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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Melissa C. Putnam Sprenkle entitled "'Þe bok as I herde say' : orality as a rhetoric in medieval and modern discursive contexts." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Linda Bensel-Meyers, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Bethany Dumas, Joseph Trahern, Allen Dunn

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting a dissertation written by Melissa C. Sprenkle entitled "'Þe bok as I herde say': Orality as a Rhetoric in Medieval and Modern Discursive Contexts." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Linda Bensel-Meyers, Major Professor

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and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

'ÞE BOK AS I HERDE SAY': ORALITY AS A RHETORIC IN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN DISCURSIVE CONTEXTS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melissa C. Sprenkle
December 1997

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my undergraduate advisors at the University of Louisville

Kerry Spiers, Elaine Wise and Thomas Van

who taught me that the 'Dark Ages' were only as dark as the modern mind.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On my path toward the completion of this project I am glad to say that I have incurred many debts. First and foremost, I would like to thank my friend and mentor Linda Bensel-Meyers who always treated me as a colleague but who knew when to give me explicit direction. I am also particularly grateful to several other English Department faculty who contributed to my intellectual and professional growth. Joseph Trahern introduced me to Old English, shaped my understanding of the field of Medieval Studies, and advised me many times on research which I presented at the Medieval Congress at Kalamzoo. Allen Dunn, tireless in his engagement in Socratic dialogue, allowed me to test the logic of my ethical assumptions and introduced me to many interdisciplinary discussion groups on campus. Bethany Dumas introduced me to sociolinguistics, encouraged me to attend the LSA Summer Linguistic Institute in 1991, and gave me the opportunity to present my first conference paper.

I would also like to give a special thanks to all the members of the various interdisciplinary discussion groups on campus whose boundary crossing made such a project possible: the Critical Theory Reading Group, the Interdisciplinary Colloquy on Rhetoric, and the University Studies Seminar on Narrative.

I am indebted to the English Department, the Medieval Studies Program and the Graduate School for financial support for professional development. I would also like to thank the British Musem Library for allowing me to work with the *Gawain* manuscript, Cotton Nero A x (3), in the Summer of 1995.

Finally, I am most grateful to my husband David and my daughter Abby for keeping me sane.

ABSTRACT

Rather than viewing orality as a cognitive process or cultural context separate from literacy, this project argues that orality functions as a holistic rhetorical perspective and that there are three distinct orality rhetorics (epic, popular, and conversational) which use the notion of 'voice' to differently organize the relation between language, culture, and the world. To demonstrate the interpretative differences which result from the application of different orality rhetorics, this study examines and compares oral approaches to textual problems in medieval vernacular narrative poetry (specifically in reference to *Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Nibelungenlied*).

The first chapter traces epic, popular and conversational orality as they have functioned in interdisciplinary research on discourse over the past three decades and demonstrates how the voice theorized as 'primary' by each orality organizes different assumptions about epistemology, textuality, and subjectivity. The second chapter scrutinizes the epistemology undergirding epic orality and demonstrates how theorizing orality and literacy as distinct conceptual schemes leads to anachronistic interpretations of culture and literature (including, ironically, orally-derived epics such as *Beowulf*.). The third chapter argues that because conversational orality theorizes the relations between subjects, texts, and contexts as heterogeneous yet coherent, it is more likely to exceed the confines of the hermeneutic circle and pull up new aspects of discursive and cultural phenomenon for conscious consideration. Interestingly, this notion of coherent heterogeneity gives a better account of how we can understand texts composed in the distant past (such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) than accounts (such

as those given by epic orality) which define our relationship to the past (and to all others) through difference and incommensurability. The final chapter contrasts the notions of personhood (subjectivity) underlying epic and conversational orality. In an analysis of representations of feminine voices in Germanic heroic epic and among critics of that genre, this chapter argues that the ethical project of epic orality is limited to the extent that it artificially enhances the voice of the masculine warrior hero posited by the epic.

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CHAPTER I

DISCIPLINING ORALITY

Over the past three decades several ongoing cross-disciplinary debates have developed concerning the qualities and viability of the concepts orality, oral culture, and oral literature. The journal *New Literary History* has published several issues in which the relation between spoken discourse and literary discourse was debated, including one focusing specifically on orality and literacy in medieval literature.[1] In *Orality and Literacy* in 1982, Walter Ong described the burgeoning of a new field of orality scholarship which was developing through the joint effort of linguists, anthropologists, folklorists, rhetoricians, and literary critics. In this same period, there occurred a parallel discussion about the relation between everyday verbal interaction (especially as conceived of in speech act theory) and literary and oral traditional performances.[2]

Yet, as Walter Ong has stated, "there is no 'school' of orality and literacy" comparable to the New Criticism or Deconstructionism (*Orality and Literacy* 1); rather, scholars often move into discussions of orality to gain a critical perspective on the relation between a particular discipline, other disciplines and the world.[3] However, Ong's idea that "knowledge of orality-literacy contrasts

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[1] 16.1 (1984). This issue featured Walter Ong, Brian Stock, Franz Bäuml and Paul Zumthor.

[2] For example, Dell Hymes' *'In vain I tried to tell you'* and *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, John Searle's famous article "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse", Thomas Sebeok's anthology *Style in Language*, Paul Hernandi's anthology *What is Literature?* and Mary Louise Pratt's *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*.

[3] Here, and throughout this study, the 'world' and the idea of 'world guidedness' refer to natural phenomena or physical objects as they exist outside language and human subjectivity. It also refers to language and culture as they are independent of human perspectives. In other words, it describes stuff as it is regardless of what we think of it or whether we can think of it. I do not mean to imply that we can know objects as they are outside subjectivity; rather, 'the world'

and relationships does not normally generate impassioned allegiances to theories" has been proven wrong in several critiques of the very existence of 'orality' which have appeared in literacy studies, folklore and literary criticism.[4] Indeed, orality has been passionately described as both an antidote for and perpetrator of Western cultural elitism and colonialism. Orality is saddled with such opposed agendas because the history and disciplinary interests behind any particular invocation of it is different; yet, ironically, the oral appeals to scholars precisely because it foregrounds the discourse from which all other discourses develop--speech. This focus on speech thus implies a place where one can obtain a perspective of perspectives, in Kenneth Burke's sense, from which to understand (and map) the interactions between language, culture and the world.

Although there is no one school of orality/literacy contrast studies, there are several distinct scholarly conversations which make appeals to orality as a means of being more critical of a discipline's hermeneutics. The most widely-known orality conversation takes place among those who support or oppose what Ruth Finnegan has dubbed the "Great Divide" theory which can be summarized as the belief that orality and literacy create distinct cultural and cognitive systems which in some ways are incommensurable with each other. Proponents of this theory often suggest that studying orality can help us recover some aspects of human experience which technology has caused us to lose, or

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accounts for the influence of non-discursive and unintended phenomena in the construction and comprehension of discourse. I have derived this notion from the work of Frank Farell (*Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy*).. Richard Bauman gives a concise argument about how consideration of oral performance can uncover aspects of culture which traditional disciplinary inquiry leaves out in his introduction to *Story, Performance and Event* .

[4]For example in the work of Brian Street, Ruth Finnegan and Joyce Coleman, respectively.

that orality can help us correct some of our interpretations of non-western, non-literate cultures. In another major conversation, theories of oral performance have developed at the nexus of anthropology, folklore, and linguistics to give an account of the degree and means by which social contexts constitute the texts of verbal art. Many of these scholars have in turn drawn from and participated in discussions among sociolinguists and discourse analysts about the relationships between speech and writing in everyday verbal interaction. To further complicate matters, underwriting each of these conversations are notions about orality and culture inherited from earlier eras (reaching back before the Renaissance and in some cases back as far as Plato) and disciplines, such as philology, firmly rooted in the academia of nineteenth century Europe.

Among critics of orality, the distinct lines of thought just outlined are often conflated, while proponents of a particular orality theory are prone to subsume speaking under the oral genre which is the focus of their specific model. This chapter attempts to give coherence to orality through an elucidation of the differences and connections between particular orality theories. The first step toward this goal is the realization that concepts of 'orality' or 'the oral', rather than expressing different cultural and physical realities, function as rhetorics in that from a meta-perspective they supposedly allow new interpretations and evaluations of culture through an analysis of the relationship between spoken and written discourse. Moving from this point, I identify the three orality rhetorics prominent in contemporary scholarship by first describing the voice which organizes each and then outlining the theories of epistemology, textuality and subjectivity which each rhetoric presupposes and implements. This description leads to a schema for orality rhetorics which the reader can use in

tracking the function of orality both in this study and in the research which this study analyzes. Demonstrating the coherence of orality in this way directly rebuts one major criticism of the concept, that it is amorphous or that it includes everything but distinguishes nothing.[5] Understanding that readers will not be equally knowledgeable about all of the disciplines discussed, I have also included the basic orality paradigms and some good introductory citations concerning specific theories in the notes in order to facilitate more interdisciplinary research.

In the chapters which follow this one, I use problems in interpreting medieval vernacular texts to demonstrate the limits as well as the possibilities of each orality rhetoric. While I think my assessments of various orality rhetorics are fair, I cannot present them as evenhanded in either coverage or evaluation. For example, one of my general conclusions will be that privileging the epic voice in orality theories has caused most of the errors (both logical and ethical) for which critics have blamed the general concept of orality. Furthermore, the subsumption of speaking under performance has hindered the full development of a viable orality rhetoric which adds to (rather than merely reformulating) what 'literate' literary theories already offer. Although this study often demystifies and limits claims made by various oralists, it also develops as a rhetoric of orality in that it identifies some paths by which orality theories pull up aspects of rhetoric for analysis which are often overlooked by theories which define rhetoric strictly through persuasion.[6] The resulting paradox is that when we give up the

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[5]An example of this argument is Joyce Coleman's first chapter of *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France.* Some oralists also use this argument as a criticism of a competing oral theory.

[6]For example, in chapter three, I demonstrate how conversational orality allows literary critics to examine the phatic, semi-conscious, rhetoric which contributes to the cohesion and congeniality of a given text. This phatic rhetoric is heterogeneous and can simultaneously contribute to and contradict the semiotic systems consciously deployed by an author.

larger claims made by orality rhetorics (such as the recovery of lost culture) the smaller claims allow us to do and say more new things about texts and culture than we would have thought possible.

Orality and literacy are not deictic categories. Orality does not point consistently to spoken things or spoken aspects of things. Neither does literacy always point to the written. Further, one complication in making sense of orality / literacy contrasts is that their fields of reference and evaluation overlap nearly as often as they run parallel. Orality and literacy have both been used to give body to the idea of 'culture,' and orality supposedly problematizes our understanding of 'literariness' which has been connected etymologically and culturally with literate structures and practices. 'Literacy,' having had a much longer conceptual existence in western culture, exceeds and supersedes the whole debate about orality / literacy contrasts.[7] That is, the cultural baggage of 'literacy' does not outweigh the overriding value of obtaining the ability to read and write through whatever tainted means which are to hand.

This adjective is used advisedly both to acknowledge the real prejudices embedded in our teaching practices and to underscore the limits of viewing such prejudices as 'essential' to literacy.[8] The following discussion focuses on *orality*

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[7] According to the *OED*, 'orality' has a much earlier attestation in English than 'literacy' but here I mean the equation of being lettered (literate) with being educated. The term 'literacy' was first conceived of as being opposite to illiteracy in the late nineteenth century, and the 'orality' of current usage in discourse theories was later suggested as a more positive term for describing cultures and groups without writing. However, many of the qualities attributed to alphabetic literacy by Havelock and Olson (among others) were also put forward by new science proponents in reaction against renaissance 'cabalism' in the seventeenth century (Nicholas Hudson *Writing and European Thought 1600-1830* 36-39). Likewise, as Ruth Finnegan points out (*Oral Poetry* 30-41), many of the cultural assumptions of some orality theories stem from eighteenth and nineteenth century studies of oral art forms (particularly oral epic).

[8] As Brian Street points out, the mystification of literacy as 'autonomous' from social contexts has and continues to cause literacy to function as a means of domination rather than empowerment. For example, in "Orality and Literacy as Ideological Constructions" (*Social*

and the new epistemological and hermeneutic possibilities which discourse theorists from a variety of disciplines claim it reveals. But since one major theme running through all of the following chapters is the need to clarify what the parameters of particular orality / literacy conversations are, it is only proper at this point to explain why the most pressing 'literacy project' is being laid to one side and used only for occasional theoretical comparison.[9]

Primarily, this study accepts the conclusion of many literacy scholars that Great Divide theories of orality / literacy contrasts merely obscure or reintroduce cultural biases which either impede the development of literacy among disenfranchised groups or allow the disenfranchised access to reading and writing only through cultural self-denigration or annihilation.[10] However, the power of orality stems from strong ethical claims which have not been addressed in critiques of scientism and elitism in orality / literacy scholarship. These ethical claims are most persuasively embedded in discussions of how orality can extricate 'literariness' from its historical associations with literacy. The connection between the etymological roots of 'literature' and 'literacy' have often been pointed out as a reflection of a Western 'literate bias' which subsumes all verbal art under 'letters' or written words. Discourse scholars in literary and

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Literacies 74-99), Street demonstrates how "the 'basic value' of literacy *can* be debated" (75), especially when the functional literacy being made available does not match the needs and world of the culture as it exists at the time of the introduction of writing. However, to see literacy as inherently hegemonic rather than as a tool in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic structures is also an oversimplification (Niko Besnier, *Literacy, Emotion and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll,*).

[9] That is, the project of defining and making literacy more accessible. Literacy studies as a field touches on and informs aspects of orality scholarship, but the main purposes, practical and ethical, of literacy studies lie outside discussions of orality / literacy distinctions. In fact, as Brian Street demonstrates, in discussions concerning literacy, orality theories tend to reimport cultural biases under new scientistic guise.

[10] Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* ; Angelane Beth Daniell, "Ong's Great Leap: The Politics of Literacy and Orality."

rhetorical history, linguistics, folklore, and anthropology (from various political persuasions) have implemented the concept of 'orality' or the 'oral' as a means of reversing this subsumption and thereby recovering culture transmitted through speech or rediscovering the oral context which deepens human experience. Because orality scholars from these various disciplines meet each other in discussions of literary texts and because their common interests lie at the intersection of ethics and epistemology, this project examines orality models as rhetorics and focuses on the roles they play in negotiations of literary value.

Voice

The term orality describes rhetorics which focus on the connection between sound (as produced and heard by humans) and meaning.[11] Some orality rhetorics explore the possibility that there are vast cognitive differences between oral and literate cultures. Some uncover, analyze and preserve oral performance traditions. Others bring to our attention the use of literary structures (narrative, rhyme, repetitions and tropes) as they occur in contemporary everyday conversation. In cross-disciplinary scholarly debates, several distinct orality projects are often conflated. There are three distinct voices of orality which differ from one another in genre and connect to each other through their focus on actual speaking. I have come to label them as epic, popular, and conversational oralities.

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[11] That is, between the biology of the speaking voice and the force of the rhetorical voice. By 'rhetoric' I mean here, broadly speaking, that scholars engaged in discussions of orality are overtly concerned with elucidating 'means of persuasion' which are specific or peculiar to this human sound/meaning nexus. Traditionally voice tone has been most associated with pathetic and ethical appeals, and many orality scholars claim that personal and social influences and interests frame or determine our conceptions of reality.

Epic

The originary scene of epic orality is that of a professional storyteller orally composing and performing a long narrative poem concerning mythic/historic characters of the tribe. This particular image of the epic singer and the designation of his genre as 'oral traditional epic poetry' is a relatively recent discovery stemming from the oral composition theory of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord which describes Homer as an oral poet.[12] However, the epic was thought of as an oral (and primitive if vigorous) genre well before theories of orality or oral cognitive processes were developed. In fact, as David Bynum reminds us, 'epic' is an etymological descendent of the Greek '*epikós* or 'pertaining to *epos* ' which in Homer means merely "an utterance, something said" (247), so that Homer's works have always been, to one degree or another, associated with the oral. Although there are several very detailed histories of how scholars came to understand the oral source of Homer's work, the following historical review will underscore an interesting contradiction: the oral theory which many scholars use to elucidate the essential qualities of orality in general is the product of a highly literate line of scholarship and was formalized by Milman Parry before he actually worked with oral performers. Furthermore, the

[12]For those not familiar with the principle components of the theory, following is a very good summary by Franz Bäuml: "(1) the oral epic--and the theory concerns only the epic-- is composed by illiterate singers; (2) it is composed of a series of traditional narrative themes, i.e., thematic stereotypes; (3)these themes are lexically formulated by means of groups of words, lexical stereotypes, the principal components of which recur under the same metrical conditions, i.e., formulae and formulaic systems; and (6) 'an *oral* text will yield a predominance of clearly demonstrable formulas, with the bulk of the remainder 'formulaic,' and a small number of non-formulaic expressions. A *literary* text will show a predominance of nonformulaic expressions, with some formulaic expressions, and very few clear formulas.'" Bäuml quotes directly from Lord's *Singer of Tales* for number six ("Medieval Texts and Oral-Formulaic Composition" 32).

oral performance this theory analyzes is a highly specialized genre which is not universal among oral cultures.

Adumbrations of the argument that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are representatives of a particular genre of oral tradition and that their connections to the oral could explain some aspects of their style, are apparent in modern criticism as early as the seventeenth century. In a polemic against the value of Homer's poetry, the Abbé d'Aubignac (1604-76) is said to have originated the famous 'Homeric Question' when he suggested that "there was in fact no man Homer, and the poems handed down to us in his name are no more than a collection of earlier rhapsodies" (Adam Parry xii). About the same time an Englishman, Richard Bentley, described Homer as a kind of minstrel figure: "He wrote a sequel of Songs and Rhapsodies, to be sung by himself for small earnings and good cheer, at Festivals and other days of merriment. . . " (Parry xii). Giambattista Vico agreed with d'Aubignac that there was no one poet of the works attributed to Homer but rather they were the creation of a 'whole people' (Adam Parry xiii). These three positions on the existence of Homer were echoed later in the famous nineteenth century 'Homeric Question' debate, but Milman Parry's vision of the poet was most foreshadowed by the diplomat and archaeologist Robert Wood (1717-71) in his *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (1767). On historical grounds, Wood concludes that the poet of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was illiterate, that he acquired, retained and communicated all he knew "without the aid of Letters" (259).[13]

[13]Interestingly, Wood also foreshadows the idea that the poetic style and cognitive processes of a culture without writing are distinct from literate art and thought: "But the oral traditions of a learned and enlightened age will greatly mislead us, if from them we form our judgment on those of a period, when History had no other resource. . . . nor can we, in this age of Dictionaries, and other technical aids to memory, judge, what her use and powers were, at a time,

There are several more thorough histories of the development of Milman Parry's thought which bear out the fact that his model of the epic voice was very enmeshed in past ideas about oral cultures and storytellers and simultaneously very radical in the extent to which it attributed style and compositional 'genius' to the workings of tradition.[14] The major tenets of Parry's oral theory were to a large extent articulated even before he worked with contemporary oral poets in Bosnia. His two doctoral theses on the formulaic nature of traditional epithets in Homer demonstrate through very detailed philological analysis that the bizarre hodge-podge of archaic and foreign noun epithet lexical structures (including many which are unique to the Homeric poems) helped the poet fulfill metrical functions; consequently, their occurrence in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (and thus our knowledge of their use in the Greek language at all) was due *entirely* to their ability to fulfill such metrical functions.[15] Parry radically emphasized the functionality of formulaic phrases both in his theses and later essays by arguing

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when all a man could know, was all he could remember. To which we may add, that, in a rude and unlettered state of society the memory is loaded with nothing that is either useless or unintelligible; whereas modern education employs us chiefly in getting by heart, while we are young, what we forget before we are old" (Wood 259-60). As we shall see in chapter two very similar wording appears in the 'Great Divide' theories of Eric Havelock, Jack Goody and Walter Ong.

[14]The most detailed analysis of the development of Milman Parry's thought is his son's introduction to the posthumously published compilation his work, *The Making of Homeric Verse.* Foley's introduction to his annotated bibliography *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* and David Bynum's "The Generic Nature of Oral Epic Poetry" fill in more of the history preceding Parry and the uses to which his theory has been put. Walter Ong also gives an overview of this history in *Orality and Literacy.* The word 'tradition', as used in the context of oral-formulaic composition theory, applies mainly to the oral transmission of the heroic epic.

[15]Parry's theses for the Degree of Docteur-ès-Lettres from the University of Paris (*L'Épithèt traditionnelle dans Homère; Essai sur un problème de style homèrique* and *Les Fomules et la métrique d' Homère*, Paris 1928) were translated and published by his son Adam Parry in *The Making of Homeric Verse*.

that the only meaning attributable to such a phrase is the noun it describes.[16] Understanding the formula (in both its lexical and later thematic versions) as the means by which large chunks of text can be retained, transmitted, and invented in a culture without writing is the crux of oral-formulaic theory and the foundation of later oral traditional rhetorics.

There are several intimations of a romantic characterization of oral culture in Milman Parry's writings, but he never developed a theory for distinguishing oral and literate cultures. His interest was in literature, and, in an effort to clarify what distinguished the texts often focused on by folklorists from the texts focused on by literary critics, Parry proclaimed that orality was the common denominator of the genres apportioned to folklore:

> There is surely much truth in each one of these names, but I think that no one of them goes deep enough: in each case there is the failure to see that literature falls into two great parts not so much because there are two kinds of culture, but because there are two kinds of *form: the one part of literature is oral, the other written*. . . . The 'primitive', the 'popular', the 'natural' and the 'heroic', all hang upon a poetry's being oral. (180-1; 377) [Parry's emphasis].

Parry was killed in a shooting accident in 1935 at the age of 33 before the advent of television and our association of 'popular' literature and performance with that mixed medium, so we do not know what he would have thought of Ong's

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[16]For example in "The Homeric Gloss: A Study in Word-Sense" (reprinted in *The Making of Homeric Verse*) Parry says: "The characteristic sense of the ornamental epithet differs profoundly from that of the words which carry ahead the movement of the poem; for the ornamental epithet does not have an independent existence. It is one with its noun, with which it has become fused with repeated use, and the resulting noun-epithet formula constitutes a thought unit differing from that of a simple noun only by an added quality of epic nobility" (249).

description of 'secondary orality'. However, both the radical and romantic aspects of his theory stem from this basic claim that a literature developed in a cultural context that excludes writing and depends on vocal memorization, transmission, and performance, has a distinct structure which is still discernible in texts from such a literary tradition even when they have been transcribed (and revised) into written form.[17]

Although he is responsible for the great Harvard collection of Serbocroation heroic songs, nearly all of Parry's published work analyzes the Homeric poems. We have a couple of articles and the beginning of an introduction to a book on the "Southslavic" oral tradition, but Parry's early death cut his work short. His students, Albert Bates Lord and J. A. Notopolous, fully developed the version of the oral-formulaic composition theory founded on the synchronic comparison of ancient and contemporary oral traditions which is familiar to scholars of ancient and medieval literature. As will become apparent in chapter two, it is important to remember that the distinctions between oral and literate culture described by 'Great Divide' theorists were not accidentally discovered through a scientific study of contemporary and historical oral traditional texts; rather, the basic tenets of the oral-composition theory which Ong and Havelock claim as the basis for orality/literacy distinctions were propounded in reference to a written text and were based on highly literate and highly abstract philological analysis.

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[17]As Adam Parry pointed out, Parry did often suggest that there is a "specific way of life which corresponds to the peculiar form of oral poetry", but his son is skeptical that he would have gone as far as Eric Havelock's notion that there was a "Homeric state of mind" or distinct cognitive processes associated with oral culture (Adam Parry xlvi). Also, unlike Ong and Havelock, Parry was careful to distinguish heroic poetry as a particular genre of oral poetry rather than as the definitive or essential oral poetic form (Parry 181, 378).

Oral-formulaic composition theory, then, predicts that particular structural textual analyses can lead to a conclusion about the history of a text's original composition. In and of itself such a theory does not call for an emphasis on the epic voice, yet the particular interests and audience of the theory's originators coupled with the cultural assumptions of the period in which the theory was developed have generated two orality rhetorics which hinge on positioning the epic voice as the essential, originary voice of orality: 1) the "Great Divide" theories of Eric Havelock and, building on Havelock's assumptions, of Jack Goody and Walter Ong (which describe oral and literate modes of thought as distinct and as precluding one another) and 2) the oral traditional aesthetic theory of John Miles Foley (which argues that oral art forms have distinct aesthetic properties which cannot or have not been accounted for in 'literate' literary theories). These two versions of epic orality will be analyzed in more detail in chapter two.

Popular

The settings and genres of popular orality are more varied than that of epic orality. It occurs at the hearth of the family kitchen when grandpa tells amusing and scary stories, on the playground when children chant as they skip rope and on the commons when local rituals (such as dramas or dances) are performed. It shares with epic orality an emphasis on traditional discourse. That is, the verbal performances in question draw attention because they have a life beyond specific occurrences; through repetition they develop a cultural endurance comparable to that of written literature, and they are perceived as marked off events by their audiences and producers. This orality is associated with the study of folklore which from its beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

was focused on documenting, preserving, and valuing the spoken traditions of common people.[18] As epic orality is associated with a heroic age before the advent of literacy, popular orality, although it coexists with literacy, is associated with preindustrial or early industrial culture.

The strong argument for this association is presented in Jack Zipes' work focusing on the rhetorical shifts which literate (industrialized, capitalist) culture imposes on the texts of folklore. Zipes argues that the 'fairy tales' collected, edited and revised by nineteenth century scholars such as the Brothers Grimm, are literature and thus are structurally and politically distinguishable from the folktales from which they are derived. The basis of such a distinction between literature and folklore rests on connecting the oral with face-to-face, collective artistic expression and opposing it to the alienating forces of modernity, capitalism, and mass culture or culture imposed on rather than proceeding from collective consciousness (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 11-19).[19]

As a kind of map for his argument about orality and cultural production, Zipes reproduces the following list of characteristics opposing folklore to literature:

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[18]Richard Bauman quotes antiquarian William John Thoms' description of folklore genres as "the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc., of the olden times" ("Folklore" 177). Contemporary folklore studies also include material culture, but as Bauman points out, the concept of folklore "emerged in the late eighteenth century as part of a unified vision of language, culture, literature, and ideology in the service of romantic nationalism" (177). According to early folklorists, such as Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), language was the crucial distinguishing feature of folk culture, and uncontaminated folk languages/traditions would of necessity be oral and local.

[19]Ethnographic folklore studies, such as Dennis Tedlock's *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* and especially the anthology *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, argue that distinctions between collectives and individuals are impossible to maintain. Furthermore, such scholars would find the narrative of Modernity underlying Zipes' formula unsettling. However, folklorists in general do share Zipes' value for local communal empowerment.

Folklore	*Literature*
Oral	Written
Performance	Text
Face-to-face Communication	Indirect Communication
Ephemeral	Permanent
Communal (Event)	Individual (Event)
Re-creation	Creation
Variation	Revision
Tradition	Innovation
Unconscious Structure	Conscious Design
Collective Representations	Selective Representations
Public (Ownership)	Private (Ownership)
Diffusion	Distribution
Memory (Recollection)	Re-reading (Recollection) [20]

The diffusion/distribution opposition characterizing the structural transmission of oral vs. written verbal art reveals that this pattern of describing culture targets print culture and the industrialization associated with it rather than the essential qualities of writing *per se*. Individualism, according to this paradigm, is the product of modernity/capitalism, and giving power to the idea of individualism begets enclosed, decontextualized interpretative systems less open to variation in the face of changing needs of particular communities (that is, change is imposed from without rather than emerging from within a given community).[21]

[20]Zipes takes this list from Joseph J. Arpad.

[21]Interestingly, Zipes' Marxist version of oral culture/folklore embodies a narrative of loss of local communal integrity which parallels the romantic anxiety about alienation in the face of modernity expressed by many early developers of the field of folklore. As Bauman points out, the romantic conception of *das Volk* and folk tradition which drove nationalistic propaganda was seen as a means for maintaining (or recovering) a community's distinctiveness and organic culture ("Folklore" 177-78). It should be noted, however, that unlike his romantic predecessors, Zipes acknowledges the oppressive potential of tradition and the liberatory potential of literary uses of folklore. Much of his work, in fact, focuses on how both traditional and literary uses of folk forms operate differently in specific socio-political contexts.

The concept of orality has a dual function within folkloristics[22] in that it distinguishes the physical quality of the texts in question from other textual types and it marks performance (in the sense of both drama and action) as constitutive of those texts. Institutionally, these vectors of folklore have been divided up by academic disciplines which tend to separate text and performance and to allocate different genres to those disciplines. In early folklore studies, orality merely marked the practices being documented as spoken, as originating from and transmitted through spoken discourse. These practices were associated with non-literate groups within early literate industrial society, and these non-literate groups, viewed by literates as relics, were synchronic manifestations of literate peoples' past. Out of this focus on a disenfranchised group coexisting with and ruled by a privileged group arose both the negative and positive inflections of folklore: from the perspective of practical reason folklore represents "folly, superstition, and falsehood, anachronistic leftovers from an earlier stage in human social development since transcended by scientific rationalism of modern civilization," and, conversely, as a remedy for cold reason and industrial capitalism, it represents natural, authentic, human warmth and emotion (Bauman "Folklore," 178).[23]

Currently, orality manifests itself in folklore research in two forms: 1)traditional folklore projects continue to collect and document verbal art forms in order to preserve them and to forward the articulation of typologies [here

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[22]This term is relatively recent in folklore scholarship. I use it here, as it is used in the literature, to emphasize the field's shift toward social science methodologies.

[23]Ruth Finnegan, one of the most insistent critics of Great Divide orality/literacy distinctions, discusses the romantic roots of the association of orality and folklore in several of her publications (e.g. *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* 26-29, *Literacy and Orality* 111-112, see especially *Oral Poetry* 30-41).

orality marks the medium of composition and/or transmission only]; 2)folklore projects influenced by recent theoretical trends in linguistics, literary criticism and philosophy of language focus on performance, such as problems with fully rendering verbal art in written form for preservation and analysis of the relations between particular performances, social contexts and typologies [here orality marks the nature of the text's full instantiation in performance and how its shape is constituted in response to rhetorical exigency].[24]

Popular orality, then, is a means to an end rather than an essential quality. Admittedly this is an extremely slippery distinction which often trips up scholars by making it all too easy to fall into an equation of orality with culture. Culture *is* the target of folklorists;however, orality is the medium or means of instantiation of culture rather than its essence. This principle can best be demonstrated by contrasting popular orality and epic orality. Epic orality (which is also interested in performance) claims distinctive compositional processes for orality which are so essential to orally composed texts that they leave their traces even when such texts are transcribed. Popular orality in traditional folkloristics is claimed to hold distinctive artful content which can be (and ought to be) preserved in writings and recordings. In performance centered folkloristics, popular orality includes individual performances of traditional texts which, when studied as they occur in particular contexts, can give researchers insight into cultural production. The different emphasis on orality in epic and popular descriptions of oral poetry is dramatized in the scholarly tension between John Miles Foley and Ruth Finnegan. For instance, in reviews of Finnegan's *Oral Poetry*, Foley and another

[24]This second trend is best exemplified (and described) by Richard Bauman's *Story, Performance and Event*.

scholar (Daniel Melia) criticized her approach mostly on the grounds that her definition of oral art was too broad and included too many genres.[25] However, Finnegan's work focuses on the nexus of folklore and anthropology while Foley's is a continuation of Parry and Lord's project. Hence, although her arguments, when viewed from the perspective of epic orality, seem tautological (i.e., '*x* is oral poetry because it is spoken'), from the perspective of popular orality her insistence on inclusiveness is predictable and reflects her disciplinary commitments.

Conversational

Conversational orality includes any discourse exchanges which occur in everyday settings (for example, informal dinner talk or telephone chats). This orality is studied most within three subdisciplines of linguistics: discourse analysis, conversational analysis and sociolinguistics. Interestingly, the groups often studied by sociolinguists have much in common with groups traditionally targeted by folklorists. They usually have a distinct ethnic or socio-economic class identification easily recognized by themselves as well as researchers, and they often have a strong oral tradition (such as storytelling, singing or insult games). The same stereotypical grandpa mentioned at the beginning of the previous section could be the subject of both folkloristic and sociolinguistic research; however, whereas the folklorist would be interested in the stories and traditions which grandpa recognizes as part of the communal value system (such as folktales or old ballads), the sociolinguist would be most interested in eliciting and recording 'natural' or informal conversation from grandpa which would

[25] It should be noted as well that Finnegan's book drew the fire of epic oralists partly because it criticized oral-composition theory from the perspective of popular orality.

hopefully contain dialect features and personal narratives as they would naturally occur in an everyday context. Studies of everyday conversation have added to our understanding of rhetoric by demonstrating the structuredness, cohesiveness, and artfulness of the most mundane verbal interchanges. William Labov's research on personal experience narratives, Livia Polanyi's analysis of what constitutes the basic structure of typical American stories, and Deborah Tannen's demonstration that what we usually think of as 'literary language' structures everyday conversation have all contributed to the questioning of once-accepted notions of what constitutes 'literariness'.

In linguistics, speech can either represent the performance of deeper structures (as in the langue/parole distinction) or the instance of social and linguistic production. Dell Hymes, one of the pioneers in the development of the field of sociolinguistics, describes these two thrusts of linguistic analysis as 'structural' and 'functional'. The former focuses on the grammar structures or systems which theoretically lie behind instances of language use while the latter focuses on actual uses of language in various contexts as the structuring and driving force of linguistic production.[26] Discourse analysis and conversational

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[26]Hymes gives the following table comparing foci in structural and functional linguistics in *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* (79):

	Structural	Functional
1.	Structure of language (code) as grammar	Structure of speech (act, event) as ways of speaking
2.	Use merely implements, perhaps limits, may correlate with, what is analyzed as code; analysis of code prior to analysis of use	Analysis of use prior to analysis of code; organization of use discloses additional features and relations; shows code and use in integral (dialectical) relation
3.	Referential function, fully semanticized uses as norm	Gamut of stylistic or social functions
4.	Elements and structures analytically arbitrary	Elements and structures as

analysis utilize both structural and functional analytic models while sociolinguistics is by definition a functionalist field. Within the discipline of linguistics, functionalist models of language offset the reductionist tendencies of structuralist/formalist analysis by appealing to a holistic view of language, action and the world (or context). Organizing this holistic view are the voices of individual speakers engaging in everyday face-to-face interaction. The functionalist observer acknowledges his/her influence on the events which unfold and takes into account (by granting some authority to) the participants' understanding and interpretations of what is said and intended.

For functional linguistics, as for folkloristics, oral discourse is the medium in which the phenomenon being studied occurs. Where epic orality focuses on a particular genre of verbal art and popular orality focuses on cultural production, conversational orality focuses on social interaction. Sociolinguistics posits informal verbal interaction as the originary locus of all linguistic, social, and textual production. Thus, studying particular verbal exchanges as they occur in their contexts are viewed as the key to our knowledge of language, society and

	(in cross-cultural or historical perspective), or universal (in theoretical perspective)	ethnographically appropriate ("psychiatrically in Sapir's sense)
5.	Functional (adaptive)equivalence of languages; all languages potentially equal	Functional (adaptive) differentiation of languages, varieties, styles; these being existentially (actually) not necessarily equivalent.
6.	Single homogeneous code and community ("replication of uniformity")	Speech community as matrix of code-repertoires, or speech styles ("organization of diversity")
7.	Fundamental concepts, such as speech community, speech act, fluent speaker, functions of speech and of languages, taken for granted or arbitrarily postulated	Fundamental concepts taken as problematic and to be investigated

textuality. For example, an analysis of recorded interviews can yield phonological information, but it can also simultaneously reveal social hierarchies and identify verbal genres. Ideally, sociolinguistics makes observable language's constitution by socio-cultural and textual forces. [27]

The term 'orality' was current in linguistic discourse studies during the eighties, but has since been largely subsumed under comparisons of spoken and written discourse.[28] This terminology difference is indicative of the structure and interests of linguistic inquiry. Speech and writing are much more specific and, therefore, much more analyzable than the categories 'orality' and 'literacy.' The latter carry evaluative baggage and are complicated by the theories of history and of culture in which they are embedded, while theories about the former can supposedly be tested through synchronic comparison. However, foregrounding speech/ writing differences eventually leads to or presupposes an orality rhetoric. For instance, in an attempt to ameliorate some of the essentialism of Great Divide orality / literacy theories while still making such a discourse distinction useful, Deborah Tannen suggested that we think of the discourse differences observed by scholars such as Ong and Goody as strategies which exist along a continuum:

> It is important to stress that it is the awareness of strategies that have been associated with oral and literate tradition that has been enlightening.

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[27]A typical example of this kind of work would be William Labov's *Language in the Inner City*.

[28]While comparisons of spoken and written discourse have always been a part of linguistic inquiry in one form or another, discussions about systematic cognitive differences between oral and literate practices were introduced in discourse analysis partly because of the use Walter Ong made of Wallace Chafe's work on integration and involvement in speaking and writing. But even as orality / literacy distinctions were tried out by conversational analysts, such as Deborah Tannen, in the early eighties, most linguists doubted that oral/literate distinctions would hold under the scrutiny of systematic analysis (see Tannen's "The Myth of Orality and Literacy"). Douglas Biber's work (e.g. *Variations Across Speech and Writing*) bore out this doubt.

> I have come to believe. . . that these strategies are not limited to orality vs. literacy, and certainly not to spoken vs. written language, but rather can be seen to interplay in spoken and written discourse in various settings ("Oral/Literate Continuum" 4).

Continuum models are structurally tricky. They are meant to account for the interrelated development of a set of variables (i.e., so that overlaps and 'regression' can be seen without discounting the model in question). Theoretically continua also map synchronic comparisons while simultaneously conceptualizing the coexistence of several different diachronic planes (e.g., contemporary changes alongside changes across eras). In a detailed analysis of a particular set of variables, such as orality/literacy or spoken/written distinctions, it is difficult to maintain the holistic perspective of a continuum without falling into a linear evolutionary narrative. In Tannen's case, her idea of an oral/literate continuum has been criticized by literacy scholars as reinstating the 'myths' she debunks, and it has also been used in epic orality rhetorics to maintain reductive historical narratives about discourse which have been called into question by current research on contemporary oral cultures. [29]

Even while sociolinguists and discourse theorists have discussed orality in the terms put forward by Great Divide proponents, much of their work depends upon an orality rhetoric which owes more to folkloristic performance theories. In *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, in the midst of his discussion of an ethnographic

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[29]For example, Brian Street critiques Tannen's discussion of the myth of orality and literacy in his "Literacy Practices and Literacy Myths" (*Social Literacies* 161-178), while Walter Ong cites Tannen's idea of an orality/literacy continuum as supporting his "Great Divide" theory (in that it allows for 'oral residues' in literate cultures). Following Ong, medieval scholars such as Katherine O'Keeffe (*Visible Song*), have used the idea of an orality/literacy continuum to describe the different types of orality they find in medieval texts.

theory of language as communication, Dell Hymes lays out his now famous communicative competence heuristic, the SPEAKING grid.[30] Hymes' SPEAKING grid allows for a description of speech acts which takes into account both "the relationships among speech events, acts, and styles, on the one hand, and personal abilities and roles, contexts and institutions, and beliefs, values and attitudes, on the other" (45). Hymes' heuristic counts as an orality rhetoric partly because it organizes the poetic, cultural and everyday uses of language and nonverbal communication as emanating from the contingencies of everyday face-to-face verbal interaction.[31] For example, both spoken and written discourse are allowed for under "instrumentalites," and "norms of interaction and interpretation" coupled with "genre" would allow for a description of literature and culture. In the way that Chomsky views grammar as the place of language, Hymes, quite purposefully, views face-to-face interaction (language use) as the

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[30]Following is a simplified version of the SPEAKING grid taken from Deborah Schiffrin's *Approaches to Discourse* (142):

S	setting	physical circumstances
	scene	subjective definition of an occasion
P	participants	speaker/sender/addressor
		hearer/receiver/audience/addressee
E	ends	purposes and goals
		outcomes
A	act sequence	message form and content
K	key	tone, manner
I	instrumentalities	channel (verbal, nonverbal, physical)
		forms of speech drawn from community repertoire
N	norms of interaction	
	and interpretation	specific properties attached to speaking
		interpretation of norms within cultural belief system
G	genres	textual categories

Hymes grouped setting and scene together under 'act situation' (*Foundations in Sociolinguistics* 56).

[31]In chapters 6 and 7 of this same book Hymes also explicitly discusses what folklore and poetics add to his sociolinguistic theory of language.

place of language/society/culture.[32] Like the continuum model, the SPEAKING grid attempts a holistic perspective on discourse. However, while oral/literate continua map strategies from different contexts in relation to one another and in reference to some essential oral quality at one end and some essential literate quality at the other, Hymes' heuristic is an etic model for discovering local taxonomies of communicative 'units' which are "in some recognizable way bounded or integral" from the perspective of participants as well as observers ("Models of the Interaction" 56). The 'orality' of Hymes' model resides in the acronym which implies that speaking is the presupposition for all communicative activity. Further, unlike an orality/literacy continuum, the SPEAKING grid is organized around what it means to be a communicating subject rather than around historical or synchronic[33] narratives of discursive or cognitive development.

Rhetorical Methods

To the extent that epic, popular, and conversational orality models all hold in tension biological and rhetorical aspects of 'voice,' they make claims for a relation between forms of language, epistemology and ethics. As will be discussed in the following chapters, epic orality makes special claims about traditional aesthetics by paying attention to their grounding in the actual voice of the oral traditional singer; popular orality makes a connection between communal verbal performances and representation as both a means of obtaining valuable texts or

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[32]In linguistic terms, Chomsky's model is emic while Hymes' is etic.

[33]By 'synchronic' narrative I refer to variables which might be organized through temporal causation but which do not actually act/move sequentially in time. For example, Tannen's continuum of discourse strategies (moving from oral to written) is somewhat structured and endowed with authority by the narrative of cultural development (from oral traditional to literate) which preceded it.

cultural artifacts and as an allegory for the ills of modernity; and finally, conversational orality elucidates everyday speaking practices while analogically bringing all other communication practices under the speaking umbrella. Through these interpretative methodologies, orality rhetorics share the goal of obtaining a coherent holistic understanding of discourse in simultaneous relation to the world, texts and subjects.

Orality and the World

One confusing aspect of orality studies is that they do not explicate, describe, or analyze human vocalization.[34] The apparent lack of literal reference for the term 'orality' in any of the theories in which it plays a role has caused many scholars to question its viability.[35] The foregoing description of different orality rhetorics and the voices which organize them was meant to clarify the fuzziness resulting from the conflation of those rhetorics in cross-disciplinary discussions. But even within those boundaries, the term orality does not referentially point to speech; rather, it points through speech to other phenomena. Orality uses the voice as a marker for an actual connection between language and the world, and it follows that the epistemology of a given orality rhetoric would depend upon the voice which organizes it.

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[34]One interesting exception to this rule is Paul Zumthor who has called for a general poetics of orality "that will act as a forum for individual inquiries and offer functional notions applicable to the phenomenon of the transmission of poetry by voice and memory, to the exclusion of all other media" ("The Presence of Voice", *Oral Poetry*, 3). Like Ong, Zumthor is preoccupied with the losses orality represents more than forwarding an actual voice science.

[35]For example, in "What is Orality–if Anything?", Ruth Finnegan says: "The basic problem, it seems to me, is that having got hold of a useful adjective, we then in typical academic manner, turn it into a noun and give it more pressure than it can bear" (140). Also, Joyce Coleman argues that orality's lack of definition swallows or subsumes more analyzable discursive practices such as 'aurality' (the art of public reading) in "On beyond Ong: the Bases of a Revised Theory of Orality and Literacy" (*Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval France and England* 1-33).

If we take the strong argument for each of the three orality rhetorics outlined above, we could make the following generalization concerning the modes of interpretation which they generate: whereas epic orality is anagogical, popular orality is allegorical, and conversational orality is analogical. For example, while Great Divide theorist Walter Ong appeals to a kind of spiritualism in his mourning the loss of an irrecoverable 'primary' orality, Jack Zipes constructs the story of alienating modernity / capitalism, and Dell Hymes argues that language is closer to communication behaviors than to grammatical deep structures.[36] Consider some statements typifying the way in which each scholar positions orality vis-à-vis the world [my comments in brackets]:

> To learn what a primary oral culture is and what the nature of our problem is regarding such culture, it helps first to reflect on the nature of sound itself as sound. All sensations take place in time, but sound has a special relationship to time unlike other fields that register in human sensation. Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent. When I pronounce the word 'permanence', by the time I get to

[36]Anagogical, allegorical and analogical divisions evoke medieval hermeneutics, but I do not mean to fully map the epistemologies of orality rhetorics through that system. Here, and throughout this study, I use these terms a bit more loosely. The anagogical and allegorical both refer to comparisons using stuff in the world to elucidate something unrelated to the comparison. The difference between these two is that allegory has a narrative structure whereas anagogy, although it might participate in cultural narratives, does not develop in narrative form. Analogy contrasts with these two in that it depends on an actual connection between the items being compared. And allegory, to the extent that narrative structure depends upon how things generally go in the world, is less abstract than anagogy which in its strongest form dips into the spiritual or other-worldly. Richard McKeon makes a similar distinction between anagogy and allegory in "Symbols, Myths, and Arguments." These three interpretative modes represent a difference in emphasis among orality rhetorics rather than exclusive boundaries between them.

> the '-nence', the 'perma-' is gone, and has to be gone. (Ong *Orality and Literacy* 31-2).

[Here we move directly from the concept of 'oral culture' to the essential nature of sound and the morals which can be derived from our contemplation of sound.]

> However, the transformation of the oral tale into the literary fairy tale does mark a significant historical turning point in the arts, for with the rise of such technology as the printing press the possibility to instrumentalize products of fantasy and govern their effect on the masses was made manifest. (Zipes *Breaking the Magic Spell* 11).[37]

[Tracing the development of oral tales into literature elucidates the story of the effects of capitalism on culture.]

> Many generalizations about the rules of speaking will take the form of statements of *relationship among components*. It is not yet clear that there is any priority to be assigned to particular components in such statements. So far as one can tell at present, any component may be taken as a starting point, and others viewed in relation to it. When individual societies have been well analyzed, hierarchies of precedence among components will very likely appear and be found to differ from case to case. Such differences in hierarchies and components will then be an

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[37]In fairness to Zipes, this thread in his thought is much more complex than it here appears. In a later piece, he is more critical of simplistic versions of this allegory: "The study of the relationship between orality and literacy has always had great significance for folklorists in their investigations of folk tales and their derivations. However, they have generally felt called upon to defend the "purity" of the oral genre and its resilient character against the "creeping disease" of literary adaptation and the production of the tales in distorted but attractive forms as commodities to make money. . . . I want to point out some of the productive results that their efforts may have for literary theory by focusing on the *ambivalent* nature of the tensions between the oral folk tale and the literary fairy tale" ("Semantic Shifts of Power in Folk and Fairy Tales," *The Brothers Grimm*, 135). [Zipes' emphasis].

> important part of the taxonomy of sociolinguistic systems. For one group, rules of speaking will be heavily bound to setting; for another primarily to participants; for a third, perhaps topics. (Hymes *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* 63).

[Emphasis mine. Speaking and the world are inextricably intertwined. We cannot make sense of sound outside context, and while the world governs interpretation and makes the articulation of rules and structures possible, there is no essential quality to speech which necessitates particular lines of development.]

Admittedly, these scholars are much more complex than this representation of them implies; however, the generalization holds in that in comparison to one another they shade into the categories assigned to them. The further we move in the direction of conversational orality, the more our oral theory becomes enmeshed in the physical world. Conversely, the further we go in the direction of epic orality, the more we move away from the world into the realm of ideal forms. Epistemologically then, epic oralists are drawn to a kind of medieval realism while conversational oralists assume that modern realism holds,[38] and popular oralists are strongly pulled in both directions.

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[38]The basic tenet of medieval realism, as propounded, for example, by Peter Abelard's famous teacher William of Champeaux, is that 'universals' exist independently (as in Plato's realm of ideal forms). The following comment by Hilary Putnam represents the realism which contemporary social sciences depend on: "'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. *We* can cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since the objects *and* the signs are alike *internal* to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what" (*Reason, Truth, and History* 52) [Putnam's emphasis]. One difference between medieval nominalism (the idea that the names of objects are the objects) and modern realism is that the latter acknowledges the real existence of stuff (or 'the world') independent of any particular scheme.

Orality and the Text

Orality also calls into question the nature of textuality. On the surface, it seems obvious that textuality would point to the written, but one argument which all oralists have made successfully is that when one moves beyond 'writteness' to the other qualities attributed to texts, the boundaries between spoken and written discourse are not so clear. Depending on the rhetoric in question, orality can either be used to redraw discourse boundaries or to blur them altogether. Oral traditional rhetorics organized by the epic voice focus on separating and defining attributes which are distinctive of heroic poetry or 'primary' oral culture. Folklore studies (both traditional and performance-centered) broaden the definitions of textuality (especially literary textuality) in order to account for the artful content of local communal practices. Studies of everyday speaking demonstrate that structures which have been traditionally thought of as essentially literary also function in mundane, typical face-to-face interactions. In each case, the vector of evaluation moves in two directions: 1)from literary textual theory to describe discursive phenomena which have previously been unaccounted for and 2) from those newly defined discursive phenomena back to a reevaluation of the assumptions of literary theory.

The rhetoric[39] generated by this movement from textuality to orality / speaking and from orality / speaking back to textuality is qualitatively affected by the voice which a given oralist presupposes as originary. For example, 'performance' functions as an analog to 'text' in each orality model, but the boundaries between audience and performance and the audience's awareness of the performance as performance varies. The epic oral performance is set off

[39]In the sense of a narrative or schema systematizing a set of discursive properties.

from day to day actions by a variety of overt cues. The performer is often a recognized professional and he or she might plan times and places of performance in advance.[40] Other folk performances might be as formal as epic, but popular orality focuses on the performances in which performer and audience are more enmeshed in each other and in the everyday world. The performer in such cases is usually not a professional and the participants are less likely to designate the event as 'official' or as art. In conversational orality, which is pulled both by speech act theory's view of all language as performative and folkloristic performance models, performance verges on being analogous to itself. That is, the oral performances or 'texts' of everyday conversation are analyzed both in reference to performance as drama and performance as action. One major difference between folklore texts and conversational texts is that participants are much more conscious of the former as texts which can be saved and repeated in other contexts; whereas, the linguist observer has to do a lot of analytical work to determine the textual boundaries in a given conversation.[41] In sociological terms, the relationship between the focal event (which counts as text in orality rhetorics) and context is more blurred the further we move into

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[40]Finnegan points this out often in her work to rebut Great Divide arguments that oral cultures are not self-conscious about the artistry of their poetic discursive practices (e.g., Literacy *& Orality* 67-77)

[41]In order to understand the pressure linguistics puts on the concept of textuality, it is good to keep in mind here the famous definition of text put forward by discourse analysts Halliday and Hasan: "A text is best regarded as a SEMANTIC unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Thus it is related to a clause or a sentence not by size but by REALIZATION, the coding of one symbolic system in another. A text does not consist of sentences; it is REALIZED BY, or encoded in sentences. If we understand it in this way, we shall not expect to find the same kind of STRUCTURAL integration among parts of a text s we find among parts of a sentence or clause. The unity of the text is a unity of a different kind" (*Cohesion in English* 2) [Emphasis theirs]. The text linguist, according to this definition, takes on a larger interpretative burden than the syntactition in that s/he must demonstrate that the discourse presented is a text by arguing for a particular set of semantic boundaries.

conversational orality and more defined the further we move toward epic orality.[42]

In her landmark essay "What is Oral Literature Anyway?", anthropologist Ruth Finnegan reveals the hypothetical nature of the genre often posited as the prototype for all oral performance. As she points out, the oral epic is hard to find outside the traditional comparison of the heroic narratives preserved in western culture and the living Yugoslavic traditions. Even in that famous connection, the orality of the epic is hard to pin down. Oral-composition theorist Albert Bates Lord describes it as the process of composition in performance, and suggests that literate composers have a different type of mindset which does not allow them to produce the kind of text which illiterate traditional composers perform.[43] The improbability of finding such a composer 'untouched by literacy' in Ong's sense makes this description impossible to prove or disprove, and it is belied by the inclusion of literate composers in the Serbocroation heroic corpus which Lord analyzed. Finnegan calls for a relative definition of 'oral' and suggests that the concepts 'orality' and 'oral literature' be viewed as tools for analyzing some dynamics of performance in relation to context--including the possible influence of writing in the composition of oral poetry (161-2).

Interestingly, in response to Finnegan's criticism of oral-composition theory, Lord demonstrates the anagogical tendency of epic oralists by pushing back the crucial level of 'performance' in his definition of oral poetry:

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[42]See Goodwin and Duranti's overview of theories of context in "Rethinking Context: An Introduction."

[43]Finnegan 137; Lord, *The Singer of Tales* 129.

> I should like to note here, however, that one must distinguish between the literal and the specialized use of the word 'oral'. . . . Some scholars have been deceived by Ruth Finnegan's confusing assertions that there are oral poetries that are not composed in performance. This is true, but those poetries generally consist of short nonnarrative songs not of long epics. It is the *mode of composition* that is crucial, not the mode of performance. (*Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* 3). [Emphasis mine].

Lord's positioning of the oral is indicative of the way in which oral-composition theory parallels the emic quality of Chomsky's approach to language: oral composition relates to performance in defining the domain of oral literature in the way that grammar relates to language in defining the goals of linguistics.[44] In respect to the operation of the idea of textuality in orality rhetorics, performance, both semantically and literally, resides in the nexus of folklore and anthropology and acts as an analog in the epic oralists' project of defining oral textuality at the level of genre and in the sociolinguists' project of defining the boundaries and significance of verbal actions.[45]

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[44]Another example of this belief in our ability to distinguish structures in the mind can be seen in Lord's criticism of Finnegan's discussion of orality and memorization: "Ruth Finnegan has quoted two versions of the Mandika epic *Sunjata* by the same singer as examples of texts in which 'memorisation is to some extent involved.'. . . If one looks in detail. . . one finds that something other than memorization has been taking place. An analysis of the syntactic, acoustic, and metric, or rhythmic structures of the individual groups of lines, couplets, triplets, and so forth, shows that they are easily remembered. They are memorable, and they are frequently repeated. Singers have not memorized them; they have remembered them" (*Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* 237).

[45]In a recent review of performance theory in folklore and linguistic anthropology, Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs examine the implications of performance theory's historical connection to notions of 'performativity' in speech act theory ("Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life").

Orality and the Subject

Orality rhetorics carry with them a definition of personhood which the voice reflects and embodies.[46] In the work of specific scholars, this ethical bent might be latent (the logical fallout of assumptions about the subject underlying an approach to textuality) or active (articulated as part of a theorist's agenda), and a given reference to orality might evoke different (even conflicting) subjectivities. Some scholars have implied that orality and literacy necessitate different ethical systems. For example, Eric Havelock went so far as to argue that ethical reasoning could not exist before the advent of alphabetic literacy.[47] While this position is generally considered extreme, implementations of orality rhetorics are often accompanied by a discussion of particular ethical interests which attention to the oral can supposedly address. One ethical theme touched on by several different oralists is the need to incorporate (or *re*incorporate) the humane perspective in analyses of discourse and texts.[48]

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[46]Here and later in chapter five, I use the minimal definition of personhood developed by Owen Flanagan in *Varieties of Moral Personality* as a reference point: "(1) All normal Homo sapiens are minimal persons; that is, they have a sense of themselves as distinctive subjects of experience with a certain diachronic unity; and they are right in this. (2) In normal environments minimal persons have distinctive personalities. For now this need only be interpreted as meaning that environmental variability, even in highly homogeneous natural and social environments, together with variations in the basic apparatus underwriting temperament, intelligence, and body type, is sufficient to produce variety in beliefs, desires, and behaviors of particular persons, in the relative strengths of shared beliefs, desires and behaviors of particular persons, and in the associative and inferential relations among beliefs and desires. (3) Minimal persons care how their lives go, and this involves caring about satisfaction of their desires over time, which in turn involves epistemic guidance of behavior" (64).

[47]"The Orality of Socrates and the Literacy of Plato: With Some Reflections on the Historical Origins of Moral Philosophy in Europe."

[48]For example Great Divide theorist Walter Ong proclaims that knowledge of orality/literacy contrasts causes us to "revise our understanding of human identity" (*Orality* 1), while sociolinguist Deborah Tannen concludes her book on literary forms in everyday conversation with a discussion of how her work contributes to a humanistic linguistics (*Talking Voices* 196-7).

Although it would be an understatement to say that the concept of subjectivity is highly contested in contemporary theory, it would also be fair to state that the vexations attending definitions of subjectivity are much more manageable in orality rhetorics. For example, the existence of the subject and of the world are less at issue in orality research than are descriptions of how and to what extent the quality of their relationship constitutes language and culture. Almost by definition, the invocation of orality in readings of texts or culture presupposes a belief in the subject which is separate from but connected to the world through biology (e.g. the acoustics of the voice). The whole point of orality, as differentiated from broader categories such as 'language,' 'art,' or 'culture,' is to hold subjectivity and the world in stasis with culture in order to examine the quality of their connection.

Epic orality defines the subject in relation to an official voice. That is, the epic voice is literally an official voice, and the epic genre defines subjectivity according to dogmas (religious and cultural), laws, and genealogies of power. The epic genre in Western traditions developed from the perspective of the ruling class (which in this context was usually also a warrior class).[49] The literal voice which produced epic songs belonged to a protégé or an official representative of the court, and this context set boundaries for who could be the

[49]For example, the *scop* in *Beowulf* is a servant of Hrothgar's hall who presents the history of the Half-Danes just before Beowulf's court introduction and during the victory feast celebrating his defeat of Grendel. Admittedly, included poet's high praise for kings and warriors are descriptions of the dilemmas endemic to warrior societies (such as the endless cycle of violence created by feuds); however, even such criticisms are couched in terms of ruling class values and concerns. Anglo-Saxonist Eugene Green has pointed out how *Beowulf* reflects and reproduces ruling class values by giving personal names only to men of royal status and women who are married to kings.

subjects of epic and what recognition would be granted to the subjectivity of an audience.[50]

The rhetorical structure and the ethical and political force of the epic voice has been analyzed by several early twentieth century literary theorists, among whom Mikhail Bakhtin is the most well-known and often cited in recent orality studies. Bakhtin characterizes epic language as "not separable from its subject, for an absolute fusion of subject matter and spatial-temporal aspects with valorized (hierarchical) ones is characteristic of semantics in the epic" ("Epic and Novel" *The Dialogic Imagination* 17). In contrast to the centrifugal forces of novelistic discourse, epic attempts to realize the fantasy of monologic, unifying, hierarchical, centripetal language.[51] For example, the audience of epic discourse is not supposed to question the motivations of characters beyond what the poet tells them; good warriors are good warriors, bad kings are bad kings, fate is fate. According to Bakhtin, "this absolute fusion and the consequent unfreedom of the subject was first overcome only with the arrival on the scene of an active polyglossia and interillumination of languages ("Epic and Novel" 17). This theory of epic aesthetics is not original to Bakhtin; Georg Lukács describes the same forces of epic nostalgically in his description of 'integrated civilizations' in *The Theory of the Novel*: "the mind's attitude within such a home is passively visionary acceptance of ready-made, ever-present meaning. The world of meaning can be grasped, it can be taken in at a glance; all that is necessary is to find the *locus* that has been predestined for each individual" (32). Echoes of this desire for

[50]Although the Yugoslavic heroic songs recorded by Parry and Lord were performed for male villagers and farmers in coffee houses, Lord points out that this tradition originally developed through court patronage as well (*Singer of Tales* 16).

[51]"Discourse in the Novel", *The Dialogic Imagination*, 270-273.

integration between subjects, objects, and language sound throughout epic oralists' research.

In *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Bates Lord emphasized the sacral intensity of oral epic:

> The traditional oral epic singer is not an artist: he is a seer. The patterns of thought that he has inherited came into being to serve not art but religion in its most basic sense. . . . The nontraditional literary artist, sensing the force of the traditional material whence his art was derived, but no longer comprehending it, no longer finding acceptable the methods of the traditional, sought to compensate for his lack by intricacies of construction created for their own sake. (220-221).

Here art is theorized as an alienated descendant of oral culture. The modern artist is cut off from the sound / meaning nexus which integrates language and life. In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong comes even closer to Bakhtinian and Lukáscian descriptions of epic:

> The centering action of sound (the field of sound is not spread out before me but is all around me) affects man's sense of the cosmos. For oral cultures, the cosmos is an ongoing event with man at its center. . . . the characteristics of orally based thought and expression. . . relate intimately to the unifying, centralizing, interiorizing economy of sound as perceived by human beings. A sound-dominated verbal economy is consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies rather than analytic, dissecting tendencies (which would come with the inscribed, visualized word: vision is a dissecting sense). (73-74)

In nostalgic views of epic, the fantasy of such integration is placed in an irrecoverable past, but as Bakhtin points out , such a past was already irrecoverable even at the original performance of an epic:

> The epic past is called the "absolute past" for good reason: it is both monochronic and valorized (hierarchical); it lacks any relativity, that is, any gradual, purely temporal progressions that might connect it with the present. It is walled off absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and his listeners are located. This boundary, consequently, is immanent in the form of the epic itself and is felt and heard in its every word. ("Epic and Novel" 15-16)

These characterizations of the force and fantasy of the epic voice will seem very familiar to literary critics and even to most readers of Homer or *Beowulf*. However, when we try to discover exactly who is implicated in epic fantasy, things become less comfortable. First, many of these characterizations of epic come with caveats. For example, Bakhtin's theories depend upon the understanding that all discourse is dialogic (discourse answers back to and tropes previous utterances in the process of its constitution), so the epic project of unification is theoretically a failure from the beginning. Also, one of the major distinctions between written and oral epics, Lord points out, is that the circumstances of performance (the context and audience expectations) influence the version of a given song which the epic singer actually produces.[52] So the closed circle and absolute past of epic are also somewhat relative. Second, the dreamer of the epic fantasy is difficult to track: is he the original poet/performer, the king and warriors for whom this poet performs, the whole community

[52]"Songs and the Song", *The Singer of Tales*, 99-123.

governed by the king, the subsequent cultures which transcribed and preserved particular epics, or modern readers and theorists? The easy answer is 'all of the above', but when we consider the heterogeneity of textual forms and language communities of the epics which are included in the Western canon (the usual genealogy is from *Gilgamesh* to Homer to *Beowulf*), more of the weight of the responsibility for the epic generic construct seems to fall on modern readers and theorists. For example, when scholars try to apply the Parry-Lord oral composition theory to Sumerian epic texts, they run up against diachronic and synchronic heteroglossia resulting from the translation of the material into different, linguistically unrelated languages and from dramatic changes in the cultural milieu of the textual communities (e.g., from secular to religious or private to public) with which the texts became associated between the Old Babylonian and Assyrian regimes.[53] In a sense, the fantasy of the epic monologue expresses the ethical nostalgia of 'original' epic audiences and modern readers--both of whom look back to a mythical clarity which was mythical and irrecoverable even at the proverbial 'dawn of history.' However, while the self-evident values which each audience mourns the loss of will be different at each juncture of a given epic's reception, the *idea* of the epic will be most mourned by the modern audiences who first articulated it.

The subjects presupposed in popular and conversational orality rhetorics are less weighed down by history. To the extent that the popular voice taps into tradition, it reaches toward the unifying, harmonizing, hierarchical ideal of the epic voice, but these tendencies are more diffuse in popular genres and are as

[53]Piotr Michalowski, "Orality and Literacy and Early Mesopotamian Literature."

likely to be turned against official hierarchies as they are to reinforce them.[54] For this reason, the subject of popular orality can be described as communal in that it expresses and reinforces unifying values, but its purview is more local and contemporary (in the sense of the now of the narrator, performer and audience), and the mythical past is more obviously functional and touchable by the present. Although the ethical choices and personal stakes of individuals can be seen in the dilemmas which characters in popular genres face, the particularity and interiority of persons must give way to communal interests. As anthropologists Bruce Mannheim and Dennis Tedlock have discovered, this subjective ambiguity makes it difficult to map cultural processes:

> But a dialogical ethnography cannot content itself with a multiplicity of voices, no matter how diverse their social origins. One of the key challenges is to reformulate the problem of the location of culture with a social ontology in which neither individuals nor collectivities are basic units. Thus reformulated, the task becomes one of identifying the social conditions of the emergence of linguistic and cultural forms, of their distribution among speakers, and of subjectivity itself as an embodied constellation of voices. (8)

Here, from a disciplinary perspective, it is interesting to note that the move toward sociological methodologies which pulls the popular oralist from the pit of romanticism his/her predecessors fell into is also a threat to the definition of his/her project of analyzing culture. Through the sociological lens we can identify systems of behavior (including language behavior) and map patterns of

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[54]See, for example, Jack Zipes' studies of the politics of folk and fairy tales cited above. The trickster figures, common among folk traditions, epitomize the ambiguity that results when these unifying and critical forces meet.

interpersonal and group interaction, but we cannot account for value, artistry, personality, or ethical decision. Mannheim and Tedlock follow Bakhtin here in their recognition that the heteroglossia and cultural heterogeneity of everyday interaction are the strongest identifiable forces pulling against the unifying, hierarchical tendencies of language as it is epitomized by the epic. The conversational orality which I have described as the interest of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis was theorized by Bakhtin as the source of the novelistic discourse which threatens epic fantasy. Bakhtin suggests that the reality of heteroglossia and cultural heterogeneity represents a painful loss for unifying discourses:

> In the presence of the novel, all other genres somehow have a different resonance. A lengthy battle for the novelization of the other genres began, a battle to drag them into a zone of contact with reality. The course of this battle has been long and torturous. ("Epic and Novel" 39)

Luckily, our ability to take in unadulterated, unorganized reality is limited so that even in our least evaluative discourse theories, subjective and ethical projects emerge. The subject of conversational orality is social in that it is conceived of as the product and producer of social forces, systems and hierarchies; however, it is also atomistic and anecdotal in that conversational oralists give credence to the experience and interpretations (logical and evaluative) of individual participants of face-to-face interaction and they also value the narrative structures which participants produce. In the introduction to her book on literary language and conversation, Deborah Tannen expresses this ethical dimension of conversational analysis:

> The central idea of the book is that ordinary conversation is made up of linguistic strategies that have been thought quintessentially literary. These strategies, which are shaped and elaborated in literary discourse are pervasive, spontaneous, and functional in ordinary conversation. I call them "involvement strategies" because, I argue, they reflect and simultaneously create interpersonal involvement. (*Talking Voices* 1)

Thus, where the unifying, centrifugal forces of language function in the epic voice to align the subject with official, absolute identities, and in the popular voice to negotiate the more ambiguous and local interests of the community, they pull the subject of conversational orality with equal force toward systems of interpersonal identification. One issue which the last chapter of this study will field is the degree to which these three subjectivity models should be treated as 'separate but equal.' Can each model fully analyze the discourse genre from which it derives its structure, or should one model predominate as the organizing principle for the others?

Schema for Orality Rhetorics

Interestingly, the holistic impulse of orality, which insists on simultaneous consideration of the world, texts and subjects, draws the epic oralist up just short of essentialism, stems the tide of materialism which threatens the conversational oralists' methodological structures and acts as a bonding agent holding the popular oralist into a discernible shape. Consider the following schema as an expression of the relations among the orality rhetorics described above:

Voice	Epistemology	Text	Subject	Model
				Emic
Epic	Anagogical	Genre	Official	
				↑
Popular	Allegorical	Performance	Communal	
				↓
Conversational	Analogical	Action	Social	
				Etic

This schema represents the general organization of the concept of orality as it is fielded in theories of discourse and culture, and it clarifies some connections between contemporary discourse theories and past cultural and literary theories. It cannot fully classify different schools of orality or even account for all the resonance of that concept in the work of a particular oralist partly because the impulse of invoking 'the oral' is driven by an interest in connections and interdisciplinary thinking. This schema also represents the general structure of this dissertation in that issues of voice are defined in chapter one, problems with the epistemological grounding of epic orality are examined in chapter two, the relations between text, performance and context are analyzed in chapter three, and the gendering of the subject of epic orality is discussed in chapter four. Outside this study,this schema can also be useful as tool for recognizing patterns of emphasis and affiliation among oral approaches to discourse.

Orality and Medieval Textuality

This project will enter conversations about what orality rhetorics actually add to textual studies by tracking how presuppositions concerning voice and context function in 'oral readings' of medieval vernacular literature. In the historical development of orality as a domain of study, medieval literature and culture

have functioned in the pivotal role of providing a more exact parallel between western culture and the oral cultures studied by anthropologists. As a parallel, the comparison of contemporary oral cultures with medieval culture seems to draw the modern reader into a closer proximity to both. At the same time, medieval textuality has often been a site for defamiliarizing modern preconceptions of literacy or literariness. For example, while being literate currently entails the ability to read and write the language one speaks, in medieval culture there were several stages separating reading from writing and basic literacy began with instruction in Latin.[55] Furthermore, literary genres were not theorized in ways familiar to readers of modern literature.[56] So just a cursory glance at medieval textual practices makes the idea that there are several kinds of literacy and orality seem obvious, and obvious differences such as these are made even more interesting when one considers the fact that medieval discourses (whether vernacular or Latin) are translatable and to some extent commensurable with our own. That is, the immeasurable gulf separating the modern reader from the medieval composer does not account for our ability to make sense of and to value medieval texts, and thus our stands against the anachronistic readings of medieval literature and culture are limited by our own synchronic relationship to medieval texts and artifacts.

The concept of orality has proven particularly useful in medieval studies because it helps modern readers theorize the relationship between texts, which would have been produced by and accessible to only a very small percentage of

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[55]See Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*. A very focused analysis of medieval literacy can be found in Franz Bäuml's "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy."

[56]See, for example, Hans Robert Jauss' discussion of medieval genres in "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature."

the general population, and a non-literate culture. Orality also atemporally connects the modern reader/scholar of medieval texts to readers/listeners contemporary with medieval manuscripts, accounting for our ability to synchronically make sense of texts which (from the perspective of our post-Gutenburg galaxy) have idiosyncratic production histories. In the chapters that follow I will explore the ways in which epic, popular and conversational orality models have been applied to these problems in interpreting vernacular medieval texts. At the same time, I will identify ways in which medieval texts deepen our understanding of the discursive and cultural phenomena which orality rhetorics attempt to describe and analyze, and I will point out areas where medieval texts set limits for the purview of particular orality rhetorics.

CHAPTER II

ASSESSING EPIC CLAIMS

Orality helps us imagine a past to which we have only occasional serendipitous access, for more often the material exigencies of writing (coupled with prejudices of gender, race and class) limit, erase or write over a clear vision of how it really was or how things generally went. Past, present and future humans have speaking in common. What of the past can be recovered when we apply the frameworks of speaking to antique writings and archeological evidence? The question calls forth mysticism--a mysticism which is not necessarily falsifying or unproductive. The vision of orality examined in this chapter is a beautiful one. At its center a performer leads his people through a communal contemplation and enactment of tribal narratives. The performance is a group effort connecting all those present to past generations who have enacted and shaped these same stories, and through the continuance of such performances the tribe projects its members into the future. This vision predates anthropological field studies of oral traditions and contemporary oral cultures, yet it still has a tenacious foothold in literary studies of pre-classical Greek and early medieval texts. The connection is perfectly reasonable in that early Greek and medieval cultures can both be described as tribal societies just developing written forms of the language they speak. However, when this vision is theorized as originary of orality or, even more narrowly, of oral art, we are alienated not only from the tribal commune but also from our daily discursive practices, and we find ourselves spinning those scholastic cobwebs of the mind which so frustrated Sir Francis Bacon.

Oral Contexts and Schemes

This chapter will visit the basic tenets of several epic orality rhetorics to test the distinctiveness of the conceptual schemes which they purport to discover or work against. The epic voice gathers its strength (both structural and ethical) by making a sharp distinction between our contemporary, literate world (cognition, culture, aesthetics) and theorized past oral worlds. Whereas current popular and conversational orality studies epistemologically situate the oral temporally and cognitively as coexisting within the same world as literacy, the anagogical hermeneutic of epic orality depends upon orality existing as an enclosed system separate from literate culture and practices. We saw this in the last chapter, for example, when Albert Bates Lord corrected Ruth Finnegan's idea that orality is highly relative and fluid and in some cases can even incorporate literate practices. However, as we shall see in the following discussion, there are stronger and weaker versions of this separation of worlds in different applications of epic orality, and while it has been all too easy for many scholars to recognize and criticize the larger claims of Great Divide theorists, the smaller claims have either passed unnoticed or have been assumed to be hung by the same noose which snares theories of a distinct oral culture.

Oral approaches to literature and culture organized by the epic voice (weakly or strongly) stem from an emic model of human cognition which posits deep structures in the mind separate from the world. As we saw in chapter one, this emic model develops both from the semantics of the epic genre and from the structuralist discourse theories which influenced the originators of oral-composition theory. The double source of this emic tendency, I shall argue, contributes to the impression that there are different, complimentary types of

evidence backing claims for distinct oral cultures and aesthetics. I will move from the larger to the more minimalist claims for epic orality, testing in turn the viability of distinguishing oral from literate culture (focusing on Walter Ong's formulation), literate/innovative from oral/traditional aesthetics (using oral interpretations of *Beowulf* as examples), and oral from written composition (returning to the original anagogical 'leap of faith' in Parry's and Lord's oral-composition theory). At each turn, questions will be asked not only about the viability of a particular oral interpretation (such as whether characters in *Beowulf* really do exemplify epic monoglossia), but also, and more importantly for this particular study, the degree to which such interpretations depend upon a separate oral world with its own distinct conceptual scheme, culture and aesthetics. If the former claims work without recourse to the latter, then orality either merely marks a shift in terminology or, more sinisterly, is doing some work which it does not overtly articulate.

As a mode of analysis, like Ockham's razor, this chapter will implement philosopher Donald Davidson's critique of conceptual scheme theories to point out needless and deceiving doubling of 'entities' (such as worlds, cultures and cognitive processes) in epic orality rhetorics. Davidson's basic argument is that conceptual relativism initially appears attractive as a means of accounting for differences in cultural perspectives, revolutionary changes in scientific theories, and asymmetries in translations of concepts from one language into another.[1] On closer inspection, however, one finds that the only way we can make sense of our

[1]Donaldson works specifically with claims made by language and science philosophers such as Whorf and Kuhn. Ong uses both of these scholars as a theoretical framework for understanding 'primary orality'.

ability to comprehend such differences is to posit ourselves and our schemes as functioning in the same world as the other untranslatable schemes which draw our attention. Davidson makes the interesting observation that in recognizing a situation as a translation failure at all one goes a long way toward weakening what appears from a distance as sharp contrasts in conceptual systems to more mundane and local distinctions.[2] My argument will hold up such logical impasses in epic orality claims, not merely to point out the scientific impossibility of such claims, but to use as a beginning for deeper analysis of what epic orality is actually buying scholars in their redescriptions of culture and textuality.

Oral Culture

One question which has emerged from the study of recordings of spoken language is whether, or to what degree, the differences observed in comparisons of oral and written communication reflect differences in ways of conceptualizing the world. Walter Ong's well-known essay, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, represents the strong version of what Ruth Finnegan calls the 'Great Divide' model for the orality / literacy distinction (*Literacy and Orality* 12) in that it theorizes a primary orality exclusive of literate culture. Ong's argument is distinctive in orality / literacy studies because it attempts to bridge the gap between common sense notions about language and literacy and anthropological studies of oral cultures. In so doing, it makes a connection between everyday oral practices and oral art. Because *Orality and Literacy* functions as a kind of interdisciplinary rhetoric of the orality / literacy dichotomy, it has not been supplanted even though it has received harsh and extended criticism.[3]

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[2]"On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."

[3]For example, Beth Daniell's work on defining literacy in composition studies criticizes Ong's argument as classist and racist. Also, Eric L. Montenyohl's "Oralities [and Literacies],"

Ong's description of the orality/literacy contrast takes the following formulation. Orality and literacy are distinct, incommensurable contexts or conceptual schemes. Analyzing oral art forms through our literate bias has up to this point obscured the fact that we cannot conceive of what it means to live in the world of the purely oral culture: ". . . a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to purely oral people" (12). Underpinning this theory of incommensurability is a narrative of loss. Descriptors such as 'pristine' and 'pure' are often paired with orality; whereas, literacy is paired with bias, limitation and metaphors of domination:

> Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. . . (14).

In order to mediate the incommensurability of these two distinct cultural and discursive contexts, Ong puts forward the model of an orality/literacy continuum which works diachronically as well as synchronically:

> Diachronic study of orality and literacy of various stages in the evolution from one to the other sets up a frame of reference in which it is possible to understand better not only pristine oral culture and subsequent writing culture, but also the print culture that brings writing to a new peak and electronic culture which builds on both writing and print. In this diachronic framework, past and present, Homer and television can illuminate one another. (2)

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discusses the implications of the fact that Ong's orality really refers to 'preliteracy.' Interestingly, Ruth Finnegan's criticism of dividing societies into two basic types (primitive/pre-industrial/oral vs. civilized/modern/literate) predates Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (Finnegan *Oral Poetry* 46-51).

Ong's diachronic study merges two histories: the history of writing beginning with Plato (although he does mention earlier and non-western writing systems) and the history of the epic beginning with Homer. Likewise, two distinct synchronic comparisons are merged to help illuminate contemporary communication: contemporary oral cultures with contemporary literate cultures and existing with emerging communication technologies. The first merger of diachronies Ong inherits from his wholesale use of Eric Havelock's work, while the second comes from his combination of the work of Jack Goody and Marshall McLuhan.[4] The back and forth movement of historical perspective in and of itself would not necessarily call Ong's notion of orality into question; however, mapping these moves into a purportedly synchronic continuum has the odd effect in this case of implying a linear movement of development (i.e. the 'evolution' of literate from oral culture). What becomes obscure in these combinations of arguments about cultural history and technological influences is that the particular path Ong maps out from ancient Greece to contemporary times is through Homer via contemporary Serbo-Croatian oral epic performances. That is, the orality/literacy contrast characterized by Ong emerges from an analogy (a comparison of Serbo-Croatian oral compositions with the works of Homer) which produces the history(that of the epic) through which the comparison was initiated in the first place.

One problem arising here is the degree to which we can make sense of orality as a distinct context of meaning if the voice of the oral-formulaic poet is posited as its purest or most concentrated form. Further, how does Ong's

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[4]Havelock, Eric A., *A Preface to Plato,* Goody, Jack, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* McLuhan, Marshall, *The Gutenburg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man.*

acknowledgment that the "basic orality of language is permanent" (7) authorize both a narrative of loss and a continuum of oral and literate practices? An examination of the nine characteristics which Ong says are distinctive of "orally based thought and expression" (36) will demonstrate how our own everyday orality becomes obscure or invisible in Ong's 'primary orality', and, paradoxically, how making sense of 'oral culture' depends both on conflating speaking in general with the performance of one particular genre and on subsuming conversational orality under epic orality.

That Oral Style Is Additive Rather Than Subordinate.[5]

What is meant here is that oral expression, because of its physical limitations, tends to connect ideas through simple coordinates (e.g. 'and' is the preferred conversational cohesive device); whereas, written expression integrates or compacts more ideas in fewer words through various means including subordination. This basic difference between the structure of speaking and the structure of writing seems obvious when one considers the different contexts for producing and interpreting speech and writing. For example, writing remains stable in time and space and its availability for interpretation and reinterpretation is theoretically unlimited. Speech, as Ong says, is passing away even as it comes into existence, so the interpretation of spoken discourse is more immediate and must be more easily accomplished.

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[5]I have elaborated on Ong's headers for each characteristic to reflect the argument he develops in each case. Part of my point in doing so is to clarify how, contrary to Ong's scientistic rhetoric, each point is interpretative and qualitative rather than quantifiable or demonstrable through some kind of statistical analysis. These nine characteristics draw special attention for several reasons. In them Ong concentrates his major claims for distinguishing orality as a separate domain for study and he sets the terms for that study. Also, these theses have often been used as an unquestioned foundation for the investigation of orality in a particular text or culture (e.g. in Edward B. Irving's *Rereading Beowulf* and Katherine O'Keeffe's *Visible Song*).

Several important distinctions are elided in Ong's articulation of the additive structure of spoken discourse. First, the sources he uses to demonstrate the existence of this characteristic of 'primary orality' include studies of contemporary American conversational practices. More specifically, one study often cited by Ong, Chafe 1982, focuses on four kinds of expressions: informal spoken language, from dinner table conversations; formal spoken language, from lectures; informal written language, from letters; formal written language, from academic papers. Furthermore, all of the subjects in this study were members of the academic community as either faculty or graduate students (36). Thus, if the additive style characterizes oral culture, then oral culture must include all language speakers. Yet Ong explicitly states that primary orality is "the orality of cultures untouched by literacy" (6).

Second, Ong equates oral expression with oral style. This distinction is not trivial in this case, if one wants to understand how everyday speech practices become subsumed under oral tradition in Ong's description. Chafe's vocabulary for describing this basic difference between spoken and written discourse does not include the grammatical terms 'additive' and 'subordinate' invoked by Ong. Rather, Chafe hypothesizes that formal writing is characterized by 'detachment and integration' while informal speaking is characterized by 'involvement and fragmentation'. In writing, the detachment from one's audience and oneself as a speaker is what encourages integration of more complex ideas into fewer words because all of the writer's meaning has to be communicated linguistically. In conversation, on the other hand, the physical and interpersonal context carries a significant amount of the communicative burden. As an example of

fragmentation and involvement in speech, Chafe analyzes the following excerpt from a recorded conversation:

> And my room was small.
>
> . . . It was like . . . nine by twelve or something.
>
> It seemed spacious at the time.
>
> . . . I came home,
>
> I was really exhausted,
>
> I was eating a popsicle,
>
> . . . I was sitting there in my chair, (38)

As a piece of writing the above excerpt would be judged inarticulate (if not 'illiterate') by most teachers. However, if we imagine that the speaker is responding to the facial reactions of his or her interlocutor, then the gaps and repetitions become less infelicitous. For example, one can imagine that the listener might have raised her eyebrows after the first clause inquiring "how small?" In reaction, perhaps, the speaker paused and gave more specific information.

It is difficult to determine the point at which pragmatic reactions to differences in communicative contexts, in this case oral and written, give way to stylistic choices in discourse production. In a follow up study, Chafe further develops his notion of the idea unit (the spoken version of the sentence).[6] In general, the idea unit is about seven words long and takes about two seconds to produce. Chafe hypothesizes that "an idea unit contains all the information a speaker can handle in a single focus of consciousness" (106). Interestingly, although written language is free of the constraints of spoken communication,

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[6] "Linguistic Differences Produced by Differences between Speech and Writing."

the kinds of writing judged 'most readable' according to Chafe clearly exhibit idea units (107). So, for example, a preference for the 'plain style' in writing might be merely an acquiescence to the "limited temporal and informational capacity of focal consciousness" observable in the structure of spoken conversation.

Finally, like many of the characteristics Ong attributes to primary oral culture, the additive 'style' is not an exclusively oral phenomenon. The degree of additive expression or fragmentation in discourse is also dependent upon the level of formality of the communicative situation. For example, in the 1982 study, Chafe found a high degree of fragmentation in informal letter writing and a high degree of integration in the traditional oral literature of the Seneca language. Other more recent studies comparing conversational structure and literary texts have found that the genre of a given discourse is at least as important in determining its nature as the degree of its orality (Tannen 15; Biber 44-45). Ong himself uses the Bible as an oral-derived text to demonstrate the additive nature of the oral style. And although most Americans do not interact in a culture which Ong would say contains a "high oral residue" (38), we all share an orality in informal conversation which exhibits the additive cohesive strategies which he views as distinctive of 'primary oral culture.'

That Oral Thought Is Aggregative Rather Than Analytic

In other words, individuals in oral cultures tend to think using the "formulary baggage" which they have inherited rather than through syllogistic questioning of how the different pieces of a problem or a situation are related. Traditional thought clusters, for example the epithets mentioned by Ong, represent little packages of values and experiences which have collected around a concept as

that concept has operated throughout a community's history. These little packages are not logically related to one another and are not bound to be consistent. Hence, traditional thought clusters are often made up of heterogeneous and even contradictory parts. For example, two familiar proverbs "a stitch in time saves nine" and "he who hesitates waits," give contradictory cautions about the relation between action and time. Literary parallels to this phenomenon would include Aristotle's topics and the commonplaces analyzed in Bacon's *Essays*.

As shown above, aggregative thought is recognizable in several different forms of traditional wisdom found in literate as well as oral cultures. The issue here is whether such thought *defines* the rationality of primary oral cultures. Interestingly, Jack Goody, whom Ong references extensively in *Orality and Literacy*, says that the opposite is also true; that writing has an aggregative tendency which can reduce the complexity of oral thought (70). In chapter 4 of his *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Goody criticizes the use of tables, a form of the supposedly chirographic phenomenon of listing, in anthropological analyses of oral cultures:

> . . . this standardisation, especially as epitomised in the Table consisting of *k* columns and *r* rows, is essentially the result of applying graphic techniques to oral material. The result is often to freeze a contextual statement into a system of permanent oppositions, an outcome that may simplify reality for the observer but often at the expense of a real understanding of the actor's frame of reference. (71-73)

Thus, although the researcher might consider herself to be analyzing or taking apart aspects of a culture by representing observed concepts in a table, she is in

fact producing an aggregation and thereby "mistak[ing] metaphor for mechanism" in her representation of that culture (73). Whether or not we can accept Goody's assertion that certain tables or lists are essentially written techniques which open up distinct "formal, cognitive and linguistic operations" or 'modes of thought' (81), their aggregative quality in this case elides complex relations between a culture's expressions and specific social contexts. This elision suggests that aggregation and analysis are extremely relative terms, that perceived aggregation could be the outsider's interpretation of the insider's analysis.

Similarly, rather than defining the quality of oral thought, aggregation is likely just the outsider's perception of the collective wisdom of cultures different from his/her own. In order to make this characteristic distinctive, Ong introduces the term "high literacy":

> Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which *high literacy* rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight. . . . The clichés in political denunciations in many *low-technology, developing cultures*--enemy of the people, capitalist war-mongers--that strike *high literates* as mindless are residual formulary essentials of oral thought processes. (38) [Emphasis mine]

The introduction of the term 'high literacy' here is an acknowledgment that this distinction between literate thought and oral thought may not show those processes to be so distinctive as to preclude each other. It connotes a self-consciousness toward discourse structure which would probably not trouble most literate people reading the newspaper or watching the President on

television. The clichés listed seem 'mindless' more because they are not a familiar part of our own cultural baggage than because of their oral 'residue'.

That Redundancy Or Copiousness In Oral Expression Represents A Lack Of Linearity In Oral Thought

As Ong points out, it is true that there is significantly more repetition in spoken discourse than in written discourse and that the need for such repetition results from the physical exigencies of the spoken communication situation. It is not clear, however, that redundancy in expression reflects a "backlooping" or circling in thought processes qualitatively distinct from cognitive processes which come into play in the production and interpretation of writing. For example, as was noted earlier, the cognitive processing of a written text seems to go more swiftly if that text is constructed with 'idea units' similar to the segments which Chafe has observed in the structure of everyday conversation. Similarly, although the copiousness of Renaissance rhetoric would offend modern sensibilities, it is still true that some redundancy in a written text makes that text more accessible and memorable.

In analyzing the significance of redundancy in spoken communication, Ong reduces interpretive contexts twice. First, he reduces the context of the interpretation of written material. Consider his description of the context of reading:

> If distraction confuses or obliterates from the mind the context out of which emerges the material I am now reading, the context can be retrieved by glancing back over the text selectively. Backlooping can be entirely occasional, purely *ad hoc*. (39)

Although a segment of written discourse can be exactly retrieved in the form it was originally produced, a reader's interpretation of that discourse will be influenced by his/her relation to the world outside the text. Such relations include a relation to time which is always changing. Furthermore, the contexts of the world situated in time outside the text which the reader participates in influences his/her focus in interpretation so that a rereading can never be entirely a "purely *ad hoc*" backlooping.

Second, Ong reduces the context of spoken communication to the discourse of the speaking subject:

> In oral discourse, the situation is different. There is nothing to backloop into outside the mind, for oral utterance has vanished as soon as it is uttered. Hence the mind must move more slowly, keeping close to the focus of attention much of what it has already dealt with. (39-40)

Here the mind of the speaker and the mind of the listener are merged into one slow-thinking, fast-discourse-producing entity which is speaking into an unstable void. A spoken communication situation also contains a world outside the discourse being produced which speakers and listeners can 'backloop' into (e.g. shared intersubjective histories and shared furniture). This backlooping is possible because the physical context of spoken communication changes at a different and, overall, at a slower rate than the rate of speech.[7] Of course, the world changes in time and spoken communication contexts are in movement in a way that written communication contexts are not. More specifically, texts

[7]For example, according to Erving Goffman, "it is obvious that in most 'situations' many different things are happening simultaneously--things that are likely to have begun at different moments and may terminate *dissynchronously* " (*Frame Analysis* 9 [emphasis mine]). *Frame Analysis* is one of the standard sociological texts on the stability and rule governedness of face-to-face encounters.

produced in spoken communication situations are less stable than written texts. However, I would argue that these differences are quantitative rather than qualitative. We can understand this through a linguistic analogy that Ong himself refers to. Literacy slows down the pace of language change through standardization of grammatical forms and dictionaries, but language still changes and furthermore it changes through the same processes by which it changes much more quickly in non-literate cultures. The rate of linguistic change is different for literate and non-literate cultures; however, this quantitative distinction does not demonstrate that the linguistic processes involved are essentially different. Similarly, the higher level of redundancy in spoken communication is a human coping mechanism to facilitate speedy interpretation in conversation. This same mechanism is utilized (admittedly at a lower level) in written communication as well; hence, it does not in itself distinguish oral thought processes from chirographic cognition.

That Oral Culture Is Conservative Or Intellectually Traditionalist

This characterization of oral culture follows from the notion that redundancy is distinctive of oral thought. The rationale is that if a culture is totally dependent upon living human memory, if all of its knowledge resides in the minds of its people, then of necessity such a culture will be more leery of innovation than would a culture with texts to take on intellectually conservative tasks such as memory work (Ong 41). According to Jack Goody, pre-literate cultures have their own versions of the intellectual (33); however, the advent of scientific thought and discovery depends upon the development of chirographic technologies:

> Nevertheless, it is not accidental that major steps in the development of what we now call 'science' followed the introduction of major changes in the channels of communication in Babylonia (writing), in Ancient Greece (the alphabet) and in Western Europe (printing). (51)

In *Literacy & Orality*, Ruth Finnegan directly challenges the idea that conservatism is necessitated by orality or that innovation necessarily results from literacy. For example, citing a study on literacy in traditional China and India by Kathleen Gough, Finnegan points out that the development of secular historical research in the former coupled with the failure of the latter to develop such research demonstrates that "literacy itself is not enough. It has to be faced too that writing can as easily be used to interfere with objective scientific or historical enquiry as to support it (152)." Similarly, Ong also admits that 'conservative' is a relative term when he says that "[w]riting is of course conservative in its own ways" (41).

Furthermore, memory work, including the amazing memorization of lengthy texts, has been shown by Mary Carruthers to not be limited to or necessarily to stem directly from oral thought processes.[8] It is interesting to note here, that the idea that memory and orality are connected and that writing brings on a loss of memory, comes directly from Plato's *Phaedrus*. Ong's notion that "by taking conservative functions on itself, the text frees the mind of conservative tasks" merely puts a positive spin on Socrates' criticisms of writing, and this positive spin is directly taken from Eric Havelock's history of literacy. In short,

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[8]For example, the medieval art of *memoria* was developed and practiced in the highly literate monastic enclaves. Carruthers argues that "it is in the institutionalizing of a story through *memoria* that textualizing occurs" in medieval culture (12), and that this particular art of memory values written texts for their generative capacity(213).

this particular distinction between oral and literate culture, rather than being the result of scientific observation of cultural differences, is at least in part a presumption or bias which seems natural to those of us whose literacy includes a specific literary education valuing the texts of Ancient Greece.

That Oral Culture Is Close To The Human Lifeworld

In general terms, being close to the human lifeworld can be described as the tendency to understand the objective world by assimilating that world into the more intuitively known realm of human interaction.[9] Such an assimilation also characterizes many modes of human learning in both oral and literate cultures. The distinctiveness this characterization claims for oral culture is that information which chirographic cultures would store in neutral spaces (such as an encyclopedia) is invested with human or narrative meaning in oral cultures or

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[9]This definition describes Ong's usage rather than some relation to Husserl's psychological philosophy. However, it is interesting to note that the relation that Ong assumes between language and the lifeworld is very similar to Habermas' analysis of that relation in Derrida's work: "Castoriadas proceeds--as do Heiddegger, Derrida, and Foucault, in their own ways--from the notion that an ontological difference exists between language and the things spoken about. This difference means that language discloses the horizon of meaning within which knowing and acting subjects interpret states of affairs, that is, encounter things and people and have experiences in dealing with them. The world-disclosing function of language is conceived on analogy with the generative accomplishments of transcendental consciousness, prescinding, naturally, from the sheerly formal and supratemporal character of the latter. The linguistic world view is a concrete and historical a priori; it fixes interpretative perspectives that are substantive and variable and that cannot be gone behind.... No matter whether this metahistorical transformation of linguistic world views is conceived of as Being, différance, power, or imagination, and whether it is endowed with connotations of a mystical experience of salvation, of aesthetic shock, of creaturely pain, or of creative intoxication: What all these concepts have in common is the peculiar uncoupling of the horizon-constituting productivity of language from the consequences of an intra-mundane practice that is wholly prejudiced by the linguistic system. Any interaction between world disclosing language and learning processes in the world is excluded"("Communicative versus Subject Centered Reason" *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity* 319). Ong's use of conceptual schemes to understand orality/literacy distinctions subsumes "horizon-constituting productivity of language" under the orality which he theorizes as lost to those influenced by literacy. In other words, he cuts of access to orality of everyday interactions which might allow for an account of our ability to make sense of differences between oral and literate frames of reference.

it is lost. Again Ong mentions the problematic example of lists moving from the claim that "an oral culture has no vehicle so neutral as a list" to the conclusion that "oral cultures know few statistics or facts divorced from human or quasi-human activity"(42,43). In order to contextualize this claim, Ong gives examples from the *Iliad* where the lists which do appear, such as the lists of rulers, are embedded in "a total context of human action"(42). Ong also puts forward the *Iliad's* descriptions of navigation procedures as an example of how oral cultures humanize information which literate cultures would store in the 'neutral' form of a "how-to-do-it" manual.

These examples of being close to the human lifeworld underscore both the historical inconsistencies and structural contradictions of an orality / literacy dichotomy. Using the *Iliad* as an example of the contextualization and humanization of knowledge in oral culture suggests that the works of Homer as we have them today were more immediate or more immanent in the everyday workings of Greek culture than written texts are in modern culture. But where and when was the "Homeric culture" in which Ong says navigational procedures (exemplified in a narrative account of a ship embarking) were "crucial"? Basically, the texts of the poems passed down to us make up a canon composed and standardized by the rhapsodes beginning in the sixth century B.C.E. traditionally at the request of the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus (Enos 18). The written texts were used to aid memorization for oral performance and to guarantee that performers transmitted the authentic Homer. However, these poems were performed and various written versions were produced during the two centuries before their codification, and, according to Richard Enos, contemporary scholars generally agree that the rhapsodes had a hand in their composition and therefore "were the

composers and consequently the sources for *literate* compositional techniques and form" (18, emphasis mine). Furthermore, even before the production of the Homeric canon, Homeric pronunciation was already obsolete and, according to Pindar, audiences of his time required someone to interpret for them .[10] In short, the Homeric texts available to us today were already very remote to the audience for whom they were originally constructed and performed; hence, it would be pretty difficult to discover the specific human lifeworld, much less the original oral context, of Homeric culture.

But even if actual history is removed from consideration, aligning the lifeworld with orality in itself produces some of the infelicities inherent in the Kuhnian model of context dependent meaning (or conceptual schemes) which underwrites Ong's orality/literacy dichotomy. This is the conundrum: on the one hand we have an argument that orality and literacy are incommensurable conceptual schemes, that speaking and thinking the world through one precludes understanding the other; however, on the other hand, the elaboration of essential differences between orality and literacy depends upon the evaluator working within some conceptual scheme which can translate/interpret the other two while those two remain untranslatable to each other. Additionally, the criterion of closeness to the human lifeworld, because it contrasts contextual and neutral/abstract knowledge, dislocates the relation between context and meaning in Ong's argument. How can contextual meaning both distinguish orality *from* literacy and describe orality *and* literacy? As the philosopher Donald Davidson says,"[c]onceptual relativism is a heady and exotic doctrine, or would be if we could make good sense of it" (183).

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[10]Enos 16; Pindar *Nemean Odes* 7.14-16; *Isthmian Odes* 6.98-110; Plato *Ion* 537 A,B.

That Agonistically Toned Oral Art Represents A Violence "Also Connected With The Structure Of Orality Itself"

There are many well-known oral traditions or genres which include an exchange of insults or a verbal battle. In his exposition of the agonistic nature of oral thought and culture, Ong cites the flyting scenes in the *Iliad* and *Beowulf* and the inner city ritual insult games of 'dozens,' 'joning' or 'sounding' studied by William Labov.[11] Because all of these examples are taken from written texts or contemporary communities influenced by literacy, the 'primary' orality their agonistic quality represents is a remnant or residue, rather than the thing itself, or 'pure' oral culture.

Moving from this very specific genre of oral performance, Ong makes a series of claims about the high emotional intensity of oral cultures. The first claim is founded on an acceptance of 'closeness to the human lifeworld' as characteristic of oral culture. That is, whereas writing supposedly allows literate people to construct knowledge in neutral or abstract terms, "[b]y keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle"(44). This claim subsumes spoken communication under verbal contests. The examples Ong cites of proverb or riddle games, insult contests and flyting traditions make up only a small part of verbal interaction in general. For example, everyday conversation often includes personal experience narratives, anecdotes, jokes and songs, and is itself complex yet coherent in structure. However, Ong's intuition that face-to-face communication involves negotiating interpersonal tensions is sound. Much research in conversational analysis focuses on protocols and strategies for turn exchanges in everyday talk,

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[11]"Rules for Ritual Insults," *Language and the Inner City*, 297-353.

and the negotiation of such exchanges is also seen as significant in lay persons' evaluations of their own discourse. In her work on conversational style, Deborah Tannen describes what she terms the 'high involvement' and 'high considerateness' styles. Interestingly, one major distinction between them is a conflict about what constitutes a rude interruption of a speaker's turn at talk. In general, HC speakers tend to interpret any overlap as an interruption while HI speakers interpret overlapping queries and exclamations as a sign that listeners are involved and paying attention (*Conversational Style* 64-71). Both HC and HI speakers evaluate their counterpart's tendencies negatively: the HC speaker feels that the HI speaker will not allow her to finish, while the HI speaker feels that HC speaker is making him carry the whole conversation.

That group talk has the potential to become a competition for 'holding the floor' is a truism articulated in commonsense notions of discourse as well as in linguistic research in discourse analysis. But even given this tacit acknowledgment, the spoken communication situation is nowhere nearly so polarized as to warrant being described as agonistic. In fact, the emphasis of conversational rules is to insure that the potential for conflict is not realized in spoken conversation rather than to heighten, intensify or polarize the relations between interlocutors.[12]

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[12]For example, consider the complexity and the number of choices available in the "basic set of rules governing turn construction" at points of turn exchange as described by Sacks et al.:

1 At initial turn constructional unit's initial transition-relevance place:

(a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, then the party so selected has rights, and is obliged, to take next turn to speak, and no others have such rights or obligations, transfer occurring at that place.

(b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, instituted, with first starter acquiring rights to a turn, transfer occurring at that place.

In describing the agonistic quality of oral culture, Ong makes a second major claim that "[e]nthusiastic description of physical violence" in oral narrative is one symptom of situating knowledge in the lifeworld, while "as narrative moves toward the serious novel, it eventually pulls the focus of action more and more to interior crises and away from purely exterior crises"(44). Here Ong subsumes all oral contests under the epic genre and maps orality into a modernist account of Western literary history.[13] Yet medieval historian, Carol Clover, has demonstrated that although Germanic flyting shares some qualities with the Greek and contemporary insult traditions, it differs in important ways not only from those other traditions but also from Ong's characterization of the exteriority and violence of oral narrative.[14] Clover argues that the exchange of insults between Beowulf and Unferth at Beowulf's introduction to Heorot is an example of a specific Germanic tradition evidenced in Norse literature as well as

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(c) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of "current speaker selects next" technique, then the current speaker may, but need not, continue, unless another self-selects.

2 If, at initial turn-constructional unit's initial transition-relevance place, neither 1(a) nor 1(b) has operated, and, following the provision of 1(c), current speaker has continued, then the rule set (a)-(c) reapplies at next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected. (13)

One major concern of conversational analysis is to demonstrate that the discourse generally perceived by speakers as 'off the cuff' or spontaneous (or as the amorphous stuff that fills the gaps between significant verbal events such as narratives) is actually highly structured and rule-governed, so the above outline for turn exchanges in conversation contains place holders for highly variable content (e.g. the constitution of an "initial transition-relevance place"). Hence, the process of changing speakers in everyday conversation is even more intricate than it at first appears in this model.

[13]To clarify, this generalization refers to narrative theories which describe the premodern subject as being wholly identifiable (or adequate) with the objective world while modern subjects (associated with novelistic narrative) are alienated from it. The implications of the comparability of such narrative histories with oral traditional rhetorics will be analyzed later in reference to *Beowulf* scholarship.

[14]"The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode."

the Anglo-Saxon epic. According to Clover, understanding the similarity in the structure of Norse and Anglo-Saxon verbal contests will clear up some misapprehensions scholars have had about Unferth's impoliteness to the great hero or his supposed presumption of his king's place (467).[15] However, comparisons of Germanic flyting with verbal contests outside that tradition yield many differences which limit their descriptive power. For example, unlike the fantastic ritual insults which characterize inner city "sounding" traditions, the insults of Germanic flyting are effective inflections of the truth. That is, Germanic contenders argue about the moral implications or interpretations of the facts rather than the facts.[16] Also, to the extent that heroic societies share a tendency to realize human behavior in competitive terms, the flyting traditions of medieval Germanic peoples and of Homeric culture can be compared. But the nature of the violence encoded in verbal contests is hard to pinpoint. In Germanic flyting at borders or thresholds (such as when Beowulf seeks an audience with Hrothgar) a verbal contest averts battle. According to Clover although violence is an option for ending flyting, usually such violence occurs as another distinct episode of the story. For example, a flyting contest loser might

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[15]Clover identifies the basic components of this oral traditional genre as follows: setting, a body of water separating contenders or in the Hall (drinking, often at court or, in Iceland, at the Althing); contenders, mostly male/male or male/female (although female/female pairings make up the "quarrel of the queens" subgenre associated with the Brunhilde tradition) - one on one is the general rule; dramatic situation, if the contenders do not know one another, flyting usually occurs when the hero enters unfamiliar territory and is challenged at a threshold (a new shore, a gate or a hall door); structure and content, the standard sequence is claim, counterclaim and defense where the first two consist mostly of boasts and insults referring to past events while the third is made up of threats, vows and curses concerning future action; outcome, the winner is usually indicated by the other's silence or failure to respond (447-459).

[16]Facts here include received tradition or what Clover terms 'mythological facts'(458). The distinction is that Germanic contenders are most effective when they put the most powerful moral spin (either positive or negative) on what their audience accepts as the truth; whereas, ritual insults in Labov's analysis gain power through their size and ingenuity.

seek revenge later, but the winner of such contests is determined when his or her interlocutor falls silent (459). Verbal competitions can be conceived of as verbal combat (as are the traditions cited by Ong) but the particular relations which they bear toward actual violence is context specific. That is, they are meant to avert, incite or perform a particular kind violence in a particular setting within a culture, and to that extent they represent the violence *particular to* that culture. Yet such verbal 'violence' cannot be (as Ong says) directly "connected with the structure of orality itself" (45) since oral exchanges are not often agonistic in this way, and when such exchanges do occur the potential for violent action is encoded in ways particular to a given culture and context rather than in the act of speaking itself.

That Oral Cultures Are More Empathetic And Participatory Than The Objectively Distanced Chirographic Cultures

This means oral cultures are more apt to display an emotional identification with characters of orally performed narratives. In his discussion of the agonistic quality of oral communication, Ong lays the foundation for the claim that oral cultures are more empathetic:

> When all verbal communication must be by direct word of mouth, involved in the give-and-take dynamics of sound, interpersonal relations are kept high - both attractions - and, even more, antagonisms. (45)

Ong develops the romantic, emotional oral personality further as lacking distancing mechanisms or objectivity toward textual practices (or 'verbal art'). This lack of distance manifests itself when a village storyteller, for example, slips into the first person and merges the narrator's and the hero's identity and when the audience responds to the narrator as though s/he were the hero. In this way

an oral community participates actively in the world of story. The implication is that this kind of reaction to performance is foreign to literate audiences. Yet the lack of distinction between real and fictional worlds is familiar to literates in incidents as trite as a soap viewer writing letters giving advice to a character on his/her favorite show.

In *Literacy and Orality*, Ruth Finnegan cites several examples of oral cultures distinguishing literary or artful discourse from everyday language.[17] Finnegan's work in oral studies advocates broadening the domain of oral literature and thereby resists generative theories which imply that oral literature is essentially distinct from written literature and that the lesser forms (such as short lyrics) bear a genealogical relation to oral epic. Because scholars have been too apt to generalize about the nature of orality by taking the Yugoslavian epic as universal, they have often fallen into "the assumptions that oral literature is necessarily communal and traditional and lacks detachment, careful aesthetic form or personal insight. . ." (Finnegan 158). Although this type of oral communal performance can occur in oral cultures, mechanisms for distancing the world of story from the real world (such as schooling which designates certain narrative performances as specialized art forms) are just as likely to exist.

That Time/History And Discourse Are 'homeostatic' In Oral Cultures

Basically, oral cultures are thought to be homeostatic in the sense that time and discourse in such cultures have a kind of equilibrium or snychronisity with the present moment. History (for example tribal genealogy) is tailored to the present and words change their meanings very quickly because "each word is controlled

[17]Such as specialist education in the composition and delivery of oral literature like the Maori 'school of learning', training in poetry in Rwanda and professionalization of Uzbeck epic singers (68).

by what Goody and Watt. . . call 'direct semantic ratification' . . . " (Ong 47). Because we have dictionaries which stabilize and historicize words as distinct segments of meaning, we literates have a sense of distance from our discourse. We understand it as a stable system or entity which exists outside of us. Another symptom of this aspect of oral culture is that past historical events are reworked to match the current state of things. Ong cites the example of the Gonja in Ghana whose oral tradition about the founder of their state changes within a few decades to reflect current territorial divisions: "The Gonja were still in contact with their past, tenacious about this contact in their myths, but the part of the past with no immediately discernible relevance to the present had simply fallen away" (48).

Like many of the other characteristics of primary oral culture, 'homeostasis' is readily discernible as a quantitative contrast (i.e. original castings of historical events are remembered for a longer period and the histories of past word meanings are recorded in chirographic cultures). However, essential qualitative differences in the cognitive processes of oral and literate people are not demonstrated by such a contrast. Simply put, the symptoms of cultural homeostasis are reducible to two basic linguistic principles: 1) the most important meanings of words are those ratified by present contexts and 2) meanings shall be remembered only as long as they are in use in present contexts. The process of forgetting old language usage and coining new language structures to meet the demands of new contexts may move at a different pace in our literate world of dictionaries, but it is very difficult to make the case that this process is distinctive of primary oral culture--it is hardly possible to distinguish it from language change in general. Further, the notion of homeostasis seems to cover areas where

oral culture is less traditional or conservative than literate culture, and thus the 'conservatism' of orality becomes less distinctive here as well.

That Oral Thought Is Situational Rather Than Abstract

In different ways, Ong's first eight characteristics of primary orality set the stage for the generalization that oral thought is situational while chirographic thought is abstract. The identification of the 'lifeworld' with context dependency and concreteness flits in and out of the examples given throughout *Orality and Literacy*, and so it is not surprising that the scale determining whether a given subject's response is situational or abstract (say for example, in Luria's study of illiterate and partially literate people in Uzbekistan and Kirghizia) is calibrated according to distance from the lifeworld. The objection to this characterization of orality is not so much that it is impossible to make meaningful statements about the relative abstractness of a given response, but that this distinction only makes sense if we position both the judge and the subject being judged in the same world, lifeworld and/or context. However, such a placement of subjects would run contrary to Ong's general frame for differentiating pure primary oral culture from literary/literate/chirographic culture (that is, that they are conceptually distinct, that they are defined by incommensurable thought processes).

Many scholars have focused on the situational vs. abstract thought distinction as either the most enlightening discovery or the most devilish formulation in orality/literacy scholarship.[18] Ruth Finnegan cites sociological, linguistic and cognitive research which indicate that cross-cultural tests for such a distinction are likely to "(tautologically) uncover nothing more than the

[18]In making this distinction Professor Ong continues to draw from the work of anthropologists Goody and Watt and from A.R. Luria's *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations* .

presence or absence of our own cultural norms. . . "(*Literacy* 151). Beth Daniell, following Brian Street's work, questions the validity of the Luria study cited by Ong, and she denounces the classism and ethnocentrism which she finds in the generalizations about culture, reasoning and literacy put forward by Ong and Thomas J. Farrell (among others).

David R. Olson, a proponent of connecting literacy with rationality, concluded from his own research on the reasoning of young children that "[d]eciding on the truth of a proposition on the basis of unambiguous evidence is probably universal to the human species"(171). However, he goes on to reintroduce the situational vs. abstract distinction within a narrower framework by arguing that because "syntactic writing" (as opposed to pictographic systems, for example) can express propositions it can separate (abstract) verbal form from content. According to Olson, this separation allowed ancient Greek thinkers to distinguish literal from metaphorical meaning, and a consciousness of literal meaning is important because it is the necessary element for the development of logical proof (176-178). Olson formulates his new stance on this issue thus:

> ". . . a distinction must be drawn between the understanding of necessity of relations in the world and the necessity of relations among explicit propositions. The latter is metalogical understanding" (171).

It seems that what we have here is a redefinition of what it means to be 'abstract'; further, such a definition merely recasts the argument that oral culture is more concrete, context dependent or 'situational' than chirographic culture. To the extent that 'Great Divide' orality rhetorics develop from the separation of the world and discourse in this way it will be susceptible to Brian Street's criticism of the 'autonomous model' of orality and literacy:

> Writers concerned to establish a 'great divide' between the thinking processes of different social groups have classically described them in such terms as logical/pre-logical, primitive/modern and concrete/scientific. I would argue the introduction of literate/pre-literate as the criterion for making such a division has given the tradition a new lease of life just as it was wilting under the powerful challenges of recent work in social anthropology, linguistics and philosophy." (24)[19]

Thus, instead of opening new domains of knowledge, 'Great Divide' models for distinguishing oral and literate culture merely reintroduce earlier, more obviously ethnocentric models for distinguishing western industrialized cultures from other civilizations. While cultures without writing still exist in a few parts of the world, oral culture and oral thought are not exclusive to them, nor is orality 'autonomous' from other socio-cultural contexts. Similarly, while writing (in its various forms) can lead to an understanding of discourse and textuality not possible in non-literate cultures, reasoning about the world is neither necessitated by nor dependent upon the development of writing. Although strong models for this discourse division (such as Goody's, McLuhan's and Olson's as well as Ong's) often come with caveats supposedly allowing for the exceptions which a reasonable acknowledgment of the demands of the world would entail, at the core, such models depend to some degree on a notion of orality as a separate or distinct context of meaning.

It has been shown above that this orality is not an easily documentable and analyzable phenomenon, that distinctions which presuppose its autonomous existence become contradictory or disappear on closer inspection. Furthermore,

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[19]*Literacy in Theory and in Practice* .

the claims for a 'primary orality' can only be made sense of through references to everyday contemporary orality. Ong helps us make sense of this performative contradiction by contextualizing primary orality in the history of the 'Homeric Question' and the development of oral-composition theory; however, in so doing he moves orality into an absolute, untouchable, epic past, a past already functioning in narratives of modern nostalgia without reference to speech/writing differences.

Oral Aesthetics

The broad categories and historical and cultural sweep of 'Great Divide' orality theories would seem to be highly susceptible to attack, and any large-scale synthesis of research can be revealed as a hodge-podge under the dissecting gaze of a specialist. Still, if the reader accepts Ong's work as a fair representative of arguments for a distinct oral culture and mindset (including as well as drawing from Eric Havelock in classics, Jack Goody in anthropology, Marshall McLuhan in media studies, and David Olson in cognitive science), then the preceding discussion has done more than beat up a straw argument--it has demonstrated that epic orality (even when implemented in several different academic disciplines) is a backward-looking description of culture which renames all too familiar systems of distinctions rather than revealing new knowledge about the human condition. Many epic oralists would be ready to admit that these models ask too much of the epic voice; however, the impossibility of defining an entity so large as oral culture does not preclude the possibility of distinguishing an oral poetics.

Epic models for identifying oral poetics define the nature of textuality at the level of genre. That is, epic orality begins mapping discourse and culture on

the textual plane, initiating its rhetorical function with the idea of the epic poem and then moving outward simultaneously to the epic singer as the essential voice of orality and oral culture as the place of orality. By definition this orality rhetoric was designed to fit the measure of the epic, so it seemed probable from the beginning that this would place limits on its ability to describe culture and discourse generally. Ironically, though, this same textual/ generic focus also severely limits its ability to contribute to research in the smaller domain of epic aesthetics.

The project of Parry and Lord diverged from earlier comparitist methods for epic traditions in that it focused on one living oral tradition and from a comparison of that tradition with the ancient written epics developed a synchronic theory of oral composition which answered the diachronic question "Who was Homer?" As Franz Bäuml has reminded scholars, Parry and Lord were not initially attempting to theorize orality but to explain the generation and transmission of traditional oral epic poetry.[20] However, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, Milman Parry's description of an heroic style of life sowed the seeds for a romanticization of oral culture, and Albert Bates Lord developed the notion of an oral mindset as the foundation for distinguishing oral composition processes from writing processes. As we continue to unfold the many levels at which orality is posited as a distinct place, context, or perspective, I would again like to divide the larger from the smaller claim here, dealing first with the possibility that orally composed texts call for an oral rhetoric separate from existing literary theories and second with Parry's initial claim for an oral

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[20]"Medieval Texts and the Two Theories of Oral-Formulaic Composition: A Proposal for a Third Theory."

composing process. In the following section, I will focus on oral approaches to *Beowulf,* tracing scholarly movement from the idea of oral composition to the notion of an oral style. I will address the question of whether or to what degree the oral style thus identified can be accounted for through existing literary theories which many oralists claim carry a literate or chirographic bias.

The Oral-formulaic Context

Even before oral-composition theory was introduced to Old English scholarship, the idea that poems like *Beowulf* were constructed orally in performance was thought to be hinted at by the poet himself. John Beaty described the repetition and patterns of variation of epithets in the poem as 'echo-words' taking the idea from the poet's description of a singer's performance at the first celebration feast in Hrothgar's hall:

Hwilum cyninges þegn,
guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena
worn gemunde, word oþer fand
soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian,
ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
wordum wrixlan; welhwylc gecwæð,
þæt he fram Sigemunde[s] secgan hyrde (ll. 867-75)

[Now and again one of the king's men, a proud man, knowledgeable of songs, one who remembered a large number of old sagas about many things; he found other words and truly / befittingly bound them together, the man again began to skillfully recite the journey of Beowulf, and with skill to recite the story with

variation in (his) words; he recited everything which he had heard tell of Sigemund's. . .][21]

According to Beaty this passage represents the poem's stylistic principle which "consists in the repetition of words or phrases to round out a full poetic picture by presenting an idea from varying points of view."[22] The singer is referred to as *cyninges ðegn, guma gilphlæden* and *secg,* his skill is pointed out in *snyttrum, on sped* and *gerade*, his knowledge and memory of traditions are mentioned in *gidda gemyndig, ealfaela/ealdgesegena, worn gemunde* , and *secgan hyrde,* and his act of recitation is referred to in *styrian, wrecan*, and *gecwæð*. In short, these nine lines denote that 'one of the king's men began to skillfully sing a traditional story', an idea that could have been expressed in two lines or less. This type of poetic repetition is one form of what Parry originally described as the formula; however, in *Beowulf,* scholars like Beaty have convincingly argued, the 'variation in words' so valued by the poet carries meaning beyond the epic weightiness which Parry allowed the formulaic epithets in Homer. On this view, each repetition adds a new perspective or evaluation to the idea being expressed. In the passage above, the singer is a king's man, a proud or glory covered man as well as simply a man. His recitation is a 'stirring up' and a forceful speech as well as simple speech. With each mention of the singer and his act of singing we get a better picture of who he is what he is doing both in the literal meaning of words and in the aggregative weight of their reformulation.[23]

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[21]The text is quoted (here and throughout the chapter) from Dobbie's edition of the poem. The translation is mine, using glosses from Klaeber's edition, Dobbie's edition and Hall's dictionary. The parentheses enclose my interpretations.

[22]"The Echo-word in *Beowulf* with a Note on the *Finnsburg Fragment*." Beaty's title comes from the idea of words finding one another and thus being bound together.

[23]For a more recent reading of this type, see Fred C. Robinson's *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*,.

The problem of deciding what to make of this word variation/idea repetition in Old English poetry became more complex after Francis Magoun introduced oral-formulaic theory to Anglo-Saxonists in 1953.[24] Magoun begins his argument by defining the means by which the orality of a poem could be measured:

> . . . the recurrence in a given poem of an appreciable number of formulas or formulaic phrases brands the latter as oral, just as a lack of such repetitions marks a poem as composed in a lettered tradition. Oral poetry, it may be safely said, is composed entirely of formulas, large and small, while lettered poetry is never formulaic. (446)

Before proceeding to his demonstration of the formulaic, and thus oral, nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry, Magoun cites Parry's definition of the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea (80)." [25] Taking a short passage from the beginning of *Beowulf* and lines 512-35 of *Christ and Satan,* Magoun underlines phrases which are repeated either in these same poems or in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus and notes variations in the frequency of repetitions for each phrase. Magoun finds that seventy percent of the phrases from the *Beowulf* passage occur in whole or in part elsewhere in the "limited corpus of some 30,000 lines" of Anglo-Saxon

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[24]"The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry." However, as William Whallon points out (in *Formula, Character, and Context* 72), the description of this repetition as formulaic and as comparable to the Homeric poems was made as early as 1912 by H.M. Chadwick in *The Heroic Age*. According to Chadwick, "The most cursory glance at the two groups of poems will be sufficient to show that they contain many common features in regard to style. In both we find the constant repetition of the same formulae, e.g. in the introduction to speeches" (321). Recently E. G. Stanley has drawn scholarly attention to the fact that comparisons between the Serbian *guslar* and the Anglo-Saxon *scop* were made as early as 1839 by German scholar J.A. Schmeller (*In the Foreground: Beowulf,* 41; "The Scholarly Recovery of the Significance of Anglo-Saxon Records in Prose and Verse").

[25]"Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style."

poetry, and using this type of evidence concludes that "there well might be almost nothing in the language here used that could not be demonstrated as traditional" (89).

Moving to the formula as a means of understanding the repetition in *Beowulf*, many complained, reduced the meaning of the poem dramatically. Let's take our initial passage about the singer for example. A strictly formulaic reading might go something like this: 'An important man who was thinking about songs, one who knew a great number of songs, one word found another and were joined together as this man began to skillfully sing about the journey of Beowulf, and to skillfully recite the story with word variation; he told everything he had heard tell about Sigemund's. . .' The translation gives the gist of the passage, yet we lose the movement in the poet's perspective which Beaty described.

Ironically, as Anglo-Saxonists discovered, equating the orality or traditionality of a poem with its formulaicity actually makes the oral nature of the work more difficult to prove. In a brilliant, if a bit polarizing, rebuttal of Magoun, Larry Benson put forward an analysis of the "Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry" using Magoun's own method.[26] If, reasoned Benson, the repetition of traditional phrases demonstrated that a poem was composed through oral processes, then the use of traditional phrasing in known literary material would demonstrate that such oral composition processes were not necessarily oral. Looking at translations of Latin works into Anglo-Saxon (such as the *Phoenix* and the *Meters of Boethius)* and the work of known literate Anglo-Saxon poets (such as Cynewulf and Adhelm), Benson shows how

[26]Alistair Campbell does point out some problems with polarization of the terms 'oral' and 'literary' in his analysis of the Beowulf poet's use of older vernacular poetry ("The Use in 'Beowulf' of Earlier Heroic Verse."

formulaic phrases were just as likely (and in some cases statistically more likely) to occur in known literary texts as they were in orally composed or orally derived texts such as *Beowulf.* Given that we know the source of the literate material while the source of the oral material is in doubt, quantitatively speaking, formulaic stylistics alone are more likely to point to a written than an oral origin.[27]

Benson's argument keys into (and resists) oral-formulaic theory's demand for a separation between oral and literate worlds. Without reference to formulaic composition scholars had generally long accepted the idea that poems like *Beowulf* were descended or derived from older oral traditions. In fact, *Beowulf* drew the attention of Jacob Grimm as an example of Germanic folk epic, and finding its folk source material was one main line of critical analysis of the poem in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries.[28] The oral theory of Parry and Lord analyzes orally derived texts for proof of the *process* of oral transmission rather than viewing them as the accumulated products of oral tradition. Thus, orality shifts from being one medium of transmission to a cognitively distinct process which produces a distinct aesthetics. Obviously, the second orality is more difficult to definitively demonstrate--especially when one does not have a recording of the performance of the poetry one has found to be

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[27]One important problem which I don't deal with here in detail is the definition of the formula and its semantic companion the theme. The vagueness of Parry's original definition coupled with differences in the application of that definition to various works from different poetic traditions has created contradictory results. For example William Whallon has taken issue with the percentage of true formulaic diction which Magoun and later Robert Creed have claimed to find in Old English poetry (*Formula, Character, and Context*, 73-74; see also John S. Miletich's "The Quest for the 'Formula': A Comparative Reappraisal"). More recently, Francelia Clark has reviewed the history of similar problems in delineating themes in the oral epic poetry preserved in writing (*Theme in the Oral Epic and in* Beowulf,).

[28]Stanley, *In the Foreground*, 5-13; A late example of this folklore approach is the *Beowulf and its Analogues* anthology (Garmonway and Simpson, London: Dent & Sons, 1968).

oral in this sense. As Benson points out, this type of reasoning in reference to written documents can only produce tautologies:

> To prove that an Old English poem is formulaic is only to prove that it is an Old English poem, and to show that such a work has a high or low percentage of formulas reveals nothing about whether or not it is a literate composition, though it may tell us something about the skill with which a particular poet uses the tradition. (336)

Franz Bäuml argues, however, that oral-formulaic theory is saved from being a true tautology because it develops from an analogy. For example, we may not have actual original performances of Anglo-Saxon poetry, but we can compare the performances of epic poems from other oral traditions to the written documents we have.[29] What Benson misses, and what scholars like Stanley Greenfield and Alain Renoir began to explore soon after Magoun's initial formulaic approach to Old English poetry, is that this analogy helps us make sense of the rhetorical context which traditional poetry draws from and responds to, and having access to this context allows modern readers a deeper access to (in this case) Anglo-Saxon aesthetic, cultural, and ethical values. Moving beyond mapping simple repetitions, Greenfield traced patterns of traditional, formulaically expressed, ideas (or themes) in several Old English poems.[30] Greenfield finds, paradoxically, as Magoun predicted, that understanding a given phrase, theme, or scene is traditional (in that it is identical to or similar to

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[29] "Medieval Texts and Oral Composition", 33-4. The quality of the analogical relationship between Homeric and Yugoslavian epic will be looked at more closely at the end of this chapter.

[30] For example in "The Theme of 'Exile' in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *Speculum* 30 (1955): 200-6, and "Syntactic Analysis and Old English Poetry."

expressions found elsewhere) allows modern readers to more truly appreciate the individual styles of particular examples of Anglo-Saxon poetry:

> In the largest sense, therefore, originality in the handling of conventional formulas may be defined as the degree of tension achieved between the inherited body of meanings in which a particular formula participates and the specific meaning of that formula in its individual context. (Exile 205)

Giving up Lord' s emphasis on the mode of composition as crucial in favor of the notion of an 'oral-formulaic rhetoric', Renoir continued to develop this broader understanding of oral traditional poetry in his analyses of medieval textuality and oral-formulaic contexts:

> . . . prospective interpreters of such ancient and medieval verse as reveals clearly oral-formulaic features might do well to disregard the obviously tantalizing question of the actual mode of composition and to concentrate on the interpretation of the text within the context of attested rhetorical practices of the oral-formulaic tradition regardless of whether the lines on the page were originally written in solitude or spoken before an audience. (63) [31]

The large claim of oral-composition theory which originally drew the attention of Anglo-Saxonists -not that any given text is of oral origin but that we can determine whether a text was orally or chirographically composed- gave way relatively quickly under the pressure of textual and historical evidence. However, the powerful comparison of contemporary oral epic singers with

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[31] *A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West-Germanic Verse* .

Anglo-Saxon poetry has permanently changed the direction of literary research in Old English because it has allowed scholars to shape a coherent picture of how such a literary tradition might develop in a 'pre-literate' culture and how it might continue to function in a culture of mixed literacy. Greenfield, and scholars following him, used the idea of formulaic composition to map out contours of thought and feeling particular to Anglo-Saxon poetry, and understanding that themes of 'exile', 'the hero on the beach' and 'the beasts of battle' are part of the common stock from which an Anglo-Saxon poet (or even, more broadly, a Germanic poet) drew in the process of composing his poetry is now part of any basic introduction to Old English.[32]

But the question of whether this comparison of similar poetic traditions (one performed orally, the other 'recorded' in manuscripts) entails a distinct traditional poetics which differs from modern, literate, textual aesthetics has yet to be fully tested. Renoir and Greenfield both suggest that understanding the rhetorical context of oral traditional poetry entails at least a defamiliarization of modern assumptions, derived from the nature of printed textuality, about what makes a good story or poem. Greenfield even sketches an outline of this aesthetic theory which later comparitists take up and develop:

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[32]Because the focus of this study is more an analysis of what we can logically derive from the structure of specific orality rhetorics, I have sharply curtailed the history of this dramatic debate in Old English scholarship which bounced between polemic and apology using Benson and Magoun as opposite poles for nearly two decades. More detailed histories of the debate in the literary history of *Beowulf* can be found in the works cited for Renoir, Whallon and Foley (among others). As scholars have moved toward understanding orality and literacy as multiple and heterogeneous rather than monolithic this particular debate has lost much of its energy. In *Visible Song*, Katherine O'Keeffe gives an apt summation of its conclusion: "The argument, when based upon the stylistics of the text (such as formula, redundancy, generative composition, type scenes), points clearly to an oral origin for the poetry, but when based upon the dissemination of sources, points just as clearly to a literate origin. There is no way out of this dilemma without making an arbitrary decision on the relative values of the stylistic or source-based approach" (13).

> The importance of ascertaining conventional patterns in Old English poetry lies, of course, in the basis such patterns establish for the further investigation of the aesthetic values of individual poems. . . . A highly stylized poetry like Anglo-Saxon, with its many formulas and presumably many verbal conventions, has certain advantages in comparison with a less traditional type of poetry. The most notable advantage is that the very traditions it employs lend extra-emotional meaning to individual words and phrases. That is, the associations with other contexts using a similar formula will inevitably color a particular instance of a formula so that a whole host of overtones springs into action to support the aesthetic response. (Exile 205)

Most recently, John Miles Foley has taken up Greenfield's description of formulaic aesthetics and has moved beyond this tracing of themes particular to a given poetry to develop a more general theory of oral traditional aesthetics. In *Immanent Art,* Foley suggests that his traditional aesthetics theory will redefine literary criticism in general so that it will more fully account for all verbal art and thereby extract the critic of orally derived works from the worn out 'mechanism vs. aesthetics' polarity:

> The polemical nature of the dialogue between these two schools has made it difficult for the well meaning critic of the Homeric, Old English or even the Yugoslav poem; with now common ground available, the critic must in effect choose whether to side with the oralists and embrace the "non-literary" character of his or her cherished texts or to focus on the literary quality of poetry to the exclusion of its traditional aspects. (47)

Foley's traditional aesthetics emphasizes inferred meaning (which is foregrounded and communicated through metonymy) over conferred meaning (which is given by the author and is specific to the particular text being analyzed):

> The key difference lies in the nature of tradition itself: structural elements are not simply compositionally useful nor are they doomed to a limited area of designation; rather, they command fields of reference much larger than the single line, passage or even text in which they occur. *Traditional elements reach out to the fecund totality of the entire tradition, defined synchronically and diachronically, and they have meanings as wide and deep as the tradition they encode.* (7 [Emphasis mine]) [33]

This description of the distinctiveness of the domain of traditional reference is itself poetically rendered, but if stripped of its evaluative force this distinctiveness, like the distinctiveness of Ong's characteristics of oral culture, fades. Structurally, it would be difficult to differentiate Foley's 'traditional metonymy' from everyday metonymy, nor can the distinction be pushed too far before it merges into the more general way in which words bring some of their past contexts with them to help define the new contexts in which they are used. What truly distinguishes Foley's traditional metonymy is that the poet invokes a particular traditional system through it (such as exile themes or honor codes), rather than that it has some distinctive essential structural quality.

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[33]Note how this last sentence compares with Greenfield's description of formulaic aesthetics above. Students of oral-formulaic theory will know that this theoretical aspect of Foley's work does not fairly represent the bulk of his comparative project which continues Lord's method of analyzing problems of style specific to the Homeric, Yugoslavic and Anglo-Saxon traditions. It would be difficult to do justice to the breadth of Foley's contribution to the study of traditional oral epic. Here I focus only the aspects of his aesthetic theory which pertain to the problem of distinguishing oral from chirographic culture and cognition.

As with Ong's sharp distinctions between orality and literacy, we can only make sense of claims for distinctions between oral and literary aesthetics if we understand them as operating in the same world and functioning through the same cognitive and discursive processes. At every point where epic orality arguments based on contextual differences move from the local to the global, it becomes more difficult to honestly distinguish orality from very broad categories such as language or cognition. In this blurring of local with global distinctions the holistic perspective which orality rhetorics attempt to realize functions conservatively, bringing back former ethical and cultural assumptions in new guise. In order to demonstrate the validity of this claim, using *Beowulf* as the test case, I will lay Foley's and Ong's oral interpretation theories next to some literary approaches to the problem of epic character.

Orality, Traditional Reference, and Epic Character

The difference between characterization in epics and novels has long been a point of departure in modern histories of literature. In critical works ranging from the introductory to the theoretically complex, the following familiar generalizations about the differences between epic and novel will still be found: the epic is traditional whereas the novel is innovative, epic deals with external and large crises (such as the rise or downfall of kingdoms) while the novel makes large the interior crises of relatively unimportant individuals, and (after Lukács and Bakhtin) the epic is an expression of or nostalgia for adequation between persons and the world, whereas, the novel is a symptom of modern alienation. The question for epic orality rhetorics is whether understanding the epic as oral changes our interpretive schemes for assessing it. Will, for example, the implementation of Foley's traditional aesthetics help the reader understand

Beowulf by means which are essentially different from the occularcentric, literate biased interpretative tools already implemented in readings of traditional character?

Simply speaking, literary (novelistic) characters are thought flat or round according to the degree to which the reader is made aware of changes in their motivations or interior ways of being. Measured by this criterion, traditional folk or epic characters always seem flat, and often they appear contradictory, malformed or confused. For example, epic characters often exhibit extreme changes in attitude without any explanation, or they seem to suddenly remember things which no sane person would forget (such as when Hrothgar forgets Grendel has a mother until she revenges herself upon Heorot). Foley's traditional aesthetics theory accounts for the perceived flatness of traditional characters by demonstrating that they are constructed under different depth criterion. Traditional characters gain depth by broadening their exterior domain, indexing traditional contexts (historical and thematic) with the immediate, more circumscribed context of the story world. Their 'immanence' (which Foley suggests stems from the immediacy of oral performance) demands that an audience make sense of them as they appear at any given moment rather than judging them across time.[34]

In one reading of characterization in *Beowulf*, Foley puts forward a new multiform or traditional theme of heroic poetry which he denominates the "battle

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[34]Many of Foley's interpretations of ancient texts and contemporary performances suggest this 'performative' stance toward epic poetry, but the full articulation of his theory can be found in his two latest monographs, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* and *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. In the latter, he addresses more directly how his traditional aesthetics relates to ethnopoetic and folkloristic performance studies.

with a monster."[35] He claims that there are no analogues for this theme in Germanic poetry outside *Beowulf*, but that because of the repetition of the multiform within this one text we can glimpse something of the broader tradition of the hero facing the monstrous or extra-human opponent.[36] Foley identifies the contours of this traditional theme by mapping a progression of significant differences in each of *Beowulf's* three fight scenes, and he demonstrates how in each instance the scene simultaneously ratifies the integrity of the traditional multiform while stretching the theme to produce a new configuration of heroic character.

The multiform of the "battle with a monster" contains the following typical events: the arming, a *beot* (or verbal contract), the monster's approach, the death of a substitute and the engagement of battle. Many critics have pointed out the fact that Beowulf does not intercede when Grendel kills his man Handscoh as an action which seems inconsistent with the heroic persona. On Foley's reading, the death of the substitute emphasizes the extraordinary power of the heroic character. The hero prevails where regular men, good as they might be, die. This pattern is exceeded in the third fight scene. In the battle with the dragon Beowulf is an old man . He is the first to engage the monster and thus, if the multiform had developed according to pattern, Beowulf would have been in the position of the substitute with his man Wiglaf ready to take the hero's position. Instead, with Wiglaf's assistance Beowulf defeats the dragon and demonstrates that he is

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[35]*Immanent Art* 231.

[36]Depending on how the idea of the monster is defined, one might take issue with this claim. Many scholars have seen analogues to these fight scenes in Norse sagas. For example, there are sections on "the fight against manlike monsters" and 'the dragon fight" in *Beowulf and its Analogues*.

a hero apart from heroes in that he even outdistances the traditional structures for setting the hero apart from other men.

Foley's reading of this particular theme is very interesting and would have implications for further readings of the poem; however, the epic hero here looks much like the familiar literary description of epic character. Beowulf is not an individual person but a representative of heroic virtues. If some action or comment seems to contradict this position then (under more traditional readings) we are to ignore this inconsistency and chalk it up to the messiness of folk art, or (under Foley's reading) we are to look for other narrative or thematic patterns which might explain away the contradiction. In both these readings of epic character, the unifying, hierarchical, centrifugal forces of epic language (as described by Bakhtin) are given precedence. We are to pay attention to the aggregative weight of an epic poem's assertions rather than (from our literate biased perspective) insist on linear, logical consistency.

In *Rereading Beowulf,* Edward B. Irving uses Ong's characteristics of oral culture to develop a reading of character in the poem which is structurally similar to Foley's traditional aesthetic reading. Rather than arguing that poems like *Beowulf* must be interpreted entirely from an oral or traditional perspective, Irving takes a holistic approach, suggesting that understanding the oral-derived nature of the poem can set limits for or correct misapprehensions of modern literate audiences. One thing that Irving gets from Ong's characteristics of oral culture is simply the permission to stop trying to account for meaningless inconsistencies and the authority to contain other critics' attempts to do so:

> As I shall be insisting regularly and monotonously henceforth, *Beowulf* does not conceal its structures of meaning. Its serious statements are almost without exception entirely recognizable and explicit. (10)

This comment occurs as a rhetorical punctuation at the end of a very witty (and valid) containment of the exegetical critics who look for Christian allegory in *Beowulf,* and as he promises, it occurs several times throughout his book to contain other interpretative excesses as well. What's more interesting for our discussion of orality and epic character is the kind of containment it mobilizes for Irving in his discussion of characterization in *Beowulf.* In general, Irving uses orality to free characters from the depth criterion of realist aesthetics. Characters are roles in *Beowulf* rather than personalities who could be expected to have consistently developed interiorized histories. In order to demonstrate this principle, Irving analyzes how Hrothgar (the old king) and Unferth (the contentious advisor) function in the roles demanded of them by the particular contexts in which they appear at any given point in the poem. For example, if Hrothgar' s reaction is not mentioned in a scene, then we are not to worry about it:

> . . . it is later the same counselors who decide, after some debate, to go away and leave Beowulf at the mere's bottom after they observe the evidence of blood in the water (1591-1602a). Presumably Hrothgar goes along with their decision, since he does not stay there but returns to Heorot with the other Danes. By not showing him taking any decisive part in the debate, the poet really directs us not to think of his having made any decision at all . . . . Hrothgar can be made simply not to exist in

> any relation to this act by the device of maintaining silence about him. (54).

And if Unferth is a hostile figure in one scene and said to be friendly in another, (as when he initiates a verbal battle with Beowulf at his entrance, but then offers the hero his sword later at the mere) then we are to accept him functioning in those roles in those instances:

> In this review of Unferth's career in the poem, I have tried not to explain difficulties or inconsistencies by resorting to hidden or implicit meanings. . . . Unferth is always a symbolic spokesman for the Danes, whether we hear his actual words or watch his behavior or observe how Beowulf treats him. He speaks for their anger, their pride, their frustrations, their xenophobia, and their grateful generosity of spirit. (47)

However, it is interesting to note that this kind of transparency is not systematically implemented throughout Irving's reading but is used as a backdrop for valuing the development of Beowulf as a character who is more similar to the round characters of realistic modern fiction:

> Another virtually zero-grade element contributing to our sense of Hrothgar's weakness is the remarkable thinness of his past. . . . Again we have the very strongest contrast with Beowulf, whom we see in spectacular action in youth as well as old age. Indeed two-thirds of the poem is given over to describing his youthful deeds in detail. Thus, by the time he reaches old age, he has acquired a sheer depth of rich past experience that Hrothgar lacks, and it is a depth important to a hero in this genre. (59)

Here Irving's reading converges with Foley's. The traditional/ epic hero is produced through a different depth criterion than novelistic characters in that he is judged by his accumulation of socially recognized successes in heroic contests rather than by his psychological growth. Yet, unlike secondary characters in the epic he his judged as progressing over time. In contradiction to his own emphasis on the radical 'immanence' of traditional characters, Foley assumes that the audience will be able to judge Beowulf's growth over time in the poem, consciously or unconsciously comparing his performance as a typical hero in the first two fight scenes with his performance as an extraordinary hero in his fight with the dragon as an old man. Similarly, in Irving's reading we are to judge each character only as functioning in the role assigned in particular contexts, but at the same time to view the hero's different actions under similar circumstances as an evaluation of former problematic actions (or inaction) on the part of other characters. In both readings, the oral qualities of the poem are used to shore up hierarchical, unifying epic forces, unless this impedes our understanding of the growth of the hero. In this sense, orality is used (as a substitute for what was formerly denominated 'epic qualities') in order to account for inconsistencies which would hinder a structuralist or new critical reading of the poem. While such a result is not an impasse for Irving's holistic approach to the poem, it does set limits for Foley's claims for a distinct oral traditional aesthetics. To echo Larry Benson, 'to say that an epic poem is an oral traditional poem, is to say that an epic poem is an epic poem."

Oral Composition

Like Ong's primary oral culture, Foley's oral traditional aesthetics places us in familiar territory named anew. In founding his 'Great Divide' model on the

discoveries of oral-formulaic theory, Walter Ong participates (as he himself suggests) in a much larger and older discussion about the relation between literature and subjectivity. Ong's oral and literate subject bear a striking resemblance respectively to the romanticized pre-industrial and alienated modern subjects described nostalgically by Lukács and critically by Bakhtin. This resemblance is not coincidental. For Ong and Foley and oral-formulaic theorists such as Lord have in common with those narrative theorists an interest in epic and history which developed from the philological emphasis of nineteenth century academia. [37] So it makes sense that they would be drawn to the epic voice as an organizing principle for language, culture, and aesthetics. However, with this background Lord, Ong and Foley inherit assumptions which cause them to naturalize epic aesthetics under the more scientific descriptor 'orality'. The problem with this naturalization is not that it causes us to misinterpret epic characters such as Beowulf, Hrothgar or Unferth, but that it obscures our relation to oral practices by distancing us from our own orality. At every turn we have seen how epic orality remaps domains (such as culture and cognition) which are not exclusively oral. Such descriptions are authorized in part by the synchronic comparison of Homer and contemporary Yugoslavian oral epics; however, the 'orality' of oral composition theory remains to be tested.

With philological training mostly only in medieval Germanic vernaculars, this critic is not qualified to pass judgment on the particulars of Parry's analysis of Homer or of Lord's and Foley's work on Yugoslavic oral traditions. Yet from this outsider's perspective, Parry made an intuitive leap which was magical but at the same time believable. Extratextual historical evidence (as well as a few

[37]In fact all of these scholars were and are trained philologists.

references within the text) corroborate the idea that Homer's works (as well as later medieval 'folk epics') were associated at least at one time with oral performance. Parry's analysis of the metrical functions of epithets in Homer and his comparison with composition practices of Serbian singers show *how* such a tradition *might* develop and be maintained orally (even in a relatively stable form) over several centuries. Before Parry, the lengthiness of the texts in question along with declarations about the limits of human memory were the main arguments against their oral origin.

Though oral composition theory must have a huge bearing on how we think about the development and dissemination of ancient and medieval poetic traditions, this chapter has demonstrated why it cannot be used to organize theories of discourse or culture in general. In the historical bent of philology lies both its beauties and its dangers. For example, without the historical comparisons made by nineteenth century philologists such as Sir Arthur Evans, Parry's composition theory would not have been possible. In "The Generic Nature of Oral Epic Poetry", David Bynum reproduces the following description of Bosnian singers from Evans' travel diary:

> But what carried one back into epic days at once was a larger gathering, forming a spacious ring lit up by a blazing fire, in the middle of which a Bosniac bard took his seat on rough log, and tuning his ghuzla began to pour forth one of the grand sagas of his race. Could it have been an unpremeditated lay? Without a book or any aid to memory he rolled out the ballad for hour after hour, and when I turned to rest, not long before sunrise, he was still rhapsodizing. I do not pretend to know what was the burthen of the ballad. . . The hearers of the bard to whom I was listening

> seemed never to grow weary. Every now and then an ecstatic thrill would run through the whole circle, and find utterance in inarticulate murmurs of delight. (240)

Thus we return again to the image with which this chapter began. Evans makes several historical connections between the Bosnians he observes here and the ancient Greeks whom he studied and from whom he thought these Bosnians were descended. Not even understanding their language, he identifies their race and their poetic genres with the Greek models which interested him, yet this elision of cultural and historical differences helped the lay the foundation for later, more viable comparisons between the two poetic traditions. For this reason, the implementation of oral-composition theory as an analogical bridge between two specific poetic traditions carries the seeds of ethnocentric anagogical comparisons between those cultures and our own.

CHAPTER III

'ÞE BOK AS I HERDE SAY': THE HETEROGENEITY OF COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION

The preceding chapter questioned the sharp distinctions between oral and literate worlds and mindsets which characterize epic orality rhetorics. Logically, theories which depend upon an incommensurability of discourses are difficult to make honest sense of; likewise, ethically, epic nostalgia and the focus on irrecoverable cultural losses tend to reinforce and conserve (by renaming) dated assumptions about the primacy and coherence of Western civilizations. Chapter one suggested that separating epic orality from orality rhetorics organized by other types of voices would lead to new connections between texts of the past and contemporary textual and cultural interpretative methodologies. This chapter will touch on some of the ways in which popular and conversational orality rhetorics have already contributed to making such connections between modern culture and medieval texts, but it will focus on circumventing a critical weakness which currently limits the descriptive ability of these performance-centered orality rhetorics.[1]

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[1]In this chapter I group together popular oralists who work from performance theory with discourse analysts and sociolinguists who draw implications from comparisons of everyday and literary discourse. To the extent that traditional folklore has affinities (genealogical and structural) with epic orality it produces the same problematic cultural assumptions examined in chapter two, and linguists who use textual paradigms only to discover and map patterns of everyday verbal interaction are involved in discipline specific work and, therefore, do not activate the meta-perspective of orality. Furthermore, many performance-centered oralists from these disciplines also group themselves together to the extent that they dialogue with one another through the work of Dell Hymes (For example in critical anthologies such as *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* and *Rethinking Context*).

In the way that epic orality struggles to move beyond tautologies in which oral tradition discovers oral tradition, popular and conversational orality (in different ways) must move beyond mapping textual paradigms onto behavior before they can add to or critique the literary hermeneutic which inspires their comparisons of everyday speech and action to literature. Simply put, before we can understand what the similarities and differences between everyday and literary discourse mean, before we can say that our holistic perspective (understanding the merging of world, text, and subject through communal and social voices) adds some coherence rather than merely fuzzing established discursive and disciplinary boundaries, and before we can claim that we are discovering interdisciplinary phenomena rather than merely engaging in crossdisciplinary remapping of phenomena, we must consider the nature and limits of our shared textual paradigm.

Admittedly, this is a tall order for a half-dozen life projects much less a single chapter; furthermore, the narrowness and exclusivity of analysis are exactly what the holism of orality is meant to ameliorate. As we shall see in the following discussion, the nature of textuality cannot be fully pinned down or elucidated (the very notion of 'oral texts' demonstrates how very fluid that nature is); however, a pinch of painful analysis--consideration of the logic of using a textual paradigm to map everyday discourse and then using that map to evaluate textual paradigms--can act as a catalyst by focusing our attention on areas where orality can move beyond renaming to add to our understanding of literature as well as face-to-face verbal interaction. Thus, this chapter will be suggestive rather than summative, beginning with some specific criticisms of performative

contradictions in applications of conversational orality to literary theory and an examination of the hermeneutic circle of performance discourse models.

A clarification of the terms under which orality can bring the world to bear on literary interpretation and evaluation will be one payoff of such an interrogation. I will argue that because functionalist discourse models theorize the relation between subjects, messages and contexts as heterogeneous yet coherent, they have the potential to exceed the confines of the hermeneutic circle. Structuralist discourse models, even when they give an account of context, are more bound by the circle to the extent that they are organized by an intentionality which moves directly from a speaker through context to an addressee. For example, Roman Jakobson's model describes the speech event as sentences moving from one mind and being interpreted by another (see note eight below); whereas Hymes' SPEAKING grid describes the speech event as an interpretable group of behaviors which includes the use of sentences.

I will attempt to make the argument concrete in two applications to readings of the *Gawain* manuscript (Cotton Nero A. x 3). First, I will investigate how this functionalist orality can set limits for structuralist reductionism by giving a coherent account of the function of multiple and asymmetrical semiotic systems within a text. As a demonstration, I will analyze several interpretations of the initial capitals of the *Gawain* manuscript, identifying their reliance on different types of literacy and orality and analyzing how the text demands some heterogeneity (in that some functions attributed to the initial capitals work in combination or overlap and no one scheme can fully account for their meaning) and at the same time this same heterogeneity limits the purview of some interpretative systems while excluding others altogether. This reading of the

initials points to multiple and multivalent 'decontextualization' processes in the interpretation of communication (including literary communication) which influence how we take the world to be but which we cannot fully or consciously control.

Second, in an analysis of tense-shifting in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* I will demonstrate how the structural expression of heterogeneity in functionalist discourse models can grant the critic access to the rhetoric which precedes style in both literary and conversational narrative. Because structuralist linguistics and formalist criticism build from a communication model which theorizes the text as a singular message and which connects the addressor, message and addressee through a web of intentionality, they can only posit context as unanalyzable, as not pertinent, or as a frame (or system of frames) participating in the intentionality of the speaker/writer and audience. In *Gawain* scholarship this tendency of formalism is realized in associating intentional semiotic systems (which are overtly and abundantly articulated by the *Gawain*-poet) with literacy and equating the aggregative and unanalyzable with orality. On these grounds, scholars have generally judged the poem to be the product of a literate rhetoric and have focused on debating which of the schemes intentionally deployed by the poet should organize our interpretation of the whole poem.[2] For this reason, *Sir Gawain* will be an interesting test case for demonstrating the critique of which functionalism is peculiarly capable: using everyday orality (which we have in

[2]For example, see Scott D. Troyan's "Rhetoric without Genre: Orality, Textuality and the Shifting Scene of the Rhetorical Situation in the Middle Ages."

common with writers of the past) to make possible and to set limits for the pretensions of hermeneutics and structuralisms. [3]

Performative Contradictions

In different ways, as was shown in chapter one, all three orality rhetorics strive toward a coherent holism which can mediate the areas of blindness particular to various historical, textual, disciplinary, and cultural lines of analysis. The epic, popular, and conversational voices organize this holism differently, but all orality rhetorics depend upon the acceptance of descriptive emergentism--that properties of the whole cannot be defined by properties of the parts--which is meant to offset the analytic reductionism which traditional oralists (epic and popular) identify with a 'literate bias' or 'chirographic mindset' and which performance oralists (popular and conversational) associate with structuralism. As we have seen, epic orality depends upon a split or 'alienated' holism[4] in that oral and literate subjects have different essences (cognitive and ethical) produced by their upbringing in different worlds. In the way that this alienated holism logically reproduces and reinforces the cultural gap it is designed to bridge, the unevaluated holism in many applications of conversational orality to literary discourse presupposes the structuralism functionalist discourse models are meant to critique or exceed. As an exemplar, I will trace one path which this unevaluated holism has taken in comparisons of literary and everyday discourse.

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[3]In the argument developed below, the term 'hermeneutics' refers mostly to the broad notion of a system of interpretation except when the German tradition for determining social knowledge is specifically under discussion. 'Structuralism' refers mostly to the literary structuralists discussed by Jonathan Culler and critiqued by Mary Louise Pratt. I am interested in these concepts in part because they negotiate more local notions of context than the broad conceptual scheme theories of epic oralists.

[4]I use the term 'alienated' here rather than the less evaluative term 'dualistic' to mark epic orality's nostalgia and its focus on the incommensurablity between oral and literate cognition.

One of the first extended studies of the application of functionalist linguistics to literary theory is Mary Louise Pratt's *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* . In that work, Pratt demonstrates the fallacy of distinguishing literary from non-literary language--a basic assumption of both structuralist linguistics and formalist literary theories--and suggests that the speech act situation model has the potential to more completely accommodate the stylistics of both everyday discourse and verbal art. Pratt's critique has two arms-one traces the flawed logic of early structuralists and the effect of that logic even in Roman Jakobson's more context oriented discourse model and Richard Ohmann's appeal to speech act theory, the other reviews sociolinguistic research demonstrating the use of literary language and genres in everyday conversation.[5] Her famous argument that the similarities between everyday and poetic language are more important than the differences rests in part on her paradoxical finding that the 'ordinary language' posited by both linguists and literary critics is more extraordinary than literary language in everyday speech situations.[6]

The argument that all language uses metaphor or other literary devices would only be trivially true in that the function of 'literariness'--in reference to grammar, style, content or context--is left unaccounted for. Although opinion is

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[5]As one example of structuralism's flawed logic, Pratt lists the following assumptions by which formalists establish the "principle of specificity" for distinguishing literary from non-literary language:

1. defining literature as a linguistic category
2. postulating an opposing linguistic category containing all and only non-literature
3. redefining grammar in such a way that its domain is all and only nonliterature
4. ascribing to non-literature all and only those properties described by structuralist grammar (8)

[6]Pratt focuses particularly on the Gricean rules for conversation and the fact that a truly Gricean conversation would be considered extremely dull. Stanley Fish anticipated this argument from a rhetorical angle and also included the ordinary language of speech act theory in his criticism of the literary / non-literary distinction ("How Ordinary is Ordinary Language?").

now more diverse than in the early part of this century, the generalization is still largely true that artful discourse (performance) and literary texts can be readily distinguished from mundane verbal exchanges.[7] The issues then become how is this agreement accomplished? What cues do audiences recognize in making this distinction? Is the nature of this distinction the same in different contexts? Thus, Pratt rightfully focuses on Jakobson's and Ohmann's approaches in that both of these theorists 1) take into account the fact that rhetorical tropes and genres (stories, jokes, personal anecdotes) can be found in literary *and* non-literary texts and 2) both appeal to the function of language in context as a means for accounting for language which appears at first glance to be a crossover of literary into non-literary discourse.

Jakobson's 'poetic function' allows for the use of poetic language in all verbal exchanges but the predominance of this function in a given communication defines that communication as literary:

> This [poetic] function cannot be productively studied out of touch with the general problems of language, and, on the other hand, the scrutiny of language requires a thorough consideration of its poetic function. Any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant,

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[7]Here I am not being flippant toward those currently involved in the heated debates (academic and public) concerning the ideology of canon formation. Rather I am working from a minimalist and highly inclusive notion of literariness--any discourse which would readily be marked off as 'special' or as artfully distinctive--and the intuition (admittedly in need of some charity) that, setting aside likes and dislikes, a very broad sampling of people from the same culture would have a high level of agreement in distinguishing such discourse from everyday conversation.

> determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. (356)[8]

Parallel to Jakobson's poetic function is Richard Ohmann's world disclosure criterion for distinguishing literary from non-literary narrative. Literary speech acts, like the poetic function, are part of all language types but the pragmatic functions of speech acts are suspended in literature:

> A literary work creates a world. . . by providing the reader with impaired and incomplete speech acts which he completes by supplying the appropriate circumstances. . . . Since the quasi-speech-acts of literature are not carrying on the world's business--describing, urging, contracting, etc.--the reader may well attend to them in a non-pragmatic way, and thus allow them to realize their emotive potential. In other words the suspension of normal illocutionary forces tends to shift a reader's attention to the locutionary acts themselves and to their perlocutionary effects. (17)[9]

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[8]"Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics", *Style in Language*, 350-377. In Jakobson's model the speech event is constituted by six factors

	context	
addresser	message	addressee
	contact	
	code	

The factor which a given message selects as its primary focus determines which linguistic (see below) function predominates in the message:

	referential	
emotive	poetic	conative
	phatic	
	metalinguistic	

Thus if the speech event is focused on context the referential function predominates, or if the focus is on the addressee the emotive function predominates, and so on. (Pratt 30; Jakobson 353, 357)

[9]"Speech-Acts and the Definition of Literature." Pratt's response to this statement: "However, if we are to use these characteristics to define literature, they must be shown to be unique to literature. And they are not." (91).

Both Jakobson's and Ohmann's descriptions of literary or poetic language share an affinity with their structuralist predecessors' interests in *avant garde* aesthetics--literary discourse distances the reader/audience from the immediate context either by defamiliarizing language (focusing our attention on how the language is working rather than on message content) or by detaching us from our usual communicative commitments. From several different vantage points throughout her analysis of arguments for distinguishing literary language, Pratt identifies the following familiar aporia: in order to define literary language we have to assume its existence and that it deviates from 'normal' or 'ordinary' language. The paradoxical result is that the supposedly inclusive category ordinary language is defined by a smaller subset of language--ordinary language is whatever literature is not. Taking Ohmann's criterion for example, as Pratt points out, there are several types of verbal play common in everyday conversations (kidding, anecdotes, imitations) that depend on the fictivity which defines 'world disclosure.' Thus:

> If fictivity were indeed the distinguishing characteristic of literature, we would have to describe such speech acts as these in terms of their similarity to works of literature. But why should we? This would be nothing short of absurd, like describing apples in terms of oranges without reference to the category "fruit." (91-2).

In response to this aporia, Pratt appeals to a broader communicative context to define what makes a particular speech act literary:

> Does it not make more sense to say that our ability to conceive and manipulate hypothetical worlds and states of affairs, possible or

> impossible, real or unreal, and to mediate between those worlds and our own is part of our normal cognitive linguistic competence? (92)[10]

Pratt's critique of structuralist and formalist models for merging linguistics and literary criticism (which has only been skimmed over here) is still the most lucid and deep analysis of the problems attending a structural distinction between literary and non-literary discourse. It is therefore disconcerting to discover that once we accept Pratt's reinclusion of literary / poetic discourse in language and move on to her application of this understanding to what has previously been designated ordinary and literary discourse, we find ourselves in all too recognizable territory. If the goal of the appeal to context was to reintegrate literary and ordinary language, then the result of such an integration should at least minimally be the erasure of the defamiliarization, decontextualization or deviance criterion which Pratt reveals as underlying structuralist and formalist definitions of literary language. What we get is the notion of the 'display text' which functions like any other text or speech act but which is interpreted according to the rules of the 'literary context' in which it is received:

> . . . a felicitous written, fictional, narrative display text *is* a felicitous novel. Obviously, this is not to say that when the fictional speaker's utterance does not fulfill any of the rules for the unmarked case or any other rules to which his utterance might be subject, his utterance and that of the author cease to coincide, and a second, *additional range of implicatures is required to make sense of the author's utterance,* the novel. (210) [first emphasis Pratt's, second emphasis mine]

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[10]The idea that literary discourse is a contextually defined norm rather than a structurally distinguishable type of language has been put forward by many literary critics. For example, see Stanly Fish above. Also Barbara Herrennstein Smith's *Contingencies of Values* .

In the sections of Pratt's argument which analyze the 'literariness' of everyday discourse (e.g. her comparison of Labov's model for natural narrative with formalist narrative theories) and which describe the everyday speech acts involved in interpreting literature (e.g. her application of Grice's Cooperative Principle to define the communicative contexts of novels-from which the above quote is taken), the idea that the addressee experiences a kind of distancing from the communicative force of a literary speech act is muted but alive and well. The admission that from the perspective of Gricean conversational analysis an "additional range of implicatures is required to make sense of the author's utterance" reveals the performative contradiction of Pratt's critique--the categories of literary and ordinary language are merely replaced with the distinction between literary and other speech act contexts and thus, the same decontextualization or 'world-disclosure' criterion which is diagnosed as the problem of the first distinction enables the more context sensitive interpretations of the second.

It is this performative contradiction of Pratt's critique that draws the attention of Jürgen Habermas in his "Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature."[11] Habermas is interested in Pratt's argument only insofar as it might question a distinction between the independently structured domain of communicative practice and an autonomous realm of fiction. He parallels Pratt's mistaken logic for collapsing literary and everyday discourse domains with Derrida's subsumption of philosophy under rhetoric.[12] The consequences for blurring the boundaries between argument (or

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[11] *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 185-210.

[12] Note how the grounds of the debate shift as we move from the disciplinary disputes between literary criticism and linguistics to those between social critical theory and philosophy.

the discourses of problem solving capacities such as science, morality, and law) and poetics (or the 'world disclosing' discourses of art and literature) are, according to Habermas, neither radical nor substantive. With biblical force he concludes his argument against such radical relativism with the following statement:

> Whoever transposes the radical critique of reason into a domain of rhetoric in order to blunt the paradox of self-referentiality, also dulls the sword of the critique of reason itself. The false pretense of eliminating genre distinction between philosophy and literature cannot lead us out of this aporia. (210)

One might well wonder how Pratt, who represents her critique of literary aesthetes as a means of foregrounding the social constitution of language and literature,[13] becomes paired with Derrida, who Habermas claims 'overgeneralizes' the poetic function of language (207). The reason is that they both advocate an unevaluated holism in which questions of meaning and value are settled by deference to the general or all-encompassing *idea* of context; whereas, Habermas advocates an analytical holism in which the critic acknowledges the existence of asymmetrical discourse systems which are valid in some sets of contexts and useless in others. The discourse distinctions which Habermas demands we hold in view are not enclosed or equivalent systems. The

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In Pratt's disciplinary context questioning the unquestioned idea of ordinary language threatens the valued notion of a distinct literary language. From Habermas' perspective, the efficacy of everyday communication is threatened by doing away with the distinction.

[13]Pratt suggests several times that a speech act theory of literary discourse would address the social issues involved in valuing certain cultural traditions, such as the western European literary tradition, at the expense of others, such as the oral traditions of 'largely illiterate nations.' Consider also her agenda statement: "If we are to have a 'science of literature,' as called for by the Russian Formalists, we should understand from the outset that science will be a social, not a mathematical one" (223).

functionality of ordinary or everyday language grounds the 'polar tensions' of problem solving and world disclosing discourses while literary criticism and philosophy act as mediators between expert cultures and the everyday world. Furthermore, the quality or functions of each discourse are not exactly parallel to one another or directly connected. For example, although all modern discourses are recognizable or distinguishable as systems in that they are "specialized for experiences and modes of knowledge that can be shaped and worked out within the compass of one linguistic function and one dimension o f validity at a time," some discourses can be grouped together to the extent that they function in either world disclosing or problem solving capacities (207). In reference to the everyday world, literary criticism (in its role as mediator for literature and art) and philosophy (in its role as mediator for science, morality, and the law) are functionally parallel but at the same time they are substantively incommensurate with each other. In each case, recognizing that each discourse system grants the subject different types of access to the world is crucial for a valid critique of reason. Thus, from Habermas' perspective, when Pratt suggests that the "real lesson speech act theory has to offer is that literature is a context, too, not the absence of one" (99), she blurs and thereby reinforces the very hermeneutic circle she attempts to escape.

No matter what one thinks of Habermas' characterization of Derrida or whether one buys into his description of the relation between modern discourses, culture, and the world, his rebuttal of Pratt's claims for the role of speech act theory and sociolinguistics in evaluating literary theory reveals how appeals to the structuredness of everyday oral discourse depend upon the textual paradigm they are meant to critique. On this diagnosis, popular and conversational orality

rhetorics will have to do something other than demonstrate similarities between the structure of everyday and literary or of spoken and written discourse before they can evaluate or substantively alter the project of literary criticism.

Hermeneutic Circles

Focusing on the similarities between oral and written discourse and between everyday conversation and literature falls short as a means of critique because it produces a disciplinary tautology in that, broadly speaking, the social sciences use textual interpretation methods to obtain their discipline specific knowledge. Questioning the validity of literary criticism' s valorization of the text over context also begs the question of the validity of the linguistic distinction of message from context which organizes not only the structuralist model of Jakobson but also the functionalist model of Dell Hymes. Substituting the notion of performance for text in order to identify oral art forms also depends upon this process of separating the meaningful (structured, directed) aspects of communication from the non-pertinent (unmarked, unevaluated) aspects of context. Describing all speech acts as performative (as well as thinking of speech as a series of discreet acts) pushes the text (meaningful)/ context (unevaluated) distinction further into the mundane and thereby foregrounds as meaningful more of what was formerly unevaluated. But here too, the direction of interpretation is to bring the text to bear on more of the world and thus the newness or worldliness of what we discover (in the sense of being stuff itself which we comprehend rather than our own shaping of stuff) can always be questioned as self-referential or predetermined. Thus, conversational orality is also subject to the hermeneutic circle identified by Schleiermacher, and appeals to context alone, as we saw in Pratt's argument, will at best shift the grounds on

which we separate (or 'decontextualize') meaning from context, and at worst will exacerbate our dilemma by removing it from our sight.[14]

Functionalist comparisons of literature and conversation trigger the hermeneutic dilemma on more than one level in that the sociological methodologies underlying conversational discourse models and folkloristic performance theories are also highly influenced by literary rhetorics. For example, Erving Goffman, whose *Frame Analysis* is used as a foundation in much research in discourse analysis, posited a dramatic approach to character in which the behavior of individuals is thought of as persuasional and everyday situations are described in terms of scenes in which these persuasions are acted out. In a similar way, Dell Hymes' ethnography of speaking was inspired by Kenneth Burke's dramatistic rhetoric to the extent that Burke's pentad for analyzing the organization of experience is included in Hyme's SPEAKING grid.[15]

When William Labov discovers and analyzes narrative structure in everyday conversation and his model for this 'natural' narrative is found to be very similar to literary narrative models (an example which Pratt focuses on), a generous response (which I think is warranted) would be that his work validates the intuition of literary criticism about how narrative works. A not-so-generous

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[14] See Schleiermacher "*The Hermeneutics*: Outline of the 1819 Lectures." One can trace several scholarly trails (some associative, some genealogical) leading from Schleiermacher's lectures on the science of hermeneutics to the interpretative schemes deployed by folklorists, sociolinguists and discourse analysts. A direct connection is analyzed in Paul Ricoeur's somewhat belated apology for the application of the model of the text in interpreting behavior, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text."

[15] In Burke's pentad the question "What is happening ?" is answered by answering five other questions: 1. Act: What took place?, 2. Scene: What is the context in which it occurred?, 3. Agent: Who performed the act?, 4. Agency: How was it done? 5. Purpose: Why was it done? (*A Grammar of Motives*). Burke describes the interaction between theses questions in terms of ratios and this notion is also echoed in Hymes statement that "Many generalizations about rules of speaking will take the form of statements of relationship among components" (*Foundations in Sociolinguistics* 63).

conclusion, which Pratt rightfully opposes, would be that linguistics can only tell us what we already know about literary language. Somewhere in the middle, one might wonder about the degree to which Labov discovers natural narrative to be structured in the same way as literary narrative and the degree to which he superimposes literary narrative on a more heterogeneous discourse. Beyond the pale is the conclusion that this type of finding radically reorganizes literary interpretation models--if anything it broadens the domain of their relevance.[16]

In saying that functionalist and performance discourse models fall prey to the hermeneutic circle, I do not mean to imply that all of these approaches are identical, nor would I argue that they would discover the same 'knowledge' that literary criticism discovers. Any given structuralism will pull up different parts of the world for our inspection depending on what Paul Ricoeur describes as the 'personal commitment' of the interpreter/participant. According to Ricoeur, although the hermeneutic circle "remains an insuperable structure of knowledge when it is applied to human things," personal commitment "prevents it from becoming a vicious circle" (117). The different placement of interpreting subjects in relation to time, the world and culture (including disciplinary commitments), makes the dialectic between explanation and understanding productive rather than merely self-referential. So one could argue that the genealogical similarities of conversational and popular orality to literary hermeneutics will not prevent them from turning up new and different types of knowledge. However, I have

[16]It must be noted that Labov's work *has* functioned as a social critique because it rebuts common classist assumptions that non-standard dialects are less organized or complex than the dialects of privileged groups. And to the extent that literariness is judged according to privileged literacies, his demonstration of the artistry and complexity of narratives told by inner-city youths questions the validity of our literary canons. But the efficacy of using his work to argue for social change depends upon including more speech types under established structural criteria rather than calling those criteria into question.

not fielded these problems in order to justify (or rebut) this type of conclusion; rather, I have done so in order to ask what the holist perspective of orality can *structurally* add to the project of literary interpretation. Although it has been shown that functionalist discourse theories cannot do away with the hermeneutic circle or with structuralism, the holism of conversational and popular orality rhetorics dependent upon such models can bring more of the world to bear on textuality. Almost ironically, I will argue that because functionalist discourse models structurally account for the heterogeneity of communication (a heterogeneity which impinges on a particular act from both the participants and the context), the orality rhetorics which use such models can take on the mediating role of literary criticism without merely blurring the boundaries between literature and everyday discourse.

Coherent Heterogeneity: Reading the *Gawain* Manuscript

He made non abode
Bot wygtly went his way.
Mony wylsum way he rode,
Þe bok as I herde say.
(SGGK 687-690)

Thus begins Gawain's journey to find the Green Knight. Taken by itself, line 690, 'the book as I heard say,' acts as a verbal token for the following discussion in that it articulates in literal form the theoretical principle that orality and literacy are not deictic categories; however, perhaps paradoxically, it also suggests that they can be functional and interactional categories for making sense of a world which cannot be fully accounted for through discourse, whether that discourse is written or spoken. Orality evokes voice; literacy evokes text; however, orality

does not describe voice and literacy and textuality exceed one another. Paul Zumthor argues that because "sound cannot be equated with the voice," we must "agree then that 'orality' is the historical authenticity of a voice."[17] In reference to the thrust of Zumthor's description of orality in medieval literature, this statement is mystical in that orality is a means of making a bodily connection with writers of the past, and even in this connection our 'recovery' of their experience is only partial. Chapters one and two traced the logical problems of positing a lost orality which is incommensurable with our own, and although Zumthor's work often dips into this epic orality, for many of the texts he studies (lyrics and ballads)[18], we *have* irrecoverably lost the bodily connection-the musical voice-which defined those texts for medieval audiences. Zumthor's notion that 'orality is the historical authenticity of a voice' reflects the medievalist's understandable emphasis on the diachronic, but whether and by what means orality authenticates voice is a synchronic problem. As we saw in chapter one, voice functions in orality rhetorics as a means of defining the relation between language and the world through subjectivity. Here I would like to explore how conversational orality can help us face our synchronic relationship to medieval texts, and, without anachronism, rather than counting the losses resulting from our otherness in relation to past cultures, to think of our

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[17]"The Text and the Voice."

[18]At some points Zumthor actually calls for a 'science of voice', but he defines his project as 'a general poetics of orality' (*Oral Poetry* 3). This poetics is heavily influenced by Jakobson, and as Romance scholar Donald Maddox points out, undergirding the Zumthor's mysticism is a structuralist method for determining generic and text/context relationships ("The Narrative Motif: A Post-Zumthorian Perspective." Speaking of the Middle Ages: In Honor of the Late Paul Zumthor, 31st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, 1996). See also Zumthor's monograph on medieval genres *Toward a Medieval Poetics*.

interpretation of those texts as ratified by our subjective contiguities with medieval writers.

Dell Hymes' functionalist description of communicative competence, as it is realized in his SPEAKING grid, accounts for multiple and simultaneous oral and literate interpretative systems even as it analogically posits speaking as the origin of all discourse and text production. One way in which it manages this is by moving the context for interpretation back or out a step, as it were. Instead of allowing that a version of orality (e.g. the 'primary' orality theorized by Walter Ong) can function as a complete, enclosed interpretive context or conceptual scheme, the communicative context described through Hymes' SPEAKING grid demands an acknowledgment of the multivalence and heterogeneity of the communication situation.[19] Although any of the elements of the speech situation can override or predominate in the meaning making process (for example, in one case genre might be more important for understanding a given speech event than the channel of communication), no one element is definable as inherently overriding in relation to the others. Interestingly, SPEAKING also accounts for the way in which meaning is shaped by uncontrollable forces (for example Hymes' distinction between setting and scene allows that aspects of the environment out of participants' control or dominion can influence the shape of a speech act sequence). Thus, although many of the exigencies of a communication situation have no direct or referential connection to the message being communicated (e.g. the temperature, relative height of participants, rank, gender, personality), SPEAKING gives a coherent picture of how a systematic means for dealing with such exigencies makes up a part of communicative competence.

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[19]See note 30 in chapter one.

I suspect that at the root of many oralists' concerns about our literate or 'chirographic' bias, lies the intuition that we are fooled by the apparent materiality [e.g. containment and flatness]and synchronisity of a written text into forgetting the means by which we interpret messages and situations. The term orality is important because, as both Zumthor and Hymes would say, it foregrounds the performance implicit in any text; whereas, theories of textuality based on writing lose sight of both the performance and the world guiding the performance.

However, as we have seen, searches for distinct cognitive processes which move from literacy toward the psyche (and stage a coup according to Ong's version) merely intensify or double our forgetfulness of the heterogeneity which complicates and guides interpretation of both speech and writing. Because we can only make sense of the notion of orality and literacy as distinct cognitive processes from a vantage point that includes both processes, such a distinction must become relative to yet another, wider term. Thus, one question to be fielded is whether communicative competence can function as the wider term which can buy us out of the paradoxes of an orality / literacy dichotomy and at the same time allow for the discourse distinctions which we now account for through notions of orality and literacy. Through an analysis of the problem of interpreting the ornamented initial capitals of the *Gawain* manuscript (Cotton Nero A.x.3), I will demonstrate how communicative competence allows for orality and literacy discourse distinctions in interpretation while also setting limits for how such terms can be functionally deployed in discussions of medieval textuality. In short, communicative competence will allow that hearing the book say is a meaningful phrase.

The Initial Capitals

Cotton Nero A. x 3, the manuscript containing the only extant versions of the four Middle English poems, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is marked off by forty-eight illuminated initial capitals drawn in blue and decorated in red. The initials vary in size, but in general most of them are small and extend for more or less three lines. An extremely large initial marks the beginning of each poem and there are four distinctly larger initials interspersed among the nine which mark off sections in *Sir Gawain*. Five initials, three in *Pearl* and two in *Sir Gawain*, have faces drawn in them or beside them. One question often addressed in the scholarship on the initials is whether the capitals are authorial or scribal. While scholars agree that the capitals are probably scribal, they have for the most part concluded that the scribe in question knew the poems of the manuscript very well.[20]

The most convincing overall description of how the initial capitals work in the manuscript as a whole is still Larita Lyttleton Hill's article published in *Speculum* in 1946. According to Hill, the initials in *Pearl*, reflecting the mathematical schema of the poet, mark off twenty sections of five stanzas each (except section fifteen which has six stanzas--an anomaly which E.V. Gordon suggests causes the scribe to add an extra initial to the last stanza of the following section). The initials in *Cleanness* mark shifts in different types of source material: four mark the beginning of Vulgate chapter divisions, three mark off sections which contain elaborations (rather than translations) and other non-Biblical

[20]This resolution to the problem of intentionality is interesting. Usually the claim that decorations or textual divisions in manuscripts are 'merely scribal' justifies the conclusion that they are meaningless. However, in this case the placement of the capitals in *Cleanness* and *Patience*, at least, depend upon the scribe having read them and having collated them with their source material.

material, three come after shifts in Biblical story, one marks a transition from the story of Noah to the story of Abraham (line 557), one may mark a shift from the Luke to the Matthew account of the wedding feast (line 69) and one begins the poem. Similarly, the four initials in *Patience* mark, as Gollanz points out, roughly "the four chapters of Jonah with an introductory prologue."[21] The initial capitals marking off sections in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* cannot be so easily explicated. They vary more in size and do not exhibit any obvious recurring patterns (e.g. they do not occur consistently after so many lines or stanzas and they do not differentiate source material). Not surprisingly then, the question of how to interpret the initials in this poem has produced the most debate.[22]

Aside from Hill's argument that the varying size of the initials is relatively meaningless, most scholars retain Madden's division of the poem into four fitts according to the placement of the larger initial capitals.[23] Hill suggests (in the

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[21]"Madden's Divisions of *Sir Gawain* and the 'Large Initial Capitals' of Cotton Nero A.x."; Gollanz, I. *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain* (4).

[22]See plates 1-9 for images of the initials in *Sir Gawain*. For those not familiar with manuscript culture, it might be interesting to note the lack of strict uniformity of size and shape. (All the plates were copied from Gollanz's facsimile). Initials 1, 2, 5, and 8 which Sir Madden originally used to designate the four major movements or 'fitts' of the poem are judged to be significantly larger than the other five. However, among these four more significant initials there are enough irregularities or variations in size, shape and decoration to cause some scholars, including Hill above, to question this traditional division of the poem. For another argument for nine rather than four divisions of the poem, see Louis Blenker's "Sin, Psychology, and Structure in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,."

[23]Following is a chart of the place of each *Gawain* initial in the context of the story. Madden's divisions and faced initials are also indicated:

	Initial	Division/Face?	Story line
1	S	Fitt I	The initiation of beheading game
2	T	Fitt II	The passing of the seasons and the arming of Gawain
3	T	face	The pentangle and Gawain' journey to Bertilak's castle
4	N		Appearance of Bertilak's castle, Christmas feast, proposal of exchange of winnings game accepted by Gawain
5	F	Fitt III	Deer hunt, first temptation
6	S		Boar hunt, second temptation, fox hunt, third temptation, the gift of the magic girdle accepted by Gawain

same 1946 article) that all nine initials mark off distinct action sequences and that they mark transitions in the use of folk sources. But as James Tuttleton points out, we have no documents of such sources which would be distinguishable in the nine sections of the poem.[24]

In his review of *Gawain* scholarship, Morton Bloomfield accepts Hill's argument that all nine capitals have narrative meaning. According to his reading, in each section

> we pass from ignorance to knowledge after the suspense has been built up to an agonizing climax. . . . the whole subject of formal divisions corresponds to a new point of suspense. (17)

Tuttleton takes up Bloomfield's call for a narrative reading of the initials, but points out limits to a 'suspense theory':

> That we are ignorant of the pentangle in one section and enlightened as to its meaning in the next does not justify saying that a peak of agonizing suspense has been passed. (305)

Tuttleton goes on to propose a dramatic narrative structure for the poem where each of the nine sections exhibits the 'principles of causality, arrangement and balance' which he says define narrative (306). Further, he claims that the larger and smaller initial capitals bear an act/scene relation to one another.[25] However,

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7	N		Fox hunt concluded, Gawain bids farewell to those in the castle
8	N	Fitt IV	New Year arrives; journey to green chapel begins, green knight makes his appearance
9	T	face	The beheading game and exchange of winnings games are brought to a conclusion, Gawain return's to Arthur's court

[24]"The Manuscript Divisions of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,."

[25]As a further rebuttal of Hill's nine part division of the poem, Tuttleton points out that there is full line of space dividing the sections marked by the four larger initials from the other parts of the poem. This argues for the poet's and/or scribe's subordination of the other five sections to these four major divisions.

Tuttleton leaves this reading undeveloped beyond this statement. Michael Sargent adds an argument for greater narrative significance of the larger initials to this discussion by reminding scholars that each of the first three fitts of *Sir Gawain* are resolved or echoed in the last fitt.[26] For example, in fitt four the beheading game and the exchange of winnings game are both completed, the passing of the seasons and the arming of the hero in fitt two are echoed in the passing of New Year's Eve and the dressing of the hero in at the beginning of fitt four, and the epic language of the first stanza is repeated in the last stanza.

Narrative explanations for the significance of the initials, like those just summarized, have tended to acknowledge but then gloss over the surface unevenness of the scribal divisions of *Sir Gawain* and to represent narrative structure as linear and systematic. Narrative as performance is more heterogeneous. Pieces of a story might be marked or evaluated for reasons unrelated to the next event or the final resolution. Furthermore, any such marking might be multivalent in its evaluation and at the same time multifunctional.

The initial capitals in *Sir Gawain* demonstrate this principle of meaningful heterogeneity. First, on a surface level, they exemplify literate textual strategies by visually signaling divisions of the narrative. Some of the initials also mark subgenres such as the topoi for the passing of time at the beginning of fitts two and four (initials two and eight). The third initial doubly marks the description of Gawain's shield and the explication of the pentangle (first with the initial and second with a face inside the initial). The final initial marks with a very grim face turned almost fully toward the text, the inherently interesting event of the Green

[26]"Three Notes on Middle English Poetry and Drama."

Knight raising his ax for the first blow to Gawain's neck. The expression of this face suggests the agony of suspense mentioned by Bloomfield but at the same time could be evaluating Gawain's immanent failure of his final test (which he accomplishes by flinching from the blow). The narrative transitions marked by initials two, six, seven and eight are also marked in the text by 'ungrammatical tense-shifting' which also been shown to serve evaluative and textual functions in contemporary everyday conversational narrative.[27] While each initial functions locally, the cases made by Hill, Bloomfield, Tuttleton and Sargent for their participation in a larger scheme need not and cannot be discounted. The use of larger and smaller initials does point to a poem-wide system distinct from the systems of division in the three other poems of the manuscript. Since this variation in size of initials does not occur in the other poems, one has to conclude that the division of *Sir Gawain* is being marked, by the poet or by the scribe, as different from the others.

Furthermore, even as the initial capitals in *Sir Gawain* work both locally and globally in that narrative, some scholars have also suggested that they function in meaning systems which give structure to the manuscript as a whole. For example, the obvious mathematical scheme which dictates the placement of the initials in *Pearl* has encouraged critics to look for numerological significance in their placement in *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *Sir Gawain*. Michael Robertson, for instance, has gone so far as to suggest a scheme for the division of *Sir Gawain* which places six initials where there are presently none and suppresses four

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[27]The phenomenon of tense-shifting in narrative will be discussed more in reference to oral stylistics in the last section of this chapter. The narrative tense-shifts in *Sir Gawain* have been discussed by Peter Richardson in "Tense, Discourse, and Style: The Historical Present in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," and in "Narrative Strategies in Early English Poetry."

existing[28] in order to correct scribal errors and regain the mathematical symmetry originally intended by the poet. At the beginning of his argument for stanzaic symmetry in *Sir Gawain,* Robertson asks,

> Is it not odd that the poet who achieved the degree of structural balance evident in the twenty sections and 101 stanzas of *Pearl* should have produced the same number of stanzas in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* but divided them into sections of 21, 24, 34, and 22 stanzas? (779)[29]

The heterogeneity of the communication situation (as described through Hymes' SPEAKING grid) accounts for such an 'oddity,' in that numerology is but one interpretive and textual production system. 101 being one more than the perfection of 100 and 11 being one more than the perfection of 10, as Robertson points out, would be significant to a poet who is consistently concerned with human failure throughout all four poems. It is also interesting from a numerological perspective that *Pearl* has 21 initials, *Patience* has 5 and *Sir Gawain* has 9--all numbers of completeness--while *Cleanness* is marked off by an ominous 13. On Robertson's reasoning, along with that of others who equate structure with symmetry, we must either assume that the scribe mistakenly added an initial to *Cleanness* or that the themes of that poem are somehow more negative than those of the other three poems.

Paul Reichardt points out that the faced initials are also separated by significant numbers.[30] Beginning from the first face there are nine initials

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[28]Sargent, 138.

[29]"Stanzaic Symmetry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*." The poet's obvious interest in significant numbers (e.g. as expressed in his description of the pentangle) has been used to justify some outrageous number-crunching interpretations. One scholar even argues for a cryptogram of the author's name in *Gawain* which depends upon numerology for its completion (Erik Kooper, "John Massey in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*."

[30]"Paginal Eyes: Faces among the Ornamented Capitals of MS Cotton Nero A.x, Art. 3."

between it and the second face, three more initials separate the second from the third and twenty-seven more initials divide the last faced initial of *Pearl* from the first faced initial in *Gawain*. Unfortunately, Reichardt stops there in that he maintains that there are only four faced initials in the manuscript. There is a fifth faced initial, mentioned above, the last one of the manuscript. The number of initials dividing the fourth and fifth faced initials is a significant five, but this additional faced initial does make Reichardt's focus on the significance of twenty-seven as the product of nine and three unwarranted.

Thus, while it is fairly clear that both the poet and the scribe of Cotton Nero Ax 3 were interested in or influenced by numerological systems, the asymmetry between the numbers encoded and the messages decoded through them indicate that at least outside *Pearl* numerology works aggregatively rather than rationally in the manuscript. Numerology is a kind of cultural literacy put to the service of literate textual strategies in the Middle Ages. As Mary Carruthers' study on memory reveals, though, arbitrary number grids, such as the numbering of the Psalms or the of Biblical chapter and verse could also function as mnemonic devices.[31] Hence, while the use of significant numbers in Cotton Nero Ax 3 has meaning, the function of the initial capitals within such meaning systems is limited by and secondary to the other textual and evaluative functions they have been shown to serve.

The faced initials also participate in a scribal evaluative system which crosses the boundaries of one poem in the manuscript.[32] The direction of the

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[31]*The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (136).

[32]For images of the faced initials in *Pearl* see plates 10-12. The idea that human images function as interpretations in this manuscript is also suggested by Sarah M. Horral in her description of the drawings of scenes from each poem which were added to the manuscript

gaze of four out of the five faces toward lines of the text make them, as Reichardt points out, images of the manuscript's readers (24-5). Reichardt argues that the three faces in *Pearl* mark tuning points in the development of the dreamer's perception, and he further suggests that a spiritual theme connects the last faced initial in *Pearl* with the first in *Gawain*. Both initials mark passages describing symbols of perfection (the Jerusalem lamb in *Pearl* and the pentangle in *Gawain*), but while the divine symbol of the lamb produces contrition as depicted in the faced initial in *Pearl*, according to Reichardt the human copy of divine perfection in *Gawain* elicits disapproval. This reading of the first four faced initials makes sense (that is, it is a productive reading given the cultural context of the poem), but the fifth faced initial in the manuscript, which Reichardt leaves out, seems to work idiosyncratically in that it marks the inherently interesting and fearful image of the Green Knight raising his ax.

In short, the forty-eight illuminated initial capitals of Cotton Nero A.x3 simultaneously participate in meaning systems which function locally (i.e. in ways specific to the particular passages so marked) and globally within each poem as well as within manuscript-wide systems. Apart from the general notion of coherent heterogeneity, what can a functionalist approach to language, such as Dell Hymes' grid, add to our understanding of how these systems function? Each of these systems begin and end at different points so that the layers of reference for each initial function, analogically speaking, 'dissynchronously' [33] and the multivalence of each initial sets limits for the 'symmetrical' containment of any meaning system. Furthermore, the intentionality of each 'message'

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before it was originally bound in the fifteenth century, "Notes on British Library, MS Cotton Nero A x."

[33]See note 7 in chapter 2 above.

communicated by an initial is also multivalent and sometimes amorphous. The 'participant' category in Hymes' SPEAKING grid is able to make sense of how we make sense of this ambiguity.[34] On a general level, the use of initials in the manuscript merely divides the text into manageable chunks for easier future reference to particular sections. From this perspective the addressor/ speaker is the scribe and the addressees are in his immediate 'textual community' (to use Brian Stock's term). The message could be something like "Here is a nice place to stop reading" or "This is the beginning of a new poem, "or, as in the case of *Pearl*, "This is the structure of the poem." As we have seen, many of the initials are also interpretative. If the scribe is a reader, talking back, as it were, to the poet then his audience includes the poet, his textual community and future listeners/ readers. In this case, his messages include "I see these are different sources" (in reference to *Cleanness*), "These are different Vulgate chapters" (in reference to *Patience*), or "This is an interesting scene" (in reference to *Gawain*). The faced initials probably point to a more evaluative message. On Reichardt's reading the scribe is addressing and imitating the reader: "One reads or ought to read this passage with care and meditation," or, more specifically, "This is a symbol of perfection"(in reference to the Jerusalem lamb) and "This epitomizes human arrogance" (in reference to the pentangle as a symbol of Gawain's virtues). The numerological messages, which mostly center around expressions of completeness (uses of fives, sevens, tens, threes and so on) or incompleteness (uses of elevens, thirteens, and of a hundred and one), are more difficult to contain within any explanation depending on intentionality. The poet, the scribe

[34]Goodwin and Duranti note that Hymes' 'participant' category opens up the complexity of the communicative context by moving beyond the speaker-hearer dyad of Jakobson and of speech act theory (26).

and the culture could all simultaneously function as the sender of such messages. The messages themselves can be evaluative (imposing the system to make a point about the world) or merely organizational (utilizing the structures inherent in the world-the way things are).

Readers of this manuscript, modern or medieval, can feel and make sense of the organizational and evaluative forces of any given initial even if it participates in several systems at once. Whether we merely, without conscious thought, accept the emphasis of the initials as 'natural' or critically meditate on the issues they raise (such as our fallen nature or human arrogance) and the degree to which we consciously recognize the poet's or scribe's systems will depend upon the other aspects of the communication situation (such as the physical setting of a particular initial or the genre which it marks as well as the experience of a given reader). For example, Paul Reichardt's attribution of a high moral tone to the scribe works for a message contextualized in *Pearl*, but falls a bit flat in the context of the more playful and sensational *Sir Gawain*. However, this asymmetry between the two poems could be attributed to the scribe as well as to Reichardt's reading. Perhaps, either missing the poet's tone or even contradicting it, the scribe has mapped *Pearl's* moral seriousness onto Gawain's pentangle. But using a face to mark moral seriousness does not preclude using one to express sensations aroused by the story line, and thus, we have a grim face anxiously watching the ax fall on Gawain's neck.

In "The Text and the Voice," Paul Zumthor describes the process of interpreting medieval textuality thus:

> "medieval texts" present us with nothing but an empty form that is without a doubt profoundly distorted from what was, in another

> sensorimotor context, the whole potential of the spoken word. All questions regarding the oral quality of poetry of that period remain subordinate to this general fact. . . . the position of the modern reader remains the same. He can, implicitly or explicitly, talk about this text; but he has no means of explicating it. By this I mean grasping and making its sensory implications perceivable to us. (70-1)

My reading of the initial capitals in the *Gawain* manuscript suggests that the project of orality is not or should not be to recover a particular performance but to use the possibilities of performance in everyday communication to guide interpretation and to open doors for recognition. In this way the sensorimotor possibilities shared by all communicative situations might help us hear what the book says more completely.

Tense-shifting and Narrative Style

Although orality rhetorics cannot guarantee the recovery of a specific performance, through conversational orality we can use our own everyday performances to access the rhetoric of medieval texts which precedes conscious stylistic choice. For the most part this rhetoric is phatic in that it sets an atmosphere, expresses general sociability and emphasizes important aspects of verbal messages. Here I separate conscious style from functional style. By conscious style I mean the selection of certain verbal patterns to produce specific effects on an audience. Functional style is doing what works effectively in specific speech contexts but not because one has thought through and predetermined how certain verbal strategies work. Tense-shifting in narrative is one discourse pattern, noted in both medieval and conversational narrative, which demonstrates this phatic rhetoric of a functional style.

Combining theories of consciousness with definitions of style admittedly places the interpreter on a precarious perch. Generally speaking, from a literary critic's perspective style is an artful shaping of language. Language is the base or broad category from which a style is derived. From the perspective of conversational orality, style is just "in a root sense. . . a way or mode of doing something."[35] Language is constituted by style and thus, as Deborah Tannen says, "style is not something extra added like frosting on a cake. It is the stuff of which the linguistic cake is made" (*Conversational Style* 8). The disagreement between literary and linguistic notions of style demonstrates the way in which performance becomes analogous to itself in conversational orality rhetorics. Performance in functionalist discourse models refers simultaneously to action, just 'doing something,' and to artful, conscious, dramatizations. Performance as action sets limits for the pretensions and exclusivity of performance as art, but at the same time, the importance or interest of performance as action is heightened by the comparison with performance as art. Paradoxically though, this performance circle can vitiate structuralist interpretative circles because it pulls up new stuff from the world even as it organizes and interprets that stuff.

Bringing in a rather naive distinction between levels of consciousness can easily confuse these already vexed issues, but I have inserted it in order to deal with some basic differences between the way tense functions in literary narrative and the use of tense-shifting in conversational narrative. Simply put, if a speaker is tracking her use of tense, she will *not* alternate them in the way that linguists have discovered them to be alternated in conversational narrative. Yet, if she is not tracking tense and if she tells a story exhibiting some of the features which

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[35]Dell Hymes, "Ways of Speaking," *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, (434).

have been identified with performance (direct speech, asides, repetition, expressive sounds, sound effects, motions and gestures) the probability of her also using tense-shifting is very high.[36] This same pattern of tense-shifting has long been observed (with some anxiety) in medieval vernacular narratives, and although tense does serve non-referential functions in later literary narratives, it usually does so through the prolonged use of a marked tense (such as the use the present tense to describe past events).[37] Furthermore, when an alteration between present and past tenses does occur in literary narrative, its effect is to make the story seem more colloquial.[38] In short, no matter how one defines consciousness, it seems that the quality of choosing involved in tense-shifting in narrative differs from the quality of choosing involved in literary uses of tense in narrative. I put forward the messy term 'functional style' in order to account for this difference in choice quality.

In their studies of tense variation in conversational narrative, Nessa Wolfson and Deborah Schiffrin debated whether the seemingly haphazard alternation between present and preterit tenses in natural narrative served discourse/textual functions (such as marking off episodes or changes in perspective on a scene) or evaluative functions (such as emphasis on important events).[39] Both linguists were in agreement, however, that 1) tense-shifts are not

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[36]Nessa Wolfson, "A Feature of Performed Narrative: The Conversational Historical Present." For example, Wolfson notes that tense alternation did not occur in any of the formal interviews which she conducted. In an interview situation, a speaker is more likely to track discourse patterns such as tense.

[37]Suzanne Fleischman, *Tense and Narrativity*, p. 285.

[38]Christian Paul Casparis, *Tense without Time: The Present Tense in Narration*. 21.

[39]See Wolfson above. Deborah Schiffrin responded to some of Wolfson's characterizations of tense-shifting (particularly the idea that the direction of shifting, whether from past to present or the reverse, did not matter) in "Tense Variation in Narrative." Wolfson argued for discourse/textual functions and Schiffrin argued for the inclusion of evaluative functions.

meaningless or 'ungrammatical' and that 2) tense-shifts were not referring to actual shifts of perspective in reference to time. Wolfson (and many who have taken up this issue after her) argues against the traditional explanation for the use of present tense in narrative; that is, that it makes the 'past more vivid' or brings past actions into the now of the narrator and audience:

> But when we consider stories which contain CHP [conversational historical present] and analyze them to discover how it functions, we discover that despite all that has been said about the use of the present tense to relive or replay past action, there is no way in which this explanation can account for the fact that *shifting between past tense and CHP occurs in all stories which contain CHP at all.* (219) [emphasis mine]

Wolfson's finding suggests that earlier explanations of the use of the present tense in narrative mapped literary notions of style onto conversational narrative in that the narrator supposedly consciously evokes the referential meaning of the present tense. Schiffrin qualifies Wolfson's finding by demonstrating how the recognition of the historical present as a use of the present tense allows us to understand its use in verbs of saying:

> Direct quotes are frequent in narrative: they increase the immediacy of an utterance which occurred in the past by allowing the speaker to perform that talk in its original form, as if it were occurring at the present moment. It is through a combination of deictic and structural changes that direct quotes have this effect: the narrative framework replaces the situation of speaking as the central reference point--becoming the locus for time, place, and person indicators, as well as the arena within which speech acts are performed. Because indirect speech reports of past utterances do not

> involve the same deictic and structural changes, the same effect of immediacy is not created. (58)

However, Wolfson's generalization still holds for the use of the present tense in complicating action narrative clauses (those that answer the question "What happened next?") which are not verbs of saying.

In medieval vernacular narrative, the occurrence and significance of what was thought of as 'ungrammatical' tense-shifting had long been noted and debated among literary scholars. Many took the position that because a consistent pattern of tense-shifting could not be identified across texts (or in comparisons of texts even within the same language or genre) that the shifts were indeed 'ungrammatical' (perhaps due to the instability or flux in language as the European vernaculars developed) and essentially meaningless. Another explanation (put forward, for example, by F. Theodore Visser) is that narrative tenses might be varied in order to fulfill metrical constraints. This explanation seemed to account for a lack of a consistent pattern of tense-shifting among texts, but required some mental gymnastics in metrical theory.[40]

Over the past decade, several literary scholars have begun to apply work on narrative tenses in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis to the problem of 'ungrammatical' tense-shifts in medieval vernacular narrative poetry. The most thorough and theoretically provocative is Suzanne Fleischman's *Tense and Narrativity*. Working from the model of a heterogeneous yet coherent communication situation, Fleischman describes how tense can serve textual,

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[40]Peter Richardson points out that although Visser justifies his metrical explanation by claiming that tense-shifting only occurs in narrative verse in medieval vernaculars, the phenomenon also occurs in the narrative prose of the Norse sagas ("Narrative Strategies in Early English Poetry" 124). Richardson also gives a much more detailed and insightful review of how this issue has been fielded among Middle English scholars.

pragmatic, evaluative and metalinguistic functions in narrative and further how the performative context and genre of narratives determine which function will predominate. Following is an application to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* of her approach to tense-shifting as a response to the oral performance situation. One question I will field is 'What type of orality can functionalist discourse models discover in *Sir Gawain*?'

Tense-shifting in Sir Gawain

Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, like most texts composed in the vernacular in the Middle Ages, mixes literate and oral linguistic strategies. For on the one hand, as Scott Troyan has pointed out, the author consciously implements the recursive rhetorical strategies recommended by the rhetoric handbooks popular at the time,[41] while on the other he refers to himself as singing a lay in line 30 and he uses formulaic phrases and other oral delivery devices which are often remarked by oral-formulaic theorists. Paul Zumthor and Walter Ong have suggested that medieval vernacular texts display this mixture of oral and literate strategies because they were composed in an era when, although literacy and vernacular writing were increasing, the culture in general was still oral. Hence, although the author was compelled by the very physical contingencies of writing to shape the text with literate devices, he or she at the same time was compelled to use the oral means of making meaning, in this case narrative meaning, which were embedded in his/her culture. This is supposedly why many medieval vernacular texts which were obviously not composed orally still contain vestiges of oral composition. Almost by generic definition, though, *Sir Gawain* (which is a romance) could not be considered as orally composed in

[41] "Rhetoric without Genre."

the sense described by A.B. Lord. In the following discussion, I will propose that the oral and dramatic qualities many have associated with this poem stem from an orality which all modern people, whether or not they are literate, share with the *Gawain*-poet.

Although the *Gawain*-poet consciously uses recursive rhetoric and other literate textual strategies (e.g. using capitols in the manuscript to indicate the beginning of a new fitt), unconsciously, he uses tense-shifting to mark the text off or to break it down into smaller segments or chunks of action which would be more easily digested by a listening audience. This type of marking off of sections in the text through tense-shifting falls under what Fleischman categorizes as the textual functions of tense. I have noted three different textual functions which I think tense-shifting serves in *Gawain*.

Two of these three textual function are related in that in both cases tense-shifting is used to reinitiate the narrative line of action after a pause or digression. In the first type, tense-shifting frames the actions surrounding a long descriptive passage. Near the beginning of the poem, the initial description of the Green Knight is framed by the present tense. In line 135 he "hales" into the hall then he is described for several stanzas until he "heldez" his horse in and again "entres" the hall in line 221. After which action, the narrative line returns to the past tense. Similarly, tense-shifting marks the reinitiation of narrative action by reporting Sir Gawain's actions in the present tense after a description of his first sight of Bertilak's castle (ll. 773-779). The present tense alternating with the past tense also marks the reinitiation of narrative action after a long speech or series of speeches. For example, the Green Knight "laȝes" (316) after he and Arthur finish the flyting which followed his entrance and the present tense in

lines 1103-04 marks the return to the narrative line after the long conversation between Bertilak and Gawain which ends in the agreement to exchange winnings.

The third textual function of tense-shifting in the poem is to mark off a change of scene or a change of perspective on the action. Interestingly, tense-shifting marks the breaks in the hunting and bedroom scenes which literate audiences of the poem have often focused on. Present tense clusters occur each time the scene of action changes from the hunt to the bedroom and from the bedroom to the evening exchange of winnings for each of the three days. More subtly, at the beginning of the poem, the present tense in the narrative line marks the narrator's change of focus on the actions which occur during the opening banquet scene. In lines 104-113 the present tense marks a change in the narrator's focus from the merrymaking of Arthur's court in general and a general description of Arthur's mood to the actions of Arthur and the group of nobles seated on the dais with him. The present tense in line 136 when the Green Knight "hales" into the hall marks a change of perspective from the serving of the second course to the new series of events which follow the Green Knight's entrance. And again, in the same scene, the present tense in line 250 marks a change of the narrator's focus from the general reactions to the Green Knight's entrance to Arthur's reaction in particular.

Tense-shifting serves a different quality of textual function in *Sir Gawain* when it is used to mark the passage of time. In her analysis of the use of the present tense in narrative, Suzanne Fleischman makes a distinction between the historical present and what she terms the narrative present. The narrative present refers to the use of the present tense in alternation with other tenses in

orally performed narrative while the historical present, in her view, should be limited to refer to the use of the present tense in chirographic or literate narratives. Such terminology distinguishes tense-shifting that is the unconscious reaction to the oral performance situation from the conscious use of tense for stylistic effect. One of the theses of Fleischman's book is that the stylistic use of tense in literary narrative and tense-shifting in early vernacular literature both have their origin in linguistic phenomena which developed naturally in response to the pragmatic needs and contingencies of the oral story-telling situation. There is evidence that both uses of the present tense in narrative (the historical present and the narrative present) operate in the text of *Sir Gawain* and this lends credence to Fleischman's theory at the same time that it supports the notion that the communication situation is heterogeneous in that we can make sense of discourse which mixes oral and literate strategies.

An example of the use of the historical present occurs in the poem when the narrator marks the passing of the year in which Gawain awaits his turn in the beheading game. The entire passage, almost two full stanzas, is narrated in the present tense, and at first glance, it seems to be merely a description of the habitual action of the manner in which seasons generally pass. But at lines 531-535 it becomes apparent that the narrator has been marking the passage of actual narrative time as well as describing how seasons pass in general when he states the Michaelmas *was come* (532) and that Gawain *thinks* of his voyage (533). The prolonged use of the present tense and the rather formulaic way of describing the change of seasons (comparable to Chaucer's prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*) indicate that the poet is consciously using the present tense as a stylistic device.

There are three other passages in the poem, however, where I think the narrative present, rather than the historical present, is used to mark the passage of time.

The first instance occurs at the very beginning of the poem (ll. 9-19) when the narrator moves from the doings of Aeneas to chronicling the building of major European cities to the founding of Britain and the beginning of his story about Arthur. The doings of Aeneas are narrated in the past tense while the settling of Europe is narrated in the present tense. The second instance occurs when the narrator notes Gawain's fighting of the creatures of the forest on his way to Bertilak's castle (ll. 715-725), and the final instance of this use of the present tense occurs when the narrator describes the passing of the night before Gawain goes to the green chapel (ll. 1998-2007). In each of the three examples just noted, time elapses in which the sequential ordering of events breaks down because not all the events that take place during that passage of time are narratable (i.e. interesting or pertinent). These three instances of the use of the present tense to mark time differ from the passage at the beginning of fit two in that they are much less prolonged and less consistent; tense-shifting rather than the consistent use of one tense occurs in each passage. Hence, a vestige of oral text making processes (i.e. using tense-shifting to mark the passage of time) coexists in the poem with its more consciously used and more prolonged descendent (i.e. using the present tense to mark time).

According to Fleischman, tense functions expressively as well as textually in narrative. Expressive functions include the narrative devices which sociolinguist William Labov categorizes as evaluation. Evaluation in this linguistic sense can describe what is often thought of as the "moral" of a story, but it also encompasses the much broader area of what makes a story tellable (i.e.

interesting, exciting, different, horrible, etc.). The use of this broader understanding of narrative evaluation reveals at least two ways in which tense-shifting highlights important actions in *Sir Gawain*. First, tense-shifting often distinguishes the actions of important characters from the actions of those around them. For example, as has already been pointed out, in fitt one present tense clusters mark off or frame the actions of Arthur, the Green Knight and Gawain. Also, in the first half in the second fit, the actions of Gawain are marked off from the actions of Arthur and his court as well as from the actions of the beasts he encounters on his journey.

Second, and more interestingly, tense-shifting emphasizes actions in the poem which are inherently interesting or exciting even though they may be tangential to the narrator's overall themes. The one example of this evaluative use of tense occurs in the hunt scenes. Although not all of the following events occur in each hunt scene, when they do occur they are marked off by present tense clusters at their initiation: the initiation of the hunt, the maneuvers of the hunters and the hunted (e.g. the tricks they play on one another), the one on one confrontation of the lord and the hunted animal (in the last two scenes), the death of the animal, and butchering of the game. The fact that not all of the actions which fall under the above categories are narrated in the present tense indicates that tense is not a conscious device used on the part of the narrator to speed up the action or to make those events more vivid by bringing them into the now of the audience. Furthermore, the butchering of an animal is not an event which needs a fast pace. Rather, tense-shifting frames or accentuates the initiation of events which would be inherently interesting or exciting to the *Gawain* -poet's audience. The butchering of an animal, for example, may not be appealing to

modern audiences, but among the *Gawain*-poet's contemporaries, the ability to properly butcher game was a sign of nobility. For example, in Strassburg's *Tristan*, Tristan proves his nobility by demonstrating his butchering skills.

Peter Richardson, hitting many of the sections of the poem which I point out, describes tense-shifting as a conscious stylistic device used by the poet to foreground important events.[42] From this perspective, the importance of each action narrated in the present tense in the poem must be demonstrated. As Richardson acknowledges, this type of analysis falls into a kind of circularity in that "foregrounding is defined in terms of what the narrator sees as especially significant, and significance is defined in terms of what is foregrounded" (348). However, the etic quality of functionalist discourse models, such as Hymes' SPEAKING grid, hold out hope (although no guarantees) for the validity of such interpretations to the extent that it adds a minimal notion of person to ground the movement between discourse, texts, and the world.

I have described the rhetoric of tense-shifting in narrative as phatic because it mostly accentuates themes and interests which are communicated more overtly in other ways, and I have argued that this rhetoric is not under the narrator's conscious control because conscious use of tenses other than the past tense in narrative do not alternate past and present tenses in uneven clusters--they do not tense-shift. One might well ask what need we have for a hermeneutics of an unconscious style, functional or otherwise, which merely emphasizes meanings which we could get at in other, more literary, ways.

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[42]In doing so, Richardson develops some suggestions which Rüdiger Zimmerman made about the possibility that shifts from the preterit to the present perfect in the poem might signal discourse boundaries while the historical present continues action and changes scenes ("Verbal Syntax and Style in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,."

Suzanne Fleischman and Peter Richardson, among many others, make strong cases for using discourse approaches to narrative (and other linguistic structures) to help us be more precise about our aesthetic judgments of texts of the past. For example, Richardson shows how his findings about the function of aspect in *Beowulf* can sift through critical responses to the poem, validating some and qualifying others:

> The discourse model of narrative structure has implications for literary debates concerning the structure and unity of Old English poetry. The definition of an episode which results form this analysis both supports and lends precision to certain claims about the structure of *Beowulf*, particularly claims which concern the status of digressions and the linearity of narrative. At the same time, the discourse approach provides strong evidence against readings which see the narrative technique of *Beowulf* as associative and indifferent to chronology. (75)[43]

Richardson suggests that this precision moves his reading of the poem beyond "an exercise in formalism which does nothing to enrich our understanding of Old English poetry" (60). I think one difference between the readings validated by or parallel to Richardson's and those which are problematic is that the former posit a minimal subjectivity for the poet and audience which is contiguous with our own subjectivity whereas the latter posit an other, irrecoverable subjectivity for them (e.g. a subject, who unlike us and just coming out an alien preliterate world, is indifferent to chronology rather than a subject who is like us and lives in the same world as we do but who responds to a different cultural-historical context). This presumption of a shared subjectivity is the position from which

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[43]"Narrative Strategies in Early English Poetry"

conversational orality (functionalist approaches to discourse) allows readers like Richardson to adjudicate interpretation.

Thus, we come back to Ricoeur's "personal commitment" of the interpreter/participant, and we come back to a reformulation of Pratt's thesis: the similarities between past and present subjects help us understand the differences. Richardson argues that while *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* may not be a typical Middle English poem, it can be viewed as paradigmatic for understanding the function of tense-shifting in narrative. I think that the performativity of the poem, of which tense-shifting is one characteristic, can also function paradigmatically for demonstrating the subjective similarity which conversational orality presupposes.

Many readers of *Sir Gawain* have discussed the poem's impressive dramatic quality.[44] The hunt scenes are fast paced, the dialogue is witty and original and the scenery (such as the descriptions of the landscapes of Bertilak's castle and the Green Knight's chapel) is cinematic in its detail and perspective. As we have seen, this dramaticality has even encouraged some critics, such as Tuttleton, to propose a more traditional dramatic structure for the poem (sometimes linked to the placement of the manuscript's initials and sometimes linked, as in the case of Blenker's reading, to the introduction and completion of themes). Interestingly, the poet also uses performance techniques which characterize what Nessa Wolfson identifies as performed stories in conversational narrative (i.e. dialogue, asides, repetition, expressive sounds,

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[44]Some recent examples include, Frederick B. Jonassen's "Elements from the Traditional Drama of England in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Viator* 17(1986): 221-54, Wendy M. Reid's "The Drama of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Parergon* 20 (1978): 11-23, and Judith Perryman's "Decapitating Drama in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters* 8.4 (1978): 283-300.

sound effects and motions and gestures). The poem is well-known for its artful dialogue and the use of repetition is inherent in poetry. But its use of asides, expressive sounds and sound effects connect it more directly with oral storytelling. Consider a few examples.

Asides. There are several places where the poet actually pauses to comment about his narrative technique. For example, when describing Gawain's journey to Bertilak's castle the poet says:

> So mony meruayl by mount þer þe mon fyndez,
> Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenþe dole.
> Sumwhyle wyth wormez he werrez, and with wolues als,
> Sumwhyle wyth wodwos, þat woned in þe knarrez,
> (718-21)

[There are so many marvels which the man finds in the hills, It would be to difficult to tell the tenth part of them. At times he wars with dragons and also with wolves, at times with wodwos which dwelled in the knolls]

Here the poet gives an explanation for not detailing Gawain's heroic exploits in the way that more episodic and traditional romances would. It would be too much to relate, so he gives a summary so that we don't question the hero's courage or strength. Another of the poet's asides is more personally directed at the audience. When Gawain lays down to sleep, after having accepted the lady's gift of the girdle and having failed to fulfill his promise to exchange all winnings with Sir Bertilak, the poet says:

Let hym lyȝe þere stille,
He hatz nere þat he soȝt;
And ȝe wyl a whyle be stylle
I schal telle yow how þay wroȝt.
(1993-6)

[Let him lie still there, he has close at hand what he sought; If you will be still a while, I shall tell you how they acted.]

Expressive sounds and sound effects. The poet often uses alliteration to give his audience a sense of the sounds involved in a scene. The horns 'crack' loudly during the feasts at Arthur's and Bertilak's courts and the hunters yell exclamations to each other. But the most intense and compelling sound effect occurs when Gawain hears the Green Knight grinding his ax just before their last meeting:

Þene herde he of þat hyȝe hill, in a harde roche
Biȝonde þe broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noyse,
Quat! hit clatered in þe clyff, as hit cleue schulde,
As one vpon a gryndelston hade grounden a syþe.
What! hit wharred and whette, as water at a mulne;
What! hit rusched and ronge, rawþe to here.
(2199-2204)

[Then he heard from off the hill, in a hard rock beyond the brook, in a bank, an extremely loud noise, What! it clattered in the cliff as though it would cleave it, as one might grind a scythe on a grindstone. What! it whirred and whetted, as water in a mill; What! it rushed and rung, grievous to hear.]

According the Tolkien's and Gordon's gloss, 'Quat!' and 'What!' are to be thought of as an echoing sound rather than the interrogative 'what.' Also, it should be noted that 'wh,' alternately spelled 'qu' in this manuscript, descends from Old English 'hw' and could alliterate with 'qu' as in queen and other words beginning with a 'cw' sound as well as other words beginning with 'w'. This suggests the sound was harder and closer to a back fricative than to our modern 'wh'.

Many critics have suggested that the poet's dramatic flair was influenced by the plays and mummers of the period, and certainly, this could have occurred. However, in this scene the poet is trying to recreate a scene entirely through sound (as well as through the dramatic repetition of that sound) for a listening rather than a viewing audience. The similarity of his techniques to those employed by storytellers in everyday conversation, and the fact that both types of stories use tense-shifting suggest that although the *Gawain*-poet might have been influenced by a particular type of drama or literary style, he need not have been. Further more, when we respond to his dramaticality it might be true that we hear echoes of particular dramatic performances which influenced him, but it is our own general sense of drama which allows us to interpret those echoes.

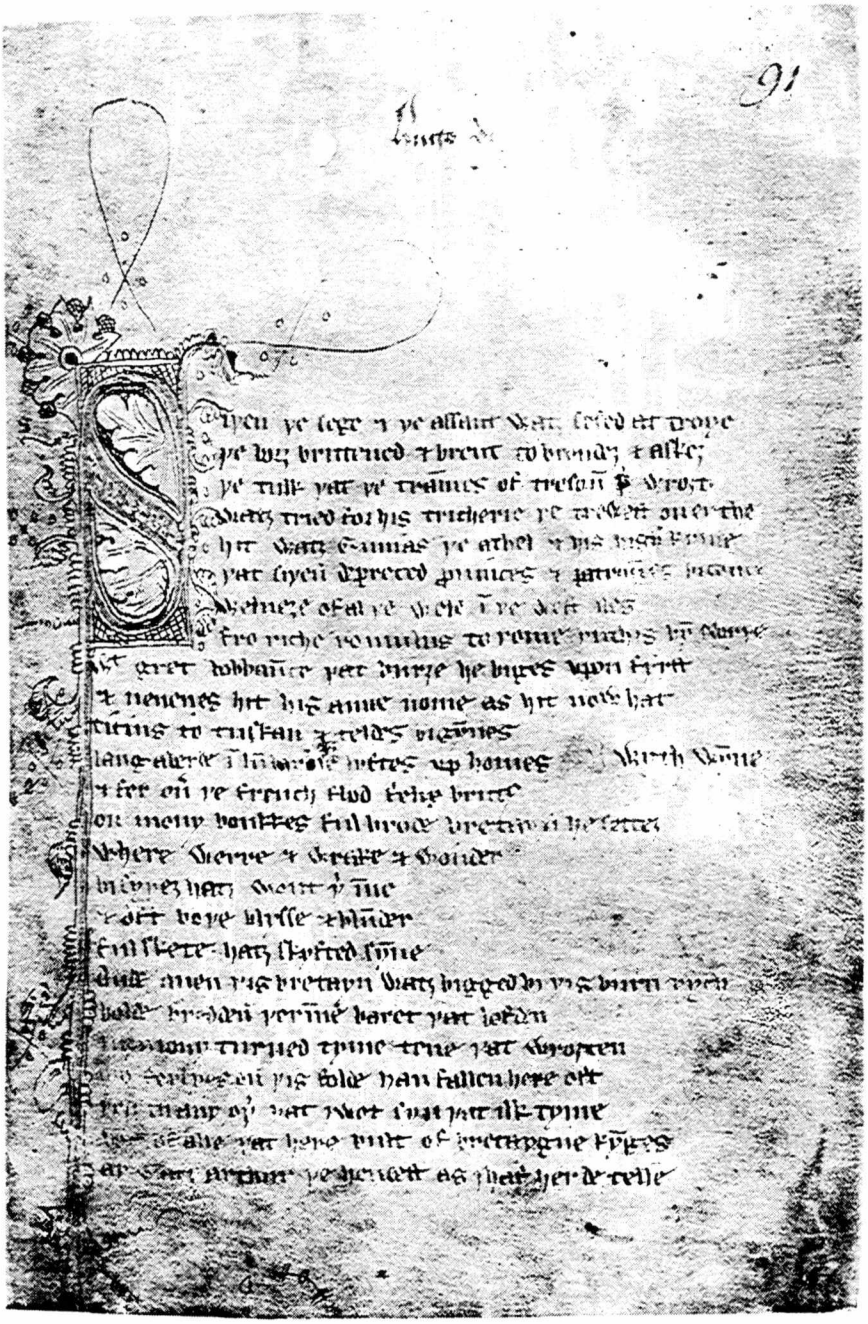

Plate 1. First initial captial in *Sir Gawain*. Line 1, "Siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye."

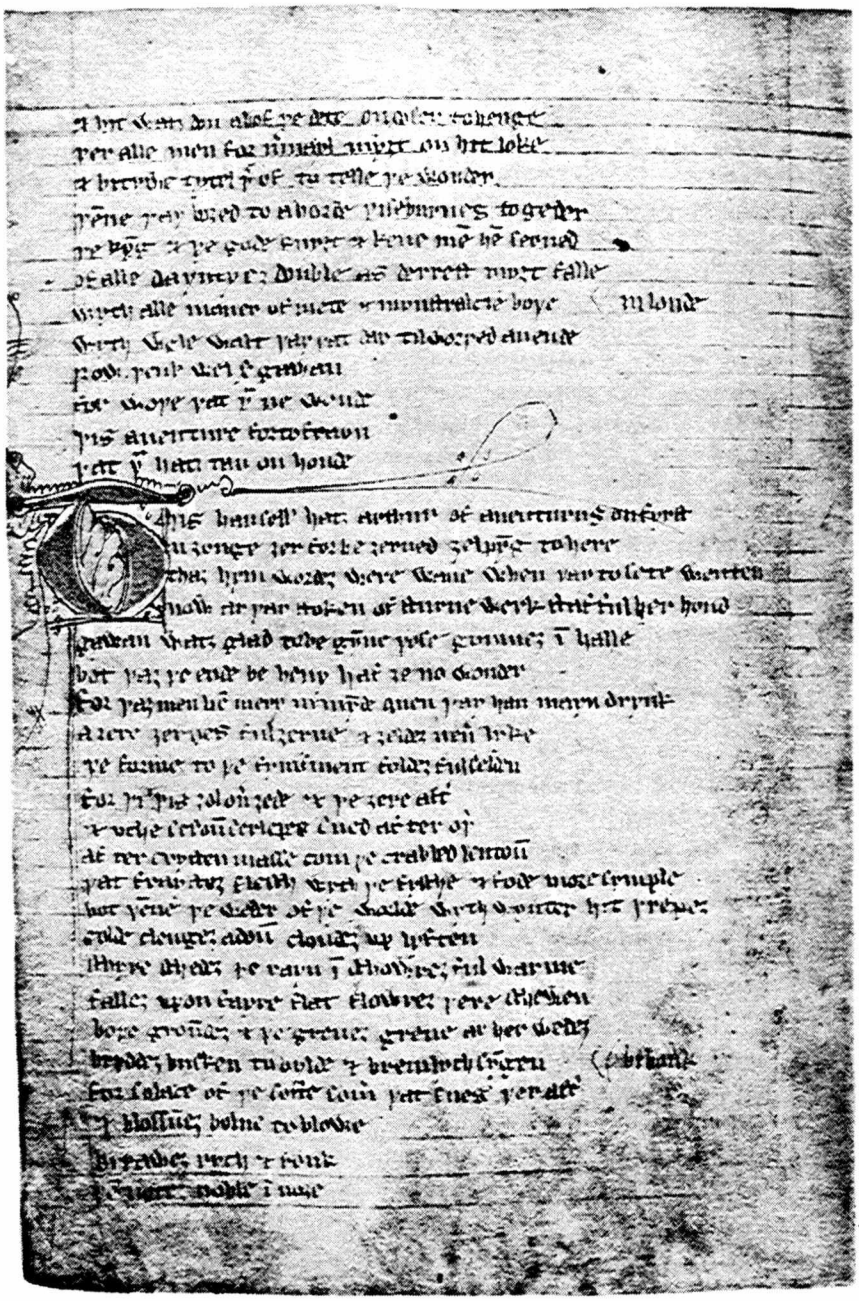

Plate 2. Second initial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 491, "This hanselle hatz Arthur of auenturus on fyrst."

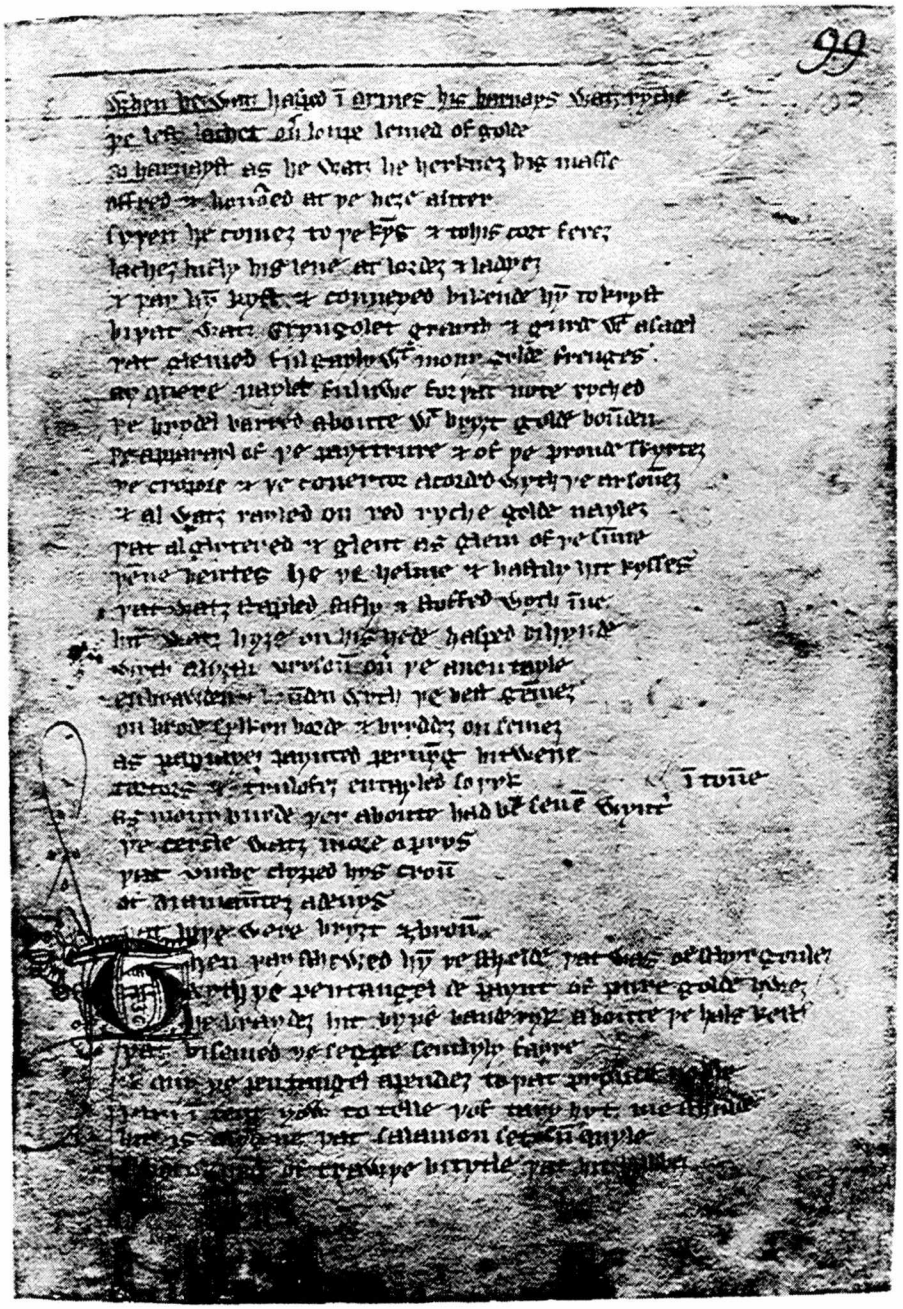

Plate 3. Third initial captial in *Sir Gawain*. Line 619, 'Then þay schewed hym þe schelde, þat was of schyr goulez."

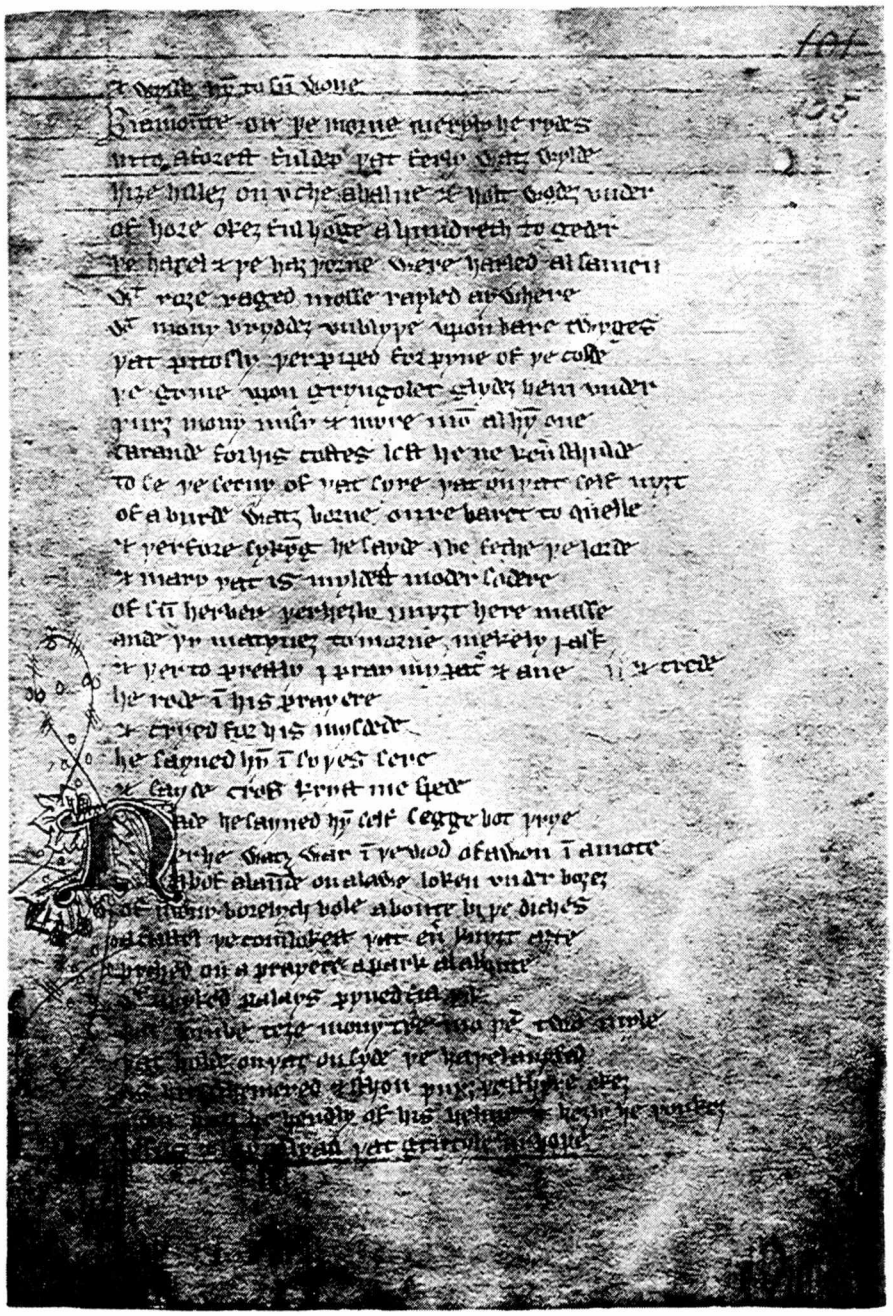

Plate 4. Fourth intitial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 763, "Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot þrye."

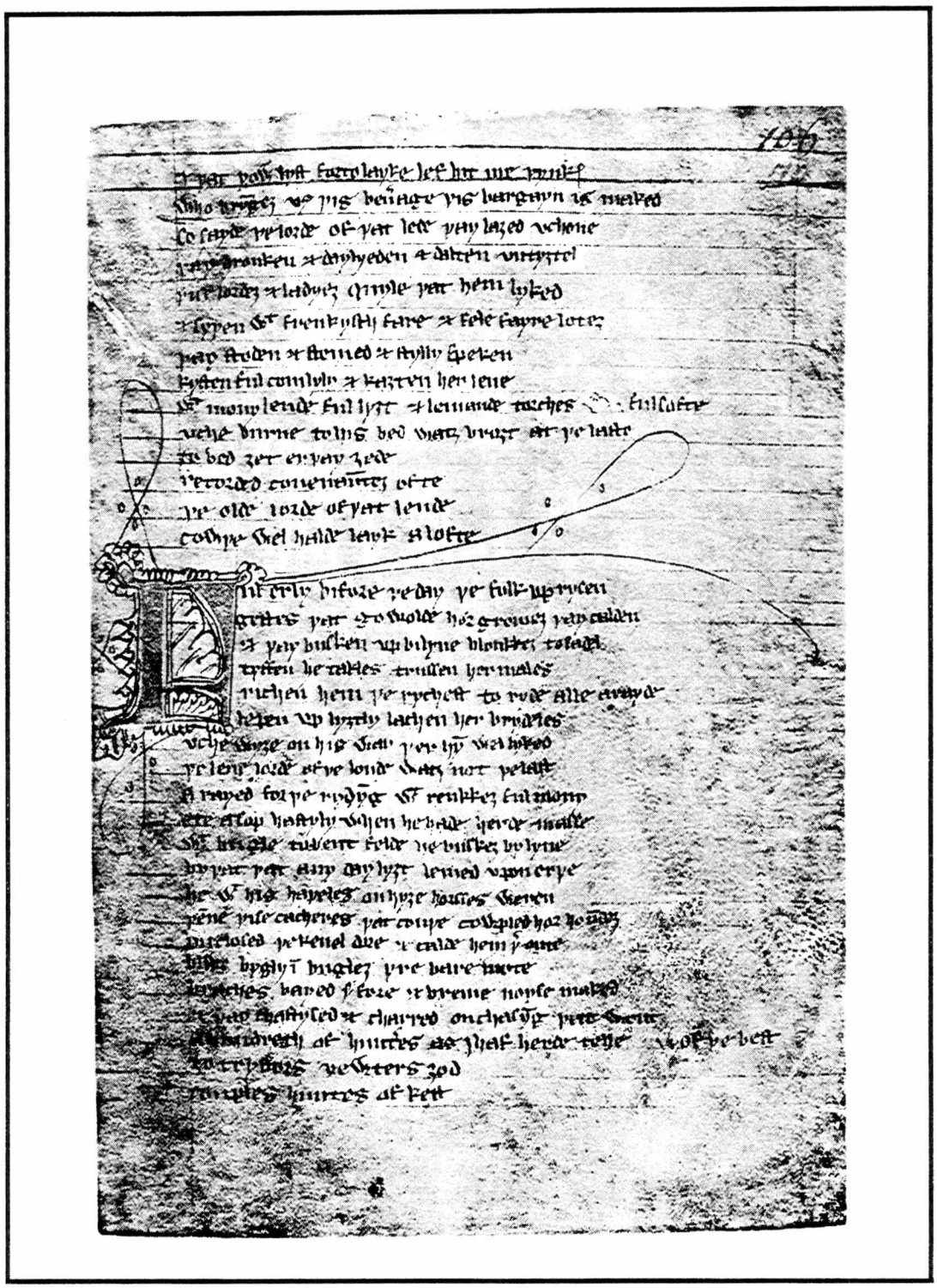

Plate 5. Fifth initial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 1126, "Ful erly bifore þe day þe folk vprysen."

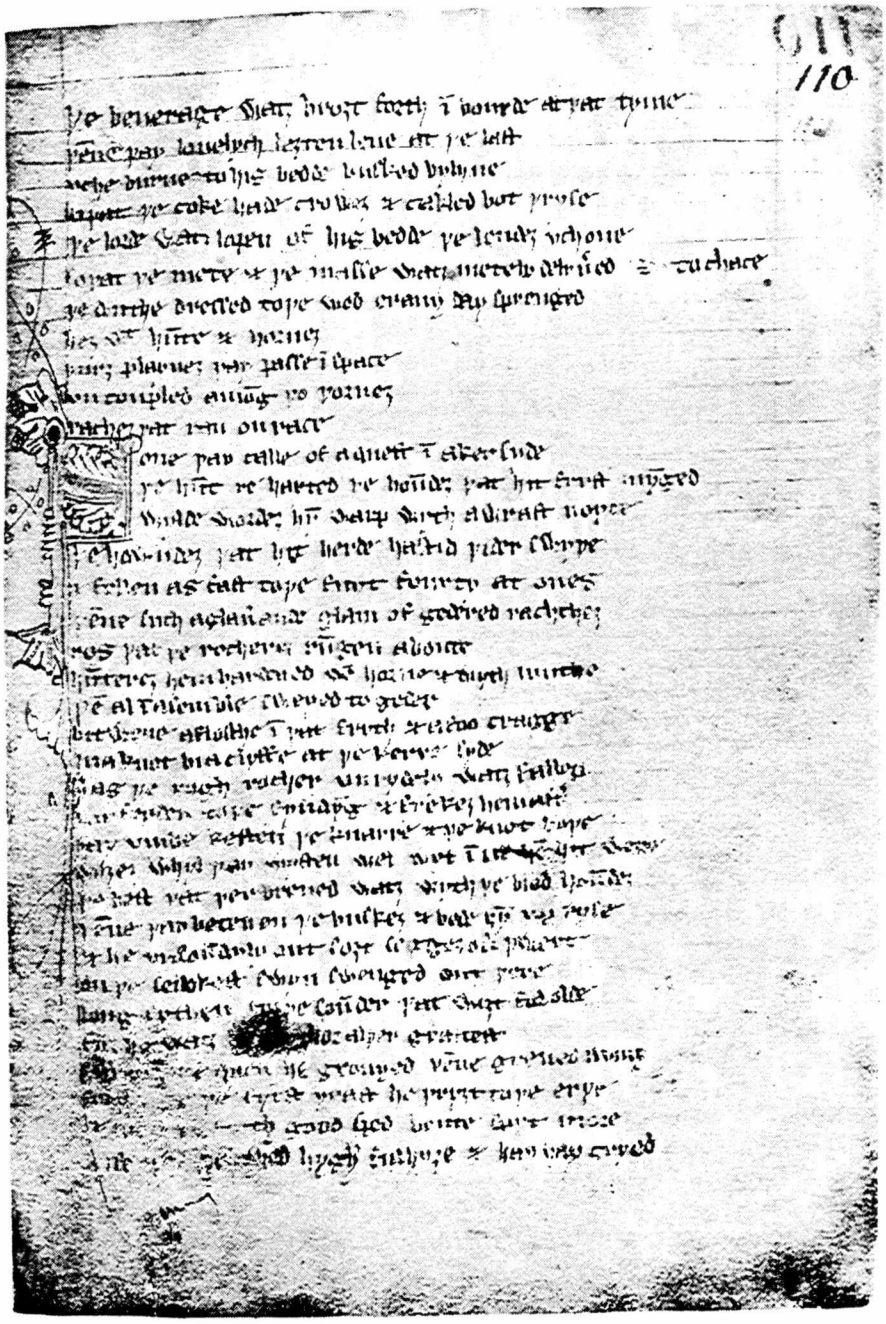

Plate 6. Sixth intial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 1421, "Sone þay calle of a quest in ker syde."

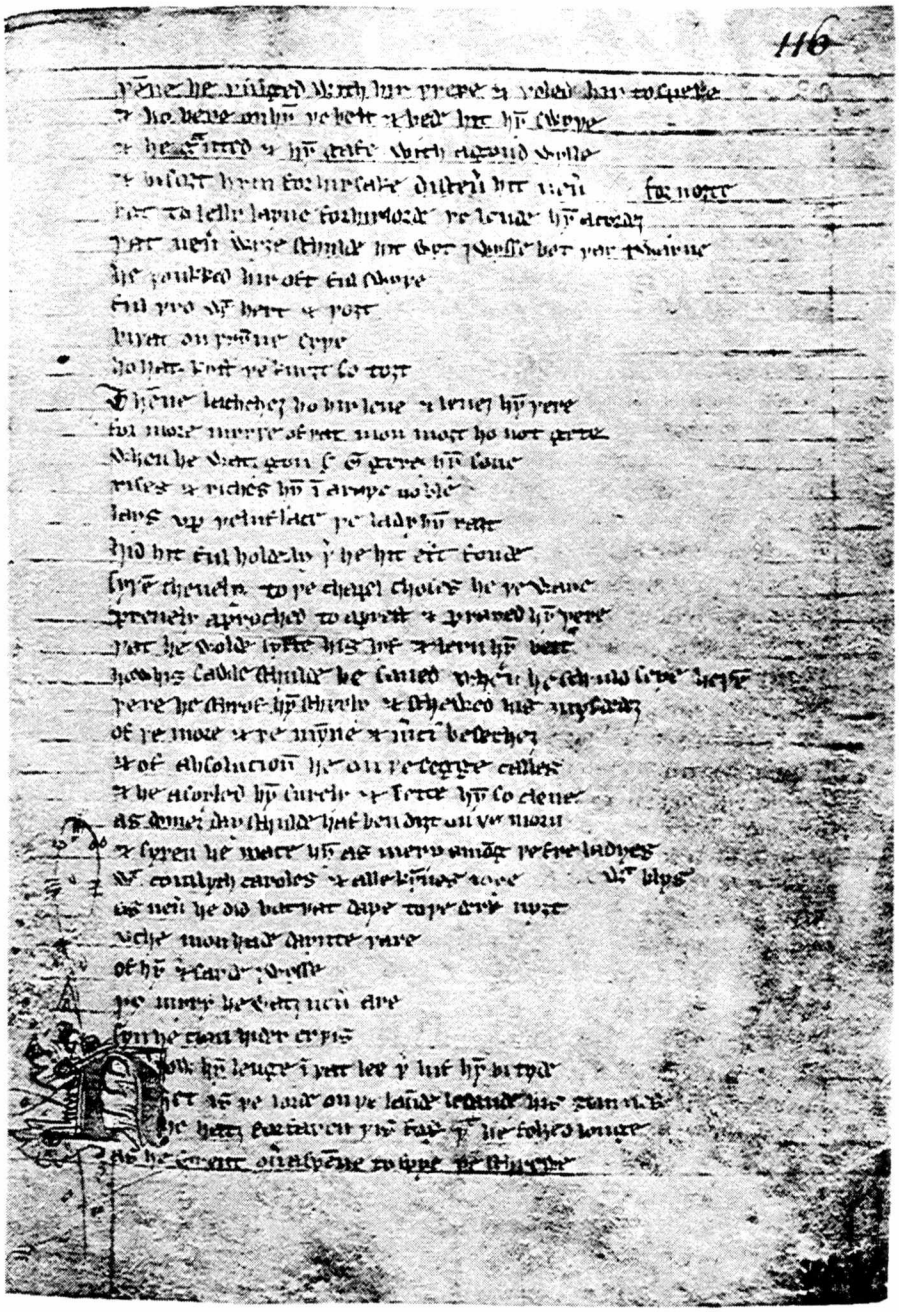

Plate 7. Seventh initial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 1893, "Now hym lenge in þat lee, þer luf hym betyde."

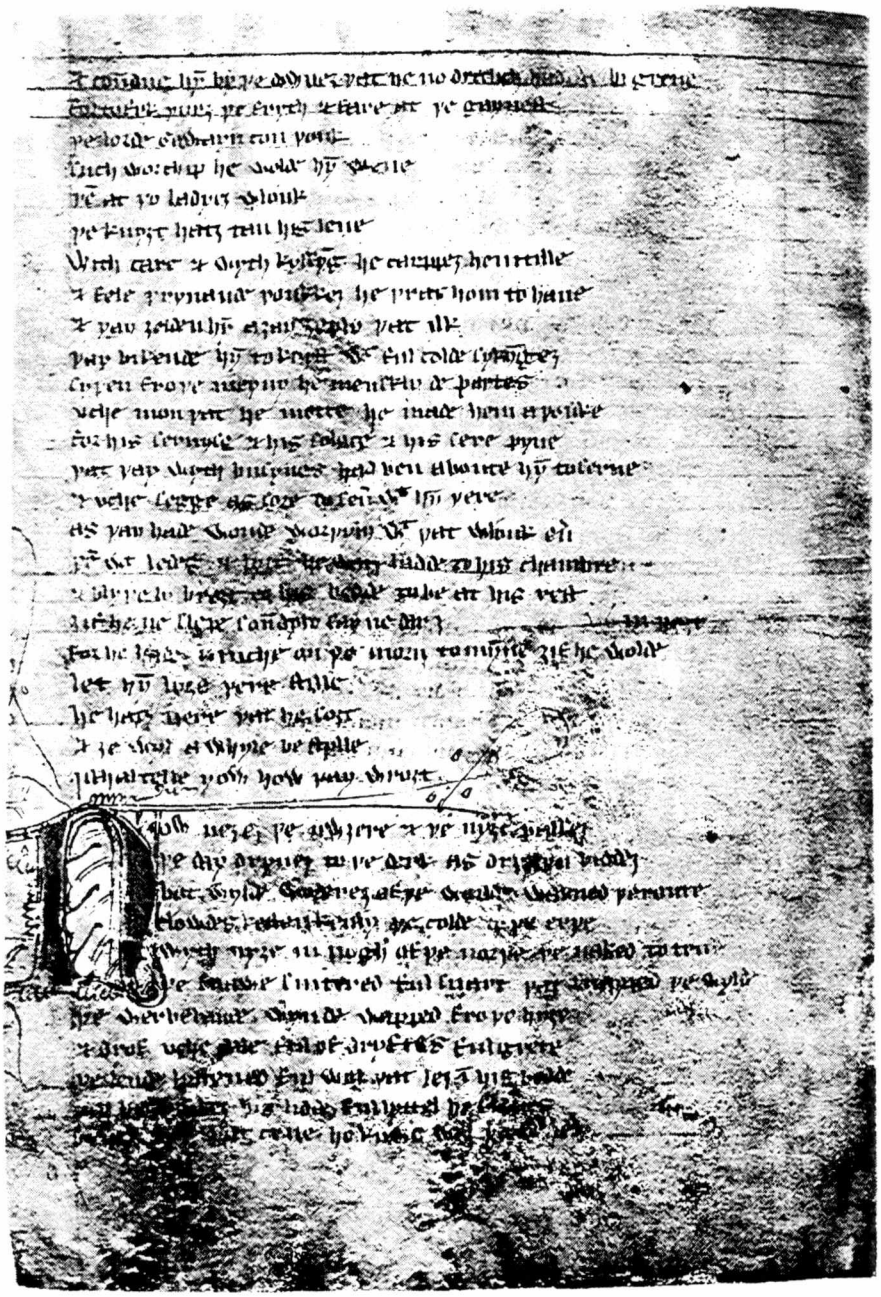

Plate 8. Eighth initial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 1997, "Now neȝez þe Nw Ȝere and þe nyȝt passez."

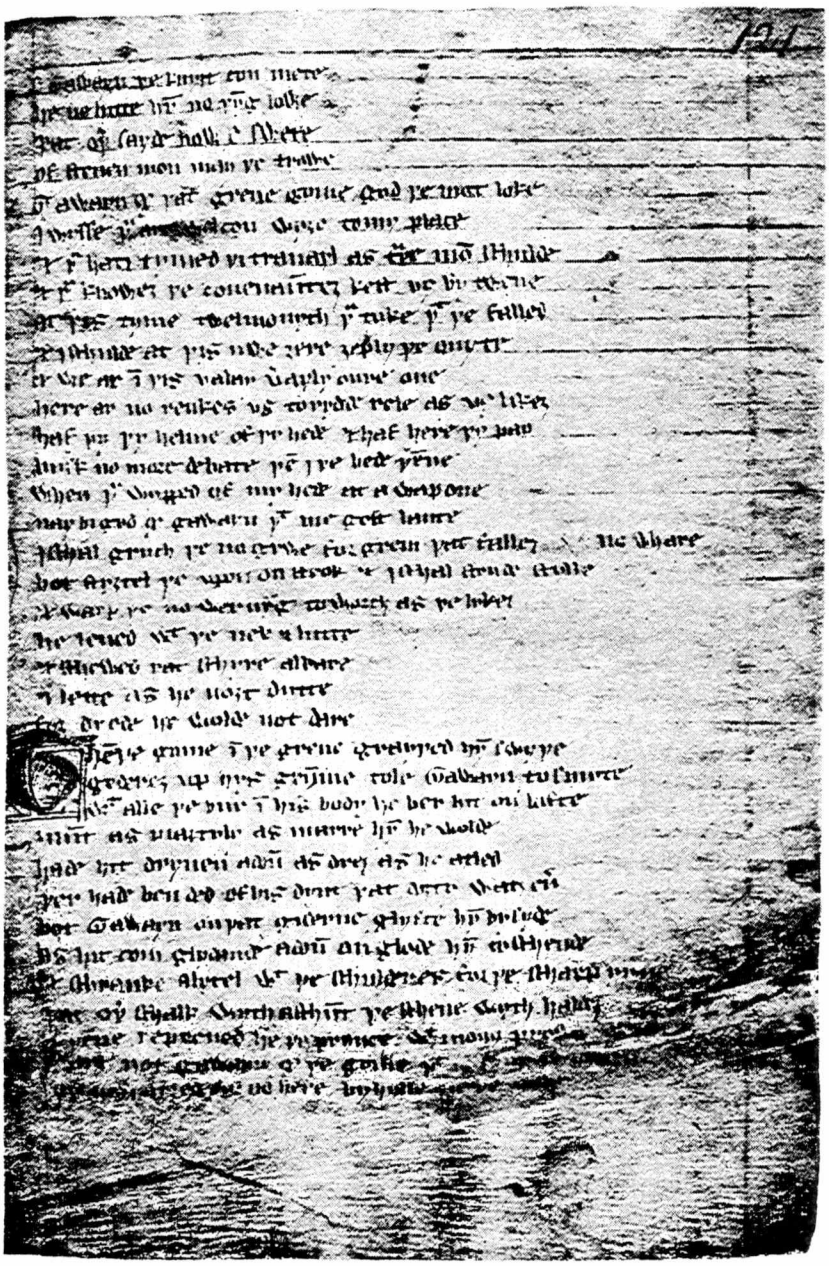

Plate 9. Ninth initial capital in *Sir Gawain*. Line 2259, "Then þe gome in the grene gray þed hym swyþe."

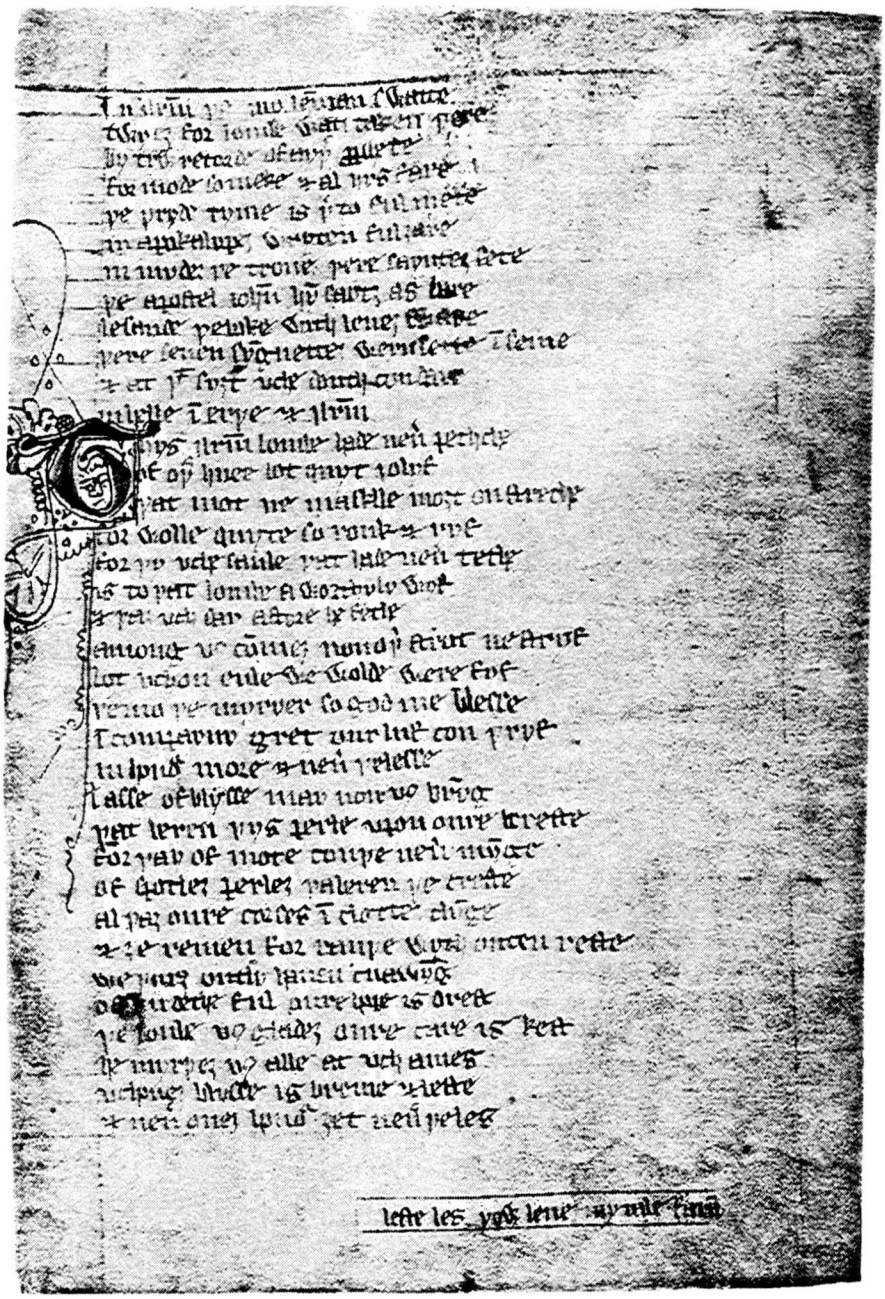

Plate 10. First faced intitial capital in *Pearl*. Line 121, "The dubbement dere of doun and dalez."

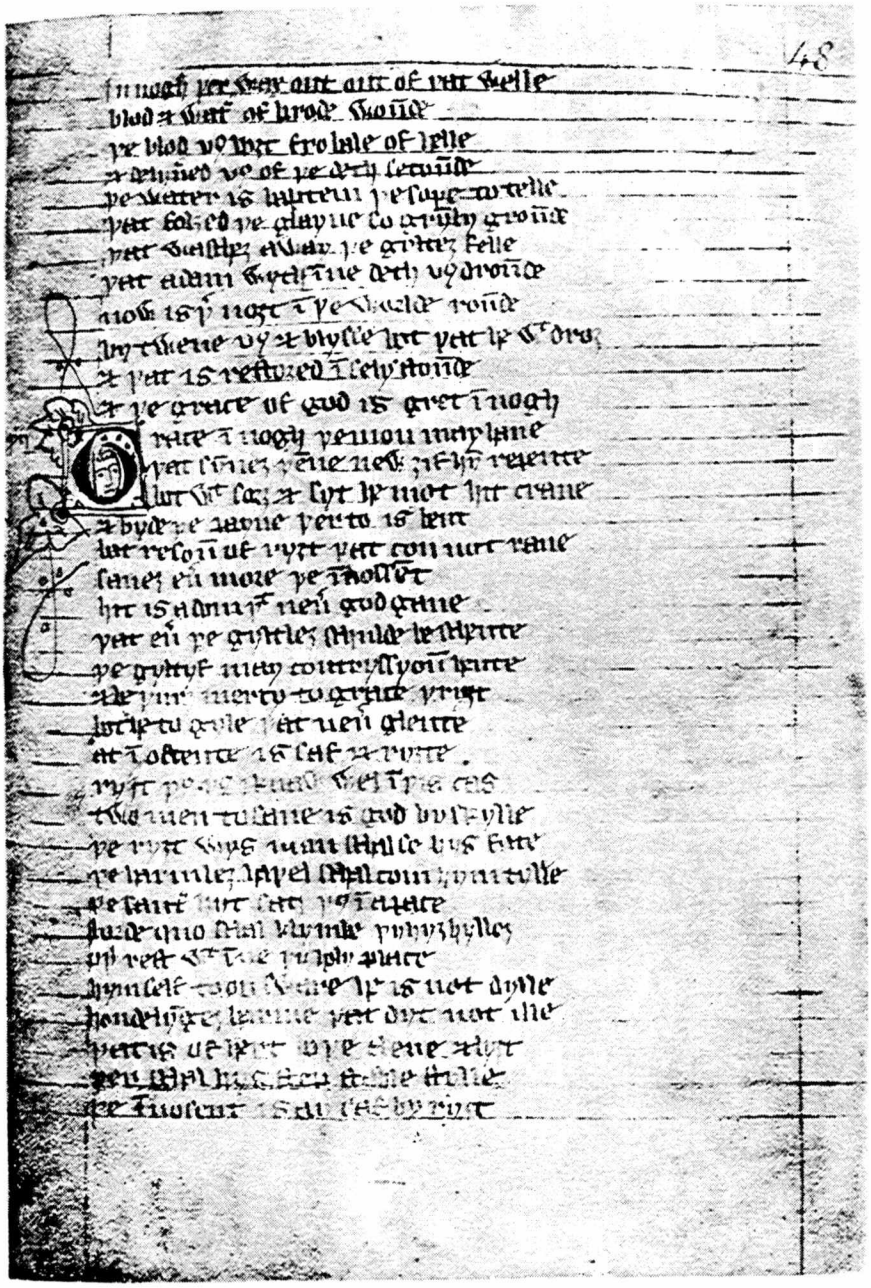

Plate 11. Second faced initial capital in *Pearl*. Line 661, "Grace innough þe mon may haue."

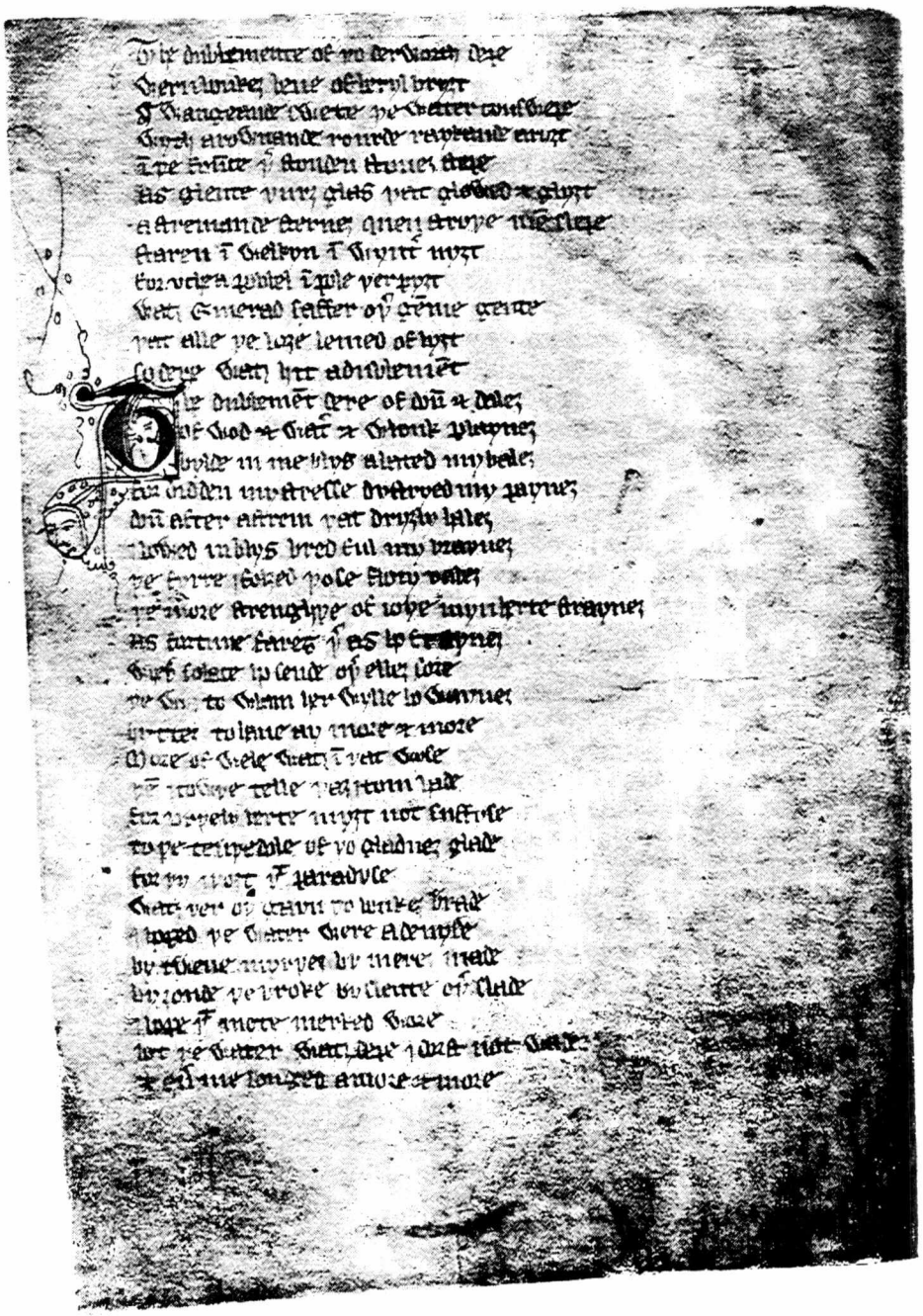

Plate 12. Third faced initial capital in Pearl. Line 841, "Thys Jerusalem Lombe hade neuer pechche."

CHAPTER IV

VOICE AND PERSON: THE GENERIC, GENDERING FORCE OF GERMANIC HEROIC EPIC

Voice exceeds any structuralism--whether the structuralism is etic or emic,[1] visual or metaphorical. In chapter one, the three orality rhetorics, (epic, popular, and conversational) were differentiated from other discourse theories to the extent that they were organized by voice, and they were differentiated from each other to the extent that they were organized by a particular type of voice. This chapter will look at how the notion of personhood presupposed by the voice which organizes conversational orality can help us evaluate the gendering of epic character. I will begin by outlining the problematic role of women in the production of the epic genre and then move on to an examination of how epic and conversational orality rhetorics differently evaluate that problematic role.

Feminine Representations in Germanic Heroic Epic

Heroic epic is a genre which, like all genres, has fluid or contested boundaries. Yet there is a core of questions or issues which helps define the set of contests peculiar to the category *heroic*. This core of questions becomes even more concrete or focused when heroic is matched with the categories Germanic and epic. None of the categories has a bounded domain either singly or together, in time or in space, for as Jacques Derrida has pointed out in "The Law of Genre," genre "gathers together the corpus and, at the same time, in the blink of an eye, keeps it from closing, from identifying itself with itself" (65). Thus, genre is a

[1]In the last chapter I suggested that functionalist discourse models structurally account for heterogeneity and their validity as an etic model was a hope rather than a guarantee.

productive process which works its work through misleading yet necessary images of stasis, domain, boundaries, structures.

To be a hero in a general sense is to be an individual who stands outside or is notable as distinct from a given community. A hero is defined by his or her special perspective, by the interest derived from the representation of his or her ego or character, and one of the issues worked out by the heroic position is a negotiation of what can constitute an ego in the culture which produces a given text. The heroic epic genre seems to be a domain which contains characters (as one *Nibelungenlied* critic has pointed out) who value or are criticized for not valuing or demonstrating the following traits: strength, honor, loyalty and in more courtly times, gentility.[2] The Germanic heroic epic genre gives a particular body (a corpus of texts and oral traditions) and a particular content to the values just listed. In the Germanic tradition, a hero (or valued subject) is a warrior who demonstrates his or her heroism through courage and strength in battle. Honor is obtained through ambitious contests of all kinds and is maintained by demanding recognition of one's rightful pride of place.[3] Loyalty is consistently paying back those who have been good to you or who have a filial claim on you.[4]

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[2] Werner A. Mueller, *The Nibelungenlied Today: Its Substance, Essence and Significance*, 4-22.'Gentility' is a questionable virtue to attribute to heroic epic; however, in poems of mixed genres (such as the *Nibelungenlied*) which combine courtly and heroic traditions, some lip service is paid to gentility as a masculine virtue. Still, putting aside the poet's attribution of this virtue to male characters in the *Nibelungenlied*, one would be hard pressed to come up with examples of those characters demonstrating gentility.

[3]For example, in 'flyting' or boasting such as Beowulf's exchange with Unferth as well as in actual battle.

[4]As Berger and Leicster have pointed out ("Social Structure as Doom: The Limits of Heroism in Beowulf,"), the system of gift giving which holds kinship and *comitatus* claims together is riddled with contradictions which unravel the order which it tries to establish (for example in inciting envy as well as gratitude).

Consider what one recognizable version of the Germanic heroic corpus might include. In discussions among literary critics, the Germanic heroic textual network is made up of narratives such as those found in the *Edda* and Sagas of Iceland, the *Nibelungenlied* and *Beowulf*. The relationships between these texts have been conceptualized by scholars in terms of shared oral origins, lost original manuscripts of larger epics and even shared Latin traditions. After all, one familiar way of authorizing a discussion of these examples of Germanic heroic epic together is to refer to concepts coined in Tacitus' *Germania*, such as the *comitatus*, as terms common to or shared among all Germanic cultures. Such analogies can be useful and interesting, but questions concerning the history of the development of particular Germanic heroic texts, of their physical production, dissemination and reproduction cannot be fully answered, nor do such answers which we do have account for the productive system designated by "genre" because genre is simultaneously a valuing and categorizing productive mechanism, and the boundaries of genre systems are renegotiated in time.[5] In other words, genre does not merely clarify or explain already existing natural phenomena and it's aim is not to merely represent mimetically the bare facts of history; rather it formalizes by ranking, foregrounding or ignoring particulars in order to produce a valued version of cohesion.

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[5] Thus, what we understand as the epic genre was not percieved as such by original epic audiences, yet the systems which we recoginze under that term functioned under different terms at their inception. I emphasize the fact that the extant Germanic heroic poems are thematically rather than genealogically related to each other. For example, the *Nibelungenlied* combines figures from different historical periods (such as Atilla the Hun and Theoderic the Great - King Etzel and King Diectrich, respectively, in the poem). Furthermore, although the *Poetic Edda* and the *Volsunga Saga* were written down in Iceland in the second half of the thirteenth century, thier representations of Siegfried (Sigur) and Kriemhild (Gundrun), for example, are considered to be older (closer to oral tradtion perhaps) than those of the *Nibelungenlied* which was composed around 1200 (Henry Kratz, "The *Nibelungenlied* and the *Klage*," *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 138: 243-53).

Most readers of medieval epic narrative agree that machismo dominates the epic genre. Epic action is divided almost evenly between fight scenes and scenes where the hero's position in the social hierarchy is verbally negotiated (for example, in 'flyting' exchanges with competitors or in official dialogs where important personages, such as the king, queen or court poet, recognize the hero's value). In Germanic epic the female character, if she makes any appearance at all, either takes on male characteristics or she acts as an icon displaying the wealth and power of a particular warrior. Recent feminist approaches to medieval epic have sought to offset this gender imbalance by focusing our attention on females who have heroic attributes or by emphasizing the importance of traditional feminine roles in early Germanic cultures. For example, Jane Chance has written a very well received book on female heroes in Old English poetry while Helen Damico has directed scholarly attention to the true power which traditional feminine characters such as Wealtheow (Hrothgar's queen) represent.[6] One issue which such work leaves unaddressed is whether or to what degree a feminine voice or viable representation of the feminine can be discovered in or recovered from texts which speak to one another through their participation in the genre of Germanic heroic epic. For although the work of scholars like Chance and Damico trace interesting and viable parallels and foreground examples of representations of the feminine which have been too often ignored, they leave open the question of what it means to be a hero at the level of genre in Germanic heroic epic.

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[6]Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* ; Damico, *Beowulf's Wealtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*

For example, although Chance foregrounds female heroes, the term which helps choreograph her movement from one set of texts to the next is left unevaluated. She never really addresses what it means to be a 'hero' in this genre and thus fails to see that it's structurally impossible for a woman to fully realize this role within the valuing system of Germanic heroic narrative. It's not just a quantitative representation that's lacking in our reading of heroic literature, its a structurally qualitative lack of representation. The representation of the male as heroic within this genre depends upon the systematic exclusion of women from this role. This fact is demonstrated even in the examples of female heroes described by Chance:

> The saint's lives of this period corroborate this idea by describing women saints of heroic chastity and spirituality, a handful of whom literally don masculine disguise to hide a female form- and presumably "female" desire. Similarly, when queens attained a reputation for chastity and sanctity, or when they became abbesses, which marked their intentions as socially or spiritually acceptable, their political power within the community increased. (53)
>
> Antithetically, when queens ruled singly or attempted to rule over their husbands without the qualities of chastity and sanctity, they were depicted especially in legendary accounts as highly incontinent and immoral creatures whose excessive sexuality, when linked with warlike or masculine behavior, became a metaphor for unnatural and heathen or devilish proclivities (55).

In these passages (and many similar ones throughout the book) Chance allows her own evaluative voice as a 20th century critic to be swallowed by the values of

the Anglo-Saxon and Latin texts she interprets. The criteria for feminine heroism--chastity and sanctity--go unanalyzed. If we unload these terms of their connotative force, we discover that a woman could be a hero if she were not sexually active and if she had the means and status to maintain this state. If, as Chance herself points out, women could only aspire to the role of hero and expect positive evaluation from their contemporaries if and only if they were able to "dissociate from their sex," how then are we to value representations of women as heroes in such narratives? The danger lies in the trap of the evaluative language guiding the production system of the Germanic epic genre. To what degree will valuing and recovering (foregrounding) such representations cause us to discursively perpetuate the devaluation of women in general?

In case this question seems a bit melodramatic as stated consider the fact that as recently as May 1995 a paper entitled "Why Women are Unimportant in *Beowulf*" was given by Raymond Tripp during the Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo.[7] The thesis of that paper was basically that women were unimportant in *Beowulf* because the poet was not concerned about women and it is only our modern interest in such subjects which cause us to endow the women of the poem with importance. In a sense Tripp is correct in that the poet wanted us to believe that women were unimportant, but he leaves unaddressed the question of why it might be important that women are unimportant in *Beowulf*, and to the extent that Chance falls into the evaluative language of the texts she is

[7]In all fairness to Professor Tripp, the focus of his paper was to criticize naive recovery projects, such as Damico's focus on Wealtheow as an important character, which totally misrepresent the proportions of the poet's interests in particular characters. However, his implication that the poet's interest in the masculine precludes a critic's focus on representations of the feminine in the poem reveals his own naïvete concerning gendering processes.

studying she allows critics such as Tripp to define the terms under which the feminine voice can be acknowledged in interpretation of medieval literature.

The need for interrogation of evaluative language in literary criticism of Germanic texts is supported by the recent philological study done by Christine Alfano on translations and glosses to the words used to describe Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*.[8] In that article, Alfano directly critiques Chance's reading of Grendel's mother as an anti-type of the Virgin by demonstrating that the evidence for viewing her as a monster come from skewed translations of descriptors such as *aglaecwif*, --skewed translations influenced by 19th and early 20th century lexicographers who could not believe in a normal human female warrior. Thus, almost paradoxically, allowing evaluative terms in discussions of Germanic heroic epic to go unevaluated or unanalyzed will not only make us prey to the value systems of the literature being interpreted but can also cause critics to reproduce biases against women more typical of our own culture than of the early Germanic cultures. The result in the case of Grendel's mother, according to Alfano, is to perpetuate the erasure of feminine identity:

> Lacking any identity independent of her son's even in name, Grendel's mother replicates the historical experience of millions of women who were defined through their male relatives. She finds herself implicated in her child's monstrosity, as unchallenged assumptions subsume her maternal role within a son's identity. Refusing to differentiate between mother and

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[8]"The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity: A Reevaluation of Grendel's Mother." The term *aglæca* is used in *Beowulf* to refer to Beowulf as well as Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon. Klaeber actually glosses the word as 'monster' or 'fiend' for the three antagonists and as simply 'warrior' for the references to the hero. Interestingly, there is a plural reference at line 2592 which includes the hero and the dragon together. The usage of the word suggests something more general such as 'fierce enemy'; however, critical reception of the poem has literally attributed monstrosity to Grendel and Grendel's mother.

> son, these translators, lexicographers and critics transform her into an inhuman beast; and readers consume their modified texts as if they represented authoritative truth. (12)

However, though Alfano's criticism is well taken, one wonders what authoritative truth will be realized even if we agree that Grendel's mother is a normal human woman who happens to be a warrior and a mother. Will we recover a true feminine voice, will we have discovered a viable representation of the feminine? Could Grendel's mother be recognized as playing the role of a hero? I think it's fairly apparent that the *Beowulf* poet considered her a villain and an adversary not worthy to be recognized as equal in honor even to her son. Remember, for example, that after defeating *her*, Beowulf reclaims *Grendel's* head as a token of his victory. Further, Grendel's mother is not the only powerful woman in our corpus of Germanic heroic narratives to be considered monstrous or even devilish, and in the case of Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, translations of these pejorative terms are not subject to dispute.

In the final segment of the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild is twice referred to as a she-devil, once by her own liegeman Dietrich and once by her nemesis Hagen (who is also called a demon). The question of why Kriemhild would be singled out as monstrous while all the others involved in the blood bath at Etzel's are described as courageous and glorious heroes has interested many scholars. Hagen, who in the first half of the epic treacherously assassinates Siegfried and who is consistently ruthless toward Kriemhild throughout the poem, actually consorts with fairies and kills children, yet he is characterized as the bravest of warriors. And, according to at least one critic, "The numerous scenes in which Hagen is allowed to shine have prepared us to accept this verdict and to feel

Hildebrand's killing of Kriemhild is perfectly justified."[9] But although the poet feels this judgment and killing of Kriemhild is justified, readers such as myself are still a bit confused. The fact that the *Klage*, which praises and defends Kriemhild, appears as a sequel in all but two of the complete manuscripts of the *Nibelungenlied* suggests that contemporary audiences were also not so sure about the poet's judgment of her. Granted, Kriemhild is not a character with whom one would like to represent all women. Recovering or empowering her particular voice would probably be destructive to society; however, such concerns would doubly condemn Hagen and every other main character in the poem (maybe with the exception of Siegfried's parents).

The key to this enigma can be found in the ways in which modern critics have mirrored the poet's evaluation of Kriemhild in their analyses of her character. Most critics begin with the given that she *is* a she-devil and will move to demonstrate how this is so. For example, in the Twayne introduction to the *Nibelungenlied,* Winder McConnel explains that the epithet demonstrates that she has taken on some of the wildness of Siegfried or the maiden Brunhilde by exerting power and command of the terrible destruction at the end of the poem. Thus, she's not being morally condemned but is merely being recategorized as a phenomenon outside of nature. Other critics point to her excessive and unwomanly obsession for revenge.

I would submit, however, that Kriemhild's development into a she-devil and her antagonism with Hagen come close to metacommunicating or directly revealing what's been the driving force (or the stakes) in the genre of Germanic heroic epic in the centuries preceding this particular instance of that genre: the

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[9]Edward Haymes,*The Nibelungenlied: History and Interpretation*, 86-7.

production and privileging of the version of the masculine character exemplified in the warrior hero. Ironically, this poet's position has been best expressed by Edward Haymes (a critic committed to de-emphasizing the importance of Kriemhild's character in this poem):

> The critics who would make her the central figure in a tragedy have fallen victim to the woman who lured Siegfried to Worms in the first place. The poet of our version of the epic was able to work the two Kriemhilds into a compelling figure, but his success has ended up distracting us from the centrality of the two heroes. (85)

The poet certainly does work very hard in the second half of the poem to even up the tally of good and evil between Hagen and Kriemhild. It takes eight chapters of valiant fighting against increasingly incredible odds before Hagen's death would require the terrible punishment dealt out to Kriemhild by Hildebrand, still it's symbolically significant that the fruition of Hagen's character is dependent upon Kriemhild's degradation. In fact, tracing the relationship between these two characters from almost the beginning of the poem reveals that Hagen becomes a hero at Kriemhild's expense in order to curtail her pretensions to the power and freedom of a warrior; in other words, to deny her access to the status of male personhood.[10]

In the world of the poem, one can claim a right to acknowledgment of their personhood only if they are members of the elite warrior class. Such membership does not guarantee such acknowledgment, but warrior status is the

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[10]Laura Wideburg has done a detailed study of the Kriemhild figure ("Kriemhild: Demon-Hero-Woman") inwhich she discusses how Kriemhild crosses into the masculine domain when she picks up the sword to decapitate Hagen. Wideburg makes a strong case for viewing Hildebrand's execution of Kriemhild as a compensation for Hagen's loss of honor from dying by the hand of a woman.

key to obtaining it. In the first third of the poem, Kriemhild is represented as a typical heroine of romance (although her conversations with Uote mark her from the beginning as a distinctive personality): her desires are all encompassed in the person of Siegfried, and her value is ascertained on the part of the reader/listener by noting the lengths to which Siegfried goes to obtain her. The figure of Hagen in this section of the poem begins to develop through his growing opposition toward Siegfried. Thus when Siegfried is dispatched so early in the story, a kind of character vacuum appears which the Kriemhild figure is used to fill.

On this model, it is interesting that we could grant the critic Haymes' his assessment of the poet as having lost control of character development in his desire to build cohesion between the two halves of the epic.[11] Using Kriemhild as a bridge between the two disparate narrative traditions combined in this version of the *Nibelungenlied* has granted her *ex post facto* a personhood at least equal to that of Hagen's and moral high ground as well.[12] That this situation is a problem for the poet can be seen in the way in which he choreographs Hagen's attacks on Kriemhild. In each instance, Hagen foregrounds Kriemhild's status as a woman and uses that status against her. For example, while persuading Gunther to take the treasure of the Nibelungs away from Kriemhild, Hagen argues that it is dangerous to let a woman hire warriors:

Hagene sprach zem künege: 'ez solde ein frumer man

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[11]Although the Gundrun/Kriemhild character is even more powerful in the Icelandic traditions.

[12]The relation between personhood and voice will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. See note 46 in chapter one for Flanagan's minimal definition of personhood. Flanagan's first criterion is that all humans are minimal persons; however, most societies throughout history have not given equal recognition to the personhood of every human. I argue here that the criterion for getting such recognition in early Germanic cultures (as they are represented in medieval epic) is that one must be a male warrior.

deheinem einem wîbe niht des hordes lân.
si bringet ez mit gâbe noch unz ûf den tac,
dazz vil wol geriuwen die küenen Burgonden mac.'
(strophe 1130)

'No man who is firm in his purpose should leave the treasure to a woman,' said Hagen. 'By means of her gifts she will bring things to the point where brave sons of Burgundy will bitterly regret it.' (Hatto 148)

Even more telling are the several instances where Kriemhild is frustrated in her aims because she, herself cannot respond as a warrior to a direct challenge. Because she is not physically powerful she cannot obtain recognition as a an equal from Hagen or even from some of her own vassals at Etzel's court. From the beginning of this section of the poem we see the males on both sides of the conflict rhetorically arrayed against her. When she realizes that Hagen and the Burgundians have been warned by Dietrich to remain armed during their visit, she becomes angry and receives this response from her vassal:

Des antwurte mit zorne der herre Dietrîch
'ich pinz der hât gewarnet die edelen fürsten rîch,
und Hagenen den küenen, den Burgonden man.
nu zuo, vâlandinne, du solt mihs niht geniezen lân.'
(strophe 1748)

'It was I that warned the illustrious kings of Burgundy and their vassal Hagen,' replied King Dietrich angrily. 'Now come on you she-devil, you must not let me go unpunished.' (Hatto 217)

Here Dietrich mocks Kriemhild's pretensions to respect as an equal by referring to her inability to engage him in direct combat. The poet helps Dietrich make his

point here by stacking the deck against Kriemhild so that no matter how many vassals or assassins she is able to hire with her red gold, she is made impotent by her inability (presumably) to obtain strong or even consistently loyal support. From the viewpoint of several traditional critics, Kriemhild is being judged by the poet and the warriors in the world of the poem because of her treachery and underhanded dealings; however, since these qualities are by no means peculiar to Kriemhild in the poem, this explanation cannot hold.

From the time of Siegfried's death, Kriemhild focuses on obtaining revenge on his murderer. Although this goal seems like a terrible focus for a life plan, allowing the negative evaluations of the language the poem to stand as an explanation for her motivation will not only cause us to be unfair or to ignore the importance of the feminine voice in a Germanic heroic narrative, more importantly doing so will continue to obscure the significance of such a goal and why it is imperative to the poet that she not obtain revenge with her dignity unsullied. If Kriemhild could exact revenge on Hagen, she would demonstrate that personhood (even when using the harsh criteria of Germanic culture depicted in the poem) is not exclusive to the male warrior. Consider the basis on which Dietrich builds his argument for not fulfilling her command to subdue her brothers and Hagen:

> Dô sprach in sînen zühten dar zuo her Dietrîch
> 'die bete lâ belîben, küneginne rîch.
> mir haben dîne mâge der liede niht getân,
> daz ich die degen küenne mit strîte welle bestân.
> Diu bete dich lützel êret, vil edeles fürsten wîp,

daz du dînen mâgen rætest an den lîp.
si kômen ûf genâde her in ditze lant.
Sîfrit ist unerrochen von der Dietrîches hant.'
(strophes 1901-2)

'Do not ask this thing, great Queen,' said Dietrich with all the courtesy that was his. 'Your kinsmen have not done me such wrong that I should wish to do battle with the valiant knights. Queen of an illustrious King, your request does you little honour with its plotting against the lives of your kindred, who came here in good faith. Siegfried will not be avenged by Dietrich.' (Hatto 235)

If King Etzel had requested that Dietrich take revenge on Hagen for the murder of one of his vassals, would Lord Dietrich have begun by assessing what wrongs these warriors had done him personally? Indeed not, and it is significant that his doing so at this point marks Kriemhild's inability to physically protect her own interests and right her own wrongs. His second statement begins by giving her an epithet (Queen of an illustrious King) which reminds her that her identity is defined through the male to whom she is currently allied. Because she does not really count in the hierarchy, she cannot have personal honor worth maintaining. The result of such reasoning is that Siegfried will not be avenged by Dietrich. How is Dietrich's logic working here? How does his conclusion follow? It is difficult to accept truisms about the terrible consequences of revenge in the context of a poem which values Hagen's vengeance on Siegfried for Brunhild's distress. If Siegfried were avenged by Dietrich, Kriemhild's pretensions to power would be validated and Dietrich's identity would be subsumed under his role as her tool for the realization of her goals. Obviously, that must not be allowed to

happen, so the poet intercedes once again to tip the scale of honor against Kriemhild, for Dietrich does not, in essence, avenge Siegfried but finally defeats Hagen through his own desperate, yet valiant, fury at him for having (almost singlehandedly) dispatched his personal band of retainers.

The demonization of Kriemhild on the part of the *Nibelungenlied* poet as well as modern critics exemplifies the process by which feminine voices are not articulated or heard in Germanic heroic epic. A hero in the context of this genre is the most fully realized type of person or individual, yet he cannot be a hero if he must acknowledge the personhood of a woman as equal to his own; therefore, whatever qualities of heroism which can be defined as exclusive to the male (e.g. brute physical strength) must be the characteristics from which the particulars of what it means to be strong, honorable or loyal are generated. If a woman happens to have warrior strength, like Brunhilde, then she must remain a virgin or she must be subdued and tamed.

I have foregrounded the connections between gender, language and voice because they reveal how the models of subjectivity which help organize the holistic communication models of orality rhetorics set limits for the interpretations which those rhetorics can produce. Many oralists have pointed out how the agonistic structure of the epic genre stems from political and cultural stress. According to Paul Zumthor:

> The epic tends toward the "heroic," only where "heroic" means the exaltation of a sort of community superego. It has been noted that it finds its most fertile grounds in border regions where there exists a prolonged hostility between two races, two cultures--neither of which obviously dominates the other. The epic song crystallizes this hostility and

> compensates for the uncertainty of competition; it foretells that all will end well, proclaims at least that we have righteousness on our side. In so doing, it forcefully arouses action. (Oral Poetry 85)

Thus, the generic force of epic is to encourage combative action, and the hero represents the nation or community rather than just the exceptional individual. Literary critics Harry Berger and H. Marshall Leicester have argued that this is the case in *Beowulf* and further that the poet comments on the heroic social structure which dooms the order brought about by heroic action:

> . . . while the characters [in *Beowulf*] focus on ethical behaviour--ideal heroic consciousness--as the key to order, the poem and the poet direct our attention to fundamental conditions of social structure which operate beneath or beyond consciousness, and which constrain heroic behaviour in ways not discernible by the characters. (43)

On the one hand, the martial ethos emphasized in the epic has its source in a community's strong need for warriors; however, on the other, the community which defines personhood through the characteristics of the warrior (or which only values persons who are warriors) builds its own destruction into the fabric of its social structure. When critics apply an epic orality rhetoric in interpretations of such poems they artificially enhance the warrior ethos at the expense of the other voices, contemporary as well as modern, which clash with that ethos.

Franz Bäuml's analysis of literacy's influence on the depiction of Kriemhild demonstrates this tendency.[13] Bäuml, as was mentioned in chapter one, distinguishes several levels of literacy and illiteracy in medieval cultures.

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[13]"Transformations of the Heroine: From Epic Heard to Epic Read."

The early Germanic tribes (whose important historical figures survive as characters in many of the extant epics) were "socially functional illiterates" in that they depended on oral transmission for the conservation of knowledge (what Ong and Havelock refer to as the encyclopedic function of orality). And although they did have a form of writing, that writing was not discursive and did not take on these conservative functions. There also two types of literate societies 1) a society of a small literate elite who use writing for governance and business and a large group of "disadvantaged illiterates" dependent upon the literate elite; 2) a society in which literacy is considered a necessity for all functional individuals. The former characterizes medieval society as a whole while the latter characterize modern cultures as well as subgroups within medieval society (25-7). Bäuml argues that the Icelandic versions of Kriemhild(Gudrun) are closer to preliterate or 'socially functional illiterate' culture while the *Nibelunglied* Kriemhild represents the disadvantaged illiterates' interest in domestic social order. On this model epic character is exterior and public in preliterate culture, and thus Gudrun is not negatively evaluated for carrying out revenge:

> The encyclopedic function of epic. . . demands that the narrative matter cluster about the culture-hero Siegfried and the issue of revenge for the treachery of Etzel against Kriemhild's brothers. If the narrative matter of oral epic is to fulfill its function in a preliterate society, if, in short, it is to carry out its function of preserving group mores, then those who act in it must carry out actions involving the public law and the family law of that society. This is the case with Siegfried and also with Kriemhild as instrument of revenge for Etzel's treachery against her brothers (as transmitted in the *Edda* and the *Völsungasaga*). It is unlikely, to say the

> least, for a negatively exemplary figure--a villainess--to become the encyclopedic vehicle for the knowledge a preliterate society to preserve. She was not yet what she was to become: she was neither the principle protagonist nor the symbol. (28)[14]

The Kriemhild of the *Nibelungenlied,* however, functions in a narrower sphere of the 'disadvantaged illiterate' thus she is reduced to private rather than a public role :

> . . . the transformation of Kriemhild from fury avenging the murder of her brothers on her husband to Kriemhild as fury avenging the murder of her first husband on her brothers--I do suggest that this distinction is not one between Norse and German, or pagan and Christian, but rather between preliterate and disadvantaged illiterate. The former is an affair of state, and can only be perceived as an affair of state. Kriemhild, on this level perpetuates tribal social order. The latter can be perceived as an exemplum of the faithfulness of wife to husband. (31)

In more intimate contexts, it seems, the warrior-woman is more frightening, and even though audiences feel for her plight, they are moved, with the poet, to contain her extravagant behavior. Thus, Kriemhild's actions are harshly evaluated in the later versions of this epic narrative. Bäuml textually ascribes this shift in evaluation of the Kriemhild character to the literate poet's relation to a disadvantaged illiterate audience. The poet's literacy allows him to recognize the potential for irony in the traditional epithets such as 'Diu vil guote' ('the very good/noble handmaid) in relation to Kriemhild and Brunhild, and the narrower

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[14]Here Bäuml speaks of the Kriemhild/Gudrun figure in general, using the German names of characters but referring to events in the Icelandic traditions.

functions of these epics in a society of mixed literacy allows him to expand on this irony for his illiterate audience. Furthermore, the stabilization of the text in writing allows the audience to contemplate Kriemhild as a cohesive, developing character rather than as merely an actor who recurs in many of a series of episodes (32-36). Ironically, Bäuml's 'oral reading' of the *Nibelungenlied* ends with the very patristic (i.e. Latin literate) conclusion that Kriemhild is punished for her *inordinatio*:

> Given these fundamentals, Kriemhild can easily be seen by this audience as emerging through the pattern of her actions--a pattern now perceivable as a stable whole--as exemplary of "falsitatis et vanarum phantasiarum." In the terms of St. Augustine and of a literacy and symbolism directly or indirectly dominated by him, she would be exemplary of The Woman, the perpetual challenge to *sapientia*, that is, order, by which she must be dominated or bring about chaos. . . . This *inordinatio* reaches its apex in the second part of the epic, when Kriemhild--in demanding the source of Siegfried's power, his treasure--explicitly wants to *be* Siegfried. (36)

In her study of the Kriemhild figure (noted above), Laura Wideburg discusses the changes of women's status in medieval German society during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries:

> Kriemhild's concerns about her position in her society speak to the women who were faced with similar, if less drastic choices. The economic expansion of the tenth and eleventh centuries had ended, and a period of contraction, combined with population pressures, was making itself felt. Women, who had earlier enjoyed some measure of economic independence, were losing their position through changes in dowry and

> inheritance patterns, which consolidated wealth in the hands of the oldest son. (10)

Wideburg points to the popularity of the *Nibelungenlied* and its sequel, the *Klage,* --a popularity attested by the numerous extant manuscripts of both works-- in comparison with the more docile female depicted in *Kudrun* (of which there is only one extant manuscript). This popularity (coupled with the overt praise for Kriemhild in the *Klage*) indicates that thirteenth century audiences were sympathetic toward her. Wideburg thus argues that the decreasing power of women in thirteenth century Germany--a decrease stemming from economic pressure--is brought about by a gendering of her social status. People do not own treasure and land, men do. Women cannot be independent, independent women are usurpers. Thus Bäuml's 'oral reading' intensifies this gendering. As Wideburg's study points out, Kriemhild' s problem is not that she wants to "be Siegfried" but that she wants to be an independent person. The ability of women to be financially independent is just the issue in the culture and time of the poet, and it is this issue that distinguishes the wild, yet positively evaluated Gudrun in the Icelandic traditions from the *Nibelunglied* poet's demonization of Kriemhild. Thus, Bäuml's application of epic orality picks up and intensifies the official representations of subjects and he does so by excluding or shutting out consideration the voices (e.g. in the *Klage* as well as the *Nibelungenlied*'s positive epithets for Kriemhild)which explicitly question this official masculine subject.

Conclusion

In chapter one, I argued that epic orality is organized by an official voice/subject while popular and conversational orality are organized, respectively, by communal and social voices/subjects. As we move from epic toward popular

and conversational models, the subject becomes more diverse and polyvocal, but in all orality rhetorics, voice--to the degree that it is an organizing principle--is a centripetal force. This subjective structuralism sets limits for the degree to which any orality rhetoric can be efficacious in ethical and political critique. Simply put, to the degree that Hymes' polyvocal model (SPEAKING) gives weight to how a speaker takes things to be/mean, conversational orality will also reduplicate the biases and assumptions of the discourse analyzed.[15] However, Hymes does see the project of ethnography and sociolinguistics as adding an ethical element to discourse/language studies--an ethical element which has the potential to bring about social change:

> For others, it is all right to speak of language in general, but never of languages in particular. One suspects a resistance to a long-standing tendency to treat some linguistic particularities as inferior, or a reflection of a climate of opinion in which any explicit limitation on mental freedom is resented. First, it seems inescapably true to me that the means available to persons do condition what they can verbally do, and that these means are in important part historically shaped. Second, such a view is not derogation of differences; what can be done may be admirable. . . . But, third, differences in available means and related abilities do exist in ways that pose problems. In some respects problems are inherent in the human condition, insofar as each of us must be a *definite person* in a world changing unpredictably and without our consent or control. In other respects problems are inherent only in social orders and circumstances,

[15]This problem underlies many of the criticisms which have been lodged against Deborah Tannen's books on gender and conversational style.

> and could in principle be solved. It is my conviction that the requisite social change requires knowledge of actual abilities and activities, and that a linguistics of the sort sketched above [ethnographic approach] can contribute to such knowledge. ("Ways of Speaking" 450-1). [emphasis mine]

This passage suggests a heterogeneous but organized subject comparable to the heterogeneity of communication discussed in chapter three. There is a speaker subject contemporaneous with an interpreting subject who makes choices (uses some freedom) but whose freedom is limited.[16] Unlike, epic orality's official subject, such a subject allows for a distinction between gender and person. This distinction, I think, is crucial for understanding the function of the Kriemhild figure in Germanic heroic epic.

The epic fantasy emphasizes the fulfillment of order which the hero accomplishes completely and often surpasses. Interestingly, many of the epic oralists who have suggested that orality research will deepen our understanding of the human condition have also argued that the epic voice is gendered. For example Paul Zumthor has pointed out that long epic narratives are exclusively performed by males for predominately male audiences (*Oral Poetry* 83), and Walter Ong published a book just before *Orality and Literacy* which connected agonistic discourse (as well as other contests) with the masculine drive for differentiation from the feminine. According to Ong:

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[16]Interestingly the idea of a heterogeneous yet coherent subject has been fielded in the recent work of Owen Flanagan in discussions of moral realism and the science of consciousness. For example, see "Is the Science of the Conscious Mind Possible," *Self Expressions: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life*,12-31.

> In these ways and many others, masculinity is thus differentiation. Unisex would be feminine. Interaction with a strongly masculine father in the confidence provided by a strong and caring mother fosters the full heterosexual development of a child of either sex, a being at peace with his or her own identity as something sexually differentiated. (*Fighting for Life* 115).

Kriemhild figures, women who participate in contests or who demand acknowledgment of their personhood in terms outside the epic contest, disrupt this gendering process. Women are thus important in works like *Beowulf* in that they provide the undifferentiated background from which the masculine warrior hero stands out and they also provide a guarantee of the continuation of society despite the best efforts of the hero to destroy it. The gendering force of epic (both as a historical phenomenon and as a modern fantasy) limits the ethical insights which can be obtained through the implementation of epic orality rhetorics. In "The Three Genres," Luce Irigaray states that "the generation of messages is not neutral but sexuate" (45), but later in the same article suggests that these gendering processes can be redirected:

> Working on language in its sexuation therefore means bringing out who *I, you, he, she* are in the discourses of men and women. That allows us to interpret the misunderstandings and impasses to which their sexual relations, both in the strict sense and in the social, cultural sense, are often reduced. This type of work allows us to analyse the symptom, to name and understand the problem, to find the openings that allow us to modify the economy of the utterance, of exchanges in general. A formalism undergone, unconsciously produced, can thus become a style. (147).

Irigaray and Hymes have in common the idea that some aspects of person fall outside or exceed the social constructs or structuralisms, including gender, by which persons are largely constituted. Furthermore, in contrast to epic orality (which strives toward monologue), Hymes' functionalist discourse model is designed to interpret a variety of voices and to pull up for inspection voices which have gone unheard. For these reasons, conversational orality has the potential to contribute (and has already contributed) to many different kinds of ethical projects while epic orality artificially enhances an ethical project (gendering through the voice of the warrior hero) which will hopefully soon be defunct.

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