

# Probe: Trump's Ardent Male MAGA Supporters, and Walter J. Ong's Thought

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## Article abstract

On Tuesday, November 5, 2024, Americans will vote for the next president of the United States. I plan to vote for vice President Kamal Harris to be the next president of the United States. But former president Donald Trump's ardent male MAGA supporters plan to vote for him to be the next president of the United States, because they feel under siege because of certain cultural developments in the United States over the last decade or so. In the present short "Probe," I use the thought of the American Jesuit scholar Walter J. Ong to explain certain psychodynamics about our contemporary secondary oral culture that are contributing to Trump's male MAGA supporters feeling under siege over the last decade or so.

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## Probe: Trump's Ardent Male MAGA Supporters, and Walter J. Ong's Thought

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**Abstract:** On Tuesday, November 5, 2024, Americans will vote for the next president of the United States. I plan to vote for vice President Kamal Harris to be the next president of the United States. But former president Donald Trump's ardent male MAGA supporters plan to vote for him to be the next president of the United States, because they feel under siege because of certain cultural developments in the United States over the last decade or so. In the present short "Probe," I use the thought of the American Jesuit scholar Walter J. Ong to explain certain psychodynamics about our contemporary secondary oral culture that are contributing to Trump's male MAGA supporters feeling under siege over the last decade or so.

My admittedly modest claim to fame is based on my many publications over the years about the work of the famous American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist Walter Jackson Ong, Jr. (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955) of Saint Louis University, the Jesuit university in the City of St. Louis, Missouri – where I took five courses from Father Ong over the years.

My award-winning book *Walter Ong's Contributions to Cultural studies: The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication* (2000) is an introductory survey of Ong's life and eleven of his books and selected articles. My book received the Marshall McLuhan Award for Outstanding Book in Media Ecology, conferred by the Media Ecology Association in June 2001. To spell out the obvious, the expression "media ecology" is formed from the widely known term ecology.

I recently came across what I will refer to here as an example of a media-ecology sensibility in the *Wikipedia* entry on the "Internet":

Most traditional communication media, including telephone, radio, television, paper mail, and newspapers, are reshaped, redefined, or even bypassed by the Internet, giving birth to new services such as email, Internet telephone, Internet television, online music, digital newspapers, and video streaming websites. Newspapers, books, and other [forms of] print publishing have adapted to website technology or have been reshaped into blogging, web feeds, and online instant messaging, Internet forums, and social networking services. Online shopping has grown exponentially for major retailers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs, as it enables firms to extend their 'brick and mortar' presence to serve a larger market or even sell goods and services entirely online. Business-to-business and financial services on the Internet affect supply chains across entire industries.

Please note that the original text in the *Wikipedia* entry shows no superscript numerals in this

paragraph – meaning that none of the sentences in this paragraph are based on a media ecology source. Hence, I refer to this paragraph as expressing a media-ecology sensibility on the part of the anonymous writer.

In any event, I have also discussed Ong's thought about media ecology in my 1991 essay "Secondary Orality and Consciousness Today" in the well-organized anthology *Media, Consciousness, and Culture: Explorations of Walter Ong's Thought*, edited by Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup (pp. 194-209). Ong famously coined the term secondary orality to refer to the orality of communications media that accentuate sound (such as the telephone, radio, television, tape-recorders, and the like), on the one hand, and, on the other, to differentiate our contemporary secondary orality from the ancient and pre-historic primary orality that dominated human existence before the invention of phonetic alphabetic writing systems.

For further discussion of phonetic alphabetic writing systems, see Ong's Chapter 4: "Writing restructures consciousness" in his most widely read, and his most widely translated, 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (pp. 78-116). Ong's first extended discussion of the history of media ecology in our Western cultural history can be found in his massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (for specific pages references to what is now known as media ecology, see the entry on aural-to-visual shift in the "Index" [p. 396]). Peter Ramus (1515-1572) was a French Renaissance logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr.

But also see Ong's discussion of the sensorium in his 1967 seminal book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (for specific page references to the sensorium, see the "Index" [p. 356]), the expanded version of his 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale University.

Now, in my 1991 essay "Secondary Orality and consciousness Today," I take various hints from Ong in my discussion of consciousness today. I draw on the thought of the Freudian psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson's account of the eight stages of psychosexual development, on the one hand, and, on the other, the thought of the Jungian psychoanalyst Erich Neumann's account of the eight stages of consciousness. Briefly, taking a hint from Ong himself, I connect what Ong refers to as secondary orality in our contemporary culture with what the German-born Israeli Jungian psychoanalyst Erich Neumann (1905-1960; Ph.D., 1927; M.D., 1933 – both in Germany) refers to as stage seven in the stages of consciousness.

Now, in Erich Neumann's landmark book *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull (1954; orig. German ed., 1949), he synthesizes C. G. Jung's massive exploratory work – as Jung himself gratefully acknowledges in the "Foreword" (pp. xiii-xiv).

I first heard of Erich Neumann's landmark book from Dr. Raymond Benoit in a graduate course in English that I took for him on Romanticism. Subsequently, I read Neumann's landmark book. I was captivated by it, and I have read it several times over the years. In Ong's book *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (1971, pp. 10-

11), he makes the following statement about Erich Neumann's Jungian account of the stages of consciousness in his landmark book:

The stages of psychic development as treated by Neumann are successively (1) the infantile undifferentiated self-contained whole symbolized by the uroboros (tail-eater), the serpent with its tail in its mouth, as well as be other circular or global mythological figures [including Nietzsche's imagery about the eternal return?], (2) the Great Mother (the impersonal womb from which each human infant, male or female, comes, the impersonal femininity which may swallow him [or her] up again), (3) the separation of the world parents (the principle of opposites, differentiation, possibility of change), (4) the birth of the hero (rise of masculinity and of the personalized ego [yes, Neumann refers to the development of personalized ego-consciousness as masculine – presumably in girls and women also]) with its sequels in (5) the slaying of the mother (fight with the dragon: victory over primal creative but consuming femininity, chthonic forces [as exemplified, for example, in *Beowulf*?]), and (6) the slaying of the father (symbol of thwarting obstruction of individual achievement, [thwarting] what is new), (7) the freeing of the captive (liberation of the ego from endogamous [i.e., “married” within one's psyche] kinship libido and the emergence of the higher femininity, with woman now as person, anima-sister, related positively to ego consciousness), and finally (8) the transformation (new unity in self-conscious individualization, higher masculinity, expressed primordially in the Osiris myth but today entering new phases with heightened individualism [such as Nietzsche's overman?] – or, more properly, personalism – of modern man [sic]).”

Incidentally, Neumann discusses the Great Mother of Stage 2 at length in his other landmark book *The Great Mother*, translated from the German by Ralph Manheim (1955). On the back cover of my paperback edition of this book, Aldous Huxley is quoted as saying of this book in *Esquire* magazine, “For paleolithic man, every day was Mother's Day.

Now, Ong also sums up Neumann's Jungian account of the stages of consciousness in his (Ong's) book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981, pp. 18-19; but also see the “Index” for further references to Neumann [p. 228]), the published version of Ong's 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University:

“In *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1954), still a capital summary work that will serve occasionally in the present study as a point of reference, Erich Neumann has brought together in a generally Jungian framework a good deal of thought touching on struggle as an element in both ontogenetic and phylogenetic psychic development [Erik H. Erikson also highlights struggle when he characterizes each of the eight stage of psychosexual development as having a key crucial struggle involving A versus B]. Neumann's first stage is that of the undifferentiated, self-contained whole symbolized by the uroboros (Greek *ouroboros*, tail eater), the snake with its tail in its mouth, seeking to tuck itself inside itself and thus to eliminate from consciousness all external reality. (The thumb-sucking child, regressing into itself from a threatening external world, is engaged in a similar project.) Except for this initial stages (1), a flight from all

conflict , all of the [other] stages that Neumann discerns in the development of consciousness through human history are more or less agonistic [contest-oriented] in constitution: (2) domination by the Great Mother, (3) separation of the world parents, (4) birth of the hero (rise of masculinity and the personalized ego[-consciousness]), (5) slaying of the mother and (6) of the father, (7) freeing of the captive, and (8) transformation into self-conscious individualism, symbolized primordially in the Osiris myth but today entering into new personalizing phases. Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1963), a corresponding Freudian account of development, mostly ontogenetic, treat adversativeness [agonistic contest-oriented behavior] in human personality developments, especially in connection with trust and mistrust [the psychosocial crises in Erikson's Stage 1] and with American identity (pp. 18-19)."

In the present essay, I am also concerned with American identity over the last decade or so, involving Trump's ardent male MAGA supporters, on the one hand, and, on the other, the liberals and progressives who make Trump's ardent male MAGA supporters feeling under siege.

But I want to make one further observation here. In the famous ancient Homeric epic *The Odyssey*, the goddess Athena, the Greek goddess of war, is portrayed as the benign benefactor and divine patroness of King Odysseus on his ten-year journey back from the Trojan War to his wife and son in Ithaca. For all practical purposes, his wife Penelope has been held captive and is still the captive of her suitors. Consequently, I see *The Odyssey* as an ancient Greek story of the freeing of the captive that Neumann identifies as Stage 7 in the history of individual consciousness.

Yes, I admit that it is extremely counter-intuitive to find the Greek goddess of war portrayed as Odysseus' benign benefactor and patroness. But we need to remember that King Odysseus fought bravely and cleverly in the Trojan War. So perhaps we should interpret the portrayal of Athenea the Greek goddess of war as showing the goddess of war can become the benign benefactor and divine patroness of a seasoned and favored warrior – as a kind of reward for him.

Now, Ong somewhere identifies Odysseus as a trickster figure. The late Jungian psychotherapist and psychological theorist Robert Moore (1942-2016; Ph.D. in religion and psychology, University of Chicago, 1975) of the Chicago Theological Seminary theorizes that The Know-It-All Trickster is a "shadow" form in Boy Psychology of The Precocious Child. The Precocious Child in Boy Psychology is the forerunner and precursor of the masculine Magician/Shaman archetype of maturity in Man Psychology: See Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette's 1990 book titled *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (esp. pp. 16-17).

Now, I have explored other aspects of Robert Moore's bold thought about optimal human psychological development in my 5,313-word deeply personal and candid essay titled "Probe: Robert Moore's Thought on Optimal Human Psychological Development, and Walter J. Ong's Thought" in this issue of *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Consciousness*. It is a

deeply personal and candid essay inasmuch as I use Robert Moore's thought to profile myself in it. Frankly, such honesty and candor about myself in profiling myself in a publication did not come easily to me.

Now, in the German-born American Freudian psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson's account of the eight stages of psychosexual development, he refers to stage eight as Old Age. He sees the crucial crisis of Old Age as involving what he refers to as integrity versus despair.

On my last birthday, I turned 80. Thus, I am now clearly in my Old Age. As to the crucial crisis of Old Age involving integrity versus despair, I feel no despair about my personal life past or present. However, as a concerned American citizen, I have been concerned for more than a decade now with the rise of Trump and his ardent male MAGA supporters. Because Trump and his ardent male MAGA supporters are also American citizens, I feel a sickening sense of despair about them as my fellow American citizens.

For a penetrating discussion of Trump, see the American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Dr. Justin A. Frank's book *Trump on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President* (2018).

Now, in Erikson's 1982 short summative book *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*, he uses variations of the term ecology in the following eight sentences:

(1) Page 21: "Here [in the context of seminars involving psychoanalysts dealing with child patients], instead of a single person's inner 'economic' of drive and defense, an *ecology* of mutual activation within a communal unit such as the family suggested itself as a future subject of study" [italics in Erikson's text].

(2) Page 23: "We also learned to recognize the importance of the style of child training not only for the inner economy of the individual life cycle but also for the ecological balance of a given community under *technological* and *historical* conditions" [italics in Erikson's text].

(3) Page 24: "What, to begin with the beginning, *is* the function of pregenitality, that great distributor of libidinal energy, in the healthy as well as the disturbed ecology of the individual life cycle – and in the cycle of generations?" [italics in Erikson's text].

(4) Page 26: "Freud's own dream reports and case fragments, at any rate, always contain data pointing to such ecological considerations."

(5) Page 31: "Communal institutions can, in principle, be expected to support the developmental potentials of the organ systems, even though, at the same time, they will insist on giving each part function (as well as childhood as a whole) specific connotations which may support cultural norms, communal style, and the dominant world view, and yet may also cause unecological conflict."

(6) Page 53: "Still, it is the task of psychoanalysis to point to the possible dangers of radical changes in psychosexual ecology (as was, in fact, its original mission in the Victorian age), so that their effects may be recognized in clinical work – and beyond."

(7) Page 83: "Can *defense mechanisms*, we asked, be shared and thus assume an *Ecological value* in the lives of interrelated persons and in communal life?" [italics in Erikson's text].

(8) Page 96: "However, the world suggested in the imagery of universal technology and apt to be dramatized by the media can turn into a vision of a totally fabricated order planned

according to strictly logical and technological principles – a vision dangerously oblivious of [to?] what we are emphasizing in these pages; namely, the dystonic and antipathic trends endangering the organismic existence and the communal order on which the ecology of psychic life depends.”

At the very least these eight sentences show that Erikson liked to use variations on the term ecology. Now, I want to take this last variation regarding “the communal order on which the ecology of psychic life depends” and connect it with my observation above about despairing over the last decade or so about my fellow Americans who are attracted to Trump and his MAGA movement.

It remains now for me to relate “the communal order on which the ecology of psychic life depends” to Ong’s account of secondary orality and its deep impact of American consciousness over the last decade or so – and on the consciousness of Trump and his ardent male MAGA supporters.

Secondary orality reached a certain critical mass around 1960. If there was some kind of spike in secondary orality over the last decade or so, I am not aware of that spike. In short, I am not aware of a spike in American culture over the last decade or so in the communications media that accentuate sound.

Consequently, my analysis of Trump’s ardent male MAGA supporters over the last decade or so is predicated on their longstanding cultural conditioning by secondary orality. Yes, it is entirely possible that factors other than secondary orality as such have prompted Trump’s many ardent male MAGA supporters to react as they have over the last decade or so. Ah, but what might those other possible factors be? Generally speaking, Trump’s many ardent male MAGA supporters feel under siege because of certain themes of American liberals and progressives over the last decade or so that have incensed Trump’s many ardent male MAGA supporters. For example, Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Kamala Harris in 2024 have aroused certain misogynistic tendencies in Trump’s ardent male MAGA supporters.

As I was writing the present essay, Trump made headline news by discussing the size of golfer Arnold Palmer’s penis at a public rally in Pennsylvania on October 19, 2024.

But Trump’s many ardent male MAGA supporters feel under siege on the level of personal ego-consciousness is also influenced by the deeper psychological conditioning of secondary orality on their psyches. The impact of secondary orality on their psyches resonates with collective memories of primary orality in the collective unconscious of their psyches.

Now, the Jungian psychoanalyst Edward C. Whitmont refers to the return of the goddess in the human psyche in his book *Return of the Goddess* (1982). I see what Whitmont refers to as the return of the goddess in the human psyche as aligned with the emergence of the critical mass of communications media that accentuate sound around 1960 – and onward.

Now, in our Western cultural history, one of the most widely known portrayals of a goddess in a literary work involves the Greek goddess Athena, the goddess of war, who is portrayed as the benign divine benefactor of King Odysseus during his ten-year journey after the Trojan War back to his wife and son in Ithaca.

The famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst C. G. Jung thought that each man has an anima figure/force in his psyche – a benign figure/force in a man's psyche. Thus, if Whitmont is right about the return of the goddess in the human psyche, then this bodes well for men who want to work out a positive relationship with the anima figure/force in their psyche. But because Trump's ardent male MAGA supporters feel under siege, the MAGA men have not yet worked out a positive relationship with the anima figure/force in their psyches. However, even though I am here celebrating Jung's perceptive conceptualization of the anima in a man's psyche, I do not want to imply here that we should necessarily follow his example of personifying this spiritual force in a man's psyche as a gendered personification – because it will suffice to speak of this spiritual movement in a man's or a woman's psyche simply as a spiritual inclination or force.

Indeed, Ong urges his fellow Jesuits to be attentive to the spiritual currents in their psyches without explicitly adverting to Jung's perceptive conceptualization of the anima in a man's psyche. See Ong's article "'A.M.D.G.' [Ad maiorem Dei gloriam = For the greater glory of God]: Dedication or Directive?" in the now-defunct Jesuit-sponsored journal *Review for Religious* (September 15, 1952).

Ong's 1952 essay is reprinted in volume three of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 1-8). Ong reprises his 1952 essay in his 1986 book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (pp.78-81 and 87), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto. Now, recently I published two *OEN* articles about the beautiful young Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman in the 1970s *Wonder Woman* television series (1976-1979; 59 episodes): (1) "Young Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman" (dated September 3, 2024); (2) "Thomas J. Farrell's Encore on Young Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman" (dated September 30, 2024).

I watched the DVD version of the 1970s *Wonder Woman* television series on the big-screen television in the living room of my home in late August-September 2024. As I watched the beautiful young Lynda Carter (born in 1951) perform in her wonderfully revealing Wonder Woman costume, I became strongly infatuated with her gloriously beautiful body – with her big 37" natural boobs and with her beautiful long legs.

Now, I subsequently interpreted my strong infatuation with the gloriously beautiful body of young Lynda Carter as involving the anima in my psyche (as Jung uses this term). As Jung uses the term anima to refer to a feminine figure in a man's psyche, I see this anima figure as the one optimal and positive form of the feminine Lover archetype in a man's psyche. I highlight the late Jungian psychotherapist and psychological theorist Robert Moore's thought about optimal human psychological development in my deeply personal and candid essay titled "Probe: Robert Moore's Thought on Optimal Human Psychological Development, and Walter J. Ong's Thought," mentioned above.

In any event, I am here in effect setting up the equation: Jung's anima in a man's psyche = the optimal and form of the feminine Lover archetype in a man's psyche.

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