

## MANUSCRIPT VERSUS PRINT IN THE TRANSMISSION OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1600-1700

ONE OF THE MAJOR DEBATES of contemporary literary theory has centred round the notion of 'presence' as an element of discourse. <sup>1</sup> It is held in certain well-known quarters that the development of Western thought has been governed by a 'metaphysic of presence' through which speech is credited with a capacity to generate self-validating meaning while writing is denied this capacity. I have no intention of buying into this debate on the present occasion, but would merely remark that both Ong, who accepts presence as a valid constituent of meaning, and Derrida, who does not, have quite correctly defined a way of perceiving the relationship between spoken and inscribed forms of language which was almost universally current until very recent times and to that extent is a datum of bibliographical study deserving examination in its own right.<sup>2</sup> However, the relationship of speech and writing with regard to presence is not a matter of polar opposition so much as of relative positioning on a spectrum of communicative possibilities. Such a spectrum exists within speech itself to the extent that the capacity, delusory or otherwise, of the spoken word to convey self-validating meaning is exercised at descending levels of plausibility by the sound of one's own voice, by that of another addressing one directly, by a voice heard over a telephone, by words heard indistinctly over a public address system in a busy airline terminal, by the raised pitch levels of a diver speaking from within a diving helmet, by the voices of the dead from old recordings, and so on. One might differ over the placing of a particular speech-experience on the spectrum but the principle of a hierarchy of levels of 'authenticity' in presence is clear enough. Moreover there is a point on the spectrum at which certain forms of writing may be regarded as bearing a stronger intimation of presence than certain forms of speech. In Chinese tradition such claims are frequently made for calligraphy as against the spoken word. In Western tradition written statements using the writer's blood for ink have always been afforded a highly privileged status and were generally preferred over vocal attestations in such important matters as pacts with the devil and appointments to the crews of pirate ships. Within the more conventional modes of inscription, a sub-spectrum along the axis chirography-typography-electronography might be formed thus: authorial holograph, scribal transcript, typewritten transcript with manuscript corrections, typewritten transcript without corrections, words printed from copper or steel engraved plates, word-processor printout, lithographic printing, raised surface printing, baked clay tablets, braille, skywriting with aeroplane, computer printout, words seen on a TV screen or VDU, neon sign — each representing a further stage by which the inscribed word is progressively removed from its presumed source of validation in the movement of the author's fingers.

It is not the spectrum, however, which is my present subject but a change in the relative degree of authority assigned to elements within the spectrum which took place between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries but was at its most critical in the seventeenth. This was one aspect of the change from manuscript to print as the favoured medium for the transmission of literature, a matter which has received considerable attention from theorists in the traditions of McLuhan and Ong as well as a vast body of empirical study by incunabulists and book-trade

historians. The outlines of this history are therefore well understood. The earliest printers still regarded manuscript as the more prestigious and authentic medium and bestowed great pains to make their products look as much like manuscripts as possible — modelling their types on the established book-hands and employing professional illuminators to paint in coloured initials. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, attitudes had changed and printers began emphasising the things that gave print active advantages over manuscripts: cheapness, greater regularity of letter forms, the invariability, or near invariability, of the text from copy to copy of any given edition, and a vastly enhanced (though still incomplete) fidelity in the preservation of authorial readings. The abandonment of black-letter types for the more legible romans and italics, coinciding as it did with a marked decline in the quality of inks and paper, indicated a new confidence that print had no need to disguise its true nature or to make any concessions to the prestige of manuscript. From the same period began a process by which readers began to allow the printed text a higher authority than the handwritten one. Manuscripts were discarded in large numbers — often in favour of inferior printed editions — and printing practice accepted as a matter of course that the handwritten copy for a new work should be used as waste as soon as setting was complete. (It does not seem to have entered either the printers' or the authors' heads that the manuscripts of *Hamlet* or *Paradise Lost* should have been worth preserving: the fact that we still possess one book of the latter seems to have been due only to the fact that it contained an official permission that the bookseller preserved as a guarantee against legal problems.) The few eccentrics who in the earliest period of printing had refused to admit printed books to their libraries soon disappeared, to be replaced by others who were just as prejudiced against manuscripts. The manuscript-hunting antiquarians of the time were in many cases only concerned to get rare materials into printed form (not always accurately), after which the original had to take its own chances of further survival. All these were more or less predictable consequences of the changes in mental attitudes that Ong has analysed as characterising the transition from oral to typographic cultures — the script-based or chirographic stage still retaining a strong element of 'residual orality'.<sup>3</sup> But what is important for our present study is to note that, while the handwritten text had lost a great deal of its earlier authority, it still retained a higher degree of authenticity in the sense of the ability to convey presence — a fact that we still acknowledge today when we pay more for a copy of a printed book inscribed by the author than for an uninscribed copy.

And yet manuscripts did survive, and, more importantly, as late as two centuries after the invention of printing we find that many writers still looked to manuscript as the preferred medium for circulating their work, and actively resisted the sometimes very pressing blandishments of the press. This brings us to the other critical fact that a scribal profession as such continued into the period of print and in many cases preserved its continuity down to the late nineteenth century when most of its functions were taken over by the typewriter. This profession as it had existed just prior to the invention of printing was, of course, a large, highly-skilled one whose techniques of copying had millennia of unbroken tradition behind them. The branch of which we are most directly aware is that centred on the scriptoria

of monasteries and cathedrals; however there was also a second class of scriptoria operated by secular stationers. In England by the fifteenth century the secular stationers seem to have been responsible for a sizeable proportion of book production. There was a stationers' company from an early period and we have what Manley and Rickert rather disparagingly call 'shop' manuscripts of writers like Chaucer and Langland. Unlike the religious scriptoria, the secular scribes had to remain commercially viable, and therefore needed to concentrate either on commissioned work or on texts for which there was a strong and lasting demand. As they were not copying for the glory of God, they could not allow themselves to put hundreds of man-hours of their own or their scribes' time into the reproduction of a manuscript that could not expect a ready sale. We also know that mediaeval scriptoria used ingenious methods of speeding up the copying of a work that happened to be in demand, such as dictation to several scribes or forms of progressive copying involving the so-called *peciae*, in which exemplars were prepared in small, separable sections for simultaneous use by a number of scribes. These last points need to be stressed in order to make clear that the scribal industry at the close of the middle ages was capable of quite high levels of production — there is a record of an order given to a Flemish scriptorium for 400 copies of an educational text<sup>4</sup> — and while it could never rival the press in terms of speed or volume it remained commercially competitive for runs too small to justify the capital-intensive process of setting a text in moveable type. We should also remember that in a pre-industrial society relatively few documents required circulation in large numbers.

Let us consider the ways in which the skills of the scribe continued to be valued into the age of print. Scribal copying remained the norm in law for the majority of deeds, contracts, wills, court documents and records of legal proceedings; in government, both central and local, for virtually all administrative documents and records apart from acts and proclamations; in the military for orders, commissions, despatches and every kind of record apart from gazettes, standing orders and commissions lists; in the church for virtually all kinds of official communication; in commerce for virtually all records of transactions; in music for the bulk of part books and performing scores; and on the stage for promptbooks and actors' sides. I would suspect that even as late as 1800 there were still many times more scribes in employment than persons employed in the printing trades. It is true that they were no longer called scribes or scriveners but clerks, but their working methods in many instances stood in an unbroken line of professional descent from those of their mediaeval forbears. It is only in a certain subset of documents intended for wide circulation that printing had any effect at all on older traditions.

Moreover, I would suggest that the most important documents, those most intimately associated with the exercise of power, still tended to be circulated in manuscript. Acts and proclamations would be put into print, but warrants, commissions, lettres de cachet, declarations of war, patents of nobility and interdepartmental memos were still only issued in manuscript. Up till the eighteenth century in England this still remained true of parliamentary proceedings. One might

say that even today power is advertised through print but actually exercised by pen strokes: the validating signatures of the powerful. Rupert Murdoch has not actually bought a new newspaper until he has put his signature on a dotted line. This requires us to look more closely at the kinds of authority that can be inherent in a document. In one class of documents, those that remained the province of scribes, authority derived from authenticity, from the power of chirography to convey presence. But not all presences possess that authority, as we acknowledge today when — to reverse my earlier example — we refuse to pay as much for a copy of a printed book signed by a person of no particular fame as we do for a piece of typography unsullied by chirographic markings. The authority of print, on the other hand, derives from its very lack of presence, from its power to suggest an impersonal, generalised condition of existence, independent of human particularity, a condition which in one context might be seen as embodying a collective authority, superior to that of any individual human being, however powerful, or which in another context might have the force of liberating readers from authority through the very process of liberating them from presence. These two contrasting effects of print may be seen on the one hand in the seventeenth-century *Book of Common Prayer* which would surely have been that much less common, and hence authoritative, had it been circulated in manuscript, and, on the other hand, in Puritan attitudes to the printed text of the Bible, which, in occupying an impersonal space rather than one constricted by presence, encouraged a greater personal liberty of interpretation.

### **Authorial Attitudes towards Script and Print**

We have seen that a scribal profession continued to exist for many centuries after the discovery of printing. I now wish to consider to what extent that profession was involved in the transmission of literature. Obviously the majority of literary works written in England from the sixteenth century onward were intended for the press, and even those inherited from an earlier period could as a rule be much more adequately marketed in printed form. One of the first fruits of printing in England was Caxton's edition of Chaucer. Once it had appeared it was obvious that no-one was ever going to bother about copying out Chaucer by hand again. And yet it remains a fact that even as late as the nineteenth century certain writers — Gerard Manley Hopkins comes to mind — preferred to circulate their writings through handwritten copies rather than entrusting them to the press. It is true that such behaviour was by this time unusual enough to be called eccentric; yet in the seventeenth century this was most emphatically not the case, but simply represented a choice between two modes of publication, neither of which was necessarily perceived as any more or less professional than the other. Two very important poets of the century, Donne and Rochester, published their work almost exclusively through scribal copies. Others, while allowing their work to appear in print, did so without any evident feeling for the possibilities of the medium. Interestingly, the writers who remain orientated towards manuscript transmission tend to occur in pairs with others whose attitude to print was much more welcoming and imaginative. Although there is necessarily an element of *post hoc* classification in the compilation of these pairs, I will use them as a convenient framework for

exploring the range of attitudes with regard to the priority of print over script or script over print that are detectable within Renaissance and Augustan literary culture.

One very obvious pair is Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Jonson was fascinated by the possibilities of print and took extraordinary care over the publication of his plays, especially the 1616 folio in which he set out to create a timeless monument of his genius comparable with the great Renaissance editions of classical authors, only better because, whereas their editions had been created by editors, he would create his himself. In the 1605 edition of *Sejanus*, as Philip Ayres has pointed out, the very look of the page, with its severe columns of verse flanked by marginal scholia and with the proclamations set in the style of Roman lapidary inscriptions with medial stops between each word, was meant as an iconographic expression of its subject.<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare, on the other hand, seems to have shown at best only a luke-warm appreciation of print as a medium. Few of his plays appeared during his lifetime in editions that were in any way worthy of them, and much important material remained unpublished until the posthumous collection of Heminge and Condell. One hesitates, on the other hand, before enrolling Shakespeare as a member of a script as opposed to a print culture for the very good reason that the act of writing in itself seems to have been one that he performed rather carelessly. We are probably safest in seeing the plays as conceived for the oral medium of performance, with any mode of inscription simply a means to that end. The poems are a rather different matter. The two Ovidian narratives seem to have been intended from the start for the press, while the publication of the sonnets can no longer, following the findings of Katharine Duncan-Jones, be regarded as unauthorised, or their order as unauthorial.<sup>6</sup> It would be unwise, however, if, simply because we are accustomed to encounter such lines as 'O none, unlesse this miracle have might,/ That in black inck my love may still shine bright' in the soberness of print, we should overlook the possibility that Shakespeare's own mental image at the time of writing might have been one of a manuscript leaf in the hand of a single sympathetic reader.

Another contrasting pair are Donne and Spenser, linked as the two greatest non-dramatic poets of their generations both in contemporary esteem and our own. For Spenser, that *The Faerie Queen* should be published and circulated to as wide a readership as possible was almost an inbuilt premise of its strident nationalism, its Puritan didacticism and its claim to stand as a worthy continuation of the great tradition of European epic. Speaking to a nation of its most urgent political and religious concerns, he required a nation for his audience and therefore print for a medium. But equally to the point is the look of the poem on the page: its magisterial succession of stanzas, each grounded on the concluding alexandrine, processing past with the air of a fleet in full sail — a design that despite its Italian and Chaucerian forerunners seems so perfectly adjusted to the strengths of Renaissance typography. Donne on the other hand not only rejected print, circulating the great bulk of his verse only in manuscript, but does not even look particularly distinguished in print. Whereas the book-designer's art is based on the repetition of standardised visual patterns, whether they be type pieces, fleurons,

or stanzas, within a harmoniously balanced page, Donne's poetic art leads to bizarrely shaped and constantly varied stanzas — even in some cases within the same poem. His stanza pattern for any given poem is determined by the requirements of the thought, without consideration for visual effect, and as the thought is invariably knotty and intricate, so are the stanzas, in a great many instances, straggly and gnarled. In both this and in Donne's uncompromising intellectuality, he may be seen as consciously opposed to the values of the open market and the promiscuously purchasable page created by print. The ideal act of transmission, one feels, would be for the poem actually to be copied out by its intended reader, and, in some of the surviving manuscripts from the Donne circle, this ideal is realised.

Another pair of poets who exhibit the same contrast of attitudes are Herbert and Marvell — both developers of the tradition of Donne, but each manifesting a very different attitude towards the possibilities of print. The whole impetus behind Herbert's writing was that his poems would cohere into a book and that this should be a printed book, *The Temple*, which should pass into the hands of as many Christian believers as possible. *The Temple* is a church in print: to open it is analogous to entering a church building and as the reader progresses through the volume he encounters a series of poems corresponding to the various parts of the physical church — the porch, the church floor, church monuments, the altar — and often mimicking them through their shape on the page. 'The Church Floor', for instance, is written in stanzas in which a long line, representing the floor, is supported by two shorter lines representing the foundations. Herbert's great fondness for pattern poems is a direct consequence of his acute sense of the possibilities of print. Many rely on effects of lettering which could only be realised in a clumsy and approximate way in manuscript, requiring the printer's privilege of being able to manipulate an impression until it was precisely the intended shape and then take off all the copies from that ideal impression.<sup>7</sup> In all these respects, Herbert shows a sensitivity for the print medium which is wholly absent in Donne, and which is also alien to Marvell.

Marvell does show a certain interest in pattern poems, or at least in poems that please on the page in Herbertian way, but felt so little inclination towards the press that most of the poems on which his reputation rests today only came into the world as the result of a posthumous publication motivated by a fraudulent attempt to gain control of his estate. What is more important, however, it is that by the time Marvell's lyrics finally reached the public through the medium of print, poems of a very different kind — his political satires — had already achieved wide circulation in manuscript. In his own lifetime, therefore, his verse was predominantly known through the chirographic medium, and through that medium gained him enormous influence. It is undeniable that this choice was made partly as the result of compulsion: to print Marvell's virulent attacks on the king and his ministers would have required the printer, quite literally, to hazard life, limb and fortune. But it can also be argued that manuscript transmission had significant advantages for Marvell at least in a political sense. The topical poem encountered in handwritten

form will have conveyed not only an immediacy of presence (all the stronger now that chirography was a medium of choice rather than compulsion) but also a flattering assurance that the reader belonged to a select circle of the privileged and well-informed. The exclusiveness, not to say elusiveness, of the chirographically transmitted poem will also have had the effect of ensuring that those who genuinely needed to be well-informed took special pains to hunt out copies of these works and that they read them with a closer attention than they would give to the common stock of printed pamphleteering. A further, rather more oblique, appeal was a sense that the author, despite the trenchancy of his attacks on the court, was still carefully restricting his views to an audience of opinion-makers, rather than, demagogue-like, spreading them abroad to the public at large. (In the late 1670s Marvell was to emerge as a very effective demagogue, but this was to be in prose, not verse.)

My last pair is Dryden and Rochester: Dryden the supreme professional man of letters of his time; Rochester the aristocratic virtuoso. Dryden, with only one significant exception, that of *Mac Flecknoe*, hurried every work composed during his mature years straight into the hands of the printer.<sup>8</sup> Rochester, for all except a handful of complimentary verses, was just as assiduous to avoid print and to restrict the circulation of his poems to manuscript. It was only after his death that the bulk of his verse appeared in print, and then in the surreptitious and unauthorised collection of 1680. The content of this verse — certainly no less libellous than Marvell's and a good deal more obscene — was one very good reason for this restricted circulation: the engrained upper class code of a conspicuous amateurism in the arts was another. In his case, however, unlike Donne's or Marvell's, one perceives that, while certain kinds of poem were well adapted to manuscript circulation and probably more effective when encountered in this way, others really deserved the greater amplitude of print, and probably would have achieved it if this had not involved a socially compromising entry to the public arena in competition with the established professional and master critic, Dryden. The lampoons, the lighter satires, the songs and the pornographic *jeux d'esprit* are the social poetry of a small closely-knit group of literary amateurs whose original medium had been the holograph personally exchanged and, in some instances, collaboratively composed. Although the activities of the professional copyists led to this verse being circulated well beyond the group, manuscript transmission remained its natural medium, and, in the case of the feebler talents of the circle, a kind of literary hothouse protecting them from the full severity of public appraisal. Other poems by Rochester, however, particularly 'An Allusion to Horace', 'Artemisia to Chloe' and the two reworkings of satires by Boileau, 'Timon, a Satyr' and 'Against Mankind', are serious and substantial contributions not simply to English but to European literature: essays in a formal, classically derived satirical manner whose intended audience was the serious-minded and well-read rather than the mob of gentlemen who writ with ease, and which clearly envisaged the greater permanence and impersonality of print — though Rochester was never himself to print them. In the case of the two Boileau poems, he was reworking originals which he had himself encountered in print. In this, as perhaps in other ways to be discussed shortly,

he was a poet uneasily caught between the possibilities of chirography and those of typography, but certainly well aware of the respective advantages and disadvantages of the two mediums. I will return to this matter shortly, after looking at the scribal resources that were available to Rochester and Marvell and the many, largely anonymous poets who shared their preference for chirographic publication.

Before I do so, however, I would like to point out that it is in Rochester and the poets of his group that we first encounter the phenomenon of the scribally transmitted poem endeavouring to subvert the typographically transmitted poem through parody. Quite a few of the satires produced by the Rochester circle are explicit send-ups of genres which had become popularised through print. 'Actus Primus Scaena Prima' and *Sodom: or the Quintessence of Debauchery* burlesque the externals of the printed play; the various mock-songs allude parodistically to the popular printed miscellanies; two of the satiric epistles appear to be specifically directed at the Dryden-directed group translation of Ovid's epistles; and then there are the scribally circulated burlesque encomia of the printed text, *The British Prince*. I mention this in order to draw attention to the further fact, that, after the cessation of commercially organised manuscript transmission, such attempts to undermine the print medium through parody were to continue, the difference being that they were now conducted through print itself, with Swift the prime instigator and in this the direct heir of Rochester. Swift's perversions of such popular modes as the travel book, the political pamphlet and the scholarly edition are directed at the conventions of print quite as much as at human folly.

### The State Poems and their Scribes

I began this paper by pointing out that a scribal profession as such did not cease to exist with the invention of printing. All that happened was that some of its tasks — specifically those involving high-volume reproduction — were passed over to the press, and that this included a substantial part but by no means all of the publication of works of literature. We have seen that Donne, Marvell and Rochester preferred to circulate their works through the scribal medium, and in the last two cases there is no doubt that professional scribes were involved in this transmission, and that their motives were thoroughly commercial. In Donne's case, the sheer volume of surviving manuscript material suggests that more than a self-help network was involved in their creation. Other scattered evidence exists from Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline times of works published in manuscript through the agency of professional scribes — Nashe's *A Choice of Valentines* being a particularly intriguing example, and the continuation to Mary Wroth's *Urania* perhaps another — though to the best of our present knowledge this was an occasional rather than a regular practice. From the late 1660s, however, the position becomes clearer and we have evidence not simply of scribal transcription of individual poems but of regular scriptoria, drawing on the services of a number of scribes, and producing multiple copies of very substantial books, the so called



'state poems' miscellanies.

I do not intend to go into the historical evidence for this phase of scribal publishing, as it has already been discussed in detail by David Vieth and the editors of the Yale *Poems on Affairs of State* series; but a couple of statistics will give an idea of the size of the operation. My own list, largely derived from Vieth, of manuscript sources containing at least one poem by Rochester contains 120 items, while W. J. Cameron's 1688-1697 volume in *Poems on Affairs of State* draws on ninety-eight scribal sources of which forty-four are classified as anthologies.<sup>9</sup> In each case we need to allow for many times this number of lost sources. Of course, many of the Rochester sources are not the work of professional scribes but copies made by private individuals in letters or commonplace books, while of those that do appear to be in the hands of trained scribes not all will have been prepared on a commercial basis. But at the heart of the tradition lies a group of about a dozen very bulky manuscript miscellanies containing extensive amounts of verse by Rochester intermixed with that of other poets, which give every appearance of having been produced on a commercial basis by professional scriptoria. Alongside these there also survive a number of smaller collections consisting as a rule of a single gathering or a group of two or three which may very well correspond to the *peciae* of mediaeval scribal practice — that is units of work in progressive copying that permitted a number of scribes to work simultaneously on a single text. There are also numerous examples of satires written on a half-sheet folded either laterally or vertically in order to give two leaves. In the case of these half-sheet manuscripts, we even have evidence regarding distribution: they were prepared commercially for sale to the owners of coffee houses by agents such as Robert Julian, Edmund Warcup and John Somerton, who are themselves addressed in a number of the poems.<sup>10</sup> I should stress again that the scriptoria continued to flourish for at least a further two decades after Rochester's death — that is until the beginning of the reign of Queen Anne, when, as a kind of historical appendix to the tradition, the repertoire of the scriptorial publishers was finally issued in a series of printed anthologies, though often in corrupt and bowdlerised texts. It is only at this point that manuscript transmission ceases to be a significant agency in the commercial publication of English poetry.

### Script Consciousness versus Print Consciousness

I now return to what is the most important question raised by this paper. I have suggested that the choice of manuscript circulation as an alternative to print resulted in some instances from the print medium simply not being available for certain kinds of material — particularly political comment, heterodox religious speculation and pornography. In other cases, however, it was a matter of positive choice dictated by the perceived advantages of the chirographic medium. What some of these advantages were has already been suggested in part: a sense of closeness to the author, or presence undiluted by the intervention of technology; a subtly different visual aesthetic; the possibility of speaking to an audience chosen and defined by the writer and excluding those likely to be imperceptive or unsympathetic;

and a sense that if the work of one's imagination was to become an article of commerce it would be at the upper rather than at the lower end of the market. Manuscript publication also offered the opportunity to the author of intervening in the circulation of his work, monitoring the process of reproduction (since this was sequential rather than simultaneous) and interpolating answers or continuations to poems already in circulation.

But the basic distinction was that arising from the mediation of presence, and here the ideas of Ong and McLuhan seem to me to be of more relevance than those of Derrida. Ong's concern is with the way human language and indeed human thought is conditioned by the circumstances under which texts are customarily encountered in any given culture — whether orally, chirographically, typographically or electronically. From his point of view chirographic transmission represents an intermediate stage between oral and typographic transmission in which the values of orality are still strongly felt. The written word is therefore more likely than the printed word to encourage a vocal or sub-vocal experience of the text, the validating sense of voice. Because, as just mentioned, it is easier for an author or, indeed, a reader to intervene in the process of transmission, manuscripts remain 'closer to the give-and-take of oral expression' and their readers 'less closed off from the author, less absent, than the readers of those writing for print' (*Orality*, p. 132). A manuscript-based culture preserves 'a feeling for the book as a kind of utterance, an occurrence in the course of conversation, rather than as an object' (p. 125). Related to this is a richer sense of communality: the text is less likely to be regarded as the possession of a particular author, and less stress will be placed on originality, fidelity to fact or consistency in point of view. Words in print were owned words while words in a manuscript were more likely to be viewed as communally possessed (p. 131). (There was no copyright in the era of manuscript transmission.) Print, on the other hand, 'situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did' (p. 121), thus giving them the status of objects rather than experiences and separating off the apprehension of meaning from the apprehension of presence. Print imposes a pressure towards closure and finality in the text which was less acutely felt by producers of manuscripts if only because their methods of production did not have to be crowded into a single, definitive press run. These distinctions of Ong's are of course broad ones between cultures predominantly devoted to one medium or the other, and require to be applied with some delicacy, and a constant attention to particular contexts, to writers who persist in the use of manuscript transmission within a society that was already fully exploiting the possibilities of print. But they certainly do not oppose the suggestion already made that seventeenth-century poets might choose scribal transmission as offering positive advantages rather than simply as a result of negative restraints. In the present paper I have only been able to suggest in very general terms what those advantages might be, and I would certainly not wish to imply that they were necessarily the same for each of the poets discussed. But I hope that I have at least been able to make a case for a return to the texts of the writers I have mentioned in order to explore how the choice of means of transmission affects or is affected by the actual process of creativity.

In conclusion, I would like to look briefly at an incident in the life of Rochester, which seems to me to be suggestive of the relationship of manuscript culture to the concept of presence as it was discussed at the beginning of this paper. As is well known, Rochester's exceptionally lewd life was capped by a pious and repentant death. One of the consequences of his repentance was a decision to destroy the manuscripts of his writings, which was done in a bonfire also fuelled by his 'obscene and filthy Pictures'<sup>11</sup> The decision undoubtedly led to the destruction of verse and prose which has not been otherwise preserved — among it his *History of the Intrigues of the Court of Charles II* — and also meant that much of what has come down to us as the result of scribal publication during Rochester's lifetime survives in questionable though thankfully not disastrous texts. I would suggest that the decision by an author to destroy a finished work is intimately bound up with questions of presence. From the author's own point of view the work contains a kind of emanation of himself which will live on indefinitely, justifying the Horatian boast *non omnis moriar*. To the reformed Rochester, however, that presence was now an alien one: a rejected self mocking him from his own chirography!<sup>12</sup> The destruction of his manuscripts will not have prevented poems already in circulation from being copied and transmitted or even from being published in surreptitious editions from manuscript copies, as happened very soon after his death. But it did destroy any possibility of there ever being a full and complete printed edition of his works, such as had been prepared by Ben Jonson and was to be produced by those other poetical gentlemen from his own circle, Sedley and Mulgrave. In other words, Rochester was doing his best to ensure that his writings remained restricted to the chirographic medium and did not assume either the authority or the permanence of print.

What is equally interesting, however, is the experience that led Rochester to his repentance and which is described, from his narration, by Burnet:

He said, Mr. *Parsons* in order to his Conviction; read to him the 53 *Chapter* of the Prophesie of *Isaiah*, and compared *that* with the History of our Saviour's Passion, that he might there see a Prophesie concerning it, written many ages before it was done; which the *Jews* that blasphemed Jesus Christ still kept in their hands, as a Book divinely inspired. He said to me, *That as he heard it read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his Mind, and convince him, that he could resist it no longer: For the words had an authority which did shoot like Raies or Beams in his Mind; So that he was not only convinced by the Reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his Understanding, but by a power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did ever after as firmly believe in his Saviour, as if he had seen him in the Clouds.*<sup>13</sup>

What is described here is an authentic experience of the metaphysic of presence in its religious formulation as the logos or psychically energising word. We may or may not regard it as a valid experience of the nature of reality and ground of being; but we do have to concede, I feel, that it involves a perception of meaning

as totally self-validating, and an annihilation of the Saussurean distinction between the signifier and the signified. Let us note that this experience springs from what Ong would call 'secondary orality', that is of meanings transmitted (and to a significant extent created) by an inscribed medium being translated back into voice, but that this inscribed medium was typographic, not chirographic. Let us note also that the speaking voice does not intervene as a source of presence, Mr Parsons' aim having simply been to draw Rochester's attention to a point of intellectual comparison — the validity of the passage as prophecy. This suggests to me, though it can be no more than a suggestion, that in accepting Christian belief Rochester had simultaneously accepted the superior validity of the typographic medium, a validity that in his case arose from its freedom from the constrictions of presence — or at least of human presence. Adapting Ong's insights, we might argue that while Rochester had initially made use of manuscript transmission to assert the value of intimacy and an intimate communality — the values if we like of human closeness — it was only by escaping into an intellectual space unconstricted by presence that he could open his mind to the workings of conviction, a space for which typography provides a truer analogue than chirography. I would add that this is a very Protestant solution and would not please Ong for whom the *logos* is always to be conceived in terms of the spoken. Neither should we forget that, even in Rochester's time and the generation following, Catholics such as Père Simon and freethinkers such as Anthony Collins were assiduous in stressing that the Bible was only a printed *manuscript*, with all that that entails, and Protestants found themselves forced to defend its claims to the permanence and finality associated with print. But that is another matter. My aim here is simply to suggest that Rochester's decision to burn his manuscripts may be interpreted as a statement about modes of communication as well as about morality.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first given at the Society's annual conference held in Brisbane, 1 September 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1967), and *Orality and Literacy* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 71-77 and 166-170; and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1977). The paper in which Derrida is most specifically concerned with the issues now under discussion is 'Signature, event, context', *Glyph* 1(1977), 172-97 (also in his *Marges de la Philosophie* [Paris, 1972], pp.365-93). There is a summary of Derrida's view in Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 26-32. For Ong's reply to Derrida's position, see *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 101-103. Ong and Derrida are not really talking about the same thing. To Ong, presence is an expression of human individuality and the spoken word therefore more fully human than the written one. To Derrida, the assumption of presence represents an (invalid) attempt to apply closure to the free play of signification within language conceived in Saussurean terms as a system of differences. The individual subject is simply the 'space' within which this play of significance takes place.

<sup>3</sup> Ong, *Orality*, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> Referred to in Marcel Thomas, 'Introduction' to Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre* (Paris, 1958), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Philip J. Ayres, 'The Iconography of Jonson's *Sejanus*, 1605: Copy-text for the Revels Edition', *Editing Texts: Papers from a Conference at the Humanities Research Centre*, ed. J. C. Eade (Canberra, 1985), pp. 47-53.

<sup>6</sup> Katharine Duncan-Jones, 'Was the 1609 *Shake-speares Sonnets* really Unauthorized?', *RES* 34 (1983), 151-171.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ong, *Orality*, p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> *Mac Flecknoe* was circulated anonymously through the same scribal distribution network used by Rochester. For an account of the sources see *The Works of John Dryden. Volume II: Poems 1681-1684*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg, Jr. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), pp.428-9.

<sup>9</sup> See *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, gen. ed. George de Forrest Lord (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1963-75), Volume V: 1688-1697, ed. W. J. Cameron, 539-543. For Vieth's contribution to the study of Restoration scribal traditions, see in particular his *Attribution in Restoration Poetry* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1963).

<sup>10</sup> For Julian, Warcup, Somerton and the transmission of lampoons, see *Poems on Affairs of State*, I, xxxviii; II, 209, 331; III, 478; IV, 65, 209; and V, 528-38; as well as Brice Harris, 'Captain Robert Julian, Secretary to the Muses', *ELH* 10 (1943), 294-309 and Mary Claire Randolph, 'Mr Julian, Secretary of the Muses: Pasquil in London', *N&Q* 184 (1943), 5. The prologue to Edward Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds*, first performed in 1681, refers to Julian as being assisted by 'two Clarks' (Pierre Danchin, ed. *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration* [Nancy, 1978-], III, 329).

<sup>11</sup> For the bonfire, see V. de Sola Pinto, *Enthusiast in Wit: A Portrait of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester 1647-1680, rev. edn.* (London, 1962), p. 218.

<sup>12</sup> There is an interesting parallel to this in Christopher Isherwood's destruction of his early diaries, largely on the grounds that he did not really like the brash young man who confronted him from them.

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Honourable John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (London, 1680; facimile repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), pp.140-2; also Pinto, pp.216-8.

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