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THE MARCH OF MYTHINTERPRETATION: Musings on Culture-Bound Cause and Effect

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Musing on stories can be amusing while dwelling on principles tends to be boring. On the other hand, the stories I am about to embark on won't hang together without their principal underpinnings — so the quicker these are disposed of, the better.

For the cultural anthropologist and ethnolinguist with an integrated approach to human behaviour, "language is a part of culture, not a thing in itself" (Leach 1964: 153).

If sauce for the ethnolinguist be sauce for the practising linguist, then the perils of communication at any level — non-verbal as well as verbal, monolingual and multilingual — are not so much due to the barriers of language as to the chasms of unshared values. A given culture-group's total communicative behaviour is the conventional social code symbolic of that community's cognitive experience, of its world view, of its personal and environmental values, both cerebral and visceral. The translator needs to be objective about such underlying values. Take the case of Cortés' interpreter, la Malinche, as she is affectionately called to this day: by all accounts[1] Doña Marina's linguistic abilities would have been wasted but for her intimate knowledge, impartial intelligence of, and total empathy with such diverse culture-codes as the Mexican, Tabascan and Castilian. Hers was no small achievement, for "... it is difficult to translate culturally distant languages..." (Kolers: 284). When a culture is not shared and its thought mannerisms are lifted out of cognitive context, intelligence fails[2]. Intelligence, that is, the faculty of thinking, understanding, processing, interpreting, and by no means the prerogative of book-taught intellectuals, seems to call not only on memory engrams but also on any or all the senses; and the senses in turn are conditioned by individual and environmental cognitive experience. Finally, the monitoring and intricate processing of all this intelligence goes on in the brain — and trite as this finding may strike one today, we shall note by mid-text how its absence must have affected old-style interpretation.

Having roughed out generalities to show where I'm at, I now proceed with what I'm after.

CULTURE-BIAS

It would be superfluous to recount classical cases of failure of intelligence on the part of the 20th century culture-code interpreter, the translator of text or speech for whom accidental wire-crossings, faulty code-switching or just plain bafflement, whatever the extent of one's professional cross-enculturation (and perhaps at times because of its tangled web), are a daily occupational hazard: are not the annals and contemporary gossip columns of translation redolent with anecdotes of record-breaking misinterpretations? Therein is the reader regaled with instances of slips of the mind such as have Venus vying with venous, or the diagnosis of *faux-amis* flare-ups along the bifid mid-Atlantic lines of "presently", "momentarily", when it is not the demands of English in the face of *une demande, par hasard, actuel*, etc. The broad view on the social history and future pros-

pects of interpretation must probe further than these problems of vocabulary, these symptoms familiar as the common cold, in an effort to survey the evolution of a deeper-seated condition and uncover its cause. I refer to the insidious, chronic effects through the ages of misconceptions and mistranslations caused by culture-bias. The bias, we shall soon see, is as old as Eve. Its effects, through a process for which I am coining the term *mythinterpretation*, are actually constructive. Of its layered stuff is made the ongoing history of translation.

Many critical minds agree that world history-books, sacred scriptures and literary texts, translated or transcribed as they are at second, third, and often many removes, spiced as they appear to be with all kinds of subjective input, must be peppered with myth-making deconstructions and reconstructions (see, in particular, McNeill, Bloch, Kattan, Douglas). I shall attempt precisely, as we look into a few of these historical puzzles which we usually accept and perpetuate unwittingly, to focus on inevitable culture-bound causes for mythinterpretation.

OF BONES AND BOATS

To begin at the conventional starting point for Western culture, let's go back to the genesis of Eve in the story we know so well (Gen. 2).

A mist had gone up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground when the Lord formed man and planted a garden in Eden. From the land of Eden, we are then told, went out a river to water the garden with its four heads: Pison, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. And when it became obvious that Adam, the only gardener, needed a suitable helper, the Lord put him into a deep sleep and proceeded to make Eve, "the mother of all living", from Adam's *rib*.

Now some literal-minded people are seriously divided in their interpretation of this astonishing birth from sleeping bone. A plausible clue to the enigma is tendered by Samuel Noah Kramer who claims (pp. 101-103) that the *rib* translation derives from the world's most ancient of literary puns, enshrined in a Sumerian paradise myth. The poem was evidently recited (or, more likely, chanted) during centuries, at the New Year or Carnival time, around the delta of the Tigris and the Euphrates. It tells at length about the great spirit of earth, Enki, also known as the water-god Ea (his hybrid nature was illustrated by the goat-fish). Enki-Ea the all-wise, the lord of incantation, "the knowing one who opens the door to understanding" watered, indeed every springtide flooded, the gardens of Mesopotamia. Mercurial, both creative and destructive, he angered the Chief goddess — evidently his better half, the once all-important Great Mother — when tempted into "eating her eight precious plants", all conceived by the water god himself and which she had made to sprout without the slightest pain or travail. Whereupon Ea fell dangerously ill with eight mortal afflictions. The goddess, you see, had put the curse of death on him for his misdeed. There he lay, sinking fast, when the Mother finally relents, producing one by one eight healing spirits to bring back to life the corresponding eight sick parts of the water lord's body. The lady in charge of his ailing rib is called Nin-ti, and therein lies the pun: the word *ti* in Sumerian meant both "to make live" and "a rib", while in Hebrew, where the two terms apparently have nothing in common, the pun is lost.

So Eve, "the mother of all living", could well be related, under cover of a rib, to "the lady who makes live". One might add that the Ea-Ninti tandem, taken at face value, just as easily may have punned on the reviving virtues of *eau de vie* (conversely, I need not stress how these can turn sour when some of us mortals have one over the eight!). But when all is analyzed, weighed and compared — and it is less confusing when it isn't — these metaphors are more than pun-deep. On the strength of ancient, non-biblical texts such as this Rebirth poem, Flood stories, etc., one school holds that Old Testament

accounts are rooted in the early past of Ancient Mesopotamia where the first gardeners were responsible, through intervening generations of Akkadians, Hurrians, Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and Arameans, for transmitting their heritage to the Hebrews. Others share the conviction that both the similarities and discrepancies between the so-called Babylonian texts and Genesis, not to mention other cultures' In-the-Beginning myths, stem from the survival and transformation through the ages of a common inheritance dating back to "a time when the human race occupied a common home and held a common faith"[3] and, as scientifically brought out by the Swadesh lexico-statistical method, shared a common language.

The two hypotheses are fully compatible, and there is ample evidence in support of both. Either way, primeval concepts have obviously been doctored with a heavy dose of transformation, loss and accretion in the process of transmission from cradle-day lore to fatherland doctrine. Kramer's observations (pp. 8-9) about "misleading translations" of myths from the Ancient Near East seem to apply equally to myths from any part of the world. Other perceptive scholars have shown that interpretation and documentary translation of all communities' ancestral stories get hopelessly garbled when handed down from sedentary parents to restive sons, from farmers to fighters, and arranged, generation after generation, to fit in with incompatible values and constantly changing experiential knowledge[4]. Though it be coined in the context of contemporary mundane information, the adage neatly put by Danica Seleskovitch (p. 74) as "ce que l'on perçoit est fonction de ce que l'on sait" clearly holds even truer for the linking up of current savvy with the mist-shrouded chain of the past.

Only last week, it so happens, the need for purely technological linking up with the past cropped up, as unexpected things will in the rapid-fire of simultaneous interpretation. On the wire, an excellent interpreter by her government's standards blithely rendered a shipbuilder's historical allusion to the *commerce maritime* of third-millenium Sumerians in terms of "trade by canoe", evidently brainwashed into thinking that ancient is primitive, and unaware that seaworthy sailing vessels (this being no misty myth) plied the waters east of the Gulf to India and west to the African coast some centuries, it would seem, before Noah was ordered to build his eccentric Ark. Thus, by all appearances, does the process of cross-cultural hermeneutics sink one culture's ship — and incidentally several models of ark[5] — for the sake of another's canoe.

WHAT IS WRITING?

The translator's graphic medium for communication is also the graphic mirror of civilization. And since Ea's domain is sometimes called the Cradle of Civilization, its ambiguous writing at this point may be pursued more broadly than the crossing of *tis* allowed for. Not only that, but I believe there are enough myths and misconceptions surrounding the nature and origins of writing, even among linguists, to warrant a sketch of the background so far as in this essay it well merge with the action, and let you be the judge of what is writing.

Primates with second thoughts about their "overnight" evolution into civilized human beings may feel, as I do, that the development of that specialized branch of the graphic arts which serves as a visual means of communication and is now called writing was amazingly slow, given the relatively rapid, dynamic pace of artistic and technological advance during the "Information Explosion" of the last ice age (about which see Pfeiffer, especially chapter 8). When you come to think of it, the very survival of our then highly-endangered species must have depended on the strict observance and understanding, at *every* possible level of communicative behaviour, of a social code expressive of hunter-gatherers' values and interaction with their universe. To this day hunter-gatherers' initia-

tion rites and "medicine" sessions make formal use of traditional symbols, signs, motifs, sand paintings that are rich in abstract meanings to members of the tribe, however much the "code" may have become impoverished through isolation, lack of motivation or acculturation.

It began 35,000 years ago. Increasingly thereafter, the first adult specimens of modern *homo sapiens* endowed with well-developed frontal lobes and anatomically adapted to the production of *modern* speech sounds (in comparison to Neanderthals and as deduced from the shape of the skull, neck, oral cavity, etc. [see Lieberman]) seem to have been perfectly capable of correlating abstract concepts with whatever human speech sounds they presumably uttered and, obviously, with the graphic images, dots and dashes and symbolical signs that have come down to us by the thousands — otherwise, what was the point of producing them? They are anything but doodling or art for art's sake. The recognition is dawning that the secret signs, symbols, geometrics, tallies that accompanied sculpture, carved bone, "Venus" figurines and so-called "hunting-magic" paintings from paleolithic cave-sanctuaries and ceremonial centres were seminal, and perhaps much closer to universal truths than all our long words put together. The "language" was circulated over a period of roughly 23,000 years, and its basic conceptual source must be a few thousand, if not million years older, possibly going back to early hominid life in Africa. Yet no one today can boast of unequivocal "reading" of the sign-and-notation systems of the Upper Paleolithic, though attempts at general semiotic interpretation can be and have been made[6]. Of special interest are the Azilian symbols and signs painted or incised on some 2000 pebbles from early-postglacial Europe, notably at Mas d'Azil in Ariège, France, where they date to c. 9000 BC; the graphics' likely diffusion to North Africa, the Near East, and beyond, is documented elsewhere[7]. From Neolithic southeastern Europe, and surprisingly little-publicized although they may turn out to be highly important once the stubborn East-to-West bias is uprooted, are votive inscriptions, both ideographic and linear, on clay plaques and weights dating from the late-sixth to fourth millenium[8]. In the limelight in North America is the system of inscribed clay tokens or business counters with numeric impressions, apparently used as an accounting system in Neolithic western Asia, and announced just over a decade ago as the earliest precursor of writing[9]. Precursors they *all* are, and none, for what my impartial opinion is worth, should be disregarded. Nevertheless, all these graphics from Europe to Asia belong to prehistory.

History, for the historian of literate civilization, starts with the oldest record of *organized* signs and symbols to be deciphered. That, by current expert-consensus (which may change tomorrow!) is the world's earliest writing. It emerged, as neatly aligned as the geometric mosaics of the first-known city temples (built on top of village shrines), as clean-cut as the first city-states' irrigation canals, during the latter half of the 4th millenium (*Naissance*; Schmandt-Besserat 1981, 1986). The place was the lower reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates, the floodplains of Mesopotamia between Baghdad and Basra. The script, of course, turned out to be Ea's (or the Mother's) mother-tongue. Because the progress of writing in Asia coincides with that of centralized city-state administration, its advent is said to speak volumes for the changes in cognitive processing brought about by bureaucracy, taxation, massive trading and the discipline of urban civilization[10]. "L'écriture est un fait de civilisation", writes Professor Jean Bottéro (*Naissance*: 28), brooking no argument: "L'écriture est d'abord un fait de la civilisation mésopotamienne ancienne."

Considering that the first cities were also large ceremonial and religious centres, it is not surprising that the quantities of Sumerian clay-plaque inscriptions from Uruk (biblical Erech), now Warka in southern Iraq, were found in temple archives. They are picto-logographic, in other words conventionally pictorial, often geometric ideographs

(lozenge, triangle, cross-in-circle, star, but also bird-and-egg, open-hand, etc.) representing abstract concepts, with only a few exceptions of self-descriptive drawings such as the head of a specific animal, the outline of an object, a building. The earliest are dated to 3350. This makes them some three centuries older than Egypt's first stone-carved religious symbols which the Greeks called hieroglyphs, and a good 1500 years older than the oracle-bone and bronze-vessel inscriptions which foreshadowed Chinese ideograms. For practical purposes, as technological advance required the constant addition of new concept-words (e.g., the wheel, the cart, metallurgical terms), Sumerians began, about 3000 BC, to structure unwieldy picto-logographic signs into a syllabary (most base-words being monosyllabic). The syllabary in turn was adapted to the parallel systems of wedge-shaped, cuneiform shorthand which, in the course of centuries, was finally contracted by the Mediterranean coastal peoples — the so-called Phoenicians — into our more familiar alphabetic scripts (see *Naissance*). The reminder is relevant that philologists classify the Sumerian substratum as an agglutinative, non-Semitic language in a class of its own. And that it remained the élite's language of religion, learning and "classical" literature until supplanted just about from the start of the Christian era by Greek, Syriac (an East Aramaic dialect) and Latin. The battle was lost, but old soldiers never die. In spite of the many intervening generation gaps and the fact that scribes at various periods slanted their writing in different directions, Sumerian-type pictograms may still be recognized in modern scripts. A striking, often-quoted example is the original sign for a bull or an ox: it survives as Greek *alpha* and Old Hebrew *aleph*, and appears to head the Roman alphabet as our letter A reversed.

BILINGUALISM AND THE PERILS OF THE ANCIENT SCRIBE-TRANSLATOR

Southern Iraq's Gulf-commanding position has undoubtedly been envied since time immemorial, and the same must have been said in the not-so-distant past of its schools for scribes and translators. Its wealthy walled cities built around their monumental high temples (the ziggurats) were world-famous as temples of learning. Attractive to desert and mountain peoples, to dairy farmers and cattle thieves alike, to kings and shepherds, students and sages, tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, mendicant and merchant, Ancient Mesopotamia became a mosaic of populations, increasingly coloured by an assortment of Akkadians, Hurrian-Subarians, Elamites, Amorites, Kassites, Assyrians, Babylonian-Chaldeans and Arameans. Small wonder such a cosmopolitan area developed its masterful class of scribe-translators no doubt before Egypt[11], and centuries before Babylon's Tower was built and blamed for its babble of tongues. The scribes were housed in temple-precincts. They were graphic artists and trained "rememberers" as well. A passing thought, when one learns of their temple-colleges and very strict training, is that methods of teaching, rules of entrance, graduation and practice were probably then discussed during a few thousand years much as they are now in our professional associations. And a significant factor to be borne in mind, for I shall revert to it before I am through, is that these professionals' first patron-deity was Nisaba, a matronly goddess with reeds sprouting from her shoulders (she was also the spirit of reeds from which was made the scribe's stylus, among other essentials). Nisaba does not entirely drop out of the picture until the dark ages which preceded the Neo-Babylonian period (c. 600 BC) and during which perishable papyrus, parchment or wood may have replaced clay-tablet supports. When durable records reappear, the status of women, and presumably that of female scribes, shows a marked decline, and only the male "divine scribe" Nabu is mentioned.

By the end of the 3rd millenium, Sumerians were practically absorbed by the rest of the population, and their language from then on was no longer the vernacular. But their liturgical rites, science, technology, scholastic and bilingual traditions lived on. A

prerequisite for any student aspiring to the high-ranking scribal profession was bilingualism in Sumerian/Akkadian[12], Akkadian cuneiform being the earliest-documented Semitic language, and it was long used side by side with Sumerian. There were evidently other bilinguals, and probably multilinguals, too. At least one official interpreter, named Shu-ilishu went on record for Meluhhan (Meluhha was the Indus valley)[13]. Syntactical guides were compiled, as well as bilingual word-lists and dictionaries for each specialty, many of which were later collected or transcribed for Assurbanipal's famous Niniveh library (668-627 BC). Even so, if one is to judge by the headaches of contemporary Sumerologists with the correct reading of a syllabary rooted in numerous homophones and interspersed with persistent picto-logographs, translation may not always have been an easy exercise.

For the rub is not only in the rib but in a host of other signifiers. Consider, for example, how many literary misconceptions might be nurtured through mere reference to a word list when a single word for a *sheepfold* also stood for *lap*, *loins*, *vulva*, *womb*[14]. And what is the modern interpreter to make of the progenerative prowess of the water-god Ea when, in his creative mood, after erecting the Mother's sheepfolds and seeding her fields, he called the rain down to earth, watered field and farm, set sail to "penetrate the Underworld", "mated with the cow-Tigris like a rampant bull", and similar exploits — how is our intellectual word processor to grasp the macho-poetic dimensions of such imagery unless it is revealed that in Sumerian logic, as every translation-class once knew, the same word applied to *water* and *semen*[15].

THE CULTURED EAR OF EA

Despite Sumerologists' awareness of some of these double and multiple meanings, much of Mesopotamian literature remains obscure. While the reasons usually given for this are broken tablets, erasures and, naturally, inscrutable "amendments", a very simple one, related to manners of saying — which of course reflect figures of thought — may lie in the fact that modern intellectuals do their thought-processing differently — a point that will be clarified, I hope, further on.

Knowledge about cerebral information-processing is of relatively recent vintage. If I am skirting the giddy issue of how scribes and translators adapt from hearing orally dictated language to writing hard-copy, from visualizing concept-symbols (ideograms) to transcribing them as phonetic symbols (syllabaries), how they might have mode-switched in the past from picture strip to abstract caption (cuneiform) and back again, it is that state-of-the-art studies on the relevant motor reflexes and on the lateral, concerted and permuted hemispheric contributions of the brain to such acrobatics are as well documented as can be by present-day specialists[16] in a field where I am out of my depth and my subject. These neurolinguists and brain specialists study the current behaviour of the human brain, and their findings, invaluable though they are, perforce apply only here and now, since the brains of ancient scribes have perished. Clever inference as to past, and perhaps future, may nonetheless be drawn from these and other findings. One such deduction, and one that is generally accepted, is that the makeup of the adult human mind has not remained static, any more than its vocal and graphic expressions, in the course of modern *homo sapiens* evolution. While a prognosis of our plastic brain-circuitry's liability to future modification in its post-1984 computer environment might well be little else than science-fiction conjecture, not so extrapolation from a past that has left, helter skelter, a monumental legacy of building blocks for the imaginative scientist's reconstruction. That is precisely what Julian Jaynes has done.

Seizing upon this heritage, Jaynes has methodically put together the history of the mind, underpinning his thesis with evidence from archaeological material, historical records, linguistics, literature, psychological studies and split-brain research. The author

advances the fascinating theory that important organic changes in the structure of the brain occurred less than 3,000 years ago, when so-called Greek ego-consciousness set in as a result of increasingly complex changes in culture, including language. Until then, the two hemispheres of the brain were not connected (as they normally are by our corpus callosum). Because of this "bicameral mind" people in Mesopotamia could not think as we do and were not conscious as we are today. The scribe's perception of dictated or remembered material could be very strange: some language generated in the right hemisphere and heard in the left might have been interpreted (for instance in Ea-type poems, the Old Testament and the Iliad) as "the voices of the gods".

Jaynes's model is controversial as being highly speculative. Speculation is a dirty word to the positivist, and everyone realizes that such a model cannot be tested. And there is an additional catch in it: Mesopotamian writings do not bear the exclusive stamp of divine inspiration. It is well attested that apart from sacred myths, epic-poems, psalms, magical incantations and oracular revelations, Sumero-Akkadian archives featured stacks of dull business records, no-nonsense legal texts, diplomatic correspondence, the pharmacopoeia, a staggering amount of medical, mathematical, technological, astrological findings, recipes, moralizing animal tales, sober precepts and sane proverbs such as have their near-counterparts on many a contemporary secular bookshelf. One fails to see how the Ancients could have lacked awareness of their practical sense when they devised (or inherited) the very same planetary week that has since been adopted the world over. Or when they wrote, as might we when conscious of figuratively falling from the frying pan into the fire: "Upon my escaping from the wild-ox, the wild-cow confronted me"; and used the wise precept: "Into an open mouth, a fly will enter"[17], a variant of which may be heard on the streets of Madrid, as I discovered to my delight 4,000 years later, as *En boca cerrada, no entra mosca* — literally stating that into a closed mouth, a fly will not enter.

Right. All the same, at the risk of putting a fly in the ointment it is time I opened my mouth about that other well-attested fact, the one concerning the cultured ear. I impart it here, straight off the tablets, mainly for its direct bearing on our predecessors' more uncommon sense, and accessorily for its possible comfort to fellow-interpreters whose auditive input, alas, is now indubitably mundane: Mesopotamians believed the ear, not the brain, to be the seat of intelligence. The expression *to set one's ear* was used in contexts where we would speak of "opening our mind" to something[18]. And if someone was said to have the *ear of Ea*, it meant that person shared in the supreme intelligence of the all-wise spirit of incantations — the knowing one who opens the door to understanding.[19]

LEGACIES OF THE HEART AND SOUL CULTURE

Not till sometime between the BC 10th and 6th centuries did it become official that unprocessed hearsay or cocking one's ear is not good enough for the grasping of gospel truth. That is, if we may generalize from contemporaneous Egyptian instructions on how to deal with words of wisdom: *Give thy ears, hear what is said/ Give thy heart to understand them*[20] (see also the Old Testament, Prov. 22:17).

Those centuries, notwithstanding current press opinion, were the peak of warfare, regicide, fratricide, genocide, invasions, iconoclasm, migration and mass deportations throughout western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean. Environmental changes, ordeals and culture shock surely must have altered structures of thought, if not of brain. Important, very important changes in concept come to light from the comparative sources consulted by Jaynes. The word *soma* in Ancient Greek, for example, had stood for "deadness", and *psyche* for "life"; while by the age of Pythagoras (end of BC 6th century), soma meant "body", and psyche, "soul".

The BC 4th century gave us Aristotle, as revered by the Medieval scholars as Saint Augustine. Aristotle, however, is better known today for his systematic thinking than for his notions on the source of nervous control, which he installed, along with the seat of the soul, in the heart. And this, presumably combined with a bit of ear-setting to the voices of the gods, at one brilliant stroke opened his door to understanding the god Kronos — who in the gory myth devoured his wife's children — as Father Time (*chronos*). Furthermore and unbeknown to Aristotle himself, that perceptive man actually had Ea's ear, because Kronos, usurper of his father's throne, unseated in turn by Zeus-Jupiter, and recognized by the Romans in the farmer-god Saturn, was recently identified with Old Man Ea[21] who, as destroyer, swallowed up the Mother's plants. The concatenation thus takes us back to the well-watered Eden where we began... but let's not start on those Time-conscious beginnings all over again. The point is, all aqueous things considered, there seems to be greater reason than Edmund Leach (another perceptive soul who could not have known about elusive Ea) owned up to in his interpretive essay on Cronus-chronos (1961), infinitely more timeless reason for *time*, and the ebb and flow of *time-and-tide* to have remained such slippery concepts for our dictionaries to interpret.

To be sure, not everyone was blessed like Aristotle with the faculty of proper ear — heart/soul connection. Population misnomers rank not least among our heritage from the age of expanding literacy, folk-bilingualism and the birth of journalism. Herodotus has it that Assyrians, so named after Assur on the Tigris, were called Syrians by his ancestors in Greece, while the Syrians acquired this appellation only after Assyria was wiped off the map (612 BC). With the disappearance of neighbouring Urartu, which meant Ararat-land, its occupants old and new went by the name of Armenians apparently because the Greeks thought they were Arameans.

From the very onset of ego-consciousness, ethnic pride wormed its way into many a human heart, especially so among Ancient Greek colonists who called anyone who did not speak their language, barbarians. And no sooner had certain other upstarts of cowboy ancestry settled down in new grazing lands and learnt to read and write than spurious genealogies were invented right and left. The cult of legendary demi-gods is at the root of hero worship. Thus the Indo-Iranian Persians claimed noble descent from a mythical hero called Arias whom their conqueror-cousins in Northern India had purportedly once worshipped, as have other would-be Aryans since. Similarly, a few centuries later, Merovingian scholars felt so free in Old Gaul, now France (though it might just as easily be Freeland, since Frank meant "free"), as to eschew their Germanic Meroveus and Clovis in favour of forging a family-tree from the Trojan Francus, putative son of Hector — though a less exclusive version makes Francus the great-grandson of Noah and brother of Romanus, Alemanus and Britto.

Pedigree is permuted further with the tamperings of metathesis. Opinion varies as to whose tongue was responsible for Arian-land, east of the Tigris, getting twisted into "Iran." Of greater consequence is the fact that wave upon wave of restless populations, who crossed rivers and deserts west of the Tigris, are indiscriminately listed in ancient records as Habiru, Abiru, Apir, Abhir, Harib, Ibhri, Abra, Abar and Arab — perpetuating a big who's who problem for today's ethnoconscious translator.

THE ROOTS OF ANGELS, ETYMOLOGY AND BARNACLE-BIRDS

As with the children of the hearty New Consciousness, so with the inhabitants of their spiritual world. That confusion reigned in the less-concrete environment is obvious from those Oriental immortals which made their way into Europe even before anyone there could have suspected Time would soon recycle the old lunar calendar. Severance from a fallen pantheon orphaned epiphanies of eastern deities, divine messengers, mons-

trous guardian spirits and supernatural helpers anciently familiar as Mesopotamian *labbu, lahma, anzu*-bird, *ilu, karubu, sarrapu*, and so on. I doubt that the West did not already have its own lively concepts of kindred supranatural beings, but migration and new languages caused the sophisticated newcomers in due course to conquer the heart of Western terminology as dragons, centaurs, winged bulls, griffins, angels, cherubs, seraphims — you name it. Never mind the polemics they sparked upon entry into Byzantine theosophy, where winged refugees were proverbially fitted and counted "on the end of a needle"; never mind "le sexe des anges" veering to male after French lost the Latin neuter: supernatural beings are still with us, providing an excellent subject for the new programs of language desexification.

On this delicate topic, I venture to add with respect, androcentric society seems to be lagging far behind its sisters. The Araucanian *machi* (shamanesses in Chile) long ago solved the problem of the Ancestral Male's single parenthood. Their rendering of the Lord's prayer all-humanly runs (in translation): "Father God, *old woman* who art in Heaven..."[22]

Backtracking in time and space to earth's northern hemisphere (which in Herodotian geography was the be-all and end-all of the world, and flat) has us getting down to the roots of scientific vocabulary. The 2nd (or 3rd) century A.D. is a memorable date for the specialist in biology, fable, bestiary or scrabble dictionary. A serious book on natural history was compiled from previous manuscripts (Pliny the Elder's Natural History, Aristotle's History of the Animals, Ctesias, and others), drawing also on Aesopian-type fables and oral descriptions. It was written in Greek, probably in Alexandria, by an anonymous author nicknamed Physiologus. Immediately upon circulation the manuscript was a roaring success. The text was translated (and illustrated for the illiterate) into Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, then Latin and, ultimately, almost as many languages as the Bible, with exotic accretions joining the mainstream through the centuries. The original forty-strong menagerie, including Man, grew into a handwritten bestiary some 150 creatures thick (and as many in the sea), of which the very first Latin-English prose translation actually to be *printed* is T.H. White's 1954 *Book of Beasts*, rendered from the twelfth-century Revesby manuscript and republished in 1984. That means at least one hundred more species than Physiologus ever dreamt of two millenia ago, from Amphisbena to Ziffius (now xiphias), the lot penned, groomed, explicated and authenticated by the clerics for the modern medieval-terminology banks.

The learned scribes of antiquity, as mentioned earlier, were housed in temple-precincts. Likewise, the learned clerks of Medieval Europe lived in church-monasteries. There, in the scriptorium, the clerics sharpened their quills, rolled up their sleeves, and concentrated on copying out the latest version of Physiologus, with commentaries, in the Western lingua franca for religion and learning, namely Latin. And how was the Latin bestseller penned for demystification by future translators? White informs us that the twelfth-century scribe in England quilled some rather extraordinary abbreviations (apparently as hermetic as our consecutive-interpreter's notes) where the easiest to crack were: for ∻ *est* or m̃ia for anything from *miseria* to *misericordia*. Punctuation followed the wayward pauses in the lector's dictation, and when boredom set in, followed not at all. At which stage spelling also suffered, with *comici* for *ocimi*, *aquarum* for *equorum*, etc.

White straightened that out, of course, as a translator should. There is nothing he could have done, however, about the beginnings of etymological science, still less its lasting effects. *Aquila* the eagle was so called "from the acuteness (*acumine*) of his eyes..." As for *Agnus* the lamb, "some people think it has got the name because it recognizes (*agnoscat*) its own mother..." While *Camelis* was the name given to camels by Adam "with good reason, for when they are loaded up they kneel down and make themselves

lower and humbler — and the Greek for low and humble is '*cam*'". Further commentary for gullible people explains that a man "is called *Vir* because there is more worth (*virtus*) in him than there is in women — hence also he gets the name of courage, or else because he governs his women by force (*vi*); while *mulier* the woman "is derived from 'weakness', since '*mollior*' (weaker), with a letter taken away or changed, becomes '*mulier*'; they are differentiated from man both in courage and in imbecility of body"; and so forth. It follows that Mr. Medieval-Muscle named the animal world in his own image with equal force, performing long-lasting sex changes where necessary. Among insects, for example, the queen bee because of her size was naturally thought of as King — and he ruled, what is more, until the late 17th or 18th century (White 154, fn.). Shakespeare, in *Henry V* (I.ii.187) thought of them (the queen bees) as Emperors.

For a recent overview of the way early medieval etymology informed not only biological, but also historical and theological exegesis for centuries to come, I refer the interested reader to Howard Bloch's *Etymologies and Genealogies*.

Religious thought forges vocabulary, and neither the former nor the latter has always been impressed by biological difference. There was once a fervent belief in universal complementarity, and that everything on earth or in the air has its counterpart in water. Or maybe it was the concept of living souls departing to dwell in a lake or the sea after death — whence the derivation of our words for "sea" and "soul" from the same base — which accounts for the happy survival of these fabulous creatures of vernacular speech: the dogfish, angelfish, mermaid, seahorse and kindred souls. Anyway, turning to a late twelfth-century manuscript concerning Ireland, White in his *Book*'s Appendix specifically notes the tendency for birds and shellfish to get scrambled, producing for instance the barnacle goose (*ansa* or *branta leucopsis*, French *bernache*, *bernacle* or *barnache*). For many birds in Ireland (and no doubt Brittany) were called barnacles and "... translators had been liable to render the two shells of an oyster as 'wings'".

The learned books do give a would-be logical reason why barnacles grew wings, namely that folk in Medieval Britain never saw Arctic birds' eggs and therefore supposed the winter visitors to be hatched from rock-clinging shellfish. All I can say is there appears to be a great deal more to this fishy business than meets the bookish explications. Indeed, I strongly suspect there are as many precious sea-to-soul dimensions converging on barnacle-goose imagery as confusedly survive in the concepts of angels, golden eggs, Eve born, yes, from an Adam's rib-bone, Venus from a seashell or in the American Northwest-coast Raven-and-the-People-in-the-Clamshell myth — and, of course, in the monks' rendering of shells as wings. And here I stop, mindful of the warnings of sages such as Roland Barthes not to peel the layers off the palimpsest of metaphor, not to literalize it, lest its core meaning escape us altogether.

The barnacle goose, you may agree, confirms my view that it is not the logic of dictionaries and documents that makes a language, but the people who perennially mould it to the logic of their social and world-view requirements. If coastal folk in their fisher-fowler wisdom once fitted their shellfish with wings, just as the architect's code allows for our homes, all the more colourful our inherited vocabulary. True, this may not help the literary translator into "culturally distant" languages, who, at a loss for a suitable simile, might be driven to borrow from Latin an insipid *ansa leucopsis*.

THE MARCH OF MYTHREALITY: THE UNICORN

In spite of my barnacle-goose digression, which I could not resist, I have not lost sight of other creatures more prominently featured in the animal records. By the way, let there be no lingering doubt as to the primary role of bestiaries in the history of natural-science language.

> A bestiary is a serious work of natural history, and is one of the bases upon which our own knowledge of biology is founded, however much we may have advanced since it was written. Its sources go back to the most distant past, to the Fathers of the Church, to Rome, to Greece, to Egypt, to mythology, ultimately to oral tradition which must have been contemporary with the caves of Cro-Magnon. (White: 231.)

Whenever it was that animals were first given their names — and a cave of Cro-Magnon overlooking some river in Europe is as good a time and place as any[23] — one single-minded beast that has skilfully managed to escape the clutches of exact science throughout the world, yet is more real than science, is the Unicorn. It has been rumoured as the first animal named by Adam. Its popularity is amazingly universal. Whatever its name when we shared the same faith, culture and language, this Sacred Cow/Bull advanced in high profile, waxed, waned (it is a lunar critter), shed a horn, grew crescent horns for the next rutting season, branched them, plaited them, and backtracked prouder still as it ran through myth, migration, many moons, tides and high water, and a gamut of antlered, twin-horned, single-horned, beaked and winged or sworded and finned animals. A Unicorn, I have reason to think, must have been at times that rampant bull of a goat/fish, Enki-Ea (or the cow-Tigris, or the couple) and, by the light of another silvery moon, the Greek river-god Achelous when *he* went a-courting as a bull, and in the process lost one horn to Hercules (the Naiads used it as a Horn of Plenty similar to that of Amaltheia, the Cretan Goat-nymph who suckled Pan and baby-Zeus). Volumes have been written about unicorns, from real one-horned animals through dull experimental ones to Chinese Ki-lin — the s/he moon-animal which made Confucius' mother pregnant — to deer, goat, gazelle, stag, ram, buffalo, bull, boar, mammoth, dove, karkadann, swine, whale, narwhal, seahorse, land-horse unicorns (Alexander's horse Bucephalos wore an armour of horns sticking out from its forehead), as also the rhino unicorn (the latter's horn was prized in Asia as an aphrodisiac). Ctesias in his BC fourth-century *Indica* described it as a wild-ass whose horn was an antidote to poison. At all composite events, its name made famous as Greek *monoceros* through the Jewish bible-translators at Alexandria (BC 3rd century) and Physiologus in its many translations, that Unicorn won out, outflanking wild-ox or buffalo (some extinct *re'em*), wild-ass, rhino, and all the rest.

So it would seem that this pan-human memory engram for the creature which does not exist, yet *is*, this perennial ideogram for the swift-running beast which could be caught only, as the saying goes, "when at rest in the lap of a virgin", cuts east to west right across cultures. And it owes its tenacity throughout the Christian era to scores of talented linguists, intuitive bards, bestiary limners, bible illustrators, miniaturists, heraldists, tapestry designers, merchants, museums, modern revivalists, and more linguists like T.H. White and ourselves — not forgetting, as we shall see, the conditioned field of perception of our Medieval scribes.

THE MEANINGS OF MORALITY

What I have not told is those unicorn-tales that are shocking to the ear of modern Western society. Suffice it to say that Physiologus had disliked the Unicorn as a nasty beast harbouring ill will toward men. Like the Mother's Ea — and Longfellow's "little girl/ who had a little curl/ right in the middle of her forehead/ ... (and could be so good and so horrible)" — the Unicorn, too, had his/her dual nature, and some there were who philosophically took the rain along with the sunshine, the Beast with the Beauty. But times have changed since the Dark Ages, and so have the meanings of nouns and names.

While an assortment of parchment-manuscripts, picture-books, minted coins and engraved "magical stones" entered Europe and shuttled back and forth from east to west

and south to north, literacy spread throughout the monasteries. Schools and colleges were run by the monks. Church congregations heard sermons. Zoroastrian-sectarian ideals and Christian morality were penetrating the Western mind (heart?). We currently take for granted that the languages of cultures steeped in the Age of Morality acquired corresponding imprints quite naturally, much as a fruit ripens in the sun. Yet the process, in retrospect, runs rather like a series of conjuring tricks, unfolding more or less as follows.

Centuries, armies, missionaries, pilgrims, relic hunters, Crusaders, craftsmen and traders came, went or stayed and, with them, a variety of totemic clan-emblems, icons, banners, picture-textiles, symbolical eagles, demons, cupids, virgins, which had to be tested by Church Fathers against early immigrants (*ilu, sarrapu, karubu...*), compared with the first bestiaries, and reconciled as well, the way I see it, with native ideas of the barnacle-goose variety. They must be explained, moreover, in terms of the new monotheistic, manicheistic morality, and that caused problems. Ambivalent views about unicorns were apparently sent to burn for all eternity in the medieval realm of twin-horned demons (protestors were also given the fire-test as heretics and witches, and so were their books as works of the devil). Now the single horn was a different matter. It proved supremely amenable to metamorphosis into "the sword of God", the symbol of the "whole" nature of Jesus who himself said "I and the Father are One"; an emblem of the Annunciation; wholesomeness, uprightness and high birth; or, as some declare, sublimated sex and chastity. And the ambiguous "lap of a virgin" was turned to good account by Honorius of Autun (unless it was Albertus Magnus) as the womb of the Virgin who bore Christ in human shape.

Other meaningful products from up the resourceful medieval sleeve have worn quite as beautifully as these. Just think, however, how much perplexed tonsure-scratching might have preceded the product whenever nouns for totally unknown creatures had the monks agape in their scriptorium. Not to worry: regardless of which animal it might have been, its nature was what counted as moralizing symbol. Take Phoenix, the self-sacrificing bird from Arabia (evidently one of several ancient sacrificial birds, White being justifiably partial to Egypt's "sun bird", the purple heron): the fact that it sets fire to itself and rises from its ashes signified we are to believe in the resurrection — and that, in a flick of the wrist, fixed Phoenix. Besides, Saint Augustine once stated that it did not matter whether certain animals existed; what did matter was what they meant.

We could not agree more. But there is the constant danger, as we have seen all along from Adam-Eve rib to Unicorn-horn, that meaning removed from its original time and culture frame may lie wide open to subjective, selective interpretation. When ancient zodiacal spirits, Olympian deities, Greek, Egyptian and Oriental mythology, astrology, allegory, iconography arrived in the wake of Aristotle (and I am skipping alchemy), their symbols, translated from Greek to Arabic to Latin, were altered beyond modern recognition. Leafing through Jean Seznec's survey of *la Survivance des dieux antiques*, we learn that scriptural meaning was read into Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A lizard placed under Saturn's feet turned into a bunch of grapes (the vine had become one of the symbols of the Eucharist). *Libra* (the Scales) was perceived as a rather more familiar book or hare: *liebra* in Spanish translation, *livre* or *lièvre* in French (the hare in Gothic times stood for fleetness and diligent service). The virtues of Andromeda (she reconciled husband and wife) were ascribed, in a Bibliothèque nationale manuscript, to a dromedary. Cupid was christened the Angel of the Annunciation, and Minerva, the Virgin Mary. Eagles and cupids, Isis, Astarte, Minerva from ancient temples were destined to serve the new morality and its cathedrals as allegorical angels and virgins.

If I may interject just in case you should be wondering about the target of true Cupid's arrows, what with the heart being otherwise engaged for so long: the liver was

the seat of love. I am not certain when the "fear" emotion first leapt into the Western liver, though I do recall that omens were read apprehensively enough in the Ancient Orient from the aspect of sacrificial animals' innards, especially the liver (hepatoscopic divination); that Shakespeare saw Macbeth's gutless servant as "lily-livered" (V.iii.15); and that fear may still be expressed in modern-Frankish parlance with *avoir les foies*.

The Renaissance, according to Seznec, made no break in medieval interpretations, only recapitulating classical sources, with many a contemporary flourish thrown in so as to satisfy pagan-scholarly taste along with the fashionable twin-cults for beauty and the fabulous. Though paper from China and the printing press took some time to catch on, the new techniques certainly added tremendous impetus to literature and literacy, thus speeding up the spread of mythography and science, both.

As for the "moralizing culture", it was still running its course, neck to neck with the sciences, for those of us who got our fingers rapped at the age of candid reason for dreaming up more meanings into the fables and rhymes and superman angels than morals allowed.

MARCHING INTO THE FUTURE

Today, as I write, one might expect that the separate pursuit of science, the common base of Greco-Latin to many modern vocabularies, the emergence of English as the neo-scientific and hi-tech link language, and, not least, the world-wide diffusion of translated findings (how else would my mind have been opened, for instance, to the Ki-lin unicorn which Confucius say, and he should know, has at least *two* horns) would afford greater objectivity and circumspection, enabling minds to meet from Beijing to Toronto or Timbuktu to Peru. Yet, speaking for myself and the likes of me, the constraints of social conditioning remain eternal blinkers[24].

All the same, the objective approach seemed worth the attempt when I tried my hand, within space limitations, at picking out these historical products of interpretation bound up in their causes. At retracing through such illustrations the cumulative course of mythinterpretation since the first few, fairly articulate humans in their own words told their "time-factored stories" (Marshack's interpretation of what seem to have been heavy rituals); since their primitive speech developed, as did they, diffused, as did their culture, diversified, then diversified again and again, along with human forms of knowing the world; since new names were found to have been given, new meanings tacked onto the old magical words, after animal-followers and sedentary folk lost touch, boomingly multiplied, and at various periods thereafter met again (and not one amongst us today remembers for sure the true origin of, say, the old-fashioned compound *ea-gre*, for a tidal bore); since cultural copying, subjective borrowing, hybridization, syncretization, specialization set in, as well as pride, prejudice, proselytism, parochialism, sectarianism, secularism, scientism, plus, for better or worse, dozens more trendy-isms. Or, to sum up sweepingly as time is short, since a Horned Beast once pregnant with meaning irreversibly turned like the hands of the clock into the keyboard's capital A.

In our time, the Age of the Knowing Keyboard, the Age of Aquarius and the Unicorn, it seems to me that accelerating accretions in specialized terminologies are no real stumbling block: computers and data banks were evidently a necessary external-reference development — as were the first conventionalized graphics and notations to go on tentative record 35,000 years ago, the first formal writing system 5,000 years ago, the first grammar, glossaries, dictionaries, encyclopedic libraries — to cope once more with relief of overstretched memory and overloaded brain circuitry. The questions now arise, where is intelligent literacy headed, and what of the future of circumspection and objectivity?

Currently much-discussed is the topic of intelligent literacy. And since new candidates for future mythinterpretation are at this very moment being shaped by the new trends in literacy, I cannot gloss over this topic with less than a few comments. Scholars increasingly believe that the democratization of "high" language into "low" and, especially, our reliance on the electronic communications media, alongside the ever-popular picture strips (the comics), are leading us into postliteracy. Be that as it may, we are at present at the stage of semi-literacy, and changes in culture, and maybe also in the brain, are once more under way. The bulk of the records for civilization in the year 2000 will be kept by the hustling, bustling industrial world's semi-literate millions. Semi-literate because, as it is, a vast number of scribe-students in industrialized countries like the U.S.A., France and Canada simply cannot write. In Québec alone, 50.2 percent of the 54,870 Francophone students tested in May 1986 wrote "as if they had never studied syntax or grammar" (and I spare you statistics on errors in spelling); conscious of the "written-language crisis", Education Minister Claude Ryan is counting 150 percent on teachers to help him improve language teaching[25].

Meanwhile, teaching centres are busy gearing new programs to new methods as they yield, willy-nilly, to mounting pressure for technoliteracy, now that it is accessible (as is plain literacy) to the public at large. Throughout the month of November 1986, an educational institution bolstered by good repute, credibility and the motto *'fiat voluntas Dei* ran a weekly advertisement in the Montreal press offering an intensive computer-course as an "introduction (to the machine's)... functions and principle [*sic*] software applications"[26]. So caught up are we in the mesh of the moment as to be unconscious of making our own mythistory.

Mind you, the slip — possibly a spellright slip in software application — was corrected the following month in tacit recognition of an accident. The correction, in my opinion, was hardly necessary inasmuch as the context reveals the meaning, and the misprint must have passed unnoticed, I would wager, by the average reader. The principal/principle switch is now so common, even in Québec where you would think folk-bilingualism might open up those shy Anglo-Latin vowels to proper discernment, that the average reader simply is not conscious of it. If it is all right by contemporary majority, then it ceases to be a mistake. And if it is wrong by the purist, then it is not just a spelling mistake. It is the wishful crossbreeding of two, indeed several different-natured species of sound-alike-animals — homophonous beasties, each puffed up with respective capital importance, defiant of alphabetic differentiation and crying out nostalgically, perhaps, for pepped-up mnemonic picture-logos. Visual memory for abstract monochrome is failing the average would-be literate brain. Is this due entirely to the glut of words, or to a variety of reasons, one of them the blinding aftermath of technicolour? And is it noise pollution that is driving canned-incantation addicts to write by ear again? — I reely dunno, tho wright enuf their doz seem to be a growin tendoncy to rite (right?) as we here say. Do the concepts and adjectival connotations remain clear in the mind despite the grammatical errors and misspellings? — Jaynesians might diagnose our computer-course accident as symptomatic of an underlying conceptual-shift process kin to the phenomenon which, twenty-six centuries and as many paragraphs ago, ended up by affecting the Greek *psyche*.

That is as far as I am able or willing to muse upon the causes at the root of general principle behaviour. Forgive me, then, if I pass the buck to the ethnolinguists, the Piagetians, the social scientists and/or the moralizers, while I get on with my specific example's possible snowball effects (and read *a*ffects if you like!)

No, that does not mean I am about to change my tack and now spy on the contemporary horizon any semantic problem in our software being qualified as "principle". On the contrary, I agree wholeheartedly (or is it time I wrote whole*mindedly*?) with Saint

Augustine that it is the meaning that matters, and the meaning in this instance is perfectly clear to the in-group, namely us advertisement-wise readers of the eighties. Montrealers are in an ideal position to appreciate, when the local grocer hands us insiders deux cannes de beans, that le bottom line c'est qu'on s'comprend, regardless of whether le bottom line becomes le *baseline*, as it does with my own sportsfan grocer who trades on this maxim. Once the code is engrammed, we are exquisitely programmed to de-literalize, to rectify unconsciously, to deal sensibly with our own cultural ambiguities. The problem in question lies not with us but with our *deus ex machina*, the computer, since computer intelligence, stupendous though it is, remains until further notice a glorified robot, and a robot has no culture of its own. And that is not all: it is predicted by the R&D specialists that within a decade this robot, as pocket translator for the traveller, will have progressed far beyond its present plume-de-ma-tante capacity. Therefore I am confident that heaps more mythinterpretations are in the offing if, by the will of God (*voluntas Dei*) and for the benefit of even a single batch of aspiring technowordsmiths — hence their future clients — artificial intelligence is allowed to toy in its literal manner with ambiguously programmed principles.

FUTURE CIRCUMSPECTION ABOUT ANCIENT CULTURES

Inevitably, by the time present-day programs for software applications are outmoded, tomorrow's interpreters will be tuned-in to a different wavelength from ours. And it won't be long after that before we have joined the Ancients and the Medieval scribes in the world's historical archives. Should no more than a tiny fraction of our trillions of messages survive, people will try to read us. What will *they* think of us in five hundred, a thousand years hence?

Posterity — assuming that postliterates or E.T. visitors are able to decode our more durable records[27] — will probably meet our idiosyncracies with the same condescending smile we put on for our elders. Time alone will tell whether mythinterpretations of the eighties are to be judged with kindness by future interpreters. Will our gross henaurmities barf them out? At its most polite, their reaction to our culture-specific renderings may echo that of the seventeenth-century gentleman to certain renderings in the bestiaries: "As dutifull children, let us cover the Nakednesse of our Fathers with the Cloke of a favourable Interpretation"[28].

With a difference, I would guess, if there is to be any circumspection, and since language is a part of culture. Because current statistics for the growing strength of the female translator-person suggest that the scribal-goddess Nisaba, after 3,000 years in limbo, is staging her comeback (and now you know why I asked that you bear her in mind!). So chances are that any linguistic covering-up for the Fathers, in whatever future technolingua, will have to provide for a whole lot of *old-woman* Mothers as well.

Notes and References

1. In William H. Prescott's: *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, II.5, and copious references.
2. Rich examples may be culled from Lederer.
3. Ira M. Price: *The Monuments and the Old Testament*, Philadelphia, 1925; quoted by Alexander Heidel in *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago & London, the University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1951: 139 & fn.
4. On the "*dégradation des mythes*" ("The Corruption of Myths"), see Mircea Eliade: *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Paris, Payot, 1964, rev. ed. 1974 & reprints; trans. by Rosemary Sheed as: *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York, New American Library, 1974: § 165; further food for thought is Joseph Campbell's reflection on "... the influence of consciously contrived, counterfeit mythologies and inflections of mythology upon the structure of human belief and the consequent course of civilization", etc. (Campbell: *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, Penguin, 1976 and reprints: 323).
5. For the chronological development and geographical distribution of Flood-survival vessels in southwest Asian mythistory (from round boats through square boxes to a ship 3,200 ft. long!), see Alexander Heidel: *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1946, 2nd ed., 1949; Phoenix, 1963: "The Ark," 232-236.
6. André Leroi-Gourhan's definitions of signs (charts for a total of 126 signs are reproduced in Marshack: 198-199, as in various paleolithic-art publications by Leroi-Gourhan, and others) are balanced by Marshack's thoughtful analyses and Pfeiffer's general conceptual interpretations.
7. C. Couraud: *l'Artazilien: origine / survivance (Gallia Préhistoire, suppl. 20)*, Paris, CNRS, 1985.
8. Marija Gimbutas: *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C. - Myths and Cult Images*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982: 85-87 & figs. 36-44; and refs.
9. Denise Schmandt-Besserat: "The Earliest Precursor of Writing," in *Scientific American*, 238-6, June 1978: 50-59; but cf. I. Marica: "Before Babilla — interpreting Neolithic writing", in *Babel* 34:2, 1988: 65-79.
10. Jack Goody: *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978.
11. Contrary to Lower, Middle and Upper Mesopotamia, the "Two Lands" of Ancient Egypt, and therefore its language, were united very early: however, problems of communication between the disparate regions of Lower and Upper Egypt are sufficiently documented in Pharaonic times for Egyptologist James A. Wilson to write that "just as today, the dialects of these two regions varied enough to cause misunderstanding. An inept writer was chided with the words: 'Thy narratives ... are confused when heard, and there is no interpreter who can unravel them; they are like the speech of a man of the Delta with a man of Elephantine'." (Wilson: "Egypt", pp. 31-121, in Frankfort *et al.*: 73 & n. 20.)
12. Béatrice André-Leickmann, in *Naissance*: "Les Scribes", 324-357; for more detail on this and the scribal arts generally, see Oppenheim: ch. V, "The Scribes."
13. 2334-2193 BC; see D. Collen: *First Impressions*, London, B.M. Publications, 1987:142, 147 & 211, 637.
14. Diana Wolkstein, in Wolkstein and S.N. Kramer: *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth - Her Stories and Hyms from Sumer*, New York, Harper & Row, 1983: 144.
15. *Ibid.*: 139; see also Kramer, in Kramer, ed.: 98-100.
16. See the relevant contributions and massive references conveniently collected in *META*'s thematic issue: *Brain, Language and Translation*, *META*, 29:1, March 1984; also Floyd E. Bloom *et al.*: *Brain, Mind and Behaviour*, New York, W.H. Freeman, 1985: ch. 8.
17. Proverbs 3 and 6 of "Proverbs from Mesopotamia (from Nippur and Ur, c. 2000 B.C.)," trans. by Edmond I. Gordon, in James B. Pritchard, ed.: *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. I: *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1958; reprint 1973: 245.
18. Diana Wolkstein, in Wolkstein and Kramer (*op. cit.*, n. 14): xvi-xvii.
19. Thorkild Jensen: "Mesopotamia", pp. 125-219 in Frankfort *et al.*: 133.
20. From "The Instruction of Amen-Em-Opet": I.10, trans. by John A. Wilson, in James B. Pritchard, ed.: *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. II: *A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, Princeton and London, Princeton University Press, 1975: 237.
21. Alexander Heidel (*op. cit.*, n. 5): 117 & n. 49: 229.
22. Alfred Métraux: "Le Shamanisme araucan", in *Revista del Instituto de Antropologia*, II-10, Universidad nacional de Tucumán, 1942: 334; cited by Mircea Eliade: *le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, Paris, Payot, 1951; rev. ed. trans. by Willard R. Trask as *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Bollingen Series, 76, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1964, 1972; reprint 1974: 239 & n. 133 (italics original).
23. Jaynes, *inter alia*, bears me out with his statement on the giving of "life nouns" (Jaynes: 133): "The age of nouns for animals coincides with the beginning of drawing animals on the walls of caves or on horn" — these beginnings thus far are archaeologically dated to c. 33,000 (Aurignacian) in Southwest France and Northern Spain, and the drawings abound in c. 16,000 (Magdalenian); the anonymous author of Genesis (O.T.), as we know, has Adam naming the animals somewhere in Eden, shortly after the seventh day; the Yuchi-American version of the event is hazy as regards their Eden's whereabouts and time, but enlightening as to language, caves, name-giving, and general circumstances: "In the beginning all the animals could talk,

and but one language was used. The deer lived in a cave watched over by a keeper and the people were hungry. He selected a deer and killed it. But finally the deer were set free and roved over the entire earth. All animals were set free from man, and names were given to them so that they could be known"; (quoted from the Yuchi "Creation of the Earth," in *Bureau of American Anthropology Bulletin* 88, Washington, D.C. 1929, republished by Leroy H. Appleton in: *American Indian Design & Art Decoration*, New York, Dover Publications, 1971: 43-44).

24. An example sprang to mind as I was checking up on "pagan" pantheons (featuring many powerful goddesses): I invariably catch myself tending to translate *une divinité* as a "god" rather than a deity, and a deity into French as *un dieu* — a tendency that is even more pronounced among prominent and influential contemporary scholars; which illustrates the fact that this, and certain other neuter generics (among them the generic plural, "gods"), are not usually *thought of* in our literate society as neuter, that such mental slant warps the fabrics of translation, and that these, in turn, perpetuate social bias (and revert to Campbell's comment, quoted in n. 4 above).
25. Quoted by Jennifer Robinson, *Gazette*, Quebec Bureau, in column headed: "Half of French students flunked language test," *The Gazette*, Montreal, 10 December 1986: front page.
26. Noticed at the Tuesday breakfast-table, in the Montreal *Gazette*, 4 November 1986: p. E 5; 11 Nov.: D 6; and so on.
27. A sobering thought is that despite the application of computer-aided code-breaking techniques, a number of ancient scripts for important civilizations remain unreadable, or are only very incompletely deciphered, notably: Crete's Early Minoan (linear A); the writing of the Harappan-Moenjodaro Empire (pre-Sanskrit and possibly related to the Dravidian languages); and, not least, the Iberian inscriptions, left over from a script perhaps once spread over the Iberian Peninsula, Sardinia, Corsica, France and the British Isles.
28. Alexander Ross: *Arcana Microcosmi*, London, 1642; quoted by White: 270.

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