

# ARTIKLAR

## RE-PLAYING THE RECORD: THE PRIMACY OF PERFORMANCE IN THE PROMULGATION AND RECEPTION OF WRITTEN TEXTS

Frances Young ([francesmyoung@googlemail.com](mailto:francesmyoung@googlemail.com))

*University of Birmingham (Emerita)*

### Abstract:

The article revisits the role of orality in the process of wisdom transmission among early Christian monastics. Blurring the line between literacy and illiteracy in late antiquity, the article suggests that the *apophthegmata* and other early texts may be understood as a form of written orality. The transmission of text does not merely pass from one written source to another, but, being also presumably performed live, texts like these passed back and forth between oral and written word, in ways that should affect how text critical scholarship engage with the sources.

### Key Words:

orality, wisdom, monasticism, *apophthegmata patrum*

The 2010 edition of my guidebook *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* substantially expanded the 1983 edition in its treatment of literature generated by the monastic movement. However, I would now confess that even so I did scant justice to Samuel Rubenson's groundbreaking work on the *Letters of St. Anthony*.<sup>1</sup> I suppose I might advance the excuse that I have never been an expert in this field – in fact, as that very compendium maybe

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Anthony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint*, Lund: Lund University Press 1990.

demonstrates, I am really such a generalist I can hardly claim to be expert in anything. Sometimes, however, to set a particular subject in a broader frame can open up fresh questions, and that is what I hope to do in the present article.

So what is it that I now regard as particularly significant in Rubenson's contribution? It is his challenge to assumptions about literacy and illiteracy in the desert, a challenge offered in the course of arguing for the authenticity of the Coptic version of Antony's letters. It is that which I will seek to set within a broader context, not least because it may also open up questions about the process by which desert wisdom was promulgated and received.

Rubenson outlined the strong arguments against attributing the letters to Anthony so as to counter them. His outline may be summed up as follows: First, we lack evidence for literary activity in Coptic as early as the first half of the fourth century; second, Egyptian monks are traditionally thought to be illiterate and uneducated; and third, there are certain specific statements in Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* that seem to point in the same direction.

All three points Rubenson was able to counter: First of all, the Nag Hammadi documents and other translated texts show that there was a Coptic literary culture in the making this early; second, the validity of the traditional picture of the uneducated monk given in the *Apophthegmata* needs careful consideration, since these collections were not recorded before the second half of the fifth century; third, Athanasius' picture of Anthony was meant to show that the monk was taught only by God. In fact, the latter represents a general tendency; we only have to recall Origen's idealization of the illiterate apostles to see the force of it: they spread the word "by divine power," he told Celsus, and it would never have been so evident that that was so if "the gospel and the preaching were in persuasive words of the wisdom that consists in literary style and composition."<sup>2</sup> Thus, even though Anthony's illiteracy was a powerful motif, Rubenson reached the conclusion that the letters are authentic and Anthony not unlettered.

What I now want to explore further are the implications of that conclusion – both for the literacy or illiteracy of the desert communities in general, and for "Wisdom on the Move" – the wide dissemination of

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<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* I.62; trans. from Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1953.

desert wisdom both orally and as text in multiple languages.<sup>3</sup> The focus will be on the *Apophthegmata*, and it is worth briefly reminding ourselves that there are considerable variations and overlaps across the two types of collections, alphabetic and topical, and collections exist in Latin, Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopic. Their dissemination was profuse.

It seems to me that there has been increasing recognition that for Antiquity in general it is difficult to draw any sharp demarcation between literacy and illiteracy – indeed, what is meant by the terms in any given instance requires careful definition – and that literature, though written, was then actually oral in ways that we find difficult to imagine. Indeed, implicit, formerly unquestioned, assumptions that authors and readers then used and composed texts in ways similar to modern writers and editors have to be abandoned. We will consider those two points in reverse order.

### Literature as Having an Oral Character

In Antiquity, the whole point of script was that voices from a distance, or indeed from the past, could be heard:

For it is by means of writing alone that the dead are brought to the minds of the living, and it is through the written word that people who are spatially very far apart communicate with each other as if they were nearby.<sup>4</sup>

The absent person was made present as the letter, or poem or speech or history, was read aloud, usually to a gathering of people, though high class individuals would perhaps have a slave to perform the text exclusively for them. I vividly remember long ago reading Edwin Hatch's late

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the title of the symposium "Wisdom on the Move: Late Antique Traditions in Multicultural Conversation" (23 Sept 2022), during which an earlier version of this article was presented, and the edited volume under the same name, published as number 161 in the *Vigiliae Christianae*, Supplements series, Brill 2020, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Thomas Arentzen, Henrik Rydell Johnsen & Andreas Westergren.

<sup>4</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 12.13, as quoted by William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, Cambridge, Mass; Harvard University Press 1989, 26; cf. Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter-Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Philadelphia, Penn: Westminster Press 1986.

nineteenth-century classic, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*:<sup>5</sup> he insisted on the respect accorded to ancient written texts precisely because they seemed to defy mortality. I also still recall the surprise I felt, again long ago, when I came across Augustine's amazement at Anselm reading to himself in silence<sup>6</sup> – but indeed, to read in one's head was unknown. The script was effectively the equivalent in our world of a tape recording. The continuously written text had to be deciphered and realized: indeed, the ancients would be well aware of the fact (which is now, I suppose, associated with post-modern reader-response theory) that a text is only black marks on the page until a reader makes sense of them, and in the case of the ancients that meant speaking them out loud, or at least murmuring them as your eyes passed over the page. Texts had to be performed, and were usually received through hearing with the ears rather than seeing with the eyes.

This "auditory culture" is well captured in Carol Harrison's book, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*. She opens her introduction with the estimate that "around two-thirds of the early Christian texts we now read were originally spoken rather than written, and intended for hearers, rather than readers."<sup>7</sup> Noting the "primacy of the verbal over the written" she cites the famous discussion in Plato's *Phaedrus* where writing is criticized for destroying the memory and Socrates responds by naming it as "the illegitimate brother of speech," describing speech as "the word which is written with intelligence in the mind of the learner." Following Gamble,<sup>8</sup> Harrison suggests that this provides the right sense in which to understand Papias' comment that he preferred over books the "living and abiding voice" – it should be taken "not as a rejection of literacy but as a preference for the first-hand immediacy of the oral, which was shared by pagans and Christians alike in antiquity."<sup>9</sup> In any case, a

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<sup>5</sup> This work was re-published in 1957 as a Harper Torchbook, Harper and Brothers, New York; Hatch's Hibbert Lectures of 1888 were edited from the unfinished manuscript by A. M. Fairbairn and published posthumously by Williams and Norgate, London.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* VI.2.

<sup>7</sup> Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church. A History of Early Christian Texts*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison, *Art of Listening*, 5.

text was composed by speaking to oneself or by dictation to a scribe; it was written in a spoken, rhetorical form; “published” by public reading; “read” by being read aloud; taught by oral exegesis and discussion in the schoolroom, or by *ex tempore* preaching and catechesis in the Church.<sup>10</sup>

The early Christians heard the word rather than read it – in fact, heard it “sounded.” Again drawing on the earlier work of Gamble, she reminds her readers of the physical and technological constraints faced by writers and readers – the lack of word division and punctuation, the labour-intensive and cumbersome nature of the materials for writing, and so on.

But the really important point for us is her picture of how literate and illiterate shared

a rhetorical culture; one based on the practise and power of the spoken word. In this sense, we can speak not only of an oral culture, but of a much broader “cultural” literacy ... or a facility for “literate listening” among the illiterate majority in the ancient world.<sup>11</sup>

So she writes of “the unlettered” being

able to “read” and understand reality through the shared, often tacit, markers of complicit understanding, customary practice, and habitual ways of thinking created by speaking and hearing.<sup>12</sup>

A couple of times I have referred back from Harrison to Harry Gamble: his book, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, must have been the work that brought home these realities to students of early Christianity, realities better known perhaps to text-critics and ex-classicists like myself. Gambles’ own account of the close relationship between oral and literary culture, and also of book production and dissemination, both in society in general and in early Christianity in particular, provides the practical background for Harrison’s discerning account of the “auditory

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<sup>10</sup> Harrison, *Art of Listening*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison, *Art of Listening*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Harrison, *Art of Listening*, 4.

culture" of antiquity and the vital place of performance in reading texts and bringing them to life. Crucial to both of these studies, however, is the prior work of William Harris on *Ancient Literacy*.<sup>13</sup>

### Literacy and Illiteracy: Distinctions and Definitions

Harris' book brings us back to those issues concerning definition, where to draw the line between literacy and illiteracy, how to discern the uses of literacy in a given society and the extent of participation in a given population. It is those questions which Harris broaches, working through from the invention of the Greek alphabet in the eighth century BC through to the fifth century AD and challenging the notion of widespread literacy in the ancient world. He helpfully provides perspective by using comparative material, drawing, for example, from UNESCO's 1977 survey of world literacy, which was itself vitiated by variations in the definition of literacy: "there are infinite gradations of literacy for any written language," he writes; sharp polarity needs to be avoided. Indeed, account must be taken of the category of semi-literates – "persons who can write slowly or not at all, and who can read without being able to read complex or very lengthy texts."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, terminology is ambiguous: "illiterate" in Latin, as in English, could mean "uncultured."

What Harris sets out to do is to try and place the Greeks and Romans with respect to mass literacy, and also with respect to what may be called "scribal literacy" and "craftsman's literacy." By considering various societies, historical and contemporary, he takes account of social factors which affect literacy levels, things like the requirements of the economy, the provision or otherwise of education, and the ready supply or otherwise of substitute writers and readers. In light of such comparisons, he then works through the evidence for three periods of Greek history (Archaic Times, the Classical, and the Hellenistic periods) and three periods of Roman history (Archaic Italy, the Late Republic together with the High Empire, and Late Antiquity). The evidence discussed includes what we can deduce from the extant literature, but also inscriptions and other sources. Most pertinent to our enquiry is his work on the Ox-

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<sup>13</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*.

<sup>14</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 5.

yrhynchus papyri, as we shall see. Meanwhile we should note his general estimate: not more than 10% were actually literate in any of these periods. He insists, moreover, on the continuities between the oral and literary – a point we have already been observing – and he focuses on the actual uses of literacy in Greco-Roman society.

This last discussion is worth pursuing further before we proceed.<sup>15</sup> Harris observes that Aristotle apparently had four categories of use: money-making, household management, instruction and civic activities; while Diodorus Siculus spells out the importance of votes, letters, testaments, laws, treaties, the sayings of the wise and education, adding that “the cause of the good life is education based on the written word.”<sup>16</sup> Harris next proceeds to compile a substantial list which, he says, “probably covers the great majority of what was written down in antiquity;”<sup>17</sup> it spells out more specifically things like receipts, accounts, labels, advertisement, contracts, weight and measures, legends on coins, records of legal proceedings, lists of citizens, and much other bureaucratic documentation.

It is tempting to follow this up by turning to Peter Parsons’ book, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Papyri beneath the Egyptian Sand Reveal a Long-Lost World*.<sup>18</sup> He provides a fascinating reconstruction of the administration, markets and trade, contracts and apprenticeships, revealed by the rubbish-tip of papyri found at Oxyrhynchus. We eschew much detail, for our current interest is simply to highlight the way written documents and records were built into the everyday life of that ancient society and its legal and economic relationships pretty much as widely as in ours. There were many everyday uses of literacy, and illiterates were involved in transactions that were guaranteed in writing.

Indeed, Harris<sup>19</sup> notes “how deeply embedded acts of reading and writing were in people’s lives, and how authoritative the written word had become.” Yet his estimate of levels of literacy is surprisingly low: with “reasonable clarity,” he writes, “the Greek papyri ... show which

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<sup>15</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, ch. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica* 12.13. Translation from Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish. Greek Papyri beneath the Egyptian Sand Reveal a Long-Lost World*, London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson 2007.

<sup>19</sup> See Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 276–281, for the following points.

social groups hovered on the edge of illiteracy and which were predominantly illiterate." Of course, some may have been illiterate in Greek though "able to write in Egyptian;" and furthermore, some may well have relied "on the writing of an intermediary" though in fact "able to write," and "even those who are declared to be illiterate may well be able to read and even write after a fashion." But even village elders were illiterate, and in the villages government clerks seem to have little more than signing ability. What is absolutely clear is how literacy followed class – the Greek elite, male, property-owning "gymnasium" class would be literate, and some, but not all, artisans: "everyone of the master weavers who appears in apprenticeship contracts is said to be illiterate," he notes. The clear evidence of the papyri is that lenders tended to be more literate than borrowers and lessors more literate than lessees; yet they also show how "illiterates who were involved in the transactions just referred to were, in spite of their illiteracy, making use of the written word."<sup>20</sup> Thus they made "occasional use of the written word, but there was no necessity for them to write with their own hands," and they do not seem to have regarded "the education of their sons in *grammata*" as important. "Almost all the free-born poor in Egypt must have been illiterate, for our very extensive documentation scarcely produces a counter-instance."<sup>21</sup> So "it comes as no surprise when Origen ... asserts that the majority of people ... are 'unlettered and somewhat rustic' [C. *Cels.* 1.27]."<sup>22</sup>

Harris judiciously warns against extrapolation from the Egyptian papyri to more general conclusions for the High Empire, but given this overall situation in Egyptian society, it is hardly surprising that the monasteries of Egypt were predominantly made up of persons with little or no literacy, and that an oral culture would be paramount. Harris notes that Pachomius expected "all novice monks ... to be instructed in reading;" his deduction from this is that Pachomius "naturally assumed that some of the new recruits would be illiterate."<sup>23</sup> Yet surely it also indicates the importance which books and reading had in Pachomius' eyes.

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<sup>20</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 280.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 278.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 279.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 303–304.



## Desert Literacy, Desert Illiteracy

Given the role of scripture in Christianity, it is hardly surprising that certain books were accorded value, or that memorization and meditation on scripture features large in monastic practice. Burton-Christie's study, *The Word in the Desert*,<sup>24</sup> sits alongside that of Samuel Rubenson in rendering our picture of the situation more complex, tracing, as it does, the co-existence of illiteracy with profound attention to the written words of scripture, written words which would be realized in performance – in liturgy predominantly but also in the recitation involved in meditation on those words. Again it is tempting to digress and pursue this further by rehearsing some of Burton-Christie's findings, but let me merely remind the reader of a couple of things: first, his use of the term "oral text," and second, his exploration of the tensions around owning books – even copies of the scriptures – given the ideal of possessing nothing and giving to the poor. Asked for a word, Serapion said, "You have taken the living of the widows and orphans and put it on your shelves," the shelves being full of books.<sup>25</sup> Yet, for all that, scripture was clearly at the heart of desert life. The implicit challenge to the presumption of illiteracy among the desert monks, offered both by Burton-Christie and Rubenson, is surely reinforced by the way in which Harris' work on *Ancient Literacy* in general underlines the continuities between oral and literary culture.

## Wisdom on the Move

So now to the relevance of all this to the dissemination of desert wisdom in both oral and written form. That sayings and anecdotes were originally passed on by word of mouth is an assumption backed up by evidence from the collections of *Apophthegmata* themselves. Classic examples, particularly from the collection made by Abba Isaiah, are assembled by Graham Gould in his book, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 115–116.

<sup>26</sup> Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993.

Isaiah begins his account with a short introduction: "Brothers, those things which I heard and saw of the old men, these I recount to you, neither omitting anything from them nor making any additions." Each section begins with a phrase such as, "Abba John said to me" (2a), or, "Abbas Amoun said to me" (4Aa), and some end with "These things were told to me by Abba Abraham, who dwelt with him [Agathon]" (5Ga), or, "These things were told to me by the brother who heard them from Abba Sisoës" (6C). There seems to be no reason to doubt this evidence that Isaiah is recording in writing an oral tradition.<sup>27</sup>

Gould also mentions the Ethiopic collection, describing it as "marked by the prevalence of a first-person style of reporting, and by several striking examples of oral transmission of a story over several stages."

The question now is whether or not at the stage of oral transmission the material was simply passed from one individual to another and took the form of isolated incidents or sayings, as perhaps implied by the evidence just noted. Was it writing that stimulated collection or were collections formed and memorized for communal recitation and performance well before being written down? Is it even possible that such recited collections were orally delivered in translated form in bilingual communities, thus facilitating dissemination even in unwritten form? Would such a process explain both the diversity and similarity found in the collections better than any attempt to trace the laborious process of gathering, editing and copying sources which is so often envisaged?

To attempt an answer to that question I turn to a cross-disciplinary project on *Oral Cultures Past and Present*, subtitled *Rappin' and Homer* and published in the 1990s.<sup>28</sup> A classicist, Thomas J. Sienkiwicz, and a sociolinguist, Viv Edwards, together demonstrate how "the same features which emerge from an analysis of the ancient Greek tradition recur time and again in oral cultures widely separate in time and space."<sup>29</sup> At the same time they insist, as do Harris and others we have considered, on continuities between oral and written cultures:

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<sup>27</sup> Gould, *On Monastic Community*, 19–20.

<sup>28</sup> Viv Edwards & Thomas J. Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures Past and Present: Rappin' and Homer*, Oxford: Blackwell 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Quotation from blurb on back cover of Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*.

the written word does not divide so much as the spoken word unites the alliterate and the literate; that is, the presence of literacy does not remove all trace of orality, nor must an oral culture always function independently of literacy.<sup>30</sup>

On this point they endorse the statement of Finnegan in his book on *Orality and Literacy* that they “are not two separate and independent things” nor “two mutually exclusive and opposed processes for representing and communicating information.”<sup>31</sup> They explicitly state that, when contrasts are drawn, they are “talking in relative not absolute terms;” in fact, “we are dealing essentially with an oral-literate continuum.”<sup>32</sup>

Performance they certainly regard as fundamental to oral cultures,<sup>33</sup> alongside interaction with an audience which knows the drill, so to speak, and acts as prompt.<sup>34</sup> The performer’s “oral literature”<sup>35</sup> (note the parallel to Burton-Christie’s phrase, “oral text”) is shaped in response: “no two oral performances by a single artist are ever the same”<sup>36</sup> – there is an open-endedness and a flexibility, enabled by the social bonds of the oral community, and “oral performance plays a vital role in cementing social cohesion.”<sup>37</sup>

performer and audience are part of a single performative dynamic. They share a set of assumptions ... If performers stray from these norms, the audience will hold them in check.<sup>38</sup>

Because oral transmission is essentially creative transmission, the end result bears the mark of contributions from many generations

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<sup>30</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 10, quoting R. Finnegan, *Orality and Literacy*, Oxford: Blackwell 1988, 175.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 195.

<sup>33</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, e.g. 32, 218 & passim chs. 1–3.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, e.g. pp. 66, 70, 79, & passim chs. 3–7.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 167; cf. 61.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 189.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 65.

... Each generation makes its mark on the tradition which is the collective property of the group.<sup>39</sup>

They share a “web of words” which “reinforce the cultural cohesion of the community.”<sup>40</sup>

Another significant observation in this study is that memory works differently in oral and literate communities:

While in a literate context memorization means word-for-word reduplication of a previous speech event, in an oral context memorization usually involves replication of the tradition, not of the specific words.<sup>41</sup>

The accomplishments of oral artists thus go well beyond mere recitation. Each performance is an act of re-creation ...<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, it is the creation of a tapestry of words facilitated by repetition, elaboration, exaggeration, metaphor, proverb, riddles, and such like.

Now these observations would seem to make appropriate clear differentiation between the memorization and oral recitation of scripture and the oral transmission of the *Apophthegmata*: the former would be word for word, the latter the replication of the tradition in a more flexible performance.

So, in light of this study, let me conjure up a gathering of monks in a Palestinian community:

Here is an exile from Scetis, performing the tradition, with lively prompting from his affirming audience, probably including Egyptian fellow-exiles. He is telling yet again in the old familiar order the tales and wise words of their one-time Abbas in Egypt, while in little huddles among the listeners the Coptic is orally rendered into Syriac and perhaps Greek in other little huddles, and the odd stenographer jots down what he hears, perhaps in Coptic, perhaps Syriac, perhaps Greek, treating this event, and then other such oral events, as things worth recording in short-hand.

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<sup>39</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 167.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Edwards and Sienkiwicz, *Oral Cultures*, 64; cf. 38–39, 58–64.

Later on dictation generates multiple copies, so that the oral (the spoken) becomes aural (heard), and aural becomes written, and written is carried in various languages to other communities, and there read aloud, re-rehearsed and re-performed, and so the diffusion spreads, oral and written, written and oral – no sharp dichotomy, constant interaction and audience participation ...

Thus, perhaps, we are led to the conclusion that the scholarly endeavours of text-critics to reconstruct the process of editing written sources, copying them, translating them, adding to them, re-copying, etc. etc., needs to give way to a re-conceiving of the culture and means by which dissemination took place, to a fresh grasp of the complexity of communal exercises in participation and adaptation, remembering and dictating and performing afresh: we might call it a living tradition, a series of unrepeatably speech-events which somehow get captured on tape, as it were, and so can be replayed. As I put it in *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, “a text was a form of recorded speech and it had to be realised to make sense, rather like playing a musical score.”<sup>43</sup> Re-playing the record necessarily involves live performance, whether of written text or traditional material received orally.

The aim of performance was, of course, pedagogical and practical – the word generating practical and ethical living<sup>44</sup> according to the tradition which ultimately stemmed from those giant Abbots of the past. It was all about hearing those sages directly; even when written, it would be oral performance which made it effective, the word spoken being powerful to effect its outcome, as Isaiah had long since said of the Word of God:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997, 77.

<sup>44</sup> See Gould, *Desert Fathers on Community*, for further development of this aspect.

<sup>45</sup> Isaiah 55.10–11 (NRSV).