Chapter 1

Introduction

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AS WE ENTER the sixth millennium of recorded civilization, human beings have developed a superabundance of ways of communicating with each other. Some, such as writing, are several millennia old. Most have a much more recent vintage. Printing, the mechanical means whereby written symbols are reproduced in multiple identical copies, is barely five centuries old, despite some medieval and traditional Chinese precursors. The telegraph, invented in the nineteenth century, first allowed humans to communicate with others at a considerable distance. Radio, at the start of the last century, extended that technical immediacy by allowing the human voice to be carried, wireless, across great distances. Television and film reinserted the represented physical presence of the speaking human, and their modern successors, the live videophone and videoconference, have facilitated meetings of individuals as far apart as Canada and Australia. More mundane instruments, unheard of twenty years ago, now fill our personal informational universes: cell phones that allow us to converse at a distance but no longer tied to a fixed instrument in our homes or offices; and pocket organizers that ‘beam’ information to each other. Above all, email has become a matter of routine for hundreds of thousands of users. (It is worth remarking that the present book – perhaps ironically given its subject – has been co-edited by two historians who at the time it went to press had not, in fact, ever met face to face, and that virtually all of their interaction, including exchanges of the text of this introduction, occurred through email and the occasional phone call.)

In the light of all this, it is easy to overlook the fundamental importance of speech, the oldest form of intelligent communication, and of its reception-end counterpart, hearing. Although modern social theorists decry the disintegration of society, or of the family, and have argued that we are becoming atomized individuals without enduring social bonds, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. Conversation, the subject of analysis by social scientists,¹ is now much less formal than it was a hundred or even fifty years

ago, and somewhat less subject to class boundaries. It is also considerably less structured by formal education and manuals for aristocratic and gentle behaviour than was the case for our more remote, early modern, ancestors.² We speak freely with our co-workers, our families, our friends, and to the dozens of people with whom we interact, however casually, over the course of our lives. Our topics range from the weather to politics, work priorities, gossip, our own personal lives, religion, entertainment and even once taboo subjects such as sex. The electronic and mechanical implements that we have devised to allow us to project our verbalized thoughts at others not physically in view have aided this activity, but not replaced it. One can imagine a fictional 'Y2K' situation in which all electronic forms of communication ceased to function. This would limit the choice of persons with whom we could speak to those in proximate view, but it would not affect our choice of topics or our ability to conceive of an idea and then express it.

It is not a coincidence that the twentieth century, which witnessed remarkable changes in the modes of communication, was also the century that developed theories and models for explaining how it works. These have taken a number of forms, across a number of disciplines, several of which have approached communication principally through the theoretical, philosophical, and empirical study of language. Analytical philosophy, beginning with Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein, first developed a modern logic for the representation and linguistic denotation of 'ideas', thereby setting off a 'linguistic turn' decades before that phrase became associated with deconstruction and postmodernism. Less than a century later, philosophy of language remains a vitally important if difficult branch of the discipline and has helped to spawn newer areas of study such as cognitive science.³ Linguistics proper, which has historical origins in the study of family relationships among words, through comparative philology, has borrowed from the philosophers of language and also from psychology and anthropology. This may be seen, for instance, in the work of the American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, whose 'linguistic determinism' postulated that human thought was invariably constrained by the cultural categories available in a particular language.⁴ In its structuralist form, descending from Saussure via Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss and literary structuralism, linguistics examines the relations not only of words, but also of grammatical structures. Noam Chomsky has famously posited an innate human ability to create a 'generative grammar' (cohering to a 'universal grammar') of which any given individual will be unaware but which enables his or her native-language fluency. A widely read recent adaptation of Chomsky's views by Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist, has gone so far as to postulate a 'language instinct'.⁵ From a different perspective, semiotics, the study of sign systems or modes of signification, has for many years ranged beyond language proper and into the analysis of ritual and popular culture. It now

routinely examines non-verbal ways of communicating such as dress, gesture, visual art, and performance.⁶

It would seem that the more means we have developed to communicate with one another, the greater our urge ‘as reflective, not merely communicative, animals’ to understand how and why such communications take place. Perhaps the most ambitious and inclusive discipline is a comparatively new one, the sometimes amorphous but immensely popular field of ‘communication studies’.⁷ The Canadian historian Harold Innis (1894–1952), for instance, saw communications technology as the key to understanding world history. Innis linked different communicative processes and media (which included transportation networks) to social evolution, and in particular to the development of political régimes. Perhaps his most interesting insight was to point to the inherent ‘bias’ in any communications system toward either time or space. Thus, stone tablets and hieroglyphs had an inherent temporal bias, since they could endure many generations, even millennia. They were, however, not easily transportable and therefore poorly disposed spatially, which made them good instruments of central record-keeping but not well-suited for governing geographically large territories. In contrast, papyrus and paper had (and have) a spatial bias. Lightweight, they are easily transportable over great distances, but their very lightness makes them temporally ephemeral.⁸

Innis’s views, like those of his younger and more famous contemporary Marshall McLuhan (to whom we will return), rely on an evolutionary model of technological progress that envisions communicative change as not simply forward-moving, but also constitutive of other types of change, social, political, economic, and even cognitive. In one form or another, this perspective has until relatively recently underpinned most accounts of media transformation in various historical periods. Thus for Innis communications advances ‘caused’ (in the sense of providing the necessary and sufficient conditions for) most significant political changes, though the direction of these developments was neither invariably clear nor unambiguously progressive. The advent of papyrus, for example, had a democratizing effect on knowledge in ancient Egypt by spreading information afar and beyond a priestly class. Much later, a further technological advance, the printing press, became (Innis here quotes G. M. Trevelyan) ‘a battering-ram to bring abbeys and castles crashing to the ground’. Innis’s work was filled with unresolved contradictions and puzzles such as this: at the same period that print was supposedly engineering the downfall of monastic and aristocratic medieval power, Innis suggested, Tudor censorship also restricted its use. This tension in turn facilitated a widespread contemporary interest in drama ‘and the flowering of the oral tradition in the plays of Shakespeare’.⁹

ORALITY AND LITERACY

Within the broader study of communications, the relationship of the spoken word to other media has always been complex and problematic. As argued in Michael Hobart and Zachary Schiffman's recent survey, *Information Ages*, what we say has never been divorceable from the means by which we say it, or from the forms within which we give it expression, though the medium is not (*pace* McLuhan) equivalent to the message.¹⁰ Plato, in the fourth century BC, recognized the impact of the Greek alphabet and of writing. He warned of the corrosive effect that the commitment of thought to inscriptions would have on face-to-face communication, and particularly on memory, thitherto the basic means of recording something said and replicating it for others not present at the original conversation. Nearly two millennia later Renaissance thinkers such as Erasmus, though they made great use of print, expressed similar concerns.¹¹ Rousseau, building on two centuries of European encounters with largely non-literate New World peoples, romanticized oral culture in his *Essay on the Origin of Language*, becoming perhaps the first to conceive of the oral-literate transition as an intellectual and cultural problem. This so-called 'privileging' of orality as a more natural and primary human form of communication has been a recurrent theme in Western thought, as one of its most famous critics, Jacques Derrida, pointed out many years ago.¹² There is little doubt that the ability to write and read opens communicative worlds for individuals and that it makes reliance on memory for some, though not all, tasks redundant. With each new innovation in human communications, there have been those who have regretted the passing, perceived or real, of old ways, and those who have anticipated social consequences, for good or ill.

The consideration of writing and its relations with speech present one set of problems for all periods prior to the late fifteenth century. These are by now relatively well defined, and some remarkably subtle work has been done in recent years on medieval communication. Brian Stock's important investigation of the creation of literary communities in the High Middle Ages is one example and Michael Clanchy's erudite study of the transition in post-Conquest England 'from memory to written record' another.¹³ From the mid-fifteenth century, however, the issues take on a different level of complexity principally owing to the introduction of another variable in the form of a new medium: mass-producible typographic print. Early modern Europe faced a communications change that was arguably as revolutionary as the one that we have lived through in very recent years.

The impact of movable type on early modern culture has been much debated. Two scholars writing principally in the 1950s and 1960s, Marshall McLuhan and his one-time graduate student Walter J. Ong, SJ argued in

different ways that the press fundamentally changed the ways in which humans communicated, and each tended to decry the results. McLuhan made the press, along with later electronic media, especially television (he did not live into the age of the Internet), the twin foci of an elliptical critique of modern culture. His work, written in a deliberately idiosyncratic and often impenetrable 'mosaic' style that has irritated many of his readers, has nevertheless exercised a continued influence on modern communications research.

McLuhan's own reputation has ebbed and flowed since the 1960s, and he is alternatively revered as a prophet of the Information Age, and even of postmodernism, or decried as superfluous manufacturer of 'self-destructing clichés'.¹⁴ Ong, in contrast, has retained a higher credibility, principally owing to his impressive credentials as a historical scholar and the relative clarity of his thought. Ong began with a specific period, the late sixteenth century, and a particular genre. He examined the impact of printed logic textbooks, especially those of the French pedagogue Petrus Ramus, in support of a broader argument. That argument may be summarized thus: that during the later Renaissance knowledge first became cognitively 'spatialized' (Innis's earlier view on the geographically spatial bias in paper is not intended here), and conceived of as something primarily to be found 'contained' in the physical location of a book, rather than communicated dialogically. Ong's analysis of the flood of Ramist books on logic and rhetoric (the first major reform to Aristotelian systems in nearly two millennia) suggested that they considerably simplified the teaching of those subjects, virtually reducing rhetoric to a subcategory of logic. This was not necessarily to the gain of either discipline, or of their subsequent generations of students.¹⁵ The re-orientation to spatialized knowledge diminished the age-old primacy of the human voice, 'the primordial medium of communication, the basis of all dialogue'.¹⁶ A corollary of Ong's specific conclusion about Ramism, still cast in a McLuhanesque mould, was another, more wide-ranging, thesis: that Western culture had fundamentally shifted at the Renaissance from a primarily auditory perceptual and cognitive mode to a primarily visual one, 'and that the vehicle for this shift was the invention of printing'.¹⁷ The interactions between the spoken and the not merely written but printed word are a major connecting theme of several of the chapters below.

Less speculative treatments than Ong's or McLuhan's abound.¹⁸ Indeed, it is fair to say that since the Second World War, considerations of the impact of print in particular have tended to dominate treatments of communications change in past times, especially in the first two centuries or so of printing's history. (The parallel but not identical relationship between speech and writing has been given comparatively less attention, and is often subsumed.) Innis himself had already made print the *terminus ad quem* of his *Empire and Communications* in 1950, and general studies by S. H. Steinberg and by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin followed within a decade.¹⁹ For the past twenty

years, however, much of the discussion has occurred in the spreading wake of Elizabeth Eisenstein's major study, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*.²⁰ This has sometimes been criticized for overemphasizing both the impact of the press and the objectivity or fixity of the 'print culture' it is supposed to have created.²¹ Nevertheless, Eisenstein's book has had the merit of reviving discussion of issues such as the past relations of speech, writing and print during a modern cultural moment of even more profound significance for early twenty-first-century humans. According to Eisenstein, the impact of print can be measured in a variety of ways, not least in its enabling of the Reformation. Luther's revolt was more successful than that of previous, medieval, heretics because he was literally able to get The Word out, in the form of his German Bible and of hundreds of polemical and pastoral tracts. Protestant countries moved from a religion based on ritual and auditory communication with the divine through a priest, to one based on private study and devotion focused on a personal experience of the Gospel.²² In the two centuries thereafter, print's influence spread further, creating the international learned community that was able to share experimental and mathematical knowledge (in addition to more conventional textual scholarship). It thereby facilitated the second great intellectual phenomenon of the post-Renaissance era, the Scientific Revolution.

The study of the impact of print has been renewed with vigour since Eisenstein's book first appeared.²³ During this time, the subject has to a considerable degree converged with the related histories of the book, of libraries, of reading, and of popular mentalities.²⁴ Select older treatments such as that by Febvre and Martin have become available in translation, along with the more recent work of Roger Chartier, the best-known of the current generation of French scholars. Chartier, like the late Robert Mandrou, has also been interested in the profound influence of printing on popular culture, as a written world associated with the literate elite collided with the oral and mnemonic world of the vast majority of the population who could neither read nor write.²⁵ British and North American scholars have also addressed these matters, and while the impact of print is conceded to have been immense, it has also been qualified in some important respects. In particular, the notion of a print culture that overwhelmed and eventually eradicated the oral ritualistic culture of the masses has been fairly convincingly undermined as far too simplistic. The spread of print was neither rapid, nor universal, outside of major commercial and political centres. Indeed, it did not completely 'supplant' writing as the vehicle of choice for elite literary communication, since 'scribal publication' retained a high social status among the affluent and the educated throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁶ Even after the Copyright Act of 1710, Margaret Ezell has suggested, script remained 'a competitive mode of transmitting and reading'.²⁷ Both writing and print also retained some of the dialogic quality of speech in the

sense that texts in both forms were routinely annotated and revised by readers.²⁸

How many people were reading, and in what ways, has in itself proved very difficult to assess with much precision. European literacy was indeed increasing (much more rapidly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than in the sixteenth), but both the rate of that change and what exactly was changing remain obscure, a problem to which we shall return in greater detail below. For now it is sufficient to note that the once-accepted measure of literacy, ability to sign one's name, is no longer regarded as a reliable index of reading ability, much less of full literacy; conversely, those who could not write at all were sometimes able to read.²⁹ The reformers who sought to spread Protestant piety and doctrine, though they stressed the virtues of education as an aid to spirituality, nonetheless recognized that the vast majority of the population that they needed to win over was illiterate in whole or part, and they quite reasonably compensated for this in various ways. Use of vivid pictorial images by reformers, ably demonstrated by the late Robert Scribner for Germany, and more recently by Tessa Watt, Margaret Spufford, Margaret Aston, Ian Green and others for the English Reformation, enabled the evangelical message to penetrate even the humblest households. Shared reading, in familial or devotional settings, provided the means to use the spoken word to bring the otherwise inaccessible printed page to the attention of those who could not read it on their own.³⁰ Even among those who could read with facility there are important distinctions to be made. There were those, for instance, who could read one style of typeface more easily than another.³¹ A significant subset of the fully literate was 'unlettered' in the classical sense of being unable to read Latin (much less other languages.) This too is an important division in an era when literary writing was both highly allusive and often linguistically hybrid, English texts still including extensive passages and quotations in Latin and other languages.

It is not very helpful to cling firmly to the technological progressivism of the Innis-McLuhan school, for three reasons. The first is that the cognitive superiority or even modernity of one medium (writing) relative to others (such as speech) has not been satisfactorily established in any cross-cultural context, a point made most sharply by Ruth Finnegan.³² Secondly, the tripartite relationship between speech, writing and print over the long early modern period from 1500 to 1850 – in technological terms, the age of the hand-operated press – is different from the equivalent relationship since then. (This in turn has now been further complicated by very recent developments such as the Internet, cellular phones and satellite television.) Thirdly, and perhaps most important, this same relationship can be shown to have altered and evolved dynamically at various times, in different regions, and within quite distinct social contexts – even within the era covered by the present book.

We should not, therefore, spend much more effort in re-'proving' (or even

reproving) the notion of a grand cultural shift – whether conceived of as progress or decline scarcely matters – from ‘spoken/auditory’ to ‘written/visual’. Rather, we need to attend more closely to the ways in which writing or printing, either separately or in combination, can be said to have modified, marginalized or reinforced different aspects of oral culture. This process was not one-way, since the spoken word itself continued to inform and shape what was put into script or print. Ong himself acknowledged this in postulating a kind of ‘secondary orality’ detectable in literate societies, and he identified a good example of this in the form of an ‘oral residue’ in Tudor prose.³³ Above all, though there were unquestionably arenas of conflict between spoken and written, such as the law and custom, these are not usefully generalized into a polarized relationship which sees orality and literacy as Manichaean opposites. As Finnegan has aptly remarked, ‘orality’ and ‘literacy’ are not two separate and independent things. Nor (to put it more concretely) are oral and written modes two mutually exclusive and opposed processes for representing and communicating information.³⁴ Harvey J. Graff has similarly warned that ‘the oral and the literate, like the written and the printed, need not be opposed as simple choices’.³⁵ We are much better off conceiving of overlapping spheres of the oral and the literate, within which many of a culture’s communicative activities occur in different ways depending upon a variety of factors such as time, location, purpose, and the identity and status of the communicators. This is a less orderly and simple model, but it permits us to recognize differences between the forms of communication without losing sight of their similarities, their connections, or their historical mutability.³⁶ Within the period covered by this book, the spoken and the written or printed interacted in a complex and often circular fashion. This is not to argue that oral culture was utterly immune to the effects of writing and print, which would be foolish, or that some aspects of it were not seriously altered, marginalized or even eliminated. It is simply to acknowledge that instances of this were particular, rather than general, and that other aspects of orality adapted to a more literate environment and even thrived on writing and print, which were in turn affected in style and content by speech. In other words, the ever-increasing presence of the written or the printed word in early modern Britain cannot be assumed to have occurred invariably at the expense of or in opposition to the spoken word.

RE-CAPTURING ORAL CULTURE

The modern study of oral culture has developed quite independently of the study of print culture, but the collision of the spoken and the graphic (whether alphabetical or iconographic) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has marked out some lines of mutual influence and of tension. As noted above,

there has been a tendency since Plato to valorize the oral as more immediate and personal than the written, at the same time that the more 'modern' character of written communication is conceded. (The result has sometimes been a kind of 'world-we-have-lost' nostalgia for an imagined pure orality, supposedly shared by past times and by more recent primitive societies.) Social anthropologists, Claude Lévi-Strauss in particular, have demonstrated how aspects of culture, especially myth, are transmitted in predominantly oral 'traditional' societies.³⁷ Among the best-known studies, that of Milman Parry and Albert Lord of the poetic recitations of Slavic guslars cast new light on a much older problem, the oral composition of the Homeric poems, to which they exhibited some similarities.³⁸ The implications of this for ancient literacy were more fully worked out by Eric Havelock in his classic *Preface to Plato*, which examined the transition from orality to literacy in ancient Athens.³⁹ There are differences in the various treatments, but a common presumption is that literacy so fundamentally restructures human thought as to fossilize even an orally based subculture, turning the traditional songs of Lord's guslars, for example, away from a performative and creative process into a more straightforwardly text-emulating and recitative one.⁴⁰

Historians have approached the problem of orality from a slightly different angle. We are naturally inclined to favour the document, even while recognizing that it, too, is incomplete, partial and selective.⁴¹ Given this long-standing preference, we have to face the inescapable fact that societies without writing (or non-literate segments of the population within partially literate societies) do not by definition generate written records that can provide local evidence of that culture's past life, including its communicative aspects. How then to verify historical information derived from the traditions preserved by such a society? Africanists such as Jan Vansina and David Henige have addressed such issues directly, working out the structure and typology of oral traditions and offering methods by which external evidence (colonial records, or the written records of neighbouring and more highly literate indigenous societies) can be used to verify such fundamental historical details as chronology and genealogy. At the same time, they have also been careful to admit some of the problems with using oral traditions as a source equivalent to a written document (which leaves aside the issue of the degree to which documents themselves are inherently more trustworthy). These problems include 'telescoping', or the reduction/conflation of generations to fit a preconceived time scheme; the jettisoning of unwanted or undesirable forebears, and of those for whom no present trace of influence continues to exist in the present; and, of most significance for the present book, the idea of 'feedback'. This last phenomenon occurs when an oral culture comes into contact with a written one, and apparently pure mnemonic recitations are tainted with the written records generated by an alien, often colonizing, society. Vansina's and Henige's studies, among others, have also demolished

nineteenth-century romantic notions of the superiority and inherent reliability of the oral tradition (the conceptual background for which is captured in Nicholas Hudson's essay in Chapter 8 of this volume) while nevertheless preserving the essence of the position that it is a usable and critically testable type of source.⁴² Others have been less cautious. The fate of the African-American popular novelist and journalist Alex Haley stands as a permanent warning against uncritical acceptance of tradition as if it were a literal and verbatim genealogical and historical record – a written record minus the writing. Haley's *Roots*, a mid-1970s' bestseller and television series, appears to have rested on an enthusiastic search for his ancestral origins, sufficiently well advertised in advance that he was able to hear what he wished to hear from a well-prepared Gambian story-teller.⁴³

Much additional scholarly work has appeared in the past thirty years on various forms of African oral literature and on its griots, or traditional performers.⁴⁴ Finnegan in particular has drawn a distinction between traditional (trans-generational) oral literature and that which is non-traditional. She makes the point that there are many examples of cultures with precisely memorized oral literature, composed by one group (for instance medieval Irish poets or French troubadours) and recited by another. In contrast, oral traditional literature rarely passes down verbatim over several generations, as if it were simply a memorized historical record repeated *viva voce* from the aged to the young. Nor, she suggests, does it arise from a 'people' as a generalized voice of the volk. Rather, it generally consists of a central story or message sequentially improvised upon by a series of individual performers, often in response to time-specific social situations, and highly dependent on the performer's choice of language, use of intonation and gesture – some of these, indeed, features that cannot be adequately captured in a transcribed version.⁴⁵

The sorts of problems that the Africanists have identified can guide, *mutatis mutandis*, our treatment of other cultures. Early modern European countries were communicatively hybrid, with widely varying levels of literacy, and geographically uneven penetration by the written or printed word. We as their modern historians are highly dependent on written sources in our efforts to gain access to oral culture. Further problems arise. These written sources have nearly always been bequeathed us by privileged observers who were themselves geographically external to the oral culture on which they were reporting – antiquaries and travel writers for instance. Even more frequently, they stood 'above' that culture, socially and intellectually, however interested and sympathetic they may have been (and in many cases they were not). Yet these written testimonies are often our only means to recapture traditions, riddles, rituals and proverbs which may or may not have been purely oral in their own time, but which have now disappeared or been altered beyond recognition. The authors of another recent work on orality,

who range all the way from Homer to African-American rap artists, invite their reader to step 'through the medium of print' into the 'oral world' (the singular is significant) of 'Homer, the rapper, the orators of Madagascar and Samoa, the story-tellers of Africa and the Caribbean and many, many more'.⁴⁶ The notion that all these cultures constitute a single 'oral world' is itself troublesome. So is the suggestion that we can gain direct entry to such a world through literary and archival sources. In fact, the oral worlds of the past, like other locations in that 'foreign country' and perhaps even more so, cannot be entered, at least not directly. We cannot, to paraphrase Ranke, restore their reality *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. We can, however, study the traces of that reality, the reflected remnants of those worlds, through other means, and even empathetically imagine how those worlds functioned, so long as we also recognize the indirect nature of our evidence.

ORAL CULTURE, ORAL COMMUNICATION AND ORAL TRADITION

The present volume investigates the nature of oral culture in Britain between the early sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. The authors recognize that the singular 'culture' is indeed a construct, and that it is probably more accurate to talk of distinct oral cultures, not least because some very different regions and linguistic environments are involved. Nevertheless, we hope to point to some common features that justify the theoretical use of the singular, with the caution that it is virtually never monolithic in practice.

Of what does an oral culture consist? Jack Goody has recently defined it as 'a culture without writing'. Within an early modern British setting this definition is too exclusionary given the increasing number of ways in which speech and writing could come into contact, ways which increased as we move ahead within the period. But Goody immediately points out that writing does not supplant oral communication; instead it provides it with another channel, 'substituting for the oral only in certain contexts but at the same time developing new ones'.⁴⁷ It is perhaps best not to define oral culture as an identifiable social unit (that is, as an oral society). Used in that sense, Britain more realistically consisted of a number of subcultures since at no time in the early modern period was an entire region of Britain, of any significant size, utterly untouched by writing, except perhaps in the most remote and outlying regions of the Scottish Highlands and Western Isles. We prefer to define oral culture as a collection of communicative habits and practices, premised on primarily face-to-face *viva voce* communication, and occurring within a variety of contexts. These habits and practices were more or less capable of adapting to encounters with the written or printed word.

In the case of early modern Britain, they were lived through in different ways, at different times, in different parts of the land. They were unquestionably

subject to social differentiation. But if 'literate' can no longer be taken as a synonym for elite (or even educated), then 'oral' is emphatically not coterminous with popular or marginal. Speech figured in every human being's life, from kings and archbishops down to minstrels and vagrants, and for every human being it was the most routine and commonplace, as well as most powerful, instrument of communication. To be sure, certain aspects of speech were increasingly seen by the educated as inappropriate, inelegant, or rude. But others ran with great freedom between speech and writing, writing and print, print and speech, as well as up and down social strata. Nor was the appropriation of oral elements of culture unidirectional. University-educated figures such as James Howell could collect popular proverbs into printed editions,⁴⁸ or into private commonplace books. Conversely, literate culture frequently doubled back into speech: the origins of many Tudor popular tales about the past can be found in late medieval literary sources, while biblical episodes repeated through Scripture-based sermons exemplify the appropriation by oral culture of a literary form.

It may be helpful at this point to differentiate clearly between oral 'culture', the more general term, and other phrases, such as 'oral tradition' and 'oral communication', which are associated with but not equivalent to that culture. All of these represent a quality that can be called 'orality', in the sense that the spoken word features prominently and even dominantly. But there are distinctions to be drawn. Oral culture we have already here defined, in a sense, as the aggregate of those things which are communicated orally in a specific social, linguistic and geographic setting, together with the vocal means by which they are communicated. Oral communication is thus one aspect of an oral culture, that which involves the method of transmission. Simply put, it is a specific act, occurring within a social setting (whether predominantly illiterate, overwhelmingly literate, or hybrid). That act routinely occurs in the form of a verbal exchange between individuals, or between individuals and groups, relying principally on the human voice. (The 'principally' is important since oral communication could and did frequently occur around or with the help of written and printed aids, for instance in the preaching of sermons from notes, or in the kind of reading aloud described below in Chapter 4.) Oral Tradition in the singular, the subject of several of the essays herein, is in turn a subspecies of oral communication – the means by which a primarily or exclusively oral story, song, or saying is transmitted from one generation to the next. At the same time, one may also speak of oral traditions in the plural, which are properly considered as the narratable individual stories, songs, sayings which are to be so transmitted via 'Tradition'. A particular story about a local monument and its origins thus makes up a 'tradition' which is orally *communicated* among contemporaries but also orally *transmitted*, via Tradition (the trans-generational vehicle) to listeners yet unborn.⁴⁹

The authors of the essays in this book use all of these terms at different points. All are part of oral culture, along with many other elements that are in other ways ‘traditional’ (that is, not written down but repeated across many generations) such as local ritual and custom as described below in Bob Bushaway’s essay (Chapter 9). During this period oral tradition remained a vehicle of the utmost importance in the transmission of received wisdom, the creation of cultural capital and the dissemination of knowledge. But other, non-traditional forms of oral communication were equally important. This was an environment in which the ability to read was partially and unevenly dispersed throughout society, the ability to write even more circumscribed, and the capacity to print what one had written still slow and expensive. The spoken word necessarily remained the first and in many cases the only means by which the vast majority of people at all social levels exchanged ideas and acquired information.

VERNACULAR CULTURES

Oral cultures are by their very nature highly variegated. The myriad diverse communities which made up England, Scotland and Wales each supported their own quite particular vernacular repertoires which served to divide up all three countries into a series of palpably distinct cultural environments and, in each case, to cut across any sense of common national identity. Linguistically there was a high degree of variety not only between the constituent parts of the British Isles but also within them. In these, as in all other societies, the very forms of the spoken word, the vocabularies and phraseologies in which ideas were expressed, provide the most immediate and graphical insight into the mental world of their diverse inhabitants.⁵⁰

In Scotland, the English language was already long established in the Lowlands by the sixteenth century, although many people spoke Scots, or ‘Scottis’, a strain which would have been unintelligible to most people south of the Tweed. Meanwhile, Gaelic, or ‘Erse’, continued to thrive in the Highlands and Islands, while traces of it lingered in Lowland Aberdeenshire and endured in Galloway into the seventeenth century. Communities which straddled the Highland line became bilingual or were even rent in two on linguistic grounds. James IV (1488–1513) is said to have claimed that the inhabitants of Nairn were thus divided by mutual incomprehension; almost three centuries later it would be here that Boswell and Johnson first heard the Gaelic language on their travels through Scotland. In 1655 Thomas Tucker could report from Inverness, not far away, that the town was split between Gaelic speakers and English ‘such that one halfe of the people understand not one another’. Similarly, when the English antiquary, Thomas Kirke, encountered the folk of border regions between Highland and Lowlands in

the 1670s he found them to 'speak both' languages but to be 'so currish, that if a stranger enquire the way in English, they will certainly answer in Erst, and find no other language than what is inforc'd from them with a cudgel'. A century later Thomas Pennant found that of the ten parishes in Caithness 'only the four that lie s[outh] e[ast] speak Erse; all the others speak English'.⁵¹

Nor were these Gaelic, Scots and English regions by any means monolithic in the variety of the tongue which they spoke. At the end of the seventeenth century, the Reverend James Kirkwood, a native of Dunbar in East Lothian, observed of the Lowlands that 'every countrey has its own accent and mode of speech; by which ordinarily they know one an other'. As for the Highlanders, they too had many and various dialects of Gaelic which instantly identified the origin of their speakers and abruptly made them unintelligible to others. As Kirkwood put it: 'Of their language there are several dialects, which make them to one another partly unintelligible, partly ridiculous. The purest dialect is thought to be in Cantyre, Argyle and the Western Isles. Where they confine with the Lowlands they speak most corrupt. They can discern the countrey one is of by his dialect'.⁵²

In Wales the Welsh language was the sole tongue of the vast majority of the people throughout this period and beyond. Following the Henrician legislation of 1536–43 which secured political union with England, English became the normal medium of administration and law throughout the principality, a process traced by Richard Suggett and Eryn White in Chapter 2. But although the imported language was quickly adopted by the anglicizing Welsh gentry and made some progress among the mercantile and professional classes in those border regions with strong economic links to England, it achieved few inroads elsewhere. Only in south Pembrokeshire, the Gower peninsula and the Vale of Glamorgan, where English had been planted well before this period, was there any element of linguistic and cultural divide. At the end of Elizabeth's reign, George Owen could report from Pembrokeshire that 'half the shire is mere English, both in speech and manners', while 'the other half speaks the Welsh tongue'. This 'diversity of speech breeds some inconveniences', he admitted, 'so that often times is found at the assizes that in a jury of twelve men there will be one half that cannot understand the other's words ...'. Elsewhere, however, monoglot Welsh speakers were in the overwhelming majority. In 1700, 90 per cent of Welsh people spoke only their mother tongue and the figure was still as high as 70 per cent in 1800. The nature of that Welsh also varied enormously across the country, however. The almanac writer and bookseller, Thomas Jones, could declare in the late seventeenth century that there was a closer affinity between Welsh and Hebrew than there was between the Welsh spoken in Gwynedd and that in south Wales. Meanwhile it was a lament from the sixteenth century onwards that encroaching English influence in the Welsh border regions was hybridizing the speech of local people.⁵³

On the English side of the border some of the same influences were felt. Bilingual Welsh and English speakers could be found sprinkled throughout the western regions of abutting counties. 'About the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's time', reflected John Aubrey in the later seventeenth century, 'Welsh was spoken in Hereford and I believe 100 years before that as far as the Severn.' In the 1690s the great Celtic scholar, Edward Lhwyd, intended to visit all those parishes 'in Shropshire and Herefordshire where the [Welsh] language and ancient names of places are still retained'. At the same time, the yeoman Richard Gough knew several neighbours in Myddle who 'could speake neither good Welsh nor good English'. Further south, in Cornwall, meanwhile, the Cornish language stubbornly remained alive among an ever dwindling minority, although by the end of the sixteenth century the local antiquary Richard Carew was already reporting that English had driven it to 'the vtter-most skirts of the shire. Most of the inhabitants can no word of Cornish; but very few are ignorant of the English ...'. Aubrey later thought that in Cornwall, as in south Wales, English 'weares out more and more ... especially since the civill warres', but he had still heard of 'a woman towards the farther end of Cornwall that could speak no English'.⁵⁴

Throughout the rest of England a more or less common literary language had developed during the fifteenth century, while something like a standard spoken vernacular seems to have been emerging simultaneously, at least among some sections of society. Nevertheless, pronounced regional and local differences in speech would prove enduring, and marked variations in vocabulary and pronunciation created a patchwork of often quite small and highly distinct 'speech communities' across the nation. The size of such communities was estimated in 1551 by the orthoepist John Hart who reported that if people 'heare their neyghbour borne of their next citie, or d[w]elling not past one or two dais [j]orney from them, speaking some other word then is (in that place) emongest them used, yt so litell contenteth their eare, that ... they seem the stranger were therfore worthie to be derided, and skorned'. When the pronunciation of English was investigated more systematically in the nineteenth century it was discovered that England and Lowland Scotland could be divided into forty-two dialect districts, twenty one of which could further be divided into varieties and eight of these into subvarieties.⁵⁵

It is scarcely legitimate to think in terms of a national spoken tongue in any one of Scotland, Wales or England in the early modern period, therefore, still less of a vernacular common to Britain as a whole. Even within the ostensibly homogeneous linguistic zone of England, communication could be a real problem between natives of different regions and localities. Daniel Defoe formed the judgement, as he toured the country at the beginning of the eighteenth century, that the dialects of the common people were as distinct as the patois spoken in provincial France. Two generations later the agricultural writer William Marshall was to find the observation no less valid.⁵⁶

The linguistic variety within Britain was only the most fundamental and powerful expression of the richly variegated oral traditions which existed both between and within the many regional zones of England, Wales and Scotland. In addition, every speech community also contained its own distinctive repertoire of sayings and phrases, of stories and songs, myths and legends, which contributed to its parochial mentality and fabricated its distinct identity. In the case of proverbs, for example, 'it is well known', wrote one commentator about 1640, 'that everie nation hath the[ir] own proverbs and proverbiall speeches, yea everie shire or part of a nation hath some proverbiall speeches, which others hath not'.⁵⁷ Such expressions of the local vernacular culture were rarely recorded in detail: rather, they were the intellectual inheritance of generations of people who never wrote down their thoughts or expressions for posterity nor were such things usually deemed worthy of transcription by others. But like the language itself, these traditions formed a fundamental part of the perceptions and consciousness of their speakers. They were the cultural building blocks through which the sense of belonging to a particular locality or 'country' was fashioned and sustained.⁵⁸

These distinctive 'countries', or agrarian *pays*, which disaggregated Britain's regions were as crucial in the construction of cultural identity as they were in the determination of economic organization and social structure. Many such geographical areas could be located, some of them retaining elements of particularity to this day. One such was the district of Hallamshire, around Sheffield, where in the early nineteenth century Joseph Hunter thought that 'rustic and mechanic' people were still speaking the language of Shakespeare and Jonson.⁵⁹ Distinctive countries were equally constituted of Redesdale and North Tynedale in the western highlands of Northumberland, the Wealden areas of Kent and east Sussex, or the cloth districts of the Stour valley along the Essex-Suffolk border, among myriad others.⁶⁰ Or consider the vale of Berkeley in Gloucestershire. In 1639 the estate steward, John Smyth of Nibley, penned a description of this clearly demarcated agrarian *pays*, bounded by solid natural barriers in the form of the River Severn to the west and the Cotswold edge to the east, and tributaries of the Severn marking the border with Somerset to the south and the vale of Gloucester to the north. What defined the area and its people most readily and most graphically was their particular vernacular culture, their 'certaine words, proverbs and phrases of speach' which they believed 'to bee not only native but confined the soile bounds and territory thereof; which if found in the mouthes of any forraigners, wee deeme them as leapt over our wall, or as strayed from their proper pasture and dwelling place'.⁶¹

Another vivid example of such a 'country', defined not only in terms of topography and economy, but also by ways of life and modes of expression, was the north-east of Scotland. This was a distinctive border region on the cusp of Highlands and Lowlands, bounded by the sea to the north and east,

by the Grampian mountains to the south and the Cairngorms to the west. This geographical isolation created a distinct cultural environment and bred a particular character among the inhabitants; it also nurtured and preserved a quite unique set of oral traditions over many centuries. The people spoke a dialect known locally as 'the Doric', a form of Scots-English elaborated by borrowings from Gaelic as well as the Scandinavian and other northern European languages, reflecting the nature of the region's contact with outsiders over centuries. Until the Victorian period, literacy levels in the region were very low and it produced little in the way of imaginative prose or written lyric poetry. But it fostered instead a rich tradition of folklore and folktale, of proverbial wisdom and vernacular forms, and above all it afforded the principal fount of Scottish balladry.⁶²

In the early eighteenth century Anne Farquharson lived in the pastoral countryside of Braemar in Aberdeenshire. There she was said to have 'spent her days ... among flocks and herds at Allan-a-quoich' and thanks to 'a tenacious memory' she learned and 'retained all the songs she had heard the nurses and old women sing in that neighbourhood'. Later she moved to Old Aberdeen and there in the early 1750s she passed on 'her songs and tales of chivalry and love' to her young niece, Anna Gordon. Anna probably learned these ballads before she could read and write and even when, much later in life, she came to set them down, she did so 'entirely from recollection', for, she confessed, 'I never saw one of them in print or manuscript; but I learned them all when a child, by hearing them sung by ... Mrs Farquharson, by my own mother, and an old maid-servant that had long been in the family'. In total, Anna Gordon, or Mrs Brown as she became, wrote out thirty-three ballad stories in a variety of versions before her death in 1810 and they were later to provide some of the finest examples in Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-98).⁶³

Mrs Brown exemplified and bore witness to the important role played by women in the transmission of so much oral tradition. Within the home 'nurses and old women' were responsible for the dissemination of stories and songs, nursery rhymes and word games which could bear little or no relation to the world of literature and print. Children learned these things by heart and transmitted them, in turn, without reference to text. When elements of nursery lore began to be enshrined in print in the eighteenth century they represented the first full recordings of rhymes and tales which, thanks to occasional references to them much earlier, are known to have been circulating by word of mouth for centuries before. In the later seventeenth century, John Aubrey was to reflect back on his childhood in rural Wiltshire during the reign of Charles I in which the narratives and superstitions of his own nurse together with those of the other women of the neighbourhood had exercised such a formative influence upon him. 'When I was child (and so before the civil warres)', he remembered, 'the fashion was for old women and mayds

to tell fabulous stories nighttimes of sprights, and walking ghosts &c'. It was also common for the 'maydes to sitt-up late by the fire [and] tell old romantique stories of the old time', for in those days, 'the old ignorant times, before woomen were readers, the history was handed downe from mother to daughter'.⁶⁴

Aubrey's nurse, Katherine Bushell, knew the history of England from the Norman Conquest down to her own day in the form of ballads and she, like Mrs Brown much later, testifies to the importance of song as a source of both edification and entertainment in all these cultures. Indeed, scarcely any aspect of work or leisure, it seems, went unaccompanied by a tune and each nation had its distinctive inheritance in this as in other contexts. 'The vulgar sort of people in Wales have a humour of singing extempore upon occasion', observed one seventeenth-century commentator, noticing how in one place 'the woemen that were washing at the river fell all a singing in Welsh'. Equally, it was said of the Scottish Highlanders at the same time that 'their women are good at vocal music; and inventing of songs'. Edward Lhwyd divided these into 'rowing songs for sea' which they called *iorrain*; any 'raucous song' or *crònan*; 'a melodious cheefull song' or *luinneag*; and 'any grave serious song', *amhran*. In England, no less, it was normal for women to sing as they sat and sewed, for men to sustain their ploughing with a tune, or for 'manual labourers and mechanicall artificers of all sorts' to 'keepe such a chaunting and singing in their shoppes'.⁶⁵

An important element within this repertoire of popular song was that which related stories about the past. Accounts of the great deeds of former kings and national heroes, yarns of the miracles performed by saints and magicians, myths about the giants and devils whose extraordinary deeds helped to explain so much of the physical landscape in which people lived, all provided significant components of these varied oral cultures.⁶⁶ Thus, at the beginning of the seventeenth century the people of north Wales were reported to climb their hilltops on Sundays and listen to

their harpers and crowthers singe them songs of the dooings of their ancestors ... and then they ripp upp their petigres at lenght howe eche of them is discended from those their ould princes. Here alsoe they spende their time in hearinge some part of the lives of ... the intended prophets and saincts of that cuntrie.

Equally, in the 1560s the Scottish Highland bards were said to 'maintain and improve' old 'tales composed about ... the sons of Milesius and about the heroes and Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors'. At the end of the seventeenth century, it was claimed of the Highland people in general that they sing verses 'containing for the most part praises of valiant men, and there is almost no other argument of which their rhimes are composed'. In the north of England, it was later remembered, 'the winter

evenings were often spent in listning to the traditionary tales and songs, relating to men who had been eminent for their prowess and bravery in the border wars'.⁶⁷

THE SCRIBAL TRADITION

The importance of the spoken word in fashioning the mental world of most of the partially literate populations of England, Scotland and Wales in this period can scarcely be doubted. These references to the performances of bards, however, draw attention to the fact that much of the repertoire of story and song, phrase and fable, which was passed on one to another by word of mouth was by no means the pure water of unmediated oral tradition. A large part, indeed perhaps the majority, of the material which came to infuse the common stock was the product, at one remove or another, of a long heritage which derived from the highly learned and literate traditions of bardic and monastic culture. Wales and Scotland had supported since the early Middle Ages elite orders of hereditary bardic families whose written compositions in verse had enshrined the early histories and legends of these countries, setting on foot stories and songs which passed from their texts into the fireside narratives of the people and provided such a stimulus to local folklore.⁶⁸

In 1693 Dr James Garden, Professor of Theology at King's College, Aberdeen, penned an account of the bards of the *Gàidhealtachd*, or Gaelic Scotland. His source was 'a gentleman's son in Strathspey' who was able to offer an account of them 'as they are at present in these parts, and such as they were within the memory of my informer's father (who is an aged man of ninetie seaven years)'. He described the skilled poets, or *phili*, who 'frequent onlie the company of persons of qualitie and each of them has some particular person whom he owns his master'.

These bards in former times used to travel in companies, sometimes 40, 50, 60 persons between men, wives and childrene, and they were thus ranked. The first were termed *philies*, i.e. poets, and they were divided thus – some made panagyricks onlie, others made onlie satyrs. The second degree consisted of those called *skealichin* or *sheanachin*, i.e. narrators of antiquitie and old historie, especialie geneologies of great persons and families, *skealich* or *sheanachi* properlie signifieing ane historian. The third order contained [those] named *kreahkirin*, i.e. such as could discourse on anie short or transient subject, told newes and such modern things, *kreahkish* properlie signifieing anie discourse. And the fourth consisted of those named *kheahkirin*, i.e. such as proponed enigmaes and othere difficult questions, *kheahkir* intimating one that delights to invade others with subtilities and ambiguous questions.⁶⁹

In addition to these highly skilled literati, of course, were many common minstrels and harpers, whom Garden branded the ‘inferior sort, otherwise called beggers’, and who make ‘few or no verses or rhymes of their own, but onlie makes use of such as hath been composed by others’. But such popular performers, whose fortunes in sixteenth-century Wales are described by Richard Suggett in Chapter 5, played a crucial role as cultural mediators, serving to disseminate the remnants of high bardic production among a wider audience.⁷⁰

Thus, in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, for example, the people told many stories of Fionn mac Cumhaill and his exploits in which common narrative threads would be woven into the texture of a particular landscape and rendered meaningful to people by being endowed with specific local associations. The origin of these traditions was, however, highly literary, deriving from the eleventh-century Fionn cycle of Irish tales in which this hero was famed for his deeds as the leader of the band of elite fighting men, the Fianna. The ubiquity of his legend in the north and the Western Isles of Scotland is testimony, therefore, to their cultural contact with Ireland and the literary exchanges in Classical Common Gaelic between them over many centuries. From such sources tales of Fionn found their way into local tradition, so that by the seventeenth century it could be reported that on high hills throughout the Highlands were ‘vestiges of great bulwarks of very big dry stones, so big as four oxen can not draw. These they say, were the habitation of giants who were the attendants of Fin Mac Cùil ...’. Thus the legendary warrior, like so many heroes of popular tradition in this period, had gained, by his allegedly prodigious strength and gargantuan feats, the reputation of being a giant. Of the three cairns on the coast of the Isle of Skye the local people were said to ‘have a tradition that upon these stones a big cauldron was set for boiling Fin-Mac-Coul’s meat’. On the west coast of the Isle of Arran could be seen a huge cave in which it was affirmed the ‘great giant’ had lodged during his mighty battle there, and the stone circle on the moor to the east of Druim-cruey ‘was made by the giant Fin-Ma-Coul, and that to the single stone, Bran, Fin-Ma-Coul’s hunting-dog, was usually tied’.⁷¹

Perhaps the most ubiquitous figure in the popular traditions of England, Scotland and Wales by the early modern period was King Arthur. Here too, of course, local folklore represented the assimilation and translation into parochial settings of the products of a long learned and literary tradition. It had been some of the great monastic chronicles, most especially Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, written in the 1130s, which had contributed significantly to the propagation of the Arthurian myth across Britain. In addition to these chronicles, a variety of manuscripts preserved fragments of the ancient bardic tradition of story and song, such as the Black Book of Carmarthen, a manuscript of c. 1200 containing poems in which

reference is made to the mystery of Arthur's burial place. Among the three manuscript collections of prose romances now known collectively as the *Mabinogion* is preserved *Culhwch ac Olwen*, probably written about 1100 and thus one of the earliest tales about Arthur in Welsh.⁷²

With Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (printed in 1485) the legend came to receive even more elaborate literary treatment and, recycled thereafter in poetry, prose and song, no less than in ritual, pageantry and drama, it became in its many forms a staple of the developing mass media. All of these sources provided the narrative framework both to reinforce and to invent the stories and songs of local tradition by which communities nationwide claimed for themselves some association with the great king. In the mid-sixteenth century the Welsh historian Sir John Price could endorse Geoffrey of Monmouth's fabulous account of Arthur by pointing as corroborative evidence to the great number of places and landmarks throughout Wales which bore his name.⁷³ Among innumerable such was the hill in south Brecknockshire 'proportionate to the dimensions of that great and mighty person', known as 'Arthur's chair', or the huge boulder called 'Arthur's stone' in south-west Glamorgan. There was 'Arthur's gate' at Montgomery and 'Arthur's hill' near Brecon; at Caerleon in Monmouthshire were inscriptions which told that this had once been the hero's home; while on top of Mount Snowdon lay the pile of stones marking the spot where, as Geoffrey had stated, he slew the giant Ritho.⁷⁴

LITERACY AND PRINT

By the early modern period, therefore, many of the inherited forms of oral culture in the various parts of Britain were already the distillation of a long series of interactions between the spoken and the written word. The majority of people had always received a large part of their knowledge, entertainment and edification through listening to narratives and songs, anecdotes and sayings, which were either imbibed unconsciously or else learned off by heart without reference to text. But some form of scribal influence often played a part in their preservation and propagation at one level or another. In the early modern centuries, moreover, this reciprocal relationship between the oral and textual realms was to develop more rapidly and dynamically than ever before. The reasons for this were many and varied, but they included the advent of printing which enormously increased the quantity and distribution of texts from the late fifteenth century; the continued and steady circulation of written works in manuscript; and the significant expansion across the country and down through society of the ability to read.

Throughout England, many parts of Wales and much of the Lowlands of Scotland, the centuries after the Reformation witnessed sustained if uneven

growth in the varied skills of reading and writing. Detailed calculations of 'literacy' levels have been made based upon the percentage of people who could sign their name on a document as opposed merely to making a mark.⁷⁵ As suggested above, these probably represent quite serious underestimates of the ability to read since all the evidence points to a diffusion of basic reading capability well beyond the capacity to wield a pen. Thus, although in England, as a national aggregate, only 10 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men could sign their names in 1640, and only 25 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men could accomplish this by the mid-eighteenth century, it is likely a majority of the adult population could read print to some degree by the latter date.⁷⁶ Behind these crude nationwide percentages, however, could lie a significant amount of social and regional variation. The gentry were universally able to sign their names by 1600, while among the professions there was near complete literacy by the same date. Craftsmen, artisans and yeomen were always likely to be more literate than husbandmen and labourers. Urban areas tended to be more literate than rural: the spectacular example was London which was home to perhaps one tenth of England's population by the mid-seventeenth century at which time some 67 per cent of its inhabitants could sign their names.⁷⁷

These advances in reading ability were paralleled by a huge expansion in the number of printed books over the course of the early modern period. Thus, around forty-six titles were published in England in the year 1500; by 1530, this figure had risen to 214; 259 works were printed in 1600, and 577 in 1640. Given print runs of about 1,500 copies per title, it has been estimated that there were, on average, around 300,000 volumes published every year between 1576 and 1640. At the same time cheap and ephemeral prints were being produced in enormous quantities for a mass market. The four decades between 1560 and 1600 probably witnessed some four million broadside ballads printed in England. The 1620s saw the advent of the newsbook and the 'small book', or 'chapbook' as it was later known, which sold unbound for a few pence and carried a similar range of material. By the 1660s chapbooks were probably selling in numbers of about 400,000 per year, a quantity matched by that of printed almanacs.⁷⁸

When control of the press lapsed in the middle decades of the seventeenth century some years saw up to 2,000 titles appearing. The suspension of censorship in the 1640s and 1650s also allowed newsbooks to proliferate: in 1644 a dozen were appearing in London every week selling anything between 200 and 1,000 copies each. By 1695 the licensing of the press, re-established with only partial success after the Restoration, lapsed altogether and with this presses spread beyond the capitals and university towns. Daily newspapers began to proliferate with a total of 130 newspaper titles established in England between 1700 and 1760.⁷⁹ In parallel with this, periodical and magazine publications became an established part of both metropolitan and provincial

culture and the publication and distribution of all manner of books continued to increase inordinately during the eighteenth century.⁸⁰ At the same time, moreover, the period witnessed new developments such as the serialization of otherwise expensive titles in order to make them affordable to the middling sort of reader, and the expansion of public and circulating libraries in England, Scotland and Wales.⁸¹ Popular formats, well-established over the previous two centuries, such as broadside ballads, chapbooks and almanacs were endlessly reprinted and recycled.⁸²

The social and geographical penetration of such material was extensive and its contents clearly fed into oral communication, structuring its form and determining its contents. Cheap print was sold in the shops of stationers in provincial towns from the early sixteenth century onwards and was dispersed around the country, in urban and rural areas alike, by an increasing network of chapmen and pedlars. One of the many cultural consequences of the dissemination of common literary forms in standard written English was to further the progress of anglicization in Wales. During the seventeenth century English books were sold by mercers in Welsh market centres and these may have included broadside ballads, as may the packs of the pedlars, one hundred of them licensed in 1698, who retailed their goods throughout the Welsh countryside. It is tempting to wonder whether the ‘poor pedlar ... that had ballads and some good books’ who, around 1630, came to the door of Richard Baxter’s father in the little village of Eaton Constantine, just south-east of Shrewsbury, was on his way into Wales.⁸³

As Eryn White has shown elsewhere, there were at the same time significant advances in the provision of education in Wales. This cause was given an enormous boost by the Act for the Better Preaching and Propagation of the Gospel in Wales which the Puritan regime passed in 1650. It provided for the foundation of elementary schools out of sequestrated Church funds in its mission to instill Protestantism in the native population and it succeeded in establishing sixty-three elementary schools in Welsh towns. Thereafter the major initiatives were the work of philanthropic organizations and individuals: the Welsh Trust (1674–81), the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (1699–1737), the Circulating Schools of Griffith Jones (1731–79) and the Sunday schools of Thomas Charles from 1785. Their combined success in bringing basic literacy and numeracy to the Welsh population seems to have been considerable, an achievement enormously aided by the decision in the second quarter of the eighteenth century to teach reading in Welsh, the single tongue of the overwhelming majority.⁸⁴

The impact of these developments is evident in the steady increase in the number of books published in Welsh during the course of this period. The first book to emerge from the London press in the language was Sir John Prys’s *Yn y Lhyvyr Hwnn* (1546) [translates as ‘In This Book’]; the New Testament in the vernacular appeared in 1567, the work of William Salesbury

with the help of Bishop Richard Davies and Thomas Huet; and in 1588 Bishop William Morgan produced the great literary monument of early modern Wales in his translation of the complete Bible, a text which was to exercise a profound influence on the written language into the twentieth century. Whereas the period of over a century between 1546 and 1660 saw only around 108 separate titles issued in the native tongue, the forty years between 1660 and 1699 witnessed the publication of 112. Thereafter, there were 614 Welsh books printed between 1700 and 1749, and fully 1,907 in the second half of the eighteenth century. This steadily rising output benefited greatly from the general development of the provincial press following the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, and Shrewsbury, Trefhedyn and Carmarthen were to emerge as centres of the trade thereafter.⁸⁵

In the Lowlands of Scotland, meanwhile, literacy levels exhibited similar trends. In 1650 an aggregate of around 75 per cent of Lowlanders were unable to write their names, but considerable improvement over the course of the following century meant that 'illiteracy' on this measure had fallen to perhaps 35 per cent among adult males by 1760. Here, as elsewhere, women consistently lagged behind men, however, and rural dwellers always betrayed less signing ability than urban. In the mid-seventeenth century, for example, evidence suggests that 68 per cent of residents in the capital city, Edinburgh, could write their names, as against a mere 24 per cent of the inhabitants of the parish of Newbattle out in rural Midlothian. Predictably enough, familiarity with the pen also varied markedly with social status. Figures calculated for Edinburgh and Glasgow over the whole period from 1650 to 1760 indicate that while those of gentle and professional status were 'literate' in terms of their ability to sign, craft and tradespeople were on average about 90 per cent so capable, and servants only about 63 per cent. At the same time, the literacy levels for these same occupational and social groups in rural society were far lower at 95, 61 and 33 per cent respectively. The appetite for reading material was satisfied in part by books and pamphlets produced in Edinburgh which, after the setting up of its licensed press in 1507, became the centre of a native book trade. Output from the Edinburgh printers, augmented by that from the smaller operations in Aberdeen and Glasgow, began to increase significantly from the 1670s and thereafter grew rapidly throughout the eighteenth century.⁸⁶

In the Scottish Highlands, by contrast, there persisted throughout this period and beyond an oral culture much less influenced by the written word. The ability to read and write Gaelic remained the preserve of a few literati and although a variety of manuscript works both in poetry and prose were written in this tongue over the course of the early modern centuries, one category of which is given detailed treatment in Martin MacGregor's essay (Chapter 7), it was barely a language of print. During the late 1680s and early 1690s, the efforts of Robert Boyle, aided by James Kirkwood and Robert

Kirk, had succeeded in transcribing into Latin type the Irish Gaelic Bible translated by James Ussher in 1603, and had disseminated it with limited success across the Highlands. But even this did not represent the current spoken tongue of the people. The first printed book in Scottish Gaelic had been John Carswell's translation of the *Book of Common Order*, the 'Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh', published in Edinburgh in 1567. An edition of the Psalms in the language was printed in 1690 but the first New Testament thus rendered did not appear until 1767 and a complete version of the Bible had to wait until the beginning of the nineteenth century, as Donald Meek explains below. Indeed, there were no more than seventy titles sent to the press in the Scottish Gaelic language before 1800.⁸⁷ In the 1770s, Dr Johnson articulated the common, although erroneous, belief about Scottish Gaelic when he dismissed it as 'the rude speech of a barbarous people', for reason

that the Earse never was a written language; that there is not in the world an Earse manuscript a hundred years old; and that the sounds of the Highlanders were never expressed by letters, till some little books of piety were translated, and a metrical version of the Psalms was made by the Synod of Argyle. Whoever therefore now writes in this language, spells according to his own perception of the sound, and his own idea of the power of the letters. The Welsh and the Irish are cultivated tongues. The Welsh, two hundred years ago, insulted their English neighbours for the instability of their orthography; while the Earse merely floated in the breath of the people, and could therefore receive little improvement.⁸⁸

It is hardly surprising therefore that there should have been high degrees of illiteracy among Gaelic speakers. The attempt to reform the 'heathenism' of the Highlands through a process of education which had begun with James VI and I's edict of 1616 was always partial in its reach and limited in its success. In addition to the problems of the lack of an educated ministry and the truncated efforts to found parochial schools, the texts of instruction were all in English, meaning that, as Johnson realized, those children who did receive instruction learned to 'read a language which they may never use or understand'. Predictably enough, therefore, the *Statistical Account* of the Isle of Harris in the 1790s revealed that of the 2,536 inhabitants, only 108 could read or write and that these inabilities were particularly acute among the Gaelic-speaking population. Another survey undertaken in the first decades of the nineteenth century found that 86 per cent of the 22,501 people living in seven West Highland parishes could read neither Gaelic nor English. This literacy divide added a further dimension to the linguistic, cultural and socio-economic factors which partitioned Highland regions from Lowland within Scotland. Based on the evidence of ability to write a signature, it has been calculated that by the mid-eighteenth century adult males in the Highlands were 20–30 per cent less 'literate' than those in the Lowlands.⁸⁹

The experience of the Highlands notwithstanding, the significant developments, both in the expansion of reading ability and in the mass production of cheap printed matter, were to have enormous influence on the cultures of most parts of Britain during the early modern period. On the one hand, elements from oral tradition were taken up by the new medium of print and disseminated over a much wider area than ever before; on the other hand, new material from print fed into oral circulation, greatly expanding the repertoire of the spoken word and enriching its contents. Many instances of the reciprocal borrowings of oral, scribal and print culture could be cited which demonstrate the way in which the written word drew upon the spoken and, in turn, had a considerable impact in structuring the form of the common vernacular stock.

Thus in Lowland Scotland, for example, the complex interaction between printed, manuscript and oral forms of transmission, is evident from the first introduction of the press to Edinburgh. In the second decade of the sixteenth century, Sir David Lindsay was a 'familiar' at the court of the young James V of Scotland (1513–42). In the 'epistle' prefacing his *Dreme* he referred to the way in which he would lull the boy king to sleep with a variety of 'stories amiabyll'. Some were part of the great tradition of classical mythology, including the legends of Hector and Alexander, of Hercules and Sampson. But his repertoire also incorporated narratives closer to home, such as the deeds of King Arthur, and 'the prophiseis of Rymour, Beid, and Marlyng', which were finding their way into print by this time. In addition, among the 'mony vther plesand storrye' which he would tell his charge was that of 'the reid etin and the gyir carlyng'. In this case, no written text of the old Scottish fairytale 'The red giant and the old witch' survives from the period and it may actually have been the product of essentially oral dissemination, although certainly drawing upon motifs long known to literary tradition. Scribal copies were clearly made at some date but the tale was not printed until the 1820s when the Edinburgh publisher Robert Chambers transcribed it from a 'curious manuscript collection'. He found this refrain put in the mouth of the red etin, a three-headed ogre:

Snouk but and snouk ben,
I find the smell of an earthly man;
Be he living, or be he dead,
His heart this night shall kitchen my bread.

Clearly this rhyme, like its equivalent south of the border, had a long career before it ever made it to the press: 'Fy, fa, fum, I smell the bloud of an English-man' was first referred to in the 1590s but was not given full literary context until *The History of Jack and the Giants* was published as a chapbook in the early eighteenth century.⁹⁰

Another frequenter of James V's court was the priest Sir James Inglis. It

is he who probably wrote the treatise *The Complaynt of Scotlande* which was first printed in Edinburgh in 1548. In it he depicted a group of shepherds who decide that each one of them shall ‘tel ane gude tayl or fabil, to pas the tyme quhil euyt’. Of these ‘sum vas in prose, and sum vas in verse: sum var storeies and sum var flet taylis’. They too knew ‘the taiyl of the reyde eyttyn vitht the thre heydis’, together with the rest of the stories which Sir David Lyndsay had told his young master. Moreover, they were said to be conversant with other apparently indigenous Scottish fairytales, seemingly the preserve of oral transmission. Among them was ‘the tail of the pure tynt’, the native version of ‘Cinderella’, and ‘the tayl of the velle of the varldis end’, another classic type about a wicked queen and her horrid daughter who send the good daughter of the king to fetch a bottle of water. Both of these similarly evade literary form until Chambers transcribed them from word of mouth in nineteenth-century Fife as ‘Rashie-Coat’ and ‘The wal at the world’s end’.⁹¹

At the same time, the remarkable repertoire of the shepherds included some tales which seem only to have been known from manuscript circulation, the references to them here predating their first known appearance in print. Still other items which they knew were clearly drawn from the stock of vernacular romances, histories and verses to be put in print in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. They told tales of ‘the Bruce’ which were first given literary expression in the late fourteenth-century verses of John Barbour, archdeacon of Aberdeen, but not known in a printed copy before about 1570. They related the acts and deeds of William Wallace, recorded in a single surviving manuscript of 1488 and first printed at the press of Walter Chepman and Andrew Myllar ‘in the south gait of Edinbrugh’ in 1508. Among the Arthurian tradition which was also finding its way from script to print, the shepherds knew ‘The tail of Syr Euan, Arthours knycht’, ‘Arthour knycht he raid on nycht’, and ‘Arthour of litil bertangye’. Some of the great stories of Anglo-Norman romance literature, such as ‘The tayl of the four sonnys of Aymon’, ‘Claryades and Maliades’ and ‘Beuis of Southamptoun’ were equally said to be at their fingertips, perhaps derived from their earliest printed forms.⁹²

Among the songs which the shepherds sang were those which were probably already known to the printed word. ‘O lusty maye, vitht flora quene’ was one such to have emerged from the press of Chepman and Myllar in 1508. ‘Robene Hude’ was in print at least as early as 1510 as *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. In ‘The huntis of cheuet’, or *Chevy Chase*, they intoned a famous ballad which was probably another of those familiar in printed form by this time. Also in their repertoire was ‘The battel of the hayrlau’, commemorating an epic conflict of 1411 between feuding lairds, the earl of Mar and Donald of the Isles, while ‘Ihonne Ermistrangis dance’ probably celebrated the exploits of the notorious border reiver Johnie Armstrong of Gilknockie, hanged by

James V about 1529. Both of these ballads may also have been part of the printed stock. So, too, 'Stil vndir the leyuis grene', 'Cou thou me the raschis grene', and 'Brume brume on hil', which were among eight of the shepherds' songs or tunes said to have been works owned by the mason of Coventry, Captain Cox, as described by Robert Laneham in the 1570s.⁹³

In a number of cases the shepherds sang refrains which had been included in the collection of *The Gude and Godlie Ballets* first compiled by John Wedderburn of Dundee around 1542. This anthology comprised translations of German psalmes and paraphrases but it also drew on traditional Scottish tunes and adapted the form of familiar native ballads. Thus the shepherds knew, as did Wedderburn, 'Allone i veip in grit distres', 'Rycht soirly musing in my mynde', 'O myne hart, hay, this is my sang', 'Greuit is my sorrou' and 'Allace, that samyn sueit face'. After the Reformation of 1560, the Scottish Kirk adopted a strategy of attempting to inculcate true doctrine among its semi-literate peoples by employing and appropriating the genres of popular culture such as music and drama, iconography and cheap print. As noted above, it was an endeavour common to many religious reformers across Europe, and Alexandra Walsham explores another manifestation of it in the English context in her contribution to this volume (Chapter 6). Thus the *Gude and Godlie Ballets* were actively disseminated in an effort, as the expanded edition of 1621 made plain, to replace the indigenous stock of 'prophane sanges' with a new repertoire of 'godlie sangis for avoyding of sin and harlatry'. Ironically, however, the evidence suggests that in recycling these well-known themes and melodies their effect was rather to reinforce the strength of the very 'bawdie songs and rymes' which they sought to expunge.⁹⁴

Such examples indicate very clearly that the circulation of the printed word was not something that necessarily served to undermine the vitality of oral traditions or the independence of the spoken word, but could, instead, help to augment and invigorate it. It is less instructive to think in terms of inversely correspondent relationships between oral, scribal and print cultures, in which an advance in one must entail a consequent retreat in another, than to regard these three media as complementary and mutually sustaining. On investigation, the provenance and gestation of so many elements within the vernacular cultures of England, Scotland and Wales in the early modern period prove to owe much to the augmenting influence of writing. Equally, a great deal of that which found its way into the textual realm at this time drew upon the contents of common discourse.

The extent and nature of the English vocabulary, for example, provides a signal example of the infusion and enrichment of the spoken word through the circulation of print. During the Renaissance, with the international exchange of ideas across Europe and the ever-growing output of printed books, the size and capacity of the English language was enormously increased. Some 30,000 new terms were naturalized to English from ancient

and modern European languages during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The new genre of English dictionaries, which began with Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabetical* in 1604 and culminated in the early modern period with Samuel Johnson's famous *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) reflected the need to record, explain and authorize this expanding lexicon.⁹⁵

By the same token, many of the familiar sayings and proverbs of English and Welsh can be traced back to dicta derived from ancient Latin and Greek authors as disseminated by the ten editions of *Adages* which Erasmus published between 1500 and 1536. These alone were responsible for the propagation of over 4,000 proverbs and formulaic phrases in early modern Europe and for the ubiquitous status enjoyed by many of the household sayings of today's Britain. Erasmus spawned many imitators and followers, such as John Heywood, whose *Dialogue of Proverbs* (1546), was to prove the starting point for the genre of vernacular proverb literature which developed in England over the next two centuries.⁹⁶ In Wales, meanwhile, the 'Welsh Erasmus', William Salesbury, published *Oll Synnwyr pen Kembero ygyd* in 1547 to similar effect.⁹⁷ In Scotland proverbs found their way into print rather later but much of this purportedly indigenous stock was no less the product of an ancient and pan-European literary tradition.⁹⁸

The same process may be observed with respect to many other aspects of the spoken word. Thus, in the case of popular tales and stories about the past, local folklore was often less the pure water of undiluted oral tradition and more the distilled product of narratives irrigated by script and print. Thus the broadside ballad accounts of King Arthur and his exploits, such as *A pleasaunte history of an adventurus knyghte of kynges Arthurs Couurte*, printed by Richard Jones in 1566, or *The noble Actes nowe newly found of Arthure of the round table* penned by Thomas Deloney in 1603, gave an added inspiration to parochial traditions of the ubiquitous hero. Passing Arthur's seat above Edinburgh in 1598, Fynes Moryson could describe the many such monuments associated with him as 'famous among all ballad-makers', and he might have added with no less justice that they were, in turn, made famous by them.⁹⁹

Similarly, the tales of Robin Hood were not born so much of popular oral tradition as of the literary romances written for performance among the social elite during the later Middle Ages. Thereafter, it was the widespread dissemination of his story in the famous *Gest*, which was reprinted several times during the sixteenth century, together with broadsides such as *A ballett of Robyn Hod* (1562), which ensured the place of the famous outlaw in local lore. Thus, Robin Hood's Bay is not known to have been so named before 1544 and his many 'strides', hills and mills, or the examples of his butts which are to be found in at least six counties of England, are apparently attributed no earlier. Robin Hood's grave at Kirklees in the West Riding was

not so described before 1565 while the resting places of Maid Marian at Little Dunmow, Essex, and Little John at Hathersage in Derbyshire were not designated as such before the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁰

In parallel with this invention and stimulation of oral traditions by the written word went the reciprocal influence of the spoken word on what was recorded and printed. The early modern centuries witnessed fragmentary elements of the dialect, proverbs, traditional tales and many other aspects of vernacular culture from communities across England, Scotland and Wales being enshrined in print for the first time. The expansion in topographical, antiquarian and travel writing which is such a distinctive feature of the intellectual and publishing history of the period was one phenomenon responsible for capturing and freezing in texts elements of popular oral tradition as they were encountered and set down by the scholars and tourists. Histories of these three nations, or of their constituent counties, towns and parishes, together with the published accounts of itineraries through parts of Britain, occasionally referred in passing to snatches of vernacular tradition and local lore, thus affording glimpses of its lineaments in ossified form. At the same time the unpublished notes and correspondence of a number of antiquaries continued to record materials that they were somewhat more reluctant to put into print.¹⁰¹

Perhaps most notably, John Aubrey transcribed a number of such vernacular forms in the course of his investigations among the people of Wiltshire during the second half of the seventeenth century. He 'rakt up' scores of legendary tales and popular stories; he committed to paper nursery rhymes and bawdy jingles, sometimes centuries before anyone else thought them worthy of recording. He noted down, amid his often chaotic scribbles, various proverbs, 'the ancient and natural philosophy of the vulgar', samples of the speech of 'the common people (whose dialect and pronunciation antiquaries are not to slight)', and numerous examples of 'superstitions' and 'old wives' tales', for 'there may some truth and usefulness be elicited out of them'.¹⁰²

At the same time, Edward Lhwyd began work with a team of researchers on a monumental project to record and interpret the 'ancientest languages of Britain and Ireland' and to establish the relationships between them. His method was not only to travel through Wales and the Highlands of Scotland collecting ancient manuscripts and interviewing native speakers in order to compile catalogues of these tongues, but also to gather information by questionnaires sent out to informants in the localities. 'What words, phrases, or variation of dialect in the Welsh, seems peculiar to any part of the country?' he asked. 'What names of men and women uncommon? And wherein doth the English of the Vulgar in Pembrokeshire and Gowerland differ from the Western counties, etc., of England?' In the Highlands Lhwyd jotted down the first group of Scottish Gaelic riddles ever to be transcribed and he made

a small collection of Gaelic proverbs, instigating a project which was taken up by Donald Mackintosh in the late eighteenth century and completed by Alexander Nicholson in the late nineteenth.¹⁰³ So it was, therefore, that print could feed into the oral repertoire helping to invent and refashion elements within it, and, in turn, an antiquarian interest in the folk traditions of the people became increasingly concerned to enshrine aspects of these vernacular cultures in writing.

As to the wider consequences of the spread of reading and writing skills and literary culture over the various parts of Britain during these centuries, these can be viewed in many different ways and remain the subject of debate among historians. It is possible, on the one hand, to stress the essentially incorporative nature of the changes in this period and to highlight the ways in which they conspired to draw people from around the regions and down through society into a more or less common world of letters, of standardizing English and of a homogenizing cultural repertoire. On the other hand, the more divisive implications of these developments might equally be emphasized. The penetration and the impact of literacy and of the printed word were not felt with equal force among all social groups; nor were their influences necessarily the same on men as on women, or experienced to the same degree in urban and rural areas, or evenly across the country.

Thus, in the seventeenth century Aubrey had identified certain superstitious beliefs and narrative practices which he associated particularly with women. Evidence from subsequent generations of the variable effects of printed literature on men and women suggests that it may have served to add another dimension to the gender differences in this respect. What appears significant, for example, about the visit which Richard Steele paid on the children of a friend in 1709 is not just that the 8-year-old boy, Robert, was reading chapbook histories of the great chivalric heroes, *Bevis of Southampton*, *Guy of Warwick* and *Saint George*, *Tom Hickathrift* and the *Seven Champions* among them, but that the little girl, Betty, as her mother told him, ‘deals chiefly in fairies and sprights’. Already, it seems, the male imagination was being fired by a world of swashbuckling adventure as delivered from cheap print whereas the female mind was being nurtured on a magical lore as delivered from the mouths of maids and nurses.¹⁰⁴

Several generations later the vivid testimony of John Clare, whose early experiences are dealt with in more detail by Bob Bushaway’s essay (Chapter 9), suggests something of this same difference between men and women in their relationship to the printed word. Clare recalled his childhood in the remote Northamptonshire village of Helpston during the 1790s where his father, on the one hand, could read a little in the printed word and loved ‘the supersti[tious] tales that are hawked about a sheet for a penny, such as *Old Nixons Prophecies*, *Mother Bunches Fairey Tales*, and *Mother Shiptons Legacy*’, as also the ballads of which ‘he was likewise fond’. His mother, on

the other hand, 'knew not a single letter' and was steeped in 'superstition', just like the other 'gossips and granneys' of the neighbourhood. Clare was later able to evoke images of this female oral tradition and its formative influence. Thus the 'cottage evening in January' where the 'huswife', who 'knits and sues' before the fire, 'tells tales of magic wonders' and 'fairy feats'; or the field-work in spring and summer which became 'a delightfull employment, as the old womens memorys never faild of tales to smoothen our labour, for as every day came new Jiants, Hobgoblins, and faireys was ready to pass it away'.¹⁰⁵

Although Clare's father and the other local men seemed to have been more literate and more directly influenced by popular literature than his mother and her 'gossips', however, there was apparently little difference in the essential content of their stories and songs, the one no less 'superstitious' than the other. Even the narratives learned from old women who could not themselves read were drawing upon centuries-old themes from popular print. The point was explicitly made when Clare 'met with a poetical story ... *The Foundlings Lamentation*' told to him by a female neighbour. 'Some of the things struck me so much as to copy them. She traced its origin to a 'penny book' from which she had gotten it by heart years afore ...'. Such evidence may caution, therefore, against too rigid an ascription of gendered relationships to the printed word, at least in the context of the cheap print circulating at this social level by this date.¹⁰⁶ In general, the impression given by Clare's reflections on childhood, corroborated by similar sources contemporary with them, is of just how widespread the cheaply printed page was by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, even among labouring folk in relatively isolated provincial villages, and of the great extent to which it structured their vernacular culture at almost every point.¹⁰⁷ But this had not always and everywhere been so. It could be argued that another feature of the ever-greater spread of an English-dominated literary production in Britain over the course of the early modern period was to marginalise the culture of 'peripheral' regions, or the 'provinces', as defined from a metropolitan or civic perspective. Large parts of Wales and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, what Londoners often referred to dismissively as the 'dark corners of the land', were by virtue of their separate languages, geographical isolation and many other features of economic and cultural difference, thrown into even greater relief by their exclusion from an encroaching anglicization.

This exclusion also had a social dimension. For all that the mass medium of print served in some degree to reform the language, both spoken and written, and to infuse the common stock of phrase and fable for all social groups, regional dialects and Celtic tongues, together with much of the cultural product for which they were vehicles, came to be regarded among certain social groups and those responsible for the definition and arbitration of manners as being inferior and uncouth. Even in 1570 the English writer

George Puttenham had been able to draw a distinction between the kind of English ‘spoken in the kings court, or in the good townes and cities’, and that to be heard ‘in the marches and frontiers, or in port townes’. And the latter was different again from that of ‘any vplandish village or corner of a realme, where is no resort but of poore rusticall or vnciuill people’.¹⁰⁸ So the speech of uplandish rustics, the ‘poorer sort’, or denizens of the ‘Celtic fringe’ came to be deprecated in some quarters, no less than their proverbs, songs and parochial traditions which were to be regarded in due course as the expressions of ‘vulgar error’. To the extent, therefore, that some of the many different uses of the spoken word became more socially variegated and determined over time, they may be said to offer a valuable perspective on the development of social prejudices and social relations in early modern Britain and beyond.

EXPLORATIONS OF THE SPOKEN WORD

The essays that follow attempt to highlight some of these possible differences in interpretation, even if they cannot hope to resolve them, by dealing with a variety of the themes raised here in more depth across different segments of the larger period, and with reference to different regions. Several of them examine aspects of the complex relationship between speech and literacy/writing, and between the spoken and written or printed word. This is not a comprehensive treatment: we have been selective in our approach, preferring depth to breadth. Consequently by no means every aspect of oral culture that could be addressed is explored here (news, for example, a subject of much recent scholarship,¹⁰⁹ is here omitted) while others, such as oral traditions, figure in several essays. Nor are we able to cover every linguistic group. Cornish has been excluded, while systematic comparison with Ireland deserves separate treatment in another place.

Consistent with the volume’s aim to be British in scope, we begin with an arena, education, in which two national tongues overlapped. Richard Suggett and Eryn White’s contribution in Chapter 2 focuses on the relationship between speech and writing both within a single language, Welsh, and between two languages, Welsh and English. Welsh was in no danger of becoming extinct as a spoken language during the early modern period, but the increasing influence of English as the language of official and property transactions meant that Welsh, by default, was increasingly the tongue of the less privileged members of society. But the imperatives of religion – the need to make the Welsh into good Protestants first, and only secondarily into good English speakers – intervened to reinvigorate the study of Welsh. Throughout the eighteenth century, proponents of reform and education increasingly relied on written texts composed in the language of the majority,

Welsh, in order to increase popular literacy – and with it religiosity. The result, as Suggett and White conclude, is that far from being the twin enemies of speech, literacy and print culture may have actually reinforced the spoken tongue, by mandating the continued use of Welsh as an oral language of instruction linked to printed pedagogical texts written in that tongue.

Suggett and White allude in their chapter to several topics dealt with in more detail in ensuing essays. Donald Meek, in Chapter 3, provides a study that pursues the influence of religion on another minority language, Gaelic at the respective frontiers between Highland and Lowland, and between orality and literacy. Meek demonstrates that the eighteenth-century Scottish clergy, not unlike their earlier and contemporary Welsh counterparts, used the popular medium of Gaelic in oral and written form to advance the Gospel. A work such as the Rev. Ewen McDiarmid's collection of sermons, published posthumously in 1804, spread through the Highlands and across the Atlantic, providing material for domestic and emigré Scots preachers; it thereby allowed the printed text to influence the subsequent direction of the oral art of preaching.

It is an editorial tenet of this book that orality extends up and down the social ladder, though its manifestations and uses will vary according to stratum. One of the ways in which the written and spoken word continued to interact among the most highly literate members of society was in the phenomenon of reading aloud; another was the even more commonplace occurrence of conversations based upon texts. In Chapter 4, Daniel Woolf explores discussions of history in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historians, as observed once or twice already in this Introduction, are highly partial to the written word, conventionally favouring the manuscript over the printed and particularly the oral source, while at the same time we assign a high value to print as the proper medium for presenting historical scholarship derived from those sources. These biases have a very long pedigree and there can be no doubt that reliance on written sources to the exclusion of the oral, and the use of print to present historical research both intensified between 1550 and 1700. Yet it is possible to overlook many contexts in which discussion about history continued to occur orally. Even in the eighteenth century, by which time the history book had become a commonplace fixture of private libraries, print remained for most educated people a supplement to speech rather than something read exclusively in silence and for private pleasure only. Published histories furnished topics of conversation and argument, and sources of learned anecdote, sometimes channeled from print to mouth by the intermediate step of collection in a manuscript miscellany, diary, or commonplace book: how they were used depended on the situation and also, to a considerable degree, on the ranks and genders of the interlocutors. The uses of spoken history could be both frivolous and serious. In lighter contexts, they provided a subject for discussion between courting

couples, or for coffee-house amusement. More gravely, they figured in religious discussions, not least as fodder for preachers who increasingly referred to secular as well as biblical history in constructing their sermons, a point made within a Scottish setting by Meek's essay in Chapter 3.

Several essays move from oral communication and oral culture to the more specific problem of oral tradition, in both of the senses – the medium and its content – outlined above. These essays, too, range into Scotland and Wales as well as England, and collectively cover a similarly lengthy period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. In Chapter 5, Richard Suggett's second contribution to the volume examines the social role of minstrels in sixteenth-century Wales, demonstrating that the 'decline' of popular minstrelsy was considerably more complex than has previously been acknowledged. Although often associated with vagabonds, minstrels were not always prosecuted because they were vagabonds. Nor were all popular purveyors of tradition dealt with in the same way. Indeed, the *eisteddfodau* of 1523 and 1567 show a gap opening up between an approved minstrelsy, supported by the local elites, and a more vulgar, unlicensed class of performers, to be deemed rogues and beggars; this is roughly the same division noted above in connection with Highland bards over a century later. By the end of the sixteenth century the tastes of the elite had changed (with dance, for instance, supplanting extended poetic performance) and the locus of popular entertainment had shifted from household to alehouse. It was then that this strategy of 'social closure' failed, and with it for a time the holding of *eisteddfodau*. 'Festive culture, dominated by dancing, favoured new types of entertainers', Suggett concludes, 'but in the process the music and action of the dance silenced the spoken word of the professional poet.'

The social biases against oral stories, and in particular their association with vulgar error and superstition are the subject of Alexandra Walsham's essay in Chapter 6. Walsham begins by noting the well-known tendency of the advocates of Reformation to declaim against popish superstition and to contrast the truth of God's written word with the falsity of human traditions (here in the sense of 'unwritten verities' passed down through the Catholic Church). Yet the principle of relying on the written word was violated, of necessity, by its own architects in the interest of evangelism, as Protestantism was rapidly obliged to develop a set of traditions of its own. This 'reformed folklore' consisted of Lactantian tales of the grim deaths of popish persecutors and apostates, and the unpleasant torments providentially inflicted on the wicked. It played a crucial role in the spread of godliness in Britain, and in the reformation of morals and behaviour. Finally, Walsham cautions us appropriately that while it is an error to assume that the Reformation–literacy brought an end to Catholicism–orality, so it is also mistaken to explain the seventeenth century's scepticism toward oral traditions as exclusively a function of a growing rift between elite and popular culture. Ideological reasons –

particularly religion – drove many Tudor and Stuart critiques of vulgar error. As with several of the preceding essays, Walsham demonstrates that speech and both writing and print were interdependent, as oral tales found their way into written and printed texts, and were lifted thence back into conversation and newer traditions. ‘Cultural traffic’, she notes, ‘did not travel in a single direction.’

Tradition is often contrasted with history, the one oral and fluid, the other written and fixed. This, however, is another example of a false dichotomy providing an easy, but misleading, picture of what in fact was a much more complicated relationship. The antiquaries of the seventeenth century, who often criticized the unreliability of tradition, are paradoxically our most important sources for it, since they were not willing to rule it out of court altogether, especially where it shed light on matters for which no documentary source survived. In this vein, Martin MacGregor, in Chapter 7, shows how tradition and history came together in the ‘genealogical histories’ of Gaelic Scotland after the Restoration. This distinctive genre appeared at the very time that an earlier and indigenous, aristocratic set of learned or ‘classical’ traditions, which had developed around clan and family origins, was drawing to a close. Written principally in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, predominantly in English, Scots or Latin, the newer genealogical histories nevertheless show familiarity with the Gaelic tongue. Typically, genealogical histories were an amalgam of four different types of historical material: original documents; earlier, indigenous Gaelic histories; material from the earlier ‘classical’ learned tradition of Gaelic culture; and oral tradition. The last component may well include elements going back centuries; it is exemplified in Alasdair or Alexander Campbell, author of *The Craignish History*, who wrote his work down for the first time between 1717 and 1722, in middle age, having ‘listened with a greedy ear to all the traditions, and poems of my countrymen’ while a lad in the 1680s. MacGregor suggests a typology of these genealogical histories, explains their relationship to earlier forms of both oral and written history, and provides a preliminary listing of the works that so qualify. His essay further undermines the elite–literate and vulgar–oral equivalences. Moreover, the presentation of previously Gaelic materials in English provides an excellent illustration of the cross-cutting between different media and different languages, as the act of writing for audiences geographically and temporally distant necessitated presentation in languages more widely understood further afield.

MacGregor’s essay reminds us that these issues transcend not only the borders within Britain, but also the English Channel, and that we must be mindful of contemporary developments on the Continent. The construction of oral information as usable historical source, featured in the activities of many of the Scottish genealogical historians, is treated at a more general level by Nicholas Hudson in Chapter 8, in an essay on the eighteenth-century

origins of the concept of 'oral tradition'. Medieval writers often made little distinction between oral and written sources, while Renaissance and especially seventeenth-century writers – as we have seen – frequently criticized the oral as an inferior and ephemeral form of the written. In contrast, eighteenth-century authors, swept up in the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment, began to recognize speech as not only not inferior to the written or printed, but as qualitatively different and non-comparable. Samuel Johnson, the great lexicographer, criticized as misguided earlier attempts to find a universal or natural language. Others pointed to the impossibility of replicating the force and range of the spoken word in graphical form. Linked to this was the emerging social critique of contemporary European society and its contrast with the simplicity of pre-literate cultures. Once seen as uneducated, heathen and savage, native societies were paradoxically, now praised for their very illiteracy which, like the satirical Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels*, allowed for a purer recollection of a more noble and rational past. Similar ideas soon spread to the interpretation of ancient texts, and it was this era that notably produced the earliest theories of the Homeric epics and parts of the Hebrew Bible as originating in primitive, pre-literate orality. It also generated the most egregious literary forgery of the eighteenth century, James Macpherson's *Fingal* (1761), followed fifteen months later by a companion epic, *Temora*. These poems their author proclaimed as genuine translations of ancient Gaelic historical song, passed down by tradition and literary fragment from the third-century bard Ossian or Oisín.¹¹⁰ Leading into the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a valuing of the oral precisely because it was oral surfaces most acutely in romanticism. Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* is a novel that well captures the meeting of Scots, English and Gaelic between tradition and writing, its protagonist at one point enraptured by his apparent discovery of a native, Gaelic tradition.¹¹¹

Hudson's essay links the later years of the period covered by this book neatly with some of the very issues of orality and literacy raised at the beginning of this Introduction in connection with the work of Havelock, Parry and Lord. With Bob Bushaway's closing chapter, we shift to another aspect of oral culture: rural customs and recreations. At the same time, we move further forward chronologically, peering ahead from the end of the early modern period into the nineteenth century, the age of industrialization, to the eve of the First World War. While many of the contributions to the volume have suggested that oral culture was deeply affected by writing and that some aspects of it may have been altered beyond recognition, Bushaway argues strongly for the survival and endurance, rather than revival, of oral culture in rural England. His essay suggests that in popular customs, rituals and calendrical practices a form of life, and sense of local identity, were preserved in the face of modernization up to and perhaps past the First World War. Many of the features of orality that he describes for the nineteenth

century are familiar to students of early modern popular culture. These include the importance of unwritten custom and the perseverance of memory. Bushaway's rural villagers sent off to Gallipoli may seem a far remove from the Welsh minstrels described by Richard Suggett, and the differences in their material and social worlds should not be underestimated. Yet in other ways, such as their reliance on the voice as the primary instrument of communication and collective memory, they are not so very far apart.

The editors have proposed in this introductory chapter that the relationship between spoken language and its graphical counterparts should not be viewed as fixed but dynamic. We have also suggested that the changes in these relations did not occur in a linear or unbroken fashion. In the *longue durée* of civilization, the few centuries covered in the essays that follow constitute a relatively brief, if significant, period in the history of the spoken word. Just as speech continues to evolve today in relation to a dizzyingly rapid pace of technological and social change, so current knowledge of how speech and other forms of communication interacted in previous times will need further elaboration and debate. The authors of this book hope to have made a contribution to that continuing conversation.

NOTES

- 1 Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 77ff; Ronald Wardhaugh, *How Conversation Works* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 1–23, 101–15.
- 2 Peter Burke, *The Art of Conversation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); idem, 'A Civil Tongue: Language and Politeness in Early Modern England', in P. Burke, B. Harrison and P. Slack (eds), *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31–48; Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 153–9, 173–87; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 3 Two helpful historical overviews of the philosophy of language are Alexander Miller, *Philosophy of Language* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1998); and (for historical discussions) Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). Cf. an older overview in Albert Borgmann, *The Philosophy of Language: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Issues* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), part 2.
- 4 Edward Sapir, *Language: an Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1921); idem, 'Language', in *Culture, Language and Personality*, ed. D. G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1949), 1–44; Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. J. B. Carroll (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956). For the opposing view, see Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 57.

- 5 The literature on the key figures in modern linguistics is too vast to cite here. Some useful recent works are: *Chomsky: Selected Readings*, ed. J. P. B. Allen and Paul van Buren (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Steven Pinker, *Words and Rules: the Ingredients of Language* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Rosalind Horowitz and S. Jay Samuels (eds), *Comprehending Oral and Written Language* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1987), for developmental aspects of language.
- 6 See the helpful introductory essays on topics such as dress, gesture, humour, dance and other types of non-verbal communication in Richard Bauman (ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiii–xxi.
- 7 For a review of the history of the field, which emphasizes philosophical and sociological approaches and neglects historical ones, see Everett M. Rogers, *A History of Communication Study* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
- 8 Harold A. Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951, repr. 1964), esp. ch. 1.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 35, 55.
- 10 Michael E. Hobart and Zachary S. Schiffman, *Information Ages: Literacy, Numeracy, and the Computer Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), a book more concerned with information than communication but nonetheless offering insightful comments on the latter.
- 11 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275a; Desiderius Erasmus, *De ratione studii*, trans. B. McGregor, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–), vol. 24: *Literary and Educational Writings*, 91.
- 12 Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 34–6, 50, 68; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 7–10 and *passim*; *idem*, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bas (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12. The primacy of orality is assumed by recent cognitive scientists, for instance in Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, 16: ‘writing is clearly an optional accessory; the real engine of verbal communication is the spoken language we acquired as children’.
- 13 Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993). See also Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- 14 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); *idem*, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). An early critique can be found in Sidney Finkelstein, *Sense and Nonsense of McLuhan* (New York: International Publishers, 1968). For more recent evaluations and critiques of McLuhan, see Graeme Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the Interpretation of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: the Medium and the Messenger* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1989), esp. 120–37; Glenn Willmott, *McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 153 (whence comes the quotation).

- 15 Walter J. Ong, SJ, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); idem, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); idem, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982). On Ong's work, see Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (eds), *Media, Consciousness, and Culture: Explorations of Walter Ong's Thought* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991), esp. 25–43.
- 16 Dennis P. Seniff, 'Ong, Ramism, and Spain: the Case of Pedro de Navarra's Dialogues on the Differences between Speaking and Writing', in Gronbeck, et al. (eds), *Media, Consciousness, and Culture*, 121–32; D. R. Woolf, 'Speech, Text, and Time: the Sense of Hearing and the Sense of the Past in Renaissance England', *Albion*, 18 (1986), 159–93, in which Ong's writing is evaluated in somewhat greater detail than present space permits.
- 17 Marchand, Marshall McLuhan, 67. Ong's influence has been nearly as potent as McLuhan's (it indeed may even have inspired *The Gutenberg Galaxy*), and his works continue to be cited in a variety of disciplines.
- 18 H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print: an Introduction to Medieval Vernacular Literature* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1945) is a good example.
- 19 Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications* (first published Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), ed. D. Godfrey (Victoria and Toronto: Press Porcupic, 1986); S. H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), and many subsequent editions; Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du livre* (Paris, Editions A. Michel, 1958), trans. D. Gerard as *The Coming of the Book* (New York: Verso, 1997). The notion of print as one of the modern marvels of the age was of course abroad as early as the Renaissance; at that time it was frequently cited (along with gunpowder and the compass) as a technological achievement unknown to the otherwise superior ancients.
- 20 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- 21 See especially Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 22 Eisenstein cites Innis's *Empire and Communications* and consulted but does not specifically cite *The Bias of Communication*: see Eisenstein, *Printing Press*, bibliographical index.
- 23 Miriam U. Chrisman, *Lay Culture, Learned Culture: Books and Social Change in Strasbourg, 1480–1599* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, 2nd edn (New York and Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette* (New York: Norton, 1990); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975); Sandra Hindman (ed.) *Printing the Written Word: the Social History of Books ca. 1450–1520* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
- 24 For instance, Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World: a Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-century London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985).
- 25 In addition to Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book* (cited above), see H.-J. Martin, *Le Livre français sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, Promodis-Éditions

- du Cercle de la librairie, 1987) and *Print, Power, and People in Seventeenth-century France*, trans. David Gerard (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) and *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Oxford: Blackwell; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles: la bibliothèque bleue de Troyes* (Paris, Stock, 1964).
- 26 See especially Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
 - 27 Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 12.
 - 28 Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, 135–208 usefully terms this interactive process ‘social textuality’. On interactive reading and annotation there is a spreading literature including Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine ‘“Studied for Action”: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy’, *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), 30–78; William H. Sherman, *John Dee: the Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: the Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
 - 29 R. S. Schofield, ‘The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-industrial England’, in Jack Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 311–25; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); but cf. Keith Thomas, ‘The Meaning of Literacy’, in G. Baumann (ed.) *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); and Harvey J. Graff, ‘On Literacy in the Renaissance: Review and Reflections’, in his *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections on Literacy Past and Present* (London, New York, and Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1987), 133–52. An excellent if now somewhat dated overview of the literature and theory concerning literacy may be found in Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
 - 30 Margaret Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, vol. 1); Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-century England* (London: Methuen, 1981); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). In an interesting cautionary remark at the outset of his lengthy book, Green notes (p. v) that print, for all its profound impact on piety, was ‘by no stretch of the imagination the only or the most crucial means by which the Protestant message was conveyed to those who were illiterate or had only limited reading skills’.
 - 31 This is a suggestion first made by Thomas, ‘Meaning of Literacy’.
 - 32 Ruth Finnegan, ‘Communication and Technology’, in her *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 15–44, and elsewhere in that volume.

- 33 Walter J. Ong, 'Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style', in Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 23–47.
- 34 Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, 174. Ian Dyck has made a similar comment concerning early nineteenth-century England, with respect to speech and print: 'Print and orality, the rational and the non-rational, were not mutually exclusive genres or world-views within rural popular culture.' Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85. From a literary perspective, Leah S. Marcus has warned against the tendency not only to constitute writing and speech as a binary, but to 'invest speech as opposed to writing with an almost mystical wholeness, integrity and "presence" supposedly lost to human communication in our own culture.' See Marcus, 'From Oral Delivery to Print in the Speeches of Elizabeth I', in Arthur F. Marotti and Michael Bristol (eds), *Print, Manuscript, Performance: the Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 33–48.
- 35 Harvey J. Graff, 'Reflections on the History of Literacy', in Graff, *Labyrinths of Literacy*, 15–43, at p. 25.
- 36 Viv Edwards and Thomas J. Sienkewicz, *Oral Cultures Past and Present: Rappin' and Homer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 6.
- 37 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 208–10; idem, *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951–1982*, trans. Roy Willis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 118–23; Edmund Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (London: Fontana, 1970).
- 38 Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York, 1965); idem, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1991). Lord and Parry's theories on the composition of oral poetry have also been applied, not without criticism, to Old English epic: John Miles Foley, 'The Oral Theory in Context', in John Miles Foley (ed.), *Oral Traditional Literature: a Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord* (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1980), 27–123, esp. 51–60. For a more recent cross-cultural exploration of epic orality, focusing on Beowulf rather than Homer, see John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: the Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
- 39 Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Havelock refined his views in *The Muse Learns to Write*, which among other features contains a useful history of the study of orality since the 1950s. Cf. criticisms of Havelock in Hobart and Schiffman, *Information Ages*, ch. 1. Rosalind Thomas has pointed out that ancient Athens was an oral society in many respects but also relied on record-keeping: Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2–3.
- 40 Edwards and Sienkewicz, *Oral Cultures Past and Present*, 7–8.
- 41 The tradition of rigorous documentary criticism of course goes back via German *Quellenkritik* and classical philology through Jean Mabillon and the late seventeenth century, back to the Renaissance humanists. More recently, working historians (and not merely postmodern exponents of the extreme view that the past is unknowable and no reality exists beyond texts) have begun to question the general reliability and completeness of documentary evidence more generally. See for instance Natalie Zemon Davis's exposure of the constructed stories in sixteenth-century pardon tales in *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987),

- or Patrick J. Geary's discussion of selective archival preservation (an early precursor of current 'document management') by medieval monastic scholars, in *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 42 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); David Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); idem, *Oral Historiography* (London and New York: Longman, 1982). For an anthropological treatment, see Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and Verbal Arts: a Guide to Research Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
 - 43 Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).
 - 44 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), esp. 59–113; Stephen Beecher, *Epic Traditions of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 7–8, 110.
 - 45 Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, 14–15; idem, 'Transmission in Oral and Written Traditions: Some General Comments', in Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, 139–74, esp. 154–8.
 - 46 Edwards and Sienkewicz, *Oral Cultures Past and Present*, 1.
 - 47 Jack Goody, 'Oral Culture', in Bauman (ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, 12–20. Cf. the classic early formulation of Goody's position in his essay, with the late Ian Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 304–45. Goody's views are discussed and evaluated in Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 44–65.
 - 48 James Obelkevich, 'Proverbs and Social History', in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 43–72; Donald F. Bond, 'English Legal Proverbs', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 51 (1936), 921–35; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), ch. 2.
 - 49 Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and Verbal Arts*, 7 and sources cited therein.
 - 50 Glanville Price (ed.), *Languages in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) is a useful collection of essays covering the range of languages spoken, past and present, including newer minority 'community languages'.
 - 51 C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698–1981: the Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), 25; *Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 22; *Early Travellers in Scotland*, ed. P. Hume Brown (Edinburgh: 1891; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 174, 262; Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*; MDCCLXIX, 3rd edn (Warrington: 1774), 183. Cf. *Beyond the Highland Line: Three Journals of Travel in Eighteenth-century Scotland*, ed. A. J. Youngson (London: Collins, 1974), 41.
 - 52 *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs Copied by Edward Lhuyl from the Manuscript of the Rev James Kirkwood (1650–1709) and Annotated by him with the Aid of the Rev John Beaton*, ed. J. L. Campbell (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer for the Folklore Society, 1975), 21. Cf. *Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. Chapman, 106.
 - 53 Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997); Glanmor Williams, *Renewal and*

- Reformation: Wales, c. 1415–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 93–5, 149, 269, 277–8; George Owen, *The Description of Pembrokeshire*, ed. Dillwyn Miles (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1994), 13–14, 36, 41–3; Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales, 1642–1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 214, 219–22. For early modern English reactions to Welsh speech, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 301–2.
- 54 John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), II. 329; ‘Parochialia: Being a Summary to Answers to Parochial Queries in Order to a Geographical Dictionary, etc., of Wales issued by Edward Lhwyd’, ed. Rupert H. Morris, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (Supplements, 3 parts in 1, London, 1909–11), I: x; Richard Gough, *The History of Myddle*, ed. David Hey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 110, 150, 247; Richard Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall* (London, 1602), fol. 56r. Cf. A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall: Portrait of a Society* (London: J. Cape, 1941), 21–4; Philip Payton, ‘Cornish’, in Price, *Languages in Britain and Ireland*, 109–19.
 - 55 Hart quoted in Joseph M. Williams, ‘“O! When Degree is Shak’d”: Sixteenth-century Anticipations of Some Modern Attitudes Toward Usage’, in T. W. Machan and C. T. Scott (eds), *English in its Social Contexts: Essays in Historical Sociolinguistics* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 73; Alexander J. Ellis, *On Early English Pronunciation*, 5 vols (London: Chaucer Society Publications, 2nd ser., vols 1, 4, 5, 11, 25, 1869–89), vol. 5; Martin F. Wakelin, *English Dialects: a Survey*, 2nd edn (London: Athlone Press, 1977), 51. The latest research is presented in Harold Orton *et al.* (eds), *Survey of English Dialects*, 4 vols (Leeds: E. J. Arnold for the University of Leeds, 1962–71) and Harold Orton, Stewart Sanderson and John Widdowson, *The Linguistic Atlas of England* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).
 - 56 Daniel Defoe, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider’d* (London, 1724), 48; William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Norfolk*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London, 1795), II. 373. For further comment to this effect see Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, 79–83.
 - 57 Fergusson’s *Scottish Proverbs from the Original Print of 1641 Together with a Larger Manuscript Collection*, ed. Erskine Beveridge (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Text Society, new ser., 15, 1924), 2.
 - 58 Alan Everitt, ‘River and Wold: Reflections on the Historical Origin of Regions and Pays’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 3 (1977), 1–19; idem, ‘Country, County and Town: Patterns of Regional Evolution in England’, *Trans. Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 29 (1979), 78–108; Charles Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History Occasional Papers in English Local History* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); idem (ed.), *Societies, Cultures and Kinship, 1580–1850: Cultural Provinces and English Local History* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1993), 9–18 and figs 1.1–1.4. The cultural distinctions between *pays* in France is vividly evoked in Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 45–9.
 - 59 British Library (hereafter BL), MS Add. 24539, fo. 31r. On the region in the early modern period, see D. Hey, *The Fiery Blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and its Neighbourhood, 1660–1740* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).
 - 60 On each of these regions in turn, see S. J. Watts, *From Border to Middle Shire*:

- Northumberland 1586–1625* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1975), chs 1–2; Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500–1640* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), 120–1; Nicholas Tyacke, ‘Popular Puritan Mentality in Late Elizabethan England’, in Peter Clark, A. G. R. Smith and Nicholas Tyacke (eds), *The English Commonwealth, 1547–1640* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), 77–92; John Walter, *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: the Colchester Plunderers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34–5, 243–5.
- 61 John Smyth, *The Berkeley Manuscripts*, ed. J. Maclean, 3 vols (Gloucester: Gloucester Archaeological Soc., 1883–85), III. 30. For discussion see David Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire 1500–1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), ch. 3.
- 62 David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 1–47.
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