Caliban’s Books: The Hybrid Text in Peter Greenaway’s *Prospero’s Books*

by James Tweedie

This essay discusses Peter Greenaway’s *Prospero’s Books* as an allegory of the adaptation of canonical literature to cinema, with The Tempest’s colonial concerns refigured as a confrontation between a “masterful” original and an “unfaithful” follower. The essay then situates the film’s meditation on the literary artifact and neobaroque aesthetics in opposition to the discourses of heritage circulating in Thatcherite Britain.

In early Westerns there are those classic chase scenes in which we see a train and men on horses galloping beside it. Sometimes a rider succeeds in leaving his horse and pulling himself aboard the train. This action, so beloved by directors, is the emblematic action of cinema. All film stories use cross-overs.

—John Berger

The Canonical Artifact in a Thatcherite Moment. Like Shakespeare’s original, Peter Greenaway’s version of *The Tempest*, *Prospero’s Books* (1991), dramatizes a series of stormy passages. The most literal are geographical, as Prospero’s exile takes him from Milan to a Mediterranean island and, after he exacts his revenge, back to his dukedom. But the film and the play (and centuries of criticism) also suggest that the powerful conjurings of Prospero, his “arts” and “magic,” tease us out of a literal mode of reading and into an allegorical one: Prospero’s island becomes an alchemical laboratory for a reconfiguration of geological elements, a microcosm of colonial relations, or a stage peopled only by actors and a director, thereby laying bare the practice of stagecraft and artistic “illusion.” Greenaway’s film of course performs the literal action of the play proper, but it also provides a meditation on its large allegorical significance by inserting another narrative, both embedded within and superimposed upon the play: the expanded story of Prospero’s books. A running commentary on the process of “reading” a film, and, in particular, a screen adaptation, those books illustrate the issues at stake in both a postmodern filmmaker’s encounter with the First Folio and Shakespeare’s crossing to our current cultural milieu.

In the extended horizontal tracking shot accompanying the credits, the film enacts a series of exchanges, as a book is passed from person to person in a space teeming with objects, elaborately costumed and half-nude actors, and all manner of incongruous sounds. The sequence then continues into Prospero’s library, where

James Tweedie is a Ph.D. candidate studying English and film at the University of Iowa, where his dissertation is on the neobaroque tendency in contemporary European cinema and culture. His essay on *Lolita* is forthcoming in *Twentieth Century Literature*.

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his spirits blow dust off the volumes scattered throughout the room. In these opening moments, the film foregrounds the transmission of a seemingly sacred book within a spectacular setting and, in the process, addresses three issues of overriding concern in contemporary film adaptation: first, will the text itself be overwhelmed by the spectacle on the screen (as “heritage” films often double as museums for sumptuous period objects) or offscreen (as those films sometimes become standard star vehicles); second, will the film present an unreflective, “faithful” rendition of the original or will it interrogate and unsettle the book’s canonical status and thereby reconsider its exchange value within the “imagined community” it addresses; and, third, can a film incorporate a classic text without inviting comparisons to an idealized original, without capitulating to that original’s cultural capital, without merely blowing the dust off old and venerated volumes?

Prospero’s Books is, of course, yet another recent adaptation of the Bard, but it also embarks on a formally radical interpretation of Shakespeare with broader cultural implications. It incorporates books and paintings into a reconfigured cinematic space, situating the viewer (or reader or beholder) in a liminal position somewhere at the crossroads of the arts: as a reader, but of an oddly vertical text; as a beholder of a framed art object, but one that is always in motion; and as a spectator at the movies, but at a film that always threatens to become a still or textualized object. The whole film unfolds in this disorienting environment, a space of instability and heterogeneity, the apotheosis of a Deleuzian “any-space-whatever.” The parallel series of Prospero’s books tells a related tale: it leads us back through a genealogy of illustrated and illuminated manuscripts, forward to new technologies that make possible the baroque ideal of an “entr’expression” outside the confines of page or screen, and between the categories of text and image. Prospero’s Books thus relates its Tempest in a distinctly baroque idiom designed to undermine the certainties of heritage and the sanctity of the canon.

As it meanders among media, Greenaway’s baroque Tempest relates its aesthetic concerns to the play’s allegory of social boundaries and border crossings. The clash between Prospero’s books and their adversaries on the island parallels the problematic relationship between the classic text and the film adaptation, often figured as a conflict between a masterful original and an (un)faithful follower. For this reason, The Tempest, one of Shakespeare’s most adapted plays, is the emblematic story of literature adapted to the screen. A central text in postcolonial theory, The Tempest also allegorizes the power relationships played out in its microcosmic society and manifested in the struggle to destabilize the fetishized books that become the instrument and symbol of Prospero’s dominance. At the core of the play’s various allegories (be they figurations of political struggle or of artistic illusion) lies the book. Although Greenaway has always been more of a formal innovator than an overtly political filmmaker, by foregrounding Prospero’s books, he implicitly critiques the social and cultural status of the book, an act with wider implications in a Thatcherite moment when Britain’s literary heritage served more than ever as a mooring for a reified national past. As a film about books, a visualization of the spoken and written word, a farrago of anachronistic visual and literary cultures displayed in digitally constructed images, a clash between the First Folio
and new technologies of representation, and a revisionist reading of Shakespeare in the heyday of heritage films, *Prospero’s Books* emphasizes the kindred nature of these aesthetic and social concerns, while it also experiments with a neobaroque idiom capable of supporting such cross-overs.

**Prospero’s Library and the Unbound Book.** *Prospero’s Books* seizes on a promising conceit for its presentation of *The Tempest*—promising because the books in Shakespeare’s play, although they serve as mere props for most of the drama, also function as a site where the agonistic relationship between Prospero and his subjects is contested. Each mention manifests a different conception of the utility and authority of the book and establishes a continuum of power relations marked by varying degrees of access to power through language. Prospero first broaches the issue early in the play, as he recounts his ouster from the seat of power in Milan and his hastily arranged exile. Upon his departure, a “noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,” arranges “out of his charity” to provide “rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessaries” to soften Prospero’s fall from grace. Prospero also says of Gonzalo:

> Knowing I lov’d my books, he furnish’d me
> From mine own library with volumes that
> I prize above my dukedom.
> 
> (1.2.165–68)\(^1\)

Prospero’s thankfulness rests upon a qualitative distinction between the books and political power, as he elevates those volumes to a status above and beyond the realm of dukedoms and “Absolute Milan.” But this dichotomy between worldly ambition and a rarefied conception of literature and pure knowledge contrasts dramatically with the play’s further action: Prospero draws on the knowledge and instrumental value contained in his books to summon a storm and avenge the usurpation of power in his dukedom. And, as Caliban makes clear when plotting his own escape and revenge, those books lie at the core of his master’s actual and mystified power. Instructing Stephano and Trinculo on the surest means of performing a coup, he says:

> Remember
> First to possess his books; for without them
> He’s but a sot, as I am; nor hath not
> One spirit to command: they all do hate him
> As rootedly as I. Burn but his books.
> 
> (3.2.91–95)

Homi Bhabha traces a similar trajectory of thought into the nineteenth century and beyond, as the “English book” continues to elicit the mixture of fear and wonder evident in Caliban’s words. In the colonial context, the battle of the books becomes a struggle over power, origins, and, ultimately, the “status of truth.” Bhabha writes: “For it is precisely to intervene in such a battle for the *status* of the truth that it becomes crucial to examine the *presence* of the English book. For it is this *surface* that stabilizes the agonistic colonial space; it is its *appearance* that regulates the
ambivalence between origin and Entstellung, discipline and desire, mimesis and repetition.”4 For Bhabha, the “English book” comes to embody the paradox of the colonial situation: even an object of obscure origins can become “an insignia of colonial authority” and a source of unified power, while the “signs” contained within this “wonder” are productive of endless hybridity and dissemination.5 Thus, the book—as surface and insignia—transforms literature as a phenomenon of language into a mystified symbol and instrument of colonial power.

With books constantly arrayed on shelves and desktops, with the massive cast of characters constantly engaged in reading and writing, with words inscribed on surfaces of stone, paper, water, and celluloid, Greenaway’s film presents an extended meditation on the relationship between the mystical authority of the book and the hybridizing act of reading and writing. More than just a cinematic performance of The Tempest, Prospero’s Books provides a running commentary on the struggle between the book as a cultural object and the text it strives but fails to contain. Greenaway’s use of rich visual detail creates an explosion of the sign into the manifold aspects elided in the moment of inscription.

The director has described the film as the process of a mind reviewing its contents, as a recapitulation of “all the masses of knowledge that a scholar accumulates, some of it quite wasteful, some of it quite bad”;6 and he has maintained that all works of art are “encyclopedic by nature,” the result of the reconfiguration and manipulation of cultural allusions.7 The film’s baroque mise-en-scène, deep-focus cinematography, and constantly moving camera reveal just such an encyclopedia of allusions through a flood of visual images, startling both in their number and density. The long horizontal tracking shot that accompanies the opening credits surveys a group of figures with an allegorical relationship to water, the subject of Prospero’s first book. Noah, Moses in the bulrushes, Leda and the Swan, and Icarus all make cameo appearances as the visuals virtually exhaust the connotative capacity of the word water, made visible and audible in the rhythmic dripping that begins and ends the film. Add to this the visual pun on “making water” as Ariel urinates and Prospero calls forth a storm, the toy galleon and countless other nautical references, the waves and waterfalls, the bathhouse supplied with “large, exotic shells and a basin and brushes, sponges and towels,” and the visual images begin to reflect some of the complexity of the word.8

From this perspective, the film meanders through the reading process in a fashion reminiscent of Roland Barthes’s S/Z, which also represents a reading experience through an expansive annotative apparatus. The volumes in Prospero’s library serve as an outline of Renaissance knowledge and, adjusted for time and place, make visible the “Books” of cultural knowledge that construct the paradigm of any reading experience and that Barthes cites in his study of Honoré de Balzac’s novella. In many instances, Prospero’s books share the title or thematic concern of Barthes’s mythic reference works; both have a Book of Love, for example, and both attach special importance to the standards of popular science and mythology. Indeed, Greenaway’s oeuvre as a whole, particularly the aesthetic based on seventeenth-century Dutch and Italian art that governs Prospero’s Books, could function serviceably as a chapter of Barthes’s History of Art.
Greenaway once commented on a “slightly facetious note” that “if The Cook, The Thief . . . was a film about ‘You are what you eat,’ Prospero’s Books is a film about ‘you are what you read.’”9 Conceived in that spirit, Prospero’s array of books confronts us with an encyclopedic version of the “school manual” that tutors Barthes’s reading of the cultural codes, the book most responsible for constructing our experience as readers. Like his earlier work in T.V. Dante (1989), which inserts scholarly commentary into a wildly illustrated and animated visualization of the text, Greenaway’s Tempest spotlights the gamut of cultural knowledge and institutions that inform and interfere with the reading process.10 Jonathan Romney argues that Greenaway adds to “the cacophony of Prospero’s ‘isle full of noises’ . . . a visual and conceptual ‘cacography’” that both invites and defies the reading process. In so doing, Greenaway performs one of the essential functions of literature because, as Barthes says, “literature is an intentional cacography.”11 As the film creates a field of “static” between author and reader, Greenaway’s visual excess performs a similar function, as the images ramify to the verge of “countercommunication.”12

The tour of Prospero’s collection of books also provides a compendium of theories of reading, as each book establishes a particular relationship with the reader. As Miranda flips through the enormous End Plants (Fig. 1), for example, she introduces a vast variety of leaves and flowers, one per page, with hundreds of potential variations. From the initial categorization signaled in the title, the complexities of language unfold moment by moment, recalling the devolution from “primal form” to specific utterance described in Friedrich Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense,” an early gesture in the direction of poststructuralist literary theory. Nietzsche writes:
Every idea originates through equating the unequal. As certainly as no one leaf is exactly similar to any other, so certain is it that the idea of “leaf” has been formed through an arbitrary omission of these individual differences, through a forgetting of the differentiating qualities, and this idea now awakens the notion that there is, besides the leaves, a something called the “leaf,” perhaps a primal form according to which all leaves were woven, drawn, accurately measured, coloured, crinkled, painted, but by unskilled hands, so that no copy had turned out correct and trustworthy as a true copy of the primal form.13

Far from exhaustive despite its length, Prospero’s book *End Plants* exemplifies visually the failure of language to contain the manifold particulars and rich ambiguity of a world beyond ideas. The mere presence of the objects glued to a page demonstrates the inadequacy of the title signifier’s taxonomic gesture.

Likewise, *A Book of Love* underscores the limitations of language by extending the metaphors inevitable in all language into the doubly metaphorical realm of abstraction, by again eliminating all traces of difference and formulating what Nietzsche calls a *“qualitas occulta.”*14 The Book itself provides only a brief glimpse of a “naked man and woman” and “clasped hands” while everything else remains “conjecture.” Beyond these literal figures of love, the pages are unable to materialize the abstraction promised by the title, and its contents remain elusive and ineffable. As Greenaway writes in the screenplay, these icons “were once spotted, briefly, in a mirror, and that mirror was in another book.”15 All such abstractions are founded upon an infinite *mise-en-abyme*; and, as in Paul de Man’s theory of reading, the abstraction is writeable only through the invocation of an endless regression of further abstractions. The naked bodies provide a figure for “love” not because of any necessary connection between the picture and some essential notion of love—they could introduce a *Book of Lust* or *Gray’s Anatomy*—but because Renaissance convention dictates such a figuration—or, perhaps more accurately, because the privileged signifier on the spine announces their presence as “Love.” As de Man writes of an allegory of *Karitas* in a Giotto fresco, “We accede to the proper meaning through a direct act of reading, not by the oblique reading of the allegory.”16 A strict “thematic” reading of the allegory therefore forecloses other readings, other “incompatible meanings between which it is impossible to decide in terms of truth and error.”17 All reading, for de Man, entails a manner of “crossing, or chiasmus” between “two modes of reading,” between the “literal” and the “allegorical.” *Prospero’s Books* constantly performs this sort of crossing, as a literal reading of the play performed on the screen alternates with various allegorical readings that center on the archive presented through those books.

*A Book of Mirrors* implies a purely subjective relationship between reader and text, with the mirrored pages serving both as a reflection of a beholder’s desires and, as Maurice Yacowar argues, a “prototypical postmodernist fabrication” in which different “sheets of past” are conjured up on the “pages” of the book.18 Instead of reflecting a “realistic” vision of a world external to the text or reader, the mirrors show a world of “lies,” a world seen “backwards, another upside down,” and finally a *mise-en-abyme* in which, again, “one mirror simply reflects another mirror across the page.”19 A *Book of Mirrors* abandons all conceptions of literature as mimesis, and the book physically enacts the dissolution that its pages evoke, as
quicksilver drips down the page, the most explicit illustration of the essential im-
materiality of the sign. This liquefied text also announces its kinship with Prospero's 
first book—The Book of Water, the ur-text of both the island and the library (as all 
writing emerges from the liquid in Prospero's inkwell, and all the books are sub-
jected to a final drowning). The drips of water at the film's beginning and end, the 
pool where Prospero writes and conjures up the tempest, and the misty atmos-
phere that thickens the air into a medium for spectacular light effects all establish 
water as the master element in the world of the film, pitting its fluid amorphous-
ness against the imaginary unity that each book strives to uphold.

Perhaps most exemplary of Greenaway's conception of the book is A Book of 
Motion, an unruly volume that lies in Prospero's study, restrained Gulliver-like in a 
web of straps and buckles, spilling the ink perched on its cover with its incessant 
rumbling. This animated volume demonstrates "all the possibilities for dance in 
the human body" and most directly questions the unitary conception of the book, 
as it threatens to escape its comic discipline and unbind itself, joining the cascade 
of pages filling the air in Prospero's library. The book also demonstrates in its 
unseen insides "how the eye changes shape when looking at great distances," an-
other affirmation of the beholder's role in a transformation and re-creation of the 
site or object seen. The mythical integrity of the book as an object, as an element 
in a scholarly still life arranged on a dusty desk, begins to disintegrate as the book 
is cracked open and its contents examined.

Prospero's library also harbors an alternative genealogy of the book, one that 
emphasizes a tradition of visuality leading from illuminated and illustrated manu-
scripts to contemporary digital media. Greenaway has argued that "cinema is re-
related to two thousand years of image-making in Europe," and his idiosyncratic 
history of the book situates one branch of bookmaking within that tradition of 
image production. Using Japanese high-definition television facilities for the ed-
iting and effects processes, Greenaway adds motion and depth to the flat images 
 stamped or drawn into the surface of the book. On the pages of A Harsh Book of 
Geometry, the diagrams of the Renaissance science of physical space are updated 
by televisual technology, as computer-generated shapes and figures inhabit and 
animate geometric principles. Similarly, in Architecture and Other Music, virtual 
structures rise from the page as though from a pop-up book before undergoing a 
final, undetectable transformation into physical sets. Prospero introduces the book 
and describes its contents, only to summon forth the visible and ultimately the 
material structures through which he soon strolls.

Such animation and materialization of textual images, as Romney argues, "con-
tribute to a general undermining of the smooth surface of the text, obstruc-
ting the (already slender) certainties of the play with words' tendency to become flesh 
(or water, or metal, or colour, or any of the other metamorphoses the book exhib-
its)." The film presents a variation on Jorge Luis Borges's "Chinese encyclopaedia," or a book collection organized with total disregard for Dewey 
and his decimal system. In Greenaway's conception, the book belongs not in a 
library traditionally defined but in a museum of image-making and intermediality 
founded on an alternative organizing principle; the book is a space where archi-
tecture coexists with related manifestations of “music,” and where text and image manifest the same lineage. The film not only adapts *The Tempest* to the screen, it also translates the text into a flood of literal, architectonic images that deconstruct categorical distinctions between the book and visual culture and that employ what Walter Benjamin describes as the translator’s most effective strategy: “For if the sentence is a wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade.”27 As Rey Chow points out, translation is primarily a process of putting together. This process demonstrates that the “original,” too, is something that has been put together . . . It is also a process of “literalness” that displays the way the “original” itself was put together—that is, in its violence . . . What needs to be translated from the original . . . is not a kind of truth or meaning but the way in which the “original” is put together in the basic element of human language—words.28

Greenaway’s adaptation, at times literally word for word, both demonstrates how those words were themselves “put together” and performs their disintegration into constituent elements. The result is not the standard “literate” adaptation, which attempts to emulate the canonical status of a literary object, but a “literal” film, one that deconstructs its subject into infinitesimal elements and translates them, word by word, image by image. *Prospero’s Books* also demonstrates how films are “put together,” and its anachronistic books propose a forward-looking lineage, one that prefigures the age of mechanical reproduction, cinema, and a new generation of television technology. Greenaway positions protofilmic moving images prominently in his mythical texts. In *Ninety-Two Conceits of the Minotaur*, for instance, a hybrid bird-man leaps from the flipping pages in a reenactment of the experiments of Étienne-Jules Marey, who developed a primitive cinematic device that animated a series of still pictures by spinning the site of their inscription, and the inventions of Eadweard Muybridge, who translated the same principles into a new technological medium. (Greenaway suggests in the screenplay that Caliban, who becomes allegorically associated with cinema as the film progresses, “would find this book of great interest.”)29 Likewise, through a seemingly misplaced image of a boxer, *The Autobiographies of Pasiphae and Semiramis* refers to later manifestations of the moving picture, namely, the first filmed heavyweight fight, a match between Ruby Robert Fitzsimmons and Gentleman Jim Corbett in 1897.30 This series of animated books is imprinted with a history of cinema and constantly folds between these domains.

The references to film history continue Greenaway’s longtime interest in the possibilities of early cinema, possibilities foreclosed in classical narrative structures.31 In films like *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982) and *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1986), the meticulously rendered or photographed scene—art conceived as a means of circumscribing nature or as a tool of social or biological science, as in the motion studies of Frank Gilbreth or Muybridge—coexists with other conceptions of the visual image: as anarchical excess and as a site for the irruption of the uncanny. Through a series of metamorphoses, *Prospero’s Books* transforms the traditional site of inscription into a medium more akin to cinema, a place where image and text occupy the same ontological sphere and where the visual excess reminds us of the
book's tendency to limit the ramifications of the text. The film itself displays the strategies that such a transformation entails.

The Neobaroque Book. The film’s presentation of Vesalius’s lost Book of Anatomical Birth alludes to a long tradition of paintings that address the relationship between text and image within the context of a disfiguring violation of bodily integrity, the most notable being Rembrandt’s The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicholas Tulp and Thomas Eakins’s The Gross Clinic. In the former, the actions involved in painting and writing are performed and displayed within the operating theater, identifying “the painter with the role of one— butcher, hunter, surgeon— whose hand cuts and delves into the body.”32 Both Rembrandt’s painting and Greenaway’s invocation establish an intimate connection among paint, text, and flesh, and among the institutional spheres associated with each: museum, library, surgery, and slaughterhouse.33 As Bridget Elliott and Anthony Purdy point out, Greenaway’s work shares Georges Bataille’s interest in the conjunction of exalted and abject social spaces, a concern expressed most succinctly in Bataille’s short dictionary entries on “The Museum” and its shadow space, “The Slaughterhouse.”

In his study of Thomas Eakins, centering on The Gross Clinic, Michael Fried situates the painter’s work within a related problematic in the late nineteenth century. Eakins was educated by a writing master father who considered penmanship an extension of the visual arts and in a school system in which both drawing and writing were considered graphic arts subsumed by what Fried calls a “writing-drawing complex.”34 Fried discusses the spatial organization of Eakins’s work as an attempt to reconcile the horizontal surfaces of writing and the vertical orientation of the painted canvas. He sees in Eakins’s paintings of rowers on the Philadelphia river, for example, a sheet of water extending horizontally into the perspectival system of the canvas’s constructed space; and he sees in the ripples on water a graphic equivalent of the words that crop up more conspicuously in other paintings—in scraps of paper incorporated into the composition, in carvings on wooden surfaces within the painting, and in frames where Eakins (an accomplished woodworker) inscribed relevant passages, thereby transgressing both the traditional compass of the frame and the perceived boundaries between script and picture. His frame for The Concert Singer beckons toward a further medium, as he carves thereon the opening bars of a Mendelssohn opera, as if giving voice to the singer pictured on the canvas. Fried sees in The Gross Clinic the apotheosis of these intermedial concerns, as the bloody, scalpel-wielding hand of the surgeon becomes an iconic figure for the writing and painting hand as well, conflating various modes of art and science in one unsettling image.

Eakins further embodies the writing process through a doctor (modeled on himself) transcribing notes from the operation on an unseen book; but X-rays of The Gross Clinic have revealed traces of another picture of a rower on the water, a subliminal configuration of horizontal, water-like writing surfaces beneath the less obviously inscribed anatomy lesson. Thus, beneath the surface of the painting, the implicit depth of the medium enacts the thematic laid bare on its surface. In Greenaway’s film, scenes of reading and writing present those processes both in
medium shots, which show Prospero at his desk with the book, and in extreme
close-ups of the words themselves. These two compositions reflect different con-
ceptions of cinematic space: the former is in the mise-en-scène tradition, which
emphasizes composition in depth and the long take, designed to communicate
through choreographed movements and the meticulous placement of objects; the
latter is a more frontal and vertical model, in which most information exists on the
surface, as though contained in a book held upright. The scene in the operating
theater demonstrates the tension between these two spaces, between the operat-
ing table, which extends in depth surrounded by a throng of onlookers, and the
screen’s vertical surface, whose flatness is underscored by an internal frame and
by diegetic spectators beholding the scene as though it were a painting. The anatomy
lesson exists both in depth, as the caméra-stylo circumnavigates the space in which
the scene unfolds, and as a framed surface, as the camera pulls back through that
frame, dissolving ultimately into the superimposed text of Vesalius’s book itself,
overwritten by Greenaway’s Quantel Paintbox. Through this movement of the cam-
era and the subsequent act of inscription, Greenaway underscores the both/and or
neither/nor status of his medium in relation to its constituent arts. Instead of stag-
ing a performance of canned theater or an insistently literary adaptation of a clas-
sic, the film uses digital pyrotechnics to reaffirm the potential hybridity of those
arts and the cinema.

In both Rembrandt and Eakins, this violation of boundaries also bears the bur-
den of castration, disfiguration, and what Fried calls a “wounding of seeing”; the
depicted assault on the body is both “painful to look at . . . and all but impossible,
hence painful, to look away from.”35 But in Prospero’s Books the crossing over be-
tween text and image, word and flesh, museum and slaughterhouse is no longer
implicated in an assault on the body and embodied vision, becoming instead the
object of intense scrutiny as the film focuses relentlessly on those translations and
transgressions. Superimposed text and image occupy the same ostensible space;
their celluloid transparency allows the two to bleed together until their once-sepa-
rate identities and spaces become indistinguishable. As Greenaway writes in the
screenplay, when Prospero writes the first words of the play and they appear verti-
cally on the screen, occupying the entire frame, “for the moment, there is no clue
whatsoever where this handwritten word on paper is situated.”36 These words are,
for the moment, written outside the book, occupying a liminal, disorienting space at
once horizontal and vertical yet neither. Just as the books disintegrate, signifiers
disseminate, and diagrams are animated in the film, text and image lose their sepa-
rate identities and merge onto one hybridized screen. Such moments unfold in the
apotheosis of Gilles Deleuze’s “any-space-whatever,” or in a “perfectly singular
space, which has merely lost its homogeneity . . . so that the linkages can be made in
an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus
of the possible.”37 The “any-space-whatever” is also the terrain of deterritorialization
and, therefore, a site where the aesthetic migrates into the social dimension, where
the cinematic “nomad space” clashes with Prospero’s claims to ownership of the
island. Alternately oblivious and hostile to the chaos surrounding him, Prospero
writes, entrusting his words to the familiar confines of the book or using his library
as an instrument of control. But this conception of both the book and the island as bounded territory becomes increasingly untenable, as the film foregrounds another model of the book: as multiplicity, assemblage, and "line of flight."38

Soon after the anatomy sequence, Prospero's quill returns to the inkwell and his calligraphy re-creates more moments from the play. Shot in extreme close-up, the quill in a container of limpid blue liquid is a metaphor for the process of writing on screen and for the transition between the surface of writing and the fluidity and depth implied by the camera in motion. Running fuguelike throughout the film, this close-up of the inkwell calls attention to the medium that both makes inscription possible and colors and transforms all representation. Like Prospero's quill plumbing the depths of its well, Greenaway's graphic paintbox and caméra-stylo negotiate the passage between surface inscription and depth, between the word and the meandering it compels. As Andrew Higson says of the British "heritage film," "Literary authorship, the process of writing itself, is foregrounded in the recurrent narrative episode of a character writing or reading a letter or a book, either aloud or in voice-over, thus celebrating the purity of the word."39 In contrast, Prospero's Books celebrates the extravagant impurity of the word, reveling not in the books themselves but in the ramifications they initiate. An illusionist in the tradition of Méliès, Greenaway runs the risk of drowning the text in the eye-catching potential of new media and the spectacular baroque environment that envelops the film's source material. But the trajectory of the film emphasizes that the reader and viewer are already engaged in spectacular and hybridizing cognitive processes, in a crossing-over between modes of reading and between words and images.

Omar Calabrese has called "neo-baroque" a "sign of the times," the dominant "character" of the contemporary epoch, across cultural levels and media; and he cites Greenaway as one of its legion practitioners.40 Others identify Greenaway as a participant in the "gradual, scattered but undeniable emergence of what might be described as 'mannerist' cinema," whose characteristics include a "concern with theatrical mise-en-scène, the use of tableaux, hyperbolic lighting effects, [and] quotation from painting."41 Whatever terminological disparities may exist in theory and criticism, and however evaluations of the scope of this phenomenon may differ, this tendency clearly harbors an anti-classical impulse, with the director's elaborately constructed, convoluted works providing one example of this departure from classical models, be they literary, cinematic, or otherwise.

Walter Benjamin writes that the baroque differs from the Renaissance in the object of its inquiry: the baroque shifts its attention from the universe to the library; it meditates on the archive, envisioning the world only through the mediation of those collected texts.42 The neobaroque tendency in contemporary European cinema likewise involves an exploration of libraries and museums, and it often adopts a critical approach to contemporary mobilizations of the heritage housed in those settings. This phenomenon is most evident in the work of Derek Jarman and Sally Potter in Britain and on the Continent in films by Jacques Rivette, Raúl Ruiz, and Jean-Luc Godard during the 1980s. Through its radical impurity and its incessant rummaging through an archive of archaic knowledge, Prospero's Books offers an extreme example in which, paradoxically, this baroque tendency emerges in its purest form.
According to Deleuze, the baroque (in both its historical and contemporary manifestations) is characterized primarily by an idiom based on “the fold,” as described by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. After the calligraphy of the earliest scenes establishes the curved rather than the perpendicular line, the baroque rather than the classical, as the film’s fundamental graphic principle, Prospero’s Books devolves into a mass of seemingly endless convolutions. The entropic shots of innumerable books unbinding, for example, are a visualization of the film’s aesthetic principles; these shots suggest that the book and the film do not comprise a series of discrete, flat sheets or shots leading from a beginning to an end, but a mass of curves, convolutions, and folds that, like the baroque in Deleuze’s definition, “unfurls all the way to infinity.”43 Greenaway’s later work in The Pillow Book (1996) offers a further instantiation of this process, as it discards the sheet of paper altogether, replacing it with the single, idiosyncratically undulating and involute surface of the human body, which serves as the site of inscription for the omnipresent calligraphic curves; the body reveals the kindred curvature of the book that it becomes. Prospero’s Books also rehearses the director’s obsession with mathematics and geometry; but rather than a Cartesian or Euclidean system, Greenaway’s film operates within mathematical ordinances modeled on what Deleuze calls Leibniz’s “Baroque mathematics,” in which the “straight line always has to be intermingled with curved lines.”44

Greenaway’s mathematical bent and obsession with graphic systems derive less from a compulsion to impose an exogenous order on his films than the desire to use those foundations as a staging ground for the alternative particularities they become.45 Prospero’s twenty-four books, a number chosen to replicate cinema’s twenty-four frames per second, present themselves not as a sequence of discrete objects but as a series of unfoldings, with each book becoming the source of endless visual ramifications. Each of the books, and, by extension, each of the frames, becomes a gesture toward “incompossible” worlds, toward the alternate referents and media elided in the moment of inscription. As in Prospero’s Books, in Leibniz’s baroque system the “monad” “is the book or the reading room,” from which the film constantly folds into the alternative, incompossible spaces, media, and images that exceed Prospero’s initial attempt at circumscription.46 As Deleuze put it:

The visible and the legible, the outside and the inside, the façade and the chamber are, however, not two worlds, since the visible can be read (Mallarmé’s journal), and the legible has its theater (both Leibniz’s and Mallarmé’s theaters of reading). Combinations of the visible and the legible make up “emblems” or allegories dear to the Baroque sensibility. We are always referred to a new kind of correspondence or mutual expression, an entr’expression, fold after fold.47

By following this baroque line, Greenaway suggests that an authoritative ideal posited on the stage or page is itself a fiction. The film becomes the cinematic equivalent of what W. J. T. Mitchell calls “ekphrastic hope,” the belief that crossing over—between genres, media, and modes of reading—is the foundational trope of language and the arts.48
A Nomadic Shakespeare and the Confines of Heritage. Why undertake all of these formal and technical innovations in a screen version of The Tempest? What do Prospero’s books, high-definition television, the palimpsest of text and image, and the countless idiosyncrasies of Greenaway’s Tempest have to do with Shakespeare’s original? These questions subtend many critical responses to the film, and their answers determine whether The Tempest provides more than just an occasion for televisual pyrotechnics and whether Greenaway’s rendering of the text affects in any significant way the play’s attendant interpretive tradition. Many critics have explored the relation between the autobiographical elements that unite the play with the film. While Prospero’s farewell to illusionism at the end of The Tempest seems to signal the playwright’s departure from the conjurings of pen and stage, actor John Gielgud and Greenaway, conflated in the figure of Prospero, also announce their exits: the octogenarian actor says farewell after a half-century playing Prospero on the stage, while the director embraces new media after a career working as an artist and filmmaker.

The fantastic surroundings of Prospero’s island also afford a dramatically coherent opportunity for Greenaway’s technical and formal innovations: because Prospero practices his own brand of magical “arts,” Greenaway’s tricks are justified in the diegesis. But the play’s “isle full of noises” provides more than a fantastic setting for the film, and its characters are more than figures for its various authors. As a tradition of postcolonial readings has demonstrated, the play is structured around the relationship between a dominant power and its others, constructing their difference through alterity of language and the body, through the discrepancy between the curses emanating from the “monster” Caliban and the standards of linguistic and bodily propriety established by Prospero and enforced by his minions.49

From the First Act, Caliban’s character is marked by a lack, by a seeming deficiency in his capacity to communicate and, by extension, to move beyond mere reference to artful turns of phrase. Miranda, for example, emphasizes her own role in bestowing the power of language upon Caliban; she says:

I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
Know thy own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow’d thy purposes
With words that made them known.

(1.2.353–58)

Miranda’s refusal to value alternative methods of making known underscores the fact that the hierarchy of signifying systems is founded on indifference or ignorance. And such a tenuous hierarchy needs and receives constant reinforcement, as Prospero’s “spirits” “set upon” Caliban to punish “every trifle,” making their status known through their mocking “mow and chatter,” their display of superiority in matters of language; Caliban says:

sometime am I
All wound with adders, who with cloven tongues

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Do hiss me into madness
(2.2.12–14)

Caliban’s lines often resemble a kind of doggerel, bearing few of the trappings of poetry present in the speech of Ariel, for example, who breaks into rhyme and song at every opportunity. Caliban’s language thus exists in a tacit hierarchy that renders his every utterance deficient when compared to the posited, imagined ideal. Caliban’s linguistic alterity is accentuated in the film by the mechanical reverberations that accompany his lines, in stark contrast to the clipped, precise enunciation of the other impersonated lines, nearly all recited by Prospero. Played by one of Britain’s most renowned “theatrical knights,” Prospero inherits the mantle of a long tradition of stagecraft; Caliban’s lines sound like the product of a sound stage and technological manipulation.

The binary logic of the island’s social system becomes most apparent when Prospero invokes Caliban’s position in the hierarchy during an extended criticism of Ferdinand and his coconspirators. Implicitly reinforcing already established hierarchies, Prospero says of Ferdinand:

To th’ most of men this is a Caliban,
And they to him are angels.
(1.2.481–82)

A similar form of binary logic situates Sycorax, a witch and Caliban’s mother, at one end of a spectrum that confirms Miranda’s status as elevated beyond any possibility of comparison. According to Caliban, Prospero

himself
Calls her a nonpareil. I never saw a woman
But only Sycorax my dam and she;
But she as far surpasseth Sycorax
As great’st does least.
(3.2.99–103)

Miranda’s status is affirmed only by the seeming impossibility of other Mirandas, by the unthinkability of her being equaled, by the assertion that her beauty is “nonpareil,” “perfect and peerless.” Deprived of contact with women because of his isolation on Prospero’s island, Caliban attributes this policy to Prospero’s fear of his ability to reproduce and to be reproduced. Without Prospero’s restrictions, Caliban says:

I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.
(1.2.350–51)

If Miranda’s value derives in part from an enveloping aura of uniqueness, Caliban’s negative valence results from the absence of that aura; he is the embodiment of unrestrained reproduction and reproducibility. Caliban is an “abhorred slave” and “capable of all ill,” according to Miranda and Prospero, whose debased state is marked not only by this fear of his potential ubiquity but also by his resistance to Prospero’s efforts at redirection. To his master, Caliban will forever remain outside
the established linguistic order, at the lower reaches of the established hierarchies, because he operates in a body and a language “which any print of goodness wilt not take” (1.2.352). And in the film Prospero makes every effort to overwrite him, as the majority of the written lines appearing on the screen belong to Caliban. If his speech is unrefined by the rarefied standards of the likes of Miranda and Ariel, Caliban is doubly disturbing to Prospero because he remains so resistant to this reinscription and beyond the reach of books and print culture. This outsider status is accentuated in the film, as Caliban’s first appearance is accompanied by a frenzied defilement of books, with excrement and vomit serving as a weapon in this attack on Prospero’s instruments of power, the body thus serving as a defense against the book.

In *Prospero’s Books*, Caliban’s departure from his master’s ideals is also a function of visuality and the body, of his relentlessly physical and sexual presence in a world where the body is everywhere else de-eroticized. Relegated to the lower reaches of the linguistic order, Caliban becomes a phenomenon of motion and the body. Played by dancer Michael Clark, Caliban is in constant motion in the film, and his incessant writhing emphasizes his difference from the stillness of Prospero at work in his study, from the library, where only the falling pages break the dusty stillness, and from the grand halls, where every movement seems eerily controlled and choreographed. Like *The Book of Motion*, which remains strapped down in Prospero’s reading room, Caliban shares a propensity for unrestrained movement, identifying him as a target for his master’s impulsive discipline. Caliban’s body is likewise stamped as outside the bounds of normality by its hypersexuality, by the visualization of Prospero’s fears in the exposed, raw genitalia of the “vile creature” he has kept isolated from his daughter since their childhood. His threatening, overt, and proscribed sexuality stands in stark contrast with the playful urination of the various Ariels and unself-conscious nudity of the other spirits, whose actions all recall the Freudian conception of an infantile sexuality that predates social interdiction.

Caliban, the book’s other, becomes the embodiment of the opening lines of Fredric Jameson’s *Signatures of the Visible*: “The visible is essentially pornographic, which is to say that it has as its end rapt, mindless fascination; thinking about its attributes becomes an adjunct to that, if it is unwilling to betray its object.”50 Like Miranda and Prospero, who situate Caliban at the lower, debased end of all hierarchies based on language and the body, Jameson dismisses the inscrutable visual image as an essentially prurient mode of communication.51 According to this oversimplified formulation, any attempt to study the image must “betray” it by translating it into a more intelligible linguistic order, a movement signaled by Jameson’s title, which itself imagines that the visible must leave a “signature” to be properly understood. *Prospero’s Books* received caustic criticism in the mainstream press on related grounds, because of the visual excess presented on screen and, in particular, the extreme extent of nudity. More recently, critics have questioned whether the legions of nude bodies fit within any coherent thematic structure; the most volatile source of this incredulity remains H. R. Coursen’s descriptively titled “‘Tis Nudity.”52 Greenaway has offered only a tepid defense against charges of gratuitous sensuality, situating his costumes (or lack thereof) in Renaissance theatrical conventions. But in the end this presentation does serve
one important thematic concern, for it embodies, embraces, and attempts to trans-
value all the standard early prognostications about the harmful effects of cinema,
and now the new media, with which Greenaway engages; the film is carnal, hy-
perkinetic, hybrid, and all of Prospero’s worst fears realized before us.53

In her study of “film and the rival arts,” Brigitte Peucker sees in Balzac’s
Sarrasine one explanation of the problematic status of the body in intermedial
representations: “One body constitutes the model for sculpture, painting, and nar-
rative; transposed repeatedly from one medium into another, it may be said to
embody the meeting point of all the arts.”54 Now old, “motionless and somber,”
with a “cadaverous skull” and smelling of death, this abject body appears to the
narrator as a “creature for which the human language had no name, a being with-
out life, a form without substance.”55 Seen together with a beautiful young woman,
“this shadow” causes the narrator to gasp at the vastness of their difference: “Ah!
here were death and life indeed, I thought, in a fantastic arabesque, half hideous
chimera, divinely feminine from the waist up.”56

Barthes points out that the confusion of the sister arts is also embodied in a
similar baroque arabesque, since the genealogy of this body and its portrait winds
endlessly through narrative, sculpture, and painting, with every turn policed by
the threat of castration. As Peucker writes, “In thus alluding to the Horatian trope
of generic transgression (comely woman above, grotesque fish below), Balzac
strengthens the connection of this body, now figured as androgyne, with the insta-
bility of generic boundaries.”57

In Prospero’s Books, Caliban serves as a site of abjection and transgression,
and as the “composite substance” on which the film’s generic transgressions are
played out.58 A hybrid, mysterious being in the eyes of Stephano and Trinculo,
Caliban is described not as a being in himself but as some unspeakable combina-
tion of other categories. Trinculo exclaims in a passage reminiscent of the Horatian
trope, “What have we here? a man or a fish? dead or alive?” (2.2.24–25), and
continues through a variety of possible categories to contain the complexity be-
fore him: “monster,” “savage,” “islander, that hath lately suffer’d by a thunder-
bolt” (2.2.35–36). Caliban’s hybridity confounds the linguistic capacity of his
companions, who project onto his transgressive body their anxieties about the
death-dealing effects of such boundary crossings. Prospero’s fear of Caliban par-
allels what Peucker describes as the “fear that film, as a hybrid form comprised
of image and narrative, is nothing less than a ‘monstrous birth,’” the fear that
when text and image commingle, the result will elicit a response not unlike
Stephano’s at the sounds emanating from Caliban: “Where the devil should he
learn our language?” (2.2.66–67).59

In his study of ekphrastic poetry and its relation to patterns of social othering,
W.J.T. Mitchell argues that anxieties about the mixing of artistic media are often
“grounded in our ambivalence about other people” and are therefore intimately
related to the maintenance of social boundaries.60 If an aesthetic based on exclu-
sive categories often mimics practices of exclusion in other spheres, Mitchell ar-
gues against the position, elaborated most famously by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
in Laocoon, that each art should occupy only its “proper” sphere.
Recent British history attests both to the persistence of these social and artistic boundaries and to their unsettled and contestable status. Although Thatcherism posited an antiquarian, idealized, and totalizing conception of British identity, emerging British cultures put the lie to those claims of consensus and homogeneity. The privileging of canonical English literature in the heritage industry—and the performance of this ascendency in the heritage film’s recurrent scenes of reading, those celebrations of the “purity of the word”—underscores the connection between reified literary monuments and the reified nation that upholds them as its cultural patrimony. At the same time, in films such as Isaac Julien’s *Looking for Langston* (1989), a political meditation on sexual and racial injustice coexists with a cinematic meditation on the politics of the film’s interlacing arts: photographic images, poetry, music, and cinema. The emergence of mannerist and neobaroque cinema in contemporary Britain—in films ranging from Derek Jarman’s literary adaptations, *The Tempest* (1980) and *Edward II* (1991), and painterly films, *Caravaggio* (1986) and *Blue* (1993), to Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1993)—is symptomatic of the recurrent cultural crises caused by sociopolitical boundary crossings. One of Greenaway’s contributions to the debates is a baroque *Tempest*, in which a nomadic Prospero ultimately parts with his books and their phantasmatic unity and vestigial powers in order to embrace the complexity through which he has been wandering all along.

The film’s final moments involve a curious recuperation of Caliban, when the character who once defecated and vomited on Prospero’s books suddenly saves one—Shakespeare’s First Folio—after his master makes good on a pledge to “drown [his] books.” The strangeness of Caliban’s final gesture has elicited quizzical comments from many critics, who ask whether the film’s “meaningless Caliban” deserves such a prominent role in the salvation of the First Folio: “Why Caliban?” asks Coursen. These final moments, after Prospero abjures the power of his books, imply that a hybrid art form—one that “vandalized” Shakespeare for some of its earliest story material—can also salvage something vital from the text. Such a salvage operation has become increasingly germane during the past two decades, as the heritage industry threatens to transform the book into another exquisite object and the Bard into another guarantor of “quality,” his unnamed presence serving the same function as the name of the author in the recent spate of “authored” adaptations. These adaptations, and the literary branch of the heritage film more generally, aspire to the condition of “literature,” approximating the experience of viewing first editions at auction or a performance at Stratford-upon-Avon. In an era when Shakespeare as a cultural icon has gone “big time,” when his name and likeness are enlisted as expert pitchmen and exchanged as the plugged nickel of cultural capital, perhaps drowning the book, abjuring its cultural power, “Calibanizing” “literature” is one means of reinvigorating the text. In its excess of visuality, *Prospero’s Books* prevents its overloaded images from becoming a display of exquisite objects, short-circuiting any desire to reify and consume the past. By abdicating the power of book and Bard, by celebrating its own radical inauthenticity and its departure from the traditions of stage and page that too often constrain such adaptations, the film invokes the always unrealizable but intriguing possibility of experiencing Shakespeare
after the “death of the author,” by drowning the First Folio then rediscovering it in a radically estranged form. Just as Deleuze develops a philosophy of the emergent event, a philosophy that emphasizes not the retrospective but the anticipatory, Greenaway’s Tempest is concerned less with maintaining Shakespearean drama as it was than with envisioning what it might become.

While The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover constructs an allegory of Thatcherite economic conditions, Prospero’s Books also constructs a political allegory, but one that responds to the cultural politics of an era when “Royal Shakespeare” has become a marker of national culture.64 The Thatcherite conception of heritage as commodity and national patrimony tends to uphold artistic values favored either by the market or by caretakers of traditional “Englishness”; like Prospero at the outset of the play, it marshals power behind the unifying force of the book (especially the First Folio). Faced with the centrifugal pressures of a collapsing empire, European union, and globalization, the nation responds by returning to heritage, to documents attesting to Britain’s certainty, stability, and ascendancy. According to Stuart Hall, “Culturally, the project of Thatcherism is defined as a form of ‘regressive modernization”—the attempt to ‘educate’ and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past.”65 Brimming with allusions to European cultures extending beyond national borders, Prospero’s Books transforms Shakespeare from the apotheosis of English culture into a playwright whose concerns can be extended into a new, pan-European configuration. And if the literary adaptation and the heritage film can lead to the sedimentation of the present “imagined community” around a single canonical conception of past culture, Prospero’s Books provides a critique of this mode of heritage-making by underscoring the hybridity of that culture and its adaptability to the exigencies of the present; it is the rare literary adaptation that, instead of harking back, crosses over.

Greenaway is not generally considered a political filmmaker because he usually approaches politics obliquely, either through allegory or through the textual politics of his formal experimentation. In this regard, in words that could apply to Greenaway himself, Deleuze writes of an affinity between Leibniz and Prospero, “the Mannerist hero par excellence,” “magician and rationalist, who knows the secrets of life, a mountebank, a dispenser of good fortune, but who is himself lost in his splendid isolation.”66 Greenaway’s critical reputation rests primarily on praise for his Prospero-like manipulation of spectacular surfaces and façades; his detractors dismiss him as a “mountebank” peddling images in a hermetic world of museums and art house theaters, the most prominent sanctuaries of heritage. But the politics of heritage has remained a major concern throughout his career: in early features such as The Draughtsman’s Contract, which stages a politically charged clash between classes and interpretive frameworks within the sort of manor house slated for preservation under the Heritage Acts, a site dripping with excessive Englishness; in The Belly of an Architect (1987), in which Rome’s ancient edifices become a contested site, as enthusiasts and financiers applaud that architecture’s eminently marketable performance of heritage and struggle under the weight of its attendant artistic and economic burdens; and in his more recent adaptations of Dante and Shakespeare.67
If the national past is the terrain on which many of the conflicts of global capitalism and its Thatcherite variation take place, Greenaway’s work makes heritage itself an object of inquiry and destabilizes many of its most precious monuments. While a modernist response to the persistence of the past might advocate an ideology of the break, a “make-it-new” mentality, Greenaway’s more recent films instead deterritorialize the objects and spaces that help solidify a sense of heritage. Not just a fashionable “nomadic” cinema in which “everybody now goes everywhere,” these films also perform the more difficult work of contesting the heritage industry’s myth of origins; they are nomadic works that know where they came from. And if, as Hall says, renewal depends on “occupying the same world that Thatcherism does, and building from that a different form of society,” Greenaway’s films shake the cultural underpinnings of Thatcherism’s mythical nation.

Prospero’s Books ends with Ariel, the source of much of the play’s poetry. As the sprite runs through the crowded halls, he launches himself into a site that is neither a book page nor a cinematic space but something in between. Courtesy Video Treasures.

Figure 2. Prospero’s Books ends with Ariel, the source of much of the play’s poetry. As the sprite runs through the crowded halls, he launches himself into a site that is neither a book page nor a cinematic space but something in between. Courtesy Video Treasures.

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power, running through the crowded halls and launching himself into a space that is neither a book page nor a cinematic space, escaping into something in between (Fig. 2). This final image suggests that only if the text remains unencumbered by such culturally imposed boundaries, if it remains perpetually in flight, can it support the crossing from Shakespeare's time to our radically different cultural milieu.

Notes
My sincere thanks to Dudley Andrew, Corey Creekmur, Ashley Dawson, Rob Latham, Garrett Stewart, and to the anonymous readers, editors, and staff at Cinema Journal for their help and insightful comments.


2. Harlan Kennedy provides a useful listing of many previous screen adaptations of The Tempest. His discussion is particularly interesting in its emphasis on the play's adaptability to a variety of times, spaces, genres, and social concerns: from soldiers returning home to “New Women” in Yellow Sky (1948), to attempts to conquer the final frontier in the science fictional Forbidden Planet (1956). See Kennedy, "Prospero's Flicks," Film Comment 28, no. 1 (January-February 1992): 45–49.


5. Ibid., 163.


12. Ibid.


17. Ibid., 76.


20. Ibid., 24.

21. Ibid.

23. The specific instrument used in the making of the film, the “Quantel Paintbox,” is a digital “canvas,” paintbrush, and palette (whose more than three hundred colors appear in the *Book of Colours*) that allows the director to create images on a monitor before reshooting them and combining them with filmed images. Greenaway has suggested that the “paintbox” allows the director simultaneously to be a painter working on a “unique” image and a filmmaker with “realistic,” indexical, “authentic” pictures at his or her disposal.


26. At a conference in Iowa City concerned with the relationship between film and image studies, André Gaudreault used the term “intermediality” to refer to art forms that question the traditional distinction between “beaux-arts” and “belles-lettres.” His paper situated “intermedial” arts somewhere in between and suggested that in the future film studies should avoid entrenchment in one or the other of the established disciplines. With his tendency to transgress the boundary between writing and the visual, Greenaway seems to be the best example of a director working in a space between the belles-lettres and beaux-arts.


32. Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt’s Enterprise: The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 81. Rembrandt’s painting depicts the dissection of a cadaver with a throng of medical students gathered round, staring not at the cadaver’s flayed arm but at Vesalius’s text propped up across the operating theater. The lecturer, Dr. Tulp, demonstrates a grasping gesture, as though wielding a paintbrush or pen, performing the physiological process that activates the anatomical features exhibited on the table and in the text.


35. Ibid., 65.


40. See Omar Calabrese, Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times, trans. Charles Lambert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Building on Deleuze’s observation that Prospero is the exemplary mannerist hero, Amy Lawrence provides an excellent, detailed discussion of the mannerist and baroque characteristics of the film. I would, however, borrow Deleuze’s distinction between films concerned with the “manner” in which art is produced—Derek Jarman’s Caravaggio would be the exemplary mannerist film—and a baroque exploration of the archive in Greenaway and in Sally Potter’s more recent work. See Lawrence, The Films of Peter Greenaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161–64.


44. Ibid., 17.

45. Greenaway’s repeated use of counting systems as a structural principle in his intermedial films recalls James Elkins’s discussion of the “common origins of pictures, writing, and notation.” Elkins’s analysis of the “ontological instability of the mark” begins to deconstruct the constituent elements of pictures just as Greenaway’s films deconstruct words and cinematic images; the result is a study of painting very reminiscent of Leibniz’s baroque, as seen by Deleuze. See Elkins, On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 163–87, 43–44.

46. Deleuze defines the “monad” as the unit that is specific and individual yet whole, that “conveys the entire world, but does not express it without expressing more clearly a small region of the world, a ‘subdivision’ a borough of the city, a finite sequence.” Deleuze, The Fold, 25, 31.

47. Ibid., 31.


49. The film alludes only in passing to explicitly colonial situations, most notably in the Book of Utopias, with its depiction of the Virginia colonies, the ultimate goal of the colonists whose account of a shipwreck in Bermuda influenced Shakespeare’s writing of The Tempest. But as in Derek Jarman’s adaptation of the play, the colonial situation becomes an allegory for power relations in Britain itself, especially the effective colonization of the past by nationalist politics and the heritage industry.


51. Martin Jay links Jameson’s book with a tendency he sees underlying French literary theory in the twentieth century, a tendency he labels the “denigration of vision.” Jameson’s opening lines are a particularly succinct expression of the larger trend because they make explicit the tacit distrust or even fear of vision in theory written after the linguistic turn. See Jay, Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
53. Derek Jarman’s 1979 version of *The Tempest*, in which Caliban is played by Jack Birkett, a blind actor, also foregrounds issues of visuality through this casting decision, which situates Caliban’s alterity in his bodily difference but also in his status as an outsider to a system based on visual signification. The setting of the film—a ruined manor house—also overlays the play’s colonial concerns onto contemporary Britain, discovering within a British context a persistent problem: an aversion to difference in all its manifestations. Greenaway’s more pan-European perspective searches for an alternative to this problematic history by displacing Englishness and embracing a more postmodern political entity; in contrast, in Jarman’s *Tempest*, a film draped in all the trappings of traditional English culture, the play’s “island” of decaying Englishness contains a microcosm of forces poised to destabilize that identity from the inside.
56. Ibid., 230.
61. Among the properties preserved by the National Trust, for example, an extraordinary number are advertised as sites with a “literary connection,” including the birthplaces or residences of Carlyle, Coleridge, Hardy, Henry James, Kipling, Beatrix Potter, Shaw, Tennyson, Thackeray, H. G. Wells, Woolf, and Wordsworth. Among the sites with a connection to film or television, the vast majority served as locations for literary adaptations of the heritage variety. For a discussion of the National Trust, see Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen, 1987), 54–73.
68. Stuart Hall, quoted in James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 44.