doing something and saying something, but also, an entirely new capacity, by not saying something, but thinking something. And look at literature at the beginning of the 12th century, people still, when they don't say something, and yet really say it, they mumble to themselves. By the 13th century, they already are thinkers, you know. Simple people learn to think, that is, to "read" on their own insides something which is written there, without their being able to read and write. These are the things which interest me in the 12th century.

David Cayley
Ivan Illich thinks that these changes in the popular mind actually began as changes in the physical layout of the book, and these changes in the physical book also supported a new type of reading--silent, personal and private. This, in turn, dramatically enhanced the possibilities for individual thought and expression. Marshall McLuhan called print "the technology of individualism", and it began with the portable and accessible manuscript book that now began to appear.

Paul Saenger
In the medieval university, you could bring books to class and read contrary opinions. There was a possibility of questioning, of internal questioning, which was facilitated by this new medium which was so much more easy to control. A second was a dimension of personal piety. In antiquity, prayer was allowed. Silent prayer was as much an exception as silent reading. Prayer was an oral activity. St. Augustine talks about this as an oral activity. He explains that we don't have to do it for God, because God would know, of course, what we said, but we do it for ourselves. And it is this tradition, which stems from pagan antiquity, continues through the early Middle Ages, of oral prayer which is fractured radically by the new private kind of reading. And we find, especially in the parts of Europe where the vernacular was dissimilar to Latin, books of great diversity which were brought into church and which people read while they were listening to the mass. And so, instead of the one mass which everybody understood as it existed at the end of Roman antiquity because they understood Latin, one had a whole variety of personal religious experiences which were taking place during a public oral act which was no longer comprehended except in the way it was explained in these vernacular books, which were particularly intended for silent perusal during the oral celebration of the mass. This is the roots of the kind of personal religion which becomes so apparent in the Reformation. And third, and I think related to this, and it has a great deal of relevance today, is the development of the forbidden, the fascination with the erotic, the book as a stimulant, in the way in which it's become of course a problem in modern society, but which one sees, especially at the end of the Middle Ages, in certain books, strangely, in books of devotion in which the vices are so especially graphically so described as to be the type that one would contemplate in a small book, and were obviously intended to titillate the imagination of the person contemplating and regarding the book in a private dimension, and in certain texts of this type which grew, and which is also a result of this privacy. The germ of pornography was born at the end of the Middle Ages in this private, individual, solitary activity of reading.

David Cayley
As Europe gradually became a literate society, the world became a text to be read and interpreted. Writers of the 11th and 12th centuries spoke for the first time of the Book of Nature. St. Anselm called God a grammarian and thought of creation as obeying grammatical rules. An entirely new concept of nature was appearing.

Brian Stock
The term "nature", "natura", comes from the Latin word to be born, "nascor," and in the ancient world, the commonest understanding of "natura" was something born or the essence of something. Our concept of nature is that of a set of laws, of a realm of physically law-bound activity. You know, nature, or the natural universe runs according to law, we say. And that notion of nature, nature as a self-sustaining set of laws in the world, is an invention of the 12th century.

David Cayley
Brian Stock is a Fellow of the Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. He sees this new idea of nature as just one of many changes taking place in the intellectual landscape of Europe during the 11th and 12th centuries, a period he's studied in a book called Implications of Literacy. Many of these changes are related to a new type of reading, a type of reading which eventually flowers as scholastic philosophy. Its purpose was very different from that of the monk who read for savour, not science.

Brian Stock
The purpose of monastic reading was personal, was a personal spiritual growth and development, that you would read and meditate, pray and contemplate--these were the four divisions, generally, of monastic reading--in order to fulfill ascetic ideals, really. It's almost as if today, I suppose, we went off with a book of poetry and instead of writing an essay about it, we just sat down and meditated about it and thought about it, and thought deeply about it, and even when we put the book down, we continued to recite the words and to think about them and that they would inform our being, so to speak. They would be inside us, they would be living inside us in this way, and the ideal monk was this sort of person. The scholastic had a different view and it's a

much more modern view. His idea was that knowledge was cumulative and that the purpose of study was to accumulate knowledge, facts. So that what you should really do in reading scriptures and the Bible was to codify theological and other ideas so that you could sort them out, talk about them logically in all sorts of ways, and accumulate knowledge. And, of course, the scholastic was to win out. I mean, in terms of the production of scientific knowledge, the scholastic approach was the future, and the church, being the most advanced institution intellectually of its time, saw this and, in fact, became the early sponsor of scholastic learning.

David Cayley
Europe in the 11th century was still a predominantly oral society. But as reading changed its character and the number of readers increased, European society began to be preoccupied with the problem characteristic of written language--the problem of interpretation, of meaning. Spoken language at that time always occurred as part of a face to face physical encounter, and this human context helped to define its meaning. Written language has no context, it must provide its own, and this is part of the reason why the medieval page is often so richly decorated. Written language places speech at a distance from us, and this raises new questions about what language actually is and what words really mean. Do words point to ultimate realities or are they themselves the ultimate reality? This was the kind of question which began to preoccupy scholastic philosophy. In The Implications of Literacy, Brian Stock has examined a whole series of these new problems of interpretation. One of the first concerned the meaning of the Eucharist, the communion meal of bread and wind which lies at the heart of the mass. The question, in its most naive form, was whether the bread and wine were really the body and blood of Christ, and it was debated between two 9th century theologians called Radbertus and Ratramnus.

Brian Stock
Ratramnus of Corbie, I think, having newly read Augustine and possibly some other grammarians, proposed that what happens in the Eucharist is not a physical change, or perhaps not only a physical change, and certainly not a historical change, it's basically a conceptual change in our minds. It's something that happens through language and interpretation, to put it simply. And this, though it seems like a quite innocent thought to us, and perhaps even obvious, struck some figures in this period as being very dangerous. And one of the spokesmen for the other side was a very eminent 9th century theologian, who said that no, in fact, every time the Eucharist ceremony or sacrament is enacted, it's a real enactment. It's physical, it's historical. And so the controversy began there. Now, in the 11th century, when people became much more consciously literate, when cathedral schools were beginning, when we find a whole network of support systems for a literate culture, it was inevitable that this issue should be raised again, but it wasn't raised in quite the same terms as it was in the 9th century. And what I tried to argue was that the two positions on this controversy, which I presented in the 9th century terms, become positions of interpretation, that the position which argues that the appearance of the bread and the wine is historical and physical and is a real change in some sense, is a subject of interpretation, and that the other position which was most forcefully argued by Berengar of Tours, the famous heretic, and an aristocrat of early logical thinking, in fact, is also an interpretive position. So that we have a transformation of what, in fact, could have been thought of in anthropological terms as a ritual, into something which in a reading culture and a writing culture becomes a subject of interpretation.

David Cayley
The existence of texts creates the problem of interpretation. Spoken words have a context, a voice, a look, a situation. Written words have none. The reader must reconstruct their meaning on the evidence of the text alone. The result, says David Olson, is that a distinction comes to be made between a text and its interpretations, between what the writer says and what he means, a distinction which he thinks is peculiar to literate societies. David Olson is the co-director of the McLuhan Program at the University of Toronto and was the main organizer of the Literacy and Orality Conference on which this program is based. He thinks that this distinction between a text and its interpretations eventually leads to the idea of objectivity, the idea that we can separate facts from our thoughts and feelings about those facts, and he thinks that this distinction is fundamental for both the Protestant Reformation and the scientific revolution.

David Olson
In the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, there was a new and different understanding of the relationship between a text and its interpretation. As is well known, Protestantism was built on the notion that a text simply means what it says, and that any other interpretations were fanciful. "Dreams of the imagination" was how Francis Bacon characterized it, and Luther called any interpretations "tradition and dogma", and he said that what a text means is what it says, and all the rest is mischief. Well, that distinction certainly didn't originate with Luther and it wasn't exclusive to Protestantism, of course. It presumably grew out of a rabbinical tradition and it spread through the Catholic world just as quickly as it spread through the Protestant world almost, or pretty well. But the distinction came to be seen as justifiable. You could

actually distinguish what the text actually said from its interpretations, and the interpretations came to be seen as accretions, as additions, as fanciful constructions, mental things. Well, when text came to be seen that way--and I'm not saying that they saw it correctly, I'm just saying that they came to see it that way--they also realized or came to believe that the world could be treated that way. There were some things about the world which really could be observed because they were in the world, just in the same way that Luther said there are some things that you can find in scripture because it's really in the text. Well, and so for Francis Bacon, but not only for Bacon, for a whole host of 17th century scientists--Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke. The charge that they felt that they had was to find out the facts about nature which could be derived from diligent observation. This is an expression of William Harvey's, who discovered circulation of the blood. He said that all that's required for our science is diligent observation, and Francis Bacon said all that we need is the statement of observed facts. Look at nature as if it's a text, find out what's really written there, and exclude all this stuff that had been tied in with science in the past, which he now started to see or take to be mere interpretation. So the difference between astronomy and astrology, for example, was that the astronomers wanted the observed facts, cut off from their interpretations, the interpretations being how the conjunction of the planets might make you happy or depressed, or whatever, and the same between chemistry and alchemy. The distinction came to be made between the observed facts in those sciences and the interpretations of those facts. So the same distinctions which had been made in regard to text, namely the difference between what's given and what's interpreted, came to be applied to nature. Find out what's given, given to observation, and distinguish that from the dreams of the imagination.

David Cayley
The idea that texts had a plain, objective meaning also led to changes in the way they were written. Explicitness became an ideal and the modern prose essay was born.

David Olson
Luther was probably wrong in thinking that scripture was autonomous, and because it's just a collection of oral tradition, there's a vast interpretative tradition lying around about it. But the interesting thing was, if you believe that they're self- interpreting, or should be self-interpreting, you can invent a form of prose which is as close to self-interpreting as you can make it, which is to say it starts to be tied into the tradition rather than to be tied into the background knowledge of the reader. So that it's the case that books, if they're written now, all academic books, but even popular books, are written itondicate their place in the literature, as we say, not their place in the relationship between the author and reader. But the implications of this in the 17th century was that when they believed the texts should be self-interpreting, they started to write texts which were quite close to self-interpreting, and they adopted, the Royal Society of London in 1666, in their charter claimed, they adopted a mathematical plainness of style. They just said what they meant, and they said that in the minutes of their meetings, there was to be no amplifications, or digressions, or fanciful expressions. They were simply to tell the truth, and tell it in a factual, direct way so that anyone reading it would come up with the same meaning or the same interpretation. By interpretation there, they didn't mean fanciful interpretation, they meant just getting the meaning out of it. And I think that's really the decisive factor in contemporary prose, that namely there's still an attempt, and we judge writers to be successful or failures on the basis of their ability to achieve something resembling an autonomous text, something which could be picked up by a reader, if he didn't have the background knowledge, it would tell him where the background was. So the modern book might say this follows the argument of McLuhan, or I'm building now on the arguments of McLuhan, and if you don't know what they are, there's a book mentioned, and you will read that book. They never become completely autonomous, of course, but our textual tradition is very much in the tradition of the 17th century, namely make texts, write them in such a way that they don't depend on any private experience or on any mystical interpretations. They can just be read, and if you know the language, and if you know the backgrounds that are stated there, you'll come up with the same meaning or interpretation that the author had.

David Cayley
Writing creates a new kind of reality and raises vexing questions about the status of that reality. Today, we take it for granted that authors will create fictional characters and that we'll laugh and cry over them as though they were perfectly real. In the Middle Ages, it was not so. The first writer in English to call himself an "author" was Geoffrey Chaucer, who lived in the second half of the 14th century. Before he wrote, poetry was oral, and the poets were bards or scops, who stitched together tales and legends which belonged to the whole culture. Chaucer made the Canterbury Tales up, and in doing so, he challenged the very idea of what an author was.

Barry Sanders
He has to take on God, and the reason he has to do that is that there is only one author in the Middle Ages.

David Cayley
Barry Sanders is the co-writer, with Ivan Illich, of ABC: The Alphabetization of the Western Mind. Their book includes an account of how Chaucer became an author.

Barry Sanders
Only God has done all of that creation. I mean, he already did his fiction, and that was Adam, you know, with his finger... Fingere fiction, he touches Adam with his index finger. Medieval poets disclaimed the notion that they sucked any stories from their fingers. They say that this has not been--the preface to a story will say, "this has not been sucked from my finger". But Chaucer is sucking these stories wholesale from his finger, and he's weaving them, as we say, in the modern period, out of whole cloth. He told this story out of whole cloth. He's making up the texture himself. And so Chaucer, in a sense, has created. Well, that's kind of, as far as I know, divine usurpation.

David Cayley
Sanders thinks that Chaucer gets around this by playing with the situation. He's funny, and his humour makes his fiction transparent. But Chaucer has another problem as well--the expectations of his listeners. The oral poetry they were used to involved the retelling of tales which varied with each telling. The bards who sang these tales were not their authors. They were conservers, not creators, of culture, and they were the servants, not the source, of popular taste. Chaucer was a completely new kind of poet, an author who was producing a written text and who intended to please himself, not his listeners. He shows this by the way that he starts the Canterbury Tales. The first sentence of the poem lasts twelve lines and begins with two interminable subordinate clauses. You have to wait until the twelfth line to find out what the sentence is about, a construction almost impossible to grasp with the ear.

Barry Sanders
So what he does is to not just give to a listening audience one of the most complicated, difficult sorts of grammatical constructions possible, he gives those people two in a row. The first one from lines one through five, and the next from lines six through eleven. And so by the time they get to the twelfth line of the Canterbury Tales, which is the independent clause, "Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages," they've certainly retained only a vague sense of what went on before, or forgotten all of it. Now this is a person who is, this author who is standing there, reciting this poem, and being nasty to them. I mean, it would be as if I were on the radio right now and delivering all of this in the most complicated, high falutin' sentences I can imagine, with complicated grammar and riddled with jargon. There'd be lots of--maybe there already is-- turning of the dial to find someone else to listen to. So you have to ask why is Chaucer doing that. Why is he being so nasty, and not only that, but he delivers it in a different metrical form than they've ever seen before and with a different beat than they've ever seen before. And what he does is to really separate himself out from the rest of these people that he is not giving them a quasi-improvised poem. All that he's doing is reading a text out loud. What he's suggesting to them, if they really want to understand this thing that he's giving them, is that they've got to learn to read. So Chaucer's audience has to become literate if they want to "get" this poem, because at this point, the poem "gets" them. It's hostile.

David Cayley
Fifty years after Chaucer's death, in the German city of Mainz, Johannes Gutenberg printed a Bible with his new invention-- movable types. His printing press considerably amplified the power and the reach of printed texts. Processes of change that had been underway for several centuries were speeded up. The number of books and the number of readers increased dramatically. Derrick De Kerckhove is the co-director, with David Olson, of the McLuhan Program at the University of Toronto. He worked with Marshall McLuhan before McLuhan's death in 1980, and he has continued to refine and develop ideas first put forward twenty-five years ago in the Gutenberg Galaxy. He thinks, for example, that the appearance of perspective in Renaissance painting is a visual bias related directly to the experience of reading print.

Derrick De Kerckhove
Why does perspective appear, both in theory and practice, after the Renaissance or around the Renaissance? Why is it that the medieval mosaic maker or painter represents things juxtaposed, with no sense of basic proportionality? Why is it that somebody on the top of a tower in a medieval illumination looks as big as somebody at the foot of the tower? There is no sense of diminishing size and perspective. There is no sense of relationship between that object and that object in the total field of space. Maybe because he couldn't paint, but that's not a very good explanation. More likely, he couldn't care less, and more likely because the symbolic value of the elements of representation was given a dimension, a physical dimension. Christ on the Last Judgement images that you find on the tympany of the entrances of cathedrals, and not just cathedrals, the old Roman churches as well, is big, is large. He's the largest figure of all, and around are slightly quite a bit smaller saints, and then the evil people, who are tiny, very often. They are not placed in relation to each other, they are placed in relation to the symbolic value of their merit or their inner context. In the Renaissance, this ceases to be the code--the code becomes, people are either closer or farther from the viewer, from the person who's looking at the sculpture or looking at the painting. That is the

analysis of space in sequence and proportionality. Proportion--the proportion of things in relation to each other becomes the principle by which a society is organized. It's a completely different ground from anything the world had known until then. I attribute this appearance of proportionality in the context of the given reality as a consequence of training one's brain by reading and writing our alphabet to use sequential analysis as a prime organizer of information.

David Cayley
Derrick De Kerckhove thinks that this homogeneous visual space of Renaissance painting is an analogue of how we process print, by analyzing linear sequences of letters. Reading reduces sensory experience to a single visual dimension. So when reading begins to dominate our experience of the world, we literally "take leave of our senses".

Derrick De Kerckhove
A lot of our information processing, a lot of our understanding of reality, went to our heads, and stayed there. And we suddenly looked down on all this, saying, what's this here for? kind of thing. Well, of course, we need it, and you have all kinds of philosophical treatises in the 16th and 17th century of how to handle your body. The passions--it was called "the passions", and you have a heavy, hefty literature on the passions, not just from the church, but from your regular philosphers, in England, in France, in Italy, in Spain, all of Western Europe, starting, really, right after the Renaissance, right around the Renaissance. This was the major problem. In other words, once speech had ceased to be understood as something happening between people and as something that was involving all of life, all the oral context, and began to be manipulated in the privacy of one's little cabinet, as when one was writing and reading, such as Montaigne, in his favourite "librairie", oh "la librairie de Montaigne", "ma librairie", this isolation. Then the whole question of the physical manifestation of human communication became problematic. You had to find a way by which you could abstract yourself from human communication. You had to retire to become a thinker. You had to retire from human discourse. This was a real problem, how to interiorize one's experience and become a consciousness.

David Cayley
Typographical man, as McLuhan dubbed him, lives in his head, and to De Kerckhove, this means that he lives vicariously. Readers recreate their own lives as literature.

Derrick De Kerckhove
When you begin to read, and particularly read novels, you begin to see life as conceptual, visual representation of built images, images that you build from yourself, over which you have control, but which didn't really happen and didn't need to really happen for them to have full coherence in your mind. What's absolutely fascinating about the history of novels, what's fascinating about the history of interiority, the interiorization of consciousness, is it's fictional. It is fiction. Fiction is a word that we call our books, but fiction is the way we organize our internal mental processes and take control over them. We fictionalize reality to take power over it. We fictionalize ourselves into experiences that we didn't really have, but experiences that represent what we might have had, or what could stand in lieu of what we really had. We remember, as an author tell us what it's like for the Princess de Cleves to be in love, or Phaedre by Racine, or any of our theatrical heroes La Rochefoucault said, many people would not ever fall in love if they had not read or heard about what it's like to fall in love. It's simply that we begin to learn and accumulate incredible amounts of experience by vicarious experiences which all are interiorized, mentalized and inner controlled. A reader became an interiorizer of experience, and all the sensory references that had to be experienced in life with the body before reading in an oral context became borrowed from memory in a reading context. It is always the memory of experiences of senses that stood in lieu of those experiences themselves. No wonder the body stands in the way. Once the head is separated from the body, as it happens after the Renaissance, the mind says I want it my way, I want it in my own fantasies, and I don't want to have a body standing in the way of my own organization of reality. So that the struggle, the tug of war between mind and body, which took religious forms even in the 17th century, was the major tension between an externality of the human live speech and the interiority of the silent reading process.

David Cayley
It's not remarkable in itself that we should model our love affairs after the Princess de Clèves. All cultures tell stories which shape the lives of their members. But De Kerckhove, I think, is saying something more. He's saying that we build our lives out of fragments of literature as though they were Lego bricks, and it is the resulting abstract mental structures which he thinks are the hallmark of literacy. Derrick De Kerckhove emphasizes the physical aspect of reading, the way in which we actually process strings of letters, and the effect he thinks this has on our sensory experience. Other people you have heard tonight lay more stress on the book as metaphor, or on the way in which a literate culture's cognitive style becomes, as Brian Stock says, "more readerly". But all of the scholars interviewed for tonight's program agree that in some way literacy transformed the European mind. Looking at literacy historically enables us to see it in perspective. It gives us a glimpse of a time before writing and helps us to

locate literacy in the context of other ways of understanding the world. This perspective is something I think we need when we try to assess the role of literacy today. Literacy today will be my subject in the final program of this series, next week at this time. I'll talk about the book in the era of the computer, about the need for a proper balance between written and spoken forms of the language, and about why the worship of texts may be destroying literacy, not preserving it. Please join me then.

Lister Sinclair
Tonight's program was written and presented by David Cayley.

PART III

Lister Sinclair
Good evening. I'm Lister Sinclair and this is ideas on Orality and Literacy.

David Olson
Literacy by itself is nothing without orality. Literate traditions exist and are perpetuated by virtue, not just of having text, but having talk about text. The texts themselves are extensions of oral discourse. Literacy has to be seen in its oral milieu.

Lister Sinclair
Seeing literacy in its oral and its human context is what tonight's program is about. We'll introduce you to an Indian scholar who thinks that the cult of literacy degrades people who can't read or write.

David Patanayak
What I am worried about is that there are 800 million illiterates in this world, and for those 800 million illiterates, there is nobody to speak. We are speaking as though literacy is responsible for everything, for family welfare, for modernization for all kinds of things. But I don't think that is correct. I don't think that is correct.

Lister Sinclair
We'll talk about the different purposes for which literacy can be used.

Suzanne de Castell
Literacy has such a mixed history. On the one hand, literacy has been used as an instrument of control, of suppression, of manipulation, of the instilling of an ideology. And on the other hand, it's been used in this illuminative sense, this way of developing people's rights and their freedoms, and their rationality and their authority, and giving them this kind of dignity. And so it becomes very important in the field of literacy, I think, to be very clear about the purposes with which you're doing a thing.

Lister Sinclair
You'll meet a distinguished classicist who thinks that primary school should bring back elocution lessons and teach reading and writing only in the context of oral performance.

Eric Havelock
Are you going to deprive infants of the power to crawl and insist they walk at once? You learn to walk through crawling. How you introduce reading on top of oralism, you wed the two together. What is going to be read must first be heard.

Lister Sinclair
And finally, we'll consider the effect of the computer on literacy.

Ivan Illich
As in the Middle Ages the book became a socially dominant metaphor for 95 percent of people who were lay and couldn't read or write, so now the computer has become, the text composer has become the socially dominant metaphor by which people actually reduce speech to communication, themselves to a system, their individuality into a moment on the world screen.

Lister Sinclair
Tonight's program, the last of a three-part series, was recorded at a conference held last June at the University of Toronto. It was jointly organized by the McLuhan Program and the Toronto Semiotic Circle, and it brought together many of the most noted scholars in the field of orality and literacy. David Cayley covered the conference for Ideas. He interviewed the participants and based this program on those conversations.

David Cayley
Last fall, Southam News released the results of a major ten- month survey of how well Canadians read. The results were splashed across the front pages of newspapers from coast to coast. Five million of us, the study found, are functionally illiterate, and this includes more than a million and a half people who claim to have graduated from high school. The tone of the newspaper coverage was dramatic, and slightly panicky. It painted a grim picture, confided the "agony of illiteracy", and called for a crusade against it. I read various articles about the survey, but they all seemed to me to have the same problem. It was as if illiteracy were a disease and literacy the cure for it when administered in the correct dosage by certified professionals. There was no sense that reading and writing take place in the context of

human lives and purposes, that people choose to read or not to read, no sense that literacy has disadvantages as well as advantages, no sense that illiteracy might be a positive choice for people who have experienced literacy as a form of oppression. Literacy was treated as an abstract, unquestioned good; illiteracy as an unquestioned evil.

I mention the Southam survey in particular, not because I mean to pick on it, but because I think its approach is typical. It treats literacy as a thing, and it treats it in isolation. But literacy isn't a thing, it's a relationship, and it's not isolated, it always occurs in context. For example, in the 1840s, a Methodist missionary invented a script for the previously unwritten language of the Cree Indians. This writing system spread through the Cree population very rapidly. There were no teachers, no schools, no pens nor paper. They wrote with charcoal on birchbark. But writing served their purposes. It kept a dispersed hunting and trapping community in touch. And so the Cree achieved almost universal literacy in a very short time. The point of the story, I think, is that reading is easy when people use it for purposes that come from themselves. In other words, the meaning of literacy depends on its social context, and this context will determine whether it succeeds or whether it fails. It is only in this light that we can make sense of illiteracy in our own society, otherwise it will remain an abstract and incomprehensible problem over which we will continue to wring our hands in vain. How did more than a million and a half people manage to graduate from high school without learning to read? Putting literacy in context means understanding it critically. It means that we must see literacy not as the solution all other problems, but as the problem itself. What is it? What effect does it have on us?

David Olson co-directs the McLuhan Program at the University of Toronto and he was the main organizer of the Orality and Literacy Conference. He credits two scholars who both taught at the University of Toronto with introducing this new, critical orientation--Harold Adams Innis and Marshal McLuhan. Before they wrote, he says, the benefits of literacy were unquestioned.

David Olson
An interest in literacy, of course, is very old. Part of the Enlightenment was a concern with literacy and the importance of literacy to modernity and to civilization, and so on. But in the 18th and 19th century, the discussions about literacy were always directly connected with discussions of development and prosperity and employment and health and democracy, and so on, so that literacy was seen as a critical part of any modern social institutions. So literacy was just thought of as a good, something that everybody should strive for, and if everybody achieved, would produce utopia. Now that assumption persisted right into the 20th century and I think first started to fall to the assaults of people like McLuhan and Innis, who, while not deprecating literacy, pointed out how much could be done through orality. In other words, the thing that made literacy seem interesting again in the 20th century was the recognition that the most important aspects of social organization and thought are tied to speech, not to writing. Now that's not to say that writing isn't important, but they started to recognize that writing wasn't just a good, but was a bias, as Harold Innis would have said and Marshall McLuhan would say, too. So the question then was what kind of a bias is it, what does it help us do, what does it make it difficult for us to do, and to see orality then in a new light.

David Cayley
Let me ask what was Innis's specific contribution here.

David Olson
His view was that changes in the forms of communication altered forms of social organization, and if you say that quickly, it seems obviously true. In other words, you can organize the stock market, for example, if you have telecommuications, but it's very hard to have the stock market or bid on futures, for example, if you don't have modern means of communication. What McLuhan's contribution was, was to look at the psychological side more than the social side and say not only were social institutions changing under the use or impact of literacy, but so was people's thinking about the world and about themselves. So that they became much more conscious of their own thoughts, much more subjective in their perceptions of the world, much more acknowledgement of the subjectivity of perception and thought.

David Cayley
David Olson has been one of a group of scholars who have followed up on the work begun by Innis and McLuhan. He thinks now that we need, in his phrase, "to decentre literacy," see it as a useful but limited and specialized form of language and see it always in its oral context.

David Olson
Literacy by itself is nothing without orality. Literate traditions exist and are perpetuated by virtue not just of having text, but having talk about text. Oral discourse about written text. The texts themselves are extensions of oral discourse. Literacy has to be seen in its oral milieu. Reading without talk is absolutely nothing. You have to see the relations between those two things The implication of this for education, for example, is that it's just mischievous to put all of your resources into making children literate. You have to allow them occasions to use their oral resources and let them be

orally competent. Children's resource for thinking is primarily their speech, and their competence with their speech has to be recognized and appreciated. It must never be overridden or monopolized by writing. I'll give you a simple example. Children who are called dyslexic in our culture, children who can't read, schools often assume that what they must do at all costs is teach the child to read, so that the child might get three or four hours a day of practice at reading. Well, that's an inappropriate use of resources. Reading isn't that important. Reading should never be given more than an hour a day or something like that. It's much more important to let the child engage in oral discourse. Let him listen to tapes, let him listen to Ideas, let him watch video and let him talk to others. Let him express himself in any way that he finds he can use to lay out his Ideas. That's not to say that I would devalue literacy, either. I would decentre from literacy, realize literacy in its context, but I wouldn't deprecate literacy. Literacy is the competence to deal in a culture where the primary social and intellectual resources are coded in printed forms. So I am all for high levels of literacy, I'm just not for subordinating orality to that literacy. Orality is absolutely the core of all human competence.

David Cayley
David Olson's idea of decentring literacy has broad implications in the field of literacy promotion. At the moment, we define everything in terms of literacy, so non-readers are "illiterates", defined by what they lack. Identifying orality as the core of human competence might lead to a different evaluation. David Patanayak is the director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore, India. He thinks that so long as literacy is seen as entirely good and illiteracy as entirely bad, literacy campaigns will only serve to stereotype more than half the population, in India's case, as second class citizens. Literacy and orality, he says, must be seen as interrelated.

David Patanayak
What I am worried about is that there are 800 million illiterates in this world, and for those 800 million illiterates, there is nobodoy to speak. We are speaking as though literacy is responsible for everything, for family welfare...or modernization for all kinds of things. But I don't think that is correct. I don't think that is correct. The whole question is that there are illiterates and there are literates, and we should be looking for interaction among the illiterates and the literates, rather than trying to prove the superiority of one over the other.

David Cayley
Is the assumption that literacy is somehow related to economic development and general social improvement true?

David Patanayak
You see, there is a fellow called Shankar who has pointed out that there is no relationship between literacy and improved agricultural techniques. He made a study. Stubbs has pointed out that there is no relationship between modernization and literacy. The whole question is, we are eager to relate everything to literacy, and it is quite clear that they are not relatable directly. Moreover, you see there are all kinds of communities in the world, the Cree community for example, the Cree people, who have a writing system but have no texts other than the Bible. They are literate, but they don't create any texts in their language. So it is extremely difficult under those circumstances to generalize and say that literacy is responsible for modernization. Now, literacy has a role to play. So has illiteracy. Because the 800 million people...to say that they have no contribution to the development of the world is absolutely ridiculous. Therefore my plea would be to see the interaction among the literates and illiterates, rather than establish the superiority of one over the other.

David Cayley
In order to have this interaction, would we have to change the way literacy promotion is taking place now?

David Patanayak
I personally am very unhappy about the way literacy promotion work is going about. In some places, it is seen to be merely reading and writing, just merely force people to recognize characters, to read and write, without bothering about the...social content of literacy. There are other places where the emphasis is on testing. We test, go on giving batteries of tests to find out what they have achieved, what they have not achieved. Both of them seem to me to be inadequate processes. Literacy without social concern is meaningless, so we must think of literacy in terms of larger perspectives rather than merely either testing or merely reading, recognizing letters.

Suzanne de Castell
Orality is organically connected to human beings in a way that literacy is only mediately connected, and I think one of the reasons for looking to orality as a kind of a check to keep literacy under control is because it does therefore force us to reembed the study of literacy in the context of human lives and human purposes.

David Cayley
Suzanne de Castell of the Education Faculty of Simon Fraser University. Like David Patanayak, she thinks that literacy must be seen as more than just recognizing letters. It must grow out of people's purposes. But for this to happen, literacy must be chosen rather than

imposed. She thinks that contemporary trends in education may work against this possibility.

Suzanne de Castell
It's very unfortunate that the technical dimensions of education are really pushing out these other kinds of sort of more embedded human abilities that people have. And teachers are increasingly coming to believe, being obliged to believe, being encouraged to believe that there are certain skills and strategies, certain bits of knowledge that they can use to allow them to educate people better, and I think that that's very mistaken. And increasingly I think that what teachers need to begin with is a very down to earth, heartfelt grasp of human rights, of people's human rights, of their human rights and the human rights of the children or the people that they teach. And so I would say that the social context of literacy instruction is what will shape that and make that either work or not work, and make what it does either good for a person or not good for a person. And in a way, that's parallel to Freire's notion of education always being connected in some way to political action.

David Cayley
Paolo Freire is a Brazilian educator whose approach to literacy was shaped by his work with peasant communities in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America. He insists on the political dimension of literacy because he believes that education is never neutral, it either liberates people or it dominates and oppresses them. One of the forms this domination can take is the textbook, a current interest of Suzanne de Castell's.

Suzanne de Castell
We are doing a book at the moment, that I expect to be out not until this time next year, called Language Authority and Criticism: Readings in the School Textbook, and what we've tried to do is to enlighten teachers, I suppose, about the nature of the text, the dominance of the text. The text is considered to be the curriculum. Most people when they think of a curriculum think of a series of texts. So historically, certainly, since Luther, there has been a standardized text that has constituted the curriculum and that has been central to the notion of schooling. And we're trying to draw teachers' attention to things like the production of texts, the political economy of texts, the materiality of texts. The way that knowledge is structured in order to encode it in textual form often requires a misrepresentation of what that knowledge is when it's in the world. Knowledge is already an abstraction, but what it is we want people to know. And also, we're trying to show them the ways in which, well, a history of texts, the ways in which texts have changed. There is a wonderful book that a lot of people know by Frances Fitzgerald called America Revised. Do you know that? And that's a nice document that we should replicate for Canada, that goes through American history books and shows how American history has been rewritten with each successive generation, and so the facts change, not just the interpretations. And as there's been a sensitivity to racial minorities, suddenly black people are in history books and women are in history books. But because we always have to have a very neutral, conflict-free analysis of, say, in this case, America, the blacks are struggling, but they're not struggling against anything, Fitzgerald points out, which is really funny, I mean, because it's another kind of distortion. It makes people seem quite ridiculous. So the same thing with women. Women have appeared in textbooks via domestic appliances--their husbands, their children and their domestic appliances. And so we want to show how texts will shape and reshape the same knowledge differently.

David Cayley
Textbooks turn knowledge into a thing. They conceal the social process in which knowledge is created and changed. Even books that don't set themselves up as neutral authorities do this to some extent, simply because their form is fixed forever. They're down in black and white. True knowledge is always a dialogue.

Suzanne de Castell
Between two human beings talking, something can be constructed, co-constituted between them, that is first of all greater than either of them would have intended, is more than the words will convey, and in fact is more than either of them would fully comprehend. There's a kind of a third entity created in dialogue, and I think in some way that would be what I would want to regard as knowledge. And when you textualize knowledge, of course, you make it monological. You take away the voices and you take away the dynamism of it and you try to set down one fixed thing that counts as knowledge. So I think dialogue is actually terrifically important in education.

David Cayley
Dialogue is also important because knowledge is never just in a text. It's also in the web of relationships which surround the text and in the purpose which readers bring to their encounter with the text. "If the wrong man uses the right means", says a very old Chinese aphorism, "then the right means works in the wrong way." Suzanne de Castell found another version of the same idea in the writing of the German thinker, Hans Georg Gadamer.

Suzanne de Castell
He takes up that old question about the difference between philosophy and sophistry, and I like Gadamer's answer, which is throughout history, before Plato and

since, philosophy and sophistry have always been indistinguishable. The only thing that differentiates philosphy from sophistry is the intention with which it's carried out. I think this is very important in the literacy field, where literacy has such a mixed history. On the one hand, literacy has been used as an instrument of control, of suppresson, of manipulation, of the instilling of an ideology. And on the other hand, it's been used in this illuminative sense, in this way of developing people's rights and their freedoms, and their rationality and their authority, and giving them this kind of dignity. And so it becomes very important in the field of literacy, I think, as it does in the field of philosophy, to be very clear about the purposes with which you are doing a thing. And no matter how abstract and remote and theoretical your study, it's going to be grounded either in improving conditions for human beings or, however much you might deny it, in a kind of a self-interested, amoral pursuit.

David Cayley
Perhaps this explains why so many people remain illiterate after years of schooling, that when people have a reason, they learn to read, but when reading is pushed at them, without a reason, they resist.

Suzanne de Castell
I am quite sensitive, from the school context, to what happens when people feel oppressed by something. That is to say, they don't internalize it, they resist it. They find ways to make a secondary accommodation to it. One particular kid stands out. He's a kid who was a personal friend in the neighbourhood, and the school had already decided that he could not read or write. He is 15 years old, actually a brilliant artist, and they gave him his books on tape because, of course, he couldn't read. The kid was a voracious reader, absolutely voracious reader. He read enormous amounts of science fiction and all kinds of things, and he was perfectly literate. But I didn't know that until we went away once and he sent this long letter. He wrote this long letter and I thought, well, wait a second, he's not supposed to be able to read. And I came back and realized that he'd been reading for years. He just didn't want to enter into the rituals of degradation which the school is so effective at and I think that that's a very, very common thing. The tragedy is not the kids like him. The tragedy is the kids who have their own ambitions and their own abilities invalidated, even in their own eyes. The kids who resist in the way that he did and make a secondary accommodation and still retain some sort of primary identity, that's great when that can happen. But sometimes kids are devastated by that. I think there's a lot of that about.

Eric Havelock
The natural human being is not a writer or a reader, but a speaker and a listener. This must be as true of us today, of all of us present here, as it was 7,000 years ago. Literacy at any stage of its development is in terms of evolutionary time a mere upstart, and to this day, it is in our spoken communication with each other in which we reveal and operate our biological inheritance.

David Cayley
Eric Havelock, addressing the Orality and Literacy Conference at the University of Toronto. He has another explanation for reading problems in schools. As a young man, Eric Havelock taught classics at the University of Toronto, and then went on to head the classics departments at Harvard and then Yale. In books like Preface to Plato and The Muse Learns to Write, he traced the transformation of ancient Greece from an oral to a literate society. Eric Havelock thinks that we're all born oralists and that we can most successfully become literate in the context of that orality.

Eric Havelock
Primary education should stress more than it does, in my opinion, recitation and performance. Some of what goes on in the kindergarten should be continued throughout primary school, much longer than it is, and with more attention. The trouble is, it costs money, because it takes a lot of skilled teaching to get kids to enact and recite, get up. I found this out when I was teaching Virgil in Harvard to a large class. I got them, one by one, to get up and memorize and recite five lines, so that they could know that it was poetry. I made them memorize. They could induce any passage they wanted to, but they had to memorize the rhythm. Okay? And of course, these were grown people. Well, you can't imagine the time it took, the sheer time, and I can see why teachers skip all that now and why it's cheaper, really, to teach prose than poetry. But I would teach elocution, both prosaic and poetic, to children and insist on it as part of the grade school requirements, right through grade school. I'd impose what I would call rhetorical standards upon the curriculum.

David Cayley
And what do you think the consequences would be if you were a dictator and could decree that this take place?

Eric Havelock
Well, I think that they would then more easily become literate, because I think that if you start to do that and then lead them into reading and writing, especially reading, through what they've already memorized--not new stuff, not creative writing, all that rubbish, but what they've already memorized. I don't care what it is. It could be an address of Lincoln, it could be a poem by Walt Whitman, and so on. Let them learn to write that, learn their alphabets through that, what they've already

elocuted clearly, and above all, you should train their voices. We speak very badly in this country. You should teach them to elocute slowly, but you should also teach them to sing, and, I would say, dance.

David Cayley
Why does training in rhetoric form a better ability to comprehend and to write prose?

Eric Havelock
Because you're living the racial experience. You're reenacting- -let us use a rather loose analogy--are you going to deprive infants of the power to crawl and insist they walk at once? You learn to walk through crawling. That's when you first learn body posture and balance, and so on. How you introduce reading on top of oralism, you wed the two together. What is going to be read must first be heard, not artificially imposed by something that you never heard before.

Jan Swearingen
Well, one issue that interests me greatly is the development or the revival of oral literacy, if you will. Now we're being totally contradictory.

David Cayley
Jan Swearingen teaches at the University of Texas, in Austin. Her special study is classical rhetoric, and she is an enthusiastic admirer of Eric Havelock's views on education.

Jan Swearingen
Orally based schooling that would train the ear and that would train the ability to listen and to analyze on your feet, in the way that we do when we discuss things, and if that could be reinstated or put firmly in place at the centre of the curriculum, I think many good things could result from it, and that it would ultimately improve the written literacy of people later on, as Havelock proposed. I think it's very significant that all these great Roman orators, like Cicero, who still remains an exemplar of both oratory and prose style, were trained to compose and deliver those wonderful pieces orally. They were not writers, they were orators. We read Cicero's works, but we forget that it was, most of it, in large part delivered orally. As well as we can tell, Plato's Dialogues and other dialogues written in that same genre were not written to be printed and read, they were written in order to be performed, much like a play. So in downtown Athens one night, you and your friends would get together and each person would take one part and read the Meno, or the Phaedo, or whatever, and then discuss it. So if we could begin to see that these genres that we think of in such ironclad terms as written genres were originally thought of in a very different way, just loosen up our own boundaries about genre, about texts, about what you do with texts, and hopefully, I think, we could also begin to get back to the meaning of the texts instead of just their structure and form.

David Cayley
Jan Swearingen thinks that we make too much of texts themselves and too little of the meanings and purposes that they carry. She points to movements in contemporary criticism, whose aim is to penetrate the inner logic of texts rather than their meaning. The extreme example of this is what is now called "deconstruction", with its claim that texts refer to nothing outside themselves. When I asked Jan Swearingen the reason for this obsession with texts, she said she thought there were many and then offered one that I found particularly intriguing. It has to do with the number of philologists and literary scholars assigned to intelligence work during World War II.

Jan Swearingen
They were put to work in both Britain and America as cryptographers, as analysts of codes, so forth and so on, and then they went back into academia in the early '50s and became very caught up with what has loosely come to be called The New Criticism, which is very formalistic. New Criticism, which looks at genres and the surfaces of texts, really, is quite similar to structuralism and deconstructionism, because it's all so focussed on the text as fetish, if you will, as a "thing", the thinginess of it, and it doesn't look beyond it or beneath it to get at things like meaning or cultural value or the ethics represented in a story. In fact, that's regarded as sort of silly, like little fables for children. We're not doing that, we're doing serious stuff. We're looking at the logic of the text or we're looking at the form of the text, and that has come to be regarded as more difficult, more complicated, more intellectually powerful than doing what most people, most of their lives, spend their time thinking about: why they're doing things, what's good and what's bad, and what can we learn from a story. The formalists don't want to ask those questions, they want to count numbers of words and they want to break things down into descriptive pieces, much like scientists. So I think the texts in academic settings has become overly a fetish, and it would be nice to return to the content of the stories.

David Cayley
Jan Swearingen is also concerned with how an exclusive emphasis on texts can devalue spoken language. She fears that standard written forms will dissolve the variety and richness of oral forms.

Jan Swearingen
One group that I'm particularly interested in is women, who have traditionally not been in the high textual academic disciplines of philosophy and logic and so forth, and classics, for that matter, and who have a rich