



# ORAL TRADITION

A Festschrift for  
Walter J. Ong

Volume 2, Number 1

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Slavica



# ORAL TRADITION

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*Oral Tradition* seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral literature and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. As well as essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, a Symposium section (in which scholars may reply at some length to prior essays), review articles, occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts, a digest of work in progress, and a regular column for notices of conferences and other matters of interest. In addition, occasional issues will include an ongoing annotated bibliography of relevant research and the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition. *OT* welcomes contributions on all oral literatures, on all literatures directly influenced by oral traditions, and on non-literary oral traditions. Submissions must follow the list-of-reference format (style sheet available on request) and must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return or for mailing of proofs; all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. Authors should submit two copies of all manuscripts. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one member of the editorial board before a final decision is reached. Review essays, announcements, and contributions to the Symposium section will be evaluated by the editor in consultation with the board.

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1987: ii (May)

A special issue on *Hispanic Balladry*

Edited by Ruth H. Webber

Includes essays by Samuel G. Armistead, Diego Catalán, Manuel da Costa Fontes, Mercedes Díaz Roig, Beatriz Mariscal de Rhett, Suzanne H. Petersen, Antonio Sánchez Romeralo, Judith Seeger, Joseph H. Silverman, Maximiano Trapero, and Ana Valenciano

1987: iii (October)

Victor Mair on Chinese oral narrative

Mark Edwards on ancient Greek (Part II)

Richard Swiderski on a South Indian oral tradition

Alexandra Olsen on Old English (Part II)

David Henige on the nomenclatures of orality

Olga Davidson on Persian oral narrative

Brynley Roberts on Welsh

Annual Bibliography

1988: i (January)

A special issue on *Arabic Oral Traditions*

Edited by Issa Boullata

Includes essays by Frederick M. Denny, R. Marston Speight, James T. Monroe, Muhsin Mahdi, Dwight F. Reynolds, Bridget Connelly and Henry Massie, H. T. Norris, Saad Abdullah Sowayan, Simon Jargy, Adnan Haydar, Dirgham H. Sbait, and Teirab AshShareef

## Introduction

John Miles Foley

When a literary scholar thinks of the contribution of Walter J. Ong, S.J. to the academic community, and beyond that to the generations of students and readers who have learned from his lectures and writings, one tends naturally to recall landmark books like *The Presence of the Word*, *Interfaces of the Word*, *Orality and Literacy*, and *Hopkins, the Self, and God*. His close relation, the scholar of oral traditions, will think of these same works and others, though probably from a slightly different perspective; for Walter Ong has in many ways liberated us from the cultural myopia he terms “chirographic bias,” made it possible for us to understand the world of orality from the inside and to “see” how that world is in part still with us.

Readers of *Oral Tradition* will need no introduction to these aspects of Father Ong’s achievement, but they may be surprised, as I was, to learn that his writings have permanently affected numerous other major constituencies in the arts and sciences. As the present collection bears out, Ong is in dialogue not only with colleagues throughout the vast and expanding world of orality-literacy studies, but also with scholars in the areas of Biblical studies, linguistics, religion, theology, philosophy, sociology, pedagogical theory, popular culture, and English, French, Spanish, Italian, American, and comparative literature. In fact, depending on a reader’s training and *métier*, one or another section of this Festschrift will undoubtedly open up an entirely new vista on the honoree’s life’s work.

To Randolph F. Lumpp goes the *kudos* for originally organizing the group of papers which appear herein. His insistence on providing an interdisciplinary testimony to Father Ong made for an immediate education of all those involved and, it is hoped, a continuing education for those who use this volume. Thomas J.



Farrell and Joseph Cirincione conceived the notion of having the Festschrift papers presented orally at a symposium, *Questions of Orality and Literacy: A Tribute to Walter J. Ong, S.J.* (July 29-August 1, 1985), which coincided with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of Rockhurst College, Ong's undergraduate alma mater. All who attended that memorable event can vouch for its intensity and spirit of exchange, and are much in the debt of its organizers. It should also be noted that Tom Farrell has been of great assistance to many of the authors in discussing their papers, not to mention to the editors in formulating the volume.

This Festschrift, then, presents revised versions of papers selected from those solicited by Randolph Lumpp and offered at the symposium at Rockhurst College. Since all contributions given at the symposium were refereed according to the review policy of *Oral Tradition*, many have been substantially recast and a few have been omitted.

The first section of the Festschrift, "The Word in Oral Tradition," includes articles by Eric Havelock and Albert Lord, two of the founding fathers of orality-literacy studies. Havelock looks at the ancient Greek accounts of the Olympian gods and cosmic architecture, pointing out that, even where we might most readily expect abstractions, we find action-oriented patterns typical of oral thought and expression. The major concern of Lord's contribution is to compare Father Ong's principles of orality with the real-life situation of oral epic tradition as he experienced it in Yugoslavia. In this same section Bruce Rosenberg surveys some of the recurrent problems in the study of oral traditions, stressing their inherent variety, and John Foley considers the role of oral epic in the ancient Greek and South Slavic traditions as an "encyclopedia" of accumulated knowledge about psychic development.

The title given part II, "The *Written* Oral Word," is meant to reflect the apparently oxymoronic nature of many works which combine textualization with undeniable oral roots. It is precisely in this area, of course, that Walter Ong has taught us so much. Werner Kelber's essay on the Gospel of John studies the nature of the Logos as the sayings of Jesus Christ take on narrative and textual form; of interest to many will be his coming to terms with Jacques Derrida's concept of *archê*-writing. Thomas Farrell probes the oral structure of early Christian creeds, offering an explanation of their content and evolution against the background of

orality-literacy studies. In a much different milieu, Dennis Seniff argues suggestively for a composite view of medieval Castilian prose that recognizes both its written and its oral modes.

From this point the volume moves, in Ongian fashion, to its third section, "The Oral Word in Print." Since Father Ong's initial work treated the philosophical thought and cognitive categories of the sixteenth-century figure Peter Ramus, it is only appropriate that two of the essays touch on Ramist analysis and inquiry. Peter Sharratt links the analytic and educational methods of Ramus and Ong and goes on to explain how an understanding of these methods can serve the contemporary teacher of the humanities. Likewise, John Rechten explicates the Ramist structure underlying the sermons of John Udall, showing how Udall transformed the Puritan sermon into a "popularized academic lecture."

Other contributions to part III include essays by Ruth El Saffar and Elias Rivers that to various degrees engage the works of Miguel de Cervantes and his contemporaries. El Saffar demonstrates the immense transition that took place between the novels *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote*, a shift she characterizes as a discernible stage in the evolution of consciousness. Rivers' concern lies with the combination of monoglossia and heteroglossia within any one linguistic community, as illustrated in part by reference to Cervantes and Lope de Vega. Taking another approach, William J. Kennedy reviews the status of "voice" and "address" in the history of rhetoric, with special reference to modern critical reinterpretations, while Robert Kellogg writes persuasively of the "harmony of time" in the special mythic history of *Paradise Lost*, a characteristic he understands as Milton's remarkable latter-day conjuring of the oral epic mythos. Another instance of "oral residue" is the subject of Thomas Steele's study of Benjamin Franklin's use of proverbs in *Poor Richard's Almanach*.

Part IV, "Orality and Literacy," opens with Paolo Valesio's essay on silence and listening, which applies insights drawn from *The Presence of the Word* and elsewhere to a Pirandello short story. The next three papers treat different aspects of religious studies and theology. Harold Stahmer investigates the oral hermeneutic in the writings, especially the "speech-letters," of the late philosopher Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; Frans Jozef van Beeck studies the technical and popular concepts of religious terms from

an Ongian perspective; and Randolph Lumpp explores the common ground shared by literacy, catholicity, and commerce. This section closes with James Curtis' analysis of the role of the electronic modern media, associated by Ong and McLuhan with secondary orality, in the rash of assassination attempts on public figures over the last two decades.

Since Walter Ong has always argued for the continuance of dialogue as the natural condition of learning, it is perhaps fitting that his *Festschrift* should not end without his own response—which will in turn engender many more responses. In this essay, “Orality-Literacy Studies and the Unity of the Human Race,” he reviews many of his major theorems and adds depth to cultural understanding by advocating recognition of our common roots in the evolution of orality and literacy and their ever-evolving interaction. Like so much of his earlier and ongoing work, this paper reveals, in addition to an encyclopedic awareness of pertinent issues and theories, an earnestness and devotion to task that have conferred an extra value on his brilliant writings.

In offering a closing remark before the dialogue of this volume begins for another participant, I am tempted to invoke Chaucer's famous description of his Clerk—“And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche” —for Walter Ong has been both a learner and a teacher all his life, and we are certainly much the richer for his gifts. There is, however, a problem with this allusion. The simple beauty of that line out of context is qualified by Chaucer in its attribution to a man who lives in the proverbial “ivory tower,” who has been so intent on his studies that he has not bothered to consider life on any but his own terms. For Walter Ong, on the other hand, learning and teaching do not stop at the library or classroom door, nor are proper subjects for inquiry chosen only from the list bequeathed and sanctioned by academia. His thinking, as this volume indicates by example, has spilled out of the customary disciplinary containers, challenging both himself and us to re-conceive the form and content of our research and scholarship, of our educational policies, even of our understanding of modern media and spectator sports. Unlike the Clerk, then, with the “Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed, / Of Aristotle and his philosophie” at his bed's head, Ong has brought his learning and teaching to all who wish to take part, and both he and his partners in dialogue have been irrevocably changed in the process.

Perhaps Father Ong would not mind my offering one brief illustration of his devotion to intellectual community. Just after Christmas, on our way back from the meetings of the Modern Language Association, it happened that he and I were passengers on the same plane from New York to St. Louis. I had heard him give a stunning paper at the conference a few days earlier, and had a chance to chat about some mutual interests before the flight was called. Although our seating assignments prevented us from continuing that discussion, I was close enough to see that he had engaged a fellow traveler in conversation about orality and literacy, and further to notice that this man was genuinely excited by what he found himself (quite unexpectedly) talking about. It is only tangentially pertinent to observe that Father Ong's fellow traveler was not another academic journeying back from the ritual wars of the Modern Language Association, but rather a businessman whose formal training had doubtless not included a heavy dose of orality-literacy studies. Training or not, however, he was engaged—just as we have been.



Walter Jackson Ong, S.J.  
(photo by Daniel T. Magidson)

**Walter Jackson Ong, S.J.:**  
**A Biographical Portrait**

**Randolph F. Lumpp**

I'm interested in language because it's the meeting ground of . . . process and structure. . . . People in English label me philosophical. The people in philosophy seem to feel I'm philosophical but I think some of them tend to resent me because I don't do it the way some of them do. I'm constantly being misclassified. Or I'm asked to classify myself and I don't know how. Some people think I'm an anthropologist or a sociologist or a philosopher or a theologian. Occasionally a professor of French. In principle, I'm a professor of English, but in my own way. I don't particularly see why a person has to first classify himself and then do something. I've been told I teach and practice English. (From *The New Jesuits*, by George Riemer)

Studies in oral tradition, converging on insights from contemporary anthropology and other fields, are making evident the profound relationships between the personal and public aspects of our lives as human beings. The ways we are shaped by home and hearth as well as by more formal training significantly pattern the ways we perceive and interact with the world in which we live.

A survey of Walter Ong's personal and professional history seems to provide retrospectively a concrete and fitting example of what Ong himself has styled a "relationist" approach in scholarly work. Such relationist thinking is of course one of the hallmarks of his professional life, and one could conjecture that the familial and educational traditions to which he is heir have deeply grounded the sorts of perceptions of interconnectedness for which he is so well known. In some ways they mark him as both a distinctively American and yet uniquely cosmopolitan thinker and scholar.

Ong is an English name. The family of his father, Walter Jackson Ong, Sr., dates its American branch to the early

settlement of New England with the arrival in 1631 of Francis Ong in the Massachusetts Bay Colony on the same ship with Roger Williams. Grandfather Richard Marshall Ong was born in Ohio. After the Civil War, in which he had a brother in the Union Army and another in the Confederate, Richard moved to New Orleans, where he worked in business. Walter Ong senior was born there.

Ong's paternal grandmother, Mary Virginia (Jackson) Ong, born in New Orleans, came from Tennessee Scotch-Irish stock. She was the daughter of a physician and reared Ong's father in the Episcopalian tradition rather than in her husband's Methodism. Walter Sr. followed in his father's footsteps as a businessman. He was received into the Roman Catholic church toward the end of his life.

Ong's mother, Blanche Eugenia (Mense) Ong, born in Kansas City, Missouri, came from an entirely German Catholic background. Her mother, Sophia (Timmermann) Mense, was born in St. Louis, Missouri. Her father, Matthias Mense, was born in Germany and emigrated in his late teens to Washington, Missouri, where he co-founded an English-language newspaper, *The Franklin County Observer*, with his brother Ben. He later moved to Kansas City, Missouri, and founded a paving contracting business there. Ong's uncle Eugene Mense was for a short time a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, and his younger brother, Richard Mense Ong, has spent his life in the printing and publishing business.

Walter Ong was born November 30, 1912, in Kansas City, Missouri, and he has characterized his family setting as filled with vitality, congeniality, and security coupled with a deeply religious spirit. His father's Southern heritage encouraged a focus on human relations, and Ong recalls comfortable associations with friends that were well-to-do and with poorer persons who were esteemed "both as poor and as persons." Intellectual and artistic pursuits were encouraged, yet, in Ong's words, "what our father and mother principally gave us two boys was the unselfish love they had for each other and for us. They would support us in our interests even though they didn't particularly share or even understand them."

Though he began in public school, Ong's formal education was in Catholic schools from fourth grade until his doctoral studies at Harvard. He edited the student newspapers at Rockhurst High School and Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Missouri. On

graduation from high school at the age of sixteen, he wrote a lengthy series of features for the metropolitan daily, the *Kansas City Journal-Post*, on his group's experiences in Europe at the 1929 worldwide Boy Scout Jamboree. While in college, he founded and edited a tabloid newspaper for his home parish. As a young boy, he had briefly attended the Kansas City Art Institute, and he did a good bit of art work later, including advertising posters. He also studied piano and organ. During college he worked in the summers as a lifeguard at a lake in Kansas City's Swope Park.

After graduation from college in 1933, in the midst of the depression, Ong took a job with the Southwest News Company, a branch of the American News Company which distributed magazines to most of the newstands nationwide. Later he joined the Quigley Lithographing Company, which operated one of the last stone lithograph presses in the country. When the company failed, he worked briefly for another publishing firm.

Ong entered the Society of Jesus on September 1, 1935 at the Missouri Province novitiate, St. Stanislaus Seminary, in Florissant, Missouri, near St. Louis. After the usual two years as a novice which culminated in his vows in the Society of Jesus, he proceeded to the "juniorate" for studies in the humanities (chiefly Latin, Greek, English, and history). As was common for those who had already finished college, this phase was reduced in his case from two years to one. Likewise, because his college work had included a considerable amount of philosophy, his study at the Jesuit philosophate at St. Louis University (1938-40) was also shortened to two years instead of the usual three. He received a licentiate in philosophy (1940) and an M.A. in English (1941) from that university. Ong's master's thesis on Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins was directed by the late Marshall McLuhan, who taught at St. Louis University from 1937 to 1944. While studying there, Ong also taught part-time religion classes regularly to Black inner-city students and to young boys in a city correctional institution.

The Jesuit course of training normally included a few years of full-time teaching experience before theological studies began. From 1941-43 Ong taught English and French at Regis College in Denver. He then began four years of theology at St. Mary's College, St. Mary's, Kansas, the then displaced St. Louis University School of Divinity (the Jesuit Missouri Province theologate). He was listed at the time as an assistant in the St. Louis University



English department in order to teach English to foreign Jesuits in studies at St. Mary's. He also learned Spanish from Mexican Jesuits in the group.

Ong was ordained to the priesthood at St. Mary's on June 16, 1946. After another year of theology, he taught ethics in summer school at Rockhurst College and immediately afterwards began "tertianship," the year of prayer and directly spiritual ministry concluding the Jesuit priest's training, completing this year at the new tertianship building, the remodeled St. Joseph's Hall in Decatur, Illinois. He received the licentiate in theology (S.T.L.) from St. Louis University in 1948. The summer of the same year Ong taught moral theology at Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa.

In autumn 1948 Ong began doctoral studies in English at Harvard, completing his oral comprehensives December 8, 1949. In spring 1950 he went to Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship (he received a second Guggenheim for 1952-53) to research what became his doctoral dissertation on Peter Ramus, the sixteenth-century French philosopher and educational reformer, and Ramus' associate Omer Talon. The result was a 1700-page manuscript interpreting Ramus' significance and widespread influence, published in 1958 in two volumes by Harvard as *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* and *Ramus and Talon Inventory*. The former, a classic in Renaissance studies, has been continuously in publication since 1958 and was in 1983 issued by Harvard University Press in paperback.

Ong spent the first part of his European sojourn in England. In November 1950 he moved to the Jesuit house of *Etudes* in Paris, where he lived across the hall from Père Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and read his works for the first time. In late November 1953, Ong returned to Harvard, completed his dissertation, and began teaching English in the autumn of 1954 at St. Louis University.

In 1959 Ong became Professor of English at St. Louis University and in 1970 Professor of Humanities in Psychiatry (co-directing a joint program for M.D.'s who were residents in Psychiatry and for invited Ph.D. students in English which he co-founded with the psychiatrist, the late Dr. Charles Hofling). In 1981 Ong was appointed University Professor of Humanities.

In addition to his academic work, Ong has devoted much time to direct priestly ministry at St. Louis University, regularly celebrating and preaching at masses in St. Francis Xavier (College)

Church, hearing confessions there and elsewhere, conducting a great many retreats based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola for students and others, and assisting in tutoring in inner-city University programs.

Outside St. Louis University, he has held a number of fellowships and visiting professorships, including the following: Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut (1961-62); visiting professor in English at the University of California-Santa Barbara (1960); and visiting lecturer at the University of Poitiers (1962).

Ong delivered the Terry Lectures at Yale University (1963-64) which were published as *The Presence of the Word* (1967). He is a fellow of the Indiana University School of Letters (1965), was Berg Professor of English at New York University (1966-67), McDonald Lecturer at McGill University in Montreal (1967-68), Willett Visiting Professor in Humanities at the University of Chicago (1968-69), National Visiting Scholar for Phi Beta Kappa (1969-70), and visiting professor of Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis (1983-84). He was a resident fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in Stanford, California (1973-74), gave the Messenger Lectures on the Evolution of Civilization at Cornell University (1979, published in 1981 as *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness*) and the Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto (1981, published in 1986 as *Hopkins, the Self and God*). He also delivered a series of twenty-six lectures, seminars, and videotapes in Zaire, Cameroun, and Sénégal (in French) and in Nigeria (in English) on a tour sponsored by the United States Board of Foreign Scholarships (April-May 1974) to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fulbright academic foreign exchange program.

Ong has served in many learned societies and other educational bodies including: the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (advisory board); the National Humanities Faculty (chairman of the board and president); the Renaissance Society of America (advisory council); the Modern Language Association (president, 1978); the Modern Humanities Research Association; the National Council of Teachers of English; the Cambridge Bibliographical Society (England); the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (executive committee); the Milton Society of America (president, 1967); the

American Council of Learned Societies (regional associate); the National Fulbright Selection Committee for France (chairman, 1958); the White House Task Force on Education (1966-67); and the National Council on the Humanities (vice-chairman, 1971-74). He was made a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques by the government of France and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The editorial boards on which he has served include those of *Studies in English Literature, Philosophy and Rhetoric, Abstracts of English Studies, The English Literary Renaissance, Manuscripta, Thought, Oral Tradition*, and other learned journals.

**Walter Jackson Ong, S.J.:**  
**A Selected Bibliography**

**Randolph F. Lumpp**

The published works of Walter J. Ong, S.J., number close to four hundred. What follows here is a chronological listing of about half that total. Some earlier publications, some items that would be difficult to obtain, and many of his book reviews have been omitted. All of his major works are included, along with the most important and accessible reprintings in English and in other languages. Published articles which were later reprinted in Ong's books are identified by a citation of the book title, date, and page number following the citation of first publication.

1939

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1940

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1941

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1942

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1945

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1946

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1947

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1948

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1949

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1950

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## **The Cosmic Myths of Homer and Hesiod**

**Eric A. Havelock**

### **I**

#### HOMER'S COSMIC IMAGERY

Embedded in the narratives of the Homeric poems are a few passages which open windows on the ways in which the Homeric poet envisioned the cosmos around him. They occur as brief digressions, offering powerful but by no means consistent images, intruding into the narrative and then vanishing from it, but always prompted by some suitable context.

##### *A. Iliad 5.748-52 and 768-69*

The Greeks in battle being pressed hard by the Trojans, assisted by the god Ares; the goddesses Hera and Athene decide to equalize the encounter by descending from Olympus to help the Greeks. A servant assembles the components of Hera's chariot: body, wheels, spokes, axle, felloe, tires, naves, platform, rails, pole, yoke are all itemized in sequence, comprising a formulaic account of a mechanical operation: Hera herself attaches the horses to the car. Athene on her side is provided by the poet with a corresponding "arming scene"; she finally mounts the chariot and the two of them proceed:

748     Hera swiftly with whip set upon the horses  
749     and self-moving the gates of heaven creaked, which the seasons kept  
750     to whom is committed great heaven and Olympus  
751     either to swing open the thick cloud or to shut it back.  
752     Straight through between them they kept the horses goaded-and-driven. . .



768 Hera whipped up the horses, and the pair unhesitant flew on  
769 in midspace between earth and heaven star-studded.

B. *Iliad* 8.13-27

Zeus commands the gods in council to observe neutrality in the war; any disobedient member will be severely punished:

13 I will seize him and throw him into Tartarus gloom-ridden  
14 far away, where deepest abyss under earth pertains.  
15 Then-there (are) the iron gates and brazen threshold  
16 as far the remove beneath Hades as heaven stands removed from earth.  
17 Then you will all understand by what remove I stand strongest above all  
gods.  
18 Try it out if you want to, ye gods, that you may all know.  
17 Suspend a golden rope from heaven  
19 and all of you gods and goddesses catch hold of it.  
20 You still could not pull down from heaven to earth  
21 Zeus, counsellor supreme, strain though you might many times,  
22 but what time I myself should put my mind to it and decide to pull,  
23 I could pull you up plus earth itself plus sea itself,  
24 and next the rope round Olympus' peak  
26 I would tie, and all (things) would turn into what is up above.  
27 So far the remove by which I stand superior over gods and stand superior  
over mankind.

C. *Iliad* 8.478-86

The episode narrated in A is repeated three books later in identical language but omitting the description of the chariot-assembly. This time, however, Zeus disapproves of the goddesses' mission, so it is cancelled, and he inveighs against Hera:

477 . . . as for you, I reckon nothing of you  
478 angry as you are, not though you should betake yourself to the bottom-most  
borders  
479 of earth and deep-sea, where Iapetos and Kronos  
480 are seated unrefreshed by either rays of the Hyperion sun

481 or by winds and deep (is) Tartarus on either side  
 482 not though you get as far as that in your vagrant wandering, do I for you  
 483 skulking as you go give a thought, for than you is nothing more bitchy.  
 484 So he spoke, white-armed Hera gave no answer  
 485 And now the bright light of Helios fell into Ocean  
 486 drawing black night across the grain-giving fields.

D. *Iliad* 15.162-67

Zeus had been temporarily overcome by sleep, during which his purpose to allow the Greeks to be worsted in battle is suspended as it had been once before. Poseidon, Zeus' brother, takes the opportunity for a second time to intervene on the Greek side, and the tide of battle is reversed. Zeus, awaking, instructs intermediaries to order his brother's withdrawal:

162 If he will not offer obedience to what I say but instead discount it  
 163 he had better ponder thereafter within his wit and spirit  
 164 lest strong as he may stand he may not have nerve to await my coming against  
 him,  
 165 since I can assert myself to stand above him  
 166 and prior in generation. Forsooth his heart presumes so far  
 167 as to assert equality with me, whom even others shudder before.

These last three lines, which recall an earlier claim on Zeus' behalf made by the poet himself (*Iliad* 13.355), are then repeated almost verbatim (*Iliad* 18.181-83) during the transmission of Zeus' instructions.

E. *Iliad* 15.187-95

Poseidon responds in kind; the messenger pleads; he replies:

187 Three brothers are we born of Kronos and Rhea  
 188 Zeus and myself and last of us Hades ruler of the buried ones.

189 Three ways have all been apportioned, each has his share of status.  
 190 I for my part obtained of the shaken lots to inhabit forever the grey salt sea;  
 191 Hades obtained the dark gloom-ridden;  
 192 Zeus the wide heaven in the aether and the clouds;  
 193 Earth remaining is common to all, and also tall Olympus.  
 194 Therefore I need not the wits of Zeus to rule my life by; rather at ease  
 195 let him remain in his third share though standing strongest.

F. *Iliad* 20.56-65

Reversing policy once more, Zeus in council announces to the gods that they may choose sides and join in the fighting. They accordingly get involved:

56 Terribly thundered the father of gods and men  
 57 from on high, while far below Poseidon shook  
 58 the unbordered earth and the steep mountain summits,  
 59 and all the feet of well-watered Ida quaked  
 60 and the hill-tops and Trojan city and the Achaean ships.  
 61 From beneath, Aidoneus lord of the buried ones was affrighted,  
 62 and in his fright sprang from his seat and shouted, for fear that above him  
 63 Poseidon the earth-shaker may break open the earth  
 64 and his house might be exposed to mortals and immortals,  
 65 horrible, dank-ridden, which even gods shudder before.

G. *Iliad* 21.190-99

In a confrontation between Asteropaeus and Achilles on the battlefield, their lineages are compared. Asteropaeus had announced himself as grandson of the river Axios “wide flowing” (an epithet thrice repeated). Achilles astride his victim’s body rejoins that he is the great-grandson of Zeus:

190 Therefore as Zeus (is) stronger over seaward-murmuring rivers  
 191 so is Zeus’ generation made stronger over a river.  
 192 To be sure, you indeed have a river at your side, if indeed it can at all

193 protect you. But no; there is no way to fight against Kronian Zeus.  
 194 Beside him not even lord Achelous may match himself  
 195 nor even the great strength of deep-flowing Ocean  
 196 from whom indeed all the rivers and all the sea  
 197 and all springs and deep wells flow.  
 198 Yet he too is frightened at the bolt of great Zeus  
 199 and the terrible thunder-clap when from heaven it explodes.

#### H. *Odyssey* 10.80-86

Odysseus' narrative of his adventures continues:

80 Six days long we sailed nights and day alike,  
 81 on the seventh we came to Lamus' steep citadel,  
 82 even Telephylos of the Laestrygonians where herdsman to herdsman  
 83 gives call, the one driving in, the other calling back as he drives out.  
 84 Then-there an unsleeping man would earn double wages,  
 85 one for tending the oxen, one for pasturing silvery sheep:  
 86 For nigh at hand are the pathways of night and of day.

#### J. *Odyssey* 10.508-17

Circe, complying with Odysseus' plea that he be allowed to leave her and sail homeward, informs him of a prior voyage he must take to Hades to obtain a divination from the prophet Teiresias. She then adds sailing directions. He is to sail before the north wind:

508 But whensoever in ship through Ocean you traverse  
 509 then-there (is) a waste shore and groves of Persephone  
 510 and black poplars tall and willows fruit-shedding.  
 511 Beach ship thereon over against Ocean deep-eddying  
 512 and yourself pass into the hall of Hades dank-ridden.  
 513 Then-there into Acheron flow Puriphlegethon  
 514 and Cocytus, which is-a-break-off from water of Styx,  
 515 and a rock and conjunction of two rivers loud-roaring;  
 516 Then-there, my man, draw close-to-touching, even as I bid you  
 517 and dig a trench as about a cubit from there to there. . . .

K. *Odyssey* 11.13-22

The voyage is duly undertaken:

13      And the ship came to the borders of deep-flowing Ocean.  
 14      Then-there are the deme and city of Cimmerian men  
 15      in gloom and cloud enshrouded, nor ever upon them  
 16      does Helios the Shiner cast vision with his rays,  
 17      neither when he climbs up into the starry heaven  
 18      nor when back to earth from heaven he turns down.  
 19      Night the Destroyer instead spreads out over miserable mortals.  
 20      Then-there we came and beached, and took out the sheep  
 21      while ourselves we went along the flow of Ocean  
 22      till we came to the space that Circe had signified.

The components of these items are various and invite some comparisons:

Item A portrays an earth and a heaven separated by intervening space as a common-sense notion. Heaven is prefigured in architectural terms, as a palace with gates that creak as they open and shut to admit a vehicle, but which illogically become also a cloud behaving in the same way. A connecting link between these disparate images is provided by a third image of the Seasons as gate-keepers. The poet's vision sees the sky alternately clear and covered in the cycle of summer and winter, rain and shine, and seeks to make this cosmic sequence understandable in terms of a familiar domestic operation.

B makes two advances on A. Repeating the obvious theme of a space separating heaven from an earth to which sea is added, heaven is now identified as an area comprising "what is up above" (*meteôra*), formally distinct from earth plus sea. To this scheme is now added Tartarus as an abyss beneath the earth (and so by definition not available for inspection) which like heaven is imagined in architectural terms and supplied with its own gates and threshold, whose metallic nature may be intended to suggest how formidable they are. The atmosphere of this place suggests that of an underground cave or dungeon. For the future development of speculative thought, there is some significance in the fact that two sets of images, supernal and infernal, combined to form a symmetrical total in which heaven and Tartarus are

equidistant from a center, though whether in this center earth and Hades (not otherwise described) are combined or separate is left unclear.

C, instead of separating Tartarus from earth, offers a connection between them, so far as Tartarus is located at the lowest part of earth and of sea—a remote boundary but still a boundary. It is sunless and apparently windless (the sense of the Greek is not quite clear) and has two inhabitants known otherwise as Titans, possibly seated prisoners. The place, however, is visitable by Hera if she wants to get away.

E envisions a cosmos on different lines as divided into three equal areas in a tidy tripartite scheme: first, heaven, including daylight and cloud; second, sea; and third, “the dark.” This leaves earth unaccounted for, and also rather surprisingly Olympus, viewed as distinct from heaven. These two, earth and Olympus, are “common ground,” shared as a dwelling place by all the gods from whose standpoint as persons competing for living space the whole construct is offered (another hint of an architectural approach to cosmology). Tartarus is ignored.

F essentially is a narrative of the effect of two concurrent events, a thunderstorm and an earthquake, prefigured as the actions of two gods, which as they are described occur in the visible territory of Troy land. The actual victim of earthquake is also described as earth as a whole, now lacking borders, and with earth is involved what is “beneath” the earth, an abode of the dead envisioned in architectural terms as a domicile possessing that dungeon-like atmosphere elsewhere assigned to Tartarus, a place no god would now want to visit. Earth covers it like a protecting roof which could be broken apart.

G is not interested in cosmic architecture. It merely identifies by name a common source for all water on and under the earth, salt or fresh. The name *Okeanos*, whatever its origin, is obviously not equivalent to what we mean by an “ocean.” Its location is not specified, but it has a deep “flow” which suggests an image of fresh water rather than salt, consistent with its designation elsewhere in Homer as a “washing place” and as a “river.” Otherwise, the passage has relevance to an important aspect of Hesiod’s theology (to be noticed below) rather than to his cosmology.

In H, cosmic architecture is replaced by a location on a primitive map—a far country, pastoral, and, it would seem,

peaceful, where field hands earn a daily wage by herding in sheep and cattle at night and releasing them at the next daybreak. But in this land daybreak comes so very quickly that a herdsman passes and hails his alternate going out even as he goes in. Is this a poetic echo of reports of conditions in the Shetlands, “land of the Midnight Sun”? If so, the incredible is treated with a touch of humor. But what is to be made of the quite inconsistent but haunting image in the last line of the paths of night and day? Is their proximity one that exists between equals, as the symmetry of the formula seems to imply (and as would be true at the equator; Odysseus has been carried before the North Wind) or are these the paths taken by the adjacent herdsman, and if so, should not night practically disappear? The lines make up in magic what they lack in logic. Both Hesiod and Parmenides were to find the magic irresistible and amended the logic.

J again is not strictly cosmological, though it does introduce Hades once more as a house. The architectural motif recurs, reminiscent of the dungeon-like description of Tartarus, but in company with an image of a quite different sort, a rocky forbidding landscape intersected by menacing rivers and reached by a new route.

In K, however, Hades, rather than being obscurely buried beneath the earth, lies adjacent to a land on the earth’s surface occupied by mortal men, a remote but urban people, who live either on this side of Ocean or the other—it is hard to be sure which, nor again is the location of Ocean specified. They live in that kind of perpetual night elsewhere allotted to Tartarus or Hades. The narrative later refers to an “Erebus” situated below a pit dug in a desolate spot of this land, and apparently the equivalent of Hades.

These eight contributions to a Homeric architecture and geography of the physical cosmos contain obvious incoherencies. How can a cloud become a gate and “creak” (A)? Is Tartarus to be envisioned as an abyss below the earth or as a place lying below and beyond an abyss (B)? or at the borders of earth (C)? and is Hades conjoined with earth or separate from it (B)? Is Tartarus in an alternative scheme to be eliminated altogether, being replaced by Hades (E and F), even though Hades and Tartarus are elsewhere distinguished from each other (B)? Why should Zeus (D) share with Hades (F) the distinction of being repellent even to gods? Does earth have borders (C) or no borders

(F)? Where does the added cosmic item “Ocean” fit in, of unspecified location (G) but reachable by ship (K)? The paths of day and night (H) might be expected to have some connection with the cloud-gates of heaven (A). But do they? Is the perpetual night of Hades (E and F) shared by a population on the earth’s surface (K)?

It is of course a mistake to seek for or expect reconciliation of such confusions and contradictions. These are not organized accounts of a physical environment consistently conceptualized. Each is an “episode,” not a static description of fixed relationships, and each is separately imagined, not thought of in relation to an overall system. The cause of this goes back to the genius of orally preserved speech, which requires that reflections of any kind upon the human or cosmic condition be incorporated in the narrative context. The various contexts supplied for these nine descriptions reveal that four of them (B, C, D, E) are spoken by gods in the first person while arguing with other gods, one (G) by a hero in the first person arguing with an opponent, one (J) by a goddess in the first person giving a hero his voyaging directions, one more (K) by the hero himself in the first person narrated by the poet himself, but even these report previous decisions of gods. In sum, description occurs as it is prompted by and occurs within the actions or speech of agents in the story—in this case divine ones (for even the last instance supplies a rendition of previous divine directives). These can all fairly be seen as instances of what has been called the “god-apparatus” used as a device to record cosmological “facts” in memorizable form.

For example, in A the Greeks are retreating, a fact which naturally prompts their allies Hera and Athene to help them, which means an exit from Olympus, and so the architecture of the exit comes up for brief description. Zeus, however, later vetoes their intervention in an appropriately menacing speech which threatens what he will do to them—and this is where he will send them if they are disobedient—and so a brief description follows. All eight passages occur within this kind of contextual pattern. Essentially they are brief digressions sustained and carried along by the sweep of the story. As the prompting contexts are various, so are the details of each digression.

The same rule of narrativization requires that the digressions themselves become not descriptions formally conceived but little episodes of action to which descriptive detail is attached



incidentally. We are not told that heaven is so constructed as to have gates which open and shut according to the seasons and weather, but only allowed to see the gates swinging open under the supervision of permanent gate-keepers, while a car passes through on a given occasion. The intention of Zeus' threatening speech is not informative; he merely invokes Tartarus as a weapon of terror and gets so worked up as to taunt and challenge his council to a duel with himself—a tug of war—which will occur between heaven and earth, thus leading incidentally to a brief reference to the cosmic relationship between the two. All examples can on analysis be seen to be of this character.

In sum, they constitute a series of images, disparate yet loosely connected, for we become aware that they are all “visions” of the circumambient environment, selectively imagined with features that vary according to the requirements of the surrounding narrative, in which they themselves become little narratives also.

It needs no close observation to realize that the verbs employed describe actions or intentions of particular agents rather than those fixed relationships which would be characteristic of formal description. This is completely true of A, and mostly true of B (except for the statement “abyss pertains” and “then-there [are] gates”) and of C (except for a “deep [is] Tartarus”) and wholly so of D, E, F, G, and of H and J (except for “near are the pathways” and “there is a waste shore”). The presence of a syntax of action in narrative discourse is not of course surprising. But it is noteworthy how in Homeric discourse this preference infects—if that is the best word—other elements of the vocabulary besides the verbs. “Self-moving” (A) translates the Greek *auto-matoi*, which does not mean “automatically” in a mechanical sense; the gates are “alive,” spontaneously responding to the direction of gate-keepers, to whom the whole heaven has been “committed,” not as an act of bureaucratic assignment, but “turned over” (*epi-tetraptai*) by an act of personal decision (by Zeus). “Goaded-and-driven” (A) is a translation which uses the device of hyphenation to render the dynamic force of a compound adjective (*kentrênekees*: goad-enduring) which summons up the (unstated) image of the whip incessantly applied to gain speed. This quality of the language is often concealed in the translation, not least because the Greek original is polysyllabic and so phonetically

extended in pronunciation, forcing the original listener to call up the complex moving image while the translated word in European tongues is often as not phonetically curt. So also “star-studded” (A) renders a participial form *astero-enta* which means more than simply “starry.” “Gloom-ridden” (B and E) represents a similar type of formation, *êero-enta*, which does not mean just “gloomy,” but calls up the image of the *aêr* swirling through the area. “Un-bordered” (F) represents a five-syllable word *a-peiresiên*, even the sound of which conveys the sense of a prospect stretching beyond ken. “Well-watered” (F) inadequately renders the Greek *polu-pidakos* which refers to a multiplicity of springs, not so much a “large number of such” as springs multiplying over the location. The semantic stress does not fall on an abstract arithmetic count. “Dank-ridden” (F and J) represents *eurô-enta*, two heavy spondees, again participial in form; the place is not just “dank” but atmospherically permeated. “Seaweed-murmuring” (G) represents *hali-murêentôn*, a compound of noun and participle. The two heavy spondees, terminating the word and the hexameter in which they are placed, call up the image of the steady ceaseless seaward flow of all the rivers of the world: the word constitutes a dynamic statement. “Deep-flowing,” like “deep-eddying” (G and J: *bathu-rheitao*, *bathu-dinê*) achieve the same kind of effect by compounding an adverb with a participial form. “Fruit-shedding” and “loud-roaring” (J) are of kindred shape and semantic significance.

The significance is not a matter of mere stylistics. To be sure, compounding of epithets remains a standard device of archaic and high classical Greek poetry, preeminently in Aeschylus, and was revived in Alexandrian imitation. But while in the latter case it is proper to treat it as a decorative embellishment, its original usage reveals a way of experiencing the world (rather than thinking about it) which is specific to preliterate Greece. One can say that this world tends to be perceived kinetically, as things-in-motion, rather than as objects possessed of determinate properties. The language used to describe this experience is itself kinetic, a term which will recur in our subsequent account of Preplatonic philosophical language. It becomes applicable not just to verbs but to nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

The usage of the Greek adverb *entha*, translated by hyphenated “then-there” (B, H, J, K) is a case in point. The

meaning of the term—its references—hovers between these two English adverbs, the senses of which a sophisticated experience would keep apart. The Homeric mind's eye moves on from one episode to another which comes next in time, that is, in the time of the narrative. As it does so, it also moves within physically perceived reality to that location which comes "next" in space: the word "next" indeed retains in English some of this ambivalence between temporal and physical succession. As the spatial sense becomes reinforced at the expense of the temporal, we move closer to the notion of a spatial cosmic structure replacing a temporal story or myth (*muthos*). This transition of the mind moves parallel to the transition from orally preserved discourse to those literate formulations characteristic of systematic discourse. A conceptual framework replaces the myth. Hesiod, as will appear, exploits this adverb to the point where it begins to take on the clothing of systematic description. But the change is incipient only. It will take the endeavor of all the Preplatonic thinkers (Socrates included) to force the passage from story to structure, to reorganize the language in which we describe our experience of the world and of ourselves so that it can identify stable mental objects having identifiable properties. When Plato turns upon the language of poetry and condemns it as a language of action (*praxeis*) rather than idea, the transition has been accomplished.

And yet, if the above is taken as a portrait of the oral mentality and the manner of its discourse, the portrait is incomplete. Literate successors who were to create the language and the mentality of philosophy and science did not create *ex nihilo*. They had to build on what was given in the oral discourse as this became written down, and there was something to build on. One can begin with the Homeric primacy of Zeus, in terms not of religious belief or theological system, of which the oral mentality was innocent, but of a vision, if that is the best word, of a controlling superagent, superior in status and power to all the other agents in the divine and cosmic apparatus. The moral quality of his action is not pertinent, is indeed irrelevant to his primary feature, which is simply to exercise political overlordship, in the last resort unchallengeable, and so to impose a rudimentary political structure upon the cosmos, actually expressible in a kind of physical measure: "Such is the distance by which I am prevalent over gods and am prevalent over mankind" (B). There has been a tripartite *dasmos* or apportionment of cosmic areas (E)

between Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, but in fact, the latter two are Zeus' subordinates (D); this particular Homeric Zeus-formula, asserting the authority of primogeniture, with explicit denial of equality, actually occurs three times in the *Iliad* (D) and, though the story by narrating Poseidon's temporary defiance (E) creates a moment of suspense at the prospect of the rule being abrogated, it is only temporary. In fact, the measure of Zeus' predominance is extended further. Not only his brothers (D) but also the powers prior in generation to him are now his unquestioned subordinates (G). Cumulatively, in these brief cosmic visions, a world of mobile and dynamically shifting phenomena is reduced to a political order under a dominant authority.

In parallel with this political picture, there intrudes from time to time a language which briefly envisions the all as an all, a whole, a total, in an act of integration symbolized in the term *panta*, "all things" (B: cf. also G; it is a mistake to dismiss this usage as commonplace), and symbolized also in statements indicating cosmic symmetry (B, E, F). The pattern may vary, but not the notion that a pattern is there, which is also implicit in the presence of cosmic boundaries of one sort or another. The language of B includes one term of special interest, "the-up-above" (*meteôra*: the Greek anticipates the later "meteorology") or "the (things) suspended aloft," in Homeric contradistinction to the earth. By the fifth century, this word had passed into popular currency, paired along with the phrase "the-underearth" (*ta hupo ges*), to identify the subject matter of physical science. "The under-earth" in Presocratic cosmology took the place of the Homeric area designated as "from beneath" (F line 61; cf. line 57), namely, the Hades from which ghosts could emerge to be revived (K). The earth between Hades and heaven is represented as shared territory "common to all" (E). Speculative versions of these two notions, of revivification and of the existence of a "universal common" (*xunon pasi*) will be seen to reappear in the cosmology of Heraclitus. Applying a similar notion of consolidation, the poet envisions a common source for all forms of water (F), possibly furnishing the hint upon which Thales built the more ambitious proposition of a cosmic water as the source of all things. Characteristically, the Homeric notion is expressed kinetically and personally: "from whom all. . . flow."

The cosmic status of Zeus, considered as a means by which the poet's discourse endeavors to suggest the existence of a cosmic

order, is implemented by the crude means of physical force. He can terrify; he can commit bodily assault; he can hurl a weapon. But his portrait contains a hint that there exists a dimension of his power which is more sophisticated. He is “supreme-counsellor” (A: *hupatos mêtôr*). The formula recurs in the *Iliad*, and it has a variant “counsellor-Zeus” (*mêtietia Zeus*) which is even commoner. The epithet (and its companion verb) carries the senses of skill and cunning, advising and planning. Is this the ultimate means by which Zeus exercises power? Poseidon says (E) “I do not need Zeus’ wits (*phrenes*) to rule my life by,” putting emphasis on the mental processes available to the supreme god for purposes of control. As will appear, it is precisely this distinctively Homeric attribute of god-head which Hesiod will in his turn choose to exploit and which will in the Presocratics undergo transformation into a cosmic intelligence, source of an order within which phenomena are coordinated. By an act of cosmic projection, they translated the human mind into the cosmos, as it were by a Hegelian effort. It was left to Parmenides clearly to grasp the truth that the dimensions of this mind lie in the human thought processes.

Summing up, one must issue a last warning. Historians of early Greek thought are always prone to fall into the unconscious assumption that the conceptual discourse of description, which is not visible in the preserved discourse of Greek oral society, was nevertheless already there in place, available to early poets if they had chosen to use it (but of course, being poets, they did not); and therefore that it is a legitimate historical exercise to interpret and understand early cosmology by the light of this conceptual program, either over-praising early Greek thought for its supposed success in approximating to conceptuality, or evaluating it as “primitive” for its failure to do so. The control exercised by such presuppositions prevents a perception of the intensity of a struggle about to be undertaken to emancipate language from its poetic constraints in order to achieve such a program. For the philosopher of today doing his own thinking, it is precisely in the realization of this early historical struggle that he can gain fresh insight into the sources and manner of his own thought processes.

## II

## HESIOD'S COSMIC ARCHITECTURE

The *Theogony*: 717-817

Our text of the *Theogony* consists of 1022 hexameters. The passage under consideration comprises almost one-tenth of the whole, and occurs at a point where seven-tenths have already been completed. It interrupts a genealogy of gods interspersed with narrative episodes of varying lengths, replacing these with what could be roughly described as an architecture of the physical world or “cosmos” (the word however in this sense is post-Hesiodic). This is true despite the fact that much of the imagery is concentrated upon the underworld. The phenomena there pictured are continually related to the structure above them. At the conclusion of the passage, the poem reverts to its prevailing style of genealogy and narrative.

We are not, however, dealing with an insertion by another hand. More than once in these hundred lines, the architectural syntax lapses and reverts, either to genealogy (746, 758, 776; these are brief) or to a syntax of personal agents performing cosmic actions (734-35, 746-48, 769-74, 780-86, 792-805) in a manner consistent with Hesiod's style otherwise, in both the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*.

The composition is unpracticed, as though the author knows he is wrestling with a problem with which his previous bardic training has given him no familiarity. So both theme and scene of what is being described keep shifting, as focus moves from physical space unconfined to a prison with walls, fences, gates, and warders, from Tartarus to Night to Hades, from Night and Day to Sleep and Death, from Death to Hades, from Hades to Styx, from Styx to Ocean and back again to Tartarus, from Tartarus to gates, from gates to prison (ring-composition). In our translation, the frequent and often repetitive subdivisions or “versions” into which the passage has been cut up convey the kaleidoscopic effect of the composition, with one image replacing another image yet overlapping with it.

Version I: *Cosmic Symmetry*

717      And the Titans down under the earth wide-wayed

718 were taken (sc. by the three giants) who in bonds of affliction bound them  
 719 having with their hands overcome them even though over-weening they  
 proved-to-be (*eontas*)  
 720 as far down below under earth as heaven stands (*esti*) far away from earth;  
 721 that far indeed (is the distance) away from earth towards Tartarus gloom-  
 ridden.  
 722 Nine nights and nine days a brazen anvil  
 723 from heaven descending on the tenth to earth would reach;  
 724 and nine nights and nine days again a brazen anvil from earth descending  
 725 on the tenth to Tartarus would reach.

Version IIa: *The Cosmic Prison*

726 Around this a brazen fence runs driven on either side of it.

Version IIIa: *Cosmic Night*

727 in three rows is spread around the neck  
 And night

Version IVa: *Cosmic Roots*

728 Moreover up from below  
 are roots of earth implanted and roots of the unharvested sea

Version Va: *Cosmic Space*

729 And then-there the Titan gods under the dark gloom-ridden  
 730 stay-hidden by the counsels of Zeus the cloud-assembler  
 731 in a space dank-ridden at outermost-edge of giant earth

Version IIb (enlarged): *The Cosmic Prison and Warders*

732 For them there-is (*esti*) no egress; Poseidon has imposed (a barricade of)  
 doors  
 733 of bronze, and a wall runs driven round from side to side  
 734 and then-there Gyges, Kottos, and Briareus of high-spirit  
 735 do dwell, trusty warders (servants) of Zeus the aegis-bearer

Version IVb (enlarged): *Cosmic Springs and Borders*

736 And then-there of earth the dusky and of Tartarus gloom-ridden

- 737 of deep-sea unharvested and of heaven star-studded  
 738 of all in succession do the springs and borders obtain (*easin*)  
 739 distressful, dank-ridden, that even gods shudder before

Version Vb (enlarged): *The Cosmic Chasm*

- 740 a great-big chasm, nor through (the space of) a whole consummate year  
 741 would (one) reach the floor, if once (one) should find himself inside the  
 gates.

Version VI: *The Cosmic Gale*

- 742 Nay, there, and then-there, would gale before gale carry (him)  
 743 distressfully; a frightful prodigy even for the immortal gods  
 744 (is) this.

Version IIIb (enlarged): *Cosmic Night*

- And frightful the house of Night the obscure  
 745 (that) is-there-established in clouds enshrouded inky-black

Version VII: *Cosmic Personification*

- 746 Further on before these does Iapetos' child hold up broad heaven  
 747 standing-there with head and unwearying hands (upheld)  
 748 unshakable

Version VIII: *Cosmic Exchange*

- where both Night and Day approaching close  
 749 speak one to the other exchanging the great-big threshold  
 750 of bronze; one of them will descend inside while the other doorwards  
 751 proceeds, nor ever the both of them does the house within contain  
 752 but always the one of them outside the house remaining (*eousa*)  
 753 over-circles earth and in turn the other within the house remaining (*eousa*)  
 754 awaits the season of her own journey what time it may come  
 755 the one of them for the terrestrial ones holding light many-visioned



756 the other (holding) Sleep in her arms, Death's brother

Version IIIc (duplicated): *Cosmic Night*

757 She, even Night the Destroyer enshrouded in cloud gloomy-formed

Version IX: *Cosmic Sleep and Death*

758 And then-there children of Night the murky keep their dwelling  
 759 even Sleep and Death frightful gods nor ever upon them  
 760 does Helios the Shiner cast-vision with his rays  
 761 either to heaven ascending or from heaven descending.  
 762 One of these two over land and sea's broad back  
 763 circles-round quiet and gentle upon mankind  
 764 but the other has a mind of iron and brazen his heart  
 765 and ruthless within (is) his breast; whomsoever he first grasps he holds fast  
 766 of mankind, and (is) enemy to the immortal gods as well.

Version X: *Cosmic Hades (and narrative of Dog)*

767 And then-there, further on, the echoing halls of the underworld god  
 768 even of powerful Hades and of awesome Persephone  
 769 are established, and ahead of them a frightful dog keeps watch  
 770 a ruthless (beast) and baneful his skill. Upon those approaching  
 771 he fawns alike with tail and both ears (wagging)  
 772 but to go out back again he forbids; yes, he watches out  
 773 and eats up any whom he catches going out of the gates  
 774 of powerful Hades and awesome Persephone.

Version XIa: *Cosmic Styx and Ocean*

775 And then-there does she inhabit, that goddess before whom immortals  
 shudder  
 776 even Styx-the-shudderful daughter of refluent Ocean  
 777 she the eldest; and remote from the gods she inhabits a renowned dwelling  
 778 roofed over by great high rocks; and all around  
 779 with silver pillars it is conjoined to heaven.

*Narrative Digression*

780-86 How Iris at Zeus' command administers the oath of the water of Styx to the gods.

Version XIb: *Cosmic Styx and Ocean (resumed)*

787 Full-and-far beneath the earth wide-wayed  
 788 from the sacred river it flowed on through black night  
 789 (being) a branch of Ocean; and a tenth portion has been allotted (to it).  
 790 In nine portions around the earth and the sea's wide back  
 791 in silver eddies coiled does Ocean fall into the sea;  
 792 but she, the one (portion), flows out of a rock (to be) a great affliction to the  
 gods. . .  
 806 (Styx's water) discharges (itself) through a rough-and-rugged space.

*Narrative Digression*

792-805 How a god who forswears himself by the water of Styx suffers a ten-year punishment.

Version IVc (repeat of IVb): *Cosmic Springs and Borders*

807 and then-there of earth the dusky and of Tartarus gloom-ridden  
 808 of deep-sea unharvested and of heaven star-studded  
 809 of all in succession do the springs and borders obtain (*easin*)  
 810 distressful, dank-ridden that even gods shudder before.

Version XII: *Cosmic Gates and Threshold*

811 And then-there (are) both gleaming gates and brazen threshold  
 812 unshakable upon far extended roots compacted,  
 813 self-implanted.

Version IIc (enlarged): *Cosmic Prison and Warders*

Further on and set apart from all gods

814 the Titans dwell far beyond Chaos the dusky.  
 815 Moreover of mighty-blasting Zeus those famed assistants  
 816 inhabit halls upon the foundation-roots of Ocean  
 817 even Kottos and Gyges.

In these one hundred lines, the logic of literate composition is lacking, and one should not impose it by forced rationalizations and excising of supposed additions. The text as we have it appears to be the one that was familiar to the early philosophers. To seek to find place for supposed interpolators between them and the poet they read and memorized is an exercise in futility.

Yet out of a world made by gods and peopled by them a different vision is struggling to emerge, philosophically positive in its nature. An architecture of coherent space is replacing a genealogy of divine persons whose birth and acts occur in sequence of time. This becomes evident at the beginning in Version I. Heaven and Tartarus are presented as upper and lower limits of a world above and below the earth, within which earth is placed equidistant from each. This hints at a principle of geometric regularity, rendering more explicit what had been implicit in the rhetoric of Homer's Zeus. Alternatively and more frequently, the main components or areas of this world—Heaven, Sea, Tartarus—are assigned a common possession described as “roots” or “springs” or “borders.” This vision is organic instead of geometric, but it points toward a second principle with philosophic implications, namely a common elemental source, what Aristotle would call a “first principle,” for the entire contents of the physical environment. These contents in turn occasionally yield precedence to a description of a larger continuous space or “chasm,” with a hint that they are phenomena which either take place in this space or emerge from it or in some way rest on it. Finally, in an image of the alternating journeys of Night and Day, a passage of rhythmic magic supreme in Greek poetry, the poet proposes a fresh type of symmetry, one of process or balance, in which interacting and opposed phenomena alternately yield place to each other.

In these episodes, a curtain is lifting on the future to reveal the approach of Preplatonic cosmology. The Milesians and their successors lived under the spell thus cast. The thresholds and fences and walls and houses and Styx and Atlas and the Dog and the Giants look backwards; they revert to the speech of the pre-conceptual mind. But it is when we too look back, and grasp what Hesiod is doing to Homer, that we realize the strength of his own forward leap. A series of autonomous images inserted digressively into previous epic narrative have been brought together with some attempt at coordination. Heaven, Earth, Sea, and

Tartarus are principals in Hesiod's vision as Homer's. Night is reproduced in her Homeric roles as on the one hand an autonomous power dreaded by all, on the other an equal partner of Day. The positions of Hades, Styx, and Ocean in the architecture are given subordinate treatment, consistent with the architectural place they occupy in the Homeric narrative (Hades: *Il.* 20.61-65; Ocean, Hades, Styx: *Od.* 10.511-15; Ocean: *Il.* 14.200-1 and 302-3; *Od.* 4.563-68, 11.13, 160-61, 20.64). The gates, thresholds, borders, the dank and gloom are all reproduced from the Homeric apparatus. The Homeric "abyss" and the emphasis on Tartarus' depth and its remoteness are translated into the notion of a cosmic chasm, utilizing a hint provided by the most desperate of Homeric formulaic oaths: "May earth the wide gape open (*chanoi*) for me if. . ." (*Il.* 4.182; 8.150; cf. 17.417). Homer furnishes hints of two different spatial symmetries, one tripartite, retaining earth as the middle term between Heaven and Tartarus; the other quadripartite, setting earth apart as "common ground" not included with Heaven, Sea, and Hades. Hesiod prefers the first (Version I) but shows signs also of remembering the second (Version IV) which has four components, but with Heaven replacing Homeric Olympus. Homer's herdsmen who salute each other where Night and Day pass close are converted into actual Night and Day, and the symmetry of this personal exchange is converted into an architectural one transacted across a threshold. Refluent Ocean at the edge of the earth is given geometric position surrounding it, and an arithmetic relationship to that Styx which in Homer is reached only after crossing Ocean (*Od.* 10.508-15). The Homeric rock associated with Styx is converted into a rock-cave (*Od.* 10.518; *Theog.* 727-28). The Homeric land of the Cimmerians denied the light of the rising and descending Sun becomes the land of Hesiod's Sleep and Death. Many of the components are placed within the architectural composition awkwardly, and geographically disconnected, but they are there.

What is the mental mechanism which sets this proto-conceptual process in motion? The clues to it are linguistic, to be tracked down by observing some of the syntactical devices employed in composition. They are all available in the previous epic language. There is the narrative connective "and then" or "and next," which leads on from one happening to another. The Greek connective is *entha (de)*, which can also mean "and there"; in this overlap of meaning, a time sequence of events merges into

a space sequence of “physical” objects. The rendering “then-there,” despite its English awkwardness, has been used as a translation device to bring out the fact of this transition. A parallel function is performed for Hesiod by the adverb *prosthén*, which carries the meaning of “in front” (of whatever has been recently described) and “further on.” The mind’s eye is moving like a traveller from one image to the next, so that what would have been an event-series in original epic is converted into an area-series. Sometimes the attempt to connect is abandoned. The composer resorts to the epic *autar*, “moreover” or “and next,” which does little more than fill up a metrical gap in the hexameter, in order to introduce the ear to a fresh image.

More importantly, a preference can be shown for replacing epic verbs of action, reporting the activities of agents, by verbs of position, posture, fixity, or status, so that the subjects of these cease to be agents performing actions and become physical phenomena of one sort or another. So we observe a repeated preference for images of imprisonment, fencing in, and verbs of binding and containment (710, 726, 728, 732, 751). Permanence of condition or situation is suggested by the frequent use of the perfect tense in the active, passive, or intransitive voices (727, 728, 730, 732, 733, 745, 747, 769, 789, 791, 812); or by the use of the verb *echô* in the sense of “sustaining” (746, 755, 758, 765); and, most significantly, by the use of the verb “to be” (*einai*) to signify a perpetual or permanent presence (720, 732, 738, 752, 753, 809). It is important to stress the fact that all these are resources already present in the oral epic vocabulary. Conceptualization of language does not occur in a vacuum. It operates by selectivity exercised upon the oral medium, certain elements of which are given preferred expression. The choice does not fall on single words as such, but on preferred syntactical arrangements in which they are placed.

From a philosophical standpoint, these are the positive aspects of the poem. The negative ones are easier to perceive: there is no architectural consistency, different spatial arrangements are superimposed one upon another, and the failure of logical continuity is marked by syntactical disjunction. Eye and ear are invited to jump around, from Earth to Tartarus to Night to Hades to Ocean. There is a prison somewhere, required by the myth of the Titans, sometimes in empty space, sometimes with borders. The “all” is equipped in the same breath with springs (as required

by the all-encompassing sea) and with roots (as required by all-encompassing land). But through the confusion, one can see what Hesiod is trying to do to the Greek mind and it is a fascinating spectacle. The divine agent performing creative acts is yielding place, perhaps reluctantly, to the physical phenomenon which just “exists,” as the reading eye begins to take architectural control over the acoustic flow of the listening ear.

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## Characteristics of Orality

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In his book *Orality and Literacy* Father Ong listed a number of characteristics which are among “those which set off orally based thought and expression from chirographically and typographically based thought and expression, the characteristics, that is, which are most likely to strike those reared in writing and print cultures as surprising” (1982:36ff.). In this paper I should like to discuss several of these important characteristics in further depth in respect to their applicability to oral traditional literature, especially oral traditional poetry.

The first characteristic mentioned by Father Ong is that oral thought and expression are additive whereas the written are subordinative. His prime example is from the first chapter of Genesis, with its succession of coordinating conjunctions. “In the beginning God created. . . . And the earth was void. . . and darkness was. . . and the spirit of God. . .” and so forth. The South Slavic oral traditional epic certainly bears out this proposition. One needs only to note in any song the number of lines which begin with the conjunctions *i*, *a*, or *pa*, meaning “and” or “and then.” Here is an example from Sulejman Makić’s song “Katal ferman na Djerdjelez Aliju” (“Writ of Execution for Djerdjelez Alija”):<sup>1</sup>

Ta’ put tatar ferman dofatijo,	Then the messenger took the firman,
Pa istera carskogo mezila,	Then he rode out the imperial post-horse,
Pa on krenu zemlji carevini.	Then he set out through the empire.
Lak’ polako Bosnu pogazijo.	Easily he crossed Bosnia.
Bosnu prodje, do Kajnidja dodje.	He passed Bosnia, he came to Kajnidja.
Pa ga vide kajnidjki muftija,	Then the mufti of Kajnidja saw him,
Pa on zovnu bajraktara svoga:	Then he called his standard-bearer:

There is also a tendency in South Slavic oral epic to a variant of the above accumulation of conjunctions, namely, the use

of asyndeton, to the listing of actions without connectives, as “he did this, he did this, he did that.” One sees an example of this in the following from Salih Ugljanin’s “The Battle of Kosovo.”<sup>2</sup> Messengers from the sultan have just arrived at the gate of Lazar’s palace at Kruševac:

Zatrupaše halkom na vratima.	They knocked on the door.
Lazar pudi popa duhovnika,	Lazar sent the priest,
Da prifati careva fermana.	To receive the imperial firman.
Side pope na gradsku kapiju.	The priest went down to the city gate.
Arapu mu pomoj naturiše,	The Arabs greeted him,
Pružu popu careva fermana.	They gave the priest the imperial firman.
Kad je pope ferman ugljedao,	When the priest saw the firman,
Sedam put se zemlji preklonijo,	He bowed seven times to the ground,
Osmi put je ferman prifatijo.	The eighth he took the firman.
Arapu se natrag povratije.	The Arabs returned.
Pope trči, ide uz bojeve.	The priest ran, he went up the stairs.

It should be noted that, in spite of oral traditional literature’s very real predilection for the “additive” over the “subordinative,” subordination is by no means lacking in oral traditional style. There is sometimes a rhythm discernible, a repeated pattern in the usage of some singers of South Slavic epic, in which a series of actions is interrupted by a time clause which introduces a new series of actions or a new scene. For this pattern a preceding subordinate clause is often used. The following passage, taken again from Salih Ugljanin’s version of “The Battle of Kosovo” (lines 30-39), illustrates this phenomenon. Queen Milica has just had a dream of foreboding:

Noj prolazi, sabah zora dodje.	Night passed, dawn came.
Lazar proti popa dozovnuo.	Lazar summoned the priest.
A kad dodje pope u odaju,	And when the priest came into the room,
A rastvori debela indjila,	And opened the thick gospel,
Pa pogleda knjige viječnice.	Then he looked at the gospel books.
Pa kraljica sad priča Milica,	Then Queen Milica spoke,
A sve pope gljeda po knjigama.	And the priest consulted the books.
Pa kad beše knjige pregljedao,	Then when he had looked over the books,
I Milica sve mu iskazala,	And Milica had told him everything,
Pa mu stade pope govoriti:	Then the priest began to speak:

There are other ways in which what Milman Parry called “the adding style” expresses itself. Parataxis, appositives, and



parallelisms, the latter of which Roman Jakobson indicated as the main criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose, are outstanding manifestations of the adding style. Both Hebrew and Anglo-Saxon traditional poetry are strongly marked by these devices. Many Old Testament examples come to mind. One of my favorites is Psalm 24, verses 1 and 2:

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof,  
The world, and they that dwell therein;  
For He hath founded it upon the seas,  
And established it upon the flood.

Such parallelisms are basic to Hebrew poetry and are antiphonal in their ritual background. And consider the appositives in this passage in the Anglo-Saxon epic from Beowulf's description of his fight with sea-monsters in his contest with Breca<sup>3</sup>:

*Leoht eastan com,  
beorht beacen Godes, brimu swaþredon,  
þæt ic sae-naessas geseon mihte,  
windige weallas.*

*Light came from the east  
God's bright beacon, and the seas calmed,  
till I saw at last the sea-cliffs, headlands,  
the windy shore.*

Father Ong's second characteristic, "aggregative rather than analytic" thinking, refers to the acceptance without questioning of what he calls "formulas" current in everyday speech. He is thinking of slogans and clichés, of course, rather than the formulas of oral traditional verse. He mentions such phrases in Soviet usage as "the Glorious Revolution of October 26," or in the United States "the Glorious Fourth of July," terms used without further analysis whenever the respective dates or events are mentioned. Here the necessities of verse composition in performance do not come into play at all, as they do with "the Homeric epithetic formulas 'wise Nestor' or 'clever Odysseus,'" with which he compares them.

Nestor's epithets in Homer are *dios* (godlike), *megathumos* (great-hearted), *agauos* (illustrious, noble), *hippota* (horseman), and *Gerenios* (Gerenian). Of these only "Gerenian horseman" is used exclusively of Nestor and is peculiarly his. It is meaningful for Nestor whatever the context, because, as we know, Nestor was brought up among the Gerenians. He was thus absent when

Heracles attacked Pylos and killed Nestor's father Neleos and all his brothers. The Pelian war was related by Homer in *Iliad* 5.690ff. The epithets are useful, but not for that reason meaningless. This is particularly true for "clever Odysseus," Father Ong's second example. That Odysseus is called *polumetis* eighty-one times proves that that epithet was useful in making lines. Odysseus was not being especially clever in every instance, of course, but whether he was being clever or not at any given moment, he was characteristically clever. Cleverness was one of his permanent attributes.

As Father Ong realizes, one must make a distinction between slogans and the formulas of oral traditional poetry. He is right in thinking that the unquestioning acceptance of such slogans or clichés forms part of the "oral residue" in speech and thought, but it seems to me that they are both qualitatively and functionally different from the formulas in oral traditional poetry. The use of the term "formula" for both popular slogans and clichés as well as for the formulas of oral traditional poetry might lead to ambiguity, because the latter are by no means bereft of meaning, and both poet and audience have some sense of that meaning, which they do not need to analyze every time they are used. Moreover, the formulas of oral traditional poetry have an important and necessary function in the composition and transmission of that poetry, a function which has no parallel in the slogans and clichés of popular usage.

The third characteristic adduced by Father Ong is redundancy as opposed to sparseness, or perhaps spareness of expression. In oral "life situations" it is necessary to repeat. Fullness, *copia*, and *amplificatio* are oral characteristics which are kept well into the written period as oral residue. Here, too, Father Ong's characteristics are more applicable to a context of general communication than to oral traditional literature. The repetitions in the latter do not, in my opinion, arise from the need to remind the audience of what has been said, but from what I would call "ritual repetition"; and I would like to suggest that the fullness, the copiousness, comes from "ritual elaboration." Only those elements are described fully which are of significance. It is not "any old sword" that is described at great length, but the hero's special sword, and it may be described either at the moment when it is specially made for the hero, as the armor of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*, or when the hero arms himself for battle with the

dragon or his chief adversary. The fullness and repetition are there all right, as Father Ong has indeed quite rightly seen, but it appears to me that they are not there to fill up time while the singer thinks of what comes next, or for the convenience of the audience who have to be told what happened previously in the story. The repetitions have, or once had, an important role of their own, a ritual one of great antiquity. This applies as well to those repetitions of instructions given to a messenger or to the receiver of a message. There is not only a kind of verisimilitude, but also an emphasis on the ritual character of the communication. It is surely not that the audience will have forgotten what was said twenty, or forty, or however many lines earlier. Father Ong's comments are more applicable to political speech-making than to oral literary composition. The original ritual function of such repetitions may in time become lost, and the repetitions may be kept as conventions of literary style which are retained as "oral residue" in written literature. Such repetitions, by the way, are characteristic of both oral traditional verse and oral traditional prose.

Earlier in the same chapter (1982:34) Father Ong wrote:

In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's 'helper,' and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems.

It is to be noted that in this statement Father Ong has not mentioned word-for-word memorization. What he is speaking of is recall of thought rather than of words, although the configuration of the words which express the thought aids in remembering it. I personally am skeptical that the configurations came into being, were originally created, for mnemonic purposes. That they served

those purposes I have no doubt, but I would like to suggest that the configurations themselves came into being—some of them, at any rate—in response to ritual requirements.

Descriptions of caparisoning a horse, or of dressing or arming a hero, are common repeated themes in South Slavic epic, and elsewhere as well. They are included in what Father Ong called “standard thematic settings” in the passage quoted above. Their ritual function can be clearly illustrated from the following example from “The Wedding of Smailagić Meho.”<sup>4</sup> In that epic song young Meho is sent by his father to Buda to receive credentials as a commander and successor to his father in the same post. When his mother has dressed him in special clothing and given him the special sword sent him long ago by the sultan for this very moment, he appears before his father for “inspection” before his journey. Here is part of the description of his being dressed and armed by his mother:

She gave him his breastplate. It was not of silver, but of pure gold and weighed full four oke. . . . She put on him silken breeches, which had been made in Damascus, all embroidered in gold, with serpents pictured upon his thighs, their golden heads meeting beneath his belt and beneath the thong by which his sword was hung. . . . She girded on him. . . his belt of arms. . . braided of golden threads and embroidered with white pearls. Therein were his two small Venetian pistols forged of pure gold; the sights were diamonds and pure pearls. . . . Upon his shoulders was a silken cloak, its two corners heavy with gold. Gilded branches were embroidered round about, and upon his shoulders were snakes whose heads met beneath his throat. Down the front hung four cords, braided of 'fined gold, all four reaching to his belt of arms and mingling with his sword-thong which held his fierce Persian blade.

She put on him his cap of fur with its twelve plumes, which no one could wear, neither vizier nor imperial field marshal nor minister nor any other pasha save only the alaybey under the sultan's firman. Upon his head waved the plumes, and the golden feathers fell over his forehead. The imperial plumes were made after two fashions, half of them were stationary and half mobile. Whenever he rode or marched, the stationary

plumes hissed like angry serpents, and the moving plumes revolved. The hero needed no watch, for the plumes revolved three or four times an hour.

At the beginning of the song Meho had been confirmed as his father's successor by the council of the nobles of Kajnidja. That was the first stage in his "ceremony of investiture." His father had not been in the council, but his uncle had reported this action to his brother Smail, Meho's father. When Smail had sent Meho to his mother to be outfitted, he had said:

"I shall not say whether I shall send you to Buda or not until you return from the women's chambers and I see you in your dress array, that I may judge whether you are worthy to be alaybey, whether your fur cap suits you, the golden cap with its twelve plumes, and the feather of the alaybey at your brow, and the Persian sword blessed at Mecca at your side. That sword is no trifle and I desire to see it by your flank to judge whether you are a hero worthy of that Persian saber. Only then shall we see, my son, whether I shall send you or not."

And here is that ritual moment, the second stage in the hero's investiture when Meho's father accepts him as his successor:

When Mehmed came before his father with his Persian blade beneath his left arm, like a light gray falcon, he approached his father's right hand and kissed it, he kissed the hem of his garment and his hand. Then he did the same to his uncle. And, retreating three or four paces, he stood at attention before his father, in his glorious array, in boots and leggings, with his fur cap and plumes; then he let his Persian blade drop at his left side, his left hand on its hilt, and his right resting on his belt of arms. He waited upon his father and uncle even as the nobles upon the sultan in Stambol.

From his cushion-seat his father watched him full quarter of an hour without a word, and Mehmed did not move; so proud and jealous of his honor was he that he would have toppled over rather than budge from that spot without permission from his dear father. He is a blessing to the father who begat him, as well as

to the Border and, indeed, to the whole empire.

Smail said no word to his son, but turned and summoned the standard-bearer Osman to give him the commission to accompany Meho to Buda and to have Meho's horse prepared for him. This horse was a gift from the sultan and had been kept for Meho unriden for seven years.

The singer Avdo Medjedović's description of the caparisoning of the horse in preparation for Meho's initiatory journey contains elements used in all his descriptions of horses in other poems in which they are appropriate. They are repetitions, not from one poem to another, for they belong in all of them; rather they are descriptions used and adapted to a number of situations. It would take too much space to quote any of these descriptions in full here, but, as with the case of the outfitting of Meho, a sample will have to suffice to illustrate the degree of elaboration which such passages may attain. After the horse has been washed and dried with a towel, the caparisoning begins:

First they took a Hungarian saddle-cloth and placed it on the chestnut steed. On this they set the coral saddle which was adorned. . . with gold. . . and decorated with Egyptian agates of various colors. . . . Over the saddle were four girths and a fifth beneath to protect the horse's flesh. . . . All four were woven of silk and the one next to the horse's body was of black marten fur. . . , the two shabracques were of gold, and down the horse's breast hung shining bosses. . . . Over his mane from ears to shoulder they cast a piece of embroidered mesh from Egypt. . . . Through it the dark mane hung, shining through the gold like the moon through the branches of a pine tree.

The stewards brought the horse into the courtyard, and when Smail and his brother saw him, "they opened the window and leaned forth their foreheads against the jamb, their beards out the window, and all four hands upon the sill." It was only then that Small spoke to his son:

"Mehmed, here is your horse all caparisoned and ready. Care well for the horse as if it were your own head. . . . Mehmed, my dear son, if fate is with us, you must not long delay, for I can hardly await your return. Proceed wisely; do not perish foolishly, for

Buda is like a whole province, my son, or like a small kingdom!"

Smail accompanied his son to the courtyard, and Meho and Osman mounted and departed. Thus ends a scene, or series of scenes, elaborate descriptions of ceremony and ritual in an evolving drama of succession and investiture interwoven a) with an initiatory journey in the company of a "sponsor," and b) a betrothal to a bride who has to be gained in combat, for on his initiatory journey to Buda Meho encounters and rescues his bride-to-be. The repetitions and elaborations are not "amplificatio" for its own sake, but embellishment of ritually significant moments in a complex story of *rites de passage*.

In fourth place in his scheme of characteristics of orality, Father Ong notes that orality is "conservative or traditionalist." This characteristic is certainly applicable to oral traditional literature on all levels, but I should like to suggest a further elucidation of the content of tradition. A tradition, as I understand it—that is to say, all the performances of all the songs and all the singers in any given culture since the beginning of the genre in question—includes a variety of songs of differing quality and also singers of great diversity. There are good singers, mediocre singers, unskilled singers, and singers of real genius. Tradition is not a mediocre mean; it does not consist merely of what is common to all songs or singers over all or even over some discrete part of the period during which the practice exists. It embraces all types of singers and all types of performances. It includes the "hapax legomena," the coinages of the moment, as well as the much-used and often much-varied formulas and themes. Of special importance in the tradition are the singers of merit and the skilled performances of carefully composed songs and stories.

The great singers of the past, such as Homer, and of the recent present, as was Avdo Medjedović, part of whose song of the investiture and wedding of Meho we cited at some length earlier, sang traditional songs, and their renderings of them, of extraordinary quality, are traditional as well. There is no need to illustrate Homer's art, for it is well known, and I have just given an example of Avdo's. Within each of the traditions which they represent, that of ancient Greece and of Serbo-Croatian epic of this century, Homer and Avdo, different as their traditions may be, were preeminent artists and storytellers, and they both belonged in

living oral traditions. The point which I wish to make is that the tradition includes the very best in quality. The singer does not need to leave the tradition to produce a poem of the highest artistic value.

It is true, however, that there are differences between the aesthetics and poetics of oral literature and those of written literature, as well as shared qualities, and these must be kept in mind in judging their excellence. The repeated noun-epithet formulas in Homer as well as in other oral traditional narrative song, including South Slavic, belong to the poetics of oral traditional poetry, but not to that of written literature which tries to avoid repetitions. Translators of the Homeric poems into English vary the epithets in translation, because present-day usage finds the degree of repetition which they represent awkward. Our poetics is different in that respect from that of the oral traditional Homer. That fact has to be taken into consideration in our assessment of quality.

Moreover, tradition is not a thing of the past but a living and dynamic process which began in the past, flourishes in the present, and looks forward into the future as well. While it does not seek novelty for its own sake, it does not avoid the new in the life around it. In the *Odyssey* Phemius sang the newest songs for the suitors in Ithaka. Oral traditional literature tends to make the songs and stories from the past serve the goals of the present for the sake of the future. It is only when a tradition is dying that it begins to lose contact with the present and becomes a preserver of its own past rather than a continuator.

One speaks of "Homer Against His Tradition," or "Tradition and Design," or "Tradition and Spontaneity"<sup>5</sup> as if the singer has to fight something called tradition, or as if tradition had no design and lacked spontaneity. Put in that way, none of that is true. If tradition is conceived of as an inflexible body of thought, of formulas and themes, of songs in an established form, which is transmitted from one generation to the next, which accepts it in that form and in its turn hands it on, then those titles would have meaning. But tradition consists not only of a body of thought, formulas, and themes, but, equally importantly, tradition also embraces an *art* of composition, which has shaped the formulas and themes used to express that body of thought. It is this art which gives the traditional singer a design. He makes lines, he constructs themes, he composes songs in accordance with that design. The



tradition which he receives and in his turn transmits is a tradition of making lines, not one of merely reciting already fixed expressions, although there are some more or less stable formulas, which he makes his own by using them.

On the level of composing sentences in rapid song—in the case of singers of oral traditional epic—the art is an extension into the realm of art of the making of sentences in everyday speech. It is a tradition of constructing themes, not one of retailing memorized passages, although when the singer has formed a theme in the shape which he likes best, he tends to keep it more or less stable. One must add, however, that singers vary in the degree of variation they practice at each performance. It is, finally, a tradition of telling a story which the singer, or storyteller, has heard without a fixed text, and which he will himself reshape to his own design. The oral world is conservative and traditionalist, but its oral literary tradition includes training in the art of telling traditional stories, in learning to create an artistically structured and fittingly expressed narrative.

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What I have said about the art of composition of oral traditional narrative song seems to apply as well to traditional lyric and ritual songs. It has been thought that, because they are short, oral traditional lyric songs undergo less variation between performances than oral traditional epics. Their brevity would make them easier to memorize. But as I have analyzed both Serbo-Croatian oral traditional lyric poetry and some Latvian quatrains, I have discovered that they contain a more or less stable core of verses tied together by various kinds of what were later called rhetorical devices and surrounded by variant settings to which they are adapted. In her doctoral dissertation on Rumanian oral traditional songs, Dr. Margaret Hiebert Beissinger has pointed out a similar phenomenon in her material. It is to be noted that the “more or less” can be made specific within definable parameters if one has a sufficient body of variants. From the variants one can tell not only what variations are possible, but also exactly what variations have been used; they are, therefore, not what *could have been* used but what *have actually been* used. It is important to stress that this core does not argue the existence of a fixed text, but just as indicated, namely, “a more or less stable

core.” When we do not have a sufficient body of texts for comparison, it may seem that an oral text is repeated exactly.

It sometimes happens, however, that in spite of the existence of variants some scholars have interpreted the evidence as reflecting a fixed, memorized original. This is the case of J. D. Smith, formerly Lecturer in Sanskrit in the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, now of Cambridge University. In an article in 1977 he set forth the very instructive case of the Pabuji epic in the Indian state of Rajasthan. After demonstrating that the performed text of a couplet, which he terms as its “nuclear text,” adds word fillers to it in order to adjust it to the metrical and musical frame in which it is sung, he concludes (146ff.): “It is thus, remarkably enough, the case that the linear metrical text of the epic of Pabuji is not delivered as a text, either in song or in declamatory *arthav*, rather it is the foundation for the sung and spoken forms of words, and, like all true foundations, is wholly concealed by the edifice it supports.” He continues:

Be that as it may, the text exists, and it is easy to demonstrate that it exists in what is, in essence, a single unitary form memorized by all its performers. Naturally, there is quite wide variation in detail from singer to singer—considerably more than is normal among manuscripts of the same literary text, for example—yet careful comparison reveals that the similarities are far more profound than the divergences. Extracts (8) to (11) below are translated from recordings of four different performers, none of whom had ever met any of the others. All four passages describe. . . the same event: the giving of wedding-presents to Pabuji’s niece. In order to allow easy comparison between the four, two index-letters have been assigned to each line, a capital for the giver and a lower-case letter for the gift.

8. (Aa) As she ascended into the pavilion, Buro (her father) gave her a white cow;  
 (Bb) her Gahlot maternal uncle gave her (excellently-)moving elephants.  
 (Cc) Members of the wedding-procession had leaf-shaped rings made for her hands;  
 (Dd) Jesal had gold pendants made for her.  
 (Ee) Cado had a gold bracelet made out of gold for her;  
 (Ff) Dhebo promised her 1001b of pearls from the sea.  
 (Gg) Harmal son of Al clad her in fine garments;

9. (Aa) As she ascended into the pavilion, her father Buro gave her a white cow;  
 (Bb) her Gahlot maternal uncle gave her (excellently-)moving elephants.  
 (Hh) Ghurmal. . . had a horse-necklace for horses made for her;  
 (Di) Jesal had strings of bells for horses made for her.  
 (Gg) Harmal son of Al clad her in garments of *dikhani* cloth;  
 (Ff) Dhebo the opium-addict promised her 100lb of pearls from the sea.
10. (Aa) In the splendid pavilion her father gave her a white cow;  
 (Ij) her mother gave her a necklace, a necklace of nine strings for her throat.  
 (Jh) Her paternal uncle had a horse-necklace for her horses made for the girl;  
 (Bb) her Gahlot maternal uncle gave the girl (excellently-)moving elephants.  
 (Ee) Cado Vaghelo had a gold bracelet made out of gold for her;  
 (Ff) Dhebo promised her real pearls from the sea.  
 (Gg) Harmal Devasi clad her in a fine garment of *dikhani* cloth;  
 (Kd) Harmal's mother Bhim had a gold pendant made out of gold for the girl.
11. (Aa) As she ascended into the pavilion, her father Buro gave her a white cow 'by way of wealth';  
 (Bb) her maternal uncle gave as avuncular gifts (excellently-)moving elephants.  
 (Ee) Cado had a gold bracelet made out of gold and silver for her;  
 (Ff) Dhebo the opium-addict promised her 100lb of real pearls from the sea.  
 (Gg) Harmal Devasi clad her in a fine garment of *dikhani* cloth;  
 (Ld/j) her paternal grandmother (gave her) angular? pendants of nine strings.

Smith continues:

It need hardly be said that four narrative passages from four separate performers in which the divergences are so few and so slight cannot possibly result from improvisatory technique. . . . This degree of verbal resemblance typifies that to be found throughout the different recorded performances of the epic: substantial agreement tempered by some variation in order, in grammar, in the use of synonyms, etc. The epic text is essentially one and fixed: the singers have committed the entire tale to memory.

There is much more in the article, but the above will have to suffice. First, Smith and I have different views of what is meant by "improvisatory technique" and "memorization." Second, I do not agree with him on either the number or importance of the divergences. Third, I should like to adduce on my part some examples of similar passages from South Slavic oral traditional song, in order to demonstrate that a fixed text for memorization does not exist in such cases but only a "more or less stable core." A "more or less stable core" and a fixed memorizable text are not

the same thing.

Improvisation, in my view, is the opposite of memorization, which means a careful and conscious word-for-word recalling of a passage. I do not believe that his examples, fascinating and helpful as they are, are the result of memorization of a fixed text. It would be difficult, I believe, to say what that fixed text is. True, one could say that it would probably include (Aa) with “slight variations,” and (Bb), but one would not be certain where it would occur. (Cc) is found in only one of the four texts. Was it part of the original fixed text? It certainly was not memorized, if it was. (Ee), (Ff), and (Gg) with “slight variations” would probably be, I imagine, according to Smith, part of the original memorized text—at least until a performance is recorded which omits them. And so forth. Which text was “memorized?” Certainly not one of the four presented? No, it seems to me clear that there is no fixed original and that it was not memorized. His texts are splendid examples of a “more or less stable core” with variations such as I was speaking of a moment ago. I do not prefer to call this type of composition “improvisation,” because that term implies “being made up on the spur of the moment.” While it is true that the precise form of each performance may vary, it is not “made up” from scratch each time. There is a “more or less stable core,” as Dr. Smith has demonstrated, but certainly we should not equate a “more or less stable core,” which can be remembered, with a *fixed* text to be memorized!

Second, the divergences among the four texts are not as few as he has wanted us to believe. Leaving aside the order for the moment, we note that the maternal uncle gives the bride elephants in all four cases, but the paternal uncle appears only in one case, where he gives her a horse-necklace. In another text a horse-necklace is given her by Ghurmal. Her mother appears only in one text. Is there some significance in the fact that the mother and the paternal uncle seem to be ignored in the majority of the texts presented? The paternal grandmother occurs once, with a gift of pendants of nine strings. This gift is similar to the necklace of nine strings given the bride by her mother in text 10. How about the maternal grandmother? Why is she slighted? If this were a society in which family relationships are important and wedding gifts imply status, these divergences could indeed be significant. It could be dangerous to underestimate their possible implications for their traditional audience.

The example given by Dr. Smith is a type of catalogue or list of people, presumably relatives for the most part, and gifts. It may be useful to see a somewhat similar group of texts from South Slavic songs, in this case, lyric riddling songs.

Our example encompasses five variants of a riddling song. The stable parts consist of a series of questions and the answers to them. The settings of the questions and answers vary from song to song. Here are the questions and answers in A and B<sup>6</sup>:

A (lines 6-18)  
 “O, Bože, moj mili Bože,  
 Što li je šire od polja?  
 Što li je dublje od mora?  
 Što li je brže od konja?  
 Što li je sv’jetlje od mača?  
 Što li je milije od brata?”  
 To junak slusa i gleda.  
 “Djevojko, mlada, razumna!  
 Sad da te vadim iz uma.  
 Šire je more no polje.  
 Zmaje je brži od konja.  
 Sv’jetlje je sunce od mača.  
 Milij’ je dragi od brata.”

B (lines 6-18)  
 “Ustaj, Ano, da te nešto pitam!  
 Šta je šire od sinjega mora?  
 Šta je dulje od zelena polja?  
 Šta je brže od sivog sokola?  
 Šta je sladje od djulbe šečera?  
 Šta je draže od mile matere?”  
 Progovara plemenita Ana:  
 “Lako ti se mogu dosetiti.  
 Šire nebo od sinjega mora.  
 Dulje more od zelena polja.  
 Draži dragi od mile matere.  
 Brže oči od siva sokola.  
 Sladja draga od djulbe šečera.”

Here is a translation of the questions:

“O God, my dear God!  
 What is wider than a field?  
 What is deeper than the sea?  
 What is swifter than a horse?  
 What is brighter than a sword?  
 What is dearer than a brother?”  
 A hero listens and watches.  
 “O maiden, young, prudent.  
 Now I shall take you from your  
 mind(?)”

Arise, Ana, that I ask you something!  
 What is wider than the blue sea?  
 What is longer than a green field?  
 What is swifter than a gray falcon?  
 What is sweeter than rose sugar?  
 What is dearer than a dear mother?”  
 Noble Ana spoke:  
 “I can easily think of an answer.”

One of the differences between these two texts is that A is in octosyllables (3-2-3) and B is in decasyllables (4-6). Of the five questions asked in A, only four are answered. “Broader” (*šire*), “deeper” (*dublje*), and “swifter” (*brže*), in that order, form three of the five questions in both. “Dearer” (*milije*) in A is represented by *draže* in B and it characteristically ends the series. The fourth question is different in each—“brighter” (*sv’jetlje*) in A and “sweeter” (*sladje*) in B. Of the objects in the questions only “field” (*polje*) and “sea” (*more*) are found in both songs, but in reverse order. The object in the fifth question is always a member of the family—“brother” (*brat*) in A and “mother” (*mater*) in B.

“Swifter than a horse” (*brže od konja*) in A is matched by “swifter than a gray falcon” (*brže od siva sokola*) in B. “Brighter than a sword” (*sv’jetlje od mača*) in A and “sweeter than rose sugar” (*sladje od djulbe šečera*) in B have no counterparts in the other song. Some of these differences result from the difference of meters.

The answers vary more than the questions. In the following translations I have italicized the same or similar objects which are wider, deeper, swifter, brighter, sweeter, or dearer than another object.

A	B
The <i>sea</i> is wider than a <i>field</i> .	The sky is wider than the blue sea.
A snake is faster than a horse.	The <i>sea</i> is longer than a green <i>field</i> .
The sun is brighter than a sword.	<i>One’s beloved</i> is dearer than one’s dear mother.
<i>One’s beloved</i> is dearer than one’s brother.	The eyes are swifter than a gray falcon.
	<i>One’s beloved</i> is sweeter than sugar.

There is a feeling of “textuality” in the questions and answers sections of these two songs, that is, the singer has a sense that the song has a text. But it is clear that the text is not a fixed one. Let us look at the other three variants. First C<sup>7</sup>:

C (lines 19-29)	
“Seko moja, tico mekušica!	“My sister, bird of beauty!
Šta je brže od <i>konja</i> viteza?	What is swifter than a noble <i>horse</i> ?
Šta je šire od <i>mora</i> sinjega?	What is wider than the blue <i>sea</i> ?
Šta je bolje od djuli mehara?	What is better than a rose?
Šta je draže od oca i majke?”	What is dearer than father and mother?”
Njoj govori tica mekušica.	The bird of beauty answered her.
“Luda li si, seko lastavica!	“You are daft, sister swallow!
Brže <i>oči</i> od <i>konja</i> viteza.	The <i>eyes</i> are swifter than a noble <i>horse</i> .
Šire <i>nebo</i> od <i>mora</i> sinjega.	The <i>sky</i> is wider than the blue <i>sea</i> .
Bjelji snijeg od djuli mehara.	Snow is whiter than a rose.
Sladji <i>dragi</i> od oca i <i>majke</i> .”	<i>One’s beloved</i> is dearer than father and mother.”

I have italicized the elements found in the previous two variants. The order is different. The horse has an appositive/epithet. There is metathesis of noun and epithet in *mora sinjega* of this version with the more usual *sinjega mora* of the other two. The family members of the last question are “father and mother” rather than “brother” or “mother.” Only one line in the question and answer

series is different from the other two, and in the question part “better” (*bolje*) is inappropriate—a mistake, in fact—as the answer, “whiter” (*bjelje*), shows. In spite of these differences, the sense of textuality, of certain specific words, is strong in all three variants, but once again it would scarcely be possible that there exists a fixed original that the singer has memorized.

The last two variants are D and E<sup>8</sup>:

D (lines 3-15)

“Ah, mili Bože i dragi!  
 Ima 1’ što šire od mora?  
 Ima 1’ što duže od polja?  
 Ima 1’ što brže od konja?  
 Ima 1’ što sladje od meda?  
 Ima 1’ što draže od brata?”  
 Govori riba iz vode—  
 “Djevojko, luda budalo!  
 Šire je nebo od mora.  
 Duže je more od polja.  
 Brže oči od konja.  
 Sladji je šećer od meda.  
 Draži je dragi od brata.”

“Oh, dear and kind God!  
 Is anything wider than the sea?  
 Is anything longer than a field?  
 Is anything swifter than a horse?  
 Is anything sweeter than honey?  
 Is anything dearer than a brother?”  
 The fish spoke from the water—  
 “O maiden, innocent fool!  
 The sky is wider than the sea.  
 The sea is longer than a field.  
 The eyes are swifter than a horse.  
 Sugar is sweeter than honey.  
 One’s beloved is dearer than a brother.”

E (lines 10-20)

“Što je šire od mora sinjega?  
 Što 1’ je brže od konja viteza?  
 Što je milije od brata jednoga?”  
 Na grančici tica delkušica.  
 Te se ona mlada razgovara.  
 I od derta i od muhaneta.  
 Od srdaka jada velikoga—  
 “Bre ne luduj, tica sevdelijo!  
 Šire nebo od mora sinjega.  
 Brže oči od konja viteza.  
 Milij’ dragi od brata jedina.”

“What is broader than the blue sea?  
 What is swifter than a noble horse?  
 What is dearer than a brother?”  
 On the branch the bird of beauty.  
 The young one spoke  
 From sorrow and sadness,  
 From heart of great sorrow—  
 “Do not be daft, bird of love!  
 The sky is wider than the blue sea.  
 The eyes are swifter than a noble horse.  
 One’s beloved is dearer than an only  
 brother.”

D, it is to be noted, is octosyllabic and has five questions and answers, while E is decasyllabic and has only three. In the other texts of this song in Vuk, there is only one line between the two quotations, but E is an exception with four lines. On the other hand, the comparatives and the objects in E are to be found in

the other texts, each one of which, however, has some unique element. In D that element is “honey.”

There can be no doubt about a sense of textuality in these sections of the five variants, although it is abundantly clear that there is no fixed text for memorization. What we have, indeed, is a remembering of a number of “more or less stable” lines. The texts that we have seem to be the result of remembering known and used variables rather than of memorization of a non-existent fixed text.

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It would seem, then, that the adding style and the use of repetitions for ritual reference and elaboration as well as for composition are characteristic of oral traditional literature. Its traditionalism, another element emphasized by Father Ong, includes the highest quality of artistic form and aesthetic value, representing an art continuous from past to present and beyond, as long as the tradition lives. It is constantly creative, never merely memorizing a fixed entity, but even when one would perhaps expect otherwise, ever re-creating a new version of older forms and stories.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Parry Collection Text No. 677, written down from dictation by Nikola Vujnović, November 25, 1934 in Novi Pazar, lines 170-176. Unpublished.

<sup>2</sup>Parry Collection Text No. 650, written down from dictation by Nikola Vujnović, November 14, 1934 in Novi Pazar, lines 63-73. Unpublished.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted from Chickering 1977 (lines 569-72).

<sup>4</sup>Parry Text No. 6840, written down from dictation by Nikola Vujnović, July 5-12, 1935 in Bijelo Polje. The text has 12,311 lines. Published as *SCHS* 3-4 (lines 1615 ff).

<sup>5</sup>Respectively, Russo 1968, Bowra 1930, and Nagler 1974.

<sup>6</sup>Examples drawn from Mladenović and Nedić 1973: nos. 143, 144.

<sup>7</sup>From Karadžić 1935: no. 379.

<sup>8</sup>From Karadžić 1932: nos. 285, 286.



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## **The Complexity of Oral Tradition**

**Bruce A. Rosenberg**

In challenging a remark I had once made while presenting a paper at a professional meeting, a member of the audience said that he could demonstrate that there was no oral tradition in sixteenth-century Spain. To me this meant that the speaker had proof that people living on the Iberian Peninsula at that time never spoke to one another. Obviously, to him, “oral tradition” meant something else entirely. The very concept, the comprehension of such a mode of life, is alien to literates; and despite the writing done on the subject in recent decades by Walter Ong, Albert Lord, Ruth Finnegan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jack Goody (to name only a few), “Oral Tradition” is not a concept widely understood by professional educators, let alone agreed upon. This essay will outline some of the major research and thinking done on this subject to date, to provide a context for uni-disciplinary work now done. It will not announce a truth; it will describe what the author has in mind when speaking of this mode.

Although many Romantics were, for their own reasons, enthralled with the idea of savage nobility and its lifeworld, a world in which the complicating (and corrupting) products of technology had not yet been imposed, that simple (oral) society has not been easy to identify. In his *The Singer of Tales* (1960:137), Albert Lord laments the rise of literacy in the Yugoslavia where he and Milman Parry did so much of their fieldwork with the remark that printing had introduced the notion of the “fixed” text and that there were now very few singers “who have not been infected by this disease.” Their performances are reproductions rather than creations, Lord continues, and “this means death to oral tradition . . .” (*ibid.*). Anthropologists and folklorists would not agree, since much of their research on the subject indicates that rarely is a

society entirely oral (non-literate or pre-literate) or literate. The truth, as is usually the case with truth, is mixed.

Ruth Finnegan reminds us that some degree of literacy has been a feature of culture nearly all over the world for thousands of years (1977:23). In searching for a model culture in which to demonstrate the consequences of literacy, Jack Goody and Ian Watt (Goody 1968:27-68) had to reject nearly every society of their acquaintance, certainly those of the "Third World," before deciding on classical Greece. They found that initially they had to "reject any dichotomy based upon the assumption of radical differences between the mental attributes of literate and non-literate peoples" (44). Finnegan's basic point, and mine, is that oral and literate societies exist in a continuity, not a dichotomy, as do their lyrics and narratives. The two kinds of society, if one can even speak of "kinds," are not purely separate:

They shade into each other both in the present and over many centuries of historical development, and there are innumerable cases of poetry which has both "oral" and "written" elements. The idea of pure and uncontaminated "oral culture" as the primary reference point for the discussion of oral poetry is a myth (Finnegan 1977:24).

She sagely warns that nearly all of the (oral) Third World cultures have been exposed, in varying degrees, to the influence of literacy (1977:23); the line between oral and written literature, if there ever was one, is now hopelessly blurred. Linguists, measuring the amount of detail, direct quotation, sound and word repetition, syntactic parallelism, and so forth, conclude that written imaginative literature uses aspects of spoken language (e.g., Tannen 1982:18) and may be qualitatively indistinguishable. Finnegan was writing to argue with the Parry-Lord enthusiasts, but the point must not be disregarded out of that context. Purely oral folk probably cannot be identified and studied today, but certain conclusions about orality are nevertheless possible, and some descriptions of oral literature can be made.

Philosophers such as Father Ong have tried to re-create what the world of the non-literate must be like and though his work is somewhat speculative, his insights are extremely valuable. Our difficulty is suggested, for instance, by the necessity of using the locution "oral literature." "Literature" means that which is

written; the addition of “oral” makes the compound an oxymoron. The whole matter of orality is intricate anyway—do we mean orally composed, orally transmitted, or orally performed?—and “oral literature” denies the priority of orality as a communication mode. Just as the early typewriters were “writing machines” and the first automobiles were “horseless carriages,” we have created the back-formation, “oral literature.” The difference between “horseless carriages” and “oral literature” is that the horse did “come” first, while writing did not precede oral communication. The term “illiterate,” only slightly more so than “pre-literate,” gives a primacy and a normality to “literate”; to be illiterate is to lack something. Literacy has become so much the norm that we no longer think of “oral tradition” as redundant, though “tradition” originally meant transmission by word of mouth or by custom. Instead of the paradox “oral literature,” I have coined “Oralature,” employing both “oral” and a suffix implying language which is ordered for an aesthetic purpose. This neologism, for whatever reason, has not taken hold.

Goody and Watt note that even in the most literate cultures “the transmission of values and attitudes in face-to-face contact” (1968:58-59) is oral. They find this desirable in some instances, citing the conservative influence of primary groups whose oral communication is more realistic in its attitudes than are commercial media, particularly television. It has long been appreciated that in literate cultures the most important aspects of life are communicated orally.

Melville Jacobs (1971:212) tells us that in the societies he analyzed everyone participated in the tribe’s “literary” heritage, unlike the situation in ours. Myths retold within the community contained many apostrophic pontifications which established the truth and strength of the community’s convictions. The goals of some folklorists in their study of oralatures is not distantly removed from the aims of some literary critics; oralature is the expression of a people—to some extent this is also true of the written art which is familiar to us—and not that of a few geniuses (121).

All of the verbal elements in culture—literate and non-literate, but especially the latter—are transmitted by a long chain of interlocking face-to-face conversations between members of the group. All beliefs and values are related orally, face-to-face, and are held in human memory. Writing, and other components

of a material tradition, are ideal for preserving data, but do not lend themselves so cogently to the assertion of a culture's values. Oral traditions are both more specific and less ambiguous communication, because the speaker reinforces his or her specificity of meaning with gesture, expression, intonation, and so on, and various self-correcting mechanisms of which fixed print is incapable. Conrad's narrator in *Under Western Eyes* comments that "words, as is well-known, are the great foes of reality" (1963:1). Nevertheless we can speak of print's stability; the fixity of print does give the relative stability of meaning to words (or tries to), while oral folk ratify the meaning of each word "in a succession of concrete situations" (Goody 1968:29). The vocabulary of non-literates is small, commonly around five thousand words, as opposed to about seven or eight times that for a college-educated Western European or American; but in oral society there is much less disagreement about denotation and connotative usages. Words acquire and retain their meanings from their existential setting (Ong 1982:47).

While literature has made many aspects of culture available to a very great proportion of society's members, the impersonality of print has also made culture easy to avoid. Print removes a portion of learning from that immediate chain of personal confrontations. In an oral culture the aged are the repositories of a culture's wisdom; the elderly can be discounted somewhat in modern technological society, not so much because of rapid changes in successive waves of the "future," but because wisdom is available in books. Plato had argued that the wisdom of writing was superficial; no give and take of cross-examination and responses was possible. If the reader questions a written proposition, there can be no response, no defense. A book can be put aside; it may never be opened at all. Discussion, argument, and oral deliberation are not easily side-stepped in face-to-face situations. Some Indian philosophers (see Goody 1968:12-13) were suspicious of book knowledge (it is not operative and fruitful), and knowledge that was not acquired from teachers was suspect. Be that as it may, the impact of writing (and later, print) has been incalculable. It universalized the Italian Renaissance, helped to implement the Reformation, made capitalism possible (Eisenstein 1979). Print established the grammarian's canon of correctness.

Objectifying words in print, and especially in dictionaries, makes them and their meanings vulnerable to intensive and

prolonged scrutiny. They—words—are impossible to fix. Durrell (1961:65) has complained about “as unstable” a medium as words. But this is no more than Chaucer had done; language changes in time, across distance, shifting as does mood. Dictionaries eventually become obsolete, yet during the era of their viability individual thought is fostered by them. The solitary, introspective reader is the polar opposite of the gregarious participant in an oral culture; yet both are, in these extreme images, heuristically symbolic. Nevertheless there is much measurable truth in this polar abstraction; the conservatism inherent in oral cultures militates against the individuation that writing and private reading foster. The ties in traditional societies tend to be between persons; in literate cultures the ties are complicated by abstract notions of rules, “by a more complicated set of complementary relationships between individuals in a variety of roles” (Goody and Watt 1968:62).

While contrasting these polarities, it is well to remember, once again, that we can only deal (safely) with tendencies, shades, and degrees, since an entirely oral culture, unaffected by writing or the influence of literacy, is a rare phenomenon. When sociolinguist Deborah Tannen summarizes the results of research comparing the relation of events, as narratives, by ethnic group (cited in Shiffrin 1981:960-61), it is not the same thing as comparing literate with non-literate groups. Greeks used verbal strategies associated with oral traditions, while Americans invoked those of literate traditions. But the claim could never be made that Greece is a pre-literate culture, or that even in its most remote fastnesses its citizens are untouched by print. Nevertheless, we want to be able to describe, however speculatively and uncertainly, the nature of an oral tradition, difficult as that is. Finnegan (1977:259) wrote a paragraph refuting some of the excesses of Marshall McLuhan’s overgeneralizations about orality, commenting that “a full refutation would inevitably fill a book.” She chose to cite McLuhan’s claims of the relative passivity and democratic ethos of oral cultures, noting the “aristocratic and aggressive ethos of the Zulu king Shaka” and the intensely meditative poetry of the Eskimos.

One of the innately appropriate uses of literacy is the compilation and preservation of data sets: lists, modern economic systems, capitalist or socialist, could not exist without literacy. Complicated accounting procedures (and ones not so complicated at that) and the storage of resultant data demand writing. So do

records, files, bookkeeping, diaries, and the calculations stimulated by these procedures. Worker's wage and tax records are stored by the hour, day, week, or year; chronology, as typified by our dependence on the calendar, precise dating, and precise sequences must all have writing, if not print. So too with histories and other records of the past, in fact the very notion of the past as a series of datable events that happened then—all depend on writing. Ong argues that writing was invented in order to make lists (1982:99):

Indeed, writing was in a sense invented largely to make something like lists: by far most of the earliest writing we know, that in the cuneiform script of the Sumerians beginning around 1500 BC, is accountkeeping. Primary oral cultures commonly situate their equivalent of lists in narrative, as in the catalogue of the ships and captains in the *Iliad* (ii. 461-879)—not an objective tally but an operational display in a story about a war. In the text of the Torah, which set down in writing thought forms still basically oral, the equivalent of geography (establishing the relationship of one place to another) is put into a formulary action narrative (Numbers 33:16 ff.): “Setting out from the desert of Sinai, they camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. Setting out from Hazeroth, they camped at Rithmah. . .”, and so on for many more verses. Even genealogies out of such orally framed tradition are in effect commonly narrative. Instead of recitation of names, we find a sequence of “begats,” of statements of what someone did.

Such sets occur in oral narrative for several reasons. The narrator in oral traditions is inclined to use the mnemonically useful formula, does not mind redundancy, is inclined to exploit balance (the repetition of the simple subject-predicate-object aids recall). The narrative context is far more vivid than a mere list; as Ong neatly puts it, “the persons are not immobilized as in a police line-up, but are doing something—namely begetting” (99).

Not to dispute those pious scholars and laymen who believe that Scripture is literally true in a sense that would be comprehensible to a literate historian, but oral traditions are rarely accurate with the precision of those who keep written records. This is one of its strengths. Useless data are forgotten in an oral tradition, while remembered phenomena are updated—made

consistent with current beliefs and attitudes. Jack Goody tells the story (1968:33) of Gonja myths (of northern Ghana) at the beginning of this century which explained the seven political subdivisions in terms of the founder and his seven sons, each of whom succeeded to the paramountcy in turn following the father's death. Fifty years later two of these subdivisions had been absorbed, for one reason or another, and British anthropologists collecting in the area found that the myths now described the founder and his five sons. The geneologies were altered to fit the facts of political reality during a half-century of serial remembering of etiological legends. And, Goody concludes, a similar process will transmute other elements of culture, even sacred lore, such as myths.

Literate societies do not and cannot alter their past as can an oral culture, or at least not in the same way:

Instead, their members are faced with permanently recorded versions of the past and its beliefs; and because the past is thus set apart from the present, historical enquiry becomes possible. This in turn encourages scepticism; and scepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole (Goody 1968:67-68).

Hence the literate's suspiciousness, that is, the academic's suspiciousness, of orality and oral tradition. Oral literature is respectable (with a very few exceptions) only if it has come down to us in manuscript form.

Research in this area, it will come as no surprise, has been hard to come by. Anthropologists with linguistic expertise are available, but the purely oral society is not. Much of the work of American linguists on orality has thus been necessarily on speech among Americans, none of whom have been non- or pre-literates. It is not the same thing; but it is the only research that has been done. Deborah Tannen summarized much of the work conducted to date in a recent article in *Language*; some of her observations are nonetheless pertinent here, since the similarities between written and oral discourse (of literature) are demonstrated (1982:2-16).

She found that literary discourse is not substantially different from "ordinary conversation," but is actually quite similar to it. Using features traditionally felt to be literary—sound patterning, word repetition, and so forth—she coincidentally argued against



those who still believe that oral qualities are detectable when such a performance is fixed in textual form. The speakers interviewed by Labov (1972) in his now seminal research used both oral and literate strategies in spoken discourse; one might well argue that rather than being “natural,” Labov’s informants were probably influenced in their narrative constructions by the conventions of our literary heritage. The influence of literacy is impossible to escape in our society; in primary classrooms the discourse of children was analyzed and found to be a preparation for literacy.

Recent sociolinguistic research confirms that storytelling in conversation is based on “audience participation in inferred meaning” (Tannen 1982:4); among Clackamas tales, episodic transitions are sparse—sometimes just a morpheme—the audience filling in the details (Jacobs 1971:213). The effect of conversation, and narrative in conversation, involves and moves the auditor(s). Labov found that ordinary conversation shows a much more complex structure than oral narratives. In research that compared oral narratives with written versions by the same informant, the oral renderings were more expressive, the written stories more content-focused. Writing compacts narrative, integrating its verbal units more tightly. Yet when informants were asked to write imaginative prose—a “short story”—the result was lengthier; written imaginative literature combines the facility of involvement of spoken language with the integrative quality of writing. Lakoff has shown that many features of ordinary conversation are also in popular contemporary writing (cited in Tannen 1982:4). Parallelism and intonations thought to be basic in poetry are also basic in face-to-face conversation. And further assimilating the two styles—if there are two—is the finding of researchers that informants’ written versions of stories used alliteration and assonance, traits associated with orality. Yet, for our purposes—a description of an oral tradition in a non-literate society—the above conclusions are at best tangential, useful mainly in discussion of orally derived text-literature. They show how speech affects our writing and vice versa; and that is not the same as the situation in a traditional society.

Oral tradition is the transmission of cultural items from one member to another, or others. Those items are heard, stored in memory, and, when appropriate, recalled at the moment of subsequent transmission. Several disciplines—anthropology and folklore, but sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics as well can shed

light on such a situation—attempt to describe a world, one which participants of a literate world can barely begin to imagine. In an off-handed line, Levi-Strauss comments that “ethnology is first of all psychology” (1966:131).

Memory, to repeat, is a vital human process in transmission. Psychologists break this down to four functioning categories: verbatim, gist, episodic, and general memory. Verbatim memory is the least frequently used in the lifeworld, certainly in oral traditions, though it is not unheard of. Passages are remembered by piecing together retrievable data, and then by giving them coherence by filling them out with supplementary information; it has been shown that people listen for meaning unless otherwise motivated, and not for verbatim wording (Clark and Clark 1977:134). We all assume that Albert Friedman was right when he wrote that memorization is the basic vehicle of oral tradition (cited in Finnegan 1971:53), but that memory is not a simple phenomenon. It is not a reduplicative process, for instance, but a procedure of creative reconstruction.

Memory for prose—written, alas, in Clark and Clark’s cited experiment, and not transmitted orally—depends primarily on four factors: the type and style of the language to be passed on; the situation of the listener at input; the interval of retention; and the circumstances and purposes of the output. Once again, though these conclusions about the influence on oral transmission were deduced from experiments with literate subjects, they seem to be largely true of transmission in general.

Controlled experiments have demonstrated the ability of long-term memory to store verbatim forms alone. Herbert and Eve Clark (1971:136) refer to those Hausa-speaking Nigerians who have memorized the Koran and who do not know any classical Arabic. The ability is not at all rare. Somali poets commonly memorize their poems, even those that take several evenings for a complete recital (Finnegan 1977:74). She also reports that memorization was centrally involved in the recitation of Cambian epics of *Sinjata*, and that Ruandan and South African praise poems are usually memorized. When Finnegan leaves Africa, where she has done so much fieldwork, she is on slightly less firm turf; the 40,000-line *Rgveda* is cited, composed more than a millennium before the birth of Christ, and said to have been transmitted verbatim (1977:122, 135). But this judgment has recently been questioned, since it is thought that the transmitters of the *Rgveda*

may have occasionally consulted manuscripts for accuracy. Such a theory would bear out the report of Clark and Clark that memory for verbatim wording is rapidly lost, and over the long haul what is retained is the meaning.

But, although illiterates do try for verbatim repetition (Ong 1982:62), they seldom achieve it, except in short genres, and in the rare cases cited above. Jacobs reported that his informants probably transmitted their older myths with “something close” to phrase and sentence memorization, in “some if not all episodes” (1971:268). But his diachronic experience with the Clackamas was limited, and he really could not be sure.

Parry had defined the formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” (1930:80). For many of his disciples the phrase “regularly employed” came to mean “repeatedly employed.” For Lord, Magoun, Duggan, and others, formulicity became an indisputable sign of oral composition. And we all now concede that the most marked trait of orature is repetition—of some sort. Yet there is no universality of opinion about those aspects of the formula that must be repeated in order to “qualify”; metrical, syntactical, and semantic elements have all been considered, but vary in varying oralatures. Even the length of a putative formula is questioned: linguist H. L. Rogers (1966) questioned the failure of literary scholars to define with satisfactory precision any of the components of Parry’s formula. Joseph Russo (1976) argues that a fuller and more rigorously analyzed sample of Homeric verse might not support the claims for a higher formulaic content in the epics, and that the overall level of formulicity might prove to be little higher than that assumed for literary texts. Further research has not borne out Russo’s suspicions, and despite all the modifications and reservations expressed about the oral-formulaic theory, Milman Parry did make us aware of that characteristic of oral narrative, the repetitive formula, however and in whatever way repetitive. Repetition may not be the “touchstone” of oral poetry (Finnegan 1977:130), but it occurs so often that Ong can meaningfully speak of “the oral drive to use formulas” (1982:99).

Formulas, of whatever sort, are memory aids almost entirely. Too much has been made of the audience’s liking for familiar language because of its comforting aspects; it is more likely that aural participants in orature performances like formulas and familiarity of plot because they can participate more than passively,

not as active performers, but neither merely receptively like modern hushed audiences at a poetry reading. Experiments have shown that listeners filter out what they consider to be errors (many traditional audiences will correct errors as they occur, aloud); the auditor stores in memory only what is thought to be correct, or what is thought was intended. Passages are relatively easy to memorize if they are meaningful, and in the listener's native language. Grammaticality is also important, as is brevity; rhyme is an aid to memorization, as is metricality (Clark and Clark 1971:138-41).

In memory people store kernel sentences and the necessary notation that will account for a transformation when the sentences are recalled; the process of output "makes note" of the necessary transformations and appropriately transforms the stored kernel sentence. American speakers, at least—those from whom these results were observed—are biased toward active sentences in memory, and to subject priority. There seems to be also a preference for an "order-of-mention-contract," supporting Labov's thesis that recalled personal experiences are related with a chronology that matches that of the actual events. The comparative is easier to remember (over the equative), as are positive statements over negative ones.

Inferences are stored, and when recalled, often mistaken for their inferences in the original sentence. A major source of confusion is people's inclination to integrate new information with that of their world knowledge before storing; at recall it is often difficult to remember which pieces of information were acquired when. All known facts regarding a single entity are clustered around a "single point," and that organization controls recall (Clark and Clark 1971:156-60). Thus, Jacobs (1971:249 ff.) found that his Clackamas stories and myths did not explain nature, people, or customs; explicitness was unnecessary because certain memory cues in the narrative would evoke the relevant message. In such a traditional society, just the titles of stories were sufficient to explain the plot to the audience. Everyone participated in the tribe's literary heritage, so that the meaning of each narrative was effectively conveyed to all members briefly and without the sense of moralizing.

Information at the instant of input is made consonant with the listener's "global representation" of reality; and, as noted, in a traditional society that global representation will more closely

represent group values and attitudes than in a literate one. Recall will reflect this construction, even if it is inaccurate or wrong. Memory is reconstructive in any case. But the individual's global representations, made at the moment of input, have already shaped the information according to his or her background and experience, so that the recalled product may be relatively divorced from the original source of information (Clark and Clark 1971:164). The same phenomenon occurs during the communicative process of stories. Listeners build global representations of elements of the heard narratives, with the results (sharpening, leveling, rationalization) described by Bartlett (1932).

The Finns codified the kinds of "mistakes" ("variations" is more objective and is actually much closer to the evaluative truth of the situation) which they found in their field experience. In songs, single verses or groups of them are displaced, while some segments are dropped altogether. Forgetting was increasingly frequent when the performer was outside his or her community or family, another evidence of the stabilizing role of an informed traditional audience. Details superfluous to "the main theme" are the first to disappear from a narrative. Specific traits may be generalized and specified, the result of partial recall loss; or details may be repeated or expanded (Krohn 1971:66, 56-72).

All of these processes conspire to alter the details in the transmission of narratives (as of ordinary facts), to get it "wrong." Stories in our culture are goal-oriented (Clark and Clark 1971:170), and even though many of the details are altered in transmission, the goals of the narrative tend to be preserved. That leaves a great deal of room for variation; and it is another demonstration of the fragility of interpreting traditional narratives from the text alone. Stories may be shortened by reducing causative agents, initiators, and enabling events, with no loss of meaning to an experienced audience, as Jacobs found. Yet such a truncated story would seem to bear little relation to an analogue distended with detail, compared on the basis of transcriptions alone.

Rumelhart (1977) found that the listeners he observed structured their own hierarchies of heard stories, and their recall was determined by this structure. Those aspects so ordered were setting, event, action, change of state, the internal and overt responses of characters, and so on. Listeners arranged these components when they formed, at input, their own global representations of the story. In recall, this hierarchy was

reconstructed. The classic psycholinguistic study of the effect of memory on storytelling is Bartlett's, often cited by folklorists but always with qualifications. And rightly so; Bartlett's subjects were Cambridge University students, not the homogeneous group one finds in a traditional society. The narratives were transmitted to each student in writing, not orally. And the narratives used in these experiments were not native to the students, but, as nearly all have remarked, somewhat strange and exotic. Consequently, the Cambridge students made many more alterations in transmitting these tales than would be true of the native transmission of familiar material. For instance, Bartlett noted the tendency to rationalize certain magical or otherwise supernatural elements; but this is just what we would expect from students at Cambridge University who were relating an unfamiliar story filled with magical elements in which they did not believe.

In recent years reader-oriented criticism has stressed the role of the receiver in the aesthetic transaction. In oral tradition the listener is even more important in several respects, certainly important in understanding the oral tradition itself. Since Lord we have all become aware of the oral poet's instant responses to his oral audience, and to his flexibility in reacting to them. If the performance is not going well, the reciter usually has several techniques for livening audience interest (more dramatic gesture, more engaging expression, more eye contact); or he can abbreviate the performance, cutting his losses. The writer has no such audience awareness. In some societies the group involves itself quite actively, as in Hawaiian oral poetry where the composition is collaborative, insuring a precise transmission of traditional materials (Finnegan 1977:85-86). Melville Jacobs (1971:211) likens an oral performer to a Western actor, the performance to theater, not a brilliant or an original metaphor, but one that usefully describes the situation. It is a theater where the audience is free to correct the performer. The older Clackamas listeners made corrections of phrases and even specific words during the recital of myths. And at story recitals a full discussion of the plot (both during and after recitals) is usual; interruptions were by a theorizing and fantasizing audience (269). The same happens among the Somali, who feel free to correct "faulty" renderings of known poems (Finnegan 1977:74-75). In brief, much more so than with written poetry, an oral audience's aesthetics reflect the purpose and effect of the poem.

One of the American folk preachers whose performances I recorded for my own research in a domestic oral tradition of formulaic composition (1970:103-4) was instantly able to correct errors he had just made in his own performance; the correction formulas of Rev. Rufus Hays appeared to be spontaneous, and not pre-formed such as the one Finnegan notes during the singing of Yoruba hunter's songs. In the latter situation other expert singers may be present, and if they feel that a mistake has been made they will interrupt the singer with some such formula as, "You have told a lie, you are hawking loaves of lies. . . listen to the correct version now. . . Your version is wrong. . ." (Finnegan 1977:232).

Edson Richmond once remarked to me that folklore was everything that didn't get communicated when an oral performance is transcribed. The performance situation is vital; it throbs. Lord (1960) noted that when his *guslari* dictated their poems the meter—the meter of the rapid oral communication—broke down and that nearly all elements of the performance were affected. Jacobs noted the same among his informants (1971:221). Linguists have found that when subjects are asked to write out versions of stories they have been reciting orally, the written versions are different also: more compact and more integrated (Tannen 1982:8).

The best stories, oral as well as written (as many think), say the least while evoking the most.<sup>1</sup> In oral traditions brief statements are often evocative of a substantial recall. Narratives that allow the audience a maximum of imaginative creativity are the most successful (Jacobs 1971:21). In this way the auditors participate in the performance in a creative way; they feel as though they are a creative part of the performance in active, participatory ways that the reader is not. Repetitive language enables an audience to anticipate not only the narrative elements to come, but the phrasing as well. Empowered to criticize, oral/aural audiences are genuinely part of the performance, creatively and not merely passively.

Axel Olrik's famous "epic laws" of oralature are both well enough known not to need repeating here, but must at this point be cited, at least in outline.<sup>2</sup> Olrik observed, to condense greatly, that oral narratives do not begin or end abruptly, but move from calm to excitement (and vice versa at their conclusion); threes, in repetitions, in the numbers of characters and events and in details, abound, and have for millennia in the West; only two characters

appear in one scene at any time (if more, only two speak at one time); the oral narrative is polarized as to character types and plot genre<sup>3</sup>; twins violate this “law,” as though weakened, and are unable to occupy a major role in the action—when they do they are subject to the “law of contrast”; folk narrative is comprised of tableaux scenes, has a unity of plot, and concentrates on a leading character (as summarized in Dundes 1965:131-41).

In a more general way, thinking in an oral culture takes place in mnemonic patterns, “shaped for ready oral occurrence” (Ong 1982:34). The oral style of discourse is more focused, slower-moving, frequently redundant. Oral poetry tends to be additive rather than being organized by subordination (*ibid.*:37-40). The characters in such narratives are noticeably “heavy” character types, rarely three-dimensional, and monumental<sup>4</sup>; their creators strive to make them memorable. Oral cultures do not organize long, climactic narratives; climactic plots are not natural, do not conform with events in the lifeworld (*ibid.*:70, 143). Yet oral narratives can be lengthy (narratives quite aside from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, whose “oralness” needs several pages of qualification and explanation); Stith Thompson singles out “vagabonds” as individuals who often “string out their stories to an inordinate length,” while some tellers elaborate their tales to an extraordinary degree while keeping “the old general pattern” (1977:451-52).

Keeping to the “general” pattern is the most exact mode that nearly all oral transmitters are capable of. Precision, as already noted, is a product of writing. An oral culture cannot deal in geometric figures, abstract categorization, or formal logic; and illiterates cannot organize “elaborate concatenations of causes” (Ong 1982:55-57). It is print that fosters tight and intricate plotting, such as we take for granted in the detective story and the spy novel. Goody and Watt similarly observe:

The same process of dissection into abstract categories, when applied not to a particular argument but to the ordering of all the elements of experience into separate areas of intellectual activity, leads to the Greek division of knowledge into autonomous cognitive disciplines which has since become universal in Western culture and which is of cardinal importance in differentiating literate and non-literate cultures (Goody 1968:54).



Inaccuracy and reduced intellectual performance (of certain analytic processes) occasionally deplored by cerebral literates are certainly present. Yet much of the contempt felt by literates for the unlettered is not justified. Lévi-Strauss has shown how some of the most important aspects of “the savage mind” (1966) are merely differently coded expressions of the same fundamental thoughts of sophisticated cultures; “savage mind” (*la pensée sauvage*) is in itself an ironic statement intended by the author, since savages are not, popularly, supposed to have sophisticated thought at all. Yet, not only do totemic societies evolve cerebrally intricate structures; they also reflect on the nature of poetry (Finnegan 1977:236).

Economic development as well as literacy does not seem to influence the flourishing of poetry; among certain Polynesian societies praise poems are felt to belong to certain families, and at times a member’s claim to rank may depend upon his power to reproduce, “letter-perfect,” his family chants and his “name song.” Many oral poets are among their society’s elite. Among the Clackamas upper class, life is depicted in the poems of the oral tradition (Jacobs 1971:176).

Ong concludes *Orality and Literacy* with the remarks that while no one wants to advocate illiteracy, and while every oral culture in his knowledge wants to acquire the ability to read once it has been exposed to the possibility, oral cultures have produced “creations beyond the reach of literates, for example, the *Odyssey*” (175). The list should be extended; and it could be extended to include those written works which have also enjoyed an extensive oral currency: Marlowe’s “Come Live With Me and Be My Love” and Raleigh’s reply were printed anonymously on broadsheets, and were sung (as were many poems) by broadside street peddlers. The poems of Burns are still recited aloud today. Writing co-exists peacefully with orality; it is not its executioner.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Although linguists define literate strategies as supplying maximal background information and “connective tissue” (e.g., Tannen 1982:3).

<sup>2</sup>For a general account, see Dundes 1965:129-41.

<sup>3</sup>Ong (1982:45) observes that oral culture is full of praise as well as vituperation, reflecting polarization.

<sup>4</sup>Ong (1982:152) insists that round characters are not possible.

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**Man, Muse, and Story:  
Psychohistorical Patterns in  
Oral Epic Poetry**

**John Miles Foley**

I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only  
But of many generations  
T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages"

Early studies of oral epic literature, that is, of epic literature composed without the aid of writing within a continuous tradition of some antiquity, focused quite logically and understandably on the somewhat mysterious mechanics of a totally unfamiliar process.<sup>1</sup> Scholars strained at the intellectual bit in an effort to explain how this only quasi-literary phenomenon of letterless composition—which seemed even to defy the etymology of “literature” from Latin *littera* or letter—could have come about, how this practice of oral poem-making could have been carried on throughout the long and unremitting Dark Ages before the advent of alphabets and writing materials. Fieldwork in Yugoslavia and elsewhere has provided some notion of the mechanics involved, and analytical techniques have exposed aspects of particular kinds of structures we have come to know as “oral.” Much more and more careful analysis is yet to be done as we begin to understand that oral literature is, if anything, more complex and varied than its written heir, so that the romantic notion of two entirely discrete worlds—the primitive “oral” and the sophisticated “lettered”—is every day less accurate. What is more, we are starting to absorb the remarkable truth that not just some but all literary traditions

begin with an oral phase that customarily dwarfs the written phase in its longevity.

With the recognition of the primary place of orality at the root of literary traditions, we are at present entering a “second growth” in studies of oral tradition. This second growth, concerned as it is with modalities of *interpretation* rather than strictly of *description*, promises to have permanent and far-reaching effects on the understanding of some of our most cherished texts; already, for example, crucially important studies of this sort have appeared on the Gospels (Kelber 1983) and the Homeric epics (e.g., Havelock 1963, 1982), and many more such works are in preparation. This shifting of emphasis from simple description of oral traditional works to the manifold and challenging problems of their interpretation is due in large part to the brilliantly innovative writings of Walter J. Ong, whose published oeuvre represents not only a major new direction in oral literature research (a discipline that now affects more than 100 separate language areas) but also, as scholars abroad have already recognized, one of the chief contributions the twentieth century has made to the progress of humanistic learning. For this achievement all of us who came to Rockhurst College in July 1985 to take part in the symposium devoted to his work are profoundly, and permanently, in his debt.

Especially since his landmark study *The Presence of the Word* in 1967, Ong’s ideas on the storage and retrieval of culturally significant information have gained wide support among an increasingly diverse group of scholars committed to the study of the world’s oral traditions. Telegraphically put, both Ong and another of the authors in this volume, Eric Havelock, understand the oral epic, such as the ancient Greek *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as a repository for cultural attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs. A member of an oral society cannot turn to a shelf of reference books for such information—first because a library of this conventional kind does not exist but more fundamentally because modern categories such as generosity, honor, truth, and beauty that would be memorialized therein do not exist as uncontextualized abstractions. Rather, this sort of vital information is embedded or inscribed in the stories that circulate orally, that are told time and time again, that pass from one generation to the next and from one place to the next without the inevitable barriers set up by a literate society. To know the story is to know its content: the guest-host exchange of Homeric society as epitomized in the

*Odyssey*, for example, is part of the story told and retold, and of the story remembered; the Catalog of Ships in Book 2 of the *Iliad* recalls an ancient muster list; the raft-building episode in the *Odyssey*, Book 5, fossilizes instructions on how to construct a raft. Nor was Greek society of the Homeric Age alone in using stories as a master filing system for its ideas and data; a number of investigators have observed the same process firsthand in various African societies. But no matter what the specific tradition or the nature of the information encoded, the knowledge embodied becomes available to all present at an oral epic performance precisely because it constitutes part of the story. In the continuous flow of the narrative—and not in the analytical, decontextualized abstractions that populate reference books—are embedded such traditional pearls of wisdom.

Oral epic thus keeps the wisdom of what the Anglo-Saxon oral poets called the “wordhoard” close at hand, maintaining a grasp on the accumulated knowledge of the society not by holding it at a distance via deposit in a library or archive but by keeping alive the story or cycle of stories that serves as its medium. As Ong has said in *Orality and Literacy*, “in the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings” (1982:42). Furthermore, since knowledge is in essence story, and since the very mode of knowing is therefore narrative,<sup>2</sup> one cannot speak with any accuracy of individual, static parts, passages, or characters in the holistic experience of oral epic. The actions and values associated with a hero accumulate to that hero by virtue of his enacted and re-enacted mythic history; he is both complete in any one manifestation and forever becoming complete, because his identity is inscribed in the dynamic of story which is known but can never end. Ong has often spoken of knowledge being centered around such “heavy” characters as Achilles, Odysseus, or Nestor, and neither the knowledge nor the character who serves as encoder of that knowledge can live outside the continuous present of narrative. Such is the phenomenology of the oral epic medium, then: it is complete extratextually by reference to the tradition that constitutes the prior experience of the poet and audience, and it is correspondingly incomplete

intratextually without reference to the “story” that lies outside of the present act and instance of storytelling. In this way the fundamental mode of oral epic is ritualistic, quite the opposite of more modern, literate forms like the original and self-contained stories told in novels.<sup>3</sup>

Let us take as twin exordia, then, the idea of oral epic as encyclopedia and the realization that the knowledge which that encyclopedia contains is not inert, decontextualized fact but ever-dynamic story, and let us attempt an extrapolation of Ong’s and Havelock’s premises toward what I feel is a natural conclusion. For if the oral epic can encode information as relatively distant from the human life-world as raft-building and muster lists, it would seem much more likely to be able to describe within the process of narrative less ostensibly practical but finally more crucial kinds of knowledge. To put it quite directly, it is the drama of psychological maturation—the record a culture maintains not about its things, events, and beliefs but about the secrets of the human psyche in its development from birth to adulthood—that is acted out in the story-form of oral epic. Modern psychology in its many avatars has established the importance of psychoanalytic patterns in the literary texts of our post-oral, post-traditional age, and most scholars have little difficulty with interpreting the complementary narratives of, say, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos* and D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* as in part reflexes of a common ontogenic myth. Of course, each represents far more than a simple dramatization of the Oedipal story, and we seldom find much of a consensus on exactly which particular school of psychoanalysis is most apposite for treatment of the root story’s essentials. But no one doubts the mythic power of the psychohistorical underlay; in each case the author has for a brief narrative moment harnessed the tremendous energy inherent in the mythic-psychological pattern and involved his audience in a universal drama whose *dramatis personae*, central conflict, and *dénouement* we all know firsthand.

And if written, post-traditional literature can harness this energy, why not oral tradition? In fact, the oral traditional medium would seem if anything to present the more suitable (because more dynamic and extratextually connotative) medium for the telling of our most basic and far-reaching tales. Ong and Havelock have shown that oral epic provides a vehicle for the encoding of objective and external knowledge; I now suggest that subjective and internal knowledge of the sort examined by

psychoanalysis is yet more readily inscribed in, and apprehended through, the mimetic medium of oral epic. No aesthetic or cognitive distance exists between the collective oral palimpsest of tradition and the minds that compose, erase, and recompose that mental folio. The story of the way we live and grow proves to be the most fundamental of all stories anthologized in the oral epic.

What is more, the story thus told and retold never disappears or goes out of print. At every oral performance, singer and audience alike “re-read” the tradition and retell the story and all that it contains; along with factual information, they re-experience the deepest wisdom “published” in their oral encyclopedia—the accumulated cultural *sagesse* on the psychological evolution of humankind and of the individual. Thus the transmission of cultural knowledge about psychohistory passes as smoothly from one performance situation to the next as do the song-stories that serve as its vehicle. And just as “echoes from one occurrence of a given theme reverberate not simply through the subsequent linear length of the given poem, but through the collective mythic knowledge of the given culture” (Foley 1976:231; cp. Renoir 1981), so the story one hears in the present performance echoes against all earlier performances and the Gestalt that is the experience they provide. The story serves in effect as a counselor (cp. La Pin 1981), a wise old Gerenian Nestor able to rise above the turmoil of the individual situation and offer generic wisdom both on how to organize the things and rituals of society and on how to cope with being human. The archetypal level of the story educates its hearers “by presenting them time and again with a verbal montage of the group’s poetic models and thereby with the data which these models encode” (Foley 1977a:134; also 1978). And this continuing, lifelong process of education takes place over generations of oral performances and under the aegis of tradition.

But we need to ballast theory with an example. In order to illustrate the story dynamic at work, let us concentrate on a single but enormously widespread tale-type, that of the so-called Return Song. This story of return from exile, specifically as described first by Albert Lord (1969; also, e.g., Coote 1981), occurs in at least ancient Greek, Yugoslav, Bulgarian, Turkish, Albanian, Russian, and English, and seems to be a story-form of originally Indo-European provenance.<sup>4</sup> It is convenient to represent the Return Song in Lord’s scheme as composed of five elements, but we must remember that any such oral story’s essence is narrative



and that the story thus cannot be fairly construed as merely a combination of discrete units.

- A — Absence
- D — Devastation
- R — Return
- Rt — Retribution
- W — Wedding

In the various Serbo-Croatian versions, for instance, the tale customarily opens with an imprisoned hero loudly bewailing his confinement and prolonged separation from his wife or betrothed (element A). His noisy complaining leads to an exposition of his prior capture and, sometimes through the report of an intermediary, of the suffering of his wife as she attempts to dispel the suitors usurping her husband's place at home (element D). A bargain with his captor, made necessary by the hero's unrelenting success at disturbing the peace, earns him release (sometimes only conditional) and the opportunity to return home (element R) and to reconcile the domestic dilemma. Once arrived, the hero, almost always disguised as a beggar, engages in ritual combat with one or more of the suitors before driving them off and reasserting his authority (element Rt). A wedding or rapprochement (element W) then takes place between the hero and his wife or betrothed, and this enactment or reenactment of their union ends the story in the great majority of instances.<sup>5</sup>

Of course we recognize in this South Slavic Return Song the story of the *Odyssey*, from Odysseus' captivity by Kalypso through his hard-won return to Ithaca, his vengeance on the suitors, and his reunion with the faithful Penelope. But we can also recognize in both story-forms the more fundamental tale of human development. In Jungian terms adapted for mythic application by Erich Neumann, the first element of imprisonment or containment (Absence), always overseen in some fashion by a female figure, reflects the uroboric stage. Psychohistorically, this part of the tale images that time in ontogeny when the ego is the prisoner of the "mother" unconscious, when the ego has not yet begun to develop a singularity that will eventually lead toward maturity. Devastation also symbolizes, at the narrative level, the *sturm und drang* of this early stage, specifically the slightly later period during which, according to the natural evolutionary pattern, the ego becomes restive in its passive role and readies itself to move

forward into a personal consciousness. This is naturally a time of considerable mental anguish, of psychological birth pains, and that anguish is reflected in, for example, the weeping of the twenty-year exile Odysseus on the shores of Ogygia or by the near-hysterical shouting of the South Slavic prisoner in his wretched place of confinement.

However, the requisite bargaining with a female figure (and here we recall Athena's supplication of Zeus as well as the Yugoslav equivalent of the captor's wife's intercession) soon frees the hero/ego from his state of powerlessness and starts him on the road toward his homeland/maturity (Return). The detail of disguise, always a feature of the Return Song narrative, seems to image the ego's nascent character; having broken free from imprisonment, he nonetheless has a long period of development in front of him before his goal can be reached. Even when the extraordinary Phaeacian rowers deposit Odysseus on Ithaca, he still has almost half of the *Odyssey* to negotiate before he can win back the olive-tree bed. And his many South Slavic *confrères* likewise must successfully pass through a number of verbal, athletic, and sometimes musical tests before they can doff the temporary identity of beggar and re-assume their proper social roles.<sup>6</sup> If Odysseus begins his reaccession to the Ithacan kingship by breaking bread with a lowly swineherd, it is no accident: in terms of psychological development, he has only lately escaped the overpowering unconscious represented by Kalypso, Kirke, and others. And if Alagić Alija or others of his Balkan brethren first appear at home looking very much like the prisoners they have so long been—with “nails grown out like a winged horse,” for instance, or with beards to their waists—it is a mark that they too are ego-figures only recently emergent.

The road toward mature consciousness, and the story that encodes that inner journey, leads on directly through the complexities of the Oedipal problem, here symbolized in part by what Neumann would term the “men's group” competition (1954:138-41) between the disguised hero and the suitors who have challenged not just his skill but his very identity. This competitive, highly agonistic section of the story reflects the emergent ego's wrestling with the parental figures as he comes to further consciousness and begins to develop an identity of his own, complete with sexual alignment. If ritual combat seems inevitable in the story-pattern of Return, and it most certainly is, we may

interpret that necessity as the foregrounding of the Oedipal rite of passage within the larger story of psychological growth. A hero could no more forgo the test offered by his competitors than any individual could or can pass gracefully and unchanged through the equally inevitable onset and process of the Oedipal period. At both levels, the story simply is not complete without the hero's taking up the gauntlet cast down by his peers. With the contest(s) won, however, that is with his Oedipal battle ending in victory, the hero/ego is prepared to continue his quest for maturity.

The final element in the story of Return is also the most transparent from a psychohistorical point of view. The reunion with Penelope, or with Fatima or another *vjerna ljuba* ("true love") in the case of the Yugoslav Odysseus, symbolizes the hero/ego's constellation of the anima figure in Jungian terms (Neumann 1954:379, 403-7). After victory in the Oedipal wars, so goes the ontogenic narrative, the ego is ready to assume its hard-won individuality at a healthy distance from the mother unconscious, ready to make his way as an adult human being in a mature relationship with the opposite sex. Neumann notes two major mythic motifs that gloss this stage of development—the capture of the princess and the raising of the treasure (1954:195-219). Both story features betoken the reaching of the goal of adulthood, that degree of consciousness toward which the ego has been striving since immersion in the uroboros. The fact that the Anglo-Saxon hero Beowulf takes possession of the dragon's treasure just before he succumbs to the mortality that calibrates all human life, for instance, is in this way the same kind of mythic-psychohistorical signal as Odysseus' winning back Penelope through their shared secret of the olive-tree bed. In both epics the climax represents attainment of full adult consciousness, and thus it is that each work ends its narrative and its special counsel at a psychologically appropriate epitome.

Even such a brief and incomplete sketch of the psychohistorical resonance of the Return Song story-pattern, when taken together with the fundamentally mimetic nature of story in oral epic as established by Ong and Havelock, gives some idea of the immense resources of the Homeric and South Slavic "oral encyclopedias," as indeed of other cultural encyclopedias not specifically examined in this essay. But in order to complete the exposition, we need to ask exactly how the encoded content of oral

epic informs its audience; that is, we need to know exactly how the oral story dynamic works. Since the nature of oral transmission is ultimately a phenomenological problem, we may begin by recalling that the essence of knowledge in an oral culture is story. To construe the Return Song as a sequence of five elements is a useful exercise, especially because we in a post-traditional age are concerned with understanding through analysis—through the separation of wholes into their arguably constituent parts, with the division of ongoing processes into isolated moments. But this fragmentation is of course a convenient falsification when applied to oral story, one which becomes immediately obvious when we attempt to reintegrate the decontextualized, inert “parts” or “moments” back into the whole or process. Narrative cannot be experienced as a series of integers, since we are as concerned with what lies between the static invariance of such arithmetical signposts as with the signposts themselves. To do justice to the insistent power of oral epic, then, we must avoid at all costs the murderous act of dissection; rather, we must start by remembering that the story as a dynamic entity is paramount. The perspective offered by moments and episodes may serve our analytical purpose, but for the original audience—and even for the faithful modern-day reader of such works—the story’s the thing.

We may enlarge on this point in two ways. First, in a recent essay entitled “The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics” (1983), Havelock has described the activity of these early philosophers as a “competition between mythos and logos” (12), by which he means a tension between the *old Homeric word* that is mythologized and embedded in the dramatic action of narrative and the *new Platonic word* that is abstract, decontextualized, and complete in itself. Presocratics like Xenophanes of Colophon felt this tension, and they responded to it in different ways; not a few turned to outright criticism of Homeric ideas, albeit often couching their criticism in the ancient oral medium of the Homeric hexameter. For our purposes, the most significant lesson of this painful and gradual transition must be that when we speak of Homeric story, we are speaking of a narrative medium that cannot faithfully be characterized as analytical in our own sense.<sup>7</sup> Homeric story represents or encodes not in the staccato rhythm of post-traditional cognition, ably supported by the ornate intellectual latticework of rhetorical argument (see Ong 1976) and other kinds

of categorization and conscious dismemberment of reality, but rather in the continuous and continuing present of tradition. The bard is in effect a seer, who, as Homer himself tells us, knows all things past, present, and future, and the song he performs embodies the truths of his culture in action.

Along with Havelock's discrimination of the long-supplanted Homeric mythos from the Platonic logos that is still the staple of our analytical perception, we may distinguish two modes of referentiality. In the case of *logos*-based thinking, we describe the characteristics of an abstract truth and then proceed to ascribe its qualities to a person, place, or thing. In an essay entitled "The Alphabetic Mind" (1986), Havelock has described this intellectual operation of adding abstract qualities to a "motionless" concept as the "is statement," to be contrasted with the oral epic reality of knowledge-as-action. For instance, a modern reworker of the ancient Greek *Iliad* might begin with a discourse on the nature of wisdom and then go on to attribute this abstraction (or its lack) to Achilles, Agamemnon, Nestor, Odysseus, or any of the principals in the Trojan drama. Were this modern author to persist long enough (and were his reader to bear with him), he might eventually establish *ex nihilo* a credible and complex set of characters loosely approximating those who populate the Homeric poem. But even if his result turned out to be similar, his method would have been entirely different from the *mythos*-based thinking of the ancient Greek bard, who, thanks to the remarkable resonance of his oral traditional medium, inherited his Achilles, Agamemnon, Nestor, and Odysseus fully formed and ready for action. For the oral poet would have access to characters replete with prior associations for his audience, heroes whose very epithets—"wily," "swift-footed," "leader of men"—conjured up whole worlds of meaning<sup>8</sup> (see Foley 1984, 1986a). One's epithet in Homeric epic was not a one-time qualifier, appropriate only in the present situation; likewise, the poet did not need to carve out an image of truth or wisdom or honor before assigning it, since that abstraction already inhered in a figure or figures who lived, moved, and breathed in the experiential world of the audience. Heroes were players in a grand pageant, a *mythos*-centered pageant, and the knowledge they mimetically encoded was available to all who took part in the oral performance.

Another way of understanding this homeostatic, narrative process is to speak of the actors and their actions, even of the

constituent units of oral epic, as comprising a language of *metonymy*. Against the timeless background of the song that cannot ever be wholly captured in or reduced to any one version, this or that performance stands in the relation of part to whole, *pars pro toto*. One knows about Beowulf, or Odysseus, or Smailagić Meho not merely from one song sung by one bard in a particular time and place, but from lifelong experience of these cultural heroes in a variety of songs and performances. Even if some of their actions are inconsistent or contradictory, the listener/participant in an oral performance will fashion what he has heard into a composite traditional identity, and it is that identity which will be brought up into each narrative situation. In a similar way, any one typical scene will be defined in the listener's or reader's mind as the Gestalt of all instances of that same scene as he has heard it during other performances (cp. Nagler 1974). Opposite the particularized shape of the theme of arming or feasting or voyaging or whatever, the informed listener or reader places the generic knowledge he has derived from other, prior instances of the same action. Whether we are speaking of a character or of a typical scene, then, the *particularized* occurrence in any single performance draws its traditional meaning from the *generic* wordhoard of storytelling. The individual instance is metonymic of traditional meaning.

The story-pattern, whether of Return or of some other sequence, works correspondingly. In a real sense the entire epic is a single word, functionally (that is, referentially) indivisible and explosively connotative. An audience engrossed in the Return of Odysseus or of one of his South Slavic counterparts is not engaged by a novel tale, a series of actions interesting because they are somehow fresh, original, or unique. If the audience is faithful to the enterprise, they are hearing both the immediate and metonymic instance of the Return Song and its finally ineffable referent that contextualizes this and all other versions. And along with the sequence of events that make up the narrative, the song presents that audience with a symbolic montage of the deeper, more significant story of psychohistory that they no doubt could not consciously tell. Lacking our analytical or logos-centered techniques, they pass on the traditional wisdom-tale of psychological maturation, fueled by the dynamics of story. We, on the other hand, lacking their narrative or *mythos*-centered techniques, cannot tell—or without considerable effort even

understand—their kind of story; not surprisingly, we thus turn to what we do best: dismembering and fracturing the process into an assemblage of manageable parts.

One last observation will complete this brief overview of the enormously powerful process of oral epic psychohistory. In his *Ion* (535e-36a), Plato describes the situation of oral performance in the Homeric era or shortly thereafter as a series of rings surrounding the Heracleian stone; innermost is the poet, with the latter-day rhapsode or performer next, and the audience at the periphery. The magnetism, a metaphor for the Muse's inspiration, passes from the center outward, causing all assembled to vibrate to the strains of her song. The extent to which the audience actually participates in the oral performance is made yet more explicit in a passage from the *Republic* (605c-d):

When even the best among us listen to Homer or to any of the tragic poets *imitating* [the verb is from the same root as *mimesis*] some one of the heroes in mourning and extending a speech of lamentation or, if you like, singing and beating his breast, you know that we both enjoy it and, giving ourselves over to it, *follow along*; *sympathizing* and eagerly paying close attention, we praise as a fine poet the one who most moves us to that state (italics and translation mine).

Quite clearly, the audience does not just look on dispassionately, evaluating the bard's effort analytically, but rather takes up the story as its own—in the simplest and most far-reaching sense. As one can still observe today during an oral performance in Yugoslavia (see Foley 1977b), the participants feel free to join vocally into the presentation, for the song is theirs as well as the poet's.

To sum up, then, we have an audience that actively participates in the ritual of oral performance by identifying closely and strongly with the characters who act out their cultural drama. The drama itself is a process, a fabric of events woven and re woven that cannot survive an analytical shredding: *Absence leads inexorably to Devastation, Return to Retribution and Wedding*, without interruption and under the aegis of oral story. The poet and tradition do not pluck out redundancy or manipulate motifs any more than we could dismember a lexical word phoneme-by-phoneme and hope to retain the word's meaning.<sup>9</sup>

The essence of story is in its “ongoingness,” its dynamic wholeness, and it is this holistic memory, rife with institutionalized associations, that provides a map for the traditional audience’s narrative journey. Outside of the here and now of one or another version lies the timeless and omnipresent song that can never be reduced to one instance, but the magic of metonymy means that the greater song can be summoned by epitomized example, created anew in a nominal form *pars pro toto*, the part standing for the whole.

And what is the meaning of this long but single, integral “word,” this labyrinth of story made navigable by the extratextual wisdom of tradition? I have argued that, at one level,<sup>10</sup> that meaning is psychohistory, the story of the development of the human psyche from immersion in the unconscious to the independent establishment of consciousness in the adult individual. If that mental development is encoded in the Return Song, consider how powerful an instrument such cornerstones of Western civilization as the *Odyssey* represented for the oral cultures that composed and re-composed them. As Walter Ong has often explained, the repository of epic is an active educational instrument as well as an archive; members of an oral culture “check out” the available “volumes” as well as contribute to the collection. In short, as I have maintained elsewhere (1977a, 1978), the psychohistory inscribed in the Return Song serves what amounts to a therapeutic function, in that it brings before its constituency a ready-made handbook on the logical sequence leading toward psychological maturity. Whatever the age, sex, vocation, or social position of the listener-participant, the Return Song speaks to him the wisdom of ontogeny, reinforcing the process of inner maturation and reminding him of his present place in the overall scheme of the human community. Since we are dealing with a medium that by its very nature excludes analysis, we cannot claim that the participants in an oral performance consciously “know” or “realize” the psychodynamics of the ritual event in which they are, have been, and will continue to be involved. That separation of the whole into parts—that *analysis*—must be left to we who can no longer personally use the traditional medium, to we who no longer know how to tell the story.

From our detached, decontextualized point of view, we cannot appreciate either Homer’s or the South Slavic *guslar*’s song in its original meaning, but we can at least track the inscription of



psychohistory in these stories. We can, by summoning the comparative mythology called psychoanalysis,<sup>11</sup> begin to understand how essential the function of oral epic must have been for its (re-)makers and their audiences. Before the appearance of the aesthetic distance introduced by the commission of verbal art to the exteriorization of writing and then of print (see espec. Ong 1982), one's inmost concerns—concerns of which a person was not even consciously aware—were coextensive with the shared verbal art of the community; it was as impossible to separate such concerns from their embodiment in verbal art as it was to deposit them in the exterior world, cut off from the lifeblood of story and wordhoard. Story was in fact all: truth did not here and there make an appearance as an attribute consciously assigned to this or that character, honor was not an absolute that an author either conferred or withheld. Like the marvelously animate frieze on John Keats' immortal urn, the image lived, full of vital and sensate reality, as a continuing narrative reenacted in oral performance. And as long as words were "winged," as long as story and its images lived, the core myth of psychohistory served as counselor for the ages. As long as humanity worshipped the god of Mimesis (rather than sacrificing at the altar of Analysis), just so long did the stories of oral epic guide the cultures who told them in that most fundamental of quests—the universal task of "growing up."

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>E.g., Murko 1929, Parry 1930 and 1932, Lord 1960; summaries in Foley 1981b, 1985, and especially 1988.

<sup>2</sup>An interesting example from the Anglo-Saxon oral tradition is the verb *cuthan*, ordinarily translated simply "to know," which really means both "to know" and "to make known." Knowing involves telling as well as having something to tell.

<sup>3</sup>See the distinctions drawn in Foley 1984.

<sup>4</sup>For references to the various traditions, see Foley 1981c.

<sup>5</sup>One also finds versions of the Return Song that were for one reason or another cut short. In one such case, the singer aborted most of elements R and Rt and proceeded directly to closure in element W (the "Wedding")—even though the hero ended up betrothed to a near relative. Such is the power of the story-pattern.

<sup>6</sup>Of course, the *re*-entry, as well as the general thrust of the Return Song in restoring the hero to his implicit initial position, indicates by its recurrent or repetitive character both the inevitability of its outcome on the narrative level and the universality of its application on the psychohistorical level.

<sup>7</sup>For a complementary view, see Russo and Simon 1968, e.g.

<sup>8</sup>See further Foley 1984, 1986a, b.

<sup>9</sup>The cultural function of epic is, as one might guess, a genre-dependent quality. Other genres, such as lyric or even the shorter epic forms, do show manipulation of motifs with aesthetic design; see further Foley 1983.

<sup>10</sup>It is important to emphasize that I am treating only one level of interpretation of oral epic in this essay, and that there naturally exist many other levels worthy of close attention.

<sup>11</sup>It may be helpful to remember that psychoanalysis can be seen as a highly conscious (and therefore apposite) modern mythology.

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**The Authority of  
The Word in St. John's Gospel:  
Charismatic Speech, Narrative Text,  
Logocentric Metaphysics**

**Werner H. Kelber**

Everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist. . . and whoever perverts *the words* of the Lord. . . and says there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, that man is the first-born of Satan. Therefore let us abandon the foolishness of the great majority and the false teachings, and let us return to the Word which was transmitted to us from the beginning. Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*, 7:1-2 (italics added).

The theology of the word is the end of signification and the consummation of desire in complete presence, and thus the word becomes literally flesh, the word that is a silence transcending the entire system of discourse.

Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses*.

Few topics are as suited for a celebration of Walter Ong's intellectual accomplishment as the *Logos*, for the Word in its kaleidoscopic manifestations and intriguing transformations constitutes the center of his lifelong scholarly attention. A masterful practitioner of words himself, he has repatterned the entire paradigm of *Logos* and *logoi* toward a new synthesis, the relevance of which extends beyond the broad range of the humanities and social sciences to the so-called hard sciences that shape our technocratic world. The *Logos* of the fourth gospel has served as a forceful intellectual stimulus both in biblical studies and in philosophical, theological deliberations on language and metaphysics. We wish here to pursue the study of the *Logos* in these two areas of biblical exegesis and philosophical, theological reflection. Because Ong's work has awakened sensibilities that are all too often left dormant in academia, it is incumbent on us to

honor him by thinking through the issue of the *Logos* in a novel manner.

## I

### From Charismatic Speech to Narrative Gospel

Among the numerous studies of the *Logos* in the prologue to the fourth gospel the genetic question has principally claimed the attention of biblical scholars. This question is motivated by the conviction that genuine progress toward understanding John's *Logos* hinges on discovering its historical and philosophical background. The scholarly literature abounds with suggestions ranging from the ancient Hebrew notion of the creative function of *dabar* (=word) to Jewish Wisdom, and on to the Hellenistic philosophical traditions of a Philo, of Stoicism, Neoplatonism, and Neopythagoreanism, all the way to an assumed redeemer myth of gnostic persuasion. At present, Jewish Wisdom is the favorite candidate. It provides us with a key to the principal operations of the *Logos* in John's narrative scenario: preexistence, participation in creation, descent into a hostile world, proclamation of revelation, rejection and homelessness, and return to the heavenly abode. Within limits the genetic approach proves helpful. It also begs a number of crucial questions. Left unanswered is the question of a Johannine motivation for adopting the Wisdom model in the first place. For in order for an influence to be accepted or absorbed, a situation must first arise to greet it as an aid in interpretation. Left unanswered also is the fundamental issue of the identification of Jesus with the *Logos*. Why is he perceived as entering the darkness of the world as *Logos*, and not, for example, as light, or as Wisdom? Why *Logos*?

In an important article F.-M. Braun has observed a distinct tendency in Johannine literature to move from the plural to the singular (1978:40-67). The plural commandments (*entolai*) culminate in a "new commandment" (*entolê kainê*); Jesus' many works (*ta erga*) are accomplished in the work of his glorification (*to ergon*); the sign of the loaves of bread (*hoi artoi*) gives rise to Jesus' self-identification as the bread (*ho artos*); the disciples (*mathêtai*) find ideal representation in the Beloved Disciple (*ho methêtês hon êgapa ho Iêsous*), and so forth. On this analogy, it is tempting to assume a similar shift in emphasis from the many

*logoi* to the single *Logos* in John's gospel. One would, in that case, have to consider an intra-Johannine rationale linking the plurality of *words* in the gospel with the elevation of Jesus to the *Word*. A connection of just this kind is suggested by Polycarp's agonistic outburst that serves as an epigraph to this piece. Highly offensive as it appears today, it does give us insight into the heart of the bishop's anxiety. His indignation is directed at those Philipians who used the words of their Lord in ways that prompted a denial of the incarnation, of individual resurrection, and of future judgment. How is it that the words of the Lord could become the center of such a grave controversy? In all probability, Polycarp is faced here with a communal practice to let the words of Jesus be effective in their oral, life-giving sense. Words when spoken are bound to present time and in a sense advertise presentness (Ong 1967:130, 168, *passim*). The oral performance of the *logoi* of the Lord likewise manifests presence. If, moreover, in the early Christian milieu the words are spoken prophetically, i.e., in the name and on the authority of the living Lord, they could be understood as effecting both the presence of Christ and communion with him. In this essentially oral sense the *logoi* are endowed with sacral quality. Consistent with this experience of an orally induced presence, there was next to no interest in Jesus' past incarnation or in one's own future soteriological status. In the face of this distinctly oral employment of the *logoi*, Polycarp counsels a return to the *Logos* as it was in the beginning. He clearly intends to redirect attention to the singular *Logos*, the authority over the plural *logoi*. His is a reductive move which, we shall see below, epitomizes the metaphysical bent in the philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical tradition of Western intellectual history. The analogy we have observed between Polycarp's turning away from the *logoi* to the *Logos* and John's predilection for that same authoritative singular, leads us to assume an oral, efficacious operation of *logoi* in both instances. It is the kind of oral sacrality from which emergent orthodoxy in its bent for literacy will increasingly distance itself. One may suspect, therefore, a distinctively oral operation of sayings in John's community which caused the evangelist to reach beyond the *logoi*, spoken by or attributed to Jesus, back to the primordial, personified *Logos*.

The sayings tradition embedded in the fourth gospel is of massive proportions. There does not, to my knowledge, exist an

accurate count. The Farewell Discourse alone (13:31-17:26), a vast collection of speech material, has been estimated to comprise one-fifth of the gospel. If one discounts chapter 21 as a secondary addition, approximately three-fourths of chapters 1-20 consist of sayings. If the passion and resurrection narrative is disregarded, approximately four-fifths of chapters 1-17 appear to be constructed from sayings (Sneller 1985). In a study of Johannine sayings of a strictly proverbial nature, moreover, Kim Dewey has isolated and analyzed thirty-four proverbs (1980). Notably, his essay did not even intend to be exhaustive. So impressed was Dewey with the preponderance of sayings in John that he speculated the gospel may have arisen out of anthological concerns, the drive to collect sayings and to cluster them in sayings collections. However one may view the genesis of the fourth gospel, the immense amount of material that is oral in origin or by adaptation is plainly in sight.

Apart from the sheer quantity of sayings, John's gospel exhibits a pneumatic, oral hermeneutic of the functioning of Jesus' words. None of the synoptic evangelists equals John in that regard. The words, when spoken, are primarily regarded not as carriers of ideas or records of information, but as manifestations of power. They grant access to what is perceived to be real, and pose concomitant threats and danger. This concept of language as an instrument of control and revelation, of persuasion and condemnation is firmly situated in the oral sensorium (Kemp Forrest 1976).

Interestingly, the Johannine Jesus is described as a literate man (7:15: *grammata oiden*), although without formal, Rabbinic schooling (7:15: *mê memathêkôs*). And yet, the key to his person lies in the power of his speech: "Never did a man speak the way this man speaks" (7:46). When we read that his words are in effect "Spirit and life" (6:63), and powered to cleanse hearers (15:3), we know that we move in a world in which language, i.e., spoken words, are a mode of action, an event. Hearing his words and believing or keeping them is a matter of life and death. "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my words, he shall never see (or taste) death" (8:51, 52). A version of this saying is found in the gospel of Thomas, a sayings or cluster gospel, placed there programmatically at the outset of 114 sayings: "Whoever finds the explanation of these words will not taste death." Whether it is with Thomas a matter of deciphering and interpreting the sayings, or with John a matter of hearing and



observing them, they are in each case understood to give life and transcend death. Appropriately, Simon Peter's confession identifies Jesus as dominical speaker whose words hold the key to life: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (6:68). The authority of Jesus the speaker is strengthened and the prestige of his message is enhanced by the repeated affirmation that he speaks not his own words, but those he has heard from the Father (8:26; 15:15). Based on this logic, the words he utters and his audience hears are perceived to be the words of God (3:34). What matters about words is less what they say and more what they do. It is a principle enforced in John's gospel as Jesus the speaker makes disciples of those who abide by his words (8:31-32). The power of his words relates hearers to the speaker through the bond of discipleship. Again, words are less carriers of ideational content to be received and transported by individuals than a means of creating community and unity. Such is the authority of his words that they work for better and for worse. They can cause division among those who reject and others who accept (10:19-21), and bring about judgment upon the former (12:48). Considering the effects his words may have, they can be disregarded only with the gravest of consequences. In short, Jesus' words in the fourth gospel are not conceived as signs committed to space but as vocalization, and not as content encased in texts but as events in time effecting life as well as condemnation.

One of the most characteristic forms of speech in John's gospel is the *egô eimi* saying. As is well known, the fourth gospel carries more "I am" sayings than any of the synoptic gospels. At frequent intervals the Johannine Jesus employs the self-authenticating formula, "I am the Light of the World" (8:12), "I am the Good Shepherd" (10:11), "I am the Bread of Life" (6:35, 48), "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25), and so forth. One may presume here a classic oral principle in operation according to which the speaker of words is as important as the message he delivers. In a comparable, though extravagant sense, Jesus the speaker of words of revelation acquires the status of revelation himself. It is this extravagant sense, however, that requires additional explanation. In the ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic world, gods and goddesses, or their prophetic spokespersons, manifested themselves by way of *egô eimi* language. In the early Christian tradition it was primarily prophets who employed this self-authenticating form of speech (Woll 1981:150-51,

n. 11). It is fair to assume that the *egô eimi* style in John carries similar implications. The Jesus who legitimates himself by way of *egô eimi logoi* speaks not only authoritative language, but specifically prophetic language. He speaks rather like an early Christian prophet.

Prophecy is a category that has shaped crucial features of the Johannine Jesus (Aune 1972:88, *passim*; Boring 1978:113-23; Käsemann 1968:38, *passim*; Michaels 1975:233-64). A classic enunciation of his prophetic function is found in the witness of John the baptizer: "For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; truly boundless is his gift of the Spirit" (3:34). The verse delineates rather precisely the office of the prophet. The sending formula, regularly associated with Jesus in John, designates him as the prophetic representative and mouthpiece of God. In prophetic fashion he acts as spokesman of the One who sent him, and as dispenser of the divine Spirit. Those who hear his words are invited to believe not only the speaker, but the One who sent him: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life" (5:24). Word and Life are the principal goods negotiated by the prophetic speaker. Just as the Apocalypse was written by someone steeped in prophetism, and the Johannine letters grew out of a prophetic milieu, so also did the fourth gospel originate from circles in which prophetic, oral speech was very much alive (Boring 1982:48-50).

The prophetic sending formula has deeply affected the narrative world of John. At the very outset, the baptizer himself is introduced as one commissioned by the highest authority: "There was a man sent by God, whose name was John" (1:6). As the baptizer is sent in prophetic fashion, and as Jesus is sent following him, so also will the Paraclete be sent when he comes to replace Jesus (14:26; 15:26). Sent like a prophet, the Paraclete manifests himself in a characteristically oral manner. "Every verb describing the ministry of the Paraclete is directly related to his speech function" (Boring 1978:113). Speaking and hearing, pronouncing and receiving, teaching and bringing to remembrance, bearing witness and guiding in the truth, glorifying and convicting, he fulfills the function of "a pneumatic Christian speech charisma" (Boring 1978:113). Significantly, the Johannine Jesus applies the sending formula toward the end of his career even to the disciples: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (20:21). Since in the fourth gospel the disciples constitute

not merely the Twelve but the believers at large, the consequences are startling. Jesus represents the One who sent him (12:44), and in like manner, those who are sent by Jesus, the disciples, represent Jesus, or even the One who sent him (13:20).

This pervasive function of the prophetic sending formula brings us to suggest that we are dealing here with a projection of a prophetic, charismatic self-consciousness of the Johannine community. In other words, if we conceive individual believers as speaking words of Jesus in prophetic *egô eimi* fashion, then the Johannine Jesus and other figures in the gospel are to some extent at least “comprehensible as a projection (or retrojection) of the religious needs and experiences of the Johannine community. . .” (Aune 1972:77). One may thus plausibly contend that aspects of the socio-religious and oral-rhetorical milieu of the Johannine community have impressed themselves upon the gospel text.

There is an additional feature that we propose to examine only in the most general fashion as it relates to the gospel’s matrix. In his discussion with the Pharisee Nicodemus, Jesus articulates his own authority in the following manner: “And no one has ascended into heaven, except he who has descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (3:13). The statement has a polemical ring to it. There must not be ascent unless there is first descent! It postulates the priority of descent (*katabasis*) over ascent (*anabasis*). The polemic is directed toward an assumption or experience of *anabasis* without prior descent. The context suggests a Mosaic reference (3:14). Moses’ ascent to Sinai, often interpreted as a heavenly journey, preceded his descent from the mountain to deliver the commandments of the Lord (Smith 1973:237-43). If the Mosaic pattern was one of *anabasis* followed by *katabasis*, the pattern instituted by the Johannine Jesus is one of *katabasis* followed by *anabasis*.

It may not be entirely amiss, however, to sense a reservation not only toward a Mosaic *anabasis* tradition, but toward a Christian *anabasis* experience as well. If Sinaitic theophany traditions were part of the Jewish legacy of the Johannine community, John’s specifically Mosaic polemic against a *visio Dei* becomes intelligible (Aune 1972:98-99). This brings us to the visualist language which permeates the gospel alongside its oralist language. The seeing of God, and perhaps of the risen Christ, is an issue in the fourth gospel. But just as *anabasis* experiences are discouraged, so are also direct visions put under restraint. The

prologue itself, for example, culminates in a severe restriction on heavenly visions: "No one has ever seen God at any time; it is God the only Son, even at the Father's side, who has revealed Him" (1:18). By implication, the Son is exceptional in having access to the Father. As such he alone bears witness to what he has seen (3:11). A very similar view is expressed in the Bread of Life discourse: "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father" (6:46). Restrictive language of this kind appears to be designed to elevate the authority of Jesus. But if one inquires more deeply into the motives for heightening christology, one wonders whether the promotion of Jesus to the status of sole visionary is not meant to curb *anabasis* experiences among the believers in John's community. Philip wishes to see the Father, and Jesus responds that seeing him (=Jesus) equals seeing the Father. It is a motif repeated several times in the gospel (12:45; 14:7; 17:24). It is worth mentioning in this connection that John narrates neither a baptismal story nor a transfiguration story. This may be significant in that both accounts in the synoptic tradition depict the open heavens, a motif John appears to be reluctant to encourage. The only time he refers to the open heavens is in one of the most puzzling statements found in the gospel: ". . . you will see heaven opened and angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (1:51). Whatever else this saying may mean, it does not promise individuals direct access to power, but rather a vision of the Son of Man as sole communicator with the heavenly world (Bultmann 1971:105, n. 3). Individual believers are advised to work through the one who possesses sole access to power. Hence, the one reference to the open heaven does more to curb than to promote ascent mysticism.

The social and linguistic world that emerges from behind the gospel is one constituted by the Spirit manifesting itself in efficacious speech and perhaps heavenly visions. The preponderance and oral functioning of the *logoi*, the *egô eimi* diction, the egalitarian practice of discipleship, the prophetic shaping of principal characters in the gospel, and a preoccupation with accessibility to the heavenly world are all features that will have been nourished by a profoundly oral, prophetic, charismatic community. The believing disciples carry the *logoi*, speaking them in the name and on the authority of the risen, living Christ. The rite of baptism may well have played a greater role in this

community than the narrative will let us know. Through word and sacramental rite the *praesentia Christi* inhabits the individual and communal experience. Perhaps the presence of the Spirit encouraged heavenly visions or journeys. When seen in this perspective one wonders whether we are not here in a situation similar to the one castigated by Polycarp. The deeply oral sense of pleromatic presence is ill-disposed to favor reflection on Jesus' past incarnate life or one's own future soteriological fate. One lives in the presence of the Word.

One of the reasons for an exacting treatment of oral performance and communication, Walter Ong has taught us, is "not to reject the later media, but to understand them, too, better" (1967:314). In the case of the fourth gospel, a substantial measure of oral ethos has become absorbed into the written narrative. Yet the overall function of this gospel is not to produce an unedited version of oral verbalization, but to recontextualize orality, and to devise a corrective against it.

John's narrative logic suggests that Jesus exercises authority by virtue of his heavenly *katabasis*. Coming from above, he is "above all" (3:31), setting a norm critical of unreserved *anabasis* mysticism. Descent also provides the presupposition for narrating the incarnate life. By elevating the earthly Jesus to normative significance, the evangelist introduces a historicizing dimension and a sense of pastness that is not directly translatable into pleromatic presence. The focus of the narrative, moreover, falls on Jesus' death which is interpreted as his being "lifted up" (*hypsôthênai*). This "lifting up," metaphorically understood as ascension, transforms death into the hour of glorification (17:1). Significantly, John does not narrate an ascent story in the Lukan sense of Jesus being lifted up into the heavens (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:2,10). In this gospel ascent is synchronized with death, and death serves to consummate the prophetic *egô eimi* identity of the Son of Man: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he" (8:28; cf. 3:14; 12:34). When taken as a narrative whole, the gospel does not seem to benefit the desire to gain full life in the present, be it through the power of the *logoi* or in visions. For the *logoi* are enlisted in the service of the written narrative. To what extent they can still be extracted so as to function in their lifegiving sense is an exceedingly difficult hermeneutical question. Suffice it to say that their principal responsibility is now to their new narrative world. And the norm set by this narrative is Jesus'

life and death. Is it too much to assume that henceforth the way to life leads not through the sounding of the words, but through the silence of death?

Earlier we observed how some christological features were modeled after the figure of the early Christian prophet. In other ways, however, the Johannine Jesus distances himself from what he regards as excesses of prophetic self-consciousness. He does, for example, find it necessary to protect himself against *autodoxology*, the drive to seek one's own glory. Given the oral, prophetic matrix of the gospel, at least some of those speaking in the power of the Spirit could conceivably have developed a weighty sense of self-identity. Indeed, could not pneumatic speech and heavenly visions have engendered a feeling of superiority even over Jesus himself? This may be suggested by the intriguing *Logos* that the disciple shall not only do the works of Christ, but "greater works than these shall he do" (14:12). Against this background it is comprehensible why Jesus would lay down the rule differentiating legitimate from illegitimate successorship: "The one who speaks from himself, seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him, he is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him" (7:18). In a similar vein, the Johannine Jesus twice counsels that ". . . a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him" (13:16; 15:20). This is language designed to correct not merely the universal human disposition toward vanity, but the specific problem of charismatic self-consciousness. In this way, the Johannine Jesus, though modeled after the prophet-disciple, nonetheless sets critical accents with respect to a charismatic discipleship that placed itself above tradition and traditional authority (Woll 1981:80-92).

In the wake of Jesus' *anabasis*, the disciples live under the guidance of the Paraclete. They live, therefore, in the age of the Spirit (20:22). Still, theirs is not a life in unlimited pleromatic bliss. They were clearly not in a position to return with Jesus to the place of his departure (13:33). "His access to the Father is direct, unmediated; theirs is mediated" (Woll 1981:31). To be sure, the Paraclete functions as surrogate for Jesus. Yet he can come only after Jesus has departed (16:7). He is, therefore, an *altos paraklêtos* (14:16), a successor not fully identical with Jesus. The time of the presence of the Paraclete is thus also a time of the absence of Jesus who is with the Father. For the time being, the disciples are orphaned (14:18). It is, moreover, one of the

functions of the Paraclete to “teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all I said to you” (14:26). This remembering activity of the Paraclete has no parallel in the New Testament and should, therefore, be taken seriously as a distinct concern of the fourth evangelist. Remembering entails a retrospective point of view. What is to be remembered is everything Jesus ever said. This motif is closely tied in with the narrative logic of the gospel. While the disciples are depicted as lacking full understanding during the earthly ministry, they are promised remembrance at the time of glorification and with the coming of the Spirit (2:22; 7:39; 12:16). The Spirit’s arrival marks the hermeneutical turning point separating the time of concealment from the time of remembrance. This remembrance is more fully accomplished with the production of the narrative text itself, for it incarnates retrospectivity in a sense orality never could. It sets the norm for what is henceforth to be remembered: the Jesus tradition written by the evangelist and sanctioned by the Spirit (Woll 1981:103; Bultmann 1971:576, n. 2). This does not bind believers slavishly to textuality in the sense that all oral sensibilities are extinguished. One of the functions of the Paraclete is to teach what the earthly Jesus did not and could not say (16:12-13). Creative, pneumatic speech will continue in the age of the Spirit. But all *logoi* will from now on be measured by a norm, i.e., the authoritative record of the written text.

This brings us back to our principal topic of the authority of the Word in John’s gospel. We remember Polycarp’s anxiety over the Lord’s sayings whose life-giving performance left little, if any, room for incarnational christology, for individual resurrection and future judgment. The bishop had coped with what appeared to him to be a problem by deflecting attention away from the controversial *logoi* to the authoritative *Logos* that was from the beginning. Not unlike Polycarp, John the evangelist coped with a world in which the sense and function of Jesus’ words were utterly oral. Responding to a multitude of words and authoritative speakers, John articulated singular authority by personalizing the Word and lodging it at the beginning. Once the speaker of *logoi* was elevated to the *Logos*, he assumed a position of control over the *logoi* material. Placed in authoritative position, the *Logos* took charge of the *logoi* in and through the narrative text. There is a sense in which the sayings, once situated in the narrative, are taken away from their speakers outside the text. Not that a text

can ever put an end to speaking. But when operating vis-à-vis a world dominated by the spoken word, texts create new worlds and set new standards. Whether oral in origin or by adaptation, most *logoi* are now put in the mouth of a Jesus who speaks prior to his *anabasis*. As such they are distinctly his own words, grounded, as it were, in a historicized framework. They are not, thereby, repudiated, but recontextualized, or perhaps more to the point, reincarnated into the new medium of textuality. Now the incarnate Christ himself harbors and administers the oral treasure. Seen in these perspectives, it may well seem appropriate that Jesus presides as *Logos* over a narrative that sets standards for oral proclamation and prophetic authority, and revises a christology and a notion of discipleship that are both deeply rooted in the oral matrix.

## II

### Logocentrism versus Textcentrism

Our thesis of the incorporation of the *logoi* in a text that is presided over by the *Logos* does not, of course, exhaust the Johannine hermeneutics of orality and textuality. We shall in this second part go beyond the shift from charismatic speech to narrative gospel, and focus attention on the status of the *Logos* as determiner of the text. Our concern here is with a particular philosophical and theological view of language, both written and oral, that entails the assumption of, or inspiration for, metaphysics.

Central to the hermeneutics of John is the notion of the preexistence of the *Logos*. Being with God *en archê*, he is situated prior to the realm of history and outside the reality of the text. In this position he constitutes something of a metaphysical reference point without which world and text are deprived of orientation. It follows that the text cannot really be accorded full self-referentiality, let alone ultimate significance. This does not detract from our earlier observation concerning the normative function of the written gospel. When viewed in relation to the *logoi*, the text operates normatively. When viewed in relation to the *Logos*, however, it appears in a less prominent position. Subordinated to the metaphysical authority of the *Logos*, the text is but a transition, a detour even, toward what is considered to be real. In current linguistic parlance, John's *Logos* is a typical, and perhaps the leading, case of *logocentrism*. Coined by Jacques



Derrida (1976:11, *passim*), the term refers to the Greco-Christian or Platonic-Johannine tradition according to which language, above all written language, belongs to the realm of the contingent and imperfect, while true knowledge and being pertain to the plane of the immutable forms or the preexistent, personified *Logos*. It is a school of thought which both derived from and contributed to the metaphysical tradition in the West. In our time, *logocentrism* has been widely displaced by non-metaphysical and antimetaphysical thought in religion, linguistics, and philosophy. When seen in these broader philosophical perspectives, the historic nature of the Johannine *Logos* leaps to the eye. A useful way of highlighting its increasingly precarious role in Western intellectual and religious history is to discuss three schools of thought that are antithetical to *Logos* metaphysics: Rabbinic hermeneutics, the Anglo-American New Criticism, and the grammatological philosophy of Derrida.

To Susan Handelman goes the honor of having explicated Rabbinic hermeneutics vis-à-vis a Gentile, Christian, and specifically Johannine *logocentrism*. Her book, *The Slayers of Moses* (1982; cf. also 1983:98-129), is a work of profound intellectual insights. In it she notes that Judaism, once robbed of its central place in 70 C.E., reasserted itself in the Rabbinic mode which cultivated the book as the new center. The Rabbis became the foremost experts in reading and interpreting texts. Theirs was a world of Scripture which called forth a relentless concentration on written words and their interrelations, “including even the physical shapes of letters and even the text’s punctuation” (1982:17). Intertextuality and interpretation was the condition of the Exile. There was no metaphysical escape from the text, no exit toward sacred place or sacred person. Interpretation moved from one sense to another, shunning the temptation to lift itself from the visible to an invisible realm of true being (1982:21). In the absence of extralinguistic standards of correctness, texts in the Rabbinic tradition “echo, interact, and interpenetrate” (1982:21). The Rabbis practiced and generated interpretation, endlessly searching and probing texts, often through methods akin to free association, writing commentaries on texts and commentaries in turn on commentaries. This “horizontal interplay” (1982:65) of interpretation created a space of difference and conflict, of contradiction and cacophony, never permitting the many meanings to be gathered up into the one meaning. One does not move in Rabbinic hermeneutics, as one does in John, from the plural to the

singular. There is only plural. All the elements in the text are potentially equal, the particular not being inferior to the general, and the general incapable of predicating an essence beyond the particular (1982:65). In classic linguistic, theological terms, words are never understood as signs pointing beyond themselves to a metaprinciple governing all language and interpretation. Words only point to other words. "God's presence is inscribed or traced within a text, not a body. Divinity is located in language, not person" (1982:89). Meaning is accomplished by displacements in and of texts; it is not to be displaced away from texts. In this manner, Rabbinic hermeneutics illustrates the eternal desire to sustain the productivity of the text, revising it, re-creating it, reversing it in interpretation after interpretation.

When seen from the Rabbinic vantage point, *logocentrism*, the displacement of meaning away from the text, suggests the end of signification, the suppression of the fertility of texts. This is the meaning of Handelman's epigraph to this piece. A theology of the Word, transcending the realm of textuality and intertextuality, abolishes the space of difference, consummates desire, and puts an end to what matters most in human life: interpretation.

The kind of text-bound thinking advanced by the Rabbis made headway in the non-Jewish culture as well, putting *logocentrism* increasingly on the defensive. In academia, *textcentrism* manifested itself with intellectual sophistication in the Anglo-American New Criticism of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s (Ransom 1941). One of its ideological underpinnings was a formalist understanding of language which, when reduced to a simple formula, states that language, above all written language, has a life of its own. Culture and history are no longer taken seriously as a causal or contributing factor in the making of texts. Genetic considerations were held to be fallacious at worst and irrelevant at best as far as a proper understanding of texts was concerned. There is thus no way texts can either be reduced to or explained by anything extraneous to written language. They are assumed to be generated from no other order but that of other texts. Tradition, a significant value for the New Criticism, was seen to be embodied above all in intertextuality. In this climate, the objective of literary criticism was to explore how words hang together inside texts and how they relate to words in other texts, but not to test texts against something before or behind them. Little, if any, attention was given to world outside of texts. What

mattered was the presentation or transcription of world inside of texts. In one sense stridently anti-Romantic, the New Criticism served as a healthy antidote against naively psychological notions of authorship and crudely representational ideas about language and its relation to non-linguistic actuality. How texts relate to oral utterance, however, or how the structure of language and the texture of existence correlate, or at least interact, were simply not regarded as viable issues.

In view of its unswerving loyalty to the world of stable texts the New Criticism is in some quarters described as the product of a self-absorbed, bourgeois middle-class mentality (Hawkes 1977:154-55). Perhaps this is too ideological a judgment that does not quite get to the heart of the matter. More to the point is Ong's observation that the New Criticism was "a prime example of text-bound thinking" (1982:160). Treating texts as self-maintaining and self-referential artifacts, it bespeaks a desire to reduce language to closed systems. As Ong has made clear, this closed-model thinking epitomized by the *textcentrism* of the New Criticism flourished at a stage in the cultural, intellectual history of the West when the technologizing, objectifying impact of printing had reached a high point (1977:305-41). This requires a brief exposition.

Spoken words are bound to the authority of the speaker and inseparable from auditors and their lifeworlds. Lacking a visual presence, they are uncontainable in formal models. To regard speech as knowable in terms strictly of itself is a notion that has no conceivable reality in oral culture. Oral utterance cannot exist in transauthorial and transcommunal objectivity. As we turn to scribality, we note that ancient and medieval manuscripts were rarely, if ever, thought to be fully closed or to reflect their own internal relations (Bruns 1982:44-59). Both the manufacture and use of manuscripts readily interacted with orality, be it through dictation or recitation. Moreover, handwritten texts were generally understood to reach out toward and communicate with readers, or more likely hearers, so as to please, persuade, or stir them to action. While chirographic culture was by and large unfriendly toward fully closed systems, typography, the art of printing, increasingly fostered closed-model thought. With printing technical control over words reached a state of perfection unimaginable in scribal, let alone oral culture. More than ever words took on the appearance of objectivity and semantic self-reliance. That language

exists in the space of impersonal neutrality could become a perfectly reasonable and academically acceptable assumption. If we imagine centuries of interiorization of the typographic, objectifying management of words, we can understand in direct consequence of it not only the New Criticism, but also the Russian Formalism, different schools of structuralism, as well as the Saussurian principle of language whereby meaning is figured as relations between words and not as reference to something outside of them. When thus placed in the broader setting of cultural history, the apotheosis of the text as a closed system, and the implied fading of *logocentrism*, can readily be seen as an outgrowth of the typographic age.

*Textcentrism* sought and found its elaborate philosophical self-justification in the work of Derrida. Taking up a position of privileging *écriture*, he delivers in *Of Grammatology* (1976) an uncompromising critique of *logocentrism*. From this very textcentrist position he chooses to read Western philosophy and theology not as we did in terms of a fading of *logocentrism* and the rise of *textcentrism*, but rather as a stubborn clinging to the illusions of *logocentrism*. There is no disguising the fact that Derrida confronts us with abysmal depths or, as the case may be, voids in our being—if being were a concept acceptable to him. Few, if any, have reflected more keenly and more abstrusely on the high-risk area of language, exposing us to its dangers, deceptions, and displacements. This one must grant him, as it must also be granted that he has never acknowledged familiarity with the work on orality undertaken by Eric A. Havelock (1963, 1978), Albert B. Lord (1960), Walter J. Ong (1967, 1977, 1982), and many others.

The subject of Derrida's discussion in *Of Grammatology* and the principal source of his distress is the referential paradigm of language. He views it as a root cause of *logocentrism*. With force and great persuasive powers he inveighs against a longstanding convention of thinking of linguistic values as referring to something outside of language. Nowhere does he find referentiality more subtly and insidiously entrenched than in the linguistic, theological concept of the sign. According to a prominent Western tradition, ranging from Plato to Stoicism, and from Augustine through medieval theology to Ferdinand de Saussure, the linguistic sign is defined by the *signifier* and the *signified*. In brief, the *signifier* constitutes the visible marks committed to stone, papyrus, or paper, and the *signified* the so-called meanings we attach to them. Whether we speak with the Latin tradition of *signans* and

*signatum*, or with Saussure and Derrida of *significant* and *signifié*, the two constituents determine the character of written language in terms of a bipolarity of the sensible versus the intelligible. More implicitly, they suggest referentiality, treating language as written exteriority, the *signifier*, capable of mediating the essential referents, the *signified*, as long ago pronounced in the medieval dictum: *aliquid stat pro aliquo* (Derrida 1976:13).

As Derrida assesses the history of the sign in Western philosophy and theology, the *signified*, the meaning attached to the *signifier*, came to take on a reality in its own right. Indeed, its reality acquired greater prestige than that of the signifying marks on surfaces. One fell into the “naive objectivism” (1976:61) of attributing transcendental significance and ontological status to the so-called referent of language. The *signified* was assumed to be imaginable as a *res* or *ousia*, and thinkable as being “in the eternal present of the divine logos and specifically in its breath” (1976:73). In this way, linguistics collaborated with theological speculations on a presence alleged to be outside of *signifiers* and summed up in the plentitude of the logos. This desire to ascribe transcendental significance to the signified, and to strive after *parousia* and underived origin, Derrida calls *logocentrism*, or *logocentric metaphysics* (1976:43).

*Logocentrism*, firmly entrenched in the linguistic-theological concept of sign, manifests itself in numerous dichotomies: body versus soul, culture versus nature, letter versus Spirit, form versus essence, derived versus underived, and so forth. What they all have in common is a craving for the “metaphysics of presence” (1976:49), making us believe that we live out of eternal verities and elementary unity, making us yearn for the underived origin, making us deny the derived self, and making us feel we experience full being.

One of those logocentric dichotomies to which Derrida directs his special attention is that of textuality versus orality. In the logocentric climate of Western theology, philosophy, and linguistics, orality has traditionally been treated as a transcendental *signified*, with textuality playing the role of the *signifier*. Consequently, the human voice transmits the elementary and unitary experience, while writing is consistently viewed as the outer face of it. The internal, truly valuable, oral speech is set above the exteriority of writing. Speech is assumed to be innocence, and writing fall from innocence. The pure originality of oral verbalization is disrupted

by the original sin of writing. An artful and contrived technique forced itself upon the natural condition of the Word, violating it, and raping it. Writing is forced entry. The outside erupted within the inside, invading a living presence and violating the soul. In thus setting the autoproduction of speech against the alienation of written language, and nature against nature denatured, the Western tradition has tended to operate in terms of a "reduction of writing to the rank of an instrument enslaved to a full and originarily spoken language" (1976:29). Assuming the soul of oral speech, writing would always be humbled to being mere body.

In the end, *Of Grammatology* intends to erase the logocentric illusion of the transcendental *signified* in whatever form one encounters it. Not surprisingly, the exposure of orality's status as *signified* throws us back upon the text. Engulfed by textuality, we are called in effect to replay the Rabbinic experience in its most radical sense. To have shown this connection between Rabbinic hermeneutics and Derrida's post-modernist philosophy remains the superlative achievement of Handelman. As the Rabbis engaged in the interminable play with the *signifiers*, so does Derrida invite us to "think of writing as a game within language" (1976:50). Both choose the exile of grammatology over ontology, which is either assumed or declared to be absent. For the Rabbis, as for Derrida, the text constitutes the space of difference, misspelled by Derrida as *differance* so as to protect himself and us from privileging language with final reference. For written language is form and not substance. Lacking constitutive meaning, it harbors merely a *trace* which "does not let itself be summed up in the simplicities of the present" (1976:66). And finally, as the Rabbinic tradition postulated the preexistence of written language in the scroll of the Torah (shab. 88b), so does Derrida claim *arche-writing* (1976:56, *passim*), essentially suggesting that there was differentiation prior to unity, and lack of innocence without an anterior state of purity.

As we move toward the end of the twentieth century, with yet another holocaust behind us, the Rabbinic hermeneutic of deferring and differing has gained wide acceptance in modernity and post-modernism, while logocentric hermeneutic, the reduction of language and meaning to ultimate referents, appears more difficult than ever to affirm. Given the present climate, the most thoroughgoing demythologizing would be the deliberate erasure of the *Logos* and the acceptance of exile in the space of written

letters. Yet this cannot be the objective of this piece. Having experienced the power of the grammatological tradition, it behooves us to return to the logocentric gospel, and to relearn its textual valence, its treatment of the *logoi*, and its subordination to the *Logos*. In keeping with the orality-literacy topic of this paper, we shall formulate these concluding observations linguistically rather than in classic christological terms.

The presupposition of John's gospel, as of all narrative gospels, is that divinity was incarnated in a person. While alive, this person was of course manifest, both visibly and audibly, to those who saw and heard him. A performer of deeds and a speaker of *logoi*, he attracted some and offended others. The sword of his mouth cut both ways. Oral utterance is capable both of strengthening human bonds and of severing them. A good many other hearers were puzzled and alienated. The riddling nature of his words has left its mark on the Johannine vocabulary (Leroy 1968). Once his earthly life was accomplished, he continued exercising influence by passing fully into language. Charismatic speakers in the Johannine community resumed the genre of the *logoi*, speaking in the Spirit and on his authority. Using the presenting power of oral speech to full advantage, they rendered him present in the community, or at least they claimed they did. It was, however, a form of presence that precluded the incarnational dimension. Propelled by breath and attuned to the spirit, the *logoi* tended to promote the living, spiritual Lord to a degree that eclipsed the incarnate Jesus. Polycarp, speaking on behalf of orthodoxy's rapid adjustment to literacy, had astutely observed and angrily denounced the performative powers of the *logoi*. The bishop interpreted the phenomenon as a "perversion of the words of the Lord." Of course, stories must have circulated about this person, and stories have a retrospective bent. Still, as long as stories remain unwritten, they retain a contemporizing actuality. Spoken stories accommodate to the hearers' present more than written ones. Full retrospectivity and the retrieval of a fully incarnate life followed by death is thus the achievement of textuality. In this sense, orality-literacy reflections cast fresh light on John's textual performance and on incarnation, this text's leading motif. Medium and message are connected by the compelling logic of incarnation. The Jesus who is mediated through language accomplished his entry into the flesh of humanity by full implementation of the powers of textuality. Linguistically

speaking, the *Logos* incarnated himself in a hostile world by choosing the exile of textuality.

No text grows directly out of lived experience. Words are related to other words, both oral and written. The text of John's gospel is conspicuous by the presence of a massive amount of speech material. Yet matters of orality and textuality have been curiously confused in Johannine studies. The last two decades saw a preoccupation with John's use of other texts, primarily the so-called *Gospel of Signs* (Fortna 1970; Nicol 1972; Teeple 1974). Inspired by the typographical model of intertextuality, scholars felt inclined to apprehend the text's diachronic history almost exclusively in textual terms. A more discriminating assessment of the *logoi* tradition could not have overlooked the extent to which oral verbalization and values are stored in the Johannine narrative. Indeed, the gospel's commitment to the genre of the *logoi* is far more in evidence than its reliance on another gospel text. As is often the case in the study of orality-literacy relations, the failure to come to terms with a text's oral legacy in turn impedes apprehension of the text itself. In Johannine studies one tendency in recent years was to emphasize the *textual* nature of the history of the tradition, while another was to read the text itself as if it were an *oral* proclamation. Speaking on behalf of a majority of scholars, Ernst Käsemann illustrates the latter: "The *praesentia Christi* is the centre of his [John's] proclamation" (1968:15). If this were truly John's principal concern, would he not have better stayed with the oral powers of prophetic speech?

Lest we play lightly and loosely with the metaphysics of presence, this might be an occasion to dialogue with Derrida. Oral utterance evokes presence as writing never does. Contemporary electronic communication, termed "secondary orality" by Ong (1977:298-99), confronts us with history as an urgent present in a sense unknown to previous, print-dominated times. One could meet Derrida halfway by conceding that speech already represents alienations and pretenses, and that the ideal of presence is problematic when claimed for speech and hearing. This must not exempt us from exploring orality and literacy, their differences, relations and complex interactions, a task which Derrida along with many others has failed to undertake. For to postulate *arche-writing* without a prior grasp of what oral utterance was and is smacks of a projection of typographic sensibilities. When it comes to the matter of textuality, however, Derrida proves to be a



safer guide, especially in advocating the incompatibility of writing with the metaphysics of presence. Texts cannot be entirely supportive of oral attributes and values, and often are subversive of them. The *logoi*, when placed in the Johannine narrative, are deprived of the kind of powers they exerted when spoken by prophetic speakers. Nor does the written text about the incarnate Jesus operate in the best interest of the presence of the living Christ. Incarnation mediated by textuality is one thing; the *praesentia Christi* experienced in orality another.

Incarnation and textuality, one mediated through the vehicle of the other, constitute basic norms promoted by the gospel. Once the text is in existence and in fact privileged by canonization, it is inevitably caught in the chain of interpretation. The narrative that is itself interpretation engenders more and more interpretation. There does not seem to be an end to it. This is the *grammatological* destiny shared by all texts, including this one. Like any other text, the gospel invites or, as the case may be, condemns us to engage in the “horizontal interplay” of the *signifiers*.

I do suspect, however, that for the most part of its history the gospel was read *logocentrally*. Hearers, or readers, let themselves be guided by the narrative dynamic to move from plural experience to singular authority. While text and incarnation were understood normatively, they nevertheless served the larger ends of transtextual realities. The text was thus not taken with ultimate seriousness. This is hard to comprehend in the *grammatological* age which has come to view language and literature as closed systems. However, with the exception of Rabbinic hermeneutics, Western literary history has only recently begun to view textuality as an end in itself. What used to matter in Western literature was not primarily the intratextual construction of meaning *per se*, but rather the textual strategies to affect readers’ intellect and imagination.

Still more difficult to grasp for the age of *arche-writing* is the idea of the preexistent *arche-Logos*. Indeed, the very notion of the preexistence, according to which human beings are fashioned after some model that existed before they did, has no place in *grammatology*. In fairness to John it should be stressed that the *Logos* represents not an *extralinguistic* mode of authority, but an *extratextual* one. This gospel knows no pre-word or non-linguistic metaphysics! It rather is fundamentally Word-centered, and the

Word undoubtedly epitomizes oral utterance. Again, what is unthinkable in the age of *grammatology* is not altogether alien to historical periods when linguistic properties were defined largely in oral terms. The privileging of the *Logos* in a time still dominated by orality should not surprise us any more than the privileging of writing in our own present. That the *Logos* incarnates itself in textuality and texts emanate from orality constitutes common thinking in antiquity about the relations of speech and writing. By oral standards, not even the personification of the *Logos* is entirely baffling, for what typifies oral verbalization is the inseparable unity of speaker and message.

*Logos*, finally, is also the appropriate metaphor for transcendence. Like oral speech, the *Logos* is ephemeral. It has at its disposal no visual or physical means of preservation. It is, therefore, inaccessible to any standards of measurement. Like oral speech, the *Logos* manifests itself in the moment of verbal action. Its prime potency is sound. As such it is elusive presence. These are attributes of divinity.

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## **Early Christian Creeds and Controversies in the Light of the Orality–Literacy Hypothesis**

**Thomas J. Farrell**

The orality-literacy hypothesis developed in the largely complementary works of Walter J. Ong, S.J., and Eric A. Havelock grows out of the field research of Milman Parry (1971). Better than half a century ago, Parry initiated the investigation into the composing practices of completely non-literate Yugoslav singers of stories that culminated in the landmark publication of *The Singer of Tales* by Albert B. Lord (1960).<sup>1</sup> One of the central claims Ong and Havelock make in their formulation of the orality-literacy hypothesis is that the primary oral mentality is characterized by concrete thinking, while the literate mentality is characterized by abstract thinking. Coincidentally, the field research conducted by A. R. Luria (1976) better than half a century ago concerning the cognitive development of completely non-literate peasants and peasants who had participated in a literacy program corroborates this claim of the orality-literacy hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> In Ong's formulation of the orality-literacy hypothesis, he also notes that the primary oral mentality, and even the residually oral mentality of people who have acquired but who have not yet fully interiorized literacy and literate modes of thought, are characterized by formulary expressions.

Now these two major tenets of the orality-literacy hypothesis enable us to understand more fully than ever before the nature of the formulary and concrete expressions employed in the early Christian creeds and the nature of the Arian and the Pneumatomachian controversies over the abstract term *homoousios* in the Nicene Creed of 325 and in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, respectively. The former controversy involved the

consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, the latter the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Both controversies involved a clash between the primary oral mentality and the literate mentality, but, as I hope to show, these clashes arose within the context of composing credal statements in accord with the dictates of the primary oral mentality. This essay proceeds through six points: (1) a discussion of key characteristics of primary orality and vowelized literacy, (2) a summary of J. N. D. Kelly's standard history of *Early Christian Creeds* (1972), (3) a close analysis of the largely oral character of the Greek text of the Creed of 325, (4) an analysis of the Arian controversy surrounding the Creed of 325, (5) an analysis of the Pneumatomachian controversy over the amendments added to the Creed of 381, and (6) some closing reflections about these investigations.

From the basic insights of Parry and Lord about the use of formulas, formulaic elements, and themes in oral poetry, Ong moves to the large claim that all verbal discourse in primary oral cultures and in residual forms of primary oral culture is largely formulary in nature. He implies that the formulary expressions which E. R. Curtius discussed in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1953) should be considered as oral residue in the sense of carryovers into writing of ways of thinking or expressing thought formulated before writing was invented and then perpetuated by writing itself until around the latter part of the eighteenth century (1971:255-83). He notes that the commonplaces of rhetoric—the kind of sayings Erasmus collected in his *Adages*—are formulary in nature.<sup>3</sup> Ong infers that thought had to be formulary in order to be remembered by highly oral people—not just the auditors, but also the composers themselves. For if the thought were not expressed in a formulary manner, it just simply would not be retained. This is an extremely important point to bear in mind with respect to the formulation of the early Christian creeds.

Havelock makes a second important point about the primary oral mentality that needs to be borne in mind. Oral discourse was attentive to the sensory (the concrete) and was more disposed to describing actions than to creating abstractions because people hearing what was said or sung could feel and follow concrete actions. Havelock repeatedly says that primary oral language is imagistic; Northrop Frye in effect says that primary oral language is metaphorical; and Ong says in *Orality and Literacy* (1982) that

primary oral language involves concrete operational thinking; these three phenomenological accounts of the primary oral mentality are complementary, not competitive; therefore, their various descriptions can be used interchangeably. Primary oral people, Havelock points out, could not see or hear or taste categories, classes, relationships, principles, or axioms, and A. R. Luria's (1976) field research bears him out on these points. Oral tradition, according to Havelock, did not analyze history in terms of cause and effect, factors and forces, objectives and influences, and the like because these analytical processes were not amenable to the psychodynamics of memory upon which primary oral thought and expression are based.

Now Karl Barth says in *Dogmatics in Outline* that "the Bible is not a philosophical book, but. . . the book of God's mighty acts . . ." (1959:38). Barth here is not making so much a theological point, as he thinks he is, as a literary-anthropological one with considerable theological consequences. For he is in effect saying that the Bible comes out of a primary oral tradition. Even though the material in the Bible obviously was written down, the writing, I have suggested (Farrell 1986), largely transcribed primary oral patterns of thought and expression, and rightly so, for what was written was obviously intended to be read aloud later. Frye makes virtually the same points as Barth in *The Great Code* (1981:27):

There are no true rational arguments in the Bible, not even in the New Testament, which despite its late date keeps very close to the Old Testament in its attitude towards language. What may look like rational argument, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews, turns out on closer analysis to be a disguised form of exhortation. Nor is there much functional use of abstraction. Biblical Hebrew is an almost obsessively concrete language, and while there are a few abstract terms like "nature" in the New Testament, they hardly affect what is still a metaphorical structure.

According to Havelock, the rational argumentation of philosophy, which Barth and Frye allude to, comes out of the development of vowelized phonetic alphabetic writing. Of course, the primary oral data of the Bible can be subjected to the reflection and abstract analysis of literate thought. If this were done, it would involve expressing in explicit abstract language what

is implicit in the imagistic language of the Bible. If this were done, for example, with the threefold naming in the baptismal formula treated later in this essay, then one might use the concrete term *prosopon* or “person” to refer to each of the three distinct parties named therein.<sup>4</sup> Or one might use the rather abstract philosophic term *homoousios* or “consubstantial” to refer to the oneness of the three parties named in the baptismal formula. But the important points to note for the present are that early writing is largely a transcription of primary oral thought and expression and that truly literate thought develops gradually with the development of philosophy in ancient Greece.

The gradualness of this development comes home most clearly in Havelock’s magisterial account of *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (1978), which happens to illustrate nicely the above-mentioned point about making explicit in abstract language what is implicit in imagistic language; for Plato’s concept of justice makes explicit the concept of justice that is implicit in Homer. As a matter of fact, a review of the etymologies of many abstract terms reveals that they began as rather concrete terms and then gradually took on more abstract meaning, and I would attribute this transformation to what Ong describes as the interiorization of literacy and literate thought. Because this point is important for my later analysis of Arianism, I would mention here that Lev S. Vygotsky (1962) claims that the word meanings in the thinking of children in the literate culture he was studying change just as they had changed historically, from relatively concrete referents to gradually more abstract terms (73, 124). The point is that literacy and the development of literate thought proceed by degrees, so to speak. That is, becoming literate involves more than just acquiring the basic rudiments of reading and writing a vowelized form of phonetic alphabetic literacy. While abstract literate thought did not develop with all-consonant Semitic alphabet, as Havelock points out in *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (1982), the Yahwist quality in the Bible that Herbert N. Schneidau variously calls self-criticism, demythologizing, and distanciation probably emerged with the development of the all-consonant Semitic alphabet, because this quality is not common in primary oral culture without some form of phonetic alphabetic writing (cf. Farrell 1987). Of course, it is true, as Havelock and Vygotsky indicate, that terms which come out of the concrete thinking of



primary orality found in the Yahwist or in the early Christian tradition can take on abstract meaning over the centuries as they are appropriated for literary use, as has happened with the concept of person (cf. Rahner 1970:301-2).

Before we turn to considering the formulation of the early Christian creeds as such, let us briefly consider that part of the Bible on which they are based in the light of the two points we just noted about orality. The sayings of Jesus Christ are obviously formulary expressions, and his parables probably should be considered to be formulary in a certain way, as Kelber (1983) suggests, although I am not going to try to develop this point here. His acts of healing, exorcizing, teaching, and debating are obviously action-oriented deeds, and his birth, active life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension all clearly involve acts or events. In other words, the features of his life recorded in the accounts we have are in harmony with the orientation of the primary oral mentality, whereas accounts of his subjective state of consciousness or his thoughts would not be. Now, one of these accounts ends with the well-known rhetorical figure of speech that the account is not exhaustive in its treatment of the things Jesus Christ did (Jn. 21.25). No other account is exhaustive either, nor are all the accounts considered together exhaustive. Each account is selective, and each account selects presumably important things about Jesus Christ to pass on. (This selecting process involves a kind of abstracting, but so does all narrative; consequently, literacy may not be in play here. The product in the case of the four gospels is still not abstract philosophic statement, and this is still essentially the case with the other New Testament writings.) But even if we grant the importance of the things recorded in the New Testament writings, we would have to grant that there is a lot of material there to be remembered in, say, the living human memory of prospective converts. Consequently, just as the composers of the New Testament writings had to select salient points from the life of Jesus Christ, so too the followers of Jesus Christ needed to select salient points-to-repeat, in order first to attract and then to instruct prospective converts to the new faith. Moreover, they had to formulate these salient points in formulary expressions and in action-oriented language. Of course, the new members of the faith might later expand their knowledge of the life of Jesus Christ, but it probably was best for them to begin with the most prominent points first and then pick up the details later. It is important to

recall that many of the prospective converts were not literate and that even those who were literate to some degree were still highly oral in their thinking.

With these considerations in mind, let us now turn to Kelly's careful account of the diverse background activities that contributed to the formulation of the Nicene Creed in 325. We begin with a brief review of the creeds and then move to some background information. Kelly (1972:296) points out that the creed now known to ordinary Christians as the Nicene Creed is misnamed. For the Nicene Creed of 325 (as it is designated in this essay) was not only reaffirmed, but also amended and expanded at the Council of Constantinople in 381. This amended creed has been considered authoritative in Christianity in the East and the West alike from the time of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Kelly says that the Apostles' Creed of the fifth century is "purely Western" (296) and "has no place in the liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox churches" (368), and he further notes that it is a rather elaborate variant of the Old Roman Creed which precedes the Nicene Creed of 325. The Old Roman Creed itself emerged gradually from the catechetical setting in which people were instructed in the faith preceding baptism. Declaratory creeds were ". . . pronounced before the candidate actually entered the baptistry and came to the water" (40), whereas interrogatory creeds, which proceeded by question and answer, were part of the baptismal rite as such. Here is how Kelly explains this complex situation (49):

The double recital of creeds, one declaratory and one interrogatory, has always been something of an anomaly. The explanation is that the declaratory creed was really bound up with the ritual of the tradition and rendition of the creed, and this logically cohered with the catechumenate, not with the baptism itself. The only creed properly belonging to the baptism as such was the interrogatory one.

He goes on to note that the declaratory creed belongs ". . . to the second generation of the third century at the earliest" (49) and that the declaratory creeds borrowed in large measure from the baptismal interrogations; he points out that there is no trace of declaratory creeds in the early liturgies, although they eventually became a standard part of Christian liturgies.

Given this brief overview of the history, let us now consider

these expressions of the faith with respect to the psychodynamics of primary orality. The language Kelly uses to describe the catechetical instruction repeatedly accentuates the formulary nature of the credal expressions of the faith: "It is obvious that teachers must always have felt the need for concise summaries, approximating as closely as possible to formulae. . ." (50). It would be tedious to list all the times that Kelly uses the terms "formula(e)," "formulary," "stereotyped," and the like, but we may note that he uses such terms on the average of about once a page without saying anything explicit about the primary oral mentality. Unlike Kelly, we can now understand the psychodynamics involved in instructing highly oral people: if the expressions of the faith were not formulary, they simply would not have been remembered by the catechumens, who, for the most part, were from a residual form of primary oral culture. (For that matter, so were the educated converts, although by virtue of their education they probably were literate to some degree.) It is also worth pointing out that as the expressions of the faith lengthened, they followed a narrative (that is, action-oriented) pattern and generally used straightforward paratactic or additive linguistic structures rather than elaborate structures of subordination. As noted above, the narrative approach, as distinct from the approach of what Frye calls rational argumentation, would be in tune with the orientation of the primary oral mentality, and Ong notes in *Orality and Literacy* (1982:37-38) that primarily oral discourse is additive rather than subordinative in its use of grammatical structures. On these bases, one may generalize from James A. Notopoulos' study of "Parataxis in Homer" (1949) and say that parataxis characterizes the primary oral mentality. This pervasive quality is manifested in paratactic grammatical structures, additive rhetorical structures, and episodic narrative structures.

Readers who are familiar with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, which is used by contemporary Christians, can readily see how the heritage of the narrative and paratactic oral features of thought and expression carried over into this expression of the faith, and these readers will see the survival of this oral heritage in the Nicene Creed of 325 when I quote it and analyze it later in this essay. Of course, the Creed is a fixed formulary expression, whereas truly oral (unwritten) formulary expressions are not fixed, but fluid or variable in the sense of being multiform in passing on "uniform" thought.

Let us now turn to the Council of Nicea. Of course, there were both political and theological concerns that contributed to the formulation of the Nicene Creed of 325. The emperor Constantine the Great had made Christianity the favored faith of the empire. The doctrines of Arius had divided Christians, and Constantine saw this division as a threat to the stability and well-being of the empire. His attitude bespeaks a highly oral mentality: the primary oral mentality is essentially tribal in orientation, and tribalism is predicated on outward manifestations of unity and loyalty. This attribute of orality explains why the Christians as well as the Jews were earlier readily considered suspect and easy prey to persecution and why in the early fourth century division among Christians could be considered a threat to the outward unity of the empire by Constantine. The Nicene Creed of 325 was designed to squelch the Arians and restore unity, but the Arians later managed to interpret a key term in this creed (a seemingly unambiguous, very abstract philosophic term) in a *concrete* manner consistent with their own contentions so that the controversy over Arianism eventually raged on. This suggests that aside from the substance of the debated matter—the term *homoousios*, consubstantial—the Arians might be considered to be manifesting a primary oral mentality. With this possibility in mind, let us look at the text of the Nicene Creed of 325.

Kelly (1972:215-16) gives both the original Greek and an English translation of this creed. Here is the Greek text he gives with what I consider to be its formulary expressions arranged paratactically to illustrate one point mentioned above about primary oral composing practices:

- 1 Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεόν,
- 2 πατέρα παντοκράτορα,
- 3 πάντων ὁρατῶν τε
- 4 καὶ ἀοράτων ποιητήν.
- 5 Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν,
- 6 τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ,
- 7 γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ,
- 8 τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς,
- 9 θεοῦ ἐκ θεοῦ,
- 10 φῶς ἐκ φωτός,
- 11 θεοῦ ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,
- 12 γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα,

13 ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ,  
 14 δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο,  
 15 τὰ τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ  
 16 καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῆ,  
 17 τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους  
 18 καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα  
 19 καὶ σαρκωθέντα,  
 20 ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,  
 21 παθόντα  
 22 καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ,  
 23 ἀνεληθόντα εἰς οὐρανοὺς,  
 24 ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας  
 25 καὶ νεκρούς.  
 26 Καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα.  
 27 Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας  
 28 ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν,  
 29 καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν,  
 30 καὶ ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο,  
 31 ἢ ἐξ ἐτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας  
 φάσκοντας εἶναι,  
 32 ἢ τρεπτὸν ἢ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ  
 33 ἀναθεματίζει  
 34 ἡ καθολικὴ  
 35 καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία.

Of course, line divisions could be somewhat different for the English translation because English syntax is different from Greek syntax,<sup>5</sup> but the point is that formulary elements are obviously being used to compose this credal statement. The additive structures of primary orality are manifest in the translation as well as in the Greek original. Likewise, imagistic terms characteristic of primary orality abound in this credal statement (e.g., “Father” in line 2, “Son” in line 5, “Holy Spirit” in line 26, “almighty” in line 2, “begotten” in line 7, “light” in line 10), while the more abstract literate thought occurs in line 8 and 13. But the abstract terms are situated within a narrative structure which presumably would aid the memory of highly oral persons. Of course, the entire creed is structured around the formula used in baptizing in the name of the Father (lines 1-3) and of the Son (lines 4-26) and of the Holy Spirit (line 27). Except for lines 8 and 13, the formulary elements affirmed in this creed are undoubtedly by-products of the oral

tradition of Christianity. Some of the affirmations about the Son are simply traditional Christian formulary expressions that were put in to flatly contradict equally formulary expressions of Arius about the Son, and the anathema (lines 27-35) unequivocally rejects the formulaic expressions of the Arians (e.g., lines 29, 30).

With the advantage of hindsight, a Christian today could readily argue that the teachings of the Arians were not consonant with the threefold naming in the baptismal formula. Why name three in the baptismal formula if they are not distinct and yet also equal and at the same time one? But the Arian mind boggled at the idea of two (Father and Son) without one being subordinate to the other. Is it possible that the idea of equality of being implied between the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) was somehow impossible for the highly oral mind to grasp? In other words, must one acquire literate thought to a certain degree in order to grasp the idea of equality implied here—allowing the possibility that grasping the idea implied here is tantamount to acquiring literate thought to a certain degree? This matter of degree needs to be carefully considered. We today speak in honorific terms of a person who is “highly literate” to praise someone who is well read to a superlative degree, and so there is a basis in our usage for speaking of the degree of literacy in persons. Moreover, I have regularly used the term “basically literate” in my articles to describe inner-city black open admissions students who have mastered the rudiments of reading and writing but who nevertheless come from a residual form of primary oral culture.<sup>6</sup> Given my usage, I would say that Arius himself could have been basically literate but still highly oral in his thinking and therefore limited in his ability to understand abstract literate thought and perhaps thereby also limited in his potential ability to understand the relationship of equality between the Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit) implied in the threefold naming in the baptismal formula. Someone may argue against this interpretation by noting that Arius was educated and therefore literate beyond the rudimentary level. He was indeed educated in rhetoric, which is what education meant in his day (cf. Riché 1976, Kennedy 1980). Most likely, that education included some philosophy (or literate thought properly so called). But it undoubtedly also included training in the effective use of sound effects, rhythm, repetition, and other oral-acoustical dimensions of rhetoric. Since Arius became famous for teaching with clever ditties (that is,

good-sounding formulary expressions), he obviously employed the oral-acoustical dimensions of his education in rhetoric more conspicuously than the presumed philosophic (or properly literate) dimension.

However that may be, the Nicene Creed of 325 clearly employs abstract literate thought in lines 8 and 13 where the philosophic term “substance” is employed, and it is revealing that the Arians subsequently managed to interpret even this term in a very concrete way, even though St. Athanasius says that the formulators of the clauses thought that the clauses were unambiguous (Kelly 1972:213). It is also instructive to note that diehard Arian missionaries were later quite active in converting the barbarians to their kind of Christianity, for the barbarians were still by and large primary oral people. Since this is a very benign interpretation of the origins and the appeal of Arianism, it is important to recall that Arianism made Jesus Christ neither God nor man but a demigod, like a Homeric demigod, whereas orthodox Christianity eventually came to hold that Jesus Christ was both God and man. These insights about the divine and the human natures of Jesus Christ are undeniably important. Consequently, their denial in Arianism was rightly opposed.

If this analysis of Arianism as a manifestation of a residual form of the primary oral mentality resisting a formulation of the literate mentality can be accepted, then a similar analysis might be proposed to account for the similar resistance in the Pneumatomachian controversy to the proposed application of the abstract (or literate) term *homoousios* to the Holy Spirit. As a result of this controversy, the Creed of 325 was amended at the Council of Constantinople in 381. It is important to note that the formulary expressions added to the Creed about the Holy Spirit are all concrete terms. Kelly (341) notes that most of these expressions have scriptural flavor: “the Lord” (2 Cor 3.17), “the giver of life” (Jn. 6.63), “he proceeds from the Father” (Jn. 15.26), and “he spoke through the prophets” (2 Pet. 1.21). While “The Tome of Damasus,” which was probably composed around 377-78 and which was confirmed by the General Council in Rome in 382, and “The Synodical Letter of the Council of Constantinople,” which was issued in 382 by the second council held in Constantinople,<sup>7</sup> employed abstract terms to characterize the Holy Spirit (e.g., “equal,” “one divinity,” “only one true divinity,” and “of the divine substance” from the former document, and “the

uncreated and consubstantial and coeternal Trinity” from the latter), Kelly notes that the Creed of 381 employed the language of St. Athanasius and St. Basil in the expression “who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified.” He rightly points out that this language was less offensive than other language already being used to characterize the Holy Spirit. The orality-literacy hypothesis now enables us to see that the language added to the Creed of 381 is concrete action-oriented language attuned to the primary oral mentality and that the other language in use at the time is abstract language of the kind fostered by vowelized literacy. Moreover, this hypothesis suggests that the abstract (or literate) language was offensive to certain people precisely because they were still deeply attuned to the primary oral mentality.

Someone might object that even a highly literate person could reject either the claim that Jesus Christ was of one substance with the Father or the claim that the Holy Spirit was of one substance with the Father and the Son, or both claims. Indeed, John Milton, whom Ong (1977b:189-212) considers to have interiorized literacy extremely deeply, is known for his Arianism. Of course, being highly literate does not necessarily mean that the Christian believer will grasp and assent to the doctrine that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of one divine substance and equal. But that is not the question raised in this essay. In other words, I do not treat the question of being literate as a sufficient condition for grasping abstract thought. Rather, the essay suggests that being literate is a necessary but not sufficient condition for grasping abstract thought. Now someone else might ask if this means that a person must be literate in order to be a Christian. Since one becomes a Christian by being baptized, the above summary of Kelly’s account of the history of baptism should indicate that one does not need to be literate in order to be baptized and thereby become a Christian. Moreover, one does not need to be literate to remember and recite the Creed of 381, and one does not necessarily need to grasp the meaning of *homoousios* in the Creed of 381 in order to be a faithful Christian. But it may deepen one’s faith if one does come to understand the meaning of *homoousios* as well as a number of other abstract concepts which developed over the centuries, and to the extent that one does understand them one may be said to be literate.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Presence of the Word* (1967), Ong raises the question



of why divine providence chose the time it did to enter human history. I might close with a bit of speculation about this point based on the foregoing analyses: the primary oral mentality probably still had to be strong for people to believe in Jesus Christ, and yet the literate mentality probably had to be developed and waiting in the wings, so to speak, in order to eventually help make as understandable as a mystery can be, how the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and yet distinct, as the threefold naming in the baptismal formula implies.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Of course, Lord's book stimulated considerable subsequent research. For example, Berkley Peabody (1975) has provided a detailed study of orality in Hesiod, while Michael N. Nagler (1974) has produced an insightful generative theory of Homeric oral composition which may be helpful in understanding oral composition in other languages. In addition, John Miles Foley annotates some 1800 items in more than 90 language areas in his bibliography of *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* (1985). Moreover, Parry's attention to oral tradition as such deeply influenced the phenomenological studies of primary orality and literacy offered by Ong (1967, 1971, 1977, 1982), Havelock (1963, 1978, 1982, 1983a, 1983b), and Marshall McLuhan (1962). Their works in turn have influenced to one degree or another the analyses of historical phenomena presented by Frans Josef van Beeck, S.J. (1979), Werner H. Kelber (1983), PHEME Perkins (1980), M. T. Clanchy (1979), Brian Stock (1983) Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979), and Kevin B. Maxwell, S.J. (1983).

<sup>2</sup>For an extensive discussion of the nuances of this claim, see Farrell 1986.

<sup>3</sup>I would suggest that literary studies such as *Chaucer's Use of Proverbs* (Whiting 1934), *Proverbs in Earlier English Drama* (Whiting 1938), *Elizabethan Proverb Lore in Lyly's Euphues and in Fettle's Petite Pallace* (Tilley 1926), *Spenser's Proverb Lore* (Smith 1970), and *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language* (Dent 1981) need to be considered in the light of Ong's insight about the attraction of formulary expressions for highly oral people. Of course, not only primary oral people generated formulary expressions. Essentially literate but still highly oral people produced learned formulary expressions such as *sententiae* (e.g., Smith 1970). Moreover, if one considers Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (cf. Ong 1958:57) to be learned formulary expressions writ large, so to speak, then one might wonder if Erasmus' antipathy to the schoolboy scholasticism of his day was due in part to the formulary nature of the teachings.

<sup>4</sup>Concerning the concreteness of this term, see Grillmeier 1975:126 and

elsewhere.

<sup>5</sup>To illustrate the point, here is a comparable division of the English translation provided by Kelly:

- 1 We believe in one God
- 2 the Father almighty
- 3 maker of all things visible and invisible;
- 4 And in our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 5 the Son of God,
- 6 begotten from the Father,
- 7 only-begotten,
- 8 that is, from the substance of the Father,
- 9 God from God,
- 10 light from light,
- 11 true God from true God,
- 12 begotten not made,
- 13 of one substance with the Father,
- 14 through Whom all things came into being,
- 15 things in heaven
- 16 and things on earth,
- 17 Who because of us men
- 18 and because of our salvation
- 19 came down
- 20 and became incarnate,
- 21 becoming man,
- 22 suffered
- 23 and rose again on the third day,
- 24 ascended to the heavens,
- 25 will come to judge
- 26 the living
- 27 and the dead;
- 28 And in the Holy Spirit.
- 29 But as for those who say,
- 30 There was when he was not,
- 31 and, Before being born He was not,
- 32 and that He came into existence out of nothing,
- 33 or who assert that the Son of God is of a different
- hypostasis or substance,
- 34 or is subject to alteration or change—
- 35 these the Catholic
- 36 and apostolic Church
- 37 anathemizes.

<sup>6</sup>See Farrell 1972, 1974, 1976-77, 1978, 1979, 1983.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Burns and Fagin 1984:150ff. for these texts in English.

<sup>8</sup>The author wishes to thank Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., Mary T. Malone, and John P. Egan, S.J., for their helpful comments on this essay.

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## **Orality and Textuality in Medieval Castilian Prose**

**Dennis P. Seniff**

### *Introduction*

This study evaluates several medieval Castilian prose works in light of recent investigations dealing with orality and textuality. As a homage to Father Walter Ong and his monumental scholarly contributions to communication theory during the last three decades, it offers some criteria for improving our knowledge of the creative process with respect to sources, composition, and diffusion. Until very recently, the proponents of this critical perspective have limited themselves to the medieval literature of England and France, and to that of classical antiquity (e.g., Havelock 1963), whereas researchers of Spanish literature have almost completely ignored not only the work of Havelock, but also that of McLuhan (1962), Ong (1958, 1982), and Ferguson (1959); indeed, the concept of *diglossia*, or “the co-existence of oral and written (i.e., popular and learned) systems of language in a determined environment” described in the last essay is of great importance for the present paper. To my knowledge, the only commentaries dealing with this topic in light of medieval Peninsular literature are those of Burke (1982, 1984), Gurza (1986), Rivers (1983), and Seniff (1984). Not surprisingly, these are North American hispanists, working in quite a different critical environment from that of their European colleagues, many of whom have only just recently been able to consult translations of the aforementioned scholarship of Father Ong and others.

In order to remedy this situation somewhat, I here offer some applications of the theories advanced by these and other studies in communication to the literary corpuses of Alfonso X (thirteenth century); Juan Manuel (fourteenth century); and Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, Diego de San Pedro, and Fernando de Rojas (fifteenth

century), in order to provide a critical perspective that can help us to appreciate better the artistic value of their works. Martínez de Toledo's *El Corbacho*, as we shall see, lends itself perfectly to such an analysis by means of its popular sermonizing character, which is developed in the context of numerous classical and Biblical sources, as well as from an omnipresent testimonial perspective (the famous "eyewitness account" of modern police novels); whereas Rojas' *Celestina*, in its own right, continues to enchant—and distract—with its debt to sources now Petrarchan, now popular.<sup>1</sup>

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As a point of departure, I hasten to calm the so-called neo-traditionalist and neo-individualist groups (or oralists/Pidalists vs. the "British school" of hispanists) and to avoid immediate theoretical conflict, preferring to cite the conciliatory words of A. D. Deyermond with respect to the origins of epic poetry: "It should not be concluded that *neotradicionalismo* is necessarily wrong at every point; and we certainly cannot resolve all the problems of Spanish epic by [just] the application of. . . theories of monastic origins" (1971:48; see also Deyermond 1969). Such observations are not out of place, analogically, for medieval Castilian prose. Although there exists no work here as penetrating as is Albert B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (1960) for epic poetry, the contributions of Father Ong in the form of several theorems of literary history (1982) offer possible touchstones for textual evaluation. Following the work of I. Hajnal (1954), he notes that "medieval literature is. . . intriguing in its relation to orality because of the. . . pressures of literacy on the medieval psyche brought about not only by the centrality of the biblical text. . . but also by the strange new mixture of orality (disputations) and textuality (commentaries on written works) in medieval academia" (1982:157). Citing the work of Ruth Crosby (1936), William Nelson (1976-77), and John Ahern (1981), Ong proposes that "probably most medieval writers across Europe continued the classical practice of writing their literary works to be read aloud. . . . This helped determine the always rhetorical style as well as the nature of plot and characterization" (1982:157-58).

Even as a hypothetical abstract, the importance of this "strange new mixture" becomes clear in evaluating the genesis of the majority of medieval works in poetry *and* prose. The



psychodynamics of oral expression simply cannot be disregarded during the period of creation, or when the works were being diffused, either from memory or from a written text. An early poet would write down his lines, imagining himself declaiming them to an audience (real or fictional, see Gybbon-Monypenny 1965); and prose works as diverse as St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* present narratives in objection-and-response form, so that the reader can imagine himself involved in an oral disputation with men and women telling stories to one another, that is, in the form of a "frame story," which allows the reader the fiction of becoming part of the listening company (see [Alfonso X] 1984:30-40). Regarding the oral delivery of such texts, Ruth Crosby has posited that this is most evident in "the use of direct address not to the reader, but to those listeners who are present at the recitation" (1936:100), an axiom subsequently applied to the extended romance-narrative of the *Libro del Cavallero Zifar* (c. 1301) by R. M. Walker, who has also noted remnants of epic-formulaic phrases therein as "llorando de los ojos" and "pesóle el corazón" ("crying from his eyes," "it pained his heart"), but which exist only in the original version of the work and not in later redactions (1971:39, n. 17).

In pure contrast, Colin Smith and J. Morris have used these same "physical phrases" to support their theories on the legal (non-popular) origins of the works in which they appear (1967), a valuable contribution that nonetheless also reinforces the notion of a polarized genesis (now neo-traditionalist, now neo-individualist) of the medieval text. On the other hand, I hasten to point out that an oral-formulaic style persists even in many scientific texts of the period, as illustrated by phrases like "afevos aquí," "ya oyestes" ("here you have," "you've already heard"), and so forth. The narrator Bernardo Gordonio in his medical treatise, the *Lilio de medicina* (1495), for example, frequently offers the same "oral" prescription for different afflictions, noting that "muchas vezes la *oystes* & la *oyredes*" ("many times you've *heard* this one, and you will also *hear* it later"; fol. 96r, emphasis added). In King Alfonso XI's *Libro de la montería* ("Book of Hunting," c. 1350), the reader is frequently exhorted to understand correctly its accounts of big-game hunting, canine surgery, and geography of the chase throughout Spain; indeed, the repetition of key phrases in the 9000 locations of the last of these sections—coupled with the peculiarity

that apparent garblings of place-names in certain manuscripts actually *make sense* when read aloud—bespeak the oral genesis of this work to some degree, a phenomenon which is perhaps attributable to the dictation of royal huntsmen to a scribe or scribes. And even as late as 1599, there is evidence that some novels of chivalry were composed orally in the Peninsula and circulated as such, also being represented orally (Harvey 1974). Given these convergences of oral and written—or “learned”—sources in the same medieval work, it would appear myopic, if not incorrect, to view it from a single, rigid perspective. A critical equilibrium must be achieved and maintained.<sup>2</sup>

*The Alfonsine Literary Corpus (1250-84): Diglossia in the Royal Scriptorium*

There are several criteria that can assist us in an evaluation of the interaction of popular and learned aspects of medieval language—that is, diglossia—in its culminating moment: the creation of a literary work in written form. As early as 1250, before he ascended to the throne of Castile and León, Prince Alfonso showed keen interest in placing Castilian on a par with Latin as a literary language, if not above it, and this fervor characterizes his scholarly oeuvre throughout his reign. Thus the issue of diglossia is entirely apposite for understanding the genesis of the first great Castilian prose texts during the Alfonsine period. In evaluating the popular and learned aspects of the literary corpus of the Wise King and of later writers, I have found the following divisions, some of which have been studied by Lord (1960), Gurza (1986), Powell (1983), Walker (1971), and others, to be of value in establishing a general context for interpretation, and will allude to them at appropriate points in this paper.

*Oral Aspects*

1. Degree and type of formulaic expression in the text;
2. Degree of direct address, exhortation, and epideictic “demonstrative” expression (*mio fïo*, *oyeste* “my son, you’ve heard” etc.);
3. Anomalous or sporadic narrative changes, suggesting dictation;
4. Systematic textual distortion, which may also suggest dictation;
5. Use of proverbs, apologues, comedy, popular tales, etc.;
6. Nexus with epic, ballad, or other popular poetry;<sup>3</sup>
7. References to the acts of reading, hearing, writing, speaking;<sup>4</sup> to

words, sounds, and silence itself.

*Textual/Written Aspects*

1. Character of the prologue (if one exists) and of the narrative in general with respect to structure, specific sources, goals, historical aspects. Excessive dependence on rhetoric or declamation throughout?<sup>5</sup>
2. Presence of legal and scientific terminology, inventories (of names, materia medica, etc.), geographical sources, or disputations of a juridical character; Biblical and theological elements, e.g., of Thomas Aquinas. Are Latin, Greek, or Arabic quotations, translations, or transliterations given? Catachrestic or other philological commentary provided?
3. Degree of “literary” embellishment present *vis-à-vis* a primitive version.<sup>6</sup> Are amorous or chivalric elements present? Existence of epistles between protagonists (antagonists)? Existence of commentary on the creative literary process, or on problems associated with transcription?

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The *convergence* of such oral and textual components (some of the latter perhaps of popular origin) is made clear in the *Primera crónica general* (“First General Chronicle,” c. 1270) of Alfonso X, specifically in chapter 755, “De como Almançor fue uençudo et de la su muerte” (“Regarding How Al-Mansour Was Conquered, and His Death”), when the redactor cites the work of Lucas of Túy, who in his Latin *Chronicon Mundi* (1236) quotes the monorhyme tristich, “en Cannatannaçor/ Almançor/ perdio ell atambor” (“in Calataiñazor/ Al-Mansour/ lost his drum”), for R. Menéndez Pidal “the most ancient *villancico* that we are familiar with” (1968:97-98; my trans.). The placement of a verse that was apparently so well known in the learned Alfonsine chronicle gives credence to the nickname “a medieval folklorist” for the Wise King, as proposed by J. E. Keller (1965)—or rather, for the royal scriptorium team that prepared the work (cf. Oral Aspects, No. 6 in the above schema).

The popular/oral tradition also provides the basis for the Oriental short stories that Alfonso and his brother, Prince Fadrique, had translated from Arabic and other languages. Such is the “Enxenplo del omne, e de la muger, e del papagayo, e de su

moça” (“Account of the Man, and of His Wife, and of His Parrot, and of His Maid”), from Fadrique’s 1253 translation, *El libro de los engaños* (“Book of the Wiles of Women”), in the tradition of Sindibad, Joseph (*cum* Potiphar’s wife), and other virtuous noblemen:

— Señor, oy dezir que un omne que era çeloso de su muger; e conpro un papagayo e metiolo en una jabla e pusolo en su casa, e mandole que le dixiese todo quanto viesse fazer a su muger. . . ; e despues fue su via a rrecabdar su mandado; e entro su amigo della en su casa do estava. El papagayo vio quanto ellos fizieron, e quando el omne bueno vino. . . mando traer el papagayo. . . ; e el papagayo contogelo todo lo que viera fazer a la muger con su amigo. . . ; e la muger cuydo verdaderamente que la moça la descubriera, e llamola estonçes.

E dixo: — Tu dexiste a mi marido todo quanto yo fize.

E la moça juro que non lo dixiera: — Mas sabed que lo dixo el papagayo.

E quando vino la noche, fue la muger al papagayo e . . . començole a echar agua de suso como que era luvia; e tomo un espejo en la mano e parogelo sobre la gabla, e en otra mano una candela, e paravagelo de suso; e cuydo el papagayo que era rrelanpago; e la muger començo a mover una muela, e el papagayo cuydo que eran truenos. . .

E despues que fue la mañana, vino el marido e pregunto al papagayo: — ¿Viste esta noche alguna cosa?

E el papagayo dixo: — Non pud ver ninguna cosa con la gran luvia e truenos e rrelanpagos que esta noche fizo.

E el omne dixo: — En quanto me as dicho es verdat de mi muger commo esto, non a cosa mas mintrosa que tu, e mandarte e matar. — E enbio por su muger, e perdonola, e fizieron paz (Fadrique 1983:15–16).

(“— Sire, I once heard about a man who suspected his wife of infidelity, so he bought a parrot to watch what she did and to report this to him. Once the man had gone, the woman’s lover came in; the parrot saw everything they did, and reported this to his master when he returned. The wife, furious, called the maid, for she thought *she* was the one who had denounced her.

And she said:— ‘You told my husband everything I did.’

— ‘Not I, ma’am. It was the parrot.’

That night, to fix the bird, the woman began to throw water on his cage, as if it were rain; and she took a mirror and held it over the cage along with a candle, and the bird thought it was lightning; and the woman began to turn a grindstone, and the bird thought it was thunder. . .

The next morning, the husband asked the parrot:

— ‘Did you see anything last night?’

— ‘Nothing,’ he replied. ‘A big storm passed through; I couldn’t see anything.’

To which the man held the bird to be a liar, and promptly killed it, thereafter restoring his wife to his good graces”) (cf. Oral Aspects, No. 5 above).

The collection of tales known as *Calila e Dimna*, has, as does Fadrique's *Engaños*, an edifying goal that transcends its own humorous aspects. As a point of departure, the work's "Introduction by Ibn al-Muqaffa" is firmly anchored in Arabic Scholasticism, which indeed may have influenced the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, inasmuch as the fables and apologues that the *Calila* contains are meant to assist the growth of the listeners' philosophical knowledge in order to transport them to the "limitless expanse that is the house of God. . ." ([Alfonso X] 1984:90, 121; my trans.). Clearly, such a convergence of popular tales and moral philosophy is but another example of the phenomenon of diglossia in the genesis of Alfonso's literary corpus, the *Calila* apparently having been translated by him while still a prince (1249-50).

Indeed, the situation is similar for the Wise King's *General estoria* and various epic legends as well as the *Primera crónica general*, with their indebtedness to various epic legends as well as to Petrus Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, the works of Lucan and Suetonius, the *Speculum Historiale*, Ovid's *Heroides*, the *Physiologus*, the Bible, and other Latin, Romance, Arabic, and Byzantine sources (see, for example, Gómez Pérez 1959 and Eisenberg 1973). Herein, the *textual* exposition is at times based on an *oral* one, or, vividly maintaining the impression of written communication, an epistolary one, which is in turn derived from another textual source, as in the case of the famous "Letter from Dido to Aeneas," full of passion and emotion, translated by Alfonso's team from *Heroides* 7 for inclusion in *Primera crónica general* 59 (Impey 1980:284-88). Without doubt, the dramatic element of such a text is enhanced through the medium of dialogue and its attendant oral components; just as much here as in official documents like the "Testament of King Alfonso X Proclaimed in Seville on 8 November 1283," which is directed at "todos los homes que este escrito *vieren*, e *leyeren*, e *oyeren*" (Alfonso X 1966:224, emphasis added; "everyone who might *see*, and *read*, and *hear* this document"), with its clear visual, textual, and oral exposition.

In the Alfonsine juridical corpus, the importance of *lex naturalis* must also be emphasized (cf. Textual/Written Aspects, No. 2). This philosophical concept, which inheres in the *Summa Theologica* (particularly 1-2, Q91, a2), describes the "participation of the Eternal Law in the rational being," by means of which man, through his natural reason, can deduce an ethical code. For St.

Thomas, to do good and avoid evil were obvious derivations from this principle (Aquinas 1947:I, 685). Other conclusions, some of which are more remote, were attained through the process of Scholastic reasoning as formalized in the *disputatio*, an integral part of the *studium generale* in European universities before the end of the twelfth century which also served as an effective pedagogical tool for the training of lawyers and rhetoricians.

This emphasis on “the natural” is clearly stated in the Alfonsine *Libro de las leyes* (“Book of Laws”) as regards the Church’s right of patronage:

Natura & razon mueue a los omnes pora amar las cosas que fazen & pora guardar las quando pudieren, que se meiores. . . . Assi cuemo el padre ama a su fijo que engendro, el guarda quanto puede, que biva & dure en buen estado. Otrossi el que llanta algun arbol, plazel con el. . . . Otrossi las criaturas que han entendimiento o razon aman & deuen amar & seruir & onrrar. . . . E por esta razon el que faze la elesia deue la amar & onrrar cuemo cosa que el fizo a seruicio de Dios” (Alfonso X 1978:fol. 89v).

(Nature and reason move men to love the things that they create and to protect them as much as is in their power so that they may be improved. . . . Thus does the father love the child that he engendered, protecting him as best he can, such that he may live and flourish. Also he who plants a tree is pleased by it. . . . Too, creatures with understanding or reason love and must love and serve and honor. . . . Therefore, he who builds a church must love it and honor it as something he created in the service of God.)

However, the culmination of oral and written currents—of diglossia—appears not in the Wise King’s literary corpus, but in that of his son, Sancho IV (1284-95), the “literary bridge,” according to R. P. Kinkade (1972), between Alfonso and the fourteenth-century raconteur, Juan Manuel (1282-1348). A work attributed to Sancho, the *Lucidario*, in particular, offers an excellent example of moral/natural philosophy expressed in the dialogic mode, as the following chapter titles indicate: “Cómo el discípulo preguntaua al maestro si querría que le preguntase más” (xxxix) and “Sy ay alguna alimalia que aya tan complidamente los

cinco sentidos como los a el home” (xli) (“How the Disciple Asked the Master if He Wanted Him to Ask Him Anything Else”; “If There Is Any Animal That Has the Five Senses So Perfectly Developed as Does Man”). For Kinkade, “While Alfonso paints the polychromatic exterior of human history, Sancho attempts. . . to describe man’s interiority on the basis of his beliefs and own chemical composition, i.e., his Catholic faith (*lex divina*) and four elements with their corresponding humors (*lex naturalis*). [Also of] extreme importance in the *Lucidario* is the central fiction of the dialogue, which assumes an increasingly realistic character: from the initial ‘Student’s Discourse’ [to] chapter xxxix’s ‘How the Disciple Asked the Master. . . Anything Else,’ which treats the neophyte’s growing uneasiness that he might be importuning his mentor excessively” (1972:1042-43; my trans.).

*The Dominican Legacy and the Works of Juan Manuel: Oral Sources, Written Sources*

The success of the diffusion of Thomism in Iberia after 1300, especially in Castile, appears to be due largely to the pedagogical activities of the Dominican Order. While a detailed examination of textual transmission is not feasible in the present study, it seems probable that the works of the Aquinate were received in the Peninsula soon after they were written and that the Dominicans adopted them immediately for instructional purposes. It is significant in this respect that Thomas’ spiritual brethren included among their number some 1500 teaching members—half of whom dedicated themselves to theological instruction—holding positions in conventual, cathedral, and monastic schools as well as in the universities (Hillgarth 1976:137). The nobleman Juan Manuel (d. 1348), the nephew of Alfonso X, was devoted to the order (for whom he founded the monastery of Peñafiel) and was deeply influenced by the climate of opinion created by the writings of Aquinas, particularly the element of Natural Law. At the same time, the fundamental orality of many of his works cannot be denied, as numerous studies have indicated.<sup>7</sup>

The *Libro de la caza* (“Book of Falconry,” 1335?), for example, offers a convergence of oral and written sources in the production of a manual for falconers, the presence of which sources is manifested in the various sporadic narrative changes—characteristic of the dictated text—that it exhibits (cf. Oral Aspects, No. 3), and whose narrator, certainly *not* Don Juan, is

revealed in the following passages: “e avn dize don iohan quel *oyo dezir* quela caça delos falcones abaneros vino a castiella despues que el sancto Rey don ferrando. . . caso con la Reyna doña beatriz”; “Otrosi *oy dezir* en portogal avia vn conde que dizian don gonçalo garçia”; and “*dize* don iohan que tanto *se paga el* dela caça e por tan aprouechosa la *tiene* para los grandes señores e avn para todos los otros. . . , que si commo *fizo escriuir* lo que *el vio e oyo* en esta arte dela caça, que si alguna cosa *viere* daqui adelante que se mude o se faga mejor e mas estraña mente que asi lo *fare escriuir*” (Manuel 1880:46, emphasis added) (“and Don Juan even says that *he heard* that the chase with high-flying falcons came to Castile after saintly King Ferdinand. . . married Queen Beatriz”; “Also, *I heard* [that] in Portugal there was a count called Gonzalo García”; and “Don Juan says that *he enjoys* falconry so much and *holds* it to be so beneficial for great lords and even everyone else . . . *that he had ordered* to be written down what *he saw* and *heard* in this art of falconry; but if he witnesses anything hereafter that should be changed or made better or more extraordinary, *I will* [also] *have it recorded* as such”).

As I have shown elsewhere (1984:95), the editors of the *Caza* (Manuel 1880, 1982a) have disregarded the dynamic oral process that it entails, interpreting the preceding morphological differences as curious transcriptional variants instead of recognizing their significance as traces of a spontaneous rephrasing that occurred during dictation by Juan Manuel himself, or later when this dictation was revised by a central compiler who was apparently an expert in falconry as well. In the end, as the narrator admits, the excellence of the sport resides in the experience of the huntsman: “quantos escrivanos enel mundo son non podrian escriuir quantas cosas son mester si el falconero non ha entendimiento desuyo para conosçer la manera del falcon e lo quel cuple de fazer” (Manuel 1880:20); (“all the scribes in the world can’t write down every single matter dealing with the sport if the falconer doesn’t have his own knowledge of his animals and what the activity entails”). For Don Juan, theory is never more important than practice based on reason and understanding.

Neither does the importance of understanding—or other Thomistic principles—lack in the *Libro de los estados* (“Book of Estates,” c. 1330), with its dialogue/debate between the knight Turín and the philosopher Julio regarding *lex naturalis* and natural justice (cf. Textual/Written Aspects, No. 2)—in effect, aspects that



are structurally and thematically similar to those of Sancho IV's *Lucidario*, as can be seen in this passage from I, xxiv-xxv:

—Sen[n]or—dixo Turin—, nunca. . . se acuerdan los omes que en esta tierra oviese omne que mostrase ninguna ley çierta, et por ende non beuimos en otra ley. . . . —Sennor infante—dixo Julio—, todas las leys del mundo son en dos maneras: la vna es ley de natura; la otra ley es dada por alguno. La ley de natura es non fazer tuerto nin mal a ninguno. Et esta ley tan bien la an las animalias commo los omnes, et avn mejor: ca las animalias nunca fazen mal las vnas a' las otras que son de su linage, nin a otras, sinon con grant mester. . . para su mantenimiento. . . nin se llegan los maslos a las fenbras, sinon en tienpo que an de e[n]gendrar segund su naturaleza; et eso mismo fazen las aves, tan bien las que caçan commo las otras. . . . Et asi, pues es çierto que de la ley de natura muy mejor vsan dello las animalias que los omnes, de ualde ovieron los omnes entendimiento et razon, lo que non an las animalias (Manuel 1982c:238—40).

(—Master—said Turín—, men on this earth have never agreed that there existed a perfect law, and so we do not live under such a law. . . . —Master Prince—said Julio—, all the laws in the world are of two types: the ones found in nature, and the ones given by man. The former involve doing no harm or evil to anyone. And this type of law is also possessed by animals, even more so than by man: for animals never do evil unto each other, neither to themselves nor to those of other types, unless they have great necessity [from lions to birds]; neither do males copulate with females, unless it is their mating season. . . . And so, it is clear that the law of nature is far better observed by animals than by men, even though the latter possess understanding and reason, and animals do not.)

Consequently, an adaptation of *written* Thomistic sources that are expounded in an *oral* context appears to predominate in the *Estados*, whereas in the *Libro de las armas* (“Book of Heraldry,” 1334?)—also known as the *Libro de las tres razones* (“Book of the Three Accounts”)—personal, oral sources of Juan Manuel and his family are recorded in written form<sup>8</sup> for Friar Juan Alfonso, as is conceded in the prologue to the work (Manuel 1982b:121; cf. Oral Aspects, No. 2). The narrative is of some historical interest as three “private” questions are answered for the Dominican friar: 1) why the *armas* of wings and lions were given to Manuel, Don Juan’s father—a study in heraldry; 2) why Don Juan and his legitimate progeny can create knighthoods; and 3) what transpired in the last conversation between Sancho IV, Don Juan’s cousin, and him while Sancho lay dying in Madrid.

The brief prologue to the *Armas* lends itself well to our

investigation of orality and textuality in that it describes the Baron of Peñafiel's process for gleaning knowledge from experience, and then recording it for the benefit of others. In responding to Friar Juan Alfonso's request for information, Don Juan explains that the transfer of "things heard" to "things written" is not an easy task; similarly, it is easier to explain something verbally than to write it down. Words flow from oral sources, some of which are certainly more credible than others, and are then judged by the faculty of understanding, which acts as a filter and synthesizer; the results are then recorded, mentally and/or textually. At the same time, Don Juan prefers to attain a consensus rather than to rely on just one source. On testimony from others, he notes that "non lo oy todo a vna persona, mas oy vnas cosas a vna persona, et otras, a otras; et ayuntando lo que oy a los vnos et a los otros, con razon ayunte estos dichos (et por mi entendimiento entendi que passara todo el fecho en esta manera que vos yo porne aqui por escripto) . . . ; et asi fiz yo de lo que oy a muchas personas, que eran muy crederas, ayuntan[do] estas razones" (Manuel 1982b:121-22); ("I didn't hear things from just *one* person, but from *several*: some things from one, and other things from others. And I rightly put these bits of information together, using my understanding, in the text you have here; and I have compiled the discussions you have here on the basis of what I have heard from many people, who are very reliable sources"). This amounts to a simple but effective description of audial discrimination centuries before the studies in communication of McLuhan, Ong, and others would be realized.

In the third *pregunta* ("question") of the *Armas*, what transpired between Juan Manuel and the dying king, Sancho IV (in effect, a monologue on the part of the latter), we see the "dark side" of orality in Don Juan's oeuvre. On his own admission, Sancho was the target of his parents' invariable curses: "Et dio me la su maldicion mio padre en su vida muchas vezes, seyendo biuo et sano, et dio me la quando se moria; otrosi, mi madre, que es biva, dio me la muchas vegadas, et se que me la da agora, et bien creo por cierto que eso mismo fara a su muerte. . ." (Manuel 1982b:138); ("And my father [Alfonso X] cursed me many times during his life, being alive and healthy, and, too, while he was dying; also my mother, who is alive, cursed me many times, and I know that she is doing so now, and will continue to do so until her death. . ."). A work of the imagination—an oral fiction, as Deyermond considers it (1982)—or a true account? Indeed, Sancho

led a rebellion over the succession to his father's throne which was still in progress when the Wise King died in 1284 (see MacDonald 1965 and Craddock 1986), and there would seem to be little reason to doubt the content—if not Don Juan's delivery—of this second-hand confession.

In any case, the entire study of diglossia, and of other issues in orality, in the literary corpus of Juan Manuel remains to be made. It suffices to note that future investigations here should keep in mind its written and oral aspects with respect to sources, narrative technique, and possible audiences (see England 1977 and the Introduction to Manuel 1980). After all, as Don Juan tells us in the *Armas*, “las cosas son mas ligeras de dezir por palabra que de poner las por scripto. . .” (Manuel 1982b:121) (“things are easier to communicate via the spoken word than through writing them down. . .”); and medieval listeners could not turn back the pages to remind themselves what had come previously in his narrative. Happily, the modern reader can.

#### *Fifteenth-Century Secularization of Fiction; Conclusion*

The works of Juan Manuel represent a watershed in the evolution of Peninsular fiction with respect to their use of oral and written sources. In the fifteenth century, however, it happens that the Humanistic impulse and full flowering of courtly literature assign to a lower level of inquiry and inspiration various intellectual currents, now interpreted increasingly in more rigorously moralizing contexts. Included here is much philosophical material in the Thomistic vein, relegated to numerous doctrinaire “mirrors” for correct living and to the defense of women against misogynists, notably the *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mugeres* (“Book of Noble and Virtuous Women,” 1446) by Álvaro de Luna. As creatures of God, it was assumed, women could not be totally evil.

Still, Thomistic “fiction” existed. J. H. Herriott (1952:274-78), for example, has identified the importance of the interior senses, a predilect concern of the Thomists, in various Spanish works from the courtly literature of the mid-1400s to the historical, theological, and philosophical texts of Bartolomé de las Casas, Suárez, and Vives almost a century later, at which point a vigorous Neo-Scholasticism would revive certain aspects of medieval moral and natural philosophy. Literature of the pulpit, moreover, offers a popularizing form of this doctrinaire mode, which reflects the functioning of diglossia at yet another level the

Biblical-patristic text expounded in an environment that is essentially oral (see Cátedra 1978, Deyermond 1980). In the case of the *Arcipreste de Talavera o Corbacho* (1438) by Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, numerous “sins of the flesh” of the faithful are vividly placed in relief by means of an omnipresent testimonial perspective (the “eyewitness account”). ““Es que non farás fornicio” (“Thou shalt not fornicate”), the narrator tells us, citing the Biblical commandment. He then proceeds to enumerate the numerous consequences of this activity: “E sy por ventura se enpreña la tal donzella del tal loco amador, vía buscar con qué lance la criatura muerta”; “¿Quántos, di, amigo, viste o oýste dezir que en este mundo amaron, que su vida fue dolor e enojo. . . e, [de que] mueren muchos de tal mal e otros son privados de su buen entendimiento[?]”; etc. (I, ii and vii; Martínez de Toledo 1984:49 and 58); (“And if by chance the young maiden becomes pregnant by her passionate lover, she would look for something with which to abort the child”; “Tell me, friend: how many people in this world have you seen or heard tell about whose lives were nothing but pain and aggravation. . . and [of whom] many die of such an affliction, others being deprived of their sound understanding[?]”).

Erroneously citing St. Paul (rather than Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9) in order to illustrate that “Los que Dios ayuntare non los separe onbre” (“Those whom God hath joined let no man put asunder”), Martínez de Toledo describes to us the three appellations of the progeny of those who do *not* obey this norm: “los fijos avidos de fornicacion. . . en derecho espurios llamados, e en romance bastardos, e en común bulgar de mal dezir, fijos de mala puts” (I, xv; 1984:69-70); (“children who are had from fornication are legally called spurious, and in romance [i.e., Castilian] bastards, and in common, vulgar street language, sons of bitches”). This is an excellent example of the clear linguistic interest that the work exhibits, later reinforced through the histrionics of key scenes such as that offered in the chapter “Cómo las mugeres aman a los que quieren. . .” (“How Women Love Whomever They Wish. . .”): “¡Yuy! ¡Dexadme! ¡Non quiero! ¡Yuy! . . . ¡Libreme Dios deste demoño). . . ¡O cómo soys pesado! . . . ¡Avad, que me quebráys el dedo! . . . ¡Ravia, Señor!” (II, xiii; 1984:174-75); (“Ouch! Leave me! I don’t want to! Ouch! . . . God save me from this monster! . . . You’re so *heavy*! . . . Get OFF, you’re breaking my finger! . . . God, he’s insane!”). The

*Corbacho*, then, is a unique case as regards dramatic and linguistic elements in a context of popular theology and morality; it offers what is perhaps the best example of diglossia in medieval Peninsular literature.

In the sentimental novel *Cárcel de Amor* ("Jail of Love") by Diego de San Pedro (1492), the faculties of understanding, reason, memory, and will of the "prisoner," Leriano, capitulate in a *tour de force* of courtly despair. These elements of the soul (so important for Thomistic-Augustinian doctrine), once "enslaved," permit the passions of their unhappy victim to file past in an environment now epistolary, now rhetorically oral, with its *exclamatio* of "Ay de mí," "O," "Triste de mí," "Guay de mí," etc. ("Oh, me!," "Oh!," "Sad me!," "Wretched me!"), as studied recently by I. A. Corfis, who notes that "literary and rhetorical traditions represent a distinctive characteristic of the *Cárcel de Amor*. Its mixture of epistles, narrative, oratory, and treatise genres creates a polyphony in the text that captures the reader's attention (1985:47, "Resumen"; my trans.).

Fernando de Rojas' debt to numerous sources, both written and oral, in the preparation of his famous novel-in-dialogue, *Celestina* (sixteen-act version, Burgos 1499; a twenty-one act version appears no later than 1502), has been demonstrated by many scholars.<sup>9</sup> Gurza (1986), in particular, has pointed out its affinity with a popular tradition of dramatic performance and diversion with respect to its nexus with *cancionero* ("song-book") poetry, its use of the proverb (but see also Deyermond 1961 for its dependence on Petrarchan elements), abundance of formulaic expressions, and numerous allusions to words and even silence. While this tale of avarice and the destruction of youth through unbridled passion is a contemporary exposé of moral debauchery in the cold light of social criticism, the critic D. Severin (1982 [1984]:207) has noted, however, that the heroine, Melibea, seems to be thinking about the popular lyric of the *bella malmaridada* ("beautiful unhappily married woman") when she says, speaking of the hero Calisto, that "Si pasar quisiere la mar, con él iré, si rodear el mundo, lléveme consigo, si venderme en tierra de enemigos no rehuiré su querer. . . que más vale ser buena amiga que mala casada" (XVI; see Rojas 1982:206); ("If he wants to cross the sea, I'll go with him; or wander through the world, may he take me with him; or sell me in a hostile land, I will not refuse his will: for it is better to be a good lover than a bad wife").

This is closely related to a ballad of the day which is indeed entitled “La bella malmaridada” (no. 293 in Frenk 1977:148).

This lyrical preoccupation, however, has a more rudimentary analogue in the *Celestina*'s treatment of the relationship between speech and survival: the go-between Celestina herself has the “gift of gab”; whereas the servant, Pármeno, offers an explanation (act IX) of the *primum mobile* of his class when he says “La necesidad y pobreza, la hambre, que no hay mejor maestra en el mundo, no hay mejor despertadora y avivadora de ingenios. ¿Quién mostró a las picazas y papagayos imitar nuestra propia habla con sus arpadadas lenguas, nuestro órgano y voz, sino ésta?” (Rojas 1982:143); (“Necessity and poverty, hunger: there is no greater awakener or sharpener of your wits than these. Who showed magpies and parrots how to imitate our speech with their singing tongues—our organ and voice—other than hunger?”). A key statement, such a fundamental observation on communication complements the textuality of the work (cf. Oral Aspects, No. 7), with its inventory of pharmacopoeia (I; Rojas 1982:61-62), presence of juridical terminology (“¿quemada seas!”) [“may you be burned”], “fraude hay” [“there’s fraud (here)”]; *passim*) and numerous allusions to classical antiquity. All of this in the face of *Celestina*'s culminating moment, the silent “performance” by Pleberio after his daughter Melibea has committed suicide by jumping from a tower, while his wife Alisa tragically interrogates him: “¿Por qué arrancas tus blancos cabellos? ¿Por qué hieres to honrada cara? ¿Es algún mal de Melibea?” (XXI; Rojas 1982:231-32); (“Why are you pulling out your white hair? What are you clawing your honorable face? Is there something wrong with Melibea?”). Irony of ironies: at that moment, Alisa had not yet seen her daughter’s shattered body.

\* \* \*

Without intending either to favor or to discriminate against any particular school of critical theory in the present paper, I have had as a goal simply to make some observations on the phenomenon of diglossia, or convergence of oral and written sources, in several prose works of the medieval Castilian corpus, also offering appropriate commentary on the application of other studies in communication to them. Much remains to be done; I hope to have stimulated some interest in realizing other

investigations of the topic, in Spanish and in other languages, for the moment providing some guidelines and possible criteria in order to aid colleagues in attaining this goal. Here I have reached no particular conclusions, preferring instead to emphasize the introductory aspects of the task at hand: an evaluation of Peninsular literature in terms of that “strange new mixture” of orality and textuality and of other phenomena of human communication that Father Walter Ong studied for the first time some thirty years ago.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See the case of Melibea, the prototypical heroine of the ballad of “La Malmaridada” (“The Unhappily Married Wife”), studied by Severin 1982 [1984].

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the review by Harvey (1986) of Pattison 1983.

<sup>3</sup>For the impact of the epics on Alfonsine historiography, see Pattison 1983.

<sup>4</sup>See Gurza 1986 and Frenk 1984.

<sup>5</sup>See Faulhaber 1972 and Fraker 1985.

<sup>6</sup>See Walker 1971.

<sup>7</sup>See England 1977, Macpherson 1977, Ayerbe-Chaux 1982, and Seniff 1984. Of interest, too, is the introductory study by Alan Deyermond to Manuel 1985.

<sup>8</sup>A central fiction may predominate here; see Deyermond 1982.

<sup>9</sup>See Deyermond 1961, Gurza 1986, Severin 1982 [1984], Frenk 1984, and Fraker 1985.

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## **Peter Ramus, Walter Ong, and the Tradition of Humanistic Learning**

**Peter Sharratt**

In the 1950's Walter Ong focused his attention on the sixteenth-century Parisian philosopher and educationalist Peter Ramus, and published the results of his research in two major works, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958a), and a *Ramus and Talon Inventory* (1958b), which listed for the first time over one thousand printings of books by Ramus in the fields of grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, physics, optics, ethics, and theology. Thirty years on, as we settle down firmly into the computer age in scholarship, it is possible to appreciate fully the value of these two seminal books which have stimulated and enriched all work on Ramus since their publication.

Contemporary scholars of Ramus continue to acknowledge their indebtedness to Ong (Meerhoff 1986, Grafton and Jardine 1986, Murphy and Newlands 1986). It is true that in the last two years studies in Ramus have begun to take a rather new direction as a result of a computerized catalogue of his works, prepared at the Centre d'Histoire des Sciences et des Doctrines in Paris, which obviates the need to trudge from library to library and to handle hundreds of disparate and inadequate catalogues, and has provided the tools necessary for a clearer comparison of Ramus' textual revisions. In a recent book (1984) Mme. Bruyère-Robinet has begun the work of providing a new stemmatology, which establishes more accurately than was possible a generation ago the relation between the different editions, and, in the matter of logic, at least, has reappraised Ramus by setting out the main stages in the development of his thought against a background of a fundamental and abiding Neo-Platonism. Yet even this book owes much to Ong and it is worth stressing that without his early work the real importance of Ramus would not have been recognized and the

computerized catalogue would scarcely even have seemed worth organizing.

This is not the place to enter into a discussion about this major new study of Ramus, but I mention it here for two reasons: to show how Ong's early research has continued to have an impact on all recent scholarship on the subject, even when his interpretation is called into question, and has incited this work based on more refined techniques of information (a matter close to his own heart), and to emphasize that for Ong Ramus survives and merits our attention not so much as a profound and original thinker and a forerunner of Descartes (which he is in Mme. Bruyère-Robinet's opinion) but as the center of controversies about method (both in teaching and in scientific discovery) and about rhetoric and logic and their role in communication. Ong was able to situate Ramus in the great scholastic tradition as it came into confrontation with the new humanism of the Italian and Northern Renaissance and as it was experienced by scholars and teachers in the ancient university of Paris. His concern has been with Ramus the teacher, the educational theorist, the humanist, and the communicator, and this will be the principal concern of the present essay.

My purpose is to examine, firstly, some of Ramus's ideas on education (the close relation between art, method, and teaching; the unifying vision contained in the one method common to all teaching; the union of philosophy and eloquence) and on the teaching of literature (the theory of analysis and genesis, the need for universal knowledge, the freedom and harmony which learning brings with it); secondly, Ong's views on teaching, especially of literature (the commonplace tradition in rhetoric, the relation of Latin to the vernacular in teaching and communication, orality, the high moral purpose of the teacher, the integral humanist vision); and, thirdly, to say something briefly about how the study of Ramus and of Ong's evaluation of him help towards an understanding of the role of the teacher today and his place in the humanist tradition. I shall suggest that the teacher of literature today should still aim at an encyclopedic ideal, even though its realization is less and less possible, that breadth of vision is just as important as ever, and indeed that the study of literature must embrace all kinds of communication if his subject is to remain, as it should, at the center of the humanities.

## I

Peter Ramus gave himself entirely to his teaching, either in the classrooms of his various colleges, or in the lecture-hall of the university, or at the Collège Royal (now the Collège de France), the alternative university set up by François Premier, or again in the publication of textbooks or pedagogically oriented monographs. If we try to define what teaching meant for him, what theory lay behind it, we find ourselves faced with several related terms which keep recurring in his writing. Together with his contemporaries he uses “ars” almost synonymously with “scientia,” “disciplina,” “methodus,” “professio,” and even “virtus” and “sapientia.” Other words such as “doctrina” and “*mathêsis*” are also linked with “ars,” and behind all of them is the idea that an art is a way of teaching. As Ong notes, *natura* is “more or less implied as the complement of any and all of these” and it is the idea of teaching, more particularly the teaching of philosophy, which binds them together: “Dominating the passage from early discourse-knowledge to observation-knowledge stands the all-important figure of the teacher” (1958a:156, 149, 151).

Of all these near-synonyms it is method which people now associate most readily with the name of Ramus. The direct link with teaching is best seen in a pamphlet he published in 1557, *Quod sit unica doctrinae instituendae methodus*, taken from the ninth and tenth books of his *Animadversiones Aristotelicae*. In his attempt to find a universal formula to explain reality and to demonstrate the relatedness of all branches of knowledge, he fastens onto the unifying factor that there is one method applicable to the resolution of all problems, one common doctrine of invention, a theory which was for him far from being a mere logical or rhetorical exercise, since all discourse, not just teaching, was founded upon it. This doctrine of invention is compared to a river (sometimes the Tiber, sometimes the Seine) with its many uses—drinking, washing, irrigation, cleansing, putting out fires, transport: “nor are there individual streams set aside for all these purposes, but the whole river is of such a nature that it is useful for each and every one of them; similarly the doctrine of invention is universally applicable” (1549:47). Each art retains its special aim and approach, yet the same logic pervades all teaching and there is a common ultimate purpose: “The ends and teaching-procedures of all arts should be separated from one another, but they should be united in their usefulness; we see the

same thing in the possession of farms and fields—my field should not make inroads into yours, nor yours into mine, but when we buy, sell or exchange produce, they should have common usefulness” (1569:237; Ong 1982:135). In his *Pro philosophica disciplina*, in a justification of his own practice of teaching, the metaphor of utility is enriched by one of fruitfulness: “In farming there are crops, trees, vines, herds and cattle which all demand a particular kind of treatment: we leave the stubble in the fields and carry home the grain; we leave the trees in the orchard and carry home the apples; we leave the beasts in the pasture and carry home the abundance of milk and fleeces; we give them all a common usefulness in feeding, nourishing, and clothing the body. So it should be in the nourishment of the mind: its various parts should be catered for in different ways” (1569:1020). In this broad view of the encyclopedia of the arts compared to the rich variety of nature, Ramus is searching for a unified vision, and it is in method that he finds it.

This one and only method of teaching all subjects is not exactly what modern educationalists call “teaching method” but simply logic, even though, as Ong says, “it is adopted from classroom procedures and rhetorical manuals without any closely reasoned foundation in formal logic” (1971:84-85). It was the same pedagogical principle which made Ramus refer so often to Solon’s Law, according to which there should always be a space between two adjoining properties and between walls around properties: in spite of their common utility subjects taught should always be kept apart (Ong 1958a:280-81; 1977:175).

Yet for all this apparent desire for demarcation Ramus was above all favorable to cross-fertilization between the disciplines. There was one area in particular in which he was more concerned with linking subjects than with keeping them apart, and that was the celebrated union of philosophy and eloquence. This was a common enough topic of Renaissance theorists, as they drew upon Cicero and ultimately Aristotle. In 1546 Ramus alluded to it in his commentary on Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* and in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de Presles, *Oratio de studiis philosophiae et eloquentiae conjungendis*. In his *Pro philosophica disciplina* he further justifies his own educational theories about the union and explains his own practice.

In the eyes of some of his contemporaries, however, Ramus was a good teacher neither of philosophy nor of literature, and



with reference to literature at least it is difficult not to sympathize with these critics. The only works of literary criticism, if we may call it that, which we have from his pen are his commentaries on Virgil's *Georgics* and *Bucolics* and on some of Cicero's speeches. The approach is biographical, formalistic, and moralizing: the primary concern is with the identification of tropes and figures, though Ramus did accept that pleasure was a valid if incidental aim of reading poetry. Moreover, in spite of this mechanistic attitude to literature, he often expounded the theory, frequently found at the time, of *analysis* and *genesis* as the principles by which existing texts are to be studied and by which students may be helped to engage in creative writing. Analysis of a work is the methodical examination of it and genesis is the "bringing into being of a new work" (a phrase which he later altered to "similar or even better works, as Aristotle showed"). Even analysis is not pure contemplation of the work since it involves the process of unraveling (*analuein, retexere*) (1549:175; 1569:304; Ong 1958:191, 263). By genesis the student carries on this process and produces something original. This dual theory is the basis of Ramus' views on imitation, and his theory of imitation is at the center of his views on education. For him, as for Aristotle, all learning progresses by imitation and is finally synonymous with the ascent to wisdom. The theory of imitation, clearly presented in the *Ciceronianus*, bears witness to Ramus' humanist outlook: he wished to reinstate genuine classical learning, to liberalize education, to link all disciplines in a harmonious body of knowledge.

Yet even with his humanist aspirations, Ramus remains ill at ease about literature and in particular about poetry. He did share the opinions of most of his contemporaries about poetic fury and divine inspiration, and like them he thought that poets were born not made, yet in spite of this elevated vision of the role of the poet, he could not bring himself to believe that poetry was a serious pursuit, and all are agreed that he himself lacked poetic sensibility (Ong 1958a:281-83; 1971:177).

Ramus often returned to the question of the relation of poetry to the other arts of discourse. He was of the opinion that poetry, rhetoric, and logic all use the same language, more or less, and that they share a common logic and a common prudence (that is, spontaneity of judgment). They all aim to persuade, and they are so interrelated that the practitioner of any one art should be

well-versed in all the others, and in many other arts besides. A knowledge of music or mathematics, he thought, will not make a man a better grammarian, but it should make him a fuller man, and therefore a better teacher of grammar. This theory was a corollary of the Renaissance ideal of the universal man. Ramus insists that orators should be absolutely familiar with the encyclopedia of all the arts, but adds (and here he is attacking Cicero) that these should all be subservient to rhetoric. According to Cicero, he writes, the perfect orator “shares in all the arts,” but Ramus contends that what Cicero is describing is the perfect citizen, the accomplished politician. When Quintilian adds that the orator must have the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance and a knowledge of philosophy, law, history, and the rest, Ramus agrees but wishes to exclude this from the art of rhetoric (1569:236, 242-43, 320). In fact, for Ramus, the perfect philosopher and the perfect historian need eloquence more than the orator needs a knowledge of philosophy or history.

The French poets of the Pléiade group, some of whom were acquaintances of Ramus, shared the high ideal of learning a poet or orator should have. Du Bellay, for example, in the *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Française*, wrote: “L’office donques de l’orateur est de chacune chose proposée elegamment et copieusement parler. Or ceste faculté de parler ainsi de toutes choses ne se peut acquerir que par l’intelligence parfaite des Sciences.” Du Bellay does not really differentiate between the poet and the orator in this respect, as may be seen from his address to the poet in the chapter ‘Du long poeme François’: “Donques, ô toy, qui doué d’une excellente felicité de nature, instruit de tous bons Ars et Sciences, principalement naturelles et mathématiques, versé en tous genres de bons aucteurs Grecz et Latins, non ignorant des parties et offices de la vie humaine, non de trop haulte condition, ou appellé au regime publiq. . . ô toy (dy-je) orné de tant de graces et perfections. . .” (1549:33, 127-28). Peletier in his *Art poétique* makes even clearer the accomplishments which the poet must have: “Je n’e donq pas ici grand besoin de dire, qu’à notre Poete est necessere la connoissance d’Astrologie, Cosmografie, Geometrie, Phisique, brief de toute la Filosofie” (1555:216-17). The humanist scholar-poet Marc-Antoine Muret in a speech which he made in Venice claimed that the teacher of literature must share this high ideal of learning, since he has to explain everything contained in the books he is talking about; he

must acquire a real taste for all the liberal arts, even if he cannot achieve a deep knowledge of them. Muret even asks if it is possible for someone to be a competent critic of poetry if he is not familiar with astronomy and geography (1555:26).

Ramus, for his part, is clear about the ultimate purpose of such encyclopedic learning. In the end learning liberates man: it has a sedative effect on unruly desires and restores harmony to the soul under the rule of reason. This may be seen from his praise of *mathêsis* which closes the *Dialecticae partitiones* of 1543, a passage already present in a rather different form in the earlier manuscript version recently published by Mme. Bruyère-Robinet. *Mathêsis* frees man from all his earthly limitations, gives him peace and harmony, makes him greater than the universe, and leads him to his true heavenly country, the contemplation of divine light and wisdom (1984:52-54).

Ramus never lost the desire for universal harmony and the rule of reason expressed in this Neo-Platonic and Christian conclusion to the very first work he published. For practical purposes his educational theory kept apart the different branches of learning, yet he had no doubt of their interconnection and of the need for a sense of wholeness and universality which would bring them together.

## II

A glance at the bibliography of Ong's works shows that while he has continued on occasion to concern himself directly with Ramus, he has moved away from his original study of Ramus as a pointer toward literary, cultural, social, and philosophical shifts to a consideration of more basic questions about knowledge, communication (the *artes sermocinales*), and education (which is primarily "the study of the word" [1962:10]); all of these ideas he has developed in his far-sighted and wide-ranging works on orality and literature, humanism and technology, and the evolution of consciousness.

His initial study of Ramus took into account the history of writing and printing, and the effects that developments in ways of transmitting knowledge have had on thought-processes and modes of perceiving the world and learning about it. With his dichotomized tables (which Ong once compared to the binary organization of computer flow-charts [1977:177]), Ramus exemplified the swing from essentially oral/aural culture which the Middle Ages

inherited from antiquity to the visually ordered culture of the Renaissance, and a study of Ramus helps us to understand the cultural implications of the electronic revolution.

Such a study is also valuable as an aid to understanding the history of the teaching of literature and its place in the humanities. Ong has shown more than once, but nowhere better than in his "Tudor Writings on Rhetoric, Poetic, and Literary Theory" (1971:48-103), how central Ramus' reforms in rhetoric and logic were to changing views of criticism, and he has applied similar criteria to later critical theories up to structuralism and beyond. An excellent practical application of the study of Renaissance modes of thought is to be found in his treatment of the ever-present commonplace tradition, best seen in Johannes Textor's *Epitheta* or *Officina*, Erasmus' *Adagia* and *Apophthegmata*, and in Theodore Zwinger's *Theatrum humanae vitae*. One thinks of Ong's masterful unraveling of Shakespeare's sonnet 129, "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame," which shows its dependence on this tradition (1977:181-88).

Among the other ways in which a knowledge of Ramus and his milieu enhances our understanding of subsequent literature and thought are the role of learned Latin in relation to the emergent vernaculars (Ramus' world was bilingual in Latin and French) and the highly polemical form of Renaissance discourse which underlines the agonistic structure of much of human experience (Ong 1971:113-41; 1981).

Perhaps Ong's greatest contribution to the study of literature is to be found in his emphasis, from his earliest writings onwards, on the oral rather than the written. This can be summed up in a phrase from *Orality and Literacy*: "The basic orality of language is permanent" (1982:7). Ong recognizes that there have been recent studies, more and more of them, which take account of orality, and yet "literary history on the whole still proceeds with little if any awareness of orality-literacy polarities, despite the importance of these polarities in the development of genres, plot, characterization, writer-reader relationships, and the relationship of literature to social, intellectual and psychic structures" (1982:157). The reason for this stress on written texts instead of orality, he explains, is that writing is necessary for abstract and analytic study (1982:8-9). Nonetheless, the teacher of literature must remain aware of the importance of the spoken word.

It is difficult to separate the teaching of literature from

teaching in general. This is especially so in the case of the exalted Renaissance ideal we have just considered. Ong's ideal is no less exacting. In *The Barbarian Within* he writes, "In the person of the teacher, who is the depository and communicator of knowledge, mankind constantly reviews what it knows, reevaluates its knowledge, revises it, detects its deficiencies, and sets up the framework for new discoveries" (1962:220). The three main points of this lapidary definition have equal importance. Firstly, the teacher communicates most often *orally*, even if he also writes, and in this way transmits learning from one generation to the next; there is a strong sense, here, too, of the corporate nature of learning both through the ages ("Diachronic integrity must always be honored" [1979:392]) and across society through the world today. Secondly, the role of the teacher is to question, and not to succumb to the permanent occupational risk of sclerosis of thought and presentation. (The force of this danger can easily be seen from satirical literature and from an examination of the history of words concerning teaching which so often suffer downgrading: academic, scholastic, dogmatic, pedagogue, and pedant). Thirdly, Ong's statement evinces confidence in the future of learning, and optimism for mankind.

When we turn to the special role of the teacher of literature, we find that he bears an even greater responsibility. Ong stresses that the professional work of such a teacher is more directly related to his own life and ego than in many other occupations. His work invites and obliges him to talk frankly about his total response to literature, thought, and life, and to enter openly into a personal relationship of trust with his students (1979:388-91). This authentic engagement of the whole personality is of a piece with the ultimate harmony of all truth and knowledge. In an article entitled "Literature, Threat and Conquest" Ong wrote: "For the teaching of literature cannot stand alone. It engages the entire personality at its most profound depths, psychological, philosophical, sociological, and religious. It both needs and fosters other disciplines" (1966:623). Now it is clear that Ong's own approach to the teaching of literature bears this out admirably, both in the matter of authenticity and in the range of interests, which have gone well beyond English literature and the intellectual history of the sixteenth century. His interest in psychiatry in the humanities is well known, as is his study of sociobiology and "noobiology," which he describes as "the study of the biological setting of mental

activity” (1981:11). Such concerns are not the result of chance but are part of a deliberate program and a conscious ideal for the teacher. In the preface to *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology* (1971), he refers to a question which preoccupied Ramus: “Cicero used to make the point that the orator needed to know everything that could be known. Hence rhetoric, the art of oratory or public speaking, ultimately took all knowledge as its province. Cicero was not voicing merely a private hope or theory. For most of classical antiquity rhetoric was the focus of learning and intelligence, the foundation and culmination of the humanities and of a liberal education” (1971:vii; 1981:126). We have seen that according to one Renaissance theory, the teacher of literature took over this role, and Ong is suggesting that he should still preserve it today. His work must remain the focal point for studies in language and indeed in other forms of communication.

According to Ong, the first subject that the teacher of literature needs to know about is communication itself, and the “interaction of expression and culture,” to borrow the sub-title of *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology*. The teacher of literature has evolved out of the teacher of the humanities, but there is no reason why he should have discarded his earlier role. In an article entitled “Crisis and Understanding in the Humanities,” written almost twenty years ago, Ong noted: “One can also take the humanities in the larger sense as the study of man in his relationship to the entire human life-world, thus including such subjects as philosophy and anthropology and history. And once history is admitted, almost everything can be got in, directly or indirectly, under one or another perfectly honest rubric” (1971:307). The teacher of literature, or of the humanities, for it is increasingly difficult to separate the two, must therefore know something of all these disciplines. It is only by becoming aware of the all-embracing nature of his subject that the teacher of literature will be able to meet the attacks on the humanities. As Ong has shown, literature and the humanities have nothing to fear from science and the technological explosion. In his presidential address to the Modern Language Association in 1978, he affirmed that, “Language and literature study can assimilate everything in the human life-world, including technology” (1979:393). Modern communication and information technology is not essentially different from that involved in the first Sumerian cuneiforms, the first writing with ink, or the first printing from moveable type.

All technology (and does not *technê* mean art and *logos* reason?) is simply part of the history and evolution of man's spirit. Ong shows, after Havelock, how Plato's strictures on writing in the *Phaedrus* and the Seventh Letter drew attention to the relative advantages of oral communication over writing using the same arguments as are now sometimes used against computers (dehumanization of the living world, destruction of memory, weakening of the mind [1981:125; 1982:79, 167]). Ong notes further that modern technological society is no more depersonalized than earlier society, and indeed that personalist philosophy is a product of our society alone (1981:200).

The unifying thread in this view of teaching is to be found in *The Presence of the Word*. The argument leads from Ong's profound inner conviction about nature and mankind as a way to God, to a consideration of God's presence in the world and in us, and of the Word in the church (1967:*passim*; 1981:193). No doubt many readers will part company with him here in much the same way that readers of Ramus may accept the account of method and reject the Neo-Platonist eulogy of *mathêsis* or the Zwinglian *Commentarii de religione Christiana*; as some readers of Pascal's *Pensées* delight in his finely observed social and psychological description of mankind's wretched condition, without being prepared to make the leap into the absurd contained in the wager that God exists and that Christianity is true; or again as some readers may admire Teilhard de Chardin's account of the palaeontological origins of "Le Phénomène humain" without accepting his theories of the evolution of the mind. Yet as Ong says, "Science is born of a vision of completeness" (1962:271) and "Knowledge is ultimately not a fractioning but a unifying phenomenon, a striving for harmony. Without harmony, an interior condition, the psyche is in bad health" (1982:72). Ong shares with all the writers I have just mentioned a view of the world which can best be described by the title of a book by the neo-scholastic writer Jacques Maritain, *L'humanisme intégral* (though Ramus stands apart from the others in that his world-view is closed whereas theirs is open). For Ong the word "catholic" means not so much "universal" as "expansive" (1977:330). In *Orality and Literacy* he comments that "orality-literacy dynamics enter integrally into the modern evolution of consciousness towards both greater interiorization and greater openness" (1982:179). This position is very close to that outlined by Teilhard in *Le Phénomène humain*, especially if we add

to it the notion of “complexification” which necessarily accompanies openness.

### III

I should like to add some concluding reflections on the teaching of literature and the humanities today, arising from my discussion of the views of Ramus and Ong. I agree with the remarks of Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* that a student cannot learn literature in the way that he can learn physics, but that he can only learn about it; what he learns is criticism and this is all that the teacher of literature teaches (1957:11). I agree also with Jonathan Culler that there is such an accomplishment as “literary competence” (1977:64); otherwise the formal study of literature would be in vain, and I wish to propose the Ramist-like definition that the study of literature is “ars bene legendi.” Now learning criticism, acquiring literary competence, and mastering the art of reading all call for the presence of a teacher of wide accomplishments and great breadth of vision.

The traditional view of what literature is, who should teach it, and how this should be done still lingers on where it does not flourish. The study of literature is still often restricted to printed texts, usually of imaginative writing in the three most obvious genres, recognizably serious and of high quality. This view is often supported by a strong feeling that the teacher of literature should restrict himself to his own discipline and preferably to his own specialization within the field of literature.

It is evident, however, that the concept of literature has evolved through the ages and that it continues to do so (Williams 1977:26-27); it seems equally evident, therefore, that the scope and subject of the teacher of literature must evolve in the same measure. My contention is that, at a time when the relation of writing to other forms of communication is changing almost beyond recognition, the teacher of literature should redefine his role before it is too late. It is true that some have seen this for a generation and more, and may even be astounded to learn that old ideas die so hard. Yet the simple fact is that not everyone accepts that the history of education is organic and evolutionary and that all parts of it are in a continual process of transformation; as Ong says, “Education must be in a constant state of reforming itself” (1962:150); and as sections of the discipline become atrophied, they can evolve no further and so become extinct.



The scope of the teacher of literature must be extensive enough to include writing of all kinds, not just imaginative writing (even if this is the real heart of his subject) but discursive texts, philosophical, scientific, political, social, and in all registers, including, and possibly even favoring, what is popular and ephemeral.

There is no need in this place to plead the case for the study of the oral expression of a culture. Yet sadly not all university teachers of literature seem aware of the importance of what Ong has called the “purely oral art-form” (1982:107). This vast domain, still imperfectly mapped, should not be neglected by the teacher of literature, whether he is interested simply in the “oral residue” in literature, to borrow the title of one of Ong’s articles (1971:23), in the pervading presence of the rhetorical tradition, or in the clearly established forms of orality. His brief should include the study of all modern forms of discourse and communication, primarily radio, television, and film as well as the performing arts, and in so far as is possible, he will practice creative writing and encourage it in his students.

The use of computers, too, will be part of his work in that they provide new forms of organizing knowledge, of thinking, and of looking at the world. He should be aware of the possibilities of communal creative writing with the help of computers (I am thinking of experiments such as those conducted in connection with the recent exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, *Les Immatériaux* [Lyotard and Chaput 1985]). He should go beyond a whole-hearted acceptance of computers in the humanities to an attempt to define the role of the humanities in computer studies and information technology.

This redefinition of the role of the teacher of literature is, of course, ambitious. We can no longer expect him to acquire the encyclopedic knowledge which the Renaissance demanded of the universal man: this is formally excluded by the explosion of knowledge which has already taken place and which is continuing at an ever-increasing rate. One of the greatest problems of modern education is that of specialization. Teilhard’s remark about evolution could be aptly applied here, “La spécialisation paralyse et l’ultra-spécialisation tue” (1955:173). But at least the modern teacher should have a Socratic awareness of the limitations to his knowledge and a curiosity about other fields of study. A course on modern French humanism, for example, can include Claude

Lévi-Strauss, Le Corbusier, and Teilhard, and this will call for some knowledge of social anthropology, mathematics, paleontology, and nuclear physics. More generally, he should be abreast of contemporary philosophy and of problems—moral, social, psychological, and educational—raised by new scientific developments. Universal knowledge remains the ideal even if we are moving further away from attaining it, and here we might adopt Ong's glossing of "universal" ("catholic") as "expansive" (1977:330). In our present relativist age it is no longer possible to accept the bounds of Ramus's encyclopedia, however much we may admire his enthusiastic, all-embracing view of the arts and sciences; it was a perfect circle, it is true, but a closed one, in keeping with pre-Copernican cosmology. Our vision, on the other hand, should be expansive and outward-looking.

We are now at the beginning of a new educational revolution which will go far beyond the exciting experiments of the 1960's. It is necessary to set out afresh the aims of the study of literature and its place in humane studies and studies in communication. Literature, widely understood, must remain at the center of such studies, but its teachers must become more and more aware of the expanding circumference. The aim of a liberal education is the understanding of human consciousness in relation to the world, and of its expression of itself by speech (oral, written, and electronically transmitted), as well as by all other forms of communication.

The work of Peter Ramus and Walter Ong, two great educators and communicators, is solidly centered within the long humanist tradition in education, and a study of it is of permanent relevance and help in evaluating the present and in planning for the future.

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## **The Ramist Style of John Udall: Audience and Pictorial Logic in Puritan Sermon and Controversy**

**John G. Rechtien**

With Wilbur Samuel Howell's *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (1956), Walter J. Ong's *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958) helped establish the common contemporary view that Ramism impoverished logic and rhetoric as arts of communication.<sup>1</sup> For example, scholars agree that Ramism neglected audience accommodation; denied truth as an object of rhetoric by reserving it to logic; rejected persuasion about probabilities; and relegated rhetoric to ornamentation.<sup>2</sup> Like Richard Hooker in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (I.vi.4), these scholars criticize Ramist logic as simplistic. Their objections identify the consequences of Ramus' visual analogy of logic and rhetoric to "surfaces," which are "apprehended by sight" and divorced from "voice and hearing" (Ong 1958:280).

As a result of his analogy of knowledge and communication to vision rather than to sound, Ramus left rhetoric only two of its five parts, ornamentation (figures of speech and tropes) and delivery (voice and gesture). He stripped three parts (*inventio*, *dispositio*, and memory) from rhetoric. Traditionally shared by logic and rhetoric, the recovery and derivation of ideas (*inventio*) and their organization (*dispositio*) were now reserved to logic. Finally, Ramus' method of organizing according to dichotomies substituted "mental space" for memory (Ong 1958:280).

In the context of this new logic and the rhetoric dependent on it, a statement was not recognized as a part of a conversation, but appeared to stand alone as a speech event fixed in space. Thus, logic became an art of arrangement to fix an apparent truth. This "truth" was guaranteed by intrinsic structures of discursive

meaning—syllogism and especially method, which for Ramus was the “only way of understanding and memory” (1569:501). No longer was logic an interpersonal art of discourse about probabilities. Instead, it had decayed into a mnemonic technique not intended to direct an inner struggle for truth. Rhetoric itself became separated “from other intellectual disciplines” (Zappen 1983:65). As Brian Vickers points out, this distortion colors the statements of even sympathetic modern historians of rhetoric (1981:105-9).

From his early work on Ramus to his more recent *Fighting for Life: Context, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981:24) and *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong has developed the contrast he introduced in *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* between the public oral contentiousness in classical logic and rhetoric and the private hypervisual thinking of the typographic era typified in Ramism. According to Ong, non-agonistic silent thought processes intensified in the typographically inspired Ramist revision of logic and rhetoric as western Europe shifted from the phonocentrism of primary oral culture, which had been in part carried over into manuscript culture, to the logocentrism accentuated by the manuscript culture and intensified in print culture (1982:168).

Ironically, such logocentrism was first popularized orally in the graphic literary structure of sixteenth-century Puritan sermons and related treatises, as clearly shown in the works of John Udall (c. 1560-1592), a Puritan minister first at Kingston-upon-Thames and then at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Udall’s five series of sermons, a posthumously published commentary on Jeremiah, and a polemical treatise all enact the “intertwined dimensions” (Tannen 1985) of orality and literacy.

For example, thirteen printings of Udall’s five sermons extended his adaptation of Ramist logic beyond his listeners. Furthermore, published five times from 1593 to 1637, Udall’s paradigm of the sermon explained in *A Commentarie vpon the Lamentation of Ieremy* became a standard for preaching in England and America. Finally, Udall’s treatise entitled *A Demonstration of the Trueth of That Discipline* (1588 and 1593) supported ministers and laity arguing for the presbyterian program in Walter Travers and Thomas Cartwright’s *Ecclesiasticall Discipline*. In all these works, Udall attenuated the oral heritage of rhetoric and logic as he replaced rhetoric’s interpersonal dialogue and logic’s inner dialogue with the monologue of a closed system. His hypervisual

style looked ahead to what Ong identifies in Milton and in the New Criticism as closed-system thinking (1977:189-229, 279-83).

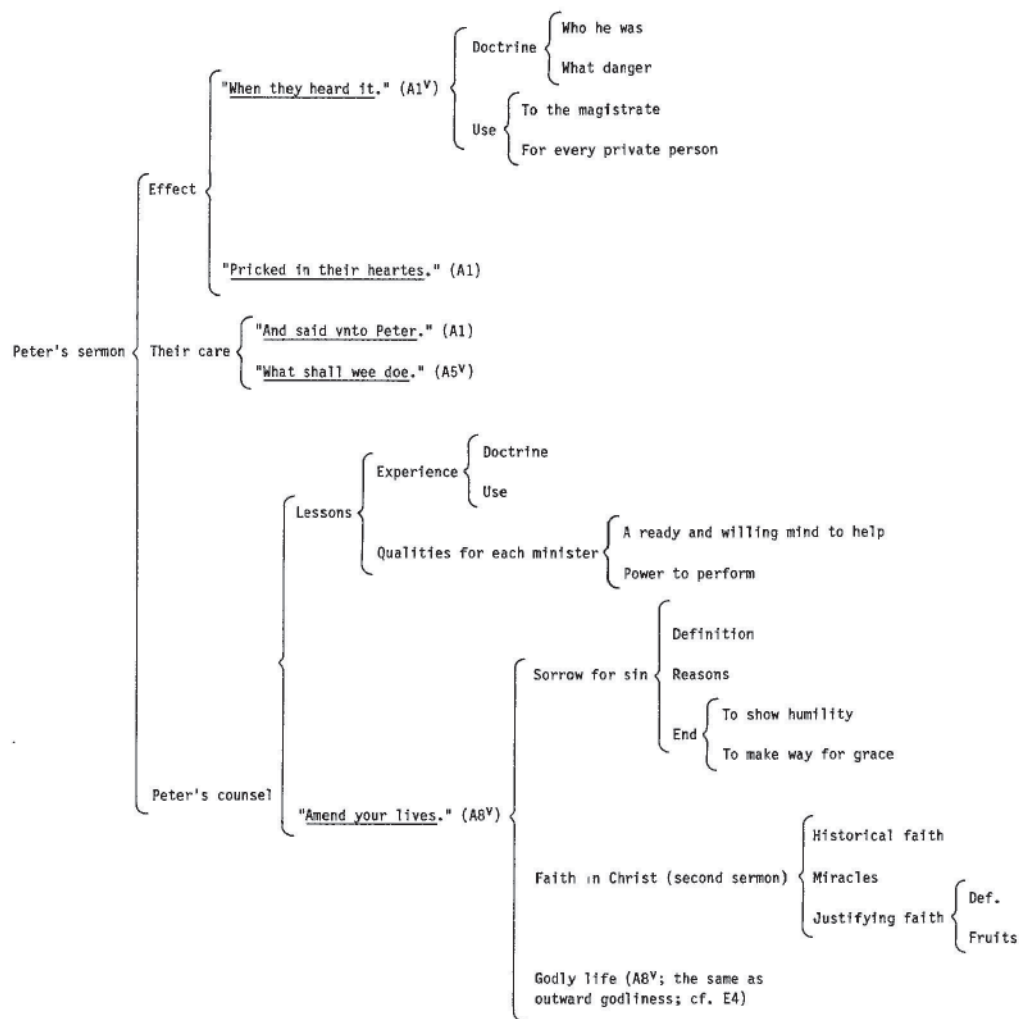
### **The Development of Udall's Ramist Style in His Sermons**

Because Udall addressed two audiences—the non-academic and the educated—his style can be studied to determine the previously unrecognized influence which differences in audience could have on the employment of Ramist “logical” thinking in oral and written discourse. The structure of Udall's sermons resembles that of earlier dichotomous sermons by Laurence Chaderton in 1578 and 1584 and Bartholomew Andrewes in 1583.<sup>3</sup> Perry Miller's and Eugene E. White's “paradigm” of the four parts of the Puritan sermon (text, doctrine, reasons, and application or uses) neglects this early dichotomous organization.<sup>4</sup> It subordinated the parts to diagrams that move from universal to particular in an application of Ramus' “Law of Wisdom.” That is, the sermon's pictorial structure controlled the audience in its appropriation of the values proposed by the preacher. The audience uncritically appropriated meaning in place of judging the truth of that meaning. Udall employed such pictorial organization to teach both his parishioners and ministers gathered to study and pray. In three out of five series of sermons, numbers follow the final entries in his Ramist outlines, as in a table of contents.

The organization of Udall's first sermons in *Amendment of Life* can be pictured in tables which include doublets (arranged as if dichotomies), triplets, and a definition with five items. Triplets and doublets organize his second pair of sermons, *Obedience to the Gospell*. Dichotomies, or more properly doublets, characterize his third and fifth series of sermons and his two scholarly treatises, *A Demonstration* and *A Commentarie*. The antithetical nature of a dichotomy of “either. . . or” would at least echo debate in the mind of a solitary thinker. However, in Udall's pairing of ideas that are not antithetical, such contest with self is lost in simple organization.

In the series of the first three sermons, *Amendment of Life* (1584a), Udall leaves enough clues that his visual outline can be reconstructed in tables 1 and 2:

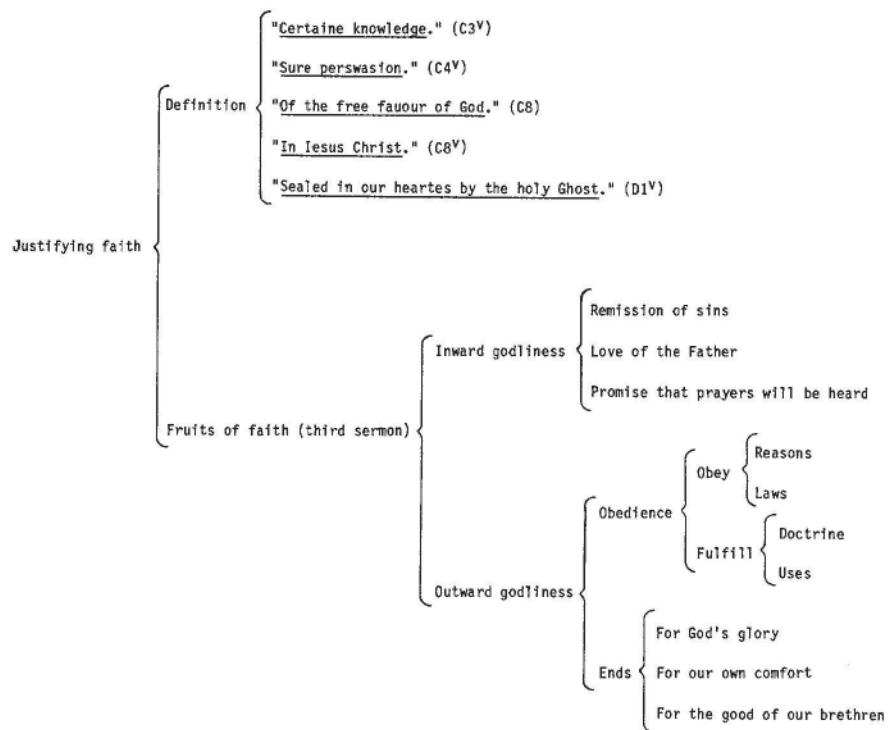
Table 1



Udall's *Amendment of Life* (1584)



Table 2



*Amendment of Life (contd.)*

The more or less associative doublets posing as dichotomies retain the illusion of logic at the same time that they graphically redistribute the more oral structure of question and answer in Peter's sermon. Although a sense of ritual contest with another is largely absent from Ramist dichotomies, the doublets do suggest an illusion of oral contest. Nevertheless, they transform the additive or paratactic bent of oral composing analyzed by Ong (1982:37-38) and Thomas J. Farrell (1979:13-14; 1984:43) into a highly visualized system of apparent dichotomies joined by ostentatiously visible brackets. Furthermore, a primary oral audience probably never visualized the additive paratactic structures, commonly found in primary oral composing, which were carried over and then visually intensified in the composing practices of manuscript culture. In addition to their hypervisual Ramist organization, the tables show that *Amendment of Life* also subjects the dialogue to analysis by applying distinctive elements of Puritan style. The tables identify "doctrine," "use," definition, parts, and "reasons." Eugene Hershon Bernstein identifies such "reasons" as Udall's contribution to the form (1973:93-101, 109).

The major parts of the first sermon, which "divide" the text taken from Acts, establish the outline followed in the second and third sermons. They expand the first sermon's analysis of characters, questions, and answers. Much of the second sermon, about 16 of 20 printed pages, develops six elements which define "justifying faith." The third sermon explains the "fruits of faith," inward and outward godliness.

Throughout these sermons, a synthesis of logic and techniques for oral delivery controls sentence structure, as Udall compares Peter's audience with "carnall christians of our time" (A2) and contrasts evil conduct with God's expectations or punishments. Parallelism and contrast facilitate both delivery and a Ramist "either. . . or" thought pattern:

The cause wherereof [sic] was, for that they dreamed of a worldly king full of pomp and glory, and Christ being so base and poore, they were offended at him: much like the carnall christians of our time, who are ashamed of the baseness of the gospel and simplicitie of religion, and therefore thinke that it is too meane a thing for men of great estat and honor: but we see the contrarye in Gods word: that there is no ioy without Christ, but sorrow: no, [sic] honor, but ignominie: no

blessednesse, but curssednesse, howsoeuer it seemeth otherwise to carnall people, that iudge fleshly and according to naturall reason . . . (A2-A2”).

Two “therefores” which follow indicate that these contrasting examples stand for syllogisms:

. . . and therefore we reade that the greatest dishonour that euer came to the kings of Iuda and Ierusalem, was their negligence in religion, and their greatest praise is their care to establish it in sinceritie: and therefore, how base, poore and contemptible so euer Christ seem to flesh and blood, there is no glory, riches, nor honor that profiteth, excepte it be gouerned by him, and directed to his glory.

Next, Udall identifies as a “doctrine” that “there is no way in the worlde that can serve to conuert man vnto god, vntill the appointed time too come” (A2<sup>v</sup>). As proof, he cites the example of the Jews. Finally, Udall draws two “uses” or applications:

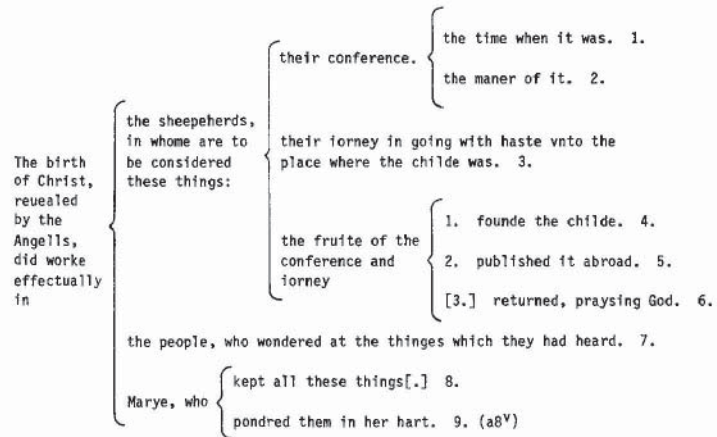
Which doctrine ministreth a double vse vnto vs: first to the magistrate that he compell all, (yea euen the obstinate) to the outward exercises of religion: for by that meanes it may please God to worke their conuersion. Secondly for euery private person that is already called, (yea and the minister of the worde especially)] to beare with pacience the vnregenerate, and not to determine or iudge rashly of their reprobation: But still to hope for the time of their conuersion (A2<sup>v</sup>-A3).

The scriptural examples and quotations constitute “reasons.” In Udall’s sermon, Scripture has replaced ratiocination at the same time it has been subsumed into a syllogistic pattern.

Logic determines the style of each of Udall’s sermons. Each of them develops doctrines, reasons, and applications according to syllogisms and pictorial outlines. Such use of logic unfolds a commentary on Scripture that provided a popularized academic lecture to a non-academic audience.

More tightly organized than *Amendment of Life*, Udall’s two sermons titled *Obedience to the Gospel* (1584b) analyze a scriptural text in three triplets and two doublets: “The birth of Christ. . . did worke effectually in” shepherds, people, and Mary. The triplet of “conference,” “iorney,” and “the fruite of the conference and

Table 3



*Udall's Obedience to the Gospell (1584)*

iorney” (a8<sup>v</sup>) develop the “shepherds.” “[C]onference,” “fruite,” and “Marye” are also further divided in table 3.

Perhaps the triplets recall the rhyming formulaic triple comparisons in more rhetorically structured thirteenth-century sermons (d’Avray 1985:248-54; MacLure 1958:152). Nevertheless, these triplets have, after all, replaced the echo of rhyme with a visual structure. Furthermore, the analytic commonplaces have supplanted narrative excitement, which aided the memory (see Becker 1983:9). Commonplaces were relics of an oral past, for they could be taught and memorized by rhyme and were commonly applied by speakers to prompt a continuous flow of words (the ideal of *copia*). However, here they establish logical analysis. Although the ten numbered points follow the narrative structure of the Gospel, commonplaces establish Udall’s discursive structure, as he analyzes “who,” “when,” “how,” and “what”: “sheepherds, in whome,” “time when,” “maner,” “place where,” “people, who,” “Marye, who” (a8<sup>v</sup>).

In the preface, Udall advises listeners to take notes to be used to guide discussions at home for mutual instruction and to educate children and servants. Practiced in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, such transcription of sermons was not new.<sup>5</sup> For Udall, though, as for Continental reformers (Febvre and Martin 1976:295-96), taking notes became a means to educate the household in the principles of reformation (Hill 1964:443-81). Udall’s program may have caused the divisiveness in Kingston-upon-Thames recently noted by Christopher Haigh (1985:209-14).

Udall extended Ramist method to his audience as a mnemonic device. Ramus and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century students trained in a humanist environment continued to associate the derivation and organization of ideas with oral presentation and elocution (Howell 1960:91-92; Joseph 1983:459-71). In contrast, because it lacked the training that linked logic and rhetoric, Udall’s audience would not have experienced organization as a means of persuasion (that is, rhetoric, which regards probabilities). Instead, the non-academic practitioner of Udall’s advice would have experienced organization as an art of private deliberation abstracted from public communication.

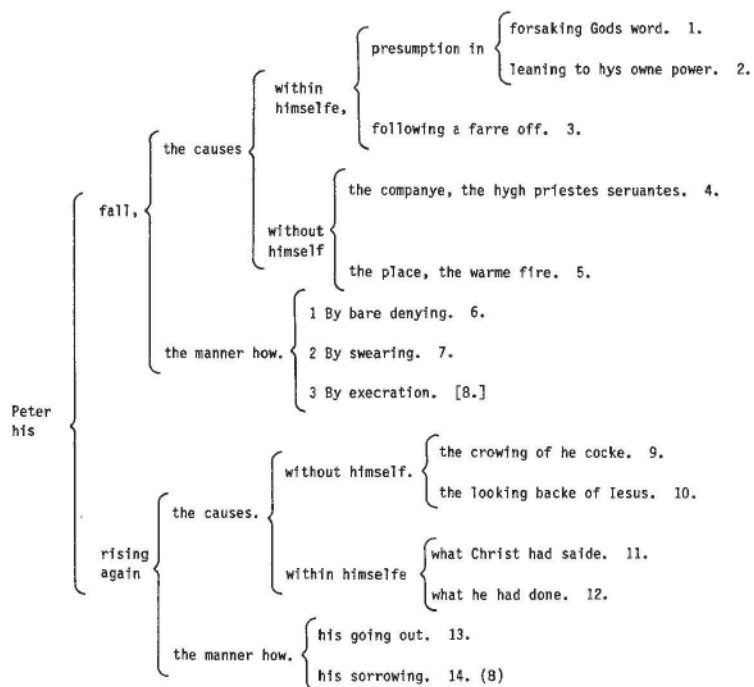
*Peter’s Fall*, Udall’s third series of sermons published in 1584, recounts a failure to listen and struggle. Like *Obedience to the Gospell*, *Peter’s Fall* divides the Gospel narrative according to

analytic commonplaces. However, the analysis of the sermons investigates the more substantial circumstances of “causes,” as well as “manner,” rather than the descriptive “who” and “what” developed in *Obedience to the Gospell*. Other analytic commonplaces also appear, such as “what” and “where.” They recur throughout to develop “the causes” and “the manner how” of both Peter’s “fall” and “rising again.” These two commonplaces divide each of the sermons, the first about Peter’s “fall” and the second about his “rising.” With the exception of one triplet, eleven doublets suggest the increased “*Method and order*”(8) with which Udall labels his table, whose final “particulars” list fourteen points (see table 4).

The lack of true dichotomies of “either. . . or” indicates that Udall drew on method because it aided the memory to visualize, not because he wanted to divide reality through metaphysical analysis. Like the less rigorous table of *Obedience to the Gospell*, this more “dichotomous” table merely reflects mnemonic intention. Udall depended on such organization not just to aid his own memory but to control the memory of his listeners—to guide their notes and subsequent discussions. His Ramist mnemonics contrast sharply with other Renaissance memory practices rooted in oral tradition. Eric A. Havelock in *Preface to Plato* (1963) and *The Greek Concept of Justice* (1978) claims that primary oral mentality is imagistic. Frances A. Yates in *The Art of Memory* (1966) shows that up until the advent of Ramism striking images were used to aid the memory—both to help the *rhetor* remember what he had worked out to say and the auditors to remember what he had said. As Yates notes, Ramism changed those practices rooted in oral tradition with its “inner iconoclasm” (35), a characterization admired by Ong (1971:111). Published a year before Udall’s own treatise on the sermon but after these sermons, William Perkins’ *Prophetica, sive de sacra et unica ratione concionandi* (1592) rejects Giordano Bruno’s association of images as “impious” (1631:570), recommending instead a Ramist-inspired logic (Rechtien 1977a:79-88).

Udall’s series of five sermons preached in 1586, *The True Remedie against Famine and Warres. Five Sermons vpon the Firste Chapter of the Prophetie of Ioel*, lacks the kind of extended outline which governs his other sermons. The lack of consistently methodical organization may reflect delivery before revision for publication or haste to respond to an existential situation.

Table 4

The Method and order of the whole matter in this booke.

*Udall's Peter's Fall (1584)*

Although not as methodically as in the other sermons, dichotomies do occur throughout. Commonplaces continue to stimulate both analysis of ideas and their organization. Doctrine and uses also appear throughout the five sermons, such as in the early general doctrines and their particular application to evaluate ministers (4<sup>v</sup>-10<sup>v</sup>). As in *Amendment of Life*, Udall applies logic to form his listeners, this time to recognize the qualities which they must expect in a truly reformed minister. He would resemble Joel, whose prophecies are here being analyzed.

A more systematic distinction between “general” and “particular” establishes Udall’s division of *The Combate betwixt Christ and the Devill* (1588), his final series of sermons. Their title expresses the agonistic spirit of orality, as does the repetition shown in table 5 of the words “Assault” and “Resistaunce” (1589:A5<sup>v</sup>). For the listener or reader of *The Combate*, the struggle between Christ and the devil models the interior struggle of the soul rather than a struggle with an exterior enemy.

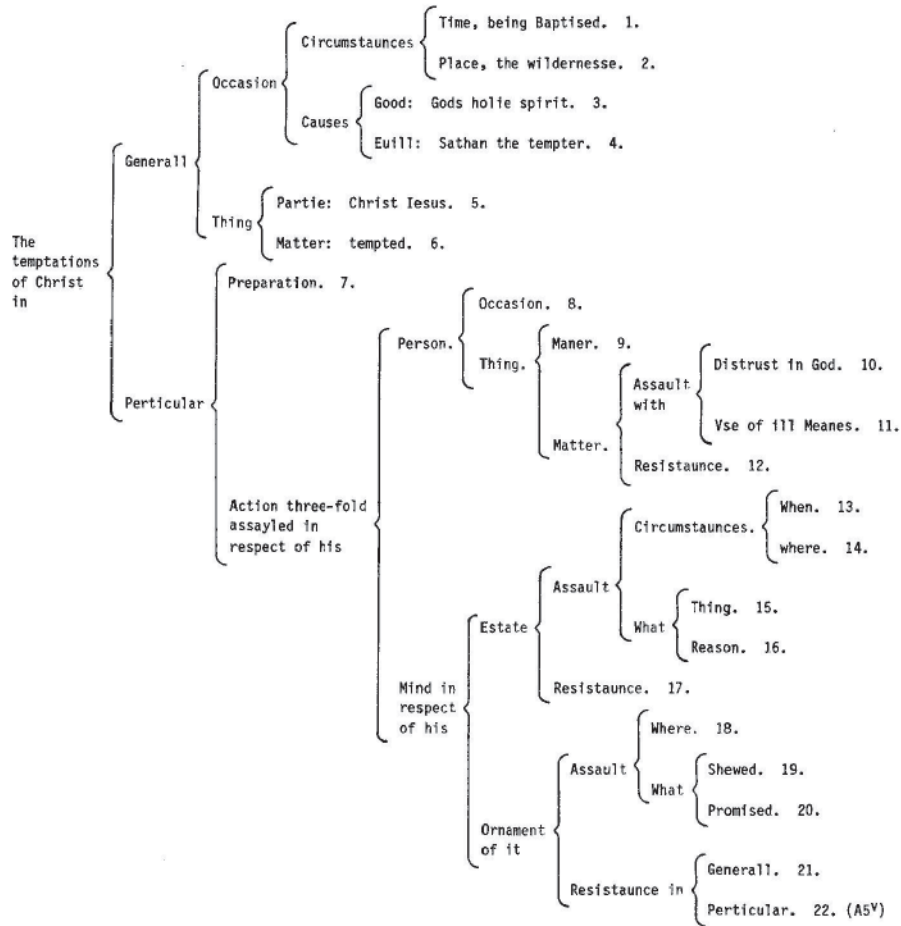
As in *Obedience to the Gospell* and *Peter’s Fall*, analytic commonplaces replace the narrative structure of a story to organize the dichotomy of “Generall” and “Peticular.” “Generall” is divided into “Occasion” and “Thing.” The commonplaces of “Circumstaunces” (“Time” and “Place”) and “Causes” analyze “Thing.” The dichotomies that develop “Peticular” include “Maner,” “Matter,” “Circumstaunces” of “When” and “where,” “What,” “Where,” “What,” “Generall,” and “Peticular.”

After having published these texts, all to be collected in *Certaine Sermons* (1596), Udall explained the organization and purpose of the reformed sermon in *A Commentarie upon the Lamentations of Jeremy* (1593). Its letter “To the Christian Reader” indicates that concern for “*method and order*” reflects an image of preaching as instruction. Precisely as instruction, preaching was intended to persuade. Twenty-five references to teaching or knowledge depict the “Preacher” (A3) as a “teacher” (A3<sup>v</sup>) and “the consciences of the hearers” to be “throughly [*sic*] perswaded of the trueth” (A2<sup>v</sup>) by method. Here and in the subtitle, Udall explains method as “*a Literall Interpretation of the Text*” (a paraphrase of its sense), “*a Collection of Diuers Doctrines*” with examples, the “*Reasons or Prooffe of Every Doctrine,*” and their “*Particular Vses.*” Thus, for Udall the term “method” refers to the structured contents of a sermon, rather than



Table 5

A Methode of the whole matter in this Booke.



Udall's *The Combate betwixt Christ and the Deuill* (1588)

to the dichotomous distinction of general and particular which Ramus meant. Although Udall's letter expands the meaning of method to specify the four parts of the Puritan sermon, an introductory table of 343 "places" outlines five chapters in the usual Ramist fashion.

Table 6 closely, but not completely, transcribes part of "*The Lamentations of Jeremie in a Table*" for most of the first chapter. In addition to its dichotomous organization, the complete table reveals the influence of logic by including analytic commonplaces (place, time, cause, effect, manner, who, what) and, over and over, distinctions of general and particular.

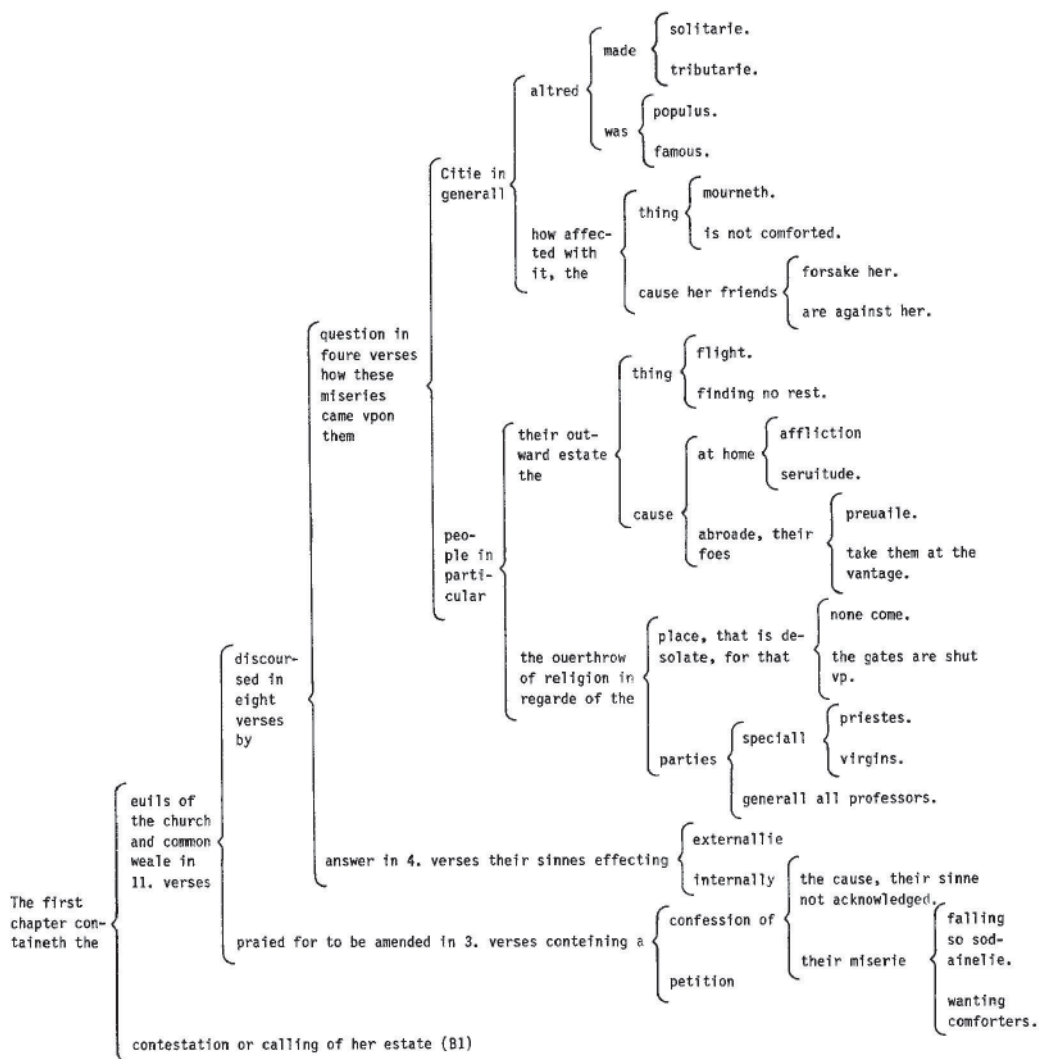
Each of Udall's five chapters opens with an interpretation of a verse, as does, for example, "*The Third Chapter*":

[*I Am the man*] i. I the Church of GOD being one bodie, am like vnto a man; for heere the Prophet changeth, from the person of a woman (as before) to the person of a man; and speaketh not of himselfe alone, but of the whole Church vnder the person of one man [*that hath seen affliction*] i. that hath had experience of all sortes of troubles [*in the rod of his indignation*] i. whilest he (to wit the Lord) corrected me with his rodde, that his exceeding anger against me for my sinnes, caused him to lay vpon me (92-93).

Then Udall enumerates doctrines, listing reasons and uses for each doctrine:

*Doctrine.* [*the man*] the Church and children of God, are the most subiect vnto affliction of all other people. Examples hereof are the Israelites in generall, *Iacob* [*sic*], *Moses*, *Job*, *Dauid*: *Christ* himselfe in particular. The reason is, because, first, God will not haue them in loue with this world: Secondly, Sathan and the wicked beare an vnappeseable malice against them: Thirdly, they are thereby made fittest to serue God and obey his lawes, *Psal.* 119.67. The vse is, to teach vs, first, not to looke for any other condition, if we desire soundly to continue in the seruice of God, *Luke* 24.27, else afflictions when they come, prooue either intollerable vnto vs, or cause vs to fall away: Secondly, to esteeme afflictions not a note of infamie, but rather a speciall mark of Gods fauour in his Children (93).

Table 6



Udall's *A Commentarie vpon the Lamentations of Ieremy* 1593)

The sentences which develop the reasons do not reflect the syllogistic structure suggested in the sermons and used in *A Demonstration*. In the sermons, syllogisms lend a sense of climax in delivery, as they do in a more literate fashion in the long periodic sentences of *A Demonstration*. However, “expressed in short sentences,” “the particulars” of *A Commentarie*, more briefe then [*sic*] when they were spoken.” have been abridged for the “Reader” (A4).

The sermons first address an audience which listens, then one which reads. *A Commentarie* provides teaching to those who read. In it, exposition depends solely on dichotomies and analytic commonplaces. Finally, *A Demonstration* has a reading audience which will speak its evidence. This polemical treatise brought Udall imprisonment and perhaps thus hastened his death.

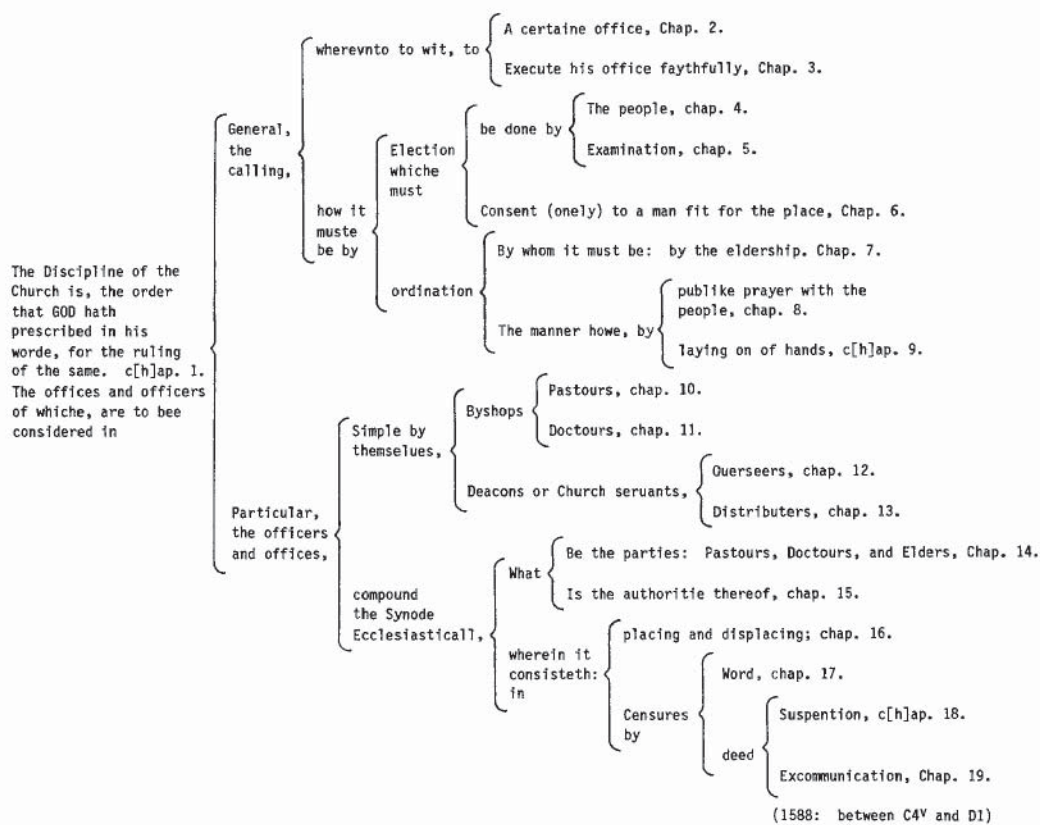
### **Audience and Organization in Udall’s *Demonstration***

Udall’s *A Demonstration of the Trueth of That Discipline* (1588) joined propositions and syllogisms to dichotomies when he turned from the non-academic audiences of parishioners and pastors to an audience of laity and ministers engaged in controversy. Through the use of logic, he wanted to provide these readers with refutations of objections to Travers’ program in *A Full and Plainer Declaration of Ecclesiasticall Discipline*. In 1574, this treatise had appeared at Heidelberg in Latin and in Cartwright’s translation (Johnson 1948:284-86). Thus, Udall proved with syllogisms the axiom-like statements which unfold his own dichotomies.

The logical style of *A Demonstration* contrasts with the satiric dialogues of Udall’s *The State of the Church of Englande*, previously published for a popular audience in 1588. The audience could be approached with the agonistic irony traditional in dialogues rather than with the more lecture-like and literate techniques that extended logic to the audience of the already converted. Three editions of the dialogues provoked the government’s destruction of Robert Waldegrave’s London press. This reaction may have prompted the Marprelate tracts, even more strikingly agonistic and residually oral in style and to be printed later on Waldegrave’s fugitive East Moseley press along with Udall’s *Demonstration* (1588). In Udall’s dialogue, Paule, the “Puritan,” recommends Travers’ *Ecclesiasticall Discipline*, which surrounds dichotomous exposition with Ciceronian introduction and

Table 7

A Table of Discipline, the particular heades whereof, are handled  
in the severall chapters, according to the number wherewith  
they are noted: as followeth.



*Udall's A Demonstration of the Truth of the Discipline  
Which Christ Hath Prescribed in His Word (1588)*

peroration, and Chaderton's dichotomous 1584 sermon on the same theme, *A Fruitfull Sermon* (Rechtien 1977b, 1978:268).

The dichotomous organization and syllogisms in *A Demonstration* establish a pictorially clear meaning. This effect is quite deliberate, as ten images of sight or blindness in his introductory letters "To the Supposed Governours of the Church of England" and "To the Reader" make clear. Sentence structure in both letters expresses the influence of logic in the unfolding of syllogisms or dichotomies. For example, the letter "To the Reader" expands this dichotomous sentence for slightly more than two pages to specify the audience:

The course of my enterprise, is first in respect of the favorers of the desired reformation; secondly of the adversaries of the same, [sic] the favourers of it, are also of two sorts; ministers of the word, and private persons, and both I hope, may haue profit by it (1895:9).

Addressed as "Supposed Governours" and included in this dichotomy, the bishops are not engaged in agonistic dialogue that includes *ethos* and *pathos*. Instead, their objections are excluded by a *logos* adapted from logic rather than from rhetoric, for Udall discards the residual orality of the Ciceronian exordium, *narratio*, and peroration that enclose Travers' dichotomously arranged proofs (Rechtien 1977b:58-59). *A Demonstration* presents the second two audiences from the dichotomy, convinced ministers and laity, with a model of deliberation.

According to Ramist method, the statement of a universal must open a series of dichotomies that should continue to the least particular. The Scottish Ramist Roland MacIlmaine had explained that the scriptural text constitutes the universal to be interpreted (1574:13). Out of that universal from Scripture, Udall, in his sermons and *A Commentarie*, derived doctrines, reasons, and applications. In *A Demonstration*, a definition of discipline states the universal in table 7.

Chapter 1 begins with a proposition implied by the definition. The following chapters reformulate or divide into "propositions" an initial statement based on Travers' *Ecclesiasticall Discipline*. All propositions are proved by scriptural and patristic testimonies. A means to recover knowledge (*inventio*), testimonies constitute a form of "inartificial" proof in Ramist logic which is dichotomous to "artificial proof" derived from analytic commonplaces. Udall's

scriptural testimonies are incorporated into syllogisms. These syllogisms and the patristic testimonies are then summarized in a concluding enthymeme. Udall's subtitle describes this technique as "*a Plaine Forme of Reasoning*" (1588).

For example, a dichotomous table with chapter numbers divides Udall's definition of discipline into fifteen dichotomies and one triplet. Logic supplies the first distinction ("General" and "Particular") and the analytic commonplaces ("whereunto," "how," "By whom," "maner howe," "What," and "Wherein") (1895:vi). Then Chapter 1 opens by stating that "*The diffinition of Discipline, contayneth this proposition*":

The worde of God describeth perfectly vnto vs, that forme of governing the Church which is lawfull, and the officers that are to execute the same: from the which no Christian Church ought to swarue.

To disprove the "Assertion" of the bishops, Chapter 1 lists fifteen syllogisms and three patristic testimonies (1895:13). The syllogisms need only summarize or allude to Scripture. Finally, in sixteen out of nineteen chapters, 29 sorites-like chains of clauses begun with "therefore" reformulate the series of syllogisms and testimonies in a "conclusion" like the "Conclusion" of Chapter 1 with eighteen "if" clauses and one "then" clause, all in 311 words (1895:16-17). Although not linking conclusions which become succeeding premises, as they would in a true sorites, the clauses in this enthymeme do follow a sequential order.

Ramus had dichotomized the organization of ideas into axioms and "intelligible order," either syllogisms or method (Ong 1958:251). Method he had dichotomized into "natural" or perfect, proceeding from general to particular, and prudential or imperfect, proceeding from particular to general. The imperfect method was commonly used by poets, orators, and historians, who must address the public (Ong 1958:252-54). *A Demonstration* exemplifies all three means of "natural" organization. Dichotomies develop a definition or general statement. Propositions function as "axioms," a protean Ramist term (Ong 1958:252). From these known propositions or "axioms," syllogisms then prove the previously unknown propositions with which they conclude.

By combining three Ramist techniques of organization, Udall made the dichotomous organization of Travers even more rigid. Whether he addressed a popular or pastoral audience, or an

audience of controversialists—in sermon, commentary, or argumentation—Udall applied logic to teach what he regarded as certainties. Like parents at home in household study sessions, ministers engaged in sermons and disputation were expected in their turn to apply logic as a means of teaching religious reform.

### Conclusion

For Udall, the object of communication had become social formation by means of a conviction taught with the aid of logic rather than persuasion through delightful teaching (*docere, delectare, persuadere*), the three purposes of traditional rhetoric. In spite of this constant use of logic, Udall did adapt it for each audience, simplifying the syllogisms and dichotomies of Ramist logic for his parishioners. Thus, unlike a more orally attuned thirteenth-century scholasticism, which did not imprint divisions and subdivisions on the popular sermon (d'Avray 166-78) but reserved such an approach for the classroom, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritan preaching transformed the sermon into a popularized academic lecture. In contrast with this simplification of logic in his sermons and exegesis, Udall combined formal syllogisms and dichotomies to organize the argumentation of *A Demonstration*. Only of the educated audience intended for this tract did Udall demand formal syllogisms. However, like his parishioners, this audience also would have experienced the recovery and organization of ideas as a model of how to think about the practical implications of certainties.

Udall's application of Ramist logic capitalized on its pedagogical nature. Ramism was not a means for discussion among the learned about probabilities, the meaning of the term "dialectic." Nor was it a means to investigate certainties, the Aristotelian understanding of "logic." Instead, Ramism replaced three different procedures (persuasion of the public, discussion among the learned, and investigation of certainties) with one procedure, the recovery and placement of ideas as if they were certainties calling out for appropriation and application. In itself, Ramism meant "a subscientific logic designed for pedagogical convenience."<sup>6</sup> In its adaptation by Udall's new practice of audience accommodation,



Ramism became a pedagogical tool to form audiences which differed in education but shared the same world of meaning.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See S. Miller 1982: 50-56 and Steinhoff 1982:32.

<sup>2</sup>Perelman 1982:279, Howell 1982:67-68, Farrell 1979:910-18, Vickers 1981:109-18.

<sup>3</sup>See Rechten 1978:268 and 1979:245-46.

<sup>4</sup>P. Miller 1961:331-49 and White 1972:22.

<sup>5</sup>Herr 1969:75-86, Thomas 1948:10-21, Regan 1983:155-56.

<sup>6</sup>Ong, personal correspondence, 5 July 1984.

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## **“Voice” and “Address” in Literary Theory**

**William J. Kennedy**

One of Walter Ong's major interests has been the history of the rhetorical tradition in the West and its impact on literary forms. In recent years that interest has faced a powerful challenge from the theoretical advances of deconstruction. On the face of it, no approach to rhetoric or literature could be more different from Walter Ong's than that of deconstruction. In juxtaposing these contrary approaches, I wish to look at both from within, to examine their concerns, to understand their usefulness. Jacques Derrida describes the deconstructive approach as one that is free from method: "The first gesture of this departure and this deconstruction, although subject to a certain historical necessity, cannot be given methodological or logical intraorbital assurances" (Derrida 1976:162). Deconstruction nonetheless partakes of method and systematic discovery. In the words of one of its foremost literary theorists, Paul de Man, it teaches that "truth is the recognition of the systematic character of a certain kind of error" (1979:17). Walter Ong's own studies have focused on methods and systems of thought, and many have explored the particular rhetorical system of Petrus Ramus and his followers. In this essay I will argue that the rhetorical assumptions of deconstruction share one of the central weaknesses of Ramus' system. The weakness is to reduce the rhetorical presence of voice and address to an emotional affect, to subordinate it to the suppositious materiality of a figure or trope.

Contrary to the allegations of many literary critics hostile to deconstruction, the latter's chief problem is not that it finds no meaning in human discourse, for often its highly resourceful, deeply pressured readings find more meaning than a given text might seem to bear. Its chief problem is that it locates all meaning in reified textuality, in the material substratum of language and

discourse, especially their written forms, at the significant expense of voice and address. The materiality of the word implies its rootedness in time and space with the concomitant notions of presence and absence. One major difference between the approaches of Ong and deconstruction stems from an opposition between presence and absence in the concept of the verbal signifier.

For Walter Ong, presence entails a “double and interlocking dialectic”: “A word can live only while actually issuing from the interior, physical and psychic, of the living individual. As soon as it has passed to the exterior, it perishes. . . . On the other hand, in so far as words are found within us, they are destined for exteriorization. . . . In so far as we speak to ourselves in any way, others are capable of sharing our thoughts” (1962:50). For Ong and for most of Western philosophy, presence requires an admission of the otherness of others, a confirmation of their difference from the self. Presence acquires meaning by situating two separate entities in relation to each other. For deconstruction, however, presence entails a suppression of difference, or, to use Derrida’s word, *différance*, a participial noun that subsumes differing and deferring, division and displacement, distance and delay. “That *phenomenon*, that presumed suppression of *différance*, that lived reduction of the opacity of the signifier, are the origin of what is called presence. That which is not subjected to the process of *différance* is *present*” (Derrida 1976:166). Writing, not speaking, affords the best model for the working of language, because in writing both the speaker and the referent are absent. Deconstruction explores absence as the condition of language. It explores the void that separates words from things, meaning from reference, speakers from audiences, all at the possible expense of rhetorical address to effect shared communication.

It is important to qualify this expense as “possible” because Derrida himself denies usurping rhetorical voice and address or privileging writing and absence over speech and presence: “It has never been a question of opposing a graphocentrism to a logocentrism, nor, in general, any center to any other center” (Derrida 1981b:12). Nonetheless, the effect on voice and address is the same. Deconstruction ignores, often at its own peril, the power of the subtext to center voice and address. The concept of the subtext, at least in modern usage, owes much to the dynamics of live theater. “Subtext” is Stanislavski’s term for any gestures, sounds, inner or outer movements, auditory or tactile sensations



that lie behind and beneath the words of a text: “It is the manifest, the inwardly felt expression of a human being in a part, which flows uninterruptedly beneath the words of the text, giving them life and a basis for existing. . . . The words come from the author, the subtext from the actor” (Stanislavski 1949:108-9). In rhetoric, and certainly in rhetoric as the Western tradition has understood it from antiquity through the Renaissance, various subtextual strategies of voice and address enforce a centering role in spoken and written discourse.

Though sometimes riddled with inconsistency, these terms “voice” and “address” offer important resources for rhetorical criticism and literary theory (see Kennedy 1978). They designate a frame of reference that emphasizes some dimensions of rhetorical meaning and suppresses others. In literary texts this frame acts on local figures and tropes to generate new levels of meaning. It can transpose the medium of discourse—language—so that its semantic stability depends upon a bond between speaker and audience. A historical awareness of concepts associated with voice and address may help to unravel some misunderstandings.

In English the term “voice” enters rhetorical theory circuitously. Its primary reference to vocal sound as the vehicle of human utterance dates to at least the fourteenth century. Modern rhetoricians, however, use the term in a highly metonymic sense that attributes the quality or tone of a speaking voice to the character or *ethos* of its individual speaker. This metonymic meaning derives from classical rhetoric with its technical treatment of *vox* or *pronuntiatio* (delivery) as a separate act of composition. Here classical theory sometimes urges the speaker to impersonate several voices mimetically.

Greek rhetoricians, for example, designate *prosopopoeia* (= Latin *fictio personae*, the impersonation of a fictive voice) and *ethopoie* (= Latin *notatio*, the impersonation of another’s voice) as forms of direct quotation. Latin rhetoricians subsume these forms in the concept of *sermocinatio*, a figure that attempts to render mimetic dialogue or monologue. Quintilian, for example, lists such *figurae orationis* as *simulatio*, *exclamatio*, and *libera vox (licentia)* to fashion a distinctive voice for free and open discourse (Butler 1920-22:9.2.26).

The history of the term “address” is more complicated. The word enters English as a substantive only after long use as a verb. In the fourteenth century it means “to straighten” or “to direct”;

hence in the fifteenth century Caxton employs it in the transitive sense of directing one’s speech to another. In the eighteenth century Pope uses it in the intransitive sense of speaking directly to another. A more restricted usage occurs in George Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), where the noun “address” implies a command of one’s attention. Thus Campbell speaks of rhetoric as a discourse affecting the faculties of understanding, imagination, passion, and will. Each faculty requires a particular “kind of address’ that formal rhetoric proposes to study (1963:2).

This interest in voice and address originates in classical theory. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, for example, Socrates privileges the rhetorical role of address when he asserts the importance of knowing one’s audience: “Since it is the function of speech to lead souls by persuasion, he who is to be a rhetorician must know the various forms of soul” (Hamilton and Cairns 1961:271d). In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” an essay on this dialogue in *Dissemination*, Jacques Derrida traces Plato’s association of writing with the word *pharmakon* that ambivalently signifies both “medicine’ and “poison.” Derrida concludes that “if *logos* is already a penetrating supplement, then isn’t Socrates, ‘he who does not write,’ also a master of the *pharmakon*?” (1981a:117). As Derrida shows, “the nakedness of the *pharmakon*, the blunt bare voice (*psilos logos*), carries with it a certain mastery in the dialogue’ (1981a:120). Contrary to Derrida’s understanding, however, Plato shows over and over that speakers listen to their own voices while their audiences speak to their own selves, so that even in written dialogue mastery does not flow in a one-way direction. Derrida suspends that situation.

Aristotle recognized a dialectical interaction of voice and address between speakers and audiences in his *Rhetoric*. There he associates the role of voice with the act of address when he directs both toward the audience as the end of discourse: “That which is persuasive is persuasive in reference to some one” (Freese 1926:1356.b.11). The character of the audience determines what voice the speaker appropriates: “All men are willing to listen to speeches which harmonize with their own character” (1390.a.16). Later rhetoricians describe many techniques that enforce this dialectic between voice and address. The pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (84 BC) designates figures of thought like *effictio* (character portrayal) and *sermocinatio* (direct speech) (Caplan 1954:4.63-65) as stylistic means towards the creation of

voice, and figures of diction like *apostrophe* and *interrogatio* (4.22) as stylistic varieties of address. Quintilian expands the list in his *Institutio oratoria* (AD 94). He considers *ironia*, which the audience understands by reference to the speaker's voice (Butler 1920-22:8.6.54), and adds *exclamatio*, *prosopopoeia*, and "all those expressions that are especially striking and most effective in stirring the emotions of the audience" (9.2.24-29).

From the beginning rhetorical theory interacts with literary theory. In *The Republic*, for example, Socrates distinguishes among literary genres by voice: "There is one kind of poetry and tale-telling which works wholly through imitation [in several voices], tragedy and comedy, and another which employs the recital of the poet himself [in one voice], best exemplified in the dithyramb, and there is again that which employs both, in epic poetry and in many other places" (Hamilton and Cairns 1961:394c). Aristotle echoes Plato when he discusses genre in his *Poetics* (Fyfe 1927:1448.a.2). Drama entails the mimetic creation of different voices for each character without the intrusion of the author's voice. Narrative (*apaggellonta*), on the other hand allows several options: to speak in one's own voice, or in an assumed fictive voice or mixture of voices that imitate the speech of various characters. The second of these options—to speak in an assumed fictive voice—subtly modifies the notion of genres other than drama or narrative. For the lyric it allows the poetic speaker to relinquish his or her own voice altogether and to speak in an imaginative, fictively dramatized voice not his or her own. From this assumption proceeds the idea of a fictive persona in lyric poetry and dramatic monologue, and it has a long history. Often the fictive persona addresses an equally fictive audience. Longinus, for example, illuminates this function of voice and address in his *On Literary Excellence* (AD 80). Figures like apostrophe, adjuration, anticipation and concealment, questions and answers, and asyndeton (chs. 16-19) provoke a kind of address. By deviating from the conventional grammatical order, they challenge the audience to work towards a fuller, richer understanding of meaning. Special *polyptota* include hortatory appeals to the reader in direct address (ch. 26) and dramatic changes in the speaker's voice (ch. 27). They enable poets in all genres to achieve strikingly distinctive styles.

For many moderns all poetic voices are fictive. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, anticipates Derrida by insisting upon the

facticity of the speaking “I,” “the only truly existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things” (1967:50). Nietzsche wholly dissociates the speaking “I” from the subjective voice of the poet: “Throughout the entire range of art we demand first of all the conquest of the subjective, redemption from the ‘ego,’ and the silencing of the individual will and desire; indeed, we find it impossible to believe in any truly artistic production, however insignificant, if it is without objectivity, without pure contemplation devoid of interest” (1967:48). For Nietzsche the means of objectifying the “I” is to fictionalize it, to divorce it entirely from the author’s identity, to fashion it as a fictive voice. In that sense, then, all poetic voices are or should be factitious verbal structures free from merely contingent associations with individual beings.

The historical path from Nietzsche’s formulation to post-structuralist theory that explodes the stability of the speaking “I” is complex. It is sufficient to indicate two quite different approaches that both anticipate some of deconstruction’s claims and attempt to refute them. One is Benedetto Croce’s complaint in his *Aesthetics* that modern rhetoric has degenerated into mere taxonomic refinement, a theory of elocution and beautiful speech that accumulates insights without system in a play of empty forms. Croce complains that this dessicated rhetoric reflects a mechanistic “prejudice that the reality of language lies in isolated and combinable words, not in living discourse, in expressive organisms rationally indivisible” (1909:151). The impoverished rhetoric that Croce describes prophetically suggests the structuralist taxonomies of figures and tropes that deconstruction proposes to overgo. Croce, however, argues that no rhetoric can move ahead by reifying language as deconstruction does.

An alternative approach pursues the claims of the Russian linguist V. N. Vološinov (or, as some scholars claim, Mikhail Bakhtin) about the social nature of language. In every text an implied listener functions “as an immanent participant in the aesthetic event,” determining the form of the text from within as a participant who “exists in the poet’s voice as the basic tone and intonation of that voice whether the poet himself intends this or not” (Vološinov 1976:114). Like Croce, Vološinov validates the roles of voice and address in a broadly social context. Unlike structuralists and deconstructionists, however, he refuses to enter the devocalized, silent field of mental space cultivated by many

systems of thought since the sixteenth century. Vološinov's dialogic imagination construes all discourse as a living exchange of voice and address.

Prospect might profit from retrospect, and retrospect shows that Renaissance rhetoric plays a crucial role in shaping modern sensibility. On the one hand, it increasingly construes figures, tropes, and other elocutionary devices as deviations from ordinary meaning rather than as intensifiers of deeper meaning. On the other, it pays decreasing attention to voice and address as frames for discourse. Renaissance rhetoric redistributes the classical emphasis on voice and address. George of Trebizond (1395-1472), for example, celebrates the intensifying functions of voice and address in his *Rhetoricorum libri V* (Venice, 1434), the first complete rhetorical treatise of the Renaissance. There George treats rhetoric as an enactment of dialogue, "a civil science in which, with as much agreement of the audience as possible, we speak on civic questions" (1538:5). He devotes three books to topics of *inventio* and a fourth book to their *dispositio*, where the *exordium* "prepares the audience for listening" (9) and the *peroratio* allows the speaker "to stir the audience's emotions as much as possible" (18). In the fifth book he discusses *elocutio* partly as a matter of figures and tropes but mostly as a matter of stylistic qualities or "ideas" like magnitude, vehemence, and gravity. These "ideas" that George appropriates from Hermogenes enhance the fabrications of a projected voice that moves audiences.

As Walter Ong has shown (1958), conceptions about rhetoric change profoundly as print technology overtakes the sixteenth century. Rhetoric shifts its attention from oral-aural performance towards the apprehension of thought in spatial, diagrammatic, or otherwise visual analogues. In his *De inventione dialectica* (1479, published 1515), Rudolph Agricola (1444-85) compares the speaker or rhetorician to an artist: he works "like a painter who shows how something swollen or hollow is expressed with drawn lines, or what color renders shade or light" (159). Just as figures or shapes and colors or shades constitute a painter's vocabulary, so material figures of speech and colors of expression constitute a rhetorician's vocabulary: "A picture is a silent poem, a poem is a talking picture" (166). Like George of Trebizond, Agricola designates the exordium and peroration for direct appeals to the audience, but he warns that such appeals must observe the laws of decorum. He derives these laws from Horatian literary theory and its concept of

decorum: “From ignorance of this principle one errs not only in life but often in poetry and speeches as well” (*idem*). The speaker must hold in check the resources of voice and address, subdue their emotive force, restrain their free play of idea and feeling.

Just as decorum in Agricola tends towards a flattening of style, so the rhetorical reform instituted in the *Dialecticae institutiones* (1543) of Petrus Ramus (1515-72) flattens the structure of composition. Like our deconstructionists, Ramus privileges writing over speech as an effective form of communication. The priority of writing to speech becomes a key issue. For modern deconstructionists writing is “prior” to speaking in a paradigmatic metaphysical sense. Writing typifies the lag inherent in any signifying act, and thus in all language, through its absence of a signatory and a referent. “Writing is the name of these two absences” (Derrida 1976:41). As a model of *différance*, writing provides a model for language in general. “Language is a possibility founded on the general possibility of writing” (Derrida 1976:52). For Ramus, writing is “prior” to speech—and privileged over it—in both a temporal and a pragmatic sense: “The practice of writing occurs prior to speech in nature and time” (1543:521). With this claim Ramus offers standard advice about writing an argument before delivering it as a speech. The reason is that a writer has more latitude than a speaker to dispose an argument, to select and heighten its best parts. Certainly Ramus’ claim that writing is “prior. . . in time” argues for conventional rhetorical practice. The claim that it is “prior. . . in nature,” however, argues for a new logical method.

Logic and rhetoric merge in rhetorical *inventio*. Among techniques for invention that Ramus proposes is *imitatio*, the technique of imitating earlier texts: “The first and easiest method of writing is imitation that prudently selects what it wishes to imitate” (*idem*). So far Ramus is asserting the classical and Renaissance practice of *copia* that Erasmus explains so well: “Who could speak more tersely than he who has ready at hand an extensive array of words and figures from which he can immediately select what is most suitable for conciseness?” (King and Rix 1963:15). With Ramus, however, the imitative copy entails endless repetitions in a vast intertextual space where echoes bounce impersonally off each other. As Walter Ong states the case, “At the heart of the Ramist enterprise is the drive to tie down words themselves, rather than other representations, in simple

geometrical patterns. Words are believed to be recalcitrant insofar as they derive from a world of sound, voices, cries; the Ramist ambition is to neutralize this connection by processing what is of itself nonspatial in order to reduce it to space in the starkest way possible" (1958:89). This reduction throws into bold relief the material substratum of language.

Ramus' idea of imitation also points toward the material substratum. Imitation entails surrendering one's own personal voice and sense of an audience, at least until one finds an authentic voice. Ramus defines the problem by (ironically enough) echoing Cicero's *topos* of influence as a sunburn: "When we feel ourselves colored by the virtues of others (as it happens to those who walk in the sun), then writing and speech depart from imitation and struggle with themselves" (1964:53<sup>R</sup>). Unlike earlier Renaissance humanists—notably Poliziano, Ermolaio Barbaro, and Erasmus, all of whom construe imitation as a point of departure for original composition—Ramus confines the writer within the materiality of the imitative frame. He offers no practical advice to distinguish between heuristic imitation and slavish copy. He can embrace only an intertextual world of depersonalized models that have lost their own subtextual powers of voice and address.

Post-structuralist theory oddly recalls some of these issues in our own time. True, Ramus is referring to the practical teaching of composition while post-structuralist theory is usually responding to a second order of thought about philosophical problems. Among literary critics, however, Paul de Man has written extensively about rhetorical theory and practice, and for other critics he has set an influential example of neutralizing voice by locating it in the material ground of metaphor: "The term *voice*, even when used in a grammatical terminology as when we speak of the passive or interrogative voice, is, of course, a metaphor inferring by analogy the intent of the subject from the structure of the predicate. . . . And this subject-metaphor is, in its turn, open to the kind of deconstruction to the second degree, the rhetorical deconstruction of psycholinguistics" (1979:18-19). The philosophical warrant for this position substantiates the power of rhetoric while it puts into question the stability of intentional acts. Jacques Derrida, for example, brackets conscious intentionality when he discusses the phenomenological assumption of being as present in signs that stand for being. He insists that he is challenging only a philosophical assumption about conscious intention: "In this

typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances” (1982:326). One gain is that this position enables deconstruction to analyze unconscious motivation as a basis for some speech acts. For the specter of intention, however, deconstruction substitutes the material power of rhetorical figures and tropes. *Logos* dominates and even subverts *ethos* and *pathos*. *Elocutio* becomes the focus of rhetoric. Its differing, deferring, and dispersive character finally displaces the functions of voice and address.

In its historical development Renaissance rhetoric similarly narrows its focus to *elocutio*, the search for figures and tropes in verbal expression. *Inventio* and *dispositio* become adjuncts of logic and dialectic whose proper function is to formulate ideas. Rhetoric attends wholly to verbal style. It schematizes figures and tropes, the devices of style that supplement thought rather than serve as a medium through which thought lives. Ramistic studies of rhetoric offer long inventories of elocutionary devices, figures of words and of thought that enhance style. Attention to voice and address disappears, all the more so since their uses, unlike those of schemes and tropes, admit of no logical limit. Major examples of Ramist rhetoric that have served literary criticism since the Renaissance include Abraham France’s *Arcadian Rhetoric* (1588), Du Marsais’ *Des Tropes* (1730), and Pierre Fontanier’s *Manuel classique* (1818).

The twentieth-century counterpart of rhetorical taxonomies is Groupe  $\mu$ ’s *Rhétorique générale*, the most ambitious structuralist rhetoric of our time. Groupe  $\mu$  seeks to free our understanding of rhetoric from contingent contexts by distinguishing among universal types of schemes and tropes, finally relegating voice and address to the behavioral inflections of a pre-determined code. Deconstruction reacts against such a code by bracketing its assumptions about voice and address.

Jacques Derrida argues specifically against them when he criticizes Husserl’s search for the metaphysical foundations of knowledge. Derrida begins by questioning Husserl’s intuition about the presence of voice to itself: “Consciousness owes its privileged status. . . to the possibility of a living vocal medium [*la vive voix*]” (1973:15). He asserts that traditional philosophy has used a metaphor of “the unity of thought and voice in logos” (74) to confirm its principles of self-identity and continuity. This use, “taking auto-affection as the exercise of the voice” (82), entails a



metaphysical assumption that begs the question of presence and its privileged status. To overcome this assumption, Derrida disrupts it: "Shall we say that the auto-affection we have been talking about up until now concerns only the operation of the voice? . . . This pure spontaneity is [only] an impression" (83-84).

Clearly Derrida is subverting only the philosophical identity of voice with thought and presence, yet he subverts it with important consequences for rhetoric and literary theory. By calling all these terms into question, Derrida undermines their usefulness in his broader critical vocabulary. Even though he repeatedly reclaims them for rhetorical and literary analyses, he nonetheless discloses their theoretical complicity with other ungrounded metaphysical assumptions. More specifically, he accords a newly privileged status to their opposites, silence and absence. His critique of Husserl comes full circle. Derrida himself makes an ungrounded metaphysical assumption in according absence equal status with presence, silence with voice. By denying one's privilege over the other, he in fact begs the question of absence, of non-identity, and of discontinuity. When he designates iterability as the structure of communication, he makes the absence of intention a necessary entailment: "Given this structure of iteration, the intention which animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content" (1982:326). In this context there is simply no philosophical means of denying or affirming metaphysical assumptions about presence or absence. Nor are there any rhetorical means.

Traditional rhetoric, however, assumes neither presence nor absence in voice and address. It instead construes them as heuristic devices. Rhetorical voice may resemble the living human voice, but it nowhere presumes to supplant the latter. Its function is wholly mediatory: it lends form to the speaker's discourse. Likewise rhetorical address need not presume a living audience present in time and space. By heuristically construing a fictive audience, it indeed assumes the opposite. It assumes that audiences can suspend their limitations in time and space in order to interact with the text. As rhetorical terms, voice and address privilege neither presence nor absence because they freely admit both when they fulfill their heuristic function. As Paul Ricoeur has shown, they provide frames for the focus of discourse (1977:83-90).

Though discourse takes many forms, Derrida seeks to valorize

one form of it as irreducible. For that form he designates writing as the becoming absent and unconscious of its subject and referent (1976:69). Writing reifies absence by effacing both author and reference, and it displaces signs across time and space in ways that correspond to the original condition of the sign. In his philosophy Derrida seeks to clarify the logical limits of the relationship between signifiers and signifieds. He begins with Saussure’s concept of the sign. According to Saussure, each sign acquires meaning only through its difference from other signs: “In language there are only differences” (1966:120). Derrida carries this principle a step further by postulating that as part of the sign a signifier acquires its meaning only through difference from its signified, “the thesis of *difference* as the source of linguistic value” (1976:52). This postulate entails a logical fallacy, however, since within the sign system signifiers and signifieds belong to mutually exclusive orders of meaning. Signifiers certainly differ from other signifiers: one phoneme differs from another and one morpheme differs from another; but the signifieds of various signs do not necessarily differ from each other. Two unlike signifiers may in fact point to the same signified, as happens in synonymy and circumlocution. Signifiers operate on an entirely separate level from their signifieds.

Derrida tries to overcome the breach by asserting that the signifier’s difference from the signified constitutes a necessary condition of its meaning: “Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only everywhere differences and traces of traces” (1981b:26). No real connection prevails between signifiers and what they refer to. All words are buried metaphors. They relate neither to reality nor to a personal understanding of reality, but rather to a series of displaced meanings. They are common coin, public property that belong alike to all and cannot be appropriated by any single person or voice.

If Derrida’s displacement of voice and address evokes Ramus’ reduction of rhetoric to *elocutio*, there is a good reason why it does. Both operationally distrust the dynamics of a subtext, Ramus because print technology occludes it, Derrida because the text is so full that there is nothing outside the text. Both also distrust metaphor, yet both conceive of it as a rhetorical necessity because for each rhetoric is primarily a system of figures and tropes. As pure supplement it adds itself to already significant language and defers it in a necessarily indefinite process (Derrida

1976:141, 275). Yet the rhetorical construction always comes to obliterate itself, endlessly affording grounds for its own deconstruction. It represents a moment of detour in which truth can be lost the very instant it is gained (Derrida 1982:241).

The result is an endorsement of interminable rhetorical analysis, a *déformation professionnelle* that appeals to literary theorists of various stripes and has certainly gained much ground in the 1970s and 1980s. At the root of this interminability, however, is a faulty definition of metaphor as a deviation from literal meaning. As Paul Ricoeur has shown, metaphor is not a negative deviation from meaning, but rather a positive interaction and fulfillment of many richly textured meanings. The startling effect of a momentary deviation gives way to fuller significance. The referent emerges on a higher level of meaning (Ricoeur 1977:147-56). Derrida nonetheless privileges a negative metaphoric of deviation. Metaphor “risks disrupting the semantic plenitude to which it should belong. Marking the moment of the turn or of the detour [*du tour ou du détour*] during which meaning might seem to venture forth alone, unloosed from the very thing it aims at however, from the truth which attunes it to its referent, metaphor also opens the wandering of the semantic” (1982:241). He then announces a deconstruction that replaces the binary simplicities of Ramistic analysis with the opaque antinomies of an unsettled, forever self-questioning analysis. Literary theory that adopts this approach pursues an enormously subtle and often productive program for rhetorical analysis, but it also surrenders its commitment to rhetoric as an instrument of insight or discovery. In deconstructive theory each gain bows to a succeeding one that inevitably contradicts it.

As literary theorists ought to recognize, language is not just extensional, referring to something outside itself. It is also intentional, stemming from a consciousness that knows and wills. In a philosophical study that has important implications for rhetoric and literary theory, John Searle shows that intention constitutes a state of mind or attitude rather than a conscious act, thereby accommodating both conscious and unconscious intentions: “One can represent something as being the case even when one believes that it isn’t the case (a lie); even when one believes that it is the case, but it isn’t (a mistake); and even if one is not interested in convincing anybody that it is the case” (1983:169). If it were otherwise, the rhetorical or literary critic might be able to

deny material intentionality in a text by arguing that the author never declared such a conscious intention. Instead, because it is a state of mind or attitude, one must take account of its relational properties. These properties derive from the circumstances of the utterance. They involve the character of the speaker, the nature of his or her knowledge and will, the composition of the audience, and the speaker’s interaction with the audience registered in various forms of voice and address. Voice and address convey these intentional properties, and they constitute a frame that powerfully modifies both the speaker’s and the audience’s focus on language and meaning.

We might conclude with Nietzsche. Deconstructive theorists have referred with great enthusiasm to his fragmentary and until recently unpublished “Notes for a Course on Rhetoric.” There Nietzsche asserts that all language is inherently figurative: “Tropes do not supervene upon words but are rather their proper nature: one cannot speak absolutely of a proper signification” (1971:113). Deconstructive theory stops with that formulation. Paul de Man, for example, concludes his discussion of Nietzsche by asserting that “rhetoric is a *text* in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding” (1979:131). Nietzsche, however, continues with a clear endorsement of voice and address as mutually interfacing components of a dialogue. The speaker projects his or her voice through a poetic persona: “His art is one of imitation: he speaks as an actor speaks for another person or cause that is outside himself” (1971:117). Speech implies not only the existence of another to whom the speech is addressed, but also that the speaker has a kind of otherness within himself or herself. The speaker’s voice is always a fiction that allows the speaker to address another in the sympathetic awareness of what it means to be an other.

As with the speaker’s voice, so with the audience that the speaker addresses. Speakers and audiences together enter the discursive field as makers, shapers, formers, and transformers of meaning. Walter Ong has memorably shown that “the writer’s audience is always a fiction” (1977:53-81). To designate both speaker and audience as fictive, however, does not deny their concrete existential reality, nor does it abrogate the intentionality of the producing speaker or writer. On the contrary, it reinforces their reality as particular components of rhetorical expression while

it confirms the intentionality of the producing agent. In writing as in speech the audience participates in a rhetorical contest with the producing agent. The latter's chief advantage is his or her rhetorical mode of voice and address. Only at their own peril do rhetorical criticism and literary theory ignore them.

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## **The Making of the Novel and the Evolution of Consciousness**

**Ruth El Saffar**

In his article “Milton’s Logical Epic and Evolving Consciousness” (1976a), Walter Ong points out that a critic looking at sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts must inevitably engage in an examination of dissociations.<sup>1</sup> A separation takes place in that period that makes easy repetition of the old formulae no longer possible. That separation renders obsolete, among other things, the epic, giving birth in its place to the novel. In the present paper I want to reflect upon narrative as it becomes a consciously written phenomenon, taking *Don Quixote* Part I (1605) and *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) as my cases in point.

The two works, both seminal in the creation of the novel, reflect clearly that moment in Western culture when the narrative voice dissociates from collective presuppositions and values while presenting itself as purveyor of the *written* and not the spoken word. In accord with their alienated and iconoclastic natures, both works draw attention to, while questioning the authority of, their fictional narrators. *Lazarillo de Tormes* will offer itself as the autobiography of an accused towncrier whose education among cruel masters taught him to defend himself “como mejor mentir supe” (“lying as best as I could”). Aping the formula of the epic hero, Lázaro, the grown man who has emerged out of the boy-child Lazarillo, styles himself as a river-born, orphaned wanderer whose “skills” finally win him the “respect” and “favours” of the “high” and “mighty.” But his story is so written that every noun in the second half of the previous sentence is ironized to the point of obliteration. That irony is both the sign and the result of the narrator’s separation from his audience and its cultural norms and is not incidentally linked to his role as writer, as Walter Ong has shown in “From Mimesis to Irony” (1976b).



*Don Quixote* also presents itself as the work of a fictional narrator, a person on the fringes of established society. Like Lázaro, the fictional narrator of *Don Quixote* uses the cherished literary topos of the noble hero against both the hero himself and the society that harbors his values. Drawing on the formula of the scribe who recounts the heroic deeds of the exemplary Christian warrior, *Don Quixote* undermines both the chronicles of true knights and the fictional romances of chivalry so popular in the sixteenth century, while challenging at a more radical level the capacity of the written word to express truth. The fictional reader who finds the Moorish chronicler Cide Hamete's manuscript in Chapter 9 of Part I and arranges for it to be translated shatters any audience expectation about the reliability of the supposed author by arguing that perfidy and envy are native to his race.<sup>2</sup>

The representation of the narrator as dissociated from the dominant consciousness—socio-political as well as literary—far from being a secondary aspect of the text, reflects its most distinguishing trait. Lázaro and Cide Hamete are figures set off to the side of society and text, figures caught having to please a community that has rejected them, while rejecting in their turn the norms and formulae on which their success as narrators nonetheless depends. Lázaro and Cide Hamete define the place of consciousness in their respective writings as duplicitous—with all that word's cognate and etymological associations with doubling, doubting, and deviling. Removed from the arena of the storyteller, where speaker and what is spoken, telling and listening, form a single unit, the narrators in these works so central to the creation of the novel capture the essence of a new sensibility, one centered not in speaking and presence, but in writing and separation. In these two consciously “writerly” narratives, narrators, characters, words, topos, and literary conventions all disengage in varying degrees from the environment out of which they arise.

Written, respectively, just before and just after the reign of Phillip II, *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote* stand for two key moments in the shift in consciousness of which Walter Ong has written so persuasively. No longer one with earth, the mother, the mother tongue, the collective (un)consciousness, the new genre separates and problematizes teller, audience, literary convention, the “hero,” the word itself. With separation come doubt, conflict, desire. The hero becomes thief or madman; the teller, a liar. The close look we are about to take at the early novel shows clearly

the pain, conflict, and guilt that surrounded the rejection of the oral culture, and, more basically, the rejection of the realm of the mother that was our collective Western European experience in the 1600's.

In *Fighting for Life* (1981) and elsewhere, Walter Ong has associated the development of Western objectivist scientific consciousness with the masculine, and attributes that new consciousness in part to the use of learned Latin as the instrument of academic discourse from the sixteenth to well into the twentieth century. Crucial to an understanding of the effects on the collective Western European psyche of the lay schooling made possible by the technologies of the printing press and farm machinery is the recognition that the acquisition of learned Latin was an exclusively male prerogative achieved through a violent wrenching of young boys from their maternal environment. The forced dissociation of large numbers of boys from childhood, the emotions, the mother, the body, and home was not unique to the schooling process, however. Separation from home became the common experience of boys across a wide spectrum of classes in sixteenth-century Spain as the expanding empire required more and more young men for its military and colonial enterprises. The depletion of manpower in the countryside and the increasing value of currency helped sponsor an internal migration from the land that duplicated the external migration to the new world, and that resulted in famine and a massive swelling of the ranks of the urban poor.

Although these phenomena were common throughout Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were experienced earlier and with more intensity in Spain with the empire-building aspirations of the Hapsburgs. The commitment, carried over from the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, to the concept of "one language, one faith" also favored the early development in Spain of a consciousness unsympathetic to dispersal and difference, one based on unity, clarity, and power. Those qualities of focus and order are ones associated, in Ong and elsewhere, with the masculine, the world of the father. In individual as well as in collective psychological development, that world disrupts the primary mother-child symbiosis and is experienced as invasive and traumatic by the subject in question. *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote* can be read, as I intend to do here, as reflections of the crisis in the unfolding of the Western

European psyche—a crisis that results when masculine energies break free from their moorings in the feminine, creating the imbalance from which, collectively, we are still recovering.

In *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote* can be found documented all the changes mentioned: the starvation of the countryside, the migration of the rural poor to the cities, the breakup of the family under the pressures of empire, the use of machinery to harness the forces of nature, the exchange of land value for money value, and the growth of an adventuring, outward-bound, home- and woman-denying spirit. Although I may refer in passing to some of these specifics of the two texts under discussion here, my attention will be primarily centered on the more basic observation of the psycho-sexual dynamics highlighted in the two works. Underlying my interest specifically in the novel is my suspicion that the new genre's subversive nature carries at its core an unconscious identification with the rejected maternal that makes the emergence of the novel at the time of empire and its creation by socially marginalized authors a natural aspect of its formation.

It has already been noted that both *Don Quixote* and *Lazarillo de Tormes* feature narrators who work actively to undercut the tradition of the hero and the social and literary norms that support him. The socially reprehensible narrators of those two works further subvert the pretenses of empire by challenging the authority not only of their own discourse, but of the written word, of social codes, of literary formulae. The structural emphasis on separation, alienation, and disorientation, as well as the thematic concern with transgression and madness, cut deeply into the emerging linear, hierarchical, orderly, impassioned consciousness that empire and the burgeoning universities would seek to inculcate.

It must be noted here that the novel, in registering a basic shift in consciousness, also provides insight into the psychic costs which that shift entailed. Both works to be examined here will reveal an intense anxiety among both narrators and main characters over issues of control, and both will present characters engaged in the struggle to recover through language and the imagination the power over their lives that economic and social forces have conspired to deny them. At a more basic level, however, the question of power and control alludes to the Oedipal phase of psychological development—not simply to the phase of

the young boy's conflict with and imitation of a superior male figure, but to the perhaps more devastating task of rejecting the hitherto all-nurturing body of the mother. Critics of the novel have readily analyzed the conflictive structure of the novel—the struggle of its protagonists and antagonists for dominance,<sup>4</sup> but little has been said about the feminine realm from which the hero must escape in order for conflict in the male world to become possible. In the two works I will be treating in this discussion, I will be highlighting not the foreground of conflict, but the anxiety, guilt, and desire for the obscured feminine that the surface struggles both reveal and seek to mask.

Early in Part I of *Don Quixote*, the mad knight sets forth the problem he has taken up arms to redress. Elaborating on the familiar classical and Renaissance theme of the Golden Age, he laments in Chapter 11 the passing of that time when “the crooked plough had not yet dared to force open and search the kindly bowels of our first mother with its heavy coulter; for without compulsion she yielded from every part of her fertile and broad bosom everything to satisfy, sustain, and delight the children who then possessed her” (86). Further developing the imagery of not only the plundering of the once-bountiful mother earth, but of the state of danger in which her daughters must live, he goes on to refer to “this detestable age of ours,” in which “no maiden is safe . . . for. . . through some chink or through the air. . . the plague of love gets in and brings them to their ruin despite their seclusion” (86). While much of what Don Quixote says echoes the *beatus ille* topos, his speech veers from his models in its fanatical horror of lust and concomitant urge to protect widows and damsels.

Crazy as Don Quixote is portrayed to be—his narrator calls the speech a “harangue, which might well have been spared” (87) and notes that the goatherds to whom it was directed listened in dumbfounded silence—his concern for the feminine in two of her archetypal aspects, mother and virgin, represents a cry for balance in a world clearly alienated from the feminine. Carolyn Merchant has shown that precisely in the sixteenth century one finds a major shift from an organic to a mechanistic view of the world:

Central to the organic theory was the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe. . . . An organically oriented mentality in which female principles

played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically-oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitative manner. As Western culture became increasingly mechanized in the 1600's, the female earth and virgin earth spirit were subdued by the machine (1980:2).

By the time *Don Quixote* is written it seems no longer possible to recover the longed-for union with Demeter, or the happy innocence of Kore. As incident after incident will show, the feminine as mother has all but disappeared from a landscape now dominated by windmills, fulling mills, the wool industry merchants, and civil and ecclesiastical figures of authority. The feminine as virgin is trapped in the role of prey. It is no wonder that the last female figure that Don Quixote tries to rescue (Part I, Chapter 52) is that of the Virgin Mary in mourning, painted with tears on her face. In that final amalgam of virgin and mother is condensed the whole issue of the feminine in Part I of *Don Quixote*. That she would be carried in procession by penitents praying for relief of the drought that is threatening to bring starvation to the area further underscores the wasteland effect her mourning brings to the land.

The ambiguity of Don Quixote's quest and of the novel in which he comes to life is grounded in the hero's complex relation to the feminine. His plan to devote his life to succoring widows, maidens, and orphans is premised on his escape from a household made up precisely of an unmarried mother figure and a "young damsel," his own orphaned niece. He abandons, in other words, the widow, maiden, and orphan of his household in order to save others whom he imagines endangered. The ethereal Dulcinea, whom Don Quixote invents as the woman of his heart, guarantees that, even out on the road, he will be protected—out of loyalty to her—from any real engagement with women. Don Quixote's decision to protect the feminine is also, and radically, a decision to escape involvement with women. By choosing the way of adventure and combat, Don Quixote is caught mirroring the very enemies he has set out to conquer. The battle is clearly as hopeless as it is never-ending. Even if the last rival were finally killed, Don Quixote would be no closer to a real resolution of his desire to restore his lost relation to the feminine than before, since to do that would require that he break out of his own armored, distanced, combative position.<sup>5</sup>

Don Quixote is a hero working in the masculine modes of

arms and letters. Modeling himself on the heroes of chivalric romance, he seeks out service to women through masculinist means. His effort is anachronistic not only because the age of feudalism is gone, but because neither damsel nor mother are what they were when land rather than money ruled the economy. Careful analysis of the events of Part I shows in any case that women consistently and radically undercut with their deeds the presuppositions of weakness and vulnerability that Don Quixote—and all the other men in the novel—project onto them. Don Quixote, in other words, is caught in a misreading of the real world of the women he aspires to protect, a misreading that betrays an inner affliction of the feminine that affects not only him, but the other lettered male characters as well.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the chivalric heroes whom *Don Quixote* hopes to emulate, the male characters of the early seventeenth-century novel carry within them, in their own economic and social marginalization, the image of the rejected feminine they are seeking to redeem. The very technology that produced this combative hero has also marginalized him, and rendered insignificant his ancestral home and the class of the landed nobility from which he sprang. His longing for mother earth's all-giving bounty is therefore an expression of his own sense of loss in the face of urbanization and industrialization.

While very much the hero of arms and letters, the secret of Don Quixote lies in his pre-history. As Alonso Quijano he was in a real sense part of what as Don Quixote he leaves behind, a part of the spurned feminine to whose defense he has come by becoming a knight errant. The richness of his character depends on his dual role as both the abandoner and the abandoned, a figure reaching out through his masculinized armor for the spurned and ever-endangered feminine within.

The complex place of the in-between that Don Quixote inhabits also characterizes the novel which bodies him forth. The text lies precisely at the intersection of those energies that would enshrine and those that would destroy the romances of chivalry. Popular with all classes in the early part of the sixteenth century, the romances of chivalry were denounced by most literary theorists by the time Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*. By the early seventeenth century, the books of chivalry were considered pulp fiction, read and enjoyed by large numbers, to be sure, but disdained by the learned elite. Knowledge of learned Latin appears to be the marker most surely distinguishing those who decry the

popular romances from those who embrace them, the most articulate spokesman against those works in *Don Quixote* I being the figure highest in the ecclesiastical order, the Canon of Toledo. When Don Quixote defends the books of chivalry in Chapters 49-51 of Part I, he does so not by appealing to the intellect, which is a faculty the Canon most obviously enshrines, but to the imagination. Don Quixote offers up the books of chivalry as works in which the senses are stimulated, and in which one can participate imaginatively in a world of passion and fulfillment prohibited in ordinary life.

Don Quixote, and with him most of the other readers presented in the novel, reads in a participatory fashion, while the Canon, who might also be tempted to fall into the stories' seductions, urges a critical reading that separates and finally disenchants him. The Canon says: "For myself I can say that they give me a certain pleasure when I read them—so long as I do not deliberately reflect that they are all triviality and lies" (436). Clearly, learned Latin is doing for the Canon and for all those neo-Aristotelian erudite critics of the romances of chivalry just what Walter Ong has promised it would do. It has provided a separation from the world of participation, the world of the passions and the senses.

Cervantes, who confesses in his own prologue to being incapable of sprinkling his work with Latin quotes and other signs of erudition,<sup>7</sup> shares with his main character that uncomfortable place of the in-between, being neither a part of the intellectual elite who would condemn the novels of chivalry, nor a part of the unquestioning public who would surrender entirely to their charms. Like Don Quixote, Cervantes is caught between the longing for a good, fantasy-engaging story—for an immersion in what we can here call the feminine participatory<sup>8</sup>—and a critical consciousness prepared only for separation, struggle, and resistance. *Don Quixote* is a novel, in other words, that radically calls into question its own authorship and the authority of the written word while also finding itself inextricably entangled in the web of the very writing it questions. The result, as many critics have shown, is a wonderful amalgam of voices and styles, a veritable compendium of popular and erudite systems of expression, a compendium that undoes all pretense to ideological coherence and aristocratic hierarchy while nonetheless remaining locked within the distancing ironies of a solitary consciousness.

If *Don Quixote* marks the last major effort in Spanish Golden Age literature to defend the endangered nexus of elements associated with the mother/virgin against the totalizing and power-motivated forces of a consciousness broken off from it, *Lazarillo de Tormes* marks the first. Like *Don Quixote*, *Lazarillo de Tormes* captures that difficult place of the in-between, balancing both popular and elitist cultures in a diction that draws from folk as well as from classical and Biblical sources. The main character reduplicates the lexical and tropological anomalies of the work in his own position at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, from which he mediates between the classless and the classed in a society whose rigidities would otherwise prohibit their interaction.

Although the anonymous author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* remains unidentified, most speculators agree that he may well have been a *converso*, and most probably a humanist. In the Spain of the mid-1500's, to be a *converso* or a humanist was to walk constantly on the edge of the precipice (Elliott 1964:204-17). Like Cervantes, the anonymous author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* left the image of his dissociation from dominant cultural values in the figure of his surrogate. Quotations in the text from Cicero, Pliny, Homer, and the Bible suggest a person of considerable learning, a person, therefore, born into the hallowed and masculinized world of academic letters, but severed, at the same time, from a position of true power.

If *Don Quixote I* offers for our contemplation that moment of regret and guilt when the realization has dawned that the mother has been left, that her bounteous giving is no more, that only through male-oriented combat can what remains of her be protected, *Lazarillo* takes us further back, to that pre-verbal moment of union from which the hero is brutally and prematurely wrested. In *Don Quixote's* world the plow has already long since pried open "the kindly bowels of our first mother." *Don Quixote* comes into the story as an old man.

*Lazarillo de Tormes*, on the other hand, is a story that insists on origins, a story that is designed, finally, not to defend a male-combative alliance, but to protect a continued embeddedness in the feminine. Alonso Quijano, through his reconstruction as *Don Quixote*, takes up a wandering, alienated, eccentric, struggle-based, and body-denying attitude in a conscious decision to abandon home, anonymity, and control by the feminine. *Lazarillo* weeps as he is led away from his maternal home by the



first of several masters bent on teaching him that he is alone in the world.

Because the severance was unwilling and premature, Lázaro will spend his efforts seeking to return to the place of protection and fulfillment that the feminine represents for him. In the unending combative structure of the novel, Lazarillo finds himself perpetually at odds with relentless male masters who, from beginning to end, will seek to displace him from the comforts of the mother and all that is associated with her: food, shelter, peace of mind, bodily satisfaction. His predetermined unconscious decision to ally himself with the feminine radically affects the way he adjusts to the demands of the masculinized world into which he is thrown, and the quality of the skills he develops to survive in it.

Lázaro's skill with words has none of the repose and assurance of Don Quixote, for whom reading and conversing represent a kind of recreation. Ineluctably linked with the struggle for survival, Lázaro's developed intellect remains associated with anxiety and the never-ending threat of failure. His story, then, is one of suspended accommodation to the male world. His true allegiance, from beginning to end, is to the feminine world he has never really left. The ingenuity, verbal skill, and sense that he is alone—all hard-won lessons learned in the school of his several heartless masters—do in fact equip him for survival, and even for a kind of precarious acceptance in the hierarchized male world of church and state. At what he calls the height of his good fortune he has secured a job in the royal hierarchy—the lowest job on the ladder, that of town-crier, which involves, among other things, denouncing in public processions the crimes of the paraded prisoners—and lives in a comfortable and well-stocked house with his wife. He got to his place of success and prosperity, he proudly explains in his prologue, not by right of birth, but by hard work.

What the autobiography makes clear is that Lázaro's continued success and prosperity hang on his ability to manipulate the spoken and written word. As both town-crier and author his ever-demanding task is to accuse and denounce as a defense against being accused or denounced. Here, combining the communal, voiced word of town-crier with the individual, written word of an accused rogue, we find joined within the text and character of Lazarillo de Tormes the oral culture's sense of the activity and power of the word combined with the written culture's sense of its instability and unreliability.

On one level, Lázaro would like to convince us that his is a success story, that he is offering of his own free will the autobiography of a young man of humble birth who, with wit and determination, pulls himself up to a respectable place in society. That reading would honor the male world into which he has apparently won access, and is shored up by the pretense in the prologue that he is writing the book for art and for honor's sake.

The whole relationship to the masculine is turned upside down, however, by the revelation in the prologue that the writer is not in fact performing a disinterested work of art, but that instead he is responding defensively to a master ("Your Worship"), through whom the accusation has come that this living situation is at best irregular. The true addressee of the work is not "dear Reader" after all, but "Your Worship." The autobiography is not the product of a successful author's leisure, but yet another episode in the struggle to preserve his precarious hold on access to bodily comforts in a world full of menacing authority figures.

Unlike *Don Quixote*, where everyone speaks, where authority is challenged by a polyphony of voices, dictions, and lexicons, in *Lazarillo de Tormes* silence constitutes the only radical undermining of the structures of authority. Speaking, naming, identifying, and structuring are marks of privilege and power in the world created by *Lazarillo de Tormes*. They are marks of power not because of their intrinsic value, however, but because of their capacity to command silence.

The ambiguity regarding Lázaro's position vis-à-vis the authorship of his life story is reiterated in the last chapter of the book, wherein the nature of the case against him is guardedly revealed. The arrangement is as follows: Lázaro, who as town-crier also has control over whose wine gets sold, has married the archpriest's mistress. In that way the archpriest, who has his own vineyard, guarantees the sale of his wine, and shrouds his affair. Lázaro, in the exchange, gets a nice little house next to the archpriest, and plenty of food. It looks very much as if the peak of Lázaro's good fortune has been achieved by transgressing the two central codes of secular and ecclesiastical conduct, that is, by ignoring both the archpriest's vow of celibacy and the honor code's stringent repudiation of cuckoldry. Lázaro's transgression, however, affords all three members of the *menage à trois* every kind of bodily comfort in a world officially structured to insure their denial.

What Lázaro's education has taught him is that denial is not based on the intrinsic relation of signified and signifier. To say "one should not indulge in the sins of the flesh" is not in fact to avoid such indulgences. Lázaro has learned that what one requires for survival in this world is access to dominion over those signifiers. His whole book is a case in point. Regarding his sharing of his wife, he has first the gossiping neighbors and then the "Your Worship" to deal with.

For the neighbors, the task of keeping the affair secret is relatively easy. He reports telling them, "I swear on the Sacred Heart itself that she [his wife] is as good a woman as any in Toledo. If anyone says the opposite I'll kill him!" Then he adds "as a result nobody says anything and there is peace at home." For the "Your Worship" who has ordered Lázaro's defense, however, the task is more complicated. In Chapter 1, when the boy Lazarillo had been confronted with an accusatory authority figure, he had neither the experience nor the distance the written word provides to elude condemnation successfully. The result of his failure to lie at that time was the breakup of his home and ending of his security. Now a grown man, and possessor of the skills needed to manipulate the male codes of power, Lázaro's rhetorical strategy involves the transformation of this latest threatening male authority figure, "Your Worship," from the role of reader outside his story to that of participant in it. He does this by reminding his accuser that the Archpriest is his friend. It is now Lázaro, having miraculously harnessed the power of the written word, who can reduce his "master" to silence by implicating him in his story as character.

The goal for handling both "Your Worship" and the neighbors is the same: to achieve the place where "nobody says anything and there is peace at home." That is what all the struggle, all the rivalry among men, all the development of rhetorical skill in *Lazarillo de Tormes* is about. The very writing of his story is yet one more task in Lázaro's never-ending struggle to return to silence, to "peace at home."

Critics have had little to say about the role and presence of the feminine in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, of its constant impulse in the direction of silence and home. A careful look shows, however, that beneath all the struggle and posturing among men is a single-minded devotion, bordering on the obsessive, for the food, sex, and protection the woman represents in the structure of

*Lazarillo de Tormes*. Women are associated in the story with the free supply of food, money, sex, and shelter, while the men in positions of authority are identified with the official suppression of the need for such things. Because the official codes—civil as well as ecclesiastical—stress restriction, plentiful supplies of the desired objects, always associated with the feminine, are available only through transgression, through that which cannot be named or spoken.

Lazarillo and his first master, the blind beggar, engage in endless skirmishes centering around money, wine, and food. As the blind man guards the vessels in which such desirables are contained, he teaches Lázaro the fundamental lesson, that his privations are intended to school him in the dual arts of lying and thievery. The second master, the cleric, raises up his penury and near starvation of Lazarillo to a virtue, instructing the boy “not to indulge his greed too much,” while the priest himself leaves only the gnawed bones from his meal for Lazarillo to eat. As with the blind man, Lazarillo finds himself locked in struggle with the priest over the vessel in which food is stored yet forbidden. Once again the boy is forced to marshal skills of verbal trickery and deceit in order to survive. And once again it is a feminine vessel that bears the “breadly paradise” from which Lazarillo finds himself barred.

The vessels, containing and withholding the promises of physical sustenance, are from the beginning of Lazarillo’s life and right through his apprenticeship years the unspoken, unnamed focal point of male struggle. Lazarillo’s father was sent away as punishment for having cut into grain sacks at the mill where he worked. Lazarillo in his turn will learn to cut and bore his way into the sacks, jugs, and chests whose contents of food and wine he so ardently desires. But about all this nothing will be said. The conversation will center on the forbidden objects of desire only when the boy is caught in the effort to steal. Success, along with the efforts leading to it, must be left unspoken. Language, then, can be used only to accuse and to deflect. It plays an adversarial role. Like the honor and ecclesiastical codes it enunciates, it serves to distinguish, separate, and deny, setting up hierarchies and limiting access of mankind to the natural world.

No character better illustrates the life-denying impact of the literary acceptance of such codes than the squire of Chapter 3. The squire’s total identification with honor has left him without land, home, work, money, food, or sex. Emptied of all signs of

life, without even a poor old chest with dried bread inside to struggle over, the house which the squire inhabits becomes for Lazarillo a coffin, one in which both he and his master would surely die were it not for kindly neighbor ladies who discreetly and illegally provide Lazarillo with food and who later shelter him when the squire disappears.

The episode with the squire is definitive in the development of Lazarillo's attitude toward both authority and language. In choosing life, Lazarillo chooses along with it refusal of integrity—refusal of the integration of word and deed, of appearance and reality, of intention and desire. The very short Chapters 4-7 show Lázaro finding his way into the official structures, the structures of power, while simultaneously learning to fulfill his and his male compatriot's appetites for sex, food, and money. His final position on the lowest rung of the ladder of the hierarchized world of church and state represents that precarious place of the in-between from which he mediates between powerful men whose codes would, if taken literally, cut off their access to life, and anonymous women who, while they supply those very things their masters surreptitiously desire, lack any power to define themselves.

Lázaro supplies wine and women to the likes of "Your Worship" and the Archpriest while promising to keep intact their official codes of honor and celibacy. He colludes, in other words, in the seemingly all-pervasive determination of the powerful to possess that which their codes are designed to expel and debase. As town-crier, he uses words—both spoken and written—in the desperate and ever-escalating search not for their correlates in reality, but for "silence, and peace at home," for, in other words, the comforts of the body which only the squire is foolish enough to allow words to destroy.

*Lazarillo de Tormes* captures Spanish urban society at the end of the reign of Charles V, at a time just before the Inquisition was given free reign to persecute illuminist and other Erasmian and *converso*-associated heresies, just before the imposition of a strict index of forbidden books, just before the period when the Jesuits took over the schooling of young boys on a scale never before known in Western Europe. The impact of the printing press, large-scale education, and new machinery can surely be felt in the 1550's. But we can see that these two novels, *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote*, represent two very distinct moments in the

transition from orality to literacy. In the *Lazarillo*, the hero of the in-between feigns allegiance to and participation in the world of the father—of authority, hierarchy, discrimination, and language—while revealing his and the whole society's continued dependence on and desire for the world of the mother—of anonymity, oneness, indiscriminacy, and silence.

By 1605 the young boy for whom childhood separation from the mother remains the most significant event has become an old man so immersed in letters, so divorced from the world of childhood and the mother, that he verges on madness. His place of the in-between begins not with the mother but with the father. *Don Quixote* will take up his position in no-man's land as knight errant and scholar. He will glory in his rhetorical and literary capacities, which are no longer associated with survival, but with enjoyment and ornamentation. And he will seek re-contact with the lost feminine out of those skills of language and combat that identification with the world of the father has taught him.

Preceding and following these two moments—markers in the development of consciousness—we have on the one hand the romances of chivalry, and on the other body- and woman-denying texts that tend to refuse the innovations of the novel.<sup>9</sup> These are oversimplifications, of course. But the general trend points from an earlier immersion in the senses and passions, and a participatory reading of the romances, to a violent rejection of those things and a separate, body-denying consciousness in the literature of the Baroque. And in between, in the period that brackets the reign of Phillip II, are two crucial works in the development of the novel, works capturing the conflicts of a consciousness in the process of breaking the comfortable pre-verbal, mother-child symbiosis. *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote* reflect upon both the pain experienced by the young boy and the guilt of the old man whose life experience was to grow up separated from the world of mother, home, and the oral culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>“Attempts to describe in depth what happened to the Western European psyche during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries inevitably find themselves dealing with dissociations—T. S. Eliot’s ‘dissociation of sensibility,’ for example—which logic registers and defends” (1976a:305).

<sup>2</sup>The fictional reader who stumbles upon the manuscript in a market in Toledo says: “Now, if any objection can be made against the truth of this history, it can only be that its narrator was an Arab—men of that nation being ready liars, though as they are so much our enemies might be thought rather to have fallen short of the truth than to have exaggerated.” The fictional reader further accentuates the separations built into the entire work by opening a cleavage between narrator and subject, a cleavage whose rupture has carried into twentieth-century commentary on the work. He goes on: “In this history I know that you will find all the entertainment you can desire; and if any good quality is missing, I am certain that it is the fault of its dog of an author rather than any default in the subject” (Chapter 9, Part I:78, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*. All subsequent quotations from *Don Quixote* are drawn from this edition.) See de Unamuno 1967 for a twentieth-century expression of reader dismay at the author’s failure to render fairly the character’s high quality.

<sup>3</sup>Works in which Ong discusses the shift from orality to literacy are too numerous and too familiar to cite. For the purposes of this paper, however, I want to call particular attention to “Latin Language Study as Renaissance Puberty Rite” (1971) and “Transformations of the Word and Alienation” (1977). I single out these articles because of their careful linking of orality with the realm of the mother. For further discussion of the links of language and narrative with the mother, see Garner et al. 1985.

<sup>4</sup>For discussions of the conflictive nature of the novel, see Girard and, as specifically related to *Don Quixote*, Bandera 1975.

<sup>5</sup>In his last work, his posthumously published romance *The Persiles* (1617), Cervantes satirizes the situation of male struggle as a means of recovering the endangered feminine.

<sup>6</sup>For a fuller discussion, see El Saffar forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup>Explaining that he is ashamed to bring his book before the public, he tells his friend in the Prologue, “. . . I have nothing to quote in the margin or to note at the end. Nor do I even know what authors I am following in it; and so I cannot set their names at the beginning in alphabetical order, as they all do, starting with Aristotle and ending with Xenophon. . .” (26).

<sup>8</sup>It needs to be stressed that the term “feminine” as used here refers to a whole cluster of attributes which, while historically projected onto and assimilated by women, are in no way to be confused with female human beings. The attributes of the feminine belong within the fullness of all human beings, male and female. Here and throughout this paper I have linked, through the connection of orality with the mother tongue, the feminine with the oral culture, with environment, the body, nature, silence, anonymity, the participatory, and the unconscious. The masculine, on the other hand, is associated with writing, separation, the mind, technology, directed activity, individuality, and consciousness. I am indebted to Thomas J. Farrell for

pointing out the need to clarify this point.

<sup>9</sup>John Beverley (1982) has observed that after *Don Quixote* there are no true novels in Spain until the nineteenth century. The great literary works of the Spanish Baroque tend, instead, toward poetry and drama, and aim not at a general audience, but at the highly sophisticated audience at court, the very audience Cervantes both envied and feared. Deeply invested by the political and economic circumstances in “reconstituting the ideological coherence of aristocratic hegemony” (41), that audience generates a literary product linguistically and tropologically embedded in classical literature and caught up in subjects thematically polarized into sharply conflicting sets of opposites.

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## **Two Functions of Social Discourse: From Lope de Vega to Miguel de Cervantes**

**Elias L. Rivers**

At the inevitable risk of oversimplification, I propose to approach as directly as possible a broad and complex question: how are we to view in an orderly way the many different social functions of language, both oral and written? I will begin with the premise that oral language, analyzed abstractly by structuralists as a “semiotic system,” is more concretely the human race’s characteristic and fundamental social institution; normally acquired within the primary context of the family, language makes it possible for families and schools and other social organizations to exist and to function, articulating themselves, perpetuating themselves and developing historically. Purely mechanical inventions, such as the wheel, seem not to depend on language; but human families, tribes, city-states, and nations both constitute and are constituted by their verbal discourse. And the invention of writing, the “technologizing of the word,” as it has been aptly characterized by Walter J. Ong, went hand in hand with an economic, social, and cultural revolution.

If, then, verbal discourse is in some sense coterminous with human society, what are language’s basic social functions? Perhaps we can use as a point of departure the famous debate between B. F. Skinner of Harvard and Noam Chomsky of M.I.T., the debate (crudely put) between, on the one hand, a behavioristic theory of language as a limited system of conditioned reflexes and, on the other, a creative theory of language as an open system of almost infinite syntactic possibilities. According to Skinner, language—or, rather, “verbal behavior,” which in its covert form includes what we normally call “thought” —is simply one complicated example of operant conditioning: the human child, like Pavlov’s dog salivating at the sound of an electric gong associated with meat, learns to

salivate at the mention of the word for milk, and eventually to ask for it by name. Chomsky, on the other hand, emphasizes that the human user of language understands and produces new sentences that he or she has never heard or said before: human mind in language is thus no mere surface reflex, but has a deep structure that allows it to be original, productive of new meanings. (We university intellectuals, needless to say, tend to prefer Chomsky's view, which allows us to function meaningfully.)

I will not attempt here to deal with the debatable genetic and environmental hypotheses that underlie such metaphors as "deep structure" and "surface structure." The fact is that, phenomenologically, each of them—Skinner and Chomsky—seems to account for a different, real experience of language; and I submit that both these experiences of language must be taken seriously. Thus, those of us who teach foreign languages know that there is a basic function of language that can best be mastered by pattern drills: the phonology, the morphology, and a great deal of syntax may in fact be learned by rote, by operant conditioning. In everyday social usage there actually exist many set formulas:

Good morning, how are you today?  
 Fine, thanks, how are you?  
 Buenos días, ¿cómo está usted?  
 Muy Bien, gracias, ¿y usted?

At this level Skinner seems to be right: the conditioned reflex is all there is to this kind of linguistic competence. But, at another level, Chomsky seems more appropriate. If, for example, someone asks me, "What does it mean to say "Good morning?"", I cannot simply respond with a ready-made answer, for I must first think more analytically about how sociolinguistic formulas function. Metalinguistic activity is itself an essential aspect of certain basic uses of language.

For a more comprehensive, socially oriented theory of language than those of Chomsky or Saussure, which are structural theories that tend to limit their object of study to single complete sentences as the maximum grammatical units, we must, I think, transcend structural linguistics altogether and turn toward what I will call sociolinguistics, in the broadest pragmatic sense of that word. I have in mind such works as the following, in which their authors try to explain how discourse, or a sequence of interrelated sentences and paragraphs, works socially: Eric Havelock's *Preface*

to Plato (1963), Walter J. Ong's *Presence of the Word* (1967), J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1975), William Labov's *Language of the Inner City* (1972), some of Emile Benveniste's *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (1966-74), Voloshinov's (or Bakhtin's) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973), and Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). These different theorists pose some of the same basic questions concerning the social existence and social functions of the language, while using different points of departure: the alphabetic revolution in classical Greece, the religious function of audible language, performative speech acts, conversational narratives as display texts, language as the source of subjectivity, conversation as the grassroots matrix of a society's ideology, and of the novel. Despite their differences, it seems to me that they coincide in a remarkable degree of consensus. I will now attempt, in my own way, to synthesize this consensus, drawing freely on these and other writers. (In what follows, only I am responsible for the oversimplifications, and for any self-contradictions.)

I will begin again with the simple binary opposition suggested by Skinner and Chomsky, and will then sketch between these two poles a range or spectrum of differentiations. Thus Bakhtin, for example, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, develops the Hegelian opposition between epic poetry and the novel as an opposition between aristocratic monoglossia and popular heteroglossia; similarly, in his *Preface to Plato*, Havelock shows us how Plato's *Republic* deconstructs and replaces Homer's poetry, in much the same way, I would suggest, that Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* deconstructs and supersedes romances of chivalry, and Lope de Vega's honor-code theater.

On the "monoglossic" extreme, we have the primitive oral community, without writing, a probably authoritarian tribal community that depends heavily on the recitation, from memory, of more or less fixed, highly privileged sequences of words, usually in verse and often set to music; these word-sequences tend to be used ritualistically, often as magical incantations in which the words seem simply to work, to convert two single persons, for example, into a married couple ("What God hath joined, let no man put asunder"), or to reenact some mythic or historic event. This sacramental view of language is aptly characterized in scholastic language by the concept of "verba efficientia," "words that do things"; it is clearly alluded to by Austin's own references

to the “outward and visible signs” of an “inward and spiritual act” (1975), words taken from the Anglican catechism. The speech act, whether rooted in the authority of God’s Word or in that of the community’s rules and conventions, tends to function *ex opere operato*, by public performance, regardless of secret or private intentions and subsequent behavior. Havelock has described this “pedagogic” function of the mimetic recitation of Homer’s poetry in preclassical Greece.

We should not think of this monoglossic, or univocal, function of language as something belonging only to an archaic, primitive past. Today, in twentieth-century America and elsewhere, ancient and modern texts still work in the same way, for many people at least. Margaret A. Doody has described what happens to her when she recites a sixteenth-century “General Confession” from the *Book of Common Prayer*. These are some of the words that she quotes:

We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness,  
Which we from time to time most grievously have committed,  
By thought, word, and deed, against thy Divine Majesty. Provoking  
most justly thy wrath and indignation against us.

“The old forms. . . ,” she comments, “with their doublets of words and phrases, with the varied repetitions combined with the building up of clauses in a tension which has to be acknowledged by a slowing of pace, make an enactment which is something more than flat statement. . . . The speaker at the end is different from the speaker at the beginning” (1980:111-12). And, she says, “. . .there is a tradition, a view of human nature older than Romanticism and quite alien to modern notions of sincerity, according to which outer actions and words spoken can create the feelings and move the desires” (108).

Similarly, it seems to me, singing The *Star-Spangled Banner* at an American football game in front of the flag may well induce a transformation of the individual: putting one’s heart into it, as the saying goes, he or she may become once more a member of the patriotic football community by such a performance, by virtue of the rhymes and reasons of “the rockets’ red glare, and bombs bursting in air,” words that can work when sung, even though they may seem semantically irrelevant when analytically transcribed or

translated into a written text.

In Spanish literature the plays written by Lope de Vega constitute a sort of secular liturgy. *Fuenteovejuna*, for example, despite its revolutionary violence, is highly lyrical in its versification, appealing to the social ideals and wishful thinking of its audience, which easily identified with the romantic characters, the innocent pair of young country *fiancés*, threatened by the sexual abuses of the corrupt Comendador from the city. Ceremonious courtesy, with complimentary turns of poetic phrase, seems to induce harmonious social relations, with mutual congratulation for one another's honor. It is the breakdown of this ideal of courtesy that leads to rape and to rebellion against the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. When the women of the village insult the men and murder the Comendador, the villagers are saved from punishment, and order is restored, by the quasi-magical word "Fuenteovejuna," repeated unanimously by everyone being interrogated under torture: it is an Austinian performative which the royal judge must finally accept as a *fait accompli*.

This, then, is the behavioristic, or perhaps Heideggerian, extreme of our spectrum of language's different social functions: we memorize traditional words, which, when repeated, quite simply do our thinking for us, by seeming to be the Truth. When I leave my girl-friend behind, I tell her that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," and she replies, "Out of sight, out of mind": popular verbal culture supplies us in this way with countless clichés, allowing us to justify ourselves by citing their authority. And Georges Poulet is not far from this end of the spectrum when he describes what happens to us as we read a readerly text: we lose ourselves in it, we allow a traditional literary subjectivity to replace our own, and, as we read, we go thus quietly, even quixotically, mad (1970:57-62).

What is the other and opposite end of the spectrum? Here Bakhtin is extremely suggestive. In opposition to what he calls monoglossia—that is, the idealistic belief of a traditional ethnocentric culture that there is a single truth-bearing language (classical French, for example) that is totally unified in a synchronic, structural way—Bakhtin emphasizes what he finds to be the more immediate, materialistic, and primary reality of *parole* (not *langue*), of heteroglossia, of disparate utterances in different

social and geographical and historical dialects and vernaculars, utterances that are all trying to make sense to one another as, in dialogue, they tend toward the formation of new and different languages and ideologies for the future. For Bakhtin, as for Austin, utterances are primarily social acts; but whereas Austin emphasizes the conventional rules that constitute or govern such acts, Bakhtin finds in them radical ambiguity and ideological creativity, that is, the constant revision of conventional rules. To quote from the English translation of Voloshinov's, or Bakhtin's, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*: "In each speech act, subjective experience perishes in the objective fact of the enunciated word-utterance, and the enunciated word is subjectified in the act of responsive understanding in order to generate, sooner or later, a counter statement" (1973:40-41). This intersubjective process of producing socially objective language cannot, according to Bakhtin, be analyzed in the static grammatical or structural terms of monoglossia, but must be seen as a historical process of evaluative dialogue: this is Bakhtin's grass-roots matrix of ideological tendencies, tendencies which may become, it seems to me, eventually fossilized as monoglossic codes. But, in its historical context, each heteroglossic utterance is unique, provoking a different interaction between speaker and hearer. Bakhtin cites a passage from Dostoyevski in which the same vulgar word ("merde" in Russian, no doubt) is used by six different speakers with six different intonations and six different ideological evaluations, ranging from flat condemnations to high praise. And, in a more complex and humorous way, Cervantes has done something similar with the Spanish phrase "hi de puta" in *Don Quixote* (Part II, chapter 13).

Bakhtin's social concept of dialogue, or of an unending historical process that is both intersubjective and materially objectified in words, is basic to his theory of the novel as the constantly developing devourer of all established literary genres, including preceding novels. He praises the novel as the sort of literary discourse which, by his own definition, reveals the true heteroglossic nature of historically developing language and ideology; conversely, he seems to condemn epic poetry as the sort of literature that incarnates the false structural and monoglossic principle of fossilized language and anti-historical, utopian, synchronic authoritarianism.

But here I pose a question: can heteroglossia exist without monoglossia of some sort, to serve both as its point of departure and as its own tendency? It seems to me that the myth of a single unified language of truth not only makes epic poetry and ritualistic formulas possible, but is also necessary as a foil for mock epic, for parody of all sorts, for Rabelaisian carnival, and for the novel itself insofar as that language is essentially anti-monoglossic. We must at least temporarily indulge in the myth before we can deconstruct it.

Let us turn from this literary question to the broader question with which we began: the range of varying social functions of language in everyday use. No one can deny the real social existence of ritualistic formulas: if I say “thank you” to the check-out person as she or he tells me to have a nice day, and if we both understand one another and even feel better about our fleeting encounter after repeating these banal phrases, then monoglossia does have a real social function, and, I suspect, a universally important one. To sing *The Star-spangled Banner* is not the same thing as to have an intelligent dialogue; both of these verbal activities, however, are occasionally indulged in by the same American citizens. We must, I think, not only recognize the coexistence of monoglossia and heteroglossia, but also try to analyze further their productive interaction.

Some years ago the American sociolinguist Charles Ferguson invented a concept, which he called “diglossia,” to cover the complementary relationship in certain cultures between one classical written language and the different vernacular(s): in German Switzerland, for example, or in Haiti, a local dialect or creole is learned at home as the mother tongue, and another quite different standard written language is learned at school, not only for reading and writing, but also for speaking and listening, under certain more formal circumstances. In Bakhtin’s terms, the standard written language is more or less monoglossic, as the fixed vehicle of high official culture, while the spoken vernacular is more heteroglossic, as the varied and freely developing medium of everyday conversation. But even more profoundly heteroglossic is the interplay between both of them: this phenomenon is what Bakhtin finds to be particularly productive culturally in such a period as the Renaissance, which had a complex diglossia involving the humanists’ neoclassical Greek and Latin, the Church’s scholastic



and liturgical Latin, and the infinitely various vernaculars of different marketplaces and of nascent nations; Rabelais' carnival of languages is an objective-subjective interplay of all three of these complex registers.

Father Ong has described in terms strikingly similar to those of Bakhtin what happens in true dialogue (1982:176):

Human communication, verbal and other, differs from the "medium" model most basically in that it demands anticipated feedback in order to take place at all. In the medium model, the message is moved from sender-position to receiver-position. In real human communication, the sender has to be not only in the sender position but also in the receiver position before he or she can send anything.

As I approach my tentative conclusion, I would like to cite Cervantes' *Don Quixote* as the text within which the heteroglossic novel is first fully realized, with dialogue at many different levels. Its necessary monoglossic point of departure is of course the romance of chivalry, what Northrop Frye has called "the secular scripture": this archaic narrative code of heroic behavior, reinforced in Spain by the oral media of ballads and of Lope de Vega's popular theater, is what constitutes Don Quixote's madness when reenacted within the heteroglossic chronotope of modern roads and inns and palaces, where different social classes and literary idioms meet and mingle in dialogue. Cervantes' central dialogue is that of an archetypal comic pair: the tall, thin, ascetic, aristocratic landowner and reader of books, and the short, fat, guzzling, landless peasant, who can neither read nor write. These two characters, when they find themselves isolated as a pair on the road or in the woods, have endless meandering conversations, exploring each other's range of words, ideas, values. Initially the literate member of the pair seems to have all the advantages: his linguistic range includes not only his own Renaissance library, but many of the oral sayings and Latin quotations that Sancho Panza uses in a garbled way. But the illiterate representative of the lower classes eventually acquires control of his master's literary idiom and with it is able to convince Don Quixote that his lady Dulcinea is enchanted, apparently transformed into a smelly peasant girl, which had been in fact Dulcinea's flesh-and-blood

source. The affection and the struggle for control are both always comic, as is the apparently aimless process of conversation on such topics as which deed is greater: to kill a giant (the deed of a knight errant) or to raise someone from the dead (the deed of a saint). The growing dialogic area of overlap between the two characters provides a free play of heteroglossia, which reveals self-contradictions within the more or less official monoglossic codes of knightly honor and saintly virtue, of Don Quixote's Ciceronian, hypotactic prose and of Sancho Panza's popular, paratactic aphorisms. Without these monoglossic codes, I submit, the heteroglossia of the novel could not even have come into existence, much less come to an end in the recantation of Don Quixote, who writes his last will and testament in correct legal style before declaring his repentance and making his deathbed confession as a good Catholic.

The basis for our two functions of social discourse is no doubt the structure of the linguistic sign itself: a material "signifier" (whether phonetic, chirographic, typographic, or electromagnetic) associated in a problematic way with a more diffuse mental "signified" (subjective, intersubjective, lexicographic). The signifier, divorced from the signified, may be reproduced in a mechanical way, subject to the *lapsus linguae (calami)* of mnemonic (graphic) confusion: "Lead us not into Penn Station," says the little boy, allowing the acoustic substitution of one syllable for another to garble a sacred text. The association of sounds in oral formulas is a sort of writing, in Derrida's words, "avant la lettre": it makes possible the recitation of thousands of lines of poetry, without their necessarily deriving from any fixed sort of sense or personally intended meaning. But, when those lines are heard or read, they may well evoke a sense or meaning in the hearer or reader, even transforming him or her in some inner way; and, of course, the hearer may well be the same person as the reciter.

But what if one starts, not with the ready-made signifier, but with a more or less vague sense of meaning, of trying to say something to someone? One then searches for a word, a linguistic sign with some more or less appropriate signified, and, with the help of "anticipated feedback," eventually settles for a given signifier: within a given social context, or historical community, original human communication is in this way somehow possible.

And yet.. .

Words strain,

Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. . . (*Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton," 150-54).

The world of historical time, of sociolinguistic process, does not permit, either for Bakhtin or for Eliot, any ultimate permanence of meaning.

In conclusion, I will assert again the necessary coexistence of varying degrees of monoglossia and heteroglossia in any culture or community or literary text: one function of language provides for the apparently univocal use of the same words by different people, and the other permits skeptical analysis of traditional formulas, equivocal explorations of new ideological possibilities, innovative social discourse, and the novelty of new novels.

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## **The Harmony of Time in *Paradise Lost***

**Robert Kellogg**

In the first terrible misery following God's judgment on him, Adam longed for death. Nor could he understand the delay in carrying out the sentence. The conditions had been clear enough: "In the day thou eat'st, thou diest" (7.544).<sup>1</sup> "Why delays," he asked himself,

His hand to execute what his decree  
Fixed on this day? Why do I overlive,  
Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out  
To deathless pain? (10.771-75)

Adam's confusion is in some measure resolved by the time he comes to talk with Eve. He tells her that

. . . this day's death denounced, if aught I see,  
Will prove no sudden, but a slow-paced evil,  
A long day's dying to augment our pain,  
And to our seed (O hapless seed!) derived. (10.962-65)

Because we readers of *Paradise Lost* are at home in this fallen human world, it can be instructive for us to imagine how it must first have impinged on Adam, as the strange consequences of his crime and his punishment were borne in on him. We discover that the poem's theological doctrine is a key not only to its meaning but to its narrative art as well. A consequence of the fall for Adam was his heightened awareness of duration and change, memory and anticipation—in other words, of a plot unfolding in time. From the almost timeless simultaneity of the heavenly *aevum*, Adam is expelled into a world of time, of history and story. The judgment of God is, he discovers, to be worked out in time, both the sentence of death and the promise of redemption. Eventually time will have a stop, Paradise will eventually be regained; this future hope is consolation for the dreadful sorrow that memory of his past happiness brings on him. But an

important human virtue in this new world of change becomes endurance, enlightened and made possible by memory and hope.

Except for the forbidden tree itself, everything in Eden was what it appeared to be. Sign and signified were the same. Except for the tree, the things that looked good and tasted good and felt good were good. The literalness with which Adam could understand language and his experience in Eden is no longer appropriate after the fall. He must learn new ways to interpret the laws and purpose of God, including both his own sentence to death and God's judgment on Satan: that Adam's progeny will bruise his head and that the serpent will bruise the heel of Adam's seed. The angel Michael, in describing the enmity between Christ and Satan, warns Adam not to be too literal in his understanding:

Dream not of their fight,  
As of a duel, or the local wound  
Of head or heel. (12.385-87)

In the visions of stories revealed by Michael, Adam learns that the history into which he has fallen is a multiplicity of cultural forms, whose true significance bears only a metaphorical relationship to their appearance. Michael's instruction in hermeneutics is also intended to instruct the reader. Before the fall Adam's intellectual ability was impressive, in our terms superhuman. It is evident in Adam's naming the animals and his understanding of their language. And with his prelapsarian wisdom came control and command. But after the fall that ancient language was lost. How this fall into metaphor, history, and cultural variety affects the aesthetics of *Paradise Lost* can be illustrated at the outset.

In Book I the poet asks his muse to say the names of the fallen angels who roused themselves at Satan's summons from their nine-day's slumber. He tells us first that their true, original names have been blotted out of heavenly records. So the muse must list them instead by the names they took on later, as false deities throughout the heathen world. The effect of the catalog that follows, which contains little thumbnail stories of the heathen gods, is to blend history and myth, to suggest a whole world of story in which the worst results of the fall appear as mythic and historical images of sin.

The time of Milton's main story — the plot of which moves here with glacial slowness — is before the creation of the world.

The time, however, of the names and stories in the catalog of devils disguised as gods is between the fall of Adam and the birth of Christ, still the ancient past. In a simile that introduces them, the alien angels are likened in numerousness to the barbarian Goths, who poured from the populous north in Christian times:

A multitude, like which the populous North  
 Poured never from her frozen loins, to pass  
 Rhine or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons  
 Come like a deluge on the South, and spread  
 Beneath Gibraltar to the Lybian sands. (1.351-55)

This is an example of what I call the harmony of times in *Paradise Lost*. Historical, legendary, mythological figures are organized and understood in one grand intellectual and poetic scheme. Here the idea is introduced into Book I by narrative devices that are themselves the relics of an ancient past. The invocation of the muse, the mythical and historical similes, and the catalog are all easily recognized features of Homeric epic, all made possible, so to speak, or necessary, by history, metaphor, and cultural fragmentation—the consequences of Adam’s fall. Because it is for me a useful way to approach Milton’s narrative art, I want to consider this particular relationship between Homeric and Miltonic epic in some detail. I am less interested in the influence of Homer on Milton than in the degree to which it may be said that *Paradise Lost* and the Homeric epics are “in harmony,” sharing a generic feature of epic, despite the great distances that separate them in time and culture. Milton’s poem is, I suppose, a special case of the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall, another way in which God turns evil into good. Adam says, toward the end of the poem in which he is a central character, “full of doubt I stand, Whether I should repent me now of sin” (12.473-74). Not only was his disobedience a necessary condition for the very existence of his story; but the great intellectual effort of telling the story is, in human and cultural terms, a kind of cure, a compensation for the loss of Adam’s wisdom and his fall into history and metaphor.

Except for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, it is hard to find narrative poems that can rightly be called epic pure and simple. There are “secondary” or “literary” epics, “romantic epics,” “allegorical epics,” “folk epics,” and so on. But by Milton’s time, or even by Virgil’s, the epic as a narrative genre had passed into the mists of time. Its relationship to the cultures and societies in which it developed and

flourished could not be replicated in succeeding ages of European history. The reason for this is that, very strictly speaking, the epic is not a *literary* form at all. It is instead a form of *oral* narrative.

A fuller account of oral narrative than I can manage might be offered by half the contributors to this volume for Father Ong. So I shall only mention its three primary characteristics and then discuss one of them as a way of seeing a common purpose in the epic of both Homer and Milton.

Oral narrative is *formulaic*, *rhythmic*, and *traditional*. Much has been written, of course, about the formulaic quality of oral narrative. It is what first led Milman Parry and Albert Lord to argue, by analogy with formulaic narrative songs in modern oral cultures, that the Homeric poems were orally composed. The rhythmic characteristics of oral narratives are more subtle and less well understood. Some of them consist of gestures, dances, or chanting by the performer. Others leave deeper traces in a transcribed text, such as stanzas, refrains, repeated motifs, temporal repetitions of all sorts, not only verbal but also thematic and imagistic. For its relevance to the epic as Milton understood the genre, it is the third characteristic of oral narrative — its *traditional* nature — that deserves some attention.

An oral performer is not an author. He is bound by tradition to tell his story the way he and his audience learned it. The quality of an oral performance is measured against some hypothetical or ideal performance that exists as well in the audience's mind as in the performer's. Since the performer is not an author, it may not be too far-fetched, if it is somewhat figurative, to say that the tradition is the author. The performer's allegiance is not to his own experience, to his private vision of the truth, or even to his own creative genius as we might conceive of such a faculty, but to the tradition. If an analogy with literary culture is useful, we might say that the oral performer's relation to tradition is analogous not to an author's relationship to a text, but to a conscientious reader's. In an oral culture, narrative art exists in performance; in a literary culture it exists in readings.

Since there are no authors of oral narrative, there can be no ironic disjunction between author and narrator. The performer and his audience in an oral culture are entirely taken up with the fictional world of the story. Except for rare and stereotyped invocations and comments on the events of the stories they tell,



performers of oral narratives do not talk about themselves, nor do they attempt to cultivate an intimacy with their audiences by questioning the values implicit in their story or the integrity of its hypothetical reality. In criticizing the narrative poets of his day, whose works are now entirely lost to us, Aristotle raised precisely this objection. In contrast to Homer and the dramatists, the later Greek epic poets did not so much imitate the speeches and actions of other men as they placed themselves at the center of the stage. To get some idea of what Aristotle objected to, we might imagine the chatty and ironic literary narrators of Chaucer's *Troilus* or Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

In *A Preface to Plato* (1963) and subsequent writings, Eric A. Havelock has placed the beginning of ancient Greek *literary* culture, as contrasted to *oral* culture, as late as the last third of the 5th century B.C. Writings attributed to an earlier date, and this includes the Homeric epics, Greek tragedy, and the archaic lyric, all show signs of oral composition. One feature of oral performance in particular may offer an explanation of its survival so late into a culture that had access to writing materials. In an oral culture there is a clear distinction between two forms of discourse. The rhythmic, traditional, formulaic performances worthy of being repeated, in some sense preserved and transmitted from generation to generation, are distinguished from all other forms of discourse that are not rhythmic, traditional, and formulaic. These latter utterances are ephemeral and will quickly disappear if they are not put into what, for a lack of a better word, we might call traditional "literary" form. In other words, a distinction is made between a verbal activity which might be called "literature" and verbal activities which are not. They have different forms and hence different statuses in the culture. The great event, then, that takes place when oral culture gives way to literary culture is that the distinction between "literature" and "nonliterature" is lost. A culture and an educational system that is based on books instead of on rhythmic, formulaic, and traditional oral performances is capable of preserving and refining verbal activities of every sort. Such a culture is capable of producing science, philosophy, history, and all the other forms of discourse which in a literate culture we are incapable of distinguishing from literature.

The Homeric epics viewed in this light, that is as the products of an oral culture before the development of nontraditional literary forms, combine a number of aesthetic and intellectual

impulses which in a literary culture tend to seek separate and often antagonistic forms of development. The attack made both by Plato and by the early Greek historians on the “lies” perpetuated by Greek oral tradition illustrate this point. From the epic poems themselves we get some idea of their cultural function. To a surprising extent, for example, the adventures of Odysseus are narrated not directly by Homer but by Odysseus himself and other characters within the story. The description of the blind singer Demodochos in the palace of Alkinoos suggests the formal communal function of heroic song in an aristocratic society. The manners, values, and experiences of a heroic warrior class are combined with history and sacred myth to produce an almost seamless amalgam of narrative impulses.

All fiction attempts to protect itself to some extent from the charge that it tells lies. To do so it advances, or so its defenders claim, either some higher truth that through the veil of its apparent lies can be discovered by the learned adept (generally the way of allegory), or it attempts to represent universal truths, not through particular instances but through typical ones (generally the way of realism). Aristotle is the greatest theoretician in ancient times of this second line of defense. Classical allegories, on the other hand, had no single advocate so distinguished. Theogenes of Rhegium (c. 525 B.C.) is at best only the first of a long, long line.

Aristotle had another tactic for defending fiction against its detractors, an extremely important one. When the poet cannot say something that he knows to be true, he should say things that men have always *thought* to be true. While he gives preference to universal truths derived from the representation of typical and plausible characters and events, he does allow for the perpetuation of tradition, even in a literary culture. This Aristotelian license permits traditional stories a place in literary epic, no matter how implausible they may be. The sanction was buttressed by the Greek allegorists and later by the traditions of Pauline typology as reflected in Books 11 and 12 of *Paradise Lost*. Virgil, who as far as influences on Milton go, is a great deal more significant than Homer, was the beneficiary of a combination of strategies such as these, which allowed him to perpetuate the mythological and legendary features of epic, while at the same time focusing on moral and psychological experience far more complex than anything to be found in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.

Erich Auerbach (1953) has done full justice to the surface

realism of the Homeric epics.<sup>2</sup> In comparing the episode of the scar of Odysseus to the scriptural story of the sacrifice of Isaac, he may have been reading the Old Testament through somewhat anachronistic Pauline glasses. But his point about the *Odyssey* is a good one; the lives of the characters are out in the open for us to see. Even the interior monologs are not an attempt to represent inarticulate spiritual or psychological experience. The great scenes are communal, either public or domestic, as are the great themes. The worlds of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are in this sense like Adam's world in Eden. Sign and signified are much the same thing. The literal level of the poem, or, by extension, of its fictional world, has not yet "fallen" into a doubtful relationship to a truer meaning. It is not yet a vehicle for some higher tenor. And this is what we miss in all later epics — the society of real men, albeit generals and princes, in all of its rich detail of manners, technology, and policy. There is some of it in the *Aeneid* to be sure, but none at all in Milton.

Virgil is a bridge from Homer to Milton in another respect as well. The narrator of the Homeric epic is not distinguished, even potentially, from the author. I have mentioned the reason I believe this to be true. But in a literary culture, which produces books with title pages, not only are we aware of an author; we also expect him to put his own individual stamp on every feature of his work. A distinction between author and narrator is not just potential; it is actual. In this matter as in so many others, the greatest naturalness conceals the greatest art. Because it is difficult for us to imagine Virgil's doing less to create a narrator as a character separate from the author, we need not consider this a missed opportunity. Almost any characterization of a narrator would bring about the charge leveled by Aristotle against the later Greek epic poets, namely that they talked about themselves rather than imitating the actions of other men. Such developed characterization of a narrator would seem, by epic decorum, to be low, ironic, and a deterrent to the audience's full commitment to the world and the value of the story being told. How, then, could Virgil meet the demand for an authorial identity and yet maintain the diffidence expected of an epic narrator?

The author of a literary epic cannot depend upon the stereotyped response of an oral audience which listens to a familiar traditional sound. Because the events in which he is most interested tend to be the spiritual, moral, and psychological

experiences of his hero, hidden to some degree beneath the surface of the inherited epic trappings, and because by the time he comes to write his epic he has a personal and public authority based on his own literary accomplishments to date, Virgil must be and is able to adopt a self-conscious ethical posture from which to guide his audience's response to essentially ethical situations. This was Virgil's solution, an extremely influential one, since it has been followed by every epic poet since his time, including Milton.

From Virgil the Renaissance epic poets learned, rather than to fashion a created narrator distinct from the creating poet, to speak in their own public voices. The model for doing so comes from an oral tradition of sorts that flourished in both Rome and Renaissance Europe—public oratory. Rather than adopt a character in the fictional sense, the orator adopts a character in the ethical sense, an *ethos* that is suited to his argument and to his audience, one carefully designed to persuade. The idealized *ethos* of the Virgilian narrator provides a model for his audience to follow. When he weeps, feels pity, indignation, or fear, they respond in like fashion. He is a reliable guide through uncharted realms of moral experience, reliable because he does not threaten the fictional integrity of his story by bringing attention to himself, and reliable also because he draws on his public reputation as a poet of proven and superior ability.

Returning briefly to the role of traditional story in literary epic, it is safe to say that Milton took a more rigorous view than did any of his predecessors. He was ambitious to meet Homeric standards, a complete reconciliation, amalgamation, and harmony of tradition and truth. An historical setting had since Homer's time been an epic necessity; but the fracturing of the Homeric amalgam of myth and history in subsequent Greek culture meant that the modern epic poet had to choose between intellectually valid history on one hand and what could be best be called only legend on the other. From Virgil onward most epic poets have opted for legend; all of the really successful ones have, except for Milton. In planning an epic poem he rejected the legends of Arthur for exactly this reason—they were not true. Instead, he chose the only story that was both traditional *and* true, both mythical *and* historical: the revolt of Satan, the creation of the world, the fall of man, and his redemption by Christ. By choosing the Bible as his source he achieved a coherence of idea and story that no epic poet since Homer had managed.

Milton's ability to solve the problem of belief—can the poet and his audience simultaneously believe in ancient traditional stories and at the same time satisfy new canons of moral, philosophical, and historical truth?—was owing to the accomplishment of that whole cultural movement we call Christian Humanism. Its Christian elements rest on the achievements of Paul and Augustine in the understanding of scripture so as to preserve an amalgam of historical, moral, and philosophical truth.<sup>3</sup> Because Milton based his epic on scriptural tradition, he moved even closer than Virgil did toward the solution of that other problem that confronts any epic poet who aspires to the cultural importance of a Homer. He comes closer than any other writer of literary epic to being a singer or performer, rather than an author. The intellectual grandeur and complexity of Milton's poem are immense. In English narrative poetry his aesthetic achievement is rivaled only by Chaucer and Spenser. And yet Milton did not, and could not, take credit for his traditional story in quite the same sense that most literary authors are entitled to. He pretends, in the conventional way, to be divinely inspired, as did Homer. Whether, like the Homeric singers, he composed his mighty song through the intellectual and aesthetic mastery of a great tradition or, as he may himself have believed, through a process more akin to divine inspiration and prophecy, his authorial role in the poem is more nearly limited than in other literary epics to the disposition of materials and the telling of the story rather than the invention of its matter.

What it really meant, then, for Milton to imitate Homer was to tell a traditional heroic story, familiar to his audience, in such a way as to conform to the philosophical and historical truths of his time. That he was able even to attempt such an accomplishment is a tribute to the coherence of the cultural tradition to which he and his fit audience belonged. Furthermore, however, he had to find some place for himself in the poem that would neither detract from its traditional character nor obscure the fact that its great intellectual and artistic achievements were uniquely his own. That he felt compelled to make a thing “unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” he states explicitly, and yet, as Samuel Johnson remarked, he disappointed later canons of taste by repeating matter too familiar to please. I hope I have shown some reason for believing that Milton intended to do exactly what Johnson blamed him for.

What then *was* new about *Paradise Lost*, that had as yet

been unattempted? Of many answers to the question I might begin with the remarkable extent to which he succeeded in bringing to his poem a cultural and intellectual richness that is everywhere related to his central theme, a modern (that is, seventeenth-century) human understanding of Christian myth, a justification of the ways of God to man. This cultural richness I have already attributed to Milton's humanistic education. It includes not only the traditional story of scripture and classical antiquity, but the theology, astronomy, natural history, and other forms of learning that in literate cultures tend to go their separate ways. One aspect of this Miltonic synthesis from which I have chosen to view his narrative art is its harmony of time. Let me return to the text for an example. In describing Adam's shame after his amorous play with Eve and subsequent restless sleep, Milton writes:

To guilty shame he covered, but his robe  
 Uncovered more, so rose the Danite strong  
 Herculean Sampson from the harlot-lap  
 Of Philistine Dalilah, and waked  
 Shorn of his strength. (9.1058-62)

Adam wants to hide, to "live savage, in some glade obscured" and proposes that they

. . . devise  
 What best may for the present serve to hide  
 The parts of each from other, that seem most  
 To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seen,  
 Some tree whose broad smooth leaves together sewed,  
 And girded on our loins, may cover round  
 Those middle parts. (9.1091-97)

In the woods

. . . they chose  
 The fig-tree, not that kind for fruit renowned,  
 But such as at this day to Indians known  
 In Malabar or Decan spreads her arms  
 Branching so broad and long, that in the ground  
 The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow  
 About the mother tree, a pillard shade  
 High overarched, and echoing walks between;  
 There oft the Indian herdsman shunning heat  
 Shelters in cool, and tends his pasturing herds

At loop-holes cut through thickest shade: those leaves  
 They gathered, broad as Amazonian targe,  
 And with what skill they had, together sewed,  
 To gird their waist, vain covering if to hide  
 Their guilt and dreaded shame; O how unlike  
 To that first naked glory. Such of late  
 Columbus found the American so girt  
 With feathered cincture, naked else and wild  
 Among the trees on isles and woody shores.  
 (9.1100-18)

Leaving aside the psychological response to guilt and shame, the range of reference here is remarkable and all remarkably appropriate. Hercules and Sampson are conflated from their separate cultures as types of Adam. The fig-leaf of scripture is preserved but explicitly related to the tree that “at this day” (that is, August 1667) bends down to hide the primitive Indian, in contrast to the upright tree and innocent unfallen Adam. The leaves themselves are compared to the shields of the Amazon warriors in classical legend, to suggest the hostility of the sexes resulting from the fall. The finished garments are contrasted, in the kind of narrator’s guiding aside to which I referred earlier, with the naked glory of the newly created Adam and Eve. Then back again to modern times and the savage Americans discovered by Columbus. In commenting on the catalog of fallen angels, I mentioned that the poem’s plot moves with glacial slowness. Like a glacier it inches forward along a huge front. But the telling of the story synthesizes a new poetic and intellectual whole out of the cultural and historical materials whose very vastness and diversity and hidden significance are themselves a consequence of the fall.

Reading the poem, therefore, mitigates for us the consequences of the fall, as the cloudy metaphoric relationships between signs and their significance are made intelligible, with something like a prelapsarian clarity. Reminded continuously of our place in history and of its temporal relationships to other times and other cultures, the reader is nevertheless afforded a vision which reconciles human with sacred time, the *aeuum* of medieval philosophy.

The role of the poet in this is that of a Christian visionary whose imagination experiences simultaneously both historical time and a divine spirit in which all times are one. If his vision lifts us up to Heaven, it also brings Heaven down to earth. Nowhere else that I know of is the story of the fall told with real human

characters as they are understood by modern man. Nor is such great human love in any earlier version of the story celebrated as both the chief joy of man's unfallen condition and also the reason for Adam's fall. Eve in earlier versions of the story is at best only half of man. Here she is a whole human being, without whose company Adam cannot imagine himself happy. Adam's action in following Eve to death is analogous to Christ's. It is an entirely understandable human gesture which leads us to a greater understanding of the Son's divine love. Because on this human level the poem still appeals to us—it is a form of “science fiction” in which normal human beings are put in a context we have never experienced—the reader's imaginative experience constitutes the last level of time. “Yes, that is how *I* might feel in similar circumstances,” we say, “it rings true, no matter how long ago it may have happened.”

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Citations of *Paradise Lost* are made to Fowler 1971.

<sup>2</sup>By “surface” realism I refer to Auerbach's point that nothing of significance in Homer is to be inferred from some “deeper,” implied, “inner” experience of the characters. Even events long in the past, such as the wound that left Odysseus' scar, are brought to the center of a continuous narrative present. It is tempting, of course, to associate this feature of Homeric narrative with what Father Ong and others have observed of the “primary oral mentality” in general, that it exists only in the present, unable to distinguish stages of the past from a generalized ideal. I am indebted for this suggestion to Thomas J. Farrell.

<sup>3</sup>For a comprehensive description of the synthesis of pagan and Christian ideas and imagery in the literature of the Renaissance, see Allen 1970:espec. pp. 289-96 on Milton.

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## **Orality and Literacy in Matter and Form: Ben Franklin's Way to Wealth**

**Thomas J. Steele, S.J.**

The reader finishes Benjamin Franklin's *Way to Wealth*, first published as the preface to the silver-anniversary *Poor Richard's Almanach* of 1758, with the sense that an infinity of proverbs have followed one another in an endless sequence. With very few exceptions, Franklin took these proverbs, the "active ingredients" of the piece, from printed sources. They came immediately from his own twenty-four previous almanacs, but originally he had taken them from a handful of books which scholars assure us were his direct source of proverbial wisdom (Gallacher 1949:238-39; Newcomb 1957:3, 252; Amacher 1962:56-57). Franklin was, after all, city-born and city-bred, while by contrast proverbs are native to the world of agriculture, orality, and traditionalism. Proverbs embody the concrete and earthy morality of peasant shrewdness; as Walter J. Ong states it, they are situational and operational rather than abstract and speculative,<sup>1</sup> and they are formulated as concrete and earthy expressions in order to be memorable and readily available in the concrete and earthy situations of everyday peasant life (Ong 1982:33-36).

Among the quoted material in *The Way to Wealth*, some poetry stands out as exceptional, for by contrast with the proverbs it is highly literate—for instance:

I never saw an oft removed Tree,  
Nor yet an oft removed Family,  
That throve so well as those that settled be.

These regular iambic pentameter lines appear to be Franklin's own versification of one or two parallel sources (Gallacher 1949:247; Newcomb 1957:358). Often enough, it is interesting to note, the neo-classical verse of the eighteenth century was the swan song of the oral world, for in it may be seen oral content which has been

processed by literacy and put into typographic form. Pope's "What oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd" served as the elegy of this world, for Pope's successors in literature turned away from the received wisdom of the past and moved instead in the direction of novelties—"originality."

Franklin, very much a man of his era, did not personally research the world of rural orality for the proverbs of *Poor Richard's Almanack* and *The Way to Wealth*. Instead, he pruned them from collections of proverbs and aphorisms. He did not preserve them simply on account of their wisdom nor simply on account of their value as rural "reliques." Instead, he hunted them out in order to utilize them for a purpose even more practical than their own very practical wisdom. Franklin made use of them for twenty-four years to sell the almanacs he printed, and then in a valedictory mood, sailing across the ocean toward England during the summer of his retirement in 1767, he composed the preface for the next year, the last edition he would publish. His final careful culling of the proverbs in the former almanacs produced an item very different from its multiple sources, for Franklin made out of the oral, rural, moral proverbs a finished product which was literate and even typographic, urban and commercial, systematic and, strictly speaking, ethical. "There is a flower of religion, a flower of honor, a flower of chivalry that you must not require of Franklin," Parrington quoted Sainte-Beuve, noting that Ben "ended as he began, the child of a century marked by sharp spiritual limitations" (1930:178).

However much Franklin had turned his back on the older values of the medieval world, he was deeply concerned all his life long with method, with ethical behavior, and most especially with ethical education; and we may perhaps see in *The Way to Wealth* the sketch of a projected work on ethics concerning which he wrote Lord Kames three or four years later (Fiering 1978). "*The Way to Wealth*," Newcomb reminds us, "was unique in form and specific content, but in overall economic philosophy it can be reckoned as belonging to a type of then-popular literature" (1957:233). We will advert from time to time in this essay to the economic philosophy aspect of Franklin's work, but we will mainly try to deal in our special fashion with the aspects of "form and specific content" which make *The Way to Wealth* unique in the ethical literature of the world.

In classical, medieval, and Renaissance rhetoric, the term

“paroemia” meant the use of a proverb which effectively fit subject and circumstance. Rhetoricians identified paroemia as a form of allegory, along with irony, sarcasm, and four other related tropes (Migne 1850, vol. 82:115-16). As an instance of thinking in patterns rather than in cause-effect sequences, proverb and paroemia belonged to a conceptual style which was atavistic for an eighteenth-century scientist like Ben Franklin. But the proverb’s capacity for irony and sarcasm apparently recommended it to him and to many other sophisticated men of his day, who packaged their witty ideas in a form like that of rural proverbs, some of which Franklin used side by side with true folk proverbs both in the Almanacks and in *Way to Wealth*.

As many recent critics have noted, the proverbs of the 1757-58 Preface are not a random selection from those of the previous quarter-century. Franklin ignored the rowdier and randier proverbs which typified the earthy peasant world view and which characterized the humor of the British Empire before Thomas Bowdler (1754-1825) and Queen Victoria. Not for *The Way to Wealth* the likes of these proverbs from the barnyard:

The hasty Bitch brings forth blind puppies.  
If God blesses a Man, his Bitch brings forth pigs [piglets].

Nor these from the bathroom:

Force shits upon Reason’s back.  
The greatest monarch on the proudest throne is obliged to sit upon his own arse.

Nor these from the bedroom:

Neither a fortress nor a Maidenhead will hold out long after they begin to parley.  
Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.  
Let thy maidservant be faithful, strong, and homely.  
Squirrel-like, she covers her back with her tail.

Further, there were many proverbs such as the following which Franklin passed over because they did not have anything to do with the purpose of *Way to Wealth*:

Fish and visitors stink in three days.  
Marry you Daughter and eat fresh Fish betimes.  
The Tongue is ever turning to the aching Tooth.

And there was at least one which would have flatly contradicted the set purpose of the projected essay:

An Egg today is better than a Hen tomorrow.

Finally, though Franklin intended to formulate an ethical system which paralleled and “improved upon” the morality of organized religion, he did not want to contradict it openly, so he passed over such almanac proverbs as these, which attacked church functionaries:

The Bell calls others to Church, but itself never minds the Sermon.

Sound and sound Doctrine may pass through a Ram’s horn and a Preacher without straightening the one or amending the other.

The painful Preacher, like a candle bright, Consumes himself in giving others light.

The literal meaning of “painful” in the couplet is probably “painstaking,” though the “painsgiving” meaning is doubtless intended as well. And finally,

How many observe Christ’s Birth-day! How few his precepts! O! ‘tis easier to keep Holidays than Commandments,

a proverb which Franklin seems to have made up himself and which is particularly funny because of the adroit use of the zeugmas. Ultimately, of course, Franklin would not have wanted to exalt religious faith but instead to emphasize practical reason, so he of course avoided this emblematic epigram for which he had been indebted to Francis Quarles:

The Way to see by Faith is to shut the Eye of Reason; the Morning Daylight appears plain when you put out your Candle.

Franklin picked out only the comparatively dismal proverbs which had to do with two preconcerted theses: a man should be industrious, steady, and careful so that he will earn money, and he should be frugal and prudent so that he will keep it. Having chosen the proverbs from *Poor Richard’s Almanack* which inculcated these virtues, Franklin organized and unified them, with the aid of the technology of writing, into a logical structure resembling a systematic ethics—roughly the equivalent, for the industrial capitalism about to emerge in America, of the Code of

Hammurabi, the Ten Commandments, Solon's Laws, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in their eras (Havelock 1978:42-43, 252-60). Having left behind the old manner of moral control, a literate society demands a systematic ethical code available in a written prototype and able to be interiorized as each individual's superego; whereas Adam and Eve reacted to their sin with shame, the sinful man or woman of a literate world reacts with guilt (Vigne 1967:1). Furthermore, the oral mentality would tend to judge that categorical thought tends to miss much of what matters most about the world, rendering mainly the unimportant, bloodless, uninteresting, and trivial; as Ong puts it, "closing your eyes and concentrating on abstract principles about animal coloration is a splendid way to get eaten by a bear. Better to open your eyes and see what that big white blotch is that's moving across the hill beyond the blackberry bushes" (1982:52, citing Luria 1976:54-55).

This codified and categorical aspect of *The Way to Wealth*, which results from Franklin's gathering the right proverbs under the implied headings, produces the needed abstract and systematic ethics. The headings are not made explicit, of course, so as to safeguard the pleasant illusion of an oral setting generated by the character Father Abraham and his speech at the "vendue" or auction of goods. But this illusion is only an illusion; the speaker Father Abraham is a fiction generated by the fictional pen of the fictional Poor Richard Saunders, and the setting is like that in a modern city zoo in which captive animals—here, captive proverbs—live in an artificial replica of their natural habitat (343):

'Tis true there is much to be done, and perhaps you are weak-handed, but stick to it steadily, and you will see great Effects, for *constant Dropping wears away Stones*, and by *Diligence and Patience the Mouse ate in two the Cable*; and *little Strokes fell great Oaks*, as Poor Richard says in his Almanack, the Year I cannot just now remember.

Methinks I hear some of you say, Must a Man afford himself no Leisure?—I will tell thee, my Friend, what Poor Richard says, *Employ thy Time well if thou meanest to gain Leisure*; and *since thou are not sure of a Minute, throw not away an Hour*. Leisure is Time for doing something useful; this Leisure the diligent Man will obtain, but the lazy Man never; so that, as Poor

Richard says, a *Life of Leisure and a Life of Laziness are two Things*. Do you imagine that Sloth will afford you more Comfort than Labour? No, for as Poor Richard says, *Trouble springs from Idleness, and grievous Toil from needless Ease. Many without Labour would live by their Wits only, but they break for want of stock.*

Thus a short sample of Father Abraham exhorting his listeners to lead industrious lives. The other half of his speech encourages them to save their hard-earned money by living frugally. A sample of the latter (346-47):

*A Child and a Fool*, as Poor Richard says, *imagine Twenty Shillings and Twenty Years can neer be spent, but Always taking out of the Meal-tub, and never putting in, soon comes to the Bottom;* then, as Poor Dick says, *When the Well's dry, they know the Worth of Water.* But this they might have known before, if they had taken his Advice: *If you would know the Value of Money, go and try to borrow some; for he that goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing;* and indeed so does he that lends to such People, when he goes to get it again.—Poor Dick farther advises, and says,

*Fond Pride of Dress is sure a very Curse;  
E'er Fancy you consult, consult your Purse.*

And again, *Pride is as loud a Beggar as Want, and a great deal more saucy.* When you have bought one fine Thing you must buy ten more, that your Appearance may be all of a Piece; but Poor Dick says, *'Tis easier to suppress the first Desire, than to satisfy all that follow it.* And 'tis as truly Folly for the Poor to ape the Rich, as for the Frog to swell, in order to equal the Ox.

*Great Estates may venture more,  
But little Boats should keep near Shore.*

'Tis however a Folly soon punished; for *Pride that dines on Vanity sups on Contempt*, as Poor Richard says. And in another Place, *Pride breakfasted with Plenty, dined with Poverty, and supped with Infamy.*

But this is a literary imitation of orality and not bona fide orality at all. The real milieu of *The Way to Wealth* is literacy.

The cause being evangelized is that of capital accumulation in the context of an emerging economic system made possible by Calvinism and brought into full being by Newton's theorizing and James Watt's steam engine. Moreover, the real setting is the city, that great synapse of the literate nervous system. The alphabetic method of organization usually produces something abstract, but by keeping his proverbs intact in their concreteness (indeed, by rewriting many of them so as to make them even more easily remembered), Franklin maintains the semblance of concrete peasant orality and nevertheless produces the Pelagian ethics of the City of Man (Ong 1982:33-36, 57-68).

By delivering his ethical gospel of industry and thrift into literate man's inmost being, Benjamin Franklin became the apostle of a new economic redemption. Whereas Abram Kardiner says that the medieval church "reproduc[ed] the parent-child relationship, thus externalizing the superego (or conscience) mechanisms, . . . the Calvinist dogma destroyed the externalized conscience and placed it where it could wield far more despotic power than was ever done by the church. The Reformation internalized conscience. . . . The most startling thing about the Reformation is that. . . this conscience still operated on the same factors which were emphasized by the old church, chiefly the pleasure-drives the repression of which were fundamental in the family disciplines. The doctrine exerted no restricting influence on the social and mercantile practices of the middle class" (1945:440). And the revolution in morality, he goes on, brought about other difficulties:

As far as impulse control was concerned, the Reformation made the psychological task more difficult. Man had to become his own judge, for with the break with the church went the opportunity to keep the conscience externalized. The internalization of conscience had an equivocal effect on social stability because it did not operate on those hidden forms of aggression concealed in commercial practice. It could only operate on those impulses which fell under disciplinary ban in childhood—chiefly the pleasure drives. . . . In practice Calvinism worked out so that repression of the pleasure drives acquired a reward in the new liberties, which became filled with new opportunities for self-assertion and aggression. . . .



Success in worldly life is one of the ways of establishing the fact that one is saved; hence industry is exalted to a high position, operating now with the sanction of the new church and in harmony with new social goals. The adoption of this new Calvinist plan of life—essentially the definition of bourgeois goals—by the lower classes led to a unique practice called Puritanism with its emphasis on industry and thrift (439-40).

The paternalistic mercantilism of Franklin's day was not the wave of his present, nor was it to be the wave of the future (Burke 1967:109). As the auditors of Father Abraham's discourse ignored his fatherly advice to them and "began to buy extravagantly" when the auction started, so the American colonies were about to reject the paternalistic and mercantilist reign of Georgian England. The old world of hierarchical structure, whether of honored age or of reverend order, was becoming a thing of the past; the old world of Augustinian Platonism and Thomistic Aristotelianism—both of them epistemologically realist—had given way to Occamist nominalism and the individualism it engendered; in Kenneth Burke's words, "Realism considered individuals as members of a group; . . . nominalism considered groups as aggregates of individuals" (1967:125-26)—that is to say, universal ideas are merely convenient words. Thus nominalism, when it arose toward the end of the Middle Ages, "undermin[ed] the group coordinates upon which church thought was founded and also prepared for the individualist emphasis of private enterprise" (Burke 1967:126). In the field of science, nominalism prepared the human mind to generate new and less rigidly "realist" notions of species, preparing the way for Buffon's and Darwin's careers, and hence it encouraged the shift of "natural philosophy" or "natural history"—what we call science—from the language of realist philosophy into the language of statistical mathematics.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, the world of *The Way to Wealth* is typographic. Though when he wrote it he was sitting in a deck chair in the middle of the Atlantic, fifteen hundred miles from the nearest printing press, Ben Franklin possessed always the mind and heart and inky soul of a printer. If mere literacy initiated mankind's fall from the peace of a communal agricultural maternal Eden into the warfare of individualistic urban mercantile competition, then typography, the epitome of literacy, has completed the process. Most popularly Marshall McLuhan, most broadly and deeply Walter

Ong, and most recently Werner Kelber have all sensitized us to this process, and Benjamin Franklin is capable of being Exhibit A for most of their assertions.<sup>3</sup>

The printed book is, after all, the first mass-produced, interchangeable-part item, and the fonts of type which print it are themselves systems of interchangeable parts. Further, a Bible or an almanac or any other book is mass-produced in order to be mass-marketed, and a Bible and an almanac—like as not Poor Richard's—formed the entire library of many Colonial and Federal American families, as Hawthorne suggested in "Roger Malvin's Burial" when he described "the current year's Massachusetts Almanac which, with the exception of an old black-letter Bible, comprised all the literary wealth of the family." Small wonder that the Bible as interpreted by Calvin and the almanac as shaped by Ben Franklin cooperated in creating the new urban man: mass-man, statistical man, rather than communal man—and what a difference *that* is!

Near the beginning of his work, Franklin identifies the simplest level of irony of Poor Richard's relationship with the proverbial content of Father Abraham's speech (340):

In my Rambles, where I am not personally known, I have frequently heard one or other of my Adages repeated, with "as Poor Richard says" at the End on't; this gave me some Satisfaction, as it showed not only that my Instructions were regarded, but discovered likewise some Respect for my Authority; and I own that to encourage the Practice of remembering and repeating those wise Sentences, I have sometimes *quoted myself* with great Gravity.

Judge then how much I must have been gratified by an Incident I am going to relate to you.

And Franklin returns to the explication of this most superficial irony at the very end (350): "The frequent mention [Father Abraham] made of me must have tired anyone else, but my Vanity was wonderfully delighted with it." The openly-admitted irony of Poor Richard Saunders's vanity as he serves as "frame-narrator" of the events of *The Way to Wealth* masks the deeper and much more effective irony of those events themselves. The people who hear Father Abraham's recital refuse to apply its moral lesson to their lives, bidding wildly when the

auction begins (350):

The old Gentleman ended his Harangue. The People heard it, and approved the Doctrine, and immediately practiced the contrary, just as if it had been a common Sermon; for the Vendue opened, and they began to buy extravagantly.

It is only the narrator Poor Richard who changes his mind and saves his money (350):

Not a tenth Part of this Wisdom was my own which he ascribed to me, but rather the Gleanings I had made of the Sense of all Ages and Nations. However, I resolved to be the better for the Echo of it; and though I had at first determined to buy Stuff for a new Coat, I went away resolved to wear my old One a little longer.

Thus Father Abraham's "common Sermon" fails to affect the common people; the oral presentation of folk wisdom has no impact on the communal audience which has been denominated with the plural terms "you," "the people," or "they." Poor Richard must then turn to the only target of the discourse to whom nominalism would attribute reality, the *individual* reader addressed in the *singular* by the *individual* writer (350): "Reader, if thou wilt do the same [as I did], thy Profit will be as great as mine. / I am, as ever, / thine to serve thee, / RICHARD SAUNDERS."

Thus, where the oral and communal has failed, the literate and individual still has hope of succeeding. By constructing a literate and even typographic object, Franklin has made the breakthrough from the ineffective old morality to a new world of system and ethics, offering his reader the raw materials from which to construct an "up-to-date" eighteenth-century superego. As Edward Gallagher notes, it is not the fifty-odd repetitions of "as Poor Richard says" which accomplish the goal but the single "as Poor Richard does" at the end which wins the day; it is not the mere knowledge of the practical proverbial wisdom of the peasant which will alleviate the lot of the plural people or the singular reader, but the concrete perception of its applicability and its concrete application now (Ross 1940:785-94; Gallagher 1973). Thus the early comic Poor Richard Saunders, hag-ridden by his wife Bridget, has given way to the persona of the successful almanack-maker with his store of "solid Pudding" on which to base his retirement, money to be spent or not according to his

discretion; and discreetly, Rich Richard Saunders will not be extravagant. The people entertain themselves by complaining about the bad times and the high taxes, thereby wasting their best time and taxing themselves by their idleness; and for them the homily is merely “live entertainment” even though Father Abraham explicitly applies its lessons to the concrete situation at hand, the “Vendue of *Fineries* and *Knick-knacks*” which is imminent. But although the reader should be quite entertained by the essay Franklin offers him, it is much more important that he should also be altered by it for the better—and not just by hard work and restraint on this one day but by hard work and restraint in his very being, in his innermost conscience, for the remainder of his life: “I live industriously and frugally; yet not I, but Poor Richard liveth industriously and frugally in me.”

Thus the early comic Richard altered during a quarter of a century into a role model (Newcomb 1957:27-29); his confession of innocent vanity brings the reader to trust him all the more as he invites that reader into the lonesome intimacy of an author's confidences: in the silent privacy of your reading these pages, unassailed by the temptations of a crowded auction of fineries and knickknacks, construct your individuality so that it is free of all the social pressures—like vanity, pride, and honor—which survive from the dying world of rural communities, the world of aristocrats, peasants, and the church. In this manner Benjamin Franklin tore apart the foundations of past culture, and with the lapidary proverbs which were its building blocks he built a new structure altogether, a barricade of literacy, typography, and systematic ethics with which to overthrow that dying world. And that barricade has become in its turn the foundation of that new world—our world—which has appeared in place of the old.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Redfield 1947:300, 1960:78; Wolf 1966:99; Stavenhagen 1975:66; Ong 1982:49-57.

<sup>2</sup>Lovejoy 1959:88-93; on Franklin's philosophy of science, Jorgenson 1935, McKillop 1948.

<sup>3</sup>See especially McLuhan 1962:18-23, 124-26, 153-55; Ong 1982; Kelber 1983.

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## **A Remark on Silence and Listening**

**Paolo Valesio**

### *Before Beginning*

Why “remark”? Because I am still developing the theory, and also because this is a short presentation. Why “a” remark rather than “some” remarks? Because this is not a series of different lines of thought constellated around one leading theme (that is what we have in mind when we speak of “some remarks on. . .”); it is rather a single thread of thinking which weaves its way through different places, acquires various colors when coming under different lights, and yet remains (no matter how thin, no matter how often exposed to the danger of breaking) that same single thread.

A last prefatory word, this time on the small specific occasion within the larger occasion celebrated at Rockhurst Hall and in this volume. In April 1964 Father Ong gave, at Yale University, a series of conferences within the well-known program of the Terry Lectures, whose expanded text was later published (Ong 1967). More than twenty years after Father Ong delivered his impressive lectures at Yale, a person from the university who came across his lectures a long time after they were published submits his thinking to him, as a homage to the inspiration he received. And this is more than an academic homage, more even than a purely intellectual tribute. My coming to such a place as Rockhurst College, in the heart of America, is a way of coming back to my spiritual roots. That such roots happen to have struck first on European soil does not, given the nature of what is involved, make a great difference.

This brief autobiographical excursus is here presented only to explain what otherwise would have appeared a temerity: that is, my speaking of spiritual matters here, in front of an audience

where so many are masters in the arts of the spirit.

*A remark on silence and listening*

“Remember the day in which, without fear in your heart, you met your first silence”

(Maurice Maeterlinck)

Listening as a crucial spiritual category is not a novelty. It is an important element in many religious traditions—certainly in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (but such an experience is by no means alien to Buddhism, for instance). It is also present in some contemporary philosophical theories (e.g., see Heidegger 1962:207, *passim*). But it seems to me that Heidegger’s great subtlety in this case is that of constantly playing an ontology of saying up against an ontology of silence. As for cultural and literary criticism: certain signs of a renewal of attention for the category of listening (cf. Barthes and Havas 1977) mark only the beginning of the necessary development.

What I am sketching here, on the other hand, is a definite option for listening—which as such has to face all the attendant dangers, designated by terms that still for too many are words of opprobrium, like quietism. Listening is considered here not as a sort of dialogical taking turns (a mechanical, temporary alternative to speaking), but as the crowning of the activity of saying, when the latter is pushed to its limits. The only way to really implement the paradox of silence—if we want to go on doing rhetoric, writing, literary criticism, translation—is to take up the stance, not of the *silentarius* so much as of the listener.

The position I am delineating has something in common with that of the mystic, but it should not be simplistically identified with it. For its concern is discourse in general and within it that particular ethic/aesthetic combination that is the literary text. What takes place in this process is not a series of occasional borrowings; this rhetorical approach is a spiritual interchange, not a form of confessional or technical dependency.

Contemplation is a word that has come to be associated almost exclusively with vision; but its etymon (going back to Latin *templum*) points in the direction of a more general notion, having to do with space.



When, therefore, I speak of this listening as a contemplation, I do not mean a passive looking on, but the rearrangement of the space around a text. Thus listening to what a text has to say has little to do with the modernistic tradition of purely immanent criticism, which takes a kind of idolatrous pride in staying within the single text that it examines.

On the contrary, by creating a space of silence around a text this approach first of all does something to the text (it is not passive); in the second place, by surrounding the text with the silence of a contemplation, this critical listening liberates energies and connections in the text which lead outside of it, broadening the spiritual background of the whole enterprise. In this way the rhetorical analysis does not superimpose an alien metalanguage on the literary text, but comes closest to the position of the writer, because it brings to the fore the crucial element of contemplation that is implicit in every act of writing.

A concrete illustration will be helpful. One of the least known among the many short stories that Luigi Pirandello published in literary magazines around the turn of the century and started issuing in book-length collections from 1901 on is the one titled “Canta l’Epistola” [“He-who-intones-the-Epistle”], a phrase which is the nickname of the defrocked seminarian who is the hero of the little story (Cf. Pirandello 1985, I:482-90).

Tommasino, who because of his change of heart has become an object of scorn and ridicule for his father and for the other inhabitants of his village, leads a chaste and solitary life, a life for which the term “contemplation” could be used—with the specification, however, that Tommasino’s experience is not a systematically religious one (he has left organized faith), but an asystematic way of looking at, listening to, things.

In the course of his musings, Tommasino concentrates his attention on one single blade of grass, growing wild near a little abandoned church, in a hilly spot he regularly visits in his walks. It is not that he takes care of it in an active way (watering it, for instance): he simply follows its life, rejoicing in its growth and duration. But one day a young lady passes by, sits in that spot and, getting up to continue her walk, absent-mindedly rips off that blade of grass, putting it between her teeth.

“You idiot!” cries out Tommasino in exasperation. The young lady, astonished at this insult on the part of a person with whom she never exchanged a word, reports the episode to her

fiancé, an army lieutenant who happens to be a very good shot. He asks for an explanation that naturally the young man cannot offer: slapped by the officer, Tommasino accepts the challenge to a duel, and is mortally wounded by a pistol shot. To the priest who kneeling by his death-bed asks him the meaning of all this (“But why, my son? Why?”):

Tommasino, with half-shut eyes, with a weakened voice, in the midst of a sigh which turned into a very tender smile, simply answered: “Father, it happened because of a blade of grass. . . .” And everybody believed that he had remained delirious until his dying hour.<sup>1</sup>

Such are the closing lines of what I do not claim to be one of Pirandello’s greatest achievements, although it is a remarkable story. The initial part of this short story is a little too didactic and expository in tone; given the brevity of the text, this weakens the concentration.<sup>2</sup> But I am not putting together an essay on Pirandello (and at any rate, the minor texts of an important writer are crucial for his or her critical assessment); my purpose is to implement a certain way of thinking about literature, and this intelligently sensitive story is a significant emblem. Let me then briefly sketch certain basic critical responses which are possible here.

A first possibility is what can be called a naive reading. Such a reading would not look behind or beyond the text: what it would see is a bizarre anecdote, wry and faintly moving—in short (according to the circular move characteristic of a certain handbook style) a “typically Pirandellian” text. As most naive readings, this one is essentially right. But, again, as most naive readings, it does not have enough force to restrain the questing or questioning reader as he or she is drawn to go deeper: with all the attendant risks (and challenges) of tortuosity, of endless erring through the maze of interpretation.

Indeed, the possibility of what might be called an astute reading quickly emerges here. Consider.

Contrary to the coarsely voiced suspicions about the reasons behind his leaving the seminary, Tommasino is (as noted) completely chaste: “. . . no woman could have claimed to have received as much as a passing glance from him” (20). A post-Freudian reader will immediately suspect repression at work here; and such suspicions would be rewarded, given the way the

growth of that blade of grass is described—the blade of grass which Tommasino

had followed almost with a motherly tenderness in its slow growing among the other and shorter ones which were around it; and he had seen it rise---shy at first, in its quivering slenderness---above the two encrusted rocks, as if it were fearful and at the same time curious, in its admiration of the sight that opened up beneath it—the green, boundless plain; and then he had seen it stand up taller and taller, bold and self-confident, with a small reddish tassel on its top, like the comb of a young rooster.

Indeed, the phallic symbol seems so blatant here that the reader could incline to regard this too explicit delineation as further proof of the relative immaturity of the author's narrative skills at this stage. Such an impression could be confirmed by the following images:

Tommasino's joy at finding it every time intact, with its defiant small tassel (*pennacchietto*) on top, was indescribable. He stroked it with the utmost delicacy, he smoothed it using only two fingers; it was as if he guarded it with his soul and breath. And in the evening, on leaving the stalk, he entrusted it to the early stars which began rising in the dusky sky, so that they and all their sisters would watch over it during the night. And really, with his mind's eye, from afar, he saw that blade of grass of his, between the two rocks, under the thickly crowded stars sparkling in the black sky, which kept watch over it.

Once again, it would seem that the symbolic infrastructure of the tale is (“and thereby hangs a tale”) almost embarrassingly clear.<sup>3</sup> With this kind of preparation the culminating image in the story, which triggers Tommasino's insult, appears almost to quiver on the edge of pornography. The young lady

absent-mindedly stretching her hand, had pulled up precisely that blade of grass and had stuck it between her teeth, with the small tassel hanging out. Tommasino Unzio had felt his soul tear, and he had not been able to resist the impulse to cry out to her: “You idiot!” when she had passed in front of him, with that

stalk in her mouth.<sup>4</sup>

No further elaboration is necessary here: the whole development of a certain kind of critical reading is already unfolding before your eyes. Such a reading I would define as hypercritical. Now, the kind of listening criticism that I am proposing avoids both the *hypocriticism* (if I may use this new coinage) of the naive reading—which at any rate is certainly not hypocritical, in the current sense of the word—and the hypercriticism of the astute reading.

But such a characterization does not imply any condescending or polemical attitude toward the readings which have been sketched. Anxiously setting one interpretation against the other is typical of that *phônomaikhein* (“waging battles of words”) which has been already defused and refused by the ancient Greek Sceptics; and at any rate such an attitude would be clearly contrary to the listening approach advocated in this essay. Indeed, in order to be serious, such a listening must be understanding and comprehensive: it must listen not only to the texts but, with equal attention and respect, to all interpretations that have grown, or can grow, around them. The rhetorical ontology recovers the whole textual complex (including, I repeat, critical interpretations) as part of a common effort—to bring things to expression, to transform Being into forms of being. This enterprise is objectively shared by all the components of textual work, beyond all appearances of division, of competitive struggle.

Within such a restorative enterprise there is no neglect of differentiations (indeed they are developed and discussed, as we just saw); but there is no space for the sharp, absolutist polemics that removes and discards. So much is this true, that the reading of “Canta l’Epistola” that I am going to briefly delineate in the next few lines grows out of a careful listening to the possible readings sketched above, and is meant as an integration of them, not as a way of scoring points with respect to them (cf. Valesio 1981).

What does it mean, in this specific case, to listen? To say that one listens to the text is not specific enough; if we leave it at that, what we have is a slightly more intense way of repeating what (in a different parlance) literary criticism has been saying for a long time. What we actually have to do is *to listen to what Tommasino is listening to*: the voice of mute things.<sup>5</sup>

It could be objected that this is a counter-intuitive way of

describing the situation, for what Tommasino is doing is not listening to, but looking at; the whole text in fact is (as my quotes from it have shown) textured on images that have to do with sight. But precisely this is the epistemological turning point.

If we confine ourselves to looking at what Tommasino is looking at, then we are in the same position as all the other people around him: we do not see *anything* (because nobody, under normal conditions, really *sees* a blade of grass); therefore we conclude, quite reasonably, that Tommasino is crazy; and his reaction to Miss Olga (the lieutenant's fiancée)—who, as all of us normally do, handles the blade of grass without really seeing it—appears as totally arbitrary. But what really explains Tommasino's behavior is that he is listening to a message. Only if we accept this are we ready to grant a human value to his actions. So long as he is seen as merely looking at the stalk, his attitude appears as a perverse one, as a way of avoiding mature relationships between human beings, stooping down to a form of life which lies below such relationships; it would be, then, a one-way connection which, although definitely not brutal, looks brutish—a stunting and impoverishing attitude. And yet—"The religious sentiment arises from. . . a brute conation of human nature," as is noted in a series of philosophical reflections of those years (The Gifford Lectures at Glasgow, 1916-1918; see Alexander 1920, 2:406 and 407, "the brute sentiment for deity").

More specifically, if we accept the fact that in doing what he does Tommasino is listening to a voice, then this very act of listening confers human dignity on this relationship.<sup>6</sup> "Human dignity," I said—but how can one speak of this, when the relationship at issue does not take place between two humans, two full persons? The answer is found in a religious notion which can also be considered as a paradox: the predominantly Judaeo-Christian concept of rooting human dignity in a relation with the transcendental. It turns out, then, that Tommasino's loss of faith is not a mere sociological fact in the background of the story; much less is it a kind of stage to be passed through on one's way to a more sophisticated view of the world. Tommasino is, to be sure, thinking/feeling in the wake of the abandonment of an institutionalized, confessional faith, but his thinking/feeling is still a response to that faith.

This situates our text in its appropriate context, which is a very broad spiritual landscape. In this sense, Pirandello's short

story comes to look like that stalk of grass, and the context necessary in order to really listen to what it is saying appears now as that great plain which spreads below; recall the passage about the blade of grass that grows “as if it were fearful and at the same time curious, in its admiration of the sight that opened up beneath it—the green, boundless plain.” Like every intense interrogation in the territory of Christianity, Tommasino’s experience is on the verge of heresy; that is, it holds commerce with one of the great rivals, and nourishing alternatives, of the Christian confession. In this case, the nourishing alternative is that of pantheism. Thus Tommasino’s listening to the voice of the stalk of grass is one more episode in a very long and complex story which crosses the history of philosophy, and of theology, *and* of poetry: the story of the several efforts to recover a sense of the sacred in the adherence to all the things in the world, from the largest to the tiniest. “Expression is the one fundamental sacrament,” A. N. Whitehead will say, a little after Pirandello’s story, in his Lowell Lectures.<sup>7</sup>

Let us get back, for some moments, from this broad context to the specific rhetorical strategy at hand: this story is also an effective reminder of how, in the actual implementation of sacred images and themes (what I have called elsewhere “*theorhetic*”; cf. Valesio 1984), irony and even the grotesque can play a decisive role, without diminishing (on the contrary. . .) the spiritual tension of discourse. The image of the “blade of grass” as a symbol of the tiny but important things in the world is, by the time Pirandello writes, a philosophical topos.<sup>8</sup> The interesting theorhetical twist of this novelette consists in *literalizing* the metaphor: the “blade of grass” thus becomes a blade of grass—no longer a passing nod to the variety of the world, a hurried way of speaking, but the motor of the whole sequence of events. This makes for a mixture of serious and grotesque elements. There is also another stab here, aimed at the rhetoric of “rest and recuperation,” with its description of the weary man-immersed-in-the-world (intellectual, political, or simply mundane man or woman) who goes to the country in order to bathe in the spontaneous and innocent simplicity of nature.

This is a vital and persisting discourse, to be sure. (One still reads letters from friends and colleagues, many of them professional writers, who talk in these terms of their experience of retired living in the country.) Yet this discourse is questioned by a modern rhetoric which points up the element of illusion implicit in such a

move, and the many petty or sordid realities which are to be found in the places apparently most close to nature. In this sense, Pirandello's text has close antecedents in texts like a well-known narrative essay by Giovanni Verga, "Fantasticheria," in the short story collection *Vita dei campi* (1880; cf. Verga 1940, 15:145-52), or an acidly intelligent novel like the one by Joris-Karl Huysmans, *En Rade* (1887). The ironization of this kind of return of the native is not an isolated case in Pirandello's short stories. But this one is remarkable in its heightening of the colors—and I refer not only to the element of grotesque, but also to that of deadly violence. (For this latter dimension, I think of the brilliantly described slow crescendo of violence in the famous novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, *Doña Perfecta* [1876].)

A final point on the story—which turned out not to be such a minor text, after all. . . . If we do not simply listen to Tommasino listening, but (as I proposed) listen to what he is listening to, then we have a right (indeed, an obligation) to maintain a critical attitude. I refer to Tommasino's abrupt reaction against Miss Olga.

Let us dare ask a question that is often disdained, as if it were too naive, by literary criticism: what passed through Tommasino's mind between the moment in which he saw the blade of grass being ripped off and the moment of his exclamation? It is not absurd to surmise that Tommasino, who had studied in the seminary, may have thought along the lines of reflections like the following:

. . .nothing the world has to offer  
—the sensual body,  
the lustful eye,  
pride in possessions—  
could ever come from the Father  
but only from the world  
(1 John 2:16).

Indeed, Miss Olga with the stalk hanging from her mouth must have been an emblem of what the Vulgate (with a phrase that rings deeper than the "pride of possessions" of the Jerusalem Bible version) calls *superbia vitae*: "life-pride," or "pride of life."

But isn't Tommasino's reaction to that life-pride a bit too strident, too uneasy? (We thus recover what is fruitful, and cannot be ignored, in the astute reading.) Isn't this reaction

somewhat inconsistent with the terms of Tommasino's own experience, which is teaching him a fully sympathetic acceptance of all things and creatures in the world? This is certainly not said in order to score a point on Tommasino — but rather, in order to underscore the necessity for constant self-criticism (isn't this, actually, a weaker synonym for soul-searching?) in the pursuit of the experience of listening.

But we cannot stop here. A systematic listening continues to open up broader spaces, both inside and outside; every prolonged act of listening prolongs the discourse beyond the individual text. (To remain inside it would be like stopping one's ears in order not to listen.) We must then continue to contemplate a blade of grass, without being discouraged by Tommasino's fate.

Etymologists remind us that the sense of *blade* as in sword-blade is secondary with respect to the sense of blade as in *blade* of grass. The original theme is the same that appears in German *Blatt* "leaf, sheet of paper" — something that has interesting implications for a general (we might say, a Vichian) rhetoric. For it seems that the key figure of speech here is not one of *hyperbole* but one of *euphemization*: I mean, it is not the case that the thing in the meadow is rigidly and phallically hyperbolized on the model of the thing in the warrior's hand; rather it is the case that the warrior's weapon is felt as something so brutally disturbing that it must be exorcized by euphemism, and called with the same name of the supple thing bending on the meadow.<sup>9</sup>

This points to an innovative restatement of the ancient topos dwelling on the connection between Book and Life—from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to that delicate image that appears in the midst of a complicated perspective (a woman telling her lover, who is a writer, how she imagines his sister) in a beautiful modern novel of 1900:

Sometimes she would come into your room while you were working  
and lay a blade of grass on the page you had commenced.<sup>10</sup>

One might speak of an overdetermination of the image, if this did not sound like a negative judgment, while on the contrary what is at work here enriches our perception of the world. This leaf of grass used as a bookmark between two leaves of paper on which writing has begun to be traced is a *figura etymologica* rooted in nature. It vividly brings before our eyes both the origin of any



book as a physical object out of the vegetal world, and the possible destiny of the book, as a complex of signs which goes back into the bosom of nature.

Indeed, if we look at this blade of grass as a representative of the green world, we soon discover that we are faced with a powerful archetypal image: that *viriditas* on which the alchemists focused many of their meditations—when they considered how blessed Nature makes all things new and green blossom out of the putrefaction of matter in darkness.<sup>11</sup>

This cosmic *viriditas*, this germination of being, may however—important as it is—distract us from the experience of listening, by underscoring a mere looking at. What is crucial, in this turn-of-the-century period which is still the key to understanding our so-called modern literature, is a renewal of that impressive theme: the voice of mute things. For, contemporary with the writing of this and other short stories by Pirandello, a short masterpiece comes out in Northern Europe, as a unique literary document: Hugo von Hofmannstahl's *Letter of Lord Chandos*, where the hero of the Epistle expresses his dramatic nostalgia for a language “in which the mute things speak to me” (. . . *die stummen Dinge zu mir sprechen*). This voice does not have for him only a utopian existence. He can hear it, or rather I should say (exploiting the powerful Italian crasis, in the verb *sentire*, of both English “to hear” and English “to feel”), he can feel it in certain privileged moments:

The mute and sometimes even inanimate creatures rise toward me  
with such an abundance, such a presence of love, that my enchanted  
eye can find no dead place around me.<sup>12</sup>

This is not only a literary, but also a philosophical, perspective<sup>13</sup>—and one that, as such, must acknowledge and make explicit its link with a rich theological tradition.

Once again, one should not be led astray by merely visual and imaginative considerations. The voice of the blade of grass and of similar mute things is the voice hidden in all processes of miniaturization; for miniatures are not only images, but speaking images; suffice it to remember the acute treatment of the theme of miniature in Bachelard 1964 [1958].

Yet even his important analysis falls short of identifying a key emblem which, in linking together the dialectic of

inside/outside, of enlargement/narrowing, in miniaturization, reveals an ontology: an emblem of the growth of forms of being in their spiritual nature, beyond sensory divisions and sensual speculations and sensuous delimitations. For if every poet is an heir to the fairy-tale hero who can hear the grass grow (cf. the lines of poetry quoted in Bachelard 1964:177), something greater is at work here. The key image is that of the small mustard seed which grows into “the biggest shrub of them all” (Mark 4:31,32). This image is diffracted and refracted in the visionary poly-discourse of the synoptic Gospels, with differences to which we cannot be indifferent. In the quoted passage from Mark as in the analogous one in Matthew (13:31,32), the mustard seed is a parable of the growth of the Kingdom of God: an image which, for all its power, is still somewhat abstract and external. But, more challengingly, the mustard seed in another place in Matthew (17:20) is — with a significant process of interiorization — an emblem of individual faith. And finally in Luke 13:19 the interpretive potential of this parable is realized when this text is immediately followed by the parable of the yeast — homely in appearance, but in fact agitating and suggestive. For the leavening of the flour mixed with yeast takes place traditionally overnight (thus evoking, by the way, for the *Jack and the Beanstalk* type of fairy-tale, an intertext broader and deeper than the one mentioned in note 3).

Also, the growth of the leavened bread evokes an intercourse between man and nature more intimate than that described by the sowing of the mustard seed. This kneading is like an embrace: “lovely-dumb” (as G. M. Hopkins would put it); and yet (and, because of this) decisive.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The ellipses belong to the original text. This and the following translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup>Some other details conspire towards this weakening. For instance, the family name of the hero — Unzio — is too transparent an allusion to religious *unction*.

<sup>3</sup>We could collate this image with a Freudian analysis of the giant beanstalk growing at night, and of the boy climbing on it, in the *Jack and the Beanstalk* type of fairy-tale, as images on one level are connected to a boy’s

feelings about masturbation. Cf. Bettelheim 1971:171.

<sup>4</sup>Rhetorical analysis, which constantly follows those intricate genealogies of images that make poetry out of prose, can point out here the genealogical link between this carefree, mundane, and sexual image of the stalk hanging out of the mouth of a woman in the bloom of her youth, with the sickly growth about the mouth of another Pirandellian character, in whose case the floral presence is a metaphorical one. I refer to the one-act play “L'uomo dal fiore in bocca” (“The man with a flower in his mouth”) (cf. Pirandello 1950 [1926]:297-310), where reality of that silentiary zone—deadly sickness—takes the surrealist, Magritte-like drollery out of the metaphor and gives it, in its stead, a sinister resonance. This short play or “dialogo” (as the author calls it) is the rewriting of an earlier short story (a frequent procedure in Pirandello). But the short story was already in dialogic form, so that the dramatic version simply reproduces it in full, without adding or taking out anything, but only inserting stage directions. What is relevant to the present analysis is the only change made, the title, which in this short story is “La morte addosso” (“Death on one’s back”—cf. Pirandello 1923:61-72). This latter title is strongly (almost brutally) effective; whereas the rhetoric of the drama’s title, “L'uomo dal fiore in bocca,” is an indirect rhetoric of suggestiveness.

<sup>5</sup>“It is to the invisible that listening may attend” (Ihde 1976:14, emphasized in the original). In adhering to this thought, I at the same time must distantiate the present analysis from a certain pale punctiliousness in the phenomenological enterprise, which sharply separates theology from philosophy and promotes the latter as the only possible enterprise (*ibid.*:15). The present analysis, on the contrary, is built on the refusal of any neatly cut division between theology and philosophy.

<sup>6</sup>On the problem of listening versus seeing, consult Ong 1982.

<sup>7</sup>“Expression is the one fundamental sacrament. It is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. . . this primary expression mainly clothes itself in the media of action and of words, but also partly of art” (Whitehead 1971 [1926]:127, in the context of a discourse which structures elements of pantheism.)

<sup>8</sup>Consider the following passage (with a resounding Hegelian ring) that I noted from Benedetto Croce’s works (and whose original context I have still to recover): “Everything in the Universe is Mind, down to the blade of grass and the worn stone; and philosophy is the very consciousness of the Universe.” Such thoughts raise the problem of the links between absolute idealism, the traditional religious notions of theism and pantheism, and the more specific philosophical underpinnings of these latter. On this, see for instance the quoted Alexander 1920, 2:382-401 especially. To be sure, Tommasino’s pantheistic leanings could be described, as this same philosopher would say, as being of “the more popular and easy-going form” (389). But, in the comprehensive rhetorical approach that is developed here, there is nothing really easy-going about the philosophical perceptions of the common man.

<sup>9</sup>This euphemistic move is not limited to the Anglo-Saxon linguistic domain: in some old Italian texts which maintain a particularly close connection with their dialectal background, the blade of the sword is sometimes euphemistically referred to with words normally designating the pods of some Leguminosae. (Cf. also that established Italian metaphor: *Il filo*

*della spada* “The edge of the sword.”)

<sup>10</sup> cite from the translation of *Il Fuoco* in D’Annunzio 1914 [1910]:226. The passage appears in the second and last part of the novel, called “The Empire of Silence.”

<sup>11</sup>See, for instance, the eloquent passage quoted in Jung 1954:269 from the anonymous alchemical treatise *Rosarium Philosophorum* (for which Jung uses a German edition of the Latin text, in 1550).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Hofmannstahl 1979:472 and 469 respectively; English version (here followed with some changes) in Hofmannstahl 1952:141 and 138. Composed in August 1902, this fictional letter appears in two installments (October 18 and 19, 1902) in the Berlin paper *Tag* (cf. Tarot 1970:360ff.). As for Pirandello’s story, it was first published in the *Corriere della Sera* of December 31, 1911.

<sup>13</sup>A modern philosophical essay in the style of Christian existentialism like Sciacca 1962, interesting as it is, is a weaker echo of images like the one in Pirandello’s short story, a text which in its turn is paler than the beautifully pulsating images in the quoted *Letter of Lord Chandos*. (But we have to do here with a general strategy of discourse and thought.)

<sup>14</sup>“The miniature of an entire cosmos that speaks softly (175). . . . We are taught the ontology of presentiment. . . this tense state of fore-hearing. . . the weaker the indication, the greater the significance, since it indicates an origin (176). . . . the play of the dream devices known to us as seeing and hearing, ultra-seeing and ultra-hearing, hearing oneself seeing. . . to hear oneself listen” (181). I was reminded of these pages by Brandy Alvarez, who is not responsible for the particular development here.

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**Speech Is the Body of the Spirit:  
The Oral Hermeneutic in the Writings of  
Eugen Rosenstock—Huessy (1888—1973)**

**Harold M. Stahmer**

All things were made by the Word. In the beginning there was neither mind nor matter. In the beginning was the Word. St. John was properly the first Christian theologian because he was overwhelmed by the spokenness of all meaningful happening.

Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy

The evolution of human society and the “hominization” of the world (man’s entering into possession of the world, filling it up, becoming the active focus of more and more of its operations) can thus be understood in a basic, although by no means an exclusive sense, as a triumph of voice, of the word, through which man comes to an understanding of actuality and through which he constructs human society.

Walter J. Ong, S.J.

The indicator or indicators of illocutionary force implant the meaning in the stream of social intercourse; they are what make speech take hold, and what make language more than the medium of information exchange that philosophers and linguists long seem to have thought it.

J. L. Austin

. . . it is significant that the emotional dynamics of the Gospel were always controlled by the meaningfulness of speech. To this, visionary and psychic phenomena were subordinated, and the language in question was not only the spoken word but personal address; it was not only in the indicative mode but in the imperative; it was not only in the third person but in the second and the first; it was not only a matter of declaration but of dialogue.

Amos N. Wilder

\* \* \*

The Christian social philosopher, Eugen Friedrich Moritz Rosenstock-Huessy, lived most of his life under the “spell of language,” more specifically under the influence of the Incarnate Word as it manifests itself in and through human speech. Hence his

description of Man as “reverberating the Word”:

Man is reverberating the Word. How can he do this if he runs away from the first periods of life, in which he should acquire forever the resounding qualities of obedience, of listening, of singing and of playing? These first periods have made me. From them, the power has sprung of giving the slip to any one outdated later period of style or articulation and to grow up to one more comprehensive. . . . The pages of my *Sociology* may be those in which I have vindicated these four chapters of my life of the spirit as creating our true time, our full membership in society (1959:24).<sup>2</sup>

In 1958, at age seventy, Rosenstock-Huessy was awarded an honorary doctorate in theology by the theological faculty of the University of Münster and hailed as the new “Magus des Nordens” (“Magician of the North”), the J. G. Hamann of the twentieth century. Like Hamann (1730-88), Rosenstock-Huessy gnawed continually on the bone of language and for that reason is hailed in Europe as “Der Sprachdenker” (“The Speech-Thinker”).<sup>3</sup> Although these two men addressed two radically different social and intellectual climates, the similarities in their writings with respect to the sacramental power of speech is striking. Compare, for example, the following statements by Hamann with one of Rosenstock-Huessy’s:

I know of no eternal truths save those which are unceasingly temporal. I speak neither of physics nor of theology; with me language is the mother of reason and revelation, its Alpha and Omega. With me the question is not so much; What is reason? but rather; What is language?<sup>4</sup>

And for Rosenstock-Huessy:

And this temporal character of my thinking is in fact the Alpha and Omega from which I grasp everything afresh. Speech reflects this mode of procedure, even for someone who has been influenced by philosophy. For that reason I prefer to talk about speech rather than about reason (1969:119).

For each, speech (or as Hamann put it, *verbalism*) constituted a *via media* between the Scylla and Charybdis of philosophical and theological discourse. Each regarded speech as sacramental and

each saw in language the answer to his age's obsession with artificial and abstract systems reminiscent of the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century German idealism, historicism, and positivism.

This paper will focus on the oral hermeneutic in Rosenstock-Huessy's writings and will attempt to give the reader an insight into the extent to which his lifelong preoccupation with the Incarnate Word and the spoken word, with "speech," dominated and shaped the substance and style of his written work.<sup>5</sup>

It is not uncommon to hear from those reading the writings of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy that they find his style difficult, his selection of topics and themes unusual, and his method and approach to language, time, and history unconventional and hard to classify. These difficulties seem particularly acute for those trained in theology, analytic philosophy, and sociology or law. One reason for this is that the breadth of his knowledge exceeds that of most scholars trained in any one of these disciplines. Another is that his approach to each of these disciplines, coupled with his use of concepts like "Grammatical Thinking" (*Grammatisches Denken*) and "Cross of Reality" (*Kreuz der Wirklichkeit*) and terms like "speech-thinking" (*Sprachdenken*) and "speech-letters" (*Sprachbriefe*), is unfamiliar not only to most American scholars, but to those trained in Europe as well.

Rosenstock-Huessy admits that his style and writings are as unconventional as was his life. He stated this publicly in one of the last works to be published before his death in 1973, *I am an Impure Thinker* (1970a). In his foreword to that work, the poet W. H. Auden said that although normally "'A good wine needs no bush,' I should warn anyone reading him for the first time. . . he may find as I did, certain aspects of Rosenstock-Huessy's writings a bit hard to take. At times he claims to be the *only* man who has ever seen the light about History and Language. But let the reader persevere, and he will find, as I did, that he is richly rewarded. He will be forced to admit that, very often, the author's claim is just: he *has* uncovered many truths hidden from his predecessors." Quoting Rosenstock-Huessy's motto, "*Respondeo etsi mutabor!*" ("I respond *although* I will be changed"), Auden concluded, "Speaking for myself, I can only say that, by listening to Rosenstock I have been changed" (1970a:vii).

In a review in *The Modern Schoolman* of one of



Rosenstock-Huessy's major writings, his two-volume *Sociology* (1956 and 1958), Walter Ong described him as a member of that group of philosophers whose concerns are with the "human life-world" and whose writings, quoting Rosenstock-Huessy, were directed "against the decay of time-sense and of the power of speech." Of his writings, Father Ong admitted that they "are difficult to classify." He then added:

And this is as it should be, for a dissatisfaction with all classification because of the disability it unavoidably entails is a mark not only of Rosenstock-Huessy's thought but of contemporary philosophy generally. If it is true, as those who are intelligently ill at ease in the presence of classification well know, that we can never avoid it, however industriously we may conceal it, it is also true that man can never again be so smug about classifying things as he rather consistently has been in the past. Philosophy today is spilling out of its old containers, not shrinking but growing, developing a social dimension and cast which is personalist and even poetic and literary. Under these circumstances, it is hard to see how the practicing philosopher can fail to pay attention to Rosenstock-Huessy's work (1960:139).

Before his conversion to Christianity at age 18 or 19, Rosenstock-Huessy had become aware of the fact that "Language is wiser than the one who speaks it. The living language of people always overpowers the thinking of individual man who assumes he could master it" (1921:114; 1968:62-63). In 1902, at age 14, it was apparent to Rosenstock-Huessy that language—philology, grammar, writing dictionaries, compiling indexes, translating and studying history—had special meaning for him ("all linguistics intoxicated me"), although he lacked at the time the inspiration and insight into the powers inherent in speech that permeated his later life and writings. In a lengthy autobiographical essay he stated that from 1902 until 1942 "speech made me the footstool of its new articulation—since 1902 I have lived under the banner of speech" (1968:63). An early sign of Rosenstock-Huessy's departure from his early preoccupation with traditional linguistics was occasioned by the refusal of the law faculty at Leipzig in 1912 to accept a chapter of *Ostfalens Rechtsliteratur*. Nevertheless, as he put it, "I had braved them, printing the chapter—*based on my recognition of*

*speech as creating us*—just the same.” In retrospect, it took World War I to end what he called “departmental scholarship.” “The war taught me that professional squabbles were not enough—that the whole world of the educated was embodying a spiritual lag” (1959:17).

In 1914 Rosenstock-Huessy’s life and style changed dramatically. The onslaught of World War I affected him profoundly. His experiences as a German officer at the Western front transformed him from a brilliant Privatdozent into an inspired Christian revolutionary. He described this change in his major work on history, *Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man* (1938): “Any real man behaves in the volcanic hours of his own life as people behaved during revolutions” (708). In his “Post-War Preface” to this work and in the chapter “Farewell to Descartes,” Rosenstock-Huessy outlined his new orientation and the task and challenge that he had set for himself:

The idea of this book originated in an experience we went through in the trenches. . . . The attempt to found a new future for the united soldiers of Europe, that is, for its manhood, on the common experience of the World War can only be successful if this generation that was killed, wounded, weakened, decimated, by the War can bequeath a lasting memory of its experience to its children. Scholars cannot demobilize until the World War has reformed their method and their purpose in writing history (5).

Its topic, “the creation of humankind,” owes to “the World War its daring to be simple and general. It owes to events that far transcend our individual judgment its rediscovery of what is important and what is trifling in the life of mankind. This book owes to the sufferings of millions and tens of millions its ability to treat the history of the world as an autobiography” (6). And in a concluding manifesto he stated:

We post-War thinkers are less concerned with the revealed character of the true God or the true character of nature than with the survival of a truly human society. In asking for a truly human society we put the question of truth once more; but our specific endeavor is the living realization of truth in mankind. Truth is divine and has been divinely revealed—*credo ut*

*intelligam*. Truth is pure and can be scientifically stated—*cogito ergo sum*. Truth is vital and must be socially represented—*Respondeo etsi mutabor*” (740-41).

According to Rosenstock-Huessy it was during the first of the war years, 1914, that he wrote his “first totally inspired book” and “broke away from antiquarianism” (1959:16). The book, *Königshaus und Stämme in Deutschland zwischen 911 and 1250*, represented his break with traditional scholarly ways of treating medieval legal history, just as his later work, *Vom Industrierecht, Rechtssystematische Fragen* (1926), represented his break with the then prevailing norms in the field of industrial legal scholarship.

Two Rosenstock-Huessy scholars, Konrad von Moltke and Eckart Wilkens, have traced the interrelatedness of Rosenstock-Huessy’s lifelong preoccupation with language and law, which they document using an unpublished nine-page letter which he wrote while at the Western front on military service in 1915. This letter reveals that in 1915 Rosenstock-Huessy had begun to develop his “Grammatical Method” and “Cross of Reality” which are based upon a recognition of the power of speech and which constitute the methodological framework for his two-volume *Sociology (Soziologie)*, I:1956; II:1958), a work that appeared earlier in a limited edition under the title *Cross of Reality*. According to Konrad von Moltke, “Even without giving a name to the Four as a form of orientation, of revelation, Rosenstock-Huessy puts the grammatical method to work in the area most readily accessible to him in law, . . . in writing under the pressure of the situation in the field of battle.”<sup>6</sup>

The historic oral foundations of the Germanic as well as common law traditions fitted in quite well with Rosenstock-Huessy’s early preoccupation with language. It should be noted that his interest in law did not arise originally out of his interest in language, inasmuch as he took up the study of law at his father’s urging in order that he could be independent and self-supporting. Nevertheless, the centrality as well as the evidentiary role of the spoken word and oral tradition in law fascinated him. Again, quoting von Moltke:

In the Germanic legal tradition—as in common law tradition—the *spoken word* occupies a very special place. Indeed, originally the written word had not evidentiary value without *oral* confirmation. Thus, the

*spoken* character which is so typical of Eugen's work can also be seen in terms of his legal training. It is even evident in the most academically oriented of the seven works discussed by Eckart Wilkens, *Vom Industrierecht, Rechtssystematische Fragen* (1926) (*On Industrial Law, Issues in Legal Systematics*). The themes which were already audible in the sketch of 1915 and in the article of 1918, the application of the Four, the Cross of Reality, to unexplored domains of law, are also evident in this work (von Moltke and Wilkens 1982:4).

Already in 1910 a group of young intellectuals, one that included Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) and may have included Rosenstock-Huessy, had come together in Baden-Baden out of concern about the "spiritual lag" in German universities and their fear that these concerns were signs that all of Europe was facing an impending catastrophe, a fear which, in Rosenstock-Huessy's words, was at the time "communicable to a few friends only." For many who shared these concerns, the problems they faced had to do with speech and the inability of individuals and professional and social groups and organizations to communicate with one another. It is therefore not surprising that between 1910 and as late as 1930 many of those who shared these convictions produced a variety of works that dealt with language, especially the spoken word, the interpersonal, and programs and possibilities for the restructuring and re-creation of more human and humane communities and societies.

For example, there was the Patmos group (1919-23) and those who edited and contributed to the periodical, *The Creature* (*Die Kreatur*, 1926-30). The original members of the Patmos group included Leo Wiesmantel, Werner Picht, Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg, Karl Barth, Rosenzweig, and Rosenstock-Huessy. The editors of *The Creature* were Joseph Wittig, Martin Buber, and Victor von Weizsacker (Catholic-Jew-Protestant), and the journal included among its contributors, in addition to Rosenstock-Huessy, Rosenzweig, the Ehrenbergs, Weismantel, Picht, Florens Christian Rang, Rudolf Hallo, and Nicholas Berdyaev. And while only a few of the authors of *The Creature* were identified with the earlier Patmos group, they nevertheless shared many of the group's concerns.<sup>7</sup>

Although they may have first met in 1910 in Baden-Baden,

and again in 1912, it was not until the night of July 7, 1913 that Rosenstock-Huessy and Rosenzweig met again and engaged one another in an intensely personal dialogue. Thereafter, they began a close yet often stormy and antagonistic friendship that lasted until Rosenzweig's death in 1929. In a letter to his old friend and occasional enemy shortly before he died, Rosenzweig said, "I learn from no one so naturally, so inevitably, so effortlessly, as from you" (10.4.1929).<sup>8</sup> Rosenzweig's "encounter" with Rosenstock-Huessy on July 7, 1913 and their famous correspondence on Judaism and Christianity in 1916 decisively shaped the lives and thinking of both men.<sup>9</sup> Rosenzweig later credited their encounter in 1913 as having provoked in him the seeds of a spiritual journey that caused him to shed his gnawing agnosticism and embrace Revelation, first as manifest in Christianity, and then subsequently as revealed in his "reaffirmed" Judaism. Both men admitted afterwards that they had been under the "spell of speech" during these encounters, and each subsequently looked back on these events as living examples of "speech-thinking" and "grammatical-thinking." What each later wrote about and referred to as his "system" or "method" *reflected the actual process by which most of their significant theoretical writings had evolved*. Based on their own terminology and reflections, their encounter in 1913 was a "speech-encounter" or "speech-event" (*Sprachereignis*) and the twenty-one letters exchanged in 1916 were "speech-letters" to one another. Without that correspondence and their previous encounter in 1913, it is doubtful that Rosenzweig would have written from the trenches and while on leave his *Star of Redemption* (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, 1921) (8.22.1918-2.16.1919), or that Rosenstock-Huessy would have written in 1924 the cornerstone of his hermeneutics, his *Applied Knowledge of the Soul* (*Angewandte Seelenkunde*).

In an essay entitled "The New Thinking" (1925), Rosenzweig states that "Speech-thinking" is the method he employs in his new way of philosophizing and that it was central to writing his *The Star of Redemption* eight years earlier (Glatzer 1953:198-99). In a letter to Rudolf Hallo (2.4.23) two years before he wrote his essay, Rosenzweig said that "without Eugen I would never have written the *Star of Redemption*." Similarly, Rosenstock-Huessy said of his 1916 correspondence with Rosenzweig: "This exchange . . . turned the rhythm of life of both writers inside out. Both had to live quite differently than they had before" (1968:70). He

compared their significance to that of “love letters” which have the same effect. The writer of love letters realizes that in the writing of the letter something “new” is learned; “namely, that between him and the recipient of the letter there exists a gaping abyss. The letter is, in fact written to close this abyss.” Thus when Shakespeare’s Romeo cries out, “It is my soul that calls upon my name,” Romeo “senses that he already in the past was called Romeo, that first through Juliet’s calling of his name the one half of his soul can become whole.” The division within us, powers “that drag us *backwards*, drive us *forwards*, paralyse us from *without*, excite us from *within*,” are overcome and united, that is, our soul and our name grow together, are united, when “the soul speaks aloud our name.” This unity is achieved by a surrender to the voice that addresses us and a simultaneous “forgetting about ourselves”:

As often as this happens, the person becomes the one that he should become. Because neither can we nor should we become ourselves. We can only achieve our destiny by forgetting “ourselves” (1968:169).

Rosenzweig himself had experienced the meaning of Romeo’s “It is my soul that calls upon my name” perhaps as deeply as anyone. He also knew what “speech-letters” were all about. On January 16, 1920, ten days after his engagement to Edith Hahn, Rosenzweig wrote to her:

Do you know why you were unable at that time to know “the meaning of love?” Because one only knows it when one both loves and is loved. Everything else can, at a pinch, be done one-sidedly, but two are needed for love, and when we have experienced this we lose our taste for all other one-sided activities and do everything mutually. For everything can be done mutually; he who has experienced love discovers it everywhere, its pains as well as its delights.

Believe me, a person who loves will no longer tolerate anything dead around him. And since love teaches him “not to run away,” there’s nothing left him, whether for good or ill, but to love. . . . We never awaken for our own sakes; but love brings to life whatever is dead around us. This is the sole proof of its authenticity. *You see, I can no longer write a*

*“book,” everything now turns into a letter, since I need to see the “other.” That is how I feel now in writing the piece on education. Since today I am really at it. Every once in a while I have a fit of laziness because it is mere “writing”—I had rather speak—but I go on all the same and make my pen shout (1937:384-85, emphasis added).*

“Speech-letters” are letters that are wrung or even wrenched from the soul out of a desire for wholeness and unity as well as by the need, according to Rosenstock-Huessy, of “every healthy person. . . to get rid of himself, as often as possible.” “Franz” realized this secret when he observed in 1913-14, the time when “Eugen” was writing his “Professorenbuch,” that “Eugen spewed forth this book like a volcano.” And similarly, in Rosenzweig’s life,

Little did Franz realize, that the same “spewing forth” would apply equally one day to his own evolving major work, *The Star of Redemption*. Franz “spewed forth” this encompassing work between the end of August 1918 and February 1919; for which he paid dearly with his subsequent life-shortening illness. . . . For the trance of inspiration tore him out of his powerful body and he was never able thereafter to find his way back into his body (Rosenstock-Huessy 1968:169).

Their influence on one another was not something either man could have been “aware” of, for “awareness” is, in itself, “a very superficial form of spiritual address or communication” that does not “penetrate very deeply under the skin.” The process of change, the “metamorphosis” that occurred to each, was the result of the power of speech that forced each partner to rid himself of his old self and to become united and strengthened in his powers in ways that completely changed the quality and direction of their respective lives. Rosenstock-Huessy summarized what occurred to each fifty years later, after half a century of living under the spell of his fascination and preoccupation with speech. To paraphrase the German title of his essay on the “Origin of Speech,” “Im Prägstock eines Menschenschlags oder der tägliche Ursprung der Sprache,” the periodic renewal of speech occurs as new types and forms of creatures are “coined” and “stamped” (1964:II, 451):

It is clear to me today, fifty years later, that in

1913 I planted the *germ* of the *Star* in Franz; and conversely the metamorphosis of my own esoteric works, from a kind of St. George-and-the-dragon approach into the worldly form of revolutions, was promoted thanks to Franz's grounding in the methods of scientific historical investigation. But neither one needed to have known or been aware of such an influence if it had occurred. For awareness is, in itself, a very superficial form of spiritual address or communication. Its messages do not penetrate very deeply under the skin. What is supposed to get under the skin should be able to penetrate as if by subcutaneous injection. . . . It is perhaps all for the best. This is why our duel which can be dated—in the written one of 1916 and the more oral one of 1913—should be seen as a step away from the brink of the insanity of European humanity, to which humanity had been condemned in 1890, and as a step back to spiritual recovery (1968:172).

In his essay “The New Thinking” (“Das Neue Denken,” 1925), Rosenzweig elaborated on the qualities of “speech thinking” and stated “When I wrote the *Star of Redemption*. . . the main influence was Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; a full year and a half before I began to write I had seen the rough draft of his now published *Applied Knowledge of the Soul*,” which Rosenstock-Huessy had sent to Rosenzweig in the winter of 1916 after their correspondence on Judaism and Christianity in the form of a lengthy “speech-letter” (Glatzer 1953:200). In his “Prologue/Epilogue to the Letters—Fifty Years Later,” Rosenstock-Huessy referred to the drama that began in 1913 as a series of acts in the course of which Franz and Eugen were, to use his words, “existentially transformed” (1969:72). Quite accurately, the correspondence was cited by the late Fritz Kaufmann as a veritable model of “existential” dialogue. “True co-existence,” Kaufmann wrote, “in the consummation of face-to-face relationships is no less intensive and forceful for being unobtrusive, a model of non-violence.” Such, he asserted, was the quality “alive in the highly charged controversy between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig in 1913 and 1916” (1957:214-15). In retrospect, Rosenstock-Huessy made the following comment about their first significant encounter in 1913 in his introduction to the 1935 edition of Rosenzweig's *Letters*:



“Much to their own surprise the two partners found themselves reluctantly put under the compulsion to face up to one another in a struggle with no quarter given or asked. . . . For only in this last extremity, of a soul in self-defense, is there hope to realize the truth in the questions of life” (Rosenzweig 1935:638). His published remarks, those in *Judaism Despite Christianity* (1969) and *Ja und Nein: Autobiographische Fragmente* (1968) confirm Rosenstock-Huessy’s convictions that their “speech-letters” altered the direction and rhythm of their lives:

Thus, the biographies of the two correspondents can best be understood as a junction, the one provoking the other. That this is so could be documented very fully indeed, but it is doubtful that any amount of documentation could convince modern humanists, so accustomed as they are to treat biographical facts in a completely individualistic fashion, of the thesis that two men, Eugen and Franz, exchanged life rhythms in the course of their encounter from 1913 to 1918. The arsenals of modern historiography and biography have not yet developed tools for such an interpretation.

However, this lacuna in the inventory of modern thinking does not impress Eugen very much. After all, the twelve apostles, the four evangelists, St. Francis and St. Dominic, and many, many other groupings represent examples of the interpretation of “individual” lives. Even Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville got under each other’s skins. Franz and Eugen did exchange with each other certain fundamentals of their life rhythm, in mutuality, and—must it be added?—quite unintentionally, in total unconsciousness. Individual purposes or intentions were subordinated to a large extent to a process of re-creation or transformation brought about by a most unwanted, even abhorred, exposure to each other.<sup>10</sup>

The evidence that these letters shaped their lives suggests that “speech-letters” deserve special consideration as a form or genre not simply of “existence communication” or “dialogue,” but rather as media or vehicles of “autobiographical” or “existence transformation.” Traditionally, letters become interesting and worthy of editing and publication as a means of shedding light on

the personalities or published writings of individuals. Letters are seen as a report of some event that has taken place or is in process *independent* of the letter itself. Seldom, if ever, are letters themselves seen as the forces of transformation not only for the recipient but for the author as well. The influence of letters viewed as “speech-letters” on the recipient may also account for works written or produced resulting from the impact of the perceived, appropriated, or interiorized meaning of such letters for the recipient’s existence, whether or not discernible linkages or signs of indebtedness are acknowledged or can be detected. Rarely have letters been considered the kernels or germs of major writings which may or may not have influenced the intended recipient, but which nonetheless profoundly affected the direction and focus of the author’s life in ways that the recipient as well as the author of such “speech-letters” were unaware of. Those involved with theological, philosophical, and literary hermeneutics may one day add to our appreciation of letters as a unique genre of autobiographical or existence transformation. And most certainly Rosenstock-Huessy’s own insights should be viewed not simply as autobiographical commentary, but as an example of the application of his own “grammatical method” to this phenomenon. Consider, for example, his numerous autobiographical references to his relationship with Rosenzweig in *Ja und Nein*.<sup>11</sup> Fifty years after his correspondence with Rosenzweig, the period during which his own version of “speech-thinking” as “grammatical method” matured, Rosenstock-Huessy stated that something that he was unaware of in 1916 came to his attention that “bears upon the meaning of all our letter writing” and “eliminates the false doctrines in the literature about conversation (dialogue) and letters.” For “. . . the prevailing teachings about letters seem to expose the nonsense of our teachers of linguistics in a most devastating way”:

In the letters between Franz and Eugen lofty matters were discussed about Judaism and Christianity. However, it may be more important for further generations, what this exchange of letters in itself reveals. Behind the fashionable words “dialogue,” “existentialism,” “involvement,” the main issues always remain unsaid, namely, those which grasp the event in these letters. I ask: what has happened as a consequence to the writers of these letters? What

meaning do these letters have on their life histories? (1968:168).

In the introduction to volume one of his *Sociology*, Rosenstock-Huessy states that his style or method is based on the outgrowth of conversations with “friends,” arising out of the “services of friendship.” This approach differs from an individual producing a “system based on first principles” on the one hand and the “essay” approach *à la* Emerson or Nietzsche on the other. He refers to his sociological method as a “third style” that has resulted in the fact that many who read his writings “stamp me as unsystematic.” Quoting Goethe, Rosenstock-Huessy refers to his sociology as “*fragments of a confession*.” “The highest work of art must remain incomplete, if the mask on the face of its creator is not to turn to stone” (1956:11).

The importance of the concepts “speech-thinking” and “speech-letters” to Rosenstock-Huessy’s oral hermeneutic have been noted, but attention must also be given to the concepts “grammatical thinking” and “Cross of Reality,” which are equally central to his oral hermeneutic or “speech-thinking.” As early as 1916 in his “speech-letters” to Rosenzweig and then subsequently in his two-volume *Sociology*, his two-volume “speech-book,” *The Speech of Mankind (Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts)*, 1964), and *Speech and Reality* (1970b), Rosenstock-Huessy refers to “Grammar” as “the future organon of social research.” The complete breakdown of the German language between 1933 and 1939 made Rosenstock-Huessy more convinced than ever that “language” in the form of “articulated speech” is the “lifeblood of society” and that it “should be exalted to the rank of social research.” The originality of “grammatical thinking” as a method for creating social unity lies in the fact that “it is stolen neither from theology nor from natural science” and that by using it Roman Catholics and Protestants and Free Thinkers can be united in a “common enterprise.” “Without such a unity,” he maintains, “the revolt of the masses must find the various intellectual groups in a helpless division, as helpless as in the new war. . . . We must discover a common basis for social thinking” (1970b:8-11).

In chapter five of *Applied Knowledge of the Soul*, Rosenstock-Huessy attacks those “false grammars” which reflect the dominance of the perceiving “I”—those beginning with “I,” as the origin of experience, rather than, as our experience proves, with “Thou” Not *amo, amas, amat*, but rather *amas, amo, amat*

should constitute our grammatical posture. It is through the external address early in life in the form of vocatives and imperatives and our response in the form of the grammatical second person that “I” is shaped, and through this process that we become conscious of our “names.” Only after utilizing the grammatical forms “Thou” and “I” do we employ the third person, “he,” “she,” “it.” While the second person is our primary grammatical form, the complete grammar of the soul “appears as an inflection of its grammatical configurations” (1964:756). These grammatical moods are the media through which our grammatical persons are expressed. They are the garb of the soul in each moment of its existence. All grammatical moods and tenses manifest the “soul’s possibilities. . . the soul can swing to the melody of becoming just as it may resound with existence’s tune of the rhythm of transformation” (761).

Two of Rosenstock-Huessy’s essays in *Speech and Reality*, “In Defense of the Grammatical Method” and “Articulated Speech,” are especially useful since they illustrate the interrelatedness of his “grammatical method” and his Cross of Reality. Within the framework of the Cross of Reality, the traditional subject-object distinction represents the “inner” (subject) and “outer” (object) vectors of the spatial axis, while “past” (trajective) and “future” (prejective) are the vectors of the temporal axis. The quality or health on each front or vector of life, whether it can be that of the individual or society, is determined by our use of articulated speech: “Through speech human society sustains its time and space axes. . . it is we who decide what belongs to the past and what shall be part of the future. Our grammatical forms in our daily speech betray our deepest convictions. . . . Society lives by speech, dies without speech” (1970b:16).

We speak out of need and out of fear; out of fear that decay, anarchy, war, and revolution will destroy the time and space axes of society which give direction and orientation to all members of society. In order to prevent social disintegration, men reason, pass laws, tell stories, and sing. In so doing “the external world is reasoned out, the future is ruled, the past is told,” and the unanimity of the inner circle is expressed in song:

Without articulated speech, man has neither direction nor orientation in time and space. Without the signposts of speech, the social beehive would disintegrate immediately. When speech is recognized as

curing society from the ills of disharmony and discontinuity in time and space, grammar is the most obvious organon for the teachings of society (*idem*).

By means of this method, we become conscious of our “place in history (backward), world (outward), society (inward), and destiny (forward).” The grammatical method constitutes “an additional development of speech itself,” which fulfills itself in our new powers of “direction and orientation.” Thus, “Grammar is the self-consciousness of language just as logic is the self-consciousness of thinking” (1970b:18).

Without articulated speech, men neither have one time nor mutual respect nor security among themselves. To speak has to do with time and space. Without speech, the phenomenon of time and space cannot be interpreted. Only when we speak to others (or, for that matter, to ourselves) do we delineate an inner space or circle in which we speak, from the outer world about which we speak. . . . And the same is true about the phenomenon of time. Only because we speak are we able to establish a present moment between past and future (20-21).

Rosenstock-Huessy’s style is personal; he is “confabulating” with the reader, extending an invitation, giving thanks to friends who have made this occasion possible. His written style is typical of that of “speech-letters” as he and Rosenzweig experienced and described them—unsystematic, incomplete, unpredictable. Like Rosenzweig, Rosenstock-Huessy is always “speaking” to you when he writes, always attempting to get the reader’s attention, to engage the reader in a dialogue or conversation. Quoting a line from a letter of Friedrich H. Jacobi to J. G. Hamann, (11.18.1784), Rosenstock-Huessy is saying, “Speak that I may see thee!” Rosenstock-Huessy’s “written” style is controlled by his “voice”; his mind and thoughts are at the mercy and service of “articulated speech.” Whatever difficulties the reader may have in understanding the complexity of the grammatical method or the Cross of Reality of this “impure thinker,” the problem is often compounded and complicated by Rosenstock-Huessy’s constant attempt to treat the written word as a form of “oral address” :

Sound calls forth sound, song calls forth song and innumerable books given to friends bear witness by their

often lengthy poetical inscriptions to the infectious character of confabulation. I mention this so the reader may see, from this underpadding, that the printed word was not radically different to me from the words spoken or written between friends. *Fittingly, letters have played an immense role in my life. The letters printed in Franz Rosenzweig's volume of letters are a good example of their role in my own existence. Many good books got started as letters* (1959:22-23, emphasis added).

In this connection there are many students of Rosenstock-Huessy and also his son, Dr. Hans R. Huessy, who believe that Rosenstock-Huessy comes through best in his recorded lectures when one can actually listen to his voice. His son has said repeatedly that the best and perhaps only way “to really understand my father is to listen to him when he is speaking,” as for example, in the recorded lecture “History Must Be Told,” or in the more than 150 lectures recorded by his students.

For Rosenstock-Huessy, the truly inspired individual, the “enthusiastic” creature in whom God dwells and through whom God speaks, is the God who “looks at us and looked at us before we open our eyes or our mouths. *He is the power which makes us speak. He puts words of life on our lips*” (1946:94, emphasis added). In *Out of Revolution*, Rosenstock-Huessy proposes a sequel of Michelangelo’s painting of God creating Adam in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. God, in the upper right-hand corner, is shown creating Adam, reclining naked and helpless, in the lower left-hand corner. In the beginning, all of God’s angels were on God’s side, contained in the folds of his robe. Rosenstock-Huessy’s proposed sequel would portray the angels as having left the Creator and descended to man, “keeping, strengthening, enlarging his being into the divine. In this picture God would be alone while Adam would have all the Elohim around him as his companions” (1938:727-28). This is consistent with Rosenstock-Huessy’s Johannine millennialist portrayal of Christianity. In the third millennium, the Age of the Spirit, “the New Jerusalem” is envisioned as “a healing of nations without any *visible* Church at its center.” “I believe that in the future, Church and Creed can be given a new lease on life only by services that are nameless and incognito” (1946:127). In another place he states that, “In the third epoch, beginning today, Christians must immigrate into our workaday world, there to incarnate the Spirit in unpredictable

forms,” since “. . . each generation has to act differently precisely in order to represent the same thing. Only so can each become a full partner in the process of Making Man” (124). Early in *The Christian Future: Or the Modern Mind Outrun*, in a section entitled “Let us Make Man,” he elaborated on this theme:

Hence the third article of the Creed is the specifically Christian one: from now on the Holy Spirit makes man a partner in his own creation. In the beginning God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26). In this light, the Church Fathers interpreted human history as a process of making Man like God. They called it “anthropurgy”: as metallurgy refines metal from its ore, anthropurgy wins the true stuff of Man out of his coarse physical substance. Christ, in the Center of history, enables us to participate consciously in this man-making process and to study its laws (1946:108).

Rosenstock-Huessy’s style, his oral hermeneutic, is totally consistent with Professor Amos Wilder’s statement that “the founders of Christianity used the language and idioms of the people: not a sacred or holy language, nor a learned language, nor did they encourage an ecstatic language. . . . The common language of men was itself the medium of revelation” (1964:26-27). Shortly after this passage, Professor Wilder states:

There is, indeed, such a thing as a rhetoric of faith, the language of the Spirit; one can recognize that the early Christians were endowed with new tongues; but all such heavenly discourse remains rooted in the secular media of ordinary speech. Pentecost, indeed, we may take as a dramatization of the fact that there is no peculiar Christian tongue (28).

For Ernst Fuchs, the Gospel, the “Good News,” is fundamentally a “speech-event” (*Sprachereignis*). According to Fuchs (1960:261), “Jesus wrote nothing and adds that even Paul wrote reluctantly. When he and other authors of our New Testament writings *did* write or dictate, their speech still has a

special character, since the new depth and freedom of speech perpetuated itself even in the written productions. *The voice of the writer is the voice of the speaker to a remarkable degree.*"

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy was born the son of a Jewish banking family in Berlin, Germany on July 6, 1888. He was educated at the universities of Zurich, Berlin, and Heidelberg and received his doctorate in law in 1909 (Heidelberg) and his Ph.D. in 1923 (Heidelberg). He converted to Christianity at age 18 or 19. From 1912 until 1914 he was lecturer in law at Leipzig and served in the German army as an officer from 1914 until 1918. In 1919 he edited a factory newspaper for Daimler Benz and in 1921 directed the Academy of Labor in Frankfurt. In 1923 he was appointed professor of law and sociology at Breslau, where he served until January 31, 1933. From 1933 until 1936 he taught at Harvard, and from 1935 until his retirement in 1957 he was professor of social philosophy at Dartmouth. In 1927 he founded the German School for Adult Education and in 1929 was elected Vice President of the World Association for Adult Education. In 1940 he helped found Camp William James in Vermont, an experimental leadership training center for the CCC. He is the author of more than 450 essays, articles, and monographs, including 45 books. About 150 of his lectures were recorded. He died on February 24, 1973 in Norwich, Vermont.

<sup>2</sup>A discourse on Rosenstock-Huessy is a fitting contribution to a celebration of the life and work of Walter J. Ong, S.J. Both men responded to the power of speech and dedicated their own lives, albeit in different ways, to revealing for humankind the mysteries of the Incarnate Word. I have been privileged to know both men and wish to express my indebtedness to Father Ong, whom I first met in 1957 and whose research and generous spirit have provided me with a constant source of intellectual and spiritual nourishment.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Rohrbach 1973 and Stahmer 1968.

<sup>4</sup>Hamann to F. H. Jacobi (11.14.1784); Hamann to Herder (8.6-10.1784); Hamann to Jacobi (3.4-10.1788). Cf. Alexander 1966:133-34: ". . . Hamann's use of the term 'language' (*Sprache*) is sometimes highly figurative: frequently he has in mind not only human expression, but the divine self-expression (the LOGOS) which lies at the ground of it. We use 'word' for the self-expression of God by which man communicates with his fellow-man (on which human society and even human existence itself rises), and for the mediating organ between our invisible souls and our visible bodies. For Hamann this is not a semantic accident but a clue as to the place to investigate the divine mystery of man, both the nature of his powers and the misuse of these powers."

<sup>5</sup>My use of the phrase "oral hermeneutic" in Rosenstock-Huessy's writings will focus on the first of at least three possible meanings of the term "hermeneutic." The first of these is "to profess," "to say," "to assert," "to express aloud," "to announce," and is derived from the Greek *hermeios* in connection with the priest at the Delphic oracle and the wing-footed



messenger-god Hermes who by tradition “mediated,” “transmitted,” or “interpreted” that which did not heretofore exist into a form that humans could understand. This mediating or interpretative process also expressed itself as an “explanation” of a situation and, thirdly, as “translation” (Palmer 1969:2-32). The emphasis in Rosenstock-Huessy’s writings on his “oral hermeneutic” is quite similar to Walter Ong’s definition of “interpretation” as “... to bring out what is concealed in a given manifestation, to make evident what in the manifestation is not evident to the milieu in which the interpreter’s audience lives” (Ong 1986:147).

<sup>6</sup>von Moltke and Wilkens 1982. The reader may also be interested in a recent work by one of Rosenstock-Huessy’s first students at Dartmouth College, Professor Harold Berman, whose ideas were significantly influenced by Rosenstock-Huessy’s work on revolutions.

<sup>7</sup>Rosenstock-Huessy 1947:209-10. Cf. also Stahlmer 1984:61-62. The works that Rosenstock-Huessy and Rosenzweig produced during this period were actually responses to the fundamentally human and social issues which they experienced. Hence, Rosenzweig’s remark, “The dialogue which these monologues make between one another I consider the whole truth.” Other related works produced during this period include Buber 1923, Ebner 1921, Ehrenberg 1923, Litt 1919, Gogarten 1926, Lowith 1928, Grisebach 1928, and lastly Marcel 1927. Two additional works that deal with some of these same concerns, but from a nonreligious and more philosophical perspective, are Scheler 1923 and Heidegger 1927.

<sup>8</sup>Made available to the author by Mrs. Freya von Moltke.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Rosenzweig 1937, 1984; also Glatzer 1953, Martin 1970, Rosenstock-Huessy 1969, and Stahlmer 1968:106-82.

<sup>10</sup>Rosenstock-Huessy 1969:172, also 71-76, 171-77; 1968:70-72, 107-18, 166-72.

<sup>11</sup>Rosenstock-Huessy 1968:70-72, 107-18, 161, 166-72.

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**Rahner on *Sprachregelung*:  
Regulation of Language? Of Speech?**

**Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J.**

*Introduction: Homage to Karl Rahner*

The late Karl Rahner's elder Jesuit brother Hugo, a fine scholar as well as a fine stylist, is said to have quipped at one time that he hoped to become famous in his old age by translating Karl into German. Yet Karl's works did win for their author, in 1973, the Sigmund Freud Prize for Scholarly Prose of the German Academy for Language and Literature, with the citation stating: "The master of the literary word has succeeded in winning a new hearing for the word of religion" (Weger 1984:8). What a striking contrast between two appraisals!

The first, humorous remark calls to mind the high degree of abstraction, formalism, and technicality in Rahner's theology, where terms have to be distinguished: *existentiell* is not identical with *existential*, and *formell* is not the same as *formal*, and the "transcendental" must be carefully told apart from the "categorical." This aspect of Rahner's works, if we apply Walter Ong's analysis, is associated with the visual, the objectifying, the analytical, the logical—in short, with the kind of literacy that is associated with *reading*, with concentration on, and analysis of, words and terms, and further down the road, with scientific method, along with its panoply of terminological tools.

There is a second aspect to Rahner's works—the one which the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, in awarding him the prize, must mainly have had in mind. Rahner's work has deep roots in the literary world, where the living word, oral-acoustical, the interpersonal, the synthetic, and the rhetorical are predominant. In fact, the citation makes explicit reference to this: Rahner has won a new *hearing* for the word of religion. After all, the word *Sprache*, in the name of the Academy that

awarded the prize, conveys a concern not only with “language” and “usage,” but also with “speech” — not only with *langue/langage*, but also with *parole*, in F. de Saussure’s classical distinction. Rahner has indeed greatly enriched the German language and the usage of theology viewed as the stable, available linguistic equipment scholarly theology needs; in this way, he has succeeded in making large new areas of cultural and religious experience habitually amenable to theological expression and discussion. But this success is rooted in a more fundamental achievement in the area of live speech: once touched by Rahner, the German language and the language of theology have *sounded* differently. Many of Rahner’s formulas have rung a new note; a new excitement and a new eloquence have been brought to the international theological conversation.

This second, literary aspect of Rahner’s work is most prominent in some of his more “popular” writings in the areas of pastoral practice and spirituality, and in his many interviews, recently published—all of them models of liveliness and depth. Still, it is by no means absent from the “heavier” writings, which is consistent with the fact that a large portion of Rahner’s works, especially his essays in the many volumes of the *Theological Investigations*, were not *written* by him at all, but, of all things, *dictated*—periodic sentences and second-order abstractions and all. What we read, in other words, is very often live speech edited for the purposes of publication. Augustine preaching and Thomas Aquinas dictating come to mind, both of them with their scribes scribbling. Hans Urs von Balthasar, who has tended to claim the great aesthetic traditions of the Christian West as the principal source of his theology, once conceded in an interview that Rahner has been “the strongest theological power of our day”; but he then proceeded to characterize the distinctive difference between himself and Rahner as follows: “. . . our points of departure were always different, really. There is a book by Simmel, entitled *Kant und Goethe*. Rahner opted for Kant, or Fichte, if you wish—the transcendental starting-point. And like the *Germanist* I am, I opted for Goethe” (*Herder-Korrespondenz* 1976:75-76). Let the last sentence of this confession pass; the one before that, in its baldness, does Rahner, a life-long reader of poetry, and his written work, with its strong undertow of literary and theological passion, a serious injustice. “Much of what Rahner wrote may be stiff reading. But that is no reason to deny he had the gift of literary

language-use” (Weger 1984:8).

Noticing the coexistence of these two, the periodic sentence and the accoutrements of second-order abstraction, is a good way to approach the literary complexity of Rahner’s work. For all its high literacy, the periodic sentence hails from the world of rhetoric, with its cultivation of conviction, persuasion, and loyalty; it is a product of the tradition that has Cicero and Quintilian for its masters. The other ingredient, the abstractions, along with their daunting array of terminology, hail from the dispassionate world of methodical intellectual operations, aware—with a clarity that certainly goes back to the *Aufklärung*, but beyond that to scholasticism—of their uses, but also of their limitations. Walter Ong has explained that thought in a “preliterate,” that is to say, a rhetorical culture is bound up not with dispassionate observation, but with the dynamic world of interpersonal communication; once the world has been made “objective,” set off from the personal world as essentially neuter—in the best Kantian fashion—thought is exercised no longer as a response to the world but as an operation upon it (Ong 1970:22ff.). One of the attractive features of Rahner’s work is precisely the harmonious, yet tensile, co-existence of two styles of thought, along with their corresponding linguistic styles. On the one hand, we have faith seeking to address Church and World, as well as trying to respond to them, both with a passion; on the other hand, we have the same faith dispassionately seeking for its own foundation, and probing Church and World to find the core of their integrity: the periodic sentence and the terminological tool.

“*Sprachregelung*”

No wonder that Rahner, so eloquent and at the same time so formal a writer, came to take a strong interest in the status of theological language. More particularly, he came to take a strong interest in what he called *Sprachregelung*, “linguistic ruling” (Rahner 1966:54ff.): the communal, i.e., ecclesiastical, fixation of doctrine in *terminological* form. The word first occurs in an essay entitled “What is a Dogmatic Statement?”, first published, in German, in 1961. Over the next ten years, Rahner regularly returned to the subject, as appears from the lists of citations in the *Schriften zur Theologie*, which give the original dates and occasions of the individual essays.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that Rahner saw the need for a treatment of the

meaning of terminological doctrine mainly in three related areas of theological inquiry, namely, (1) the relationship between kerygma and dogma, (2) ecumenical relations, and (3) the obligations imposed by magisterial definitions.

Sensitivity to the tension between the (“kerygmatic”) language of faith and the formal language of dogma, as well as their relative autonomy, became a fundamental feature of Rahner’s thought. His main emphasis came to be on the fact that the latter is an intellectual specialization, and hence a limitation, of the former, and one dependent on historical circumstances (esp. Rahner 1966:54-58).

In treating ecumenical matters, Rahner came to apply this specialization-concept. It allowed him to explore the implications of pluralism, and thus to show the significance of dialogue—dialogue among Catholics and with other Christians, but also with non-Christians. This dialogue, Rahner argued, was not only possible as a matter of principle, given the partiality of divergent dogmatic expressions. It was also a downright requisite for the deeper understanding of one’s own faith-commitment; ultimately, it would remind all participants of the basic function of all theological and religious language—the *reductio in mysterium* (Rahner 1969:85-87; 1974b:40-42; 1974d:251-52).

The authority of terminological dogma is not Rahner’s most fundamental theme, yet it appears to be the one he treats with the highest sense of urgency. It is never far to seek, not even when the first two areas are the principal subject of discussion. It was this issue which brought Rahner face to face with the issue of the unity of the Catholic Church in believing, and, in connection with this, with the functions of the *magisterium*. What is the obligatory force of terminological dogma, and how is its interpretation to be regulated (Rahner 1974a:14-17; 1974c:112-13; 1974e:21ff.; 1974f:131-32)? The controversy surrounding Hans Küng’s *Infallible?* occasioned much pointed discussion along these lines (Rahner 1976a:62-65; 1976b:78-83). Still, we should not forget that the question had already come up much earlier, and in a far quieter, more speculative context, when Rahner was pleading for an alternative terminology in trinitarian theology (Rahner 1970:108— “regulation of language”).

### *Terminological Dogma: From Meaning to Function*

Now what is interesting—certainly from an “Ongian” point of

view—is that Rahner, in treating the problems connected with terminological dogma, refers only to the problem of *meaning* involved. His theme is, invariably, that the meaning of these dogmatic expressions, is *relative*: relative, that is, to the original kerygmatic expressions, to other approaches to the same mystery, to the ecclesiological issue of unity in believing, and ultimately to the mystery involved in and behind the proposition.

Rahner is not by any means alone in treating the issue in this way. In fact, while his distinctive contribution lies in his particular conception of the “relativity” of doctrine, and in his reasons for it, he scarcely differs with any other theologian on the basic question as to what the issue is, namely, one of *meaning*: the interpretation of terminological doctrines is a *cognitive* matter. It is both interesting and a bit surprising to watch such a sensitive and eloquent stylist as Rahner agreeing with most of his colleagues, and even with the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on this basic point.

The observation just made is important. It involves the realization that terminological dogma is widely regarded, among theologians, as regulated *language*. Hence the standard practice of interpretation: one concentrates on a *fixed dogmatic text* (preferably set in its historical, and especially its literary, context) in order to establish what this particular doctrine means.

This essay is written to suggest that this concentration on the *cognitive* (in Ongian terms, the predominantly *visual*) function of doctrine is incomplete. Dogmatic propositions, even the most terminological ones, can, and often do, also function in *affective* (that is to say, predominantly *oral-acoustical*) ways. We will argue, therefore, that terminological dogma often involves the regulation of *speech*. To make this case, some preliminary observations of a general linguistic nature are in order.

### *Connotation in Natural Language*

The distinction most frequently used to deal with the way words function is that between *denotation* and *connotation*: words “say” more than that which is amenable to our cognitive constructs. Words *connote*. That is part of their attractiveness: they are not only precise; they are also eloquent. This applies not only to individual words, but also, and even more, to word-complexes: they say more than they say. This means, very concretely, that they betray, even in written or printed form, that



they “address,” not only issues, but also *people in situations*: they create an audience in the very act of conveying thought. Much of the time, such situations and audiences are incidental: many utterances are *ad hoc*, fleeting, and impermanent; most language is the verbal accompaniment of the ways in which we do this, that, and the other thing with Tom, Dick, and Harry.

But there are situations that are more permanent, and they are characterized by stable patterns of connotative language-use, especially if those situations are “natural”: the family, the village, the tribe, even the school. These permanent human configurations are characterized, as Walter Ong has not tired of pointing out, by language-use that is strongly *formulary*: myths, epics, sagas, legends, proverbs, tribal histories, family stories, playground cant, and what have you. Notice that the term “connotation” is really too weak to convey all that is involved here; it is better to resort to a term like “function” to approach the issue. The formulary usages of more or less permanent natural human configurations function as the bearers of the group’s identity, and those who speak and listen in these situations react, not so much to *what* is said or heard, as to the way the words are *used appropriately*, i.e., as a function of the understanding and the loyalty that hold the group together. In joining such a group, *we learn the usage before we get the understanding*.

### *Meaning and Use of Terms*

In what we have said so far, we have been dealing with the formulary use of natural language, whose constitutive elements are what we know as *words*—“regular” words. But our language, even our everyday language, employs not only words, but also *terms*: special words, usually (though by no means always) derived from foreign roots; words which you have to know how to pronounce and use right, because they tend to have very precise, usually abstract meanings laid down by definition. In other words, *terms are maximally denotative*, at least in intention; in fact, one definition of “term” is: a word without connotations, to be used exclusively in the service of rational discourse about objective realities. Yet at the same time, terms look and sound, certainly to the non-initiated, a lot like *formulas*, and so the question arises: do terms also function as bearers of community loyalty?

The answer is obvious: yes. But we must be careful here. In natural language, there is a close, spontaneous connection

between the *meaning* of a word and its *appropriate use*, between its cognitive meaning and its rhetorical impact. In the case of terms, no such close connection prevails. Terms mean what they are defined to mean, and hence, the rules for their appropriate use are rather more *extrinsic* to their meaning (Verhaar 1963:133-34). Armed with this knowledge, we can easily see how terms function as bearers of community loyalty: terms bestow “membership in the profession,” *but only on those who both understand what they mean and have learned to use them appropriately.*

*“Displacement” of Terms*

Now it is one of the characteristics of our technological, highly literate age that “sounding educated” often means “using technical terminology”; we associate knowledge with expertise, with a panoply of technical terms—that is to say, with cognitive meaning as it is shared among professionals. But this also means that we live in an age in which many terms are liable to revert, as it were, to the realm of natural language. Terms are born at one or more removes from natural language; then, on account of the spread of education, the popularization of professional knowledge, and the authority of such knowledge, hundreds of terms find their way back into natural language. This chain of events creates a very real problem, which is connected with the relatively loose link between the meaning of a term and its appropriate use. When a term is used *outside the sphere of rational discourse*, some of the normal ambiguity and vagueness of natural language comes back to it, but in an uncontrolled way, “through the back door, dragging along a number of implicit assumptions not always easily detected” (Verhaar 1969:22).

There is nothing necessarily sinister in this, though it is true that advertisers, mellowspeakers, and ideologues abuse precisely this quality of terms in the interest of “hidden persuasion”: lots of prejudice and unexamined loyalty is expressed and promoted by means of computerese, sociologese, journalese, economese, nationalese, theologese. The problem is not that the quasi-natural-language use of terms conveys and creates non-professional loyalties, but that these loyalties are *hard to examine*. That is why operators, fast talkers, rhetoricians, and sophists—the well-intentioned as well as the unscrupulous, and also the merely mindless—love to use terms: there’s no loyalty like unexamined loyalty.

*Terminological Dogma and the Profession of Loyalty*

*Abusus non tollit usum* is one of the many maxims once taught in seminaries: the fact that something is abused is no reason for its abolition. While it is right to conclude from the foregoing that terminological doctrine is likely to be *correctly understood and used* only by a small minority of professionals, it is wrong to conclude that only professionals *may* use it. The Christian tradition has, at any rate, encouraged the opposite. Terminology has become part of the ordinary, that is to say, the live, oral-acoustical profession of faith.<sup>2</sup> What we should also conclude, however, is that the non-professional use of doctrinal terminology can be expected to involve not so much *meaning* or *precise understanding* as *profession of loyalty*, and that this will show in a certain lack of proportion between the term's (rhetorical) *significance* and its (cognitive) *meaning*.

This essay will test this hypothesis in the case of three terminological doctrinal definitions, viz. Jesus Christ's *consubstantiality* with the Father in Godhead; the change, by *transubstantiation*, of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ; and the *infallibility* of the ecclesiastical magisterium in matters of faith and morals.

*Homoousios*

Christ's "consubstantiality with the Father" occurs in the Creed promulgated at Nicaea in 325 A.D. It found its way into the so-called Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: "And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, [. . .] of one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father." It is part of the tradition of the undivided Church. The term has a very precise meaning: every predicate attributable to the Father must also be attributed to Christ, except "Father"; Christ is the Son. However, several observations are in order.

First, this clarity is the product of hindsight. Anyone familiar with the Arian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries knows how long it took before this precise focus was a matter of consensus. That Arius was wrong was, perhaps, not too hard to establish, but many found the mandatory use of a suspect technical term—*homoousios*—by way of remedy worse than the disease; while it took care of Arianism, it seemed to introduce new, equally undesirable errors. It took the best part of the fourth

century to discover, in the course of much confusing debate, just how restricted—if crucial—the area of affirmation covered by *homoousios* really was. And this lack of precision has continued. I have even met theologians who were less than entirely clear on the point.

Secondly, this lack of precision in the fourth and fifth centuries did not prevent the term from being abundantly used—mainly as an ecclesiastical loyalty-flag. But since the fourth century also witnessed the gradual establishment of orthodox Christianity as the sole religion (Theodosius, *Cunctos populos*, 380), the emperors, both of the West and of the East, developed a taste for using *homoousios* as a civil loyalty test, too. Similarly, on the other side, we have the professed Arianism of the Ostrogoths under Theodoric and his successors in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, over against the orthodoxy of the old Roman establishment, over which they held military sway. There is every reason to doubt the *strictly theological* significance of both.

This enormous *disproportion* between the (mainly oral) use of *homoousios* as a loyalty-marker and its (literate) use to express orthodoxy is paralleled by the use of *transubstantiation*, albeit with a difference.

### *Transubstantiation*

Transubstantiation defines the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The dogma was first laid down by the fourth Lateran Council of 1215. More than three centuries later, in 1551, the Council of Trent picks up the terminology, states that the substances of bread and wine are entirely changed into the substances of the Body and Blood of Christ, and adds that this change has been aptly and properly been called transubstantiation. Now the question is: What is the reason for the aptness and propriety of the term? What, in other words, is the target of the affirmation? The question is of great ecumenical significance, for acceptance of transubstantiation separates the Catholic Church from the Reformation.

It turns out that the *meaning* of “transubstantiation” is surprisingly restricted. Around the time of the fourth Lateran Council, “transubstantiation” and the affirmation of the real presence were simply “two sides of a single coin” (McCue 1967:92), with no affirmations implied about *the way in which* the real presence was thought to come about. In fact, authorities like

Peter of Capua and Lothar of Segni, who as Pope Innocent III was to preside over Lateran IV, considered the three prevalent theories about the coming about of the real presence (“consubstantiation,” “annihilation,” and “transubstantiation”<sup>3</sup>) a matter of theological opinion, even though they themselves favored the third explanation. “Transubstantiation,” therefore, at this point, had two meanings. In the *definition of Lateran IV*, it simply affirms the real presence, whereas as a *concept among theologians* it defined one way in which the real presence was responsibly thought to come about. It was only a generation later that Aquinas argued that annihilation and consubstantiation were both illogical and heretical, and only transubstantiation orthodox, but interestingly, *he did not quote Lateran IV in support of his position*. Fifty years later, Scotus and Ockam disagreed: they found consubstantiation intellectually more attractive than transubstantiation, but since Lateran IV had made the latter an article of faith, they viewed “*transubstantiation*” as *simply a matter of authoritative doctrine, not of conceptual understanding*. This, of course, goes a long way towards explaining why the only claim Trent made in regard to the *term* “transubstantiation” was that the real change of the eucharistic elements is “aptly and properly so named” (McCue 1967).

Transubstantiation is an intriguing term, a fact which helps to explain why it has functioned so prominently in theological debate and controversy, even down to our own day. At the same time, the *doctrine* of transubstantiation is *conceptually* feeble: while affirming the real presence, it does not provide insight into its structure. This, however, has not prevented it from being vigorously alleged as a mark of *loyalty*. In this regard, it both resembles *homoousios*, and differs from it: like *homoousios*, *transubstantiation* has functioned as a loyalty-badge, but whereas the former can be shown to have a very precise logic, the latter is little more than an authoritative term of considerable oral-acoustical weight to convey and commend the realism of the Catholic eucharistic tradition.

### *Infallible Magisterium*

Infallibility expresses the freedom from error in teaching faith and morals enjoyed by the Church’s teaching office, whether papal or collegial-episcopal, under certain conditions. The exercise of infallible papal magisterium was defined at the first Vatican Council in 1870; episcopal-collegial infallibility, while made much of

at Vatican II, has never been formally defined.

In a recent book, the nature of magisterial authority, both of the “non-definitive” and the “definitive” (infallible) kind, has been explained with exquisite clarity (Sullivan 1983). What is striking in the book, from a literary point of view, is the care with which its author argues the *limitations* of infallible magisterium—something which may worry some readers. What is especially striking is the way in which the author argues the limits of the *object* of infallibility. Thus, for instance, he denies that matters of natural law can ever be the object of infallible teaching by the ordinary universal magisterium—a position highly relevant to the interpretation of *Humanae vitae* (Sullivan 1983:119-52). Yet while stressing the limits of infallibility, the book clearly shows a high esteem for the teaching office, and it does everything to commend a responsible, mature attitude of respect and obedience, on the part of the faithful, towards all authentic teaching in the Church, whether non-definitive or definitive.

The reason behind this apparently negative tendency in the book is not far to seek: while the target area of infallibility as a defined doctrine is very narrow—and relatively few theologians and bishops are so keenly aware of this as Father Francis Sullivan—its non-professional use *as a loyalty-marker* is extremely broad. The latter use really bears out the characteristic Catholic faith-attitude. This attitude is not so much concerned with the precise definition of the pope’s infallibility, as with a particular practice of universal papal *jurisdiction* and episcopal governing authority, which is vastly more influential in everyday life in the Church than the infallibility-dogma. Again, as in the case of *homoousios* and *transubstantiation*, the term *infallibility* shows a big gap between its professional, literate use as a cognitive counter, and its natural-language, oral-acoustical use as a loyalty-marker.

### *Three Conclusions*

This essay has been written to illustrate how Catholic theology has gained enormously from the two influences at work in Karl Rahner’s theological achievement: the formal-literate and the rhetorical-literary. It has also been written to say that *in the latter area* theology stands to gain even more from the insights of scholars like Walter Ong if it wants to overcome its onesidedly cognitive biases, which are noticeable even in so literary a theologian as Karl Rahner. Hence, three conclusions to wind up.

First, dogma is a determination, or normative regulation, not only of *language*, in the form of canonized pronouncements authoritatively taught, but also of *speech*, in the form of formulary professions of faith and loyalty couched in “displaced” terminological language. The two must be carefully distinguished, so that both may be truly appreciated.

Secondly, there tends to be a notable gap between the *meaning* of terminological dogmatic language and its *use* in the ordinary profession of faith. This realization should influence the practice of theological hermeneutics: theologians should ask not just what certain dogmatic formulas mean, or meant, *in cognitive terms*, to theological professionals, but also *in the interest of what affective concerns* they are, or were, regularly used.

Thirdly, loyalty is fine, but the formulas that carry it are often the carriers of prejudice, too. This has special relevance to ecumenical theology. It is easier to change minds than habits of speech; different *ideas* can co-exist, side by side, in the same space, while different *voices* are harmonious only if they are “in synch.” In many areas of the faith, it is not *doctrine* that separates us, but *formulas*. They need not do so, provided the different formulas are given equal time, so that all involved can attune the ears of faith to them.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The *idea of Sprachregelung* is found even earlier, in an essay on *Mystici Corporis*, where the expression “determined terminology,” in a footnote, translates the German expression *terminologische Festlegung* (Rahner 1963:66, n. 83). Vols. I-X of the *Schriften zur Theologie* are covered by the *Rahner-Register*, a birthday present on the occasion of Rahner’s 70th (*Register* 1974). Vols. XI-XVI have (not quite complete) indexes; *Sprachregelung* does not occur in them. However, in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18 (the translation of most of *Schriften* XIII), the mistranslation “linguistic usage” reflects German *Sprachregelung* (Rahner 1984:25-28, 51, 110; Galvin 1984:367).

<sup>2</sup>This live profession has taken two characteristically *oral-acoustical* shapes. The first is liturgy; the Creed, including its technical terms, is recited and even sung at Sunday Eucharist. The second is catechesis (Gk. *katechesis*, meaning “instruction,” etymologically connected with “echo”), which reflects ancient question-and-answer teaching habits to cultivate loyalty as much as orthodoxy; cf. Lk 2, 46 and John 16, 30, where “questioning” means “teaching.”

<sup>3</sup>“Consubstantiation” explains the real presence by holding that, after the consecration, the substances both of the Body and Blood of Christ and of the bread and wine co-exist in union with each other. “Annihilation” explains it by positing a replacement of the substances of bread and wine—which are annihilated—by the substances of the Body and Blood of Christ. “Transubstantiation” explains it by stating that the substances of bread and wine are changed into the substances of Christ’s Body and Blood.

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## **Literacy, Commerce, and Catholicity: Two Contexts of Change and Invention**

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How many of our abbeys, which two hundred years ago were resplendent with grandeur and sanctity, are now the refuge of the slothful? The order is still powerful, but the stink of the cities is encroaching on our holy places, the people of God are now inclined to commerce and wars of faction; down below in the great settlements, where the spirit of sanctity can no longer find lodging, not only do they speak (of laymen nothing else could be expected) in the vulgar tongue, but they are already writing in it, though none of these volumes will ever come within our walls—fomenter of heresies as these volumes inevitably become!  
—Abbot Abo in *The Name of the Rose*

The pioneering work on orality and literacy by Walter Ong invites revisionist thinking about a great many things. Thus, a new “meta-discipline” is emerging which not only poses new questions but calls for re-exploring territories of learning that have seemed pretty well mapped out. Taking some leads from Ong, I would like to offer some preliminary reflections on an aspect of this re-exploration which seems to me to be especially timely: the relationship of Christianity to the world of commerce. While the chief concern of this paper can be so simply put, an adequate response to it cannot be. Nor can a paper of this sort do anything but begin to explore such a vast topic. Yet the current debate surrounding the U.S. Catholic bishops’ attempt to address the pastoral implications of the contemporary economic environment warrants a start. Shifts on the scale of orality and literacy have

shaped radically both Christian and commercial history in the past. Today we still live out the heritage of that past, but new dynamics in this process raise perennial issues in new forms. My present interest in this topic is essentially theological, and the *leitmotif* of the discussion which follows will be the theological concept of “catholicity.”

### *Catholicity and Culture*

Ong presents the catholicity of the Christian Church as a mandate to permeate and leaven human cultures wherever it finds them in time and space. This is not only because Christians must live in different times and places, but because the missionary character of the Christian gospel entails the work of bringing the entire cosmos back to God the Father through Jesus Christ (Ong 1959:63-64). As Ong has noted in numerous places (e.g., 1956:71-72; 1967b:152), the Greek concept of *katholikos* does not mean “the-same-everywhere” (like the Latin *universalis*, “turning as one”) but something rather more like “through-the-whole-ness.” What is at stake in “catholicity” is not uniformity but unity-in-diversity. On this view, the movement of divine providence is not something external to cosmic evolution; rather God works through the stages of that evolution from within. Christians can transform the world in grace only by living in particular cultures and bringing the vision of Christ to bear on them. Christians find themselves living in tension between two worlds, which Augustine called the City of God and the City of Man.

Since there is no detailed blueprint for human cultural evolution or for the precise Christian response in each instance, specific responses must be invented along the way. From a theological standpoint, the evolution of the media of communications from primary orality, through manuscript and print, to our present technological world of electronic secondary orality lies at the core of that process of invention. The stages in media history determine in important ways the stages of human history, and they structure fundamental stages in salvation history as well. Therefore the way Christians respond to these stages constitutes a significant dimension of Christian history (Ong 1969a).

Much of Ong’s work connects explicitly or implicitly with this history. I will explore here aspects of Christian responses to two shifts on the scale of literacy that triggered two major cultural

changes. The first is the commercial revolution in Western Europe in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. The second is the twentieth-century revolution in American Catholicism in the commercial culture of the United States. Neither of these situations is simple, and there are many dimensions of each that cannot be treated here. But the broad patterns of interrelationship are worthy of consideration.

I want to draw together some strands of Ong's work, to interrelate them in ways that he has not (so far as I am aware), to relate them to some other sources, and to offer some reflections on the current scene in American Catholicism relevant to the concerns of the bishops' letter.

### *Monasticism and the Medieval Commercial Revolution*

The connections between literacy and commerce go back to the invention of scripts. Connections between literacy and the Judaeo-Christian tradition reach back over 3000 years. While the legacy of the Holy Scriptures and the tradition received from earliest Christianity embody deep concern about matters that hinge on wealth and poverty, it was in the Middle Ages that commercial activity first seriously challenged the Western Christian imagination. It was a challenge that appears deeply related to changes in attitudes toward and new applications of the written word.

Ong has discussed numerous aspects of medieval literacy, its connections with classical rhetoric, its preoccupation with texts, the separation of Learned Latin from the vernaculars, and so forth (Ong 1958a). The part of the story which concerns us here begins with the fifth century when progressive waves of illiterate barbarians began to erode the western half of the Roman Empire, diluting the quotient of literacy and thereby all but destroying the remnants of Latin civilization. The Christian imagination responded with the invention of the monastery, governed by a written rule and committed to the preservation of texts.

The symbiosis between literacy and monastery in Western Europe from the sixth through the tenth centuries was so thorough that the distinction between "cleric" and "lay" became virtually synonymous with "literate" and "illiterate" (Baldwin 1971:32), although somewhat ironically the monastery seems to have been in part a counter-move against earlier tendencies toward eremitic isolationism. In any event the monastery linked the silence and solitude consistent with its literate mission to a residue of ancient

rhetoric which expressed itself in communal liturgical prayer. Monastic communality bespeaks oral roots, while monastic textuality fosters introspection. Attention to individuality and interiority became heightened.

Symbolically, the monastic life identified itself as the Garden of Eden, the Kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God, surrounded by the warring oral world, the barbarian city of man. The monks were drawn largely from the warrior class. They tamed themselves through life under solemn vows, although they retained a certain combativeness in their spiritual life. The vow of poverty amounted to a renunciation of physical violence and the booty which accompanied it (Little 1983:68); the vow of chastity freed them from bondage to the politics of marriage arranged by families and lords (Ong 1969a:13). Vows of obedience and stability provided a supportive, harmonious communal context for the pursuit of learning. Here monks could not only enter into that uniquely individual and inward journey to spiritual perfection modeled on Christ and his saints, but they could engage in communal liturgical combat for the salvation of souls. For the better part of five centuries, the monastic way of life remained the gravitational center of Latin Christendom. Despite its commitment to literacy, texts were few, precariously held, tediously multiplied, and the quest for stability rooted in authoritative antiquity reigned over a basically devotional and conservationist mentality.

The eleventh century initiated radical and dramatic change. A population explosion tripled the population of Europe by the end of the thirteenth century. This necessitated establishing new villages and clearing land that had long lain fallow. Building on earlier advances in technology (White 1962), particularly in agriculture with the invention of the iron plow and effective systems of crop rotation, these new fertile lands helped produce surplus crops which could be traded advantageously beyond the previously self-sufficient estates of lords and monks alike (Southern 1953:41-49). Periodic trade fairs developed into permanent towns, and regions began to specialize in their best products—wine, wool, textiles. Centers on navigable rivers and on sea-coasts grew into privileged commercial cities. The Crusades opened up dormant contacts with the East, bringing not only essential goods and luxuries from afar, but an influx of additional texts from antiquity. Commerce flourished on a scale previously unknown to barbarian Europe.

L. K. Little identifies the economic change as a shift from “gift economy,” where precious metals and even coinage are thought of as treasure, to “profit economy,” where money appears as a convenient and neutral medium of exchange (1983:3-18). Money replaced barter and made possible more abstract, more varied, and more distant transactions. Manor-house artisans moved to towns and cities where they could sell their crafts and skills for more than their subsistence. Merchants engaged in more complex and more long-range trading which required more sophisticated methods of accounting and marketing. More ambitious projects demanded full-scale arrangements for banking, contracts, credit, and investment with networks of brokers and agents spread around the continent. The written contract began to supplant interpersonal oral commitments as the “glue” of society.

Town and city governments grew as well and faced new challenges in civic management, building projects, the regulation of trade, tax collection, social problems, the adjudication of legal issues, the administration of criminal justice. All these things demanded new inventions which required the skills of literacy, and they exploded into a host of new roles: administrators, notaries, stationers, bureaucrats, architects, engineers, lawyers, bankers, educators—as well as new social arrangements to keep all these people working together. Likewise, artisans and skilled workers, including teachers, formed legal corporations called “universities” for mutual aid and protection and for the regulation of their trades (Baldwin 1971:22-23).

This new expansive order could not have been more antithetical to the serene timeless ideal of the monastery. Yet the monasteries themselves quickly became heavily involved in the new system, not only because they and the landed nobility were major owners of production but also because they became major sources of capital and credit. The monastic chamberlain, the manager of financial affairs, became more important than the cellarer, the monk who was responsible for storage of produce from monastery lands (Little 1983:65). Monasteries that became buzzing centers of commercial activity, even with towns growing at their gates, expressed their new-found wealth in building expansion and other forms of luxuriation.

Morris suggests that the monastery, with its somewhat blurred commitment both to the Christian scriptures and patristic writings and to pagan Stoic and neoplatonic writings as well, mirrored in its

spiritual withdrawal and pessimism toward the world the dismal actuality of barbarian feudal society (Morris 1972:20-36). Hence an ambivalence toward the world produced an enduring mistrust of Christian involvement coupled with an equally enduring contribution to secular advancement (Cf. Decarreux 1964). One could hardly expect from monks the comfortable symbiosis of world and faith signaled by the fourteenth-century Italian merchant, Francisco di Marto Datini, who headed his ledgers with the motto "For God and Profit" (Ong 1969a:14; Ong 1958b).

The seeds of reaction also began to sprout, reasserting the anti-secular side of monasticism. Early in the eleventh century complaints arose about the disruption of monastic serenity by the tumult of economic change. Reform-minded monks and abbots hearkened back to the eremitic ideal of the desert fathers who had a different stake in literacy, and they sought refuge from the madding crowd in remote hermitages. By the turn of the twelfth century, full-scale attacks were launched on what was seen as monastic complicity in a corrupt world. Virtually every aspect of urban commercial life was condemned, even its schools, even though the thinking of the reformers themselves registered elements of the new literacy. New monastic orders were formed—the Carthusians, the Premonstratensians, the Cistercians—in hardly accessible places in an effort to restore poverty, simplicity, and contemplation to monastic life (Little 1983:70-96).

In the religious polemic of the day, avarice had replaced pride as the deadliest of sins (Little 1983:36). Symbolically, the crisis had focused on biblical and traditional condemnations of usury, complexly related not only to the charging of interest but to the very legitimacy of a profit, credit, commercial economy. Neither the older monastic mind nor that of the monastic reformers could form a positive interpretation of the new circumstances, and the consequences were often tragic. People involved in urban and commercial activity dangled in a spiritual no-man's land, and even pious lay men and women who caught the spirit of reform and sought voluntary poverty and communal living were subjected to harrassment, even excommunication or execution, at the hands of civil and religious authorities (Little 1983:113-45).

Most damaging of all was the rise of anti-semitism. European Jews, who had gravitated toward the new economy along with their Christian compatriots, were increasingly forced to perform certain economic functions proscribed for Christians.

Where they had enjoyed a lack of discrimination in the pre-commercial age, Jews were now persecuted for engaging in unholy work at the same time as they were required to do so. A figure so prestigious as Abbot Peter the Venerable can wonder “whether a Jew is a human being.” And Bernard of Clairvaux was scarcely more enlightened. This pattern became a lasting part of European culture (Little 1983:42-57).

The rise of commercial culture and the negative reaction to it continued into the thirteenth century when new inventions offered hope of at least a partial resolution of the conflict. During the first part of the feudal age, and for good reason given the chaotic state of worldly affairs, the Christian life had hardened into a form adamantly resistant to change. But the new circumstances called for a breakthrough, and it came signally with the appearance of the friars—the Dominicans and the Franciscans—who, in their distinctive ways, invented and affirmed a new understanding of religious life and embraced the new secular literacy associated with the commercial world, the literacy of the schools, scholasticism.

The history of scholasticism, its development and its manifestations, is too complex a subject to be treated here, but we can note a few ways in which its literacy differed from the literacy of monasticism. Its often-remarked disputatiousness made it more congenial to the world of commercial haggling and negotiation. While still wedded to the texts of antiquity, it typically took a more analytic approach, from the topical organization of sentences (positions, authoritative opinions) transmitted from the ancients to the construction of *summae* which run the gamut of questions for dispute (Baldwin 1971:82-97). Despite its avowed reverence for the past, a new stress on individuality and reasoned explanation became evident (Morris 1972). It was more aggressively empirical in focus, more mobile in its interest in the advance of knowledge as well as its preservation, qualities fostered especially by Dominican attention to newly rediscovered works of Aristotle.

The scholasticism of the High Middle Ages made great advances in logical precision, laying the foundations for modern science and commerce (McLuhan 1951:33). But most important for present purposes, the friars took up study and secular learning in order to wade into the cultural currents of the day. They studied to prepare for preaching in the marketplace, they entered the schools to debate theological and moral issues which the new order had generated, and they affirmed the widening world of vernacular



discourse. Reflective giants like Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and many others, provided a spiritual and intellectual basis for a life that could be both deeply Christian and thoroughly involved in commercial culture (Little 1983:184-96).

The monks cannot be held accountable for all the evils of the period. They had a point: avarice was running rampant. Nor can the friars be credited with all the good. But the two groups typify the chasm that existed between commercial culture and ecclesiastical attitudes. Despite the vigorous persistence of old attitudes, change did come, often quite rapidly. If Pope Lucius III, a Cistercian in his early days, could call for a crusade against pious textile workers in 1184, just fifteen years later Innocent III would give the same group official sanction and elevate a merchant, Omobono of Cremona, to sainthood (Little 1983:215).

From the standpoint of literacy's drive toward interiorized orderliness, the business person's character is a kind of secularized monasticism (Ong 1969a:13). Seen against the background of the tribal barbarian world, the monastery is a blow against traditionalism. Ironically, monasticism's symbolic attachment to stability rendered it unable to acknowledge its own psychological progeny. The itinerant friars were able to re-imagine, as was Ignatius Loyola in the sixteenth century with his highly interiorized and individualized spiritual exercises. In any event, the encounter between the religious life of the three vows and commercial culture in the High Middle Ages illustrates Christianity's struggle with its catholicity. It was a struggle which involved successes and failures, a learning process by which Christians discovered how to incarnate the faith into those new circumstances. Adaptation is a risky business because it involves treading the narrow path between selling out to the spirit of the times (overadapting) and failing to address the issues of the time (underadapting). Either is a failure from the viewpoint of catholicity. The adaptation which monasticism represented in the early Middle Ages was enormously successful both from the viewpoint of Christianity and from the viewpoint of civilization in the West. But when that embodiment of Christianity failed to meet the challenge of the commercial revolution, new and seemingly antithetical means for realizing itself in the new culture of commerce emerged. As representatives of official Christianity, Franciscan and Dominican friars not only addressed the challenge in their time, they did groundwork which continues to affect the destiny of the globe. Their contribution,

occasioned by the failure of the older arrangement to be catholic enough, is one of catholicity's great success stories.

*Catholicity, Commerce, and Literacy in America Today*

It would appear at first glance that catholicity is more easily dealt with in the Middle Ages than elsewhere since virtually everyone was "Catholic." This is particularly true if one takes the meaning of "catholic" to be "universal," as is usual in common parlance and most dictionaries. Yet the historical record paints a different picture. It takes only a modest amount of historical reflection to realize that Christianity's "catholicity," like the other marks of unity, holiness, and apostolicity canonized by the Council of Nicaea, admits of considerable variation in degree and form. If one understands these marks as homogeneous qualities statistically assigned always and everywhere, rather than as indications of movement through time and place, they can occasion misunderstanding and even cultural or religious chauvinism. Catholicity describes the gospel's imperative to elevate and humanize every human situation. As such it becomes a standard of judgment, a criterion by which all Christians must measure their performance always and everywhere. It stands as a permanent challenge to individuals or groups of Christians who might be tempted to regard their own practice as ultimate or unqualifiedly normative.

I chose to begin this discussion of catholicity, commerce, and literacy in the context of the Middle Ages rather than in the Renaissance and Reformation for several reasons. First, following on Morris' argument, the contours of the "modern" world lie not only in the Renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in the renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth (Morris 1972:5ff.). And Ong has extensively demonstrated how medieval manuscript Latinity helped make the later Renaissance possible. The sharp opposition between "medieval" and "modern" may reflect the propaganda of later ages more than it reflects actuality.

Second, since the Reformation the term "catholic" has tended to be used as a sectarian identification rather than as a criterion of performance applicable to all sectors. While such usage reflects actuality in some ways, it makes the applicability of catholicity to all sectors difficult to get at.

Third, one of the hallmarks of American Catholicism, according to Ong, has been its tendency to select medieval

European Christendom as the epitome of Christian faith and culture. James Walsh's apologetic work, *The Thirteenth, The Greatest of Centuries*, published in 1913, is a classic embodiment of this symbolization. While it may have been serviceable for the Catholic-Protestant polemic in the United States, its failure to deal with the medieval economic-spiritual crisis I have described shows that symbolization to be horribly out of touch with historical fact. Its backward-looking stance, like that of the twelfth-century monastic reformers, deflects attention from catholicity's essentially forward thrust and increases the danger of mishandling the crises of the present.

Fourth, in today's rapidly globalizing world of electronic culture, identifying Christianity with its European embodiments of any age can seriously hamper efforts to adapt Christian responses appropriately to contemporary shifts in literacy and commerce. We are aware that earlier adaptations in manuscript and print culture are complexly related to and grow out of one another in various ways. But each was a new and unique circumstance of adaptation. We might learn a great deal about the challenge of catholicity from the successes and failures of earlier Christians, but we will not find in any previous era—biblical, medieval, or reformational—a detailed blueprint for meeting our own challenges.

The debate and discussion surrounding the drafts of the "U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," with their emphasis on dialogue and participation by all members of the society, draws attention to the need for ongoing reassessment of the role of Catholics in America. Without precisely stating it or attempting to understand it, the document nevertheless registers significant changes over the last fifty years or so in the status of Catholics who belong to literate commercial America. This situation gives new urgency and new currency to attempts to understand the interfaces among catholicity, literacy, and commerce.

Literacy in general, but especially print literacy, encourages a tendency toward standardization and a tendency toward homogenization. This is evident in Ramist efforts to subject all knowledge to a single method which assumes knowledge is homogeneous, fostering the illusion that reality is something rather simple and straightforward, needing only to be properly organized for distribution (Ong 1971:142-64). Ong notes how compelling this notion was for sixteenth-century bourgeois merchants and artisans

whose interest in learning was governed by a kind of intellectual commercialism, knowledge as a commodity subordinated to practical concerns (Ong 1971:165-89). Their consumer-minded approach to education is still a prominent feature of American culture and consciousness, not only in education but in religion and other areas as well.

We know today that things are neither so simple nor so homogeneous. Not only because of the legacy of Romanticism but also because of the knowledge accessibility and abundance brought about by electronic technology, the very notion of homogeneity has been greatly eroded as an ideal. Part of the reason for this erosion lies with the heightened historical sense which comes from an immensely more circumstantial knowledge of the past, with its complexity and diversity, and the correlative effect such knowledge has on secular and religious consciousness. We know for example that efforts to standardize and homogenize Christianity played a major role in its fragmentation. Standardization works contrary to catholicity because it renders a thorough and ongoing leavening difficult if not impossible (Ong 1967a:262-86; 1967b:171-73).

The history of Catholicism in America is complex and variegated, often too little known by American Catholics themselves. It has medieval roots in several ways, and any decent assessment of the catholicity of American Catholicism must take that history into account, its successes and failures as well as its contributions to such critical matters as Vatican II's decree on religious freedom and the shaping of Catholic life in a pluralistic society. The American presence, it is worth noting, was felt not only in the work of Vatican II, but even as a tempering and moderating influence at Vatican I (Hennesey 1970:40-42). But we must limit ourselves here to some general observations about post-immigrant American Catholicism in commercial America.

In a variety of significant ways, American Catholics have drunk deeply of the American spirit from colonial times, even though a reflective awareness of that fact has not been evident in the popular mind for most of the twentieth century (O'Brien 1972:26-50). Let us consider this in relation to literacy and then in relation to commerce.

American society has been unremitting in its preoccupation with literacy. We declared our independence in writing before having a revolution. We are committed to a written constitution as the cornerstone of our political integrity. We continuously take

the pulse of our literacy with SAT scores, studies of functional illiteracy, the effectiveness of writing and reading programs in our schools; we even identify our relationship to the latest technology in terms of “computer literacy.” Such concerns reflect the foundations without which American society and its contributions would be impossible, including the pervasive commercial culture toward which much of this literacy is directed.

American Catholics have not been immune to the effects of this milieu. They have in this century tended to think of their massive commitment to parochial and collegiate education as a normal circumstance for Catholics, yet nothing like it exists or has ever existed anywhere else in the history of Catholicism (Ong 1956:7-8). This is ironic since a major argument against separate schools for Catholics in the nineteenth century was that they would retard the Americanization of immigrant Catholics. As a peculiarly American invention, these schools have greatly facilitated that Americanization, and as such have been an instrument of catholicity (cf. O’Brien 1972:93-99; Hennesey 1970:37-39).

Ong characterized his discussion of American Catholicism in the 1950’s in terms of “frontiers” and “crossroads,” images which are nothing less than prophetic given events during the decade following the publication of his two books, *Frontiers in American Catholicism* (1957) and *American Catholic Crossroads* (1959). While noting exceptions to his charge, he struck at the general lack of reflective awareness on the part of American Catholics of the distinctive character and role of the church here as both Catholic and American. He notes, for example, a frozen symbolization of Europe as a recent past from which they escaped. This aspect of “the American Catholic complex,” something shared with many other Americans, was coupled with a romantic idealization of medieval Europe, the deeper past, as the pinnacle of Christian culture. This latter feature could be understood as a largely defensive maneuver by a peasant folk finding itself in an urban slum and faced with open or veiled hostility from the Protestant middle class: the glorious pre-existence that gives assurance of a glorious rising from present degradation. It also encouraged the idea that insofar as the “modern” world is no longer “medieval,” it is thereby “post-Christian” (Ong 1967b:147-65). Whatever the actual facts, immigrant Catholics (who were, incidentally, by no means the majority among immigrants) were often seen as a threat to the American way of life. A significant part of that threat as

perceived, apart from fantasies about a papal takeover, seems to have lodged with Catholics' lack of education (Maynard 1953:3-23, 61-74).

Catholic education, in keeping with a more general tenor in the American church, found itself with a bifurcated mission. On the one hand it sought to preserve the faith by an excessive dependence upon and deference toward European sources either from the remote past (such as the scholasticism of St. Thomas Aquinas) or from more modern sources which seemed safe because they had come from Catholic Europe. There is irony here, given St. Thomas' role in adapting Christianity to new cultural circumstances. Perhaps on another level it is appropriate insofar as Catholic immigrants retained elements of a peasant mentality for which neo-scholasticism provided a transition to the ratiocination required by life in a pluralistic, commercial, scientific, technological culture.

On the other hand, Catholic education had to overcome suspicion at home by inculturating immigrant populations as quickly and completely as possible. The difficulty is not that inculturation was unsuccessful, but rather that the bifurcated mindset prevented this inculturation from being consciously perceived and critically attended to.

Ong devotes attention to the dangers that accompany attempts to live out programs that do not square up with actuality, but he also argues for what he calls "the apostolate of the secular arts and sciences," which he sees rooted in the very substance of catholicity. Far from being inimical to revealed religion or even neutral, secular learning, research, academic excellence, and even a pluralistic cultural setting can serve to advance God's designs for the cosmos and human destiny within it (1959:118-56). Developments in technology and communications make possible greater and more intelligent management of human affairs. Despite difficulties and dangers, these developments offer new possibilities for the human person because they are themselves human inventions, and they call for a thoughtful and judicious assimilation and leavening by persons who claim devotion to a God from whom their very notion of personhood derives.

But there is another dimension to the question that is pertinent here. If the business of America is business, as Calvin Coolidge said, the business of American Catholics is to a great extent business as well. When commerce broke out in the Middle

Ages, it had to find its Christian interior in a new *saeculum*. Similar adjustments occurred during the Renaissance and the Reformation. Now American Catholics, assimilated as they are into the American mainstream, confront the question of catholicity in new ways. In commercial America, the literate drives for independence, personal and career success, and self-knowledge, things often commercially exploited, have largely eroded immigrant ethnic kinship with Europe's feudal past, weakening core elements in American Catholic self-symbolization.

We have seen the Christian-commercial tension in the Middle Ages. It continued into the next Renaissance. Ong notes that Ramism spread chiefly among merchants and artisans with Calvinist tendencies (Ong 1971:165). Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans tended not to take to Ramism, not because of religious concerns but because they lacked the mindset found in markedly commercial settings. Methodism also had Ramist affinities (Ong 1953:235-38); New England, as Perry Miller has shown, was just such a markedly commercial setting (Miller 1939), and the characteristics typical of Ramism have shaped American consciousness deeply.

Among the characteristics of this Ramist-commercial mindset, we can note a concern for proof (closely associated with arithmetic and geometry), for keeping accounts balanced, for itemizing and inventorying. It is statistical, concrete, resistant, sensible, orderly, objective, impersonal. This fits well with the Ramist penchant for methodical argument, the tendency to treat knowledge as a quantity or commodity to be conveyed, in short to organize knowledge visually and diagrammatically as in a ledger. This mindset merges well with the qualities Ong finds in the American business environment: utilitarianism, idealism, optimism, naivete, and "uncanny know-how" (1956:24-34). None of this fits well with a peasant's world-symbolization.

The medieval university and the humanist college both arose in commercial contexts. In America as nowhere else, university work and research carried on in the business world itself merges commerce with the study of natural and social sciences. Catholic colleges and universities in particular, partly because of their bifurcated mission mentioned earlier and their often proclaimed commitment to liberal education, insist on a required mix for business majors of modern language, literature, philosophy, religious studies, and natural and social science, along with courses in

accounting and market analysis. The effect of this is to people the business world with individuals — with men and increasingly with women — who have exposure to higher education.

It is here in this expansive world of lunch clubs, boosterism, and enterprise that Ong found also “an apostolate of the business world.” In contrast to the medieval situation, today’s American Catholic Christian can enter the commercial world not under a cloud of suspicion, but with the endorsement of the Church’s own system of education. Ong notes that this has allowed the Church to penetrate the secular world on a scale unthinkable in Europe, where the Church’s ordinary relationship with the secular order has been through the state. Certainly, whatever else may be said about it, the election of John F. Kennedy — literate, urbane, Catholic, scion of commercial success — symbolized for American Catholics ascendancy to full status as citizens.

But what about the condition of “catholicity” in these circumstances? It is not easy to get one’s bearings when the circumstances are characterized by such rapid and radical change. A century ago, most Catholics were wage workers, and they remained so until World War II. Since then thousands of college-educated Catholics have graduated into every corner of the commercial world. Just seven years before Kennedy’s election, Theodore Maynard described the prospect of a Catholic president as “hardly foreseeable” (Maynard 1953:5). And just two years before John XXIII became pope and announced his plans for a second Vatican Council, Ong, noting the discrepancy between the deficient American Catholic self-understanding and its actual evolution into the future, described a malaise in the American church which was “like the malaise of adolescence, full of promise, and rather likely to end in a spurt of productivity” (1956:9). No one could have predicted the extent to which both the malaise and the productivity would be extended into the ensuing three decades. And no one can predict in detail where it will go from here. At the risk of oversimplifying a situation that is complex and still in transition, let me hazard a few observations.

The bishops’ pastoral appears to have brought to the surface a rearrangement of vectors in American Catholicism today. It seems to assume a changed status for American Catholics. It addresses them as having economic power along with a wider sphere of economic agents — other Christians, Jews, believers and non-believers. It averts to no religious identification for the poor,



but calls instead for a preferential option on their behalf, for a new experiment in economic democracy in which all have a fully just level of participation. In building its case it draws on the biblical tradition shared by Christians and Jews, and on the Catholic natural law tradition which has been a major point of access to American political life for Catholics. It stands firmly on the principle of catholicity in proclaiming the solidarity of the human race, the dignity of the human person, and the demands of justice that flow therefrom.

It is not surprising that the document has been met with very little enthusiasm from the Catholic community at large. Most American Catholics have very little experience with reacting actively to episcopal documents, especially when they run upwards of forty thousand words. The bishops themselves will admit that they are still feeling their way through the more independent role given them by Vatican II.

But there has been considerable heated and polarized response among Catholic and non-Catholic business, political, and academic persons to the bishops' invitation to dialogue and consultation in the drafting process. The entire scenario presents a new wrinkle in American Catholic life.

Before Vatican II "liberal" and "conservative" were not prevalent categories for discussing church life. If used at all by lay people, they would have perhaps referred to clerics who were loose or strict constructionists within a widely agreed-upon ecclesiastical consciousness. Hence one could find a characteristically conservative Catholicism functioning in a world of immense practical innovation in church life and very successful adaptation to the secular culture.

Since Kennedy's election and the Vatican Council, the markers of separation, of Catholic difference, have crumbled in various directions. Educationally, politically, and economically Catholics are part of the mainstream. The terms "liberal" and "conservative," as applied to religious attitudes, now almost inevitably carry overtones from politics that would have surprised earlier generations. Moreover, Catholicism has become a major media event in the electronic global village for Catholics and non-Catholics alike, heightening both a sense of Catholic transnationalism and of the distinctiveness of being American Catholic and Catholic American. In this globalized setting, religious and secular issues are compressed, and Catholics can find

themselves openly and publicly debating U.S. foreign and domestic policies on religious grounds. They find themselves propelled into kinships with other Christians, with Jews and other religious and non-religious persons. The resulting polarities even among Catholics themselves readily focus on global polarities in the economic and political spheres, since the heart of the electronic global revolution beats with commercial rhythms.

Although there are many factors involved, one might characterize the change effected by elevated literacy, increased commercial participation, and electronically globalized awareness on the part of American Catholics as a vernacularization of consciousness analogous to what happened in the medieval situation: events outstrip the received symbol system, and bifurcation becomes polarization.

Liberals and conservatives seem to have handled the transition differently. For conservatives, the bishops' entrance into the secular order seems to be an intrusion. They appeal to the tradition of scholastic natural law which holds for a large measure of secular autonomy. The religious realm should form individual moral conscience and leave implementation to individuals wherever possible. Since the religious and secular involve different domains, radical renovation of the religious (which is the guardian of eternal concerns) seems somewhat factitious. Hence the charge that the bishops lack expertise in economic matters. Ecclesiastical medievalism expresses time-honored truth. This posture fits well with the traditional separation of church and state in the American experience.

On the other hand, the liberal charge commonly has been that the bishops have not gone far enough. Riding the winds of three decades of change and building on the foundation of renewed biblical perspectives, they call for a prophetic challenge to the prevailing culture. Sensing that commerce is at best a concession to human weakness and at worst the occasion of greed and the abuse of power, they resonate with the monastic reformers in search of the kingdom of God on earth.

These are, of course, stereotypes. But they are stereotypes that enjoy currency in contemporary American Catholic symbolization. Both of them embody aspects of the medieval controversy and reflect the breakup of the older American Catholic synthesis. Each has its own blind spots, each its own areas of moral tolerance and outrage. From the standpoint of catholicity, a

new leavening and a new synthesis is demanded even if it defies our present powers of imagination. In the emerging world globalized by electronic technology, a world fragmented by poverty and wealth, nationalistic antagonisms, posturing superpowers, and polarized political, economic, and religious ideologies, it is as difficult for us to see the outcome as it was for the people of medieval Christendom to imagine their own future. One wonders what good and what evil our efforts will set in motion.

Yet the history of Christian catholicity is also a witness to how Christ's saving power can be brought into the real human world where salvation is needed, and as such it is an occasion of hope. Perhaps the most important thing the bishops have done is to put forth a long-range agenda for invention. It will certainly involve a better understanding of our actual past and the symbolizations which have come from that past. It involves as well a deeper understanding of what Christian existence means in a technological, commercial world such as ours. It is, indeed, the form here and now taken by the mystery and problem of the incarnation. Perhaps with Walter Ong's help we have made a start toward a new historical conjunction of catholicity, literacy, and commerce.

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## **Coming of Age in the Global Village**

**James M. Curtis**

I wish to analyze in this paper three acts of violence directed against public figures: Arthur Bremer's attempt to assassinate George Wallace in 1972; John Hinckley, Jr.'s attempt to assassinate President Reagan in 1982; and Mark David Chapman's unfortunately successful attempt to kill John Lennon in 1981. Each of these three acts was inextricably bound up with popular culture, and the sensibilities of the psychotic young men who committed them were formed by popular culture.

Yet as of now we have no way of discussing or analyzing this relationship—much less of understanding or ameliorating it. To explain this situation, I turned to my favorite of Walter Ong's books, *The Presence of the Word* (1967), where Father Ong reminds us that "The word moves toward peace because the word mediates between person and person. No matter how much it gets caught up in currents of hostility, the word can never be turned into a totally warlike instrument. So long as two persons keep talking, despite themselves they are not totally hostile" (192). It would seem, then, that if we could find a way to analyze popular culture—and not simply praise or condemn it—we might be able to change its effects.

Indeed, there is some evidence that this is the case. One psychological study (Leyens et al. 1976) showed that subjects who were taught to perceive violent movies aesthetically—in terms of composition and focus, for example—showed little if any change in their behavior after watching such movies. By contrast, a control group did become more aggressive after watching the same movies. Another study (Huesman et al. 1983) showed that children were hardly affected at all by violent television if they learned to write essays about them. Since the word moves toward peace, this is only what we would expect.

Let us consider whether an application of some of the principles which have informed the thought of Walter Ong may not help us begin an irenic dialogue about popular culture. For one thing, the three violent acts which I mentioned were committed by men and directed against men, and thus may be considered perverted forms of the agonistic structures, or ritualized contest, which Father Ong has discussed in *Fighting for Life* (1981). Ranging widely over the psychological, sociological, and anthropological literature which has appeared since Bruno Bettelheim's analogous *Symbolic Wounds* (1955), Father Ong has shown that such behavior has deep biological roots, and appears virtually everywhere in world culture. In traditional oral cultures, agonistic structures often serve as a rite of passage through which young men come of age, and achieve an identity as adults. They thus involve a twofold movement of enduring hardship and attaining some worthwhile things, such as status in one's society, by doing so.

Yet agonistic structures do evolve. As Father Ong puts it, "The fate of agonistic structures is tied in with the history of verbalization, and in particular with the technologizing of the word . . . . The conversion or technologizing of verbal performance gives the word and thought itself marvelous new powers and restructures the psyche" (1981:26). Since the effect of literacy is to foster the privatization of consciousness, what happens to agonistic structures, which are a form of socialization?

In *Fighting for Life*, Ong comments that, "The art of oratory, always highly agonistic, atrophied spectacularly after the advent of print" (26). Print changed other forms of verbal expression as well. The rise of the vernacular languages of Europe, associated as it was with printing, made Latin less useful. In his article "Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite," Ong has argued that "when Latin passed out of vernacular usage, it created a sharp distinction between those who knew it and those who did not" (1971:119). As a knowledge of Latin became increasingly irrelevant, it took on more and more meaning as a puberty rite, as an agonistic experience.

Puberty rites did not die out as fewer and fewer boys studied Latin, however. Although he does not use the term, Neil Postman has suggested in a recent book that the acquisition of literacy in any language, not just Latin, is a form of puberty rite. He interprets literacy as having created childhood in the sense that in

a literate society children who want to know what adults know must learn to read. Moreover, “when one learns to read, one learns a peculiar way of behaving of which physical immobility is only one feature. Self-restraint is a challenge not only to the body but to the mind as well” (1982:76).

In “Romantic Difference and the Poetics of Technology” (1971:255-83) and in other works as well, Father Ong has shown that the long-lasting stage in the evolution of consciousness which we know as Romanticism is an expression of a literate mentality. Wordsworth’s attack on the use of oral commonplaces serves as only one example of this change. Another example is the famous final line of “She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways”: “Lucy’s in her grave and, oh, the difference to me.” Notice that Wordsworth does not develop a comparison or a conceit to express his grief, as an earlier poet might have done; he internalizes it, as we would expect a literate person to do. The nature of his grief remains unknown, just as Lucy herself remained unknown in life.

We all know that the Romantics promoted a cult of spontaneity, and praised childlike naturalness; in the present context, it would appear that they were implicitly denying the need for agonistic experiences, and indeed the need for maturation of any kind. The Romantic admiration for naturalness and spontaneity has a democratizing quality, for it assumes that we are all natural, spontaneous—at least in the beginning. Thus, such Romantic attitudes spread rapidly in America, the most democratic country, and became an essential element of American consciousness.

If Romanticism de-emphasized agonistic experiences, and if America is a profoundly Romantic country, then it follows that American culture—literate as it was from the very beginning—will de-emphasize agonistic experiences and the need for the evolutionary maturation of the ego.

These remarks may help to create a context in which we can understand the meaning of television, as it fosters secondary orality in America. Since the Romantics praised the childlike quality of the human psyche, they might well have taken to television. Television, is, after all, accessible to all. Unlike pictographic or alphabetic literacy, “television offers a fairly primitive but irresistible alternative to the linear and sequential logic of the printed word and tends to make the rigors of a literate education irrelevant. . . . Unlike books, which vary greatly in their lexical



and syntactical complexity and which may be scaled according to the ability of the reader, the TV image is available to everyone, regardless of age” (Postman 1982:79). Children can watch television from the age of thirty-six months, and do not significantly improve in their ability to watch television. If we associate the Romantics with childlike states of mind expressed in the vernacular, then television is a profoundly Romantic medium.

This profoundly Romantic medium has made all parts of the world instantly accessible to each other, and has thus collapsed it into a global village, to use Marshall McLuhan’s term. Yet the American part of this global village has a consciousness processed through and through by literacy. It tends to believe that maturation is unnecessary and probably undesirable, and thus it tends not to produce fully developed narratives of maturation or fully developed agonistic structures. As a case in point, Leslie Fiedler (1960) has noted the frequency with which children appear as major characters in American fiction from Mark Twain’s *Huck Finn* to J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*. It is hardly surprising, then, that clinical psychologist Dan Kiley has concluded that “All across our land, our male children are refusing to grow up” (1983:24). Kiley considers this trend so important that he calls it the Peter Pan Syndrome, after Sir James Barrie’s character who said “I want always to be a little boy and to have fun” (22). No one conspired to produce the Peter Pan Syndrome, for it has appeared as a response to our historical situation. As Kiley puts it, “during the past ten or fifteen years, political events and media strategy have thrust our male children into a monumental sex role conflict” (30). How, then, do boys come of age in the global village?

One answer is that they do so through televised sports. As Father Ong has said, “Millions of males across the world know virtually no subject of sustained conversation other than spectator sports” (1981:152). It is certainly true that many American boys choose as role models men who play games. Although spectator sports may have an allegorical quality, they do not provide a narrative, and their relevance as models for behavior is thus limited.

In fact, sociologist David P. Phillips (1983) has linked televised championship boxing matches to homicide. He has shown that for the period 1973-1978 it is consistently the case that three days after a nationally televised championship boxing match in

which a white male lost, there was a statistically significant increase in homicides of white males. Similarly, three days after a nationally televised championship boxing match in which a black male lost, there was a statistically significant increase in homicides of black males. Social psychologists call this phenomenon a “priming effect” because its results are brief; boxing matches presumably trigger violent acts in men who already have a high level of aggression (Berkowitz 1984).

Phillips’ important and provocative research does not, however, explain the assassinations of celebrities, which usually require careful planning over a period of time. To explain these horrendous events, we need to notice a paradox about television. The easy access of television—no special skills are needed to watch it—does not translate into easy access *to* television. Yet once one does achieve access to television for a while, that access becomes generalized in such a way as to make the original achievement irrelevant. To take only one of many possible examples, former baseball player Joe DiMaggio receives a handsome salary for making television commercials for Mr. Coffee coffeemakers. He can do this not because he has any special expertise about coffee or coffeemakers but because he is a celebrity. Although he achieved fame with genuine achievements as an athlete, there is no direct relationship between his achievements and his commercials. People like DiMaggio resemble those products whose labels proclaim “As Advertised on TV.” To see something advertised on television, and to know that millions of other people have seen it advertised on television, is to know that it has become part of the national consciousness. To paraphrase what Saussure once said of language, such a product is a social fact. Similarly, people who frequently appear on television also become social facts—regardless of what they do. It was this situation to which Daniel Boorstin was referring a number of years ago when he commented that “The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness” (1962:57). That is to say, television tends to make agonistic structures irrelevant.

To understand why television produces celebrities in Boorstin’s sense of the word, we may have recourse to etymology. In Russian, the verb “to turn on,” as in “to turn on the television set,” is *vklyuchit’*. This verb also has meaning, still in active use, “to include,” and is derived from the noun *klyuch*, “key.” Thus, to turn something on is to include yourself in it, to use a key to

enter something. When we turn on the television set, we in effect include it in the larger electrical circuit of the house.

When we turn on a television set, we literally include it in a circuit, but we also do something else as well; we are acknowledging our exclusion from the human circuit formed by the people whom we see on television. It is this sense of exclusion from the *polis* for which print media such as the infamous *National Inquirer* compensate. They form secondary circuits which include Americans, especially working-class Americans, in the gossip going around in the global village. This is, of course, the function of chatty headlines such as “What Johnny’s Really Paying—It’s More Than You Were Told.” Although celebrities despise the *National Inquirer* and others like it, these publications perform a useful service by offering their readers the feeling of being included.

For as of now, they do not feel included. After all, some people become well-known without enduring any apparent agonistic struggle and without achieving anything notable except through the media. Johnny Carson and Dan Rather, for example, are known; they exist in the consciousness of millions of people whom they have never met. There’s the rub, for television is a one-way medium which does not allow the interaction of dialogue. Director Peter Bogdanovich articulated the psychological tensions which result from the lack of reciprocity between celebrities and their admirers when he wrote, “It’s a feeling I’ve had with several movie stars I’ve met—knowing them so much better than they could ever know me—and finding it impossible to satisfactorily bridge the gap” (1973:100). Indeed, we know celebrities so much better than they will ever know us; this inescapable fact does create an unbridgeable gap. To explain the significance of celebrities, I propose a new meaning for the verb “to mediate,” a meaning which helps to explain the cycle of violence directed at public figures beginning with the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 and (one may hope) culminating with John Hinckley, Jr.’s attempt on President Reagan’s life in 1982.

The verb “to mediate” obviously comes from the Latin *medium* and thus it usually means “to be in the middle of something,” as when someone mediates a labor dispute. We need an additional meaning for this word, a meaning which derives from the meaning of “medium” in the phrase “communications medium.” This new meaning will describe the way communications media make people well known, with no reference to the reason for what

Boorstin calls their “well-knownness.” Television makes celebrities out of people by giving them media attention; it mediates them. We may thus speak of people such as Joe DiMaggio as mediated. DiMaggio’s career as a spokesperson for Mr. Coffee shows that to become a mediated person in a highly technologized society is to acquire great power and potentially great wealth.

A very persuasive example of this principle recently appeared in an article on the people who make large sums of money on the lecture circuit. In it, James S. Kunen advises his readers: “If you want to make it in the speaking game, you have to remember one thing: *Nobody comes to hear the speech*. People come to hear celebrities, to be in the same room with them” (1984:355). And who are these celebrities? An agent at a speaker’s bureau commented, “To the extent you’re on TV, that’s the extent you’re known” (*idem*). Here, as with so much else in American life today, the medium is the message.

This situation has important implications for our society; moreover, all of these implications are unforeseen, as the implications of media change usually are. Consider, for example, the social stratification implied in the phrase “global village.” The village in a true oral society usually has a clearly defined hierarchy. Similarly, in our age of secondary orality television has created a quasi-feudal society which consists of two classes, mediated people and unmediated people. Since it is television which creates the global village, in effect only mediated people live in the global village; only they are included in the network. Everyone else is on the outside looking in.

However, this mediated hierarchy of secondary orality exists without what we might call the conceptual infrastructure of the hierarchies in oral society. That is to say, the hierarchy formed by mediated people exists in defiance of the supposedly democratic principles of American society, according to which everyone is equal. Unmediated people simply are not, and cannot be, equal to mediated people in America today; they have not entered the circuit of social facts. To be sure, American society has never been as egalitarian as people liked to think it was, and hierarchies have always existed in it. The difference is that this mediated hierarchy is constantly on display. It provides constant proof that not everyone is equal, that not everyone belongs in the circuit.

Father Ong enunciated one of the principles of his life’s work when he wrote: “It is through the ability to communicate that

man achieves a sense of belonging” (1971:119). Those who remain unmediated cannot communicate with those who are, and thus they do not belong. The results of this situation now seem clear. We can say that it is the absence of institutionalized agonistic structures which has brought on much of the violence directed at mediated people in recent years. In a highly technologized society, a few unbalanced young men will compensate for the absence of ritualized combat with planned aggression in the form of assassinations.

Such considerations allow us to make sense of the bizarre acts of violence which began with the assassination of our first fully mediated president, John F. Kennedy, in 1963. President Kennedy was a television star before he became president and indeed the conventional wisdom has it that he became president *because* he was a television star. Although we have reason to doubt that we know, or ever will know, the complete story of this epochal event, it set in motion a series of events in which unmediated people struck out at mediated people. They did so in order to relieve the increasingly severe tension of not belonging.

We may refer to the need to commit violent acts simply in order to become famous as the Herostratus complex, after the Greek who in 356 BC set fire to the temple of Artemis in Ephesus in order to make his name immortal. In recent times, the Herostratus complex seems to begin with Sirhan Sirhan, the assassin of Robert F. Kennedy. After he shot Senator Kennedy in 1968, he said, “They can gas me. But I am famous, I achieved in a day what it took Kennedy all his life to do” (Ellis and Gullo 1971:230). It is Sirhan’s use of the word “achieved” that shows the agonistic quality of his act.

Yet Sirhan was not as self-consciously narcissistic as Arthur Bremer, would-be assassin of George Wallace in 1972. Bremer presents an exceptionally pure example of Peter Pan Syndrome, in which, Kiley says, “narcissism locks the young man inside his own fantasies” (1983:31). Bremer’s fantasies derived from his media experience, but eventually became completely self-contained, and gave him a bizarre combination of honesty and amorality.

Like a typical Peter Pan, Bremer was unable to sustain relationships of any kind, so he took to keeping a journal (which he copyrighted, with an eye to his future fame). In it, he constantly berated himself as a failure and an outsider. Still, Bremer clearly understood what he wanted. He wanted fame, just

as Sirhan Sirhan had five years previously. He wrote: “But I want them all to know. I want a big shot & not a little pot noise” (1973:97). This loner who wanted a bang not a whimper had no political convictions or motivations whatsoever (this fact seems to distinguish American assassination attempts from those in Europe). He simply wanted to become mediated, and shooting a public figure was the only way he could think of to achieve this goal. He originally planned to shoot President Nixon, and followed him to Canada in late 1971 with this purpose in mind. Since it was the image of the act and not the act itself which mattered to Bremer, he tended to fantasize that he was Fred Astaire: “To wear a white tie & tails and get Nixon-boy, WOW! If I killed him while wearing a sweaty tee-shirt, some of the fun and Glamore would defionently be worn off” (Bremer’s spelling and capitalization; 1973:81).

But after stalking Nixon for a while, Bremer decided that Secret Service men were too vigilant, so he reluctantly settled on George Wallace as a substitute victim. He complained to his journal that shooting Wallace would not make him as famous as shooting Nixon: “I won’t even rate a T.V. enteroption [*sic*] in Russia or Europe when the news breaks—they never heard of Wallace” (1973:105).

Commenting on Bremer’s narcissism, Harding Lemay has said: “It becomes clear that this journal is, in effect, a film scenario” (1973:19). Since Bremer had such obsessive dreams of mediation, it is only appropriate that the motif of the pathological loner as assassin became mediated in two major films of the 1970’s, Robert Altman’s *Nashville* (1975), and Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976). The interrelationships which obtain between these films and American society in the seventies are so complex and delicate that each deserves at least a brief discussion.

The first shot of *Nashville* suggests a possible revision of Chairman Mao’s saying, “Power is what comes out of a gun”; it shows a van mounted with loudspeakers for use in a political campaign. In America, power is what comes out of a loudspeaker: mediated speech. Moreover, all the characters in *Nashville* are either mediated, or want to become mediated. Most of the action deals with the machinations necessary to persuade various country and western singers to appear at a rally for a maverick presidential candidate. *Nashville* thus has particular importance in the present context because it is the first film which dramatizes the similarities

between politics and show business as related forms of mediation. Politics and show business come together at the rally at the end of the film, where a character clearly based on Arthur Bremer shoots one of the singers, Barbara Jean.

In contrast to the diffuse structure of *Nashville*, which has some two dozen characters, *Taxi Driver* isolates the pathological male loner who becomes a would-be assassin. The title character, Travis Bickle (played by Robert DeNiro) fantasizes about shooting a political candidate; foiled by good security as Bremer was when he attempted to shoot President Nixon, he ultimately saves a young prostitute (played by Jodie Foster) from her pimp in a scene of extraordinary violence. Shots of newspaper clippings then tell us that his action has made Bickle a local hero, a fact which the girl's father confirms to him in a telephone conversation. This public recognition does not make us perceive him as any less psychotic, however. Interestingly, film historian Robert Kolker argues that Bickle's insanity comes from mediation: "The more deeply he [Travis] withdraws, the more he comes to believe in the American movie myths of purity and heroism, love and selflessness, and to actuate them as the legitimate child of John Wayne and Norman Bates: pure, self-righteous, violent ego and grinning, homicidal lunatic; each the obverse of the other; each equally dangerous" (1980:236).

John Hinckley, Jr. failed to understand such subtleties; he took *Taxi Driver* at face value, as just another American movie with a happy ending. For him, *Taxi Driver* was a dream come true. After all, Travis got what he wanted—those newspaper clippings made him a mediated person, and he saved Jodie Foster. In *Taxi Driver* Hinckley saw his fantasies of becoming mediated made into a romance and acted out. As it happens, he saw the film in Los Angeles where—like Charlie Manson—he had gone in the hopes of finding fame and fortune as a songwriter. Like Manson, he failed, but he found a surrogate identity in Travis Bickle. As a psychiatrist who studied him commented, "in even the smallest aspects of his behavior, clothes, drinking and so forth, he picked up habits of Travis Bickle" (Latham 1982:18).

Hinckley completed this identity with a fixation on Jodie Foster. Ms. Foster was attending Yale at the time, and Hinckley made several trips to New Haven in order to propose marriage to her and/or shoot her. Only an hour before he made the attempt on President Reagan's life, on 30 March, 1982, Hinckley wrote her

a letter in which he said “I will admit to you that the reason I am going ahead with this attempt now is because I just cannot wait any longer to impress you. . . . Jodie, I am asking you, please look into your heart and at least give me the chance with this historical deed to gain your respect and love” (Latham 1982:54). In terms of the present discussion, Hinckley is thinking logically, if not rationally. Like Bremer, he had no political motives; indeed, he thought that President Reagan was “the greatest president of the century.” But he understood that he was not a mediated person, and that Foster was. And he understood all too clearly that this difference constituted an unbridgeable gap between them. By shooting the president, he would commit a “historical deed”; he would bridge the gap by becoming mediated like her, and thus worthy of her “respect and love.” He was, and still is, suffering from unrequited narcissism.

When Hinckley set out to shoot the President, he had a gun in one hand and a John Lennon button in the other, for he had gone into a deep depression upon hearing of Lennon’s death on 9 December 1981. One of his many contemporaries who also loved the Beatles was Mark David Chapman, the man who had shot Lennon. If we merely substitute John Lennon for Travis Bickle, Chapman’s crime shows a pathogenesis with remarkable similarities to Hinckley’s.

As a child, Chapman was a loner who withdrew into a fantasy world. He created in his mind a imaginary kingdom, with himself as king, and ordered the Beatles to give concerts for his subjects. As he grew older, this kingdom evolved into a democracy, of which he was president. Yet he was a God-like president, and God-like powers required mediation. At Chapman’s sentencing, a forensic psychiatrist offered the following testimony: “In fact, he told me that he was not physically more remote from his people. He explained to me that just as God cannot reveal Himself directly to me, so he could not reveal himself directly to the ‘little people.’ Television was the way in which he could communicate with them” (Kempton 1981:14). Like Hinckley, Chapman’s dreams of mediation led him to choose a mediated role model—in this case, John Lennon. Like Hinckley, he began to imitate his role model as literally as possible. At a time when Lennon was not recording, and letting his wife Yoko Ono handle all his business transactions, Chapman married an Oriental woman who worked while he stayed at home. On his last day of work, he



signed out as John Lennon, just as Hinckley had registered at a motel as J. Travis.

Unfortunately, Chapman succeeded where Hinckley, fortunately, failed. Despite this crucial difference, they both thought of themselves as saviors. Hinckley wished to save Jodie Foster, as Travis Bickle had saved the character she played in *Taxi Driver*. All of these psychopaths needed models from which to take an identity, and Chapman found his model as a savior figure in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. To the consternation of his psychiatrist, and of the general public, Chapman insisted that he was the catcher in the rye. And, like Hinckley in his letter to Foster, he was reasoning logically if not rationally.

We recall that Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of Salinger's novel, fantasizes that he will stand in a rye field and catch the children who are playing there before they fall over a cliff. By killing his idol John Lennon, Chapman believed in a way which he apparently could not articulate that he was saving children. And what was he saving them from? He was saving them from the agony, which he himself experienced daily, of having to admit that he was unmediated. Since the Beatles were the most famous group of the sixties, and Lennon was widely recognized as its leader, Lennon was intensely mediated, as it were. The death of Lennon, then, would decrease the tension between mediated and unmediated people because it would remove one of the most mediated people of our time.

This discussion of assassins, Hollywood movies, and the death of a rock star may have seemed to take us from the more traditional subjects which usually concern Walter Ong. Yet no one whose life has been enriched by his interest in all cultural phenomena can afford to ignore the irenic potential of dialogue about the popular culture which surrounds us every day, and which is sometimes a matter of life and death.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Note

<sup>1</sup>This paper has profited from the bibliographical and editorial suggestions of Thomas Farrell.

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## **Orality-Literacy Studies and the Unity of the Human Race**

**Walter J. Ong, S.J.**

### I

At the end of a symposium and volume such as this, with its array of varied and brilliant papers, it is difficult to know what to say by way of conclusion other than to express my heartfelt thanks to the impressive contributors in this symposium-festschrift and to its superb organizers. One thing that I am convinced should not be done is to try to summarize the many papers presented and the discussions following them. We have had our say on these matters already. I do not want to be in the position of the speaker who announced, "I am afraid that I have spoken about these matters all too long, so please let me conclude once more."

What I shall try to do is to generalize out of all the thought-provoking papers we have heard and to say something about orality-literacy studies themselves as a whole. I shall have the temerity to generalize as widely as possible, for I have chosen as my subject nothing less than "Orality-Literacy Studies and the Unity of the Human Race." I do believe that what we have been about speaks in its own special way to the subject of human unity which is so urgent in our war-ridden and even war-mongering times.

### II

Orality-literacy contrasts represent a new field of study with a still undetermined but already vast range. The varied themes of the papers presented at this symposium manifest this range in impressive ways, and consultation of the literature they refer to makes the range all the wider. In the literature available today, orality-literacy studies have made their way into psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, intellectual history, philosophy,

including metaphysics itself, literary history (which over the centuries preserves oral residue in forms and intensities still not all accounted for), critical theory from reassessments of the old New Criticism and formalism to reader-response theory, religious history and theology (Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and other), and the theory and use of electronic communication. (This last comes into being following on orality and literacy but in its own way intricately involves both.) On the one hand, the computer extends the elaborated linear analysis introduced by writing to an unimaginable extent while, on the other hand, the telephone, radio, and television produce a world of what I have styled “secondary orality,” which fills the air with words, mingled with other sound. By contrast with “primary orality,” which is the original orality of human beings totally unacquainted with even the idea of writing, the world of secondary orality for its coming into being and its operation demands writing and print and now, more and more, computers themselves. Far from being destroyed by electronics, orality and literacy interlace in electronic communication more complexly than ever before—so much so that we have not yet developed adequate concepts and terms to describe the interlacing.

Orality-literacy studies are beginning to revise the history of academic education, at least that of the West, as they reveal the oral-agonistic nature of schools until recently populated exclusively by males taught in a chirographically controlled but orally targeted language, Learned Latin, spoken by millions of males all of whom could also write it and yet governed in its expression by the all-pervasive art of rhetoric, which still maintained its original meaning of public speaking or platform address (Ong 1981).

Orality-literacy studies have even helped explain, in a recent article by James A. Aho, the invention of double-entry bookkeeping, which, it appears, was devised not to serve exclusively informational or theoretical ends but rather for rhetorical purposes, “to justify an activity about which there existed in medieval Christian Europe a considerable suspicion: namely, commerce” (Aho 1985:22). Double-entry bookkeeping was calculated to persuade an audience by the exact balance of debit and credit that there existed an “ultimate harmony underlying the conflicting claims of the parties in a business transaction” (24), and to exercise its persuasion in an orally governed world. At its beginnings, account keeping was still physically involved in the world of rhetoric, the world of public speaking, for accounts were normally read aloud to

the responsible party, whom we still today call an “auditor,” that is, a hearer (20; cf. Clanchy 1971:215). Our present-day term still surreptitiously memorializes the old oral-aural world. In a residually oral culture you understood what the financial facts were if you heard about them better than if you looked at rows of figures.

At the risk of seeming to range altogether too far afield, I might note that awareness of orality-literacy contrasts may even be of some use in pongid linguistics. Procedures used in trying to teach speech to the Pongidae or great apes—mostly, in fact, to chimpanzees—appear often to be based unwittingly upon a model of language provided not by talk but by literacy. The apes are fed oral language word-by-word, as though they were working with word lists. Children do not learn languages quite this way. While it is true that at certain stages they do of course pick up some individual words individually, their learning processes are basically much more complex. They sense that in the vocalizations of older persons something is going on that they want to be part of. They want to “get into the act” which discourse is (Heath 1983: *passim*). There is little indication that apes want spontaneously to “get into the act” of human discourse (De Luce and Wilder 1983), and even less that they are constructing a whole world for themselves by dealing with language and its densities, as Piaget has shown children always do. Little wonder that apes are far more successful at manipulating counters by hand or at using hand signals than at mouthing words, for which both their articulatory apparatus and their neurophysiological organization have ill prepared them.

### III

The reason for the extraordinary diversity that attends the study of orality-literacy contrasts and for the usefulness of these contrasts in coming to a better understanding of deep human concerns is not far to seek: it is that these contrasts ultimately settle so deeply into the human psyche. Persons who have deeply interiorized literacy can no longer separate literacy from their natural mental process, as I have tried to explain in detail in *Orality and Literacy* (1982).

Cultures are polarized across the world today between effectively literate, high-technology cultures and cultures still largely oral (with varying but notably restricted degrees of literacy), lacking high technology. Within high-technology cultures,

such as that of the United States, a similar polarization on a lesser scale often exists between effectively literate populations and illiterates or marginally literate persons, often from ethnic subcultures. Roughly speaking, these poles of literacy and orality commonly, if not always, represent the haves and the have-nots in our present world. Literate, high-technology cultures have often treated those at the other pole of human existence by resort to concepts such as the “savage” mind or the “primitive” mind or the “prelogical” mind (which is to say the illogical or at least the sublogical mind) or even by resort to Lucien Lévi-Bruhl’s more outspoken “inferior cultures”—*Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910). In his recent *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983), the Netherlands anthropologist Johannes Fabian has reported on the ways in which Western (of course literate) anthropologists have in the past regularly, if unconsciously and subtly, downgraded the (generally oral) peoples who have in the past commonly been the subjects of their research. This condition has been bettered now, no doubt in part because anthropologists have enlarged their original dominant interest in “primitive” or “lower” peoples to include in their purview all of us human beings. The enlargement of the field has brought improvement of vision and greater tolerance and understanding.

As I have suggested in *Orality and Literacy* (1982:174-75), we can avoid the earlier invidious terms by translating the difference between the two poles as that between literate and oral peoples. I do not mean to suggest that orality or other cultural features are exactly the same in all cultures without writing any more than that all literate cultures use literacy exactly the same way, but simply that, as noted earlier, there are common characteristics that mark the speech and thought of primary orality and that contrast saliently with certain features of literate cultures, not to mention print and electronic cultures.

We should note here also that, applied to an entire culture, the term “oral” is preferable also to “illiterate,” which is subtly downgrading, designating a culture by something it lacks that we have. (Sometimes, of course, “illiterate” is useful to refer to persons in a basically literate culture who have not learned to read and write.) Orality is a positive trait, which literate cultures also have—though in a different way. We still talk, perhaps even more than our ancestors in primary oral cultures. But we do not talk in

the same style or out of the same thought-forms. An oral culture's thought-forms are just as human as ours—one could argue in certain ways more human, for they do not draw on the technology of writing, which is, as all technologies are, a human invention but which is also in some way external to the human being.

What happens when we substitute for “savage” or “primitive” or “prelogical” or “inferior” or similar denigrating terms the term “oral”? Basically, I would suggest, it can give us a new experience of the unity of the human race, diachronically and synchronically. Let me suggest some ways in which it can do this.

First, a clear continuity is established between oral cultures, ancient and modern, and ourselves. Writing, it is true, marks a dividing line, but, once we know basically what writing does to thought and to consciousness itself, we know in some sort what the dividing line is and, in general, what the effects are once it is crossed. Writing is a technology that restructures thought and consciousness. It is not, as I have indicated earlier, the only development that affects thought and consciousness, but it is the most radical and pervasive across the centuries and across the surface of the globe.

Knowing the effects of writing on ourselves, knowing how much of what we consider simply human is due to the appropriation of writing, we can enter into the state of consciousness of oral peoples—never directly, but reflectively. And reflective entry has even some advantages over direct entry, for primary oral cultures can hardly reflect on orality as such by contrast with the literacy they do not know. Entering oral consciousness reflectively, we can experience the people there as our brothers and sisters. We can feel what we are like without the support of writing technology. Their thought processes—many of them, though certainly not all—differ from ours not because they are “savage” or “inferior” but because they are what the oral economy of managing language and thought demands. Oral peoples can have high intelligence and can be very wise. They are what we ourselves are like apart from the support of the writing that has penetrated our psyches so deeply that we can never entirely separate it from ourselves. Knowing the nature of orality-literacy contrasts, we can more deeply empathize with the Homeric Greeks, the old Anglo-Saxons, the modern Seneca in the state of New York, the present-day African Nyanga people in Zaire, the West



African Mande, the modern Mongols, the Javanese, and the rest of the peoples in the more than ninety different oral language and cultural areas reported on by John Miles Foley in his *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* (1985). (It should be noted that in the case of many of these peoples literacy is not entirely unknown, but that a high degree of primary orality still informs their cultures.)

Of course, anthropological studies of many sorts in recent times have done much to create empathy and genuine human bonds of nonpatronizing affection between anthropologists from literate cultures and oral peoples. But none, I think, can range farther or more deeply than orality-literacy studies. The reason is profound. Writing is the technology which in a significant way marks the deepest encounter between human consciousness and the exterior, nonhuman world.

Secondly, since writing takes possession of consciousness and culture slowly and in ways conditioned by the variances between cultures, if we know both sides of the orality-literacy watershed, we can empathize with the intermediate stages between primary orality, early scribal literacy, academicized literacy, and all the other literacies which vary so kaleidoscopically as to make a simple definition of literacy quite impossible. Since literacy touches so much in culture—commerce, craftsmanship and industry, family structure, religious institutions, political structures and behavior, and all the rest—we can put ourselves in contact with the entirety of another culture's life. Literacy, we must note again, does not explain everything in a culture, but it relates to almost everything, and in myriads of ways. It does so in our own lives, where we live in orality-literacy contrasts multiplied beyond measure in the new electronic media. Our deep involvement in these contrasts can bring us a deeper understanding of others who differ from us only in that their cultures bring them to live out in different ways problems we all share.

Mention of the new electronic processing of the word suggests a third way in which familiarity with humankind's originally oral world and thereby with orality-literacy contrasts can enrich our sense of the unity of the human race. For orality-literacy studies look simultaneously to the past and to the future. Some of the most attentive reading about orality-literacy contrasts—contrasts in times past as well as present contrasts—is done today by persons in radio and television work. I can testify from personal experience

that such persons are as likely to attend lectures I give on orality and literacy as are persons teaching ancient Greek epic or *Beowulf* or modern African folklore. The ages of primary orality, chirography, typography, and electronics, despite their radical breaks with one another in some ways, in other ways form a continuum. As we have seen, the electronic age has maximized both orality and the effects of writing and print. This age of secondary orality has maximized oral utterance through the telephone, radio, and television in ways unknown to oral peoples, and yet at the same time has maximized the analytic, linear processing of thought and expression which writing initiated to a point unimaginable in a purely writing and/or print culture. Electronics, in other words, builds up both orality and literacy, but the orality and literacy which emerge from an electronic culture are not quite the same as pre-electronic orality and literacy, from which they differ in organization and in social import.

The effects of the computer on the thought and consciousness formerly supported by literacy have not been assessed as yet in anything like full depth. Pop psychology and pop sociology tell us nothing of what is really happening. They themselves are part of the media “hype” that spins off automatically from the culture they pretend to assess. To understand the effects of the computer on thought and consciousness we need disciplined study, which can profit from use of the computer where this is helpful (it is not always helpful, let alone necessary, in assessing some of the effects even of the computer).

Fourthly and finally, orality-literacy studies raise a question which is so profound and mystifying that it has seldom if ever been treated, to the best of my knowledge. That is, what is the relationship in depth between human consciousness and technology at the point where consciousness and technology enter into the most intensive alliances? Thousands of books on technology exist and hundreds more come out every year. How many of them take cognizance of the following facts?

(1) The human mind needs to use an extraneous technology, writing—and if you do not believe that it is extraneous, read Plato’s *Phaedrus* and his *Seventh Letter*—in order to create what we style a scientific treatment of any subject. Oral cultures have great wisdom, but none of them have the extended, analytic explanation of the world that we call science today, in the large sense of this word, including not only the physical sciences but also

the humane sciences, such as the study of verbal utterance, written or oral.

(2) As Havelock's recent monograph, "The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics" (1983), has painstakingly shown, before writing had taken possession of the Greek consciousness, the central question of metaphysics, the nature of being, Aristotle's *to ti ēn einai*, could not effectively suggest itself to the human mind. All science needs writing in order to achieve the tight, sequential, linear, "logical" organization that science requires. But metaphysics needs writing not only to organize itself analytically as a science but also to become aware of its quarry, being or existence as such. Oral cultures concern themselves with doings, with happenings, not with being as such: they narrativize their own existence and their environment. Metaphysics is not fond of narrative. It wants to know what a thing is, and ultimately what is or being or existence itself is. To oral peoples, such questions appear trivializing. What does all this say about the intimate relationship of the deepest interior of the human mind to technology? Without the technology of writing, it appears, the mind cannot find, or even take an interest in, the subject-matter of metaphysics.

(3) Why was it that the first machine working with replaceable parts to mass-produce complex objects themselves made up of replaceable parts was not a machine to manufacture swords or shoes or guns but, rather, the printing press, which manufactured books for the use of the human mind? What does this say about the relationship of the human mind to mass-producing technologies which have succeeded the printing press in countless numbers today? Can we dream of humanizing them as we have humanized writing and print? We had better do more than dream about doing so, or we are lost.

One truth stands out here. These two crucial and pervasive technologies, writing and print, were developed at the service of human consciousness, of the human interior, of the spirit, the soul, not at the service of operations directly in the exterior, material world. The human mind took them into itself for its own use—a use not always morally good, not always unselfish, but human nevertheless. The human mind relies on alliance with the external world for its own interior work much more than we have been aware. But the human being also has the power to convert the external world and its technological operations there into something of deep spiritual worth. Orality-literacy studies can at least alert

us to the truth that technologies grow out of the interior human lifeworld and need constantly to be referred back to that world, where we ourselves live as human persons.

It seems a far cry from the relatively simple technology of writing or even from print to the vast technologies whose products we know today—an automobile, an airplane, a spacecraft, an automated automobile manufacturing plant. The line from writing to print to the computer is really a direct line, as earlier suggested, moving toward greater and greater linear, quantified, analysis achieved by more and more refined management of local motion. Yet writing, print, and the computer are all ways of technologizing the word. The other gargantuan technologies have mostly to do with the creation of machines or other products for physical use—high-rise buildings, for example—that themselves have nothing to do with technologies for the management of thought and expression.

Yet the management of thought and expression has more and more to do with them. These gargantuan technologies are more and more the products not just of writing and print but of computerized technologizing of the word. Through the computer, the technologized word is reaching deeper and deeper into the heart of our ordinary lives. That is to say, today the alliance of thought and expression with technology that began with writing is becoming more and more intense. What does this say about human responsibility? Plato had Socrates protest that writing is destructive of human values—and then went ahead to put this observation into writing. Writing did not destroy human values, but it made it necessary to handle them on a different basis—in terms of more abstract principles (see Havelock 1978). Print brought new problems of value management. And computers bring still more. Somehow, we must find a way to interiorize the resources of the computer, to humanize them as we have humanized writing and print. The task is overwhelming and I have no easy directives for carrying it through. But we must manage. Otherwise, it is star wars forever.

What we need ultimately is a new and more comprehensive cosmology that takes into account both the close connections of the human person with the physical universe and the utter difference of each human person—the “I” that you and I each speak—from the physical universe. The old Aristotelian cosmology is long outmoded, but neither Copernicus nor Galileo nor Newton nor

Lamarck nor Darwin nor Marx nor Einstein at all suffice any more, although we can learn from all of them. None of these allow for such possibilities as computerized genetic engineering, which poses moral problems earlier human beings could not even conceive. We need an open cosmology—something, perhaps, like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's in *The Phenomenon of Man*: human beings are phenomena within the physical universe who in their self-consciousness also break out of the physical universe. But Teilhard when he died in 1955 did not yet know very much if anything of computers or of orality-literacy contrasts. Human self-consciousness, with the reflectiveness it entails, has made thought and language and has created the alliance between thought and language on the one hand and on the other the technologies of thought and language, writing, print, and electronicized verbalization. The meaning of the technologizing of the word lies very near the center of the meaning of the cosmos in its relationship to the human being and of the human being in relationship to the cosmos.

The cross-cultural understanding which orality-literacy studies make possible enriches the human spirit and opens the possibility for greater understanding and love between diverse peoples and for greater understanding of the intimacy with which technologies relate to human life. But it is not a cure-all for human misunderstanding and greed and ambition. I am under no illusions that orality-literacy studies will be any more redemptive or any freer of human failings than other purely human efforts. Still, the more human human beings are, the more there is in them to be redeemed. Orality-literacy studies can enlarge our humanity and open it more to redemptive powers beyond mere human reach.

However, although orality-literacy studies are not redemptive, nevertheless such studies can open new depths in our understanding of the work of redemption as known to Christian faith—and doubtless in our understanding of other religious beliefs, for which I shall not undertake to speak here. Beneath the text of the Bible lies a vast oral tradition. This biblical scholars have long known. But, until the recent intensive study of orality-literacy contrasts, the psychodynamics of oral modes of thought and expression have been very inadequately understood by biblical scholars as by others. We have been handicapped, as literates, for we have commonly, if unwittingly, interpreted oral thought and expression as a variant of literate thought and expression—in effect, as literate thought and

expression that simply failed to get put down in writing—instead of assessing oral thought and expression on their own grounds, which are quite different from those of literacy. Yet, because of its orally grounded prophetic and witnessing cast, the Bible is very likely the most variegated orality-literacy mix we have in any text. Moreover, despite the radical primacy that the biblical text has in Christian tradition, the Word of God, who is the Son, is to be thought of by analogy with the human spoken word, not the written word. Our growing appreciation of the economy of oral thought and expression promises to deepen our understanding of the word of God in the fullness of all its various senses, to provide new insights for biblical studies and thereby for the study of salvation history, that is, of the work of redemption itself as this manifests itself in biblical faith, as well as new insights into the other religions of the world which rely on texts developing out of unimaginably rich oral prehistories.

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