= Eric A. Havelock =

Eric Alfred Havelock (/ ?hævl?k / ; 3 June 1903 ? 4 April 1988) was a British classicist who spent most of his life in Canada and the United States . He was a professor at the University of Toronto and was active in the Canadian socialist movement during the 1930s . In the 1960s and 1970s , he served as chair of the classics departments at both Harvard and Yale . Although he was trained in the turn @-@ of @-@ the @-@ 20th @-@ century Oxbridge tradition of classical studies , which saw Greek intellectual history as an unbroken chain of related ideas , Havelock broke radically with his own teachers and proposed an entirely new model for understanding the classical world , based on a sharp division between literature of the 6th and 5th centuries BC on the one hand , and that of the 4th on the other .

Much of Havelock 's work was devoted to addressing a single thesis : that all of Western thought is informed by a profound shift in the kinds of ideas available to the human mind at the point that Greek philosophy converted from an oral to a literate form . The idea has been very controversial in classical studies , and has been rejected outright both by many of Havelock 's contemporaries and modern classicists . Havelock and his ideas have nonetheless had far @-@ reaching influence , both in classical studies and other academic areas . He and Walter J. Ong (who was himself strongly influenced by Havelock) essentially founded the field that studies transitions from orality to literacy , and Havelock has been one of the most frequently cited theorists in that field ; as an account of communication , his work profoundly affected the media theories of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan . Havelock 's influence has spread beyond the study of the classical world to that of analogous transitions in other times and places .

= = Education and early academic career = =

Born in London , Havelock grew up in Scotland where he attended Greenock Academy before enrolment at The Leys School in Cambridge at the age of 14 . He studied there with W. H. Balgarnie , a classicist to whom Havelock gives considerable credit . In 1922 , Havelock started at Emmanuel College , Cambridge .

While studying under F. M. Cornford at Cambridge , Havelock began to question the received wisdom about the nature of pre @-@ Socratic philosophy and , in particular , about its relationship with Socratic thought . In The Literate Revolution in Greece , his penultimate book , Havelock recalls being struck by a discrepancy between the language used by the philosophers he was studying and the heavily Platonic idiom with which it was interpreted in the standard texts . It was well known that some of these philosophical texts (Parmenides , Empedocles) were written not only in verse but in the metre of Homer , who had recently been identified (still controversially at the time) by Milman Parry as an oral poet , but Cornford and other scholars of these early philosophers saw the practice as a fairly insignificant convention leftover from Hesiod . Havelock eventually came to the conclusion that the poetic aspects of early philosophy " were matters not of style but of substance , " and that such thinkers as Heraclitus and Empedocles actually have more in common even on an intellectual level with Homer than they do with Plato and Aristotle . However , he did not publicly break from Cornford until many years later .

In 1926 Havelock took his first academic job at Acadia University in Nova Scotia , Canada . He married Ellen Parkinson in 1927 , and moved on to Victoria College at the University of Toronto in 1929 . Havelock 's scholarly work during this period focused on Latin poetry , particularly Catullus , far from the early Greek philosophy he had worked on at Cambridge . While in Canada Havelock became increasingly involved in politics . With his fellow academics Frank Underhill and Eugene Forsey , Havelock was a cofounder of the League for Social Reconstruction , an organisation of politically active socialist intellectuals . He and Underhill were also the most outspoken of a group of dissident faculty members at the University .

Havelock 's political engagement deepened rapidly . In 1931 , after Toronto police had blocked a public meeting by an organisation the police claimed was associated with communists , he and Underhill wrote a public letter of protest , calling the action " short @-@ sighted , inexpedient , and

intolerable . " The letter led to considerable tension between the leadership of the university and the activist professors led by Havelock and Underhill , as well as a sharply critical public reaction . All of the major newspapers in Toronto , along with a number of prominent business leaders , denounced the professors as radical leftists and their behaviour as unbecoming of academics .

Though the League for Social Reconstruction began as more of a discussion group than a political party , it became a force in Canadian politics by the mid @-@ 1930s . After Havelock joined the Co @-@ operative Commonwealth Federation , along with several other members of the League , he was pressured by his superiors at the University to curtail his political activity . He did not , continuing to act as an ally and occasional spokesman for Underhill and other leftist professors . He found himself in trouble again in 1937 after criticising both the government 's and industry 's handling of an automotive workers ' strike . Despite calls from Ontario officials for his ouster , he was able to remain at Victoria College , but his public reputation was badly damaged .

While at Toronto , Havelock began formulating his theory of orality and literacy , establishing the context of a later movement at the University interested in the critical study of communication , which Donald F. Theall has called the " Toronto School of Communications . " Havelock 's work was complemented by that of Harold Innis , who was working on the history of media . The work Havelock and Innis began in the 1930s was the preliminary basis for the influential theories of communication developed by Marshall McLuhan and Edmund Snow Carpenter in the 1950s .

During World War II , Havelock moved away from the socialist organisations he had been associated with , and in 1944 was elected founding president of the Ontario Classical Association . One of the association 's first activities was organising a relief effort for Greece , which had just been liberated from Nazi control . Havelock continued to write about politics , however , and his political and academic work came together in his ideas about education ; he argued for the necessity of an understanding of rhetoric for the resistance to corporate persuasiveness .

= = Toward a new theory of Greek intellectual history = =

At the same time that he was becoming increasingly vocal and visible in politics , Havelock 's scholarly work was moving toward the concerns that would occupy him for the bulk of his career . The first questions he raised about the relationship between literacy and orality in Greece concerned the nature of the historical Socrates , which was a long @-@ debated issue . Havelock 's position , drawn from analyses of Xenophon and Aristophanes as well as Plato himself , was that Plato 's presentation of his teacher was largely a fiction , and intended to be a transparent one , whose purpose was to represent indirectly Plato 's own ideas . He argued vociferously against the idea associated with John Burnet , which still had currency at the time , that the basic model for the theory of forms originated with Socrates . Havelock 's argument drew on evidence for a historical change in Greek philosophy ; Plato , he argued , was fundamentally writing about the ideas of his present , not of the past . Most earlier work in the field had assumed that , since Plato uses Socrates as his mouthpiece , his own philosophical concerns must have been similar to those debated in the Athens of his youth , when Socrates was his teacher . Havelock 's contention that Socrates and Plato belonged to different philosophical eras was the first instance of one that would become central to his work : that a basic shift in the kinds of ideas being discussed by intellectuals , and the methods of discussing them , happened at some point between the end of the fifth century BC and the middle of the fourth .

In 1947 , Havelock moved to Cambridge , Massachusetts , to take a position at Harvard University , where he remained until 1963 . He was active in a number of aspects of the University and of the department , of which he became chair ; he undertook a translation of and commentary on Aeschylus ' Prometheus Bound for the benefit of his students . He published this translation , with an extended commentary on Prometheus and the myth 's implications for history , under the title The Crucifixion of Intellectual Man (and then changed it back to Prometheus when the book was republished in the 1960s , saying that the earlier title had " come to seem a bit pretentious ") . During this time he began his first major attempt to argue for a division between Platonic or Aristotelian philosophy and what came before . His focus was on political philosophy and , in

particular , the beginnings of Greek liberalism as introduced by Democritus . In his book The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics , he argued that for Democritus and the liberals , political theory was based on an understanding of " the behaviour of man in a cosmic and historical setting " : that is , humanity defined as the poets would define it ? measured through its individual actions . Plato and Aristotle were interested in the nature of humanity and , in particular , the idea that human actions might be rooted in inherent qualities rather than consisting of individual choices .

In arguing for a basic heuristic split between Plato and the contemporaries of Democritus , Havelock was directly contradicting a very long tradition in philosophy that had painstakingly assembled innumerable connections between Plato and the pre @-@ Socratics , to reinforce the position that Plato , as his own dialogues imply , was primarily informed by his teacher Socrates , and that Socrates in turn was a willing participant in a philosophical conversation already several hundred years old (again , with a seeming endorsement from Plato , who shows a young Socrates conversing with and learning from the pre @-@ Socratics Parmenides and Zeno in his dialogue the Parmenides ? a historical impossibility that might represent figuratively an intellectual rather than direct conversation) . The book was intriguing to some philosophers but was poorly received among classicists , with one reviewer calling Havelock 's argument for basic difference between Plato and the pre @-@ Socratics " a failure " and his analysis of Plato and Aristotle " distortion . "

= = Preface to Plato = =

The Liberal Temper makes the argument for the division between Plato and early Greek philosophy without a fully realised account of Havelock 's theory of Greek literacy , which he was still developing throughout this period . Rather than attempting once again to explain his distinction between 5th- and 4th @-@ century BC thought in terms of a dissection of the earlier school , Havelock turned , in his 1963 Preface to Plato , to 4th @-@ century BC philosophy itself . He was interested principally in Plato 's much debated rejection of poetry in the Republic , in which his fictionalised Socrates argues that poetic mimesis ? the representation of life in art ? is bad for the soul . Havelock 's claim was that the Republic can be used to understand the position of poetry in the " history of the Greek mind . " The book is divided into two parts , the first an exploration of oral culture (and what Havelock thinks of as oral thought) , and the second an argument for what Havelock calls " The Necessity of Platonism " (the title of Part 2) : the intimate relationship between Platonic thought and the development of literacy . Instead of concentrating on the philosophical definitions of key terms , as he had in his book on Democritus , Havelock turned to the Greek language itself , arguing that the meaning of words changed after the full development of written literature to admit a self @-@ reflective subject ; even pronouns , he said , had different functions . The result was a universal shift in what the Greek mind could imagine :

We confront here a change in the Greek language and in the syntax of linguistic usage and in the overtones of certain key words which is part of a larger intellectual revolution , which affected the whole range of the Greek cultural experience . . . Our present business is to connect this discovery with that crisis in Greek culture which saw the replacement of an orally memorised tradition by a quite different system of instruction and education , and which therefore saw the Homeric state of mind give way to the Platonic .

For Havelock , Plato 's rejection of poetry was merely the realisation of a cultural shift in which he was a participant .

Two distinct phenomena are covered by the shift he observed in Greek culture at the end of the 5th century : the content of thought (in particular the concept of man or of the soul) , and the organisation of thought . In Homer , Havelock argues , the order of ideas is associative and temporal . The epic 's " units of meaning ... are linked associatively to form an episode , but the parts of the episode are greater than the whole . " For Plato , on the other hand , the purpose of thought is to arrive at the significance of the whole , to move from the specific to the general . Havelock points out that Plato 's syntax , which he shares with other 4th @-@ century writers , reflects that organisation , making smaller ideas subordinate to bigger ideas . Thus , the Platonic theory of forms in itself , Havelock claims , derives from a shift in the organisation of the Greek language , and ultimately

comes down to a different function for and conception of the noun .

Preface to Plato had a profound impact almost immediately after publication , but an impact that was complex and inconsistent . The book 's claims refer to the ideas of a number of different fields : the study (then fairly new) of oral literature as well as Greek philosophy and Greek philology ; the book also acknowledges the influence of literary theory , particularly structuralism . The 1960s were a period in which those fields were growing further apart , and the reaction to Preface from each of them was starkly different . Among classicists the response ranged from indifference to derision , with the majority simply questioning the details of Havelock 's history of literacy , pointing both to earlier instances of writing than Havelock thinks possible or to later instances of oral influence . Philosophy , particularly Platonic scholarship , was moving in a different direction at the time , and Havelock neither engages nor was cited by the principal movers in that field . However , the book was embraced by literary theorists , students of the transition to literacy , and others in fields as diverse as psychology and anthropology .

Ultimately , the book 's utility as textual scholarship is limited by Havelock 's methods . His account of orality is based almost entirely on Homer , but the history of the Homeric text is not known , which forces Havelock to make claims based on assumptions that cannot fully be tested . Later classicists argue that the poetic nature of Homer 's language works against the very arguments Havelock makes about the intellectual nature of oral poetry . What he asserts as a definitive use of language can never be conclusively demonstrated not to be an accident of " metrical convenience . " Homerists , like Platonists , found the book to be less than useful for the precise work of their own discipline ; many classicists rejected outright Havelock 's essential thesis that oral culture predominated through the 5th century . At the same time , though , Havelock 's influence , particularly in literary theory , was growing enormously . He is the most cited writer in Walter J. Ong 's influential Orality and Literacy other than Ong himself . His work has been cited in studies of orality and literacy in African culture and the implications of modern literacy theory for library science . Preface to Plato has remained continuously in print since its initial publication .

= = Later years = =

Shortly after publication of Preface to Plato , Havelock accepted a position as chair of the Classics Department at Yale University . He remained in New Haven for eight years , and then taught briefly as Raymond Distinguished Professor of Classics at the State University of New York at Buffalo . He retired in 1973 and moved to Poughkeepsie , New York , where his wife Christine Mitchell , whom he had married in 1962 , taught at Vassar College . He was a productive scholar after his retirement , writing three books as well as numerous essays and talks expanding the arguments of Preface to Plato to a generalised argument about the effect of literacy on Greek thought , literature , culture , society , and law .

Increasingly central to Havelock 's account of Greek culture in general was his conception of the Greek alphabet as a unique entity . He wrote in 1977 :

The invention of the Greek alphabet , as opposed to all previous systems , including the Phoenician , constituted an event in the history of human culture , the importance of which has not as yet been fully grasped . Its appearance divides all pre @-@ Greek civilisations from those that are post @-@ Greek .

But his philological concerns now were only a small part of a much larger project to make sense of the nature of the Greek culture itself . His work in this period shows a theoretical sophistication far beyond his earlier efforts , extending his theory of literacy toward a theory of culture itself . He said of the Dipylon inscription , a poetic line scratched into a vase and the earliest Greek writing known at the time , " Here in this casual act by an unknown hand there is announced a revolution which was destined to change the nature of human culture . " It is this larger point about the differences between oral and literate culture that represents Havelock 's most influential contribution . Walter J. Ong , for example , in assessing the significance of non @-@ oral communication in an oral culture , cites Havelock 's observation that scientific categories , which are necessary not only for the natural sciences but also for historical and philosophical analysis , depend on writing . These ideas were

sketched out in Preface to Plato but became central to Havelock 's work from Prologue to Greek Literacy (1971) onward .

In the latter part of his career , Havelock 's relentless pursuit of his unvarying thesis led to a lack of interest in addressing opposing viewpoints . In a review of Havelock 's The Greek Concept of Justice , a book that attempts to ascribe the most significant ideas in Greek philosophy to his linguistic research , the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre accuses Havelock of a " brusque refusal to recognize the substance of the case he has to defeat . " As a result of this refusal , Havelock seems to have been caught in a conflict of mere contradiction with his opponents , in which without attempt at refutation , he simply asserts repeatedly that philosophy is fundamentally literate in nature , and is countered only with a reminder that , as MacIntyre says , " Socrates wrote no books . "

In his last public lecture , which was published posthumously , Havelock addressed the political implications of his own scholarly work . Delivered at Harvard on 16 March 1988 , less than three weeks before his death , the lecture is framed principally in opposition to the University of Chicago philosopher Leo Strauss . Strauss had published a detailed and extensive critique of Havelock 's The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics in March 1959 , as " The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy " in the journal Review of Metaphysics . (Strauss died 14 years later in 1973 , the same year in which Havelock retired .) Havelock 's 1988 lecture claims to contain a systematic account of Plato 's politics ; Havelock argues that Plato 's idealism applies a mathematical strictness to politics , countering his old teacher Cornford 's assertion that Platonic arguments that morality must be analyzable in arithmetical terms cannot be serious . This way of thinking about politics , Havelock concluded , could not be used as a model for understanding or shaping inherently nonmathematical interactions : " The stuff of human politics is conflict and compromise . "

= = Major works = =

The Lyric Genius of Catullus . Oxford : Blackwell , 1939 .

The Crucifixion of Intellectual Man , Incorporating a Fresh Translation into English Verse of the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus . Boston : Beacon Press , 1950 . Reprinted as Prometheus . Seattle : University of Washington Press , 1968 .

The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics . New Haven : Yale University Press , 1957 .

Preface to Plato . Cambridge : Harvard University Press , 1963 .

Prologue to Greek Literacy . Cincinnati : University of Cincinnati Press , 1971 .

The Greek Concept of Justice : From its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato . Cambridge : Harvard University Press , 1978 .

The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences . Princeton , N.J. : Princeton University Press , 1981 .

The Muse Learns to Write : Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present . New Haven : Yale University Press , 1986 .