Scriptworlds

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Script and world

Thinking about literature in relation to 'world' tends to invite the broad sweep. But the widened scope needn't take in only the majestic, as conjured up in lofty concepts such as planetarity or world-historical totality. Sometimes the scale of world can produce a multifocal optic that helps us pay renewed attention to the literary commonplace. Taking script, the most basic component of literature, as one of the lenses through which to view the world literary landscape, this chapter will examine if, and how, ideas about writing can influence both our close and distant reading.

Script is something that usually escapes notice under traditional classifications of literature, which organize subjects along linguistic borders, whether as English, French, or Spanish, or as Anglophone, Francophone, or Hispanophone studies. The construction of literatures by discrete language categories supports a wide-spread view that differences between languages are not just a matter of different phonemes, lexemes and grammars but of distinct ways of conceiving, apprehending and relating to the world. This was a view that was developed into a political stance in Europe in the nineteenth century.[1] It posited a language as an embodiment of cultural or national distinctiveness, and a literature written in a national language as the sovereign expression of a particular worldview. One of the facets this stance obscured was the script in which the texts were written. Writing was defined as a medium for transcribing 'language' with no particular significance in itself.

The conflation of spoken language and written text is steeped in the tradition of European philology that bases the concept of language on speech. The primacy of speech,

which persists in Western linguistics today, renders writing an ancillary form of spoken language. The underlying consensus remains that text cannot be transformed into meaning without being calibrated by spoken language, as individual words cannot acquire meaning in the absence of an overall system, which is speech.[2] This merging of writing and spoken language does not pose an immediate problem when one is working within the confines of European languages because the Roman alphabet has been the unified standard.

However, when we take a wider view and bring diverse literatures of the world onto a single platform in a relation of putative equivalence, it immediately becomes apparent that the view of writing as a neutral and value-free tool for encoding spoken language is insufficient. Seeing texts in Arabic, the Roman alphabet, *Hanzi* and Cyrillic, side by side requires the reader to make distinctions between spoken language and written language. For the thousands of spoken languages, there are hundreds of scripts, and script and speech do not correlate to each other along the recognized linguistic borders. The relation between writing and speech is much more complex than that which emerges from within the European frame.

One need only look to the literary history of pre-colonial India to see manifold relations between orality and textuality, which, in their rich multi-scriptal and polyglot manifestations, defy the standard ways of classifying languages and literatures.[3] Elsewhere, it is not hard to note that many spoken languages are digraphic, which is to say that they use more than one script for writing. Digraphia can be synchronic, as in the examples of Serbian, which is written in both Cyrillic and the Roman alphabet, and contemporary Konkani, which is written in Devanagari, Kannada, Perso-arabic, the Roman alphabet and Malayalam. Digraphia can also be sequential. Azerbaijani was written in the Runic alphabet (fourth to eighth century), Arabic (seventh to twentieth century), the Roman alphabet (1929-1939), and then Cyrillic (1939-1991), before returning to a modified version of the Roman alphabet after

1992. Conversely, many different languages are written in a common script even if they are unrelated to one another. *Hanzi*, for example, was once the 'universal script' used for writing the many dialects and languages of China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Today, the Roman alphabet is the *scripta franca,* transcribing over 130 languages as various as Swedish, Cherokee, and Zulu.

Scrutinizing literature through the lens of script allows us to see that there has always been a gap between speech and the written sign. The gap calls upon us to notice the various organizing conventions by which written knowledge is produced. One might begin to investigate these conventions by considering the ways in which the graphic shapes of script place constraints on meaning, which, in turn, condition the form, structure and even mode or genre of particular literary works – a point to which this chapter will return. And it should be remembered that learning a script is not just a matter of acquiring an understanding of the coding system by which spoken language is rendered into a visual form of communication; it is also a process of absorbing the ideas and traditions that are inscribed in the canonical texts through which literacy was traditionally acquired. 'Scriptworlds', such as those of the Roman, Chinese, Arabic, and Pali scripts, overlap with Christian, Confucian, Islamic, and Buddhist cultures respectively. The dominant script in a given culture establishes the relations between what is present and what will be preserved, in both the technological sense as well as in the character of knowledge that culture seeks to transmit and perpetuate.

It also determines who will have access to written information and for what purpose. This point is illustrated by the famous case of the Rosetta stone, on which is inscribed Egyptian hieroglyphics (which were used for writing religious documents at the time of its inscription), Egyptian demotic (the common script of Egypt), and the Greek alphabet (used by the rulers of Egypt at that time). As can be inferred, the choice of script discloses the text's

immediate audience, whom it intends to exclude, as well as whom it aims to address. The choice of script also differentiates between the generic and literary tradition in which it situates itself, and further gestures towards the particular social and cultural sphere it is meant to reach. For example, that *The Tale of Genji* was written in phonetic *Hiragana* and not classical *Kanji* served to remove it from the male elite class in eleventh-century Kyoto and firmly situated it in the intimate female circle of concubines and consorts of the imperial court.[4] Script is not as neutral as it may seem.

But in our alphabetic age, where the Roman alphabet has become the global script, it can be difficult for some, especially for monolingual speakers of English, to imagine how script can shape meaning. To discuss the ways in which scripts differ and to consider their implications for literary studies, the next section will look to an historic example.

When a Slovenian Jesuit met a Korean philosopher in eighteenth-century Beijing[5]

On the 2nd of November 1765, the Korean astronomer and Confucian philosopher *Damheon* Hong DaeYong (담헌 홍대용, *湛軒* 洪大容, 1731-1783) set off from Seoul (then called *Gyeong Seong* 경성, 京城) on a six-month tour to Beijing as part of the *Joseon* mission (조선 연행사, 朝鮮 燕行使) to imperial China.[6] Hong was not an official delegate of the *Joseon* court but was able to secure his place as the nephew of Hong Eok (홍억, 洪檍), who was heading the delegation. What spurred him on was not political but intellectual ambition. Hong was an early advocate of the Korean enlightenment and, independently of other intellectual traditions, had developed a theory of heliocentrism, an idea that was widely dismissed and resisted by the Confucian intellectual orthodoxy of *Joseon*. Mathematics and

astronomy in particular drew him to Beijing, then the intellectual centre of the Chinese 'scriptworld'.[7]

The mission reached Beijing in the bitter winter of 1765-66.[8] Upon arrival, Hong requested, with some persistence, a meeting with the Head of the Imperial Board of Astronomy and Mathematics of the Qing dynasty. This was Ferdinand Augustin Haller von Hallerstein (1703-1774), a Jesuit missionary born in Carniola, an area with a largely Slovenian population, which was then part of the Hapsburg Empire.[9] From 1746 until his death in 1774 Hallerstein, known in China as Liu Songling, worked closely with the Qianlong Emperor and led research into astronomy and mathematics at the Qing court. Hallerstein eventually agreed to meet with Hong in the South Catholic Church of Beijing, then called Yenjing, where Hallerstein was resident. After the first encounter, they met again on two occasions to continue their discussion on mathematics, astronomy and music. Hong gives an account of the journey and the meetings in his *Damheon Yenjing Records* (담헌연기, 湛軒燕記), a chronicle in six books, written in classical Chinese, now generally regarded as one of the three finest travelogues of pre-modern Korea.[10]

Hong and Hallerstein could not communicate through spoken language but they were able to converse through a form of written exchange that was common across East Asia called 'brush conversation', that is, written communication in classical Chinese. At one point in their discussion, Hong asked Hallerstein: 'Do Europeans use Chinese characters to write?' The question, at first, seemed so absurd that it might have set an historical benchmark for parochialism. No doubt it reflected something of the cultural conditions of the time and place. In this region, China was then perceived as the only civilization, the source of all learning and knowledge, and the centre of the universe – as suggested by the characters for China (中國),

meaning literally, centre (中) kingdom (國). This perspective had dominated East Asia for over 2,500 years. By the eighteenth century, Beijing had become a multi-ethnic, polyglot city. Hundreds of different Chinese dialects and scores of languages were spoken there – Burmese, Mongolian, Manchu, Tibetan, Uyghur, Thai, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Nepalese as well as Arabic, Uzbek, Turkish, Russian and all the major European languages. By contrast, official written communication was uniformly in Chinese script or Han characters (漢子), known across East Asia as the universal script. Given this, Hong's question, taken out of context, could be put down to the sinocentrism of the time. But Hong was no innocent abroad, blundering headlong into solipsistic confirmation of the provincial; *Records* is a systematic reconstruction of Chinese civilization, in which he notes, with anthropological perceptivity, what people say and what they think, so as to reproduce for the reader at home accurate information about a more advanced civilization. Hallerstein's answer opens up an alternative reading: 'No' is his reply; in Europe, 'we only use speech-writing (諺字).'

Alphabetic writing and ideographic writing

Hong and Hallerstein's dialogue discriminates between 'speech-writing' and 'idea-writing', or between phonetic writing and ideographic writing. This is a distinction that has all but disappeared from view in Western literary scholarship. Especially within standardized Roman alphabetic cultures, the general tendency is to think that writing *is* the encoding of the sound of speech by way of a phonetic system. The idea that writing is 'visible speech' can be traced at least as far back as the seventeenth-century French poet and translator, Georges de Brebeuf's assertion that writing is 'speech for the eyes'.

But as the exchange between Hong and Hallerstein indicates, transcribing speech in a

sound-based script is but one kind of written communication from a range of historic examples. Of course writing is often a transcription of the sound of speech but at the other end of the spectrum there are sign systems that communicate visually independently of orality. To regard all writing as speech-writing is, as Jacques Derrida famously argued, to assume a phonocentric conception of language, which subordinates writing to 'an essential relationship to the presence of a speaking subject'.[11]

Examining language and literature through the lens of script affords us a view of text where writing is more autonomous because it is not reduced to voice. In other words, script reveals in concrete terms what phonocentric assumptions conceal. One script that brings clearly to the fore the visual dimension of writing, as separate from the aural, is Chinese. In China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, various and distinct indigenous languages were spoken but the writing of these various East Asian languages was in 'ideographic' Chinese. (Ideographs or ideograms are script symbols that represent ideas, objects and events; logographs or logograms are script symbols that represent words; and pictographs or pictograms are picture symbols that represent concepts, objects and events.)[12] Even today, after successive major script reforms, there are still 808 Chinese characters commonly used in everyday writing across China, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.[13] This is possible because Chinese characters, or *Hanzi,* are visual units, which can transmit meaning independently of sound – hence the claim to 'idea writing'. This is not to suggest that Chinese is detached from sound and communicates by image alone. A sound component is attached to each visual sign, and the sound and idea work in parallel and in combination. Characters at times signal visually while at others what they transmit is mainly an approximation of sound. The distinction between ideographic script and phonetic script is not absolute.

For example, the Chinese characters 文學 are used in China, Korea and Japan to

mean literature but are spoken as *wenxue* in Mandarin, *munhak* in Korean and *bungaku* in Japanese. To reduce this example to a single character, 文 means letters or writing, and is pronounced as *wen* by Mandarin speakers, *mun* by Korean speakers, and *bun* in Japanese. The sounds attached to the character 文 are spoken differently according to the language or dialect of the speaker. The local phonologies vary too widely for oral communication to be possible but the image signifier 文 retains its meaning across the borders of spoken languages.

The example of Chinese adds to the discussion of world literature not because it is a script unlike any other but because it emphasizes the degree to which signification through image is achieved. The visual aspect of Chinese makes available a perspective that enables us to see that, at times, alphabetic script also communicates by image. Indeed one could go so far as to say that all scripts, from Hieroglyphics to Hebrew to Tibetan, communicate visually as well as phonologically and in the context of a larger social semiotic system.[14] But so naturalized is the view that alphabetic writing is exclusively a phonetic transcription of the sound of speech that it often obscures the wider context of semiotic communication – visual and contextual – within which it functions.

This is a view of writing that is corrected by reflecting on everyday experience. We can see that even the most phonologically ambitious alphabetic writing, for example the International Phonetic Alphabet, has elements of 'idea writing', which are separate from speech. In English, the most obvious components of 'idea writing' can be seen in non-phonetic signs such as =, $, %, +, @, !, " ", … , ;, :,CAPITALIZATION, line breaks, line direction, visual puns, *enjamb/ment*, FONT TYPES and size, and the ever-increasing range

of emoticons available on our keyboards. The polyphonic sounds of North-West London consummately captured in Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) are not created by phonetic transcription, but through an abundant range of visual effects stimulated by the variation of form that works alongside and in collaboration with our auditory imagination. One of the most powerful passages of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is the eponymous character's monologue in chapter twenty-two, where the lack of punctuation and irregular spacing are central to its choric, haunting effect. The blank single page on which Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally* (1911) ends gives us a sense of the resolve, hope and uncertainty experienced by first-wave feminists at the height of the suffragette movement. The history of the English novel is rich with examples where authors, if not directly experimenting with typography, have nevertheless drawn on and made use of visual textuality, from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) to Donald Barthelme's *Snow White* (1965) to Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000). Currently, we are witnessing the flourishing of a diverse range of 'ergodic' literature, which is finding new relevance by means of media technology.

More ordinarily, readers of the Roman script might think of instances where meaning registers straight from the written word without there being a need to convert the letters into sound and then sound to meaning. The instances where we engage in reading that by-passes sound and operates directly from visual image to meaning are more frequent than a narrow conception of writing leads us to suppose. In the context of our present digital age, where technology allows for increasingly diverse means of visual communication and cybertexts are part of the mainstream, and where visual units of meaning such as GIFs and emoticons are rapidly becoming part of our everyday semiotic system, the view of writing as visible speech is becoming increasingly inadequate.

The dissociation of the visual from writing reflects a wider progression in post-

reformation Europe when there was a gradual transference of the model of poetry from one rooted in written Latin to one based on voice and the natural rhythm of the 'vernacular'. In the English tradition, poetry was recast as 'man speaking to man' in the eighteenth century and from there developed the idea that it should aspire to the level of music. By the middle of the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot declared that the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning.[15] Notwithstanding the counter-tradition, as most ebulliently represented by the Imagists, the ascendency of a vocal type of literature in modern Europe unquestioningly privileges speech. And hidden in plain sight are the ways in which scripts influence form, structure and genre to produce our experience of literature.

To return to the question of script and literary form raised earlier, an example of how one influences the other is found in Chinese poetics. The foundational unit of Chinese poetry is the character. Each character provides the image of a condensed, compact, free-standing unit. The composition scheme prescribes the *number* of characters per line, whether it be found in *The Book of Songs* (诗经, 11-7 BC), the earliest poetry collection in Chinese, in a set by Du Fu (a poet of the Tang dynasty), or in a modern volume of *haiku.* As we read, each character takes centre stage in the cognitive theatre, each suspended in time for a millisecond. The sound of the poem will be different according to the spoken language of the speaker. Nevertheless the grapheme, the morpheme and the word are combined in every unit, each offering multiple levels of meaning. There is stillness in the sign because each character is solid, dense and specific. Each sign is separated by space and the space is charged with implication. Some of the joys of Chinese poetry have to do with the allusiveness, the sharp contrast, the swift and ferocious reversals made possible by the conceptual density that concentrated visual communication affords.

This distinctly graphic example might serve as a springboard for considering the more general but nevertheless *visual* ways we experience literariness in alphabetic writing. The elaborate pictorial structures of George Herbert's 'The Altar' and 'Easter Wings' are obviously written for the eye. Edwin Morgan's concrete poetry draws attention to how space sets the pace for our visual experience. More commonly, we might think of the basic method of recognizing an English sonnet by its thirteen line breaks. An abiding definition of poetry, as opposed to prose, is that it is a form of writing where the author determines the lineation. Lineation creates discrete graphic units of meaning that provide the structure upon which the poet's deployment of end-stopping and *enjambment* create effects of sense and syntax. As T. S. Eliot noted: 'Verse, whatever else it may or may not be, is itself a system of *punctuation*'.[16]

A striking example of the influence of image on our reading experience is provided by Xu Bing's English square word calligraphy. The characters below appear to be Chinese at first sight yet when the eye settles on the individual unit, it is able to decipher alphabetic letters that have been compacted into free-standing signs. Below is the last stanza of W. H. Auden's 'Leap Before You Look' in square word calligraphy.

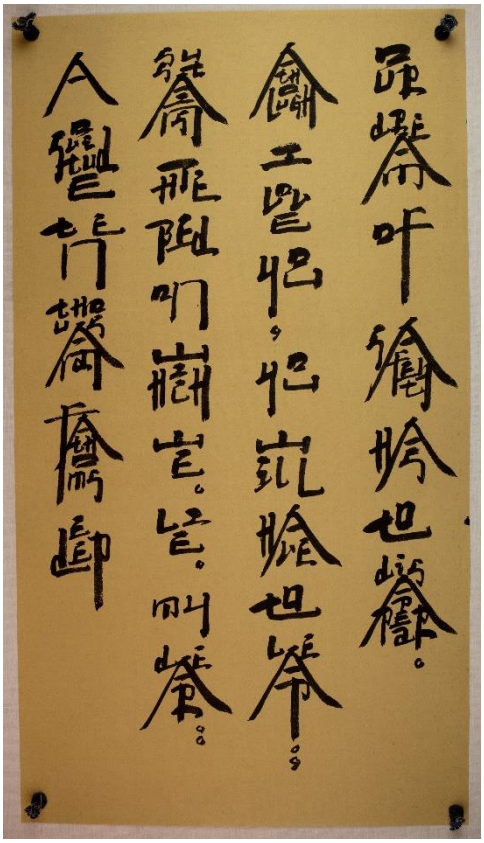

Figure 6.1 Xu Bing, ‘Leap Before You Look’ – Poem by W. H. Auden 1940, 2007, last paragraph. Ink on paper; 8 panels; 69 x 124 cm (6P), 23.5 x 124 cm (2P). ©Xu Bing Studio. Text reads (downwards, starting from the left): ‘A solitude ten thousand fathoms deep/ Sustains the bed on which we lie, my dear:/ Although I love you, you will have to leap;/ Our dream of safety has to disappear.’

The compactness of each word produces a differences in pace and rhythm. Reading Xu Bing’s version illustrates that space, shape, and visual flow are not things that exist apart from the meaning. Another more immediately legible example of square word calligraphy is the ‘Art For The People’ banner at the entrance of Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 6.2 Xu Bing, ‘Art for the People’, 1999. Silk banner; 36 x 9 ft. Installation view at MOMA, 1999. ©Xu Bing Studio.

The politics of script

Awareness of the differences between script systems opens up new vistas and allows us to reimagine the cartography of the literary world. Frames through which we commonly view literature such as language and nation appear to take on new forms, showing unfamiliar connections and disconnections. New categories are generated such as the Chinese scriptworld, the Arabic scriptworld, the Sanscrit scriptworld and so on, the comparative study of which provides the basis for charting a new world-literary landscape.

But structuring the world in terms of script also raises a number of quite difficult issues which need rather careful examination before rushing towards a new model. If a script

is selected to represent a scriptworld, what are the ways in which that single representation adds to knowledge of a greater literary abundance and what are the ways in which it blinds us to the differences within it? If the analytical unit of a scriptworld is to provide a foundation for gauging and productively addressing the relations between national literatures of different linguistic traditions, how are the commonly-held ideas about the relations between language and nation affected? This chapter has put forward the idea that 'writing as visible speech' curtails knowledge in our criticism and interpretation. Exactly how does the awareness of phonocentric thinking open up ways of approaching world literature?

Beginning with the last point, one of the most powerful consequences of defining written language in relation to speech is that text is tethered to the speaking subject. The presence of the subject then lends itself readily to the notion that a literature – say Norwegian or Zulu or Mongolian – is organically tied to a people or a demotic worldview. From the nineteenth century onwards, this conception of language hardened into the idea of a national language, which best embodies a people, their way of life, and their mode of thought. Modern literatures and literary histories have encouraged this view by mostly being written along national lines. The novel, in particular, has been defined as a genre closely linked to ideas of nationhood, so we can speak of the English, the Russian, or the great American novel. While transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are no less important registers in the twentieth-century novel, they necessarily presuppose the frame of nation in the attempt to transcend it, thereby reconsolidating the category of nation.

One form of world literary studies actively lends support to the alliance between language, nation and people by conceptualizing world literature as the total sum of various literatures as classified by distinct language categories – Turkish literature, Vietnamese literature, Nepali literature and so on. But if the basis for this 'world' is the congregation of

various literatures drawn up along standardized national and linguistic borders, an entirely predictable outcome of this conception is a reproduction of nineteenth-century imperialist cartography. For the borders of modern languages emerged as part of the development of the modern nation-state and the majority of what are now accepted as non-European standardized modern national languages were defined by traditional European philology during the period of colonialism. Postcolonial literary histories have shown how 'dialects' were marshalled into supposedly distinct wholes, classified according to the model of European languages, and then constructed as discrete languages to represent the part of the world the colonial administrators sought to govern.[17] As Robert Young has argued: 'It was not simply that particular languages were engineered, largely for political reasons, but that in order to represent the nation, the concept of language had to be dreamt up as well.'[18] If we call into question the very concept of a discrete language and recast it as an entity rooted in configurations of political hegemony, the artificiality of supposedly organic links between literature, nation, and culture that have become normalized and naturalized are suddenly brought into view. What further destabilizes the alliance of nation, language and literature is the complex history of script. Or, to see this from a reverse perspective, the ideology of a national language represses perhaps the most obvious feature of literature – its writing system.

Foregrounding script in interpretation helps to uncover the critical situatedness of texts. Digraphia, outside of Europe, is the norm not the exception: multiple scripts co-exist and have co-existed in virtually all literary cultures. The wealth of scripts may be more noticeable in the southern hemisphere but even in Europe, the standardized use of the Roman alphabet did not completely eliminate the use of Runes, Cyrillic, Glagolitic, and the Hebrew alphabet. The *choice* of script embeds the text in its socio-political and intertextual setting.

So we might consider what the circumstances are in which a script is selected

officially to represent a language or a nation. Is it the case that writing systems gradually evolve till the fittest survive? And is the predominance of one script over another purely based on the efficacy of the system, as the champions of the Roman alphabet would have it? The case of Korea provides an example that allows us to proceed to a more general observation. Korea has been simultaneously digraphic – in Chinese and 'Korean' – since around 1443, when the phonological *Hangul,* an alphabetic system of writing tailored to capture spoken Korean, was devised.[19] *Hangul* is today celebrated as the national script of South Korea while in North Korea it is the only script permitted.[20] Translated, it means the writing of the Han race. Yet before the twentieth century, there was virtually no discussion of abjuring Chinese in favour of the 'national', scientific, alphabetic writing. The phonological alphabetic or 'speech writing' that is *Hangul* was universally considered an inferior script, suitable only for women and children who had not had the benefit of a classical education. For example, Hong wrote his *Damheon Yenjing Records* in a *Hangul* version as well as in Chinese, ostensibly for his mother, and this version was read widely by women.[21] It would not have occurred to any reader of the time that the *Hangul* version was somehow more intrinsically tied to Korean culture. During the *Joseon* dynasty Chinese was not considered alien or foreign as it came to be seen over the course of the twentieth century. It was only during the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea, when Korean culture was subject to near total suppression, that *Hangul* came to be embraced as typifying the spirit of a nation.[22] The chequered history of writing does not bear out the idea that writing systems evolve organically and systematically to become as efficacious as possible in mediating between speech and thought.

Official, standardized writing systems are political institutions. They are instituted by social and political forces in order to regulate often disparate communities of polyglot, multi-

scriptal peoples. This creates a cultural sphere, or at least key parts of a cultural sphere, which transcend boundaries of spoken language and integrate people into an administrative whole. The reason why Chinese, or *Hanzi,* the Roman alphabet, Arabic, and Cyrillic formed 'scriptworlds' is because they were imperial scripts. The borders of 'scriptworlds' are often the borders of empires. In all these scriptworlds, multiple writing systems existed, as did multiple languages, but the system that had currency was the one whose foundations were laid upon the edifice of political and economic ascendency. An official script is an expression of economic dominance, political power, and cultural prestige rather than a rational reflection of how people can best communicate.

The view of writing as institutionally driven is corroborated by the observations and comparisons of script systems made by those who take a longer view. In evolutionary terms, the unique ability of humans to encode and decode language through vision is a recent development: writing emerged approximately 5,400 years ago and the alphabet is only 3,800 years old. Early writing was not devised to record stories or poems, or to express feelings and articulate internal states, or even to represent speech, but to keep track of accounting and to administer clerical and governmental processes. Early manuscript cultures are rich in legal, military, medical, philosophical, religious and even mathematical texts. What this points to is that all writing, including imaginative fiction and poetry, is the outcome of institutional forces, which continue to govern and regulate writing systems, even if they appear naturalized and transparent. This aspect of writing should help us to question any simplistic idea of a script being a mere technological device and to discern the ways in which it disguises the hegemonic nature of writing.

Script and cognitive worlds

The previous section addressed the issue of writing as a political institution; now arises the different question of how various writing systems reflect in their structure the relations between speech and cognition. One of the most influential works to deal with this problem was Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967). Derrida proposed that the history of Western metaphysics is a by-product of phonetic writing. The 'metaphysics of presence', of a speaking subject that pervades logocentric thinking, divests writing of an essential relationship to what it means. Controversially he asserted that Chinese culture is distinct by the absence of logocentrism on account of its ideographic writing system. Other Western thinkers, for example Ernest Fenollosa, A. C. Graham, Chad Hansen, Roland Barthes, and John Gray, have also reflected that the differences between ideographic Chinese and phonetic alphabets engenders a different kind of thinking. Summarized, their arguments go something like this: when one acquires a phonetic alphabetic to encode what exists in the world, the world of written language becomes an autonomous system independent of the world it represents. This is because instead of words being names for things, words are produced within their own separate and arbitrary system of difference and deferral. There is no trace of the *thing* in the alphabet, as there is in the pictographic or ideographic systems, and thus phonetic encoding affords the kind of abstract, transcendental thinking that we find in the history of Western thought. John Gray is the latest in a long line of philosophers who have pondered the effect of script on thought. In his much discussed book, *Straw Dogs* (2002), he writes:

It is scarcely possible to imagine a philosophy such as Platonism emerging from an oral culture. It is equally difficult to imagine it in Sumeria. How could a world of bodiless Forms

be represented in pictograms? How could abstract entities be represented as the ultimate realities in a mode of writing that still recalled the realm of the senses? It is significant that nothing resembling Platonism arose in China. Classical Chinese […] did not encourage the kind of abstract thinking that produced Plato's philosophy. Plato is what historians of philosophy call a realist – he believed that abstract terms designated spiritual or intellectual entities. In contrast, throughout its long history, Chinese thought has been nominalist – it has understood that even the more abstract terms are only labels, names for the diversity of things in the world.[23]

To what degree distinct cognitive worlds are produced through different script is an extremely difficult problem that demands further research. Answers to the questions posed by literary theorists and philosophers are now more likely to come from a wide variety of investigative approaches within the humanities as well as the neurobiological sciences with important technological input from the physical sciences. What has already been established however is the answer to the narrower cognitive question that has divided literary theorists and linguists for thirty years: whether visual linguistic communication is possible independently of sound. Recent developments in cognitive neuroscience concerning how we read have verified that the brain network which interprets word meaning is quite distinct from that which decodes characters/letters into sound.[24] The empirical discovery of two kinds of mental organization for reading language, the lexical and the phonological, helps free ideas about writing from the primacy of speech.

In focusing on script as a relevant issue in world literary studies, this chapter has sought to delve into a deep history of world languages and literatures. If at certain moments literature could be said to represent a history, a language or a world, it is imperative that the

framework of analysis takes into account the hegemonic force of standardized discrete languages and official writing systems, against and within which particular literary expressions were crafted. The more precision with which we explore what these texts have situated themselves against, the more we can expect to be rewarded by general insights into normative and ideal world literary categories that reflect the actual practice of reading and writing across the world.

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[1] See B. Anderson, *Imaginary Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); E. J. Hobsbawm , *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); J. E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: Nation, Ethnic, Religious* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004).

[2] See J. Defrancis, *Visible Speech* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).

[3] See F. Orsini (ed.), *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

[4] See M. Chozick, 'Eating Murasaki Shikibu: Scriptworlds, Reverse-importation, and the *Tale of Genji*', *Journal of World Literature*, 1.2 (2016), 259-274.

[5] I am indebted to Marko Juvan and Mitje Saje for the material on Augustin Hallerstein, and to the Hong DaeYong Science Museum in Cheonan, Korea, for access to the *Damheon Yenjing Records* archive.

[6] The *Joseon* dynasty ruled what is now Korea between 1392 and 1910. *Damheon* (담헌, **湛**

軒) is Hong DaeYong's (홍대용, **洪大容)** 'brush name' (호), a literary title conferred on a writer traditionally by a teacher or his peers. His given Korean name, DaeYong, is transcribed in *Pinyin* as 'Darong'.

[7] See S. S. Park, 'Introduction: Transnational Scriptworlds', *Journal of World Literature*, 1.2 (2016), 129-141.

[8] The mission left Beijing on the March 11, 1766 and arrived back in Seoul on April 27, 1766.

[9] For further details see M. Saje (ed.), *A Hallerstein – Liu Songling: The Multicultural Legacy of Jesuit Wisdom and Piety at the Qing Dynasty Court* (Slovenia: KIBLA, 2009), pp.76-115.

[10] The other two are Kim Changeop's (김창업, 金昌業) *Yeon Haengilgi* (연행일기, 燕行日記, 1712), and Park Jiwon's (박지원, 朴趾源) *Yeolhailgi* (열하일기, 熱河日記, 1780).

[11] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 303.

[12] Pictographs form the basis of writings such as cuneiform and hieroglyphs, though all writing systems contain a combination of ideographic and phonetic elements.

[13] See K. Tyson, '808 ways to Write Chinese, Korean and Japanese: Update', *The World of Chinese.* <http://www.theworldofchinese.com/2014/04/808-ways-to-write-chinese-korean-and-japanese/> [Accessed 20 February 2016].

[14] See D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[15] T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry' (1942), in *T. S. Eliot on Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p.29.

[16] T. S. Eliot, 'Questions of Prose', in *The Letters of T S Eliot, Vol. 3 1926-1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 260.

[17] See O. Dann, 'The Invention of National Languages', in *Unity and Diversity in European Culture c. 1800*, T. Blanning and H. Schulz (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.121-34; R. J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (Routledge, London, 1995).

[18] R. J. C. Young, 'That Which Is casually called a Language', *PMLA* 131.5 (2016), p 209.

[19] The *Hunminjeongeum* ('Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People'), which sets out the *Hangul* writing system, was proclaimed by King Sejong in 1446.

[20] See the special issue, 'Hangul and Korean Culture', *Korea Journal*, 36.3 (1996).

[21] The Chinese version was first published in 1939 and the *Hangul* version appeared in 1974. They are on permanent exhibition in the Hong Daeyong Science Museum in Cheonan, Korea.

[22] See, H. Lim, 'From the Universal to the National: The Question of Language and Writing in Twentieth Century Korea', *Journal of World Literature*, 1.2 (2016), 245-258.

[23] J. Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and other Animals* (London: Granta Books, 2003), p. 57.

[24] S. Dehaene, *The Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 26.