

**“HIEROGLYPHIC CIVILIZATION”:
THE TEXT ON SCREEN
IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN SILENT FILMS**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the significance of onscreen textual elements—intertitles, and inserts and props with text on them—during the silent film era by defining them as the contact zone between text and image. I examine how discourse on film during the silent film era described and prescribed text on the screen and analyze how silent films by Cecil B. DeMille, D. W. Griffith, and Buster Keaton use textual elements between and within visual images as a site in which conflicting ideas on the status of film and the limitations/possibilities of the film medium converge.

Focusing upon the hieroglyph as one of the main metaphors used in silent film discourse, Chapter Two and Three explore the heated contest between text and image during the silent film era. Vachel Lindsay, among others, valorizes the silent film as a universal language and states the hieroglyph as a key term to capture the gist of film as image-text, making the connection between silent film and the American Renaissance. Interacting with its contemporary hieroglyph discourse, DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* explores the hybridity of the hieroglyph by building up the dichotomy between image and text and criticizes the violence embedded in the process of writing, celebrating the filmic medium. The next two chapters investigate the cases of Griffith and Keaton as two extremes concerning the use of onscreen text. Griffith, with his anxiety regarding the lowly status of film in the early twentieth century, actively and heavily uses intertitles that emulate the voice of the author and invoke textual authority,

ultimately creating a book onscreen and inviting his audience to read the film. Griffith freezes the moving image and permits the non-diegetic written text to overwhelm the diegetic image on screen in his attempt to create bookness onscreen. Keaton is located on the opposite side of Griffith in his challenging attitude to the text and his endeavor to communicate with nonverbal means. Keaton, through the mastery of his body as the subject of the narrative and means of narration, minimizes the intervention of the intertitle and, moreover, resists the influence of language stylistically and thematically.

DEDICATION

To Dylan, Dana, Joon and my mother, Yongim Jung

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (1973), cultural historian Warren I. Susman defines American culture since the nineteenth century as a “hieroglyphic civilization” (xvii) based upon his observation of explosive progress in visual culture.¹ In this highly visual world, the development of photography, new printing technology, and optical instruments has made it possible for the majority of people to consume visual images and to communicate messages through visual media. Even though hopes for and concerns about new media and technology were nothing new, the tension between visual and literary communication became unprecedentedly prevalent during the nineteenth century. The emergence of film culture in the early twentieth century, at the peak of the growth in visual culture, invited public attention to heated debates between literary and visual media beyond philosophical and theoretical speculation by intellectuals. In his 1915 book *The Art of the Moving Picture*, poet and film critic Vachel Lindsay declares the media transition from the verbal to the visual by asserting that film will replace the “word-civilization” of the past and realize a long-standing yet unfulfilled dream of a universal language (123). Lindsay also foregrounds the possibility of film as an alternative tool of communication that allows people to grasp meaning with a mere glance. A silent film, filled with images and void of words, seemed the perfect realization of Lindsay’s dream medium.

Against Lindsay's valorization of the silent film as a universal language, the limitations of contemporary technology, which failed to incorporate sound effectively into moving images, caused the silent film to employ several textual elements between visual images on screen: the intertitle, the insert, and props with text on them. An intertitle is text such as narration, commentary, or dialogue written on a separate title card and inserted into the succession of moving images. Typically white letters written on a black backdrop, the intertitle unmistakably breaks into the seemingly real space of the screen and freezes the flow of narration for a moment. Inserts are written materials or documents, such as letters or newspapers, which are filmed in close-up and that are or can be read by a character. Text can also appear on other props, such as a warning on a fire curtain or a framed maxim on a wall. My dissertation seeks to bring new scholarly attention to the significance of onscreen textual elements in silent films in the early twentieth century by defining them as the contact zone between text and image. With observations and analysis of onscreen text in works by Cecil B. DeMille, D. W. Griffith, and Buster Keaton, I demonstrate that this contrast of visual and literary media invites speculation about language as a communicative tool during the silent film era.

To explore the significance of text on screen during the silent era, I take both diachronic and synchronic approaches to examining both how silent films utilize text and how contemporary discourse described and prescribed text on the screen. First, I trace the root of the hieroglyph discourse during the silent era in order to show how film culture was nurtured by long-standing discussion concerning the tension between image and text, as exemplified in its adaptation of wide spread speculation on hieroglyphics

during the American Renaissance. One of the popular metaphors among contemporary film critics, including Lindsay and those who worked in the film industry during the silent film era, is the film as hieroglyph. While a historical event—the discovery of Tutankhamun’s Tomb (1922)—increased popular interest in Egyptian culture, there was a predecessor to this hieroglyph fad. The intensified reference to hieroglyphics during the American Renaissance, which was triggered by the deciphering of the Rosetta Stone (1822), shares some similarities with the silent film era discourse on hieroglyphics. It is not a coincidence that Lindsay, in highlighting the hieroglyph metaphor, highly values American Renaissance writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne and freely uses ideas from their works to develop his vision of the new visual civilization. By underscoring the significance of the hieroglyphics discourse, not merely as a periodic interest in an exotic culture but as a speculation on language as a communicative and representational tool, I hope to locate film discourse exploring the metaphor of the hieroglyphic in a stream of American literary discourse since the mid-nineteenth century. The intertitle and the discourse on the intertitle and other textual elements on screen likewise should be examined within the context of the continuous discourses surrounding the issue of language in American society. Even though the intertitle and insert appear to compensate for the absence of sound in the silent film, the discourse concerning these textual elements on screen does not limit its scope to technological problems but also interacts with speculation on language and media as a whole.

Regarding contemporary discourses' descriptive and prescriptive responses to text onscreen, I analyze synchronically how various types of writing about film define the relation between text and image onscreen and reflect the film industry's status anxiety. Writings on film during the silent era prescribe how the intertitle and other types of text onscreen should be used, influencing the practice of the film industry. Early twentieth-century writings on silent film, such as film criticism, scriptwriting manuals, and film reviews, aim to anchor film in the realm of art rather than in that of popular entertainment and thus seek to publicize film as a new representational tool. While criticism of film as a vulgar entertainment from religious groups and reformers attacks film's visual sensationalism as corrupting to faith and morals, Lindsay's aspirations for film as a new form of visual art as well as a new language were shared by numerous writers and the film industry. One of the common grounds of their writings is that the image on screen has a more direct connection to reality and, as a consequence, can convey its message and move people's minds more effectively than printed works, echoing previous discourses about the tension between text and image. The demand to create a seemingly natural and seamless reality on screen—"the illusion of reality" (Bowser, *Transformation* 140)—is so great that some film criticism describes the presence of the intertitle as evidence of the frustrated dream of film as pure visuality. On the other hand, writers who regard the visual as an entertaining yet incomplete tool for delivering complicated messages tend to advocate the use of the intertitle, reaffirming the status of text as the main communicative medium.

With the demonstration of the continuity in the hieroglyphic metaphor from the American Renaissance to the silent film era, I explore how silent films actually utilized text. Even though the particular practice of the intertitle was based upon the production situation as well as the degree of control wielded by the director or producer, changes in the use of intertitles, over the long term, reflect the growing consciousness of the development of film as a visual medium with its own distinct narratology. One of the movements that took place during the silent film era is the transition in the main focus of intertitle use from expository intertitles to dialogue intertitles (Bordwell 183-89). This shift reveals that the silent film sought to absorb the intertitle as part of its narrative reality and to reduce the intertitle's apparent artificiality. Another invention created to erase the written text's heterogeneity is the painted intertitle card: some painted cards depict the setting or character and others are painted with the image of a scroll, book, or stone tablet. These painted intertitle cards create multiple layers of reality—written, pictured, and filmed reality—and, at the same time, foreground the convergence of media—visual and literary. In addition to the redefinition of the intertitle's nature, trade papers recommended that the insert, a less artificial form of text, substitute for the intertitle. Compared to the expository intertitle that summarizes the event, the insert as a diegetic factor is considered more natural because it does not break the flow of the reality on screen but functions as a tangible reality within the narrative, deserving of notice as an object contained within the world of the story that contributes to film's mimetic enterprise.

My project responds to discourses in film history and American Studies. While I benefit from film historians' descriptions of early film that detail the development of optical devices from the early nineteenth century, I want to problematize the assumption that locates film largely in the flow of technological development rather than in the flow of visual culture. I want to explore the interaction between the literary world and visual culture, which is a major topic in recent American Studies. I hope to foreground the continuity in that interaction since the nineteenth century in order to understand why the silent film industry, the dominant and most popular visual cultural form in the early twentieth century, was eager to proclaim its status as a medium that can transcend the linguistic limitation. The intertitle, the primary topic of my dissertation, has been discussed in many film history books as an important component of silent film. One influential work is David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, which is an extensive study of the formation of Hollywood cinema. They observe a quantitative change in intertitle use throughout the silent film era and suggest a connection between specific aspects of narrative technique and intertitle use. Eileen Bowser also provides a detailed description of the use of the intertitle during the early silent film period (1907-1915). Bordwell and other film scholars provide close observation of the intertitle and plausible explanations for changes in intertitle use derived from analysis of the exigencies of the film industry. To their observations I hope to add an exploration of factors arising from outside the film industry; to that end, I will trace the origin of the discourse on the intertitle to literary history. My argument simultaneously explores how film directors

DeMille, Griffith, and Keaton utilize and, at the same time, struggle with the presence of intertitles and other textual elements on screen.

My first two chapters explore the metaphor of the hieroglyph during the silent film era. Tracing Lindsay's fascination with the hieroglyph as a key term to capture the gist of film and his admiration of nineteenth century writers led me to American Renaissance discourse on hieroglyphs. Beyond his personal preferences, Lindsay's fashioning as a rightful descendent of the American Renaissance should be read in the context of the film industry's aspirations for broader audienceship and visual culture's unprecedented boom. One of the obvious continuities imbedded in the hieroglyph discourse in America is the dream of a universal language, roughly read as a synonym for cultural manifest destiny. At the same time, I want to foreground the hybridity of the hieroglyph that caught people's imaginations against the backdrop of visual culture. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* directly exemplifies how the hieroglyph is actualized onscreen and how the hieroglyph outlines the conflict between text and image. My next two chapters develop the interactions between the text and the image onscreen, which has been suggested in first two chapters. Griffith and Keaton are examined as two extremes concerning the presence of text on screen: Griffith actively uses intertitles to establish authorship, while Keaton overtly criticizes textual elements onscreen, and advocates body language in lieu of transcribed speech. I conclude my writing with brief observations of the presence of the body and legibility in the three directors' works, which sprung from the hieroglyph discourse intensified by the silence of silent films.

My first chapter, “‘Delineation of the World’: the Dream of a Universal Language from Hieroglyph to Cinema,” explores the significance of hieroglyphs in silent films and the film discourse during the early-twentieth century. Defining the hieroglyph as the intersection of literary and visual media, I trace the origin of the hieroglyphic discourse during the silent film era to American Renaissance literature.² Melville, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Poe were all interested in this Egyptian language system as a pictorial mode of representation. The picture-like text of hieroglyphs is imagined as the visualization of an original or a drawing of an actual object, which makes it possible to assume a close connection between a sign and its referent. For example, in *Nature*, Emerson argues that the first language was more “picturesque” (35), but, since then, language has been corrupted, which causes people to be blind to the truth in nature (35-36). He emphasizes the importance of unmediated language as such “a commanding certificate that he who employs it is a man in alliance with truth and God” (36).

The hybridity of the hieroglyph, however, invites conflicting anticipation for the possibility of this image-text. Exploring the parallels between the discourse of the hieroglyph as a universal language and manifest destiny during the American Renaissance, I understand this Egyptian text as a tool for expansionism in the form of textual evangelism. The film industry and film critics during the silent film era actively engaged in publicizing film as a universal language, echoing some works of cultural imperialism from the American Renaissance. When Edward S. Van Zile declares that film is “the Esperanto of the eye” (10) in *That Marvel—the Movie: A Glance at Its*

Reckless Past, Its Promising Present, and Its Significant Future (1923), he confirms that Lindsay was not alone in his belief in film as a universal language that can spread the American ideal to the whole world.

Despite the optimism imbibed with the textual expansionism prevalent among writers and the film industry from the American Renaissance through the silent film era, there was suspicion about the interpretation of hieroglyphics even among those who shared Emerson's belief in the divine truth inscribed in hieroglyphic text. Sampson Reed, for example, raises a question concerning human agency in deciphering the hieroglyph as a sacred text and expresses his disappointment at the lack of a "true hieroglyph" (qtd. in Irwin 9) in the then-recent deciphering of the Rosetta Stone by Champollion. Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville, who are more or less pessimistic about Emerson's contemporary idealism, express their skepticism of the hieroglyphic system as an alternative or ideal language. Poe's "Some Words with a Mummy" presents one of the harshest satires of the idealization of hieroglyphics as the universal language; through the image of Gliddon and Buckingham's absurd pantomime to communicate with a revived mummy, Poe mocks the process of visualization that is believed to be the merit of hieroglyphs (389).

In addition to literary discourses, hieroglyphics were presented physically onscreen: silent films having ancient settings, such as *The Ten Commandments* (1923), actively utilize hieroglyphs. The layers of text on screen—the image, the text in the intertitle, the image in the intertitle, and the hieroglyphic as a text-image—generate a stimulating tension between written text and image. My second chapter, "In the Light –

It's Gone': Erasing the Violence of Writing in DeMille's Films," begins with an observation of an advertisement for *The Ten Commandments*, which utilizes a hieroglyphic backdrop: the hieroglyph is explored as the central metaphor of dichotomy in this work as a hybrid of image and text.

One of the distinctive features of *The Ten Commandments* is its clear division between two parts: the ancient and the modern. While this film as a whole is designed to celebrate the Christian doctrine, the web of dichotomies generates a binary chasm in terms of religious principles, races, and more significantly, languages. Three of the main female characters in this film suffer from leprosy, but the visual representation of their leprosy is intertwined with what each of them symbolizes: Miriam's skin with visible marks of leprosy provides a sharp visual contrast with the unblemished skin of Sally and Mary.

The Ten Commandments builds up the dichotomy between Judaism and Catholicism, and the Old Testament and the New Testament, especially through differing uses of intertitle: more strict text-to-image in the ancient part and more dialogic development of narrative in the modern part. Miriam's leprous skin and Sally's and Mary's skin without the marks of leprosy align with this binary world of two religions. While the Old Testament is depicted as the world of the written word and more rigid religious dogma, the New Testament is the world of the spoken word and more vivid and energized human relationships. Presenting God as lightning that inscribes a stone tablet with destructive power visualizes an inherent violence. This engraving of sacred laws on the tablet is not unlike the marks of leprosy that appear on Miriam's skin as a sign of

God's fury. The final sequence of *The Ten Commandments* suggests that the soothing light, as the new type of visual language, will cure the scar caused by violent writing on skin.

My third and fourth chapters are a two-part opposing response to the text on screen exemplified in the works of Griffith and Keaton. The third chapter, "A Right Conceded to the Art of the Written Word': D. W. Griffith's Authorship on Screen," examines Griffith's use or overuse of text on screen in his desire to be a writer on screen. Griffith uses the intertitle as his authorial voice and presents the screen as a book for the audience's perusal. While Griffith declares that film should have "a right conceded to the art of the written word" at the beginning of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), he did not take pride in his career in the film industry during his early years. While Griffith adopted the metaphor of film as a universal language as did many of his contemporaries, he did not adhere to the world of pure image, seeking instead to define the director's role as a writer on screen. With his anxiety over the blooming film culture and the director's position as an artist, Griffith utilized lengthy and frequent intertitles to comment upon the action on screen or to explain the director's intentions to the audience. In spite of his attempts to elevate film to a high art, Griffith achieved his authorial position in film through text rather than image. *The Birth of a Nation* is an example of how authorial authority is acquired through multiple layers of authorship. The film is derived from Thomas Dixon's novel, *The Clansman* (1905) and also utilizes quotations from Woodrow Wilson's *A History of the American People* (1902), resulting in a film that also works as a book written by Griffith through his imposition of text over image. To

Griffith, even when the image attempts to be a more faithful representation of real events, it cannot be the original and remains, at best, an approximate copy of the original or an illustration of the text. As a consequence, Griffith creates a visual book on screen by visualizing page-turning and offering quotations to claim his status as a writer.

My last chapter, “‘Yours But No More Buster’: Rivalry Between Language and Body in Buster Keaton’s Films,” highlights Keaton’s preference for action over language. In contrast to Griffith’s devotion to text, Keaton, who emerged from the vaudeville tradition and was both an actor and a director, focuses upon action and visual elements on screen. In Keaton’s early shorts, text is considered a form of social order and authority, and its message is subverted and erased by the vaudevillian spectacle. He makes the text on screen clash with the image, undermining the authority of text. In this vein, his short films realize a world of sheer visuality in which the influence of text is resisted and visual language’s potential is affirmed. When Keaton moves to feature length films, however, responding to industrial trends, his attitudes toward text and image change radically. Keaton repeated several themes and motifs throughout his career; some feature length films that developed from his early shorts show how text is restored to authority in Keaton’s world. One of the most conspicuous changes in Keaton’s feature films is his use of intertitles that serve the narration as well as constituting an insertion of authorial voice. Keaton’s feature length films’ protagonists hesitate to challenge the authority of language and reluctantly but surely follow the message of the text, bowing to social order.

Notes

1 There is some confusion regarding the use of the words “hieroglyph” and “hieroglyphic.” Sometimes, the adjective form, “hieroglyphic,” has been used as a noun.

I follow the form used in each text.

2 Speculation on the hieroglyph has a long history dating back as far as ancient Greece.

Philosophers from Plato through Jacques Derrida have been fascinated by hieroglyphs.

Two Egyptian renaissances in the early-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, both triggered by archeological discovery, rekindled interest in the hieroglyph and invited various discourses on the nature and origin of language.

CHAPTER II
“DELINEATION OF THE WORLD”:
THE DREAM OF A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE
IN HIEROGLYPHIC DISCOURSE

In *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), Lindsay declares that “American civilization grows more hieroglyphic every day” and lists “the cartoons of Darling, the advertisements in the back of the magazines and on the bill-boards and in the street-cars, the acres of photographs in the Sunday newspapers” as epitomes of this visual language (14). To celebrate the cultural potential of a newly developed photoplay, Lindsay quotes various works by American Renaissance writers such as Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Whitman: to illustrate the importance of architecture in photoplays, the House of the Seven Gables and the House of Usher are listed, and to foreground the significance of California, Emerson’s New England and Hawthorne’s Salem are compared to this state as the capital of the photoplay industry (86, 148). One of the most important similarities between nineteenth-century literature and twentieth-century photoplay, according to Lindsay, is the hieroglyphic system that can communicate “a delineation of the world” (124) that will transcend the barrier of any existing languages. The discourse concerning hieroglyphics from the American Renaissance to the silent film era focuses on the possibility of a universal language and the hybridity of text and image, and reflects its contemporary society’s desire for territory or market expansion.

This chapter deals with hieroglyphics in the context of American culture from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, utilizing the work of two scholars who explore the Egyptian fad in American culture. Antonia Lant discusses Egyptomania in the silent film era, and John T. Irwin explores hieroglyphics in American Renaissance literature. Although Lant and Irwin examine two different time periods and media, their speculations on the chemistry between the Egyptian trend and American culture share an emphasis on hieroglyphics as the symbol of the contemporary mode of representation. Lant's sweeping argument suggests that "the mummy complex" (89), prevailing from the late-Victorian era to the silent film era, reflects its contemporaries' desire to "assert mastery over space and time" (107). Irwin, using a psychoanalytic approach, explores "the notion of the writer's corpus as an inscribed shadow self" (xi), highlighting the veil and phallus symbols and their connection with the process of hieroglyphic signification. Both Lant and Irwin capture historical moments of Egyptian influence and present stimulating cases of Egyptian adaptations by the American culture industry, but they isolate their respective media from the development of other media, and as a consequence, do not expand their scopes beyond their targeted medium—Lant considers only film and Irwin only literature—nor do they explore any continuities between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Miriam Hansen, who examines the universal language discourse during the silent film era in *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, reads an imperialistic logic into Lindsay's exaltation of visuality and calls it "the cinema's manifest destiny" (78), which in turn, connects the cultural politics of the silent film era

with nineteenth-century American expansionism. Hansen's insight into the continuity between the American Renaissance and the silent film era presents a good starting point for my argument. This chapter aims to prove that the discourse of hieroglyphics as a universal language in both eras not only existed as a sociocultural phenomenon that reflects the aspiration to procure a direct access to truth, but also served as political propaganda to justify and reinforce the nation's territorial and cultural expansion.

The first section of this chapter explores how the logic of manifest destiny was embedded in the discourse of universal language from the American Renaissance through the silent film era. Defining manifest destiny as a textual evangelism and foregrounding the desire for cultural expansionism in the concept of a universal language, I present how John Louis O'Sullivan based his idea of "manifest destiny" on the visibility and readability of the American Ideal and how Emerson echoes the agenda of cultural conquest in the discourse of his time in the form of inquest through reading and writing, locating the hieroglyph as a key metaphor. I will also examine how this manifest destiny of visibility persists in the arguments of writers during the silent film era such as Van Zile and, at the same time, how other writers question the effectiveness and legitimacy of a universal language and hieroglyphs as a communicative tool.

In the second section, I locate the hieroglyph discourse in the context of the explosion of visual culture in both eras. With the help of various inventions that aided the visual experience such as photography and panoramas in the nineteenth century, and photoplay in the twentieth century, the hieroglyph came to serve as a metaphoric site in which conflicting ideas converge; the hieroglyph becomes both the image and the text,

both the abstract and the physical, and both the sacred only for the chosen and the democratic for everyone, educated or non-educated. The nature of language is the gist of the discourse on hieroglyphics, and the use of hieroglyphs on screen can be interpreted as cinema's questions regarding its own identity.

Manifest Destiny from the American Renaissance to the Silent Film Era in the Form of Universal Language

Since the Rosetta Stone was discovered during the French Campaign to Egypt in 1799, the mysterious sign on the stone, which has been considered a key to the origin of language, has invited substantial debates on language. While two texts on the Rosetta Stone—Greek and Demotic (Egyptian)—are easily comprehended, the hieroglyph on the stone was not fully deciphered for over two decades. When Jean-Francois Champollion finally announced in 1822 that he had deciphered the Egyptian hieroglyph, “the hopes that [the Rosetta Stone] had inspired” (Greppo 7) seemed to be realized. One of the desires projected on the understanding of hieroglyphs was the dream of a universal language that could be traced back to the story of Babel in the Bible. The idea of a lost universal language persisted with Greek philosophers such as Plato to modern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida. The universal language discourse in the form of a political agenda, however, has been built upon and boosted by people's demands for a tool to spread their own culture as the superior one in each period. The concept of manifest destiny that was widely circulated in twentieth-century America shares some similarities with the universal language discourse. Even though manifest destiny has

often been considered synonymous with territorial expansion, there are multiple layers of significance in this widely utilized, sometimes misused, term, from imperialist agendas to cultural idealism (Johannsen, Intro. 3, “Meaning” 9). As Ephraim Douglass Adams, a historian, sums up, “there were...two phases of manifest destiny, —the earlier expressing merely the conviction of superiority in our form of government, and the greater happiness of our people; while the later phase carried with this belief the desire for new territory, and the responsibility of imposing upon other nations the benefits of our own” (93-94).

Despite controversy over the significance and impact of manifest destiny, historians concede that O’Sullivan coined this term in “Annexation,” an article printed in *The United States Magazine* and the *Democratic Review* in 1845. Expressing his indignation over Europe’s “hostile interference” in the annexation of Texas, O’Sullivan argues for “our [American] manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our years multiplying millions” (“Annexation” 5). However, even before his articulation of the term “manifest destiny” within the historical context of the nation’s territorial expansion, O’Sullivan explored the concept without naming it. In “The Great Nation of Futurity” (1839), he affirms that “universal” principles exist “in all the operations of the physical world,” but notes that this invisible code becomes more obvious through “the truthful annals of any nations,” “our [American] annals,” and “the first page of our national declaration” (426, 427). In this vein, “to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principle” (“Great Nation” 427), there must be a text that can be universally read and comprehended. “American

Progress,” painted by John Gast in 1872 and frequently called “Manifest Destiny,” visualizes the connection between manifest destiny and a book to be read. This painting shows an angelic female figure, presumably Columbia, bringing light to the darkness of a savage world. Her companions are modern technologies such as the railroad and telegraph. As a symbol of enlightenment, she holds a gigantic book in her arm that will be circulated throughout the dark world. This combination of colonialism and enlightenment embraces the concept of a universal language that can be read and understood even among so-called savages.¹

Some parallels between O’Sullivan’s idea of manifest destiny as a cultural, more precisely, textual evangelism and Emersonian idealism cannot be ignored.² Jenine Abboushi Dallal sums up American expansionism as the process of translating the conflict between America and other countries into “an internal struggle,” or the problem of defining the self rather than that of defining the boundaries of the national territory, that is, mapping the nation (48). Elucidating the process of converting conquest into “inquest” in the discourse of American expansionism, Dallal argues that Emersonian idealism hides the physical aspects of expansionism and defines the process of expansion as “disembodied, internalized, dependent on and reduced to ‘word[s]’” (72). In *Nature* (1836), Emerson expresses his optimistic view toward the possibility of reading nature on the basis of his belief in the undeniable correspondence between nature, words, and spirit and “a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material form” (37). To Emerson who decorporealizes his notion of “Me” into a transparent eyeball, a perusal of the world should begin with the process of reading oneself: “Every man’s

condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put” (*Nature* 24).

Emerson’s expansion of “I” through the metaphor of a transparent eyeball corresponds with the process of American expansionism. While Emerson’s political position toward American expansionism is hard to pin down, his theory of language clearly captures the idea of the conquest of the world through “inquest.”³ The Emersonian self’s ceaseless attempts to move from nature to the soul and expand the boundary of the self, as Dallal suggests, echoes the rhetoric of American expansionism, i.e. the expansion of the boundaries of the nation. Furthermore, both Emersonian idealism and American expansionism purport to have direct access to the truth—whether it is Emerson’s notion of “Spirit” or God’s providence for American manifest destiny—since both posit that the truth already exists in nature as well as in the spiritual territory of the agency, that is, the central self or the “Over-soul” in the former and America as the great nation in the latter.

Lindsay’s discourse of universal language can also be read as twentieth-century cultural expansionism in its relation to the film industry’s ambition to expand its audience. While Lindsay is somewhat reserved in expressing the political and economic significance of a universal language, Van Zile does not hesitate to show the profit that film, “the Esperanto of the eye” (10), would bring in *That Marvel—the Movie: A Glance at Its Reckless Past, Its Promising Present, and Its Significant Future* (1923).⁴ Van Zile indicates that film will effectively expand product markets. To demonstrate Esperanto’s potential commercial benefits, he offers the example of “a circular setting forth the merits of a washing machine or a face lotion so that even an Eskimo woman can read it” (193); “in the twinkling of an eye this Eskimo woman could learn from the screen what

it might take her half a year to glean from the advertising circular” (194). Thus, a universal language can serve as a tool for advertising.

In addition to this recognition of universal language as a useful tool for cultural expansionism, it has also been subject to criticism. Poe’s “Some Words with a Mummy” (1845) makes more direct comments on the hieroglyph, locating the speculation on language in the context of cultural clash. As G. R. Thompson’s introduction to “Some Words with a Mummy” indicates, it is “primarily satirizing (and exploiting) the Egyptology craze in America after European scholars began to decipher the Rosetta Stone” (Poe 382). At the same time, another obvious target of satire is the presumptuousness of American civilization, which believes in the superiority of its own culture and society. Even though modern Americans attempt to impress the mummy with developed features of their civilization, the mummy indicates that even during his times, Progress was “quite a nuisance,” but there has been no progress since then (396). In addition to satirizing contemporary culture and society, this work focuses on the matter of language from the interpretation of hieroglyphs to the translation of ideas across culture. When the narrator and other people encounter a revived mummy, Gliddon and Buckingham interpret the mummy’s “primitive Egyptian” (Poe 389) for others. However, to convey the meaning of words that are totally new to the mummy, the two interpreters employ “sensible forms” to show meaning: Gliddon uses the hieroglyph on the wall to convey the meaning of “politics,” which is presented as a sketch of “a little carbuncle-nosed gentleman, out at elbows, standing upon a stump, with his left leg drawn back, his right arm thrown forward, with the fist shut, the eyes

rolled up toward Heaven, and the mouth open at the angle of ninety degree” (Poe 389). In spite of its clear comic representation, the picture seems to surpass verbal language in conveying ideas. However, Poe suggests a more radical possibility through the frame and the name of the mummy. The narrator’s drowsiness both at the beginning and ending of the story suggests that all communication with the mummy may be just a dream. Moreover, the name of the mummy, Allamistakeo, can be easily understood as “all a mistake,” which reaffirms that what happens in the story is mere illusion. Poe questions the possibility of interpretation itself, suggesting that the knowledge obtained from decipherment and communication through translation is nothing but a mistake.

In 1856, Emerson, who once expressed his firm belief in the possibility of correspondence between God, nature, and humanity, changes his position to a more skeptical one when he identifies “Manifest Destiny, Democracy, Freedom” as “fine names for an ugly thing,” affirming that “language has lost its meaning in the universal cant” (“Speech”). In an age “which proceeds by the rule of contraries altogether, and is now usually admitted as the solution of everything in the way of paradox and impossibility” (Poe 388), O’Sullivan’s rosy and naïve dream of the cultural supremacy of America cannot be easily and effortlessly circulated.

The Paradox of the Hieroglyph as a Site Embracing Contradictions

The hieroglyphic and universal language discourse invites speculation on the function of language as a tool to spread ideology and values, as shown from O’Sullivan’s manifest destiny through Van Zile’s “Esperanto of the eye.” Another

debate on the hieroglyph in terms of politics is on the significance and possibility of decipherment. The decipherment of the hieroglyph can be viewed as democratic progress. Lindsay emphasizes the hieroglyph's usefulness as an educational tool: he affirms that the hieroglyph is so easy that "any kindergarten teacher can understand it" and "any child who reads one [English language] can read the other [hieroglyph]" (13). The etymology of "hieroglyph" is "sacred carving" (OED), which reflects the magical power and religious aura of this language. When J. G. H Greppo's book, *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion, Jun. and on the Advantages which it Offers to Sacred Criticism*, was translated into English in 1830, its publication inspired wide-ranging interest. The origin of the word "hieroglyph" works as the basis of understanding of this language system as "a mysterious science, the secret of which was known only to the priests of Egypt, and by them was solicitously and religiously concealed from the curiosity of the profane multitude" (Greppo 6). When the occult system of hieroglyphics suggests "the indissociable relationship between writing and power" (Hansen, "Mass Culture" 70), the decipherment itself can become a form of resistance to the authority manipulating the circulation of information.

As the discourse focusing on the political aspect of this image/text invites opposing viewpoints, the hybridity of the hieroglyph attracts seemingly contradictory conceptualizations of language. While a variety of discourses surrounding hieroglyphs reflect fascination with language itself as well as this exotic mystery of the nineteenth century, the noticeable contradictions concerning the significance of the hieroglyphs hint at the complex discrepancy between ideal language and actual language. While some

argue for the significance of Champollion's achievement as visible evidence of God's mystery, others criticize the deterioration through or limitations of decipherment. The writer of "Hieroglyphics" affirms the value of decipherment as "new evidence of the truth of the inspired volume" and defines this Egyptian inscription as the weapon against "modern infidel objectors" (201). However, Sampson Reed, one of the commentators on Greppo's work, expresses his disappointment at the lack of a "true hieroglyph" (Irwin 9) in Champollion's decipherment. What is found in these debates are two-layered definitions of hieroglyphs: the materialized mystery that visualizes unseen Providence, and the sacred text that is supposed to possess some holy meaning but cannot be deciphered. The interpretation of language is stuck in a strange dilemma: to O'Sullivan, a text that contains Providence should be manifested and the sacred knowledge should become universal through its circulation; to others who adhere to the holiness of the text, the impossibility of decipherment itself becomes the prerequisite of its holiness and the meaning of the text lies not in the interpretation but in the belief in the occult meaning.

Recent scholarship in American literature has paid attention to how media change is represented in literary works and how this change transforms the writer's concept of the world or his own identity.⁵ During the nineteenth century, visual technology from the daguerreotype to moving images developed at an impressive pace, and its products were consumed with wide enthusiasm. The daguerreotype was the first realization of the dream to "fix the camera image by the action of light" (Newhall 9), which transformed visual experience and the way of recording reality from the 1820s onward. While the daguerreotype made it possible to "secure the shadow 'ere the

substance fade” (Newhall 32), the development of visual entertainment, such as the diorama and the kaleidoscope, totally revolutionized how people perceived the world and formulated the self during the nineteenth century. Mass consumption of visual culture and the corresponding development of a visual culture industry paved good ground for the film industry and made audiences ready for new types of visual entertainment.

One of the possibilities that denizens of the nineteenth-century associated with this new visual culture was its potential to serve as a communicative tool, as exemplified in the assertion that photography will be “a new form of communication between man and man” (Newhall 84); extensive photographic coverage of important events, including the Civil War, was sponsored by the government beginning in the 1850s. As Patricia Roger summarizes, the empiricist view of language, encapsulated in John Locke’s argument that “nature is prior to language” (qtd. in Roger 438), caused others to realize “the limitations of language for describing accurately the objects and operations of nature” (439). When this speculation on language is mapped over the anticipation of new media, visibility is spotlighted as an alternative tool to represent nature more directly. This notion of a more natural or original language can be traced back to “the Neo-Platonic notion of symbolic unity between the signified and the signifier,” which puts more emphasis on “the visual force of hieroglyph” (Ikeda 39).

Some American Renaissance writers reflect this ambiguous and contradictory notion of language through the image of the hieroglyph, hinting at their response to cultural expansionism. Hawthorne, who is conscious of both the possibility and

limitations of language, uses the term “hieroglyph” several times.⁶ One of Hawthorne’s journal entries captures the moment of his encounter with the Egyptian tablet on Dec 7 1857: “I [Hawthorne] will just mention the Rosetta-stone, with a Greek inscription and another in Egyptian characters, which gave the clue, I believe, to a whole field of history; and shall pretermitt all further handling of this whole unwieldy subject” (*English Notebooks* 442). Hawthorne defines the Rosetta Stone as the touchstone to elucidate the meaning of history, which will remain untouchable even in the future. Considering Hawthorne’s usual skepticism about matters of definite truth, this firm belief in the Rosetta Stone’s role as an indisputable clue seems to be exceptional. However, while the ambiguous adjective “unwieldy” seems to qualify the importance of history, the positive appreciation of the tablet itself as a material that contains mystery is unquestionable. Moreover, in the sentences preceding this mention of the Rosetta Stone, Hawthorne voices his satisfaction with other Egyptian antiques possessing solidity: when Hawthorne finds the Egyptian beetle “wrought out of immensely hard, black stone,” he mentions that “it is satisfactory to see a thing so big and heavy” (442); Hawthorne “positively like[s]...a huge stone sarcophagi, engraved with Egyptian hieroglyphics within and without” because it will not be disturbed “once the accurately fitting lids were shut down” (442). However, Hawthorne does not mention Champollion’s decipherment, and focuses upon the stone rather than its interpretation: the tablet surely has the ultimate “clue,” but its meaning is not clarified. In this vein, the Rosetta Stone becomes the manifestation of the fundamental key to the mystery and a pure signifier that resists being signified.

Hawthorne's earlier work, "The New Adam and Eve" (1846), parodies the discovery of Champollion as well as satirizes his contemporary civilization. To foreground "the world's artificial system," the narrator of this story presents the world after "The Day of Doom," where every creature except New Adam and Eve are gone, but "everything physical that can give evidence of his [human] present position" remains (par. 1). To the eyes of New Adam and Eve, "with no knowledge of their predecessors," civilization and its artifacts are "a continual succession of puzzles" (par. 1). As a result, objects lose their original functions and meanings, and become "the signs, with their unintelligible hieroglyphics." Upon finding fancy clothes that are useless to them, Eve exclaims, "What can these things mean? Surely I ought to know—yet they put me in a perfect maze" (par. 8, par. 15). In addition, the language of the past eludes Adam and Eve's comprehension without leaving any meaning: even though they look at some "inscriptions" on the wall of the prison cell, they cannot "decipher" the writing belonging to the past—"brief words of agony, perhaps, or guilt's desperate defiance to the world, or merely a record of a date" (par. 24). Even though things once had meanings and Adam and Eve believe that there are some uses and meanings in them, they cannot grasp the use of those things due to lack of knowledge of the previous system. With the term, "hieroglyphics," Hawthorne suggests the problem of interpretation in general: we may see this picture language, but cannot understand its original meaning, and Adam and Eve, in a sense, become a Champollion in attempting to decipher the language out of its context. Because the connection between signified and signifier is arbitrary, decontextualization makes language a mere meaningless sign.

Another work of Hawthorne's that includes the term hieroglyph is "Monsieur Du Miroir" (1846), which revisits the complicated relationship between sign and significance. The connection between the narrator and Monsieur Du Miroir whose "business is REFLECTION" (par. 14) is compared to that of "truthful history" and "a fabulous legend" (par. 5), which implies the tension between original and copy. Moreover, partly from his anxiety over the existence of his Doppelgänger, the narrator defines Miroir as a visual manifestation that lacks "spirits" (par. 12). In this vein, the description of Miroir's hieroglyphic speech doubly echoes the mystery of language: "His lips are sometimes seen to move; his eyes and countenance are alive with shifting expression, as if corresponding by visible hieroglyphics to his modulated breath" (par. 2). While the articulation belongs to the narrator and Miroir reflects his act of speech, "visible hieroglyphics" generate the illusion of meaning produced by Miroir. At the same time, Miroir with "his impenetrable mystery" becomes a living hieroglyph, which should be deciphered "with some clew to the explanation" (par. 1). While Hawthorne's journal entry and "New Adam and Eve" question the possibility of the decipherment of hieroglyphs, this work questions the existence of significance itself through the spiritless Miroir.

Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), an encyclopedia on books and writing, does not miss the image and metaphor of the hieroglyph. One direct reference to Champollion implies the limitations of Melville's contemporary decipherment: "Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite hieroglyphics. But there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man's and every being's face" (379). The comparison between the

parochial practice of interpretation and the universal idea of mystery echoes Melville's contemporary perspective in a strange way. Ishmael clearly associates the enigma of the whale with hieroglyphs: the "Chilian whale" is "marked like an old tortoise with mystic hieroglyphics upon the back" (223); "The vertebræ" of the whale "were carved with Arsacidean annals, in strange hieroglyphics" (489); "the visible surface of the Sperm Whale" is compared to the "mysterious ciphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics" (333). Both Ahab's failure to hunt down Moby Dick materially and spiritually and Ishmael's failed attempt to define the whale become synonymous with the impossibility of perusal or the misreading of signs, with the metaphor of the whale as a book full of hieroglyphic mystery. Even though the whale as a mysterious object ceaselessly invites reading, the interpretation is always ungraspable. The "hieroglyphic marks" on Queequeg's skin make Queequeg "a riddle to unfold" and "a wondrous work in one volume" (524), suggesting that the whale is not the sole enigma in this book. Queequeg's tattoo on his body, which is supposed to include "a complete theory of heavens and the earth" and "a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth," inspires reading but resists being deciphered: the mystery that "not even himself [Queequeg] could read" will be "unsolved to the last" and Ahab declares the seductive but undecipherable hieroglyph the "devilish tantalization of the gods" (524).

Speculation on language, more precisely on the intertitle, during the silent film era shares similar concerns and dilemmas regarding the limits of language. On the one hand, some intellectuals like Hugo Münsterberg and Lindsay express their interest in this new form of entertainment. Book-length studies in the silent film period share a

fascination with film, but at the same time, contend that film is possibly harmful. Their ambivalence comes from the authors' definition of two levels of vision: vision in the high-level sense as in "the mind's vision" but it also vision that provides vulgar pleasures, a dichotomy that echoes the mid-century American writer's exploration of vision. On the other hand, primary sources such as trade papers and books offering advice to the screenwriter or film industry insider focus more on practical guidance, commenting on the use of the intertitle and describing ways to attract the audience's attention and enhance comprehension. These sources reveal the silent film industry's dilemma: the image on screen should convey a message without verbal effort as formulated in their aspiration that film be a universal language, but text in the form of an intertitle is needed as an economic tool to render meaning.

Just as American Renaissance writers reflected on and responded to contemporary language theory through the representation of the hieroglyph, speculating on the possibility of communication and interpretation, so the silent film industry utilizes the metaphor of the hieroglyph to speculate on its own significance as a medium. The next chapter on *The Ten Commandments* will explore how the hieroglyph, which is visualized and materialized on screen as a stone tablet, condenses the hybridity of the film medium.

Notes

1 Simon Kow observed that “recent scholarship has sought to uncouple Enlightenment thought from imperialism and colonialism” with half success (347). The fact that the Enlightenment, even with the best beneficent intentions, may be mixed with the trajectory of imperialism is frequently ignored. When manifest destiny is interpreted as a bringing of light to the darkness of the outer world, its similarity with Enlightenment discourse can be seen in its premise of a universal language.

2 Emerson was fascinated with hieroglyphics as a child, as shown in a note he wrote in hieroglyphs.

3 The relationship between inquest and manifest destiny is also explored in Susan Zieger’s “Pioneers of Inner Space: Drug Autobiography and Manifest Destiny.” Zieger observes how the rhetoric of drug autobiography resembles that of manifest destiny and how inquest of one’s inner self can be easily translated into territorial conquest.

4 As Jesse Schotter sums up, there were various universal language movements such as “Esperanto, Novial, Volapuk, Ido, Isotype and Basic English” (89). Schotter explores the relationship between universal language discourse and modernism.

5 Carol Schloss, for example, examines how Hawthorne notices “an extreme verisimilitude of surface detail” (49) in the daguerreotype and how he explores the “damaging effect of vision” (50).

6 In addition to the works explored in this chapter, Irwin has fully explored the significance of the hieroglyph in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) shown in the description of the letter A and Pearl (Irwin 239-84).

CHAPTER III

“IN THE LIGHT – IT’S GONE”:

ERASING THE VIOLENCE OF WRITING IN DEMILLE’S FILMS

On June 15, 1924, Grauman’s Egyptian Theatre announced that “the never-to-be-forgotten photoplay ‘THE TEN COMMANDMENTS’ that CECIL B. DEMILLE has given to the world” would close after its seven-month run (Figure 3.1). This advertisement reflects some aspects of the Egyptian fever stimulated by Howard Carter’s excavation of Tutankhamun’s tomb during the early twentieth century: oriental style in architecture such as the Egyptian Theatre, popular interest in oriental content shown in an example of “A Night in Pharaoh’s Palace,” which was paired with *The Ten Commandments* in its running in this theatre, and the use of hieroglyphics in popular culture. The use of hieroglyphics as a frame for the advertisement, which was not unusual for Grauman’s Egyptian Theatre, puts an exotic tone in its advertisement and, at the same time, foregrounds the materiality and textuality of this exotic sign. While the English text, i.e. the announcement in this advertisement, is presented as printed on paper, the hieroglyphics are shown as an engraving on stone, which creates two layers of writing in one advertisement. When this advertisement creates dichotomies between Egyptian hieroglyphics and the English alphabet, engraving and printing, letter as an image and letter as a text in the sharp contrast between white font and black font, it foregrounds and reflects the dichotomy in *The Ten Commandments*. This film utilizes

GRAUMAN'S HOLLYWOOD THEATRE EGYPTIAN

ALWAYS GOOD SEATS MATINEES 2:15 TWICE DAILY 8:15

To the People of Los Angeles-

I regret very much to announce that after seven months of continuous running, in my estimation, of one of the greatest pictures ever made,

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
must close three weeks from today.

Patrons state that they have seen this great production as many as five or six times; but realizing that thousands have not seen it, we are issuing this announcement so that you may make arrangements before it is too late.

The picture and the prologue could run for months longer, but on account of our contract for the next attraction, which was made over a year ago

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
must be brought to a close.

May I take this means of thanking the more than 600,000 people who have seen and so earnestly supported the never-to-be-forgotten photoplay

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
that
CECIL B. DE MILLE
has given to the world.

Sid Grauman

never again to be shown with
"A Night in Pharaoh's Palace"
Sid Grauman's own "Whatever" production

Take P. O. note on 1111 Street Street in each address. Prices:
Dress, 75c. St. 50c. Balcony, 25c. Box, 50c. 100c. Seats:
Barber Bros., 1111 Street St. Theatre Box Office, 1111 Street
Hollywood, Box 2100 Grauman's Egyptian, 1111 Street 1111 St. N.

Figure 3.1 An advertisement of *The Ten Commandments* in *Los Angeles Times* (15 June 1924)

hieroglyphics as a backdrop for intertitles and, at the same time, focuses upon the process of writing, more specifically, the Decalogue as a text written by God. Foregrounding the materiality of written text and visualizing how the writing process involves incision and scarring, *The Ten Commandments* shows how violent the process of writing is.

DeMille's versatility, especially his success in the modern commercial film industry, and his effective use of materialistic abundance reflecting consumer culture capture film scholars' attention. DeMille's path from the New York theater to Hollywood, his mastery of a range of genres, including the melodrama, the sex comedy, and the religious epic, and his commercial success reaching from the silent to the sound era all suggest how central he is to American film history. In terms of film industry history, DeMille is defined as "the blockbuster godfather" (Horton 78), who pioneered the change in the scale of production and profit during the silent film era. One of the features of DeMille's films across genres is his "enthusiastic obsession with lavish detail" (Eyman 6), which is shown through the massing of objects and materials on the screen. Both the gigantic sets of *The Ten Commandments* and Gloria Swanson's gold bed have been explored in terms of the relationship between emerging consumer culture and gender politics. Among others, Lary May has initiated the exploration of how the consumption ideal is realized in DeMille's works, foregrounding Hollywood's impact on female consumers. Sumiko Higashi elaborates on this topic when she locates DeMille's status in the dynamics of taste and class during the silent film era.¹

This chapter puts another light on materiality in DeMille's works, especially on *The Ten Commandments* within the context of the transition between literary culture and visual culture during the silent film era. I want to focus upon the written text as one form of object in *The Ten Commandments*, locating the significance of the written text in the web of dichotomies in this work, in order to argue that this work shows the violence of writing. The binary chasm between religious principles, races, and communicative medium, and more subtly also between filmic and non-filmic language, is established and, at the same time, is undermined in this work.

The first section of this chapter observes how multiple layers of tension between religious principles are developed and how rivalry between dominating mediums is explored in *The Ten Commandments*. After exploring contemporary reviews of the film that indicate a chasm between two parts of the film, I present how this work builds up the dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity or the conflict between Old and New Testaments and explores two different presentations of leprosy in the two parts – between conspicuous leprosy and invisible and curable leprosy. Mainly, I will show how leprosy is established as a form of writing on skin by God and is explored as a metaphor for the religious principles as well as for the medium.

In the second section, I explore two types of visible leprosy. The first visible leprosy on the skin of Miriam is connected with the principles of the Old Testament, which sticks to the concept of leprosy as God's mark on the sinner's skin. Sally's leprosy in the modern part, in contrast, is not visible, unlike Miriam's leprous skin. I

show how another visible mark, namely her race, can function as a mark on Sally's skin, which is equivalent to the visible mark of leprosy.

The last section of this chapter examines how this work criticizes the violence of the writing process through its extensive and shocking visual presentation of the engraving of the Decalogue and also through the destructive force of objects with written text on them. After establishing the written text as materialized violence, I will conclude that this work departs from the Decalogue, which is stuck in ancient times and in a more primitive written text, and affirms the shift to resistance to the written text, exalting the healing power of light and promoting the filmic medium.

Constructing Dichotomy in *The Ten Commandments*

In his autobiography published in 1959, DeMille explained the personal significance of *The Ten Commandments* (1923): DeMille emphasized that this film explores “a theme that brightened memories of [his father's] reading the Bible aloud to [them] and teaching his sons that the laws of God are not mere laws, but are the Law” (*Autobiography* 249-50). DeMille repeatedly affirmed that *The Ten Commandments* was designed as a visual representation of religious principle and the first intertitle of *The Ten Commandments*, which attempts to provide a directorial preface for the audience, reflects his memory of his father when this film's essence is stated as “the fundamental principles without which mankind cannot live together.” DeMille's ambitious endeavor to visualize the words from the Bible, however, was not an easy task, and deciding on how to translate the Decalogue, the written text from the Bible, into the image on screen

was one of the main challenges. At the beginning of its production, DeMille considered using episodic organization, which was soon abandoned in the interests of “dramatic unity of construction” (250). DeMille ends up exploring the biblical Decalogue in two sections. The first part of *The Ten Commandments* visualizes the Book of Exodus, climaxing in the miracle at the Red Sea and Moses’s receiving of the tablets, and the second part presents how the sacred lessons of the Bible are challenged but, in the end, restored in modern society through the story of the McTavish family.

The trajectory of both parts of this film is originally designed to reaffirm and reinstate the religious instruction, but there exist deep chasms between the two parts of the film, a division that is foregrounded through thematic and stylistic foils. The first part of *The Ten Commandments* centers on the story of Moses—how he saves the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians and how God presents to him the tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. It ends with God’s fury upon observing the idolatry of the Israelites and with His punishment—the devastating lightning upon the idolaters and leprosy upon Miriam. On the other hand, the modern part focuses more upon the melodramatic love triangle of Dan, John, and Mary. Even though John, who represents virtue and justice, helps and falls for Mary first, Dan, who symbolizes vice through his greed, dishonesty, and adultery, comes to marry Mary and then betray her. The ancient part aims to visualize the written text from the Bible like a history film, but the modern part creates a fictional modern world in order to present the lesson of the Decalogue, which is narrativized, in an effective manner.

Contemporary reception of *The Ten Commandments* did not fail to catch the clash between the ancient part and the modern part. While the advertisement campaign of *The Ten Commandments* defines it as “the world’s greatest spectacular melodrama,” the reviewer for *New York Times* expresses the noticeable division between two parts as “the spectacle” and “the melodrama.” *New York Times* reviewer adds his comment on “the ordinary and uninspired” modern part in comparison with the ancient part and observes that two sections might have been directed by two directors (“The Screen”). DeMille himself oscillated between two parts: in his autobiography, he defines this film as “a modern story with a Biblical prologue,” which put the emphasis on the modern part, but later he describes this work as “the story of the Giving of the Law,” which reverses his previous remark (251, 305).

The most remarkable tension between the two parts is two different religious principles that govern each part respectively. Although *The Ten Commandments* is originally designed to place its focus on the biblical Decalogue through its title and the visual spectacle of the first part, the real center of this film moves into the dramatization of its contemporary sinners’ and saints’ destiny in the modern part in terms of running time, two thirds of which is devoted to the rise and fall of McTavish. On the surface, the modern part seems to capture the reaffirmation of the Decalogue in that Dan and Sally, his mistress, pay for their sin through death, which represents how God’s law is alive in modern society. Yet, the romance between characters in the modern part provides a clear transition from God’s fury in the ancient part to the sacred love and the significance of forgiveness in the modern. When *Variety*’s contemporary review observes that this film

is “great pictures for the Jews” and adds that this “will be as well liked by the Catholics for its Catholicity” (26), it hints at the amalgamation of two religious principles—Judaism and Christianity.²

The suture of the New Testament and the Old Testament or the junction between Judaism and Christianity, however, was loose. Long-standing conflict between Christianity and Judaism persisted even during the early twentieth century, especially mingled with anti-Semitism: an article written in 1926 indicates that there are two contradictory movements—“an attempt to reconcile Jesus and Moses” and “an attempt to divorce the New Testament from the Old and to liberate Christianity entirely from Jewish tradition” (“The Controversy”). The difference between the endings of the two parts – the curse upon Miriam and the cure of Mary— “displace[s] the type of Moses and the vengeful God with their fulfillment in John the Baptist and the forgiving Christ” (Gardner 383), and the death and failure of the bigoted mother who stands for the Decalogue principle in the modern part signals the coming of a loving and forgiving Christ who will not curse but “clean” sinners like Mary.

Another contrast between the two parts of *The Ten Commandments* is the kind of medium that dominates the narratives and themes. The transition from the ancient part to the modern part occurs as the scene showing the McTavish family reading Exodus overlaps with the scene showing Miriam’s appeal to Moses. With this shift from the biblical part to the modern part, this film defines the relationship between the two periods as that between writing and reading: while the Biblical part explores how the Decalogue is written, the modern part focuses upon its reading and interpretation. This

transition from writing to reading comes with a distancing from written text and movement toward the spoken word: the reading activity in the modern part is closely connected with the spoken aspect of language as shown in Mother's Bible reading at the beginning of the modern part or John's reading the Bible for Mary during the ending sequence.

This contrast between written text and spoken language is noticeably indicated through the different usage of intertitles in the two sections. When the function of intertitles is divided into two, expository and dialogue in Bordwell's terms, the expository intertitle is more like written language and the dialogue intertitle is more like spoken language in a simplified dichotomy.³ The two parts of *The Ten Commandments* utilize completely different sets of intertitles. Among a total of 183 intertitles, 47 are used for the expository function and 136 for dialogue. The first two intertitles of the film have been used as a directorial preface for the film that justifies the director's intension in making of this film. While the ancient part uses 34 expository intertitles and 20 dialogue intertitles, the modern part uses 11 expository intertitles and 116 dialogue intertitles. These statistics clearly show that the mode of presentation in the ancient part depends upon written narration but, in the modern part, the main mode of presentation is shifted into building narrative, setting moods and suggesting the relationships among characters through spoken dialogue.

The difference in the style of the intertitles between the two parts also presents sheer contrast. It was a common practice that the dialogue intertitle be presented in double quotation marks and the expository intertitle without them during the 1920s. *The*

Ten Commandments, however, uses the double quotation marks in the intertitles in two separate ways – one to indicate direct quotation from the Bible and the other for the dialogue between characters. As a consequence, this film divides the use of intertitles into three – the expository intertitle, the direct quotation intertitle, and the dialogue intertitle.

The intertitles without the double quotation marks in this film function as the expository intertitle that explains the situation, introduces the characters and summarizes the plot, just as other contemporary films' expository intertitles do. In the ancient part, three intertitles are used to introduce new characters on the screen such as “MIRIAM – THE SISTER OF MOSES,” and two intertitles summarize the situation. In the modern part, 11 expository intertitles provide comments or summary on the action of the characters shown in examples such as “But there is no place where a man may hide from his Conscience.”

All the intertitles in the ancient part – 54 intertitles – are written in capital letters and 49 of them use the double quotation marks. As André Gaudreault observes, early silent films used the title cards in all capital letters as the subtitle, i.e. “titles of scenes,” following the practice of headings in written text (85). The combination of capital letters and the double quotation marks with biblical citation information provides the audience with the impression of reading the Bible and presents the following images as tableaux vivants of the biblical texts. On the other hand, intertitles in the modern part do not use these all capital letter intertitles except for the one direct quotation from the Bible, and the intertitle with the biblical quotation in the modern part functions as dialogue between

characters, which provides more spoken aspects of language. One of the advertisements for *The Ten Commandments*, which appears in *New York Times* (1925), emphasizes the direct quotation from the Bible as the selling point, writing “With Subtitles from Exodus.”

The transition between ancient and modern parts demonstrates how this film moves from written to spoken as the dominating form of language through differentiating the use of intertitles. The last intertitle of the ancient part that is written in capital letters is “‘THOU HAST BROUGHT DESTRUCTION UPON US, WITH THY GODS OF GOLD’,” which is a direct quotation from the Bible. After that, the following intertitle that overlaps with the image of Mother who read the Bible reads, “‘-and there fell off the children of Israel that day, about three thousand men’(Exodus 32:28),” which emphasizes that this passage from the Bible is used not as direct quotation but as speech by Mother.

The way this film deals with leprosy is interwoven with the governing religious principles in two parts. The curability of leprosy in the ending sequence of each part reveals another contrast: while the ancient part ends with Miriam’s unanswered plea to be cured of her leprosy, the modern part ends with Mary’s celebration of her cure from that disease. In addition to the curability of leprosy, this film differentiates the visibility of leprosy: contrary to Miriam’s obvious signs of leprosy, shown through white patches on her hand and exaggerated by her expression of shock, the skin of the main characters in the modern part remains clean throughout the film in spite of the film’s clear suggestion that these characters have leprosy (Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3). This visibility



Figure 3.2 Miriam's skin with the mark of leprosy (still from *The Ten Commandments*)

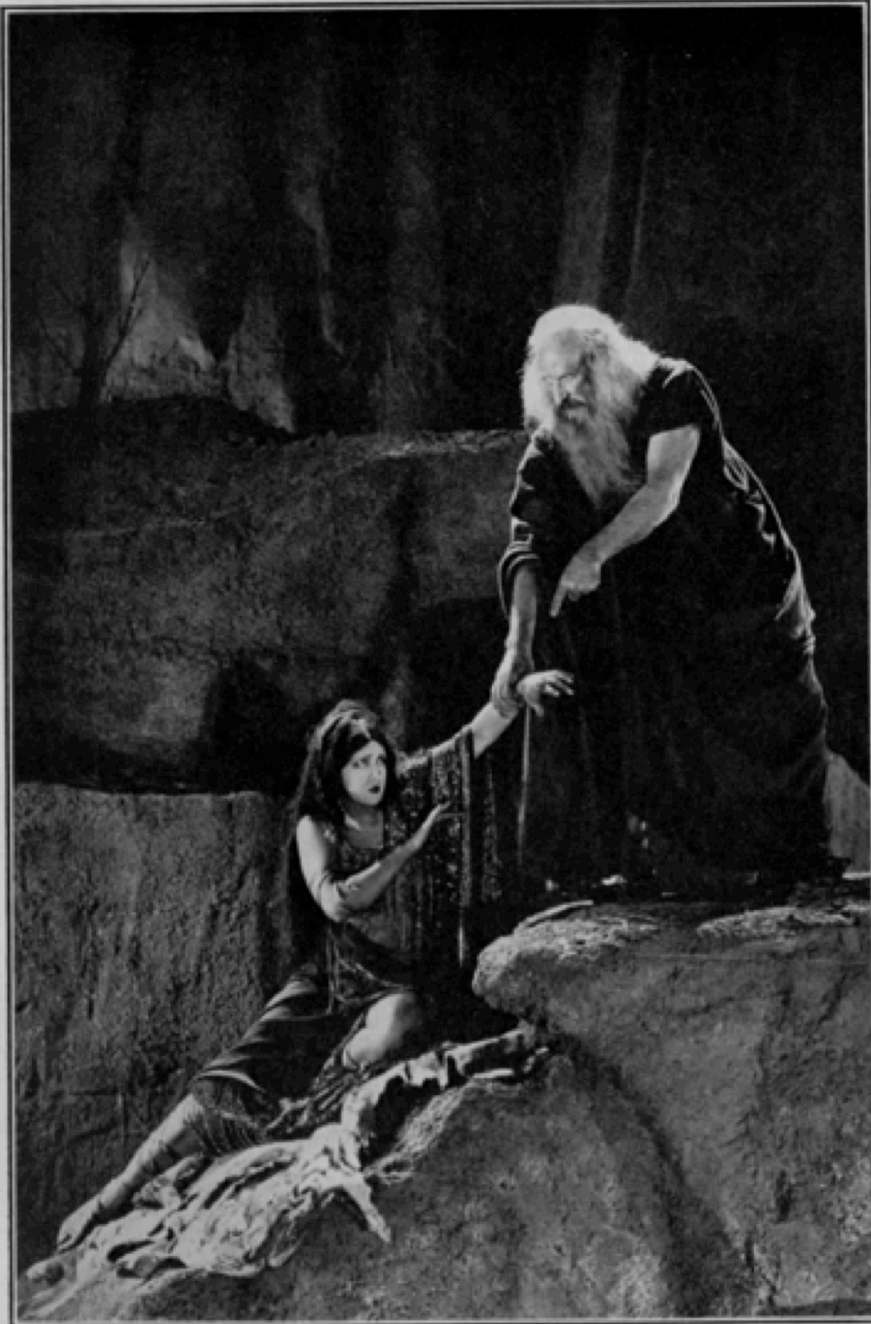


Figure 3.3 Sally's unblemished skin without any sign of leprosy (still from *The Ten Commandments*)

of leprosy is also connected with the religious principles in that Miriam's visible leprosy shows both God's fury and its ocular proof and Mary's cured or erased leprosy testifies to the power of love and compassion. At the same time, the problem of the distinction between written text and spoken text influences whether leprosy is visually presented or not. Three female characters who are infected with leprosy are used as foils: between Miriam who has visible marks and Sally and Mary who do not bear the hint of leprosy on their skin, and between Miriam and Sally who are doomed and uncured and Mary who is saved and whose mark is erased. The following sections place three characters in their relation to the governing religious principle and medium in their parts – Miriam under the principle of the Old Testament and the power of written text, Mary under the principle of the New Testaments and, as a consequence, the power of spoken words, and Sally under the principle of the Old Testament and mechanism of writing in a subtle way even though she is in the modern part.

Leprosy as Engraving God's Text: Indelible Mark on Miriam's Skin

The photoplay edition of *The Ten Commandments*, which was published in 1924, includes several stills, which present some important moments of the film. One of the stills, found as the verso of the title page, captures Moses who indicates Miriam's hand with an expression of fury and repulsion (Figure 3.4). This image, captioned as "Moses Rebukes His Sister Miriam," portrays the communication between Moses and his people through his gaze and gesture: Moses looks not at Miriam but at his people, and he urges them to pay attention to Miriam's hand. Moses, who delivers the Decalogue tablet to his



A Paramount Picture

The Ten Commandments.

MOSES REBUKES HIS SISTER MIRIAM.

Figure 3.4 Moses Shows Miriam's Leprosy
(an illustration from *The Ten Commandments: A Novel*)

people, presents Miriam's hand as another text to read and as ocular proof of her fatal sin of idolatry. The significance of leprosy as the brand of sin inscribed on the sinner's skin serves as the axis of the discourses on writing, as well as a speculation on the resurrection, in *The Ten Commandments*.

Unlike other illnesses, the connotation of leprosy traditionally conveyed a taint of immorality beyond the physical illness as shown in a differentiated nuance between "Hansen's disease" and "leprosy." Generally, the term leprosy has been loaded with more metaphorical connotations than is Hansen's disease. While Hansen's disease implies a medical condition, leprosy has frequently been used as a metaphor for moral and spiritual corruption in the history of Western society. The Old Testament treatment of leprosy presents one of the origins of the contempt for this disease. One of the obvious concerns regarding leprosy found in the Bible comes from the consideration of public hygiene. Leviticus, the third book of Moses, includes "Laws Concerning Leprosy," which details the diagnosis and treatment of this disease.⁴ When a man has "in the skin of his flesh a rising, a scab, or bright spot," the priest decides after multiple examinations if he is "clean" or "unclean" (Lev. 13. 2, 3): a man is diagnosed as a leper "when the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh" or "there be quick raw flesh in the rising"; during the examination and after the diagnosis, the patient will be "shut up" (Lev.). This depiction of leprosy focuses upon its obvious physical indicators, especially on the skin, and how to distinguish other skin diseases from leprosy. Moreover, the procedures described here focus more upon the quarantine of the patient to prevent contagion rather than the judgment of the

morality of the patient. In this vein, “Laws Concerning Leprosy” can be viewed as a public health manual, which concerns how to protect the social and national body from this fatal disease. However, other references to leprosy in the Old Testament make a clear connection between leprosy and profanity and immorality. For example, Midrash Rabbah, one of the Hebrew commentaries on the Old Testament, lists ten sins that result in leprosy, such as “idol-worship,” “blasphemy of the Divine Name,” “evil speech,” and “evil eye” (qtd. in Saul Nathaniel Brody 115-16). Among several cases in the Bible of leprosy as a punishment from God, the example of Miriam, which is used in *The Ten Commandments* with some changes, is prominent. Miriam kindles the anger of God through envying and insulting Moses’ wife and becomes “leprous, white as snow” (Num. 12. 10). Aaron and Moses beg God to forgive her, and she is relieved after being “shut out from the camp seven days” (Num. 12. 15).

The view of leprosy as a “moral disease” prevailed until G. H. A. Hansen identified the cause of this disease in 1873 and even after Hansen’s discovery (Barnes 173). Especially in the Middle Ages, lepers were thought to “have been afflicted by God for their sins” and were expected to “enter hell and damnation” (Barnes 174). As a result, medieval society doubly excluded the lepers from their community: lepers should “always carry a signal by which one can recognize them” (Brody 65) and could “lose their property and rights of citizenship” (Moran 5). Those who were sent to the leper house were relatively lucky even though they received “the same religious rites as those performed for the dying,” which made them the “living dead” (Moran 5). In extreme cases, some lepers were cut “off from food, shelter and the only human society they

were allowed to join” (Allen 33). Even after it became known that bacteria are the cause of this disease, exclusion continued to be practiced in order to avoid contagion: Molokai Island and Culion Island were used as leper colonies until the mid-twentieth century.

One of the explanations for why leprosy has been described as a consequence of moral depravity can be found in its visibility. The biblical metaphor of leprosy as ocular proof of invisible sin defines the skin as paper upon which the disease, assuming the authorial position of God, can write: the discoloration and disfiguration of the skin is constructed as a message or a sign written by God. The distinctive feature of leprosy lies not in its nature as a disease, such as contagiousness or physical pain, but in its visible and indelible mark on the skin. Any skin disease that leaves a mark on the skin could be categorized as leprosy: as Ethne Barnes observes, “chronic sores associated with other diseases, such as yaws and syphilis, as well as advanced cases of psoriasis and vitamin-deficient pellagra could easily have fallen under the broad label of leprosy” (174). The interpretation of leprosy reflects man’s desire to read God’s invisible will on the most intimate form of paper, that is, the skin.

The New Testament departs from the harsh treatment of lepers in the Old Testament. One of the most popular films of the 1920s adopts the metaphor of leprosy to foreground the principle of mercy in the New Testament. *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925), which is an adaptation of Lew Wallace’s best-selling 1881 epic with the same title, reflects, at first, the significance of leprosy in the Old Testament; Ben-Hur’s mother and sister suffer from leprosy as unfortunate patients, but people reproach them as “unclean,” and they are expelled into “the valley of the Lepers.” This film questions the

Old Testament concept of leprosy as the mark of a sinner, however, by utilizing the New Testament symbol of leprosy as the vehicle of a miracle visualized through the restored skin. The dramatic denouement of this film first shows in detail Ben-Hur's sister's and mother's leprous faces, which are discolored and deformed, and, then, the miracle of the cure that comes with their prayer, "Master, have mercy on us! We believe." Marking on the skin which, in turn, signals the status of sinner bearing the mark in the world of the Old Testament is replaced by the erasure of the mark on the skin of believer who attests to their faith in God.

Ben-Hur's representation of leprosy and its treatment are not exceptional within the context of contemporary society. Some Christians of early twentieth-century America also tried to follow this New Testament doctrine of compassion rather than the exclusion of the Old Testament. In "The Church's Duty to the Leper," written in 1920, for example, the writer argues that "the care of lepers" has "the preeminent appeal. . . to Christians" and "the spirit of Calvary seems to [be] sufficient to meet the sacrifices involved" (33). In addition to religious group's efforts to obliterate the relentless old doctrine, early twentieth-century American journalism campaigned against the distorted comprehension of leprosy, influenced by recent scientific discoveries of the time. In "The Unwarranted Stigma of Leprosy," Jay F. Schamberg, a doctor and writer, exemplifies one of the attempts to enlighten people's ignorance concerning leprosy through scientific explanation when he urges readers to distinguish "modern leprosy" from "the Biblical disease" and suggests that "the inordinate fear of leprosy" comes from "the Biblical injunction against leprosy and the segregation of the afflicted" (111). This

scientific approach seeks to erase the significance of God's curse from leprosy, and attentively uses "the scars" (112), which more emphasize the physical aspect, instead of a stigma or brand, with which the moral aspect of the patient had been easily mingled, when it explores the case of a leper. This short article reveals that the "cruel popular misunderstanding" (111) of leprosy still persists but, at the same time, that society in general has come to realize the obligation to regard leprosy as a physical disease and not a moral and religious one.

The use of leprosy in *The Ten Commandments* covers both connotations of this disease: god's text and physical disease. The visualized mark of Miriam's leprosy can be read as a faithful adaptation of the Old Testament. In the film, when Moses goes to Mount Sinai to be offered the Decalogue, Miriam leads the Israelites in worshipping the golden calf. Her first appearance as the virtuous and innocent girl at the beginning of the film presents a sharp contrast to her changed character as a sensual priestess of the Egyptian god, which justifies her punishment: when she paints her skin with sinful vanity, she invites the punishment of God as a brand on her skin. At the same time, contrary to the Biblical depiction, *The Ten Commandments* presents idolatry as the sin that Miriam commits: while the Bible indicates that Miriam becomes a leper because of her disobedience to Moses, this film transforms her sin into idolatry and manifests her abominable sin through the image of her caressing the golden calf with her hair. A clear connection between idolatry as the production of forbidden visuality and leprosy as the visualized punishment is foregrounded through this modification of Miriam's sin.

The parallel editing of the of the Mount Sinai scene with the scene in which Miriam is punished implies the interrelationship between leprosy and writing: while God inscribes the Decalogue on the surface of the stone with lightning, Miriam finds white patches on her hand. If God makes his Words visible and legible through the tablets of stone, He also inscribes Miriam's sin on her skin with leprosy. *The Ten Commandments* celebrates God's writing in the scene of the inscription of the Decalogue at Mount Sinai. What this scene emphasizes is the importance of the Decalogue as a permanent and tangible record of God's words as well as the direct message from God. Moreover, the Mount Sinai scene gives one of the most magnificent visual spectacles, along with the Red Sea scene, which visualizes God's miracle. Even though the Neon-sign like Decalogue in the sky seems not that attractive and splendid to our eyes, 1920s contemporaries found this scene spectacular and marvelous. A reviewer for *The New York Times* expresses his excitement at this scene as follows: "Coupled with the orchestration there has been nothing on film so utterly impressive as the thundering and belching forth of one commandment after another, and the titling and photography of this particular effect was remarkable. . . The sky clouds, and then seems to burst, and from the ball of smoke appears golden lettering with one or another of the commandments, stress laid upon those that are considered the most important" ("Remarkable Spectacle"). In addition, James R. Quirk, reviewer for *Photoplay*, insisted that this film is "the greatest sermon on the tablets" (2) and "the actual visualization of The Ten Commandments" (128). In fact, neon sign billboards, which make writing with light possible, attracted early twentieth-century people's interest, and the Packard neon

sign, the first American neon-sign that was installed to advertise the car dealer in 1923, “literally stopped traffic” (Stern 24). In this sense, that neon sign Decalogue can be the summit of the glorification of God’s inscription.

The scene in which Miriam’s skin becomes leprous also functions as the glorification of God’s text as well as Moses’s status as a writer in spite of its dark tone. As William Uricchio sums up, Moses was the figure who was selected to “better the cultural status of the new medium” and “a powerfully attractive symbol of stability” (165, 187). If God uses Miriam’s hand as paper and leaves the leprous mark, Moses announces His message and upholds His law. While the center of this scene is the visual extravaganza of idolatry, the thematic focus is the message and warning written on Miriam’s hands and the central action is Moses’ speech to his people filled with righteous fury.

Ethnic Mark as a Modern Leprosy: Sally’s Skin

The thematic trajectory and didactic message concerning leprosy in *The Ten Commandments* insists upon Christian charity toward the leper and resists the visual registering of sin, refuting the Judean God’s ruthless punishment that is branded on the skin. The invisibility of Sally’s leprosy, however, shows that the suppressed mechanism of the ostracism of the Other persists in more overwhelming forms and, as a result, another indelible mark of ethnicity is synonymous with the mark of leprosy. While the double-layered meaning of biblical leprosy explains the visibility of Miriam’s leprosy and the invisibility of Mary’s leprosy, the mystery of Sally’s invisible leprosy is still

unresolved with the biblical tradition. One of the possible explanations for Sally's unmarked skin is the arbitrariness of reading and producing signs. Even though lepers suffered from physical pain and social exclusion, the Hebrew community, at the same time, considered leprosy "a frightening but awesome mark from God" (Allen 26). If leprosy is the inscription of God, the mark on the body, in some sense, can be read as a certain degree of connection with divinity, which makes its skin the space for God's message whether its content is warning or punishment to its bearer.

In addition to the risk of considering the marked skin as sacred paper, the message written on the skin can be sometimes undecipherable or misunderstood, especially in a modern era that does not have strong mediators between God and people. DeMille accepts the arbitrariness in the process of creation and interpretation and illustrates that even God's sign can be manipulated in his later films. *The Godless Girl* (1929), one of DeMille's religious films set against a modern backdrop, captures the changing meaning of signs carved on the skin. This film shows redemption in modern times through the story of the repentance of atheists, Judy and James. Both of them are sent to reform school because of a death that took place during an atheist meeting, and they come to love each other. One of the scenes at the reformatory depicts a stigma on their hands caused by their contact with an electrical wire. At this moment, the cross-like stigma on the two atheists' skin can be read as anything they want: if they do not place some significance on that scar, the burn mark becomes a mere wound; if they do, it will be a sacred sign on their skin. Before that scene, James, in a cynical tone, defines Judy's skin as a paper by saying, "how white you [Judy] are." In the end, Judy and James

choose or are chosen to be sincere believers, and the stigma on their palms turns out to be not a meaningless wound but a sacred symbol. The other sign in the film, however, qualifies the significance of the sacred marks. When James alters the number “7734” on his clothes tag into “HELL,” (Figure 3.5) Judy responds to his word game by changing the number “3107” on her tag into “LOVE” (Figure 3.6). With the implication of changeability and arbitrariness, the authenticity of the central image of the cross stigma on the skin is challenged.

When DeMille wants to clarify that Dan’s fate in *The Ten Commandments* does not come from a “vengeful visitation of an *arbitrary* God” (*Autobiography*, DeMille 251 italics added), he hints at a transformation in the concept of God in his contemporary society. Even though the principles of God remain the central theme even in the modern part of *The Ten Commandments*, the presence of God is subdued and redefined with its arbitrariness, and, at a result, reading leprosy as a divine punishment seems to be challenged and the message of that brand cannot be effectively circulated.

This arbitrariness of interpretation and manipulation in modern society may provide a partial explanation for resistance to marking the leprosy on Sally’s skin as a detour, but Sally’s unblemished skin is the product of another mark – her ethnicity. While DeMille modifies the traditional concept of leprosy as a sign and erases its visibility on the screen, especially in the case of Mary, DeMille does not hesitate to add more conspicuous signs of otherness, which is easily connected with her immorality. While there are two purely evil characters in the modern part – Dan and Sally—, the depiction of the two characters’ sin is totally different. Dan is a defiant son to his mother,



Figure 3.5 Altering convict number into “HELL”
(still from *The Godless Girl*)



Figure 3.6 Altering convict number into “LOVE”
(still from *The Godless Girl*)

an unfaithful husband to Mary, and a corrupt businessman who values money over everything else. Moreover, Dan's depravity is presented in visual details from blasphemy such as graffiti on the Bible to moral hazards such as smuggling sand and building the church with rotten sand.

In contrast, Sally's only obvious sin is her adultery with Dan. Sally is, nonetheless, considered to be pure evil, and, in some sense, this one fault is more unpardonable than Dan's numerous sins. Sally's threat to society, in this sense, is not only her loose sexual morals but her alienness; as Dan's collaborator warns, "the combination of French perfume and Oriental incense is more dangerous than nitroglycerine!" Sally's interracial existence, as half French and half Chinese, and her interracial relationship with Dan is presented as a sin that is needless to explain and impossible to exonerate.

DeMille did not invent the treatment of foreignness as a form of leprosy: the otherness of the foreigner easily overlaps with the status of the leper as the Other to the social body throughout the history. On the one hand, the leper who may be a threat to the health of society should be expelled beyond social boundaries, as discussed above. The leper colony in Molokai Island, which is presented as the place from which Sally escapes, is an example of the social exclusion of the leper in contemporary American society. On the other hand, the alien who looks different from Americans should also be segregated to maintain a homogenous society. There is osmosis between the definition of the leper and that of the alien: while the leper is defined as an Other to society, the Other from without can be conversely termed the leper. Difference in appearance easily

substitutes for the mark caused by leprosy, and the basic definition of otherness as something branded by a sort of visible mark is not changed.

Even scientific discourse concerning leprosy clearly makes connections between leprosy and racial otherness. In the age of expansion, leprosy was regarded as “a tangible threat to Western bodies” and “a by-product of a way of life that Americans imagined as primitive” (Moran 5). As Rod Edmond observes, in nineteenth-century writing, the interracial encounter is blamed as one of main causes of the transmission of leprosy, and the stranger from without is easily labeled a leper even though he has no mark on his skin (508-10). The early-twentieth American discourses concerning leprosy were not entirely different from their predecessors. “The Unwarranted Stigma of Leprosy,” which aims to enlighten common ignorance regarding leprosy, attempts to find the origins of leprosy from without: it gives an example of “the son of a British officer in India who was infected in playing with a native lad” (Schamberg 112) and it insists, “nearly all of these are of foreign birth and have brought the disease with them in unrecognized form to this country” (Schamberg 111).

When Dan smuggles the sand and Sally uses the same ship for her escape from Molokai Island, the evil from without is represented through imported goods and immigrants: those imports are defined as destructive and threatening factors when the imported sand that is used to build the Cathedral causes the collapse of that building and Sally contaminates Dan and Mary’s bodies as well as their marriage. One of the advertisements for *The Ten Commandments* manipulates the appeal of this idea of



With jewels and furs and perfumes from the Orient, the siren came to him—a married man—and he broke another of

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPECTACULAR MELODRAMA

Produced By Cecil B. DeMille

Story by Jeanie Macpherson.

Operatic musical accompaniment by Eisenfeld.

A PARAMOUNT PRODUCTION

Presented by Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky.

GEO. M. COHAN THEATRE, B'WAY at 42 ST.
TWICE DAILY 2:30—8:30.
SUNDAY MATINEES AT 3

PRICES DAILY MATINEES, 50c TO \$1.00.
NIGHTS, SAT. & SUN. & HOLIDAY MATS., 50c TO \$2.00.
ALL SEATS RESERVED—ON SALE 4 WEEKS IN ADVANCE

Figure 3.7 *The Ten Commandments* advertisement foregrounding Sally as a foreign threat

foreign threat to American society (Figure 3.7). Sally is a siren armed with “jewels and furs and perfumes from the Orient,” and this imported femme fatale and objects are presented as a cause of Dan’s breaking of the Decalogue. Sally’s essence as a foreign import is marked with her exotic costume throughout her appearance. Her last costume (figure 3.3), especially, sharply contrasts with Mary’s and, moreover, makes her body look like a serpent with its smooth and shiny scale-like surface.

As Sally curses her death, Dan, who has violated the boundaries with his interracial and illegitimate relationship with Sally as well as through his smuggling of goods, “pay[s] heavy duty on those bales of jute – which [Dan] sneaked from Calcutta” through his fall and death. This xenophobia in the modern part of the film synchronizes with the ideology behind the Book of Exodus, or more precisely the 1920s understanding of Moses: as Jared Gardner indicates, Moses was linked to “white nationalists” (377) and Exodus was redefined as response to “anxieties over racial purity” (378) in the contemporary mind. With her exotic appearance, Sally as an alien is already the leper in 1920s America, and there is no need to mark her skin with leprosy.⁵

The Stigma of the Text and the Erasure of the Mark on Mary’s Skin

The cure of leprosy at the end of the modern part offers a contrast to Miriam’s visible leprous mark on the skin. Why is one of the most important miracles in this film – the cure of Mary – not visualized through inscription on the skin and erasure, an approach that *Ben-Hur* adopts in its presentation of divine love? Some of DeMille’s contemporaries argued against the visualization of the deity and miracles, accusing

DeMille of the sin of idolatry. One example of this concern in general can be found in Wallace's hesitation about the stage adaptation of his novel *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. Wallace had rejected several times the proposals of theatre producers because he thought that God and Christ couldn't be represented on the stage and that the visualization of deity was synonymous with idolatry. When the producer promised that God would be visualized as a fire and no actor would play the roles of God and Christ, Wallace finally allowed the adaptation of his work. However, DeMille did not share this anxiety over visual idolatry, as can be seen in *King of Kings* (1927), which visualizes the life of Christ using actor H. B. Warner. Rather, DeMille expresses his belief in the film medium as well in as the commercial potential of the religious genre when he says, "[g]ive me two pages of the Bible and I'll give you a picture."

Considering the anticipated effect of the visualization of this mark in terms of the moral lesson, DeMille's decision not to show Mary's leprous skin is unexpected. Contrary to the scene in which Miriam develops leprous symptoms as retribution for her idolatry, leprosy in the modern part is imagined as being transmitted by Sally. Dan has an adulterous relationship with Sally but their affair ends in a brutal and violent fight when Dan's financial situation goes bad. After Dan snatches the pearl necklace from Sally, she reveals her identity as a leper as vicious revenge, resulting in Dan's murder of her. Mary, who realizes Sally's leprosy and her husband's adultery, is frightened by the possibility of infection and wanders helplessly until John finds her. Out of fear and despair, Mary thinks that she is "branded" and should go "where [she] can find peace," suggesting either suicide or exclusion from society. John recites the miracle of Jesus who

heals the leper, soothing her, and, the next morning, Mary accepts the spiritual miracle of Jesus, exclaiming, “in the light – it’s gone.” In this modern part, John, a Christ-like figure, assures Mary of the importance of faith and repentance, and “the light,” which signifies the soothing cure of Christ, cures and erases the imagined brand of leprosy. The significance of leprosy is changed into a psychological condition and guilty conscience, and only the warmth of love and light can cure this spiritual malady. The ending sequence of the ancient part, which abruptly halts at the very moment of Miriam’s despair over the world of an angry God, provides a clear foil to the modern part’s emphasis on the cure of leprosy within a world of divine forgiveness.

The Ten Commandments glorifies the potential of visual spectacle and the ancient part in particular provides visual extravaganza “more powerful than any sermon,” as its advertisement boasted (*The Ten Commandments, New York Times*). DeMille, however, oscillates between his fascination with spectacle and his desire for the didactic. Some screen spectacles do not function as thematic foci but rather present sheer visual pleasure. While the parallel between the scenes of Mount Sinai and the punishment of idolaters summons up Old Testament didacticism with visual splendor, it also suggests the violence embedded in the writing: the sequence of punishment that immediately follows clearly cancels the positive impression of lightning with the obvious parallel between lightning used to inscribe upon the stone tablets and lightning used to strike the idolaters. As Jonathan Goldberg illustrates in his study of Renaissance writing, the concept of the “pen-knife” reflects the understanding of writing as a violent act. Even

though we metaphorically use the saying, “the pen is mightier than the sword,” writing on paper has been connected with incisions on skin.

The Decalogue inscription scene reveals the degree to which writing can be violent. At first, Moses carves God’s words on the tablet with a chisel, and then God’s lightning directly incises His words on stone: the image of the explosion clearly captures the violence and destruction involved in the writing process. Moses ignores his sister’s appeal to “cleanse me, I pray thee, for I have worshiped idols, and become a leper” because he cannot reverse God’s writing, which has already left indelible marks on her skin. When the violence in writing is revealed and the soothing power of spoken language is foregrounded, the shift to spoken language seems to be confirmed formally as well as thematically. Yet, the Decalogue returns and becomes everything in the end: it is the core of the narrative development even in the modern part as well as the title of the film and the center of the visual spectacle.

In the modern part, in which the thematic focus shifts into healing Christianity and soothing spoken language, the Decalogue is materialized through printing, stitching, and carving. The first image of the modern part is the Bible in the McTavish house, and then the camera shows the framed writing “Thou Shall Not Steal” in their house. As one reviewer comments sarcastically, the McTavish mother always carries “a volume that weighs about a hundred weight” (“Remarkable Spectacle”) even though she seems to memorize every line of the Bible. When the cathedral that Dan built with “rotten concrete” collapses, the huge stone tablet falls down upon his mother, resulting in her death. At last, the death of Dan comes with his hallucination of the Decalogue, which, in

fact, is a rock island: he envisages the Decalogue tablet upon the island and ends up colliding with the rock that, to him, is a materialization of the Decalogue.

In addition to the physical presence of the stone tablet as an agent of narrative, minor representational devices affirm the authority of the written. Contrary to its major shift from expository intertitle to dialogue intertitle, the modern part frequently utilizes the inserts to aid the development of the narrative. Even the insert, such as a letter, legal document, or newspaper on the screen, can be regarded as a diegetic device that is incorporated into the reality within the film; it, at the same time, is a summary of events rather than a visual presentation and urges the audience to read the material and realize the power of written language. A reviewer's criticism of "too many inserts" ("Remarkable Spectacle") can refer to a dependence upon inserts as material that triggers the event, as well as to the frequency of inserts. One of the most significant uses of the insert is the newspaper article that reports Sally's escape from Molokai Island. When Sally reveals her leprosy to Dan as revenge, she shows him that newspaper article without saying any words. In the web of invisible leprosy and writing, this written document substitutes for the mark on the skin as the evidence of leprosy, revealing the hidden schema in modern society.

At the same time, leprosy is used to illustrate the possibility of redemption. If leprosy is incurable and the skin of the sinner is marked by the eternal stigma of sin, the erasure of the brand and recovery of one's original skin can be a real miracle. The Old Testament utilizes the image of the healed leper to demonstrate how God as an author freely writes and erases his mark through the example of Na'aman of Syria being healed

by Eli'shi (2 Kings 5). The New Testament focuses more upon the mercy of Jesus Christ upon the miserable: when the leper expresses his faith in Christ, saying, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Christ heals him, replying, "I will, be thou clean." (Matt. 8. 2-4, see also Mark 1. 40-45, Luke 5. 12-16). Contrary to the Old Testament invocation of awe of God through leprosy as a punishing inscription on the skin, the New Testament attempts to reformulate the function of leprosy as one of the utmost examples of the soothing and healing power of Christ, which erases the signs that have been written on the skin. The last scene confirms the healing power of soothing light and spoken language through the line, "in the light – it's gone," and the soft lighting that embraces Mary. It epitomizes the victory of Christian faith that is presented through caressing light and words, overcoming the violence of inscription on the skin and explosive lightning.

Notes

¹ The remake of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) has drawn wide attention from scholars as well as from audiences, inviting several observations of connection between world politics during the 1950s and the portrayal of Moses as a political leader. Yet, the original *The Ten Commandments* (1923) was not received well by reviewers in spite of its commercial success, which has been explored by only a few film scholars.

² Robert S. Birchard records the film studio's effort to build the universal appeal in terms of religious groups. Originally there was a shot, "City showing sunrise—head of Christ dissolves into scene, raises hands, dissolves out leaving scene of sunrise," but with consideration for the religious groups who may be uncomfortable with the image of Christ, the visual presence of Christ on screen was aborted. (Birchard 189)

³ During the silent film era, intertitles were divided into two big categories according to script writing manuals and books on films. One category is the expository intertitle, which is sometimes called as leader or subtitle, and it provides explanation or commentary on the events on the screen or summary of the events. The other is the dialogue title, which conveys the speech of the characters.

⁴ All quotations from the Bible in this paper are from the online King James Version.

⁵ Invisibility itself becomes the real threat: because Dan cannot see the leprous mark on Sally, he freely has a relationship with her without feeling any danger. Then, Mary becomes an innocent victim of this disease without committing any obvious crime except her selection of the wicked Dan over virtuous John. Mary suffers from the fear of

leprosy because of the invisible invasion of *Mycobacterium leprae*, which does not distinguish between sinners and the innocent. This extreme transformation of the significance of leprosy from God's punishment to the invisible invasion of a virus ironically reinforces the need to mark the sinner or at least to blame the Other's ethnicity as the cause of the disease.

CHAPTER IV

“A RIGHT CONCEDED TO THE ART OF THE WRITTEN WORD”:

D. W. GRIFFITH’S AUTHORSHIP ON SCREEN

In one of his addresses in 1956, Cecil B. DeMille expresses his gratification over people’s comparison of him with D. W. Griffith as silent film pioneers and then boasts of the elevated status of the film medium: “We should be humble when we hear learned students of the arts maintain that motion pictures are, or can be, the highest and most popular form of art the world has ever known” (Essoe 15). DeMille’s affirmation of film as a high art was not unwarranted in the 1950s, which was hailed as “the golden age of movie criticism” (Lopate 207) and as an age in which the film industry actively responded to the demands of diversity and differentiation from television. Film’s popularity as an entertainment cannot be denied ever since its emergence, but most people in the early twentieth century would have hesitated to call film “the highest” form and might have refused to categorize it as art. DeMille, who made the transition from the silent era to the sound era with little hardship and managed to direct profitable films on a regular basis, is willing to self-fashion as a crusader on screen and does not miss any chance to publicize film’s contribution to social reform and the propagation of Christianity. Griffith, who was another commercially successful director of the silent era, vocalized his pride in film as a high art with more rigor than DeMille’s declaration, but, at the same time, his fervent endeavor to raise the status of film reflects his and the contemporary film industry’s anxiety over its status. Griffith’s works are full of conflict

between text and image, which frequently affirms the authority of text and eventually revives the presence of the author through the textual elements on screen.

The focus of Griffith scholarship has been his contribution to the development of early film narrative and technique. Claims by early film historians that locate Griffith as the singular genius inventor of film technique have been repudiated, and hyped appreciation of Griffith's influence upon the development of Hollywood's narrative system has been questioned. Recent scholarship on silent films relocates him within the cultural context of early twentieth century entertainments such as vaudeville, dropping the admiration of Griffith and offering more objective appreciation. How to define Griffith's political position against the backdrop of his contemporary society is another thread of Griffith scholarship. Griffith's connection with social reform movements and his depiction of changed female roles have been explored.

This chapter explores how cultural hierarchy in the early twentieth century, that is, the status of film as subordinate to literature, influences Griffith's style. I want to argue that Griffith actively and heavily uses intertitles that emulate the voice of the author and invoke textual authority, ultimately creating a book on screen and inviting his audience to "read" the film. While Griffith strived to endow film with the status of high art and wanted to believe that the film would be the universal language, he freezes the moving image and permits the written text to overwhelm the image on screen in his attempt to create "bookness" on screen.

The first section of this chapter observes how the cultural context and film practice of the early twentieth century influenced Griffith's definition of his job as

director and his understanding of the film medium. After exploring the cultural context of Griffith films, which defined film as a cheap and unsophisticated entertainment, I examine how Griffith reflects this social contempt for film in his early days in the film industry and gradually establishes pride in his new career. The discrepancy between Griffith's pride in film and the social perception of film as lowbrow, which is clearly exemplified in the case of *Mutual vs. Ohio*, triggers his anxiety about his status as a director and film as an art.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine how Griffith's works utilize text on screen in the form of intertitles, which relocate books to screens. The second section explores the practice of intertitles, which, to Griffith, is a possible gateway for establishing the director's status as an author. While film reviewers and film scholars contemporary with Griffith overtly express their concern about the use of intertitles as an obstacle in constructing the illusion of reality on screen or as an eruption of text interfering with the images, Griffith welcomes the use of intertitles. I explore how Griffith aggressively utilizes the intertitle as an instrument of authorial voice, which comments on the image on screen or defines the lesson of his film for the audience.

The last section examines Griffith's use of written text on screen, borrowing the authority of text. His use of numerous quotations from history, the Bible, and literary works shows how Griffith establishes authenticity on screen or borrows authority from other texts. The last part explores the visual "bookness" in Griffith's films in the form of pages turning on screen or book illustrations, which suggests an attempt to make a film into a book.

Griffith's Status Consciousness within the Context of the Silent Film Era

Film in its emerging years was easily branded as cheap and light entertainment even though it reached a wider audience. The rhetoric used by George B. McClellan Jr. is a good example of public contempt for the condition and status of film during the first decade of twentieth century. McClellan, Mayor of New York City between 1904 and 1909, ordered the closing of theaters on Christmas of 1908 and revoked and annulled the licenses of every film theater in New York City, which affected “around 550 show places” in the city (“Picture Shows”). McClellan claimed that the movie theaters were “unsanitary and unsafe” and conducted “under undesirable conditions.” When McClellan ordered the cessation of Sunday shows at Coney Island in 1909, he reminded his readers of his closing order of the previous year as one of his achievements and defined his order in 1909 as “a natural outgrowth of his stand against moving pictures shows” (“Stop Sunday Shows”). McClellan’s “crusade against bad moving pictures” attracted public approval: in a letter to the editor, a reader argued that McClellan’s order might be extended, and he paralleled “the stupidity, rank incompetence, and utter vulgarity of the language” of vaudeville with that of motion pictures (“Bad Vaudeville”). Another reader called the film “a Pandora’s box of evils let loose.” Similarly, the filming of “the Fight at Reno” was condemned as “the recrudescence of the savage” and “the cultivation of false ideals” (“A Pandora’s Box”).

When theater going was labeled as immoral and vulgar, film was easily connected with low taste. Subsequently, the hierarchy placing film beneath highbrow cultural forms such as literature was repeatedly confirmed. In his 1920 editorial in *The*

Author's League Bulletin, Julian Hawthorne summarizes film criticism by a contributor named as "The Professor" as follows:

He [The Professor] depicts his proletariat as ignorant and vulgar, . . . But he hopes that within the coming century we may, by writing occasionally something the least bit in the world above their level, contrive gradually to uplift them to a love of good literature. Gradually purify the swill you feed to your swine, and sooner or later they will insist upon nightingale's tongue and kickshaws. (11)

The Professor and Hawthorne share their contempt for the unenlightened public and their acceptance of the notion of film as "swill" and literature as "kickshaws."

Hawthorne goes further when he ridicules The Professor's naïve hope of elevating the taste of "swine" and concludes his article by deploring contemporary films as entertainments that "can hardly be worse than they are now" (12).

The status of people working for the film industry was also not high. In 1909, *Moving Picture World* grieves over the fact that "the moving picture business occupied in public esteem a position so offensive, so contemptible, and in many respects so degrading, that respectable people hesitated to have their names associated with it" (qtd. in Bowser 35). Eve Unsell, a screenwriter, lamented the lowly status of her occupation in a speech on January 24, 1919, emphasizing, "you who intend writing for the screen must prepare to receive some thorns among the roses, so begin at once to bury any atom of sensitiveness you may possess" (qtd. in Patterson 86). She reported a literary circle's intense scorn for scenario writers, which was epitomized in *The Authors' League*

Bulletin's attack against continuity writers as “the thievish, slavish, knavish Pariahs of the literary world—those utterly brainless incumbrances of the ground” (qtd. in Patterson 88).

Both society and the film industry vigorously responded to film's notoriety as a lowbrow medium. Some social reformers during the silent film era regarded the nickelodeon theaters that provided “a source unsupervised and unapproved by the churches and schools” as a place where “sins were committed” (Sklar 19). Local government and religious leaders who found evil in film, as a result, took almost every possible step to keep the harmful influence of film from spreading, which was exemplified in the case of the 1908 New York theater closings. The film industry also recognized this contemporary negative perception of their own business: *Moving Picture Annual and Yearbook of 1912* admits that “many inferior elements” and “the appeal . . . to the morbid and the vulgar” existed in the early films, which “catered to the lowest instincts of humanity” (qtd. in Sklar 33). Film manufacturers were concerned that they might find themselves “thrown on a cold and unsympathetic world without a business and minus the capital they had already invested in the new industry” and they sought to “keep [their] film stories within the broad lines of current morality and yet not open up an avenue for tyrannical repression, personal or local prejudice, or graft” (Lawson 39). The film industry, as a consequence, agreed to establish the National Board of Censorship in 1909, which was designed to bring “a raising of standards all around” (Lawson 40). In a statement in 1914, Frederic Howe, a chairman of the National Board of Censorship of motion pictures at that moment, specified some topics that should be

censored, such as obscenity, vulgarity, blasphemy, and libel (415). While Howe was reluctant to enforce a film censorship more rigid than that for drama or the press, he justified censorship of the film medium, accepting the perception of his contemporary society of film as “a propagandist agency of unmeasured possibilities” (416).

In addition to the enforcement of censorship, the improvement of theater buildings was widely conducted based upon the observation that the status of film as a low form of entertainment rather than high art was formulated by the physical reality of its early screening environment. Although there were theaters for “better” classes that presented films with lectures or vaudeville performances (Musser 432), lower classes made up the majority of early film viewers and their “mode of reception and viewer behavior” were different from “more advanced forms of commercialized leisure” (Hansen 61). The construction of more luxurious theaters after the mid 1910s reflects the film industry’s attempt to attract a broader audience through erasing its reputation as cheap entertainment. Distributors such as Adolph Zukor continued to strive to “kill the slum tradition” (Sklar 46) and succeeded in situating film as a decent form of entertainment by the 1920s .

When Griffith began his film career as an actor, director and scriptwriter in 1908, he was dissatisfied with his new occupation. One of the causes of his discontent came from his constant but failed dream to be a writer: His father’s legacy of southern romance and his early career at a bookshop “refined [his] literary tastes” (Schickel 45) and led him to determine to be a writer. When he married Linda Arvidson on May 14, 1906, he recorded his profession as “writing” (Schickel 70). After the marriage, he spent

most of his time writing a play, *A Fool and a Girl*, which turned out to be a failure and was followed by other unsuccessful attempts. Griffith's response to his first encounter with film was not enthusiastic: in recalling it, he summed up, "I found [the film] silly, tiresome and inexcusably tedious. It was in no way worthwhile and I considered the time wasted" (Schickel 52).

Griffith's attitude toward his job, however, changed with his success in the film industry: in 1910, "when he received his third annual contract, Griffith crossed out 'Lawrence' and inked in 'David.' Henceforward, he would be one man rather than two; he would be a filmmaker only" (Sklar 55). When Griffith abandoned his stage and literary pseudonym, "Lawrence," he came to embrace his new identity, D. W. Griffith, as a film director. Furthermore, contrary to his former refusal to list his name in the title or advertisements for his films, from 1913 on, Griffith "took pride in seeing his name featured in trade-press accounts of the film industry" (Drew 8). One of the introductory intertitles in *The Birth of a Nation*--"This is the trade mark of the Griffith feature films. All pictures made under the personal direction of D. W. Griffith have the name 'Griffith' in the border line, with the initials 'DG' at bottom of captions"-- can be read as the symbol of his redefined identity as a director. Griffith's instruction to his co-workers not to use the word "flicker" due to its pejorative nuance is another expression of his high pride in film media (qtd. in Hansen 77).

Griffith's newly established pride in his job, however, was damaged by censorship of his work. When *The Birth of a Nation* was released in 1915, its noticeable racism and violence caused it to become the target of censorship, which resulted in

lawsuits and the prohibition of screenings across the nation. On the State of Ohio's banning of the release, Mutual Film Corporation, the distributor of *The Birth of a Nation*, sued the Industrial Commission of Ohio. The US Supreme Court considered this case in terms of the legal status of film and the right to free speech. While the Supreme Court did not argue against "the freedom of opinion and its expression whether by speech, writing, or printing," the exhibition of moving pictures was not granted that freedom as "part of the press of the country, or as organs of public opinion" (Mutual). The Supreme Court elucidates its understanding of the definition and possible evil of motion pictures as follows:

It cannot be put out of view that the exhibition of moving pictures is a business. . . . They are mere representations of events, of ideas and sentiments published and known; vivid, useful, and entertaining, no doubt, but, as we have said, capable of evil, having power for it, the greater because of their attractiveness and manner of exhibition. It was this capability and power . . . that induced the state of Ohio . . . to require censorship before exhibition. (Mutual)

This case clearly captures the status of film within the cultural hierarchy of the 1910s, and this perspective on film as a business that cannot be regarded as an art persisted until the 1950s when this court judgment was repudiated and film finally came to be subject to the protection of the First Amendment.

Griffith expresses his indignation toward this decision through his pamphlet *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America* (1916), in which he underscores that

intolerance is the root of all censorship and the censorship is the archenemy of democracy and freedom (143).¹ In the first illustration in this pamphlet, Griffith lists Columbus, Socrates, Christ, Robert Emmet, Joan of Arc, Gutenberg and Dante as the victims of intolerance under the mask of reform. After paralleling film with other victims of intolerance, Griffith argues that film should obtain the freedom of expression given to literature and the press: he indicates that “In every essential feature the moving picture film is a publication within the meaning of the constitutional guarantee. The moving pictures are, in fact, a pictorial press, performing in a modern and entertaining and instructive manner, all the functions of the printed press” (Griffith, *The Rise and Fall* 151). Griffith was not alone in this argument: W. D. McGuire Jr., Ex-secretary of The National Board of Censorship, comments on censorship of *The Birth of a Nation* by asking “On what basis of reasoning should a film play be suppressed whose subject matter has already been allowed the freest circulation both in a novel and in a play?” (262).

Director as an Author and Authorial Intertitles

When the court’s decision and public sentiment ratified the supremacy of writing over film, Griffith wanted to argue that film is equal with literature, or that the image is even superior to language in its communicative ability. In his conversation with Lillian Gish, he articulates the potential of visual language and his pride in this media: “We’ve gone beyond Babel, beyond words. We’ve found a universal language—a power that can make men brothers and end war forever” (Gish 150). Griffith shares common ground

with Vachel Lindsay in the dream of a universal language through film. Lindsay develops his film theory based on some works by American Renaissance writers, making a connection between nineteenth century literature and early twentieth century film. Griffith's "The Avenging Conscience," for example, is evaluated as "an adequate interpretation" of Poe's works and the "photographic texture" in Poe's works is affirmed (94). Lindsay's main focus is certainly the glorification of film as a tool for democracy transcending any linguistic barrier, but there is an impulsive retreat to the supremacy of writing when he borrows authority from American literary history. When Lindsay attempts to apply the aura of the author to the film producer, the film-watching experience is transformed into a book-reading experience: Lindsay describes the experience of watching a film full of "the idea of democracy"(57) as "read[ing] the Whitmanesque message" (58) in the film.

Lindsay's concept of the "author-producer" captures the important moments in Griffith's consciousness of his status and the newly developed narrative system. Tom Gunning observes that there is a huge difference between film before and after around 1910 in terms of emphasis on narration in film: early films were fascinated with "novelty" and foregrounded "the act of display" (82). While most early silent films emphasized the surprise caused by a visual spectacle or trick, later films move toward a more uninterrupted plot and the illusion of continuity with the help of a "distinct and homogeneous style" (Bordwell 3). The social constraints on the film as a lower entertainment business as well as Griffith's former anxiety over the status of film makes him keenly aware of the importance of claiming the authority of the author. In addition,

as Bordwell observes, the narrative mode accompanies a certain degree of “omniscience and self-consciousness” (25) to achieve story-telling, which can be connected with the authorial presence.

The continuity of narrative, moreover, requires the film audience’s attendance from the beginning to the end of the screening, which changes the mode of spectatorship, realizing Griffith’s hope for the time “when patrons will not be allowed to enter a theater except at the beginning of a photoplay—that the casual hospitality of the picture theater of today will not exist” (Griffith “Innovations” 57). Griffith’s emphasis on the audience’s attention to the events on screen through the introduction of the narrative system is closely connected with the respect or prestige with which stage plays are endowed (Griffith “Innovations” 57).

Numerous techniques such as the close-up, parallel editing, and the iris shot were adopted by Griffith to achieve continuity. The visual features in the narrative film are subject to the flow of plot, and the images are sometimes manipulated by the narrator’s perspective, which accords with the audience’s perspective: the close-up projects the narrator’s or character’s psychological closeness; parallel editing creates a new meaning through combining two shots and sutures remote times and spaces in terms of the connections that are made in the minds of the audience; the iris shot literally masks the unnecessary parts, placing emphasis upon the main event and aligning it with the audience’s limited vision. Griffith elaborated on the ways in which techniques can be combined with the narrative style.

Yet, just as Lindsay was to return to the authority of the text in his glorification of film as a universal language, Griffith willingly embraces the binding of film to language in spite of his ostensible pride in the film medium and his ability to create sheer visual spectacle. One of most obvious textual elements in the silent film is the intertitle, which requires the audience's reading activity. Recent film scholars divide the functions of intertitles into two: spoken titles (or dialogue titles) show the speech of characters, while leaders strengthen the continuity.² Leaders "describe the upcoming action" or "establish the situation and allow the action within the images to present causes and effects" (Bowser 182) and "cover temporal gaps between scenes" (184). Recently in his article on Anita Loos, Brooks Hefner puts a different light on the understanding of intertitles as "modernist spaces where text can intentionally create conflicts of meaning with the images they accompany, and the artistry they represent is a function of the subversive power of language" (110).

In spite of its convenience and inevitability, this easy solution to the need for narrative continuity and logical structure was not always welcome when the intertitle as a text breaks into the visual illusion on screen. Lindsay, in spite of his acclaim for reading messages on screen, criticizes the use of intertitles, indicating that "the fewer words printed on the screen the better, and that the ideal film has no words printed on it at all" (9-10). Likewise, Everett McNeil advised aspiring scenarists in 1911 to "use subtitles or leaders sparingly—only when necessary to the proper understanding of the play"—and emphasized the importance of "mak[ing] the action in the pictures tell the story" (qtd. in Bowser 140). Frances Taylor Patterson also agreed with others, insisting

that “[the] definition of a photoplay is a story told by pictures” and “there is, ideally, no logical place for words in photoplay” (102). The reiteration of “ideal” reflects the anxiety of film industry over the definition of the film medium.

Griffith attempts to claim the autonomy of film as an art form in the emergence of the silent film era but he does not agree with the contemporary argument about film as a sheer visual form that does not allow the interruption of the textual element. In *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America*, Griffith argues that moving pictures are “illustrated and explained by written text” across genres (151). Griffith, as a consequence, does not oppose using intertitles and instead deploys them as often as possible. Anita Loos recounts her experiences as an intertitle writer for *Intolerance* and indicates Griffith’s insistence on more intertitles: “D.W. bade me put in titles even when unnecessary and add laughs wherever I found an opening” (qtd. in La Tour 82). Lindsay appreciates Griffith as “the king-figure” (125) in the contemporary photoplay world in his chapter on the celebration of the films as a modern hieroglyphics, i.e. the universal pictorial language. Griffith’s films, however, present one of the heaviest reading experiences across the silent film era.³ For example, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) uses 233 intertitles during 187 minutes of runtime, and *Intolerance: Love’s Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916) uses 330 intertitles during 197 minutes of runtime. While other contemporary directors’ films do not use intertitles so extensively, Griffith does not hesitate to add more titles.

Griffith’s use of intertitles is distinctive in terms of his preference for expository intertitles over dialogue intertitles as well as the volume of intertitles that his films

utilize. Barry Salt affirms that Griffith's extensive use of intertitles is "one of the extreme cases" and adds that his heavy use of expository intertitles runs counter to the practice of his contemporaries (160). Two works from Griffith's filmography, for example, serve to show Griffith's dense use of expository titles: *The Birth of a Nation* has only 26 dialogue intertitles out of 233 intertitles and *Intolerance* has only 58 dialogue intertitles out of 330 intertitles, while *The Cheat*, directed by DeMille, uses 51 dialogue intertitles out of a total of 64 intertitles. This overwhelming proportion of expository intertitles suggests that Griffith defines the role of intertitles as the voice of a narrator rather than as a substitution for the voices of characters.

Griffith's use of text can be traced back to the practice of bulletins during his Biograph period. Griffith's career at Biograph presents similar use of textual elements for the purpose of rendering the voice of the invisible narrator. Gunning sums up Griffith's Biograph era as a transitional period for Griffith during which he established a narrator system, which can provide "access to character psychology" and "a coherent diegetic environment" (*D. W. Griffith* 229). While gradually developed editing and other devices of Biograph shorts supported the emerging narrative system, as Gunning observes, the Bulletins that were provided to the audience before the show also influenced the perception and comprehension of the audience. The purpose of the Bulletins was to advertise shorts and, at the same time, to present a clear summary of the plot of the shorts. Usually the Bulletin includes some information on the short such as the release date, studio name and genre, and the greater part is devoted to summarizing the plot of the short. The first line of summary succinctly defines the nature or

significance of the short. For example, the first line of “The Crooked Road: A Road that Leads to Poverty and Woe” writes that “Lack of determination is the real cause of most of the sorrow in this world, and this Biograph subject goes far to prove this fact” (qtd. in Bowser, *Biograph* 301). Detailed summary fills in the gaps in plot, which were partly caused by the rudimentary narrative technique, for audiences which were not familiar with the newly developed visual narratology. The overall tendency toward shorter and shorter Bulletins overlaps with the development of narrative technique, suggesting that the developing visual presentation of the narrative reduces the need to explain the plot with the aid of text from outside the film. By the mid 1910s, the practice of Bulletins became obsolete with the establishment of the narrative system.

The conspicuous characteristic of Griffith’s film beginnings is the use of an introductory title that provides comments on the events of the film and a summary of the film as the Bulletin did. The beginning of a film is one of the most critical moments in terms of its impact on the audience and its function: the first few minutes of a film define the genre of the film, introduce the main characters and background, and let the audience know the overall trajectory of the film. Griffith goes further in his use of introductory intertitles that emulate the epigraph of a book. Griffith utilizes the second intertitle of *The Birth of a Nation*, which is entitled “A Plea for the Art of the Motion Picture,” as his manifesto of film art’s autonomy: “We do not fear censorship, for we have no wish to offend with improprieties or obscenities, but we do demand, as a right, the liberty to show the dark side of wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue—the same liberty that is conceded to the art of the written word—that art to which we owe the

Bible and the works of Shakespeare.” As a reaction to the decision of the Supreme Court that defined film as a non-art, Griffith added this intertitle to *The Birth of a Nation*, which the original release print had not included. In it, Griffith insists that film should have equal rights with “the art of the written word” and identifies *The Birth of a Nation* as one example of his argument. In the next intertitle, Griffith guides the audience’s perception of his work and defines the significance of his work, writing that “[i]f in this work we have conveyed to the mind the ravages of war to the end that war may be held in abhorrence, this effort will not have been in vain.”

If the bulletin that was given to the audience before screening provides the audience with prior knowledge of what will happen on screen, Griffith’s epigraphic titles in advance of the narrative development attempt to guide how the audiences perceive his films. Griffith’s intertitles advise audience members in how to understand his film, prescribe how to perceive the film medium and, moreover, foreground the narrator, whose voice is actualized and materialized in the form of intertitles. The fourth intertitle of *Orphans of the Storm*, for example, connects the French history that is represented in the film with the contemporary American situation, even though the film never mentions America except for the brief appearance of Thomas Jefferson in Paris: after giving a brief summary of the plot, the fourth intertitle writes, “The lesson—the French Revolution RIGHTLY overthrew a BAD government. But we in America should be careful lest we with a GOOD government mistake fanatics for leaders and exchange our decent law and order for Anarchy and Bolshevism.” Griffith as a director literally wants

to direct audience perception as well as his film when he determines the boundary between good and evil and presents the lesson of his work to this audience.

In the same manner, the first three intertitles of *Intolerance* repeat this mode of interpretative guidance, summarizing the theme of his work: “Each story shows how hatred and intolerance, through all the ages, have battled against love and charity. Therefore, you will find our play turning from one of the four stories to another, as the common theme unfolds in each.” In this authorial guide, Griffith defines his work as a “play” that includes “four stories.” Considering that the intertitle of *The Birth of a Nation* argues for the autonomy of the film medium, this word choice questions his own argument. Griffith’s later work *Way Down East* begins with a preacher-like narration that focuses on “the true ideal” and “the heart of man.” Griffith’s didacticism repeats the previous argument and affirms the influence of film in the statement that “if there is anything in this story that brings home to men the suffering caused by our selfishness, perhaps it will not be in vain.”

One of the intertitles in *Way Down East* erases the materiality of the film through abstraction: “Time and space—in the story world of make-believe, Characters—nowhere—yet everywhere; Incidents—never occurred yet always happening.” While the introductory intertitles of Griffith’s works strive to establish the authorial position in the narrative and even to control the perceptions of the audience, those writings also reflect his oscillation between satisfaction with film art and the aspiration to a higher and more abstract form of art.

Another foregrounded function of Griffith's intertitles is commentary on the visual events on the screen. In *The Birth of a Nation*, one of the earlier intertitles presents the narrator's historical perspective when it argues, "The bringing of the African to America planted the first seed of disunion." What follows this intertitle are fragments of visual images that enact the history of conflicts that support this argument. Moreover, some intertitles generate a kind of montage effect through their combination with the following images; the intertitle "hostilities" is followed by the image of a fight between a cat and a dog, alluding to the impending Civil War. Characterization also depends on the commentary intertitles, and the intertitle that introduces a character not only provides some facts regarding that character but also presents a judgment on that character. When Mary Jenkins is introduced for the first time in *Intolerance*, the intertitle describes her as "an unmarried sister of the autocratic industrial overlord," and when Danton is introduced in *Orphans of the Storm*, the intertitles define him as "a struggling lawyer, disgusted with the rule of Kings, afterwards famous as the 'pock-marked Thunderer' of the French Revolution." This introduction of a character is terminal and will be never modified. In this vein, characterization in Griffith's film is achieved not by acting or dialogue but by introductory writing. When the commentary intertitle is used as a relatively effortless way to develop characters and events at the initial stage of narrative and its validity is seldom challenged, the power of written language presides over the visual spectacle.

Emulation of Books on Screen

When “Capitalizing Race Hatred,” an editorial in the *New York Globe*, criticized the racism and the distortion of history in *The Birth of a Nation*, both Griffith and Thomas Dixon replied to that editorial. In his reply, Griffith argues, “Our story states, as plainly as the English language can express a fact, the reasons for this presentation. In our captions we reiterate that the events depicted upon the screen are not meant as a reflection upon any race or people of today” (“Reply” 168). Griffith boasts that the film medium is equivalent to language, but, at the same time, he qualifies his argument with his emphasis on “captions” as the tool to deliver his intention. Griffith’s heavy use of and dependence on intertitles strives to establish a director’s presence that is equivalent to the writer’s authority, interfering with the flow of visual images on screen. In addition to the overwhelming use of intertitles in terms of gravity and quantity, Griffith furthers his attempt to establish an authorial presence with his creation of books on the screen: Griffith borrows the authority of other texts in the form of direct quotation, utilizes some publishing practices, and presents images of books on screen.

Griffith utilizes various types of written text for his films, and many of his works were adaptations: *The Birth of a Nation* from Dixon’s *The Clansman*, *Way Down East* from Charlotte Park’s play and Joseph R. Grismer’s novel with the same title, and *Broken Blossoms* from Thomas Burke’s “The Chink and the Child.” Griffith rarely makes a direct quotation from the original text, affirming his own authorship of his works and separating his works from the original text. Griffith’s films, on the other hand, are full of quotations from other works of literature or history, and the Bible. Those

quotations are sometimes used for developing the narrative shown in the use of the Bible in *Intolerance*, but most of them function as a tool to support an argument of the narrator or authenticate the message on screen.

One of the salient examples of direct quotation is the use of a Walt Whitman poem in *Intolerance*.⁴ *Intolerance* connects four stories under the theme of intolerance throughout the ages: Babylonian, French, modern, and Judean narratives. The line “out of the cradle endlessly rocking” signals the transition between ages and, at the same time, invites speculation on the theme of the film. The beginning of the film presents how this poem works in this film. Right after presenting three authorial intertitles that explain the theme and structure of the film, the poem insert in direct quotation marks is presented, followed by the image of Gish who rocks the cradle in dim light, and then followed by an image of the cover of a book called *Intolerance*, succeeded by the turning pages of that book (Figure 4.1, 4.2). This sequence suggests that the Whitman line functions as the epigraph of the book *Intolerance*, which consequently borrows authority from the poet; this simultaneous combination of text and image visualizes the thematic inspiration of the narrative on screen. However, this dramatization of a line from Whitman that is repeated several times throughout the film freezes narrative time and, at the same time, creates a non-specific time and moment contrary to other parts of the film.

The Bible is presented as the ultimate writing that does not require any explanation or cannot be revised. The Judean part of *Intolerance* utilizes quotations from the Bible as the original text and subsequent images on screen provide illustrations to the

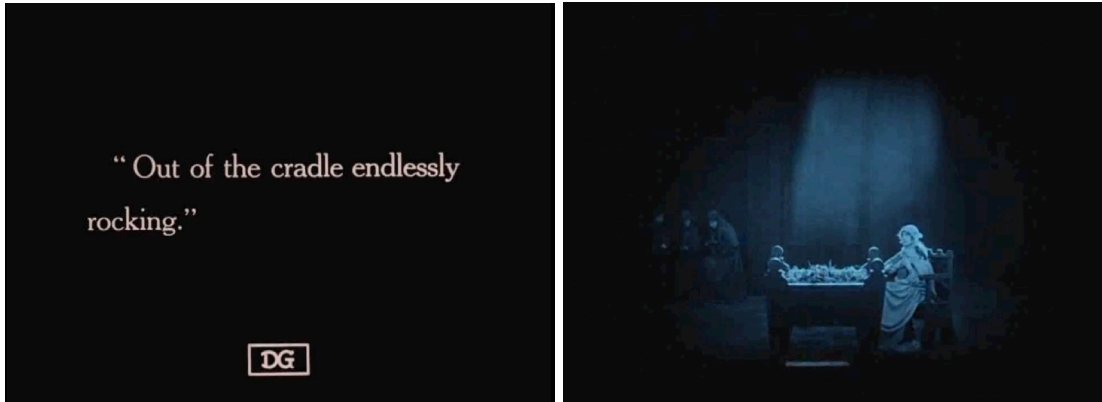


Figure 4.1 The Line from Walt Whitman’s poem and the Gish image (still from *Intolerance*)

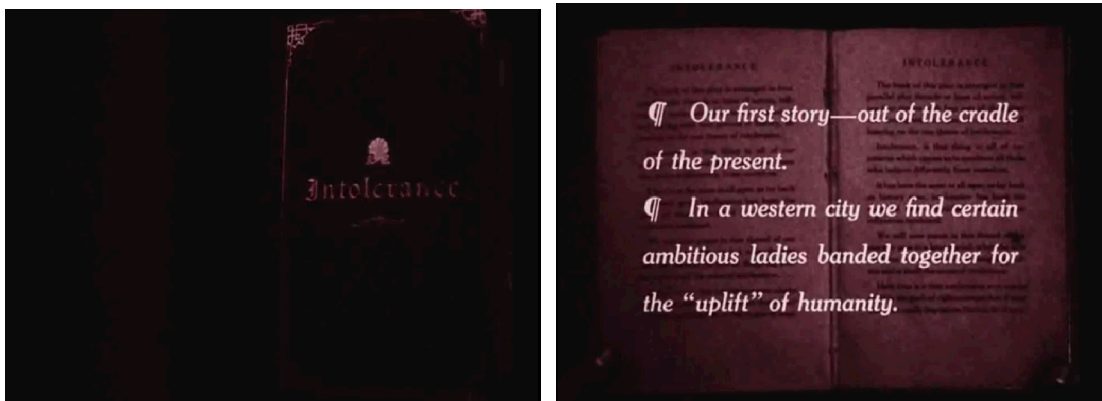


Figure 4.2 The book cover of *Intolerance* and turning page of the book (still from *Intolerance*)

given text. While other parts use the intertitles as a catalyst for the subsequent moving images, the Bible parts focus upon the truthful visualization of the text. The marriage in Cana part gives a good example of this tendency: the first intertitle of this part provides the biblical quotation, followed by the wedding ceremony scene, and then the second intertitle is presented with the illustration-like image (Figure 4.3, 4.4). Compared with other scenes that develop the narrative between intertitles, this scene does not attempt any further revision of the text and, as a consequence, the duration between intertitles is short, as shown in the example of the first scene of the marriage in Cana with a duration of only 40 seconds. As a consequence, the biblical part is the shortest among the four parts in *Intolerance*.

While Griffith pays homage to the Bible as an absolute text in his manner of adapting the biblical passage, *Intolerance* utilizes quotation from the Bible to lend its authority to the narrator's voice. The four parts of *Intolerance* adopt some painted intertitles that accord with the period of the portion of the story such as the French style patterned intertitle for the scenes of the French story (Figure 4.5). One of the intertitles in the modern part, however, uses the biblical tablet themed intertitle exceptionally (Figure 4.6): right after the scene that shows the hypocrite Uplifter opposing the pleasure of the workers as laziness and the following scene showing the worker's dance party, the biblical quotation on the timeliness of everything makes a comment on the events on screen, favoring the workers over the Uplifter's moralism. While other commentaries upon the events or characters are given in the form of narrator's voice in *Intolerance*,

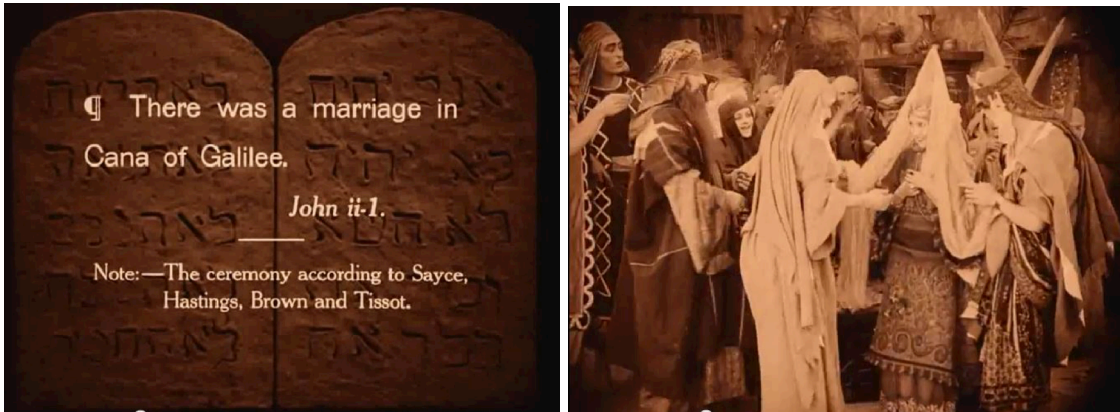


Figure 4.3 The marriage in Cana intertitle and image (still from *Intolerance*)



Figure 4.4 The direct visualization of intertitle (still from *Intolerance*)

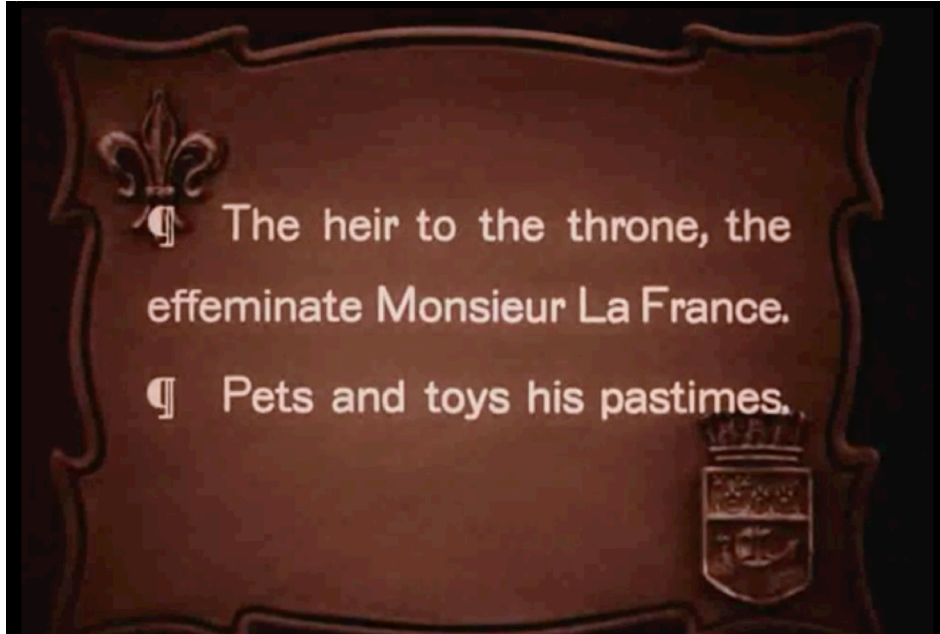


Figure 4.5 Painted intertitle that matches with its period (still from *Intolerance*)

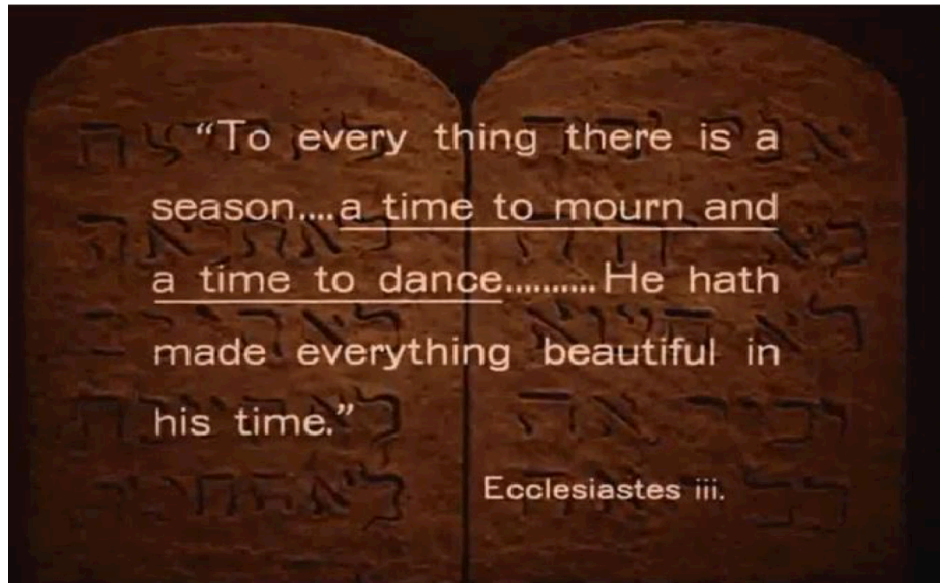


Figure 4.6 Bible intertitle that does not belong to its period (still from *Intolerance*)

this biblical quotation as a commentary voice hints at the connection between biblical voice and narratorial voice of this film.

Both *Intolerance* and *The Birth of a Nation* are loosely based upon historical events and, as a consequence, both films claim that the image on screen is based on history, utilizing direct quotation from historical documentation and history books by scholars. One of the most frequently mentioned quotations is Woodrow Wilson's statement from his book, *The History of the American People*; the second part of *The Birth of a Nation*, titled Reconstruction, presents three long quotations from Wilson's book. Three Wilson quotation intertitles give the impression that the theme of this film reflects the historical and political ideas of Wilson, who was the President at that moment. The "excerpts" from Wilson's book, however, distorted the historical view of Wilson's book due to ellipsis and resulting decontextualization from the original text (Stokes 198-200). Dixon's publicity for *The Birth of a Nation* as a "history written with lightning" demonstrates another example of the film industry's aspiration for the authority.⁵

In addition to the use of direct quotation to establish authority, Griffith's films use some conventions that are used in publishing. *Way Down East*, which is adapted from both a play and a novel, uses the word "chapter" to indicate the lapse of time. Even though the use of "chapter" in this film is not consistent, that is, there are only chapter II and chapter IV, this conspicuous segmentation of the narrative with chapters assumes the format of a book. Another publishing practice is the use of paragraph sign (¶). Almost three-quarters of the intertitles of *Intolerance* utilize the paragraph sign: 226 paragraph

symbols used in 330 intertitles. These paragraph signs lead most explanatory intertitles, with a limited number of exceptions, and both direct quotations and dialogue intertitles do not use this sign. This assiduous use of paragraph signs was exceptional against the contemporary practice of intertitles, and this foregrounds the written nature of the intertitle, affirming the presence of the narrator as the author of the film.

The use of footnotes or endnotes, which is a practice of written texts, also provides a heavy reading experience for the audience and makes visible the presence of the author on screen. Griffith did extensive historical research for his works based on historical events such as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* even though there are several historically erroneous scenes. La Tour observes that after a preview screening of *Intolerance* in 1916, Griffith heavily revised intertitles, and one of the most obvious changes was the addition of notes and quotations to aid the understanding of his audience (83). As footnotes or endnotes provide some extra information that would be a digression from the flow of the main text, “NOTE” in *Intolerance* provides details and facts that have no immediate relevance to narrative of the film. One scene from the Judean part in *Intolerance* presents the intertitle, “The first miracle. The turning of water into wine,” after the visual image of a Jewish celebration, followed by “Note: Wine was deemed a fit offering to God; the drinking of it a part of the Jewish religion.” Or an intertitle, “The first known court of justice in the world,” is followed by “NOTE - Babylonian justice according to the code of Hammurabi, protecting the weak from the strong.” This kind of encyclopedic obsession appears 10 times throughout this film, giving an extra reading experience to the audience.

The note, at the same time, attempts to provide the authenticity of an image on screen through presenting the citation information. The intertitle on the marriage of Cana includes a note saying, “The ceremony according to Sayce, Hastings, Brown and Tissot.” This note endorses the presentation of the wedding ceremony on screen as truthful one, listing the names of famous history book writers and the name of the illustrator of the Bible (Richards 29). Some notes function like explanatory intertitles when they provide the narrator’s judgment on the event or character, as shown in the example of “Note: The Abraham Lincoln of France” right after the introduction of Danton.

If direct quotations and publishing practices function as a subtle hint of bookness, the visual presence of various books on screen make audiences witness the materialized book of Griffith. When the layout of intertitles in *Intolerance* resembles the pages of book, the bookness is realized through the sheer visual image of the page. The content written on the tablets is not important and remains undecipherable. The intertitles in the Babylonian and Judean parts present the pictorial features of language in double layers—an intertitle on hieroglyphic letter as a background.

Griffith’s establishment of his authorship on screen is revealed in two books in *Intolerance*. The second part of *Intolerance*, which is written as “ACT II,” begins with two intertitles describing the lost cylinders of Cyrus: “In this last act the events portrayed in Babylon are according to the recently excavated cylinders of Nabonidus and Cyrus, that relate Babylon’s betrayal by the priests of Bel” and “These cylinders describe the greatest treason of all history, by which a civilization of countless ages was destroyed, and a universal written language (the cuneiform) was made to become an

unknown cypher on the face of the earth.” Again the authenticity of the visual presentation on screen is guaranteed by a historical document, the cylinders of Nabonidus and Cyrus, and, at the same time, the film *Intolerance* is transformed into the revival of the long-lost universal language Lindsay and others in contemporary film industry had dreamed film could become.

While *Intolerance* hints at the dream of universal language through mentioning ancient documents, the ambition of *Intolerance* to create a book on screen is more directly revealed in the image of the book *Intolerance*. The image of the book *Intolerance* is introduced at the very beginning of the film, inviting the audience to read the film rather than to watch the image on the screen. This image of *Intolerance*'s open book pages appears several times throughout the film, and this image of the *Intolerance* book is superimposed on the intertitle that makes a comment on the events on screen and develops the narrative of the film. With the use of the book image accompanying explanatory intertitles, the book of *Intolerance* substitutes for the invisible narrator of this film, suturing together the parallel episodes of *Intolerance* as Whitman's line insert also does. One of the illusions that this image of the *Intolerance* book creates is the presence of the original text, *Intolerance*. Contrary to other films that Griffith adapts from plays or novels, *Intolerance*'s scenario was written by Griffith and its intertitles were created by Anita Loos.⁶ While other works with adapted texts such as *The Birth of a Nation* or *Way Down East* never display the image of the original text nor make a direct quotation from it, Griffith uses the image of book *Intolerance* several times in this film without the original text. The presence of the writer as a narrator of *Intolerance* is

materialized with the image of the book *Intolerance* and the authority of this narrator is affirmed above the writers of other texts that are quoted and consulted.

The presence of an author that is realized through authorial intertitles, book writing practices and finally the visual image of books on screen, however, experiences self-skepticism with its own anxiety about its authority and authenticity. The use of excessive intertitles, on the one hand, is not only the major tool to establish the narrative of the film but also a significant space to explain the importance of visual language. This written element, on the other hand, interferes with the flow of visual images on screen, questioning the emerging possibility of visual language and Griffith's use of tableaux vivants.

The Birth of a Nation utilizes "AN HISTORICAL FACSIMILE" intertitles, which accompany tableaux vivants, four times throughout the film. One of the stylistic strategies in *The Birth of a Nation* is the juxtaposition of historical events with the personal experience of the Stonemans and Camerons that, in the end, justifies the emergence of the KKK as the self-defense of helpless whites against the violence of historical injustice. To foreground the authenticity of historical representation, the phrase "AN HISTORICAL FACSIMILE" claims that the image on the screen is a faithful reproduction of what really happened in the past: from "AN HISTORICAL FACSIMILE of the President's Executive Office on that occasion, after Nicolay and Hay in 'Lincoln, A History'" to "AN HISTORICAL FACSIMILE of the State House of Representatives of South Carolina as it was in 1870. After a Photograph by 'The Columbia State.'" "

In an article for *The Editor*, Griffith explores his dream of film as a teaching tool for history, saying that film in the future will make people “actually see what happened” without the intervention of the opinions of the historian (qtd. in Lang 4). The historical facsimile intertitles, however, provide a statement on film contradictory to Griffith’s historiography, generating the hierarchy between written history and the facsimile image; even though the image attempts to be a more authentic representation of real events, this cannot be the original and would remain, at best, a faithful copy of the original. Considering that history itself is the record of a past event and is mediated with linguistic representation, the intertitle suggests that the image on screen is the adaptation of the representation, or the visualization of the written text. Moreover, as Karl Brown, Griffith’s cinematographer for *The Birth of a Nation*, mentioned that historical facsimile scene is “an exact replica of an engraving Griffith was holding in his hand,” the visual image on screen came to be the copy of the copy when it comes “after” an engraving or a photograph about that event (qtd. in Jesionowski 143).

In a similar way, when the palace of Belshazzar is first introduced in *Intolerance*, this visual spectacle accompanies a “NOTE,” which observes, “*Replica* of Babylon’s encircling walls, 300 feet in height, and broad enough for the passing of chariots” (italics mine). Both “replica” and “facsimile” affirm the distance between reality and representation, threatening the claim on the verisimilitude of a film. In the same manner, one scene from *Orphans of Storm* presents the image of an aristocrat who kills a poor child with his horse before the intertitle, “an historical incident,” which the authenticity of the event depends on. In this attempt to borrow authority from history, Griffith seems

to reveal his aspiration to create a more authentic historical representation, but the discrepancy between the original and the copy hinders the image claiming its autonomy.

The historical facsimile scene in *The Birth of a Nation*, in addition, is followed by a short tableau vivant moment. Lee's surrender scene demonstrates how tableaux vivants work in this film. After the intertitle acknowledges that this scene is a historical facsimile, the tableau vivant of that moment is presented (Figure 4.7, 4.8). The audience can easily perceive that the still image on screen is not a photograph due to subtle movement such as the smoke from the pipe, but there is a freeze-frame for 6 seconds, followed by movement of characters on screen. This progress from real events to writing, then to a photographic still and finally to a moving image foregrounds how the moving image on the screen imitates reality and how far the image is from originality.

The presence of tableaux vivants, moreover, defines the film's status in contemporary cultural strata and hints at Griffith's anxiety as the author on screen. The tableau vivant has been loved and performed throughout western cultural history because it combines stasis and movement, and especially because it can arouse excitement through transformation from the inanimate to the animate. Griffith's contemporary stage enjoyed the popularity of tableaux vivants and some early film pioneers such Georges Méliès loved to use the tableau vivant in their films (Adriaensens 47). The hybridity of tableaux vivants in terms of genres and form can be applied to its cultural status: tableaux vivants combine "high and lowbrow art in popular entertainment" and are

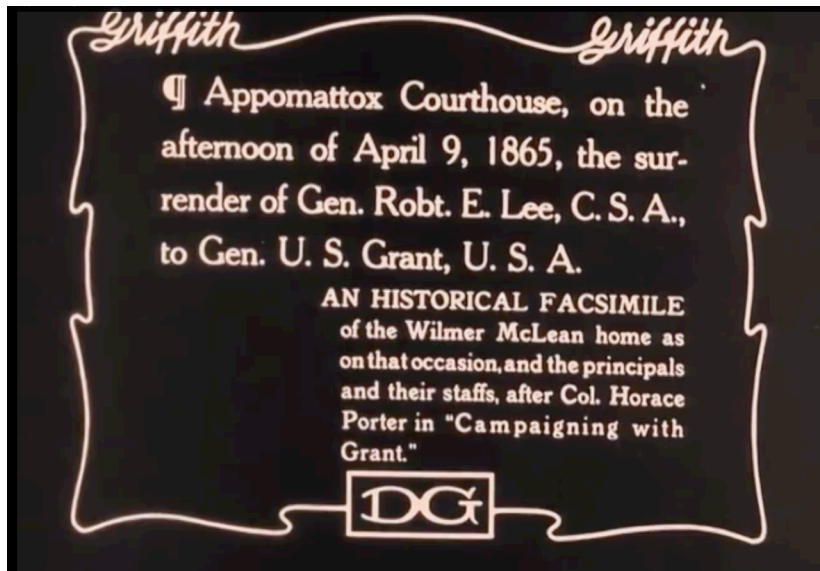


Figure 4.7 Historical Facsimile intertitle for Lee's surrender scene (still from *The Birth of a Nation*)



Figure 4.8 Tableaux Vivant of Lee's surrender (still from *The Birth of a Nation*)

“inherently intermedial” (Adriaenssens 62). While the earlier silent films utilize the tableau vivant for its shock value, Griffith places the tableau vivant as his art manifesto when he includes four tableaux vivants for significant moments in *The Birth of a Nation* and reveals the hierarchy of the image on screen and historical text in terms of its originality.

In his interview with *Daily Express* in 1935, Griffith cynically comments that the film is not an art but “a beautiful business,” and added that “I haven’t made a film myself that can endure. Words, painting, sculpture last” (qtd. in “Film Master” 188). Griffith believes that film will be the universal language of the future, strives to be the author on screen with his screen, but he did not succeed in persuading himself to accept a cultural hierarchy in which the film is on top.

Notes

¹ As Gunning observes, *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech* performs publicity for *The Birth of Nation* as well as his upcoming film, *Intolerance* and, at the same time, provides “an apologia for the racism of *The Birth of a Nation*” (137).

² Leaders were also called captions or subtitles and recent film scholars use expository titles, which foreground their function.

³ Even though, in the Hollywood system, postproduction including insertion of intertitles frequently was beyond the director’s control, Griffith’s independent status and power to control at all stages of film production (Bordwell 139) suggest the strong possibility that Griffith could control the use and layout of intertitles. Recent scholars on the silent films also confirm Griffith’s control over most every step of film production.

⁴ *Intolerance* does not credit this line, “out of the cradle endless rocking,” to Walt Whitman.

⁵ This appreciation of *The Birth of a Nation* as “history written with lightning” has been widely circulated as Wilson’s but historians dispute this legend, hinting at Dixon’s role in publicizing this.

⁶ While only Griffith and Loos were officially credited as writers, Hettie Grey Baker, Tod Browning and Mary H. O’Connor were mentioned as involved in the intertitle writing by film historians.

CHAPTER V
“YOURS BUT NO MORE BUSTER”:
RIVALRY BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND BODY
IN BUSTER KEATON’S FILMS

In his interview with Studs Terkel in 1960, Buster Keaton shared his thoughts on the function of language in film. He described the inevitable use of intertitles as “slapping subtitles” into dialogue sequences (Terkel 108) but, at the same time, explained that “we eliminated subtitles just as fast as we could if we could possibly tell it in action” (109). Keaton repeated his preference for action over language when he boasted of his contests with Charlie Chaplin on “who could do the feature film with the least amount of subtitles” (Terkel 109). Keaton provided a relatively accurate estimate of the average number of intertitles in the silent films of his contemporaries—250—and proudly announced that his greatest number was 56 and lowest, 23. Compared to Griffith’s attempt to maximize the use of intertitles in his films, Keaton’s films strive to minimize the intervention of intertitles and glorify “telling in action” on screen. The pure visual spectacle both in body movement and “the outer world of American mechanical civilization” is both the major theme of Keaton’s movies and the essential medium of his message (Sklar 120). In his pursuit of pure visuality, Keaton rather than Griffith is the one who realizes the dream of a universal language, that is, “something more all-pervading, yet more highly wrought, than any written language” (Lindsay 211).

Keaton's work, which attracts critics with different academic interests, is explored from seemingly contradictory perspectives. According to Robert Knopf, Keaton scholarship can be distinctly divided into three views of Keaton: "a knockabout comedian from vaudeville who successfully adapted his act to silent films; an unintentional surrealist; or one of the earliest and finest directors of classical Hollywood cinema" (3). The criticism that views Keaton as an exemplar of classical Hollywood cinema tends to focus on "narrative causality" in his films and places *The General* and *Our Hospitality* above his other films because of their "symmetry and the integration of gags into the narrative" (Knopf 5). On the other hand, criticism that focuses upon the vaudeville tradition in Keaton and the surrealist aspects of his work praise Keaton's subversive themes and technique such as "the double meaning of objects and words, verbal and visual puns, the juxtaposition of two disparate images, the animation of inanimate objects and the disruption of narrative continuity, time and space" (Knopf 17).

My focus is the interaction with text on screen in Keaton's films. This chapter suggests that both the subversion in Keaton's shorts and the conformity in his feature films are the byproducts of reaction and counteraction to the governing textual elements such as intertitles and inserts. In terms of the relationship between visuality and text explored in the previous chapters, Keaton can be located on the opposite side of Griffith in his challenging attitude to the text and his endeavor to express his themes through the use of his body. The endings and morals of Keaton's features, at the same time frequently affirm the authority, especially the force of text, and restore the established system, making the subversion and challenge a mere detour.

The first section of this chapter locates Keaton amid cultural changes such as the decline of vaudeville and the emergence of narrative films as well as the transition from short films to feature-length films. I define slapstick, one of the vaudevillian traits, as a genre of body performance and explore the subversion in Keaton's early works. I examine how Keaton is torn between the film industry's demand for narrative in the process of transition from shorts to features and the generic convention of comedy that places non-verbal expression over verbal articulation.

The second section explores how Keaton's shorts succeed in the vaudeville tradition in terms of their subversion and challenge to established authority. Keaton's mastery of his body as the subject of the narrative and means of narration characterizes his shorts. His shorts, with their emphasis on slapstick, effectively minimize the intervention of the intertitle and, moreover, freely deny and resist the influence of language stylistically and thematically, and explore the visual image's potential to serve as language. The use of textual inserts as a diegetic element, in this vein, is preferred to the use of intertitles as a non-diegetic intervention from an invisible narrator in Keaton's shorts.

The third section follows Keaton's transition to features, in which Keaton attempts to subvert the authority of language but ends by celebrating that authority. Keaton succeeds in minimizing the dependence upon intertitles for the development of narrative in his films, utilizing on-screen inserts as less interruptive textual elements compared to the intertitle. Even this diegetic textual element on screen, however, competes with Keaton's body to claim its function as the major medium of

communication. Keaton's feature length films put his body in the center of comedy as he did in his shorts, but various types of text on screen such as letters, signs, and books play a critical role in developing narrative. While Keaton does not foreground the persona of an authoritative narrator/writer in the film as does D. W. Griffith,¹ Keaton's feature-length films hint at a conflict between vaudevillian subversion of the established order and conformity to the system, which gradually moves toward the restoration of order.

Language of Body to Language of Word

Keaton's career experienced several rapid shifts in the entertainment industry: the transition from stage to screen and the transition from shorts to features. As a member of a family vaudeville company, Keaton was introduced to the stage as early as age three and soon played an important role in *The Three Keatons*. In 1917, Keaton partnered with Roscoe Arbuckle and made a smooth transition from vaudeville to Hollywood. Their collaboration produced 14 successful shorts until Arbuckle's career ended abruptly in 1921 when he was accused of the murder of Virginia Rappe. Early in the 1920s, Keaton made a move to feature-length films as an actor and director.

Keaton's transition from vaudeville comedian to Hollywood director/star means his films encompass both vaudeville tradition and the then-emerging Hollywood narrative grammar. To remain current, Keaton made a mostly-successful effort to adopt new film technology. "Where other comics were content to record their own performances on film, Keaton involves the camera (and all other technical elements of the cinema) as a key participant, not just an observer" (Kozarski 301). Keaton's

relationship with the camera is exemplified in *The Cameraman* (1928), which deals with the protagonist's transition from tintype photographer to news cameraman. Buster, the protagonist, ends up mastering film camera technology and wins his love while the film foregrounds the presence of the camera as a key factor in the narrative trajectory and slapstick.²

The mastery of technology, especially that of the camera, however, was not the sole challenge to Keaton in film production. Keaton was conscious of the importance of narrative from the beginning of his screen career, as Rudi Blesh, his biographer, attests:

Buster had just been questioning the appropriateness of a gag. "It doesn't seem to fit our story," he had said. "Story?" Arbuckle's voice had risen like a siren on the word. Buster had not been convinced. At that moment, it had reminded him of a similar remark that his father had made years before in a Jersey City nickelodeon... "Hell, they are just as happy with a magic lantern" (140)

While Arbuckle and Keaton's father dwelt in the realm of vaudeville and the optical illusions made by the "magic lantern," Keaton wanted to add "a story" to his work, and his transition to features makes that mission more urgent.

The film industry also required longer works from the earliest stage of its development. In "A Plea for the Long Film," an article written in 1911 for *The Bioscope*, Stanford Cook argued for the need for "an hour or two's entertainment" instead of the short variety. Cook criticized short films for their "tame and shallow" plots and argued that "the quality of the play" in a longer work is damaged by "excessive compression" in

short films. Concerned about losing film audiences due to their boredom with short films, which had already become cliché, Cook dreamed of “the advent of the long film,” which was realized almost one decade later.

When Keaton decided to move to feature length films in 1923, it was “a period when the demand for narrative marked the end to the tradition of pure slapstick exemplified in Mack Sennett’s Keystone comedies and a forsaking of a cinema of pure energetics, of gags piled one atop the other, each upping the ante, exponentially increasing the pace, violence, and preposterousness of what had come before” (Trahair 308). The transition from short to feature-length film does not mean a mere extension of screening time. In his autobiographical sketch, “Why I Never Smile,” Keaton affirms “the difference between shooting two-reelers and features” and argues, “Where audiences would tolerate the absurd, the impossible, and the whimsical in the shorts, in the features they demanded logical continuity” (qtd. in Rapf 83).

Keaton’s first feature attempt as a director, *The Three Ages* (1923), however, is “essentially three two-reelers spliced together to give the illusion of being a full-length feature” (Dardis 97), as Keaton bluntly admits. Keaton, as a consequence, collaborated with directors and writers to “be story-conscious because we couldn’t tell any far-fetched stories” (Brownlow 176). For example, “Humorists All at Sea,” a *Los Angeles Times* article, observed how the scenario for *The Navigator* was written. After indicating that the status of the writers was as high as that of the star of the film, this article provided a detailed explanation of the collaboration of Keaton and his writers, Clyde Bruckman, Jean Havez, and Joseph Mitchell:

For two whole days, the gag men shot possibilities at each other and at Buster while they built up his story... At the end of a week of this sort of thing, the stenographer had more than 400 pages of single-spaced gag ideas. These ideas were whipped into story form by Buster and his henchmen in several more days of work. Only the funniest of the gags and only those which best fitted into the story were retained (“Humorists”).

Using the actual ship as material for the scenario, Keaton and his crews created the narrative and the gag ideas simultaneously, and then Keaton and his writers worked on tightening the narrative. The main emphasis, however, is on the gags, not the narrative: Keaton revealed in his interview with Christopher Bishop in 1958 that he asked his dramatic directors to mend some scenes that were “legitimate and not done in a comedy way” (Rapf 57). In the process of constant readjustment of narrative and comedy, Keaton wanted to keep “the funniest of the gags” and did not want the scenes designed to aid the narrative development, i.e. the “legitimate” parts, to overwhelm the gist of his gags.

While Keaton’s vaudevillian background makes him foreground his performance and the visual spectacle of his physical agility, he is keenly aware of the necessity of linguistic articulation and the existence of a narrator/writer who should control the narrative. While Keaton was comfortable collaborating with writers and directors from the very beginning of his film career, and co-directors/writers such as Jack Blystone in *Our Hospitality* and Donald Crisp in *The Navigator* are said to have had little influence

on the production of Keaton films,³ the physicality of his body on screen claims its status as the main medium of the comic message, competing with the comedy of words.

Keaton, under the influence of his vaudeville lineage, emphasized slapstick comedy and claimed his narratorship through his body. In his interview with Christopher Bishop in 1958, Keaton says, “The only thing we did in laying out our material was to deliberately look for action laughs, no dialogue laughs. That has always been my fight with the brass. There were all these writers, and all these writers could think about was funny sayings and puns. I’d try to fight those down” (qtd. in Rapf 53). To Keaton, narrative is naturally connected to the presence of a narrator and the function of words on screen. While Keaton reluctantly embraced the narrative writer and logical narratives for his features, he wanted to maintain his status as the main articulator of his comedy. Tom Dardis finds the extreme case of this tendency in *The Playhouse* (1921), which is defined as an “obliquely autobiographical film” and is related to a jingle from Keaton’s vaudeville times, that is, “Little Buster Keaton is a whole show within himself; he’s a regular theater” (72).

Keaton was not alone in his discomfort with the use of words on screen. Keaton’s contemporary film critics who attempted to place the visuality of cinema over traditional language systems proposed that film expressed its meaning only with images. Knopf observes that Keaton’s films attracted surrealists such as Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, among others, because of his films’ disruption of narrative and blending of dream and reality (112-133). Marc Silberman describes German expressionist cinema as “a specific response to the modernist crisis of language” (41) and explores the

connection between the universal language discourse and the emphasis on physiognomy in early-twentieth-century Germany (48). Surrealists' fascination with Keaton films can also be connected to their consciousness of the limitations of language and their resistance to linguistic systems.

The generic conventions of comedy, furthermore, are related to a reconsideration of the communicative function of language and the importance of the language of the body over that of words. Comedy as a genre frequently questions the authority of language and proposes subversion of convention, revealing how the established system lacks flexibility. The actor's physical performance, instead of verbal articulation, conveys the message of his comic works and achieves his aim to trigger laughter. In his article observing the similarities between avant-garde art and comedy films, from Keaton's films to more recent ones, William Verrone concludes that avant-garde artists have utilized comic conventions to explore "the notions of subversion, incongruity, irrationality and implausibility"(725).

The subversiveness of the comedy genre can also be related to its position in cultural hierarchies. During the early twentieth century, the film industry did not have a high cultural status. Comedy, especially slapstick, had a particularly low status. Contrary to previous convention, early twentieth-century theater witnessed a separation between "drama and such elements as slapstick, acrobatics and equestrian acts," and those non-dramatic elements were developed into distinct genres that were not considered "legitimate plays" (Levine 76). Griffith's gradual abandonment of and disrespect for comedy during his Biograph shorts period parallels his aspirations for film as highbrow

art (*Biograph* x). Comedy, especially comedy that depends on physical performance, was considered a lowbrow genre, but at the same time, had some freedom from the governing ideology.

Keaton's comedy celebrates the moment of physical performance, when the flow of narrative is halted for the sake of the sheer visual spectacle of slapstick. The inevitable textual elements such as intertitles and inserts that aid the development of narrative sometimes compete for the physical center of the screen. In her observation of the change in the concept of voice during the transition from silent film to sound film, Jessica Taylor indicates that the synchronization of image and sound means the reattachment of voice to "its owner's physical presence" (Taylor 3). Conversely, the silent film practice of the intertitle can be viewed as the separation of voice from its body. In the case of dialogue intertitles, the physical presence of a talking character and the physical presence of the intertitle occupy two different physical spaces, i.e. the image of the speaker and the intertitle card. In the case of expository intertitles, moreover, the narration written on the intertitle creates the presence of an invisible narrator and suggests another layer of space, assuming the hierarchy between the narrator who has an omniscient view of the plot and the character who plays a restricted role in developing plot.

The textual elements on screen in various forms such as letters, signs, memoranda, and newspaper articles, which can be roughly termed inserts, were more welcome than intertitles in Keaton's films. The preference for insert over intertitle for advancing narrative was a recommended practice during the very early stage of silent

film. David Bordwell observes that “placing verbal narration within the story space” is preferred to the overt narration of intertitles, especially expository intertitles (188-189). Keaton’s preference for inserts over intertitles can be viewed as preference for diegetic elements over non-diegetic elements, but characters in Keaton’s shorts express discomfort with the presence of inserts as an attempt to subvert the meaning of that text.

Challenge to the Unreliable Language of Words in Keaton’s Shorts

Keaton’s collaboration with Arbuckle produced a series of shorts that showcased Keaton’s acrobatic slapstick and adapted vaudeville tradition to the screen. The most conspicuous examples of Keaton’s vaudevillian traits are found in *Back Stage* (1919)⁴ and *The Playhouse*, two shorts that focus on the possibility of a language of the body and the legacy of vaudeville. Henry Jenkins, who explores the vaudeville tradition in American film, compares *Back Stage* and *The Playhouse* with *Sherlock Jr.* and concludes that *Sherlock Jr.* is the most conservative of them because of “the greatest conformity to plot logic and narrative progress” (63). In addition to their freedom from narrative binding, both *Back Stage* and *The Playhouse* openly confront the authority of language, especially written language, and reveal how ineffective language is as a communicative tool.

Back Stage captures what vaudeville is and creates doubly the world of vaudeville by depicting both the stage and the backstage. The vaudeville stage can be defined by two characteristics in this film—discontinuity and subversion. The show in this short begins with an operetta, *The Falling Reign*, and then moves to *A Snowflake*

Serenade; Buster can freely change his stage gender from female to male. In this topsy-turvy world, even though the wall collapses, the show must go on. The boundary between reality and illusion easily collapses like the falling wall, and nothing is fixed and stable. In *Back Stage*, central targets that the slapstick mocks are language and sign.

One of the comic situations in *Back Stage* uses a bill as a prop: while Arbuckle attempts to paste a new bill, a kid keeps interfering with his efforts. The completion of the bill posting is repeatedly delayed and the partial content that can be glimpsed does not present accurate information about the show. When Arbuckle finally completes the poster pasting, the content is finally revealed: “You must not Miss / Gertrude McSkinnny / Famous star who will / play / The Little Laundress / First time Here / Tomorrow at 2 p.m.” However, just a few seconds after the presentation of this information, the message of bill is changed into an obscene one when half of the bill becomes obscured by the door: “Miss / Skinnny / will / undress / Here/ at 2 p.m.”(Figure 5.1). The realization of the content or presentation of written language is first deferred and then its significance is ridiculed and distorted.

The bill is not the only sign in *Back Stage* that is unstable and challenged. In the backstage area, a star sign is used to signify who the star is and both a magician and the strong man demand to have stars on their doors. Buster’s solution is to shift the star from one room to the other. Arbuckle then moves the star to express his love for the assistant of the strong man, so the star shifts from the male star to the female beloved. Moreover, its position is not fixed. The backstage area is full of signs such as “Punch the Clock” and “For Fire Only.” These signs remain mere signs in *Back Stage* but *The Playhouse*

utilizes them at the center of gags. *The Playhouse* more overtly challenges the significance of written language, questioning the link between the sign and meaning. The backstage sign that appears in *Back Stage* is used to evoke laughter. Buster punches the clock with his fist, responding to the sign, “Punch Clock” (Figure 5.2). Later, Keaton uses the axe to cut a burning mustache, following the sign, “For Fire Only.” In both cases, Buster acts on the signs in their very literal meaning, and with this strict interpretation and understanding, the limitations of language and the arbitrary link between meaning and sign are demonstrated.

Two more signs—“Keep out of the Entrance” and “No Smoking on the Stage”—are also presented as absurd and vague. When *The Playhouse* repeats the collapse between illusion and reality and the challenge to the significance of signs, it makes the audience conscious of the real significance of those signs, causing them to wonder where the stage is. The audience is thus trapped in the blurred boundary between stage and reality and cannot find the real “entrance” to the real “stage.” In addition, *The Playhouse* echoes *Back Stage*’s presentation of language as an unstable and floating medium. When Buster is puzzled by twins and assumes that he suffers from double vision because of alcohol, he rushes to his room and writes, “I resolve never to drink any more.” Yet, when Buster comes to realize that they are twins and that he did not experience double vision, he continues to write, adding, “but just as much.” The significance of the sentence is not fixed and the meaning can be altered endlessly by adding or deleting.

Keaton continues to challenge language by using letter inserts to foreground the discrepancy between image and language. Among various types of insert, letters are



Figure 5.1 Distorted bill and manipulation of significance (still from *Back Stage*)



Figure 5.2 Realization of literal meaning (still from *The Playhouse*)

widely welcomed as serving the development of narrative: letters can economically explain what happened and summarize important information for the story. In an article in a trade publication, Epes Winthrop Sargent encourages the use of letter inserts over intertitles because “they are part of the action” (*Moving Picture World* 12 August 1911, qtd. in Bowser 142). While the letter insert is generally considered to reinforce and assist narrative flow as a diegetic element, Keaton’s letter inserts subvert the typical design of the letter insert and demonstrate the discrepancy between language and image on the screen.

In his 1922 short, *Daydreams*, Keaton experiments with the subversive possibility of the use of letter inserts. *Daydreams* is peculiar in that it utilizes four letter inserts as a kind of introduction to the protagonist’s four activities in the city: Buster goes to the city to “test [his] ability” to support his Beloved, and he sends her a series of letters to inform her of what he is doing. Buster’s first letter reads, “My darling, I’m working at a hospital where I look after 200 patients. I perform operations that you could not imagine.”⁵ With this letter, Beloved imagines what Buster is doing and her status as a revered doctor’s wife, which is presented in still photography. Yet, the next sequence reveals the reality of Buster’s labor as the assistant in the Dr. Richard M. Scott Dog and Cat Hospital: Buster looks after “200” dog and cat “patients” in an animal “hospital.” The second letter reads, “Dearest, owing to a minor accident, I have been forced to abandon my work at the hospital, I am now on Wall Street, where I have been cleaning up in a big way.” While Beloved again misinterprets the letter and imagines Buster as a stockbroker (Figure 5.3), the next shot presents Buster “cleaning up” trash on Wall

Street (Figure 5.3). In his third letter, Buster writes, “Dearest, I’m through my cleaning up on Wall Street. I have decided to explore my artistic gifts, and tonight I am making my theatrical debut.” Contrary to Beloved’s image of Buster in the role of Hamlet, Buster plays a trivial part as one of the chorus and even fails to perform appropriately in that minor role. The last letter presents the most ironic situation; it reads, “Dearest, the crowd was enthusiastic for my performance, but the theatre does not suit me. I am now in the position of having the police follow my every step.” The reality of Buster who is chased by the police (Figure 5.4) gives sharp contrast to Beloved’s photographic imagination of Buster as a police chief (Figure 5.4). The four letter inserts use the same mechanism to evoke the laughter of the audience—the discrepancy between what is written and what is real. Buster does not intend to manipulate Beloved’s comprehension, and his letters actually describe what he does: Buster works in “the hospital,” “clean[s] up” the street, and “[has] the police follow [his] every step.” Buster’s letters can describe both the photographic stills that Beloved imagines based upon Buster’s letters and the reality of Buster. Rather, the problem lies in the inadequacy of language in capturing or representing reality. Moreover, the contrast between the still images generated by reading the letters and the moving image as reality hints at the limitations of language and its inability to capture an ever-changing and dynamic reality. Furthermore, it suggests a hierarchy among writing, still images, and moving images in terms of truthfulness to reality.



Figure 5.3 Discrepancy between the literal meaning and reality of “cleaning up on Wall Street” (still from *Daydreams*)



Figure 5.4 Discrepancy between the literal meaning and reality of “having the police follow my every step” (still from *Daydreams*)

While *Daydreams* explores language's malfunction in representation, *Neighbors* (1921) shows language's failure to communicate through the use of notes. As the original title, *Mailbox*, implies, the narrative of *Neighbors* begins with the correspondence between two lovers, Buster and The Girl. Because of the fence between them and their parents' opposition, they must express their feelings in notes exchanged through a tiny hole. When Buster responds, "I love you 2," their note is intercepted by The Girl's father, Pa K, and is returned to Buster's side. When Buster's father, Mr. Joe, reads the note, he believes that the recipient of the love note is his wife and that the note is evidence of infidelity between his wife and Pa K. When Mr. Joe returns the note to The Girl's side, a similar misunderstanding happens; Ma K reads the note and is upset because she thinks Mrs. Joe has seduced her husband. What the letter brings about is increased conflict between two families and testimony to two affectionless marriages. The confusion over the identities of the recipients hinders appropriate communication, and the letter is circulated without a fixed or accurate message.

While *Daydreams* and *Neighbors* question the functions of language by focusing on one prop, a letter, Keaton's first independent two-reel, *One Week* (1920), and his last short, *The Love Nest* (1923), explore the instability of language as a system and warn of the danger that you may face if you follow written messages blindly. The event in *One Week* arises from "a house and lot no. 99" that Buster receives from his Uncle Mike as a wedding gift. The disaster experienced by the newlywed couple is the result of wrong signs: the lot number sign reading 99 and the numbers on boxes of materials to direct the assembly of the house. When the house is delivered, it comes with instructions from the

Portable House Company: “Directions: To give this house a snappy appearance, put it up according to the numbers on the boxes.” Buster’s rival, Handy Hank, however, changes the numbers on boxes with paint and, as a result, box 3 becomes box 8 and box 1 becomes box 4. The consequence of this change is a surreal house: the entrance of the house is located on the second story, and the kitchen is located outside of the house (Figure 5.5). There are also other typical Keaton disasters: the wall falls down on Buster; a storm makes the house revolve; the piano sinks into the floor.

The obvious logic in this event is that the wrong signs/numbers cause all this topsyturvydom: the couple is the victim of the manipulation of signs and malfunctioning signs that cannot signify properly. The final blow to the couple also comes with a wrong sign: on the sixth day, a man turns the lot number sign 99 to 66 and warns them to find the “right” lot. On the last day, Sunday, the couple attempts to relocate their house to lot 99 and, on the way, a train crashes into the house. Buster’s last act is leaving the construction directions on the ruins of their house (Figure 5.6), thus signifying his abandonment of language.

While Keaton’s first two-reel explores the danger embedded in the linguistic system, his last short, *The Love Nest*, speculates on the instability of language and challenges its regulatory authority. From *The Boat* (1921) to his last independent feature, *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), the names of the vessels in Keaton’s films are notable: Damfino in *The Boat*, The Navigator in *The Navigator*, and Stonewall Jackson in *Steamboat Bill Jr.* Damfino is one of the strangest and in some sense failed namings: when Buster meets the storm on the sea, he sends an “SOS,” and the telegrapher asks,



Figure 5.5 Topsy-turvy house made with wrong directions (still from *One Week*)



Figure 5.6 Abandonment of wrong directions (still from *One Week*)

“Who is it?”; when Buster responds “Damfino,” the furious telegrapher replies “Neither do I.” At the end of the film, when Buster’s wife asks, “Where are we?” his lip movements read “Damfino” again. Damfino can be read as a pun on “damned fine,” which means in good shape, which presents an ironic appellation for a boat that is anything but fine. It might also be interpreted as the elision of “Damned if I know,” which successfully represents Buster’s confusion and embarrassment, but fails to communicate his actual location.

The Love Nest also explores the naming joke with the names of ships: in this film, there are three boats—the *Cupid*, the *Love Nest*, and the *Little Love Nest*. The three names are connected to the heartbroken Buster who is refused by his fiancée: he wants to find Cupid to restore his love and needs a love nest to settle down with his lover. However, the ships’ roles do not match their names: The *Cupid* takes Buster to a threatening captain instead of a lover, and the *Love Nest* is a whaling ship. The failure of naming, in this film, leads to the annihilation of existence. When Buster finds himself in his own boat, the *Cupid*, after he awakes from a dream on the *Love Nest*, the existence of the *Love Nest* and the *Little Love Nest* becomes nullified. Moreover, the *Cupid* does not go anywhere because it is tied to the pier, which again suggests that this ship exists not for real operations but for its metaphorical significance. The beginning of *The Love Nest* already introduces the problem of naming and connects the name with existence. In Buster’s letter to his fiancée, a “treacherous viper,” he ends his letter writing, “yours but no more Buster.” What he attempts to articulate is the termination of his relationship

with his fiancée, but he becomes “no more Buster,” rejecting his own name that cannot function properly.

At the end of *Daydreams*, Buster’s body is delivered to his Beloved (Figure 5.7). Buster has become “a flesh-and-blood letter” after several misinterpretations of previous letters (Oldham 286). Buster literally substitutes himself for malfunctioning letters and presents himself as a physical reality to his Beloved. Most of the subversions in Keaton’s shorts are unintentional on the part of the characters and aim at the authority of language. Buster’s low economic status causes his hardship and subversion of social order as shown in the case of *Daydreams*, in which he moves downward with his four



Figure 5.7 Flesh-and-blood letter delivered to Buster’s Beloved by postman (still from *Daydreams*)

successive failures. The rebellion, which fails in most cases, brings a fatal ending to Buster: the newlywed couple in *One Week* who follow wrong signs abandon their sole property as well as malfunctioning language and become homeless in the end. While Keaton's shorts are full of images that question the power of language and engage in narrative developments that resist the regulation of language, his feature-length films conform to the authority of language, frequently celebrating the protagonist's social success and economic elevation.⁶

Restoration of the Authority of Language in Keaton's Features

In his feature-length films, Keaton continues to utilize the discrepancy between image and intertitle for comic effect. For example, in *Our Hospitality*, when Willie McKay says, "Now, we're running smoothly," it turns out that the train is out of track. Such subversion, however, is confined to the development of minute parts of gags; the resistance to language does not prevail throughout whole films.

One of the most conspicuous changes in Keaton's feature films is his use of intertitles for plot development. In his shorts, Keaton refrains from using intertitles if possible and rarely uses intertitles for direct narration; overall, he uses at most 15 intertitles and most of them are for dialogue. Keaton's earliest features, however, *Our Hospitality*, *Sherlock Jr.*, and *The Navigator*, begin with introductory intertitles. *Our Hospitality* presents five successive intertitles at the very beginning of film: "The Prologue" (intertitle 1), "Once upon a time in certain sections of the United States there were feuds that ran from generation to generation" (intertitle 2), "Men of one family

grew up killing men of another family for no other reason except that their fathers had done so” (intertitle 3), “Our story concerns the old-time feud between the Canfield and McKay families as it existed about the year 1810” (intertitle 4), “The humble home of John McKay - the last of his line - except his infant son” (intertitle 5). Moreover, among the total 56 intertitles, 37 are used for dialogue and the rest narrate or comment on the action.⁷

These five intertitles introduce the character into the story and cue the beginning of the narrative. While Keaton’s shorts focus on performance and visual entertainment, feature films require narrative continuity in addition to visual spectacle to hold the audience’s attention. With this non-diegetic introduction, Keaton assumes a kind of authorial or narrative voice, and the use of the phrases “The Prologue” and “The Story” invites audiences to read the film. Moreover, one of the intertitles asserts its historical authenticity as do D. W. Griffith’s notes in *The Birth of Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916), observing, “NOTE - Broadway and Forty-Second Street as it was in 1830. From an old print.” While Keaton’s shorts question how language can convey the message and elevate the visual image and slapstick, this labeling of the image on the screen reverses the previous assumption of the image’s supremacy over language. The visual image of the street on screen is considered as insufficient, and the linguistic explanation is welcomed to bestow authority upon the image.

Sherlock Jr. also utilizes introductory intertitles that comment on the narrative and characters: “There is an old proverb which says: Don’t try to do two things at once and expect to do justice to both” (intertitle 1). “This is the story of a boy who tried it.

While employed as a moving picture operator in a small town theater he was also studying to be a detective” (intertitle 2). Among a total of 30 intertitles, 21 are used for dialogue and the rest narrate or introduce characters. The narrator that is embedded in the intertitles comments on characters in an exaggerated way, labeling “The crime-crushing criminologist - Sherlock Jr.” and “Gillette - A Gem who was ever-ready in a bad scrape.” Language is used as vehicle for additional comedy, but with this hyperbolic narration, the invisible narrator imposes the power of language over the visual reality on the screen. This relationship between narrator and character or between language and image is quite different from that in Keaton’s shorts, which elevated image and action over language and dialogue.

The Navigator also uses introductory intertitles for narrative formation: “Our story deals with one of those queer tricks that Fate sometimes plays” (intertitle 1), “Nobody would believe, for instance, that the entire lives of a peaceful American boy and girl could be changed by a funny little war between two small countries far across the sea” (intertitle 2), “And yet it came to pass. The spies of the two little nations were at a Pacific seaport, each trying to prevent the other getting ships and supplies” (intertitle 3). Even though the main plot of *The Navigator* focuses upon the romance between Rollo Treadway (Buster Keaton) and Betsy O’Brien (Kathryn McGuire), these introductory intertitles attempt to give a plausible reason for their hardships on *The Navigator*.

In addition to the use of intertitles as a narrative tool that foregrounds the authority of language, these three films confirm the ultimate authority of language at the

thematic level. While *Our Hospitality* focuses on the romance between star-crossed lovers, Willie and Virginia Canfield, and Willie's hardship caused by deep-rooted hatred between the two families, two mottos—"code of honor" and The Golden Rule—initiate the movement of the narrative and conclude the story. As the title of the film suggests, one of the main themes in this film is southern hospitality; Joseph Canfield advises his sons, "our code of honor prevents us from shooting [Willie] while he's a guest - in our house." The latter half of the film shows how Willie, who knows about the Canfields' intention to murder him and this code of honor, strives to "become a permanent guest." Despite their antipathy toward Willie, the Canfields never attempt to break that code of honor and, in the end, Willie becomes "a permanent guest" of the Canfield house through his marriage to Virginia and the code of honor is realized and celebrated.

While the code of honor generates comic situations and provides a happy ending, The Golden Rule presides over the narrative development and is presented as a lesson. At the beginning of the film, The Golden Rule, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," is presented as a sampler on the Canfields' wall (Figure 5.8). The following murder attempt, however, breaks that rule and a disbelieving glimpse of Joseph seems to ridicule the old-fashioned motto. While the successive failed murder attempts of the Canfields challenge the old moral, the conclusion of the film, as expected, affirms it: neighbors come to love each other and the peace is restored. When the final scene of the film shows the sampler again (Figure 5.9) and provides symmetry with the image of the sampler as both beginning and ending, the narrative of the film is encircled by this maxim and suggests that the word should and will be realized in the end.



Figure 5.8 The Golden Rule on Canfield's wall at the beginning of film
(still from *Our Hospitality*)



Figure 5.9 The Golden Rule on Canfield's new house in the denouement of the film
(still from *Our Hospitality*)

Seven Chances (1925) also affirms the significance of written language as the center of its lesson—the victory of true love. Three text messages in the film—the grandfather’s will, the newspaper article, and the note from the lover—play significant roles in the narrative development. When Jimmy (Buster Keaton) is in financial hardship, his grandfather’s will promises escape from his problems, but the newspaper article that announces his potential inheritance triggers a kind of disaster for him. His beloved’s note expressing her love for him resolves all the trouble, which results in the happy ending of the film. One of the similarities among the three textual messages in this film is how difficult it is to deliver them to their intended recipients. The delivery of Jimmy’s grandfather’s will is delayed due to a misunderstanding, which aggravates Jimmy’s hardship, and the newspaper article about Jimmy’s proposal to any woman is effectively a letter that is delivered to too many recipients (Figure 5.10). The moral of the film, however, lies in the love note from Jimmy’s sweetheart, the only medium through which their love can be communicated.

While *Sherlock Jr.* is viewed as one of Keaton’s most creative and subversive works, it also affirms the authority of language and warns against its abuse. It is obvious that Buster is the most innocent in the criminal world of *Sherlock Jr.* Buster’s only fault or lie, however, can be found in his change of a character: he alters the price of a box of chocolates from \$1 to \$4. As a result of his forgery, Buster is accused of theft: when a watch is stolen and the pawn receipt that the sheik slips into Buster’s pocket shows that the watch has been exchanged for \$4, people naturally assume that Buster has stolen the watch to buy the chocolates. The visual match of \$4, written on both the pawn receipt

and the gift box, is considered ocular proof of his theft (Figure 5.11). Buster's petty crime of exaggerating the value is punished by the testimony of another written document: the pawn receipt. The didactic message here is clear: you should not challenge the authority of the written word carelessly; otherwise, language will avenge itself on you with its own power.

The power of language, however, does not ignore the villain, and it aids in the restoration of order. When The Girl becomes doubtful about Buster's guilt, she brings the pawn receipt to the shop. With the receipt, the real thief, The Sheik, is identified and The Girl rushes to Buster. In fact, The Sheik commits a more serious crime than Buster does when he uses the sentence from Buster's detective manual to trap Buster: he is a real abuser of language. While language does not overlook Buster's lie and punishes him in its own way, it also corrects the error, punishes the real criminal, and restores the established order with its power. Against the surreal world of the film within a film that defies the logic of ordinary life, the "real world" of this film affirms the authority of language and restores order.

The didactic message concerning language use in *The Navigator* is similar to that in *Sherlock Jr.* Rollo's mishap begins with his careless reading of the pier number: Rollo should have gone to pier 2 but he inaccurately reads the sign "pier 12" as pier 2 and goes aboard the wrong ship, *The Navigator*. When Rollo fails to peruse "Instructions for Deep Sea Diving," the next intertitle comments on the situation in an ironic way: "where ignorance is bliss." Both of Rollo's misreadings bring disastrous consequences: drifting on the sea and suffocation.



Figure 5.10 Text with too many recipients (still from *Seven Chances*)

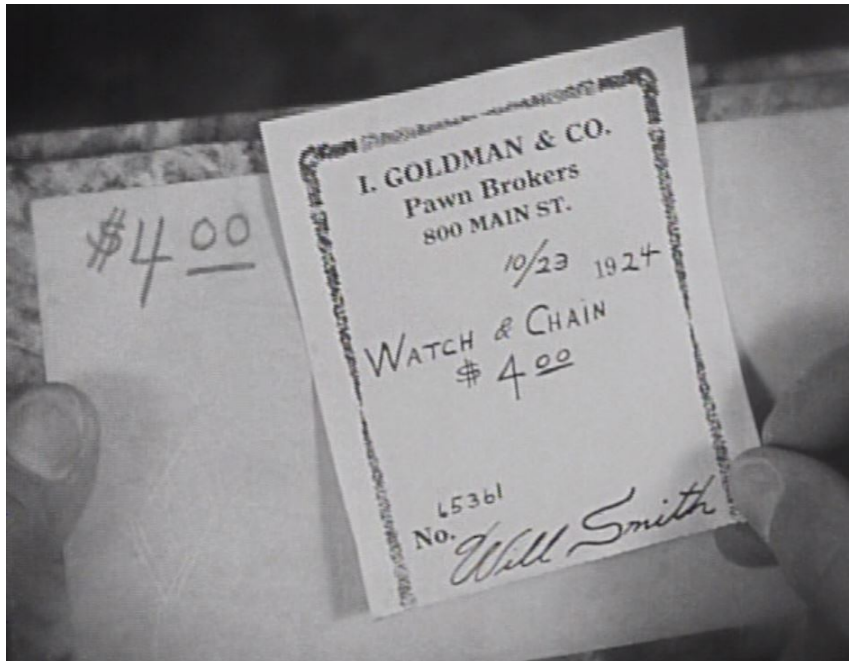


Figure 5.11 The visual match of forged text and authentic evidence (still from *Sherlock Jr.*)

In *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), the last film created by Keaton before his move to MGM, Willaim Canfield Jr. (Keaton) performs almost fifteen minutes of slapstick without the intervention of intertitles or inserts.⁸ Keaton's physical performance and interaction with the surrounding material world is the center of the cyclone sequence, but in the final sequence of the film, Junior proves his sincerity and ability to achieve his marriage through his rescue of three fathers—his own father, his sweetheart's father, and the minister.

Even though Keaton's protagonists in features make occasional deviations from the social norm and question the effectiveness of language as do the protagonists in his shorts, the features conclude with and celebrate the return to the norm and the restoration of linguistic authority. With the help of inserts such as letters, newspaper articles, and wills, Keaton's comedy aims to create a more diegetic-centered flow than works utilizing non-diegetic intertitles. The presence of inserts in his features, however, underscores written text's influence on the characters' motives and the plots.

Notes

1 Despite of their strikingly different styles, Keaton seemed to enjoy D. W. Griffith's films: he saw Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* three times when it came out in 1915 (Rapf 8) and *The Three Ages* is considered as a kind of parody of *Intolerance* (1916).

2 When I refer to the actor and director, Buster Keaton, I will use "Keaton." However, in case of the character in his films, "Buster" will be used to avoid confusion.

3 Clyde Bruckman who worked for Keaton from 1923 onwards said, "I can tell you – and so could Jean Havez if he were alive – that those wonderful stories were ninety percent Buster's. I was often ashamed to take the money, much less the credit" (Dardis 104).

4 *Back Stage*'s direction is credited to Arbuckle, but critics emphasize the collaboration of Keaton and Arbuckle and the consistent tendencies that continue in Keaton's later independent shorts such as *The Playhouse*. Critics confirm Keaton's directing contributions even when his shorts and features are credited to other directors such as Arbuckle.

5 The print of *Daydreams* was seriously damaged and the rewritten letter inserts differ from the originals. This paper uses the *Steamboat Bill Jr.* DVD released by KINO. For comparison, I will include the intertitles that Oldham uses here. According to Oldham, the first letter reads, "My darling, I'm now head of a big sanatorium looking after 200 patients. I've got operations to do that you just couldn't imagine" (271). The second letter reads, "Due to a slight mishap I've had to give up my operating. I'm now going by

car round the stock exchange district doing a bit of cleaning up. I frequently meet up with distinguished financiers” (273). The third letter reads, “I’m tired of cleaning up, I’m back at my artistic gift, and today I’m making my debut in Shakespeare’s Hamlet” (277). The last letter reads, “Fantastic Success! The Crowds were so enthusiastic I just had to make a clean getaway” (281).

6 I want to focus on language as a tool for passing down social value to members of society and consequently as a force that requires users to conform to the established system. The conservatism of the language system is closely related to social and economic issues and the power of words in Keaton’s features comes from fathers or at least symbolic father figures who possess economic and social authority. Deeper research on this relationship between language, power, and society in Keaton’s films is beyond the scope of this writing, and I want to return to this issue after my dissertation.

7 This comparison of the number of expository introductory intertitles with his earlier works does not suggest that Keaton’s features used an overwhelming number of intertitles. The number of title cards in Keaton’s feature length films is relatively low compared to his contemporaries. For example, DeMille’s *Ten Commandments* (1923) uses 183 intertitles with 4 introductory titles; Griffith’s *Way Down East* (1921) uses 251 intertitles with 8 introductory titles; Chaplin’s *The Gold Rush* (1925) uses 145 intertitles with 6 introductory titles.

8 The last intertitle of *Steamboat Bill Jr.* is “The pier is not strong enough to hold the boat against this wind,” and that dialogue intertitle is followed by the cyclone sequence lasting almost 15 minutes and the ending sequence.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The hieroglyph was a popular metaphor for the hybrid of text and image in early twentieth century film discourse. Some silent films such as *The Ten Commandments* and *Intolerance* actively utilized the image of the hieroglyph onscreen, and this presence simultaneously underscored the chasm between text and image as well as the suture between them. The film industry promoted the concept of hieroglyphs as a universal language, suggesting the connection between the newly developed medium and the tradition of American Renaissance discourse. At the same time, film critics and scholars in silent film era, Lindsay among others, attempted to foreground the hybridity of film as an image-text, which, they argued, encompasses literature, art, sculpture and play, and emphasized that the film would attract diverse audiences regardless of their education, class and even nationality. Meanwhile, the etymology of hieroglyph, “sacred carving,” invites speculation on two characteristics of the experience of film viewing, especially silent film viewing: the physical presence of visible text and its legibility.

In the discourse on hieroglyphs, the sacred text reflects two opposing desires: universal meaning but also obscurity. As explored in the second chapter, the new pursuit of the “true hieroglyph” in reaction to Champollion’s deciphering suggests that a solved mystery has lost its divinity. Priests who can interpret the sacred text for ordinary people become powerful mediators between the sacred text that resists decipherment and the desire to comprehend the divine message. In their relation to text and image, directors

played the role of modern priest: when the technology and grammar of the film emerged and were totally new to its contemporary audience, the film industry, especially directors, processed and translated the script, the written text, into the moving images on screen. Among others, Griffith was eager to fashion himself as a priest of the new medium and compared the film to religion. In *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America*, Griffith defines the motion picture as “a medium of expression as clean and decent as any mankind has ever discovered” and relates the ordeal that the film at that moment experienced with that of “the Christian religion and the printing press.”

The Ten Commandments presents two types of priest who deliver the divine message to people. The priest in the ancient part, Moses, represents the harsh punisher even of his sister, and his violence is generated by his position as the bearer of the divine message. When Moses points out Miriam’s leprous mark and makes it legible to his people, he enforces the significance of the sign and administers God’s justice. Meanwhile, John reads the divine messages to soothe, and in the end, he reads the light as God’s message of forgiveness. This transition from written text on a tablet and a scar on skin to the message in the form of light is connected to the changed role of priests, and subtly suggests the filmic priesthood. The light that heals and soothes echoes the image of the light expelling darkness in the Enlightenment tradition and, at the same time, the beam that cures the disease can be connected with radiotherapy that was even promoted as a cure for leprosy during early twentieth century. Light as a cure in the ending sequence establishes connection between religion and film and between science and film, making the director as a doctor and priest.

While *The Ten Commandments* directly engages in religion and priesthood, Keaton and Griffith do not overtly focus on religion. Both Keaton's films and Griffith's films, however, can also be explored metaphorically with the director-as-priest figure as a mediator between text and message. The use of intertitles and the connection between text and image in Griffith's films present a more traditional type of priest who interprets the text for the audience and makes the written text on screen legible even for the illiterate. Even though Griffith reiterated his firm faith in film as an art, the relationship between text and image in his films shows the superiority of text over image in terms of authority. Griffith's visual exegesis makes the image borrow its authenticity from the intertitle, sometimes provides the moving images onscreen as the illustrations for the intertitles, and establishes the hierarchy between photography and moving image, sometimes halting the movement on screen to deliver the narrator's message in an effective and authoritative manner. Griffith desires to control the audience's appreciation of the film and comprehension of the visual image through expository intertitles. In spite of Griffith's attempt to contain the message embedded in the image through the intervention of the intertitle as narrative voice, his film has been perceived as "multitudinous and polysemic" (Richard Brody).

Keaton's shorts, on the other hand, undermine the authority of the text, question the meaning of text, and mock the rigidity of written signs. Unlike Griffith's lengthy and authoritative intertitles, most of Keaton's intertitles and textual inserts are succinct. The text onscreen in Keaton's shorts, however, malfunctions and results in unexpected events. Keaton's protagonist attempts to read a sign, fails to grasp the practical meaning of the

sentence, and instead presents sheer visual pleasure. The image of Keaton's body delivered as a letter captures the moment of the substitution of the letter with a body as an object to be read. His bodily performance in the extended sequence of *Steamboat Bill Jr.* celebrates the human agent that defies the force of nature, claiming the epitome of visuality.

While Keaton's protagonist foregrounds his body as a legible object and blurs the boundary between the message and the text, Griffith's invisible narrator in his films hints at his existence through the flat surface of the intertitle card, echoing the materiality of the hieroglyph as a text on a stone tablet. While the narrator behind the intertitle precedes the narrator in a sound film who exists through his voice and is usually introduced as a character in diegetic space, Griffith's narrator occupies a different time and space than that of the diegetic location of the film. The body of the narrator in *The Birth of a Nation* never appears on screen but abruptly occupies the same location with Jesus at the end of the film. The image of Jesus overlaps with the image of the dual marriage, and two intertitles reproducing Biblical text and declaring the victory of KKK are intercut with this sequence, placing Jesus and the narrator in the same non-diegetic space. As a result, this climax sequence captures the moment that the narrator's narration and the religious metaphor become one, reviving the notion of director as priest as the interpreter of divine messages.

Again, *The Ten Commandments* adapts the body as an object of reading or as an eye-catching sign. Skin on which a divine message is written or a racial mark is branded functions as a text that can be read, and the female bodies of Miriam and Sally become

the walking hieroglyphs of religion and racism. When the markings on skin are erased in the ending sequence of *The Ten Commandments*, the hieroglyphic carving is interpreted as a violent incision and the bodily text becomes a scar.

With the advent of sound films during the late 1920s, the intertitle became obsolete. The practice of using intertitles in the silent film theater was polyphonic when it was read by various audiences and sometimes by a lecturer; the lines of the narrator and characters were vocalized at the moment of screening. With the introduction of sound in film, however, voices and characters became connected to specific actors and led to silence in the theater. With language spoken in film, the metaphor of the hieroglyph as a sacred carving became less overt onscreen. The character's body that can speak does not compete with the presence of a narrator as a representative of a director any more; the diegetic image on screen increasingly becomes the sole visual presence on the screen, without intervention of intertitles. From the Bulletin as an external source to aid the audience's understanding to the intertitle that comments on the image on screen or writes character's lines, the silent film deployed a non-diegetic voice in a form of an invisible narrator. Ultimately, however, the actor's body in sound film establishes a filmic system that incorporates the directorial voice into diegetic space, demanding a totally different type of film grammar.

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