

INCANTATIONAL AND CATECHETICAL STYLE
IN EARLY QUAKER PROSE WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates two variants of early Quaker written style that have been noted in the literature: the ‘incantational’ style, so termed by Cope (1956), and the ‘catechetical’ style as defined by Bauman (1998). The inquiry confirms the existence of these two styles, gives examples of linguistic features of each and contrasts one variant with the other. Both styles are present in a number of the texts that comprise my digital Quaker corpus and from that evidence it is clear that writers chose in their persuasive discourse to employ features from these two distinct styles throughout the second half of the seventeenth century. The incantational style is less in evidence by the close of the century and the article puts forward reasons why that might be so.

KEYWORDS

Style variants, digital texts, incantational, catechetical, seventeenth-century.

As a linguist studying early Quaker language and style, I have been struck by two observations concerning style variants; the first was made by Jackson Cope in 1956 in which he identifies a distinct style used by the first Quakers, including Fox. He calls this style ‘incantational’ and describes it as ‘an incredible repetition, a combining and recombining of a cluster of words and phrases drawn from Scripture’ (Cope 1956: 733). The second one has been noted by Richard Bauman (1998: 76) and termed by him ‘catechetical, ...for oral persuasion and preaching’. He claims that this style is closer to orthodox religious rhetorical style but employed by Quakers for more varied purposes. Indeed, some actual Quaker catechisms exist, as described below. Bauman criticises the more eccentric writings found in some of the Quaker seventeenth-century publications (1998: 75) and supports his belief citing an anonymous quote in *The Quaking Mountebanck* (1655) by an early non-Quaker contemporary. He claims that Quakers were ‘confused, undisciplined speakers by comparison with the carefully crafted and polished

sermon style of the trained clergy' (Bauman 1998: 75). This article describes the investigation into the truth of these assertions.

I use corpus-based techniques in my studies in order to retrieve stretches of relevant texts and to search widely for patterns of word and phrase combinations. To this end I have compiled a fully searchable digital corpus of early Quaker texts, described previously in *Quaker Studies* (Roads 2012). For the present paper, I make use of specific software for corpus analysis to produce the output relevant to my stylistic enquiries. The results follow.

FEATURES OF THE QUAKER INCANTATIONAL STYLE

It is thought, though it cannot be proved, that some early Quaker writers aimed to imitate Fox's unique style. Here is a good example of how he takes a phrase and plays with it, in this case a biblical quote from John 1:4, very much as Cope describes. The meaning becomes irrelevant and the reader is taken up into the flow and the sounds:

Mark, the light of men, and the light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not: This was he that was in the world, and the world knew him not though all things was made by him; and this was he that John came a witness of, that all men through him might believe; and this the true light that doth enlighten every man that cometh into the world, which light shineth in darkness, and darkness comprehendeth it not. Now mark, it is there. What? Doth it shine in darkness, and darkness comprehendeth it not? Is not this the state that the world knew him not, nor the Pharisees knew him not, though the Kingdom of heaven was within them, Luk. 17. and light shined in darkness, and darkness comprehended it not. Here is the unconverted estate; so he came to his own, and his own received him not; light shines in darkness, and darkness comprehends it not: You were darkness saith the Apostle, Eph. 5. but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light. Now mark, Heres sometimes: here is times of darkness, but now they were light in the Lord. Now here was the converted and the unconverted, and these were to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; the light shines in darkness, though darkness doth not comprehend it, and ye are sometimes darkness, and light shines in darkness, and darkness doth not comprehend it; there is the unconverted estate, and the converted estate: and God hath commanded light to shine out of darkness, and hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the peace of Jesus Christ. Now mark, heres light shines out of darkness, God had commanded it to shine out of darkness: What? Was it not there then? Now it is come forth; before it was in darkness, light shined in darkness, and God hath commanded it to shine out of darkness, and sometimes ye were darkness, but are the light of the Lord, which light that shines in the heart, gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, heres the converted estate. Now while light shineth in darkness, and darkness doth not comprehend it, theres the unconverted estate; 2 Cor. 4. John 1. and the Apostle was sent to turn people from the darkness to the light, from the power of Satan to God. Now this was the estate of preaching to them while they were in darkness, whom the God of the world hath blinded their eyes, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should

shine in them. Mark, shine in them, therefore the god of the world hath blinded the eye of the mind, and to such the Gospel is hid; for the light darkness cannot comprehend, while the god of the world hath blinded your minds; therefore the Apostle was sent to turn them from darkness to the light, light shineth in darkness, so the god of the world hath blinded them, lest the light of the glorious Gospel should shine in them. Now where it shines in the heart, it gives the knowledge of the glory of God, where it comes forth, now where it shines in darkness, and darkness comprehends it not (Fox 1657).

Here are a few examples to show ways in which Quaker writers employed simple repetition to give an incantatory feel to their prose.

FEATURES OF INCANTATIONAL REPETITION

Simple lexical repetition

(1)

The whole, the whole, the whole earth shall not hinder it; verily, the whole earth shall not hinder it (Swinton 1663).

Lengthy lists (of adjectives, in this example):

(2)

[P]rophanes, Atheistical, Hypocritical, and Hard-hearted, Persecuting, Perverse and Adulterous Generation (Sandilands 1682).

Semantic items appearing in a variety of word classes (in this case using the head word work):

(3)

[T]he Deceits and subtil Workings of the Serpent, that in the Light you may behold the subtil Enemy in his approaching,...that you may know each Workman in their several Workings in the Mystery for as Godliness is a Mystery, likewise iniquity is a Mystery, and as God is a pure Spirit, and works in a Mystery in the Light, so the Devil is a dark Spirit, and works in a Mystery in the Dark (Parker 1660).

Alliteration (sink, seed, sows; Lord, loves, lead, life) and also syntactical repetition:

(4)

Give over thine own willing; give over thine own running; give over thine own desiring to know or to be any thing, and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee, and be in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that, and Loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion (Penington 1661).

Syntactical repetition: in this case, linked *if*-clauses within a single sentence (note where the main verb is located—near the end):

(5)

If you will make Covenant with Death, and confederate with Amaleck in his cruel Conspiracy against the Innocent; if you will be one with Haman in helping the wicked one to obtain the help of Caesar against the Helpless; If you will involve your selves (as it were) with an Oath against the Innocent; if you will be on the Serpent's side against the Seed of the Woman, and strengthen the hands of the bloody Shepherds who seek to devour and woory Christ's sheep; if you will give your Power to the false Prophet, and let him ride upon you, and make you his Vassels to afflict and torment the Innocent; if instead of helping the Woman against the Dragon, who is now casting out the Floods of his Wrath and Mischief against the Lambs of Christ, and help the old Dragon to cast the harmless into nasty Holes, Caves and Prisons; if you will not quit your selves like men of Honour, and shew your selves to be of a good understanding, fearing God, and hating Cruelty; if you will not look into the Royal Law of God, and do to us and all men, as you would have us and all men to you: But if you will suffer us to fall into the hands of our Enemies, whose very mercies are cruelties, and you stand by, and rejoyce at our Calamity: if you will not while you have Power, be a bridle to the Wicked, nor Rebuke this Exalted Spirit that seeks to Raise and enrich it self in the Ruines of the Lord's People, but give your Consent and Countenance to the Wicked in their Cruelties against us; if you will stop your ears at the cry of the Righteous, and suffer our Adversaries to oppress us all the day long, and plow great furrows upon our backs, and make our Afflictions grievous to be born, **Then know** [main verb] this assuredly, The Lord will remember the afflictions of Joseph, and though our Brethren sell us into the hands of the Ægyptians, and intend our utter Ruine; though you and they in your secret Contrivances and Imaginations devise mischief in your Beds against us; yet the Righteous God will not forsake us (Mason 1660).

Clauses in a sentence, many linked by the clause-level conjunction

(6)

And so the blinde leads the blinde till you both fall into the ditch of perdition: **and** they may be ashamed, of you who are in ignorance, and blindness of heart who have not learned the way of truth and righteousness, nor come to the knowledge of God; nor denied your selves and sins, **and** you may be ashamed of them who are as they that feed themselves with the fat, and not the flocke, &c that through Covetousness by fained words, makes marchandise of Soules; **and** goes for gifts, and rewards, as Balaam, **and** while they Condemne others for hirelings, are many fold guilty themselves therein, **&** to be Condemned & Judged, with the Light of Christ Jesus; witness some of your chiefest Pastors and Teachers, at Dublin, at Limbriche, and at Corke, and at many places else where in Ireland; some having a hundred pounds a yeare & others more or less, to their shame let this be told, and to their Condemnation in the Light of God & all that know him who are hippocriticall in crieing against others for that whereof themselves are guilty, **and** are an ill favor and a reproach to some of their own Brethren; **and** a shame to Religion and to all that profess faith in the Gospell of Christ; **and** are out of the example, of all the Appostles and Ministers of Christ: who freely recived and freely gave, **and** did not seeke and receive maintenance from the powers of the Earth, but Preached the Gospell, and lived of the Gospell, & ate of the fruit of the vinyard which they had planted (Burrough 1657).

Chains of subordinate clauses piled up within a single 220-word sentence (note that the main subject + main clause is 'we deny and bear witness'.)

(7)

And to the Vice-chancellor (so called) and to you who are the chiefe in Colledges (as you call them) who study, and teach others natural Languages (as Hebrew, Greek, and Latine) and the Arts of Lodgick and Phylosophy, which is all for the fire, for the knowledge of these things puffs up your minds, and keepes you from the true knowledge of the living God, who can be known no other way but through his Son, for none shal ever know God by studying old Authors, and learning naturall Languages (as Hebrew, Greek, and Latine, which you call the Original) for natural men cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, God is a Mysterie sealed to that nature, which studieth these things before mentioned, for proud, high-minded, selfewilled men, studie and teach these Languages, but the secrets of God are kept from such; God to his Son reveales himself, who is meek and lowlie, and those who knows God, keeps his commands, and knows him by the revelation of his Son; and **we** [subject of main verb], whom the Lord hath made himself known unto, through his Son, **deny, and bear witness** [main verb phrase] against all such as comes not in by the dore, but climbs up another way in their own humane inventions (Harwood 1655).

CATECHISMS AND QUAKER CATECHETICAL STYLE

Bauman defines the catechetical style as containing rhetorical questions as a structural device which is used in three ways: (1) writers furnished answers to their own questions; (2) questions are set out as a kind of dialogue though not in dialogue format; (3) questions alone are posed but the answers are to be supplied by readers or listeners (Bauman 1998: 147-48). In order to put these prototype styles to the test, I looked at six overt catechisms of the period (listed below) and then compared them to those texts in the corpus that are not in traditional catechetical format but contain related characteristics. Quakers were not immune to compiling catechisms with 'correct' answers.

- Heidelberg (1563): *Catechism in English*
- William Perkins (1590): *The foundation of Christian religion gathered into sixe principles*
- Richard Baxter (1658): *A call to the unconverted* (sermon + catechism)
- Anon (1662): *An Abridgement of the late reverend assemblies Shorter Catechism* (Wing /A107A)
- Isaac Penington (1665): *A short catechism, for the sake of the simple-hearted* (from 'The scattered sheep sought'.)
- Henry More (1668): *The last two dialogues treating of the kingdome of God within us*

I noted three types of overt catechism or catechism-like style. Each one is explained below with a comparison of linguistic features found.

TYPE 1: INSTRUCTIONAL CATECHISMS

Here, the questions are in the format of simple yes/no ones and also *wh*-questions (*why, what, who, how, when*, etc.). Some are ‘checking’ questions requiring a pre-learned answer and the purpose of the text is never for genuine information-seeking, all the interrogatives are display ones or merely rhetorical. Some are apparently prepared questions (as in a test); some are set out as though in a play with characters, or in a one-to-one situation, i.e. Scholler/Master (cf. Fox 1657); some have debating points in question form which are clearly ‘incorrect’—these are followed with a series of ‘objections’ (cf. Baxter 1658); some catechisms set out ‘answers’ but provide no preceding question-form. The Quaker ones (Penington, Fox, Smith, Rigge, Barclay, among others) lead the reader to the ‘alternative and correct’ Quaker argument.

(8)

Quest. 1. Who is the Worshipper, the acceptable Worshipper in the sight of God? ... There is a capacity to be found in man, to make him a Worshipper, even such a capacity, which God requireth of him. Now that is the thing to be enquired into, What this capacity is, and who are the persons that are found in this capacity?

Answ. The Worshipper in the times of the Gospel, the Worshipper under the New-Testament is he that is born of God (Penington 1661).

TYPE 2: A CATECHETICAL STYLE THAT IS DISPUTATIONAL RATHER THAN MERELY INSTRUCTIONAL

This style contains all the language features listed for Type 1. The Quaker corpus contains mostly texts in catechetical style, not true catechisms. Penington’s 1661 text is an exception and there are others not included in the corpus, (see Angell 2003, for details of catechisms by Isaac Penington, William Smith, Thomas Richardson, Ambrose Rigge, Robert Barclay, and George Keith.) The examples that follow illustrate the style; I suggest the texts are subverting the ‘instructional’ variety.

(9)

Pr[fiest]. That it is blasphemy to says that the light in man, which reproveth of sin, is the light of God, is perfect, is the gift of God.

Answ. Contrary to scripture, contrary to Christs words, and contrary to the Apostles words is thy doctrine and Principles, for every gift of God is perfect (Stockdale 1659).

(10)

Thou saist, thou hast been the longer on this particular, because thou findest it galls us most.

Answ. When thou hast read our Answer (which by reason of thine being so long, hath caused ours to be so too,) thou maist consider of it, and of thy impertinency in quoting the Scriptures to prove your Practice, which being well observed doth witness against you (Burnyeat and Watson 1688).

TYPE 3: RHETORICAL QUESTIONING (but answers not provided in the texts.)

(11)

First Query. Was not Peoples going from the Light and Spirit in their own Particulars many Ages since, the Cause why so many Forms of Prayers were made to be said by the Church of England.

2dly. And did not their compelling and using Violence to those that were otherwise minded, proceed from the Spirit that made the Form? (Key 1684).

The next example uses the ‘queries’ format familiar to those who study Quakerism but adapts the structure to include many repetitions of the introductory wh-form *whether*.

(12)

Now here follows a few Queries for any of those called Spiritual Men to answer.

1. Query. Who set up the first Spiritual Court, and where was it set up?

[Queries 2-6 omitted here]

...

7. Whether a spiritual man of God who sits in the Judgement Seat can see sober men wronged in his Court, and he not rescue them?

8. Whether a man who Judges for God can hear some or one of his own Court curse, and not punish him according to the Law provided? (Gearle 1664).

In example (13), a sequence of rhetorical questions is set out in the running text. The initial interrogative in each clause is highlighted in bold type.

(13)

And now both Priest and People, Consider the difference between your practise, your way, your worship, and the practise, and the way, and the worship, of the People of God; I ask you, **where** in the Scripture did ever any one of you Read, that ever Christ, or any one of the Prophets, his Appostles or Disciples, did smite any one over the face, and Rob him of his Garment, and beat him and nave him before a Ruler, and cry take him away, and put him forth of their Assembly; that came into their Assembly, to hear, or to speak to them, or to ask them a question, or to try their Doctrine, seeing they said try all things &c. **Was it not** the practise of the false Prophets, and such as followed them? If yea: then **is not** R: C:(your Priest) a false Prophet, and **are not** you and he guilty of these things? for **did not** some of you lately do the like? **was not** Robert Turner, who came into your Assembly & there stood quietly, & peaceably among you, in your Assembly smote over the face & Robed of his garment, even in the time of your Divine Worship of prayer so called? And **did not** R. C. (your Priest) cry take him away?, and **did not** some of you obey him, and tooke R. T. away, and hald him, and put him forth of your Assembly, and afterwards beat him, and had him before a Ruler? Answer, if yea: **Is not** this to smite with the fist of wickedness, & to have the hands full of blood, according to Isa. 58: 4: 5: 6? and **is not** the prayers, of all such an Abomination unto the Lord, and as a stink in his nostrils? And **is this** the way, ye (both Priest and People) take to Convince them who are in Errors (as by your practise, it appears it is) or such as you judge to be in Error (but are not) or to satisfie any who have a word to speak to you, or a wise sound & sober question to aske the teacher, I say **is this** the way to Convince them, to smite them over the face, and Rob them off their garment, and hale them out from among you, and beate them? as aforesaid, **Is**

not this bad cure, or healing for a troubled and broken spirit, or for a grieved and wounded soule, **would you not** so count it, to be so served and done unto, Instead of a Plaister to receive a Wound; and where there is but one soare to make two? (Turner 1658).

CONCLUSION

All these types of discourse were common in the seventeenth century and were by no means confined to Quaker texts. However, we have now identified three types of catechetical style as proposed by Bauman, and shown the contrast with the incantatory style variant observed by Cope, and it is clear that frequent use was made of both style variants, among others less distinctive, in early Quaker writings. Quantitative analysis, beyond the scope of this paper, could enable an estimate of how frequently each variant occurs. The question that then follows is this: Did one style replace the other over the half-century covered by the Quaker corpus (1655–99)? The answer, judging from the corpus evidence, is that both were possible contemporaneously. Turner, the writer of example (13), manages to combine a 500-word exhortation which is largely in a repetitive incantatory style with ten succinct rhetorical questions in the catechetical style. The probabilistic evidence from the corpus indicates the following points:

- 1 Some assertions from the literature that the catechetical was more favoured by the second generation should be rejected since at least one author employed both incantatory and Type 2 catechetical styles in the same tract.
- 2 Type 1 Quaker catechisms and Type 2 catechetical texts are found dating from at least 1659.
- 3 At least one text in exhortatory incantatory style occurs very late in the century, that of Elizabeth Redford, published in 1696.

Unfortunately, there is no corpus evidence from the eighteenth century onwards to judge the continuing existence or otherwise of the incantational style. Impression is all. If so, the question remains as to why the catechetical style eventually predominated as demonstrated by the many Quaker texts from more recent centuries in which the question/answer format is favoured. These are my suggested responses:

- Over time, the message became more institutionalised. Younger or newly convinced Friends needed more instructional texts and these would be catechetical in form.
- Less public preaching was taking place; publications were also being intended for use internally among Friends.
- The Second-Day Morning Meeting (a revision committee) wielded influence to tone down the rhetoric and there is some evidence from the minutes to support that.
- Perhaps the earlier exhortatory apocalyptic message was being quietly set aside and perhaps also the incantatory style was starting to sound old-fashioned.

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