heavenly queen among an angelic host and the elements of nature finds further explanation in the influence of a particular regional tradition closely connected to the creation of this icon type—the iconographic tradition of the monastery of Solovki. A fourteenth-century manuscript originating from Solovki elaborates on the Virgin's power to send down lightning, frost, and earthquakes on the impious until they earn her mercy with prayer. Artistic activity at the monastery dates from the sixteenth century, and in the seventeenth century an autonomous iconographic school arose there, featuring precise pictorial representations derived from this local spiritual tradition.<sup>71</sup> This dimension of the iconographic composition places a specific, local imprint on its veneration. A similarly localized example of such reverence for the icon's potency is an eighteenth-century version in the Church of the Burning Bush near Devičee Pole, Moscow. This icon is believed to work a variety of miracles, and according to traditional popular belief, every September 4 a service was conducted at the church originating directly from Sinai, "where it was sung, while at the same time the sky thundered."<sup>73</sup>

A final interesting aspect of devotion to the Burning Bush icon is its role in the Orthodox perception of fire as a manifestation of divine power and purification. These features are combined in the festival of the Burning Bush icon, which in fact produced the belief that the icon itself could be used as protection against fire. Since the eighteenth century, Russians have practiced a ritual of displaying the Burning Bush icon while processing around houses endangered by fire in order to protect them.<sup>72</sup>

This analysis of the symbolism of *The Virgin Mary of the Burning Bush*, in reconstructing the message the icon sets forth, suggests the inaccuracy of interpreting it as evidence of decline in religious art. Although using an allegorical manner of representation, this icon type does not constitute a break with the Orthodox tradition in iconography; rather, it follows a long and significant tradition represented by both literary and pictorial sources. The complex composition of the icon is an excellent example of what has been called the narrative nature of iconography. While verbal devotions express their contents in a linear manner, which therefore is dispersed through time, the iconographic composition combines distinct elements simultaneously in an impressive and stable unity. Well-known figures and scenes are recast into new contexts and combinations, synthesizing theological concepts which are otherwise widely separated in the corpus of exegetical writings. By juxtaposing five Old Testament scenes pointing towards the Incarnation and the Virgin's decisive role therein, the Burning Bush icon perfectly exemplifies the concept of foreshadowing. The Virgin Mary, holding Christ in her hands and surrounded by the attributes of universal power, becomes an explicit emblem of the divine mystery concealed in the prophecy of Old Testament revelation.

1. Leonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 47. The same observations also characterize Georges Florovsky's notion of the new trend in sixteenth-century Russian iconography, which "constituted a break with hieratic realism and its replacement by decorative symbolism, or more accurately, allegorism.... The decisive dominance of 'symbolism' signified the decline of iconography." See Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979), 30.
2. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 52. Throughout this paper, I will use the term "iconography" in a specifically Orthodox sense—that is, as referring to the production and distribution of icons themselves, as well as to the system of visual imagery employed on them.
3. Boris Uspenskij, *Semiotika na Ikonata (Semiotics of the Icon)* (Sofia, Bulg.: Slavjanska Biblioteka, 1992), 161-169.
4. Gregory of Nyssa, "De S. Theodore martyre," in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* (henceforth PG) (Paris: n. p., 1859-60), vol. 46, 737. Although most of the patristic sources cited throughout this paper can now be found in Cyril Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), I have consulted primary sources and will continue to refer to them directly.
5. John of Damascus, *On Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 17. See also Gregory the Great, "Epistle to Serenus Bishop of Massilia," trans. in James Barnaby, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (henceforth NPNF) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 23: "And we commend you indeed for your zeal against anything made with human hands being an object of adoration; but we signify you that you ought not to have broken these images. For pictorial representation is made use of in churches for this reason; that such as are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books."
6. Uspenskij, *Semiotika*, 162.
7. Herbert L. Kessler, "Medieval Art as Argument," in Brendan Cassidy, ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 59.
8. A. I. Uspensky, ed., *Podlinnik Bol'shakova (Iconographic Manual of Bolshakov)* (Moscow: n. p., 1903), 3 (my translation).
9. There also exists a Western tradition of depicting the Virgin Mary within the Burning Bush; see Enriqueta Harris, "Mary in the Burning Bush: Nicolas Froment's Triptych in Aix-en-Provence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 1 (1938), 281-286; and E. Vetter, "Maria im brennenden Dornbusch," *Münster* 10 (1957), 237-253. Both authors hesitate to consider whether the Western depictions were influenced by Eastern examples; there is, however, no possibility for the opposite process.
10. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apology for Icons* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 181.
11. Eugene Trubetskoj, "Umozrenie v kraskakh (Contemplation in colors)," in N. K. Gavryushin, ed., *Filosofia ruskogo religioznago iskusstva (Philosophy of the Russian Religious Art)* (Moscow: Progress, 1993), 195-220.
12. See Roman Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," in David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London: Longman, 1994), 57-62, *passim*.
13. See Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London: Routledge, 1994), 101-137, *passim*.
14. Ignatius of Antioch, "Epistle to Ephesians," in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325* (henceforth ANF), repr. of 1885 ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 1, 52.
15. Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," in ANF, vol. 1, 227.
16. Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata," in ANF, vol. 2, 536.
17. Origen, "Commentary on Matthew," in ANF, vol. 10, 424; "Commentary on John," in ANF, vol. 10, 300.

18. Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," in *NPNF*, vol. 5, 359: "Just as in the age of Mary, the *Theotokos*, Death, who had reigned from Adam to her time, found when he came to her and dashed his forces against the fruit of her virginity as against a rock, Death was shattered to pieces upon her."
19. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. A. J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 59.
20. The other instances of foreshadowing are Moses' rod changed into a serpent, Moses' hand becoming leprous, the manna, the tabernacle, and the tablets of stone.
21. Malherbe and Ferguson, *The Life of Moses* (introduction), 7.
22. Exodus 3:2 reads as follows: "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed."
23. Cyril of Alexandria, "Contra Anthropomorphitas," in *PG*, vol. 76, 1129.
24. Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 109.
25. Theodoret of Cyrillus, "Quaestiones in Exodum," in *PG*, vol. 80, 122.
26. Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 85.
27. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 20.
28. Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 85. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428-431, supported the late-fourth-century views of the Antioch school, which asserted a distinction between the human and divine natures of Christ, contrary to Nicene doctrine. By the mid-fifth century, Nestorius and his followers had broken from the Orthodox Church.
29. Trans. in Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 86.
30. Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 49.
31. *The Festal Menaion*, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 99. *The Festal Menaion* contains all the services and hymns for the fixed days of celebration for the Lord and the Virgin.
32. Ware, *The Festal Menaion* (introduction), 61. See also Nicolas Cabasilas, "On the Annunciation," in *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris: n. p., 1926), 488: "The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father, of His Power and His Spirit: it was also the work of the will and the faith of the Virgin."
33. *The Festal Menaion*, 451.
34. Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1969), 44. The use of "biblical" here refers obviously to the Old Testament specifically.
35. *The Lenten Triodion*, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 40. *The Lenten Triodion* is the liturgical book for the Lenten service.
36. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 38.
37. *The Lenten Triodion*, 440. Other examples include the following: "In days of old, Moses saw thy mystery prefigured in the bush, O hallowed Virgin: Just as the flames did not consume it, so the fire of the Godhead has not consumed thy womb." (*The Lenten Triodion*, 399); "The bush which burned with fire and yet was not consumed, that Moses saw of old upon Mount Sinai, was a foreshadowing of thy womb, O Virgin, which received the pure fire of the Godhead. The burning bush upon the mountain revealed in prophecy to the Giver of the Law Christ's birth from the Ever-Virgin for our salvation; and with never-silent songs of praise we magnify Him." (*Supplementary Texts to the Lenten Triodion*, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 63.)
38. These three literary works exist in many textual variations in manuscripts of miscellaneous content, making their exact date of origin uncertain; their approximate origin would seem to be the twelfth century. See Aurelio de Santos Otero, *Die handschriftlichen Überlieferungen der altslavischen Apokryphen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 135-142, and Francis Thompson, "Apocrypha Slavica," *Slavonic and East European Review* 63 (1995), 91-96.
39. In the Byzantine tradition, works of *erotapokriseis* have been known since the fourth century and gained popularity from the seventh to ninth centuries. They were originally among the official genres of exegesis on the Bible—*scholia*, homilies, and commentaries.

40. It is important to point out that in many classifications of apocryphal texts, even recent ones, the title *Conversation of the Three Hierarchs* is applied to a diverse range of erotapocritic textual evidence, although its use is justified only in the specific case of a conversation among these three theologians. See Thompson, "Apocrypha Slavica," 91-96.
41. Ivan Franko, ed., *Apokryfy i legendy z ukrainshkikh rukops'v (Apocryphal texts and legends in Ukrainian manuscripts)* (Lvov, Ukr.: Komissija Arheograficzna Naukovoho tovarystva imeni Ševčenko, 1902), 431 (my translation).
42. A. I. Jacimirskij, *K istorii ložnyh molitv v južno-slavjanskoj pis'menosti (On the history of the apocryphal prayers in the South Slavonic tradition)* (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1914), 47.
43. N. Tihonravov, *Pamjatniki otrečennoj russkoj literatury (Sources of apocryphal Russian literature)* (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1863), 341 (my translation).
44. A. Pypin, *Ložnyja i otrečennija knigi russkoj stariny (Apocryphal and forbidden medieval Russian books)* (St. Petersburg: G. Kuševlev-Bezborodko, 1862), 45 (my translation).
45. George Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1973); Jill Kamil, *The Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1992); Konstantinos Manafis, *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of St. Catherine* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990); Athanasius Paliouras and Nicolas Tzaferis, *The Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai* (Glyka Nera, Attikis, Greece: Tzaferi, 1985).
46. See John D. Wilkinson, ed., *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1981).
47. Procopius, *Buildings*, trans. H. B. Dewing and G. Downey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 354: "In what was formerly called Arabia and is now known as 'Third Palestine' a precipitous and terribly wild mountain, Sina by name, rears its height.... On this Sina live monks.... the Emperor Justinian built them a church which he dedicated to the Mother of God." Justinian's role as founder of the monastery is confirmed by inscriptions on the church's roof beams; see Forsyth and Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine*, 8.
48. Weitzmann discusses *loca sancta* depictions as "souvenirs in various media, but foremost icons which combined representations of biblical events with specific elements of a holy site." See Kurt Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974), 40.
49. For this image, see Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta," figs. 48-49.
50. Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta," 53. Here, Weitzmann stresses only the fact that the monastery is linked to the historical site of the Exodus episode, neglecting the correlation between the Virgin and the Burning Bush.
51. See Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), figs. 46 and 24 respectively.
52. For the St. Catherine's mosaic, see Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue*, fig. 42; for the Forty Martyrs votive cross, see Weitzmann and Ihor Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross at Sinai," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), 389-390; for the *Christian Topography*, see I. Strzygowski, *Der Bilderkreis des Griech. Physiologus des Kosmas Indicopleustes* (Leipzig: Byzantinisches Archiv, 1899).
53. The relics of St. Catherine were brought to the monastery around the tenth or eleventh century, at which time the monastery was re-dedicated to the saint. According to Weitzmann ("Loca Sancta," 54), "it became desirable to have the new title saint appear in a *locus sanctus* picture"—thus on the icon, a frontally standing St. Catherine in imperial robes is depicted next to the Virgin.
54. Weitzmann, *Icons from Southeastern Europe and Sinai* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), fig. 28.
55. Weitzmann, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966), 49-61.
56. For an illustration of such a portable souvenir, see Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta," 54.
57. See Jeffrey C. Anderson, "The Illustrated Sermons of James the Monk: Their Dates, Order, and Place in the History of Byzantine Art," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1991), 69-120; H. Omont, *Miniatures des Homélies sur la Vierge du moine Jacques* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1927); and Cosimo Stornajolo, *Miniature delle omilie di Giacomo Monaco* (Rome: n. p., 1910). For the *Homilies* themselves, see *PG*, vol. 127, 543-700.

58. *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Marcell Restle (Stuttgart: Hierse Antonmann, 1990), 689-94. See also Robert Ousterhout, "Temporal Structuring in the Chora *Parekklesion*," *Gesta* 34 (1995), 63-76.
59. The representation of this Burning Bush scene has been published, with a detailed analysis by S. Der Nersessian, in Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Camii* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), vol. 4, 380.
60. The kneeling scene is a direct copy of the Sinai iconographic pattern, following a very rare tradition; see Doula Mouriki, "A Moses Cycle on a Sinai Icon," in Doula Mouriki et al., eds., *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 533.
61. Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 77-78.
62. Nikodim Kondakov, *Russian Icons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 110.
63. Such as the iconographic type of *Christ Pantocrator*, on which the upper square embraces the figure of the Pantocrator and is enclosed in a mandorla containing cherubims, while the lower square is beyond their mandorla and contains the images of the four Evangelists. Another star of the same octagonal shape appears on some representations of the Transfiguration and the New Testament Trinity.
64. Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 73.
65. Doula Mouriki, "Variants of the *Hodegetria* on Two Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons," *Cahiers archéologiques* 39 (1991), 153-182.
66. Nikodim Kondakov, *Ikonoğrafija Bogomateri (The Iconography of the Mother of God)* (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1914), vol. 1, 152-162.
67. For the half-length *Hodegetria* type of the thirteenth century, see Viktor Lazarev, "Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin," in *Studies in Byzantine Painting* (London: Pindar Press, 1995), 226.
68. Anna Vicini, *Icons and Holiness* (Middle Green South, UK: St. Paul Media Productions, 1991), 12.
69. Ivan Bentchev, *Handbuch der Muttergottesikonen Russlands: Gnadenbilder, Legenden, Darstellungen* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Jolanta Ciaputa Bentcheva, 1986), 68-69. *Ladder to Heaven*, the most important work of St. John Climacus, treats of the means by which the highest degree of religious perfection may be attained. Divided into thirty parts, or "steps," in memory of the thirty years of the hidden life of Christ, the divine model of the religious, it presents an image of all virtues and contains parables and historical anecdotes.
70. See Arhimandrit Amfilohij, *Opisanie obraza Neopalimov Kupiny po risunku sdelannomu s obraza v Neopalimovskoj cerkvi čto bliz' Devičjago monastirija (Description of the image of the Burning Bush according to a drawing of the image in the Burning Bush Church near the Devičee Pole Monastery)* (Moscow: Obstestvo Ljubitelej duhovnoj prosveti, n. d.), 3-5.
71. L. A. Ščennikova, *Voprosy izučeniija soloveckih ikon XVI-XVII vv (Problems in the study of the sixteenth-seventeenth-century Solovki icons)* (Moscow: n. p., 1989), 56.
72. Sergij Bulgakov, *Naručnik Svištenoslužitelja (Handbook for Priests)* (n. p., 1901), 616.
73. Bentchev, *Handbuch der Muttergottesikonen*, 66 (my translation). I have not found evidence for the continuation of this ritual service into modern times.



## The Artifice of Depicting Reality: Caravaggio and the Theatrical Spotlight

Suzanne E. May

In the sixteenth century the Italian theater aimed to be an imitation or mirror of human life. Like painting, its sister art, theater offered sensual appeal along with moral instruction through the prudent use of rhetoric, expressive gestures, and illusionistic linear perspective.<sup>1</sup> In other words, theater created an illusion of reality through great artifice.

More frequently than that of any other Italian painter, the work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) has been described as "theatrical" in modern art-historical scholarship. Certainly, Caravaggio's canvases reflected human life much too naturalistically for the tastes of his contemporary detractors, yet those same critics, paradoxically, judged his manner of execution to be entirely artificial. Caravaggio's arresting style of illuminating his paintings, spotlighting only their essential forms, was indeed unconventional, "never thought of, or done before by any other painter like Raphael, Titian, Correggio or others."<sup>2</sup> Herein lies the source of the controversy: Caravaggio ignored preordained optical decorum as practiced by past masters—that is, the soft, diffused lighting that mimicked the effects of sunlight or the supernatural glow of divine beings—and dared to seek inspiration from an alternative source. In an effort to identify that source, this essay will offer a new interpretation of Caravaggio's early career by suggesting a link between his work and the scenographic practices documented in contemporary architectural treatises. Examination of the late-Renaissance courtly stage reveals that Caravaggio's manner of employing light was not entirely unprecedented, and that the term "theatrical" is more appropriate to this artist's work than art historians have yet acknowledged.

In his *Le vite de' pittori e scultori architetti moderni* (1672) Giovanni Pietro Bellori discusses the rapid formation of Caravaggio's unusual style and the celebrity that soon followed. He cites *Saint Catherine* and *The Lute Player* (Fig. 1) as the painter's earliest works to incorporate the deep, dark shadows that strengthened his figures and compositions. Comparing them to earlier paintings of a lighter palette, such as *The Cardsharps*, Bellori notes:

The last two paintings are also in the same room but have a darker color, as Michele had already begun to darken the darks.... But Caravaggio (as he was called by everyone, with the name of his native town) was becoming more famous every day because the coloration he was introducing was not as sweet and delicate as before, but became boldly dark and black, which he used abundantly to give relief to the forms. He went so far in this style that he never showed any of his figures in open daylight, but instead found a way to place them in the darkness of a closed room, placing a lamp high so that the light would fall straight down, revealing the principal part of the body and leaving the rest in shadow so as to produce a powerful contrast of light and dark. The painters then in Rome were greatly taken by this novelty, and the young ones particularly gathered around him, praised him as the unique imitator of nature, and looked on his work as miracles. They outdid each other in imitating his works, undressing their

models and raising their lights. Without devoting themselves to study and instruction, each one easily found in the piazza and in the street their masters and the models for imitating nature.<sup>3</sup>

While Bellori's biography betrays his classicist, academic bias against Caravaggio's "novelty," his analysis of the origins of this style also reflects popular metaphysical assumptions. He attributes the darkness of Caravaggio's paintings to his "physiognomy and appearance; he had a dark complexion and dark eyes, and his eyebrows and hair were black; this coloring was naturally reflected in his paintings."<sup>4</sup> Obviously, art historians are obligated to seek a more reasonable explanation for the rather sudden transition from what Bellori saw as a Giorgionesque manner of sweet, tempered shadows, to the spotlight tenebrism of Caravaggio's "miraculous" style.

Several scholars have linked Caravaggio's strong chiaroscuro to the dark manner of his Lombard predecessors (as far back as Leonardo da Vinci), as well as to a more general, international trend toward spiritualism developing from the late sixteenth century onward.<sup>5</sup> Such theories, however, conflict with the fact that Caravaggio's earliest known works, as even Bellori points out, were painted in a blond manner. Taking into account the paintings in the collection of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, Caravaggio's first great patron, Bellori distinguishes between those works



Fig. 1 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Lute Player*, ca. 1595. Oil on canvas. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. (From Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 36. Used with permission.)

painted earlier for the open market but eventually acquired by Del Monte and those commissioned later, while Caravaggio was living as an honored guest in the cardinal's *palazzo*. Although failing to declare so explicitly, Bellori's account suggests that the painter's change in style was a consequence of Del Monte's patronage.

Favored by Pope Clement VIII and closely allied with the court of Florentine Grand Duke Ferdinand I de' Medici, Cardinal del Monte ensured that his household was at the very center of late-*cinquecento* Roman sophistication and took advantage of his position to become a force in the city's artistic milieu.<sup>6</sup> The cardinal became a patron of the painters' academy in Rome, the Accademia di San Luca, at the very time that Caravaggio—a most unacademic painter—was invited to join Del Monte's household at Palazzo Madama, staying there from about 1595-1600.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the late Renaissance, the fashionable painters of Rome easily integrated themselves into cultivated society as members of prestigious households, mixing with cardinals, wealthy patrons, and literary figures such as Torquato Tasso, Giovan Battista Marino, and even the pre-papal poet Maffeo Barberini.<sup>8</sup> Having labored in various workshops without great recognition or financial reward since arriving in Rome around 1592, Caravaggio could have expected his work and career to mature more rapidly in the security of Del Monte's stimulating and supportive environment.<sup>9</sup> It also seems only natural that the paintings of his early Roman period would reflect, as Elizabeth Cropper has so succinctly put it, "the sophisticated culture of artifice and the rarefied celebration of sensual pleasure in which Caravaggio actually worked."<sup>10</sup> The ambiguous blend of genre, allegory, and portraiture that characterizes paintings such as *The Lute Player*, *The Musicians*, and *Victorious Amor* becomes less enigmatic when considered within the atmosphere in which they were conceived.

The musical and theatrical activities of Del Monte and his associates are well documented in letters, papal *avvisi*, and various memoirs and discourses of the time. The evidence suggests a lively cultural exchange among the wealthiest households, with each hosting in turn formal and informal performances by both amateur noblemen and professional musicians and actors. Del Monte's own newsy letters to the Grand Duke contain descriptions of the guests and types of performances held at the various houses.<sup>11</sup> The powerful banker Vincenzo Giustiniani, an early admirer of Caravaggio and an important lifelong patron of the arts, also participated in this refined circuit. In his *Discorso sopra la musica* (ca. 1628), this astute and articulate dilettante reflects on the vast knowledge he had acquired "during the conversations engaged in by many lords and gentlemen in my house where, among other practices, making music was the custom."<sup>12</sup> Just opposite Palazzo Madama, Palazzo Giustiniani in fact contained a small chamber designed solely for musical performances and decorated with paintings of musical subject matter.<sup>13</sup> In the *Discorso* Giustiniani documents the new musical forms that were evolving in noble households in the years before 1600, developments that eventually produced Baroque opera.<sup>14</sup> Surely this new genre of florid, sentimental singing, accompanied by appropriately graceful expressions and gestures, provided the subject matter for Caravaggio's category-defying musical paintings of the same period. Indeed, Franca Camiz's suggestion that these paintings might depict actual performers and performances is completely plausible. Among Caravaggio's epicene figures clad in quasi-antique garb may just be a portrait of Del Monte's in-house *castrato*, Pedro Montoya.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, Caravaggio was responding to his stimulating new cultural environment, rather than merely relying on preexisting pictorial conventions.

The *Discorso* also acknowledges the contributions of Giustiniani's friend Cardinal Alessandro Montalto, who was, along with Del Monte's benefactor Grand Duke Ferdinand, one of the most important patrons of musical-dramatic developments in Rome and Florence.<sup>16</sup> At the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome, Montalto promoted many theatrical performances, both informal and elaborate. Del Monte's attendance at these performances is confirmed in his letters to the Grand Duke; he describes the hospitality in the homes of both Montalto and Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, each of whom provided entertainments ranging from all-day musical performances to banquets accompanied by masques, comedies and pastorals with elaborate *apparati*.<sup>17</sup> Such decorative sets were not necessarily housed in formal theaters, since customarily the *grande sala* of a palace would be temporarily converted for these entertainments as the need arose. The recent discovery of a specially designed *stanza della commedia* at Palazzo Giustiniani in Bassano, however, suggests that Caravaggio's patrons were more enthusiastic theatrical impresarios than has been realized.<sup>18</sup>

At the Uffizi in Florence the architect Bernardo Buontalenti designed many innovative spectacles with lavish *intermezzi* in honor of the Grand Duke. As frequent envoys to the Medici court, Del Monte and Montalto regularly witnessed several of these performances and ceremonies and may have conveyed scenographic knowledge from Florence to Rome.<sup>19</sup> While certainly more modest than the Uffizi, Del Monte's and Montalto's palaces also had the capacity to provide impressive entertainment. Extant inventories confirm that Montalto's rather large *famiglia* included artists, musicians, and architects among its *salariati*.<sup>20</sup> The responsibility for preparing theatrical productions—coordinating rehearsals, fashioning costumes, devising choreography, and, most importantly, constructing and painting ephemeral scenery—largely fell on the in-house talent. It is safe to assume that even if Caravaggio and his rival the Cavaliere d'Arpino, members of Del Monte's and Montalto's respective *famiglie*, did not directly contribute to the decoration of *apparati*, they must at least have observed these preparations and some performances.

Among Caravaggio's earliest Roman works, paintings such as *The Cardsharps* and *The Fortune Teller* suggest that the painter had an interest in theater even before entering the cardinal's household. These staged scenes defy the clear-cut genres of Italian art and recall the comical, low-life characters and situations of the *commedia dell'arte*.<sup>21</sup> The success of these pictures must have instilled confidence in the young artist that he could adapt aspects of theater onto canvas. Presuming that Caravaggio was an artist who responded to his visual environment, one is not surprised that these early paintings lack the striking chiaroscuro of his later works. The informal, makeshift stages used by the itinerant, non-courtly *commedia dell'arte*, as depicted for example in the prints of Jacques Callot, lacked the controlled artificial lighting used in private, indoor theatrical productions.<sup>22</sup>

While the details of the appearance of the Shakespearean stage have been a matter of conjecture and debate among theater historians dependent on chance archaeological finds, contemporary Italian scenography is exceptionally well documented. Most likely, the stagecraft of Caravaggio's Roman milieu adhered to the rules promulgated by nearly every architectural treatise since Sebastiano Serlio's widely influential *De perspective: Il secondo libro d'architettura*, published in 1545.<sup>23</sup> While his treatise boasted the appeal of classical authority, Serlio offered something more than Vitruvius as well: illustrations and practical advice for converting the ancient Roman *anfiteatro* into a plan better suited to the rectangular halls of contemporary *palazzi*. His *Scena Comica*

(Fig. 2) illustrates a typical, carefully constructed perspectival scene, its vanishing point contrived for the benefit of the prince or other dignitary in the seat of honor.<sup>24</sup> In his text Serlio enthusiastically praises the scenography of pictorial illusion:

Among all things made by hand of man, few in my opinion bring greater contentment to the eye and satisfaction to the spirit than the unveiling to our view of a stage setting. Here the art of perspective gives us in a little space a view of superb palaces, vast temples, and houses of all kinds, and, both near and far spacious squares, surrounded by various ornate buildings. There are long vistas of avenues with intersecting streets, triumphal arches, soaring columns, pyramids, obelisks, and a thousand other marvels, all enriched by innumerable lights (large, medium, small, according to the position)....<sup>25</sup>

Serlian stagecraft, in other words, was the essence of artifice. The palaces and temples he praises were merely fabrications of plaster and wood. Even statues "supposed to be of marble or bronze will be made of thick cardboard or even thin wood, cut to size,

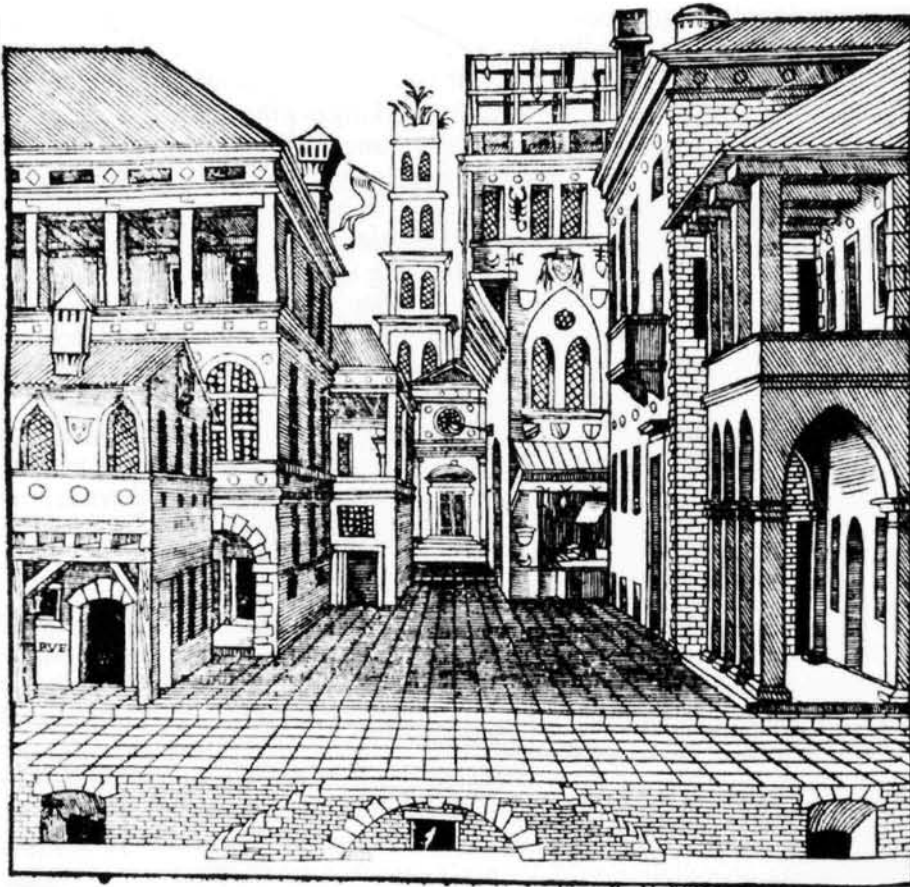


Fig. 2 Sebastiano Serlio, *Scena Comica*, from *De perspective: Il secondo libro d'architettura* (Paris, 1545). Woodcut. (From Barnard Hewitt, ed., *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini, and Furtenbach* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958), 28. Used with permission.)

and shadowed."<sup>26</sup> The substance of the "ideal town" was entirely integumentary; its core consisted of flat frames covered with canvas. Normally, in order to maintain verisimilitude, the houses of the angled wings nearest the front of the stage were built in full relief, while those closer to the vanishing point were left simply as flat, painted surfaces.<sup>27</sup> The raking of the stage upward toward the vanishing point allowed an even greater illusion of depth within a constrained space. This contrived vista remained convincing as long as the actors made their entrances only through the first few intersecting "streets"—an actor standing deep within the forced perspective set would dwarf the scenery.

Given that the ephemeral constructions of late-*cinquecento* scenography were common to theatrical productions in both the *grande sale* of wealthy households and the more permanent theaters of noble courts, such as at Sabbioneta and the Uffizi, it is most likely that performances in the *palazzi* of Caravaggio's patrons were consistent with Serlio's descriptions.<sup>28</sup> In fact, there is every reason to be confident that the artist was aware of developments in scenographic theory and practice. At the very time when Caravaggio was living in Palazzo Madama, Guidobaldo del Monte, the cardinal's brother, was composing *Perspectivae libri sex* (Pesaro, 1600), an optical treatise that revolutionized scenography. As a study of the shadows cast by artificial light, Guido's treatise sustained criticism in Pietro Accolti's *Lo inganno degl'occhi* for failing to advance the art of painting.<sup>29</sup> Accolti believed that Guido's theories on the convergence of orthogonals were of more use to practitioners working in a three-dimensional pictorial art than they were to painters. Yet artists in any medium could have benefited from Guido's experimental studies of the scenographic stage, which were too involved to be worked out effectively on paper or in the studio. Book VI of Guido's treatise, devoted to scenography, suggested solutions for the problems involved in painting perspectival details onto angled scenery wings by using mathematical formulas (Fig. 3).<sup>30</sup> Guido's refinements in scenographic draftsmanship created the possibility of replacing angled wings in relief with sets of illusionistically painted, flat wings, positioned parallel to the front of the stage. These movable, sliding wings allowed the relatively quick scenic changes that characterized Baroque theater—as opposed to the fixed, three-dimensional scenery of the sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Such an involved study would have required intense scrutiny of scenographic practice, and thus Guido must have frequented rehearsals and performances. Given his own interest in theatrical innovation, Cardinal del Monte—and his *famiglia*—would certainly have taken a close interest in his brother's work.

For all the visual conceits that *perspectiva artificialis* offered the stage scene, no aspect of optics was more important than light. Given its ability to sculpt form, to alter mood, and to add decorative splendor, the successful manipulation of light was the goal of every scenographer. Stage designer Angelo Ingegneri, in his own treatise *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo de rappresentare le favole sceniche* (1598), had this to say of scenic illumination:

There remains one matter of supreme theatrical importance—the lighting. Lighting in a theatre ought to be pleasing and clear, and the instruments should be so placed that the spectators' view of the stage is not interrupted by hanging chandeliers or lamps. ...[T]he man who is able to arrange this illumination so that only its splendor is seen, and its effect created without any member of the audience being in a position to say whence or how it is obtained, unquestionably does much to add to the magnificence of the show.<sup>32</sup>

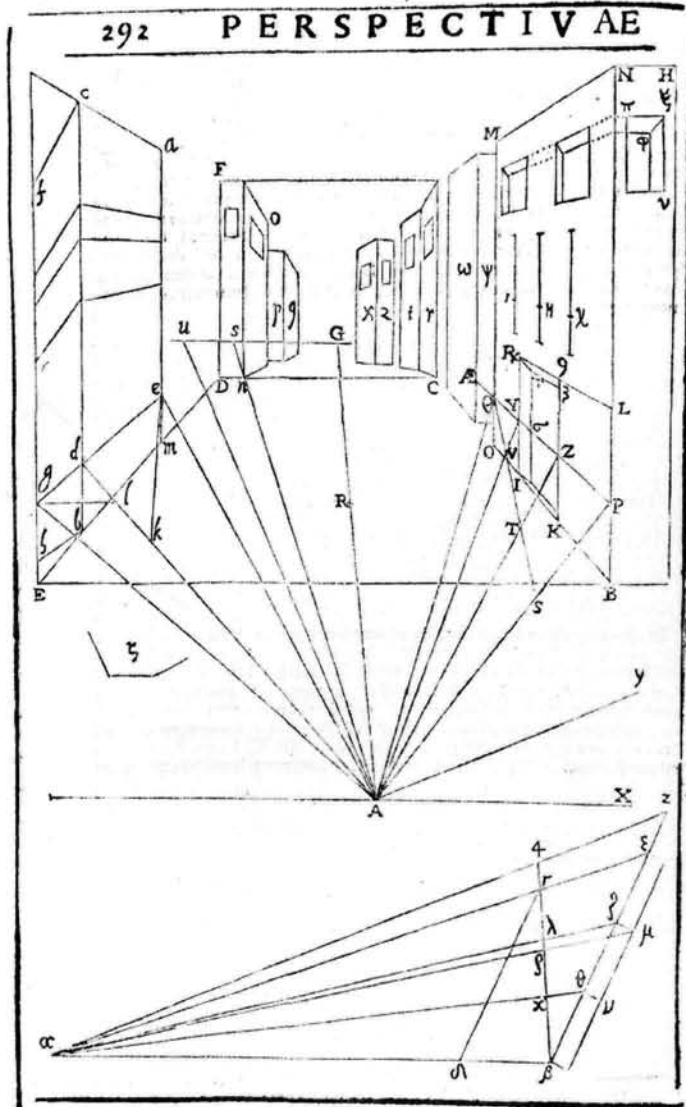


Fig. 3 Guidobaldo del Monte, "On Stage Scenery," from *Perspectivae libri sex* (Pesaro, 1600). Woodcut. (From J. V. Field, *The Invention of Infinity: Mathematics and Art in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 176. Used with permission of Oxford University Press.)

According to Ingegneri, theatrical lighting must be both functional and delightful. Obviously, adequate illumination was necessary to endow the fictive ideal town with verisimilitude, but any discussion of scenic illumination must also consider the Renaissance and Baroque affinity for abundantly lit spectacles—both secular and sacred. While symbolizing miraculous divinity, light also signified power, prestige and wealth: after all, sources of illumination were expensive and were necessarily used with great economy by the ordinary citizen.<sup>33</sup> At the Uffizi's theater no expense was spared, and Buontalenti's intent was to dazzle the spectator with light. In 1589, for example, Cardinal del Monte witnessed the festivities surrounding the Grand Duke's marriage to Christine of Lorraine, which included music by his close friend Emilio de' Cavalieri and the comedy *La Pellegrina* with six *intermezzi*.<sup>34</sup> For these allegorical interludes numerous stage technicians, including a special lighting crew,

ensured that the flying machines and the sumptuous costumes of the singers and dancers were well lit. As *Amoria Doria*, a personification of the Doric mode, descended from the stage's "heavens" on a cloud, backlighting afforded her a supernatural glow.<sup>35</sup> The Church, moreover, readily adopted such luminous artifice for liturgical ceremonies, particularly that of the Devotion of the Forty Hours (*Quarant'ore*). This sacred ceremony of medieval origin became increasingly spectacular in the sixteenth century, with the consecrated Host displayed on an altar that was essentially a highly illuminated theatrical *apparato*. Such excess prompted Clement VIII to issue an edict in 1592 requiring that the altar be toned down and that the hundreds of oil lamps and candles be reduced to only six of each.<sup>36</sup>

The more creative stage designers of the period understood not only the power and pleasure of blazing brightness but also the subtleties of fooling the eye with hidden illumination. Ingegneri's treatise, for example, explains that his method of indirect lighting relied upon a kind of flying boom.<sup>37</sup> At the front of the stage, suspended between illusionistically painted heavens and the ceiling of the hall, a valance fitted with several lamps directed beams onto the actors with the aid of attached tinsel reflectors. Other contemporary scenographic manuals provide similar instructions for devising spotlights. Serlio delighted in decorative effects and placed small, lit bowls of colored liquid (*bozze*) in each window to create a cityscape with a jewel-like sparkle. Yet he concedes in *De perspective* that an especially strong light would at times be needed, and in such a case "you put a torch behind a glass, and behind the torch a barber's basin well burnished. This will reflect a splendor like the rays of the sun."<sup>38</sup>

The architectural fabrications of the stage supplied ample opportunities for hiding sources of illumination. In addition to being hidden in the heavens, lights could be concealed in chimneys, balconies, and between streets in the wings to create the desired effect. Emanating from their hidden niches, such lights were still close enough to project a visible beam onto the actors. Yet there were also more practical reasons for concealing the sources of light: stage lighting was a messy business, as explained in detail by stage designer Nicola Sabbattini. In his manual on constructing scenes and stage machinery, *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri*, Sabbattini asserts the necessity of hiding the various activities involved in maintaining proper illumination, stressing the precautionary measures required to ensure a safe theater and a seamless production.<sup>39</sup> The numerous technicians required to supervise the illumination—containing dripping wax and replacing candles, oil, or wicks as necessary—needed to be kept out of sight of the audience, and these flaming devices of course demanded a large, nearby supply of unsightly water buckets. In his *Dialoghi* of 1565 the playwright and director Leone de Somi, while praising the mirrors used to reflect indirect lighting, cites another concern of those working with light sources in a time before electric or gas power. Not only do the reflections prevent the annoying glare of a naked flame, De Somi reasons, "they have the further advantage that here we obtain light without smoke—a great consideration."<sup>40</sup> He goes on to stress the importance of opening holes behind the scenes through which smoke can escape, lest the director create a smoke screen and "land himself in serious difficulties."

The necessity of controlling sources of illumination led to an interest in exploiting the emotional aspects particular to light. De Somi, one of the most perspicacious of the early theatrical theorists, coordinated modulations in lighting with the changing moods of the play. During happy scenes he recommended that the stage remain brightly lit, but

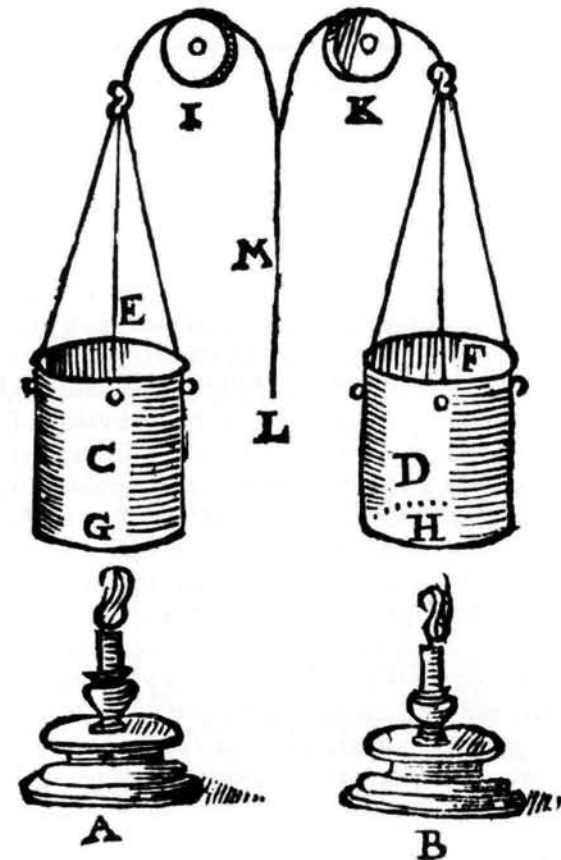


...[as] the first unhappy incident occurred, I contrived (by prearrangement, of course) that at that very instant most of the stage lights not used for the perspective were darkened or extinguished. This created a profound impression of horror among the spectators and won universal praise.<sup>41</sup>

Given the limited resources of the sixteenth century, we might well wonder what sort of "prearrangement" could have produced such an advanced special effect. The impracticalities of repeatedly extinguishing and relighting lamps, which caused unpleasant smoke and fumes, encouraged the development of a simple dimming device. Sabbattini, a student of Guido del Monte, illustrated such a device in his *Pratica* in a chapter entitled, "How to darken the whole scene in a moment" (Fig. 4).<sup>42</sup> Here a series of pulleys allows perforated tins to be easily lowered over the lights for temporary darkness and then raised again at will for sudden illumination. Buontalenti, too, amazed his audience as usual at the 1589 performance of *La Pellegrina* by causing the torches to ignite spontaneously, probably by using a spirit-soaked length of string.<sup>43</sup> That these sorts of contrivances actually worked is not in doubt: Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio's *Memoirs* recall theatrical entertainments in the homes of Montalto and his Roman friends that turned "day into night, and night into day."<sup>44</sup>

Considering all of these spectacular uses of light, it must be understood that its most important function in late-Renaissance theater was to elucidate the forms of the

Fig. 4 Nicola Sabbattini, dimming device, from *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* (Ravenna, 1638). Woodcut. (From Barnard Hewitt, ed., *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini, and Furttenbach* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958), 112. Used with permission.)



perspectival scene. One of the many seventeenth-century treatises on optical theory, for example, recognized this fundamental role of light as a component of scenographic perspective, explaining that scenes were “formed by lines, planes, and surfaces, and by solid parts, by lights as well as by shadows, formed in different ways....”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, early stage theorists often express their thoughts on ways of achieving plasticity with light, without which their illusory vistas would have lacked verisimilitude. Serlio recommends painting shadows on scenic details to suggest that the scene is lit from a single light coming from one side. However, when considering the position of the actual sources of light, he concludes that regardless of the painted shadows, “it is better to illuminate the scene from the middle because of the greater power of a light hanging at the center.”<sup>46</sup> Sabbattini also carefully considers the ideal configuration of stage lights and provides advice for more consistent lighting and shadowing. Having empirically observed lighting practices for years, he concludes that shadows should not be painted until the angle of light is set.<sup>47</sup> He then discusses the advantages and disadvantages of various lighting positions, with illustrations bolstering his arguments. Sabbattini points out that while footlights supplied a sufficiently strong light on the actors, it was an “insipid” light that washed out details and cast a sickly pallor on their faces. Conversely, a system of backlighting from the rear of the stage behind the back shutter produced a “crude” darkness that irritated the straining eyes of the audience. Ultimately, Sabbattini describes the following ideal method of sculpting forms with light, a method guaranteed to please the audience (Fig. 5):

[I]f the illumination is set at one side, left or right, the houses, the back shutter, the stage floor, and the whole scene will have a finer appearance than by any of the other methods. It will give complete pleasure to the spectators, for the highlights and the shadows are distributed in the way that will give the greatest beauty.... [T]his has been commonly demonstrated, that the greatest praise will be gained by this method of painting the scene and placing the light.<sup>48</sup>

And Sabbattini should be taken at his word: numerous illustrations included in contemporary printed plays show the lighting configured in his preferred manner, with a high light descending on the actors from one side (Fig. 6).<sup>49</sup>

In *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (Fig. 7) Caravaggio shows as much interest in creating plasticity with carefully manipulated light as any stage designer or theatrical theorist. The seventeenth-century physician Francesco Scannelli, upon viewing the painting in its alcove in San Luigi dei Francesi, judged it “one of the most luminous, sculptural, and natural works....”<sup>50</sup> A raking light cuts aggressively through the scene in a diagonal beam from an unseen source. While this light fulfills its necessary narrative role as provider of divine enlightenment, it also happens to provide exactly the artificial illumination that would have resulted from a torch with an affixed reflector positioned just beyond the picture plane. Undoubtedly, the artist had considered the painting’s impact on its viewers, confronting them with these spotlighted figures in the dark Contarelli Chapel. After five years of exposure to scenography in the Del Monte circle, Caravaggio had developed the formal qualities that earlier had worked so well to sweetly spotlight *The Lute Player* into the brazen monumentality of his first important religious commissions. Paintings such as *The Conversion of Saint Paul* (Fig. 8) and *The Supper at Emmaus* (Fig. 9) represent the fulminant expression of this stylistic evolution.



Fig. 5 Nicola Sabbattini, "How to place the highlights and shadows in painting the scene," from *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* (Ravenna, 1638). Woodcut. (From Barnard Hewitt, ed., *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini, and Furttenbach* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958), 61. Used with permission.)

Fig. 6 Anonymous, scene from *Gl'inganni*, commedia, 1592. Woodcut. (Used with permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.)

QVINTO. 69  
*gentili come lui nō se ne trouano costi per tutto, si come della robba ne soprauanza s'è pre. Io nō l' lasciarei per vn Principe, si che andatemelo à trouare, e conducetemelo quà, ch'io lascierò là porta sopraperta, se nò.*  
*Ber. V'è come risponde à sua madre la fra'ca è in fine la giouentù corre dietro al diletto, horsù farò capo a Guindolo.*  
*Te. O Bargel traditore m'hai ingannato ancor tu, o o Bargello.*  
*Ber. Ohime, che quella è la voce di Teodosio, fuggi Bertolina scampà.*

SCENA TERZA.



CENCIA TEODOSIO GIULIO ROVERGIO.  
*Gen. E Chissà può guardare dai traditori di casa? io son stata ingannata e scontenta me.*



Fig. 7 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1600. Oil on canvas. Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. (Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)

Caravaggio knew his style was eye-catching—as Mancini had remarked, “never thought of, or done before by any other painter.” Rival painters who aped Caravaggio’s manner provoked his wrath, and he supposedly threatened with violence any painter who dared imitate it.<sup>51</sup> The usual competition among Roman painters became more contentious with Caravaggio among their ranks, and surviving legal documents concerning the artist’s relationships with both friends and adversaries include petty insults, threats, and mean-spirited assessments of each others’ work.<sup>52</sup> Caravaggio’s unconventional style and approach to subject matter made his paintings the targets of a concerted attack from members of the Accademia di San Luca as well as from art theorists. In addition to Frederico Zuccaro’s well-known, sneering response upon surveying Caravaggio’s work—“What is all the fuss about?”<sup>53</sup>—early biographies also report a popular accusation by other more conservative artists, namely that Caravaggio depended on chiaroscuro to hide weaknesses in *invenzione* and *disegno*.<sup>54</sup> Typically, although seventeenth-century critics praise his powerful modeling, the verism of his coloring, and his lifelike relief, they denigrate what they perceived to be artificiality in the light itself. Carlo Cesare Malvasia, for example, faults Caravaggio’s

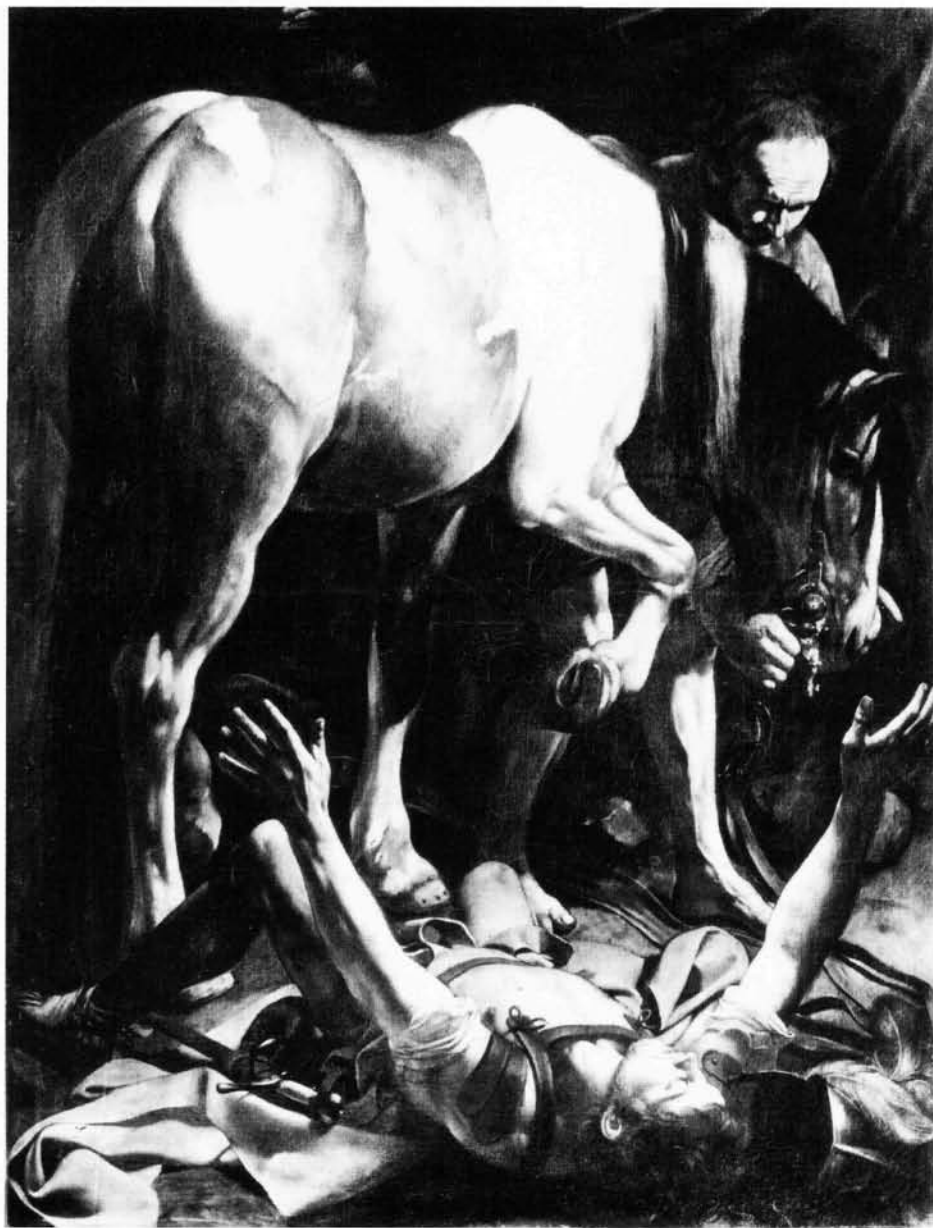


Fig. 8 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, 1601. Oil on canvas. Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. (Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)

"terrible and forced shadows, such as those falling from on high, and from half-closed windows, caused by the light of the sun or by a lit torch, [being] too unnatural in any case, violent, and affected, that we don't see naturally and ordinarily...."<sup>55</sup> Malvasia here expresses a common thought among theorists, that paintings should imitate the daylight seen outdoors in open spaces, squares and streets, instead of employing contrived, artificial, indoor light.<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 9 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Supper at Emmaus*, ca. 1601. Oil on canvas. The National Gallery, London. (From Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 74. Used with permission.)

Of course, Caravaggio's paintings could never have achieved academic perfection if his critics were correct in their suppositions about his working procedure—that is, if he did in fact paint in a dark vault or in a room with one window and walls painted black, as Mancini believed, or if “the moment the model was taken from him, his hand and mind became empty,” in Bellori's words.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, one biographer who was in a position to have actually observed the artist's working practices contradicts much of the bias and legend contained in other biographies. Vincenzo Giustiniani, Caravaggio's early and stalwart supporter, recorded his thoughts on painting in a letter to a friend some years after Caravaggio's death. In his letter Giustiniani groups painters into categories based on their manners of execution: the most highly rated group, which includes Caravaggio, achieved an admirable blend of painting from the imagination and painting from nature. Most significantly, he deems this group to have painted with “appropriate and realistic lighting.”<sup>58</sup> As he supported developments in Roman scenography and owned his own private theater, it is not surprising that Giustiniani does not seem to be disturbed by Caravaggio's spotlight figures.

Modern art historians have continued to speculate about the nature of Caravaggio's working practices and studio. Alfred Moir has presumed *The Calling of Saint Matthew* to be a literal representation of Caravaggio's studio, even going so far as to attempt to relate light sources in other paintings to the window seen in *Saint Matthew*.<sup>59</sup> Yet this approach fails to reconcile the natural light from the window with the intruding beam that overpowers it. Considering the theatrical activities of his patrons, it is reason-

able to suggest that Caravaggio made use of the halls where performances were held in order to determine the optimum manipulation of light for his paintings. We know that Tintoretto and Poussin constructed small, stage-like, perspective boxes with artificial lighting in order to observe figuration and chiaroscuro effects.<sup>60</sup> Caravaggio's circumstances offered far greater opportunities for such analysis: he was privileged with both live theater and, presumably, many painstaking technical rehearsals as well. Given his ability to enchant the Roman elite as well as "lusty fellows, painters and swordsmen,"<sup>61</sup> Caravaggio would surely have had few problems in co-opting stage technicians to help him solve or experiment with particular lighting and compositional problems. Such experience no doubt benefited the successfully illusionistic ceiling he painted for Del Monte's *casino* during his residence with the cardinal, a work intended to display to the artist's detractors his skill in foreshortening and perspective, as Bellori points out in his *Vite*.<sup>62</sup> Del Monte's choice of Caravaggio here followed Sabbattini's advice to obtain only a perspective specialist to paint the illusionistic heavens of scenic architecture.<sup>63</sup> Caravaggio could have learned these skills not only from observing the practice of stagecrafters and perspective specialists, but also from participating in the discussions regarding Guido del Monte's scenographic theories that must have taken place at Palazzo Madama.

Caravaggio's paintings themselves provide the most persuasive evidence that intense, empirical study advanced his optical knowledge significantly, from the early awkwardness in the foreshortening of *The Repentant Magdalene* or the inconsistent lighting of *The Cardsharps*, to the optical mastery of *The Supper at Emmaus*. Janis Bell's important study of this painting reveals just how far Caravaggio's understanding of light and color had progressed during his years in the Del Monte household.<sup>64</sup> Bell particularly praises his skillful depiction of the shadows cast by the table's still life, shadows that must be formed by a light source falling at an angle of roughly forty-five degrees. Since we see the progression from umbra (the black shadows of total light deprivation) into penumbra (the lighter, gray shadows) we can presume a fairly close, concentrated source—that is, much like the spotlight of the theater. While Caravaggio's treatment of the still life in this painting faithfully follows optical laws, theorist Matteo Zaccolini considered such heightened contrasts of light and dark to be crude and unnatural. To avoid a visible beam and its harsh attendant chiaroscuro, Zaccolini suggested placing the light at a considerable distance, thus diffusing the beam of light that reaches the image on the canvas.<sup>65</sup> Caravaggio obviously understood the rules of sciagraphy, or shadow casting, and he knew how to manipulate them as well, although not in a manner that Zaccolini would have found pleasing: whereas the shadows on the table are consistently plotted at about forty-five degrees, the shadow of the servant falls at an angle of only twenty degrees, thus forming Christ's sciagraphic halo.

Clearly, even when depicting holy figures, Caravaggio's light is relentlessly artificial. The beam of light that illuminates the tax-collecting Matthew and his avaricious companions leaves Christ and Peter in shadowy obscurity. There and in *The Madonna dei Pellegrini* (Fig. 10), holy figures—and, significantly, even their haloes—are subject to the same effects of light as sinners and peasants, rather than serving more traditionally as the symbolic source of light themselves. Not only did Caravaggio's academic detractors object to such a treatment of light on formal and aesthetic grounds, but any viewer familiar with Neoplatonic hierarchies of light would have been shocked by this lack of decorum. The Milanese theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo, for example, had separated light into categories, distinguishing the spiritual purity of *lume divino* from



Fig. 10 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Madonna dei Pellegrini*, ca. 1604. Oil on canvas. San Agostino, Rome. (Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)



the debased and crude shadows of earthly, artificial light.<sup>66</sup> Within this construct, the fantastical, supernatural, and optically irrational luminosity emanating from the holy figures of Tintoretto and others was perfectly legitimate. By contrast, Caravaggio's artificial light, derived from the empirical context of theatrical scenography, might reinforce a divine event, but it is never caused by one. The many previous depictions of *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, for example, usually had blatantly identified the bolt of light that fells Paul from his horse as a supernatural phenomenon. In Caravaggio's version of the story, however, the rays that bathe Paul and his horse are not so much divine as they are Serlian, suggesting the "splendor like the rays of the sun" that a well-burnished barber's basin and torch would have produced. As with the beam of enlightenment in *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, the source of this light remains unseen by the painting's "audience" and must come from a concealed source "offstage." Caravaggio's light is rational and can always be explained—as long as one considers the lighting of contemporary theater as it is discussed in scenographic treatises.

While relying so heavily on artificial light, Caravaggio simultaneously employed assertively naturalistic depictions of the human figure, another artistic preference that put him in a precarious position among critics. Mancini admits that Caravaggio's method of lighting, although unnatural, imbued his figures with great force, but he complains that because the unacademic artist was "too closely tied to nature" it was ineffective in narrative compositions, "which are based on imagination and not direct observation of things."<sup>67</sup> As mentioned, Francesco Scannelli was also impressed by the relief in Caravaggio's canvases, but his naturalistic effects, created "with the help of deceptions," only served to "demonstrate the artifice of painting when it imitates mere reality." Scannelli believed that had Caravaggio "deepened his study, he could have been able more readily to reveal a more perfect and sublime level of deeper and truer beauty."<sup>68</sup> In other words, without the weight of *istoria* behind them, Caravaggio's naturalistic figures had little more value than skillfully rendered still lifes. Their sculptural relief made them appear too real at a time when art was supposed to offer selective representations of idealized truth and beauty. The problem was that Caravaggio's figures—even the divine ones—looked like everyday Roman citizens, such as he might have seen perform at del Monte's Palazzo Madama. Bellori objected specifically to the servant and pilgrims in *The Supper at Emmaus* for their lack of decorum, contending that "Michele's work often degenerated into common and vulgar forms."<sup>69</sup> In Scannelli's opinion, Caravaggio's treatment of the Virgin and the dirty-footed pilgrims of *The Madonna dei Pellegrini* would have shocked the greatest masters.<sup>70</sup> Leaning against an architectural frame at the forefront of her "stage" and cast in sculptural relief by an unseen artificial light, the Madonna resembles no one as much as an earthy, robust performer.<sup>71</sup> Academics judged this naturalistic manner to be the simple aping of nature and a denial of internal *disegno*, lacking the rhetorical requirements of history painting—but this is not necessarily so.

Caravaggio's approach to painted naturalism again finds a parallel in the theatrical philosophy of Leone de Somi, who believed that the value of comedy as an agent of both pleasure and moral instruction was increased by its fidelity to nature.<sup>72</sup> De Somi promoted the use of vernacular prose on the stage, encouraging actors to speak in a natural voice, and he stressed that their gestures should convey dignity and grace through natural, corporal eloquence—"the soul of rhetoric."<sup>73</sup> With a directorial goal of giving pleasure while providing instruction, he was wise enough to understand that his audience was unlikely to be composed of virtuous people alone. De Somi permitted

licentious phrases and vulgarities in his productions as long as they were artfully handled by the poet, "who, desiring to present in his plays salutary material, conceals this sometimes by appeals to the corrupt taste of an infirm age." The purpose of such earthy realism was to persuade the audience "into the belief that what they see before them are real events happening casually, and not imagined by the poet."<sup>74</sup> De Somi's *Dialoghi* reveal the great pains taken to present plays in such a compelling manner, including the careful and sensitive consideration of theatrical lighting. De Somi understood what Caravaggio's critics apparently did not, that realism is the ultimate rhetorical *conchetto*—the greater the verisimilitude, the greater the artifice required to fabricate it.

Around 1600 Caravaggio left Palazzo Madama and moved on to other patrons and other cities, remaining at each new dwelling only for brief periods during the remainder of his short, increasingly restless life. The monumental religious paintings he executed in Rome near the turn of the century remain as testimony to his absorption of artistic philosophies drawn from genres other than painting. At the beginning of the *seicento*, academic painters were not yet ready to contaminate pure, canonical precedents, as was happening in music and theater. As a painter nurtured in the atmosphere of contemporary theater, Caravaggio's conception of light and sculptural form ultimately derived from their application in stage design. Expected to follow Raphael and Correggio for models of ideal lighting and figure types, Caravaggio instead followed Serlio, Ingegneri, and De Somi. Yet these theatrical adaptations betray independent and intelligent selectivity. Rarely interested in anything but the simplest background detail in his paintings, he chose not to embellish them with the scenographic backgrounds used by Tintoretto, d'Arpino, and later, Poussin. Caravaggio's pre-cinematic close-ups crop out all but the most salient forms and, in the process, evoke the sensuous ambiance and immediacy of live theater more faithfully than any architectural backdrop could ever have done.

In documenting the change that took place in scenography in the early twentieth century from heavy architectural forms to simpler, movable scenery, George Kernodle has drawn a parallel with similar changes that occurred from Renaissance to Baroque theater.<sup>75</sup> The pioneers of modern theater exploited the powerful, newly developed electric spotlight to manipulate mood and provide plasticity with chiaroscuro. The theatrical illumination of Caravaggio's time, which he employed to such great effect in his paintings, was now easily attainable in any theatrical production. Thus it seems appropriate that Adolphe Appia's dark, spotlit staging of Arturo Toscanini's 1923 production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* prompted one reviewer to describe it as "Caravaggesque."<sup>76</sup> Roger Fry even observed in the same year that the fledgling art of cinema, like the modern theater, emulated the dramatic lighting of *seicento* artists—in response to *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, he declared of Caravaggio, "what an impresario for the cinema!"<sup>77</sup>

In light of this interdisciplinary artistic exchange, we might further consider another unacknowledged channel of influence in the pictorial arts concerning Caravaggio. As Kernodle remarked of twentieth-century scenographic changes, "We have only to look at the development of perspective scenery in the sixteenth century, and see what happened to it in the seventeenth century, to understand how the theatre designer in time outgrows his function of providing heavy architecture and develops the more gratifying art of dealing with scene-planes and theatrical light and shadow."<sup>78</sup> At the turn of the seventeenth century, amid the disintegration of the pure genres of

music and drama, Cardinal del Monte's brother and in-house painter developed scenographic alternatives that instigated Baroque theater. Guido's treatise introduced the possibility of replacing heavy scenographic architecture with the flexibility of lightweight, changeable, flat wings. Caravaggio's paintings, in turn, may have demonstrated to his contemporaries in stage design that truly the most potent aspect of scenography was not the perspectival vista, but the vital relief, emotion, and narrative exposed in the chiaroscuro of the artificial, theatrical spotlight.

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My sincerest thanks go to Dr. Anthony Colantuono, Professor of Art History at the University of Maryland, College Park. Without his generous support and encouragement this article would not have been possible. I also appreciate the sound editorial advice of Brian Clancy, which greatly contributed to the clarity of my argument.

1. The relationship between painting and theater fulfills the definition of *ut pictura poesis* in the classical sense: Aristotle's *Poetics*, while concerned primarily with drama, observes that both arts imitate human nature in action and compares the plot of a tragedy to the line within a painting. See Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting," *Art Bulletin* 22 (1940), 197-269.
2. According to Giulio Mancini, physician and amateur art critic, in his *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (ms. Rome, ca. 1626 ff.), ed. Adriana Marucchi (with commentary by Luigi Salerno), 2 vols., Rome, 1956-57. Translation in Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 350.
3. Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti moderni* (Rome, 1672), trans. in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 363-364. Bellori (371) reports that even the respected Guido Reni and Guercino were influenced by this new style.
4. Bellori, *Vite*, 373.
5. See, for example, the essays by Giulio Bora, Keith Christiansen, W. R. Rearick, and Mina Gregori in *The Age of Caravaggio*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985). These authors quite rightly suggest a link between Caravaggio's work and the Lombard approach to realism and predilection for nocturnal scenes, yet it should be pointed out that the nighttime paintings of Caravaggio's Lombard predecessors, such as Antonio Campi and Giovanni Savoldo, usually include a recognizable source of light—candles, torches, or moonlight—within the painting. See also Maria Rzepinska, "Tenebrism in Baroque Painting and Its Ideological Background," *Artibus et Historiae* 13 (1986), 19-112. While dealing with Caravaggio's tenebrism as well as that of other painters, Rzepinska and others fail to pursue the source of the formal qualities that distinguish Caravaggio's chiaroscuro from that of his contemporaries.
6. Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 29-30. Del Monte assumed Ferdinand's place as cardinal when the latter married. Del Monte's residence, Palazzo Madama, in fact belonged to the Medici, and the cardinal acted as a Roman diplomat for the Florentine family.
7. Keith Christiansen, *A Caravaggio Rediscovered: The Lute Player*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 10, 11, and 46. In addition to supporting the Spanish *castrato* Pedro Montoya (who probably resided at the Palazzo Madama with Caravaggio), Del Monte became the patron of a very young Andrea Sacchi about ten years later.
8. Luigi Salerno, "The Roman World of Caravaggio: His Admirers and Patrons," in *The Age of Caravaggio*, 17-21. Salerno mentions that several friends and acquaintances of Caravaggio, such as the painter Giuseppe Cesari (the Cavaliere d'Arpino) and the poet Aurelio Orsi, were members of the intellectual Accademia degli Insensati, along with Tasso and Barberini.
9. Although early biographies contain information on Caravaggio's first period in Rome, these accounts conflict slightly in their details. Legends of his early activities include employment in the workshop of a Sicilian who painted "crude works" and a stay with a certain Monsignor Pucci, who was given the sobriquet "Monsignor Insalata" for his starvation wages. What is more certain is that Caravaggio was an assistant to the fashionable Cavaliere d'Arpino. For a summary of the various accounts, see Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 7-10.

10. Elizabeth Cropper, "The Petrifying Art of Marino's Poetry and Caravaggio," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991), 198.
11. James Chater, "Musical Patronage in Rome at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century: The Case of Cardinal Montalto," *Studi Musicali* 16 (1987), 206-208. Del Monte's letters span the years 1595-1604.
12. Vincenzo Giustiniani, *Discorso sopra la musica*, trans. Carol MacClintock (The American Institute of Musicology, 1962), 80.
13. Among the earliest paintings Giustiniani commissioned from Caravaggio was a version of *The Lute Player* as well as *Victorious Amor*, both perhaps meant to hang in his music room; he eventually owned fifteen paintings by the artist. Franca Camiz postulates that Caravaggio's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, an early painting that features a musician and a readable score, may have been a gift from Del Monte to Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, serving much the same purpose as the paintings in Giustiniani's musical chamber. See Franca Camiz, "Music and Painting in Cardinal Del Monte's Household," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991), 215-217.
14. Giustiniani, *Discorso*, 74-75. Giustiniani remarks on the power of music to produce the emotions of love and tears, which may account for the rather melancholy tone of Caravaggio's musical paintings.
15. Camiz, "Music and Painting," 219-222.
16. Chater, "Musical Patronage," 179 ff.
17. Chater, "Musical Patronage," 206-208. Chater has observed a tendency towards increasingly sumptuous entertainments by the beginning of the seventeenth century.
18. See Silvia Danesi Squarzina, "Caravaggio e i Giustiniani," in Stefania Macioce, ed., *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio: La vita e le opere attraverso i documenti. Atti del Convegno Internazionale de Studi* (Rome: Logart Press, 1996), 105. Even the Barberini did not replace "the *salone* where the comedies used to be given" with a permanent theater until 1637, well into Maffeo's reign as Pope Urban VIII; see Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 57-58 and 247-248.
19. Chater, "Musical Patronage," 214. Both men are documented as having been present at many of the theatrical festivities surrounding Medici weddings and baptisms from 1589-1602.
20. Chater, "Musical Patronage," 193-194 and 218-221. Montalto's fluctuating household usually comprised over a hundred *salariati*. A letter from the composer Emilio de' Cavalieri reports that Del Monte's *famiglia* was somewhat more modest—about fifty in number—yet Del Monte nevertheless managed to entertain a variety of guests graciously. Aldobrandini's *famiglia* numbered between 85-145; see Camiz, "Music and Painting," 213-214.
21. See Barry Wind, "Pitture ridicole: Some Late Cinquecento Genre Paintings," *Storia dell'arte* 20 (1974), 31-35.
22. For the staging practices of the *commedia dell'arte* and their depiction in Callot's series of etchings, see Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), 178-183.
23. Serlio published both Book I and Book II of his *Architettura*, respectively subtitled *De geometrie* and *De perspective*, as a single volume in Paris in 1545.
24. Throughout the sixteenth century, the stage of illusionistic, pictorial perspective remained the rule, as in surviving designs by Baldassare Peruzzi, Bastiano da Sangallo, Bartolommeo Neroni, and others that show only slight variations of this plan. The most notable anomaly, the Teatro Olimpico, whose *frons scenae* comprised five perspectival openings, was an attempt by Palladio (finished by Scamozzi) to recreate the classical stage more literally and is not considered a prototype of courtly theaters. For illustrations and discussions of pre-Baroque scenography, see Donald C. Mullin, *The Development of the Playhouse* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970) and George R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).
25. Sebastiano Serlio, *De perspective: Il secondo libro d'architettura* (Paris, 1545), trans. Allardyce Nicoll, in Barnard Hewitt, ed., *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini, and Furttenbach* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958), 24.
26. Serlio, *De perspective*, 30.
27. Serlio, *De perspective*, 29.

28. For the small, Serlian theater built by Vincenzo Scamozzi at Sabbioneta in 1588 for Vespasiano Gonzaga, see Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 171, and Stefano Mazzoni and Ovidio Guaita, *Il Teatro di Sabbioneta* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1985).
29. Thomas Da Costa Kauffman, "The Perspective of Shadows: The History of the Theory of Shadow Projection," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975), 281.
30. Judith V. Field, *The Invention of Infinity: Mathematics and Art in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 173-176.
31. Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 167; George R. Kernodle, "Farewell to Scenic Architecture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 25 (1939), 649-652. The first theater to be constructed entirely with flat wings based on Guido's principles was built in Ferrara in 1606 by G. B. Aleotti, who went on to design the Teatro Farnese (1618) with the same system. With flat wings the stage depth increased, and consequently the raking of the stage decreased. By the middle of the seventeenth century, angled wings had become all but obsolete.
32. Angelo Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo de rappresentare le favole sceniche* (Ferrara, 1598), trans. in Allardyce Nicoll, *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937), 133-134.
33. In her discussion of pre-electric scenography, lighting designer Jean Rosenthal lists the expense of candlelight and lamplight as a disadvantage. She adds that the poor were often reduced to having to consume their sources of light, as the oil and candle tallow actually had nutritional value. See Jean Rosenthal and Lael Wertenbaker, *The Magic of Light* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), 46.
34. A. M. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals of the Medici, 1539-1637* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), 79-92.
35. For this spectacle see Nagler, *Theatre Festivals*, 70, plates 42, 43.
36. Mark S. Weil, "The Devotion of the Forty Hours and Roman Baroque Illusions," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974), 220-223. Weil reports that these regulations were not strictly followed.
37. Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa*, 133.
38. Serlio, *De perspective*, 34. The German architect Joseph Furtenbach, who observed scenic practices in Italy from around 1610-1620, thoroughly covered the subject of lighting in his treatises. He describes a sunbeam created by shining light through a water-filled bowl and recommends mica reflectors, which would likely have produced a stronger beam than Serlio's barber's basin. See Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 224 and 234.
39. Nicola Sabbattini, *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine ne' teatri* (Ravenna, 1638), trans. John H. McDowell, in Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 95-98. Sabbattini's practical advice to stage technicians included various methods of reducing the dripping of wax from candles and the suggestion that water containers be placed above the beams and below the stage. He also recommended a crew of three workers for the operation of each lighting device. Allowing that accidents did happen, Sabbattini believed that if stagehands were adequately prepared, any adventitious event could be handled without disturbing the audience.
40. Leone de Somi, *Dialoghi dell'ebreo Leone de Somi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche copiati dall'originale* (ms. Parma, ca. 1565), trans. in Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre*, 3rd ed. (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1948), 259.
41. De Somi, *Dialoghi*, 258.
42. Sabbattini, *Pratica*, 111-112. Although Sabbattini was a student of the innovative Guido del Monte, whom he called the "Archimedes of Italy," his stagecraft was conservative and out of touch with the developments of Baroque scenography. His treatise, however, remains a valuable compendium of late-Renaissance stage practice. See Hewitt, *The Renaissance Stage*, 37-42.
43. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals*, 73.
44. Quoted in Chater, "Musical Patronage," 183.
45. Franciscus Aguilonius, *Optica* (Antwerp, 1613), trans. in George R. Kernodle, *Perspective in Renaissance Theatre: The Pictorial Sources and the Development of Scenic Forms* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1937), liv.

46. Serlio, *De perspective*, 28-29.
47. Sabbattini, *Pratica*, 59-61 and 95-96.
48. Sabbattini, *Pratica*, 60-61.
49. Louise George Clubb has successfully argued that these "stage-on-a-page" woodcuts were generic, interchangeable representations of the stage meant to evoke in the reader the experience of live theater, rather than faithfully depict the accompanying texts. See Louise George Clubb, "Pastoral Elasticity on the Italian Stage and Page," in John Dixon Hunt, ed., *The Pastoral Landscape*, exh. cat. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 111-128.
50. Francesco Scannelli, *Il microcosmo della pittura* (Cesna, 1657), trans. in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 358.
51. Biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia describes the fury Caravaggio directed toward Bolognese painter Guido Reni upon the latter's adoption of a tenebrist style. Guido escaped Caravaggio's physical assault by skillfully avoiding him. See Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *The Life of Guido Reni* (Bologna, 1678), trans. Catherine and Robert Enggass (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 49-51.
52. For the infamous litigation brought against Caravaggio by the painter Giovanni Baglione, see Walter Friedlaender, "Documents on his Life," *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 269-279. Richard Spear notes that Baglione's use of a Caravaggesque style in *Divine Love* and *The Resurrection* exacerbated the tension between the two artists; see Richard Spear, "Giovanni Baglione," cat. entry in *The Age of Caravaggio*, 90.
53. As related by Baglione in his *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, architetti, ed intagliatori, dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572, fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano VIII nel 1642* (Rome, 1642), trans. in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 353.
54. Bellori, *Vite*, 364. According to Malvasia, Annibale Carracci was as unimpressed as Zuccaro by the sensation over Caravaggio's style. Annibale boasted that he would better the artist's style by replacing "sharply delimited light" with more "open and direct" light, and he further accused Caravaggio of covering "the difficult parts of art in nighttime shadows.... I, by the bright light of noon, would like to reveal the most learned and erudite of my studies." See Malvasia, *Life of Guido Reni*, 43-44.
55. Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice: Vite de' pittori bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678), ed. Giampietro Zanotti (Bologna, 1841, fac. ed. 1974), vol. 2, 59: "...terribili e tortate, come cadenti d'alto, e da finestra, socchiusa, cagionate da lume di sole, e di torchio acceso, artificiose tropp' ad ogni modo, violenti, ed affettate, e per l'ordinario...."
56. For the general prejudice against the combination of extreme *chiaro* and *scuro*, see Janis C. Bell, "Re-visioning Raphael as a 'Scientific Painter,'" in *Re-Framing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 98-100.
57. Mancini, *Considerazioni*, 350; Bellori, *Vite*, 371.
58. Vincenzo Giustiniani, undated letter (ca. late 1620s) to Teodoro Ameyden, in *Raccolta di lettere* (Rome, 1768), trans. in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 346. Guido Reni and Annibale Carracci are included in this group with Caravaggio, and all rank higher than Rubens in this respect. See also Janis C. Bell, "Some Seventeenth-Century Appraisals of Caravaggio's Coloring," *Artibus et Historiae* 14 (1993), 123-125. Giustiniani was a serious collector with liberal tastes, and his collection of over a hundred paintings included works by Caravaggio, Gerritt van Honthorst, Domenichino, Francesco Albani, and Reni, among others.
59. Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 44.
60. Carlo Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto*, trans. Catherine and Robert Enggass (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), 17: "He also placed some of the figures in little houses and in perspective scenes made of wood and cardboard, and by means of little lamps he contrived for the windows he introduced therein lights and shadows." Similarly, Eugène Delacroix described Poussin's use of "little stage models lit up by the studio light," which was responsible for the painter's static "dryness." See *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Walter Pach (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 253.
61. Joachim von Sandrart, *The Life of Caravaggio* (Nuremberg, 1676), trans. in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 339.
62. Bellori, *Vite*, 374. For the restoration of the *casino* ceiling painting of Pluto, Neptune, and Jupiter—Caravaggio's only known ceiling painting—see Jonathan Turner, "The Caravaggio Beneath the Skin," *Art News* 88 (1989), 18.

63. Sabbattini, *Pratica*, 47.
64. Janis C. Bell, "Light and Color in Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*," *Artibus et Historiae* 16 (1995), 139-170. Bell considers Caravaggio's scientific treatment of light and color in this painting to be even more sophisticated than Raphael's achievement in *The Transfiguration*.
65. Bell, "Some Seventeenth-Century Appraisals," 108.
66. Moshe Barasch, *Light and Color in the Italian Renaissance Theory of Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 148-150. Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scultura, ed architettura* (Milan, 1585) holds that a descending hierarchy in the value of light, from heavenly to subterranean sources, is confirmed by Scripture and that artists should conform to biblical illumination principles. Given that Caravaggio was apprenticed to Simone Peterzano in Milan during the years 1584-88, just as Lomazzo's theories were gaining currency, the revolutionary treatment of divine light on the part of the younger artist suggests a conscious defiance of artistic authority.
67. Mancini, *Considerazioni*, 350.
68. Scannelli, *Il microcosmo*, 358 and 360.
69. Bellori, *Vite*, 367.
70. Scannelli, *Il microcosmo*, 359: "Instead of showing a suitable decorum with grace and devotion, we find everywhere their lack. In fact, the major masters would have expressed their astonishment at it all."
71. It should be recalled that due to the demands of verisimilitude, actors necessarily stood at the front of the stage, not *within* the scaled, fictive scenic architecture.
72. De Somi, *Dialoghi*, 244. Note also that the only distinction drawn by De Somi between tragedy and comedy was the social position of the characters—not the events of the play or the happiness or sadness of the ending.
73. De Somi, *Dialoghi*, 253.
74. De Somi, *Dialoghi*, 244 and 249.
75. Kernodle, "Farewell," 649-52.
76. Walter R. Volbach, *Adolphe Appia: Prophet of the Modern Theatre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 142.
77. Roger Fry, "Settecentismo," *Burlington Magazine* 41 (1922-23), 158 and 163.
78. Kernodle, "Farewell," 651.

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## Illustrating Slavery: Graphic Art in William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*

Virginia Heumann Kearney

Years came and passed; and still it pictured stood,  
The prophecy that slavery should cease.  
How many eyes, like mine have longingly dwelt  
Upon that contrast of the slave and free!  
How many, too, have sighed, "How long, Oh Lord!"  
When rampant Slavery dared take in vain  
The holiest name of Earth's Almighty One,  
As auctioneer of brother selling brother—  
(Both made, as records tell, in His own image)—  
Driven with cattle to the public mart;  
As if the Almighty bound in holy ties  
His human families, wife, husband, child  
For man to sever at the call of gain!  
Poor Mammon-worshippers! they do not see  
His altar hides the Christian's God from view.

Long have the slave-pen and the chattel mart  
Been doomed; long has the trusting eye foreseen  
The cruel master cower 'neath the clear gaze  
O' human nature's purest, holiest type,  
Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, crawl away,  
With shaded eyes, from that benignant face,  
Terrible only to the vile oppressor  
Of his poor helpless brethren! This new year—  
Grant it, O Father! May this coming year,  
From the historie records of thy children,  
For Ever see that darkest blot effaced,  
The sale and purchase of thy sons and daughters,  
Because their whiter brethren have the power!

Long had the slaves' true friends waited, long borne  
Insults, and sneers, and falsest calumny;  
Yet patient, full of hope, still they toiled on,  
Cheered and supported by the certainty  
Evil is not eternal; Wrong is doomed,  
However strong and rampant, to extinction.  
Blest are ye, Abolitionists! Your work  
Shall prosper, founded on eternal justice  
Blest are your eyes, that live to see the slave  
Freed by your efforts, blest by the Most High!  
Blest, too, your dead. Like aged Samuel,  
They, too, beheld in glad prophetic vision,  
The great salvation they had hoped to forward,  
Liberty, liberty, to their black brethren!

—Jane Ashby, "The Frontispiece of *The Liberator*," 1863<sup>1</sup>

When William Lloyd Garrison launched *The Liberator* on January 1, 1831, even he could not have suspected that the paper's goals of emancipating slaves and legalizing racial equality would take so very long to fulfill. Published in Boston as a four-page, weekly newspaper, *The Liberator* was the first abolitionist periodical to advocate immediate emancipation, and its publication is considered to have begun the radical emancipation movement. Persevering in the face of mob violence, personal threats, and continuously precarious finances, Garrison published *The Liberator* for thirty-five years, from January 1831 to December 1865, printing 1,820 issues in all.<sup>2</sup>

Central to Garrison's method of propaganda was the use of graphic illustration in *The Liberator*. The pictorial masthead of the paper, to which Jane Ashby so poignantly responded in her poem, portrayed the ways in which slaves were victims of physical brutality, familial separation, and economic disenfranchisement. Appearing weekly over *The Liberator*'s impassioned text, the masthead also exposed how the dehumanization of the slave mocked the principles of American democracy. Ashby's poem suggests that for the abolitionist, this pictorial masthead was both a stirring motivation to continue the fight against slavery and a vivid vision of the inevitable triumph of that struggle. While scholars have previously noted that *The Liberator* had three different mastheads and have discussed some of the differences among them, there has never been an extensive discussion about how these graphic images reinforced the content of the paper. Moreover, no scholars have commented on the presence of other small abolitionist graphics in the paper during its inaugural years of 1831 and 1832. In fact, in his recent biography of Garrison, Henry Mayer states decisively that the paper had no abolitionist graphics except the banner.<sup>3</sup> This study examines how the pictorial mastheads and internal graphic illustrations of *The Liberator* succinctly summarized the abolitionist message and motivated readers to join the fight against slavery. While arguing that these graphic illustrations played an important role in the campaign to end slavery, I will also contend that they re-inscribed a paternalistic relationship between the races. Thus, however successfully the images may have abetted the campaign to end slavery, they ultimately failed to be effective in the campaign to end racism itself.

Although the Revolutionary War had raised expectations that slavery would soon be abolished in America, in the early decades of the nineteenth century it became even more firmly entrenched in the South, as the invention of the cotton gin had kept slavery economically viable. Northern states had abolished slavery between 1774 and 1804, yet they were reluctant to interfere with what Southerners called their "peculiar institution."<sup>4</sup> Most white Americans, in fact, still did not believe in any sort of abolitionism, and the subject was not widely discussed.<sup>5</sup> The only abolitionist organization extant in 1831 was the American Colonization Society (ACS), which was established not to free American slaves but to buy slaves to send them back to Africa, because the ACS did not believe that free blacks could live peacefully with whites. As Garrison pointed out in his only full-length book, ponderously entitled *Thoughts on African Colonization: or An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society, together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (1832), the ACS plan was both impractical and racist.<sup>6</sup> Only a token number of slaves had been transported in the 1820s, and the attempt to re-colonize slaves had diverted many well-meaning people from the real issue, the emancipation of all slaves. As Mayer points out, Garrison's book so successfully destroyed the ACS that the organization has been largely forgotten by historians.<sup>7</sup>

The only abolitionist newspaper in existence in 1831 was *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, written and edited by Benjamin Lundy, a Quaker who had given up his harness-making business in 1816 in order to dedicate himself to ameliorating the plight of slaves. Lundy traveled across the South, holding meetings, setting up Quaker anti-slavery societies, and attempting to talk slave owners into freeing their slaves. When slave owners agreed, he often took the manumitted slaves to Haiti, where they could get a land grant and live as free people.<sup>8</sup> He published *The Genius* erratically, whenever he could get the funds and a friendly printer to loan him presses.<sup>9</sup> Yet Lundy was also responsible for converting Garrison to the cause of abolitionism, when the two met in March of 1828. For six months during 1829-30, Garrison worked for Lundy as editor of *The Genius*, even though his own views were growing more radical than his mentor's.<sup>10</sup> Between 1828 and 1829, Garrison had read Rev. George Bourne's tract *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable* (1816), which preached the sinfulness of slavery.<sup>11</sup> He had also studied the pamphlet *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* (1824), written by an English Quaker, Elizabeth Heyrick, which circulated in benevolent circles and was printed in Lundy's paper.<sup>12</sup> The pamphlet condemned gradual emancipation as satanic and advocated immediate emancipation as the only choice for the true Christian. As Garrison embraced immediatism during 1829, he hesitated when Lundy asked him to join *The Genius*, but the two men nonetheless agreed to write their own opinions in signed editorials.<sup>13</sup>

The black abolitionist communities of Boston, Baltimore and Philadelphia also influenced Garrison. Although small, the free black communities in these cities had begun in the late 1820s to protest their legal, social and economic inequality. Black abolitionists had vigorously argued against the ACS plan of expatriation in private meetings with ACS officials and at public conventions in the black communities of the North.<sup>14</sup> While editing *The Genius*, Garrison published articles by militant black reformers like Jacob Greener, who demanded public education for black children.<sup>15</sup> Garrison had also read black Bostonian David Walker's eloquent and incendiary pamphlet *Walker's Appeal...to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), which encouraged free blacks to engage in vigorous social protest and urged slaves to take up arms.<sup>16</sup> As Donald Jacobs notes, many of the proposals Garrison supported in these years were drawn from Walker's work, including Garrison's opinions on school integration, black unity, and the repeal of intermarriage laws.<sup>17</sup> Thus by 1831, when Garrison started his own newspaper, *The Liberator*, the black communities of the North had accepted him as their champion despite some uneasiness about his pacifism, defending not only his paper but also his personal safety. Black readers made up three-fourths of his subscriptions in the paper's first five years, and many of the more prominent black abolitionists gathered subscriptions from their communities on his behalf. Since Garrison believed that even self-defense was wrong, some black Bostonians decided to take his protection in their own hands—unbeknownst to Garrison, they organized bodyguards to follow him around Boston at night.<sup>18</sup>

Believing that real social change came from transformed hearts and minds rather than political mandates, Garrison was convinced that propaganda was the most effective means of reforming society—that when enough people believed that slavery was wrong, they would end it. Consequently, he sought to flood the country with words and images that stirred people's consciences about the evils of slavery, a technique he called "moral suasion."<sup>19</sup> For a model, Garrison and his supporters could look to the British abolitionist campaign, which had used petitions to Parliament,

abolitionist lectures, pamphlets, poems, and anti-slavery societies to bring England very near to emancipating their slaves in the West Indies by government decree, finally attaining the passage of a gradual emancipation bill in 1833.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, along with publishing *The Liberator*, Garrison initiated the American Anti-Slavery Society, which distributed anti-slavery literature, sent out abolitionist lecturers, held annual meetings, and established local anti-slavery groups throughout the North.<sup>21</sup> Garrison's arguments in *The Liberator* drew many influential people to use their talents for the cause of slavery—Lydia Maria Child, a well-known author of many articles as well as a textbook for abolitionists; Wendell Phillips, a lawyer from an old Boston family who became one of the most powerful abolitionist orators; and Frederick Douglass, the fugitive slave who today remains so widely admired for his autobiographies and his powerful lectures against slavery and racism.<sup>22</sup> However, it was not only these well-known agitators who were influenced by *The Liberator*, for the paper also served as an important source of information for the small abolitionist groups who worked quietly in many Northern towns to influence their friends and neighbors to take an interest in the slave.<sup>23</sup>

Garrison's one-man crusade quickly grew to a crusade of thousands, and his lone newspaper was joined, as he reported in December 1835, by "thirty-six papers in our country, which openly defend our doctrines and measures."<sup>24</sup> Even though *The Liberator* itself never had a readership of more than 3,000, Garrison's flair for notoriety provoked discussion of his ideas in hundreds of other newspapers.<sup>25</sup> Like most editors of his time, Garrison exchanged his paper with many others, giving them free reign to reprint anything they wanted and reserving the same privilege for himself. On the front page of *The Liberator*, under the title "Refuge from Oppression," Garrison regularly re-printed pro-slavery articles from Southern papers only to argue, in famously virulent language, against the content of these articles. Because his vehement rebuttals made great copy, he was frequently quoted in other papers throughout both North and South. When those papers slandered him, Garrison in turn reprinted their articles and labeled himself a martyr, setting off a new round of accusations.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, *The Liberator* was distributed not only to Congress and the White House but also to more distant locations such as California, Canada and Great Britain.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Jane Ashby was among abolitionist readers in Britain, and it was there that she wrote her moving poem.

The mastheads and other graphic art that Garrison employed in *The Liberator* powerfully complemented the anti-slavery war he waged in the paper's printed text. The paper's images also contributed significantly to the broader development of abolitionist art in America. Bernard Reilly has shown that anti-slavery art is somewhat an anomaly in American art history.<sup>28</sup> Three factors make abolitionist art unusual: the artist is usually not identified and often had little involvement in the conception of the image; the art was often printed on common decorative objects such as handkerchiefs, bags, boxes, cameo medallions, or stationery, as well as on paper sheets suitable for framing; and such objects or prints were distributed through unconventional methods like mail-order, anti-slavery offices, or ladies' bazaars. Frequently, abolitionist women copied familiar anti-slavery images in needlework or other handicrafts to be displayed or sold at their bazaars. Before the 1830s, anti-slavery art was also imported from England, where it had been successfully employed in the campaign against slavery in the British West Indies.<sup>29</sup> One of the best known images from British anti-slavery art, for example, pictured a kneeling slave in chains pleading, "Am I not a man and a

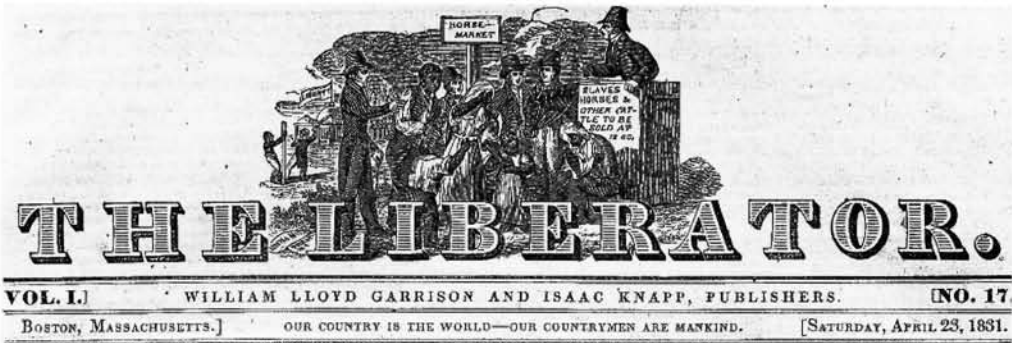


Fig. 1 David Claypool Johnston, first masthead of *The Liberator*, debuted 23 April 1831. Engraving, approx. 9" x 3". (The Boston Athenaeum.)

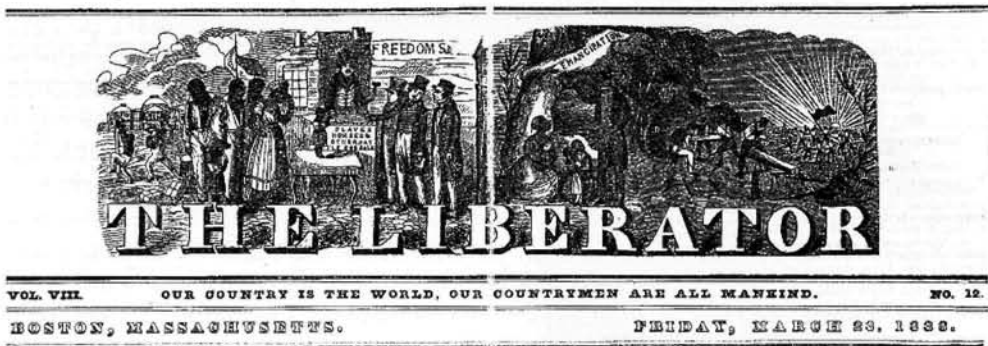


Fig. 2 Anonymous, second masthead of *The Liberator*, debuted 23 March 1838. Engraving, approx. 12" x 3". (The Boston Athenaeum.)

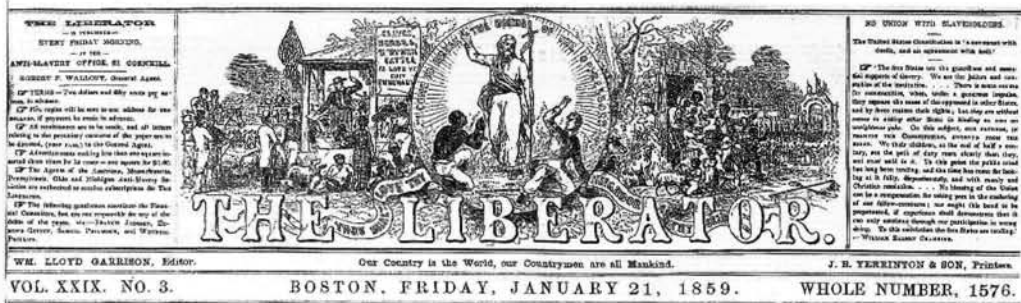


Fig. 3 Alonzo Hartwell after drawing by Hammatt Billings, third masthead of *The Liberator*, 21 January 1859 (debuted 31 May 1850). Engraving, approx. 12" x 3". (The Boston Athenaeum.)

brother?" or "Am I not a woman and a sister?" Benjamin Franklin had circulated Wedgwood medallions of the kneeling slave brother in America as early as 1787.<sup>30</sup> Other successful images depicted slave ship horrors, portraits of noble Africans, or slaves being flogged.<sup>31</sup>

Garrison's first *Liberator* masthead initiated a new movement in anti-slavery art by starkly contrasting images of suffering slaves with symbols of American democracy, and the paper's three successive mastheads depicted abolitionist themes in progressively greater detail (Figs. 1-3). As Augusta Rohrbach has discussed in her analysis of Garrison's innovations in newspaper advertising, Garrison's tendency toward dramatic rhetoric in his text extended to pioneering changes in design, typographic styles and graphics.<sup>32</sup> Rohrbach asserts that Garrison was responsible for introducing to newspaper advertising a creative use of capitals, varying fonts, and pictures. In the same spirit, Garrison also used graphic illustration to summarize his abolitionist message and motivate readers to join the fight against slavery.

On April 23, 1831, Garrison replaced *The Liberator's* simple black title with a more elaborate, white-shadowed font, set before a single graphic image by David Claypoole Johnston depicting the sale of a slave family in front of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. (Fig. 1).<sup>33</sup> Nothing in *The Liberator*, Garrison's own letters, or biographical sources on Johnston indicates why the artist might have been asked to design this masthead. In fact, Reilly cites Johnston's 1819 etching *A Splendid Procession of Freemasons* as a typical racist parody of black Bostonians.<sup>34</sup> Had Garrison converted Johnston by 1831? Or is it more likely that Johnston supplied the graphic merely to collect commission from Garrison? Whatever the answer, it seems probable that Garrison, not Johnston, was largely responsible for the content and composition of this first masthead. In March of 1838, Garrison replaced Johnston's image with a two-part masthead that pictures the sale of several slaves on the left and a scene of emancipation on the right (Fig. 2). Unfortunately, the artist of this masthead is unknown, although it may have been Hammatt Billings, a well-known illustrator.<sup>35</sup> Donating his services to the cause, Billings is known to have designed the third masthead, which was engraved by portrait painter Alonzo Hartwell and debuted on May 31, 1850 (Fig. 3).<sup>36</sup> To the slave sale and emancipation scenes of the earlier two-part graphic, this tripartite masthead added a central medallion of a liberating Christ, who has triumphantly emerged to send the master fleeing and free the kneeling slave. Featured on the paper until its valedictory issue of December 29, 1865, this masthead became one of the most famous works of abolitionist art.

In the first two years of *The Liberator's* publication, Garrison also employed several internal graphics. The first was a special insert in the paper on July 23, 1831, a diagram of a typical slave ship taken from *Walsh's Notices of Brazil*, published in Boston the same year. A second special illustration was used over excerpts from the *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear* on May 26, 1832. In addition to these two one-time illustrations, Garrison also made periodic use of four other small graphics during 1832. These illustrations were usually placed underneath one of three department columns: a kneeling female slave was used exclusively under the "Ladies' Department"; the auction of a child headed the "Juvenile Department"; and both of the remaining graphics, a slave couple being whipped and a slave being thrown off a ship, alternated under "Slavery Record." Except for a single appearance of the slave ship graphic on March 5, 1833, these small graphics were not used after 1832, even though the columns they headed

still occasionally appeared. Garrison made no comment at all about the abrupt appearance and disappearance of these pictures. Most probably, the graphics were not commissioned by Garrison but were instead borrowed or rented, perhaps from the same printer from whom he borrowed his type.<sup>37</sup>

These four small graphics from 1832 (Figs. 4-7) depicted the most despicable evils of slavery: rape, familial separation, physical brutality, and the slave trade. As suggested above, one image in particular, the kneeling slave woman (Fig. 4), would already have been familiar to abolitionists, and Garrison had used an engraving of the male kneeling slave over his own column while editor of *The Genius*.<sup>38</sup> The female version of the emblem seems to have been devised in Birmingham, England, by the Ladies Negro's Friend Society, who displayed the image not only on their illustrated albums and reports but also on folk objects, such as work bags and purses, which they stuffed with anti-slavery pamphlets and sold to wealthy patrons, including Princess Victoria.<sup>39</sup> Lundy was the first to print this image in America when he issued a

Fig. 4 Anonymous, *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?*, from *The Liberator*, 1832. Engraving, approx. 2" x 2". (Author photo.)



republishing of the *Second Report of the Birmingham Society* in 1829. A year later, he used the female kneeling slave image over a new column in *The Genius*, "The Ladies' Repository," which was edited by abolitionist essayist and poet, Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, from 1830 until her death in 1834. Emulating Lundy, Garrison adopted the same image to head *The Liberator's* own "Ladies' Department" when he initiated the column on January 7, 1832.<sup>40</sup>

As Jean Fagan Yellin has observed in her study of this image type, the submissive posture of the kneeling woman, her half-naked state, and her plea, "Am I not a Woman and a Sister?" were all designed not only as a general appeal for sympathy but also as a more direct signifier of the female slave's vulnerability to sexual assault.<sup>41</sup> Yellin's analysis of the way in which the kneeling slave woman evokes the difference between male and female slavery seems clearly applicable to Garrison's use of this image. His editorial note on the debut of this column suggests that he intended the reader to see in the graphic exactly what Yellin suggests. He explained, "The fact that one million of the female sex are reduced, by the slave system, to the most deplorable condition—compelled to perform the most laborious and unseemly tasks—liable to be whipped to an unmerciful degree—exposed to all the violence of lust and passion—and treated with more indelicacy and cruelty than cattle, ought to excite the sympathy and indignation of American women."<sup>42</sup> Female readers agreed and eagerly took up Garrison's challenge. The "Ladies' Department" printed their outpouring of concerned letters, articles, and poems underneath the picture of their slave "sister." One letter, entitled "An Address to the Daughters of New-England" and submitted by a thirteen-year-old girl signing herself "A.F.M.," urged Northern women to "shut not your hearts against the cries of the oppressed, which go up from the sister states. Woman's voice, though weak, may be heard; for it is hers, in a peculiar manner, to plead the cause of suffering innocence."<sup>43</sup>

A change in the column came when Garrison began to publish works by African-American women in March 1832. He gathered submissions from African-American female subscribers and literary societies in Boston, Salem, Providence, and Philadelphia. The lectures, poems and letters by these women discuss religion, education, slavery, and Northern racism. A woman named "Zillah," for example, suggested that blacks could only endure their suffering by finding refuge in God and the religion of the meek and humble Jesus.<sup>44</sup> In another letter, "Beatrice" urged her fellow "colored women" to struggle for an education, no matter what obstacles they had to overcome in doing so.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, "Bera" and "Zoe" exchanged another series of letters on the value of education, further advocating its importance to African-American advancement.<sup>46</sup> A typical poem is "The Death of An Infant Slave," by "L. H.," which describes how a slave mother's sorrow is mitigated by the relief that her child has gone to heaven.<sup>47</sup> Most interesting are the few articles that discuss Northern racism and recommend appropriate responses by African-Americans. "Zelmire" from Boston explains in "Unnatural Distinction" how black worshippers faced discrimination in white churches. As a solution, she encouraged blacks to support churches of color even if they differed in denomination or doctrine, asking them to remember how much better off they were than the slave.<sup>48</sup> These testimonials by African-American women cast a different light on the kneeling slave emblem. For the black female reader, the essays and poems proved that she could have a part in rescuing her slave sister and also that she could indeed become a "sister" to white women by seeking an education.



For the white female reader, these pieces affirmed the sisterhood of black women, both slave and free, by attesting not only their literary ability but also the similarity of their concerns about family, community, and religion.

Garrison also used submissions from African-American women in *The Liberator's* "Juvenile Department" column. The image that headed this regular feature shows a child being sold away from its mother; no father is apparent here, and the pleading arms of mother and child reach out for one another as the auctioneer and purchaser wrangle about price (Fig. 5). Meanwhile, two white Southern ladies and a young girl blithely look on, unconcerned. Has the father been sold away from his family? Or, worse, is the child's father the slave master, now selling the child to satisfy the jealousy of his white wife, who is perhaps one of the women inspecting the proceedings?<sup>49</sup> Whatever the slave mother's situation, her child's predicament is clear: silhouetted on a pedestal, the child is an object on sale to be taken by the highest bidder. The presence of the white woman with her own daughter further emphasizes the very different condition of the slave mother and child. Moreover, these white Southern ladies' utter lack of concern for the feelings of the slave woman and child serves as a powerful contrast to the kneeling slave's plea for "sisterhood" that we have already seen.

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## JUVENILE DEPARTMENT.

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Fig. 5 Anonymous, *Auction of a Child*, from *The Liberator*, 1832. Engraving, approx. 2" x 2". (Author photo.)

Dramatically complemented by this image, the essays and stories published in the "Juvenile Department" convey both the helplessness of slave women and children and the cruelty of slave mistresses. One typical story, "The Slave," tells of a young female slave who had escaped from a cruel mistress. Missing her husband and child, she returns voluntarily in hopes of being reunited with her family, yet she is instead sold to a man who lives in another state.<sup>50</sup> A more grisly tale is related in a ballad, "The Slave Mother." The mother in this poem tells her children she can no longer endure watching "The dreadful evils come to you/Which long have come to me." Desperately, she "took her little darling babes/And put them in the spring...She held her little babies there/Until they all were dead." To prevent the reader from suspecting that this tale of infanticide is a product of literary imagination, its editorial preface explains that the poem is "the plain narration of an incident which happened in Kentucky in 1831."<sup>51</sup>

In addition, stories and essays under this graphic frequently insisted that racial prejudice was wrong and that even children were responsible for helping to end slavery. "For the Children Who Read *The Liberator*," another story by the black writer Zillah, tells of a saintly African-American girl named Elizabeth who suffers an untimely death. Zillah's pathetic tale evokes the stories found in the first American children's magazine, *The Juvenile Miscellany*, in which stories of virtuous deaths are usually followed by a moralistic conclusion that urges young readers to imitate the conduct of the protagonist.<sup>52</sup> In Zillah's story the lesson is expanded to address prejudice in the conclusion: "I would now ask my little readers, if the character of Elizabeth appears less lovely to them because her complexion differed from theirs? I am sure every good child will answer, 'No!'"<sup>53</sup> Another story by Zillah in this column teaches that children should be grateful for what they have because slaves owned so little. At the end of this story, a little white boy who hears it determines to save his money to help pay for a black college.<sup>54</sup>

The other two small graphics (Figs. 6-7) appeared alternately over Garrison's "Slavery Record" column. Exposing the physical brutality of slavery was one of abolitionism's most persuasive arguments, often intimately associated with a second concern, the separation of slave families. Frequently, the two themes were united in a single image, as they are in Figure 6, which shows a merciless white man with a whip raised over his head, ready to strike an embracing slave couple and their terrified, clinging child. Other slaves stand in the distance, observing but apprehensive of intervening in the brutal episode. Holding one another, the slave family offers no protest except that of despair. It is not clear to the viewer what the fate of the family will be: Will they be sold away from one another? Will the wife be raped? Will the husband be punished for attempting to protect her with his embrace? The potency and usefulness of the image as an abolitionist emblem derives in part from this ambiguity in the family's situation.

In fact, all of these imagined possibilities may befall this family, because the father is powerless to protect them. As Kristin Hoganson has suggested, one of the major arguments in abolitionist rhetoric was the fact that slavery destroyed not only the "womanliness" of slave women but also the "manliness" of slave men.<sup>55</sup> The female slave was stripped of her womanhood by being subject to rape, multiple marriages, and separation from her children. Yet the male slave, unable to protect his wife or his family—perhaps the most basic of traditionally "masculine" responsibilities—also was debased and dehumanized. The helplessness of the male slave emerges as a theme in

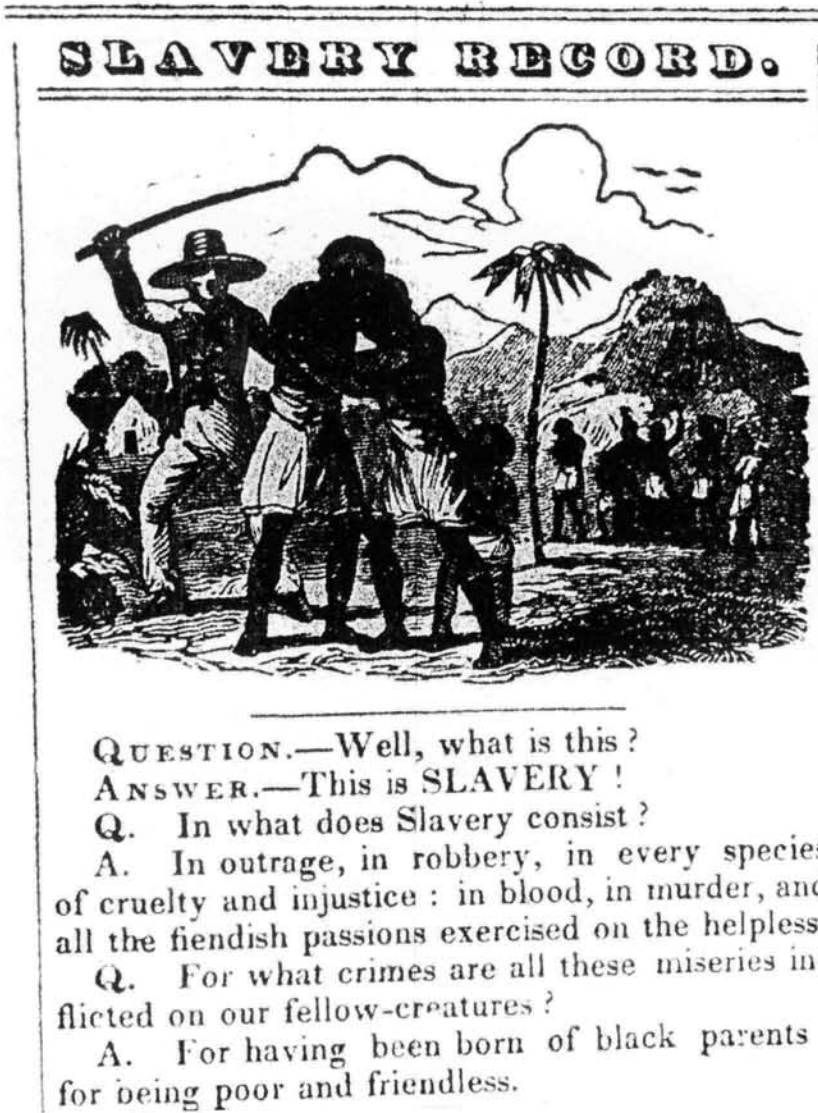


Fig. 6 Anonymous, *Slave Couple Being Whipped*, from *The Liberator*, 1832. Engraving, approx. 2" x 2". (Author photo.)

the articles that appeared in *The Liberator* directly below this graphic; while many articles describe the separation of families, other items report the failure of slave insurrections and the murder of slave rebels. As a final twist, Garrison also used this graphic over an article describing how even the rights of free blacks in Maryland were being threatened by pro-slavery legislators seeking to enact laws that confiscated their property and forced them to move out of the state.<sup>56</sup>

The separation of slave families by the internal slave trade re-enacted the original theft of Africans from their homeland. The horror of the so-called "middle passage" of slaves brought to America inspired the other "Slavery Record" graphic (Fig. 7).

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## SLAVERY RECORD.

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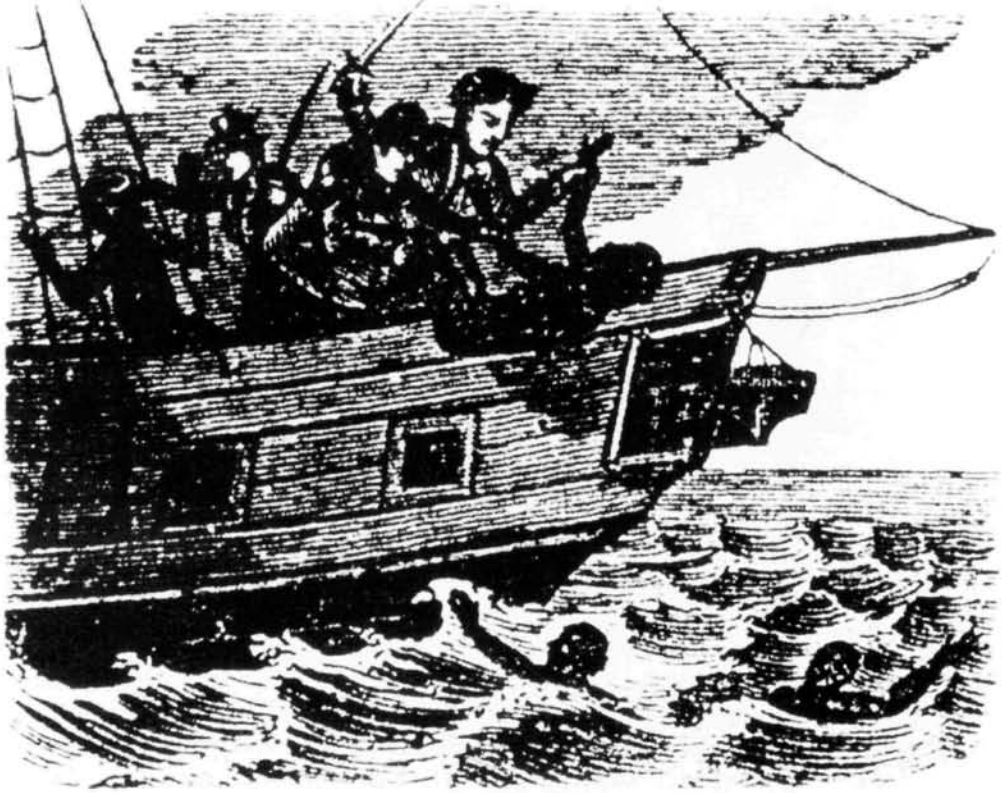


Fig. 7 Anonymous, *Slave Being Thrown Off Ship*, from *The Liberator*, 1832. Engraving, approx. 2" x 2". (Author photo.)

Normally used to illustrate stories about the middle passage and the ongoing African slave trade in the Caribbean and South America, the image depicts slave-trading sailors with raised swords disciplining one slave being thrown off the ship and two others already struggling in the water. The African slave trade also features in a copperplate engraving that was reproduced from *Walsh's Notices of Brazil* and published as a special insert in the July 23, 1831 issue of *The Liberator* (Fig. 8).<sup>57</sup> Walsh was the chaplain of an expedition intended to secure a marriage alliance between Dom Miguel of Brazil and Dona Maria, Queen of Portugal. He wrote his book for a friend in England who wanted to know all of Walsh's observations of Brazil, including his eyewitness accounts of slavery and slave trading vessels.<sup>58</sup> The book was published in 1831, and Garrison printed excerpts from it during June and July of that year, including a chapter about the conditions of slave ships alongside the insert illustration on July 23.

Whereas Carl Wadstrom's more familiar *Plan and Sections of a Slave Ship* (Fig. 9) shows slaves lying head-to-head on two levels of the ship, Walsh's diagram indicates

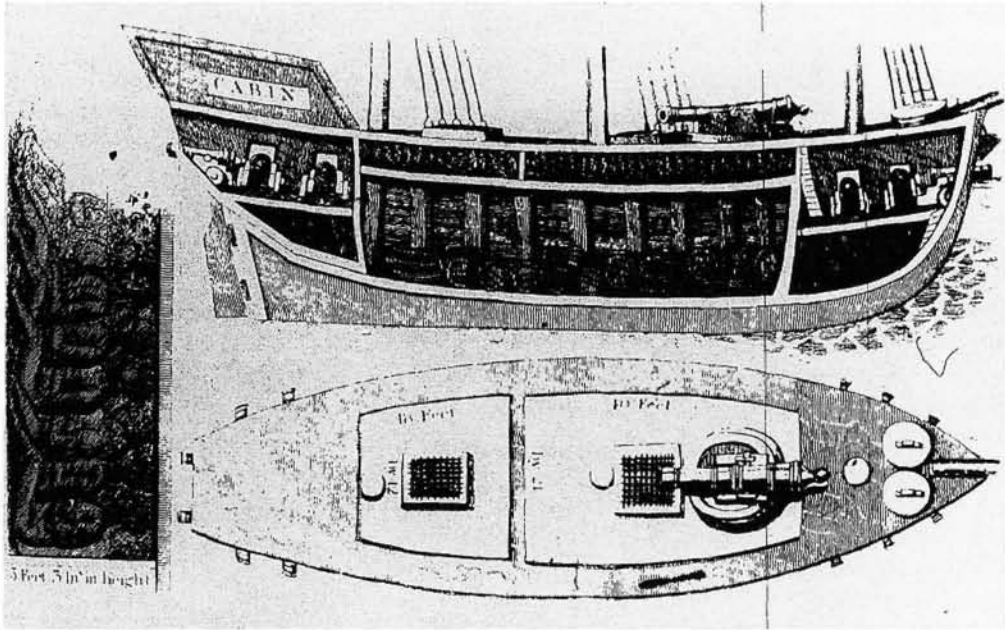


Fig. 8 Anonymous, *Slave Ship*, from Walsh's *Notices of Brazil* (1831), from *The Liberator*, 23 July 1831. Engraving, approx. 4" x 6". (Author photo.)

that slaves were placed in even closer confinement between the decks.<sup>59</sup> In a space marked as five feet, three inches in height, the slaves appear to be sitting naked, chest-to-back, legs and arms wrapped around one another. They are horrifyingly confined, packed like animals, with no regard for privacy or human comfort. Accompanying this graphic insert was Walsh's description of the treatment of slaves aboard ship, which recounts that naked men, women, and children were packed together on the ship regardless of gender. Walsh further recorded that because the children were smallest, they were often packed against the sides of the ship, farthest from light and air. When the slaves were let out on deck, these children often could not stand and seemed indifferent to whether they lived or died. In grisly detail, Walsh describes the slaves' incredible thirst, their manic rush for water, and their appalling death rate; in one seventeen-day trip, for example, fifty-five slaves died out of a total of five hundred and sixty-two on board. Most shocking is Walsh's description of slaves who were driven to suicide or murder, including men who leapt overboard in despair and women who drove nails into the heads of those near them in hopes of claiming more of the scarce air to breathe.<sup>60</sup> With the aid of the explanations provided by Walsh's narrative, the smaller "Slavery Record" graphic can be interpreted to depict both slaves committing suicide by jumping off the ship and slave traders disposing of slaves who have died from maltreatment, or even murder, by callously throwing them into the sea.

Although the African slave trade had been illegal in the United States since 1808, the graphic illustrations of slave ships remained pertinent in the early 1830s for three reasons. The first is that some slaves, despite regulations, were still being shipped from Africa to the United States through the West Indies. Secondly, these horrifying reminders of the middle passage bolstered abolitionist claims that slavery had been a

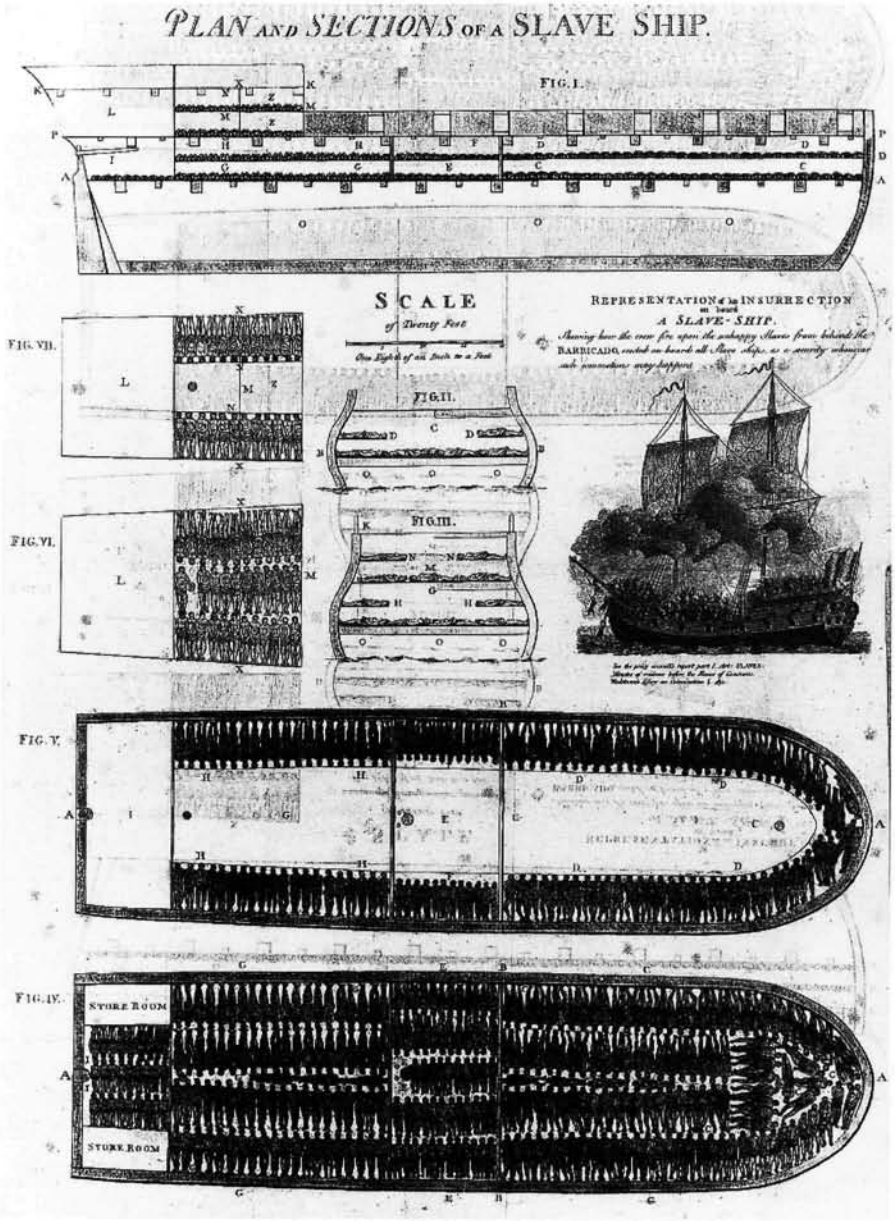


Fig. 9 Anonymous, *Plan and Sections of a Slave Ship*, from Carl B. Wadstrom, *An Essay on Colonization*, vol. 2, London, 1794-95. Engraving. (The Boston Athenaeum.)

sin from the moment of its institution. Finally, and most importantly, portraying the theft of Africans stolen from their homeland lent credence to abolitionists' legal arguments against slavery. Garrison reasoned that because the slaves had been removed involuntarily from their homeland, in a legal sense they were actually stolen property. Since stolen property could not legally be kept, sold or passed down as inheritance, the slaves were not owned by anyone but themselves.<sup>61</sup>

The other special, one-time graphic specifically emphasizes this conception of theft. In the May 26, 1832 issue, *Chloe and Her Playmates Taken Captive by the Slave-Dealers* (Fig. 10) appeared over an excerpt from the *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear*. The *Memoir* is typical of the autobiographical accounts of illiterate former slaves that were transcribed and published with the assistance of white abolitionists.<sup>62</sup> The image featured with the *Memoir* excerpt in *The Liberator* reveals a man and a dog furiously chasing two young girls, who cling desperately to each other as they flee through a land full of mountains and palm trees. Although the accompanying story explained that slave traders had kidnapped Chloe from Africa, the extract offered few details about this capture, focusing instead on Chloe's religious convictions. The story of Chloe's piety in the face of being stolen from her homeland, however, actually reinforces the abominable nature of her kidnapping. To stress this point visually, Garrison strengthened the message by placing the kneeling-slave and slave-ship graphics on either side of this scene of Chloe's capture.<sup>63</sup>

Based on the scene of a slave auction in all three of its versions (Figs. 1-3), *The Liberator's* masthead unified in a single image all of the arguments represented in the small graphic illustrations. Although the artist's conception of the auction changed in each successive version of the masthead, its basic elements remained the same. Each masthead contains a foreground scene of slaves offered for sale, as a group of white men bids on them, paired with a background scene of slaves being beaten in front of



**CHLOE AND HER PLAYMATES TAKEN CAPTIVE BY THE SLAVE-DEALERS.**

Fig. 10 Anonymous, *Chloe and Her Playmates Taken Captive by the Slave-Dealers*, from *The Liberator*, 26 May 1832. Engraving, approx. 5" x 3". (Author photo.)

the United States Capitol. The foreground scene combines the two small graphics of the kneeling slave woman and the auction of a child. In the mastheads, however, the kneeling slave woman no longer pleads to be treated as a sister; resigning herself to her fate, she covers her head or turns away in shame. The auction of the child is expanded into the auction of a whole family, watching as their youngest member is put on the block to face a crowd of men. The background scene of the whipping evokes the physical cruelty of slavery, which as we have seen was regularly depicted in the two small graphics used in the *Slavery Record* column. Locating all of these visual arguments in front of the Capitol reminded the viewer of the inequity of slavery and the slave trade in a democratic republic.

Furthermore, the changes in the masthead's design are consistent with changes in abolitionist rhetorical strategies from 1830 to 1850. The 1831 and 1838 mastheads both picture a male slave stripped to the waist and tied to a pole, while a well-dressed white man stands over him with a raised whip. In the earlier masthead the slave faces his accuser, whereas in the 1838 version he turns away towards the pole, writhing in pain. This small change actually represents a major upheaval in abolitionist rhetoric. In the early 1830s Garrison and many others still believed that an appeal to Southerners might move them to emancipate their slaves voluntarily, as the British had done in the same years. Consequently, the early issues of the paper softened accounts of violence against slaves, presumably in order to appeal to the consciences of Southerners without unduly offending them.<sup>64</sup> However, as the decade wore on, abolitionists began to realize that tactics which had worked for the British were not effective in America. Southerners lived near or with their slaves and therefore had much more at stake than did British slave owners, who generally worked their slaves from across the ocean. Because their slaves were so deeply integrated into their daily lives, Southerners knew that emancipation of their slaves would bring about a complete change of their culture, not only economic hardship.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, they fought hard against emotional appeals and attempted to censor abolitionist literature.<sup>66</sup> Garrison's newspaper chronicled the resistance: laws were passed to prohibit distribution of abolitionist literature in the South, and Congress, which was dominated by Southerners and pro-slavery Northerners from 1830-1858, refused to accept any more abolitionist petitions. Furthermore, abolitionists faced mob violence and threats to their lives, and a price was put on Garrison's head.<sup>67</sup>

Unable to persuade the South toward voluntary emancipation, abolitionists began instead to work to convince Northerners that they must not accept the perpetuation of the South's "peculiar institution." Graphic depictions of the brutality of slavery and cruel slave masters had become standard abolitionist fare by the late 1830s.<sup>68</sup> Thus the second masthead's depiction of the writhing slave follows this new rhetorical strategy. The slave no longer appeals to his master; his silent and painful martyrdom is instead directed at the Northern viewer by explicitly displaying the violence and brutality of slavery. The third version further exaggerates this portrayal of physical suffering by exhibiting not just one slave but a whole line of slaves, shackled together and driven with a whip.

The featured spectacle in all three mastheads is the auction of a female child away from her parents. Of course, the auction of a female slave recalls both the physical brutality to women and the familial separation depicted in the small graphics of the kneeling slave and the slave child's auction respectively. In an editorial column introducing the first masthead, Garrison describes the scene:



We present our patrons, to-day, a new head for the *Liberator*. It is illustrative of a slave auction—the scene is appropriately located at the seat of the National Government. Sales of slaves are very common at the horse market. On the right side of the vignette, stands the auctioneer with his hammer lifted up for a bid; at the side and in front of him are some southern speculators, with the family to be sold—a man and his wife, (whose attitudes express their grief,) and their two children, who are clinging to their mother. On the left side are seen...a purchaser examining a negro, as a butcher would an ox; and a whipping-post, to which a slave is chained, who is receiving a severe flagellation.<sup>69</sup>

According to Garrison's editorial, the image emphasizes three themes: the grief of the slave family, the tragedy of slavery's very existence in America, and the degradation of the human body as a commodity of flesh. The slave parents cover their faces while the children cling to their mother. Although the facial expressions of the prospective buyers evince no concern for the slaves' grief, these men do move among the slaves, and one of them appears to be looking at the slave mother. Southern slave owners frequently portrayed themselves as benevolent, patriarchal gentlemen who cared for their slaves as if they were family members and sold them only when forced by absolute necessity.<sup>70</sup> This first masthead seems to make some concessions to this Southern viewpoint, since the slave owners are in fact finely dressed as gentlemen, and they surround the slave family as if they have some concern for the family's future—although apparently not enough to stop the sale.

In contrast, the auction scene in the second and third versions of the masthead clearly separates slaves from their owners, evidencing no interaction between them. In the second masthead slaves line up for sale on one side while buyers evaluate them and talk among themselves. Like the small auction scene in Figure 5, this image shows a small girl standing on a table, offered for sale while her grieving mother looks on. The leering glances of the men bidding, along with the downcast gazes of the three male slaves also lined up for sale, clearly suggest what the girl's fate is likely to be. Another difference from the first masthead is the lack of a clear family group in this picture. The woman in line after the girl seems to be her mother, but it is not clear whether any of the three male slaves is the woman's husband, or whether the other small girl who stands among the men is also her child. Thus, this second masthead auction seems intended to foreground the physical violation of mother and daughter as well as the dissolution of slave families.

The third masthead communicates an even further disassociation between master and slave. Reilly has noted that perhaps the most effective messages of abolitionist propaganda were attacks on the character of the Southern gentleman and descriptions of the South as a world in moral decline.<sup>71</sup> In his editorial "The New Head to the *Liberator*," describing this masthead when it debuted on May 31, 1850, Garrison explains that the group of slaves being offered for sale are a family of eight who are expecting to be sold to work on plantations in the deep South.<sup>72</sup> The well-dressed gentlemen who lounge casually about the auction block exhibit a pointed disregard for the tragic family separation which they themselves are responsible for effecting. Unlike in the previous mastheads, where the buyers seem engaged in the scene, these gentlemen are more aloof, talking among themselves rather than paying attention to the forceful gestures of the auctioneer or the weeping of the child. The presence of dogs and a man on horseback in a hunting outfit suggest an aristocratic pretense of wealth, gained by the plantation owner through the labor of slaves. In his editorial Garrison

also points out the varying complexions of the children, a reference to the fact that the repeated rape of the mother has already violated the unity of this family. Clearly, this third masthead conveys a world of moral decline, in which Southern men casually buy and sell their mistresses and children in the open marketplace, defying the laws of God and perverting the laws of the nation for their own licentiousness.

The setting of the auction scene in front of the Capitol is deliberately ironic, as Garrison observes in his editorial on the debut of the first masthead in 1831:

On the left side are seen in the distance, the Capitol of the United States with the American flag (on which is conspicuous the word LIBERTY) floating on the breeze...Down in the dust, our Indian Treaties are seen. In view of these things, who will not exultingly exclaim, "Hail Columbia! happy land!" Is it not delightful to know, that the Fourth of July is at hand, when we may laud ourselves and our country above all nations, and indignantly point the finger of scorn at foreign oppression?<sup>73</sup>

Garrison's bitter sarcasm actively provokes the reader to respond with outrage at slavery's desecration of the fundamental precepts of American democracy. In the first masthead, the Capitol displays a flag proudly proclaiming "Liberty," in jarring disjunction with the foreground scene of human beings being whipped and sold with cattle. At the bottom left, a slaveholder tramples over several documents labeled "Indian Treaties," reminding the viewer that slavery is not the only example of grave injustice in the nation's history. In both *The Genius* and *The Liberator*, in fact, Garrison frequently remarked on the government's shameful treatment of Native Americans, which included not only broken treaties but also the removal of Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles, and other groups from the southeastern states to arid Oklahoma Territory during the middle decades of the century.<sup>74</sup> Continuing this theme of governmental hypocrisy, the second masthead displays a flag and a sign on the auction building proclaiming the site to be "Freedom Sq[ua]re."

The third masthead displays two flags, one labeled "Slavery" that flies from the Capitol and the other a large Stars and Stripes that waves above the auction scene. Again, as Garrison suggested, situating the auction in front of such powerful symbols of democracy exposed American slavery's shameful violation of the very principles those symbols represent. Abolitionists contended that both North and South shared this shame; because Northern states had sworn to defend Southern states against any external or internal rebellion, the North was implicitly responsible for helping to perpetuate slavery.<sup>75</sup> In addition, Northerners were bound to uphold slavery by several Constitutional provisions protecting it, such as the three-fifths voting law (which gave slave states notoriously disproportionate power in Congress by counting slaves as three-fifths of a person in determining representation, although they could not vote themselves) and the fugitive slave law (which required all states to apprehend and return fugitive slaves to their owners)—such laws directly contradicted the principles of the Declaration of Independence. After the 1840 publication of James Madison's account of the Constitutional debates made it clear that its framers had deliberately intended the document to protect the rights of slave owners, Garrison and other abolitionists even went so far as to label the Constitution a "pro-slavery" document.<sup>76</sup> In fact, in one of his most famous symbolic gestures, Garrison burned a copy of the Constitution at an abolitionist picnic in Framingham, Massachusetts, on the Fourth of July in 1854.<sup>77</sup>

The masthead's juxtaposition of the nation's seat of government with a slave market was not imaginary; there actually was a notorious slave market located within sight of the Capitol. The very first page of *The Liberator* contains a report on the campaign to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and by 1837 abolitionists had gathered half a million signatures on a petition asking Congress to do so. Congress eventually refused to accept any more petitions and slavery was not banned in D. C. until 1862, one year after the start of the Civil War.<sup>78</sup> Although their wording differs somewhat in each masthead, the signs describing the auction clearly offer the slaves for sale alongside "horses & other cattle." Abolitionists contended that the economic disenfranchisement of the slave denied fundamental human rights. While free individuals owned the right to their own labor, slaves were bought and sold as common beasts of burden, as these images make obvious. The first masthead is explicit enough in placing a "Horse-Market" sign above the slaves. With a more poignant, ironic twist, however, the 1850 masthead adds a banner proclaiming the Golden Rule, "Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself," underneath the juxtaposed images of auction and emancipation.

Printed toward the end of the abolitionist struggle, Ashby's poem praised this final version of the masthead by affirming that viewing this image week after week became an emotional experience for the readers of the paper, who came to wish "longingly" for the "prophecy" of emancipation to emerge as a reality. She portrays the auction of slaves as a violation of racial equality ("brother selling brother"), a violation of the humanity of African peoples ("Driven with cattle to the public mart"), a violation of family relationships ("...His human families...For man to sever"), and a violation of God's unique authority over human life ("The sale and purchase of thy sons and daughters"), which she calls the "darkest blot." Ashby sought to assure readers that "Long have the slave-pen and the chattel mart/Been doomed," that the "trusting eye" could envision the inevitable demise of slavery in the central medallion, where the "cruel master" inevitably cowers and runs away from the gaze of the pure and holy.

It is clear, then, that *The Liberator's* small graphic images and mastheads all efficiently summarized and reinforced abolitionist rhetoric, encouraging its readers to fight more intensely against slavery. Yet the more prominent masthead images also conveyed, perhaps only in subtle visual language, a more complex and disturbing message—that the future of free African-Americans would remain in the control of the white establishment.

The vision of emancipation, which appears only in the second and third versions of the masthead, imagines freed slaves as grateful celebrants of their liberation on what came to be called the Day of Jubilee.<sup>79</sup> The right half of the 1838 version includes three different images of emancipated slaves. In the foreground is a happy family of four, looking almost as if they were a white, middle-class family in blackface. The seated mother and children look up deferentially to the well-dressed father, who stands over them, proudly and protectively—significantly, the "manliness" of the slave father and the "womanliness" of the slave mother have been restored to them in freedom. In the middle ground, four black men cut logs industriously, while in the distant background of the image are a number of figures raising their hands in celebration as the sun rises behind them. The successive images of the family and the woodcutters suggest that the only thing preventing the African-American slave from becoming an industrious member of white society is the institution of slavery. The

image minimizes the detrimental and debilitating effects of white prejudice by implying that the slaves, once freed, will achieve equality with other Americans simply through their own self-reliant efforts. At the same time, the celebration in the background represents the slaves as passively grateful recipients of their emancipation, which presumably their abolitionist liberators have gained for them. Indeed, the fact that the title of the paper, "The Liberator," serves literally as the visual foundation for both scenes of the masthead emphasized for contemporary viewers that the change from slavery to emancipation would come only through the actions of abolitionists: Garrison himself, who printed *The Liberator*, and his readers, who agreed with and advocated his policies.

Significantly, the emancipation scene in the 1850 masthead further accentuates the slaves' passive gratitude to their white liberators. Rather than depicting the family in the guise of the white middle class, this graphic features a large, modestly dressed black family in a rural setting. Instead of remaining a self-contained unit deferring to their father, the family gazes hopefully into the distance at a celebratory parade. Both the father and one of his children point at the parade, as if to draw it to the attention of the rest of the family and, more importantly, to the attention of the viewer. There is no indication of American industriousness; instead, an unused shovel and hoe lie crossed on the ground to the right. The freed slaves in this graphic illustration of emancipation are as passive as the victimized slaves in the graphic illustration of slavery. Even the slaves celebrating in the background are more passive, standing and watching the parade rather than raising their hands. Behind the celebration, the Capitol building now appears flying a flag of freedom overhead, as the symbol of a benevolent government that has finally granted the slaves' emancipation.

The medallion at the center of this final masthead confirms the paternalistic nature of the relationship between the abolitionist as liberator and the slave as grateful recipient. In fact, the medallion perfectly visualizes Garrison's tripartite conception of the slave master as vicious tyrant, the slave as passive victim, and the abolitionist, the representative of Christ, as liberator. The scene actually revises one of the more popular variations of the original kneeling slave emblem, in which the female figure of Liberty stands between the kneeling slave and the fleeing master.<sup>80</sup> Replacing the female Liberty with Christ implies that it is the actual figure of a white male hero, rather than the abstract ideal of Liberty, who will free the slave. Again in his editorial about the third masthead, Garrison describes how the viewer's eye looks first to this central element, before observing the depiction of slavery on the left and resting finally on the future goal of emancipation on the right.<sup>81</sup> In other words, the viewer was meant to focus first on the active initiative of the abolitionist and then on the victimization of the slave, before finally witnessing the anticipated gratitude of freed African-Americans toward their liberators. Such a conception celebrates the self-serving achievement of the abolitionist as much as it does abolition itself.

Reilly argues that much abolitionist art portrays the slave as a Christian martyr who silently suffers physical torture as well as spiritual death in slavery.<sup>82</sup> In accordance with this theme of martyrdom, freedom was often depicted as a kind of resurrection for the slave. Reilly suggests that the use of traditional religious imagery in abolitionist art was intended to compel the viewer to take action against slavery, much as a sermon was meant to inspire its listeners to take action against their sins. *The Liberator's* second masthead clearly contrasts the "death" of slavery with the

"resurrection" of emancipation. The Christ medallion in the third masthead, then, conspicuously adds a representation of the agent of this resurrection, symbolizing the abolitionist's role in it. Ashby's poem suggests that readers of *The Liberator* responded precisely as Reilly describes, interpreting the masthead as a religious as well as political image. She not only describes this vision as a "prophecy" but also imagines the viewer being moved to pray upon seeing it.

Three contemporary references to *The Liberator's* masthead images in fact confirm Ashby's suggestion that viewers reacted strongly to this vision. During the first year of the paper's publication, Garrison printed numerous letters from correspondents in the South that described the vehement hatred his paper aroused among slaveholders, who feared that the paper might fall into the hands of their slaves and provoke an insurrection. One letter came from a frequent correspondent from Georgia, whose name was withheld, Garrison explained, in order to protect the person's life. This correspondent tells of hearing "many comments upon your paper by the slaveholders who have seen it. Your engraving in the title is galling to them, and often elicits a deep and bitter curse. I have noticed this particularly to relate to you a scene which it almost precisely represents, that came within my own view a few days since." The letter continues with a detailed account of the auction of a slave family, in which

...little matters of feeling and humanity must be dispensed with. [The auctioneer] must sell them in the way they would bring most. He would try a few bids on them together, but if they did not sell to his satisfaction, he would try them singly—which he at length did, and parted husband and wife, and children not over four years of age. The scene of separation you can imagine—I cannot describe it.<sup>83</sup>

The account insinuates that the slaveholder's curses derived from feelings of guilt, rather than merely from righteous indignation. For readers of *The Liberator*, the correspondent's personal experience of a slave auction offered testimony that authenticated the masthead's auction scene.

The other references come from two important abolitionist allies of Garrison. One is from the unpublished diary of Thomas Bradford Drew, whose father was one of the earliest supporters of the abolitionist cause. In his diary Drew recounts vivid memories of *The Liberator's* masthead, which he recalls having studied intensely when he was a young boy. A dedicated abolitionist and friend of Garrison's throughout his life, Drew writes that he would never forget, even if he should live to be a hundred years old, the impression made on his young mind by the picture of black slaves being sold on the auction block.<sup>84</sup> The second testimonial comes from Garrison's good friend and fellow abolitionist Lydia Maria Child. In 1861 Child decided to paste mastheads from *The Liberator* on the covers of educational materials she was sending to newly freed slaves at Fort Monroe. In a letter to Garrison's daughter Fanny, Child reports how she used the illustration:

I gathered up all the Biographies of runaway slaves that I could find. I bound them anew, and pasted on the covers *The Liberator* heading of horses and men sold at auction. I sent 6 of my West India Tract [which described the success of the West Indians following British emancipation in the 1830s] and cut from duplicate *Liberators* the Christ coming to rescue the oppressed, and the happy Emancipation scene of the children with their lambs &c; these I pasted on the covers, as nicely as if I were doing it for Queen Victoria.<sup>85</sup>

Child's use of *The Liberator* masthead as an inspirational tool for newly freed slaves affirms her belief in the potency of this particular depiction of slavery and freedom. In addition, her celebratory tone evokes the fulfilling satisfaction that abolitionists themselves felt upon seeing their dreams of emancipation finally become a reality. Thus, although Child's project is admirable, her attitude towards the slaves also reinforces the more complicated issue of abolitionist paternalism.

The first step toward the fulfillment of the abolitionist dream happened on September 22, 1862, when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in areas still in rebellion. The Proclamation was to take effect on January 1, 1863. Garrison and many other prominent abolitionists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, gathered for a Jubilee concert and poetry reading at the Boston Music Hall sponsored by literary figures such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. When the news arrived that the president had signed the proclamation, the crowd first cheered Lincoln; then someone shouted, "Three cheers for Garrison!" As *The Liberator's* editor smiled and waved in acknowledgment, three thousand voices swelled out his name. Clearly, for at least this one moment, Garrison enjoyed the appropriate honor and gratitude due the liberator who set the captives free.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, Ashby's poem reiterated the congratulations of the abolitionist movement just one month after the Emancipation Proclamation became law. The poem concludes with a tribute to the abolitionists' long battle, asserting that this battle was bound to triumph because it was "founded on eternal justice."<sup>87</sup> Ashby pays no tribute to Union soldiers for the victory; her accolades go to the abolitionists, both living and dead, prophets like Samuel of "Liberty, liberty, to their black brethren." Just as the third masthead features the white liberator at the center of its allegory of emancipation, Ashby too enshrines the abolitionists in the center of her triumphant vision. The testimonies of Drew and Child further confirm that abolitionists perceived *The Liberator's* masthead not only as the embodiment of the slaves' struggle but also as the representation of their own achievement.

However, while the masthead may have effectively motivated white Northerners to participate in the grand and difficult project of emancipation, it seems not to have been as uplifting an educational tool to newly freed slaves. The celebratory ovation Garrison received from Bostonians when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed stands in pointed contrast to his reception by freed slaves after the war. An anecdote from Garrison's 1865 trip to Charleston, South Carolina for a Union victory celebration illustrates the ultimately reductive simplicity of *The Liberator's* graphic illustrations of emancipation and the ambivalent relationship between abolitionist and slave. Garrison met his son George's regiment outside the city, as they finished gathering more than a thousand former slaves from the plantations devastated by Sherman's march. Garrison's enthusiasm at meeting these former slaves in person abated as he saw their wretched condition, but he nonetheless attempted to make this a moment of victory by leading them in a cheer. Exhorting them, "Well my friends, you are free at last—let us give three cheers for freedom!" he led off with a first cheer. Although they had been informed of who it was that addressed them, the slaves offered no response. Garrison gave a second, and then a third cheer, alone. Waving, he then simply walked away.<sup>88</sup> This awkward encounter, in which the "liberated" failed to recognize their "liberator," painfully attests the ambiguity of Garrison's achievement. The trip

image of white liberator, victimized slave, and passive freeman may have encouraged Northern whites toward accepting African-Americans as free individuals, but such propagandistic images prepared no one for the long and difficult road to full African-American citizenship.

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I would like to thank the library staff at Baylor University for their assistance in obtaining rare manuscripts and the English Department at Baylor for their financial assistance in acquiring photographs.

1. Jane Ashby, "The Frontispiece of *The Liberator*," *The Liberator*, 7 February 1863. This and all subsequent quotations from primary sources retain their original syntax and grammar.
2. William E. Cain, ed., *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from The Liberator* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 5.
3. Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 599. For more biographical and documentary information on Garrison himself, the most reliable sources in addition to Cain and Mayer are: Walter M. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); James Brewer Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation* (Wheeling, WV: Harlan Davidson, 1992); John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963).
4. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 52.
5. Merton L. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 10.
6. William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: or An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society, together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: n. p., 1831).
7. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 135-37.
8. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 51-52.
9. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy*, 45-48.
10. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy*, 36-54; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 53-54.
11. George Bourne, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, with Animadversions upon Dr. Smith's Philosophy* (Philadelphia: n. p., 1816).
12. Elizabeth Coltman Heyrick, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition; or, an Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery* (London: n. p., 1824).
13. Truman Nelson, ed., *Documents of Upheaval: Selections from William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator, 1831-1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), x-xi.
14. Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 3-8.
15. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 81.
16. Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 16-17.
17. Donald M. Jacobs, "David Walker and William Lloyd Garrison: Racial Cooperation and the Shaping of Boston Abolition," in Donald M. Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press for Boston Athenaeum, 1993), 7-17.
18. Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 18-20.
19. Nelson, *Documents of Upheaval*, xvi-xvii. For further information about Garrison's propaganda strategy, see Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 11-32.
20. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 149-63. This bill passed the House of Lords on July 29, 1833, although full British emancipation did not occur until 1838.

21. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide*, 80.
22. Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 175; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 208 and 248.
23. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 347-49.
24. Garrison, "Progress of Abolitionism," *The Liberator*, 19 December 1835.
25. Cain, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery*, 5.
26. Thomas, *The Liberator*, 131-32; Stewart, *The Challenge of Emancipation*, 55-56.
27. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 530.
28. Bernard F. Reilly, Jr., "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," in Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience*, 48-50.
29. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 163.
30. Reilly, "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," 54.
31. Reilly, "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," 60-62.
32. Augusta Rohrbach, "Typography Unbound," *Print* 51 (July-August 1997), 102-103.
33. James Brewer Stewart, "Boston, Abolition, and the Atlantic World, 1820-1861," in Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience*, 111. For the most complete biographical information available on Johnston, see Clarence S. Brigham, "David Claypoole Johnston: The American Cruikshank," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, April 17, 1940-October 16, 1940 (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1941), 97-110.
34. Reilly, "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," 52.
35. In a letter to the author dated 29 January 1999, Rebecka Persson, reference librarian at the Boston Athenaeum, suggested that similarities in the second and third mastheads may indicate that the same artist drew them.
36. Reilly, "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," 63-64. Garrison estimated Billings' work to be worth twenty dollars in his editorial describing the new masthead; Garrison, "New Head to the Liberator," *The Liberator*, 31 May 1850.
37. In the first issue of 1833, Garrison announced the purchase of new type for his paper, for which he had obtained money from the sale of his book, *Thoughts on African Colonization*, as well as donations from wealthy abolitionists. Perhaps, after purchasing the type, Garrison no longer could afford to rent the graphics as well. It is also possible that Garrison did not consider the graphics to be compatible with the sleek, modern look of his new type. Garrison, *The Liberator*, 5 January 1833; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 143.
38. Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 6-7.
39. Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 10.
40. Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 14.
41. Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 8-9.
42. Garrison, "Ladies' Department," *The Liberator*, 7 January 1832.
43. A. F. M., "An Address to the Daughters of New-England," *The Liberator*, 3 March 1832.
44. Zillah, "Ladies' Department," *The Liberator*, 30 June 1832.
45. Beatrice, "Female Education," *The Liberator*, 7 July 1832.
46. Bera and Zoe, "Letters," *The Liberator*, 11 August, 5 September, 15 September, and 6 October 1832.
47. L. H., "The Death of an Infant Slave," *The Liberator*, 31 March 1832.
48. Zelmire, "Unnatural Distinction," *The Liberator*, 28 July 1832.
49. Stories of the sale of slave concubines and their children provided fodder for the most dramatic abolitionist stories. The most famous of these are Lydia Maria Child, "The Quadroons," in Maria Weston



Chapman, ed., *Liberty Bell* (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Fair, 1842); William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or The President's Daughter* (London, 1852), ed. Joan E. Cashin (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996); and, of course, the story of Cassie in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly*.

50. "The Slave," *The Liberator*, 3 March 1832.
51. "The Slave Mother," *The Liberator*, 2 January 1832.
52. For examples of stories of children whose virtuous deaths inspire other children to godliness, see "Little Mary" and "Louise Preston," *The Juvenile Miscellany*, March 1828. Little Eva's death in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the culmination of this genre.
53. Zillah, "For the Children Who Read *The Liberator*," *The Liberator*, 18 August 1832.
54. Zillah, "A Dialogue Between a Mother and Her Children," *The Liberator*, 1 September 1832.
55. Kristin Hoganson, "Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860," *American Quarterly* 45 (December 1993), 564-67.
56. "Colored Population of Maryland," *The Liberator*, 3 March 1832.
57. Garrison explains in his preface to the excerpt, "Horrors of the Slave Trade," that this copperplate engraving was "procured at some expense and is suitable for framing." Since Walsh's two-volume book had been printed in Boston during 1831, Garrison probably either purchased prints from the publisher or else purchased the rights to use the plates. Both the book illustration and *The Liberator's* insert are the same size, approximately four by six inches, or about a quarter sheet. Garrison, "Horrors of the Slave Trade," *The Liberator*, 23 July 1831.
58. Rev. R. Walsh, *Walsh's Notices of Brazil* (Boston: Richardson, Lord & Holbrook, 1831), 2 vols.
59. Wadstrom's engraving has frequently been reprinted and circulated in books and posters. Like Walsh, Wadstrom had described his experiences with slave vessels in a book, *Essay on Colonization* (London: n. p., 1794-95); the book does not include the engraving but does have an advertisement describing how to purchase a print of it.
60. Walsh, "From Walsh's Notes on Brazil," *The Liberator*, 11 June, 25 June, and 23 July 1831.
61. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 74-78.
62. *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a native of Africa who was enslaved in childhood, and died in Boston, Jan. 3, 1815 aged 65 yrs.* (Boston: J. Loring, 1832). Frequently, former slaves who were unable to write told their life stories to white abolitionist friends, who then wrote and published them. No author is listed on Chloe's memoir, but possible writers are Mary Webb or Rebecca Warren Brown (Worldcat, online, OCLC-Internet, 12 February 1999). In his preface to the excerpt, Garrison notes that money from the sale of the memoir will be "devoted to the benefit of Schools in Africa." Most probably, Garrison obtained the rights to print the excerpt and the plate in exchange for publicizing the book.
63. "Memoir of Chloe Spear," *The Liberator*, 26 May 1832.
64. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 164.
65. William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1960), 83-89.
66. Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 3-8.
67. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 121-23 and 206-207.
68. Stewart, *The Challenge of Emancipation*, 88-89.
69. Garrison, "We Present Our Patrons...," *The Liberator*, 23 April 1831.
70. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 77. For an excellent satire on this convention, see the character of Mr. Gaines in William Wells Brown, *The Escape* (Boston: n. p., 1858).
71. Reilly, "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," 63.
72. Garrison, "The New Head to the Liberator," *The Liberator*, 31 May 1850.
73. Garrison, "We Present Our Patrons...," *The Liberator*, 23 April 1831.

74. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 138 and 616. As late as 1871, Garrison was still writing articles protesting the U. S. Army's massacres of Plains Indians.
75. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 168-69.
76. Cain, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery*, 31-32; Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*, 187.
77. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 444-45.
78. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 74, 110, 217 and 533.
79. The phrase "Day of Jubilee" was adopted from the Old Testament.
80. For more on the "Liberty" variation of the kneeling slave emblem see Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 19-22.
81. Garrison, "New Head to the Liberator," *The Liberator*, 31 May 1850.
82. Reilly, "The Art of the Antislavery Movement," 62-63.
83. "Letters from Georgia No. 2," *The Liberator*, 5 November 1832.
84. For more on Thomas Bradford Drew and his diary, see Mayer, *All on Fire*, 599.
85. Lydia Maria Child, *Selected Letters, 1817-1880*, ed. Milton Melzer and Patricia G. Holland (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 397-98.
86. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 545-546.
87. Although Ashby pleads for an end "This new year—/Grant it, O Father!" it was not until April 9, 1865, that General Robert E. Lee surrendered unconditionally and not until December 18, 1865 that the Thirteenth Amendment was finally ratified, making slavery unconstitutional. William L. Barney, "Ulysses S. Grant," in Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), 465-66; James M. McPherson, "Emancipation Proclamation," in Foner and Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion*, 351-52.
88. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 584; also recounted in Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide*, 298.

## Word Balloons: A Grammatological History

Brian Johnson

[The] balloon, once a disquieting device for the cartoonist, is now an intricate part of our visual vocabulary. It is employed to such an extent in comics, advertising and other mass media that it is no longer read merely as a conventional symbol for speech but is identified as speech itself.

—Albert Boime<sup>1</sup>

In his brief but invaluable remarks on the evolution of the word balloon, Albert Boime suggests that although the balloon has a venerable history, its automatic identification with speech is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the balloon's modern accomplishments, attempts to represent speech in a visual medium by conjoining alphabetic and pictorial systems of representation were characterized by awkward, uncertain experimentation, rather than by a linear narrative of progress. Examples of the balloon can be traced as far back as the medieval period, and although it began to assume its modern form in the political cartoons of the eighteenth century, the device all but disappeared for much of the nineteenth, reemerging only at the turn of the century thanks to cartoon strips like Richard Outcault's *Hogan's Alley* and Rudolph Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kids*.<sup>2</sup> In revisiting Boime's account of the word balloon's fitful history, this paper offers both an expansion of Boime's sketch and an elaboration of the balloon's ambivalent semiotic function. By contextualizing the word balloon's development in terms of Jacques Derrida's broader grammatological history of writing systems, I will argue that the balloon constitutes an aesthetically innovative and often disruptive feature of the Western attempt to subordinate writing to speech that Derrida has termed logocentrism.

### *Histories of Writing: Hieroglyphs and Alphabets*

Throughout its labyrinthine history, the balloon has assumed many shapes: medieval and seventeenth-century artists enclosed words in scrolls and banners to indicate speech, whereas cartoonists of the eighteenth century preferred more diaphanous signifiers like clouds or breath. Such formal variations, however, belie the balloon's consistent function. For the modern balloon, like its precursors, is a device that mediates between arbitrary linguistic sign systems and motivated pictographic ones. Set against the predominantly pictographic plane of the cartoon, the balloon delimits a space of writing in which different interpretive rules apply. As a structuring device which both organizes potentially conflicting semiotic systems into discrete visual spaces and acts as a conduit between them, the balloon has been aptly dubbed "the trademark of the comic strip."<sup>3</sup>

Yet the balloon's role as semiotic intermediary is also responsible for its long-standing reputation as a "disquieting device." For the balloon developed in relation to, and in some ways in opposition to, a centuries-long Western intellectual tradition of privileging speech over writing and of privileging alphabetic writing over all other forms of representation on the grounds that alphabetic writing alone could approximate the sound of the voice, and, by extension, the working of consciousness itself. In

his cogent and influential account of this logocentric tradition, Derrida identifies the attempt to claim a special place for alphabetic (or phonetic) writing as the most common enterprise in comparative studies of writing systems by Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Ferdinand de Saussure, among others.<sup>4</sup> All of these philosophers of language, Derrida argues, have viewed writing as a "dangerous supplement" to speech. Writing is valuable—and indeed necessary—to the extent that it "supplements" the natural functions of speech by extending the voice in time and space. It is also dangerous, however, because it is "a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent" and is thus "a violence done to the natural destiny of the language."<sup>5</sup> In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida famously deconstructs this classic formulation of writing, countering that language has no such "natural destiny" because speech and thought partake of the same differential structure typically attributed to writing alone. In place of the metaphysical speech-writing dichotomy, Derrida posits an inherent system of differences common to all systems of linguistic signs, spoken or written. His refutation of the metaphysical premise that there can be an ideal correspondence between hearing and understanding (*s'entendre-parler*), is thus guided by the insight that "[f]rom the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs."<sup>6</sup> Historically, however, the mainstream of Western philosophy has sustained the opposite view, perpetuating what Derrida perceives as a logocentric fantasy, that language's natural destiny is speech despite the *de facto* centrality of writing in Western cultures. Logocentrism consoles itself by partially redeeming a certain form of writing—the alphabetic "writing of the voice" which "in so far as it effaces itself better than another before the possible presence of the voice, it represents it better and permits it to be absent with the smallest loss."<sup>7</sup> Derrida instead proposes "grammatology"—a new science of writing that is no longer governed by the hierarchical opposition between speech and writing characteristic of logocentrism.

Among all the philosophies of language to exemplify the logocentric tradition, G. W. F. Hegel's opposition of alphabetic to hieroglyphic writing has, in its mistrust of pictographic signs, particular relevance to the word balloon's "conventional" yet "disquieting" history. In the third volume of his *Philosophie des Subjektiven Geistes*, Hegel strives to demonstrate the natural superiority of speech and its correlate, phonetic writing, through a contrast between phonetic alphabets and hieroglyphs.<sup>8</sup> Although they possess a phonetic component, hieroglyphs retain their pictographic primitivism and thus remain, for Hegel, a non-phonetic system *par excellence*:

With regard to the difference between spoken and written language, it is to be observed that it is the former that is immediate. Its determinate being derives from the person's thorax; in that it has appeared it has immediately disappeared, and it is therefore of an ideal nature. The written language also makes what is audible apparent to the eye, and is either hieroglyphic or alphabetic. Alphabetic writing designates the tone, the letter being merely the sign for the tone, which is the sign for the general object. Hieroglyphic writing provides the eye with an immediate designation of the general object. It appears to be more immediate than alphabetic writing, which makes the detour through the tone.<sup>9</sup>

The immediacy of hieroglyphic writing is only apparent, however, because by presenting objects symbolically, it bypasses the crucial tonal stage of reading in which written language recuperates vocal sounds, thereby restoring the original meaning and intent of written signs—what Derrida refers to as the logocentric notion of

*s'entendre-parler*. For Hegel, "hieroglyphic reading is for itself a reading that is deaf and a writing that is dumb"; only alphabetic writing involves "the correct relationship of the visible relating itself to the spoken language only as a sign. Here intelligence expresses itself immediately and unconditionally through speech."<sup>10</sup>

Within this extended grammatological history, and within Hegel's "teleological hierarchy of writings"<sup>11</sup> in particular, the development of the word balloon occupies an uncertain and frequently unsettling position. At the level of intention, the balloon is emblematic of logocentrism's desire to transform writing into the full presence of speech. As the epigraph by Boime suggests, in this regard the word balloon has been largely successful. Yet it achieves success in a devious way, at the expense of the logocentric desire for a purely abstracted, arbitrary system of alphabetic notation that enables a perfect transcription of the inner voice of private consciousness by minimizing the use of non-phonetic, hieroglyphic signs. Indeed, rather than respecting Hegel's binary, the word balloon and its precursors combine both alphabetic and hieroglyphic elements to accomplish the paradoxical task of representing speech in a written medium. The content of the balloon may be alphabetic, but the balloon itself is eminently hieroglyphic. As its history will show, the balloon is capable of subverting logocentric history not only because it mediates between phonetic and non-phonetic sign systems, but also because the balloon actually draws its formal characteristics from early attempts to render speech symbolically—to provide, in Hegel's terms, "an immediate designation of the general object." The balloon's combination of motivated (symbolic, hence non-phonetic) and arbitrary (non-symbolic, phonetic) sign systems thus makes it a difficult device to assimilate into the history of Western logocentrism, even as its hybrid status makes it an appropriate emblem for the comic medium's fusion of word and image.

Despite its centrality to the language of comics, however, the word balloon has received scant treatment by historians and semiologists of comics, primarily because they have failed to synthesize the advantages of their respective approaches.<sup>12</sup> Historical studies like Boime's tend to identify influences and precursors to the balloon, usually to the exclusion of a sustained investigation of the complex manner in which balloons from different historical periods operate.<sup>13</sup> A related problem with such studies is their tendency to treat the modern word balloon as the inevitable conclusion of centuries of failed or imperfect experiments in the graphic representation of speech, and consequently, to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate ancestors. It is by now a common historiographic gesture to identify the beginnings of modern comic history "proper" with the explosion of political cartooning that popularized the use of the word balloon in the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Earlier examples of the combination of words and images are accorded honorary status as precursors but are sparse enough to be relegated to the status of exceptions in the historical narrative. Boime, for instance, focuses primarily on the balloon's development since the eighteenth century, confining to a footnote those "exceptions in medieval art where text is made to emanate from individual figures."<sup>15</sup>

Semiological studies suffer from the opposite problem: they subordinate the historical variations and evolution of word balloons to an ahistorical analysis of form. The preeminent example of such a study is Scott McCloud's instantly canonical *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1990), which was greeted with universal praise by a grateful comics industry.<sup>16</sup> *Understanding Comics* begins with a brief historical overview, but its real significance lies in McCloud's semiotic study of comic form,

which is unprecedented in detail, scope, and theoretical rigor, valorizing the medium it describes by presenting its analysis in the form of a comic book. Yet even a groundbreaking study like McCloud's, which attempts to be both semiotically and historically expansive, devotes only one page to the word balloon itself and treats only its modern incarnation (Fig. 1).

The sections that follow seek a more inclusive history of the word balloon by combining both historical and semiological perspectives to focus on examples of the graphic representation of speech from medieval manuscripts, broadsheets of the seventeenth century, and cartoons from the eighteenth century to the present day.<sup>17</sup> Using a Derridean frame to suggest how each example engages or challenges the dominant discourse of logocentrism, this study proceeds along two complementary levels. At the primary level it offers a semiotic analysis of the distinctive ways in which artists have negotiated the problem of representing speech at particular historical moments. At the secondary level, however, it assumes a diachronic focus to discern broad patterns in the word balloon's naturalization of writing as speech through its history of formal modification and transformation. Ultimately, it is not the logocentric biases themselves but the subversion of those biases that comes to light in the history of the word balloon's fitful development.

#### *Writing the Voice: Scrolls and Banners*

Medieval artists were among the first to illustrate the conceptual difficulties involved when the graphic representation of orality seeks to wed alphabetic writing to visual images in a single medium. Woodcuts from the *Ars Moriendi* (Figs. 2-3), for instance, a well-known fifteenth-century manuscript by V erard detailing the temptations of a dying man, incorporate scrolls bearing inscriptions that sometimes act as labels but at other times issue directly from the mouths of figures to signal a verbal expression.<sup>18</sup> Although words and images are often discretely juxtaposed in medieval texts and illuminated manuscripts, the integration of verbal language into the visual frame of the *Ars Moriendi* images betrays signs of awkwardness that can only have

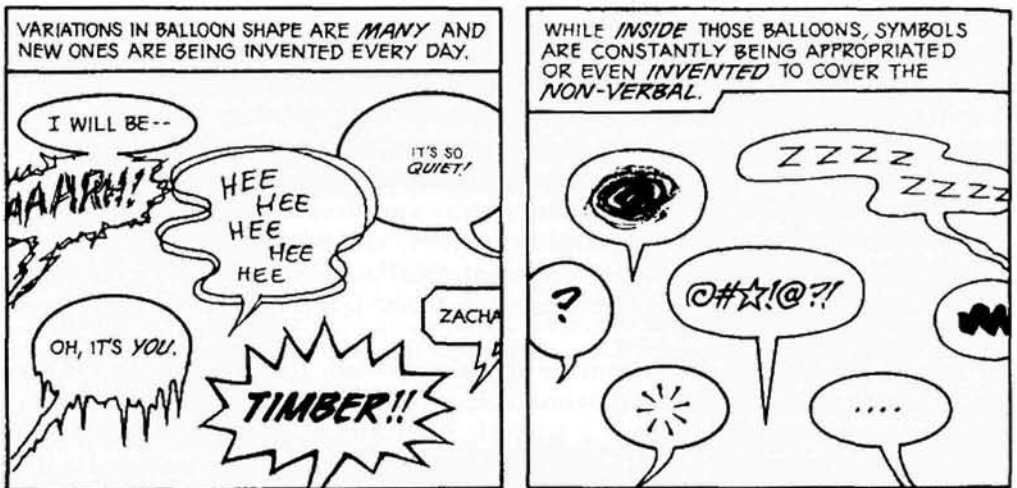


Fig. 1 Scott McCloud, from *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Tundra, 1993), 134.

derived from the challenge of representing speech in visual form. Boime correctly suggests that medieval artists who employed labels or scrolls to gloss illustrations typically configured text and image in visually overlapping, but cognitively separate, spaces. Yet the artist of the *Ars Moriendi* violates the imaginary border between these two planes by placing the angel's words literally in his mouth (Fig. 3). Emanating from the angel's lip in a single unbroken thread, the scroll suggests a tangible manifestation of breath even as the viewer is meant to ignore its physicality. The irruption of speech, in the form of a written scroll, into the domain of the figures constitutes an innovative adaptation of existing conventions to suggest the "presence" of verbal expression while maintaining the apparent "absence" of its vehicle, the scroll.

The consequence of this adaptation, however, is the problematization of the status of the other scrolls scattered throughout the images. The question of whether these scrolls are demonic exclamations commensurate with that of the angel or merely authorial labels is immediately complicated by their relation to the woodcuts' literal representation of the written word, the parchment that one of the demons in Figure 2 "flourishes before the dying man's eyes... listing all the sins that the poor creature committed in the world."<sup>19</sup> The visual coexistence of the demon's parchment and the exclamatory scrolls themselves, all rendered with a similar degree of naturalism, makes it tempting to read the latter concretely as well—that is, to see all the scrolls as continuous with the space of the figures. It would be more accurate, however, to say that the medieval deployment of banners and scrolls is slippery and flexible enough to accommodate both possibilities simultaneously. Such slippages indicate the highly volatile and improvisational nature of these early attempts to fuse two very different systems of signs—the alphabetic and the hieroglyphic—in the representation of speech.

Despite the complexities and contradictions of their rendering of the voice, the woodcuts from the *Ars Moriendi* already point to the profoundly logocentric character of subsequent visual representations of speech. At one level, the semiotic coding of these images seems to indicate a deep affinity between speech and writing. The overt use of scrollwork to convey spoken words might even seem to reject logocentric values by elevating the material signifiers of writing to the supreme status of speech. Such a conclusion would follow from what E. R. Curtis calls the "newly attained position of the book" in the medieval period, which elevated writing to a status of divine importance.<sup>20</sup> As Derrida argues, however, the medieval privileging of "the book of Nature and God's writing" conceals a deeper sympathy with logocentrism:

As was the case with the Platonic writing of the truth in the soul, in the Middle Ages too it is a writing understood in the metaphorical sense, that is to say a *natural*, eternal, and universal writing, the system of signified truth, which is recognized in its dignity. As in the *Phaedrus*, a certain fallen writing continues to be opposed to it.<sup>21</sup>

The hierarchy that places speech over writing, preserved in this conception of divine or natural writing in the soul, is figured allegorically in these panels from the *Ars Moriendi*. For as these illustrations suggest, speech is on the privileged side of the angels and divinity, while writing seems alternatively associated with the demons and sin. Not only is the angel the only figure to have a scroll issuing directly from his mouth; his oral relation to the scroll is rendered in distinct contrast to the manual relation that obtains between the demons and the scrolls upon which humankind's sinful



Fig. 2 Vérard, *Le moribond consolé par l'ange*, from *Ars Moriendi*, ca. 1470. Woodcut. (©Armand Colin, Paris, 191908, 1995.)

existence is inscribed. Just as the one fiend brandishes the parchment of sins with his left hand and points at it with his right, the scrolls attending the other monsters issue from their hands and fingertips as well. Unlike the angel, whose voice liberates his hands from “laborious, finite and artificial inscription,”<sup>22</sup> the devils’ hands are symbolically occupied with grasping or gesturing at their words or at words associated with them—a contrast that vividly dramatizes the logocentric privileging of sacred speech



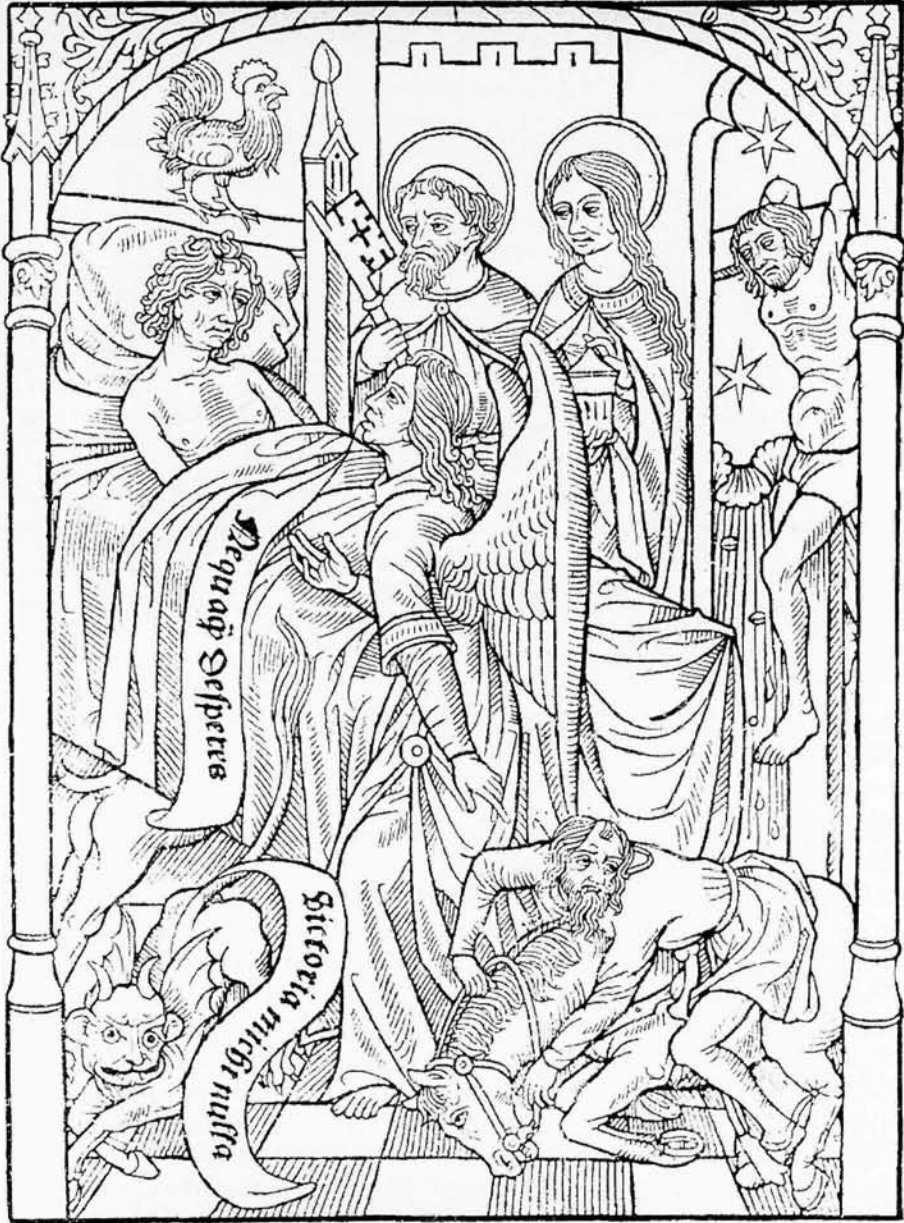


Fig. 3 Vérard, *Le moribond voit ses péchés*, from *Ars Moriendi*, ca. 1470. Woodcut. (©Armand Colin, Paris, 191908, 1995.)

over fallen writing. As if to confirm the hierarchical relation of the two, the demon in the lower left corner of Figure 3, whose scroll seems to emit from somewhere beneath his tail, offers a scatological parody of divine speech.

In many ways *The Committee; or Popery in Masquerade*, a broadsheet illustration of 1680 (Fig. 4), seems of a type with medieval forerunners like the *Ars Moriendi*—a type that is peripheral to comic histories like Boime's—since its "balloons" seem equally



Fig. 4 Anonymous, *The Committee; or Popery in Masquerade*, 1680. Etching and engraving. British Museum, London. (©Copyright The British Museum.)

poised on the ambiguous frontier between label and speech. Just as scrollwork and human figures inhabit sometimes identical, sometimes separate but overlapping planes in the *Ars Moriendi*, the broadsheet's integration of picture and text is notable for its failure to distinguish clearly between those scrolls and banners which are objectively present in the scene and those which are merely "conventional" (that is, invisible to everyone but the reader). The scrolls and banners issuing from the mouths of various figures before the committee, demanding "No Bishops," "No Service Book," "No Popish Lords," and "No evil Councillors," are clearly of the latter type. Yet they are confusingly consistent with the numerous real scrolls scattered throughout the picture: the "Thanks to the Petitioners" in the hands of the presbyter in the center, the petitions and documents on the table before him, and the proclamation of "A Solemn League and Covenant" posted on the wall beneath the window on the right. Equally confusing is the relationship between those scrolls and banners appearing to signify speech and those which function purely as labels: the banner that announces, "Behold wee are a Covenanting People," for instance, or the ribbons identifying each committee member by political affiliation as "Ranter," "Quaker," "Independent," "Adamite," etc. Like the banner announcing the broadsheet's title and the scrolls emitting from individual mouths, these banners and ribbons are not properly part of the scene itself. Nevertheless, the realism of their three-dimensional rendering emphasizes their materiality rather than their artifice and leaves them hovering somewhere between corporeality and artistic convention—an effect which is amplified by the overabundance of real scrolls and banners already mentioned.

The real flags held by the crowd on the left, emblazoned with demands for "Liberty, Property, Religion, [and] A Thorough Reformation," exemplify the interpretive dilemma posed by this provocative overlap of real and conventional signifiers in a particularly illuminating way. The flags themselves are unquestionably integrated into the action of the picture; but the mouths of the men holding them are open in speech. Are they simply bored with the proceedings and carrying on an idle conversation? Or are they shouting the words represented on their respective flags? Given the image's propagandistic composition and intent, the latter is more likely, in which case the flags function not merely as labels, but as word balloons. The blurring of semiotic levels which troubles the distinction between "balloon" and "label" in the *Ars Moriendi* is therefore compounded amid *The Committee's* chaos of scrollwork and banners.

The broadsheet artist further anticipates how misunderstandings could result from such a promiscuous rendering of scrollwork across multiple semiotic planes in his careful placement of certain scrolls. Like the artist of the *Ars Moriendi*, he inserts words directly into characters' mouths, a blatant visual cue to his reader that the scroll in each case is not a label but a sign of oral transmission. Moreover, just as the artist of the *Ars Moriendi* adapted the convention of scrolls and labels to the task of representing the spoken word, the artist of *The Committee* develops the visual depiction of speech by expanding upon preexisting formal devices that separate figures and language into discrete cognitive planes. Consider, for example, how in the upper right the Pope's "seditious" voice is cunningly eclipsed by the scrollwork of the "Covenanting People" below him, or how the voices of "The Close Caball" and "Little Isaack" assume anatomical form to shake hands just below the broadsheet's title. Such examples are more than simply clever exploitations of the paradox that results from trying to represent speech in a graphic medium. By foregrounding the artificiality of many of the scrolls and banners, the broadsheet illustration flaunts the awkwardness of its integration of visual and phonetic systems in order to signal the necessarily conventional nature of its word balloons.

Although at one level such a technique might mitigate some of the confusion that results from the illustration's representation of language on multiple semiotic planes, at another it reintroduces ambiguity into the representation of speech. In reshaping the scrolls and banners typically used for purposes of labeling into newly conventional signs for speech by placing them in the mouths of the people, the artist of *The Committee* invites us to read them metaphorically. As we saw with the *Ars Moriendi*, the use of visual metaphors of writing like scrolls and parchment to convey the dignity of speech is perfectly consistent with logocentric metaphors like Descartes' "great book of Nature." For as Derrida insists, such metaphors confirm the notion that

good writing has...always been *comprehended*...within a totality, and enveloped in a volume or a book. The idea of a book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality.<sup>23</sup>

The "totality constituted by the signified" to which Derrida refers is, of course, speech itself. But his claim that the metaphor of "good writing" in the seventeenth century "confirms the privilege of the logos and founds the 'literal' meaning then given to

writing" does not hold up in the face of the extreme literalness that the metaphoric word balloons of *The Committee* possess.<sup>24</sup> Whether in the scrolls and pennants, the scattered books, or the curled parchment inscribed with High-Church heresies that has literally been vomited up by the man seated in the lower right corner, the picture overflows with signs of writing that are undeniably concrete. In the absence of an allegorical framework like that of the *Ars Moriendi*, which dramatizes the relation of speech to writing in terms of moral categories, *The Committee* cannot transcend the paradoxes of its enterprise. Because its semiotics are still derived from conventions designed with the written word in mind (labels and scrolls) they cannot signal both the conventionality of their representation of speech and the priority of speech over writing simultaneously. Consequently, in these word balloons the metaphor of divine or natural writing, supposedly dominant in the seventeenth-century, is irrevocably literalized and abased from the beginning.<sup>25</sup>

The semiotic instability of word balloons in the seventeenth-century broadsheet thus opens the door to precisely the kind of critique of logocentrism that Derrida has in mind when he calls for "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing."<sup>26</sup> By literalizing the metaphor of the book as a sign of the authoritative equivalence of spoken and written language, these balloons anticipate Derrida's deconstructive conclusions about the philosophical writing of the same period. For the broadsheet's visual equation of writing and speech effectively undercuts the hierarchical structure of logocentrism by dramatizing the presence of "writing before speech and in speech."<sup>27</sup> It thereby illuminates the founding role of writing in the history of metaphysics, where it remains "a debased, lateralized, repressed, displaced theme" which nonetheless exercises "a permanent and obsessive pressure from the place where it remains held in check."<sup>28</sup>

#### *Phonic Drift: Clouds and Breath*

Early forays into the graphic representation of speech negotiated the contradictions of their project somewhat awkwardly by adapting preestablished conventions for grafting phonetic language onto pictographic signs. By the eighteenth century, however, satirists sought a smoother integration of the two sign systems through the radical transformation of their semiotic conventions. Shifting the emphasis of the balloon away from its obvious artifice, these artists envisioned a more authentic representation of speech. In *The State Quack* of 1762 (Fig. 5), the scrollwork and banners of the previous century are noticeably subordinated to a new icon: a cloud-like shape that issues from the mouth of the speaker. Rather than segregating words and images onto discrete semiotic planes, the cloud-shaped balloon facilitates a more profound integration of figure and speech through its more "naturalistic" semiotic coding. Within a logocentric metaphysics, products of human craft—like the real scrolls, parchments, and flags scattered throughout the scenes of the *Ars Moriendi* and *The Committee*—are appropriate models for the iconic scrolls and banners used to display the written text of labels, since writing too is a technical product of the human hand. As we have seen, however, such icons are less suited for the purpose of representing speech in logocentric terms because they confuse Hegel's hierarchical nature-culture distinction between voice and writing. The cloud, by contrast, is an ephemeral image drawn from nature and is thus a suitable vehicle for a more authentic representation of speech's immediacy. As a signifier that conveys its own impermanence, the cloud



Fig. 5 Anonymous, *The State Quack*, 1762. Etching and engraving. British Museum, London. (©Copyright The British Museum.)

inscribed with speech comprises a gesture toward mitigating the potentially harmful, rigidifying effects of writing.

Derrida explains this rigidifying effect in terms of the degree to which language in its written form reproduces the sounds of vowels and consonants. Phonetic writing retains a close relationship to the spoken word by reproducing both types of sound. In order to expose the classic logocentric anxiety that even phonetic writing is poten-

tially a threat to speech, Derrida cites the following passage from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*:

It would be easy to construct a language consisting solely of consonants, which could be written clearly but not spoken. Algebra has something of such a language. When the orthography of a language is clearer than its pronunciation, this is a sign that it is written more than it is spoken. This may have been true of the scholarly language of the Egyptians; as is the case for us with the dead languages.<sup>29</sup>

For Derrida, although phonetic language does not go this far in the direction of cold, written abstraction, its "consonantic chilling" nevertheless "announces death" and tends toward a state of "ice speech degree zero."<sup>30</sup> His metaphor of frigidity here is providential, for in *The State Quack*, the process of naturalizing the graphic representation of speech amounts to a metaphoric thaw, liberating the voice frozen by writing in the form of vapor—like clouds of breath on a cold day. Such a transformation of word balloons in cartoons of the eighteenth century marks a particularly self-conscious moment in the medium's attempt to naturalize itself—in Jonathan Culler's words, "to make literature into a communication, to reduce its strangeness, and to draw upon supplementary conventions which enable it, as we say, to speak to us."<sup>31</sup> Scrolls and banners, which only served to reinscribe the semiotic "strangeness" of balloon protocol, were thus increasingly supplanted in images such as *The State Quack* by the more motivated, "natural" icon of the cloud.

Despite their more naturalistic shape, however, the cloud balloons of *The State Quack* do not completely solve the representational problems faced by earlier cartoons like *The Committee*. As in the broadsheet, a considerable amount of visual confusion persists in *The State Quack* between oral and written systems of signification. The Quack in question, the politically inexperienced and frequently satirized Lord Bute, stands at the confluence of several different systems of representation involving writing.<sup>32</sup> His speech balloon announces, "To mend the CONSTITUTION I cause a plentiful EVACUATION"—a course of action that he will presumably enact with the "UNION syringe" that he holds in his right hand. "UNION syringe" is clearly a label, as are the ribbons tied to the jar of "brew" in his other hand that read, "PEACE...of a political CLYMER [climber]." Yet, like the speech balloons, these ribbons wave in the wind, are cloud-shaped, and even seem to emerge from the vicinity of the Quack's head. Adding to the semiotic confusion is the real poster tacked to the back wall of the platform, reading "THE SENATE FARCE—Dictator by Mr. Boot, Consul by Mr. Boot, Praetors by Mr. Boot."

In fact, the poster, the ribbons, and the Quack's balloon form three links in a visual chain at the center of the drawing. The chain is completed by the flag unfurled at the visual apex of the scene, whose pole affixes it to the back wall of the platform, joining the balloon to the poster. Each component of the chain is agitated by the wind, but the most remarkable quality of this arrangement is the visual equation of the rippling flag and the waving word balloon. Like the balloon, the flag conjoins non-phonetic and phonetic signs: the image of a man and woman embracing and the words "Performed here 5 times a Day." Wafting back and forth, the balloon—though cloud-shaped—exhibits the concreteness of the flag. Indeed, like the flag, most of the ostensibly impermanent word balloons in *The State Quack* occupy three-dimensional space within the picture, rather than existing in a separate space that is superimposed on that of

the image. For instance, the man in the right foreground, who prepares to strike his interlocutor for saying, "He's a brew Doctor & has been his Degrees at Edinburgh," obscures his own words with his upraised cane. Similarly, the balloon of the satyr seated below the stage, who tries to ensnare the two shadowy personifications of France and Scotland with his net, disappears behind Scotland's coat. The balloon of the Princess of Wales, who walks the tightrope with an enormous boot (i.e. "Bute") balanced precariously on her midsection, performs an even more dramatic role in three-dimensional space. While declaring the Princess to be "In full Swing," this balloon joins her mouth to the figures in the window above, who grasp for it and thus seem to provide her only balance.

The interpretive problems occasioned by the extraordinary combination of ephemerality and concreteness in the word balloons of *The State Quack* are alleviated somewhat by the visual strategies in an etching of the same period, *Ecce Homo* (Fig. 6). Dating



Fig. 6 Anonymous, *Ecce Homo*, 1775. Etching and engraving. British Museum, London. (©Copyright The British Museum.)

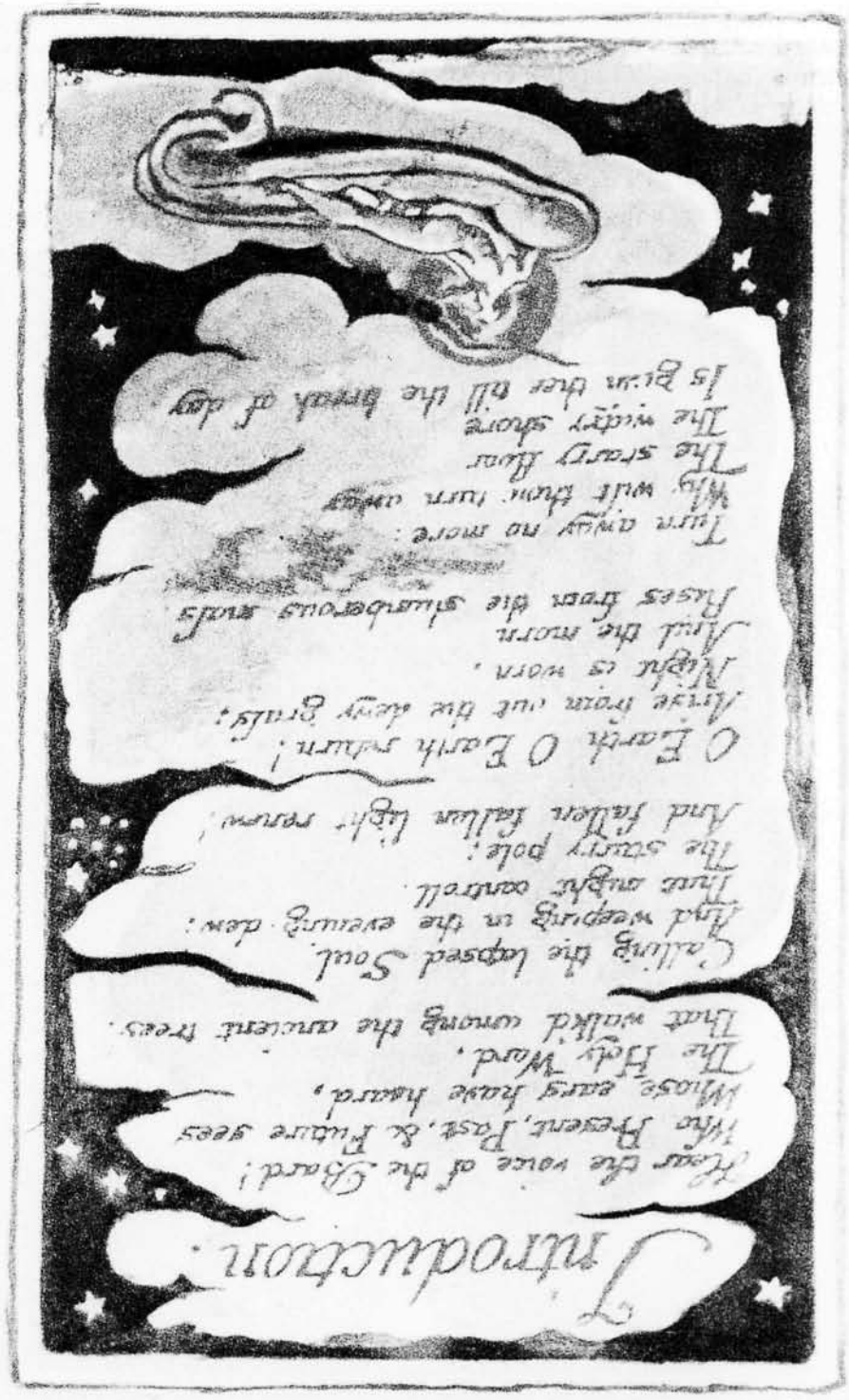
from 1775, this image displays artist and print dealer William Austin furiously defacing the window of Matthew Darly's print shop because his own "Proposal for Opening A Museum of Drawings" had been publicly ridiculed—as suggested by the "Proposal" in danger of being soiled by a curious dog in the lower right corner. Like *The State Quack*, this etching combines several real posters and papers being blown about in the wind with a visual representation of speech. It differs from the previous cartoon, however, in its use of a distinctive word balloon with an open-ended tail that literally trails off in the wind, in accordance with the style of the etching itself, whose visual density and complexity likewise dissipate from left to right. The end of the balloon closest to Austin's mouth is visually definite and sharply defined, as are his words, "Damn your foollish caricatures." As the balloon dissolves to the right, however, so do his words—"caricatures" is fainter than "Damn"—a technique that suggests the ephemerality of the voice and contrasts effectively with the real sheets of paper, bearing written words and images, that Austin tears from the window.

*Ecce Homo* brilliantly suggests the contrast between speech and writing—and the paradoxes of representing the former in the visual medium of the latter—by the *mis-en-abyme* of images created by the caricature in the upper left corner of the window. The caricature perfectly reproduces the scene of Austin's attack in miniature, except for one detail: the prominent word balloon displayed in the main scene is missing from the caricature. *Ecce Homo* dramatizes the relationship between life and visual representation as a confrontation between the real Austinian figure who attacks Darly's window and the mocking caricature of himself displayed therein. In this confrontation between life and art, the absence of the word balloon from the caricature foregrounds the living quality of the attacking figure and his speech by suggesting the impossibility of depicting spoken language in drawings and caricatures. Whereas the caricature momentarily asserts that speech can exist only in the realm of life, not art, this assertion is immediately refuted by the reality that Austin's "living speech" is only an artistic representation as well. The infinitely repeating *mis-en-abyme* of Austin's attack on the caricature of his attack and on the written and illustrated documents that flutter to the ground is thus a fitting characterization of the paradoxical enterprise of the word balloon.

With his innovative fusion of poetry and painting in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789, 1794), William Blake elaborated significantly on the use of clouds to indicate natural speech and thereby ward off the potentially rigidifying effects of graphic representation. Clouds abound in these "Illuminated Books," where they are central images in the crucial introductory poems of each section and frequently serve as vehicles for a speaking voice. Like the scrolls and banners of *The Committee*, Blake's clouds often hover in an indeterminate state between being part of the pictorial image and being extrinsic to it. The introductory image of *Songs of Experience* (Fig. 7), for instance, entreats us to "Hear the voice of the Bard!" from within a cloud-like shape that rises in the night sky above a female personification of Earth. In this image the cloud is not simply an open space left for the display of the poem; it is corporeal enough to support the divan upon which Earth reclines. Similarly, the cloud on which the text of *The Chimney Sweeper* (Fig. 8) is inscribed seems literally to snow on the beleaguered little sweep. In *Infant Sorrow* (Fig. 9), however, the cloud-shape containing the infant's soliloquy is incongruous with the indoor setting, having apparently floated into the nursery merely as a conventional signifier. Yet even this cloud appears strangely solid, supporting the weight of the curtain draped over its right side.



Fig. 7 William Blake, introductory poem of Songs of Experience, 1794. Etching and watercolor. (The Trianon Press, Paris.)



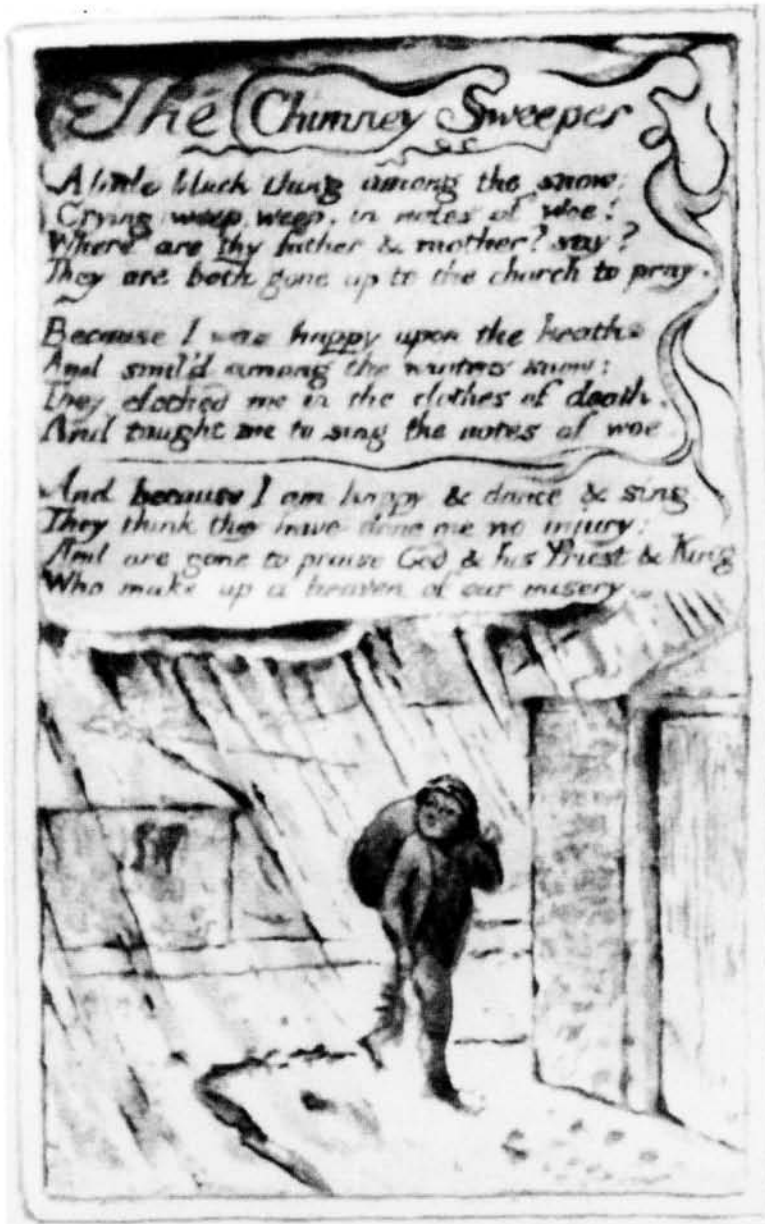


Fig. 8 William Blake, *The Chimney Sweeper*, from *Songs of Experience*, 1794. Etching and watercolor. (The Trianon Press, Paris.)

Blake's interest in dramatizing the relationship between speech and writing in the *Songs*, however, emerges most clearly in the frontispiece and introductory poem of *Songs of Innocence* (Fig. 10). Employing a figural type that reappears in reverse as the child in *Infant Sorrow*, the frontispiece depicts a tiny child who glides above the poet's head on a cloud, recounting a history of the supposed fall from speech into writing. As the serpentine tree to the right of the poet suggests, this history is framed in the biblical



Fig. 9 William Blake, *Infant Sorrow*, from *Songs of Experience*, 1794. Etching and watercolor. (The Trianon Press, Paris.)

narrative of the temptation in Eden and the original fall from innocence. Yet Blake's poem ultimately provides a redemptive conclusion to this tragic history of semiotic decline in the form of the poet's "rural pen"—a logocentric device *par excellence*. In the opening stanza, the child instructs the poet to "Pipe a song about a Lamb," commanding him more emphatically in the next stanza to "Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe/Sing thy songs of happy cheer."<sup>33</sup> The history of linguistic development represented

by this shift from piping to singing—that is, from abstract musical sound to fully articulated speech—culminates in the child's next command:

Piper sit thee down and write  
 In a book that all may read—  
 So he vanish'd from my sight,  
 And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

But just as the poet seems to have moved from speech to writing, his voice makes an unexpected return:

And I made a rural pen,  
 And I stain'd the water clear,  
 And I wrote my happy songs,  
 Every child may joy to hear

Somewhere between the child's instruction that the poet write a book that "all may read" and the poet's own anticipation that children will "hear" his "happy [written] songs," the spoken poetic voice has reemerged. As Michael Ferber points out, this reemergence is reinforced by Blake's "clever conceit to manufacture a 'rural pen' out of a hollow reed, rather than to pluck one from a bird, for it is a routine pastoral fact that *pipes* are made from hollow reeds; the pen is thus a transformed pipe."<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the poet's strangely loquacious writing is inscribed not only in phonetic language by a "rural pen" but also by the "stain'd water" of the hand-colored images of the *Songs*. The opening poem of the collection thus suggests that the voice's spoken or musical presence is potentially recoverable through the graphic integration of words and pictures. Although the interaction of these two semiotic systems is apparent throughout the *Songs*, they converge most conspicuously in the images of clouds that, as we have seen, float through the books as both a screen onto which the voice is projected and a location from which it is audible, binding the songs, and the systems, together. By fusing writing and voice on the surface of clouds, Blake thus articulates his *Songs* within a Romantic, Rousseau-inspired history of the fall from speech into writing—a history which subsequently reappropriates, through a form of writing sensitive to the musical, ephemeral quality of the voice, "that of which speech allowed itself to be dispossessed."<sup>35</sup>

Blake's use of cloud imagery in the *Songs* to explore the relationship between speech and writing is an important adjunct to the history of the word balloon, not only because it reflects the balloon's logocentric imagery and function, but also because it anticipates refinements to the presentation of text within the balloon that occur in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In keeping with attempts to inscribe the ephemerality of speech as naturally as possible, the anonymous authors of *The State Quack* and *Ecce Homo* depicted their characters' words floating upwards out of their mouths, as if trailing away in the wind. Although there is a certain symbolic logic to such a technique, vertically oriented clouds were of course difficult to read and occasioned a further shift in the structural form of the cartoon to facilitate the naturalization of balloon conventions. Because the cartoon was primarily a creation of the graphic arts, rather than of writing or drama, the primacy of the illustration often left insufficient room for the discreet insertion of speech balloons. In order to prevent ostensibly "invisible" word balloons from obliterating significant parts of the illus-

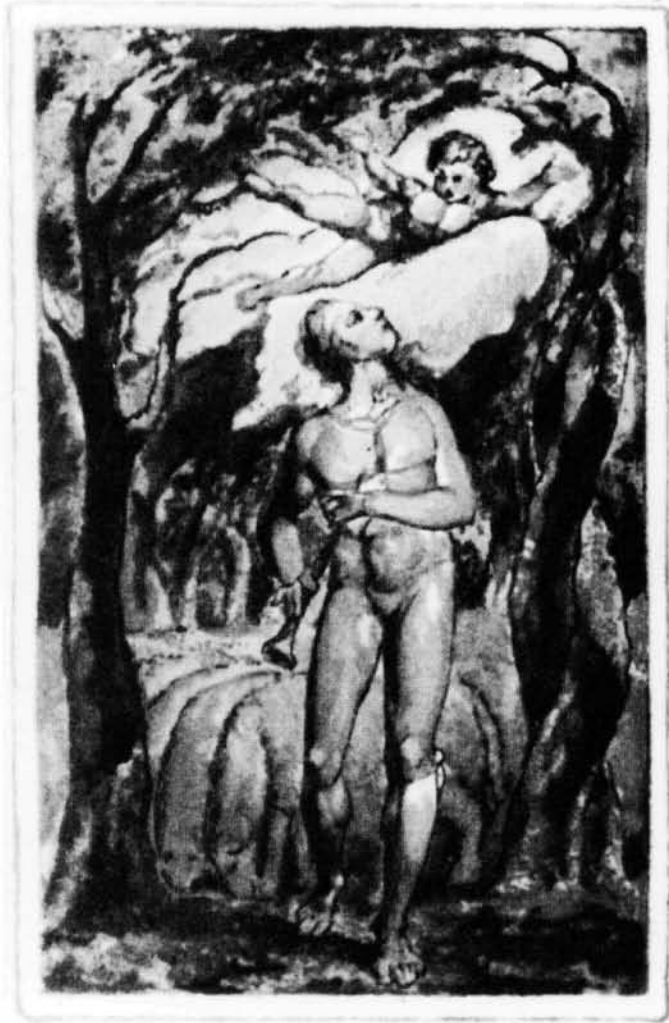


Fig. 10 William Blake, frontispiece of *Songs of Innocence*, 1789. Etching and watercolor. (The Trianon Press, Paris.)

tration—or, conversely, of being obliterated by them, as in *The State Quack*—speech had to “fit” into the gaps between figures. In comparison, Blake’s convenient juxtaposition of poem and image allowed his cloud balloons to present text in a conventional, horizontal format. As the cramped word balloons in James Gillray’s 1806 cartoon *Visiting the Sick* (Fig. 11) suggest, however, the distribution of figures in most images of this period had yet to assume a fully “organic” relation to the balloon that would suppress the alienating effect of vertical reading.

Although the reader must still rotate the cartoon back and forth in order to read its dialogue, the balloons in *Visiting the Sick* represent a significant refinement of the cloudy emissions in *The State Quack*, most notably in their accentuation and elongation of the balloon stem. Significantly, the increasingly pronounced stem extending from the mouth of each speaker in this cartoon seems to be a direct consequence of, and indeed a partial solution to, the problem of overcrowded panel-space. “Charley” James Fox—the central, seated figure who complains, “I abhor all Communion which debars



Fig. 11 James Gillray, *Visiting the Sick*, 1806. Hand-colored etching and aquatint. British Museum, London. (©Copyright The British Museum.)

us the comfort of the Cup!—will no one give me a Cordial?”—speaks with a balloon reminiscent of the slanted or vertical cloud-shapes of *The State Quack*, which did not make a substantial distinction between the body of the balloon and the stem. Other figures, however, speak using balloons with lengthier, more distinct stems, most notably “Bishop O’Bother” on the right, who says, “O Tempora, O Mores!—Charley! dear Charley!—remember your poor Soul! & if you’re spared this time give us Emancipation—or!!!” As the Bishop’s balloon illustrates, a lengthy stem is advantageous both because it allows Gillray a greater degree of control over the location of the balloon relative to the speaking figure, and because such increased artistic control permits a balloon in which text reads horizontally, from left to right. Whereas the location of the balloon had previously been restricted to projecting directly from the speaker’s mouth, the extension of the stem throughout the early nineteenth century enabled artists to move the balloon out of the figures’ pictorial space into the space above them, where the balloon increasingly assumed a shape congenial to the conventions of reading. In Gillray’s illustration, this crucial transformation remains in a nascent form: the stem of the Bishop’s balloon is exceptional and the text within it is not entirely horizontal. Moreover, the vertical type of balloon familiar to eighteenth-century readers still predominates.

George Cruikshank’s 1812 cartoon *Boney Hatching a Bulletin or Snug Winter Quarters!!!* (Fig. 12), provides a more developed example of how the increasingly naturalistic



balloon conventions of eighteenth-century satirists were refined and advanced in several significant ways. First is the continuing erasure of the balloon itself, which has become even more vaporous than it had been in *The State Quack* or *Visiting the Sick*. Not only are the lines that define Cruikshank's balloons lighter and more fluid than in earlier images; they are often broken altogether, like those of the unusual, fading utterance in *Ecce Homo*—a visual cue that the conventional framework of the standard cloud-like balloon is in the process of evaporating. Gone are the stiff clouds that protruded from eighteenth-century mouths. In their place, Cruikshank leaves only the faintest visual traces of the voice, further naturalizing the iconography of the medium by developing the visual equation of clouds, breath, and speech.

Cruikshank also redistributes panel-space in his cartoon to accommodate figures and their speech balloons in independent zones, and he connects them only with long, attenuated stems. Both innovations were crucial to naturalization in the first half of the nineteenth century. By itself, the new organization of space created a less cluttered narrative scene. The elongation of the balloon stem enabled the standardization of rectangularly shaped clouds arrayed horizontally in the upper zone, much as Blake had done in his *Songs*, so that text could be read easily from left to right. Thus, after experimenting with the "objective" depiction of speech as an ephemeral utterance that rises along a vertical axis, cartoonists of the early nineteenth century fulfilled the promise of cartoons like *Visiting the Sick* and *Ecce Homo* by combining a visual representation of ephemerality with the linear conventions of printed text. In this way, the word balloon exploited the naturalizing possibilities of both pictographic and

alphabetic sign systems, hybridizing them into a single unit of verbal expression that kept visual “strangeness” at bay.

In other ways, however, the displacement of the word balloon’s stem from the speaker’s mouth during this period significantly complicates the signifier’s apparent phonic drift. On one hand, the movement of the stem from the vicinity of the mouth to the area above the speaker’s head confirms the device’s logocentrism by making the connection between speech and thought (*s’entendre-parler*) explicit. On the other hand, by taking the words out of the character’s mouth, the stem directs the balloon away from an illusory visual congruity with speech and towards a semiotics of speech whose meaning is determined less by a logical visual connection than by conventional artistic practice and readerly competence. Consequently, the balloon’s iconic “naturalization” of speech—which seemed to have attained an ideal form by the start of the nineteenth century—produced new possibilities for visual confusion. If the problem for cartoonists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was to make clearer distinctions between speaking and writing, the problem they bequeathed to future cartoonists was to make clearer distinctions between speaking and *thinking*. This problem would not properly be addressed until the twentieth century, however, because Victorian cartoonists vastly reduced the role of the word balloon.

*Victorian Crisis: Legend and Book*

The ambiguity resulting from the balloon’s hybrid status—part hieroglyph, part alphabetic sign—reached a kind of crisis during the Victorian period, as the two sign



Fig. 13 John Leech, *Shall I Speak or Shall I Write to Her?*, from *Punch*, 1866. Pen and ink. (Reproduced by permission of Punch Ltd.)



systems disengaged and the balloon itself nearly disappeared. The diminutive suitor in an 1866 cartoon drawn for *Punch* by John Leech (Fig. 13) personifies this crisis, for to the suitor's prophetic question, "Shall I speak or shall I write to her?," Victorian cartoonists replied almost unanimously in favor of the latter. Consequently, the little gent's word balloon provides an ironic and anomalous memorial to graphic representations of speech in the period. As Boime summarizes,

By the last decade of the nineteenth century the distinctive components of the modern comic strip were present except for the balloon—still rejected in favor of the legend device. James Swinnerton, an American pioneer of the comic strip, once stated that at that time the balloon was considered archaic, belonging to a style buried with Cruikshank.<sup>36</sup>

Characterizing Victorian prudishness toward the mixture of semiotic registers, the return of the legend device signals a radicalization of, rather than a break with, the representational strategies of early-nineteenth-century comic artists. Whereas artists like Cruikshank saw in balloons the opportunity to preserve the naturalizing possibilities of two sign systems in productive tension, Victorian artists like Leech encouraged their further separation to the point of fracture. Word balloons continued to appear

Fig. 14 John Leech, *Here's Yer Roasted Chestnuts Only a Penny a Score!*, from *Punch*, 1866. Pen and ink. (Reproduced by permission of Punch Ltd.)



*Mr. Hobbie-de-Hoye.* "I'M VERY FOND OF 'EM—THERE'S NO ONE LOOKING!—DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULDN'T—I WILL '—YES—I'LL HAVE A PENN'ORTH!"

sporadically, but usually in a position subordinate to the legend text—a subordination frequently reinforced by the assignment of balloons primarily to the supporting dialogue of women, children, and members of low social class (Fig. 14).

What appears to be a reorganization of the hierarchical relation of speech and writing in such examples, however, is actually a confirmation of the degraded status of hieroglyphic forms like the word balloon itself—not an inversion of logocentric assumptions. The movement of the main text of the cartoon outside the bounds of the picture itself expresses a desire for a purer form and a more easily naturalized representation of speech—a desire already apparent in Cruikshank's attempt to naturalize speech within the balloon by realigning it in the horizontal, left-to-right reading conventions of printed text. In its increasing segregation of word and image, the Victorian cartoon thus drew even closer to the book by mimicking the visual layout of illustrated, serialized novels like William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, which was initially published in nineteen parts starting in 1847 before being collected as a novel in 1848.<sup>37</sup> Like the cartoons in *Punch*, Thackeray's illustrations characteristically feature a supporting caption relating the image to the main text of the novel, a practice that emphasized the subordinate relation of the image to the greater written work.

The radicalization of this strategy achieved its typical form in the restriction of all dialogue to the legend, which identified the characters of the picture and their speech.



Fig. 15 John Leech, *Symptoms of Hard Reading!*, from *Punch*, 1866. Pen and ink. (Reproduced by permission of Punch Ltd.)

Leech's ironically titled *Symptoms of Hard Reading!* (Fig. 15) is a classic example of this format, in which Victorian cartoonists sought to reconcile a Hegelian distaste for pictorial narrative and hieroglyphic writing with the cartoon's formal demand to represent speech in a visual medium. The recourse to dramatic conventions in such cartoons solves the "problem" of representing speech and pictures in the same frame by literalizing the balloon's implicit function. As Maurice Horn notes, "the balloon plays an ambivalent role: by function it is a dramatic device, by nature a graphic form."<sup>38</sup> *Symptoms of Hard Reading!* seeks to purify this function by returning the balloon to the exclusive realm of phonetic writing. The cartoon's attempt to separate phonetic from non-phonetic sign systems, however, results in the uncanny survival of what it tries to repress. The names designating each speaker, "Student" and "Mary," assume the utterly silent, non-phonetic function of balloon stems, just as the quotation marks around each utterance assume the non-phonetic function of the balloon.

This unintentional slippage in the Victorian cartoonist's Hegelian attempt at a radical separation of phonetic word and non-phonetic image reveals precisely the logocentric anxieties that have attended the interpenetration of these sign systems at various moments throughout the word balloon's extensive history. For what the word balloon lays bare is the absolute impossibility of the logocentric fantasy of a purely phonetic writing. As Derrida demonstrates in his analysis, "[w]riting can never be totally inhabited by the voice" because "[t]he non-phonetic functions, ... the operative silences of alphabetic writing, are not factual accidents or waste products one might hope to reduce."<sup>39</sup> Non-phonetic "operative silences" such as punctuation and spacing, Derrida argues, are not only essential components of all systems of writing but also evidence of the differential structure of spoken language as well: "That a speech supposedly alive can lend itself to spacing in its own writing is what relates it originally to its own death."<sup>40</sup> By demonstrating the enclosure of alphabetic writing itself in a non-phonetic sign, the word balloon as hieroglyph thus disturbs and, as Boime says, at times "disquiets" the history of logocentrism, endlessly absorbed in the task of hearing itself speak.

#### *Outcault's Nightshirt: Balloons and Quotation Marks*

If cartoons of the Victorian period seem to mark a historical regression in strategies for the graphic representation of speech back to the legend model of medieval manuscripts, then cartoons of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compressed and accelerated the entire history of the word balloon in the matter of a few decades. The catalyst of this process, hastening the popular revival of the word balloon device, was the Yellow Kid—a cartoon character who premiered in the pages of the *New York World* in 1895 or 1896 in Richard Outcault's weekly panel *Hogan's Alley*.<sup>41</sup> Comics historians like Stephen Becker, who credit Outcault's character with the resurrection of the speech balloon, typically emphasize the significance of the Yellow Kid's nightshirt, which was colored yellow and inscribed with text:

[T]he Yellow Kid's nightshirt, the focal point of the drawing, stood out like a billboard, and almost from the beginning written messages appeared on it. The messages were often identification tags, or bad puns, or statements of malicious intent. But the written word had moved into the drawing; it was no longer simply a caption or a legend. The Yellow Kid was the first serious break in the ancient tradition that words had no place in the drawing itself.<sup>42</sup>

As Becker's remarks indicate, the founding importance of the Yellow Kid's nightshirt as a precursor to the modern balloon is an undisputed piece of comics lore; yet what is perhaps more striking about *What They Did to the Dog-Catcher in Hogan's Alley* (Fig. 16) is the affinity between this cartoon's reintegration of words and pictures and the chaotic style of seventeenth-century broadsheets like *The Committee* or early-eighteenth-century satires like *The State Quack*. Like these forerunners, Outcault's panel employs a disorienting array of textual media, many of which revive elements of the balloon's history that had fallen into disuse during the late nineteenth century. The



Fig. 16 Richard Outcault, *What They Did to the Dog-Catcher in Hogan's Alley*, 1896. Pen and ink. (*New York World*, New York.)

juxtaposition of these elements within a single panel complicates the distinction between speech and writing in *Hogan's Alley*—particularly as related to the semiotics of the Yellow Kid's nightshirt.

In the scene toward which the Yellow Kid gestures, distinctions between speech and writing are clearly marked. Like *The Committee* or *The State Quack*, *Hogan's Alley* abounds with "real" written texts: the posters on the brick building at left announcing "McSwat's New Gold Cure—Everything from the Blues to the Borrowing Habit Can be Cured by Enough Gold—Except Populism"; the sign for "Raine's Hotel," which promises "10 Rooms for Guests" but advises "Bring Your own Lunch if You Really Want Something to Eat"; the lettering on the dog-catcher's cart; and "The Park Row Songster," a musical anthology contemplated by the young girl in the right foreground, which features "'It's Funny How They Roast Us When We're Gone' and Other Songs" and displays an image of a hammer tied with an ironic note, "Love One Another." Distinct from such concrete examples of writing are the speech balloons of the boy falling off the balcony and the parrot in the cage to his left. The boy's balloon, which boasts, "Watch me make a mash on Molly Brogan. I can't fail to make a hit," resembles the transitional, cloud-like balloons of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whose underdeveloped stems required them to project directly from their speakers' mouths. The parrot's wry observation, "That kid must take something to break him of that habit," is framed by a similarly shaped but transparent balloon, through which the bricks of the building behind are clearly visible. This innovative but difficult-to-read balloon recalls the more ephemeral iconography of speech in *Ecce Homo*, in which the shading of the building also shows through the wisps of the speaker's airy balloon.

Such clear distinctions between speech and writing break down, however, when we consider the Yellow Kid himself. Rather than using a speech balloon to communicate, the Kid holds a letter written in flowing script and wears a nightshirt displaying two messages. The main message on his nightshirt, written in the first person and referring to the dog catcher, seems to represent the Yellow Kid's thought or speech: "Say! He is de most popular bloke wot ever happened. I don't tink! An we ain't doin a ting ter him—very likely. He dont ketch no Hogan's Alley sausage today." As a direct comment to the reader, these remarks are likely meant to be "heard," since the Yellow Kid's mouth is open to suggest speech, and since the words themselves transcribe the inflections of a particular spoken dialect. Outcault's use of the nightshirt to convey speech is a strange choice, however, particularly given the use of more standard word balloons elsewhere in the panel. Their presence confuses the semiotic role of the nightshirt, which in fact more closely resembles the posters and signs scattered throughout the image. This semiotic confusion is compounded by the night-shirt's second message, on its bulging breast pocket, which reads, "Full of Rocks." These unattributed words have no identifiable speaking subject and seem to act as a label more than an utterance, or even a thought.

The relationship between speech and writing in *Hogan's Alley* is rendered even more complex by the letter in the Yellow Kid's right hand, which reads, "My correspondence is gittin so durn big dat I can't open all my mail. Won't some pretty typeriter gal please donate her services till I kin answer a few of my letters?" Upon first glance the letter seems less semiotically complicated than the nightshirt since it foregrounds its status as writing, not only by its handwritten script, which contrasts with the block printing of the rest of the text in the panel, but also by the instantiation of its own message: the written letter is literally an example of the type of mail it

describes, requiring the services of a "pretty type-riter gal" to open—and perhaps, since the letter is nearly illegible, to transcribe. In other ways, however, the letter's status as writing is problematized by its demotic "voice," whose dialect belongs to the Yellow Kid and is quite distinct from the more polished speech of the boy falling from the balcony. Like the text of the Yellow Kid's nightshirt, the letter is written in the first person and addresses a general audience—indeed, because it is the Yellow Kid who holds it, the letter presumably represents his voice. If the letter's message belongs to the Yellow Kid, however, its dialect makes it unlikely that it is presented in writing at all. Indeed, the question of whether the Yellow Kid is literate enough to write a letter becomes quite significant—particularly in light of his request for a secretary to help him answer his mail. There is, of course, yet another possibility, that the letter does not belong to the Yellow Kid at all but to his creator Outcault, who prompted an enormous public response with his wildly successful cartoon and thus would have had more obvious need for a "type-riter gal" than would the jug-eared street urchin.<sup>43</sup> After all, the sophisticated hand in which the letter is written is clearly a different kind of "hand" than the one which collected the pocket "Full of Rocks." The letter's semiotic instability thus provides a definitive illustration of the highly volatile relationship between words and pictures in Outcault's groundbreaking cartoons.

In the years following Outcault's experiments with bringing text back into the frame of the cartoon, word balloons once again became an integral feature of comic art. Turn-of-the-century strips like Rudolph Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kids* and Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* characteristically employed a version of early-nineteenth-century, horizontally formatted, cloud-shaped balloons to display speech, with little or none of the semiotic confusion of Outcault's Yellow Kid.<sup>44</sup> In keeping with precursors like *Boney Hatching a Bulletin*, the stems of early-twentieth-century balloons frequently consisted of a single wispy string, which, when attached to the simple rounded form encircling the text, gave the device its most literally balloon-like appearance yet.

Although the balloon increasingly supplanted the legend device in American comics throughout the teens and twenties, however, the integration of words and pictures in Britain remained in the thrall of Victorian prejudices. Cartoons such as *Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn* of 1920 (Fig. 17), for example, still used balloons sparingly, in the manner of Leech's cartoons for *Punch*, supplementing the illustration with a lengthy typeset caption underneath. As George Perry and Alan Aldridge note, "[t]he purpose of this [practice] was obscure since the pictures contained all the information necessary to understand the strip and few children could have bothered to read the text."<sup>45</sup> Just as it does in Leech's cartoons for *Punch*, the use of an extended caption featuring dialogue attributed to the characters illustrated in *Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn* sets two semiotic systems at odds. Instead of fostering the complementary relationship between words and pictures evident in Outcault's dazzling panels, the artist of *Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn* sets words and pictures in direct competition for authority, since both describe the same scene and, nearly word for word, the same dialogue. Perry and Aldridge's speculation that such redundant, typewritten captions "provided a sop to the attackers of comics who alleged that excessive comic-reading encouraged illiteracy" is likely correct, for the logocentric segregation of words and pictures in such cartoons reserved the possibility that the picture was merely an "illustration" of the semiotically superior narrative of the typeset caption underneath.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the popping of real balloons in the second panel of *Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn* neatly

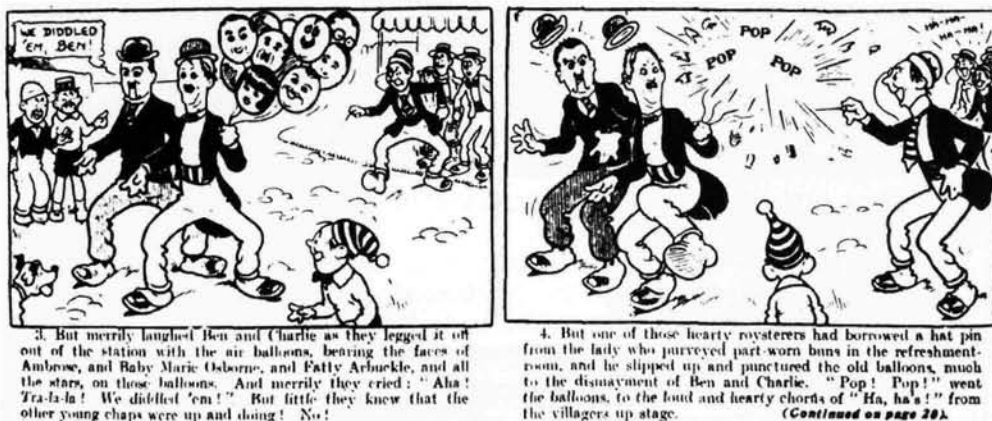


Fig. 17 George Wakefield, *Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn*, 1920. Pen and ink. (Film Fun, London.)

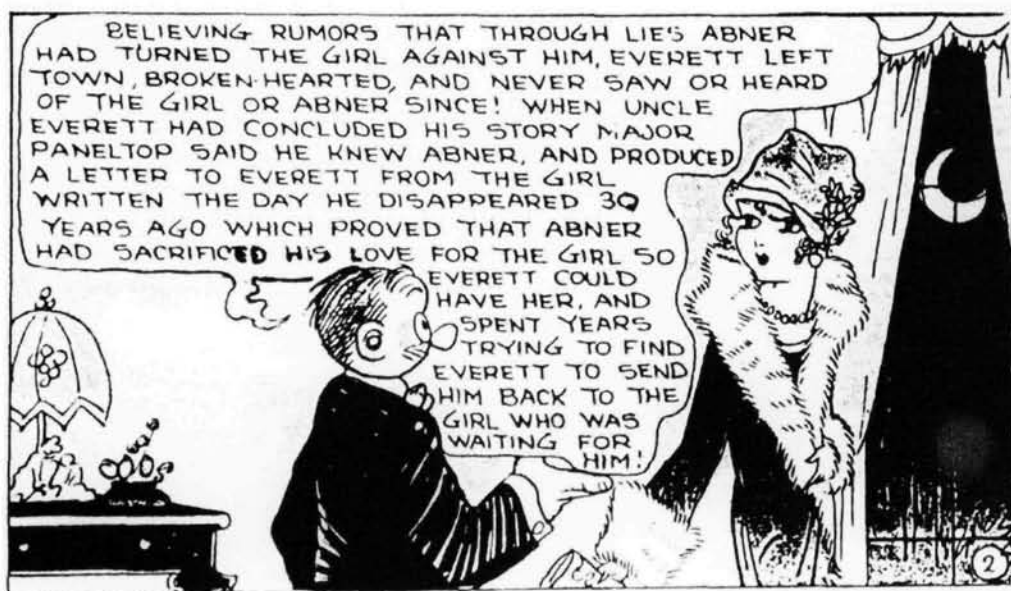


Fig. 18 Jimmy Murphy, from *Toots and Casper*, ca. 1938. Pen and ink.

illustrates the detrimental effects of such a strategy on the word balloon device in British comics of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The inclusion of lengthy captions summarizing the picture took the air out of British word balloons by subordinating their role to the authority of the written text. As the "POP, POP, POP" displayed *within* the space of the exploding balloons artfully suggests, however, the word balloon proved an exceptionally resilient device, loudly asserting itself even as it was under siege. It persisted despite its apparent redundancy and by the late 1930s had triumphed over the caption device in new British comics like *Dandy* and *Beano*.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the first half of the century in America, the alphabetic and hieroglyphic components of the word balloon continued to be naturalized according to

separate rules within the same frame. The result, as Al Hormel points out, was distractingly wordy cartoons like Jimmy Murphy's *Toots and Casper* (Fig. 18), in which the balloon, absurdly inflated by its lengthy text, claims more space than the picture, even occluding parts of the figures, like Casper's thumb.<sup>48</sup> Rather than producing the desired effect of ephemerality, Casper's balloon seems all too corporeal, like the word balloons of *The State Quack*. The illusion of the text's invisibility is further undermined by the balloon's reinsertion into the lower zone of the cartoon, driving a visual wedge between the two conversants.

By the mid-1960s, however, the word balloon occupied a comfortable middle ground between text and image, as the two semiotic systems drew closer together.<sup>49</sup> It increasingly shed its earlier naturalistic form as an ostensibly ephemeral cloud surrounding speech to assume a more conventionalized shape whose "naturalization" was left largely to the reader's competence. Yet even in its modern form, the balloon remains an appropriate shape by which to mark off speech, because what it loses of the naturalistic expressiveness it possessed as a cloud or puff of breath, it makes up in its resemblance to another signifier of speech from another semiotic system. The modern word balloon, with its more developed stem and increasingly standardized contour, in shape and function suggests a single quotation mark writ large. As a non-phonetic component of alphabetic writing, the quotation mark is an ideal model for the balloon's standard shape in the twentieth century, since the balloon has historically taken its form from hieroglyphic signs. The modern balloon thus remains intimately linked to its rich visual history, even as it exchanges a logocentric referent (the cloud) for a grammatological one (the quotation mark). Moreover, as the balloon's use became more common and as its shape settled into a standardized form, its visual strangeness receded and it acquired the pedestrian status of other non-phonetic punctuation. As McCloud wryly jokes with reference to *The Wind and the Song*, Rene Magritte's classic exploration of the treachery of images, to contemporary readers the balloon is no more obtrusive than a quotation mark (Fig. 19).

Despite the significant visual and semiotic reorientation associated with its standardization, the modern word balloon remains residually subservient to a logocentric



Fig. 19 Scott McCloud, from *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Tundra, 1993), 25.





Fig. 20 Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, *Klaw: The Murderous Master of Sound*, from *The Fantastic Four* 56 (1966). Pen and ink. (©1999 Marvel Characters, Inc. Used with permission.)

iconography. A panel from *Klaw: The Murderous Master of Sound*, from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's 1966 strip *The Fantastic Four* (Fig. 20), for instance, suggests that the balloon's more conventional appearance nonetheless retains a logocentric identification of speech with thought. Such an identification is first indicated by the continued placement of the speech balloon's stem above the speaker's head to signal the mental origins of speech. But it is most thoroughly accomplished in the use of a *thought* balloon—a device that cleverly reappropriates the cloud icon of previous centuries. Whereas the pointed stem of the speech balloon conveys the directness of audible speech, the detached bubbles of the thought balloon's stem emerge in gradually increasing sizes from the thinker's head to suggest the enclosure and interiority appropriate to thought.

In light of the apparent telos of the balloon as a conventional signifier in this panel, the encounter between Susan Richards, "The Invisible Girl," and Klaw, "Murderous Master of Sound," offers a fitting conclusion to the history of this "desperation device."<sup>50</sup> For in this meeting of heroine and villain, the original allegory of good speech and bad writing from the *Ars Moriendi* reemerges, recalling for us the ambiguous constitution of the word balloon within the history of Western logocentrism. Like the self-sacrificing Invisible Girl—who declares, "Even my *life* is less dear to me than *loyalty* to those who *trust* me!"—the balloon as a symbol for speech is remarkable for its self-effacement in the service of phonetic writing and the naturalization of writing as speech. Yet its disjunctive history proves how the balloon's function as an "invisible force-field," separating and organizing the interaction of phonetic and non-phonetic semiotic systems, is continually menaced by the alternative image of itself as "murderous master of sound"—murderous precisely because its mastery of sound can only be accomplished by a troubling combination of the violence of writing and the non-phonetic signifier, "the dead letter... the carrier of death."<sup>51</sup> In other words, the clash of the Invisible Girl and Klaw, the Murderous Master of Sound, stages an uncanny confrontation of the good logocentric balloon and its bad grammatological double, a modern allegory for the balloon's ability to disturb the very metaphysics of presence it seems to instantiate.

#### *Grammatology and Legitimation*

The balloon's paradoxical ability to dislodge logocentric primacy unexpectedly in the very act of trying to produce it may account for its—and by extension, the comics medium's—historical struggle for legitimation within discourses of aesthetic meaning and value. The history of the word balloon has been a history of the rapprochement of phonetic and non-phonetic systems of signification, a rapprochement forbidden by Hegelian semiotics and all other logocentric theories of writing. What has made this gesture of combining phonetic and non-phonetic signs so threatening is not simply its transgression of an aesthetic or semiotic edict but also the fact that the word balloon flaunts what so-called phonetic language is forced to conceal in the history of logocentrism: that "phonetic writing *does not exist*"<sup>52</sup> because all language is necessarily inhabited by non-phonetic elements. Because of its location within an overarching logocentric apparatus, however, the word balloon's hybrid nature has ultimately left it vulnerable to the very prejudices against hieroglyphic writing that originally motivated Hegel.<sup>53</sup>

Early legitimations of the comics often constructed noble histories of precursors to the medium, drawn from the art-historical canon as far back as antiquity, in an attempt to refute "the [neo-Puritan] hangover of the Victorian tradition of literacy which decreed pictures to be unrespectable... [because they] encouraged mental laziness which could in time lead to more serious mental collapse."<sup>54</sup> A grammatological approach to the history of the word balloon, however, allows us to deconstruct such denouncements of the medium from within, by exposing their implicit bias in favor of certain forms of representation. As McCloud's use of the relationship between writing and memory to illustrate the misunderstandings that plague new media so succinctly shows (Fig. 21), the old standards by which new media like the comics are initially judged are inherently logocentric. Rather than viewing the phonetic and non-phonetic components of the language of comics as unfairly matched antagonists,



Fig. 21 Scott McCloud, from *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Tundra, 1993), 151.

grammatology levels the semiotic field of play, making a reappraisal of the distinctive aesthetic possibilities of the medium and its devices not only possible but necessary.

The most curious contradiction in previous histories of the comics is their tendency to venerate the word balloon as a decisive factor in the invention of the medium while declining to explore the balloon device in any detail as a site of creative artistic expression. Boime's history, in which he grounds his nuanced discussion of Roy Lichtenstein's celebrated use of word balloons, is exceptional in this regard. Yet even here, Boime is clearly less interested in the creative use of word balloons within comic history itself than in the adaptation of comic conventions by a mainstream artist who ostensibly works outside the comic medium. It remains for us, therefore, to articulate grammatological history with more particular histories of the word balloon's function within the comics medium—to let the balloon speak by analyzing it in terms of style and content. The panoramic scope of the present essay has permitted only a sampling of examples from critical periods in the history of the graphic representation of speech. Considerably more work remains to be done to explore the nature of the balloon, not merely as a "desperation device" but as a site where the creative intervention of different artists at different times has had challenging and rewarding consequences.

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I wish to thank Dr. Cindy Donatelli of the University of Manitoba for many helpful suggestions and for encouraging me to revise this paper for publication.

1. Albert Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein and the Comic Strip," *Art Journal* 28 (Winter 1968), 156.
2. Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," 155-156.
3. Maurice Horn, *75 Years of the Comics* (Boston: Boston Book and Art, 1971), 10.
4. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
5. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 144.
6. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 50.
7. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 301.
8. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Spirit*, vol. 3, *Phenomenology and Psychology*, trans. M. J. Petry (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979).

9. Hegel, *Philosophy of Spirit*, 196-197. Derrida emphasizes the pictographic character of hieroglyphs for Hegel in "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," trans. Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 97-98: "Although hieroglyphs do bear elements of phonetic writing, and thus of arbitrary signs... they remain too tied to the sensory representation of the thing. Their naturalness holds back the spirit, encumbers it...."
10. Hegel, *Philosophy of Spirit*, 191.
11. Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid," 95.
12. In addition to Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," and Horn, *75 Years of the Comics*, the most useful sources for various periods of (primarily English-language) cartoons and comics history include the following: Stephen Becker, *Comic Art in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959); Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1973); Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1999); Syd Hoff, *Editorial and Political Cartooning* (New York: Stravon Educational Press, 1976); Michael Wynn Jones, *The Cartoon History of Britain* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Tundra, 1993); George Perry and Alan Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1967); Jerry Robinson, *The Comics: An Illustrated History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974); Victoria and Albert Museum, *English Caricature: 1620 to the Present*, exh. cat. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984).
13. See Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," as well as Perry and Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, 9-31; and McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 9-20.
14. Horn, *75 Years of the Comics*, 7; Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," 155.
15. Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," 155.
16. The back cover of McCloud's text features laudatory puffs from a catalogue of the industry's most influential and respected publishers and creators, including Will Eisner, Jim Lee, Art Spiegelman, Neil Gaiman, Dave Sim, and Alan Moore. See also Will Eisner et al., "Seeing the Invisible: Responses to Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*," *The Comics Journal* 165 (1994), 41-45.
17. The history of the graphic representation of speech furnishes a wealth of fascinating examples from various cultures in several languages, only a tiny fraction of which I am able to touch on here. With the exception of the *Ars Moriendi*, I have limited my study of word balloons to examples from Britain and the United States for purposes of historical consistency and linguistic coherence.
18. The scroll of the devil in the foreground of Fig. 2 reads, "Behold your sins." From top to bottom the other scrolls read: "You are a fornicator," "You are a perjurer," "You have lived avariciously," and "You have killed." The angel in Fig. 3 consoles the man, "May you not despair at all," while the demon at his feet despairs, "No victory for me." I am grateful to Dr. Melissa Furrow of Dalhousie University for these translations from the original Latin.
19. Émile Mâle, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1949), 152.
20. E. R. Curtis, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 306; cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 15.
21. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 15.
22. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 15.
23. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 18.
24. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 15.
25. In the broadsheet's complete form, a large block of text entitled "The Explanation" runs beneath the image of *The Committee*, compounding its semiotic instability. Despite its authoritative title, however, "The Explanation" does not constitute a logocentric privileging of text over image but rather an equivocation between the two—it consists of footnotes which explain parts of the picture in more detail and thus, in a sense, are only supplements to the visual and logical primacy of the image.
26. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 6.
27. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 51.
28. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 270.

29. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages, which treats of Melody and Musical Imitation*, trans. John H. Moran, in John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, eds., *On the Origin of Language* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), 28. Cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 303.
30. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 303.
31. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 134.
32. Jones, *The Cartoon History of Britain*, 4.
33. William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 23.
34. Michael Ferber, *Critical Studies: William Blake* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1991), 4.
35. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 142.
36. Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," 156.
37. On the popularity of illustrated novels during this period, see Robert M. Adams, *The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account* (New York: Norton, 1983), 390-391.
38. Horn, *75 Years of the Comics*, 13.
39. Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid," 95-96.
40. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 39.
41. The date of the Kid's first appearance is disputed. See Francine Silverman, "Tracing the History of America's First Modern Comic Character," *Editor and Publisher* 127:48 (1994), 16-18.
42. Becker, *Comic Art in America*, 11; see also Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein," 156.
43. According to Becker, Outcault's cartoon sparked "that first gentle wave of mass hysteria which accompanies the birth of popular art forms. The Yellow Kid was soon on buttons, cracker tins, cigarette packs and ladies' fans; eventually he was a character in a Broadway play." Becker, *Comic Art in America*, 10.
44. See Becker, *Comic Art in America*, 15-32.
45. Perry and Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, 49.
46. Perry and Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, 49.
47. *Dandy* and *Beano* departed from older comics like *Film Fun* in content as well as style, incorporating "powerful gag humour and slapstick, with a stubborn toughness and scorn for the higher virtues." Perry and Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, 49.
48. Al Hormel, "Silents, Please!," *Hogan's Alley: The Magazine of the Cartoon Arts* 1 (1994), 25.
49. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 55.
50. Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 26.
51. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 17.
52. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 39.
53. See Horn, *75 Years of the Comics*, 7.
54. Perry and Aldridge, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, 9.