

口承物語と児童文学

Oral Narratives and Children's Literature

レオナルド・ランドマーク
Leonard LUNDMARK

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Introduction

This paper is the result of several unexpected elements interacting. One element was encountering Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*. Another was using Linda Sue Park's *When My Name Was Keoko* as the textbook in an English Composition class. A third was reading Mildred Taylor's novels. A fourth was being told about and then reading Orson Scott Card's "Ender" Cycle. And the fifth was remembering Richard Feynman's book of stories, "*Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!*" Something in their coming together caused the question: "What does oral narrative mean when you are talking about children's literature?" to emerge.

Linda Sue Park's novel is based on stories she heard from her parents and others of their life in Korea when it was a Japanese colony. Park's book is similar to Richard Kim's narrative of his life in Manchuria and Korea, *Lost Names*, (Park acknowledges as much in her "Author's Note"). It also resembles Sook Nyul Choi's directly autobiographical *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*. Mildred Taylor likewise has said repeatedly that her books are based on family stories. They are based on her hearing her father and other master storytellers tell not only of their life as blacks in rural Mississippi, in a society based on white racism, but also of their family heritage. As Taylor narrates: "As they talked I began to visualize all the family who had once known the land, and I felt as if I knew them, too. I met them through all the stories told, stories told with such gusto and acting skills that people long since dead lived again through the voices and movements of the storytellers."¹

Feynman's book too is a collection of stories he told about his experiences. They begin with his early childhood and tell of his openness and interest in almost anything (other than his M.I.T. English

1 As cited in Chris Crowe's *Presenting Mildred D. Taylor* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p. 29.

classes). He was one of the people who worked on the first atomic bomb at Los Alamos and twenty years later was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for unrelated work. The stories show his successes and failures in areas as far apart as taking an Army physical examination and playing in a samba band in Brazil. He told the stories many times to many different groups of people over the years and was finally persuaded to write them down a few years before his death.

Both Taylor's father Wilbert and Richard Feynman were master storytellers. Mildred Taylor tells how her father would have her spellbound as he acted out a story about life in Mississippi or how she would be in tears from his humor. Feynman's sister Joan told of how her brother and mother could do likewise as they told stories around the kitchen table or to physicists at a conference.² And this ability to tell a story, to be a performer (or a part of the audience), is in itself an important part of the tradition.

Here we must deal at least slightly with the fact of performance as part of the storytelling event. Telling the story is part of the tradition. The whole matter of the kind of voice a speaker uses, its volume, his gestures, phrasing, and pauses are all part of tradition. All of these things are what are called the "paralinguistic features" of the performance, a subject studied by ethnographers.³ It is this that Joan Feynman and Mildred Taylor refer to when describing how they were part of the performance.

But both Wilbert Taylor and Richard Feynman were doing more than being actors and humorists. Taylor's stories were meant to tell his daughters and other children their family history and also about the racial segregation and discrimination around them, history that was not written in any school textbook. The stories showed how the Taylors had upheld their dignity as human beings in a racist society, how their love as a family had supported them, and how their ownership of land had given them respect and confidence. Feynman's stories tell of his constant questioning of unexamined assumptions, of his childlike curiosity, of his incredible persistence in working on a problem, and of his love and friendship. In other words, both Taylor's and Feynman's stories are basically teaching stories.

And what are we to make of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*? Or how are we to understand Orson Scott Card's series of novels about Ender Wiggin? The full title of Walter Ong's book is *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. It is basically a history of the changes that occur as societies adopt writing. The changes that occur are literally seismic and have both material and psychological aspects. And Card's cycle of novels about Ender Wiggin seems to be basically a prolonged meditation on seeing the world with the honesty and clarity of a child, but a child with the ability to see the moral

2 "R. P. Feynman: The Beginnings of a Teacher" in *"Most of the Good Stuff": Memories of Richard Feynman*, edited by Laurie M. Brown and John S. Rigden (Woodbury, NY: AIP Press, 1993), p. 166.

3 This is investigated in detail in John Miles Foley's *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 18.

ambiguity adults face. The Ender cycle is of particular interest because the novels seem to contain many of the characteristics of orally based thought and expression Walter Ong lists in Chapter 3 : "Some psychodynamics of orality."

Nobody seems to talk about stories such as Richard Feynman or Wilbert Taylor told, at least in terms of oral narrative.⁴ The problem is one which Ruth Finnegan recognizes: "Oral forms are often just not noticed — particularly those which are near-by or contemporary."⁵ As she says, "It's oral because it circulates by oral rather than written means...its distribution, composition or performance are by word of mouth and not through reliance on the written or printed word." Although Finnegan is specifically talking about oral poetry here, she says the term also includes oral prose.⁶ Our problem is that "since literate and non-literate media have so long co-existed and interacted it is natural to find not only interaction between 'oral' and 'written' literature but many cases which involve overlap and mixture."⁷ Not only that, but "the basic point then, is the continuity of 'oral' and 'written' literature. There is no deep gulf between the two: they shade into each other both in the present and over many centuries of historical development..."⁸

So, at least part of our problem about "oral literature" or "oral narrative" has to do with definition. Both Finnegan and Ong talk about the problems involved. Ong talks about it in terms of primary and secondary orality. He defines "primary orality" as meaning the people of a culture have no contact or familiarity with writing at all. "Secondary orality" is oral culture that is technically supported by such things as radio, television, telephones, and computers that depend on writing and print for their functioning. Like fish in the ocean, we do not notice the technical aspects of "secondary orality" because they are taken for granted features of the environment that we live and move in.

However, these technical aids that depend on writing and print have implications for our lives. This is because, as Ong titles one chapter: "Writing restructures consciousness." As he says: "Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form (p.78)." This restructuring happens because "intelligence is relentlessly reflexive, so that even the external tools that it uses to implement its workings become 'internalized', that is, part of its own reflexive process (p.81)." This means that

4 Another aspect is discussed in "The Parables of Richard Feynman" by Leonard Lundmark, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Wakayama University, Humanities Science, No.50* (February 2000), pp.149-159.

5 *Oral Poetry : Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* by Ruth Finnegan (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 5.

6 *Ibid.* , p.16.

7 *Ibid.* , p.23.

8 *Ibid.* , p. 24.

9 *Orality and Literacy : The Technologizing of the Word* by Walter Ong (London : Routledge, 1982) p. 11.

“technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word ... Technologies are artificial, but—paradox again—artificiality is natural to human beings (p.82).”

One of the simplest effects for our lives (as Ong tells us) is how writing and all its related aids have tremendously increased our memory capacity. “In an oral culture, to think through something in non-formulaic, non-patterned, non-mnemonic terms, even if it were possible, would be a waste of time, for such thought, once worked through, could never be recovered with any effectiveness ... (p.35). This means that without writing, “matters from the past without any sort of present relevance commonly dropped into oblivion (p.98).” To phrase it in more contemporary terms, with no writing or support systems we could say we have a memory capacity of 128 kilobytes. And with a writing support system of any kind that increases to megabytes or gigabytes.

This interface or change in the structure of consciousness, due to the existence of writing and mechanical and technical aids, is a mixed blessing. While, as Ong tells us, technology, properly interiorized, does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it (p.83).” It can, however, have destructive consequences. One very recently recognized one is Internet addiction. The problem is that very few people (including psychologists and other health care professionals) believe that one can become addicted to something that is not a substance. As psychologist and Internet addiction expert Kimberly Young says : “The Internet is not a substance ingested into the body. That’s what confuses many Internet addicts...The Internet is just part of a computer, they argue, and you can’t get addicted to a simple object.”¹⁰ But when we think of what Ong has just said about the characteristics of word-related technology, how it is interiorized, and how that technology restructures consciousness, we see very clearly the theoretical foundations of exactly that type of addiction.

There is another, related interface which has also helped bring about change in the structure of consciousness. This change in consciousness has been brought about by changes in narrative style. Eric Kahler describes this in his book *The Inward Turn of Narrative*.¹¹ Kahler too talks about “the transformation of our reality and the transformation within man’s consciousness” which he sees occurring in Western literature. “In fact, man himself has developed by means of the perpetual interaction between consciousness and reality, between his interior and his exterior world.”¹²

Very briefly, narrative has changed from being a way to describe external events and the characters of

10 *Caught in the Net* by Kimberly Young (New York : John Wiley & Sons, 1998), p.17.

11 *The Inward Turn of Narrative* by Eric Kahler, translated by Richard & Clara Winston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

12 Preface, p.4.

heroes (including their spiritual nature) to being a description in depth of personal psychology. This internalization has been going on since the days of epics such as *Gilgamesh* and *The Iliad*. Kahler traces its progressive development from there to the 18th century novels of Swift, Fielding, and Sterne. If I understand Kahler correctly, what has been going on is much like what Ong described in terms of technology: the technology penetrates consciousness and affects it. But here, it is the events and thoughts around us which do a similar thing. It is as if all the things we see and do, the thoughts we think, and the air we breathe penetrate not only our bodies but also our souls. "The sheer raw material of reality is no longer a merely physical or even psychological primal substance. Rather ... it is a secondary or even a tertiary plane of life ... It is a realm already full of a wealth of abstract, 'translated' elements, the precipitated salts of consciousness, as it were."¹³

In a way, this "intertwining of inner and outer life" which Kahler describes as growing stronger and stronger through time sounds a lot like the interconnected worlds of spirit and of matter which Evelyn Underhill delineates in her essay on Magic.¹⁴ We also seem to be dealing with what Charles Williams calls the co-inherence or interdependence of all things.¹⁵ Here we literally mean the interdependence of all things: physical (both of the body and mechanical), intellectual, psychological, emotional, magical, and spiritual. And we are far from knowing or understanding the limits of that interdependence or the range of elements involved. As Ong summarizes it: "The interaction between the orality that all human beings are born into and the technology of writing, which no one is born into, touches the depths of the psyche (p.178)."

Overall, considering Ong, Kahler, Underhill, and Williams, it seems as if there is no "exterior" or "interior" in any but the grossest physical terms. It seems as if there is nothing but an incredible intertwining. And this is exactly what Orson Scott Card talks about in his Ender cycle of novels when he talks about phlotic filaments, the inchoate non-physical strands that are the materials of existence, and their network. We can also see it in the way the hive queen communicates with her colony and also with Ender and the brother trees. And the way Ender and later the hive queen and the brother trees communicate with Jane, the non-physical being that controls the ansible network that allows for instantaneous communication among worlds anywhere in the Hegemony.

But how does this happen? As Ong puts it: "To speak, I have to be somehow already in communication

13 *The Inward Turn of Narrative*, p.70.

14 "A Defense of Magic" as printed in *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy*, edited by Dana Greene (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

15 The references to Underhill, Williams, and others are given in "Harry Potter in Perspective II" by Leonard Lundmark in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Wakayama University, Humanities Science, No.52, February 2002*, pp.247-263.

with the mind I am to address before I start speaking ... I have to sense something in the other's mind to which my own utterance can relate." In other words, "I have to be somehow inside the mind of the other in advance in order to enter with my message, and he or she must be inside my mind (pp.176-177)." But how can such a thing be possible? It is possible if the kind of physical and non-physical intertwining Ong and Kahler discuss occurs because then we are somehow connected to each other.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross talks about this type of communication and how young children do it.¹⁶ It is somehow connected with their acceptance of suffering and awareness of death. She saw it first at the end of World War II in drawings of butterflies they had made in the death camps of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Maidanek. She saw it later as a doctor and recognized it in the symbolic language of dying patients. She says that often they will use parable-like language, the language of story. The ability to use the language is based on the ability to understand the meaning of suffering: "All the hardships that you face in life, all the tests and tribulations, all the nightmares and all the losses...are gifts to you (p. 35)." They are all opportunities to grow, if you will but accept them as such—which means accepting the suffering they entail.

She learned this herself in her own near-death/out-of-body experiences in which she somehow directly felt all the suffering and death of each of the one thousand dying patients she had been with. At the time she had no special interest in Christianity, but her words remind one very much of a description of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Her acceptance of that suffering led to a tremendous growth and healing experience. And her acceptance of that suffering is very reminiscent of the words of St. Paul (but in the paraphrase of Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận): "I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions on behalf of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1 : 24).¹⁷

That acceptance of suffering is also perhaps the way we are able to be inside the mind of another in advance (which Ong had said earlier). This is the prerequisite for communication between human beings):

"I have to be somehow inside the mind of the other in advance in order to enter with my message, and he or she must be inside my mind. To formulate anything I must have another person or other persons already in mind (p.177)." At least one way to do this is through the religious process of kenosis (or emptying). It is because we have emptied ourselves that we are able to experience unity (or enosis) with another. Of course, this is one of the classic ways in which Christianity describes our participation in the Body of Christ. As Cardinal Van Thuận puts it: "Passing with Jesus through the Holy Door of the cross,

16 She discusses this in *The Tunnel and the Light: Essential Insights on Living and Dying* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999).

17 As taken from *Testimony of Hope* by Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, translated by Julia Mary Darrenkamp, FSP and Anne Eileen Heffernan, FSP (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2000), p.94.

we can also find the way to heal the wounds of his body...Placing ourselves there in the wound of division together with him, with immense love, we too can be instruments of unity. In his kenosis (emptying) for love, he teaches us the way to enosis (unity)."¹⁸ And what are we also dealing with here but the experience of empathy.¹⁹ This kenosis and enosis is also what happens in the telling of a story (whether in oral or written form). In telling the story the storyteller empties himself completely. In listening, the listener empties himself also. Thus there is the anticipated communication between speaker and other which Ong describes.

Kübler-Ross talks about the fact that human beings have four basic components: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual/intuitive. Our problem is that as we grow according to the ways of the world, we often lose or reject the spiritual/intuitive part. But children, especially children who have experienced great suffering, have very well developed spiritual/intuitive parts. As she says: "These children come to earth to be our teachers. If we do not hear them, if we pretend that they are too young to know about dying, or if we play games with them, then we are the losers, not the children (p.44)." What we call the simplicity of children is this spiritual or intuitive wisdom. Jesus talked of this in the Gospels when he said: "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it (Mk.10 : 15)." This is the simplicity of the parables and of children's literature in either oral or written form.

Another part of our problem is connected with the history of the study of oral poetry, especially historical poetry like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. For quite a long time — centuries — nobody could believe that poems of such length, thousands of lines long, could possibly be oral compositions. Everyone assumed that they had to be based on some sort of written text. But then the problem of oral composition of such epics was studied by Milman Parry and then by Albert B. Lord. What they discovered about Homer's epics was then confirmed by their studies (and recordings) of modern day epics in the Balkans. They discovered that oral epics were possible. What made them possible was the very high frequency (some 90%) of formulaic elements in the poems. In other words, 90% of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* is made up of these verbal equivalents of Lego blocks. And much the same is true of modern oral epics.²⁰

This focus on the work of Parry and Lord, however, distracted or misled people into what constituted

18 Testimony of Hope, p.102.

19 Edith Stein describes how this functions in *On the Problem of Empathy* translated by Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.:ICS Publications, 1989).

20 Ong discusses this in Chapter 2, "The modern discovery of primary oral cultures." The basic texts by Parry and Lord are *The Making of Homeric Verse : The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* edited by Adam Parry (New York:Oxford University Press, 1987) and *The Singer of Tales* by Albert B. Lord (New York:Atheneum, 1970).

oral tradition and oral literature, prose or poetry. It was only with the work of people like Finnegan and Foley that a fuller appreciation of such things as the stories of Mildred Taylor or Richard Feynman becomes possible. And what about the Ender cycle of stories by Orson Scott Card? If one looks at the Ender cycle, that is, the four novels connected directly with Ender Wiggin, one can see many features of oral literature. Ong talks about this. Oral literature is *additive rather than subordinate; aggregative rather than analytic; redundant; conservative; close to the human lifeworld; agonistically toned; empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced; homeostatic; and situational rather than abstract*. If we look at the world of Ender Wiggin, including Battle School, this is what we see. Especially we see a focus on competition. The search for the leader who will command the Hegemony forces against the Formics is very much also like the search for the Messiah we see in the Gospels. The followers of John the Baptist ask Jesus: "Are you the Messiah, or are we to look elsewhere?"

Conclusion

What then are we to say in conclusion? That the term "oral narrative" or "oral literature" has a very wide range of meaning and does not apply only to epics like those of Homer or modern day Balkan singers. Instead, it applies to many of the stories of modern life, including those told by Richard Feynman or Mildred Taylor's father. They become oral children's literature because of the multiple connections and networks that have accompanied the development of modern life and literature: the turning inward of narrative being especially one sign. All of this also occurs because of the empathy and kenosis between storyteller and listener, especially when both are open to the suffering and pain that are so much a part of life.

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