

## Mary Harrington, *Feminism Against Progress* (Regnery, 2023)

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**Review: Mary Harrington, *Feminism Against Progress* (Regnery, 2023).**

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After *Time* magazine named the American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift (born in 1989) Person of the Year 2023, on December 6, 2023, I read the 44-year-old Oxford-educated British author Mary Harrington's short provocatively titled online article "The dark truth about Taylor Swift: Too many young women yearn for annihilation" (dated August 16, 2023), published at the conservative British website UnHerd -- where she is a prolific columnist.

In her 2,000-word article, Harrington argues that the motif of doomed passion in Taylor Swift's songs "has its roots in a thousand-year-old religious schism." Harrington says, "our love-affair with doomed love [of the sort that Taylor Swift sings] begins in early 13th-century France with the two-decade Albigensian Crusade [1209-1229] which saw the Cathar sect persecuted, tortured, slaughtered and scattered by the orthodox Christian Knights Templar, leading to the deaths of an estimated 200,000. Their books were burned. But inasmuch as their beliefs are known, they were seen as heretical for their rejection of the Christian belief that God was made man. Rather, in their view the world was evil, and incarnation imprisoned souls who longed to be free to return to the divine. And, also heretically, in their view this return would be to unity with God, not -- as orthodox Christian believed -- 'communion.'"

In addition, Harrington says, "And the origins of the recurring theme of doomed passion in Western culture, according to the Swiss medievalist Denis de Rougemont [1906-1985], lie in the survival of the Cathar heresy, hidden in plain sight in 'courtly love' [medieval] literature."

See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, revised and augmented edition, including a new postscript, translated by Montgomery Belgion (1983; original work published 1940).

In Harrington's article, she also says, "And because such a longing [of a knight for his 'Lady']

could only be attained by escape from the prison of flesh – which is to say, by death – the love of the knight for his ‘Lady’ could not be consummated, except by the death of one or both. In other words: to convey its esoteric meaning, the narrative [courtly] ‘romance’ couldn’t have a ‘happy ever after.’

“On the contrary, it [the courtly romance] stood for that spiritual pain and longing.”

“Taylor Swift’s genius is her capacity to give catchy tunes to that sweet, painful, multifaceted longing for something higher – even if the price of reunion with the divine must be death.

“On the surface, her work recounts relatable romantic highs and lows. But its 800-year-old undertow implicitly glorifies those who renounce any possibility of happiness in this world, in exchange for the exaltation that comes from seeking something higher – even if the price of reunion with the divine must be death.

“For the young women who thrill to this promise, and don’t even realize that what they crave is not sexual, or romantic, but spiritual, it’s the cruelest imaginable way of both promising and denying relief. But that’s the fault of the age – not of the 21st century’s foremost troubadour, Taylor Swift.”

Now, I should point out here that Pope Francis (born in 1936), the first Jesuit pope, took the name Francis in 2013 to honor the medieval Italian mystic and founder of the Franciscan order, St. Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226), an orthodox Catholic in his time. St. Francis is also known as the troubadour of God. He is known for his “Canticle of Brother Sun.”

Now, I profile the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis in my *OEN* article “Pope Francis on Evil and Satan” (dated March 24, 2019).

But also see Jason Horowitz’s news article “Pope Francis Allows Priests to Bless Same-Sex Couples: A church official said the blessings amounted to ‘a real development’ that nevertheless did not amend ‘the traditional doctrine of the church about marriage’” in the *New*

*York Times* (dated December 18, 2023).

In short, the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis, who likes to scold, preaches and practices mercy. Despite his tendency to scold, the pope cannot be accurately characterized as a cultural warrior – as many conservative American Catholic bishops and priests can be accurately characterized as cultural warriors about legalized abortion.

Pope Francis' penchant for scolding is manifested in his widely read decidedly constructive 2015 eco-encyclical – by far the most widely read papal encyclical ever.

Ah, but will the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis' decision to approve the essentially modest development of church doctrine to allow priests to bless same-sex couples further inflame the already inflamed anti-Francis spirit of certain conservative American Catholics?

Yes, it most likely will.

For a perceptive discussion of the anti-Francis spirit of certain conservative Catholics, see the Italian philosopher and papal biographer Massimo Borghesi's aptly titled 2021 book *Catholic Discordance: Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*, translated by Barry Hudock (orig. Italian ed., 2021).

Now, for a perceptive analysis of St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Brother Sun," see the French Franciscan Eloi Leclerc (1921-2016), *The Canticle of Creatures: Symbols of Union: An Analysis of St. Francis of Assisi*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (1977; orig. French work published 1970).

### **Harrington's Accessible New 2023 Book on Feminism**

In any event, I decided to take a look about Harrington's new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress* (Regnery, the conservative American Catholic publisher; first published in Great Britain in 2023 by Forum, an imprint of Swift Press). Regnery plans to bring out a reasonably

priced paperback edition of her book in March 2024 – in plenty of time for it to figure in the debates about legalized abortion leading up to the American elections in November 2024. In Harrington’s accessible new 2023 book, the Oxford-educated conservative British author critiques legalized abortion, and the conservative American Catholic bishops recently declared that opposition to legalized abortion should be the preeminent priority for American Catholic voters in the November 2024 elections. Because of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, which officially overturned the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* that essentially legalized abortion under specified conditions, legalized abortion will undoubtedly be a hotly contested issue in the November 2024 elections.

See Brian Fraga’s article “US bishops again declare abortion ‘preeminent priority’ for Catholic voters” in the *National Catholic Reporter* (dated November 15, 2023).

For my position on legalized abortion, see my first *OEN* article “Why Obama Should Shun the Pope’s Views on Abortion” (dated October 10, 2009).

For a recent critique of the American Catholic bishops, see the seasoned American Catholic journalist Dr. Peter Steinfels’ article “Do the Bishops Care About Democracy? A troubling omission in the USCCB’s voting guide” in the lay American Catholic magazine *Commonweal* (dated November 30, 2023).

Now, in Harrington’s accessible new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress*, she popularizes the expression reactionary feminism that she used in her June 2021 article “Reactionary Feminism” in the conservative American Catholic journal of religion and public life *First Things*. Wikipedia has an entry about Harrington’s accessible new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress* titled “Reactionary feminism.” It is part of Wikipedia’s extensive series of entries about feminism.

For a cogent psychological account of feminism, see Edward C. Whitmont's book *Return of the Goddess* (1982).

Now, note how the very terminology that Harrington deploys cries out to be operationally defined and explained. What exactly is the supposed Progress Against which the supposed Feminism that she advocates in its place stands for? In addition, what exactly is the supposed Reactionary Feminism that she advocates? Harrington does operationally define and explain her terminology.

The most efficient way for me to provide you with an overview of Harrington's accessible new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress* is to give you the contents of her book:

Part One: "Memes + Material Conditions" (pp. 1-2).

Chapter 1: "Against Progress" (pp. 3-23; "Notes," p. 225).

Chapter 2: "Feminism, Aborted" (pp. 24-51; "Notes," pp. 225-229).

Chapter 3: "Sex and the Market" (pp. 52-71; "Notes," pp. 229-231).

Part Two: "Cyborg Theocracy" (pp. 73-79).

Chapter 4: "War on Relationships" (pp. 81-103; "Notes," pp. 231-234).

Chapter 5: "The Devouring Mother" (pp. 104-132; "Notes," pp. 234-238).

Chapter 6: "Meat Lego Gnosticism" (pp. 133-162; "Notes," pp. 238-244).

Interlude: "Detransition" (pp. 163-173; "Notes," pp. 244-245).

Part Three: "Reactionary Feminism" (pp. 175-176)

Chapter 7: "Abolish Big Romance" (pp. 177-189; "Notes," p. 245).

Chapter 8: "Let Men Be" (pp. 190-206; "Notes," pp. 245-247).

Chapter 9: "Rewilding Sex" (pp. 207-216; "Notes," pp. 247-249).

Afterword: "Ghost Books" (pp. 217-223; "Notes," p. 249).

"Notes" (pp. 225-249).

"Acknowledgments" (p. 250).

Two unpaginated pages preceding the title page contain brief blurbs about Harrington's accessible new 2023 book by Erika Bachiochi, Patrick J. Deneen, Rod Dreher, Paul Embery, Lord Maurice Glasman, Michael Gove, Helen Joyce, Alex Kaschuta, Paul Kingsnorth, Louise Perry, and Kathleen Stock.

Harrington's accessible new 2023 book does not contain an index. In her "Notes," she cites a wide variety of sources, occasionally including certain classic books by well-known authors such as Friedrich Engels. She even refers to a speech by Pope Francis on July 28, 2013 (p. 239n.29).

Now, in Harrington's Chapter 3: "Sex and the Market," she says, "But as the communication theorist Marshall McLuhan put it in 1964, at the dawn of the information age, 'The medium is the message.' That is, in McLuhan's formulation '[T]he personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by any extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.' And the message delivered by the internet of 'online marketplaces' and social media platforms that emerged in my early adulthood is as follows everything is a marketplace, including – those 'moral sentiments' Adam Smith ring-fenced as distinct from the marketplace. Inasmuch as we 'connect' with others, we do so while reserving the right to disconnect again: metaphorically speaking, to log off again or leave the platform if it's not working out for us. The 'marketplace of everything' invites us to be together, at scale, but to do so without obligation: always in perfect individual freedom. And this includes – or perhaps especially concerns – sex and relationship" (pp. 67-68; bracketed item in her text). In this way, Harrington may also be described as a media ecology theorist.

No doubt "The medium is the message" is one of McLuhan's most widely known statements. In Harrington's "Notes" (p. 230), she indicates that she is quoting from McLuhan's 1964 book

*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man: Critical Edition*, edited by W. Terrence Gordon (2003, p. 19).

Now, from the early 1950s onward, Ong the pioneering media ecology theorist worked with the sound/sight contrast. For Ong, the communications media that accentuate sound engender our still emerging secondary oral culture. Inasmuch as the internet features items that feature sound, the internet is also contributing to our still emerging secondary oral culture. However, inasmuch as the internet features items that we apprehend visually, it is thereby also contributing to our visualist orientation – just as the Gutenberg printing press that emerged in the mid-1450s in Europe contributed to our visualist orientation.

Because gender-related issues are central in Harrington's accessible new 2023 book, I should mention here that Ong also explores gender in his 1981 book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality [Gender], and Consciousness*, the published version of his 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University.

Now, in Harrington's last sentence in Chapter 8: "Let Men Be," she says, "A feminism against progress, in other words, is feminism against the Pill" (p. 206).

As is well known, the Roman Catholic Church is not only opposed to legalized abortion, but also to the use of artificial contraception, even by married couples. Consequently, those American Catholic bishops who uphold the church's official teachings should welcome and endorse Harrington's arguments opposing legalized abortion and the Pill.

## **Disclosure**

Disclosure: I retired from teaching at the University of Minnesota Duluth at the end of May 2009. I taught at UMD from 1987 to 2009. Before that, I was in the Jesuits from 1979 to 1987. I provide a certain amount of autobiographical information about myself, including my years of



undergraduate education, in my recent *OEN* article “Thomas J. Farrell on Thomas J. Farrell” (dated November 17, 2023).

Now, Harrington’s accessible new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress* also contains a certain amount of autobiographical information about her life, including her years of growing up and reading Simone de Beauvoir as a teenage and then of being educated at Oxford University and being influenced by Judith Butler, her years as a young woman of experimenting with a lesbian lifestyle and her subsequent years of marriage and motherhood (she has a daughter) and middle-class living in England. I found her account of how her experience of giving birth to her daughter deeply impacted her sense of herself and her life especially moving – poignant. She interweaves the autobiographical information so skillfully in the book that it could not be stripped from the text without requiring the text to be rewritten and perhaps even re-structured. However, her book is clearly not likely to be mistaken for a memoir.

In my *OEN* article “Thomas J. Farrell on Thomas J. Farrell” (dated November 17, 2023), mentioned above, I have recounted certain highlights of my life, including my years of undergraduate education at Jesuit educational institutions in the United States (1962-1966). Despite the various ups and downs of my young life, I did not experience anything like Harrington’s experiment with a lesbian lifestyle nor did I experience any dramatic turn of events in my younger life as dramatic as her experience of motherhood.

In hindsight, I now tend to value my years of undergraduate education in Jesuit institutions of higher education in the United States (1962-1966) more highly than Harrington, in hindsight, now values her years of undergraduate education at Oxford University. On the positive side, she does say, “Also, crucially, though I have some questions about the direction critical theory has taken since my university days, I’m deeply shaped by some of its insights” (p. 13).

Now, because my entire undergraduate education in Roman Catholic institutions in the United States occurred in 1962-1966, I should also note that my undergraduate education overlaps with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in the Roman Catholic Church – which introduced changes such as the introduction of vernacular languages instead of Latin as the language used in Mass, and eliminated the practice of not eating meat on Fridays.

For wide-ranging discussion of Vatican II, see the new 2023 *Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, edited by Catherine E. Clifford of Ottawa University in Canada and Massimo Faggioli of Villanova University in Philadelphia.

Now, as I explain in my *OEN* article “Thomas J. Farrell on Thomas J. Farrell” (2023), mentioned above, I especially value my encounter, starting in fall semester of my junior year at Saint Louis University, the Jesuit university in the City of St. Louis, Missouri, with the American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955). Over the years, I took five courses from Ong.

Ong developed his pioneering media ecology account of our Western cultural history 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 page references to the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in our Western cultural history, see the “Index” [p. 396]). Peter Ramus (1515-1572) was the French Renaissance logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr whose works in logic (most of them in Latin, the lingua franca of the time) were lionized by educators at the fledgling Harvard College (founded in 1636) and at Cambridge University when John Milton (1608-1674) studied there.

Later in Milton’s life, he wrote a textbook in logic (in Latin), based on one of Ramus’ works. Still later in Milton’s life, in 1672, after he had become famous, he published his textbook in logic (in Latin). In 1982, Ong and Charles J. Ermatinger published their English translation of Milton’s

textbook in logic in volume eight of Yale's *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by Maurice Kelley (pp. 139-407) – with an eloquent “Introduction” by Ong (pp. 144-207).

Ong's eloquent “Introduction” is reprinted as “Introduction to Milton's *Logic*” in volume four of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1999, pp. 111-142).

For discussion of Ong's account of the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD*, see my somewhat lengthy *OEN* article “Walter J. Ong's Philosophical Thought” (dated September 20, 2020).

Now, in the English-speaking world, the Canadian Renaissance specialist and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943) was inspired by Ong's massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* to write his own pioneering media ecology account of our Western cultural history in his widely read, and widely translated, 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (for specific page references to Ong's publications about Ramus and Ramism, see the “Bibliographic Index” [pp. 286-287]).

Ong's generous review of McLuhan's 1962 book is reprinted in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2002, pp. 307-308). Ong's lengthy review of *The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943-1962*, edited by Eugene McNamara (1969) is also reprinted in *An Ong Reader* (pp. 69-77).

In any event, both Ong's massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* and McLuhan's 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* are also pioneering books about the print culture that emerged in our Western cultural history after the Gutenberg printing press emerged in Europe in the mid-1450s. No doubt Protestantism also emerged in Western culture as a byproduct of the emerging print culture. However, the emerging print culture also

influenced the Roman Catholic Church.

In any event, in Ong's massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, he devotes Chapter IV to "The Distant Background: Scholasticism and the Quantification of Thought" (pp. 53-91). In it, Ong draws on scholarly studies on the anonymous quantification of thought in late medieval logic – which scholarly studies had been published after McLuhan had completed his 1943 Cambridge University doctoral dissertation on the history of the verbal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic from ancient times down to the English Renaissance in our Western cultural history.

McLuhan's 1943 Cambridge University doctoral dissertation was published posthumously, unrevised but with an editorial apparatus, as the book *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe [1567-1601] in the Learning of His Time*, edited by W. Terrence Gordon (2006).

However, before Ong's massively researched 1958 book was published, he published the article "Space and Intellect in Renaissance Symbolism" in the now-defunct journal *Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communications* [co-edited by Marshall McLuhan and Ted Carpenter] (1954). Subsequently, Ong published it as the re-titled and expanded article "System, Space, and Intellect in Renaissance Symbolism" (1956) – which he subsequently reprinted in his 1962 book *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (pp. 68-87). It is also reprinted in volume three of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 9-27).

In it, Ong says the following: "In this historical perspective, medieval scholastic logic appears as a kind of pre-mathematics, a subtle and unwitting preparation for the large-scale operations in quantitative modes of thinking which will characterize the modern world. In assessing the meaning of [medieval] scholasticism, one must keep in mind an important and astounding fact: in the whole history of the human mind, mathematics and mathematical physics come into their

own, in a way which has changed the face of the earth and promises or threatens to change it even more, at only one place and time, that is, in Western Europe immediately after the [medieval] scholastic experience [in short, in print culture]. Elsewhere, no matter how advanced the culture on other scores, and even along mathematical lines, as in the case of the Babylonian, nothing like a real mathematical transformation of thinking takes place – not among the ancient Egyptians or Assyrians or Greeks or Romans, not among the peoples of India nor the Chinese nor the Japanese, not among the Aztecs or Mayas, not in Islam despite the promising beginnings there, any more than among the Tartars or the Avars or the Turks. These people can all now share the common scientific knowledge, but the scientific tradition itself which they share is not a merging of various parallel discoveries made by their various civilizations. **It represents a new state of mind.** However great contributions other civilizations may hereafter make to the tradition, our scientific world traces its origins back always to seventeenth and sixteenth century Europe [in short, to Copernicus and Galileo], to the place where for some three centuries and more the [medieval] arts course taught in universities and para-university schools had pounded into the heads of youth a study program consisting almost exclusively of a highly quantified logic and a companion physics, both taught on a scale and with an enthusiasm never approximated or even dreamt of in ancient academies” (emphasis added; Ong, 1962, p. 72).

No doubt what Ong refers to here as a new state of mind contributed to the subsequent development of modern science and modern capitalism -- and much else – in our Western cultural history, including certain subsequent developments that Harrington discusses in her accessible new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress*.

Now, by comparison with Ong’s massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* for Renaissance specialists, his 1967 book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and*

*religious History*, the expanded version of his Terry Lectures at Yale University in the spring semester of 1964, is more accessible.

Now, just as McLuhan in his widely read 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* announced that the then-emerging cultural world of electronic communications media somehow superseded print culture, but not necessarily by wiping it out and replacing it, so too Ong in his 1967 book *The Presence of the Word* also announced that the still emerging cultural world engendered by the communications media that accentuate sound somehow superseded print culture, but not necessarily by wiping it out and replacing it. Ong in his 1967 book expressed hope about the still emerging cultural world engendered by the communications media that accentuate sound. Because second-wave feminism emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, we can align it with the still emerging cultural world engendered by the communications media that accentuate sound. However that may be, Ong's work in cultural history was never lionized by English-speaking literary critics as were three books published in French in 1967 by the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and certain other books published in French by the philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984). By the time that Harrington received her undergraduate education at Oxford University, many English-speaking literary critics were thoroughly lionizing the French philosophers Derrida and Foucault. In any event, she does not happen to advert explicitly to McLuhan's widely read 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* or to Ong's 1967 book *The Presence of the Word* – not even when she constructs her own media ecology account of recent developments in our Western cultural history.

In any event, one thing that Ong and McLuhan had in common is that they were both devout Catholics. However, in the 1960 presidential election, anti-Catholic sentiment emerged. Consequently, we may suspect that anti-Catholic sentiment played a role in how many English-speaking literary critics critiqued Ong's work and McLuhan's. However, we should also note that North American Catholics were not quick to embrace Ong's work or McLuhan's.

Now, the distinguished British Protestant literary critic Frank Kermode (1919-2010) critiqued both Ong's work and McLuhan's in his lengthy review of Ong's 1967 book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* titled "Free Fall" in the *New York Review of Books* (dated March 14, 1968, pp. 22-26). It was a hatchet job. Subsequently, Kermode reprinted it as "Father Ong" in his 1971 book *Modern Essays* (pp. 99-107).

Kermode reviewed McLuhan's 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in the February 1963 issue of *Encounter*; it is reprinted as "McLuhan substitutes the printing press for *Genesis* and the dissociation of sensibility for the Fall" in the book *McLuhan Hot & Cool: A Critical Symposium with a Rebuttal*, edited by Gerald Emanuel Stearn (1967, pp. 173-180; for McLuhan's reply, see pp. 296-297). Kermode also reviewed McLuhan's 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* in the August 20, 1964 issue of the *New York Review of Books*. However, Kermode did not reprint either of those reviews of books by McLuhan in his 1971 book *Modern Essays* – perhaps because his re-titled review of Ong's 1967 book, "Father Ong," included not just his hatchet job on Ong but also his hatchet job on McLuhan.

For further discussion of anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States, see Philip Jenkins' book *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (2003); and Mark S. Massa's book *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (2003).

In any event, in the 1970s, Ong published two 350-page scholarly collections with Cornell University Press: (1) *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture*; and (2) *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture*.

In Ong's "Preface" to his 1977 book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (pp. 9-13), he says the following in the first sentence: "The present volume carries forward work in two earlier volumes by the same author, *The Presence of the*

*Word* (1967) and *Rhetoric Romance, and Technology* (1971).” He then discusses these two earlier volumes.

Then Ong says, “The thesis of these two earlier works is sweeping, but it is not reductionist, as reviewers and commentators, so far as I know, have all generously recognized: the works do not maintain that the evolution from primary orality through writing and print to an electronic culture, which produces secondary orality, causes or explain everything in human culture and consciousness. Rather, the thesis is relationist: major developments, and very likely even all major developments, in culture and consciousness are related, often in unexpected intimacy, to the evolution of the word from primary orality to its present state. But the relationships are varied and complex, with cause and effect often difficult to distinguish” (pp. 9-10).

Thus, Ong himself claims (1) that his thesis is “sweeping” but (2) that the shifts do not “cause or explain everything in human culture and consciousness” and (3) that the shifts are related to “major developments, and very likely even all major developments, in culture and consciousness.”

Major cultural developments include the rise of modern science, the rise of modern capitalism, the rise of representative democracy, the rise of the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of the Romantic Movement in philosophy, literature, and the arts.

In short, all of the marketplace and other modern developments that Harrington discusses in her accessible new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress* occurred in what Ong refers to as the print culture that emerged in our Western cultural history after the Gutenberg printing press emerged in the mid-1450s in Europe.

Now, in effect, Ong implicitly works with this thesis in his massively researched book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1958) – his major exploration of the influence of the Gutenberg printing press that emerged in the mid-1450s in Europe.



Next in Ong's "Preface" in his 1977 book, he explains certain lines of investigation that he further develops in *Interfaces of the Word*. Then he says, "At a few points, I refer in passing to the work of French and other European structuralists – variously psychoanalytic, phenomenological, linguistic, or anthropological in cast" (p. 10). Ong liked to characterize his own thought as phenomenological and personalist in cast.

Now, please note just how careful and cagey Ong's wording is when he says that his account of the evolution of certain changes does not "explain everything in human culture and consciousness" – or every cause.

On the one hand, Ong's terminology about primary oral culture (and primary orality, for short; and his earlier terminology about primarily oral culture) is sweeping inasmuch as it refers to all of our pre-historic human ancestors.

On the other hand, his cagey remark about sorting out cause and effect does not automatically rule out the possibility that certain changes somehow contributed to the eventual historical development of writing systems and specifically phonetic alphabetic writing (= literacy) as well as to the historical development of human settlement in agriculture (or agrarian) societies and economies.

Now, in the 1980s, Ong published three accessible 200-page books: (1) *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality [Gender], and Consciousness* (1981)), the published version of his 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University, mentioned above; (2) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Ong's most widely translated and most widely read book; and (3) *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

In the 1990s, Ong published four 300-page scholarly collections titled *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1992a, 1992b, 1995, and 1999).

In 2002, Ong published the accessible introductory-level 600-page collection titled *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup. For a briefly annotated bibliography of Ong's 400 or so distinct publications (not counting translations or reprintings as distinct publications), see Thomas M. Walsh's "Walter J. Ong, S.J.: A Bibliography 1929-2006" in the book *Language, Culture, and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, edited by Sara van den Berg and Thomas M. Walsh (2011, pp. 185-245). In 2000, I published my introductory-level survey of Ong's life and eleven of his books and selected articles titled *Walter Ong's Contributions to Cultural Studies: The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication* (Hampton Press) – winner of the Marshall McLuhan Award for Outstanding Book in the Field of Media Ecology, conferred by the Media Ecology Association in June 2001. (The revised and expanded second edition of my book was published in 2015.)

In 2017, I published online the resource document "A Concise Guide to Five Themes in Walter J. Ong's Thought and Selected Related Works" through the University of Minnesota's digital conservancy.

For further information about my other Ong-related scholarly publications over the years 1974 to 2023, see my recent *OEN* article "Thomas J. Farrell on Thomas J. Farrell" (dated November 17, 2023), mentioned above.

In summation of this disclosure subsection, had Mary Harrington been familiar with Ong's deeper and richer account of our Western cultural history, she could have deepened and enriched her accessible new 2023 book by relating certain historical concerns of hers to Ong's work in Western cultural history.

End of disclosure.

In conclusion, Mary Harrington's new 2023 book *Feminism Against Progress* is accessible, carefully argued, and thought provoking. But your guess is as good as mine as to how it will be

received in the English-speaking world. However, my guess is that it will not be well received by most feminists.

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