Hallucinating the Other: Derridean Fantasies of Chinese Script

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The topic of "Representations of Otherness" would have sounded familiar to the first generation of French comparatists. According to Jean-Marie Carré, the image or mirage of an alien culture was a legitimate area of study- even more so than literary influence. To the Parisian scholars in the 30s this was known as *doxology*. What Carré and his disciple Marius-François Guyard meant by doxology included research on "the fortune [*succès*] of French literature in foreign countries" and "what the French people think about foreigners." The problem of doxology thus understood was not that it might produce Francophiles or Francophobes. For all his provincialism, Guyard could say, "La littérature comparée s'y épanouit, comme souvent, en psychologie comparée!" (21). But what then was the problem? If one reviews the early history of comparative literature studies, one finds it has always been deeply rooted in Eurocentrism (comparative psychology was made possible only by what E. R. Curtius has called a collective European consciousness).

Things seemed different in the early 60s. René Etiemble, who succeeded Carré at the Sorbonne, turned out to be an "*enfant terrible*," reacting against his predecessor. In his polemical pamphlet *Comparaison n'est-pas raison,* Etiemble deplores the lack of a common language tool in comparative studies and goes so far (or Far East) as to propose Chinese script as a "universal working language." This writing form, he argues, has the curious advantage of being recognizable by everyone while remaining pronounceable in his or her own mother tongue (27-30).

Etiemble's "extravagant" proposal echoes the celebrated hieroglyphic debate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, since John Wilkins' initial attempt in the seventeenth century to construct a pre-Edenic "Real Character," a chain of European (and to a lesser extent, American) writers, including Leibniz, Descartes, Hegel, Fenollosa, Eisenstein, and (who else) Derrida, have joined this prolonged "sinological argument." Constructing discourse on a system that is non-discursive, writing about an alien script in their own, script, all these writers have been caught up in the dialectic of blindness and insight that reveals at once images of self as well as mirages of the other. When it comes to evaluating this particular "language" of the other, their response has been, as Derrida puts it, either "hyperbolic admiration" or "ethnocentric scorn" (1976, 80).

The following critical survey of post-Renaissance conceptualizations of Chinese script raises a number of methodological problems in comparative studies and cultural hermeneutics. These problems can be defined in the context of the history of reception and/or the history of interpretation. In terms of reception, our task is to assess various Western readings theological, metaphysical, aesthetic of written Chinese. However, to reread these readings, we must first settle the problematic of the interpretation of language. Namely, from what critical stance and in what cultural context can we interpret the Chinese written character? Should we talk about the Chinese written character in terms of etymology or in spite of it? If our context is etymology and our position that of a lexicographer, we will find that there are many myths to be dispelled among the writings of the Westerners surveyed, *none*

of whom had an adequate knowledge of Chinese. If we go beyond the narrow confines of etymology and attempt to evaluate their readings in terms of the respective cultural matrices and historical moments, then we will do an injustice to the language-unless the meaning of language is never determinate. Thus we are faced with a hermeneutic dilemma between understanding and application, yet another instance of an on-going debate initiated by Gadamer and Betti.

Similar questions on interpretive authority are relevant to cultural hermeneutics. How do we represent the other? As a native speaker of Chinese and a trained lexicographer, I can hardly resist the temptation to play the role of the "indigenous ethnographer." But I want never to endorse essentialism because I believe the observed does not have a transparent existence and that he makes sense only in relation to the observer. While interpretation is of course always exteriorization, there cannot be, as Edward Said imagines, an Orientalism which will "represent Islam in itself" (60). Nor can we expect, as does Gayatri Spivak, "the First World feminist" to appreciate the "immense heterogeneity of the field" between her and Third World women (136). The kind of cultural hermeneutics I am concerned with in this paper is, rather, the functional centrality that language plays in representing otherness and, in particular, the force and limits of languages as speech in representing silent script.

The hieroglyphic debate involving Chinese script began in the seventeenth century, when philosophers launched various projects postulating a universal language. There was a theological-philosophical impetus behind such attempts namely, to restore the primordial, originary plenitude that existed before the Tower of Babel. In the proposal for such a language, which he presented to the Royal Society in 1668, John Wilkins considers several disadvantages of Chinese as a "Real Character." He writes: "As for the *China* Character and Language so much talked of in the world ... there are many considerable faults in it, which make it come far short of the advantages which may be in such a Philosophical Language as is here designed" (450). Among the "faults" he lists are the arbitrariness of the sign and the ideogram's lack of generality in representing the nature of things:

> These Characters are strangely complicated and difficult as to the "*Figure*" of them. Besides the difficulty and perplexedness, of these Characters, there does not seem to be any kind of Analogy ... betwixt the shape of the Characters, and the things represented by them, as to the Affinity or Opposition betwixt them, nor any tolerable provision for necessary derivations.
>
> Though in some particulars they seem to found their Character upon the *philosophy of things,* yet 'tis not so in others. The Character put for a precious Stone ... must be used with additions to it for several kinds of *Gems,* as *Pearls, &c....* But this [most natural expression of things] ... is no constant Rule amongst them. It should seem to be observed only in some few *Species* of nature which are most obvious, there being reason to doubt whether they had any such general Theory of Philosophy, as might serve for all other things and notions. (450, 452)

Wilkins's assessment of the limitations of the Chinese character his insistence on its arbitrary nature and its lack of generality laid the foundation for later arguments about the nature and functions of the Chinese character. For instance, while Leibniz admired the philosophical universality of Chinese script, Hegel criticized its arbitrariness and alienation from life. The same criticism can be heard from Walter

Ong who asserts that writing is parasitic to orality, which is primary. In contrast to Wilkins's, Fenollosa found an analogy between the shape of the character and the thing it represents. And it is the "copulation" of signifying elements that inspired Eisenstein to develop his concept of montage. But first we must turn to Wilkins's contemporary, Leibniz, who was a great admirer of China.

Leibniz read with special interest Wilkins's pamphlet, suggestively entitled *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language*, because like Wilkins, he was a Platonist in his theory of the origin of language. As a Platonist, he believed that general concepts precede specific concepts. Therefore the idea of a universal language (or a symbolic system), which proceeds from the general to the specific, fit perfectly with his view of the origin of language. As a Platonist, Leibniz postulated a dichotomy between philosophical language and natural language. Anchored in empirical reality and laced with semantic ambiguities, natural language, in Leibniz's view could never be the vehicle for philosophical language. But if the meaning of words could be made clear and precise, then the Tower of Babel, which separated people from one another, could be destroyed. According to Leibniz, the degree of precision necessary for philosophy could be found only in *a Characteristica Universalis (i.e.,* Wilkins's "Real Character"). Such a Universal Character is writing which transcends but mediates all natural languages, and whose individual constituents would unequivocally denote one particular idea.

Throughout his life Leibniz toyed with the notion of such a universal script, experimenting now and then with figures, letters, numbers, musical notes, and even colors as its constituents. Through the mediation of a Jesuit, he learned the rudiments of the composition of Chinese ideograms and began to cherish the hope that the ideogrammic form might eventually lead to the universal alphabet. He identified two types of Chinese characters: fundamental characters which correspond to the alphabet of primitive ideas, and combination characters, whose principles reflect our thinking process. He believed that Chinese, more than any other post-Adamic language, could express our knowledge of general truths. As he remarked:

> Those who know the Chinese characters are right to believe that it will become a universal character, whose written form would be understood by all the world. If all peoples in the world could agree on the designation of a thing by a character, one people could pronounce it differently from the other.
>
> And we could introduce a Universal Symbolism ... if in place of words we used little diagrams which represented visible things pictorially and invisible things by means of the visible ones which go with them, also bringing in certain additional marks suitable for conveying inflections and particles. This would at once enable us to communicate easily with remote peoples.... (290)

For Leibniz the advantage of this pictorial symbolism was that it would "literally *speak to the eyes*" (290). Having learnt that "the Chinese have dictionaries in which pictures are used," Leibniz often mused on the possibility of compiling a dictionary that would contain a natural history. "Such an illustrated Universal Dictionary is very desirable" (254), he maintained. About his own dictionary he offers the following description:

> It would be good if the words for things which are known by their outward shapes were to be accompanied by "little draughts and prints" of the things.

> A dictionary made in this fashion would be most useful to posterity, and would spare the textual critics of the future a great deal of trouble. A little print of an *apium* or an *ibex* (a species of wild goat) would be more use than a long description of the plant or that animal. (253-54)

Leibniz's praise of Chinese writing was severely criticized by Hegel. To Hegel, a language that "represents the ideas themselves by signs" is "imperfect" because of its separation from spoken language. In contrast to Chinese, the written form of German, Hegel believed, is much more superior and easier to learn: one has "to learn only these signs [the 26 letters] and their combinations" (135). He insisted that while hieroglyphic writing is suited "only to the exegeticism of Chinese spiritual culture," its "analytic notation of representations ... which seduced Leibniz to the point of wrongly preferring this script to the alphabetic, rather contradicts the fundamental exigency of language in general, namely the noun" (qtd. in Derrida 1976, 25-26).

According to Hegel, a script, which uses simple signs or figures to represent simple ideas, presupposes an atomistic view of reality and thought and fails to recognize the essential or true role of language. For Hegel the true role of language is to present as directly and immediately as possible the various mental intuitions and constructs present to consciousness. Speech or oral communication is the goal. Therefore, the necessary qualities for a language are ideally present in its spoken form, and only next in its alphabetical form. The most adequate forms of expression concentrate themselves into temporal moments, rather than spatial ideograms, thereby achieving their true existence only in the stream of memory and in the inter-relating power of a thinking consciousness. It is in an alphabetical language that the ultimate purpose of a language as a set of intrinsically self-transcending phonograms is most apparent. In an alphabetical language the visible stands in proper relation to the audible because the "visible language relates itself to the sounded one only as a sign, [for] the intellect expresses itself immediately and unconditionally through speaking" (Hegel 1971, 213).

This praise of pneumatology (speech of the mind), this condemnation of cryptography (writing in the tomb), is exactly what Derrida tries his very best to dismantle. For Derrida, the primacy Hegel accords to the phonic "makes every spatial language ... remain *inferior* and *exterior*" (1982, 94). Defining vocal language *(Tonsprache)* explicitly as the original *(ursprüngliche)* language, Hegel, charges Derrida, reduces writing to a supplement *(weitere Fortbildung)*. His gesture perpetuates the long tradition of logocentrism that involves language thinkers from Plato to Saussure.

Curiously, on the other hand, to Derrida, Leibniz's project is also another version of Western logocentrism. As he comments in *Of Grammatology,* "the Leibnizian project of a universal characteristic that is not essentially phonetic does not interrupt logocentrism in any way. On the contrary, universal logic confirms logocentrism, is produced within it and with its help, exactly like the Hegelian critique to which it will be subjected" (1976, 78-79).

Leibnizian hyperbolic admiration of Chinese script is like Hegelian ethnocentric scorn. Both subscribe to the dichotomies of inside/outside, self/other, etc., and both are inscribed in European history. Waging war against phonocentrism which is subject to the tyranny of linearity and temporality, Derrida proposes "a writing that spells its symbols pluri-dimensionally" (85). Derrida never explains why a writing has to spell its symbols, why the crypt has to be restored to life   an oversight that effects his own deconstruction.

According to Derrida, although the last two millenia of Western history have constructed writing as "the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, the signifier of the signifier," the secondariness of writing has always already affected all signifieds, and phoneticization never finished reducing the non-phonetic (1976, 85). Going beyond the logocentric Western tradition, we find, for example, that the phonetic use of signs "could never become extensive enough to corrupt Chinese writing in principle and lead it onto the path of phonetic notation.... Writing in China, never having *reached* a phonetic analysis of language, was never felt to be a more or less faithful transference of speech, and that is why the graphic sign, symbol of a reality singular and unique like itself, has retained much of its primitive prestige. There is no reason for believing that in *antiquity* speech in China had not the efficaciousness as writing, but it was possible for its power to have been partly *eclipsed* by writing" (1976, 91).

This last quotation belongs not to Derrida but to the French sinologist Jacques Gernet, whom Derrida cites at some length in *Of Grammatology*. In his typical strategy, which is not unlike a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, Derrida quotes the latter to support his argument against phoneticization, but at the same time raises questions about Gernet. Here we find Derrida playing a treacherous and ambivalent role that betrays at once his blindness and insight. On the one hand, like the predecessors he has criticized for being logocentric, Derrida also lacks sufficient knowledge of the writing system under discussion, so he has to appeal to an informant. But on the other hand, the informant is also accused of logocentrism.

The series of questions Derrida has raised are worth considering in some detail. First, Derrida is right that phonetic writing is not necessarily a normal "outcome," a foreseeable historical *telos,* and that the system of Chinese script is not a sort of unfulfilled alphabet as Gernet would have it, according to Derrida. Secondly, Derrida is right that speech could not have had, before the birth of Chinese writing, the sense and value that we know in the West, although he admits that a large number of Chinese characters are phonetic, or at least have a double articulation in both sound and shape. Thirdly, Derrida criticizes Gernet for the latter's assertion that the primitive prestige of Chinese graphism lies in its symbolic relationship with "a reality singular and unique like itself." He questions:

> Is it not evident that no signifier, whatever its substance and form, had a "unique and singular reality?" A signifier is from the very beginning the possibility of its own repetition of its own image or resemblance. It is the condition of its ideality, what identifies it as a signifier, and makes it function as such, relating it to a signified which, for the same reasons, could never be "a unique and singular reality." From the moment that the sign appears, that is to say from the very beginning, there is no chance of encountering anywhere the purity of "reality," "unicity," "singularity." (1976, 91)

However, this kind of mimesis is not different from what traditional Chinese scholars believe. The Chinese version of logocentrism can be glimpsed from the following statements of the sixth-century Liu Hsieh, the first and probably the only systematic literary critic in classical and medieval China.

> When the mind is at work, speech is uttered. When speech is uttered, writing is produced.
> The Tao inspires writing and writing illuminates the Tao. What in mind is

idea when expressed in speech is poetry. Isn't this what we are doing when dashing off writing to record reality?

Writing originated when drawing of bird trace replaced string knitting. (13-17)

These statements from Liu Hsieh, which have been so influential, represent different, and sometimes conflicting, theories regarding the origin of writing and its relation to speech. But they share the same belief in an ultimate, transcendental, undifferentiated, and unmediated reality, be it Tao or nature. In some sense, the metaphysics behind such statements is indeed naive and can be deconstructed by a rereading of the Chinese written character. But there is no fundamental difference between it and the Western logocentric metaphysics, which Derrida sets out to dismantle. There is no reason why Derrida's deconstruction of Western mimesis cannot be done to its Chinese counterpart. Thus I am tempted to ask: isn't Derrida, like Leibniz before him, suffering from the same "European hallucination" that China is of necessity exempt from logocentrism?

Derrida has criticized Hegel at least twice for evaluating Chinese in terms of logocentrism and phonocentrism. Hegel's knowledge of Chinese was mediated by Abel Rémusat, who proposed that the Chinese word "Tao" could be translated into the Greek word "logos" (speech) which corresponds to "nous" (reason). It strikes me as ironical that Derrida should have overlooked the implications of the suggested translation. As is by now well-known, Derrida's deconstruction was launched against a Western metaphysical system of language, namely, *logo*-centrism. Within the closure of this system based on reason and speech, truth is determined by the logos. Like its Christian-Judaic counterpart, God, logos presumes to be the originary, unitary, self-begotten, fatherless, male voice. As such, logocentrism is none other than phonocentrism or phallogocentrism.

Under the tyranny of logocentrism, writing is rendered as secondary and subordinate. In Aristotle's celebrated phrasing which opens *On Interpretation:* "Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (qtd. in Gelb, 13). This formulation, which Derrida criticizes in *The Margins of Philosophy* as psychologism, is almost a verbatim paraphrase of Liu Hsieh: "When the mind is at work, speech is uttered. When speech is uttered, writing is produced." Thus in *both* China and the West, at least in the Aristotelian and Confucian traditions, the category of writing is inscribed only in relation to speech and to the subject of writing. It is, as Derrida puts it in "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," "pneumatological" rather than "grammatological" writing (1976, 17). This primacy granted to speech is open to deconstruction. Therefore, Derrida proposes that writing be shifted to the space of arche-writing (trace, différance).

By substituting *grammè* for *logos,* and the graphical for the logical, Derrida lays the foundation for grammatology as a positive science. However, he is not unaware of the crisis that emerges to undermine the project. When *grammè* becomes a "logy," and writing an *epistémè,* it will fall into the old metaphysical trap of logocentrism, which produces a "logy."

Although the arche-writing which Derrida envisions is no longer writing in the ordinary sense, his anti-phonocentric position leads him to endorse a non-temporal, non-alphabetical, mythographical script, such as Chinese, which gives, in his words, "testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside of all logocentrism" (1976, 90). That is why Derrida speaks favorably of the enterprise

of Fenollosa and Pound.

In spite of his own European hallucination, which can be deconstructed in and by itself, Derrida's *concept* of writing is *existential urgency* to the Chinese as users of script. Ever since the seventeenth century, the Chinese writing system has been challenged of the curious joint forces of Leibnizian admiration and Hegelian scorn. Specifically, it has had to meet the continued challenge of, in Derrida's words, the imperialism of phoneticization, which has been aggravated since the Opium War by the religious, political, and technological encroachments of Western powers. This language or more precisely, *script* crisis has never been sufficiently addressed. Among notable projects of language imperialism are the numerous attempts at Latinizing the script and the on-going debate on the so-called "monosyllabic myth." Recently, Stephen A. Tyler has proposed a postmodern ethnography by questioning the ethnographer's very medium of writing for his text and suggesting as an alternative the native's participatory voice. But I am afraid that in the case of representing China's essentially script culture, the native's "voice" has to be silenced in the first place. If writing, as Walter J. Ong has asserted and wrongly, I think signifies human alienation from the Word, a theology that has tried to hold sway over a culture even as alien as Chinese, then the Romanized ekphrasis of Chinese script would only end up in ultimate silence.

What I am alluding to here is Ong's extended project on a linguistically controlled script to redress what he calls the "chirographically controlled languages" (28). For Ong, as for Hegel, the spoken word is bound to lived experience, but writing, with its "diaeretic" effects, only signifies death. This is exactly the position of Hegel when he muses on the dead hieroglyphs in the pyramid. Ong's use of the phonetic term "diaeresis" as a metaphor for writing's disjunctive effect is particularly revealing. It betrays not only his bias for the alphabet as a better script, but also his assumption that polysyllabicity is superior to monosyllabicity. We should not wonder, then, why after commenting on the inconvenience of Chinese script in communication and after taking note of the language unification movements in China and Taiwan, he should anticipate as "inevitable and rapid" (34) the alphabetization of Chinese script.

It is not my intention here to dwell on the thorny issue of monosyllabicity/polysyllabicity. To date it is still controversial whether written Chinese is syllabary, logography, or otherwise. What I would argue is that the appropriation of the linguistic concept of the syllable to Chinese does not hold. A Chinese word, or "logos," if you like, has three constituents: the initial, the final, and the tone, and there is no such thing as the syllable. Each word is a self-sufficient phonetic sign which cannot be subdivided into syllabic segments, phonemics being another problem. The distinction of syllables as bound, semi-bound, and free does not apply to Chinese, because all "syllables" in the language are free in their own right and as such are capable of making words. While a descriptive linguist would notice polysyllabicity in Chinese, a layman would call it monosyllabic, both having imposed alphabetization on this alien language.

The result can be disastrous, especially when language is politicized. One notices a drastic change in Westerners' attitudes toward things Chinese at the turn of the nineteenth century. A Leibnizian or Voltairian sinophile becomes then a strange creature. This change in attitude is documented in texts ranging from Hegel's sophisticated writing to the following example. In 1805 Lord Jeffrey, then editor of the *Edinburgh Review* (the same journal whose notoriety Said has made famous), inveighed against the Chinese for their linguistic incompetence. He says, and I must, unfortunately, quote at some length:

> There is no instance, we believe, on the face of the earth, of a language so extremely imperfect and inartificial; and it is difficult to conceive how any race of people could be so stupid, or so destitute of invention, as to leave it in such a state of poverty.... By what particular infatuation they have been withheld from so obvious an improvement [syllabic combination] ... we are utterly unable to comprehend, and no writer, we think, has attempted to explain. The fact, however, appears to be quite undeniable, that they have gone on for many thousands of years *pittering* to each other in a jargon which resembles the chuckling of poultry more than the language of men, and have never yet had the sense to put their monosyllables together into articulate words (qtd. in Kennedy 1964,105-06).

Theological and political implications aside, the assumption that Chinese is a less developed language but will hopefully end up in the alphabet can be challenged on other theoretical grounds. First, it shows the confusion of empirical facts with theoretical postulates. For instance, that the evolutionary process from hieroglyphs to alphabets in other cultures (especially around the Mediterranean area) can be generalized and will *necessarily take place* in China, however slow the process may be.[2] Likewise, that Chinese *can* be transcribed through Romanization does not lead to the conclusion that it *will,* unless a drastic measure is taken, such as what has happened to the Vietnamese script under French colonization. John DeFrancis, the radical proponent of Latinization, insists on the distinction between political issues and linguistic issues, but I would argue that the Latinization of an alien script can be *only* a political issue. Secondly, among linguists, there is an overall simplistic view of writing as a map of speech. Since all sign systems can be transferred into some linguistic form, it follows that language forms the background of these systems. From a different persuasion, which I do not always endorse, one could say this is a functionalist fallacy.[3]

The tyranny of speech can be seen in the various linguistic models that have dominated twentieth-century critical "discourses" in the wake of Russian formalism. From Saussure to Chomsky, from Austin to Bakhtin, these linguistics-or speech-based models, in my opinion, cannot hope to deal with a system that is graphical and, indeed, silent. Or if they claim anything, they have indulged themselves in metaphoricity, in treating all signs as language. Thus the problematic of representing otherness, in the context of my paper, assumes a more complicated dimension with language playing the role of self and writing its otherness. The problematic is not unlike the poststructuralist commonplace of the inability (or failure) of language to represent itself though it belongs to different orders. For another, language has to be re-inscribed, to become its otherness that is, orthography to represent a further removed otherness that is Chinese. Thanks to Derrida's deconstruction of phonocentrism, in recent years there has been an increasing amount of work devoted to writing as a distinct semiotic system, gesticulatory as well as graphical. But this is a topic with which I cannot deal in the scope of this paper.

My survey would be incomplete without mentioning Ernest Fenollosa and Sergei Eisenstein. Unlike their predecessors from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, they were more concerned with aesthetic problems raised by the "ideogram" than with philosophical issues about Chinese writing in general. Although there is hardly any established *rapport de fait* between the two writers, who

published their findings at an interval of ten years, it is interesting to note that both can be traced back to Hegel who is, as it were, at the center of a family romance about the Chinese script. Both Fenollosa and Eisenstein were interested in the combinational process in the "ideogram" a term wrongly used and in the effect of such a process, rather than in the primitive pictograms. While Fenollosa, harboring the vision of mimesis, held that pictorial quality remains visible in spite of conventionalization, Eisenstein doubted that such a quality could be retained. To Eisenstein, the present form of writing was the "crystallization" of the hieroglyph and it was already impossible to recognize its original features. But what is more interesting is where they agree rather than disagree: both read the "ideogram" as the distribution of two iconic signs on the axis of syntagmata, though Fenollosa speaks of "succession" while Eisenstein is in favor of dialectics. Now, both succession and dialectics are governed by temporality and inscribed in Western logocentric history.

Etymologically, both Fenollosa and Eisenstein are at fault. What they mean by the ideogram is only one type of the indexization of iconic signs, not to mention that the majority of Chinese characters are neither pictogrammic nor ideogrammic. It is not surprising that lexicography would make a sinologist like George Kennedy label Fenollosa a "mass of confusion." By the same token, one could also criticize as far-fetched Eisenstein's explication of the ideograms, some of which are indexical and some of which are phonogrammic. This would return us to the question I raised in the beginning of the paper: can we talk about the Chinese character in spite of etymology? It seems to me the answer is positive. Trespassing and appropriation have already been approved by convention. When lexicographers of the first and second centuries postulate the principles of "mutually defining" and "false borrowing," they have already accepted the reality that the script is subject to change. The moral is clear. Like speech, writing also carries a pragmatic dimension; what it is or is not is determined by the respective communities that use it. Here etymology is never the final authority. What appeals to Leibniz, Fenollosa, Eisenstein, and Derrida in Chinese script is what they have found relevant to their own applications. In the jargon of comparative literature studies, this kind of misreading, or mirage, is a common phenomenon when two cultures encounter one another. The value of their readings, therefore, does not lie in their contribution to etymology, but lies, as Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology,* in their aesthetic breakthrough of the entrenched Western tradition.

Notes

¹This paper was originally delivered at a Conference on "Representations of Otherness: Cultural Hermeneutics, East and West," at the Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The occasion explains the topical references in the paper. The trendiness of this topic today, half a century since it was made popular under a different and now dated paradigm by the Parisian *comparatistes,* can be seen from one of the general themes of the Twelfth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association held on August 22-27,1988. Under the general heading of "Espace et frontières dans la littérature," we find "Découverte, acceptation ou refus de l'espace autre," and "Prise de conscience de soi après la découverte de l'autre." And more interestingly, papers presented in one section are grouped under the heading of "L'Occident vu par les orientaux; l'orient vu par les occidentaux." It seems there is a revival of Jean-Marie Carré's favored project of "l'histoire ... de l'interprétation réciproque des peuples, des voyages et des mirages" (Guyard 1951, 6). For the publication of this paper in the Center for Twentieth Century Studies *Working Papers,* I would like to thank Professor Ihab Hassan, Conference Organizer, Professor Kathleen Woodward, Director of the Center, and Dr. Carol Tennessee, Program Coordinator of the Center.

²See Charles King, *Hieroglyphs to Alphabets* (New York: Crane Russak, 1977).

³See Roy Harris, *The Origin of Writing* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

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