is also silent. The oral audience participated not merely by listening passively and memorizing but by active participation in the language used. They clapped and danced and sang collectively, in response to the chanting of the singer.

9

The Special Theory of Greek Orality

In the history of the Greek written word, the earliest Greek text composed throughout as a text may be that of Hesiod, and this despite the fact that his language is basically Homeric, retaining all the formulaic character of orally preserved verse. It is all the more remarkable that in his verse he seems able to retain a vivid awareness of the orality that preceded the writing of his text, and even to recognize what its basic functions were, namely the preservation of tradition in the living memory. He does this in describing the persons and functions of the Muses for whom he composes his introductory hymn. To begin with, they are the offspring of a union between Zeus and Mnemosune, usually translated as "memory," as though the word were equivalent to Mneme (the other Greek word for memory). The fuller form signifies the exercise of memory as an activity, that is, "remembrance" or recall.

Parental inheritance, when commemorated genealogically in oral verse, was used to give a person (often a warrior) his own identity, indicating his social status and role in the community. The Muses, through their assigned parentage, are to be perceived as the guardians of the social memory, and since their behavior as described is wholly oral, without any thought of writing, it is a memory as preserved in spoken speech—that is, the storage speech required. The reason for their existence is not inspirational, as it later became, but functional. Appro-

priately what they utter is summarized as "the (things) of the present and the before" (*ta eonta, ta proeonta*), and also of "the to become" (*ta essomena*) which in its context with the other two participles refers not to novelty to be prophesied but a tradition which will continue and remain predictable (see above, chapter 7).

It is of some interest and relevance that this memory function commemorated by the early poet, but only symbolically and indirectly, achieved more explicit recognition later, after the passage of a century or more, at a time when the extended use of the alphabet had produced a rival means of remembrance in competition with the oral. One of the Promethean gifts to mankind is described as "compositions of *grammata,* Muse-mother, worker memory of all [things]." The *grammata* are "inscriptions"; that is, written letters. In these, the storage memory is now preserved. It has been transferred to their guardianship from the custody of oral language and has become overtly recognizable as a "memory" precisely because the letters as artifacts have objectified the memory by making it visible. But the fact that this is a transfer which still retains maternal orality, and not a completely new creation, is recognized in the phrase "Muse-mother," probably a recollection of Hesiod's genealogy. The term "worker," again, slight as it may be, recognizes for the first time that this language, whether oral or written, is something put to work; its role is functional, not inspirational uplift. The products of the alphabet (which included the Aeschylean play in which these words were written) are something more than just "literature" in our sense of the word.

By the beginning of the fourth century, literate intellectuals began to attend to the act of memorization itself, considered as a necessary technique to be learned. The need would only occur to them as the result of delayed recognition of an exercise that was slowly but surely becoming obsolete in their own day, but which in the oral centuries, sustained by a social pressure

which was taken for granted, had itself been taken for granted, without achieving conscious recognition.

To return to Hesiod: the memory language of his Muses is, of course, rhythmic and in his terms is uttered in epic hexameters. The metaphors applied to their speech dwell on its liquidity; it flows, it gushes, in a steady stream. It is also a performance addressed to an audience—the gods in this particular case—on a variety of occasions, as in religious ritual (the hymn, which is what Hesiod is himself composing at the moment) or in a civic chorus (the dance) or as an epic recital, or as a song. The performances are musical, they have their accompanying instruments. The occasions are festive; you had a good time in feast or celebration or procession when the Muses spoke. These combined conditions are symbolically memorialized in the names that the nine are given: Cleio (Celebrator), Euterpe (Delighter), Thaleia (Luxuriator), Melpomene (Song Player), Terpsichore (Dance-Delighter), Erato (Enrapturer), Polyhymnia (Hymnal Player), Urania (Heaven Dweller), Calliope (Fair-Speaker).

The poet is commemorating, however indirectly, a system of social communication in a culture of primary orality in which such communication is shaped and performed to preserve the cultural tradition. It is a Greek situation. The inhabitants of Tahiti, at the time when Captain Cook visited them, would have understood at once what Hesiod was talking about though they would themselves have lacked the ability to frame such an account (Havelock 1978a, pp. 20–22, 31–32). How Hesiod himself could attain such a remarkable sophistication in this matter will require consideration (chapter 10). Though he either writes or has his composition written for him, he speaks of the oral situation as though it were contemporary. The date of his own composition is in dispute. Accepting the fact that the Greek classical culture began in total nonliteracy, how long precisely had this condition lasted? On this answer will depend a judgment as to just what the achievements of

Greek orality amounted to. Were they more formidable and long-lasting than is usually perceived? Does a special theory of Greek orality demand that we recognize its creative power in molding the high classical Greek culture which we now identify with Greek written literature?

If we place the nonliterate and the literate conditions in simple opposition to each other, one replacing the other, we vastly oversimplify. But at least the first problem to settle, if we can, is the date of the alphabetic invention, that superior technology of the written word, which first isolated the consonantal nonsounds and assigned them specific visible symbols (see above, chapter 7). It clearly precedes Hesiod's time as he could not otherwise have used it, and fairly copiously at that; but by how much?

Hesiod's, as I have said, may be the earliest text actually composed with the help of alphabetic writing. It is not likely to have been the first *piece* of such writing, however. The earliest surviving specimens of the classical Greek tongue so far known occur in five artifacts—a pot, sherds of two other pots, a fragment of (probably) a clay plaque, and a bronze statuette (Jeffery 1961, pp. 68, 90, 110, 235; Cook 1971, p. 175; Morris 1984, p. 34). The letters are incised, scratched, or painted; the dates of manufacture and of inscription need not necessarily coincide. The second can be later than the first, except in the instance of the plaque. This distinction is crucial in the case of one object—supposedly the earliest—the famous "Dipylon Vase," the manufacture of which has been set variously between 740 and 690 B.C. The earlier date or something near it has proved to be more acceptable. The vase is usually hailed as providing the earliest example of Greek writing. The other four objects position themselves around the date 700 B.C. plus or minus, and as a group they suggest a date of about 700 or less for the invention, in which case the Dipylon Vase was in use as a pot for some time before someone scratched the Greek letters on it—a reasonable assumption (Havelock 1982, p. 15, quoting personal conversation with Jean Davison). To quote a careful authority (West 1966, p. 41), "there is only one known specimen of Greek alphabetic writing that need be dated earlier than 700." Even this need disappears once the object's manufacture and its use as a surface to carry letters are distinguished and treated separately.

In scholarly discussions of the date, the distinction has not been taken seriously. Considering the meticulousness which is the usual hallmark of classical learning, the omission seems remarkable. But it has the advantage of allowing the scholar to posit a date for the alphabet "in the eighth century" or "by the middle of the eighth century" rather than "the beginning of the seventh century." The reasons one suspects for this preference are ideological. It has two advantages: (1) it confines the nonliterate history of the Greeks as narrowly as possible, since nonliteracy, on modern analogy, is deemed unworthy of the honor of creating Greek civilization; (2) in particular, it allows the Homeric poems to be "written down" in the eighth century rather than later, which is felt to be more appropriate to their traditional content and their Mycenaean heritage.

One answer to the problem of dating the alphabet's invention which has been used and is commonly repeated can be illustrated from a notice published in the *New York Times Book Review* for October 6, 1985: "The Greeks themselves dated their history from 776 B.C., supposedly the date of the first Olympic games. It was about this time that the Greek alphabet was derived from that of the Phoenicians . . ." (MacQuarrie 1985). The text (of Eusebius) we actually possess which supplies this supposed information was composed in the third or even the fourth century of our era, well over a thousand years after the original event it purports to report. It has been argued that the source may have been a compilation of chronological lists drawn up by a Greek sophist at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. There is no evidence whatever that the Greeks of the classical age "dated their history" with this for-

mula. More to the point, it has been observed that as late as the sixth century B.C. an inscription reveals the existence of civic functionaries named *Mnemones* (Jeffery 1961, p. 20), that is, "Remembrancers" (the Old English term) or memorizers (Havelock 1963, p. 52). Such a function presumes a service performed for a nonliterate society responding to a felt need to preserve orally not only rulings and precedents but some chronology of the past. This purpose is served by memorizing a fixed sequence of names with some associated events, often with a count of years added. The practice is illustrated in the genealogical lists of the Book of Genesis. Preservation and transmission would be effective and reliable only if entrusted to professionals trained for this purpose or training themselves. If the Olympic lists available in the fourth century B.C. did really go back to the first quarter of the eighth, their source was oral transmission, not alphabetic notation.

To presume that any kind of Greek literacy, however restricted, existed before the date of the first inscriptions is to rely on the assumption that the alphabet was applied to the surface of parchment, papyrus, or possibly wood and (if this assumption is used to explain early Greek chronology) that this usage occurred at least fifty years and probably longer before the letters were applied to hard physical objects. This, at first, may seem reasonable, given the possible loss due to perishability of the materials as against marble or fired clay. The literate context of our own culture again supplies an analogy which, though misleading, is powerful. The pages of a document have served for centuries as a source of authority. The inscription on an object or building is treated as decorative and incidental. So may not documentation have preceded incision or paint on a hard surface?

In Greek antiquity, one has the impression that for as long as two centuries after the invention of the alphabet the reverse was true. The habit of relying on engraved inscription for purposes of public information in Athens seems to have lasted

through the fifth century B.C., one striking example being the redrafting of the Athenian law code at the end of the century. This would, of course, not absolutely forbid the notion that parchment or papyrus documents were in circulation before the epigraphical use appeared. If they were, this might mean that the professional singers themselves invented the alphabet (Wade-Gery 1952).

A plausible explanation recently offered by Kevin Robb (1978) has called attention to the act of dedication as a fundamental practice of oral societies and as a possible occasion for the invention of writing. In primary orality dedication could be achieved only by a public oral ceremony at which the object was presented and an address given in a language that the listening audience was likely to remember at least for a time. The same was true of the presentation of gifts. But in a bilingual community (in Cyprus or Crete or Al Mina) the Greek inhabitants saw their Phoenician neighbors dedicating such objects with written marks. Envious of the advantage thus gained—the object thereafter could speak for itself—they tried to adapt the trick to their own oral dedications, and the new alphabetic system was the result.

A dedication, oral or written, in effect assigns ownership of an object to the recipient and often identifies the giver as well. The names and/or the identities of the persons actually connected with this object, present or future, had to be put on record. The early group of epigraphic examples are all of this kind and moreover written in meter; they simply put into alphabetic characters a personal practice of primary orality traditionally supplied as a marginal service by bards and "rhymsters" (or rhapsodists?).

Admitting, as some scholars reluctantly now do, that the invention may postdate 700 B.C., the common presumption still rules—again following modern analogy—that thereafter its use became automatic: "The new invention spread very rapidly and from an early date a high proportion of the Greek

people were fully literate" (Andrewes 1971, p. 51). The fate of orality when it comes in contact with literacy in modern times would seem to support this judgment. Contact between literate Europe and surviving nonliterate cultures occurred when European voyagers paid visits (Cook in Tahiti) or invaded and conquered (the Spanish in America) or when colonial powers colonized their "subjects" (Portugese, British, French, Germans in Africa). Only in the first case was primary orality left untouched and uncontaminated. The conquerers and colonizers did not sail away again but stayed and lived in close contact. Their superior alphabetic technology applied to the administration of the society which they governed swiftly supplanted the oral mechanisms of government with literate practice. The original oral performance with its poetry was stripped of functional purpose and relegated to the secondary role of entertainment, one which it always had but which now became its sole purpose. And so these vestiges have remained, romantic survivals available for the delectation of the tourist and the tape recorder of the anthropologist (see above, chapter 6). The very triviality of what survives strengthens the presumption of the classical scholar, if he notices the matter at all, that Greece had to be fully literate to produce a Homer and an Aeschylus.

The uniqueness of the Greek case needs to be understood. It is one which justifies the need for a special theory of Greek orality. "The Homeric epics considered as records of the orally preserved word . . . meet the following criteria of authenticity: 1) they have been framed in a society free from any literate contact or contamination, 2) the society was politically and socially autonomous both in its oral and literate periods and consequently possessed a firm consciousness of its own identity, 3) as far as responsibility for the preservation of this consciousness rested upon language, that language had originally to be a matter of oral record with no exceptions, 4) at the point where this language came to be transcribed the invention necessary for the purpose was supplied by the speakers of the language within the society itself, 5) the application of the invention to transcribe anything and everything that might be both spoken and preservable continued to be controlled by Greek speakers" (Havelock 1978a, p. 339).

No other instance of transition from orality to literacy can meet all these five requirements. The Tahiti visited by Cook met the first three, but only these. Recorded memories of oral practice in the Scottish Highlands fulfill requirements two and four. The surviving oral "literatures" in Africa fulfill requirements two and three. The effect in the Greek case, which is particularly to be noticed and emphasized, is the total social control retained by the Greeks themselves, both over their own oral life and over their alphabetic life. On the one hand, they suffered no pressure to adopt other writing systems as practiced by their neighbors. These were too inefficient to compete with their own invention, and no Greek statement that is extant is known to have been written in them. As late as the fifth century B.C. a diplomatic incident occurred between Greeks and non-Greeks (related by Thucydides) which illustrates the point (Havelock 1982, pp. 85–86). On the other hand, assuming that (1) the invention was a device of stonecutters and potters, who were the first people to possess the tools to apply it, and (2) they applied it upon the surface of artifacts new or old for purpose of dedications and the like, it would present no immediate threat to the time-honored linguistic technology of oral storage commanded by the professional bards. It offered no threat to the organized performance socially central to the culture. The alphabet was an interloper, lacking social standing and achieved use. The elite of the society were all reciters and performers. An anecdote in Plutarch describes how this was still true in the Athens of Themistocles (*Life of Cimon* 484a1). The organized teaching of letters in primary school is not likely to have occurred in Athens until the last third of the fifth century B.C. and is first attested by Plato in the early fourth (Havelock 1982, pp. 39–40).

All reasonable considerations point not to a ready acceptance

of the alphabet but to a resistance to it which faded away at a rate to be determined by combining a great many indirect evidences. Reading, along with writing, treated as a human exercise which can be taken for granted, is not commemorated in Greek drama until the last third of the fifth century, in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides (see chapter 2, above). Primary orality departed only slowly from Greece, at a rate to be determined by the degree to which the written storage language replaced the oral storage language. Traces of inscribed "laws" (more correctly "rulings," that is *thesmoi*) survive in Crete from perhaps the late seventh century. The first coherent text (on a wall) is datable as late as 450 B.C. The so-called Constitution of Chios was perhaps inscribed a hundred years earlier. These epigraphical records, along with the Athenian "law code," as revised at the end of the fifth century, still retain, as previously noted, traces of formulations required when such rulings were a matter of oral memorization (Havelock 1982, pp. 205–06).

Under conditions of primary orality storage language is expressed in a complex of epic recitals, choric and ritual performances, dramatic enactments, and private songs "published" at symposia. It requires considerable social space. Its equivalent in letters could never be a matter of epigraphy. This afforded too restrictive a medium. Written storage had to find surfaces receptive of fairly copious and fluent transcription, which in antiquity meant parchment or papyrus.

There was also some restricted use of slate and wax tablets and even sand (recorded as in use as late as the first century of our era, if an incident narrated in St. John's gospel is to be trusted). But sand was obviously nearly as fleeting a medium as sound itself.

Inscribed on parchment or papyrus, the new writings contain the first texts of what we call great literature—but which the Greeks of the time naturally regarded as a continuation of that oral practice which was expected incidentally to provide didactic guidance for their culture. The "literature" as we

think of it was also an instrument that taught *mousike*. The name "Hesiod" (see above, chapter 2) is commonly assumed to be that of the earliest identifiable author linked to a supposedly historical episode of uncertain date (West 1966, pp. 40–48; 1978, pp. 30–32). More plausibly, the first texts that can be firmly anchored to a definite personality and a determinate date (648 B.C.) are those ascribed to Archilochus of Paros (Havelock 1982, p. 103). Personal his verse may have been; nevertheless, the remains, scanty as they are, disclose a high proportion of exhortation, admonition, proverb, fable, and ritual celebration; in short, a continuing commemoration of the orally transmitted tradition of his day. His date does give support to the hypothesis that the alphabet did not become available till near the end of the first quarter of the seventh century. Even then its adaptation to copious transcription took time. The flow of texts—at least of those we either now have or can know something about—remained meager until the fifth century.

Of course, as in the case of the first inscriptions, it can be argued that much of very early literature has been lost. The so-called Epic Cycle surviving in later epitome is often cited in this connection, though the poems concerned may not be as early as is often supposed, and their record survives only from later antiquity.

It is relevant in this connection to observe that contrary to later and literate notions of their own past, the Greeks of the sixth and fifth centuries used the names Homer and Hesiod as though they designated two partners in a common enterprise (Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Herodotus, Alcidamas: this enterprise, according to their own notices, being instruction rather than entertainment). What they taught is condemned by the two philosophers but approved by Herodotus. Plato in the fourth century takes the same view of their joint function and, like his philosophical predecessors, disapproves of it. Heraclitus, moreover, in this same connection, treats Homer as a partner with Archilochus. The casual tone of the references made

by both pre-Socratic philosophers to Homer and Hesiod, and to Archilochus, gives an impression—but only an impression—that they thought of themselves as not far removed in time from the persons they were talking about. Heraclitus, indeed, refers to Homer in one instance almost as though he might still be alive. All of which provokes the suggestion that neither Homer nor Hesiod as known in the late sixth century could have been in public circulation much before that time. By "circulation," of course, is meant publication through acoustic performance, as Heraclitus makes clear.

The special theory of Greek orality therefore requires the presumption of a long period of resistance to the use of the alphabet after its invention, with the corresponding presumptions that (1) the language and thought forms of primary orality considered as a storage technology lasted on long after the invention occurred (in fact, roughly speaking, and in attenuated form, to the death of Euripides); and (2) the character of high classic Greek literature, its historical uniqueness, cannot be understood apart from this fact. In the Greek case then we face the paradox that, whereas the alphabet by its phonetic efficiency was destined to replace orality by literacy, the first historic task assigned to it was to render an account of orality itself before it was replaced. Since the replacement was slow, the invention continued to be used to inscribe an orality which was slowly modifying itself in order to become a language of literacy.

Precisely what these modifications were is a matter for the next chapter. To our modern literate taste, if we are honest with ourselves, the changes in idiom and vocabulary as they occurred might be welcome. It is easier for us to read Plutarch than Thucydides, Theocritus than Pindar. But before hastening to consider this development, it is necessary to understand that the initial advantage offered by alphabetic efficiency was to provide a script which could fluently and unambiguously transcribe the full gamut of orally preserved speech. Anything,

any meaning, acoustically framed and spoken, any emotion or expression, could after being heard now be written down, as we say, "in full." Such complete visibility for language had not been developed in previous writing systems, and the consequent difficulty of interpretation had limited their use. They recorded simplified versions of the orality of their societies, the fulness of the oral originals being irretrievably lost.

That is why Greek orality requires its own special theory. Its transcription into the alphabet was historically a unique event. The Hebrew example furnished in the Old Testament is not a parallel case. The instrument of inscription was imperfect. It could not "hear" the full richness of the original oral tradition. The vocabulary as it is written shows a steady tendency to economize and simplify both thought and action. This adds ritual dignity to the record but at the cost of omitting the complexities of physical and psychological response, all the mobility and liveliness which are such a prominent feature of the record as transmitted in the Homeric script. The same limitation holds true for the remains of the Sumerian and Babylonian so-called "epics." The story of Gilgamesh illustrates the economy that has to be practiced (Havelock 1982, pp. 168–70). These versions were to be used and read and maybe intoned on ceremonious occasions by scribes but not recited expansively in festivals of the people.

Such scripts tend to ritualize their accounts of the human experience and so simplify it and then make this simplified version authoritative. Primary orality by contrast controls and guides its society flexibly and intuitively, and its alphabetized version in Greek continued this flexibility. The authorized versions offered in other scripts were more narrowly compulsive. They operated by imposing "the jot and tittle of the law." The original orality became compromised by doctrine and dogma.

The Greek story is free of this crippling factor. There was no single institutionalized priesthood and no attempt to form a canon out of what was being inscribed.

One can compare the account of creation in Genesis with the cosmic geography that occurs in Homer and Hesiod. The former is a standardized account, numerically simple, spaced arithmetically from one to seven. The latter records the variety, the unpredictability of the cosmos and its forces as they are personified in conflict or collision (Havelock 1981). The Genesis account is not of that kind which Hebrew singers would have originally sung for their people before the Phoenician script (or the Hebrew) took over the task of codification.

Since the Greek special theory requires us to recognize that the process of replacement must have been slow, we also have to perceive the survival power of orality in those masterpieces of epic, didactic, lyric, choric, and dramatic composition which we commonly regard as the written literature of high classic Greece. One begins with the obvious: Greek literature from its beginnings was composed in verse, not prose, and in Athens this continued roughly to the death of Euripides.

The first attested exceptions are all works written in Ionic, the authors in approximate chronological order being Pherecydes of Syros (if indeed his is to be "reckoned the first book in prose"; see Lesky 1966, p. 161), Hecataeus of Miletus, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, Protagoras of Abdera, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, Ion of Chios, and Pherecydes of Athens. The list gives evidence that the writing of Greek prose originated overseas—evidence consistent with the conclusion universally admitted that the alphabetic invention did not occur on the mainland. It is a further reasonable inference that the cities of eastern Greece had a head start in its application and in the development of a schooling to teach it, of which these authors were the beneficiaries.

The content of the versified language—which, as versified, is storage language, regardless of the individual styles and purposes of individual writers—is uniformly mythic, meaning traditional. As Homer used a legendary Mycenae to give distance to the *ethos* and *nomos* being recommended to contemporary Greek societies, so also did his successors, composers of didactic, lyric, choric, and dramatic language. The dramas of Athens, under the guise of telling a twice told tale, addressed themselves to the *polis* of the day and its concerns. Pindar, composing choruses of address to his patrons, uses mythology to commend the contemporary virtues of martial and athletic valor, along with warnings against excess. Aeschylus celebrates the rule of law in the Athens of today as it takes over from the blood-feud of the Athens of yesterday projected backwards into Mycenae. Sophocles presents in the legendary Oedipus a Periclean statesman overcome by plague and his own self-confidence in his own policies. Euripides in his *Hippolytus* uses a legendary Athens of Theseus to denominate two competing standards of sexual conduct, as they were becoming perceptible in contemporary Athens.

Surviving orality also explains why Greek literature to Euripides is composed as a performance, and in the language of performance.

The audience controls the artist insofar as he still has to compose in such a way that they can not only memorize what they have heard but also echo it in daily speech. The language of the Greek classic theatre not only entertained its society, it supported it. Its language is eloquent testimony to the functional purposes to which it is put, a means of providing a shared communication—a communication not casual but significant historically, ethically, politically. It was a continual imitation (*mimesis*) of the ethos and nomos of the city (Vernant 1967, pp. 107–08; Havelock 1982, pp. 267–68) but carried out by indirection. In the theatre of Dionysus, the plays could not be put on until the same theatre had first been used for a civic procession and a public ceremony honoring the orphans of conflicts fought in the previous year.

Didactic function is focused most sharply, though not exclusively, in the Greek choruses, a continual rehearsal (*mimesis*) of the lawful side of Greek life (or of meditations upon it), some-

times only loosely connected with the plot. These constituted the core of the play, too often treated in modern literate adaptations as peripheral to it, but never so in classical Greece.

Athenian prisoners of war in Sicily, according to Plutarch's anecdote, gained their freedom from their captors by their ability to recite the choruses of Euripides—not the dialogue or the speeches. Here was the traditional language they found most easy to memorize, not because they had read it—the first reference to the silent reading of a play occurs at the very end of the century (Havelock 1982, p. 204)—but because they had heard it, and not just once. Repetitions of dramatic performances in the countryside were regular in Plato's day; he says so himself (*Republic* V.475d). A century earlier, one famous performance in Athens—the *Taking of Miletus*—proved so overwhelming that its reenactment was forbidden. The dramatic festivals preserved the means by which primary orality controlled the ethos of its society through a repeated elocution of stored information, guidance preserved in living memories. It is a tribute to its effectiveness and the spell it cast that construction of physical facilities suitable for such performance continued to be a feature of the Hellenistic age. The Greeks had to have their theatre.

Above all, the sense of primary orality survived in the behavior of the Greek tongue itself as it was being written down. Greek drama offers no propositions, beliefs, or programmed doctrines in the style of a Dante (still more of a Milton) but an expressive dynamism whether in word or thought. It is difficult to find an instance of a conceptual subject attached to a conceptual predicate by the copula "is" anywhere in the plays. The verb "to be," if it is used, still functions preferably in its oral dynamic dimension, signifying presence, power, situational status, and the like.

The absence of any linguistic framework for the statement of abstract principle confers on the high classic tongue a curious and enviable directness, an absence of hypocrisy. The particularism of orally remembered speech has the continual effect of calling a spade a spade rather than an implement designed for excavation. The speech will praise or blame but not in terms of moral approval and moral disapproval based on abstract and manufactured principles. A character in Greek drama does not theorize himself out of an unpleasant situation. He walks into it with motives that are specific and, if he has to, later accepts it when he recognizes what has actually happened.

Translation of the high classical language into a modern literate tongue, when the effect is compared with the original, at once brings out the dynamics of the oral tongue and what has happened in the transfer to a literate syntax. Oedipus opens the play that bears his name with a public address in which he describes the city's condition: "The town is heavy with a mingled burden of sounds and smells" (Grene 1954). In the English of this widely used modern version a subject, "town," is presented and given its predicate, the attribute "heavy" connected to it by the copula "is"; and the predicate is qualified further by the phrase "with mingled burden" which is added to it. The grammatical structure is atomistic, item is added to item using the connections supplied by the verb "to be" and the preposition "with." The whole effect is static. Meaning is accumulated piece by piece. The original Greek says: "The city altogether bulges with incense-burnings." The imagery is dynamic: the city turns itself into a pregnant woman or a packed container.

The speaker then continues (in the English version): "I did not think it fit that I should hear of this from messengers"; that is, he states a proposition which he had formed mentally, which requires an impersonal "it" as part of its idiom and requires to be explained by a subordinate clause introduced by "that." The Greek says, "What [things] [I] adjudicating not from messengers other [than you or myself] to hear." A language describing active mental effort has been replaced by an

objective "think it fit that. . . ." The word "other" (in the Greek) contains a dynamic ambivalence: "I want to hear only from you: I want to hear by myself." Modern literate idiom enforces a choice: one or the other, but not both.

The English version then continues: "You are old and they are young," a propositional definition of two groups of people requiring the verb "to be" twice over. The original Greek expresses a simple call from one person to another to whom he applies verbs of dynamic process: "Oh aged sire, speechify. You have grown appropriate to pronounce in front of these here" (pointing). In this way Oedipus evokes the living presence and nature of the elder that he is confronting, in contrast to himself.

He then pronounces his last line, before the priest is allowed to speak his piece. It opens emphatically with the verb "to be"—not, however, the colourless copulative monosyllable of our tongue but a word of two full quantities sounded like a trumpet and placed at the beginning of the iambic line, proclaiming his existence, his presence, and his stature and status as their ruler. "Unpainable would I exist." In literate translation, this becomes "I would be very hard"; all the color has gone out of it.

Such examples could be multiplied a hundredfold. They demonstrate that classic orality is untranslatable. It is far easier to translate Plato. The propositional idiom with the copula which we continually fall into is precisely what Plato wished the Greek language to be converted to, and he spent his entire writing life trying to do this. When he turns against poetry it is precisely its dynamism, its fluidity, its concreteness, its particularity, that he deplores. He could not have reached the point of deploring it if he had not become literate himself.

Since Sophocles' day, much has happened to the speech of the mind and to the mind itself. While retaining the language of doing, of action or feeling in part, we have supplemented it, and partly replaced it, by statements of fact. The participles

and the verbs and the adjectives that behave like gerunds have yielded to conceptual entities, abstractions, objects. Oral Greek did not know what an object of thought was. The Muse, as she learned to write, had to turn away from the living panorama of experience and its ceaseless flow, but as long as she remained Greek, she could not entirely forget it.