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**THE PRACTICAL SENSE OF PHILOSOPHIZING:  
WHY PRESERVE ANYTHING AT ALL,  
EVEN DIGITALLY?**

**Dedicated to the memory of Edward W. Said (1935–2003 CE)**

Abstract: Confronted with the apparent need to preserve cultural heritage it seems appropriate that we ought to ask fundamental questions. Living in a world at a time of great devastation and destruction, both “natural” [sic], such as the flooding of Prague and Dresden, and man-made, such as the warring on Kabul and Baghdad, brought home to us by satellite and internet, we are anguished at the loss of and damage to the cultural artefacts of the other, artefacts that belong in a real sense to everyman. In this paper the digital technology of the age is taken as given. We know what it is and how it can be used to preserve. **But for whom do we preserve ?** Trivially, the answer is for the individual human being. The answer is not for humanity. **And who chooses what is to be preserved ?** The chooser will be like the author of a book, driven by inspiration.

The paper is constructed using different styles to forge a way of presenting the questioning, an examining of the *raison d’être*, that brings history to the foreground, on centre stage if you will, that grants technology its natural embedded scene-setting and that ultimately aims to prepare each of us for the walk-on part that each must play.

Key words: artefact, destruction, digital, everyman, questioning, humanism, philosophizing, practical, preservation, sense, technology, theatre, war.

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## 1 Prologue

“Under the Timurids, Herat and Bukhara also became centers of manuscript illustration. The school of Bihzad (d. 1535–36 CE) at Herat, and later Tabriz, created a new style.” [17, 281–2]

### *Not Again*

**C**AN you imagine  
 what it is like  
 to be a calligrapher  
 on the banks of the Tigris  
 in twelve fifty-eight  
 and to see the waters turning red?

**C**AN you hear  
 down through time  
 the screams of the dying,  
 the screams of the living  
 in burning Baghdad?

**C**AN you smell the smoke  
 of burning paper,  
 of burning flesh?

**C**AN you see  
 the red ink run  
 from the floating pages  
 illustrated by my hand  
 mingling with blood  
 seen through tears?

**C**AN you imagine?

*Mícheál Mac an Airchinnigh, 2003 CE*

**N**ONE of us alive today could be expected to understand fully the anguish of that factional calligrapher and illustrator in Baghdad who watched the works of a lifetime being destroyed by the Mongol Horde under Hulagu, grandson of Ghengis Khan, in 1258 CE. Did he die too with his illustrated works? Did his blood mingle with his inks in the Tigris?

**M**OST of us alive today (September 2003 CE, the date on which the paper was first read in Borovets, Bulgaria) have seen in one way or another the second sacking of Baghdad (Library and Museum) six months ago in March 2003 CE. It will go down in history in all sorts of ways. One way that is of particular note is the fact that very little information on the burning of the books has been made publicly available then or since.

**T**HE primary source in English is an *eyewitness account* by the famous independent journalist and author Robert Fisk [9]:

“So yesterday was the burning of books . . .  
 And the Americans did nothing . . .  
 When I caught sight of the Koranic library burning . . .  
 I raced to the offices of the occupying power, . . .  
 I gave the map location, the precise name — in Arabic and English. I said the smoke could be seen from three miles away and it would take only five minutes to drive there . . .  
 Yesterday, the black ashes of thousands of ancient documents filled the skies of Iraq.  
 Why?” [8].

This event and this account will long be remembered in history. It had the most profound

effect on me at the time (15th April 2003 CE), a date stamped in ISO format as 2003–04–15, a convention that is acceptable as a replacement for the date in Current/Christian Era format. A secondary source in English was given by Oliver Burkeman in Washington: “As flames engulfed Baghdad’s National Library yesterday, destroying manuscripts many centuries old, . . . Almost nothing remains of the library’s archive of tens of thousands of manuscripts, books, and iraqi newspapers, according to reports from the scene.” [4].



*The face of the author  
circa 2003–03–30.*

**S**ALVETE! (Greetings!)  
I hope you don’t mind me interrupting your reading ? Before you go any further I thought that it might be a good idea if I explained some of the underlying conventions that I am using.

I thought it might be a good idea to let you get this far before I said anything.

This text is deliberately unusual. It is intended to be printed out on paper and read. It is also intended to be interactive on the World-Wide Web (www). The paper is hyperlinked internally (to bibliographic references and back again) and externally (to www sites which I hope will still be existing in all the years to come). One way in which to guarantee such persistence is to use persistent URLs (PURLs, for short). (See <http://www.purl.org/>)

**Y**OU will have already noticed the initial letters on this and the previous page! These are deliberately introduced to remind you of the importance of such kinds of letters in illuminated manuscripts. I am sure you will long to see the technology developed to the extent that we will have illuminated initials. What do you think of the impact of the initial C which begins each line of the poem *Not Again* ? Such repetitions are very common in the Book of Kells.

**E**XPERIMENTAL texts such as this are often prototypical. They suggest possibilities. Some things work and some things don’t. Each unusual feature is deliberately introduced to point to the possibilities of real digitized artefacts that reach way beyond mere archival purposes. For example, the inclusion of my face on this page turns this page into a *face page*. The image is chosen carefully. It is my current passport photograph!

NOT every paragraph needs an initial letter.

The clash of recognized structures — numbered section and subsection versus initials and face pages — suggests the inevitable clash that must arise in any attempt to break out from recognized styles that currently bind the imagination when confronted with digitized artefacts.



*The author imagined.  
(Detail from Book of  
Kells circa 800 CE.)*

## 1.1 Scene-setting

HERE! The scene is now almost set! The discussion takes place against the backdrop of war and destruction. How do we hope to cope with this tragedy ? How can we set down a scholarly humanistic approach to a subject which must provoke strong emotions, which must engage in the political arena, which must embrace everyman and exclude no one ? How can we sublimate the rage that we naturally feel at the deaths of many and at the destruction of much ? For to stay human and alive, sublimate we must.

Later we will use a survivor of war, pillage and plunder as *exemplar* — the Book of Kells, a manuscript dating from circa 800 CE and currently residing in a “mausoleum” in Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. I will argue that it stands as a power symbol of sublimation for all, that it has universal significance for the human being, the everyman.

With these preliminary remarks, let us approach the question of the purpose and value of the digital preservation of a cultural heritage (DPCH). Let us be skeptical.

Why ought we to be concerned that the texts (understood as things written in some sense) of ancients (ours and others) be preserved ? Why ought we to be concerned that digital artefacts (of whatever nature) be ‘rendered/kept permanent’ ? Hereafter, for simplicity, we take the word ‘text’ to include all kinds of digital artefacts. (There is a good sound theoretical and practical basis within computing science for doing so.)

The standard response is that we have a (tribal) obligation to transmit (our) culture. In other words, not only with our genes, but also by our memes, does our humanity progress (tribally and locally). The global progression may be seen as a struggle between competing tribes, cultures, religions, value systems, etc. Such struggles often entail war with the accompanying death of the peoples and destruction of some part of their cultural heritage.

What is the purpose of such (digital) preservation ?

And should we be in favour of textual preservation and on the building of Museums and Libraries and appointing guardians thereto ? Have we not done well ? We did that and more in Baghdad and elsewhere!

In Baghdad in 2003 CE we saw with our own eyes and knew that it was not enough! Baghdad 2003 CE clearly imprinted upon our entire human consciousness that where there was overwhelming destructive human force there would inevitably be overwhelming human anti-cultural aberration and destruction. The earlier destruction of the Libraries of Baghdad (1258 CE) and Alexandria (642 CE) was forcibly brought to mind! Similar devastation of great libraries occurred in the *Island culture* of what is currently called Ireland and Great

Britain. Some of the great books (artefacts of the cultural heritage) of the 7th and 8th centuries survived and are *on display* today. I mentioned one such above, the Book of Kells.

In this paper I elaborate on the need for a *practical* philosophy for everyman, one that transcends religious and cultural boundaries, one that recognizes community values that are in harmony with the one, the individual, the self, a practical philosophy that recognizes the validity of narrow cultural origins (transcending any particular and narrow modernistic national impositional stamping).

Of course, the adjective *practical* is used in a profoundly common and technical way. In the first instance *practical* is concerned with practice and contrasted strictly with ‘theory’. And practice is that which is ‘always going on’ and concerning things ‘always in becoming’. The technical sense relates not to the established/accepted theory but to the ability of the human being to reason, strictly unrelated to how ‘philosophers’ might be said to have reasoned in the past or to reason now. In short I claim that everyone ‘who has reached the age of reason’ can philosophize and that it is natural to do so.

On the other hand, I wish to avoid a misunderstanding from the outset by my use of the term ‘practical philosophy’. The term is very well-established in the Americano-anglican hegemonistic culture and does not do full justice to what I have in mind. Therefore, I choose to use the more long-winded phrase ‘practical sense of philosophizing’ which may be considered as a dynamic interpretation of the French *le sens pratique du philosophe*. One might have wondered why I didn’t use the established English term *praxis* to describe what I have in mind. I rejected it because it doesn’t *sound* right!

What then is the real purpose of the (digital) text preservation ? It is simply this: that in order to guide the practical philosophizing of everyman there must be the opportunity to note how ‘everyotherman’ philosophizes and has philosophized. The ‘kept-permanently’ digital texts confront the philosophizing everyman with the other and said digital texts can be freely chosen by one rather than imposed upon the philosophizing everyman.

This is a primary reason why the digital artefact ‘being-kept-permanently’ can ever be justified to the human being.

When we saw the destruction of the National Library of Baghdad we thought about the destruction of other great libraries. In particular, we remembered the destruction of the great library of Alexandria to which we now turn.

## 1.2 Destruction of Library of Alexandria

“The most celebrated of such acts of vandalism, [viz. the burning of the books in the German Third Reich 1933-05-10, the sacking of the monasteries in the reign of the English monarch Henry VIII (16th c. CE), the burning of the Library of

Baghdad 2003-05-14] as every schoolboy used to know, was the destruction of the great library of Alexandria. Traditionally, this was dated to the seventh century, and ascribed to the Caliph Umar; he was always supposed to have said that if the books of the library conformed to the word of God, they were unnecessary; if they contradicted it, they were pernicious; in either case they could be destroyed without further consideration.

The story, of course, is complete rubbish . . .” [13].

**W**HAT do we really know about the destruction of the Library of Alexandria ?  
 Why is it of interest ?  
 How can we know what the truth is ?

In the English-speaking world one has relied upon Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [10] to give us something of the history of the times. It is clearly the case that the Caliph Umar is to be blamed: “When he had to decide what to do with the library, he said: ‘If these writings of the Greeks agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed.’” [10]

But Gibbon goes on to explain the source of this statement and his own personal disbelief in the allegation. “Since the Dynasties of Abulpharagius have been given to the world in a Latin version, the tale [about the burning of the Library] has been repeatedly transcribed; and every scholar, with pious indignation, has deplored the irreparable shipwreck of the learning, the arts, and the genius, of antiquity. For my own part, I am strongly tempted to deny both the fact and the consequences.” [10]

That the accusation that the second Caliph of Islam is ultimately responsible for the burning of the Library of Alexandria persists until our present times is remarkable. “From Professor Hugh Lloyd-Jones’s review of Luciano Canfora’s book on the library of Alexandria [NYR, June 14], one learns, with astonishment, that the author, and perhaps even to some degree the reviewer, are still disposed to lend credence to the story of how the great library of Alexandria was destroyed by the Arabs after their conquest of the city in 641 AD, by order of the Caliph Umar.” [18]

Perhaps now it is quite clear that the third of our questions above is particularly significant. How can we know what the truth is ?

The USUK invasion of Irak and its ongoing cultural destruction epitomized by the sacking of Baghdad in 2003 CE was a major impetus that drove me to write this paper.

But how can I write the paper I want to write without becoming embroiled in ongoing conflict ? And what is the right sort of paper to write in a reflective mood when events have not ceased, when sides are taken, when there is bitterness in the air ? On the other hand, I will not put my head into the sand. I have mentioned the burning of the Library

of Baghdad. I will also mention Guantanamo. I will mention these things because they are important for my task.

We all know the answer to the basic problem that confronts us. Had there been facsimiles and (high-resolution) digitized copies distributed worldwide of the books burned, torn up, carried away, or destroyed, then we as globalized humanity could have reconstructed everything.

But would we want to ?

### 1.3 The New Humanist Programme

“... alas, it’s an even more depressing fact that since Auerbach’s death in 1957 both the idea and the practice of humanistic research have shrunk in scope as well as in centrality. Instead of reading in the real sense of the word, our students today are often distracted by the fragmented knowledge available on the internet and in the mass media.

Worse yet, education is threatened by nationalist and religious orthodoxies often disseminated by the media as they focus ahistorically and sensationally on the distant electronic wars ...” [22, 6]

**B**ELIEFS and hopes, both religious and irreligious, inspire actions. Faced with the destructive forces of nature (see the flooding of Prague in 2002 CE) and of man (see the burning of the Library of Baghdad in 2003 CE) I see the potential for the use of the internet for good and not only as a distraction medium as portrayed by Edward Said, quoted above. Indeed, the primary technological thrust of this paper will be to highlight the way in which the internet is and can be harnessed for what I identify as a new humanist programme with a particular focus on the texts that are considered important for the ‘peoples of the book’: Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The programme will be strictly irreligious in the sense that I will seek to identify those things which unite all, religious and irreligious, rather than those specific aspects which identify and separate. One crucial component of the programme will be the language I will use. By language I do **not** mean a choice between English, Bulgarian, Gaelic, French, German, Russian, etc. Rather, I am concerned about specific words and phrases. A typical example is that used above: ‘peoples of the book’. Here the word book is to be understood as the ‘bible’. Although originally of Arabic origin to denote Jews and Christians, it seems to me to be appropriate to use “peoples of the book” today to include Muslims.

Nothing which I propose here will hinder a specific focussed religious opportunity. “Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations [such as the current USUK war], we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together.” [22, 6].

Just after the USUK war on Irak was determined to be over (2003-05-01), an Irish Literary

Award of 100,000 euros, regarded as one of the richest in the world, was made for a book, *My Name is Red* [21], by the Turkish author Orhan Pamuk [7]. Here was a text that crossed boundaries. Here was a text that introduced key Islamic issues to the Western world in a way that the Western world might understand.

The issues are matters of life and death. The matter in hand concerns the illustration of manuscripts (and of books). We are asked to consider what is allowed and not allowed with respect to the illustration, the image, in an Eastern tradition. The book opens in Istanbul, that great city which even today is still at the crossroads of East and West, viz., the European Union, for example. In the very first chapter the Corpse speaks to us directly and sets the agenda:

“My death conceals an appalling conspiracy against our religion, our traditions and the way we see the world. Open your eyes, discover why the enemies of the life in which you believe, of the life you’re living, and of Islam, have destroyed me. Learn why one day they might do the same to you. . . . Let me say also that if the situation into which we’ve fallen were described in a book [self-referentially *My Name is Red* ?], even the most expert of miniaturists could never hope to illustrate it. As with the Koran — God forbid I’m misunderstood — the staggering power of such a book arises from the impossibility of its being depicted. I doubt you’ve fully comprehended this fact.” [21, 6]

Is your curiosity aroused ?

When was the last time you read a book where a corpse spoke directly to you and appealed for your understanding ?

**U**PON reading these words (2003–06–05) it was clear to me that here was a text that signaled a possible route into the New Humanist Programme. Overtly, the book deals with a murder, which is to be solved. In reality, it is an exciting intellectual challenge that requires a multi-disciplinary approach. It is a book that invites further study and reflection. It proposes a specific ‘Islamic view’ of the world in a context with which we (humans) can be sympathetic.

**P**HILOSOPHICALLY, it is striking. For example, on the very first page, the Corpse says ‘Before my birth there was infinite time, and after my death, inexhaustible time. I never thought of it before: I’d been living luminously between two eternities of darkness.’

In the first place the Corpse is everyman. Everyman will have that finite (in time) luminous living interval. There are important philosophical and ethical debates currently going on concerning the beginning and ending of that interval. With respect to the beginning of the interval we are concerned with the coming into being of everyman. With respect to the ending of the interval we are confronted with the death of everyman.





*The face of the author  
circa 2003–03–30.*

**M**ATHEMATICALLY there are two curves over the interval (of everyman). The baseline curve (or ‘life-curve’ denoted by  $\lambda$ -curve, or simply  $\lambda$ ) is to a first approximation generally parabolic in shape which corresponds to birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death. But we know that there is a second curve which to a first approximation might be considered to be exponential: the curve of knowledge and wisdom (or ‘knowing-curve’ denoted by  $\kappa$ -curve or simply  $\kappa$ ). It is this second curve that suggests that the infinity after the interval is significantly different from the infinity before the interval from the local view of the being in becoming.

A global view must incorporate the genes (and the memes), i.e., must take into account that everyman has ancestors in both the  $\lambda$  and  $\kappa$  senses. This suggests that in addition to the curves  $\lambda$  and  $\kappa$  of finite support over the interval of luminous living, there are also important curves over the entire real number line  $\mathbb{R}$  which I am taking for granted as the appropriate philosophical (mathematical) model for time. Specifically, everyman has  $\kappa$  successors and possibly  $\lambda$  successors, perhaps spiritually and intellectually as much as physically.

Notice how naturally the mathematical modelling emerges from the text? I am conscious that in the modern world even educated people seem unable to cope with modern mathematics. This is extremely disconcerting for me. To emphasize the problem I have interrupted the free-flow of the paper again to make this aside.

Notice how I use two Greek letters to name the curves? This is a classical mathematical tradition. Notice that I assume that both parabolic and exponential shapes are part of everyman’s culture everywhere? I leave further mathematical considerations of the Corpse (or everyman) in (finite) space and possibly branching time as a philosophical challenge to you the interested reader.



*The author imagined.  
(Detail from Book of  
Kells circa 800 CE.)*

What did the Corpse really know when he spoke to us out of the pages of the book *My Name is Red*?

But I have not yet exhausted that line of of the luminous interval between two eternities. Clearly, for everyman **qua** reader, the line is read and understood and left behind. There is a story to be read. Some readers will go back and start again, knowing that there is a second story underlying the first. On this second reading, the line will re-emerge to challenge the questioning mind.

You will have noticed that the Corpse speaks about ‘eternities’? I am more inclined to use the familiar mathematical term ‘infinities’. You will wonder whether or not they really are equivalent.

I do not have the original Turkish text *Benim Adım Kırmızı* to hand. Nor do I understand Turkish. Therefore, I can only guess that there are special Turkish words/phrases that translate into the two different kinds of infinities, i.e. eternities. But then, is this Turkish the language of the Corpse? Surely, the Corpse is speaking something else in 1591 CE? (The Corpse is speaking in a well in Istanbul in the “year before the thousandth anniversary (calculated in lunar years) of the Hegira . . . beginning the events recounted in the novel.” [21, 508]. Now you will note that we are invited not only to explore Muslim history but also we are confronted and challenged with another way in which calendars work!).

Is the Corpse speaking in Arabic?

When we examine carefully how it is that we in the West acquired much of our current knowledge and understanding we find that there are important links both through 1) Ireland, and 2) Spain. Naturally, the Irish connection will feature prominently in this paper. Later I will present some thoughts in the context of the Book of Durrow (circa late 7th c. CE, well after the burning of the Library of Alexandria in 643 CE and very close to the date of the foundation of Baghdad in 762 CE!) and the Book of Kells (circa 800 CE), both of which are in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. The Corpse is linked historically to Trinity College by date. The foundation of the latter is given to be 1592 CE!

But here we will explain a philosophical connection between Ireland and the East. Specifically, we will mention the role of the Irish philosopher John Scotus Eriugena (b. circa 800–15 CE), “the loneliest figure in the history of European thought” [3, 1], who “was distinguished for his knowledge of Greek, . . . the monasteries of Ireland [being] almost the only places in Europe where the study of Greek survived in those dark and turbulent days” [3, 3]. (At roughly the same time, the Arabs were translating the Greek texts. See the work of Ma’mûn, the Caliph of Baghdad (813–33 CE) [2].)

The language of the West was Latin. Much of the learning came from both Greek texts and more significantly the new learning came from Arabic texts (see [14]). “Since Arab philosophers were obviously introduced into the West by way of translations, a study of their contribution must naturally begin with an examination of their vocabulary. The Latin terminology . . . derived essentially from . . . Augustine and Boethius; John Scotus Eriugena had provided an original contribution, which was, however, less widely used.” [14, 118].

Perhaps the the Corpse is imbued with classical Arabic philosophy of the age? Might it be supposed that he had picked up something of Ibn Sina (Avicenna in Latin, 980–1037 CE), or Ibn Rushd (Averroes in Latin, 1126–98 CE). (Clearly, we are assuming that there were no further significant Arabic philosophical developments between Ibn Rushd’s time and the Corpse’s speech in 1591 CE.) Translation of philosophical ideas from one language to another is always an extremely difficult task. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to learn that “Avicenna uses three different words which normally mean ‘eternal’ according to three different modalities: *abadî* implies infinite duration in the future, *azalî* infinite duration in the past, and *qadîm* absolute anteriority. And Gundissalinus translates all three by *æternus* . . .” [14, 119].

Did the Corpse bracket his luminous living by *azalī* and *abadī* ?

What an enormous amount of things may be learned from one sentence in the first chapter on the first page of a book.

“Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and authority. Texts have to be read as texts that were produced and live on in all sorts of . . . worldly ways . . . humanism is the only, and . . . final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history.” [22, 6].

*My Name is Red* is a text that points a way towards better understanding between East and West in the current human crisis provoked by the USUK war and the associated inhuman practices and injustices such as those of the USA in Guantanamo.



ZEALOUS reader, I see that you are still with me. This is a good point to take a little break. Have a cup of tea or coffee or whatever local beverage is appropriate to you and your culture in this setting ? If you are currently electronically engaged with me now, beware of spills.

Would you like to hold onto one idea before proceeding further ?

*The face of the author*  
circa 2003–03–30.

XENOPHOBIA is usually taken to mean “a deep dislike of foreigners” [1]. The prefix *xeno* means foreign, strange, or other (from the Greek). In the context of the World-Wide Web it is normal to experience xenotexts, texts of a xenoculture. The normal reaction to xenotext encounters is a sense of confusion and alienation. Our challenge is to find a way by which we can appropriately engage with such texts.

The text *My Name is Red* which I have used extensively in this paper is a xenotext with which we can become comfortable because it fits the literary genre of murder mystery. Under the surface though there is another stream of enlightenment.

But you will say to me “What is this text *My Name is Red* ?” “I have not read it.” “How can I understand the argument you make ?”

I agree with you. There is a difficulty. Without having read the text you will be at a slight loss. But this is similar to the problem you will have with my discussion of the *Book of Kells*, another xenotext from the ‘Irish Culture’. It is written in Latin and is hard to come

by. I will take extracts from it to make further observations in the same way that I take extracts from *My Name is Red*.

Perhaps we can agree to find a way to overcome this apparent dilemma ?

**Q**UESTIONING or querying or searching information resources on the World-Wide Web seems to be a particularly appropriate method by which one can engage with digitized artefacts. I recommend extensive use of *Google* for this purpose. If you are reading this now on the World-Wide Web then you have already made the transition to engagement with digitized artefacts. Why not **google** *My Name is Red* now to see what turns up ?

Wasn't that impressive ? Now try **google** *Book of Kells*. See! Using this paper as a contextual backdrop you are already able to engage with a variety of resources. Let us reflect on what is happening. You are reading this text and you are engaging with the World-Wide Web as a result. This is a novel sort of literary genre which is emerging. Here is another beautiful example of the same phenomenon by Günther Grass [11, 3]:

“And suddenly—entering the name of a ship as a keyword—I clicked my way to the right address: [www.blutzeuge.de](http://www.blutzeuge.de) . . . But I'm still not sure how to go about this: should I do as I was taught and unpack one life at a time, in order, or do I have to sneak up on time in a crabwalk, seeming to go backward but actually scuttling sideways, and thereby working my way forward fairly rapidly? . . . Not a word about this phase on the Internet. On the Web site dedicated to Wilhelm Gustloff, born in Schwerin in 1895, he was celebrated as ‘the martyr.’ The site did not mention the problems with his larynx, the chronic weakness of the lungs . . .”

Clearly we have an example of a modern novel, a book interacting with the reader through the World-Wide Web. To understand such a relationship imagine the book being read in twenty years time. Will the [www.blutzeuge.de](http://www.blutzeuge.de) still exist then ?

Although *My Name is Red* does not provoke engagement with the World-Wide Web directly through the use of URLs its cultural subject matter is such that enlightenment for the outsider is obtainable through the World-Wide Web.

Both books share one major common feature. They are both xenotexts translated into English which reveal to the outsider some aspects of their respective (to me) xenocultures.

The short break is over. It is time to examine the meaning of *le sens pratique du philosopant*.



*The author imagined.  
(Detail from Book of  
Kells circa 800 CE.*

## 2 Philosophizing

“The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of the unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene’. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme.” [6, 192].

LANGUAGE and philosophy are inextricably linked in an obvious way. We use language to philosophize. When we look more closely at the language used to philosophize we note that certain words or phrases become canonized. For example, in Aristotle’s works the word *ousía* (in English *substance* from the Latin *substantia*) holds a special position. The history of the devastation caused by the philosophical concept of ‘transubstantiation’ in the Christian world is very well known. The philosophical (and theological) issues surrounding transubstantiation are still with us today.

In the previous section we used a current text in English, *My Name is Red*, translated from the Turkish, in order to explore a little of the Arabic philosophy that had an important impact on the West and used it to argue the case for a New Humanist Programme.

In this section we will attempt to set down our foundation and method for the practical sense of philosophizing. Ultimately, we will want to use digital artefacts as texts to advance our general humanistic cause.

“Curiously, but not surprisingly, the introduction of this word [*autopoiēsis*] proved of great value. It simplified enormously the task of talking about the organization of the living without falling into the always gaping trap of not saying anything new because the language does not permit it. We could not escape being immersed in a tradition, but with an adequate language we could orient ourselves differently, and, perhaps, from the new perspective generate a new tradition.” [19] quoted in [25].

For many years I have used the neologism *autopoiēsis* to try to capture the idea of the intimate symbiotic relationship of everyman with/to her/his environment and in particular with/to that special modern ubiquitous environment-in-becoming we call the World-wide Web. I have tried to express this relationship in a simple haiku poem (2001-07-16):

Autopoiēsis —  
 Frog with fly in pond at one.  
 Both in becoming.

The notion of being-in-becoming is used to capture the sense of something coming into existence. For example consider a butterfly-in-becoming. There are two distinct and different stages of the being in question: the caterpillar and the butterfly. The coming into being of the butterfly from caterpillar stage is described as a being-in-becoming. One might consider the same word to be appropriate for denoting the transitions from pre-birth to birth and death to after-death of humans and other beings ? It was towards this end, the formulation of these questions, that the detailed analysis of the life-statement of the Corpse was presented earlier. In the spirit of inclusiveness towards which all of this philosophizing is tending it seems right we also consider, if only briefly, the Arabic world-view.

“...when the single word *esse* is used to ‘translate’ thirty-four different Arabic expressions, its inadequacy is patent. It usually corresponds to *kāna* and *wuġida* Being, the former in principle carrying the particular implication of being-in-process-of-becoming ...” [14, 118].

**K**ĀNA in Arabic captures very nicely the sense of our being-in-becoming and it has the merit of being a two syllable word. However, it does not seem likely that it will catch on. First there is no tradition in English, in relatively modern times, to have recourse to Arabic for borrowed words. If anything, borrowing is to be expected in the opposite direction. Consider, as an analogy, the struggle of the French to ban borrowed words such as ‘le parking’, ‘le weekend’ etc. To be successful a borrowed word must carry the experience denoted from the associated culture.

Newly coined words are like borrowed words. Consider the successful creation of *autopoiēsis* which is now firmly established in scientific discourse. A quick check using Google will reveal all. Why has it been successful ? For certain, English (among other European languages) has always had recourse to Latin and Greek to grow. The prefix *auto*, meaning self, occurs very frequently: automatic, automobile, automaton, etc. We are inclined to accept words which begin with *auto*. The root *poiēsis* does at first seem to be a stumbling block. One really does need to know Greek and Latin derivatives to feel comfortable. But then the scientific community, in general, have not had a problem in coping with such borrowings. In short, if you know that poetics and poetry are derivatives, then *poiēsis* doesn’t seem really all that strange, especially when it is explained that the Latins did not feel comfortable with too many vowels in sequence. Thus ‘oie’ becomes ‘oe’. Simple, really, isn’t it ? The root word *poiēsis* has the sense of ‘making’ or ‘creating’ (and also ‘poetry’, ‘poem’). Hence, *autopoiēsis* is self-making, or self creating. One can see that it might also fit the idea of being-in-becoming ? To use *autopoiēsis* would seem to be a better bet than *kāna*.

With respect to the specific digital artefacts with which we deal in this paper, we will wish to promote (and invent where necessary) a vocabulary that is inclusive and surprising for the ‘new’ user/browser. We will take for granted that the digital artefacts in question will be of **de facto** interest to that community of scholars engaged in professional work associated with such artefacts. Such scholars already have a vocabulary appropriate to their fields. Our concern will be to widen access to the artefacts to the lay community.





Figure 1: Durrow Carpet Page folio125v (reduced)



*The face of the author  
circa 2003–03–30.*

Go back to the previous page and take a good look. This is a picture of a carpet page from the Book of Durrow. Does it look like the picture of a carpet to you? Would you like to have a carpet just like it? The notion of a ‘carpet page’, that is a ‘a page of decoration without text’, is indicative of what we mean by *surprising*. The surprise is in the unexpected composition of two words *carpet* and *page*. If we had written *carpet-page* or even *carpetpage* then we would recognize a classic neologism. It is just like *autopoiēsis*. The term is already well-established in the scholarly vocabulary related to the Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells [20, 83].

But you will ask yourself **Why** is it called a ‘carpet’ page? Carpets are things that usually cover floors in a dwelling.

“Carpet pages, present in several of the insular Gospel books, seem to have evolved from the use of blind designs on book covers, such as the binding of a sixth-century Coptic manuscript from a site near Sakkara in Egypt (now Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS 815), which resembles Durrow in its use of cross and interlace decoration.” [20, 25].

Now we seem to be making a tenuous link between Ireland and Egypt. The Copts belong to the Christian tradition just like the Irish of that time did. However, it is around this period that Egypt had been conquered by the Muslim armies. About 50 years earlier than the creation of this carpet page, the Library of Alexandria had been burnt!

Search with Google using ‘carpet pages manuscript’ and you will immediately come upon the British Library’s page for the Lindisfarne Gospels:

“The decorated pages at the beginning of each Gospel are known as Carpet Pages because they look like oriental rugs. This may have been intentional. St Bede writes that prayer mats were known in Northumbria at this time, as well as in eastern Christian and Islamic lands. They are also found in early Coptic (Christian Egyptian) manuscripts. Prayer mats help prepare worshippers for prayer. They also help prepare them before they move onto holy ground. In the Lindisfarne Gospels the carpet pages play a similar role, preparing the reader for the the Gospel message.”



*The author imagined.  
(Detail from Book of  
Kells circa 800 CE.*

In the words of a visitor “I had no idea until I went to this exhibition that Northumbrian monks used to pray on decorated prayer carpets, just as Muslims have always done.” [5].



HERE we have a wonderful example of a key phrase, the ‘carpet page’, which unlocks unexpected doors into common spaces that ought to be better known to all. The carpet page is devoid of text. Hence the observer (which might be a useful phrase to cover user, browser, ...) will not be distracted by the meaning of a text in whatever language. Instead, images, drawings, shape, design are all to the fore. In principle, this is strictly neutral matter, that is likely to appeal to both religious and irreligious.

Part of the practical method by which we will want to philosophize is the creation and use of a suitable vocabulary with which we can learn how to ask the ‘right’ questions.

Why are not carpet pages called rug pages or mat pages ?

### 3 The Questioning Mind

“Then I realised that for these discussions to be useful, I had to determine exactly what it was that I didn’t understand [about quantum mechanics] and frame the question far more precisely. After a while, I made an empirical discovery: I never again rang up [my close friend] with questions. I stumbled on a fascinating rule: the act of framing a question precisely was the key to understanding.” [16].

WE begin to philosophize when we are very young by learning to ask questions. We all have experienced the Who ?, the What ?, the Where ?, the When ?, the How ?, and the Why ? Did you ever ask the question What is an elephant ? What sort of answer did you get ? What sort of answer would you give now ?

But perhaps we also experienced being ‘misled’ by being taught to memorise the answers to certain fixed questions. One famous question in certain religious cultures was **Who made the world ?**

The expected answer which one had to memorize was **God made the world.**

Let us look more closely at the question **Who made the world ?** Now we can see that the outcome was favoured towards a person. Today one might teach the question **How did the world come into existence ?**

A possible answer might be **The world came into existence through the Big Bang.**

One might have difficulty with this answer also. An understanding of mathematics (and physics) might lead one to be very skeptical about this being the truth!

Asking questions and giving answers is part of us in the same way that our experience of space is part of us. By being a part of us we mean exactly that the questioning and

answering is part of our practical sense (*sens pratique*). Questioning and answering is bound up with speaking and hearing, with speech, with the tongue, the palate, the lips, the mouth, and the ears. Asking questions and giving answers is how we (our minds) make sense of everything. This is what we mean by the *sens pratique du philosophe* (the practical sense of philosophizing).

Computer scientists might be interested to note that in Alan Turing's famous paper *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, he wrote that "The question and answer method seems to be suitable for introducing almost any one of the fields of human endeavour that we wish to include [in the Imitation Game by which we may study the problem concerning the question 'Can Machines think?']" [24, 435]

**T**O ask a question is to reveal an ignorance. When one is young one is ignorant and one needs to ask questions. There is no shame or fear attached. On the contrary such a questioner is said to be full of curiosity and the questions are a sign of an active intelligence.

When one is older it seems to me that one begins to be afraid to reveal one's state of ignorance. Questions do not get asked. Knowledge is not forthcoming. Perhaps it is the method of schooling that has caused the damage? Since "teacher knows all" and is prepared to give all in lessons what is the point of asking questions? Successful schooling of this kind gives us unquestioning citizens to the detriment of society.

It is taken for granted that the digitization of artefacts is a good thing in itself. There are two main reasons. First, the digital artefact may be used in lieu of the original which may then be safely locked away to preserve it for future generations. Second, the digital artefact may be accessed globally at a distance across the World-Wide Web.

Thus it would *appear* that I have answered the fundamental question.

Why preserve anything at all, even digitally?

### 3.1 Digital Artefacts

"The theme of falling in love by seeing pictures is a very popular classical Islamic subject and is elaborated in MY NAME IS RED. In the novel, I explore this theme along with the prohibition of portrait painting in Islam. A further elaboration of this theme is this picture where Mushabe recognizes the figure in the portrait" – Orhan Pamuk [15].

**V**ARIETY is the spice of life it is said. The heritage of one culture may become a very enriching experience for another very different culture by way of the digital artefact and the distribution medium that is the World-Wide Web (WWW). Uninterpreted

digital artefacts may not be very helpful or very illuminating to the unknown observer as visitor. The problem is similar to that which exists for visitors to a museum in a foreign country. I am of the opinion that we can do much better via the WWW than what the museum curator can do by virtue of the simple fact that the digital artefact is not bounded in time and space. The present means of access to it may appear to be very primitive from the perspective of future generations. Let us explore this problem now. To assist us we will have recourse once again to the book *My Name is Red*.

Orhan Pamuk set himself the task to explore the “theme of falling in love by seeing pictures.” Falling in love is universally understood by most, is a good human subject for philosophizing, and presents some difficult challenges. We can easily offer pictures as digital artefacts on the WWW. It is also interesting to learn that “falling in love by seeing pictures is a very popular classical Islamic subject” and one undoubtedly would wonder whether other cultures have used and do use the picture/portrait in such a fashion. Is it done on the WWW today ? The answer to the latter is a definite yes!

On the other hand, an account must be made for the prohibition of portrait painting in Islam. Orhan Pamuk addresses this cultural problem very well in his book. What do we need to account for in our (re-)presentation of the digital artefacts where pictures/portraits are involved ?

Clearly, in developing an environment for access to the digital artefacts we will want to construct a set of questions, the answers to which will be provided by the digital artefacts themselves. And even more importantly we will also want to present a framework that will provoke the unknown observer of said digital artefacts to ask (her/him)self fundamental questions. Let us suggest calling such a set of questions a question-net, or even a question-web, the latter to remind ourselves of the significance of the role the the WWW will play ?

Since many of the artefacts in question have religious significance, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts for example, then we will want to formulate questions that are applicable and answerable across all texts irrespective of specific religious content. (We ought not unduly concern ourselves here with any specific religious aspect knowing full well that the specific religious observer of such a digital artefact will come to it with a pre-framed question set anyway.) For example, we have already noted how we can use carpet pages as a focal point for discourse. Although strictly serving a religious purpose, one must admit that they also serve a purely æsthetic purpose.

In particular, in framing questions, we now know that we need an appropriate vocabulary. Given the phrase carpet page we can ask *Are there carpet pages in a Qur’ân ?*

*Are there other interesting kinds of pages like carpet pages ?*

To assist us in our quest we will now devote a little time to “falling in love” in *My Name is Red*.

LISTEN to Black (in *My Name is Red*) on the importance of the face.

“Four years after I first left Istanbul . . . I was slowly forgetting the face of the childhood love I’d left behind . . . During the sixth year . . . I knew that the face I imagined was no longer that of my beloved . . . by the twelfth year . . . I was painfully aware that my beloved’s face had long since escaped me.” [21, 7].

And now listen to the Black’s beloved Shekure who begins to reveal her face to us.

“In the well-known tale of Hüsrev and Shirin, there’s a moment that Black and I discussed at length . . . Beholding this picture of the handsome Hüsrev in that beautiful garden, Shirin is stricken by love. Many paintings depict this moment — or ‘scene’ as the miniaturists would have it — consisting of Shirin’s look of adoration and bewilderment as she gazes upon the image of Hüsrev.” [21, 47].



*Shirin examines Hüsrev’s portrait.*

[The curious reader is invited to discover a source for the portrait on the WWW.]

The romantic tale (i.e., love story) of the Persian Prince Hüsrev (aka Khusraw) and the Armenian Princess Shirin is a classic Islamic story which features prominently in *My Name is Red* [15] where Hüsrev first sees Shirin bathing in a small pond by moonlight.

The Murderer in *My Name is Red* is quick to point out that concerning the ultimate fate of Hüsrev and Shirin he is referring to “Nizami’s version, not Firdusi’s” [21, 21].

Immediately we will want to ask Who is Nizami? and Who is Firdusi? and Why does the Murderer explicitly distinguish one version from the other?

Now perhaps we might try to answer our question Are there other interesting kinds of pages like carpet pages?

Clearly we can imagine face pages to be like carpet pages.



*The face of the author  
circa 2003-03-30.*

I hope you don't mind me interrupting your reading again? We have just seen that a face page was a key component in the illustration by miniaturists of classic Islamic love stories. We also know that face pages for God are forbidden in Islam. This is currently different from the situation in Christianity. Perhaps now you understand why my face has appeared frequently in this text? It was a deliberate attempt to emphasize the notion of *face page*. Perhaps it was a little too much? Once would have been enough?

Now that I have spent some time philosophizing, it is perhaps fitting to conclude this first part of the paper.

In the second part of the paper I will focus on proposals for the (re-)presentation of digitized cultural artefacts that encourages engagement in a variety of ways. In particular, I will give details using the Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells (both of which reside in Trinity College Dublin).

This is also a good place to mention some very important acknowledgements.

WITHOUT the encouragement and support of Milena Dobрева this paper would never have seen the light of day on Tuesday the 16th day of September at the Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage (DPCH) mini-symposium held in conjunction with the MASSEE 2003 Conference Programme in Borovetz, Bulgaria. She is also responsible for ensuring that this first part of the paper appeared on time.

A special note of thanks is due also to Kalina Sotirova who in addition to Milena Dobрева, read an earlier draft of the paper.

At the beginning, the poem, *Not Again*, drew attention to an aspect of human anguish caused by war, an anguish viewed from the particular perspective of "cultural heritage" manifested in the manuscript, a work scribed by human hands.

Now at the end of this first part of the paper let another poem, *Messeocus Pangur Bán* [23], literally *Myself and Pangur Ban*, translated from the Celtic into English, bracket the earlier one.



*The author imagined.  
(Detail from Book of  
Kells circa 800 CE.)*

### *The Monk and His Cat*

**J** and Pangur Bán my cat  
'Tis a like task we are at:  
Hunting mice is his delight,  
Hunting words I sit all night.

**B**ETTER far than praise of men  
'Tis to sit with book and pen;  
Pangur bears me no ill-will,  
He too plies his simple skill.

**T**IS a merry thing to see  
At our tasks how glad are we,  
When we sit at home and find  
Entertainment for our mind.

**O**FTENTIMES a mouse will stray  
In the hero Pangur's way;  
Oftentimes my keen thought set  
Takes a meaning in its net.

**A** GAINST the wall he sets his eye  
Fierce and strong and sharp and sly;  
Against the wall of knowledge I  
All my little wisdom try.

**W**HEN a mouse darts from its den,  
O how glad is Pangur then!  
O what gladness do I prove  
When I solve those doubts I love!

**S**O in peace our tasks we ply,  
Pangur Bán, my cat, and I;  
In our arts we find our bliss,  
I have mine and he has his.

**P**RACTICE every day has made  
Pangur perfect in his trade;  
I get wisdom day and night,  
Turning darkness into light.

“So I’m going to begin with a poem about a student wrapped in study, with his mind up against itself. The poem also involves a mouse, and in fact it involves a cat. The cat is called Pangur Bán, which means simply ‘white Pangur’ — ‘bán’ is the word for ‘white’ in Irish. This poem was written in the Irish language in the late eighth or early ninth century by an Irish scribe on the margin of Saint Paul’s Epistles in a monastery in Carinthia, in present-day Austria. The translation is by an English scholar called Robin Flower, and it’s sometimes called ‘The Monk and His Cat.’” [12]

...

“Whether you are a freshman or a Faust, I think, those 32 lines will remind you of the activity, of the frustration and satisfaction, of hunting for a new understanding, or a new insight, and indeed, sometimes I think I’d prefer to translate those 32 lines than the 32 hundred lines of Beowulf.” [12].

Collections of Poetry are in themselves regarded as part of a cultural heritage. I am not familiar with any repository of poetic works the subject of which is cultural heritage. The two poems in this paper suggest something of the nature of poetic commentary with a particular cultural heritage aspect. In my opinion this is an opportunity to explore the democratization of cultural heritage, that is to say the process by which the people engage actively with a) their own cultural heritage, and b) more importantly with the cultural heritage of the other. The poems in question are focused on the human, the writer of the manuscript rather than on the manuscript itself. On the one hand there was quiet amused reflection, the scribe and his cat and on the other apparent impotent rage and despair of the scribe watching his life’s work being destroyed.

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