

## WORD BIRTH

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We see them. They are the frozen breath that comes from something more than breathing. We hear them. They are the precise sounds for which we interpret meaning understood by the heart and the mind as something other than linguistics or language—the words we hear are the places they come from. A laughter or a hum, what we hear are variations on these themes. Words are eloquent hums. Rounded, elongated, shortened, stiffened, loosened, open-mouthed and closed, looped, straightened, loud, soft, our humming is our spoken language.

Passing through the channel of the throat, this language of musical notes emerges to feed the audience of the air and everything in it, much as what passes into the throat through the same mouth feeds the hosts within the body—lungs, heart, limbs of muscle and flesh. What is language feeding the air? Recipes and diets are extravagantly designed regarding what goes in through this portal. For what comes out, a certain freedom of spirit is designed, ruled, and given a protected flexibility. Environmental considerations, calorie counts, and toxicity as well as overall nutritional value are present in the unique ways of the spirit and its ability to understand and to convey itself and its kind. The word born, once in the air, is typically and necessarily on wings which take it from and into a variety of specific territories, humming all the way.

Some would say it is this very hum that has brought about these territories to begin with, that this same hum nurtures and causes them to be in each new day, originating their presence. Who can argue with physics? An atom's spin may be silent to our ears but it is symphonic to our bodies and resonant with our lives and language. Religion describes the phenomenon in the concept of the Logos. Music describes similar activity in terms of harmonics. Language is mixed into a history of uses and abuses that include song, prayer, incantation and debate. Movement effects movement.

The axis of the earth lies on a tilt. It is perfect this way. The exact position of the axis in relation to everything with which it pertains is essential to the ways in which these other things appear, the physical conditions they exhibit. Our weather, for instance, is tied in with the positioning of the earth's axis. The tilt of the axis is crucial. Rules, whether physical or grammatical, which permit a democratic flexibility like this promote life. The axis is perfectly imperfect. According to its surrounding coordinates, we cannot say that the axis is rigidly vertical. The axis is on a tilt. In relation to the north/south poles it is a bit to the side, like a feather in earth's cap. Speech, with its everyday spontaneity, often tolerates a similar flexibility. It is when we come to the fixed form of the written word that the word-placer becomes a nervous parent, checking the rules of grammar against the ink-filled spray of the tongue in hand. But, whether an individual is speaking or writing, this

person is positioning words in the environment, is a word-placer, a geometer of thought and linguistic architect. An eloquent repast of relationships among sounds and meanings is the constructed result on which the ear (or eye) feeds, is nurtured, and by which it enters into a new world or home.

Remembrance and creation are the tools of the word-placer and of the word-receiver. When a chef prepares a gingerbread house or a salmon mousse or when a grandmother shapes cookie-cutter treats, their guests recognize the patterns they present. The patterns are familiar. Language functions on the same premise of identity as anything else. Before it can achieve its intended meaning, an audience of any language must be able to identify a word, to interpret the relevance of its positioning in a sentence (space) and in a moment (timing, time). The word-placer accepts this in order to be enabled to create with words.

What kind of line are you feeding (me/on)?" How do you expect me to do that, to stand there, to be in two places at once?" These are expressions which indicate the effects of language. We do eat words, in a manner of speaking. We construct them. We construct sentences with them. And, we create our lives by giving them measurable place and position. Cuttural grunts and groans are as recognizable and effective, within their limits, as languages with many more components and degrees of meaning. They are positioning identifiable sound patterns the hearer has learned to associate with a variety of meanings. In response to a growl or a word, we approach an object, retreat, enter into a specific action. The listener chooses a response. The word-placer can only invite response. Given its place, a word can catch the first light of dawn and direct it, like a standing stone, into the sanctuary of a human being.

Who has the time to listen? Words mark time, but, if we are not still, we can not hear them, can not measure time in the same way, are not in the field where the word would direct the light's ray so the ray spreads across the field, losing its shape, until someone is there to interact with it and give it direction. There are three living objects of language in action—the word, the ray it directs, the listener who assists in allowing it to find its way by giving it a place to go. There are two—the location of the word-placer and the place given by the listener. There is one focus—the word.

Were the world absent of any human other than the word-placer, the direction of words would be similar to the sound of a tree falling where we ask: If no one is there, will it be heard, or even make a sound? Response appears to condition that to which response is given. But, response is not necessarily human. There are other configurations of the elements besides those forming an interacting human response. Sound is received by the human ear as chaos when received on a blank wall and as order in a room of ruffled curtains. Sound effects

topology and topology effects sound. For us, however, the ray flattens and spreads out unless we are there to receive and give it direction for our conscious selves. The curvature of our bodies continues to provide a ruffled curtain making discernible and giving direction to the words we are host to, providing a place for them to go. We are the place words come to if they are to be known as we know them. Without earth-like support systems our words are sounds in an open field. Language as we write and speak it depends upon our presence, our physical body's ability to hear, speak, write, and the physics of earth according to which that body has learned the flexible but contingent rules allowing for these enactments of word movement.

Nevertheless, we are headed for the stars. How might language change? What veils or ruffled curtains will suggest the standing stones making it measurable and so letting it within, an ocean of noises gathered in decibeled jewels in a parabolic cup of hearing and comprehending? Other configurations of atoms will likely fail to interpret the meaning of human words and receive them on the basis of sound alone, with pattern, of course, and the chemistry of breath, but all on a purely physical basis. A tree hears and reverberates to another tree's falling, upon hearing the song of a child, while to the same song a flower and a sapling rise. But what did the child really mean to say when singing the song?

The trees don't read lips or understand sign language. They know by feeling. We know by both feeling and intellectual comprehension. The song might be familiar to a tree where a child has stood year after year repeating this music. Maybe it is even identifiable with the child, but the words of the song are flat and lost to anyone and anything unable to identify them with the meaning for which they were intended and which the child gives them by the nature of this individual's application of them and the child's own intention regarding these words and this music. So it is also with storytelling, which must not just be heard but listened to in order for its story to be completely and effectively received. Storytelling for our species has its favorite origin at the location of firesharing across the terrestrial globe, transcending tribal or international tongues. The written story has art and measure at its heart within these origins, the letters of the alphabet emerging from early forms of counting and illustrating which employed the tools of and described a localized experience of society and the natural world. One can only wonder how language would be adapted to its environment were that environment other than the bush, the desert, or other distinct yet earthly common place.

The growl of a hungry stomach is a primitive form of prayer and supplication, I believe, an expression of condition and need and relationship leading to the respondent activity which will fulfill it and transform its speaker into a nourished and whole creature. If so, is every utterance of the body a suggestion of its needs and relationship to its environment, a prayer of some kind? Perhaps so. There are many kinds of prayers.

oration, whence, by b/f, 'to orate'-  
orator, whence oratorical-oratorio-oratory;  
orant; orison; oracle, oracular;  
orison...oration-, whence E oration-orator...  
a place to pray."

[Origins: *A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*,  
Greenwich House, New York, 1983.]

Orator is the first word-giver and the originator from whom we derive the written word. But, from what does the orator derive its sounds and sound configurations but self? And from what does the writer, or translator, of these sounds derive its patterns but the topological environment of geometric relationships involving this translator in its midst? The activity the orator creates or recreates is the movement on and of the land, it is birds in flight between and among the branches of trees, the shadows cast by trees' branches, the struggles between animals, among those of the orator's own kind and between this kind and other animals. The orator speaks to convey the feeling of the colors of dawn or sunset, their meaning, the positioning of things in the environment, their relationship to each other. This is art, geometry, proportion, number and measure. To describe in sound and alphabet is to give reproductive shape, living shape. Word is born of the creative Logos to give birth to the world created by the Logos. This rebirth conveys (carries and communicates) the world from one perspective, that of the orator, to another perspective, that of the listener.

The hum of creation requires a great deal of quiet, or stillness in order to be heard. This is the principle within religion. According to the science of physics, the hum of creation may be measured, so to speak, in the vibrations of the spin of the ordinary atom composing the table upon which I am writing, and the walls and door, window and window frame of the room in which you are sitting. You don't need to buy a vibrating chair. You're sitting on one. Fortunately, you and your chair and the walls, window, and door of your home are so attuned to each other that life is not one big jalopy. Instead, it is a relatively smooth and secure ride, if only in this regard. These are words going on, a language of hums, unheard, unseen by anyone except your body and the body of your home. Somewhere in your brain a knowledge of these goings-on is lurking. Who dares say that the boat is rocking? Especially when it's not. It may be on the move; still, it's not rocking in any way that will throw you off. You and the boat are rocking together, like a mother and its infant, unalarmed when the woman carries her embryo from the chair to the refrigerator, tremoring the floorboards with each footstep. Pacing the step of the foot, the reach of the hand, the opening of the mouth, the pregnant orator speaks: food for you and food for me.

With the gracefulness and pacing of the orator who delivers language as though embraced in the ideas it conveys, pregnant with anticipatory recognition, there is this speaker's

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