

Gabe-Bines: “Forever Flying Bird”: Teachings From Paul Peter Buffalo

Thomas J. Farrell

Volume 3, Number 1, Spring 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1097599ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1097599ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

New Explorations Association

ISSN

2563-3198 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Farrell, T. (2023). Review of [Gabe-Bines: “Forever Flying Bird”: Teachings From Paul Peter Buffalo]. *New Explorations*, 3(1).

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1097599ar>

© Thomas J. Farrell, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>



Review: *Gabe-Bines: "Forever Flying Bird": Teachings from Paul Peter Buffalo [c.1900-1977]*, 3 vols., edited by Timothy G. Roufs of the University of Minnesota Duluth (Minneapolis: Wise Ink, 2019). Texts also available online:

<http://www.d.umn.edu/cia/faculty/troufs/index.html#title>

Thomas J. Farrell

University of Minnesota Duluth

tfarrell@d.umn.edu

The University of Toronto anthropologist Ted Carpenter (1922-2011; Ph.D. in anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 1950) co-edited the original journal *Explorations* with the University of Toronto literary scholar Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943). Consequently, I feel comfortable reviewing for the online journal *New Explorations*, edited by the University of Toronto physicist Robert K. Logan (born in 1939; Ph.D. in physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1965), the three volumes that the University of Minnesota Duluth anthropologist Timothy G. Roufs (born in 1943; Ph.D. in anthropology, University of Minnesota, 1971) edited and annotated of the American Indian hunter-gatherer-forager Medicine Doctor Paul Buffalo's teachings.

The overall title of the three volumes is *Gabe-Bines: "Forever Flying Bird": Teachings of Paul Peter Buffalo*. His Ojibwe name is anglicized here as Gabe-bines. His name means "Forever Flying Bird." But he is also known as Paul Peter Buffalo.

Volume 1 is subtitled "Year-Round in the Early Years"; it contains 18 chapters, spanning 537 pages.

Volume 2 is subtitled "*Wenabozho* and the Way We Think About the World"; it contains 34 chapters, spanning 575 pages. *Wenabozho* is a trickster figure in Ojibwe stories.

Volume 3 is subtitled "Living Amongst the Whites . . . the Best We Can"; it contains 50 chapters, spanning 793 pages, including the "Bibliography" (pp. 737-760).

Each volume comes equipped with an "Index."

In the "Acknowledgments" (pp. xvii-xix), printed in each of the three volumes, Professor Roufs

says, “The publication was made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Heritage Fund” (p. xix).

Incidentally, each of the three volumes also contains maps and photographs provided by the Minnesota Historical Society. So the three volumes are Minnesota-centric, as is the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Paul Buffalo’s home in Minnesota. So why might such a Minnesota-centric project be of interest to people who do not live in Minnesota or nearby Wisconsin? Let me explain.

The Testimony of Walter J. Ong

My favorite scholar is the American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and media ecology theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955). Ong’s massively researched Harvard doctoral dissertation centered on the French Renaissance logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr Peter Ramus (1515-1572), who was killed by French Roman Catholic thugs in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre.

When Ong was buried deeply, figuratively speaking, in all the inter-related materials about Ramus and his followers and his critics, on the one hand, and, on the other, the history of the verbal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic (also known as dialectic) in our Western cultural history from antiquity down to and beyond Ramus, he experienced a life-altering insight about our Western cultural history – an insight that he devoted the rest of his life to articulating and explaining to the best of his ability.

Ong’s massively researched doctoral dissertation was published in two volumes by Harvard University Press in 1958:

(1) *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of*

Reason [in the Age of Reason (also known as the Enlightenment)] (1958a);

(2) *Ramus and Talon Inventory [a briefly annotated bibliography of more than 750 volumes (most in Latin) by Ramus, Talon, other Ramists, and critics of Ramus that Ong had tracked down in more than 100 libraries in the British Isles and Continental Europe]* (1958b).

In Ong's 1958 pioneering study of the print culture that emerged in Europe after the Gutenberg printing press had emerged in the mid-1450s, he worked with what he styled as the aural-to-visual shift in sensory modality in Western cultural history (for specific pages references to the aural-to-visual shift, see the "Index" [p. 396]). Subsequently, as you may know, Ong changed his preferred terminology for referring to this shift in cognitive processing in Western cultural history.

In any event, as you may know, Ong's 1958 pioneering study of the print culture that emerged in Europe after the Gutenberg printing press had emerge in the mid-1450s prompted the Canadian Renaissance specialist and media ecology theorist Marshall McLuhan to write his 1962 pioneering study of print culture *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*.

Now, as you may know, Ong published his seminal 1969 article "World as View and World as Event" in the *American Anthropologist*. It is reprinted in volume three of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 69-90).

The American anthropologist David M. Smith of the University of Minnesota Duluth honored Ong in his 1997 essay about the Canadian indigenous people the Chipewyan "World as Event: Aspects of Chipewyan Ontology" that is reprinted in the ambitious anthology *Of Ong and Media Ecology*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2012, pp. 117-142).

I myself have used the two phrases from Ong's title of his 1969 article repeatedly along with certain further characteristics of orally based thought and expression that Ong himself articulates in his 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (pp. 36-57) in

my 2012 article “Walter Ong and Harold Bloom can help us understand the Hebrew Bible” in the journal *Explorations in Media Ecology*.

I have also discussed Ong’s phenomenological account of the aural-to-visual shift in his massively researched book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958a) in my somewhat lengthy online essay “Walter J. Ong’s Philosophical Thought” (dated September 20, 2020).

The American Indian Medicine Doctor Paul Peter Buffalo and Pope Francis

Now, in light of my past practice, it may surprise some of you to learn that I do not mention Walter Ong’s work in my recent article. Even if Paul Buffalo’s teachings may manifest certain characteristics identified by Ong as orally based thought and expression, I do not explicitly draw attention to this dimension of his monumental composition of his tape-recorded memoir. However, I do draw attention to what Paul Buffalo reports about meetings in Chapter 5: “Chiefs and Councils” in volume 1 (pp. 69-87) – which I suggest is pertinent to what Pope Francis is saying today about church synods. (Paul Peter Buffalo’s mother was a Roman Catholic convert, and he himself was baptized a Roman Catholic. Professor Roufs is also a Roman Catholic. Occasionally, Paul Buffalo explicitly refers to Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, which Professor Roufs explains in his endnotes.)

Now, perhaps I should also mention here that Pope Francis discusses the indigenous people of the Amazon region of South America in his 2020 post-synodal apostolic exhortation titled *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazon) that is available in English and other languages at the Vatican’s website.

I have myself discussed the pope’s 2020 apostolic exhortation in my 4,000-word review essay “Pope Francis’ 2020 Apostolic Exhortation, and Walter J. Ong’s Thought” that is available

online through the University of Minnesota's digital conservancy.

For my profile of the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis, see my online article "Pope Francis on Evil and Satan" (dated March 24, 2019).

Now, in Roufs' "Introduction" (pp. ix-xxi in each volume), he says, "Believing this writer to be the person his mother dreamed of, Paul Buffalo began what became a twelve-year process of systematically recounting his life experiences" (p. x).

In Roufs' "Introduction," he also says, "The individuals of Paul's generation – as the last hunter-gatherer-foragers of the upper Midwest – looked on at and were drawn into the new lifeways and new ways of making a living" (p. xi).

In addition, in Roufs' "Introduction," he says, "In the spirit of earlier books setting forth the traditions of North American Indian people – books such as *Crashing Thunder* [1926], *Black Elk Speaks* [1932], *Cheyenne Memories* [1967] – the following memoirs aim to provide for 'people who want to listen' a personal account of the early life of a modern *Anishinaabe* Medicine Doctor" (p. xii).

I learned a bit more about these three classic books in the Wikipedia entries about each of them.

Now, Billie Annette, who identifies herself as a Citizen of the White Earth Nation, provides the "Foreword" (pp. vii-viii in each of the three volumes). In it, she says, "The ethnographic biography of Paul Peter Buffalo is a treasure trove of information about the Ojibwe people of Minnesota. . . . This biography delves into Indian life in Minnesota; there are pictures inserted courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society that richly add to the narrative" (p. vii).

In Annette's "Foreword," she also says, "Every chapter reads like the storytelling my mother (who was raised on the White Earth Reservation and whose first language was Ojibwe) shared with me. It is personal, heartfelt, and truthful. Over and over the narrative presents meaningful gifts or nuggets of wisdom on how to live a good life, how everyday life was lived, how disputes

were settled, how kids were disciplined, how spirituality and science were understood, and why meetings are important ('to understand one another . . . a meeting was not held to say that a person was wrong or right . . . when you get through a meeting, you feel good . . . you are able to see things differently because you heard something . . . you learned something by other talking')" (pp. vii-viii; her ellipses).

Annette is here quoting Paul Buffalos' statements in chapter 5: "Chiefs and Councils" (pp. 69-87; at p. 75).

Wow! I'd never before heard anything quite this positive about group meetings! These snippets reminded me a bit of Pope Francis' emphasis on church synods. So let's look at Paul Buffalo's chapter 5: "Chiefs and Councils."

In it, Paul Buffalo says, "When my mother was just a girl and a chief died, he had a right to pass his authority on to those who were his next close relation. But that's never happened too much in my time because they were always changing the customs or the constitution of the tribe" (p. 70). In Roufs' annotation, he tells us that "Later on, leadership became elected" (p. 87).

Paul Buffalo continues: "We had *heroes* in my early days, and they became our chiefs. . . . Our chiefs would talk and tell you the right of their life ['Where they went right in life, and did the right things,' says Roufs, p. 87]. They were not afraid to talk because they went outward. They earned what they said by going out into the world. They were not afraid to talk because they learned from experience what they were saying. When they'd go out into the world they'd understand the world, understand the people, understand the hardship others went through, and that would give them the ability to talk. *Then too*, they *lived* the life they talked about" (p. 70).

Subsequently, Paul Buffalo says, "Later on, when I learned English, we called all of our

meetings a ‘council’” (p. 72).

Later, Paul Buffalo says, “In any council not everybody talked – but everybody *listened*. . . .

Good listeners became good advisors to the group. When a man listened to what the action was in all of the councils, we called him *obizindaan*. That was the same as calling him an advisor in our language” (p. 74).

In the paragraph from which Billie Annette quotes the most in her “Foreword,” Paul buffalo says, “Councils calling the others in for their words were always a big thing in this Indian country of ours. A meeting, a gathering, is a great thing. When you get through with a meeting you feel good. And when you go out into the field after a meeting’s over, you begin to see things differently because you heard something. You learned something by others talking. Their points meant a lot to you. It’s a great thing to get together – an important thing – so when you say anything, be careful, always. I was always glad to join any meeting. That’s the way we all joined hands to work together.

“I liked to sit and listen to the others make their points.

“Why?

“Because that’s where I was learning by the experience of others’ lives [sic]. They have experience just as well as I have. Maybe they have problems, and maybe these problems could be threshed out in the meeting. Maybe the problems could be clarified [sic] for a better way of life.

“That’s what the meeting was for – to understand one another, to listen to one another. A meeting was not held to say a person was wrong or right. Sure, we helped one another by pointing out problems, but at the meetings we worked hard just to understand others’ points. That’s what I noticed as a boy, and that’s pretty much what I’ve seen happen at councils all my life” (p. 75).

Now, it should come as no surprise that I do not have Pope Francis’ email address, so I cannot

alert him to what Paul Buffalo has to say about American Indian meetings among the Ojibwe hunter-gatherer-foragers of Minnesota.

For further reading about these three volumes, see Britney Leanos and Cheryl Reitan's online article "Ojibwe Lessons" that was published on October 15, 2019.

References

Farrell, T. J. (2012). Walter Ong and Harold Bloom can help us understand the Hebrew Bible.

Explorations in Media Ecology, 11(3&4), pp. 255-271.

Farrell, T. J. (2019, March 24). Pope Francis on evil and Satan. opednews.com URL:

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Pope-Francis-on-Evil-and-S-by-Thomas-Farrell-Abortion-Catholic-God-Homosexuality-190324-51.html>

Farrell, T. J. (2020). Pope Francis' 2020 apostolic exhortation, and Walter J. Ong's thought. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/211640>

Farrell, T. J. (2020, September 20). Walter J. Ong's philosophical thought.

opednews.com URL:

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Walter-J-Ong-s-Philosophi-by-Thomas-Farrell-Communication-Communications-Communications-Consciousness-200920-664.html>

Leanos, B. and C. Reitan. (2019, October 15). Ojibwe lessons. URL:

<http://news.d.umn.edu/news-center/articles/paul-buffalo-2019>

McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of typographic man*. University of Toronto Press.

Ong, W. J. (1958a). *Ramus, method, and the decay of dialogue: From the art of discourse to the art of reason*. Harvard University Press.

Ong, W.J. (1958b). *Ramus and Talon inventory*. Harvard University Press.

Ong, W. J. (1969, August). World as view and world as event. *American Anthropologist*, 71(4), pp. 634-647.

Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. Methuen.

Ong, W. J. (1992a, 1992b, 1995, 1999). *Faith and contexts* (4 vols.; T. J. Farrell and P. A. Soukup, Eds.). Scholars Press.

Smith, D. M. (2012). World as event: Aspects of Chipewyan ontology. *Of Ong and media ecology* (pp. 117-142; T. J. Farrell and P. A. Soukup, Eds.). Hampton Press.