Writing, Inscription, and Power :
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Toni Morrison

by Susan G. Cumings

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Abstract

In this thesis, I have sought to explore the problems peculiar to language in its *inscribed* form: that is, peculiar to writing. The first chapter looks at the letters to the Corinthians, and at the ways in which Paul constructs a system of textuality within them. In particular, I focus on the manner in which Paul invests the act of writing with divine authority, and characterizes himself as a divinely appointed *writer*. With his text therefore posited as carrying such authority I then turn to the identity which he constructs - again using tropes of textuality - and imposes on the Corinthians. The metaphorization of the reader's body into letter then serves to illustrate the denial or neutralization of pain and the silencing of dissent, two concomitant exercises in power.

The second chapter takes Kafka's short story 'In the Penal Settlement' as a Nietzschean reading of Paul, noting how metaphors become re-invested with concreteness and gruesome reality. Rendered literal, details of the imposition of writing, the inscription of authority upon the subject reveal the ways in which human qualities and expression are silenced or destroyed by this system of rule. Kafka's mirroring of the eschatological expectation common to religion also serves to show that this means used to justify the system's acts of cruelty is false and deceptive.

In the third chapter, I look at the way in which Morrison, in *Beloved*, takes up this theme of eschatological expectation; challenging it as in itself inadequate to sustain a people involved in very present suffering. Morrison, like Paul and Kafka, lets questions of writing, text, and the power of inscription drive her narrative, but through the lives and experiences of her characters explores the dangers of inscription and seeks alternative roles for writing, outside or beyond their 'Pauline' closed-system.

As a postscript, I then take these questions of inscription and identity into the new, practical context of computerized communications networks, with a view to the political advocacy called for in my concluding arguments.

Table of Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis was conceived of and written over the course of two and a half years at the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology, newly relocated (as I was) in Glasgow in the autumn of 1991. It is the product of original research and no part of it has been published to date, nor has any of it been used in any other thesis. There are however numerous people without whom I would not have been able to complete it, and here I have a chance to formally acknowledge their contributions.

I must begin by thanking my supervisor, Dr David Jasper, with whom I have worked (and squabbled) since the project began, and as it grew and changed. His suggestions for print sources and resource people have been invaluable, and the time he makes available to his students is more than generous. He also usually bought the coffee. (Thanks, David!)

I greatly appreciate the friendship of the people in the Centre, and was glad of their comments and suggestions, particularly after I presented an early version of the Paul and *Beloved* pieces in the Divinity Faculty Research Seminar at Glasgow University in April of 1993. Dr John Barclay was kind enough to offer advice on a much earlier version of the Paul chapter as I prepared for that presentation.

I am endebted to Professor Richard Herrnstadt, now retired from Iowa State University, where he helped establish the Department of African American Studies. His willingness to take on extra work at the tail end of his Glasgow sabbatical (in the spring of 1992) was very

generous, and his knowledge of the field invaluable to me as I first tried to get my chapter on *Beloved* off the ground.

My flatmates Belén, Marta, Tino and Mairi have been superb all along, and also helpful with the finer points of Spanish and German (and Chichewa... *Openga*!).

I thank Timothy Slemmons for many gifts and services rendered, including persistent arguments, and the loan of his hands to type with when mine seemed to be giving up.

I am very grateful to Alison Jasper, a brilliant feminist crying in the wilderness, without whom I might never have read *Beloved* in the first place.

Finally, I offer my deepest respect and gratitude to Doug Gay and Rachel Morley, whose love and support kept me in Scotland, and kept me sane (mostly), after a rather 'harrowing' start. There will always be roses for you, my friends.

My thanks to all, and perhaps most to LG (you know who you are).

Susan G. Cumings

Glasgow, 1994

Texts and Editions Used in this Work

Paul:

For my work on Paul, the biblical quotations given in English, unless otherwise stated, come from the New Revised Standard Version. Those in Greek come from the Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament, 26th edition.

Kafka:

The English edition of the story to which I shall refer is the translation of Willa and Edwin Muir, and can be found in the 1961 Penguin edition of *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*; quotations in German are from the 1966 Cambridge volume edited by J.M.S. Pasley and entitled *Franz Kafka: Der Heizer In der Strafkolonie Der Bau*. In general, I shall refer to the standard English language titles of Kafka's other works, except where there is a significant difference between an English title and the German original. Readers will also note that the story analysed herein, 'In der Strafkolonie' is published in English under two similar titles: 'In the Penal Settlement' and 'In the Penal Colony'. Although the latter may be somewhat better known, I shall for the most part be using the former when referring to the story by name, as it is thus that it is titled in the English language edition with which I am working, and reserve the phrase 'penal colony' for referring to the setting of the story.

Morrison:

All page references given for *Beloved* are to the Picador (paperback) edition of 1988, published by Pan Books, London.

Sources of Chapter Epigraphs

Introduction:

Michel Foucault, in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) pp. 57-58, quoted in Stephen D. Moore, 'God's Own Pri(son): The Disciplinary Technology of the Cross', in Francis Watson, ed., *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* (London: SCM Press 1993), p. 131.

Chapter 1:

Paul, *Letter to the Galatians*, 6:11; *ibid., Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 3:2a.

Chapter 2:

Steve Butler, Charlie Irvine and Dot Reid, from the album *The Human Dress* by Lies Damned Lies (p & c Sticky Music, 1993); Malcolm Pasley, 'In the Penal Colony', in Angel Flores, ed., *The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives for Our Time* (New York: Gordian Press, 1977), p. 302.

Chapter 3:

SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign, 'The Wound of the Daughter', published for the Namibia Support Committee (London) by Leeds Postcards, series no. L338.

Conclusion:

Charles Villa-Vicenzio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Capetown: David Phillip, 1992), p. 31, quoted in Kenneth R. Ross, *Presbyterian Theology and Participatory*

Democracy (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press & Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag GmbH, 1993), p. 14.

Postscript:

Barbara Johnson, 'Writing', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds. *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 48-49.

A Language for Suffering

Introduction to

Writing, Inscription and Power:
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Morrison

Nothing is more material, physical, corporal
than the exercise of power.

- Michel Foucault

In this thesis, I shall examine metaphorical and literal uses of inscription in the creation, imposition, or claiming of identity. I begin with a study of Paul and his relationship with the church at Corinth; in my first chapter, I will argue that Paul's narration of a self is not entirely congruent with his experience of self, but builds rather upon a rhetorically developed understanding of the role and status of the writer -- particularly a writer claiming apostolic status. I intend to demonstrate that, by building his ethos through his relation to Holy Writ, explicitly, and implicitly, he then as writer imposes an identity on his readers which is subordinate to his own, and renders them unable to respond or engage, for fear of losing place in -- or basis for -- community.

I go on in the second chapter to read Kafka's short story 'In the Penal Settlement', and to show the ways in which through fantasy/nightmare fiction, Kafka calls attention to this process by which people become subject to textual identification, and ultimately to text. Biblically, this happens by way of metaphor, but in the penal colony, it becomes an incarnate, gruesome 'reality'.

In my third major chapter, I will argue that Toni Morrison, through her novel *Beloved*, looks to redress the imbalance between a sense of self built from personal experience, its narration and self-narration, and one imposed by the narration, the inscription of another. The novel is set in a community of freed or escaped slaves on the outskirts of Cincinnati just after the American Civil War, and the narrative is built around three generations of women and their struggles. In my analysis, I look particularly at questions of literacy and forms of writing arising or

appearing in this setting, as they relate to issues of identity, power and community, and also give attention to the biblical figurings and refigurings which saturate Morrison's text.[1]

Originally, this investigation had a somewhat different focus. Reading by chance Roland Barthes's essay on 'The Death of the Author' on the same day as Paul's letter to the Galatians, I was struck by the way the latter seemed to answer, almost to defy the former. It almost seemed that Paul had anticipated the wish to do away with authors, and had decided to prevent this fate being imposed on himself by inscribing himself deeply and repeatedly into his text. Hence his name is mentioned frequently, and even his physical body, in the (synec_dochic) form of his hand, is represented, its action of forming big letters a reminder that this text, this artifact, most definitely came from a particular author, and one whose name was Paul.

Proceeding with an inquiry into Paul's way of inscribing himself into his text, I became aware that in the letters to the church at Corinth Paul not only referred to himself at the end of the letter in the increasingly familiar 'I Paul, write this greeting with my own hand', but that throughout, verbs of writing were frequent, and often occurred shortly after references to another form of writing, that of Holy Scripture. It was here that the present thesis began to form, as I looked at the way Paul created his identity within the text, making use of the nature of Scripture as text.

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1 This is of course looking at one of the most powerful and enigmatic of texts in Western culture -- that of scripture.

This led briefly into exploring Borges's short story, 'The God's Script', in which the narrator mused on how a *god* would write, what form the text would take, and how its significance could be contained, or not contained, in such a form of expression. Finally I came to a closer look at the metaphorical treatment of textuality offered by Paul, most particularly in II COR 3:1-6, and to this Kafka and Morrison, more than Borges, seemed to answer. Kafka, by his exposure of the literal meaning of Paul's figurative expressions, and Morrison, by going beyond mere exposure or criticism, into the search for viable alternatives, ways of conceiving the self and its relation to others outwith the constraints placed upon persons by the textually imposed identities created by others.

There are other points of contact through which these texts (those of Paul, Kafka and Morrison) may be compared and classed together. The expression of suffering, of bondage, for example, runs through all three. Paul, who tells the Corinthians of a thorn in his flesh (which at least one scholar would propose as being the Corinthians themselves), elsewhere represents himself as bearing the marks of Christ on his body (Galatians), and as preaching 'the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains'.[2] The step from these situations to a penal colony (Kafka) or to the time and place of Black American slavery (Morrison) is not a vast one. I must call attention, however, to the way Paul plays up certain kinds of suffering (mainly his own, with an ennobling gloss), and plays down certain others (mainly any difficulty encountered by others for which he might be held responsible). Hence, physical suffering, torture and the like are 'for the glory of Christ', and all should be imitators of Paul's example of

2 A. Leslie Milton, currently a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow, suggested to me in personal conversation (in February 1992) that the Corinthians themselves, with all the troubles they seem to cause Paul, are the 'thorn' in his flesh.

endurance; this overlooks the fact that suffering for Christ is only occurring in these communities because of Paul's introduction of Christianity there.

As an example of the way Paul grants but limited significance (or 'meaning') to the suffering of others, I will look at his metaphorization of the body into an inanimate object, a letter, a text, in II COR 3: 'You yourselves are our letter'. This can be compared to the 'redescription' Elaine Scarry finds in narratives of war, as we shall see below;[3] in Paul's case, it is a transformation which sweeps the physical and psychological consequences of his imposed authority under the rug, so to speak. Kafka, exercising a suspicion which follows in the path of Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ*, then lifts Paul's colourful rug of metaphor, transforming the figurative back into a literal reality, in its most extreme form; this is a second redescription, undoing the first: an 'un-redescription'. While this exposes, however, it does not suggest change, but only horror, and the explorer's flight from the colony, before his proposed meeting with the new commandant, leaves us with no better alternative to the old regime.

Morrison's *Beloved*, I will argue, contains *both* redescription and 'un-redescription', all within one episode occurring quite early in the book, to which I shall return presently. Much of the rest of the novel is an exploration of the means and the effects of the first action, the redescription, and ways are sought both to un-redescribe, to reject this imposed inscription, and to begin to *describe* one's own reality for oneself, as an originary rather than a reactionary act. As Sethe, the central

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3 I refer to her chapters on torture and war; see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

character in this episode, learned in her first days of freedom in Ohio, before tragedy followed her once again, 'Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another'.[4] Interestingly, the double movement I describe from early in the work bears certain concrete correspondences with details found in Scarry's analysis of the deceptive language of war.

Looking at the ways in which the toll of war in terms of human suffering is played down or altogether elided through language, Scarry writes:

> A second path by which injuring disappears is the active redescription of the event: the act of injuring, or the tissue that is to be injured, or the weapon that is to accomplish the injury is renamed. The gantry for American missiles is named the 'cherrypicker', just as American missions entailing the massive dropping of incendiary bombs over North Vietnam were called 'Sherwood Forest' and 'Pink Rose', just as Japanese suicide planes in World War II were called 'night blossoms', as prisoners subjected to medical experiments in Japanese camps were called 'logs', and as the day during World War I on which thirty thousand Russians and thirteen thousand Germans died at Tannenberg came to be called the day of harvesting. The recurrence here of language from the realm of vegetation occurs because vegetable tissue, though alive, is perceived to be immune to pain; thus the inflicting of damage can be registered in language without permitting the entry of the reality of suffering into the description. Live vegetable tissue occupies a peculiar category of sentience that is close to, perhaps is, nonsentience; more often, the language is drawn from the unequivocal nonsentience of steel, wood, iron and aluminium, the metals and materials out of which weapons are made and which can be invoked so that an event entailing . . . deeply traumatic experiences . . . is thus neutralized.[5]

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4 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Picador edition, Pan Books, 1988), p. 95.
5 Scarry:1985, p. 66.

In *Beloved*, after receiving a terrible beating from her new master, schoolteacher, Sethe tries to escape to the free North, where she has sent her three children on before her. Pregnant and near death, she is discovered by 'white trash', a vague, unkempt runaway named Amy, who, though her speech suggests total disinterest, helps Sethe. When she sees the marks of Sethe's beating, Amy's (re)description minimizes the horror in a similar fashion to the language Scarry discusses above. As Sethe later remembers it,

> That's what she called it. I've never seen it and I never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know.
>
> (p. 16)

What we may first notice here is the fact that Sethe has never seen this figure she bears, and never will, but from the moment another's narrative gave it shape, it became inscribed in her understanding as having that shape and no other, and even eighteen years later, though she does not see it and cannot feel it, she is acutely aware of its presence.[6] When Paul D discovers the 'tree', however, it is not living and blossoming, but is a dead thing. The total lack of feeling in the skin of Sethe's back exhibits 'unequivocal nonsentience' (Scarry) in keeping with the way Paul D, in his mind, (re)describes it in his turn:

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6 The hiddenness of the wounds from the sight of the victim is also a feature of the system in Kafka's penal colony, where the convicted never 'see' their accusation/punishment, but only have it inscribed upon their bodies: others may 'read' it, but they can only try to understand it through their pain.

> And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but not say, 'Aw, Lord, girl.' And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years.
>
> (pp. 17-18)

The living, but questionably sentient in Scarry's terms -- the blooming tree, as it was redescribed by Amy and inscribed in Sethe's understanding -- is now definitely without feeling, and its second redescription, as a pattern of wrought iron, effects at once a second objectification, and yet a reclaiming, for Paul D's kisses ascribe (inscribe) life to this hurt woman, acknowledging the pain of the past with tenderness in the present, describing, this time more accurately, the insentient, yet refusing to have that be a denial of the human suffering which has been undergone (physically), and which continues in Sethe's heart and mind.

Sixty pages on, the narrative takes up the original chokecherry tree again, going back in time to the scene in which it is first described:

> It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk -- it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder.
>
> (p. 79)

This version of Amy's description is somewhat more vivid in its detail than the one Sethe remembered earlier, with the 'sap' beginning to

suggest a flowing vitality absent from the earlier, more static picture. This passage continues however, and eventually transgresses the bounds of the poetic portrait, giving clear evidence of human pain:

> Maybe I ought to break them blossoms open. Get that pus to running, you think? Wonder what God had in mind.
>
> (p. 80)

The metaphor breaks down, the excess comes through, as the 'blossoms' cease to be part of a tree, inhuman, and instead become again the festering wounds of a woman in pain. In the coming chapters, I shall argue that Kafka's exposure of the wounds inflicted by Pauline writing, and Morrison's breaking open of their infected sores, are necessary in all of our encounters with inscriptions, for only then, when we are no longer 'shielded' by metaphor, can the process of healing begin.

* * *

The Writer and the Written: Paul's Rhetoric of Identity in I and II Corinthians

Chapter One of

Writing, Inscription and Power:
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Morrison

See what large letters I write with my own hand.

*

You are our letter.

-Paul

Pauline Textuality

In this chapter, I shall seek to construct a model of what I find to be the Pauline view of text, textual status and power. I shall do this by conducting a close reading of the letters to the Corinthians, paying specific attention to expressions concerning text and the act of writing. I begin by looking at the manner in which Paul chooses to identify himself within these letters, for he appears under many guises (among them the skilled master builder of I COR 3:10 and the father/progenitor of I COR 4:15), but I shall argue that is primarily through his *writing* that Paul assumes authority over the Corinthians; and authority which is not without its consequences, for the Christians or for Paul himself.

In the course of the chapter I shall be using the term 'rhetoric' in two different ways, and so I believe it is helpful at this stage to distinguish between them. While I shall have occasion to refer to a few of the techniques of classical rhetoric which can be observed in Paul's letters, such as the use of diatribe and maxim, or the construction of an *ethos*, it is not my intention to perform an in-depth exposition of these techniques.[1] Thus I shall for the most part confine my use of the term 'rhetoric' to its broad sense, pertaining to 'the art of persuasion'.

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1 For a brief study of classical rhetorical devices in general, see Peter Dixon, *Rhetoric* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971), esp. pp. 21-44; for detailed exposition of their use in and relation to the New Testament, I would refer the reader to the work of George A. Kennedy, particularly *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980] and *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984]. For a hypothesis regarding the Christian faith *as* persuasion in the Greek rhetorical sense (centred around uses of *pistis* and related terms) see James L. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The Paul in the Text

In the letters to the Corinthians, it could be said that there are two ways a reader learns of Paul as a writer. The first is metatextual: there is in any 'modern' edition (translation, version) a title preceding each of these letters, introducing it as 'The First/Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians' (or some variation of this phrase). New Testament scholars have much to say regarding the accuracy of the ordinal designations (whether there were other letters which have not been preserved) and the integrity of each text (whether II COR, for example, is one letter, or pieces of several, and in what order said pieces might better be read).[2] I am more concerned, however, with the designation of the author: one does not find titles the likes of 'The First Letter of Paul and Sosthenes to the Corinthians' or 'The First Letter of Tertius to the Romans'.[3] Regardless of the debates in scholarship, regardless even of what it says in the letters, *canonically* these letters are attributed solely to a person known as Paul.[4]

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2 Regarding the ordinal designations, I COR is not seen as the first letter written to the Corinthians, strictly speaking, because of the reference at 5:9 to a previous one. It is generally accepted that I COR was written before most if not all of II COR, however, and it is definite that I COR was 'externally attested' long before II COR (I COR in the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, and in 1 Clement, II COR not until Marcion's canon [ca 140-150]), though both letters *may* have been in circulation in the earlier period. See Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible Series, vol. 32A (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1984), pp. 26-30.

Regarding the integrity of II COR, Sumney points out, for example, that hypotheses range from those who see II COR as a unity (Stephenson, Bates, Kümmel) to those who see it as containing parts of two (Plummer, Bruce, Furnish), five (Marxsen, Bornkamm) or six letters (Schmithals). For a summary of the various 'partition theories' with regard to II COR, see Jerry L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: Questions of Method in 2 Corinthians*, JSNT Supplement Series 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press/Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 123-126, 215-216n.

3 See I COR 1:1, and again Romans, 16:22. (Regarding authorship and the question of amanuensis, see note 42, below.)

4 It could also be remarked that this particular example, taken from the NRSV of 1989, refers only to 'Paul', while other (mainly older) editions refer to the writer as '*Saint* Paul'. The latter designation, while obviously a 'modern' addition, testifies to the effect of the Pauline ethos (discussed below), and serves to reinforce it for the 'modern' reader.

The second source of information on Paul as a writer is intratextual: the narrative 'I' in the text of the letters who refers to himself as 'Paul'. It is this second source that will be the primary focus of my investigation.

In his *Rhetoric* Aristotle pointed out that orators, in the course of their speaking, establish for themselves an *ethos*; that is, a personal character which itself functions as a means of persuasion. Paul is just such an orator, though his oration takes place within a text. In fact, Paul makes use of this placement of his narrative within a text, since this textuality confers upon him the luxury of his absence, and thus more freedom in his creativity. The identification of this action in Paul's writing is not new; Daniel Patte, for example, writes:

> . . . Paul presents himself in a certain way to his readers; this is a "discursive Paul," Paul as the *enunciator* constructed and inscribed in this specific discourse. Similarly, Paul envisions his readers in a certain way, the Corinthians as *enunciatee* constructed and inscribed in this discourse (who might or might not correspond to the actual Corinthians). [5]

Another scholar, Norman R. Petersen, has written about the 'sociology of Paul's *narrative* world' (my italics), and thus Paul as narrator, pointing out that in Paul's letters,

> Each story is governed by Paul's point of view, because all we know of each is learned from him, even the points of view of the characters in his stories . . . [Paul] alone is the one who has selected and arranged or emplotted the events he refers to.[6]

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5 Daniel Patte, 'A Structural Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 with Special Attention on 2:14-3:6 and 6:11-7:4', in Kent Harold Richards, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, pp. 23-49), p. 24.

6 Norman R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985), p. 15.

Petersen later also reminds readers that although it often must take into account shared knowledge gained from previous contact, an individual writer's self-identification is nonetheless a subjective, not an objective act.[7]

I propose to begin now an examination of the ethos Paul creates in his letters to Corinth, with the particular aim of exposing its *textual* character. By 'textual ethos', I mean not only the ethos he creates within his text, but the ethos he creates using the vocabulary *of* text, that is, by means of an abundance of words linked with the act of writing and with things written (these, in turn, being presented both literally and metaphorically). I shall then seek to demonstrate that the closed system of the written word which he creates will serve to influence (one might go so far as to say control) his correspondents at Corinth, and that ironically, it may also, by its very effectiveness in this former task, ultimately close Paul himself out of the very community he seeks to foster.

* * *

The Letter Form

What follows is a brief examination of conventions in letter writing in the period in which I and II COR were composed. Through this we can begin to see to what use Paul was able to put these conventions, and what was unusual, or even unique, about Paul's letter-writing style.

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7 Petersen:1985, p. 57.

Letters are distinctive among written documents in any era: Frances Young and David Ford point out that they 'can embody the relationship and . . . mutuality' which may be harder to express in discursive form.[8] John Lee White goes even further: 'The major function of the letter . . . was to represent a form of 'life-together' during a time of spatial separation, i.e., to turn absence into presence, *apousia* into *parousia*.'[9] It follows from these observations that within any letter (ancient or modern) there is a textual 'person' re-created, to stand with or among the addressee(s) in the place of the absent person (the sender). Similarly, a representation (whether sketchy or detailed) of the addressee(s) must also be contained in the text, if the relationship is somehow to be expressed therein. I would like now to look at the representations of Paul contained within, or flowing out of, the letter conventions of the time.

Letter openings in this period usually followed a formula of 'x to y, greetings', which might, in some diplomatic letters, include any titles of office.[10] There would also follow a wish for the good health of the addressee(s).[11] Paul both conforms to and adapts these standards, writing at once acceptably and distinctively: the letters to the church at Corinth begin with expanded and embellished versions of the usual formulas for greeting, and the conventional health wish or blessing is replaced by a

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8 Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987), pp. 236-237.

9 John Lee White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: a Study of the Letter Body in the Non-literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle*, SBL Dissertation Series (Missoula, MT: Scholars' Press, 1972). See also his later study, 'Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition', CBQ 45 (1983), p. 435.

10 An example of such a letter opening can be seen in Acts 23:26: 'Claudias Lycias to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings.'

11 For more on contemporary letter forms and conventions, see White:1972; there is also a good survey with topical bibliographies in chapters 5 & 6 of David Aune's *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1988).

most distinctive wish for grace. Each of these variations contribute towards establishing the sender's 'identity'. In both I COR 1:1-2 and II COR 1:1, the greeting phrase is expanded so that 'x' becomes 'Paul, [called to be] an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God'. This is a very strong opening claim, and sets the tone for the rest of the letter: since the 'title of office' is conferred on this 'Paul' by the highest of all authorities, questions and quarrels are by it disallowed.[12] The phrase that follows the greeting and takes the place of the more usual health wish echoes this: 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. 'Paul' then not only has been ordained by the will of God, but brings blessings from him, as though he were God's personal friend and message bearer. This wish of 'grace' *(charis)* appears in all of the Pauline letters, but, according to David Aune, appears outside the Pauline corpus only six times through the end of the sixth century CE, so it would be a distinctive and memorable way to begin correspondence, and thus to begin building a textual identity.[13]

Recall that we have said above that this textual identity, or *ethos*, itself functions as a (rhetorical) means of persuasion. In these particular letter openings the writer is creating and introducing a fictional character

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12 Note that it is only after the name Paul *with* its sanctified epithet that we are given the names of other people involved in the sending of greetings, Sosthenes in one case, and Timothy in the other, and the inclusive 'we' is soon dropped for the more authoritative 'I' (immediately in I COR, a dozen verses later in II COR).

The movement between 'I' and 'we' in fact occurs several times in each of the letters; an example of this shift as a demonstrable rhetorical strategy can be seen in the third and fourth chapters of I COR, where Paul and Apollos are ostensibly set up as co-workers and equals, but then Paul is reasserted as the father of the Corinthian community, and thus the one (human) authority with, as Castelli puts it, the 'clear and forceful singular voice'. For more on this section of I COR, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 105, 107-108.

13 Most letters use *erroso* or *errosthe*. See Aune:1988, p. 186.

Paul re-asserts his status as an apostle towards the end of the letter, notably at I COR 15:3-10, a passage which will be of renewed interest in my chapter on Kafka's penal colony.

who, so far, has been said to be (1) the writer of that letter, (2) a person chosen by God, and (3) named Paul.

Identity, Authority, Divine Sanction

The identity that Paul creates for himself within a text has been increasingly remarked upon by contemporary scholars, as mentioned before with reference to Peterson and Patte. Further, Castelli has noted how this identity is then reinforced by many modern commentators, who reproduce uncritically many of Paul's self-descriptions.[14] I would like now to bring my study of the letters to the Corinthians into focus by exploring one particular claim to divine authority not usually addressed: an identification with the written word of Holy Scripture.

Paul's use of scriptural citation has of course been the subject of much study, however these analyses have primarily focused on Paul's choices of passages from scripture and his methods of interpretation.[15] I however am interested not in their content or use so much as in the means by which they are introduced. I will argue that Paul very carefully

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14 Castelli gives an example of the way in which Paul's deliberate blending of his own status and authority with that of Christ is reinforced by Furnish's phrasing: ' To imitate Paul and Christ means to conform to Christ's suffering . . . ' (in his 1968 book, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*). Castelli criticises Furnish (and others) for the dual sin of not only ignoring the rhetoricity of this deliberately constructed confusion, but of perpetuating it in modern writing, thus giving it a second, contemporary 'legitimation'. See Castelli:1991, esp pp. 31-32.

The biases exhibited in the language of scholars also surface where Paul's rivals are concerned: see note 34, below.

15 With respect to Paul's readings of scripture, see for example James M. Efird, ed., *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972); Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press 1987); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Morna D. Hooker, 'Beyond the Things Which Are Written? St. Paul's Use of Scripture', in *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), pp. 295-309.

constructs and presents a conception of the written word which will begin with a connection to God via the revealed word in scripture, but will then through a careful transfer of authority come to take on an indisputability all its own. To write will become *ipso facto* to create the unassailable, to create in the same manner and with the same authority as God, and Paul, as a writer, will make careful use of this authority, which has been shifted out of its context.

It is written...

In the Hebrew community, all men (though not women) would have had a strong education in the scriptures since boyhood. Training would focus on skills such as proper intonation and phrasing needed for public reading, and in the process much of the Torah (Pentateuch, prophets and 'writings') would be committed to memory. With the sacred text being so much a part of common knowledge in society, passages could be quoted at leisure (and at length) without the need for specific reference, and so it is somewhat remarkable that Paul sets apart quotations as he does, making a point of introducing passages with the phrase 'It is written...' (the most common Greek form of the expression is *gegraptai gar*), and that he does so ten times in I COR alone. I suggest, however, that he does this to give each quotation a place similar to that it would occupy in worship.[16]

16 *Gegraptai gar* , more literally translated, actually means '*for* it has been written', and the use of the perfect tense indicates that although the action took place in the past, it has a present consequence. Scriptural citations are of course also common in the gospels, but are announced and used in ways different to the methods of Paul (see below, p. 43).

The exposition of the Torah in public worship would be carried out in two ways: by the reading from the scrolls, and by the commenting on them (translation or paraphrase and sermon). The reading of the original did not have as its sole (or perhaps even central) function the presentation of some content; rather it was the performance of a sacred ritual unto itself, and in the worship service the text and the commentary on it -- Torah and Talmud, as we would now distinguish them -- were very carefully maintained as distinct.[17] The Torah was always *read from the text* (despite the fact that most readers would be perfectly capable of reciting from memory), with the special pronunciation and cantillation learned from the first levels of schooling. Paraphrases and sermons, on the other hand, were never to be read, but rather were to be *spoken*, presented from memory even in cases where they were drawn from a written source. Lastly, they were not to be given by the same person as the Torah.

In sum, the effect in worship was to have the scripture stand alone and take its own distinctive 'voice'; and in that 'voice' was something of the speech-act of 'God'.

We can see then, that when he sets his quotations apart as he does, the writer of I COR creates a context more like that in which they would be found in worship, and thus reminds his audience of their sacredness, their status as something apart. As he does this, he associates the 'text of special status' with the concept of *writtenness* through his peculiar announcement phrase, which then begins to have a life of its own. A transfer of authority is taking place: there comes to be a special aura to

17 For more on the preservation of the written Torah, see Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, tr. Eric J. Sharpe (Lund: CWK Gleerup, and Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961).

'that which is written', so that when Paul later refers to his own work as written, he is effectively conferring upon it the authority of scripture.[18] The correlation would be the way certain other passages, which he may wish to discount or dispute, are simply slipped in without the announcement phrase; this manner of quotation is more informal, conversational, rather than performative, and therefore more like what would now perhaps be termed a Talmudic presentation, which leaves these passages more open to a negotiation of meaning. More can be said on this, but for the moment let us turn to Paul's specially announced quotations for a more careful textual analysis.

The sections in question are as follows:

1:19: 'For it is written . . .'
1:31*b*: 'In order that, as it is written . . .'
2:9: 'But, as it is written . . .'
3:19*b*: '. . . For it is written . . . and again . . .'
9:9: 'For it is written in the Law of Moses . . .' -> (further reinforced by
9:10*b*: 'It was indeed written for our sake . . .')
10:7*b*: 'as it is written . . .'
14:21: 'In the law it is written . . . says the Lord.'
15:45: 'Thus it is written . . .'
15:54c: 'then the saying that is written will be fulfilled . . .'

To recapitulate: the particular way in which Paul marks each scriptural quotation with the phrase 'it is written' actually effects a two-way positing of authority: the writtenness (implication: Holy Scripture) signals the importance of the quote to come, and the weight of the quote

18 It is not the appeal to higher authority that is unusual, since this is a common device of classical rhetoric; it is the peculiar appeal *to the written* that makes it remarkable.(Regarding the use of classical rhetoric in Jewish and Christian scripture, see George A. Kennedy:1980, esp. pp. 120-132. See also Kennedy:1984.)

serves in exchange to show the authority of that which 'is written'. This is a self-perpetuating circle, but it is more complicated than it may appear, and so must be subjected to particular scrutiny, for although the authority of 'written scripture' (the repetition is intentional) is invoked, in all but one case there is no specific mention of the writing *as scriptural.* Because in his cultural context Paul has no need to cite specific sources, he is free to present passages in other ways. By introducing the association between Holy Scripture and writing, by making continuous references to the writtenness of scripture, what occurs in practice is that over time *any* term linking a question or passage to the act of writing becomes an indication of that question's (or passage's) importance.

Quotations without reference to writing

As I have stated above, there are also in I COR several quotations Paul uses *without* referring to writing. For the most part, these involve devices of classical rhetoric: for example, the dialogical style of *diatribes*, making frequent use of imaginary opponents, hypothetical objections, and false conclusions. It is precisely this sort of straw man that Paul sets up in the phrase 'all things are lawful' (at 6:12 and 10:23), and then masterfully knocks down. Similarly, there is a quotation from Isaiah that he uses to reinforce his own privilege: by taking a seemingly rhetorical question posed in scripture and boldly answering it, once again Paul comes out on top.[19] (Who shall know the mind of the Lord? Us! i.e., Paul!)

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19 I COR 2:16, quoting from Is. 40:13.

Recalling our discussion of Jewish public worship, I suggest that such dialogical engagement is more in keeping with the tradition of the oral Torah, and so Paul presents the scriptural passage in a more Talmudic style, that is, incorporated into the body of his writing without special mark or status. By doing this he leaves the attribute of writtenness for the important, the unquestionable. In the case of this Isaiah passage, the introductory phrase would have caused a conflict of authority: he couldn't give it the status conferred by the 'it is written' phrase if he then planned to 'top' it. Indication of writtenness must be held in reserve and used only where it is clearly supreme. For Paul does not wish to place himself above the written; rather, as we shall see later, he will become its ally, and very carefully assume, rather than challenge, its power.

There are other unreferenced quotations in the first letter, two of which come in quick succession at 15:32 and 15:33; the first from Isaiah, and the second from the Attic poet Menander. The piece at 15:32 is actually a quotation of a quotation: in both the original (Isaiah) and this instance with Paul, it is an utterance reported with a strong sense of its irony by the writer, for those who will voice such thoughts are, according to him, grievously mistaken in their attitude.[20] The source of the phrase then is in practical terms unimportant as there is no connotation Paul means to draw on beyond its own words. Following at 15:33 we have Menander's phrase 'Bad company ruins good morals'[21], which functions as

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20 In Isaiah, it is when the Lord calls on the people to dress in sackcloth and ashes, and instead they celebrate recklessly (with this saying attributed to them); the Lord judged this flagrant disregard of his call to repentance to be iniquity such as could not be purged while any were still living.

21 As noted in Nestle-Aland *Greek-English New Testament*, critical apparatuses prepared and edited together with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland.

a classical-style maxim: it may ring true, but it is merely a sort of popular saying, not of the sort to bear the magisterial title of 'written word'.

There are two other actual quotations from scripture in I COR which appear without the announcement phrase.[22] We could speculate on various reasons for these -- psalms being for the Jews a form of oral worship carried out in common rather than a sacred written text, for example -- but even should proposed explanations for these particular two examples be inconclusive, the presence of such anomalies does not disprove my point. For it still remains that in the *vast* majority of cases there is a conscious framing and highlighting of scripture as the written word, and in *no* case does a quotation Paul wishes to dispute or supersede have conferred upon it the distinction of writtenness.

God Writes / I Write

Having shown that Paul works hard to establish the authority of writing, we can now look again at what he does with that authority: the way he begins slowly to weave in references to himself as *one in the act of writing*, and thus one in the act of creating authoritative text. Let us briefly run through through these corresponding writing references in the order of their appearance.

Paul has given four 'it is written' scriptural citations in I COR before he first mentions his own act of writing at 4:14: 'I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.'

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22 5:13 (cit. Deuteronomy 17:7) & 10:26 (cit. Psalm 24:1).

This is a subtle entry, for the verb is seen as a negative, before the act of writing affirmed in the second clause of the sentence. He goes on in that section to remind them of his place as their 'father', and to issue a warning regarding his next visit.[23] He returns to the exposition of the written nature of their present communication, however, indicating at 5:9 a previous letter of his, and at 7:1 a letter of theirs. This serves to establish in the audience's mind the link between the congregation of Corinth and pastor Paul as a *textual* one, but hereafter Paul quickly ceases to refer to any writing other than his own and that of scripture, as the process of establishing the self-empowering written word progresses and deepens. There are two more scriptural quotations with the announcement phrase before Paul again enters the scene as a writer, a pattern repeated again before the letter comes to a close. There is a rhythm to this: 'it is written' sounds forth as the herald of crucial words to come, and as we have shown, the authority of scripture is now borne in the term of writing. Lest that association be disturbed, the formula is repeated and reinforced; only after that comes the subtle introduction of the variation. This introduction enacts the *second transfer* of the same authority, which we see is moved from scripture to writing, then from writing to Paul writing.

This bears restating. The stages, then, are:

> Scripture (has authority of word of God)
> It is written (has authority of scripture)
> I write (has authority of written word)

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23 The father image is discussed below, pp. 32-33.

The authority of God's word has been invoked through a term of writing so often that such terms become an established form of shorthand: 'writing' is understood as a short form for 'God's writing'. When this now pregnant term is applied to Paul, he benefits from its fullness, for he has (by association) the creative power to communicate in the same fashion as God, and thus with the same authority.[24]

Interdependent Identity

Turning back from this female to a more masculine image, the relationship of Paul to the Corinthians has, as we mentioned earlier, been described by him as one of a father to children (I COR 4:14-15). Scholars, particularly in recent years, have found it difficult to agree on the implications of the paternal claim. Some still argue, as De Boer has, that it expresses a relationship of love and kindness: 'His only intention was to do what every good father does; he was admonishing his children with love'.[25] Others have begun to take note of some less appealing elements of a father's approach as it is portrayed by Paul: Petersen notes the superiority 'most clearly represented in the power of the "rod" he holds

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24 Morna Hooker suggests most intriguingly in a 1964 article that the phrase 'the things which are written' (I COR 4:6) be taken as referring not to passages Paul has quoted, so much as to Paul's own teaching. She does not tie his teaching method to writing directly however, but rather bases her interpretation on parallel drawing with Paul's metaphor of building in I COR 3 and his warning regarding those who would seek to build upon his foundation, that is, to 'go beyond' the teaching he himself has already most soundly presented. (See Morna D. Hooker, '"Beyond the Things Which Are Written": An Examination of I Cor. IV.6.', in *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64).)

The direct association of Paul with the act of writing *is*, however, firmly forged by the end of the letter, at least in the minds of modern translators, since the NRSV renders I COR 16:21 as 'I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand', in spite of the fact that in the original Greek there appears no term referring to writing.

25 See Willis Peter De Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1962), p. 145.

over the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:21)'.[26] Castelli is one of the most definitive in her outright condemnation of the image, *and* of its interpreters:

> . . .[T]he image of the father must be read in cultural context, that is, in relationship to the nature of the paternal role in Greco-Roman Society--which is a role of possessing total authority over children. In addition . . . the role of parent is delineated as ontologically superior to that of the offspring, specifically because the creative role of the parent is viewed as analogous to the divine creative function . . . Furthermore, as one now knows from the many salient (especially feminist) critiques of the powerful symbolic function of the paternal image in religious texts from antiquity . . . naïve and utopian readings of Paul's use of this image are no longer justifiable. [27]

Whether one wishes to take such a hard line, or to return (even naïvely) to the 'good father', it is nonetheless true of every view of the paternal image that it clearly expresses a relation not of equality but of Pauline superiority. We shall see that this involves reciprocity (without children, could a father still be called a father?), but there is still a clear social hierarchy involved.[28] Further, as with the biological relationship, the children effectively have no choice in the matter.

The creative function in its God-like aspect returns in the next passages discussed below. We saw in the previous sections how Paul *implies* a relation between his own writing and scripture through the pairing of expressions (it is written / I write); now we can see examples of more *direct* claims regarding the divine authority of his text. And note

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26 See Petersen:1985, p. 130.

27 See Castelli:1991, p. 101.

28 A physical hierarchy is involved as well. After all, the children are not grown or independent, but only helpless babes: Paul had already described their need to be fed by him, unready as they were for solid food (I COR 3:1-2).

also how this passage serves not only to reinforce this textual (rhetorical) Paul, but how it stresses as well the interdependence of the identities of this Paul and the Corinthians (who, we recall, themselves have a 'textual' identity constructed by writer Paul).[29]

> Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.
>
> (I COR 14:37-38)

In this passage, Paul at once does away with possible rivals and makes recognition of his role as the secretary of the Lord (and thus of the divine authority of his *writing*) a requisite for continued membership in the community.[30] Here I am choosing the more widely accepted of variant readings of the passage; although there are arguments for a softer message (that those not recognizing Paul's authority are simply not worth worrying about), the stronger warning seems to continue a pattern of interdependent identity established several chapters earlier:

> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
>
> (I COR 9:1-2)

The NEB translates this still more directively:

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29 See p. 20, above, regarding the Corinthians as 'enunciatee constructed and inscribed' (Patte).
30 The idea of Paul as God's or Christ's secretary comes up again in the third chapter of II COR, as we shall see below.

> . . . If others do not accept me as an apostle, you at least *are bound to do so*, for you are yourselves the very seal of my apostolate, in the Lord.
>
> (I COR 9:2, my italics)

Paul's demand for recognition includes in this passage more specific details of his identity, though grammatically his claims are not direct. They are posed instead in the form of rhetorical questions, to which the Corinthians are forced (by the implications of verse 2) to make a positive reply. In this way, it is not Paul, but the Corinthians, who will make these claims on Paul's behalf, though they may do so largely in order to retain some sense of their own identity as a community. We will find then most appropriate that in looking to reinforce his authority while continuing to emphasize its *written* character, the epistolary image of the seal should be used, the seal on a letter serving both to register the end of the writing process (the closure of the text) and to bear the mark of its author. *This* seal does indeed close the text: it closes the issue, preventing further update. And the mark of the author is Paul's: he is clearly in control. They are his work, his text inscribed, and so by their own claim to identity -- or fear of exclusion/dissolution -- they are trapped into affirming his.[31] It becomes increasingly clear how through various devices Paul establishes the supremacy of the written word and associates himself with that 'textuality of prestige', taking on its authority through his carefully drawn connections with it. This continues from I COR on through the opening chapters of II COR, and culminates, I shall argue presently, in the third

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31 The trap sprung by Paul's logic here is not often remarked. Commentaries such as that prepared by Clarence Tucker Craig for *The Interpreters Bible* (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953) suggest here that 'conversions have come as a proof of the genuineness of the call which has gone before' ; is this not, however, tantamount to saying that truth can be defined as that which you can get someone to believe, and then shame them into continuing to affirm?

chapter, where the Corinthians will themselves not only become textually identified, but will themselves become Paul's text.

II COR: Writer Paul Continues

Beginning the body of the second letter with a list of afflictions and sufferings, Paul immediately demands not only sympathy but involvement and responsibility on the part of the Corinthians by requesting their prayers and thus commending the preservation of his (and his cohorts') strength of spirit to their care. The following is a passage worth unpacking:

> Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God -- and all the more toward you. For we write you nothing other than what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand until the end -- as you have already understood us in part -- that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.
>
> (II COR 1:12-14)

The issue in this paragraph seems to concern how those involved (Paul and his company on one side, and the Corinthians on the other) will present or explain themselves to Christ on the day of judgement. What they will have to boast about, essentially, is each other, which again emphasizes the interdependent nature of each group's identity. The passage also points out that Paul is once again in the act of writing, this reference re-establishing the link between himself and the Corinthians as a *textual* one. He explains that 'our' (i.e. Paul's) boast, the one he will give

on the day of the Lord, is that he has behaved well towards the Corinthians, has known how much they could understand and has given to them in that measure; note here though the particular 'vocabulary of the written' with which this is presented: he gave this measure by *writing*, and they received this gift and understood through *reading*. This reinforces the character of 'writing Paul'.

The section of the letter that follows this contains several more references to Paul's act of writing, which are used in two ways: justification of postponed visits (and thus in some sense substitution for them), and disarmingly frank 'admissions' of some of his 'motivations' for the shape his writings take (II COR 1:23-2:4; 2:9).

Visit Talk : 'Economy of Promise' / 'Rhetoric of Deferral'

If you speak of droughts, dryness and thirst, you enhance the value of the water given to assuage them. If you speak at length, the need is perceived all the more in the ensuing time of waiting. In the same manner Paul calls attention to his own lamented absence -- whether it was lamented in the first instance by the Corinthians or only by Paul himself, we cannot know for certain -- in order to enhance the promise of his return. The remembrance of past and anticipation of future life-together is of course part of the function of the letter form in any age, as I mentioned at the start of this chapter, and thus 'visit talk' is a common feature.[32] It appears however that the visits promised in I COR 4 and I

32 I borrow the term 'visit talk' from Terence Mullins, who uses it in his 1973 article 'Visit Talk in New Testament Letters', in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35.

COR 16 have not taken place. In II COR then, he must find a way to excuse this apparent falsehood. It is evident from the questions raised in II COR 1:17-18 that he has recognized the potential accusations against him in this respect, and so he counters this by enhancing the future promise myth all the more, emphasizing the joy to be experienced when he finally would arrive.

> But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather we are workers with you for your joy, because we stand firm in the faith. So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you. For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.
>
> (II COR 1:23-2:4)

If we accept the idea of an 'economy of promise' in the 'visit talk' of Paul's letters, we must be aware that in the context of Christianity, based as *it* is on the past presence and promised future presence of Christ, any future-anticipation necessarily assumes a theological/eschatological dimension. Thus the importance and desirability of Paul's 'second coming' (or third, or any arrival not yet achieved) is, like his claims to textual power, largely based on an authority which does not originally belong to him, but is 'borrowed' from its 'rightful owner', in a way that Paul is careful never to make explicit. [33]

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33 In my next chapter we will see how Kafka's 'In the Penal Settlement' addresses these questions of promise and deferral.

We must remember however that this epistolary 'economy of promise' only works *during the absence*; only when there is a lack is reassurance of its fulfilment effective. I shall return presently to this question, with specific attention to its effect on 'writing Paul'; first though, let us go on to the next sections of II COR, which continue to fill in the picture of this inscribing and inscribed persona.

Further Challenges

Rivals for leadership (such as were implied in I COR 9:1) continue to threaten Paul's position throughout his ministry.[34] Responding to this again in the third chapter of II COR, he turns the serious question of letters of recommendation into an opportunity to build another yet more intricate epistolary trope:

> Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us . . .
>
> (II COR 3:1-3b)

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34 Rivals are also directly mentioned, and dismissed, at II COR 11:9-15. It is not within the scope of this study to enter into the historical background of these rivalries; for a full investigation of this, see Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1987 [1946]).

Regarding rivalries, I note here again, however, Castelli's complaint that the assumption made by most commentators that Paul's opinions represent the Christian norm or 'truth', against the 'heretical incursions' of others, is at best an anachronism, given the first century climate of debate, and further that at worst it represents a reinforcement through modern scholarship of a highly biased hierarchy established with obvious intent by Paul himself, thus 'denying the rhetoricity, the perspectival nature, of his discourse'. See Castelli:1991, p. 28. (See also note 14, above.)

Here Paul is again, as in I COR 9, the founder of the community, and if he has no authority, then there is no basis for their faith. To deny him would be this time not exactly to see themselves excluded as individuals from their group, but to undermine, even destroy the very basis on which they gather, to lose their claim of membership in the greater Christian community altogether. But he is also, here again as in I COR 9, the secretary of Christ: this is a role not to be challenged, and a claim to divine authority and specifically linked to his act of *writing*. Furthermore, it is crucial that we note here one additional detail: that as Paul becomes the secretary, the people become the text. This passage will figure significantly in the examination of the metaphorical depiction of the body later in this chapter, and will prove crucial to my theory of Pauline textuality in general, as will become increasingly evident in the next chapter, where I will focus on Kafka's reading of this movement.

The Letter Kills Paul's Writing

We find, however, if we go a bit further with our run-through of II COR, that conflicting statements follow: on the heels of his naming himself as secretary of Christ, Paul continues,

> . . . [Y]ou show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.[35] Such is the confidence that we have

35 The contrast between tablets of stone and the flesh of human hearts echoes both Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26. Morna Hooker notes, however, that Paul has in his excitement muddled his metaphors rather badly, for 'while it is possible to speak metaphorically of the Spirit of God writing on men's hearts, it really is not much use trying to write on stone with ink!'. See Morna

> through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter (written code) kills, but the Spirit gives life.
>
> (II COR 3:3b-6)

This section of the letter is capped off by the great and dramatic assertion of the new freedom brought about through (Pauline) Christianity: traditional commentaries explain that Paul is here announcing that the former, legalistic understandings of God's commandments are to be abandoned in favour of new understandings guided by the spirit of God in Christ. The phrasing of the climactic statement, however, poses several problems to the economy of writing I have thus far sought to expose.

One drawback to this move/change is that Paul seems to be adopting what we would now see as a Platonic mistrust of the written word, a contrasting of some ultimate, perfect writing (here that of or with the spirit of God) with mere human (imperfect, fallen) writing. This is already problematic, given that this argument is taking place right *in* such a piece, that is, within the fallen form; it is doubly so given the time and effort already expended in building up the ethos of the writer Paul, of Paul 'with pen in hand'. Paul, however, seems to have realized this difficulty, for while he lets this dramatic pronouncement stand and take effect, he subsequently changes paths to avoid the obstacle: following this section the verbs of writing disappear.

D. Hooker, 'Beyond the Things That Are Written? St. Paul's use of Scripture', in *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980-81), p. 296.

God's Not Writing Either, At Least for the Moment

Suddenly, now that human writing, with ink, has become a bad thing, care is taken not to call attention to the nature of the present communication. There is another crucial aspect to this shift, however: not only does Paul cease to 'write' (according to the verbs used in the text), but so does God.

Put more cogently, the verb Paul will use to represent his efforts at communication will switch to ones of speech and saying. Significantly, *so will those he uses for the higher authority* with which he is to be identified. Where elsewhere the combination would be 'it is written . . . I write . . .', it now becomes 'the Lord says . . . I say . . .' . Examples of this include the pairing of 6:2, *legei gar* (referring to God), with 6:13, *lego*, and 6:17, *legei kurios* and 6:18 *legei kurios pantokrator* with 7:3 *lego*. The *structure* of each pairing will remain the same then, with Paul's form of expression being the same as that of God, but it is shifted for a noticeable time away from *gegraptai* to forms of *legein*.[36]

The writing Paul (the Paul in the self-declared act of writing) reappears in the seventh chapter, where he is cautiously reintroduced in an apology (regarding grief caused by an earlier letter), easing the audience back into the 'writtenness' frame of reference. The previous patterns of writing-authority (pairing Paul writing with the 'it is written'

36 There does remain at 4:13 one reference to scripture in this otherwise non-writing section, but it is carefully clothed in the transcendence of the spirit, and there is no Paul in the act of writing here with whom to link it nor to potentially contrast it.

of scripture) are then seen to resume, and continue through to the end of the letter.[37]

In looking at these back-and-forth shifts I am aware, of course, of the debates regarding the integrity of II COR, as well as the arranging of its parts (matters mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter). Of those critics who offer partition theories, most see breaks between II COR 2:13 and 2:14, and another between 7:4 and 7:5, and thus much of the section I have been discussing may, if we accept their hypotheses, have come from one or more other letters. My point, however, is that in whatever sections (or letter fragments) we examine,

1) Paul matches the verbs of expression used by God and by himself, and, further,

2) that a significant number of these pairings involve terms of writing, (the only exception being in the wake of a momentous multivariant metaphorization of the concept of text).

Other New Testament Writers

It may be useful at this stage to state briefly the difference, as I see it, between Paul's way of quoting scripture, and that of other New Testament writers. The Gospel writers, for example, both quote scripture themselves -- using what have been called 'formula quotations' to show how the words/actions/experiences of Jesus are a fulfilment of the

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37 7:12: 'So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of . . .'
8:15: 'As it is written . . .'
9:1 'Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about . . .' (you just did!)
9:9: 'As it is written . . .'

scriptures -- and attribute quotations to Jesus himself.[38] The former (i.e., the formula quotations used by the writers themselves), however, often refer to scripture *as scripture*, and/or give the provenance of the quotation (often referring to the prophet or prophecy of Isaiah), and do not always use the 'it is written' form of announcement for the passage used (the announcement phrase appears, for example, at John 12:14, but not at Matthew 12:17). Similarly, quotations by Jesus often refer to what 'the prophet Isaiah' has 'said' (Matthew 13:14, 15:7), or to what is written 'in your law' (e.g. John 8:17) or 'in the Scriptures' (e.g. Matthew 16:42). Jesus, therefore, does not attempt to transfer the authority of scripture onto himself. Finally, verbs of teaching are not 'matched' in the Gospels: that is, we do not find 'the Lord wrote' or 'it is written' followed by 'I write', nor 'the Lord said . . . and I say', whether the enunciator is the writer or one of his characters, such as Jesus.[39] Thus the way of parallelling terms of enunciation, and *thereby* claiming for himself the same authority of enunciation as scripture or God, appears to be a device used by Paul alone.

The Problem of Physical Presence / Deferred Visits

I have thus far examined the *ethos* created by Paul, and the Corinthians' forced position of support for it. Before closing this section of the chapter, I would like to offer a comment on the possible motivations for, and side-effects of, this tightly closed system of textuality.

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38 D. Moody Smith notes the particular predominance of such formula quotations in Matthew. See D. Moody Smith, Jr., 'The Use of the Old Testament in the New', in James M. Efird, ed., *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972, pp. 3-65), p. 47.

39 Jesus, in fact, seems to mix the verbs: see John 6:45ff.

I wish to call attention to the last two occurrences of verbs of writing in II COR, each of which contributes to our possible understanding of the other.

> I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters.[40] For they say: 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible[41].'
>
> (II COR 10:9-10)

* * *

> So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.
>
> (II COR 13:10)

Let us first take them separately. The passage from the tenth chapter attempts to perform two functions: to temper the possible impression of unreasonable severity the letter may have given thus far, so as not to alienate its audience, and to acknowledge and handle the possibly damaging observation that the physical person Paul whom the Corinthians may well remember and the 'Paul' they encounter in letters have widely differing abilities of articulation and persuasion. This difference between the two Pauls was also suggested a few verses earlier : 'I Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who

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40 The RSV reads: 'I would not seem to be frightening you with letters'.
41 RSV: 'is of no account'.

am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!'(II COR 10:1).[42]

The passage near the end of the final chapter (II COR 13) shares one of these functions, viz., the softening of the blow the letter may have inflicted, this time justifying it through the invocation of God-given authority and the promise of harmony in a future visit. In terms of rhetorical strategy, he appears to wish to leave them with a sense of warm feeling, not tension, between them.

Let us now, though, consider the possible ways that our understandings of these passages could inform each other: if we know, for example, that the physical Paul is weak or unimpressive, does this not add a new dimension to our understanding of his later attempt to avoid the necessity of appearing severe in person? And does this not colour the issue of his physical presence, his personal visits, in general? In light of this, can we take at face value excuses he gives for visits missed, cancelled or postponed?[43] Would it be at all surprising if we were to find his visits had in fact been postponed indefinitely? Quite some effort has gone into the characterizing of 'Paul' as one whose authority parallels that of holy *writing*, and the vast majority of the correspondence we have examined is filled with references to 'Paul' as one who 'writes'. *This* 'Paul', the writer Paul, is an effective leader, an eloquent persuader, a strong rhetorician. As this figure is built up, the gap widens between this writing leader and

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42 Such differences in the Pauls are attributed by many commentators to the use of a secretary, but as Paul claims continuity between the person who visits and the person who writes, I must assume for the purposes of rhetorical analysis that this is the case. For a thorough study on the subject of amanuensis, see E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* ['Wissenschaftliche Untersuchen zum Neuen Testament' series, 2. Reihe 42] (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991).

43 Excuses such as those at the end of chapter one/beginning of chapter two.

the physically weak and unimpressive Paul. It is quite conceivable that a point will come when the gap is too wide to be bridged, when there will be no going back. The consequence of the creation of the textual Paul may be the permanent alienation of the physical Paul from the community at Corinth, and, one might even argue, from himself.

The Corinthian Text

Before concluding, I would like to return to a passage that must necessarily intrigue anyone interested in Paul's act of writing: II COR 3:1-6. The passage takes as its starting point the question of letters of recommendation, but from there extends far into the realm of metaphor, the stretch supported through use of scriptural allusion. We have seen earlier something of the effect of this passage, as Paul takes on the role of secretary of Christ, and takes on the authority of such a position, setting himself above question. Let us look now more closely at the move into epistolary metaphor, at its rhetorical advantages, its side-effects, and its potential consequences.

> Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some so, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter (written code) kills, but the Spirit gives life.
>
> (II COR 3:1-6)

This passage begins with questions of self-commendation and of recommendation by others. Clearly, rivals have been presenting letters of recommendation; this being the custom of the time, it is quite probable that the Corinthians were in the habit both of receiving and of providing such letters. Since in Paul's case these norms are not being upheld, the accusation seems to be that Paul has nothing to recommend him beyond his own claims. The reply with which II COR 3 begins will deal with both aspects of this indictment: the missing letter and endorsement by others in general (which in turn could be divided into endorsements human and divine).

Always Yes : In trying to answer for what he seemingly cannot provide, Paul takes hold of the idea of the letter, and from it develops a metaphor of 'human letters'. We note here that one of the first advantages of this shift is his ability to answer with a positive claim. He does not say 'well, *no*, I have no letter, but you know me and that should be enough'. Instead, because of his shift into metaphor, he is able to give an affirmative response: '*yes*, I have a letter, and it is you'. Rhetorically this is a great advantage, as he makes no concessions; he is able to maintain an offensive rather than a defensive position. The writer's awareness of the power of an assured turn of phrase is evident when we read claims such as II COR 1:18-20, that the message with which he is connected 'is always "Yes"'.

Come Into my World : Equally, through the use of obscure imagery -- one critic has said that 'the *epistole* metaphor in 3:2-3 is more than contrived; it is tortured' -- the addressees are drawn in, encouraged, even

bound to try to make sense of such a vision.[44] They must make an effort, go a distance, to shape their own thoughts so as to be able to understand the message; in doing so, they are inevitably drawing closer to the writer's point of view, which in turn will unquestionably help further the establishment of his ethos, his persona, and its credibility and its authority.

We have seen that one of the drawbacks of using such a trope is the need to shift away temporarily from references to himself as a writer, or to any passage of scripture he may still wish to cite as sacred *writing*. Yet Paul and God nonetheless continue to share identical means of expression, of teaching, of communication, and in spite of this seeming shift away from explicit textuality, we must not be too quick to leave behind this 'human letter' metaphor, for it has more far-reaching implications. For if the chapters that follow in this letter seem on the surface to lead away from textuality, we must understand that in this metaphor we have first been bound once and for all *into* textuality. Explicit mention of it may cease for a time, but rather than deny all writing, Paul has made of human beings writing, a text, and this may subject us to controls we have not imagined. The questions must be raised of what happens when the text not only comes between, but becomes part of, those involved. What happens when the parties themselves are textual, are text? What is the fall-out of such a transformation: in becoming more textual, are they less human? And as they are text, who has the right to inscribe, to define, and presumably to destroy? Is there a writer in control? Or is text ultimately beyond control? These are precisely the questions I shall argue are being

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44 Stephen B. Heiny, '2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6: The Motive for Metaphor', in K.H. Richards:1987, p. 20.

addressed in Franz Kafka's 'In the Penal Settlement', which I shall examine in the next chapter.

Could you put that in writing?
Person and Punishment in Kafka's 'In the Penal Settlement'

Chapter Two of

Writing, Inscription and Power:
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Morrison

You are my poverty
Your promises slums
With backyard children screaming
Waiting for something to happen
Waiting for someone to come

But maybe in the next life . . .

-Lies Damned Lies

It was Schopenhauer, as Kafka probably knew, who suggested that it might be helpful "to regard this world as a penal colony".

-Malcolm Pasley

Introduction

In the last chapter, we saw how Paul developed his special relationship to holy writing, assumed its authority, and then, as writer, made of the Corinthians his text. This has raised questions as to the implications of such a transformation, including issues of control and of freedom. Written in 1914 and published five years later, Franz Kafka's 'In the Penal Settlement' is a story which has much to offer to this examination of the relation between textuality and selfhood. In it, attention centres on people literally having the text, the law, inscribed into their flesh. In the system Kafka imagines, concepts of justice are only fully understood when they -- their words -- are literally *embodied*: an enlightenment followed swiftly by death.

In her examination of the history of Kafka criticism, Ruth Gross seems to see a great division between those scholars who in examining the whole of Kafka's oeuvre take a 'narrowly theological' approach as initiated by Max Brod, Kafka's friend, editor and biographer, and those whose work she describes as the legacy of Gunther Anders. Anders, according to Gross, 'considered Kafka's works devoid of theology', and she cites his chapter on 'The Literal Metaphor' as having 'generated an entire direction of Kafka criticism that has centred on language and writing as the essence of the Kafkan text'.[1] These two strains, however, should perhaps not be so neatly segregated, for already writers such as Politzer and Steinberg, although

1 For the discussion of Brod vs. Anders within Kafka criticism, see Ruth V. Gross, ed., *Critical Essays on Franz Kafka* (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990), pp. 3-4, in which she specifically contrasts the arguments of Brod' *Franz Kafka: Glauben und Lehre* with Anders' *Kafka, Pro und Contra* (which I shall discuss further, below). Gross also looks at Freudian and existentialist strains, but these lie outside the principal concerns of this study.

they could each be placed in one of these critical companies, can be seen to use the perspective of the other in the building of their arguments. Specifically, in his analysis of 'In the Penal Settlement', Steinberg goes to great lengths to prove religious (specifically *Jewish*) significance, largely through an examination of language and ritual; Politzer, for his part, explores religious themes on his way to pronouncing that a 'strictly religious interpretation' of 'In the Penal Settlement' would be 'untenable'.[2] In the present chapter, I shall attempt to bring to bear insights from both linguistic (rhetorical) and religious perspectives, for, having introduced the question of text and writing as a theological issue in the context of the evangelism of Paul, I will follow on into this Kafka short story, and will argue in this chapter that through his talent for rendering metaphor concrete (Anders), Kafka provides a revealing midrash not only of Jewish practice and belief (Steinberg), but of the Pauline message itself, complete with a journey into Christianity's promised future, which has disturbing results.

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2 See Heinz Politzer, *Parable and Paradox*, revised and expanded edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), and Erwin R. Steinberg, 'The Judgement in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol.5, no.3 (September 1976) and 'Die Zwei Kommandanten in Kafkas "In der Strafkolonie', in Maria Luise Caputo-Mayr, ed., *Franz Kafka* (Berlin: Agora Verlag, 1978). Steinberg, in particular, goes to great pains to demonstrate the Jewishness of Kafka's story, even ascertaining that its writing took place just after the High Holidays, Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. I shall return to these two authors and their works below.

As a more recent blending of language/writing and theological/scriptural approaches, see Valentine Cunningham's 1994 monograph, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Blackwell Publishers), particularly the brief section entitled 'Scriptural Penalties', pp. 386-388. (I must add though that Cunningham is not nearly as thorough in his close reading of the Kafkan story as either Steinberg or Politzer.)

Rendering Metaphor Concrete: Preliminary Remarks

In his monograph *Kafka, Pro und Contra*, Gunther Anders gives examples of what he terms 'the literal metaphor' in Kafka's writing, including the following:

> Because Gregor Samsa wishes to live as an artist (i.e. 'free as air'), he is considered in the eyes of the respectable, down to earth world, to be a 'bit of an insect'; thus in 'Metamorphosis' he wakes up as a beetle, whose idea of happiness is to be clinging to the ceiling.
>
> Or again: 'They are all the same to me', we say of people who don't concern us at all; and so, as the inescapable companions of his hero during his stay in the village, Kafka introduces two 'assistants' who look exactly alike and whom he calls by the same name . . . [3]

Anders gives further examples from 'In the Penal Settlement' and the novel *The Castle*, and I shall have the occasion presently to discuss these and others still. For now, though, let us assume that Anders' observations suggest the 'literal metaphor' to be a regular pattern in Kafka's work.

'In the Penal Settlement' : the Story's History

Kafka first offered the story for publication, albeit half-heartedly, in October of 1915.[4] Before it was accepted, he became dissatisfied with its ending, rewriting it several times, but in the end he stayed with the

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3 Gunther Anders, *Franz Kafka*, tr. A. Steer and A.K. Thorlby (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1960), pp. 43ff. [Translated, with some adaptation, from the German *Kafka: pro und contra* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1951).] This notion of a 'literal metaphor' will recur throughout the course of this chapter.

4 See letter to Kurt Wolff Verlag, October 15, 1915, in Franz Kafka, *Letters to Family, Friends and Editors*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 112-113, 447n.

original version, despite feeling that it was *machwerk* ('botched', 'a clumsy piece of work').[5] The story was published in 1919, largely as he had first written it five years earlier.

Of his writing habits in general, we know the following:

> 'Again I realized that everything written down bit by bit rather than all at once in the course of the larger part (or even the whole) of one night is inferior, and that the circumstances of my life condemn me to this inferiority.'
>
> (Kafka, from a diary entry dated December 8, 1914)

Kafka's diaries tell us that he was frequently frustrated at having to write only in short sessions scattered over a long period, and that he often had the urgent desire to drop the larger work at hand and begin new short stories, presumably as these could be completed in just such a night.[6] A few months before the entry cited above, Kafka took a brief vacation to try to press on with the writing of his novel, *The Trial*, and it was during this break that he wrote 'In the Penal Settlement'.[7]

There is no evidence of exactly where he was in the manuscript of the novel at that time, but given a) this pattern in Kafka's writing activity, and b) his characteristic tendency to pursue an expression or figure of

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5 The alternative endings can be found in his diaries, dated August 7, 8 & 9, 1917; see Brod:1949, pp.178-181. His comment regarding the botched ending came a month later: see letter to Herr Wolff, September 4, 1917, in Kafka:1977, p. 136. This letter also contains the news of his retirement to the country, having been diagnosed that day with 'pulmonary apicitis', the forerunner of the tuberculosis which eventually killed him.

6 See for example entries for December 8 & December 19, 1914 (pp. 100-101, 103) and January 4 & January 6, 1915 (p. 107), in Max Brod, ed., *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1914-1923*, translated by Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, and London: Secker and Warburg, 1949).

7 Kafka originally took a week's vacation for this purpose, then decided to extend it into a second week; this was October 3-18, 1914. See diary entries for October 7 & October 15, 1914 (Brod:1949, pp. 92-93).

speech through to (if not beyond) its logical, literal conclusion, I suggest the following hypothesis.

The Trial

The protagonist of *The Trial*, a bank assessor named Joseph K., is accused by a mysterious legal authority of an unnamed crime of which he knows nothing. The novel treats his many fruitless attempts to obtain justice from an authority with which he cannot effectively communicate, and culminates in his utter frustration, his complete loss of human dignity, and his death.

At one stage in the novel, seeking information through inside channels when the formal ones bring no aid, K. converses with the court painter, Titorelli. The painter, having spent his entire life privy to the system, admits that despite lengthy and complicated defense procedures, even when combined with secretive inside dealings, he has never seen anyone completely cleared of charges.

> Not one case of definite acquittal, then,' said K. as if he were speaking to himself and his hopes, 'but that merely confirms the opinion that I have already formed of this Court. It is an aimless institution from any point of view. A single executioner could do all that is needed.'
>
> (*The Trial*, pp. 89-90)

I suggest that, as if wishing to *hold K. to his word* -- a variation of Anders' literal metaphor -- Kafka departed from *The Trial* to pursue this idea, and in a new short piece, created a fictional penal colony whose

entire system of justice is carried by just such a man, known only as 'the officer'.

In the Penal Settlement

Taking place on an unspecified tropical island, 'In the Penal Settlement' is essentially an account of the final hours of an outdated judicial system in a penal colony. In this colony, there are commandments which must be obeyed. When questions of transgression arise, guilt is never doubted, and so punishment is swift. The story centres around the machine which carries out punishments, an instrument of torture and execution which acts upon its victim by inscribing the rule he has broken more and more deeply into his flesh. There are many embellishments to this script, and the machine is described by its last open supporter, the officer, with particular attention to the spectator's chance of watching the text take shape, and the prisoner's struggle to understand it.[8] The inscription process takes twelve hours; in the sixth hour, it is said that the prisoner begins to decipher his wounds, to understand the law in a new way. This is seen as a time of transfiguration and redemption, though by the time enlightenment has been achieved, usually in the twelfth hour, the body has been 'pierced quite through', and is thrown into a waiting grave.

In the course of the story, the officer seeks both to explain and to demonstrate the machine to an explorer who is visiting the colony, in the hope of winning support for this judicial system, which has fallen out of

8 This process is even referred to as a 'performance'; an unseemly term for an execution by torture.

favour under the new regime. He goes into great detail in describing the various parts of the machine and their functions, paying particular attention to the 'Designer' (the control box into which the 'guiding plans' for each inscription must be placed) and the 'Harrow' (a steel band mounted with the needles which performs the actual cutting/inscription). He describes them most reverently and enthusiastically as they were in the time of the former Commandant, at once excusing and decrying their current poor state of repair.

Already in this synopsis, it will be evident that there are certain echoes of Jewish and Christian traditions involved: commandments to be obeyed suggest the decalogue; an old system of laws (cf Judaism) is superseded by new attitudes (cf Christianity); a pattern of transgression and redemption echoes Christian *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history); suffering, the turning point of which comes in the sixth hour, mirrors the Passion of Christ.[9] Yet it will become clear in the course of examining this story that this is not, strictly speaking, biblical allegory, but rather its Nietzschean antitype. In the latter half of the story, we learn that in the end the explorer is not won over; this moves the officer to pass judgement against himself, and he solemnly and ceremoniously prepares to submit to the Harrow. The machine malfunctions, killing him very quickly and messily without any sign of the promised radiance. The horrified explorer returns to town, where, beneath a table in a tearoom, he sees the grave of the old Commandant, bearing an inscription promising his return in triumph. After reading this, the explorer flees to the harbour and, beating back the former prisoner and his escort, escapes on a departing ferry.

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9 Compare this with the language of the King James Version of Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44.

The Great Entextualizer

I turn now to a more detailed analysis of the key elements of text and writing in the story, beginning with the giant apparatus used for punishment: the Harrow. The machine of course is central among agents who or which write. The enlightening powers attributed to its act of inscription are what allow the colony's system of punishment to appear in any way just. Its setting at first adjusted by hand, the apparatus functions automatically in its act of inscription, artfully and precisely carving the means of knowledge into the body given as tablet. The taking shape of the commandment on the body of the accused is to be beheld by spectators with awe and reverence, and the position of the victim almost to be envied.

The Wounds of Learning

Returning to Gunther Anders's theory of the 'literal metaphor', we see here in the action of the Harrow a further example. In his chronicle of examples of this Kafkan pattern, Anders tells us:

> When an experience makes a 'deep impression', then according to a similar German expression, 'We come to know it with our own body'. In 'the Penal Settlement' the criminal is not told of his punishment verbally: it is inscribed on his back with a needle. [10]

10 Anders:1960, pp. 44-45. I remark that it is not only his punishment, but the very rule which he has broken, incurring the punishment, that is inscribed: thus commandment and punishment are one.

The German phrase actually more closely parallels the English 'to learn something for oneself ' or 'first hand': 'etwas am eigenen Leib erfahren' ('to learn something in one's own body'), with the added connotation that the experience is not only very strong, but very unpleasant. Explaining that the prisoner has no need to be told his sentence beforehand, the penal colony's officer says: 'There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it corporally, on his person' (p. 174). In the German original, the phrase reads 'Er erfährt es ja auf seinem Leib', obviously corresponding quite directly to the German expression mentioned above. This means of learning, even in the figurative sense, is unpleasant; taken literally, it is pure, *physical* torture, and destroys a person entirely.

A Harrowing Experience

The process of entextualization concluded by the Harrow is actually initiated by an earlier act of writing: the officer's. Describing the case of the accused man in the story, he explains that when another official brought the accusation before him, 'I wrote down his statement and appended the sentence to it' (p. 175). This act of writing though, reveals a gap in what is expected of a judicial system. There is an anticipated intermediary step, which in this case is missing: the trial. Here we return to the dialogue with Kafka's novel, for, having worked out through the novel that long and drawn out trials have no effect on outcome, in the short story Kafka lets our 'single executioner' do all that is necessary.

In this instance, then, the executioner's action moves us into the realm of text. A verbal accusation, once made in his presence, initiates a *process* of writing, with 1) statement, 2) sentence, and 3) inscription by the Harrow. From here on, we see how this in turn effectively *deprives the accused of any consideration as a human being*. Here is a possible answer to the questions raised over Paul's entextualized Corinthians. What happens to people when they come under, when they bear, when they become, text? In Kafka's penal colony, from the moment writing begins, the victim will exist solely as a tablet on which to be written. Any trace of human characteristics likely to interfere with inscription, or the observation of inscription by the crowds, is systematically done away with. Sympathy, in this system, lies not with the man, but with the Harrow. The valuing of the text over the person becomes grotesquely evident: 'the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and *keep the inscription clear*', the bed 'begins to roll and slowly turn the body over, *to give the Harrow fresh space for writing*', and cotton-wool staunches the bleeding 'and so *makes all ready for a new deepening of the script*' (my italics).

The victim is not allowed to be seen bleeding, nor must his voice be heard: under the Harrow, he is gagged until he 'has no longer the strength to scream', and his limbs strapped into place, to prevent any struggling to get away, movement which might obscure the Harrow's writing. There is no means by which his humanity, in the form of resistance, must come through. Only once he has begun to 'understand', once he has succumbed to the carving rhetoric, once he begins to 'listen' to the text, is he allowed

any human characteristic.[11] In this case it will be physical hunger, and at that, he is fed at the will of the officer (and eagerly laps it up -- we shall return to this presently). Not long after, his 'enlightenment' radiates in such a way that spectators (who are not allowed to see the blood or hear the screams of resistance) are led to see in this sanitized victim an exemplary figure, and almost envy him. *Almost*, Kafka has the officer add, for it is still understood that the rapture is achieved only in dying. Whatever else it brings through its writing, the apparatus also and inevitably brings death.

The Placement of the Text / the Locus of Writing

'Whatever commandment the condemned man has disobeyed is written on his body by the Harrow' (pp. 173-74), explains the officer. The use of the word 'commandment' has obvious and deliberate biblical overtones, even when we learn that it does not refer to the decalogue as we know it. The example he gives is an ironic and somewhat sinister adaptation: 'HONOUR THY SUPERIORS!' (p. 174).[12] The way the commandment is taught, too, through fleshly inscription, is another of the series of intermingled biblical references, bringing us back to the passages mentioned in the last chapter. For example:

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11 It is curious too, that he should be portrayed as trying to 'listen' to *tactile* sensory information; see note 28, below.

12 The alteration grows more sinister when we begin to question by what means 'superior' is to be defined, and by whom: we are not told whether this new Law originated in the home country, or whether, like so much else, it was the invention of the officer's former comrade and hero, the old Commandant, to whose benefit it would obviously have been, since he was supreme in the colony. The officer's high position would likewise have been reinforced by such a rule. The honouring of the father(s), suggested by this 'commandment', can also put us in mind of Paul's status as 'father' of the Corinthians, a claim which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, is not in the least one of balanced mutuality or reciprocity, but exhibits a clearly uneven power relation between superior/father Paul and his inferiors/children, the Corinthians. (See previous chapter, p. 32-33.)

> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD...
>
> (Jeremiah 31:32-34d)[13]

Note in addition that just as Jeremiah's God promised to write this knowledge into all, 'from the least to the greatest', so under the Harrow, 'Enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted' (p. 180).

Having looked at the location and the action of the Harrow's text, let us extend the investigation to other aspects of its nature.

The Text : Form and Content

It would actually be misleading to attempt to look at the form and content of the machine's text separately, since for any example as it is actually to be written, the form, in a certain sense, *is* the content, and vice versa. The text inscribed by the Harrow is an enlarged version of what appears on the guiding plans prepared by the former Commandant, which the officer guards as sacred relics. The explorer, and therefore, the reader, has two chances to 'see' examples of the designs: first, there is the commandment destined to be inscribed on the condemned man, and then later there is that which is to be written into the officer himself. On each occasion, despite the plans being laid out in front of him, and even being

13 We also hear echoes of Paul, for the transformation undergone by victims could be seen as the old Commandant's, and the officer's, 'letter of recommendation', i.e., that which seems to justify their actions.

led and encouraged by the officer, the explorer can make no sense of them. On the first,

> . . .[A]ll he could see was a labyrinth of lines crossing and re-crossing each other, which covered the paper so thickly that it was difficult to discern the blank spaces between them. 'Read it,' said the officer. 'I can't,' said the explorer. 'Yet it's clear enough,' said the officer. 'It's very ingenious,' said the explorer evasively, 'but I can't make it out.'
>
> (p. 178)

The second instance is much the same: '"Read it," he said. "I can't," said the explorer' (p. 192). The officer traces the letters with his finger, and finally even tells him what it says, but all the explorer can offer in reply is 'I am prepared to believe you' (p. 192). For the script, of course, does not contain only the words of the commandments, but much embellishment; in fact, there is more embellishment than there are words. The officer explains:

> 'Of course the script can't be a simple one; it's not supposed to kill a man straight off, but only after an interval of, on average, twelve hours; the turning-point is reckoned to come at the sixth hour. So there have to be lots and lots of flourishes around the actual script; the script itself runs round the body only in a narrow girdle; the rest of the body is reserved for embellishments.'
>
> (p. 178)

The description of the texts may suggest comparison with other 'sacred texts', in particular either the Torah with accompanying volumes of exegetical writings, or, as Steinberg suggests, the Talmud, which in traditional editions is produced with the original text (itself a form of commentary) centred on a page whose borders are filled with further

scholarly exposition.[14] In addition, in the German, the writing of the machine is denoted by the word *Schrift*, which carries the dual meaning of 'writing' and 'Scripture' (being a shortened form of the term *heilige Schrift*, 'Holy Scripture'.[15] (Steinberg suggests that this reflects Kafka's own reaction to the labyrinth of Hebrew scripture, and his terror that he might be asked to read from it.[16])

The careful guarding and conditions for handling the documents, too, are suggestive of Jewish practice:

> [H]e inspected his hands critically; they did not seem clean enough to him for touching the drawings; so he went over to the bucket and washed them again . . .
>
> (p. 173)

> 'I am still using the guiding plans drawn by the former Commandant . . . I'm sorry I can't let you handle them . . . Just take a seat and I'll hold them in front of you . . .
>
> (p. 178)

Even towards the end of the story, when the machine has been denounced and the desperate officer forced through honour to submit himself to the Harrow's death, he still searches for the means to cleanse himself before producing the second design of the the day, and still is careful to keep the explorer from touching it. This sanctity of the documents,

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14 See Steinberg:1976, pp. 497-98, Steinberg:1978, pp. 146, 152n.

This passage on the obscurity of the sacred text is also reminiscent of Isaiah 29:11-12: 'The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read, with the command "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for it is sealed." And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read." '

15 Politzer takes up the issue of *Schrift* and its relation to the Torah: see Politzer:1966, pp. 106-107.

16 Steinberg cites Kafka's *Letter to His Father*: '[I] went in dread for years . . . [of being] called up to read the Torah.' Steinberg:1976, p.497. On Kafka and the Torah, see also Steinberg:1978, pp. 145ff.

with ritual purification before handling, strongly suggests the handling of the scrolls of the Torah in the Jewish synagogue. To this day, when the scrolls are brought in, only the rabbi may carry them. Moreover, a reader may not follow the lines with a finger, but must use a special pointer, the *yad*; this implement, usually made of silver, is itself shaped like a tiny hand, with a finger extended, pointing. It is surely no coincidence that the officer 'outlined the script with his *little finger*, holding it high above the paper as if the surface *dared not be sullied by touch*' (p. 192 -- my italics).

'In the Penal Settlement', though, cannot be reduced to an indictment of Judaism. Greenberg denies any pointed reference to the scrolls, although it 'embraces them in its meaning'; rather, he sees a reference to 'Scripture-in-general'.[17] Politzer likewise asserts: 'Kafka is far from equating the torture machine with Jewish belief', and explores some possible *Christian* symbolism, directing particular attention to the teahouse as tomb or shrine, the machine as cross, the death of the officer as sacrifice.[18]

While standing firmly by my arguments above regarding the Torah, I shall now follow Politzer's lead and move into Christianity. Turning away from broader symbolism, however, I wish to focus on character and characterization, and, more particularly, the *ethos* of the officer.

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17 Martin Greenberg, *The Terror of Art*, cited in Steinberg:1976, pp. 493-94.
18 Politzer:1966, pp. 113-14. Also cited in Steinberg:1978, p. 494.

Officer or Apostle?

Recall that Aristotle proposed that orators, in the course of their speaking, establish for themselves an *ethos*; that is, a personal character which itself functions as a means of persuasion. In the last chapter, we saw that Paul developed his ethos through association with the authority of written scripture, and briefly also noted his claims to divine sanction, specifically in his status as an apostle, which he based on his ostensible direct contact with the risen Christ. Recall how I COR begins with his 'title of office': 'Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God'. This claim of apostolic status is subsequently re-asserted towards the end of the letter, where Paul places himself within a group, ostensibly as last, but eventually as greatest (most dedicated and hard-working):

> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received . . . that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers . . . then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle . . . But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them . . .
>
> (I COR 15:3-10)

As Paul sought to establish himself as humble, yet prestigious, as lowly, yet clearly an apostle of Christ, and the foremost among them, so the officer begins his narrative with self-abasement and apology, but gradually shifts to his relationship with a figure of prominence, the

possession of relevant 'sacred' writings, and thus in the end is claiming to be a supreme 'apostle' in his own context.

> 'This apparatus,' he said, taking hold of the crank-handle and leaning against it, 'was invented by our former Commandant. I assisted at the very earliest experiments and had a share in all the work until its completion. But the credit of inventing it belongs to him alone.
>
> (p. 170)

Here he is a co-worker, though seemingly denies trying to claim status on this basis. He then continues modestly:

> Forgive me if my explanations seem rather incoherent. I do beg your pardon. You see, the Commandant always used to do the explaining.
>
> (p. 173)[19]

Then, because of his relationship with 'scripture', he becomes less modest:

> In any case, I am certainly the best person to explain our procedure, since I have in here . . . the relevant drawings made by our former Commandant.
>
> (*ibid*)

In the end, he possesses the highest knowledge (inside information through direct contact), and thus deserves to be accorded supreme authority:

> This is how the matter stands. I have been appointed judge in this penal settlement; despite my youth; for I was the former Commandant's assistant in all penal matters and know more about the apparatus than anyone.
>
> (p. 175)

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19 c.f. Paul: 'not I but the LORD . . .', I COR 6:10.

Here, as with Paul, it becomes difficult to distinguish the actual level of authority the speaker is claiming: some would argue that this goes beyond apostleship to the very words of Christ, 'I in the Father and the Father in me . . .'[20] Paul too, like the officer, is an interpreter, a teacher, benign yet conscious of (and explicit regarding) his superior position. By his own admission, he was a carefully controlled spoon-feeder of congregations such as that at Corinth.

> But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready . . .
>
> And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready . . .
>
> (I COR 3:1-2 RSV, NRSV)

Just as Paul sees Christianity as too difficult for 'infants', so the officer notes that the writing of the Harrow is 'no calligraphy for school children'. The comparison between Kafka's text and Paul's is strengthened, however, by a return to Kafka's playful game of 'what if '; more pointedly, Kafka chooses once again to take a metaphor, Paul's 'milk' and 'solid food' while on the way to spiritual enlightenment, and takes it literally, that is, brings it into *concrete* reality. Hence in the penal colony, the road to understanding (the process of entextualization) begins with sentencing, after which the condemned man is *not allowed solid food* since he will not be able to keep it down when the torture begins (he is not ready for it, cannot digest it), and vomit would foul the machine. Later, however,

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20 David Jasper, conversation, 24 September, 1993.

part way through the process of torture/understanding, when the gag is deemed no longer necessary to prevent rebellion ('when he has no longer strength to scream', p. 179), he is fed warm rice-pap -- *the food of babes*. This is when he, like the Corinthians, is just beginning to 'understand', to take on, to embody what is being taught him.

* * *

The Sound of Judgement

I will now turn to a discussion of the narrative techniques which are at work on several different levels in the story, as this too affects the perceived relation between 'In the Penal Settlement' and the religious traditions it echoes. I take as a starting point a somewhat ambiguous remark made by the officer in typical Kafkan fashion.

While setting up the machine for the punishment of the condemned man, the officer makes brief remarks concerning its mechanics, as well as trying in advance to offset the effect of any likely malfunction. It becomes evident during his commentary that the 'important visitor' has not yet been properly briefed on the colony's system of sentencing and punishment in general, and so he starts into a fuller description, beginning with the comment that 'our sentence does not sound severe' (p. 173).[21] The words are cryptic: the sentence does not sound severe to whom? Does not *sound* severe; implying that in fact it is? Why the strange

21 In German the sentence reads 'Unser Urteil klingt nicht streng' (p. 78), the verb *klingen* having the sense 'to ring', or 'to sound'.

terminology? Kafka is known for his ambiguities, particularly those implying that information is being withheld;[22] in this case, though, this particular phrase could serve as the first indication of the primacy of writing in the colony, for in fact the sentence literally never *sounds* at all: it is *written* and appended to the accusation, and carried out by the machine which, if in proper working order, is noiseless.[23]

The Officer's Rhetoric

This curious phrasing, drawing questions, is also part of a broader rhetoric practiced by the officer, who in the early part of the story says practically nothing outright, but rather lets his narrative run as one continuous preface. By this I mean that he makes constant allusions to (and promises regarding) what is to come: what he is *going to* say, what he is *going to* show. This not unlike the way Paul makes use of an 'economy of promise' when he alludes to future, harmonious visits, as we saw in the last chapter.

The officer draws the explorer (and the reader) in with phrases at once delaying and heralding the important information to come: 'you'll soon understand it . . . I'm going to describe it first . . . you'll find out why

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22 Regarding other Kafkan ambiguities, see, for example, the opening sentence of *The Trial*: the narrator's vague suggestion that there is a mysterious 'someone' who '*must have been* telling lies' (my italics) seems a desperate and unconvincing attempt to find an explanation for the wrongful accusation of Joseph K. (I am indebted to Dr. David Jasper for suggesting this particular comparison.)

23 The officer later recounts how in the past, when all was kept in proper repair, 'No discordant noise spoilt the working of the machine' (p. 184), which in the German reads: 'Kein Mißton störte die Arbeit der Maschine' (pp. 88-89).

later . . . I'll tell you presently what it's for.'[24] This rhetoric is successful, for while we have been told that in the beginning the explorer 'did not much care about the apparatus and walked up and down ... with almost visible indifference', in the wake of the officer's somewhat cryptic introduction, he feels 'a dawning interest'. Having been convinced both of his own thirst, and of the officer's ability to assuage it, he begins to pay attention, and to ask questions. The officer could wish for nothing better, as it authorizes him to give his expert opinion.

The Reticent Narrator

From the very start of the story, the officer has a collaborator in this 'rhetoric of deferral': the narrator.

> 'It's a remarkable piece of apparatus,' said the officer to the explorer and surveyed with a certain air of admiration the apparatus which was after all quite familiar to him.
>
> (p. 169)

We have here an 'omniscient narrator': we know this by the comment about the officer's familiarity with the machine. The narrator does not, however, reveal all s/he knows, but rather flaunts this omniscience before a curious reader: the word apparatus is repeated, calling attention to it and arguably underlining its significance, and yet it will be pages before the role and function of said apparatus are revealed.

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24 The phrase 'I'm going to describe it first' is, we may note, a *preface to the preface* to the demonstration of the machine.

This delaying tactic runs parallel to the officer's pattern of deferral, enhancing its teasing, luring effect.[25]

As we have seen, the exercise achieves its first goal when the explorer begins to ask questions; at this point the officer's tone shifts to become more directive, and at once more conspiratorial. He is still acting as apologist looking for an ally, and so, wishing assurance of the full attention of the explorer, bids him: 'Now listen!' -- 'nun hören Sie!' (p. 173, *p. 77*).[26]

Rhetorical and Eschatological Expectation

The explorer is not the only listener in this story, however. During the torture, 'just about the sixth hour'[27], as the officer tells it, the prisoner 'begins to understand the inscription, he purses his mouth *as if he were listening*' (p. 180, my italics).[28] The structures of understanding are virtually the same: like the prisoner, the explorer is led into looking for (or listening for) a meaning, seeking to understand, to achieve what has been promised. The explorer's rhetorically created expectation is a reflection of

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25 The narrator is effectively pushing the Pauline figure into the foreground; this is a device which Paul himself did not have at his disposal, working as he was within the letter form, rather than in the story.

26 Such a conspiratorial tone is not unlike Paul's at I COR 15:51a: 'Listen! I will tell you a mystery!' .

27 Recall the echo of the Passion; see note 9, above.

28 'Er spitzt den Mund, als horche er' (p. 84). The verb used here, *horchen*, implies that the sound listened for is very low and the listener must concentrate all his efforts to catch it. This word choice brings to mind Politzer's proposed candidate for the story's main 'literal metaphor': he suggests that the work of the Harrow brings to life a popular German adage, 'He who refuses to hear must feel', noting that the words for 'to hear' (*hören)*, 'to listen' (*horchen*) and 'to obey' (*gehorchen)* share a common root (see Politzer:1966, p. 99). The prisoner, however, has refused nothing; as we saw earlier, the process of judgement has no sound, and so his attempts at listening are belated and futile.

the prisoner's eschatological expectation (his 'search for enlightenment' as it is depicted by the officer): it runs parallel to it, mirroring and highlighting it.

Yet what is to be gained from this listening, this rapt attention, this seeking for the promised enlightenment? If the prisoner under the Harrow is the model of the 'listener', the one seeking to decipher text through embodying it, then there is a great deception being carried off, for when in the course of the story we as readers actually 'witness' the Harrow at work, unmediated by the officer's predictions and promises, the machine does not perform its promised redeeming, but only its punishment. It brings no enlightenment, but only physical death.

As noted in my introduction, Elaine Scarry observed that through the use of 'redescription' of the bodies involved in acts of torture, 'the inflicting of damage can be registered in language without permitting the entry of the reality of suffering into the description'.[29] We could argue that the machine, when properly functioning, was in its own way designed to perform a sort of redescription through the procedures of cleaning and silencing which accompany the inscription of the commandment; in its final performance, however, the techniques by which the physicality of the death was to have been covered over malfunction. The exquisite enlightening entextualization, with the almost-ignorable side effect of fleshly carving, is turned on its head, so that the physical mutilation is the only observable result. At this stage, however, Kafka infuses the horror and deception with poignancy by having it be the officer -- the machine's advocate and worshipper -- who is punished. The hopes of the *greatest of believers*

29 Again this is Scarry:1985, p. 66.

remain in the end unfulfilled. The enlightenment is not achieved, the promise is not fulfilled, the script is never deciphered, but its victim dies anyway.

Belief Disproven, Dismissed

In allowing us to witness -- in a certain sense to 'experience' -- the death of the officer, Kafka is taking us chronologically one step beyond where prophets such as Paul could go. The future is by definition always the future, and knowledge of what happens in and after death is normally unavailable to those still living. Christian tradition can be seen to take advantage of this fact, in that, while it cannot *prove* that its predictions will be fulfilled, nor can anyone else *disprove* it. Kafka subtly undermines this by planting the notion that there is proof: the 'evidence' being the officer's description of the radiant prisoner, gaining enlightenment even as he is dying. When the officer's death lacks this element, this absence serves to 'disprove' the beliefs for the future. Note too that our means of knowing about the two instances differ: the officer *relates* the rapturous end to the explorer (and hence the reader), while the explorer *observes for himself* the officer's inglorious end. The second set of 'facts' go through no filter of narration, no apology by believer or supporter, but are related 'straight', by the narrator whom, despite the aforementioned reticence, we may assume to be truthful.[30] If the officer, as 'apostle' of the old regime, is

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30 The difference between the points of view of the officer and the narrator can also be seen in a difference of terms used to describe the same object. Specifically, the inscribing of the head is carried out, according to the officer, by *nur dieser kleine Stichel*, 'just this small needle'. The narrator chooses a different expression: when the officer dies under the Harrow, the narrator relates how his forehead is pierced by the point of the *großen eisernen Stachels*, 'the great iron spike'. Stichel and Stachel sound alike, but while the officer's choice sound like an artist's

comparable to Paul, then does this not make of Paul the deceived one, and make his 'regime' equally outdated? Kafka seems to indicate a belief, held somewhat regretfully perhaps, that, as 'demonstrated' in the story, in real life (or 'real death') the end is merely that: an end, with neither great joy nor great sorrow, but only a calm emptiness like that of the expression borne by the officer's shattered visage.

Kafka articulated in a diary entry some months later:

> A promise of some kind of happiness resembles the hope of an eternal life. Seen from a certain distance, it holds its ground, and one doesn't venture nearer.[31]

Unfortunately, in the penal colony, the officer did venture nearer, nearer than would allow the legend to hold. In the same way that the rhetorical and physical Pauls could not meet, so the man whose explanations made death seem desirable could not undergo his own design.

If we take this Kafka story as a reading of Paul and Pauline doctrine, then we must understand that Kafka does not deny the sincerity of his Paul figure, the officer. In fact, he is characterized throughout the story as quite genuine; we can only assume he was deluded, and marvel at the price of his delusion.[32] What Kafka does do to his officer is expose the rhetorical nature of his narrative, thus making us aware that sincere

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implement, delicate and virtually harmless, the narrator reveals it as big, hard, cold, and undeniably nasty. Kafka offers no comment however, as to whether the officer was lying; in fact, the officer is presented throughout as quite sincere, if at times overly zealous.

31 See entry for January 6, 1915, Brod:1949, p. 107.

32 The irony here is comparable to that of Dostoevsky's parable of the 'Grand Inquisitor' in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

belief and persuasive presentation are no guarantee of truth. In doing so, he takes us into Paul's unattainable future, and argues that while it might be desirable, it is, in his view, a 'fiction'.

The Letter Kills

Is this story then simply one great expansion, making a 'literal metaphor' of the written code which kills?

In the end, Kafka calls into question the power exercised when texts are manipulated: he illustrates the danger to identity, expression, and even existence that comes with close contact between person and text, and exhibits scepticism regarding any benefit promised in return.

'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.' The promise of the God of Jeremiah, placed under Kafka's experimental conditions, exhibits a correspondence, usually unaddressed, with the insight of thinkers such as Nietzsche, who wrote of the role of pain in the making of memory:

> How does one make a memory for the human animal? How does one imprint something so firmly that it remains present to the now dull, now confusedly active wits of this creature of the moment, this piece of forgetfulness personified? . . . [O]nly what goes on *hurting* stays in the memory' -- that is a first principle of the very oldest (and, alas, the most lasting) psychology on earth . . . When man has found it necessary to make himself a memory, it has never been possible to dispense with blood, torture and sacrifice: the most repulsive mutilations, the cruellest ritual practices of all the religious cults . . . -- all these things have their origin in

> that same instinct which recognized pain as the most powerful mnemonic.[33]

Read through the glass of this claim, Jeremiah's God is seen as a punisher God, or one who understands that the only way to inscribe himself and his laws into the conscience (the memory) of the people is through intense pain and suffering. Kafka seems at first to be accepting of this, noting the promise of enlightenment, of redemption, the radiation of a prisoner as he comes to understand the laws and their relation to him through his wounding. The *éloge* given by the officer, describing the radiation of the prisoner's understanding -- his apotheosis -- makes it almost sound worthwhile, drawing our attention away from the physical torture involved just as our readings today of biblical passages tend to metaphorize, or be interpreted metaphorically, drawing attention away from concrete sufferings and violence. The officer, however, becomes the ultimate symbol of betrayal when he, who of all was most willing and most eagerly sought that union and radiant understanding, is deprived, and dies apparently without redemption. In this Kafka offers first an 'enlightening' warning of the potential literal consequences of metaphor, and then his own disbelief that such a rapture would come at all, even in that belated moment, even when one could only proceed from it into death. But perhaps it was the officer's broken law itself which proved the system's undoing: the most impossible message to decipher and to truly understand, let alone to obey, is the command 'BE JUST'.

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33 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*; quoted in Angel Flores, ed., *The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives for our Time* (New York: Gordian Press, 1977), p. 300.

* * *

We have seen in an analysis of Paul's writing, particularly to the people of Corinth, an exposition of text-based centres of control, of writing as an exercise of power, of text which isolates and alienates. In this situation even the writer has become self-estranged, creating a textual self so different from the physical that their convergence, though ever promised (through the promise of visits to the addressed community), appears doomed never to occur, lest the two Pauls, in meeting, destroy each other. And so what is ostensibly a *postponement* becomes of necessity *infinite deferral*, and along with the Pauline personae, all of Paul's messages concerning future happenings are thrown into doubt. This then creates a state of eternal suspension, the promises ever made, perhaps even ever meant, but always unreachable, the quest for the achievement of ultimate meaning ever deferred; this is however a state which still permits hope, which is (arguably) of some value even if that hope is a false one. In spite of its necessary separation from tangible reality, the appeal of living under so-called 'future-hope' (of building one's life entirely around an eschatological expectation) becomes even more clearly evident when we consider alternatives such as those suggested by Kafka ('In the Penal Settlement'). In a frighteningly plausible projection of how Paul's (hi)story might otherwise end, Kafka shows our arrival in (achievement of) the future through the supposed redeeming act of inscription being rewarded with intense suffering and betrayal. In the face of such bleak possibilities,

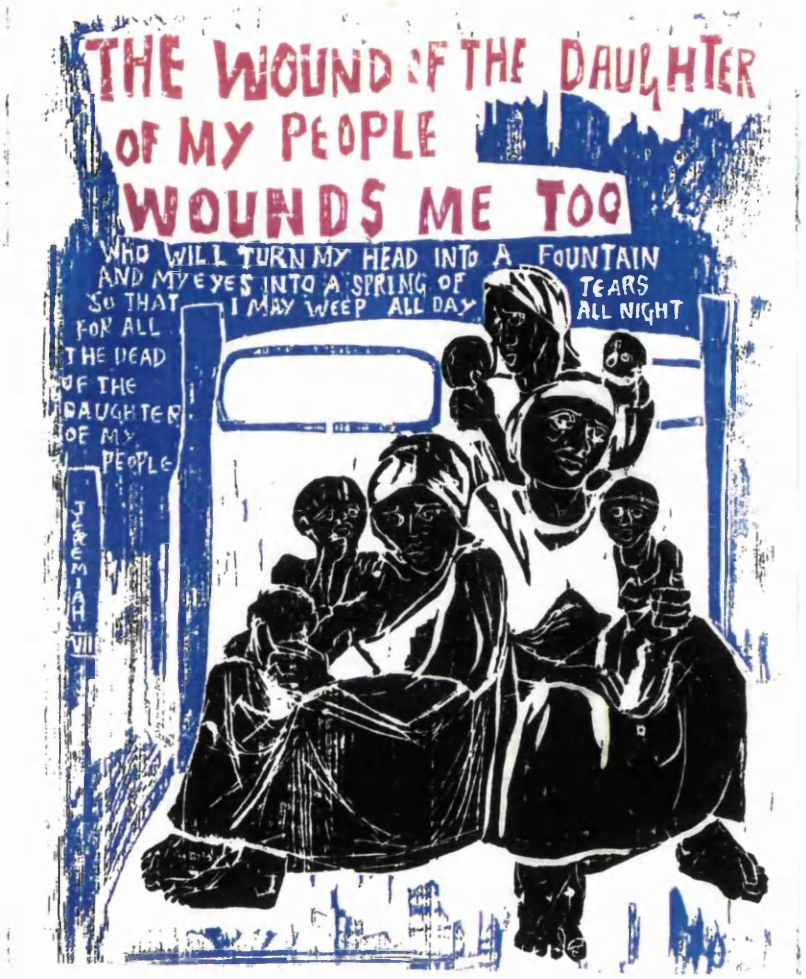
a reading that merely leaves one in perpetual suspension might well seem the more preferable.

In the third major section of my thesis, I will turn to a reading of Toni Morrison's 1987 novel, *Beloved*, where we will find rather different explorations and impressions concerning the power of writing and the role of text in the making and remaking of identity. Morrison is known for the clear stance she takes in allowing her identity as an African American woman to form and inform her work; by her choice of setting for *Beloved*, a community of freed or escaped slaves in Ohio some 15 or more years before the abolition of slavery, Morrison takes us not only closer to that world, but within it to the cradle of a new hermeneutic, stemming from what DuBois termed the necessary 'double-consciousness' of Black people under the slavery system. With the groundwork thus laid Morrison then applies a postmodern approach both to her narrative and to the questions it raises, suggesting an understanding very different from the Pauline of the nature of texts, writing, and other structures founded on hierarchies and alienation, including those of the traditional church. I will suggest that out of her postmodern attitude of 'openness' come regenerative senses of identity, community, and the sacred whose powers of emancipation affect not only her historical characters, but in fact any reader, engaging us on levels that perhaps the words of Paul, born of an attitude of control and closure and trapped as they are by their own textuality, never could.

It Is Written; I Am Not.
Naming and Reclaiming in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Chapter Three of

Writing, Inscription and Power:
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Morrison


THE WOUND OF THE DAUGHTER OF MY PEOPLE WOUNDS ME TOO
WHO WILL TURN MY HEAD INTO A FOUNTAIN AND MY EYES INTO A SPRING OF TEARS SO THAT I MAY WEEP ALL DAY ALL NIGHT
FOR ALL THE DEAD OF THE DAUGHTER OF MY PEOPLE
JEREMIAH VIII

Introduction

I -- *The Bluest Eye*

Beginning with her first published novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and continuing throughout her work, issues surrounding the effect of the written word on the lives of her characters, and the processes of inscription and self-inscription have figured prominently in Toni Morrison's fiction.[1] In *The Bluest Eye*, a young black girl, Pecola, suffers increasingly from a sense of alienation and self-loathing because she does not have the blue eyes of Shirley Temple, as shown on a souvenir cup, and because she does not look, or live, like the children in the Dick and Jane primer used to teach American children to read.

In this novel, the primer is the central text whose ideological weight is explored and exposed, mainly through the techniques of defamiliarization and interruption. In the first instance, lines from the primer precede the body of the novel, spelled out in three ways: at first, fourteen lines are reproduced as they would conventionally be printed; following this however, the first change occurs, as punctuation and capitalization are removed, and the spacing between lines reduced. This has the effect of a much more concentrated 'dose' of text; following it, the third version removes all spacing between words, and further reduces line spacing, leaving a furious burst of letters which is virtually unreadable. This process not only re-enacts the text's insistence in the vision of American life it has posited to generations as normative, but also repeats

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1 Morrison's novels to date (1994) are, in order, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), and *Jazz* (1992).

it in such a way that it eventually loses its meaning, becomes simply a visual and verbal noise.[2]

The other way the primer text functions in the novel is as a sort of third narrative voice, alongside those of the young Claudia and another, omniscient narrator. Each of the novel's four chapters begins with a personal reminiscence from Claudia, followed by a more broad, apparently objective piece from the narrator, who fills in details and background information Claudia would not have known. Each time, however, Claudia's voice is separated from the narrator's by several garbled lines from the primer. Having set out at the beginning of the novel to defamiliarize, and demystify or de-centre the Dick and Jane world, Morrison demonstrates through these interruptions and separations its textual omnipresence, its insistent and damaging imposition on the formative years of American children, particularly those children whose lives it does not reflect. Eventually, driven to self-hatred through her mother's valuing of her employer's white children over her own, black self, Pecola attempts to 'correct' her deficiencies, blinding herself while trying to give herself blue eyes. This hideous, wrenching self-inscription finalises the action of the texts (primer and cup picture) upon their ignored victims.

II -- *Song Of Solomon*

Moving down the list of Morrison's published work to 1977, we find in *Song of Solomon* (the first of her novels to receive broad critical and popular attention, winning the National Book Critics Circle Award) a tale

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2 This is of course not unlike the designs and embellishments written out by the machine in Kafka's penal colony.

in which the acceptance of one's history, the telling of one's story and the claiming (the self-inscription) of a name are of central importance. Macon Dead III, known as 'Milkman', journeys through the southern states and through his family history in search of his roots and his identity. There is a point at which, while searching for the origins of his own name, Milkman begins thinking of the names of his friends, and of others. 'Names that bore witness. Macon Dead, Sing Byrd, Crowell Byrd, Empire State (he just stood around and swayed), Small Boy... Iceman, Muddy Waters, Jelly Roll, Fats, Leadbelly...' James Wood has noted that this is a roster of naming and *un*naming, since for the African American the "given" name is most often a white imposition.[3] One of the components of freedom, then, is the right to claim, to assert, and to *self*-inscribe a name and identity.

III -- *Beloved*

In *Beloved* (1987, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, 1988), Morrison pursues her investigation of the effects of cultural, physical or psychological inscription, through examination of text and of name. Here however the text in question is no longer a Dick and Jane primer in Pecola's 1940's America, but a 'primer' that has borne the greatest cultural significance in western history, the Bible; beyond this, she begins the novel by engaging specifically with *Paul*, quoting his letter to the Romans in one of her epigraphs.[4]By her choice of historical setting, as I suggested at the end of the last chapter, Morrison takes us to the beginnings of a

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3 "A Terrible Privacy", by James Wood, appearing in the *Weekend Guardian*, Saturday-Sunday, April 18-19, 1992. This question of the name imposed by whites is significant in both *Song of Solomon*, particularly for the Deads, and in *Beloved*, as we shall see below.

4 The passage, from Romans 9:25, is itself a quotation, or better, paraphrase, of Hosea, but it is the Pauline version Morrison chooses.

new hermeneutic, an opening up of scripture, and a movement for its appropriation by a people who had been, and were continuing to be, enslaved through the (mis)use of that text's authority. The importance of the Bible as pre-text to *Beloved* has been noted by other scholars with varying degrees of thoroughness;[5] I will seek in particular to argue that the echoes lead on very much from my work on Paul, for as we shall see, from the epigraph on, the Pauline theme will recur, reinforced by many other biblical names, motifs, echoes and intertexts, throughout the novel, as the search continues for ways to survive what seems to be the inescapable influence of Paul's textual and inscriptional tradition.

The novel *Beloved*, then, is an exploration of the processes by which its characters seek to survive the damage of past inscriptions imposed by slavocracy (or its threat) on the flesh and on the psyche, and seek to name themselves and their experience, to locate and re-inscribe their own individual and collective identities.

Where Kafka's exploration of the world as a penal colony was out of time and place, Toni Morrison, in *Beloved*, presents characters who are very specifically located, identified. On the outskirts of Cincinnati in the years following the American Civil War, Sethe, an escaped slave, lives with her daughter, Denver, and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, in a house haunted for many years by the ghost of another of Sethe's children, a baby girl. The ghost finally appears to be banished by Paul D, Sethe's old

5 See for example Carolyn Mitchell's '"I Love to Tell the Story": Biblical Revisions in *Beloved*' (*Religion and Literature* vol. 23. no. 3, Autumn, 1991), and Ann-Janine Morey's 'Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison: Reflections on Postmodernism and the Study of Religion and Literature' (*JAAR*, vol. LX no. 3, 1992).

friend and new lover, but returns in the form of an actual woman, at the age she would have been had she lived.

If Paul and Kafka in their own ways take similar extreme positions with regard to writing, Morrison can be seen to envisage their opposite, but rather than take up such an equally untenable position, she instead seeks a middle ground. This is not a position of agreement or compromise however; it is not a 'position' at all, but a space in which to live out the tensions that exist between appealing and vital -- but also dangerous and threatening -- poles. Morrison does not synthesize, but rather maintains a dynamic series of dialogical tensions: oppressor-oppressed, written-oral, educated-'ignorant', slave-free, Black-White, person of colour-person, organized religion-'free-form' spiritual expression, past-present, present-future. No single view/approach/position/pole is granted supreme value, but within each pairing Morrison plays the poles against each other, expressing life as a process, lived out in the spaces between. It may be noted at this stage, with deference to Derrida and poststructuralism, that while Morrison seeks to question the hierarchies posited by these binary oppositions, she does not seek to reverse their order of precedence, but rather to engage or tease out the possible, if changeable, relations of 'equality' (or better, mutuality?) that may be fostered between them. This openness to duality or multiplicity has in our *fin-de-millenium* era been baptised as play; the same ideas, more sombrely and seriously framed, were being explored and lived out however, a century earlier.

DuBois and 'Double-Consciousness', or, 'I'm Schizophrenic and so am I' [6]

> Stamp Paid . . . believed the clamouring around the house was the mumbling of the black and angry dead. Very few had died in bed, like Baby Suggs, and none that he knew of, including Baby, had lived a liveable life. Even the educated colored: the long-school people, the doctors, the teachers, the paper-writers and businessmen had a hard row to hoe. In addition to having to use their heads to get ahead, they had the weight of the whole race sitting there. You needed two heads for that.
>
> (*Beloved*, p. 198)

While Stamp's thoughts here suggest the tremendous added weight that the disadvantage of colour lent to the struggles of black people in a racist society, the two heads he calls for also specifically bring to mind the words of William E.B. DuBois. Throughout his career as a writer, social reformer and activist, DuBois (1868-1963) proposed that the dilemma faced by Americans of African descent was a simultaneous sense of two selves. In his 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois wrote:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness . . . One ever feels his twoness -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
>
> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better, truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the old selves to be lost . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro

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6 Arthur Kroker and David Cook suggested in 1986 that the *Zeitgeist* of the *fin-de-millennium* (which, I remark, is also the era in which Morrison writes) is captured in a badge which reads:

> Roses are red; Violets are blue,
> I'm schizophrenic and so am I.

See Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, Second Edition [1986] (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1991), p. 12.

and an American, without being cursed or spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. [7]

The crucial point I wish to take up here is the quest to maintain the two selves within the sought-after 'truer self'. As we shall see throughout the coming exploration of *Beloved*, the warring influences are not posited as clear enemies or oppositions, with one to be declared the winner, the other eliminated. Rather, each option will have its positive and negative qualities explored, its benefits and its dangers exposed. These pairs of oppositions do not, however, present themselves in separate, orderly fashion, but in constant inter-relation.

Double-consciousness as Necessity and Tool for a New Hermeneutic

Across the top of a page I have written:

Morrison & writing / Morrison & whixty[8]

as if by my slash separating the words I could somehow separate the issues and deal with them as distinct. I do, and yet I cannot. In fact, even to say that these two areas of concern 'overlap' is to understate the extent

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7 William E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903], in *Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 215.

8 From here on the term 'whixty' will serve as my shorthand for 'White Christianity', referring to the particular shape of religious belief and practice peculiar to whites in the southern States in the mid-1800's, that is, in the time and place of the 'acceptable' practice of slavery. I am not only replacing a phrase which when repeated becomes rather distractingly heavier than its content, but also use the neologism because I would like to keep this particular phenomenon as separate as possible in the minds of my readers (not to mention my own mind) from Christianity per se, if there can be any meaning to that overly general term, as well as not wishing to make it seem that whixty is somehow genetically linked to race...

to which they colour each other. Nor is it enough simply to consider them together, for questions of writing/ literacy and of Christianity/ religion are all bound up in the larger historical framework of the system of slavery which forms the setting for *Beloved*. None of these parts can be considered without the whole, none seen except in the light of the others. An awareness of the phenomenon of double-consciousness described by DuBois is helpful here, as we attempt to sort through these questions, beginning with those which pivot around one central text: the Bible.

In bringing my questions on writing and theology to *Beloved*, I must immediately be aware that under the system of slavery in nineteenth century America, literacy and Christianity were two tightly bound aspects of culture. Whites (to whom Christianity 'belonged') were essentially the only ones able to read and write, and certainly kept control over most possibilities for education. Much of their action as slave-owners, traders, or even just bystanders tolerant of such a system, seemed to gain backing from their sacred book, the Bible. Somewhat ironically, whether in special 'coloured schools' or on the sly, the few African Americans learning to read at that time were likely to learn using that same Bible (which no doubt was the most readily-available volume in print). In doing so they were therefore not only gaining the power of reading, but also the coveted privilege of more direct access to the Word of God. Over time, the Black Church -- taking on an identity distinct from whixty -- began to exercise that privilege in new ways. As Michael Cartwright pointed out in a recent paper, the Black Church in the nineteenth (and on into the twentieth) century set about developing its own hermeneutic, a DuBoisian 'double-consciousness' which sought to recover messages of hope, while still

remaining conscious of the Bible's role as a weapon of oppression.[9] Thus the *necessity* of double-consciousness (i.e., its unavoidable existence as a phenomenon, stemming from the duality of the position of African Americans) is turned around, put to use as a *tool*. If 'one ever feels his twoness', what can one see from the perspective which is not that imposed by whixty? Thus, within this at first 'invisible institution' (for the Black Church was not immediately able to meet openly), frequent hermeneutical reversals of previous interpretations served as texts for anti-racist sermons preached to black congregations, and in reclamations of Christianity as a movement which could perhaps well be a movement for liberation.[10]

I shall go on with this question of Christianity/ religion (and its white and black manifestations) presently, but first I would like to give more attention to the other question I have raised: that of writing/ literacy.

Writing as an Exercise in Power

We come now to the first of what will be several explorations into issues surrounding naming as a process of inscription, and its relation to

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9 Michael G. Cartwright, 'Ideology and the Interpretation of the Bible in the African American Christian Tradition'. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Kansas City, November, 1991. For a more thoroughgoing study from a sociological/historical perspective, see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1991). Of particular relevance to the study of *Beloved* are Chapter One, "The Religious Dimension: Toward a Sociology of the Black Churches", and Chapter Ten, "The Pulpit and the Pew: The Black Church and Women".

10 The term 'invisible institution'is taken from E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, and Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), quoted by Lincoln and Mamiya:1991, p. 8.

(or divorce from) what we perhaps take for granted when we use the term 'identity'. The following passages deal with the transformation undergone by the matriarch of the story when she arrives in the territory of freedom, having been bought out of slavery by her son, Halle. Here we have a fine example of how writing, a tool in the hands of the powerful, is handled carelessly, affecting only the powerless. The first passage initiates and immediately drives home the true depth of the experience of 'coming into one's own':

> Something's the matter. What's the matter? What's the matter? she asked herself. She didn't know what she looked like and was not curious. But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, "These hands belong to me. These *my* hands." Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat. Had it been there all along? This pounding thing? She felt like a fool and began to laugh out loud.
>
> (p. 141)

Her laughter is a spontaneous overflow of emotion, the inarticulate sound of a joy which is momentarily beyond words, but also beyond her power to contain it. When she recovers her composure slightly, however, she finds herself empowered by the new, if strange feelings arising from her first encounter with her self. (Note too, that it is not appearance that is of interest to her, but action, as symbolized by her hands, and emotion, in what the narrator will later refer to with reverence as her 'great big heart'.) On the strength of this engulfing feeling, this first astounding sense of self, she seeks, in successive stages of enquiry and increased command to name, and in naming, identify that self. The following three passages are all contained within a page of the original text, showing the rapidity of this movement.

Baby Suggs thought it was a good time to ask him something she had long wanted to know.

"Mr. Garner," she said, "why you all call me Jenny?"

"'Cause that what's on your sales ticket, gal. Ain't that your name? What you call yourself?"

"Nothing," she said. "I don't call myself nothing."

. . . . .

"What did you answer to?"

"Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name."

. . . . .

"Suggs is my name, sir. From my husband. He didn't call me Jenny."

"What he call you?"

"Baby."

(pp. 141-2)

The first thing we learn is that the name by which she has been called, to which she has consistently answered without raising a question, is not hers.[11] Now, on the strength of her new heartbeat, she is able to call it *into* question, admitting next that she has never had the privilege of 'calling herself ' anything at all. In the second excerpt, two new pieces of information: firstly, that under the slave system she answered to *whatever* name was put upon her, but secondly, that there was nonetheless a name that did mean something, did bear at least some relation to her, which was that of the man she called her husband. Further on, as she gains courage, she is able to assign the name to herself directly, to call it her

11 We learn a few pages later that in fact she spent *ten years* at Sweet Home being called by the wrong name.

own, and this time she pauses before adding that it originally came from her husband. In this third stage the 'my' in 'my name' becomes as loud and as clear as the 'my' of her discovery of her own hands and heart: not a 'my' of association -- my husband -- and not exactly a 'my' of possession; rather, the 'my' of dominion: a 'my' which states that nobody but me has dominion over this thing.

A moment beyond this last excerpt, when Garner has jokingly combined the term of affection with the last name she claims into the complete name "Baby Suggs" -- a brand new combination -- she decides that if she has the right to call herself something, that is in fact what she would choose: certainly rather that than 'some bill-of-sale-name'. For despite Garner's opinion that 'Mrs. Baby Suggs' is 'no name for a freed Negro', it does in fact bear her only fond memory of the past -- the term of endearment used by the only person with whom she ever really shared herself -- *and* a hope for the future, since by carrying his name she will keep open the possibility, however slim, that they might find each other again.

This is a key section in the novel, both for its reflection of history, and the strengthening, one might even say the birth, of one of its most pivotal characters. Its importance to our investigation, however, lies primarily in its demonstration of the lasting effect of even a careless inscription when it is performed by the privileged under a system whose power is bound to its view of the primacy of the written text.

Stamp Paid

As I have noted above, the process of self-naming and un-naming was already a central theme in Morrison's earlier works. Along with Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, the characters in *Beloved* continue to explore self-naming as a necessary component of freedom; here I understand freedom in the broadest sense, or as a psychological rather than a situational description, for as we shall see, Stamp Paid is a character who achieves a measure of this freedom while still very much under the weight of his slavery.

Our first encounter with Stamp is a brief one -- as a minor figure in Denver's birth narrative, ferrying her and her mother across the river -- but even then the name calls attention to itself. It belongs in Milkman's roster of *un*naming: it is very definitely not the sort of name likely to be assigned by whites.

Further on in the novel Stamp has two occasions to tell his story (pp. 184-85, pp. 230-35), and while each incorporates different details, both narratives include mention of the name he had borne before: Joshua. This repetition shows that he still feels some connection with this name, though perhaps unconsciously, even years after its replacement, and its degree of appropriateness can be judged in the following comparisons.

In the Old Testament, when the Israelites arrived at the border of Canaan in their flight from Egypt, Joshua was one of those sent to spy on the land. For Stamp's part, 'sneaking was his job -- his life; though always for a clear and holy purpose' (p. 169). Joshua, who (after Moses) became

the leader of the Israelites, led his people to the Promised Land, with his miraculous crossing of the Jordan, and his victory in the battle of Jericho. Stamp's role, again, is similar:

> Before the War all he did was sneak: runaways into hidden places, secret information to public places. Underneath his legal vegetables were the contraband humans that he ferried across the river. Even the pigs he worked in the spring served his purposes. Whole families lived on the bones and guts he distributed to them. He wrote their letters and read to them the ones they received. He knew who had dropsy and who needed stovewood; which children had a gift and which needed correction. He knew the secrets of the Ohio River and its banks; empty houses and full; the best dancers, the worst speakers, those with beautiful voices and those who could not carry a tune.[12]
>
> (p. 170)

Leading to freedom a desperate people, he ensured that their crossings were safe, and that in his knowing, loving, care the land they reached would indeed seem a promised one.

It is clear then that there is a refiguring of the Biblical Joshua in this character, but it becomes equally evident that he is at the same time much more. Far from being simply an allegorical figure, Stamp has a story of his own, to which his new name, like those contemplated by Milkman, *bore witness*.[13] So while he has a strong identity-link with a well-known written text, it is clearly not his "destiny", and we shall see now how he, like Baby, stakes a claim in the process of self-naming, though unlike hers, his time is not one of great joy, but of great suffering.

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12 This view of Stamp's 'sneaking' could also be extended to include his spying through the window of 124, when he first sees Beloved. Reporting the unrecognized figure to Ella and John, Stamp is thus responsible for initiating the rescue operation (the gathering of women) to come.

13 See the discussion of names and naming in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, at the start of this chapter.

While a slave, this then-young Joshua was forced over a period of time to tolerate his wife's being routinely taken and raped by a white man. Knowing that if he were to act in protest (for he surely would have killed the white) it would mean his own death, his wife begged him to suppress his anger and do nothing. He complied, but not without cost to his sense of self: cost so great that he declared to himself it would be the paying off of every debt he would ever owe. In the face of such outrage, a sense of being forever clear was the only assurance of any survival of selfhood, and to ensure that even in future times of trouble he would never lose that knowledge, he took it as his name, inscribing upon himself 'Stamp Paid'. This was his own reminder, his own ticket, and it was equally his declaration to others of the defiance he did not express with bloodshed.[14]

He has created for himself, or named within his experience, a second identity, a second self, 'Stamp Paid', without ceasing to take part in the life of his first, 'Joshua'. This is another form under which we see the work of double-consciousness, where two realms, normally opposed, are simultaneously dwelt in, accepted and rejected. And in both, the concern which seems preeminent is the escape from, rather than the clashing with, the oppressor, with the goal of establishing a community, a place where each individual could have the freedom that came from being valued and loved. This idea of community arises again and again in the space of

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14 It is worth noting here that unlike 'Baby', a *spoken* term of affection, 'Stamp Paid' is a peculiarly *written* expression: we can almost imagine it appearing in block letters or rubber stamp. There is possible two-fold significance in this: Stamp was one of the few slaves of his generation able to read, and also profoundly aware of the weight carried by anything written. The name of his choice contains both the inordinate authority of that which is written, and his self-declared emancipation from the system that grants it such status. Paradoxically, in the process of trying to *escape* white domination, he takes a name symbolic of the tools *of* that domination (writing and the power of inscriptions, money and the systems of transport and trade). In addition, he takes a name which at once is written and puts an end to writing, since the words 'Stamp Paid' mark the conclusion of an exchange.

overlap of the two systems, in the realm of partnership between the written word and that which it normally seeks to exclude. This is however part of a dual concept of self and community, for just as Stamp is more than his Joshua role, so he is more than the good old Stamp who helps out his people: he bears the scars of the past, has his share of pride and of confusion or doubt.[15] I will have more to say about naming and imposed identity presently, but first, let us explore this idea of community in more depth, focussing on the use (or dismissal) of literacy as a criterion for 'inclusion'.

Colour and Literacy

Literacy, as we have mentioned before, was closely bound up in the system of authority in the time of slavery. Apart from colour, 'ignorance' (illiteracy) was one of the criteria one could list as indicative of racial 'difference'. Knowing that a tool is only a weapon so long as the enemy has none, whites kept what they believed to be a tight rein on education; this was true in the North as well as the South. We tend to look to the more blatant example of prejudice of Southerners, like the neighbours who mocked and made threats against Garner for teaching his slaves to read and count (one of the primary components in his plan of raising them as *'men'*: personhood being associated with this privilege), but even in the 'free North', Lady Jones was only picked for schooling because of the lightness of her skin, and 'the colored population of Cincinnati had two

15 Such doubt may even at times extend to his self-given name: confounded at not finding 124 open to him, and at the sight of the unknown Beloved glimpsed through the window, Stamp questions whether 'after all these years of clarity, he had misnamed himself and there was yet another debt he owed' (p. 184). Here again Morrison tries to keep from offering perfect, utopian answers: Stamp's clarity is not a 'fact' but a space of potential in which he is able to live.

graveyards and six churches, but since no school or hospital was obliged to serve them, they learned and died at home' (p. 247).[16]

Morrison exposes the 'weapon' of writing as being merely a tool perhaps most clearly in the small drama surrounding the charitable food donations received by Denver, after she bravely decides to share her troubles with Lady Jones. The following segment also reintroduces us to the partnership of individual and group identities: Denver's discovery of (coming into possession of) her self proceeds from her initiation into an adult, female community.

> "Oh, baby," said Mrs. Jones. "Oh, baby."
> Denver looked up at her. She did not know it then, but it was the word "baby", said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman. The trail she followed to that sweet thorny place was made up of paper scraps containing the handwritten names of others.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Denver stood on the porch and noticed something lying on the tree stump at the edge of the yard. She went to look and found a sack of white beans. Another time a plate of cold rabbit meat. One morning a basket of eggs sat there. As she lifted it, a slip of paper fluttered down. She picked it up and looked at it. "M. Lucille Williams" was written in big crooked letters. On the back was a blob of flour-water paste. So Denver paid a

16 Lady Jones, while passing on the skills of reading and writing to the 'unpicked', and being instrumental in Denver's escape, initiation and survival, is still , it must be said, far from a saviour to her people; she has, along with the skills she shares, taken on unquestioningly much of the value system that surrounds and oppresses her and her people. She not only expresses a 'white' point of view in seeing the woman most call 'holy' as 'the ignorant grandmother' and 'a woods preacher who fixes shoes' (woods preacher being scarcely above 'woods creature', beast...), but the clearest example of the danger of her system of prejudices, largely tied into the particular brand of religion under which she operates, is her reaction to the trouble at 124 while the other women are gathering in response: '[she] didn't believe the story and hated the ignorance of those who did' (p. 257).

second visit to the world outside the porch, although all she said when she returned the basket was "Thank you."

"Welcome," said M. Lucille Williams.

Every now and then, all through the spring, names appeared near or in gifts of food. Obviously for the return of the pan or plate or basket; but also to let the girl know, if she cared to, who the donor was, because some of the parcels were wrapped in paper, and though there was nothing to return, the name was nevertheless there. Many had X's with designs about them, and Lady Jones tried to identify the plate or pan or the covering towel. When she could only guess, Denver followed her directions and went to say thank you anyway -- whether she had the right benefactor or not. When she was wrong, when the person said, "No, darling. That's not my bowl. Mine's got a blue ring on it," a small conversation took place.

(pp. 248-49)

Literacy and the power it carries have generally, I have argued, been used to delineate and isolate various groups. Just as the Jews (and the Christians after them) have been known as the 'people of the book', so community, under whixty standards, could largely be measured by the haves and the have-nots of literacy. In this passage, however, Morrison shows how arbitrary and invalid is such a means of drawing boundaries, as she presents a community, a group of women, among whom some can letter their names, others not, but whose bond is nonetheless strong, and whose invitation is open, predicated on sympathy and solidarity, not on training or skill. Those in the group unable (or unwilling) to form big, crooked letters created their own forms of writing, and in the long run it is these idio-inscriptions which bear the most promise, since if Lady Jones failed to 'read' them (or other accompanying signs), Denver had the

opportunity to meet not just one but two or more of her 'benefactors'.[17] The world beyond the porch has long been seen as threatening, but while it is still a thorny place, it is also sweet, for it is to a harbour Denver is led by the resonance beyond polite formula of M. Lucille Williams' single word: 'Welcome'. It is in that harbour that she will at last find her individuality, discover its value, and put it to use. 'It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve' (p. 252).

Writers and Believers

As Morrison wishes to expose the artificiality of the boundary drawn in the name of literacy, so she will take on the limiting of believers to people of the book. It is not a question of excluding the tool, but of recognizing its function *as that*. Note how the community of women that surrounds Denver does use writing when it is available (i.e. does not reject it entirely), but equally refuses to be hindered by its absence, by the cases when it is not the most functional or appropriate tool. A similar paradigm is in operation when we consider the necessity of Christianity to spirituality as put forth in *Beloved*. I would like to consider now the relationship of the characters in *Beloved* to Christianity, both whixty and that of the Black churches, and explore the boundaries between the church and spirituality that are both indicated and denied.

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17 The alternative symbols may have actually expressed a person's identity (in the designs), or may have just been an imitation of the "real" writing, but in either case were notably not decipherable by a reader of "regular" types of inscription -- a nice reversal of the usual pattern of exclusion.

Whixty vs Christianity

First then, the issue of whixty versus Christianity. The more negative aspects of whixty are demonstrated with examples of the hypocrisy of "white Christians". If schoolteacher, for example, easily the darkest, most unredeemable figure in the novel[18], will ride ten miles to attend church on a Sunday morning, we are not led to value what is taught there (p. 222). Likewise a white stranger criticizes Paul D for drinking in front of a church -- show some respect! -- yet this would-be defender of the faith only appears because he wants directions while trying to find a "Saturday Girl"[19] (p. 231).

There are also ways in which whixty and its rules and teachings interfere with what seems both natural and right. When Stamp comes to carry out Baby Suggs after her death, Sethe suggests what any reader, having been through the scene of the Calling some hundred pages earlier, knows to be the right thing, but to no avail.

> Sethe had no instructions except "Take her to the Clearing," which he tried to do, but was prevented by some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest.
>
> (p. 171)

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18 The most unredeemable, that is, of those we get to know. He might have had some competition in the man Ella referred to as "the lowest yet", but I do not include him in this discussion since we never "meet" him in the narrative.

19 Saturday girls are black women who out of dire need for money sell themselves, especially to the slaughterhouse workers. Sethe herself almost became one, resigned to the fact that once she had traded her body with the stone-carver, there was no reason not to just go on with it. The message the stranger seems to bear is that while Paul D ought to respect the symbols of *what may not even still be a church*, it is perfectly all right for him to go and defile another human being. The fact that he would not even have seen her as such -- that it was easy, if despicable, for most people not to consider the Saturday Girls as people -- is exposed when Paul D also fancifully begins tossing around the name he heard, Judy. Stamp, in his reply, not only gives her her proper name, Judith, but shows her place in his community. (see p. 232.)

And there were other events besides the gatherings in the Clearing that were outside what whixty would accept: note the pairing of religious and secular L/law enforcement in this section of Denver's birth story.

> On a riverbank in the cool of a summer evening two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue. They never expected to see each other again in this world and at the moment couldn't care less. But there on a summer night surrounded by bluefern they did something appropriately and well. A pateroller passing would have sniggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws -- a slave and a barefoot whitewoman with unpinned hair -- wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. But no pateroller came and no preacher. The water sucked and swallowed itself beneath them. There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well.
>
> (pp. 84-85)

Morrison, however, is not in the business of providing clear answers, and so we also learn that whixty is not typical of all white Christians, for it is from their deeply religious (and vociferous) father that the Bodwins learned that 'human life is holy, all of it', a lesson that fuelled a lifetime's work as abolitionists, and thus facilitated, practically initiated, all the opportunities for security that Baby, Sethe and Denver (not to mention Janey Wagon and undoubtedly many others) ever know.[20]

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20 Morrison performs yet another sidestep where the Bodwins are concerned however, for lest we take them as perfect, even in their treatment of blacks, we know that Denver must still learn 'what door to knock on' (p. 253), i.e., not the front one, and as she leaves the Bodwins' house the narrator lets us see with her (and without comment) a small, functional statue, which symbolizes much of the stereotype of black people that the Bodwins ought, had they been perfect, to have utterly banished from their home.

Black Spirituality

The above examples deal with the bad and the good of white people allied with religion, but what of the black people?

The central spiritual figure in the novel is clearly Baby Suggs, holy, and we will come to an examination of her leadership in a moment.[21] Upon her arrival in Ohio, it is she who, in conversation with Janey, furnishes one of the first black comments on Christianity, and on the function of the clergy in the black community.

> "What churches around here? I ain't set foot in one in ten years."
>
> "How come?"
>
> "Wasn't none. I dislike the place I was before this last one, but I did get to church every Sunday some kind of way. I bet the Lord done forgot who I am by now."
>
> "Go see Reverend Pike, ma'am. He'll reacquaint you."
>
> "I won't need him for that. I can make my own acquaintance. What I need him for is to reacquaint me with my children. He can read and write, I reckon?"
>
> "Sure."
>
> "Good, 'cause I sure got a lot of digging up to do."
>
> (p. 146)

This dismissal of her need for the preacher might have been taken as a dismissal of her need to be (re)acquainted with God if the narrative had been related strictly 'chronologically', but when we read this, we have already encountered the future scene of her 'Calling' in the Clearing.[22] We

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21 'Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it' (p. 87), it is by the (extended) name of 'Baby Suggs, holy' that she is known in her Ohio community.

22 The Calling scene is pp. 87-89. Note here too that there is a deliberate play on the usual understanding of someone's 'calling' here: Baby Suggs herself was 'uncalled' in the strict, denominational sense (p. 87), but when people hear her voice 'calling' them to a clearing in the

know from this remarkable scene that Baby was not only able to (re)acquaint herself with God in the sharing of the power of her heart, but she is also reacquainted with the church, for although in the strict, denominational sense she is 'uncalled, unrobed, unanointed' (p. 87), she takes a leading role in the worship of various formal congregations, including 'AME's and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed' (*ibid*). Uncalled, she called; 'and the hearing heard' (p. 177).[23] 'Calling', then, is not noun but verb, is not something she receives which sets her apart, but something she does to bring people together.

This then, like Denver's paper-scrap community, is a partnership between what would be seen as the inside and the out of the normally-recognized 'official' system. Again, Morrison is not dismissing -- the churches are not to be abandoned -- but is demanding that they not be seen as the limit of the valid, or of the possible. Not disallowing, but de-centring, seeking a freer space of interpretation that is not 'more inclusive' (ultimately a condescending view), but which throws into question the very notion of exclusion. This is a far cry from the fear-driven delineation of Pauline communities.[24]

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woods, they gather before her and with her to experience what she has to share. The Calling then is not something she receives, which sets her apart, but something she does, to bring people together.

23 That Baby's authority in the pulpit is not referred to as preaching has its historical parallel in the life experiences of women such as Mrs Jarena Lee, who, before 'women preachers' were officially allowed by the Black Churches, was allowed to 'hold prayer meetings and to "exhort"'. See Lincoln:1991, Ch. 10 : 'The Pulpit and the Pew: The Black Church and Women', esp. pp. 279-281; see also Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), pp. 140-141.

24 It *is*, however, strongly reminiscent of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil' (Matthew 5:17), and so also of some traditional interpretations of II Cor 3:6, with the old Law being superseded by a new grace. Baby's grace, however, is not what traditionalists, particularly under whixty, might imagine, as we shall see.

Baby's 'Message'

Baby's role, her activity, and its location(s) challenge and expand traditional limitations. Her 'Message' challenges lies.[25] The people who gather before her are ex-slaves who still struggle for survival in a world seemingly designed against them, yet in her message there are none of the expected biblical platitudes, no Pauline/Kafkan promises for a future far remote and ever receding: the narrator relates to an apparently expectant reader that 'she did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek, or its glorybound pure' (p. 88). Similarly, in contrast to Paul's letter openings conveying a wish for grace and peace 'from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (and thus also setting himself, Paul, up as an authority figure, God's personal friend and message-bearer, mediating), the narrator tells us that Baby further declared 'that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine' and *give to themselves*.

> "Here," she said, "here in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, flesh that laughs, flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you!*
>
> (p. 88)

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25 I use the term lies with the words of Linda Hogan in mind: 'Now we are the "betrayers of the lie." In our speaking and writing, we betray what has harmed and held us down. We tell on those who hurt us. We give away the truths of oppression, and we betray our own denial by allowing our art and literature, our often unconscious internal creative processes, to express what we ourselves have held in.' This comes from her work 'Women: Doing and Being', in *The Stories We Hold Secret*, and is quoted in D. Soyini Madison, ed, *The Woman That I Am: The Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Colour* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

Against the stifling gag and the water rinsing away inconvenient bleeding under the Harrow of slavery and its legacy, Baby makes a priority of the physicality of human flesh and human behaviour.[26] Before she even utters these words, people are called forward to laugh, to dance and to weep, to share a common ritual commemorating individual and collective experiences of joy and sorrow. When at last all and each collapse about the Clearing 'exhausted and riven', she speaks. She speaks out against the legacy of slavery, the whitepeople's world 'out there', but also against Pauline whixty world which sees the spiritual as something other than incarnate, as proceeding only from the denial or the subordination of the body. Addressing people's lived experience, she guides them to rely not on any system, *nor on her*, but on their own selves and their own capacities for love and grace. This is Baby's way of reaching to fulfil the scriptural promise, and Morrison suggests a reading through her epigraph,

> I will call them my people,
> which were not my people,
> and her beloved,
> which was not beloved.

This is God's promise, taken from Hosea and re-iterated in Romans, that the excluded group will be taken in, and the shunned individual given place. Baby strives to empower the people to make it happen, to feel it happening in their own lives, *there and then*, for as Sethe once remarked 'Today is always here. Tomorrow, never'.

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26 The flesh, denied-yet-used, the site of inscription, the medium of oppression, becomes the flesh, affirmed-and-used, the medium of liberation. Flesh is thus liberated from a dependence on or subservience to W/word; see also below, p. 121 ff.

Liturgical and Scriptural Language/Idiom

The narrator's deliberate 'exclusion' (i.e., inclusion) of certain oft-quoted biblical passages as a preface to Baby's Calling in the Clearing is only one of many passages figured by or infused with biblical idiom. Many, however, are not straightforward quotations or references, but more playful (mis)use of biblical language as intertext. I shall give here just two brief examples. The narrative relating the cataclysmic confrontation that forces Sethe to choose death for her children begins: 'when the four horsemen came' (p. 148). When the scene is nearly repeated eighteen years later, however, the ominous treatment is turned on its head when Morrison treats the intertext comically, pushing the limits of what can still be accepted as pun, and leaving the crucial phrase unstated, yet resounding:

> As the scene neither one of them had witnessed took shape before them, its seriousness and its embarrassment made them shake with laughter.
>
> "Every time a whiteman come to the door she got to kill somebody?"
>
> "For all she know, the man could be coming for the rent."
>
> "Good thing they don't deliver mail out that way."
>
> "Wouldn't nobody get no letter."
>
> "Except the postman."
>
> "Be a mighty hard message."
>
> "And his last."
>
> When their laughter was spent, they took deep breaths and shook their heads.
>
> (p. 265)

[Perhaps then this whiteman at the door is always Paul, for here once again 'the letter kills'.]

In both these examples, one must note that if the references were missed, there would be no gap in logic: there *were* four horsemen in schoolteacher's posse, and Paul D and Stamp shared a joke which even on its own made sense (in a morbid way). Yet, if recognized, the intertext borders on being overly ironic: even the more ominous first one is (to the 'initiate') so blatant it is nearing self-parody.[27]

The fact that the novel takes a passage from scripture for an epigraph should by now be coming under suspicion, for Morrison consistently problematizes any attempt at interpretation, particularly of scripture. The first (re)reading of the epigraph, that of Baby Suggs, is inspiring and no doubt reflects the innovations of the 'new hermeneutic' of the day. The novel provides, however, at least one other possible reading, outside, one might say, of the sphere of religion, though it has everything to do with the question of 'keeping faith'. I now return to the promised further example of the dangers of imposing a name, especially through inscription. Beloved.

Beloved

'Everyone knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name' (p. 274). This brief quotation sums up what we can see now as Morrison's developing thesis on the importance of a name. 'You have to call me my name', Beloved begged (or was it commanded?) Paul D in the

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27 Morrison is of course taking another angle in her quest to challenge communities based around literacy, and biblical teaching in particular, with her irony directed at 'insiders' and their conventional readings.

cold room (p. 117). In the dark place, 'there is no one to want me to say me my name' (p. 212). Over and over the lament sounds: the desire not for gifts, not for love or praise, but for a name, for an identity. For, having died as a small child, the 'crawling-already? baby girl' never had the time to form any sense of her self, and was only able to take on what she was given -- the inscription of a word, Beloved.

Much of the novel centres around the attempts to understand the seeming madness that caused Sethe to murder her daughter, and to try to kill her other children as well. Like the dilemma which claimed Kafka's officer, we find here the puzzle of trying to live out the commandment 'BE JUST', for which was the worse crime, to send someone out of this life, or to condemn her to living it as an animal? Sethe knew that the system schoolteacher would take them back to would inscribe on her daughter 'not human', 'to be used and discarded', so she chose for her instead other inscriptions, first with the blade of a saw, and then upon her tombstone.

At the slain baby's burial, the still-crazed Sethe stands apart from the rest, and although within hearing of the preacher's whole ceremony, remembers of it only the first two words: dearly beloved. She latches onto that phrase, for she feels it explains what her baby girl was to her, why she had to kill her to set her free. It is in her mind the justification of her act of murder, and she sells her body for the chance to have it engraved on a pink granite marker. She sells her body for a chance to engrave it, thus showing a belief that to know it were not enough, that the things that are really true and lasting are those which are put down in writing.[28] But this

28 This shows how deeply the value system which places writing at its centre has been internalized by the people it is used against, for Sethe can hardly read, only able to 'recognize', it is said later, a few printed words (p. 161).

engraving does not put anything to rest. The child's only understanding is that she has been abandoned, her lament that in the the dark place there is no one to call her by her name. In fact, once the "welcoming cool" of the "unchiselled headstone" is disturbed, the letters of that single word *become* her only name. They are the only way she identifies herself when she returns:

> "Beloved. You use a last name, Beloved?" Paul D asked her.
>
> "Last?" She seemed puzzled. then "No," and she spelled it for them, slowly as though the letters were being formed as she spoke them.
>
> Sethe dropped the shoes; Denver sat down and Paul D smiled. He recognized the careful enunciation of letters by those, like himself, who could not read but had memorized the letters of their name.
>
> (p. 52)

Her slow inscription of the letters on the air echoes the way the same letters were engraved on the headstone, chiselled out one by one. And not only does that inscription become for *her* her only name, but for everyone: for the rest of the folk in the town, who had long forgotten the person, the *life* of the baby girl, retaining only the impressions of pride and of tragedy ('Everyone knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name'), but most especially for Sethe. For Sethe, the word is justification , her own testimony to herself (as Stamp's name was for him), and, she hopes, the reason she can offer her daughter.

I have already introduced the importance of a sense of self and of a place in community; the baby girl's life was too short, however, for her to develop much beyond the nuclear family relationship. The closest she had come to independence was in the moments when she climbed stairs on her own, yet then she was always somehow watched and protected. Returning

in the *form* of a woman, she has yet gone through none of the stages of emancipation and growth as an individual. She still has the level of demand of a tiny child, with a child's delights and a child's temper, and knows that the only thing she was given when she was abandoned all those years before was a new name. Like so many of Morrison's characters, she struggles to come to terms with her name, to find some connection between her name and her self. But because inside she is still a child, she can only attempt this by demanding proof of the name's validity from others. It is as if she is saying, You gave me that name: the stone's inscription was the only thing calling me by *any* name when I was in the dark place, when you abandoned me. Now you all must prove it to be my right name.

She demands this calling from Paul D when she visits him in the cold room[29], but the greatest demand is for the proof from Sethe of its truth. A baby will cry until its needs are met, but with eighteen years of crying unheeded, the baby-returned has a need that no one could ever hope to satisfy, a need that would have taken Sethe's life in its immature quest for punishment, for vindication.

> Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was trying to make her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that . . .
>
> (p. 251).

No proof could have been enough, and so Morrison's epigraph takes on a different meaning, standing as a child's ever-echoing accusation:

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29 The very term "cold room" stands in contrast to the place of her time away, "a hot place", and Paul D, without understanding why, knows that it was she who chose this as his -- as their -- place.

I will *call* them my people,
which were not my people;
and her beloved,
which was *not* beloved.

(emphasis added)

* * *

(Re)Moving Inscriptions: the Progress of Generations

Along with the processes of naming and self-naming, figurative forms of inscription marking the psyche, come figures of literal 'inscription' : physical wounding, maiming, marking, visible on the bodies of the victims. From generation to generation, characters in *Beloved* are known not only by name but by the scars they bear, scars which in some cases speak the only truth undeniable when all else is lost.

When Sethe is still a small girl, one of many children of the slave women on a plantation, her mother seeks her out and shares an inscribed secret. Opening her dress, Sethe's mother reveals the mark of a branding iron.

'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest all dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.'

(p. 61)

Not yet able to read its 'authorially intended' meaning, the history of animal subjugation written into this code of scarring, the young Sethe only understands its 'surface value', a unique association with her mother that leads her to plead, 'mark me too', wishing to bond herself with the mother who otherwise was only 'one of the many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field' (p. 30).

When Sethe is older, with children of her own, she is measured and her teeth counted by the new master of the Sweet Home plantation and his nephews; this continues the history of seeing black people as animals, though now the power exercised has been gentrified, hidden behind 'learning'. Rather than 'branding them' (literally, with a hot iron like that used on Sethe's mother, or figuratively, with verbal assertions), schoolteacher, as the new master is called, seeks to 'prove' this link 'scientifically'. The first inscription of Sethe, then, is not on her body but in notebooks, listing 'her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right' (p. 193), with ink which she herself has been made to prepare.

As this writing process continues, two further incidents occur concerning the inscription of Sethe. Still a nursing mother, she is held down by the nephews and her milk stolen; when she reports this to her mistress, schoolteacher has her beaten, so badly that it scars her for life. Thus she receives her fleshly inscription, as she had once wished to, despite having learned long hence to read in such a mark its intended degradation. The inscription she bears will resemble a tree, marking her place also in another history, linking her to Jesus' suffering, when he was

whipped and nailed to a 'tree'.[30] And this sign will be at once a living and a dying thing; living, as a 'tree in blossom', yet dying, for as Sethe's skin heals, it dies, so that she will never again feel the tree touching her. Yet it will also be *un*dying, for whether she can see or feel it or not, it will be with her forever, the absence of feeling a presence in each day she survives.

Before the tree, however, the stealing of Sethe's milk is of itself a part of the processes of inscription: not simply because it leads to her flesh being carved with a whip, but because it both brands her 'outward' identity (that is, demonstrates the way she is seen, 'read', by slavemasters), and cripples her power of self-possession and expression. When schoolteacher's nephews, described horribly as 'boys with mossy teeth', hold Sethe down and steal the milk from her breasts, much more occurs than a simple attack. They are milking her like an animal, returning her to the 'beast status' her mother wore as a branding scar, and this is done with 'their book reading teacher watching and writing it up' (p. 70).[31] They also are taking away her status as a mother, as she is deprived of her children's food. And figuratively, following Cixous's famous formula, they are stealing her expression, her ability to write her own life, for woman writes with the very 'encre blanche' that they suck away.[32]

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30 In the second verse of the Spiritual 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord', the question is asked, 'Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?'. In Sethe's case, the tree is whipped into her.

31 The name schoolteacher then is not carelessly chosen, but carries with it a condemnation of the misuses of education and literacy. Left uncapitalized, it is hissed on the page, written not with any respect but with bitterness and irony, for he seeks to use his education to legitimize his brutality, and to pass it on to a new generation, teaching them to whip Sethe, to punish a slave woman for their own crimes against her.

32 See Hélène Cixous, '*Le rire de la Méduse*' (in *L'Arc* 61 (1975), pp. 39-54), esp. p. 44.

The echoes of Cixous's work present in *Beloved* merit a lengthy study of their own, but briefly, let me remark that her words can also be used to describe the strangely interdependent relationship that develops among Sethe, Beloved and Denver; compare the mingling voices in the section of text the narrator calls 'unspeakable thoughts, unspoken' (pp. 200-217) with Cixous: '*en la*

The importance of this incident in Sethe's life cannot be overstated; she returns to this question of her milk again and again. It first appears only a few pages into the novel, when she shares her story with Paul D; he sees the whipping as an unbelievable cruelty, but she shouts him down, showing what was for her the ultimate violation: never mind what they put *on* me, she says: look what they took *from* me.

> 'After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. . . Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back . . .
>
> ' They used a cowhide on you?'
>
> 'And they took my milk.'
>
> 'They beat you and you was pregnant?'
>
> 'And they took my milk!'
>
> (p. 17)

* * *

For a third generation, that of Sethe's children, the promise of unmarked lives seemed possible when Sethe escaped to the North. But they have only twenty-eight days of happiness before the same men who beat Sethe and stole her milk come hunting. As I have mentioned before, it is fully appropriate for Morrison to begin her apocalyptic scene with the words, 'when the four horsemen came'. For having at last understood that branding is for cattle, not human beings, that the measuring of her head named her as a beast, Sethe, in a fury to ensure that there would be 'no notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither' (p. 198), performs

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femne toujours se maintient la force productive de l'autre, surtout de l'autre femme. En elle, matrcielle, berceuse-donneuse, elle-même sa mère et son enfant, sa fille-soeur' ('*Le rire de la Méduse*' p. 44). (See also more recent essays, esp. 'Coming to Writing', in *Coming to Writing and other essays*, Deborah Jenson, ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).)

her own act of fleshly inscription. It is because of this action that years later the young woman appearing from nowhere is recognized, for she bears a third generation's markings: four little half moons on her forehead, where Sethe's fingernails dug in, and a 'smiley' line below her chin, where her throat was cut with a saw blade.

There is a crucial difference with this third generation however. Whereas Sethe and her mother were inscribed by white masters, Beloved is marked by 'one of her own'. Sethe's action is the first of those which seeks to alter the process of inscription: recognizing the impossibility of escaping inscription, Sethe is at least able to choose what the inscription will be, and who will enact it. And to reinforce its intended meaning, Sethe barters for a second inscription, on a tombstone, trying to explain, to provide a second text for her daughter that will interpret the first.

Sethe's mother, after years with a bit in her mouth, had 'smiled' all the time;[33] her granddaughter, Beloved, also wears an inscribed 'smile' expressing not joy but sorrow. Sethe had meant it as a mark of love, but such a reading is a complex one; being but a child, Beloved must be taught to read, to understand the intended meaning of the inscription she bore. And so, by indulging her with caresses, by feeding her soft and sweet things, Sethe seeks to teach her daughter to read these inscriptions as she herself does.[34]

Sethe's life spans the time of transition from slavocracy to its *de jure* (if not *de facto*) abolition; in it, she traces a path of transition for

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33 'When she wasn't smiling, she smiled, and I never saw her own smile' (p. 203).
34 Here again is Kafka's officer with his rice pap, here again is Paul's food of babes. See previous chapter, esp. pp. 70-71.

writing. With each successive bid for freedom Sethe makes, the locus of such writing will shift, as will the price she will pay for it. Her first action, still under the full weight of slavery, is to report the nephews' attack; for her 'gall', she is punished, and a whipping inscribes upon her the living, dying, undying tree. Her next, as an escapee, is to perform an inscription herself, slitting her daughter's throat rather than submitting her to slavery's degradation. For this she pays with a jail sentence, and isolation from her community. After this, she commissions for her daughter a *second* inscription, which is the first to be carried out on stone rather than on flesh. Its price, however, is the sacrifice of Sethe's body (for sex) to the carver.

We then move to the next stage in the transition. After eighteen years of haunting, and the return of Beloved, Sethe is given a chance to re-enact the apocalyptic scene, and here her final attempt at inscription shifts away from black flesh entirely, to the flesh of the oppressor. This final act of inscription not only has a new, other locus, but is remarkable for its not being, in the end, an inscription at all.

The community of women who had left Sethe years before join and surround her, with a lesson to teach about the power that is beyond any word or inscription.

> For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water . . . It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash.
>
> (p. 261)

Here the 'Clearing' comes to Sethe in two ways: the power of the love and freedom experienced in the woods gatherings of long ago comes to her and carries her to confront, at last, the painful memories she has sought to 'beat back' for the last eighteen years. This is the beginning of a ritual of healing for Sethe, a 'clearing' of the confusion and pain carried deep within. Despite the emotional impact of this cleansing and initiation rite, however, its lesson about the useless damage of inscription is not immediate. Although she has learned that the flesh of her own, her mother, herself and her children, should not be the locus of writing, when Sethe glimpses the horseman come again, she still sees a weapon for the taking. And so she turns, and with an ice pick (like the tool that would have carved the tombstone, like the Harrow's needle, like schoolteacher's pen) takes writing into her own hands, and flies instead at the enemy. Only Denver, her living daughter, manages to wrestle her down and prevent her from killing him, and being imprisoned again, or worse.

Convergence of themes

The lesson Sethe feels without understanding bears further examination, for it is part of a convergence of themes in the novel, surrounding words, writing, and scripture. Morrison has engaged with scriptural interpretation, with language and with writing, treating all as both potential tools and serious weapons. In this dramatic scene, however, her play becomes serious business, a merging of all targets and contenders.

In explorations of the necessity (or non-necessity) of literacy we have seen that Denver's paper-scrap initiation was enhanced by the decorated markings, symbols falling outside the writing system. There are in fact many references throughout the novel to (black) people's need to express themselves outside the usual shapes of words in order to circumvent their oppressors, to expression so profound that cannot be made in words, to the moment where language fails. When Sixo is burning alive, Paul D is put off joining in the song because he doesn't understand the words, 'Although it shouldn't have mattered because he understood the sound: hatred so loose it was juba' (227). The prisoners at Alfred, Georgia 'chain danced over the fields' , 'sang it out and beat it up, tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings' (p. 108); they are fooling words, or those who think they control them. When the women gather to confront Beloved, just before the replay of the awful murder scene, they gather strength in combining their voices and in seeking 'the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words'.

We have also seen the Clearing, a place of challenge to whixty, and showing the need of *all* Christianity to be complemented by the 'unorthodox'. It is, however, when all these threads of language and belief are brought together, that the ultimate herald of challenge is aimed at language, writing, biblical expression and theology in a very brief textual moment. Listen - *nun hören Sie*:

> They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like.
>
> (p. 259)

In the beginning, there were no words. There in a sentence is the ultimate challenge to the Johannine logos, encapsulating Christian belief *and* the primacy of language and of writing. Just as in the Clearing the affirmation of flesh freed it from subservience to inscription, and thus to W/word, so here the meaning (which they all understood, because 'they all knew what that sound sounded like') is freed from the word/writing/inscription constraints of the Johannine theologizing of language. As with the narrator's introduction to Baby's Calling, Morrison must here *use* the biblical expression with all its resonance in order to negate it, must use it as a tool in order to expose its dangers. The same occurs with her own writing, for she must tell Beloved's story in order to come to its conclusion, which laments:

> 'It was not a story to pass on . . . It was not a story to pass on . . . This is not a story to pass on.'
>
> (pp. 274-5).

* * *

Conclusion

The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.

-Paul Ricoeur

The paradox addressed by Morrison is that this need to tell the story of oppression can perhaps only be fulfilled by means of (collusion with?) the system (inscription, writing, text, biblical literacy) which lies at the root of the very hurt that seeks vengeance. Perhaps, though, it is this very paradox that allows some hope of redemption: the writing system, long seen and in this novel ably demonstrated as a weapon, is both portrayed as a potential tool within the story and used as such a tool in its telling. The power lies perhaps not in textuality, but in attitudes towards it, in its uses and its users. Thus Morrison is able, within the story, to show both its negative and hurtful use (including mis-naming Baby Jenny, and planting the 'tree' in the flesh of Sethe's back) and its reclaiming (seen for example in Baby's view that it could help her reunite her family, and in Denver's paper-scrap community, which itself lies both inside and outside the norms of the system's use). At the end, however, she self-consciously admits her position as writer, acknowledges the position of the narrative in a meta-narrative frame, and at once decries the danger of having told the story, and the necessary fact of its having been told.

The last word of the novel, alone, stands as a summary of all its action, narrative and meta-narrative. The word Beloved, so overfilled with

significance, at once says everything and nothing : is perhaps truly the 'sound' that cannot be captured in words. It is the girl/ghost; it is the inscription on the tombstone; it is the promise to the enslaved; it is the girl/ghost's accusation; it is the title of the novel that cannot contain its meaning.

As Ann-Janine Morey recently wrote, the work of authors such as Morrison 'submerges the conventions . . . without necessarily establishing any alternative utopic promises'.[35] Thus Baby's alternative 'system' also disintegrates in its turn; everything changes. Far from being any ultimate solution, to be canonized in its turn, like the scriptures it explores (and explodes), this is 'not a story to pass on'. Yet in the midst of changes, small triumphs, and many defeats, the characters in *Beloved* continue, through it all, to find each other and to grow. As with acts of inscription, the need for ex-stasis, for dynamic relationships, with space for growth, exploration, failure, success, calls for a God and a quality of 'knowing God' that is equally dynamic, vibrant, alive. As modern critical theory now tends to turn from the idea of stable 'self ' towards a more elusive subject-in-process, so as people of word-power we must be prepared to explore and suggest, rather than declare, to write in a different ink, to cease to feel a right to inscribe indelibly into our own flesh, or that of others.

Just as the women in *Beloved* took a step back to the beginning, and found there that there were no words, perhaps, in seeking understanding, we need the advice of theologian Carol Christ:

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35 See Morey:1991 , p. 497.

> *We are in a time for ripening . . . We must discover a mode of thinking about the ultimate which can be modulated by a sense of timing, a mode which will not require the definitive word in a time when soundings are more appropriate.*[36]

This then argues for the continued interdisciplinary study of Literature and Theology, for rather than trying to present coherent, encompassing systems, the role of literature (including not only print but other forms of art) can be seen as that of providing a space for this timely way of 'doing' of theology: a space for soundings.

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36 Carol Christ, 'Spiritual Quest and Women's Experience', in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds, *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p. 231.

Suffering and Hope: Towards a Possible Writing of/for the Future

Conclusion to

Writing, Inscription and Power:
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Morrison

Responsible political theology must be utopian and priests are obliged to be turbulent and (annoyingly) visionary in even the most socially responsible societies. And yet, the church must also be realistically committed to what is attainable here and now as part of a great vision...

- Charles Villa-Vicencio

'Today is always here', said Sethe. 'Tomorrow, never.'

Stealing the Voice of Suffering

As explored by Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain*, the difficulty of communicating human suffering has meant that language can be all too easily manipulated in order to render pain invisible, and even to participate in its infliction. The sharing, the communication in any form of even part of such fundamentally inexpressible experiences of suffering is extraordinary; and can but provoke awe in any engaged reader or listener. Robert Detweiler comments:

> Close to the centre of Christian myth and ritual is the passion of Christ, the mutilation, pain, and suffering inflicted on his body in our stead, according to our theology of atonement: an inscription that we still read, Christian believers or not, in attitudes of guilt and awe. The pain of the crucifixion retains its power to affect us emotionally and is still at the heart of the Western sense of the sacred.[1]

The author of any story of suffering partakes of this resonance, and, wittingly or unwittingly, thus engages in a sort of rhetoric: loosely, using a particular means of expression whose form or content will elicit a response at a level deeper than can be controlled by conscious choice. When Paul then refers to himself as a sufferer, 'bearing the marks of Christ', and alluding to beatings and other punishments despite which he carries on, he elicits both sympathy and admiration for his ability to persevere in the face of adversity.

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1 Robert Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (New York, etc.: Harper and Row and London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 46-47.

'In Spite of ' or 'Because of '?

Here however a grave problem arises: when such forms of expression are used to elicit such a response in a deliberate way, they eventually lose the force of the paradox whence came their original power (the heightened unlikelihood of the achievement when attempted under difficult conditions). When we are repeatedly told that 'Paul carried on in spite of all', the 'in spite of ' loses its ability to surprise, and the story becomes a goad, a virtual commandment, a yardstick by which to measure and to punish. Instead of Paul being admirable for qualities above and beyond our own, the terms are reversed, and we become failures if we do not persist and excel as he did. What is more, this 'achievement in spite of suffering' somehow shifts, until the impression is created that the suffering *produces* the achievement. This impression is reinforced over time by re-tellers, users of what is in their view an exemplary tale. *But we must never accept the suggestion that suffering is in and of itself ennobling.* Kafka has surely taught us this. For while it may be true that sufferers grow through the resources they discover in their time of trial, pain, of any kind, be it physical, emotional, spiritual, is isolating, alienating, and leaves us with scars -- wounds that do not heal. Hurt may lessen over time, but when these wounds cease to speak pain into our senses, their silence itself is like Sethe's tree a presence forever, a reminder that we are changed, utterly. We may if we are lucky experience emotional or spiritual growth, but the pain of breaking, the suffering, should never be glorified into anything other than the horror it is.

Summary of Arguments

In this thesis, I have sought to explore the problems peculiar to language in its *inscribed* form: that is, peculiar to writing. The first chapter looked at the letters to the Corinthians, and at the ways in which Paul constructed a system of textuality within them. In particular, I focussed on the manner in which Paul invested the act of writing with divine authority, and characterized himself as a divinely appointed *writer*. Along the way, I noted details of his 'real' identity that seemed to contradict the image he was constructing, further undermining the 'truth' of this 'textual' Pauline identity. With his text therefore posited as carrying such authority -- an authority which I had thrown into question -- I then turned to the identity which he constructed -- again using tropes of textuality -- and imposed on the Corinthians. The metaphorization of the reader's body into letter then served to illustrate the denial or neutralization of pain and the silencing of dissent, two concomitant exercises in power.

The second chapter took Kafka's short story 'In the Penal Settlement' as a Nietzschean reading of Paul, noting how metaphors became re-invested with concreteness and gruesome reality. Rendered literal, details of the imposition of writing, the inscription of authority upon the subject revealed the ways in which human qualities and expression were silenced or destroyed by this system of rule. Kafka's mirroring of the eschatological expectation common to religion, and his provision of a bitterly empty failure of the system to live up to its' supporters' hopes, also served to show that this means used to justify the system's acts of cruelty was false and deceptive.

In the third chapter, I looked at the way in which Morrison, in *Beloved*, takes up this theme of eschatological expectation; challenging it as in itself inadequate to sustain a people involved in very present suffering, who exist in a moment-to-moment struggle for physical and emotional survival. Morrison, like Paul and Kafka, lets questions of writing, text, and the power of inscription drive her narrative, but through the lives and experiences of her characters explores the dangers of inscription and seeks alternative roles for writing, outside or beyond their Pauline closed-system. Generations replay the various stages, Pauline, Kafkan and beyond into a future which holds no promise other than its total honesty about what has come before. And it is with this same honesty that Morrison the writer enters into her own narrative, admitting her own necessary complicity with the writing game, making use of this threatening, often damaging system even as she seeks her people's release from it.

The critique offered by Kafka and Morrison of the Pauline text-world suggests two things:

1) that a promise for the future, alone, is not enough to justify, excuse or pass over the sufferings that are inflicted in the present, but that such a promise must -- if it is not to be abandoned entirely -- certainly be accompanied by a recognition of present distress and very concrete steps towards its alleviation.

2) that writing is a tool, but an imperfect one, which, when its possession is conflated with power, becomes a weapon which not only can

inflict (inscribe) suffering on those subject to it, but like Kafka's machine may ultimately also because of its instability turn upon the one supposedly in control, the writer.

In the penultimate scene in *Beloved*, the definitive word is replaced by something else: a sound which is at once representative, and inexpressible. Full of meaning, yet meaningless. To name with words, whether we are naming the self or the sacred, is inadequate, cannot be 'the whole truth'. There is always an excess which escapes the bounds of the text as written. Kafka's response to this was nihilism, flight. Morrison stays to wrestle with its difficulties, but is not without a sense of the irony in role as a writer, making use of the very system she decries. The characters in her fiction, however, are not bound by the same confines; they are able to explore the places of excess, the border regions between what was thought to be 'truth', and the truth that lies outside it. This is the place Denver comes to as she enters the paper-scrap community; this is the experience of Baby Suggs, who calls equally from church pulpits and in forest groves, all as expressions of the beat (object) and beating (subject) heart, the prize. There are no successes, but there are every where small victories, encouraging further 'soundings' along the way. It is only though when things are named for what they are, and not metaphorized into the dull insentient vegetable world, that the beginnings of new paths come to light. As Baby called the various people of the community forward in the Clearing, she did not give them answers from another world, or promises for a future unconnected with the present or the past.

> Finally she called the women to her. 'Cry,' she told them. 'For the living and the dead. Just cry.' And without covering their eyes the women let loose.
>
> (*Beloved,* p. 88)

If we can be as free of shielding as these women were, as free of the devices hidden in and by our language, then perhaps we can find the room to express, and to live in a present which is partnered with the past, and which can give a real, obtainable hope for the future.

Inscription, Identity and the Information Highway

Postscript to

Writing, Inscription and Power:
Word and Identity in Paul, Kafka and Morrison

What is at stake in writing is the very structure of authority itself. Whether writing is seen as the instance of the law, the loss of immediacy, or the subversion of the master, whether it opens up a stance of domination, a space of exile, or the pathway to freedom, one thing, at least, is clear: the story of the role and nature of writing in Western culture is still in the process of being written. And the future of that story may be quite unforeseeable, as we pass from the age of the book to the age of the byte.

- Barbara Johnson

Writing, Inscription and Power: Word and Identity into the 21st Century.

As a postscript, I would like to offer a few suggestions regarding the possible significances of the key words from my thesis title (writing, inscription, power, word, identity) in the coming decades, and thus suggest a practical context for addressing the conclusions I have drawn thus far.

Paul, in his time, made use of the 'technology of writing' available to him, epistolary form and epistolary function; Kafka called attention to this technology, to the 'machinery' in use in Paul's rhetorical strategy. This postscript attempts to ask similar questions about the 'writing technology' of today and of tomorrow - about what is going on implicitly as well as explicitly, about what is being hidden behind the conventions of the new 'letter-forms' and 'inscriptions' of the electronic age. Thus I will explore the phenomenon of computer-aided communication (the Internet, Bulletin Boards, E-Mail, and so on), read through the filter of my previous inquiries into the role of writing in the exercise of power and the formation of identity. This is not intended to be an in-depth study of either information technologies or postmodern culture, but is intended to raise certain questions which will, I hold, need to be addressed by those who propose to 'do theology' in the future both by way of textual interpretation and by way of concrete political involvement/praxis.

I must from the start make apologies for what may seem like an excessive amount of jargon used in these next pages, but I find it

necessary to make use of the new language of this communication revolution in order a) to distinguish it sufficiently from what exists outwith it and b) to then be able to make comparisons between the two 'worlds'.

The Internet : Introduction

It may be helpful at this stage to give a brief sketch of the history of the Internet, and to outline those of its functions I will be discussing later. Originally, the Internet -- not a computer network in itself, but a network of networks -- was set up by U.S. government researchers who believed that such an arrangement, without any single centre, would be less vulnerable than conventional databases in case of nuclear attack. Extended and broadened through cooperation with the academic community and other professional research facilities, this 'information superhighway' now stretches around the world, and is used by tens of millions of people every day. Provided one has access to a gateway, via a larger computer such as those housed at many universities, in principle anyone with a home computer (with a modem) can use conventional telephone lines to 'dial up', and gain access to a wealth of information so vast that it defies cataloguing. Libraries with computer systems are 'on-line', newspapers and other news sources are accessible, images, graphics, sound files and video can be included, one can peruse great works of literature from Shakespeare to Lewis Carroll (the project to make more books available in this way is called 'Project Gu_tenberg'), and perhaps most importantly, one can 'talk' (exchange short bursts of text) with other users all over the world. For the most part, this talking occurs in two

forms: electronic 'mail' (e-mail) and 'bulletin board' systems (BBSs). I shall now devote some attention to each of these.

A note regarding terminology: most functions of computer communications schemes are described by analogous reference to real objects or systems whose functions they mimic. Hence there is a 'mail' system for sending personal messages, there are 'bulletin boards' where one may read or attach notices, and so on. In the fiber-optic context, this second set of meanings is taken for granted; when, however, one is shifting one's frame of reference back and forth between the Net and what occurs in real life (IRL), the computer versions are usually flagged with either the prefix 'cyber-' or the word 'virtual' (thus avoiding some of the potential confusion caused by a proliferation of quotation marks). The realm 'inside' the computer world (here is another mental construct, using a spatial analogy) is often referred to in its entirety as 'cyberspace'. 'Virtual' is borrowed from 'virtual reality' the now common name given to technologically-enhanced, multisensory simulated environments, though it does not necessarily imply direct reference to this technology. Cyber[insert-noun-here] became popular after the publication of William Gibson's novel Neuromancer in 1984, and through subsequent futuristic works of fiction taking place in cyberspace (which is inhabited by the likes of the 'cyberpunk', who himself makes use of the technology of virtual reality, or what Gibson understood the possibilities of the technology to be).

* * *

E-Mail

E-mail users have an account (essentially a promise of access to functions and services, as well as an allotment of memory space) with a host computer, such as the University of Glasgow's UNIX system, or those of a private service to which they subscribe, such as CompuServe. That account serves as a sort of 'post office box' for messages, and each with a specific 'address' (a numeric or alphanumeric code) which users in remote locations use in order to direct messages to that particular 'box'. It is also the site (read: facility) from which they can send messages out.

E-mail is written (composed) most often in one of two ways: by preparing a file using a word-processor, and then sending the complete, edited file, or by sending (or replying) directly, sending short bursts of text a line at a time to the address in question. In each case, the actual transfer from one site to the other can be made in seconds, or less, no matter how geographically distant those sites may be.

Bulletin Board Systems

Ben Knox has described the bulletin board system (BBS) as a 'messaging and notice board system', adding that 'bulletin boards provide places where enthusiasts, who may live many miles from each other, can exchange hints, tips, programs, and gossip'.[1] Functionally speaking, it's a bit like leaving a note on the board at your local library or community

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1 Ben Knox, *Hotline: A Personal Guide to Computer Communications* (London: Century Communications, 1985), p. 132.

centre, only with the added bonus of having more potential respondents see it than might in one geographically limited area. Signing onto the board with a nickname, users can also take part in conversations 'in real time', interacting then and there with other users who happen to be on-line (dialled in, connected) at the same time.

Virtual Inscription, Virtual Text

I would like now to begin to look for the meanings of my thesis key-words in this new context. I explained above that e-mail messages are created and sent in two ways -- pre-prepared and on-the-spot -- and how, in both cases, the actual message transfer takes seconds, or less, to accomplish. I must point out that in either case, the act of 'writing' the message is one of composing on a keyboard something which may appear on-screen, but which, unless extra steps are taken to have it printed out, will not ever exist in concrete reality. There will be no tangible text, no ink on a page, marks in stone or otherwise. IRL -- in real life -- the 'mark' of each letter is only the temporary arrangement of a series of mechanical switches in on and off positions. First question: aside from this question of tangibility, is the act of composing -- *writing* -- the same for virtual letters as real ones? A comment from a ten-year e-mail veteran:

> I like e-mail, but it's different than regular mail. It's free and faster than regular mail, but it affects your style. Because it's free and somewhat

effortless, people get lazy and tend to send more junk on e-mail than they would if they were writing letters. This is my personal opinion, of course.[2]

And what of the on-line text: if it can only be 'read' in cyberspace, does it really exist? One problem I encountered in the course of preparing a bibliography for this chapter was the fact that on-line information sources are not permanent, nor are they all permanently archived: many entries are simply deleted once they are no longer current. This will pose a problem for students and authors who wish to document their work. For the time being, I have had to invent a format for citations, and further, I must acknowledge that some of my sources for this chapter will soon cease to exist even in virtual form (if they have not in fact done so already), and thus will in the future be untraceable. If we currently use our notes/references to reinforce the authority of our arguments, what will the effect be of having to say 'trust me, the reference did at one time exist, at least in cyberspace...'. And what of the works of literature, past and future, that are established 'on-line'? Intellectual property is one issue, and reading and interpretation another.

Intellectual Property : who will 'own' these works? Are copyright notices such as are clearly posted at the beginning of the e-journals now making the rounds on the Net going to be heeded? These are problems being addressed on an *ad hoc* basis largely by improvisation (as I have done in my bibliography), since there are no obvious precedents. William Gibson relates in a recent article:

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2 Geoffrey N. Grove, Yale University, personal (e-mail) correspondence, May 1994 . I will return later to the concept of electronic communications as 'free'.

> [It's] a knotty question for those of us who make our livings largely by maintaining that we do in fact 'own' certain information.[3] I suspect, though, that we're evolving new strategies. Bruce Sterling recently posted his nonfiction book *The Hacker Crackdown* on the Internet, with a special introduction outlining the specific uses for which he was making it available. Saying basically, 'you may download this, you may copy it to disk, even make hard copy -- but no fucking way may you print your own edition and sell it, because that's *my* gig.'[4]

Sterling then is attempting to invent rules, but there is no real way of enforcing them: it becomes a game, combining trust with peer pressure. If he loses -- or perhaps even if he wins -- there will be new meaning in Roland Barthes' notion of the death of the author.

Reading and interpretation is another issue again. Couple these questions of authorship with the evanescent nature of virtual text (here today, deleted tomorrow), and I ask, must such text not necessarily be read in a profoundly different way from the books (and letters, scrolls, and tablets) of generations past?

Virtual Identity

I would like to move back now from 'literature' to more common forms of writing as individual communication, though I will continue to

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3 More virtual vocabulary: anything transferred via computer communications networks -- from Bible verses to cake recipes, political commentary to weather maps -- is reified and homogenized, lumped into the blanket term 'information', all of which is said to travel along the 'information superhighway'. *-SGC*

4 William Gibson, 'Turning Money into Light', in *Details* vol. 12 no. 9 (February, 1994), p. 67.

pay attention to the writer.[5] I pointed out the non/existence of virtual writing (defined loosely here as the product created by a typist at a keyboard preparing something for transmission) earlier in my description of e-mail: it is readable within a certain coded system (i.e., through computer interpretation of signals/switches), but has no (interpretable) outward reality. This applies to bulletin board messages as well as to e-mail, but with BBs there is an added twist: when you enter into a bulletin board exchange, you do so under an assumed name, which, unlike your alphanumeric e-mail address, is untraceable. Writing to/for the communities in cyberspace, you are free to create for yourself a new, different 'textual' identity. Any writing referring to the self does this of course, but not all impose a radical distance between the physical and the textual realties, a distance which, as I shall explain, begins with a change of name, but may go well beyond. In my first chapter I pointed out that letters have been seen as a means of maintaining contact during a time of spatial separation, of turning '*apousia* into *parousia*.'[6] On bulletin boards, however, there has been no originary presence, no actual meeting and hence no 'actual' identity previously encountered by the other(s), to which the 'textual' identity need refer. In cyberspace, then, you can be anybody you want to be. On a bulletin board, there is only one 'I': the invented, virtual I. And as there was no physical past together, so there will be for most no anticipated future: there is no risk of a clash between the two selves. This then is neither comparable to Paul's situation with respect to his correspondents at Corinth, where I have argued that the risk in dual identities was significant, nor to DuBoisian double-consciousness, where

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5 I realize that the distinction between 'literature' and other forms of writing is *highly* debatable, but for the purposes of this essay, will make it anyway, on the understanding that in other contexts this separation is problematic and demands to be challenged.

6 The words, again, are John Lee White's (White:1972).

the two identities are simultaneously dwelt in, merged: in cyberspace, there is only one identity in play at a time, and that is the virtual-textual one, which is distinct and kept separate from the physical.[7] This is where there is a new reality (reality?) to the phrase 'I'm schizophrenic and so am I'.

* * *

Social Ethics / Moral Implications

I have said that, as well as examining the uses and significances of keywords in a new context, I will address some practical applications of conclusions drawn in the previous chapter. I will proceed to this now through 'case studies' of two of the advertised promises for the future of the information highway.

Case 1: The Virtual Globe

Nearly every article on the subject of the information highway points to it as circling the globe. This is backed up by graphic representations: pictures, drawings, computer-animated images showing lines encircling this spherical mass called planet earth. For example, because it was published while we awaited the results of South Africa's first free election, the Guardian's recent article has a cartoon man tapping

7 As Jonathan Freedland reported in a recent article in the *Guardian*, 'electronic "road signs" warn junior cybernauts never to use their real names, and never to say where they live, IRL'. See Freedland, 'A Network Heaven in Your Own Front Room', in the *Guardian*, Saturday April 30 / Sunday May 1, 1994, p. 23.

away at his keyboard, a line from which runs to a point in South Africa on a huge globe mysteriously suspended behind his workstation. A recent advertisement for an on-line [Internet connection] service shows a drawing of two happy people standing on different continents on a map, engaged in lively conversation while the sun shines benignly on them. Another service uses many small images in its advertisement, one of which is a photograph of a keyboard connected to a globe the likes of which a child learning geography might use. Still another package, with the lead text 'We've put the whole world in a box', shows a box with a handle on top (for easy carrying), decorated with a world map, with various points marked 'you are here', 'and here', 'and here', 'and here'. One publishing company advertises its *Pocket Guide to the Internet* with drawings of blue-jean-style back pockets (one for each of the six volumes), out of which peek a globe which radiates like the sun. And, as a final example, I would cite a much larger, single-volume guide to the Net, the cover of which gives the most interesting Internet-earthball association I have come across to date. It uses a nineteenth-century engraving of a very serious, long-bearded man, furiously concentrating his attentions on a very large, rack-mounted globe. He is an alchemist.[8]

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8 These examples are:
a) the illustration, done by Peter Clarke, which accompanied Freedland:1994.
b) an advertisement for the Delphi Internet Services Corporation, on the back cover of *Internet World*, vol. 5 no. 3 (May 1994).
c) an advertisement for Qualcomm, Inc., also in *Internet World*, May, 1994.
d) an advertisement for Spry Inc., also in *Internet World*, May, 1994.
e) an advertisement for pocket guides published by the Mecklermedia Corporation, also in *Internet World*, May, 1994.
f) the cover design by Edie Freedman, incorporating an engraving held in the Dover Pictorial Archive, for Ed Krol's *The Whole Internet: User's Guide and Catalog* (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly and Associates, 1992).

All of the above examples serve to show how all-encompassing this information superhighway will be. Statistics are interpreted to give corroboration. The recent Guardian article sang excitedly:

> The population of cyberspace is exploding, with more than a million new users logging onto the Internet each month. If the current rate of expansion holds up, every person in the world will have their own e-mail address by the year 2000.[9]

If the current rate of expansion holds up. But is that possible? Perhaps, but only if we redefine a few terms. We could start with 'person'. It seems that in the electronic world, a 'person' is a 'user', that is, someone with the use of a personal computer (minimum cost approximately £700), including modem (£170), plus communications software (£60), telephone service (approximately £90 a year, plus the cost of local calls for any time you are dialled-up), access to a gateway (£25 start-up fee plus £120 a year for limited access, with expanded service on a pay-as-you-go basis), and so on. [10] In the UK, that means you may buy your virtual personhood at the current going rate of £955 in start-up costs, plus on-going fees of £210 a year, plus telephone charges for time spent on-line, which normally happens at least daily, if not several times daily (and let's see anyone find even one thing they need in the maze of the Net in less than 30 minutes!).

All of the above assumes you are resident in a country with reliable telephone service. This is not something taken for granted in, for example,

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9 Freedland:1994.

10 Approximate costs based on materials and services on offer in the UK, assembled from: Jack Schofield, 'Internet: What It Is and How It Works', in *The Guardian*, Saturday April 30 / Sunday May 1, 1994; Action Computer Supplies, *Action Catalogue*, Edition 48 (Southall, Middx: Action Computer Supplies, 1993); I.B.M. Corporation, *IBM PC Direct Sourcebook* (Triangle Park, NC: Ziff Communications, 1994).

the former Eastern Bloc countries, nor, obviously, in the Two Thirds world. It also assumes you are within local dialling distance of a gateway, or mainframe computer system which is linked to this 'global' network. I recently used a local gateway link to cull some statistics on gophers (a gopher being a mainframe-based tool providing a menu-system which allows you to search for things on the Internet), to get an idea of how available gateway access is to local areas in different parts of the world.[11] The first level of a menu I saw was a breakdown by continent. Choosing North America, I then was presented with a sub-menu: Canada, the USA, Mexico, Costa Rica. The USA was my choice, since their government is the most vocal regarding the great possibilities of the information superhighway. This brought still another sub-menu: which state or territory? I tried a few, aiming for what I guessed would be highs and lows. The state of Louisiana, not famed for its electronic industry, had a list of twelve gophers. California, home of 'silicon valley', had a list of ninety, including twenty-five for the University of California alone.

Three levels of menus took me down to manageable numbers for examination of North American statistics: continent pared down to country pared down to state, with the states yielding a high of ninety, a low of twelve. Now, for comparison, I decide to look at South Africa, since it is in the news, and results of its first-ever free election were reportedly available on the Internet before they reached any official news agencies. Returning to the continent menu then, I choose the continent of Africa. Eight. The list is immediately on-screen, there are no sub-menus by

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11 I am grateful to William Nixon in the Research and Technical Support Unit of the Glasgow University Library for his assistance in collecting these statistics. His office computer is bigger, faster, and much better equipped than my home model! We used NCSA Mosaic (WorldWideWeb) software to carry out these inquiries in May, 1994.

country, by region, or by department. The entire continent of Africa has a list of eight (and four are in South Africa).

It is becoming clear that 'the world' is another term needing to be redefined. In cyberspace, that dwelling place of the future/now, 'the world' includes those areas, and only those, where there are good telephone connections, and sufficient money to establish and maintain supercomputers with links to the network system. As cyber-speak becomes increasingly the normal realm of language, vast areas of what was once the globe will for all intents and purposes simply cease to exist. Will a child someday, looking at a spinning orb on her computer screen, ask why she can't speak to someone from that area there, only to be told 'it's unknown territory . . . There be dragons ' ?

It may seem that I have assumed an overly alarmist tone, but I believe that the gap between the virtual world and the real one is one that must be called attention to over and over again, as increasing numbers of people adopt cyber-speak, and its formerly secondary meanings become 'normal'. (For example, most users, even chatting IRL, wouldn't bother specifying that a reference to a bulletin board didn't mean a physical piece of board hung on a wall. It's understood.)

* * *

An Aside: Trouble in Paradise

And all isn't rosy even within the techno-world. 'Everything that shows up in society shows up in the Net -- there's no filter', comments one who works in the Internet service industry. [12] This apparently includes language, gender, and economic biases:

1. English is *de facto* the preferred language of the Internet, and although translation facilities are beginning to be put into place, they are highly erratic.[13]

2. Research shows that the computer contributes to what is already a significant streaming of girls, particularly working class girls, out of 'statusful' technological careers: their time at the terminals will be more likely to be oriented towards general office skills such as data entry, word-processing and spreadsheet preparation, rather than programming or systems analysis.[14]

3. Social stratification occurs even once one gets *inside* the Internet. Comments the founder/owner of Echo, an exclusive New York-based BB (or 'salon', as he prefers to call it): "People who join the electronic world expecting it to be better than the physical world will be disappointed. And if you expect everyone is going to be your friend, you'll be disappointed, too. I'm sorry. Echo is not Oz." [15]

* * *

12 Doug Humphrey, of Digital Express Group, quoted by Freedland:1994.
13 See Gibson:1994, p. 68.
14 See for example John Beynon, 'Computers, Dominant Boys and Invisible Girls: Or, "Hannah, it's not a toaster, it's a computer!"', in Hughie Mackay and John Beynon, eds., *Computers into Classrooms: More Questions Than Answers* (Washington, DC and London: The Falmer Press, 1993).
15 'Virtual Exclusion', *The New Yorker* (4/25/94) p.40, extracted in EDUCOM, 'EDUPAGE 4/19/94' *NISS Bulletin Board, Section F8C* (downloaded 5 May 1994).

Case 2: The Virtual Patient

One of the most striking differences between United States President Bill Clinton and his immediate predecessors is his computer (and network communications) literacy, and, beyond that, the priority the Clinton-Gore administration has given to analysis and policy-making in what has heretofore been a realm of academics, a small number of government specialists, and a host of devoted amateurs.[16] Closer analysis of campaign promises and post-inauguration policy statements shows, however, that the main rationale for this interest is still monetary; as Vice-President Gore put it, 'Better communication has almost always led to . . . greater economic growth', and the Clinton-Gore administration's first major policy statement on computer networking was entitled 'Technology for America's Growth: A New Direction to Build Economic Strength'.[17] Even so, such statements are laced with popular appeals regarding the proposed benefits to all citizens of a broadened and developed network system: sentimental pictures of school children gaining access to the Library of Congress, health care professionals using data links to obtain second opinions on difficult medical cases. It is this second picture I would like to look at, as it reintroduces key questions from my previous chapters regarding the problematic relationship between text and body.

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16 As Freedland called them, 'university professors and techno-anoraks' (Freedland:1994).
17 Gore is quoted in Andy Reinhardt, 'Building the Data Highway', in *Byte* vol. 19 no. 3 (March, 1994), p. 74; the Clinton-Gore Policy Statement 'Technology for America's Growth: A New Direction to Build Economic Strength', made in February 1993, is excerpted in Institute for Information Sciences [IIS], Scottish Branch, 'Scottish IIS Student Prize', *NISS Bulletin Board, Section Y13* (downloaded 8 March 1994).

What's wrong with this picture? :

> Through these technologies, a doctor who needs a second opinion could transmit a patient's entire medical record -- x-rays and ultrasound scans included -- to a colleague thousands of miles away, in less time than it takes to send a fax today.
>
> -Clinton/Gore, February 1993.

Let me begin my comments by pointing out that such steps are not envisioned as being part of routine diagnosis and treatment. Doctors usually request a second opinion only when the case is not clear, when it is difficult and/or when a mistake on their part could prove dangerous to the patient. In the future, then, a *high-risk* patient will be treated by first being transformed by doctor #1 into text for transmission (*virtual* text, which, we recall, is evanescent), and the virtual patient will then be 'examined' and treatment recommended by doctor #2.

What is it, in fact, that is being transmitted, though? 'Objective' data such as scans will be accompanied by the subjective data gathered and interpreted by the first doctor. As K.M. Hunter points out, the case history assumes a temporary, artificial certainty where in fact there seldom is any; indeed 'clinical judgement is not so much a mathematical or logical ability of determining causes as a fundamentally interpretive one'.[18] How do we feel about someone's interpreting and textualizing our physical traumas, knowing that such a 'professional' may well be one of the many who have been taught that 'he must display insight and avoid

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18 Kathryn Montgomery Hunter, *Doctors' Stories: the Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1991)*, p. 45, quoted in Ann-Janine Morey, '(Literary) Listening as Moral Activity', paper presented at the Sixth Conference on Literature and Religion, 'Thinking to 2000' (Glasgow, September 1992), p. 9.

taking the patient at her own valuation'?[19] Add to this the slippery nature of texts and the practice of textual interpretation in general, and there is a potentially huge gap opening up between the virtual-textual patient 'read' by doctor #2 and the actual patient who will be treated by doctor #1. *If this first doctor happens to be a surgeon, this could prove to be quite a Harrowing experience.*

* * *

19 A Professor Rhodes, addressing an international medical congress in 1971, quoted by Anna Briggs in 'Gynaecology, Obstetrics -- a refined form of violence?' in Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill, eds., *Women Against Violence Against Women* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1985), p. 90. See also Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1979) [1978], esp. the section entitled 'Gynecology as Psychotherapy', pp. 248-253.

Conclusion

Look to literature and narrative, not to escape the responsibility of humanity, but to fulfil it.

-A.J. Morey

One of the difficulties or benefits I find in studying 'literature and theology' is that, while I may be conducting primarily literary inquiries, there is that other discipline, always looking over my shoulder, asking questions about the activity to hand. While some of the questions may at times seem anachronistic, or too inclined to protect what I am trying to expose to light, there is another side to it. My colleagues in theology are very often also working on feminist and liberation theologies, or fulfilling work-terms in poor areas, or acting as chaplains to the dying and the bereaved. This work is real, tangible, and involves human beings and concrete action toward helping those who suffer. In the face of that, I must seek the real, ethical implications and applications that may be gained from my own, initially more 'removed' work.

For the conclusion to the body of my thesis, I chose as part of the chapter epigraph the following quote:

> Responsible political theology *must* be utopian and priests are *obliged* to be turbulent and (annoyingly) visionary in even the most socially responsible societies. And yet, the church must *also* be realistically committed to what is attainable *here* and *now* as part of a great vision... [20]

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20 Charles Villa-Vicenzio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Capetown: David Phillip, 1992), p. 31, quoted in Kenneth R. Ross, *Presbyterian Theology and*

The proposed future of the information highway is not without its benefits, and already it has allowed the broadening of its users' horizons (albeit within certain parameters). This has been recognized and is beginning to be addressed by government and big business alike.[21] Increasingly, however, as computer technology becomes a standard and a norm, certain sectors of the population, on individual, local, national and international levels, are either becoming virtual text, or are vanishing altogether from view -- at least from the view of the screen -- falling through the N/net, so to speak. Even among the so called 'haves' of information technology, there are biases in favour of English speakers, men, and people of still greater economic privilege. Like the writing technology of Paul's day, the technology of the Internet allows, even *invites* rhetorical exercises which, as we have seen, run the same risk as their ancient predecessors of leading to self-alienation, deception, and even physical harm. I submit then that the responsible political theologian *must*, for her/his part, also take the movement towards the normalization of computer networking very seriously, advocating responsible use and development, and speaking, cyber-speaking if necessary, on the part of those who cannot. This postscript, following as it does this thesis, begins my own attempt at such responsibility.

Participatory Democracy (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press & Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag GmbH, 1993), p. 14.

21 Scholars of religion too, for their part, now have many specialized electronic tools at their disposal: the Bible in five languages on a CD-ROM, with concordances and other utilities, for example.

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[N.B. NISS stands for 'National Information on Software and Services'. Its bulletin boards (BBs) and directories provide on-line information to the UK higher education community via 'JANET', the Joint Academic NETwork, which links all universities and polytechnics in the UK, as well as several colleges of higher education, and many research council establishments.

Where information cited has been retrieved from this source, I have given a 'downloading' date, i.e. the date on which I retrieved the file from the system, as well as the BB section from which it was taken. This does not guarantee that the file is still held in that BB section (though it may be); however I am able to provide

[Internet, cont'd]

files or hard copy on request, at least for the next year (after which I myself may no longer choose to retain copies, due to file storage management needs). -SGC]

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