

Serious Meaning in Mac Wellman's Scribbling:
A Semiotic Study of *School for Devils* (2004)

Dr. Ahmed S. M. Mohamed

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> 25th April, 2006
>
> Dear professor Melrose,
>
> It gives me great pleasure to send you this email wishing that
> you may help me in any way that seems possible for you. I hope
> also to be one of your most sincerediscliples and applicants of
> your critical theories here in Egypt.
>
> I teach Drama at the department mentioned above and supervise
> the AUCLTR (Assiut University Centre for Translation and
> Language Research).
>
> For the time I am planning to do research for promotion and I
> wish to apply your your theory on the semiotics od dramatic
> texts. I have plans in mind to conduct my research on Susan
> Melrose's *New Semiotics: Theory and Application on Shelagh*
> *Delaney's A Taste of Honey*.
>
> I have already gathered material including your book and the
> various articles. I also checked the previous work of Esslin and
> keir Elam. However, I still find difficulty how to approach your
> notions and what are the most applicable ones to start with.
> This is due to my inability to fully grasp every detail
> simultaneously.
>
> Therefore, I will be greatly indebted to you if you guide me how
> and where to start, and if you suggest any other choiceroof
> similar text, as the discussion of two plays will indeed enrich
> my rsearch. Pls. note that I do not wish togive much emphasis
> to language (I mean linguistics).
>
> If our university plans to invite you as a speaker on any
> academic occasion, how far will this be of any interest to you.
>
> Until I hear from you, please accept my best regards and thanks
> for any help.
>
>
> Sincerely Yours,
>
> Ahmed S. M. mohamed
>
>
>
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>

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Re: Academic Help Needed

From: Susan Melrose (sfmelrose@sfmelrose.u-net.com)
Sent: Tuesday, April 25, 2006 10:19:07 AM
To: Ahmad Saber (ahmsab@hotmail.com)

Dear Ahmed (if I may)
Many thanks for your e-mail, and for your kind words.

Let me begin by saying that I am not surprised that you find the application of my work difficult: I was trained in deconstruction, and the point about that training is that it enables one to challenge dominant discourses, rather more than it enables one to identify new and productive alternative strategies. (You will be aware that "deconstruction", in the Derridean sense, has the word "de...struction" within it: in this sense it is a down-breaking process, and one might suppose that it is negative in its implications. What this means is that it tends to be neglectful of positive and affirmative strategies. But we gone on staging dramatic writing, and plainly we need a set of strategies that are also constructive, following the deconstruction.)

Your kind e-mail has obliged me to try to think constructively: and I have begun to wonder if you and I might have an extended dialogue on the matter? In a sense, I have not yet written about the necessarily constructive impulse - for a number of reasons, including the most simple: I am not, myself, a professional theatre director! My writing, including the material on my website, tends to suggest that the professional alone understands the full implication of a performance semiotics - not least because the professional tends to work collaboratively. (I have written, recently, about some of the implications of that collaborative specificity. Have you been able to read my recent article with the lighting designer, Nick Hunt, for the journal *Performance Research* (December 2005?) A text that we both found useful, in that context, is Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*, Routledge 1998. I can copy the *Performance Research* article to you as an electronic attachment, if you have not. One of my arguments, in that context, is that the professional stage manager provides one of the clearest examples of complex semiotic processing 'on the ground' that we might find.)

My own training, by way of contrast, is that of a professional writer and educator. Yet my professional activity has included postgraduate teaching at two professional theatre training institutions - Central School of Speech and Drama and Rose Bruford College. This invaluable experience has meant that I have had to teach with the postgraduate student/performance professional in mind. In that precise context, one is obliged to move from deconstruction to construction in practice.

On that basis, I would like to invite you to engage in an ongoing e-mail dialogue. This would permit me to think through some of the constructive implications of my recent research.

I should be delighted, by the way, to visit your institution, and I'd consider it a great honour. I taught in Tunisia in the 1980s, and that teaching and the experience more generally remain very close to my heart; but I have not visited Egypt.

very warmest regards - and my thanks again for your interest.

I hope I am not causing you any inconvenience by my frequent emails, but in case that you need to see my questions again I copy them for you heredown:

1- Mr. Wellman, though you haven't directly referred to the 2003 American War in Iraq, or stated this at any moment of the scene in *School for Devils*, yet a strong feeling I have that you mean this war and nothing else, how far do you think I am right?

2- Can the Current Occupant of the White House be interpreted or taken rightly or wrongly for any person other than the Current Occupant of the White House?

3- To most readers and audiences, and to your personal admission that you intend to be wordings scribbler and use highly metaphoric resonant and musical vocab and songs, and sometimes linguistic deviations. How far could this be explained or interpreted by your audience or readers? What is your purpose in using such linguistic deviations particularly in *School for Devils*? Why Ze, Zair, Zey, and "Arab Mans" for example?

4- Can I assume that the Bears and Jalbataals only exist in Iraq, or the open country, or the other side of the moon, or at the crossroads? How could you manage form the jalbataals? Does the name bear any reference to any similar name of some one in the region? What other characteristics of the jalbataals? Are they totally evil? Do you notice that the letters of the word may similarly form the name of the current Iraqi president Jalal Talabani?

5- The open country may be taken as an empty space and in this way it may be bear multiple references and symbols. Do you agree? How far?

6- If I explain what I may interpret for the meaning of the Green Cabbage, your seemingly favorit symbol, can you help me in interpreting the symbolism of the Red Wagon in which the Man without Horns may take his friends? Since the friends are known by their names, who is his Karl? What role did Karl play?

7- Can the Red Wagon mean safety (security) or it is symbolic of British participation/role ; fear/ safety or what else?

8- Are you still scribbler when you name you second scene Skene Duh? do you have something serious in mind when you do so?

9- "eight years" and "damn elections" refer to the memorable manual recount of Florida votes if I may remember, or how far I am mistaking and confusing things?

10- Finally, as an Egyptian I felt a little hurt when you included my country with other countries involved in the Middle East struggle, while I believe that we hold a very strong relationship with America, on all levels (i.e. remember I was a graduate student in your country and still hold in memory and heart my most pleasant and splendid life times there), so, could you please, resolve me of this ambiguity by revealing you stance towards us Arabs (or Egyptians) if you may.

I will be greatly honored if you find time to answer my questions and I hope soon I will let you read my paper on your fantastic play.

Thanks very much for everything.

Most obliged,

Ahmed

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Reply Reply all Forward

Re: Mac Wellman's plays

From: Mac Wellman (mac.wellman@verizon.net)

Sent: Saturday, May 19, 2007 10:49:09 PM

To: Ahmad Saber (ahmsab@hotmail.com)

1 attachment(s)
monkey8.doc (96.0 KB)

Dear Ahmad Saber: To answer your questions--

- 1) yes, the play is very much a reply to the invasion of Iraq-- and the astonishing mendacity and corruption of the Bush regime at every level.
- 2) Yes indeed; it is Bush.
- 3) The devil on the roof of the White use fake French accents (France opposed the war) to needle the current occupant; "Arab mans, etc" refers to the profound but unspoken anti-Arab agenda of the Bush republicans, etc.
- 4) Jalbataals are demons from India actually (bears are bears) c.f., BETWEEN WORLDS by Uma Singh. Old Saying: Demons inhabit the intersection of crossroads.
- 5) Yes, very much so ...
- 6) Red wagons are common (though old fashioned) American childhood toys. Karl is Karl Rove, the President's chief advisor.
- 7) Ditto...
- 8) Duh is both American slang for "stupid and the French deux (two).
- 9) Yes, it refers to the stolen elections, particularly of 2000.
- 10) I have the highest regard for Arabs and Egyptians (I was at the International Theater Festival in Cairo on 9/11), but the Republicans, and Bush Democrats who run virtually everything in the country use a vulgar (and generally unavowed) Anti-Arab rhetoric to achieve their ends. Edward Said was my hero, and I have a colleague who edited his selected writings.

Best of luck! I am attaching another Anti-Bush play OCTOBER SURPRISE written before the 2004 election when I was sure Bush was going to present Bin Laden (real or fake); it is written in a wilder invented language, and may be hard for you to parse; be well, Mac Wellman

----- Original Message -----

From: Ahmad Saber

To: mac.wellman@verizon.net

Sent: Sunday, May 06, 2007 12:01 AM

Subject: Re: Mac Wellman's plays

Dear Sir,

It is my great pleasure to receive your short reply and really appreciate that you have the intention to send me after a week. I therefore look forward to read your own words which I feel will be of great benefit to my research.

I already sent a number of very many questions I have in mind to clarify my vision and orient my analysis of the play which I tend to publish in the Journal of Drama and Theatre.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة السيميوطيقية لمسرحية ماك ويلمان: مدرسة الشياطين (٢٠٠٤) إلى محاولة استكشاف للمعنى الجاد وراء أسلوب ماك ويلمان الموسوم بالهزل (الكتابة المستهترّة). وقد ميز ماك ويلمان (١٩٤٥ -) نفسه وأسلوبه بين كتاب المسرح الأمريكيين التجريبيين المعاصرين البارزين، ميز نفسه باستعمال الأسلوب الغريب، اللغة المشوشة الغير ملتزمة بقواعد النحو، وعرض التجارب المسرحية المتنوعة. تبدأ هذه الدراسة بعرض سريع للخلفية المسرحية وإنتاج ويلمان الوافر مع التركيز على مسرحية: مدرسة الشياطين ودوافع هذه الدراسة.

و حيث أن الدراسة ستقوم على مبادئ السيميوطيقا، كان من الضرورة تقديم خلفية نقدية لعرض أهم الأساليب و المناهج السيميوطيقية الرئيسية التي عرضها بالمناقشة و التحليل كل من كير ايلام، سوزان ميلروز، ومارتن إسبن لتكون مثابة الأسس التي تستخدمها الدراسة في عرض و تحليل ومناقشة الأساليب السيميوطيقية في المسرحية ومن ثم تقدم التفسيرات المحتملة لتلك العلامات المختلفة.

بتحليل وتفسير الإشارات إلى جانب إيضاحات ويلمان، ثبت أن ما يقدمه ويلمان هو شيء جاد جدا و مثير للغاية إذ انه يتعامل مع أحد أكثر القضايا الخطيرة المتعلقة بالحرب الأمريكية على العراق، كما تؤكد التفسيرات السيميوطيقية المدعمة بتوضيحات ويلمان الخاصة بأن هذه المسرحية تعتبر رد فعل جاد وغازب (رغم كونه موسيقيا ساخرًا) ضد حرب العراق ومهندسيها (المشخص جميعهم بالشياطين) الذين تدل عليهم الإشارات الأيقونية التي لا يمكن الخطأ فيها في المسرحية.

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30. In Wellman's email answer to questions 3 and 10, he clearly indicates that this is not his own vision and that he has "the highest regard for the Arabs and Egyptians . . . but the Republicans, and Bush Democrats who run virtually everything in the country use a vulgar (and generally unavowed) Anti- Arab rhetoric to achieve their ends.

as to compare between their intellectual performance. One of these organizations was the Inside Politics which posted on its web site's latest update of June 17, 2005:

"Confidential college transcripts and test scores obtained by the Washington Post reveal that neither presidential candidate, George W. Bush nor Al Gore, were shining students during their college days at Yale and Harvard, respectively. Although each earned respectable scores on the SAT college admissions test (a total of 1355 of 1600 for Gore and 1206 for Bush), neither did that well in their college courses":

<http://www.insidepolitics.org/heard/heard32300.html>

28. See Wellman's email reply question 3.

29. Apart from Wellman's reply in which he admits that he really meant to refer to the US presidential stolen elections of 2000, multiple news and political web sites have been criticizing this historical episode. CBS News web site, for example, asserts that:

"The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights approved a report Friday that suggests blacks disproportionately had their ballots discounted in Florida's elections, leading to widespread violations of the Voting Rights Act. . . . Commission Chairwoman Mary Frances Berry said she hoped the report will be sent to President Bush, Attorney General John Ashcroft and Congress and she hopes it will renew interest in electoral reforms," for more information see the web site:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1564448.stm>

24. His profile on RightWeb web site shows that "Richard Perle is widely considered a core representative of the neoconservative political faction; he played a central role in championing the war in Iraq and an aggressive war on terror centered on the Middle East in the wake of 9/11. Once dubbed the "Prince of Darkness" because of his advocacy of extremely hawkish anti-Soviet policies while in Ronald Reagan's Department of Defense, Perle's former post as chairman of then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld' s Defense Policy Board (DPB) in the years leading up to the Iraq War gave him a privileged perch from which he helped shape Bush administration foreign policies":

<http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/1315.html>

25. See Wellman's reply to questions 6 and 7 in his email.

26. Bush grew up largely in Midland and Houston, Texas. He was not related to Dimmit High School as may be understood from the reference in the play, because from 1961 to 1964 he attended Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, a boarding school to which his father had gone. "Unlike his father, he was only an average student and did not excel in athletics".

<http://www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9232768>

27. During the US Presidential campaign, many organizations and institutions were keen to follow the nominees' educational history so

23. Paul Wolfowitz, one of the original neocons, was known as one of the "architects" of the war against Iraq. "On September 11, Wolfowitz told senior Pentagon officials that Iraq might have been responsible for that day's attacks. Several former and current intelligence officials have said that, beginning shortly thereafter, they felt pressure from Wolfowitz, Vice President Dick Cheney, Cheney's Chief of Staff Lewis Libby and others to find "the right answers" linking Saddam Hussein to what happened. No serious link has ever been found; in fact, Hussein and Osama bin Laden were known to be long-time enemies. . . . Three days after September 11, it was Wolfowitz, not Rumsfeld or Bush, who first declared that America's new policy would be "ending states who sponsor terrorism". He was a primary advocate of the preemptive strike on Iraq, eliminating the alleged threat posed by Hussein's frightful stockpiles of still-unseen weapons of mass destruction. In August 2003, after the U.S. had taken Iraq, Wolfowitz said with a straight face, "I think all foreigners should stop interfering in the internal affairs of Iraq":

<http://www.nndb.com/people/290/000023221/>

Paul Wolfowitz served briefly as president of the World Bank in 2006, but resigned in May 2007 on the ground of ethical violations. On the BBC News web site, it is indicated that "he was forced to step down after facing an outcry over a pay and promotion deals given to his partner – who also works for the World Bank":

20. Detailed biography of Richard B. Cheney is posted on the White House web site:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/vicepresident/vpbio.html>

21. "Reasons for Iraq War: Bush or Cheney," zFacts web site:

<http://zfacts.com/p/775.html>

22. In his essay, Michael Lind continues to mention the neocons by name and position, as he notes:

"Inside the government, the chief defense intellectuals include Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense. He is the defense mastermind of the Bush administration; Donald Rumsfeld is an elderly figurehead who holds the position of defense secretary only because Wolfowitz himself is too controversial. Others include Douglas Feith, No. 3 at the Pentagon; Lewis "Scooter" Libby, a Wolfowitz protégé who is Cheney's chief of staff; John R. Bolton, a right-winger assigned to the State Department to keep Colin Powell in check; and Elliott Abrams, recently appointed to head Middle East policy at the National Security Council. On the outside are James Woolsey, the former CIA director, who has tried repeatedly to link both 9/11 and the anthrax letters in the U.S. to Saddam Hussein, and Richard Perle, who has just resigned his unpaid chairmanship of a defense department advisory body after a lobbying scandal."

back the US troop at that time. Nevertheless, multiple news headlines and web sites have emphasized the animosity growing momentum from the Democrats to current US Administration.

16. The Free Online Dictionary gives full explanation of the term and the other links where it can be found or used. It shows also that the term means: "Perfect peace of mind, or calmness."

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ataraxia>

17. Detailed biography of Condoleezza Rice is posted on the White House Web Page: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/ricebio.html>

18. For more about Rumsfeld and his bio, see the US governmental web site:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/rumsfeld-bio.html>

19. In his speech of November 2004, President Bush thanked all members in his campaign team including Karl Rove whom he describes as "the architect":

"I want to thank my superb campaign team. I want to thank you all for your hard work. (Applause.) I was impressed every day by how hard and how skillful our team was. I want to thank Marc – Chairman Marc Racicot and – (applause) – the Campaign Manager, Ken Mehlman. (Applause.) And the architect, Karl Rove. (Applause.) I want to thank Ed Gillespie for leading our Party so well. (Applause.)"

Complete speech can be reached at the White House web site:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/11/20041103-3.html>

Mr. Wellman indicated (in his email in which he sent me a copy of this play before he posted it on his web site), that *October Surprise* was "written before the 2004 election when I [Wellman] was sure Bush was going to present Bin Laden (real or fake)." Full text of the play is found at:

<http://www.macwellman.com/images/monkey8.pdf>

10. See Wellman's reply to question 2 in the email.

11. This old saying (regardless of its frequency among people of the present time and its true significance) has been repeated frequently in this play and in *October Surprise*. The verbal meaning of the saying indicates that the wicked and devilish powers never care or differentiate, even if they are mistaking or falsifying things for their own mendacity and fabrication as long as all cats look like in the nighttime where their eyes only shine in the darkness.

12. See Wellman's reply to question 1 in his email.

13. See Wellman's reply to questions 4 and 5 in his email.

14. Pelosi's complete speech in addition to other Democrats' reaction to President's Bush State of the Union speech, together with a link to the video are posted on MSNBC web site:

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4011855/>

15. Michael Gordon does not focus here on the crisis between Bush and the Democrats in this article, but he rather alludes to the difference over the issue of the possibility and convenience of pulling

6. In an email reply to the researcher, Mac Wellman indicated that this play and *October Surprise* (which he sent to the researcher as an attachment before posting it on his web site) are Anti Bush plays. For more details, see the email at the end of the paper.

7. In an email to the researcher, Susan Melrose indicated and that her approach enables one "to challenge dominant discourses, rather more than enables one to identify new and productive alternative strategies." And added that "deconstruction", in the Derridean sense has the word "de...struction" within it: in this sense it is a down-breaking process, and one might suppose that it is negative in its implications." See the email at the end of the paper. See Melrose's email to the researcher at the end of the paper.

8. Mac Wellman, *School For Devils*, Fifth draft. Copyright 2004: 1.

PDF file: <<http://www.macwellman.com/images/flamelets.pdf>>

Most of other Wellman's plays that are not published can be reached on Wellman web Page. See note 1 and 5. (all subsequent references to the play will be to this draft and indicated in textual parentheses)

9. In *October Surprise* (2004), Wellman introduces three characters standing for three real people. He introduces them as follows:

MAN1, very much resembles the Political Advisor to

MAN2, the Current Occupant of the White House;

MAN3, very much resembles the Master of Al Queda.

NOTES

1. Wellman's play *School for Devils* was commissioned but not fully produced by Primary Stages, New York in 2004; and by The Hangar, Ithaca NY in 2005.

2. Wellman described himself and called his web site damnable Scribbler:

<http://www.macwellamn.com>

3. Yablonsky's interview with Wellman took place in 1995; thirteen years from now must have truly been a long time for more successful productions, wider reputation, more prizes, awards, honors, and international publicity.

4. In their introductions to *New Downtown Now* collection of plays (published by University Minnesota Press, 2006), Mac Wellman and Young Jean Lee categorized the scripts they assembled under what they have called 'downtown' movement. This label may not be adequate, as Jason Grote (a dramatist himself and former friend and colleague Young Jean Lee), notes that "there is no single geographic region in which these plays live exclusively, for one thing. These are the writers who might have once been called 'language playwrights'."

5. Details about Wellman's complete list of plays, performance places and dates, and the several honors and awards can be obtained from the CV link (PDF File pp 1-26) on the Dramatist's web page:

http://www.macwellman.com/images.CURRICULUM_VITAE.pdf

distinction, Wellman's dramatic work is still rich and wide enough to include several diverse experiments; each experiment is distinct and loaded with its own importance and significance. His bulk of plays, though familiar in the United States, is still wide enough to provide a rich area for study and research.

scene) here in this play, and the similar fake purpose of *October Surprise*, Wellman repeats a whole long song on the foolishness vis-à-vis the brightness of the moon (i.e. cunningness of Usama Bin Laden). The most important sign in this song is the 'monkey' who serves as a symbolic signifier of the Dead Ringer (i.e. for Usama Bin Laden) in *October Surprise*, or the Current Occupant in *School for Devils*. In both plays, the song functions semiotically in the sense that every thing is rigged and designed to look silly and wicked. The repetition of the song in the two plays must be indeed significant, even though it may also express the moral vacuity and sterile thinking. The final 'Skull and Bone' ritual is richly significant of the havoc and destruction and the fact that it is a ritual accompanied by the dances and songs of the devils makes it much more tragic and saddening.

In conclusion, Mac Wellman has successfully given a unique dramatic expression to one of the most critical political issues in the history of the United States. In terms of semiotic references, his work is rich with signification and connotations. The richness of Wellman's work is not only caused by his amazing use of language, scribbled structures, and discourse, but also by his daring allusions and direct or indirect references to very important political episodes and figures. By doing so, the dramatist has created a wide range of semiotization worthy of study and scrutiny in further research. His people are made of their own circumstances (iconic in their description) yet, they look like caricatures designed to be the laughing stock of his readers. Having achieved this dramatic

much in common with the Absurd, the final scene comes to reassert the ideas and song from the previous scenes. The signification process is much easier now to recognize, as the IMAGE (i.e. replica of the Current Occupant), assures the same repeated idea:

I can't be making a mistake, but if something should happen to speak against my proposition well then I shall stick to my guns and hope for the best.

[Silence. Silence. Pause]

I can't be making a mistake, but some day, rightly or wrongly I may realize I was not competent to judge. And by that time the thing will have been done. (34)

The signification in the IMAGE's denial to have made a mistake is indexical as it proposes a number of meanings: first, there could be an inner feeling of guilt and remorse as a result of a final realization that had been manipulated by other war architects. Second, it could be a boasting sense of pride that forces him not to retreat or admit his fault. Third, there could be an air of satisfaction particularly if the whole matter is proven wrong, it will only happen when every thing had already finished.

Even though it focuses on the histrionic cynicism of characters such as the OLD Lady and the Least Significant Devil (their semiotic signification has been already discussed earlier in this article), the final scene is designed to be musical. To relate between the silliness and absurdity of the war purpose (Secret Skull and Bones ritual

focus the borders of the Arab countries, but it also goes beyond limitations and extends to encompass France on the grounds of the country's opposition of the war.

In *School for Devils*, Wellman insists not lose the opportunity of adding enough and semiotic references to most of the people who had any role in the Iraq war. He gives a particular little song to Ann Coulter, (due to her importance, Coulter was frequently referred to in Wellman's *October Surprise*) a political writer and journalist who appears frequently on public media commenting on public and private affairs including the war on Iraq:

Ann Coulter's legs go on forever;
Her legs like there is no tomorrow;
Her legs and lies are infinite
(they are far more numerous than truth).
Her lies will endure forever. (26)

In the song, the devils understand that the iconically signified writer and columnist, Ann Coulter was just telling lies and that she supported the war. While they are satisfied with this, they are equally worried and therefore admit that what she is telling is all lies "like there no tomorrow."

The scenes seem to revolve in a circular movement as the devils keep changing or substitute names and roles, but in totality they manipulate the same idea of evil thinking and evil plotting. Having

All Arab mans they look alike
Iraq Iran they look alike
Of Egypt and of Palestine
All Arab mans they look alike
You kill the one you kill the other
Whether of Shia or of Sunni
All Arab mans they look alike
People of the fez people of the turban
No one can hardly tell the difference
For all Arab mans they look like
what they look like

(Except in place like silly France) (26)

In this poem, as many other situations in the play, Wellman intends to insert some linguistic mistakes or deviations to serve as attention markers. For example, the use of 'Arab mans' here in the song signifies the unspoken hatred of the speakers towards Arabs. This is again assured by means of the multiple semiotic signs which plainly reflect American Anti-Arab policies.³⁰ The iconic signs (i.e. names of countries such as 'Iraq', 'Iran', 'Egypt', and 'Palestine'; of religious sects such as 'Shia' and 'Sunni'; and of ethnic categories such as 'fez' people and people of the 'turban'), and the indexical sign 'all Arab mans' signify the comprehensive hostile attitude and aggressive political stance towards the Arabs. This loathing vision does not only



Beautiful lies.

Revenge revenge and

Beautiful lies.

Baghdad Pyongyang Tehran

Beautiful lies. (24-5)

The 'wide open country' is a symbolic sign of the United States of America. And, Wellman's repetition of the refrain 'Beautiful lies' must be extremely indexical of the state of disillusionment, disbelief, and mistrust that American people feel and experience after the war which has devastated many principles and values including 'faith'. The devils mock even the idea of 'fury' and 'revenge' used as a fake justification for their declaration of war and hostility against the iconic countries mentioned in the song. After a short while in the song, Wellman makes it clear that the beautiful lies were only a sham and that the real reasons:

Our faith is a faith beyond

The mere lie of the land

.....

A faith that shall take us

Prodigal one, ignorant many

To the land of milk oil honey. (25)

Not only this, but he continues in another song piece to survey the Republican vision of the Arabs:

replaced by the fake plots and lies to the American people. The song in itself is one of the most significant pieces in its semiotic reference to the inner and outer affairs; administrative resolutions that turn the honorable history into mere sham and falsehood (note: all repetitions within the lines are registered as they appear in the text):

Wide open country o country of

Beautiful lies.

What is sacred kept hidden o

Beautiful lies.

Road to nowhere o land of salvation

Beautiful lies.

To the land of faith and just beyond

Beautiful lies.

Restoration of faith faith beyond doubt

Beautiful lies.

(FAITH) That settles all and any argument

Beautiful lies.

(FAITH) That gives the lies to the Testament

Beautiful lies.

.....

Road to Damascus as the as the devil flies

Beautiful lies.

Wherever our our fury our fury take us

pants as they fall down. This idea is again asserted the immediately following song (line numbers are mine):

1. Devils on the roof with devil map
2. Snake people, people of the serpent
3. Our toy gun bapa tap tap
4. Down the road a devil trap
5. Snake people, people of the serpent
6. We strike from far far away. (24)

In line (1), the 'roof', referred to earlier as the roof of the White House, symbolically signifies the top administrative authority. 'Devil map' is also a symbolic sign of the charts and plans and maps prepared by the pack of fellows who earnestly encouraged the war. Lines (2) and (5) are a refrain that signifies wicked behavior and evil intentions. The onomatopoeic sounds of gunfire 'tap tap' (reduced to be a toy gun), in line (3), signify the devils' zeal for play with fire, havoc and destruction. In line (4), 'devil trap' signifies the war tactics through which the devils may capture the enemies and take them at a sudden. Line (6) introduces another symbolic sign of the nature of US war on Iraq. In the war, US Airforce and Marines strike from an amazing distance; a matter that refers to the high Technology used in giving electronic commands to hit very minute Iraqi targets.

Wellman now shifts to another issue in the following song. He seems to regret all that is beautiful in America which has been

Their denial of the theft assures their hidden schemes. The reference to the eight years duration specifies the signified 2000 elections. And, the use of the adjective 'damn' signifies their own disgust being accused of stealing the elections.

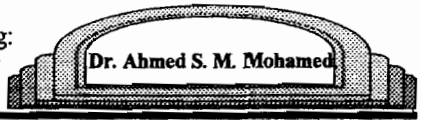
As the devils' song moves to prepare for the war, the signs get a little more blurred:

In ze school for devils we
Lead ze foolish foolish we lead zee
Ones who mad mad up ze tree
of devils where are are we. (23)

At their school, the devils give instructions through which they 'lead' (most probably deceive) the 'foolish'. The adjective 'foolish' here is a sign that signifies the listener(s) (i.e. actually may be the Current Occupant or all American people). Of their schemes also, the devils tend to make the 'foolish' look like buffoons as they pull down their pants so that they appear half-naked:

Zen we bite we bite o we bite ze
Belts off zair pantleg doop de dee
Down fall zay trouser from devil tree (23)

The devils' manipulation and sarcasm expressed in the onomatopoeic sounds 'doop de dee' signifies the sound of gunfire during the war rather than exclamation sounds accompanying the silly scene of their



Nowhere, no.
School for Devils, yeah. (21)

From their tone, the speakers are devils but their declaration that they exist '*here*', '*somewhere*', and '*nowhere*' indicate their power to be present everywhere (i.e. they interfere and plot for everything evil on the globe), to possess knowledge of every detail, while yet assuming to deny responsibility simply because evil practices are usually invisible to humans. In the second refrain, the devils' role is ambiguous; it could either signify their power and possession of more knowledge than the readers and audiences (regular US citizens), and therefore they admit planning the war. On the other hand, they may be preparing to shake off the responsibility and identify themselves with witnesses who possess more knowledge than the devils and lay the blame on some other devils.

Significant as it is, the following song refers to one of the most controversial issues in America during the past eight years; the 2000 US Presidential elections.²⁹ The signification system is direct and clear:

La la la we did not steal no damn
damn election.
.....
la la la eight years from then
No we did not did steal
La la la no damn election... (22)

Evil ring and evil string and

evil evil evil sing.

Sing, thing, sing. (20)

The semiotic connotations primarily appear in the repetition of the term 'evil' (i.e. 'evil' is repeated for nine times functioning as adjective or noun, and once as a verb). As an iconic sign, it signifies the vigorous evil activity practiced almost by all the members of this school. Besides, the use of such verbs as 'sting', 'evil', 'bring evil' and 'evil sing' asserts the signification process since their meaning is related to the evil practice.

The immediately following refrain lays additional emphasis on the deictic reference to the role of all speaker pointers (devils or otherwise), place pointers, and other related implications (*my italics*):

We understood.

We live *here* too

(*Now* more than ever,

Now we know);

School for Devils, yeah. (repeated twice) (20-1)

Then soon the speaker pointers (although the speakers are still the same devils) shift their space markers as if to change their viewpoint:

We understand.

We live *somewhere*

(more than *you* see,

More than *you* know);

Somewhere somewhere

accents (France opposed the war) to needle the Current Occupant." ²⁸
Again, the term 'DIVILLS' is a misspell of 'Devils', and the prepositional phrase 'op de roof van ze' is a significant non-English substitute for the English prepositional phrase 'on the roof of the'. 'White House' is an iconic sign for the real residence of the Current Occupant.

The entire second scene is of particular semiotic significance. It is a long sarcastic song comprised of a number of song shots which symbolically handle many facets of the war. The songs, being a variety of symbolic references and comments, have distinct and divisible outlooks; each by its own provides or develops a significant idea or subject. Even though the song pieces look randomly written and arranged, they iconologically or indexically signify various issues and notions. The first devilish musical piece sounds like a prelude or a keynote to introduce the reader or listener to the whole issue.

SCHOOL FOR DEVIL PEOPLE

School for evil evil thing;

School for every evil thing;

School where devil people sting;

Evil rope and evil string

To evil other other thing

All bring evil other thing.

a kiss to the replica, and goes out to join her DEVIL colleagues high up on the roof. (19)

The pronoun 'She' does not refer to any woman, but most probably refers to the woman who played the man WITHOUT. This sort of assimilation, apart from the absurdity and experimentation, functions semiotically in the sense that Wellman may have wished to provide an image identifying the Current Occupant (man WITHOUT) with the entire country. 'She' may symbolically stand for the USA, and the Current Occupant can be seen as a totem rather than an ordinary US citizen. However, Wellman's mingling of all these images together provides a prevailing sense of comedy throughout the play.

Wellman's stage directions for the second scene may sound strange for the English ear:

Eerie. Skene Duh. A pleiade of DIVELLS who sing a kindle of songs op de roof van ze White House.

All sing and cavort. (20)

In addition to its iconic signification of the real 'Lake Eerie' in Cleveland Ohio, the term 'Eerie' signifies, as its meaning suggests, uncanny sensations of superstitious fear, or something weird. 'Skene Duh' is a typical example of Wellman's meaningful scribbling as 'skene' sounds an absurd misreading of 'scene', and 'Duh', as Wellman indicates is "both American slang for stupid and the French deux (two)." The dramatist also indicates that the devils use "fake French

One and two.

One and one and one and one and one and one and one. (17)

Nevertheless, man WITH is satisfied with this sort of performance: "Very good now. Go on. You have almost arrived at the final point. The final place in a series that is. That is infinite, nearly"(18). If this is what he really needs him to learn, then the entire absurd practice is significant of an infinity of disastrous wars as suggested by the 'the final place in a series that is infinite'. The counting practice is also an indexical sign referring to man WITHOUT's inability to recognize even how simple calculations may be made, (probably because his SAT score in Math was very low 640 out of 800),²⁷ and therefore he let those devils to plan and drag him into catastrophic resolutions.

In its frame, Wellman's *School for Devils* is made up of three scenes, "unfolding abruptly different settings and culminating in a Skull and Bones ritual" (Welsh). The first scene ends up with the following stage directions:

She looks back at the chair where she had been sitting facing her demonic antagonist. A small image of herself as the man WITHOUT appears in her arms, as if out of nowhere. In fact a totem replica of the Current Occupant. She cradles this thing tenderly, and then places it in the very spot where she had been sitting. She turns to leave. She turns slowly, blows

I never got past, er, the Transcendental Deduction "(15).²⁶ Likewise, man WITHOUT's comments 'I was never' and 'I never got past' bear a powerful semiotic signification and its interpretant or signified is the average achievement of the US president in his college years. "The president acknowledged that he was known here for so-so grades and a lively social life," Associated Press wrote on May 21, 2001 and quoted from the President's speech: "To the C students, I say, 'You too can be president of the United States'" (FoxNews web site).

In addition to its extreme value as an experimental scene of utter absurdity, the first mathematical lesson is in itself the semiotic sign par excellence. As indicated in the play, the lesson should be a training on calculations, but as it seems here it is rather simple a training that may be practiced by kindergarten level or so:

WITH

Well you should have.

WITHOUT

Well no.

Er, one.

WITH

Go on.

WITHOUT

One and one.

One and one and. one.

the second day? Do you have any idea what it was who stepped forth, fully formed in the image, almost, of the creator, on the second day?(15)

Man WITHOUT stands completely stunned for all the questions sound difficult for any person to give a clear and certain answer. The iconic sign of the image of the creator definitely refers to Jesus Christ. Man WITH continues, but this time moves from the abstraction into contemporary reality intervened by mysterious background:

WITH

Amid torrential hellpew and. And enormous vortices of steam and nitre, both wind driven and yes, driving the wind.

Back in Midland, in Dimmit High School? (15)

As semiotic signs, the 'torrential hellpew', 'vortices of steam and nitre', and 'wind driving' may bear no clear reference to signified objects but they all seem to be used as thus to indicate a state of the supernatural and tempestuous atmosphere. Even more complex is the relationship that relates this odd atmosphere to 'Midland', and 'Dimmit High School'. Probably, man WITH wants to indicate that the early years which man WITHOUT spent in Midland Texas were of an specific worth and vigor, to which claim, man WITHOUT denies any great or miraculous past, and this appears from his clear reply: "Well I guess I was never. Because I have to say in all honesty

disambiguation of the indexical meaning of the deictical adverb 'there' and the demonstrative 'this' can be understood from the accompanying indicators. As may be understood from the context, 'there' would refer either to where the participant now are (on the other side of the moon) or at the crossroads (where they expect an encounter to take place). The demonstrative 'this' would best refer to this plight or dilemma. The worry and panic practiced by man WITHOUT are also reflected in his impelling demand to feel safe. His safety is part of the whole and can be better assured if everybody feels safe too. Therefore, it has become a collective rather than individual search: "I just want *everybody* to feel *safe*." As a deictic reference 'safe' would function doubly and provide two different indexical meanings: the safety of man WITHOUT and his fellows 'there', and *safety* of every American citizen after the 9/11 attacks.

In an experimental scene, somewhat before the mathematics lesson begins, man WITH showers man WITHOUT with a number of irrelevant and difficult questions based on abstractions and fantastical vision of the creation:

WITH:

Do you know why the earth and the vault of heaven were created? Out of the flaming river of time? Do you? Do you? Do you know why, on the first day, out of nothing, something emerged? And. Do you know what happened on

'movement' and the 'anything' or 'something.' All the references here only reveal the 'I — you' dialectic principle which is represented as follows:

I ----- You
You ----- I

(Elam 143)

In the dramatic text, however, the movement of the hand is not shown and therefore lacks its deictical value, but it could be presumably indicative in the performance text on the stage which is even doubted that Wellman has given any idea of how this movement would be like; a matter that appears in the following development:

WITHOUT

Oh.

[Creepy pause the creepiest yet. *The man WITH moves his hand ever so lightly*]

Say is *there* a catch to *this*?

Will *I* feel *safe*? I just want *everybody* to feel *safe*. (10)

Again, the italicized deictical references in the stage directions seem so vague that man WITHOUT gets confused and becomes unable to understand the relative meaning or gesturality of the movement which becomes even 'ever so lightly' as if to add more mysteriousness to the context. Therefore, he utters his most frequented query 'is *there* a catch to *this*?' Here, even still vague,

The next development of the signification process appears in the deictic relationships between man and image; devil and devil; or even man and devil. Deixis, according to Elam, is "What allows the dialogue to create an interpersonal dialectic here within the time and location of discourse" (Elam 139). Henceforth, "the context – of – utterance," Elam adds, "can be represented as speaker, listener, time of utterance *now*, location of utterance *here* and utterance It is important now to note that the drama consists first and foremost precisely in this, an *I* addressing a *you here and now* " (138,9). Applying this to a sample discourse from *School for Devils*, it will show the dramatist's intended mysteriousness of the language (deictic pointers are expressed in my *italics*):

WITHOUT

You moved your hand. Did you mean anything by this movement?

I thought you may be meant me to come to you.

WITH

I meant something by this movement, which I can only express by this movement. (9)

In addition to the deictic pointers to the participants, other references to the current situation such as: 'movement', 'anything', and 'something' (also *italicized*) seem to provide no distinct correspondence and create a sort of ambiguity regarding the

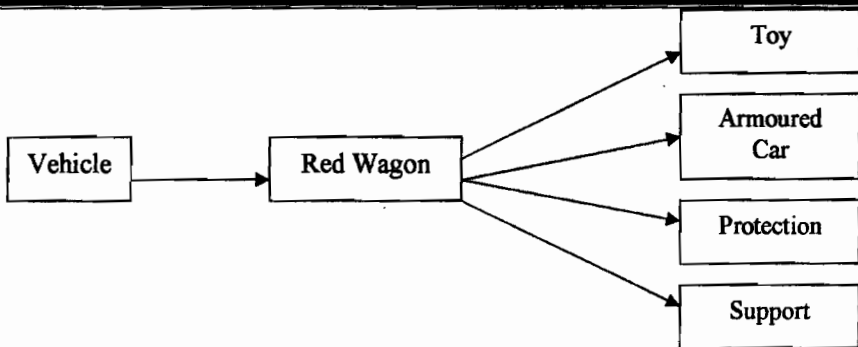
extremely terrified: "What is the hell is that?" (9), an experimental tableau of dumbness is introduced by the stage directions:

[Pause. A rather wicked pause as it is in the nature of Devil
Time to flow backward]

Taken from the context of the preceding situation, as it is the usual habit of the dramatist, these mysterious stage directions do not really include guiding notes for the performance as much as they suggest further meaning to the dramatic text. What Wellman needs to emphasize here is that the current moment takes place at a time different from our own; a time that flows backward and characterized as 'Devil Time.' In drama, as in reality, natural time proceeds forward, as quoted by Elam,

dramatic action always occurs in the present. This does not imply any stacticness: it simply indicates the particular type of passage of time in the drama – the present passes and is transformed into the past, but as such ceases to be the present. The present passes effecting a change, and from its antitheses there arises a new and different present. The passage of time in the drama is an absolute succession of 'presents.' (118)

- In fact, Wellman's time also moves forward, but his suggestion of the 'Devil Time' in the stage directions is only a sign to embody a wider range of references to the eccentric and the unjustified in the action.



With these signified meanings and symbolic implications, Wellman must be preparing to heighten the dramatic effect and experimental rhythm both visually and acoustically.

Immediately after a long period of paranoid silence from both, the dramatist prepares for a splendid experimental scene. The stage directions for this scene are very expressive of devilish impact and exercise:

[we hear a ghostly singing from afar. Voices of the DEVILS on the roof. Voices both ghastly and ghostly. Perhaps we hear the pitter – patter of their little feet] (9)

By this experimental show of the dancing and singing of the devils, Wellman does not only mean to add to the rhythmical or musical quality of the scene and provide a sort of comic relief, but he also tends to create an atmosphere of tempestuous terror. This is signified by the "ghastly and ghostly" qualities of the devils' voices. And, the approaching "pitter – patter of their feet seems to be a sign of even more evil approaching on the stage. When man WITHOUT becomes

power and dominion themes would be useless without safety and security. Therefore, he still thinks of more security: "Sure there'll be enough room in that red wagon for all my friends"(9). As quoted by Melrose, "A sign is a reality perceivable by sense perception that has a relationship with another reality which the first reality is meant to evoke. Thus, we are obliged to pose the question as to what the second reality . . . might be" (5-6). Accordingly, the sign "red wagon" is a perceivable reality and its relationship to other reality/ realities is subject to the readers' or audience's perception. In reply to what he may have really meant by this "red wagon" sign, Wellman indicated that "red wagons are common (though old fashioned) American childhood toys."²⁵ Since it is related to the contextual reality of fear, anxiety and expectation, the "red wagon" can be also interpreted as a true vehicle, (i.e. an armoured vehicle to withstand the impact of bullets, missiles, or shells, protecting the personnel inside from enemy fire, or even an apache helicopter). It can be related to safety and protection. It can be also a reference to any support or help coming from the allies. The symbolic signification can be illustrated as follows:

And: Yes, to be sure, the calculation is wrong, but that is how I calculate. (18) In spite of his realization that all his calculations are wrong, man WITHOUT is obliged to carry on. As the experimental show of the first scene approaches its end, the signs and symbols become clear and the vagueness of the images is gradually dispelled.

His bafflement and confusion are further signified: "Hey, Do I got a number on me? Because if you have a number on you how come I don't have a number on me? I mean it doesn't sound fair"(7). The first remark to be noted here is the use of ungrammatical structure, and this linguistic deviation signifies perplexity. Besides, Man WITH assures that he has got a number as same as his thus signifying the sameness of both speaker and listener (i.e. mysterious images of devils). The number again is a symbolic sign signifying identity since man WITHOUT grows more conscious and yearns to "have his own number"(8). It also relates to the contextual meaning carried out by the signs "mathematics" and "calculus" being the most important subjects to be taught and learnt at the school of the devils.

Misled by his close circle of officials, Man WITHOUT is torn between two contradicting feelings: first, he is haunted by the idea that "a catch" may be there and all his plans may fail. Second, as soon as man WITH tranquillizes him: "No catch I promise"(8), he begins to reconsider the dream of "Power and dominion. And the rectitude" (9). Practically, man WITHOUT understands that the

have been dragged into this war dilemma and the subsequent scandals inside the nation and outside. His panic is signified by his need for consolation and the company mentioned. The most impelling question at hand now appears from the signification imposed by what man WITH indicates: "Right now we are dealing with the calculus of security and safety"(8), to which he is sure that catastrophic danger may still be there: "Say is there a catch to this? Dammit safe as hell" (8). Likewise, he is worried that his calculations may be wrong (17, 18). Furthermore, man WITHOUT seems to have regretted the whole affair:

WITHOUT

Oh [Brightening]. Now I see what you mean.

But then is it possible for me to have gone wrong in my calculations? And if a devil deceive me, so that I keep on overlooking something however I often go over the count step by step.(18)

Symbolic as it is, the whole speech is marked as a moment of conscious revelation indicated by the stage direction sign [Brightening]. It cannot be mistaken that the signification system here relates to the Iraq war and its aftermath. Truly, man WITHOUT passes a moment halfway between conscious and unconscious feeling and understands that he is enchanted. Therefore, he avows "that if I were to awake from the enchantment I should say: Why was I blind?

by man WITH while he is giving his calculation instructions to man WITHOUT:

WITH

Know the story of the wolf who lost his witz? Or of the forest hare? Or of the aluminum crutch and the glass eye that passed for a Perle of precious and perilous worth? Or of the man who all unknowing kept a small devil in his closet, yes all those years, yes and still alive and likewise a shrunken and horridible replica of himself? (12)

There is one remarkable difference between the Old Lady's story and the series of questions aroused by man WITH in his lesson related to the story. The former is perhaps more indicative for its signs are easier to decode. Second, it comes about the end when most of the ambiguity and mysteriousness have been resolved. On the contrary, the man WITH wishes to add more mysteriousness by his series of questions (i.e. four questions; two of them refer to Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle; one refers to man WITHOUT who kept the devil in his closet, and the last question remains vague).

Again, Mac Wellman's choice of words in dramatic text suggests various levels of meaning. In his simple semiotics method, Esslin notes, "in drama the meaning of the words ultimately derives from the *situation* from which they spring" (86-7). Accordingly, man WITHOUT seems utterly paranoid significantly because he must

of glass and of the Wolf without any witz, who declared war on the poor and dispossessed. For zair is a powerful lizard and and a naag called ze Regime Change. And the Perle of the perilous worth was like all the others who take what is not theirs to take. Those who zay take what is not zairs, they find evil wherever they look, but. But not in his own heart, which he has never explored. And that is why we have come here, to the other side of the moon, also a place never explored. All this is perhaps unclear. (39)

The story is dense with significations and metaphoric allusions. Other than the iconic signs referring to Paul Wolfowitz²³ (i.e. the wolf without any witz) and Richard Perle.²⁴ (i.e. precious Pearl and at the same time the Perle of the perilous worth which is more convenient), the story is full of other signs. 'Regime Change' is a sign associated with the names of the people mentioned and 'Zair' (their) desire to start a military action to get rid of Saddam Hussein. The woman denounces this war as it has been clearly proven to have become a "war on the poor and dispossessed" Iraqis. 'Maledictum', 'maleficence', 'naag', 'zair', 'ze', 'zay', and 'zairs' are all typical Wellman scribbling, linguistic or phonetic deviations to impose a sense of devilish atmosphere and spells other than human atmosphere and language. The Old Lady's story was referred to earlier in the play

than election of George W. Bush, and Sept. 11 – the foreign policy of the world's only global power is being made by a small clique that is unrepresentative of either the U.S. population or the mainstream foreign policy establishment. The core group now in charge consists of neoconservative defense intellectuals.²²

In Wellman's play, man WITHOUT feels that he is all alone facing his own fear that something may happen. His query about the possibility of having Condi, Donald and Karl (Karl is always mentioned twice) and the 'red wagon' is repeated (10, 16) to signify his feelings of insecurity. It is only about the end of the play that Wellman provides more symbolic and iconic signs which refer to the war on Iraq and signify more people whose stringent roles in pushing the war were to be recognized and added to the roles of the group mentioned earlier. In the play, the character of the Old Lady (functioning as an indexical sign to refer to the signified wisdom, experience, and shrewd penetration) is used to unveil the secret through her story to the devils:

OLD LADY

Let us go over the stylistics of the process and the naag and the [devil tree] procedure and the maledictum and the maleficence. For the story is the story of the precious Pearl [THE LEAST SIGNIFICANT DEVIL: ME!] and the Perle

Karl Rove controversy is not a leak, but a war and how America was misled into that war" (par 1).

The name 'Dick' is an iconic sign and it signifies the real person Richard B. Cheney, US Vice President.²⁰ Cheney's role in the war has been so enormous that the zFacts.com assumes all claim on Cheney as the prime character whose plans for this war predated not only the attacks of the 9/11, but they had also existed before George W. Bush had become US President. After a chronological survey tracing the plot of the war, zFacts web site summarizes the reasons as follows:

Summary of Reasons for Iraq War: The two fundamental reasons are (1) Oil, and (2) Israel. But the mechanical reasons are (1) the neocon lobby, (2) Cheney as VP, and (3) Bush's desire to prove himself and best his father. The neocons discuss mainly on the needs of Israel (the WMD they were truly concerned about were Scuds aimed at Israel), but Cheney and Rumsfeld may be more focused on oil.²¹

Similarly, Michael Lind, on an antiwar web site, unveils the reality that the American neocons were primarily responsible for the war on Iraq. As Lind wonders:

What is going on in the United States? Who is making foreign policy? And what are they trying to achieve? . . . The truth is more alarming. As a result of several bizarre and unforeseeable contingencies – such as the selection rather

If you can't shoot the messenger, take aim at his wife. That clearly was the intent of White House Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove in leaking to a reporter that former Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV's wife, Valerie Plame, was a CIA agent. To try to conceal the fact that the President had lied to the American public about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program, Rove attempted to destroy the credibility of two national security veterans and send an intimidating message to any other government officials preparing to publicly tell the truth. (par. 1)

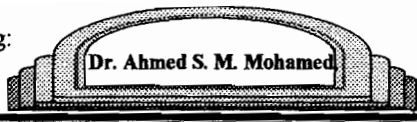
Based on this scandal, the Office of Special Counsel launched "a broad investigation into key elements of the White House political operations that for more than seven years have been headed by chief strategist Karl Rove" (Hamburger par. 2).

As it appears in Wellman's design of the speech of man WITHOUT, it is 'Karl' alone who is mentioned twice (i.e. repetition is a semiotic sign) to indicate the importance of his presence. It is indicative also that even though Wellman wrote this play prior to the wide spreading scandal, the dramatist seems to have anticipated how Rove's role was disastrous. This appears also in Wellman's *October Surprise* in which Karl Rove plays the most important one of three roles. In short, Daniel Schorr asserts that "the underlying issue in the

Most of the international public opinion was not pleased with this comment at that time. The English dramatist David Hare wrote a play to criticize the Iraq war and entitled it as *Stuff Happens* (2004) in a satirical reference to the comment made by Rumsfeld. In his NY Times review of Hare's play, Ben Brantley notes,

"Stuff Happens" charts the staff meetings (at the White House and at No. 10 Downing Street), closed-door conferences, public addresses, and backdoor diplomacy and betrayals that led to the American-spearheaded invasion of Iraq. Some of the material (including its title, famously uttered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld about looting in newly liberated Baghdad) is taken directly from transcripts of press conferences, United Nations assemblies and television interviews. (par.6)

Wellman's reference to the name 'Karl' bears an iconic sign and its signified is Karl Rove, US deputy chief of staff and one of the most important people who were involved in the war America waged on Iraq. Rove has got a long political history and played a vital role in George W. Bush's 2004 presidential campaign.¹⁹ Afterwards, Rove was implicated in a number of scandals which have definitely led to his resignation from the White House. The most important of these scandals was the one related to the leaking of information about a CIA agent, as Robert Scheer notes:



place in international politics. He is therefore determined to develop WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction]. Nothing will change until Saddam is gone, so the United States must mobilize whatever resources it can, including support from his opposition, to remove him. (Leopard par. 9)

Therefore, Condi, the iconic sign par excellence is earnestly requested to be there (i.e. on the other side of the moon which Wellman uses symbolically to suggest the remoteness of the was site in Iraq, or even inside the United States but far away to be recognized by ordinary people). Condi can provide support and/or any information that may tranquil man WITHOUT at this uneasy period.

'Donald' is Donald H. Rumsfeld US Secretary of Defense from 21 January 2001 to 18 December 2006.¹⁸ With the outbreak of the war in Iraq, Rumsfeld declared that: "The idea that it's going to be a long, long, long battle of some kind I think is belied by the fact of what happened in 1990," and added that "Five days or five weeks or five months, but it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that"(CBS News web site). As the war grew anarchic and looting began to devastate the history and culture of the nation, Rumsfeld declared that "Freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things," and that the people became "free to live their lives and do wonderful things. And that's what's going to happen here . . . Stuff happens" (qtd by Loughlin).

sense. This association signify the desire of man WITH to add perplexity, bafflement, anxiety or even paranoia in his instructions to man WITHOUT (i.e. paradoxical of what man WITH assumes to be characteristic of his current feeling or habitual exercise).

Likewise, the repetition of 'Now more than ever' reflects the need for concentration at this particular time more than ever before as they seem to be passing a hard time; a matter asserted by the man WITHOUT and his impelling need to have his friends for support and consolation: "Can Condi come along? And Donald and Karl? We got to have Karl and Dick too" (6). It is obvious enough that all these names are iconic signals referring to real people involved in the War on Iraq. 'Condi' is Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State.¹⁷ She became National Security Advisor from 2001 – 2005 (i.e. Wellman's plays *School for Devils* and *October Surprise* appeared at this duration). In addition to her notable impact on the US administration, Rice had a magnificent role in initiating the 2003 War on Iraq. Jason Leopard quotes from what Rice has stated in an article for the *Foreign Affairs* magazine:

As history marches toward markets and democracy, some states have been left by the side of the road. Iraq is the prototype. Saddam Hussein's regime is isolated, his conventional military power has been severely weakened, his people live in poverty and terror, and he has no useful

WITHOUT

— ?

WITH

—

WITHOUT

Now more than ever. Er. Do I have to say it twice?

WITH

No you do not have to say the sentence twice, but you have to repeat the sentence until you are very sure that you understand the meaning of every word.

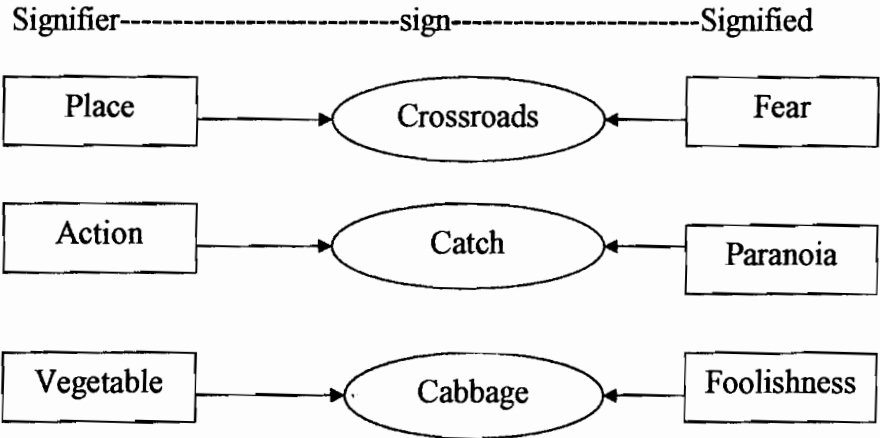
WITHOUT

Now more than ever. Okay. Now more than ever.

WITH

I repeat everything two times because two is the number of my ataraxia. My ataraxia and antistasis. And I am fond of the game of gambling, a matter of twos generally. (6)

The signification process in the repetition and word choice works doubly here. The use of the term 'ataraxia' looks odd and inappropriate or even too scientific to be understood in the context, or found in a regular dictionary. 'Ataraxia' is defined by the Free online Dictionary as "a state of tranquility free from anxiety and emotional disturbance."¹⁶ It is associated with another difficult word, 'antistasis' which means the repetition of a word in a different or a contrary



As shown from the diagram, the man WITH (i.e. adviser) mocks the man WITHOUT (i.e. advised) who looks to be more a buffoon rather than a normal person with average wits and reason.

Words and articulation have always been privileged areas for literary critics, but they may not seem equally important to semioticians since they are less powerful as signs, but with Mac Wellman the matter differs. His words often provide more than single meaning and mostly the hidden or unclear meaning may be the most appropriate for the overall contextual meaning. For example, the first devilish lesson that Man WITH teaches to Man WITHOUT is to repeat: "Just repeat and just repeat. Now more than ever. Now more than ever"(5). He himself repeats the two phrases he utters twice in practical demonstration for man WITHOUT to understand, but the result is more confusing for he keeps baffling him:

does not admit or announce to the American people the true number of casualties.

Man WITH (i.e. one of advisers, or may be the Current Occupant himself) instructs his fellow replica WITHOUT (i.e. the Current Occupant): "Just go to the crossroads where you where you will meet a certain gentleman and that gentleman will give you a cabbage" (4). This sentence should be better divided into parts and reread as it was uttered (the following is my *italics*): "Just go to the crossroads where you *were*. You will meet a gentleman and that gentleman will give you a cabbage." Then comes the difficulty of symbolic signification. As proposed by Melrose:

symbolic practice is supposed to reflect, express or neatly to represent a pre-existing and independent reality. Whether realities as conceptual or perspectival , implicating in them their perceivers , and hence dynamic rather than fixed, representations both enact and stand for complex *conceptual reals*. (283)

The sign "crossroads," as referred to earlier (i.e. a place inhabited by devils) signifies danger, fear, risk and other related meanings. In this case, it functions doubly with "catch" which also refers to similar signified fear of the unknown. The green "cabbage" sign is symbolic and its signified is foolishness and mental disability, a rounded head without brains:

is immediately expressed by the question. In fact, the enemies are not only in the Arab or Middle Eastern countries. In the United States, news headlines have never stopped since the war began to the present time. Since the time of the war, the Democrats' antagonistic tone has been rising. In her January 21, 2004 speech, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic leader said: "The president led us into the Iraq war on the basis of unproven assertions without evidence; he embraced a radical doctrine of pre-emptive war unprecedented in our history."¹⁴ The Democrats have been expressing their frequent demand to withdraw the US army from Iraq, as Michael Gordon of the New York Times writes: "one of the most resonant arguments in the debate over Iraq holds that the United States can move forward by pulling its troops back, as part of a phased withdrawal. This is the case now being argued by many Democrats."¹⁵

Therefore, the speaker in Wellman's play must be referring to all his political enemies outside and inside America. Since he understands that all he is told cannot be completely trusted or relied upon, he gets scrupulous: "But what if that doesn't work? What? I mean, maybe there's a catch" (4). The 'catch' which he frequently mentions signifies his paranoia as he expects an encounter to take place anywhere and at any time as it has really been the case in Iraq since the time of the war until now, even though US administration

By its various aspects, the 'open country' to which the man WITH horns refers embodies a number of indexical connotations. It looks like a metaphysical country existing beyond the known universe, but it is indeed a metaphorically horrible space as it appears from the pictorial description of the man WITH horns : "Yes open: but an open space deep in the heart of a great forest. Guarded by bears and Jalbataals"(3). Wellman asserts the idea that this open country or space is a symbolic sign and it can be interpreted in different ways, but regarding the "bears and Jalbataals," the dramatist wrote: "Jalbataals are demons from India actually (bears are bears) c.f., BETWEEN WORLDS, by Uma Singh. Old saying: Demons inhabit the intersection of crossroads."¹³ Remote and perilous as it appears, the symbolic signification of the 'open country' functions both inside and outside the speakers. It refers to their fear from the unknown at an unknown hazardous country.

Again, from his frequent questions about the current conditions, the man WITHOUT must be the closest iconic sign to denote the personality of the current occupant of the White House. The man WITHOUT horns asks an obvious question that clarifies the complex symbolic signification system and unveils his true personality: "What about my political enemies?" (4). Apparently, the textual ellipses, as a sign, are an indicative signifier of the pause or temporary silence. What is signified here may be fear, or the stunning labyrinth and this

Perhaps a large something precious and, um, perilous. An encounter will happen and also an encounter will not happen. By a crossroads in open country (3). The most important and significant implications in this paradoxical remark appear in the reference to the 'crossroads' and the 'open country'. The 'crossroads' may look as a symbolic sign that may be interpreted as a point of diversity, thus referring to the divisions created by the war among American people. It can be also interpreted as a point of danger that demands precaution. Similarly, the symbolic sign 'open country' may be taken for an empty space. It could also refer directly to Iraq as a country being open for the US army.

These interpretations, however, are not meant to be absolute, cutting, or final, although many of them have been based on the dramatist's replies and clarifications. The reason seems particularly important since

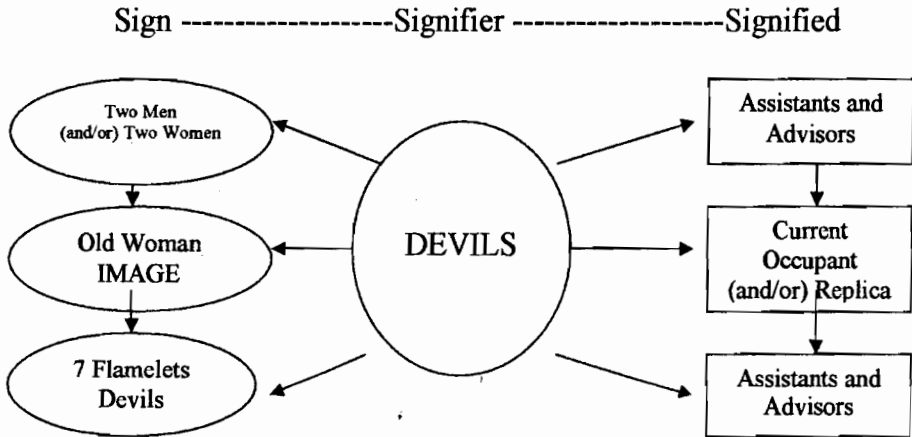
The literary relations between signifier and signified are not, of course, given once and for all as an invariable absolute. On the contrary, they shift and mutate in response to the determinations of aesthetic ideology, as Roland Barthes demonstrates A text may so 'foreground' its signifiers as to radically deform, distantiate and defamiliarise its signified; or it may strictly curb such excess, in apparent humble conformity to the logic of its content. (Eagleton 79)

of the white house). Another interpretation of the signification system in the opening stage directions finds assertion in the plays symbolic title, 'School for Devils'. It precisely indicates that at this school all devilish exercises and practices are expected, but who are the instructors and the instructed; a question which remains vague until these symbolic characters begin to unveil their intentions and plans.

The opening discourse between the two men, WITH and WITHOUT horns, sounds extremely significant. As devils, it seems that the one WITH horns, though being identical or replica of the one WITHOUT, is more experienced and wider in knowledge of devilish exercise. The horn, as a symbolic sign must be a devilish privilege making him, at least slightly, superior and decisive: "So it's settled," he starts to tranquil his fellow who seems petrified as if expecting danger of any kind to take place. This appears from his irritable query: "Say is there a catch to this?"(3), (8), (14), (16). As its literal meaning suggests, the verb "settled" signifies quietness and comfort especially after a vigorous movement or turmoil, but the pronoun 'it' and the demonstrative 'this' refer to an unidentified occurrence. Both signs signify a relative issue or emblem which the dramatist has plainly admitted it to be the war on Iraq. When the man WITH notices that the man WITHOUT horns is still worried, he continues his speech asserting that: "Everyone will be safe. All your friends can come along," but soon contradicts what he has said warning "No. . . .



played by women (i.e. who are in fact two of the 7 Flamelets and Devils from Eerie). The symbols are getting mixed all together; Men with Women; Flamelets with Devils; With Horns or Without. The sign 'IMAGE' is the only symbol that is singled out and submerged during the first two scenes. What is particular about the 'IMAGE' is that it is a replica of the current occupant of the White House. The meaning perceived from the signification process can be illustrated in the diagram below:



Probably all signs, whether icons, indexes, or symbols, refer to one signified identity, the current occupant and his assistants, councilors and advisors. As long as they share identical physical qualities and exchange roles in the performance (i.e. The two men With Horns and Without are identical and their roles are played by Women who are in fact two of the 7 Flamelets who in turn exchange roles with Devils; and finally the Image being identical with Current Occupant

was born and brought up in Cleveland, which is one of the largest cities in Ohio State and often nicknamed the "Mistake on the Lake."

As soon as Wellman finishes the stage directions of the opening, he continues his experimental design of a virtuoso dazzling Scene that may seem very difficult and challenging for stage performance. Its stage directions read as follows:

> Er. Scene One. Lights up on Two MEN; one with horns, one Without. They are otherwise identical, and are played by women, in fact two of the 7 FLAMELETS and DEVILS from ? Eerie. The others float in and out and manipulate the head and limbs of the man WITHOUT as though he were a puppet which in a sense he surely has become. The two MEN look at each other, each mirroring the other, for quite a long time. (2, 3)

It appears that Wellman repeats the graphical sign ' >Er ' as an established code since he mentioned it earlier as if he is trying to convince the readers of its existence as something normal and usual theatrical notion. The following semiotic sign appears in his design of the 'TWO MEN' with their descriptions: one with horns and the other without. Since signs "do not possess a fixed or essential meaning" (Hall 31), it seems rather difficult to come upon one single interpretation of these 'two men' as a sign. Wellman is mystifying this sign by making the Two Men identical, and by making their roles

Afghanistan or Iraq), or the other side of the earth because of the geographical distance between the two locations. It could symbolize the other side of the USA after the destruction of the towers (i.e. because of the image of the 'fallen towers'). Thus, Wellman designs the setting of scene one and two in a universe known to him as well as to us (i.e. the Oval Office in the White House, and the roof of the White House) at midnight in scene one, and after or before that in scene two. Nevertheless, Wellman uses the graphic signs: 'In > Er. (Scene 1) ', 'In? Eerie (Scene 2), ' and 'In? Ere (Scene 3)' to give a vocal expression of his own, unprecedented in drama, and meaningfully significant if the signs before the scene numbers are uttered with concentration. The first sign is a mathematical sign meaning 'is more than' which is followed by the exclamation 'Er'. The exclamation 'Er' is the sound utterance frequently made when someone pauses in the middle of what he is saying or pause before he speaks. It occurs often because this person is thinking of what to say. Thus, it denotes a number of signified meanings and impressions such as imprecision, incoherence, hesitation, invisibility, and vagueness. The second sign includes a question mark and the name of Lake 'Eerie' in Cleveland, while the third uses a question mark followed by an old preposition, 'Ere' meaning 'before'. Both question marks denote the state of uncertainty of the location and scene. The name of Lake Eerie in Cleveland is significant. The dramatist himself

An index, according to Esslin, "is a type of sign which derives its meaning from a relationship of contiguity to the object it depicts" (44). The index is also defined as "a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object. . . . The natural cause-and-effect signs . . . are thus indices according to Peircean doctrine" (Elam 21-22). So, the indexical sign 'fallen tower' signifies not only the terrorists attacks on the US and the September 11 explosions, but also what came up next; the US war against Afghanistan and later on Iraq. In reply to the question whether Wellman really meant this or not, Wellman wrote, "yes, the play is very a reply to the invasion of Iraq— and the astonishing mendacity and corruption of the Bush regime at every level." ¹²

Again, the stage directions of the start suggest a complex and multiple semiotic significations. For example, 'the other side of the moon' is a symbolic sign. Concerning the use of symbols as signs, Elam notes that "the relationship between sign-vehicle and signified is conventional and unmotivated; no similitude or physical connection exists between the two: 'A symbol is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law'" (22), but it is not necessarily directly connected or similar to its object but is purely conventional (Chandler). Therefore, the symbolic space, 'the other side of the moon' renders a number of significant interpretations: it could be anywhere around the globe other than the US (i.e.

corresponds paradigmatically to the ideological meaning. The aim of iconological analysis here is to integrate the meaning obtained from the textual images in a way that "provides the 'why' behind the representations analyzed" (van Leeuwen 116). Moreover, iconological analysis, according to Panofsky, is an attempt to "ascertain those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion" (55). As noted in the stage direction, the hideous 'IMAGE' is a replica of the Current Occupant of the White House.⁹ These iconological symbols refer directly to the current US President. Suspecting that Wellman might have referred to or implied any other image or person, a number of questions were sent to the dramatist by the researcher requesting information about the 'IMAGE' and the 'Current Occupant' to which Wellman replied that he truly meant the current US President, George W. Bush.¹⁰ The other iconic references in the stage directions bear significance since they refer to the 'strange plateau' and the 'fallen tower.' Consequently, all the iconic images of devils including of course the 'man WITHOUT HORNS,' and the 'MAN WITH HORNS' are to arrange for something evil and wicked. So, the overlapping role played by these iconic images indicate that they are all one and think in the same way. This can be also asserted by the old saying: "in the night all cats glow grey."¹¹ In this way the image of the strange tower and the strange is indexical.

signifies grave but oftentimes deadly action and tragic ending. Briefly, the title indicates that some devilish exercise is being played on the roof of the White House (the residence place of the US President).

The stage directions on the second page, resume the image already established by the title. The devil image now begins to take a variety of shapes representing a wider range of signs:

A man WITHOUT HORNS, who is conversing quietly with
A MAN WITH HORNS; and An OLD LADY, who tells a
scary story to an hideous IMAGE possibly a replica of the
Current Occupant of the White House.

Note: Action takes place as follows: In > Er (Scene 1); we are in The Oval Office of the White House, at midnight; In ? Eerie (Scene 2); we are on the roof of the White House a little after [and before] and: In ? Ere (Scene 3); we are situated on a strange plateau on the other side of the moon where all we see is a fallen tower and the other side of the moon herself [long before the two previous scenes].

In the night all cats glow gray: An old saying: [In the night all cats glow gray] (2).

For precision and exactitude of the textual image, this part of the opening stage directions is edited literally as it is inscribed in Wellman's text. It is dense with iconological symbolism which

SCHOOL FOR DEVILS

~
;or: 7 Flamelets
Upon the Roof of the White House; or:
The PLEIADES, a lost and Wayward
Greek Play ⁸

The first referential sign derives its basic connotations from the allusion to some sort of sameness, similarity, or comparison to R. B. Sheridan's comedy, *School for Scandal* being a comedy of manners and moral conduct. Wellman's play, too, is a musical comedy but of darker and sterner manners.

In the play's title, Wellman repeats the conjunction 'or' two times, thus separating three proposed titles. Since the conjunction 'or' is used to show that the word or phrase used means 'the same as', or explains or limits or corrects, another word or phrase, then all the title should give one meaning. Therefore, the three possible titles provide the images: 'devils,' 'flamelets upon the Roof of the White House,' and 'Pleiades,' which are all iconic of what they appear. They are devils changeable in forms and roles. They are all devils hovering upon the roof of the White House. They are devils giving lessons in devilish practice. The image of 'the White House' is iconic of the White House in reality. The iconic image of the 'devils' signifies mysterious and inexplicable deeds, creates an environment of fear, worry, darkness and many other strange and inhuman activities. The last part of the title 'Greek play' is also iconic for its meaning

sign that represents and stands exactly for what it signifies: a table on a stage is an icon of a table in reality, as Elam notes, "A table employed in dramatic representation will not usually differ in any material or structural fashion from the item of furniture that the members of the audience eat at" (8).

In his definition of the icon, Pierce regards it as "a sign which refers to the object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses. . . . Anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an Icon of anything." (Elam 21). The iconic sign may also bear figurative meaning, as "Pierce himself includes the figurative painting (an icon to the extent that 'we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing' . . . and the photograph; he further distinguishes three classes of icon: the image, the diagram, and the metaphor" (Elam 21). With this feedback, it will be easy to detect the iconic images on the title page and the opening of Wellman's *School for Devils* and locate their significations. First look at the mysterious title of the play shows that it is crowded with meanings and significations. The convention of adding a sub-title or sub-phrase to explain or add to a play's title has occurred in the history of drama, but in Wellman's plays, it looks different in the sense that all choices added in the title render it more complicated even though they are relative in meaning. Wellman's title bears a number of semiotic signs:

and future of theatre practices. . . . It assumes that theatre work is always in advance of it" (4).

Since the endeavor of the multiple research and scholarship in the field of semiotics of theatre and drama has not singled out a unique approach, and that the 'new semiotics is liable to constant updates and open to the past and the future', this study will depend on the most established and recognized semiotics tools and methods, namely the established down-breaking approach. Howard Smith quotes C. S. Peirce in his description of the sign:

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea. (192)

In his semiotics enterprise, Martin Esslin divides the signs of drama into six separate sets: (1) icon, index, symbol; (2) the frame; (3) the actor; (4) visuals and design; (5) the words; (6) music and sound. The first of these is a set of basic signs introduced by C. S. Pierce in his semiotic theory (Silverman 19-25). Except for the sets related to the performance (i.e. the actor; visuals and design; and music and sound) the three remaining sets can be examined in this study. The icon is a

Nonetheless, Melrose handles the dramatic 'work' in her discussion and considers that:

'the work' (for example, theatre performance) was perceived to be 'text', and the sorts of proofs, sought were to be determined through a practice of 'reading' performance, whose intricacies were perceived to derive from the interaction of *codes*, piled thickly the one upon the other along the 'paradigmatic axis' of simultaneity, and ordered in time along the 'syntagmatic axis' of event and "narrative" (6).

The standard for measuring theatre performance as text, Melrose adds, "was thus *language*, which de Saussure problematically (for the English language user) rendered as the couplet *langue* (innate) and *parole* (manifest), plus *significant* (signifier) and *signifie*, (signified)" (6).

Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century and the past few years of this century, new semiotics has been diversifying and spreading as an approach in various disciplines. This diversity has paved the way for the appearance of several labels (i.e. in addition to the already existing branches and classifications such as social semiotics, literary semiotics, structural semiotics, visual semiotics, psycho semiotics), and several other branches. In the terms set out by Schmitt, Melrose notes, "this new semiotics will be self conscious, liable to constant update, and relatively open to the past

units providing meaningful or significant theatrical or dramatic functions.

Elam's notions would have provided an appropriate, definite and clear approach for semiotic studies, had it not been for the ever developing theories of semiotics which make it impossible to single out one method or approach to follow. Due to their multiplicity and reliance on a wide range of linguistic and structural theories, most of the studies done on the semiotics of the drama have been diverse and confusing. Contemporary semiotician, Susan Melrose notes that, "the range of material and approaches included in three clusters of major works . . . seems to suggest that there can be no single and stable approach to theatre" (Melrose 7). In her semiotics study, Irmengard Rauch asserts Melrose's view as she notes that, "pluralism of semiotic thought appears to belie the existence of a paradigm with canon (or canons) and theses"(153), and adds that the diversity of semiotics "requires intellectual tolerance and openness" (158).

In her semiotics enterprise, Melrose was bound to depend on Derridean deconstructionist theory. She is aware that "the common 'ground of thought', the 'analytical' or fragmenting, down-breaking logic is not just inadequate to the project" (Melrose 7). However, Melrose's propositions embody innumerable difficulties because she herself was (via personal email contact) ⁷ unsure that Derridean deconstructionist method will be valid without enough training.

systems related with the processes of intellectual activity. The greater bulk of such studies must have been mostly based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, the founders of the modern semiotic traditions and disciplines (Elam 2). Tracing the development of semiotics as a critical enterprise, Elam dates it back to the Prague school in the 1930s and indicates that "Prague structuralism developed under the twin influence of Russian formalist poetics and Saussurian structural linguistics" (6). From Saussurian structuralism, Elam indicates that this semiotics approach

inherited not the project of analyzing all of man's signifying and communicative behavior within the framework of a general semiotics but also, and more specifically, a working definition of the sign as a two-faced entity linking a material *vehicle* or *signifier* with a mental *concept* or *signified* (6).

C. S. Peirce considers the sign as an unceasing process of semiosis; a term by which he means "an action, or influence, which is or involves, a cooperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs" (qtd by Smith 193). Accordingly, most of the early projects on the semiotics of theatre and drama were based on the assumption that theatre provided a comprehensive sign system that can be analyzed into smaller sign

As a branch of literary investigation, semiotics explores the nature and function of signs and systems that denote significance. In its simplest meaning, semiotics can be defined as the "science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society" (Elam 1). It is therefore concerned with the study and interpretation of expressions, images via a number of tools and methods. In his studies, Sebeok defines semiotics as "the study of communication of any messages whatever" (106), and adds that "its concerns include considerations of how messages are, successively, generated, encoded, transmitted, decoded, and interpreted, and how this entire transaction (semiosis) is worked upon" (106). In the field of drama and the theatre, various semiotic studies have tended to study "the complex phenomena associated with the performer – audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning . . . with the systems underlying it" (Elam 2). Further, Elam continues to emphasize the clear distinction between two main attitudes in the semiotic studies of the theatre and drama, "these two potential focuses of semiotic attention will be indicated as the theatrical or *performance text* and the written or *dramatic text* respectively" (3).

However, the ever growing fervor of semiotics scholarship and research of the twentieth century has included several attempts reflecting a remarkable enthusiasm and interest in signs and sign

Devils," commissioned but not fully produced by Primary Stages, is about the devils' pact that lead to that coup; "October Surprise" is about the surprise that never happened" (qtd. by Klich).

Distinct in its experimental mode and design, Wellman's *School for Devils* introduces an endless range of ideas and theatrical splendor through a number of theatrical rather than dramatic devices, tactics, mysterious images, gestures, broken and ungrammatical language or a compilation of words unsystematically arranged to replace the dramatic language and text. These qualities have developed a kind of enthusiasm and interest in this study particularly after the dramatist clarified his prime intention and design of the play.⁶ Besides, the basic notions and ideas that the play deals with seem particularly interesting and important to scholars, intellectuals, and anyone who may be concerned with the relatively recent world news and occurrences. Another important reason is that the recent issues handled in the play are expressed in unconventional theatrical modes and experimentation. However, aiming to dispel the mystique of Wellman's language and dramatic vision, this semiotic study will be an attempt to suggest possible interpretations of the signification system of the play. For this purpose, a brief survey of the most important and foregrounding principles and bases of semiotics will be introduced as a critical background for the study.

festival, thirty Wellman plays were staged. His scripts were produced nationally and internationally. In 2003, Wellman was also honored at the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, Cairo, Egypt.⁵

Wellman's *School for Devils* and *October Surprise* (2004) are two cynical pieces with an absurd flavor in which the dramatist introduces an extremely difficult and challenging experiment. They are both anti Iraqi war plays and sound very critical of the US administration. In fact "many people wrote against the war" but, Wellman adds, "the Bush-Democrats who run the corporate theatre (and press) simply will not produce anything that does not tow the Bush/*Times* line" (qtd. by Klich). Though the dramatic language of *School for Devils* may seem less difficult than *October Surprise*, both plays are dense with metaphors, and mysterious but mostly fascinating theatrical images. Likewise, both plays have hardly any plot, while yet various ideas of plots can be deduced and connected. Both plays are also distinguished by the daring stance of a wide range of American intellectuals who oppose the latest war policies of the current American Administration. In an experimental mode, both plays expose the devotion to the politics and calculations made by the American Administration so far in their encounter of the dilemma and risk awaiting their army far from home. Regarding the content of these two experimental plays Wellman notes: "My plays: "School for

meretricious self parody, remarkable new kinds of theater writing have begun to appear in these states. Quizzical, skeptical even of the idea (if not the fact) of reality itself. (Wellman the Village Voice)

Therefore, Wellman's dramatic work appears, most entirely, irregular, unsystematic, and unconventional. In spite of this, each of his plays is loaded with various meanings, dense imagery, serious criticism, and many other challenges that compel scholars and critics to investigate Wellman's plays as a distinct dramatic and theatrical phenomenon in an attempt to explore the multiple sophisticated notions and visions.

Wellman's massive production (i.e. over seventy plays now, as quoted by Welsh, in addition to radio plays, poems, essays, articles and other publications) established him as a 'downtown'⁴ playwright in New York City. In 1990, three of his plays *Bad Penny*, *Crowbar*, and *Terminal Hip* won him the first Obie award for Best American Play. In 1991, he won another Obie for *Sincerity Forever*, and in 2003, he won an Obie award for Lifetime Achievement. However, these are not, "all in all," he tells Linda Yablonsky, "my productions have earned a lot more—for actors, directors and designers" (Yablonsky). In addition to these awards, Wellman won several other honors and fellowships. In 1997, Wellman was honored by The Mac Wellman Festival, which ran for six months in four cities. In this

Most of American theater is built on the notion that what constitutes drama is two people yapping at each other in the foreground about something emotional. That's called drama. And that's fine with me, but that doesn't exhaust what drama can be. I don't think in Aristotelian terms. The failure of a lot of theater is that it's Aristotelian, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end: Now we're in the conflict part, now you know the conflict is going to be resolved, and then we can all get together and celebrate some perfectly obvious and banal emotional or theatrical truism in some meaningless way. (n.p.)

Wellman's critical view of the development of American drama reveals how new trends appeared as a kind of reflection of what dramatists thought of realism and its incapability to convey all that they wanted to express. Thus, Wellman believes that theatre is

a game, and yes that game is rigged, and yes everyone knows it . . . but as American theatre always manages to reinvent itself at the worst of all possible times. The best of our new theater practitioners have already begun to imagine a set of goals and procedures in which perception requires no other justification than the beauty that entitles it. In this dramatic universe, theatrical high jinks are their own reward. . . . But it may well be that just as the conventional realism of the second half of the 20th century has developed into

I was very frustrated just with writing, so I got a legal pad and I decided to write one page of bad writing every day, and I did for two and a half years...ungrammatical, vague, disordered, everything . . . I thought I'd explore the downside . . . and what I found in doing this is that there were all these interesting rhythms . . . very expressive, very speakable . . . full of ideas, and I found actually that this mysterious kind of narrative would emerge from it" (Winters ii).

Challenging as they are, Wellman's odd language structures and dramatic technique are truly fascinating in their capacity to encompass a wide variety of meaning. In the preface to Wellman recent collection of plays, Marjorie Perloff writes, "To read the plays . . . is to marvel at Wellman's uncanny ability to capture the deep structure of contemporary experience in all its absurdity and illogic" (par.1).

In addition to the strange dramatic and textual structures, Wellman's entire design is apparently unconventional. His settings, his characters, his idea of the plot, and other dramatic elements are all based on his unconventional concepts. Convinced to introduce something of his own, he abandons the basic classical conventions that he believes inappropriate for the theatre of the present time. In his interview with Yablonsky, he indicates that:


Mac Wellman (1945–), one of the leading American dramatists of the present time, has described himself as 'damnable scribbler'² because of his awareness that the dramatic style and language he uses are so confusing and ungrammatical that they can be hardly understood. In a review of one of his famous prize-winning plays, *7 Blowjobs* (1992), Joshua Tanzer notes that "the dialogue is tediously repetitive, and the characters, rather than having personalities, are differentiated by their verbal tics" (par. 3). Likewise, Linda Yablonsky, in her introduction to the interview she had with Mac Wellman, indicated that his drama: "is not the sort you see on an average night on Broadway With 40 plays to his credit in the last 20 years,³ he determinedly practices a vigorous, if undernourished, alternative to the ever 'Fabulous Invalid,'" and added that Wellman's plays are "often politically pointed and mind-bending speeches There may not, however, be a stage, not as we usually know it (par. 1). Wellman's design of the plays lacks what may be called dramatic text in the conventional way, yet it introduces a number of dramatic substitutes and experiments based on ideas of characters and other dramatic tactics. His dramatic design sounds more ideological than traditional. Regarding the complexity and ungrammatical aspect of his dramatic language, the dramatist explains how the idea came and developed as an experimental writing process:

ABSTRACT

This semiotic study of Mac Wellman's *School for Devils* (2004) is an attempt to explore the serious meaning in the so called scribbling style of Mac Wellman. Being one of the leading contemporary experimental American dramatists, Mac Wellman (1945–) has distinguished himself by the use of eccentric style, confusing and ungrammatical language, and various dramatic experiments. This article starts with a rapid survey of the dramatist's critical background, his dramatic production and reception with particular focus on the *School for Devils* and the motives behind this study. Since semiotics will be the critical background for this study, it has been necessary to give a backdrop introducing the major semiotics endeavors and the basic approaches for dramatic studies. Based on these major semiotic approaches discussed by Keir Elam, Susan Melrose, and Martin Esslin, the study proceeds to analyze and discuss the possible signification systems in the play and provide possible interpretations for those various signs. Analysis and interpretations of the signs indicate the seriousness of Wellman's dramatic text as it deals with one of the most critical issues related to the US war on Iraq. Semiotic analyses and interpretations together with Wellman's own clarifications assert that the play is a serious and angry but ironically musical reaction to the Iraq war and its architects (i.e. characterized mainly as devils) whose iconic signification references in the play cannot be mistaken.



Serious Meaning in Mac Wellman's Scribbling:
A Semiotic Study of *School for Devils* (2004)¹

Prepared 

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