

Writing Theorums

Theorem 1: Permanence

In his book, *Orality and Literacy*, Ong touches on the impermanence of orality. Without access to or knowledge of a written language, individuals in primary orality cultures rely solely on oral communication in all aspects of life. Oral communication, as we have learned, is subject to factual inaccuracies and often different variations of the same story. Primary oral cultures are also characterized by the temporary nature of speech because words disappear as soon as they are spoken. The emergence of writing, and later print, allowed for ideas, stories, and history to be recorded and preserved exactly. These inventions allowed for greater permanence and concreteness of information. As Ong mentions, "Print encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion" (129). In our age of modern technology, however, we have regressed to a state of temporariness. Even Ong questions the concept of language as permanent and unchanging, "What leads one to believe that language can be so structured as to be perfectly consistent with itself, so as to be a closed system?" (166). With modern technological advancements, language is beginning to shift and change along with our shortening attention spans. The chief example of this technology is Snapchat. Snapchat is perhaps the best example of our growing obsession of impermanence. Snapchat allows users to combine snapshots, emojis, words, and drawing, and send them to their friends. However, each "snap" can only be viewed for up to 10 seconds before it supposedly disappears forever. After it has been viewed, the entire context of the conversation goes away. Before the introduction of technology, the words written or typed out on a page seemed to be concrete and permanent. "Under the author's eyes the text lays out the beginning, the middle and then end, so that the writer is encouraged to think of his work as a self-contained, discrete unit, defined by closure" (145). New technologies, like Snapchat, redefine the permanence of language and draw attention to the differences and similarities of pre-literary and modern society.

Theorem 2: A tool for isolation and connection

As I mentioned in theorem number one, primary orality cultures are solely reliant on oral communication. As a result, interaction with others is the only way to communicate thoughts and ideas. The introduction of secondary orality in the modern world caused a shift in the way we interact with both ourselves and others. Writing and print made it so that ideas could be communicated without direct verbal expression to another person. As Ong points out, "Writing and reading, as has been seen, are solo activities (though reading at first was often enough done communally). They engage the psyche in strenuous, interiorized, individualized thought of a sort inaccessible to oral folk" (150). Both writing and reading allow for greater self-reflexivity because in order to read and write in a secondary orality culture, one must rely solely on their own mind. However, the paradox of this is that although reading and writing are solitary activities, they also help lead to expanded interaction. Technology, and chiefly, social media, turn the solitary act of reading and writing into a catalyst for conversation. Ong mentions, "Print was also a major factor in the development of the sense of personal privacy that marks modern

society” (128). And although our culture does value personal privacy, we can choose to share pieces of our private lives (pictures, captions, posts, etc.) with the world through social media. Ong touches on this point in *Orality and Literacy* when he says, “Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well” (175). Think of how a hashtag can go viral nation wide, how you can send an email across state-boundaries, or a text to someone living in a different country. Although the act of reading and writing are often very personal and private activities, they can be used as a tool for communication and connection with others. Without modern technology, our voices and conversations are limited by sound waves. With modern technology, our ability to share our thoughts and engage in writing and reading can help us be more connected than ever before.

Theorem 3: Creativity

Not only does reading and writing give us the ability to become more interconnected, but it gives us the freedom to be self-expressive and creative. In primary orality cultures, oral performers were subject to flaws in their presentation due to the lack of organization and planning. In epic poems, Ong mentions that Homer “had a huge repertoire of episodes to string together but, without writing, absolutely no way to organize them in strict chronological order” (140). As a result, the end-product lacked creativity simply because the performer was trying to remember a long list of episodes on the spot in order to construct a story. Today, we have the ability to copy and paste words, sentences, and paragraphs and re-order them however we want to. Writing allows us the freedom to construct a story, and change it if we want to. Various forms of modern technology allow us to add visuals, text boxes, different fonts and colors to match our current mood. In primary orality culture, “Oral poets commonly plunged the reader *in medias res* not because of any grand design, but perforce. They had no choice, no alternative” (140). However, the addition of writing and print to society gives us infinite choices and pathways to create and explore. In reference to manuscript culture, Ong points out that “it deliberately created texts out of other texts, borrowing, adapting, sharing the common, originally oral, formulas and themes, even though it worked them up into fresh literary forms impossible without writing” (131). In manuscript culture, and in secondary orality culture, writing can be combined with other mediums and collaged together to create something unique and original. For example, my “Listen to Molly Listen” blog allows me to post my own work in conjunction with borrowed images, videos, and articles. All of these types of media are combined to create a distinctive form of expression. As I publish each post, I have the freedom and creativity to construct a platform that is unique and individualized to me. Not only is “creative writing” its own separate discipline, but the structure of writing in the modern age allows us to be creators of our own stories.

Quote-ally awesome

“Writing created history” (Ong 168).

“The very reflectiveness of writing – enforced by the slowness of the writing process as compared to oral delivery as well as by the isolation of the writer as compared to the oral performer – encourages growth of consciousness out of the unconscious” (Ong 147).

