The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign

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PART THREE

SELF-TRANSFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

1. *A Sound Instead of Letters*

> A great thing for them was the voice of the Creator, which shouted out over the earth,
> And he taught them a new book, which they did not know.
> As if for children, he wrote a sound instead of letters,
> And he caused them to meditate upon those characters concerning the existence of light.
> Like a line he made straight the expression before their sight,
> And they began crying, "Blessed is the creator who created the light!"
> "Let there be light," cried the voice which possesses no voice,
> And the word issued forth to action without delay.

These verses are from the *memrâ* of Narsai of Nisibis (399–402) entitled "On the Expression, 'In the Beginning' and Concerning the Existence of God,"[1] one of the most powerful statements about language in the Syriac Christian corpus. Narsai, the *rabban* (director) of the school at Edessa that focused on biblical interpretation, evokes in this passage the inherent tension between the semantic and trans-semantic modes of language—language as Creator and created, as sound and symbol, as model and actualization. Here language is the constructive element of the universe, its grammar the order and wonder of cosmic operation. According to Narsai, the creation, already formed by God but hidden as with a cloak, does not fully come into existence until communication between God and the intelligible universe begins. The previous verses of the poem tell us that God has already once exclaimed "Let there be light", to which the angels now respond. Although the world has come into existence by means of God's initial exclamation, He withholds its full actualization until the angelic host achieves awareness. It is only after their acclamation of praise that He once again releases His effectual pronouncement. The created universe is thus an echo, a reduplicated sound which refers to itself, but that sound is a voice that has issued

[1] Trigg 1988, 213–214; Syriac text and French translation in Gignoux 1968, 570–3, ll. 249–56.

from no-voice, from silence, and only derives its full meaning and efficacy from the angelic antiphonal.

According to Narsai, God exits from his silence into this conversation in order to teach his *remzâ*—symbol, sign, mystery, suggestion—to the angels. In the work of Syriac authors of the 5th and 6th century, as Gignoux and Alwan have demonstrated, the *remzâ* also encapsulates the divine power that creates the universe, holds it together, arranges it, and refashions it at the eschaton (i.e., the end of days).[2] The *remzâ* is the ultimate referent but is itself a symbol, transcending linguistic potential; it is an ineffable sign that refers to something that is beyond reference and therefore refers only to itself.

The understanding and effectuality of that *remzâ* in Narsai's poem, however, is related to the angelic praise—the actualization of the *remzâ* awaits the recognition and praise of the angelic host. It is clear from this emphasis on 'praise' that Narsai is here depicting the first heavenly liturgy. Through participation in this liturgical praise the angels become aware of the mysterious sign, the *remzâ*—'more beautiful than the light itself'—as well as of the universe, from the creation to the end, and of their own existence. The impact of this sacred act is not limited to the celestial sphere. As the reflection of the heavenly liturgy, the earthly, ecclesiastical liturgy partakes of this continuing cosmogonic revelation of the *remzâ*, and through communion in this liturgy, its participants likewise share in the knowledge of the ineffable beauty of the creation and of themselves. While God thus imparts His *remzâ* to the angels as a sound that attains actualization through the angelic echo of praise, He teaches his *remzâ* to humanity through scripture, whose fulfillment is attained through the liturgical act. The complete revelation of the *remzâ* transforms both angels and men and, ultimately, the universe itself.

Narsai's cosmogony of the *remzâ* exemplifies the kind of problems with which this volume is concerned. The *remzâ* is close to what we will be calling grammar—a paradigmatic mapping or reality made accessible to the angels as a creative sound functioning as a sign and to human beings as written signs, actualized in the audible, spoken liturgy. One could go much further in exploring this particular Syriac grammar; but in fact sounds and signs are everywhere, in all civilizations, saturated with metaphysical content. They always tend to be organized in 'grammars'—sets of rules regulating the relations and transitions between

[2] Gignoux 1966; Alwan 1988/89.

perception and expression, that is, between primary cultural intuitions and their articulated modes. More generally, such grammars turn sounds into signs and define the range of signification. Each such grammar is itself a poetic enterprise, creating—or more accurately, refashioning—the world it purports to describe.

2. *Grammar as a Privileged Mode*

In many civilizations, grammar, widely defined, is perceived as constituting the core of the cultural, intellectual enterprise as a whole. Probably the most striking example is that of ancient India, where grammar in its several modes evolved very early out of the attempt to preserve and analyze the sacred texts of the Veda. By the middle of the 1st millennium BC, the great grammarian Pāṇini had produced a systematic and generative system of Sanskrit articulated in its own meta-language with explicit hermeneutic procedures and devices for 'reality-checking'. This system was so powerful that it became the paradigm for any scientific investigation in pre-modern India.

For the early Sanskrit grammarians, linguistic science is heavily empirical and pragmatic. Nonetheless, its deeper metaphysical implications were never far from the grammarians' own awareness. Patanjali, the author of the *Mahābhāshya* commentary on Pāṇini's *sutras*, offers a series of justifications and rationales for studying grammar, culminating in the assertion that by studying grammar one becomes like God.[3] Later Sanskrit grammarians claimed that they happened upon god in the midst of the arid materials of morphology as a man might by chance find a diamond buried under a heap of chaff. In short, for classical India, grammar offers privileged access to the primary forces that constitute reality. Such a view imparts a particular power and dignity to the grammarian. Thus for the Tamils in South India, the maverick Vedic sage, Agastya, the author of the first Tamil grammar, is the first culture hero and the creator of civilization.

Similarly in Greece, the grammatical tradition was preoccupied with the nuts and bolts of linguistic analysis and yet served as a springboard for theological speculation. Plutarch, himself a priest at the famous Apollo shrine at Delphi, reveals that in the heart of the sanctuary was

[3] Patanjali 1962.

an inscription with the Greek word *ei*—'you exist' or, maybe, 'if'….[4] The word itself is clearly a trigger to altered perception, its grammatical ambiguity—verb, conditional particle—instigating theosophical ambiguity. Such effects may have been a normative component in oracular speech.

Among Christian theologians, there developed a 'sacred' grammar in which the tools uncovered by their pagan predecessors unlocked the doors to knowledge of the Bible and its Creator. For example, Origen, in the Prologue to his Commentary on the Song of Songs, regards grammar as an absolutely necessary fundament to any intellectual and spiritual progress; grammar permeates all levels of science:

> There are three general disciplines by which one attains knowledge of the universe. The Greeks call them ethics, physics, and enoptics; and we can give them the terms moral, natural, and contemplative. Some among the Greeks, of course, also add logic as a fourth, which we can call reasoning. Others say that it is not a separate discipline, but is intertwined and bound up through the entire body with the three disciplines we have mentioned. For this 'logic,' or as we have said, reasoning, which apparently includes the rules for words and speech, is instruction in proper and improper meanings, general and particular terms, and the inflections of the different sorts of words. For this reason it is suitable that this discipline should not so much be separated from the others as bound in with them and hidden.[5]

While it is true that the object of Origen's discussion is the correct reading and grasping of the biblical text, it is impossible to distinguish his textual world from the physical one, and thus the latter is equally amenable to a grammatical reading. In ninth-century Latin monasteries, grammar was the foundation of the liberal arts, the key to understanding the Bible and reality, and an instrument of salvation. Maurus Rabanus emphasizes the importance of grammar in the preface to his *De clericum insitutione*:

> Know, brethren, what the law requires
> Which fitly commands us to know the Word of God.
> It asks that he who has ears, should hear
> What the Holy Spirit speaks in the Church.
> Through grammar the Psalmist brings this to the people,
> Duly confirming their grasp on the law of God.

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[4] Plutarch 1969.
[5] Origen 1979, 231.

So, brethren, we should strive always,
With eyes and ears intent, to learn the Word of God.[6]

Such statements imply the notion of a universal grammar. It is however striking that often a particular linguistic paradigm retained its primacy even after its transposition to other languages. For example, the Armenian grammatical tradition struggled to resolve the tension inherent in applying Dionysius Thrax's grammar of Greek to the Armenian language. However, the faith in a universal grammar, of which Greek and Armenian were just resonances, ensured that this Greek grammar in Armenian translation remained the standard grammatical text book well into the Middle Ages. Similarly, Sanskrit grammatical categories were projected, despite an inherent lack of suitability, onto medieval grammars of languages such as Tamil and Tibetan.

It would be easy to adduce further examples of the privileged position of grammar in various civilizations. What needs to be stressed is the potential, always latent in the very notion of grammar, for applying this paradigm to contexts that transcend the purely morphological or syntactical study of speech. Grammar is magic. Let us try to explain what a sentence like this might mean.

In a famous article from 1968, Stanley Tambiah proposed a method for making sense of the so-called "magical power of words." Working with Malinowski's Trobriand island materials—the spells and charms used in everyday rituals—Tambiah offers a highly rational, semiotic explanation for the expressivity activated by these ritualized forms of language. The problem here is not so much a purely logical one. To restate a Trobriand spell in terms of a metaphoric or metonymic semantics will not really help us to understand its dynamics. Such spells work. Even a word like metaphor used to explain such contexts seems hopelessly impoverished. In an organic cosmos like that of the Trobriand highlands or, indeed, of most of the cultures discussed in this volume—that is to say, in a cosmos in which everything is interconnected—what we call metaphor is almost always a statement about causality. These rituals are, of course, logical, and this logic can be analytically restated. More than logic, however, their grammar differs from ours. We would do better to ask ourselves what grammar they are using, rather than whether they are logical and rational in senses familiar to us.

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[6] Cited in Colish 1983, 64. On the importance of grammar for ninth-century Latin monasticism, see also Leclercq 1948, 15–22.

Grammar in this sense offers a wider template than discursive logic or emotional and associative experience, both of which have served the historians of culture as readily accessible tools. By way of contrast, grammar, though selective, presents a methodology much more textured and elastic than other conceptual models. It is, for one thing, capable of containing both the semantic and the trans-semantic pieces of reality. It retains the contours of cultural expressivity, and allows for structured transitions among disparate domains. Grammar also accounts for iconic and symbolic effects, in which the intimacy, or indeed identity, between sign and signed or sound and meaning has been preserved. In an organic cosmos, the very existence of accidental effects within language may be precluded. Grammar is thus a privileged mode for perceiving or articulating such non-accidental relations.

It is thus no accident that in culture after culture, grammar turns out to be dependably linked with creation and restoration. Knowledge of grammar allows access to the workings of reality, which the skilled grammarian is capable of using effectively—to bless or to curse, to kill or to heal, to make present or to transform. In this sense, grammar transcends the merely descriptive or referential analysis of linguistic systems. Such systems are perceived as subsets of a far more comprehensive poetics. The world itself is grammar-ed, though not necessarily in transparent ways.

3. *What is Grammar?*

It is one thing to think of God as a grammarian and the Creation as essentially grammatical in its construction and operation, another to use the word grammar as a pragmatic system for describing and generating linguistic practices. Modern linguists in their more circumspect mode tend to operate on the basis of the latter perspective. They are not alone. Classical Greek, Sanskrit, Armenian, and Arabic grammarians, for example, were for the most part driven by empirical, highly analytical, and non-metaphysical concerns. Nonetheless, for these cultures, too, the grammarian may very easily shade off into the philosopher and, in some cases, into the healer/necromancer. Take the Armenian word for grammarian: *kʻertʻoł*, which also means poet and philosopher; in the later grammatical tradition, the healing aspects of grammar are noted by the commentators.[7] The whole history and self-perception of the

[7] See S. La Porta's contribution to this volume as well as Ervine 1995, 158.

Sanskrit grammatical tradition—arguably the world's most elaborate and sophisticated form of pre-modern linguistics—seem to be balanced somewhere between the blessing of divine omniscience [a gift of the god Śiva to the grammarians] and the curse of human forgetfulness. Moreover, from the very heart of the grammatical enterprise there emerged the figure of Bhartṛhari (5th c.), a radical philosopher of the cosmos as a linguistic organism.

Let us be clear. For the purposes of this book, we are using 'grammar' as a heuristic model that enables wide-ranging cross-cultural comparison. We think of the cosmos as grammaticalized—which is to say that all the sub-grammatical domains mentioned earlier are operative and accessible to analytic interpretation. Our usage extends and builds upon the latent linguistic presuppositions that we find in culture after culture. This view regards grammar not as a convention—even if specific intellectual traditions, and most modern linguists, think of language as largely or partly conventional—but as an inherent blue-print for reality, perhaps somewhat abstracted or generalized, but in any case, deeply woven into the fabric of cosmic experience.

Sometimes we see a productive tension between the conventionalist and the naturally iconic understanding of language, with grammar poised somewhat uncomfortably between them. Take the *Cratylus*, for example. Much of Plato's discussion revolves around the question of whether words, and especially names, are inherently or naturally linked to their referents. Throughout the text, Socrates, as usual, undermines the naive and absolutist positions of his interlocutors, Hermogenes and Cratylus, with a no-nonsense skepticism. Still, an understanding of the operation of the basic elements of language as organic and non-random keeps breaking through the surface of the debate, even in Socrates's analysis. Look, for example, at Socrates' deconstruction of Hermogenes' conventionalist position (426d–427a–d):

> Well, the letter rho, as I was saying, appeared to be a fine instrument expressive of motion to the name-giver who wished to immitate rapidity, and he often applies it to motion. In the first place, in the words ῥειν (flow) and ῥοή (current) he imitates their rapidity by this letter, then in τρόμος (trembling), and in τρέχειν (run), and also in such words as κρούειν (strike), θραύειν (break), ἐρείκειν (rend), θρύπτειν (crush), κερματίζειν (crumble), ῥυμβεῖν (whirl), he expresses the action of them all chiefly by means of the letter rho; for he observed, I suppose, that the tongue is least at rest and most agitated in pronouncing this letter, and that is probably the reason why he employed it for these words. Iota again, he employs for everything subtle, which can most readily pass through all things. Therefore he imitates the nature of ἰέναι (go) and ἵεσθαι (hasten) by means of

> iota, just as he imitated all such notions as ψυχρόν (cold, shivering), ζέον (seething), σείεσθαι (shake), and σεισμός (shock) by means of phi, psi, and zeta, because those letters are pronounced with much breath. Whenever he imitates that which resembles blowing, the giver of names always appears to use for the most part such letters. And again he appears to have thought that the compression and pressure of the tongue in the pronunciation of delta and tau was naturally fitted to imitate the notion of binding and rest. And perceiving that the tongue has a gliding movement most in the pronunciation of lambda, he made the words λεῖα (level), ὀλισθάνειν (glide) itself, λιπαρόν (sleek), κολλῶδες (glutinous), and the like to conform to it. Where the gliding of the tongue is stopped by the sound of gamma he reproduced the nature of γλισχρόν (glutinous), γλυκύ (sweet), and γλοιῶδες (gluey). And again perceiving that nu is an internal sound, he made the words ἔνδον (inside) and ἐντός (within), assimilating the meanings to the letters, and alpha again he assigned to greatness, and eta to length, because the letters are large. He needed the sign O for the expression of γόγγυλον (round), and made it the chief element of the word. Thus the legislator seems to have applied all the rest [of the letters], making a sign or names for each existing thing out of [these] letters and syllables; and in like fashion [he seems] then to have formed out of these [names and signs] everything else—by means of these same [letters and syllables]. That is my view, Hermogenes, of the truth of names.[8]

In the conclusion to his list of examples, Socrates says that God or the divine legislator first created the universe, including apparently its linguistic constituents, then produced names that have an intrinsic relation to the phonetic materials which constitute them. The process includes several stages including a final one compounding the coordinated phonetic materials to produce further names and signs and the phenomena construed out of them. Implicit in this view is a strong notion of a grammaticalized universe—mostly iconic, logically and syntactically ordered, and generative. This vision of a linguistically imprinted universe exerts so powerful a fascination that even Socrates, for all his radical skepticism, seems unable to escape it.

A line leads from this point in the direction of a magical or sympathetic pragmatics such as we see in the Greek and Coptic magical papyri (*circa* 2nd c. BC to 2nd c. AD). As Patricia Cox Miller aptly observes, "when juxtaposed with the magical papyri, the *Cratylus* reads like the manual of instructions out of which the authors of those texts worked,

[8] Plato 1977, 145–7 (426D–427D). We have altered the last two sentences of the translation.

patiently dividing language into letters, letters into vowels, and so on."[9] There is an implicit notion of grammar as a systematic mechanics ordering the use of these efficacious materials. The papyri do not offer us a grammar; they presuppose one.

There are still more far reaching possibilities to mention only a few that are germane to the following essays: We have Abulafia's theology of the name as well as Kabbalistic theories of creative sounds and syllables (as in *Sefer Yeẓira*); Bhartṛhari's vision of a buzzing, humming, inherently divine linguistic world underlying and predating words and objects; the Christian apotheosis of grammar in God as Logos; the earlier Biblical insistence that God is a verb ('to be'); and Ibn al-ʿArabī's reading of the cosmos as an evolution from the divine imperative.[10] For all such conceptual models, some notion of grammar, however minimal, provides a necessary condition for the operation of a linguistic cosmos.

Yet if grammar comes to provide an authoritative paradigm for reading the world, we inevitably find voices that reject or rebel against this patterning. There are two skeptical approaches to the inherently linguistic ordering of the cosmos, both of which paradoxically end up reaffirming that very principle. One distrusts language as an accurate medium for truth without denying the latent grammaticality of reality. In such a view, ordinary language is incapable of expressing or containing the true underlying richness of experience. The only hope lies in repackaging and reordering the linguistic materials, sometimes in a trans-semantic mode. As M. Finkelberg says in her essay in this volume, "For Plato as for many others, rather than in language, the true grammar of the universe resided in the all-embracing harmony of music and number that represented the world order as it really is."

A second, more radical and subversive attitude seeks to undermine and dissolve anything that looks like authoritative syntax or semantics. There is a continuing tradition of such voices from the Nag Hammadi codices of Late Antiquity[11] to the Dadaist poets of the twentieth century. W. Bohn remarks in the introduction to his anthology of Dada poetry that "opposing discursive and nondiscursive structures to each other, the Dadaists were among the first to discover that words could be used to convey information that was essentially extralinguistic."[12] Note,

[9] Miller 1989, 492.
[10] See S. Sviri's essay in this volume.
[11] See, e.g., Miller 1989, 481–2.
[12] Bohn 1993, xviii.

however, that this vision, too, ultimately acknowledges and uses the linguistic building blocks that it finds so repulsive.

If even conventionalist and skeptical views cannot avoid conceiving reality grammatically, it is no wonder that grammar serves as a culturally privileged mode for cognitive mapping. As such, it is also a good basis for the cross-cultural comparisons we are attempting here.

IV. *A Typology of Themes*

We have divided this volume into three relatively delimited domains, each of which takes up one major strand of the grammatical paradigm: issues of creation through grammaticalized language, of cultural encoding as poetics, and of meta-linguistic existential transformation. Let us take them one by one.

1. *Creation*

Often we find a strong notion of creativity as an inherently linguistic act. As we saw in Narsai and as we know from other biblical and post-biblical traditions, God creates the world by speech of one kind or another—imperative, dialogic, meditative, mantric. In India, too, language is the creative mode *par excellence*, embodied in the goddess Vāc ('voice'), without whom no cosmos is possible.

Jan Assmann's article uncovers a differential typology of linguistic creativity in ancient Egypt. Creation, whether conceived as an 'intransitive' cosmogony or a 'transitive' intentional act ultimately evolves a mythology which "shows the structure of the divine world to be primarily linguistic." In the Egyptian case, this linguistic blueprint for reality materializes itself in the cosmic grammatology of the hieroglyphic signs. This link between writing and speech or sound is a rich comparative theme in its own right, as we see from M. Kern's essay on Chinese bronze inscriptions in section 2 and in S. La Porta's essay on Armenian theories of Logos and sign in section 3.

Sara Sviri explores the immense ramifications of a single Arabic word (spoken by God), namely, *kun*, 'be'! This Qur'ānic theme exfoliates itself in Sufi theories of creation as a divine linguistic imperative, which the human mystic assimilates and imitates in his own being. As Sviri shows, the creative power of this single word becomes in Ibn al-ʿArabī the key to the insoluble but generative "perplexity between the 'yes' and the 'no'," which lies at the heart of Ibn al-ʿArabī's mystic anthropology.

Michael Stone surveys the various and complex ways Armenian authors view the relationship between naming and creation in connection with Adam's bestowal of names on the creatures. Stone elucidates the intimate link between naming and creation based upon the theology of Adam as the image of God in the Armenian exegetical tradition. According to these authors, the very word for God (**Աստուած** [*Astuac*]) in Armenian is derived (by *Volksetymologie*) from the fact that God led (**աստ ածող** [*ast acoł*]) the animals before Adam to be named. Thus, Adam's God-given ability to bestow names actually produces God's own name in a moment of profound mutual self-reference. As the tradition evolved, this power became associated with the sacerdotal function of naming at the rite of baptism.

Finally, Margalit Finkelberg shows us the inevitable negative to all the above positives that imply an optimistic understanding of the potentiality of language, either for conveying truth or for shaping reality. In her paper, she argues that the classical Greek world was highly suspicious of language, viewing it as a social convention. But here, too, the world remains saturated with eloquent signs requiring interpretation and organized grammatically—in our use of the term.

2. *Encoding*

To postulate grammar as an underlying grid or template allows the possibility of mapping the cultural topography which is often deeply encoded. As we stated earlier, visions of culture as grammaticalized sometimes privileged non-semantic or trans-semantic effects. Language may operate in a highly regular but non-transparent manner. In all such cases, the culture will elaborate a set of rules of interpretation, or protocol of reading—what we would call poetics. In other words, we take poetics as the hermeneutics of a grammaticalized universe. Since each culture encodes its grammar differently, distinctive configurations stand out clearly when we attempt to formulate or formalize such a poetic hermeneutic in a cross-cultural comparison.

In India, for example, poetics is a natural extension of the grammatical sciences whose terminology and hermeneutic procedures it adopts. Y. Bronner reveals the operation of one primary mechanism, the simile, that becomes a building block for the logical analysis of figuration. Poetic language, for these poeticians, operates by a set of logical relations that diverge radically from 'normal' speech. Such operations require decoding and philosophical formulation. In other words, poetics

is the science that maps that level of language—always slightly twisted (*vakrokti*) in comparison with everyday speech—in which the poet's visionary truth embodies itself. Such a grammar of poetic speech is clearly privileged over standard denotative language.

Writing is perhaps one of the most deeply encoded, culturally specific, forms of language; and the Chinese case is unique in this respect. Martin Kern describes the cultural valency of writing during the Western Zhou period (ca. 1200–ca. 1045 BCE) and the formation of an official culture that the bronze inscriptions reflect. In the evolution of court ritual at this time, "writing transcended its principal functions of storing and circulating information" and "visually displayed cultural and social accomplishment."

As is clear from the Chinese example, implicit in the process of encoding and decoding is the question of power: who is authorized to conceal and reveal the message? In her contribution to this volume, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony reveals how the sixth-century Gazan ascetic, Barsanuphius, both deciphered signs and employed coded language to empower and grant authority to his teachings. In addition, Ashkelony argues, the technique of what the ancient redactor of Barsanuphius's writings termed 'counseling through enigmas' created an intimacy between the master and his distant pupils.

Dan Martin offers a rich typology of uses of and attitudes to phonemes and the raw stuff of Sanskrit and Tibetan syllabaries. There is a cross-cultural element to this typology which takes account of Tibetan appropriation of Sanskrit phonetic analysis. The northern Buddhist tradition rearranges its inherited linguistic materials in ways that are deliberately related to a theory of breath-driven metabolism, yogic innerness, and a Buddhist epistemology. Such a theory aims ultimately at "transforming our instruments of engagement with the world, not just the body, but also speech and mind."

Each of the articles in this section exemplifies what may turn out to be a normative evolutionary sequence from grammar as primarily creative, in various modes, via the elaboration of culturally sanctioned intra- and meta-linguistic codes toward the possibility of radical transformation of the self that inhabits this grammaticalized cosmos.

3. *Self-Transformation*

One of the most striking features of the diverse traditions studied here—all presupposing a grammatical foundation culturally encoded and

poetically elaborated—is the ease with which they open up the possibility for existential transformation. Stated differently, the particular poetics of grammar construct a bridge between the structured metaphysical domain and the individual self. Again and again, our texts offer programs for potential re-formation of the person who knows the grammar and the valence of sounds and signs. The final section of this volume presents four distinct cultural approaches to a language-based pragmatics of self-transformation.

J. Garb focuses on the power of those radically non-semantic aspects of language, such as voice and breath, in certain strands of Kabbalistic praxis. Although these aspects have received much less attention than the powers operative within Hebrew letters and words, they nonetheless possess a theurgic potential rooted in the isomorphic relationship between human and divine breathing. Here we find a grammar of perhaps the most elemental aspect of language, that is, the breath that precedes and sustains articulation. The Kabbalist who gains access to this level of awareness, either individually or as part of a communal voice, impacts upon the internal composition of the deity and, in consequence, upon his own state of being. Garb situates his discussion within a comparative framework drawing parallels between Kabbalistic and tantric reflections on the power and uses of non-semanticized speech.

Tom Hunter's article begins with the theme of encoding, which in Java takes the form of an 'orthographic mysticism'. The sheer graphic shape of the syllables turns out to be pregnant with vast energies available to the mystic. The grapheme resonates with the sonic levels of reality defined and contoured by poetry. The guiding principle is one of aesthetic condensation of metaphysical forces that, once controlled within the highly structured domain of *kakawin* poetry, are capable of revolutionizing the listener's self-awareness.

The Javanese example emerges in part from the kind of transformative linguistic practices that we find in Hindu-Buddhist *tantra*. David Shulman attempts to work out a rule-bound semiotic of *mantric* syllables both in South Indian poetics and in a major text of the Śrīvidyā cult. The successful application of syllable sequences by a practitioner who knows and understands their grammar of resonance enables him or her to materialize the goddess—who is the world—in her full, immediate presence. Readers who want to try it out for themselves should follow the rules given in the article—carefully.

Finally, the Armenian materials discussed by S. La Porta offer perhaps the most complete elaboration of a grammar of sound and sign.

Grammatical materials proper, derived from the Greek tradition, are recycled by the medieval Armenian theologians Grigor Narekac'i and Grigor Tat'ewac'i so as to explain the underlying order of the universe infused by the divine Logos. In such a universe, the linguistic sign—sonar, graphic, and mathematical—serves the self as a primary means of divinization. Here grammar in the deepest sense becomes the preferred channel connecting and transforming the cosmic and the mundane. Grammar translates the divine into intelligible human language just as it translates the human soul into the divine Word.

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PART ONE

CREATION