THEATRICAL PRESENCE AND THE DISCOURSE OF VIDEOCENTRISM FROM ADDISON TO LAMB

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1. Introduction

Lord Henry Home Kames says, "Of all the means for making an impression of ideal presence, theatrical representation is the most powerful" (2: 843). The statement derives from Lord Kames's argument of how a good description creates vivid images in the mind. It is indeed part of his effort to reconcile visual and verbal signs after Edmund Burke's theory of the beautiful and the sublime. Lord Kames follows Burke in that verbal representation is more powerful than visual representation in affecting passions: "It must not . . . be thought that our passions can be raised by painting to such a height as by words" (843). However, he differs from Burke in the explanation of it. For Burke words may affect without raising images (167–72), whereas for Lord Kames the affective power of language "depends entirely on the raising . . . lively and distinct images" (841). Usually description can create only a faint "ideal image," but a good description removes the faintness and elevates the "ideal image" to the level of original perception, or "real presence" (840). It puts the reader in the position of "an eyewitness" (841). Theatrical representation excels in creating vivid ideal presence because it fully employs both the immediacy of vision and the affective power of language.

Lord Kames's argument gives us a good viewpoint from which to see

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backwards and forwards. First we can see from here what may be termed as videocentrism, or the primacy of vision, and the desire to explain the working of human mind with the metaphors of vision. John Locke compares the understanding to camera obscura, and Joseph Addison says, "by the pleasures of imagination I mean only such pleasures as arise originally from sight" in "The Pleasures of the Imagination" (43; 411). For Hobbes, and for most of the empiricists, vision is representative of all the senses, and the other senses are discussed by way of analogy. And for Locke, "The ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them" (1: 173; 2. 8. 15). Words, in turn, are basically construed as corresponding to those ideas, or mental images decayed, by convention. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand the tendency among these empiricists to deal with the questions of representation in the domain of the visual. As W.J.T. Mitchell puts it, "The poetic consequences of this sort of language theory are of course a thoroughgoing pictorialism, and understanding the art of language as the art of reviving the original impressions of sense."

Secondly, through Lord Kames's comment on theatre, we can see, like a negative picture, Charles Lamb's iconoclasm in "On the Tragedy of Shakspeare" where he tries to divest Shakespeare's drama of its theatrical presence by saying that Shakespeare cannot be acted. Lord Kames as well as Lamb lived in the age of theatre pictorialism when it was the central concern of theatre to visualize passions. The actor's main task was to convey the character's psychology with corporeal expressions and thus create in the audience corresponding emotions.

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1 An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), 211-12. The quotations from Locke are followed by five numbers, the first two of which refer to the volume and page numbers in Fraser's edition, and the last three after a semicolon to the book, chapter, and section numbers respectively.
2 "The Pleasures of the Imagination," Spectator, 411-421 (1712); rep. in Elledge, vol. 1, 41-76. The quotations from the essay are followed first by the page number in Elledge's compilation and then by the number of the Spectator. For Addison's videocentrism, see for example Walter John Hippie, Jr., The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1957), 13-24.
When it is successfully carried out, the visual comes before the verbal, as can be seen in Thomas Kirkman’s description of the way John Henderson acted Falstaff: “the images seemed coined in the brain of the actor; they sparkled in the eye, before the tongue supplied them with language.”¹ In visualizing passions actors depended on the iconography of emotion. Acting handbooks of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries descended from the seventeenth-century formulas in painting, and handbook writers such as Aaron Hill and Henry Siddons were heavily influenced by Charles Le Brun, official painter to Louis XIV and powerful ruler of the Academy. William Hazlitt’s exasperation as an art critic with “the school of Le Brun’s heads— theoretical diagrams of the passions” (18: 13) was perfectly in consonance with his contempt as a theatre critic for the acting handbooks at the turn of the century, which he disparagingly called the “old receipt-books for the passions.” (18: 10).² One way of reading Lamb’s “On the Tragedy of Shakspeare” is to see it as an attack at this primacy of the visual on his contemporary stage. For Lamb the process of the consumption of theatrical signs is so “instantaneous” (46) and so overpowering—no doubt one important aspect of the idol—compared with “the slow apprehension oftentimes of the understanding in reading” that we tend to “identify in our minds, in a perverse manner, the actor with the character which he represents” (46). This is not to say, of course, that Lamb demanded the reinstatement of declamation. He is arguing that Shakespeare is unfit for acting, whether declamatory or pictorial in style.

The theatre in the age of Garrick, Siddons and Kemble had much to owe to the visualization of passions for its affective power. The base line is the doctrine of sensibility, or the faculty to feel and react. Not only the actor but also the audience were required to have sensibility. It was the link which connected the stage and the audience. The audience not only read passions through their visualization by the actor; they were also moved by them. Passions and affections were often regarded as synonymous. The artists of the eighteenth century worked on the assumption that through the service of sensibility—the notion which was beyond doubt as important as reason in the age—a success-

ful delineation of passions also inevitably evokes corresponding feelings in those who see, read, or hear it. To show passions artfully, therefore, was tantamount to affecting one's soul. It is not surprising that not only those who were engaged in the theatre but the artists of the age as a whole hardly ever doubted the centrality of passions in the effects of their art. It could be argued, then, that the shift from declamatory style to pictorial style of acting in the eighteenth century was a manifestation of theatre's desire to intensify its affective power by drawing drama made of words nearer to the domain of the visual. It was partly an attempt to replace the remoteness of the verbal signs of drama with the closeness of the visual signs of theatre.

However, as soon as the distance between the original and its representation comes into question in the representation of passions, we encounter a difficult problem: passion does not have a visual form as an origin. It has its visual correlative, of course, but expression is representation of passion, not an origin. Passion is, in a sense, an idea which cannot be traced back to any visual perception. As I hope to show in this paper, Addison has to take a step away from videocentrism in spite of his intent to do otherwise when he discusses the affective power of description. And Lamb will proclaim that, as far as the drama of Shakespeare is concerned, the visual representation of passions is not only unnecessary but even irrelevant. My aim in the present paper is to see how Addison's videocentrism is reversed, in the discussion of representation of passions, in Lamb's essay.

2. Addison and videocentrism

In *The Spectator*, 416, Addison clearly states that the objects which the imagination operates on are ideas:

It is sufficient that we have seen places, persons, or actions, in general, which bear a resemblance, or at least some remote analogy—with what we find represented—since it is in the power of imagination, when it is once stocked with particular ideas, to enlarge, compound, and vary them at her own pleasure (58; 416).

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The reason for him to say this is obvious. This is the place where he begins to discuss the secondary pleasures of the imagination, or the pleasures which arise from representation, and in many cases one does not have the experience of seeing what is represented either in statuary, painting, or description. The part of the passage which holds the key is "a resemblance, or at least some remote analogy" because by so saying Addison tries to reconcile the notions of images and ideas. Addison says, "the ideas we receive from statures, descriptions, or such like occasions are the same that were once actually in our view" (38; 416). To reduce everything in the mind to ideas after the fashion of Hobbes and Locke is necessary to allow the mental data to enter into a system of operations. Different ideas, then, can be conceived of as resembling each other in so far as they are regarded as decayed images, faint but still visually comparable. The problem is that, although all the ideas are the same in that they are subject to the operation of the imagination, this is not to say that they are all equally visual. Analogy is a metaphor of resemblance, reaching outside the boundary of the visual, which gives rise to the question of whether the rules applicable to the visual still hold good with that the visibility of which is considerably attenuated. Furthermore, the introduction of the metaphor in turn blurs the visibility which should remain within ideas even after it is decayed. In other words, how is generality or universality of ideas, without which the secondary pleasures of the imagination would be inconceivable, compatible with its visual quality on which the notion of resemblance depends? If, as Locke says, "universality belongs not to things themselves" (2: 21; 3. 3. 11), then they must belong to relations among them. Locke's answer to the question, therefore, is that generality is created from similitude by virtue of the understanding (2: 23; 3. 3. 13). In other words, similitude is a product of operations on sense data. But then how can Addison's videocentrism reconcile general words which do not represent things with visual sense data which should be the source of the pleasures of the imagination?

It is these questions which cause some uneasiness when one encounters a sentence like "a spacious horizon is an image of liberty" (45; 412). Definitely there is parallelism between the structure of sense-perception and that of understanding: the indefinite vastness is to the fancy what eternity or infinitude is to the understanding (45; 412). This is the effect of analogy. Addison says that the pleasures of the imagina-
tion "are not so gross as those of sense nor so refined as those of the understanding" (43; 411). However, what in fact he does is to merge, when it is convenient, the structures of sense perception and of understanding in one power-field, which is the imagination. Hence the imagination becomes almost synonymous with the mind where ideas are stored and operated on. The comprehensiveness of Addison's notion of the imagination thus suspends the problematical nature of video-centricism, and around this suspension revolves Addison's argument of the pleasures of the imagination gained from representation, and especially from verbal description.

This suspension reverses the hierarchic order Addison observes among modes of representation according to the naturalness of the signs employed. For him, the more immediate the signs are to the original object, the more natural is the representation. Therefore, as statuary is three-dimensional, it is "the most natural, and shows us something likest the object that is represented" (58-59; 416). Next comes painting, which is two-dimensional. Description is even further from the things represented "for a picture bears a real resemblance to its original which letters and syllables are wholly void of" (59; 416). It is not surprising that Addison was deeply impressed by the image projected on the wall by a camera obscura. When he thought it was the "prettiest landscape" he ever saw (52; 414), he was of course struck by its novelty but even more by the naturalness of the mode of representation: "certainly the chief reason is its near resemblance to nature, as it does not only, like other pictures, give the color and figure but the motion of the things it represents" (52; 414). Addison, however, is obliged to modify this pictorialism in his explanation, albeit heavily laden with metaphors of painting, of why a good description can give ideas even livelier than a survey of the actual object. Well chosen words can "get the better of nature" because the scene described is "drawn in stronger colors and painted more to the life in [the reader's] imagination" by the aid of "more rigorous touches" (60; 416). Addison is undoubtedly making his argument in the context of ut pictura poesis, since he applies to description what is applicable to painting. However, especially when he explains the power of description to bring about in some cases more vivid impressions than the actual object itself as that of selection, emphasis, and pointing out, his argument also raises the suspicion that, in spite of the repeated pictorial metaphors, verbal
signs are superior to those pictorial and sculptural precisely because of its power of articulation inseparably accompanied with its referential selectivity. It seems to follow, then, that the purpose of letting description speak for statuary and painting, albeit language is more remote from the original object than the other two more "natural" media, is to suggest, without overtly destroying the framework of video-centricism, that verbal signs can affect the imagination more strongly than visual signs exactly due to its remoteness from the objects.

This is a typical course that an argument founded on the notion of *ut pictura poesis* follows. In likening literature to painting and vice versa, the mutual reference between the two by way of metaphor suspends the origin. No wonder Lessing, in attacking *ut pictura poesis* in his *Laocoön*, should make such a fastidious argument about which came first, poetry or statuary, in the making of the statue.\(^1\) What follows as a result of an argument which draws on the notion of *ut pictura poesis* is chiasmus, namely the reversal of the relationship between the point of reference and the metaphor used to describe it. In the case of Addison, having started out to talk of description in terms of painting, he then talks of painting in terms of description. Addison's desire to talk of representation within the framework of video-centricism requires the objects of the imagination's operations to be essentially visual. The notion of ideas, in this chiasmus, is put under a sort of eccentric force which draws them away from the domain of the visual in the attempt to enclose verbal representation in video-centricism. Since ideas, or at least those of the primarily qualities of bodies as Locke calls them, are by definition resemblances or pictures in the mind, why should one follow the roundabout route of generalizing images into ideas and then transforming back into images again when the actual painting is before one's eyes? But the case is different in the process of forming a vision from a description because, according to Hobbes, convention which intervenes in the verbal communication requires the universality of words, and therefore their indefiniteness at the same time, unless they are proper nouns.\(^2\) Locke emphasizes the indefiniteness and unreliability of words. Indeed the book III of *Essay* is full of his distrust of the clear

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communicative power of language—"When a man speaks to another; it is that he may be understood" (2:9; 3.2.2). This distrust of words in Locke is connected with his low opinion of the association of ideas. There is a certain affinity between ideas and words when it comes to the mind’s operations on them. Edmund Burke later says, "by words we have it in our power to make such combinations as we cannot possibly do otherwise" (174). Verbal signs, because of their implicit universality and indefiniteness, lend themselves to the operative function of the understanding over ideas. Since for Locke association is so vulnerable to individual interest and social custom that ideas are often wrongly and unnaturally connected, association "hinders men from seeing and examining" (1:535; 2.33.18, emphasis added). Locke's famous use of the camera obscura as a metaphor of the understanding, in spite of its overreliance on the visible as Locke does not mean by idea only what can be seen, is an outcome of his desire for what Addison would call the "naturalness" of signs. Some ideas may represent outward objects, and at the same time ideas are all the mind can get. It is at this point that the desire of videocentrism tries to merge presence into representation, since presence, if ever it is possible, can only be perceived as ideas. Presence is only ideal. Videocentrism aspires to what later Romantics are to call the state of oneness between subject and object, and tries to realize it by willingly suspending the oxymora of presentational representation, of ideal presence, of being there and not there, of Locke's camera obscura.

When Addison discusses the power of description to evoke passions in the reader, his argument shows a definite step away from videocentrism. The case in which description is more suitable than any other mode of representation is, according to Addison, where it represents "such objects as are apt to raise a secret ferment in the mind of the reader and to work with violence upon his passions" (66; 418). The reason is patently classical; it pleases and instructs. What is worth noting, however, is the result: "the pleasure becomes more universal and in several ways qualified to entertain us" (66; 418), because universality is the quality accorded to language as well. Another step is taken here to accord superiority to verbal signs for their universality. It is at

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this point that Addison suddenly regresses to the discussion of painting instead of continuing on the uniqueness of the verbal representation:

Thus, in painting it is pleasant to look on the picture of any face where the resemblance is hit, but the pleasure increases if it be the picture of a face that is beautiful, and is still greater if the beauty be softened with an air of melancholy or sorrow (66; 418).

Here parallelism between descriptive aptness and pictorial resemblance is evident. Addison again thinks of the pleasures of the imagination in the way of addition: the pleasure equals resemblance/aptness plus original beauty plus force upon passions. But compared with aptness/resemblance or the original beauty, the affective power of description definitely relies much less on the object of representation visually conceived in spite of Addison’s effort to enclose it within the visual field. Not only his rather abrupt deviation from the discussion of description but also the use of the word “air” points at Addison’s awareness that he is here drawing away from the domain of the visual. The phrase “an air of melancholy or sorrow” hovers between the visual and non-visual: it can mean the facial expression or the affective power of the painting as a whole. The ambiguity is only part of Addison’s strategy of expanding the territory of the visual.

It is interesting that in Addison’s discussion of description’s affective power where, according to Burke, it is difficult to find a proper room for mimesis, the distance between the original and its representation does creep in. The topic is a familiar one: why tragedy causes pleasure? One draws pleasure not only from a passage which produces passions such as hope, joy, admiration, and love but also from one which causes terror and pity. Addison employs a sort of distance theory here. The pleasure which arises from description of terrible objects is the result of self-reflection which confirms the reader’s safety from the danger. We can face the otherness of the object of contemplation, which would only cause terror if encountered in the real world, “with the same curiosity and satisfaction that we survey a dead monster” (66; 418). The description of dismal accidents causes pleasure not from the grief it causes so much as from “the secret comparison

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1 Addison is following Hobbes in this respect. See C. D. Thorpe, “Addison and Some of his Predecessors on ‘Novelty’,” *PMLA*, 52 (1937), 1114–29.
which we make between ourselves and the person who suffers" (67; 418). It is the working of the understanding, its comparison and hence separation as well as assemblage of ideas, that causes pleasure. It is not the recognition of ideas but the relations between them. But then the comparison of ideas is hindered if the object of contemplation works too immediately upon senses. The sight of a person actually tortured leaves no room for such self-reflection:

Our thoughts are so intent upon the miseries of the sufferer that we cannot turn them upon our own happiness; whereas, on the contrary, we consider the misfortunes we read in history or poetry either as past or as fictitious; so that the reflection upon ourselves rises in us insensibly and overbears the sorrow we conceive for the sufferings of the afflicted (67; 418).

The important thing is that this argument is made to explain why description is more suitable than other media for raising passions. Addison, without explicitly saying so, seeks for the reason in description’s remoteness from the original. Clearly he in this passage omits pictorial representation in spite of his insistence on the see/read dichotomy. If fictitiousness or temporal distance is the reason for the sort of pleasure explained here, it should also apply to painting. The sentence to fill the gap would be like this: the immediacy of pictorial signs backfires here. Implicit in this strangely twisted argument is that verbal signs are more suitable than visual signs in causing pleasure even if they are used to represent that which should be unpleasant in actuality for no other reason than their remoteness from the original.

3. Lamb’s iconoclasm

Although Lamb’s argument that Shakespeare and especially King Lear cannot be acted is an extreme case, his dissatisfaction with the contemporary stage production, his tendency to put priority on the reading of a play over its acting, is shared by other Romantic critics such as Leigh Hunt, Coleridge, and Hazlitt in varying degrees. Observers have pointed out many reasons for this, among which are that texts are often “corrupted” (Tate’s version of King Lear is the case in Lamb’s essay); that supporting actors are often only competent or sometimes even incompetent; and that two patent theatres are so large that performance can only be seen, not heard. However, what is obvious in Lamb’s case is that behind his discontent is a deep distrust of theatre’s repre-
sentativity: “there is something in the nature of acting which levels all distinctions” (52).

As far as performances of Shakespeare’s plays are concerned, Lamb conceives not only of the actor’s physical presence but of the visual aspect of stage production itself as a kind of impurity which contaminates the text. For him “the sight actually destroys the faith” (58). Psychological movements lie invisible: they are behind those passions actually visible through the actor’s physical representation, and from there control them. In order to reinforce his point, Lamb on occasion strategically draws the psychology of the dramatic character away from the realm of theatrical representativity by paralleling the body/mind dichotomy with the visible/invisible:

there is just so much reality presented to our senses as to give a perception of disagreement, with not enough of belief in the internal motives,—all that which is unseen,—to overpower and reconcile the first and obvious prejudices. What we see upon a stage is body and bodily action; what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind, and its movements (57).

Signs employed in theatrical representation not only hinder the appreciation of psychology; they are intrinsically inappropriate.

Lamb’s distrust of acting is mainly turned towards its visual aspect. However, in so far as acting inevitably includes speech as well as gesture, it is not surprising that he also fires at its audible aspect. He sees the whole physical dimension that acting gives to the text is “a strait-lacing actuality” (47), something that comes in between and disrupts his intercourse with the character by diverting his attention from the signified to the signifier:

In fact, the things aimed at in theatrical representation, are to arrest the spectator’s eye upon the form and the gesture, and so to gain a more favourable hearing to what is spoken: it is not what the character is, but how he looks; not what he says, but how he speaks it (49).

One question which arises from this is whether the character’s psychology can be fully represented by such textual signs as present themselves before the consumer of signs without the mediation of the actor’s corporeality. In other words, does the silent text, text without voice, is a transparent medium, a privileged sign which replaces but
does not replace? Lamb, in answering the question, starts out to say that in the best dramas "the form of speaking... is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one" (48). The nature of Hamlet's psychology, for instance, though exteriorized in his lines, does not actually lend itself to speech. Lamb, however, is obviously not content at the point when he deprives text of voice, as he says that the protagonist's psychological transactions "are the silent meditations with which his bosom is bursting, reduced to words for the sake of the reader, who must else remain ignorant of what is passing there" (49). The psychology of the dramatic character is vested with the aura of transcendental Nature, which is already sullied or made "artificial" when it is pressed into any verbal signs whatsoever. Text, even without voice, is after all a medium, and therefore, an obstacle, something in between, which must be overcome. It is at best a necessary evil, because without it nothing but "any gift short of intuition" (48) could take one to the core, or the character's mental structure.

Lamb's gaze at the character is directed at the same time at the author, since, according to Lamb, the object of Shakespeare's mimetic representation exists a priori in his mind. His characters are not the products of the "admirable observation of life"; rather, they come "from his own mind, which was, to borrow a phrase of Ben Jonson's, the very 'sphere of humanity'" (51). In so far as his characters are derived directly from the author's mind, understanding the dramatic character is tantamount to understanding the mind of the author itself. The state that Lamb aspires to eventually after reading is, like other Romantics, a linguistically unmediated intercourse between the reader and the author who is given the status of the transcendental. Dramatic characters are "those images of virtue and of knowledge, of which every one of us recognizing a part, think we comprehend in our natures the whole" (51). In this sense Shakespeare's mimesis as Lamb sees it is highly Platonic. And this comprehension is not only intellectual but also emotional. With the help of imagination the reader achieves sympathetic identification with the author, eradicating the threshold between the two:

1 I say highly Platonic, but not purely so, because Lamb does not see Shakespeare's mind as totally independent from nature. In other words, Shakespeare's mind, for Lamb, is immanent rather than transcendental.
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[We] oftentimes mistake the powers which he positively creates in us, for nothing more than indigenous faculties of our own minds, which only waited the application of corresponding virtues in him to return a full and clear echo of the same (21).

That to understand the character and to understand the author are the same thing for Lamb is important because it forms the basis of his belief in authorship, of which his "On the Tragedies of Shakspeare" provides a very good case. As long as Lamb upholds the supremacy of the playwright in terms of Bardolatry, the actor is forced to remain in the secondary status of servitude. He is at best the loyal commentator—the state which Antonin Artaud was never tired of denouncing as no other than the acceptance of servitude. A passage from Jacques Derrida's reading of Artaud may be relevant here:

The classical Western stage defines a theater of the organ, a theater of words, thus a theater of interpretation, enregistration, and translation, a theater of deviation from the groundwork of a preestablished text, a table written by a God-Author who is the sole wielder of the primal word. A theater in which a master disposes of the stolen speech which only his slaves—his directors and actors—may make use of.1

Speech is stolen from the actor just as man is denied the proper, unarticulated state of being—the state of the body without organs—from the moment of birth. As Speaker repeats at the opening of Beckett's A Piece of Monologue, "Birth was the death of him."2 Derrida's reading of Artaud, as the title of the essay "La parole soufflée" shows, hinges on the double meaning of the word "souffler": to inspire and to purloin (169-195). That which inspires/purloins (souffle) the speech is a God-Author, the creator of the origin(al) text. A sense of understanding in Lamb's opinion becomes the realization of being cheated out of one's property in Artaud's, because what the reader reaches at the end of the day is the state where he is made to feel mistakenly or not that what he has in mind is inspired/stolen by the God-Author from the beginning.

Unless the actor is transparent in this patriarchy, he is criticized as

deviating from the author. If even text is a necessary evil in arriving at the meaning of the author, it is only part of the natural conclusion that acting is totally unnecessary in this communication process in that it forms just another artificial medium. Lamb complains of Garrick, Kemble, and Siddons not only because they block the understanding of the character but because in the audience’s mind they usurp the throne of the God-Author. To compare Garrick with Shakespeare is, in Lamb’s mind, to admit not only the infringement of the reader’s right of access but the introduction of paganism by the interposition of an idol. In the theatre, instead of worshipping the author, the audience is lured into adoring the actor. Since Lamb starts the essay by attacking the undeserved levelling of Garrick’s worth with Shakespeare’s, it is not surprising that he should say that one should not “sink the playwright in the consideration which we pay to the actor” (46).

When Lamb says that in the theatre “the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses” (57), his imagination is as far away as possible from Addison’s fancy and almost entirely consists of his understanding. What matters to Lamb is the imagination’s operations upon ideas, and in this process it is not at all necessary for ideas to be visual however remotely. After we have succumbed to the temptation of seeing a tragedy of Shakespeare acted, we are doomed to find “that instead of realizing an idea, we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood” (47). This vision, of course, is not the kind of vivid ideal presence in which Lord Kames says theatrical representation most excels. Lamb’s vision has no distinct shape. He rejects the idea of immediacy upon senses that the visual has in videocentrism. It is more like a dream totally divested of its visual quality until only belief is left. That is why Lamb says that once we have seen a tragedy of Shakespeare performed, “We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance” (47).

4. Conclusion

The trajectory from Addison to Lamb is that from Neo-classicism’s desire for perspicuous language—language which does not lose any of the visual quality of the object it represents—to the Romanticism’s desire for the establishment of intersubjective intercourse between the subject and the object unmediated by signs either verbal or visual. Along
this course, ideas are more and more devisualized and imagination’s emphasis shifts from its visualizing faculty to its sheer operations upon ideas. As Mitchell says:

Romantic writers typically assimilate mental, verbal, and even pictorial imagery into the mysterious process of “imagination,” which is typically defined in contrast to the “mere” recall of mental pictures, the “mere” depiction of external visibilia, as opposed to the spirit, feeling, or “poetry” of a scene (24).

This is already predictable in Addison. The discourse of videocentrism embraces in itself the self-destructive structure which devisualizes ideas in spite of its intent to do otherwise. As Addison’s discussion of the imagination moves its position closer to the domain of the understanding, the primacy of visual signs is more and more eroded and verbal signs are centralized instead. Then in the case of Lamb’s “On the Tragedy of Shakspeare,” the erosion extends to verbal signs. In divesting drama of all its theatrical presence mainly consisting of the actor’s corporeality, not only the body and the voice but also the text disappears. This is perhaps another product of ut pictura poesis: just as the mutual reference between the visual and the verbal suspends the state of origin, so the negation of one results in the negation of the other.