

# Afterword : words and images

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## Afterword: Words and Images

Brian Cummings

In a manuscript addition to a printed edition of John Foxe's *Pandectae* (1585), now in Lambeth Palace Library, an early reader has written:

A certaine carver was set on worke to carve a plumme tree into a God, w<sup>ch</sup> idoll by the Divells helpe gave propheticall answers to those that enquired of him. The Carver coming to be resolved of some question, the Idoll would give him noe answer, wherupon he breaks out into a passion and sayes to it, Yee need not be soe proud for I knowe ye [are] of a plumbe tree. (MSS 677-678, fo. 359)

The carver in the story, and the reader who represents him, are at loggerheads with each other, and yet brought together by their mutual incomprehension. For, just as the carver, having made his image, is exasperated that it will not talk back to him, so the reader, despite his sarcastic description of this dialogue of the deaf, seems equally in awe of the idol. The tree is no longer just a tree. It has assumed the shape of a god, and like a god it appears for all the world as if it can talk. It is only natural, indeed, to try to communicate with the tree. The carver's passionate eloquence and the idol's dumb silence tell of the same wonder: *what if idols could speak?* Carver and reader match each other in obverse: the carver's anger is met by the tree's failure to respond; while the reader's blank refusal of idolatry is equalled by his imaginative *ekphrasis* of the presence within the wood. Indeed, the reader's disbelief has conjured this idea into being, just as surely as the credulity of the carver. He has imagined the encounter as a conversation, and so has brought to life the very thing that he fears and despises, in front of another reader, the one (like you or me) who now beholds it.

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The place of these words written into a work by Foxe could not be more powerfully resonant with the iconoclastic conflicts of late medieval and early modern England. By 1585, this was an old project for Foxe: in March 1557, Johannes Oporinus printed his *Locorum Communium Tituli* in Basel as a structured commonplace book, with headings for 154 topics, divided into ten categories (Freeman). Like its predecessor, John Day's London printing of the *Pandectae* combined revised headings with blank pages to be filled in by a reader. Foxe's introduction to the *Pandectae* makes clear his desire to help the reader to nurture memory through study. Like the *Actes and Monuments*, the *Pandectae* reorders the conceptual framework of the reader. The book replaces the image. Foxe the iconoclast (who cast down images by hand in his youth) reinforces his commitment to the arts of rhetoric and logic by making the reader participate in acts of writing. Inculcating the alphabetic lessons of the Reformation, the reader enacts its doctrines. Finding the words *Idola, Idolatria*, in the list of commonplaces legislated by Foxe, he draws from his experience and responds with a lesson of his own, in the exemplary tale of the carver. However, it turns out that he cannot, after all, so easily separate idolatry from ideology. The idol rears its head in the opposite direction, giving "propheticall answers to those that enquired of him." The carver in return is left only with compensatory violence, as he "breaks out into a passion and sayes to it, Yee need not be soe proud."

The intimate connection between writing and violence in the work of Foxe is immediately obvious to all his readers. By the time of the fourth edition of *Actes and Monuments* in 1583, the centrality of the connection was declared on the title-page, which with a certain grisly relish advertises its contents as the "*bloudy times, horrible troubles, and great persecutions against the true Martyrs of Christ.*" *Actes and Monuments* constitute a comprehensive history of violence through the Christian centuries leading up to his own tortured century. This is a violence mediated to the reader. There is a way of responding to iconoclasm which accounts for its violence by seeing it entirely in negative terms, as the iconoclast reacts with destructive force to something alien to him (or to her). Hating the image, he smashes it into pieces. However, the god in the plum tree shows us that the contrary is true: the iconoclast destroys because drawn to the image, because word and image cannot be separated *except* by force. Margaret Aston's wonderful last work, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation*, proves how close word and image are to each other even in the explicit culture war that is played out of "Word against Image" (chapter 9). The worst of all idols, Aston points out, were the ones who

pretended to speak, “whose heads nodded and lips moved” (930) as if they were conveying the word to believers. “Haue not your idols giuen aunswer? haue they not wagged their heades and lips, &c. O shamelesse dogges & blasphemous idolaters,” (sig. N5<sup>v</sup>) denounced William Fulke. Iconoclasts reserved some of their most virulent bile for such delusions. In brilliant shows of pastiche, Hugh Latimer delighted in demonstrating how such relics (like the Rood of Boxley) might be fakes, revealing the automaton that lay beneath the moveable eyes of the dumb idol (349). Reformers went to extreme lengths to endorse such principles, not only whitewashing walls in order to render images invisible, but recommending silent prayer to purge the liturgy of any taint of ritual performance.

However, violence was not itself invisible. The Reformation left iconoclasm in plain sight, as a visual remainder as well as doctrinal reminder. Sculptures would be left with their heads torn from the socket of the neck; the faces of saints in roodscreens were scratched and their eyes gouged. Latimer’s desecration of the fake display of relics was itself a form of public display. In that way, violence was mimetic as well as anti-mimetic. Indeed, without any apparent recognition of the contradiction, the new doctrine ordered the destruction of books as well as images. A circular in June 1535 from Thomas Cromwell to the bishops, and later to the secular authorities, ordered the word *papa* to be erased from all prayers, mass-books, canons, rubrics and other books in church:

all manner prayers, orisons, rubrics, canons in mass books and in all other books used in churches, wherein the said bishop of Rome is named or his presumptuous and proud pomp and authority preferred, utterly to be abolished, eradicated, and erased out, and his name and memory to be nevermore (except to his contumely and reproach) remembered but perpetually suppressed and obscured; and finally to desist and leave out all such articles as be in the general sentence which is usually accustomed to be read four times in the year, and do tend to the glory and advancement of the said Bishop of Rome, his name his title, or jurisdiction. (Wilkins III 773)

Henry VIII took a personal interest in these acts of erasure, and emended the documents to insist upon a visible enforcement of destruction.

In this process, bureaucratic relentlessness joined with destructive zeal. In relation to the cult of St Thomas Becket, the proclamation went as follows:

Therefore his Grace strayghtly chargeth and commandeth that from henseforth the sayde Thomas Becket shall not be estemed, named, reputed, nor

called a sayncte, but bysshop Becket; and that his ymages and pictures, through the hole realme, shall be putte downe, and avoyded out of all churches, chapelles, and other places; and that from henseforthe, the dayes used to be festivall in his name shall not be observed, nor the service, office, antiphoners, colletes, and prayers, in his name redde, but rased and put out of all the bokes. (Hughes I 276)

In September 1538, Thomas's shrine was dismantled, its treasure removed and carted away, and his bones disinterred and possibly burnt. This caused a palpable shock in the Papal curia. Something odd, nonetheless, is going on here. The cult of Thomas Becket is felt to reside not only in relics, or in images that form a transitional substitute for the body of the saint, but in his very name. The zeal against idolatry is transferred over into the realm of the onomastic or the semiotic. To declare that "the sayde Thomas Becket shall not be esteemed, named, reputed, nor called a sayncte" is to bring down not only the visual order but the world of words. Yet it is not enough for the name not to exist: it must be seen not to exist. In that way, words are being treated as if they were things, and the very *mode of representation* is subject to destruction, in addition to the objects of representational disgust.

Surviving missals and other service books manifest how the decrees are carried out to the letter, or rather the non-letter. The quarrel between word and image is nowhere more obvious than in the rigorous attention to detail in censors carrying out instructions. Eamon Duffy and others have drawn attention to the opposition to these laws shown by defenders of the books. In Ranworth in Norwich the service for St Thomas Becket was defaced with faint diagonal lines, and easily re-used in the reign of Mary (360). Perhaps the oddest case of failure to comply is in King Henry's own Book of Hours, where neither the name nor the image of the saint is removed (MS Kings 9, fo. 38<sup>v</sup>-39<sup>r</sup>). Royal privilege extends far indeed.

But perhaps as remarkable is the dogged literalness with which the order was time and again fulfilled. Iconoclasm here destroys the letter as rigorously as the spirit. This is manifested in a number of ways, showing not only the degree of enforcement but also the time-consuming process involved.<sup>1</sup> Let us take the evidence of surviving York Use missals. In the Broughton Missal, recently acquired by Lambeth Palace Library as MS 5066, the word *pape* is untouched in the Calendar, but in the Canon of the Mass, the word *papa* is overwritten with *rege*, making the Mass

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<sup>1</sup> The following examples have all been examined personally; for the best account of this process across all liturgical books, see Aude de Mezerac-Zanetti.

conform to monarchical piety. In York Minster Library MS XVI.I.3, the word *pape* is consistently marked out for censorship in the Calendar with crosses, but it is not in fact either scratched or erased. The feast of the translation of Thomas of Canterbury is, however, untouched. In York Minster Library MS XVI.A.9, the word *pape* is struck through in black, and then also crossed out for good measure. The translation of Thomas of Canterbury is once again untouched. In London, British Library MSS Add. 43380, two censors seem to have worked at different times: in the Calendar, *pape* is scratched out so as to be almost invisible, except in July, where the translation of Thomas has been crossed through in black ink. Cambridge, Sidney Sussex MS 33 shows the same zeal in relation to the word *pape* in the Calendar, and to the name of Thomas of Canterbury whenever it appears. The words *papa nostro* in the Canon of the Mass, are, nonetheless, untouched. In Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.11.11, the word *pape* in the Calendar is uniformly scratched out so as to be invisible in every instance. The Octave of Thomas is also obliterated by being scratched out. On fo. 28r and following, the prayers and sequences for the feast of Thomas of Canterbury are erased, and the name Thomas is removed meticulously. In the Canon, however, the word *papa* is first removed under Henry VIII, and then later restored under Queen Mary.

Only twelve manuscripts survive of the York Missal, perhaps itself a sign of the rigour of the iconoclasts. Under Edward VI in 1548 and 1549, the iconoclasts turned book destroyers, no longer content with names alone. As the Act of Uniformity ordered the introduction of the *Book of the Common Prayer*, so all mass books were to be turned in and torn up. Whereas the censorship of the Henrician orders seems sometimes banal in its expediency, an example of a printed York Use Missal illustrates the violence of the Edwardian order in the most startling way possible. Perhaps no image better expresses the violent memory of the Reformation than this damaged missal. Published in Rouen in 1516 for sale in York, an obit for the priest John Best shows it in use in Faceby in Yorkshire in 1530. The book was not so lucky afterwards. It has become a wounded body, slashed and mutilated, seven times in all. The deepest of these gashes is at the *Te igitur*, the opening of the Canon of the Mass (*Missale* sig. N2<sup>v</sup>-3<sup>r</sup>). The most sacred part of the Roman rite, this page was traditionally decorated with an illuminated crucifixion. The priest would kiss the book at the foot of the page when raising it, and evidence survives of this in the way that the paint is here smudged. The cross has been sliced right through, deep into the pages beneath, barely avoiding the body of Christ. On the facing page, the companion image, of God

the Father enthroned, has been cut through the nose and between the eyes. Perhaps the iconoclast mistook God for the Pope, due to the iconography of a papal tiara.

And yet, by a further historical curiosity, the book survived in this invalid form. In the seventeenth century, it was owned by two successive vicars of Stainton, also in Yorkshire, on the edge of the Moors. Was it the mutilated state of the book that made them take it in, as the incorruptible wounded body of a now obsolete and illegal liturgy? Whatever their motivation, the Stainton Missal asks urgently the question, "What is an image?" For, just like the god in the plum tree in Foxe's *Pandectae*, here too the idol speaks back to us. Christ on the cross has died twice and weeps again a second time in the slashing of the book. Did the iconoclast miss (by a few centimetres) the body of Christ, out of residual respect, even as he tore into the cross that bears him? Or was his rage so blind that he did not know what he was cutting? The forensic mutilation of the face of God enthroned, on the other hand, shows a precision to the violence. A further question beneath, however, is the relation of damage done to a book, to damage done to an image. Sixteenth-century book destruction blurs the distinction between word and image more than ever. The Stainton Missal, because of its role as the container of the defamed or even damnable Roman Mass, is more than a book to the iconoclast. It is a kind of relic or image of the Mass, and therefore subject to the same law against idolatry as the graven image of the godhead. But it is also visibly a carrier of words. Where does representation end and idolatry begin? In redefining the boundary of semiosis, the Henrician and Edwardian lawgivers broke the very rules that made them upholders of the law.

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