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Desert and Spring:

Reading a Saint's Body through the Intertextual Encounter between a Christian Ascetic Life and Daoist Utopian Writing*

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This paper juxtaposes Athanasius's hagiography of Saint Antony and Tao Yuan-ming's poem "Peach Blossom Spring" to create an intertextual reading of Christian ascetic life. I use four dialectical threads—disclosedness/inaccessibility, similarity/difference, unmindfulness/discrimination, and exile/sociality—to analyze the Daoist world ideal and Christian ascetic practice. This intertextual strategy allows me to explore how desert asceticism is exemplified in various techniques, as well as how religious ideas and physical experiences are intertwined. The primary goal is to examine how religious ideas of renunciation, Christ imitation, redemption, and resurrection are embodied in the practices of fasting, solitude, fighting demons, and performing miracles. The meanings of the ascetic, perfect, redeemed, and social body are also discussed. I suggest that body is not only the medium for transcendence, it also constitutes the site where culture is reflected and rewritten.

Keywords: asceticism, bodily cultivation, *The Life of Antony*, "Peach Blossom Spring", comparative studies

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Introduction: Textualization of Body and the Embodiment of Text

Asceticism, a time-honored and cross-cultural phenomenon, has long attracted both popular interest and intellectual concern. As Wimbush and Valantasis (1995) point out, asceticism has been the subject of historical studies, exegetical studies, ethnographic studies, theological studies, and even psychological and psychiatric studies (ibid.: xix). While the early scholarship focused on particular religious traditions, cultural systems, historical periods, exemplary individuals and texts, or particular behaviors (ibid.: xix), more recent work crosses disciplines, fields, and religious traditions. According to Wimbush and Valantasis, "Scholarship on asceticism reflects the late twentieth-century humanist emphasis on comprehensiveness of scope and sophisticated engagement of a number of methods and approaches." (ibid.: xxi) Valantasis characterizes this new trend as the perspective of the theorist who understands asceticism as a large and pervasive cultural system and locates it at the center of cultural, social, and individual engagement in every sphere of cultural expression (ibid.: 544).[1] Accordingly, asceticism is not only a unique mode of religious practice that informs religious ideals, it is also a force that constructs cultural parameters.[2] In this essay I'd like to explore how the disciplined body of the ascetic constitutes an essential arena for the performance of religious ideals and how the bodily cultivation of the ascetic becomes a potential site for reflection and rewriting of culture.

Athanasius (298-373 AD), author of *The Life of Antony*, is considered a central figure of fourth-century Christendom. As a spiritual master, theologian, and bishop of Alexandria, he devoted his life to opposing the Arian heresy. In his account of Antony's life—one of the very first and by far the most important work of hagiography (Harpham 1987)—Athanasius tells the story of an ascetic hero who devotes himself to the pursuit of holiness by living a strict solitary life in the Egyptian desert. Its narrative of saintliness has exerted tremendous influence on Western ethics and spirituality, and is a key resource for the study of early Christian asceticism.

Scholars have noted a close connection between ascetic practices and the reading and writing of texts, activities that play a crucial role in ascetic beliefs and practices

1 Valantasis regards Max Weber, Michel Foucault and Geoffrey Harpham as the three primary ascetical theorists of the twentieth century.

2 According to Yu's introductory essay of this volume, "bodily cultivation is considered a channel for learning, embodying, developing, or shaping cultural concepts and ideals."

(Krueger 1999). Desert ascetics' ongoing ruminations about scripture were an important vehicle of their transformation and holiness (Clark 1999). In other words, the Scriptures and hagiographies contained exemplars ascetics could consider and model, thus transforming their own lives through the unremitting act of reading and writing. Their desire to embody these texts was the primary source of their compelling spirituality. With a saint's narrative serving as the basis for transformation (Clark 1999 cited in Burton-Christie 1993), an ascetic's life could itself be regarded as an edifying text (Krueger 1999). Or we can say that the ascetics intermingled with the exemplars by weaving their lives into the texts they read. This corresponds to the Latin etymological meaning of intertextuality: "to intermingle while weaving." According to Flood (2004), the ascetic self shapes the narrative of its life to the narrative of its tradition; the formation of the ascetic self involves both the eradication of subjectivity and voluntary acts of will. If we transpose Flood's understanding of this process to the framework of reading and writing, we can say that ascetics eliminate the very notion of authorship but become the active readers who quote the texts actively.

The strong link between ascetic text and ascetic body beckons a more material reading of text, one that "raises issues of social power and cultural interests" (Clark 1999: 373) displayed in the textualization of body and the embodiment of text—ideas expressed in Chang's (2006) juxtaposition of text-textile-texture-textuality. According to Chang, these words share the Latin origin *texere textum*, meaning "to weave, to twine together." Accordingly, *text* is analogous to *textile*, with their respective textures woven by open flows of signification. An ascetic's reading of a text and transformation of the self can therefore be regarded as a trans-linguistic movement of read and written ideas. This trans-linguistic movement cannot be analyzed from a system of significations that "may be authoritatively identified and isolated as a distinctive semiotic phenomenon" (Asad 1993: 165). While Asad proposes in his study of ritual and discipline in medieval Christian monasticism that reading is a product of social disciple and the text a product of disciplined performers who "discourse with one another in historically determinate ways," in this essay I'd like to propose that the desert ascetics' practice of reading texts and creating texts is embodied in processes of exemplification based in various techniques. Importantly, this exemplification does not result from the inscription of religious ideas, rather, it is the bodily experiences themselves that make the realization of religious ideas possible.

In the West, during the classical and Christian eras, the body was characterized as threatening and dangerous, something that needed to be controlled and regulated by cultural processes. This perspective stems from ancient Greek culture and was intensified in the Christian theology of evil that characterizes human beings as fallen creatures (Turner 1987: 20-21). The body as flesh therefore requires the discipline of meditation, fasting,

and sexual abstention to achieve the purification and maintain the life of the soul. Following the growing dominance of Christianity in the West, ascetic attitudes set the tone of Western culture and gave birth to the more general ethic of world mastery that constitutes "the essential project of modernity" (1987: 22). In a similar vein, Harpham argues that asceticism is not only the particular set of beliefs and practices that erupted into high visibility during the early Christian era, it also refers to certain features of the Western culture (Harpham 1987: xi). For Harpham, culture and asceticism exist in a distinct dialectical relationship. Taking the early Christian desert monks as an example, he suggests that their radically anti-cultural forms (e.g., withdrawing and remaining isolated in the desert, inflicting morbid deprivations and torture on themselves) are entirely incompatible with communal life or the family structure; nevertheless, they "brought Book to the Desert, and served as apostles of a textual culture in the domain of the nature" (ibid.: xii). In other words, the asceticism of desert monks problematized their "home" cultures. Its ability to problematize makes asceticism a vital pursuit:

> The durability of asceticism lies in its capacity to structure oppositions without collapsing them, to raise issues without settling them... Asceticism neither simply condemns culture nor simply endorses it: it does both. Asceticism, we could say, *raises the issue* of culture by structuring an opposition between culture and its opposite...asceticism is always marked by ambivalence, by a compromised binarism. To contemplate the ascetical basis of culture...is to recognize that an integral part of the cultural experience is a disquiet, an ambivalent yearning for the precultural, postcultural, anticultural, or extracultural." [Harpham 1987: xii]

Furthermore, Harpham regards the "ascetic imperative" as a transcultural structuring force that manifests in every culture and articulates each culture's urge for transcendence (ibid.: xiii). Harpham's suggestion sheds light on the desert ascetics' reading texts and creating texts: If we consider their practices a way to raise issues of culture and express a yearning for transcendence, we can then ask what ambivalent binaries their asceticism raises and how it problematizes culture. Accordingly, by considering the text *The Life of Antony* as an "urge to transcendence" and "saying otherwise than culture," we can examine those dialectic binaries and how they are grappled with through the embodied practices of Christian asceticism.

To this end, I adopt the strategy of reading *The Life of Antony* through another text. I will juxtapose it with the analogous "Peach Blossom Spring," a work by the Chinese poet Tao Yuan-ming (365-427 AD). My goal is not simply to place the two works on the same level—for example, to compare the meaning of other-worldliness in early Christian and

Chinese cultures or the transcendental qualities of desert and springtime images. Rather, the juxtaposition here is intended to be productive in *generating* the relationship between these texts and the play of difference (Gill 1998: 284).[3]

In this intertextual environment we can begin to explore the dialectic binaries in *The Life of Antony*. These two works obviously have very different content and genres—one is a Christian hagiography and the other a poem of the Chinese utopian hermit tradition. Yet I believe the two are related in terms of their dynamics of void and longing that constitute the basis of both ascetic practice and the poet's writing process. By making them "two,"[4] the one ("Peach Blossom Spring") is able to recall the other (*The Life of Antony*) and to resonate with it (Freud 2007). In the following, I will explicate the dynamic of void and longing in the former and show how this work "recalls" a similar dynamic of *The Life of Antony*.

Void and Longing in "Peach Blossom Spring"

The author of "Peach Blossom Spring," also known as Tao Qian, was a minor official who renounced public life and became a recluse. He practiced *dao* (the Way) and wrote many famous poems on nature and solitude. His "Peach Blossom Spring" combines poetry (thirty-two lines) and fictive prose about a fisherman who unmindfully enters a world of peace and tranquility inhabited by villagers whose ancestors had fled the chaos of the Qin dynasty in antiquity. After vividly depicting a happy and carefree society, the narrative ends with Tao addressing the inaccessibility of this ideal world and expressing his admiration and longing for it. This work has been credited with initiating a tradition of utopian literature in China, and the Chinese term "peach blossom spring" is now considered a synonym of "utopia."

As a revered literary achievement, "Peach Blossom Spring" still attracts research attention, with some scholars analyzing it as a political fable having critical connotations

3 Gill explores how juxtaposition constitutes an important comparative strategy for Jonathan Z. Smith's study of religion. According to Gill, "Juxtaposition is more than placing two things in adjacent spaces. Juxtaposition is a placement that implies relationship. Juxtaposition is the necessary precondition to comparison. It demands comparison. An effective juxtaposition engages a tension among the items juxtaposed, a tension that raises questions not easily answered. In an engaging juxtaposition there is movement back and forth among the elements. An interplay" (1998: 284).

4 According to Cirlot's Dictionary of Symbols, "two stands for echo, reflection, conflict and counterpoise or contraposition; or the momentary forces of stillness in equilibrium" (Cirlot 1962: 221).

for contemporary society and others emphasizing its philosophical and religious meanings. For example, Tsai (2005) has classified traditional interpretations of the work into three categories: fairyland, historical narration, and interior space. She goes on to note that its themes of reclusion and hermitage are still being mined by those interested in a comparative study of Eastern and Western pastoral literature and mythology. To say that "Peach Blossom Spring" presents the image of a Chinese utopia does not comport with the contention that there is stable utopian content in an unchanging "Chinese mind." While the happy and carefree conditions depicted by the poet certainly look Daoist or Chinese, the ideal world of this work is not something static or uniform that can be extracted in a content analysis of the work; it is instead an event that takes place during the reading process.

Liao (1985) claims that to understand how "Peach Blossom Spring" makes such experiences possible, one must consider the prose and poem as a "no-thing" that does not necessarily point to any specific reference, thus allowing readers to fill in the blanks of the work and to appropriate it for themselves. Liao extracts three elements of aesthetic structure in reading this work: longing, lacking, and exile. In the beginning of the prose portion, Tao Yuan-ming notes the specific period (Tai-yuan太元) and place (Wu-ling武陵) where the fisherman (the main character) comes from, thereby creating a sense of truth for the reader. Upon reading poet's cinematic description of the fisherman's tour, it is very difficult not to become entrapped in this fictive world. Tao uses images in the manner of a film director, and the reader finds it easy to *become* the fisherman who "rowed upstream, unmindful of the distance he traveled," and who suddenly confronts a different world. Tao employs the most ordinary images to create a sense of wonder and strangeness: the scenes are not unfamiliar to readers, nor are the villagers depicted as aliens or celestial beings. The differences between this village and the outside world arise from a sense of familiarity, and Tao never directly mentions what those differences are. Left unsaid, they constitute part of the "no-thing" aspect of this work and foreshadow the loss that occurs later. Furthermore, this different world is apprehended by the unmindful and undifferentiated mind of the fisherman; when he later attempts an intentional search for the world, he loses it forever. The reader experiences the same anxiety and disappointment triggered by the paradox: the ideal world is hidden to those who know of it and try to find it. The poet's admiration and longing for it only deepens the reader's sense of loss.

Kwong (1994) considers the work's verse complementary to its prose—not repetitive but variant in focus, structure, and means of expression. While the prose describes the fisherman's experience in an impersonal and objective tone, the sense of loss at the end of the prose injects a more personal and interpretive voice. The poet begins with an account of why the villagers retreated from their earlier stations and then draws an

admiring portrait of their new world—a tax-free agrarian economy and pre-calendric culture. Tao writes that those who live in this world "have no need of clever contrivance." This utopia is characterized by inaccessibility: it is viewable for short glimpses, but remains absolutely separate from the fisherman's world. Acknowledging that inaccessibility, the poet expresses his longing in an emotional voice:

> May I ask you who wander within the realm,
> Can you fathom what lies beyond the dust and noise?
> I would like to tread the light breeze,
> And fly high to seek my fellows. [Kwong 1994]

This yearning voice contrasts with the final line of the prose: "Since then there has been no one interested in trying to find such a place." In his translation and analysis, Kwong points to the ambiguity of both the prose and poem, asking why a utopia so squarely down-to-earth in character remains so inaccessible:

> The tension between visionary longing and historical consciousness explains the presence of two voices, one that finds utopia in nothing more exotic than a sublimation of everyday reality, and the other which gauges its chance in the contemporary milieu. And while the historical voice has the last word in the prose, it is the visionary one that takes the poem to a crescendo, yearning for a society ...[in which] the dilemma that has long agonized humanity will not be solved but dissolved. What the lyric voice registers is a hope that the ordinary ideal which has turned almost other-worldly might still be realizable, if only a more innocent form of social organization could be found. The one ending on a subdued and the other on a romantic note, the two parts give contrastive rings that attest to the complexity of the poet's sentiments. [Kwong 1994: 54]

Similarly, Tsai (2005) also recognizes the tensions in this work by noting that the easy and peaceful depiction of the ideal world implies a bleak sense of tragedy (2005:28-29). Yang (1998) also proposes that "The Peach Blossom Spring" is both utopian and anti-utopian. In other words, it is a work about the appearance and the deconstruction of the utopian world. Following the logic of desire and void, "Peach Blossom Spring" reveals four dialectical threads: disclosedness/inaccessibility (of the ideal world), similarity/difference (between the fisherman's world and the ideal world), unmindfulness/discrimination (of the fisherman's state of mind), and exile/sociality (of the poet's state of mind). Because the dynamic of void and longing informs ascetic practice as well as the poet's writing pro-

cess, I will apply these same dialectical threads in my analysis of the saint's biography in the hope that the meeting of these two texts can reveal an otherwise invisible dimension shared by both (Flood 2004).

Disclosedness/Inaccessibility: The Ascetic Body

Antony was described as being different from other children in his inclinations. As a boy, "he could not bear to learn letters," but once he started attending church with his parents, he quickly began "paying attention to the readings, [and] carefully took to heart what was profitable in them" (Athanasius 1980: 30-31). The first real change in his life occurred when he considered a biblical message as God talked directly to him. Antony was between eighteen and twenty years old when his parents died, and soon afterwards he heard a biblical passage, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." He immediately gave his possessions to local townspeople, keeping just a few items for his younger sister. Later, after hearing a passage proclaiming "Do not be anxious about tomorrow," he gave away his remaining possessions and devoted himself to the life of an ascetic. Whereas Tao Yuan-ming longed to "tread the light breeze" to find his ideal world in the fabrication of language, Antony lived his life according to a book he had read and heard with his heart. The world of the peach blossom spring was built with words, but they could not replace the "real" world that the poet inhabited—and that gap was the source of the poet's longing and loss. In a like manner, letters were only letters for Antony before they were inscribed in his heart. As a person shaped by a particular relationship with the word of God (Brakke 1998), Antony can be considered the product of his unceasing efforts to overcome the distance between the flesh and the word.

When Antony first left his village, he imitated the ascetics who lived nearby. At that time there were many local primitive ascetic congregations, but rather than join one of these, he moved away and established a relationship with a senior ascetic. In the beginning he practiced what might be called a standard form of asceticism, but he gradually moved farther and farther from the community of humans. He finally settled in the Egyptian desert to practice fasting, maintain vigils, and sexual abstinence, and later he even retreated to a group of tombs to preserve his solitude and his pursuit of holiness (Chadwick 1958).

These three major practices manifest the two basic components of ascetic life, *anachōrēsis* (withdrawal) and *enkrateia* (self-control) (Ware 1995)—both of which have negative and positive connotations. Withdrawal expresses both escape from the social

and cultural order and a return to an original and uncorrupted bodily state. Self-control is aimed at conquering instinctive urges, but is also viewed as involving "violence to our natural appetites" as well as their transfiguration (Ware 1995: 4). Using hunger as an example, Brown (1988) notes that in Antony's time, residents of the Egyptian desert and the land surrounding it were constantly under threat of starvation, therefore the practice of fasting has much more cultural and social relevance than sexual abstention. Hunger is a familiar experience for destitute people who live in the desert—often described as a "nonhuman place," void of both food and water. Thus, leaving home and entering the desert represents a direct confrontation with the core of temptation: the loss of humanity. The need for food forged a connection between the ascetics and the shared weaknesses of a starving humanity—a condition from which the ascetics wanted to free themselves (Brown 1988). In other words, they constituted a new form of humanity and sanity formed through withdrawal and resisting fleshly needs, including food.

This raises questions concerning how this new form of humanity might be disclosed in a state of inaccessibility and in ascetic practices, and how resistance to fleshly needs and renunciation of bodily pleasures might constitute sanity. Both questions can be explored from the Christian understanding of the body or flesh—for example, the Old Testament description of the body as the site where the meaning of holiness is manifest:

> The body is shown to be liable to pollution from various foods and from its own discharges and emissions. Lack of bodily integrity, whether caused deliberately or congenital or the result of disease, also causes impurity. The blurring of boundaries between species or between genders, through bodily activity, was also regarded as an unclean act. Israel was called by God to be a holy nation, and this essentially involved being separated from other nations with significant boundaries being vigorously policed. [Isherwood and Stuart 1998: 53]

Accordingly, holiness is actualized by physical purification involving distinctions between dirty and clean and the maintenance of boundaries. In the New Testament, the religious meanings of sin and redemption are realized through Jesus' incarnate and resurrected body. His body constitutes a site of transformation for redeemed men and women:

> It is from the body of sin and death that we are delivered, it is through the body of Christ on the Cross that we are saved; it is into the body of the Church that we are incorporated; it is in our body that its new life has to be manifest; it is to a resurrection of this body to the likeness of his glorious body that we are destined. [Robinson 1952: 9]

The letters written by Paul contain a consistent contrast between flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*). But instead of proposing a body/soul duality, Paul held that the contrast between flesh and spirit lies in their indications of humans' fallen or redeemed states (Isherwood and Stuart 1998). Although infirmity is an inherent quality of the body, the body is also the vehicle of resurrection. Under conditions of persecution, qualities such as faith, the capacity to bear suffering, other-worldliness, contempt for material goods, and longing for heaven constitute a martyr's virtues (Chadwick 1958). Ascetics are considered "white martyrs," who eagerly pursue redemption through combat with the body weakened by sin and liable to sin. As Chadwick observes, "Whatever is hard in their bodily circumstances is to be counted as discipline, like the athlete's training, as the soul prepares itself for heaven" (1958: 20).

According to Athanasius, a successful ascetic life lies in the incarnation of the Word: "By dwelling in a human body, the Word granted incorruption to other human bodies, renewed humanity's knowledge of God in preparation for a life of virtue, and defeated the devil and his demons" (Brakke 1998: 149). Athanasius describes the ideal human as a being whose body is perfectly controlled by the Word and remains untouched by its passions. In Athanasius' book, Antony represents a paradigmatic instance of a human being whose life is steered by the Word—that is, the saint's body is "a tablet on which to be written" (Clark 1999: 59). The process of writing constitutes an incessant conquering of fleshly needs, and the ideal state of spirituality disclosed by the Word starts the ascetic on the long journey of cultivation. While an ascetic still lives with a human body, the ideal state is never fully achieved. This inaccessibility constitutes the prime impetus behind the ascetic's void and longing. Furthermore, the process of writing the religious ideal does not imply bodily passivity. As Asad has noted,

> The human body is not to be viewed simply as the passive recipient of 'cultural imprints,' still less as the active source of 'natural expressions' that are 'clothed in local history and culture,' but as the self-developable means for achieving a range of human objects—from styles of physical movement (e.g., walking), through modes of emotional being (e.g., composure), to kinds of spiritual experience (e.g., mystical states). [Asad 1997: 47-48]

Accordingly, it is the various bodily experiences, such as hunger, thirst, sense of control and lack of control, which make the realization of religious ideals possible.

Similarity/Difference: The Perfect Body

After Antony gave away his possessions and left the village, he began his journey to sainthood by imitating the senior ascetic. Brakke argues that by describing Antony's pursuit of holiness as the imitation of a senior ascetic, Athanasius supports an "ethic of imitation" that reflects his own program of self-formation (Brakke 1998: 245). The logic of imitation is also expressed via Athanasius' understanding of the relationship between soul and God. In his *Contra Gentes*, he states that the soul is like a mirror—only when every stain of sin is removed and purity attained can one "truly contemplate as in a mirror the Word, the image of the Father" (Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, cited from Louth 1981: 79) This metaphor of the soul's semblance to God implies the intimate relationship between self and holy knowledge—in other words, "self-knowledge involves knowledge of God, because God has made the soul to reflect His image" (Louth 1981: 79).

Unlike the Origenist mystical theology, which was strongly influenced by a Platonic understanding of soul and ideas, Athanasius's mirroring metaphor does not suggest a natural kinship between the soul and God. Following the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*, there is an unbridgeable gap between God and all creatures—God is eternal, while human beings are both unstable and changeable—therefore no ontological continuity exists between the image in the mirror and the image itself. Accordingly, "In the case of the soul reflecting the image of God, this similarity discloses a much deeper dissimilarity at the level of substance" (Louth 1981: 80). For Athanasius, "The Christian life required continual formation of the self through imitation of an eternally consistent 'form' or 'pattern.' Such self-formation through imitation was the ethical facet of the process that he called 'divinization'" (Brakke 1998: 167). Gaps or dissimilarities between imitators and an exemplar raise several questions: What does it mean to be a follower? What is the guiding issue for the follower? What does it mean to be a perfect imitator? Is it possible to be a perfect imitator? I turn to Gadamer (1989) and Masuzawa's (1993) discussions of art and representation to discuss these questions.

Gadamer uses the ontological interwovenness of the original and reproduced when distinguishing between a picture (*Bild*, also meaning "image") and a copy (*Abbild*). Since the essential character of any copy is to "resemble the original," it functions as a means rather than an end that points to what is copied via the similarity. Once the function is accomplished, its own existence is no longer important. Gadamer calls this and similar mediating functions *self-effacement*. In contrast, the picture can never be separated from what is represented:

> The picture has its own being. This being as presentation, as precisely that in which it is not the same as what is represented, give it the positive distinction of being a picture as opposed to a mere reflected image. This kind of picture is not a copy, for it presents something which, without it, would not present itself in this way. It says something about the original. [Gadamer 1989: 140]

Unlike the one-sided relationship between a copy and its original, a picture and its original define and enhance each other. The picture is an "autonomous reality" emanating from the original, and "essential to an emanation is that what emanates is an overflow. What it flows from does not thereby become less." Recognition of the ontological valence of a picture implies that it "has an autonomy that also affects the original. For strictly speaking, it is only through the picture (*Bild*) that the original (*Urbild*) becomes the original (Ur-bild)..." (ibid.: 142).

In another illustration of the exemplary significance of a religious picture, Gadamer argues that the divine becomes picturable through word and image, neither of which replicates the divine like a copy duplicates its original: "Word and image are not mere imitative illustrations, but allow what they present to be for the first time fully what it is" (1989: 143). From this perspective, the original is no longer the "origin" to which the representational work (word or image) tries to return. Rather, the "original" is something to be pursued. Since there is nothing to be replicated, the representational work realizes its origin by *saying something about it* rather than by simply duplicating. Thus, we can say that Tao Yuan-ming's work is the realization of the ideal world of the peach blossom spring through language, but the realization of "no-thing" does not give birth to a definite "something." The work remains a no-thing, but one that allows for "all kinds of imaginative elaboration." This represents the indeterminate and inexhaustible quality of a work of art.

If we use Gadamer's understanding as an analogy,[5] Antony's pursuit of the perfect can be understood as "an event of being—in it being appears, meaningfully and visibly" (1989: 144). His practice of a disciplined and solitary life was not an imitation of his prior exemplar in the same manner that a copy replicates its original and functions via the simple similarity. By reading different exemplars and taking them into his heart, he wrote his life as a work of art and became a new exemplar to in turn be read and followed by

5 The analytical strategy of adopting Gadamer's understanding as an "analogy" is similar to the analytical strategy of juxtaposition of this essay. Etymological speaking, analogy means making two things proportional, on which a comparison may be based.

others. In asceticism, the transcendence of the natural is analogous to "an act of literary or artistic creation" (Cameron 1995: 153). In other words, the production of an ascetic self resembles the work of artistic creation. In the same manner as a work of art whose ideality "does not consist in its imitating and reproducing an idea but, in the 'appearing' of the idea itself" (1995), Antony made the ideality of sainthood visible through the writing of his flesh.

Where Gadamer emphasizes the interwoven relationship between origin and representation by illustrating the ontological valence of a picture, Masuzawa (1993) disrupts the order of origin and representation in her discussion of Walter Benjamin's essay on photography, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1968), which she describes as one of the most important commentaries on "the disappearance of the authority of origin, original, originality" (Masuzawa 1993: 16). According to Benjamin, the advent of photography—characterized by new technological modes of production and reproduction—destroyed the original aura of artworks by "substitut[ing] a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (Benjamin 1968: 211).

Masuzawa examines this loss of aura and authority from two perspectives. First, she notes that the photographic "copy" does not replicate the original but acquires autonomy and independence from it by its unique way of capturing an image, which differs from our daily bodily experiences. In other words, it creates something new rather than reproducing something old. Furthermore, its limitless simulacra circulate on their own terms and reactivate the original. Second, photography as an art form lacks an original, therefore the "traditional auratic economy of origination" (Masuzawa 1993: 19) disappears and the boundary between origin and replication become blurred. Masuzawa further argues that regardless of how faithfully it represents, it is by no means identical to what it repeats. She uses Jorge Luis Borges's illustration of Pierre Menard's re-writing of a Cervantes novel to claim that "representation as such does not establish identity either through resemblance or by the logic of descent; rather, representation is a function of difference, of repetition without a unitary origin" (ibid.: 25). Here representation is characterized by rebellious difference, or we can say that difference gives birth to resemblance, and the descendant gives birth to its ancestor. By building an ideal world through the fabrication of language in "Peach Blossom Spring," Tao Yuan-ming remains aware of the original difference that partakes in the building process. Here, the dialogue between the same and the different can be read from two perspectives. First, his ordinary description of the peach blossom spring is a construction of difference between the ideal world and the fisherman's world via the similarity. The second level of difference is the fisherman's failure to return to the peach blossom spring, implying that the same marks cannot be

used to find one's way back. In other words, the difference is original, and the disruption of difference only temporary.

Furthermore, when the descendant becomes the original, lineage is something to be earned rather than inherited. Antony's combat with his own desires illustrates a longing for "the likeness of the glory of Adam" (Brown 1988: 213)—that is, a longing for the original state of humanity. However, such an original state does not exclude the existence of temptation, which existed at the very beginning. As Harpham (1987) observes, "The origin is always already differential and nontranscendent; 'usurpation' or 'violence' has always already occurred; the natural is always already unnatural" (Harpham 1987: 9). The loss of the original state does not result from the existence of temptation, but from humanity's "twisted will," and so there is no original perfect state to return to, only an original condition that allows one to "relive Adam's first and most fatal temptation, and to overcome it" (Brown 1988: 221).

Rather than pursue the original state of perfection, Antony pursued a disciplined and solitary life as part of his unremitting search for the "original" condition of battle. Evenutally time no longer follows the successive rhythm of past, present, and future. The past must be cut off at every moment, and only the present counts:

> He did not hold time past in his memory, but day by day, as if making a beginning of his asceticism, increased his exertion for advance, saying continually to himself Paul's word about *forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead*...He observed that in saying today he was not counting the time passed, but as one always establishing a beginning, he endeavored each day to present himself as the sort of person ready to appear before God. [Athanasius 1980: 37]

In order to enter an eternal state of freshness and readiness, Antony had to forsake all past memories, including those of his parents and relatives. Athanasius writes, "All the desire and all the energy he possessed concerned the exertion of the discipline" (1980: 32). Furthermore, his body had to be remade, to return to "an original, natural and uncorrupted state" (Brown 1988: 223). In other words, Antony's ascetic practice is not an attempt to destroy his body, but to perfect it (Jasper 2004). The remade body becomes the expression for the process of transformation. Thus, when St. Antony emerged from his fortress after twenty years of "pursuing the ascetic life," his friends "were amazed to see that his body maintained its former condition, neither fat from lack of exercise, nor emaciated from fasting and combat with demons, but was just as they had known him prior to his withdrawal. ...He maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that which accords with nature" (Athanasius 1980: 42). In Ware's words,

"There is no trace of dualism here, physical austerities have not destroyed Antony's body but restored it to a healthy and natural state. Asceticism, rightly understood, is a struggle not *against* but *for* the body" (Ware 1997: 99-100). The unchanging body state is thought to be the outcome of an incessant battle with temptation. So Adam as the "original ancestor" is not an ideal to return to, but a critical moment to be overcome, after which the possibility of temptation must still be acknowledged and resisted. "The Flesh is shown as polysemic," writes Wyschogrod (1995). "Words [are] resplendent with higher meaning when disciplined, but always ready to erupt into temptation" (1995: 24).

Unmindfulness/Discrimination: The Redeemed Body

The difference between unmindfulness and the state of discrimination is the point of tension in "Peach Blossom Spring," the first being a Daoist ideal and the second a degraded state originating from the use of language. As a poet who fully aware of the power and problems of language, how did Tao Yuan-ming handle this? If we first explore the Daoist perspective on language, we inevitably come across Lao-tzu's dictum, "He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know." The emphasis on pure non-intellectualized experience reflects a belief in the transparency of language, or, when applied to poetic language, the ideal *is* its transparency, which makes it like "a spotlight that brightens objects emerging from the real world, showing them in full brilliance" (Yip 1993: 82). As long as it brings us before Nature, it will be forgotten, suggesting that poetry is created to disappear. The goal of language is not to represent or rebuild reality, but to recover the relationship between us and a spontaneous Great Composition. Poems are bridges that carry us from intellectualized suffocation to the freedom of Nature. Instead of explaining Nature to us, a good poem leads us to the threshold between the spoken and the unspoken. Yip (1993) used Chinese painting to illustrate, arguing that "the full activity of language should be like the co-presence of the solid and the void in Chinese painting, allowing the reader to receive not only the words (the written) but also the wordlessness (the unwritten)." Thus, when language brings us to the unspoken, the concrete, or changing Nature, we can forget it in the same manner that—as Chuang-tzu put it—a fish trap can be forgotten once a fish has been caught. To see things as things see themselves is a Daoist ideal, one that cannot be achieved easily because our minds are clouded by broken "knowledge" through which we lose the ability to relate to Nature.

In *Transmission of the Lamp*, the famous Zen Buddhist Kung—an succinctly explains the three stages of our perception of reality:

> Thirty years ago, before I was initiated into Zen, I saw mountains as mountains, rivers as rivers. Later when I got an entrance into knowledge, I saw mountains not as mountains, river not as rivers. Now that I have achieved understanding of the substance, mountains are still mountains, rivers still rivers. [Yip 1993: 101]

That is, originally we perceive things in the manner of innocent children who respond to concrete meanings and the tangibility of things—the smell of their blankets and the feel of their bottles. However, when this primary relationship is broken, we must use language to repair the rupture, thereby "seeing mountains not as mountains, rivers not as rivers." At this stage we try to rebuild order through ideas and knowledge about things from many different disciplines, each one built upon different assumptions. These human-made theories alienate us from immediate relationships with things, and when we lose the ability to see things as they are, we also lose part of ourselves.

How does poetic language bring us back to things? The next example is Wang Wei's (701-761 AD) *Hsin-Yi Village*:

> High on the tree-tips, the hibiscus
> Sets forth red calyxes in the mountain.
> A stream hut, quiet. No one around.
> It blooms and falls, blooms and falls. [Yip 1972]

Wang Wei's language spotlights the brilliance of the hibiscus blossom, bringing us before Nature to listen to its rhythm. The poet invites us to a landscape in which no one else is around—in other words, he invites us to suspend our typical attitudes and desires to listen to the subtle voice of the blossoms, blooming and falling, blooming and falling. The same idea was captured in Cezanne's words: "The landscape thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 17).

Wang Wei shows us how a poet pursues the Daoist ideal of unmindfulness: letting things be themselves without the disturbance of human contrivance. The ideal of linguistic transparency may be possible for poets like Wang Wei, but the problems of language are more complex for Tao Yuan-ming. The three stages of perception described in *Transmission of the Lamp* do not hold here. In his depiction, the unmindful state of the fisherman is immediately and irrevocably lost once the differentiating mind arises. The rupture of differentiation cannot be repaired and the longing at the end of the work does not recover our relationship with the "spontaneous Great Composition"; it expresses that

rupture rather than resolving it. If we view Wang Wei's poem as arrival, then Tao Yuanming's work is simply passing through.

The dialectical relationship between undifferentiation and differentiation in Antony's life can be explored from two dimensions: demonology and the non-differentiation between public and private life. Demons are central elements in any ascetic's solitary life, their most distasteful and faithful companions. Valantasis (1992) argues that demons contribute to the perfection of a monk's body through a growth-oriented antagonistic relationship, and Brakke (2001) suggests that for Antony, demons constituted "principles of differentiation resistant to the ascetic's return to an original unity of spiritual essence" (2001: 22). The temptations of demons are recognized by the ascetic's discrimination of bodily movements; he needs to know differences between those that are natural to the body, those caused by negligence in food and drink, and those caused by demons. According to Rubenson (quoted in Brakke 2001), who analyzed Antony's letters,

> The mind or soul that fails to attend to the teachings of the Spirit of God becomes disordered, allows the demons to stir up movements within the body, and serves as "a guide to the evil spirits working in its members." [Brakke 2001: 24]

Since the invisible power of demons is actualized in the ascetic's body, and since the body both exteriorizes the negative invisible power of demons and the positive spiritual power of the Word, the work of discrimination constitutes important training for ascetics. This work is best exemplified in the discernment of sexual desire—in Brown's (1988) words, "Sexuality became a privileged ideogram" (1988: 230). Compared with the bodily labor of enduring pangs of hunger, the work of discernment is more closely tied to a mindful awareness of the state of the heart. The strong connection between control of the body and control of the mind indicates that the state of the heart may be recognized in bodily movement. Sexual dreams and emissions mark the lingering of an ascetic's sexual desire, regularly pointing to an impure state that needs to be purified.

Harpham (1987) explored the significance of discrimination in his discussion of ascetic linguistics. One of the most important tasks in an ascetic's life is discriminating among spirits and not being entrapped by the tricks of demons. In Antony's life, demons tried to disrupt his discipline through memories of things he had renounced, including his possessions, the pleasures of food, and the bonds of kinship. The reason why demonic suggestions are tempting is because they make sense, both in terms of what is being resisted and what an ascetic is trying to achieve. Demons are good at imitation: they chant sacred songs, recite scripture, and are capable of repeating what an ascetic has just

read. Harpham suggests that a demon's repetition of an ascetic's imitation of the apostles through reading blurs the boundary between the original and parody:

> [The] demon's mere repetition reveals that speech operates not by a one-way process of redemption, but by a two-sided possibility of double mediation that both realizes the meaning of the text and empties it of meaning. In all they do, demons represent a principle of perfect imitation that is at once the goal of the ascetic and his undoing. [Harpham 1987: 9]

He continues to note that demonology reveals the fallen dimension of speech, with perfect mimicry disturbing the order of logos "in the suspicion that the 'original' is already structured by repetition" (1987: 10). The ascetic's best weapon for defeating parody is to see through its illusion and ignore the content, otherwise it can only complicate the ascetic's pursuit of perfection. Whereas ascetics had to inscribe the truth of the Book onto their own hearts, they also had to see through the illusion of "truth" when it took the form of parody. It is interesting that the only time a demon utters the truth is to admit failure: "I no longer have a place – no weapon, no city" (Athanasius 1980: 62). Through this confession, the demon admits that he is able to do "nothing," but "nothing" will continue to haunt the ascetic until he can see through the "something" to "nothing."

The problem of language that Tao Yuan-ming dealt with resonates with the lives of ascetics, leading us to ask if language leads to referential reality or cancels the existence of the reference. Demonic temptation exposes the problematic relationship of the ascetic to language, and Antony's solution differed from both Wang Wei's re-appropriation of poetic language and Tao Yuan-ming's maintenance of irreconcilability. As Harphram explains so well, Antony's radical solution was to make himself into a sign that shines in heaven:

> Counseling his audience not to boast about expelling demons, Antony cautions that "the performance of signs does not belong to us—this is the Savior's work. So he said to the disciples: "Do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven"... [a] sign that truly signifies is like a person who has been cleansed so that the apparent is identical to the real. This is a goal worthy of any discipline, and yet human beings are incapable of true signification; the successful "performance" of signs can only be God's work. The best we can hope for ourselves is not that we learn to use signs, but that we become signs—and not spoken signs, but durable signs "written in heaven" in a script which, defying the nature of script itself, is intimate with the divine essence. Signs may be vulnerable to demonic pollution, but the mark of virtue is that we aspire to the condition

> of signs, aspire to an utter materiality, a totally degraded and therefore perfect dependency on the animating spirits. [Harphram 1987: 10]

The fallen dimension of language revealed by demonic temptation turns out to be the ascetics' redemption. The question being asked is no longer where language leads us, but how to transform oneself into a sign that can be written by the Savior.

The problem of differentiation and undifferentiation also appears in another dimension of an ascetic's life: how to undifferentiate one's private and public lives. This goal is related to Antony's teaching that the ascetic "must withdraw from his individual, separate, surface self of the fleshly name to the shared, united, hidden self of the true name" (Brakke 2001: 27). While discriminating awareness is emphasized in combat with demons, undifferentiated states of private and public become the main goal as the ascetic goes through incessant self-examination. Such works of self-examination and self-testing are not limited to the sphere of the inner self. On the contrary, Athanasius (1980) describes it as a process of bringing private thought into the context of public heteroglossia to erase the distinction between the two by social judgment:

> Let each of us note and record our actions and the stirrings of our souls as though we were going to give an account to each other... Let this record replace the eyes of our fellow ascetics, so that, blushing as much to write as to be seen, we might never be absorbed by evil things. [Athanasius 1980: 73]

As Foucault (1997) pointed out, writing here as "an arm in spiritual combat... [has an] ethopoietic function" (1997: 209) that transforms truth into ethos. The other's gaze becomes the light that penetrates the shadow of the ascetic's desire. Brown (1988) adds that combat against the ascetic's desire is carried out via the interpenetration of body and soul:

> In the desert tradition, the body was allowed to become the discreet mentor of the proud soul. The rhythms of the body, and with the body, his concrete social relations determined the life of the monk: his continued economic dependence on the settled world for food, the hard school of day-to-day collaboration with his fellow ascetics in shared rhythms of labor, and mutual exhortation in the monasteries slowly changed his personality. The material conditions of the monk's life were held capable of altering the consciousness itself. [Brown 1988: 237]

The redeemed body is a body of living sacrifice; it is also the only place in which the Spirit of God can manifest itself (Destro and Pesce 1998). Denial of personal wealth is only one preliminary stage for the final renunciation of the wish to possess one's own experience. Every trace of the inner world has to be transformed into the communal world of the desert. An ascetic's life is not one of solitary insulation; on the contrary, community plays an important role in the disciplined life.

Exile and Sociality: The Social Body

Liao (1985) identifies five levels of exile in "Peach Blossom Spring." The exile of the village ancestors from Qin political disorder constitutes the territorial exile. The villagers were themselves people of "dis-placement" or "land-lessness" who lost their original property. When their village was accidentally found by an outsider, they became outsiders to the outsider. These were not people from no-where, but from the same origin as the fisherman. However, their collective origin was not a place to return to—"their ancestors had fled the disorders ...and, having taken refuge to this inaccessible spot with wives and children and neighbors, had never ventured out again; consequently they had lost all contact with the outside world" (1985: 34). The retreat becomes the center, with no place to return to. This explains the villagers' comment to the fisherman upon his departure: "There's no need to mention our existence to outsiders" (ibid.: 34).

The temporal difference revealed by the fisherman's report constitutes the second level of exile: the villagers "sighed unhappily as the fisherman enumerated the dynasties one by one and recounted the vicissitudes of each" (Liao 1985).The temporal difference makes the fisherman and villagers strangers; when the villagers settled at the peach blossom spring, they permanently abandoned the temporal zone defined by the alternately ruling dynasties (remember that each new dynasty started its own calculation of time). When the villagers asked the fisherman about the present dynasty, they lamented the erasure of a prior time and the laying down of a new beginning. From their atemporal perspective, the loss of prior times meant only that the fate they had suffered in historical time would be repeated. From the fisherman's perspective, the Tai-yuan period of the Jin dynasty to which he belonged had lost its footing, not broken by an alternative historical temporal course, but by the peach blossom spring's atemporality, which represented Nature's undisturbed timeless cycle (Kwong 1994).

The third level of exile emerges through references to signs or marks. When the fisherman left the peach blossom spring, he carefully marked the route and reported what he had found to the magistrate. Such an intentional mindset was in total conflict with his earlier unmindfulness, and the marks and signs he noted could not return him

to that place. The high-minded Nanyang gentleman who heard the story and followed the same signs, could not find the place, either. The disappointment expressed at the end of the prose section is followed by a wishful poem that suggests the fourth level of exile—that of the poet himself. While he uses language to fabricate the peach blossom spring, he also suggests that it is only accessible to unmindful people, that language at once creates the world and makes it inaccessible. The reading experience is the fifth level of exile. We experience the exile of the villagers, the fisherman, and the writer until we finally realize that we, too, are exiled by the work, the language, and the ideal world it creates. The peach blossom spring is no more than a non-place that takes shape in our longing, and the experience of reading exposes its unbridgeable distance. In accord with this theme, we must ask how exile becomes possible, how does the world expel a person, and how does a person abandon this world.

The alternative "Peach Blossom Spring" world is not a non-world. When the refugees hid themselves from the disorder of the fisherman's society, they rebuilt a place of their own; when the ascetics retreated into the desert, they built a new city there. In his discussion of Indian asceticism, Olivelle (1995) describes the dialectic between the ascetic creation and the social construction of the body. We cannot understand one without the other. Even though the ascetic creation is considered a deconstruction of the socially constituted body, at times they share a common pursuit. For example, they both quest for purity and immortality, although these values are pursued in opposite ways. This model of dialectical interrelatedness can be productively used to discuss the relationship between the desert and the city.

In the fourth century, Egypt was a land "whose population lived under a pall of perpetual fear of starvation" (Brown 1988: 218). When Antony refused to participate in the conventional world, he was in fact making a radical move because the desert was considered an especially food-deprived zone. If ascetics could remain human in such an environment, they were "thought capable of recovering a touch of the unimaginable glory of Adam's first state" (1988: 220). They viewed their lives as mimicking Adam's condition in order to overcome the Fall and acquire a new humanity. But after Antony had spent twenty years in solitude, his spirit attracted many followers, and "from then on, there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for citizenship in the heavens" (Athanasius 1980: 42-43). This new city was a "counter-world" where twisted humanity could only be healed by contact with others. Antony, acting as spiritual father in this new community, led his followers by teaching from his own ascetic experiences. "It was through dependence on his spiritual father that the monk learned to understand his own heart, and to open the heart to others" (Brown 1988: 227). When these followers left their parents,

they did not become orphans or strangers in the world, since the new community and its spiritual guide offered a countercultural identity. Their bond with the world was changed but not dissolved (Nagy 1992).

The new community was dedicated to devotion and righteousness, "for neither perpetrator nor victim of injustice was there, no complaint of a tax collector . . ." (Athanasius 1980: 64). It was also a place for transforming multiple hearts into one spirit. Brown (1988) argues that such transformations were not achieved by pondering the meaning of scripture in the manner of the highly literate Origen; instead, "the monk's own heart was the new book" (1988: 229). They read themselves through the incessant exegesis of the movement of their hearts. Such readings were not done in solitude, but in front of the spiritual father and fellow monks. In Origen's group of elites, people's hearts were burned by the appropriation of sacred texts. In Antony's nonliterate community they found a "new alphabet of the heart" (Brown 1988: 229).

Twenty years of solitude did not deprive Antony of his sociability: "When he saw the crowd, he was not annoyed any more than he was elated at being embraced by so many people. He maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that which accords with nature" (Athanasius 1988: 42). He was gifted in healing those who suffered bodily ailments, purging demons, consoling the mournful, and reconciling those who were hostile to each other. Athanasius alternately describes him as "a lamp to everyone" (1988: 99) and "a physician given to people by God" (1988: 94). When he chose an ascetic life, he did not do so from a sense of contempt for people's needs in this world; he shared the same longing for Paradise with common people. When ascetics used their energy to break "the dark cycle of hunger and avarice" (Brown 1980: 221) by fasting, people believed that they would be rewarded with the "huge, physical exuberance of Adam's Paradise" (Brown 1980). Farmers therefore collected sand from the successful ascetic's footsteps and scattered it on their fields in hope of producing a richer harvest. The ascetic and the farmers shared the same famine-centered situation. The ascetic radicalized this lack to its most underprivileged degree, while the farmers recognized the paradox of the ascetic's practice—the more you renounce, the more you get—and attempted to share the extraordinary power gained from strict discipline by collecting the ascetic's physical traces. The ascetic's life was textualized even as he was alive, with others reading it and using it as the desert yearns for water.

Another means of exploring the relationship between ascetics and farmers is through the meaning of bread, symbolic of ties to human social life. When Antony first retreated he started to grow food by himself, rejoicing that he would thereby "be annoying no one... and because he kept himself from being a burden in all things" (Athanasius 1988: 69). If true ascetics were those who attempt to completely deny the interdepen-

dence that constitutes a basic character of human life, then the farmers revived that interrelatedness by connecting the crop's growth with the ascetic's physical existence. When Antony did not become a martyr, he gave himself as a teacher to his imitators and became a healer for the sick and broken. The common people called the ascetic back to their world through their needs, and the ascetic responded like a martyr, answering with a testimony of his faith. The ascetic who renounced the world and the common people who remained in the world sustained a kind of dialectical relationship.

Unlike modern science fiction writers who situate their stories in extraordinary temporal-spatial matrixes, Tao Yuan-ming used the most ordinary language and located his fable in the era in which he lived, making "Peach Blossom Spring" simultaneously too near and too far. His villagers created a world of no-where from their experience of exile, but when we encounter their world through the construction of language, we become the ones who are expelled and no longer completely at ease in our own world. Perhaps it was this sense of being a stranger that led Antony to the desert, and perhaps it was the very cry of urban destitution that led him back to the world. When he came out of his desert cell and reencountered people, he participated in the old world in accordance with his new humanity—not like an immortal angel, but like someone giving from a state of destitution, a new mind creating a new line.

Conclusion

Both Athanasius's hagiography of Saint Antony and Tao Yuan-ming's "Peach Blossom Spring" can be regarded as texts that "say otherwise than culture" and "urge transcendence." Their similar combination of disquiet and longing allows us to read one through the other. Although more directly comparative studies across traditions are important and worthwhile, the focus here has stayed primarily with the desert ascetic. Following Harpham's articulation of culture and asceticism, I have tried to reveal how Christian asceticism raises issues for Western culture. But to distill these problems as posed in *The Life of Antony*, I found a detour to the famous Chinese utopian poem useful. While this detour has been unconventional, the decision to make it was not totally arbitrary or intuitive since it has allowed me to reveal the meaning of one thing through another thing. Accordingly, the intertextual relationship between *The Life of Antony* and "Peach Blossom Spring" is symbolic. As Trias points out, the original etymological meaning of "symbol" was not a noun form, but rather "symboling," which implies the act of "throwing-together" two parts of a broken coin that betoken and secure an alliance (Trias 1998: 103): "The event itself is always an encounter, or rather a (*sym-ballic*) relation between a presence

of some kind that reveals itself and its recognition by a particular witness (defining its form and figure)" (Trias 1998: 105). In this sense, "Peach Blossom Spring" is more like a translucent mirror held up to *The Life of Antony*. The one must be translucent to let the other emerge. The "Peach Blossom Spring" in this sense manifests the method, *The Life of Antony*'s way of going.

Furthermore, in addition to serving as a strategy for this essay, intertextual reading also plays a significant role in ascetic beliefs and practices. In the preceding I propose that an ascetic's reading of a text and transformation of the self can be regarded as a trans-linguistic movement between scriptural reading and bodily writing. And I argued that Christian ascetic practices are strongly associated with the exemplification/textualization of the body and the embodiment of text. The religious ideas of the Word—including renunciation, the imitation of Christ, redemption, and resurrection—are all embodied in the Saint Antony's fasting, solitude, demon fighting, and performing miracles. In other words, body is the medium through which transcendence can be experienced (Norris 2005: 184) .

Since the body is a site of transformation, the practices of fasting and solitude are not really negative effacements of human inclinations, but affirmative acts toward making a new humanity based on the creation of a new body. The stage of bodily transformation is preliminary to the transformation of the heart. Discernment and undifferentiation then constitute the "mindful" part of ascetic labor. But bodily and heart transformations cannot be separated in ascetic practice. The textualization of the body, encompassing both negative control and affirmative re-creation, and the mutual engagement of body and mind in this process indicate the indispensability of the body to ascetic practices. For Antony, the new humanity both originated and was realized in the malleable body, which manifested text to transform him into an exemplar for his culture. People witnessed the power of transcendence through the ascetic's most balanced and healthy body:

> He never succumbed, due to old age, to extravagance in food, nor did he change his mode of dress because of frailty of the body, nor even bathe his feet with water, and yet in every way he remained free of injury. For he possessed eyes undimmed and sound, and he saw clearly. He lost none of his teeth—they simply had been worn to the gums because of the old man's great age. He also retained health in his feet and hands, and generally he seemed brighter and of more energetic strength than those who make use of baths and a variety of foods and clothing. [Athanasius 1980: 98]

The religious practice of the desert ascetics springs from uneasiness about culture. As a "negative landscape located outside the sphere of existence," the desert becomes the place

susceptible only to things transcendent (Cirlot 1962: 76). The ascetic body in the desert is a body of becoming. By renunciation of food, sex, and identity, it pushes the logic of the culture to its limit and invents a heterogeneous logic of fertility. The ascetic body problematizes issues of culture and offers an arena for echoing and counterpoising the same. Consequently, it is not only the medium for achieving transcendence, it also constitutes a site where culture is both reflected and rewritten.

Appendix

The Text of "Peach Blossom Spring"〈桃花源詩并記〉

晉太元中，武陵人，捕魚為業，緣溪行，忘路之遠近。忽逢桃花林，夾岸數百步，中無雜樹，芳草鮮美，落英繽紛，漁人甚異之。復前行，欲窮其林。
林盡水源，便得一山，山有小口，髣髴若有光。便舍船，從口入。初極狹，才通人；復行數十步，豁然開朗，土地平曠，屋舍儼然，有良田、美池、桑竹之屬，阡陌交通，雞犬相聞。其中往來種作，男女衣著，悉如外人；黃髮、垂髫，並怡然自樂。

見漁人，乃大驚；問所從來，具答之。便要還家，設酒、殺雞，作食。村中聞有此人，咸來問訊。自云：先世避秦時亂，率妻子邑人來此絕境，不復出焉；遂與外人間隔。問今是何世，乃不知有漢，無論魏、晉。此人一一為具言所聞，皆歎惋。餘人各復延至其家，皆出酒食。停數日，辭去。此中人語云：「不足為外人道也。」

既出，得其船，便扶向路，處處誌之。及郡下，詣太守，說如此。太守即遣人隨其往，尋向所誌，遂迷不復得路。
南陽劉子驥，高尚士也，聞之，欣然規往，未果；尋病終。後遂無問津者。

嬴氏亂天紀　賢者避其世
黃綺之商山　伊人亦雲逝
往跡浸復湮　來徑遂蕪廢
相命肆農耕　日入從所憩

桑竹垂餘蔭　菽稷隨時藝
春蠶收長絲　秋熟靡王稅
荒路曖交通　雞犬互鳴吠
俎豆猶古法　衣裳無新製
童孺縱行歌　斑白歡游詣
草榮識節和　木衰知風厲
雖無紀歷志　四時自成歲
怡然有餘樂　於何勞智慧
奇蹤隱五百　一朝敞神界
淳薄既異源　旋復還幽蔽
借問游方士　焉測塵罣外
願言躡輕風　高舉尋吾契

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沙漠與桃花源：
從《聖安東尼傳》與〈桃花源詩并記〉之並置閱讀談基督宗教苦修者之修行實踐

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本文以基督宗教禁慾主義的經典作品《聖安東尼傳》為對象，討論沙漠苦修者之生活的範本化如何透過種種苦行技術得以完成，並說明身體並不只是表現宗教意涵或銘刻文化意義的所在地，身體也是建構宗教意義的重要媒介。沙漠苦修者之生活的典範化如何透過種種苦行技術得以完成，是本文對《聖安東尼傳》的閱讀所環繞的中心議題。本文之分析策略將《聖安東尼傳》與陶淵明之〈桃花源記〉並置，來理解沙漠修行者之修行實踐。本文提出並置閱讀的策略，理由在於上述二個文本都有將文化「問題化」、提出質疑，並尋求超越的性質。本文的互文閱讀以〈桃花源記〉所開展出來之四重張力——開顯與隱蔽、相同與差異、有心與無意，以及放逐與群居——來進行對於《聖安東尼傳》的閱讀。本文探索宗教理念與修行實踐的彼此交織，並以「身體的文本化」以及「文本的身體化」來理解這個交織的關係。在「開顯與隱蔽」與以及「相同與差異」這兩節中，本文討論身體如何成為修行所追求之轉化的重要媒介。禁食、獨處等苦修方式不只是為了消極地革除墮落人性之欲望，也有積極重新恢復新人性之意涵。新的人性不是一個抽象的宗教理念，而是由一個新的身體來體現。身體的轉化交織著心的轉化，在「有心與無意」這一節中，本文討論語言之虛實的「分辨」以及身體「鑒察」如何構成修行實踐中重要的功夫，指出「心的鍛鍊」與身體狀態的彼此交織。最後，本文認為身體不只做為實踐超越的中介，也是對文化提出質疑以及改寫文化的重要場域。

關鍵詞：禁慾主義，身體與修練，《聖安東尼傳》，《桃花源詩并記》，比較研究