

Grand Piano,” “To Bem’s Memory,” “Marionettes”—are included. (It should be noted that of the forty-three poems in what is now the third collection of Norwid in translation, twenty-five also appear in Adam Czerniawski’s 2004 *Selected Poems of Cyprian Norwid*.) Whether mocking the phoniness of polite society or brooding on exile, Norwid’s poems are perhaps less visionary than the means of conjuring elusive visions in the reader. However difficult these poems may sometimes be, they are worth the effort. [Brooke Horvath]

Xu Bing. *Book from the Ground*. MIT Press, 2014. 112 pp. Cloth: \$24.95

Xu Bing is a prominent Chinese painter who, in the late 1980s, published *Book from the Sky*, an illegible text written with thousands of characters of made-up, pseudo-Mandarin. Almost twenty-five years later, Xu has reverse tacked semantically with a graphic novel composed of emoticons, numerals, corporate logos, standardized signs, mathematical operators, and cartoon stick figures. It has no words, yet tells the story of twenty-four hours in the life of a white-collar, urbanite bachelor who is, visually, a twin of the guy you see on the door of men’s rooms everywhere—dot for a head, shoulders square, circular nubs for his hands and feet. Mr. Black (as the protagonist is referred to in the book’s meta-book, *The Book about Xu Bing’s Book from the Ground*), is part Dilbert, part Little Tramp, part “Buddy Boy” Baxter. He’s romantic but obedient. Skeptical but loyal. He gets excited to see he’s got e-mail. He plays video games when he can’t fall asleep. He fantasizes about sex with the strangers that pass him in the hallway. And he has issues with constipation. He’s the twenty-first-century grandchild of all those brow-furrowed proletarians at the center of such wordless, woodcut, proto-graphic-novels as *Passionate Journey* by Frans Masereel or *Gods’ Man* by Lynd Ward. That Mr. Black can be so thoroughly portrayed via a universal pictographic rebus is proof, perhaps, that Xu is onto something, or that the average white-collar bureaucrat just isn’t that deep inside, or that a Bible-grade rending-apart of civilization is at hand. Though if at times the story feels simple and silly (as when Mr. Black extinguishes his burning eggs

and bacon with a cupful of hot coffee), you can't help but think that an infant's first words are also simple and silly. Reading this book makes you feel as though you're looking through a window to the future, and while that future may be sad and techno-alienated and irrevocably urban, it is, alas, the place to where each of us is headed. [Tim Peters]