

ORALITY & LITERACY

REFLECTIONS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

EDITED BY KEITH THOR CARLSON, KRISTINA FAGAN,
& NATALIA KHANENKO-FRIESEN



Orality and Literacy

Reflections across Disciplines

*Edited by Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Fagan,
and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen*

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Introduction

Reading and Listening at Batoche

KEITH THOR CARLSON, KRISTINA FAGAN,
AND NATALIA KHANENKO-FRIESEN

The wind was constant and cold on that October day in 2004 as we walked across the open Canadian prairie toward the little graveyard on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. The Batoche cemetery still sits where it did when the conflict between the Métis, a people of mixed Aboriginal and European descent, and the Canadian military forces raged over its grounds in 1885. As we made our way into the burial ground, bending our heads against the stinging gale, we paused to examine a tall monument listing the names of those Cree and Métis who fell in the battles of Batoche, Fish Creek, and Duck Lake. We studied the names carved in stone and we thought about their meaning.

Each of us in the group was, in a sense, a professional thinker about meaning. Twelve scholars from different disciplines – anthropology, folklore, history, literature, and sociology – with diverse ethnic backgrounds and from different parts of the world, we had gathered for an invitational three-day symposium to talk about how we interpret the different ways that meaning is communicated through, and across, the spoken and written word. None of us specialized in prairie Métis history or culture. Our excursion to Batoche was primarily a social one. We had not come with the intention of formally examining the historical conflicts and tensions between Aboriginal people and the Canadian state, although as organizers, we did hope that we might see and experience some of the theoretical issues we were engaging at the conference being played out in a real world setting – and in that desire we were not disappointed.

Though the Battle of Batoche looms large in Canadian history, it does not necessarily resonate in Canadian popular consciousness – let alone in the minds of people living elsewhere. What is known about it – or at

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least what is communicated through history texts – describes a conflict that was ostensibly over land, governance, and identity. What we observed that day suggested that it was also, in a fundamental sense, a conflict between literacy and orality. The Canadian military came armed not only with Gatling guns and artillery but with documents and maps asserting title, proclaiming law, and declaring legislative authority. The Métis responded with bullets, and, when those ran out, they reloaded their rifles with rocks, nails, and brass buttons from their coats. But behind their powder and shot were oral traditions that spoke a counter-narrative, in which title emerged from relations with the land itself and the spoken words of God resonated in the ears of Louis Riel and those who followed him.

As we stood with our faces to the wind, studying that seemingly simple text carved on the Batoche monument, we were reminded just how complex communication is. Those inscribed names were mnemonic devices that triggered a symphony of layered stories, stories of individuals, families, and nations. All these stories pushed in different directions, highlighting the slippery middle ground in the contact zone between orality and literacy.

Immediately prior to visiting the gravesite we had shared steaming bowls of soup, plates of bannock, and saskatoon berry tarts at Maria Campbell's home. Maria, perhaps best known as the author of the 1973 autobiography *Halfbreed*, is a descendant of Gabriel Dumont, the Métis military commander in 1885. Her house is on the riverbank on the site of Dumont's old home. Over that wonderful meal, Sherry Farrell-Racette, a Métis scholar, shared with us what she knew to have happened at Batoche and what has happened to the Métis people since. Some of her accounts came from her family, part of a living oral tradition. Others came from digging up written archival records. She blended these, weighed evidence, contrasted accounts and motivations, and created a story that was both hers and a community's. She passed quickly over the battle, which for her was but a moment (admittedly an important and tragic one) in the Métis story. The battle did not define the Métis people. Sherry spoke more about what they did after it. Hers were principally stories of survival.

As we departed Maria's house on our way to the Batoche National Historic Site, we were warned to be sceptical of the 'government version' of the story. We arrived at the federal interpretive centre and were ushered into a theatre to view a multimedia show about the history of Batoche. The presentation began with a quotation from a song titled 'Maria [Campbell]'s Place' by Canadian folk singer Connie Calder:

On the South Saskatchewan River
 There's a crossing and a bend
 That they call Batoche
 And on the banks of that river
 A battle was won
 And a people were lost.

'A people were lost.' It was clear that we were going to hear a very different version of Batoche from that told in Maria's kitchen. Indeed, what we watched was a detailed story of the battle – a story that stopped when the battle was over. It left us wondering what happened next: what did it all mean? Then the lights came on and we met our tour guides, a young Métis man and a woman from the local French-speaking community. As they spoke enthusiastically about the land that we stood on, it was clear that for them, the story did not end in 1885. We were told, for instance, about the bell from the Batoche Catholic church that had been taken 3,000 kilometres back to Ontario as a war trophy by the victorious Canadian soldiers. After sitting behind glass in a central Canadian veterans' Legion Hall for more than a century, the bell had recently disappeared. With a twinkle in their eyes, the guides explained that witnesses had reported seeing an old pick-up truck bearing a Saskatchewan licence plate speeding into the night the evening before the 'theft' was discovered. And yet, while our guides provided glimpses into the ongoing oral traditions surrounding Batoche, they also referred to a government-composed interpreters' manual that gave them the 'official meaning' of Batoche, a meaning that did not include things such as stolen bells. Clearly, once again, both written and oral traditions were at work in dynamic tension.

So we stood in the graveyard with a variety of stories pushing against one another in our minds. And, of course, we also brought our own stories with us. Those of us born in Canada reflected on what we had earlier learned, or not learned, in school, as we contemplated the meaning of a government heritage site that commemorated that same government's military alienation of Métis lands and the supposed destruction of Métis governance. And language made a difference. Some of the names were Cree and few of us could penetrate their meaning. One of the symposium participants, however, was looking at the name of his Cree grandfather on that monument. His story was surely a complex one. Others in our group were not from Canada, or had never been to the prairies before. For some of these visitors, the English names were

just as foreign. Surely they were sorting out a different set of stories (perhaps having to do with Canadian winter weather).

The graveyard at Batoche is layered with stories: some written, some oral. Some have the authority of government manuals, others of archival documents, still others of family connection and intergenerational memories. They make different and sometimes conflicting claims about Batoche and they require different kinds of interpretation; some provided space for counter-interpretations, and others were polemical. And it was not simply the messages that were in tension but also the media. Oral and literate sources competed for legitimacy, each citing different criteria for authority and each received differently. Some listeners/readers were predisposed to privilege one over another, but as we said, we were all, in a sense, professional thinkers about meaning, and so we paused to reflect on what we brought to the stories and what we were going to take away.

In trying to figure out these kinds of tensions and differences, early and influential theorists of orality and literacy – such as the ‘Toronto school’ of Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong – tended to assume that oral cultures and written cultures were essentially, inherently, and universally different, both psychologically and culturally.¹ The culmination of the Toronto school is found in the seminal writings of Walter Ong, who claimed that ‘fully literate persons can only with great difficulty imagine what a primary oral culture is like.’² The oral–literate epistemological chasm was nearly impossible to bridge, Ong argued, because writing was ‘a technology’ that literally ‘restructured thought.’ So profound was this transformation that within oral societies thought functioned in a manner that to the literate mind appeared ‘strange and at times bizarre.’³ Once transformed, literate people’s minds worked in a new and distinct way, as reflected in Ong’s list of binary divisions: oral peoples tend to aggregate knowledge, speak repetitively or redundantly, think conservatively and empathetically, and reason situationally. Such characteristics contribute to the saliency of words and thereby enhance the memorability of utterances. Among literate peoples, in contrast, knowledge tends to be analysed, thought is innovative, ideas are objectively distanced, and reason is approached abstractly. Within literate societies words are not necessarily spoken so they will be remembered (written texts can always be pulled from the shelf and referred to when needed), nor are they necessarily meant for an audience that can respond immediately. While text relieves the need to memorize, it simultaneously creates a distance between

writer and reader. This distance in turn facilitates the interiorization of thought, and when thought is interiorized people are able to situate themselves abstractly within time.

Considered in this light, the relationship between orality and literacy inevitably becomes characterized by a unidirectional displacement; literacy, once introduced into a society, becomes an unstoppable force, impelling orality to recede into darkness. Thus for Ong, just as a child exposed to literacy in the Western tradition ultimately and inevitably became a literate-thinking adult, so too civilizations and cultures transform, mature, and develop once literacy is introduced. For Ong and Havelock, literate thinking necessarily supplants oral thinking. As such, these theorists highlight that orality and literacy are not simply two ways of expressing the same messages; rather, as Marshall McLuhan famously declared, the media themselves define and ultimately become the messages.

Running parallel to the Toronto school was the work of anthropologist Jack Goody.⁴ Ethnographic evidence Goody collected among African tribal communities seemed to confirm the theoretical musings emerging from the Toronto school. Oral societies were 'pre-logical,' Goody argued, by which he meant that they lacked syllogistic reasoning (i.e., 'If A, then B; but not B, so therefore not A').⁵ In addition Goody found that his study group lacked complex hierarchical systems for organizing information and therefore had trouble using visual representations to arrange conceptual data. Oral societies, he argued, might have arithmetic, but they inevitably lacked multiplication tables and as such the ability to develop organizing systems such as algebra, calculus, or trigonometry. In such societies, Goody concluded, knowledge could never be cumulative and therefore one person's reasoning could not be recorded and built upon by someone from the next generation – as occurred in classical Greece, for instance.

Though Ong concluded *Orality and Literacy* by asserting that neither orality nor literacy was superior to the other (p. 175), and Goody attempted to be cautious in assessing the broader implications of his case studies, the thrust of their overall arguments fit snugly into a stream of popular and political discourse that regarded western European society as not only unique but superior and exceptional. Critics latched onto Ong's assertion that 'both orality, and the growth of literacy out of orality, are necessary for evolution of consciousness' (p. 175) and Goody's contention that 'Cognitively, as well as sociologically, writing underpins "civilization," the culture of cities.'⁶ The Eurocentric and

evolutionary normativism informing such assumptions were plain to see, and if not explicit, the belief was that all societies would (perhaps should?) go through identical evolutionary changes as had Europe. Thus, whatever the merits of their analysis, those who followed Goody and Ong sought correctives that showed, for example, how orality had not always bowed to literacy, and how orality continued to inform literacy long after earlier scholars had dismissed its influence.⁷

Revisionist works that emerged over the past two decades have generally either sought historical examples of oralist achievements to challenge the supposed evolutionary rule (the Inca, for example, were oral and had yet built a nation state), or pointed to the veracity of oral forms within supposedly literate societies (the English written epics were largely products of oral thinking and representation;⁸ oral communication persisted as the dominant vehicle despite the introduction and adoption of literacy in Malaysia⁹). One of the earliest, and most compelling, of these critiques came from Ruth Finnegan, who questioned the technological determinism that informed Ong's and Goody's work. Although literacy and its associated technologies could be credited with creating certain of the conditions that precipitated the rise of modern democratic institutions, scientific thought, and rationalism, they were not, she argued, their causes. Nor, in her opinion, did the introduction of literacy mean that an oral culture would necessarily abandon its traditions and embark down the path of Western rationalism and modernity.¹⁰ Certain African tribal communities, for example, had oral traditions that matched the complexity of European literature. Among Maori orators she found clear evidence of oral-literate hybridity, and among Fijian oral historians she observed people who cared deeply about keeping narratives fixed and unchanged as they were transmitted across generations. Perhaps more important, however, Finnegan intimated that literacy's supposedly inevitable benefits were not so inevitable. Biblical authority, for example, could stifle intellectual enquiry, and divisions between literates and non-literates within a society could lead to deeper and reified social stratification. There existed no genuine 'great divide' between orality and literacy; rather what mattered was how the technology of literacy was controlled and mobilized within a society.¹¹

The debates and discussions surrounding the orality-literacy divide continue. Rather than viewing orality and literacy as separate and opposite, the authors of the various essays in this collection take for granted that whatever meaning literacy and orality have are a product

of their relationship to one another. Put another way, it is impossible to understand literacy outside the context of its relationship to orality, and exceedingly difficult to understand orality in isolation from literacy. Furthermore, most scholars today have become attentive to the sometimes subtle ways in which power shapes this relationship. It is unfortunate that the first scholars to explore the dynamics between these two forms of communication did so primarily through an evolutionary lens derived either from their understanding of the process by which western Europe collectively adopted literacy, or from observations of the equally culturally specific experience of a single child's transition from an oral to a literate state as he or she passes through the process of Western education. This legacy has been difficult to shake, as is apparent from the common and popular conflation of the term *non-literate* with both *preliterate* and *illiterate*.

Considering the history of Batoche quickly makes it clear that the relationship between orality and literacy has been shaped as much by power relations as by inherent differences in the media of communication. At its most simple level, the Battle of Batoche can be seen as a fight between an oral people (the Métis) and a literate people (the Canadians). The Métis wanted to create a community that conformed to the natural landscape of the river and prairies, in which each family's land would include a portion of the riverbank. The Canadian government sought to impose a written orderliness on the landscape. They wanted to discard the natural features in favour of a grid system consisting of quarter-section farms. The surveyed grid was based on, and in turn justified by, literate, paper-based mapping, land tenure, and ultimately governance. The Battle of Batoche was, then, the orality-literacy conflict writ large and in real, human terms. But it also took place in a world where Métis leader Louis Riel wrote proclamations and decrees and where many of the Canadian soldiers were themselves illiterate.

We can see the story of Batoche as a 'micronarrative' that complicates some of the 'metanarratives' which have dominated scholarly discussions of orality and literacy. Similarly, most of the essays in this collection investigate the intersections of the oral and the literate through close study of particular cultures at particular historical moments. This focus on culturally specific micronarratives reveals the powerful ways in which cultural assumptions, such as those about truth, disclosure, performance, privacy, and ethics, affect how particular cultures approach and make use of the written and the oral. Our efforts to ascribe value and meaning to written or oral texts is inevitably culturally determined. And

as J.E. Chamberlin points out in his contribution to this collection, because of these cultural assumptions, 'the trouble is that one community's currency is often merely another's curiosity' (p. 21). The power imbalances that arise out of this trouble have often served to marginalize oral-based cultures in the face of societies for which literacy is the currency of power. Across the colonial world, for instance, oral forms of knowledge and interaction have been devalued by literate invading nations. A reading of the essays in this collection reveals connections and commonalities between societies around the world that have been disempowered in this way, from post-Soviet women in Ukraine to the First Nations of North America and to peasants in the Philippines. However, the essays also remind us that we must be careful not to overgeneralize the oral-marginal/written-powerful binary. Overall, this collection highlights the need for scholars to be attentive to the social and cultural contexts of written or oral texts rather than relying on universal generalizations about how literacy and orality function.

Diversity appears on many levels. It is unusual to find a volume in which Canadian Aboriginal communities and authors are discussed alongside Soviet women, ancient Chinese autocrats, medieval magic, Plato, Ukrainian immigrants, Filipino peasant romantic verse, and South African Khoikhoi tribesmen. We did not select these topics for inclusion because they reflect a suitable range of people, cultures, and times to reveal the workings of the dynamics between orality and literacy. Rather, as editors from three separate disciplines but working on the same university campus, we invited scholars whose ideas about orality and literacy we found stimulating, provocative, and insightful. The purpose of this collection, therefore, is not to focus on any particular cultural group but rather to raise theoretical issues about the interaction of orality and literacy through the exploration of specific cultural contexts. The collection is also cross-disciplinary, bringing together scholars who are pushing the boundaries of their home disciplines (while recognizing the value of a firm disciplinary grounding). Individually and collectively, these authors move beyond disciplinary boundaries and in so doing are seeking to re-define their disciplines as much as they are striving to reassess the topics of their research enquiry. We invite readers to engage these essays not as an introductory survey of orality and literacy, nor as a scholastic appetizer providing a taste of a particular methodology or approach to the study of orality and literacy, but as a sampler of the innovative research occurring at the intersection of orality and literacy across several disciplines, on several continents, and relating to different periods.

We begin with two challenging essays that we group together under the heading 'Questioning Truths.' These chapters set the parameters and establish the tone, tenor, and trajectory of the chapters that follow. J.E. Chamberlin's 'Boasting, Toasting, and Truth-telling' is a wise and wide-ranging essay and the only one in the book that does not undertake a close reading of a particular cultural moment. But it reminds us of the fundamental reason why such close study is essential. He points out that each of us essentially lives inside our own minds, gaining access to the outside world only through the lens of our own interpretation. Thus when we take in a work of verbal art – whether spoken, written, or sung – we look to our own learned methods of interpretation to understand it. But we may not know how to access and interpret another culture's messages and furthermore, intermediaries such as translation, transcription, electronic recording, and so forth may stand between us and the original message. We look to these works for truth, but our sense of what is true is largely determined by the form and style they take and the kind of pleasure we get from them. To understand the truth of a work we must learn to experience the kind of pleasure it can give. It is an assumption that understanding sophisticated oral traditions comes naturally to the sympathetic ear. It does not. Just as we learn how to read, so we learn how to listen. This kind of learning is the purpose of this collection.

Chamberlin's broad examination of truth within oral and literate media is followed by Keith Carlson's deeply focused essay, 'Orality about Literacy: The "Black and White" of Salish History.' Carlson's epistemologically sensitive study exemplifies the way that learning about specific interactions between orality and literacy can challenge many of our assumptions about them. By engaging Salish historical consciousness, Carlson turns the table on the postulation that literacy was a new arrival in North America, imposed upon indigenous orality. He reveals that Salish people claim the power of literacy as an indigenous practice that once belonged to them. Within legendary Salish stories of community origins and transformation and nineteenth-century prophetic narratives, and as revealed through ethnolinguistic analysis of the Salish words for writing, inscription, and ancient transformation, literacy is portrayed not as an outside imposition but as a tradition that can be repatriated. While historians have traditionally dismissed such claims about literacy as untrue, Carlson, as Chamberlin suggests, shows a way of listening to the kinds of truth that these stories of literacy can tell. In turning the usual idea that orality precedes literacy on its head,

he disrupts standard Western notions of the evolutionary relationship between orality and literacy, and in so doing challenges us to rethink the our approach to the history of Native–newcomer relations.

Other essays in the collection find more subtle but equally nuanced ways to contest the idea that literacy necessarily supplanted orality. The next two, by Twyla Gibson and Susan Gingell, do this in a way we characterize under the heading 'Writing It Down.' Early communication theorists McLuhan, Havelock, and Ong argued that we could see Plato's writings as evidence of the 'great divide' in human history, when Greek society's primarily oral perspective (seen in Homer and Socrates) was replaced by a gaze that was fundamentally literate. This perceived rift between oral and written cultures has acted as a model for how theorists have understood other, more recent, meetings of the oral and the literate. Twyla Gibson invites us to revisit this long-held belief about 'the great divide.' In 'The Philosopher's Art: Ring Composition and Classification in Plato's *Sophist* and *Hipparchus*,' she provides a close reading of two of Plato's dialogues to reveal the degree to which they are structured around 'ring composition,' a traditionally oral technique characteristic of ancient Greek poetry. The dialogues, she argues, represent a blending of oral and literate traditions in which oral modes persist alongside and into written texts, and this has implications not only for the way we interpret ancient, orally derived works of history and philosophy but also for the study of current oral cultures.

Returning to Aboriginal content, Susan Gingell's 'The Social Lives of Sedna and Sky Woman: Print Textualization from Inuit and Mohawk Oral Traditions,' provides a thoughtful engagement with contemporary Aboriginal writers that makes a similar point to Gibson's about the blending of oral and literate traditions. Much like, and indeed perhaps because of, the Greek 'great divide' theory, the academic view of writing down Aboriginal oral traditions is that the writing process will help to salvage oral traditions as they die away, since 'the written supplants the oral in a linear development from the primitive to the more sophisticated' (p. 113). However, drawing on Julie Cruikshank's insight that Aboriginal people use oral traditions in a way that is suited to contemporary circumstances – that stories have a 'social life' – Gingell explores the ways in which two Aboriginal writers have drawn on ancient oral stories to express ideas about contemporary Aboriginal lives. Moreover, she illustrates that they have mobilized distinguishing characteristics and features of oral style in their writing. The stories continue to live and to change, moving into writing and, Gingell points out, back into the oral.

Like Gibson's reading of Plato, Gingell's engagement with the narratives reveals a complex intermingling of the oral and the written.

Along with their assumptions about the 'evolution' of literacy, the Toronto school of orality theory emphasized that individuals had little control over the ways in which literacy entered their lives and minds. Literacy was regarded as a societal phenomenon: broad, unstoppable, and all encompassing. The essays by Kristina Fagan and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, grouped together under the heading 'Going Public,' show how this is simply not the case. Using diverse examples (Ukrainian immigrants to Canada in the former and indigenous writers in the latter), they show how communities have deliberately and strategically harnessed certain oral tales for written tellings.

Keeping with the Aboriginal focus of earlier chapters, in "'Private Stories" in *Aboriginal Literature*,' Fagan explores the process through which indigenous writers negotiate the move from oral, public communication to seemingly private reading and writing. This carefully argued piece shows how Aboriginal writers have engaged with the published and thus public written word while remaining conscious of the oral value placed on privacy and reticence in communication. This does not, however, mean that they are disinclined to disclose in print. Indeed, as Fagan shows, Aboriginal authors have frequently used the printed page as a place to share information not deemed culturally appropriate for oral transmission. Exploring a variety of works by Aboriginal writers over the past century, Fagan shows how the writing is both shaped by, and sometimes deliberately against, cultural protocols.

Similarly, Khanenko-Friesen's folkloric study shows how Ukrainian-Canadian narratives of migration have been shaped by oral traditions and forms. In 'From Family Lore to a People's History: Ukrainian Claims to the Canadian Prairies,' she shows how individual narratives of migration have, over generations, been appropriated by entire communities to create synthesized, generic stories that are themselves heavily influenced by even more ancient Ukrainian folk tales. She traces the oral roots of current Ukrainian-Canadian community self-representations to show that the resulting mediated master narrative of Ukrainian history in Canada is intricately connected to oral traditions. But she also shows how writing down these community stories in order to legitimize them and make them more publicly accessible has changed their form, eliminating some of their folkloric qualities. Like Fagan, she emphasizes the ways in which the community has moved to write down previously oral stories for strategic purposes, changing them

while remaining aware of cultural values and forms.

While Gingell, Fagan, and Khanenko-Friesen all find people from traditionally oral cultures moving to take advantage of the power and legitimization offered by writing, such is not always the case. As in the essay by Carlson, who shows how the Salish claim literacy as their own precolonial possession, the power relations between orality and literacy play out in very different, and from a contemporary Western perspective, non-intuitive ways in other contexts. Gary Arbuckle's and Frank Klaassen's contributions to this volume, collectively identified under the heading 'Subverting Authority,' remind us not to rest in the easy assumption that literacy is always a stable institutionalizing force while orality is marginal or subversive. In reopening the debate over the Daoist sage Laozi, Arbuckle's 'Literacy, Orality, Authority, and Hypocrisy in the *Laozi*' argues that a kind of 'fabricated orality' was promoted within ancient China in order to give legitimacy to Laozi's oppressive political program. Alongside this 'faux spoken style' (p. 210) Laozi wished to see a literary vacuum in which political analysis and protest could not take root and grow. Within Laozi's ideal non-literate world, a village would be 'a frozen dream, not a real place, and its imaginary population ... little more than a collection of waxworks' (p. 211).

Klaassen's sweeping engagement with medieval European manuscripts in 'Unstable Texts and Modal Approaches to the Written Word in Medieval European Ritual Magic' likewise reveals that literacy sometimes functioned within a theatre of ritual and discourse that ran counter to common assumptions about the relationship between literacy and orality. Previous scholars examining the medieval transition toward literacy have usually understood this move to be illustrative of literacy's reification as a static and standardized medium – a development reflective of society's increasingly rational and objective outlook. Within the dynamic realm of magical manuscripts, however, Klaassen finds that 'the intellectual culture surrounding the production of texts revels in, and self-consciously employs, the ambiguous or unstable features of the written word' (p. 219). Ironically from our present-day perspective, it was the oral utterances associated with the text that provided a level of stability and community to their readers.

If cumulatively the essays presented here hint at the depth and breadth of the complex power relations between orality and literacy, certain contributions remind us forcefully that scholars cannot exempt themselves from the dynamic. Academics and poets alike are often engaged in the process of 'textualizing orality' – recording, or encoding, oral creations

on the page. Indeed, much of the work on orality is conceived of as an inclusive project to legitimize voices from the margin within officially construed Western – literacy-based – histories. Within this school of thought, writing the oral message down is meant to legitimize it. The final two essays in the collection, grouped under the heading 'Uncovering Voices,' deal with, among other things, the possibilities and limits of oral historical methods. Reynaldo Ileto's essay 'A Tagalog Awit of the "Holy War" against the United States, 1899–1902' looks at a handwritten version of a Filipino oral romance (an *awit*) composed by a member of the resistance army, in order to reveal the shortcomings of conventional oral historical methods. Building on the theory and approach pioneered in his seminal study, *Pasyon and Revolution*,¹² Ileto demonstrates the extent to which classic methods of engaging oral history are inadequate to the task of retrieving the 'language of popular mobilisation' from the distant past. Through this *awit*, Ileto derives an understanding of the history of resistance to imperial rule from below, a story that is not part of institutionalized literate Filipino history and yet is only available through literate sources.

Oksana Kis deals with the challenges of collecting oral histories in the present. Kis, a feminist oral historian from Ukraine, offers her critical assessment of post-Soviet Ukraine's first women's oral history project in her essay 'Telling the Untold: Representations of Ethnic and Regional Identities in Ukrainian Women's Autobiographies' and reminds us that even such supposedly neutral terminologies as 'cultural setting' and 'cultural context' can never truly be void of politics – especially in times of totalitarianism. In the Soviet Union, the official discourses, whether in politics or entertainment – were empowered by the written word. As such they became associated with the domain of literacy: a predominantly male and urban preserve. At the other end of this process of marginalization, unofficial counter-discourses, with their often rebellious testimonies, were routinely confined to the domain of oral circulation among trusted family and friends. As a result, Ukrainian women's oral autobiographies and testimonies rarely exited the intimate circulation of which they were a part. Once liberated from this context, Kis demonstrates, such testimonies illustrate the contested nature of privacy while providing historical insights that challenge both the old official Soviet line and the more recent revisionist interpretations of Western political historians.

While there are often inequities and tensions between modes of communication, taken both individually and as a whole these essays show

that past generations of scholars were misguided to conceive of orality and literacy primarily as set in opposition to one another. However, our intellectual forebears did initiate the discussion, and without their work to build upon we could not have launched the symposium that led to this collection and that brought together voices from many cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. Our goal was to explore the ways that orality and literacy make meaning in complicated and intertwined ways. Insights inevitably emerge not from a study of one form of communication but from the cracks and fissures where orality and literacy give meaning to one another. It is appropriate perhaps that the Métis history we engaged at Batoche, the history of a blended people, introduces us to how oral and written traditions blend as well as how they contest one another. We invite readers to bring their own voices to the topics, themes, and theories raised here and to engage in a conversation that will help to move the discussion beyond where it stands today.

NOTES

- 1 See especially Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); Marshall McLuhan, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).
- 2 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 4 Jack R. Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jack R. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jack R. Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 200).
- 5 Goody, *Interface between the Written and the Oral*, 205.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 7 Myron C. Tuman, "Words, Tools, and Technology" (review of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technology of the Word* [New York: Methuen, 1982]), *College English* 45, no. 8 (1983): 769–79.
- 8 Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (New York and Oxford: Clarendon Press/Oxford Press, 2000).

- 9 Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
- 10 Ruth H. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).
- 11 Among the most prominent scholars to challenge Ong, Havelock, and Goody were Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Among those who tended to support the literacy-orality divide were David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance, eds., *Literacy and Orality* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 12 Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution; Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo University, 1979).