World countries should "de-link" themselves from the First World countries in a bid to acquire more influence in the community of nations. Finally, the book is somewhat unbalanced in its discussion. The author does not give as much attention to the USSR as he does to the US militarization of the communication systems. I hope this unevenness has something to do with the availability of data and information rather than to any inherent difference in the militarization strategies in the two countries.

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The Origins of Writing
Roy Harris

Roy Harris's book The Origins of Writing takes a new and fascinating look at an old question. By drawing together and discussing evidence and theories from a wide variety of sources both ancient and modern, erudite and mundane Harris manages to keep the reader's interest piqued through his intricate theoretical musings. In fact his scope of reference is perhaps too large for the slim (158 page) volume and the reader is left feeling somewhat tantalized but unfulfilled. The book seems to lack overall direction and Harris's main point (if indeed there is one) is lost.

Harris begins his book with a preface in which he discusses the question, "what is writing?" While he admits to having no new facts to contribute to the answer he does explain that a general neglect of critical examination of the question and the way it should be posed is responsible for the poor answers which have thus far been put forward. The reader can only assume that his book serves to repair that neglect.

In the first chapter Harris considers writing's place in literate societies, how it is viewed and the legends that surround it. Here the reader is treated to new perspectives on such far flung works as Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories, Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan as well as Diodorus Siculus of ancient Greece, Joseph Priestly of the 18th Century and the Sequoyah of the North American Cherokee Indians, among others.

Chapter Two, "The Tyranny of the Alphabet" deals with the all pervasive aspects of the alphabet in European cultures which gives an ethnocentric bias to the consideration of non-alphabetic languages. Harris also considers how the close relationship of speech and writing affects "Western" culture's perspectives on syllabic and alphabetic symbols.

The third chapter is devoted to disputing the prevalent theories which claim writing evolved from drawing with the rebus forming the link between picto/ideographic symbols and phonetic/alphabetic writing. He argues persuasively that the rebus is not
an attempt to represent pronunciation but merely lends pronunciation to the picture image and further that it affords no basis for systematisation. This chapter also includes a good summary and critique of Schmandt-Besserat's theory of the evolution of clay tokens.

Chapter Four considers writing as representation and examines just how far and in what ways writing can be said to represent speech. After once again drawing on a rich plethora of sources and examples Harris uses the example of a street map as a good summation noting the need to distinguish between the streets and the grids and what they represent before being able to use the map effectively.

In Chapter Five, Harris cautiously puts forward his own idea that writing can be considered an invention rather than an evolution of communication skills. He claims that it was the sudden realization that graphic signs are infinitely flexible and adaptable to both media and meaning and so have no limitations for human communication which was responsible for the development of writing. He bases his argument on a discussion of increasingly complex communications needs, particularly record keeping and counting. His argument, while sound enough, is curiously similar to that of Schmandt-Bessarat which he previously dismissed.

Harris manages to keep a potentially heavy subject light and entertaining by constantly drawing on examples not only from different eras (as in Chapter One) but also from different arenas of western life. He includes considerations of poetry and even children's word games. He often uses thought-provoking word constructions himself such as "homo scribens." Occasionally he shows his disdain for those of his colleagues whom he feels are suffering from tunnel vision. For example Harris claims, "It would take a linguistic theorist to misread (Burroughs' allegorical Tarzan)" p. 7. These aspects help to keep the tone of the book light and interesting.

This is not a book for the casual audience however. Harris's musings and arguments require careful reading. He often makes references to other people's works or ideas and assumes the reader will be familiar with them. Harris chose to keep his volume slim, however many of these references need further explanation or at least more relevant illustrations. For example he makes a reference to Bell's Visible Speech system on page 101 and briefly explains what it is in technical terms. Since it plays a key role in his argument and is mentioned again several times a picture of its "alphabetic and iconic letter shapes which copy configurations of the glottis, palate, tongue and lips" would have been extremely useful (101).

Furthermore Harris seems to liken himself to a Greek orator. Many passages in the book smack of the writings of Plato. Harris often uses long, involved examples to prove the invalidity of a theory or idea. He painstakingly draws the reader into a theoretical circle, only to arrive back at the same question from which he started. Harris also uses the tactic of addressing a question with another question or asking rhetorical questions. He minutely dissects the issues he is discussing into sub-issues and even
sub-sub-issues, thus necessitating close reading. Added to this he tends to be verbose, using more words than are truly necessary to make his point. A good example of this style can be found in his discussion of the Rosetta Stone (123-124). Harris's writing ability is certainly equal to his demanding style but the reader must be prepared to equal it also.

Unfortunately the book lacks a unifying theme or direction strong enough to show through Harris's intricate musings. While he offers the reader many gems of information and insight they are never strung together to produce a satisfying strand. Some of these gems are passed over too quickly. For example Harris makes an intriguing reference to Japanese dyslexics in a discussion of logographic and phonographic symbol comprehension but he does not discuss this at any length. Also he does not include any comments on sign language, braille, stuttering or other speech-writing phenomenon. All of these would have been highly relevant. Furthermore, some of Harris's most forthright statements seem curiously unsound. For example in Chapter One he states that, "whereas speech separates humans from all other living things, writing is one step further...every child who is not handicapped will normally learn to speak but whole cultures did not know writing" (15). Harris's book was published in 1986 so it seems unlikely he could not have been aware of research revealing intricate communication patterns among dolphins and whales. His first statement is patently anthropocentric and suggests an extremely limited definition of speech a charge he cannot answer because the definition is not clarified. The second part of the statement is curious in that children only learn to speak culturally correctly when surrounded by speaking people - what bearing does this have on cultures without writing except to suggest they are undeveloped or backward?

Likewise in the final chapter Harris seems to stress the point that the "genius idea" behind the invention of writing was that graphic signs have no limitations for human communications. By using the term "genius idea" he seems to be implying a revolution rather than an evolution. Although he refutes other ideas reasonably skillfully, this, his own point, is put forth with very little convincing evidence. In fact, as mentioned earlier he bases it largely on an argument that closely follows Schmandt-Besserat's which he had previously negated. The Origins of Writing is, on the whole, well written and intriguing but these areas of sloppiness and apparent lack of direction give it an unfinished, dissatisfying effect.

Other high points of the work, aside from its rich and varied scope of reference, include its photographs. These are generous, interesting and of a high quality. Harris also includes a helpful bibliography with comments relating to each book. Harris is meticulous about quoting his sources - both for the photographs and ideas within the text, making it easy to read further into any area of interest.

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