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Commentary — From the Margins *From Hand to Heart*

Languages change with time, a statement of accepted fact that's not fully appreciated by language users. Consider the opening lines of the famous (but probably unfamiliar) early English romance, *Havelok the Dane*:

Harknet to me, godemen,
Wiues, maydnes, and alle men,
Of a tale þat ich you wile telle,
Wo-so it wile here and þ-to duelle.
þe tale is of Hauelok imaked;
Wil he was litel, he yede ful naked.
Hauelok was a ful god gome:
He was ful god in eueri trome;
He was þe wicteste man at nede
þat þurte riden on ani stede.

The above passage is written in end rhyme, in rhyming couplets. The language is Middle English, not Old English, and is from eight centuries ago. The passage can be read by modern English speakers if words are pronounced phonetically. A few words will be unfamiliar, but their context should reveal their intended usage. The passage doesn't really need translating if the spelling were regularized, for the language is our own—just as the language of King David was the language of the seventy who, in Alexandria, translated Holy Writ into Greek in the third century BCE.

Time and culture subtract meaning from all texts. Words do not carry around little backpacks of “meaning.” Rather, meaning is assigned to words by the language user that reads the inscribed text. And users removed by centuries, even when linked through the consistent usage of a unifying text such the King James translation of the Bible, will lose meaning. The 17th century usage of “conversation” meant all of one's conduct, and was not limited to a verbal exchange. If a wife is to win her husband by her conversation (1 Pet 3:1), he will be won by her conduct, not by her arguments.

For disciples of Christ Jesus, meaning is assigned to Scripture through hearing the words of the true Shepherd (John 10:3). Hearing comes through the Holy Spirit, through the law of God being written on hearts and minds, through the mind and not through the ear, which hears those things that are physical. The commandments of *YHWH*, circumcised Israel's *Elohim*, uttered from atop Mt. Sinai were heard by the ear, and form the shadow of the spiritual law of the Father that is written on hearts.

Hebraic poetry uses *thought couplets* in structural arrangements that possess complexities similar to how poetry in Indo-European languages use rhyming couplets. Thought couplets will survive translation whereas rhyming does not. Meaning has no hard link to sound, but again, must be assigned to sound. Thought couplets transcend the sounds assigned to convey them. Any

appropriate, condensed use of language will convey the same or very similar meaning; whereas sound in rhyming structures is used to enhance meaning, and as an aid to memorization, but the effect is lost when the structure is translated into another language. Plus, the repetition of sound can seem stilted if that repetition predicts or dictates a word choice. Thus, blank verse now dominates English poetry.

In the above passage from *Havelok the Dane*, the end rhyme is readily apparent. The rhyming pattern of the poetic cycle *At Abby Creek* is a little more complex as the following stanza (the headpiece) indicates:

The hillsides above Abby Creek, clearcut
by Publishers Paper, planted the same
summer with three-year-old firs, came
back in blackberries and choke cherries
anyway. Publishers sprayed the brush, but
didn't kill the alders or the maples;
they killed the magnolia and the apples
in the orchard by the spring. The covered

bridge at Elk City, the one in the movie,
washed out while we were in Alaska—
I went by boat, stood where the Light Brahma
rooster attacked Kori, and saw how silly
we were to clear a garden and plant potatoes
when, above the brush, nothing of us shows.

The rhyming pattern of the octet is /a/b/b/c-c [internal rhyme]/a/d/d/e-e/. The pattern for the sextet is /a/b/b/a/c/c/. And the pattern (in slant rhyme) for the octet holds through the following stanzas, with stanza #1 being an example:

1.

Breeze rustled chittams, foxglove white
pink purple, fireweed, thistles, roses
along the tracks, meadowlarks & sparrows,
yellow tanzy heads, fleece from the curly
ram caught on berry thorns, a kite
tangled in power lines, an Okie Drifter
cast into an alder—a Brown Leghorn rooster,
wings spread, neck stretched, bled

from his beak as he hung beside Mrs. Parks' night
gown. In Elk City, they said Vern January
died as had Vern Young, names that carry
memories of Abby Creek and things right
with us, that era before you shut

our life. We're still married, but

If the romance *Havelok the Dane* had been written five centuries earlier, the rhyme pattern would have been alliterative within the line; i.e., a word in the middle of the line would have begun with the same sound as the last word of the line, or a word in the first half of the line would have begun with the same sound as a word in the last half of the line. Again, Indo-European languages use sound—that which is heard with the ear—to connect the narrative and to amplify meaning. Hebraic poetry uses movement: the thought or idea moves from outside to inside, from the surface of the person to the mind of a person, from the hand to the heart. A classic example, in translation, is Psalm 40:8 — “I desire to do your will, O my God; / your law is within my heart.” *To do* the will of God is outward, and constitutes those things that are done with the hand or body. Those things are done because the law of God is written on the heart in those individuals who please God. The outside now reveals the inside—a tree is known by its fruit. The yearning of the heart (*I desire to do your will*) is because of the law within the heart.

King David, as an accomplished poet, composed through deeper and deeper (i.e., more inward looking) thought couplets. Remaining in Psalm 40, verses six through eight read as follows:

Sacrifice and offering you have not desired,
But you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required
Then I said, “Behold I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
I desire to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”

For comparative purposes, lines one and three of these seven lines or thoughts address the added sacrifices and offerings given to circumcised Israel that foreshadow the reality that is Christ Jesus. These sacrifices and offerings are for the benefit of the physical nation, and not for God’s benefit. These works of the hands are not what God desires or requires.

Lines two and four address first hearing of or about God [from line six], then coming to God through *the scroll of the book* that addresses what is expected from one who has come to God. The movement is from the shedding of blood to the scroll of the book, from what the hand does with a knife to what the hand, inspired by God, does with the pen, from what the nation does [line 1] to what the individual does [line 3], from hearing to coming, then from those things that are outside of the person [line 1-5] to what occurs inside the person [lines 6-7] (i.e., the desires of the heart that has within it the laws of God). The law moves from being inscribed in a scroll of a book to being within the heart. The movement is from physical to spiritual, from what the physically circumcised nation does as national obligation to what the spiritually circumcised individual does by desire.

Instead of a structure of reoccurring sound, some structures convoluted, David writes with structures of thought movement, these movements coupled

together in outside/inside or physical/spiritual arrangements that present the range of complexity of Indo-European language structures. More importantly, the varying structures of these thought couplets that each move from outside to inside—the structures themselves moving couplets from physical to spiritual—present an irrefutable argument for typological exegesis.

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, the drunk priests of Ephraim attempted to teach the way of God using precept-upon-precept exegesis. But they caused a nation to go backwards, fall, and be ensnared in sin (Isa 28:13) as have those Christian fellowships which today cause a spiritual nation to be broken and taken through precept-upon-precept exegesis. The structure of the language, the structure of the poetics, the unsealing of prophecy—all argue for the visible, physical history of the physically circumcised holy nation being the invisible, spiritual history of the spiritually circumcised holy nation. Holy Writ reveals the first and the last, not much of what is in between. What's revealed is the physical shadow of spiritual events, most of which have not yet come to pass. Today, the physical end to this age is being written, and this end will become the shadow of a spiritual end a millennia-plus from now.

Even when a unifying text common to a culture is employed to fix [as in fastening down so no movement is allowed] a language, as long as the language remains the first language of users, the language will continue to drift about as users stylize and streamline word usage. Dr. Johnson (ca 1755) likened preventing a language from drifting to trying to enchain the wind. Only when a language ceases to be the first language of users will drifting stop and the language stabilize. Old English remains essentially as it was when William invaded England in 1066 CE. William wrote court records in Norman French. Not until Henry the 5th did English return as the language of the court and of any scholarship. (The language of the King James' translation is not Old English, but archaic Modern English. Its usage today would be somewhat akin to the Pharisees of the 1st Century BCE using the language of Ezra and Nehemiah.)

Much scholarship remains to be done analyzing what is revealed through the movement of Hebraic poetics within Holy Writ. The direction this scholarship takes and its intensity will depend upon the number of people involved. Today, those who study Hebrew are inevitably physically minded, focusing on the shadow instead of upon the reality, focusing on seeing greater detail in the visible and thus ignoring that an invisible exists.

A person can read the introductory lines of *Havelok the Dane* and take from those lines that when Havelok was little, he went about naked. He was a fully good man, fully good in every company or situation in which he found himself (even from his youth). He was the noblest man in duty or honor that might ride any steed or horse. Havelok's nakedness now suggests that he needed no covering for sin, even from when he was little. And the romance goes on from here.

If the reader did not take the above meaning from those opening lines of *Havelok the Dane*, what meaning did the reader take? What meaning does the reader take from the poetry of King David when meaning is revealed through the movement of thought couplets? *Havelok the Dane* is written in language much

more familiar to us than is the language of King David, for translation of this romance about a noble working for a living is not required. But much of the subtlety in the romance has been culturally lost (such as the significance of a good man being naked). Much of David's meaning was lost by the time of Ezra. This meaning can only be recovered through the Holy Spirit, through walking the same mental terrain as David, a man after God's heart, walked. It cannot be recovered by those scholars who think physically, and pick apart the shadows.

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Verses from *Havelok the Dane* are cited from *The Fantastic Middle English Romances*, ed. By Alice L. Harris.

Stanzas from "At Abby Creek" are from *Upriver, Beyond the Bend*. Available from [Xlibris](#).

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